

CHAPTER 8- TAKING OFF THE ROBE

Return to the USA: 1935-1942

Leaving Egypt for Home

Crabitès realized that the British would never permit him to reach the Court of Cassation. They restricted his advancement; meanwhile, the Depression had greatly reduced his salary. He had suffered humiliation just a few years earlier at the hands of the Egyptian press and his fellow Egyptian judges. After the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in 1936, Crabitès must have sensed that the Mixed Courts would be phased out. It was time for him to pursue an alternate future course. This treaty provided for greater Egyptian control over domestic issues and a timetable for Britain to pull out of Egypt. Crabitès desperately desired a position within the State Department, but he had damaged his prospects by authoring an article railing against American treatment of the Foreign Service.

In an article titled “The Wage of the American Diplomatist,” Crabitès condemned the lack of support that American diplomats received from their own country. This article, published in *Catholic World*, certainly did not endear him to the American Foreign Service community in Washington D.C. The impact of this article is not known, although it was published during a period of debate over Foreign Service reform. Crabitès insisted that the United States required an efficient diplomatic corps, which could only be achieved with proper funding. According to Crabitès, European states handsomely paid their Foreign Service officers, whereas the United States believed that a diplomatic career was attractive not for its monetary reward but for its cultural advantages and opportunity to take part in public service.¹

Crabitès maintained that American diplomats could not be expected to entertain without a proper pecuniary compensation, “It takes money and experience to maintain both bibulous tendencies and an equilibrium. To meet

¹ Pierre Crabitès, “The Wage of the American Diplomatist,” *Catholic World* 130 (1930): 405.

these conditions European nations grant post allowances and establish entertainment funds.”² Crabitès debated whether the United States could recruit the best Foreign Service officers in the absence of an adequate salary commensurate with the private sector. In comparison, not only did Europe remunerate their Foreign Service officers better than the United States, but they also accorded them more prestige than their American counterparts.³

Crabitès resolved to leave Egypt and resigned from his post in June of 1936. He provided no other reason for his resignation from the Mixed Courts than a “desire to be among my own people.”⁴ The members of the Mixed Courts promptly extended their regrets at losing such a valued member of the judiciary.⁵ At the time, he had really wanted a Foreign Service position. After enlisting the support of American policy makers to assist him with obtaining a diplomatic job, their efforts could not secure him that much sought after post. Instead, he accepted a position with the school of law at Louisiana State University as a special lecturer in civil law and legal history.⁶

Before returning home to his native state, Crabitès first traveled to Europe. His son Henry was already home in New Orleans with his daughter-in-law and his two granddaughters, Frederica and Margaret Crabitès.⁷ In July of 1936, Crabitès and his wife Charlotte boarded the SS *Marco Polo* and sailed for Europe. They went to Italy, Czechoslovakia, and England before heading home in August. When the Crabitès’s arrived in Baton Rouge, they lived in the King Hotel before he began teaching at Louisiana State University in September.

The Montreux Convention

That same year, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt appointed Crabitès to be the American representative to the Montreux Convention. He was part of a

² Ibid., 406.

³ Ibid., 407.

⁴ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-88, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁵ *Al-Ahram*, 2 June 1936. Mss.73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁶ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-88, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁷ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

delegation which resolved to phase out the Mixed Courts and transfer their authority to the Egyptian government over a period of twelve years.⁸ The Mixed Courts' last day of operation was 15 October 1949. After that day, all persons appearing before the law, regardless of their nationality, would have to go through the Egyptian National Courts. The Montreux Convention also brought the Capitulations to an end, a decision which received widespread support in Egypt. The Capitulations had been a polemic issue instigating nationalist sentiment.

Speaking Tour

After returning home, Crabitès traveled the South, Midwest, and Northeast on the Rotary Club lecture circuit. Before the Rotary Club recruited Crabitès, he had spoken to audiences in Louisiana, where he commanded packed halls and auditoriums. In his addresses, Crabitès concentrated on his specialty, foreign affairs, but he also spoke on hot topics of local interest, such as the Nazi and Fascist threat, Jews, and African-Americans. Local newspapers reported many of his talks.⁹

The Depression

In late 1936, Crabitès thought that the American economy was recovering, so he believed that was no need to jumpstart the economy through government spending, thus providing the millions of unemployed Americans with jobs. Instead, Crabitès felt that the United States should create a solid foundation for peaceful employment. This view was not so unusual at the time.

By 1937, however, Crabitès altered his original analysis regarding the Depression. He advocated Roosevelt's policies towards the Depression, which called for heavy government expenditures to infuse the economy with much needed assistance, otherwise known as Keynesian Economics. Crabitès argued that America did not have to adopt foreign ideologies to solve its fiscal troubles,

⁸ Letter from Pierre Crabitès to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, 24 February 1937, Mss. 73-2, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁹ This chapter will rely on newspaper reports to better understand the subjects of Crabitès lectures, specifically the Nazi and Fascist threat, Jews, and African-Americans. The texts to his speeches do not survive.

We can and we will find an American solution, but it is first essential that we recognize the fact that there is sickness in the body politic, that there is a moral cancer which requires some kind of surgery. The old laissez faire attitude toward economics is gone. We must be up and doing.¹⁰

He was a proponent of government intervention. To demonstrate his point that the United States required an American answer to an American problem, Crabitès emphasized that Britain and France were drifting towards socialism to cope with the Depression, meanwhile Germany and Italy had turned to dictatorship to resolve their economic tribulations.¹¹

Red Scare

Since 1917, Crabitès had been more concerned with Bolshevism than the Fascist or Nazi menace. Some of the legacies from World War I influenced Crabitès. The period between wars was a time of ethnic and cultural tensions, a time of distrust as well as Americanization. He witnessed the ascension of so-called super-patriots. Americans associated certain groups with the enemy, who were most often Germans, socialists, and communists. Super-patriots controlled the Committee on Public Information, and after World War I, American super-patriotism turned from the German to the Bolshevik threat. Americans perceived the Bolsheviks as German agents ever since the Revolution came to terms with the Germans at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and pulled out of the war.

The ensuing Red Scare affected Crabitès: “America should fear both the disintegration of democracy and the inroads of Communism more than the other ‘isms’, and avoid war because current ills could lead to the chaos in Russia, Germany, and Italy.”¹² Crabitès thought that the period after a war was often succeeded by inept decision-making. According to Crabitès, the United States had changed a great deal since World War I; therefore, it needed to be vigilant lest these two new influences, infiltrate the American people and government. Crabitès attributed Europe’s problems neither to Nazism nor Fascism but to the

¹⁰ *Shreveport Times*, 27 February 1937. Mss.73-89, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Newspaper article, *Crowley Signal*. 15 March, Mss. 73-89, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

spread of the Soviet brand of communism, which espoused the international communist revolution and overthrow of Western capitalist democracies.¹³ He was in many ways sympathetic to King Farouq's views.

African-Americans

Crabitès realized the importance of the African-American franchise in elections. Like so many other Americans, Crabitès linked labor and African-Americans with communism. He argued that African-American suffrage was the most threatening issue in America because communism had influenced it.¹⁴ Crabitès concluded, "If the Negroes take over the control of the Northern states, they will take over the control of the federal government, and gradually the judicial system of our country."¹⁵ His white, Southern proclivities affected his perception of the world around him during a period when African-Americans were just beginning to demand greater rights. Crabitès feared the African-American vote would become the deciding factor in the power struggle between Democrats and Republicans, as both parties were courting African-Americans: "Before the Hoover administration 45 percent of the voters were Republican and 35 percent Democrats. The remainder was a flying wedge that acted as a balance of power. It is to this flying wedge that the Communists are making their appeal," clearly referring African-American franchise.¹⁶ Crabitès could not overcome the environment in which he was raised, never forgetting Reconstruction which he labeled as "a period of Negro and Carpetbag rule," and he argued in favor of white supremacy organized through white political unity.¹⁷

The Nazi and Fascist Threat

The peril of Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy in Europe concerned many Americans. Crabitès's popularity stemmed partly from the timeliness of his

¹³ *Bogalusa News*, 16 October 1936. Mss. 73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

¹⁴ *Baton Rouge State Times*, 12 January 1939. Mss. 73-86, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Newspaper article, Mss. 73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

¹⁷ Pierre Crabitès, "A White South or Black?" *North American Review*, Mss. 73-Series III, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

main topic, the looming war, but he also provided a unique international perspective on the increasingly dangerous situation in Europe. His yearly tours to Europe prepared him well for his speaking engagements. He traveled often to Italy, France, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. During his visits to Europe, Crabitès collected information for his books and articles. For Crabitès, these trips facilitated a better understanding of the condition of pre-war Europe in the mid-1930s. An acclaimed speaker on the Rotary Club lecture circuit, Crabitès addressed the present conditions in Europe, offering his tips and predictions. His views towards the war developed as the war progressed.

Crabitès recalled the foreign entanglements that drew America into World War I and said that the United States must eschew such arrangements. Weary of alliances, he was a stout isolationist during the buildup to war. He thought that the war hysteria was suicidal, and he went to Washington D.C. in order to convince the government to maintain its isolationism and avoid these entanglements.¹⁸ To forestall, or even avoid such intervention, Crabitès appealed to the government in Washington D.C. to forgive European debts.¹⁹ While he was unwavering in his disapproval of international pacts, he was willing to accept trade treaties.

Crabitès remained optimistic that war could be averted early on, provided that the United States remained neutral: "We must make up our minds not to let anything draw us into the maelstrom of European difficulties."²⁰ He warned that it would require more than just refusing to sell to belligerents in order to avoid war.²¹ For him, only Roosevelt could manage to keep the United States disentangled from Europe's coalitions:

I am a warm supporter of the policies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and I believe that he is entitled to the undivided support of all Americans in

¹⁸ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-86, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

¹⁹ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-86, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

²⁰ *Birmingham Post*, 9 January 1937. Mss. 73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

²¹ *Birmingham Post*, 15 January 1937. Mss. 73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

regard to the question of foreign policy. I believe in strengthening his hand by letting the world know that the whole American people regardless of politics are backing him as our spokesman on foreign affairs. But I believe that Congress is overstressing the importance of what is generally referred to as neutrality legislation.²²

Crabitès predicted that Europe would remain at peace until someone accepted Hitler's or Mussolini's challenge, who, in return, must react in order to save face and maintain his job. He sensed that an immediate solution would be disastrous. Rather, the parties involved should pursue a gradual resolution:

We should not crowd them too much. We should give Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin a chance to sell their bellicose, militant jargon to the people because their chief desire is the understandable one of wanting to hold office. They've got to talk 'hot air' to hold their jobs.²³

Although he was not entirely convinced that the war was inevitable, after his return home from his European sojourn in the late 30s, Crabitès finally accepted the necessity of preparing for conflict. He was a proponent of increased military spending, but this expenditure should not be the sole means for economic recovery. Crabitès concluded that the United States should distance itself from Great Britain and France because he foresaw Nazi Germany defeating them before America could enter war, forsaking the United States until Hitler brought the war to the shores of America.²⁴ Conversely, should the war come to pass, Crabitès envisioned Hitler and Mussolini neutralizing each other over South Tyrol in Hitler's drive to unite the Germans.

Crabitès held world diplomats accountable for the present predicament in Europe, for they neglected to examine Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, where he explained his goal of affecting a *lebensraum* for all Teutonic peoples:

The diplomats of the world have themselves to blame for the present situation. I say this because Hitler in his book put all his cards on the

²² *Shreveport Times*, 27 February 1937. Mss. 73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-86, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

table. That book was written about 1929 and had the diplomats taken the trouble to read it, as was their duty to do, they would have foreseen what has happened.²⁵

Most likely, these views would have infuriated both British and American diplomats. Now that Hitler had achieved power in Germany and sought an *anschluss* with Austria and the Sudetenland, Crabitès obliged the foreign service to either make provisions in order to endure the looming crisis or acquiesce gracefully: “My dominant feeling is one of complete disgust for the diplomats of the world and particularly for those who wear spats and direct the chancelleries of the great countries of Europe.”²⁶

During his many travels, Crabitès visited many places and met numerous important dignitaries in Europe. Crabitès met and interviewed Edward Beneš, the first president of Czechoslovakia, on numerous occasions. He even came across Adolph Hitler while exiting an elevator in the Atlantic Hotel in Prague.²⁷ Crabitès spent much time in Czechoslovakia from 1929-1936, and as early as 1934, in his biography of Eduard Beneš, Crabitès predicted the present crisis which had the world teetering on the edge of war. In his book, *Eduard Beneš: Statesman of Europe*, Crabitès attributed much of the hostility in Europe to the racial animosity between Czechs and Germans, “Czech racial pride, instinctive animosity to anything and everything bearing a German label, made itself felt as early as the ninth century. It has smoldered at different times during the past 1000 years, but at no time has it ever been eradicated.”²⁸ He described Hitler as a “madman, a paranoiac, who is a menace to the world.”²⁹ However, Crabitès offered a caveat, “But whatever we may call Hitler, we have to admit that he was intellectually honest. He did lay his cards on the table.”³⁰ Crabitès was confident

²⁵ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-86, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-86, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

²⁸ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-86, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

that Beneš could save Europe: "Europe depends today more upon the brain, the tact and the activity of Beneš than upon any other factor."³¹

Early on, Crabitès questioned Hitler's ability to wage war on Great Britain and France. He felt Hitler was only feigning German unification. Crabitès believed Hitler was merely hiding behind a masterful propaganda designed to enhance his prestige. He predicted that Hitler would forfeit power should his propaganda campaign falter. He acknowledged that Hitler's Nazism was much more than a brilliantly led propaganda machine and a passing fad but was rooted deep within the German psyche. It was too late to restrain Hitler before he grew too formidable.³²

Regardless of the direction the United States was taking, Crabitès continued to oppose American entrance into the war:

In the domain of international politics we, Americans, are babes-in-the woods. Slogans sweep us off our feet. Propaganda has so unbalanced our sense of the realities of life that we seem determined to fight under the banner of democracy without inquiring whether it is carried by clean hands.³³

He was quoted in the *Progress*, a Left-leaning newspaper, questioning the pro-war and anti-Hitler movement,

If we stop and ask ourselves why we are anti-Hitler, I think that most of us will agree that it is his treatment of the Jews which has made us so hostile to him. His unfairness to Protestants and Catholics has confirmed us in this antipathy. It is, nevertheless, his cruelty to the Jews which has made us doubly conscious of his injustice to Christianity.³⁴

For Crabitès, this was the height of hypocrisy, as Britain and France, while opposing Hitler, had been simultaneously courting communist Russia, and anti-Semitic Romania and Poland: "We are hoodwinked by the mask of democracy

³¹ Ibid.

³² Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-86, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

³³ *Progress*, 14 July 1939. Mss. 73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

³⁴ Ibid.

worn by London and Paris.”³⁵ He argued against allying with such countries as Britain and France, who were willing to subvert their own democratic principles for the sake of defeating Germany. That Left-wing newspapers were now quoting Crabitès could have been symbolic of a shift in the general tendencies of the American people towards engagement while he remained steadfast in his isolationism.

Crabitès reasoned that the crisis in Europe was ultimately an economic one. He maintained that European states were attempting to deal with the Depression by purchasing armaments. He condemned the so called “Merchants of Death,” defense contractors who made a fortune on wars while young men died in battle. Although mobilization may possibly decrease unemployment, Crabitès took this philosophy to its logical conclusion, asking “Why have peace?”³⁶ He speculated that Europe’s statesmen were weary of stabilizing their economies based upon more peaceful means of production:

Armament building is filling stomachs. It is cutting down unemployment. It is subsidizing industry and bribing capital. It is creating the resemblance of prosperity which holds politicians in office. We are in a vicious circle. Nobody wants war, but no statesman can take chances on letting the other state get a drop on him. All nations are therefore going about armed to the teeth. They are thereby temporarily averting internal economic collapse. They are afraid to stop arming not merely because they cannot trust one another, but also because if they do not know how to prevent revolutions at home if they throw away their hundreds of thousands of munitions workers into the streets.³⁷

Crabitès assumed that the Germans would never revolt against Hitler so long as Germany remained victorious on the field of battle, for “Nobody deserts a winner.”³⁸ Crabitès asserted that the outcome of the war depended on food

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Newspaper clipping, *Progress*, 1939. Mss. 73-87, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-86, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

production. He predicted that Germany had prepared well and would have great endurance for a long war, especially considering her efficient food-rationing. While he recognized that France could feed herself, England was incapable of self-sufficiency. Crabitès believed that Germany's U-boat campaign was proficient enough to enervate Great Britain's navy, thus causing a food shortage. Germany, like Japan, neither had enough food nor raw materials for the war, and so Germany must seek new lands, especially in the east. He thought that Russia could not cultivate enough food to assist Germany because she needed it to feed herself.³⁹

Crabitès contended that Mussolini would ally with Germany because she wanted to find herself on the winning side after the war, "Italy's efficient diplomatic machine will watch the war with undivided attention and when convinced of the winner, is more than likely to find an excuse to pitch in with the victorious side."⁴⁰ Crabitès reminded his audiences that Italy had been Germany's ally during the initial stages of the World War I, only to switch sides and fight against Germany within a year. A believer in the cyclical nature of history, Crabitès predicted this to transpire once again, "Italy has more to gain with the Allies and knows where her bread is buttered."⁴¹ He looked to Italy's condemnation of Russia's advance into Finland as evidence that the Italians were shifting their sympathies in favor of the Allied cause.

As the war deepened, Crabitès became ever more convinced of the unavailability of American involvement. By 1938, Crabitès realized the inevitability of American participation in the war. He anticipated that the Americans would enter the war by January 1941, should Germany not have won by that date: "With 90 percent of the American people in sympathy with the Allies, no president will stay out of the war. Roosevelt if he runs and is reelected, will not stand by and see Germany win because this country is not in sympathy with

³⁹ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-86, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Germany.”⁴² Crabitès escalated his criticism of American decisions leading up to the war, “I consider the repeal of the embargo a hostile act to Germany and, from the point of view of America’s official interpretation of international law, a decision tantamount to a declaration of war by the United States against the German Reich.”⁴³ He insisted that by providing arms to Britain and France and, at the same time, refusing to sell munitions to Germany, the United States “would be guilty of a hostile act toward the belligerent which desired to import munitions of war from the United States.”⁴⁴ Crabitès stated that the reversal of American policy towards Germany, especially after the outbreak in hostilities, was equivalent to a declaration of war against the Axis.⁴⁵

Eventually, he abandoned Roosevelt, whom he had previously believed could keep America safe from war, “I heartily approve of giving him the type of legislation which he asserts will keep America out of the war. I disapprove of any action, either positive or negative, which could serve as an alibi for permitting the president to have America drawn into the fighting.”⁴⁶ Crabitès was one of the many traditional Southern Democrats who deserted Roosevelt over the course of his tenure in office, for they alleged that he had repudiated the long-established Democratic platform: “The president, however, is in a position to create conditions which practically nullify this provision. And I intend no disrespect to the present incumbent when I assert that he is just the type of man and of an executive to brush aside such a constitutional check upon his freedom of action.”⁴⁷ It was only Pearl Harbor, in December 1941, that changed the minds of many of these isolationists.

The Middle East and the War

Crabitès’s knowledge of the Middle East certainly influenced his perspective of the region during the buildup to the war. Crabitès argued that neither Great Britain nor France could afford to go to war with Germany with the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Newspaper clipping, 12 November 1939. Mss. 73-87, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

situation in Palestine as a potential destabilizer. Instead, they would have to court the Arabs and gain their assistance before going to war.⁴⁸ This was an opinion not altogether different from the arabists within the British administration of Palestine. It was not just the German military superiority that Great Britain and France should be concerned with but the possibility of an Arab rebellion in the Middle East while England and France were concerned with the Western Front.⁴⁹ Crabitès declared that Chamberlain was busy placating Arab opinion in the Middle East while reneging on earlier compacts with the Jews; Great Britain simply could not recover from the loss of the Suez and the coveted Red Sea route to India.⁵⁰

According to Crabitès, the American public failed to fully comprehend the ramifications of Chamberlain's task in the Middle East. He had to appease the Arab masses in regard to Palestine and continued Jewish immigration. The White Paper would not come until 1939. Crabitès claimed that the survival of world Jewry was contingent upon the victory of Democracy over Nazism and Fascism, but for Great Britain to have an opportunity to defeat the Germans and Italians and save the Jews, Chamberlain first had to placate the Arabs, regardless of the immediate effect upon Jewish immigration to Palestine.⁵¹ Essentially, the Jews of Palestine had to temporarily sacrifice their present rate of immigration because it was antagonizing the Arabs, who would have to cooperate with the Allies in order to win the war.⁵² Pragmatic Jews on the left were willing to accommodate the Allies, for they believed Hitler to be the more immediate and imperative threat; however, the ideological Jewish right refused to accept any deals restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine.

Crabitès held the British responsible for the troubles in the Middle East and the Holy Land, and while Crabitès said that the Jews deserved sympathy,

⁴⁸ *Jefferson Davis Parrish News*, 9 March, no year given, Mss. 73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Newspaper article, 7 April 1937, Mss. 73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁵² Newspaper article, 1 March 1939, Mss. 73-87, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

Great Britain could not make Palestine into a Jewish homeland; otherwise, the British would arouse the anger of the Arabs across the Middle East. He thought that Great Britain should not implement the Balfour Declaration, for Arabs were still the majority in Palestine; and Crabitès was a believer in (Woodrow) Wilson's concept of self-determination. Western leaders never took self-determination into account when marking treaties and drawing boundaries. Crabitès advocated allowing the Arabs and Jews to settle their differences without the intervention of external forces, instead of permitting the extremists on both sides to derail the peace process in Palestine.⁵³ The British could not agree to the demands of individuals like Louis Lipsky, Vice President of the Zionist Organization of America, who contested limitations on immigration to the Holy Land. Crabitès insisted that Jewish victims of Nazi persecution should be allowed to immigrate to North America and Anatolia, where they could reside under the liberality afforded to them by Islam, a toleration they had lived under for many centuries.⁵⁴

In 1935, Crabitès turned his attention to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. Even though Crabitès had a personal dislike of Ethiopians, accusing them of acting in a manner unfit for Christians and castigating them for their past involvement in the slave trade, he condemned Mussolini's attack on Ethiopia.⁵⁵ According to Crabitès, Mussolini negotiated non-intervention agreements with French Foreign Minister Laval and Sir Samuel Hoare, British Foreign Minister, prior to his invasion of Ethiopia.⁵⁶ The British foreign minister promised not to protest Italy's invasion so long as Italy did not threaten the security of the Sudan and Egypt, and the parties gave assurance to protect the emperor's "vital interests."⁵⁷ Crabitès believed that British and French sentiment was reluctant to accept the outcome of the negotiations, thereby causing the collapse of the settlement, so

⁵³ Newspaper article, 25 October 1938, Mss. 73-86, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁵⁴ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁵⁵ Pierre Crabitès, *Gordon: The Sudan and Slavery*. (London: Routledge, 1933), 116.

⁵⁶ Newspaper clipping, Mss. 73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Mussolini courted Hitler instead.⁵⁸ Italy's rape of Ethiopia appalled Crabitès, and he recognized the Fascist threat to British and French interest in the region. Crabitès also acknowledged that Hitler and Mussolini were too hesitant in taking advantage of Allied unpopularity with the Arabs.⁵⁹

Crabitès on Palestine

Crabitès was an opinionated writer, often forcefully challenging earlier interpretations. His two unpublished manuscripts "Palestine and her Problem" and "Israel out of Egypt" were basically thematic in character. These works exhibit many of the qualities common among his contemporaries, such as numerous large quotes and a lack of citation. His unpublished manuscripts were his most controversial pieces, and their polemical character must have contributed to his difficulty in publishing them. These works challenge Western notions on the conflict in Palestine and the nature of anti-Semitism. They also clearly reveal his views on the Middle East during the interwar period.

"Palestine and her Problem"

Crabitès wrote his manuscript entitled "Palestine and her Problem" between 1936 and 1937. The exact date of the composition is not known; however, one is able to glean from the information contained within it that it was written after 1935 yet before his next unpublished manuscript titled "Israel out of Egypt," which was authored in 1938. Crabitès made some startling predictions for the future of the Holy Land in this manuscript. While he accurately forecast Adolph Hitler's ascendance and increasing militarism in Germany, he failed to foresee Hitler's scheme to eliminate Jewry from Europe, which resulted in a tidal wave of Ashkenazic-Jewish immigration to Palestine. Even though his logic was unflawed based upon the data available to him at the time, one can understand why Crabitès, writing in "Palestine and her Problem," was mistaken in his calculation that "as long as the Balfour Declaration, as now interpreted and

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Newspaper article, 14 April, Mss. 73-89, Scrapbooks, 1919-1939, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

enforced, remains part of the British Mandate for Palestine, the Holy Land is destined to be either an armed English camp or a vast Jewish graveyard.”⁶⁰

In “Palestine and her Problem,” Crabitès opened by stating that the ‘people of the book’ owe Islamic civilization a debt of gratitude for its treatment of them in the Middle East. Muslim tolerance permitted the ‘people of the book’ not only to remain in the Middle East but to prosper. The ‘people of the book’ were protected under Islam by their *dhimmi* status, and they not only had the right to be tried in courts of their own particular religious adherence, but they also had immunity from being conscripted into the army:

Muhammadian [sic] liege lords constituted a warrior caste and cared, as a general rule, naught for trade and but little for agriculture, the ‘people of the book’ became the war profiteers of those benighted days. That carried with it the open door to ease. Money has a way of its own of begetting comforts and of engendering respect.⁶¹

Crabitès asserted that this system perpetuated a Muslim superiority complex by making the Jews and Christians essentially second-class citizens, yet the British Mandate for Palestine attempted to turn Middle Eastern society upside down by placing the Jews over the Muslims.⁶²

Taking aim at specific articles in the Mandate for Palestine, Crabitès emphasized that it was British who had provided the Jews with a “most favored nation clause.”⁶³ He pointed out that Article 6 promoted citizenship for newly arriving Jewish immigrants while mentioning nothing about Muslims and Christians.⁶⁴ Crabitès claimed that the League of Nations was “determined to subordinate the Arab majority to the Zionist Organization.”⁶⁵

Turning from politics to religion, Crabitès highlighted the significance of the Islamic religious connection to the Holy Land. He assumed that most westerners

⁶⁰ Pierre Crabitès, *Palestine and Her Problem*, unpublished ms., Forward, p. I: Mss. 73-41: Crabitès Collection. University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA. [The pagination of this manuscript is by chapter and then by page, not consecutive.]

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Ch. 2, p. 9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Ch. 5, p. 4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Ch. 6, p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Ch. 6, p. 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Ch. 6, p. 6.

were aware of the importance of the Holy Land to both Christians and Jews, but appreciated little of the religious connection that Muslims have to the Holy Land, specifically to the *Haram al-Sherif*, or temple complex. On his journey to heaven in a dream recounted in the Qur'an, the Prophet (*al-Nabi*) Muhammad traveled to Jerusalem on his horse, *Buraq*, which had the visage of a woman, body of a horse, and tail of a peacock. Upon arrival in Jerusalem, he tied his horse to the temple wall before ascending to heaven. Muslims believe that the entire complex is holy because the Prophet Muhammad visited the *Haram al-Sherif*. Caliph Abdul Malek's construction of the holy complex on top of the most holy site in Jerusalem in the year 691 C.E. represents a lengthy, unbroken line of Muslim tradition in the area.

Crabitès focused not only on religion but law as well, an area in which he was an expert. He declared that the Muslims of the Holy Land created a foundation, or *waqf*, in 1321, to oversee the maintenance of the *Buraq*, the complex which derives its name from the prophet's horse. Crabitès insisted that this provided an important legal basis to the conflict.⁶⁶ Article 9 of the mandate reinforced his argument that the Muslims should be in control of this holy site: "In particular, the control and administration of the *waqfs* shall be exercised in accordance with religious law and the dispositions of the founders."⁶⁷ He contended that in 1929 the Chief Rabbi for Palestine had been requested to submit proof of Jewish customs or traditions at the Western Wall under the Ottoman government, but he was unable to do so.⁶⁸

When the Ottomans sided with the Central Powers of Austro-Hungary and Germany during World War I, the Allies persuaded the Arabs in the Middle East to revolt against the Ottomans. The Allies made pretexts that they would grant the Arabs an independent state for their efforts on behalf of the Allies. Regretfully, according to Crabitès, the Allies' promises did not directly refer to Palestine, for Allied assurances in the MacMahon correspondence with Hussein, the Sherif of Mecca, dated 24 October 1915, were either inchoate or vague in

⁶⁶ Ibid., Ch. 8, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Ch. 8, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Ch. 8, p. 9.

regard to Palestine.⁶⁹ The Jews had the backing of the Balfour Declaration which emanated directly from Great Britain's executive branch and directly contradicted Arab claims. The British were double-dealing throughout the war.

Crabitès criticized the League of Nations as an entity comprised of a few select European countries bound together to dominate world relations. With the creation of the League of Nations, every country that participated in the League had to harmonize its past with the Peace Conference: "If there had been a peccadillo, the offending state bound itself to go to Canossa, or, at all events, to remain out of the pale of the League until its soul had been purged of wrongfulness."⁷⁰ In other words, any agreements or promises that the British made to both the Jews and the Arabs were null and void as of 28 June 1919. Under the direction of President Wilson, the Peace Conference focused on the concept of self-determination. Crabitès explained that by this logic, the Arab majority of the Holy Land should have been able to determine their future, yet, "President Wilson and his self-determination did not contemplate holding this Arab majority by the throat until it became a minority."⁷¹ In his hostility to the Balfour Declaration, he maintained that the executive branch of the British government pushed the Balfour Declaration forward, even though the House of Lords announced their opposition in a motion on 21 June 1922, stating that it violated prior commitments that the British government had made to the people of Palestine.⁷²

While Crabitès did not provide evidence of any argument supporting the Jewish claims to Palestine in this manuscript, he did refute Arab opinion of the Jews. Of the Arab contention that the Jews of Palestine were both atheists and communists, Crabitès posed the question, "Who would go to the Middle East other than for spiritual reasons when they could go to the wealth and

⁶⁹ Ibid., Ch. 9, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Ch. 10, p. 3.

⁷¹ Ibid., Ch. 11, p. 9.

⁷² Ibid., Ch. 12, p. 1.

opportunities of the West?”⁷³ Just because many of these Jews in Palestine were residing in communes, it did not necessarily make them communists.

Following the outbreak of violence in Jerusalem on 16 August 1929, the British appointed Sir Walter Shaw to oversee a commission to investigate the causes of the aggression and to make recommendations for improving the situation. Crabitès concentrated on several salient facts from the commission’s findings. It was evident that the Jewish authorities had failed to adequately enforcing the restrictions on immigration into Palestine so as to avoid overloading the economic and agricultural capacity of Palestine. The report also stated that the Arabs in Palestine were afraid that they would lose their livelihood under the political domination of the Jews.⁷⁴

Even though Crabitès viewed the Shaw Commission as decidedly “orientalist” in its recommendations to the British government, he tended to concur with some of their conclusions on the immediate causes of the outbreak in violence in the Holy Land. He found many egregious errors in the minority report on the same subject, which was produced at the same time as the Shaw Commission and direct contradicted it. To begin with, he attacked Mr. Snell, compiler of the minority report, over his opinion that the Arabs in the Holy Land should stop considering themselves victims. Crabitès rejected Mr. Snell’s position that the Arabs in Palestine stood to profit from Jewish enterprise, for the Zionists were entirely against supporting the Arabs when they had an obligation to aid the Jews.⁷⁵ Crabitès placed much blame on the Zionists, who, in his estimation, were financing the massive Jewish immigration into Palestine despite the findings of the Hope-Simpson Report of 22 August 1930.⁷⁶ The British government truly offended the Arabs when it failed to consider the conclusions of this report, which confirmed that the current situation in Palestine, both economically and agriculturally, could not continue to support the influx of Jewish immigrants.

⁷³ Ibid., Ch. 13, p. 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid., Ch. 14, p. 3.

⁷⁵ Ibid., Ch. 14, p. 7.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 148. [The pagination for the remainder of the book is consecutive.]

According to Crabitès, the Royal Commission Report, under the direction of Earl Peel, clearly identified why the Jews and Arabs were incapable of living together in harmony, for:

The war and its sequel have inspired all Arabs with the hope of reviving a free and united Arab world with the traditions of the Arab Golden Age.

The Jews similarly are inspired by their historic past. They mean to show what the Jewish nation can achieve when restored to the land of its birth.

National assimilation between Arabs and Jews is thus ruled out.⁷⁷

Before the British established the mandate, the Jews and Arabs of Palestine resided side by side in peace; therefore Crabitès asserted that the heart of the conflict was rooted in the terms of the mandate. Crabitès assailed the Royal Commission Report since it identified the strife as basically political in nature, “Politics no more brought the Jews to Palestine than the lure of lucre.”⁷⁸

According to Crabitès, the Jews who immigrated to Palestine did so at a tremendous financial risk, so it must be concluded that they came for religious reasons. These Jews were not purely secular. The Arabs in Palestine intended to remain there for similar reasons. Crabitès condemned the Royal Commission Report for ignoring the religious character of the unrest,

To overlook the religious aspect of the conflict and treat it as something purely secondary shows such a fundamental misconception of the Holy Land that even Mr. Ornsby-Gore [sic] tribute to the Royal Commission’s Report as ‘a literary work of art’ and as a document which will ‘stand for all time as the final statement of historical truth’ cannot make me believe that its authors know enough about the body politic of Palestine to be competent to recommend its dissection.⁷⁹

While Crabitès placed the lion’s share of the blame for the conflict in Palestine solely on Great Britain, he empathized with the positions of both the Arabs and the Jews. He proposed his Arab defense thesis in the 1930s to provide for a peaceful resolution to the tribulations in Palestine. Although he

⁷⁷ Ibid., 202.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 206.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 207.

failed to find guilt with those Jews who had moved to Palestine, he considered the Jews of England and America, especially those associated with Zionism, as somewhat culpable in regard to the atrocities that were occurring in the Holy Land. They were the financial machine that backed the Jewish immigration to Palestine and displaced the Arab population which had lived there since the seventh and eighth centuries. Crabitès placed very little, if any, responsibility for the problems in Arab hands. While this alone did not necessarily make him anti-Jewish, it does lead one to believe that he was very much pro-Arab. He argued that his position fell far short of anti-Semitism, for he reasoned that the Jewish position on the Holy Land was readily available to the Western media. He formulated a defense for the Arabs since there was nobody to stand up for them in the world's media.⁸⁰ In fact, his genuine empathy for these two peoples was readily exhibited in "Palestine and Her Problem." That he was an ardent Catholic sheds some light on his pro-Arab stance in the conflict. The Catholic position on the partition of Palestine was that Jerusalem should be internationalized, a perspective that the United Nations would later assume. The Catholicism that Crabitès grew up under was decidedly anti-Semitic, so to understand his pro-Arab attitude on the conflict, the reader should keep this in mind.

At the end of his manuscript, Crabitès tried to predict the future. He pointed out that Great Britain would stay in Palestine as a third party, yet only so long as she could foresee a profit. If the expenses incurred by remaining in Palestine to oversee the conflict and hinder the violence continued to escalate, and the British taxpayer became weary of paying for the maintenance of an army in the Holy Land, they would pull out and leave the Arabs to slaughter the Jews. This was a fairly accurate prediction.

"Israel out of Egypt"

In the course of one year's time, from 1937 to 1938, much occurred in Europe, especially to the Jews. Considering the Jewish situation in Europe in 1938, Crabitès rethought many of the arguments that he had made in "Palestine and her Problem" for his next manuscript "Israel out of Egypt." He still

⁸⁰ Ibid.

maintained that the Holy Land should be under Arab control, for he still believed that they had a policy of toleration of the Jews down through the centuries, unlike the Occident. He suspected that the issue of immigration would remain a flash point because Palestine was too small an area to accommodate the Jews fleeing European persecution. In today's world, much of what he had to say in "Palestine and Her Problem" could be interpreted as politically incorrect, or at least in poor taste. Regardless of his inability to accurately forecast the future of Palestine, much of what he had to say is still relevant today since he did an excellent job of examining the sources of the conflict.

Crabitès composed his manuscript "Israel out of Egypt" in 1938 in an effort to combat what he perceived as the rising tide of anti-Semitism in the United States, which he believed was a threat to American religious freedom. Much of this manuscript was written in the first person, as it drew on many of his personal experiences in America, Europe, and the Middle East. This work is thematic in character, rather than narrative. This manuscript also attempted to explain how the situation in Palestine prior to World War II was jeopardizing the relationship that the Jews and Muslims had shared for centuries in the Middle East. He insisted that both the situation with the Jews in Palestine and America needed to be resolved, "If this is current be not arrested it will, in time, inevitably assume the more virulent form now so prevalent in Europe. Should that sad eventuality ever come to pass, Israel will need Islam to save her from the intolerance of Christendom."⁸¹

While Crabitès was sympathetic to the plight of the Jews under the Nazis, he remained pro-Arab concerning the situation in the Holy Land. He concurred with the Arabs that Israel did not have the capacity to absorb the continuous influx of Jewish refugees from Europe. Crabitès thought that the Jews should be provided a safe haven in North Africa or Anatolia, where they could live in peace under Muslim toleration, yet this course had to be pursued with haste before this

⁸¹ Pierre Crabitès, "Israel out of Egypt," unpublished ms. (c. 1938), p. ii, Mss. 73-23, Crabitès Collection, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

option passed because of the issue of immigration, he believed, was “antagonizing Islam.”⁸²

A good portion of this work concentrated on the difference between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewry. Crabitès had made many Sephardic-Jewish acquaintances while sitting on the Mixed Courts’ bench for so many years, as there were many Sephardic-Jewish attorneys who practiced before him on the Mixed Courts. He envisioned Sephardic Jews as the aristocracy of the Middle East:

Islam sanctions polygamy and there was a time, not far distant, when the wives of the ruling Muhammedan caste were recruited almost entirely from Circassian or Georgian slaves. This practice did not tend to build up an aristocracy of blood in a sense known to the Occident. And the Christian minority found itself so overshadowed by the greater prestige of co-religionists from abroad, that it appears to have effaced itself in favor of the elite of Jewry.⁸³

Crabitès believed that the Levantine Jews ascended to such prominent social positions because of their family connections.

Crabitès questioned, for example, why Jews in the Middle East were able to rise to such social prominence while American Jewry was discriminated against in Catholic Louisiana. He concluded that the United States was not anti-Semitic, as he had first supposed, but anti-Ashkenazic in essence. Recalling that only Sephardic Jews participated in the high society of New Orleans, such as the carnival organizations and men’s clubs, Crabitès inquired, “Is the world really anti-Semitic? Is it not merely anti-Ashkenazic? And if it is, why this distinction?”⁸⁴ He even described the discrimination that existed between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews. Crabitès explained that the two groups did not encourage intermarriage. As a matter of fact, the intermarriage of an Ashkenazic

⁸² Ibid., iv.

⁸³ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 15.

Jew with a Sephardic Jew, in his opinion, challenged the Jewish social structure in the Middle East.⁸⁵

Crabitès devoted much time to examining the roots of the differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews. He began by tracing the path of the Sephardic Jews since their residence in medieval Spain, prior to the *Reconquista* in 1492. Crabitès characterized the Sephardic Jews as Spanish in language as well as culture, yet they preferred to live under the rule of Islam. While residing under Islam, the Spanish Jews were essentially exempted from service in the military, and although they had to pay a tax for this privilege, the Jews of Spain ultimately profited from the arrangement. Crabitès explained the relationship between the Muslims and Jews in Spain by stating that they coexisted in a system where the Muslims fought and the Jews thought,

The Mohammedans did the fighting, but had no budgetary worries, and allowed themselves to drift into intellectual stagnation. The Jews furnished the wherewithal to carry on the wars and conduct the government. They became the war profiteers in those days. [sic] They used their wealth to obtain the leisure which permits of the most development of culture . . . The ruling Mohammedan caste found it most congenial to rattle swords without worrying about money. They Jews, upon whom the financial responsibility fell, considered it far more satisfactory to remain quietly at home while others lived unproductive lives in the Army.⁸⁶

Crabitès described these Iberian Muslims as indolent and the Jews of Spain as industrious.⁸⁷ The special position of Iberian Jews gave them social mobility and permitted them entrance into the aristocracy.

According to Crabitès, while the Muslims of Spain allowed their Jews to participate in their administrations and better their social standing, the Christians of Europe prohibited Jews from working in government, and they were not allowed to possess land, so their situation greatly contrasted that of their brethren

⁸⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

in Iberia. Ashkenazic Jews were unable to advance socially. Crabitès was incorrect in this assessment, rather Jewish social advancement depended largely on their time and place.

Later in his manuscript, he developed an analysis of anti-Semitism in the United States by arguing that America was moving in the direction that Germany had taken and this progression was fueled by stereotypes. Crabitès believed that it was these generalizations that were hampering the ability of Jews to assimilate into American society. This was often due to the American perception of Jewish immigrants, based upon generalizations, and applied to Jews who had been in the United States for years, thus inhibiting their ability to assimilate:

I reasoned that as a linguistic bond linked together all branches of Ashkenazic Jewry, creating thereby an affinity between the Russian and Romanian Ashkenazic Jewish immigrants from the East, and the French and German from the West, every time one of the descendents of the latter began to climb the social scale, the Russian or Romanian newcomer hampered his ascent.⁸⁸

Crabitès tackled the situation of the Jews in the Middle East by first studying the Qur'anic perception of Jews. While the Qur'an recognizes that there exists the *Dar al-Islam* (Land of Peace) and the *Dar al-Harb* (Land of War), it established a dichotomy between the 'people of the book' and pagans. Crabitès interpreted the Qur'an's stance on the 'people of the book' as a "short-term truce," stating that the Arabs only wanted to maintain a peaceful coexistence with the Jews, "I saw in the Arab support of the Balfour Declaration a demonstration of the sincere desire of Mohammedianism [sic] to prolong this truce indefinitely."⁸⁹ Crabitès believed that the situation in Palestine threatened to undermine the peace between Muslim and Jew and make them enemies.

He held the British responsible for the present hostilities in the Holy Land. The British first pledged a Jewish homeland in the Balfour Declaration, and then they turned their backs on the Jews under the exigencies of war and issued the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 43.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 70a.

White Paper favoring the Arabs in 1939. The White Paper severely restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine. The British essentially played off the two sides for their own advantage. They had backed the Jews until it became more profitable to support the Arabs. Crabitès concluded that the Jews in Palestine must, out of necessity, become more conciliatory towards the Arabs, or they would eventually be slaughtered, for he believed that Muslim tolerance was waning in the face of a rising tide of anti-Semitism.⁹⁰

Disturbed by the frightening implications of Nazi Germany's anti-Semitic rhetoric, Crabitès challenged some of their arguments against the Jews. He made an effort to correct misperceptions of Jewish involvement in the financial collapse of Imperial Germany as a result of unrestrained inflation. Crabitès also disputed Jewish conspiracies to bring about the downfall of Germany during World War I. He said of their accusations, "They were blamed for having precipitated the collapse of the German Mark in order to be able to fasten upon the carcass of German prosperity."⁹¹ In doing so, he examined the three most prominent Jews of Imperial Germany, Max Warburg, Albert Ballin, and Walter Rathenau, and he exonerated these men of all culpability for Imperial Germany's economic woes and, instead, blamed Hugo Stinnes, a man he characterized as an "inflation profiteer." Crabitès declared, "Even if I be mistaken in thus envisaging Hugo Stinnes, the Aryan of Aryans, as the high-priest of inflation, assuredly the blame for that orgy devolves upon either the German government, or the German bankers."⁹²

Crabitès made a case against the widely held German notion that the Jews were taking over Germany, "I argued that if Jewry exercised the occult power which Hitlerism insists upon denouncing, it would have attempted to corrupt the mind of the youth of Germany during the decade when it said to have

⁹⁰ Ibid., 91c.

⁹¹ Ibid., 103.

⁹² Ibid., 105.

controlled the Reich.”⁹³ He cited statistics showing that Jewish enrollment in universities had almost halved between 1896 and 1930.⁹⁴

He next scrutinized Jewish banking houses in Germany, contending that their business practices closely mirrored those of the Christian-owned banks. He recalled that some wealthy Jewish families, such as the Mendelssohns and Bleichroeders, had converted to Christianity, and in his quest to prove false Nazi stereotypes he stumbled upon a question which he found profoundly disturbing:

Was it the truths of Christianity or social ambition that had converted these capitalists? I asked myself how long the wealthy German Ashkenazic families of today, with their plebian origin of yesterday, would have been able to resist the enticement of having “von” precede their names if the Great War had not abolished the Imperial power?⁹⁵

Crabitès responded, “I am free to say that I came to the conclusion that the blandishments of aristocracy, and the social ambition which wealth generates, are a greater menace to the ancestral faith of Jewish plutocrats than the power of Jewish wealth could possibly be to the body politic of Christendom.”⁹⁶

Crabitès defended the Jews against German accusations of Bolshevism. He recognized that some Jews were communists, such as Marx and Trotsky, while others tended towards socialism. He disputed the idea that Jews were susceptible to communist propaganda because of their education and urbanization; however, they still comprised less than six percent of the communist party’s membership.⁹⁷ Although the Bolshevik Revolution promised the Jews freedom from the oppressive czarist government, Crabitès believed that Jews did not regard communism as a panacea because it failed to promote private enterprise and threatened their independence.⁹⁸ Having examined Crabitès’s major unpublished material of the 1930s, we now need to return to an examination of the final year of his life.

⁹³ Ibid., 112.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 112.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 120.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 125, 126.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 127, 128.

William “Wild Bill” Donovan and the Office of Strategic Services

Originally, Crabitès had returned to the United States to procure government employment. With the difficulties of finding a job during the Depression, he accepted a position at Louisiana State University; however, he continued to utilize friends and connections to achieve his ultimate goal of an overseas post. He realized his dream in 1942, when William J. Donovan recruited him as an intelligence officer for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

William “Wild Bill” Donovan established the Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency, and was a close friend of Roosevelt, even though he was a conservative Republican. Donovan clearly recognized the value of research in the intelligence business, so he endeavored to draft many intellectuals, such as Crabitès.⁹⁹ Donovan was a pragmatic recruiter, mostly drawing from academics and professionals, especially lawyers, as he was a lawyer himself.¹⁰⁰ Crabitès was well suited to Donovan’s tastes, as his early agents were socially prominent men with connections, and he was reluctant to reject applicants who came with recommendations.¹⁰¹ Throughout his career, Crabitès exploited his relationships to further his career.

As General Erwin Rommel rapidly advanced across North Africa, Roosevelt aided the British in Egypt by invading North Africa. Although this strategy disappointed the Soviets, it surely assisted the British, for it endeavored to keep the Mediterranean open.¹⁰² Roosevelt enlisted Donovan’s help to gather information prior to the invasion, so when Donovan began the OSS’s North African Intelligence Project late in 1941, he dispatched agents across the whole sweep of North Africa, including Egypt. These men were fluent in French and had a good knowledge of North Africa, just like Crabitès. The OSS sent forth operatives under the cover of consular attachés and diplomats.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Joseph E. Perisco, *Roosevelt’s Secret War: FDR and World War II Espionage*. (New York: Random House, 2001), 110-11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 353- 54.

¹⁰¹ Edward Hymoff, *The OSS in World War II* (New York: Richardson and Steirman, 1986), 76-78.

¹⁰² Perisco, *Roosevelt’s Secret War*, 279.

¹⁰³ Hymoff, *The OSS in World War II*, 62.

The OSS assigned Crabitès to the State Department as the special assistant to the minister at Cairo. Serving as the State Department's coordinator of information, Donovan personally appointed him to the post.¹⁰⁴ As the Coordinator of Information, Donovan instructed Crabitès on his duties while in Washington D.C., and Crabitès reported, ultimately, to Donovan; however, he was under the supervision of Alexander C. Kirk.¹⁰⁵ His station was an attractive one. It commanded a salary of six thousand dollars per annum, plus traveling expenses.

It appears that Crabitès inadvertently became caught up in the conflict between the OSS and the State Department. The OSS tended to be left-leaning and had a more anti-Imperialist perspective than the State Department. The State Department was more right-wing and promoted maintaining the status quo. While the OSS was decidedly anti-imperialist, the State Department sought to placate the British.

Return to Egypt

In January 1942, the *Afrika Korps*, under the command of General Erwin Rommel, repulsed British forces from the Libyan desert. Crabitès arrived in Cairo three months later, under the threat of a Nazi victory in Egypt, just before the Nazis began to lose their foothold in North Africa in October when Montgomery defeated Rommel at El-Alamein.¹⁰⁶ This time Crabitès parted company with his family in Louisiana and departed to Egypt alone. Ill fortune greeted him shortly after his arrival in Cairo when he became sick with dysentery and had to be hospitalized.¹⁰⁷ Crabitès began his work during convalescence.

He contacted Hassanein, Chief of the Royal Cabinet, and established a relationship with him, for Donovan charged Crabitès with coordinating palace-

¹⁰⁴ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/5: From G. Howland Shaw, Asst. Secretary of State, to Alexander C. Kirk, American Minister, Cairo, Egypt. 14 May 1942.

¹⁰⁵ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/6: From G. Howland Shaw, Asst. Secretary of State, to Colonel Donovan, Coordinator of Information, Washington D.C. 14 May 1942.

¹⁰⁶ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/2: From Alexander Kirk in Cairo, to the Secretary of State, 20 May 1942.

¹⁰⁷ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/3: From Alexander Kirk in Cairo, to the Secretary of State, 26 May 1942.

embassy relations.¹⁰⁸ As a judge, Crabitès had a reputation for being a pro-palace sympathizer. He gained access to the Abdine Palace archives and had composed several decidedly pro-Egyptian books, which reinterpreted history in a more favorable light for the royal family.

Hassanein and Crabitès discussed the present situation in Egypt. It delighted Crabitès to learn how pleased King Farouq was to welcome him back to Egypt. While on the Mixed Courts, Crabitès had maintained a cordial and friendly relationship with the palace, often receiving invitations for an audience before both King Farouq and his father King Fuad. Hassanein conveyed the King's belief that,

He has long felt the need of having the counsel of a foreigner of his father's generation who knows Egypt and who has no ulterior motive to subserve. There is no telling what blessing to Egypt, to the Allied cause and to a healthy understanding with England may not flow from your presence here.¹⁰⁹

Before long, the State Department began to question the appointment of Crabitès to a post in Egypt. Although the State Department recognized his eminent qualifications for the position, they were fearful of his affiliation with the palace. According to Wallace Murray, Advisor on Political relations for the Department of State,

The question of whether it is desirable to sanction the presence in Cairo at a time like this of an American citizen with intimate relations with the Palace is clearly debatable. However, if such contact is considered desirable, it seems clear that Judge Crabitès for a number of reasons is better qualified than any other American I can think of.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/7: Communiqué from Pierre Crabitès, transmitted by Alexander Kirk, Cairo, to Colonel Donovan, through the Secretary of State, 28 May 1942.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/8: From Wallace Murray, Adviser on Political Relations, Department of State, to Welles, Under Secretary of State, 3 June 1942.

His anti-British sentiments continued to haunt him in Egypt and impair his career. American Minister in Cairo Alexander C. Kirk wrote Secretary of State G. Howland Shaw,

The British Ambassador has now approached me regarding the matter of the presence here of Judge Crabitès which according to messages received by him from the Foreign Office in London sometime ago appears to be a cause for concern to the British Authorities owing to Crabitès' previous relationship with the Palace.¹¹¹

British concern over the palace during World War II was understandable. In 1939, King Farouq filled the position of chief of his royal cabinet with Ali Maher Pasha, who was decidedly anti-British, and later with Sidki Pasha, an avowed fascist sympathizer. By 1940, Sidki Pasha sought to take advantage of the precarious position Great Britain found herself in Egypt, but Sir Miles Lampson, British Ambassador to Egypt, coerced the Egyptian government into supporting the Allies. Ali Maher Pasha resigned, believing that the Axis would ultimately be victorious. The situation had reached such a threshold that by 1942 Lampson issued an ultimatum, virtually at gunpoint, to King Farouq, compelling him to promote Nahhas Pasha, leader of the Wafd, to be the new prime minister. Ironically, Lampson had forced the king to acquiesce to the appointment of a political adversary who had also displayed perpetual hostility towards the British presence in Egypt as well.¹¹²

The American Legation in Cairo, in coordination with the Allied war effort, sought to maintain a harmonious relationship with the British in Egypt. The legation considered Crabitès's association with the palace detrimental to their rapport with the British, so they attempted to limit his contact with the palace. Actually, American Minister Kirk worried about the opposition drawing upon Crabitès's connection to the palace to incite violence in Egypt.¹¹³ Essentially, the State Department feared Crabitès moving without prior approval from his

¹¹¹ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/8: From Alexander Kirk, Cairo, Egypt, to the Department of State, 31 May 1942.

¹¹² George Annesley, *The Rise of Modern Egypt*. (Durham, UK: The Pentland Press Ltd), 389

¹¹³ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/9: From Alexander Kirk, Cairo, Egypt, to the Secretary of State, 29 May 1942.

superiors. They needed Crabitès out of Egypt, so they tried to send him to Khartoum, but within just a couple short months before he could go, the American Legation in Cairo arranged for his transfer back to the States.¹¹⁴ These events indicate that in Crabitès's particular case, the State Department proved to be an implacable foe of the OSS and more powerful than the OSS.

It was paradoxical, for the OSS sent Crabitès to Egypt to gather information on the palace so that the Allies could profit by this knowledge to assist the war effort. Farouq's intentions during the war concerned the Allies; yet it was the mere presence of Crabitès at Abdine Palace that alarmed the British. His tenure as a judge on the Mixed Courts was not easily forgotten, and the British still remembered his anti-British attitude.

Crabitès's poor constitution prevented him from traveling immediately, and he remained in Egypt. While in Egypt, Crabitès pressured the State Department, requesting a transfer to the American Legation in Beirut.¹¹⁵ In January of 1943, the State Department agreed to assign Crabitès to Beirut. The State Department thought it best that Crabitès act as a legal attaché to the American Minister in Beirut because of his expertise in Middle Eastern politics and law. Syria and Lebanon were former French protectorates, so Crabitès's fluency in French certainly was an asset in Beirut. Mr. Wadsworth, of the State Department, commented on a possible role for Crabitès in Lebanon, "My suggestion that he could aid also by following political trends in Lebanese religious circles was rather by way of afterthought. But it is not an unimportant item."¹¹⁶ The American Legation expected him to research the local political and legal conditions in Lebanon and Syria.

Crabitès's Last Year

Crabitès never arrived in Beirut. Lebanon was under British military occupation at the time, and there was much apprehension regarding his possible

¹¹⁴ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/11: From Alexander Kirk, Cairo, Egypt, to the Secretary of State, 29 July 1942.

¹¹⁵ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/20: From Murray, American Legation, Beirut, to Wadsworth, Department of State, 16 January 1943.

¹¹⁶ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/21: From Wadsworth to Secretary of State, 20 January 1943.

anti-British sentiments. His former supervisor, Alexander C. Kirk, explained that Crabitès's connection to the palace in Cairo had provoked uneasiness on the part of the British. Rather than risking a disturbance, the American Legation removed him. Kirk was not quite sure of the British reaction to Crabitès's appointment to Lebanon. Crabitès's health was a concern, as he was getting on in years and had not fully recovered from his bout with dysentery.¹¹⁷ After recuperating sufficiently to travel, Crabitès returned home for a short while.

In May of 1943, the State Department assigned Crabitès to be the special assistant for legal affairs in the American Foreign Service Auxiliary; he headed off to the American Legation in Baghdad.¹¹⁸ Before he reached Iraq, the Legation in Baghdad attempted to pass him off to another legation. Mr. Wilson, of the American Legation in Baghdad, wrote the department,

I should appreciate being informed of the duties expected of Special assistant for Legal Affairs in Baghdad. Unless this officer is charged with duties of a nature beyond the ability of individual members of the present staff the nature and volume of work here do not justify such an assignment and I respectfully submit that a man of Crabitès' qualifications can be utilized elsewhere.¹¹⁹

This rejection probably had to do with reasons other than his personal convictions or relationships. Instead, the legation in Baghdad refused him because they deemed him to be of little assistance. Regardless of Mr. Wilson's views, the State Department ordered Crabitès to Baghdad. At least the department would have him far from Egypt and in a place which would not arouse British anxiety because he was not intimate with Iraqi leadership, like he was with the Abdine Palace. While his wife Charlotte remained at their Washington D.C. residence in Aldie, Virginia, Crabitès boarded a sea plane and flew to Iraq in June of 1943. Most likely, he took the southern route from the

¹¹⁷ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/24: From Alexander Kirk, Cairo, Egypt, to Wallace Murray, Department of State, 10 February 1943.

¹¹⁸ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/25: From the American Legation in Baghdad to the Department of State, 8 May 1943.

¹¹⁹ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/28: From T. M. Wilson, American Legation in Baghdad, to the Secretary of State, 3 June 1943.

United States to Brazil and from Brazil to the west coast of Africa. He first landed at Accra, Gold Coast, and then later traveled east to Cairo. Crabitès stayed at the Shepherd's Hotel in Cairo while his feeble constitution slowly acclimated to traveling. He still had not recovered from his sickness of a year earlier in Egypt.¹²⁰

While he was recuperating at the Shepherd's Hotel in Cairo, Paul H. Alling, of the State Department's Division of Near Eastern Affairs, also questioned the necessity of sending Crabitès to Iraq when it was apparent that Mr. Wilson did not want Crabitès to come and "roost." Alling was aware that Ato Deressa, a highly influential Ethiopian dignitary on mission to Egypt, was requesting an American legal advisor to assist the Ethiopian government. In an effort to expedite the process of transferring Crabitès to Ethiopia, Alling was able to gain the consent of the Foreign Service Auxiliary, securing Crabitès's release from his position in Baghdad.¹²¹

Wallace Murray, Advisor on Political Relations for the Department of State, agreed with most of his colleagues on the subject of Crabitès's qualifications and suitability for the job in Ethiopia. Crabitès exerted a significant amount of pressure on the State Department from his political contacts in Washington. It appears that some in the State Department believed Crabitès was interested in adventure, not hard work. In a letter to G. Howling Shaw, Assistant Secretary of State, Wallace Murray described Crabitès as a man consumed by his own egotism,

Judging by the methods employed by Judge Crabitès in forcing his services upon us in the present instance, and granting that his qualifications were considerable when he was a younger man and serving on the Mixed Courts of Egypt, I very much doubt whether he has the health or the punch to attack any such job as that suggested in Ethiopia. I have the unfortunate impression that Judge Crabitès is looking for

¹²⁰ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/35: From Gaudin in Baghdad to the Secretary of State, 20 July 1943.

¹²¹ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/38: From Paul H. Alling, Division of Near Eastern Affairs, Department of State, to Wallace Murray, Advisor on Political Relations, and Shaw, Asst. Secretary of State, 29 June 1943.

excitement and not hard work. He made that clear to us when it was suggested that his services might be utilized in the Legal Adviser's office in the Department. If I had any confidence that he could or would go to Addis Ababa with a determination to knock the spots out of the legal problems facing Haile Selassie, I would be the first one to support his candidacy. Unfortunately, I fear that he might go there 'for the ride' and for the material he might be able to collect for a new book, but with very little intention to put his nose to the grindstone. I hope I am wrong but I am afraid I am not.¹²²

Paul H. Alling joined Wallace Murray's denunciation of Crabitès as a man who only had his own self-interest at heart when he applied for a diplomatic position in the Middle East. Alling applauded the idea of sending Crabitès to Ethiopia so as to disencumber themselves of him, yet he, like Murray, worried that Crabitès was ill-suited for Ethiopia, partly on account of his ailing constitution and partly because of his personality. Alling accused Crabitès of wanting nuance, declaring, "He completely lacks a judicial temperament."¹²³ Unless his responsibilities in Ethiopia provided for Crabitès's partisan nature, Alling thought, he would most likely become involved in extracurricular activities.¹²⁴ He believed that the problem with dispatching Crabitès to Ethiopia was that he might become an embarrassment to American prestige in the country; whereas, in Baghdad he could be better controlled. While Murray considered Crabitès' credentials adequate for the position in Ethiopia, Alling called his qualifications into question, for Crabitès was a specialist in the French Code rather than English Common Law. He refused to post an American to Ethiopia to implement a system dissimilar to the form of justice administered in the United States. Rather than sending Crabitès to Ethiopia, Alling recommended Jasper Brinton, American judge on the Court of Cassation. He argued in favor of Brinton's aptness for the job, citing two reasons: Brinton was more familiar with the American legal system

¹²² State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/38: From Wallace Murray, Adviser on Political Relations, Department of State, to Shaw, Asst. Secretary of State, 29 June 1943.

¹²³ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/38: From Paul Alling, Division of Near Eastern Affairs, to the Department of State, 29 June 1943.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

than Crabitès, and he was more interested in legal systems than Crabitès, having written a book on the Mixed Courts.¹²⁵ Wallace Murray agreed with Paul H. Alling, saying in July, “After the example and heroic services of Mr. Everett W. Colson, who literally gave his life in the service of the Emperor, I feel that Judge Crabitès would suffer by contrast with Mr. Colson, to the detriment of American prestige in Ethiopia.”¹²⁶

It was immaterial how the State Department felt about stationing Crabitès in Ethiopia because Ato Deressa, Vice Minister of Finance, contacted the American government in Washington, requesting the services of Crabitès as a legal advisor in Addis Ababa. The State Department was more than willing to release Crabitès from his duties as special assistant for legal affairs in Baghdad so that he could assume the position in Ethiopia. At the time, Crabitès was stranded in Accra, Gold Coast, awaiting passage to Cairo. Once he arrived in Cairo, he was to contact the Ethiopian chargé d'affaires in order to discuss the offer and arrange for travel.¹²⁷

Crabitès finally arrived in Cairo from Accra in late July 1943. His stay, while brief, remained a concern for the American Legation in Cairo. The American Legation feared that Crabitès would return to his old habit of contacting the palace, so the Legation pressured him to sail on to Baghdad post haste. He never went to Addis Ababa. Crabitès arrived in Baghdad on the 29 July 1943.¹²⁸

In August of 1943, Russell Barnes, of the Office of War Information, commissioned Crabitès to prepare an article entitled “Americans in the Egyptian Army,” an abridged version of the book he had published in 1938 under the same title. The Office of War Information in Cairo sought to publish the article in

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/38: From Wallace Murray, Adviser on Political Relations, to Shaw, Asst. Secretary of State, 29 June 1943.

¹²⁷ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/38: From the Department of State to C. Lewis at the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, 29 June 1943.

¹²⁸ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/42: From T.M. Wilson, American Legation in Baghdad, to the Secretary of State, 30 July 1943; State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/43: From Wallace Murray, Adviser on Political Relations, to Shaw, Asst. Secretary of State, 22 July 1943.

Arabic and distribute it throughout the Middle East as propaganda for the war effort.¹²⁹

On 5 October 1943, doctors diagnosed Crabitès with a fever, which they attributed to the Iraqi climate and living conditions.¹³⁰ Two days later he suffered a paralytic stroke.¹³¹ Crabitès died at 3:35 a.m. on 10 October “as the result of chronic nephritis with acute acerbation, high blood pressure and hemorrhage of the brain,” and was subsequently buried in the British Civilian Christian cemetery in Baghdad, along with another famous Westerner, Gertrude Bell.¹³² At his funeral ceremony, the Egyptian chargé d’affaires, on behalf of King Farouq, placed a wreath on his grave. His wife Charlotte was notified via telegram the following day. Charlotte wanted his body exhumed and returned to his home in the States as soon as possible, but she would have to wait eighteen months before they could exhume his body and ship it to America.¹³³

¹²⁹ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/44: From T.M. Wilson, American Legation in Baghdad, to the Secretary of State, 21 August 1943.

¹³⁰ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/49: From Gaudin, American Legation in Baghdad, to the Secretary of State, 6 October 1943.

¹³¹ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/50: From Gaudin, American Legation in Baghdad, to the Secretary of State, 8 October 1943.

¹³² State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/51 From Gaudin, American Legation in Baghdad, to the Secretary of State, 10 October 1943.

¹³³ State Department Document: 123 Crabitès, Pierre/54: From Gaudin, American Legation in Baghdad, to the Secretary of State, 12 October 1943.