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People who gave me information

Al Khouriya family Guest House, Jifna, nr Ramallah

Hijazi Eid, Bethlehem-based walking guide

**Visit to Jerusalem, Palestine, Bir Zeit Twinning meeting and Al Walaja
(linked with Bedford via Friends of Al Walaja) April 2017**

Bedford, UK, May 2017

Marion Colledge

Marioncolledge@hotmail.com

Getting a shared taxi to Jerusalem Jaffa Gate could not have been more simple. I enjoyed myself at Christchurch Guest House in Jerusalem. In the night there was a great howling wind, one of those which would blow up the desert sands and I went downstairs for a bit. I went to church there the first morning on the other side of the compound. Nice to be in the Old City rather than in the new Israeli part. It's in an old embassy building that was built during the Ottoman period, so there's a shaded courtyard. The church was built in mid-19th century by the London Society for the Ministry to the Jews (in which Wilberforce was involved), later Jews for Jesus. A good biblically based sermon, but mention of a recent

murder: Apparently the British student was killed on the light rail on Good Friday by a mentally unsound man was actually going to Christ Church when she was stabbed. The vicar called it 'terrorism', but when it was first reported by the *Times of Israel*, it was reported that the perpetrator was mentally unsound and returning from a hospital visit and had previously tried to commit suicide; initially nothing was said about terrorism. So I wonder if it really was? Later reports used the word 'terrorism' (Gross, 2017).

I appreciate that most Israelis living in that part want simply to get on with their lives in security. Because of the big PR machine I doubt they know the excessive violence committed by their police and army. Some Israeli women march weekly against injustice to the conquered. Haaretz is a liberal newspaper which tries to exposes truths, as does Bet'selem, a group of professional humanitarian Israels.

I went round the old city in the afternoon, was pointed up on to the rooftops for the view by some Palestinian shopkeepers. Noise was coming up from below. At first I didn't understand it was the roof over the suq. I was then invited into a shop. The shopkeeper sat me down and told me lots and I asked him lots about his life. I wondered when he was going to get round to trying to sell me something. It was at least half an hour later: I was given mint tea, and he was waxing lyrical about how you have to do your best and that is like the flowering in the desert, so I asked him what his religion was and he said 'Sufi', and that he was a Bedouin. He had had to leave the Negev – which the Israelis have settled, but didn't seem to mind. He made hand-made jewellery incorporating bits of waste he had bought from the current Davidic archaeological dig near the city walls, so of course it was very expensive. In the market I bought almonds and dates and drank pomegranate juice. I then went out of the Damascus Gate to the Garden Tomb, which is unfortunately always closed on Sundays. (This is the only place I met where there appear to be two competing claims for a site – The Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Garden Tomb). I walked round the city walls and saw young Moslem girls relaxing in the sunshine, walked back in

through a narrow gate and tried to find the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. I ended up in a Franciscan church by mistake, was going to stay for the 6 pm service, but a noisy Italian woman came in so I didn't. I did find the church of the Holy Sepulchre eventually, where Orthodox rites were going on and crowds had to be controlled entering. I couldn't find my way out and followed an Italian crowd, but they weren't on their way out, they were going to a Roman Catholic room at the side and celebrating mass with their priest, so I stayed. I gather that Jewish extremists invaded the hospital of St John belonging around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to the patriarchy in 2002 and that their police were unable to get them out (Raheb,).

I ate in a Lebanese restaurant at the side of Christchurch that the receptionists in Christ Church oddly didn't seem to know about.

Then the second day I looked for the bus to go to the Mount of Olives – down the steps near the parking lot, I was told, but didn't find it and fuffed around for a while and eventually I took a taxi up to the Mount of Olives and it was very hard to bargain. It's harder than in the other countries I've been to. The Mount of Olives is almost completely built up. So there's a sort of open Church on the top with altars round in the circular enclosure, one for each denomination and two footsteps in a small inner round room, which Christ is supposed to have made on the rock. There was an Indian group there and an Italian one, who'd come by coach. The whole hillside was actually very crowded with pilgrims. It was getting very hot – and I lost my anorak which I had needed at 9 30 a.m. Then I had some orange juice in a deserted, rather smelly café nearby, and I said to the keeper, 'Are you Jewish or Arab.? He said, 'I'm Palestinian. I'm Canaanite'. They were the original inhabitants before the Israelis arrived.

Then I walked down. There were lots of Indian groups there, lots of Italians, lots of Russians; an Arab-looking group: quite crowded. You descend the almost vertical slope past Jewish cemeteries – they believe that is where Armageddon

will happen, and then you walk past the Garden of Gethsemane, which has really big old olives with splintered trunks, and is planted with roses, much smaller than i had always imagined it and fenced round. Then you can go down a little further with the crowds to what is reputedly the place where Mary was buried. (some believe she rose to heaven). There was a Moslem there giving out books on the Moslem view of Christ. All these holy places have had church after church after church, building after building after building put on top of them. But I realise that if they hadn't, someone else would have built something ordinary over them or someone would have ploughed them up. I walked back long the wall, the side of the Temple. Then I saw the architectural site where they're now digging out David's old Jerusalem. That's got interesting water tunnels in it, but it was 1 o'clock, I hadn't got shorts or swimming trunks with me and I wanted some lunch and a rest so I walked up past the Wailing Wall and through the old Jewish quarter of the city and then I came across an American-produced Jewish publicity propaganda leaflet (Katz, Stand With Us, 2017), asking for funds which contains a lot of untruths which is being distributed. For example, it says there haven't been any new settlements since around 2008 (Netanyahu approved another earlier this year, plus 2800 housing units in existing ones) (Editorial, Telegraph, 31 March 2017). Furthermore, the leaflet claimed that the land was given to the Israelites, that the settlements only use up 2% of the West Bank land, and that the Palestinians only live in about 8% of their land, so why are they complaining, and all sorts of other offensive things. (One reason why Palestinians may live in such a small proportion of their land is because part of it is desert, and a second is because of their family togetherness – brothers living in a flat next to their mothers, etc, plus if you are cultivating olives, you don't need to be near them all the time - you plough up weeds in the spring and you harvest in November. I didn't have space to carry that leaflet home with me but I've kept the address. I'm going to write to them.

The main street outside the Old City walls is very tidy. Near the city wall are elite shops, terraces and gardens. I wonder how many homes or traditional businesses were demolished in order to build them.

Reluctantly, I went on the light rail to a Jewish shopping centre as I had forgotten my laptop cable and had work to finish off. The ticket machine wasn't working. Two Jewish young men pushed in and used their season tickets, but a Palestinian woman helped me. I was glad I wasn't staying in a hotel in that area. I was ill on Tuesday morning first thing, but still managed to go into the little museum of Old Jerusalem, which is inside the Christ Church compound. The museum keeper and I had an argument. He said that when the missionaries had come to Christ Church in the nineteenth century, the land was a wilderness and swamp. (Probably it was: it was at the very edge of the Ottoman Empire). I told him there were swamps with mosquitoes near Southampton too at that time, but He didn't get it. He said the Jews were doing a good thing: they were promoting the greening of the land – this is one of the myths promoted by the Israeli Public Relations Department. It actually doesn't make a lot of sense to try to grow aubergines, cotton and crops that need irrigation. Jordan and Israel are using up the water from the aquifers that flow into the Jordan at such a rate that the Dead Sea is sinking one meter per year. In my opinion, it is the concreting over, or Europeanisation of the land which has been promoted, especially Northern West Coast near Tel Aviv. Furthermore, it is not sensible to grow aubergines, peppers, cotton (in the Negev), which require irrigation. Too much water is being used from the aquifers and the Jordan (Jordan also uses this) and no water is flowing into the Dead Sea, which is going down at the alarming rate of 1 meter per year.

I visited the 'Tower / Citadel of David' across the road – it's NOT the Tower of David. It's an Ottoman Tower. There are Moslem, Herodian, maybe but doubtfully Davidic, and Canaanite ruins underneath – inside the site the information is much more objective. There were Palestinian school groups and Jewish school groups inside.

I was ready to leave Jerusalem – with plenty more left over to see another time. Then realised I was running fast out of cash and would need some for a taxi in Bethlehem, and queued half an hour in the post office (Interesting as lots of old men who clearly don't get postal deliveries at home were coming in to empty their post boxes). I had to use a money changer who gave a much less preferential rate. There wasn't an ATM in sight in the Old City...

Then I got an ordinary service bus to Beit Sahur, which is joined onto Bethlehem. I was advised to get that service bus because it goes along a new Israeli motorway past the settlement of Gilo to Beit Sahur and you get there quickly, in about 45 minutes. It's not very far, about 12 km. If you go on the Bethlehem bus on the old road, it stops before the old checkpoint between Rachel's Tomb where the Israelis 've carved a piece out of Bethlehem and the wall; if you go through that checkpoint there are long delays because that's the one the Palestinians have to go through and they check everybody. So I got to Beit Sahur in the bus which passed settlements, and at one point we passed steep hillsides with beautiful terraced walls and olives – I thought – I bet those are some of the ones that have been confiscated from Al Walaja. I got a taxi from Beit Saur to Bethlehem and got to the Lutheran Guest House in Bethlehem by walking up some steps (after the taxi driver had dropped me off annoyingly in Manger Square, dumped my case on the pavement and tried to palm me off with some Euros in my change).

Beit Sahur (the place where they Wise Men are supposed to have decided not to go back via Jerusalem) and Bethlehem are joined on together and it's an extremely big urban complex and it's on very steep hills and I wouldn't call them hills. I'd call them mountains because they're about 2,100 feet high. There are these mountains that go down through the backbone of Palestine/Israel and if you weren't on mountains it would be extremely hot. It was hot in the middle of the day as it was, but only about 12-14 degrees at night.

I then unpacked, rested for ten minutes and J my interpreter for Al Walaja, our twin village, was waiting for me in reception and she said we don't need to take a taxi, my brother has driven my uncle's car, is that all right. So they drove me to Al Walaja. There was a checkpoint at the exit to Bethlehem but it wasn't manned. (In fact most of the checkpoints when I was travelling were not manned. I only found two that were actually in use. One was in use in the opposite direction from which I was going and then one was in use on Sunday between Jericho and Jifna and then I just decided to go to sleep while we were queuing and by the time we finished queuing they'd decided to go back into their military zone. Maybe they wanted their lunch. Don't know. So these checkpoints weren't as bad as I'd imagined. However, I understand that there are particularly crucial ones where they make it difficult for Palestinians to go to work on the Israeli side every day and those are the ones where the ecumenical accompaniers go (Nablus and Hebron) who go out there on three month volunteer contracts to make sure the Palestinians don't get abused).

In Al Walaja which is almost on the brow of the hill and much more spread out than I'd ever imagined, it was explained to me that when they had to move in 1947 the land was given to them by another village. That's not what Wikipedia said - it said that some of them had land there. The Israelis have built their wall along the edge of the main road of the village at the top of the hill and they have built their settlement, Har Gilo, just behind it and Har Gilo is on the peak and the other side of the hill, so it's slightly higher than Al Walaja (That land was probably taken from Alwalaja, so old plans show). Al Walaja had three springs. The whole country is rich in springs because water goes through the limestone/chalk and if it meets another kind of impervious rock it comes out as a spring making it ideal for certain sorts of agriculture. The the Har Gilo inhabitants took two of their springs because they're on that side of the hill so they've only got one spring left. I was taken down a steep incline to what is considered to be the largest olive tree in the world where they have put a fence round. You can see it has rotted in the middle and split into several trees. I asked what animals nested/lived in it. The

Alwalajans are apparently hoping, in the future, to be able to show it to tourists and they're intending to have a cafe on the edge of the village, they're hoping to get Spanish development funding for it. But if they want to show the olive tree to tourists, I think they're going to have to build steps down their steep hillside. Not everybody has got walking shoes! At the bottom of this hill, near the olive tree, is a spring and they've constructed a concrete pond under it. They have been told (by the Israeli Water Board or by the Police??) that they are not to use the water from that spring. I'm trying to find out when they were told this and how it was communicated, but no one of my correspondents has told me up to now. This seems to be nasty. The nursery beds of which I saw some. I also saw a horse ploughing up the olive fields. It would be difficult to take a tractor down that steep hill.

I was then taken back up the hill to J, my interpreter, to her mother's house, which was very well appointed, marble trims on the staircase, with radiators for the winter. I was given dinner and we talked, half in French and half in English. (J studied French in Bir Zeit University and is currently very much under-employed). Her sister who has studied to be an architect does have a job in Bethlehem though. We had rice, vermicelli and chicken and vegetables – lovely. I did email to say I didn't want to eat in anybody's houses because of my allergies. I had to pick out the vermicelli from underneath the rice. I carried for J five French books in my small case all the way there; I ordered them on Amazon France and I discussed by email whether I could post them direct to her, but they don't have a postal service in the village.

Al Walaja is much more spread out than I had thought and is built on a steep hillside. So you've got this lovely house, with marble trims on the staircase, and then the wall of Al Walaja, directly through their bedroom window about ten feet away. In one case some people had been offered money to move and had refused and the Israelis had actually built the wall around them rather than demolishing their house, which gives you a bit of hope in the legal system. I saw

some half-built houses on the other side of the main road a bit further up and I was told that they had been building them and then the wall had been built and the settlement of Har Gilo had been built and the inhabitants of Har Gilo had said, 'You cannot build those houses, they spoil our atmosphere'.

J belongs to the Araj family, one of the big families of Al Walaja, and is related to an activist Bessil Araj, an Egyptian-trained pharmacist, who was shot dead in the night in his home by Israeli police in March upon release after six months. You can see tributes to him on-line. Imagine the older generation – they moved there in 1948, were under Jordan, built their houses, tilled the soil from scratch, then in 1967 suddenly found themselves under Israeli occupation for a second time. Then from 2003 onwards there was the confiscating of land to build the wall. Now they are threatened even further. J is also related to Shireen Al Araj about whom an Australian lady made a film in 2015. Shireen is now in exile. J's Mother and brother keep a restaurant in the main street. We went past it while it was closed, and the hatch wasn't locked. 'We don't need to', she said. Isn't that wonderful? People in Al Walaja mainly work in Jerusalem, I was told, and apparently Al Walaja used to be in the Jerusalem district and that's probably why they have permits. (An academic report states that 47% work in Jerusalem). Reverend Mitri Raheb's book (Faith in the face of Empire, 2014) tells us that many Palestinians are engaged in building the apartheid roads that lead to settlements and the settlements themselves, J said that some with links to Al Walaja who used to live in Jerusalem find it so difficult to get new building permits in Jerusalem that they are coming back to Al W and building homes there (without permits of course, because they argue they wouldn't be granted anyway).

Al Walaja is partly in Zone B (under partial Palestinian control) and partly in zone C (Israeli military²), I was told. I'm not sure how that affects matters in the village – Technically, the Israelis could decide to put a practice firing range there – this has been done in one place in the country.

² Zones agreed at the Oslo Accords

Imagine the older generation – they moved there in 1948, were under Jordan, built their houses, tilled the soil from scratch, then in 1967 suddenly found themselves under Israeli occupation for a second time. Then from 2003 onwards there was the confiscating of land to build the wall. Now they are threatened even further. Al Walaja is subject to the Greater Jerusalem plan, and the Israeli government wishes to take more of the olive groves away in order to make a National Park (Hasson, 29 April 2017).

I feel that the Palestinians' narrative tends to go back only to 1947. Jewish ones tell a carefully crafted older story. I feel that the Palestinians need to construct one that is older too: some of them may have been original Canaanites. Canaanites and Jews interbred. During the Old Testament Jewish exiles it was largely only the officials who were exiled. Mitri Raheb (2014) claims that occurred in AD 70 too, it was likely it was principally the urban and elite Jewish families who were exiled. The agricultural workers would never have been exiled. People remaining may have converted to Christianity under Constantine (up to and before 4th Century) then to Islam after the Arab invasions to avoid taxes.

I returned to the Lutheran guesthouse in Bethlehem for the night. The population of Bethlehem is only about 11% (?) Christian now. It's mainly Muslim. Muslims and Christians get on well with each other. It is said that the Christians have been better educated than other people and they have had perhaps a little bit more opportunity to leave, to emigrate and it's quite depressing for them being under Israeli occupation. Population of Bethlehem in 2007 according to Wikipedia was 25,000, but this doesn't count Beit Sahur or Beit Jala. I was quite upset by the loudness of the Islamic call for prayer at 5 o'clock in the morning – it was coming from Manger Square, but it seemed just outside. Doesn't seem right for it to be majority Muslim but it's been like that for a very long time – and the Muslims and Christians are very friendly to each other. Incidentally, most people go to the Holy Land with Companies that link with Israeli guides, so they get bussed into

Bethlehem for half a day and don't get to stay there. A new regulation created in May 2017 is being discussed which will stop Israeli guides getting a permit to guide a group unless they sign an undertaking not to take people to stay in the West Bank.

Then the next day I went to J's house in Al Walaja by taxi. She took me into the school to meet the headmistress. She hadn't heard of Bedford Friends of Al Walaja, but when Father Jay set it up she wasn't the headmistress then. She was probably either teaching in Bethlehem or on maternity leave because she's got four children and she had several years' maternity leave. I asked her what she wanted buying and she wanted tape-CD-radio-players for the school. She showed me two that were broken and she left the school early to buy them with me on the pretext of a headache, which she did have. The phone is constantly ringing. She doesn't have a secretary, because the UNRC won't pay for one and so it's answer the phone, take a message, speak to the guests and that's stressful. J went home to get on with her things. As soon as J went, I could see that the headmistress actually could manage to understand me and have a good go at English.

And the headmistress and I got the elderly bus back into Bethlehem, there were two Israeli helicopters flying overhead as we waited. We went to her husband's kebab restaurant for lunch – he was a teacher for two years. His story is that some of his friends were in a resistance group and because of that, he lost his teaching job, so he's had to be a restaurateur for the last 25 years. We went to a bank for me to change money into shekels. Then separately we went to her father's booth – he's a money changer – just to pay respects to him. And then we walked up the hill in the heat of the mid-day sun to where the electronics shops are. We went in three different shops finding out the price of these recorders and ended up buying two from the shop in the photograph. It was about £100 all together for the two.

She says they had ten computers in 2008 and only three of them are working, so really she needs computers. Maybe we can manage to collect for a computer next year. Then she invited me back to her house, but she'd forgotten her key. Just like me! Normally her daughter would be there, having come home from school, but she was trying to finish off a project for a competition about a computer application. I met her Christian neighbour who'd been – in her retirement – doing a degree in Jerusalem – but hadn't finished it because of an eye problem. The headmistress's daughter-in-law who lives in the flat upstairs and eventually let us in. and we both had a rest – each on a settee – the sitting room was very big. She looked less fearsome and more human when she'd taken off her hijab. She then showed me how to do stuffed vine leaves properly - I have vine leaves in my garden but I've never done them very successfully. Then I went back to the Lutheran guesthouse, had a rest and then went to eat in Manger Square.

While I was staying at the Lutheran Guest House there was an American group of elderly Lutherans, mainly ladies, who were doing a kind of information pilgrimage there which is run by Mitri Raheb, the Palestinian Lutheran priest who's written a lot of pacifist books on what it means to be a Palestinian Christian. They went to the refugee camp which is in Bethlehem near the wall. While these elderly Lutheran women were being shown round the refugee camp which is right near this checkpoint with Rachel's tomb on the other side, some of the little boys threw marbles at an Israeli soldier and they were tasered in the legs. And the ladies reported the next day that Israeli soldiers had come in the middle of the night and taken a boy away at random as a prisoner in retribution. Apparently this goes on not infrequently and I find that kind of thing very upsetting. Now I wondered why people are still in refugee camps 69 years after the occupation began, but I understand the situation is complex. You lose refugee status if you move out. In some cases they've built themselves a better house there than they were originally given upon the spot, and so they still live there and then they take the kids out and go to school etc. Some of the camps

have still got United Nations schools in them. Al Walaja still has a United Nations school in it.

On Thursday I had hired a guide so that I could go on a long walk in a desert valley known as a Wadi Qelt, and it was interesting from the wildlife point of view. At the start of the walk I could see a settlement on a hill about four miles away the other side of the gorge. This is quite far into the West Bank and I began to appreciate that the settlements do go right inside the West Bank. They are not just for overspill near the border. We saw a wild deer and birds whose name I've forgotten. He showed me what's known as Christ's Thorn Tree, which is probably what the crown of thorns was made of. It's a very common bush in the scrub. There was a tree whose roots can be used to clean teeth. There were Bedouins with their goats. Two little goats were bleating because they got behind the group, but the mother didn't bleat back unlike English sheep; the goats stay near their master, unlike British sheep who live alone. They don't run away. It's very interesting. We saw bulldozer marks where the Israeli soldiers had removed a Bedouin camp forcibly in the middle of the night during rainy weather quite recently. They want the wadi as a national park and they're trying to herd all the Bedouins together. Now that doesn't work because you can't look after goats or sheep if you stay in one place because basically goats can eat scraps from thorn trees. And the area is otherwise more or less brown, it's arid most of the year and so it's ideally suited to a nomadic lifestyle.

Then we went down a steep incline, down hikers' steps to the level of the gorge

And then back up more proper steps to St. George's Monastery which is built on the place where Elijah hid from God in a cave when he was worn out and depressed. This area is much visited by pilgrims who come on a bus nearby. So steep hike up and it was 11 by then and I was really sweating. It was really hot and the sweat came down my forehead and into my eyes and actually stung. Fortunately I was able to use some eye wipes. The Greek Orthodox priest wouldn't let me in the church. My guide said I was a Christian. The priest said, 'Is she Orthodox?' He said, 'No'. The priest said, 'She isn't a Christian then. She

can't come in.' I didn't mind. I sat in the Elijah cave above and prayed for a few minutes. The whole area is full of caves and it's quite natural to cut homes or tombs into the rock because the chalk/limestone lends itself to that, whereas I had never seen a cave in my life until I was 11! I can now picture the bible scenery better.

And then we walked down again amidst the donkey keepers and then up to a place on the other side where buses stop and we got back to Bethlehem. On the way I was shown the place at the top of a hill before where the wise men would have looked back on Bethlehem and decided not to go back to Jerusalem. I was also shown the place where most Moslem Palestinians have to look at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem from where Mohammed was taken up into heaven, because they're not allowed to go to Jerusalem. We went under a bridge and I said 'What's that? Is it a railway?' I was told, 'No, it's a road leading to a settlement.' So there's a whole network of new roads serving just the Israelis. And I see that a settlement has been put to the east of Beit Sahur, so Bethlehem and Beit Sahur will be half encircled. There are now 600,000 settlers in the West Bank. Mitri Raheb's book (2014, *Faith in the face of Empire*) and Maayan Lubell in *The Forward* (2014) says they are given huge subsidies to live there, which were not transparent.

We enjoyed coffee at the Franciscan restaurant. It was the only one open as there was a general strike in Palestine in support of the political prisoners who have been on hunger strike recently. There seem to have been one million of them since 1948, if you believe the poster. That's a very large proportion of the Palestinian population. And around 250 'martyrs' – people shot indiscriminately or deliberately by the Israelis or prisoners denied medical treatment. A notice about this was placed on the fence of the Franciscan café and on the construction fence round the Church of the Nativity, which is currently undergoing renovation. No shops were open as I walked back to the Lutheran guesthouse

apart from a pharmacy and a bakery. The strike received a page and a half of reporting and comment in the *Observer* (Guardian, 2017)

The Church of the Nativity which is supposed to be a place of refuge was shot into by Israeli soldiers during an uprising in 2002. Manger Square repaving has been paid for by USAID, so a large notice proclaims. My guide said, 'With the left hand they pave our square and with the right hand they give the Israelis weapons to kill us.'

The Headmistress invited me to go back to her house again on Friday for lunch before I went to the Ramallah area. So I did that, rather than going to a couple of museums or to the Shepherd's Field. We ate the stuffed vine leaves and masses of chicken. I had no map of Bethlehem to find my way round with because I never got chance to go to the Tourist Office, but I got the receptionist to write the address down in Arabic and a taxi took me there with little difficulty, though there were fewer of them as it was Friday. We looked at the fruit trees in her tiny back garden/yard. One was a vine and the one in the photo is, I think, a kumquat. Good use of space.

At 3.30 she took me in a relative's vehicle to the shared taxi station, and told one of the passengers to make sure I got to Bir Zeit and Jifna, the village nearby. At Ramallah we stopped and I had to hand over my money and get out. Woe is me without a map, but sure enough I followed the passenger through the deserted streets for about ten minutes to the North East to the shared taxi station for Bir Zeit. That taxi stopped at the top of a hill in Bir Zeit until a yellow taxi came past and told the driver to take me to the Khouriya family guesthouse in the village of Jifna. He didn't know where it was, but the people in the village shop did. So I arrived around 5.30. The family I stayed with near there were a Palestinian Catholic family who run a bed and breakfast and there were other people staying there from the conference.

On Saturday I went to the twinning meeting near Ramallah. There were people there from Bath, Solihull, Walsall and Lichfield, many places and people from their twinned Palestinian villages. J and her sister went from Al Walaja, not for long because her sister had an exam. They have exams on Saturday afternoon. They have Fridays off. Some Twinning groups have their schools writing to each other. Some send people over during the olive picking season to help with work. I met a scientist from Bethlehem University who runs a museum in the university who is interested in Al Walaja. He demonstrated there with Shireen. He might be a good contact. The twinning conference was at a university called Bir Zeit. They told us during the conference that Bir Zeit University had been closed about eight times by the Israelis during the last 20 years because if the Israelis suspect that somebody was doing some anti-government activity, they'll root them out and close it. Not very nice.

I went to the Catholic Church on Saturday evening instead of Sunday so that I would be able to go out on my last Sunday and the owner's husband took me out in his car. Of course I had to pay him, but I thought it was a good use of a day and so we went to Jericho, which is nothing much, but it's by what's supposed to be the Mount of Temptation, so I was able to climb up twenty minutes to the Mount of Temptation where there is again a Greek Orthodox monastery and looked down on the banana groves and the date palm groves. There's a new Swiss built cable car for the faint-hearted. It's about 400 feet below sea level so it's very hot and then I went down and the driver was waiting for me and he took me to something called Hisham's Palace which is an 8th Century Muslim palace with a mosaic floor and they're beginning to excavate bits of it. I commented that it needs covering up, and was told a Japanese company are going to do it next year. I didn't go to the old Bronze Age Jericho city which is being excavated, as I am feeling disgusted with the narrative of the invasion of Jericho being seized upon by the extreme Israelis as an excuse to take the whole land now. There have been various views on whether the Israelites really did walk round it and sound their trumpets and then the walls fell, and the latest view is that yes it did

fall round about that time, to within 150 years and that probably it fell because of an earthquake and probably, yes the Jordan did dry up for a day or half a day because an earthquake upstream would cause water to get blocked and it wouldn't flow again until it had flowed over the blockage. Well that's the current theory. And I went down to the place where Jesus is reputed to have been baptized by John the Baptist. The Israelis have renamed it. They're calling it in the Hebrew language 'Place of the Jews' but the English says 'Baptism Site'. It's in one of these military areas; about one third of the country is a military zone and I took a picture of that notice. Name changing is something they do. (For example Al Walaja has been left off the map altogether on purpose). You used to have to walk down a dusty road to get to the baptism site, but now the Israelis have built a spanking road for the buses and then they sell white overdresses for people for about \$10 each so that people can go and renew their baptismal vows in the dirty water.

And then on the way back I took a picture of some Israeli propaganda which says 'you are entering Zone B. You do so at your own risk. There is a danger of being killed'. Well that's propaganda. They control the water and I was shown another settlement and I was told that one Jewish family went there. Now this is 20 miles away from the border. It's nowhere near the border. One family went there, refused to move, so they built a military station in front of it to protect it.

I got back from this trip at about 2 o'clock. I was quite nervous because I was told that you get questioned when you go from the West Bank into Israel. I was taken by a driver. It cost about £75, an hour's drive straight from Jifna to the airport. If I hadn't, I'd have had to have gone in a taxi to Ramallah and then a shared bus from Ramallah to Jerusalem, walked through Jerusalem to the other gate and then a shared bus from Jerusalem to the airport and that would have taken all day and I thought it was a good use of time to do that trip with the Christian bed and breakfast owner and then to go with this driver that he found me who has a permit to drive into Israel. He's Palestinian but he's got an Israeli passport so he

can drive across. I just thought it was a good use of time and my flight was at 9.15 but Easy Jet were two hours late. No problems getting out. He put Israeli radio on just before the airport so security would just wave him through, thinking he had a Jewish passenger.

I enjoyed the holiday, but I found it very upsetting and the Christian family in Jifna say they would like English churches to twin with Christian churches there because they feel so isolated. Rather than a village twinning, they would like the churches to twin as well so that they can hear from churches and be prayed for. I think there's a lot of foreign church presence in Jerusalem and in Bethlehem because those are the famous spots. You know you've got a Peace Centre in Bethlehem, you've got a Catholic Centre run by the Franciscans and then you've got this Lutheran German Centre where I stayed, which run conferences and a jewellery college, and then you've got all the Greek Orthodox monks and so on but where these people live they've got a very tiny little church in their village and there's another village Teybeh, where there's a brewery and that village used to be totally Christian and that is still largely Christian. And the bed and breakfast owner said 'We have to send our children to private school and it's expensive but we have to send them to private school because they won't get religious education if they go to a state school and all the other children are Muslim.'

And they have sent one of their children to Germany to study; that headmistress I told you about, they've sent one to Egypt to study and one to Turkey to study. They save up and do it and one's still studying; two of them are still studying in Bethlehem. So of course they ask about scholarships. We don't have many. Theresa May made it very difficult for foreign students to come to this country.

I found a fair amount of litter in the streets, Coca Cola cans etc. and I commented on it and my interpreter in Al Walaja, said, 'At one time we had a project with the school to pick it all up but that sort of faded'. There were two bins, the big wheelie kind of bins, not like our little household ones, they were like the ones you get,

recycling bin size like you get near the bus station but they were on the edge of the village - the bins were not big enough. I wonder how many more there are? According to a report, the village council is responsible for collection of rubbish. I gather from the World Bank website that there's been a grant/loan to start a recycling and waste collection service of sorts in Hebron, Gaza and Bethlehem. Throughout the whole of Palestine I found litter heaps here and there. Some later people I met *were* concerned about them, e.g. the guide who took me walking on Thursday picked them up from our path – they were dropped directly by tourists outside the monastery fence, and the bed and breakfast owner/guide from the village on the last day wouldn't even let me throw down a biodegradable banana skin.

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People who gave me information

Al Khouriya family Guest House, Jifna, nr Ramallah

Hijazi Eid, Bethlehem-based walking guide

J in Al Walaja

Mazin