



Antonio de la Cierva y Lewita: the Spanish Consul in Jerusalem 1914-1920

Roberto Mazza

Ballobar in his official uniform. *Source:*
author's collection.

In September 1914 a young Spanish diplomat, arrived in Jerusalem- a few months afterwards he, began to record his experiences in Jerusalem, a city that was increasingly involved in the First World War due to the Ottoman alliance with Germany. His name was Antonio de la Cierva Conde de Ballobar:

“On 8th September the Ottoman Grand Vizier informed all foreign ambassadors that the Sultan had signed an *irade* abolishing the Capitulations. The effect of such news cannot be described: tremendous panic spread amongst Christians as almost immediately demonstrations against the Europeans began. However in Jerusalem this event was not of great importance despite its official character. The governor of the city was present and a telegram from the Minister of the Interior was read. News that I have received from other regions are more serious than here as the demonstrations are more anti-Christian.”¹

What is the relevance of Ballobar as a historical source? What are the corners of history this source can shed light upon? How can this source be used by researchers? It is essential to bear in mind these questions while discussing Ballobar and the Spanish consular mission. During his first stay in Jerusalem, the Conde de Ballobar, while still in his twenties, wrote a diary which was eventually published in 1996 and has still not been translated into English. So, why is Ballobar an important source for the history of Palestine and Jerusalem? From the diary

and the documents available it is possible to add a new and fresh historical perspective on the city and the region. It is also possible to cross check disputed historical facts and to fill unknown corners of history. The consul was the only diplomat who lived through the whole period of the First World War in the city, as Spain remained a neutral country in the conflict. The American consul Otis Glazebrook, also stayed in the city throughout most of the war; however, besides some material from the American archives, there are no personal papers, memoirs or diaries available in order to study this figure in more detail. Ballobar, as mentioned earlier, eventually became a sort of ‘universal’ consul in Jerusalem as he represented the interests of all countries involved in the conflict, but above all he became a link between the Ottoman and British rule. After the arrival of the British in December 1917 Allenby, commander of the British force in Palestine, and the Foreign Office allowed him to maintain the protection of British interests and others until the military and political situations were consolidated.²

The diary and the consular material shed light on Jerusalem during World War One, particularly with regard to social aspects, as the consuls on many occasions reported on the living conditions of the Jerusalemites, and on political issues with local but also international relevance. Local politics were the most important issues to the young consul as they had direct impact on Spanish interests; however, considering his isolation from the rest of the world, whilst attending social events he always tried to gather as much information as possible on what was happening outside the microcosm of Jerusalem.

As a source Ballobar has only been mentioned in scholarly written works by Tom Segev, despite the fact that when the British occupied Jerusalem the Spanish consul was a well known figure.³ It is clear however that Ballobar’s position as a key figure in the city faded away quite rapidly after the British capture of Jerusalem. This was probably for several reasons that includes the fact that Spain was not a crucial actor in the Middle East, secondly that Ballobar had a limited knowledge of English and lastly the development of the events which cut him off from the main political stream. Segev, however, has only partially captured the importance of Ballobar, as he reported some of the entries of the diary but his brief analyses of the Spanish consul ended with reporting the socialite behaviour of the young consul.⁴ Researchers should however reconsider this particular figure. As I will attempt to show, Ballobar played a major role in wartime Jerusalem and his ‘socialite’ attitude was not an obstacle, but provides a fresh perspective, on the city and its politics.

In terms of available sources, aside from the diary, references to the Spanish consular mission can be found in several archives. The diary was written in Jerusalem from September 1914 to May 1919. It was written almost on a daily basis, though sometimes there are significant gaps from one entry to the next, as when the consul travelled to Istanbul in 1917. Apparently he left some space in the diary to fill at a later date, but he never completed the part relating to his journey.

There are several themes that emerge from the diary and sources. Ballobar was extremely concerned with the difficulty in contacting the Spanish embassy in Istanbul



Ballobar in the Getsemani. *Source: author's collection.*

or the Spanish Foreign Office in Madrid; as the consul was a very young diplomat he felt that isolation was his worst enemy. Isolation that was worsened also by the sense of detachment from the local population that is possible to feel in his writing. Another concern of the Spanish diplomat was in relation to the Christian Catholic institutions of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Ballobar, in fact, was sent to Jerusalem in order to deal with the stalemate between the Spanish consular mission and the Custody of the Holy Land. The predecessor of Ballobar, Rafael Casares, following a diplomatic incident between Spain and the Custody in 1913, severed all relations with the Custos Father Carcaterra.⁵ Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century engaged in a battle against the Custody over the possession of certain convents which were established and managed by clergy of Spanish citizenship. Besides this tense environment Ballobar also had to cope with the unilateral abolition of the capitulations in 1914 which meant to him lesser protection against the Turks. These are, of course, only some examples of issues that emerge from the diary.

Biography

Antonio de la Cierva y Lewita, later on Conde de Ballobar and Duque de Terranova, was born in Vienna in 1885. His mother was Austrian of Jewish origin but converted to the Catholic faith. His father was a Spanish military attaché to the Spanish embassy in the Austrian capital. The title Conde de Ballobar was inherited from the second wife of his father and Duque of Terranova from his wife.⁶ In 1911 Ballobar entered the Spanish consular service and was sent as vice-consul to Cuba. In May 1913 Ballobar was appointed consul in Jerusalem, when he was less than thirty years old; according

to his personnel file he took possession of the consulate in August 1913 and remained until the end of 1919.⁷ At the time of the British occupation of Jerusalem in 1917 he found himself the only consul in the city, in charge of the protection of the interests of all countries involved in the war. Ballobar spoke fluent French and Italian, but only basic English and he did not speak Arabic or Turkish, though he adopted a number of words used locally. He became a crucial personality, though this rapidly faded away. In 1920 he married Rafaela Osorio de Moscoso Duchess of Terranova. Later on the Count often used Terranova instead of Ballobar.

In January 1920 Ballobar took charge of the Spanish consulate in Damascus; however in November of the same year he moved to Tangier where he served for few months.⁸ On 24th June 1921 Ballobar resigned his commission as consul and moved back to Spain.⁹ Ballobar was commissioned to carry out a report on the Spanish convents and hospital in Palestine in 1925, but until 1936 he was an 'excedente voluntario', that is he took an extended leave of absence. In August 1936 Ballobar decided to publicly support Francisco Franco and his 'Junta de Defensa Nacional de España' against the left-wing Popular Front that won the election few months earlier. Due to some anti-clerical violence against the Church that took place after the elections, it is not surprising that the pious Ballobar supported Franco. From August 1936 Ballobar was first appointed in the Diplomatic Cabinet of the 'Junta' and then as Secretary of the External Relations of Franco's Foreign Office. During the interwar period and in the 1940s Ballobar mainly worked at the Spanish Foreign Office, with a particular interest in the relations with the Holy See. In June 1938 he was appointed as First Secretary of the Spanish Embassy to the Holy See; however, a year later Ballobar returned to Spain with his wife and five children.¹⁰ After the war Ballobar was offered important positions as consul around the world, such as Canada or the United States, he did not accept these appointments. On the contrary, he asked for a short leave of absence which he alternated with short periods at the Spanish Foreign Office.¹¹ In May 1949 Ballobar was named once again consul to Jerusalem where he served until 1952. Ballobar eventually died in Madrid in 1971 aged 86 years.¹²

Three Case Studies

Ballobar was a man who cared about his appearance and his social life: in fact he always, even in times of crisis, dressed carefully according to the social occasion, wearing suits; but he also worried a great deal about his personal residence, seeing this as a reflection of his status, changing house when other foreign officials left the city due to war conditions.¹³ He was famous for the luxurious meals he served at his residence and indeed he was also able to entertain the local political and military establishment: Cemal Paşa was a regular guest of the consul. Nevertheless, to define him as a socialite is to present a very superficial picture of the consul.

Looking at three examples, using the diary and other sources, I will suggest a different view of the Spanish diplomat. Ballobar was indeed a classical orientalist, in

Saidian terms, as he possessed an ideological misperception, latent and manifest, of the ‘Orient’.¹⁴ Ballobar’s mind was led by classical stereotypes and clichés in relation to the Near East and its inhabitants; therefore it is not surprising that in his diary and reports he avoided granting any particular attention to the local population or that he discussed the indigenous population in negative terms. Ballobar often did not differentiate between the different communities living in Jerusalem unless discussing particular cases. Frequently he used the word ‘Arabs’ meaning the local populations as in the occasion of the solar eclipse of 6th July 1917:

“It is logical that the Arabs considered the eclipse a sign of evil. However Djemal Pasha must have considered it differently. It seems in fact that he will be appointed *generalissimo* and minister of war.”¹⁵

The first reference to be found in the diary concerning the local population is a note on 16th February 1915. Ballobar interestingly reports the Arab frustration against the Turks who sent them to fight a war they did not want to fight.

“The Arabs are angered at the Turks as they have sent them to die. However none of them (the Arabs) are able to resist the (Turkish) oppressors. These people (the Arabs) have no awareness of the spirit of nationalism.”¹⁶

In this case he ungenerously states that the Arabs have no sense of nation and national spirit. According to the sources available we may speculate he knew little if not anything of the rising local national movements. Interestingly it took three months from the outbreak of the war for Ballobar to write a note on the local population; a reflection of his poor attention to the city and its population, at least in the first stages of his consular mission in Jerusalem, but also a reflection of his consular mission which was meant to deal with religious institutions rather than with people. This is quite the opposite of the American consular mission as intended by Glazebrook who in fact cared a lot about the local residents and reported frequently and in length about them. In June 1915 the consul was informed of current Arab political activity; however, he maintained his negative opinion and he openly claimed the Arabs would not be able to achieve anything against the Turks.¹⁷ Ballobar then took some interest in the condition of the Turkish army and the development of the Palestinian front as well as in the living conditions of the Jerusalemites, most evidently towards the end of the war. At the time of the invasion of the locusts in 1915 Ballobar continued to dine with the other foreign officials in the city as well as with the German commanders enjoying cognac, wine, cigars and large meals with them, a sign that the war was indeed very far from his mind. In March 1915 Ballobar was mainly concerned with the price of wheat that increased as a consequence of the invasion of locusts.¹⁸ Apparently the spring and summer of that year proved to be quiet for the consul as he wrote on 16th July 1915: ‘Time is passing and it is quite monotonous. What will I write? Possibly nothing relevant. Almost every day I am having an excellent German beer with the

Austrian Consul, Kraus or with my friend Kittani.¹⁹ Ballobar was indeed aware of the low profile role and he played along this line until 1917 when the pressure of the war reached Jerusalem and he personally had to deal with a shortage of resources and with his new and unexpected role of ‘universal’ consul. Still, he continued to be detached from the local population turning to questions such as the devaluation of Turkish paper and the rise of the cost of living, less in terms of impact on the population than on the money available to him.

[21 January 1917] “Bread costs today in Jerusalem 10 piastres. Bread! This means a general feeling of discomfort. We are in the funniest situation: a *rotal* [2.5kg] of meat costs 36 piastres against 18 piastres before the war. 500 lbs of gold is necessary everyday to have enough bread in Jerusalem, however considering that the Bedouins do not accept Turkish paper money it is almost impossible to find gold, therefore according to the head of the ‘bread committee’ Zaki Bey, in no time nothing will be available for the population, so what will we do?”²⁰

A second example of the relative importance of the Spanish consul as historical source is provided by the consul’s personal character. Ballobar liked indeed to be at the centre of the stage and Jerusalem under war conditions gave him the chance to do so. In April 1917 with the impending British conquest of Jaffa the Ottoman authorities ordered the evacuation of this city with a particular focus on the Jewish population who were to be deported.²¹ The news of the evacuation of the Jewish population of Jaffa reached Europe and beyond. At this point what Ballobar noted on 11th April 1917 as ‘The Jews of Jaffa have left the city for the Jewish colonies in Galilee’ became a massacre of Jews in the press around the world.²² The evacuation was portrayed in terms of massacres and pogrom. The *Revue Israelite d’Egypte* wrote that Jews had been deported and eventually condemned to die along the way.²³ The *New York Times* titled: “Plea for the Jews of Jaffa; driven out by Turks, they are wandering in increasing misery.”²⁴ The Vatican as well expressed its concern in relation to the evacuation of Jaffa and the fate of the Jews. The Apostolic Delegate in Istanbul interviewed the German ambassador in the Ottoman capital and reported to Cardinal Gasparri, Secretary of the Vatican State that the deportation was ordered for military reasons and the issue of massacres was not supported by solid evidence.²⁵ It is clear that the deportation of Jews from Jaffa became a significant topic in Ottoman and German circles. For Germans it was crucial not to alienate those German Jews supporting the Reich as suggested by a campaign led by the press supporting the adoption of a German pro-Zionist stance.²⁶ Germans, besides, made clear that it was Cemal Paşa’s will to evacuate Jaffa and not a necessity of war.²⁷ In June 1917 the German Ambassador in Istanbul and Cemal Paşa himself asked the Spanish consul to investigate. Ballobar interviewed some Ottoman and German officials but at the same time he also managed to interview local Jews. Eventually Ballobar concluded that no massacre had taken place and as said earlier the Jewish residents of Jaffa

moved towards Galilee and some to Jerusalem.²⁸ The results of his work were sent to the various Foreign Offices around the world, but were not reported in the press until later in 1917. A similar case occurred after the British occupation of Jerusalem took place. Rumours reached Europe that the British had sentenced to death some German subjects including civilians. Ballobar was urged by the Spanish Foreign Office to investigate.²⁹ The consul eventually reported that the British in 1918 did not execute anyone but they had deported some German subjects for security reasons.³⁰

The war provided Ballobar with another chance to become a prominent social actor and to increase his prestige. As mentioned earlier, until the last few months before the end of the war, Ballobar was quite detached from the local population though at times he took care of the fate of some local residents.

[30 November 1917] “We are in a period of anti-Semitic mania, besides the governor has ordered to arrest all Jewish notables: doctor Thon, head of the local Zionists, Astroc, head of the Rothschild hospital, doctor Thico and Farhi of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, Barouchan and doctor Schatz, also the dragoman of the Franciscans and other Christian notables and one Muslim from Jaffa. Because of this situation I went to the hospice of San Paul to interview Major Schrenges who passed on my queries to Von Falkenhayn.”³¹

During the war Ballobar was also charged with the distribution of aid and relief, principally from the United States. This job was mainly handled by the American Consul Otis Glazebrook, but when in April 1917 the United States joined the war and broke diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire, Ballobar was asked to carry on with this task. On 17th April 1917 Ballobar met Glazebrook and they agreed on the procedures to adopt in case the United States would sever diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire.³² Following these events Ballobar took charge of the distribution of aid, mainly to the Jewish population of the city, but also to the other communities of Jerusalem.³³ Ballobar complained that this work required most of his time as in fact he had to keep record of all money arrived and to make sure this would reach the correct persons. He also complained that this work and all social activities would have had a repercussion sooner or later on his health.³⁴ After the arrival of the British the consul fell victim of a light neurasthenic attack, due, according to him, to stress caused by an overload of work.³⁵

A third example that shall be discussed in relation to the Spanish consul is Ballobar’s perceptions of the Ottoman administration. He was not very fond of the Ottoman rule, however it would be reductive to label his comments as merely orientalist and not to pay attention to some of his views. Ballobar had some good friends amongst the Ottomans like the local Chief of Police Nur al-Din Bey, Zaki Bey (military governor of Jerusalem for some time) and Cemal Paşa (governor of Syria and commander of the Fourth Army). He was suspicious of the Ottoman governors, as they stayed only for short periods, and he could not establish proper relations with them. On many occasions he had quarrels with Ottoman officials, which were often

solved with the intervention of Cemal. Late in November 1917, when it was clear that it was only a matter of time before the British would take Jerusalem, the Ottoman authorities ordered the deportation of the highest religious figures in the city including the Latin Patriarch Mons Camassei.³⁶ Ballobar complained against this particular measure, above all in relation to the way the clergyman was taken away, considering he was seventy years old and in poor health. Ballobar lost no time complaining about the governor's handling of this to Cemal Paşa.³⁷

[2 December 1917] "The governor is furious with me because he has received a letter of complaint from the Minister of the Interior as a consequence of the rude behaviour shown on the occasion of the expulsion of the Latin Patriarch."³⁸

From the diary it is not clear how and when this 'friendship' with Cemal began. Nevertheless it is clear that from the first few times the two met they easily became well acquainted. Cemal Paşa eventually confessed to the Spanish consul the veracity of the rumours reporting that the Ottoman General was having an affair with a Jewish woman in September 1915: Lea Tenenbaum.³⁹ This episode clearly shows the close relationship between the two. The affair of Cemal Paşa and Lea Tenenbaum was apparently quite famous and gave rise to criticism as shown in the war-time diary of the local resident Ihsan Tourjman, who considered Lea Tenenbaum a 'private prostitute' and Cemal not fit to lead the army.⁴⁰ Wasif Jawhariyyeh, a Greek Orthodox resident of Jerusalem, also discussed Miss Tenenbaum, defining her as one of the most beautiful Jewish women in Palestine.⁴¹ Besides reporting rumours and gossip, Ballobar indeed provided some light relief when he described the Ottoman Triumvirate as the Holy Trinity with Talat as the father, Cemal as the son and Enver as the Holy Spirit.⁴²

Ballobar lived in a microcosm which reflected the larger context of the war in the Middle East. The diary and related material has proved to be a valuable and unique historical source which sheds light on several facets namely socio-political life in Jerusalem and Ottoman policies and religious institutions. There is also new material on Turco-Greek relations; information on typhus and cholera epidemics in Jerusalem and Palestine; a good picture of the British Military Administration in Jerusalem; and data, figures and information on the war and its effects on the region. It is quite clear that research on this topic has not been exhausted. It would be a great opportunity to study Ballobar together with Tourjman and Jawhariyyeh and perhaps other sources yet to be researched in a comparative analysis to enrich our understanding of this historical period.

Roberto Mazza is Assistant Professor at Western Illinois University.

Endnotes

- 1 Conde de Ballobar, edited by Eduardo Manzano Moreno, *Diario de Jerusalem 1914-1919*, (Madrid: Nerea, 1996), p. 63. All translations of the diary entries are mine.
- 2 The National Archives: Public Record Office (TNA: PRO) FO141/665, Foreign Office to High Commissioner for Egypt, London, 31 January 1918.
- 3 Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, (New York: Holt & C., 2001).
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 5 Patrocinio Garcia Barriuso, *España en la Historia de Tierra Santa*, (Madrid: MAE, 1994), vol. II, p. 627-630.
- 6 Conde de Ballobar, *Diario de Jerusalem*, pp. 25-26.
- 7 Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores (AMAE), Madrid, P481/33813, Personnel files Antonio de la Cierva y Lewita.
- 8 AMAE, P481/33813, Personnel files Antonio de la Cierva y Lewita.
- 9 AMAE, P481/33813, Minutes of Secretary of States, 22 October 1921, Madrid.
- 10 AMAE, P481/33813, Spanish Embassy to the Holy See, 21 May 1939, Vatican City.
- 11 A complete picture of the positions offered is to be found in the personnel files. MAE, P481, Personnel files Antonio de la Cierva y Lewita.
- 12 Officially the Spanish government did not recognise the State of Israel however Franco wanted to open a consulate in Jerusalem in order to open a dialogue with the Israeli authorities. It was only in 1986 that full diplomatic relations were established between Spain and Israel.
- 13 Conde de Ballobar, *Diario de Jerusalem*, p. 65. Ballobar moved his residence on 16 November 1916 and he went to live in the house of Guerassimo, director of the Credit Lyonnais in Jerusalem. Ballobar noted that this was the most comfortable and chic house in the city.
- 14 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Pantheon Books, 1978), pp. 205-209. An example of manifest Orientalism can be seen in Conde de Ballobar, *Diario de Jerusalem*, p. 91. Ballobar, as it will be discussed later as he judged the Arabs as weak and with no sense of nationalism.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 214
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 179.
- 21 AMAE, H3025/020, Spanish Embassy in Berlin, copy of the German report on the evacuation of Jaffa, 9 June 1917, Berlin.
- 22 Conde de Ballobar, *Diario de Jerusalem*, pp. 199-200.
- 23 Archivio Storico Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASMAE), Archivio di Gabinetto, Italian Consular Mission in Egypt, 30 May 1917, Cairo.
- 24 *New York Times*, 22 May 1917.
- 25 Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), *Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918)* - 130, Card Dolci to Card Gasparri, 3 June 1917, Istanbul.
- 26 David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, (New York: Owl Books, 2001), p. 296.
- 27 AMAE, H3025/020, Spanish Ambassador to Ministry of State, 10 August 1917, Istanbul.
- 28 Conde de Ballobar, *Diario de Jerusalem*, p. 200. Isaiah Friedman, *Germany Turkey and Zionism 1897-1918*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 364-365. Friedman discusses the same event offering different accounts. According to German sources the inquiry was shelved, while the Spanish consul claims he carried out this enquiry.
- 29 AMAE, H3078/005, Ministry of State to Diplomatic Mission in Palestine, 13 April 1918, Madrid.
- 30 AMAE, H3078/005, Ministry of State to German Embassy, 8 August 1918, San Sebastian.
- 31 Conde de Ballobar, *Diario de Jerusalem*, p. 229.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- 33 AMAE, H3069/008, Ballobar to Ministry of State, list of payments, 10 October 1917, Jerusalem.
- 34 Conde de Ballobar, *Diario de Jerusalem*, p. 209.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 245.
- 36 ASV, *Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918)* - 130, Card Dolci to Apostolic Delegation in Vienna, 29 December 1917, Istanbul.
- 37 Conde de Ballobar, *Diario de Jerusalem*, pp. 221-225.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- 40 Jacobson, 'Negotiating Ottomanism in Times of War', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, No.1 (Feb. 2008), p. 77.
- 41 Salim Tamari, 'Jerusalem's Ottoman Modernity: The Times and Lives of Wasif Jawhariyyeh,' *Jerusalem Quarterly File* 9, (2000), 27.
- 42 Conde de Ballobar, *Diario de Jerusalem*, p. 105.