

Jerusalem

El Kuds Al Sharif

“The Rock of Faith”



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Homer

1970

Jerusalem's importance and its place in Islam

*“Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night
from the Holy Mosque to the Farthest Mosque,
the precincts of which we have blessed,
that we might show him some of Our signs.
He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing.”*

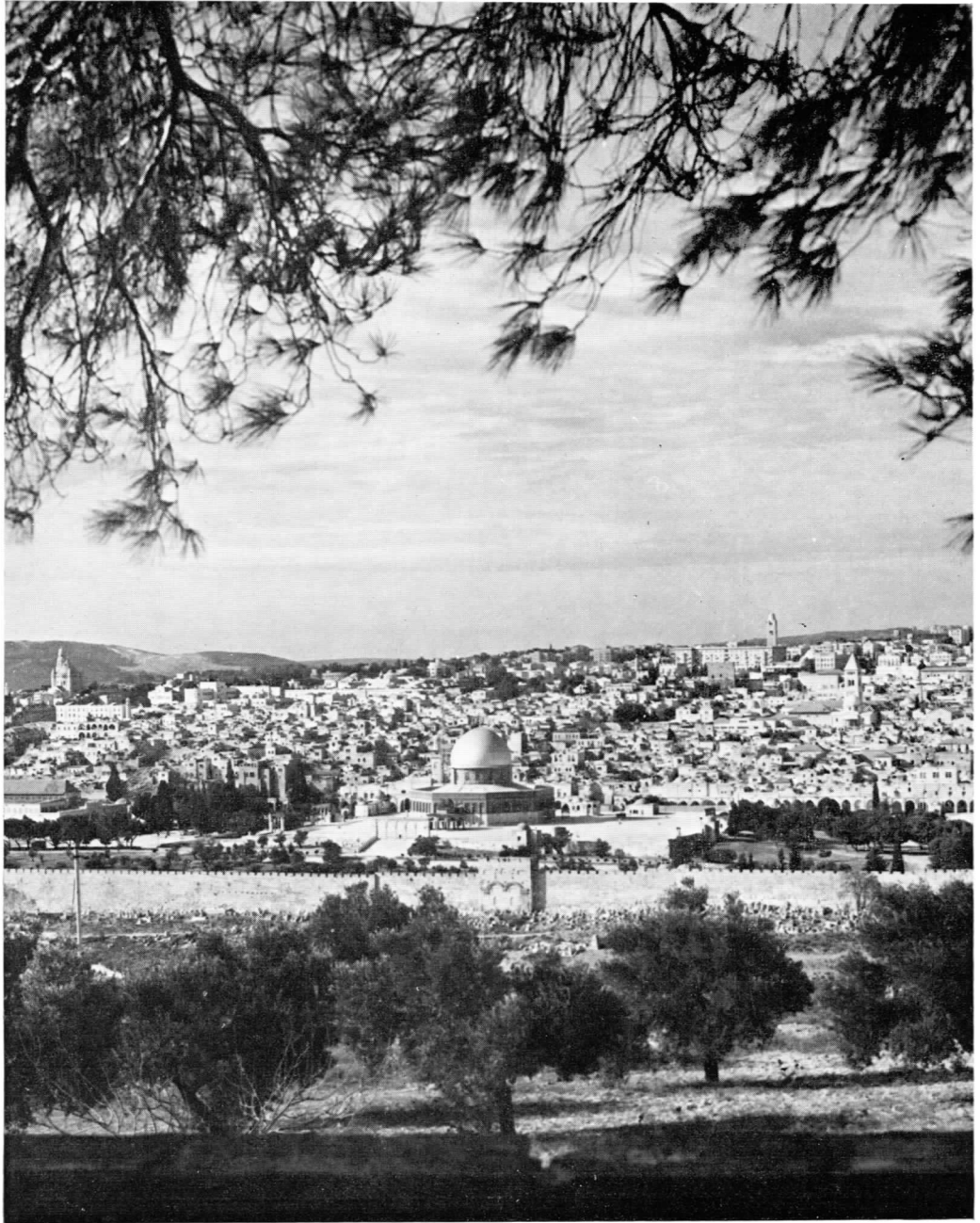
Thus, in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, does the Holy Koran refer to the miraculous journey made by the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Jerusalem. He prayed there and received divine instructions about the forms of prayer and other observances. Later he is reported by his contemporaries as saying that after the Holy Mosque of Mecca, the mosque at Jerusalem was the next to be established.

From this can be seen in elemental form, the value and importance of Jerusalem, not only to Arabs who live within Arabia and Palestine but also to Moslems all over the world. Mohammed was born in 571 A.D. in Southern Arabia. By the time he was a mature man, he had become disillusioned with the society which surrounded him—even as far north as Damascus. Like other prophets before him, he saw hope for the future of the community only in a disciplined life, and by recognition and worship of the one true God by its individual members.

He had started preaching in 612 A.D. Beset by enemies, suffering bitterly, he slowly gained support while vowing that he would break down the idolatry around him in due time. After ten years, his fortunes changed and the trickle of converts became a flood, as military victories followed diplomatic advances. His death in 632 A.D. left his followers, most of whom were poor and underprivileged, with a new dignity.

Islam was on the march: bringing with its belief in Allah, a personal responsibility, welfare for dependants, and a code of social justice hitherto unknown in Arabia. These, together with the ritual of daily prayers were to remain the bastions of the Faith, which Mohammed had preached, up to the present day.

Flushed with the success of their consolidation of Arabia, it was inevitable that the Arabs should be attracted to the fertile and strategic lands of Syria and Palestine. The empires of Byzantium and Persia were exhausted by long and bitter wars between themselves, and in 637 A.D. Jerusalem was surrendered to the Caliph Omar and Christians and Jews were allowed to remain.



Omar built a wooden mosque to mark the place of Mohammed's arrival in Jerusalem during his night journey to Heaven from Mecca, and another mosque near to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre by which he had prayed.

Omar laid down the principle of freedom of worship and established the rights of all communities in Jerusalem, which persisted throughout the period of Moslem rule.

"The Caliph proclaims protection to the people of Eilia (Jerusalem) and guarantees full security to their lives and property, their churches and crosses, their sick and healthy and all their co-religionists. Their churches shall not be converted into dwellings, neither shall they be demolished nor their precincts or crosses violated. There shall be no compulsion in matters of religion and none shall be persecuted or discriminated against."

Abdul-Malik Ibn Marwan—"Prince of the Believers"—began the building of the Dome of the Rock in 685 A.D., and finished it in 691 A.D. It is a shrine of infinite beauty and craftsmanship, bringing together under its golden dome a combination of arts and materials, whose mixture would sound inconceivable, if the reality was not set out for all to see. The shrine is built over the place from which the miraculous ladder of light rose up to conduct Mohammed to the Heavens.

In 688 A.D. Abdul-Malik started the construction of the great mosque, Al Aqsa, incorporating within it the modest wooden building set up by Omar. It was finished by his son, Walid in 705 A.D. In passing, it is worth mentioning that it was during Walid's reign that the great Arab empire reached out to the Atlantic, as far east as China and north to the Black Sea; while Europe was sunk in its Dark Ages of economic and spiritual poverty.

Each successive ruler embellished the buildings, added to them or erected shrines, pulpits and arcades within the Noble Sanctuary Al Haram al Sharif, and restored and reconstructed damage done by earthquakes until 1097 A.D. when Jerusalem was captured by the Crusaders.

After the liberation of Jerusalem in 1187 A.D. by Salah-ed-Din (*Saladin*), massive repairs were carried out and beautiful mosaics and inlays were fitted to the Dome of the Rock. He brought the superb cedar wood minbar from Aleppo, which Nur-Ed-Din had made in 1186 A.D. in anticipation of the restoration of Moslem authority in Jerusalem, and installed it in Al Aqsa mosque.

There it remained until the Al Aqsa mosque was severely damaged by fire in August 1969 A.D.

With the incorporation of Jerusalem into the Ottoman empire, Suleiman II—"The Magnificent"—rebuilt the walls of the city and carried out extensive work in The Haram. Particularly fine were the elaborate tiles with which he decorated the outside of the Dome of the Rock, which were recently restored by the Jordan Government in 1962.

To the holy city of Jerusalem came pilgrims; students of theology; mystics; philosophers and pious men—and women—of the Jewish and Christian faiths. Under Moslem rule, they enjoyed communal autonomy and freedom of worship. The liberation of the city by Salah-ed-Din brought a revival of these communities even while parts of Palestine remained under Crusader control.

This situation continued until the 19th century when the “pogroms” in Eastern Europe helped to crystallise the designs of those Jews who sought to establish a political entity in Palestine. The political manoeuvrings and world-engulfing wars, which burst out of Europe during the first half of the twentieth century enmeshed Palestine, not only in further military traffic, but in international dealings over the heads of the indigenous Arab population.

Today, the Holy City of Jerusalem, packed with historic buildings and associations of great religious concern to Moslems all over the world, lies in a state of uneasy tension. Each dawn the sun’s rays are caught and flashed back across the city and over the dusty hills from the Golden Dome of the Rock and the Silver Dome of Al Aqsa mosque like signal beacons from a beleaguered camp. Each sunset sees the burning reflections of faith amid the surrounding gloom.



The burning of Al Aqsa, 21 August 1969



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