

A Research Agenda for Writing the History of Jerusalem¹

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Jerusalem is a city with a great deal of history, layer upon layer of it, represented in its more than twenty-five archaeological strata, and at least a dozen major historical periods. Jerusalem may indeed have too much history for a living city to come to terms with easily. As in Rome, Istanbul, and a few other cities of great antiquity that have long been sites of deep feeling and intense conflict, in Jerusalem the past and the present have often been involved in an uneasy coexistence, and they remain so until this day. For proof of this, one need only note the sometimes violent political conflicts that have erupted in Jerusalem in recent years over matters concerning history, such as archaeological excavations, the uncovering of graves, and the restoration of monuments. In Jerusalem, as elsewhere, this problem is severely exacerbated by the sharp antagonism between competing forces in the present, which appeal to different pasts to buttress their present claims.

At the same time, like many other locales that have been the focus of conflicting passions, in Jerusalem much history has been suppressed, denied, ignored or forgotten. It is also a place where names attach to sites for no apparent historical reason. One example is the famous landmark surmounting the Citadel on the western side of the walls surrounding the Old City.

¹ This article is based on a paper originally presented to the Institute for Jerusalem Studies conference on “Contemporary Research Trends on the History of Jerusalem, in December 2000, and was revised for publication in July 2001.

This structure is described to tourists, and in modern times has been known the world over, as “the Tower of David.” Such a name may seem inexplicable, given that this structure is in fact an Ottoman minaret on top of a fortress different parts of which constructed by the Mamelukes, Ayyubids and Crusaders, and whose original foundations date back to the Herodian period, but no earlier than that.² It is a typical piece of irony that this site has connections to virtually every other period of Jerusalem’s history but that of King David, but is now almost inextricably connected with his name.

Finally, in Jerusalem history is constantly invoked for an extraordinary range of purposes, some of them blatantly political. A typical example is the Israeli-sponsored “Jerusalem 3000” celebrations in 1998, which were meant to confirm the false notion that the “real” history of Jerusalem began in the era of King David, around 1000 B.C., rather than 5000 years ago, as is manifest from the ample archaeological evidence.³ Outright falsification and other exploitative abuses of history have all been common in this city. They have been particularly common over the past century, which has witnessed fierce competition between differing nationalist and religious ideologies that are all deeply dependent on historical legitimation.

Because of its centrality to the three Abrahamic religious traditions, Jerusalem is a city deeply enfolded in potent myths, intense religious beliefs, and deep yearnings. Many of them have both historical dimensions and millenarian aspects – but they are sometimes provably false, and the older myths among them are generally historically unverifiable. Nevertheless, any

² Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, The Holy Land: An Archaeological Guide from the Earliest Times to 1700. 2nd. Rev. ed. Oxford, 1986, 23-29. In his detailed description of the Citadel, Fr. O’Connor states that the misidentification of this site with David started with the Byzantines, who focused on a different part of the Citadel than the 17th century minaret which westerners since the 19th century have linked to the Israelite king.

³ A brief discussion of why the state of Israel was celebrating the 3000th anniversary of a 5000-year old city in a year that happened to mark the 50th anniversary of its independence can be found in R. Khalidi, “Introduction,” in K.J. Asali, Jerusalem in History, 3rd ed., New York, 2000, xi-xii. For a good summary of what is known about Jerusalem during the first 2000 years of its history based on this archaeological evidence, see H.J. Franken, “Jerusalem in the Bronze Age, 3000-1000 BC” in ibid., 11-41.

consideration of writing, or rewriting, the history of Jerusalem, requires addressing, and sometimes criticizing, these myths, beliefs and yearnings. This can be a perilous undertaking given the nationalist and religious passions involved, and it complicates a task that is already complex enough without these swirling emotional cross-winds.

Finally, in Jerusalem we find an accentuated version of the same winner-takes-all pattern in the writing of history that can be found elsewhere, with the victor generally determining what is written in the standard texts, the terminology that describes it, and the framework and even the language in which it is written. Thus, there is an extensive field of Biblical archaeology, while considerably less work is done in the fields of Jebusite or Canaanite archaeology; thus, the built topography of the Old City of Jerusalem, and therefore its art history and the history of its architecture over the past 1400 years, is mainly Arab and Islamic (although strenuous efforts are often made to deny or ignore this or to focus on earlier periods while ignoring the past two millennia); and thus, Palestinians do most of their historical writing in Arabic or English rather than in Ottoman Turkish, or Byzantine Greek, or any other language.

With archaeology dependent on permits from whatever political authority controls the land, with museums, monuments and archaeological sites open to the public dependent on the state, and with state archives, and national libraries and university systems at its disposal, the winner at any historical stage has an enormous amount of influence over the agenda for historical research. Indeed, it sometimes has absolute control over this agenda, as for example in the crucial matter of determining which archaeologists can dig where and for what on the national territory.⁴ Before 1948, this meant that the Ottoman state and then the British Mandate called the

⁴ For examples of how this control operates with regard to archaeology in the Israeli case, and to what nationalist and political ends it can be put, see Nadia Abu El-Haj, Excavating the Land, Creating the Homeland: Archaeology, the State and the Making of History in Modern Jewish Nationalism, Chicago, 2001; Nachman Ben Yehuda, The

tune. Since then, it has mainly been Israel which has utilized these means in order to influence how history is written.

Taking into account the weight of history in Jerusalem, combined with the generally negative added weight of myth, belief and yearning, and the powerful influence of history's winners on the historical record, what are the most important lacunae in the history of Jerusalem? What are the most potent false notions about the city's history, and how can they be deconstructed? And how can serious, committed scholars best address these problems, given the envenomed atmosphere in which any serious, objective and responsible attempt to study the past of Jerusalem and Palestine is currently enveloped?

Since we are dealing with a city with a recorded history of several thousand years, much of it history which is of great importance for so many people the world over, an encyclopedic work would be required to fill in all the gaps, deconstruct all the myths, and address all the problems in the historiography of Jerusalem. And since I am a historian of the modern period, with little expertise in the study of earlier epochs, I will confine myself to that period, or at least to historical issues which bear on the modern period. We shall see, however, that the concerns of the modern period often stretch quite far back into the past, sometimes obsessively so, and that I have therefore not succeeded in greatly limiting the scope of my topic by saying this, since a vast range of past topics are perceived by virtually all concerned as being highly relevant to the present in Jerusalem.

At the outset I will touch briefly on the question of how to overcome the difficulties of writing history in the circumstances in which the Palestinian people find themselves today, and indeed in which they have found themselves for most of this century. This is a crucial issue,

Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel, Madison, 1995; and Yael Zerubavel, Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition, Chicago, 1995

since a Palestinian perspective is a vital one in this endeavor. Who else, other than Palestinians, knows or cares about certain crucial historiographical issues, or has privileged access to certain kinds of sources? Unfortunately, their perspective is rarely reflected in much academic research on Palestine and Jerusalem. Indeed, given this absence, the provision of such a perspective, grounded in systematic research, and featuring judicious presentation and scrupulous objectivity, should be one of the central aims of any research agenda for writing the history of Jerusalem. Sadly in spite of the many educational achievements of the Palestinian people, the number of competent Palestinian scholars with any impact on international scholarship on these and related issues is actually extremely limited, whether in absolute terms, or relative to the vast numbers of non-Palestinian researchers who are working on these topics, many of them not notably sympathetic to the Palestinian perspective.

In part this is the result of a conscious choice made by Palestinians, since there is no shortage of Palestinian graduates in the fields of business, medicine and engineering, while there are relatively few with Ph.D.'s in the social sciences. But leaving aside these subjective problems, overcoming the objective impediments to Palestinians writing their own history would require many fundamental changes in the status quo. These include insulating Palestinian universities from the constant interruptions they have suffered throughout 34 years of Israeli occupation, and providing them with the resources to pay a regular living wage, and support academic research and graduate training. They would include as well the creation of additional independent research institutions and educational foundations, the establishment of national and private archives, and generous state support for serious scientific research – whenever there is a Palestinian state.

Needless to say, these and other pre-requisites for the writing of history have rarely been available to the researchers inside Palestine. Palestinian universities grew up without the benefit of state support, and have faced constant interference from the Israeli occupation, which is still ongoing, ranging from lengthy shut-downs to preventing students and faculty from reaching their campuses. Their finances are precarious, and their ability to support and nurture advanced research is in consequence extremely limited. Beyond this, there has been no national effort to provide for a Palestinian national archive, a national library or other kinds of support for research.⁵ To all of these profound structural problems must be added the traumatic necessity for those inside Palestine of confronting the grim daily reality of occupation, repression and massive collective suffering.⁶ Clearly these concerns impinge gravely on the ability of most Palestinians to do scholarly work.

Leaving these pressing issues aside, what are the major gaps in the history of Jerusalem?

Perhaps what is most lacking in the existing histories that deal with Jerusalem are good general books on the subject, ideally ones covering a broad historical sweep and accessible to a wide audience. The only two relatively recent books in English which generally fill this need are Karen Armstrong's Jerusalem, One City Three Faiths,⁷ and the late Kamil 'Asali's newly updated edited volume, Jerusalem in History.⁸ For all its good qualities the former is essentially a popular work with a religious focus by a non-scholar, and is therefore not strictly a history book,

⁵ The P.L.O. established the P.L.O. Research Center in Beirut in 1965 to serve as an archive, a research resource and a center for information on Palestine. It was the target of repeated Israeli attacks, and its contents were seized by the Israeli army when it occupied Beirut in 1982, but they were returned as part of a prisoner exchange two years later. The Center has functioned only sporadically over the past two decades in consequence. The Institute for Palestine Studies, an independent private research institution established in Beirut in 1963, currently has branches in Jerusalem and Washington and is still headquartered in Beirut, where its archives and research library are located.

⁶ Various distractions affect Palestinians in the diaspora, whether they live in the harsh conditions of refugee camps or in relative material comfort: among them are the political pressures to avoid dealing with issues relating to Palestine, both within the Arab world and outside it, difficulty of access to Palestine, and the same problems of absence of archives and facilities for research on Palestinian history which affect historians inside Palestine.

⁷ New York, 1998.

nor is it suitable for classroom use. The latter constitutes an excellent reference book, but it is not a synthetic work by a single author, and it thus lacks a certain focus and a unity of style, making it less useful for the general reader.

It is not necessary that such general works be written from a Palestinian standpoint: they must simply be broadly objective, and not reflect the distorting biases of a nationalist agenda, particularly the Zionist historiographical slant that is apparent in most of the books available on the topic in English. There is a need for such general books on the history of Jerusalem in both English and in Arabic, as well as for more specialized monographs and collections of articles. Although existing examples of the latter two categories include Burgoyne's superb Mamluk Jerusalem⁹ and the recently published Ottoman Jerusalem,¹⁰ what is particularly needed for Jerusalem are broad surveys, like those in Arabic on different periods of the history of Palestine by Khalil 'Athamna and 'Adel Manna' recently published by the Institute for Palestine Studies,¹¹ and which seem to me to be highly suitable for use as university-level textbooks.

Another need is for a basic history of Jerusalem as an urban or municipal area, whether in terms of the use of land and forms of ownership of property; the history of the growth of different urban neighborhoods; or the history of the municipality itself, and how its power has been used since its establishment by the Ottomans during the Tanzimat period. Such work is badly needed in the modern period in particular, although there may be a similar need for earlier periods. For some eras, such as the 16th and 17th centuries, where a number of monographs by

⁸ Cited in n. 1.

⁹ Michael Hamilton Burgoyne, Mamluk Jerusalem: An Architectural Study, London, 1987.

¹⁰ Sylvia Auld and Robert Hillenbrand, eds., Ottoman Jerusalem: The Living City, 1517-1917, 2 vols. London and Jerusalem, 2000.

¹¹ Khalil 'Athamna, Filastin fi khamsata qurun: min al-fath al-islami hatta al-ghazw al-franji (634-1099), Beirut, 2000; 'Adel Manna', Tarikh Filastin fi awakhir al-'ahd al-'Uthmani, 1700-1918 (qira'a jadida), Beirut, 1999.

authors like Amnon Cohen, Bernard Lewis, Dror Ze'evi and Amy Singer exist,¹² the problems are different ones. They include an over-concentration on economic history, partly due to the nature of the sources available, and occasionally an essentialism that betrays the Orientalist tendencies of their authors.¹³

Lacking for the modern period in particular are histories of religious, legal, and other types of scholarship, as well as journalism and literary work, produced in Jerusalem, of the institutions where this work took place, and of the buildings in which they were housed, to match the impressive work done by the late Kamil al-'Asali for earlier periods of the city's history.¹⁴ There would appear to be ample sources for this sort of research for the modern period. Schools, libraries, newspapers, publishing houses, public institutions, all await serious research and analysis, as does the work of many Jerusalemite scholars, educators, journalists and writers of the last two centuries.¹⁵

¹² Amnon Cohen and Bernard Lewis, Population and Revenue in the Towns of Palestine in the Sixteenth Century, Princeton, 1978; Amnon Cohen, Economic Life in Ottoman Jerusalem, Cambridge, 1989; Amy Singer, Palestinian Peasants and Ottoman Officials: Rural Administration around 16th Century Jerusalem, Cambridge, 1994; Dror Ze'evi, An Ottoman Century: The District of Jerusalem in the 1600's, Albany, 1996.

¹³ See, e.g., Cohen, Economic Life, 126: "...the Ottoman Empire emerges as a continuation of a long historical chain that had not changed either conceptually or pragmatically since the emergence of Islam."

¹⁴ Ma'ahid al-'ilm fi Bayt al-Maqdis [Islamic institutions of learning in Jerusalem], Amman, 1981; Ajdaduna fi thara Bayt al-Maqdis: Dirasa athariyya tarikhyya li-maqabir al-Quds wa turabiha [Our ancestors in the soil of Jerusalem: A historical-archaeological study of the cemeteries and masolea of Jerusalem], Amman, 1981; Makhtutat fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis: Dirasa wa bibliografiyya [Manuscripts on the merits of Jerusalem: Analysis and bibliography], Amman, 1981, 2nd ed., 1984; Min Atharina fi Bayt al-Maqdis [Some Islamic monuments in Jerusalem], Amman, 1982; Watha'iq madisiyya tarikhyya, ma' muqaddima hawla ba'd al-masadir al-awwaliyya li-tarikh al-Quds [Historical documents on Jerusalem, with an introduction regarding some primary sources for the history of Jerusalem], 3 vols., Amman, 1983-89; Mawsim al-Nabi Musa fi Filastin; Tarikh al-mawsim wal-maqam [The Nabi Musa festival in Palestine: The history of the festival and the shrine], Amman, 1990; Bayt al-Maqdis fi kutub al-rihlat [Jerusalem in Islamic travel accounts], Amman, 1992; Muqaddima fi tarikh al-tibb fil-Quds [An introduction to the history of medicine in Jerusalem], Amman, 1994.

¹⁵ There are few biographies of Jerusalemites, besides those dealing with political leaders: Geoffrey Furlonge, Palestine is My Country: The Story of Musa Alami. London, 1969; Nasser Eddin Nashashibi, Jerusalem's Other Voice: Ragheb Nashashibi and Moderation in Palestinian Politics, 1920-1948. Exeter, 1990; and several on the Mufti: Philip Mattar, The Mufti of Jerusalem: Al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement. New York, 1988; Zvi Elpeleg, The Grand Mufti Haj Amin al-Hussaini: Founder of the Palestinian National Movement. London, 1993; Joseph Schectman, The Mufti and the Fuhrer: The Rise and Fall of Haj Amin el-Husseini. New York, 1965; and Husni Jarrar, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni: Ra'id jihad wa batal qadiyya [Hajj Amin al-Husayni: Pioneer of jihad and hero of a cause], Amman, 1987.

Another major gap involves research into the social and economic history of different sectors of the population of the city, and of its connections with its environs along the lines of Beshara Doumani's work on Nablus in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹⁶ This would include work on orphanages, businesses, hotels, the Old City's markets, and the newer commercial districts in Salah al-Din street and elsewhere. If we are to have a picture of society as a whole, such studies should avoid the focus on the elite which is a natural tendency of much historiography, in part because of the bias of the sources, which reflect the urban, literate upper classes more than the rural, illiterate and poorer segments of the population, or the middle classes, who also often left few records of their activities.

A related need is for a study of the demography of Jerusalem, and of the changes in its social make-up over time. A very small city with only 8-10,000 inhabitants about 200 years ago,¹⁷ and about 40,000 people at the turn of the 20th century,¹⁸ greater Jerusalem today has a population of about three quarters of a million: over 300,000 Arabs and more than 400,000 Jews. While an enormous amount has been written about the increase in the city's Jewish population (some of it of limited demographic or historical value¹⁹), we know much less about the demography of its Arab inhabitants, particularly the non-elite segments of the population. This is partly a function of the sources utilized in the bulk of the work done on the demography of the city, which has tended to focus, sometimes obsessively, on the city's Jewish population. Because of this focus, and because of the tendency of many modern historians of Jewish Jerusalem to pay little attention to materials in Ottoman Turkish and Arabic, the sources used were generally

¹⁶ Palestine Rediscovered: Merchants and Peasants of Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900, Berkeley, 1995.

¹⁷ Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, "The Population of the Large Towns in Palestine during the first 80 years of the 19th Century according to Western Sources," in Moshe Ma'oz, ed., Studies on Palestine during the Ottoman Period, Jerusalem 1975, 53.

¹⁸ Justin McCarthy, The Population of Palestine: Population Statistics of the Late Ottoman Period and the Mandate, New York, 1990, Table 1.9, 15.

foreign or were generated by the Jewish community in Palestine. In consequence, in these works we get a view of the demography (and much of the rest of the social history) of the overwhelming majority of the population of Jerusalem until well into the modern era – the Muslims and Christians – from without, as it were, rather than from within.

Much therefore remains to be learned about the demography of the city's Arab population. Specifically, when did the modern influx of people from the rural areas and neighboring regions begin, where did they settle, and what of the "original" groups who made up the city's population before this large-scale influx? Was this just a continuation of earlier rural migrations to Jerusalem, or did it differ fundamentally from them in any way? Why did so many of the newcomers in recent decades apparently come from Hebron-area villages, and what was the impact of the inflow of refugees to the city after the 1948 war? What factors determined the growth of the new Arab quarters of the city to the north-east and south-west, and how did the population of the older quarters of the city change?²⁰ While some research has been done on aspects of these matters,²¹ much more work remains to be done to chronicle and analyze the demographic development of what since 1948 has been the largest Arab urban area in Palestine (with the possible exception of Gaza city).

This brings me to the next broad theme I would like to address: myths that need to be deconstructed as part of a serious research agenda for writing the history of Jerusalem. The myths surrounding the history of Jerusalem are legion, and every serious researcher is acquainted with some of the outrageous legends that pass for the history of this city in certain circles. The

¹⁹ For a critique of a typical work, see the review of Yehoshua Ben Arie, Jerusalem in the 19th Century: The Old City, Jerusalem, 1985, by James Reilly in the Journal of Palestine Studies, XVI, 2 (Winter 1987), 136-138.

²⁰ One work dealing mainly with the Shaykh Jarrah quarter to the north-east, albeit without the use of many indigenous Arabic or Ottoman sources, is Shimeon Landman and Ruth Kark, Ahya' a'yan al-Quds kharij aswariha fil-qarn al-tasi' 'ashr [The quarters of the notables of Jerusalem outside the city's walls in the 19th century], Tel Aviv, 1984.

source for many of these myths was the Zionist movement, which was a fertile producer of lies and distortions of reality about Jerusalem, as part of its campaign to master the city and transform it in its own image. There are of course a number of Palestinian, Arab and Muslim myths about Jerusalem, some of which will be alluded to below. Moreover, it is vitally important when deconstructing myths to avoid creating new ones, a point to which we will return. The existing myths are so numerous and so frequently minted, however, that no survey of them could purport to be comprehensive. Nevertheless, I will try to list a few of what seem to me to be the most pernicious and widespread of these myths.

The first is what I call the demographic myth: this is the oft-repeated statement, found everywhere from scholarly work to propagandistic polemics, that Jerusalem has had a Jewish majority since some time in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. The reasons for propagating such a myth should be obvious, given the importance for Israel's current claims to the city of the impression of a continuous Jewish presence in the city stretching 3000 years back in time. Adding the argument from demography that Jerusalem has been a predominantly "Jewish city" for over a century and a half would only reinforce that impression. Such claims are of a piece with familiar tropes from the arsenal of Zionist arguments which are aimed at minimizing, and if possible ignoring, the Palestinian presence throughout the country, and exaggerating the Jewish presence, in some cases inventing one where it did not exist. An example of such invention is what might be called the myth of the eternal Jewish quarter, or of the eternal sanctity of the Wailing Wall, two features of the urban geography of the Old City which are first attested – at least where they are located today – respectively in the mid- and late Ottoman periods, meaning

²¹ A notable example is the book edited by Salim Tamari, Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighborhoods and their Fate in the War, Jerusalem, 1999.

that they are fairly recent innovations in the lengthy sweep of the city's history.²² Selim Tamari has indeed argued that until the very end of the Ottoman period in the 20th century, "there was no clear delineation between neighborhood and religion."²³

It can be shown that what I call the demographic myth has no substance quite simply by looking carefully at the available late Ottoman-era statistics. Meanwhile, for the Mandate period, when a Jewish majority first emerged in Jerusalem, it is necessary to examine the boundaries of the municipality as they were arbitrarily drawn by the British Mandatory authorities, to understand how we should understand this new majority status. The widespread claims that a Jewish majority existed during the Ottoman period are based on inflated population figures for the Jewish population of the city provided by European and Jewish observers over a period of many years.²⁴ It may be asked why anyone should give these figures any credence: none of these observers counted the population, none was a trained demographer, and none cite Ottoman or other official statistics. All were considerably more familiar and culturally comfortable with European Jewish settler society than with Arab society, about which their ignorance was generally nearly total. Moreover, as perhaps the most accomplished expert on the demography of Palestine, Justin McCarthy, has acutely pointed out, "... Ottoman statistics are the best source on Ottoman population. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that the only ones who can properly evaluate population numbers are those who count the population. For the Ottoman Empire, it has

²² For details regarding the Wailing Wall, which appears to have taken on its special sanctity only in the last few centuries – before that Jewish worship took place facing the Eastern Wall of the Haram – see R. Khalidi, "The Future of Arab Jerusalem," in Arab Nation, Arab Nationalism, edited by Derek Hopwood, London, 2000, 23-25.

²³ For more on the relatively recent hardening of the identification between religious groups and specific areas of Jerusalem, drawn from his study of the memoirs of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, see Selim Tamari, "Jerusalem's Ottoman Modernity: The Times and Lives of Wasif Jawhariyyeh," Jerusalem Quarterly File, 9 (Summer 2000) 8-10.

²⁴ For the best assessment of these European and Zionist population estimates, see McCarthy, The Population of Palestine, 15-24.

been shown that no population statistics but those of the Ottoman government provide usable demographic data.”²⁵

The Ottoman data for Jerusalem – which are not as complete as their statistics for Palestine as a whole – nevertheless show that the city almost certainly had an Arab majority throughout the Ottoman period. Thus in 1871-72, Ottoman figures show the Jewish population of the city to have been about a quarter of the total.²⁶ In 1895, when the city’s population was about 43,000, the entire Jewish population, including Ottoman citizens and non-citizens, could not have been larger than 14,500, by the most generous allowances.²⁷ The last official statistics for the Ottoman period indicate that in 1912 in a city of about 60,000 the Jewish population was perhaps 25,000, and it is very unlikely that it could have amounted to a majority.²⁸ Thereafter, the vicissitudes of World War I war led to a 6% population decline throughout Palestine.²⁹ This was followed by population growth throughout the country: this was due to natural increase following the return of normal economic conditions, and to Jewish immigration in the early post-war years.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁶ The most detailed Ottoman figures for Jerusalem itself were published in an Ottoman provincial yearbook for 1871-72 (*ibid.*, 47): out of 2393 households, 630 were Jewish, or roughly a quarter of the total.

²⁷ According to Ottoman statistics for 1895 reproduced by Kamal Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830-1914: Demographics and Social Characteristics*, Madison, 1985, 156-7, the number of Jewish Ottoman citizens in the entire Jerusalem *sanjak*, which had a total population of over 300,000, was 9046. As regards foreign Jews, these statistics indicate that there were 5457 non-citizens in the *sanjak* at this time, only some of whom were Jewish. Even if it is assumed that all the non-citizens were Jews, the total goes up to only 14,513 for the entire *sanjak* of Jerusalem. According to the most reliable figures for the population of Jerusalem, those of the respected Ottoman official and historian Semseddin Sami cited by McCarthy, *Population of Palestine*, 15, the city’s total population was 43,000: even using the highly inflated figure noted above, the proportion of Jews in the city’s population was just over 33%.

²⁸ For 1912, McCarthy, *ibid.*, 53, cites Ottoman statistics as giving a total of 18,190 for the Jewish population of the entire Jerusalem *qada*, or district, including the city and nearby villages. Even if one assumes all of these people to have been living within Jerusalem, and allows for more non-Ottoman Jews in the population than the 5457 included in the total for 1895, the total comes to about 25,000. This is well below a majority in a city whose population was probably around 60,000 before World War I.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 25-27.

The city's population reached 67,000 in 1922, with a clear Jewish majority, according to the British census taken in that year. The figures produced by this census are generally considered to have been reliable (with a few minor exceptions noted by McCarthy³⁰), but it is crucial to note that it measured population within a different area than did the Ottomans, since the British arbitrarily redraw the boundaries of the municipality after their occupation. This may have been done out of their sympathy for Zionism, or because British town planners looked approvingly on the modern communities inhabited by an "urban" Jewish population, by contrast with the "traditional" ones in which lived the "rural" Arab population of immediately adjacent quarters. Whatever the reason, the British administrators included within the municipal boundaries a number of far-flung Jewish settlements in the area, some of them more than four kilometers from the core of Jerusalem, the Old City, and stretching the city limits far to the north-west.³¹ At the same time, they drew the city's municipal boundaries so as to exclude numerous nearby Arab neighborhoods, such as Silwan, al-Tur and al-'Aizariya, all of them within view of the city walls, and some only meters away from them. Even within these grotesquely gerrymandered limits, and after four years of unrestricted Jewish immigration, in 1922 there was a bare Jewish majority of 33,000 to 28,000.³² Only later on in the Mandate period did massive immigration create an actual Jewish majority in both the British-delineated Jerusalem municipality proper, and its immediate environs.

Of course, neither the existence of an Arab majority before 1918, or of a Jewish majority from the Mandate period onwards, means anything in and of itself. Whatever rights either side

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

³¹ They include, e.g., Giv'at Shaul, Beit ha-Kerem, Beit veGan, and Talpiyot. The resulting map, with a "claw" of Jewish neighborhoods stretching well to the north and north-west of the central part of the city, produces the kind of pattern that would be familiar to students of the ethnically-driven electoral re-mapping process in the United States that originally produced the word "gerrymander."

³² *Ibid.*, Table A8-5, 158.

may have in Jerusalem are unaffected by these changing, and often politically determined, demographic realities. Claims in this regard on both sides are simply weapons in the ongoing struggle for hegemony in Jerusalem between the two national movements which claim the city as their capital, and whose peoples revere it as a focus of religious devotion. And it is worth repeating that it is vital to avoid falling into the twin traps of either denying the facts, or attempting to erect new myths to match the old ones.

The second myth is what I call the “Jerusalem was never their capital” myth. This is linked to an oft-repeated and similar argument that Palestine was never an independent country. The “logical” corollary of both is that Jerusalem was “always” the capital of the eternal Jewish nation, and that Eretz Israel was always present as a sort of virtual national home, even when there was no apparent evidence of its existence. The best way to deal with these related fallacies is of course to challenge their premises: it is sufficient to show that before the 20th century nation-state nationalism did not exist, and that in consequence there were no nation-states, anywhere in the Middle East, and that before then neither most Palestinians nor most Jews thought of themselves in what we would recognize as modern national terms. This challenge to the premise of such specious arguments is indeed far more important than any specifics that can be marshaled to deal with them. Doing this successfully requires a certain level of sophistication in terms of explaining the genesis of nationalism, and is likely to grate on the sensibilities of any committed nationalist, including those of the Palestinian variety. Some of them are enamored of the equally mythical idea that Palestine always existed as an immanent nation, and that the ancestors of the Palestinians were the Canaanites, Jebusites, Philistines, Amorites et al., who

were all really Arabs underneath all those confusing extraneous details like language, history and archeological evidence.³³

There are, however some specifics relating to Jerusalem are worth mentioning in this regard. One has to do with the implications of the tantalizing results of the archaeological excavations south and southwest of the Haram al-Sharif for our understanding of early Islamic Jerusalem. We are told by polemicists like Daniel Pipes that Jerusalem is not and never was important to Muslims, except in an intermittent and opportunistic way: he implies that Muslims today only claim that it is important to them in order to have ammunition for denying the much stronger Jewish claim to the city.³⁴ The inconveniently massive evidence of the Haram al-Sharif itself and its exquisite 7th century monuments, the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, are ignored by partisans of this view, who dismiss them as evincing no more than transient religious feeling. Indeed, for the most extreme partisans of such views, nothing is ever likely to suffice to prove that there is a significant Islamic connection to Jerusalem, given the privileged – indeed for some of them, the exclusive – place they give to the Jewish connection to the city, and their obliviousness to all that does not contribute to confirming that connection.³⁵

Perhaps the best example of how this obliviousness operates and is disseminated can be seen from the workings of the complex apparatus involved in guiding tourists around Jerusalem, labeling the city's sites, and maintaining museums such as that at the Citadel, in the Western

³³ This idea derives from a pseudo-scientific idea popular among 19th century European Orientalists, the Semitic wave theory, which held that the entire population of the Fertile Crescent originated in waves of nomads pouring periodically out of the Arabian Peninsula over many millennia. For more details, see Nimrod Hurvitz, "Muhibb ad-Din Al-Khatib's Semitic Wave Theory and Pan-Arabism." Middle Eastern Studies, January 1993, 118-134. For recent evidence regarding the common ancestors of Palestinians and Israelis, see the results of recent research reported in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, Nov. 13, 2000, "All in the Family," indicating that two thirds of the members of both groups share common prehistoric ancestors, results which are likely to be unwelcome to nationalists of all varieties, Arab and Israeli.

³⁴ This meretricious and offensive argument is summarized in "If My Hand Forget Thee: Is Jerusalem Really Important for Islam?" The New Republic, Sept. 1997, 15-19.

³⁵ For more details, see Abu El-Haj, Excavating the Land, Creating the Homeland, and Zerubavel, Recovered Roots.

Wall tunnels, in the nearby archaeological garden and other similar locations such as the Cardo and the “Burnt House” in the Jewish Quarter. This involves the efforts of a concatenation of Israeli state agencies from the Department of Antiquities to the Ministries of Religion and Tourism to the Municipality of Jerusalem, and produces a remarkably homogenous picture. The result is that the average tourist is led to focus on the various Jewish links to the city, and to a much lesser extent the Christian ones, with the remarkable result that most of the built structure of the Old City created over the past 1400 years, which is Islamic-Arab, is ignored.

However, for those who have resisted such brainwashing and who are amenable to rational historical argumentation, the imposing Umayyad structures inadvertently revealed by the Israeli excavations south of the Haram undertaken in the 1970’s by Benjamin Mazar, assisted by Meir Ben Dov, have the potential for revolutionizing the standard view of the political and administrative importance of Jerusalem for the first century after Islam, and indeed of our understanding of the whole Umayyad period itself.³⁶ Unfortunately, the entire Islamic era of nearly a millennium and a half is de-emphasized for political reasons by the Israeli state and its various agencies, and it seems to be of little interest to most Israeli archaeologists, with the consequence that the full results of these excavations have yet to be published, and the structures they revealed have now been obscured by excavation of the strata below them.

In fact, more recent excavations dating from the late 1990’s in an area immediately inside the city walls just to the west of Bab al-Maghariba, and whose results also have not yet been published, have uncovered what appear to be several additional relatively large Umayyad-era

³⁶ The evidence uncovered by the Israeli excavations is examined in R. Khalidi, “The Future of Arab Jerusalem,” 22, and in R. Khalidi, “Transforming the Face of the Holy City: Political Messages in the Built Topography of Jerusalem,” *Jerusalem Quarterly File*, part 1: 3 (Winter 1999): 16-21; part 2: 4 (Spring 1999): 21-29, and most notably in Oleg Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*, Princeton, 1996, 128-134. Mazar so little expected to find any such thing that he initially refused to believe that these remains were Islamic, and was only with difficulty convinced of this fact by Ben Dov, according to the account of the latter: Meir Ben Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple. The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem*, Jerusalem, 1985, 272 ff.

structures west of the six large buildings first found by the earlier Mazar-Ben Dov excavations. A definitive and scientifically grounded statement about the place of Jerusalem in early Islam is only possible once the results of all of these already completed excavations have been fully published, and once further excavations have been undertaken under the auspices of trained archaeological specialists in the early Islamic period. Given the extreme sensitivity of the site – it directly abuts the eastern edge of the expanded Jewish Quarter, and the southern edge of the Western Wall plaza – and given the fraught politics of archaeology in Palestine, and in Jerusalem in particular, none of these things are likely to happen very soon.³⁷

In any case, from what is visible even to an untrained eye, it is apparent that during the early Umayyad period a brand new quarter comprising a series of imposing buildings was erected by Jerusalem's new Muslim rulers at the city's southern edge. These buildings make it clear that the Umayyads expended significant resources, not only for religious purposes as was the case with the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock in the Haram al-Sharif, but also for political, administrative, or social purposes to the south and west of the Haram. We can only surmise at these purposes in the absence of further specialized research. Expanding our knowledge of early Islamic archaeology and history through work on this period would seem to me to be a task of primary importance in writing the history of Jerusalem. It would of course be somewhat useful in dealing with the stupider polemics about Jerusalem issuing from the partisans of Israel, and would historically anchor the early Arab connection with the city in a way only partially possible at present, but much more importantly, it would provide invaluable

³⁷ The definitive work on this subject is Abu El-Haj, [Excavating the Land, Creating the Homeland](#).

information on the early Umayyad period from one of the few early Islamic cities to have been even partially excavated so far.³⁸

Another modern concern – bordering on the status of a myth – that is rooted in earlier eras of Jerusalem’s history is the argument that Jerusalem is never mentioned in the Qur’an,³⁹ and is therefore relatively unimportant in Islam. This is based on the preposterous assertion that since Jerusalem is not specifically mentioned by name in the famous first verse of Sura 17 of the Qur’an, known as Surat al-Isra’ [the nocturnal journey], another site could have been meant by the reference to “al-masjid al-aqsa” [the farthest mosque or temple] in that verse. This is patent nonsense, since there are many reasons why early Muslims would understand, indeed could only understand, this term as referring to a site in Jerusalem. These include notably the attachment of the first Muslims to Jerusalem as a site of sacrality for the earlier revealed religions which they saw Islam as continuing and completing. Most importantly, however, these arguments ignore the fact that the rest of Sura 17, which is also known as Surat Bani Isra’il [the children of Israel], repeatedly refers to the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem [the word used is al-masjid], and mentions several of the Biblical prophets in the context of a heavily moralistic retelling of central episodes in Jewish history. Given this context, the earliest Muslims could not possibly have understood the relevant verse as referring to anything but Jerusalem, and the suggestion that this was not the case is tendentious at best.

³⁸ For information on another early Islamic site recently excavated, Ayla (near ‘Aqaba), see Donald Whitcomb, “The Misr of Ayla: Settlement at Aqaba in the early Islamic period” in Averil Cameron and Lawrence Conrad, eds., The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Land Use and Settlement Patterns, Princeton, 1992. v. 2, 155-70. Whitcomb is currently excavating at another early Islamic site, Qinnasrin in Syria. Jerusalem differs from both of these newly-established amsar first founded by the Arab conquerors in two respects: it contains an Islamic addition to an existing major city, and it is a currently inhabited city, rather than an abandoned site.

³⁹ This argument has been made by Pipes, and then repeated ad nauseam by propagandists for Israel, but also can be heard from more reputable quarters. For a more scholarly but also tendentious version of this argument see Moshe Gil, A History of Palestine, 640-1099, Cambridge 1992, 90 ff., which is analyzed in Rashid Khalidi, Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness, New York, 1997, 216 nn. 23, 24.

Related to this is the assertion by a number of writers⁴⁰ that Jerusalem throughout most of the thirteen centuries of Islamic rule was a provincial backwater, to which Muslims only paid attention when their possession of it was threatened. This assertion is absurd on the face of it, if only in view of the Abbasid, Fatimid and Ayyubid renovations and restorations to the major Umayyad mosques in the Haram al-Sharif, and the myriad remarkable structures built in Jerusalem by the city's Islamic rulers over nearly seven centuries that are detailed in Burgoyne's masterful Mamluk Jerusalem and in the recent two-volume work, Ottoman Jerusalem.⁴¹ Nevertheless, I will not deal with this myth in detail, but will leave it to those more familiar with the fields of archaeology, art history, the history of religion, and social, economic and political history for the various Islamic periods of the history of Palestine, each of which is likely to reveal a complex and nuanced picture contradicting this assertion (although there certainly have been a number of times during the Islamic era when Jerusalem was a backwater, and others when it was probably not the most important city in Palestine, at least in certain respects⁴²). The point is that considerably more monographic work must be done, in both Arabic and English, in all of these fields in order to make it possible to generate scholarly responses to such assertions which are common across a broad range of purportedly scholarly literature.⁴³ Without so doing, we would be failing in our duty to elucidate the history of Jerusalem in a number of periods that

⁴⁰ Needless to say, the ubiquitous Pipes is among them.

⁴¹ Burgoyne, Mamluk Jerusalem; Auld and Hillenbrand, eds., *Ottoman Jerusalem*.

⁴² Besides various eras of the Islamic period when Ramla was the most important administrative, economic and cultural center of Palestine, see the argument by Beshara Doumani in Palestine Rediscovered that Nablus was the most important city of Palestine in a number of ways during a large part of the period he covers.

⁴³ To take only one example, the Israeli archaeologist Meir Ben Dov's In the Shadow of the Temple is full of tendentious statements about what the author calls "the Moslem age:" see e.g., 278-280, 286-287. This is far from the worst of such examples. For other periods, and other disciplines, see also, among many others, Ben Arie, Jerusalem in the 19th Century, and Moshe Gil, A History of Palestine, 640-1099.

have not received their due from scholars: those of the thirteen centuries of Arab and Islamic rule.⁴⁴

This brings me to another area where it clear that considerable work remains to be done: this is the Islamic and Christian connections to Jerusalem, and how they relate to the well-explored Jewish connection to the city. I raise this matter only because it constantly intrudes on discussions of the modern history and politics of Jerusalem, in the form of the sort of crude libels that have already been mentioned, and in multiple other forms, some of them more scholarly and weightier, and some widely prevalent in public discourse in the West, and therefore more dangerous. This can reach the point of a denial that there is any important Islamic association to the city, and that even the Christian reverence for the city is in some way not as significant as the Jewish one. The fact is that there are few easily accessible, readable, and up-to-date sources on these topics in English,⁴⁵ and only somewhat more in Arabic, where the remarkable corpus of work of the late Kamil al-‘Asali stands out, much of it now out of print and hard to find.⁴⁶

Popular and accessible writings on these topics in English and other western languages are particularly rare. Given the ignorance in the west of Islam’s view of itself as a continuation of the Abrahamic tradition, and a similar ignorance of the multiple influences of Judaism and Christianity on Islam,⁴⁷ it is particularly hard for non-Muslims to understand the sanctity of the city to Islam as both derived from its sanctity for the other monotheistic religions, and from an exclusive Islamic connection via the Prophet Muhammad. This major gap in popular knowledge

⁴⁴ It is probably also the case that the immediately preceding late Roman-Byzantine period has also failed to receive its full share of attention from historians and archaeologists.

⁴⁵ Among the few such works in English are F. E. Peters, The Distant Shrine: The Islamic Centuries in Jerusalem, New York, 1993, Thomas Hummel, Kevork Hintlian and Ulf Carmesund, eds., Patterns of the Past and Prospects for the Future: The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land, London, 1999, and Anthony O’Mahoney, Goran Gunner and Kevork Hintlian, eds, The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land, London, 1995.

⁴⁶ A number of his most important works are cited in n. 13.

⁴⁷ For one aspect of these influences, see Tarif Khalidi, The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature, Cambridge, 2001.

in turn makes it considerably easier for those whose aim is to denigrate any non-Jewish link to the Holy City to make their tendentious arguments.

It should be noted that ignorance on these matters, and spurious political arguments rooted in such ignorance, are not the exclusive province of one side in this conflict. There is currently a wave of bigoted and ignorant assertions coming from Islamic sources regarding Jerusalem, presumably as a response to the denials of an Islamic link to the city. An example of these assertions can be seen in a leaflet distributed in Chicago during demonstrations in support of the al-Aqsa intifada by the Islamic Association for Palestine in North America (entitled “Our Aqsa Never Their Tempel” [sic]). In this leaflet, the remarkable assertion is made that the angels or Adam built the foundations of the al-Aqsa Mosque,⁴⁸ thus denying that there ever was a temple on the site, and neatly explaining the origins of the imposing walls of the Herodian temple enclosure on which the Haram al-Sharif was constructed in the 7th century.

This is not an isolated example: it is consistent with statements by several Palestinian official, religious and popular figures denying that there is any evidence of the existence of either a first or a second temple beneath the Haram al-Sharif.⁴⁹ (While there is virtual unanimity that Herod’s temple stood on this site, no historical or archaeological evidence has yet been uncovered for the existence of a first temple beneath the Haram or anywhere else, although most archaeologists assume that it was located there, and all pious Muslims, Christians and Jews are obligated to believe in its existence, given the unequivocal affirmations on the subject of both the Bible and the Qur’an.) It is easy to understand the roots of these misguided ideas: the extreme frustration among Palestinians at the exploitation of every real or presumed Jewish religious site

⁴⁸ Leaflet: “Our Aqsa Never Their Tempel” [sic], Islamic Association for Palestine in North America, Chicago, October 12, 2000.

⁴⁹ These figures include the current mufti of Jerusalem, ‘Ikrima Sabri, and several officials of the Palestinian Authority.

as a sort of “mismar Jeha”⁵⁰ on which Israel hangs the most extreme political and military claims and demands. These seem invariably to result in land expropriations, military occupation, and the death of Palestinians, whether at “Joseph’s Tomb” in Nablus,⁵¹ Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem, al-Haram al-Ibrahimi in Hebron, or the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem. The casualty toll at most of these sites in recent years, and particularly in the months immediately after the outbreak of the “al-Aqsa intifada” in September 2000, was extremely high, and in a few cases there were also Israeli casualties.

Whatever the supposed justification, these denials by nominal Muslims of the very existence of the Jewish temples are truly perplexing, given that a few verses after the well-known first verse of Surat al-Isra’ (this verse is quoted in Arabic on the back of the leaflet) there is an explicit reference in the Qur’an to two occasions on which the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed as punishment for the misdeeds of the Jews. The entire Sura of the Qur’an, which we have seen is known as the Sura of the “Children of Israel,” describes this and other matters relating to Jewish Biblical figures from ranging from Adam, Noah and Moses to David in a tone entirely consistent with both Jewish and Christian traditional religious interpretations.⁵² No believing Muslim with even a passing knowledge of this Sura could be in any doubt as to the existence of the temples, or of the likelihood that they were located where the Muslims later erected a mosque named al-Masjid al-Aqsa precisely because of the site’s multiple connections with the sacred, whether through the Hebrew prophets or the Prophet Muhammad.

⁵⁰ The reference is to the nail (mismar) which the apocryphal popular folklore character Jeha (Goha) asked to retain as his own property when he sold a house, returning repeatedly to hang his coat on it, and thereby frustrating the new owner to the point that he returned the house to Jeha for a pittance.

⁵¹ This site of course has even less to do with the Prophet Joseph than do most other similar shrines with the holy figures purportedly buried within them: the tomb of the latter has been universally acknowledged by followers of all three faiths for many centuries to be located in Hebron in al-Haram al-Ibrahimi.

⁵² The Qur’an, 17:4-8. There is another more obscure reference to the Jews’ failures on two occasions to heed God’s warnings, and their consequent punishment by means of destruction of the Temple in 17:104.

This is worth mentioning not because it is particularly surprising to find fervent Muslims such as the authors of this leaflet, or other Palestinians, some of them supposedly learned religious figures, to be ignorant of an important aspect of their religion. Sadly, that is not in the least surprising, whether among Muslims or followers of other faiths. Rather, in this specific case it is evidence of the lack of a consciousness of the degree to which Muslim devotion to Jerusalem is rooted in the city's central importance to the earlier prophetic messages that Islam considers itself as completing. This inter-relation between the Abrahamic traditions, something which is absolutely central to the traditional self-view of Islam, risks being lost sight of as the religious polarization of the Arab-Israeli conflict produces more and more blindly chauvinistic representations of self and other. This intimate connection between the Abrahamic faiths is a matter that scholars should deal with and explain not in religious terms, or at least not only in those terms, but rather in the context of the history of Jerusalem, and it should be a high priority in the writing of the history of Jerusalem. In the absence of such historical writing, the danger exists that myths of this sort will spread and gain credence in the envenomed politico-religious atmosphere surrounding Jerusalem, and will in turn contribute to further exacerbating the conflict itself.

In conclusion, it appears more important today than ever before that if we are to write the history of this city properly, this must be done in a truly humanistic and tolerant way, one which gives proper recognition where it is due, which explains the full depth of the multiple strands which come together in this bizarre and tragic city, and which can both educate the Palestinian people, and edify and educate others who may be interested in learning about the real history of this city. This is not an easy task, given the incredible pressure of circumstances on all of those concerned with an equably shared Jerusalem to write partisan history, history which will respond

to the flood of lies, the calumnies and the racist invective which fills so much of popular and “scholarly” discourse on Jerusalem and related subjects. In fact, however, the best response to such offensive material is sound, convincing, clear scholarship, whose value is readily apparent by comparison with the twisted, distorted and ultimately anti-humanistic message of those who claim Jerusalem for one nationality and one religious tradition, and privilege only the narratives that support that claim.