

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Occupying Syria under the French Mandate

What role does military force play during a colonial occupation? The answer seems obvious: coercion crushes local resistance, quashes political dissent and consolidates the dominance of the occupying power. Yet violence can also have more subtle and more ambiguous consequences. This discerning and theoretically rigorous study focuses on Syria during the French Mandate from 1920 to 1946, a turbulent period in which conflict between armed Syrian insurgents and French military forces not only determined the strategic objectives of the colonial state, but also transformed how the colonial state organised, controlled and understood Syrian society, geography and population. The book shows how, in addition to the coercive techniques of air power, collective punishment and colonial policing, civilian technologies such as urban planning and engineering were commandeered in the effort to undermine rebel advances. In this way colonial violence had a lasting effect in Syria, shaping a peculiar form of social order that endured well after the French occupation. As the conclusion surmises, the interplay between violence, spatial colonisation and pacification continues to resonate with recent developments in the region.

Dr Daniel Neep is Lecturer in Middle East Politics at the University of Exeter and Research Director (Syria) at the Council for British Research in the Levant.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge Middle East Studies

Editorial Board

Charles Tripp (general editor)

Julia Clancy-Smith

F. Gregory Gause

Yezid Sayigh

Avi Shlaim

Judith E. Tucker

Cambridge Middle East Studies has been established to publish books on the nineteenth- to twenty-first-century Middle East and North Africa. The aim of the series is to provide new and original interpretations of aspects of Middle Eastern societies and their histories. To achieve disciplinary diversity, books are solicited from authors writing in a wide range of fields including history, sociology, anthropology, political science and political economy. The emphasis is on producing books offering an original approach along theoretical and empirical lines. The series is intended for students and academics, but the more accessible and wide-ranging studies will also appeal to the interested general reader.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Occupying Syria under the French Mandate

Insurgency, Space and State Formation

DANIEL NEEP



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107000063

© Daniel Neep 2012

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2012

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Neep, Daniel.

Occupying Syria under the French mandate : insurgency, space and state formation / Daniel Neep.

pages cm. – (Cambridge Middle East studies)

ISBN 978-1-107-00006-3 (hardback)

1. Syria – History – French occupation, 1918–1946. 2. Mandates – Syria.

3. Insurgency – Syria – History – 20th century. 4. Power (Social sciences) – Syria –

History – 20th century. 5. Political violence – Syria – History – 20th century. 6. Social

control – Syria – History 20th century. I. Title.

DS98.N44 2012

956.9104'I-dc23

2012009859

ISBN 978-1-107-00006-3 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Note on Translation and Transliteration</i>	xiii
Introduction	I
1. Rethinking Colonial Violence	5
2. The Architecture of the Colonial State	20
3. Political Rationalities of Violence	39
4. Time, Science and Space	66
5. Rebel Movements and the Great Revolt	101
6. Urban Planning, Hygiene and Counter-Insurgency	131
7. Nomad Space: Securing the Desert	165
Conclusion	199
<i>Bibliography</i>	211
<i>Index</i>	227

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Illustrations

3.1. The Execution of Fakhrī Ḥasan al-Kharrāṭ (1926)	<i>page</i> 56
3.2. Syrian Rebel Corpses Displayed at al-Merjeh Square, Damascus (1925)	56
6.1. Barricade in Damascus Manned by Syrian Gendarmes (1926)	137
6.2. Urban Development of al-Qāmishlī 1927–1930 (1931)	145
6.3. The Old Sūq in al-Qāmishlī (late 1920s)	146
6.4. The ‘Great Sūq’ under Construction in al-Qāmishlī (c.1930)	147
6.5. Swamp Drainage Plans for Alexandretta (1930)	159
7.1. Political Map of the Mawālī and Ḥadīdiyīn Tribes	177

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgements

My association with Syria nearly did not happen. As an undergraduate student of Arabic and French, I had decided it was only natural for me to focus on North Africa. A trip to Damascus in the summer of 1997 caused me to change my plans completely. That was the beginning of an ongoing fascination with Syria which so far has spanned fourteen years, some four or five of which have been spent there. I still have not made it to North Africa. This book represents a small advance in my understanding of Syria, an understanding that nevertheless remains limited, incomplete and always woefully inadequate.

I have incurred numerous debts in writing this book and the doctoral thesis from which it developed. The Politics Department at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) provided a fertile environment for the critical study of the Middle East. Charles Tripp, my supervisor, has been a consistent source of patient encouragement and sound advice over the years. This book no doubt reveals the extent to which his work has shaped my thinking about state, society and history in the Middle East. I am deeply grateful for his support. The intellectual vigour, political engagement and sheer energy of Laleh Khalili, my second supervisor, have been exemplary; her comments on my work have been insightful, incisive and, above all, supremely generous. My peers at SOAS helped deepen my awareness of politics within and beyond the Middle East: special thanks to Marie Gibert, Julia Gallagher, Mark Sedra, Vivian Ibrahim and Saleem Haddad. At St John's College, Oxford University, Robin Ostle and the late Elizabeth Fallaize were formative influences in my study of the Arab Middle East and French post-structuralism. My PhD examiners, Peter Sluglett and Martin Shaw, offered valuable advice on how to improve

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

the argument of the thesis. For their comments on various sections of this book, I would like to thank Charles Tripp, Laleh Khalili, Matt Nelson, John Chalcraft, Gurminder Bhambra, John Heathershaw, Jennifer Regan-Lefebvre and two anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press, as well as participants at the BISA conference in 2006, a SOAS Politics Department Seminar in 2006, the EUI Mediterranean Research Meeting in 2007, the BRISMES conference in 2009 and the Symposium on Postcolonialism and Historical Sociology at the University of Warwick, also in 2009. All errors in this volume endure in spite of their best advice.

The research on which this volume is based was funded by a doctoral award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), a travel grant from the Council for British Research in the Levant (CBRL) and a SOAS Fieldwork Award. A research trip to Damascus in 2006 was facilitated by the Institut Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO), to which I was attached as a *chercheur associé*. I am grateful to IFPO-Damas for their assistance.

In Damascus, the staff of the Markaz al-Wathā'iq al-Tārikhiyya, home to the Syrian national archive, provided me with a warm welcome. I am grateful to Dr Ghassān 'Ubayd, the director of the centre, who granted me access to the documents; Madām Razzān, who helped locate relevant papers; and Ānisa Hudā, who was always ready to help decipher difficult handwriting. Dr 'Ammār al-Sumar was an indispensable guide to sources housed at the centre and elsewhere in Damascus; he has been a passionate interlocutor, a dedicated researcher and a good friend. I would also like to thank the staff of the al-Asad and IFPO-Damas libraries in Syria. Dr Sami Moubayed kindly granted permission to use images from his online archive, syrianhistory.com. In France, my gratitude goes to the staff at the Centre des Archives diplomatiques in Nantes, the Service historique de l'armée de la terre in Vincennes and the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères in Paris.

Bāsil Ḥināwī, Erik Mohns and Urs Frühauf helped keep me sane during the various stages of research in Damascus, while Jennifer Dueck offered me the benefit of her insight into all matters Mandatory. In London, I was lucky enough to have fantastic friends who made sure I was never stranded in the ivory tower. Jo and Alex Mackinnon, Tom and Claire Ewing, Zoe and Al McKinnon, Chuck Dreyer and Steven Dwyer deserve particular mention. I am especially grateful to Jo and Alex for their generous hospitality in providing me with a home away from home whenever I returned from Syria and visited London. Thanks, guys. At the University of Exeter,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgements

xi

my thanks go to Marjo Koivisto for our ongoing conversations on Historical Sociology, Eurocentrism and International Relations.

Finally, the deepest thanks go to my parents, Trevor and Lorraine Neep, for their incredible support over the years. They may have wondered what on earth possessed the son of a Yorkshire farmer and a midwife to study Arabic and head off to the Middle East, but they have always given me their full and unconditional support. The faith my parents have in my judgement and my ability far exceeds my own. For this – and for so many other things – I shall always be grateful. This book is for them.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00006-3 - Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation

Daniel Neep

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Note on Translation and Transliteration

I adopt the system of Arabic transliteration from the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*: the initial *hamza* is unmarked; the ξ is represented by ‘; and the *tā’ marbūṭa* is represented by ‘-a’ or by ‘-at’ (in an *iḏāfa*).

Some Syrian places have well-known English names (Damascus, Aleppo, etc.); others I have transliterated according to their standard Arabic spellings (e.g. Dayr al-Zūr). However, the names of city quarters, villages, and so on in the region of Damascus have been rendered to approximate their colloquial pronunciation (e.g. ‘al-Merjeh’ for ‘al-Marjah’, ‘al-Mlayḥa’ for ‘al-Maliḥa’).

All translations from Arabic and French are my own unless specifically noted. My translations err on the side of naturalness, readability and fidelity to the overall meaning of the passage. I provide the original term in square brackets at points where my translation might conceivably be accused of undue exuberance.