

Film Guide
SEARCH FOR DESTINY

PART I

Even the name “Middle East” is a Western term, and the names of many of its countries are those given by Westerners. Through the tangle of historical timelines emerges the quest of peoples for the definition of nationhood, of destiny. That tiny fraction of the earth from which sprang the great monotheistic faiths has often been the province of an empire. At the beginning of this century most of the Middle East was under the rule of the Ottoman Turks, who in World War I sided with Germany in its struggle with Britain and its allies. The passage of time has made it difficult to relate to the intensity of that conflict, but victory was seen as a matter of national life and death. In Egypt, a province of the Ottoman Empire, the British unhesitatingly and illegally deposed the governor and occupied the country. Prior to the war there was no concept of an Arab nation, no sense of Arab nationalism, but Britain incited the Arabs to revolt, luring them with promises of a great independent kingdom of all the Arabs, and teaching them the tactics of guerrilla warfare and terrorism-murder, kidnappings, bombings, theft, arson, kidnapping. At the same time, trying surreptitiously to embroil the United States in its war, Britain promised the Zionist Jews an independent Jewish state in the Balfour Declaration. But at the same time Britain negotiated secret treaties to divide the Middle East with France and Russia, to make the same area they had promised to the Arabs as a free nation and dangled before the Zionists as a homeland a series of vast British colonies and dependencies. Lenin vastly embarrassed the Allies by publishing the texts of those secret agreements revealing Britain’s mendacity and greed. Eventually the League of Nations gave that area to Britain and France as mandates, which they carved up between themselves as puppet states. The Arabs were completely betrayed by the British; former patriarchs of tribes and clans nominally headed the “Anglo-Arab monarchies”; their revenues and policies were dictated by Britain, the rulers’ children educated in British schools. Treaties as allies or colonies of Britain tied them, and their borders were arbitrarily imposed by Britain dividing people identical in every way, and designed to prevent any of them from becoming powerful. In the rump of the former Ottoman state, Turkey, the Kemal Ataturk who had humiliated the British at Gallipoli abolished the caliphate and the use of Arabic and set up a secularized authoritarian state. France divided Arab-Christian dominated Lebanon from Muslim Syria. In the meantime Jews were unfettered in their immigration to Palestine; in slightly over a decade their numbers increased from 8% to 20% of the population in the Holy Land, a Diaspora in search of destiny. They freely admitted their intention of creating an independent Jewish state. The Christian and Muslim Palestinians who had lived there for fifty generations saw this as an invasion, another function of western imperialism. Britain, needing Arab oil for the war which it foresaw with Nazi Germany, ended Jewish immigration. But Britain’s tutoring of the Arabs in terrorism rebounded on it as both sides resorted to bombings and assassinations; Britain never admitted its promises to the Arabs, and tried to vitiate its promise to the Jewish people with deceitful semantic games. As Zionist agitation mounted, and increasing numbers of refugees from Hitler’s Europe sought asylum, the Arabs were driven to side with Britain’s enemies. The British, for example, held the supposedly independent Egyptians in contempt, and humiliated their king, so Egypt would openly have welcomed a Nazi victory in North Africa. As World War II, born of Britain and its allies’ revenge, greed and ambition in the Versailles treaty, began, it was once again outsiders-Europeans-who fought a European war in the Middle East.