

## **The Founder of the New Field of Inquiry of Islamic Jerusalem Studies: Background and Methodology**

**Aisha Al-Ahlas** *Al-Maktoum Institute*  
**Sara El-Awaisi** *University of Dundee*

Every age has its particular requirements, which differ from those of previous ones. As we find ourselves in the United Kingdom in the fifteenth century of the Hijri calendar and in the third millennium and the twenty-first century of the Christian era, the researcher argues that there is a great need for Muslims to seriously and honestly examine past, present, and future events. If Muslims do this, they will find that there is no room for idlers in the intellectual and cultural arenas, and that they desperately need specialised international academic institutions and model cultural establishments. The aim is to provide comprehensive and distinguished academic studies on the major issues of the Arab and Muslim worlds and present model foundations where people are able to interact with each other in peace and harmony. Prompted by this understanding, Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, becoming known as Al-Maqdisi, and this researcher, started out to set up the Islamic Research Academy in the UK as an international academy on Islamic Jerusalem Studies.

The aim of this article is to examine the historical background, and the reasons which led to the establishment of the Islamic Research Academy. For a better understanding of

the Academy, the researcher will also shed light on the founder's background, and his early experiences, discussing his philosophy and his methodology of studying and understanding history.

## **Foundation of the Islamic Research Academy in the UK**

Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi argued in his fourth annual report in 2000 that "The beginning was humble but it bore the seeds of a global project".<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the saying, "The facts of today are the dreams of yesterday, and the dreams of today are the facts of tomorrow", and based on "El-Awaisi's approach of specialisation and integration", the Academy pursued "El-Awaisi's understanding of the principle of gradual establishment and development".<sup>2</sup>

The Islamic Research Academy (ISRA)<sup>3</sup> was formally founded<sup>4</sup> both by Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi and this researcher in London on Thursday 27 Safar 1415 AH/4 August 1994. The date of the Academy's formal foundation is not fortuitous, corresponding as it does to two important events in the history of Islamic Jerusalem. 26 Safar 11 AD was the day that the Prophet Muhammad ordered the preparation of Usama Ibn Zaid's mission; this was the third and last event in the Prophet's lifetime towards conquering Islamic Jerusalem. In addition, 27 Safar 589AD was the day that Salah al-Din died.

## **Lack of Academic Studies**

Living in an age of precise specialisation, the two founders spent the first two years of the Academy's life (1994-

96) investigating very closely the reality and position of Arabs and Muslims in the UK. The aim was to identify a major issue on which to focus the Academy's activities, but not one already exclusively covered by any international academic institution. There were several options open to them, but they did not want to repeat the activities of others by choosing an academic issue with historical, religious, cultural, political and international dimensions. The Western countries, particularly the United Kingdom, played a pivotal role in establishing a Jewish state in the Holy Land<sup>5</sup>. This gave rise to grave problems in the Arab region.

From his academic work in the United Kingdom, El-Awaisi was "very concerned" and painfully aware of the lack of academic studies on Islamicjerusalem,<sup>6</sup> especially those addressing the issue of Islamicjerusalem from Arab and Muslim viewpoints. El-Awaisi argues, for example, that the history of Islamicjerusalem has "suffered distortion, falsification and alteration. Most of our historical researches, specifically those related to the history of Islamicjerusalem before the Muslim conquest, are limited to biblical and Orientalist studies. The Orientalists tend to underestimate the relevance of the Qur'an and Hadith to the thinking of the Muslims, and may indeed regard allusions to the Qur'an and the Prophet as merely a sort of general piety with little direct bearing on the postures and politics of the Muslims vis-à-vis Islamicjerusalem".<sup>7</sup> In addition, he said that "the difficulty is to adopt a neutral approach in the case of a holy region such as Islamicjerusalem, where the competing claims of the adherents of the three world religions

and the international interest met and clashed”.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Islamicjerusalem is a place laden with religiously significant, cultural attachments, competing political claims, and international interest.

Most studies on Jerusalem focus either on the Jewish or the Christian aspects of the City. As most of these researches tend to adopt a biased point of view, one could argue that very little balanced academic work has been done on Islamicjerusalem. Studies on what may be termed ‘Islamicjerusalem Studies’ can be divided into two types:

### **I. Orientalist and Israeli Studies**

In his editorial note for the first issue of the Journal of Islamicjerusalem Studies, El-Awaisi argued that the Orientalist’s studies in general “tend to approach the subject in ways that Muslim scholars would see as an outsiders’ viewpoint, and therefore inevitably lacking balance”.<sup>9</sup> However, El-Awaisi opens up this important discussion and criticism of the Orientalists and the Israelis academics when he argued that the “attempt of some Israelis academics and Orientalists to play down the importance of Muslim sources relating to the period of the first Muslim conquest of Islamicjerusalem and in particular to undermine the significance of the region of Islamicjerusalem to Islam, seeks to eliminate other viewpoints and rewrite the history of Islamicjerusalem from a single biased point of view”.<sup>10</sup> In his leading article on “Umar’s Assurance of Safety to the People of Aelia (Islamicjerusalem): a critical analytical study of the historical sources”, he focused his main criticism on

Shlomo D. Goitein.<sup>11</sup> One example of such bias is Goitein's assertion that the "Arab conquest is embellished with imaginary myths and legends, and that consequently there remain only a very few authentic accounts of the stages of Muslim conquest and the early centuries of the City's life under Islamic rule".<sup>12</sup>

However, El-Awaisi argues that "Despite his doubts about the authenticity of the Muslim sources", Goitein describes the report of Umar Ibn al-Khattab as being accompanied by "Jewish wise men ... as quite feasible". In addition to rejecting Goitein's "twisted logic", El-Awaisi argues that this way is "unsuitable for handling historical events". One interesting point in his response is when El-Awaisi put the question: "How could the Jews, who had been absent (from the region) for five hundred years, guide Umar Ibn al-Khattab around a city which had been flattened and had its landmarks, elevations and undulations altered on more than one occasion?".<sup>13</sup> In addition, Goitein's hasty accusation of Sayf Ibn Umar al-Kufi al-Asadi al-Tamimi (died 170 AH/786 CE) as having little authenticity, and showing both irresponsibility towards Palestinian issues and ignorance of them, is in El-Awaisi's argument, "undoubtedly a trumped-up distortion displaying a shameful bias". In the justification of his strong criticism of Goitein, El-Awaisi argues that "It would seem that such bias is not based on any rational academic analysis or objective criticism of historical sources, but rather, at the very least, on religious and political reasons linked to the struggle of the political institution currently ruling in Israel to gain control of the City"<sup>14</sup>, to lend some historical

and archaeological legitimacy to its occupation of the region of Islamicjerusalem.

## **II. Arab and Muslim Works**

There are many books and articles in the Arabic language available in libraries on the subject of Palestine and Jerusalem, written for different reasons and for specific audiences. Some Arab and Muslim scholars have compiled studies on different aspects of Islamicjerusalem. Their contributions have been of varying academic value. The researcher claims that many<sup>15</sup> are still sadly lacking and behind in academic research on Islamicjerusalem Studies. Most Arab and Muslim works on the subject are emotional and devoid of research methodology and attention to detail.<sup>16</sup> Some researchers fail to apply academic methods or overlook detail in their research. This could be due to these requiring either much work or much time; it seems that some take the easy path of quoting sources without analysis or criticism. It may be also that they do not want to exert the effort necessary for research or that they are forced to accommodate to or are influenced by the social, political, and economic circumstances surrounding them in the Arab and Muslim worlds, which restrict and prevent them from achieving their potential. It seems that both Arabs and Muslims have now reached the pinnacle of sensationalism and subjective bias.

Indeed, the limited Arab and Muslim cultural presence and their absence on the academic arena have allowed Orientalists and Israelis to fill the gaping holes in Arab and

Muslim countries by fabricating and marketing their academic works. For more than a decade, El-Awaisi has been urging intellectuals in the Arab and Muslim countries to discuss this serious issue critically. In 1991 he published a small booklet in Arabic entitled “The Muslim’s Scientific, Intellectual, and Cultural Presence”, where he identified successfully this unbalanced formula. He argued that the Orientalists’ work “which fills the Arab and Muslim academic arena today, has become the only frame of reference. This has, therefore, had dangerous effects on Arab and Muslim thinking, education, and culture. As a result, Arab and Muslim ‘forts are threatened from inside’ and they have fallen victim to an intrinsically hostile culture. They have become submerged in cultural immersion and their thoughts fettered by the intellectual receptacles of others. This sad situation has placed the efforts of some sincere Arab and Muslim scholars on the defensive, leaving the other party free to draw up phased strategic plans to achieve their goals. Whenever any Arab or Muslim scholar tries to draw attention to an issue raised by the other side, they are forced into another defensive position, and so it goes on”.<sup>17</sup>

## **Official Declaration of the Academy’s Establishment**

Two years of dedicated examination highlighted this desperate situation. This led the two founders to conclude that there is a crucial need for a global academic alternative that would fill the vacuum with constructive work. It is vitally important to note that the founders were very keen to escape the

trap of reacting to others by creating debates which would lead those others to adopt a defensive side instead.

According with “El-Awaisi’s understanding of the principle of gradual establishment and development”, the two founders invited another three individuals<sup>18</sup> in June 1996 to join them in the project. Following the approval of the Academy’s constitution on 4 Safar 1417AH/ 20 June 1996, the Islamic Research Academy was recognised on Monday 8 Safar 1417AH/24 June 1996 as an independent, charitable, academic institution specialising in Islamicjerusalem.<sup>19</sup> Meeting at the Glenhommie House in the Scottish City of Dunblane on Sunday 27 Rabi’ al-Awal 1417AH/11 August 1996, the five members formed the Academy’s first Management Committee and elected the various officeholders. Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi was elected at that meeting as Chairman of the Academy, known as the Secretary-General.<sup>20</sup>

In recognition of their support for the Academy and their distinguished stands on Arab and Muslim issues, two prominent British politicians, Lord Watson of Invergowrie<sup>21</sup> (Labour) and Sir Cyril Townsend (Conservative), were appointed to the Committee as Honorary Presidents. Their appointments were made in accordance with Article 6 (J, and K) of the Academy’s constitution.<sup>22</sup>

## **The Founder’s Background and Methodology**

The associations between the key founder, Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, and the Academy are so close that one can almost say that El-Awaisi himself embodies the attributes and



characteristics associated with the Academy. Indeed, one can completely identify the Academy with his personality and give him credit for its strength and success.

The researcher argues that any action is not born of that particular moment; rather it is an expression of numerous factors surrounding the person involved. To fully comprehend the Academy, it is important to understand El-Awaisi's background, his early experiences and methodology of studying and understanding history, as these greatly influenced the course adopted by the Academy. This section will therefore attempt to shed some light on the key founder's background and methodology.

### **Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi's Background and Early Experiences – to 1994<sup>23</sup>**

Becoming known as Al-Maqdisi for his grass root background of being born, growing up and working in the IslamicJerusalem region and for his leading role in establishing the new field of inquiry of IslamicJerusalem Studies, Abd al-Fattah Muhammad Abd Allah Ali El-Awaisi is originally from the village of Zarnuqa near Ramla in the region of IslamicJerusalem. He was born on Monday 11 Rabi' Al-Awal 1379 AH. The day and date of his birthday is not fortuitous, corresponding as it does to the eve of the anniversary of the birth of Prophet Muhammad.

## The Significance of the name Abd al- Fattah

His parents named him “Abd al-Fattah”. Abd means servant or worshipper; and al-Fattah, which is one of the names applied to God, means the one who opens much or most or who holds the key to open gates or opportunities; or the one who grants success or achievements. It is very interesting to note that the only verse in the Qur’an in Surat Saba’ which says “God is the Great opener who is all knowing” (34:26) is the only verse to mention the name al-Fattah is linked with another name al- Alim, the all-knowing; this indicates a close link between the one who holds the keys of power to open the gates and opportunities and the one who holds knowledge. Indeed Al-Fattah is derived from the verb (fataha) which is a successful action based on, or from knowledge. The Qur’anic verse therefore embodied two inter-twined concepts, knowledge and power. In short, Abd al-Fattah means the worshipper of the Lord who holds the keys of power.

Adopting the same approach that Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi used to analyse the importance of Muslim names, one could argue with him that<sup>24</sup> “It may be supposed from the Islamic tradition of naming that his parents gave him a beautiful name so that he should act as his name suggests”. In other words, they hoped that their child, Abd al-Fattah, “would grow to have the Islamic virtues to which his name refers”. Consequently, it became Abd al-Fattah’s responsibility “to live up to the meaning and spirit of his name. In accordance with the Arabic proverb *Ismun ‘ala Musama*, he earned, by dint of his own efforts, his admirable name. Some developmental

psychologists would recognize the importance of names and cultural significance of names to personal and social identity. In fact, names do play an important role in Muslim life. The name defines the person” and may have influenced the life of Abd al-Fattah “by placing moral and social obligations on him”.

Later, Abd al-Fattah was to be seen as the founder of a new field of knowledge of Islamic Jerusalem, and one who opened up a new area of specialisation in Jerusalem studies. In addition, he successfully brought together the two main elements of the equation mentioned in the verse in the Qur’an: **الفتاح العليم** (the one who has power which leads to actions-knowledge and power). His teachers and friends used to say that his name gave *Barakah* to him, in that both his vision, ideas, projects; and anything he did always had great significance. Other people feel surprise as to how he could have achieved so much in such a very short period of time.

Abd al-Fattah was brought up in a very poor humble family that had suffered the bitterness of being refugees. His father, Haj Muhammad, sold eggs and later vegetables, travelling between neighbouring villages and refugee camps in order to secure his family’s daily bread. However, his father sought to give him and his six sisters the best education available to them and to improve their living conditions. For this purpose, Haj Muhammad travelled to work in Saudi Arabia.

The refugee environment, which he is proud of, had uniquely formative influences on Abd al-Fattah’s personal development. In an interview with him he stated “I am very proud to have lived and grown up in a very poor humble family

where I didn't use to have a proper school bag”<sup>25</sup>. This left an impact on him that to be a poor did not prevent him from achieving his dreams and objectives. Indeed, one could argue that this sort of environment taught him to take things seriously and to try to face the challenges with an open mind and thus gave him the skills to solve problems and to work in a team. In addition, to be a refugee does not mean the end of life. It is a challenge which should be met with strategies and plans to turn that difficulty in to a positive action. One could argue that this refugee environment taught El-Awaisi that the best way to meet these challenges is to escape from the trap of reaction to create instead the action itself.

He lived in the al-Nussairat refugee camp for 18 years and witnessed the bitter times after the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948 and the Arab defeat of 1967; these left clear imprints in his early life and affected his future. To see the sadness and the miserable situation, the powerless and hopeless feelings encouraged him that he should focus his efforts to succeed in his study so that he could feel the taste of success instead of the failures which led to the two tragedies in 1948 and 1967. Indeed, he realised as a result of his refugee experience that they need models for success which could be at the individual and the institutional levels. The opposite of failures meant that we need to present good and successful positions. In short one could argue that the word ‘impossible’ was not part of his dictionary. Indeed, as Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum stated in his important speech at the World Economic Forum in Jordan on 16 May 2004 about Dubai's success, that the word ‘impossible’

does not exist in leaders dictionaries. No matter how big the challenges are, strong faith and determination will overcome them.

Indeed, the martyrdom of his elder brother Abd Allah who was also known as Hashim, in the famous battle of al-Karama in the Jordan Valley in 1968 made a great impact and family responsibility became now laid on him, Abd al-Fattah. The death of his brother meant that he was now the only son of his father, as had been his father and grandfather before him. Consequently, in 1977, Abd al-Fattah travelled to Amman in Jordan where he got married.

### **Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi's Educational Career and Teaching Experiences**

When he was 18 years old, Abd al-Fattah left the Islamicjerusalem region and travelled with his wife to Kuwait to study there. During his five years in Kuwait he obtained a BA (Hons) in Politics from the University of Kuwait, and worked in the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, and the Kuwait Finance House. However, behind his study in university he said "My parents were hoping for me to study medicine but, unfortunately medicine was not available at the University of Kuwait for non- Kuwaitis"<sup>26</sup>. His parents later on encouraged him to do engineering which he spent a whole year studying. Yet at the end of the year he felt that this was not what he wanted. He was attracted to the humanity subjects and thus he decided to study politics as a major and Economic as a minor. However, his preferred opinion for his second subject was

Islamic Studies. But that combination was not acceptable at the university at that time. However, as he was so keen on this combination he chooses all his options from the Islamic Studies which resulted with a degree in three subjects, Politics, Economics and Islamic Studies. In 1983 he travelled to the United Kingdom with his wife and four children to continue his postgraduate studies, where he gained his PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies (history) at Exeter University in 1986.

Although he received offers to teach at the University of Wahran in Algeria and the International Islamic University in Malaysia, he decided to return to his beloved original region of Islamicjerusalem and, in particular, to the West Bank City of Hebron where he was appointed Assistant Professor of history in the Department of History at Hebron University. He was then prompted to become Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the same University. Most significantly, he taught for a number of years at Al-Quds University in the City of Jerusalem where he used to teach in Al-Aqsa Mosque. For this, he would commute between the City of Jerusalem and Hebron. He chose one of the stone benches *Mastaba* of Al-Aqsa Mosque from where to teach his modules on the “History of Islamicjerusalem throughout the ages” and “Palestinian Studies”. In this way, he was trying to revive the previous Muslim scholars teaching in Al-Aqsa or the Dome of the Rock or one of the *Masatab* of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa where they conducted their teaching surrounded by their students.

When we asked him about his feeling in teaching in this way, he expressed that teaching in Al-Aqsa Mosque was a very

rich experience for him and for his students. He felt proud that he got the opportunity not only to perform prayer *Salah* in Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa but to teach his students in the Centre of Barakah which later on developed far away from the Barakah. Thus, one could argue that the development of the new field of inquiry of Islamicjerusalem Studies is an actual radiation from his teaching in the centre of the *Barakah*.

It was natural, therefore, that he urged his students to focus their research on the Islamic heritage of Al-Aqsa Mosque. Later on, this collective research project was made into a documentary video entitled “The Treasures of Al-Aqsa Mosque”. The success of this research project, and the revived unique method of teaching the module on the history of Islamicjerusalem in one of the *Mastaba* of Al-Aqsa Mosque, led his students to organise a special ceremony on 24 Safar 1413 AH/ 23 August 1992 in Al-Aqsa Mosque to pay special tribute to this “young historian” for his unique works on Islamicjerusalem.

One could conclude that El-Awaisi’s early life was like that of any other Palestinian refugee, suffering from the unjust position in which his people were forced to live. However, he travelled outside the region of Islamicjerusalem when he was very young to gain firstly an undergraduate education. Moreover, he travelled a great distance, to the UK, to continue his postgraduate studies. When he returned to his beloved region he also chose to work in academic institutions in Islamicjerusalem.

## Central points in Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi's life

Indeed, Islamicjerusalem and education were the central points in his early life. This could be attributed to what he used to hear from his illiterate parent, that "though we lost our land in Zarnuqa our children must not lose their education. Education is the strongest weapon to fight for their rights". In addition, his mother used regularly to take him to visit Al-Aqsa Mosque and talk to him about the Night Journey of the Prophet Muhammad from the al-Harram Mosque to Al-Aqsa Mosque. Indeed, these visits and the significance of Islamicjerusalem to Muslims were enhanced and developed significantly by his school - teachers.

In brief, Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi's love for Islamicjerusalem was developed through his education which leads to the establishment of the new field of inquiry of Islamicjerusalem Studies. **Love for Islamicjerusalem + Education = Islamicjerusalem Studies.**

In short, when he was living in Islamicjerusalem, El-Awaisi's unique dream was to see the establishment of an academy or institute or centre, the sole concern of which would be to examine Muslim problems in general and Islamicjerusalem in particular.<sup>27</sup> In 1993, however, he again left his beloved region of Islamicjerusalem with his wife and children, to the United Kingdom; here he achieved his dream when he started to develop his unique project on Islamicjerusalem Studies and went on to establish the Islamic Research Academy in 1994, Al-Maktoum Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in 2001, and Al-Maktoum Cultural Centre in 2004.



## **Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi's Methodology of Studying and Understanding History**

Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, in his small booklet in Arabic entitled "The Muslim's Scientific, intellectual and Cultural presence", explains that "While history is the knowledge of the past, because it expresses human interpretations of the problems in a particular age, it is also the knowledge of the present and future, because it contains good and bad experiences that provide a human being with lessons and warnings. Apart from constituting the roots of a people or nation, it is also a depository of its living experiences, the foundations of its building, the secret of its strength, the basis of its interaction with the past, and its conscious memory through which it understands its past, explains its present, and anticipates its future. Moreover, history is not merely a category of events compiled for fun nor is the historian involved in merely recording past events. Rather the historian's long experience helps him/her to explore the experiences of the past so as to understand God's plan for the cosmos". To support his methodology of studying history, he quoted Hassan Uthman<sup>28</sup>, an authority on historical methodology, who asserted that knowledge of the past gives a human being "the experience of many years", and makes them "more able to understand themselves and to behave better in the present and future". Accordingly, El-Awaisi argues that "a historian's age is not measured simply in terms of his age; it is measured by the experience he gained through the period he examined".<sup>29</sup>

In addition, El-Awaisi argues that a “human being’s behaviour is governed by his/her experience of the past and his/her expectations of the future”; or as stated by the Muslim thinker, Malik Ibn Nabyi,<sup>30</sup> that “our view of history does not only lead to theoretical results but practical ones too that relate to our behaviour in life. They determine our stands towards events and the problems that arise from them”. El-Awaisi added that “History is a chain of interlocking links that make up the course of human civilisation. History for a human being is the past that lives on into the present and extends into the future. Thus our past is their present (the present of the past generations), and our present is their past (the past of future generations), and our future is their present (the present of future generations). A person cannot understand his/her being and his/her present and plan for his/her future without understanding his/her past, because all ages are governed by the same rules. The human being is the pivotal point around which past, present and future events revolve. A human is a human in his/her present, past and future. The difference between these three times is the difference in the degree of the changing circumstances, environments, and times he/she lives through”.

El-Awaisi also argues that “Islam undoubtedly raised unique historical awareness of this matter. It laid down a new methodology of dealing with history and a new way of viewing history as a single unit of time. The present of a nation is the result of its historical course and the beginning of its path towards the future. The Qur’an links a human being’s present, past and future. Thus, history, from a Muslim view, has never

been an independent knowledge, but part of the Muslim knowledge, subject to fundamental Muslim sciences. It was, for example, a branch or a science allied to the sciences of the Hadith (Prophetic Tradition) and the sciences of the Qur'an. Moreover, Sira (Prophetic Biography) was a branch of science of the Hadith and its methodology. History also remained a branch of the Sunnah (ways of the Prophet) and of Tafsir (Qur'anic Exegesis). Indeed, the Qur'anic treatment of historical knowledge, in particular the stories it relates, has prompted Tafsir scholars to search for historical information to help them in their explanation of the text. Al-Tabari<sup>31</sup>, for example, relies on historical background in his book *Jami al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* A Collection of Evidence for Interpreting the Qur'an. Historical knowledge, therefore, became a branch of fundamental knowledge, closely linked to the Qur'an. In short, history is an original and inextricable part of the web of all sciences. Thus in Muslim history, we find the historian narrator, the interpreter historian, the jurist historian, the geographer historian, and so on”.

El-Awaisi concludes his methodology by stating that “We must not regard history merely as a refuge from the bitter present, a form of compensation for the deficiency that is exposing a nation, preserving its essence by injecting it with doses of pride in the glories of past generations. It is essential for the progress and stability of any people that it knows and seeks inspiration from its history. Any distortion of a nation's history in the eyes of its people will lead inevitably to a loss of

direction and progress. In short, the nation that survives is the one with a conscience and a true appreciation of its history”.

In the light of the founder’s background and methodology, one could argue that Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi’s early experiences greatly shaped the development of his own approach of specialisation and integration and his understanding of the principle of gradual establishment and development. Against this background and methodology, one could understand why he was very keen to escape the trap of reacting to others by creating debates which would lead those others to adopt a defensive side instead; and why he decided not to repeat the activities of others by choosing issues which were not already exclusively covered by any institution.

## Conclusion

The establishment of the Islamic Research Academy in the United Kingdom on **Thursday 27 Safar 1415 AH/4 August 1994** was the humble beginning which adopted El-Awaisi’s understanding of the principal of gradual establishment and development. The two founders decided to officially announce this international academic project on Islamicjerusalem on **Monday 8 Safar 1417AH/24 June 1996**; to coincide with the 1400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Muslim conquest of Islamicjerusalem’s region, when the Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab made his historical visit to Aelia during **the summer of year 16 AH/637**<sup>32</sup> to establish the first Muslim rule there.

Indeed, one could argue that the foundation of the Academy was prompted by El-Awaisi’s understanding of the

importance of studying historical events in building peoples and nations. His methodology of studying history is to understand the past, not for the sake of studying the past but to help explain the present and, most importantly, to plan and anticipate the future.<sup>33</sup> In short, the establishment of the Academy was a practical implementation of El-Awaisi's methodology of the studying and understanding of history.

- <sup>1</sup> Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, "Secretary General's Report", in the Fourth Annual Report of the Islamic Research Academy (IRAP): 1999-2000, p.2.
- <sup>2</sup> Interview with Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi.
- <sup>3</sup> The Islamic Research Academy used to be known as IRAP. On 6 October 2000, the AGM of the Academy decided to change from IRAP and instead use ISRA. The problem of the IRAP acronym was due to the P having no apparent connection with the Academy's full name. See the minutes of the Fourth AGM on 6 October 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> Although the concept to establish the Academy was discussed and debated by the two founders in May, June and July 1994, the first formal step was the opening of a bank account in the name of the Islamic Research Academy on 4 August 1994. Accordingly, the two founders have decided to take Thursday 4 August 1994 as the day of the formal foundation of the Academy. It is worth mentioning that the first donation the two founders received consisted of a few pounds sterling that their sons Abd Allah and Ali had donated from their pocket money. This money was used to open a bank account in the name of the Academy at a London bank.
- <sup>5</sup> Abd al Fattah El-Awaisi (1992) *The roots of the Palestinian question* (Dar al-Hassan, Hebron), pp.136-139.
- <sup>6</sup> Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, "Secretary General's Report", in the Fourth Annual Report of the Islamic Research Academy (IRAP): 1999-2000, p.2. See also the "Editorial" note to the *Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies* (vol.1, no.1, Winter 1997), p.1.

- <sup>7</sup> Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, "The Significance of Jerusalem in Islam: an Islamic reference", *Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies* (vol.1, no.2, Summer 1998), p.48. See also the "Editorial" note to the *Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies* (vol.1, no.1, Winter 1997), p.1.
- <sup>8</sup> Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, "Umar's Assurance of Safety to the People of Aelia (Islamic Jerusalem): a critical analytical study of the historical sources", *Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies* (vol.3, no.2, Summer 2000), p.48.
- <sup>9</sup> Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, "Editorial" note to the *Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies* (vol.1, no.1, Winter 1997), p.1.
- <sup>10</sup> Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, "Umar's Assurance of Safety to the People of Aelia (Islamic Jerusalem)", p.52.
- <sup>11</sup> Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, "Umar's Assurance of Safety to the People of Aelia (Islamic Jerusalem)", p.49. El-Awaisi's leading article was in response to Daniel J. Sahas's claim that the first Muslim conquest led to the "emergence of an opportunity for the Christians of Jerusalem to contain the Jews, with the help of the Muslim Arabs, through the concessions granted to them in Umar's Assurance". See Daniel J. Sahas "Patriarch Sophronious, Umar Ibn al-Kattab and the Conquest of Jerusalem" in Hadia Dajani-Shakeel and Burhan Dajani (eds.) (1994) *Al-Sira' al-Islami al-Firanji ala Filastin fi al-Quruon al-Wasta (The Islamic Frankish Conflict over Palestine during the Middle Ages)*, The Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, p.54.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp.52-53. See also Shalomo Goitein, "Jerusalem in the Arab period (638-1099)" an article in *Jerusalem cathedra* (studies in the History, Archaeology, Geography, and Ethnography of the land of Israel), Edited by Lee I. Levine, Yad izhak ben zui institute (Jerusalem 1982 AD)
- <sup>13</sup> El-Awaisi, "Umar's Assurance of Safety to the People of Aelia (Jerusalem)", pp.57-58; See also El-Awaisi's criticism of Goitein's claim that Umar's Assurance is a fabrication, p.75.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.52.
- <sup>15</sup> There are many examples to support the researcher's claims. However, due to the limitations of this book, the researcher suggests that a separate piece of research be carried out to analyse relevant Arab and Muslim works on the subject; examining other positions and viewpoints.
- <sup>16</sup> This position could apply to both Arab and Muslim works in general and on Jerusalem in particular.

- 17 Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, *Waqiuna al-Ilmi wa al-Fikri wa al-Thaqafi* (The Students' Cultural Society, Al-Quds University, Jerusalem, 1991), pp.34-35.
- 18 The three were: Jak Kilby (London), Mohamed Branine (Stirling), and Michael Andrews (Glasgow). Kilby had been known to the founders as a leading photographer ever since he visited them in Hebron in 1989. He has a huge collection of photographs relating to several aspects of Islamic Jerusalem. The other two individuals were invited as they were among the first people known to the two founders when they moved to Scotland in August 1995.
- 19 Charity number SC024913.
- 20 The first Management Committee (1996-2000) consisted of Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi (Secretary-General), Michael Andrews (Secretary), Mohamed Branine (Treasurer), Jak Kilby (member), and Aisha Al-Ahlah (member). The Current Management Committee consists of Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi (Secretary-General), Jak Kilby (Secretary), Mohamed Branine (Treasurer), Aisha Al-Ahlah (member), and Khalid El-Awaisi (member).
- 21 On 27 November 2001, Lord Watson of Invergowrie stepped down as Honorary President of the Academy, upon being appointed Scottish Executive Minister for Tourism, Cultural and Sport.
- 22 The Islamic Research Academy's Constitution.
- 23 This background is based on the researcher's observations during her 27 years' journey with Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi and also on her interview with him. The researcher suggests that a separate researcher is needed to examine El-Awaisi's life and discuss his main publications.
- 24 Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, "Emergence of a Militant Leader - a study of the life of Hasan al-Banna: 1906-1928", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. XXII, no. 1, Fall 1998, pp.49-50.
- 25 Unstructured interview with Prof. El-Awaisi on the 15 May 2004
- 26 Unstructured interview with Prof. El-Awaisi on the 15 May 2004
- 27 Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi (1991), *Waqiuna al-Ilmi wa al-Fikri wa al-Thaqaf*, pp.41-46.
- 28 Hassan Uthman (1943), *The historical methodology*, Cairo, p.13.
- 29 Interview with Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi.
- 30 Malik Ibn Nabiy (1979), *Ta'amulat*, Dar al Fiker, Beirut, p.126.

- 31 Abi Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari, al-Musama Jami al-Bayan fi Tafsir al- Quran*, (Dar al-Kutub al- Ilmiya, Beirut 1420 AH/ 1999 AD), 3<sup>RD</sup> Edition.
- 32 That was in Jumada First or Second 16 AH/June or July 637 (e.g., 29 Jumada First 16 AH/1 July 637)
- 33 Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi (1991), *Waqiuna al-Ilmi wa al-Fikri wa al-Thaqaf*, pp.2-4.

