

THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

◆ The Moroccan Quarter & Al-Buraq Wall:

The **Moroccan Quarter**, Al-Harat Al-Magharbah, also referred to by Palestinians as Al-Harat Ash-Sharaf and by Jews as the Jewish Quarter, was first constructed over 700 years ago by the Ayyubids and Mamluks. The entire quarter - then home to some 650 people - was demolished by Israel following its conquest of the city in June 1967 and most of its inhabitants relocated to the Shu'fat refugee camp. The small area in front of Al-Buraq/the Wailing Wall, then measuring no more than 120 m², eventually became a sprawling plaza measuring some 20,000 m² - all of which was built over the ruins of the Moroccan Quarter.



The Moroccan Quarter in front of Al-Buraq Wall prior (l) and after (r) its demolition.

Al-Buraq Wall forms part of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. The site is holy to Muslims as they believe that Prophet Mohammed was taken in a night journey from the Noble Sanctuary in Mecca to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem (*Isra' wa Miraj*, Qur'an 17:1). Jews, meanwhile, refer to the wall as the **Kotel** or **Wailing Wall** (*Mabka* in Arabic), a direct reference to the Jewish mourning of the destruction of the Temple. They also like to refer to it as the **Western Wall** - even though it forms only a *part* of the entire western wall of Al-Aqsa compound - whilst claiming that the entire area was once a part of the destroyed Second Temple (see photo on page 3).



Israeli excavations at Al-Buraq Wall, 1968.

allowed to pray in the space between the wall and the Moroccan Quarter. Also noteworthy in this regard is the fact that in the middle of the 18th Century, the Ottomans established the '**Status Quo**' arrangement, which forbade any construction at or changes to holy places, and that although the arrangement initially referred to Christian holy places, it was later for-

mally extended by the British Mandate authorities (1922-47) to include Al-Buraq Wall in Jerusalem and Rachel's Tomb on the outskirts of Bethlehem.

The '**Status Quo**' arrangement thus forbade Jews from engaging in any construction work in the Al-Buraq area. In Sept. 1928, however, a group of Jews used chairs to separate men and women performing Yom Kippur prayers. This action was quickly interpreted as violating the arrangement, and so began one of the first real crises and periods of unrest.

The Ottoman STATUS QUO ARRANGEMENT, which was introduced in a Firman in 1852, froze the rights of worship and possession of the religious communities in the Holy Places of Christendom. The introduction of the arrangement represented a futile attempt by Ottoman Sultan Abdul Majid to avoid a war between the Greek Orthodox and Catholic churches over rights relating to some of the holy places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Article 62 of the Treaty of Berlin (1878) subsequently proclaimed the inviolability of the decree of 1852 and declared it the '**Status Quo** of the Holy Places.' The successive governments of Palestine, the British Mandate, Jordan, and the State of Israel further maintained the regulations as set forth by the status quo arrangement of 1852.

A year later, the dispute between Muslims and Jews over access to Al-Buraq Wall escalated and in Aug. 1929, a series of violent demonstrations and riots resulted in the death of dozens of Jews and Arabs and the injuring of hundreds more. The conclusions of the subsequent British Inquiry Commission, which were presented in Dec. 1930, determined that although Jews would have free access to the Wall for the purpose of performing their devotions at all times, ownership of the Wall, as well as the pavement in front of the adjacent Moroccan Quarter, belonged to the Muslims, as did the sole proprietary right to the Wall.

Property taken over by Settlers in the Old City

