

Amos Elon

## The Weight of the Past



Born 1926 in Vienna; since 1928 in Israel. 1945-52 Law School at Tel Aviv University and Modern History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, interrupted by two years of army service. Correspondent, columnist and editor for *Haaretz Daily Newspaper of Tel Aviv* for several years. 1971-78 and since 1984 independent writer. 1986 Dr. h.c. in Hebrew Letters. Among his various publications are: *War in Jerusalem* (1948); *Immigrant Absorption* (1952); *Journey through a Haunted Land* (1968); *The Israelis — Founders and Sons* (1971); *Between Enemies. A Compassionate Dialogue between an Egyptian and an Israeli* (1974); *Herzl* (1974); *Flight into Egypt* (1980); *Timetable* (1980); *A Certain Panic* (1988); *Jerusalem, City of Mirrors* (1989). Translations in several languages. — Address: 44 Betlehem Road, Jerusalem.

I spent some time in Germany during the nineteen-sixties. Intrigued by the manner in which young and old Germans were coping, or not coping, with the Nazi past, I wrote a book about this entitled *Journey through a Haunted Land* (the German version was entitled *In einem heimgesuchten Land*). I was not interested in Hitler but in his ghost and in the shadow it still threw on the German } *Selbstverständnis*. During my year at the Wissenschaftskolleg I returned to this frequently elusive theme — a generation later, and after the unexpected reunification of the two Germanies. I explored these themes against the background of Germany's newly found role as a great continental power in the heart of Europe. The weight of the past, I discovered, seemed to have increased in the interval but, paradoxically, new *Feindbilder* appeared to have substituted those that had waned. I was interested, among other things, in the fate of continuing efforts by different groups on both sides to achieve German-Jewish reconciliation. I travelled extensively in the former GDR and in parts of the old West, taking notes, focusing on current letters and historiography, the media, the tone and content of the political discourse, generational change, *Historikerstreite* and popular literature. The results will be published in a number of essays and, later on, I hope, in form of a book.