

## **Philip Rushworth (Asian & Middle Eastern Studies) - Palestine, Summer 2016**

I was very generously awarded the Rosenthal Memorial Travelling Scholarship with additional funding from the Pembroke Scholarship Trust fund to cover the cost of a two-month colloquial Arabic course at Birzeit University in Palestine from June to August 2016. I am very grateful to have had this fantastic opportunity to work intensively on improving my level of spoken Arabic in preparation for my PhD fieldwork from 2016-17 with Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Dresden, Germany.

There were three reasons to go to Palestine. I wanted to work specifically on the '*shammy*' dialect spoken in Palestine, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. I was also keen to learn at Birzeit University, one of the top universities in the region. Just as important, however, was my interest in Palestine. I wanted to work on Arabic while learning more about historical and contemporary Palestine and to see for myself and understand better how life on the West Bank goes on under occupation. My brief and only partial exposure to this life was enough to yield its daily hardship, violence and humiliation. Homes were ransacked, family members of friends were killed, water was unavailable for days at a time, and mobility was severely restricted. I was struck, however, by people's resilience, generosity and good humour.

The classes at Birzeit University were three hours a day and were mainly conversational. We worked through different kinds of everyday encounters, learning vocabulary and carrying out role plays, as well as more in-depth discussion of political, social and economic issues. The focus remained, however, Arabic for everyday life. It was fantastic to be able to leave the classes and immediately put the language to use in carrying out mundane tasks, talking with friends or following the song lines, plot lines or speech narratives at social, cultural and political events; or even to follow the exuberant analysis of football commentary.

Today I am continually reminded of Palestine and what I learnt while I was there. As I write, in October 2016, I put what I learnt to use in the time I spend with Syrians and Iraqis in Dresden, whether chatting over coffee, translating in conversations with their German friends, or assisting in the manifold bureaucratic hurdles to setting up life in Germany. I would like to thank Pembroke College for making this important experience possible.