



THE LEGACY OF SOLOMON

JOHN FRANCIS KINSELLA

THE LEGACY OF SOLOMON

the Temple of the Jews

a novel

by

John Francis Kinsella

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The Legacy of Solomon
(revised)

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to

Tilla, Selma, Eléonore, Noé, Xaver, Elyas, Adèle, Camille & Antoine

There is no nonsense so arrant that it cannot be made the creed of the
vast majority by adequate governmental action.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)

The water, why I do not know, was unusually cold, so that we could
only bathe in it in the afternoon when the sun had stood on it a long
time. As for the hill, it was a favourite walk of half an hour: a height
called, certainly from the old days and most inappropriately, Mount
Zion.

Thomas Mann 'Doctor Faustus' 1947

Contents

- 1 A Jesuit
- 2 San Francisco
- 3 Rue Montbelliard
- 4 The Underground Cisterns
- 5 An Outline
- 6 A Little Research
- 7 Water and Purification
- 8 Purification in the Temple
- 9 The Trust
- 10 Hertzfeld
- 11 Tel-Aviv
- 12 The High Priests
- 13 de Lussac
- 14 The Promised Land
- 15 Jerusalem
- 16 The Wall
- 17 Archaeology in the Bedrock of the Haram
- 18 The Ramp
- 19 Religion and Archaeology

20 The Temple
21 A Documentary
22 Sacrifice
23 A Visit to London
24 The Palestine Exploration Fund
25 New Discoveries
26 Menorah Press
27 Seville
28 Caesarea
29 The Hittites
30 Bethlehem
31 The Aqueducts
32 Minimalist or Maximalist
33 Petra and the Nabateans
34 UCLA
35 Rhodes
36 Syria
37 A Secret Site
38 Persians
39 The Palace of King David
40 The Bulla
41 Masada
42 The Origins of the Wailing Wall
43 Cuneiform
44 Manipulation
45 The Destruction of Jerusalem
46 The Exodus
47 David and Solomon
48 A Question of Interpretation
49 Exploration
50 Myths and Legends
51 Muslims
52 Akhenaton
53 The Koran
54 A Jesuit in Angkor
55 Philistine and Babylonian Gods

56 Ancient Egypt
57 The First Egyptians
58 Texts
59 The Christian Bible
60 Sects
61 The Covenant
62 King David
63 An Incident at the Wall
64 The Temple Mount Dispute
65 The Pool of Siloam
66 Palestine
67 The Archaeology of Jerusalem
68 Folklore and Legends
69 Tel-Aviv University
70 Aisha Barghut
71 Gaza
72 Flight from Gaza
73 Fighting Breaks Out
74 Sympathy and Identity
75 The War Against Terrorism
76 Stranded
77 Reason
78 Willing Helpers
79 The Legacy of Solomon
80 Another Theory
81 Aliyah
82 The Wandering Jew
83 Paris
84 On a Bridge
Acknowledgements
Other books by the author

A Jesuit

And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.
Nietzsche

O'CONNELLY HAD BEEN INVITED to what was announced as a 'travel writer's celebration', organised by Shakespeare & Company, a Parisian bookshop, in reality a rag-tag monument to second-hand books and literature, situated on quai de Montebello opposite Notre Dame on the Left Bank of the Seine. It was run by an ancient Bostonian, George Whitman.

O'Connelly was present as member of a discussion panel entitled 'Travel in Words'. To his regret he had not been invited to present a new book of his own – he had written nothing for over two years. His name was still a good draw for the reading public, a successful writer, whose books had regularly remained in the best sellers' lists for several weeks and could be found on the shelves of most bookshops and libraries.

He remembered having met George by chance one Sunday summer afternoon a good many years previously as he explored the shelves in the vague hope of finding Liddel Hart's biography *T.E. Lawrence* published in 1934, for background to an article he was writing for another of the endless Middle East crises.

George Whitman, who was born in Salem, must have been in his early seventies at the time. At first glance O'Connelly had taken him for a rather strange scruffy old eccentric, which he was, even for the owner of a second-hand bookshop. Whitman after asking him if he was looking for something in particular, led him up a very steep rickety stairway lined higgledy-piggledy with old books to the first

floor. In a small back room with an unmade bed, he quickly glanced over the shelves, stopped then pointed a wrinkled finger to a dusty red spine red on a low shelf deformed by the weight of books. O'Connelly slid the book out and flipped it open to the publisher's information page. It was exactly what he was looking for, a June 1935 reprint, published by Jonathan Cape, complete with fold-out maps, in pristine, though yellowed, condition. On the inside cover was pencilled 20F, a bargain.

'I'll take it, excellent.'

'Would you like to join us for tea?'

'Tea!' said O'Connelly a little surprised.

'Yes, come with me.'

He followed him up several more flights of steep, creaking, stairs, past more books it seemed than the British Museum Library. On the top floor in a rather worn room, looking over the Seine towards Notre Dame, several people who seemed as bemused as O'Connelly were gathered around holding cups and saucers and drinking tea, trying to make conversation as a plate of home made cake cut into slices was being offered around.

George poured a tea and handed it to O'Connelly, then left in search of another impromptu guest.

Since that time O'Connelly became a regular visitor to the bookshop and its Sunday afternoon tea sessions and as the years passed little changed, George got older, though as sprightly as ever, but perhaps a little more abrupt.

Shakespeare & Company was now managed by a new generation, which seemed not only determined to maintain the tradition, but also to turn the monument into an institution with the 'celebration'. For O'Connelly it was a welcome event in the literary wilderness of Paris, for English writers that is.

A large white marquee had been set up in the René Vivaldi Park just a few paces from the bookshop to serve as a conference hall for the four day event and twenty seven of the ‘best’ travel writers had been invited to speak.

Inside there was a pleasant looking crowd, *bon chic bon genre*, looking prosperously clean in their summer outfits, the only off key point was a drunk, whose bench had been usurped by the event, and who appeared from time to time to shout obscenities.

The round table question time was going well, the guest writers replying to the questions from a mainly Anglo-American crowd with a sprinkling of French Anglophiles, who spoke slightly accented but perfect English. It was a relief from the pompous French intellectual literary milieu, perched on the pedestals and always ready to be outré, for ever sliding back to their favourite phobias of racism, guilt and socialist politics.

Towards the end of question time Laura slipped in, taking the only vacant seat on the front row reserved for guest writers, critics and organisers, she caught O’Connelly’s eye and smiled. A few minutes later the session broke up and the audience ambled towards the bookshop where the writers were signing books for the public. It seemed a long time since O’Connelly had performed that obligation.

‘Pat, there’s somebody I would like to say hello to you...you know the archaeologist,’ said Laura taking his arm, nodding towards a thin, elongated individual, whose brown bespectacled head reflected the afternoon sunshine like a polished brown nut, who was gazing in the direction of Notre Dame.

‘Now?’ O’Connelly replied sounding a little vexed.

She pouted.

‘Okay,’ he said giving in, reluctantly allowing her to guide him towards the newcomer.

‘This is Monsieur de Lussac,’ she said in French introducing him to the tall Frenchman.

‘*Enchanté*,’ said O’Connelly forcing a polite smile, looking at the archaeologist’s narrow face, wondering if he was not a reincarnation of King Tut.

‘Ah, it’s a pleasure to meet you,’ replied de Lussac beaming, ‘I have read your books and Laura has told me a lot about you.’

On second thoughts, he looks like a curé from a medieval film, thought O’Connelly.

‘Monsieur de Lussac has been working a project about the Temple in Jerusalem.’

Laura had vaguely mentioned de Lussac’s work, however, O’Connelly had only half listened. He smiled as he tried to recollect which temple, as images of gold domed mosques flashed through his mind.

‘Very interesting discussion,’ said de Lussac nodding to the now empty stage.

‘Yes, very.’

A young woman appeared, one of the organisers, waving a hand, urgently beckoning O’Connelly.

‘Look, you must be quite busy,’ said de Lussac waving to the crowd. ‘I don’t want to bother you now, why don’t we try to meet at a more appropriate moment, here’s my card.’

‘Excellent, I’ll call you,’ he replied relieved to escape vespers.

He headed towards Laura who announced the editor of the cultural section of *Le Monde* was waiting for him in the private cocktail room set up on the first floor. Florence Bousquet was a friend at the Middle East desk of the paper and had little to do with culture. Their friendship went back to the days when O’Connelly had first arrived in Paris as a correspondent for *The New York Times*.

‘So Pat, still bathing in an aura of recent glory?’ asked Florence.

O'Connelly frowned.

'Ah! So it's serious, sorry I was just pulling your leg.'

'No, don't worry, I'm looking for an idea, but that's as far as I've got.'

'Why don't you do something on the Middle East?'

'You mean something like how I tracked down Osama bin Laden,' he said a little sourly collecting a glass of Champagne.

Florence shrugged, she was only trying to be helpful.

'Forget it, here's to future success.'

O'Connelly emptied the glass and got a refill.

'When are you off again?'

'With the present situation in Palestine, I'm off to Jerusalem next week, an interview with Shimon Perez.'

'Lucky for you, be careful.'

'Don't you miss all that?'

'Not really, I never did like editors and their deadlines breathing down my back.'

'Me too, I'd prefer Cannes and film festivals.'

'Book events?'

He gave a Gallic shrug, 'Can't really say I like that either.'

'Where's Laura?'

'Down stairs talking to some kind of an archaeologist...curé'

'Curé?'

'Looks like one, or a Jesuit.'

'...an archaeologist?'

'Yeah, some kind of a strange bird. Something about a temple.'

'A temple?'

'Jerusalem.'

'That sounds interesting'

'If I remember what Laura told me he's discovered some new site.'

'That would stir up a hornets nest.'

‘Oh.’

‘I assume your talking about the Temple.’

O’Connelly shrugged he was not sure, he hadn’t thought about it.

‘It’s an age old bone of contention between the Jews and Muslims. In the present circumstances best left alone.’

‘So you’ll join us for dinner?’

‘That’s the general idea, a bit too early though. We can have a before dinner drink somewhere on St Germain, get some air.’

‘I’ve had nothing but fresh air all the afternoon,’ he said thinking of the open marquee. ‘You know Gilles?’

‘Of course.’

‘He’s somewhere outside with Laura, he’s reserved a table.’

‘Great.’

They spent fifteen minutes shaking hands and tapping shoulders before they got away, joining the early evening strollers along the Quai des Grands Augustins, following Gilles had reserved a terrace table in a restaurant facing St Germain des Près. The table was well placed in one corner of the square where a modern jazz festival being held – Gilles was full of surprises. They ordered drinks and listened to a quartet, playing jazz classics, ensconced on a small stage erected in the middle of the square. The audience consisted of a prosperous easy going crowd of mostly plus forties – enthusiasts and passers-by – jazz had long since become an intellectual thing.

Laura chatted excitedly telling them about her archaeologist, she had worked more than a week trying to persuade O’Connelly to meet de Lussac. He had been preoccupied by other things and had only half listened, he was more concerned by trying to fix a meeting with his elusive agent to discuss prospects before his New York publisher arrived in Paris at the end of the month, wondering what kind of a story he would tell them. He had pocketed an advance of twenty thousand dollars for a book he had not even started, and did not

know where to start. Not that the money was a problem, words on paper were the problem, and worse ideas were in such short supply that his mind seemed to have shrivelled to the size of a walnut.

2

San Francisco

WITHOUT O'CONNELLY REALIZING IT success had progressively transformed his financial situation from that of a wage earning journalist to a successful writer with a substantial income earned from the sale of his books. When the US tax authorities started to become over interested in his growing prosperity, he decided it was time to return to Europe renting his Telegraph Hill apartment to a senior investment banker at Wells Fargo.

He enjoyed the profits of his success, though whenever he took his boat out into the Bay he remembered what J.P.Morgan had replied when a friend asked what a yacht would cost to operate – if he had to ask that question then he couldn't afford it. O'Connellly did not ask, because not only did he know the answer, his accountant constantly reminded him of it, and many other things he would have preferred to forget, like when his new book was scheduled for publishing.

He consoled himself with the thought he had bought his San Francisco apartment when he had, prices had since gone through the roof, and so had rents, though in the last months the Bay Area prices had been sliding, but Telegraph Hill was not the Bay Area – it was a golden investment. For a rather successful writer he was a wealthy man and his success had come at the right time enabling him to build an asset base which had risen spectacularly, the boat apart. His stock market investments had also risen, when with the luck of the Irish, he

had invested in the stock market after the dotcom crash betting on Google and Microsoft. However, he remembered the saying: if you don't stay humble, the market will humble you – after all he was a writer and what was important was a new book, instead of counting his past successes.

San Francisco had been qualified as the third most unaffordable housing market in the world, that is to say seriously unaffordable. He remembered his accountant had advised him against paying cash for the apartment, but accountants and advisers were often wrong. Was it money in the bank? That was the least sure of future predictions, in the worst place it was a place to live, and a damn good place at that, especially if things got bad in writing, where a writer could fall into disfavour and disappear forever in the blink of an eyelid. He had never really trusted the stock market; too many ordinary people had lost their shorts too many times. All he knew was the money he saved in interest on bank loans could only be to his advantage and the way things were could inflation seemed to be back. He wasn't a mathematical genius, but as a student at UC Berkeley he had noted the San Francisco peninsula was a cul de sac that could not be physically expanded.

The gleaming towers of steel and glass that had once symbolised the power of American capitalism had given way to an obsession for nip tuck, dental rebuilds, liposuction, health and eternal youth, and a refusal to care for the hideous excrescence of living dead slowly lurching down Mission towards the Financial district, its tentacles threatening to pull a debt burdened elite into its own dark world. London, Frankfurt, Shanghai and Bombay now boasted their own skylines and their versions of capitalism. The American dream was fading and even its once mighty army struggled, mired in the clutches of a Babylonian nightmare.

Rue Montbelliard

De Nugis 110, 24-25

You are asking an inexperienced and unskilled man to
 write, and to write from the court: it is to demand no less
 a miracle than if you bade a fresh set of Hebrew children
 to sing out of the burning furnace of a fresh
 Nebuchadnezzar.

RUE MONTBELLIARD ROSE STEEPLY from Square St Medoc in the general direction of the famous Parisian Lycée Henry IV, not far from the Sorbonne and a stone's throw from the little known Irish Cultural Centre. It was market day and a smell of rotten fruit and vegetables hung in the air as O'Connelly navigated his way around the heaps of garbage, which the municipal cleaning gangs were busily sweeping into piles hurrying to return the street to the lunch time strollers and tourists. He had taken the Metro to Les Goblins and had decided to make the rest of the distance on foot, firstly because the early autumn weather was fine and warm and secondly as he was not sure at which end of the street number 45 was situated. He vaguely knew street numbers in Paris started at the end nearest the River Seine, but the problem was rue Montbelliard ran more or less parallel to the river.

Finally number 45 was tucked in between one of those tiny Parisian art cinemas and a small bookshop, the building was fairly recent. In the recessed entrance he found a plaque with a column of names and their respective intercom buttons. He spotted 'de Lussac' and pressed the button.

O'Connelly waited a moment for a reply, then announced himself to a disembodied voice that instructed him to take the lift to the third floor, there was a click as the entrance door lock was released and he entered into the dimly lit lobby.

O'Connelly, a journalist turned successful writer, had been going through an unproductive period, it was two years since his last book appeared. He had bathed in the lime light of literary success when his second book made it into the top ten best sellers eight years previously. His problem was not that he was short of ideas, but none inspired him enough to sit down and write.

Now a dread about eating into his comfortable capital had started to gnaw at him, something which did not prevent him from spending his money fairly liberally. The royalties from his books had slowed; it was not surprising considering his last book had appeared two years back, though he had recently received a handsome down payment for the film rights to two of his novels.

There had been fewer demands for interviews and he was slowly discovering that success was as ephemeral as the praise for a new book. Books were a business and without a new novel ready for the presses he would fade from the public view. His only alternative was to come up with something new for his publisher, and quickly, or face the grim prospect of being a has been and eventually forced to turn to hack writing political or financial exposés or even worse returning to journalism with its deadlines and stress.

Though O'Connelly had been born in London, his family was Irish, which did not prevent him from growing up more English than Irish. He had studied languages and journalism in London, then spent three years in California at the UCLA International Institute before joining The New York Times and was dispatched to Paris as a correspondent. It was in Paris he discovered the good life, mixing with prominent personalities, wining and dining on his generous

expense account, attending film festivals and reporting on political summits and the usual French scandals.

His visit that morning went back to his contacts with the Irish Cultural Centre, where he had been invited from time to time for literary evenings, art exhibitions and theatrical presentations. In a manner of speaking it was by chance he had discovered the Centre, normally he avoided all things Irish, and small countries in general with their introspective vision of the outside world and the kind of parochial snobbery born of associating with a narrow home made elite.

His first visit to the Cultural Centre had been at the prompting of a friend, Gilles Bruno, who had persuaded O'Connelly to join him for a reading given by a Donegal housewife who had become the darling of Dublin critics with her autobiographical story of a handicapped girl in a small Irish town. Gilles was with Le Figaro, an arts critic, and had an inexplicable passion for all things Irish, as did curiously a good many French people, O'Connelly put it down to some kind of empathy with another enemy of Perfidious Albion. However, Gilles had another motivation, as a bachelor he had discovered it was a good spot to pick up newly arrived Irish girls, girls who had been won grants to study in France, full of enthusiasm and naivety.

Gilles had persuaded O'Connelly to drop by at the Centre, where a cocktail was planned. It was just to fill in an hour or so before dinner, he explained, though in reality he wanted to check out the new arrivals, that is the girls. The occasion was the inauguration of an exhibition for an obscure abstract Irish painter.

O'Connelly quickly scanned the lifeless paintings and observed the pretended interest of the visitors before turning his attention to the meagre cocktail. Up to that point it had been a dull half hour with Gilles disappearing and chatting to the different persons he recognised amongst the crowd.

‘Patrick,’ he said beckoning O’Connelly. ‘Let me introduce you to Laura de la Salle.’

O’Connelly found himself presented to an attractive young woman.

‘Laura is the Centre’s cultural director,’ he said, then maliciously added: ‘She’s a fan of yours.’

To O’Connelly’s surprise she blushed unable to find a suitable *réplique* to Gilles’ remark.

‘Tell me about the Centre,’ said O’Connelly, offering her a life line.

She was seduced by O’Connelly’s easy going style, his indifference to his image as a successful international writer, talking about her interests and not his own. He invited her to join them for dinner, it was impossible her obligations to the painter came first. Finally a place was found for the two intruders at the after cocktail dinner given by the Centre in a nearby restaurant.

O’Connelly discovered Laura’s mother was Irish, a converted Catholic, her grandmother’s family had belonged to the tiny and ever diminishing community of Irish Jews, her father was a prominent French art specialist and critic who had lectured at Trinity College in Dublin where he had met Laura’s mother. She had lived in Ireland on and off graduating in French and English literature in Dublin before studying European history at the Sorbonne.

She persuaded O’Connelly to give a series of readings at the Centre and they agreed to meet the next day for lunch to go over the schedule. He agreed more for Laura than any culture aspect and the next day they found themselves in more relaxed and comfortable surroundings. Neither was a literary snob avoiding so-called intellectual circles, preferring the relaxed company of close friends than the weary pretentious dinners with tormented thinkers. As they got to know each other she discovered the absence of a plan in his career and disconcerted set out to fill his creative void and his

relative indifference to the dilemma, offering him encouragement, but to little avail. O'Connelly seemed indifferent to the fact he had run into a blank wall, he needed something new, he was in a rut, his success had left him satisfied, he needed to be shaken from his routine tranquillity.

O'Connelly's problem was that he procrastinated in everything that was not directly related to his personal needs. His life was comfortable, extremely comfortable by most standards, with the sixth floor penthouse he owned in Paris on quai des Celestines facing Saint Louis en Île, for which he had struggled to keep up the payments until the success of his first book. The apartment was not big, but it was surrounded by a planted terrace that had an impregnable view over the Seine with Notre Dame to the right and the Jardin des Plants to the left. After his second successful book the money poured in and his first real investment, with an eye on the future, was the apartment on Telegraph Hill overlooking the Bay and Alcatraz. More extravagantly he bought a 15 metre motor cruiser that he kept in the Sausalito Marina, where he liked to spend weekends with his friends when the weather was fine.

Isaac de Lussac had discovered the Irish Cultural Centre in the course of his archaeological research work, whilst looking for bibliographical data on an Irish Jesuit priest who had lived in Paris before leaving for Jerusalem in the 19th century. De Lussac had met Laura and told her of his archaeological investigations in Jerusalem, and his difficulties in finding a publisher for the monumental work he had spent ten years in writing. One of the problems was that it was written in French – all 2,800 pages – and the market for such a work as it stood was small if not non-existent. His chances would have been better if it was in English, but the cost of translation was prohibitive, and up to that point he had had little time for such worldly considerations.

Laura recounted the story to O’Connelly who laughed – archaeology was not his thing and the Holy Land even less. His successes had been politico-financial thrillers based on his journalistic experiences in the corridors of European politics. Laura, fascinated by de Lussac’s work, finally persuaded O’Connelly to meet and talk with the archaeologist.

Laura, though a Catholic, treasured her, if not unique, extremely unusual Irish Jewish heritage. At the beginning of the third millennium there remained just a handful of Jews in Ireland, around one thousand including her grandparents.

Her great-great-grandparents had arrived in Dublin in the latter part of the nineteenth century, after fleeing Russia and the pogroms, where they had bought a fine town house in the centre of the city and set up a textile import business. Life in Dublin was peaceful and anti-Semitism was nonexistent given the almost insignificant number of Jews in the country, then part of Great Britain. The ‘troubles’ were still decades away and the Irish independentists a small minority, the country being firmly in the hands of the rich Anglo-Irish gentry.

Since that time the Jews of Ireland had become assimilated through intermarriage, like her mother, or had immigrated either to England or the USA in order to find a suitable Jewish partner in marriage, some chose Israel – where there were more Irish Jews than in Ireland.

Laura’s grand-father, Joseph Briscoe, had been a prominent lawyer and Irish parliamentarian, as a young man he had known Chaim Herzog – who was to become the President of Israel – who had been born in Belfast, where his father was a well-known rabbi.

Though the apartment building where de Lussac lived was modern and in a fashionable district it did not radiate wealth; the lift was *correct* as the French would say. O’Connelly stepped out into a dark corridor on the second floor and fumbled for the light switch, a door

opened and a head appeared. O'Connelly greeted the bespectacled de Lussac, a man of about sixty, recognising his head clean shaven and his smile that displayed solid, but slightly irregular teeth.

'Come in, I'm sorry we couldn't met elsewhere – my mother you know, she suffers from Alzheimer – it's very kind of you to come.'

'Don't mention it, it's no problem,' O'Connelly replied stepping inside the apartment, which at a glance seemed to be composed of three rooms, through an open door he saw the bowed form of an elderly woman watching an old fashioned television set.

'If you don't mind we can talk in my office,' said de Lussac pointing the way. It was a small room that evidently served both as an office and a bedroom. It was Spartan, a single bed to one side and a long built in table to the other, on which stood an ancient desk top computer and a printer. In another corner was a built-in wardrobe and on the floor before it, a huge, though neatly arranged pile of documents and a small bookcase.

'Sit down, here take this chair,' de Lussac said unfolding a collapsible chair.

O'Connelly sat down, not entirely at ease.

'So did Laura tell you about me?' de Lussac said with a very kindly and apparently sincere smile, the smile that doctors and men of God use to assure their patients and parishioners.

'Yes, well not completely, I know that you've worked in Israel, on the site of Temple I believe?'

'Yes, I'm an archaeologist. Some years back I was working on a site near the Dead Sea when Isaac Rabin was assassinated by a fanatic. Up until that time I had not realised or perhaps considered the importance of religion in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I'm a Jew myself, an atheist, and always looked on Israel as the home of the Jews, not in a religious sense but as a nation.'

O'Connelly observed him; he spoke rapidly and with conviction. He had not dressed up for their meeting, his clothes though not threadbare had seen a good deal of wear, his spectacles superannuated.

‘In my research work I came across a 19th century report by a certain Captain Wilson, the chief engineer of the Palestine Survey Fund in the Holy Land, concerning investigations on the underground of the Haram esh-Sharif.’

O'Connelly looked puzzled.

‘Commonly known as the Esplanade of the Mosques.’

‘I see.’

‘In my work as an archaeologist in the Near and Middle East, I have observed how water has played a role in ancient civilisations, in Babylon; the Euphrates, in Egypt; the Nile. That of course doesn't mean that every city was built on a great river. Jerusalem at its origin was a small village where springs and wells provided water. However, as it grew, its need of water also grew, especially for religious needs.’

O'Connelly listened with interest to the lesson in ancient civilisations.

‘But even though the ancients were great hydraulic engineers they had no pumps and no mechanical power, so there were just two possibilities, the first was to sink wells – that is if ground water existed – and the second was to transport the water from a not too distant source. Now Jerusalem, which is to say the Old City, is situated 700 metres above sea level, and water obviously can't flow uphill.’ He smiled obviously enjoying his explanation, though O'Connelly could not yet see where it was leading to.

‘The nearest springs, with sufficient water to supply the city, were the Etam Springs, twenty kilometres to the south of Jerusalem, 800

metres above sea level. So they built an aqueduct to supply what is today the Temple Mount with spring water.'

O'Connelly nodded as de Lussac pulled a map to show the path of the aqueduct.

'That water served the needs of the first Temple of the Jews.'

'Quite an exploit for a temple.'

'Yes, you see the needs were enormous because the rituals in the Temple required the sacrifice of animals.'

'I didn't know that.'

'Sacrifice was practised by the Jews: bulls, rams, sheep.... For Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, tens of thousands of animals were sacrificed. Basically there were two types of sacrifice, a complete sacrifice when the animal was totally burnt on the altar, then a sacrifice when the animal was butchered by the priests, part was kept by them and the rest returned as food to those who had offered it.'

'That's why they are called feast days!'

'Yes, I suppose so.'

'Now, the essential point is this whole process generated a huge quantity of waste blood and viscera, as the animals were slaughtered, skinned and emptied of their innards, before being quartered and butchered. Remember Yom Kippur was the greatest religious feast of Judea and the animals led to the Temple had to be fed and watered as they waited their turn. The floor of the Temple would have been awash in urine and defecation, not to speak of the blood and viscera, unless there had been an enormous quantity of water to wash away the detritus.'

'I see,' said O'Connelly becoming more interested, 'so all this water came from the aqueduct?'

'Yes and no, in fact the water was stored in huge cisterns cut into the rock, supplied not only by the aqueduct, but also by rain water collected during the winter months.'

‘So these cisterns were underground, underneath the Esplanade of Mosques.’

‘Exactly.’

‘And they supplied the Temple?’

‘Yes, by gravity, yes since water cannot not rise by itself, as I said there were no pumps, no electricity or other power, only animal power or human muscle.’

‘So this explains the title of your work.’

‘Yes.’

‘Le Temple dans la vallée,’ he said smiling, ‘The Temple in the Valley.’

‘Well I think I’ve got the idea, the Temple could not have been on top of the mountain, on what is today the Muslim Haram, for the simple reason water cannot flow uphill.’

‘Of course. You see the water was essential for the sacrificial rituals in the Temple.’

‘Sacrificial rituals!’

‘Yes, but not only the sacrificial rituals, it was also for purification, which is at the very heart of the Jewish religion. This purification was codified by the High Priests and extremely complex, from the washing of hands to the complete immersion in a special bath each time a priest entered into the Holy of Holies, the most sacred place in the Temple.’

‘Apart from the archaeological aspect what signification does this have?’

‘It should go a long way resolving the conflict between the Jews and Muslims, since this archaeological work removes one of the sources of conflict where the two different religions claim the same holy site.’

‘So how can I help you?’

‘Well I need to publish this work. I’ve spent ten years research proving that the Temple could not have been on the Haram, a total of two thousand eight hundred pages.’

‘Two thousand eight hundred pages!’ O’Connelly exclaimed, he had never heard of a book two thousand eight hundred pages long, not even the Bible.

‘Yes,’ he replied in that doctor-patient manner. ‘You see I’m an archaeologist, I know very little about books and publishers. There’s another thing...my book is in French and the people I want to target are basically English speaking; Israeli and American Jews, Middle Eastern Arabs, and the negotiators who are mostly Anglo-Saxon. It costs money to translate a book.’

‘Look, I’m not a translator, my publishers are more interested in contemporary fiction and it’s not my agent’s thing either.’

De Lussac seemed unperturbed and pressed on: ‘Look this is an introductory section that describes the essential details, three hundred and fifty pages.’

He handed O’Connelly a printed manuscript bound together in a plastic spine. ‘Why don’t you read this, perhaps it will change your mind.’

O’Connelly left, not very convinced, but he promised he would read the introduction and come back to him very shortly.

4

The Underground Cisterns

DE LUSSAC HAD EXPLAINED to O’Connelly, in detail, how his theory was built around the existence of a system of huge underground

cisterns in the bedrock beneath the Haram esh-Sharif in Jerusalem, the site of the most holy of Muslim mosques. The only detailed study ever carried out had been made in the 19th century by the British Palestinian Survey Fund. De Lussac had studied the topographical contours and elevations of the bedrock traced by the 19th century engineers observing the Temple Mount sloped from north to south, between two enclosed valleys, the Kedron Valley to the east, and the Tyropean Valley to the west.

At its summit, to the north, at a height of 743 metres, stands the *Masjid Qubbat As-Sakhrah* - the Dome of the Rock. The hill was thus protected to the east, west and south by steep slopes. To the north of the Dome of the Rock was a relatively deep transversal depression. These feature therefore formed a natural defence.

It was on this spot that the Citadel of the Hasmoneans was built, which much later became the Citadel of Antonia, built by Herod, and finally the Haram esh-Sharif, where the Jews believe their Temple had once stood.

The City of David stood on a small hill just to the south of the Temple Mount and was supplied with water from the Gihon Spring that was diverted by a tunnel to flow into the Siloam Pool, providing the city with water in the case of siege.

As the city grew an additional supply of water, both for the population and its animals, was necessary and reservoirs were built to the north, the Struthon Pool and the Sheep's Pool connected to the city by aqueducts. However, water could not be brought up to the ancient citadel.

Today the citadel is the Haram, a rectangular platform, partly natural and partly man-made, built around the hill that served as its foundation. The walls that can be seen surround the hill and the space inside, between the sloping surface of the natural rock and the vertical ramparts, was filled in with earth and rubble to form a

horizontal platform, level with the summit of the now hidden hill. Therefore the upper layer of the Haram was made up of earth, rubble and mezzeh – a kind of fossilised clay that is not impermeable and could not have been used for cisterns or conduits.

Beneath the upper layer is an intermediary bed of rock, called Malachite, this is impermeable and is between twenty and thirty metres thick, descending from the summit with a slope of 15° to a depth of about forty metres relative to the Haram's surface, reappearing downhill and outside of the ramparts. Below this is another impermeable layer of rock, called Dolomite. The cisterns were mostly built in the Malachite layer of rock. These cisterns were rediscovered and explored by the 19th century archaeologists and the engineers of the Palestinian Survey Fund, who recorded their details and measurements together with those of the different interconnecting channels and conduits.

The most ancient cisterns were built in the form of an amphora and later, in Roman times, the form of became more rectilinear. Openings situated at ground level could be used as well shafts or channels to collect rainwater whilst others were used as water supply conduits or access for maintenance. In the same manner stairways were progressively built into the rock to facilitate access for workers during the construction of the cistern. These stairways could later constitute passage ways for drawing water or for the adjustment of weirs and other arrangements installed to control the flow of water as well as for maintenance of the installations. Certain older cisterns were later enlarged and transformed by masonry works.

The aqueduct supplying water from the Etam Spring was directly connected into five underground cisterns situated at the southern extremity of the bedrock. These five cisterns held a total of almost thirty million litres of water.

De Lussac therefore concluded that the Temple must have been situated downstream of the underground cisterns on the principal that the water could not have been brought up to the level of the Haram in sufficient quantities by hand – noting that the pulley was invented by Archytas between 460 and 365BC, half a millennium after Solomon – thus positioning the site below the Triple Gate beneath the southern rampart of the Haram, where he theorised water could gush out at the greatest possible pressure onto the Temple’s platform.

During Herod’s reign and the reconstruction of the second Temple, the whole of the city’s water supply system was reorganised and improved with the help of Roman technology and Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa the son-in-law of the Roman Emperor.

5

An Outline

then even a piglet shines and even a sow wears silk
Kanteletar

THE TRAFFIC WAS SNARLED-UP, it was mid-morning Monday and the rain did nothing to help the pre-holiday period rush in central Paris. By the time O’Connelly neared his agent’s office, situated on rue de Rivoli between the Louvre and place de la Concorde, the rain had started to ease off. He dropped his car at an underground car park near Pyramids and made the last few blocks on foot.

The façade of the building dated from the 18th century, but once inside he was in a modern office building. He took the lift to the fourth floor and made his way to his literary agent’s office suite.

Angela Steiner was a New Yorker who had settled in France where she set up the agency with a Frenchman, Henri Rubenstein. They mostly handled the rights for American and British best sellers for the French market.

There were few American writers in Paris, the City of Light was no longer an incubator for unknown foreign writers and future literary prize winners. The Hemingways, Orwells and Baldwins were ancient history. Rubenstein looked after the French and European publishers and a string of writers with more than a sprinkling of France's professional penseurs, who were still, in O'Connelly's opinion, regretfully taken seriously, especially by themselves.

He greeted the secretary, a new girl, who indicated a seat. Ten minutes later he was still looking at his watch, it was not the red carpet treatment he had become used to. Thinking about it he realised that his last visit to Angela's office went back quite a few months. Still, his royalties continued to be flow into his bank accounts, mainly from foreign translations, and apart from cocktails and special events most of his professional contacts with Angela had been by phone. Five minutes later he was shown into her office, she greeted him with a brilliant smile, warmly embracing him.

'So how are you Pat, what's new?'

They sat down on a couch before a low table.

'Some coffee?'

He nodded.

'Well how's the new book,' she said hopefully.

He shrugged.

'I see.'

The secretary placed the coffees on the table and Angela lit a cigarette.

'What are your plans then?'

For the first time O'Connelly felt hopeless, his confidence stalled, he picked up his coffee winning time to think, then for some unknown reason he announced: 'I met an archaeologist.'

'Oh,' she drew on her cigarette looking at him curiously. She was just over forty, dark haired and very attractive, but very attached to her career as a successful literary agent.

'He's discovered the true site of the Temple in Jerusalem.'

'The true site!' she said sitting upright. She was a Jew, not religious, but attached to the Yiddish traditions of her family and a keen supporter of modern Israel.

'Yes, I met him and we talked about his book.'

'A book!'

'Don't get excited, it's an archaeological work – 2,800 pages.'

'Oh.'

'Actually it's quite interesting, but not commercial.'

'You've read it then,' she said visibly taking a not very interested attitude.

'Yes, no, not exactly, but as I said it's quite interesting.'

'It's a pity it's scientific...if you see what I mean, there's quite an interest in that kind of a subject.'

'What do you mean?'

'I don't have to tell you there's quite a few best sellers with some historical background, you know.'

'Half truth, half reason!'

'They sell by the millions,' she said reproachfully.

He shrugged.

'What does your archaeologist friend have in mind?'

'He wants his book published.'

'Not the slightest chance.'

He shrugged he hadn't expected anything else and wondered why he had mentioned it before remembering his scrambling for an answer to Angela's question.

'So speaking about your project...'

He looked glumly into his empty coffee cup.

'Okay, let's get some lunch,' she said standing up.

They walked to Chez Philippe five minutes from the office, a typical French bistrot. They were naturally greeted by Philippe, the bistrot's garrulous patron in his white apron and toque.

'*Bonjour Monsieur l'Ambassador, Madame, a table for two?*'

The bistro employed two persons, Philippe and the chef who worked in the kitchen. There were eight tables and the food was excellent. O'Connelly ordered *foie de veau à l'anglaise*, Angela lamb cutlets, and bottle of Brouilly.

'Look Pat, let me speak frankly, this is the advice of a friend, if you want to transform the success of your books into something more than just a passing event you have to come up with something new quickly.'

He poured himself another glass of wine and ordered two cafés.

'What about this Temple thing? Can you make something from that?'

'My books are politico-finance fiction, what can I do with a Temple.'

'It could be a good thriller, archaeology, the conflict in the Holy Land, intrigue.'

'What about my archaeologist?'

'Promise him a translation, you should not have too much difficulty to find a hard up translator?' she said looking at him questioningly.

He ordered two more cafés.

'If you come up with an outline I can guarantee you Hertzfeld will jump on it, plus of course a nice down payment.'

O'Connelly perked up, it was the best suggestion he had heard for some time.

‘How much?’

‘You’re not hard up?’ she said with a slightly worried look on her face.

‘No, of course not, it’s just a thought.’

‘I think an advance of one hundred thousand could be managed, it would pay for any research work, you know in Jerusalem,’ she smiled, ‘and then we’ll see how it progresses.’

He made a mental calculation, if the book was a success sales with good marketing world wide sales could reach at least five hundred thousand, that could net him...he snapped out of his day dream.

‘Okay, I’ll speak with my archaeologist.’

6

A Little Research

A FEW DAYS LATER he had still not re-contacted de Lussac, but had spent time researching the history of the Temple. There was a mass of Internet sites, most were serious; historical, political and religious sites, but there were also a good number of extremist sites of every of leaning, including Israeli and Arab nationalists, and a quantity of NGOs dedicated to peace, not to speak of tourist organisations and of course the usual crazies.

It was no surprise; on occasions in the past he had covered events related to the Middle East in Paris: visits of heads of state, peace conferences, oil crises, wars and terrorist attacks. He had never really interested himself in the roots of the region’s long drawn out

problems, in spite of his interest in history, modern and ancient, he had never thought of its link with the real world.

As different ideas came into his head he decided a walk across Saint Louis en Ile to the Latin Quarter would be in order. Walking and looking at people in the cafés, people going about their business, stimulated his imagination. As he strolled along the boulevard Saint Geramin he remebered a second-hand English bookshop run by an American on rue Monsieur le Prince, where he knew he could find out of print books and books dating back to the twenties of thirties that gave a different perspective of history, history as seen in those decades.

Perhaps he could find a guide to Israel or something on its history. He found both, first a 1949 Guide Bleu in good condition with fold out maps, interesting because it pre-dated fifty years of political events and appeared to be concentrated on Israel's ancient monuments and ruins. Then to his surprise he found a 1950 copy of Archaeology in Israel, he felt pleased with himself, they were a good buy and would provide a good background to the ancient history of the Near East.

He felt the first stirrings of enthusiasm as he walked up to the Jardins de Luxembourg, where he found a chair by the circular pond and started to explore the contents of his two finds, refreshing his mind on the formative history of the modern Middle East and the geography of Israel, or to be precise Israel and Palestine according to the 1949 boundaries described in the Guide Bleu.

A couple of hours later back in his apartment he took a cold beer from the fridge – the weather was beginning to feel hot – then grabbing de Lussac's introductory section of three hundred and fifty pages he stepped out onto the terrace, adjusted a parasol and settled himself on a comfortable chaise longue. Clearly there were enough ingredients to make a novel, but what would de Lussac think? The

man had spent ten years of his life writing a serious work. O'Connelly picked up the bound volume and started to turn the pages.

The history of Israel was more than just interesting, a series of disasters, exiles, destruction, invasions and conquest. Assyrians, Persians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, Ottomans, British and finally the rebirth of a nation from the ashes of a war inflicted on them by an alliance of neighbours sworn to destroy them.

The problem was how to make sense of de Lussac's work, filled with endless repetition, an arcane vocabulary, an elliptical syntax and an excessive use of multiple adjectives, in short in its actual form it was unreadable. However, apart from its value as an archaeological work, for which O'Connelly was incapable of making a judgement, it could form the background for a good story.

De Lussac had clearly explained his own motivations; to demonstrate the present day conflict was based on an erroneous belief, the cause of a murderous dispute over Jerusalem and its most holy site, which that he believed, would be resolved as a result of his research and discovery.

If O'Connelly agreed to accept the task of having the book translated into English, at his own expense, perhaps he could persuade de Lussac to agree to an abbreviated version more accessible to a broader public. As to the French version he would have to find a specialised publisher, perhaps a religious foundation. He would talk with Laura, if anybody had contacts with religious organisations it would certainly be the Irish, he remember her talking of the St Patrick's Day mass, where a good number of people from different interdenominational groups had been present or invited to the reception afterwards.

Water and Purification

O'CONNELLY'S RESEARCH REVEALED that in the ancient Hebrew's religion water played a primordial role for purification in the Temple, the focal point of their religion. De Lussac had theorised that the underground water system arranged in a cascade structure – an extremely difficult engineering task in ancient times – had in reality been designed to obey biblical laws related to the purifying power of living, or running water, water which if held stagnant would have lost its power of purification. The purifying power of the stored water was maintained by the constant addition of fresh running spring water, carried to the Temple Mount by an aqueduct. The purified water flowed downwards in a continuous stream, cascading through the heart of bedrock, to the Temple, thus supplying the necessary washing water in total compliance with the Talmudic instructions for purification.

It is quite probable that when Herod rebuilt the Temple the older cisterns were modified in a more rational system. The works of Herod, in general but more specifically those designated for the Temple, not only bore the mark of Roman influence, but also that of a close collaboration between the Jewish and Roman engineers.

This cooperation was no doubt due to the admiration that Herod held for Roman civilisation and the friendship that bound him to Agrippa, who was responsible for the monumental water works built in the Roman Empire under the Emperor Augustus.

Flavius Josephus wrote in his work the Antiquities of the Jews:

When Herod had dispatched these affairs, and he understood that Marcus Agrippa had sailed again

out of Italy into Asia, he made haste to him, and besought him to come into his kingdom, and to partake of what he might justly expect from one that had been his guest, and was his friend. This request he greatly pressed, and to it Agrippa agreed, and came into Judea: whereupon Herod omitted nothing that might please him. He entertained him in his new-built cities, and showed him the edifices he had built, and provided all sorts of the best and most costly dainties for him and his friends and that at Sebaste and Caesarea, about the port he had built.... He also conducted him to the city of Jerusalem, where all the people met him in their festive garments, and received him with acclamations. Agrippa offered a hecatomb of sacrifices to God; and feasted the people, without omitting any of the greatest dainties that could be gotten. He took so much pleasure there, that he dwelt there many days with them, and would willingly have stayed longer, but that the season of the year made him haste away; for as the winter was coming on, he thought it not safe to go to sea later, and yet he was of necessity to return again to Ionia.

Herod's admiration or dependence on Rome was such that he named many towns and fortresses he built after the emperor and the members of his family.

Concerning the construction of the Temple, Herod imposed his own architectural and decorative notions on the priests, which were

radically different from those that had governed the construction of the old Temple. He constructed a special platform above the Sanctuary with stairwells that allowed him to descend into the Holy of Holies hidden from the view of the priests.

Herod also provoked a revolt of pious Jews and Pharisees by profaning the Temple adding a golden imperial Roman eagle, which was brutally put down in blood in the usual Roman fashion. But he was not satisfied with erecting the Roman eagle symbolising the power of Augustus, the Divine Emperor, the King of the Jews also engraved the door of the Temple with Agrippa's name.

The eagle that had been a festering sore was finally removed towards the end of Herod's reign. Many scholars tried though with little success to locate the eagle more specifically within the Temple. Some placed it on the main façade of the Temple. Others placed it over the main gate, as a sculpture of the pediment, corresponding with other temples of the period. The image of the eagle was often placed on the façades of temples in Rome and Syria and was the symbol for the god Baal Shamin, as can be seen on lintels of the Temple of Baal Shamin in Palmyra. The eagle can also be seen killing a snake appears on the coins and in the monumental sculpture of the Nabatean kingdom.

In any case the fact that King Herod had added the imperial eagle constituted in itself a grave violation of the rules, according to which only the priests had the right to supervise construction work in the new Temple.

It was impossible that the door of the Temple could have a pagan name even if it was the name of the Vice-Emperor of Rome, Agrippa. According to Flavius Josephus, no one would have dared publicly protest and Josephus himself does not seem to have been really shocked by the idea.

De Lussac hypothesised that the animals to be sacrificed in the Temple were stabled in an area that is today called Solomon's Stables, which dates from the time of Herod and was believed by de Lussac to have been a vast holding area where the animals were watered and fed as they waited their turn to be led to the place of sacrifice, in the Court of the Priests, since it was improbable that a large number of animals would have been allowed to wander or gather in the other courts or steps of the Sanctuary.

Flavius Josephus noted that several thousands of animals were sacrificed on one single day. It was therefore logical to think these animals were gathered together in stables close by the Temple, as many had certainly arrived from distant towns and villages, equipped with watering troughs and a continuous supply of fresh water and where the animals would have been washed after their journey to Jerusalem.

The owners of animals, who led them to the Court of the Sanctuary to present them to the priests, would have also been purified before penetrating with their animals into the Sanctuary. Thus it is probable that alongside the watering troughs for the animals, washing rooms with mikvehs, or lavers, were built for those who led the animals to sacrifice.

On this point it is useful to note that the technique used by the Agrippa's hydraulic engineers, was first employed in Imperial Rome for the Cloaca Maxima as a powerful flushing systems to evacuate the detritus that filled the sewers and cesspools that Agrippa had methodically renovated throughout the city.

This same principal was applied for the city of Caesarea, built by Herod in honour of Augustus, where the engineers probably advised by Agrippa, had designed an almost horizontal flushing system to clean the sewers of the city by propelling flood tide waters through a

network of specially designed channels, as recorded by Nicolas of Damascus and Flavius Josephus.

The retention, storage, filtration and ritual circulation of purification waters supplied from Solomon's Pool plus the rainwater stored in the underground cisterns of the Haram, posed enormous maintenance and flow problems, during the greatly varying seasons in Israel: the dry season, the wet seasons and the season of melting snows.

Wilson of the Palestinian Survey Fund reported that all of the cisterns were interconnected by a network of canals cut into the rock in such a fashion so that when one of the cisterns was full, the overflow could flow to the following cistern and so on, with the final overflow carried by canal to the Kedron Valley.

8

Purification in the Temple

THE NEXT THING O'CONNELLY had to clarify was the link between the underground water cisterns and the Temple itself, or more specifically the precise reasons behind the need for purification, plunging himself into the complex rites of worship of the ancient Hebrews.

The worship of the Hebrew's god implied purification and this purification required a constant supply of pure running water according to their religious laws. Thus the theory was that these huge giant cisterns were positioned in cascade upstream of the Temple, so as to provide an unlimited supply of running water to ensure the rites of purification were in strict conformity with the religious principles.

The Sanctuary of the Temple contained the Covenant between God and his Chosen People. Therefore to celebrate the permanent nature of the Covenant, different rituals were established to demonstrate the Jewish people's commitment to the Covenant. These rituals included purification, sacrifices, offerings and prayers.

These rituals were exercised by priests of the family of Moses, that is to say by the descendants of his brother Aaron, who in their duties as priests were aided by the members of the Tribe of Moses, the Levites, who were equally exclusively consecrated to the worship in the Temple.

To be worthy of this Covenant, the Eternal demanded that the Jewish people be 'pure' or 'purified' as proof of their devotion, their respect of his rules, and their exclusive commitment to him.

Jewish texts were cited by de Lussac providing a list of what was considered as 'pure' and 'impure', some of which were given in the Book of Leviticus:

When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean.

If a man lies with a woman and there is a seminal emission, they shall both bathe in water and be unclean until evening.

When a woman has a discharge, if her discharge in her body is blood, she shall continue in her menstrual impurity for seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening.

There are animals that are pure and animals that are impure. All direct or indirect contact, with impure animals renders man impure.

All cadavers, human or animal, are impure. All direct or indirect contact, with impure animals renders man impure.

If a man lies with a woman and there is a seminal emission, they shall both bathe in water and be unclean until evening.

The leper and all infectious disease having a bodily manifestation render impure. All direct or indirect contact, with this sick person renders man impure.

Mould on clothing or on the walls of a house renders all contact impure.

Objects and recipients having been in contact with something impure, or having belonged to non-Jews, are impure.

Other human beings, in particular, could be 'temporarily' impure, for example:

During menstruation

Men and woman having had a sexual discharge, normal or abnormal, or have had sexual relations

Persons affected by skin disease including lepers, and those having had sexual relations

Those persons having committed a grave moral fault

All contact with an impure person also rendered the Jew impure.

Human beings, temporarily impure, could be purified by the appropriate rites.

The same goes for certain objects, recipients, homes or places that could have been rendered temporarily impure and could also be purified by the appropriate rites.

Different methods of purification had been decreed by Moses. The purpose of all purification was to allow the person who had become temporarily impure to return to the community so that he could again take part in the sacred rituals of the Temple.

The Lord also spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying:

Thus you shall keep the sons of Israel separated from their uncleanness, so that they will not die in their uncleanness by their defiling my tabernacle that is among them.

There was relatively little information concerning the system of purification with running water as it was practised in the Temple of Jerusalem. However, Jewish texts provided some information relative to these rituals.

The Jew, who became impure by direct contact with an impure person, or by contact with an impure animal or object, or by eating an impure food, had to undergo a complex purification process so as to be readmitted to the Temple and the community.

The purification of Jews having become impure went from simple washing of the body and clothes to the total immersion of their naked body in the running waters of a spring. For lesser impurity, purification was carried out in the evening at sunset. Concerning impurity over a period of time, such as in the case of menstruation or following birth or illness, several days or even weeks were

prescribed before purification could be definitely pronounced and celebrated by a priest.

Other forms of purification were carried out by the sprinkling with holy oil and or the blood of an animal sacrificed in the sanctuary by a priest with the impure person standing outside of the Tent of Meeting. Then there was the sprinkling of the impure person with purifying water by the priest, this water included the ashes of the Red Heifer, which had been sacrificed and burnt. Purification was also carried out by destruction, fire or washing with the immersion of recipients, objects or places that had become impure.

The most complete and demanding ritual concerning the integral process of purification by water was given in details relative to a man having an infection of his sexual organs.

The Lord also spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them:

This, moreover, shall be his uncleanness in his discharge: it is his uncleanness whether his body allows its discharge to flow or whether his body obstructs its discharge.

Every bed on which the person with the discharge lies becomes unclean, and everything on which he sits becomes unclean.

Anyone, moreover, who touches his bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening, and whoever sits on the thing on which the man with the discharge has been sitting, shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening.

Also whoever touches the person with the discharge shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening.

Now when the man with the discharge becomes cleansed from his discharge, then he shall count off for himself seven days for his cleansing; he shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in running water and will become clean. Then on the eighth day he shall take for himself two turtle doves or two young pigeons, and come before the Lord to the doorway of the tent of meeting and give them to the priest and the priest shall offer them, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the Lord because of his discharge.

Now if a man has a seminal emission, he shall bathe all his body in water and be unclean until evening.

As for any garment or any leather on which there is seminal emission, it shall be washed with water and be unclean until evening.

If a man lies with a woman and there is a seminal emission, they shall both bathe in water and be unclean until evening.

When a woman has a discharge, if her discharge in her body is blood, she shall continue in her menstrual impurity for seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening.

Thus the notion of purification by ‘running water’ was established and defined in Hebrew as *mayim hayyim*, gushing directly from a natural spring, as opposed to ‘drawn water’ or *mayim she’uvim*, that is water removed from its natural source and flow, meaning conveyed by the hand of man.

The word *mikveh* designated a bath, natural or man made, for ritual bathing, by total immersion in living spring waters, without the direct intervention by man in the flow of the purifying waters.

Thus this was how the purification ritual acquired its sacred ritual character, culminating in the Temple of Jerusalem on the Day of Atonement for the purification of all Israel, when the sins committed by all Jews were atoned for.

There were six degrees in the classification of mikvehs, these included bathing under falling rain, in well water, hot springs and running spring water, the most pure was spring water mixed with the ashes of the Red Heifer. However, water drawn from wells had a lower degree of purity compared to running spring water.

9

The Trust

LAURA PRODUCED THE LIST of interreligious organisations based in Paris she had copied from the Irish Cultural Centre's records. O’Connelly was surprised at the number and their diversity; there was also a brief profile of each organisation. Together they proceeded by eliminating Buddhists, Taoists and all those not present in the Holy Land then drew up a short-list of organisations with Jewish and Muslim links since it was their Holy Sites – and in

particular the Temple Mount – which lay at the heart of the politico-ideological dispute between the two religions.

Laura pointed to a name on page 4, ‘This one looks interesting. I checked it on the web this afternoon, it seems that their main vocation is peace. They believe peace between the Muslims and the Jews will resolve most of the problems.’

‘Good for them.’

‘They also have also have a publishing activity, nothing exciting, collected interviews, fairly low key books, plus brochures and pamphlets...they have a nice Internet site.’

‘Do you think they’d be interested in the Temple work?’

She shrugged.

‘Do you know these people?’

‘I spoke with their communications and editorial man.’

‘And...’

‘He’s not the decider, the key person is Alfred Mann, the founder.’

‘He’s Jewish?’

‘No, Swiss.’

‘It’s some kind of an association?’

‘To be exact it’s a Swiss trust.’

‘A trust, then they’ve got money?’

Laura laughed: ‘No, it’s not the Rothschild Foundation, even though it is a charitable trust it’s not rich – a long, long, way from it.’

‘They have an office in Paris?’

‘Yes, a small office near Bastille.’

‘How does it work then?’

‘It’s a non-profit making organisation dedicated to public good, they collect donations from the general public, businesses, the state, the European Union and foreign governments, but mainly from other trusts including the Rosenstein Trust.’

‘This Alfred Mann?’

‘He’s a charismatic do gooder.’

‘What’s his exact role?’

‘He’s one of the founders, I think there are two, I’m not sure.’

‘What’s it called?’

‘The Abraham Heritage Trust.’

‘It sounds Jewish.’

‘Silly, the sons of Abraham are the Jews *and* the Arabs...look here’s their telephone number.’

‘Let’s call them.’

O’Connelly dialled the number on his mobile, waited for a few seconds, then asked for Alfred Mann.

‘I’ll see if he’s here, who wants to speak with him?’

‘I’m Patrick O’Connelly of Independent Press Associates.’

Mann was in Paris, O’Connelly’s press card always did the trick, he had held on to it, it was worth its weight in gold, a real open sesame.

O’Connelly introduced himself to Alfred Mann who at once agreed to a meeting – like any good communicator would have – it paid to have good relations with the press. Mann proposed they meet at the George V, where he was attending a conference, the next day at eleven.

The next morning the concierge at the George V discretely pointed out Alfred Mann who was already waiting for O’Connelly in the lobby. He presented himself to Mann, who at first view seemed a fairly ordinary looking individual, simply dressed, of average height, silver hair and a close cut beard of the same colour. However, once Mann spoke he radiated a silent force that O’Connelly immediately sensed and could not help thinking he had a Christ like aura. When Mann smiled it was evident he inspired his followers, he was in fact far from ordinary, even noble looking with a regular sincere face,

white well formed even teeth, he looked like a man who could be believed and followed.

Alfred Mann's manner was above all sincere; he radiated charisma, though casual detractors could have said he was a bleeding heart. He had commenced his career with the Red Cross and then working with other NGOs, he organized aid for war zones and lands struck by natural disaster, revolution, famine and drought. As often happens one of the successful NGOs he headed got caught in a quagmire of politic wrangling, jealousy and accusations, and he was forced to resign. Wiser he sought another path and after crossing his own wilderness he founded a Trust based in his home town of Wintertur nearby Zurich. Gathering a tight team of loyal followers, he focused the trust's attentions on the Middle East conflict and more specifically that which had embroiled Palestine and Israel for decades, seeking an alternative route to peace based mutual comprehension and acceptance of the other.

They found a quiet corner in the bar of the luxurious Parisian hotel, there were very few people at that time of the day, it was too early for lunch and too late for breakfast. O'Connelly talked of de Lussac, presenting him to Mann as some kind of discovery, he was convincing, it came as second nature to a successful writer and a former foreign press correspondence. He then hinted to Mann he had signed the foreign publishing rights – for an English language edition – offering him the exclusivity of the French language version, though he not hide the fact the de Lussac's work needed substantial rewriting in order to reach a non-specialist public. He convinced Mann of his own sincerity and his own readiness to finance the translation

After listening to O'Connelly for just a few minutes, Alfred Mann nodded in tacit agreement; the Trust was definitely interested in publishing the book. He seemed to have seized the historical value of

de Lussac's work, instinctively sensing the impact it could have on the different religious communities present in Jerusalem.

That same evening O'Connelly called de Lussac and invited him to lunch the next day in a small traditional French restaurant at the upper end of rue Montbelliard.

De Lussac was not any better dressed when he met O'Connelly at the street entrance to his apartment building, he wore a faded purple pullover, shapeless trousers and a pair of old loafers. The weather was warm and they opted for a pavement table at the restaurant. O'Connelly proposed an aperitif that was politely refused, de Lussac was obviously an aesthete who by choice lived frugally, it was understandable he had spent his life exploring ancient ruins across the globe where camp life was spartan and evenings spent writing arcane reports under the dim flickering light of acetylene lamps.

'So Isaac, I have some good news, I think I have found a publisher for your work.'

De Lussac's face broke into a broad smile, mixed between joy and triumph, his eyes shone behind his smudged glasses, the frames of which were badly in need of repair.

'That's wonderful news,' he said suddenly standing up, almost knocking over the table, and holding out his hand.

O'Connelly, a little surprised by the reaction, barely had time to push his chair back and grab the table, before grasping De Lussac's outstretched hand.

'There's a few details we have to agree on,' O'Connelly said.

De Lussac's face clouded.

'There's no problem, let me explain,' he said realising that de Lussac would agree to almost anything, his motivations were founded purely on a burning desire to be recognised for his years of labour.

‘As you know I’m in the publishing business...journalism, not to mention my own successful books. What I’m proposing is the following; I will invest in your work, represent you, and finance the translation of your work into English.’

O’Connelly paused to measure de Lussac’s reaction, he saw his eyes glow. It was almost as if he had seen the resurrection of the Christ, he thought before recalling the man was a Jew.

‘I have prepared an agreement,’ he said, taking several sets of paper from an envelope, he handed one to de Lussac. ‘Here, this is a simple agreement. First we shall publish an abbreviated version in French...with a complete version later in a second phase.’

De Lussac nodded and O’Connelly made a sign to the waiter to bring a bottle of rosé, but to hold off a while on the menu.

‘An English abbreviated version will be published in parallel.’

De Lussac scanned the papers, perhaps he was a good archaeologist, but he was a poor businessman, not realizing his work could not go far as it stood.

‘Listen Pat,’ de Lussac said obviously feeling more at ease. ‘I know very little about publishing, but I have total faith in Laura’s judgement, where do I sign?’

O’Connelly was surprised; he had expected more resistance and the need for more convincing. He pointed to the bottom of the sheet and offered his ballpoint; he then added his own signature and repeated the process for the copies.

The waiter opened the wine and stood by as O’Connelly went through the ritual of tasting it, then turned to fill de Lussac’s glass, who had hesitatingly placed his hand over it, the smilingly accepted.

‘Just this once – to celebrate. Here’s to our cooperation,’ he said beaming with satisfaction.

‘To success,’ O’Connelly said downing his wine and picking up the menu: ‘Let’s order.’

He handed de Lussac his copy of the agreement and slipped his own into the envelope.

‘When do we start?’

‘Now, today.’

‘Wonderful, after lunch I’ll give you the discs with the full manuscript plus the maps and diagrams that go with it.’

O’Connelly left de Lussac’s apartment with two CDs containing the entire manuscript of the Temple and a heavy bound paper copy. Before taking the Metro he called Laura to meet him at his apartment as soon as she could get away from the Centre.

Late that afternoon, seated on the terrace under a parasol, O’Connelly flipped through the manuscript whilst Laura checked the disc on her laptop. The terrace, facing directly south ran along three sides of the penthouse apartment, was comfortably wide, three and a half metres, fitted with teak flooring and garden furniture, surrounded by flowering plants and the potted olive trees and palms, it had cost him a small fortune to design and furnish, and it included an automatic sprinkler system to ensure the survival of the plants during his often long absences.

It was worth it, the apartment building had been built in the late twenties and stood on quai des Celestines with an uninterrupted view from the sixth floor penthouse apartment that overlooked the Seine and Saint Louis en Ile, to the left were the towers of Notre Dame and in the distance the Eiffel Tower. With the relative silence it offered it was an ideal place to relax and work. He had bought the apartment from his predecessor at The New York Times was retiring and planned to return to the USA, unluckily for him it was just when the bottom had fallen out of the property market some fifteen years earlier, and desperate to sell he unloaded it to O’Connelly for a bargain price. The apartment had required substantial work and it

was not until his books had become best sellers did he have the means to invest in its modernisation.

‘He’s leaving for Cambodia on Saturday,’ he told Laura.

‘Who?’

‘De Lussac.’

‘What!’

‘Yes, he’s taking off.’

‘He didn’t mention that to me,’ he said surprised at the sudden news.

‘That’s funny.’

‘Isn’t that a problem for us?’

‘No,’ she said not too convincingly, ‘not really.’

‘Why Cambodia?’

‘A dig he said, a temple site or something like that.’

‘Another temple! For how long?’

‘Six months he wasn’t sure.’

‘And the book?’

He slid the agreement across the table to her.

‘Fantastic!’

‘Yes, all we’ve got to do is get it published, translated it into English and write a novel.’

Laura laughed: ‘So you’ll be busy.’

‘By the way did you dig up anything on Alfred Mann, where he gets his money from?’

‘They get their money mostly from Jewish foundations, including the Rosenstein Foundation, the Arab Emirates, the European Union and various other sources. They organised a conference earlier this year in Zurich, an interreligious peace congress, Jews and Muslims.’

‘Jews and Muslims?’

‘A congress for peace between Jews and Muslims.’

‘Good luck to them! At least it will keep them busy for a long time.’

‘Don’t be so cynical.’

‘So can they keep their promise?’

‘For peace?’

‘Don’t be daft,’ he said laughing, ‘publishing de Lussac’s book!’

‘Why not.’

‘Okay then, I’d better start working on an outline for Angela.’

‘Great Pat.’

‘By the way thanks, it was you who came up with the idea, de Lussac has a total confidence in you, what did you do to him?’

‘I just promised I’d help him, he seemed sincere.’

‘Yeah, like your stray dogs.’

She frowned.

‘Sorry, let’s go out and eat something.’

‘Fine, the translation, I can look after that if you pay me enough.’

‘I’ll pay you in kind.’

She whacked him with de Lussac’s manuscript, picked up her bag and headed for the door with O’Connolly on her heels. They ordered a beef bulgoki in a small Korean restaurant a few doors along the boulevard, then turned to discussing a story line for the book.

‘Have you been to Israel?’

‘Yes, following up the peace process, when they tried to get Camp David back on the rails, you know new investments, rebuilding Gaza, when things were more optimistic, that was some time before the Second Intifada.’

‘Did you visit Jerusalem.’

‘Yes, you know the usual kind of tourist visits, the Wailing Wall, the Holy Sepulchre’

‘And the Esplanade?’

‘Yes.’

‘Perhaps you should go back, get some inspiration?’

‘Why?’

‘You know, get a feeling for the place, the atmosphere.’

‘You’ve got itchy feet?’

‘Me!’

‘Why not,’ he said warming to the idea of a few days with Laura away from Paris.

‘I don’t know if I can get off.’

‘Tell Mary Collins your old Jewish grandmother is dying.’

‘You’ll burn in hell O’Connelly.’

‘That’s possible if I don’t come up with a story, de Lussac’s Temple is the stage and backcloth, I have find to find the actors and the plot.’

‘The Holy Land is full of stories, war, religion, history...just use your imagination.’

‘If you like,’ he said ordering another Korean beer.

‘Look you said the de Lussac’s Temple site wouldn’t settle anything, why not start by investigating his theory.’

‘Good idea. By the way I don’t know very much about de Lussac.’

‘To be honest me neither.’

‘He said he was a Jew, Isaac sounds Jewish enough.’

‘De Lussac doesn’t sound very Kosher.’

‘If you ask me he looks like a Jesuit.’

‘He mentioned he lived for many years in Israel and speaks Hebrew.’

‘Perhaps it wouldn’t do any hard to find out a little more about him.’

O’Connelly spent the next three days in front of his portable computer writing and rewriting an outline. Finally he felt satisfied with its fluidity and mailed it to Angela, then made himself a sandwich, took a cold beer and Le Monde and feeling very pleased

with himself settled down under a parasol to ponder over the next moves.

10

Hertzfeld

HE WAS WOKEN BY THE SHRILL RINGING of his mobile, as he fumbled for it he glanced at his watch, it just after three in the afternoon, he had been asleep for more than two hours.

‘Hello, Pat! Are you all right?’

‘Yes, Angela? Sorry I must have dozed off.’

‘It’s all right for some!’

‘You get my mail?’

‘Yes that’s what I called about. Look Pat, Jason Hertzfeld is here with me. Are you free to come over to the office?’

‘Right now?’

‘Yes, Jason’s got tight schedule, he’s leaving for Tel-Aviv tomorrow morning.’

‘Okay, I’ll be there in an hour,’ he said hanging up.

Hertzfeld was one of the senior partners at Bernstein Press, O’Connelly’s New York publisher.

As soon as he arrived at Angela’s office he was shown into the meeting room and a few moments later she arrived with Hertzfeld.

‘How are you Pat, nice to see you again.’

They shook hands and Angela invited him to sit down.

‘Pat, we’ve read the outline and Jason likes it,’ she said turning towards Hertzfeld and smiling.

‘That’s right Pat, it has all the makings of a good story.’

O’Connelly could not help beaming with pleasure.

‘The international situation over the last few years has changed, and novels have changed with it, Cold War epics into terrorist and religious thrillers, you know the clash of civilisations.’

‘Sure, times have changed since Bush the father went into Iraq.’

‘Dan Brown is the hottest thing in the market today and has set the trend for this kind of novel.’

‘We’re in the twenty first century even Jean le Carre has had to find something different, you know ‘The Constant Gardener’.

‘Since 911 terror is big business in books and films. People need things that fit in with what the media feeds them, bombs in the subway, bombs in tourist resorts, Egypt, Bali, Kenya.’

‘And some kind of convincing ideological-philosophical motivation.’

‘Islam, religion, Israel, Al Qaeda!’

‘I see, so that’s where the Temple comes in.’

‘You’ve got it! The Temple is in the middle of Jerusalem, that’s at the very heart of the three great monotheist religions, and Israel is at the heart of the Middle East conflict,’ Hertzfeld said triumphantly, pleased that O’Connelly followed his reasoning.

Angela gave O’Connelly one of the smiles she usually reserved for her money winners, a smile he hadn’t seen for some time.

‘You may or may not know it, but we do some of our printing in Israel, near Tel-Aviv, I get over there quite a bit, so I’m fairly familiar with the situation there. Getting to the point Pat, I like the outline and we’re ready to invest in your book, Angela will work out the conditions.’

‘That’s good news Jason, thank you...’ he said hesitatingly looking at Angela who read his mind.

‘We’ve agreed to make an advance of fifty thousand Euros... and fifty more on the receipt of outline and first chapters,’ she said smiling.

O'Connelly grinned, he couldn't hide his pleasure, it was confirmation they still believed in him, in spite of the relatively lack lustre performance of his last book.

'Oh Pat, just one point, have you anything special on for the next few days?' said Hertzfeld in a tone that was more a demand than a question, bringing O'Connelly back to the fact that publishing was a business.

He raised his eyebrows questioningly.

'Can you join me in Tel-Aviv?'

'Tel-Aviv?'

'Sure Tel-Aviv, it would be nice if you could meet some of my friends like the Kleins.'

'The Kleins?'

'Yes, three brothers, some of Israel's most outstanding scientists in the field of archaeology.'

'When?'

'Say the day after tomorrow, we can look over the Old City together, Angela will look after the expenses.'

'Why not,' he replied with forced enthusiasm, there was no way he could have refused, 'it will help me with the research work,' he paused an instant, 'Just one thing, is it a problem if my assistant joins us, Laura de la Salle?'

'I don't see why not.'

'Excellent.'

'Pat, Angela, I'm sorry, but I must leave you both now, I'll be at the Sheraton in Tel-Aviv, Angela let me know Pat's schedule, his flight.' Then turning to O'Connelly he added with a business like smile, 'I'll have you picked up at Ben Gurion.'

Tel-Aviv

TWO DAYS LATER THEY TOOK OFF from Charles de Gaulle for Tel-Aviv on an Air France flight as scheduled at exactly seven thirty in the morning. It was much too early for O'Connelly, used to rising at eight or nine, but the security checks for flights to Ben Gurion required they arrive more than two hours before take off time, and a taxi had picked them up at his apartment at five.

Hertzfeld's invitation had left O'Connelly just enough time to settle a few outstanding details in Paris. First and most important he returned to his agent's office the following morning to sign the agreement with Angela who arranged for the transfer of the advance from Bernstein Press in New York to his Swiss account. He then picked up the tickets from their travel bureau and headed over to the Irish Cultural Centre where Laura was tidying up her affairs, it had required several calls to string pullers in Dublin to get leave at such short notice and arrange a temporary replacement.

Laura collected her affairs and made a few last minute purchases before stopping off at Librairie Ulysse on Saint Louis en L'Île, the oldest travel bookshop in the world, where Cathérine Domain, its founder, provided her with a quick selection of maps and guide books on Israel and Jordan.

The flight was spent recovering from their early start, relaxing in the business section of the aircraft and thumbing through their now impressive library. Four hours later they touched down at Ben Gurion and after the usual obligatory security hassle for all arrivals in Israel checked in at the Tel-Aviv Sheraton, where they were pleased to discover Hertzfeld had booked them into a comfortable suite on the beach side of the hotel.

It was a few years since O'Connelly had visited Tel-Aviv and at first glance not much had changed, perhaps a few more office towers

in the business area and new hotels to the south of the beach towards Jaffa, the traffic gridlock had not however changed and the drivers seemed just as dangerous. For Laura it was her first visit and she was struck by the European appearance city and its suburbs, she was a little disappointed, perhaps she had expected something...a little more biblical. The view overlooking the beach changed all that and her first suggestion was they join the strollers along the seafront promenade.

A light flashed on the telephone it was a voice message from Hertzfeld wishing them welcome and asking them to meet him in the lobby the next morning when they would leave for Jerusalem by road. That left them the remainder of the day free to explore Tel-Aviv.

The beach seemed to be filled with keep fit enthusiasts as was the broad sea front promenade. People of all ages walked, jogged or rolled past in the different styles and different attires, from the most conventional to the most bizarre. To their left the main road seemed more like a freeway race track than a seaside thoroughfare, crossing it was a dangerous enterprise. They decided to walk south, Jaffa was about two or so kilometres distance. It would be a good start and would please Laura with a glimpse of a little more oriental exoticism.

To their left towards the end of the beach was the beautifully restored Hassan Beck Mosque built in the off-white stone of the region with its elegant, slender, minaret. Behind loomed the new Dan Panorama Hotel and others, there was nothing oriental about them. They saw the Clock Tower as they approached Jaffa where the area was more run down and unkempt.

Walking up hill through the gardens they arrived in the main square of the old centre, transformed into an agreeable tourist district with art galleries, jewellery and antique shops. They then continued down

to the south side where Yefet Street and the Arab district stretched out before them with its shops, restaurants and markets.

After a stop for refreshments in a small and typical café they took a taxi back to their hotel, a little footsore, to rest and shower before finding a suitable restaurant for dinner. Laura commenced to prepare their visit to Jerusalem with a new guide as O'Connelly referred to his 1949 Guide Bleu with its map that showed the city divided into West and East Jerusalem. Their attention was first focused on the Haram esh-Sharif and the history of the Temple. O'Connelly found little mention of the underground cisterns, the Palestinian Survey Funds work had been long forgotten in 1949. Laura had little more success with her politically correct Lonely Planet guide, more oriented towards the needs of the modern tourist than history, avoiding sensitive questions concerning the politics of religion and the respective claims of the Jews and Muslims.

Laura announced she was hungry and started to flip through the pages of the different local guide magazines provided in their suite, finally she announced her choice a restaurant specialised in Yiddish cuisine and called to book a table. They took a taxi to the Gefilte Carpe situated not far from the Mann Auditorium in the better class Rothschild Boulevard district. It was stylishly modern and evidently appreciated by fashionable professional class Israelis, they were shown to their table by the maître d'hôtel, a smartly dressed woman, who presented them with the menu in Hebrew and English, then their waitress, a svelte girl in her early twenties, proposed an aperitif which they refused preferring to start with wine and were shown the wine list, the girl recommended the restaurants reserve, a five year old red Cabernet Sauvignon from the reputed Carmel vineyard region.

They both opted for their specialities paté de foie gras prepared in the tradition of Yiddish cuisine and naturally the gefilte carp as the

main dish. The presentation was modern and they were not disappointed by the cuisine, it was delicious and the wine perfect, distinct from French or Californian wines. After coffee they decided to stroll back to their hotel in the warm evening air along Bograshov to Ben Yehuda and the seafront area.

The streets of Tel-Aviv were filled with people enjoying a walk in the *douceur* of the Mediterranean evening air, apart from the restaurants and cafés many shops were open. After half an hour they arrived on Hayarkon Street, not far from the old Dan Hotel and the bunkered US Embassy building, where there were many bars that stayed open late into the night. They decided to stop for a nightcap before returning to the hotel, they had had an early start and the next day they would also be up early again. They walked for another ten or more minutes before finding a bar with a free table, it seemed that population of Tel-Aviv enjoyed café life as in Paris, though Tel-Aviv more resembled the South of France. It was far from Laura's vision of biblical Israel, almost everything she had seen was modern even in the less prosperous areas of Jaffa.

12

The High Priests

THE DAY HAD BEEN LONG and with the time difference between Paris and Tel-Aviv O'Connelly had overrun his biological clock. Unable to sleep he turned the pages of de Lussac's manuscript and stopped at a chapter entitled 'Purification' and started to read.

The key person in the Temple of Jerusalem was the high priest who applied the rules of purity and impurity defined in the Torah, which were based on the notion of moral purification. Other than different

physical or organic impurities, all individuals who commit a breach of the moral laws prescribed by the Eternal to Moses are impure.

However, the moral impurity of the whole population of Israel was absolved by the purification ritual celebrated in the Temple on the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur, the greatest feast day in the Jewish calendar.

During this ceremony, performed under the strictest and most rigid rules, the High Priest, in the name of the entire Jewish community of Israel, solicited the benevolence of the Eternal and pardon for all the sins committed, or that persons or members of the community could have committed in the course of the year ended.

Because of the global responsibility the High Priest assumed, the Torah first of all defines the purity and purification specific to the sacerdotal class, that is to say to the High Priest, the priests and by extension the Levites in exercise in the Temple.

This concept of purity and purification, specific to the the Temple, was extended to a certain degree to all persons exercising an activity in the Temple.

In addition to the rules of purity imposed on all Jews were several specific and complementary conditions, imposed on all priests in general and more particularly on the High Priest, to enable them to exercise their sacerdotal offices.

Amongst these rules specific to the sacerdotal corps figured physical integrity as described in Leviticus:

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron, saying, 'No man of your offspring throughout their generations who has a defect shall approach to offer the food of his God.

For no one who has a defect shall approach: a blind man, or a lame man, or he who has a

disfigured face, or any deformed limb, or a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, or a hunchback or a dwarf, or who has a defect in his eye or eczema or scabs or crushed testicles.

and

He shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow, or a divorced woman, or one who is profaned by harlotry, these he may not take; but rather he is to marry a virgin of his own people, so that he will not profane his offspring among his people; for I am the Lord who sanctifies him.

Also the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by harlotry, she profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire.

Sacerdotal purification by complete immersion of the body in the living waters of a bath within the Sanctuary itself, was to be carried out for the consecration of the High Priest, each time the High Priest entered into the Tent of Meeting and in particular on the Day of Atonement, and in addition the washing of hands and feet was to be carried out before all sacrificial offerings at the altar.

The purification of the High Priest was made by complete immersion in the living waters of a bath situated inside of the Sanctuary that a supreme act of purification and having immediate effect, whereas, in general the purification in the living waters did not take effect until after sunset.

The worship in the Temple and the precepts of purity and purification at their origin and without any other consideration were uniquely attributed to the priests, principally the Sadducees.

The sacerdotal class and the Sadducees were obliged to establish a system for all the rites of purifications, extending the different obligations of the Torah over time by constantly by applying the most extreme of the prescribed conditions. This included the washing of hands and feet, for the High Priest, his sons and hereditary successors, in the bath near the altar, a bath for complete immersion in living waters, for the High Priest and his sons and hereditary successors, in the Sanctuary, in a sacred place near the altar

Progressively, the sacerdotal class, the Sadducees, then the Pharisees, relayed by the rabbis, had therefore extended to all the priests of the Temple, this obligation of supreme purification in the Sanctuary, as demanded in the Torah.

The Pharisees, in their constant struggle for the conquest of ideological power, fought this interpretation of the Scriptures, and on different occasions, as transmitted by rabbinic literature, succeeded in imposing their views by obliging the High Priest and the priests to submit to their demands.

An example is the ceremony of the sacrifice of the Red Heifer. The sacrifice and burning of the Red Heifer, whose ashes were necessary for certain rites of purification, had to take place outside of the Temple. The Pharisees took advantage of this obligation by questioning the principal of instant and lasting purification of the High Priest, imposing the principle of a renewed purification whenever the High Priest left the inner Temple.

Another example is on the Day of Atonement, for which the Pharisees progressively imposed not one but five successive baths of purification for the High Priest in the course of the ceremony, in order to be sure that no breach could have been made in the complex laws of purification on the Day of Atonement for all Israel.

It was this day once a year the High Priest asked pardon from the Eternal for all the sins committed by the Jews, which is to say asked

for the purification for all Israel. It was the only day when the High Priest alone could enter into the Holy of Holies and in a state of total purity, to ask the Eternal for forgiveness of all Israel.

It is also to say to which point this capital ceremony that aspired to the quintessence of purification should be executed, respecting the laws down to the least detail, and in strict compliance with the spirit of the Torah, as the purification of all

Once a year, the Day of Atonement, a complex ritual is imposed on the High Priest, who is dressed in special robes of pure cotton, to offer an exceptional sacrifice to the eternal and to cast all the sins of Israel onto a ram that is then sent into the desert to an entity of evil doing named Azazel. This is described in Leviticus:

Aaron shall enter the holy place with this: with a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and the linen undergarments shall be next to his body, and he shall be girded with the linen sash and attired with the linen turban (these are holy garments). Then he shall bathe his body in water and put them on.

He shall take from the congregation of the sons of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering.

Then Aaron shall offer the bull for the sin offering which is for himself, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household.

He shall take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat.

Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for the Lord fell, and make it a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot for the scapegoat fell shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make atonement upon it, to send it into the wilderness as the scapegoat.

Then Aaron shall offer the bull of the sin offering which is for himself and make atonement for himself and for his household, and he shall slaughter the bull of the sin offering which is for himself.

He shall take a fire pan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before the Lord and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring it inside the veil. He shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the ark of the testimony, otherwise he will die.

Aaron then purifies the Tent of Meeting by sprinkling blood from the sacrifice on the Altar.

Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he

did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.

He shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities.

When he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, no one shall be in the tent of meeting until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household and for all the assembly of Israel.

Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the Lord and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and of the blood of the goat and put it on the horns of the altar on all sides.

With his finger he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it seven times and cleanse it, and from the impurities of the sons of Israel consecrate it.

When he finishes atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall offer the live goat.

Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it

away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who stands in readiness.

The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.

Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there. He shall bathe his body with water in a holy place and put on his clothes, and come forth and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people.

Then he shall offer up in smoke the fat of the sin offering on the altar. The one who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body with water; then afterwards he shall come into the camp.

To avoid running the slightest risk of not fulfilling the whole of the Levitic prescriptions during the annual purification of all Israel, the priests demanded that the High Priest underwent not two purification baths as indicated in the Torah, but five baths with complete immersion.

In the Temple there were six chambers in the Priests Court – three to the north and three to the south. The Salt Chamber, where salt was stored; the Parvah Chamber, where meat was salted for the High Priest and hides were salted; the Rinsing Chamber, where the innards of the animals sacrificed were washed; the Wood Chamber for the High Priest; the Diaspora Chamber and the Hewn Stone Chamber where the Grand Sanhedrin formally gathered in meeting.

Baths or mikvehs were situated in the Court of the Lepers, which was in reality not for lepers, at least those unhealed, but for those who had been cured from skin disease and had to go through purification according to the prescribed rules before being admitted into the Sanctuary.

The Court of the Women was thus called because it was where the women gathered, separated from the men, on a balcony that surrounded and overlooked the court.

The bronze bath – called the Sea of Bronze – was intended for the High Priest's purification bath and for the washing of hands and feet during the different phases of the ceremony.

When Solomon constructed the First Temple in Jerusalem, the sacerdotal hierarchy no doubt ensured that the Sanctuary was designed as it had been in the Meeting Tent, faithfully transposing its form into the architecture of the new Sanctuary.

The biblical legend recounts that Solomon asked King Hiram of Tyre, for a specialist in bronze to cast the monumental bath that sat on twelve bronze bulls, symbolising both the twelve tribes of Israel and the years of wandering in the desert. Therefore it was supposed that the bath installed in the magnificent Temple rebuilt by Herod was both in weight and dimensions at least as big as that in the First Temple, and once filled would have weighed around one hundred tons.

The use of this great bronze bath, which would have measured more than five metres in diameter, twenty metres in circumference and five metres high, filled with water two and a half metres deep, posed different problems of accessibility and use. The bath would have certainly required a series of steps inside and outside – with a curtain to hide the priests as they undressed – since they could not have been completely immersed without danger in water two and a half metres deep.

This type of awkward situation that occurred in the utilization of this bronze purification bath was referred to in the Qumran texts, which proposed a solution for the practical problems in the priest's purification area that was situated between the altar and the Temple.

The small community of Qumran, which lived on the shores of the Dead Sea, were probably an extremely purist branch of the Essene sect, who at the outset may have been led by a dissident high priest following opposition with the sacerdotal authority and the royal court of Jerusalem at the time of Hasmonean kings.

The first leader of the Qumran community, a high priest, had either refused the principal that the power of the royal court and the sacerdotal authorities be combined in a single person, which was the case for the Hasmonean dynasty, or the leader was in conflict with Queen Salome at the time when she favoured the power of Rabbis and the Pharisees to the detriment of the hereditary priests and the Sadducee party.

Archaeological vestiges bear witness to this as seen by a stream of running water from a spring in the cliffs overlooking the Dead Sea that had twisted through the small town of the Qumran community, pouring in gentle cascades from one purification bath to another.

One of the baths – the largest – was destined to the purification of one of the meeting rooms, the floor of which was slightly sloped, and where the community ate meals together, in place of the sacrificial ceremonies that took place in Jerusalem. And if the community could not sacrifice animals, the purifications obligation with living water was nevertheless transposed with the greatest fidelity for the strict worship that was practised within the Qumran community.

Amongst the writings of Qumran that have come down to us, one, called the Temple Scroll, establishes the rules that would be applied when the concepts of community would at last prevail when the new

age arrived and the community would be at last be able to take charge of the Temple and its rituals.

The Temple Scroll describes a Temple with a new architecture, completely idealised, in the manner of the visionary Temple described by Ezekiel. Amongst these different descriptions and prophetic prescriptions figured extremely pragmatic directives concerning the bath for the purification of the priests.

It seemed that this specific part of the text of the Temple Scroll had been established taking into account the real difficulties caused by the position and relatively empirical use of this purification bath in the second and perhaps the third Temple of Jerusalem.

The solutions proposed by the Temple Scroll were according to all evidence aimed at rationalising and sanctifying the use of the bath-mikveh for the supreme purification of the priesthood by protecting its dignity and magnifying its exemplarity.

With this in mind a special edifice would have been built around the purification bath. This would have also served as a vestry for the priests, where they could undress away from the regards of others, to proceed to their purification by total immersion in the living waters of the bath, and then dress themselves with the ritual vestments for worship in the Temple.

The Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls of the Temple give these instructions:

You will construct to the south-east of the Temple
a square building around the bath 21 cubits by 21
cubits.

This building will be 50 cubits from the Altar.

The wall of this building will measure 3 cubits
thick and 20 cubits high.

You will make doors to the east, north and west 4 cubits wide and 7 cubits high...

In the wall of this building you will make boxes 1 cubit wide.

These boxes will be position 4 cubits above the floor and covered with gold.

The priests will put their cloths they wear in them...when they officiate in the Sanctuary.

You will build a channel around the the bath inside of the building.

This channel will will discharge into the bath and leave the building by an opening cut in the floor, the water could pour into this opening, to be evacuated and disappear into the ground.

No person should touch this water, because blood from the sacrifices could be mixed with it.

During the great annual religious feasts it is estimated that about one thousand priests officiated in the Temple and that all these priests had to be purified by immersion in the mikvehs, washing their hands and feet a continuous flow of water to ensure the necessary purification.

The cistern that Warren of Palestine Survey Fund designated as N°8, could contain more than twelve million litres of water was considered by its form to be one of the most ancient and was called the 'Great Sea' in the Septuagint was directly connected to another later cistern called the 'Sea' these were thought to supply the Bronze Sea with running water.

Aristeas the Greek, who wrote between the third and first centuries BC, described the functioning of rituals in either the Hasmonean

Temple or the Herodian Temple. Whichever the case, Aristeas had more than likely witnessed the ceremonies in the Temple during a pilgrimage on the occasion of one the great annual religious feasts, indicating a figure of seven hundred priests officiating in the Temple of Jerusalem.

The great number of officiating priests implied a great number of permanent installations for purification, for complete bodily immersion, or for washing hands and feet in running waters within the Sanctuary.

Aristeas wrote in his letter to Philocrates:

The ministration of the priests is in every way unsurpassed both for its physical endurance and for its orderly and silent service. For they all work spontaneously, though it entails much painful exertion, and each one has a special task allotted to him. The service is carried on without interruption - some provide the wood, others the oil, others the fine wheat flour, others the spices; others again bring the pieces of flesh for the burnt offering, exhibiting a wonderful degree of strength. For they take up with both hands the limbs of a calf, each of them weighing more than two talents, and throw them with each hand in a wonderful way on to the high place of the altar and never miss placing them on the proper spot. In the same way the pieces of the sheep and also of the goats are wonderful both for their weight and their fatness. For those, whose business it is, always select the beasts which are without blemish and specially fat, and thus the sacrifice

which I have described, is carried out. There is a special place set apart for them to rest in, where those who are relieved from duty sit. When this takes place, those who have already rested and are ready to assume their duties rise up spontaneously since there is no one to give orders with regard to the arrangement of the sacrifices. The most complete silence reigns so that one might imagine that there was not a single person present, though there are actually seven hundred men engaged in the work, besides the vast number of those who are occupied in bringing up the sacrifices.

As to Flavius Josephus, who was himself from a family of priests, he also described the functioning of rituals that took place in the Temple of Herod, and confirmed indirectly that more than one thousand priests officiated in the Temple.

And this was the speech Herod made to them: but still this speech frightened many of the people, as being unexpected by them, and because it seemed incredible, it did not encourage them, for they were afraid he would pull down the whole edifice, and be able to bring his intentions to perfection for its rebuilding; and this danger appeared to them to be very great, and the vastness of the undertaking to be such as could hardly be accomplished. But while they were in this disposition, the king encouraged them, and told them he would not pull down their Temple till all things were gotten ready for building it up

entirely again. And he promised them this beforehand, so he did not break his word with them, but got ready a thousand wagons, that were to bring stones for the building, and chose out ten thousand of the most skilful workmen, and bought a thousand sacerdotal garments for the priests, and had some of them taught the art of stone cutting, and others of carpenters, and then began to build.

Many strange ideas existed as to how purifying waters were brought to the Temple. A Babylonian rabbi, Ben Katin, who positioned the Temple at the level of the present day Haram, invented the idea whereby a system of mechanical winches raised the bronze bath, filled with water and weighing one hundred tons, every morning and then lowered it again every night through a vertical shaft from a depth of twelve meters beneath the ground. Certain rabbis even recounted that the noise of the winch could be heard from as far as Jericho.

The problem was that all evidence was destroyed when the Romans razed the Temple and the city, obliterating it once and for all, leaving no vestige as to the functioning of the Temple and its water system. Except that is for the water storage system hewn into the bedrock of the Haram built by the ancient Hebrews

DE LUSSAC CALLED HIMSELF AN ARCHAEOLOGIST, although he had no academic qualification in archaeology and to boot he had started out in life as Jean de Lussac, Isaac came much later. His formal training was in teaching, however, his training was quite unlike that of the average teacher. He had the traditional upbringing of an upper class Bordeaux family of devout Catholics. He attended a religious school until the age of eighteen and then with the encouragement of his parent entered the Seminary of the Society of Jesus. At twenty three he was ordained and sent to Indo-China to bring Christianity and the French Language to France's colonies. In Saigon he was set to work at a Jesuit college teaching French and French history to the children of the colonies administrators and planters together with the children of wealthy and privileged Vietnamese as the sun was setting on France's colonies in Asia.

De Lussac's work together with his gift for languages was greatly appreciated and as the French ceded their place to the Americans with the intensification of the Vietnam war, he was transferred to a safer and more senior teaching position in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh. In Cambodia he discovered the ruins of Angkor and archaeology, visiting and exploring the little known temple sites deep in the jungle whenever the occasion presented itself, developing a passion for the message carried through time by the stones left by an ancient civilisation.

Unfortunately for him the American war overflowed into Cambodia and he suddenly found himself in a drab suburb in the north of Paris, where his work included teaching French to North African immigrant workers and their children in Aulney-sous-bois. It was a dismal prospect for a young man used to the smiling respectful Asians of Indo-China. Not discouraged he set about learning Arabic and discovered Islam a religion he knew little of. His only relief were the long French vacations, when could join summer camps at

archaeological digs in France and Italy, where he was appreciated for his methodical though pedantic approach, something sought after in a branch of historical investigation where the smallest item of evidence could be of great significance.

In 1970 another door opened and to his great joy he was dispatched to East Jerusalem to work with Palestinian refugees. His arrival in the Holy Land, the land of Jesus Christ and the Bible, was another turning point in his life, when he found himself straddling the fault lines that lay between the three great religions of the Book.

He was fascinated by the distant history of the Holy Land and whenever he could he joined archaeological campaigns, however his proximity to Jews and Arabs, Judaism and Islam, slowly began to transform his vision of religion raising profound questions concerning the precepts of Christianity. The breaking point came with the Six Day War in 1973 and the battle for Jerusalem, he witnessed first hand the bitter fighting between the Israeli army and the city's Jordanian defenders, when the Jews unexpectedly found themselves in possession of the Holy City for the first time in almost two thousand years, for de Lussac it was an event inspired by the hand of God.

His found himself in disagreement with the philosophy of the Society of Jesus and after a bitter drawn out conflict he abandoned his calling. In his mind he had been forced to leave, something that was to mark the rest of his life. Now speaking Arabic and Hebrew he found part time work with a small monthly publication Biblical Archaeology, he also worked as a freelance translator making a modest living, with his newly discovered freedom, not having a fixed position, he was able to satisfy his interest in archaeology and biblical history, which as time passed became his ultimate vocation. However, in spite of his religious training and acquired archaeological skills he was not a formally trained archaeologist,

which mattered in a land where archaeologists of all schools flourished and where each one dreamed of a discovery that would confirm or infirm biblical history, the glory of 19th century amateurs had passed. Exploration and excavation required permits, permits required credentials and money, and money required sponsors.

The years passed and he achieved the rank of assistant archaeologist, living in rudimentary base camps at often isolated sites, he passed his time writing obscure articles and reports, and as time slid by he grew more and more introspective as he began to realise he would never make the history books, the field was too crowded, too specialised, he had neither the academic nor the technical qualifications to stand out from the crowd and to his disadvantage he was a poor communicator, growing more and more vindictive towards his more successful colleagues as time passed.

His feeling of rejection grew, de Lussac had not realised it, but the order of Jesuits had been his home, offering him spiritual comfort, food, shelter and brotherhood. He was now isolated and alone.

He rarely returned to France, his family had not forgiven him for his decision to quit holy orders. When his father died he returned to Bordeaux for the funeral, it was then he stumbled on a birth certificate amongst his fathers papers – that of a boy named Isaac Stern, born in Bordeaux on the same day as himself. Digging further he discovered a set of adoption papers. He was dismayed to discover he was an adopted child – the de Lussacs were not his natural parents. The mother he loved, now his stepmother, confessed he was the son of a Jewish family that had deported to Germany and had perished in the Nazi death camps, leaving him to the care of the de Lussac family, who adopted him and brought him up in the Christian faith.

As the discovery of his origins sunk in, he was not displeased to discover his Jewish roots, it gave him a mission, a new attachment to

the Promised Land, which was now the land of his ancestors. On his return to Israel he changed his name, he was now Isaac and claimed the same rights as any Jew becoming an Israeli citizen, though not abandoning his French nationality.

With the inheritance he received from his father, his financial position eased and spent the summer with a group to study the Roman aqueducts of Istanbul. Back in Israel he returned to his work with the monthly publication Biblical Archaeology, but he now with a keener knowledge on the importance of water to a large ancient city fresh in his mind. One evening he climbed the Mountain of Olives overlooking the Old City, there he tried to visualise the natural flow of water in ancient times, he knew that the Temple of the Jews, according to common Jewish belief, would have been situated on the Esplanade of the Mosques on the summit of the Temple Mount. He also knew of the importance of the purification rites in the Jewish religion, but something seemed illogical as he looked out over the Holy City, water flows downhill and not uphill, that was until the invention of the mechanical pump, moreover to lift significant quantities a powerful driving force for the pump such as a steam engine was necessary. Those inventions came almost seventeen centuries after the Temple had been destroyed by the Roman Titus in 70AD.

The idea continued to nag him until some days latter he left to write an article on an excavation at Massada. The dig was at a site where one of the Roman Legions that had besieged the citadel had been camped. The archaeological team was housed in a series of tents and temporary porter cabins on the nearby banks of the Dead Sea. After a long day of interviews and visits under the burning sun he spent the evening preparing his notes, finally turning in when the last of the lights in the camp went out.

That night in his sleep troubled by the stifling heat he heard the gurgling of cool flowing spring water and a voice spoke to him – *Seek the path to my tabernacle, follow the waters of Solomon, there my house will rise up again.* He woke with a start, he was drenched with sweat. He rose from his camp bed and staggered outside, the night was still, the sky was a bright dome filled with a myriad of shinning stars. The words rung in his head, had he imagined them – *follow the waters of Solomon* – no, they were a sign, a commandment.

After once again flicking through the thick volumes of The Temple, printed and bound by a copying service, a mass of almost three thousand pages, O'Connelly realised, as painful as it was, he was going to have to plough through de Lussac's work in more detail. Laura had already summarised it as a tautology of references and biased historical facts, obviously designed to suit the confused archaeologist's theory. De Lussac's had discovered nothing new from an archaeological point of view, it was no more than a theory based on his analysis of documents that dated back to the nineteenth century, when the British officers of the Palestine Survey Fund explored the underground structure of the Haram, cross-referenced to biblical and rabbinic texts, which he entirely took for historical fact. De Lussac had not even verified the facts, he could not, as all investigation beneath the Esplanade was forbidden by the Wafq. In addition no other historical description of the cisterns and water system had ever been attempted.

The question that remained for O'Connelly was, did it matter? The answer was obviously no; de Lussac was just another visionary who had developed a personal theory that could never be verified. If de Lussac wanted to transform his work into a book, then why not, and if Mann wanted to publish it, that was up to him. What interested

O'Connelly was whether it was a credible base for his novel, a fictional story built around real or supposed facts, identifiable by its readers. Successful fiction writers had always successfully woven disputable historical facts into their books and that was what mattered to Hertzfeld and the Bernstein Publishing Company, a good story for a successful novel, which with the right kind of promotion would sell millions.

Israel was a good subject from many points of view, O'Connelly reasoned, it was after all the Holy Land, the source of the three great religions of the Book, with two or three billion believers, and even if the Jews represented a tiny fraction of that number they certainly held considerably more influence. Then there was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which hit the international news headlines on an almost daily basis, reminding the world of the tragedy just in case it had forgotten, and on a broader scale there was Islam and its impact on the Western world that indirectly manifested itself in the Iraq War, Afghanistan, Iran, the Twin Towers and last but not least oil, the very foundation of the world's economy and industry.

14

The Promised Land

THE BIBLE TELLS OF THE HISTORY of the ancient Hebrew civilization, which in reality has very, very, little in common with modern Israel. The story commenced in Genesis when:

*God made a covenant with Abraham and said,
'To your descendants I give this land, from the
river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates',*

and came to bitter end at the hands of Romans at the time of the Emperor Vespasian.

The end of the Hebrew civilization in fact occurred in two steps, the first when their Temple was razed by Titus in 70AD and second when Hadrian crushed the Second Jewish Revolt in 130AD, rebuilding Jerusalem as a Roman city and naming it Aelia Capitolina.

The Jews were then dispersed to the four corners of the Roman world, their homeland destroyed and transformed into a Roman province, their Temple razed to the ground – not a stone remained and its site never again found – erased from human memory.

The Israel of modern times is made up of a people forged from Germans, North Africans, Russians, Ethiopians, Yemenis, Iraqis, Iranians, Ukrainians, Arabs and many others, living together in an artificially reconstituted land, which was first colonised and then – according to the people who had occupied the same land for many, many, centuries – expropriated!

Logically the questions that we dare not ask should be asked, not with the objective of dividing, but trying to explain the perhaps unexplainable. Leaving aside the ethical and politically correct considerations defined by Western civilization in the third millennium for a moment, the peoples of the countries mentioned have culturally speaking little in common, but are European Jews members of the same ethnic family that speak Hameo-Semetic languages? Are Ethiopian Jews culturally the same as Siberian Jews? This is not a question of trying to define belongings or trying to balance the politically dangerous question of what is a people, but simply to objectively look at the constitution of the population of modern Israel relative to the population at the time of Herod, which may or may not have been homogeneous. The same question could be asked concerning the Hebrews at the time of Solomon or even Moses or Abraham. Will the Israelis of tomorrow resemble those of

today? It is impossible to say. The Britons of the time of Bodecia would have had little in common with the Normans or the English of William Shakespeare's time, and even less with Victorians or the multi-ethnic British society of the 21st century.

What is left of the past, what became of the ancient Jews, what became of their religion, language and culture, what had become of their temples, cities and monuments?

The Bible commences with a people descended from Abraham called the Hebrews who founded the Kingdoms of Israel. The Hebrew name *Yehudi* came into being after the Kingdom of Israel was split into the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern Kingdom of Judah. The Latin word *Iudeus* is derived from the Greek *Ioudaios*, and means Judaeans, from the land of Judaea. Later following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the word Jew came to mean a follower of the Jewish faith, or someone of Jewish descent.

But, commencing with the solid vestiges of their past very little remains, there are of course the Hasmonian tombs, there is absolutely nothing that resembles the ruins of Egypt, Rome or ancient Greece, neither Babylon nor Persia, or Hattusa the capital of the Hittites, or even the Nabatean city of Petra. Their ancient language, that became practically extinct as a spoken language in around the third century AD, was revived and modernised, it had been barely spoken outside of synagogues, replaced by the languages and dialects of their homelands, Ladino, Yiddish, Russian and many others. Their culture was that of their countries. So what was Judaism, what bound them together, were they bound together? Was it a religion based on the Bible, the Torah and other ancient texts, the collective memory of an ancient people with its commentaries, or was it the collective rejection and persecution of their descendants by the Christians and Muslims in the lands they had made their homes.

Did they consider Andalusia, Spain, France, Germany, Russia, North Africa or the Middle East as their homelands? What did an Austrian Jew living in Vienna in 1900 have in common with a Moroccan Jew living Marrakesh? It was certainly not their language, or their culture. To find a common root it was necessary to go back perhaps two thousand years, a link as tenuous as that of an Italian Christian with an early Roman Christian in Palestine.

When did the Hebrews become Jews? To trace their history it is necessary to go back to the biblical legend of King David and his son Solomon, who built the first Temple of the Hebrews in Jerusalem, which according to the Bible stood for 400 years, until in 588BC King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered the city and destroyed the Temple, exiling the Hebrew leaders and their elite to Babylon.

Then came the Persians who defeated the Babylonians in 540BC and Cyrus the Great, King of the Persians allowed the Hebrew exiles to return home from Babylon. The Second Temple was built under Nehemiah, who was appointed governor by the Persians in 445 BC, when the walls of the Temple Mount were rebuilt and its fortifications strengthened.

Over the course of the following five hundred years, the Greeks, Seleucids and Romans took turns in conquering the city, at times forbidding Jewish religious practices in an effort to assimilate the Jews into their respective cultures.

Alexander the Great conquered Jerusalem in 333 BCE and established Hellenistic monarchies in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucid dynasty in Syria under Seleucus I Nicator. Under Antiochus III they captured Jerusalem from the Egyptians and Palestine fell under Syrian rule. The desecration of the Temple by Antiochus IV provoked a Jewish insurrection led by Judah Maccabee, who succeeded in defeating the Syrians in 161BC,

liberating Jerusalem and re-establishing Jewish worship in the Temple.

After one hundred years of independence civil war broke out and the Romans, under Pompey, conquered Judea in 63BC, ending the autonomy of Israel for two thousand years. The Jews simply became another of the many different peoples of the Roman Empire.

The Romans ruled over Palestine relatively peacefully for nearly a century until the First Jewish Revolt 66AD. It had been ruled as a vassal state like the other provinces of the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Herod, a Judean, who was made king in 37BC and ruled until 4BC, was a friend of Agrippa the son-in-law of the Emperor Augustus. He built many cities including Ceasarea, where the Roman governor resided, and more notably he transformed the Temple of Jerusalem into a magnificent edifice so as to be worthy of the Jewish God Yaweh.

After Herod's death, Judea was divided among his three sons, but their endless quarrels resulted in Rome appointing a governor to rule Palestine and Jerusalem directly from his official residence in Ceasarea. One of these was Pontius Pilate, who governed from 26-36AD.

An unsettled period followed with periodic riots in Jerusalem resulting in frequent clashes with Roman troops. In 66AD, when the population of Jerusalem had reached an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 inhabitants, a much more serious revolt broke out against Roman rule, it ended in 70AD, when a Roman army of 80,000 soldiers under the leadership of Titus besieged and conquered the city, plundering then razing the Temple to the ground. More than 100,000 Jews were killed or died of hunger, the rest were executed or sold in slavery. Virtually the entire city was destroyed and all Jews banished from Jerusalem.

In 130AD, the Emperor Hadrian after crushing the Second Jewish Revolt decided to rebuild Jerusalem as a Roman city and the city was renamed Aelia Capitolina. When Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire in the 4th century, Queen Helena and her son, the Byzantine Emperor Constantine, transformed Jerusalem into a Christian city.

Almost all of the population of Palestine had by then been converted to Christianity, with however, the exception of some Jews. The Byzantines forbid the remaining Jews entry into Jerusalem except for just one day a year, when they mourned the destruction of their Temple, who were also deprived of most of their rights including the building of synagogues.

During these Christian centuries Persia continued to be a threat to Christian Palestine and the capture of Antioch by the Persian Emperor Khosrau I in 540AD which the beginning of the last great Persian onslaught against Byzantium. In the early 7th century Khosrau II launched his attack, giving hope to the Jews that the Christians would be defeated and their rights be restored just as they had been after the Persians captured Jerusalem in 540BC.

In the spring of 614AD a Persian army once again entered Palestine burning Christian churches and soon reached Jerusalem. When the city fell 60,000 Christians were massacred and another 35,000 were sold into slavery, and worse – symbolically speaking – the most holy relic of Christendom, the True Cross of Christ, was taken back to Persia as part of the victorious army's plunder.

In AD 622 the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius counter attacked sweeping through Asia Minor and Armenia to the frontier of Persia. After a series of attacks and counter-attacks the war ended when Heraclius entered Mesopotamia and defeated the Persians at Nineveh destroying Khosrau's palace in the Persian capital of Ctesiphon. The

True Cross was returned in 629AD, to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

But, peace did not last long as a new threat had appeared from nowhere with a new religion and the emergence of the Arabs with a powerful all conquering composed of desert tribesmen from Arabia. The Christian cities of Syria and Palestine quickly fell to the Arabs. In 635AD, Damascus, and in 638AD Jerusalem fell to the Muslim army of Caliph Omar after a siege that lasted for a year.

Mohammed had preached that Moses and Jesus were his Muhammad's predecessors as prophets and Jerusalem took on a special significance, and in 691AD, Caliph Abd al-Malik of the Omayyad dynasty built the Dome of the Rock on the supposed site of the Jewish Temple. Jerusalem became the third most holy place for the Muslims after Mecca and Medina.

Under Muslim rule, a Jewish community was re-established in Jerusalem and flourished. Jews were even among those who guarded the walls of the Dome of the Rock. In return, they were absolved from paying the poll-tax imposed on all non-Muslims.

The Muslim dynasty of Omayyads ruled most of the Arab world in the second half of the 7th Century but after a dispute with the rulers of Mecca and Medina, the holiest of Islamic cities. They decided to make Jerusalem, which was nearer their capital Damascus, a counter weight to those cities. They rebuilt Al-Aqsa and also built a magnificent monument, the Dome of the Rock, on the centre of the mountain, on the presumed site of the Jewish temple. They also built palaces to the south of the mountain and their actions made Jerusalem the third holiest city of Islam.

Then the Abbasids dynasty moved the Arab capital from Damascus to Baghdad and so Jerusalem declined in importance, which contributed to the reasons why Crusaders were able to take Jerusalem in 1099 AD, massacring tens of thousands of its Muslim and Jewish

inhabitants. King Baldwin I became the first ruler of the Crusaders' Kingdom, called the Kingdom of Jerusalem, until 1187AD when Sultan Salah a-Din besieged and captured the city. The Jews were allowed to return in 1210AD joined by other Jews from Europe and the Maghreb.

Jerusalem lost its importance as a political centre under the Muslim rulers first belonging to the province of Damascus, then becoming a separate province. It fell to the Turks in 1517AD, and remained under their control for four centuries.

At the beginning of the 19th century the population of Jerusalem was just 9,000 inhabitants. It was about that time the city and the Near East was rediscovered by the competing European nations, commencing with Napoleon's expedition to Egypt.

'We must go to the Orient,' Napoleon is reputed to have said. *'All great glory resides there.'* Apart from the thirty odd thousand troops that landed near Alexandria there were almost one thousand officials, artists and poets, botanists and zoologists, surveyors and economists, who compiled *Descriptions de l'Egypte*, in twenty-two volumes which were to become one of the most famous descriptions of Egypt up to that time. The treasure he brought back to France included the Rosetta Stone, which was to provide the key to Egyptian hieroglyphics deciphered by Champolion.

In his plans to conquer Egypt, part of the Ottoman Empire, he attack the Turks by marching on Palestine with an army of 13,000 men in the spring of 1799, sacking Jaffa after bombarding the city with his artillery. Jerusalem was of no military importance though Napoleon wrote to the Jews backing the idea of a Jewish nation. At that time less than two thousand Jews lived in the City of Jerusalem, a miserable backwater. He target was Acre, which he believed to be a strategic point in the Holy Land, but he failed to capture the city when his troops were ravaged by plague.

A century later, the city's population had reached 55,000 of which more than half were Jews.

With the First World War came the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917, in which Britain declared:

'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.'

Following the victory of the Allies over Germany and its Turkish ally the Ottoman Empire was dismantled and Britain occupied Palestine, which at that time included the territory that is now Jordan.

The Mandate zone covered more than one hundred thousand square kilometres, but 1921, Britain split it into two zones, three quarters to the east of the Jordan River was made into an Arab protectorate, which was to become the Kingdom of Jordan, from where the Jews were forbidden to live or own land. The territory to the west of the river became what we as Israel and the Occupied Territories today.

Modern Israel commenced after the First World War when Britain was given the Mandate for Palestine by the League of Nations. This included the creation a Jewish National Home in the territory, according to the Balfour Declaration.

In the following years the hostility of the Arab population to Jewish immigration and the majority Jewish presence in Jerusalem grew. Outbreaks of violence against Jewish residents were frequent often

resulting in death and injury. This led to the British government seriously restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine in 1939.

In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted to partition Mandatory Palestine into Jewish and Arab states with Jerusalem under a special international regime. Immediately the State of Israel was proclaimed and an Arabs coalition composed of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Syria attacked Israel.

An armistice was signed in 1949 between Israel and Jordan, and Jerusalem was divided into two zones, the West became the capital of Israel whilst the East was the Arab city until the 1967 war when Israel occupied the whole city.

In the nineteenth century Palestine was part of the tottering Ottoman Empire, and was seen by the Arabs as part of Bilad ash-Sham, or Great Syria, a region that approximately includes what is now Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan. In 1831 the region was usurped by Muhammad Ali of Egypt from his Ottoman suzerains.

What role did the Arabs play in the Ottoman Empire? The Sultan in Istanbul was the Caliph, which is to say the successor of Mohammed, the supreme religious authority of the Muslim world. The Arabs saw the Ottoman Empire just as much as their Empire as the Turks, as Muslims they were proud of the Empires power and prestige, fighting for it, at first to expand Ottoman Europe and then to defend it.

Arab anti-Zionism commenced in the late nineteenth century with the arrival of Jewish settlers. Before the 1890s there had already been attempts to settle Jews in Palestine, which at that time had a population of some 520,000 people, mostly Muslim and Christian Arabs and about five percent Jews.

Jewish immigration to the Holy Land had started in the 1870s with the arrival of small numbers of Russian Jews fleeing the anti-Jewish pogroms when the Jews were wrongly blamed for the assassination

of the Tsar Alexander II, though the Ottomans discouraged large-scale immigration to Palestine. At that time most Jews in Palestine belonged to the old Yishuv, or community, that had settled in the Holy Land for religious reasons and peacefully cohabited with the Arabs. Tensions between the Jews and Arabs commenced after the first Zionist settlers arrived in the 1880s, purchasing land the absentee Arab owners.

Then in the twenty odd years between 1882 and 1903, about 35,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine, however, many of them leaving soon after as their existence as small time farmers was extremely hard. In 1891, the first sign of political opposition to Zionism made its appearance. Arab notables from Jerusalem called upon the Ottoman administration to prohibit the immigration of and the sale of land to Jews and the Ottoman rulers took measures to restrict immigration and land purchase. But with the Zionists, a political movement that advocated a homeland for the Jewish People in the Land of Israel, the Ottomans gave way to European demands and immigration grew. The poor Arab peasants naturally considered the land on which they had lived for generations to be theirs, but it was sold from under their feet without their knowledge by the absentee landlords, the legal owners, to Jewish settlers. Those Palestine Arab farmers who refused to move from the land purchased from absentee owners were evicted by the Turkish authorities.

Theodor Herzl, an Austrian Jewish journalist, who was the founder of modern political Zionism, wrote in his diary after the first Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland, in August, 1897:

‘Were I to sum up the Basle Congress in a word – which I shall guard against pronouncing publicly – it would be this: “At Basle, I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today, I would be

answered by universal laughter. If not in five years, certainly in fifty, everyone will know it.”

Land was sold to Jewish settlers by Palestinian Arabs attracted by the possibility of quick profits thus causing prices to rise creating a vicious circle whereby absentee landlords hastened to sell their land before the music stopped. This was accelerated by the severe economic depression that affected the territory resulting in unemployment and economic difficulties which only went to aggravate the situation of many Arab peasants, who were forced to sell their land to survive.

In 1931 the Jewish population had risen to almost two hundred thousand and the British High Commissioner for Palestine at that time recommended the total suspension of Jewish immigration and land purchase to protect Arab agriculture as all cultivatable land was occupied by the indigenous population and sale to Jews would create a class of landless Arab cultivators.

The Arabs proclaimed a general strike in 1936 boycotting Jewish businesses and goods, they demanded an end to Jewish immigration and land transfers to Jewish owners together with a new government that represented their interests. In a campaign of terror Jews were killed as armed gangs of Arabs attacked Jews until in August 1936 the British crack-down on the terrorists.

At that time David Ben Gurion, noted that *‘in our political argument abroad, we minimize Arab opposition to us,’* whilst he recommended, *‘let us not ignore the truth among ourselves.’* The revolt was brutally put down by the British authorities.

Violence continued on and off until 1939 when World War Two more or less suspended suspended political unrest.

The 29 November 1947 the United Nations General Assembly approved a plan, to resolve the Arab-Jewish conflict by partitioning

Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. Each state would comprise three major sections, linked by extraterritorial crossroads; the Arab state would also have an enclave at Jaffa. With about 32% of the population, the Jews would get 56% of the territory, an area that then contained 499,000 Jews and 438,000 Palestinians, though this included the inhospitable Negev Desert in the south. The Palestinians would get 42% of the land, which then had a population of 818,000 Palestinians and 10,000 Jews.

15

Jerusalem

THEY LEFT JERUSALEM EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, just sixty or so kilometres from Tel-Aviv, even at that hour Highway One was choked with tailbacks, it seemed that the roads of Israel were a huge chaotic car park and whenever the traffic got moving it seemed that the drivers were bent on either suicide or murder. Hertzfeld had laid on a people carrier, the best, with aircon and coffee.

Once they passed Ben Gurion Airport the traffic slackened a little and after about thirty or so kilometres the road started to rise turning around the steep hills that led up to Jerusalem, the driver pointed out the rusting carcasses of Israeli home made armoured vehicles abandoned or destroyed in their battle for independence almost sixty years before.

Their first stop was a café overlooking the Old City where they installed themselves at a table and spread a map on the table before them identifying the different edifices that lay before them.

‘What I’d like to do is make a tour of the walls of the Temple Mount, get a feeling for the layout,’ said Hertzfeld.

‘Have you been here before?’ asked Laura.

‘Sure, but to be honest apart from a couple of visits to the Wailing Wall I can’t say I’ve really thought about it the religious or historical aspect very much.’

‘You’re Jewish?’

‘Yes, my grandparents came from Germany. They immigrated to the US after the Crystal Nacht. My family was lucky, they had a successful publishing firm in Berlin and Frankfurt with a branch in New York. We were not very religious, you know just celebrating the usual things Bar Mitzvah, Yom Kippur, Rosha Shannah, the synagogue from time to time, weddings and all that stuff.’

‘And the business here?’

‘That goes back to the Six Day War, I was eighteen at the time and my father tried to do everything he could to stop me joining the Israeli army, by the time I got here it was all over,’ he said wryly.

‘Did you stay?’

‘Just for the glory then I was back to college in New York, but I realised our ancient roots were in Israel convinced my father to start a printing house here. The market for books was too small, but printing costs were much lower than back home in the States.’

‘Did you ever try to retrace those roots?’

‘Not really, I suppose they remained vague and distant, the reality was we were far from all that kind of Orthodox thing, we were what is called Universal Jews. It was later I became interested in history and languages, not as a specialist, just a keen amateur,’ he said smiling, ‘perhaps an enthusiastic amateur.’

‘So you’re familiar with the details?’

‘To be very honest no, in a way it's a bit like a good book, I can't say I retain all the details, just a general picture, but it's something that has always interested me.’

‘Do you know your way around the Old City?’

‘Yes and no, as I said I have never really made the effort to explore Jerusalem. I'm not an expert, it's why I've asked a couple of friends to join us, David Elquayam from Tel-Aviv's Ben Gurion University, he is a real expert on Jerusalem, and Shlomo Klein, a leading scientist’ he said looking at his watch, ‘They're both very old friends.’

Two men approached, the taller one of about forty wore a relaxed smile and clearly had nothing to do with the world of business, the other was a little older and seemed more serious.

‘Here they are now,’ Hertzfeld said standing up. ‘David, Shlomo, on time for once!’

‘I'm always on time, usually you're early,’ said Elquayam laughing.

‘Nice to see you both,’ said Hertzfeld. There was a lot of laughing and back slapping as Hertzfeld greeted Elquayam and Klein.

‘I'm more specialised in old stones, but Shlomo is the real scientist, he's our leading specialist in radio dating techniques.’

Shlomo Klein was a friendly man in his late forties who took time to explain his science in terms that could be understood by any open mind, he was also a great specialist in the ancient history of Israel with many books to his credit on biblical archaeology.

‘Let me introduce you to my friends from Paris,’ said Hertzfeld. ‘This is Pat O'Connelly and Laura de la Salle – Laura read Oriental history in Paris, she's with the Irish Cultural Centre.’

Elquayam was good looking, dressed in jeans and a white tee shirt, tall, blond, good looking in a very manly way, exuding a charm that

women appreciated. O'Connelly saw Laura appraising him as women do before a quality potential male producer.

'Irish,' he said appreciatively. 'Nice to meet you Laura, where's the Orient?'

Laura laughed, 'Anywhere between Istanbul and Hong Kong!'

'Patrick O'Connelly, one of my successful writers.'

'Ah, a writer, fact or fiction?'

'That's up to you to decide, it's a question of how you look at things.'

'I see, a philosopher into the bargain.'

They laughed and Hertzfeld invited them to sit down and take something to drink.

'So tell us about the reason for your visit, you were a little vague over the phone?'

'Well it starts with the Palestine Exploration Survey, perhaps Pat can tell you more than me.'

O'Connelly outlined de Lussac's theory that was entirely based on the findings of the Palestine Exploration Fund, which had been founded in London more than a century before. The organization had been established in 1865 to provide a survey and archaeological investigation of the Holy Land for the needs of the British Empire, then at the height of its glory.

It had all commenced with the Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem by the British Army engineers in 1864-5. Then the Palestine Exploration Fund began its work in Jerusalem in 1867, with Captain Charles Warren, whose discoveries included a water shaft, known as Warren's Shaft, and a series of tunnels cut into the bedrock of the Temple Mount.

The fund expanded its scope in the 1870s to a complete survey of the Holy Land. The fund's geographers, archaeologists, anthropologists, and orientalists published a great many articles that

influenced British public opinion at a time when the enlightened Anglican Church and its followers pointed to the bible as a source of belief and conduct for the builders of the Empire.

The maps, drawn between 1871 and 1877, had served Sir Edmund Allenby in his victorious cavalry campaign in Palestine in World War I and were still invaluable to present-day historians. The maps designated the historical boundaries of Palestine as extending a few miles east of the Jordan River. Certain members of the fund, particularly its director, Claude Reignier Conder, advocated British colonization of Palestine and the restoration of its Jewish population. The group funded also the work of archaeologists W. M. F. Petrie and Kathleen Kenyon.

‘I see,’ said Elquayam. ‘I’m very familiar with the work of the Fund, unfortunately today it is impossible to verify that work with modern techniques or continue the exploration that they had commenced.’

‘Why is that?’ asked Hertzfeld.

‘The Temple mount or the Haram esh-Sharif is under the authority of the Muslim religious body, the Waqf. Very regretfully it is totally out of the question for a non-Muslim to enter the underground water system of the Haram.’

‘I see, what do you suggest.’

‘We can start with a historical tour of ancient Jerusalem, a history course, starting with Solomon, then Herod, the destruction of the Temple, the Muslim conquest and modern history.’

‘I see, what about Christian history?’ asked Laura.

‘Christianity came later, if the Temple is your subject then it would best to stick to its history, as you perhaps already know, the Temple was destroyed in 70AD before the emergence of Christianity as a religion.’

‘Okay, let’s stick to the facts?’ said Hertzfeld. ‘Archaeological facts!’

‘Good, so let’s start at the Wailing Wall.’

‘That’s fine with me,’ said Hertzfeld looking at the others.

‘Why?’ said O’Connelly. ‘I mean why not another spot?’

‘Well the reason the Jews pray at the Wailing Wall, which incidentally we call the Western Wall, is that it has been confused with the western wall of the Temple of the Jews.’

‘What do you mean confused?’ asked Laura.

‘That’s a very complicated question. It’s related to the site of the Temple, which was razed by the orders of the Emperor Hadrian in 70AD, and the Jews were banished from the city under the threat of instant death if they attempted to enter it.’

‘How did they make the difference between a Jew and a non-Jew?’ Laura naively asked.

They laughed and Hertzfeld offered an answer: ‘Suspects had to present themselves.’

Laura looked puzzled.

‘The Jews were circumcised, by the order of Abraham, so if a Roman soldier suspected a visitor he had to lift his frock and present himself.’

‘Oh!’ said Laura shutting up like a clam.

The three men laughed.

‘So over a period of two or three hundred years few Jews penetrated into the ancient city of Jerusalem.’

‘Tell us about the City today?’

‘The Old City is divided into four quarters plus the Haram esh-Sharif or Temple Mount. These are the Christian Quarter, the Muslim Quarter, the Armenian quarter and the Jewish quarter. The Western Wall or the Kotal is situated in the Jewish Quarter against the flank of the south west wall of the Haram.’

They parked outside of the Zion Gate near to the Armenian Quarter and made their way by foot along Batel Makhalee into the Old City and following David Elquayam towards the Western Wall Plaza and the Ophel Archaeological Park. Their first visit was to the Western Wall that stood before a large square cordoned off into prayer areas closer to the Wall itself. As they stood admiring the huge ancient stone wall a couple approached them, to O'Connelly's surprise it was Florence Bousquet his friend from Le Monde together with another person.

'So the saying is true!'

'The saying?' said O'Connelly as he embraced his friend.

'It's a small place the world.'

They laughed and made their introductions, here friend was a documentary film producer.

'Where are you staying,' she asked him.

'At the Sheraton in Tel-Aviv.'

'For how long?'

'We haven't fixed anything yet, but probably a couple of weeks.'

'Great, we're here for the interview with Shimon Perez, we'll be here a few more days, at the Hilton, why don't we get together.'

'Good idea, let's say at seven in the bar at the Sheraton.'

They said goodbye and they followed Elquayam to the prayer area. He stopped and took a paper kippah from a basket and told Hertzfeld and O'Connelly to do the same. Laura not wanting to be left out reached out to take a kippah.

'Sorry,' he said laughing, 'men only. Ladies to the right.'

He pointed Laura to a smaller area reserved for women, she pouted and turned away annoyed at being left out from the men's thing.

'So what do we do now?' asked O'Connelly.

'Go to the Wall and pray like the others.'

O'Connelly shrugged and joined the men at prayer, there were Orthodox religious Jews rocking as they prayed reading from prayer books. There were tourists who pushed small wads of paper between the joints in the huge blocks of stone, which Elquayam had told him were prayers and requests to the Almighty.'

O'Connelly could not help thinking as he looked at the ancient stones how strange it was that this site and the religion of the Jews had influenced Western civilization. He remembered singing Jerusalem as a child at the daily morning assembly in the Church of England School he had attended in north London. As a Roman Catholic, he did not know or even stop to think why Jerusalem had played such an important role in the formation of modern England. He remembered reading Thomas Mann's book Doctor Faustus, when Zeitblom had described his childhood surroundings and a hill called Mount Zion in Bavaria, it was curious that a hill in German Bavaria be called Mount Zion, but when he thought of Martin Luther, Protestantism and Bible it seemed normal, but why should it be normal a hill in Germany, so far from ancient Jerusalem in time and distance, be called after the Temple Mount? The Jewish Bible had influenced Western civilization for two millennia and continued to influence the philosophy and politics of the Western World to the chagrin of the Eastern Muslim world.

16

The Wall

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THE HISTORY of the wall David,' O'Connelly asked.

‘It depends whose version of history you want to hear!’ he replied laughing.

‘Well I don’t know very much about it so I can’t say.’

‘Well, let me see, if I start with the popular Jewish vision of the Wall’s history. The Jews and most Israeli’s believe this wall is a remnant of the wall of the second Temple built by King Herod the Great, called in Hebrew *Ha’Mikdosh*.

We don’t in fact call it the Wailing Wall, for us it is the Western Wall or in Hebrew *Kotel ha-Ma’aravi*. The only visible stones still left from those days are the bottom seven layers, but another seventeen layers are buried under the ground. You can see some of these huge stones where excavations have been made the Kotel Tunnels, and can be recognized them by the indented borders. The layers of stone above them are not from the original wall but were added many years later.’

‘Can we visit the tunnel?’

‘Only by prior appointment. A shul has been set up at the exact spot where it is believed the *Kodesh Kodoshim* or the Holy of Holies once stood.

‘A *shul*?’

‘That’s Yiddish for synagogue,’ explained Shlomo.

‘Oh.’

‘In the period between 1948 and 1967 when Jordan controlled the old city, Jews were not allowed to come and pray here. It was only when this part of the city was recaptured in 1967 during the Six Day War we were able to return here again. The old buildings facing the Wall were demolished for the plaza you can see today. So everyday there are thousands of visitors who come to pray at the wall, some complaining that this is nearest they can get to the site of the Temple, as the extreme conservatives dream of rebuilding of the third and *Bet Ha’mikdosh*, that’s the Temple.’

‘I thought there were three Temples?’

‘According to the Bible, the first Temple was built by King Solomon, the son of David in the 10th century BC. It was composed of successive courtyards, each one more holy than the next, with the innermost the Holy of Holies containing the Ark of the Covenant. It was destroyed by the Babylonians and the second Temple was built then Herod the Great rebuilt it, so you see there was in fact only two.’

‘Do you believe Solomon existed?’

‘The fact is that very little is known about Solomon, even his very existence is questioned by serious scholars,’ said Shlomo.

‘So the others are not serious.’

‘I didn’t mean that. There are Bible scholars who believe only the Bible holds the truth and there are those who seek other forms of evidence in archaeology.’

‘And you?’

‘I have an open mind. Besides the Bible, there is practically no evidence of either Solomon’s or David’s existence. A couple of inscriptions have been found referring to a ‘House of David,’ from a later period, which doesn’t really mean anything, how many people were called David?’

‘And the Kingdom of Israel?’

‘If you are speaking of Unified Kingdom not many archaeologists believe it was anything like as is described in the Book of Kings, stretching from the Euphrates to the border of Egypt. Biblical minimalists suggest that the Book of Kings is a myth invented hundreds of years after the time it was written, designed to reinforce the territorial claims the ruling power who fabricated the story. If the legend of David and Solomon has any truth they were probably nothing more than local tribal leaders and in 1000BC Jerusalem was a small unimportant town.’

‘Isn’t that a little blasphemous,’ said Laura smiling.

‘I’m a historian, not a rabbi. But that’s not the entire story! The Temple of Solomon, that is to say the first Temple is without doubt another legend, though most scholars don’t doubt the existence of the second Temple. Archaeological and recorded evidence points to the fact that by 715BC Jerusalem had become a prosperous capital ruling over a modest kingdom.’

‘So the Bible is just a myth?’

‘I’m sorry to say that concerning the first Temple it looks that way. Of course it’s always possible that new evidence may eventually be dug up.’

‘What about excavations today?’

‘From 1948 to 1967, during the Arab occupation of the Old City, access to the city by Jews was forbidden. Then after the 1967 Six Day War the first archaeological work started with diggings in the area south of the Temple Mount, which is now the archaeological park under the southern ramparts,’ he said pointing the way.

‘If we recall a little biblical history, the Temple Mount, called Mount Moriah by the Jews, is the spot, where according to the Bible, Abraham, obeying God's orders was to sacrifice his son Isaac, who following his father to the Mount asked, *Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?* Abraham replied, *God will provide for the sacrifice*, as he built an altar on the rock and prepared to attach his son. At the last moment, the voice of God ordered Abraham to lower his knife. It’s also where Jacob dreamt of the ladder reaching to heaven. Therefore we can see why it was sacred to the Jews for about one thousand years.’

‘Until it was destroyed.’

‘Yes, in 70AD Titus, the son of Roman Emperor Vespasian, plundered and destroyed first the Holy Temple of Jerusalem, and then the Holy City. According to the written evidence of Josephus

Flavius hundreds of thousands of Jews were slaughtered. The vast treasures of the Temple, accumulated over hundreds of years, including gold vessels and ritual objects, even the gold that covered the walls and doors of the Temple were looted.

To celebrate his victory over the Jews, the great Triumphal Arch of Titus was built in the Forum of Rome, where it still stands today. The carvings show Titus's army carrying the treasures of Jerusalem into Rome, leading the procession are bearers carrying the huge solid gold Menorah as a symbol of the total subjugation of the Jews. Not only was the Temple plundered and the population slaughtered but tens of thousands of Jews were carried off as slaves by Titus. The value of these treasures was so great that they provided Vespasian and Titus with the means and the slaves to build the Colosseum in Rome.'

'Do you think a new Temple will be built?'

'There are a number of people who would like to rebuild the Temple, but the problem is where? They can't build it on the Temple Mount. That would be certainly the cause of WWII. But architectural plans are being prepared by the Sanhedrin.'

'I thought that no longer existed.'

'You're right, but the Israeli rabbinical council involved with re-establishing the Sanhedrin, is calling on all groups involved in Temple Mount research to prepare detailed architectural plans for the reconstruction of the Jewish Holy Temple.'

'What is the Sanhedrin?'

'It last met in Tiberias 1,600 years ago and has now been reformed, meeting in Jerusalem monthly. It is appealing to the Jewish people to contribute toward the acquisition of materials for the purpose of rebuilding the Temple.'

'So it's some kind of council then?'

‘It was an assembly of rabbis that convened adjacent to the Holy Temple before its destruction in 70AD and then outside Jerusalem until about 400AD.

17

Archaeology in the Bedrock of the Haram

WORSHIP IN THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM was based on the need of constant purification so as to respect the Covenant, requiring the High Priest be immersed in the running spring waters borne to the heart of the Temple.

The Temple was therefore organised around a continuous supply of running spring waters, however the only springs having a suitable and constant flow rate were the Etam Springs, a collection of springs at an altitude higher than that of Jerusalem, situated in a region to the south of Bethlehem.

The waters of these springs supplied a storage and collection area called Solomon’s Pools situated at approximately 785 metres above sea level, whilst the average elevation of the cisterns was at approximately 725 meters above sea level. The water was therefore carried by gravity to the Temple of Jerusalem by aqueducts, either in the form of channels and tunnels cut into the rock, or bridges crossing valleys and ravines.

However during certain months of the year the flow rate was insufficient for the needs of the Temple. Therefore cisterns were cut into bedrock of the Temple Mount. These subterranean cisterns could store up to fifty million litres of water.

According to Jewish law the purification power ceased once the water became and water contained in the cisterns could have been declared impure according to the Torah.

Therefore it was necessary to conceive a system that ensured a continuous flow of the water stored in the cisterns, this was ensured by a system of cascades so that the water was in continuous movement.

Without the exploration by the archaeologists of the engineers of the Palestinian Survey Fund the water system would have never been discovered. De Lussac considered this water system to have been conceived and designed uniquely for the needs of the Temple and its purification rights. By extension this system was the only surviving structure of the Temple destroyed by the Romans in 70AD.

Up until the 19th century it had been relatively feasible for Westerners to explore and study, with the necessary approval, the surrounding area of Jerusalem and the aqueducts that carried water to the presumed site of the Temple. However, any investigation into the Haram underground was totally forbidden to infidels by the Muslim authorities.

Popular legends told that the underground was haunted by djinns, good or evil genies, but who had been the first creatures outside of Mecca to have recognised Mohammed as the Prophet and were converted to Islam.

In the 19th century the sanitary conditions in the Old City had reached such a disastrous state that the city authorities were forced to call on the help of foreign specialists to help modernise the water and drainage system.

Thus British officers of the Royal Engineers were given the task of carrying out a survey, which was extended to a detailed topographical and geographical survey of the whole of the Holy

Land and in which Jerusalem and the principal holy sites were studied from their historical, religious and archaeological aspects.

The men who carried out the work included three officers of the Royal Engineers assigned to the Palestine Exploration Fund: Charles Wilson, Charles Warren and Claude Reignier Conder, and in addition Conrad Schick, a German architect and researcher who became a representative of the Palestine Exploration Fund and its equivalent German organisation.

These men located a large number of underground cisterns taking dimensions and determining levels, as well as describing the nature of their construction and investigating the vestiges of channels and conduits connected to the water storage network with as much rigour as the circumstances permitted.

Exploration of the Haram's underground was carried out over twenty five years, between approximately 1850 and 1875, during a period of relative tolerance of the Muslim authorities.

The official reason for this topographical survey was for the planning of a water supply system for Jerusalem and an efficient system for the evacuation of waste water. But in spite of this official reasoning the resistance of certain Muslim religious leaders did not weaken and provoked in a recurring fashion many difficulties for the exploration of the Haram underground.

The surveyors used many different ruses to achieve their goals, especially the intrepid Warren whose determination often reached the limit of Muslim tolerance when he dug shafts outside of the Haram and tunnelled under the ramparts into the Haram's underground itself.

Exploration was made difficult at times as it was forbidden to dig shafts or carry out the least excavation work inside the Muslim Haram. In the same manner scaffolding was totally excluded which meant the archaeologists had to improvise as best they could.

This dangerous work was undertaken solely by candlelight or burning torches, at a time before the invention of magnesium lamps with little protection against the dangers of their rough tunnels collapsing.

Whenever the Muslims were alerted by suspicious noises and threatened Warren with reprisals, it was necessary to pay baksheesh and cease the excavations in progress.

These engineers gave little thought to the possible link between the underground water storage and distribution and the Temple of the Jews.

De Lussac concluded that the Temple would have been situated downstream of this elaborate water storage and distribution with its spouts supplying water for purification for the evacuation of the offal and dejections from the animals sacrificed by the Temple priests.

The detailed knowledge of the hydraulic system as it stands today is due to the extensive work of these engineers and archaeologists who codified and explored the cisterns, as well as the different tunnels and conduits that carried water and waste.

The descriptions, surveys and elevations recorded relative to the cistern-reservoirs, conduits and channels in the bedrock were principally made by Pierotti, Barclay, Wilson, Warren and Schick.

Certain measurements were checked by Conder, in particular the precise elevation above sea level for each cistern and the surface level of the Haram vertically above each respective cistern.

The results of the surveys with the related maps and drawings were published by the Fund in the 1884 book that included two parts for Jerusalem, composed of descriptions and plans.

O'Connelly read one of Wilson's accounts of the first exploration campaign:

The cisterns were explored in December and January before the last rains. The measures were carried out with a yard stick when I was alone and with a surveyor's chain when we were several persons. The elevations were measured with a prismatic altimeter or with a compass.

But none of these measurements could be considered as perfectly exact because it is not easy to work holding a candle in one hand and with your feet in water. On certain occasions it was very difficult to determine the exact nature of the vault of the cistern or to be entirely sure of the presence or absence of a conduits outlets or inlets. In addition the candles gave off a very weak light for such immense cavities, and before the arrival of the magnesium from England the winter rains had started and we were obliged to halt the explorations.

Three men were employed for the exploration of the cisterns, an interpreter and two labourers. The most part of the descents into the cisterns ere made with a ladder and rope. But in certain cases for the smaller cisterns their inlets were too narrow and this method could not be used, then a knotted rope was tied around the waist and lifting our arms as high as possible we tried to squeeze into the access holes on the surface.

The interpreter watched everything that happened and sent down candles by a cord for this purpose. Certain of these descents were carried out by Doctor Chaplin, who was always ready to join in

these explorations, others were made by myself alone.

It was a big problem to come back up, because the ladder and rope often hanging 12 metres swung and twisted in every direction in a very disagreeable way, whilst our clothes were soaked and hindered our legs....

Wilson established the topographical contours of the subterranean rock as well as inventorying the system with reference numbers and all their corresponding measurements with the greatest precision possible.

Warren, Wilson's successor, however remarked that there remained an immense amount of exploration work to be undertaken in the Sanctuary, all the surface drains be examined, and the probability of new cisterns being discovered, however in 1875 the exploration work came to a sudden end.

18

The Ramp

AL-HARAM AL-QUDSI AL-SHARIF is administered by the Islamic Waqf since it came under Israeli control during the Six Day War in 1967. The City of Jerusalem officially became the capital of Israel in 1980 under the Begin government,' he reminded them.

‘What started these riots?’

‘The reconstruction of the ramp.’

‘Why?’

‘The pedestrian ramp as you can see goes up from the Wall area to the Mughrabi Gate and the Esplanade, a lot of tourists use it every day and for simple safety reasons it needed renovation.’

‘It was damaged?’

‘Yes, a minor earthquake and a snow storm in 2004 damaged it.’

‘I see.’

‘Unfortunately any building work within the walls, on the walls themselves or even around them has always been highly controversial.’

‘Any excuse to start trouble!’ said Hertzfeld.

‘Regretfully so. The ramp was damaged and unsafe, so the authorities decided to rebuild it. The riots are provoked by trouble makers and religious extremists, most of these rioters are young good for nothings, just look at them, poor uneducated youths who do have not the least idea of their own history or the history of their religion.’

‘The Muslims?’

‘I’m sorry to say both sides are often at fault. In 1996 sixty nine Palestinians and sixteen Israeli soldiers were already killed in riots after Netanyahu’s Government opened a new tunnel leading to the Western Wall.’

‘I suppose the site has to be maintained.’

‘Maintain, yes, but in 2002 a bulge in the southern wall raised a storm of protests against the Waqf who were building a new mosque which endangered the site by excavations in the Stables of Solomon.’

‘So it’s part of an ongoing religious battle for between the Waqf and the Israelis for control of the site.’

‘Unfortunately so, the al-Aqsa mosque was nearly burnt down by a Jewish extremist in 1969. Abdullah of Jordan restored it together with the Dome of the Rock, it needed 85kg of 24-carat gold!’

‘Religion has become important, or is it an excuse for intolerance of anything different?’

‘Here you can see the Hassidim walk around non-Jews to avoid unclean shadows,’ laughed Hertzfeld.

O’Connelly was not surprised after all he had seen in Jerusalem.

‘I’ve heard things are bad in France,’ said David.

‘Bad?’

‘Yes.’

‘A lot of Jews are emigrating from France.’

He shrugged his shoulders: ‘I don’t know.’

‘They say France is full of Arabs...Muslims.’

‘And?’

‘Well they say in the press that anti-Semitism is on the increase, Jews, are being attacked with rioting and burning cars.’

‘It’s the first I’ve heard of it!’

‘That’s what we hear,’ said David smiling, ‘and the French Jews who come to Israel have pretty extremist ideas concerning Arabs. Since the Intifada they’re arriving at a rate of about 3,000 a year, that’s the most since the Six Day War.’

‘I didn’t know,’ said O’Connelly not sure whether David was provoking him.

‘They mostly live in and around Ashdod, there’s a lot of French speaking North African Jews there, then quite a lot move to the Netanya area.’

‘Who are they?’

‘Mostly they’re relatively young people, professionals and businesspeople. The older ones move to Herzliya and Caesarea. They are mostly Sephardic, from North Africa.’

‘I see, what motivates them then?’

‘Some kind of dream, an ideal, something they’ve always thought about. But since the number of Muslims in France has grown a lot it forced their hand if you like.’

‘So they felt threatened.’

‘I suppose so.’

‘And not by the Hezbollah rockets!’

David laughed: ‘They actually spend a lot of time outside of Israel and when things start hotting up they jump on a plane back to France.’

‘Most Jews in France live in Paris,’ said Laura speaking authoritatively. ‘I suppose the threat is more in their imagination fuelled by the media, where I live a great majority have businesses or are lawyers and doctors. I remember an article where one complained about being called names and said stones were thrown into the local synagogue garden, I suppose that’s not as bad as Hezbollah rockets.’

‘Or military service in Israel!’

‘Many Jews in France came from North Africa where they had lived for centuries, they were there before the French arrived, but left with the French when those countries became independent, they had always lived in relative peace with the Arabs. I suppose it was the foundation of the State of Israel that sparked of the problem between them and the local populations.’

The problem was that the younger generation had little experience of living alongside Arabs. When the Jews arrived in France, after the independence of France’s North African territories, many settled in certain suburbs of Paris, but then with the arrival of new waves of immigration of North African workers in the seventies Arabs started to arrive in these same suburbs.

The Jews then moved to Paris intramuros as they prospered and the Arabs asserted their own identity. For economic reasons many Jews chose Israel, where they were offered housing and financial incentives, which was very much more interesting compared to their condition in France. It is possible that those who claimed they had to hid their religion lived in immigrant suburbs not in Paris itself. But the Jews also became radicalised, even flaunting their difference,

twenty years ago it was rare to see a kippah, now it is common and the synagogues are much more visible as are their new faith schools.

‘It’s a fact that there is an increase in communitarism and ghettoization in France today, whether the future for Jews will be more complicated, I don’t know, but will it be simpler in Israel?’

‘It’s serving in the army is what makes a real Israeli. If you are too soft like the French, you’d be eaten alive.’

‘Apart from that in France and Europe in general,’ Laura told him, ‘even the smallest criminal act can be transformed into anti-Semitism, when in fact they’re often acts of robbery or common violence. In any case a lot of the immigrants from France think they’re special, but here they are just Jews like everyone else. The Russians are grateful to have escaped from Russia, but the French behave like they are in conquered land, they are very demanding and often disappointed to discover a lack of job opportunities and lower wages.’

‘The grass is always greener....’

‘The laugh is that about twenty percent of the population in Israel is Arab and Muslim.’

‘As I said they think that life will be easier here.’

‘Aumann said a lot Jews don’t understand why they are here, and if they don’t understand why they are here we will not survive. Perhaps in another fifty years, we probably won’t be here!’

‘Who is Aumann?’ asked Laura.

‘Robert Aumann! He won the Nobel Economics Prize last year.’

‘Never heard of him.’

‘Well he said the reason for the recent conflicts is national fatigue and if we fall asleep we will die, just like a mountain climber in the snow. So we have to stay alert!’

‘Sounds logical.’

‘He also said we are too sensitive about our losses, the 3,000 soldiers were killed in the Yom Kippur War was small change and the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip was a “tactical and ethical mistake”, which sent out the wrong signals to the Arabs. The result was the war against the Lebanon that set peace back at least 10 years.’

‘It certainly hasn’t promoted good relations.’

‘The trouble is a lot of Israelis are just bystanders, looking on as the Israeli state dispossesses the Palestinians of their territory and rights on the premise that the legends of our sacred book tells us we’re the chosen people! How can someone from France come and accept a home built on land seized from the Palestinians!’

‘In France the least supposed anti-Semitic event causes outrage,’ said Laura, ‘but people couldn’t give a damn about Palestinians, Iraqis, Somalis or Darfur.’

‘Are you anti-Jewish Laura,’ asked David jokingly.

‘As a matter of fact my mother is a Jew,’ said Laura.

That stopped David in his tracks.

‘The world is a strange place,’ said Shlomo taking over the conversation. ‘When Pinochet died he was ranked with Hitler and Stalin, tragically three thousand people died during the conflict in Chile, but it is incomparable to the countless millions Hitler, Stalin or Mao. Myself I was in Santiago de Chile, a student, before, after and during Allende’s government. I remember under Allende the country was literally falling to pieces, people were starving, there was nothing in the shops, a disaster, then Pinochet pulled things around.’

‘I don’t know about that, but in any case it’s clear today there’s an excess of political correctness.’

‘In France and many other countries in Europe,’ Laura told them, ‘there is a refusal by some and the left in particular to see things

objectively, and all those who do are branded as racists, and no one, absolutely no one defends a racist.’

Religion and Archaeology

THEY CONTINUED THEIR VISIT walking towards the ramp that led up to the Haram from from the Western Wall Plaza to the Mughrabi Gate and David pursued his discussion.

‘An example of the use of archaeological evidence can be seen in the controversy surrounding the ramp.’

‘This one – to the Haram esh-Sharif?’

‘Yes, here, in this dispute archaeological evidence was used to back the claims of the different parties relative to the holy sites.’

‘Tell us about the recent background history of the Haram?’ said Hertzfeld.

‘Well in 1967, we captured the Old City from the Jordanians, and Moshe Dayan allowed the Muslim religious authority, the Waqf, to administer it. But we maintained the right to enter it for security reasons using the Mughrabi or the Moors’ Gate. But as you can see the gate is high up in the wall and the ramp is the only way in.’

They stopped to look up at the massive walls before them.

‘The plan is that the Old City becomes a UNSECO World Heritage Site. So the Israelis and the Palestinians were supposed to work together for the protection of Jerusalem, but this raises the problem of archaeological works and more precisely the excavation works on the ramp leading up from the Western Wall Plaza to the Mughrabi Gate for access to the Esplanade.’

‘The Mughrabi Gate, wasn’t that the quarter demolished by Israel following the six-day war of June 1967.’

‘Yes, it was demolished to make way for the present day Plaza, but that’s another story. As to the ramp, it’s composed of several archaeological strata dating from Herodian times to the British Mandate period and a large amount of earth and rubble.’

He pointed to the ramp, which was situated to the left of the temporary wooden walkway, there was a yellow Caterpillar mechanical shovel standing idle before a pile of rubble. The old ramp was about seventy five metres long and curved upwards from a spot near to the Archaeological Park, it had originally been constructed so that visitors could enter the Haram through the Mughrabi Gate, six metres above the level of the Plaza. It was now the main entry point to the Haram for visitors as well as the Israeli police. The ramp was closed to Muslims and was controlled by the Israeli authorities. Muslims entered by other gates controlled by the Waqf, and regulated by the Israeli police.

They continued to part of the ramp situated closer to the Wall that included part of a house used as a prayer room by Jewish women. The house blocked the entrance to the Barclay Gate under the Mughrabi Gate, which certain thought was one of the ancient gates of the Herodian temple. On the other side of the wall, inside the Haram esh-Sharif, was prayer room that Muslims believe was the stable of Al-Buraq, Mohammed's horse.

‘The controversy goes back to February 2004, when heavy rain and snow caused the collapse of the wall on the north side of the ramp, exposing vaults and the underlying structures. Then in July 2005, a temporary wooden bridge was set up to access the Haram.’

‘That’s what we can see now?’

‘Yes, two million people visit the Haram each year, so the mayor of Jerusalem proposed a new and better ramp be designed and naturally

the World Heritage Committee wanted to see the details. The problem however, was in January the Prime Minister approved archaeological excavations on the ramp, though without consulting UNESCO and excavation works started under the supervision of the IAA.'

'So the Waqf got mad!'

'Right, the problem was that the old earth ramp would have had to be removed down to the bedrock for the foundations of the new ramp. In addition the work included other surveys on the southern side of the ramp towards the southern entrance of the Plaza and inside the Archaeological Park.'

'I thought they were only responsible for the Haram itself?'

'That's correct, but the problem is the Waqf considers that the entire area of the former Mughrabi Quarter and the ramp are its property.'

'Is that justified?'

'To be honest I don't know, but in any case they have always asked for the keys of the Mughrabi Gate to be given back to them, though without success.'

'So what's their worry?'

'They're afraid that the excavations work will destroy what remains of the Mughrabi Quarter and archaeological evidence relating to the Ayubid and Mamluk periods. They are also worried that the Israeli authorities hide any discovery that could be favourable to their claims.'

'So what's the situation now?'

'They've scrapped the plans for the new walkway. And they're now looking at some kind of an alternative.'

'Can we visit the Haram now?' asked Laura.

'Yes, we have plenty of time, it does not close until three. I'm glad to see you are not wearing shorts Miss Laura, many ladies are

refused entry if they are wearing shorts, remember the Muslim religious authorities are in charge and we have to obey their orders,' he said smiling.

After passing through the gate they were met by an Arab Israeli and friend of Shlomo's, Omar bin Salman, an archaeologist and specialist on Islam, who was to guide them on their visit and answer their questions

'The Al Aqsa Mosque,' he told them, 'after Mecca and Medina, is the third holiest place of prayer in the world for Muslims. It was completed in about 720AD. Al Aqsa is one of the oldest mosques in existence and probably the most beautiful. Here,' he said pointing to the graceful porticos, 'King Abdullah I of Jordan was assassinated in 1951, before his 15-year-old grandson who was to become King Hussein father of Jordan's present King Abdullah.'

'Can we go inside?' asked Laura.

'Yes, except during prayer times, but now is alright,' he said looking at his watch.

The left their shoes with their driver and entered into the Mosque.

'Removing shoes is an ancient tradition that goes back to the time when Moses saw the Burning Bush in the Sinai Desert and heard the voice of God telling him to put off his shoes.'

They entered a broad hall hung with chandeliers, the floors covered with oriental rugs. The roof was supported by columns embellished with early Islamic and Byzantine design. To the front, after a series of great marble pillars, was a dais reserved for the Jordanian royal family.

'The pulpit or minbar you see before you was one of Islam's greatest treasures, it was commissioned by Saladin for the re-consecration of the mosque after the Crusaders.'

'Was?'

‘Yes, a tragedy, it was destroyed when a crazy Australian tourist set fire to Al Aqsa in 1969, what you see is a reproduction.’

They continued their visit climbing the broad ceremonial stairs leading to a decorative archway and a raised centre portion of the Temple Mount complex. The façade of the Dome of the Rock was covered Persian blue tiles added by the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent in the mid-16th century. The Dome of the mosque had been completely rebuilt and gilded with eighty kilograms of 24-carat by the King of Jordan.

Inside thick carpets line the floor and ceiling with stained-glass windows. The mosque was built in 691AD, covering the rock, or the summit of the mountain.

‘Here according to Islamic tradition is the exact spot from which the Prophet rose into heaven, after a night ride on his horse Buraq, as you can see the Prophet’s footprints on the rock bear witness to this,’ he told them with the utmost seriousness.

‘Now you can see where the Prophet Muhammad’s hair is kept,’ he said pointing to a latticework cabinet.

As they left the mosque O’Connelly walked ahead with Salman as Laura and the others admired turned to admire the Dome of the Rock.

‘By the way where are the Stables?’

‘Ah yes, the Stables of Solomon, that’s something important for your book, I would think!’

‘Yes.’

‘Unfortunately it’s not possible for the moment, there are works going on and there is a security problem.’

He saw O’Connelly’s face and he shrugged his shoulders sadly.

‘I can image your disappointment, but here take my card, telephone me and I will be pleased to provide you with any information you want at a more convenient place.’ He slipped his card discretely into

O'Connelly's hand. 'Call me.' He said softly raising his finger to his lips.

That evening O'Connelly called Salman who proposed a meeting at a bookshop in the Arab Quarter early the next morning.

'Alone please Mr O'Connelly.'

Early that afternoon O'Connelly found the bookshop, not without difficulty in the twisting streets of the north-east part of Arab Quarter in the Old City. It was a typical Arab bookshop filled with green copies of the Koran and other holy books with their looping Arabic titles in gilt, technical works and children's books.

Salman invited him into a back room.

'It's very kind of you to come,' he said pointing to a low table and low cushion covered seats along the wall. 'A coffee?'

O'Connelly nodded his agreement and took a seat, a young boy appeared with two cups of Turkish coffee and two glasses of water. There exchanged a few polite phrases as a preamble before Salman got down to the object of his invitation.

'So you would like to visit Solomon's Stables?'

'Yes, if it is possible.'

'Let's see what we can do.'

They sipped there coffee.

'As you know I am an archaeologist, which means I do not necessarily agree with the work on the Haram.'

He saw O'Connelly raise his eyebrows.

'You should not think because I am a Muslim and an Arab that I have not a mind of my own,' he said smiling to soften his words.

'No,' said O'Connelly weakly.

'I am a believer, that is to say in God, but I do not necessarily accept all that is written in the holy books.'

O'Connelly said nothing, he waited for Salman's explanation.

‘You know religion is symbolism, people need thoughts and ideas to be transferred into something less abstract. So symbols such as holy books, holy places and relics, these are proof of the past, the pre-existence of things they are brought up to believe. Religion and our history books tell us of our past, something that is gone for ever, religion helps us to see our future, it even promises us a future beyond what we fear most, death. These things help us to concentrate on living, on going about our daily life, bringing up our families.’

O’Connelly listened fascinated by the unexpected frankness of Salman, wondering where it was leading.

‘So I believe in the need for symbolism, I don’t necessarily approve its use by politicians or even worse perpetrators of violence. I am not an iconoclast, if Muslims and Jews share a common and peaceful respect for the holy places that is a good thing. As an archaeologist I don’t believe our work should be used for political ends or to demolish the faith of others.’

‘I see.’

‘So your book interests me, the story of the Temple, the cisterns....’

‘Myself I am a novelist, but the archaeological work relating to the underground water system was made by a young man, a Druze. The theory concerning the site of the Temple was based on this young man’s work and was developed by a Frenchman. So, myself I started out with the idea of writing a novel about the investigation’s into the history of Temple. Now it seems that this has turned into an investigation.’

‘Ah, an investigation.’

‘No I don’t mean an investigation in the sense of a newspaper or police investigation, I mean an exploration of history and the different people’s motivations.’

‘Do you believe your French archaeologist’s theories?’

‘Theories are theories, I now realise there are as many as there are religious experts concerning the Temple,’ he suddenly stopped and then picking up again flustered, ‘I’m sorry I didn’t mean to offend you.’

‘There’s no offence, I am a rational man not a theorist,’ Salman said smiling kindly.

‘As to the young student archaeologist’s work, it’s really interesting, it’s a pity it was never completed.’

‘Who is this young man?’

‘He was killed in the IDF on the Lebanese border.’

‘Ah, I’m sorry to hear that, he was perhaps a Druze if he was in the IDF?’

‘Yes.’

‘And the Frenchman?’

‘That’s more complicated, a strange character, not exactly a crank, inspired by some kind of a religious vision.’

‘We have many of those in Jerusalem. Does he live here?’

‘No he’s in Cambodia.’

‘Oh....’

There was a silence as he reflected.

‘So how can I help you?’

‘Is it possible to visit the Stables.’

‘I can arrange that,’ he replied promptly. ‘If you are free now we can go there directly, on Thursday morning the Haram is closed to tourists

A stairway led down to the underground area.

‘It’s often called Solomon’s Stables, perhaps it was the Crusaders who gave it that name. They thought they were the stables for King Solomon’s horses. What they are in reality is part of the substructure built by Herod’s for the platform now the Haram esh-Sharif what you call the Temple Mount. Some Muslims wrongly think it refers the

Ottoman Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, who rebuilt the walls around Old City repaired the Dome of the Rock in the 16th century.

‘By the way we heard that Herod’s tomb has been discovered?’

‘I know, that’s what Ehud Netzer of the Hebrew University says, it’s at Herodium, that’s to the south of Jerusalem in the Judean desert.’

‘It was the same Herod mentioned in the New Testament?’

‘Yes, Herod the Great, he was made King of Judea by the Roman, and reigned from about 37 BC to 4 BC.’

‘So he wasn’t there when Jesus was born?’

‘Not according to historians, perhaps to the New Testament.’

‘It was he who built the Second Temple.’

‘Not exactly, he rebuilt it to make it more magnificent more worthy of God. He also built the walls around the Old City and the hilltop fortress of Masada, where Jewish rebels made their last stand in 73AD.’

‘How did Netzer discover it?’

‘Well he has worked on the site for decades. But I was an ancient staircase built for Herod’s funeral procession that was described in detail by Josephus Flavius, which led Netzer to the hill-top burial site.’

‘What exactly did they find?’

‘A broken limestone sarcophagus. It was decorated with ornate rosette patterns, which indicates it was for someone important. Herod was no doubt buried somewhere inside of his palace built on the hilltop.’

ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE, Moses commanded that there be a place for sacrifices to the Almighty. At that time the people of Israel lived in the desert and their place of worship was a tent, the Tent of Meeting. After David made Jerusalem the capital of Israel, his son Solomon built the First Temple that took on the same form as the Tent of Meeting.

The Temple was described as being thirty metres long and ten metres wide. It had forecourt and an inner court, where the Ark of the Covenant was stood the Holy of Holies. Sacrifices were offered daily on the altar at the Temple. For the great Jewish feasts, the Passover, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths the Jews made pilgrimages to the Temple for worship. Under Kings Hezekiah and Josiah the Temple became the sole place of sacrificial worship. In 587BC the Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians.

The Second Temple was built between 520BC and 515BC and this was rebuilt in a grander form by Herod the Great who transformed it into a greater and more beautiful sanctuary for the Jewish people. It was razed by the Romans in 70AD and was never rebuilt.

Josephus recounted how Herod trained an army of priests as stonecutters and carpenters specially to build his Temple and an ossuary discovered in Jerusalem hints at those involved in the construction with an Aramaic inscription to Simon the Temple Builder.

In his book *The Jewish War*, Josephus wrote that '*the expenditure devoted to his work was incalculable, its magnificence never surpassed.*' The Temple, its platform and its porticos, were no doubt typical of Roman architecture at that time. Cassius Dio called the Temple '*extremely large and beautiful.*' Tacitus, no friend of the Jews, described the Temple as having been built '*with more care and effort than any of the rest, the very colonnades around the Temple made a splendid defence.*'

To the north-western corner of the Temple Mount was the Antonia Fortress. At the time of Herod the Great, Jerusalem was surrounded by valleys on every side except the north, which was in fact the only way of approach for an attack on the city. It was here Herod built the huge Antonia Fortress, designed to protect the Temple Mount from the north, on the site of an earlier Maccabaeen fortress built by John Hyrcanus I. Its name was given by Herod after Mark Antonio. Josephus Flavius described the fortress as being 115 metres from east to west, with the western side 35 metres long and the eastern side 42 metres long, with four towers.

The fortress was defended against the Roman army of Titus in the siege of Jerusalem in 70AD and its capture resulted in the fall of the city and the sack of the Temple.

21

A Documentary

AS PLANNED THEY MET FLORENCE BOUSQUET and Philippe Dubosc in the bar at the Sheraton the follow evening and after drinks left in high spirits for a Yemeni restaurant on Shabazi Street that had been recommended to them by David Elquayam.

Bousquet was in a celebratory mood, they had filmed thirty hours of interviews with Shimon Perez, who had spoken of his childhood in the Ukraine, his arrival in Israel and the Israeli-Arab wars when he had been an army general before becoming a politician. Bousquet was more than the cultural editor of Le Monde she was a natural communicator, close to politicians, spin doctors and the string pullers of the media world.

‘So what are you doing in Israel Pat? I can’t believe that you are just tourists.’

‘We’re doing some research for a book project.’

‘Ah, a new book!’

‘No...just working on some ideas.’

‘Hertzfeld is your publisher?’

‘Yes.’

O’Connelly was careful not to unveil his project, news of his plans could precipitate all those short of ideas into the breach, which was the last thing his publisher or he himself would want.

‘So it’s secret!’ she said pretending to drop the subject.

‘No, it’s just we haven’t any fixed ideas for the moment.’

‘Well if it’s about Israel, it won’t go unnoticed.’

‘What about Perez, it would be a good subject for a biography?’

‘First a two part documentary for television, then perhaps a book.’

The taxi had dropped them at the restaurant in what appeared to be a less prosperous district of Tel-Aviv, where the passers-by seemed to be composed of Arabs, Ethiopians and Indians. It was very oriental compared to the other restaurants they had eaten in, the waiters were dressed in traditional Yemeni costumes and the menu was composed of with spicy dishes that they did not recognise from the extreme south of the Arabian Peninsula. The atmosphere was completed by a small group of musicians playing oriental music.

‘Well Pat when your ready let me know so that we can give an advance review.’

‘It’ll probably be ready for release in autumn next year.’

‘With two million copies, translated into thirty-six languages with film planned?’

‘Who knows,’ O’Connelly replied laughing.

‘What about you?’ he asked Florence. ‘What’s your next project.’

‘Well, sitting in Paris is not really my thing, once we’ve got the interview to the studios Philippe will look after the production, then I will be free, you know the usual things, art, music, books, films and the rest, but in a month’s time I’m off to Libya.’

‘Libya?’

‘Yes, on the footsteps of the Egyptian civilization.’

‘In Libya.’

‘Yes, Arte the Franco-German channel has produced a documentary on the Sahara before it was a desert, so I’ve been invited to make an introductory presentation.’

‘Sounds really interesting.’

‘It is, because before being a desert the Sahara was teeming with animals and Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers, but the most interesting is archaeologists and anthropologists now believe these peoples settled on the banks of the Nile as the climate became dryer and were the ancestors of the ancient Egyptians.’

‘Fantastic!’

‘If it interests you why don’t you come along?’

Laura hopefully looked at O’Connelly.

‘I’d love to join you, but it depends on our work here. I have to earn a living.’

‘Do kid me you’re hard up,’ Florence said pulling his leg.

‘No, but I do need to top up my bank account from time to time.’

‘Think about it, remember if you’re writing about Israel, the Egyptians played an important role in the history of ancient Israel, and many Jews immigrated to the Greek and Roman colonies in and around Leptis Magna.’

‘Maybe I’ll take you up on the offer, in the meantime we have to do our research work here.’

Sacrifice

THE SACRIFICE OF ANIMALS was a religious ritual common to the majority civilizations and peoples of the Ancient World. Sacrifice, both human and animal, was offered to placate violent gods and spirits and as a sign of recognition of man to the power of nature that surrounded him with all its forces.

‘I never realized that the Jews sacrificed animals.’

‘Well if you read the Bible you’ll remember that Abraham was order to sacrifice his son Jacob!’

‘I suppose so, but here de Lussac talks of thousands of animals being sacrificed.’

‘That was the culmination of their ancient civilization, which was in fact destroyed by the Romans, what remained was changed for ever.’

In the case of the ancient Hebrew civilization the ritual of animal sacrifice in the Temple of Jerusalem was governed by particularly complex laws, but basically these were either complete sacrifices whereby animals sacrificed were integrally offered to God and entirely burnt on the altar or communal sacrifices in which certain parts of the animals sacrificed were burnt in offering to the Eternal and the remainder of the animals destined as food for priests, families, or those who had directly or indirectly offered the sacrificed animal.

The Bible described complete sacrificial rituals in Leviticus:

Then the Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When any man of

you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock.

If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the Lord.

He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.

He shall slay the young bull before the Lord; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces. The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire.

Then Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar.

Its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer up in smoke all of it on the altar for a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the Lord.

and public ritual sacrifices:

Now if his offering is a sacrifice of peace offerings, if he is going to offer out of the herd,

whether male or female, he shall offer it without defect before the Lord.

He shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and slay it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle the blood around on the altar.

From the sacrifice of the peace offerings he shall present an offering by fire to the Lord, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, which is on the loins, and the lobe of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys.

Then Aaron's sons shall offer it up in smoke on the altar on the burnt offering, which is on the wood that is on the fire; it is an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the Lord.

The animals sacrificed were slaughtered in the Temple Court, and the sacrificial altar was in fact an altar for burning parts of the animal sacrificed.

The different operations of slaughtering, flaying, cutting up the fatty parts and offal, washing of the viscera and feet, implied a great quantity of blood and animal dejections of all kinds. In addition not only were the animals slaughtered ritually by cutting their throats, but they were also entirely emptied of their blood.

The number of animals sacrificed in the Temple on certain occasions was extremely important, especially during the great annual Jewish feasts that brought together a great number of people and pilgrims from all of Israel and overseas.

The heads of all Jewish families considered it essential to be present at the Temple in Jerusalem to offer up a communal sacrifice, which sanctified the meat. Those parts not burnt on the altar as offerings to the Eternal and not reserved for the High Priest, the priests and the Levites to be eaten at once or preserved, could then take away.

As for royalty, dignitaries, and other leaders, their glory was amplified when they offered the greatest number of animals possible for sacrifice.

According to the Bible story, for the consecration of the Temple, King Solomon and all the Israelites offered a very great number of animals for sacrifice. The Book of Kings tells of how Solomon offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep in sacrifice to the Lord.

These royal sacrifices were the occasion for great festivities that continued for seven days with sufficient food for all, without taking into account meat salted for preservation, prepared by the priests and the Levites as a food stock.

Other accounts speak of 70 bulls, 100 rams, and 200 lambs, sacrificed in a burnt offering to the Lord another speaks of 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep.

Flavius Josephus spoke of the high priests and the Feast of the Passover, calculating the number of sacrifices as 256,500 animals sacrificed at altar in the Court of the Temple. Thus the Temple and its courts were transformed into a huge slaughter house and butchery together with specialised functional areas near to the Altar of Incineration for the slaughtering the animals, cutting their throats and bleeding them, tables for flaying and cleaning the skins, tables for butchering the carcasses according to the ritual for distribution of the parts, eviscerating and rinsing the entrails as well as for washing the animals' hooves.

Jewish texts describe these areas:

Twenty-four Rings set into the floor to the north of the Altar.

Some said 4 rows of 6 rings.

It was there they slaughtered the animals.

The slaughter area was to the north of the Altar

There were eight columns with square boards in cedar wood at the top to which were fixed iron hooks.

These hooks were arranged in three rows, on which the animals were hung after slaughter (and bled).

The priests flayed them on eight marble tables.

The slaughtering, bleeding, flaying, butchering, removal and washing of the viscera of thousands of animals, even hundreds of thousands of animals, produced vast quantities of waste in the Court of the Priests, not only the blood of the sacrificial victims, but also their urine and dejections of all kinds, transforming the court into a vast, slimy, bloody cesspool that would have quickly become an evil smelling lake if it had not been washed and cleaned immediately.

A Visit to London

ON THEIR RETURN TO PARIS O'Connelly decided that a visit to the venerable organisation in London was essential to document himself on the work of Queen Victoria's 19th century Royal Engineers conserved in vast archive of Palestine Exploration Fund's London library. The Fund was still active after almost one hundred and forty years of research into the *archaeology and history, manners and customs and culture, topography, geology and natural sciences of the Levant* as they described their work. The Levant being in fact modern Israel and Palestine.

The Fund continued to publish the Palestine Exploration Quarterly, a journal respected by archaeologists and researchers. It also continued to modestly finance research projects in the Holy Land.

After the payment of the annual subscription of £30 O'Connelly became a member of the Fund and had access to its reference library situated at Hinde Mews, Marylebone Lane, London. The collection included rare eighteenth to early twentieth century travelogues, as well as a unique collection of over 9,000 vintage photographs, archaeological objects, natural history collections, archives and manuscripts.

The library was just a short walk from his hotel, the Churchill on Portman Square, along Wigmore Street to Marylebone Road, it was situated in an elegant late Georgian or early Victorian brick building, part of which had been apparently rented out as a result of Fund's financial situation, they were in hard times.

He set out after a late breakfast and in less than ten minutes found himself before the elegant entrance doorway that dated back to the early nineteenth century. The library was small. He could not help thinking it was a pity that such a historic institution was in difficulties. After a short visit and questions to the librarian, the

library bookshop quickly provided him with what he needed; a work entitled 'Below the Temple Mount in Jerusalem', a source book on the Cisterns, Subterranean Chambers and Conduits of the Haram al-Sharif for £40. It was described as '*a comprehensive study of descriptions and available information on the Temple Mount, including plans by Wilson, Warren, Schick and others, much of this published here for the first time. 310 pages, 130 drawings, sketches and photographs*'. He also bought a history of the Fund and a CD of the various works they had carried out in Jerusalem during their long existence.

The weather was fine and he set out across Hyde Park in the direction of Knightsbridge. The object was Harrods where he would take lunch, his favourite spot when he was alone, a sandwich and a glass of good wine at the bar in the food hall. Nothing was comparable to a Harrods' roast beef sandwich, the prices were extravagant, but that was part of the pleasure. On occasions he went from bar to bar, first the sandwich, then an ice cream, a pastry or a fruit salad, followed by a double espresso coffee, each at a different bar, there were eighteen in all in the food hall.

However, there was another reason to visit Harrods was his safe box, where he kept a reserve, a precaution, a kind of retirement fund, or a hideaway where he could keep small treasures from prying eyes and the tax man. In 150 years of existence, Harrods had never been burgled.

Settled at the bar and after his sandwich he flipped through his new acquisitions. Palestine in the 19th century had been many things to the British middle-class and upper-class Victorians. It was the 'Land of the Bible', visited, experienced, and described to illustrate the veracity of the revealed scriptural texts, biblical archaeology and geography, in parallel with the other great popular revelation of the time; Egyptology.

Between the Holy Land and Egypt lay the Suez Canal, a passage of strategic importance for the British Empire and the subject of rivalry between the European powers competing for influence over the territories still nominally ruled by the Ottomans. For London, regardless of its real political and legal status, Palestine was British, which can be seen from the words of William Thompson, the Archbishop of York, in his inaugural address to the meeting of the Palestine Exploration Fund on 22 June 1865: *‘The country of Palestine belongs to you and to me. It is essentially ours’*.

He then went to the book department where he found a coffee table book of water colours by the Scottish artist David Roberts drawn during his visit to the Levant in 1838-39. He spoke of an outbreak of the pest in Jerusalem in January 1839, its narrow streets filled with people of all nations in their picturesque costumes amongst mules and donkeys transporting veiled women between harems.

After a quick visit to his safe box, his next visit was to Christies in Kings Street. There was an auction preview of late 19th century and early 20th maps and books, including works and descriptions of archaeological investigations made in the Holy Land and more notably Jerusalem.

Laura would join later that evening for the weekend in London and if the preview was of interest the auction would be on their Saturday afternoon programme.

The Palestine Exploration Fund

IN THE EARLY 1870S, the Palestine Exploration Fund sent a team of explorers to make a detailed survey of the area to the west of the Jordan River. A map was published in 1880 to a scale of 1 inch to 1 mile composed of twenty six individual sheets, each approximately two feet square. It was the first scientific map of the Holy Land.

The CD O'Connelly had bought at the Fund's headquarters in London contained high resolution photographic copies of all the maps of Western Palestine produced in by the nineteenth century surveyors.

Immense changes had occurred in the interim period of one and thirty years. Not long after the publication of the map Nathan Birnbaum founded modern Zionism in 1892 and the first Aliyah began. Today a map of the Holy Land is very much different from that draw by the surveyors of the Fund, place names have been changed, populations moved and new cities built with roads and infrastructure.

From his laptop O'Connelly could visit the Holy Land of Charles Warren and the army officers of the Royal Engineers. He had the maps reproduced in full colour on paper at a local copy centre near Dizengoff on which he had retraced aqueducts and highlighted archaeological sites with a marker. It was much less costly than the Archive Editions luxury edition of the maps advertised at US\$4,795 published in thirteen volumes.

With the aid of the Funds book *Thirty Years' Work in the Holy Land* published in 1895, O'Connelly poured over the maps retracing the history of Israel and Palestine. The details of the century old maps were extraordinary, indicating vineyards, orchards, gardens, woods, scrubs, palms, and fir trees. The locations were designated for wine presses, milestones, tombs, wells, cisterns, and caves. The

team surveyed successive regions covering all of the territory west of the Jordan River between Tyre in the north and Beersheba in the south.

The original names of many ancient and biblical sites remained transliterated into the present day names in Arabic of many towns and villages.

At the time the survey commenced its work in Palestine the population of Palestine was estimated to be around 450,000 compared to the present day population of about seven million. As in most other regions of the world this population is concentrated in urban centres such as Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Tiberias, Nazareth, Beersheba, Hebron, and Nablus.

What interested him most was Jerusalem's water supply system at the time of the survey the average annual rainfall about fifty centimetres with the rainy season between November to March, which was no doubt little changed since. The survey indicated how the cisterns and reservoirs had been built for the collection of the rainfall, which was complimented by springs, wells, pools and aqueducts.

Since the Bible nothing comparable to the work of the Survey of Western Palestine had detailed so much knowledge of the Holy Land until the development of the modern state of Israel had been established.

The number of Jews in Palestine was small in the early 20th century; it increased from 7,000 in 1870 to nearly 40,000 by 1912, representing under ten percent of the total population. The majority consisted of Arabic speaking Muslims and Christians. Even the Jewish population of Jerusalem was in a minority.

New Discoveries

TWO REASONS MADE JOHN ENNIS pleased to be in Tel-Aviv, firstly he always enjoyed the pleasure of Europe's eastern most Mediterranean city, and secondly, by one of those chance meetings often experienced by frequent travellers, he had met one of his oldest friends, Pat O'Connelly, in the lobby of the Sheraton.

After their initial surprise, Ennis, a reporter with the International Herald Tribune for Middle East affairs, explained he was covering a visit of Condelezza Rice on the latest events in Gaza following attacks and counter attacks at the border and the Hamas threatening Israeli towns its Kassam rockets. Ennis, far from being a Biblical specialist, was extremely knowledgeable on modern Near Eastern history and O'Connelly described to him the reasons for his visit.

Late that evening after dinner, Laura made an excuse to return to the room leaving the two old friends together, both of whom then wandered down to the seafront and sat on the low beach wall, the promenade was practically deserted. The temperature must have been around 26°C, the luminosity of the night was intense with an almost full moon reflecting off the still sea, a couple of kilometres to the south were the soft lights of Jaffa, it was an almost dreamlike evening. O'Connelly would have liked to seize the moment, make time stand still, but it slipped slowly through his helpless fingers like smooth water.

'Tell me something about the history of modern Israel.'

'The history of Israel is very different from all other countries Pat, for several reasons, one because of the most unique book in the history of man, the Bible, two because of the language of the Jews, Hebrew, which against all odds has survived as a written and spoken language, and finally because of the Jews themselves, who have

survived the longest and most unrelenting persecution against a single people in all history, more than two thousand years.'

'And its religion?'

'Of course, that's the linkage between the three reasons I just mentioned.'

'How can you explain that?'

'What?'

'The persecution.'

'Why, that's rather complicated, but in a nutshell it's probably linked to the fact that it was the first great monotheist religion, a factor of great importance. I'm speaking objectively, leaving aside religion and belief. Then there is the fact that Israel lay at a strategic crossroad between Egypt and the great early civilizations to the north, the Assyrians, Persians and Babylonians, then later the west, Greece and Rome.'

'Which brought Israel into contact with the exterior.'

'Right. If it had been at the other end of the Arabian Peninsula history would have been different.'

'But it wasn't.'

'No, invasion and conflict was the order of the day over 1,500 years of history before Christ.'

'Was Christ a catalyst?'

'Yes and no. But the conflict with Rome did coincide with the appearance of the Christian religion. Jerusalem was a hotbed of revolution around the time of Christ, different from other parts of the Empire where the real fault lines between civilizations lay.'

'Revolution?'

'Yes, Judaism contained an ideology, and still does, look at the state of Israel, but it was more than a religion, but it was not and is still not a proselytic ideology. The Jews were defending a way of

life, against the occupiers, a situation that is not so different from that of today, but the tables are turned, they are the occupiers.'

'Let's see if we can get something to drink,' said looking at his watch.

'There's something open?'

'Sure there's loads of bars on Hayarkon Street.'

They crossed the boulevard and made their way across a parking lot to Hayarkon, where they found a bar that was not noisy and ordered a couple of large beers.

'So the Romans were the oppressors.'

'Yes, but the Jews were also in constant conflict amongst themselves, different sects as well as the constant internal struggle for power following the death of Herod.'

'Sects like at Masada?'

'That's right plus the fact the country had been divided into three parts by the Romans after Herod.'

'And that's where Jesus Christ came into the picture.'

'Yes, he was also a revolutionary, against the strict rules of traditional Judaism at the epoch. He succeeded not because he was a prophet, but because the new religion was adopted by the Roman Empire and the Byzantines.'

O'Connelly looked around him a little alarmed, but saw that the other late nighters were too deeply involved in their own conversation to be paying any attention to a couple of very unremarkable tourists.

'Then six hundred years later came Mohammed with another religion. Making three, Judaism plus two offshoots, Christianity and Islam.'

'Yes. It's funny if you think back to the time when we were kids, brought up as Catholics, we knew little about the Jews, but we did not like them and we knew nothing about the Mohammedans, except

in history, Khartoum and Lord Kitchener fighting of wild fanatics, or the Crusades.'

'Rightly or wrongly I rejected religion when I was about sixteen, so I'm not very well up on the details of religions.'

'I can understand that, but don't forget that Christianity was founded by a Jew and the base of Christianity is the Bible, that is Old and New Testaments. And when Christianity became the religion of Rome, it became the keystone of Western civilisation.'

'Of course, so how does Islam fit in with that?'

'Islam grew out of Judaism or more precisely from the Judaic form of monotheism, borrowing a considerable number of elements from it.'

'Such as?'

'Abraham...Jerusalem, for example, not forgetting Jesus, who is considered as a prophet in Islam, though not for the Jews.'

He looked puzzled, 'Abraham?'

'Yes the Muslims consider him as the father of Islam.'

'And Jerusalem?'

'Well Mohammed rose into heaven from the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.'

'So that explains these endless disputes.'

'You could say that.'

'So how does the Temple come into it?'

'In very simple terms Abraham spoke with God on Mount Moriah and an alliance was formed between God and the people of Judah. This was called the covenant, which was kept in an Ark in his tent, that is until the first Temple was built by Solomon in the 10th century BC.'

'So it sat in his tent for a thousand years.'

'If you like,' he laughed and looked around for a waiter.

The television at the end of the bar showed a group of Palestinians burning a synagogue in Gaza.

‘Look at that,’ said Ennis.

‘What about it!’

‘Without an explanation viewers would think the conflict is about religion, you know the nature of God and all that, like your friend, Alfred Mann, he thinks peace is about religion, understanding the other, that's a lot of shit! And even worse he connives with religious extremists in helping them to believe the present day problems of Israel and Palestine are the fault of Europeans in general.’

‘Oh!’ said O’Connelly.

‘There’ll never be peace as long as the Jews are here.’

‘That sounds a bit racist?’

‘No, but unfortunately it's a fact, why do you think the Jews have had so many problems throughout history, the Pharaohs, the Assyrians, Nebuchadnezzar, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, Mohammed, the Spanish, the Ottomans, the British, Germans and now Arabs and Muslims in general?’

‘Fuck knows,’ said O’Connelly. With his friend Ennis it often ended up like that, an argument. He felt tired he had enough for the day. The waiter finally appeared and he asked for the check.

‘Had enough then?’

‘Yeah, so tell me.’

‘What?’

‘What you were saying about the Jews.’

‘In a nutshell they’re impossible, nice but impossible, they want to be different, it's up to them, but whatever they do they can’t live on an island, and that's not going to be settled by a lot of imams and rabbis sitting down together and talking about Andalusia.’

They two friends had practically lost contact after their university years until they met again in Paris at a cocktail reception for the

inauguration of an Asian fine antiques exhibition. O'Connelly then a journalist and newly arrived in Paris was lost amongst the aloof Parisian fine art crowd when he overheard English being spoken. He immediately recognised Ennis engaged in small talk with a wealthy Lebanese, whom he had met at a press conference in the Syrian Embassy a few weeks previously.

The Lebanese recognised him and was about to introduce O'Connelly, when he discovered the two were old friends. After several glasses of Champagne and talk of Paris, the Middle East and the latest Palestinian crisis they managed to slip off. It was in the early hours when they finally quit each other after having dined together and hit a good number of bars. O'Connelly and Ennis had first met at boarding school near Dublin and then gone on to university in Dublin and London.

They left the bar and slowly made their way back to the hotel continuing their discussion.

'Tell me John, what do you know about the history of recent archaeological finds in Jerusalem?'

'The latest archaeological finds? I'm not a specialist, but from press reports I've read there's a Jewish ritual bath from the time of Herod's Temple, and a piece of wall from the First Temple period, which was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC.'

'Who were the archaeologists?'

'The digs were sponsored by Elad, that's an ultranationalist group.'

'The guide book says that there is a tunnel that can be visited?'

'Yes, there's a tunnel, near the Wall, it ends in the Muslim Quarter.'

'Can you visit it?'

'I believe it's possible, though it's been the source of quite a considerable source of controversy.'

'Controversy?'

‘Back in 1996, a rumour went around that the tunnel was part of a plot against the Muslims, it ended up in riots and gun battles between Palestinian security forces and Israeli forces, eighty people were killed.’

‘That’s some controversy!’

‘There’s been a lot of underground structures discovered. During the 19th century the Palestine Survey Fund carried out excavations over a long period of time, they discovered the vestiges of underground tunnels and galleries in the Kidron Valley connected to the Gihon Spring. That work came to an end with the World War Two. After the archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon, continued work at three other sites in the Old City, in the hope of discovering evidence from the Roman period, but little was discovered.’

Ennis continued by explaining how in the seventies, the Israeli authorities undertook excavations alongside the west wall where a stone sewage conduit was discovered, then in the eighties the Hebrew University carried out excavations in the hope of finding evidence of ancient occupation of the city, but all they turned up were details relating to the Stone Age period, which had little to do with Jewish history.

The Western Wall, he said it had nothing to do with Temple itself, it was in fact part of the foundation of the walls built by Herod to form the platform, now the Esplanade.

More recent excavations between the Western Wall and the south-western corner of the Esplanade uncovered a ten metre wide street paved with large flagstones, lined with shops dating from Roman times. It runs parallel to the Western Wall along the Tyropoeon Valley, between the Temple Mount and the western hill.

Near the end of the street protruding from the wall were the remains of what is called Robinson’s Arch, which had once projected out from the Western Wall high above and over the street, on the

other side of which were the remains of its supporting pier. The arch had been the continuation of an access stairway that led up from the street to the Temple Mount. It had been destroyed by the Romans and had collapsed covering the street with huge blocks of masonry.

‘What’s interesting is one of the stones found amongst the debris covering the street had an inscription in Hebrew that says ‘*to the trumpeting place*’. A place where a trumpet announced the Sabbath...that is before the destruction of the Temple. Then there’s the ramp, leads up to the Triple Gate, now it’s closed, under repair. A temporary wooden structure was set up for visitors’ access to the Esplanade during the repair works.’

‘That’s what all the controversy has been about.’

‘Yes, another of the Wafq’s ploys to prevent excavation works.’

‘A pity.’

‘Below it outside of the walls is a garden with the remains of excavation work, called the Ophel Archaeological Park.’

‘Yes we visited it, apparently the first settlement goes back several thousand years with twenty five layers of ruins, unfortunately all buildings that go back to the Roman times were destroyed in 70AD. There were two gates in the south wall during the Second Temple period, known as the Huldah Gates, leading into tunnels through which people could pass on their way to the Temple Mount.’

‘Though nobody knows whether the Temple actually stood there or not!’

Menorah Press

DE LUSAC HAS SIGNED A CONTRACT with the Menorah Press!’

‘A contract! Are you sure?’

‘Apparently there is a written contract to publish his work.’

‘How do you know?’

‘That’s what Cedric Delauny told me.’

‘Has Mann confirmed it?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Then we’d better find out. If he has a serious editor they could put a spanner in the works.’

‘Can we meet?’

‘Of course, what else do you know?’

‘I can’t speak over the phone.’

‘Where?’

‘In the lobby bar in fifteen minutes.’

‘He saw Shlomo Klein, sitting at a table fumbling with a sheaf of papers looking his normal smiling agitated self.’

‘Hi Patrick!’

‘So Shlomo what’s new?’

He leaned forward and lowered his head: ‘I have a copy of the contract with the Menorah Press.’

He handed O’Connelly the papers, who flipped through them, it looked like a draft, not too well written and on plain paper.

‘There’s no signature, or name!’

Shlomo shrugged: ‘A draft.’

‘A draft is not a contract!’

‘That’s all there is.’

‘How did you get this?’

‘Delauny gave it to me.’

‘Does Mann know?’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘What about the Menorah Press? Do you have any confirmation from them?’

‘Not for the moment.’

‘This mentions a payment of ten thousand Euro and royalties, is that the way they work?’

‘I’m not sure.’

‘Why was it at Mann’s?’

‘Cedric told me he thinks de Lussac is trying to get the Trust to cough up an advance.’

‘The best thing you can do Shlomo is to discretely call the Menorah Press department and get some confirmation, then we can decide what to do next.’

‘What is the Menorah Press?’

‘It belongs to the Anglo-Israeli press magnate Ronny Gould.’

27

Seville

IT WAS MORE BY CURIOSITY than anything else he had agreed to make the trip to Seville to attend the World Council for Interreligious Reconciliation. The theme for the 23rd council was the reconciliation between Jews and Muslims, which to O’Connelly following his visit to Israel an impossible task, on the other hand for those who had made a career promoting peace it offered a lifetime occupation.

World Council for Interreligious Reconciliation had its roots in the efforts at reconciliation between the Church of England and the Vatican in the early 1950s. At the outset a committee had been formed of religious leaders and influential representatives of both faiths in the UK, including the Duke of Wessex, a member of the Royal Family. Over the years the role of the Council had expanded with the arrival of numerous Muslim and Hindu immigrants in the UK, and its entry into the European Union.

Historical differences between Anglicans and Roman Catholics had taken on less importance, becoming almost inconsequential in the eyes of the world as militant Islam emerged, nurtured by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

O'Connelly hoped it would give him the occasion of meeting with Alfred Mann, who was attending the Council as an observer, and discussing the problem of de Lussac, in addition it would provide him with background on the relations between the different religious factions embroiled in the Israeli-Arab conflict in a neutral territory.

The inaugural ceremony took place in the elaborate octagonal arabesque Hassan II Pavilion – built for the 1992 World Expo – situated a couple of kilometres from the city centre. The walls and balconies of the Pavilion were decorated with exotic woodwork and carved plaster. It overflowed with imams and rabbis from all over the world dressed in their colourful ceremonial costumes, from the Middle East, from Africa, Malaysia and Indonesia all listening intently to speeches given by the Grand Rabbi of Jerusalem and the Minister of King Mohammed VI of Morocco.

The Pavilion was overflowing; it was too small to handle all the delegates together with the world's press and television eager to hear the messages of peace and hope. Amongst the spectators was a Palestinian delegation of religious leaders, close to the Hamas government, many of whom had never travelled outside their

besieged, listening with amazement to the speeches of peace and brotherhood from their enemies seated almost within touching distance, and even worse seated alongside Palestine's Arab allies exchanging niceties.

O'Connelly found it more than strange to see the two sworn enemies seated side by side, beard by beard, amongst religious representatives of Christianity in their soutanes and Hinduism in their turbans. He equally surprised to discover that many of the Israelis had to come to Seville to discover what their neighbours thought on the other side of the wall that divided their two peoples. Many rabbis openly admitted that they did not know their Palestinian counterparts and vice versa.

According to Benny Weinfeld's information, from a source close to hard-line rabbis, the idea that the Temple site was anywhere other than on the middle of the Esplanade itself was totally excluded.

It was evident that there was no way Mann would jeopardise his trust to satisfy de Lussac's theories, it would be filed away to be forgotten, lost in the dusty files of his storeroom. Any alternative had been spelt out in clear terms by the hard-liners, who would ensure that Rosenstein and the Bertelsmann Foundations would pull the plug and his source of funding would dry up as quickly as the early morning dew in the Negev.

The more open and more secular Israeli community would have no such problem and even the New York publisher, who was in any case uninterested in De Lussac's work, would have seen it simply as another controversial Biblical related book, like so many others that could be found in book stores in New York or Tel-Aviv, good for stimulating discussion over cocktails and at dinner parties.

However, they did not take into account de Lussac's obsession or his pugnacity. He was a Jew, though he adhered to no particular group, he was not even a practising Jew, not even a lip service

believer. His unique mission, a divine mission that had come to him in a dream, was to save the people of Israel from a catastrophic conflict that would result in another banishment of the Jews and the re-occupation of Jerusalem by the despised Muslims.

De Lussac had developed a fixation that was translated into his belief that a lasting peace could be achieved by means of a powerful factual and historical demonstration; there was no reason for the dispute between the Jews and the Muslims, because the Esplanade had never been the site of the Temple of the Jews, thus in a single stroke the bone of contention that had poisoned the relations between the two communities for 1,400 years would be removed.

As an archaeologist in the Holy Land he should have known better, but his narrow vision prevented him from knowing better, he was too fixed on his focal point. The fact was the Promised Land had been the theatre of conflict where men had fought and killed since the dawn of time, they had fought over land, grazing, water, in defence of their family, their tribe, their god, their religion, over power, against each others against invaders, for their own dreams of kingdoms and empires.

De Lussac's suspicious instinct told him that Mann was avoiding him and his paranoia made him suspect he was the victim of a plot by Mann and his Orthodox Jewish rabbi friends from Jerusalem. He was not too far wrong and his blind obsession soon reached such a degree of desperation that he was willing to make a pact with the devil. In exchange for the publication of his work de Lussac compromised his short term loyalty by accepting the approach of a London publisher, owned by a Lebanese close to the Assad regime in Damascus.

De Lussac had never before considered the plight of the Palestinians, beyond the political and ideological conflict that constantly made the headline news he read, they were far from his

thoughts. He was oblivious to the fact that a great many of them were deprived of the basic human essentials such as a roof, a job, schooling; the most basic ingredients of family life. He saw the Palestinians in a historical context; to him they represented those who had usurped the right given by God to his chosen people, to worship him in the manner handed down to Abraham.

He had little time for the kind of religious dialogue spoke of God, of brotherly love and charity and more love and more God and words and endless words. Nor was he like certain intellectual European Jews who saw outspoken Palestinians as rabble rousers, or the kind of European Jew that the young Israelis, who bore arms and served death to a people who they realised also had rights, called *Juifs de salon*, and asked where all that brotherly love for the Palestinians was.

Mann's assistant Cedric Delauny went about his high profile multi-tasking, dressed in an open neck, purposely unironed, white shirt, and black trousers. His head of carefully cultivated wild hair identified him as he ran from left to right, his left hand bunched with a wad of papers, his right clutching his cellphone, huddling with a Rabbi here or an Imam there, issuing an instruction, or flashing a 'do not disturb' glance at helpers – as much as to say I doing something important. Alfred Mann talked low and confidentially to Rosenstein, a man in his mid-thirties, his wife slightly to one side, her face already worn by the sun and years of intensive beauty treatment that resulted in a faded flat look.

The other members of Mann's small delegation were in a state of hyperactivity, each vying to outdo the other, young men in their twenties and early thirties, mostly without fixed employment after years of studies in everything from religious mediation to inter-community sociology, obscure and poorly paid subjects with few

professional openings, enjoying a week in a first class hotel in Seville, as helpers and all expenses paid.

The current Lord Wessex, honorary president of the World Council for Interreligious Reconciliation, an inbreed though otherwise sincere though weak individual, had a guru, Pastor ‘Sonny’ Ford, a fiery preacher and leader of the Texan Congregationalist Church. Pastor ‘Sonny’ Ford had not hesitated to mix business with religion to finance his church, inventing a clever method of communication designed to promote harmonious relations in communities that he had adroitly extended to business and institutional organisations.

The pastor’s method had the huge advantage of requiring an almost non-existent operating structure that was cleverly marketed to businesses and institutional bodies, having either had money to burn or were desperate to solve their often insoluble organisational problems. It worked. It contributed not only to his church but also the pastor’s fine sailing boat moored at the Portland Marina in the Gulf of Maine and a sprawling ranch in Montana where he played out his imaginary Clint Eastwood style role, changing however, the laconic to garrulous.

As for Sunday church service in his Texas parish or his Sunday evening TV show, Pastor ‘Sonny’ Ford exchanged his Stetson and cowboy boots for the more sober attire of a pastor the his Marlborough voice remained unchanged.

Discussions ranged from perceived insults to Islam perpetrated by writers and newspaper, described by one rabbi, who though he believed in free speech, as a desecration of a great religion whilst condemning the Iranian Mullah’s attitude to Jews and the holocaust.

O’Connelly was bewildered by the amazing kaleidoscope of religious politics, there were Indonesians, Pakistanis, Kazakhs, Iranians, Americans, Egyptians, Russians, Senegalese, Malians, Europeans from every state of the Union and of course Israelis and

Palestinians. There was however little religious fervour, confrontation was lurking in certain meeting rooms of the hotel.

As it was far from evident that he would get to talk seriously to Mann about de Lussac he decided to escaped to the nearby historic city centre. Outside of the heavily guarded hotel there was a shuttle service laid on for the delegates and O'Connelly was the last passenger in one about to leave. The passengers looked like the Three Kings multiplied by four or five. He took the last seat next to the only other person dressed in civvies who greeted him with a smile and introduced himself: 'Benny Weinfeld, I'm with Ha'aretz'. He was a journalist and Ha'aretz was the leading Israeli daily newspaper.

The shuttle headed across the bridge to the historic centre of the city where the delegates wanted to discover the city that had been the home to the Moors of Andalusia, where according to legend and folklore it had been a haven of peace and learning, and where the faithful of the three great religions of the Book coexisted in harmony and understanding.

'So you are going to visit the heart of Andalusia,' said Benny somewhat cynically.

'Yes, whilst I'm here I might as well do a little research work.'

'Research work?'

'Yes, I'm a writer.'

'A historian?'

'No,' he laughed, 'fiction, I'm a novelist, ex-journalist as a matter of fact.'

'Well I hope you're making more money than me!'

'That I don't know.'

'So that's why you are interested in the conference.'

O'Connelly hesitated, he was not sure what Weinfeld meant. The shuttle stopped in a large square and the passengers got down.

‘Shall we do this together,’ asked Weinfeld. ‘I’ve never been here before, and besides I don’t want to be involved in the fancy dress ball,’ he said with a disrespectful nod towards the other visitors who have divided into two or three groups of like affinities and were consulting a city maps.

‘Why not,’ said O’Connelly, Benny seemed friendly enough and apparently not very convinced by the religious aspect of the conference.

They headed into the old town pleased to escape the pressure cooker atmosphere of the conference.

‘I’m surprised by those Israeli rabbis present, they are not very representative.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I expected a more open mixture. All those I’ve seen so far are hard-liners.’

Benny a hardened journalist, shuttling between Tel-Aviv and New York, the two greatest Jewish cities. His business was news, he worked to a deadline, he was in Seville for a story, not a rehash of the rabbis’ discourse – so familiar to the paper’s readers in Tel-Aviv or Jerusalem. He wanted hard news about the Palestinians, news gleaned on Hamas policies in Gaza.

They found the cathedral, but it was not yet open and Benny suggested they take a beer at one of the many terrace bars. Shlomo had seen it all, he preferred to watch the passers by and talk as he enjoyed his beer.

‘So you’re writing a book about Jerusalem?’

O’Connelly was careful, as an ex-journalist himself he knew that whatever he said could be found in the pages of the next edition of Benny’s paper.

‘Yes, the setting is in Jerusalem, so I’m trying to get some background about the Temple Mount situation.’

‘Between the Jews and Muslims,’ Benny said helping him.

‘In a nutshell that’s it.’

‘The problem with our country is religion, we have too many fanatics, on both sides, you can see it at the conference, they have a tremendous influence and they stop our country functioning as a normal state.’

O’Connelly was surprised by his frankness, his attitude to his religion. He knew relatively little about Jewish thinking, or more specifically the thinking of Israeli Jews.

‘Israel is not like Paris or London where religions plays little or no role.’

‘I can’t say, but there seems to be quite a few French Jews moving to Israel today.’

‘They see things differently when they arrive in Israel and discover everyday life, where everybody is Jewish, with a large minority, all Arab. It’s not at all Paris, where they see themselves as a threatened minority, defending themselves against real or imaginary threats from those around them. Constantly worried like Finkelkraut about the growing Muslim population in France, seeing it as a reason for immigration to Israel, forgetting of course the daily difficulties they would have there, you know language, Hebrew is not easy to learn to read and write proficiently at thirty or forty, then there is the question of jobs, living standards, military service, competition from other powerful immigrant communities like the Russians, not forgetting other forms of prejudice that exists like in every country.’

‘Prejudice?’

‘Yes, you know power is mostly in the hands of the Ashkenazi, many of the French are Sephardic.’

‘So.’

‘They don’t always get on together. They also forget we are totally surrounded by Arabs. Today many French Jews lived in and around

Tel-Aviv, where they appreciated the good life, many of these are retired people, people who have made money, they don't have to work, their families come to see them, and when they see them sunning themselves and drinking in the cafés in the sunshine they think its paradise, which it's not!'

'So what about the Esplanade, do you believe the Temple stood on the Esplanade?'

'Who knows? Personally I'm not very religious, the truth is for archaeologists. But religious forces are extremely power even fanatical. Today, it's a political not a religious problem, of course religion is used as an argument. We Jews believe Jerusalem is our city, even myself, although I am not religious it seems clear to me and most people that we were here before anybody else as far as can be remembered. The Muslims however, want to prove at any price Jerusalem is the City of Mohamed, who only came here in a dream according to the Koran. Of course the Arabs captured the city, but that does not mean it's their forever. The Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, Turks and British captured Jerusalem at one time or another, today its ours again.'

'So you are a little nationalist after all,' O'Connelly said gently mocking him.

'Yes, but I am also realistic, if anybody wants it, it will be over our dead bodies!'

'Okay, forgetting about dead bodies, what's your opinion about archaeology and archaeologists in Jerusalem today?'

'It's the same – it depends who is financing them. I tend to believe independent archaeologists, not those financed by extremists or hard-liners, the trouble is that objective archaeologists can play into the hands of the Waqf and Muslims in general, many of us Jews are

objective and I'm sorry to say it is not the case of most Muslims believers.'

'But if the Temple was proved to be at one site of another would it not help to resolve the conflict?'

'I don't think so, even if the foundations of the Temple were discovered with the Ark of the Covenant the Palestinians would reject it.'

'What about the presence of the Palestinians at the Congress, aren't they more open minded?'

'You're joking, haven't you seen them bunched together, they have little in common other Muslim delegations who in any case are in the larger majority from non-Arab countries, from Africa, Asia, Europe and even the USA, who are not directly involved in the problems of the Palestinians and the Middle East in general, in any case the only give lip service to inter-religious cooperation with the Jews, whilst the Palestinians are in total conflict with Israel.'

'You say there are few Arab delegations.'

'Few of any importance, where are the founders of Islam, the Saudis, who are here Dervishes very nice but most Muslims don't even consider them as Muslims.'

'It's not evident to non-specialists.'

'Ah, now you've got it! The media and the public can't make the difference between who is important and who isn't important, it's a huge charade. I'm sorry to say your friend Mann is involved or manipulated by the hard-liners, like Rabbi Weizger, who was originally from Manchester but now leads an extremist religious group in Jerusalem.'

I don't want to run down these good doers like Cannon White and scholars like Rabbi Steiner who is specialist in comparative religious studies in Manchester, but they have little or no influence on peace

between Israel and Palestine, the only thing that counts is politics and power.’

O’Connelly seemed disappointed.

‘Look Patrick, the hard line rabbis and politicians will stop at absolutely nothing to prevent anyone, whoever they are and whatever the proof they have, from conclusively demonstrating the Temple stood anywhere but on the Esplanade. When you come to Israel the next time.’

‘You really think so?’

‘Absolutely, when you next come to Israel I’ll help you with some introductions to people both archaeologists and specialists who can help you.’

‘I’ll do that.’

‘One other thing be careful of what you say to Ruth.’

‘Oh!’

‘Yes, never mind why, just be careful.’

Ruth Klein was a wizen New Yorker, a non-practising Jew, though a fervent support of the Jewish homeland, she worked as a writer for Mann’s trust, handling all confidential and key documents. Unfortunately for Mann not all of his team were loyal followers, Klein was the hard-liners’ mole, diligently copying all documents relating to the trusts general policy and especially communications with the imams to Jerusalem. She had one weakness however; she needed a bottle to keep her company each night and not a hot water bottle.

As Mann’s real intentions finally penetrated de Lussac’s mind he became enraged, he was fifteen thousand kilometres from Paris in Phnom Penh with a cybercafé as his only means of contact with the outside. His bouts of malaria did not help with the onset of the rainy season.

Unknown to him, Jean-Louis Claudel gave O'Connelly a day by day account of de Lussac's ravings and his wanderings in the city's lesser respectable bars for expatriates. He told his story to anyone prepared to listen; a year lost, betrayal, ingratitude, frustration, manipulation.

He had told Claudel that his entire savings had been swallowed by the years he had spent writing his work; all that remained was the small apartment on rue Montbelliard, which in fact belong to him and his sister who was with him in Cambodia. Out of concern for her and his lowly salary prevented him from flying to Paris to vent his rage.

The implications were extraordinarily complex and Alfred Mann had understood that from the very start. His goal was to stop the publication of 'The Temple' at any price.

For the influential Israeli hard-liners religious extremists it was an open the door to Palestinians' claims to Jerusalem. For the Catholic Church the assault on the Bible was an indirect attack on the Church in a time when post-Christianity was the religion of the day, they needed the wealth of the developed nations, not just the weight of the disinherited. For the Muslims it was a justification for Holy War endorsing their claim to the Haram esh-Sharif.

The goal of the Congress was to win over moderate Muslims with speeches preaching peace, dialogue and brotherhood. The presence of the important Palestinian delegation was to demonstrate the all embracing legitimacy of the Congress to the apparently more moderate Fattah, playing them off against the democratically elected Hamas government.

The Palestinians were entering a grave crisis with its non-functional government, isolation, a dramatic budget crisis and even worse food shortages. Discussing the names of the Prophet with

Indonesian or African imams in the presence rabbis whatever their tendency was low on their scale of priorities.

O'Connelly found an ally in Eva Guttmann, a Swiss woman, who had worked for Mann in Zurich. She had naively signed a \$400,000 bank guarantee, backed by her house on the Lake, to help Mann out of one of his never ending financial crises, now the bank was now calling in the long overdue loan that Mann had no intention of paying.

28

Caesarea

IT WAS ALMOST SIX IN THE AFTERNOON; Laura lay on the bed thumbing through a collection of tour brochures she had picked up from the hotel tour office. A now well thumbed copy of Ernest Wright's book Biblical Archaeology lay to one side.

After a busy morning and a late lunch they were relaxing after a hectic two weeks in Israel, it was now time to explore the background history of the Temple's history and its destruction.

'Look, if the last Temple was built and destroyed in Roman times, perhaps we should take a look at some of the Greco-Roman sites. What do you think?'

'If you like.'

'I've drawn up a list. There's Caesarea, then Megiddo, Masada and Petra.'

'We could start with Caesarea or even Petra in Jordan that's nearby by.'

'Where's Caesarea?'

‘It’s sixty kilometres away, about an hour’s drive from Tel-Aviv, forty kilometres south of Haifa.’

‘Tomorrow Friday is Sabbath so things will be quiet for a couple of days, why don’t we rent a car?’

‘What about a chauffeur driven rental car, it would be easier, the driver would at least know where he was going.’

‘Great let’s do that!’

‘I’ll see if the car rental office is still open.’

Half an hour later, Laura returned triumphantly holding a tour booking form. She had rented minibus bus with an English speaking driver who was a trained guide who would meet them in the lobby ready for departure at nine the next morning. Their first stop would be Caesarea and they had a hotel booking at Haifa overnight before continuing to Megiddo the following day.

The next morning O’Connelly was awoken by the daylight that filtered through the curtains; he was used to the total darkness of his Parisian bedroom with its roller shutters cutting out all light, as in all French homes. He climbed out of bed, careful not to awake Laura and went to the bathroom.

It was seven and he felt wide awake looking forward to their day at Caesarea. The pick-up was at nine, which left them a couple of hours to ready themselves and take breakfast. He pulled up a chair to the writing table and switched on his portable PC to check his incoming mail, a glance told him there was nothing very important except for a message from de Lussac in Phnom Penh. The message visibly indicated that de Lussac was more agitated than usual, he had no news from Tel-Aviv where he suspected that they were checking his work; his mail was a diatribe of complaints about Alfred Mann who was not keeping him up to date regarding the translation of his book. From the recent mails O’Connelly had received it becoming clear by the day that de Lussac was of an extremely susceptible nature, if not

paranoid, on the other hand it was understandable, he had invested ten years of his life dedicated to his work on the Temple of Solomon.

De Lussac had been the cause of considerable confusion sending annoying messages to Rubinstein and Mann, worrying O'Connelly who was beginning to suspect he was dealing with a loose canon. He would have to put a stop to it and quickly, if not he would have a problem with his publisher and Mann's trust.

Laura stirred the noise on keyboard had woken her. She sat up and looked at him then smiled.

'Can't keep away from your mistress?' she said softly.

He went over to the bed and kissed her tenderly on the forehead.

'It's our friend de Lussac, he seems to be upset.'

'Oh.'

Laura got out of bed and read the message on the screen.

'I hope he doesn't spoil our plans.'

'I'll send him a reply, sympathise with him.'

'The problem is he will be away for several months, far away.'

Over breakfast their conversation wandered from the day ahead at Caesarea to de Lussac. The question was to know what he would or could do if ever he really got upset; he had an agreement with O'Connelly and there was also a contract with Mann. They would have to find a way to calm him down.

There was another problem, it was necessary to have a direct communication with de Lussac, O'Connelly's question were piling up at an alarming rate, it was important he sit down with him to go over a growing number of points. In spite of De Lussac's continual repetitions and reiterations in his immensely long work of almost three thousand pages, which included a multiplicity of citations and references, the exploratory work related to the text accomplished over the three weeks they had spent in Israel had raised many contradictions as to foundation of ancient Israel, though the factual

archaeological evidence exposed relative to the discoveries of the Palestine Survey Fund seemed solid.

Their discussions with renowned archaeologists such as Finkelstein and Silberman had raised numerous questions concerning early biblical history, which appeared to be nothing less than a glorious legend, comparable to that of Greek Mythology or the mythical founding of Rome, designed by their authors to form a glorious foundation and justification of their respective nations, and in the case of Israel origins to replace a likely reality, which probably consisted of a few wandering Bedouin tribes, caught between the conflicts of real and mighty empires with the Egyptian to the south and Assyrian to the north.

The minibus was punctual and they soon joined the morning jam, crawling out of Tel-Aviv northwards to Herzliya and Highway 2 in the direction of Haifa. Their driver and guide, Eli, a Sephardic who had immigrated to Israel from Morocco many years before, spoke good French and English, he was friendly and well used the needs of tourists such as O'Connelly and Laura.

O'Connelly listened to Eli with interest as he recounted the history of Caesarea, whilst Laura thumbed alternatively through her Guide Bleu and copy of Josephus' Histories, interrupting from time to time with her more pointed questions. The city had originally been the site of a Phoenician port, where Herod built Caesarea transforming it into the finest city beside Jerusalem in Palestine with a magnificent amphitheatre and hippodrome. It had been the seat of the Roman governors of the Province of Judea and the main point of entry into the country for the Romans.

He pricked up his ears when Eli spoke of the impressive aqueduct they had seen that ran along the seashore. It had been built by King Herod with the help of the great Roman builder Agrippa in the first

century to carry water to the city from springs in the Carmel Mountains over a distance of ten kilometres.

Their guide went on to explain how the Great Revolt of 66-70BC, which ended with the destruction of the Temple, had started in Caesarea. Riots had broken out between the Jews and Palestinians over a pagan ceremony conducted on the Sabbath near the entrance to a synagogue. At first the Romans ignored the Jewish protests, but the violence spread throughout the country and was transformed into a general uprising against them. The result was that the uprising was crushed and Caesarea became the capital of Palestine, it remained so until the Roman Empire was Christianized by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine in 325AD.

With the slow decline of Byzantine power there was a long period of peace until the Arab conquest and Muslim Palestine became a backwater until the arrival of the first Crusaders.

They turned off the highway near Or Akiva towards the coast following a small side road arriving at the archaeological site of Caesarea where they left car in the parking area and followed Eli to the entrance gate. The site was vast stretching several hundred meters along the rocky coast line. There were few visitors as they strolled along under the clear blue sky, to the left were the sparkling clear waters of the Mediterranean that lapped the ancient stones of the harbour now submerged after a distant earthquake that had destroyed the city, to the right in the distance were the Carmel Hills; the idyllic image was however spoilt by the huge electric power generating station with its enormous red and white chimneys that stood to the north of the site.

The amphitheatre faced the sea and to complete the picture they had built an oil terminal pier that stretched out onto the blue waters to the western horizon. The amphitheatre had been transformed for an open air concert hall with all the modern paraphernalia of lighting

gantries and sound systems for the event. Inside the amphitheatre gate was a plaque, a replica of the inscription found during excavations with the words 'TIBERIVM' and 'TIVS PILATUS,' references to the Emperor Tiberius, and Pontius Pilate the governor of Judea at the time of Jesus. This was an important find because it is the only archaeological evidence of Pilate's existence.

The hippodrome built by Herod is still identifiable, though now it is a banana plantation. It is considerably smaller than the great Circus Maximus in Rome, but Herod's arena could hold 20,000 spectators for chariot races.

In addition there were vestiges of the fortress walls built by the Crusaders, monuments to the Christian invasion of the Holy Land in the eleventh century. Eli recounted the legend of how the Holy Grail, the goblet used by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper, was stolen by the Genoese who aided the Crusaders conquer the city in 1101AD.

The evidence of Rome's presence, wealth and power in their Palestinian Province was overwhelming corroborating the descriptions given by Josephus. Palestine was a relatively small province within the Empire and had been crushed by its imperial masters when their patience with its endless trouble makers had run out. They had other more pressing problems with the conquest of the Germans to the north of the Rhine and the Persian threat from the east.

One of the points of interest in their visit to Caesarea was the Roman Temple that had been dedicated to the Emperor Augustus; it stood on the highest point of the city facing the harbour and symbolized the link between Herod and the Emperor Augustus.

Israeli archaeologists had sought not only to establish the temple's design, but also its fate in their research into the conversion from paganism to Christianity in the eastern Mediterranean world. The

Roman Jewish historian Flavius Josephus had described the temple as standing on high ground and being visible far out to sea.

‘What people don’t realise when they talk of the destruction of Temples is that there were large stone structures, as you can see,’ Eli said pointing at the huge blocks of stone. ‘It needed some considerable effort to pull them down. They probably used stone masons and craftsmen to dismantle the temples, it could have taken years.’

At its height of its importance Caesarea was an international port with a cosmopolitan population, many of whom continued their traditional religious practices after Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine in 323BC. In the late 4th century, the temple was dismantled, leaving only the foundations, to force pagans to convert to Christianity.

The extent of Roman influence in Palestine was visible through excellent relations maintained between King Herod, 73BC to 4AD, and Agrippa, the second most important person in the Roman Empire, during the first part of the reign of the Emperor Augustus.

Agrippa, 63AD to 12BC, married Julia, the daughter of Augustus 63BC to 14BC, and was therefore the son-in-law of the Roman Emperor, thus the children of Agrippa and Julia were the grandchildren of the Emperor.

Agrippa owed his close relations to Octavius, whom he had faithfully and loyally served during his ascension to the imperial throne, as the Emperor Augustus, and in particular after having played a decisive role in the Battle of Actium in which Octavius defeated his rival Marc Anthony.

It was against this background Agrippa was close to the Roman Empire’s seat of power and in a certain fashion exercised the role of Vice-Emperor.

Agrippa was an advocate of progress and Roman civilisation, and held a great interest in hydraulic works, undertaking major works across the Empire, making considerable technological progress in the projects he undertook, transforming them into veritable works of art. His political and visual approach concerning the distribution of water, both as a public service and as an instrument of the expansion of Roman civilisation and its values, was extended to the whole Empire.

In Rome itself Agrippa improved the flow of all the aqueducts built before the reign of Augustus and on occasions transformed their paths and structures employing arcades and superimposed bridges as well as building new aqueducts including the Aqua Julia, after the names of his wife and daughter, Aqua Alsienila, Aqua Virgo and Aqua Augusta.

According to Pliny the Ancient, Agrippa built 130 water towers in Rome in one year, half as much again as those that existed before, in addition he built 500 fountains and 700 public water baths in city.

The Romans owed the construction of the first thermes to Agrippa, other than being a spectacular monument its technological achievements, which were in constant development, characterised this particular aspect of Roman life.

Roman Gaul, conquered by Caesar of whom Augustus was the adopted son, was endowed by Agrippa with an extraordinary system of aqueducts designed both for the needs of the population and to be seen by the Gauls as part of the benefits offered by the marvels of Roman technology.

In the region of Lyons in Gaul, Agrippa built a network of aqueducts with the most advanced technology of the time including a succession of bridges and siphons.

Amongst the different achievements of Agrippa in Gaul was the aqueduct that carried the waters over a distance of 50 kilometres

from springs in the region of Uzès to supply the city of Nîmes, obliging the Roman engineers dig tunnels and build bridges. These included the Pont du Gard an aqueduct constructed with three levels of superimposed arcades bridging the River Gardon, 275 metres long and 50 metres high.

The technological renown and the aesthetic appearance of this aqueduct became one of the references of the Roman engineering as well as for the Empire's client kings wishing to demonstrate modernity of their kingdoms.

Flavius Josephus often alluded to the privileged relations that King Herod had succeeded in creating with Augustus and Agrippa. Augustus had known Herod's father, Antipater, had provided crucial help to Julius Caesar during his campaign in Egypt.

Herod was an ideal model of Rome's client Kings with his unswerving loyalty and his fidelity to the values of Roman civilisation, he was a modern king, soldier, administrator and an ambitious builder. It was he who built the Port of Caesarea and its magnificent temple also consecrated to the Divine Emperor Augustus.

However, by organising the Roman Games in Jerusalem held every five years, which were both festive and religious, he provoked religious Jews who were outraged by this profanation of the holy city consecrated to their sole and unique God.

After the visit they headed north through Haifa past the port and industrial area stopping at the picturesque historical seaside town of Akko or Accre. They lunched in a small Arab run restaurant, their menu included delicious grilled fish accompanied by an excellent Carmel wine, the table was in a small courtyard shaded by vines and directly overlooking the waters of the town's small port with its fishing boats and sailing boats belonging to the more prosperous locals. It was where Napoleon's armies were struck down by the pest

after the Emperor escaped to France abandoning his men to their tragic fate. It was a calamitous end to his glorious expedition in Egypt and his forced flight overland to Palestine, after his fleet was burnt in the Port of Alexandria by the Royal Navy of Britain's King George III.

Their overnight stop was at Carmel where they were booked into the Dan Hotel situated high on the Mount, where their room overlooked the port far below. Carmel and its monasteries were of a passing interest to them as was the burnished dome of the Bahai Temple.

Nearby on the slopes of Mount Carmel the remains of prehistoric man had been found in the Skhul Caves, just one of the sites in Israel where human fossils have been found and where signs of early man's appreciation of art is shown by the 100,000 years old beads made of shells that were strung together to form a necklace or bracelet. It was the first evidence of early man's capacity to think symbolically as modern humans. It was strange to think that this small piece of land, a bridge between Africa and the rest of the world, has been inhabited by man for hundreds of thousands of years, commencing with Homo erectus, Neanderthal and finally Homo sapiens. Ever since it was the place of an endless mixing of men as they flowed to and fro, between Africa and Asia.

The next morning O'Connelly discovered another furious tirade from de Lussac. Over breakfast they mulled over the problem of their unstable archaeologist. At first it seemed that the best solution was that he join them in Israel, where he could enlighten them with the evidence in view, but on second thoughts his archaeological argument was founded uniquely on the cisterns that lay below the Haram, which had been closed by the Waqf for almost a century and any investigations, especially by a Jew were totally out of the question. De Lussac was also bound to a year long contract in

Cambodia with an American archaeological research foundation and would have difficulties in leaving his work, there was also the problem of his handicapped sister.

‘Why don’t you go to Cambodia?’

‘Cambodia!’

‘Yes. It could supply an interesting link in your story.’

‘What about you?’

‘I’ve got to get back to Paris, I’m needed at the Cultural Centre, at least I need them to earn a living, my leave is almost up.’

‘I’ll think about it.’

‘Do that another couple of days here and we shall have enough information to keep you going for the moment. You also need to sit down somewhere and start getting your ideas on to paper!’

‘I’d forgotten about that,’ he said a little depressed at the idea.

‘Don’t worry once you get into the swing of it, it’ll go by itself.’

‘Your right, I send him a mail to see how he reacts to the idea.’

‘Great!’

‘Why don’t you join me, ask your boss for a sabbatical.’

Her eyes light up at the idea.

‘I need to pay my rent.’

‘Don’t worry about that, I’ll pay you as my research assistant with no strings attached.’ He knew how she valued her independence just as he valued his own, but he felt at ease with her, she was not demanding and had no visible nesting ideas.

‘I’ll think about it,’ she laughed.

Before leaving the hotel for Megiddo he mailed de Lussac proposing that he visit him in Phnom Penh. Laura’s suggestion seemed good and the idea of visiting the temples of Angkor was very enticing.

Megiddo was a fairly short drive away from the city, situated on the Great Plain of Esdraelon to the north side of the Carmel

Mountains at the crossing of the Haifa to Jenin road and the Nazareth to Tel-Aviv road in the Yizre'el Valley.

It is one of the world's most important archaeological sites, where thirty successive cities had stood, each built one on top of the other, and archaeology evidence of six or seven thousand years occupation.

Today the site is a mound, a hillock, in the middle of the plain, or a 'tell' as archaeologists call it. The city was an important stronghold in ancient times because of its strategic position on the road that controlled important trade and military routes from Egypt to Syria, avoiding Cape Carmel, situated at the mouth of the valley, where the road divides into a western branch to Tyre and Sidon and an eastern branch to Damascus and Mesopotamia.

It guarded the key Yiere'el Valley, one of the bloodiest sites in the human history, where battles had been fought for thousands of years, the last in date being the British defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1917.

Excavations at the Megiddo tell began in 1903-05 with the work of the German Palestine Society, when their archaeologist, Schumacher cut a deep, wide trench on the east side of the tell, which still bears his name. Between 1925 and 1939 the site was systematically investigated by the Chicago Oriental Institute, and in 1960 Yigael Yadin began the excavations which determined the chronology of the site. Yigael Yadin's work uncovered evidence that the site had been occupied in Neolithic times and a Canaanite settlement had been established in the fourth millennium BC that continued until the Israelite occupation of the Promised Land.

Megiddo was one of the most important biblical sites in Israel its roots going back to the fourth millennium BC when cities started to appear in the Levant. When the city-states rejected Egypt's attempted control, Megiddo led them against the Pharaoh. Thutmose III routed the Canaanite forces and laid siege to the city for seven months and

after capturing the city Canaan was transformed into a province of the New Kingdom. The Egyptian description of the battle of Megiddo was the earliest account of a major war in antiquity.

In 1479BC, the Pharaoh Tuthmosis III gained control of the pass after a battle during his advance to the Euphrates and Megiddo fell under Egyptian control. In the Egyptian Tell el-Amarna archives that date from the 14th century BC letters were found from the Egyptian governor Biridja asking for military reinforcements against the Habiru, some archaeologists believe these were the Hebrews. The Bible tells of how Solomon built monuments in Megiddo, but no archaeological evidence of this has been discovered.

In Early Bronze Age, the fourth millennium BC, Megiddo was the largest site in a region that is now Israel. It covered an area of approximately 50 to 60 hectares. This was a large site for that time and in that region, it probably had some kind of defensive fortifications against marauding tribes, meaning that in the fourth millennium BC, there existed some kind of fiefdom.

It was a small city about approximately five or six hundred meters in diameter within the fortifications, the buildings included sanctuaries and administrative buildings. Outside the fortifications there were no doubt like in all such cities small dependant villages, farms and grazing land.

The significance of Megiddo is that it is the oldest real archaeological evidence of a significant permanent site of human occupation establishment in what is now Israel, at the outset it a simple early Bronze Age village.

They turned off the main road and arrived before a cluster of small buildings where they were met by Ishak Steiner, one of the young archaeologists present for the summer campaign during which students worked under the guidance of a team of qualified specialists from Ben Gurion University.

‘The Hebrew name of Megiddo is Armageddon, or the hill of battles,’ Ishak told them. ‘In the Late Bronze Age, between 1550 and 1150BC, archaeological evidence points to Canaanite culture. The city of Megiddo prospered, but at the end of this period there is evidence of its destruction,’ Ishak explained. ‘That black line you can see shows the buildings were burnt down.’

‘Who destroyed it?’ asked Laura.

‘Probable one of the Sea Peoples.’

‘The Philistines? They were one of the Sea Peoples?’

‘Perhaps. We don’t have any inscriptions to tell us.’

‘Could it have been destroyed by some other Canaanite army?’

‘It could have been destroyed by a neighbouring city state, but personally I think one of the Sea Peoples is the best candidate.’

‘Is there any possibility that it was the Israelites in their conquest of Canaan?’

‘No, at least not in my opinion.’

‘Why not?’

‘I’m don’t have any knowledge of the Israelites in the 12th century BC,’ Ishak said a little forcefully.

‘Were the Sea Peoples the Minoans?’

‘Maybe, but the Minoans were wiped out by the explosion of the volcano Thera on Santorini, 1,600 years before Christ, it was a mega colossal eruption with a VEI or Volcanic Explosivity Index of 7, the caldera was fifteen kilometres in diameter, but we haven’t discovered any conclusive evidence up to now.’

O’Connelly was a little surprised by a young Israeli who seemed to deny the existence of the Israelites at a time the Bible described them as a nation.

‘So, in other words, archaeologically, you don’t feel you can identify the presence of the Israelites.’

‘Yes. If you think that a gang of Apiru or Habiru, an uprooted population, or Shasu, or whatever, in the 12th century could be identified as Israel, and, that in the turmoil of the 12th century, who conquered the city, then it’s a possibility. But myself I don’t believe in a functioning, coherent ethnic entity called Israel in the 12th century BC.’

‘When did Israel come into existence according to you?’

‘I suppose that there were groups who identified themselves as Israel in the Canaanite highlands as early as the time of the Merneptah Stela.’

‘Stela?’

‘It was a victory stela set up by the Pharaoh Merneptah around about 1207BC to mark an Egyptian victory over Israel in Canaan. However, at that time there were only undefended villages in Canaan, it was probably to glorify a relatively skirmish with the local tribes or the Assyrians for the Pharaoh's image.

‘I see.’

‘These tribes were, or at least they were identified by the ancient Egyptians, as the Haribu.’

‘When was that?’

‘In the late 13th century, that’s around 1200.’

‘So when was Jerusalem founded?’

‘That’s a difficult question, Jerusalem was conquered and reconquered, besieged, destroyed, abandoned and rebuilt over and over again throughout its history, almost 3,000 years according to the present archaeological evidence.’

‘It was probably like Megiddo at the beginning?’

‘Naturally, in the beginning it was just a very, very small town, no doubt captured by the early Jews from its previous inhabitants. Over the centuries it grew and according to the Bible it expanded under David, whether he existed or not is not the question, but the fact

remains that it did expand sometime after 1000BC, later becoming the capital of the Kingdom of Israel.’

‘So Israel was already a nation.’

‘That we don’t know, in any case at the beginning Israel was small, very small, too small to be mentioned by the great powers of that time situated to the north and south. Later it was divided into Israel in the north and Judah in the south, both of which were conquered by the Assyrians, whose presence at Megiddo is in no archaeological doubt.’

He then led them to the underground tunnel, an aqueduct that supplied the city with water from the nearby hills.

Amateur archaeologists flourished in the 19th century, some of them were inspired like Schliemann who thought he had discovered the ancient Greek city of Troy. The treasures he unearthed were held in the Berlin Museum until they disappeared at the end of WWII when the Red Army captured the city.

O’Connelly told Laura how on a visit to Moscow in 1993 taking breakfast in the Marco Polo Hotel he had read in the Moscow English language daily that an exhibition of the treasures of Troy was to open that very day.

He told her how he quickly finished his breakfast and took a taxi to the Pushkin Museum with a friend, Kalevi Kyyronen a Finnish journalist. A queue had already started to form, it was not yet too long as the news of the exhibition was totally unexpected, a sensation in the archaeological world that believed the Heinrich Schliemann treasures had been lost forever.

He explained how they had been had struck by the Russian presentation of Schliemann’s excavations. Describing how he had dug vertical shafts into the mound where he believed Troy had once stood, at the entry to the Dardanelles in Asian Turkey. In the shafts

Schliemann found an extraordinary treasure 1873, which he called Priam's Treasure, composed of exquisite gold jewellery, necklaces, bracelets and brooches.

The Russian archaeologists explained that Schliemann, a German-Russian treasure hunter, had not discovered Troy, but several cities, one built on top of the other, like Megiddo, The treasures in fact came from different levels, centuries apart, and were not therefore the treasure of Helen but many Helens.

When O'Connelly opened his mail back in their hotel in Tel-Aviv he found De Lussac's reply. De Lussac was delighted at the idea his coming to Phnom Penh, but he had evidently been exchanging mails with Alfred Mann who had touched one of his sensitive nerve ends. In addition he was insisting on receiving copies of the translation work done up to that point. The problem was that they had sublet it out to three different resident students at the Cultural Centre and though their productivity up to that point had been good, the quality of their work left a lot to be desired. The result was a lot of reading and corrections, the difficulty was accentuated by the student's lack of historical and technical knowledge, which required a considerable amount of bibliographical research work and the sifting the serious biblical works from those of the religious crazies. The result was that they were seriously behind with the corrections and collation.

De Lussac appeared more and more like a loose canon and seriously worried O'Connelly who began to have a worm of doubt about the viability of his project.

They had pondered the utility of providing De Lussac with the translation chapter by chapter as it progressed, finally deciding that they would wait until its completion. De Lussac would receive the finalised text for his corrections. In spite of the disadvantage that the work was complicated by lack of his direct advice, it soon became clear that his absence in Cambodia was a blessing. However, his

mails filled with his undisguised frustration and O'Connelly could easily imagine De Lussac's paranoia that was being stoked by the day. In the meantime O'Connelly's story was beginning to take form and the first stirrings of the pleasure he had felt in writing his early success were beginning to emerge. The theme was evolving day by day as he discovered the complexities of the Holy Land and the continual drama that was unfolding before his eyes meeting the different protagonists and visiting the historical sites.

29

The Hittites

THE PROMISED LAND LAY at the point of fracture between the great civilizations of the ancient world. There were four great civilisations with four great kings; these were Egypt, Assyria, Mesopotamia and the Hittite Kingdom. What was interesting about the Hittites was their disappearance forever, in an extremely short period of time, a few short decades towards the latter part of the second millennium BC, leaving behind them the ruins of their capital Hattusa in the arid centre of Anatolia hundreds of kilometres from the Mediterranean.

The capital of the great king was capable of resisting any attack, its walls six kilometres long, up to eight metres thick with towers up to thirty metres high. Hattusa had a capital of 50,000 inhabitants, a vast royal palace and a vast temple with two hundreds halls and rooms with dozens of large public buildings.

Archaeologists found the ancient library of Hattusa with thirty thousand cuneiform tablets, archived and classified in perfect order, the greatest ancient library ever discovered. The language was totally

unknown to the world of archaeology, even though cuneiform was of common use in those times by the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians in writing their languages.

The language of the Hittites deciphered by a Czech was astonishing it resembled no other Middle Eastern language, but belonged to the Indo-European family of languages. The tablets told of a civilization built on duty, discipline and sacrifice, and a vengeful god who could inflict terrible punishment to those who did not respect the iron discipline of the king and empire. The powerful army built an Empire that stretch from the Aegean down to the frontiers of Egypt, which was then just to the north of what is modern day Israel.

In 1279, Ramesses II reigned over Egypt, his empire met with that of the Hittites near the ancient city of Kadesh close to the borders of present day Syria and the Lebanon. It was here the greatest battle the world had ever known until that time, the Battle of Kadesh, where the chariots of the Hittites carrying three warriors, of a superior design to those of the Egyptians that carried two, clashed in a terrible battle. History recorded the victory of Ramesses II, but the library in the ruins of Hattusa uncovered the peace treaty signed between the two great kings, which showed that the Hittites had imposed their forces over the Egyptians pushing the frontier of their empire hundreds of kilometres south into today's Israel, thus becoming the greatest empire of the ancient world. Later a permanent peace treaty was concluded between Ramesses II and the Hittite King Hattusilis III.

A few short decades later the Hittites disappeared from history for unexplained reasons, until a new discovery was made by modern archaeologists in their excavations at Hattusa. A series of indecipherable hieroglyphs were discovered in an underground area, after much research these were finally translated telling how the winner of the Battle of Kadesh and the great king launched

themselves into a fratricidal war. Hattusa was destroyed, designed to resist an external enemy it could be defended by an enemy from inside.

The archaeologist discovered the palace and temples had been burnt down, but not in war, they concluded the city had been abandoned, the population taking with them everything that could be carried. The city had been evacuated. Where they went is a mystery, but in any case the Hittites disappeared forever from history, victims of their own cupidity.

The lesson of this story is its comparison with biblical Jerusalem. Hattusa was the centre of a great empire, its vestiges are still visible today after more than three thousand years, though a stone remains to confirm the existence of the biblical empire of Solomon and David, which according to the Bible was in its making at the time the Egyptians battled with the Hittites at Kadesh.

30

Bethlehem

THEY DROVE UP THE STEEP HILL and turned left where they arrived in the parking area the lay between the Church of the Nativity and a mosque.

The first written reference to Jesus Christ's birthplace in Bethlehem is given in the writings of St. Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century AD. A church was built on the spot by Helena, the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine following the Council of Nicaea when Constantine ordered it to be built to celebrate of the Nativity of Christ in 326AD. It was burnt down in a revolt in 529AD

and was replaced by the present church built by the Emperor Justinian, and is the only important church in the Holy Land that has survives intact from early Christian times.

They entered the fortress like church through the small entrance in the massive wall and walked through the broad colonnade of the nave to the curtained marble doorway polished with age to a stairway that led down to the cave. They entered dimly light Grotto of the Nativity through a pair of Gothic doorways behind several visitors and a guide, from the ceiling were suspended numerous lamps that emitted a dim red light where an altar draped with ornate hangings stood over the sacred spot where Jesus was born.

The stone floor was polished by the countless feet of pilgrims and visitors over one and a half millennium. Beneath the altar a silver star with fourteen points according to the guide set in a stained marble plinth surrounded by ancient oil lamps marked the exact spot of the divine birth, the visitors advance and knelt to touch it.

O'Connelly sceptically observed them from one side, after the moved to the second altar that marked the spot where the manger stood, he hesitated then quietly approach the star and bent down to reach out to the glass centre piece.

As he touched it he was suddenly filled with a huge and explainable surge of emotion to the point he had to slip into the shadows to recover his senses before rejoining the others. He had touched the spot where the Christ was said to have been born the focal point of Western Civilization Later he learnt many visitors to the holy site were overcome by the same feeling, perhaps it was the weight of history he reasoned, it was some time before he had the courage to tell Laura of his emotion.

Later destroyed, the church was rebuilt by Justinian in 530 AD, in which form the church remains today. The Persians spared it during their invasion in 614 AD because, according to legend, they were

impressed by a representation of the Magi that decorated the building.

Their itinerary was first Bethlehem, then Masada before crossing into Jordan, where they planned an overnight stop in Amman before setting out the next day for Petra. Solomon's Pools were just three or so kilometres to the south of Bethlehem in the Judean Hills, reservoirs that had once supplied the aqueducts that carried purifying running waters to the Temple in Jerusalem, constantly replenishing the great cisterns that had been cut into the heart of the Temple Mount in ancient times.

After Jerusalem they headed in the direction of Bethlehem, the site of the nativity that lay in Palestinian territory, it was a short drive of about ten kilometres south of Jerusalem. After several army check points they reached Bethlehem, one of the most prosperous towns in Palestine. The birth place of Jesus Christ was a major tourist attraction with a large number of visitors throughout the year and like all such sites it was filled with all the souvenir shops and commercial activity that tourists attract.

The town was situated at about 760 metres altitude surrounded by rolling hills that stretched eastward to the Judean desert offering a spectacular views of an ancient landscape of vine yards, olive trees and tiny villages.

Solomon's Pools lay to the south of Bethlehem on the main road to Hebron a city that according to David Elquayam had been continuously inhabited for at least 3000 years.

'It is the Biblical Sanctuary of Abraham or Tomb of the Patriarchs, where it is believed that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are buried, it is also according to the Bible,' Elquayam said smiling with incredulity, 'the place of King David's anointment, as you can imagine it is regarded by Muslims, Christians and Jews as a most holy site. As a matter of fact for Muslim's, it is the fourth most holy place in their

religion and according to them was visited by Mohammed on his night flight to Jerusalem.'

They nodded, not all sure what he meant by a night flight to Jerusalem. The only night flight that O'Connelly remembered was a club of the same name in Moscow.

'We'll visit Hebron later, here we'll turn off to the left,' he said pointing to a sign. They were about five kilometres south of Bethlehem when they took a road through a fertile region that led up to an old Ottoman fort, Murad's Citadel or Qalat al-Buraq, the Fortress of the Pools. They arrived in a park where they left the Toyota and followed Elquayam over the rocky path that led up to the first of three large water reservoirs. It was surrounded by a surprisingly green wooded park of tall conifers in contrast to almost parched biblical landscape of the road from Jerusalem. The morning was already hot and the only relief from the sun was under the dark green pines that certainly drew their sustenance from the pools cut into the rock.

'This is the Lower Pool, together the pools were used to collect spring and rain water from the surrounding hills and was carried to Jerusalem by gravity in a series of aqueducts totalling sixty kilometres long, today the pools still supply Bethlehem and local needs.'

The first reservoir looked more like an outdoor swimming pool, it seemed incredible that it had been there for well over two thousand years.

'The pools are composed of three large reservoirs arranged in cascade, each separated from the other vertically by a height of a few metres and a distance of about fifty metres, the smallest reservoir is situated at the highest level and the largest reservoir at the lowest level.'

They looked uphill and saw the other two pools against the blue sky and the trees. The site gave an idyllic appearance.

‘As you can see these reservoirs were cut into the rock in rectangular forms, more or less constant the same width and are reinforced in places by stonework and masonry.’

They could see the three pools were situated in steps each a few metres above the other and partly built in stone. Laura clicked away with her camera photographing the details from every angle as Elquayam continued his commentary.

‘Solomon’s Pools are fed by Ain Etam, which is in fact a group of springs, Ain Etam, Ain Salih, Ain al-Burak, and Ain Farruja situated in the surrounding area. The Etam Spring is the most important, altogether they can hold up to 160,000 cubic meters of water.’

O’Connelly whistled as he tried to compare the figure with something more tangible, one hundred metres long by one hundred metres wide and sixteen metres high.

‘Why are they called Solomon’s Pools?’

‘In reality these pools as we see them today were probably built by Herod the Great when he rebuilt the Temple. There are different stories about the name, it probably comes from a biblical reference in Ecclesiastes to the Preacher, the son of King David, who some believe was King Solomon, and who said: *I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.*’

‘But you don’t think Solomon existed,’ said Laura with a hint of accusation in her voice.

‘As I said there is absolutely no archaeological proof of his existence or that of David’s.’

‘It’s very green here,’ replied Laura changing the subject.

‘As you can see when this area was administered by the Jordanian government there was a forestation program. More recently it has been developed for tourism by the Palestinians. They plan to set up a

centre called Solomon Pools Resort started with a Convention Centre Project.

They have been renovating pools and the Ottoman fort that built in 1617 by the Turkish Sultan Suleyman Al-Qanouni, but with the continuation of the Palestinian troubles there's been problems. Tsahal has shelled the buildings causing a great deal of damage.'

'You don't approve?'

'Look I'm an archaeologist not a politician. I can't approve damage to an archaeological site by any army.'

31

The Aqueducts

THERE WAS LITTLE DOUBT THAT the underground water system of cisterns and conduits was huge and extremely complex and sophisticated but such installations were common to all ancient civilisations.

The technology for the retention, transportation and supply of fresh water was born at the dawn of ancient civilisation, necessary for agricultural irrigation or for towns and cities not built on the banks of lakes or rivers, or built for reasons of defence on hills and high places.

Ancient civilizations developed the materials necessary for water transportation and distribution systems. Such as waterproof coatings and joints of cement and mortar, terracotta tiles, pottery, ceramics, copper, bronze and lead.

Catchment techniques collected water springs, rainwater ground drawn from wells carried by aqueducts, canals, conduits and pipes

flowing by gravitation along natural slopes. Most of these techniques were employed in the surrounding area of Jerusalem.

Aqueducts consisted of channels cut into the rock generally covered with cemented stones to protect the water clean and prevent them from being blocked by falling material. When there were hills on the path aqueduct tunnels were hewed into the rock. To facilitate the work and wielding of hand tools these tunnels were generally built with the height of a man. This has often resulted in archaeological observations that supposed these water tunnels were secret passages and in fact many did also serve as such though their primary use was to carry water.

When there were low valleys be crossed or permeable ground, earthen levees or dykes were built in which the water flowed over U shaped rock sections set end to end and sealed with different kinds of cement joints, the U sections were covered with slabs to protect the canal.

In the case of deep valleys or ravines bridges were constructed on which watertight channels was built. Such aqueducts were relatively vulnerable. This was the case for Jerusalem where the Etam Aqueduct crossed the Tyropoeon Valley inside of the city walls passing over the so called Wilson Arch to reach the underground cisterns beneath the Haram. Siphons were to cross certain small valleys or crests both upstream and downstream of Solomon's Pools.

The storage of water in antiquity was in non-porous rock in ponds, reservoirs or cisterns hewed into the rock. These storage systems received water from springs or rainwater. Cisterns were cut into the rock enclosed by the rock itself or covered by stone slabs cemented into place.

The cisterns of the underground system in Jerusalem were disposed in cascade within the bedrock interconnected by conduits to form a single hydraulic system.

Etam was mentioned by Josephus Flavius when he described splendour of the royal court during the reign of the legendary King Solomon, and in doing so Josephus gave a certain legitimacy to the myth by his bucolic description of Solomon riding high on his chariot in the midst of his cavalry, dressed in a white garment, at a pleasant place called Etam, with fine gardens, abounding in streams.

The problem was de Lussac took the Bible stories of Solomon and Ezechias for historical fact using them to back his theories as to the use of the cisterns and by extrapolation fix the site of the Temple citing chapter and verse as proof.

From the archaeological view point there is a fundamental difference between the system of the so called Etam aqueducts and the underground systems of the Haram. Both of these systems had received constant improvements over the centuries up until the destruction of the third Temple of Herod.

Cisterns and conduits had been continuously added to the underground system by successive generations without the initial system of cisterns being radically modified. Therefore the different archaeological strata and installations situated in the bedrock have been preserved and could be identifiable by their time of construction.

On the other hand substantial transformations had been carried out on the Etam Aqueduct system over the centuries, designed to improve the supply of water to Jerusalem. Therefore, from the archaeological point of view the vestiges of the past were removed for ever. Thus the only remaining evidence was the paths taken of the aqueducts that ensure the downhill flow of water to Jerusalem.

Certain of these aqueducts had the mark *L.X.F.* of the 10th Fretensis Legion that was stationed in Jerusalem after the destruction of the Temple.

The most ancient aqueduct was extremely sinuous with twists and turns, and hair pin bends, using a very shallow slope, to take advantage of the small difference in elevation reservoirs and the cisterns in Jerusalem. The path was then modified and was relatively rectilinear, doubtlessly inspired by Roman aqueduct technology after the first century BC and especially the influence of Roman civilisation on the work of Herod, the protégé of Mark Anthony and then Augustus, and friend of Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa the son-in-law of the Emperor, who was very knowledgeable about Roman technology.

The three reservoirs could contain approximately 160 million litres of water. The upper reservoir measured approximately 120 long with an average width of 70 metres with a sloping floor having a depth of 9 to 11 metres. The intermediary reservoir measured approximately 150 metres long with an average width of 70 metres with a sloping floor having a depth of 10 to 12 metres deep. The lower reservoir measured approximately 180 metres long with an average of 70 metres wide with a sloping floor having a depth of 10 to 16 metres.

The difference in elevation between Solomon's Pools, 780 metres above sea level and the point of entry of the aqueduct into the Haram underground 730 metres above sea level was therefore 50 metres and the distance as the crow flies 12 kilometres, but for the older more meandering aqueduct path this would have been about 24 kilometres following the contours of the natural topography and maintaining the a slope so that there would always by an inclination in the direction of Jerusalem, this was in the order of 0.21%.

On reaching Jerusalem the aqueduct had to cross the Tyropean Valley running alongside the western ramparts of the Haram to penetrate into the Haram's underground. The vestiges of a bridge situated to the north of the Wailing Wall and approximately midway between the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, called

Wilson's Arch, after the British officer of the Ordnance Survey, was no doubt built to carry the aqueduct and entered the Haram at an elevation of 727-729 metres above sea level, with the surface of the Haram at this point being approximately 738 metres above sea level.

32

Minimalist or Maximalist

THE REALITY IS THE TEXTS, from Genesis to Kings, were compiled during the Persian Period, which means more than five centuries after Solomon is supposed to have lived.'

'When you use the word compiled it implies that texts were existing?'

'Well the scribes who compiled the Bible had very little real historical information about the early history of their country available,' explained Shlomo, 'and in any case probably weren't interested by it.'

'Not interest by it?'

'They had a political agenda if you like.'

'You mean that they wrote it to suit their concept of Israel as a nation?'

'That's about it, they like those before them and after them, who wanted to justify their historical claims and justify their ambitions as a nation.'

'That is what I believe they call the 'minimalist' position.'

'Call it what you like, as far as I'm concerned that is the real evidence.'

O’Connelly shrugged his shoulders, it confirmed his research work that showed the minimalist position was nothing new, it went back to the 19th century and even further. Early archaeologists had been blinded by their acceptance of the Bible as historical fact. Later as science in general developed and more specifically archaeological science the question changed; ancient Israel’s origins and early its history could be explored and interpreted by archaeological evidence.

Scientific disciplines became more developed with the advent of new technologies in dating and the accumulation of scientifically collected archaeological evidence. Philologists were capable of deciphering ancient texts and inscriptions, which together with the data from other scientific disciplines helped archaeologists to piece together the historical facts.

In 1896, the first inscription referring to Israel was discovered by Egyptologists who dated it to the Pharaoh Merneptah who reigned from 1212 to 1262BC. More recent pieces of evidence included two stone fragments bearing an inscription ‘the house of David’ discovered at Tell Dan in 1994, which is less convincing than the Merneptah Stele, by its briefness, after all David was a common Jewish name.

‘I would think that the inscriptions discovered up to now are very, very few.’

‘Yes, these are mostly Assyrian and Babylonian references to minor kings in the small central Palestinian hill country.’ Shlomo explained. ‘These same sources confirm that the Assyrians destroyed Israel at the end of the eighth century BC and that the Babylonians later destroyed Judah at the beginning of the sixth century BC.’

‘The Bible mentions that!’

‘Yes, the Bible is a source of historical information, there’s no denying that, but it has to be interpreted alongside archaeological and epigraphical information.’

‘Now you’re talking about the maximalists?’

‘Yes, here in Israel Eva Mierberg, a German archaeologist, leads the traditional Christian archaeological faction that accepts the biblical texts as being the basis of Israel’s ancient history, they tended to contort all material evidence uncovered as proof of the Bible’s verity.’

33

Petra and the Nabateans

THE NABATEANS WERE A SEMITIC people who came from the Arabian Peninsula and founded the city of Petra in the 5th century BC. What was the relationship with the Nabateans and Israel? They were neighbours separated by the Dead Sea, the Nabateans were a trading people on the spice and silk route that ran from the Horn of Arabia to Egypt and the Mediterranean ports of ancient Palestine and Phoenicia.

O’Connelly was curious to see how this ancient civilization had fitted in with its neighbours and the Edomites who had controlled the trade routes from Arabia in the south to Damascus in the north before being pushed out by the Nabateans.

They hired a car in Amman and leaving early had visited the magnificently rich Roman city of Jerash in the north before making an about turn skirting the capital heading south. The road was good and after two or three hours they turned off to the town of Wadi Musa where they stopped at a small hotel. It was quiet, very quiet, the tourist trade was bad with the constant tensions in the Middle East and between Israel and the Palestinians to make matters worse

Sheik Nasrallah had been making inflaming rhetoric in support of the Hezbollah militia in the south Lebanon.

Visits to the site commenced early so after dinner in the hotel restaurant they turned in ready for the visit at sunrise. It was barely day when they entered into the defile, called the Siq, on foot with the few other visitors present, at places it was just wide enough to walk or ride on horse back, to one side a water channel was cut into the rock.

The Nabateans, had been on of the many nomadic tribes that lived in the desert of North Saudi Arabia and South Jordan around 600BC living by their camels and from time to time raiding and plunder each other. They also offered protection for caravans that travelled from ancient Yemen, the home of the legendary Queen of Sheba who had visited the legendary King Solomon, bringing incense and treasures from India and China to the rest of the ancient world.

The Nabateans settled in Wadi Musa, coexisting with the Edomites. Petra was a natural mountain fortress, with only one very narrow passageway in through the mountains making it almost impregnable. During the Hellenistic period under the Seleucids and Ptolemies, the whole area flourished with increased trade and the establishment of new towns such as Philadelphia now Amman, and Gerasa now Jerash. The struggle between the Seleucids and Ptolemies for power allowed the Nabateans to gain control over the caravan routes between Arabia and Syria, in spite of the conflict between the Jewish Maccabeans and their Seleucid overlords.

In 63BC, the Nabateans were conquered by Pompey, but an independent Nabatea was allowed to serve as a buffer territory against the desert tribes. Under the Emperor Trajan, Petra and Nabatea became part of the Roman province known as Arabia Petraea with its capital at Petra, later Hadrian visited the city and named it after himself, Hadriane Petra. The city continued to flourish

during the Roman period, with its buildings and monuments influenced by Roman architecture.

Although an earthquake in 363AD destroyed half of the city, Petra prospered into late antiquity, when it was the seat of a Byzantine bishopric, but an even more devastating earthquake in 551AD caused the ultimate decline of Petra. With the rise of Islam, Petra faded from history, though once a Crusader outpost, until it was re-discovered by the Swiss explorer Burckhardt in 1812, though almost two hundred years later only a small part of the city been investigated.

The city was literally carved from the red sandstone cliffs in the harsh desert of southern Jordan, with 3,000 temples, tombs and dwellings places and at its height was home to a population of 20,000 inhabitants

After half a kilometre the defile suddenly opened out and before them was the extraordinary sight of the Treasury. They then turned right down into the valley that opened out before them where the ruins of the ancient city lay surrounded by the red ochre hills on all sides. It was vast, monumental tombs were cut into the cliffs, there were amphitheatres, temples, market places and the Roman Cardo with its columns. The Nabateans had left behind them an extraordinary witness to the civilization built on commerce and trade, it contrasted to the little that was left of ancient Israel.

The returned to their hotel in the afternoon exhausted but more than satisfied with the beauties of ancient Petra, left wondering as many before them about the rise and fall of ancient civilizations, conscious of their brevity of their own and the threats the conflicts, so very close to them, bore.

The previous evening O'Connelly had prepared their visit to the Wadi Rum by reading the story of D.H.Lawrence and the description of the legendary desert where he had attacked the Istanbul-Baghdad-

Red Sea train with the forces of the Arab tribes during World War I, in guerrilla operations in the desert.

The Wadi Rum lays in the Rift Valley an hour's drive from Petra or Aqaba, to the East of the Desert Highway, beneath the Rum Mountain one of the highest points in Jordan.

The vista of the Wadi Rum was one of the most beautiful he had ever seen, the majestic mountains and vertical cliffs rising out of the deep yellow and ochre sands in a panorama set against a deep blue sky. He promised himself he would return to explore the desert as he had seen other travellers leaving in specialised all terrain camping cars to explore the desert.

They arrived in Aqaba early that evening and stopped overnight at the most comfortable Movenpick hotel. Aqaba was a quiet town preferred by divers who had from all over the world to explore the marvels of the Red Sea. The next morning after having dropped of their rented car they took a taxi to the crossing point with Israel, they were alone. The formalities were uncomplicated; their only problem was the distance between the different bureaux for exit visas, passport controls and entry formalities into Israel. Once clear on the Israeli side they took a taxi to the Eilat Hilton.

THE VIEW OVER THE BAY was as usual beyond words under the clear Californian morning sky that almost hurt his eyes. He remembered there were only ten shopping days to Christmas as he zapped on the news listening to the reports of heavy snow in the Denver region then

showered. It was just after eight as he left the condo pent house and made his way downhill to the ferry jetty. The weekend had been pleasant enough with the warm weather though the days were too short for his liking, the time it took to get the boat out and around the North Bay area was too long with the temperature dropping too quickly to really get the best out of it. He was at the best a weekend sailor and if it wasn't for Bill Pike a retired broker and excellent skipper shared the boat it would be too much for him.

Four months had passed since he had first embarked on his new project and he had taken time off to get down to the essential – writing. San Francisco was far from the giddy whirl of Paris and Tel-Aviv and O'Connelly had time to think and catch up with his other projects.

There was the usual motley crowd, weekenders, the odd early tourist and a few business commuters on the ferry who stood out with their dark suits and polished shoes burdened by their black computer bags slung heavily over their shoulders, their faces already wearing harassed looks. O'Connelly wondered if they slept with them over the weekends. He sipped the latte he had grabbed at Starbucks as he watched the San Francisco skyline grow through the stained windows of the second deck as the Ferry ploughed its way to the Embarcadero terminal.

He disembarked and took a cab to Heights, he had just three more busy days before he left for Paris. The screen play for *The Lost Forest* was complete and he was meeting with Joe Steiner the script writer to discuss a few last points before shooting began on location in Costa Rica. Hollywood producers seemed to like Costa Rica for jungle scenes it was relatively near to home, cost effective and the local politics were uncomplicated, which was alright with O'Connelly who in any case had little say in the matter though several scenes would be shot in Jakarta and Pontianak.

Shooting was to commence in the late spring that left him a short time to gather his ideas for his next novel which at that moment were so vague as to be almost non-existent. He put the idea out of his head, first on his mind was a quiet Christmas with Laura, away from the never ending pressure of California, to a more human way of life, life on a smaller scale, away from the never ending questions of business.

Writing had always seemed to him as an easy going intellectual or academic way of life and so it had been until he had been hit by success that turned his life into a money spinning business in which he was hounded from morning to night by agents, publishers, critics, speaking tours and interviews. His escape was to Paris where he could hide incognito.

In their research work in the history of the Levant Laura's network of relations led her to Bertrand Lacour a French archaeologist and linguist specialised in ancient Middle Eastern Civilizations. He was an associate director of archaeology and ancient History at UCLA and moved between the universities offices in Beirut, Damascus and Amman. He was part of a joint project to form a library of ancient inscriptions and texts with the German Max-Planck-Institute and the University of California at Los Angeles. Lacour was a polyglot and bon vivant who enjoyed the company of his fellow academics who shared his love of pleasure and science, whatever the country or region his presence ensured long evenings of wining and dining when the sometimes passionate discussions would go on long into the night.

They had driven down to Santa Monica and had checked in to Shutters on the Beach, a short taxi ride to the UCLA Campus at Westwood Village, it was a pleasant way to relax for the weekend before getting down to work with Lacour and Smith. O'Connelly liked the hotel for its luxurious comfort with an ocean view suite and

if the luxury was too overwhelming he could slum it with a stroll to Venice Beach and its seedy Fellini like non-stop circus.

They dined in the excellent hotel restaurant, One Pico, ordering steamed mussels in a spicy coconut and lemon grass broth and then Moroccan spiced rack of lamb and couscous with a Ravenswood Teldeschi Zinfandel followed by a Shafer Cabernet Sauvignon.

The UCLA Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures is in the Humanities Building on 415 Portoloa Plaza just next to the Powell Library, turn off Sunset Boulevard take Hildegard then Charles Young Drive, you can't miss it.

'This is the Kinsey Hall,' said Lacour, 'our old red brick building was one of the first on the Westwood Campus of UCLA, originally it was the old Physics and Biology Building and was built in 1929. Today it is completely renovated to seismic standards and from last year is the new home for the Humanities, English and Foreign Languages.'

Just a short walk from the Humanities Building is the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology in the Fowler Museum on Charles E. Young Drive North. The Institute was specialised in interdisciplinary study of the human past and set up in 1973, for the study of ancient human societies. Located on the lower level of the Fowler building on the UCLA campus were the laboratories for regional field research projects, technical labs for the specialized analysis of archaeological materials, classrooms, a teaching lab, meeting rooms and offices. The Institute presents public lecture programs, publications, and research seminars as well as field research grants to its members. The Institute also trains professional archaeologists through an interdisciplinary graduate degree program.

The Institute researchers work throughout the world with particular emphasis on Mesoamerica, South America, California, China, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Europe. Researchers employ a

wide range of theoretical perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds, bringing anthropological, classical, historical, humanistic and scientific perspectives to the Institute and its interpretations of the past.

The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology and the J. Paul Getty Trust formed a partnership to create a new program awarding a Master's degree in Archaeological and Ethnographic Conservation. The conservation of archaeological and ethnographic materials and sites is an important part of our efforts to preserve the cultural remains of the past.

‘Our program will emphasize the multiple values and meanings that archaeological and ethnographic artefacts may hold for society, and how they impact decisions on the conservation and use of those materials,’ he told to them.

The role of the archaeological or ethnographic conservator is increasingly involved in wider cultural or museum-based decisions. Likewise, the conservator may work as part of an interdisciplinary team, with ethnographers, indigenous communities, cultural resource managers or curators.

They were joined by Charles Smith held the Chair of Near Eastern Languages & Ancient Mediterranean Studies at UCLA. He was Professor of Biblical Studies & Semitic Languages and worked with one of the Getty programmes. A tall friendly man with a kind and open scholarly approach, he wore dark glasses due to an eye injury that had occurred on a dig in Iraq many years previously when that country was better known for its ancient history than Middle Eastern politics.

He told them how the UCLA Getty Conservation Program provided students with a solid educational base and practical training in both archaeological and ethnographic materials; as well as an appreciation of the often complex issues relating to significance,

access and use of these materials which can be very different from the criteria for conservation of fine art or historical materials. In the case of ethnographic materials especially, the program will facilitate an understanding of the multiple values that artefacts hold for indigenous populations, and will foster a sense of partnership with indigenous communities in relevant aspects of the conservation process.

Lacour had been given a copy of de Lussac's manuscript to read, his opinion was vital if O'Connelly's novel was to hold water on the historical facts and details. Did de Lussac's theory have any real basis, was it just a good subject for the countless amateur archaeologists that gravitated around the subject of the Temple and its mysteries?

'Bertrand, what's your opinion, be frank, I didn't write it?'

Lacour looked to Charles Smith as if to prompt him.

'Alright,' said Smith smiling, 'it's an interesting theory, but if I can speak frankly it confuses history, archaeological and religious fact.'

'I see.'

'Firstly, the author speaks of Solomon and David as though they existed, as you know we archaeologists doubt that. Then he draws heavily on the work of the Palestinian Survey Fund, an excellent work...for the 19th century, which is unverifiable.'

'What do you do Bertrand?'

'I entirely agree. Another point is that your friend seems to have an axe to grind with the Muslims, which contorts historical fact.'

'Quite so, we notice that.'

'There are too many suppositions used to back his ideas.'

'Is there any credibility in the theory?'

'Yes, obviously those cisterns were built to carry water, and water can only flow downhill. But that doesn't prove the Temple was in that precise spot.'

‘What about the quality of the work, I mean the exposition?’

‘I wouldn’t give one of my students a high note for that. Too many repetitions, too many circumvolutions, too much insistence on the Bible and other texts that draw on unverifiable notions.’

‘But it’s a good story,’ said Charles Smith laughing.

O’Connelly was pleased to have received the opinions of learned specialists, he could now proceed without fearing he would end up with a fatwa of one kind or another hanging over him.

The next evening, back in San Francisco, they wrapped up things and were prepared to leave for Paris. They decided to eat out as they would be leaving the next morning and he suggested to Laura they try Chinese, in any case he preferred Chinese cuisine to even the best American and for something tasty that would not bloat them. They decide a walk would do them good and one of his favourites was the New Asia on Pacific Avenue a ten minute walk from his Telegraph Hill penthouse apartment. The sky was cloudless and the temperature warm enough not to need a top coat, they walked around the Tower Gardens to Montgomery down to the steps and crossing a seedy Broadway with its adult book stores before entering into China Town. What he liked in the New Asia was picking dishes off the passing trolleys and no unwanted surprise when ordering from a menu. It was noisy as usual and with a largely Asian clientele.

San Francisco was a place to live that suited him, providing he kept north of a line determined in his mind by Geary, where it combined some of the better aspects of the USA with those of Europe, to the south of that line the misery of the homeless and mentally ill that roamed the streets was overwhelming. He became American when heading south of Geary taking a taxi to the place he was visiting, it was cheaper than parking that cost a small fortune, though a taxi home was not that easy to grab when returning later. The homeless were said to be harmless, but it only took one deranged person or

drunk to transform an everyday situation into a very dangerous one and he had witnessed such cases though they were mostly between members of that particular population.

At the airport the next morning casually flipping over the pages of the San Francisco Chronicle he suddenly stopped, his eyes drawn to an article reporting Harper Collins announcement of Michael Crichton's new novel *NEXT*, to be published in hard cover, audio, large print and e-book formats simultaneously around the world with a first printing of two million copies. He could not prevent his mind from going into cash register mode with a vision of dollars ringing up in their millions as royalties poured into Crichton's bank account. It was a sobering reminder of his own urgent financial situation, breaking the satisfied feeling that had that he felt about the progress of his novel.

35

Rhodes

THEY FLEW INTO RHODES for a stop-over between Paris and Tel-Aviv; O'Connelly wanted to research the background history of the island, which had been the home of the Templar Knights, legend had credited them with discovering the treasure of the Temple in Jerusalem. It was early summer and the island was overflowing with tourists. Laura had found a hotel on the Internet in the old city, it was said to be four hundred years old and had been built by a Turkish merchant.

'It's definitely four hundred years old!' said O'Connelly dryly as he examined the bathroom and a notice that asked guests to deposit used toilet paper in a waste bin.

‘There’s no way I’m going to spend my time looking at my waste bum paper,’ he said sourly.

‘Stop complaining, it’s their sewerage system.’

‘They should have taken a few lessons from the Jews!’

‘Forget that and look at the view.’

Laura had opened the window and climbed out onto a small terrace, it really a flat roof equipped with two plastic chairs and a table. There was no denying that there was a magnificent view over the old city and the port where a couple of huge cruise ships were berthed.

As they left the hotel and following the old stone streets towards the town centre Laura recounted how Rhodes had been the home of the Hospitallers. She had done a little preparatory work in Paris and on the flight and told O’Connelly how the Hospitallers together with the Order of the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon had been the greatest of the monastic Crusading Orders. These orders with the help of several Papal bulls levied taxes and tithing in the territories under their control. The Templars had got their name from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which tradition held was the site of the Temple of Solomon. The order was founded in 1118AD and in 1128AD and entrusted by the Council of Troyes with the task of aiding Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land.

They selected one amongst the many restaurants on the main tourist street, the menu announced the day’s specialities what seemed to be almost every known language on the earth, they opted out of the aperitif proposed by the owner and chose to commence with a bottle of the local rosé wine. Laura continued her story with the legend of the Templars’ treasure said to be hidden in the tunnels beneath the Esplanade.

Certain believed that one of Sir Charles Warren of the Palestine Survey Fund’s goals had been to find the treasure and one of his assistants, a certain Captain Parker, had written in a letter in 1912

how on one of their underground explorations they had discovered a secret room cut into the rock beneath the temple site with a passage leading from to the Mosque of Omar. Parker described how he broke through the wall at the end of the passage and found himself in the mosque and had to flee to save himself from the angry Muslims.

According to the legend the Templars had discovered the treasure of the Temple beneath the Esplanade and had transmitted its secrets from generation to generation.

The Sovereign Order of the Knights of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes, and of Malta, the Hospitallers, occupied Rhodes from 1309 to 1523, and Malta from 1530 to 1798. The order began as a hospital founded in Jerusalem to provide care for poor and sick pilgrims in the Holy Land, before the Crusades, the Order was then recognized by the Pope in 1113 and developed a military branch, provided men for castles such as the Krak des Chevaliers.

After the Fall of Acre in 1291, the Hospitallers first moved to Cyprus and then on to Rhodes, which they invaded in 1307 and conquered. For two centuries they resisted the Mamluks and the Ottomans, until the Suleyman the Magnificent reduced them to surrender in 1523.

After the fall of Rhodes, a new base of operations was found in 1530 thanks to the Emperor Charles V. The rocky and isolated island of Malta, where the local Catholic population, speaks a language related to the Arabic introduced by the Arab conquest in 870. The Order became identified with Malta, and Cross of the Order became the Maltese Cross.

After the young Suleyman had driven the Knights out of Rhodes, his father sent an army to drive them out of Malta. The Turks besieged the island in 1565, without success leaving thousands dead on the island and the Hospitallers secured their new home for two centuries, until the arrival of Napoleon on his way to Egypt in 1798.

When Charles V gave Malta to the Knights, the tribute was a falcon a year, which was to inspire the novel by Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* and the John Huston movie in 1941 with Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall and Peter Laurie.

36

Syria

‘LISTEN, FOR MORE THAN 1,300 YEARS it was the Muslims who ensured peace and prosperity in Jerusalem,’ Mohammed Haroun of Amman University told O’Connelly as they left Gerash thirty five kilometres to the north of Amman and headed towards the Syrain border.

‘What about the Crusades?’

‘When the Christians arrived they brought war and bloodshed with them, which lasted for almost a century when they founded the Kingdom of Jerusalem that went from the Aqaba in the south to Sidon in the north.’

‘Then the Muslims conquered the city.’

‘Yes, the city was taken over without any bloodshed, the Caliph Omar ibn El-Khattab travelled from Medina and entered the Jerusalem, on foot as a sign of respect, receiving the keys of the city from the Archbishop and promised safety to the Christians and Jews.’

‘In any case the city came under Muslim domination.’

‘Domination, I don’t know if that is the word, about half of what we know as the Old City was given to the Christians, a quarter to the Jews, and the rest was for Muslims, where they built two mosques.’

‘For Muslims, Jerusalem is a holy place, the third most important for Islam. As a matter of fact it was the first place where they turned to for prayer, but more important it was where the Prophet was transported from Mecca to Jerusalem on his horse Buraq and then to Heaven by an angel.’

‘So the Arabs arrived with Islam?’

‘No, my friend,’ he smiled condescendingly to one who was so ignorant, ‘Palestine was already a home to the Arabs, more than one thousand five hundred years before Arab tribes had entered this land from the Arabian Peninsular in the second millennium BC. These included Jebusites who lived in what is now Jerusalem. There were also the Canaanites, another tribe of nomadic herders from Arabia who settled throughout Palestine. These were the forefathers of our people today.’

‘So the original inhabitants were not Jews?’

‘It depends what you call Jews. In those ancient times the people who were later to become Jews were just another nomadic and animist tribe, speaking one of the many languages belonging to the Semitic family, from which ancient Egyptian Aramaic, Arabic and Hebrew had sprung.’

That seemed reasonable to O’Connelly, but he continued with his explanation.

‘Jerusalem was founded by the Jebusite priest-king Melchizadek who was called King of Salem, the King of Peace, he was a very pious man. That’s how the city got its name Joro Salem, which means City of Peace that then became Jerusalem.’

After the border formalities they crossed into Syria and after a couple of hours of easy driving reached Damascus. They visited the city where they stayed overnight eating in an area on the outskirts of the city famous for its traditional restaurants. They were attending the Syrian Archaeological Society’s annual conference, which was to

take place in the coastal city of Latakia. It was known to the Phoenicians as Ramitha and to the Greeks as Leuke Akte, its present name was a corruption of Laodicea, who was the mother of Alexander the Great's general Seleucus I Nicator in 3rd century BC.

The next day they covered the 350 kilometre journey from Damascus by road, passing through Homs with a stop to visit the Krak Crusaders Castle before continuing to the coast and Tartous.

CNN had reported a dispute concerning an Israeli soldier captured in Gaza. It was the same story with threats and counter threats. It looked no worse than usual and did not deter them from going ahead with their plan to visit the Lebanon and Syria. O'Connelly wanted to visit the Crusaders castles and if things went well Palmyra in Syria.

It seemed that the Lebanese government and the opposition were building up to a confrontation since the opposition pulled out of the coalition, a strike is paralysing the country and street fighting between mobs from both factions are spreading.

The country's debt could be counted in tens of billions. The Hezbollah was increasing its pressure on the governmental coalition made up of Druze and Christian warlords supported by the Sunnis who fear the Shias.

In Tartous they visited the remains of the Crusader castle in centre of the old city, where in the 12th century Saladin had besieged the Templar Knights protected by its concentric fortifications, laying waste to the surrounding city. During the centuries that followed the tower at the northern extremity of the castle overlooking the harbour had been transformed into dwellings places with windows and balconies built into its enormous stone walls. The once proud battlements of the castle were decorated with long lines of washing.

Inside the Templars' old walled city was a somewhat shabby market square surrounded by rather shops and cafés, the square, as

the nearby narrow streets were unkempt like many cities in the Middle East filled with plastic bags, rotting vegetables and rubbish.

They pressed on to Latakia, the principal sea port of Syria hoping for something more wholesome, the city itself was modern where the visitors were mostly Syrians day-trippers and holiday-makers who filled the terraces of the sea front cafés and restaurants; there were also a few foreigners, businessmen or tourists taking a well earned rest from their hectic visits to castles and Roman ruins. The nearby beaches were covered with the usual sprinkling of detritus the covers the shore of the southern Mediterranean from Algiers to the Turkish frontier with Syria, the only exception being that of certain areas of Beirut and the coast line of Israel in the region of Tel-Aviv. The locals seemed to oblivious to the filth

From a distance the ancient city, founded in the 3rd century BC, seemed an excellent choice for the venue with its beaches, mountains, archaeological sites and relics from the Crusader time. The only problem was the hotel was ten kilometres from the city centre though the beaches were better where bikinis replaced the veils, and tourists enjoyed the sun on chaise longues under well kept palm trees. The conference also coincided with the 60th anniversary of Syria's independence from France, and the authorities had made an effort to smarten up the appearance of the town in preparation for the festivities, almost every shop window bore a picture of their beloved President Bashar al-Assad, who had succeeded his equally beloved father six years previously.

The Syrians claimed that the Blue Beach of Latakia was the most popular beach on the Eastern Mediterranean. They were booked into the five star Meridien Latakia Hotel, a huge modern truncated pyramid like building that faced the beach.

They walked past a huge poster of Assad, whose personality cult was comparable to that of Gaddafi in Tripoli and in so many other countries ruled by such dictators.

The main shopping street in Latakia was lined with cheap hotels, teahouses and numerous small shops selling souvenirs, jewellery, clothes and music cassettes. In several of the shop windows were portraits of the surrounded by ribbons of cheap coloured flashing lights, probably imported from China.

For the average Syrian politics was a subject well left alone, any public criticism of him or opposition to the regime was a short cut to a prison cell; government spies and informers were listening everywhere. The former Vice-President of the country, Abdel-Halim Khaddam, was a victim of the dictatorial regime, denounced as a traitor for criticising Assad and was forced to flee the country.

37

A Secret Site

CEDRIC DELAUNY WAS ABOUT THIRTY YEARS OLD, of average height with regular features, his dark hair was thick and long, wavy and disordered, he wore a fashionable half beard with a three day's growth on his cheeks. He wore a white collarless shirt and white jeans.

Alfred Mann had a small poorly equipped office in the Old City of Jerusalem, it was pompously called an observatory, its supposed role was to monitor relations between Jews and Muslims in his trust's quixotic crusade to promote peace.

O’Connelly could not help thinking that Delauny resembled an idealised or pop image of Jesus Christ. Moreover, Delauny’s smiling manner was cultivated to exude warm and a tolerant, benevolent attitude towards all those he met. He could have been described as a disciple of Alfred Mann, whom he admired and obeyed.

‘The trouble with the Palestinians is that they believe Israelis always try to fit historical evidence into a biblical context, adapting it to their policy of colonisation in Jerusalem,’ suggested O’Connelly.

‘It’s part of a general confusion over the Temple site, most of the population, including religious and political leaders, believe that the walls that support the platform on which the Al Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock are built were part of King Herod’s Temple, which incidentally pre-existed Islam by centuries,’ said Delauny appearing well informed, though in fact he was simply repeated what he had heard from those around him.

‘If I’m right it was part of the supporting wall built by Herod.’

‘According to archaeologists.’

‘I’ve heard a rumour about a site outside of the Old City,’ said O’Connelly changing tack in the hope of gleaning some information.’

‘Yes, it’s all kept very quiet, there’s a group of archaeologists working on a site just outside of the Old City of Jerusalem, below the Mount of Olives and near the Kedron Valley, top secret so the rumour goes.’

‘Secret!’

‘Yes, it seems like there’s a tight security veil around the site, it’s completely closed off and roofed in. You need a pass from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to get in.’

O’Connelly had already learnt that secret archaeological sites in Israel were two a penny, every archaeologist dreamed of making a sensational find and a few even went as far as inventing them, which

seemed to be the case for de Lussac, though his idea was better in the sense it was unthinkable he Waqf would even let an excavation be carried out under the Haram.

There however remained other sites outside of the Old City such as in the City of David that lay to the south of ramparts, a site had been excavated for almost a century without any find that could shed some real ght on the Bible story.

38

Persians

‘AHMADINEJAD IS A PSYCHOPATH like Hitler,’ explained Abdul Samara, an Israeli Sufi, specialist in religious affairs.

‘Hitler!’ exclaimed Laura.

‘He wants to wipe Israel off the map.’

‘He speaks just like Hitler before the Second World War and said the Jews should move their country to Europe or North America.’

‘It’s obvious he’s some kind of a psychopath. Can you imagine what he would do with an atomic bomb!’ added Benny.

‘Do you really think they want a bomb or are making one?’

‘The Mossad has proof that secret uranium enrichment sites exist in Iran and that they are a very short time away from developing a bomb.’

‘What will Israel do?’

‘There is only one option and that is military action against, if we don’t it will be like committing suicide.’

‘Shouldn’t the UN Security Council look after that...sanctions or some such action?’

‘Ahmadinejad says he doesn’t give a damn about the UN.’

‘So do you think we’ll have a war of religions?’

‘A war of religions?’

‘I mean it’s not really a war of religions, is it?’

‘Well the Palestinians will tell you it’s a question of self determination and the creation of a Palestinian state, the Israelis will tell you it’s their fight against terror and the survival of the state of Israel. But, that’s not the whole story,’ he said waiting for Laura to asked the question he begged.

She remained silent.

‘The story is much older and is in fact a question of religion. It goes back to the Prophet Mohammed,’ said Samara:

‘When it is said to them, Believe in what Allah Hath sent down, they say, “We believe in what was sent down to us,” yet they reject all besides, even if it be Truth confirming what is with them. Say: “Why then have ye slain the prophets of Allah in times gone by, if ye did indeed believe?”

Laura looked at him, her face totally blank.

‘That’s from the Holy Koran.’

She looked even blanker.

‘Let me explain,’ he said with the kind of exasperation a teacher would have for a recalcitrant child. ‘Mohammed spoke to the Jews who refuse the Koran, he accuses them of killing the prophets of Allah, specifically Jesus.’

‘I see, so there is a religious conflict.’

‘Of course,’ said Benny. ‘If you look at the Bible, the Christians transformed it into their book, then they added the New Testament. Then, with respect to my good friend Abdul Samara, the Muslims extrapolated it to create Koran. The holy scriptures of the three

religions are filled with vilification of the other revealed religions. Today people like Alfred Mann try to present the good aspects, which of course exist, but alongside these good aspects there is a multitude of rejection, threats and contradictions, which cannot be ignored without rejecting that which cannot be rejected as it is the revealed word of God. This is a deep rooted conflict that cannot be smoothed over and is acerbated by the territorial and political conflict.'

'I can not agree Benny about the Holy Koran being an extrapolation of the Bible,' said Samara smiling sadly.

The discussion seemed like another of the endless justifications for one or the other religions.

'Look, when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad addressed the United Nations, he said he had a mystical experience, during which the assembly was spellbound as they listened to his message, but at the same time Ahmadinejad has publicly vowed to wipe Israel off the map, he denies the holocaust and is has become obsessed with the idea of destroying Israel.'

'Perhaps they are just words.'

'I don't know but the government has quietly ordered the Israeli Defence Forces to prepare to launch air strikes against Iranian nuclear sites if necessary. He is only waiting for a nod from the Americans. Remember how Israel's F16 war planes destroyed Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981 before it could be fuelled'

'Maybe there is some truth in what Ahmadinejad says when he accuses the West of hypocrisy and arrogance by trying to deprive Iran of its rights.'

'Perhaps.'

'The Americans won't do anything,' laughed Benny, 'they've learnt their lesson in Iraq. They imagined all they had to do was to

turn right after Baghdad to attack the other Middle Eastern member of the axis of evil.'

'I suppose you're right there.'

'Sure I am, now they can't do a damn thing, Iran is giving the finger to the West while the Americans are bogged down in Iraq, in addition its allies just want to get out.'

'What about Israel's position? Do they want you to do their dirty work?'

'If it's anybody's dirty work it's ours, it's our survival, Ahmadinejad is another Hitler.'

'We should attack and we are capable of doing the job,' he said. 'Iran is an impending danger to Israel. Benjamin Netanyahu is right when he backs the destruction of Iranian nuclear facilities.'

'Has Israel really the capability to attack Iran?'

'Yes, our Air Force base at in the Negev is ready to attack to attack the Iranian facilities just like we bombed Iraq's nuclear reactor at Osirak in 1981.'

'That was in 1981.'

'Now we have two submarines that can launch cruise missiles.'

'Aren't you afraid of Iranian missiles?'

'Of course, we know that Iran is developing long range missiles and will soon be able to produce bomb-grade uranium unless they are stopped.'

The Palace of King David

‘IS IT PART OF A GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME?’

‘Every site requires the permission of the Israel Antiquities Authority, IAA, which comes under the Ministry of Culture and Education, this one is excavated by the university under Dr. Eilat Mazar.’

‘Do you know what they have found?’ asked O’Connelly.

‘Rumours speak of a palace,’ said Shlomo.

‘A palace?’

‘King David’s palace.’

‘That’s incredible,’ exclaimed Laura.

‘Not so fast, it’s dated from around the tenth century BC when King David was supposed to exist, but there is no other concrete evidence, at least that I know of.’

‘Will there be some kind of publication?’

‘I’ve heard nothing for the moment. This kind of work takes time and money, the state controls archaeological excavations but it does not finance them, funds have to be found, in addition to that you can’t go charging in with a bulldozer.’

‘Jerusalem and its surroundings are so filled with history that you have just to scrap the top soil and something turns up,’ said Solly. ‘Any construction work in Israel requires the presence of an archaeologist. The problem is however which archaeologist, because each and every archaeologist represents a school of archaeology or of religious or political conviction.’

‘So it’s all very political.’

‘You’re dead right there, the number of factions are endless, there’s of course Jews with a whole spectrum of viewpoints, from the strictly archaeological and almost anti-Bible position to the hard-line strictly Bible Orthodox Jews. Then there’s Muslims who have a curious attitude supporting all confirmation concerning the holy site but rejecting ancient history that might show Jewish possession from very ancient times, naturally this includes the Palestinians with their political standpoint. Lastly there’s the Christians who are even more varied than the Jews, they go from the fanatical Bible punchers to the Vatican and the Orthodox Church.’

‘Eilat Mazar believes she has found King David’s tenth century palace.’

‘She belongs to which archaeological school?’

‘She has been sponsored by the Shalem Centre, that’s a non-conservative think tank in Jerusalem.’

‘How does that affect her work?’

‘Well it’s very politically orientated since the Shalem Centre, a non-conservative think tank, wants to prove that Jerusalem was the capital of the ancient kingdom of the Hebrews thus reinforcing a claim on Jerusalem as the capital city of the Jewish people.’

‘Against the Palestinians?’

‘Exactly.’

‘So what has she found?’

‘The most important find is a major public building that dates from around the 10th century BC together with pottery shards that have been dated to the time of David and Solomon, and a government seal of an official mentioned in the book of Jeremiah.’

‘Thirty centuries old, that’s incredible. What’s your opinion?’

‘Well its an extraordinary find, art of the foundations of a sizeable public building have been uncovered, built in Phoenician style dating from the 10th or 9th century BC, that’s the time of the United

Kingdom of David and Solomon. So there is no doubt that it's a very important discovery, but the historical interpretation remains unclear for the moment. The site is just outside of the Old City of Jerusalem, in the City of David, below the Mount of Olives and near the Kedron Valley, that's to the south of the Dome of the Rock. That means that Jews, Muslims, and Christians dispute its historical interpretations.'

'Anything to with the Temple Mount is explosive and a real thorn in the side of the Israeli government.'

'Why?' said Laura surprised.

'The government's job is to run the country – keep the peace – with the Temple Mount being a constant source of problems. Let me give you an example, in 1999 the Waqf, that is the Muslim authorities, decided to carry out work on the Temple Mount, over which they have full authority, to build a new mosque and started excavation without any consideration for archaeological aspects. They proceeded to excavate a huge amount of earth and rock and dumping outside of the city walls. Naturally that caused an uproar and finally permission was given to Jewish and Christian archaeologists to sift through about seventy truckloads of rubble.'

'So going back to King David's palace?'

'Well, Mazar figured that she knew where David's legendary palace might be, that is just outside the walls of the ancient city. The Bible describes it as a palace and the seat of an important kingdom, but others say David's city was just another small town run by tribal chieftains who controlled a few rocky hilltops. However, if it turns out to be as described in the Bible then it proves the Jews have ancient roots there thus justifying their territorial claims.'

'And what is the position of serious archaeologists?'

Shlomo laughed: 'Serious archaeologists, how do you define serious? On the one hand is the Bible and on the other a pile of old

stones. The problem is to fit the pieces of the puzzle together without using one to make the other say something you want to hear.'

'But you as a Jew believe in the Bible.'

'Religion, history and archaeology are mixed with written traditions, and written traditions are mixed with oral traditions and myths. A lot of the Bible is based on the traditions handed down by an ancient society that transmitted its history orally, so by the time it was written down it had been changed to suit political ideas and fit in with kind of legends that form national identity, so what really happened in the 10th century BC in a small recently nomadic society is as good as fiction.'

'Oh!'

'Yes I'm sorry to say that's how it is, one of my friends at Al Quds University, likes to explain it by saying *they found a button and want to make a suit out of it.*'

They all laughed.

'So how come the palace is outside of the City Walls?,' asked O'Connelly.

'Ancient Jerusalem in David's time was not the Old City you can see today. It was perhaps built on the hill where the Haram now stands. According to the Bible David captured the city, which was no doubt nothing more than a small village, which is why he built his palace just outside of the walls directly to the south above the Kedron Valley, this is what we call the City of David.'

'Just a small village!'

'Yes. You have to remember that several generations of archaeologists have work on excavations in and around the city, including Mazar's grandfather. Before him was a certain Robert MacAlister in the 1920s, followed by Kathleen Kenyon in the 1960s then Yigal Shilo in the 1970s and 1980s. Kenyon had found evidence of well-worked stones and proto-aeolic capitals, which decorated the

tops of columns, evidence of a large important building,' Ziv told them.

'It will no doubt be the start of a battle between specialists,' Shlomo added.

'That's for sure, it was Israel Finkelstein who suggested that Jerusalem at that time was nothing more than a typical hill-country village without any sign of monumental architecture or even simple pottery shards in the floor of the building. So it's a kind of revenge for Eilat Mazar, discovering what looks like some kind of public building and some datable pottery, especially the seal – said to belong to an official called Jehucal, son of Shelemiah, son of Shevi who is mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah.'

'It's not some kind of button?' asked O'Connelly.

'Perhaps.'

40

The Bulla

THE SAME EVENING BACK IN TEL-AVIV they were invited to dinner at Shlomo's mother's just ten minutes from their hotel in a modern apartment building. She was a typical Jewish mother, wielding a rod of iron over her three sons of whom Shlomo was the youngest. She was immensely proud of Shlomo one Israel's leading nuclear scientists whose work included the development of sophisticated scientific dating methods using isotopes, employed by Israeli and foreign archaeologists, including his brother Solly, a leading specialist in Late Neolithic History with the Israeli Department of Archaeology.

Mrs Klein's apartment was a huge duplex where she lived alone, situated on the eleventh and twelfth floors facing the Mediterranean on one side, and the university campus on the other, though she was highly active in different women's social and political associations, often hosting lobby related meetings in her comfortable home.

She was delighted to receive O'Connelly and was extremely curious about his relationship with Laura, which seemed to her as being something deliciously unkosher. All three of her sons were there – a command performance O'Connelly suspected in his honour. Drinks and appetizers were served on the terrace amongst potted palms and olive trees facing the setting sun as they chatted about books, archaeology and Shlomo's contribution to science. Mrs Klein spoke of her late husband's travels to Europe, often together, for their very successful family business; dried fruit. Shlomo's mother was the matriarch, running the family business where a shekel was a shekel, closely watching over her sons, guiding their careers – even though the three were well into their forties – regally reigning over her large family with her daughters-in-law and grandchildren.

Dinner consisted of a series of spicy eastern plates, stuffed peppers, aubergines, fried chicken, fetta and mixed vegetables spiced with cumin served with an excellent Carmel Cabernet-Sauvignon.

Conversation turned to Eilat Mazar, who belonged to the maximalist school and whose discoveries were clouded by non-scientific biblical interpretation, anathema for Mrs Klein who saw it as a slight to her son's work, even though Mrs Klein was a fierce nationalist and took the Hebraic Bible for the source of the sacred nations rights.

'Mr O'Connelly,' she said pronouncing his name slowly and carefully, her English was good but she spoke with a strong German like accent, 'we have two schools of archaeology in Israel, the minimalists and the maximalists. The minimalists includes

Silbermann and Finkelstein and the maximalists Eilat Mazar, who is excavating what she believes to be King David's palace and will go to any length to prove that the Bible is a factual account of our history.'

'She is sponsored by which organisation?'

'You should know Mr O'Connelly that her excavations are carried out with the backing of the Shalem Centre and the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, both of which have a political agenda.'

'A political agenda?'

'Yes Mr O'Connelly, a political agenda, the Shalem Centre is highly politicised, extreme conservatives, who maximise the biblical connection to history.'

'Ah yes, we were told about the Shalem Centre.'

'It was her grandfather who did much of the early exploration work on the site and who taught her that the bible was the key to archaeological exploration in Israel.'

'He's dead now,' said Mrs Klein forcefully, suggesting he no longer counted.

'Yes mother,' but apparently she has found some new things of interest, large stone masonry, I saw a photo of a beautifully carved capital for a column, proto-aeolic.'

'It was under the remains of a Jebusite wall,' said Solly. She suggested it had been destroyed by King David.'

'There are also huge walls that she says could have been built by King David, part of his palace, going back to the end of Iron Age, around 1000BC. That fits in with her Bible theory when David was supposed to have conquered Jerusalem from the Canaanites.'

'Tell him about the bulla Solly!'

'Yes mother, they found a bulla or a used for documents. These were small pieces of flattened clay about the size of a fingernail

stamped or marked with an inscription. This one has three lines of ancient Hebrew script' he added looking to the eldest of the three brothers, Ziv, a bookish man specialised in ancient languages.

Ziv pulled out his wallet and extracted a small disc. 'Look this is a copy of the bulla,' he said passing it to Laura. Then taking a paper napkin he wrote something in Modern Hebrew. 'This is what it says,' Ziv said taking a piece of paper and writing, ליהוכל בן שלמיהו בן שבי, translated that means Belonging to Yehuchal ben Shelemiyahu ben Shovi. Yehuchal is mentioned in the book of Jeremiah, where there is a verse that says King Zedekiah sent Yehuchal son of Shelemiah to the prophet Jeremiah to pray for the people.'

'So how old is that?'

'Based on palaeographical analysis it dates from the late 8th or early 7th century BC, similar such bullae have dated to around 600BC.'

'So you see by comparing the ancient script they dated the bulla to the period that corresponds to the end of the First Temple,' Solly explained. 'Therefore, according to this interpretation, she has discovered what appears to be an important public building, dating from around the 10th century BC.'

'And in together with that,' added Shlomo, 'there are pottery shards that date to a period that corresponds to the supposed time of David and Solomon.'

'The importance of this bulla is it that it is the first time a written text from the First Temple period has been found in the area of the Temple Mount itself.'

'Naturally the Palestinian newspaper Al Quds says Mazar's approach is an attempt to fit historical evidence into a biblical context,' said Mrs Klein to complete the story.

'I have to agree with their idea mother,' said Shlomo, 'though not for their political motivations. The fact is that the biblical text was

written much later, so any link is purely coincidental, it is a contrivance by the maximalists to fit things together to suit their story.'

'The Waqf, Mr O'Connelly, is a Moslem religious trust that administers the Temple Mount and has claims that there was never a temple there and to make matters worse our own Israel Finkelstein, who is the chairman of Tel Aviv University's Department of Archaeology, says that the biblical accounts of Jerusalem of David and Solomon are essentially false including the idea that the city the centre a powerful monarchy.'

'We are not arguing with Israel Finkelstein mother,' said Shlomo with a hint of exasperation in his voice.

'I know Shlomo, but I don't like playing into the hands of the Waqf.'

'Shlomo could you tell us more precisely where Eilat Mazar is working and what the City of David is?' Asked Laura trying to escape Mrs Klein's derive into politics.

'A good point Laura,' said Shlomo. 'To answer your question the City of David is where ancient Jerusalem stood, to the south of the mountain where the Temples is supposed to have stood, it the most central place in our Jewish religion because it is where the Bible says King David brought the Ark of the Covenant, and where King David's palace was built by King Hiram of Tyre, the Phoenician ruler who was David's ally against the Philistines.'

'Tell them about the illegal excavations.'

'Yes mother, I was getting to that! The Waqf has been carry out work for years under the Haram, they sealed up the ancient Hulda Gates entrance to the Temple Mount on the southern wall and buried the adjoining steps and sealed an underground water cistern. Then in 1999, they bulldozed and paved over almost six thousand square meters of the Esplanade, secretly dumped the rubble in several places

around Jerusalem, mainly in the Kedron Valley, that's to the east of the Old City. More than one hundred truckloads of rubble and earth were removed.'

'That's awful,' said Laura.

'Going back to the question of Solomon,' said O'Connelly wanting to clarify the many references to his time in de Lussac's work. 'Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe there is no mention of him in any text or inscription outside of the Bible itself. There are many ruins in Israel corresponding to the period in time when Solomon is said to have lived – Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer – dating from about the tenth century BC, but is there no clue concerning the existence of Solomon?'

'Is that important, isn't the Bible sufficient?' said Mrs Klein.

'Mother,' said Shlomo in a slightly exasperated tone, 'as we've explained many times the texts are nothing more than compilations, based on earlier writings and oral accounts. All through history these have been modified for a multitude of reasons, problems of translation, transcription, insertions, political and religious motivations. That's why we need some kind of corroboration, like in Egypt, Assyria, Greece or Rome, where inscriptions not only confirm events in the country itself, for example the name of kings or battles, but also make reference to conquests and events in the countries of their allies or enemies.'

'I see,' said O'Connelly, 'so the question is whether the story of Solomon could have continued to exist five hundred years after he had lived.'

'Exactly, remember writing was almost non-existent in those small towns, there could have been oral traditions. But if he ruled a kingdom of any size why are there no inscriptions or references in Egypt or Assyria, two great powers who were successively present in

the region. Why is there no evidence of his great capital Jerusalem apart from a few skimpy remains?’

‘You tell me.’

‘The role of us archaeologists is investigate the remains of the past, to try to piece together facts relating to historical events, but not only by uncovering old stones, but also by interpreting the smallest signs of human activity, from pottery, coins, jewellery, wood, ivory, fire, bones and on very rare occasions textiles.’

‘What about written evidence?’ he said turning to Ziv.

‘Yes we use epigraphical references that we try to compare with the physical evidence, for example the remains of pottery.’

‘How does pottery help?’

‘Each site in each region used different kinds of pottery in terms of manufacture, form and decoration. The wonderful thing about pottery is that it survives times! So we have pottery shards everywhere from the very first potters in Neolithic times until today. We can analyse the composition, compare the designs and build up a time scale and a relationship between the different traditions.’

‘So what about here in Megiddo have you found any evidence that corroborates biblical texts?’

‘There is no evidence of any significant kingdom here in the region during the tenth-century BC. The main architectural constructions found here in Megiddo, and also similar sites such as Hazer and Gezer, date from the ninth century BC.’

‘I thought this was an important site?’

‘My dear friend, if Megiddo was in Greece or some other place in the ancient world, what importance would it have?’ he laughed.

‘I don’t know,’ said Laura a little embarrassed.

‘I will tell you, not very much, a few clues to the existence of a couple of insignificant kingdoms that lay on the crossroads between two mighty powers, Egypt and Assyria, which is very briefly

mentioned in a few inscriptions from the ninth century BC onwards, a small town repeatedly destroyed by passing armies, a trivial detail in the ancient struggle for power in the eastern Mediterranean!’

‘I see.’

‘There is absolutely nothing here that relates to King Solomon or Israel, if you want something like that I suggest you talk to Eilat Mazar in Jerusalem, one of our maximalist colleagues, she’s a senior fellow at Shalem Centre in Jerusalem.’

‘We know a little about here work and the fact that she considers that there is little doubt that King David’s palace was situated in Jerusalem.’

‘Correct, she has used Biblical texts in her search to locate the palace, according to which it was built with the help of King Hiram of Tyre. She believes that the remains of the palace are situated just outside the northern fortifications of ancient area, in what is called the City of David. Those ruins date to the Jebusite period, that is to say Canaanite, probably the tenth century BC. She points to passages in the Bible that describe King David in the City of David, descending from his residence to the fortress. In other words she literally accepts the biblical text.’

‘The City of David is where compared to the Old City?’

‘The site of ancient Jerusalem, or the City of David, lies between two valleys on a ridge south of the Temple Mount, it is a very small oblong area of about only four hectares.’

Masada

THEY FOLLOWED THE TWISTING ROAD south from Bethlehem that descended sharply for about thirty kilometres until they saw the shimmering blue sea – the Dead Sea – against the stark ochre hills of Jordan on the opposite shore, it lay 360 metres below sea level.

Masada was a desolate rock overlooking the sea, part of the harsh mountain landscape where no plant grew, burnt by the sun, day in day out for millions of years. Following the revolt of the Maccabees a group of Jews had fled to the rocky stronghold where they were besieged by Rome's legions. According to legend they preferred death by mass suicide rather than surrender to the Romans.

O'Connelly could understand why De Lussac had had visions in the night after being exposed to the burning sun for months in such a desolate spot.

They stopped overnight at the Minerva resort, joining the tourists enjoying a rest from their visit ritual sitting on white deck chairs under parasols as others cake themselves in mud or floated on the waters of the Dead Sea.

They donned their bathing costumes and making their way down to the seashore joined the other visitors in the water astonished by the unnatural effect the salinity of the water had on their flotation. After an obligatory shower they made their way to the hotel's the palm studded gardens to sun and refresh themselves with cold drinks watching the tourists come and go.

'Twenty five years ago,' said Shlomo pointing to the sea, 'the water would have been almost here. Now it's shrunk by almost a

kilometre on lower lying areas. In just fifty years the surface of the sea has reduced by a third falling almost twenty-five meters.'

'Evaporation?'

'No, mainly because water that once flowed into the Dead Sea from the River Jordan is used by Syria, Jordan and Israel for agricultural and hydro-electrical projects.'

The next morning they left to visit the site of the last stand of the Jews against Rome's legions. A cable car led to the top of the sun baked rock that rose more than four hundred meters above them into the harsh blue sky. For the more courageous it was possible to walk up the mountain side to reach the fortress. There were few people that morning just, in fact only three other persons, an Englishman and two Finns. As the cable car climbed up they saw behind them the panorama of the Dead Sea and on the opposite bank were the ochre hills of Jordan, below them they could see the hotel and a patch of green, the gardens of the hotel and its palm trees, otherwise the landscape was threatening, O'Connelly could imagine the lives of those peoples in ancient times, a life and death struggle.

42

The Origins of the Wailing Wall

HISTORICAL TEXTS INDICATE that the western rampart of the Haram, commonly called the Wailing Wall, or preferably the Western Wall or more correctly *Kotel ha-Ma'aravi*, Kotel for short, did not become a central point for worship until the 16th or 17th century. Prior to this time there was no mention of the Western Wall in any texts.

The Haram, which was the supposed site of the Temple of the Jews that had been razed by the Romans, had been occupied by the Christians from the time of the Crusades, who transformed the Dome of the Rock into the Templum Domini and the Al Aqsa Mosque into the Templum Solomis.

The Jews at the time of the Crusades obtained the authorisation to pray in a small forecourt inside the Golden Gate near to what they believed was the court of their Temple. This however led to violent attacks by the Muslims who were insulted by what they considered a public exhibition by infidels.

This led the Jews to using the nearby Mountain of Olives as a place of prayer as it had the advantage being situated outside of the city and was to the east of the Temple site and corresponded to the laws concerning the direction of prayer.

For the Jews the Western Wall was the wall of the Holy of Holies in the Temple, situated to the west side of the sanctuary and against which was placed the Ark of the Covenant. The entrance to the Temple was to the east, therefore the high priests and the worshippers would have been to the east of the Temple where they prayed.

In 950AD, a guide to Jerusalem was written by the Geniza of Cairo, which described the different holy places of Jerusalem where the Jews prayed following the transformation of the Esplanade to the Haram esh-Sharif by the Muslims, made no mention of the rampart, or of the Western Wall, but mentions the places of pilgrimage or prayer and the gathering of Jews were principally situated to the south and to the east of the Haram and in particular on the Mountain of Olives.

In 1244AD the defensive walls of Jerusalem were demolished on the order of the Sultan of Damascus and the city was sacked by the Muslim Tartars who massacred the Christians and the Jews. Then in

1250AD, the Mamluks, mercenary slaves converted to Islam, in the pay of the Ayyubids, seized power in Cairo, Egypt, and then defeated the Mongols in 1260AD. The Mamluks then ruled Jerusalem for the next three centuries until the arrival of the Ottoman Turks in 1517AD.

In 1267AD after the sack of Jerusalem by the Mongols and at the beginning of the Mamluks rule of Jerusalem, Nahmanides wrote a letter to his son:

What can I say of this country? Great is the solitude, great is the waste, in a word the more sacred the places the greater is their desolation!

And Jerusalem is even more devastated than the rest of the country and Judah is more ravaged than Galilee. But in spite of this terrible destruction, it is a blessed land! Jerusalem has about 2,000 inhabitants, of which 300 are Christians who escaped the sword of the Sultan. There are no Jews. Because since the attack of the Tartars. There are only two brothers who are dyers, and must by their ingredients from the Muslim authorities. Ten Jews (of which eight are outside of Jerusalem) gather together for the Sabbath and the service is held in the house of these two brothers.

But we encouraged them and we succeeded to find a vacant house, built with pillars and marble with a fine vault (perhaps part of the remains of a Crusader church). We made it into a synagogue.

Because this city has not a real master, and whoever wants to take possession of a ruin can do so. We contributed to the repairs of this synagogue. We also sent someone to Sichem so that he could bring back Rolls of the Law, that had been kept in safekeeping there, at the time of the Tartar invasion.

In fact the Jews come to Jerusalem, men and women, from Damascus, from Aleppo, from all of these regions to contemplate the Sanctuary and there to mourn for it.

During the 12th century, a new Muslim power emerged in the Eastern Mediterranean – the Ottoman Turks. The first wave of development of Ottoman power took place around Constantinople and in Anatolia, where the remaining Christian lands were conquered. Constantinople the capital of the Christian Orient was taken in 1453 and between 1359 and 1463AD the Ottomans had advanced into the Balkans conquering Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, Moldavia and Bosnia, and had reached the gates of Vienna in the north,

The name of the Roman Emperor Constantine, who had transformed the whole of the Roman Empire into Christianity and had created Constantinople into a living junction between paganism and Christianity, was swept away. In its place the Christian capital, taken by the Muslim Ottomans, was to become from then onwards the capital of Islam during four centuries, was renamed Istanbul.

From 1453 the Ottomans spread south conquering Arabia with its holy cities Medina and Mecca where Islam was born, then Egypt, Syria, and Palestine with Sultan Selim entering Jerusalem in 1517,

whose son Suleyman the Magnificent rebuilt the ramparts of Ancient Jerusalem.

The Ottoman Empire ruled Jerusalem for four centuries, until the arrival of the British in WWI and the abolition of the Turkish Sultanate in 1920 thus bringing to an end the last Caliphate.

It was sometime between the 16th and 17th centuries, under the Ottomans, that it prayers at the Wailing Wall came into being. At that time the Jews of Jerusalem lived in a quarter near to the eastern rampart of the Haram. Since access to the Haram was forbidden to the Jews by the Muslim authorities and the Mountain of Olives was far it appears that some Jews came to the wall to pray so as to be near to the site of their never forgotten Temple, which had disappear one thousand five hundred years previously but was constantly recalled in their sacred texts and prayers.

At the base of the western rampart of the Haram in the Old City was a passage of about thirty metres long and four metres wide that terminated in a cul-de-sac. This could be reached from David Street and a passage enclosed by the walls of a mosque and other buildings that offered protection from the regards of the Muslims. The ancient western wall was formed by huge stone blocks offering an evocative place for prayer near to the site of the Temple.

The fact that this rampart was situated at the west of the Haram facilitated the identification of the Western Wall with the Temple's Holy of Holies. The Jewish texts give eyewitness accounts referring to the Wailing Wall in the 17th and 18th centuries. But prior to this time no references exist as to the existence of the wall.

One of the first texts that mentions Jewish prayer at the western rampart of the Haram dates to 1658 with a description that speaks of the wall as part of the Temple where the Jews could pray after paying a yearly tax.

This text affirms the confusion between the western rampart of the Esplanade and a wall of the Temple. Another text by a Jew from about the same time describes of the supposed remaining Western Wall of the Temple as long, very high, and very old. Some of stones measured between two and three metres long. It continues by recounting that on the day of the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple the Jews went to the Wall to pray with loud lamentations.

43

Cuneiform

AT THE DAWN OF CIVILISATION, towards the end of the Neolithic period, religious myths were invented by man to try to explain the unexplainable. The oldest surviving of these is the Epic of Gilgamesh, which is in fact the oldest surviving complete literary work known today. It was discovered by an Englishman called George Smith.'

'Never heard of him,' said O'Connelly, 'though that's not a reference.'

'Where did he discover them?' asked Laura.

'Strangely enough in London!'

'London!'

'Yes, in London.'

'Where?'

'In the British Museum.'

'Oh!'

'Smith was a bank note engraver, but also a self-trained Assyriologist.'

‘Were they on papyrus?’

‘No, the texts came written on cuneiform tablets, which had had been discovered by different archaeological expeditions on the banks of the Tigris in Mesopotamia, or modern day Iraq, since 1854. These tablets were shipped to the British Museum where Smith set about trying to decipher them. The problem was that the story was incomplete, some tablets were evidently missing, so when the news of Smith’s work with the mystery of the missing tablets reached The Daily Telegraph it had all the makings of a good story. At that time the informed public was greatly interested in any news concerning discoveries from the Middle East, especially those related to the Bible.’

‘Why?’

‘That’s an interesting point, because it was the interest of the British public in particular and Europeans in general, as Egyptomania developed in the 19th century, which was to influence not only archaeology, but many of the future events to come in the Middle East over the next one and a half centuries. At that time the British upper and middle classes were good Christian church goers – remember that the Anglican religious base is the Bible – and had started to develop a notion of social justice. Therefore, anything that gave added weight to the bible was of great news.’

‘So what happened then?’

‘As often happened in the 19th century a newspaper sponsored an expedition to find the missing tablets, the object of which was to complete the story of the flood, and in 1873, Smith after only five days of excavation found the missing texts.’

‘Sounds too good to be true,’ said O’Connelly. ‘So what about Gilgamesh?’

‘Once back in London at the British Museum, George Smith deciphered what were the remains of a great epic poem about a

legendary king by the name of Gilgamesh. Then Smith made a parallel between the Babylonian Flood mentioned in the epic that dates to about 1750BC and the story of Noah in the bible.’

‘So based on biblical chronology the Babylonian legend of the Flood could have been that which was referred to in Genesis.’

‘Absolutely, the epic of Gilgamesh was written in Akkadian cuneiform on clay tablets. These tablets were discovered by archaeologists in the 1850s, in the ruins of the royal library of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal, where they had lain buried since 612BC. The library was destroyed by the Persians in that year, the tablets abandoned under the debris.’

‘Who wrote the epic?’

‘We don’t know, all we can is that it was the work of a Babylonian poet or poets, who lived in Mesopotamia more than 3,700 years ago.’

‘Are there any other similitude with the Bible?’

‘Yes, the epic describes the creation of man in an astonishing garden, how evil was born into an innocent world, and the story of a deluge, caused by the iniquity of man.’

‘So what was the link between the Bible and Mesopotamia?’

‘Remember Mesopotamia was one of the cradles of civilization, part of the Fertile Crescent, and it was from there that Abraham led his people out of the city of Ur to the Promised Land, Canaan, according to the Bible. No doubt bringing certain beliefs and legends with them.’

‘I thought the Bible was a legend?’

‘It is the chronology and lack of corroborative evidence that is questioned and confounding events that took place centuries apart, but the legend of a charismatic tribal chief leading his people in search of a home is possible, and it is possible he came from the north. Between the 19th and 18th centuries BC the Chaldean Empire is supposed to united several different tribes, one of which was

Abraham's; but there is no archaeological evidence to confirm his existence.'

'Look at your King Arthur, that was just a thousand or so years ago, and there is no certitude he every existed, here were talking of four thousand years ago!'

O'Connelly concurred.

'Very little archaeological evidence exists in southern highlands of Canaan where Abraham is said to have settled. As Finkelstein said it was practically empty apart from nomadic pastoralists and at the very best perhaps a few miserable tiny villages.'

'What about the Exodus?'

'According to the Bible that took place around 1200BC. The problem is that we have an extremely detailed knowledge of Egypt at that time.'

'...and?'

'And I'm sorry to say again there is no evidence showing an exodus of Jews from Egypt. In fact there is nothing about the Jews, All the stories of plagues, the flight and the parting of the Red Sea described in the Bible as great events would have surely been recorded.

'At that time Egypt ruled Canaan, sparsely populated desert region, with many military outposts along the Mediterranean coast of Sinai, protecting them from the ever present threat from the northern powers.

'Remember that Egypt was a vast and powerful superpower that weighed on the region for three thousand years, the Nile delta was just a few days sailing or weeks march from the main ports of ancient Israel, so it possible that the Egyptians who mastered writing skills long before the Jews could have overlooked the presence of powerful kings in the region, when they knew and fought with the peoples of

the north; Assyrians, Persians and Babylonians, and traded with Crete and the Sea Peoples over almost three millennia.'

'You say that it was an almost desertic region, perhaps when there was drought famine forced the desert tribes south?'

'Quite so, changing climatic conditions would have forced the tribes to seek refuge in the Nile Delta region, which was not that far away. In fact this is what happened when the Hyksos arrived in Egypt around 1670BC finally founding their own dynasty and ruling the country.'

'So Egypt was not the power you described.'

'That's not quite right. The Hyksos blended into the country as is often the case with lesser developed invaders, becoming Egyptians, accepting the advantages of a great civilisation. Though in the end the Egyptian people revolted and drove out the Hyksos, sacking and burning Canaanite cities as far as Syria. There are theories about some of the Hyksos who fled Egypt settling in Jerusalem, where they are said to have built a temple, but up to now there is no archaeological evidence to support this.

44

Manipulation

THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE JEWS and the Muslims was at the heart of archaeology in the Holy Land. Both sides manipulated archaeology to prove the existence or non-existence of the Temple of the Jews. Shlomo Klein, as an Israeli, naturally sided with those who wanted to prove the existence of the Temple, but as a scientist and a nominal Jew he could not accept in good conscience evidence based

simply on belief and religious faith. For Shlomo the bible was a great book, there was little doubt that it was the greatest and most ancient comprehensive work of human literature, equivalent in literary terms to the pyramids of Egypt; no other people in the history of the world had produced a work of such importance, of such historic, cultural and moral dimensions.

They were eating a light dinner in the coffee shop of the Intercontinental Hotel in Amman where they had arrived early that evening after having crossed the border into Jordan at the Allenby Bridge crossing point. The next morning they planned to leave early for a visit to Petra about 250 kilometres to the south with one of Jordan's doyens of archaeology, an internationally respected intellectual, Selim Nassib, whose family had fled Israel in 1949, whose long friendship with Shlomo had survived the multiple trials that had divided their two peoples.

'Tell me Shlomo, this news about Mazar's latest finds in Jerusalem...', Asked Selim.

'Well as you know some of our friends believe they have found King David's Palace.'

'What do you think?'

'Selim, my dear friend, you know my position, I would like to see a lot more solid evidence and not this kind of messianism.'

'So what's their objective?'

'You know better than me,' he laughed. They had jostled like this for years respecting their different political points of view, but in total agreement as far as scientific archaeology was concerned. 'Their goal? Simple, to deny to the other party's historical right to existence.'

'How?' asked Laura.

'Well take Arafat for example, he always insisted that there was nothing there, he denied that any such palace had ever existed, that

Solomon's temple never existed, that if a Jewish temple had existed it was located in Nablus.'

'But everyone knows that's not true,' remarked O'Connelly now more sure of his facts after three weeks intensive investigation.

'That doesn't matter, for him the opposite was true and anything the Jews said were according to his own words, lies, lies, lies.'

'What is the Muslim point of view?' asked O'Connelly.

'According to the Jewish Book, the first Jewish Temple was built by King Solomon in the 10th century BC and was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The Second Temple was built in 515BC after Jerusalem was freed from the Babylonians, then it was rebuilt much later by Herod the Great and then destroyed by the Romans in 70AD. The Al Aqsa Mosque was constructed around 709AD, and the Dome of the Rock was built by the Caliph Abd al-Malik and completed in 691AD. Al Aqsa was built to mark the place where we Muslims came to believe the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, ascended to heaven.

'The problem however, is that the Waqf deny the Jewish temples ever existed, in spite of overwhelming historical and archaeological evidence, especially the well documented evidence of the Greek and Roman periods and the vast underground structures that date to the centuries before Christ.'

'You mean the cisterns?'

'Yes, amongst other things. The Palestinian position according to their Office for Religious Affairs is that the Temple Mount is Muslim and the Western Wall, which it calls the Al-Buraq Wall, was a waiting place for horses. It was where the Prophet Muhammad tethered his horse, Buraq, to the wall before ascending to heaven.'

'My research shows that Islamic scholars in the 11th century were not able to agree as to the precise spot where Mohammed had tethered his horse. Different places around Haram esh-Sharif were

suggested. Finally it was agreed that Mohammed entered Haram esh-Sharif through the eastern wall, south of the Mercy Gate, but then others protested he had tethered al-Buraq outside the southern wall. No one mentioned the Western Wall!’

‘Mr O’Connelly with all due respect you have been misled. As far as, Sheik Ikrima Sabri, the mufti of Jerusalem, is concerned there’s not the slightest indication that a Jewish temple had ever existed on the Esplanade. He even went as far as saying that there is not even a single stone linked with Jewish history in the whole city and that even the Jews don’t know where exactly their temple stood.’

‘Is that true,’ asked O’Connelly surprised that Shlomo could repeat such words and in the Jordanian capital.

‘Absolutely, I’m simply repeating what has been said.’

O’Connelly had been given numerous documents and reports relating to the Muslim claims, in which and amongst other things, the Mufti of Jerusalem accused the Jews of deceiving the world. He declared that there was not a single stone in the Wailing Wall relating to Jewish history and that the Jews could not legitimately claim the wall, either religiously or historically. He however claimed that what he called the Al-Buraq Wall was part of Al Aqsa Mosque, a wall of the mosque. Saying that the wall of any house belongs to the house, therefore the Al-Buraq Wall belonged to the Al Aqsa Mosque. Consequently the Jews who prayed in front of the wall were on the outside, but the wall belonged to the Muslims.

Arafat often claimed that the Jews had invented a religious link between Jerusalem and the Wailing Wall, announcing that they found not a single stone that proved the Temple of Solomon had stood there, for the simple reason that historically the Temple was not in Palestine.

Today, Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president continues to approve Arafat theories on Jerusalem, challenging the idea that the

Jews had a temple and accusing them of forgetting the fate of the Palestinian people whilst paradoxically somehow remembering the supposed existence of a temple on the Haram two thousand years previously without the least solid evidence exists.

The Al Quds Al-Sharif Encyclopaedia claimed that the Israelis falsified history, fabricating Jewish inscriptions on rocks and pretending they were parts of Jewish palaces or historical buildings. In another study they rejected false Zionist religious claims even pretending that the Al Aqsa Mosque had been built more than a thousand years before Solomon, throwing out any idea that the Mosque had been built on the ruins of Solomon's Temple and that the Zionist's so called rights to the wall were groundless.

'You must understand Mr O'Connelly,' said Selim, 'that the archaeological battle has become a political battle, which not only affects the Jews and Palestinians, but also certain archaeologists. For example Sean Kingsley, a British archaeologist, who has written a book called God's Gold, in which he pretends he has conclusive evidence concerning the treasures of the Temple pillaged by the Romans in 70AD, proving that the treasure is hidden in the Holy Land, not hidden in Vatican vaults as certain image.'

'So you see Pat, you're are not the only one writing a book, and in addition books such as the one Selim mentioned are even stranger than fiction.'

'There is a big market for such books,' added Selim.

'Who is this Kingsley?'

'He's an archaeologist and historian specialised in marine archaeology.'

'Like de Lussac?'

'No, his academic qualifications are better, he holds a doctorate in the archaeology of the Holy Land from Oxford University and is a

Visiting Fellow at the Research Centre for Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at Reading University.'

'We know of the Titus' triumph in Rome when the treasures were paraded as booty including the Menorah and a large part of this treasure was used to build the Colosseum, but what else was there?'

'There is good historical evidence that some fifty tons of gold, silver and precious objects were plundered by Titus, the son of the Roman Emperor Vespasian, in 70AD. There are stories that the treasure is kept in the vaults of the Vatican, this the gold Menorah, the Table of the Divine Presence, and a pair of silver trumpets, which were said to have been displayed in the Temple of Peace in Rome's Forum until the early fifth century.'

'It sounds like an archaeological version of the Da Vinci Code.'

'It's not all, the best is that he claims to have found proof that silver trumpets, golden candlesticks and other jewellery are hidden in Palestinian controlled territories.'

'As I said such claims, stories and rumours become part of the Arab-Israeli conflict centred around the Temple Mount, making it difficult for ordinary people to sort out truth from invention, it is why scientific archaeology is of the utmost importance,' emphasised Selim, 'Unfortunately there are as many theories as there are words in the Bible.'

There was little doubt that amongst the general public in Israel many believed that if the Temple treasures still existed and could be found, then they would be the finally proof of Israel's ancient historical rights to the Promised Land, in the same way De Lussac believed finding the true site of the Temple would bring about peace.

Shlomo explained that the problem of any object that suddenly appears on the archaeological scene raises more questions than answers, especially those unlinked to a specific site and dissociated from their stratigraphical context, and an object that bears no

inscription becomes extremely difficult to date. A case in point, he explained, was the black stone tablet found in 2001, in this specific case it was in fact covered with inscriptions in ancient Hebrew and the stone was dated to being nearly 3,000 years old. The inscriptions gave evidence that the Temple that Solomon had been built for the Ark of the Covenant, which according to the Bible contained the Ten Commandments.

Up until the discovery of the black stone the only evidence pointing to the possible existence of the Temple was a pottery shards dating from the 10th century BC. Therefore when the scientists of the Geological Survey of Israel, were asked to investigate the authenticity of the black stone it was necessary to undertake a very deep scientific investigation. The initial investigation was logically focused on the surface patina of the stone.

‘Patina?’

‘Yes, a thin surface film an object built up over thousands of years, caused by the interaction of chemicals present in air, water or soil, with the stone itself. In the case of the black stone the scientists saw that the patina covered not only the general surface of the stone but also the inscriptions.’

‘I see, so that meant that the inscriptions were not added to an old piece of stone,’ said O’Connelly.

‘Exactly, in addition to that chemical analysis showed that the composition of this patina was very similar to the minerals present in Jerusalem, thus indicating it really came from the city.’

‘How did they fix the date, I mean apart from what the inscription said?’

‘That’s a very interesting point, on analysis they noted that the patina contained minute traces of charcoal, which meant they could be dated by C14 dating techniques.’

‘Which showed...,’ Laura said excitedly.

“It was over 2,300 years old, so obviously the carving under the patina must have been older than the patina.’

‘Fantastic!’

‘That’s not all...they also found traces of gold in the patina.’

‘Gold?’

‘When the Temple was burnt down by the Babylonians in 572BC the gold covering would have been evaporated leaving traces in the ruins.’

‘So it really came from the Temple.’

‘That what the scientists confirmed.’

‘So the legend of King Solomon was true.’

‘Yes, this together with the House of David stele is the only archaeological proof of the existence of Solomon, the father of David.’

‘Who found the stone?’

‘Now that was the big question, as I said if you don’t know where it comes from it raises many questions. After all, the inscription did not say ‘made in the Temple 2300BC!’

‘So nobody knows where it comes from!’

‘It was rumoured that it was found in rubble that had been dumped outside of the Haram from building works made by the Waqf.’

‘So what happened?’

‘Well the stone then disappeared.’

‘Lost.’

‘Not exactly, nine months later a businessman, owner of Israel’s largest private collection of antiquities, announced that he had been contacted by the widow of a Palestinian dealer who had the stone in her possession. Apparently the stone had in fact been discovered near to the Eastern Wall in the Muslim cemetery outside the Temple Mount.’

‘So did they buy the stone?’

‘Be patient Laura,’ he laughed, ‘it’s not the end of the story, because in the meantime an ossuary turned up in Canada at the Royal Ontario Museum.’

‘An ossuary?’

‘Yes, like the name indicates, ossuaries were made to contain the bones of someone dead.’

‘Of course.’

‘Now this ossuary bore the inscription James, Son of Joseph, Brother of Jesus.’

Laura’s mouth fell open. ‘So, it’s the proof that Jesus existed. Where did it come from?’

‘Oded Golan.’

‘The collector?’

‘Yes.’

‘Too good to be true, *n’est ce pas?*’ she said with disappointment in her voice.

‘What happened next was the police raided Golan’s apartment and storehouses and found the ossuary sitting on the seat of a toilet, and...they also found the black stone.’

‘Of course they were forgeries, incredibly clever made forgeries. One of the things that gave them away was the Hebrew used in the inscription was mixed with Modern Hebrew.’

‘You see,’ said Selim, ‘if this stone had been found during an organised archaeological excavation it would not have raised the questions it did.’

‘So what happened in the end?’

‘Well in the end it turned out that the stone was a local stone, I mean not from Israel, it probably arrived as ships ballast in ancient times. The carved inscriptions were new and the patina the covered the inscription was artificially formed at temperatures too hot for

natural conditions, and as Selim just mentioned the Hebrew used contained errors with words that did not exist in ancient times.'

'But how exactly was the patina made?'

'When police searched Golan's home they found a workshop with all the necessary materials, thus confirming they had cleverly prepared the patina. In fact they used some fairly elementary chemistry, all the different ingredients had been ground up, including chalk and soil from the Jerusalem area, a few specks of gold and some charcoal dating from the period the stone was supposed to have dated from.'

'How did they do that?'

'It's not too difficult for an archaeologist to lay his hands on some ancient charcoal from some site or other.'

'So you see,' said Selim, 'they had a nice little business and had probably getting rich selling fake archaeological objects to the market for years, not poor archaeologists like us!'

Laura looked worried, thinking about the Assyrian eye black applicator she had bought in a Jaffa antique shop.

'Which goes to prove that only objects clearly identified at a given site, in a given strata, during an organised excavation by qualified archaeologists have real scientific value as far as dating and historical identification is concerned.'

The Destruction of Jerusalem

IF YOU LOOK AT THE BAS-RELIEFS on the Arch of Titus in Rome, you can see the soldiers carrying their plunder away from the Temple, including the menorah, which Josephus tells us it was made of gold.'

'Have you found anything similar in your excavations?'

'Nothing made out of gold, but two pieces of a menorah in unpainted plaster were discovered in the ruins of a house in Jerusalem from the Herodian period. Probably is a copy of the menorah used in the Temple.'

'I believe a curtain separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies.'

'Yes like in the Tent.'

Shlomo then went on to describe how in April 70AD, during the Feast of the Passover, the Roman General Titus, son of the Emperor Vespasian, laid siege to Jerusalem. His legions surrounded the city, to the north-east, on Mount Scopus, the XII Fulminata and XV Apollinaris legions camped together with the V Macedonica nearby and the X Fretensis camped on facing the Temple on Mount Olives.

The Old Town stood on a steep plateau and was almost impossible to assail. To the west of the Temple was the New Town with its own walls. After the initial clashes Titus decided on a display of strength, with a march past that lasted for four days, to intimidate the defenders to surrender. However, the Jewish leaders were not impressed and the Romans relaunched the attack though without success. The Romans soon realised that the siege of Jerusalem would be long and decided to starve the city into surrender. The Kedron

valley and the Valley of Hinnom soon were filled with the dead bodies of those who tried to flee Jerusalem.

Then at the beginning of August, a small group of Roman soldiers climbed the walls of the fort killed the guards and sounded a trumpet. The defenders fled to the Temple and the Romans demolished the fort to build a ramp to the Temple. At the end of the month the Romans set fire to the Temple and a few days later Titus took the remainder of city.

Titus returned to Rome, where he and his father the Emperor Vespasian celebrated a triumph, parading through the streets of the capital the prisoners and the sacred vessels and treasure of the Temple, including the Menorah, and the curtain of the Holy of Holies. The treasure was transformed into coins marked with the legend Judaea defeated. A total of almost one hundred thousand prisoners had been taken during the course of the war many of whom were forced to become gladiators or slaves to build the Temple of Peace where the Menorah was placed and the Colosseum.

A triumphal arch can still stand in the Forum Romanum in Rome, another that was demolished in the Middle Ages bore the inscription: Senate and People of Rome to their Princeps, Emperor Titus Caesar Vespasianus Augustus, son of the divine Vespasian, high priest, in the tenth year of his tribune powers, seventeen times Emperor, eight times consul, father of the Rome, put-down the Jews and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, something which none of the leaders, kings and armies before him failed to do.

The Exodus

‘CONCERNING THE EXODUS,’ Selim explained, ‘the real problem is not there, it’s whether Solomon himself ever existed, never mind the Exodus. In any case you’ll see all calculations based on biblical references are irrational.’

‘So you’re saying that biblical calculations are fictive.’

‘In a nutshell, yes! On the other hand Egyptian references provide solid reference points and these do not match with biblical data. For example the victory stela of the Pharaoh Merneptah, which dates from about 1207 BC, says that Israel is laid waste, his seed is not it appears to make reference to a victory over Israel by the Egyptian army, but archaeological evidence relating to this period of time in Israel has only discovered insignificant unwallled villages in the region that was then Canaan. The stela probably refers to a minor victory over Assyrian forces or simply a skirmish with the local tribes of the region.’

‘That’s interesting.’

‘Of course, as there is a considerable number of Egyptian texts dating from the time of the New Kingdom, but none speak of an Exodus, there is not the least evidence relating to the 600,000 Israelite warriors mentioned by the Bible at Mount Sinai and archaeological exploration of the Negev has not uncovered the least sign of a city or settlements that could have conquered or destroyed by Joshua.’

They arrived in Eilat where they were resting after their journey from Petra by the pool of the Hilton Hotel. Laura had taken a chaise longue to catch the last rays of the sun as it fell over the harsh red-

brown mountains of the Sinai Desert, a frightening mass of rocks strewn haphazardly by an angry God. The men had installed themselves at a shaded table and where they sipped their cold drinks and talked.

‘You see Mr O’Connelly,’ explained Selim, ‘the presence of settlements in the hill-country between Lower Galilee and the Negev started around 1000BC, and archaeological exploration shows that in most cases they were new.’

‘New?’

‘I mean they weren’t built on the sites of pre-existing villages.’

‘I see, who were these settlers?’

‘They were the Canaanites.’

‘How do you know that?’

‘Well we have certain texts – the Amarna letters from Palestine and a few Egyptian texts. These together with archaeological data show the early Israelite community was very mixed. They were different peoples from the Canaanite city states that supposedly conquered together with other tribes and various nomads.’

‘Then what about Abraham, the founder of Israel?’

‘We have to start at the beginning – that is in the time of Ramesses III around 1200BC – Canaan was invaded by the Philistines, called the Sea Peoples by the Egyptians. As far as we can work out they came from Anatolia and the Aegean and brought Iron Age technology with them. According to Ramesses they were invincible and destroyed everything on their path and only Egypt was powerful enough to resist them. It was they who brought the Late Bronze Age to an end.

These Sea Peoples settled along the coastline of present day Gaza and the remains of their Iron Age pottery confirms this. They then spread out inland destroying and settling Late Bronze Age villages they found, becoming the hereditary enemies of the Israelites. They

in turn were crushed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar when he invaded Canaan in 736BC.

‘So you see Pat, Abraham could not have fought the Philistines as the events do not fit together. Genesis was written around the middle of the 6th century BC, that is to say six hundred years after the arrival of the Philistines. So Abraham was inserted into the story by scribes at a time when the people of Israel did not exist as a specific people.’

‘So the Bible is pure fiction?’

‘Let us say it is a mixture of myths and legends, written to glorify the ancient nation of Israel. There are many points of historic fact but as far as we archaeologists are concerned there is an extraordinary confusion of dates and events,’ Selim said with an apologetic smile.

‘Who exactly invented Abraham then?’

‘The first thing we should do is fix the birth of Israel.’

Selim went on to tell them the first known reference to Israel – outside of the Bible story – occurred in the so-called Armana Letters, which dated from about 1400 BC. These letters were discovered in 1887 by an Egyptian peasant woman and contained a request from the governor of Jerusalem to the Pharaoh for help against the Habiru, thought to be a reference to the Hebrew invasion of Canaan.’

The question for historians and archaeologists was who were the Habiru, were they the founders of Israel? Where did they come from how did they build their home in the land of Canaan? The only clue is given in the Bible itself, which tells of how the Hebrews left the city of Ur in Mesopotamia and were led by Abraham on their long journey to Canaan.

It then tells of how God made a covenant with Abraham’s people, promising him that in return for their obedience to his will, Abraham’s descendants would rule over the land.

This covenant was passed on to Abraham's son Isaac, and then to his son Jacob, who was to be called Israel. The Bible continues, telling the story of how Jacob had twelve sons, and one of whom, Joseph, became a Minister of the Pharaoh. Jacob at his son's beckoning then left Canaan to live in Egypt together with his extended tribal family composed of some hundreds of men women and children.

Initially they were welcomed by the Egyptians, but as their numbers grew the welcome turned to resentment and the people of Israel were made into slaves. It was not until another leader appeared could the people of Israel leave Egypt for the Promised Land; Canaan, where they defeated the Canaanites and took over their land.

'How does the Hebrew invasion of Canaan fit in with the archaeologist's point of view?' asked O'Connelly.

'Ah my friend, unfortunately, there is not a shred of evidence outside the Bible to corroborate these claims,' replied Selim.

'So you see Pat,' said Shlomo, 'before the Hebrews dominated the region, the population was probably made up of a groups of tribes formed by Semite-speaking groups of pastoral nomads, not unlike those we saw today at the Wadi Rum, without the Toyotas of course. Archaeological shows that in the eleventh or twelfth century BC, a great number of new settlements appeared in the hill country of central Canaan.'

'What precisely do you mean by settlements?'

'Small villages and the likes, nothing important.'

'I see, so other than Bible sources there's nothing that indicates the existence of a Hebrew kingdom.'

'Right, and whilst we're on the subject of the Bible we should remember one important point. There are no surviving biblical texts that date before the third century BC.'

'So was it invented in one stroke?'

‘No, it’s much more complicated than that, the texts used to compile the Bible as we know it were drawn from other written sources that existed at that time. It was a process that repeated itself, writing and re-writing by scribes, whose work was controlled by the high priest and rulers. So they always re-arranged it to suit their political agenda.’

‘Like today in Israel!’

They all laughed.

‘It’s a long tradition, if we look at ancient Greek texts, such as that of the earliest Herodotus, which date from the fifth century BC, before the compilation of the Bible I just mentioned, he wrote of some very strange things, almost like today’s science fiction, because in those times distances were vast almost interplanetary. His descriptions were based legends and travellers’ tales. Biblical texts were no doubt compiled in the same fashion, but more down to earth, no monsters, but lots of burning bushes and voices.’

‘But Shlomo you mentioned before written records, I mean Egyptian or Assyrian?’

‘Yes, the problem was that after the Assyrians had disappeared with their written cuneiform language any surviving texts, tablets for example were indecipherable and not only that if they had been available they were far away from ancient Jerusalem.’

‘Remember Pat, very few people could read or write in their own language, forgetting distant and forgotten civilisations,’ said Selim. ‘From here, Eilat to Alexandria is just an hour’s flight, or a couple of days by car, but imagine we have to walk to Sharm el-Sheik tomorrow? Over rocky, parched, mountainous paths and with the constant threat of danger from unfriendly nomads. Time and distance had a totally different meaning in the past, especially the distant past.’

‘So going back to King David and Solomon?’

‘As I said we do have texts from many contemporary neighbouring civilisations, those that fought for control of that region, the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, but not one of them even mentions the name of David or Solomon, or even the existence of a Hebrew kingdom of any importance.’

‘You say importance?’

‘Well, there were certainly small tribal grouping of very local importance, but certainly not on the scale as described in the Bible.’

47

David and Solomon

THE BIBLE TELLS US OF THE GREAT and magnificent united monarchy of David and Solomon in the 10th century BC, which Solomon's son, Rehoboam divided into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, resulting in two centuries of strife, wars and fraternal hatred.

At that time Jerusalem was a merely a small mountain town compared to the great cities of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. Nothing has been found that remotely compares to the monuments and architecture of the Pharaohs or Nebuchadnezzar. Its temple was insignificant in comparison to the splendour of the temples of Egypt.

If we know a great deal of Egypt, Babylon and Assyria the question can be asked as to how dates mentioned in the Bible fit in with those put forward by archaeologists? Calculations have been made by Bible specialists that show Abraham was called by God in 2090BC and the Exodus began in 1447BC. After forty years in the desert Joshua conquered Canaan in 1407BC. In 1011BC Saul was killed and David became King of Judah, then all of Israel, his son Solomon

ascended the throne in 971BC and built the Temple in 966BC. Then historically verifiable facts coincide with Bible dating when in 605BC Nebuchadnezzar became King of Babylon and invaded Judah, destroying Jerusalem and the Temple in 586BC.

This leads to the question as to why the Bible was written, what was its purpose. But before that question is answered a word has to be said about the invention and use of writing. The first structured writing system appeared in Egypt in the form of hieroglyphics and the written alphabet was developed by the Phoenicians. In addition the Assyrians brought their writing skills when they conquered Israel in 720BC. Thus the literary skills of the Hebrew's neighbours to the north and south were naturally adopted by them, in any other circumstances the Bible story, its legends and traditions, most of which were doubtlessly handed down by oral tradition from the time when the Hebrews were desert tribes, would have never been recorded and the Bible as it is known today would have never existed.

Writing also required a support, which was invented by the Egyptians in the form of papyrus and parchment, easily stored and easily transportable prior to that the Assyrians had invented cuneiform writing on clay tablets, which were compact and solid, though not so readily usable as papyrus since the clay had to be soft for writing then dried and was not practical for large documents that were to be transported. At the outset writing was used for recording commercial transactions, administrative needs and military communications. Scribes were men of learning, officials and priests employed by the wealthy and powerful in their communities.

Before these supports writing was used for monuments, it was therefore brief, telegraphic, it is not easy to carve words onto stone and space was limited, but stone could survive weather and time, leaving a permanent record of glorious conquests by great kings,

praise to the Gods, laws to be obeyed. Writing therefore became a tool of power, authority and obeisance as can be seen from the Ten Commandments that were engraved on stone.

Therefore the authors of the Bible had understood the power of the written work, the power of an ancient book, which starts with the creation, designating the Jews as God's Chosen People and the Promised Land given by God to his people. In other words the most powerful piece of propaganda ever invented, since it was the word of God creator of heaven and earth who made man in his own image and likeness.

However, the book was not written in one go, like Harry Potter, it was the work of innumerable generations, starting with tribal laws and oral traditions transcribed onto paper, probably in the seventh century BC, the texts were enlarged by kings and priests, re-written, improved, collated, edited, censored, until the collection had reached an unwieldy quantity that no doubt became difficult to interpret. At some point in the third century BC the texts were re-written once and for all, thus codifying forever the history and laws of the Jews with their monotheistic religion with one God, its capital Jerusalem, the Temple and a king.

48

A Question of Interpretation

TO UNDERSTAND THE EXISTENCE OF THE CISTERNS it was necessary to understand the importance of water. Water was a vital element in all towns and cities of the ancient world as it is today, however it is necessary to see this beyond the context of temperate climates and

modern technology. Jerusalem is situated in an arid region with rainfall mostly in early spring and late autumn. Water has always been a scarce commodity.

To ensure a regular supply of water the ancient people of Jerusalem had to build aqueducts to carry it from the nearby hills to the city and build a collection system for rainwater. To store the water a great number of underground shafts, tunnels and cisterns were necessary in addition to its maintenance system in the form of a complex network of stairways and passages. These structures were the subject of a long systematic exploration by the Palestinian Survey Fund in the nineteenth century.

‘Of course since those initial investigations other hydraulic systems have been discovered and described by archaeologists.’

‘Including our friend de Lussac.’

‘No, he discovered nothing, he simply interpreted what others found before him, making it fit into his own theories.’

‘But the system did supply the Temple.’

‘No doubt it did, but not necessarily as your friend has described it. Perhaps we shall never know exactly how. As we already know very little solid evidence exists concerning the Temple. When it was rebuilt by Herod, the Bible tells us a thousand ox carts were used to haul the stones from the quarry to the building site, and that Herod hired 10,000 skilled workmen and trained 1,000 priests as masons and carpenters for the work.’

‘Priests?’

‘Yes, you see only priest could be employed in the sacred areas of the Temple. Then Josephus tells that the Temple itself was completed after a year and a half, but the outer courts took eight years.’

‘Ah yes, we have read that.’

‘A notice was discovered on stone fragments in Greek warning gentiles to proceed no further, they say: *No foreigner is to enter*

within the balustrade and embankment around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death which follows.

‘An old tradition it seems!’

‘Perhaps, anyway Josephus described the Temple as having four courts. The outer court was open to everybody, including gentiles, though with the exception of menstruating women. All Jewish men and menstrually clean Jewish women were allowed into the second court and the fourth court was only for priests.’

Remember the inscription that says *To the place of trumpeting* found at the base of the wall at the south-west corner of the Temple Mount. Josephus confirmed this idea when he wrote that a priest stood at that spot and sounded a trumpet to announce the Sabbath.

49

Exploration

‘TELL ME PAT, I BELIEVE YOU’RE IRISH?’

‘Yes.’

‘Have you heard of Robert MacAlister, another Irishman...an archaeologist? He worked on excavation carried out by the Palestine Exploration Fund. Between 1923 and 1925 he excavated the Ophel Gardens and developed a chronology of the city walls.’

‘Good for him.’

‘As a matter of fact archaeological finds have been made recently in an ancient underground tunnel nearby, but as usual the Waqf protested like it always does whenever there is any suggestion of an Israeli dig near the Haram.’

‘Is there some way we could get into those tunnels?’

‘It’s strictly forbidden to enter into the underground of the Haram. You would start another Intifada and end up in prison.’

‘Certain rabbis have decreed that Jews may not enter certain areas of the Temple Mount.’

‘Why is that?’

‘Because they can’t comply with the ritual requirement of purification without the ashes of a red heifer.’

‘Red heifer?’

‘It’s complicated, but the ashes of a red heifer are required by Jewish religious law for certain acts of purification. Certain Jews are still looking for a red heifer, a red cow, a completely red cow, without any white hairs, which has never been yoked, and whose sacrifice will purify the Jewish priesthood, allowing them back onto the Temple Mount.’

They walked through the Arab market in the crowded alleyways, stopping to look at the mounds of spices and brassware, a perpetual image of the mythical Orient.

‘Extremists want to rebuild the Temple, they’re even making the sacred vessels and the robes of the High Priest.’

‘There’s all kinds of crazy ideas.’

‘It can’t be easy to find a red heifer?’

‘No, at least not a perfect one,’ he laughed.

‘Strange!’

‘There is a story that the Waqf is going to clean the underground cisterns that have not been explored by non-Muslims since Warren’s in the 1860s. There is even a report that some of the cisterns have already been cleaned.’

‘So that means the at least the Muslims can visit the cisterns.’

‘Probably.’

‘Is there any entrance from the outside?’

‘Yes, there are, but they are bricked-up.’

‘Apart from the work outside of the walls, has any exploration been done inside?’

‘Back in 1968, Israeli archaeologists carried out excavations at the foot of the Temple Mount.’

He described the work undertaken to the immediate south of the al-Aqsa mosque when two ancient Second Temple period tunnels 30 meters were opened, beneath the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the area of the Hulda and Single gates, one of which was cleared over a length of 30 meters.

Then in the seventies and eighties another tunnel was excavated to the west of the Temple Mount, northwards from the Western Wall, but the Muslim authorities protested after a shift in part of the southern wall was observed with large fissures in one of the buildings in the Moslem Quarter, putting an end to the work.

In 1982, the rabbis of the Western Wall decided to open the Warren's Gate, which leads into the Temple Mount underground. As they tunnelled north they found an ancient underground door that had been walled up. They broke down the wall and began to clear out the cistern, but when workers of the Waqf heard noises they came hurried down and found the Jews clearing the passageways. The result was a riot and the Israeli government put a stop to the work and re-sealed the door, however the rabbis were allowed to continue digging northward outside of the Western Wall.

It was called the Rabbi's Tunnel because the work was commenced by a group of Orthodox rabbis just after Six Day War in 1967, under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. It was not an ancient tunnel, but it started in the area of the Western Wall plaza and ran north along the outside of the western wall.

A few years later they had reached the north end of the Haram and connected with a pre-Herodian tunnel cut into the rock north of the

Haram dating from the 1st and 2nd centuries BC water, it is called the Hasmonean Tunnel. The work was completed in 1988, when the tunnel was opened to tourists. At first it was a dead end, but later an exit was made onto the Via Dolorosa in the Moslem quarter of the Old City.

‘So you see this tunnel can be visited.’

‘Is there no way into the cisterns from the Archaeological Park?’

‘There could be a way, but it would be extremely dangerous with unimaginable consequences if you were caught.’

‘Tell me about it.’

‘Well, in the Archaeological Park we know that there is a sealed door, bricked up, and this we believe leads to the cisterns adjacent to Solomon’s Stables.’

‘Would it be difficult to get inside?’

‘Not too difficult, but I would be finished as an archaeologist in Israel if I embarked on some crazy scheme to break into the Haram underground.’

‘Let me put it this way, if you thought you would discover something that settled once and for all the site of the first Temple would you take the risk?’

‘Are you serious?’

‘Sure.’

‘There is no problem in getting into the Archaeological park, but number one I don’t believe in such a discovery and number two you’re forgetting that this is one of the most security conscious places in the world.’

‘Okay, imagine for a moment what I am saying is true.’

‘All right, tell me more?’

‘De Lussac believes that when the Romans besieged Jerusalem in 70AD, the High Priest ordered the Ark of the Covenant to be put into

safe keeping in a secret place. This place was evidently within the Citadel, hidden somewhere underground!’

50

Myths and Legends

MOST PEOPLE IN ISRAEL think that the conquest of Jerusalem by King David is an undeniable historic fact! The problem is that nothing could be further from the truth!’

‘So you are sure that King David did not exist?’

‘I didn’t say that. It is possible that such a person existed and that Jerusalem was his capital in the tenth century BC, however there is absolutely no proof other than what is written in the Bible and as I have explained the Bible is nothing more than a collection of legends to exalt the nation.’

‘The evidence of Jerusalem’s existence at that time is in no doubt, but it was nothing more than a small unimportant town compared to the great cities of Egypt and Mesopotamia at that time, and it could have been the stronghold of David, who in that case was a mere kinglet and not the mighty conqueror described in the Bible.’

The Amarna letters made a vague reference to Jerusalem in the 13th century BC, though there are no references to a King David in any other Egyptian, Syrian or Assyrian documents of that time, and in addition to that the numerous archaeological excavations in Jerusalem failed to turn up so much as a mention of his name.

The only archaeological evidence is an inscription on a piece of basalt, which has been identified as part of a victory column erected by the King of Syria that dates from the ninth century BC. It says *beit*

David, the word *beit* means house, so it could be interpreted as the house of David, but it does not necessarily refer to a King of that name.

Briefly the Bible is a collection of books that recounts the history of the Jews as seen by the Jews, part of which is based on fact and part on legend, in no way can it be considered as a historical document, however a good many facts from the third or fourth century BC onwards are confirmed by archaeological evidence and other contemporary written sources. It is a history designed as a cohesive instrument by the ancient Jewish leaders to justify the existence of the Jewish state, the beliefs of the Jewish people and their sacred laws. The book defined the laws and the divine right of kings and high priests appointed by God to ensure his word was obeyed, it was the fundamental legitimacy of rulers. The ultimate compilation of the Bible, a master work unique in the history of man, by unknown scholars based on a mass of pre-existing documents that have not come down to us. The Bible constitutes for the Jews the legitimacy and rights of the Jewish people to the Promised Land as the Chosen People, to the detriment of all other tribes who lived in those lands at that time.'

'What do you mean by pre-existing documents?'

'It is impossible to think that the Bible was written in one inspired moment, its very structure indicates this was not the case. The Old Testament is made up of thirty-nine books, written at different times by different writers over a period of several hundred years.

'What was the origin of these books?'

'First of all the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic, whose forms and dialects changed over the centuries. Aramaic had become the language of the Jews from the late fifth century BC century onward, though in the Temple scriptures were read in Hebrew followed by a translation in Aramaic. The Gemara, which is

part of the Talmud, was entirely written in Aramaic and as is often the case for ancient translations, the translator was at times led to explain the sense of a word, lost or transformed, so as to adapt it to contemporary circumstances, to render it comprehensible and coherent with the whole of the original text. At times these translations show that the original Hebrew had been transformed, or had disappeared.’

‘Where does Aramaic come from?’

‘Aramaic is a Semitic language, it is different from other Semitic languages such as Akkadian and Phoenician, but is similar in vocabulary and pronunciation to Hebrew. However, they are both distinct languages in both their form and pronunciation. It is the root language of Hebrew, Arabic, and the alphabet for Greek, Farsi, Georgian and Turkish. Aramaic replaced Akkadian, the oldest Semitic language, around 1000BC. The Aramaic script was derived from the Phoenician alphabet. After the Assyrians adopted the language of the Aramaeans, Aramaic became the lingua franca of Mesopotamia and the whole Middle East.

Two major dialects exist, Western and Eastern, the Eastern is called Syriac that is a dialect. Parts of the Bible were also written in Aramaic.

‘I see.’

‘But, as far as the New Testament is concerned it was written in Greek, which was introduced by Alexander the Great during the Hellenistic period and continued to be used until 500AD. But speaking of Greeks we should examine how written history came into being. History written in the form of literary prose as factual or supposedly factual events had only just been invented by the ancient Greeks in the form we know it today. There was Herodotus with his Histories in the middle of the 5th century BC and then Thucydides who wrote the history of the Peloponnesian Wars towards the end of

4th century BC, the work of the former was still filled with fantastic accounts and legends of distant and legendary lands with monstrous peoples, whilst Thucydides wrote a precise account of the Wars in exactly the same manner as we write today and with great detail.'

'Were there any non-Greeks who wrote on Israel?'

'Yes there was Hecataeus of Abdera, he wrote *Aegytiaki* and *Peri Ioudaïon*, that's means *On the Jews*, around 315-320BC for Ptolemy Sotor, the first Greek ruler of Egypt. Then there was Megasthenes who wrote *Indika* on India a memoir of Alexander the Greats conquests went as far as the Indus.'

'But they were Greeks!'

'Yes, Hecataeus of Abdera was a Greek historian who lived in the 4th century BC. He was a member of Ptolemy Soter's expedition to Syria, and he sailed up the Nile with him as far as Thebes. If you remember after Alexander's death his empire was divided up, Ptolemy founding a Greek dynasty in Egypt,' he said with a slightly condescending smile.

'What I meant was, were there non-Greeks?'

'Well there was of course Josephus, a Romanised Jew, who quoted Hecataeus in his works. Some scholars believe that he used the work of a Jewish writer, using a pseudonym, so there is some confusion. But apart from Hecataeus there was Berosus, a Hellenised Babylonian, who wrote the history of Mesopotamia, *Babyloniaka*, and by doing so created the history of the nation with its traditions, thus establishing beyond doubt for its people, as well as its neighbours, the historic legitimacy of the nation's sovereign and his ancestors.'

'I see, so the Bible was a history amongst others of that time. I suppose it survived because the Jews survived?'

'You've got it! That's the general idea. Until relatively recently, the Bible was considered by Christians and Jews as the word of God,

untouchable. It was only in the 19th century that scholars began to look at the biblical texts differently, studying its linguistic structure and analysing its contents. They commenced by trying to situate its texts within an archaeological, historical and geographical context.

‘Quite so,’ said Ziv, ‘and outside religious circles, most lay specialists agree that the compilation and editing of Bible’s different parts began in the seventh century BC. That’s to say about three centuries after the time of King David.’

‘Are their documents of this period?’

‘King David’s!’ he said smiling.

‘No...I mean from the seventh century as you mentioned.’

‘No, the earliest actual material evidence we have are the Dead Sea Scrolls, and these dates to the second century BC at the earliest.’

‘Oh!’

‘Quite, so let me continue my story. By the seventh century, David's legendary kingdom had split into two; there was Israel to the north, which had been invaded and destroyed by the Assyrians, and Judah to the south that had survived the Assyrian attack.

‘In Egypt, in the middle of the third century BC, under the Hellenistic dynasty, the Bible flourished amongst the Hellenised Jews in Alexandria; it was called *sepher ha-Torah*, the book of law. It must be remembered that after Alexander and the division of his Empire, the Jews found themselves in a world ruled by Greeks and where Greek had become the spoken language of this Greek world, Israel included.’

‘So the Torah is the Bible?’

‘Yes, it was also called The Book of the Law of Moses and was then composed of the first five books of the Bible as we know it today. It was not simply a book of law, but a history of the Jewish people to be read and meditated.’

‘I see.’

‘Good, now take the Book of Deuteronomy for example, it was compiled by scribes and recounts the history of Israel from the conquest of the Canaanites by Joshua to the destruction of the Temple in 587BC by the Babylonians. It was no doubt based on oral tradition and it is possible that documents that may have existed at that time, however there is little other evidence to back this up.’

‘It’s complicated with all of these books.’

‘It’s much more complicated than you can imagine. The foundation of Jewish traditions is based on Rabbinic texts, that’s to say the entire gamut of rabbinic writing accumulated throughout the history of the Jewish religion. The texts are composed of the *Sifrut Hazal* or The Literature of our Sages, which includes the Talmud, the Midrash and related writings.’

‘Where do they come from?’

Ziv told them how the earliest writing was the oral law, composed of the Mishnah and the Tosefta, which were in turn compiled from early materials pre-dating 200AD, then followed by the two Talmuds, Jerusalem Talmud 450AD and the Babylonian Talmud 600AD. The Midrash was a method of interpreting biblical texts and referred to a compilation of Midrashic teachings, in the form of legal, exegetical or homiletical commentaries on the Bible.

Then came the Jewish law with the Halakha that includes, the Major Codes of Jewish Law, the Mishnah Torah, the *Arba’ah Turim*, the *Shulhan Arukh* and their commentaries and finally the Responsa literature.

In addition there were the texts on Jewish thought and ethics including the Kabbalah, the Aggadah, the works of Hasidic Judaism, Jewish ethics and the Mussar Movement, as well as Jewish liturgy.

Much later came the works of the Geonim the Rabbis of Sura and Pumbeditha, in Babylon from 650AD to 1250AD. The works of the Rishonim – early medieval rabbis – from 1250AD to 1550AD, are

composed of commentaries on the Bible and Talmud, including works of famous rabbis such as Rashi, Nissim of Gerona and Maimonides. The rabbinical texts from 1550AD onwards were known as the Acharonim.

He went on to explain how in recent times extensive archaeological surveys had been carried out on the West Bank by serious archaeologists mostly from Tel Aviv University's Institute of Archaeology and the results of their work showed that around 1200BC semi-nomadic tribes from the bordering Arabian Peninsula to the east began to settle in the hill country of Canaan. At the same time others arrived from the south fleeing the Egyptians, who were pacifying the northern border regions, and from the north-west pushed inland by the arrival of the Sea Peoples on the coastal region.

The consequence was a very mixed population, which was however mostly Canaanite. Over the centuries this mixed population grew and blended into a single people with common language forced to defend its towns and villages against the encroaching Sea Peoples or Philistines who sought to expand their coastal territory.

This evidence fits in with the remains of Bronze and Iron Ages settlements found beneath the City of David, situated on the low, narrow, ridge of rock to south of the Temple Mount and the Old City. The bedrock on which the City is built is composed of hard limestone rock, known to geologists as a karst, this formation contains natural caves and tunnels that trap rainwater, which gradually flows down to lower levels through the natural fissures and channels in the rock finally flowing into the open in the form of springs. To the east of the City the Gihon Spring, the city's only natural source of water, surfaces in the Kedron Valley.

The spring was no doubt a key factor in the choice of this site by Jerusalem's first inhabitants around 1000BC. During the winter months rain caused the spring to overflow forming a stream that

watered the Kedron Valley and provided a source of irrigation for the settlers' vegetable gardens.

The only problem was the Gihon spring lay outside of the city walls, making the city vulnerable during times of war, therefore during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah the spring was covered with a vault and a tunnel was built to carry water to the Siloam Pool in the Tyropoeon Valley. Hezekiah's tunnel was cut into the rock towards the end of 8th century BC, as indicated by an inscription, in paleo-Hebrew script, cut into the rock near the exit.

Hezekiah's Tunnel was the best-dated Iron-Age biblical structure in Jerusalem because the lime deposits in the plaster used for sealing on the walls of the tunnel were analysed and found to include bone, charcoal, ash, wood and plant fragments. Radiocarbon-dating by Oxford University fixed the age of the wood at between 822-796BC, and plant samples at 790-760BC and 690-540BC and together with a radioisotope estimate of an ancient stalactite on the tunnel's ceiling gave a date of around 700BC, which fits in with the time of King Hezekiah.

Then there were the huge vaults called Solomon's Stables, built against the mountains to support the buildings built on top of them, which have been transformed into a mosque.

More recently, in the 1990s, excavations were carried out along the outer Western Wall and after the removal of much debris, a street running along the wall was uncovered, it was ten metres wide and was paved with stones, there were also the remains of shops that opened onto the street. Across from Robinson's Arch a pier that once supported it was uncovered.

Three water storage and distribution systems supplied by the waters of the Gihon spring were cut into the rock beneath the City of David forming one of the most complex and advanced systems of any known from biblical cities.

However, a shaft known as Warren's Shaft was the earliest subterranean water system, its entrance was located in the middle of the eastern slope of the City of David, inside of the city's walls. It was a subterranean tunnel cut into the rock with a shaft at its end, which led down to the waters of the Gihon Spring and where water could be drawn from the spring within the safety of the city's walls. Warren's Shaft was open to visitors and Hezekiah's Tunnel be also be visited, walking through the water that flows to the Pool of Siloam.

A study carried out at the beginning of the 1980s, established that the shaft and most of the tunnel were in fact natural karstic fissures in the rock that the builders of the system had used, to making it possible to have a subterranean passage from the city to the spring.

‘Tell me about the recent work in excavations in Jerusalem?’

‘Between 1961 and 1985 four major excavations have been made in Jerusalem, the problem is that not very much information has ever been published. Most of the discoveries come from Late Bronze Age tombs.

‘Tombs?’

‘Yes, it quite common to find tombs, but no remains have ever been found of a town or city.’

‘Nothing?’

‘Nothing, no walls, gates or buildings of any kind.’

‘So what about the references in the Amarna letters that de Lussac refers to?’

‘The letters found at Tel Amarna in Egypt, in the ancient capital of Akhenaton, are in fact cuneiform tablets, in total there are about four hundred sent by heads of different Palestinian city-states.’

‘City states?’

‘Yes, there was for example Shechem, Gaza, Beth-Shean and Megiddo.’

‘Ah yes, we visited the Megiddo.’

‘Six of these letters make reference to Urusalim, which was described as a large town protected by a solid wall. The problem is that more than a century of intensive archaeological excavations has uncovered almost nothing from this period.’

‘But the letters are real, they are not legends, so it must have existed.’

‘I don’t know there are three possibilities, first it has not yet been found, second there is nothing left of it, and third it never existed.’

‘How can you be sure of that?’

‘Well several trenches were dug down to the bedrock, but no buildings were found corresponding to Late Bronze Age Jerusalem, that is before about 1200BC.

‘But it is improbable that the letters referred to a town in the same region with the same name.’

‘As I said I don’t know, perhaps the letters referred to a region, or some kind of a farming community.’

‘So the de Lussac’s reference to Biblical descriptions of Jerusalem as a magnificent city, at the centre of a large and prosperous empire is a myth.’

‘I’m afraid so, your friend de Lussac mixes myth and archaeology to suit his theory, which by the way is not totally illogical.’

‘But what about the terraced system and that high stone wall found by Mazar?’

‘Ah yes, the wall, in my opinion t dates from the tenth century BC, probably the substructure of some kind of fortification.’

‘But such a wall, originally about twenty seven metres high and forty metres long at the top, was not built for a small village?’

‘It is not that big, think of forty metres compared to the present day Haram, it’s rather small. The ancient wall was no doubt designed

with earthworks to make it difficult for attackers to climb up the hill to the city.’

‘Was anything else found?’

‘Mazar found several ashlar and a large proto-aeolic capital near the wall, probably from some kind of public building. There was also a quantity of pottery shards confirming the tenth century dating, but no houses.’

‘No houses?’

‘At least not in the excavated area, the houses were probably further away outside, another wall was built later lower down the slope of the hill. The city was perhaps some kind of an administrative centre, but in any case it was very small.’

‘Can you say how many people lived there?’

‘At a guess, probably a couple of thousand.’

‘So it was not a large state?’

‘No, it was certainly no different from the other towns of the period that have been studied in detail such as Megiddo, Hazor, Gezer and Lachish.’

‘In any case there is considerable evidence of increased settlement in the region, so Jerusalem was clearly some kind of small centre.’

‘What happened after?’

‘What we know is that in the late eighth century BC the Assyrians destroyed much of the country including Jerusalem, which had doubtlessly grown in importance. The ruins of the Babylonian destruction can be seen by the thick layer of remains beneath the city today. A considerable quantity of objects has enabled archaeologists to date the construction of the city walls, houses and water systems to the 8th century BC. Therefore we can relatively accurately reconstruction life in the city at that time.’

Nebuchadnezzar had conquered Jerusalem sending its leaders to exile in Babylon. He appointed a vassal king, but the Jews rebelled

and the Babylonians totally destroyed the city which had become one of the most important in the region with a population of approximately 10,000 souls.

Beneath the buildings destroyed by the Babylonians remains were found that date from the 10th and 9th centuries BC. But few inscriptions have been discovered from the 10th and the early part of the 9th centuries BC in Israel, and Egyptian and Babylonian sources are silent.

The City of David that lies about one hundred metres to the south of the walled Old City of Jerusalem is simply a name given to it early archaeologists who believed the area was the site of King David's Jerusalem.

Before the arrival of the Hebrews 10th century BC Canaan covered a region from Sidon on the north coast running down to Gaza with the Jordan River as its eastern border. It was no more than a collection of small city-states paying tribute to the Egyptian Pharaoh. The Amarna letters were written in cuneiform on clay tablets in Akkadian, the lingua franca of the region, used by Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt for communication. These tablets – now in the British and Berlin museums – date from the time of Akhenaton, which is to say around 1200BC, and were correspondence from the Egyptian governors in Syria and Palestine, as well as from the rulers of Assyria and Mesopotamia.

Muslims

THAT SAME EVENING when O'Connelly arrived in his room he saw the voice mail message light flashing on his bedside phone. A voice

announced Hadi Mahmoud, saying he was a journalist and proposing a meeting in the hotel bar, leaving a mobile phone number. O'Connelly was curious, he called Mahmoud, who he was surprised to discover had been awaiting his return in the hotel lobby bar.

As O'Connelly entered the bar a man of about forty seated in one of the red leather armchairs in the far corner made him a sign.

'Nice to meet you Mr O'Connelly, please sit down. What would you like to drink?'

'A cool beer would be nice.'

Mahmoud ordered the beer from a waiter who had arrived and a Pepsi Light for himself.

'You must be wondering who I am?'

O'Connelly smiled politely.

'My name is Hadi Mahmoud, I'm a journalist, the Jerusalem correspondent for Al Quods, that's a Palestinian newspaper.'

'You're a Palestinian?' said O'Connelly becoming a little wary.

He observed Mahmoud, a good looking man, a small moustache, a regular face, casually but smartly dressed, an expensive wristwatch, perhaps a ladies man as some would say.

'Don't worry,' Mahmoud laughed, 'I'm not a terrorist, nor am I a Palestinian in the sense you mean. I am an Israeli Arab.'

O'Connelly smiled a little embarrassed.

'Let me explain, I've learnt that you're here doing some research work for an archaeological book. What I would like to do is provide you with the Palestinian point of view of history in the Holy Land.'

The drinks were served and Mahmoud lifted his glass, 'Cheers.'

'Cheers.'

They sipped their drinks.

'How did you get my name?'

'Let us say from a mutual acquaintance.'

'So how can I help you?'

‘As I said I am a journalist, you are a writer. We have both been taught that the pen is mightier than the sword – at least that is what we like to believe.’

O’Connelly nodded.

‘In the West everybody takes it for a given fact that this is the Promised Land of the Jews, nobody has ever stopped to wonder where the Palestinians came into the story. People some how think it is we who have usurped the land of Israel.’

O’Connelly in his mind seemed to agree with that, after all the Jews had lived there from the beginning of time until they were dispossessed. He remembered de Lussac’s work and the historical facts both ancient and modern.

If you have a little time I would be pleased to provide you with another vision of this land.’

O’Connelly nodded.

‘Before going into details, it is important to bear in mind the fact that we Muslims believe in all the prophets, including Jesus Christ, we consider the heritage of all prophets as our own. Islam is in fact an extension of the founding monotheist religion of the prophets prior to Islam.’

O’Connelly was surprised as the Muslims he had met in his own limited experience had never admitted such an idea.

‘By the way, I am not a fundamentalist. I am not even a very good Muslim. I believe in Allah, but I rarely pray or go to the mosque. That surprises you I can see.’

O’Connelly shrugged, it was not his business what a man believed or not.

Mahmoud spoke slowly and carefully, he avoided giving the impression of trying to convince or making an impassioned defence of religion.

‘Any way, we, that is us Muslims and you Christians share the same beliefs and values, the difference being is that Muslims believe Mohammed was the last and true messenger of God.’

O’Connelly drank his beer and listened he did not want to get involved in a religious debate, he himself a solid convinced atheist.

‘Do you know much about Islam?’

The question caught O’Connelly by surprise, in truth he new very little apart what filtered through in the media.

‘We believe, that Islam is the continuation and perfection of the monotheism of which were earlier versions,’ he said then paused waiting for a reaction. O’Connelly simply nodded.

‘The message Judaism and Christianity was superseded by the message of the Prophet Mohammed, the last prophet. You should know that Muslims recognize the Old Testament and the Bible as the words of God.’

O’Connelly was not surprised, but had to admit to himself that his knowledge of this fact was very recent.

However, we do not believe their message is exactly as it was revealed to Moses or Jesus, who were also messengers and prophets of God. So you see we have a lot in common.’

‘Interesting,’ he replied non-committally.

‘Islam recognizes Jesus but rejects the idea of the Trinity and Christ being the son of God. The Koran confirms the virgin birth of Christ and the story of Moses is also found in the Koran. We respect Jesus and Moses and all other prophets as they were true prophets of Allah.’

‘Tell me how Islam is structured? I mean the difference between Shias and Sunnis.’

‘There are two main sects with a number of smaller sects and branches. The Sunnis – I myself am a Sunnis, are the largest – followed by the Shias. We Sunnis do not have a structure like you

Christians have a clergy or for that matter any formal organization. No one person or institution has religious authority.

‘What is the role of the imams?’

‘Our imams are prayer leaders, but in fact any respectable Muslim can lead the prayers. The muftis interpret laws of the Sharia whilst the *Qazi* or *Kadi* applies the Sharia.

‘In Iran, the Shias have an organized clergy with imams and ayatollahs as religious authorities who decide on religious questions. They can to some degree innovate and reform laws together with the state.’

‘What about questions of belief?’

‘There are few doctrinal differences between the Sunnis and Shias. The origin of the separation goes back to the succession of the Prophet. When Muhammad died in 632AD his role as the messenger of Allah ceased, since there was to be no messenger or prophet after him. So the difference had more to do with politics than anything else.’

‘And Saudi Arabia?’

‘Saudi Arabia is the home of the Prophet, but they have no authority outside of their country, though they are respected. Today the international Muslim community looks to specialists concerning their laws University of Al-Azhar in Cairo is a reference.’

‘I see, most interesting.’

‘Look, let us forget religion and talk about the Palestinians. If we look at history and archaeology we know that the Jews were just one of the many peoples that lived in this land in ancient times. We Palestinians, part of the nomadic Semitic people, lived here before the Jewish religion came into being.’

‘I’ve no argument with that.’

‘There were many tribes as we know from the Bible. Some of these tribes became Jews and others followed other ancient religions. The

Jews rose to power and dominated the region, their power rising and falling with the regional balance of power and with the invasions of the Babylonians, Persians or Greeks. Then came the Romans and after the Revolt the Jews ceased to hold any power and were dispersed to all parts of the Mediterranean and Middle East. Palestine then became Provincia Syria Palaestina until the Arab conquest by Muslims.'

Mahmoud paused to let the words sink in, perhaps waiting for a reaction. He was disappointed O'Connelly had heard it all before, endlessly repeated by every expert and so called expert since he had started his research.

'Look I don't want to bore you with an historical exposé, what I would like is to spend a little time with you talking of the archaeological and historical evidence and to put into perspective the existence of the other peoples who have shared this land for thousands of years.'

'So what do you suggest?'

'Perhaps we can visit the Haram esh-Sharif tomorrow or the day after, as you wish, according to your schedule.'

O'Connelly looked more enthusiastic, it could be useful, perhaps he could even get to see the cisterns: 'Why not.'

'Good, how long are you here for?'

'For the moment I have an open schedule.'

'Then perhaps we could get to see the Nabateans in Jordan, they founded the first Arab city in Petra.'

That sounded like getting carried away to O'Connelly, though it would be a pity to miss the opportunity to visit Petra especially since Mahmoud sounded like a good guide.

'Let's stick to Jerusalem for the moment.'

'No problem,' he said with a smile, 'so let me call you tomorrow and we can try to set up the visit to the Haram esh-Sharif.'

The next day he met Mahmoud early and the left for the Old City where they entered the Haram by the ramp at the Western Wall. It was a fine morning and when they entered the gate O'Connelly was surprised to find himself in a pleasant leafy square.

'So let us start with a general tour, then we can look at the mosques.'

'It suits me.'

'As we walk I will tell you about our people.'

'Fine,' said O'Connelly looking around, there were few people, it was probably too early for the tourists.

'We believe there was a covenant and it was given to Abraham and his descendants, but the children of Ismail and Mohammed are also the descendants of Abraham.'

Mahmoud then launched in a long deviation explaining how the present day Jews were not Abraham's descendants, but are Caspian Jews who were converted to Judaism in the ninth and tenth centuries AD.

He explained that the Jew's vision of history was inexact and that Islam had through the Palestinians a longer presence in Jerusalem than that of the Jews. O'Connelly heard for the twentieth time the story of how the ancient inhabitants of Palestine had lived as nomads then establishing towns and villages long before the arrival of the Hebrews and their religion. O'Connelly had to agree he now knew that Palestine had been the home to many different peoples, the early Canaanites who were in fact the Philistines, then the Phoenicians and the many other tribes such as the Moabites, Edomites, Aramaeans and Ammonites. All these peoples had intermingled with the early Arab tribes that migrated out of the Arabian Peninsula from ancient times and after the Muslim Conquest.

Anthropological discoveries showed that early man lived in Israel since the dawn of humanity, evolving from hunter gatherers to early

farmers and nomadic tribes that settled in the region in the Palaeolithic. Archaeological shows the sites of more than two hundred Canaanites towns and villages during the second millennium BC, long before Judaism had been established as the religion of the Hebrews.

The Hyksos ruled Palestine from the eighteenth to sixteenth centuries BC. They were a people of Western Semitic origin possible from southern Palestine who during the 12th and 13th dynasties migrated into Egypt. With a decline in Egyptian power they captured the Egyptian capital at Memphis according to historic records in 1648 BC.

During this period of time no Hebrew nation existed. At the time David is supposed to have existed the region was made up of different lands: Philistia, Phoenicia, Judah, Ammon, Moab, Edon with what is part of present day Syria including the area of Damascus. To the south were the Egyptians, the north the Hittites and to the east the tribes of Arabia, including those who founded the city of Petra. To the north were the Assyrians, Persians and Babylonians who in turn invade Palestine and were by the Greeks and Romans.

‘You see Mr O’Connelly during Roman times the Jewish presence ceased to exist in Palestine after the destruction of Herod’s Temple.’

‘That’s going a bit far, a whole people didn’t disappear in one go.’

‘I agree but their power was broken for almost two thousand years, as for those not killed or put into slavery they were gradually dispersed all across the Roman world.’

‘Some of them certainly remained.’

‘No doubt, but in 66AD, under the Emperor Nero, the Jews revolted against Roman rule again, and Titus put down the revolt once and for all in 70CE. It took him four years. After besieging the

city he entered Jerusalem and razed Herod's temple and the city, 350,000 were killed and the rest sold into slavery.'

'Yes, that's history.'

'You can still see the triumphal arch in Rome, standing on the Via Sacra leading to the Forum, built to commemorate the conquest of Judea and the end the Jewish Wars. The soldiers can be seen carrying the Menorah.'

'I've seen it – it remained in Rome almost four hundred years until Vandals sacked the city in 455AD. It went to Constantinople in the 6th century where it was probably melted down.'

'The Jews revolted again in 132-135AD.'

'In Jerusalem?'

'No, in the rest of Judea occupied Jerusalem for a short time.'

'Interesting I was not aware of that.'

'Then Hadrian sent a huge army defeated the Jews and took over Jerusalem again, tens of thousands of Jews were killed and captured and Hadrian had the city razed, building a new capital they called Aelia Capitolina and the Jews were banished and did not for two hundred years.'

'It was Christian then?'

'Not yet. But in any case there were no more Jews. They fled from Judea and dispersed across the whole of Mediterranean area as far as Andalusia and even to Persia and Arabia. So for more than two hundred years they had no contact with Palestine, just their religious beliefs and the memory of their Temple. It was after the peoples of Palestine were Christianised, that is until the arrival of Islam.'

'What effect did Christianity have on Palestine?'

'Palestine became Christian under the Romans. Jesus, the son of Maryam, according to our Muslim belief, was one of God's signs sent to mankind. He declared himself as such at the very outset. He was a

servant of God, and God made him a prophet. If I can quote the Koran, Jesus said:

I am indeed a servant of God: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet; and He hath made me blessed wheresoever I be, and hath enjoyed on me Prayer and Charity as long as I live.'

‘So the Palestinians were romanised.’

‘Yes, at that time Aramaic had long since replaced Hebrew, then with the arrival of Christianity as the official religion of the Eastern Roman Empire in Constantinople, Greek became the language of the educated class.

‘The latest archaeological research work shows that Abraham came into Israel from the north in the seventh century AD, which is total conflict with the interpretation of Jews and Christians.’

‘So you agree that the first Temple could not have been built at the time attributed to David.’

‘That’s correct, the general idea is that David and Solomon lived in the ninth century before Christ, and that is totally wrong. The Bible was written by the Jews to justify their domination of the different peoples who lived in Canaan, forming the Kingdom of Judah.’

Akhenaton

‘You can be a good scientist and you can believe. You can be a good scientist and not believe’. Finklestein

IT WAS TWO IN THE MORNING when they arrived in Cairo, the road into the city was flooded after a violent storm and they arrived in their Hotel overlooking the Nile at almost four in the morning. In spite of the brief night they took their breakfast at nine, joined by Professor Faoued Nasser, a good friend of Shlomo Klein, one of the country’s most eminent Egyptologists, was their guide during their stay in the city.

The object of their visit to Cairo was to learn more of Egypt’s role in the ancient history of the Jews and their first stop that morning was the Egyptian Museum of History.

‘According to my book Professor, Egypt was the site of the first monotheistic religion.’

‘That’s right my dear,’ replied the professor softly. He was a man of about sixty five; he spoke perfect English with a very slight accent and was dressed like an English gentleman with a gentleman’s manners. ‘According to some scholars Akhenaton was the first person in history to establish a form of monotheism. He is also known as Amenhotep IV and was Pharaoh from about 1350 to 1334BC. Akhenaton was the son of Amenhotep III and husband of Nefertiti.’

‘Nefertiti, that’s interesting,’ said Laura, always pleased at the mention of a great woman in history. The professor gave her an indulgent smile.

‘Akhenaton set up the cult of Aton, the sun god. He believed Aton the sole creator of the universe. So you see some of us think that the Hebrew’s concept of a universal God, preached seven or eight centuries later in a land that Akhenaton once ruled, was perhaps derived from his cult.’

‘Very interesting, so it was some kind of a new religion?’

‘Above all a religious concept. But, it did not last long, because when he died his son-in-law, Tutankhamen, restored the old polytheistic religion.’

‘Where did the Egyptians come from, I mean they were before all other civilisations.’

‘That’s another thing, a long story, but briefly about six or seven thousand years ago a prehistoric peoples called the Badarians and Naqada already farmed the banks of the Nile. They were basically Stone Age tribes who lived in the northern Sahara region which had a wetter climate at that time, a Savannah type ecosystem like in Kenya today. Their technology was Stone Age but they had elementary metal technology, and could make jewellery and pottery, though they didn’t mummify their dead, they buried them with ritual objects for an afterlife. The Naqada and the later Egyptians were basically the same group of people. There are many ancient wall paintings that exist across all of North Africa, which in the case of what is now Egypt show that their leader had a similar relationship with his people as did the Pharaohs who came much later. Everything points to them being the same people as the early Egyptians of the Pharaonic dynasties, that is to say the same peoples who have occupied Egypt from prehistoric times to the present.’

‘I thought that the Middle East was the cradle of civilisation?’ said Laura.

‘So it was.’

‘Mesopotamia,’ she hesitated.

‘Right,’ he smiled at her effort. ‘As a matter of fact just recently near the Syrian border with Iraq at a place called Hamoukar, archaeologists say they have uncovered the earliest evidence for large-scale warfare.’

‘Nothing changes!’

‘How right you are. The work is at one of the Mesopotamia’s earliest cities that date to around 3500BC, which was apparently destroyed in a siege. Archaeologists found extensive destruction with collapsed walls, which appears to have been attacked with a heavy barrage of missiles launched by slings, they found more than one thousand small oval-shaped missiles and about one hundred larger clay balls.’

‘So the city was completely destroyed.’

‘So it seems, lying waiting to be discovered six thousand years later.’

‘A bit like today.’

‘I’m surprised that work like that can continue in Syria in the present political situation.’

‘We archaeologists and anthropologists are a very peaceful bunch, we keep our friendships and work going even during these conflicts, we are witness to so many conflicts of the past we feel it as some kind of a mission to humanity to unravel and understand these sources of conflict.’

‘What was happening in Israel in those early times?’

‘It depends where you start, but if we look at recently uncovered evidence of man’s advance towards civilization then we can say with some certainty that agriculture started in the Jordan Valley ago about 11,000 years ago, at that time there was of course no Israel no nothing just nomadic hunter-gatherers who had started to cultivate plants. Evidence was found in the form of the carbonised remains of

a domesticated type of edible figs together with barley, wild oats and acorns at a dig in an early Neolithic village.’

During the centuries after Alexander, non-Jews knew what Jews thought of their cult images. The fact that Jews did not maintain cult images of their god was discussed by both Greek and Roman authors. Some writers, early and late, showed disdain for the Jewish approach. Others, however, suggest a more positive evaluation. The Roman author Varro used the example of the Jews in support of his desire that fellow Romans might return to their ancient imageless religion. If the earlier Roman practice had continued, Varro wrote *our worship of the gods would be more devout*. Strabo of Amaseia’s description of the Jewish cult betrays considerable respect for the Jewish position, at least in its origins, for example he wrote that Moses was an Egyptian priest *who held a part of Lower Egypt*.’

53

The Koran

IF THE BIBLE IS A COMPILATION of different texts designed to give a history of a mixed people what about the Koran?’

‘Same thing, today all Muslims have an extraordinary reverence for the Koran, it is the holy of holies. For example the sacred book must never lay beneath other books, always on top, you must never drink or smoke when it is being read aloud, and it must be listened to in silence,’ Professor Nasseri explained to them.

In the past Europeans such as Gibbon considered it *an incoherent rhapsody of fable*, for Carlyle it was *insupportable stupidity*, whilst the German scholar Salomon Reinach said:

From the literary point of view, the Koran has little merit.

Declamation, repetition, puerility, a lack of logic and coherence strike the unprepared reader at every turn. It is humiliating to the human intellect to think that this mediocre literature has been the subject of innumerable commentaries, and that millions of men are still wasting time absorbing it.

‘What is your position Professor?’ asked O’Connelly delicately. ‘I mean myself I know very little about Islam or the Koran, of course the subject is present everywhere, it’s quite extraordinary that in the space of a little more than a generation Islam has become the subject of so much debate in the Europe. In the early sixties I didn’t even know what a Muslim was, I had heard of Mohamed and Mohammedans from history books, we were always fighting them in Khartoum or at the Khyber Pass. I even remember there was an Anglo-Indian in my office, he was Muslim, but I never asked him what a Muslim was because it was of no importance!’

‘Things have changed, the world has become wider!’

‘Yes.’

‘Myself I’m an academic and Egyptologist, I am also a believer, however my scientific training allows me to question many things, though it does not alter my faith in God. For me I see no reason why the Koran cannot be studied using the same techniques of Biblical criticism, though in Egypt this must be done with the utmost discretion and in academic scientific circles, otherwise we would have a riot on our hands.’

‘So how did the Koran come down to us? Who compiled it?’

‘That’s a very good point, who wrote it and when was it written? According to Muslims the Koran was revealed to Muhammad, by an

angel, little by little until his death in 632AD. How it had been written down at the time of Muhammad's death is unclear, there is no evidence of a single manuscript covering the whole of the revelation, though tradition tells us the Prophet dictated it to his secretaries.'

Professor Nasserri continued his explanation telling them how after the Prophet's death Abu Bakr became the second Caliph from 632 to 634. Omar, concerned many Muslims who knew the Koran by heart died during the Battle of Yamama, decided that all the parts of the Koran be gathered together before they were lost for ever. Abu Bakr agreed, and Zayd ibn Thabit, who had been the Prophet's secretary, was given the task collecting the Koran's different texts that existed on a variety of different materials: papyrus, flat stones, palm leaves, shoulder blades and ribs of animals, pieces of leather and wooden boards, as well as from men's minds. The collected texts were transcribed onto paper and handed down to the Prophet's descendants.

The collected texts remained in the hands of Zayd ibn Thabit and his family until the third Caliph Uthman ordered Zayd ibn Thabit to make an official text after arguments had broken out among his soldiers as to the correct readings of the Koran. Zayd's texts were compared with those held by Omar's daughter and using the dialect of the Quraysh, the Prophet's tribe Zayd completed the work in about 650AD and all other versions were ordered to be destroyed.

A problem however remained, since today's Koran is not dialectal Arabic, though specialists accept that the text was written at the time of Uthman between 650 and 656, as to who compiled is not clear whether it was Abu Bakr or Uthman, though it is generally assumed that the final form came into being under the third Caliph Uthman.

According to certain traditions Muhammad could not read or write, therefore what God revealed to him perfectly transmitted and a number of questions arise concerning the reliability of oral transmission by early Muslims and the texts in the possession of

Umars daughter. The fact that oral traditions have a propensity to vary with time means that it is more than probable that the Koran as it exists today underwent change before arriving in its final written form, not to speak of politically or religiously inspired insertions, cuts and modifications.

In spite of these facts Muslims adamantly refuse any discussion concerning the Koran, this was not the case in the early years of Islam when Muslims had a more flexible approach, aware that parts of the Koran had been lost or modified. To unify the peoples of the Caliphate Uthman therefore created a unique and final version of the Koran called the Medina Codex, copies of which were distributed to all the towns and cities of the Caliphate and all other existing versions of the Prophets words were destroyed.

At the time the Koran was written Syro-Aramaic was the most commonly used cultural and written language in the region where Mohammed and his immediate successors lived. Educated Arabs used Aramaic as their written language though it was slowly being replaced by Arabic in the seventh century. Thus the Koran often employs a grammatical structure based on Arabic and Syro-Aramaic.

Written Arabic grammatical rules did not appear until around 780AD and up until that time the written language was uniquely composed of consonants. These had different forms and more important there were no written vowels, thus the Koran was written in what we call a scripta defectiva. The written alphabet was composed of just seventeen letters and one letter could stand for two or more letters.

Grammatical rules were fixed at that time by the Persian Sibawayh, but by that time the language had evolved to a degree that it was no longer identical to that of the Koran, leading to problems of interpretation and reading. Without vowels a reader had to determine not only the pronunciation but also the meaning of each word and its

grammatical form. This led to the development of a scripta plena in the ninth century.

However, more than two hundred years had passed since the death of the Prophet plus the fact that several texts existed in spite of Uthman's orders to destroy all other texts. Therefore the Koran was reorganised into chapters on the basis of their length rather than the order of revelation or the nature of the subjects.

It was not until three hundred years after Mohammed's death that seven systems of reading the texts were fixed by ibn Muqlah and ibn Isa with the help of a learned scholar ibn Mujahad. They decided that this was canonical, and the only way vowels could be denoted in the text. As time passed five of these systems were abandoned, then finally what is called the text of Hafs became the universal accepted form when the printed form came into being.

'So you see my friends the Koran for us modest scholars is filled with interpolations, some of which are a form of exegesis, though others are of a more dogmatic or political nature.'

'So the Koran took on form slowly with modifications and additions not unlike the Jewish Bible?'

'You could say that, the difference being that the Koran is not a history of the Arabic peoples or their land, but a divine revelation.'

'So the Bible is not a revelation?'

'I did not say that my dear, the Bible is a mixture of revelation, laws and history.'

'What do we know of Mohammed himself?'

'The earliest material relating to the Prophet's life that we have was written in about 750AD by ibn Ishaq, that's a hundred twenty years after his death. Ibn Ishaq relied mostly on oral tradition, so there is a question of reliability as the story would have certainly been very much modified during those intervening years.'

'Have these texts been translated?'

‘Yes and no, unfortunately ibn Ishaq’s work was lost and all we have are some extracts written by ibn Hisham who died more than half a century after ibn Ishaq.’

‘What about the Hadiths?’

‘The Hadiths are a collection of sayings and doings attributed to the Prophet. They were transmitted dependable eye witnesses, these include the story of the compilation of the Koran, and the sayings of the Prophet’s disciples. Again the problem is that they were compiled and edited more than two hundred years after the Prophet’s. Unfortunately many were invented at a time when there were no books when leaders of all kinds made up sayings to suit their own ends. Finally Bukhari compiled six supposedly authentic collections of Hadiths.’

‘There must have been a good deal of historic reference to the Prophet from other sources?’

‘There is of course written Islamic law, dating back to about a century after the Prophet’s death. This was in fact derived from law under the Ummayyads that became Islamic law. Then the first Koranic quotations appeared on coins and inscriptions towards the end of the seventh century.’

‘So they confirm what was written in the Koran?’

‘No these vary with the canonical text, which shows the text of the Koran had not yet been fixed.’

‘And other than Arab references?’

‘Well, the earliest Greek source we have, speaks of Muhammad being alive in 634, which is two years after his death according to Muslim tradition.’

‘In Jerusalem we visited the Dome of the Rock, can you tell us how Jerusalem came to play a role in Islam?’

‘Palestine played an important role in Muslim traditions, because of the Prophets dream, but not only that, with the expansion of the

Arabs Palestine became a target and the religious aspect was motive for its conquest.'

The Professor look at his watch, 'My goodness I've been talking so much, we're going to be late they are waiting for us at the Museum.'

'Tomorrow the Museum is closed so perhaps you would like to arrange another visit?'

'Closed?'

'Yes Friday prayers.'

'Oh yes, of course.'

'It's an interesting story Friday prayers. It was a weekly event for the Prophet, and was transformed into a regular, public meeting, where the governor in the absence of the caliph presided. So it was a religious and administrative function because of the presence of a representative of political authority. This regular meeting therefore united the religious and political functioning of the community.

The early Muslim conquests transformed the Arabs and created the need for the organisation of Islam as a state religion and doctrine. Friday prayer meetings became one of the official pillars of Islam where a special class known as al-Qurra was given the task of spreading the knowledge of Islamic doctrine according to the Prophet and his message in the form of the Koran, which formed the base of the Arabs' doctrinal philosophy following the death of Islam's founder.'

A Jesuit in Angkor

DE LUSSAC INSISTED ON COMMENCING with a visit to the Royal Palace museum, it was just a short walk across the impeccable

maintained grass gardens from the Bougainvillea Hotel, which overlooked the Mekong. At the entrance to the museum Laura donned a long sarong to cover her legs and a tee shirt to cover her shoulders before entering the grounds as they wanted to visit the temple. An hour later, after admiring the magnificent statues of the Khmer Empire, they paused for a moment on a veranda facing the courtyard gardens seated in the wicker armchairs and shaded from the sun by the broad roof. The temperature was perfect; a slight breeze moved the bright green palm fronds and the silence was broken only by the sound of birds chirping in the background.

They had slept well, but waking up had been an effort, the flight to Phnom Penh from Amman with the changes in Bahrain and Bangkok had been long. They immediately discovered the Cambodian capital was much noisier and considerably warmer than Israel. A sharp spell of cold weather had hit Israel in the few days prior to their departure when the temperature had fallen to zero in Jerusalem.

Laura had progressed with the translation work whilst O'Connelly cogitated over the exchanges they had had with de Lussac, who seemed unstable and difficult to reassure even though progress had been made. He hoped that the firm assurance he had from Alfred Mann as to the publication of de Lussac's work, once the translation had been completed, would satisfy him.

De Lussac had picked them up from the airport the previous evening and dropped them off at their hotel, where pleading fatigue they had called it a day. That morning he had been charming, providing them with a guided tour of Phnom Penh and running commentary on the history of Khmer Empire and South East Asia in general. O'Connelly was struck by similarity of the monumental works and the rise and fall of empires, so familiar, not only in the Orient, but in other regions of the world so far apart in distance and in time.

The Khmers rivals were the Burmese and Thais to the West, the Vietnamese to the East and the vast empire of China to the north. South East Asia with its natural barriers composed of mountainous jungles and vast rivers had throughout history been a brake on the movement of armies, unlike the more open arid regions of the Middle East, but the jungles had not prevented the religions of northern India from penetrating and dominating East Asia thought and the destiny of its peoples.

De Lussac was not engaged in research at the well known sites of the ancient Khmer capital of Angkor, but in the exploration of lesser know sites and vestiges of the country's past civilisations and answers to the multiple questions linked to the sudden the collapse of the a vast and powerful empire that had prospered over hundreds of years.

That afternoon as O'Connelly braced himself for more probing questions as to the real or imaginary problems that troubled de Lussac, but another subject was to trouble him. But the first visit on their agenda was to the Genocide Museum. O'Connelly had seen other forms of hell where man had inflicted torture and death on his fellow men, the first he remembered had been Auschwitz-Birkenau, then there were the prisoner of war camps in Vietnam, Mandela's prison in South Africa, not forgetting Alcatraz, a different kind of hell, which he could contemplate every morning from his apartment when in San Francisco.

The strange banality of the museum left O'Connelly plunged into his own thoughts and as he walked past the boutique towards the exit he was surprised not to see souvenir skulls for sale. Later he learnt that rocket launchers covered be fired for two hundred dollars a shot at the Killing Fields outside of the city or machine guns fired for a dollar a round.

Genocide was as old as man, as the history he was discovering of the Middle East, even the Bible preached the virtues of wiping out the Canaanites to deliver the Promised Land to the followers of Joshua. What was it in man's soul that drove him to wantonly kill his fellow men and what stopped his victims from resisting such slaughter, walking like sheep to the sacrifice, and what stopped observers from intervening.

He recalled how as a reported during the war in Yugoslavia he had watched the events take place Srebrenica, in living colour on his hotel room TV in Belgrade, Serbs separating men from women and children under the eyes of a Dutch contingent of the UN. He remembered how so painfully obvious what their fate was to be, yet not one nation, not one single nation, had made the slightest effort to intervene. A short gun battle would have surely passed the message, but seven thousand innocent Muslim men were led to the slaughter, without a single finger being lifted, under the eyes of blond, muscular, macho, European troops, in their impeccably clean, freshly pressed, uniforms, clear eyed and well fed, frozen into inaction by their hierarchy and inability of the European governments to act.

The Genocide Museum was a necessary, but sinister tourist attraction, as was Auschwitz or the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, though it was impossible for ordinary, free, men and women visitors to relate to the terrifying reality of the past, when men and women sent other men and women to their atrocious deaths.

They had lunched in a small restaurant a few steps across the road from the gate of the museum. De Lussac spoke of his irritation with Mann as O'Connelly tried to smooth his ruffled feathers, carefully studying the man who obviously suffered some kind of paranoia. He had spent ten years of his life studying the history of Jerusalem and believed his work would lead to a peaceful solution between the Jews

and Muslims in their dispute over the site of their respective holy places.

In spite of that his writings barely concealed his contempt of the Muslims, more precisely the Palestinians, who were the historical co-owners of Canaan ever since the dawn of historical times before the legendary arrival of Moses. The Jews had been overwhelmed by the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Romans, until the Holy Land was conquered by the Arabs, Crusaders, Ottomans and finally the British.

Seen far from Israel, O'Connelly saw that the Jews historical claim could only be considered tenuous. The return of the Jews to Israel was a consequence of centuries of persecution in Europe. Their resettlement in the Holy Land had commenced in 1881 when they had been given permission to do so by the Ottoman government at a time when the population of Jews in Palestinian was no more than a few thousand, an insignificant number compared to the Palestinian Arab population who had lived in the land for at least two millennia.

De Lussac spoke little of his work in Cambodia, his attention was focused on the publication of his work he now called *La source du Temple*, the word source meaning both spring and origin in French. He complained he had received little feed back concerning Mann as to the publication of the work and the translation.

'We have several tasks ahead of us Isaac, one the work has to be condensed, two it has to be translated into English and three it has to be published and four we have to find a distributor.'

'I'm not sure about Mann,' de Lussac replied.

'Well we've signed an agreement with him.'

'I don't think he is capable of publishing my work.'

'The agreement doesn't necessarily mean that his trust publishes it, though they have published a good number of books related to

religion. Mann has excellent connections in the Jewish world and that's where the principal market is, especially in the USA.'

De Lussac did not seem convinced he appeared to be extremely nervous if not agitated.

'I have received nothing concerning the abridgement of the work.'

'We are working on it, Laura has several people working on it.'

'Specialists?'

'No, I don't think we need specialists Isaac, you're the specialist, our people are working on the literary content, the subject is not being touched.'

'I have to see the drafts.'

'Of course.'

'When?'

'We have a draft of the first three chapters with us, Laura will go over it with you.'

That seemed to calm him down and O'Connelly was relieved to be able to return to their planned visit to Angkor, the capital of the ancient Khmer civilization at Siem Reap the next day, two hundred kilometres to the north. De Lussac had made the travel arrangements, there were three possibilities he explained, by plane, boat or by road. He had opted for the latter, like that they would see the Cambodian country side, the boat was crowded and uncomfortable and he had assumed they had seen enough of airports after the journey from Tel-Aviv.

The Mekong Express, a first class bus service, left Phnom Penh at seven the next morning from the operator's office, a short taxi ride from the Bougainvillea Hotel. The journey would take about five hours explained the charming hostess who seemed not more the sixteen years old and dressed in a traditional style wild silk uniform with an orchid in her hair. They settled in and once they were under way O'Connelly saw de Lussac one row ahead of them and to the left

sifting through the draft that Laura had given him the previous evening.

Both O'Connelly and Laura had now spent a month of intensive work reviewing the history of the Holy Land and the Jews, sifting through archaeological reports and visiting sites, as well as speaking to numerous experts in Israel, England, Egypt and Syria. Their preliminary conclusion was that de Lussac's work was based on research in ancient texts that made reference to disputable direct or indirect eyewitness accounts as the site of the Temple linked to the different levels of the cisterns measured by the Palestinian Survey Fund one hundred years previously, references to springs and aqueducts, and lengthy descriptions of the purification rites for the Temple's priests, as well as long references to the history of the Holy Land since the time of Christ.

However, his theory relied entirely on the fact that the cisterns were positioned in cascade, which was logical since water according to the laws of gravity flows downhill, and the aqueduct, which supplied the cisterns with water from Solomon's Pool situated at an altitude of about that of Jerusalem in the hills to the south of Bethlehem, entered the Esplanade near its surface. However, there was in fact no original discovery, no new archaeological evidence, no new texts, no new scientific evidence, no new survey, simply the work of the British army engineers carried out by candlelight in the tunnels of beneath the Haram, more than one hundred years before using the rudimentary measuring techniques of those times .

Was his theory justified, it was impossible to say, there was a certain logic to his theory, but it would be clearly impossible to investigate the underground hydraulic system for years, decades or maybe centuries to come. His theory therefore remained conjecture, a sop to the imagination of certain extremist Orthodox Jews. It would

certainly do no harm to publish it, if it was not taken up as a political tool to justify certain extremist actions.

The most important question for O'Connelly was whether he could build his novel around the story of the Temple, he had already accumulated a substantial quantity of notes and documents. Little by little his story was taking form, the subject was rich in history, Israel was filled with contradictions and protagonists, de Lussac had all the makings of a central character. He now realised he had little need for de Lussac, his novel would be built around the story of the Temple, but where it would lead was still unclear.

During the two scheduled stops, they got down to stretch their legs and O'Connelly observed de Lussac becoming more and more introspective, his face a closed mask.

At the Siem Reap bus station they were met by Jean-Louis Claudel, a French archaeologist working with the French team on a restoration programme. Claudel announced they would be staying at his guest house a couple of kilometres from the centre of the city.

The house was off the main road that linked the city centre to the airport in a district where instant wealth was visible in the form of luxury ten or twenty room architect designed villas bordered surrounded by unmade roads, on the corner of each road were smoking piles of garbage; the refuse disposal system had not caught up with the creation of private wealth.

The guest house was a large modern villa of two levels with, as far as O'Connelly could make out, eight to ten guest rooms. Claudel, his family and their staff lived in the rear part of the house. As an archaeologist his salary was modest, but the income from the guest house enabled him to live comfortably, most of his guests being French tourists travelling individually, the staff, chamber maids and cleaners, lived in and certainly not paid more than a few dollars a week plus food and board. O'Connelly later discovered another form

of clientele when an expensive SUV arrived with a Cambodian, probably a businessman or official, and his girl friend, renting a vacant room for an hour or so.

De Lussac took his leave, he rented a house on the other side of the Siem Reap River in a residential district near to the down town area, he barely said goodbye and seemed to have almost totally clammed up. They spent the evening with Claudel and his Thai wife, he was amusing and talkative, a fluent Khmer speaker who was well informed on local politics and gossip. He recounted how speculative investors had built an over supply of up market hotels in and around Siem Reap, many of which were half empty. O'Connelly prompted him to talk of de Lussac, it was not difficult and Claudel told him how he lived frugally with his handicapped sister in a modest house, he had few friends and his only interest was his work for an American society whose interests seemed more related to religion than archaeology.

The next day they took breakfast with de Lussac at the guest house, he was not very talkative and announced he would be busy but would spend the morning looking through the drafts. The couple set out for Angkor Wat in a tuk-tuk, a three wheeled motorised rickshaw. Claudel assured them the driver knew the site well, he was reliable and spoke good English, but O'Connelly soon discovered that the driver's conversation was limited to about a dozen words, however, he was friendly and willing, he could read the map and his sign language were efficient.

The wonders of Angkor were a pole of attraction for tourists from all over the world and O'Connelly was a little disappointed to discover that they were amongst the two or three thousand daily visitors to the site. He was consoled however, by the dimension of the site was, so vast that they were alone in most of the huge outlying temples, the majority of tourists being on short trips visiting Angkor

Wat and its surrounding temples. He was one hundred and fifty years too late, after all it was impossible to complain about tourists in Jerusalem or at the Pyramids for that matter. O'Connelly needed little confirmation to realise that it was impossible to be alone in the world at the beginning of the 21st century.

That evening with no news from de Lussac and they decided to eat in the down town area. Laura's guidebook recommended the Khmer Kitchen, which owed its fame to the reported visit of a certain Mick Jagger, as for the food it was less sensational than the rock star.

Siem Reap was rebuilding its sewage system; it was the dry season and the quantity of dust raised by the motodops and tuk-tuks was choking. The city centre was not unlike any fashionable tourist site, where a wildly free market economy prevailed, restaurants of every kind, beggars, thieves, armless and legless musicians and souvenir shops, it could have been Key West. There were expatriates, adventurers and itinerants, all trying to make their fortunes, in every kind of enterprise from French restaurants to guest houses, from banana leaf paper to elephant shit paper and every tourist service imaginable.

In despair they stopped at a traveller's bookshop, rather a more Cambodian run down version of Shakespeare's bookshop. In it O'Connelly found a copy of George Orwell's 'Burma Days' written in 1927 when he had served in the Imperial Police, he hoped it would give him an insight to the pre-Boeing age. They returned to the guest house a little bewildered and disappointed by their first impressions of Siem Reap compared to the splendours of Angkor's past they had witnessed in its ruined temples.

O'Connelly switched on the TV and watched CNN news; the headlines reported the Hamas take over of Gaza, threatening to turn Palestine into another war zone. O'Connelly could not help thinking

that Alfred Mann had chosen a good cause for his trust, it would assure people such as him of work for many generations to come.

The Hamas landslide victory in the elections eighteen months earlier had resulted in shooting in the streets and now a schism in Palestinian politics. Alfred Mann's vision of peace, de Lussac's Temple theory seemed more far fetched than ever. Politicians come and go and Israel will inevitably be...what? Destroyed! Thrown out! Defeated! So many tragic possibilities, in a scenario that was changing at a startling speed.

The next day they set out again, seeking a lesser known part of the huge site. An article in the local English language press had announced satellite images from NASA's telescopes showed that Angkor had been larger than modern day Los Angeles. Whilst Laura scrambled amongst the fallen lintels of an isolated and unnamed temple, O'Connelly sat alone in the stifling heat high up on its steep flank, he looked out at the dense green forest below and asked himself, as had so many others before him, what had caused the rise of civilisation, the availability of resources and the desire to become rich and powerful? And their fall? The loss of resources? The number of Asian tourists he had seen swarming over Angkor Wat was perhaps the evidence of the rise of their civilisation and the decline of Europe's.

It was two days since they had had no news from de Lussac. Was he sulking? When they returned to the guest house Claudel informed them that de Lussac had left for his site somewhere in the jungle to the west of the country in the hills nearby Battambang. He had left O'Connelly a note that he could join them at an address in Thailand in Koh Chang.

'What do you make of this?' he asked Claudel.

'Don't ask me, he's a very strange bird.'

'What's this address in Thailand?'

‘It’s not that far from here, he’s got friends there, Israeli’s.’

‘Israeli’s?’

‘Yes, some guy who’s made a lot of money.’

‘How do you get there?’

‘Depends, but you can take a boat to Battambang, then you go to the border where you can pick up a bus.’

‘How long does it take?’

‘If you leave tomorrow morning you’ll be there in the afternoon. I’ll get the boat tickets if you like.’

De Lussac was gone, they had seen enough of the extraordinary temples and Siem Reap held no more charm. O’Connelly looked at Laura who nodded yes.

The boat was not what they had expected. The tuk-tuk dropped them off at a filthy quay in a third world slum village on the banks of Lake Tonle Sap, the boat was not much better. O’Connelly cursed as the boat filled with back-packers and other lost travellers. Claudel had no doubt made a substantial profit on the tickets knowing he would never see them again. The lake crossing was pleasant enough, though they were cramped for leg room. The river to Battambang was another story, the water was low and the boat piloted by two Cambodians who looked more like Dayak pirates had the greatest difficulty in navigating the stream. It was late in the afternoon when they finally arrived in Battambang where they decided to stay the night.

There was nothing to see in the city after the wonders of Angkor and they took a meal at a restaurant nearby the hotel then after some inquiries booked a taxi to take them to the Thai-Cambodian border forty kilometres away.

They settled down in the room watching BBC news that reported the indignation of Muslims in the Middle East over a perceived insult to Mohammed in a recent Swedish film, riots had broke out in

Pakistan, Indonesia Iraq and Gaza in protestation. The Hamas threatened Swedes in Palestine and when a preview of the film was show on French TV France was in turn threatened. Islam was in its virulent phase with frequent bouts of fever when ever it perceived real or imaginary threats. No other world religion at the beginning of the 21st century was in such a state of ebullition. The State of Israel was vociferous, but not as a result of its religious convictions but out of concern for its survival.

The next morning they left for Thailand early, the taxi was air-conditioned and comfortable, but the road was unsurfaced and with the dry weather and the other vehicles they crossed or overtook raised huge clouds of ochre dust. In a village the driver stopped and took on an unforeseen passenger, an ex-Khmer Rouge leader still wearing the Pol Pot style uniform, a hard faced silent man. He dropped him in the last town before the border and told them how the Khmer Rouge leader's first marriage had been extremely turbulent, his wife spending the family income playing cards, finally the Khmer Rouge leader divorced her and married again, his second wife was not better than the first, resulting in daily domestic fights to the amusement of his neighbours, she too spent his money on playing cards all night.

They crossed the border without incident and found themselves in Thailand, the bus station they had been promised was non-existent, an open truck with bench seats took them to the next major town eighty kilometres away where they caught a regular bus line to Trat, a town facing the island of Koh Chang. A fast boat took them across the straits to the island where O'Connelly showed the address to one of the local taxi drivers. It was not exactly a taxi, but a small open pickup truck also with a long bench seat to either side; they picked up and dropped off anyone who hailed them without any regular stops. The driver not speaking a word of English made a sign they

climb in and set off, twenty minutes later he stuck his head out and pointed to a small road on the coast side.

Rolando Winkler had arrived in Thailand five years previously with what he called a small capital that he had wisely put to one side for a rainy day, the equivalent to half a million Euro, he had lost his shirt in the dotcom crash and done an overnighter to escape angry bankers and investors with all that remained in the company safe. Koh Chang had proved to be a good spot then, little known and about to take off as a new tourist destination in Thailand. He invested in a piece of real estate and built the first phase of his future resort. Winkler, an Argentinean Jew, held at least three passports, he had met Claudel on an exploratory trip to Angkor and had invited him to Koh Chang.

Claudel had told them that de Lussac visited the island from time to time, it was better than Sianoukville with its polluted waters and other dangers, however de Lussac's reason for visiting Thailand was not tourism, but the need to renew his two monthly visa and that of his sister. The problem was he could not subject his sister to such an arduous journey, however Winkler's connections with the local police overcame that difficulty.

Winkler told O'Connelly that de Lussac held an Israeli passport, which he used alternatively with his French passport for his Cambodian residence visa, thus saving the time it required for the paperwork at the Cambodian embassy in Bangkok. Each time he arrived in Koh Chang he simply handed in the passport with the expired visa and collected the other with a new visa, just needing to stay overnight.

Winkler ran he ran a small exclusive resort for wealthy scuba diving enthusiasts. He told O'Connelly his story over drinks that evening, 'I looked around and bought this piece of hillside land for a song. Nobody was interested then as there was no direct access to the

main White Sands Beach, only the small cove, where the jetty is now. My clients are up market diving enthusiasts, they can spend a night on one of the small islands I now own where I've built a few bungalows, they can relax in a real natural paradise. Some of the guys like to go down to the public beach for a change, there's a lot of Swedish girls down there...alone.'

The resort stood on a densely forested hillside between White Sands and Klong Prao. The guests arrived directly from Trat by speedboat from the ferry terminal a short ride from the airport. Winkler had got himself a good lawyer from the start, an American educated Thai who paid off all the local politicians.

'Who are those guys fishing down there on the jetty?'

'They're a couple of guards, Israelis, they keep an eye on things, you never know.'

Winkler's story was long; he had a studied business and finance at the University of Haifa, before his first attempt at business in Israel after the Camp David agreement when he hoped for a boom in business with the Palestinians. He was out of luck, too optimistic, not sufficiently oriental in his ways, and after a series of difficulties he gave up and returned to Argentina, where he invested in the import of computer equipment. His business prospered, but anticipating one of Argentina's periodic economic crises he left for Miami where he became involved in telecoms. Three years later with the new technology boom he returned to Argentina setting up an Internet services company, but when the dotcom crash he was forced to make a hurried exit for Tel-Aviv, where an Israeli passport gave him protection from the various creditors who pursued him accusing him of fraud. Thailand seemed a good refuge, one of the countries in South East Asia where Israeli nationals were accepted, and he took of once again awaiting for the storm to pass.

‘We only take direct bookings mostly word of mouth and a couple of specialised agencies, no local tourists. You have seen the only road we have is the service road with security guards at our discreet entrance off the island road. No advertising. No local girlfriends, he said laughing, this is a serious establishment.’

‘I would have thought there were few security problems in Thailand.’

‘Not now, you’re forgetting the Muslim south, only yesterday three people were killed there and with the cartoon story tensions are running high. We’ve quit a few guests from Israel.’

The next morning they decided to explore a little taking a taxi to Lonely Beach, the name had a nice sound to it. The beach was small, in the middle was a relatively upmarket hotel where travellers could be lonely in comfort, further along the beach were a few forlorn huts for back packers. In all it was about five hundred meters long with effectively few people. The White Sands beach seemed more attractive with the long clean beach they had seen from Winkler’s resort, it was lined with small cafés bars and hotels. Behind the islands beaches was a backdrop of jungle covered hills, the coast road was separated by a broad fringe of palm and leafy mangrove trees from the beach area.

They selected a spot and settled down to enjoy the scenery and clam after the previous day’s hectic journey. Laura stretch out on the white sand to improve her tan and O’Connelly decided to stretch his legs with a walk along the seashore. He reached a rocky promontory near the south end of the beach by the worn wooden huts, described by a sign as bungalows and the young Scandinavians taking a break from their endless cold and dark northern climate, where a swarthy foreigner looked at O’Connelly and scowled, surprising him by waving his arm in sharp movements. Almost too late O’Connelly saw a fishing line.

‘Sorry.’

The swarthy man pulled in his line without the least sign or gesture in his direction. O’Connelly deciding to be friendly, he smiled and nodded. There were two men, one about fiftyish and the other in his thirties, they looked like Middle Easterners or perhaps light skinned Indians though they were very thick set. The older of the two looked at him, his face seemed hard and unfriendly, his eyes were surprisingly light coloured in contrast to his swarthy bearded complexion.

‘Caught anything?’ asked O’Connelly.

The man nodded to a plastic bucket. O’Connelly looked in there was a stone the size of a fist.

‘I can’t see anything.’

The man thrust his hand into the bucket and pulled out dark ugly looking fish.

‘Are you staying at Lonely Beach?’

‘Yes.’

‘On holiday?’

‘Yes.’

His guttural accent seemed familiar, Arab perhaps.

‘Where are you from?’

‘Israel.’

‘Ah, Tel-Aviv?’

‘No, Haifa.’

The man relaxed a little and they exchanged a few casual words as tourists do.

‘So good luck with your fishing, shalom.’

‘Shalom,’ the man smiled thinly.

O’Connelly returned to Laura and told her of his encounter.

‘Funny meeting a couple of Israeli’s here.’

‘Yeah, funny,’ he replied pensively. Israelis were cautious about where they travelled avoiding Muslim countries. Thailand seemed a good destination non-Muslim, thought O’Connelly, wondering about the route they took, they themselves had flown from Amman; Winkler would no doubt provide him with the answer.

Back at the hotel when he the men he had seen on the beach Winkler laughed. He told O’Connelly they were from his security staff, it was their day off and as usual they had gone fishing. Later that evening the two security men turned up with two of the ugliest girls he had ever seen, they had picked them up in a massage parlour. Winkler laughed remarking that their feet were especially designed for working in the rice paddies and when he was accused of being contemptuous he replied the truth could not be contemptuous.

That day O’Connelly has seen how certain locals lived and only thirty metres from the coast road, the only road on the island, the same distance from the beach, in miserable huts surround by the plastic refuse, the rejects of civilisation, hidden from the environmentally conscious Scandinavian and Germans tourists, enjoying hedonistic massages and manicures under the leafy palms fronds from the wives of the disinherited, or strolling hand in hand with their daughters before the girls became worn and ugly. The luckier daughters would win a lottery ticket to Düsseldorf or Essen, returning as queen bees to be massaged and fawned over by their unfortunate sisters.

They decided to eat out and took a taxi to the Taj Palace. O’Connelly ordered a chicken Vindaloo, it was hot, powerful and required a good quantity of cold beer to wash it down. The waiter, a Nepalese, told them the restaurant was owned by a Thai born Sikh, he himself had briefly escaped the political throes in Kathmandu, where the oppressive king fought an even more vicious Maoist movement. The young man’s ambition was Europe.

Outside of Winkler's resort they had the greatest difficulty in getting themselves understood, he told them that the island was more than ten years behind Koh Samui and twenty behind Phuket, and so much the better thought O'Connelly.

The next day they left for a small island that was to all intents and purposes Winkler's own private island where they were to some diving. They were joined in the boat by Ofir, an Israeli of about twenty five. That evening they spoke of Israel and the conversation drifted to France and Israel.

'They're Jews!' retorted Ofir when O'Connelly spoke of the Jews in France.

'Jews?'

'They're not Israeli's, not the same thing, a completely different mentality, soft, coddled by Europe. We're Orientals,' he said laughing. 'In any case the Jews in France are Sephardic,' he added with a hint of disdain.

'Not all.'

'Most.'

'I spent my three years military service in a front line special combat unit.'

'Front line?'

'Yes fighting in the Lebanon. Fourteen of my friends died. I saw a lot of dead bodies and blood whilst other guys of my age were enjoying themselves in soft army jobs, you know computers and programming, surrounded by girls, when they left they were snapped up by civilian IT firms.'

'And you?'

'I had learnt how to kill, not much use in civilian life, so I went back to university, languages, my Arabic was not bad, same with my English, I also did history, to try to understand more about Israel I suppose. Interesting but not much money in it.'

‘So what will you do now?’

‘As you see I’m passing the time in archaeology, what I really want to do is go to Australia, Israel has changed.’

‘Changed?’

‘More corrupt. The people have changed only money counts. There’s one million Russians.’

‘Jews?’

‘Not all of them, they’re clever. It’s funny before they came the churches were empty, now they’re full.’

‘There’s a lot of Arabs too.’

‘One million.’

‘Do Israeli Arabs do military service?’

‘The Bedouins like the Druze can do military service if they want to, it’s not compulsory for them, but Palestinians are excluded from military service.’

‘What do you mean Bedouins?’

‘Those who still led nomadic lives, herders.’

‘Ah, I see those you can see camping in the Negev.’

‘That’s it.’

‘And your family came from where?’

‘A Ukrainian grandfather and an Iranian grandmother on one side, and a Czech grandfather and German grandmother on the other.’

‘Quite a mix.’

‘We’re like that in Israel.’

‘So going back to archaeology, what’s your position?’

‘I suppose you mean am I a Bible archaeologist or a real archaeologist,’ he said laughing. ‘For me the answer lies somewhere in the middle of the road, I don’t try to demolish the Bible like Finkelstein.’

‘I don’t think he does that.’

‘Well you know what I mean. Personally I don’t believe in God. God would not have made the Holocaust; if he did then he didn’t care much about us. My grandfather’s family was deported in early 1944 to Auschwitz. Where was God during the Holocaust? How could we have merited such a punishment?’

O’Connelly shrugged there was little he could say.

‘If you are asking me whether I am a religious person the answer is no. If you are asking am I a Jew the answer is yes. I respect tradition, that includes the synagogue, but I do not pray. The prayers of my grandfather and his family went unanswered in Auschwitz. God does not exist.’

‘How do you feel about the Arabs?’

‘At university I made a good friend, a Druze, he doesn’t like being called an Arab, he feels Israeli, speaks fluent Hebrew, and wants to be recognised as an Arab speaking Muslim Israeli and nothing less. When we went to the army we ended up in the same unit together. Somebody called him a Bedouin and got a bloody nose for it. He’s studied Aramaic and Assyrian. If ever he prays, it’s for peace, so that he can enjoy life, he’s like me, not too sure about what happens after.’

Ofir was well built, five-eleven, his English was good though with an Israeli accent. He told O’Connelly his family was closer to being poor than anything else and that he had been brought up in a kibbutz, which had failed with the kibbutz system in general. His parents could not pay for an education in the USA like the privileged young Israeli’s who spoke with good American accents. He was a determined man with ideals and it was clear he was made of a much stronger fibre than any European.

‘I want to catch up on the time lost in the army, enjoy myself with the girls.’

‘Maybe in one hundred years we can live in peace...maybe we’ll not be here.’

‘It doesn’t look good.’

‘Do you know that some people are already building bunkers in their homes against a nuclear attack?’

‘Are they?’

‘Yes, they’re spending tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of dollars to build them!’

‘People are afraid of Iran?’

‘Of course, you know some Israelis argue that the time for diplomacy is over, they believe Iran could have the bomb very soon, four or five years, even less. The fear of a nuclear attack has almost become an obsession, two thirds of Israelis believe that if Iran has an atomic bomb, it would use it to destroy Israel.’

‘And the Palestinians?’

‘It’s not ordinary people, it’s their leaders, the Hamas and Hezbollah, they’re well organised with political, military and social structures. They get money from Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia. The poor Palestinians have large families and are given help in exchange for a son who will become a militant, trained to fight and perhaps end up in an Israeli prison, like the 11,000 Palestinians behind bars today, if he is not killed. They give money to the Bedouins to, so that they support the Palestinians rather than becoming Israelis. For my self I keep away from politics, politicians are all corrupt, not only the Arabs, but also our leaders.’

Ofir was not against de Lussac’s water theory, but he did not concur with his positioning of the Temple site. He believed things were complex and spoke of the water wheels in Syria that could have raised water to the surface of the Esplanade. O’Connelly wondered if it was just to be different. Ofir explained that the original cisterns

were natural faults and fissures in the bedrock that had been progressively opened by man as Jerusalem grew.

‘Interesting, but why so big and so many cisterns,’ asked O’Connelly. Then as the thought passed his mind he asked: ‘I wonder if it’s possible to visit the cisterns?’

‘It’s very difficult unless you are a Muslim, and then you would have to get permission from the Waqf.’

‘It’s a great pity; it would be really useful for giving a convincing description to get a first hand look.’

Ofir shrugged.

‘What about the stables?’

‘Same thing, it’s been transformed into a mosque today.

‘There’s no secret tunnel?’ he asked only half jokingly.

‘There *is* a tunnel, nothing mysterious or secret, but it’s under lock and key. A few years back it caused an outbreak of riots when the Arabs heard noises made by our archaeologist and said we were desecrating the Haram by secret excavations.’

There was a long pause as O’Connelly digested his disappointment.

‘Maybe there is a way...,’ Ofir finally said. ‘You remember I talked about an Israeli Arab friend, perhaps he could help us. He’s a Druze but like me very sceptical about religion. We studied history together. He thinks like me. I’ll speak to him.’

Philistine and Babylonian Gods

‘TO UNDERSTAND JUDEA AT THE TIME the Romans destroyed the Temple it is necessary to examine the reasons why Christianity came into existence.’

‘Oh,’ exclaimed Laura, on the defensive given her Irish background, even though she was a rare churchgoer and her Jewish ancestors were more folklore to her than anything else she had inherited a rebels sensitivity to religious questions.

‘Jesus Christ was a revolutionary,’ said Shlomo.

‘A kind of Che Guevara I suppose!’

‘Yes, in a way of speaking he was.’

‘I didn’t know revolutionaries existed at that time.’

‘They were not called revolutionaries, they were wise men, messiahs, saviours and many other things. They did not promise riches, that was impossible, but what they could promise was a better after life.’

‘Didn’t existing religions promise that?’

‘No, Judaism was a harsh religion with a dominating, intimidating and vengeful god. The High priests and his priestly servants ruled with a rod of iron, demanding that the Jews following an almost impossibly strict way of life requiring constant purification, sacrificial offerings and forgiveness.’

‘Sacrificial?’

‘Yes, I will come back to that, first I will talk of a Judea that had been Hellenized since the time of Alexander the Great, that is over a period of three hundred years, the elite and educated spoke Greek , the Romans had only recently arrived. This paved the way for the

development of Christianity since Greek culture and philosophy was more humanistic without an all powerful unique and intimidating, vengeful, God.'

'Compared to the god of the Jews?'

'Yes, in addition Imperial Rome brought change and what was then a more modern and materialistic vision of life, not forgetting the fact that life in the Roman Empire was for the majority was brief and arduous.'

'So this was a breeding ground for your revolutionaries.'

'It was an alternative to the domination of the Temple's priests. The Jesus cult simply asked its followers to sell their possessions and give to the poor, in return promising them the treasures of heaven. All they had to do was follow him. This was extraordinarily simple compared to the complex and demanding rites of Judaism, it was a revolutionary concept, no fasting, no sacrifices, no purification, Jesus offered the first form of universal democracy for all whether they were rich, poor, slave or sinner.'

Christianity offered brotherhood and friendship in a ritual gathering and shared dinner with philosophical discussions. Their God was a god of mercy and compassion, a god for all mankind, not just for the chosen people. He offered justice and salvation, in contrast to the angry demanding Jewish God.

Jesus was born at the time of Herod the Great a client king of the Romans. In modern terms Jesus was a revolutionary, a Che Guevara, with a philosophy that offered freedom and promised a place in paradise for the poor and the good. Today that could seem a simplistic vision, but in those times the poor were downtrodden by the rich, the powerful and above all the priests wielding the threat of eternal damnation by an all seeing and vengeful god. The Jews were the Chosen People living the Promised Land, all others were excluded as shown by the inscription at the entrance to the Temple

that threatened instant death to any non-Jew who dared entered their place of worship.

The burning question for many is whether in fact Jesus had ever existed. Evidently for Christians this is a question of faith, but for objective scientific researchers there is little or no evidence that Jesus existed apart from what is written in the Gospels. There are no records whatsoever of Jesus' life and trial in the Roman records of that time and the earliest of the New Testament writings dated at the best thirty years after presumed date of his death. No other references is made to Jesus in any other Roman history, literature or inscription during his lifetime, something astonishing considering that the Gospels speak of the great impact he had on those times.

The only other source from that time is that of Flavius Josephus in his *Antiquities*, a huge work that contains only two references one of which is a known insertion and the second one is very questionable. Josephus made several references to John the Baptist, but since his writings have come down to us from Christian sources the question of interpolation is always present. This mention is known as *Testimonium Flavianum*, a subject of much controversy since the seventeenth century.

One of the suspected interpolations occurs in the Greek Version of Josephus' *Antiquities*, where it is written; about this time there lived Jesus, a wise man if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not cease. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life. For the prophets of God had prophesied these and myriads of other

marvellous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still up to now, not disappeared.

Then in Agapios' Kitab al-Unwan, an Arabic summary of Antiquities dating from the 10th century mentions: At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.

High priests up to the time of the destruction of the Second Temple had been appointed by the Roman governor in Judea, something that many Jews considered as an unacceptable interference in their religion, many seeing the Temple and its institutions as an instrument of Roman power and domination. This resulted in growing political agitation and the appearance of politicised religious movements such as the Christians, which was not perceived as a new religion, since Jesus was a Jew, but a revitalised and more open version of Judaism. At that time other sects had appeared for similar reasons such as the Essenes of the Dead Sea scrolls, who had spoken of a miracle worker though without naming him.

The destruction of the Second Temple had the effect of destroying the seat of Judaism, with its head, the High Priest together with the priesthood and its role as guardians of Jewish religious doctrine and its scared rituals. The consequence was a collapse of Judaism into factions with no one guiding leader.

It appears that sometime around 50AD the followers of Jesus in Antioch formed the first Christian cult. There were several cults that gradually merged into one around the emerging Gospels and Epistles

that were to become the canon of the church in the form of the New Testament. The gospel writers were converts to the new Christ cults.

Christianity at the outset was a Jewish religion, but soon a Christianity broke away to become a distinct religion as it became the religion of Rome that had at one point considered Judaism before accepting the Jesus cult that was much more attractive to them. Judaism had too many constraints including circumcision. Christianity was a religion all could be a part of, without regard to ethnic origins or circumstances of social status, accidents of birth or location.

The new movement, centred on the person of Jesus, was based on a model of that time, adopting and adding to the concepts and myths drawn from pre-existing religions and traditions. Life at that time of Christianity's birth was steeped in mythology, superstition and miracles. For example crucifixion is linked to a number of Greek myths, such as for Dionysus, who is shown wearing a crown of ivy, dressed a purple, and given gall to drink before his crucifixion.

The town where all Christians believe Jesus lived as a youth, Nazareth, was invented by Emperor Constantine's mother in the fourth century, who in her passion for building Christian churches in Palestine, gave the name to an existing village where she decided to build a basilica dedicated to Jesus.

The average Christian accepts the four Gospels as such, but there were many gospels, most were lost, but others have survived. If the canonic Gospels are examined it can be seen that Mark does not speak of the birth of Jesus as the legend of the manger in Bethlehem had not yet been integrated into the Christian story. Then Matthew drew on Mark's gospel, followed by Luke who did likewise. As to John he wrote his gospel in the early years of the second century, four generations after the events

Hellenic intellectualism in the Byzantine world gave birth to several Jesus movements that were transformed into cults, which were in conflict with each other developing heresies that spread with each local bishop having his own concepts of the new religion trying to impose them on his followers and others.

The bishoprics of the main sects were situated in Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Alexandria and Carthage, which continued to wrangle with each other over dogma.

Emperor Constantine and his co-emperor Lucinius prepared the Edict of Milan in 313AD, through a series of letters, which in effect of legalized Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. Constantine himself was not a Christian, but he was baptised on his death bed, and his wife was a devout Christian. After Constantine had become the emperor of the whole Roman Empire, he convened the Council of Nicea in 325AD that resulted in the Apostolic Creed and the Catholic Church controlled by the emperor and organised on the lines of the government of the then Roman Empire, and the seat of the Church was established in Rome.

Constantine gave Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea, the task of preparing scriptures for his new festival of the resurrection, called Easter. Eusebius, one of the most notorious historical revisionists of ancient times, concerned by the contradictions in the profusion of texts, prepared a compilation that was to become the standard bible of the Eastern Church. The Bible for the Roman was compiled by Bishop Jerome of Dalmatia, at the demand of Damasus, the Bishop of Rome. His choice of New Testament works was governed by the works he'd already translated and standardized, which became known as the Vulgate Bible the standard Bible of the Roman Catholic Church until the sixteenth century.

The Christian Bible is filled with errors and contradictions, though not all of them are accidental or poor translations. The problem was

that the writers of the original documents used as source material often revised earlier material, which in turn, had been revised, then their work was revised again and again. With the problem of even more revisions were introduced, and almost always to suit some political or religious idea.

The result is that it is impossible to know whether the words read have the same meaning as those intended by the original writers intended, in their long lost original texts, the is further complicated by the fact that many documents used were many generations removed from the originals. Therefore it can be reasonably assumed that the Bible as we know it today is the result of the innumerable revisions, translations, interpolations and cuts made by hundreds of people over centuries to countless lost documents.

The Christian Church on which present day European philosophy and civilization is built was founded on the approximation of events that took place two thousand years ago in the eastern Mediterranean and the decisions of a vanished Roman civilisation based on religious concepts of nomadic Semitic tribesmen and their god Jehovah, whose origins are lost in the mist of time somewhere in pagan Mesopotamia.

Ancient Egypt

THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS ARRIVED on the banks of the Nile from the vast, rolling, savannah like region with its abundant vegetation and game that was slowly transformed into the Sahara Desert commencing about 7,000 years ago. At that time the climate was changing and the savannah like climate was becoming drier. For

thousands of years the Sahara had been the home of vast herds of animals as can be seen in Kenya and the Serengeti today with seasonal rains that favoured the same species of animals. As the desert crept in, the human populations moved northwards to the Mediterranean following the game, to the west to the Atlas Mountains and in the east to the Nile.

‘In many areas of the Sahara paintings and engravings of wild animals, domesticated cattle, sheep, goats and humans are found. It’s like a lost world in the middle of a desert that’s so arid that only highly specialised animals can survive. These paintings show that prehistoric cultures thrived, hunting game and herding domesticated cattle, a lost people that has left practically no trace of their existence.’

‘Extraordinary.’

‘Not really, you only have to look at Darfur on the television to see what happened when the climate becomes drier, of course the population density was considerably less, they were hunter gatherers and herdsmen who were amongst the first to domesticate cattle.’

‘So they were the first Egyptians?’

‘Yes, you could say that, the banks of the Nile offered a refuge for those pushed by drought and their struggle for food and water ended, with their cattle and pottery making skills they became sedentary.’

‘So the settlers their animals and skills founded the base for the future civilisation.’

‘Yes, archaeological evidence shows that there was a first attempt at settlement on the Nile as early as 11,000BC.’

‘But where did they come from?’

‘Not so quick, if we examine modern man or to be precise *Homo sapiens sapiens* as opposed to his predecessors then we can see evidence of human activity in north-eastern Africa since the Middle Pleistocene Period.’

‘How many years ago is that for us non-specialists?’

‘The Middle and Upper Palaeolithic was between 90,000 to 10,000 years ago,’ he said smiling. ‘Now if I can go on, slowly hunter-gatherers migrated into the prehistoric Nile Valley, forced from the lake and savannah regions of the Eastern Sahara by climatic changes. Traces of these early peoples still survive as rock carvings along the Nile, just like can be seen across all of North Africa and especially in nearby Libya.’

‘So these nomadic hunter-gatherers settled along the edges of the Nile Valley, that’s when they started to become farmers?’

‘Yes amongst these were Neolithic cultures we call the Badarian, Amratian and Gerzean in Upper Egypt, but all this happened very, very, slowly over maybe one thousand years. It was probably one of the most important events in the history of man who had up to that time been a hunter-gatherer, a nomad following the game, transforming men into farmers and villagers.’

‘I thought that happened in the Fertile Crescent?’

‘Quite right, this was happening in many places around the world including the Middle East with its Fertile Crescent. But North Africa was a different because at that time an inexorable change had started as the climate became dryer. The vegetation that had supported great herds of game started to die, the savannah slowly giving way to and over the next few thousand years the Sahara Desert came into being. Humans were pushed relentlessly in all directions by the encroaching drought and sand, to the Mediterranean in the North, the Atlantic in the West and the Nile in the East, this great life giving river watered by the mountains of East Africa that in addition was much more temperate than the Nile Valley of today

The Lower Nile and its Delta is at the crossroads between Africa and the Levant. We can therefore imagine that this land would have

been inhabited by men from prehistoric times until Egyptian civilization flowered with the early dynasties.'

'So climate change was at the root of this transformation.'

'Yes, as has often been the case in the history of man.'

'Has this happened often in the Sahara region?'

'Many times, if we stick to modern humans there was a long period when the Sahara had a very dry climate that did not allow humans to live there. During this time men migrated to the Nile Valley, but about 11,000 years ago, the Nile went through what is called the *Wild Nile* and a new wet period in the Sahara with people returning to a renewed savannah.'

'The Wild Nile?'

'Yes at the end of the last Ice Age the glaciers on the mountains of Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda melted, that would be about 11,000 years ago, and the water from these melted glaciers poured northwards to Lake Victoria and to the Blue and White Nile Valleys, as a result terrible floods washed away all early settlements destroying the earliest beginnings of human life in Egypt. We call this the "Wild Nile" and it went on for about 3,000 years making human presence impossible, after which commenced the dry period that we know today.'

'So from about 7000BC until the Sahara had completely dried up many of those people migrated to the Nile valley.'

'Right, where the conditions had become more favourable with less heavy flooding.'

'Those pre-dynastic peoples you mentioned, who were they?'

'Well in 1923 archaeologists discovered tombs of the Badari culture that represented the earliest known Egyptian society dating from about 4500BC Egypt. Hunting no longer played an important role with the domestication of cattle, sheep, pigs and goats, plus crops of wheat and barley. Metal was introduced together with

basketry, pottery, weaving, and leather. So you can see this formed a transitional phase between Stone Age nomadic tribal life and early civilization.’

The First Egyptians

THE EL KEBIR WAS IN FACT Tripoli’s former Hilton, refurbished following Gaddafi’s coming to terms with governments of the USA, the UK and France on the country’s implication of the Lockerbie Pan Am terrorist bombing attack, and the UTA French airline DC10 that resulted in the deaths of more than five hundred innocent people. Libya had renounced terrorism and had theoretically returned to the fold of civilised nations.

O’Connelly had finally decided it would be a good idea to Florence Bousquet’ in Libya, where she was making a reconnaissance for the Arte documentary, he was curious to learn more about how the hunter gathers of the Sahara had settled on the banks of the Nile some thousands of years before the rise of Egyptian civilization.

However, another subject had influenced his decision to make the trip to Libya, Alfred Mann had spoken to him of de Lussac’s latest antics, if the story was true he had been talking to a certain Ronny Gould, a former City businessman and financier who had close links with Gaddafi. Gould’s Jewish family had fled Libya to England, when King Idriss had been overthrown by Colonel Gaddafi in 1964, where his father had bought a printing business. The business had grown into a media and publishing giant headed by Ronny, but following a political scandal linked to illegal oil contracts during the Libyan embargo involving Gould, to escape British justice, had

discretely transferred his headquarters to Tel-Aviv and adopted Israeli nationality, the Jewish state offered the immense advantage of not allow the extradition of its citizens.

Florence had organised an excursion to the south of the country to the Akkakus Mountains, a region which according to the Arte specialists had been a vast savannah rich in game eight thousand years ago before climatic change had transformed the region into a desert. They left Tripoli for Sabha an hour's flight directly south where they were met by Driss Azwai, from the University of Tripoli, a specialist in desert ecosystems, who was to accompany them during their trip. Driss was about forty, good looking, charming, cultivated and multilingual who attracted the attentions of Florence and Laura at once.

They left at once to for a meeting point where they were to join the team who was to accompany them on their trip to the desert. The route was south-west passing one of Libya's main oil producing regions where they could see the columns of dark smoke from the gas that was burnt off at the oil wells. After about seventy kilometres they stopped in a small restaurant where they took lunch and met with their guide and drivers. There were three SUVs, two for the passengers and one to carry their tents and kitchen – it was not exactly Club Med comfort – they were to spend three nights camping in the desert visiting the archaeological sites by day.

Their small caravan of three SUVs headed south, Driss with Florence and Laura in one vehicle and O'Connelly with the guide who spoke good English in another. They left the road behind them and headed south over a vaguely visible trail that disappeared after about half an hour. In the distance to the left side were huge dunes and in the distance a pale blue shadow of the Akkakus.

The desert was relatively flat and they advanced at a fast pace, the three vehicles abreast avoid the plume of dust thrown up behind

them. O'Connelly realised the purpose of the bar in front of him and hung onto to it as the SUV bucked through the depressions in the stone strewn surface of the desert. After a couple of hours they stopped for refreshments and were surprised to discover the variety of desert vegetation around them, round melon like fruits were everywhere together with low vegetation. Driss explained the desert was in fact filled with a highly specialised flora and fauna, including animals such as jackals, desert foxes, snakes and lizards.

Towards the end of the afternoon they started to climb towards the rocky outcroppings that formed the foothills of the Akkakus. The rocks were of all forms as though they were formed by weathered lava flows, the colours were various shades of chocolate and the sand a reddish ochre. As they progressed the rocks turned into hills worn by the sun and winds of the desert, an astonishing and fantastic panorama unlike any that O'Connelly had ever seen. It was equal to the beauties of the Wadi Rum of Lawrence they had visited some weeks earlier on the route from Petra to Aqaba.

It was about seven when they stopped and their drivers set up the smalls blue tents, then set about collecting dead wood for the cook who started to prepare their evening meal. The toilets were behind the rock of their individual choosing, far enough but not too far, Driss had told them that life expectancy in the desert without water was not much more than twenty fours hours.

The sun had set as they settled down on the rough carpets that had been set around the camp fire, freshly cooked bread, lamb and vegetable stew, supermarket cheese cubes, oranges and dates washed down by bottled water or juice, alcohol was totally forbidden in Libya. They then sipped mint tea from small glasses around the crackling fire as Driss told them of the ancient peoples who had lived in the region.

The conversation slowly died under the stars of the desert sky and Driss produced a small packet and unwrapped the aluminium foil that protected it, producing what looked like a hard dark brown bar of soap. The cook busied himself with cleaning up and the drivers attended to their vehicles. Driss placed the bar on the back on his metal dinner plate and commenced to shave off small flakes, he smiled telling them it was for his cigarettes.

The temperature had fallen and the night air chilly two girls then left for the tents about fifteen metres away leaving O'Connelly with Driss. He took a Marlboro and carefully emptied the tobacco, mixed it with the flakes and refilled the cigarette and offered it to O'Connelly. It was cannabis. He then produced a plastic flask and announced it was arak, a strong home brewed liquor. He poured a measure into O'Connelly's glass. The two men sat around the embers of the fire smoking and sipping their drinks and talking as men had always done in the cool desert night.

They were awoken by the early morning light that penetrated the fabric of their tents. It was cold and they were pleased they had brought their thick polar jackets with them. Breakfast was ready, instant coffee and packaged sliced bread with butter and marmalade. After each one sought out his favourite rock. O'Connelly looked out over the fabulous desert panorama that stretched out below him, in his squatting position, not a single sign of man, nature in its raw beauty, silent, peaceful, he had to admit it was the most extraordinary shit he had ever had. Then washed themselves with the perfumed serviettes, the thoughtful Parisian travel agent had recommended they bring with them.

They continued to climb over the following two hours before stopping above a broad flat valley. They stopped and Driss pointed below.

‘Here hunter gatherers camped, below they could see the game, there were elephants, giraffes, rhinoceros and a species of buffalo now extinct, they knew the animals every movement, their favourite grazing places, the watering holes. Now I will show you something.’

He led them to a bluff and pointed to an overhanging rock. Under the shadow they saw painted onto the red surface of the rock the forms of men twenty or thirty centimetres high, paintings of giraffes, deer, elephants and other animals. He told them that these extraordinarily beautiful paintings had been made by hunter gathers eight thousand years ago.

They continued down hill stopping a more wall paintings until they reach the valley slowly making their way across the opposite hills, Driss looking carefully at the rocky ground. He made a sign and the driver stopped. They got down.

‘Here is what we call a kill site. The hunters lived up on the hill protected from dangerous animals, they came down to hunt and gather plants and fruit,’ he said point the ground to one side.

‘Look,’ he said picking up a stone. ‘This is a stone tool, you see it is flat with a cutting edge that was made by flaking away small chips. After they had made their kill, a zebra or an antelope, they butchered it on the spot. They could not carry it, it was too heavy. They used stone tools and when these were blunted they simply discarded them. Look around you, you can see them everywhere if you look carefully.’

They searched around and O’Connelly picked up a stone tool that fitted into his hand as if it had been made for him. It was a beautiful object, covered with a chocolate patina, formed by the wear of the desert wind and mineralization over thousands of years. The whole valley was a vast archaeological site, evidence of Neolithic man’s presence in a Garden of Eden teeming with game before one of

nature's whims had transformed it into the inhospitable desert of today.

Driss told them that the earliest rock-art was believed to have been made by hunter-gatherers more than 7,000 years ago and maybe as early as 10,000 years ago. Domesticated cattle were thought to have been widespread 6,000 years ago, then came sheep and goats, horses and even chariots and finally camels around 500BC.

‘So what happened to the people who lived here when the climate changed?’

‘The change was slow, hundreds perhaps thousands of years and the inhabitants moved on following the game in search of water, to the north, to the west and to the east where they would have met the Nile.’

‘Do you think that these people were the ancient Egyptians?’

‘That’s very likely, the whole region surrounding the Nile became slowly decertified and the certain peoples found new homes on the banks of the Nile.’

Three days later they were back in Tripoli where they visited the ruins of the Leptis Magna and then flew east to Benghazi where they visited Cyrenaica, that had been colonised the ancient Greeks and then the Romans, a few days, sailing from Alexandria, and where many Jews had fled after the Jewish wars to form communities that had existed until the arrival of modern Arab nationalism and the creation of the State of Israel.

Back in Tripoli Driss had made enquiries concerning Gould and his links to the Gaddafi family. It was strange, ordinarily travellers were not even permitted to enter the country with an Israeli stamp in their passport, but Gould’s family had always maintained contacts with Libya, and sensing the end to the embargo had taken advantage of the possibilities that had opened in the oil business.

Gaddafi, who had been forced to accept that revolution was no longer an option after the end of the Cold War and the end of the protection of the Soviet Union had offered, still dreamt of an exceptional destiny in the Arab world where unity began with the resolving the Palestinian dilemma. He believed that Gould could intervene in Jerusalem convincing the Israeli government of what could be gained through a lasting peace.

Gould had met de Lussac by chance during a visit to Koh Chang, and had been persuaded by de Lussac that peace could be achieved in the Holy Land if the question of the Haram was settled. Gould could never resist boasting of his relations with charismatic world leaders, Castro, Sharon, Arafat, Pope Jean Paul and Assad. He had been often been one of Gaddafi's guests at his desert camp where he had facilitated the introduction of British companies and contracts for the exploitation of oil and gas fields in the south east of the country. He delighted Gaddafi recounting de Lussac's theories concerning the Haram, talking of the evolution of monotheism and the history of the Muslim expansion and how Christians, Jews and Muslims who had lived together in harmony for centuries in the ancient cities of Libya.

Driss informed O'Connelly that Gould's presence in Libya was relatively rare and his visits swift, he was not a man to waste time once his business deals were sealed.

When they returned to Paris, Mann informed him that de Lussac had been to Paris and had announced his book would be published in London. O'Connelly then received a mail in which de Lussac announced that the agreement he had signed in Paris with him was null and void and that from that point onwards he would be working with Gould's publishing group. O'Connelly decided he would speak with his lawyer, if the situation turned nasty it could considerably complicate his own position.

Texts

‘WHERE DOES CUNEIFORM WRITING COME FROM?’

‘Cuneiform is the ancient written form of Assyrian inscribed on wet clay tablets with a wooden point making triangular marks, after the clay is then baked and it’s almost indestructible compared to other written materials.’

‘Who discovered it, I mean how did it come down to us, when?’

‘That’s a very interesting question. It was first invented by the Sumerians, who lived in a region that is approximately that of present day Iraq, in about 3500BC and was also used by other peoples to write their languages. It was rediscovered by Henry Rawlinson, an English army officer, who found inscriptions carved on a cliff at Behistun in Persia in 1835, these dated from the reign of Darius the Great, King of Persia in the fifth century BC. The texts were written in three languages: Old Persian, Babylonian and Elamite. Since Rawlinson had studied Persian, he was able to work on deciphering the others and after more than fifteen years he could read 200 Babylonian signs. Today there's about one hundred thousand cuneiform tablets in museums and private collections around the world making it the largest collection of ancient texts, that's considerably more than the Bible.’

‘Have they all been translated?’

‘Not all but a good number.’

‘What do they say?’

‘Just about every thing, commercial transactions, laws, royal decrees, literature and so on. What’s interesting is that there are

probably tens, even hundreds of thousands of tablets waiting to be discovered.'

'Incredible!'

'There are hundreds of specialists in the languages written in cuneiform and a detailed knowledge of the grammar exists, almost like a living language.'

'So what does it tell us of ancient Israel or Palestine?'

'A great deal, when the Babylonian Empire was defeated by the Persians Palestine fell under Persian rule and became a satrapy in other words a province for centuries until the arrival of Alexander the Great.'

'For example?'

'Well it is possible to fix the fall of Jerusalem to the Second of Adar, which is the sixteenth of March in 597 BC.'

'So does that mean the Bible is right?'

'Yes, on that point.'

'What else?'

'In the seventh month of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's reign in 599 BC during the month Chislew, that's November-December his army laid siege to the city of Judah. He conquered the city and took the Israelite King Jehoiachin prisoner, putting his uncle in his place.'

'What happened to Jehoiachin?'

'He was just a child only eight years of age, and reigned for one just hundred days according to the Bible. He was brought to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar as a prisoner together with the elite of Jerusalem.'

'All that is written on clay tablets?'

'Yes and if you compare the Book of II Kings with the cuneiform texts from ancient Babylon they are in broad terms concordant.'

'Are there many other tablets that speak of Judah?'

‘Yes, there are texts such as the Lachish letters that talk of the last days of Judah. These were discovered at Lachish or Tel ed-Duweir with later three inscribed potsherds containing names and lists from the time just before the fall of Jerusalem in 586BC’

‘What did they say?’

‘They were mostly dispatches from a Jewish commander at the time the Babylonians invaded the country. Then there is a tablet that revealing the presence of the Judean royal prisoners in Babylon. They contain lists of rations of barley and oil issued to the royal and artisans, including *Yaukin, king of the land of Yahud* a direct reference to Jehoiachin when he was a prisoner in Babylon.’

‘So this is all factual recorded information.’

‘Absolutely, there are also several seals, for example one bears an inscription relating to a servant of Jehoiakin found near Hebron and another has the inscription *Zedaliah, who is over the house*, Zedaliah as I just mentioned was the new King of Judah appointed by the Babylonians to replace Jehoiachin.’

59

The Christian Bible

‘THE CANON, a text that was considered sacred and recognised as authentic of the Christian Church, is based as you know on the New Testament, which is composed of the four Gospels plus the Epistles.’

‘These were written during the time of Christ?’

‘No, the precise time they were written has been the subject of a great deal scholastic discussion. Some think that the earliest of these writings is St Paul’s epistle that dates to around 50AD, then comes St

Mark's gospel about 65AD and as late the beginning of the 2nd century AD for St John's gospel.

'That spans one hundred years.'

'That's right.'

'Do the originals of these texts exist,' asked Laura.

'No my dear, unfortunately no,' he replied laughing. 'We do have about 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament exist, plus about 8,000 in the Latin Vulgate. However, the oldest existing copy of the Bible is the Codex Vaticanus safely guarded in the Vatican Library, this is believed to have been written in Egypt during the first half of the 4th century, this codex contains a large part of the Septuagint version of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

'Septuagint?'

'Yes the Septuagint was transcribed from Hebrew into Greek for the Great Library of Alexandria in ancient times, before Christianity, Septuagint means seventy, referring to the number of translators. It was more than a simple translation of the Hebrew text, since the translation was influenced by Greek ideas, Greek philosophical concepts, which later was important for the birth and spread of Christianity.

'So that Vatican has the oldest existing version of the Bible?'

'Yes, but there are others, the second oldest is in the British Museum, it is called the Codex Sinaiticus and is a 4th century manuscript of the Greek Bible, which is believed to have been written shortly after the Codex Vaticanus, however the only part that remains is the Septuagint, the New Testament part was lost.'

'What is the history of these bibles?'

'Well in the case of the Codex Sinaiticus, as its name indicates, it was discovered in the Monastery of Saint Catherine, on Mount Sinai in Egypt, in 1859 by Constantin von Tischendorf.'

'And after those?'

‘Then comes the Codex Alexandrinus, which was written the 5th century, it’s also in the British Museum today, then finally concerning the oldest bibles in existence is the Cambridge University library’s Codex Bezae, written in the 6th century.’

‘So there’s a huge time gap between the events and the texts. I mean if you take St Mark’s gospel and the Vatican Codex that’s three hundred years.’

‘Quiet so, but when it was written it was copied from existing manuscripts, like for other ancient works that have come down to us from Greece and Rome. Remember the Codex Sinaiticus is one thousand seven hundred years old!’

‘So the same principal could also apply to the Gospels?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well that Jesus really existed!’

He laughed.

‘Right, though it is not so simple. In the case of ancient Greece and for example Thucydides ‘Peloponnese Wars’, archaeological evidence corroborates his account plus the fact that many surviving works of ancient writers refer to his works, some of these going back to Roman times. In the case of Jesus we only have the gospels.’

‘Only!’

‘Sorry, I don’t mean to offend your beliefs, I mean there is no other corroborative evidence.’

‘I was joking.’

‘What we have to remember is that all texts from the ancient world have been passed down to us in the form of copies, there is no original of the first Bible, and what we have was manually copied from manuscripts. All books were hand written and all copies hand written, there were no presses, so everything was made by scribes, priests, monks, of one form or another. These scribes changed texts, either by error, or by deliberately, for religious or political motives.’

‘So the changes made by the scribes were not those spoken by God, but by man?’

‘The original texts were inspired by God, according to believers, but we don’t have them and those we have were written centuries after the originals!’

‘Let me tell you something of the history of the Holy Land.’

‘Please.’

‘One and for all there is absolutely no evidence of the existence of the key Biblical figures such as Abraham, Moses, David or Solomon, or for that matter of almost all the others mentioned prior to about 200BC. In other words there is no evidence of Temple or the existence of Jerusalem at the time when the first Temple was supposed to have existed.’

‘So King David who founded Israel is a myth?’

‘I’m sorry to say that the existence of King David, is cited in the Bible, and in the Bible alone, for this is no other source that speaks of David, established Jerusalem as his capital nearly 3,000 years ago.’

60

Sects

THE TRUST IS BUILT AROUND the person of Alfred Mann, without him it would collapse.’

‘So you think it’s a kind of sect?’

‘Not a sect in the sense of the Raelians,’ he said laughing. ‘But you have to admit all the key persons are either members of his family, in-laws or close friends of long date.’

‘I suppose so.’

‘It’s a fact. They hold the purse strings and managed the trusts finances in the greatest opacity and in a somewhat amateur fashion. Not one of them is a trained professional, some are good doers with vested interests, especially the Swiss.’

‘I have to agree with you there.’

‘Their conferences are designed to attract a maximum of international attention, to show that the rabbis were open minded and modern, that they held out their hands to the Muslims, a good public relations act, not quite what our journalist friend told us.’

‘Who?’

‘Shlomo, he said they were mostly hard-liners.’

‘In any case all decisions seem to taken arbitrarily manner by Mann, and only him, no other person has a say except for the details, any initiative that doesn’t suit his own precise goals is stifled and I’ve seen that those who display an excess of personal initiative are quickly ejected from the inner circle of his minions or altogether.’

‘His technique consists of convincing the members of the different committees and structures he sets up are the deciders, in reality the members of those committees are compliant or naïve or have a programme of their own.’

Alfred Mann appeared to those who did not know him well as an engaging man of about sixty, his thick white hair was always well combed and his close beard well trimmed, he walked with a stick, which at once disarmed those who did not know him. He radiated charisma, but was given to violent outbursts when he was in disagreement with his followers and felt with whom he felt a natural superiority, sulking if reproached by his equals, disdaining his adversaries and stonewalling superior authority.

When speaking he focused his pale blue eyes on his interlocutor and articulated his well chosen words with what was obviously great

care to those who knew him. He tolerated no nonsense from those who worked with him or his associates.

Alfred Mann had learnt that communication was power, the Abraham Heritage Trust was functioned on the basis of a broad communication network with the press and media and its world wide contacts. His philosophy was based on Oscar Wilde's motto according to which there is only one thing worse than having a bad press, and that is to have no press at all.

Mann had dedicated a good part of his life to humanitarian work before discovering that he was treating the results of man's follies and not the causes. The success he had achieved in his humanitarian work had brought rewards in the form of gratitude from those he had helped, but not the recognition he had hoped for in his country or from the international establishment, rather envy of his achievements with so little means and jealousy from his rivals.

He sought a moralising source as a remedy for the causes of international strife and conflict. In the Yugoslavian war he discovered the role of religion in the conflict and the rejection of Islam by the Orthodox Serbs. As the war in Yugoslavia came to an end he turned his attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and discovered Israel and Judaism. He came to believe that the cause of the problem was due to a clash between Islam and Judaism and by reconciling the two, peace could be achieved.

Mann was not content with minor achievements, over the years he had not only made enemies, but had created a following of loyal followers, idealists and workers, who believed in him, believed in his destiny and were seduced by his undeniable charisma. His goal was to build a structured that would confederate the great monotheist religions, an organisation led by himself, which he headed, as a consequence of the great religions' inability to cede the controlling

power of one of their own. He had become a unifier, an undeclared modern prophet, his followers came from all faiths.

He had dedicated his life to a mystical community of peace based on a fusion of the holy books of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, a path that ignored the reality of the world; possession, economics, land, power, human cupidity and deceit.

Many were there to finance his vision, people of all faiths who could not afford to go against peace, who to be politically correct before the world rejected violence and terror to gain their ends or to hold onto them. He had a sense of a personal mission and destiny in uniting feuding religions into one congress.

One of his backers was Messaoud Darmon a rich Algerian Jew who had made his fortune in business in France. He had started with his fathers transport business before Algeria's independence and moved to France after independence where he built a huge conglomerate of companies. Darmon never forgot his roots cherishing the idea that Muslims, Jews and Christians had once lived in harmony in Algiers of his childhood, it was for this reason he backed Mann with generous donations to encourage the reconciliation between the Jews and Arabs

Mann's background was psychology and it seemed to O'Connelly that he applied his training with skill to manipulate all those he met on his path to sainthood. O'Connelly wondered if his walking stick was a simply a prop to disarm, or draw sympathy and attention from, all those he met. In the same way Mann avoided drawn out meetings maintaining his reserve by withdrawing to rest or retiring early in evening feigning his need for a good night's rest.

After having been a journalist for many years O'Connelly had an ongoing interest in the Israeli-Palestine question, and why had this question occupied the world's headlines more regularly than any other region of the world over the previous seventy years. War and

strife was an old tradition of the region, going back almost four thousand years. Wars had ensnared the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Muslims, Crusaders, the Ottoman and British Empires. Why did men fight of the piece of land called the Holy Land, which would have been better named the Land of Blood and Strife, where countless men women and children of all religions and races had left their bones in its parched soil.

A land of milk and honey? Certainly not. For thousands of years it had been a land burnt dry by the sun, a land of harsh contrasts, which lay between the fertile mountains of the Lebanon and the Nile Delta. Myth said it had been transformed by the sweat of Israel's brow; reality was that dollars, twentieth century technology and know-how had brought about the transformation that certain Israelis pointed to with pride, forgetting that the regions scarce water resources were being depleted to grow avocados and oranges.

De Lussac's latest backers were amongst Mann's supporters, a hard-line Orthodox sect, who unknown to de Lussac had not the least intention seeing his controversial theory concerning the Temple published, which could only provide addition arguments to the Waqf. De Lussac's naivety and stubbornness reached its limit when Mann's hard line friends learnt that he had been in contact with Palestinian archaeologists close to the Waqf – who saw their rights to Esplanade historically confirmed by his theories – it was too much.

Two days later, returning to his hotel late in evening de Lussac was roughly bundled into a van by armed men wearing masks and brought to a house in the suburbs of southern Tel-Aviv. He was cross-examined and accused him of being a false Jew and collusion with the enemy, after a couple of hours of questioning using Tsahal methods, he was thrown into a darkened room overnight and left to ponder his future. Early the next morning, tired and frightened without having eaten or offered even a glass of water, he was

dropped on a street in the Arab quarter of Jaffa with notice to quit the country at once under the threat of being abandoned in the Negev Desert if he persisted with his plans. The same evening he left for Bangkok with a low cost fare with no intention of using the return portion of the ticket.

The Covenant

‘IT’S A FACT THAT THE JEWS invented monotheism,’ he said.

‘Not quite, the Pharaoh Akhenaton was the first great historical figure to have adopted monotheism, and certain believe that Hebrews who lived in Egypt at that time became monotheists. But if we remember the story of the Exodus this doesn’t quite fit in, because we have seen how the Exodus is very probably a legend. It was possible the Hyksos who carried the idea with them when they were forced out of Egypt.’

‘The Hyksos did not have a god of their own?’

‘At the beginning, but they had become Egyptians.’

‘And before that?’

‘Little is known of the Hyksos or Sea Peoples, but in ancient times Semitic tribes were polytheists. However, it was the tradition of each of these tribes to enter into a covenant with one particular god and in doing so the tribe was assured of that god’s exclusive protection, in turn for which the tribe offered their exclusive obedience and loyalty.’

‘Ah, so that’s where the covenant comes from!’

‘Yes. In the case of the Hebrews led by legendary figure of Abraham who inherited such a covenant, though in the beginning

there were most certainly polytheists. Then as the tribe grew in importance the covenant with Yahweh replaced all others.'

'Yahweh?'

'Yahweh comes from a Hebrew tetragram of consonants, Yhwh, which roughly translated means Lord.'

'Oh...', she mumbled wondering what a tetragram was.

'So as the tribe grew into a nation, the nation was symbolised by this covenant, representing the direct relationship between God and the Nation of Israel. In this way it replaced all the older covenants of the various tribes that formed the nation. So you see this form of belief was in fact derived from the social patterns of nomadic tribal life in ancient Palestine.'

'So that explains Abraham's tent and the movable tabernacle in the bible.'

'Right.'

'So Abraham could have existed?'

'So far the findings from intensive archaeological surveys in Israel do not confirm the biblical portrayal of Abraham as the founder of Israel. Data does not support the biblical origins as portrayed in Genesis through to Joshua. Today most humanist scholars agree there never was an Exodus as portrayed in the Pentateuch, nor was there a military conquest of the Promised Land by Joshua.'

King David

'KING DAVID WAS ISRAEL'S FOUNDER, our patron saint if you like, you see his name everywhere, the King David Hotel, the most

prestigious in Israel is just over there,' he said causally pointing to the grey stone building. However, the fact is that there is absolutely no proof of his existence outside of the Bible in view of a total absence of clear archaeological evidence.'

'Like King Arthur.'

'Quite so.'

'Yet he is believed to be a warrior, a conqueror, anointed by God...whatever that means.'

'The Hebrew University is rumoured to have discovered his palace.'

'They speculate that it's the remains of a palace, but there is nothing to say it is where King David lived.'

'It is pretty well described in the Bible where if I remember rightly the Phoenician King Hiram helped him to build it using cedar and stone.'

'One of the questions is why the site is outside of the ancient Jebusite city walls, which was in fact very small only about nine acres in size, too small for the huge palace described in the Bible.'

'The problem is the Bible always exegetes or *meforshim*, which means commentators or interpreters.'

'To be fair, what was big in early biblical times would be very small by later standards.'

'They argue that since the city conquered by King David was from the Jebusites was too small, he built his palace and other buildings outside of the city walls, where it was nevertheless protect by the two valleys that flanked it to the east and west with the citadel and the old city to the south.'

'This was supported by British archaeologist, Dr. Kathleen Kenyon, who discovered a 4th century BC wall to north of the citadel, built on a much older structure that belongs to the late Canaanite or early Israelite period.'

‘Up until this discovery not even simple pottery shards from this period have been found it’s unlikely that any conclusive evidence will ever be found.’

‘Jerusalem is pretty big, they can’t have looked everywhere.’

‘True, but Jerusalem is the most explored site in the world, for almost two centuries enlightened amateurs and archaeologists have explored and excavated almost every nook and cranny. The result is that most serious archaeologists believe that if David existed he was just a small local chieftain and Jerusalem just a small unimportant village.’

‘Being objective however, it is certainly a major discovery and the first of a major building from the early Israelite period in Jerusalem.’

‘In the Bible, the book of Samuel, recounts that David conquered the Jebusite city of Jerusalem around the beginning of the tenth century BC, and spared it making it the capital of his kingdom.’

In early 2005, with the backing of the Shalem Centre, the Hebrew University, and the City of David Foundation, Mazar commenced new excavations on the site discovering a section of wall about thirty meters long with a corner indicating it was part of a large building. Potter shards were found in the wall dating to the 11th century BC meaning that the wall was constructed at this date.

Two other walls perpendicular to the first date were built a century later according to pottery dating indicating the building was still in use. The structure was built on bedrock meaning that on that spot there was no earlier constructions.

The archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon found a Phoenician decorative stone column head in 1963 on the same site dating to the same period and in the early 1980s, Yigael Shiloh discovered the stepped support structure.

It was here that Mazar discovered a clay bulla, bearing the name of Yehuchal Ben Shelemiah, from the time of King Zedekiah who is

mentioned in the bible, which she described as something of a miracle.

‘One of our problems is that trained, scientific, archaeologists are constantly presented with the most bizarre ideas of romantics and religious fanatics who come-up with the most sensational theories about the Solomon and Temple and just about everything else mentioned in the Bible.’

‘Yes, not forgetting Zionists and Palestinian nationalists, plus every imaginable kind of political motivation, local and foreign.’

‘The unified monarchy, invented at the end of the Judean period, appears to be nothing more than the figment of imagination in the minds of those who take the Bible to be the revealed truth.

If we examine the evidence in the Bible, on the one hand we have a detailed description of a Phoenician-style built by David on a mountain, and on the other we have a structure of the Phoenician style dating from the same time period also situated on the summit of a mountain in Jerusalem.’

‘So the maximalists consider the possibility of this happening by chance to be extremely small?’

‘In my mind there evidence is very skimpy and not good science.’

An Incident at the Wall

MANN WAS HIT HARD IN THE FACE and fell to the ground striking his head heavily against a low wall. Sitbon ran to help, he was a trained army doctor, but a large woman who had been standing

nearby was already leaning over Mann who was unconscious and bleeding from the nose mouth and ears.

‘Let me help I’m a doctor,’ Sitbon said.

‘I’m a teacher,’ the woman replied.

‘He’s a doctor!’ said Laura.

‘Prove that you’re a doctor.’

‘I don’t have to prove anything to you, but for the record I’m a Tsahal military doctor.

‘But I trained two years as a teacher.’

‘What are you going to do teach him English!’ shouted Laura.

‘Go read your guide!’

‘At least I can!’

A crowd had gathered around and several armed men from the security forces arrived, their arms at the ready. A few moments later an ambulance arrived from nowhere and two paramedics pushed their way through the crowd.

‘Okay now, move aside!’

Sitbon stood up and stepped to one side.

‘His pulse is low and is showing signs of concussion.’

‘Just step aside and let us get on with our work.’

Sitbon hesitated.

‘We’re looking after this, step aside.’

‘I’m just letting you know the situation. I’m a doctor and have given him first aid.’

At that moment a police patrol car arrived and a youngish police officer appeared.

‘Move aside now,’ he said aggressively to Sitbon.

‘Okay, I was just helping.’

‘Are you responsible for this?’

‘I’m a doctor.’

‘I’m a friend of this person,’ added O’Connellly

‘Just move aside.’

‘Okay, I was just explaining.’

‘I’ll ask you one more, if you don’t get out of the way I’ll arrest you.’

‘But we’re with him,’ said Laura.

‘Move on or you’ll be arrested too.’

‘I’ll make a complaint.’

The police officer pointed to the number on his shoulder and shouted, ‘There’s my fucking number, report me then.’

During this exchange Mann lay on his back unconscious and bleeding profusely. Two more medics had now arrived with first aid material and a stretcher was brought.

A several soldiers appeared and the entrance to the ramp was sealed. A senior police officer appeared and the security men were pointing and describing the incident. Then the senior police officer approached to question them.

‘Please tell me what happened?’

‘We were visiting the area around the Wall and the Archaeological Park when a man came out of the crowd and hit Mr Mann in the face for no reason.’

‘What was he like?’

‘Average height...’

‘I mean was he an Arab or what?’

They looked at each other.

‘I think he had a beard and was wearing a kippah.’

‘A Jew?’

‘I suppose so.’

The officer turned and talked to his men in Hebrew then with continued them in English.

‘I think he was an extremist, a Jewish extremist. What does your friend do?’

‘He’s the president of a trust for peace.’

‘Ah! Peace! That’s always the cause for anger or violence.’

Mann had come to, it was not clear how badly he had been hurt, but in any case he was seriously shaken. After the first aid he left in the ambulance accompanied by Cedric for an x-ray examination and observation.

They returned to hotel shaken by the gratuitous attack on Mann, by an apparent stranger, questioning the reasons and the strange behaviour of those present. Laura and Tamara went over the scene repeatedly wondering where he had been taken.

‘What did you want to get involved for in the first place?’ said Tamara turning on Sitbon.

‘Well I’m a doctor, it’s normal.’

‘I’m a doctor too.’

‘You’re still a medical student,’ said Sitbon!

‘I’ve studied for years, the title’s just a formality.’

A general shouting match developed each one launching accusations and counter accusations backed up justifications.

‘Tell me Henri, why would someone do that?’

‘You’re in Jerusalem, passions are high especially why something religious is involved.’

You think someone had it in for Mann?’

‘Certainly, not everybody likes his imams and rabbis thing, don’t forget for many of the religious sects here there’s a lot of anger with the Muslims position regarding the Esplanade, where most Jews believe the Temple stood.’

‘Do you think it was a warning?’

‘Possibly, but who knows, perhaps it was something to do with de Lussac?’

Mann had overstepped his right to interfere and to confirm it on his return to Paris he found his office invaded by representatives of the

French financial brigade sifting through his files. A couple of hours later he found himself at their headquarters replying to questions of tax fraud and inappropriate use of the trust's funds. The next day he left for the relative safety of Zurich.

The Temple Mount Dispute

IN 1999 EXCAVATIONS nearby Solomon's Stables resulted in a controversy when excavations were carried out by the Waqf to build a new underground mosque with bulldozers and 300 truck loads of rubble was removed and dumped outside the city walls.

Together with Gabriel Barkay of the Bar-Ilan University they were visiting the Temple Mount who told them how the courtyard had been built by Herod the Great around the summit of Mount Zion in around 20BC with the object of constructing a huge rectangular formed fortress. It was 485m long and 315m wide, oriented north-south in the longitudinal direction, and surrounded by massive retaining walls up to 5m thick with huge cut stone blocks weighing up to 150 tons. The area between the natural slope of mountain and walls was filled with rubble, up to 30m deep in places, to raise the level of the courtyard to that of the mountain's summit, especially in the south-east corner where the bedrock slopes down to the Kedron River, 47 meters beneath the summit.

The fortress was unequalled in the ancient times and the Jewish-Roman historian, Flavius Josephus, wrote *the wall was itself the most prodigious work that was ever heard of by man*. To the south-east corner the wall was 48m high, and the southern wall was comparable in height to that of a fifteen storey building. Beneath this corner, 12.5

meters below the surface level of the courtyard, a series of vaults was built, supported by eighty eight pillars was built in twelve parallel rows with thirteen aisles between them. At the bases of the pillars were rings for tethering horses.

In the southern wall are three gates, from east to west the Single Gate, the Triple Gate and the Double Gate, these gates are now walled up. During the Second Temple period these vaults were entered by the Hulda Gates, and stairs led to up the courtyard.

When the Crusaders took Jerusalem they identified the vaults as the stables of King Solomon and used them to stable the horses of the Templar Knights, who established their headquarters were in the El Aqsa Mosque. The Crusaders entered their stables through the Triple and Single Gates. It is believed that similar arches could also exist in the south-west corner but in is impossible to investigate this area.

The Waqf had transformed the stables into an underground mosque and the rubble that was removed dates back more than two thousand years, rubble from ancient buildings and constructions, rubble that must have contained vital archaeological evidence as to the past history of the site and its surroundings.

‘Who knows what was lost?’ Shlomo said. ‘The rubble must have contained quantities of ancient materials dumped in the Kedron Valley.’

‘Yes, Jewish history dating back to the first and second temples, and Christian material dating from the Crusades, destroyed or lost.’

‘Luckily we have no a licence to excavate the dumping grounds in the Kedron Valley.’

‘We’ve started collecting rubble from the areas the areas where it was dumped, moving it to a safe area, carefully protected and identified.’

‘A number of Herodian coins dating from the first century BC have been found.’

‘Apart from archaeology, the real question concerns the Temple Mount, which is at the very heart of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict,’ said O’Connelly.

‘Sure, but which claims are justified?’

For Muslims the Temple Mount was the place where the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven. For Jews the Temple Mount was the place where the Jewish Temple stood and for Christians it was where Jesus taught and overturned the money changers’ tables.

Historically Islam’s claim to the Temple Mount went back to 638AD when Omar entered Jerusalem where he built Dome of the Rock mosque, making it the third most holy site for Muslims, after Mecca and Medina.

‘These walls have stood here for almost two thousand years, but the underground work that has been carried out is extremely risky, it could endanger the whole structure.’

‘How come?’

‘You see the bulge in the wall, that is due water, rain water that no drains into the ground and seeks another gravitational path.’

‘So it accumulates at the walls.’

‘Yes, wherever there is no downward drainage. So the south wall of the Temple Mount has developed a huge bulge under the force of the water pressure.’

‘So it will collapse?’

‘It could collapse – it doesn’t need much to bring a whole stretch of wall down.’

‘Like what?’

‘An earthquake!’

‘Earthquake?’

‘Yes, you saw Caesarea, this is an earthquake zone. The last one that occurred happened three or four years ago, it shook Jerusalem and brought a whole load of stones down from the wall.’

‘The underground mosque they built can house up to 10,000 people.’

‘But who owns it – who controls it?’

‘In the Camp David talks, Bill Clinton proposed sovereignty on the Temple Mount be divided. Everything above the ground is Palestinian and everything underground is Israeli.’

‘I don’t know the complete story, but this, rightly or wrongly, but in any case for at least three thousand years is supposed to be Solomon’s Temple and the place where Jesus walked. How did it become a wholly Muslim site?’

‘In a nutshell, according to the Bible, the Dome of the Rock is where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Zion, where. Later David and his son King Solomon built the First Temple there, destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Then the Second Temple, which represents a focal point of the Judeo-Christian common tradition, was built. In 1638 when the Muslims conquered Jerusalem, the Caliph Omar was told of the significance of the Temple Mount and he ordered a mosque be built on the Temple Mount.’

‘That’s the ancient history, and now?’

‘Following Israel’s victory in the Six Days War in June 1967, Jerusalem was unified and declared the capital of Israel. But, Moshe Dayan left the Temple Mount under the responsibility of the Waqf, the Muslim religious authorities.’

‘And that’s the situation today.’

‘That’s the situation today.’

‘And the Stables.’

‘A classified report by the Israel Antiquities Authority has says that the eastern wall is in danger of collapse following a minor earthquake and there is a risk part of the wall could collapse onto Solomon’s Stables, causing a disaster in more ways than one!’

The Pool of Siloam

THE POOL OF SILOAM DATED FROM about 700BC when the Assyrian King Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem. Hezekiah, the then King of Judah, in view of the Assyrian threat, had built a tunnel to ensure Jerusalem's water supply, since the only source of fresh water at this time was the Gihon Spring in the Kedron Valley. In those times the task of building a tunnel under the crest of the hill on which the City of David sat was a major undertaking.

Two teams of tunnellers had worked from opposite ends to meet in the middle and an inscription was carved in the tunnel wall to commemorate the feat. Hezekiah's tunnel is over five hundred metres long and allowed water to flow from the spring to the Pool of Siloam at the other end, today visitors can walk through it.

Why Hezekiah's tunnel follows a meandering path is unclear, perhaps its builders used natural pre-existing openings in the rock that facilitated the work of the miners explaining the winding path of the two tunnels before they met. There is also the question of ventilation and lighting, since the miners worked by oil lamps which at the tunnelling work had to be ventilated to supply air for both the men and the lamps.

The Pool of Siloam from Hezekiah's time mentioned in the Bible has not been found, but another that existed at the time of Jesus was by the archaeologists Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron who were working nearby the Gihon Spring where Hezekiah's Tunnel begins.

A sewer pipe running from the west of the City of David into the Kedron Valley was in the course of repair. The work was watched by the archaeologist Eli Shukron who saw two stone steps uncovered by

the excavators. The work was immediately halted and Shukron called in his colleague Ronny Reich who identified the steps as part of the Pool of Siloam from the Second Temple period. With the authorisation of Israeli Antiquities Authority the site was excavated by archaeologists and a large part of the structure was revealed. The pool would have varied in size depending on the level of the water and the area excavated shows that the pool would have been more than sixty metres wide with the steps on at least three sides of the pool. The pool appears to have had a trapezoidal form, but the exact length is not known at this time.

Coins were found in the plaster that covered part of the steps these were minted under Alexander Jannaeus a Hasmonean king who reigned from 103 to 76 BC, so it could be assumed that the pool was built in the late Hasmonean or early Herodian periods. Then they found a number of coins from the period of the First Jewish Revolt between 66 and 70AD. So it could be concluded the pool was in use from at least 103BC to 70AD, after which the pool fell into disuse and was slowly submerged under a thick layer of mud.

In the fourth century, the Byzantines assumed the Pool of Siloam referred to in the New Testament was at the end of Hezekiah's Tunnel, so they built a pool and a commemorative church where the tunnel emerges from the rock.

What was the function of the Pool of Siloam, during the time of Herod pilgrims came to Jerusalem for the Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles? It is possible that they camped in the Kedron Valley where drinking water was supplied from the pool. In addition this water would have been suitable for ritual bathing as it is naturally flowing spring water as required by Jewish law for purification.

Reich and Shukron discovered a fortification surrounding the Gihon Spring which they date to the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries BC, which was connected to underground tunnels leading

into the Jebusite city. They believe that there was an underground water system that connected the Gihon Spring with Jebusite Jerusalem.

It was in October 1867 when Charles Warren of the Palestine Exploration Fund and his assistant Sergeant Birtles crawled through a chamber connecting the Gihon Spring with what would later be called Hezekiah's Tunnel. From the tunnel they climbed a vertical shaft to a horizontal passage which, although filled with debris, connected the vertical shaft with the surface above. The vertical shaft has since been known as Warren's Shaft.

Who built the water system and the cisterns is a major question. The water systems at other sites such as Megiddo, Gibeon and Hazor have been all dated to the tenth century BC at the latest. There is no proof that the water system was Jebusite, that is to say belonging to Canaanite Jerusalem.

Some archaeologists believe that the cisterns were originally natural openings and fissures, in other words not man made, that is to say they existed long before the site was occupied by man. The rock is a mixture of karstic or limestone and softer rock. Rain water forms acid in contact with the rock and eats into over geological time forming caves and crevices. In addition the natural drainage of rainwater flowing over the surface of this rock cuts channels in the softer with time. This has led archaeologists to suspect that the original hydraulic system and its cisterns are much older than had been previously thought.

Palestine

TODAY PALESTINE CONSISTS OF TWO TERRITORIES geographically separated by Israel. To the west of the Jordan River is what we call the West Bank, which was occupied by Israelis following the Six Day War of 1967, to the east is Gaza.

The name Palestinian comes from the Hebrew word Pelisti, which originally came from the mysterious Sea Peoples mentioned in an Egyptian temple text at the time of Ramesses III in Thebes in the twelfth century BC.

The Sea Peoples are believed to have migrated from the Aegean area of Anatolia. They ravaged the whole of eastern Mediterranean; invading Egypt where they were pushed back to what is now the coast of Gaza and Israel where they founded cities of Gaza, Ashkelon and Ashdod.

The whole region has been subjected to one invasion after the other over thousands of years, Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Crusaders and Turks. So who are the Palestinians, ethnically that is to say by language and culture they are Muslim Arabs. Their blood is no doubt a mixture of the peoples who flowed back and forth across that strategically important but narrow strip of land between the sea and the desert.

For the last few hundred years it had no significant status and was part of the Ottoman Empire. That is until the end of World War I and the end of Ottoman rule when it fell under the rule of the British Mandate.

One of the great roads of the ancient world passed through Gaza, running from north to south, a narrow corridor with the sea on one

side and the desert on the other, a resting point before crossing the Sinai to the south. Gaza was the nearest western sea port for the Nabateans and was the Gate of Canaan for the Egyptians.

For ancient Egyptians, it was an advance defence against the invaders from the north, first the Assyrians, then the Babylonians followed by the Persians and finally the Greeks and Romans. It was a garrison town with a source of fresh water.

The first known people to live in Gaza were the Hyksos, a sea people believed to have come from the north. They then conquered the Nile Delta and founding a new dynasty ruled over Egypt for two hundred years before the Egyptians revolted and drove them out. The Greeks arrived with Alexander the Great, who besieged and destroyed Gaza, then transformed it into a fort.

‘So you can see that until the arrival of the Romans, Gaza was independent from Israel and Judah,’ Hadi Mahmoud told him. ‘Since the arrival of the British and the colonisation of Palestine by the Jews we have suffered, but now we have new hope.’

Gaza has been one of the great crossroads of civilization, from the most ancient prehistoric times of human existence when man his first steps outside of Africa. Then came the emergence of human civilisation in Egypt and the civilisations born in the Fertile Crescent: Mesopotamia, Assyria and Persia, followed by the Greek and Roman civilisations, after that the Arabs and finally the West, all these overlapped and mixed together.

Archaeological treasures and evidence are everywhere, but Palestine has neither the means nor the immediate need to build a suitable museum, their priorities are elsewhere, further most Palestinians are not even aware of their country’s rich historical heritage.

‘You know that Palestine is not the historic name for the country,’ said Hadi.

‘I thought Palestine was derived from Philistia, today’s southern coastal area?’ said O’Connelly.

‘No, not exactly.’

‘What was it then?’

‘Syria, that was the name originally used by the early Greeks and the Romans.’

‘So when did Palestine come in?’

‘Actually, the ancient Greek historian Herodotus used the name ‘Palestinian Syria’.’

‘So Palestine was at least part of the name!’

‘Yes, classical writers used the term Palestinian Syria for a region that includes present day Syria, Israel, the Lebanon, part of Jordan, and even part of south-eastern Turkey. So it was really a geographic reference for the Greeks, not one just one country.’

Hadi described how the region had in fact been several different countries with different names and the coastal region that is today Lebanon and Syria was called Canaan, or Phoenicia by the Greeks. Then the territory that is now Israel plus the West Bank was composed of two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. In addition they were other states, such as Ammon, Moab and Edom that lay on the banks of the Dead Sea. In the Hebrew Bible, Pleshet or Philistia covered the coastal area south of Jaffa including Gaza.

Judea was the Roman name for Israel, and for them Judea included the whole region under the control of the Jews. It lay on both sides of the Jordan River and part of the surrounding area including Samaria and most of the Galilee and some other localities, but the name ‘Palestine’ was not used officially by the Romans until Hadrian in 135AD.

Herodotus called the inhabitants of the region Palestinian Syrians because of their languages, a Semitic group, close to that of the Phoenicians.

After Alexander the Great's conquest, the Greek name was Ioudaia, then when the Romans took over they called it Iudaea. After the first great Jewish revolt in 70AD, which ended the destruction of the Temple, the Romans transformed Judea into a Roman province. Then 65 years later in 135AD, the Roman Emperor Hadrian crushed the last Jewish revolt led Bar-Kokhba, and renamed it Provincia Syria Palaestina. From that moment the Jews were forbidden under pain of instant death to approach Jerusalem, which was rebuilt and renamed Aelia Capitolina, thus the Jews were prevented seeing their ancient capital, the home of their sacred Temple.

Aelia Capitolina was in effect a Roman colony and a polis, without the Jews, who were banished, forced into exile in Galilee, Golan, Jericho and overseas.

When the Arabs arrived they did not consider it as a separate country, it was part of what they called Bilad ash-Sham or Greater Syria and it remained so for the next 1,200 years, until the end of the British mandate, however the name Filastin was used, but only for the southern region of the country, what the Romans called Palaestina Prima.

The Christians and Crusaders called the region the Holy Land, Palestine, Judea, Zion and the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Only in modern times did Palestine become the official name, so as to avoid the religious connotations of Holy Land. Therefore Palestine was a Western name, as it had been in ancient times, it was first officially employed in 1920 at the San Remo Conference when it was legally declared the Jewish National Home.

‘By the way, whilst were talking of names, where does the word Zion come from?’

‘Zion, or the Hebrew transliteration *Tziyyon*, is one of the names of Jerusalem, as mentioned in the Bible,’ said Hadi.

‘Ah....’

‘You see under the Ottoman’s the region of the eastern Mediterranean seaboard was divided into three administrative regions, to the north was the Vilayet of Beirut with its three sanjaks, Beirut, Acre and Nabulus. To the south was the Independent Sanjak of Jerusalem. To the east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea was the Vilayet of Damascus that was divided into two sanjaks, to the south of the Dead Sea was Maan and to the north was Hauran.’

67

The Archaeology of Jerusalem

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS with Jerusalem from an archaeological point of view is the city has been destroyed and rebuilt more than forty times since the seventh century BC and in places the debris is as much as twenty metres,’ Shlomo told O’Connelly.

‘That represents a huge amount of work?’

‘Absolutely, but not only that, all these modern buildings you see around us makes excavation impossible, I mean we can’t dig under them.’

‘You mean now.’

‘Yes, as you know the first to scientifically explore the subsoil were the British. Robinson’s Arch, one of the four gates mentioned by Josephus was discovered Charles Wilson, then Barclay discovered a limestone cave near the Damascus Gate when walking his dog, it had been a quarry where stone was extracted to build the Temple and fortifications, one of the foundation stones is estimated to weigh more than one hundred tons.’

‘What about the Temple?’

‘No remains have ever been found of Solomon's temple in spite of the extensive excavations made by archaeologists such as Kathleen Kenyon and Mazar.’

‘But I thought the Temple stood over the Dome of the Rock and the Wailing Wall was the remains of its west wall.’

‘No, the Wailing Wall was substituted for the Temple in the 18th century, the site of the Temple according to De Lussac stands below the Triple Gate.’

The Dome of the Rock was built over the outcropping or the summit of Mount Moriah. It was the site of the Church of the Holy Wisdom, destroyed by the Persians and Jews in 614AD, it had stood the rock that the sixth century Christians of believed was the site of the Praetorium where Jesus was judged by Pilate and Jesus left his footprint on the rock.

During the early Christian period the Church of Saint Mary or Nea Basilica had been very imposing, Procopius said there was nothing comparable in the city, it stood where the Al Aqsa Mosque stands today. When Omar arrived in Jerusalem only the ruins remained and its stones were used to build the mosque. This led to the development of the popular belief that this had been the site of Temple of Solomon.

After Omar Jerusalem became less important, the centre of gravity of the new Arab Empire moved from the Arabian Peninsula to Damascus and later to Baghdad.

The area that today covers the Mediterranean seaboard of Syria, plus the Lebanon, Israel and Gaza were always under the control of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Greece and Rome in ancient times. Exploration of the Sinai Peninsula has only turned up evidence of meagre settlements nothing on the scale the Bible describes, just some rather rudimentary nomads, who from time to time raided villages or small towns.

Gaza City is less than two hundred kilometres from the Nile Delta, a march of five or six days from the great city of Ramesses II in the 13th century BC. Therefore it is improbable that Moses wandered about the desert for forty years with six hundred thousand men and their families. A visitor to Israel can see how small in it with the distance between Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem only sixty kilometres, that is to say about two days walk in ancient times when people were used to walking and no other form of transport existed except for donkeys and carts.

The Babylonian invasion and destruction of the Kingdom of Judah took place in 586BC, this is confirmed by comparing pottery and other remains found in the archaeological horizons in the region of Jerusalem and other cities and settlements.

The ancient City of David was protected on three sides by deep valleys. From east to west are the Kedron, Central and Hinnom Valleys. The Kedron protected the city on the east. The Tyropoeon valley is now filled in by several metres of refuse accumulated over centuries. The Hinnom valley comes in from farther west and meets the first two. The meeting of these valleys marks the southern limit of the original city. Therefore in the beginning Jerusalem was a very small town of only 300 metres long by 80 wide, it had excellent natural defences on all sides, except the north, where a saddle linked it to the Benjamin Plateau.

The oldest archaeological evidence of a synagogue ever found in Jerusalem is the Theodotus Inscription. This stone plaque, which once hung in a Jerusalem synagogue before its destruction in 70AD, bears an inscription written in Greek telling of the synagogue and the family of priests that presided over it for three generations. The plaque was found in a cistern in the City of David in 1913 by a French archaeologist, Raymond Weill, a hundred or so metres the Gihon Spring:

Theodotus, son of Vettanos, a priest and an archisynagogos, son of an archisynagogos grandson of an archisynagogos, built the synagogue for the reading of the Torah and for teaching the commandments; furthermore, the hostel, and the rooms, and the water installation for lodging needy strangers. Its foundation stone was laid by his ancestors, the elders, and Simonides

Historians usually tell us that after the Great Revolt against the Romans and siege of Jerusalem, which as we know ended with the Temple being razed and the massacre and slavery of the city's population by the Roman army of Titus, no Jews remained in the city and its surroundings.

However, recent archaeological excavations near the Shuafat refugee camp in northern Jerusalem show that a Jewish community continued to live in Jerusalem after its destruction in 70AD. The excavations at Shuafat show the continuation of Jewish presence after destruction of Second Temple

In 2003, in anticipation for the construction of the light-rail system planned for Jerusalem, the Israel Antiquities Authority began a preventive dig at the site, on the main road from Ramallah to Jerusalem, within the Jerusalem city limits.

Four kilometres from the Jerusalem city walls and located on the main road to Nablus, several spacious dwellings were found with façades of dressed stone and well laid out streets between the houses. Several amphorae that were found that contained imported wine from Greece and Italy, indications of the prosperity the inhabitants. In

addition cosmetic items and glass rings were also discovered. The structures included two bathhouses as well as a large public building.

A number of stone food storage and other vessels were found indicating that these were used by Jews since this type of vessel was not considered to transmit impurity. However, no Jewish ritual baths were found. Archaeologists believe the basins discovered on the site had been used for ashes from the Temple.

The settlement was abandoned after the Bar Kochba Revolt in around 130AD. Specialists from Bar-Ilan University believe that up to the period of the Bar Kochba Revolt, there was a good Jewish majority living between Samaria in the north to Be'er Sheva in the south. They also believed that a number of Jews lived in Jerusalem providing services to the Roman army.

The bathhouses found were believed to be for the Roman soldiers in the area. Up to this point in time the other sites in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem have only turned up farms destroyed during the Great Revolt.

A stone tablet, first evidence of reconstruction work following the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple was discovered at the Temple Mount in 1999, it had been found during construction work at the entrance to Solomon's Stables carried out by the Waqf. It was part of a victory arch and bore an inscription bearing the name of the Roman governor of Judea, Flavius Silva, who had besieged Masada with the Roman Legion X Fretensis. Josephus Flavius describes how Masada's defenders had set fire to the fortress, preferring mass suicide to captivity or defeat.

Folklore and Legends

IN ANCIENT TIMES FOLK TALES AND LEGENDS were passed on orally from generation to generation becoming traditions in societies before writing was invented. After contact with the Assyrians or Phoenicians writing reached small tribes such as the Hebrew with the result their local traditions and legends were recorded becoming the basis for the biblical narrative.

Whether there conquests were great or not or had really taken place the legends were there, for the honour of the tribes and its families, in reality minor skirmishes with neighbouring nomadic tribes and vague memories of other events of local importance.

These were transformed into a more coherent story by the scribes whose role was to create history for the glorification of the leaders of a growing people. In the long run these fabricated histories were the justification of claims on adjacent territories with historical proof in the form of the written word or sacred book. Thus they modified history to suit their ambitions and in the case of the Hebrews history went back to the glory of King David, the first to ruler of the land of Israel.

‘Are you saying that the story of the conquest of the land is a complete fiction?’ asked Laura.

‘The story as it is presented in the Bible certainly never took place,’ replied Shlomo. ‘Archaeology evidence has shown that there are no historical grounds to support it. The problem is many of the sites mentioned in the Bible story of the conquest of Canaan did not even exist at the time indicated.’

‘So there was nothing to conquer?’

‘According to serious archaeologists nothing – just a few hills and rocks. Jericho, at that time, was not even a settlement, certainly not fortified and definitely without walls.’

‘What do the Egyptians or Assyrians say of Israel at that time?’

‘Nothing, at the time of the supposed conquest of Canaan according to biblical dating took place in the 13th century BC, the problem is that region was ruled by the all powerful Egyptians at that time of which there is no mention in the Bible.’

‘Is there any mention in Egyptian documents of Israel?’

‘Yes – the stela in the museum in Cairo – that mentions the word Israel for the first time in written form. You see the son of Ramesses II made a military expedition to Canaan conquering Ashkelon and Gezer, and the rather enigmatic inscriptions on the stela says *Israel is spoiled, his seed is not*. That event took place in 1207 BCE that is to say after the biblical conquest.

‘So if there was no conquest, where did the Israelites come from?’

‘Egypt was a mighty empire that ruled here with an iron fist. In the 14th century BC local kings in the region of Israel asked the Pharaoh for help in their fights with each other, asking him to send 50 soldiers, not very many, but apparently enough to quell any disputes, probably due to marauding nomadic tribes.

‘So can you explain how a few invaders from the desert conquer Canaan?’

‘As I said there was no conquest, probably the gradual migration of different Hebrew tribes from the east, who pushed by climatic conditions started to settling the hill regions of Canaan, then over many generations slowly encroached on the heartland of the Canaanites, who over time became assimilated with the new arrivals.’

‘So there was no war?’

‘No, very probably skirmishes, but no war of conquest with huge armies as described in the Bible.’

‘So going back to those who wrote the bible, they must have had a programme?’

‘In the 7th century BC Kingdom of Judah the story justified the conquest of the Kingdom of Israel.’

‘So Joshua did not exist?’

‘I didn’t say that. Perhaps some great military leader existed. The problem is the Bible speaks of events that happened in the 13th century BC, but it was written in the 7th century BC, that’s six hundred years after.’

‘Perhaps there were some kinds of records?’

‘No, in the 13th century BC the alphabet had even been invented.’

‘In any case Judah and Israel became united.’

‘Many people talk of the United Monarchy, what this was however is another question and there is not the least evidence it ruled over a large empire.’

‘Not all archaeologists and historians agree with what you say?’

‘If we look at the figure of Solomon he resembles an Assyrian king, magnificent, rich, wise, a great warrior in other words an idol in the modern sense of the term, unfortunately nothing in the archaeology record supports this, there is not the least evidence of great wealth in terms of palaces, monuments and public buildings in Jerusalem between the 10th and 8th centuries BC, until the arrival of the Assyrians when it was a small village, remote, miserable and unfortified.’

‘So there was no Jerusalem to speak of and no Temple?’

‘What I’m saying is that if in the 7th century BC an old tradition probably existed in Jerusalem that said the temple on the hill had been built by the founders of the dynasty. That’s a possibility but it doesn’t mean that it was a huge and magnificent structure.’

‘So are you saying that the United Monarchy is an invention?’

‘That’s another question. Two palaces were found at Megiddo. Yigael Yadin dates them from the 10th century BC, but I think they are from the 9th century BC, which corresponds to the time of the northern kingdom.’

‘This then confirms the biblical dating!’

‘The north at that time was Canaanite, whilst David and Solomon ruled in Jerusalem, and perhaps the southern hill region with part of the northern hill region. But they did not rule in the northern valleys or in Galilee, consequently there could have been no split of the monarchy. At the outset there were two separate entities, northern and southern, it would appear as I said the biblical story served to justify Joshua’s conquest in the 7th century BC, Now we will establish the monarchy anew, and it will be united eternally.’

‘There is absolutely no archaeological or historical evidence that the Hebrews were ever in Egypt.’

‘What about the Canaanites then?’

‘There is some archaeological evidence of that in the second millennium BC.’

‘The story of the Patriarchs is nothing but folklore, there is no again there is no evidence of their existence outside of the Bible.’

‘What about the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron?’

‘It was built in the time of Herod, centuries after the Patriarchs are supposed to have lived.’

‘The Hebrews then, they existed!’

‘There were a people that the Egyptians called the Apiru, perhaps a tribe, maybe they were the Hebrews, but in any case they were not a nation, at least before the 10th century BC.’

‘So before that there was nothing?’

‘The Bible may contain the remains of some traditional myths that go back to the 12th century. It’s impossible to say with a sort of great

legendary leader in the very distant past, like King Arthur. But there is nothing in the archaeology record about an Abraham.'

'So archaeology can't help?'

'Archaeology is based on tangible evidence. My role is to piece together evidence related to the existence of past events through the evidence that has been handed down to us, buildings, pottery, jewellery, weapons and so on, not forgetting written accounts that match with this evidence corroborated by other parallel texts.'

'What about the Palestinians?'

'The Palestinians? Who are the Palestinians? For me they are descended from the ancestral peoples of this land. Not all the inhabitants of this land were Jews, not all Jews remained Jews, the same goes for non-Jews. History has transformed the descendants of these peoples into what they are today, Palestinian Muslim Arabs. An Arab is someone who speaks Arabic as his mother tongue, Islam is a religion like Judaism. These things change with wars and invasions, in ancient times these peoples were Hellenised, Romanised, Christianised and finally Muslims.'

'Not all Israelis would agree with your analysis?'

'No, I'm neither a politician nor a fanatic nationalist!'

'The Palestinians have their own archaeologists.'

'Yes, they have their own historians and Syro-Palestinian archaeologists also carrying out their own research work. They also use the Hebrew Bible and other ancient texts and documents to support their excavation work.'

'I see.'

'You know Israel was a just small country situated on a strategic crossroad between the great powers of the ancient world since its beginning and has remained so ever since. The Bible draws on this geopolitical configuration with sources based on the ancient texts of the countries and empires that surrounded it Phoenicia, Palestine,

Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia. These texts included inscriptions, tablets and letters that detailed events, political relationships, religious laws, commercial transactions which all describe in one form or another the functioning of daily life in those times.'

'So what it all boils down to is Israel and Judah were simply small buffer states that lay between powerful neighbours. The vast majority its population lived in small towns and villages linked by kinship, community, and tribe.'

'Absolutely, very small buffer states without any great importance.'

'Except for the Bible!'

'Yes, the most remarkable book known to man.'

'I'm glad you agree with that!'

He ignored the remark and continued, 'The problem with historians in general is that they always focus on the great events in history. We archaeologists on the other hand get down to the nitty-gritty – pots and pans, food, dwelling place, drainage systems, tombs, skeletons that describe the daily life of ordinary people. As for the Bible it is a remarkable piece of evidence in that it shows the astonishing multi-ethnic society of those times, when the Jews were just one of the many peoples that lived and mixed together.'

'It's not the case today.'

'Quite so, now ethnic cleansing is the rule!'

Tel-Aviv University

RAMAT AVIV CAMPUS OF TEL-AVIV University is just a ten minute taxi ride from the Sheraton across the Yarkon River, that is if the traffic was not too snarled up, the concierge told him; it was not however the case since as was usual the Tel-Aviv traffic was in dense gridlock. Thirty minutes passed before the taxi pulled off the Haifa Road onto Einstein Boulevard and the campus, dropping him in front of the Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, where he had fixed a meeting with Professor Ariel Lehmann, of the Department of Jewish Studies specialised in history and archaeology of the biblical period.

The building was a massive, imposing structure of modern design. Ennis was shown to a lift that took him to the second floor where Lehmann was waiting for him. He was a well built man with greying blond hair who greeted him with an open friendly smile.

‘Boker tov, welcome to Tel-Aviv University,’ he said pointing the way to his office that was situated in the south-east wing of building behind the museum. His office window overlooked the pleasant green space of the campus and its palm trees.

‘Nice to meet a famous American novelist, unfortunately I haven’t had the opportunity to read your books,’ Lehmann said smiling apologetically.

‘Irish.’

‘Oh I’m sorry.’

O’Connelly waved his hand.

‘It’s no problem, in fact I spend my time between Paris and San Francisco.’

‘Wonderful.’

‘Professor,’

‘Call me Ariel, we have no formalities in Israel.’

‘Ariel, thank you meeting me at such short notice, as I mentioned to you over the phone, I am working on a new historical novel that needs some research work. It covers the period when the Romans destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem. I have read Josephus, but unfortunately it is not clear where the Temple stood, so it was a logical step to speak with specialists on the subject.’

There was a long pause. Lehmann was atypical of many academics, he spoke quickly.

‘John, that question has been studied for almost two thousand years, and there are almost that many replies to the question. The answer I regret to say is that we don’t know, though there are some very brilliant colleagues working on the subject.’

‘I see.’ He paused. ‘I have seen on the Internet that some people believe that the underground cisterns could be a pointer.’

‘Ah, you have done some serious work. Perhaps there is an answer there, but as you may know it is difficult to investigate that question archaeologically speaking as we Jews have not access to the Haram.’

‘So you think there is some possible evidence there.’

‘Almost certainly.’

There was a long silence as O’Connelly let him consider his affirmation.

‘A few years ago one of our Ph.D. students worked on the subject, Assad Areyda, a brilliant young man, 26 years old, from a good Druze family, his father was a businessman in Daliyat el-Carmel.’

‘A Druze!’ exclaimed O’Connelly in surprise at the mention of Areyda’s name.

‘Yes,’ he said kindly, as though talking to a slow student, but missing the reason for O’Connelly’s surprise. ‘We also have

Christian, Moslem, Druze, and Bedouin students. The Arabs are only a small percentage, the Druze less than one percent. You may think there's a question of not accepting them, but it's an economic problem, many of our Arabs are unfortunately very poor.

'I see,' said O'Connelly not interest by a lesson in Israeli sociology.

'The entry conditions to the university require fluent Hebrew, the tuition fees are high, more then eleven thousand shekels for an undergraduate.'

'Could I meet him?

Lehmann paused, his head bowed in thought, then after an interminable moment looked up sadly: 'Regretfully he was killed on army service.'

O'Connelly looked taken aback.

'Yes, the Druze serve in the Israeli Defence Forces.'

'I see.'

'Did he work on the cisterns?'

'If I remember rightly the hydraulic system was the main theme of his thesis. Most interesting. I went over some of his work, which was investigating the underground water storage cisterns. A pity.'

'What happened to his work?'

'Well that's a bit of a mystery. He was an army reservist, like all of us, when he was called up for his annual service, he must have taken most of his work with him. But what happened after I don't know, we checked it out with his family without any success, they knew little about his work. His father was a businessman and little disappointed by his son's interest in archaeology.'

'Did Assad work with anyone else here?'

'He was a serious minded young man, but fairly independent, at least it appeared like that, you know Jews and Arabs do not socialise outside of the University. He mostly worked alone. His great

advantage was that he had access to the Haram, even though he was a Druze, and he quite naturally spoke Arabic.'

'The Druze are Muslims then?' It was less than a question, rather for confirmation.

'Yes, the Druze are not orthodox Muslims, they believe they are Muslims, but not all Muslims accept them as such.'

'Did he have any close friends in the archaeology department?' O'Connelly said repeating his question.

'I'd have to check that out it's already six years ago. All I remember is that he was very excited by his project and became rather secretive, almost as if he had found something interesting. That's not unusual for students you know, especially for many archaeologists and researchers who live in the dream of a great discovery.'

'Like your colleague Finkelstein,' O'Connelly added.

'That's more controversial, publicity seeking.'

O'Connelly thought he detected a little envy in Lehmann's remark.

It was clear that not much more evidence was forthcoming and O'Connelly thanked him for his help.

'Well, John, I hope I have been of help. If there's anything you need for your book I'll be pleased to help you. Drop by again when you have time.'

'Perhaps you could try to check the name of Assad's friends?'

'I'll do that.'

'Oh...one last point have you heard of a French archaeologist...Isaac de Lussac?'

'De Lussac, French! No...Isaac that's a common name here, but Lussac doesn't ring a bell.'

O'Connelly left a little disappointed, he was not to sure that Lehmann would pursue his request.

Back at the Sheraton O'Connellly decided to check-out who the Druze were. Internet told him that the Druze community in Israel was about one hundred thousand strong in Israel and about one million in the world. The religion is officially recognized as a distinct religious group with its own specific laws and spiritual leadership; though they are Arabs and speak Arabic many refuse to identify themselves with the Arabs. However, they consider themselves separate from the rest of the Arab community and serve in the Israel Defence Forces and the Border Police.

The Druze religion does not accept converts from other religions and in theory all of today's population descends directly from the original 10th-century founders. The canon of the religion is the secret of its leaders and certain initiates with its religious books only open to such on the basis of the traditions passed down from generation to another. Its secrets are guarded not only from outsiders but also from the 'ignorant' co-religionists or Juhals, who represent the majority of the Druze and must accept the faith on trust. It is without ceremonies or rituals and its faithful are forbidden to eat pork, smoke, or drink alcohol.

The Druze religion was an interpretation of the three great monotheistic religions, revering the prophets from all three religions, and all those who believe in one God, including Akhenaton, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and Alexander the Great, to this is added a belief in reincarnation.

The Israeli Druze community is afforded special minority privileges, with its own courts. Its members speak Arabic; however, they dissociate themselves from the Muslim community and serve in the Israeli Defence Forces. Many hold high level political, military and administrative positions in the country.

Most of the Druze towns and villages in Israel were populated exclusively by Druze, though today a minority of Christians Arabs

and Muslims had moved in. Daliyat el-Carmel is situated on Mount Carmel to the south-east of Haifa.

He looked at his watch and decided that a visit to Daliyat el-Carmel would not be a waste of time it was at the most a couple of hours drive away even allowing for traffic and called the hotel concierge to order a car to drive him there.

It was a couple of hours up through the winding hills to the village. His driver was an Israeli Arab and talkative. O'Connelly had little difficulty in prompting him to talk of life.

'You know what they call us?' he asked O'Connelly. 'They call us a cancer inside of Israel. And what do you want to do with a cancer? Cut it out!'

'Most of us Arab Israelis live in run-down neighbourhoods look at our flats graffiti everywhere, paint peeling of the walls no cleaning or maintenance services.'

'At school we are taught history from a Jewish point of view, the Jews are heroes, the Arabs bad. Well I'm sorry to say those Arabs were our grandfathers. We Arabs cannot feel at home here in this Jewish state, in a land which is always ours, never, never in history even in the ancient kingdoms of Israel were all people Jews!'

'We want a country for representative of all of its citizens, not a religious state that favours only the Jews. That is not democratic.'

'You are right. In France we have a similar dilemma, take the French Jewish intellectual Finkelkraut, he is against communitarism, as post-nationalism breaks a society down into factors, and for Jews in France this is certainly not good. The only viable future in France, is a multicultural society, Jews are weak simply because the power of anti-Jewish groups would be greater.'

'It's the same here for us Arabs.'

'The difference is here you have a growing population and there is weight in numbers.'

‘I don’t agree with that, history has shown that a few can and does rule of a majority, taken the recent example in Iraq between the Sunnites and the Shias.’

‘In France it’s another problem, anyone who says anything against our immigrant population is considered a racist, though Christianity can be attacked, but a single bad word about Islam results in uproar.’

‘Here the immigrants are Jews, but they are criticised for all kinds of reasons, especially the Russians today.’

‘But they are Jews, you don’t have Muslim immigrants!’

‘The problem is you Europeans simply don’t see the complexity of our situation. There are many just reasons for Palestinian complaints against Israel, but the problem is that most people abroad see it as a problem between Jews and Arabs that implies Muslims, but it is a conflict of two nations, we Palestinians and the State of Israel, which has transformed our land into there’s and the occupied territories into a Gruyere of colonies.’

The Areyda family lived in Daliat el Carmel a short drive to the south east of Haifa. Daliat el Carmel is a small colourful town with narrow winding streets, situated on the Carmel Mountains amongst ancient olive groves and vineyards. O’Connelly found the Areyda’s home on the southern edge of the town situated on the hillside with a splendid view overlooking the coastal plain and the Mediterranean to the west. It was a large, beautiful centuries old stone house of two levels surrounded by a spacious garden filled with orange trees and olives.

O’Connelly introduced himself to a white haired man of about sixty, wearing a large equally white moustache, he was Assad’s father.

‘Ah, an archaeologist! It is strange that so many archaeologists are suddenly interested in my son.’

O’Connelly was puzzled.

‘Yes, you are the third person to visit me in the last few weeks.’

‘I was given your name by Professor Ariel Lehmann.’

‘Ah, a good man, my son got along with him well. Please come in, you must be thirsty, we can drink something in the garden.’

He led him around the house into the garden.

‘Please sit down,’ he said pointing to a weather worn table. He went into the house and a few moments later a younger man returned with tea and oriental pastries.

‘Tell me what you want to know of my son.’

‘I believe Assad was doing research on the ancient water distribution system of Jerusalem, more specifically the Temple Mount.’

‘Yes, so he told me. He was a good son, I wanted him to go into our business, but instead he is interested in history. In our country history has always been filled with problems.’

O’Connelly nodded politely and sipped his tea patiently.

‘You must understand Mr O’Connelly that ours is a close-knit, conservative society, our religion is more than one-thousand year-old. Today we are Israelis and like my son, hundreds of our soldiers have died fighting for Israel, that’s a lot for our small community. We are not interested in trouble, especially trouble of a religious kind.’

‘Religious?’

‘Yes, everything is religious in our country. Jews, Muslims, Druze, Christians.’

‘Of course.’

‘We represent only less than two percent of the population. Today Daliat El-Carmel is the largest Druze settlement in Israel, unfortunately there are few job opportunities available. Many of our people work in the defence, army and police services.’

‘Your family is in business?’

‘Yes, we have a lot of visitors to Daliat, tourists mainly. It is good for our family’s restaurants and hotels. We have cultivated the land for centuries, our land...agriculture, olives, oranges. That was our traditional business, my father’s business. Today we are in construction, much of it for the government. My son decided to be an archaeologist, it was his choice.’

‘Did he have any special friends from university?’

‘At University his friends were mostly Arabs, some Palestinians. There was a girl, an Israeli Arab.’

‘She was studying archaeology?’

‘No, I’m not sure, Tel-Aviv University, the Sackler Faculty of Medicine.’

‘Do you remember her name?’

‘Barghut... Aisha, she was from Jaffa...a Sunni.’

The old man poured more tea and sipped it lost in his thoughts. After a long moment he stood up, a little wearily, signalling the meeting was at an end.

‘Well I must be on my way. Thank you for your help,’ said O’Connelly.

‘One more thing Mr O’Connelly...,’ he paused not sure whether to pursue his words.

Yes?

‘Be careful, the question of religion in our country can be a dangerous one.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘My son’s work concerned the site of the Jewish Temple, but it is best forgotten, there are people who will stop at nothing to prevent the truth being discovered, whatever it is.’

‘The truth?’

‘Yes, the truth about the site of the Temple,’ he said turned and leading the way out.

Aisha Barghut

WHEN HE ARRIVED BACK at the Dan Hotel he found Laura having her bags unloaded from a taxi. She had just arrived from London where she had been researching the survey work carried out on the underground cisterns at the Palestinian Exploration Fund's offices. It still seemed incredible to O'Connelly that the Fund continued to function and publish the Palestine Exploration Quarterly, more than a century after its foundation by fervent academics and clergymen whose desire was to promote historical and archaeological research in the Holy Land – backed by the interests of empire builders.

'So how are our Victorian friends?' he asked pleased to see her looking as fresh as ever even after a day's travel.

'Victorian!'

'Was it useful?'

'Of course, but it's not the British Museum Library.'

'I suppose not, but it is specialised in the Holy Land.'

'What about you?'

'Me? I've got a surprise!'

'A surprise?'

'Yes, let's go to the room and I'll tell you all about it.'

O'Connelly told her of his find as they prepared for dinner, his meeting with Lehmann and his trip to Daliat.

'So the mystery deepens, that bastard de Lussac plagiarised your man's work!'

'Not so fast, we don't know that yet.'

'Well I for one wouldn't be surprised.'

'Don't forget it was you who introduced him to me.'

She busied herself with her make-up ignoring his remark.

‘What we have to do is find his friends.’

‘What was the girl’s name again?’

‘Aisha Barghut, studying medicine, at least she was five years ago.’

‘Where?’

‘At Tel-Aviv.’

‘Okay, I’ll check that out tomorrow.’

‘She was from Jaffa.’

‘That’s good, at least it’s nearby.’

The next morning Laura’s investigations led her to an address in Old Jaffa in a students’ residence. The administrative office informed her that Aisha had left three years previously after graduation and gave her a forwarding address in Beit Hanoun in the extreme north-east corner of Gaza. Laura met O’Connelly back at the hotel at midday for lunch and handed him a piece of paper with the address on it feeling pleased with herself.

‘Where’s Beit Hanoun?’

‘I didn’t ask.’

‘Great, let’s check that out,’ he said turning to the concierge’s desk.

‘Gaza Sir.’

‘Gaza!’

‘Yes Gaza, it’s just over the border from Sderot.’

O’Connelly sighed.

‘Is it possible to go there?’

‘Yes, with the proper authorization Sir.’

Gaza

THERE ARE TWO ROAD CROSSINGS to Gaza City, the Erez crossing point and Al Mintar or Karni crossing point. Another two crossings are in the south plus the Rafah crossing into Egyptian Sinai. Those wishing to enter Gaza via the Erez checkpoint need written permission from the Israeli government. It requires about five working days. No permission is needed from the Palestinian Authority. The other possibility is from Egypt at the Rafah crossing for foreign representatives of recognized international organizations, perhaps the Trust can organise that. You also need a permit from the Palestinian Authority for that route.'

'What about flying in?'

'Impossible Gaza Airport has been closed for the last five years on Israeli orders, and for that matter the sea port is also closed.'

Gaza was a huge camp, sealed off by the sea on one side and on the other three by a high fence with watch towers and guards. Before the Israelis left it had been cut into three sections by Tsahal. The Gaza Strip was as the name suggests a strip of coastal land forty five kilometres from north to south between the two main crossings points, the Erez crossing with Israel at the northern end and Rafah terminal with Egypt at the southern end.

People from Rafah or Khan Younis, in the south of Gaza, had to spend anything up to five hours at checkpoints going to Gaza City, but the complex of sheds, collection points and walled walkways were abandoned. The route to Gaza, once jammed with vehicles, was empty and the deeply potholed road covered with piles of rubble and sand.

They took the south bound Highway 4 passing the cities of Ashdod and Ashkelon and were dropped off by their driver at the Erez crossing point – between Israel and the Gaza Strip – a heavily fortified concrete structure standing on the surrounding wasteland. There were few people at the crossing and they walked to the checkpoint gates, past concrete blocks and metal detectors to the passport control cabins where they handed their papers and permits to the grim faced guards. O’Connelly with Laura had obtained Israeli Government Press Cards, which they presented with their passports to the Israeli border authorities.

The no man's zone between the Israeli and Palestinian checkpoints was about one hundred metres overlooked by the heavily armed Israeli Defence Force. They were then unsmilingly dispatched into a concrete walled corridor, lined with cameras and divided by railings, a wire fence separated it down the middle, and it was covered with a plastic roof transforming it into a greenhouse in which the heat was already stifling, then through a series of turnstiles, it was as though they were being led to cattle pens or worse. Only a year before a twenty-one year old Palestinian girl wearing a bomb unsuccessfully tried to blow herself up before the cameras at the gate.

They then arrived in another broad corridor like area, almost half a kilometre long covered with a corrugated iron roof at the end of which was the dismal empty Palestinian control point where their passports and visas were examined. After registration with the Palestinian police and a few brief formalities they left the checkpoint and were in Gaza, at the exit there was an odour of stale urine and the floor was scattered with refuse.

Waiting to greet them was Tim Collins, the correspondent of the International Herald with his stringer who led them to the Toyota Landcruiser parked at the exit, it bore large door stickers marked Foreign Press in English and Arabic. Their driver opened the back

door for their bags and where they saw flack jackets and helmets as well as a sizeable first aid box.

‘Just in case,’ said Tims with a forced laugh.

‘Do you ever need them?’ asked Laura anxiously.

‘Yes, there could be an air strike at any time. A lot of Palestinian militants have been killed in air strikes as well as bystanders.’

‘Is there a warning?’

‘No, if the Israeli’s fire a missile, don’t move as they may fire again, normally they know who they are firing at! A lot of people have been killed or wounded, including journalists, when they fire again when rescuers arrive.’

‘Oh!’

‘Keep away, curiosity can kill! If your mobile phone is working normally it means the helicopters have left.’

‘How long has it been like this?’

‘Always, but more recently since the Second Intifada.’

‘Who started that?’

‘Sharon, when he said: *The Temple Mount is in our hands and will remain in our hands. It is the holiest site in Judaism and it is the right of every Jew to visit the Temple Mount.*’

‘Why!’

‘He went there to investigate the work on the Haram. The Waqf had started excavation works in Solomon's Stables to build another mosque, an underground mosque. The rubble was dumped in the Kedron Valley. Truck loads of rubble and stone from their building excavation work. The Israelis tried to block the entrance of construction materials and when Sharon arrived the Arabs bombarded him with stones. Then Arafat made some inflammatory speeches and the riots became more violent with shots being fired and several Palestinians were killed.’

The driver headed along Salahadeen Road past the industrial zone, about eight kilometres before turning right and another couple of kilometres into Gaza City. The Gaza strip as it had been described was exactly that, a strip of land about forty or so kilometres long and six to fifteen kilometres wide, a vast refugee camp in grey dust covered concrete. The total population of Gaza was 1.3 million people living in an area of 360 square kilometres, a quarter of those lived in Gaza City itself. O'Connelly made a quick calculation, Paris intramuros, that is inside its circular ring road, was about half of that area with a population of two million.

The traffic was light on the streets of Gaza City and few people seemed to be in the shops, armed groups of men seemed to be everywhere. The economy of Gaza had almost come to a halt, food being supplied by the many international aid agencies present.

They were booked at the Windmill Hotel on United Nations Street where before anything else they were handed a list of recommendations for travellers in Gaza.

Collins had obtained a press card from the Palestinian Ministry of Information for O'Connelly, who since his days as a journalist had always held an up-to-date international press card, an open sesame, which in this case was necessary to facilitate his visit to Gaza.

'Never go alone without a local escort or translator, even if you speak Arabic,' warned Tim handing him the card.

'Can we speak with the locals?' asked O'Connelly.

'Normally yes, people are quite open to the press, but it depends who you are talking to. It helps if you speak to them in Arabic, then they become quite communicative, unfortunately my Arabic is very basic, Slimane Saoudi helps me, he's a journalist and speaks perfect English, he can explain all the local things. One important point, avoid speaking of terrorists or terrorism when you talk of Palestinian militants, here they are freedom fighters, martyrs and heroes.'

‘What happens if we get hurt?’

‘Go immediately to the Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, that’s the main governmental hospital. You’ll get special care, but don’t worry it’s very unlikely anything will happen if you are careful.’

‘Speaking of the hospital have you spoken with Aisha?’

‘Yes, she is working tonight, but we have fixed a meeting with her tomorrow morning.’

‘Excellent, so what’s our programme this afternoon?’

‘It’s up to you, we can show you around Gaza, if that’s what you would like?’

‘What is there to see?’ asked Laura, as ever a keen tourist.

‘There’s the Qasr Al-Basha on Al-Wehda Street, the means the Lord’s Palace, because Napoleon stayed there in 1799, and the Porphyrus Church.’

‘It suits us.’

‘Fine, let’s eat then we can show you around.’

They were few people outside, a few men starting to come out after their afternoon siesta. Opposite the hotel there were a couple of SUVs parked in the shade, their drivers still sleeping.

They left the hotel taking the Toyota passing the Old City with the Great Mosque Al-Omari Mosque with its beautiful minaret, once a church, built by the crusaders in the 12th century. Fifteen minutes later they arrived at a small restaurant faced the sea.

‘The owners are good friends of Slimane’s’, said Collins. ‘Nothing luxurious, but food is good, fresh fish.’

It was good, fresh shrimps and grilled fish with beer then Turkish coffee and arak.

‘So what’s the situation in Gaza today,’ O’Connelly asked turning to Slimane.

‘Bad, with the changes,’ he said alluding to the arrival of the Hamas to power, ‘funding from the European Union and US has

dried up and tens of thousands of government employees have received no pay.’

‘Yes and the promises from Saudi Arabia and the rich Arab states as usual are slow in coming if ever,’ added Collins.

‘Libya has also promised an unspecified amount, but all we have is chicken feed, the rest is just talk and promises.’

‘What about the Iranians?’

‘What about them? What are we supposed to do? Starve to death?’

‘The problem is that the rich Arab countries fear US sanctions.’

‘Can there be no agreement with Israel?’

‘It depends on the agreement, if it is another Munich then that’s not for us, besides what kind of Israel should we recognise? Look at the map of the Occupied Territories on the West Bank it makes a Swiss cheese look solid! In any no Israeli government has ever given the least sign that they would withdraw to the 1967 borders.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Jerusalem!’

‘They want a weak Palestinian government, making a deal with Abbas, it’s Finlandization, bowing to Israeli dictates and American pressure.’

‘Most Arabs see the US as an imperialistic power, whose only goal is to impose its will and steal Arab oil and Arab rights,’ said Collins.

‘The truth of the matter is that Israel is nothing more than a puppet state, a surrogate of American money and power, our land is under foreign military occupation, nothing more than a vast prison camp.’

‘Well, times have changed and the Palestinians with it. Before there was hope for a united Palestine, that seems difficult now. They want us to recognise Israel, impossible!’

‘Gaza is being slowly strangled, and we have been divided in the hope that we recognise Israel the only alternative is starvation! ‘They are pushing us into civil war! The Fatah against the Hamas, while

Israel looks on gloating and saying, 'we told you so, they are incapable of managing themselves, they are killing each other.'

The next morning Slimane left for the Shifa Hospital to pick up Aisha Barghut, where after completing medical studies at the Sackler Faculty of Medicine at Tel-Aviv University she was an intern working in the emergency service. It was eleven when she joined in the hotel coffee shop with Slimane. Aisha was about twenty six or twenty seven, tallish with long black hair, attractive but rather serious.

She sat down and excused herself for being late but during the night there had been fighting with Hamas and Fatah supports with several of the fighters seriously wounded.

'It's very kind of you to meet us Aisha.'

'I was told you wanted to speak of Assad Areyda?'

'That's right, I met his father a few days ago in Daliat El-Carmel.'

'A good man.'

'Yes, Assad's death was a great loss for his family.'

'We were good friends, but he was a Druze and me a Sunni, in our country that makes life complicated.'

'I'm sorry.'

She smiled sadly, 'Me too.'

O'Connelly explained the story of the Temple and how he was interested to know about Assad's work.

'Assad had a brilliant future, his death was a tragedy. He was working on the hydraulic system and underground water storage cisterns of the Haram esh-Sharif.'

'Do you know much about his work?'

'I'm not an archaeologist....'

'Ah,' said O'Connelly unable to hide his disappointment.

'But I type the draft of his thesis.'

O'Connelly sat up, his eyes lit up with new hope.

‘What happened to his work?’

‘I have kept it, it is all that I have of him with some photos.’

That evening Aisha returned with a cardboard box containing Assad’s thesis and his notes. She had agreed to put it into O’Connelly’s care in return for any publishing rights that she would use for the benefit of Palestinian children suffering from the effects of the conflict.

‘This is all I have Mr O’Connelly. You know Assad worked with another person, somebody who had been helping him with research work in London or Paris.’

‘Do you remember his name?’

‘I think his name was Isaac.’

‘Did he work with him in Jerusalem?’

‘No he met him in Masada, then returned to France.’

‘Isaac did not have the possibility to go to London to do research at the Palestinian Survey or something like that.’

‘So Isaac did that for him?’

‘Yes.’

‘Good, look Aisha, I will read everything here, its mostly in Arabic or English I hope?’

‘There are some notes and references in Hebrew.’

‘Okay, I get that translated. In any case I’ll look after everything. It’s very, very, kind of you to leave this with me.’

‘I trust you Mr O’Connelly and you must trust me, my only objective is to help these children and in the memory of Assad. We have so many problems with the fighting between the Fatah and Hamas factions. Every day we have injured in the hospital and they even fight in the hospital itself.’

‘You can count on my help, once we are back in Paris by one means or another we will get help for the children.’

‘Thank you. You know since the Hamas won everything changed. In spite of the elections being democratic Israel closed its border and no Palestinian could go out or come in...as you know I am an Israeli citizen working here for a cross-faith humanitarian organisation. Before a lot of our medical supplies came from the West Bank. On top of that they have withheld tax revenues and to make matters worse foreign aid has been blocked.’

‘Some of the hospitals doctors are driving taxis to get money, they haven’t been paid for months. They’ve got no choice, they have to feed their families. The civil service, no longer functions, they are driven into poverty, garbage is uncollected, sick people are not being for!

‘It’s really bad.’

‘To make things worse the Hamas supporters have been given weapons and uniforms for a new security force and they even have armed guards the hospital.’

‘And you...?’

‘I have to stay here, it’s my duty to help our people, whatever side they’re on.’

72

Flight from Gaza

THE SOUND OF GUN FIRE AWAKENED THEM. The previous evening there had already heard the sound of guns in the distance. It was time to get out and get out quick. The Israeli’s were putting pressure on the Hamas using Fatah gunmen to attack public buildings. The hurriedly checked out paying in US dollars one of the three

currencies accepted in Gaza, the others being Israeli shekels and Jordanian dinars.

The Landcruiser was waiting for them outside, its motor running and ready to go. Slimane told them they just had time to get to the Egyptian border crossing which was still open.

He told them that factional gun battles broke out in the southern Gaza town of Rafah the previous evening after the funeral of a slain Hamas man.

‘Are you sure we can cross there?’

‘I hope so!’ He did not sound too sure.

‘How long does it take?’

‘To cross into Egypt?’

‘No to get to the border!’

‘Not long, depends on the road blocks, maybe half an hour.’

‘Let’s get going then.’

‘The border crossing is open?’

‘It was half an hour ago.’

‘Let’s get going!’

The sun was just coming up as their bags were quickly loaded into the Toyota, the climbed in set off immediately to the south by the coast road. Practically all roads in Gaza ran from north to south or east to west. At Peat Sade they turned left inland, skirting around Rafah to join the main road near to Gaza’s disused Dahaniyeh International Airport, forcibly closed down by the Israelis.

Suddenly the Toyota was shaken as two F-16s roared over the road at very low level. The driver pulled up in the shelter of an abandoned building and waited, a few moments later they heard the sound of propeller driven aircraft. ‘Drones’, Slimane informed them.

New fighting between the Fatah and the Hamas had broken out as the rhetoric between Abbas and Haniyeh had become heated. The

national unity government had been specifically formed to prevent internal fighting.

The objective of the two Palestinian leaders was not a peace agreement with Israel but the establishment of a single state within the borders of pre-1948 Palestine, the return of refugees, with an Arab-Muslim majority and an end to the Jewish state.

When the British left in 1948, the Israelis were attacked by a united Arab force, which it pushed back to the former Mandate boundaries that became the ceasefire lines. The West Bank and the Gaza Strip remained outside of Israeli territory. In the wars that followed Israel took control of the West Bank and Gaza, as well as the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula. The latter was returned to Egypt when the peace treaty between the two countries was signed in the early 1980s, and the international border between the two countries was recognised. Then Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel, and the River Jordan and the Dead Sea formed the border between the two countries to the north with a land border running directly south to the Gulf of Aqaba. In 2005 Israel withdrew from Gaza. As to the 1967 borders it is unthinkable for Israel to withdraw or return East Jerusalem to the Palestinians.

On leaving Gaza city they passed two or three dead bodies, signs of the night's violence, and gunmen stood in doorways. Slimane did not need to tell the driver to drive carefully so as avoid attracting attention.

Ahead was a road block, a chicane with large concrete blocks. The stopped and a Palestinian approached, his head covered by the black and white chequered keffiyeh, he looked not more than about twenty years old. He walked around to the passenger side, offered his hand to Slimane who spoke to him quickly in Arabic. The Palestinian looked at the passengers, then with a sharp swinging movement of his Kalashnikov he waved them on.

‘We’re lucky,’ said Slimane, ‘a cousin of mine.’

It was unwise to show any signs linking the passengers with the Fatah or the press especially with a BBC correspondent being held somewhere in the south of the Strip.

The Press sticker had been removed and the driver fixed a green Hamas flag in his window, it worked they were waved through at makeshift Hamas checkpoints.

The fighting between the Hamas and Fatah supporters was becoming more and more serious by the hour, the radio announced dozens of dead and worse whilst during the night Israeli air strikes on Hamas facilities in Gaza killed five people and destroying the building belonging to the Executive Force, responsible for security in Gaza. The latest news spoke of Israeli tanks were poised to move into Gaza.

The Hamas had been elected democratically ousting the corrupt Fatah government and its supporters, who under Arafat had shown off their wealth building ostentatious villas under the noses of their desperate compatriots. The reward for democracy was rejection by Europe and America. Now, the Hamas were taking their revenge as the Fatah was ejected, humiliated, beaten and even executed.

Since Rafah was the target of frequent Israeli raids, in retaliation from attacks by Palestinian fighters planting roadside bombs and firing anti-tank grenades, they were ordered to don their flak jackets and helmets. The road was filled with dangers not only the gunmen of the warring factions but there was the risk of Israeli air strikes and random firing by Israeli army to warn off those trying to try to approach the border.

They realised just how small the Gaza Strip was and how desperate its population had become after years of economic crises, unemployment, its utilities destroyed or in serious need of repair, its administrative structure in chaos and its business at a standstill and

all cross frontier employment halted indefinitely. Any hope of an improvement following Israel's withdrawal had disappeared with the election of the Hamas.

73

Fighting Breaks Out

'THE BORDER CROSSING IS CLOSED.'

'Israeli tanks have crossed into Gaza.'

'Why?'

'A soldier has been kidnapped by the Hamas, there are helicopter gunships everywhere, it's not safe to go out.'

'They said something about a tunnel under the border and an attack on an armoured personnel carrier with rocket propelled grenades.'

'Shit!'

'They've blown up several Israeli vehicles and taken a prisoner,' said Slimane.

'The border will be closed for several days,' announced Collins.

'Right, the Egyptians have reinforced their side of the border with extra troops in case the prisoner is moved to Egypt through one the tunnels the militants have dug to the Egyptian part of Rafah.'

'What shall we do?'

'Stay calm and stay put! We'd be better back in Gaza City than here.'

'How the radio says the Israel aircraft have attacked several bridges in central Gaza, they want to prevent militants from moving their prisoner to the Jabalya refugee camp, that's on the outskirts of Gaza City.'

‘Okay,’ said Tim to Slimane, ‘let’s use the coast road again if it’s too dangerous on the main road. But first get that press sign on the roof.’”

They turned around and headed back in the same direction to the coast road.

‘Can we get out by sea?’

‘No the Israeli’s have patrol boats everywhere,’ replied Tim.

‘If things get bad it could be a possibility, one of my brothers could drop you off across the border, he has a fishing boat.’

‘Won’t the patrol boats fire on you?’

‘No, the fishing boats have signals, in the worst case you could be transferred on to one of the patrol boats.’

‘Only if things become really bad!’

‘The advantage of the sea is it does not have any checkpoints,’ Slimane laughed. ‘The problem is the IDF stops Palestinian boats from going out to sea more than ten kilometres. It’s bad for our fishermen they can’t make a living.’

They arrived back in an almost silent Gaza City at ten, the streets were deserted and there was an atmosphere of fear as they checked in again.

Together in O’Connelly’s room they watched the television that announced that IDF tanks and troops had moved into southern Gaza, in an effort to get the release soldier seized Sunday in an attack on a military position near the Gaza border.

‘So the Palestinians took a prisoner,’ said O’Connelly. ‘What’s the big deal, there’s a war going on?’

‘Here the rules are different,’ said Slimane, ‘if we capture an Israeli soldier, it’s called abduction by the Israeli’s, nice word eh! If they take one of our men, it’s called preventive action against terrorist infrastructures.’

On CNN they watched the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert warn that Israel would not baulk at extreme action to free the captured army corporal. An IDF operation, called Summer Rain, was launched after failure to release the corporal. The incursion was the just first step of the operation.

‘The military action will continue in the coming days,’ Olmert said. ‘We do not intend to reoccupy Gaza. We do not intend to stay there. We have one objective, and that is to bring Gilat home,’ CNN reported.

IDF troops penetrated more than a kilometre into the southern area of Gaza, which in only eight kilometres wide, deploying tanks and armoured vehicles to the east of Rafah, and Dahaniyeh airport.

The Palestinians had fired a number of their home made Qassam rockets into the Negev area, but there were no casualties.

Suddenly the television went out, Laura tried the light switch, nothing, it was a power cut. They left the room and went down to the coffee shop, the desk announced the Israeli air force had attacked the city’s power station. Israeli missiles had plunged Gaza into darkness. The only gain for the Israelis was to punish the poor suffering citizen, whose only sin was to have voted for the Hamas after decades of Arafat’s corrupt rule.

‘The concierge says that armed militants have taken up positions in the Shajaiyeh, that’s near to the border, not far from here, to resist any incursion by the IDF, they’ve told the residents to leave the area.’

‘So what shall we do, wait like sitting ducks?’

‘No we’ll go to the coast, now!’

Late that evening they sat in the same seafront restaurant, its windows now taped over and the lights low, they were sufficiently experienced and wealthy enough to be equipped with a small generator. However, they had little appetite, the situation was

worsening and there was no indication as to how long it could last. Tim Collins had contacted the UN office in Gaza for instructions concerning foreign residents and was simply told to seek cover away from the border area.

Collins told them of the home made rocket factory he had visited nearby to Gaza City. Describing a garage like workshop where they made the one metre long tubes fitted with fins. The tube was filled with home-made propellant made with a coffee grinder and a kitchen mixer from common household chemicals, and the warhead filled with explosives. They could make several a day. Though the rockets were on occasions deadly, they were no match for the IDF forces, the main goal of the Palestinians was to create fear amongst Israelis so as to weaken their support for IDF aggression.

The IDF retaliated to the home-made rockets with heavy artillery shelling, hitting farms, housing and with shells falling as far as the beach area, killing a number of civilians.

Just before the midnight the IDF crossed the border, the first major ground offensive in the Gaza Strip since Israel pulled its troops out in 2005. The Hamas exhorted its fighters to resist.

O'Connelly dug into his bag and pulled out his Israeli mobile phone, it was working, he dialed Benny Weinfeld's number at the Ha'aretz offices.

'Weinfeld.'

'Benny, this is Pat O'Connelly.'

'Hi Pat, nice to hear from you. How's your story going?'

'Bad, listen Benny we're caught up in Gaza City, we're in trouble and want to get out!'

'Gaza City! Boy oh boy, that's bad, what are you doing there?'

'A long story, but if you get us out then it's yours!'

'Where are you exactly?'

O'Connelly gave him the address and their numbers and Weinfeld promised to call them back.

The television announced that Olmert had ruled out any negotiations concerning a prisoner swap and vowed that Israel would respond fiercely to recent attacks from Gaza.

That evening one of Slimane's cousins who had run a small business told them how life had become so difficult.

'Now I can't even go to visit my family near Bethlehem, about an hour's drive from here. It's as though we lived in a different countries, completely cut off, before it was bad, it used to take up to five or six hours, if there was no problem at the checkpoints, now it's worse.'

'What about imports?'

'We can't import food from Israel or from abroad, our trucks are blocked at the checkpoints, sometimes they have to wait several days to get through. Now it's impossible to travel to Tel Aviv for business, before it took as long to go to Tel-Aviv as it takes to fly to London, in addition we were humiliated at the checkpoints, forced to undress by soldiers, treated like dogs.'

Sympathy and Identity

LAURA COULD NOT HELP OBSERVING that the feelings of sympathy between international Jewish communities and Israel had weakened as the conflict between Israel and Palestine continued and the inflexible position of Israeli governments. By her mother, according to Jewish tradition, she could have claimed to be a Jew, but her father was a French Catholic and she had been brought up in the Catholic

religion having little contact with the Jewish community or Jews of her own age. Intermarriage had had its toll on Irish Jewry and this together with immigration had reduced the community to a pittance.

Over the centuries there was a strong bond between Jewish communities, wherever they lived, however, as Israel developed with its own specific national identity as a modern state with its internal politics the links had weakened. Isolated communities gradually disappeared as immigration to Israel took in those who had been rejected or who were in danger. Modern Israel had become a regional superpower, a modern state with powerful allies and armed with the ultimate weapon of dissuasion capable of affronting and defeating any of its neighbours.

Laura had not been born at the time of the Six-Day War in 1967, when there was powerful emotional support for an encircled Israel, David against the Arab Goliath, but she had been old enough to remember the plight of Soviet Jews.

Though she had not been brought up in the Jewish religion she had nevertheless a keen awareness of her Jewish family's history, but she like many of the younger generation felt little, or at least less, in common with the brash present day Israel and the religious traditions of the past that had been the traditions of her parents. But the continuing conflict between Israel and Palestine, and above all its brutal reprisals in Gaza and the Lebanon sapped the sympathy felt after each terrorist attack in Israel.

Bombings and suicide attacks had become everyday events currency, Iraq, Lebanon, London, New York, Madrid and Egypt, the list was long. There was little in common between defenceless innocent tourists in a Bali restaurant and an all powerful Tsahal firing rockets on Palestinians from airborne gunships to defend Israeli settlers in Palestinian territory. The infernal cycle of reprisals had

slowly eroded sympathy for the Palestinians people, transforming the Israeli army into aggressors.

Nightly images of Palestinian camps bombarded in Israel or in the Lebanon did little to prevent the image of Israel from being transformed into that of an aggressor without feelings, no different to the Lebanese army that bombarded Palestinian camps around the clock, transforming them into ruins and desolation as the world turned a blind eye.

Since her arrival in Israel she felt very little in common with the traditional Jews she had observed, the way they dressed, the way they thought and more specifically their religion. On occasions she had seen Orthodox Jews in Paris, she had seen films and photos of such people, but those she saw praying in such religious fervour, balancing their bodies backwards and forwards, at the Wall had as little in common with her as the Eskimos in Nanook of the North. But worse was she felt little in common with modern Israel and its people, once she had admired it, now she did not understand it and in many ways. She knew nothing of their language and little of the history of the Jewish diaspora, its divisions and traditions, in short she had nothing in common with Israel other than a tenuous notion of ancestral religion. She was more attached to the history of a peaceful Ireland, yes a peaceful Ireland, that of the republic, a pastoral country, whose troubles were nothing in comparison to the convulsions of Israel. Her life had been lived and influenced by the world around her in Paris, forming her own ideas and opinions, untouched by any feeling of a narrow community whose persecution was both real and imagined.

Whenever she watched the TV reports on events in Israel and the Occupied Territories she could not avoid seeing an unequal conflict, but the David was a Palestinian, not a Jew, even if she felt no particular sympathy for the Arabs. She had often listened to Jewish

acquaintances in Paris talk of their hatred for the Arabs, but she had not expected to see such an enormous difference between the economic conditions of the two peoples. On arrival in Israel she had been almost astonished to discover what resembled a modern southern European country, not unlike Greece.

Bethlehem was already another world compared to that of Tel-Aviv. Her previous impressions of Palestine were those of Yasser Arafat's fighters holding Kalashnikovs and their keffiyeh, their raised clenched fists and terrorist attacks. But in Gaza she discovered ordinary Palestinians on the other side of the wire fence living in extreme misery and poverty. It was they who were encircled, by what was in comparison a superpower, an enemy armed with modern technology and supported by massive American military aid.

The news had announced a thirty billion dollar arms programme for Israel whilst the Palestinians suffered as Europe held back a few tens millions of dollars food aid and Israel withheld payment of added value taxes. The difference in scale was dizzying.

Times had changed from when Israel was a small weak nation surrounded by belligerent Arab states armed by the Soviet Union. The table had been turned, Egypt, Jordan, Syria not to speak of Iraq had their own problems. The rich Arab countries were more concerned with managing the petro-dollar wealth. It was time that a compromise was found, but Israel had set out its own future by allowing the development of settlements transforming the West Bank into a chequered quilt of colonies, illegal in the eyes of international law, creating a bone of contention for future generations.

The War Against Terrorism

SLIMANE'S BROTHER ARRIVED with another man he introduced as Saad; a film producer. O'Connelly had hoped they would bring news of the situation in Gaza, but he was disappointed.

With little else to occupy them during their long wait the conversation turned to politics. Slimane an experienced Palestinian journalist, born on the West Bank in Jericho, had lived in Gaza for many years and had observed the deterioration of living conditions ever since the peak of optimism following the Camp David Agreement. For him there was no doubt as to corruption of Arafat's and his party the Fatah, but the Palestinians leaders were not alone perfidy.

Ever since the attack on the Twin Towers and the declaration by George Bush of the war against terrorism eyes have been turned on the Muslim world, suspected in block of jihad against the West, and Palestine had been diabolised as a quasi terrorist state for its rightful fight against Israel for the liberation of its occupied and colonised homeland.

Slimane spoke of the consequences of the radicalisation of the West and the Muslim worlds. At the outside the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had been no different to that of a conventional war of territory, with little concern for the underlying growing discord between the two worlds.

For Saad, who was in fact an expatriate Iraqi who lived in Paris, the heart of this discord was the simmering conflict with Israel over Palestinian rights, and the question of oil. Nature has to a great extent put its oil reserves in the Muslim world, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, the

Emirates, Indonesia, Malaysia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and even in Russia part of its vast oil reserves are situated in Muslim republics such as the little know, but rich Bachkiristan.

Resentment had been simmering before the destruction of the World Trade Centre with attacks amongst others in Saudi Arabia, Tanzania and Kenya.

The results today are reflected in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine as well as the position of Iran with the world becoming a more dangerous place. The excuse of terrorism led to the war in Iraq with the accusation of its possessing weapons of mass destruction, though no proof was discovered. It was neither Iraq nor Afghanistan that perpetrated the attacks on the US homeland.

US foreign policy was reoriented to counter-terrorism and homeland security whilst promoting the American concept of freedom, a word that has little meaning to an ordinary Iraqi or Palestinian, who to their way of thinking were already free.

The Western philosophy of democracy with free elections has given Palestine a Hamas government, has caused civil war between the factions that divide Iraq and Afghanistan, has increased the risk of civil war in Lebanon. Democracy has little meaning in societies divided by ethnic and religious lines.

For Saad Western democracy in Iraq was impossible, democracy commenced with education, equal opportunity and above all wealth created by effort, not wealth pumped out of the ground that benefits a few. The so called political reforms in a society of so many facets such as Iraq claimed by Americans in the comfort of their fortress state had no meaning whatsoever. Iraq was in reality a state formed on artificial premises, around Baghdad with its ancient history as the capital of a regional power, with its Sunnite population who could only be pleased to see their power extended by the borders imposed by an imperial power, giving them authority over Kurds, traditional

desert tribes and the Shiite region extending down to the Gulf port of Basrah.

When the Bush administration declared war on terrorism with global with the right to intervene militarily in Iraq and Afghanistan and the right arrest anybody anywhere in the world on suspicion of his being linked to terrorism, it gave, by extension, countries such as Israel the freedom to act whenever they feels the need by invoking the threat of terrorism.

Israel's attack on Gaza was based on it confounding the capture of a soldier with terrorism, though its own massive attacks are said to be in self defence, self defence against a few amateurish rockets, deadly for sure, but their effects are dwarfed compared to the number of Palestinians killed.

The result of the world's only superpower decision to ignore human rights in the supposed defence of their vision of democracy has been the exploitation by unprincipled governments of anti-terrorist laws for the oppression of rightful political opposition and the rejection of rightful demands such as for Palestine and its territories occupied by Israel.

Saad was a film producer, a small film producer. After two modest successes focused on the everyday life in the Iraqi war zone he had arrived in Gaza with the idea of preparing a documentary on everyday life in Palestine and had found himself caught up between the warring factions.

He had already abandoned the hope of continuing work in Iraq because of the sectarian violence and now found himself caught up between the Hamas, Fatah and Israelis. He told them of how Sunni families in mainly Shia neighbourhoods were driven out of their homes in the by endless sectarian violence and intimidation.

Baghdad had become a trap from Adhamiya in the north, through the huge overflowing Shia slum of Sadr City, to Zafaraniya in the

south, as ethnic cleansing swept through its communities with murder and assassination around the clock with Shia death squads abducting and murdering Sunnis, Sunnis reeking death with their murderous car bombs.

The al-Mahdi militia had infiltrated the police, controlled service stations for petrol and propane cooking gas, extorted money from shops and businesses to finance its war.

Saad likened Gaza to Baghdad and the Hamas to al-Mahdi with the enclave being transformed it into a political-religious power base.

76

Stranded

THE NIGHT WAS LONG as sat around a table in the light of candles. Nearly half of Gaza was without electricity after the brutal bombing of the power station.

‘We can’t watch the TV without electricity. Our batteries are almost flat, I don’t know how long more they will last.’

‘Did you hear the shelling last night?’ asked Slimane.

‘Yes, it must have been terrifying for those in that district.’

‘You’d be surprised, it is three generations we have lived with such attacks, people are very stoic.’

‘Do you think they will attack?’

‘I don’t know, but you’d stay inside for the moment. I think it may get more dangerous.’

‘It’ll take months to get power back to normal.’

‘We don’t have any water either.’

‘It’s normal the water is pumped, so no electricity, no water!’

‘We heard that the bridges on the main road were hit. I don’t know how we’re going to get back!’

‘Two others were also hit.’

‘Why did they take the Israeli corporal?’

‘It was revenge for all the Palestinians killed.’

‘They’ve been dropping leaflets telling people to avoid areas that are targeted.’

During the night Israeli tanks and infantry pushed into the south of Gaza near to Rafah as air strikes continued near to the Khan Younis refugee camp and the Islamic University in Gaza City. On the northern border Israeli ground forces were massed ready to move. Elsewhere the Israeli attack continued with large troop movements, artillery barrages and air strikes, there was little resistance from the Palestinian forces armed with mere peashooters, home made rockets made in makeshift workshops.

The next morning the small generator was started and they switched on the TV to an Israeli channel that announced an operation against a terrorist organisation, arresting Hamas ministers and lawmakers in the West Bank, at least seven ministers and twenty parliamentarians were arrested on raids in several towns.

They zapped to CNN news that announced the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza had been closed. They saw crowds of Palestinians stranded on the Egyptian side of the border, held behind the gates that led to the terminal, under the hot sun and surrounded by Egyptian police. Certain of them had been waiting for two weeks to be let into Gaza and deaths had been reported.

Much of Gaza woke up stunned by the attacks, life came to a standstill with the destruction of key bridges and infrastructure with all moving vehicles being targeted by missiles fired from Israeli helicopters and F16s. The previous day batteries and candles, flour, food and water had been sold out in expectation of a long siege.

Later that morning tanks moved into northern Gaza, in the largest military operation since Israel had quit Gaza in 2005, tanks and armoured bulldozers took up positions near to the Jabaliya refugee camp and heavy shelling was reported in the south around Dahaniyeh airport. The Israeli government claimed it was retaliating for the firing of home-made rockets at villages near to the Gaza border.

The Palestinian forces armed with automatic weapons and rocket propelled grenades took up positions, ready to face the Israelis invaders with their sophisticated missiles and ultra-modern tanks.

They laughed nervously when CNN reported the White House was keeping up its pressure on Hamas, demanding that the Palestinian government cease its aggression.

‘Palestinian forces are threatening to overrun Israel!’ Saad laughed, then added bitterly, ‘They’ll turn this into another Iraq? If they saw the bodies piled up in the morgues every morning they would think differently.’

Every now and then they heard the roar of low flying F16s, rattling windows and making the glasses on their table tremble, they froze in silence expecting the worse. Slimane told them, ‘don’t worry it’s when you don’t hear them you should start to pray! The sonic booms of the Israeli jets were so powerful, windows were often broken.

‘Will the other Arab states help?’ asked Laura.

The Palestinians roared with laughter.

‘I worked in Iraq,’ said one of Slimane’s cousins, ‘but with the killings I was forced to leave, now it is as if it’s followed me! Why? Because of America and Israel, not because of Saddam.’

The generator was switched off during the day to save petrol and without the TV little news leaked through to the small group who had taken refuge in the restaurant. Rumours were rife, there was talk of a surprise attack from Syria or Egypt like in 1973. Bashir Assad was rumoured to be preparing to move forces to take back the

Golan Heights, confident of having the backing of his new ally Iran. Others talked of the Hezbollah attacking Israeli forces on the border with the Lebanon.

That same night Israel aircraft caused panic by bombing Beirut International Airport and the threat of a generalised war was becoming possible very quickly. The Israeli air force had responded after the Hezbollah had attacked Israeli troops near to the border between the two countries and had taken prisoners.

It was extremely urgent they get out quick before they ended up dead or as hostages, but for the moment there was little alternative but to wait, hoping that they would be missed.

A corner of the restaurant had been transformed into a makeshift sleeping area for the stranded travellers with a few worn mattresses. O'Connelly had just settled down to try to sleep when his cellphone vibrated, it was Benny Weinfeld.

'Pat, where are you?'

'Still here in Gaza, near the sea,' he said in a low voice to avoid disturbing the others.

'Things are not looking good. How many are you?'

'Three or four.'

'Foreigners?'

'Three.'

'Forget the others if they're Palestinians!'

'Okay.'

'We can pick you up from the sea, we'll send a boat.'

'A boat?'

'Yes, an inflatable, a fast Zodiac.'

'It'll bring you over to our side of the border, its only six or seven kilometres.'

'What do we do?'

‘I’ll call you back with instructions. We’ll get a fix from your cellphone. Don’t switch it off, don’t say anything to anybody just be ready.’

‘Okay, how long?’

‘I’m not sure, maybe an hour or so,’ he said and hung up.

He shook Collins to tell him to be ready, they would be soon be pulled out, he shook his head saying he had no intention of leaving Gaza, he was in the right place at the right time for a reporter.

‘Up to you, if you want to die, we’ll see your body be dragged through the streets from a car bumper.’

‘I’ll take the risk,’ he said though he didn’t sound very convincing.

‘Can you trust Slimane?’

‘Absolutely.’

‘Can he drive us to a pick up point?’

‘I suppose so.’

‘What about the others, I mean his family, what will they do?’

‘We’ll just tell them we’re going to the UN in centre of Gaza City.’

‘Okay.’

The phone rang about thirty minutes later.

‘Are you ready?’

‘Yes.’

‘How many?’

‘Two.’

‘Okay, we’ve got a fix on you, take the coast road about a kilometre north, no lights, repeat no lights, when you get there we’ll call you back.’

They got together their bags and a rucksack containing Assad’s work and after a quick thanks to Slimane’s family made their way to the Toyota parked outside. Suddenly they heard shouting and shots, they piled into the SUV, Collins with them. They saw the headlights of a vehicle moving towards them and Slimane put his foot on the

pedal screeching away along the coast road, his lights out. The night was dark, they could just make out the road ahead of them, only a few flashes on the horizon to the east lit up the surrounding followed by the muffled rumble of explosions as they anxiously looked behind them.

The cellphone rang. It was not Benny.

‘Continue one hundred metres more, then stop, keep your lights off, and keep talking.’

‘We’re being followed!’

‘Do as I say, we’ll look after the rest!’

They moved ahead rapidly.

‘Stop! Get down and make your way to the waters edge, its about thirty metres from the road.’

They stopped. Slimane pulled out O’Connelly and Laura’s bags and turned towards the beach. A dark figure emerged and beckoned them to hurry.

Slimane waved and climbed back into the Toyota, suddenly there was a screeching of tyres as two SUVs appeared out of the darkness and firing broke out. They heard the frantic revving of the Toyota’s motor and more shots rang out with men running towards them from the SUVs. A hand pulled Laura and O’Connelly followed into the dark. Turning he saw Slimane slumped over the wheel of the SUV and Collins doubled over on his knees.

O’Connelly felt a sharp sting in his thigh, he felt no pain, then his leg collapsed under him and he fell onto the sand. Collins had been hit in the chest, he was not had time to put on his flak jacket.

Suddenly a beam of light appeared from the sky and there was a whoosh as a helicopter fired a rocket, one of the newly arrived SUVs exploded in a ball of fire. Heavy firing from the helicopter sent their attackers running for cover.

Some moments later they were roaring away in to the waves, the boat bucking like a wild horse as the hit the waves at sixty or seventy kilometres an hour, swinging out to sea in an elliptical northward direction. Laura was lying flat on the floor next to Collins who was unconscious, O'Connelly desperately hung onto a cord. Lifting his head could make out the form of three commandos holding their weapons at the ready scrutinising the horizon, a fourth was at the wheel leaning over the dim screen of a GPS and speaking Hebrew rapidly into a microphone fixed onto his helmet. The noise of the powerful motor and the sea submerged any noise from the shore that had disappeared behind them.

Less than five minutes later the Zodiac turned towards the shore, to one left side they the bright lights of roads and buildings, to the right the lights ended abruptly in total darkness. They beach and were helped up towards a waiting helicopter, a medical team attended to O'Connelly's wound and put Collins on a stretcher. A few minutes latter they took off in the direction of the Ashdod general hospital.

O'Connelly had been hit by a bullet that had passed through his thigh, a couple of day's hospitalisation and he would be back on his feet. Collins had not been so lucky, but he would survive, a bullet was lodged in his chest just avoiding his lungs, he would need at least a couple of weeks or more care, he would have his story. There was no news of Slimane or Saad.

The next morning Laura arrived in O'Connelly room, where he was watching the development of events in the Lebanon on the TV news. The IDF was carrying out round the clock sorties against Hezbollah targets as Katushka rockets rained down on Israeli border districts to the south the Lebanon. Sheikh Nasrallah accused the Lebanese Prime Minister of hampering Hezbollah's efforts in resisting the Israeli attacks.

Laura though very shaken by the events was already back on form and had already started sifting through Assad's papers. As she talked excitedly, jumping to and from the previous day's rescue operation and Assad's papers, Benny Weinfeld poked his head around the door to the room.

'So how are our heroes?' he said coming in with a broad smile holding a bouquet of flowers he gave to Laura.

'A lot better, glad to be back in civilization, even if it's in the middle of a war!' said O'Connelly.

'Good. The doctors tell me your friend Collins should be fine. So are you going to tell me how you got into such a jam?'

'The Temple papers!' said Laura pointing to her treasure trove.

At first glance the young Druze archaeologist Assad had carried out extensive verifications of the measurements of the underground cisterns carried out by the Palestinian Survey Fund more than one hundred years before confirming the precision of the investigations carried out by the engineers of Queen Victoria's army.

It remained to be seen whether de Lussac's had plagiarised Assad's sifting and comparing the documents O'Connelly had acquired from Jean-Louis Claudel and those he had risked his life for in Gaza. A time taking task as many documents were written in Arabic and Hebrew. Whatever the result the translation of de Lussac's theory was no longer of any importance and in view of the accusations that hung over him in Cambodia the document that he had bequeathed to the State Library of Israel would be left to gather dust in some basement storeroom in Jerusalem until it was long forgotten, a curiosity amongst so many others as to the lost Temple of the Jews.

O'Connelly's immediate plan was to return to Paris with Laura and escape the war between Israel and the Hezbollah that was growing by the hour. As he meditated the events of the previous days he received a strange message from Jean-Louis Claudel in Phnom Penh,

informing him that de Lussac was being held by the police in Cambodia in Siem Reap, he had been arrested three days after his return on a series of charges that went from trafficking in archaeological works to unlawful sexual with under aged girls. It was difficult to unravel the story but it seemed that de Lussac had become entangled with Claudel's unsavoury friends, who had used his guest house as a meeting place and as a *maison de passe* with the presence of young Cambodian girls. It seemed that the friends were part a smuggling ring trafficking Cambodian antiquities. When the police had raided the guest house de Lussac had been found in a compromising situation and had been pulled in with all those present.

77

Reason

SOLLY, THOUGH AN ISRAELI AND A JEW, like a good many of his fellow country men was an atheist, however he went further, he was an iconoclast, targeting religion and religious institutions whatever their gods or beliefs. He liked to tell people that his university had a faculty devoted to something that did not exist: God!

Solly explained that religion had of course given thought to theologians as well as to philosophers, historians and men of science, however, kings and politicians had on the other hand not given religion much thought, but throughout history had wielded god and religion as powerful weapons on their road to power.

At the beginning of the third millennium Christianity and Islam found themselves face to face in a conflict that bordered more on ideological concepts than those of faith. Christianity had come into

conflict with Islam when Jerusalem was conquered by the second Caliph Omar and continued with the Crusades until the fall of the Christian Byzantine Empire to the Ottoman Turks.

The Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologus said out during the siege of Constantinople between 1394 and 1402: *Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.* The emperor argued against violence, which he believed was contrary to God's nature.

However, Solly explained this position was that of an emperor educated in the tradition of Greek philosophy, which was not the case for Muslims whose God was beyond the reasoning of man. For them God was not bound even by his own word.

Christianity was the European concept of a god imported from the Middle East by Greeks and Romans, spread across Europe by the Roman Empire, transformed and then spread to the New World. The New Testament was written in Greek and naturally bore the mark of Greek thought.

For him there was little in common today between the god of Abraham and his descendants and that of the Christian Greco-Roman god and the religion built around Western philosophical concepts with reason as its foundation stone. We as Westerners applaud the concept of 'reason', but it is not the vision of others, just as intelligent, just as wise in other worlds, parallel worlds, whose right to existence is equal to ours.

Many ordinary Muslims see Christianity as the ally of Zionism, very few see the roots of Christianity in Judaism, or are aware of the so called notion of Judeo-Christian civilization. The fact is that this Judeo-Christian concept is a recent invention that contradicts its Greco-Roman foundation. Throughout Christian history the fact that Christ was a Jew was been given relatively little philosophical

thought, after all it was the Jews who had persecuted and crucified Christ with the complicity of the Romans.

Today the leader of the most powerful Christian church, the Pope, has enraged many Muslims by his remarks about Islam. The Pope's attitude towards the Islamic world has been controversial.

John Paul II became the first pope to set foot in a mosque on a visit to Syria. It was a gesture intended to help end centuries of hostility and suspicion between the two religions. Benedict XVI seeks reciprocity, meaning that Christians should have an equal right to follow their faith in Islamic states, without fear of persecution, as Muslims do in the West

Acts and words perceived as insulting by Muslims, result in the killing of Christians and the burnings of churches in Muslim countries. The sensitivity of Muslims about their religion was highlighted by the publication in a Danish newspaper of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad. These caricatures were reproduced in certain other countries, causing outrage amongst Muslims leading to riots and other acts of violence.

Mobs in Beirut and Damascus, driven by political agitators in the pay of Syria and Iran, had burnt down the Danish embassies in reprisal for a newspaper cartoon depicting Allah, even the Norwegian embassy was looted, and in Gaza riots had broken out exacerbated by the world reaction to the Hamas election victory.

Religious and political leaders in the West are acutely aware that their words will be transmitted to a worldwide Muslim audience and any faux pas will result in a violent backlash from extremists in the Islamic world.

Pope Benedict as a cardinal was opposed Turkey joining the European Union, as it belonged to a different cultural sphere, and its adhesion would be a grave error against the tide of history.

The Vatican was dismayed that a mere quotation used to illustrate a philosophical argument should have provoked such anger from Muslims.

If Muslims want to enjoy religious freedom in the West, then Christians should have an equal right to follow their faith in Islamic states, without fear of persecution. The hyper sensitivity of Muslims about their religion was made clear by their reaction to the cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad.

78

Willing Helpers

‘LOOK AT PALESTINE TODAY, surrounded by walls and watch towers surveyed by armed soldiers and tanks. It’s a vast prison! Why? Because they claim the right of any nation to their freedom! In 1948, the United Nations recognising the claims of both Jews and Arabs divided the country as best as possible, sixty years later Israel is a prosperous nation and Palestine lives in misery.’

‘But it was the Arabs who started the war in 1948.’

‘That’s clear, that was an error by the Arabs as was their later attacks, and they paid for it, losing the war and losing territory, but since peace treaties were signed with Egypt and Jordan there was no reason to prevent Palestine from achieving nationhood.’

‘What about Arafat, he prolonged the conflict with terror!’

‘Even if we forget the rest, Arafat has been dead for three years now, peace could have been made with Abbas.’

‘But the Palestinians have never abandoned their war.’

‘And Israel has never put a stop to the colonisation of Palestinian territories with the silent complicity of its citizens.’

‘Complicity?’

‘The IDF soldiers are the willing instruments of oppression, not forgetting the democratic peace Israelis from every walk of life, including historians and researchers of Nazism, the Holocaust and Soviet gulags?’

He was silent.

‘And there’s the expropriation of lands and destruction of farms for settlements and exclusively Jewish roads.’

‘What’s your position on Gaza?’

‘You think I approve the shelling and air attacks that kill the old and the young in the Gaza Strip? Or how sick people from Gaza are prevented from going for treatment on the West Bank.’

‘Perhaps people don’t realise what’s happening in Gaza.’

‘That’s the same defence the German’s used. Israelis ignore the fact that a short distance from where they live the army is vigorously oppressing the Palestinians, harassing them at checkpoints where thousands of people wait everyday for hours upon hours under the blazing sun.’

‘I suppose you’re right.’

‘I’m dam sure I am, our country is a democracy for its Jews. Look at the democratically elected Palestinian prime minister, he cannot even visit the West Bank. It’s no wonder he accepts money from when Gaza is being deliberately strangled. Gaza is dying on its feet because of Bush, Blair and Europe!’

The Legacy of Solomon

‘PRESENT DAY ISRAEL IS FORMED on concepts of ruthless violence and conquest as laid down in the Book of Joshua in their Bible, which tells how they were ordered to: *cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses.*

‘It actually starts in the Book of Genesis, when God made a covenant with Abram, saying: *To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river the Euphrates. The land of the Kenites, Kenizites, Kadmonites; the Chitties, Perizites, Refaim; the Emorites, Canaanites, Gigashites and Yevusites.*’

‘That’s a big piece of real estate!’

‘God also said: *And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your temporary residence, all the land of Canaan as an eternal possession and I will be a God to them.*’

‘Unfortunately when they arrived it was already occupied.’

‘That’s right, it belonged to the Canaanites.’

‘So they conquered it.’

‘In a nutshell, yes, Solomon and David ruled over Canaan and were therefore the founders of Israel.’

‘The legacy of Solomon?’

‘Yes, what a legacy!’

‘What is the definition of conquer?’

‘To take possession of a land or territory by force of arms.’

‘Force?’

‘Yes.’

‘Not very democratic.’

‘No, it had not yet been invented, and those times were definitely anything but democratic.’

‘So who were the descendants of Abraham?’

‘The children of Abraham?’

‘Yes.’

‘Now things get complicated.’

‘The Bible says he had two sons Ishmael and Isaac. Muslims believe that Abraham offered Ishmael for sacrifice. Jews and Christians believe that he offered Isaac. Now the Muslims believe that they are the descendants of Ishmael the son of Abraham, therefore Palestine belongs equally to them.’

‘So going back to the conquest of the Canaanites.’

‘Okay, In the Books of Joshua and Judges, the story of the Israelites settlement in the land of Canaan is told. Joshua describes the arrival of the Israelites into the Promised Land and the battles fought for control of its main cities. Then it tells of how it was divided among the tribes of Israel. In fact this was a long series of battles with victories and defeats that probably lasted for a very long period of time.’

‘So they fought a long series of wars of conquest?’

‘According to the Bible, the answer is yes, historically it is more complicate. In any case the Israelites took over.’

‘And all the other peoples were killed or became Jews?’

‘No, some were no doubt assimilated, but most of those peoples continued to exist as the Bible constantly reminds us. That region was if fact a patchwork of warring tribes and kingdoms until late Roman times.’

‘In short Israel put down all the other tribes and groups.’

‘Yes.’

‘Always fighting with their neighbours.’

‘Yes, territory has always been the main cause of wars.’

‘Their methods were always violent.’

‘Not more than the others.’

‘Others?’

‘Romans, Greeks, Arabs to name a few. They certainly weren’t the own in their methods of conquest. If we jump a thousand years into the future from the time of Herod, the Crusaders were blood thirsty conquerors.’

‘They came to *free* Jerusalem.’

‘They were out for loot and plunder. A good example is the rape and pillage of Constantinople in 1204, which was certainly no reference lesson, especially when they were supposed to be there to free it.’

‘Free it?’

‘From Alexius, a tyrant. They savagely sacked and pillaged Constantinople in a reign of terror and horror that lasted for three days, killing, raping, burning, stealing and destroying ancient Roman and Greek works. In spite of their holy oaths and the threats of excommunication, they ruthlessly violated the city’s holy sanctuaries, defiling all and even a prostitute was set up on the Patriarchal throne. When Pope Innocent III heard of the conduct of his pilgrims, he was filled with shame and strongly rebuked them saying: ‘The Latins have given an example only of iniquity and of works of darkness.’ Anyway the Eastern Empire was divided up between the victors and the Latin Empire formed.’

‘So your saying that the Jew’s leitmotif was that it was theirs, given by God, compared to the Crusader’s who were clearly there for conquest, veiled by the idea of freeing Jerusalem.’

‘Yes, an example is seen amongst the Crusaders were the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon.’

‘The Templars,’ interjected O’Connelly fresh from his visit to Rhodes, ‘one of the most austere of orders, who in fact transformed their gains in fortunes and eventually became bankers.’

‘Yes, and if you look around the shadow of the Crusaders still hangs over the Levant. In Syria there is the extraordinary Castle, the Crack de Chevalier, then there is Acre in Israel, Rhodes and Cyprus. People in the West have forgotten the ravages wreaked by the Crusaders, which have remained fixed in the memories of the peoples of the Levant, who still fear that one day the Crusaders would return and they had reason to believe it. Any invader from the West was to be feared especially if there was a religious connotation to his arrival, and whether they were Christians or Jews was of little importance.’

‘The Muslims weren’t any different when they swept out of their own homelands, conquering Egypt and North Africa and colonising southern Europe...Spain and Sicily.’

80

Another Theory

‘LOOK AT THIS, IT SAYS AN ARCHAEOLOGIST called Joseph Patrich of the Hebrew University has come up with a different theory about the site of the Temple. His work is based on one of the large underground cistern on the Temple Mount and references in the Mishna.’

‘Oh, and where does he put the Temple?’

‘On the Esplanade, but this says more to the south-east with a diagonal alignment compared to traditional positioning.’

‘Well, well, so Patrich has also based his theory on the Palestine Exploration Fund and Wilson’s work in 1866!’

‘Just like our friend de Lussac.’

Effectively Patrick’s work was based on huge cistern, 4.5 meters wide and 54 meters long, which lay underground near to the southeast corner of the Esplanade. He had compared the location and configuration of the cistern with the description in the Mishna, the book of Rabbinic Oral Tradition that was compiled in the 3rd century AD. The cistern appeared to be the only one that tied in with the ancient rabbinic texts concerning daily purification and sacrificial duties carried out by the priests in the Temple forecourt.

‘Patrick links this with the supposed position of the large bath or laver, I imagine he means the Bronze Sea, used by the priests for ritual washing, and the noriah for drawing water from the cistern.’

‘At least de Lussac appears to be right about the illogical mechanics and hydraulics of the system.’

‘Here it says that Patrich claims by locating the laver, the water wheel, the ramp and the altar, with the description from the Mishna, he can position the Temple’s alignment.’

‘Good for him!’

‘According to this information the Dome of the Rock would be in the Temple courtyard, look there’s a drawing.’

O’Connelly pulled himself out of his chair to take a look, he was becoming tired of the theories and arguments about the Temple and Israel, he had reached saturation point. His only satisfaction was his book was now approaching its conclusion, at least it would have an end, not like the Temple saga.

Aliyah

THE TERM ZIONISM WAS FIRST USED in 1892 for Jewish nationalism by the Austrian publisher Nathan Birnbaum. He was founder of the first nationalist Jewish students' movement Kadimah, in 1890.'

'Does it still have the same meaning?'

'As you know Zion is another name for Jerusalem but, today the term Zionism is generally considered to mean support for Israel.'

'You mean politically?'

'Not only politically, it's used for those who support the concept of a Jewish nation state, but it is also used to identify other ideas such as Religious Zionism, Revisionist Zionism, or Labour Zionism.'

'Why do the enemies of Israel always refer to a Zionist state, or Zionists?'

'I'm sorry to say certain people use the term Zionism or Zionist negatively against the Jews, today the Arabs and Iranians use it liberally as a defamatory term.'

'What were the goals of Birnbaum?'

'Amongst others a return to the homeland.'

'Immigration?'

'If you like, we call it the Aliyah, one of the basic principals of Zionism, the Law of Return, which permits any Jew the legal right to Israeli citizenship and assistance to immigrate and settle in Israel.'

'Anybody?'

'Yes, Jewish of course, it is part of the biblical promise to the descendants of the Hebrew patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.'

‘The very great majority of Israeli’s immigrated here from somewhere abroad.’

‘I suppose it goes back to the Jewish diaspora and persecution in Europe.’

‘Yes, the Jews were expelled from England in 1290, from France in 1391, from Austria in 1421 and from Spain in 1492.’

‘History has been unkind to the Jews.’

‘Yes, though the case of Spain has sometimes been exaggerated seen through the prism of time.’

‘Why is that?’

‘The Jews live in the Iberian Peninsula since at least the third century. In the Middle Ages they were the largest Jewish community in the world, but contrary to what is generally believed, by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, they formed only about two percent of Spain’s population, that’s to say about one hundred thousand people, in percentage terms that’s about twice that of the present day Jewish population of France. In addition most did not leave Spain, they were converted to Christianity, and many of those who left returned.’

‘It was still a tragedy for the Jews.’

‘That’s an understatement. But the Zionist Aliyah started in 1882 with Russian Jews, if we go into figures then about 35,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine in the period from 1882 to 1903. The second Aliyah took place between 1904 and 1914 and brought another 40,000 Jews from Russia as a result of the pogroms and anti-Semitism. Then after WWI from 1919 to 1923, again mostly Russian Jews.

When the British were given the mandate for Palestine by the League of Nations, the Jewish population had reached 90,000 and between 1924 and 1929 more Jews arrived from Poland and Hungary, another 90,000 of mostly middle class families, they settled in towns setting up small businesses and industry.

When the Nazis came to power in Germany 250,000 immigrants arrived, these were mostly from Eastern Europe, they were doctors, lawyers and teachers, and by 1940 the Jewish population of Palestine had reached 450,000.'

'That's still a long way from today's population.'

'Don't be in such a hurry, after the end of WWII, nearly 700,000 Jews quit the Arab countries for Israel, but the greatest exodus was from Russia, first from the USSR and then from the Russian Federation, today we have over one million Russian Jews.

'That explains why we see so much written in Russian everywhere.'

'Quite so.'

'What about the Arabs?'

'You mean the Israeli Arabs.'

'Yes.'

'There are about one million Israeli Arabs, they have equal rights as Israeli citizens.'

'Some of them are against the State of Israel.'

'Yes, they're the families of Palestinians who stayed in Israel after the war of independence in 1948.'

82

The Wandering Jew

'I SUPPOSE THAT EXPLAINS THE LEGEND of the Wandering Jew.'

'You mean the Diaspora?'

'Yes, the Diaspora since Roman times and the expulsion of the Jews from European countries over the centuries and the Aliyah.'

‘The Wandering Jew is in fact a figure from medieval folklore that commenced around the thirteenth century. It tells the tale of a Jew who is supposed to have taunted Jesus on the way to the Crucifixion and was cursed to wander the earth until the Second Coming.’

‘That’s true in a sense!’

‘Maybe, some do see the Wandering Jew as a characterization of the Jewish diaspora, a kind of divine retribution for perceived Jewish responsibility for the Crucifixion together with the destruction of Jerusalem.’

‘A kind of anti-Semitism.’

‘I wouldn’t mix the two, though one leads to the other. The fact that the New Testament implicates the Jews in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus is one thing, however, we shouldn’t forget that Jesus was a Jew and a rebel. Rebels were dealt with harshly, look what happens to them today in certain countries!’

‘But it did lead to anti-Semitism.’

‘It was used as a rabble rousing excuse. The fact is that Medieval society and for that matter modern society rejects what is different, there are a thousand examples of ethnic confrontation across the world today.’

‘Ethnic confrontation.’

‘Yes, the Jews have always maintained their difference and this was difficult for the communities in which they lived to accept. Look at pre-revolutionary Russia. There were six million Jews in the Russian Empire, who were badly treated as Jews, but once they were converted they could accede to the nobility and high status in Russian society, like Lenin.’

‘What’s Lenin got to do with it?’

‘His family was Jewish, converted to the Orthodox Church, and his grandfather was admitted to the nobility.’

‘So the Jews were rejected because they were different.’

‘In a nutshell yes.’

A modern allegorical view claims instead that the ‘Wandering Jew’ personifies any individual who has been made to see the error of his or her wickedness, that is if the mocking of the Passion epitomizes the callousness of mankind toward the suffering of individual human beings.

83

Paris

THE LEAVES OF THE PLANE TREES had started to take on their late summer colours, a mixture of various shades of greens and browns, the weather was fine and there was the promise of an Indian summer in the air. Best of all O’Connelly was in his Paris home, his left thigh was still sore and the muscles stiff, however the wound had healed and a little therapy would soon see him back to normal.

The conflict in Israel had run its course with a large part of southern Lebanon in ruins and Gaza more isolated than ever, their peoples once again the victims of politics that few understood. Israel for the first time since its independence doubted its capacity to fight a war, a new kind of war, a guerilla war, the kind dreaded by all governments.

O’Connelly’s intensive contact with the world of archaeology in eastern Mediterranean and the interlude in Cambodia during the previous months had provided him with a considerable quantity of solid information for his book. He had now fixed the theme and structure of his novel, the characters were real as were the settings with its heroes and villains. He had made progress in analysing the

mass of documents provided by Assad's research and de Lussac's ramblings.

He felt satisfaction and pleasure at the idea of the task that lay before him over the coming winter months, entering the imaginary world of his book, transforming his experience and research into a bestseller.

He typed a heading into his laptop 'The Legacy of Solomon'.

Whether Solomon had existed or not was of little importance, what did exist was his legacy, a legacy that had created three thousand years of Jewish history, which gave birth to the world's three great monotheist religions, and the endless conflicts that would continue to wrack the Middle East for an indeterminable time.

The story had no end, the characters inside and outside of the pages would of course experience their individual destinies; the story of the Temple would be fought out by archaeologists and religionists for centuries to come, and almost certainly without any conclusive evidence to favour one theory or another.

Would Islam rediscover harmony when the wells of Arabia had run dry? Would Judaism find peace when the Palestinian conflict was resolved? Would Christianity ever recover faith in a world of virtual pleasure and material wealth.

On a Bridge

PAUL CALLED HIM TO FIX THE photography session needed for the press and book covers. He had suggested the location should be at the new Simone de Beauvoir Bridge a footbridge that spanned the River Seine near Bercy. It was where the National Cinematheque

stood; designed by Frank O.Gehry, initially the American Centre in Paris, which had collapsed under a mountain of debt and was transformed as a home dedicated to the history of the cinema.

It was a bright but sharp Sunday afternoon when Paul, accompanied by his assistant Anne-Marie, picked him up and headed over to Bercy where they parked the car under the Novotel and walked through the gardens to the recently inaugurated bridge that led over the river to the National Library.

‘So how is the book coming along?’

‘Not too bad, I hope it will be ready in the New Year.’

‘Recovered from your adventures in the Middle East?’

‘That’s the least of my worries. The problem is the Trust and de Lussac.’

‘I thought he was locked up in Cambodia?’

‘He is, but the stupid bastard bequeathed his work to the Israeli government.’

‘That’s no problem for your book?’

‘No, but it’s a problem for Laura, you know the translation.’

‘I thought he had given the rights to the Trust?’

‘He did, but as the Trust seems to be going belly-up it’s a mess. The lawyers are trying to work things out. If they come to some kind of agreement then the book could be published.’

‘An archaeological work by a defrocked Jesuit accused of paedophilia, not very good publicity.’

‘Not so quick, it turns out that the idea was not his, nor was the original work, remember our promise to Aisha.’

They climbed the steps up to the bridge. Between the towers of the Library facing them on the opposite bank of the Seine the sun hung in the sky, a brilliant globe surrounded several black clouds in the otherwise bright blue sky.

Paul stopped and unloaded his cameras.

‘Stop there, lean on the rail, like you are reading your book.’

‘Isn’t the sun a problem?’

‘Don’t worry about that, I’m the photographer, you’re the writer, keep on talking

Ennis posed and continued to talk.

‘The work was done by a young Arab Israeli Ph.D. student, a Druze, in archaeologist at the Tel-Aviv University who de Lussac met some years ago.’

‘So what happened to him.’

‘He was killed in a border clash in the Lebanon.’

‘I didn’t think there were Arabs in the Israeli army.’

‘Yes, but they are Druze and Bedouin.’

‘What’s the different?’ he said shrugging, ‘Never mind...anyway, so de Lussac stole the manuscript.’

‘Not exactly, he stole the research work, a huge mass of research work.’

‘Right, and what was so unusual in the research was being an Arab and a Muslim, he had access to the Haram and its underground.’

‘So he could verify the data.’

‘Some of it at least.

They made their way across the bridge, Paul shooting away with Anne-Marie struggling behind with his equipment.

‘How did you find this out?’

‘Ah, that’s a long story I’ll tell you another time.

Back in his apartment O’Connelly was making his last preparations, he was leaving for Tel-Aviv the next morning on the early Air France flight when his cell phone rang.

‘Hello John, Jean-Louis here,’

‘Jean-Louis?’

‘Jean-Louis Claudel!’

‘Where are you?’

‘In Paris!’

‘In Paris?’

‘Yes, I arrived this morning from Phnom Penh.’

‘On holiday?’

‘Not exactly, had to leave suddenly, I’ll tell you about it. Are you free? I’ve got something that might interest you.’

‘I’m leaving in the morning for Tel-Aviv.’

‘This is important, very important.’

‘Where are you staying?’

Claudé gave him the address of a hotel near to the Gare Saint Lazare and they agreed to meet late that afternoon.

O’Connelly had surprised the last thing he was expecting was Claudé in Paris and above all that he had something that might interest him. He hoped that it was not illegal antiquities.

The hotel was a dingy two star establishment between the station and Pigalle. They met in the lobby and went to a local bar for a coffee, where Claudé explained that his corrupt friends in the police had obtained his release against the ownership of his guest house and had helped him to flee the country overland to Thailand taking the few remaining things of value he possessed.

‘You were lucky to get me I’m leaving tomorrow.’

‘I have to be lucky once in a while.’

‘So what is it that you have that’s so interesting?’

‘It’ll cost you!’

‘Look I’m not in the market for Cambodian antiques.’

‘Something quiet different, something I think you’ll be interested in.’

‘Well let’s see.’

They returned to the room, the bed was unmade, and different pieces of baggage were lying around the small room in disorder

Claudiel pointed a bulging suitcase.

‘Here,’ he said pulling it out and laying it on the floor.

Claudiel pulled it open and O’Connelly immediately recognised a couple of de Lussac’s photocopied manuscripts. Claudiel then started to pile the contents of the suitcase onto the floor, papers, sketches, notebooks, plans, maps and photographs and CDs.

‘Look Arabic and Hebrew if I’m right.’

O’Connelly picked up a sketch, it was clearly the plan of a cistern marked in Arabic. There were several notes on paper with the University of Tel-Aviv heading.

‘Where did you get these from?’

‘De Lussac left this with me. He’s in jail now and won’t be needing them for a while,’ Claudiel said slyly.

‘How come?’

‘Someone has to carry the can and de Lussac’s bad relations with the authorities in the Department of Antiquities have ensured that the police will be needing his presence for quite some time to come.’

‘What about the French authorities, I mean he is a French citizen?’

‘Yes and no!’

‘No?’

‘He was too clever for his boots, he held an Israeli passport that he used for his residence visa, so for the Cambodians he’s an Israeli, but unfortunately for him Israel has no diplomatic relations with Cambodia.’

‘Tough shit!’

O’Connelly waded through what appeared to be the draft of a university Ph.D. thesis. Then he sported the name Assad Areyda, it was dated four years previously. There were copies of extracts from the Palestinian Survey Fund and many reference documents. Then he picked out a bundled of email copies and correspondence. Flicking

through them he saw to his surprise that they were between the Ph.D. student and Isaac de Lussac.

‘Interesting eh?’

‘Yes, he asked me to take care of all this. It was in his house in Phnom Penh. He wanted me to put it into safe keeping.’

‘Have you looked through this?’

‘It’s not really my thing, but it looks as though the Israeli guy had done most of the work.’

‘How did he become involved with de Lussac?’

‘That’s not complicated, de Lussac had access to all the archaeological records in Paris or London, that’s why Assad contacted him in the first place.’

‘You mean de Lussac was not the instigator of the work?’

‘As I said it’s not my thing, but if I’m not wrong it looks that way. Our friend Isaac seems to have lifted all the work from the PhD student.’

‘What about the student?’

‘Dead! Killed in the Israeli army.’

‘So what are you going to do with all this?’

‘Seems it would be useful for your book!’

‘Otherwise?’

‘I’ll see what Mann will give me for it.’

‘So what do you want?’

‘A couple of thousand euros would see me through.’

O’Connelly made him out a check for three thousand handing it to Claudel who had repacked and locked the suitcase.

‘This did not happen,’ O’Connelly told Claudel as he left carrying the suitcase.

‘We never meet,’ he replied with a satisfied smile as he fingered the check and then folded it into his wallet. That was Claudel he

lived by his wits, a street wise *titi* Parisian through and through, ready to bounce back at the next opportunity.

O'Connelly passed the evening engrossed in the papers, the end result of which was a draft thesis that pointed to the site of the Jewish Temple destroyed in 70AD. They were without any doubt the culmination of almost four years of extensive postgraduate archaeological research on site of the Temple Mount. The abstract described the functioning of the hydraulic system and the conclusion supposed the site of the Temple of the Jews was situated to the south of the Temple Mount below the present walls on the site of the present day archaeological park. O'Connelly concluded that de Lussac had in effect been the correspondent of a certain Assad Areyda, who at the date indicated on the draft thesis was preparing for his doctorate in the Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Tel-Aviv. How de Lussac came to possess Areyda's cache of personal documents was a mystery. There were in addition a number of documents written in Arabic and Hebrew which were undecipherable for O'Connelly.

The next morning he left for Tel-Aviv with the key documents packed in his luggage, including the draft of the thesis, the plans, CDs, note books and photographs. He had not yet figured how he would use them or what his plan was, but his first job was to expose de Lussac and inform the authorities of the fraud.

O'Connelly talked with John Steiner, the senior archivist at the Israeli Archaeological Association, concerning de Lussac's bequeathal, who gave him an understanding smile, he remembered meeting de Lussac whom he took for an unqualified and illuminated amateur, a kind of mad scientist, with one more theory as to the site of the Temple. Steiner had registered his work and consigned it to their archives for such unsolicited curiosities.

Laura then made a few discrete enquiries at the French Consulate, which confirmed de Lussac according to its records was an Israeli citizen; he had the ambiguous status of double nationality, worse he had used his Israeli passport for entry into Cambodia and was therefore an Israeli citizen for the Cambodians, beyond the jurisdiction of the French authorities.

–The End –

Author's remarks

All through my life I have been fascinated by the story of the Bible and Israel and from my early youth was curious as to the historical reality of the Holy Books. For which reason it is difficult to say, perhaps because of the confusion of myths and facts, such as between Virgil and Livy, Thucydides and Homer.

After many visits to Israel and the countries of Middle East I learnt many things, though it would be more than pretentious to say I discovered anything new in the long and complex history of the Holy Land. However, by a sequence of curious events I was drawn into a reflection on the Archaeology of the Bedrock of the Haram esh-Sharif, a site shrouded by mystery and religious conflict, which finally inspired my story.

My profound excuses to serious scientific researchers and the sensibilities of believers for what may seem to be an over simplified or confused vision of history and religion.

The story is inspired by real, present day and historical, events.

Acknowledgements

This book could not have been written without the data and information published on the Internet and in the world press collected over a period of seven years, starting when the very first signs of the sub-prime, sovereign, euro, debt crises appeared in early 2007. I have trawled numerous British, Irish, US, Russian, French, Spanish, Chinese, Israeli newspapers, news blogs and specialist Internet sites, and books (authors' cited). And of course Wikipedia.

During this period I have collected information during my visits to the USA, China, Hong Kong, Macau, Indonesia, India, Dubai, Thailand, Cambodia, Libya, Egypt, Kenya, Tanzania, Senegal, Mali, Morocco, Mexico, the UK, Germany, Belgium, France, Spain and Italy. To this I have added my experience in other parts of the world, notably Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, Burma, Switzerland, Algeria, Russia, Scandinavia, the Baltic Countries, Poland, Hungary, the countries of ex-Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Russia, Turkmenistan, Jordan, Syria, Israel, Egypt, the Caribbean, Central and South America.

I present my thanks and excuses to all the willing and unwilling contributors to the information included in this book, the information from this information world. I have tried to verify all the facts, but this is an impossible task. In my humble opinion most data reflects real events and the opinions of the vast majority of persons affected, directly or indirectly, by the multiple crises.

The is a story, a novelised account of the events leading up to and relating to the economic ongoing crises, where the fictitious characters are fictitious, and where the real characters such as George W Bush and Tony Blair are real.

The stories of 2010-2012 and 2013 are recounted in tomes three and four of *The Turning Point*.

With my very sincere thanks to all contributors, direct and indirect, knowing and unknowing, willing and unwilling.

John Francis Kinsella, Paris, February 2019



My other books

Fiction

Borneo Pulp

Offshore Islands

The Legacy of Solomon

The Prism

The Lost Forest

Death of a Financier

The Turning Point 2007-2008

The Collection

A Redhead at the Pushkin

The Last Ancestor

Cornucopia

A Weekend in Brussels

Non-fiction

An Introduction to Early Twentieth Century Chinese Literature

Translations

Le Point de Non Retour
The Sorrow of Europe
The Temple of Solomon
Jean Sibelius - A biography
Understanding Architecture
L'île de l'ouest

In the works

Spanish Gold
A Biography of Patrick Wolfe (Fiction)