

Yerushalayim versus Al-Quds

Julian Schvindlerman

The Middle East covers an area of roughly 15,000,000 square kilometers.¹ There, you can find a small country called Israel, which encompasses a space totaling 27,800 square kilometers. Its capital, Jerusalem, hardly fills 120 square kilometers. Within it is located the Old City, covering just one square kilometer. Inside the Old City lies the Temple Mount. There, in this tiny area, whose symbolic importance is inversely proportional to its geographical dimension, one of the most atrocious archeological crimes of the modern era is taking place.

It all began when the Islamic Religious Authority (WAQF), currently under the auspices of the Palestinian Authority, opened an "emergency exit" to one of the several mosques located on the historical Temple Mount a few months ago. In time, and with the help of bulldozers and trucks, workers dug a pit 1,250 square meters in area and 12 meters in depth near this original exit supposedly for the sake of renovations to the mosque, thus transforming the "exit" into a monumental entrance to the area of the mosque. During this construction process, the workers have systematically dumped piles of ancient relics from the First and Second Temple periods onto a 6,000-ton mountain of dirt in the Kidron Valley as if it were garbage, in the way someone would toss a McDonald's hamburger wrapping.

This almost unbelievable act of Islamic sacrilege prompted an open letter addressed to the Israeli prime minister and signed by, among others, the mayor of Jerusalem, Ehud Olmert, former mayor Teddy Kollek, writers Haim Gouri, Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua, professors, recipients of archeological prizes, and 82 members of the Knesset — ranging in ideology from Meretz to the NRP. The letter stated that "a serious act of irreparable archeological vandalism and destruction is being carried out without archeological supervision ... this archeological crime is insufferable."²

Haim Gouri, also a member of the Committee for the Protection of Antiquities at the Temple Mount, called for UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) to intervene. This call for help is particularly significant in light of Israel's past experience with the UN agency. During the 1970s and 1980s, UNESCO repeatedly condemned Israel for various archeological excavations that, according to the Muslim world, were damaging the foundations of the mosques. At

the time, UNESCO even went as far as to cut off financial aid to Israel.

That is why the current indifference of UNESCO, as well as that of the international media, various NGOs, and Western governments is simply too much to abide. As these prominent Israeli personalities pointed out in their public letter of protest, it would be inconceivable for a similar act of desecration to take place in areas of comparable historical importance, such as the Acropolis in Athens or the Forum in Rome — or, for that matter, in Mecca itself. Actually, had this pit been carved by Israel, and had the desecrated relics belonged to Muslim instead of Jewish history, World War III would no doubt have erupted.

One need only recall what happened at the same location a few years ago to realize that this statement is no exaggeration. In September 1996, the Netanyahu administration opened a 2-meter-long exit at the end of a Hasmonean tunnel under the Western Wall. This event was denounced from Gaza to Bangladesh as a desecration of the Islamic holy places in Jerusalem, and a few hours later rallies against Israel and the "Judaization" of the City of David filled the streets of the Palestinian autonomous areas. In the ensuing riots, the Palestinian police joined the protesters, at times shooting at the Israeli police and army — with weapons they got from Israel in the framework of the peace process. After three days of fighting, 70 people had lost their lives and dozens had been wounded, mostly Palestinians.

Passions were further inflamed when the official Palestinian television station showed images of the corpses while describing the revolt as an Israeli "massacre." At Palestinian request, the Arab League met and condemned Israel, while the international media, unsurprisingly, echoed the Palestinian account of events.

The present crime being committed by WAQF on the Mount has, of course, much more to do with the battle over the sovereignty of Jerusalem than with archeology. Nor is this careless, even hostile Islamic attitude toward historical treasure surprising. The entire Palestinian leadership is committed to "erasing" Jewish history from the area through its official media, school textbooks, or, as in the current case, by simply tossing into the garbage any shred of evidence pointing to a Jewish historical presence here.

Throughout the peace process, Israeli foreign policy has generally avoided adopting a systematic information campaign highlighting the historical Jewish link to Jerusalem or the moral dimension underlying such bond. That is to say, Israel could remind the world that the word "Jerusalem" appears 587 times in the Jewish Bible (its syn-

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onym, "Zion," another 151), whereas it does not even appear once in the Koran; that Jerusalem was the capital of a Jewish kingdom and was never the capital of any other rule; that Muhammad attached religious value to Jerusalem with the sole intention of gaining Jewish supporters; and that Jews have been for millennia praying three times a day facing Jerusalem, whereas Muslims — even when they are in Jerusalem — pray facing Mecca.

Israel could also remind the world that, under Jordanian rule, Jews were forbidden to pray at the Western Wall, that almost all the synagogues in the Old City were desecrated, and that tombstones of the old Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives were removed for use in various construction projects (including the building of latrines). Nor was Jerusalem that relevant for Muslims religiously under the Jordanian administration. As Daniel Pipes has recounted, the act of securing a bank loan, subscribing to telephone service, or registering a postal package required a trip to Amman in those days. Friday sermons were not transmitted from Al-Aqsa but from a minor mosque in Amman (by the way, these sermons were censored by the Jordanian authorities, a restriction Israel rescinded when it reunified the city in 1967). Nor was Jordan's policy toward Jerusalem atypical. Save a few occasions when King Hussein deigned to visit Jerusalem, no Arab leader paid a visit to the Holy City during 1948-1967. Not even in the 1964 PLO Charter, Daniel Pipes reminds us, can one find mention of Jerusalem.³

No, only after Israel captured the city in 1967 did the Arab world start to "miss" Jerusalem. It was recently

reported, for instance, that King Fahd told the American president he wants to pray at Al-Aqsa mosque before he dies. This is reminiscent of the late Syrian president who, as talks regarding the possible return of the Golan Heights were in full swing, told President Clinton that he wanted to swim in Lake Kinneret. Perhaps these declarations of intent and sudden interest in Israeli sites reflect a potential materialization of one of the promises of the "New Middle East": the promotion of regional tourism. Accordingly, we shouldn't be surprised if tomorrow we hear that Saddam Hussein wants to eat a falafel in Tel Aviv or Colonel Qaddafi wishes to surf off the coast of Eilat...

In any case, this extreme act of Islamic disrespect toward Jewish history and the lack of elementary Palestinian sensitivity toward its peace partner in themselves constitute the basis upon which Israel should define its Jerusalem policy. Since September 1993, Yasir Arafat has adopted a position on Jerusalem and has not moved one inch from it. Perhaps the time has arrived for Israel to do the same, and for once to set and respect a red line in this peace process — a line which, incidentally, enjoys a significant national consensus. •

Notes:

1. Including Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Cyprus, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Yemen.

2. *Ha'aretz*, 11 June 2000.

3. Daniel Pipes, "Whose Jerusalem," *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 July 2000.

FALL

ELISHA PORAT

Now in the fall the curlews assemble
In the orchards, and the gray conies
Are already changing their colors, while I,
Too, rub on my heart the cream
That protects from summer heat, to keep it
Safe on wintry days as well.
And in my room which darkens in the cloudy light
I go up to the wall: I tear off papers,
Pictures and reminders of the last two thousand years.
I stand in front of the empty rack
And once more take a pledge:
No bungling now, you treacherous body,
You have to bear me still,
All of me, into the next thousand.

Translated from the Hebrew by Asher Harris

The Land of Israel and Jerusalem in 1900

Elliott A. Green

Palestine is a Western name. One hundred years ago Arabs and Muslims did not commonly use it. Nor did they see the country to which the name is applied as a separate country. For them, it was an indistinct part of a larger geographic entity, *Bilad ash-Sham* (usually translated as Syria or Greater Syria). The Ottoman Empire never used the name officially to apply to any administrative division of its territory. Nor did the Ottoman Empire have a territorial division of any name that corresponded in its boundaries — even roughly — to those of the political entity named Palestine set up by the international community in 1920 at San Remo which was designated to embody the Jewish National Home.

Yet Avi Shlaim, who teaches at a British institution of higher learning and is more widely known as an Israeli “new” historian, wrote recently in a very thick book: “At the end of the nineteenth century, Palestine was a province of the Ottoman Empire.”¹

This is a gross error. But, rather than explain how a university scholar could make such a mistake about something so basic, it is more important to point out that elementary mistakes, falsehoods such as this, as well as omissions of basic facts (which also create a false understanding), are symptomatic of our times.

A number of other falsehoods concerning this country and its population in 1900 (especially regarding Jerusalem in that period), are repeated constantly, not only in the press or by Arab propaganda agencies but in the press releases of those human rights organizations that frequently seem to favor the rights of one party to a conflict over the rights of the other party or parties. These errors turn up over and over in scholarly books and journals and in the often raucous babble of diplomats at the UN.

Standing out among the truths commonly disregarded concerning the Land of Israel and Jerusalem one hundred years ago — and of special importance at this time of Arab-Israeli negotiations — are: 1) at the end of the 19th century, there was no “Palestine” on the ground, only in Western historical memory, and in occasional usage by Western diplomats, scholars and travelers; 2) the population was religiously, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, and, even though Muslim Arabs were a majority in the country at the time, the country was not then a defined territory; 3) Jews were a majority of the population of Jerusalem and had been so at least since 1870, or

earlier, according to some estimates; 4) Jews were a majority of the inhabitants of the Old City in 1900; 5) Jews lived both inside and outside the Old City walls, inhabiting quarters that were to be occupied by Transjordan (later Jordan) in 1948 and were thus to form part of what could be called “Arab East Jerusalem” between 1948 and 1967.

Bilad ash-Sham (Syria or Greater Syria) included not only Israel, but the Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan of today, roughly speaking. The country traditionally called the Land of Israel by Jews, and by Christians the Holy Land, was not ordinarily — or traditionally — seen as a separate or distinct land by Muslim Arabs or the Ottoman state.

In 1900, the Land was divided among the *vilayets* (provinces) of Beirut and Damascus, and the *mutesariflik* of Jerusalem. At the start of the 19th century, however, Jerusalem had belonged to the *vilayet* of Damascus. However, after a series of political-military vicissitudes and administrative changes, the Jerusalem district was made into an independent *mutesariflik* or *sanjaq* (district), since its governor reported directly to the capital, not to a provincial governor. This innovation was introduced in 1854 during the Crimean War as a consequence of increasing influence by Christian powers on the Ottoman Empire and Jerusalem’s political sensitivity due to the Christian powers’ interest in the city. The British and French were doing much of the fighting for the Ottomans against the Russian Empire, and had to be compensated (with favors in Jerusalem, *inter alia*). Yet, from the Ottoman viewpoint, Muslim interests had to be protected too. Further, the Crimean War had grown out of Christian rivalries in Jerusalem focused on the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Thus decisions about Jerusalem had to be made quickly and at the highest level in Constantinople. They could not be left for the *wali* of the Damascus *vilayet*.

Ironically, although the Arabs did not ordinarily or traditionally see the country as a separate land, the term “Holy Land” appears in the Qur’an used in the Jewish and Christian sense. It says that the Holy Land was divinely assigned to the Children of Israel, and they were commanded to enter it. (*Sura* 5:21; also 5:12, 20:80)² The Qur’an says too that God settled Israel in a “blessed land” (*Sura* 7:137; also 10:94). It further relates that God will gather the Jews back to their Land from their Dispersion at the End of Days. (17:104)

Why the Muslims did not habitually call the country the Holy Land, in view of the Qur’anic text, should be the subject of research.

In any event, since the Muslim majority in 1900 did not see the Land as a distinct country, and recognizing that

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there were then deep gaps of identity and sentiment between the religious groups — including Arabic-speakers of different faiths — it is not credible to claim that the ethnically and religiously diverse population of the Land saw itself as a separate nation or people. The Muslims, who included not only Arabs, but Turks, Bosnians, Circassians, and others, plus Arab families originating in Egypt or elsewhere, saw all of *Bilad ash-Sham* as part of the Islamic domain, of *Dar al-Islam*. Lands within the Islamic domain, originally conquered from non-Muslims, have the status of *waqf*, that is, property owned collectively by the Muslim community. *Waqf* ownership is holy and inalienable.

This last point means that once a land is *waqf* it is always *waqf*, as a Hamas leader once explained to a French journalist. He pointed out that Spain, for instance, was still *waqf* land.³ In principle, he asserted, Muslims cannot accept non-Muslim sovereignty in an Islamic (*waqf*) land. Nevertheless, the Spanish example demonstrates that in practice Muslims recognize superior force and come to terms with it — like nearly everyone else. In circumstances of Muslim weakness, Muslim law holds that the duty of *jihad* (holy war) to restore *waqf* land in non-Muslim hands to *Dar al-Islam*, is left in abeyance.

The *waqf* concept in its classic form does not allow for local nationalism. It places Islamic affinities above affinities to one's fellow countrymen who may belong to the wrong religion. Indeed, Jews and Christians in the Land suffered persecution and economic exploitation at the hands of local Muslims during the 19th century, long before Theodor Herzl was born. Jews and Christians in the Islamic domain had the status of *dhimmis*, that is, "protected persons." This meant that, among other disabilities, they paid special taxes, *jizya* and *kharaaj*, to the Islamic state. In practice, they were left open to further exploitation and extortion by local Muslim officials, strong men, and notables. Thus they paid all sorts of irregular taxes, levies, exactions, fines, and bribes beyond what Muslim law prescribed. The Ottoman reforms in the mid-19th century did much to make non-Muslims legally equal to Muslims. Yet the new laws were not always carried out, and many Muslims resented the legal equality given to *dhimmis*, whose subordinate status persisted de facto to a great extent.

Although Muslims did not see the Land as a distinct country, in Jewish tradition, the Land was called the Land of Israel through Second Temple times, while Christians, through the 19th century, were likely to call it the Holy Land (in forms to suit each language: *Terra Sancta*, etc.), with Palestine as the most common alternate name. Other alternate names among Christians were Zion, Judea, the Land of Israel, the Promised Land, the Land of the Bible, the Land of Jesus, etc. On the other hand, the Land was sometimes seen as part of a larger geographic notion — the Near East, Syria, the Levant, the Bible Lands, etc.

The name, Palestine, gained ground through the 19th century against other names. If the medieval Christian West had favored "Holy Land," after the Renaissance Westerners seem to have sought a more "scientific" name. The early modern West admired both science and classical culture. Names for scientific classification were taken

from Latin, the language of the Romans, as Linnaeus was doing for biology, giving plants and animals Latin names.

Palestine was the late Roman name for the country, albeit the earlier Greeks and Romans had called it Judea (*Ioudaia*, *Judaea*). The Emperor Hadrian imposed the name Palestine after suppressing the Jewish Bar Kokhba revolt (135 CE), with evident intent to further suppress the Jews. *Provincia Iudaea* had spread over Samaria, the coastal plain, Galilee, both sides of the Jordan, and the Golan Heights. Hadrian renamed it *Provincia Syria Palaestina*. In the following centuries, Palaestina was divided into three parts, *Palaestina Prima*, *Secunda*, and *Tertia*. After the Arab conquest (ca. 640), *Palaestina Prima*, essentially the southern part of the country (without most of the Negev), was named *Jund Filastin* (Filastin military district). On the other hand, the Galilee and northern Transjordan (*Palaestina Secunda*) were renamed *Jund Urdunn* (Jordan military district). Since the Arabs often retained Roman geographic names, the name *Jund Urdunn* may indicate that the East Roman (Byzantine) Empire had changed *Palaestina Secunda* to *Iordania* before the conquest. The name *Filastin* was not used by Muslim rulers after the Crusades, and the whole *Bilad ash-Sham* was several times reorganized administratively by Mamluks and Ottomans before the British arrived. Incidentally, at first (1917-20), before San Remo, the British subsumed the Land under the rubric "Occupied Enemy Territory-South."

Another Arab-retained Roman name was *Iliya* for Jerusalem, from Hadrian's name for the city, *Aelia Capitolina*, *Aelia* for short (*Aelius* was Hadrian's family name). The Arab names commonly used for Jerusalem today, *al-Quds* and *Bayt al-Maqdis*, were introduced long after the conquest. They are modeled on Jewish names for the Holy City, *haQodesh* and *Bayt haMiqdash* (originally meaning the Temple, of course, but after the Temple's destruction taking on the meaning of the whole city). There is no doubt that these names entered Arabic through contact with Jews.

Since the Christianized Roman Empire forbade Jews to live in Jerusalem, medieval Jews must have been grateful to the early Arab conquerors for enabling Jews to live in the Holy City once again, even though the Jews there, like the Christians, were *dhimmis* and subject to special exploitation as described above. The Crusaders put an end to the Jewish and Muslim populations in Jerusalem in 1099. Lasting, relatively stable, Muslim rule there was not reestablished until 1260.

By the end of the 19th century, Jews were a majority of the city's population and had been so since at least 1870. This emerges from the careful research of Professor Yehoshua Ben-Arieh.⁴ Some Western writers claimed a Jewish majority some years before that. One was Karl Marx — yes, that Karl Marx. (*New York Tribune* 15 April 1854)⁵ A French author, Gerardy Santine, who published his account of the city in 1860 (*Trois ans en Judie*, 1860), wrote that Jews were "a good half of the population of the Holy City."

Jews were the first inhabitants to move outside the Old City walls to build the New City, partly because the Jews

were so crowded within the walls. Meanwhile, inside the walls, Jews spread into the Muslim Quarter, with the added motive of being close to the Temple Mount. Jews not only moved into the part of the Muslim Quarter adjacent to the Jewish Quarter, just west of the Temple Mount, but also farther away into the the Muslim Quarter's Bab al-Huta section, north of the Temple Mount and close to Damascus Gate and Herod's Gate in the northeast corner of the Old City: "By the end of the century, the Jewish community had expanded greatly [in Jerusalem]; in the Old City alone, it constituted more than half the total population."⁶ Jewish shops were numerous on David Street, on the Street of the Chain, in the Christian Quarter and on the central market streets (outside the Jewish Quarter).

Yet, by 1948, Jews had disappeared from all of the Old City but the old Jewish Quarter. Pierre van Paassen provides part of the explanation for this. In August 1929, the chief Arab political and religious leader in the country, the British-appointed mufti of Jerusalem, Muhammad Amin al-Husayni (Husseini), "directed his fury [through incited mobs] against peaceful Jewish communities in ... the Bab Alchota [al-Huta] quarter of Jerusalem" and elsewhere in the country.⁷

In fact, a series of pogroms from 1920 through 1936-1938 drove Jews out of their homes and shops in the Muslim and Christian Quarters of today. Not only homes but synagogues and yeshivot were abandoned. In one case, an Arab neighbor took it upon himself to protect the Torat Chayyim Yeshiva on Valley Street (Rechov haGai, al-Wad) where it coincides with the Via Dolorosa. This institution was preserved virtually intact with its furnishings and religious books until after the Six Day War — the only one in the Muslim Quarter not looted and wrecked.

The pogroms during the period of British rule (plus British refusal to protect Jewish residents in certain places) also caused mass flight from Jewish quarters outside the Old City walls, most of which were eventually occupied by Transjordan in 1948. Jews were driven from Eshel Abraham (across from Damascus Gate, 1929), Silwan (1929, 1938), Batei Sham'a (1938) and the Beyt Yosef quarter (1929). Jewish forces retook Batei Sham'a in the 1948 war and it is now the Jerusalem Cinematheque.

Yet the Jewish neighborhoods around the Tomb of Simon the Just north of Orient House and the American Colony Hotel (Shimon haTsadiq and Nachalat Shimon) were cleared of Jews very early in the war, in December 1947 and early January 1948, as were the nearby Siebenbergen Houses somewhat later. Transjordan's Arab Legion eventually took over these areas and the Jews did not return. Thus was created what the mythology of Arab propagandists and the Western press now calls "historically Arab East Jerusalem" (see, for example, Lee Hockstadter in *International Herald Tribune*, 31 July 2000), which in fact only existed between 1948 and 1967.

Another contemporary myth is that of a "Palestinian people," which, as commonly portrayed, has something to do with the Arabs but is somehow distinct. Yet, in 1900, the Arabs in the country did not see the Land as a separate or distinct land, nor did they have a consciousness of

a "Palestinian people." The Muslim Arabs were loyal to the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, the scholars Zeine, an Arab, and Gokalp, a Turk, invalidate the notion of a separate Arab nationalism before World War I. Zeine and Gokalp agree that the Ottoman Empire was a joint enterprise of Turks and Arabs. Zeine wrote, "The Arabs as Muslims were proud of Turkish power and prestige. The Ottoman Empire was their Empire as much as it was the Turks'... the Arabs did not consider the Turkish rule as 'foreign' rule..."⁸ Gokalp wrote, "the Ottoman state might even be called a Turkish-Arab state."⁹

The Arab upper class in the Empire generally, and that of what became Palestine at San Remo in 1920, in particular, contributed high officials to the Ottoman state. For instance, standing out among those who became Palestinian Arabs were Musa Kazem al-Husayni [Husseini] and Yusuf Diya al-Khalidi, both active at the turn of the century. The former attended the Ottoman School of Administration and served as governor of various imperial districts, including in Anatolia, far from his home in Jerusalem. The latter, another Jerusalem Arab notable serving in a highly responsible position, officiated as Ottoman consul in Vienna, which was a very sensitive diplomatic post for the Ottomans, given the delicacy of relations with the neighboring Austro-Hungarian Empire, which coveted Ottoman territory throughout the 19th century. Khalidi also held for a time the prestigious post of speaker of the Ottoman parliament.

Given that the Arab upper class was part of the Empire's governing class, they were pro-Ottoman until the Ottoman defeat in World War I. Neither did they call for a "Palestinian" state after the war. Most of them became pan-Arabists, eagerly supporting Faisal, the Hashemite would-be king of Syria, whose kingdom based at Damascus was overthrown by the French in July 1920. They were not, to be sure, Zionists. Yet neither were they "Palestinian nationalists." After 1920, after San Remo had set up the Palestine entity as the Jewish National Home, they focused *faute de mieux* on fighting for "Palestine for the Arabs" (one of their slogans). Interestingly, spokesmen for the Arab side before the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine (1946) denied that there was such a place as Palestine. •

Notes:

1. Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. New York: Norton, 2000, p 4.
2. Verse numbers and translations vary somewhat in different editions of the Qur'an.
3. Sheikh Samir Abu-Assad quoted in *Valeurs Actuelles*, 8 February 1988: "The Qur'an absolutely forbids a Muslim to accept the sovereignty of a non-Muslim in an Islamic land. And this principle makes no exceptions: neither in Jerusalem, nor in Cairo, nor Beirut, nor even in Madrid..." (p 23).
4. Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *Jerusalem in the Nineteenth Century: The Old City*. Jerusalem: Ben Zvi, 1984, p 358.
5. Marx's article is reprinted in Shlomo Avineri (ed.), *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization*. Garden City, 1969, pp 142-151.
6. Ben-Arieh, p. 400.
7. Pierre van Paassen, *Forgotten Ally*. New York: Dial, 1943, p. 162.
8. Zeine quoted in Hans Tutsch, *Facets of Arab Nationalism*. Detroit, 1965, p 57; from Zeine N. Zeine, *Arab-Turkish Relations and the Emergence of Arab Nationalism*. Beirut: Khayat's, 1958, p. 117 ff.
9. Ziya Gokalp, "The Ideal of Nationalism," in E. Kedourie, (ed.), *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*. London, 1970, p 197.