

### Jerusalem and I Author: Hala Sakakini

*Review by Rose Ghurayyib*

Hala Sakakini introduces her book, "Jerusalem and I", as "a book of reminiscences, describing the childhood and youth of an Arab woman in Jerusalem." The topic is original. I found it particularly attractive because it represents the point of view of a woman rather than a man, which is a rare case in our Arab society. When I started reading the book, I found more reasons to like it. Hence, it is written in a sincere and natural tone, free of exaggeration and emotionality. The style is fluent and distinguished by its sense of humor, vivid descriptions of details and use of anecdotes.. Furthermore, the plot is eventful and written by a masterful pen.

The reader will earnestly share the happy childhood of the author, Hala Sakakini and her sister Dunia, who were privileged to be born to a cultured and sophisticated family. They received a modern education in one of the best schools of Jerusalem. The reader will equally share the sad events and grief, which befell the sisters, early in their lives. It started with the death of their mother in 1939, when they were fifteen and sixteen. The time also coincided with the eruption of World War II. Consequently, the German school which they attended in Jerusalem closed down, and the two sisters were forced to attend a school of lower academic standards. Friction between Arabs and Jews grew. The young sisters evaded the tension and anxiety by traveling to Lebanon to attend College. They attended The American Junior College (currently Beirut University College, BUC), between 1942 and 1944, and the American University of Beirut, (AUB), in 1945-46.

After World War II, events cause tension to increase in the region, which culminated in the first exodus of the Palestinians in 1948. Consequently, the two sisters and their families, including their aunts, father and brother left their beautiful homes in Katamoun, a modern quarter of Jerusalem and moved to Cairo, Egypt. In Egypt, their brother and

father both died of heart attacks during the same year, 1953. The sisters, now 25 and 26 began searching for work, starting in Egypt and ending in Palestine.

At this point in the book, the author stops telling her life story and embarks on the issue of the agony of losing her homeland. She reveals a series of letters, written by her brother and herself to family and friends between 1949 and 1953 and others between 1970 and 1973. The letters express "feeling and thoughts with regard to the Palestine question and Jerusalem."

Throughout the five chapters of the book, Jerusalem and the Palestinian problem occupy an important place. A feeling of nostalgia permeates the paragraphs in which the author remembers the happy years. The bitterness of the author and her family's forced exile are evident.

Chapter I begins with : "Jerusalem is my home town. Both my parents were born in that great city. So were my maternal and paternal grandparents. Although I myself spent only the first twenty four years of my life as a resident of Jerusalem, I rightly feel bound to that great city by years of family history." In a final page, extracted from her diary, when she and her sister finally settled in Ramallah, she tells of an evening in which they sat counting their many blessings and recapitulating their lives. Hala recalls her brother, Sari saying: "What worries me is the moral wrong I see being done and condoned everywhere- not only done and condoned but even sought after and wished for and planned."

The book is not only a life story told in an interesting manner. It also contains food for thought. •