

## **In Jerusalem**

Interview with David Perlov

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**When you made *In Jerusalem* did you consciously plan to make a film that was different, of a kind we'd never seen before?**

"Yes, I was aware of the difference. In the film I interview an old man, a religious photographer, who tells me, 'No one took photographs in the Holy Land before me. I was the first.' I, too, said this while I was filming, but only to myself. I had a feeling that I was doing something decisive for myself and also for Israeli filmmaking.

Firstly, because of the freedom in which I was creating, and second, due to the formalism, if that is the word, the striving for a form in documentary film, something that was not common here. And that film really did serve its purpose, among my friends, too, who were studying at the time or had begun to make films.

To this day, when the film is screened from time to time, people come up to me and use the words you used, that it is 'a type of film we have not seen before,' and they mostly express their wonder that it was made so long ago. Immediately after that film, however, I wanted to be freed from the bonds of its formalism, I wanted to work with the thing itself, to go to the street."

**After all, this is a land that opposes changes, that still holds credibility as a supreme value - whether regarding feature films or documentaries. Were you at all afraid of the reactions, or did you not think about how it would be received, working only out of need, or perhaps even naiveté?**

"No, no, not naiveté. I wanted to break something. It was a bit dreamy of me. I wanted to make an exemplary film. I did not want to make an antithesis to the films made in Israel, or not just to them, but rather to the whole mentality, which around that time forbade the Beatles to visit here.

"I was a big believer in the possibility of change and in the support I would receive from those who came after me.

"Of course the film encountered problems. It clashed with the official establishment approach. After all, it was about Jerusalem, the capital of Israel,

with everything it involved, and I filmed at street level. I have a tendency to shoot the "below". I came with a certain innocence but also sobriety. I lived in Paris for a few years before immigrating to Israel in 1958, and there I saw documentary films by Alain Resnais and Georges Franju and Agnes Varda, films commissioned by the French establishment but made with total freedom. I believed that this is how it should be here, too.

It was wonderful for me to make a film about Jerusalem, because it was different from the Israel I had known until then. A courtyard was a courtyard, children were children. I did not understand the symbols, apart from that of the eternality of Jerusalem, and I loved that myth. I knew that my camera was trained very low, and that the figures I would film would look directly at it. There were people in the studio who said I was crazy. 'How could he let people look directly at the camera and even wave to it?'

"I included old film clips in my movie, ones that had been made in Jerusalem at the beginning of the century. There were shocked reactions to that, too. And on top of all these, there was also the story of the beggars, which led to a clash with committees of the Foreign Ministry, the Jewish Agency, and the Film Service. In the end the film even reached Levi Eshkol."

**What was so outrageous that the prime minister had to decide whether the film could be screened or not?**

The problem began with the poet Zelda, who appeared in the film, and until then was almost unknown. She was a wonderful personality, and it was she who mentions in the film that the Messiah may come from among the beggars of Jerusalem. So I filmed the beggars of Jerusalem, and they, the establishment, wanted to remove that scene, because they apparently thought that it was not complementary to Jerusalem and would not look good abroad. I could not agree to that, because the story had tremendous ethos: even the lowliest of the paupers could be the Messiah.

"After all, the country was socialist and those who opposed the film were bearing a banner: There are no beggars in Jerusalem. There are no barefoot in the country. To the establishment's mind, they brought them to Israel and

gave them clothes and shoes. So how could I go about shooting the exceptions?

“In short, they wanted me to forget the film and proposed that I make another one. Eventually the matter reached Levi Eshkol, and he approved the film. He said something very nice: ‘Although there are enough beggars in the film for two movies, even so, it is worthy of screening.’”

**The big shock of *In Jerusalem* was that it was the first Israeli documentary film with such tangible cinematic presence and involvement.**

“That was the intention. I wanted real cinema, and I felt that I was making something happen. My camera at the time was no less innovative than the one in *Diary*, which focused on one apartment, while in this case the camera wandered all over Jerusalem.

*“In Jerusalem* is truly a document. The Old City is presented in it as something invisible that is viewed through the holes in the wall that divides the two parts of the city. The moment of the photography through the cracks in the wall is perhaps the strongest moment in the film. The children are peaking both at the Old City and at the camera, and both of them are present and noticed at the same time.

“When I arrived in Jerusalem to make the film,” continues Perlov, “five years after I had immigrated to Israel - the first two of which I spent on a kibbutz - I felt for the first time that I had come to the place where I was born. There was no ideological exaltation of ‘We are here!’ Jerusalem, as opposed to the rest of the country, was eternal, but it also had the simplicity of eternity. I think that in that combination lies the film’s secret: its aesthetic is diary-like, realistic and its editing is lyric-suggestive. Its simplicity was raised to a lyric level, if that is what it is called. I also insisted on a profusion of pictures. I wanted the film to have as much pictoriality as possible.

“After the film, I abandoned this over pictoriality. I did not want to be bound by it. But I was bound anyway. No one ordered films from me, as I relate in *Diary*.”