

The Holy Land in History and Thought

**Papers Submitted to the International Conference
on the Relations Between the Holy Land
and the World Outside It**

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Foreword

No single fraction of the world's surface is linked to our history, to our beliefs, to our emotions, as strongly as the Holy Land, a relatively small and unspectacular tract of country between the eastern shores of the Mediterranean and the surrounding deserts.

There were born two of the most important religions to have shaped the destiny of mankind. To the Jewish diaspora and to the citizens of the State which emerged again in 1948 after an eighteen-century eclipse, Eretz Yisrael is not only a holy land but the eternal Zion, a gift of God to His people. To Christians all over the world, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the Galilean village of Nazareth, the Christ's preaching at Capharnaum and the final tragedy of the Crucifixion at Jerusalem make up a deeply moving picture book, an integral part of their sensibility. The history of Europe cannot be understood without the pilgrimages, without the Crusades.

Moreover, the third and most recent of the monotheistic religions, Islam, although it possesses its own holy places in the Arabian peninsula, considers "Al-Quds" as one of the cities sanctified by its Prophet. The beautiful mosques of Jerusalem are among the most renowned monuments of worship of the Muslim world.

The Holy Land has been a country at crossroads since the Palaeolithic era and the theatre of the Empires' expansion and wars from antiquity right up until today. Its history bears the seal of tragedy. All the peoples who have invaded it or dwelt in it have abundantly shed their blood on its soil.

The International Conference on the Relations between the Holy Land and the World Outside it, thanks to the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, under the chairmanship of Prof. Moshe Sharon, has given an opportunity to specialists from Israel, Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, the United States of America and South Africa to discuss such themes as the early history of the Holy Land, its relations with Christian theology and the attraction it exercised upon so many people, including the Falashas from Ethiopia as well as the medieval pilgrims. The papers submitted to that Conference are a worthy contribution to one of the most fascinating subjects of human science. Such

a symposium not only clarifies a certain number of problems; it also raises meaningful questions which should be addressed in further meetings. It is therefore to be hoped that the example set by the Conference on the Holy Land will be followed by other initiatives of the same kind, and with the same success.

Dr Jacques Soustelle

Member of the French Academy

Paris, May 1987

Preface

The International Conference on the Relations between the Holy Land and the World Outside it brought together some 40 scholars from major centres of scholarship in the world. They convened at the University of the Witwatersrand at the beginning of December 1986 to mark the introduction of Jewish Studies into the University. Most of them contributed papers to the conference and studies for this volume.

The choice of the Holy Land as the theme for the conference seemed most appropriate because of its relevance to all three monotheistic religions and to the civilisations which they produced.

"The Holy Land is at the centre of the development of great civilisations" wrote Karl Tober, Principal and Vice Chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand. "It was in the Middle East that mankind made the initial advance from the conditions of pre-historic life to the formation of urban communities. These sizeable and complex communities represented in their development a shift of such dimensions that in the whole of the subsequent history, perhaps, only the changes wrought by industrialisation and, in this century, the technological revolution can be compared with it. Modern historians have developed, to an unprecedented degree, an awareness of the relevance of the past for contemporary society. By systematically exploring the past, scholars may perhaps be able to develop insights which will illuminate the obscurities of the future."

The studies presented in this volume represent these ideas. They belong to a wide range of disciplines: history, general and Hebrew literature, archaeology, theology, Bible studies, Islamic studies and modern politics; and they cover an extraordinarily long period which stretches from the depth of pre-history some 70 000 years ago to our present time.

It is with much gratitude that I wish to thank all my colleagues who contributed to the success and the high standard of the conference.

The establishment of the Chair in Jewish studies would have been impossible without the generous donation of Mr Eric Samson, the Chairman and Chief Executive of Macsteel, South Africa, and without the dedication of Mr I. Greenstein, the Chairman of

the South African Committee for Tertiary Jewish Education, and the members of this committee. Thanks are due to Professor K. Tober, the Vice Chancellor, and Professors L.A. Suzman and N. Garson, the successive Deans of the Faculty of Arts, for the crucial parts they played in bringing to fruition the idea of Jewish Studies at the University.

The convening of the conference would have been impossible without the unusual commitment and professionalism of Ms Sharon Wolman, the conference co-ordinator.

Special gratitude belongs to Mrs M.M.M. Blackbeard (van Wyk) and to Mrs M.J. du Toit for their contributions to the professional preparation of the manuscript. Mr C. Cohen has not only seen to the legal matters connected with the publication of the book but has always been a source of encouragement on all matters concerning the establishment of the Chair.

The conference was also supported by The Anglo American and the De Beers Chairman's Fund, Anglo American Corporation of South Africa Ltd, De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd, Mr R. Ackerman, Mr N. Nossel and the Adcock-Ingram Laboratories Ltd, South African Airways and Snap Print.

May they all be blessed.

M.S.

Johannesburg, July 1987

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