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Jerusalem in history: the city of peace?

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The ancient name Uru-salim meant 'Foundation of the God Shalem',[1] Later the more widely known name of Jerusalem (Hebrew: Yerushalayim; Arabic: al-Quds) came to mean 'city of peace',[2] yet it more readily conjures up notions of pain and prophecy, bloodshed and longing, even of God, among us. These connotations do not promise a life of peace or ease.

The sense of significance of Jerusalem for all three main Semitic faiths is encapsulated in the following statement by Joshua Prawer:

> Few can look at it dispassionately. The viewer be he Jew, Moslem or Christian, brings with him the remembered tales of his childhood, the teaching of his adult years, the collective memory of his race or religion: all impinge on the wondrous picture laid out before him. Each adds a dimension of things experienced and lived – once upon a time: Jewish Priests moving on the Temple esplanade, Roman legions garrisoned in the Fortress of Antonia, Jesus bearing the cross, Mohammad reining in his steed Burak to pray in the Sacred Enclosure.[3]

In the context of the above quotation it would be helpful to begin with a survey of Jerusalem's history from the perspective of the three major religious groups that attribute varying degrees of sacredness to it.

Understanding history

Jewish longing

The Old Testament book of Joshua indicates that Jerusalem was a former stronghold of the Jebusites, who called it Jebus. When King David took up residence in Jerusalem after its capture, perhaps around 1000 BC, the citadel became known as the City of David.[4] Though there is debate about the precise date this took

1 Colin Chapman, *Whose Holy City? Jerusalem and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Oxford: Lion, 2004), 14.

2 Kenneth Blackwell, 'The City of Peace', *Middle East Review* XIII/3-4 (Spring-Summer 1981), 5.

3 Joshua Prawer, 'History, Faith and Beauty' in Meir Ronnen, *Jerusalem: the Living City* (Jerusalem: Armon, 1969), 1.

4 Abba Eban, *My People: the Story of the Jews* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 27.

place, archaeological evidence provides some support for the broad outline of the biblical account.[5]

Since that time, the children of Israel have claimed Jerusalem as their own. Their association with it has always been one of heartache and hope, expulsion and desperation to go back to the earthly home of God. They were first ejected in 586 BC, when the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar captured the city after a long siege. The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, executed many of its leading citizens, and deported the rest of the city's inhabitants to Babylon, to work as slaves.[6]

The anguish of the exiles was captured by an anonymous Hebrew poet in Psalm 137:

> By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion....If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.[7]

Scripture came to define the city for Jews, as a place from which they were torn, to which they yearned to return. The same psalm ends with a curse that threatens the most unholy violence:

> O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us – he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.[8]

This serves as an ominous warning of future trials that immediately refer to Babylon, but looks well beyond that particular context to the more distant future.

History was repeated tragically several decades after the death of Christ. Oppressive Roman rule under several Procurators culminated in Roman troops looting Jerusalem in AD 66. This triggered a full Jewish revolt in Judaea and Galilee, which lasted for seven years.[9] In AD 70, on the ninth day of the Jewish month of Ab, almost the exact anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, Roman forces overcame Jewish defenders in Jerusalem and sacked the city.[10]

Tens of thousands of Jews were massacred by Roman forces after the city

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5 A stone fragment which may bear the first known reference outside the Bible to the House of David was found in the ruins of Tel Dan, an ancient city in the north of Israel. Cf. 'House of David: Clues in Stone Inscription' *International Herald Tribune*, November 18, 1993, 10, and 'The Tel Dan Inscription', http://www.kchanson.com/ANCDOCS/westsem/teldan.html, copied 17 March 2005.

6 John Bright, *A History of Israel* (London: SCM, 1960), 309.

7 Psalm 137:1, 5-6.

8 Psalm 137:8-9.

9 Cf. Cecil Roth, *History of the Jews* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 103ff. Also Martin Gilbert, *An Atlas of Jewish History* (Dorset Press, 1969), 16.

10 Cf. Roth, *History of the Jews*, 110.

fell.[11] Many more were expelled or sold into slavery.[12] Three years later the last revolts were suppressed when the Jewish fortress of Masada to the south was overcome by the Romans, with all its defenders committing suicide rather than be taken into slavery.[13]

This time it was to take 1,894 years before the descendants of the expelled Jews repossessed Jerusalem, vowing never again to be separated from their most sacred place. This is the oath taken by all new recruits to the Israeli Defence Force at the site of the former fortress of Masada.

The Jews have long memories. As stated so poignantly by the famous Jewish scholar Elie Kedourie:

> The Jews are the only people now living who recall and lament inflictions suffered at the hands of Powers whose pride bit the dust a thousand and two thousand years ago.[14]

This long memory is due in large part to the fact that such afflictions have been repeated on many occasions by others, in centuries subsequent to the earlier Babylonian and Roman oppression.[15]

Christian symbolism

For Christians, too, scripture plays a crucial role in defining the city of Jerusalem. The book of Revelation envisages 'a new Jerusalem' as the perfect centrepiece of 'a new heaven and a new earth'. The holy city comes down out of heaven 'prepared as a bride adorned for her husband'.[16] Symbolism rather than any practical design for living are the architectural order of the day.

The phrase 'a new Jerusalem' has entered our language as a metaphor for an ideal society, though usually one not prefabricated by God, but constructed by human effort and 'mental fight'. Geographical location is here irrelevant. In his famous poem, William Blake hoped to see it rebuilt in England's 'green and pleasant land'.[17]

Yet Jerusalem is also a specific place that Christians yearn for. It is the city where Jesus lived and died and lived again. This is what made its loss to Islamic armies in 638 AD so especially painful. The pain was duly repaid. When the First

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11 Norman Cantor, *The Sacred Chain: A History of the Jews* (London: Fontana Press, 1996), 85.

12 Eban, *My People*, 95.

13 Cantor, *The Sacred Chain*, 86.

14 Elie Kedourie (ed.), *The Jewish World: Revelation, Prophecy and History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979), 7.

15 Including expulsions from various European countries, commencing with England in 1290; the repeated pogroms against Jewish communities by Russians; and the Nazi Holocaust.

16 Revelation 21:2.

17 For the text of William Blake's 'The New Jerusalem' cf. http://quotations.about.com/od/poemlyrics/ablakepoem13.htm

Crusade recaptured it in 1099 it became the scene of savage slaughter of thousands of Muslims and Jews, a deliberate 'ethnic cleansing'.

For further discussion of the significance of Jerusalem to Christians see the articles by Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali and Anthony O'Mahony.[18]

Muslim capture, consolidation, and loss

Jerusalem does not even rate a mention by name in the Qur'an. Yet it is valued as Islam's third (but only third) most holy city. Prominent Muslim scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr gives three reasons for this, attributing a mystical dimension to Islamic understanding.[19]

First, Jerusalem originally provided the direction of prayer for Muslims. This was later changed to Mecca, according to the Qur'an at Q2:144ff. Famous classical Qur'an commentator Al-Baydawi (d. 1286)explains the reason for the original identification of Jerusalem as the direction of prayer in the following terms:

> The direction of prayer which Muhammad observed in Mecca was towards the Ka'ba; then when he emigrated (to Medina) he was ordered to face in prayer towards the Rock....(in Jerusalem) in order to establish a bond with the Jews....[God has] instructed you to turn back again (towards the Ka'ba) in the direction of prayer which you adopted (originally), in order to ascertain who would persevere in Islam and would not execute an about face as a result of inner uncertainty and weakness of faith...[20]

Second, Jerusalem is the place from which Muhammad is said to have ascended to heaven on his nocturnal journey to meet the prophets and God himself. This appears in the Qur'an at Q17:1:[21]

> Glory to (Allah) Who did take His servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless.

Muslim tradition identifies the two mosques mentioned in this verse as being in Mecca and Jerusalem. Colin Chapman underlines the importance of this night journey and prophetic ascent to heaven for Islam in saying:

> The event is seen as a commissioning of Muhammad for his ministry as Prophet, and demonstrates the continuity between Islam and the previous religions of Judaism and Christianity. It also indicates a significant change in the role of the Arabs in relation to the Jews in the purposes of God, representing a kind of spiritual conquest of Jerusalem by Muhammad.[22]

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18 Cf. also, Chapman, *Whose Holy City?*, chapter 2.

19 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'The Spiritual Significance of Jerusalem: The Islamic Vision', *The Islamic Quarterly* XLII/4 (1998), 233-42.

20 Al-Baydawi, commenting on Q2:142ff, translated in H. Gatje, *The Qur'an and its Exegesis* (Oxford: One World, 1997), 132-33.

21 Cf. also Abdul Hamid Siddiqi (ed.), *Sahih Muslim* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1980), Book 001, Number 0309.

22 Chapman, *Whose Holy City?*, 91-92.

Nasr attributes the third factor in Jerusalem's significance as its being believed by Muslims to be the location of the final judgement at the end of days, when all good Muslims hope to go straight to Paradise. Thus for Islam, too, Jerusalem is a place of past and future import.

In terms of historical detail, Jerusalem was controlled by Muslim authorities of various empires between 638 and 1917. After a siege lasting two years the Muslim armies of Caliph Umar captured the city in 638. The famous Islamic historian and commentator al-Tabari (d. 923) writing some 250 years later, records the treaty offered by Umar to the residents of Jerusalem in the following terms:

> In the name of God, the Merciful Benefactor! This is the guarantee granted the inhabitants of [Jerusalem][23] by the servant of God Umar, Commander of the Believers. He grants them the surety of their persons, their goods, their churches, their crosses – whether these are in good or bad condition – and the cult in general. Their churches will not be expropriated for residences or destroyed....No constraint will be imposed upon them in the matter of religion, and no one of them will be annoyed. No Jew will be authorized to live in Jerusalem with them....[24]

Though there is some debate about the historicity of this treaty, its content broadly accords with the practice of early Muslim authorities vis-à-vis Christian subjects. Such subjects received protection and a measure of religious freedom in return for payment of the *jizya tax*[25] and acceptance of the rule of the Islamic authorities. Although Jews were not, in fact, subsequently systematically excluded or expelled from Jerusalem, the above treaty suggests that they did not fare as well as Christians under Islamic rule. Nevertheless, they did not receive the harsh treatment they endured under medieval Christendom.

The fifth Muslim Caliph of the Sunnis, Mu'awiyya, moved the capital of the new Umayyad empire from Medina to Damascus, but took his oath of office in Jerusalem in 661, thus signalling its ongoing spiritual significance.[26]

The ninth Muslim Caliph, 'Abd al-Malik, built the Dome of the Rock shrine between 687and 691, to commemorate the prophetic night journey referred to in Q17:1. It stands on the site of the previous Jupiter temple of the Romans, and before that of the two Temples of the Jews. This development determined that there would be subsequent rival claims and counter-claims between Muslims and Jews regarding the sacred sites of Jerusalem.

Under the early Caliphs, life for Jerusalem was relatively peaceful. But under the Fatimids, a rival Shi'a dynasty which gained control of the city in 961,

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23 Referred to as Aelia in this and other documents in the early Muslim period.

24 Chapman, *Whose Holy City?*, 94, citing F. E. Peters.

25 Cf. Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1970, 5th ed.), 94.

26 Kenneth Cragg, 'The Excellence of Jerusalem', *Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies* 2:1 (Winter 1998), 2.

non-Muslim minorities fell on hard times. Many churches and synagogues were destroyed, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and relations between adherents of the three religious communities were fragile.

Moshe Gil discusses the period of Fatimid expansion and rule in the following terms:

> The Fatimid army...turned toward Palestine....Theoretically this was the outset of about a century of Fatimid rule in Palestine. In fact, the Fatimids were compelled to join battle with not a few of the enemies who stood in their way: the Arabs...the Qarmatis; a Turkish army....Arab tribes in Syria....and in the background the Byzantines were lurking....[All] in all it was an almost unceasing war which destroyed Palestine, and especially its Jewish population, even before the Crusaders' eventuality.[27]

Succeeding centuries witnessed Christian-Muslim warfare during the Crusades. Jerusalem fell to Christian armies during the first Crusade in 1099. The city again witnessed massacre and expulsion, as described by Christian chroniclers:

> Our pilgrims entered the city, and chased the Saracens, killing as they went, as far as the Temple of Solomon....At last the pagans were overcome, and our men captured a good number of men and women in the Temple; they killed whomsoever they wished, and chose to keep others alive....In the morning our men climbed up cautiously on to the roof of the Temple and attacked the Saracens, both male and female, and beheaded them with unsheathed swords. The other Saracens threw themselves from the Temple...On the eighth day after the city was captured, they chose Godfrey of Bouillon as ruler of the city to subdue the pagans and protect the Christians.[28]

In 1187 the Muslim leader Salahal-Din recaptured Jerusalem for Islam. Descriptions of Jerusalem's fall differ markedly between Christian and Muslim sources, though it seems that the brutality of the Christian capture of Jerusalem in 1099 was not repeated to the same degree. The treatment of the Christian population by Salah al-Din is described in a contemporary Christian account:

> Saladin had taken counsel and laid down these ransom terms for the inhabitants of Jerusalem: each male, ten years old and over, was to pay ten besants for his ransom; females five besants; boys seven years old and under one. Those who wished would be freed on these terms and could leave securely with their possessions. The inhabitants of Jerusalem who would

27 Cited in James M. Arlandson, 'Islam's Mystical Claim on Jerusalem', *The American Thinker*, December 4, 2005, http://www.americanthinker.com/articles.php?article_id=5046&search=mystical

28 Elizabeth Hallam (ed.), *Chronicles of the Crusades: Eye-Witness Accounts of the Wars Between Christianity and Islam* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), 93.

not accept these terms or those who did not have ten besants were to become booty, to be slain by the army's swords.[29]

In 1260 the Mamluks, a dynasty based in Egypt, gained control of Jerusalem. Their period was noteworthy for the extensive building programme which they oversaw.[30] Subsequently, under Ottoman rule centred in Istanbul, Jerusalem became a political backwater. Nevertheless it retained considerable religious significance for all Jews, some Muslims and some Christians.

Jerusalem burst back onto the world stage in the early years of the twentieth century, when British forces captured it from the Ottoman Turks in 1917. During the subsequent British mandate for Palestine, Jewish return and Arab concern led to the Arab revolt of 1936-39, and to the emergence of the State of Israel in 1948.

Jewish return

The United Nations partition proposal embodied in UN Resolution 181 of November 1947 recognized the unique position of Jerusalem.[31] While the surrounding lands were to be partitioned equally between Arabs and Jews, Jerusalem itself was to be made an international city under UN administration. This reflected a recognition of its special significance to Jews, Christians and Muslims, and also the highly sensitive nature of any discussions surrounding Jerusalem's identity.

Today the Jewish State of Israel controls Jerusalem. Many Jews see its recapture and reunification by Israel in 1967 as part of God's divine plan; some Christians take a similar view, while others vigorously reject it.[32] Muslims also see history being played out today in terms of a divine plan. Consider the following clearly revisionist interpretation by Dr Ahmad Shafaat (a prolific writer on Islam and Christianity, and lecturer at the Montreal Islamic Institute of Religion and Culture),[33] of the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem:

> The Kingdom of Judah itself became a vassal State and for long periods of time paid tribute to Assyria, Egypt and Babylonia. In 587 BC, when the Kingdom of Judah was under Babylonian suzerainty, Jews became extremely seditious and the Babylonians were left with no choice but to move against them in full force. They destroyed the Kingdom and its capi-

29 James Brundage, *The Crusades: A Documentary Survey* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1962), 159-63.

30 For an excellent study of this, cf. Michael H. Burgoyne, *Mamluk Jerusalem* (World of Islam Festival Trust, 1987).

31 'United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181, November 29, 1947', http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/un/res181.htm, accessed 17 March 2005.

32 For the intra-Christian debate cf. Chapman, *Whose Holy City?*, ch.6; Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism* (Leicester: IVP, 2004); Steve Maltz, *The Land of Many Names* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Lifestyle, 2003).

33 'The Iqra Foundation', http://www.iqrafoundation.org/IIRC%20arabic%20050220/index.htm, copied 17 March 2005.

tal, the city of Jerusalem, burned Solomon's temple, and carried the Jews into captivity. Regarding this the Qur'an says:

> And We made it known to the children of Israel in the Book: 'Twice, indeed, will you do corruption on earth and will become grossly overbearing; hence when, the prediction of the first of those two (periods of iniquity) came to pass, We sent against you some of Our servants of terrible prowess in war, and they brought havoc throughout the land and so the prediction was fulfilled.' (Q17:4-5)

The same author sees present day events as signalling a future conflict, in terms widely accepted by Muslims:

> 'The events that have taken place in Jerusalem in recent years or are now taking place also have divine purpose. They are meant, it seems, to remind us that we have not been living up to our responsibility as Muslims to strive to make supreme the word of God. They are also meant, it seems, to prepare for yet another decisive battle, both of arms and of ideas, between tawhid and shirk, between the worship of the one true universal God and the worship of the three idols of Zionism, nation, race and land.'[34]

Seyyed Hossein Nasr insists that Jerusalem is inseparably Muslim by saying:

> Not all the Palestinians, nor all the Arabs, nor even all the over one billion and two hundred [million] Muslims now living in the world could give Jerusalem away, for no matter what amount of wealth, power, land or any other worldly compensation. The attachment of Muslims to Jerusalem is permanent, and will last as long as human history itself.[35]

With the proliferation of views seeing Jerusalem events as inextricably connected with a celestial struggle it seems far more likely that Jerusalem's history of conflict will continue into the future before it has a chance to fulfil its name as the City of Peace. Given the volatility surrounding past history and present reality, how should we go about approaching the writing of history to avoid exacerbating deep-seated rivalries?

Considering context in writing about history

A major problem with so much discussion about the identity of Jerusalem, and, indeed, the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is that debates often take place between those for whom Israel can do no wrong and those for whom Israel can do no right. If there is a leaning towards the former view in the USA, as is so often claimed by some British scholars and commentators,[36] it should be said that the

34 Ahmad Shafaat, 'Jerusalem', 1987, http://www.islamic perspectives.com/Jerusalem.htm, copied 17 March 2005.

35 Nasr, 'Spiritual', 234.

36 Cf. Chapman, *Whose Holy City?* passim.

latter view is widespread in Britain and Europe.

As an example, an October 2003 opinion poll conducted by the Eurobarometer organisation, based on interviews with five hundred people in each of the fifteen States of the European Union, reported that 59% of those surveyed considered Israel to be the greatest threat to world peace.[37] This public perception across the EU derives in large part from the fact that much comment from official sources, as well as the mainstream media, in Britain and Europe is heavily and consistently anti-Israeli. This is born out by a series of studies of BBC reporting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict carried out since 2000. The most recent of these studies, published in July 2004, concluded:

> We have found that BBC documentaries featuring the Middle East over the last 43 months have been overwhelmingly negative in their depiction of Israel, or positive of Palestinians, with a considerable amount of time and space being given to programme makers with views known to be antithetical to Israel.[38]

It would seem that such programme makers, in surveying the tapestry of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, deliberately cover one of their eyes in doing so. The consequence is that what they see and thus portray for their audience is only half the picture, and is wrenched from its context.

Any critical assessment of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which merely reports on Israel's ignoring of United Nations Resolutions has some value, in that it puts on record certain historical details. But such an assessment is also incomplete, in that it tears such Israeli action from its broader context. Such a context includes a range of key factors:

- First, the wars in which Israel expanded the territory under its control, principally the wars of 1948 and 1967, were triggered by Arab States.
- Second, Resolution 242 of November 22 1967 not only called on Israel to withdraw from occupied territories, but also on Arab States to recognise Israel's right to exist. With the adamant refusal of Arab States to give this recognition in subsequent years – indeed rhetoric from the Arab States continued to call regularly for Israel's destruction[39] – it is understandable that Israel refused to withdraw its forces to the difficult-to-defend boundaries of the pre-1967 war period.
- Third, the extent to which the United Nations has become compromised

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37 'EU embarrassed as poll labels Israel world's biggest threat', AFP, 3 November, 2003, http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/afp/20031103/wl_mideast_afp/eu_poll_isreal_031103172948.

38 Cf. Trevor Asserson and Cassie Williams, *The BBC and the Middle East: The Documentary Campaign 200-2004*, July 2004, http://www.bbcwatch.com/july04.html, accessed 20 March 2005. Earlier reports are available from www.bbcwatch.com.

39 Cf. Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin (eds.), *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict* (London, Penguin, 2001, 6th revised edition).

in its biased treatment of Israel down the years is a key factor in explaining Israel's extreme caution in dancing to a UN tune.[40]

- Fourth, the decades-long prevalence of anti-Semitic motifs and themes in media throughout the Arab world explain the cynical response of many Israelis to Arab declarations of acceptance of Israel's right to exist.
- Fifth, the duplicitous behaviour of Yasser Arafat down the years partly accounts for Israeli caution in its dealings with the Palestinian leadership. It is no accident that Arafat's departure from the scene with his death in November 2004 suddenly injected new life into the Peace Process (now sadly grinding to a halt with the success of Hamas in the Palestinian legislative elections of late 2005.)
- Sixth, the widespread support for radical Islamist groups, such as Hamas, among the Palestinian community must cast doubt on the ability of non-Islamist Palestinian groups to fulfil their own currently stated policy of recognising Israel's right to exist, given the inherent view among Islamists that Israel's very existence is a blasphemy.
- Seventh, portrayal of the Jewish population of Israel as essentially an immigrant population which has dispossessed Palestinians of their land begs many questions. There has been a considerable Jewish presence in the area of present day Israel for thousands of years. Jerusalem has had a Jewish majority since census records were first taken; records of the Ottoman Turkish rulers from 1844 indicate that in that year Jerusalem's population of 12,510 consisted of 7,120 Jews, 5,000 Muslims and 3,390 Christians.[41]

A way ahead

None of the above factors should be used to whitewash Israel. Criticism of Israeli policy is entirely appropriate on occasions, but only when balanced by an equal scrutiny of all parties to this most intractable of conflicts. A few central principles need to be observed in critically engaging with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

1. In recent history both sides have contributed to tragedies, both sides have blood on their hands, and each has been a victim of the other's actions.
2. The land in dispute has been home to two communities throughout history. The nature and make-up of these communities has altered over time. Nevertheless, both modern Jews and modern Palestinian Arabs can trace ancestry to the disputed land. Thus they can both make a valid claim to at least part of the land.
3. The Jewish Israeli community has the right to have its own independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. There should be no caveats to such a statement.

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40 For a discussion of UN bias against Israel in the years following UN Resolution 242, cf. Michael Curtis, 'The United Nations Against Israel', *Middle East Review* XIII/2 (Winter 1980-81), 32-35.

41 David Bercuson, 'Canada and Jerusalem: An Historical Overview', *Middle East Review* XIII. 3-4 (Spring-Summer 1981), 50.

4. The Palestinian Arab community has the right to have its own independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. There should be no caveats to such a statement. When such a state is created in the future, as it surely will be and must be, it should not be regarded by Arabs as merely a stage on the path to Israel's eventual destruction.
5. Any calls for one of the communities to have its own state with Jerusalem as its capital should be accompanied in the same breath by statements recognising that the other has the right to exist.

The 1947 UN proposals embodied in UN Resolution 181 were ahead of their time. Looking back, it now seems a tragedy that Arab communities rejected them at the time. Subsequent events have rendered the 1947 proposals beyond salvaging.

Ultimately success in implementing a two-state solution will hinge on resolving the status of Jerusalem. The 1947 proposal to place Jerusalem under international control was far-sighted and probably the best possible solution. However, too much water has passed under the bridge since then, and too much blood has been spilt, for it to be resurrected.

The following proposal by Muslim writer Waleed El-Ansary is on the wrong side of history:

> Perhaps the only ways to achieve peace in the Middle East would be for Jerusalem to be depoliticized. It should not be a political capital of either Israel or Palestine, but be given a unique status as a spiritually sovereign entity under a theocracy of the traditional representatives of the Abrahamic religions...[42]

At the same time, unilateral control of all parts of the city by any one of the warring parties will ultimately undermine attempts at peace-making. Consequently the only possible solution lies in the concept of shared sovereignty over the city, with both Israelis and Palestinians accepting the other's right to have Jerusalem as its capital. It seems that this may be the only arrangement which will ever give Jerusalem the chance to live up to its name as the City of Peace.

Abstract

Jerusalem has great significance for all three Semitic faiths. In the case of Islam, Jerusalem's rich past history is balanced by its future eschatological function. Islamic tradition looks not only to the city as the site of Muhammad's ascension to Heaven but also to its role as the location for the final tribulation and judgement. In this context, contemporary conflicts between modern Israel and its Arab neighbours are interpreted by many Muslims as a fulfilment of prophecy. This poses important challenges for scholars engaged in research into Jerusalem's past and present.

42 Cited in Arlandson, 'Islam's Mystical Claim'.