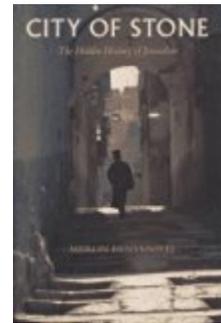


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Meron Benvenisti. *City of Stone: The Hidden History of Jerusalem*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996. 274 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-20521-5.

Reviewed by Marsha B. Cohen (Florida International University)
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Peace of the Rock?

Benvenisti's *City of Stone: The Hidden History of Jerusalem* is as full of surprises tucked among familiar facts as the city itself. It defies such tidy categorizations as objective or subjective, right-wing or left-wing, pro-Israel or pro-Arab. Benvenisti writes that "Jerusalem's fame (and thus the obsession with its 'resolution') is due primarily to the fact that its conflict is being played out on a historical stage decked with powerful symbols and myths and pervaded with an air of sanctity." With admitted irreverence he continues, "[t]ake away Jesus, Muhammad, David, Jeremiah, Omar, and Godfrey de Bouillon, and the preoccupation with Jerusalem shrinks to the level of a petty family quarrel among cousins vying for their inheritance" (pp. 206-207).

Chapter One, "The Quarry of History," is an historical mini-tour of the city from its founding by the Jebusites 5,000 years ago to the opening event celebrating Jerusalem 3000 in 1995. Among the pebbles in Benvenisti's vast quarry is that the Museum of the City of Jerusalem consigns the earliest period of Jerusalem's history, from 3150-1200 BCE, to a small entry-way to the first exhibition hall of the museum, exposed to wind and rain, just as the word "Arab" never appears on any of the museum's chronological charts and in its exhibits. The Museum of Islam on the Temple Mount contains no trace of the Jews. "History may be written by the victors, but the vanquished have not relinquished their version and are diligently cultivating it," Benvenisti observes wryly (p. 9).

Benvenisti's "hidden history" is a chronicle of fluid

expediencies hardening into stony "status quo," which in the holy city is synonymous with sacredness itself. Benvenisti offers insight as to why Jerusalem can neither be ignored nor resolved by the ongoing peace process, since one cannot even speak of its boundaries, which have proven elusive for the past century and remain so. Another pebble: When Moshe Dayan and Abdullah al-Tal of the Arab Legion signed the cease-fire on November 30, 1948, each drew a line on a map in grease pencil—Dayan's green, al-Tal's red—which demarcated the areas of Israeli and Jordanian-held territory. Neither realized their line would be a de facto border for 19 years. Nor did anyone at the time realize that each line was three to four millimeters thick, which, on a map drawn to the scale of 1:20,000, represented strips of land 60-80 meters wide, in a city where streets measured nine meters across.

Benvenisti is scathing in his account of the role of politicians actively usurping the responsibilities of urban planners in expropriating land and hastily approving massive construction projects in order to create "facts on the ground" as rapidly as possible that will deface Jerusalem's urban landscape permanently. At the same time, he considers the lack of planning and budgeting for infrastructure in Arab neighborhoods, and the stark limitations on building in the Arab sector, including the refusal of bureaucrats to issue permits for Arabs to build on land which they own but which is not included in the area zoned for residential housing, as "nothing short of a blueprint for catastrophe" (p. 166).

All of this might seem fairly standard anti-Israel fare

coming from anyone who loved Jerusalem any less, or whose Zionist credentials are assailable. But Jerusalem-born Benvenisti, half Sephardi, half Ashkenazi, writes not only as a knowledgeable historian, but as the city's former deputy mayor responsible for the administration of East Jerusalem. The insoluble political contradictions of Jerusalem tear at him, and irreparable changes to the city being wrought with heedless strokes of a pen genuinely pain him. He cannot be easily written off as a "self-hating Jew" or "bleeding heart liberal." He toes no party line, and faults his ex-boss, former Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, with whom he broke in the 1970s over matters of policy, which included long years of neglect and discrimination in East Jerusalem, pointing out that less than six percent of Kollek's last budget proposal in 1992 was allocated to Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods.

Written with the "peace process" well underway, Benvenisti sees the multiplicity of peace plans as mere variations of a few basic patterns, each of which addresses a few aspects of the insoluble enigma of Jerusalem while ignoring others. "The conflict over and within Jerusalem is not so much a problem as it is a con-

dition ... Conditions have no solutions; there are just solutions to some of the problems they cause" (pp. 222-23). He faults the present peace proposals for being based on theoretical solutions which ignore the realities of two distinct peoples in a city that wants neither separation nor sharing.

The utility of *City of Stone* for scholarly purposes is somewhat limited by its lack of a bibliography for further research and the absence of documentation of sources, except for a few excerpts from historical and literary accounts. Reports, proposals, and legislation whose contents are referred to, as well as many intriguing indirect quotes, are untitled or unattributed. Nevertheless, for anyone who wishes to move beyond platitudes in thinking and speaking about the complexities involved in dealing realistically and compassionately with the problems of Jerusalem in the ongoing peace process, Benvenisti's latest work is highly recommended.

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