

The British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem

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The British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem (BSAJ) is located in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem on the Nablus Road, just opposite the Mount Scopus hotel. It is situated in a beautiful

old three-story house once owned by the Murad family and before 1967 serving as the residence of the British Consul General. One enters from the street into a shady, upwardly-sloping garden, ascends steps, and finds oneself in cool, dark rooms with lofty, vaulted ceilings, the silence broken only by the distant chirping of birds, and the air redolent with the musty smell of old books. It would be hard to imagine a place more conducive to scholarly contemplation.

At the rear of the large dining and reception hall, a low door takes one into the old but well maintained library. The stacks in the main room have spilled over into an adjoining office, whose walls are wrapped with books from floor to ceiling. Altogether the library contains some 100,000 volumes on all aspects of Middle Eastern history, politics, archaeology, geography, art, religion, and language, the majority in English. Upstairs there is a large periodical room with up-to-date collections of over 200 journals specializing in archaeology, Mediaeval and Islamic studies, Biblical studies, and architectural history. Adjacent to the periodicals is a smaller room containing several hundred rare books on Middle Eastern history and archaeology. To use the library it is recommended that the visiting scholar present a letter of introduction from his or her academic institution or contact the BSAJ in advance. One can also become a friend of the BSAJ by contributing £10, which earns one library privileges and the right to stay in their hostel.

While the BSAJ continues to serve as a library, a school for training archaeologists, and as a hostel for visiting scholars and

archeologists, in recent years its status has changed. Founded in 1919 by the Palestine Exploration Fund, it was funded for many years by the British Academy. The Academy, however, has had to reduce its funding for archaeological institutes overseas. The BSAJ, therefore, has come under the auspices of a special committee for the BSAJ. While the School of Archaeology continues to operate as usual—conducting archaeological digs in cooperation with other institutes and training young archaeologists—it is no longer under the direction of the BSAJ, but rather the Committee for British Research in the Levant, which has offices down the road from the main building. Under these new arrangements the BSAJ must now engage in fundraising to ensure the continuation of all aspects of its work.

Although the library does not have a computerized catalogue of its holdings, locating books should not prove difficult. The card catalogues are divided into a list of titles by author and a list of titles according to their order on the shelves. In addition, charts of the library's classification system are provided that make it easy to locate books according to subject. The focus of the collection is on Middle Eastern archaeology and history, especially Palestine. There are, however, smaller collections on environmental sciences, anthropology and folklore, travel literature and geography, art and craft history, language, and religion. The library has both the classic and the most important recent books in these fields. While concentrating on Palestine, the collection includes books on all areas of the Middle East. Moreover, while emphasizing

empirical research, it offers important works on anthropological and archaeological theory as well. Being up to date and fairly comprehensive in its areas of concentration—at least when it comes to English titles—it represents a useful library for scholars, particularly in archaeology and anthropology. On the subject of Jerusalem, for instance, we found all the most important titles in English from the last 30 years. We were particularly impressed by the collection of reference works, which included the complete Cambridge Ancient History, the Babylonian Talmud, and a complete set of the *History of Al-Tabari*, along with many other major multivolume reference works.

While we did find some political works treating the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the library lacks resources concerning Israeli and Palestinian societies today, especially from Israeli and Palestinian perspectives. This is perhaps to be expected of a library focused on archaeology and history. But even in its focus on the past, the library operates within frameworks that are arguably Western, even Orientalist. For the collection concentrates on matters concerning the ancient roots of Western civilization, the Bible, classical languages, European travel accounts, and the like. Libraries are always memorials to particular, historically situated ways of conceptualizing and classifying the world, and embody decisions about what counts as knowledge that are implicated in relations of power. This library is of course no exception. But this fact does not detract from the library's usefulness for research, and may indeed add to its interest as a place to visit.

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