

A reading into the story of Jerusalem

After years of hard work and extensive research, Grassroots Jerusalem is finally able to present to you “Stories of Jerusalem Communities: Jerusalemite Neighborhoods and Villages”. Digging through history books and old records, visiting and meeting residents in each village and district, and conducting empirical study on the current situation of each subject, our researchers were able to create a holistic collection of articles that bring together academic validity with a more personal and humane insight. A history of this prominent and complex region becomes more visible as we learn more details about the origins of its areas; the historical stages they had undergone, the pre-colonial nature of each, and the changes brought about by modern colonization leading to the hardly distinguishable current reality of the region in its struggle for liberation.

The articles introduce each of the 41 villages or neighborhoods with its topographic and demographic natures, and further investigate the lifestyle that its residents were accustomed to – an aspect very well connected to the Mediterranean countryside nature of Palestine; the abundance of natural resources and the economic dependence of each area to a certain crop that would be exported to both neighboring and distant countries. We also get to know which families were the original residents of which areas, how many people lived there at what times and what caused migration into or out of the area, causing overcrowding or depopulation.

We are further enlightened about the etymological origin of each area’s name and its connection to certain historical eras, and the connection of the areas themselves to prominent historical events and religious beliefs, in addition to the locations and tales of important landmarks like shrines, mosques, churches and monasteries, and popular stories and tales known and told among the residents connected to the history of their land. Special significance is given to prominent figures who aided the local community at various points in history, like saints, liberators or modern revolutionaries. We learn about certain traditions that the villagers used to practice, and personal accounts of heroic, tragic or sometimes funny stories that remained in popular memory years later, in addition to tales by people themselves in recollection of wars, political events and noteworthy people – whether friends or enemies.

When presented with such research on the development of the region due to colonial expansion and occupation, we become aware of how the current situation was conceived. Starting with the story of each village or neighborhood in the Nakba war and the first attempts to invade and depopulate the

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district, the articles research the battles and heroic stances taken by the residents against the armed militias in defense of their land, the endless crimes against humanity and the important role of resistance in the Palestinian struggle since the beginning. A chronological approach to the cause proves efficient in explaining how each of the researched areas were separated, further targeted and suffocated by Zionist policies and colonial construction, most dramatically after the Naksa of 1967, leading to urbanization and the emergence of the refugee camps we know today, and severely diminishing local economies and freedom of movement which forever changed the appearance of the area and lifestyle of its residents. We get to know the names and stories of rebels and local resistance in the face of hegemonic expansionism through detailed accounts, reliving the great victories of defeating colonial projects, and empathizing with the resisters who were martyred in the struggle.

However, the research is not only retrospective. The current situation of each neighborhood or village that have been separated from each other by the annexation and expansion wall, checkpoints, arbitrary policies and military oppression is brought to light; the colonial project has not stopped, and crawls in baby steps towards every Palestinian house and piece of land. Our researches shed light on the current issues of each district, citing to us in detail how the Israeli occupation tightens more and more in attempt to drive out Jerusalemites and keep out all other Palestinians, complicating routes between neighboring villages, setting up checkpoints at the entrances to each neighborhood and planning large-scale colonial projects to connect Jerusalem to the rest of the occupied territories and take over all that remains. Very recent events and uprisings are cited as well, some up to the date of conducting the studies, and the resulting project is an all-inclusive accumulation of sources that hopes to comprise a pillar in the research and preservation of the Palestinian story.

The experience of reproducing these articles was magical for me, a translator from the West Bank, as I've gotten to see a long-lost image of my homeland's past that I've never seen before, and a colonial-free vision of a liberated future. Names of villages and neighborhoods that are only heard on the news and knew nothing about have become meaningful headlines for a magical history and humanitarian cause of the first degree, allowing to see beyond the urbanized and strangled reality forced by the occupation, and mentally expanding my personal sense of geography beyond the walls that separate the West Bank from Jerusalem, the Palestinian coast, the Arab world and the rest of the world. It was a pleasure and honor to contribute to such an important project that will allow Palestinian voices to reach further and spread the messages of truth and justice, and we hope the reader enjoys learning about the history of Jerusalem's places and people.

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