



# Libraries and Archives

## The Arab Studies Society Library

The Arab Studies Society Library was established in 1980 as a specialized library focused on Palestinian history, politics, and society; the Arab World; and the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1983 the Arab Studies Society moved to its current headquarters in the grand premises of the Orient House at number 8 Abu Abeida St. in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem. Then in 1988 the center was ordered shut by the Israeli government and remained closed for four years. The process of collecting books, however, continued at other locations. Beginning with only 200 volumes in 1980, the collection currently

includes approximately 17,000 books in both English and Arabic, and 70 periodicals. These holdings include the private library of Musa al-Alami, the chairman of the Arab Office in Jerusalem from 1947-49. In addition to the library there is a Document Center with a document archive, a photograph archive, a press archive, and a section of documents on important contemporary and historical personalities. While open to the public and free of charge, the library does not permit books to be taken out.

The library is divided into two main sections, one for English and one for Arabic volumes, with books ordered according to the Dewey decimal system. The catalogue is currently being computerized. The collection concentrates on the social sciences rather than literature or the arts. In English I found several important recent works on Jerusalem, but not a comprehensive collection. The small non-Arabic periodical section has the major journals on Palestine and the Middle East such as the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, some important scholarly and theoretical journals that often cover Palestinian issues such as the *Third World Quarterly* and *Race & Class*, and Jewish journals such as *Tikkun*, *Encounter*, and the *Journal of Jewish Studies*. The reference section includes complete sets of major reference works on Ottoman and Mandate history such as the *Palestine and Transjordan Administration Reports 1918-1948* in 16 volumes and the *Arab League British Documentary Sources 1943-1963* in ten volumes.

Like the English section, the Arabic one covers the most important works on

Palestinian history and society. For instance, it has the complete publications of the Center for Studies of Arab Unity. But it does not offer a comprehensive collection for researchers. The strength of the Arabic collection lies not in the books, but the periodicals. It has runs dating from the 70s to the present of all the local Palestinian papers such as *al-Quds*, *al-Fajr*, and *al-Sha'ab*. It has all the most important Palestinian intellectual journals such as *Shu'un Falastinia* and *al-Bayader al-Siyassi*. And it even has runs of newspapers and magazines that only appeared for short stretches, such as *al-Manar* and *al-Katib*. To research special subjects in the Palestinian and Arab press, one can also consult the press archive section of the Document Center, which collects news items and clippings from local newspapers by theme, such as Jerusalem, the Arab-Israeli conflict, settlements, and refugees.

The aim of the Document Center is to preserve and protect the intellectual and physical records of Palestine from deterioration. The collection contains 200,000 hard copies of documents and 300,000 copies on microfilm and microfiche. 60 percent of the papers are original documents. The collection covers Palestinian history chiefly from the last period of the Ottoman Empire through to the present and is divided according to subjects such as political parties, economy, education, land sales, Palestinian women, Jewish immigration to Palestine, and Jewish political organizations. The most important documents are those acquired from the Arab Office of Jerusalem, established in 1945 by the Arab League. The Arab Office of Jerusalem was one of 7

Arab Offices set up around the world, the others being in London, France, Lebanon, Iraq, Washington, and Rio de Janeiro. The Jerusalem office, under the direction of Musa al-Alami, served to give voice abroad to the opinions and ideas of Arabs and Palestinians concerning events in Palestine. There are also papers of the Arab Higher Committee, of the Palestinian army, *al-Jihad al-Muqaddas*, and many others collected from families and private institutions.

The photograph section contains a large collection of original photographs from the Ottoman period to the present. They include glass negatives that go back to the Ottoman period and a fine collection of family photographs from the Mandate period. The collection also contains a photographic survey of Palestine that was conducted by the Arab Studies Society from 1980 to 1984. The library is currently in the process of organizing and developing the archive and digitizing the collection for viewing on CD-ROM. In addition to the personalities section and the press archive section already mentioned, there is a small Oral History collection consisting of 100 cassettes devoted chiefly to interviews with Palestinians who lived through the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939.

The Orient House mansion is itself part of the history which the library seeks to document, standing as a monument to late Ottoman Jerusalem and the new Arab neighborhoods being built outside the city at that time. It was built by Ismail Musa al-Husseini in 1897 and served for decades as a guesthouse for visiting dignitaries. After the 1948 war it served briefly as headquarters for the Conciliation

Committee and UNRWA and then as a hotel called "The New Orient House" from 1950 until 1967. Then the Arab Studies Society rented a section of the building from 1983 until its closure in 1988. In 1992, however, the offices were permitted to re-open, and the whole building came to serve as the unofficial headquarters of the Palestinian negotiating team to the Madrid peace conference and once again as a guesthouse for visiting dignitaries. Visiting the Arab Studies Library is not only an occasion to do research, but a chance to visit a piece of living history, a monument to the long and continuing struggle of the Palestinian national movement in Jerusalem.