



The Open Veins of Jerusalem

Munir Akash, with Fouad Moughrabi, eds.

Arlington, MA: Jusoor Books, distr. by Syracuse University Press, 2005. 290 p. \$24.95. ISBN: 0815681453.

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A collection of 11 essays divided into two parts, each dealing with the agonizing connection Palestinian Arabs have had with Jerusalem over the centuries. The characterization of each part is a forthright statement of the emotional appeal sought out by Palestinians from some time in the past to the present. The introduction accepts the notion of the currently popularly-used term “orientalism” as the editor guides the reader to an appreciation of an oppressed people who have been subjected to a foreign occupation by an alien folk who have no discernable connection to the region. This is followed by part one, entitled, “Misrepresenting Jerusalem,” introduced by the late Israel Shahak, the well known anti-Zionist Israeli who separates the Jewish connection to Jerusalem by noting the differences in attraction of the secular and the observant Jew.

Karen Armstrong attempts to elucidate in an academic manner how each of the three religious faiths has come to view Jerusalem over time. Perhaps most notable here is when she disabuses the Orientalist tendency to equate the Western notion of urban space with that of Islam, noting the sacredness that is attached to the latter’s belief system to the area. Nasser Rabbat focuses on Islamic architecture and the Umayyad dynasty’s building of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque. The prominent Palestinian-American academician, Naseer Aruri, attacks the Israeli position on Jerusalem as an attempt to create a myth. Rashid Khalidi calls for a system of joint governance of the urban center as a viable alternative to continued conflict. A bonus to this collection is the contribution made by Sarah Rogers who rounds out this first part with a provision of a set of photographic reproductions of Palestinian Arab artists’ renditions of political art.



Part two, entitled “They Came for Our Land,” is in the form of an indictment of those “foreigners” who have taken Jerusalem from its rightful connection. It is introduced by Fouad Moughrabi who provides a personal memoir of his childhood in Jerusalem before he left for the United States. Issa Boullata left Jerusalem in 1975 and decided to settle in Canada, accepting an academic position in Montreal. He instills the emotional quality that memories tend to bring. The late writer, Jabra Jabra relates tales of family travail during the first Palestinian-Israeli conflict in 1948 when battles raged throughout the city. The concluding essay is by Heather Spears, who weaves of heart-wrenching tale of Palestinian youngsters who become targets of Israeli soldiers engaged in security operations.

The Open Veins of Jerusalem is one of the better depictions of the communal values of Palestinian Arabs’ attitude toward the meaning of Jerusalem to their culture. Popularly written, it can be easily read and the impact similarly absorbed.