**Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018, 464 pp, Index. $35, ISBN: 9780691177397**

The question of the autonomy that Menachem Begin offered the Palestinians within the construct of the Israel–Egypt peace treaty stands at the center of Seth Anziska’s *Preventing Palestine,* which deals with the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians from 1978, the year of the Camp David conference, to the 1990s, the Oslo accords era. The book is based on impressive and new research in diverse archives in the Middle East, the United States, and Europe, facilitated *inter alia* by the author’s impressive proficiency in Hebrew, Arabic, and English.

In contrast to the view of the autonomy offered by Begin as leader of the Likud, as the initial breakthrough that allowed the leaders of the Israel Labour Party, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, to sign the Oslo accords with Yasser Arafat in 1993 (and, accordingly, that traces the subsequent failure of the process to subsequent events and not to the underlying ideas of Oslo)—Anziska’s main argument is the opposite: the Oslo accords were indeed predicated on Begin’s original consent to autonomy but collapsed for that very reason. The autonomy that Begin proposed, the author contends, like the version offered to the Palestinians in the 1990s, was meant not to evolve but to serve as a sophisticated mechanism for the prevention of Palestinian statehood.

At the moment of truth, Begin put forward his autonomy plan as a corollary of the letters of Zeev Jabotinsky, founder of the Revisionist Zionist Movement, who, while striving for a Hebrew state with a Jewish majority, arguably envisaged a unique model of a Jewish state that would also be a state of all its citizens if not a nearly binational one. Indeed, the state that Jabotinsky sought during the British Mandate was to be Jewish only by dint of the Jewish demographic majority; within its frame, the Arab minority would be assured equal rights and cultural-national autonomy.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Admittedly, it was not only the development of the Palestinian national movement from the Mandate era to the late 1970s, like the historical circumstances that have changed since Jabotinsky’s time, that made Begin’s offer of autonomy inadequate for the Palestinians. In fact, as Anziska proves, Begin invoked Jabotinsky to offer a different kind of autonomy, a strictly administrative version that withheld from Palestinians all recognition as a distinct nationality (the accord refers to them as “the inhabitants of Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza District”). And even though the autonomy framework invited the Palestinians to apply for Israeli citizenship and participate in elections for the Israeli parliament, the true intention was to give them Jordanian citizenship under Israeli rule. Above all, Anziska states, the goal of the autonomy scheme—which assured Jews the right to continue “acquiring land and settling in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza District” (p. 99)—was to establish permanent Israeli rule in the territories with independent Palestinian management of internal affairs. In his epilogue, Ansizka shows adroitly how the architects of Oslo aspired to the same goal but with one difference: they were willing to dialogue with the PLO.

Thus, as Jabotinsky’s idea metamorphosed from the 1950s to the late twentieth century, it was gutted of its content. Furthermore, since Jabotinsky deemed national affiliation a matter of subjective conscience,[[2]](#footnote-2) he was willing to recognize distinct Palestinian nationhood even at a time when many Palestinians considered themselves part of the Arab nation. Begin, in contrast, refused to afford them national recognition even at the time of Camp David, decades after the Palestinian national movement had solidified and received international legitimation. In Anziska’s opinion, it is not by chance that Begin’s offer of autonomy was extended in the late 1970s, since those were years in which the PLO underwent a process of de-radicalization and entertained a discourse about the two-state vision (p. 173). Thus, the idea behind the autonomy offer was to deprive them of the possibility of developing as an independent state with the support of the U.S. administration under Jimmy Carter, who tended to understand the need to establish Palestine. Anziska’s fluency in Arabic also helped him to show how the Egyptians of all people, who ostensibly represented Palestinian interests at Camp David, shared Begin’s wish to thwart Palestinian statehood.

The conclusion of this important book is dismal: the governments of Israel have managed to throttle the two-state vision, but the day will come when Israel, too, will pay the price for it.

1. Zeev Jabotinsky, *A Hebrew State—A Solution to the Jewish Problem* (Tel Aviv: Jabotinsky Institute, 1933, in Hebrew), p. 58. ‘The country can no longer be considered the sole property of its actual inhabitants. It should be seen as the joint property of two elements: one—the current inhabitants of different confessions and faiths, approximately 700,000 in number, and the other—the Jewish people, for whom Eretz Israel will be home, roughly twelve million’. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Zeev Jabotinsky, ‘Self-Rule of a National Minority’, *Writings: Nation and Society* (Jerusalem: Eri Jabotinsky, 1959, in Hebrew), p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)