

# **Jerusalem: the city which changes in land-management: borders, settlements, connection roads, the Defense Barrier, from the English Mandate up to nowadays.**

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## **Abstract**

This study aims at describing the changes occurred in the city of Jerusalem since the English Mandate up to nowadays, analyzing in the first place political and social questions related to land management. Dealing with an extended historical period, it would be possible to sum up only the most significant stages.

Jerusalem is “liberated” from General Allenby of the British Army in 1917 and the Protectorate period would last almost 30 years. The seizure of the city and the British Mandate are mostly welcome initially by the city inhabitants- both Arabs and Jews alike – as a positive change, able to restore the role and the centrality of both national communities, which could never had happened under Ottoman rule, given the Ottomans’ constant fear of ethnical minorities uprisings against the Empire. The task of the Mandatory power is namely, according to UN criteria, that of conducting the respective population of the territory assigned under the Mandate to independence, but in Palestine are present already at that time two conflicting national groups, both holders of historical rights on the same land.

At the beginning, the British objective is that of bestowing new relevance on Palestine, and peculiarly on Jerusalem, the holy city, that the British take in major account because of its religious function too. Their project include two qualifying points: increasing the number of Jerusalem’s residents, in order to the city to enjoy a solid population, and modernizing Palestine, in order to turn it into an economically-advanced country, although not an industrial one. Each of these two main points has a major influx on land management: the first is producing a mass immigration, mostly Jewish, which will go on with a positive trend for the next 70 years, that is until the Oslo accords and the following flow of terrorist attacks; the second introduces in the city modern urbanism’s patterns, typified by the planned alternation of housing spaces and gardens and by the building of main high-speed connection roads and by a road network linking the city to the main urban concentrations surrounding it.

The “ New City” – which nowadays overlaps almost entirely with West-Jerusalem- encompasses the pre-established neighborhoods outside the Walls and inserts them in a town plan which completely reorganizes the urban space<sup>1</sup>. One of the distinctive features of the British project is

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<sup>1</sup> “The “New Town” was an ambitious project. It involved the creation of a garden zone around the city walls, the planting of 3000 trees, the creation of an extensive municipal centre in which British, Jews and Arab could build their official structures and the naming of 130 streets completed with ceramic tiles on which the names were emblazoned in English, Arabic and Hebrew” (M. Gilbert, *Jerusalem in the 20<sup>th</sup> century*”, John Wiley and Sons, U.S., 1996)

the attention given to the preservation of the Old City in virtue of the uniqueness of its religious and artistic heritage, surrounding it by gardens which hinders the construction of other buildings of housing and commercial areas immediately close to the Walls. The British are willing to isolate the Old City with its historical heritage from the new directions of urban development, target of measures of special protection and safeguard.

As pragmatic administrators, the British identify among the city- weaknesses both the chronic lack of rain water and the city dependency on insufficient and ill-maintained supplying sources, and the lack of modern educational and municipal institutions, and they provide solutions to both the problems, by building water-pipes and digging wells on one hand<sup>2</sup>, and by promoting a cultural and educational revival, mostly Jewish, on the other hand. One of the main concern is transforming Jerusalem into an self-sufficient unit, which might be able to provide for itself autonomously thanks to the integration with an *hinterland* wide enough<sup>3</sup>.

The first shortcomings to British projects occur when relationships between the Arab and the Jewish community get strained<sup>4</sup>, not only in respect of the daily coexistence in the city, but in regard to long-term expectations that the two national groups are nurturing for the time of independence immediately following the end of the Protectorate. Since 1932 the first requests of partition, regarding both the city and the country, are advanced by the Jewish side, but they are rejected by the British with contempt, as the British are still committed to the political and symbolic need of keeping Jerusalem undivided<sup>5</sup>. The two conflicting stances cannot be reconciled easily: the Arabs continue to think of the Jews as a “foreign body inside the country”, whereas the Jews are going on strengthening unwearingly their institutions and their population growth which will allow them to assure their long-standing presence in Palestine. Only in 1939, after fluctuating but substantially compromising policies, the British acknowledge the fact that the Jewish presence in Palestine will influence soon and irrevocably the inter-community balance in place up to then: thus they publish the White Book, that is a rigid regulation of Jewish immigration in Palestine which imposes a maximum limit of 75.000 Jews in a 5-years time-frame.

The decision ends up to be twice as harmful, both because of the timing of its release ( the outbreak of the Second World War and the beginning of the Jews’ persecution in Europe ) and because of the factual inability of the British to curb substantially Jewish initiative in order to

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<sup>2</sup> “ In 1928 the British began the water-pump project : a water-pump was installed at the Ayin Farrah spring in Wadi Kelt, 700 feet below the city in the Eastern side near Jericho. The pump meant that the city no longer relied on the flow of gravity from Salomon’s pools in the hills south of Bethlehem.” ( in M. Gilbert, *cit.* )

<sup>3</sup> “In 1926 the district of Jerusalem is expanded to include Ramallah, Bethlehem and Jericho, in addition to a greater metropolitan area.” ( *ibidem* )

<sup>4</sup> The reference here is to the Arab 1929 and 1936 uprisings.

<sup>5</sup> “In 1932 Chaim Arlosoroff, the head of the Political Department of the Jewish agency, proposed to the British the division of Jerusalem municipal region in two boroughs : West Jerusalem, the newer part of the city, which was mostly Jewish, and the Old City, which was largely Arab. Each would have a council of its own (...) The British rejected it. “the Government views with disfavor any proposal for the partition of Jerusalem.” ( *ibidem*, p.133).

assure a future of Arab-Jewish coexistence to the city : a clear proof of the political climate prevailing in those years would have been the terrorist attacks carried out by the Irgun targeting the British and the consequent paralysis of municipal institutions in the absence of any chance of agreement between the two communities<sup>6</sup>.

The Mandate period ends with the intervention of the United Nations, which put forward a partition plan in fact cast aside by the territorial changes created by the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948. Jerusalem is the only territorial unit actually divided, although according to criteria totally different from the ones included in the international proposals<sup>7</sup>: a border of barbed-wire spaced out by control towers and checked by snipers on both sides will become the no-trespassing line of division between the Arab and the Jewish city, the Jordan Jerusalem and the Israeli one, as well as between West and East in architectural, social, political, military and cultural terms. An impermeable border, which from one side take away from the Jews – but also from the Arab Christians and Muslim residents of Israel - any right to access to the holy sites of the Old City, and on the other side creates a consistent number of Palestinian refugees irrevocably expelled from their homes, a process also known as “ ethnic cleansing of Palestine ”. Actually, it does not consist on ethnic cleansing, but more on a population-transfer, which are settling on a new border line: that dividing the new frail Jewish State and the extended Arab world surrounding, which however has been dispossessed of a coastal territorial stripe economically relevant. Besides, in Jerusalem the population-transfer occurs in such a quick and irrevocable way to represent still nowadays a still-opened wound: numerous neighborhoods and houses remind their Arab origin, the tastes and the history of a people who totally faded away from the Western side of the city.

For 20 years Jerusalem is a divided and impoverished city, where each activity is basically linked to survival: the Western side is barred and fenced-up on three over four sides, with a single land access to the coastal plain ( the way to Tel Aviv ), the East side is old, neglected, abandoned, and again at the periphery of a State which assigns It only a secondary importance and role. The State of Israel casts more attention to the West side, notwithstanding the problematic conditions of the city, because it wishes to restore its role of capital city in virtue of its symbolic value for the Jewish people and for its new revival as a State. All ministries and national institutions are therefore moved to Jerusalem, although this initiative is not welcome by the majority of States in the international community, with the consequence that numerous States will not moved their embassies to the city in sign of protest. A condition of permanent instability is set for Jerusalem and the surrounding areas: important Jewish institutions as the Hebrew university and the Hadassa hospital, are fully located in Jordan territory in the Mount Scopus enclave, as the Holy Sites of the three monotheistic religions which have not been internationalized, but better still, further limited in the access, whereas Arab families are allocated in the two halves of the city

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<sup>6</sup> “In 1944 the death of Jerusalem Arab Mayor, Mustafa al-Khalidi, posed a problematic question about who should be appointed afterwards. The population of Jerusalem was: 61% Jews, 21% Muslim, 18% Arab Christian. The Muslim objected to a Jewish mayor. The British proposed a 2years-rotation but it didn't work. At the end, a commission of six Britons was to administer the city for the remaining 3 years. ” ( *ibidem* )

<sup>7</sup> “UNSCOP proposals regarding Jerusalem is to give the city the status of *corpus separatum*” ( *ibidem* )

militarily divided and disconnected. This is also the time during which the Oriental Jews coming from Arab countries and temporarily hosted in the “mabarot” or transfer-camps, take over the houses previously inhabited by Palestinians: for the 20 years of partition of Jerusalem they would be placed all along the border line, constantly exposed to enemy fire, while in the Western side of Jerusalem a hierarchy among safe and dangerous neighborhoods is set in place.

The 6 -Days War is the major event which is again changing radically the state of Jerusalem, ending the unnatural and unsustainable division of the city. The euphoria and the relief of the Jewish side, are opposed by the rage and the new deep disillusion of the Arab world, which apprehends the loss of Jerusalem in the terms of a new Nakba, but also the partial happiness of Jerusalemite Arabs who see the conditions of normal life restored after years of division of the city during which they have been the principal victimized group. For a short time it is supposed, also by the Arab side, that a new positive period of compromises is about to disclose and that the city is about to come back to normal conditions, which might deliver social and economical progress together with the renew unity<sup>8</sup>. The Israeli government shows itself initially restrained, but the most significant point is the re-conquered sovereignty, the exclusive possess of Jerusalem and the opportunity to modify its display, its management and social composition by clear-cut policies.

From this time on, the history of Jerusalem could no longer be explained, unless placing in the context of the “macrohistory” of the country to which it belongs, Israel, which is turning it into a more Jewish and less international city, despite of what it is generally considered. Actually, in 1967, the city is officially annexed to Israel and integrated, in its basic services and structures, to West-Jerusalem; in the annexation-process numerous “dunam” of Palestinian land<sup>9</sup>, amounting together to the territory of 27 Arab villages, are confiscated to meet security needs of Israel.

The “demographic battle”, as it is acknowledged today, dates back to that time: the Israeli authorities set up a limit to the Arab presence in Jerusalem, which should be kept inferior to 30% of the whole population, and they started targeted policies aimed at assuring a solid Jewish majority in the city as well as at isolating the two main Palestinian urban concentrations set at the north, east and south edge of its municipal boundaries.

The policy of settlements-building starts also at the same time, among them three categories of settlements could be identified: the ones the ones that are planned inside the municipal boundaries, the one external to them and the ones placed in areas with an Arab majority. The Israeli government notifies to both the U.S. and the international community that it will not felt bound by the application of U.N. resolutions on the issue of Jerusalem, as well as it will not welcoming as legitimate the principle of non-altering structures and composition of the annexed (

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<sup>8</sup> “For many of the 199.000 Jews and 66.000 Arabs the prospect of cooperation led to hope for a new and better era. Among the first measure Kollek ( the mayor ) took was to give permission for a monument to be erected in the city for the Arab war dead.” ( in M. Gilbert, *cit.* )

<sup>9</sup> “The administrative and spatial expansion up to 126.000 dunam of land was the basis of Israeli and Arab expansion in Jerusalem. The area of expansion included many Palestinian villages such as Bei Hanina, Sur Baher, Isawieh, Kufur Aqab, that were not within the boundaries of Jerusalem.”(in R. Khamaisi, *Divided, shared and integrated cities*, in *Divided cities in transition*, Jerusalem Berlin Forum, The International Peace & Cooperation Center, Jerusalem, 2003)

“occupied”, according to international law ) , but furthermore working for the successful reunification of the city<sup>10</sup>. The first measures adopted in this direction are therefore the extension of Israeli law to the city management and the allocation to Jerusalemite Palestinians of special residents’ rights, which entitled them to avail themselves of public and social services, of the right to work and of participating to municipal elections, and, later on, in taking part to the direct election of the mayor. These provisions serve a double scope: to build a Jerusalemite Arab identity differentiated from the one of the Palestinians in the territories and dependent on the Israeli State because of economical and political advantages, but at the same time unifying the city administrative control under a single authority, the Israeli one, cutting short the possibility of a joint control<sup>11</sup>.

The overall framework today is that of continuous expropriation of Arab property, of visible discrimination of East-Jerusalem in public services, of a drastic curb in the allocation of housing and building permits to an Arab population which shows a constant demographic growth, and of standing division and incommunicability of the two halves of the city, kept divided by social and physical barriers. Only the Oslo Accords had foreseen the slight possibility of an agreement, but they had sunk in the terrorist attacks’ flow which had followed them.

The settlement-building policy is not only going on so far that it has almost achieved the security belt around the city, but to it since 2002 is added the so-called “Defense Barrier” , namely a Separation wall radically dividing the urban perimeter of Jerusalem from its historical *hinterland*, thus denying the strong interdependence characterizing the relationship between the Arab side of the city and the surrounding Arab cities as Ramallah, Jericho and Bethlehem. The new city administration, led by the mayor Nir Barkat got elected in November 2008, is already showing a further aggressive attitude, declaring itself officially supporting the extension of Jewish settlements in East-Jerusalem : in this situation, and taking into account the patent helplessness of the Palestinian Authority in this moment, but also the level of disaggregation of the Jerusalemite Arab elites, it is hard to predict positive solutions aimed to coexistence, and even more unrealistic and remote seems the possibility of Palestinian sovereignty over East-Jerusalem.

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<sup>10</sup> “Israel did not accept the premise of Ambassador Yost’s ( U.S. ambassador ) proposal: “to request the parties to lay aside their recriminations, to desist from any action (...).”No resolution in NY, even when supported by the US, could halt it. Israel had no intention of halting the creation of Jewish suburbs beyond the Green Line, arguing that the Green Line was no more than the point at which armies had ceased firing in 1949, that it had no demographic or urban significance, and that a city could not be condemned never to grow.” ( in M. Gilbert, *cit.* )

<sup>11</sup> “The ostensible purpose for barring access to the city is to protect the security of the Jewish population from terrorist activity that originate in the West Bank and Gaza. However, the latent but hardly disguised objective also aims at preempting the final status negotiations over sovereignty by creating a *de facto* separation of the city and many of its Arab neighborhoods” ( in S. Tamari, “A Contested city in sacred geography”, in *Divided cities...*, *cit.*, .119 )

