

Film Guide

SEARCH FOR DESTINY

PART IV

The 1950s and 1960s in the Middle East were a time of dreams and emotions. Jerusalem is almost a fetish, a symbol, an obsession in itself, in the Middle East history is a cycle where loops emerge and reemerge, the same problems and antagonisms recur, where all too often the responses of the great powers are repeats of the past. The decline in Christian fervor for holding the Holy Land has in no wise been mirrored by a comparable decline in such fervor in Islam or Judaism. Indeed each seeks not merely to possess the Holy City but to deny it to its enemies World War I British promises and deceptions sparked the rise of an unfulfilled Arab nationalism - but the British had reneged on their commitments to both Zionists and Arabs, and both felt betrayed. In addition, many other countries felt that the Jews were trying to take over Palestine based on a faith that mixed myths and historical desire. But World War II and the Nazi Holocaust engendered a Western sense that the Jews must be provided a homeland; the British withdrew in 1948 and Israel came into being. Its birth gave rise to an equal and opposite action-an explosion of Arab nationalism as symbolized by the rise and career of Nasser. 1958 saw a coup in Iraq and the death of its British puppet monarch; 1959 saw Syria and Egypt join in a United Arab Republic that threatened other post World War I British appendages and allies such as Jordan. In Israel life moved at a fast pace; it was a country always prepared and preparing for war for its survival against Arab guerillas and the powers surrounding it. Westerners were fascinated by its women soldiers and kibbutzim. A pivotal event in the modern Israeli state was the kidnapping and trial of Nazi administrator Adolf Eichmann from Argentina in 1961; young Israelis could not understand the seeming passivity of their forbears from the 1930s and 1940s. Eichmann was the only person so far executed in the state of Israel. The French fought wars following World War II to retain their colonies in Vietnam and in North Africa. Morocco and Tunisia gained their independence by 1956, but the struggle for Algeria continued until 1962. Unlike the other colonies, Algeria was considered an integral part of France, a department just like those on the European mainland. It is not primarily an area of desert, but rather is an agriculturally prosperous land with grains, citrus fruits, and wines. Many French inhabitants of Alsace had fled to Africa after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 and had prospered. But the French writ of liberty, equality, fraternity did not apply to most of the Arabs and Berbers; the French colons comprised 10% of the population but owned 90% of the land. The Arabs rose in rebellion, but the French poured in troops- 700,000 at one point, to protect the interests of 1 million Frenchmen. The FLN fought a bitter and bloody war with French reprisals leading at one point to almost total control of the country; yet the FLN persisted and France was condemned worldwide both for trying to maintain its control and the methods it employed. The diehard French settlers supported Charles de Gaulle in his bid for the presidency of the French republic, believing he would support them in their struggle to retain control. But DeGaulle proved himself more of a realist and agreed to hold elections for the Algerians to determine their fate. A massive French exodus followed in 1962, but a group of recalcitrant French officers led a tremendous rebellion against DeGaulle. Eventually the Algerians triumphed. Libya became independent in 1951; Aden fought a 10 year war with Britain before driving away the British; and in 1960 Iraq claimed Kuwait, an area separated from Iraq only because that British had so drawn the map lines at the Versailles conference in 1919. 1960 also saw the breakup of the United Arab Republic. By the end of the 1950s the outlook again was not so bright for the Arab world.