

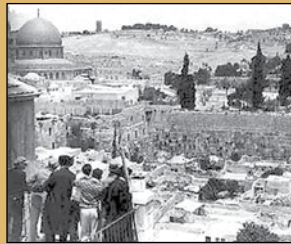
The **Mughrabi Gate**, an Al-Haram Ash-Sharif gate facing westward, is closed to Muslims and exclusively under the control of the Israeli authorities, while all other gates of the Haram Ash-Sharif are open to Muslims and admin-



*Excavations at Mughrabi Gate*

istered by the Islamic Waqf (though their access is regulated by the Israeli police). After the collapse of the northern wall of the **pathway** to the gate in early 2004, a temporary wooden bridge was built in July 2005, and the Israeli authorities began planning the new pathway. In January 2007, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, approved the start of the archaeological excavations on the pathway, which began a month later. The municipality's Regional Committee for Construction and Planning officially approved the construction of the bridge only in May 2008 (see also map on page 2).

The **MUGHRABI** or **Moroccan Quarter** (*Al-Harat Al-Magharbah* or *Al-Harat Ash-Sharaf*) was first constructed over 700 years ago by the Ayyubids and Mamluks. Following its conquest of the Old City in June 1967, Israel demolished the entire quarter - home to some 650 people, most of whom were relocated to the Shu'fat refugee camp. Israel then expanded the small 120 m<sup>2</sup> area in front of Al-Buraq/the Wailing Wall, where Jews were allowed to pray since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century reign of the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, into a 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> plaza.



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

### ◆ **Burj Al-Laqlaq and Others**

Another point of contention is the Burj Al-Laqlaq ('Stork's Tower') area in the north-eastern corner of the Old City near Herod's Gate (Bab As-Sahira), where the West Jerusalem municipality approved in July 2005 a Town Planning Scheme for the construction of 21 housing units and a synagogue on a 3.8-dunum site. So far, over ten structures have been demolished in the area, including housing units and a center for the disabled, in preparation of the plan's implementation. The plan represents a technical and engineering violation of Old City regulations since Burj Al-Laqlaq is not only an archeological site but also a 'green area' where building of any kind is prohibited. (See also map on page 2).

The Israel Land Administration (ILA) owns 1.9 dunums ('absentee property') of the land in question while Himanuta Ltd., a subsidiary of the Jewish National Fund, owns 1.3 dunums, which were reportedly acquired privately from the White Rus-

sian Orthodox Church in 1982. The project is awaiting approval from the Regional Planning Committee of the Ministry of Interior.

The plan was first disclosed in 1990 by then Housing Minister Ariel Sharon, who announced the intended construction of 200 housing units at the site. Another plan was ratified during the tenure of Prime Minister Netanyahu, this time envisioning the construction of a religious school, two six-floor residential buildings, parking lots, and two underground tunnels. In May 1998, settlers from Ateret Cohanim - protected by Israeli soldiers - laid the 'cornerstone' for the new settlement



*Burj Al-Laqlaq from the outside*

and moved caravans to the area. However, due to the ensuing confrontations with Palestinians, the Israeli government halted the process in June 1998, but 'compensated' the settlers by allowing excavation works at the site. Somewhat ironically, the work, carried out by the Ministries of Infrastructure and Antiquities, exposed the stone walls of buildings that made up an Arab neighborhood dating to the 7<sup>th</sup> Century Umayyad rule.

The ultimate aim of the plan is to gain another foothold within the Old City. Part of the plan also includes the expansion of a nearby enclave where two Jewish families live in red-roofed bungalows adjacent to the home of the Palestinian Qara'in family, who were repeatedly denied a permit to build a second storey in order to accommodate their extended family.

Another move to strengthen the Jewish presence in the area was the "reopening" of the "Ohel Yitzhak" **synagogue** in the Old City, between the Cotton Merchants Gate and the Heavy Chain Gate, some 80 meters from Al-Haram Ash-Sharif, in October 2008. The synagogue, originally built at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, apparently on property purchased by Hungarian Jews from the Al-Khalidi family, was abandoned by the ultra-orthodox Shomrei Hachomot (Guardians of the Walls) in 1938 in the wake of Arab-Jewish violence. It was later blown up by the Jordanians. The complex is owned by Cherna Moskowitz, the wife of US Jewish millionaire Irving Moskowitz, who funds Israeli settler groups with proceeds from his businesses. Moskowitz purchased the building rights from Shomrei Hachomot in the early 1990s and also financed the refurbishing of the synagogue. In 2004, the Israel Antiquities Authority began excavating under Ohel Yitzhak, with the aim of creating an underground passage linking the Western Wall tunnels to the synagogue.

In focusing their activities on the Old City and the so-called "**Holy Basin**" area (see textbox), the settlers are attempting to form a string of settlements that will eventually encircle the Haram Ash-Sharif area.