

## MID-EAST TRAVELOGUE

2000

May 25, 1:30 a.m., my plane descended into Amman, Jordan—old “Rabbah.” A taxi from Queen Alia airport took me along a dark highway past stone buildings with keyhole windows, to a bed at the small, family-type Hisham Hotel.

After a little sleep, my morning guide, Palestinian Elias, in his red-checked *kafiyeh*, brought me first to the still-used amphitheater that dominates the east downtown area. The amphitheater now can seat 5,000 persons, but according to Elias it anciently could hold only 4,000 Romans....

Boys played in the coolness of the arched “Odeon,” a small theater off to the amphitheater’s side. I ran my hands over a sculpted torso of Hercules and imagined imperial chariots drawing up before the entry’s pillars.

Outside the amphitheater grounds, city life was busy as it is anywhere--a bustling thoroughfare and array of Arabic signs over shops and stalls. Elias walked me at a steady pace up to the hilltop ruins of the “Citadel,” the acropolis of the ancient site of “Rabbath-Amon”—the Greco-Roman “Philadelphia” of the Decapolis.

As I stood facing toward Damascus, Elias recounted the various conquerors that had commanded Amman’s heights before Rome--Ammonites, Nabataeans, Babylonians, Hebrews, and Macedonian Greeks. “Yes,” he assured me, “native Jordanians have Greek blood, too.”

The Citadel mount (*jebel*) is one of seven mounts on and around which is built the present metropolis of Amman. As the mount of the acropolis hill falls away, the densely built

city dips before it and rises again to the horizon. Seeing the city from there is much like overlooking San Francisco from one of its hills. Here, the sun is hot, the sky such a light blue it almost is white and the architecture, all stone or concrete flat-roofed buildings with lots of colorful laundry hanging from apartment windows.

Parts of enormous stacked-stone, city walls still stand on the citadel's east side. I imagined it as it was three thousand years ago, when beneath it Bath-Sheba's husband, Uriah, fell in battle with the Ammonites, King David having arranged that he be placed at the front. Imposing gigantic stone pillars remain of Alexander the Great's temple of Hercules; and nearby are remains of another temple, where it is claimed that Herod Antipas placed John the Baptist's head on display.

Seven thousand soldiers were housed in the Citadel in Roman times, Elias told me, pointing out niches inside the wall where sentries stood guard. A sauna room, with openings in floor tiles for heat to emerge from an oven sunk beneath, all still is visible. Elias was careful to hold me back from the edge of the deep cistern, once filled by a spring, which foiled the common ancient enemy tactic of thirsting surrender of a walled city.

Some original carved stairs still exist down the rocky slope from citadel mount. I rested my hands on Elias' back as we descended. Lunch at a local restaurant was *fsooliyah*--a green bean, lamb and tomato stew--a mid-east staple dish served with a side of yellow saffron rice. There I had my first experience with a "squat" toilet--its opening flush with the tile of the floor. (Being aware in the premises, I had opted not to wear slacks on the trip!)

Akmahd, my evening cab driver, like Elias was born in Jerusalem and had come to Amman after the '67 war. Ameen, my driver the next day, was yet another displaced Palestinian, who serves tourists staying at the Hisham Hotel.

Ameen headed north to the country of the “Gadarenes/Gerasenes” and ancient Gadara, in the region of the southeast Sea of Galilee (*cf.* Mark 5 *et seq.* and Matt. 8:28 *et seq.*). We were in Magdalene country, from which word of Jesus’ preachings went out through the Decapoli. The ruins of Gerasa/Jerash--some 34 kilometers SE of the sea--are too phenomenal for words to do justice to the scope of columned thoroughfares, plazas and amphitheater.

At Ajlun one crosses a drawbridge to enter a restored castle built by a nephew of Saladin—a mazed endurance test of staircases, vaults, and towers. An Arabian grandmother matriarch, who needed rest as much as I, proudly introduced me to the generations of her family group.

Despite great interest in “Philip” of the *New Testament*, I spent so much time at Jerash and Ajlun that I had to skip Pella (pronounced “Bayla”), another of the Macedonian Greek Decapoli cities. Pella, on the Jordan River’s east bank, was inhabited as early as 5000 b.c./b.c.e. Like other cities in the region, after the death of Alexander the Great in the fourth century b.c./b.c.e, Pella at various times was under Ptolemaic and Seleucidic rule.

For a short while after Herod the Great’s death at the turn of the millennium, Pella was in son, Philip’s inherited territory. Philip, the Great’s son by a mysteriously unknown “Cleopatra of Jerusalem,” was half-brother of Herod Antipas, whose alliance with Rome figured greatly in events preceding ultimate Roman domination.

It was on, instead, to Umm Qais/Umm Qeis, founded in third century b.c. by Ptolemies and site of ancient Gadara of the Decapoli. Um Qais overlooks Lake Tiberias to the west and Golan heights to the north, beneath which meet the Syrian/Jordan/Israel borders. Umm Qais flourished during Roman hegemony; hot springs nearby were their spa. Tears fell as I walked the massive stone road that leads west, at which end the “Tiberias Arch” once stood above the

sea.

Temporarily lost as to how to exit the site, I was led out by a man with his several children. His family totaled 10, he said, showing me his pay slip from the refinery where he worked--416 dinars a month; about \$624 U.S.

As Ameen continued north, an oncoming car made a bad pass. When it went past us, Ameen turned and made a scissors-like gesture and said something that sounded like "Al-K-otho-genitals-genitals-genitals," which last words I'm certain he didn't say. It sounded so appropriate, however, I felt for a moment as if the Holy Ghost had settled a linguistic revelation on me.

Ameen and I had a good laugh because Omar, the Hisham's manager, kept checking on us by cell phone the last hour or so of the trip. When we got back Mr. Hisham, himself, was there to greet me, and gave me a Hisham Hotel duffel bag to carry back to the states.

It was 9 p.m. before I had dinner. Coffee never tasted so good! Afterwards I had a chat with Khaled, the night clerk, about what "Palestine" really meant to him. "Jordan and Israel together really were 'Palestine,' he commented. "It might be said that we're all 'bedouin' descended from desert-dwelling nomadic pastoralists, throughout most of the desert belt from the western desert, Sinai, and Negev to the Arabian desert."

Very early on the 27th Ameen commenced a desert loop south then east from Amman on two-lane highway 40. Qsar al-Kharaneh, an eighth century a.d./c.e., 61-room Ummayid castle, rose out of nowhere on empty rocky land, edged at the far horizon by hills of shadowed pink ocre. Ameen waited in the car while I explored. Only 60, his physical condition was that of a much older man. *Yo Allah*-- "Oh, god"--he would say softly, each time he pushed himself from the driver's seat....

The castle guide made me nervous; I felt that he rarely saw other persons, and I cut that exploration short.

We continued along highway 40 to Qusayr ‘Amra, built in the early 8th century as a rest pavilion for hunting parties of the ruling Ummayid. A water wheel pump had fed the baths from a 40-foot well. An opening in the ceiling of a main room served as a clock, as a spot of sunlight through an opening in its roof moved around the floor. The reception hall and baths were outstanding, richly decorated with murals reflecting the secular art of the time.

Under the noonday sun the desert stretched flat east toward Iraq--colorless dun terrain touched with pink, broken now and then by little sand cyclones. Ameen took us further north on route 5 to the castle of Qsar al-Azraq, built 200 years before Christ, where carved stones still bear records of Roman emperors. A small mosque in the center of the compound was built by the Ummayids centuries later.

The castle’s entry doors are stone rectangles, each weighing a ton, with hewn stone ‘hinges’ that fit into the sides of the stone threshold. Qsar al-Azraq, originally three stories high, was partially destroyed by an earthquake; however, one large second-floor room is still intact. There, I was told, Lawrence of Arabia stayed in the coolness under its arched ceiling. The guide proudly showed me old newspaper clippings and a photograph of Lawrence with a pleasant-faced, elderly man, the guide’s great-grandfather....

Back on 5 to the junction with 30, then northeast to Hammam As-Sarakh, another Ummayid bath house, small but charming, where a boy pointed out the two bath sides--one for males, the other, females. Blackened posts testified to the water-heating fire once stoked in the cellar beneath the bath floor.

Our next stop was at Qsar Al-Hallabat, the one Roman ruin out in that desert, of which

there remains only a small partial structure amid heaps of fallen stones. But I lingered beneath that one tension arch in wonder, at what it must have taken to erect its stones--some 3 by 15 by 2 feet—which have stood for two millennia.

We finished the day's journey east and down through Zarqa back to Amman. Ameen explained how he stays in Jordan to work but his home is in the west bank. Of three wives, the first had only five girls; the second, one girl and two boys. His new wife, which, he said, his mother insisted he take, has a first child due this month.

Sons are important in the old culture, but Ameen claimed he likes girls best. "When I go home," he says, "my daughters greet me with great gladness and solicitation--'Here, dear father, sit down. Would you like a cup of tea? Some food?' The boys," he said (tightening his face and shadowing his eyes), "Give me hard looks."

The next day, May 28th, I rested from extended tours. With Marwan, another taxi-driver, I visited two Amman folklore museums that preserve dress, jewelry, and examples of the handiwork of the various regions--Hebron, Ramallah, and Bethlehem; all distinctively different patterns and colors. A bedouin tent scene embraced garbed figures and a camel topped by a richly decorated, curtained carrier for a woman.

I had Marwan take me again to the acropolis, where an archeological museum, replete with objects from the bronze age forward, is a veritable treasure trove of history that I was free to photograph. Among the items were a large facade with eagle headdress of "Artagatas, Nabataean Goddess of Fruits and Fertility;" second century a.d. statues of Apollo (found at Samaria City/Sebaste) and Daedalus (found at the citadel); two carved heads--a first century a.d. Nabataean of sandstone/limestone from Petra's main temple (Qadriel Bint), and a first century a.d. limestone male head with "phrygian" cap--possibly a Nabataean priest--also from Petra.

I could not believe my luck, however, when I reached a glass case at back: sections of the famous copper scroll, and a copper reproduction--and able to take pictures! (Fearing airport x-rays destroying my films, I had them developed in Jerusalem before the trip home; strangely, I would find missing the photos of the scroll, and one of the “earliest statue ever attempted” [mottled clay, dated 8000-6000 b.c.]).

The afternoon of the 28<sup>th</sup>, Samir, a friendly young man studying to be a lawyer, helped me spend about \$75 on gifts at a local shop. The 29<sup>th</sup> was a day to write postcards and pack for departure next day to Petra. My waiter at lunch, at the Hisham’s pleasant patio restaurant, was Yousef, also a Palestinian but lastly from Kuwait. He spoke sadly of his losses under Saddam’s aggression (“everything” in ’91--more than 150,000 JD’s”). Yousef, who worked 14 hours a day, seven days a week, had been unsuccessful at obtaining a U.S. visa; but he hoped now perhaps to get to Saudi Arabia, and find a more reasonable existence.

Yousef spoke of how it is necessary for the people to value life first; stop the killings; work together. Yet he believes the governments and wealthy powers really do not want to see “the Palestinian problem” solved; Palestinians in Jordan (like in Kuwait), he claimed, are the main labor force in exiled society, all of whom want to return home and would, could they....

In my room after dinner I cried aloud, fatigue mixing with sadness from the plights of individuals I’ve met here, plus all the global horrors covered in the International Herald Tribune bought at a bookshop near the Hisham. At one a.m., feeling chilled, I feared being sick. I had antibiotic with me; but I awakened perfectly sound without it, after a deep sleep following meditation.

May 30<sup>th</sup>, south from Amman to Petra, was another all-day affair--first through Moab’s mountains to Mt. Nebo and its memorial to Moses, a commanding view from Jerusalem’s spires

to the Dead Sea. Inside the church, beyond the original stone and mosaic slab flooring, a Catholic mass was in progress for a tourist group. It startled me to hear the *New Testament* liturgy. I thought about Zipporah, Moses' first wife from the south of Jordan, whom he had to "keep in the closet," so to speak, when his organized army of immigrants out of Egypt initially objected to that affiliation....

Onward, to Madaba's Greek Orthodox church with its paintings, crystal chandeliers, and vaulting gold-haloed Jesus in the nave. A cordoned mosaic was unearthed in 1884 on the church floor, the "oldest preserved, most detailed ancient map of the lands east and west of the River Jordan, from Lebanon to Egypt and from the desert to the Mediterranean."

The two-lane road south of Madaba is lined with pines like those seen on the Jerash trip--trees which at home would be considered sparse and dry; here, revered as a forest. How *does* one describe this landscape? I do not try.

Coming down a hill, a first glimpse of the Dead Sea--only 9:30 a.m. but HOT already. We didn't take the side road to Mekawer/Machaerus, where Herod Antipas imprisoned and murdered John the Baptist. Reluctantly I had to make some sacrifices time-wise; but maybe it was just as well I missed Macherus, the way I felt about Salome's bad rap....

The "oriental turquoise" of the Dead Sea stretched along the roadway that in some places wound not more than 10 or 12 feet above the water. I recalled Josephus' story, about how the Romans enjoyed throwing a man into the sea with hands and feet bound, to see the spectacle of its extreme buoyancy. On the other side of the sea, yellow-white "sand-rain" hazed desolate cliffs.

Ameen turned left toward some bordering bare mountains, past bedouin tents and donkeys playing in the roadway. The mountains are fiercely barren; what determination there

had to have been, to build a fortress on any of them! A dull, motionless expanse, rocky soil widely interspersed with spindly trees and scrub grass, reached to western cliffs, seen through the heated light of noon as if through a lavender film.

Next stop, Kerak. Ameen, meanwhile, “sang” again as he does at regular intervals; I conclude it is his form of prayer. This time in the middle of it he stifled a big yawn. “Look!” Ameen pointed, upon finishing his recitation, “Banana plantation.” I thought, *should have had breakfast!* and murmured, “Wouldn’t I love having a banana now!” But I knew Allah would will me to eat when it was time, although our very necessary water supply was getting low.

The 1000-meter climb to Kerak castle is immediate. Despite the good condition of Ameen’s ‘80 Mercedes, its engine begged once or twice for mercy. “It’s coming *down* that’s dangerous,” Ameen said, “*Yo Allah!*”

Kerak...ancient capital of the Moabite kingdom, later seat of a Byzantine bishopric; known mainly for the fort erected by the Crusaders in the first half of the 12th century. I avoided the smartly-dressed young English-speaking guide at the gate but was a sucker for the Bedouin haunting the place inside. Good thing, too; because he showed me the torso in the rock, the obscure staircase to the top, and the hand-hewn stone balls thrown over the ramparts upon enemies. An old man, watery glassed green-grey eyes, he said nothing--merely pointed and mimicked; I gave him five dinars.

Afterwards, wondering, I asked Ameen how much guides get. Ameen exclaimed, *very* excited, “You go with a *guide*??” He had told me repeatedly, “Better alone!”

“Oh, no, Ameen,” I evaded lying, “I didn’t go with *the* guide,” because I *had* avoided the “official” one.

Lunch never was more welcomed: bananas and fresh flat bread that tasted like pizza

crust (Ameen gave me its Arabic name; I gave him a pretty good guttural echo but can't remember it.) Down off the Kerak road we passed fruit stands. Ameen stopped and came back cradling a dozen apricots to add to our feast. At that point we were about two-thirds the way from Amman to Petra, where I would stay and need to bid him farewell....

Red dirt, some agriculture on small parcels, the ubiquitous stone houses, then bare land again; a herd of sheep; wind tearing through the car's open windows. We came to a large village, more like a small city—Tafila--olive and fruit tree groves, no English signs. To come out of stark mountains and desert into a bustling city was a novel experience for me, although perhaps not so for an Arizonan or New Mexican. "Is this a Palestinian village?" I asked. "No," Ameen replied, "Jordanian Bedouin." *Will I ever get the 'ethnities' straight?* I wondered.

Ameen stopped again and this time he came back with something wrapped in paper. "Not more food!" I exclaimed.

"Not *food*--sweets!" Ameen replied: *halubh/hallub?*--deep-fried rings, crispy on the outside, soft insides that look like a slightly lumpy flower mixture dripping oil. "Have another!" Ameen commanded, using one of my wipes on his bushy moustache. "I buy two for Madame and three for me." At this rate, I thought, I won't need dinner.

Such a mix--the houses, a great number of them large and ornate in the Arab tradition; large in-between spaces and no fences; grazing goats and, amidst the scrub brush, bedouin-garbed people, an old man and his loaded donkey walking the road. Stone walls and rocks, rocks, rocks--beyond gorges the landscape receding in that pastel-tinted sun-haze that makes one think one's eyeglasses need cleaning....

I rolled up the window so as to give a combing to my hair, taking it down from its pins, barrette and bandeau. Catching a glimpse of myself in the right-hand rear-view mirror, it

appeared the sun was bleaching my hair white once and for all. It took but a couple of minutes to comb, but as I retied the bandeau at the nape of my neck I almost prayed to some god to make my fingers do it quicker, so I could get the window back down before I expired.

Ameen was singing again, while I thought, *any middle-aged lady who thinks she's getting incontinent ought to come to the mid-east: almost a quart of water today and I've peed only once....*

Our car was stopped by soldiers a second time this day--a lot of loud talking and worrisome gesturing. Nearby vendors, knowing Ameen from his frequent tourist trips, came over in support. Soon all joined in hand-shaking and smiles. When we came back around to the road, one of the officers gave me a big wave and a wide, white-toothed smile, "Welcome!"

"They need to make their quota of stops, that's all," Ameen supplied.

It was getting late. Another but less difficult decision was to skip the 12th century castle at Qasr Al-Shawbak/Shobak. I needed to conserve some energy for getting settled at Petra.

The small town of Wadi Musa, which adjoins the Petra site, is dominated by the Movenpick luxury hotel. My hotel, however, was the small "Flowers"—from the Movenpick two blocks uphill that felt like 20. My second-floor room was "homey" as to furnishings and curtains, with lots of light. Exhausted, I cleaned up a bit and went down to the reception area, where Ameen sat with Yahya (John), the Flowers' owner. Yahya had specifically come to greet me after talking with Omar of the Hisham. (*Oh, oh....mistake? I worried. I gave generous gratuities at the Hisham but must tighten the belt here on....*)

After my reluctant goodbye to Ameen, Yahya served me Arabic coffee. His great-great-great-grandparents were "of the original bedouins of the region," he explained, showing me his map of the large Petra site—much to see, in two days!

At 9 p.m. I was the only patron in the restaurant that occupies the Flowers' entire top floor. Carved, highly polished high-backed chairs were inset with embroidered velvet-cotton, their backs and seats cushioned in deep red and pale green. French-hung brocade curtains hung high on the surrounding windows, and pastel paintings of Arab street scenes adorned the walls.

John appeared and opened wide the window next to my table. The lights of the city ran brightly up the hills beyond, the night prayer song vibrant on the cool night air. The chant, each time I heard it, caused a peaceful feeling in my solar plexus--can't explain why; it just felt good. I asked Yahya about the practice.

"Five times a day," he explained, "the call comes to prayer." He sang some words and then patiently helped me record the sounds in my journal. Again--being treated like "royalty"--I thought, *I will try to repay it by being a good-will ambassador*. The tourist business there was everything, the main months being April and October.

"We'll have more conversation later," John said, leaving me to my dinner. I was served the traditional appetizer--a small plate of hummus (cooked chickpeas ground into a paste, mixed with tahini, garlic, and lemon, and decorated with leaves and tomatoes); a salad of finely chopped tomatoes and cucumbers (a variation of *tabbouleh*); flattened chicken breast with a crusty breaded coating; the (ubiquitous, it seems--the Hisham also served--) French fries of the thick variety; and pocket bread to eat with the hummus, or to make one's own little sandwich with the chicken.

In the morning I was at the Petra site's gate when it opened at 6 a.m., the sun just beginning to hit the tops of the cliffs. A half hour later I emerged from the *siq*, a passageway between cliffs that leads into the Nabataean stronghold of long ago, and there it was!--The Khaznah, the ancient "treasury" temple carved into a pink cliff. The film, "Raiders of the Lost

Ark,” had not done justice to the tall portico with six columns, the ornate niches above (from which statues long are gone to one museum or another), and the large interior room, all beyond imagining hand-hewn in the rock.

Three hours later, under a tent at the site’s museum courtyard, my journal notes were shaky, having just dismounted from journeying by donkey to Petra’s “high place,” or monastery. The steep ascent (and descent!), which drops straight off to the gorges below, is along narrow rock “stairs” carved into the cliff thousands of years ago.

The high place temple edifice, seemingly at the top of the world, rivals the Khasnah; indeed, its spires are carved free from the cliff. As “Jack,” the donkey clopped the descending trail, I pushed my feet against stirrups to keep from sliding sidewise on the rough camel-hair saddle. I thought of Jesus’ mother: *no wonder she went into labor!*

Under a tent in Petra’s main courtyard I had my first cup of coffee of the day and watched tourists only beginning their upward trek, already red-faced, borne down by backpacks. I was fiercely happy that, informed in the premises, I didn’t need to prove my stamina. According to affable Siel (“Jack’s” owner, a dark-skinned bedouin in red and white checkered headdress), a tourist who climbed by foot last month had a heart attack and died. Not a bad place to say farewell to life, I thought, although I doubted he ever considered his cortege would be on a donkey. The 15 dinar (\$22.50 U.S.) I paid for the donkey ride was well worth the price....

Siel lived in a cave nearby; and, on the way down, I was invited to tea by his brightly-garbed wife. Twenty years ago I would have said yes, without hesitation; but my reservoir of energy was not what once it was.

There were no brochures about contents in Petra’s museum and much to see. Amidst the collection: a small bronze bust of curly-haired, long-bearded Dhu-Shara from the Temple of

Winged Lions; Nabataean pottery of eggshell-thin, pure clay; a seven-inch figure of Isis; figures and inscription from the Temple of the Winged Lions, where was found a 6<sup>th</sup> century b.c. statuette of Osiris (which temple, dedicated to Isis and Osiris, possibly identifies with Dhu-Shara and Uzza, or Al-'Uzza-Aphrodite).

Small, slender, jug-shaped vials (*unquentaria*) for scented oils and perfumes put me in mind of the Magdalene. Recalling the big deal made in Scripture about Ashtoreth worship, how innocuous looked the clay figurines of the mother-goddess Astarte. Ancient coins included a silver of Trajan, 98-117 a.d.. A 2-1/4 x 1-1/4 x 1/2 inch cuneiform tablet inscribed, “A contract between two Aramaeans and an Edomite in the first year of Darius” recalled political intrigue that followed Cyrus the Great’s death; and a first century a.d., 12 x 12 foot slab of mosaic floor, from the main room of a Nabataean villa in Wadi Musa, was unique in its incorporation of four colors of stones....

The name “Uzza” stayed with me. I remembered its appearance in confusingly irresolvable *Old Testament* mixed Benjamin-Manasseh genealogies and ethnicities after the Babylonian conquest. I recalled Ahihud, brother of (Benjamin-) Uzza--“brother of mystery”—from Scripture, and extant inscribed clay tablets (*ostraca*) from an unknown “Temple of Uzza” that indicated a tax-exempt structure in the ancient Hebron region.

Scripture also reports the death of one Uzza at an unknown threshing floor site, during King David’s moving of the Ark of the Covenant. That Uzza was son of Abinadab, with whom the Ark had rested two decades; and kings Manasseh and Amon had been buried in a “Garden of Uzza,” also an unknown site....

Waiting for lunch afterwards, again at the museum restaurant, a tour group of 150 Italians invaded its peace and quiet. “Italians are like Arabs; and both of them, like Spaniards,” my

waiter whispered with a smile and a gesture that indicated “motor-mouthed.” *What do I look like?* I wondered—‘*American?*’

Ghassam, a young bedouin living with his mother also in a nearby cave, made my acquaintance. Bedouins once lived in caves throughout Petra’s site, he informed me; but the government now had restricted dwellings to a farther radius. “Would I like to visit his family, some 25 minutes away?”

Again, an offer I had to decline; but I valued our conversation about Nabataean history. Per Ghassam, the Nabataeans arrived in the region from Yemen via Saudi Arabia; but evidently recent Yemen discoveries may change concepts about Nabataean origins. Statues of Nabataean gods such as Dhu-Shara and Uzza were destroyed when the territory was occupied by Romans, who caused carving of Petra’s amphitheater by enslaved Nabataeans. I couldn’t recall exactly when Rome reached the region, but remembered that Alexander the Great didn’t exactly best the Nabataeans. They seemed most able to hold their own for some time; and Herod the Great allied with them, too.

When I asked Ghassam what language the Nabataeans spoke, the word sounded like *Farisi*, allegedly very close to ancient Hebrew. When I queried, “Aramaic?” Ghassam said he believed so. I wanted to find out about that. By then, however (having not eaten since last night’s arrival dinner), all I could think was, *by now he barbecue fire, for which all patrons are waiting, ought to be going well enough to start cooking!*

Meanwhile, I learn more from Ghassam about “bedouin.” The government had built many houses for them, to take the place of Petra caves. However, many who dwell in houses still preferred tents. Indeed, yesterday on the trip down, I had seen residents keeping and feeding their herd on land surrounding house *and* tent.

Ah! Lunch is announced....

Exiting the Petra site, I paused to watch the enduring white-robed, older Bedouin guides on foot, some with pure white headdresses as well, patiently listening to the same chatter from their hirers, and the young ones galloping on horses, headdresses flying in the wind.

Before the hike up to Flowers I ensconced myself in the luxurious Movenpick atrium, a mosaic-tiled central palazzo complete with spouting fountain, four-story-high glass dome skylight, and (unbelievable!) ivory-mosaic-inlaid throne chairs with silk cushions of green and gold.

I sat on a wood frame settee, the high back and sides of which were rows of carved wood filigree, a snifter of brandy and cup of coffee before me, ecstatic I survived to remember the day. My haunches even on the soft cushion reminded me of not just the donkey ride, but a half-mile camel ride back to the (shaded!) *siq*, along the walls of which run aqueducts by which the Nabataeans brought water to Petra from springs in the Sharah mountains.

On the other side of the *siq* a young Abdullah had offered me a horseback ride to the gate. The sun being very hot and the remaining walk long, when he agreed to take the pittance I had left in my pocket I gave him a kiss on the cheek for a tip. It's incredible how many tourists take a one-day Petra trip out of Amman: the hot drive down, the impossible breadth of the site, it's a wonder there aren't more cardiacs.

Breakfast at the Flowers Hotel June 1<sup>st</sup> was an unusual assortment of hummus dishes and something that looked like thick baloney. I was nervous about getting from Petra to Jerusalem the next day, a leg of the journey I couldn't plan ahead of time. The southern crossing was

closed; to get to the Allenby bridge one had to go almost all the way back to Amman, and circle around. Here was where faith must set in!

Yahya--that is, John--took me for a drive up Wadi Musa's surrounding mountains for a view. Deep below, the *siq* was but a dark shadow amidst many in the rocks, imperceivable from any point of the compass. Far across on a topmost mount was the shining Mosque of Harun/Aaron.

In the evening, boys on the Flowers' small front patio used heated coals to light a tall, ornate water pipe (*aghillah?*), in which Arabians place flavored tobaccos; and I was treated to a couple of mild, strawberry-tasting puffs. Before retiring I took a last nighttime look around me through the crystal air. John was willing to take me to the border crossing; departure was set for seven a.m....

We left at 8:30 a.m., later than planned; but the mid-east is a lot like Mexico that way. John drove like a desert wind over the two-lane road, bare rocky terrain stretching east again, all dun-colored except for an occasional patch of green, but never the verdant green of rain-drenched lands; and out in the wide spaces the bedouin tents, their inhabitants' figures tiny shadows among their flocks.

The repetitive beat of Arabian popular music over the airwaves heightened the tautness in my solar plexus, the speedometer clocking 130 kilometers an hour along the road once traveled by kings and conquerors on horses and camels. "Don't worry," John said, "I am driving 25 years."

Circling back from mountains the road toward the border crossing descended to hills; sparse "forests" on their crowns but spindly sentinels. Down through Addassieh, lower into the

valley from which Jordan gets most of its fruits and vegetables, one sees terraced agriculture; here and there orchards and small spots of villages intersperse the barrenness.

Buses for the first time along the road; banana groves; trees getting denser--one full-leaved variety covered with bright red clusters of blossoms. Past the Shounah turnoff I recalled my guess at the length of "Magda's" trip in *Beloved Disciple*, and I asked John how far a person could go, one day on a donkey. "About 15 to 20 kilometers," he estimated. That sounded like I got it right, after all....

The journey of Jordan was ending for me. I hadn't cognated fully how colorless had been the landscapes traveled, until, through Deir Allah, deep red flowered trees clashed against orange bougainvillea. The speed limit on the straightaway said 80 K, and we were clocking 130. I was praying almost, again; but I understood the urgency I sensed now in John. The long drive by him was a favor with no saving grace.

Tall trees now lined the road, yellowed Eucalypti. Coming to a rise and seeing two cars passing in the opposite direction I finally couldn't keep from exclaiming, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" John simply lit another cigarette; *perhaps I should do the same*, I thought...

Noon, at the border; a quick kiss on John's cheek and long holding of hands; he stresses we must keep in touch. "I'm your brother now," he said. "It's good to have a sister somewhere else in the world, even if I don't see her for another 10 years."

Thus, my exit from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, into a tension I did not feel before. I was allowed on the Jordanian side to keep my films from passing the x-rays; now, I was not. The air was all serious as I boarded a bus with a few others crossing over--three teary Muslim women in long black caftans and white headscarves, leaving family members at the station.

The bus took us about 100 feet through the Hashemite gate to the other side, where a couple of laconic taxi drivers were hanging out. Told the 125 miles to Jerusalem would cost \$90 U.S. I cashed another traveler's check, lucky the cashier window still was open; luckier still, in that the taxi had air conditioning.

It was one p.m. when we entered the west bank. The taxi driver, a second Marwan and a Palestinian from Nazareth, lamented as we passed through pre-1948 and 1967 Palestine territory. A sign for "Mehola" struck another recall—*where, really, was Elisha's home?*--where Elijah found him plowing? Weary, I kept expecting to see Jerusalem, but again the road was circuitous; I would have to forego Jericho....

Late afternoon, arrival--finally!--at the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate Guest House, 36 Via Dolorosa, in the Muslim quarter of the Old City. My reserved room was small but pristine, towels but no soap. I was dismayed, however, to discover they did not have the box of copies of my *Beloved Disciple* pocketbooks, sent from the States. The manager was away; the young clerk knew nothing of it.

Down at the corner I bought kabobs—meat with slices of tomato and cucumber pushed from a stick into pocket bread, one U.S. dollar--the first food since a small breakfast and unbelievably good. I stood against a stone wall as I ate, in the midst of what at first seemed a bedlam of stalls, vendors, and mixed peoples. The first to gain my focus were two customarily-attired Muslim women, with an older man and a boy; and I and one of the women exchanged smiles. Before I knew it, she was over to me, embracing me like a long lost relative. She spoke no English but we made ourselves understood. She was from *Uzza* (!), and ecstatic when I recognized the name. The exchange restored my spirits.

Later, up the street at the Jerusalem Star Restaurant, recommended by the guest house clerk, I paid one dollar (four shekels) for coffee, 50 cents for *baklava/baklawa*, and \$1.20 for orange juice. I was a bit surprised that the owner's eyes didn't light up, when I said I'd just come from Jordan--after all, there was dead King Hussein's picture large on the wall, with several others of important-looking Arabian men.

A group of American travelers then entered--Arizonans and Californians of Arabian descent. When my eyes dropped to the oldest one's grey-haired chest I saw a huge cross buried there and then, glancing up to another wall, a photograph of the Pope on his recent visit. *Ah...Christian Arabians*, I finally discerned.

One of the women in the party struck up conversation. Did I like it here? I replied guardedly: "I'm not altogether sure," I hedged. She agreed. She'd been here some years previous, "when it was very nice. But now it is so congested--terrible for the Holy City." Then she said something she hid from the rest of the room, her hand angled at her mouth: "It's the Muslims...." *Enlightenment comes slowly*, I thought; but clarity was beginning in me.

The Old City maze I would begin to explore on the morrow. Now, however, a shower and blessed, blessed sleep. A last thought was, *there's a difference between being summoned into existence, and being invited...*

In the morning I cashed my last traveler's check at a money changer just inside the Damascus Gate and took coffee at a small cafe up El Wad, near the Lion's Gate ("Stephen's portal"). Outside the gate one can overlook swift-moving traffic along the highway down in the cleft of the old Kidron valley, and across to the Mount of Olives, now a maze of residential areas and glittering spires of various shrines.

I made acquaintance of the cafe's owner, another Khaled. He would have Issa/Jesus, his

taxi-driving brother, meet me the next morning to discuss a trip to the Galilee.

Along the cobbled walk back up El Wad I was stopped by a man named Asad, hovering at the entry of the “Sanctuary of the Flagellation and the Condemnation” (“Station of the Cross #2”), purported site of the Fortress Antonia. Asad insisted on escorting me *gratis* around the now-monastery, believed the house of Pontius Pilate, and encouraged me to walk on original stones of the Via Dolorosa preserved in its courtyard. I wasn’t surprised, to then be taken across the street to his brother’s boutique; and I made a decent deal for an antique bedouin dagger for my husband, “JC.”

I bought a *ka’ak* (an Arabian bagel--soft bread ring with sesame seed topping), and a fat *falafel* (ground chick peas blended with herbs and spices into a fat patty, deep fried). I ate while sitting on cool steps in the shade of the street arcade, watching tourists at the entrance to the Wailing Wall. It was the Sabbath; no picture taking allowed, photography orthodoxically considered “work.” *That’s true*, I thought, *according to strict physics terminology....*

A guard informed me it would behoove me to queue early to visit the Dome of the Rock. First in the line, “Allah” decided to bring to stand next to me a man probably labelable schizophrenic. Mostly he parroted numbers about sons of Ishmael and Esau, and about his father and other relatives in New York, in that unmimicable “conversation” which at once is ‘sense-sounding’ but largely indecipherable. “You see,” he did say intelligibly, gesturing from his mouth to me, “I’m not able to speak ‘straight-out’ speech. I have no ‘mother’ tongue. I really don’t know what my heritage is.” It made me think about *tongues* and their effect on speech, recalling how once—long, long ago—potential crossers the Jordan east to west were tested by the word *shibboleth....*

All the while the man’s arms shook and his small thin fingers quivered; yet he was tall

and of good looks. I tried to be polite. Finally a guard at the gate shouted. “No talk! Your talk is making me crazy!” Yet the man persisted, despite finger to my lips and shake of head, as I moved my eyes toward the guard. I wished I could make myself invisible (as Eastern mystics say an adept can); mercifully, when I failed to respond further, he gave me a blessing and left.

I sat myself down on a rock at the wall and did work at being invisible, for it seemed the guard was about to move the tight waiting assembly out into midday sunshine. Four young women surrounded me; the lead, an Israeli from a kibbutz, was showing the sites to the other three, visitors from South Africa and Finland. She was pleased to discover she had fooled me into thinking she, too, was a tourist.

Inevitably the talk turned to politics. “I understand how Palestinians feel, really I do,” she said. “But even if only 100 Jewish descendants remain from antiquity, it’s our god-given land. And I’m afraid there’s going to be a war before it’s over....” She echoed my own fears for the region; and I disliked my unbidden thought, that I knew no other peoples to whom a god had guaranteed land.

The dome, or temple of “the Rock” (to Muslims, “Qubbat Al-Sakhra on Mount Moriah”) sits on the mount on which it largely is accepted once sat the ancient Hebrew temple. I wondered whether if somewhere beneath lay the threshing floor that King David bought from Araunah/Oman, the Jebusite, leaving son Solomon the task of building a temple.

The gold-domed mosque, bright mosaic tiling adorning its exterior, sits before a central fountain area at the head of a lovely park. The interior affects equally all who enter, temporarily rendered thoughtless by the grandeur of size and design, with uplifted heads mesmerized by a complex feast of pattern, color, and textures that keep the eyes in motion and the spirit in awe--marble inlays, intricately carved balustrades, and stained glass of artful compositions and

hues—all melding together in perfect symmetry. A carved railing encircles the exposed enormous rock of the mount top itself.

Across the park opposite the Dome are the Al Aqsa Mosque and an Islamic museum. Al Aqsa is resplendent also, with its interior designs and glittering chandeliers. Like in the Dome, elegant carpets cover the floors, some sections cordoned for worshipping. I watched women in delicate silk caftans and draped scarves do their prostrations and risings, flawlessly performed no matter the person's age.

A most memorable item at the museum was a four-foot, curved sword and its heavily embroidered, hand-woven sheath with brass fittings, attributed to Asad Allah, a famous Iranian sword maker. Photographs were not allowed in the mosques, but the museum's custodian permitted me to photograph a lovely stained glass window at back.

In the late afternoon I strolled the eastern portion of the Christian quarter, along the arcaded *suq* of Aqabat El Khanga, a bazaar swarming with shops and people. There I found a little cafe that I dubbed "The Nice Lady Cafe" after its owner, who had created a calm, dainty oasis of an English tea shop, in the middle of commercial bedlam. Along with coffee and a slice of strawberry and cream-filled sponge cake, I enjoyed conversation with an Australian woman, cheery despite being a bit overcome by the hot weather, who had come to visit her husband, an engineer working on a power station under construction in the Gaza strip.

Momentarily lost when I left the shop, I retraced my steps and found I'd taken a wrong turn at what I had thought was a bar. Then I saw the sign I'd missed previously: "Station of the Cross #7!"--a small, dim chapel-type room. I reflected again how it must take religious pilgrims some adjustment, reverently tracing the "dolorous way" through the oblivious commercial commotion. I availed myself of some dried apricots to take back to the room....

The morning of the June 3<sup>rd</sup> I met Issa at the corner of Bab-Hutta and Sha'ar Ha-Arayot, a pebble's throw from Stephen's Gate, to arrange the northward trip--*a pretty penny*, I thought, *but strike while the iron's hot!*

I then made my way to the Jaffa Gate, on the east side of the Old City where the Christian and Armenian quarters meet, making sure to record the path this time through the maze of *suqs*. I explored the Tower of David museum a bit but decided I would spend more time doing the "rampart walk." Fourteen shekels at the Jaffa Gate admits one to entry stairs that climb to the Old City ramparts. Walking along them, north and then northeast to descend at the Damascus Gate, one receives a view of all Jerusalem and its contrast of the Old City's crowded complex with the farflung modern areas beyond.

The day's main aim still was undone, to locate the box of *Beloved Disciple*. It was not among non-claimed packages at the post office inside the Jaffa Gate, which handles the hospice mail. I returned to the hospice through a swarm of people shopping at the stalls along El Wad (aka Ha-Gay), which leads slowly downward by stone paths and steps.

The Old Quarter, built over uneven terrain, requires more energy to walk than one would expect. El Wad begins in open-air, chockfull of produce stands and bread vendors, then gradually gives way to shops of tinned staples, cheeses, dry goods and souvenirs--an ever-moving array of colors and sounds. Old women sit on the ground against the walls, selling fresh fig leaves, herbs, and used clothing. I bought two pocket breads, tomatoes, and fruit from the outdoor tables, and a small tin of tuna from a shop, for the day's dinner. I needed to rest and review sites I wanted to visit on the morrow....

Six-thirty a.m. I was ready and waiting, my window thrown open to the Via Dolorosa. A group of pilgrims passed below, heads bowed, solemnly singing. Once more I wondered how many centuries would need to pass, for certain things to depart Collective Consciousness. My trip's time was winding down, and I was concerned about the books--I didn't know quite how to accept failure of my plan, to place free copies with bookstores of my version of the last four years of life of "Yehohshua," the man who came to be known as Jesus Christ.

Issa spoke perfect English and Hebrew, as well as his parents' tongue. He was an Israelite citizen, born after the Six-Day War, although his identity papers earmarked him. "It's crazy," he said. "Folks of the Jewish religion who emigrate here can become non-distinguished citizens practically overnight." I could tell it hurt; yet Issa was conciliatory. "Israel acquired the north of Palestine in '48 and the west bank in '67; but the main thing is the here and now, and Destiny has placed us together. The only reasonable thing is to work together for harmony. Neither side cares, really, how the other pays homage to the one God.

"No! The case is not religion. Everything has to do with eeking out life, a place for a home, and a job to support one's family. It's not common knowledge," Issa concluded, "but a lot of the Arabian population, in and from many places-- Syria, Iraq, Iran, for example--practice Judaism." My thought callously was elsewhere. For a \$25-an-hour fee I was embarking on 12 priceless hours, from Jerusalem in old Judah through Samaria to Galilee and back.

We left Stephen's Gate and headed north on route 60. Some 15 kilometers ahead, at Ramallah, Madame Albright and Mr. Arafat incidentally were having a meeting in the continuing "peace process."

The hills of Ramallah, originally in Benjamin's apportionment, were known as Ramah-- or Ramathaim-zophim--a stone's throw from Gibeon, hometown of Saul, the first king of record

who preceded David. Ramah was the birthplace of Samuel, protégé of High-Priest Eli, prophet-commander under whom power switched from Saul to David. Ramah had been home, also, to Joseph of Arimathea, familiar to *New Testament* readers as the influential man who owned the cave to which Jesus' body was taken.

Ramallah's shops weren't open yet, but the town already was alive with traffic. Issa stopped to talk with a Palestinian police *boy*, wearing a dark blue cotton uniform but devoid of police gear except a badge on his hat--an eagle crest in Palestinian colors. "Our policemen have no arms," Issa explained. "Under existing agreements the Palestine Authority is not allowed an arsenal."

The 13<sup>th</sup> day of my middle-east trip and still I lacked comprehension. From a country where race, nationality, and religion were equally-accepted clear-cut elements, I was stymied by the complexities here. Amid my confusion were, for example: the term, "Jew" (which came from later Graeco-Romanized "Judaea," the name of the post-David, southern kingdom of Judah); that all of Arabian descent were not Muslim; that all of Jewish faith were not Hebrew; that among those of Arabian descent were Palestinians, Syrians, Jordanians, Saudis and Iraqis. Then there were the bedouins--Palestinian, Jordanian, Saudi--urban as well as nomadic. Among others of Hebrew descent, Poles, Germans, Americans, Russians.

*Arabs who practiced Judaism?* If so--if Judaism equated with *Old Testament* "Hebrewism"--could not a practicing Muslim be of ancient Hebrew descent and vice-versa? What was the difference between, a "nation" of race and/or territory, and a "nation" of God? I wondered, too, whether the same betrayal "by tongue" still was apparent between present-day sectors, as in antiquity--*shibboleth* vs. *sipboleth*; *Yaweh* vs. *Javeh*; and, as I noticed yesterday, baklawa vs. baklava?

Issa was right: neither Bible nor Koran could serve as answer. Was it not of record?--that Moses promised and Joshua confirmed, that all Hebron would belong to the descendants of Caleb/Chelubai unto perpetuity? Yet who could say with certainty from whom Caleb's *mother* descended?

Here in this land of displaced and/or replaced souls, all yearned for the same thing: a reasonable, peaceful life. What human being, irrespective precedent circumstances, could be expected voluntarily to give up his or her now-established home? According to Issa, there were now in such a small territory some 6,000,000 "Jews" and 2,000,000 "Arabs." What had the Jewish girl grieved, just two days before at the Dome of the Rock? "I'm afraid there will be a civil war before it is finished. Maybe a few decades ago there were only a small number of my original people left on the land; but it is very different now...."

It permeates the pores, almost--the Jordan River, the fruit basket of the entire region, now drying up from the great demand for water, its prior full presence manifest only in a narrowing green strip. The ancient names have changed over time. *Old Testament* Canaan became "Palaestina," thanks again to the Greco-Romans. How small the area, in which so much of history sufferingly has occurred....

Very quickly highway 60 from Ramallah took us some 20 or so kilometers, past where Abraham once pitched his tents between Bethel and Ai, and soon to Shiloh in Ephraim territory, where Joshua established the first tabernacle. It was at Shiloh, first long-time home of the Ark, that Joshua made the last tribal apportionments. The tabernacle remained there throughout almost all the three hundred-plus centuries between Joshua and Samuel. After Eli's sons fell before the Philistines, the people exhorted Samuel to consolidate defenses by appointing a king. Enter Saul, followed by David....

We passed a turn-off to “Izhar”...*Izhar!--name of Moses’ and Aaron’s uncle...*

The center of Nablus, ancient Shechem, is tucked at the base of, and its houses climb up surrounding hills. Per Issa, Nablus and Sebaste/Sebastiya (old Samaria City) were incorporated into one by the PA. Samaria City, founded by northern king Omri, was a long-time capital in the north during the “Period of the Kings,” when that part of David’s original kingdom seceded under one Jeroboam, claiming civil rights abuses under Solomon’s son, king Rehoboam. *This was the region, I mused, where Jacob tented his household as they emigrated south from Haran; where Shechem’s king offered a marriage alliance between his prince son and Leah’s daughter, Dinah. But Simeon and Levi opposed it and did the Shechemites a severe injustice. Jacob, himself, said their acts “made his name stink forever”....*

The lush agricultural west bank hills were rolling by, as Issa educated me about the Koran or, rather, ‘Qu’ran. “Heaven, it says, is *so very* wonderful it is beyond conception by the human mind. And Hell is a fiery place of unimaginable torments.”

“Those also are Christian descriptions,” I commented, and asked, “What name does the Qu’ran give to ‘Hell?’”

Issa answered with a word I neither could pronounce nor spell, but it sounded a lot like *Jehannan*, which put me in mind of *Gehenna* (you know--“Get thee *there!*”). I did know already, as he told me, that the Qu’ran speaks of Jesus, and that Muslims honor him as a prophet. I *was* surprised to hear that they believe Jesus never died--that Allah produced an artificial being that looked like Jesus, and it was that which was crucified....

Eleven a.m., past Jenin through country returned to Palestine some several years ago but not, Issa claimed, “because of any political process--because people fought with stones.” (Was that following the *Intifada*, I wondered?) “It’s crazy,” he reiterated, pointing. Left of the road

was Israel; right, a Palestine village.

“It’s crazy,” Issa repeated; but I had no response, feeling the pain of both sides. Instead, seeing a turnoff to “Yezreel,” mind was cast back again to ancient time of civil strife. I realized “Jezreel” was nearby. There, Elisha’s anointee, Jehu, had ambushed both Ahaziah of the south and Jehoram of the north, and had Jezebel thrown from a balcony to her death....

Issa waved his hands at the passing wheat fields. “All this from Tiberias down was occupied in ’48,” he said, as I spotted a sign for Nain...*Nain...where Jesus went from Capernaum during a preaching tour.* Another dozen miles down the road we entered Nazareth, the location of the reported “Annunciation”—an absolutely beautiful mountain town, clean and cheerful in appearance, that is divided in two sections, Hebrew and Arab.

I was grateful that it was time for a meal—*schwarma* from a street stand, and a great cup of coffee with milk. At the church and shrine of the Annunciation, large depictions of Mary from many nations circle the courtyard garden. The massive interior dome connects to branching stone arches; a mass was in progress--singing and organ music beneath stained glass windows. Steps at one side led down to a grotto shrine, appointed simply with a table altar where other tourists kneeled in prayer....

It was too much; I had been over-exposed to only one side of the chasm, whereas sympathy was due equally on each side of Caesar’s coin. Not that Caesars alone were to blame. The hegemonial waters of all antecedent suzerains and their descendants in the history of the region flooded over me, along with fresh understanding of what had determined that young pacifist known as Jesus, whose maternal blood, alone--in his then temporal history—bestowed a legitimate claim to Herod Antipas’ throne. One word from him would have unleashed but another civil war in which, like the entire history already that he knew, would take all toll on the

innocent people, caught in living vises of power's decisions.

We continued our pass up through the Galilee--next stop, Tiberias, a lovely city with a cosmopolitan look. We took a boat ride around the lake, and after so many arid days I reveled in the stiff breeze over blue-jade water, silvered by large patches of sun. I kept pinching myself.

*Was I really on the waters of Lake Chinneroth?*

It was then that I suggested to Issa that we look for Mary Magdalene's home. "Let's start at this village, Migdal," I said, pointing at my map.

Issa was mystified. "Migdal? There's nothing of interest around there." Nonetheless, he graciously took to the road.

Migdal was a neatly ordered Hebrew settlement, nothing more; but an old man Issa consulted at a corner seemed to know what I wanted. He directed us toward the lake. "But don't take the right path at the fork; stay to the left." Issa, uncertain, first took the right; I didn't say anything but saw a sign at left, leading down, that said, "Magdala Beach."

Coming only upon a fruit-packing shed, Issa queried two workmen who directed us back. A short distance along a rutted dirt road we came to a compound of sorts, a large site completely surrounded by a chest-high stone wall set with high barbed wire. At center I saw stone ruins of a foundation. It was four p.m.

I jumped from the car and went to the locked gate--heavy green iron doors painted with gold crosses of the eastern orthodox type. A large dog inside that ran menacingly toward the gate was corralled by the caretaker, a gorgeous young man with crystal-blue eyes embraced by languorous lashes. Issa interpreted for me....

Indeed, the young man replied, this *was* the house of Mary the Magdalene, anciently a place of "ill repute." The Magdalene was so taken by Jesus, he said, she left her "lover" (whose

name our recounter could not recall), to join Jesus' extended family. He finished his tale with the part about, "Let he among you who is without sin cast the first stone."

Was the young man's story more typical legendary embellishment? I wondered. Magdalene tales abounded, despite it academically proven there is nothing of record to sustain any ill repute. The locale, however, above a small beach, in ancient days well could have been an 'out-of-the-way' place known the Lake's fishermen, as were at least two of Jesus' band.

"The site's kept closed because it's dangerous," Issa continued to interpret; yet the site seemed not half as dangerous as many others I had visited. "One can enter only with approval of the Bishop of Tiberias," he finished, "provided one accepts the risks." *Ah...bishopric approval? Time would not permit....*

Issa couldn't get over it, he was that surprised at what my distant research had uncovered. All the time that he had been in the touring business, he never had known of the site. I, myself, was so taken with the discovery that my attention was unfocused, as we proceeded to visit Tabgha, in Capernaum territory, and the Church of the First Feeding of the Multitude. An enshrined rock inside is worshipped as that upon which Jesus laid the loaves and fish. *But I thought that took place on a hillside—was it taken from there?.*

We skirted the lake south by route 90, down along the west side of the Jordan, and stopped at Beth-Shan/Beit Shean—"Scythopolis" in the time of the Maccabees. One of the largest Decapoli cities, it was a junction town on the ancient route from the Mediterranean east to Damascus, a strategic site commanding entrance to the Jezreel valley from the Jordan valley.

Some 60 kilometers or so past Beth-Shan I saw a sign for "Gilgal" and wondered, *which* Gilgal? But I was at "max," as we worked through another troubled checkpoint, passed a sign "Ma Mixmas" or something like that (*might that be toward the "ravine of Michmas(h)," where*

*Saul encamped against the Philistines?*). I had to put my pen away.

Re-entering the Old City the back way, Issa exclaimed, “Ah! So happy to be back in Jerusalem. I love Jerusalem!”

“You feel about it the way I do about San Francisco, where I was born,” I said....

Nine-fifteen the next morning the Gate Cafe was full at breakfast, this time egg omelet, bread, juice, and coffee. The small, open-air cafe is at bottom of the steps from the ramparts, raised a bit above the stone paved street, now swept clean of the prior day’s market hubbub. Merchants were setting out their wares anew while the *muezzin* chanted the mid-morning call.

Before breakfast I had gone to the main post office, outside of Herod’s gate, to check on the books, and was given a form to fill out—unfortunately, it all was in Hebrew. I set it aside; the first cup of coffee tasted great after the long walk. I watched the shoppers: young mothers, weighed down by all-covering garb, carrying a newborn and leading one or two toddlers by joined hands--somber-faced young women, most in the company of their mother or mother-in-law; but I spied high-heeled shoes under some caftans, and an occasional colored blouse or scarf. I winced a bit from empathetic reminder of my own young womanhood, when there is so much one would like to have, and do....

Above the commerce inside the Damascus Gate, one sees a tangled maze of antennae on the clusters of roofs beyond. “Terrible,” John at the Flowers Hotel had lamented. “Now we have cable TV all over the place--22 channels! The children see so much--too much, compared to what parents can give them.” Indeed, it had been my observation that television in the mid-east was no different from the west: one saw the “perfect” family--all smiles and in western garb for the most part, touting all the comforts of life.

Eleven-thirty at the Rockefeller Museum, and what a collection!—some I’m impelled to note: the “Galilee Man” (uncovered in 1925 in a cave northeast of Lake Tiberias/Sea of Galilee/Lake Chinneroth; the most ancient skull found in the Levant--the only one extant from the Lower Paleolithic period, some 300,000 years before the present time; artifacts from a million-year-old lakeshore site in the Jordan Valley; a second century a.d. Nabataean doll, tightly swaddled in the manner used to protect against scorpion and snake bites; Egyptian alabaster vessels from Ai (the second city taken by Joshua, where in 3000 b.c. a large temple existed on the town’s acropolis--the vessels being “some of the oldest and most exquisite of their kind found in Canaan”; finely wrought gold jewelry from treasure hidden by a southern Canaan “City of Hyksos” (where people took refuge around 1550 b.c. from pharaoh Ahmose of Egypt); No. 6 of the Lachish “letters” (a small clay fragment); carved ivories from Megiddo (“attesting to the prosperous Canaanite economy in the shadow of Egyptian rule, and the importance of Megiddo amongst cities of Canaan”).

Among the latter items was a box decorated with lions and sphinxes, and an ivory ancient “game board.” A limestone pedestal bore names of five Roman legions; and a column bore a Latin inscription about the raising of a statue in honor of Marcus Flavius Agrippa. There were coins of the Seleucids, Antiochuses I, VIII, and IX; Demetrius II; and Cleopatra; and shekels of Askelon and Tyre. In a cloister corner, a basalt fragment of a Seti I stele commemorated a military expedition to Canaan. A door lintel found at Beth-Shean was inscribed with a dedication to Ramses III; and a small stele, dedicated to the Goddess Anat (consort of Baal), was inscribed, “Anat, Lady of Heaven [*shades of Jeremiah!*]), Mistress of all Gods”....

At five, refreshed and redressed after meditation, nap, and shower, I headed back to the main post office, this time with the post office number of the Patriarchate guest house. *Lo and*

*behold!*--the box was there; but I would need to return in the morning with a signed release.

Then I would canvass bookstores; but how was I going to handle that 40-pound box?

It was a hassle in the morning. The absent manager had his rubber signature stamp with him on his trip! The seeming obsession with rubber stamping reminded me of Kafka; but the clerk finally produced a letter of permission (although it took my threatening rapping on the Bishop's gate next door to spur action). By 10:30 the box of 60 copies of *Beloved Disciple, Daughter of Logos*, finally was in hand.

I hired a \$5 taxi ride to get the box two or three blocks to the nearest bookstore, where Lady Luck truly was with me. The owner said that the store, being "Christian," was the only one likely to accept the books. The owner gracefully agreed to distribute them free, as I requested, and to keep me posted on reactions.

Fear for my photographs through airport x-rays caused me to hoof it a VERY long way, out of the Old City down to the banking area, to an ATM to accept my credit card and give me 400 shekels--about \$100; enough to pay for film developing that last afternoon. Issa was to come for me in the middle of the night, to take me to the Ben Gurion airport at Tel Aviv. I retrieved the films but would not have a chance to look them over until I was on the plane....

Issa was prompt; the drive to Tel Aviv, only 40 minutes--little traffic under a clear night sky. The airport was another story, however--security checks were triplefold; and I was interrogated some 15 minutes about places I had visited and why.

The bedouin gift dagger in my duffel bag caused some concern at Ben Gurion airport, but I was allowed to carry it. *Not so easy at Milan!*--where I had only a little time for the connecting flight. The Italians made such a fuss! Finally, they wrapped it in a separate box and sent it to the plane's baggage compartment, for me to retrieve at San Francisco. It was the last box to drop

onto the carousel; I hoped JC would like it...

*Tosca Lenci*  
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