

Photographing Jerusalem at War: Images from 1948*

Issam Nassar

Before its division in 1948, Jerusalem was a modern city that played a central role in the life of Palestine. Not only was the process of modernization, which started in the nineteenth century, already bearing fruits, but the shift from Ottoman to British rule had fostered considerable growth and development in the city. For under the British, Jerusalem ceased to be the small provincial town within a vast empire that it had been under the Ottomans. Instead, it emerged as the central city in a much smaller country. In between the railway station - built in 1882 to the south of Jerusalem - and

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the airport - built much later by the British to the north - there were modern roads, buildings, and all the other signs of modernity.

The area between the outside of the Jaffa Gate of the Old City and the French Hospital across from the New Gate was one of many busy new markets emerging all around. It was in this block that the earliest local photographers of Jerusalem established Palestine's first photography studios. In a sense, the area became Jerusalem's photography market. Just as the city had its spice, meat, or leather markets, this stretch outside the walls of the Old City became the destination for people wanting to buy photographs or have their picture taken.

It had all started with a young Armenian photographer named Garabed Krikorian. After learning the new craft at the photographic workshop founded by Patriach Yassai Garbidian inside the Armenian Quarter, Krikorian established Jerusalem's first studio just outside of Jaffa Gate in 1885. At the time, the court outside of Jaffa Gate was Jerusalem's "central station." Not only was the location packed with horse carriages, cars and travelers arriving from the villages and other large towns, such as Jaffa and Bethlehem, but it was next to Hotel Fast, Jerusalem's main hotel at the time, and Thomas Cook Travel Office.

Although we cannot be certain about Krikorian's reasons for choosing the site for his shop, it would seem safe to assume that the choice was connected to the fact that the area was the main tourist area in town. Krikorian's shop was the first of a number of photographic studios that opened in the block. His disciple and apprentice, Khalil Raad, soon followed him and, in 1890,

established his own studio just across the street from his master's shop.

By the 1940s, there were several studios in Jerusalem and a considerable number of photographers who either worked in these studios or simply placed their cameras somewhere around the area or in one of the many city markets. Among the best-known photographers of the time were Johhanes Krikorian, Khalil Raad, Hanna Safieh, Ali Zarour, Sam'aan Sahar, Studio Elia, and the photographers of the American Colony. Several Jewish photographers also worked in Jerusalem and offered their services to the Arab and Jewish communities in the city.

In light of all the flurry of photographic activity in the city, it seems surprising - to say the least - that Jerusalem's Arab and Armenian photographers would not devote their attention to capturing the events that were unfolding around them in 1948. The reasons behind the poor documentation of the war lies, I believe, in the loss of the western suburbs after the fall and division of the city, which transformed the photographic district of the city into a border. The studios of Raad and Sahar became inaccessible to their owners who had to retreat inside the Old City for their own safety. The shop of Hana Safieh on Jaffa Road fell under Israeli control and Safieh was unable to bring much of his own collection into the Arab section of the city. In contrast, the commercial Jewish centers of the city, where Jewish photographic establishments where most likely located, remained intact and fell under control of the newly created state of Israel.

Thus, with the loss of access to the Arab and Armenian photographers' centers of life and work, the visual recording of the events surrounding the fall of the city remained mostly under the control of Israeli and

Zionist photographers. However, reconstructing the events surrounding the loss of the Arab suburbs in 1948 based on Israeli photographic archives is very problematic. Among other things, the bulk of the pictures taken by Israeli photographers were pictures of locations taken after their Arab population had fled; they captured a number of emptied city locations, from the viewfinder of the cameras of one side of the conflict.

The photographs published here attempt to illustrate the loss that the Palestinians sustained in Jerusalem. Because many of them were taken by Israeli photographers who capture the scenes "after the fact" - as it were - the plight of the Palestinian refugees remained outside of the picture frame. And yet, the argument can be made that these pictures represent dramatic testimony of it. For seeing the Palestinian environment, streets, century old buildings, furniture and ruins without the people is the most accurate reflection of the nature of the process of colonization of the western part of Jerusalem.

The photographs of Ein Karem illustrate the point in a rather keen way (p.17). In one of them, we see the village fountain with a number of Jewish immigrants fetching water. The immigrants have just arrived in the village and the buckets they are using, with the logo of the new state, reflects that clearly. But the fountain, far older itself than the buckets they are carrying and the state which imprinted its logo on them, is testimony of a life and a history that preceded the one shown in the picture.

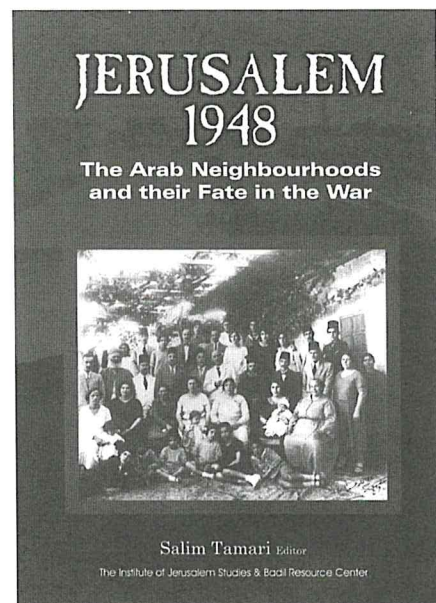
It is in such a history that the evicted population of Ein Karem is present and will continue to be so as long as the fountain stands. For, to anyone familiar with the

history of the place, the contrast between the century - old homes, streets, fountains, and olive groves and the newly arrived Jewish immigrants is, first and foremost, an acute allusion to the process of dispossession and depopulation to which the city was subject. It is as if the Palestinians, through their very absence, inhabited all images.

The owners of the homes in the photographs are like the little hunchback in the folksong on which Walter Benjamin once commented: "This little man," Benjamin wrote, "is at home [but] in distorted life." And when the current inhabitant of his home attempts to go to sleep, as the song says, he is confronted by the fact that this invisible little man is there.¹

Issam Nassar is the Associate Editor of the JQF and a member of the Advisory Board.

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 134.





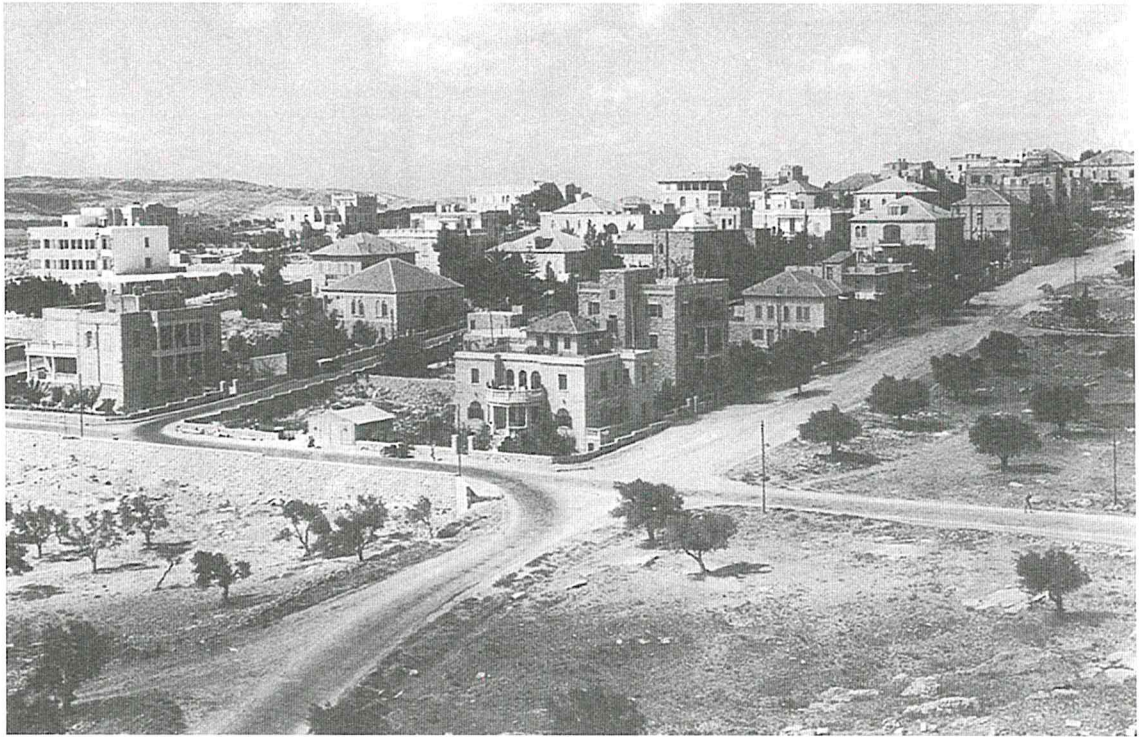
Jaffa Road outside the walls of Jerusalem, 1890s.

(Photograph by Zangaki. Private collection, reprinted from Photographing Jerusalem: The Image of the City in Nineteenth-Century Photography by Issam Nassar, Boulder: East European Monographs, 1998.)



Musrara neighborhood viewed from the southeast, 1910.

(Photographer unknown, private collection)



Talbiya neighborhood, early 1940s.

(Photographer unknown, reprinted from Before Their Diaspora, edited by Walid Khalidi. Washington DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1991)



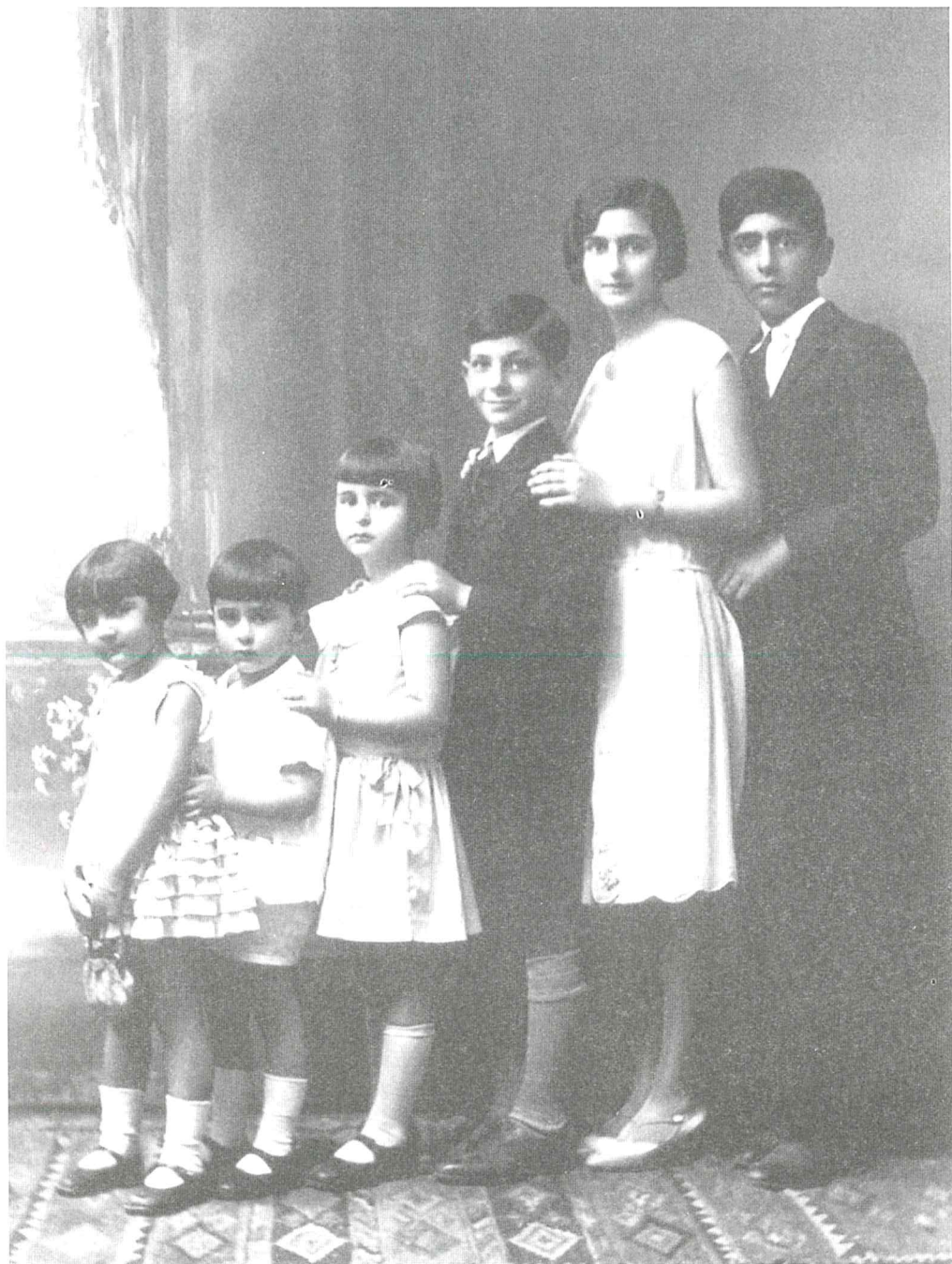
Lifta village, 1994.

(Photograph by Rochelle Davis)



The Jerusalem Girl's College, ca. 1920.

(Photographer unknown, reprinted from Before Their Diaspora)



The children of the Merhej and Krikorian families, 1932.
(*Photograph by Johannes Krikorian, Foundation Arabe Pour l'Image - Aida Krikorian Kavar collection*)

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Advertisement for cars, distributed by Shukri Deeb.
(Reprinted from Before Their Diaspora)



Family from Lifta: Haj Salih Siyam, Hajja Halima Muhammed Isma'l, and their children, from left, Mahmoud, Ahmed, and Muhammed.

(Photographer unknown, reprinted from Lifta by Sharif Kana'nah and Lubna Abdelhadi, Destroyed Villages Series, no. 12. Birzeit University, 1991)



Israeli armored vehicles from the Palmach, Jerusalem Hills, October 1948.
(Photographer unknown, Israeli Government Press Office)



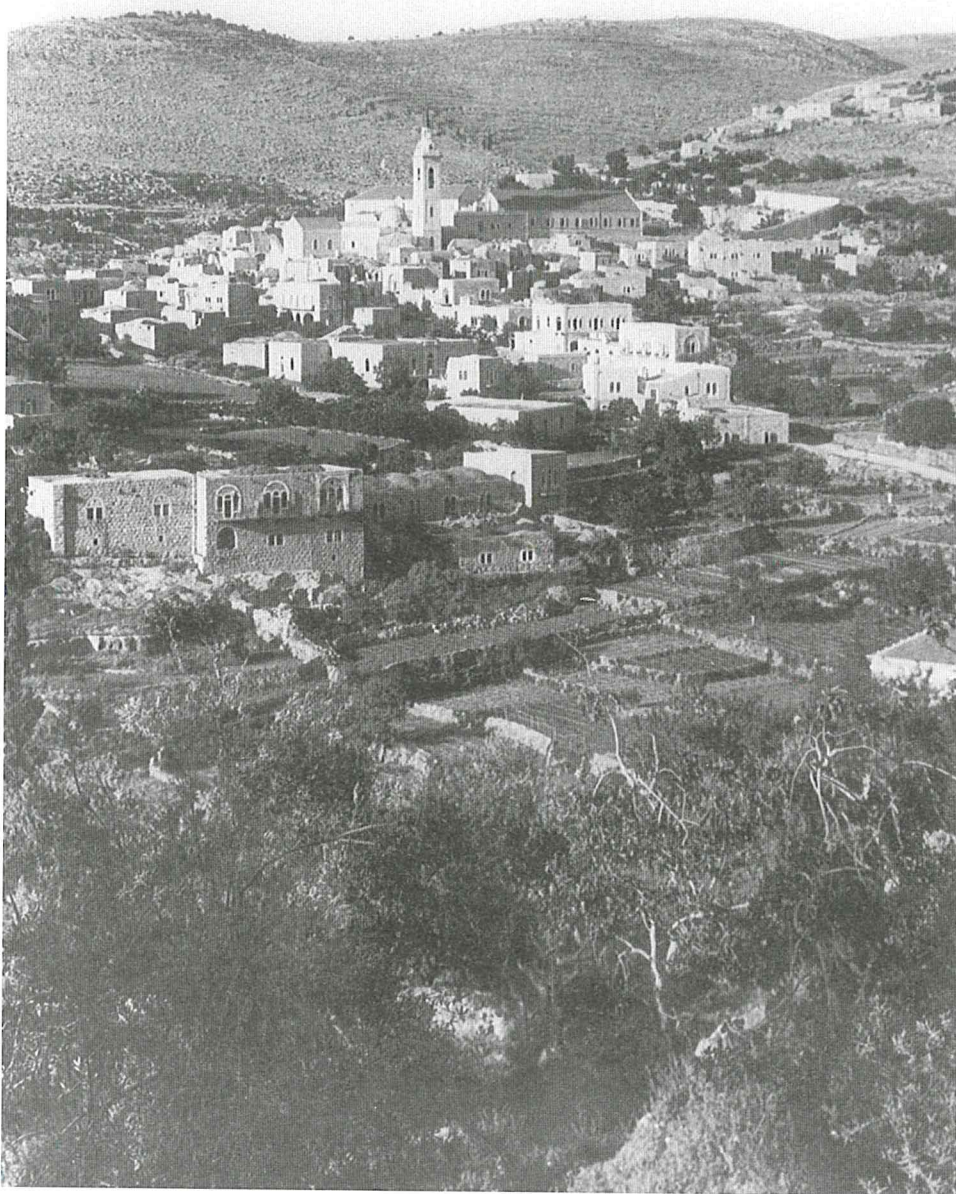
Zionist forces attack Qattamon home, 1 May 1948.
(Photographer unknown, Israeli Government Press Office)



Fighter from al-Jihad al-Muqaddas, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Huseini, is standing in the middle in the light jacket, 1948. (Photograph by Hanna Safieh, Arab Studies Society Collection)



Israeli soldiers near a truck full of what appears to be furniture in Ein Karem on 1 October 1948, three months after the village was occupied and its people evicted and two months before the start of Jewish settlement in the village. (Photographer unknown, Israeli Government Press Office, 1/10/1948)



Ein Karem near Jerusalem, 9 October 1920.
(*Photograph by Larson, Israeli Government Press Office*)



New Jewish immigrants fetching water from communal fountain (*ein*) in Ein Karem, 1 June 1949.
(*Photographer unknown, Israeli Government Press Office*)



Jewish immigrants moving a couch in Ein Karem from an abandoned home, 1949.
(*Photographer unknown, Israeli Government Press Office, 1949*)



Road block on King David street with the YMCA building in the center and Salameh's shop to the side, 1948. (Photographer unknown, Israeli Government Press Office, 1948)



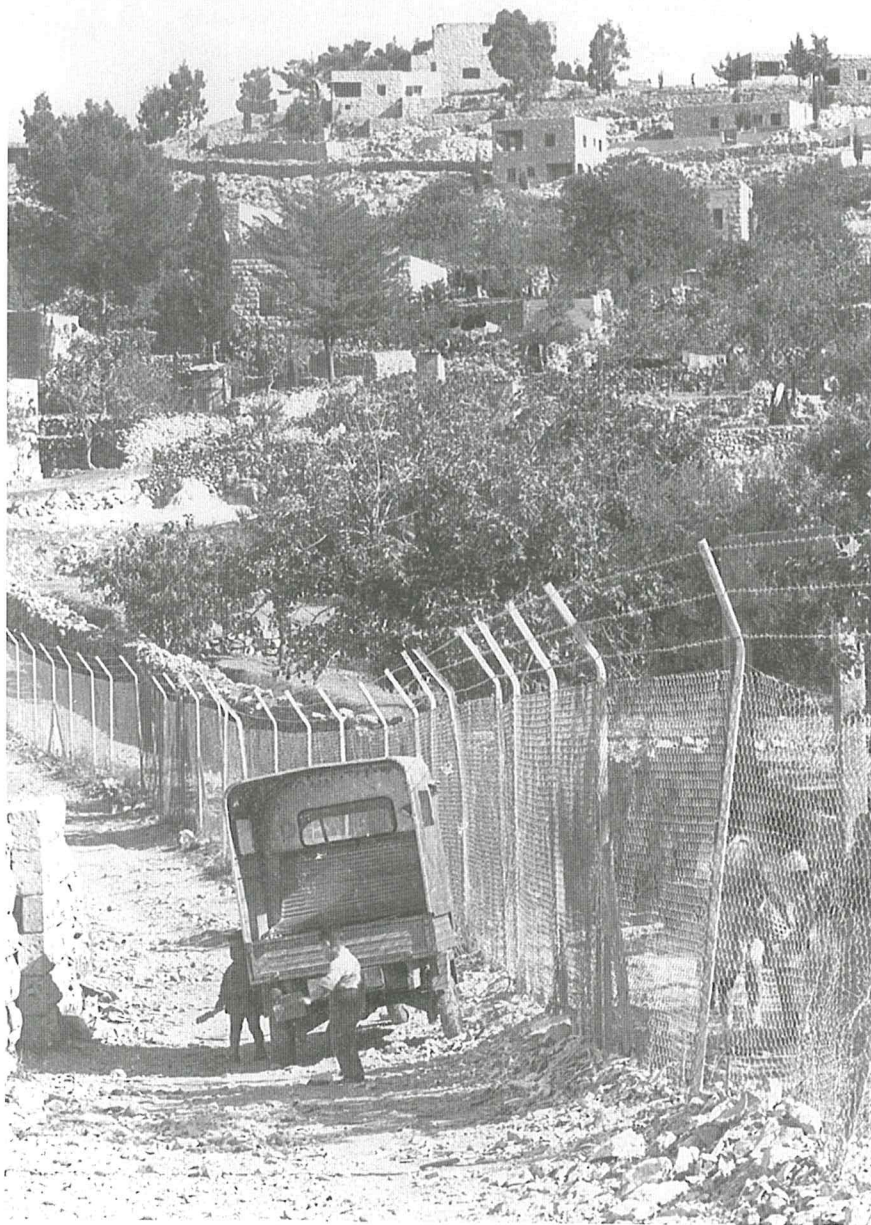
Road block in Mamila, 22 November 1948.
(Photographer unknown, Israeli Government Press Office, 1948)



Jewish prisoners of war from the Old City, with Arab Legion officers Abdullah al-Tal and Kamil 'Eriqat, 1948. (Photograph by Hanna Safieh, Arab Studies Society Collection)

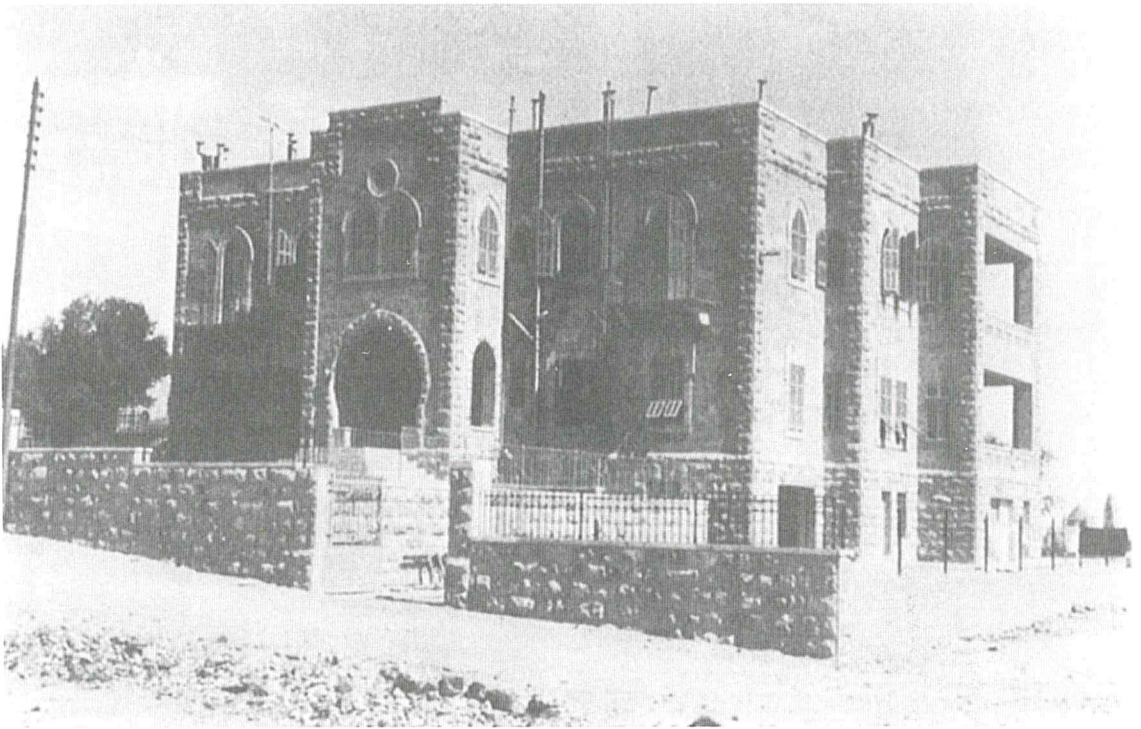


The Maundelbaun Gate, the only point of entry between Jordanian East Jerusalem and the Western part. (Photographer unknown, Israeli Government Press Office)



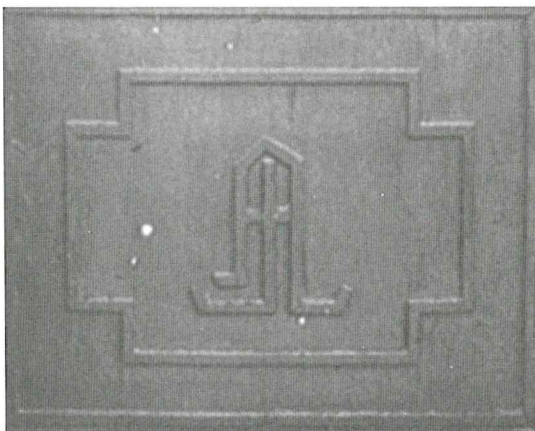
Border fence dividing the village of Beit Safafa on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The picture is taken from the Israeli side of the fence and the homes in the picture are in the part that was under Jordan.

(Photograph by Cohen Fritz, Israeli Government Press Office, 1/11/1964)



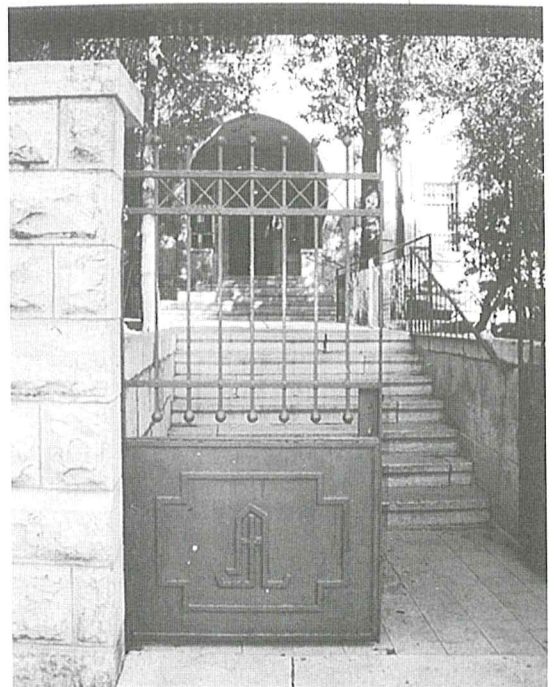
Jamal family home, Talbiya, early 1940s.
(*Photograph by Khalil Raad, reprinted from Before Their Diaspora*)

לה על שם נתן שטיינברג
MOADON HAOLEH NATHAN STEIN



Jamal family home, 1998. The bottom floor is now a 'club' for new immigrants; the back side and top floor are private residences. Note the ironwork at the bottom of the gate which has a stylized 'Jamal' written in English.

(*Photograph by Rochelle Davis*)





Sansour building on Jaffa and Ben Yehuda roads, 1935. Notice the Tannous building in the center-left of the photo. (Photographer unknown, Israeli Government Press Office)



Sansour building, 1998. (Photograph by Terry Rempel)