

Location, Recent History, Demography

Location

Jerusalem is a city with shops and businesses, hotels and restaurants, sports arenas, police stations, schools, hospitals, and everything else we might expect of a modern city, including effective governance, equitable urban planning, efficient trash collection, and proper law enforcement. This modern city is located in a dramatic landscape and enjoys an appealingly mild climate. It boasts traditional holy places, world-class museums, and modern sites of memory. It is a center of higher education and government, a national capital, and a popular magnet of religious pilgrimage and cultural tourism.

Jerusalem is located at 31.47 degrees latitude and 35.13 degrees longitude and nestled on the watershed of the central highlands of the southern Levant, in the Judean mountains. It is not mere fancy that Jewish, Christian, and Islamic lore refers to Jerusalem as the “navel of the earth.” The place from which they believe the world was born connects the old continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe. The Holy Land, a crossroads of water and land routes that facilitated a millennial exchange of goods and ideas between the early high urban civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Mediterranean basin.

At an elevation of about 700 meters above sea level, the original city was surrounded by higher peaks and hence invisible from afar. Protected by

natural glaxis and fortifications, its perennial source of fresh water, the Gihon spring, accessible from within the walls, the city was thought of as impenetrable. The major ancient seaports and the King's Highway were miles away. A city on the hill for a nation dwelling apart.

Jerusalem enjoys the advantages of the proximity of the Mediterranean to the west, the dry climate of the desert to the east, and reliable rainfalls in the winter due to its relative altitude. The summer is the dry season with an average of zero millimeters of precipitation. The relative humidity is highest in January (65%), which is the peak of the rainy season with an average of 128 millimeters of precipitation.¹ Jerusalem is never as humid as the cities of the coastal plain and never as hot as it is in the desert to the east. When snow falls in Jerusalem it is a major event, as one can see from postcards sold to celebrate the unusual spectacle. It is, and always has been, a great place to visit or retire in.

Jerusalem's dwellings and other structures used to be built so as to collect rainwater in cisterns, as well as to keep residents cool during the heat. The interiors of older houses boast shaded courtyards, lush with bougainvillea, that are invisible from the outside and accessible only through gates that could be closed overnight. In Roman times, when the city was retrofitted by King Herod and his successors to accommodate large numbers of international pilgrims offering vast quantities of animal sacrifices, a great amount of water was needed to keep the city clean. One still finds huge cisterns, now defunct, and the remains of ancient pools, aqueducts, and drainage systems built at various times to provide for the needs of the erstwhile temple city and its populations. UN climate specialists have been advocating for a revival of these cheap and efficient rainwater-fed systems across the Middle East.

The Mount of Olives to the east of Jerusalem overlooks the Judean Desert with a gradual drop to the Dead Sea (422 meters or 1,385 feet below sea level). Since late antiquity, these hills have been dotted with secluded monasteries and dominated by migrating Bedouin and their herds of sheep and goats. If one follows the natural path of the Kidron Valley one can walk to Jericho, one of the oldest cities in the world, near an oasis in the *Wadi Araba/ha-Arava*, an arid rift valley forged by the Jordan River, which now – diverted in the Galilee for the purpose of irrigation – is a mere trickle. If one continues along the western shores of the Dead Sea in the direction of the Gulf of Aqaba/Eilat (preferably in an air-conditioned bus or car) one passes the oasis of Ein Gedi, once famous for its date palms and coveted by Queen Cleopatra. Nearby are the ruins of Qumran, where an ancient

sectarian library was found hidden in caves, and Masada, a mountain palace hewn out of the rock by the famously paranoid King Herod. This virtually inaccessible fortress served as the last bastion for the most fanatical among the ancient Jewish resistance fighters commanded by Eleazar ben Yair whose story of foolish heroism was immortalized by Josephus Flavius.² Everything in and around Jerusalem breathes history.

To the west, a highway winding through the reforested Judean mountains leads to the plains along the Mediterranean coast. On the way to Tel Aviv one passes al-Qastel, the former Crusader castle Beauverium, destroyed in 1191 by Sultan al-Adil shortly after the fall of Jerusalem to the Ayyubids. It was at this strategically located outlook that, in April 1948, Abd al-Qadr al-Husayni, commander of the Palestinian forces in charge of the roads to Jerusalem and himself a prominent Jerusalemite, lost his life to Jewish paramilitary snipers during a reconnaissance mission in the run-up to the end of the British Mandate.³

Just a stone's throw to the south of Jerusalem is Bethlehem with its famous Church of the Nativity that, in a diplomatic victory for the Palestinian National Authority's bid for international recognition of Palestinian statehood, was adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a protected World Heritage site. If one continues on Route 60 in a southwesterly direction for another 20 km one reaches Hebron, also known as *el-Halil*, the city of Abraham, whom Muslims revere as the first "monotheist" (*hanifa*), Jews regard as the first Jew, and Christians consider the father of all believers. Hebron served as the capital of the first Judean monarchy, before King David conquered Jerusalem, and is the site of another great Herodian structure, the Tomb of the Patriarchs, built over the biblical Cave of Machpelah. Further south, on the cusp of the colorfully rugged Negev Desert one reaches ancient Nabatean Arad and, eventually, the Sinai Peninsula, an austere liminal space between African Egypt and the Western Asian Levant.

A mere 16 km north of Jerusalem is Ramallah, administrative center of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA)⁴ in the West Bank, which is one of the two regions of Palestine (the other being Gaza) that the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1994 between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) assigned to a future Palestinian state. Jerusalem's place in any future settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is complicated by the fact that the West Bank is no longer simply Arab territory and that Jerusalem and its surroundings have significantly changed since June 1967. Jerusalem is no longer a frontier city at the end of a narrow corridor surrounded on three

sides by Arab territory. Instead, it increasingly resembles the territorial and symbolic center of the “greater Israel” first envisaged by Revisionist Zionists in the 1920s and actively pursued by Israeli governments since 1977, when the electorate first replaced the socialist parties that had dominated the country for the first 30 years of its existence with a coalition of nationalist and religious parties.

Jerusalem is nearly equidistant between Tel Aviv (64 km) – hub of Israel’s secular “fun” culture, nerve center of its globalized high-tech economy, and a gem of 1920s *Bauhaus* architecture – and Amman (71 km), about the distance from Boston, Massachusetts, to Providence, Rhode Island (see Map 1). Amman is the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, released into independence in 1946 by the British and sustained by American and Saudi aid. Though the Hashemite Kingdom lost Jerusalem and the West Bank in June 1967, king and country remain vitally interested and involved in the fate of the Holy City.

The distance from Jerusalem to Damascus in the northeast is a mere 209 km, closer than Boston is to Augusta, the capital of Maine. From Jerusalem to Cairo it is about 418 km about the distance from Boston to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The city’s relative proximity to the most important regional power centers explains why Jerusalem was rarely independent and commonly subject to changes due to shifts affecting the entire region, a ping pong ball in the political and military games played by the rulers of the more populous and strategically better located centers of Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia in their millennial struggle for hegemony over the Levant. Today, as the seat of government of the only (officially unacknowledged) nuclear power in the Middle East, Jerusalem maintains security partnerships across a volatile region from which it was virtually cut off until 1977 when Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat made his famous visit to Jerusalem, breaking Israel’s isolation.

Recent History

We will look at Jerusalem’s modern emergence in more detail in Part IV. The following provides a quick overview. For exactly four centuries, from 1517 until 1917, Jerusalem was part of the Ottoman Turkish Empire that at its greatest expanse bordered on Austria, Hungary, Russia, and Iran and controlled land and sea trade across North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. In late 1917, when the Great War was at a stalemate in the

European theatre, a Franco-British contingent commanded by General Allenby took the city from the Ottomans, a rare public relations opportunity that London celebrated with church bells ringing as a “last crusade” and a “Christmas present to the English nation.” To enlist Arab support, the British and the French stoked Arab ambitions of independence but the actual post-war reorganization of territories was a different matter. Under British rule, Jerusalem served as the capital of Palestine, a League of Nations mandate to be readied for eventual release into independence. The territorial boundaries of Western Palestine or Cis-Jordan resembled those of biblical Israel, a landscape familiar to Christian Zionists in England, the United States, and elsewhere who promoted a return of the Jews to their ancient homeland. In November 1917, His Majesty’s government expressed sympathy for, and in 1920 the League of Nations confirmed, the project of establishing a “Jewish homeland in Palestine.” The arrival of waves of Jewish immigrants in the 1920s and 1930s led to tensions between Jews and Arabs, culminating in the Arab rebellion of 1936–1939. In November 1947, half a year before the expiration of the British Mandate, the UN General Assembly voted to partition Palestine. The map accompanying the UN partition plan assigned the majority of territory west of the Jordan to a future Arab state, based on the Arab demographic majority of Palestine. Jerusalem was to be kept united under an international regime. This plan was never implemented. Jewish and Arab militias ratcheted up the violence, and prepared for war. The British cracked down on the militias while managing their own departure. On May 14, 1948, Israel declared independence. The next day, the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq invaded the country. A UN-brokered ceasefire and the tacit support of the Soviet Union allowed Israel to rearm. At the end of the war, Israel had consolidated its territory, held on to a fiercely embattled West Jerusalem, and over half a million Arabs had fled the areas held by Israel. Jordan took the West Bank, Syria held on to the strategic Golan Heights, and Egypt was in control of the Gaza Strip.⁵ Jerusalem was divided between Israel and Jordan. In December 1949, Israel’s Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declared Jerusalem the capital of Israel and began moving government offices to areas in western Jerusalem under Israeli control. This decision was made in defiance of the UN Partition Resolution and placed Jerusalem in limbo. Member states of the UN who wished to establish diplomatic relations with Israel were not supposed to recognize Israel’s claim to Jerusalem. Most of those countries, including the United States, have therefore kept their embassies in Tel Aviv. The Hashemite Kingdom also defied the international community, but their

measures did not elicit the same diplomatic response. After the Arab notables of East Jerusalem and the West Bank placed their political fortunes under the auspices of King Abdullah I, East Jerusalem became the provincial center of the West Bank.⁶ The seat of government remained in Amman. Jordan saw itself as the temporary caretaker of Palestinian national interests in all of Palestine, including territories now under Israeli control. The Kingdom eventually yielded this claim to the PLO, but even now the Hashemites continue to serve as guardians of the Christian and Muslim holy places of Jerusalem.

In June 1967, in a short but consequential preemptive war against the combined armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) captured the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank. Arab East Jerusalem, including the Old City and its holy places, were now in Israeli hands and placed under civilian administration. Some military and religious leaders, for whom the conquest of Jerusalem's Old City seemed like the beginning of the messianic age, wanted Israel to declare full sovereignty over the Temple Mount, the Islamic Noble Sanctuary (*al-Haram al-Sharif*). Instead, the government – fearing repercussions beyond the diplomatic gestures of displeasure it was suffering – ordered the IDF to withdraw the Israeli flag that had been hoisted on the Dome of the Rock in the enthusiasm of the moment. In his speech to the UN, Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban contrasted Israel's policies with those of the Jordanians, who, when East Jerusalem was under their control, had allowed for the ancient Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives to be defiled and prevented Jews from visiting their holy places. He assured the international community, that Israel was to guarantee access to the holy places and freedom of religious worship. The administration of the Muslim holy places remained under the auspices of the Jerusalem Islamic Endowment (*a-waqf*). The municipal administration of long-term mayor Teddy Kollek, now extended to Arab East Jerusalem, promoted Israeli–Arab coexistence, while national governments, beginning with Golda Meir, supported the building of Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, so as to keep the city united and unified under Israeli rule.⁷ In 1980, following the Camp David agreement between Israel and Egypt, the Israeli Knesset passed the so-called Jerusalem Basic Law, declaring Jerusalem the eternally undivided capital of Israel.⁸ A negotiated redivision of Jerusalem between Israel and the Palestinians, who claim East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state, was briefly on the table during the 2000 Camp David negotiations brokered by US President Bill Clinton, but recent opinion polls show that the majority of Israelis as

well as the majority of Palestinians oppose a redivision of Jerusalem. Both sides desire to keep the city whole, though each under their own sovereign rule. Jerusalem's future remains one of the final status issues to be resolved between Israel and the Palestinians as part of the two-states solution envisaged by the Oslo Agreements, the Wye River Agreement, the George W. Bush administration Roadmap for Peace, the Geneva Accords, and many other preliminary bilateral and multilateral peace plans.⁹

Demography

One of the most striking features of modern Jerusalem is the dramatic growth of its population from no more than 45,000 or perhaps 60,000 inhabitants in 1900 to about 815,000 in 2012. There are several reasons for this growth. One is the high rate of fertility, especially among the ultra-orthodox Jews and Muslim Arabs. More significant still are the waves of immigration to Jerusalem during the British Mandate and under Israeli administrations. Another reason for this growth is the revision of Jerusalem's municipal boundaries (see Map 2). From the sixteenth until the middle of the nineteenth century, the city's area was defined by the Ottoman walls that now enclose the Old City, an area of 1,000 dunams or 1 km². Land purchase and establishment of religious, charitable, and residential compounds outside of the Old City walls began in the 1860s, following the Crimean War.¹⁰ The territory under the jurisdiction of the municipality has since been expanded several times, first in 1931, following a decade of neighborhood development under British administration, then again in 1949 when Israelis and Jordanians redrew the boundaries of the part of the city under their respective jurisdiction (Jordanian East Jerusalem: 6 km² or 6,000 dunams; Israeli West Jerusalem: 38.1 km² or 38,100 dunams). In 1967, Israel extended the boundaries to an area of 108 km² or 108,000 dunams and, in 1990s, brought the city to its current size of 126.3 km² or 126,300 dunams.

The municipality founded by the Ottomans and revised by British, Jordanian, and Israeli administrations represents modern means of governance and administration that rely on abstract boundaries and definitions of territory rather than on physical barriers. Over the past decade, Israel saw itself compelled to revert to the pre-modern means of defining who is in and who is out by establishing a physical barrier, the so-called Separation Fence, between Jewish and Arab centers of population that, in certain areas, crisscross the municipal boundaries established by prior Israeli legislation.

Equally as striking as the growth in Jerusalem's population is the shift in the ratio between the city's constituent communities. Over the past two centuries, the Christian community experienced significant ups and downs, growing from about 3,500 residents in the early 1830s (total number of residents: 20,000) to about 30,000 shortly before the end of the British Mandate, including expatriates (total number of residents in 1945: 157,080). Around 1900, Christians began to outnumber Muslims, something not seen since the time of the Crusades. Over the past 70 years, while the overall population grew, the number of Christians steeply declined, dropping to 14,500 in 1995, or from 19% of the population in 1946 to a mere 2% in 1995. The main reason for the decline of Jerusalem's Christian population is the departure of the British administration and the *Nakba* or flight and expulsion of Arab residents of West Jerusalem at the time of Israel's War of Independence.¹¹

Until the early 1800s, Jews were the minority in Jerusalem, ranking behind Christians and Muslims. Although nineteenth-century estimates for the city's population are not very reliable, some sources indicate that the Jewish community began to overtake the Muslim population in the 1860s. Some foreign (as opposed to Ottoman) estimates for the 1880s show more Jewish residents than the combined number of Muslims and Christians. The general condition for this rapid growth, including the increase in the Christian population, was Ottoman reform (*Tanzimat*), which granted equal rights to religious minorities, provided increased safety, and encouraged foreign immigration, investment, and infrastructure development. Overall, the Jewish community grew from less than one quarter of the population in 1806 (perhaps 2,000 out of 8,774) to almost three quarters of the population in 1967, while the total number of inhabitants grew by more than a factor of 10 just over the past century.¹²

With a municipal territory of 126 km² Jerusalem is the largest city in Israel, more than twice the size of Tel Aviv (51 km²) or Haifa (58 km²). With its more than 800,000 inhabitants and growing, Jerusalem is also the most populous city in Israel. Large average family size among Haredi Jews and Muslim Arabs and the development of foreign-owned, high-end but underutilized apartments has led to serious shortages in affordable housing and high population density. In comparison, the city of Boston, Massachusetts, which also suffers from lack of affordable housing, nevertheless provides twice the acreage for about the same number of residents.

The first master plan for the development of the city approved by the Israeli cabinet after June 1967 designated most of the newly added areas

surrounding the built-up city center as green space. Attention to rebuilding was initially focused almost entirely on the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. Political concerns with the threat of a redivision of the city, however, persuaded the Labor-led government coalition under Prime Minister Golda Meir in the early 1970s that the areas surrounding the city center should be used to establish a ring of new Jewish neighborhoods, to ensure the city would remain united and that the Jewish community was to constitute a decisive demographic majority. In the 1980s, Prime Minister Menachem Begin (Likud) initiated the building of a second ring of settlements around Jerusalem, outside its municipal jurisdiction, which led to an erosion of government funding for the city and a negative migration since housing in the new settlements was cheaper and hence particularly attractive to those sections of the Jewish population that were living with high unemployment, below-average wages, and high rates of fertility, especially among the ultra-orthodox Haredim.

Far from achieving the goal of establishing a stable rate of growth of the Jewish demographic majority, the initiatives of the national government inadvertently led to a significant increase in the Arab population of the city after 1967 and to a growth of the ratio of Arab and other residents relative to the Jewish population. The objective of creating and maintaining an integrated and unified Jerusalem had largely failed (see Figure 1). This failure was openly acknowledged by the Israeli government under Ehud Barak in 2000, the first Israeli government willing to reach an agreement with the Palestinians on a redivision of Jerusalem and a sharing of sovereignty over the Old City and its holy places. Subsequent governments abandoned the rhetoric of redivision and have since pursued renewed Jewish settlement building within and around the city.

On the Palestinian side, the struggle for presence, housing, and maintaining the Arab character of East Jerusalem has fostered the development of both violent and non-violent means of resistance to Israeli civilian governance and political control. The majority of Arab residents of the city have boycotted the municipal elections since 1967, so as not to confer legitimacy on the Israeli annexation. Even though the Arab residents of Jerusalem have the right to apply for Israeli citizenship, only a few have availed themselves of this opportunity and those who do, I was told by an Arab architect and city planner, mainly use it as a way of obtaining a green card for emigration to the United States.

As Moshe Amirav points out in his book, *The Jerusalem Syndrome*, in the 2003 municipal elections a mere 20% of the city's eligible voters changed

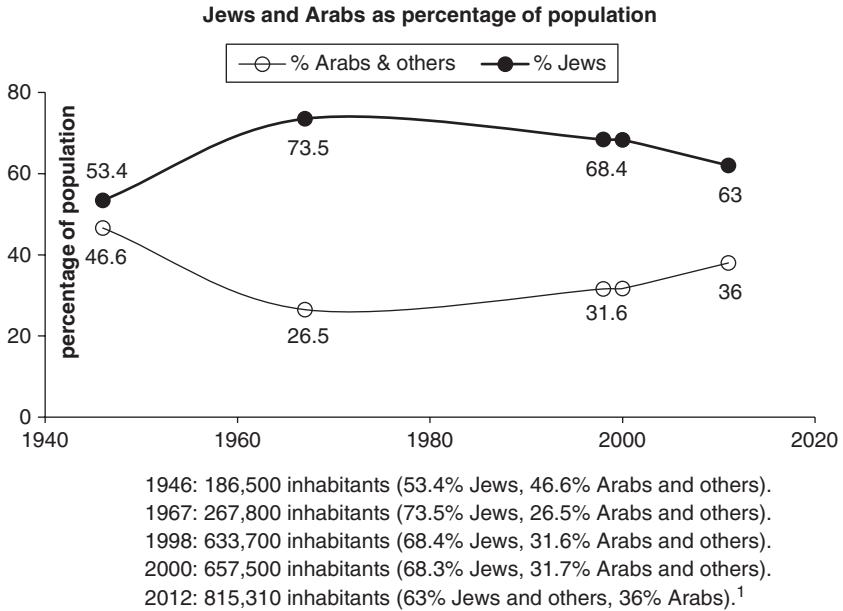


Figure 1 Demographic proportion Jews to Arabs, 1946–2012.

the majority in the city council and upset the hitherto secular system of governance by electing an ultra-orthodox Jew, Uri Lupolianski, as the city's mayor. Given their demographic strength, Jerusalem's Arabs could decide to abandon their boycott and return an Arab to the mayor's office. Since the 1990s, Palestinian activists, most prominently among them Faisal Hussein (1940–2001), called for "steadfast attachment" (*sumud*)¹³ to Jerusalem as a form of peaceful resistance to policies aimed at pressuring the Arab population to abandon the city.¹⁴ Among these policies (as tracked by human rights organizations such as B'tselem¹⁵) are the revoking of Arab residency permits, neglecting housing and infrastructure in the Arab neighborhoods, keeping the process of obtaining building permits costly and cumbersome, and bulldozing of illegal housing. While temporarily eclipsed by the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000–2005) and disrupted by occasional spikes in violence, such as occurred in the wake of the collapse of the American-brokered peace talks of 2014, peaceful resistance and civil disobedience have created a culture of non-violent political action that appeals to moderates and enhances civil institutions that will be essential for Palestinian society to maintain itself alongside Israel.

In the following two chapters, we will complete our brief look at some of the basic aspects of the urban space that is modern Jerusalem by considering the “cities within” the city (Chapter 2) and the constituent communities that inhabit the city without always living together (Chapter 3).

Notes

1. Source: <http://www.jerusalem.climateemps.com/precipitation.php> (accessed November 21, 2017).
2. Cf. Klawans (2013).
3. On the Husayni (or Hussein) family's place in Palestinian society see Pappe (2002).
4. See <http://www.mofa.pna.ps/en/>, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Palestinian-Authority>, and <http://palestine.dk/palestine/government/> (accessed November 21, 2017).
5. Trans-Jordan, originally part of the British Mandate for Palestine, was exempted from Jewish homeland building in 1922, following the first violent clashes between Arabs and Jews, to accommodate the ambitions of the Hashemite Amir Abdullah. The territory was released into independence in 1946, effectively making good on the British wartime promise of creating an Arab state in Palestine.
6. See Katz (2005).
7. On Israeli policies and policy goals for Jerusalem since 1967 see Amirav (2009). An excellent introduction to Jerusalem since 1967 is Dumper (1997).
8. See Zank (2016a).
9. See Ben-Ami (2006), 240–284, Molinaro (2009), Klein (2003), Lapidoth and Hirsch (1994), Hirsch, Housen-Couriel, Lapidoth (1995).
10. See Chapter 14.
11. On Jerusalem's communities see more in Chapter 3.
12. For demographic facts and figures see Ben-Arieh (1984), 267–179, Kark and Oren-Nordheim (2001), 28–29, Schmelz (1987), Dellapergola (2001), Tamari (1999).
13. On *sumud* and other terms Palestinians use to describe forms of popular resistance see Qumsiyeh (2011), 11.
14. On Faisal Hussein's role in Palestinian politics see Musallam (1996), 51–67.
15. See <http://www.btselem.org/topic/jerusalem> (accessed November 21, 2017).