

*His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan*

It is important to underline some of the demographic and geographic changes currently taking place in Jerusalem, one of the most sacred cities in the world. This city is close to the hearts of millions of people, since it is a focal point of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the three monotheistic religions. The changes taking place in and around Jerusalem are relevant to some of the themes underlying the seminar. These changes are undermining the environmental harmony of the region; the introduction of foreign transplants yields a destructive disharmony in any community. We can illustrate the polarization that results from the importation of foreign architectural elements.

The Haram al-Sharif (Sacred Precinct) in Jerusalem contains two of the holiest of Muslim sites. First is the Dome of the Rock, a building of exquisite design and workmanship built by the Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik Ibn Marwan in 691 A.D. It was constructed around the rock from which the Prophet Muḥammad ascended to Heaven on the night of al-Israa. Second is the Aqṣā Mosque, to which the Prophet was transported from al-Ka'ba in Mecca; after the Ka'ba it is the second most sacred site in Islam. However, changes are being effected around these buildings in the course of Israeli excavations in search of the Temple of Solomon, razed by Titus in 70 A.D.

Excavations to the south and southwest of the Haram area have unveiled an Umayyad palace, Roman ruins and a single coin minted during the Bar Kochba rebellion. The presence of this latter artifact has justified the disruptive search for the Temple in this area. The plaza in front of what is held to be the exposed western wall of the Temple, the so-called Wailing Wall, was enlarged to accommodate visitors. This necessitated the bulldozing of many homes and much *waqf* property in the Moroccan and Bab al-Silsila quarters.

Arab dismay at the Israeli excavations, which were seen as tampering with the local Islamic heritage, was compounded by a mysterious fire in the Aqṣā Mosque in August 1969. The fire occurred on a day

when the water mains had been shut, necessitating fire-fighting help from outlying Arabic towns. The Saladin *minbar* was completely lost, and the *miḥrāb* area, three colonnaded aisles and the roof were seriously damaged. The decorative dome and several ornamental windows of gypsum and stained glass required extensive repair. Restoration of the Mosque was commissioned by the Government of Jordan, and advice from UNESCO and ICCROM resulted in implementation of the latest techniques.

Other edifices and landmarks in the Haram al-Sharif area require urgent care and restoration before they become ostensibly unsafe eyesores and are demolished by the Israeli government. These landmarks include important *sūqs*, gates, *sabils* (fountains) and Islamic religious schools. Changes to them affect the centuries-old Arab urban character.

Damage to Muslim areas in Jerusalem is not unique; the environs of the city are also plagued by rapid redevelopment and in particular by the imposition of new architectural styles on the old. As French photographer Marc Ribout wrote of the new Israeli buildings at French Hill on the northern outskirts of Jerusalem,

The bulldozer and the crane in Jerusalem have become a new skyline foreign to this sky and this land. This frantic race to anchor—with steel and concrete—new roots on a new soil has to brave the dignity of other people. As on many faces, I saw the humiliated pride and anger on the faces of the Palestinian women. A bulldozer had smashed through their small orchard. The next day the whole family was expelled from their beautiful old stone house which had been theirs for generations, and knocked down. I understood then how dignity is much dearer than an improved standard of living for the people of this land, and what is built on humiliation seldom lasts long.

*In Jerusalem: City of Mankind* (1974)