

MID-EAST e-NEWS

An electronic journal of the Middle East, for those who want to be informed.

FREE

Subscribe by email to receive your own copy every 2 weeks!

Issue No. 83 North Africa

February 15th, 2007

<http://www.morethantourists.com>

Contexts

Topical

Atlas of News 1
Al Aqsa Mosque 3

Religious

Rabbinic Judaism (5)
Timeline 2

Topical

Christian Zionism: Geography 3

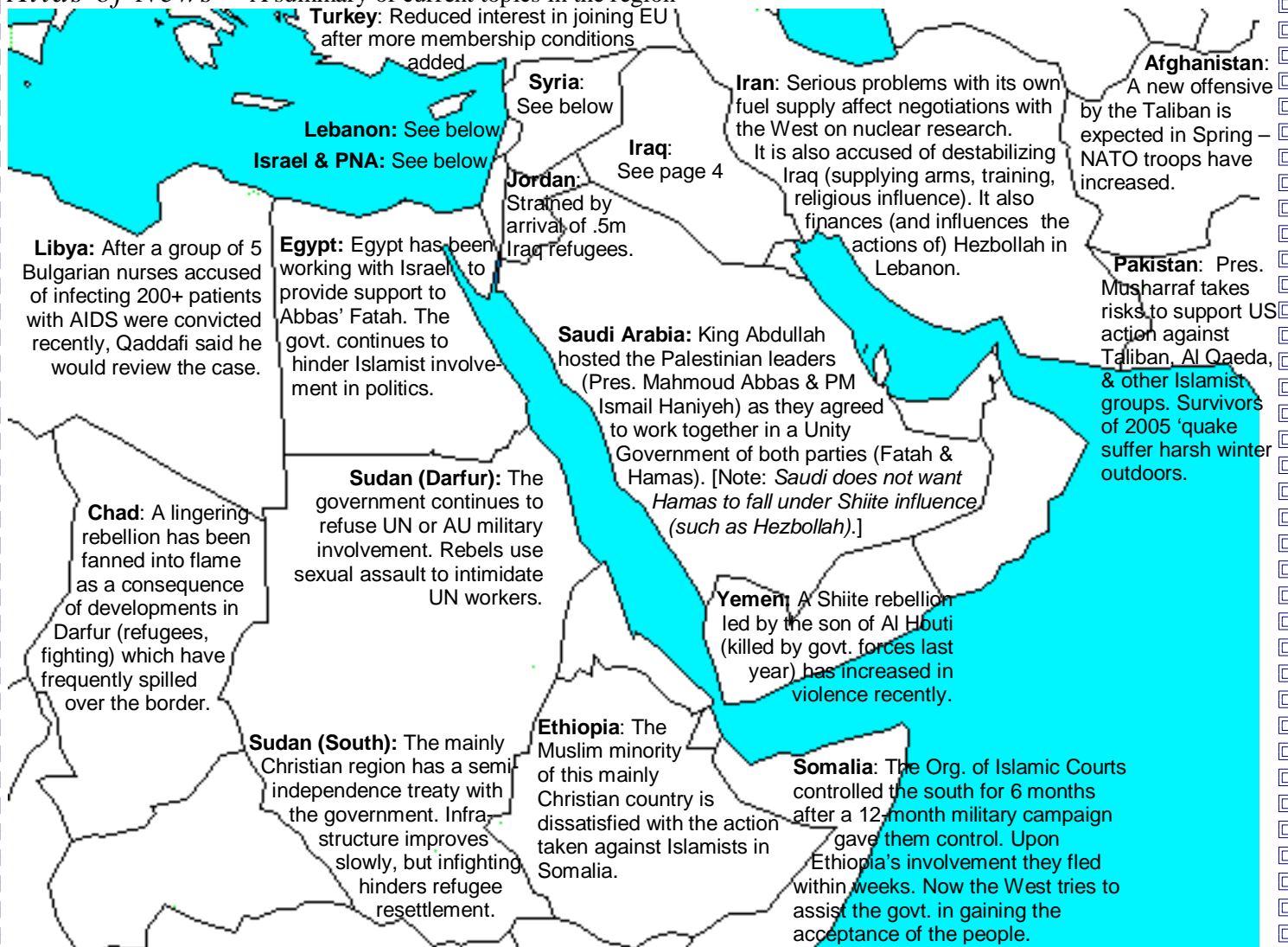
Welcome

I hope this reaches you promptly. I had it almost ready 2 days ago, but was away from an internet connection until this evening – the trials of journalism!

I hope this page's Atlas is a useful synopsis of what you should be keeping up with on the news. If it's not enough detail, check out the information about the ruckus on the excavation near the Al Aqsa Mosque, and if you need still more, go online and view the site on a web camera provide by the antiquities authorities. (Not all of you at the same time, however, we don't want to overload their web site with all of us arriving at the same time, now, do we?)

Write me at pkclark@pmbx.net & let me know what you think.

Atlas of News - A summary of current topics in the region



Israel: Financial & moral scandals involving a number of politicians affect the electorate. After-effects of Lebanon conflict include reduced respect for military, PM Olmert, & FM Peretz.

PNA: Fighting between Hamas & Fatah forces & supporters calms after Saudi-negotiated plans for Unity Govt. US govt. aims to provide Abbas with \$86m for Fatah security forces. Hamas still refuses to recognize Israel, renounce violence.

Lebanon: Recent bombing adds to fears of renewed conflict. Shia/Sunni divisions dominate events; Christian groups divided into Pro- or Anti-Syrian opinion.

Syria: Has spoken more moderately recently, but is still very closely involved in Lebanese issues. Has condemned attacks on US forces in Iraq

Rabbinic Judaism – a Timeline

Though elements of Rabbinic Judaism can be dated back to the period of the Restoration, the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, Rabbinicism can best be said to emerge during the Hasmonean period. During this period Judaism went through “a radical transformation from the rule of the Jewish community by God through the High Priest, to rule of the community through the judicial and legislative discourse of the Supreme Court.” From now on the High Priest was subservient to the supreme court of the Sanhedrin.

The eras of Rabbinic Judaism	Prior to the Hasmonean state, when the Jews were under the yoke of the Seleucids, the function of the <i>av beit din</i> (father of the religious court) was oversight of the Sanhedrin. He was the senior spiritual leader of the Jewish people, a kind of <i>Chief Rabbi</i> .	
Zugot 142 BC 40 BC	From a Hebrew word for ‘pair,’ <i>Zugot</i> , we have this name for the period when the religious leadership of Judaism was in the hands of successive pairs of teachers.	The two heads of the Sanhedrin, the President (<i>rais</i>) and the Vice-President (<i>av beit din</i>) led the religious life of the Jewish community. This was the period of the growing division between the elitist Sadducees and the more egalitarian Pharisees, arising from the appointment of a Greek sympathizer as High Priest. Divisions on points of law date from the dual leadership of Hillel and Shammai, during the time of Herod the Great.
Mishnaic 70 AD 200	This is the period when the Mishna was written.	The High Priesthood had become increasingly corrupt, beholden to Rome, and for sale to the highest bidder. The leaders of the Jewish community (<i>Tannaim</i>) lived in the Holy Land, and Jerusalem in particular. After the destruction of the Second Temple (AD 70) the Rabbi Yohannan ben Zakai founded a new Yeshiva in Yavne. The Tannaim included Shammai, Gamaliel (inc. AD 70), Akiva (during the AD 135 revolt) and as many as 120 in all.
200	The <i>Mishna</i> (Jewish code of law) is completed, from material written over the previous 2 centuries.	
Amoraim 200 500	The Amora were the scholars who codified Jewish law into the Gemara. In interpreting the Mishnah, they produced the Gemara, which together then formed the Talmud.	Beginning with the Rabbi Akiva (known simply as <i>Rav</i>) this period lasted about 8 generations. After moving to Babylon in 219 the Rav founded the yeshiva at Sura. Others were Joshua ben Levi (Lydda, 3 rd C), Shmuel (Pumbedita, d.254), Abbahu (Caesarea, 4 th C), Hillel II (creator of current Hebrew calendar), Rashi (5 th C, compiled Babylonian version of Talmud).
Savora 500 700 700	Editors of the Talmud, responsible for its final structure.	Though largely complete by 550 AD, the Talmud was probably significantly improved by the work of the Savora over the following two centuries. One of the last of these was Rabbi Yose.
700	The <i>Talmud</i> is completed in content (Mishnah and Gemara) by Rashi and structure by the Savora.	
Geonim 589 1038	Geon (‘excellency’) literally means ‘splendour’ or ‘genius.’ The <i>im</i> is a Hebrew plural form.	The two great yeshivot in Babylon were at Sura and Pumbedita. During the early medieval period the spiritual leaders of the Jewish community were the heads of these colleges. (The <i>exilarch</i> was the secular authority, under Islamic rule). Hezekiah Geon, the last Geon of Pumbedita, was tortured to death in 1040. The Geonim took the completed Talmud and taught it to their students.
Rishonim 1250 1500	Rishom means the ‘former’ and refers to the leading Rabbis of the period before the writing of the <i>Shulkan Arukh</i> .	Rashi, Maimonides (‘Rambam’), Nahmanides (‘Ramban’), and Halevi were Rishonim. It is not so much a position, as an measure of the respect their writings acquired, the honor in which they are held now, and the validity of their work as a basis for quotation and commentary.
1560	The <i>Shulkan Aruch</i> is a compendium of Jewish law compiled by Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575). In his introduction he explains that he wrote it due to the expulsion of Jews from Iberia (Spain and Portugal) and the invention of printing. Both of these threatened to weaken the rituals and laws of the Jewish people (by dispersing the people & facilitating the spread of heresy). It is an abridged version of Karo’s earlier <i>Beth Josef</i> , but it gained respect from both Ashkenaz and Sephardic communities alike, and is often simply known now as the <i>Code of Jewish Law</i> .	
Acharonim 1500 Present	The ‘later ones,’ referring to the Rabbis and scholars of the modern period, since the 16 th century publication of the <i>Shulkan Aruch</i> .	Scholars working in the centuries since the <i>Shulkan Aruch</i> was published have not been able to ignore its content, and it has hence served as the foundation for much discussion of Jewish Law in the modern period – particularly the editions printed with the commentaries of Rabbi Moses Isserlis in the inner margins. The <i>Acharonim</i> since then have produced commentaries on the <i>Shulkan Aruch</i> , supplementing those on the Talmud.

Christian Zionism: Geography

When the extent of the land of Israel is considered, there are a number of relevant Old Testament passages. (We will continue this list next issue.)

PENTATEUCH PROMISES TO THE PATRIARCHS

Abraham received his Covenant promises in stages:

Genesis 12:6-9 The Canaanites were then in the land, but the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."

Genesis 13:14-17 The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring for ever."

Genesis 15:18-21 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

Genesis 17:3-8 I have made you a father of many nations...., and kings will come from you. ... The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you, and I will be their God."

Some passages, such as Gen. 22:15-18, apply specifically to the *descendants*, rather than the land.

...but promises made solely to Abraham could without difficulty be applied to his non-Jewish descendants (as is already the case in Gen. 21:11-13).

To **Isaac** were passed on the promises already made to Abraham, the 3-stage promise of descendants, land and a blessing to the nations:

Genesis 26:4 "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me..."

and to **Jacob**:

Genesis 28:13 "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and your father Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying."

Genesis 35:22 'A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you.'

The Lord communicated the same to **Moses**, initially only mentioning Canaan:

Exodus 6:3-8 "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens... I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord."

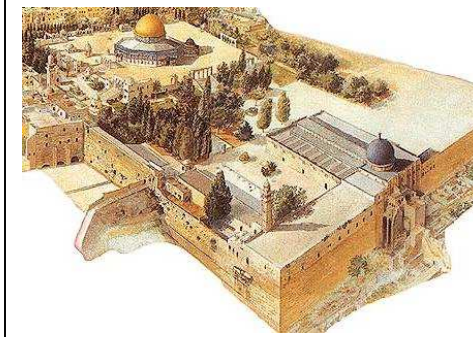
Exodus 23:31-32 "I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River."

and through **Moses** also, a warning:

Deuteronomy 30:17-18 But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.

Al Aqsa Mosque

The Al Aqsa was the first mosque built on the Temple Mount after the Arab invasion. It is located on the southern wall (the grey dome), overlooking the Biblical *Ophel*. The building in the SW corner is actually an Islamic museum, though part of the 'Al Aqsa Complex'.



Near the SW corner of the Haram Al Sharif compound there is a small projection from the wall. This is the base for an arch that in

Roman times supported a bridge over the valley that ran alongside the wall. Known as Robinson's arch, from the archaeologist who identified it, it is evidence of an earlier access point to the Temple precincts from this point. On the above picture the stairs on the left



provide for entry for those approaching from the south. Beyond those steps is the *Western Wall*. The steps pictured have not survived, and have for a number of years been replaced by a ramp which curves south (towards you, dear reader).

The recent demonstrations have concerned the work being done on this ramp. There have been plans to extend a bridge across to the wall. For now a temporary walkway has been erected.



View excavation: <http://www.antiquities.org.il>

5. Geography (B)

Prophecies include a wide area of the Middle East – Israel today is only a small part of that.

The prophesied return of Israel will occupy will include...

the present State of Israel	plus the West Bank	plus the Gaza strip	plus the Sinai	plus what is now Jordan
-----------------------------	--------------------	---------------------	----------------	-------------------------

