

ANERA

NEWSLETTER

AMERICAN NEAR EAST REFUGEE AID

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JERUSALEM: CROSSROADS OF PEOPLES AND RELIGIONS

Historically, no place evokes more emotion, stands more sacred to more religions, claims more recognition from every corner of the world than Jerusalem.

Christians, Muslims, and Jews revere Jerusalem as a "Holy City". Jews venerate it as the place Abraham promised the Chosen People. Christians look to Jerusalem as the site of the climactic events of Jesus' life and mainspring for Christianity. For Muslims, Jerusalem is the third holiest city after Mecca and Medina. These faiths share the belief in the God of Abraham and they share many prophets. Their historical and religious traditions have been intertwined throughout Jerusalem's history.

You may never have visited Jerusalem, but for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, for Arabs and Israelis, for students of ancient history and culture, art and architecture, this city holds much meaning and symbolism. The similarities and differences among the groups inhabiting Jerusalem make the city a fascinating focus.



Earliest mosaic of Jerusalem

FACES OF JERUSALEM

The people of Jerusalem today are a blend of descendants of an indigenous population and large numbers of immigrants. Of those living in the Old City, most keep the traditions of their forefathers, earning their livelihoods from time honored crafts and services. The Old City displays an array of colorful embroidered cloths and Oriental carpets, brass and copper and ceramics, intermingled with the smell of spices and perfumes, burning incense and brewing tea. And one must not forget the tourists and pilgrims. They are ever present as they have been for at least 3000 years. All three religions have attracted them to this holy city throughout their respective histories. These sights, sounds and smells of Jerusalem are as much the result of history as are any of the religious structures and ruins.

VIOLENCE IN PALESTINE STARVATION IN LEBANON

Jerusalem, Dec.22. At least 20 Palestinian youths killed and 150 wounded in Gaza and the West Bank during the past two weeks. 20 years of military occupation with no end in sight. A dire need for true peace. This is the sad situation as the ANERA Newsletter goes to the printer. It underlines once more the great need for the leaders of the world, including the U.S., to work anew for a just and lasting peace for all people and groups in the Holy Land.

Beirut. The reports out of Lebanon are devastating: "The sight of frail, elderly Beirutis stooping over scattered mounds of garbage is common now in West Beirut." Many "Lebanese families simply are no longer able to afford food, medicine or education," Nora Boustany. "About 1.2 million people, one third of Lebanon's population, needs help," Hans Einhaus, U.N.H.C.R.

You can help these people through ANERA. Make a difference (see coupon on back page.)

COMMON SYMBOL

Jerusalem, city of three great Abrahamic religions, contains many sites which Jews, Christians, and Muslims honor. The Dome of the Rock, a focus for all three, dramatically exemplifies this commonality of sacred shrines. Here, the Torah, Bible and Quran tell us, Abraham offered up his son in sacrifice to God, Solomon built his Temple, Jesus preached, and Muhammad journeyed to Heaven. Variouslly called the Temple Mount, Mount Moriah, or Haram ash-Sharif, this site illuminates the ways in which the three religions intermingle within and around Jerusalem.

The Dome of the Rock marks the location of the Jewish Temple of which the only remaining edifice is the Western Wall, the outer wall of the Muslim Haram ash-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary). Since the Temple's destruction 2000 years ago, the Western Wall represents the greatest symbol of Judaism and has been a sacred place of Jewish pilgrimage. The site, consecrated by the Crusaders as the "Templum Domini" (Temple of Our Lord), is also of great significance to Christians since no other spot is so closely associated with the life of Jesus. They believe Jesus returned here after his miraculous Resurrection. Muslims also revere this site which is connected with their greatest prophet. In the Quran, it is stated that Muhammad flew here on his famous steed al-Burak and ascended to Heaven to receive revelation from God.

After the Muslims established a presence in Jerusalem, they built a mosque called the Dome of the Rock. It is the oldest Muslim shrine in Jerusalem and the third greatest center of Islamic pilgrimage. Just as Jewish synagogues and many Christian churches all over the world are built to face towards the Holy City, the earliest Muslims faced Jerusalem when praying.

Built by Caliph Abd al-Malik in 688 AD and situated on a vast platform (the Haram ash-Sharif), the Dome of the Rock mosque encloses the rock which is venerated by all three faiths. Originally, it is thought, Solomon had flattened this area of Mt. Moriah for the first Jewish Temple. Other Muslim shrines and tombs as well as the great Al-Aqsa Mosque, constructed by Caliph Umar, occupy the platform. The Dome of the Rock itself, built on a higher part of the platform, is clearly visible from the outskirts of Jerusalem. The bare rock slab housed within the structure contrasts the elaborate ornaments and mosaics. Nonetheless, this rock bears much significance for followers of all three faiths. The focus of many legends, it remains a lasting symbol of Jerusalem.

THE JEWISH QUARTER

The Jewish Quarter, traditionally a home for Orthodox Jews, is an area with winding streets and narrow alleyways. Belonging to synagogues and yeshivas (religious schools), their lives are centered on religion. Tourists and pilgrims through the shops of this quarter purchasing icons and religious souvenirs. The Sabbath replaces the noise and crowds with the hush of silent prayer. Most go to the Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall, where they insert petitions written on slips of paper in the wall's crevices.

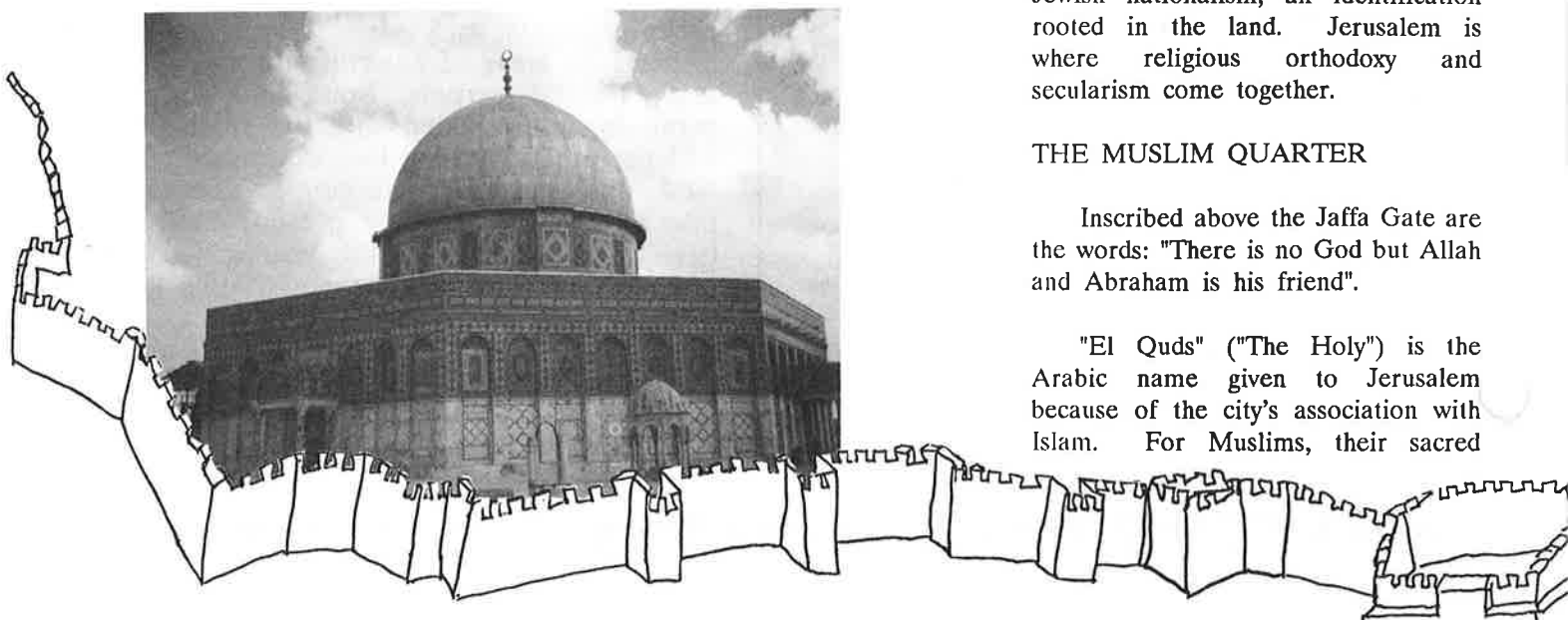
The Jews of Jerusalem represent many strains of Judaic faith, ranging from the very orthodox to more worldly. The Hassidic Jews, originating from eastern Europe, epitomize the stricter side of Judaism by incorporating the letter of the Torah to their daily lives. They are easily recognizable on the streets of the Old City in keeping with the style of their 17th century counterparts. Men wear velvet robes and fur hats and women don very modest clothing. Also in Jerusalem are Ashkenazi Jews from Europe, and Sephardis originating from Spain, North Africa, and the Middle East. Emanating from over 50 different countries, the Jews of Israel speak as many different languages.

Others, representing the balance of Jews in Israel, blend their religious and secular identities. Their religious affiliation is closely associated with Jewish nationalism, an identification rooted in the land. Jerusalem is where religious orthodoxy and secularism come together.

THE MUSLIM QUARTER

Inscribed above the Jaffa Gate are the words: "There is no God but Allah and Abraham is his friend".

"El Quds" ("The Holy") is the Arabic name given to Jerusalem because of the city's association with Islam. For Muslims, their sacred





book, the Holy Quran, is the product of a tradition which built upon Judaism and Christianity, both of which preceded it. Jesus, Moses, and Abraham are among the prophets of Islam associated with Christianity and Judaism. According to Islam, Muhammad is the last and greatest prophet of Judeo-Christian-Muslim traditions. Their prophet, like those of Judaism and Christianity, received messages from God which are recorded in their sacred text. And, as with the texts of other monotheistic faiths, the Quran contains codes of behavior and guidelines for rituals which measure to a large extent one's devoutness.

The majority of Muslims in Jerusalem are Palestinian Arabs, but some have other Islamic origins. Walking through the Muslim Quarter, one is captivated by colorful stands of fresh fruits and vegetables and shops filled with brightly colored cloths and hand-woven carpets. One might come across some men bent over a backgammon board or smoking a hubbly-bubbly, both distinctively Middle Eastern conventions. Another traditional practice is to lure passersby into one's shop for tea or coffee: all enjoy the game, even if nothing is purchased.

THE CHRISTIAN QUARTER

The Christian community is the most diverse of Jerusalem's communities, with over 30 Christian denominations and sects represented. While

most are Palestinian Arabs, individuals and small groups also hail from throughout the world.

In many corners of the Old City one finds numerous churches and monasteries and missions, the focal point for all Christian pilgrims being the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This Church was built by decree of Byzantine Emperor Constantine, whose mother, Helena, identified many sacred sites connected with Christianity, including this church which is believed to mark the site of Christ's tomb. Over the years the various churches have vied with each other for control or access to its shrines. At one time the friction among the churches became so acute that a tradition of entrusting the keys of the Holy Sepulchre to a notable Muslim family was established. In 1852 the ruling Ottomans passed a decree, known as the "status quo", that partitioned the shrines amongst the six main religious communities. The edict granted the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Armenian Orthodox the main portions of the Church. The Egyptian Copts, Syrian Orthodox, and Ethiopian Copts were assigned the remaining shrines of the Holy Sepulchre. Because of the lack of space within the Church itself, the Ethiopians were apportioned the roof where they established their chapel.

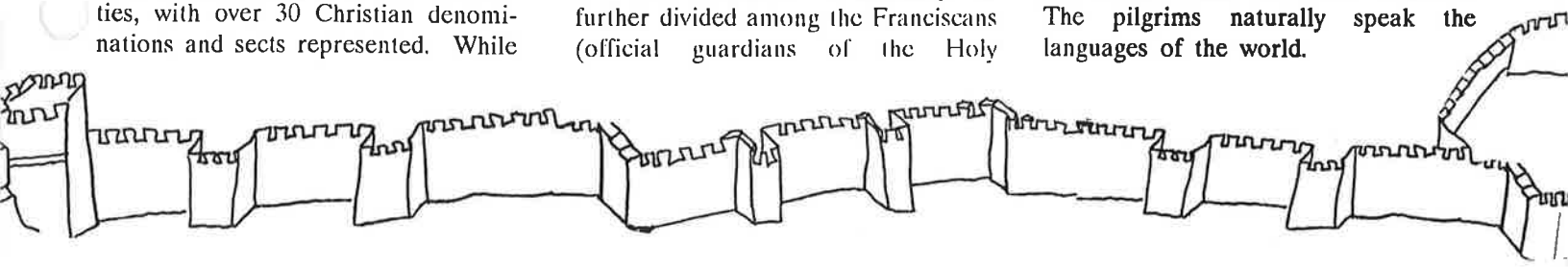
The Catholic community is further divided among the Franciscans (official guardians of the Holy

Places), Benedictines, Dominicans, Carmelites, and many others. Of particular interest are the Maronites from Lebanon. Their liturgy is in Aramaic, the language which Jesus spoke. Many other communities represented in the Old City include Anglicans and various Protestant denominations. Given the large number of religious groups, it is no wonder that problems among the various denominations have plagued the history of the churches in Jerusalem. Although contentions persist, presently in the form of trying to sing louder than other groups at religious ceremonies, the "status quo" decree remains in effect.

THE ARMENIAN QUARTER

The Armenians, another Christian group, have their own quarter in Jerusalem. Armenians were among the early settlers in the city where they have immigrated since embracing Christianity in the third century. They brought with them their traditional handicrafts, including embroidery, pottery, tiles, and painting.

Here one may visit their seminaries, chapels, and schools and a printing press where most of the religious texts for Armenian Churches all over the world are printed in an alphabet exclusive to the Armenian language. On the streets, one hears Armenian, rather than the Hebrew of the Jewish Quarter, or the Arabic of the Muslim and Christian Quarters. The pilgrims naturally speak the languages of the world.



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This issue of the ANERA Newsletter was written & designed by Monica Freres, Administrative Assistant.

ANERA

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