Editors' Note

• • • *Slouching toward Armageddon*

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is famously multilayered. It includes a struggle between two national movements over the right of self-determination, a political battle between two peoples over the same small piece of land, and a clash between two cultures. For many decades it reflected the global competition between the superpowers, while more recently it has been partially subsumed into a struggle between regional powers. In addition, of course, religion is increasingly involved. Fortunately, the leaders of both nations have generally been aware that if the religious dimension came to the point of overshadowing the others, it would lead to havoc and destruction for all. Therefore, although this dimension was embedded in the conflict, it was generally somewhat subdued and not as visible as many of the other issues.

In the past two decades, however, that genie has burst out of the bottle. Since the collapse of the peace talks in the summer of 2000, the suicide attacks of the Second Intifada, and the hardening positions of both Palestinians and Israelis, the religious dimension has become ever more prominent. The most dramatic expression of this has been the intensifying struggle over Jerusalem/al-Quds, where both (Jewish) Israelis and Palestinians are demanding changes in the ever more fragile status quo that has prevailed in the holy places since 1967.

This activism, accompanied by waves of brutal violence, has been somewhat deflected, partly because of pressures exerted by King Abdullah of Jordan and United States administrations, but it revealed the potentially destructive power of the 'Holy Basin' when it is used as a political tool. The clamor of many Israelis to allow Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount, on the one hand, and the manipulation of the putative Jewish threat to alter the status of the Haram al-Sharif by Palestinians, including secular officials, on the other, has given extremists on both sides a symbol, a flag, and a deadly weapon. The Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif today is no less than a nuclear weapon that has the potential to ignite not only a regional war but also a cosmic explosion.

The escalation of the religious war over the holy sites has been accompanied by intellectual, theological, and political developments in both national movements. This special issue of *Israel Studies Review* deals with them. Its genesis was in a conference held by the Minerva Institute at Tel Aviv University in May 2015, and most of the articles reflect the research done by scholars who participated in it.

It should be noted that the authors have focused mainly on the Jewish side, and only one article deals in part with political developments among the Palestinians. Whatever your worldview, dear reader, whatever your political preferences, you must not underestimate the power of this genie. If it is not reined in and controlled, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might truly lead to an Armageddon.

We hope that we have whetted your appetite, because our articles are indeed an intellectual feast. We begin with Hillel Cohen's historical analysis of the religiopolitical importance of the Mount to Palestinians and to Jews—how they have regarded it over the centuries, culminating in the present. Then we present "A Visual Genealogy of a Sacred Landscape" by Noa Hazan and Avital Barak, which examines how photographs of the Mount since 1839 have shaped and been shaped by external perceptions. On a related theme, Hava Schwartz traces the gradual conversion of the areas surrounding the Old City of Jerusalem and spaces overlooking the Temple Mount into national symbolic landscapes.

Shlomo Fischer looks at the similarities and contrasts between two 'Yehudas'—Yehuda Etzion, a leader of the Jewish underground in the 1980s that plotted to blow up the mosques on the Haram al-Sharif, and Yehuda Glick, who, more recently, has agitated for the right of Jews to pray on the Temple Mount. Then, focusing on one instead of two individuals, Shifra Mescheloff traces the ideas of the late Rabbi Shlomo Goren relating to the Temple Mount, from his entrance with the paratroopers who captured it in 1967 to his efforts to make it halachically permissible for Jews to ascend it, which had long been forbidden.

We conclude our issue with Tomer Persico's provocatively entitled article, "The End Point of Zionism: Ethnocentrism and the Temple Mount." Persico demonstrates how the growing focus by Israelis on the Mount developed paradoxically but inexorably out of secular Zionism, something that was actually foreseen as a likely and potentially fatal problem by some of Zionism's early progenitors.

In addition, we offer a smorgasbord of reviews of new books on Israel, from ecology (Alon Tal, *The Land Is Full*) to history (Orit Rozin, *A Home for All Jews*) to the influence of present-day rabbis on Israeli society (Marek Cejka and Roman Koran, *Rabbis of Our Time: Authorities of Judaism in the Religious and Political Ferment of Modern Times*), as well as, of course, the

history of the conflict (Galia Golan, *Israeli Peacemaking Since 1967*), and more, including one book as yet published only in Hebrew, Nissim Leon's *The Turban and the Flag: Nationalism versus Mizrahi Ultra-Orthodoxy*.

We earnestly hope that none of the dire scenarios implied or foreseen in some of these articles come to pass before you have a chance to read them here—or ever, for that matter. And we look forward to seeing you at the annual Association for Israel Studies conference at Brandeis University in June.

— The Editors