



The Burden of the Past

The burden of Jerusalem's multi-cultural and multi-religious past can weigh heavily on those who live in the present. For partial visions of this rich and varied history are used to justify arbitrary claims to exclusive sovereignty and possession. One group's assertion of more profound religious attachment or deeper historical roots often serves to rationalize oppression of another group, the expropriation of its land and property, and the effacement of its heritage. Indeed, as in the case of the Moroccan Quarter examined in this issue, a belief or communal memory, whether mythical or real, can lead to the eradication of an entire living community.

The articles in this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly File* illustrate how dangerous historical narratives can be in the hands of those who grip political power. At the same time each essay draws attention to Palestinian Arab aspects of the city's history that are omitted or downplayed by the dominant narratives, with their partisan aim of proving a continuous Jewish presence in the past to justify Israeli sovereignty in the present.

Tom Abowd recounts the destruction of the Moroccan Quarter, drawing on interviews with former inhabitants of the quarter who lived through the experience to elucidate its traumatic impact on individuals and families over generations. After more than seven hundred years of continuous existence, this neighborhood, located just below al-Aqsa mosque and adjacent to al-Buraq/the Western Wall, was wiped off the map by Israeli bulldozers in 1967. As Abowd suggests, this was done not just to make room for an expected influx of Jewish worshippers and tourists to the Wall, but also to re-write the whole history of this urban space.

In his essay on the village of Silwan, Jeffrey Yas illustrates how archaeological accounts can reshape our understanding of places in Palestine as effectively as bulldozers, particularly when manifested in the form of tourist development projects. Like Abowd, he draws on interviews to show how people experience the same space in very different ways depending on the narrative frameworks they bring to bear. In the case of Silwan, archaeological narratives have been concretely embodied as tourist spaces that powerfully re-enact the narratives in spatial terms. Thus Israel

has attempted to superimpose the biblical "City of David" on the living Palestinian village of Silwan.

This process of expunging Palestinians out of their own history and land is discussed further in the review essay by Saliba Sarsar. Sarsar shows how in three widely read texts on Jerusalem, Martin Gilbert weaves selective narratives that demonize the Arabs and focus exclusively on Jewish contributions to the city.

Memoirs can open up alternative perspectives on the city, while at the same time expressing a personal sense of attachment and loss. Yusuf Natsheh tells of his personal relationship with a place in the heart of the Old City, Khassaki Sultan, which dates back to the early Ottoman period in Jerusalem and whose majestic presence evinces the city's rich Arab Islamic history.

Photographs of historical subjects can also provide a personal perspective on history, as Issam Nassar shows in his article on Hannah Safieh. Nassar introduces the life of Safieh, one of the earliest Palestinian photographers in Jerusalem, and reviews the central themes of his work, which documents a period in the twentieth century central to the changing reality of Jerusalem. And finally, John Dixon visits one of the most important archaeological libraries in Jerusalem, that of the Ecole Biblique, and informs us about its contents and history.

Finally, starting with this issue *JQF* adds to its regular sections a quarterly **Jerusalem Chronology**. The chronology will cover important political and social events related to Jerusalem that have occurred over the previous three months.

JERUSALEM 1948

**The Arab Neighbourhoods
and their Fate in the War**



Salim Tamari Editor

The Institute of Jerusalem Studies & Badil Resource Center

© 1999. The Institute of Jerusalem Studies, Jerusalem, Fax 972-2-5828901 & Badil
Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, Bethlehem

Available in the USA and Canada from the Institute for Palestine Studies book orders at
<http://www.ipsjps.org> for \$20 including postage.