

THE DREAM OF A MORMON COLONY IN THE NEAR EAST

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The two areas most neglected in the writing of Mormon history are the modern and the non-American experience of the Church; this essay enters both of these realms in tracing the efforts to establish a colony for Mormon converts in the Near East. Rao Lindsay, Assistant Professor in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, gained personal interest in his subject as one of the last L. D. S. missionaries in Palestine: he returned to do a thesis at Brigham Young University on missionary activities in the Near East, and his doctoral dissertation at the University of Michigan, NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN SCHOOLS IN THE LEVANT — A STUDY OF PURPOSES, was published in 1965.

For almost 130 years, Mormon missionaries have been going to foreign lands. Most of this activity has been in Western European countries where the culture and the political and social institutions were quite similar to those in America. Some attempts however have been made in non-Western areas. Proselyting in a culturally different country raises a number of questions about the responsibility of the evangelizing church to the new converts. How much of the native culture should be left intact? How "American" must the new members become? When conversion means political estrangement or severance from social services, what is the new church's responsibility? Should the church engage in social, welfare, and economic activities,

or should the converts be left to trust in God? The experience of the Mormon Church in the Near East can shed some light on the last question and can illustrate one specific scheme initiated by missionaries and the reception given to it by the Church leadership.

The Mormon missionaries envisioned a colony in Palestine for their Near Eastern converts. This aspiration occupied the thoughts and labors of the Near Eastern missionaries for almost forty years and became an important thread running throughout the history of the Turkish and Armenian Missions.

The colony dream grew into a vision of an organized stake or even stakes of Zion that would be an important contributing factor in the return of Judah to Palestine and in the temporal redemption of the entire Near East. The idea took an Apostle, a university president, and two other special investigators to the Holy Land. For the members of the Church in the Near East, it was a source of hope for relief from temporal bondage — but also of disappointment, for the scheme never materialized.

THE BIRTH OF THE COLONY DREAM

When Mormon missionaries began their labors in the Near East in 1884, they found in the rubble of the decaying Ottoman Empire, traditions, political regulations, social institutions, customs, and social restrictions which not only hindered their proselyting but also hampered the spiritual development of the converts. Although Turkish law provided for religious freedom, under the "millet system" the government only dealt with individual citizens through heads of the recognized religious organizations. The role of the church in the Ottoman Empire was much larger than in the West, because it acted as the government's agent to collect taxes and provide social services such as education and cemeteries as well as to devise and administer personal laws concerning such matters as marriage and divorce. Unless a church received official recognition by the Ottoman Sultan, it could not publish religious literature, hold public meetings, operate schools, or freely move its ministers from city to city. The Protestants as a single group had obtained such recognition in 1850.

This political arrangement contributed to the many hardships faced by the new converts. By the end of the nineteenth century, Mormonism, with its American origins (especially when contrasted with the Greek and Armenian Orthodox or the Maronite Churches of the Ottoman Empire), maintained that religion was a private matter and that legal and social services should be the concern of the political state. Consequently, when an Ottoman subject became a

Mormon, he was immediately subjected to all kinds of annoyances, being still at the mercy of the head of his former church since Mormonism was not recognized. His taxes were usually increased; he sometimes suffered the loss of his job; he was liable to imprisonment and even banishment; and very often he was the recipient of hatred and persecution by his former friends and neighbors. Thus when Ferdinand F. Hintze, the first of the Mormon missionaries to work with the native people, succeeded in making a few converts among the Armenians, he felt that to obtain official recognition for the Church was the best solution to the members' plight. After working unsuccessfully for a full year at Constantinople against impossible political and diplomatic obstacles, whose difficulty he could not have fully appreciated, he concluded that the Church must do something to aid the converts.

In many other missions of the Church, emigration was the usual solution to similar problems, but Ottoman law made it virtually impossible for any except the wealthy with sufficient "baksheesh" to bribe their way out of the country past a host of corrupt officials. These conditions prevented Mormon converts from even considering gathering to Utah with the other members, because they were very poor. Moreover, the polygamy controversy in the 1880's in the United States had generated a growing resentment against Mormon immigration. Commencing extensive emigration from the Near East, where polygamy had been a traditional practice among the Muslims, would certainly not have improved the position of the harassed Church in the opinion of the race-conscious American people at that time.

As Hintze pondered the many facets of this problem, he visited the German members of the Church who had been converted from among Palestinian colonists. These Germans, who believed that Christ's second coming was imminent, came to Palestine, purchased land, and established prosperous colonies. With this example fresh in mind, Hintze returned to central Asia Minor, where he found a very receptive group of Armenians at Aintab. It was there on May 11, 1889, that he first made written mention of his idea of a colony for the Near Eastern Mormons. In his diary he mentioned writing a letter to Franklin D. Richards, of the Council of the Twelve, suggesting that it might be "a good plan for us to settle in Palestine and make a colony there."¹ According to Hintze, the idea came with much force to his mind.

¹ "Ferdinand F. Hintze's Journal," May 11, 1889 (Original five volumes at Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah).

In Utah, Hintze's colony idea met with a favorable reception in an editorial by Apostle George Q. Cannon, embodying Hintze's ideas.

It appears that the time must soon come when a gathering place for those who obey the gospel in those regions [speaking of Palestine and Turkey] must be appointed, so that they can be taught the principles of righteousness in a body and not be left in their scattered condition. The disposition manifested in the United States against our emigration which comes from Europe would be greatly manifested, no doubt, if we were to bring the people of the Orient to our land. The cry which has been raised against polygamy would, it is probable, be much stronger against such a movement, and we would be accused of bringing in polygamous hordes from Turkey and from adjacent regions, to perpetuate our system of marriage and to fasten it upon the United States. It is probable, in view of this, that when the converts in the Orient become sufficiently numerous to make it necessary for them to gather together, a place will have to be selected probably in Palestine itself, that will be suitable for this grand purpose, and a Stake or Stakes of Zion be organized there. It may be necessary, in the progress of events, for experienced elders, with their families, to go from Zion to the land of Jerusalem to help lay the foundation of the work there in teaching these people the arts of true civilization, from which they have fallen through the transgressions of their fathers.²

As Hintze thought more and more about the colonization scheme, it grew to larger proportions. He saw it not only as a means of preaching the message of Mormonism to the great Asian nations but also of bringing about their temporal reformation by teaching them the arts and sciences of life, "thereby effecting the true restoration of man."³ He visualized that "should it be adopted, it would solve our troubles and place us in direct and proper communication with the continent of Asia and its people, and also right among the Jews themselves while they gather."⁴ Hintze felt that the Mormon people would be the means of restoring and redeeming Palestine prior to the gathering of the Jews. The establishment of the colony would be the beginning. This association of the colony with the gathering of the Jews developed into one of the most interest-rousing arguments in subsequent years. Hintze concluded that the gathering of the members of the Turkish Mission would be "the key to the salvation of the honest of the Oriental nations."⁵ As for the new converts, a colony

² George Q. Cannon, "Topic of our Times," *Juvenile Instructor*, XXIV (August 15, 1889), 390-91.

³ Hintze to *Deseret Weekly*, December 13, 1888, printed in *Deseret Weekly*, January 26, 1889, p. 139.

⁴ Hintze to Teasdale, August 1, 1889, *Millennial Star*, LI (August 1, 1889), 139.

⁵ "Hintze's Journal," September 6, 1889.

would bring them together where they could sustain each other in living righteous lives and relieve them from the suppression of an "ignorant government and a priest-ridden people."⁶ At the conclusion of his mission in December, 1889, Hintze returned to his Utah home where he continued his campaign for the colony through conversations, written articles, and visits with the General Authorities of the Church.

Frederick Stauffer, who succeeded Hintze as president of the Turkish Mission, fully concurred with the colony plan and wrote occasionally to encourage it. He saw the colony mostly as a spiritual haven for the new members of the Church as he wrote, "I am encouraged to hear of the idea of having a gathering place, where we could teach and strengthen those who are willing to accept the Gospel."⁷ He mentioned that "the idea of having a gathering place in Asia Minor or Palestine is very pleasing to the Saints, because they are anxious to gather to one place where they can be more fully instructed in the ways of God."⁸ Later he felt that the only way to successfully carry on missionary work in Turkey would be to have a colony.⁹

There was little further mention of the colony until after the Turkish Mission had been closed because of the massacres in 1896, except in Utah where Hintze was busy at work trying to educate and convince the Church authorities of its necessity and importance. Typical of his efforts is the following from an article appearing in the *Deseret Evening News*.

. . . . But when the day comes that we shall have a gathering point somewhere in the land, the Saints will have a chance to look after their own and also do something for the thousands of honest souls who are scattered throughout that part of Asia.

It would not take much to begin work there. . . . The people are used to getting along with little and if a location can be decided upon, they would quickly gather and in many instances perform most of the work themselves. What is necessary is a sprinkling of good, sound, faithful Latter-day Saints who would work for the exclusive benefit of a fallen race. . . . And when the day comes that the servants of the Lord shall feel moved upon to take the initiative steps in that direction, I have no doubt that a great work will be done.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid., July 26, 1889.

⁷ Stauffer to *Deseret Evening News*, n.d., *Deseret Evening News*, September 26, 1890.

⁸ Stauffer to Teasdale, May 17, 1890, *Millennial Star*, LII (December 4, 1890), 395.

⁹ Stauffer to Brigham Young, October 30, 1890, *Millennial Star*, LII (June 16, 1890), 764.

¹⁰ Ferdinand F. Hintze, "Proselyting in the East," *Deseret Evening News*, January 31, 1891, p. 5.

THE LUND-HINTZE MISSION CENTER

On October 13, 1897, just two months after Philip S. Maycock and Andrew L. Larson had been sent to reopen the Turkish Mission, Hintze called on the First Presidency to discuss the welfare of the Armenian saints in Turkey. After considering the tax that had to be paid by the churches and the need for recognition, Hintze stated that "the best way to get a footing in Turkey was to purchase land and colonize it with the native members of our church" and to send eight or eleven families from Zion to settle there and regulate the work. He figured that \$1,000 would be sufficient to purchase the necessary land to begin the colony.¹¹ On November 16 the First Presidency decided that Apostle Anthon H. Lund and Hintze should go to Palestine to seek a suitable place for the gathering of the "Oriental Saints."¹²

According to the newspaper account a great deal of interest was created as soon as this mission was announced. When two special missionaries left Salt Lake City on December 30, 1897, the *Deseret Evening News* announced the purpose and significance of their mission:

The Saints in Turkey, as in other parts of the world, have a strong desire to gather with their co-religionists, but as it is understood that emigration is virtually prohibited by the Turkish authorities . . . it has been deemed best to send a special messenger to the Armenian Saints to see what can be done to obtain the Turkish Government's permission to select a place within the Turkish empire for a gathering place. . . .¹³

After explaining how this was being done at the solicitation of the Armenian members, who wished to be loyal and "more useful subjects of the Sultan," the article further explains the colony:

It is in full accord with the views of the Saints to establish a gathering place in the land of promise. For the word of the Lord shall go forth from Jerusalem and the Law from Zion. Probably the time for accomplishment of this still belongs to a distant future, unless indeed it is consistent with the plans of the Almighty to intervene in a special way before long and hasten the latter-day work on. But the mission of Elder A. H. Lund, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, may be looked upon as one of the stages in the great work of gathering Israel and Judah and the coming restoration to pre-eminence of the country where once dwelt the glory of the Lord. . . .¹⁴

¹¹ Journal History, October 13, 1897, p. 2 (Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah).

¹² "A Mission to Palestine," *Deseret Evening News*, December 29, 1897, p. 4.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

The Lund-Hintze party reached Jaffa, Palestine, February 17 and traveled to Haifa where they visited some of the Jewish colonies and obtained considerable information in regard to the work and activities these colonists had accomplished as well as the resources of the country. At the Jewish colony of El Khedera, where they stayed one night, Hintze and Lund found that the colony site of 7,000 acres had cost \$126,000 or about \$18 per acre. This seemed to be very expensive when compared with \$1,000 Hintze had felt would purchase a colony site. After a brief visit to effectively organize the branches throughout the Turkish Mission, Lund and Hintze, along with Maycock, Larson, and a local member, Nishan Shirinian, traveled to Palestine to investigate further possible locations for the colony. Maycock and Larson were taken along because, according to Lund, "I feel the matter in hand is important and I would like their opinion also."¹⁵ He mentioned that they had traveled overland from Aleppo to Damascus and added, "When a stake of Zion shall be established here that will be the route over which the Saints will travel."¹⁶

The group concentrated their investigation in the Haifa area and after several weeks decided that they would recommend to the Church authorities at Salt Lake City a piece of property called "El Kire," owned by Selim Khory. It was on the banks of the Kishon River, consisted of about 6,000 acres, and was priced at \$120,000, including "all good rights desired."¹⁷

After the departure of Apostle Lund, Hintze, who had been set apart as Pastor to the Turkish Mission, continued his travels throughout the entire Near East, preaching, investigating and writing prolifically to the periodicals in Salt Lake City, describing in detail the land, its potentialities, and the aims of the colony. His published correspondence portrays Palestine as having unlimited opportunities for the hard-working Mormon colonists.

Hintze noted how the Germans had turned acres of the "hardest looking country ever laid out doors" into beautiful, cultivated gardens.¹⁸ He felt that if the Germans could achieve such great success, then the Mormons, with the inspiration of God, would do still better. He continued: "We are not here to arraign them for such [faults and

¹⁵ Anthon H. Lund to Frank M. D. Richards, April 20, 1898, *Improvement Era*, I (July, 1898), 684.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See Anthon H. Lund, "More from the Turkish Mission," *Millennial Star*, LX (May 5, 1898), 278-79; "Editorial Note," *Millennial Star*, LXII (February 1, 1900), 73-75; Hintze to *Deseret Evening News*, June 11, 1898, p. 15; and "Hintze's Journal," April 23 and May 15, 1898.

¹⁸ Hintze to *Deseret Evening News*, May 11, 17, 1898, printed in *Deseret Evening News*, June 18, 1898, p. 15.

mistakes of the Germans] but rather to profit by their example and do better when our turn comes. . . . One of the great points made by these Germans is the possibility of turning the barren wastes into a fruitful vineyard or field."¹⁹ The purpose of this regeneration of Palestine by the Mormon colony was to prepare the land for the return of the Jews. After refuting an expected argument that the task of reclaiming the Holy Land would require too much work and expense, Hintze wrote:

And when we contemplate that deliverance from the barren waste is at hand and that God is about to gather a second time His chosen people to this promised land, and that we have a mission looking toward the immediate future (i.e., in this generation) of these promises when one of the Stakes of Zion will be planted here, our hearts have swelled with joy and thankfulness to God for His goodness.²⁰

It is not fully known to what lofty heights Hintze's dreams soared as he trudged by foot over the deserts of Palestine seeking, investigating, dreaming, and writing of the Palestine colony.

The Church authorities in Salt Lake City could not feel so certain that Hintze's dream would immediately crystalize into reality. On August 7, 1898, Hintze noted in his journal that he had learned by letter that the First Presidency had acted upon the Lund-Hintze report. The Church could not buy the colony site at that time because it had no money. Hintze had more or less expected that the Church would not be able to afford it and had himself recognized that the site offered no opportunity for expansion. He did not give up, however, for he declared after receiving the news, "I am now here in Constantinople for the purpose of trying to do something & I will see what I can do. I know that land & home is necessary for these people. They must gather or we can do little or nothing and I feel to continue to labor in this direction."²¹

At Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, on November 9, 1898, after a long letter was read "from Elder F. F. Hintze in Palestine, who is still engaged in looking for a cheap and suitable tract of land for colonization purposes," President Lorenzo Snow stated that "the Church was not prepared to go into that business at the present time."²² This ended the most intensive and lofty phase of the Palestine colony scheme.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid. See also Hintze to *Deseret Evening News*, May 9, 1898, *Deseret Evening News*, June 4, 1898, p. 15; and Hintze to *Deseret Evening News*, September 28, 1898, *Deseret Evening News*, October 29, 1898, p. 11.

²¹ "Hintze's Journal," August 7, 1898.

²² Journal History, November 9, 1898, p. 2.

BOOTH WORKS FOR THE COLONY

Hintze received an associate in his battle for a colony when Joseph Wilford Booth was called to Turkey as a missionary in 1899. During the seventeen years Booth spent as a missionary in the Near East, he worked tirelessly, trying to bring the colony dream into reality. He was converted to the idea early in his mission; only a year after the Lund-Hintze mission, he wrote: "It seems to me the colonization movement cannot be too rapidly pushed."²³ On October 10, 1899, Booth wrote to Hintze at Constantinople telling him that if he would go to Utah and work up the colony scheme and return with fifteen or twenty families and call at Alpine, Utah, and bring Sister Booth, then Booth promised he would stay in the Turkish Mission five more years. He also suggested the names of John Maybe, J. H. Beck, Joseph A. Stubbs, J. M. Jensen and James Clove as men with their families who would make good colonizers.²⁴

During the following years Booth made many requests to the Church authorities for the immediate establishment of the colony. In March, 1904, he wrote to President Heber J. Grant of the European Mission requesting a colony.²⁵ In May of the same year he recorded in his diary, "The poverty this month is touching. More pleas were made for the establishment of something better for temporal aid among the Saints."²⁶ He later stated that the three wishes of his heart were to get recognition, obtain the Book of Mormon in Turkish, and see the establishment of a colony. If these things were done, then he had great hopes for substantial progress in the Turkish Mission.²⁷

Booth's earnest solicitations for a colony received their impetus from the heart-rendering poverty of the members. Following the ruinous massacres of 1894 and 1896, the economic conditions of the members became worse. With the rejection of the colony proposal in 1898, some temporary relief was extended to the members by the Church in the form of cash for food and loans for establishment of some weaving businesses. As the years passed, many of the members became more and more dependent upon welfare given by the Church. There were many factors that produced this condition of continual destitution. The economy of decaying Turkey, with the absence of

²³ Booth to Francis M. Lyman, *Millennial Star*, LXI (May 25, 1899) 330.

²⁴ "Booth's Journal," October 3, 1899 (Original thirteen volumes at Brigham Young University Library, Provo, Utah).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, March 22, 1904.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, May, 1904.

²⁷ Joseph Wilford Booth, "Turkish Saints Celebrate — Progress in Syria," *Millennial Star*, LXVII (August 24, 1905), 541.

any industrialization, allowed foreign exploitation of native markets. The Armenians as a people were not given equal social or economic opportunities and lived in constant fear of the Turks. To a certain extent, the members lacked drive, ingenuity, and consistency.

Booth's main reasons for the colony related to the desire to help place the poverty-stricken members, who were demoralized from being on relief, on a more self-supporting basis financially. The overtones of Stakes of Zion and the redemption of the Near East are missing from Booth's diaries and correspondence. To him the colony had become a temporal expedient that would allow the members free spiritual growth and development while striving for economic self-sufficiency.

Between the years 1904 and 1907 Booth spent much time investigating problems connected with the establishment of a colony. During this time the idea of renting a village in which the members could live and work together evolved. He discussed the establishment of a colony with several American Consuls and with the American Ambassador, Leishman, at Constantinople. They all promised their support and offered their "well wishes and much advice."²⁸ He investigated many potential sites and the problem was continually on his mind as he explored every possibility.²⁹ He spent all of July, 1907, examining available sites, both those for rent and those for sale. One night he went with the United States Consul, Pache, to examine a few large tracts of land. Although they were stony and the water was scarce, he thought wells could be dug and profits could exceed expenses during one year's operation by \$2,368. On July 31 a long letter was written to the First Presidency laying the matter before them.³⁰

The years 1908 and 1909 brought a new peak in the development of the colony scheme. A letter came from the European Mission instructing Booth to purchase a house for mission headquarters if proper title and deeds could be obtained. Upon inquiry, he was informed by Ambassador Leishman that he could purchase property in Turkey as an individual but not for an institution.³¹ No suitable place was found, for every time an agreement was near culmination some deficiency was discovered, such as no water rights, conflicting deeds, or major physical defects in the house.

On February 1, 1908, Booth wrote a strong letter to the First

²⁸ "Booth's Journal," September 26, 1905 and March 18, 1904.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, July 20, 1904.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, July 24, 31, 1907.

³¹ *Ibid.*, March 30 and May 13, 1907.

Presidency in Salt Lake City concerning the condition of the mission and again he suggested a colony and official recognition even if it "cost \$50,000."⁸² A few days later a letter came from Salt Lake City instructing Booth not to purchase any land for the present. Again in May Booth sent a letter to the authorities and this time his efforts brought a favorable reply, dated at Salt Lake City, July 2, 1908:

Dear Brother,

Your letter of May 23rd has been read and considered as we improve the present opportunity of replying to that particular part of it in which you state that the Mayor of Aintab has suggested that it would be a good thing for us to start up work in agriculture for our people. . . .

In connection with this suggestion we have referred to your communication of July 31, 1907, and have considered the proposition therein contained about renting a tract of farming land consisting of from 800 to 1200 acres belonging to Mr. Frederick Pache, the Consular Agent at Aleppo; and we have concluded to authorize you to rent this property for such time as you & the elders with you think best.

It is not clear to our mind that we ought to purchase land, to any great extent at least, in Syria, but we consent to your resorting to this renting proposition as a means of ascertaining what, if anything, can be done by way of assisting the poorer class of our Armenian Saints to make an independent living which, if successful, will no doubt lead to our effort on our part to colonize there. But as to the idea of colonization we particularly desire you to make no promise whatsoever in this direction to our Armenian brethren & sisters. . . .⁸³

The authorities did not want the members to be disappointed if the colony never materialized. Various other details concerning the importation of machinery and rental agreements were included in the letter. Upon receiving the letter, Booth commented:

I hope that is a beginning of a realization of one of my long cherished hopes in favor of the Armenian Saints. May the Lord give us wisdom and prosper us in the undertaking if He sees fit to have us begin.⁸⁴

When the letter reached Booth he was in France assisting three Armenian families to emigrate to America. He was very concerned about his absence from Turkey where he felt he ought to be "looking after the matter of starting up an Agricultural Industry."⁸⁵ He hurried to Turkey as fast as ships and horse-drawn carriages could take him; but upon his arrival at Aintab, he found a letter from the First

⁸² Ibid., February 1, 1908.

⁸³ Anthon H. Lund for the First Presidency to Booth, "Booth's Journal," August 11, 1908.

⁸⁴ "Booth's Journal," August 11, 1908.

⁸⁵ Ibid., August 14, 1908.

Presidency asking him to defer negotiations for the present regarding the leasing of a farm, since some changes had taken place recently.³⁶

THE PAGE MISSION

Subsequent correspondence brought the news that Thomas P. Page, a former Turkish missionary who returned home because of illness, was being sent by the Church officials at Salt Lake City to make an investigation of the various sites of land that were available for a colony. President Booth met the Page party on March 2, 1909, at Adana, Turkey. The group consisted of Page and three companions who were tourists. Booth's disappointment is recorded in his diary:

I talked with Bro Page much concerning his visit and the object of the same. I had supposed that he would be authorized to act in regards to a farming proposition but it seems that he is only to investigate & report at Salt Lake City.³⁷

Traveling extensively throughout Turkey, Syria, and Palestine, Booth and Page investigated various tracts of land. They paid special attention to the Jewish colonies in Palestine and found conditions generally very favorable for agriculture. After the completion of these investigations, which lasted about six weeks, Page returned to Utah to report and Booth returned to Aleppo to await further developments.

Four days later the developments came, with the attempt of Sultan Abdul Hamid II to regain the reins of government from the Young Turks. He was deposed by the National Assembly and his brother established as a puppet sultan. This *coup d'etat* resulted in more Armenian massacres. It was at Adana, where, only a few weeks previously, Booth had met the Page party, that the worst massacres occurred. Confusion and terror reigned among the members although the missionaries were not harmed.

The Church officials were considering the Page report when a letter in which Booth described the upset conditions reached them. Booth inquired whether it would be possible to bring the two hundred Church members to Utah while they still had liberty to leave their native land under the new constitution. With the members taken care of, it would be possible to close the mission until the people should more readily manifest a willingness to receive Mormonism. Under the circumstances, the Church authorities decided that the best thing to do was to honorably release the missionaries

³⁶ Ibid., September 21, 1908.

³⁷ Ibid., October 18, 1922.

laboring in Turkey to return home and let the members get along the best they could without missionary aid from America.⁸⁸ In accordance with these instructions, on October 1, 1909, Booth and his wife, and the remaining missionaries, bade farewell to the poverty-stricken members, now left alone to face the horrors of World War I and the wanton destruction which always followed unsettled political conditions in Turkey.

With the closing of the mission, the colony plan was reduced from an imminent reality to a longing hope buried within the souls of the missionaries and the destitute members in Turkey.

A NEW MISSION AND A NEW HOPE

The autumn of 1921 found Joseph W. Booth returning to the Near East for the third and final mission. The entire seven year period of this mission was spent almost exclusively in relief and charity work, including the distribution of goods that relatives and friends as well as the Church had sent to the destitute refugees who had been gathered at Aleppo, Syria, in two large houses rented by the Church. From these trying circumstances, constant appeals were made for a colony by Booth. New United States immigration laws practically excluded all the people born in Turkey from entrance into the United States, so that it appeared hopeless to make any attempt to emigrate the members of the Turkish Mission.

In the latter part of 1922, an investigation was made of the possibility of moving the Armenian members to Cyprus, at the suggestion of the European Mission Office. A prompt negative reply from the British Consul killed the suggestion. More pleas were sent to Utah for definite action leading to a colony, while more investigations were made in Syria for suitable land. To ascertain the possibility of growing various crops in the Syrian climate, seeds sent to Booth by his brother in Utah were planted in the courtyard of the refugee home. Both grains and vegetables grew very well, according to Booth, who blistered his hands planting potatoes.⁸⁹

In January, 1924, the Armenian Mission was visited by David O. McKay, European Mission President, who accompanied Booth on a short but active tour of several available colonization sites. They visited many relief institutions supported by the Near East Relief Agency and examined their facilities. Several farms in the Beirut-Damascus area were investigated. During the six months following the departure of Elder McKay, Booth was very active trying to locate suitable facilities for an agricultural colony.

⁸⁸ "Journal History," June 23, 1909, 7-8.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, May 4, 1923.

While busy with this intensive research, Booth wrote often to Church President Heber J. Grant, including in one letter a suggestion for "a general big drive to collect enough money to cut off further expenses of the Armenian Mission."⁴⁰ Although there were unfavorable replies to these suggestions, still investigations continued. Elder McKay offered to come again to the Near East, if needed, to assist in locating a tract of land for rent. He was released shortly after making this offer; consequently all talk and investigation ceased until the new European Mission President, James E. Talmage, could be informed of the purpose and needs for a colony.⁴¹

The following year Booth expressed his feelings about the colony and the status of the long-cherished dream, first to his diary and then in an historical report:

For 25 years I have been hoping and longing and urging and praying for the establishment of a colony for the Armenian Saints but so far it has not materialized. We meet with objections and difficulties here and there. A suitable location where land and water and wood, building materials and climate etc. as well as safety from the ignorant and malicious who might be in the neighborhood — all of these must be considered and also something reasonably cheap.⁴²

For the past 25 years there has been talk of establishing a colony for these Armenian Saints where they might be taught agricultural pursuits, stock raising, fruit growing, bee keeping, poultry, etc. Favorable decisions have been made and unfavorable conditions have intervened. Until to this date no action has been taken to bring about this much desired condition. The authorities at home have wisely considered the matter from many angles, and until greater safety is in sight, the scheme has been postponed for at least another year. Yet the purchase of a tract of land either in Palestine or Southern Syria is still recommended at as early a date as possible while land is comparatively cheap.⁴³

Thus there was, over the years, a shift in emphasis from a colony to serve as a sanctuary from political and social persecution, as well as aid in the redemption of Palestine for the returning Jews, to a colony that would be a means of agricultural employment for refugee members.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid., April 16, 1924.

⁴¹ About September, 1924.

⁴² "Booth's Journal," May 1, 1925.

⁴³ Badwagan Piranian, "The Palestine-Syrian Mission," p. 13 (A typewritten history compiled from papers left by Booth in the Haifa Mission Office in 1928, possessed by Piranian at residence in Salt Lake City, Utah).

⁴⁴ "Development of Armenian Mission Shown in Report," *Deseret News*, August 15, 1925, p. 10.

HARRIS'S VISIT ENDS THE COLONY DREAM

New hopes were aroused in March, 1926, when Booth received a letter from Heber J. Grant stating that "the Armenian Mission is being considered, and the question of a colony for the Saints here has been talked of. Someone may be sent to see about it."⁴⁵ Word was received May 11 from President Grant that Franklin S. Harris, president of Brigham Young University, was expected to take a trip around the world and that he had been requested to "make it his business to spend some little time" in the Armenian Mission to look over the situation.⁴⁶ Grant stated further that his personal desire was to have the colony in Palestine rather than in Syria.

When this news was received, Booth, at the suggestion of the American Consul, Paul H. Alling, submitted a report to the Consulate, listing the desires and aims of the proposed colony. This request was favorably received by General Billotte, the French Military Officer (under the mandate from the Treaty of Paris which attempted to settle the problems of World War I), who returned typewritten copies which were forwarded to the First Presidency.⁴⁷

Franklin S. Harris arrived in Beirut from Haifa on February 2, 1927. He and Booth visited with the members of the Church, as well as the American Consulate officials and educators in the American University of Beirut. When they reached Aleppo, Harris spent six days investigating conditions, talking with the members of the Church, inquiring into conditions from government officials, and writing his report to the First Presidency. It was a thorough investigation, and the report brought forth new factors concerning the difficulties of a colony. According to Booth, the ten page report contained the information necessary for the First Presidency to decide on the future of the Armenian Mission.⁴⁸

The comprehensive and objective evaluation demonstrated the advantages and disadvantages of any kind of colony scheme. Harris lists several reasons for the proposed colonization: The East is basically different from the West and, in the Orient, church-membership is not so much a matter of individual conversion through the intellect as it is accepting a system of leadership in social, financial, and religious activities. Hence a different missionary system is required in the Near East than in America or Western Europe. A few long-term missionaries would be far more effective than many short-term

⁴⁵ "Booth's Journal," March 21, 1926.

⁴⁶ Piranian, *op. cit.*, 16.

⁴⁷ "Booth's Journal," June 18, 1926.

⁴⁸ Piranian, *op. cit.*, 18-20 contains copy of report.

elders, and if the new converts are to live the high standards of the Church they must be brought out of the old environment and put under special leadership. Moreover, a colony would be of particular benefit to the Armenian members since they have recently been driven from their homes and are destitute. In addition a colony would make possible an educational program for the children, and it would also attract the attention and interest of many people and could be an effective method of proselyting.

Possible locations for the colony were given, such as Haifa, Jaffa, or Jerusalem in Palestine. Syria also possessed several sites, which were cheaper; however, governmental stability was lacking there. From \$100,000 to \$200,000 was the estimated cost, with an additional \$25,000 to \$50,000 necessary for equipment, plus enough more to pay expenses until the project came into full production.

The report showed that only twenty of the 173 members were self-sustaining; all the rest, which included many women and children, were receiving aid. Since investigation disclosed that most of the members had an industrial rather than an agricultural background, the interests could best be utilized in an industrial colony in which good supervision and collective buying and marketing could benefit the members.

The final alternative was to continue giving hand-to-mouth help to alleviate the most extreme poverty, as had been done for the past seven years. This would be much cheaper and the expenses would gradually diminish as the members became better assimilated into their environment. A special suggestion recommended that a respectable mission headquarters be established in Haifa and missionary work be concentrated among the Europeans.⁴⁹

The report got directly to the core of the colony problem. The most significant new recommendation was for the industrial colony, which pointed to the fallacy of hoping for success with an agricultural colony when the prospective members were almost unanimously of an industrial inclination.

As President Booth read and copied the report he foresaw the decision that would be made. He wrote to the First Presidency expressing the joy that the Harris visit had brought to them. Then he resigned himself and the future of the colony into their hands:

With such a splendid report as Brother Harris has submitted to you for your consideration, we can only await your pleasure in the disposal of the questions involved, and I feel sure that what you do will be for the best interest of the mission in this land.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Entire summary is from the Harris report, *ibid*.

⁵⁰ Booth to First Presidency, February 16, 1927, in Piranian, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

But his feelings of disappointment and heartbreak slip out in his concluding paragraph:

You are well aware of the sincere efforts I have made for the last 28 years and of the hopes and dreams and aspirations and anxieties to see a colony of Latter-Day-Saints established in these old Bible lands, founded on gospel principles and to be a living example of light and life and salvation for and to this people so long in the thralls of the blighted customs and traditions and superstitions which have prevailed here for so many centuries, but even after all my fond anticipations, and fervent prayers and earnest longings and at last with a possibility of a crushing of my hopes for such a blessing, I think I have never in all these long years felt more reconciled to willingly and cheerfully and thankfully acquiesce in any decision that the authorities might see fit to make on the report now sent to you by our recent visitor Dr. F. S. Harris. . . .

My greatest desire is to see the work of God prosper and triumph in the Earth.⁵¹

When a letter arrived on April 10, 1927, from the First Presidency informing Booth that James E. Talmage would soon visit the mission to help secure a mission home in Haifa, Booth knew that his fears and forebodings, so evident in the preceding letter, had been justified. When Talmage arrived he told Booth that "it seems the Church is not ready to secure any great holdings in Syria."⁵²

Again the decision was not a violent death blow to the long-cherished Palestine colony dream, but rather a crippling, fatal suffocation. This final, indefinite postponement pushed the colony scheme into the oblivion of historical archives.

One year later, Booth, having moved the mission headquarters to Haifa, died while on a visit with his beloved saints in Aleppo. There in a sandy, desolate cemetery, he was buried along with his hopes, dreams and yearnings of twenty-nine years for a colony in the Near East.

Subsequently, when the mission was reopened in 1933 by Badwagan Piranian, an Armenian who had lived most of his life in Switzerland, no further serious consideration was given to the colony scheme. During his four and a half year presidency, headquarters were maintained at Haifa, and proselyting was carried on thereabouts, with frequent visits made to the Armenian members in Syria. In the course of reorganizing the branches, almost half of the members were excommunicated when Piranian became convinced that "most of the members had joined the Church only for financial

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² "Booth's Journal," October 11, 1927.

help"⁵³ and very few had real testimonies. He regarded welfare with skepticism, stressing individual self-sufficiency. Personally he sought to aid the members to find markets in Switzerland and other countries for their rugs and other woven products. Instructions from the Church specified that money should not be used for marketing the goods. A few missionaries served under Piranian and under his successor, Joseph Jacobs, until the threat of world war closed the mission and again left the members on their own.

Piranian re-opened the mission in 1947, with headquarters established at Beirut, Lebanon, due to the political turmoil in Palestine incident to the creation of Israel. The twenty-odd missionaries who served in the mission during the postwar period found the few (less than a hundred) who were still members in a poor but vastly improved economic condition, as the entire Near East had prospered very much during World War II. Proselyting was carried on chiefly in Beirut among the Christian Arabs, many of whom were refugees from Palestine. The mission gained very few converts. Due to the alleged reasons, among others, that the "people were not ready" and the "unsettled political conditions," the 17 missionaries were transferred to various European missions and the Piranians to California at the end of 1950, the author being the last missionary to leave. The members were attached to the Swiss-Austrian Mission, whose missionaries visited them periodically.

Although the colony never materialized, some of its important objectives have been realized independent of the Mormon Church. Stronger political control has brought economic reform, which together with technological progress, oil, and international trade have resulted in financial independence of the Armenian members, the most important objective of the colony. Furthermore, the millions of dollars collected from world Jewry by Zionist organizations have been poured into Palestine, and along with world technology and talent are beginning to "redeem" the land from its desolate condition. Immigration has brought many of the members to America. Thus the passage of time, with the progress and developments of the world as they have converged on the Near East, have fulfilled the important objectives of the colonial aspirations of the Mormons in that area.

⁵³ Piranian, *op. cit.*, 42.

The Church is, or should be, a fellowship of those who believe in God as he is made known to us in Jesus Christ — or at least a fellowship of those who now and then believe in God and, believing, catch a glimpse of His deep concern for humanity, and then endeavor — at least intermittently endeavor — to emulate Him. The Church exists not for its own sake, but for the world's sake, and not just for the sake of the believing world — especially not just for the sake of the believing world — but rather for the sake of the confused, dispirited, and aggressive world of unfaith to which it was sent and which stands now as always in great need of the true Church for its redemption.

Today the world of unbelief is all about us—in ourselves, our homes and our societies. It is indeed peculiarly the world of our time, and it needs help. The Reverend Henry Bellows said that the men of his day — about a hundred years ago — were excessively “luminous in their doubts.” How much more characteristic this has been, and continues to be, of us! It is of course obvious that we cannot win faith by wanting it, neither by intellection or by volition. Nor is salvation to be found in the study of theology. But can we not now, when occasionally we sense the Holy Spirit — and I believe that most of us, at times, do sense it — undertake to be a little less luminous in our doubts, to be a little more ready to receive than to resist and then, letting it help us to put off doubt, show more confidence in response than has always latterly fitted our mood? Can we who have erred in spirit not come to understanding? Can we who have murmured not learn doctrine? If we cannot do this ourselves, or let it happen in us, how can we hope to influence others toward this end?

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September 28, 1966*