

Book Review by Francis Clark-Lowes

***An Atlas of Palestine (The West Bank and Gaza)*, Jerusalem, Applied Research Institute, 2000, price £40.**

A major frustration faced by those of us who try to explain the Palestinian case to the average ill-informed lay-person is the complicated geography of Zionist colonisation. While I have long objected to the phrase 'but it's all so complicated', I must agree that the detail on the ground is difficult to grasp. Indeed this complication serves Zionism very well. For it enables Israeli politicians and their supporters to maintain that they are offering wonderful deals to the Palestinians when in fact they are doing nothing of the sort.

The Applied Research Institute's *de luxe* Atlas of Palestine is, therefore, a welcome, indeed indispensable, addition to our armoury. In its more than 150 maps and images an amazing array of information on Palestine is presented to us by an entirely Palestinian project team.

The atlas is divided into six chapters, namely 'History and Politics', 'Socioeconomic Conditions', 'Physical Characteristics', 'Water Resources', 'Land Use', and 'Main Palestinian Cities between the Past and Present'.

The all-important first chapter begins with a fascinating time-chart going back to the time of the Canaanites. Maps with pie-charts for each district show the distribution of land-ownership in 1945 and indicate how little of the country was then in the hands of Jewish organisations. A map and list show the 421 depopulated villages of 1948 and 1967. Indeed the whole process of occupation is graphically presented. Particularly revealing, in this respect, are the maps about Oslo II, the Hebron Protocol and Wye River.

The last chapter contains aerial photographs of Palestinian cities, significantly with military bases and settlements whited out. Four maps show the establishment and expansion of illegal settlements on occupied territory from 1967 onwards.

There is, perhaps, an excessive tendency to detail at times. I'm not sure how useful ephemeral information such as the location of gas stations is. A smattering of predictable errors of grammar and style do not seriously spoil the generally favourable impression. However, the atlas stands to be criticised for an understandable but unfortunate down-playing ancient Jewish history in Palestine; the time-chart is drawn in such a way as to minimise this aspect, and there are no maps on the subject.

The foreword, by Abu Ala', and introduction by the Director General of the Institute, Dr. Jad Isaac, now appear unduly optimistic. They were signed before (to be exact just nine days before) the shooting of worshippers at the Al-Aqsa mosque which gave rise to the new *intifada*. The Atlas contains a couple of blank pages ready to be printed with the outcome of the final status negotiations, a rather forlorn hope at present. Nevertheless, this beautifully produced work should play a vital role in educating both the converted and the 'to-be-converted'.