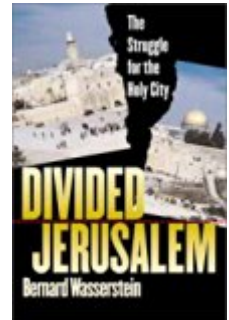


Bernard Wasserstein. *Divided Jerusalem: The Struggle for the Holy City.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001. xix + 440 pp. \$17.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-300-09730-6.



Reviewed by Lorenzo Medici

Published on H-Levant (February, 2003)

The Walls of Jerusalem

Jerusalem, the "city of peace," is one of the most bitterly contested territories on earth. The city has long been grounds for dispute in a conflict based on religion and national sovereignty. This particular feature of the city's past, therefore, has gained the attention of countless scholars who dedicated their work to explaining the history of the Holy City. Bernard Wasserstein's book occupies an important place in this voluminous literature. Unlike some recent works, Wasserstein, professor of history at the University of Glasgow, traces, in this in-depth study, the political and diplomatic events affecting Jerusalem from the Ottoman Conquest of Greater Syria (including Palestine) in 1516 to the present.[1] He also describes the city's constant transformations in size, demography, urban development, and political rule. Basing his account on archives, interviews, and memoirs as well as on a broad bibliography, Wasserstein tells the story of an endless struggle for the "holy places" among Muslims, Jews, and Christians. This last group, he notes, was divided and weakened into various confessions, at the

time when parts of Jerusalem were controlled by Ottomans, Egyptians, French, British Jordanians, and Israelis. While Jerusalem "is a holy city to three world religions," Wasserstein points out that "the holiness of Jerusalem is neither a constant nor an absolute" and that, "considered as a historical phenomenon, the city's sanctity has waxed and waned according to social, economic and cultural conditions, and perhaps above all, political sources" (p. 1).

Wasserstein begins his study with the birth of the religious French protectorate and the capitulatory treaties imposed to pursue the definition of the *status quo* for the Christian holy places. Then, he discusses Russian influence, Egyptian rule, the Prussian-English Protestant bishopric, the effects of the Crimean War, and subsequent French, British, Russian, German, Italian, and American influences. For nearly four centuries, he argues, the European consuls worked against the Ottoman authorities, acting to protect their countries' religious interests and further their political as well as commercial penetration into Palestine. They competed among each other as did their

leaders in the European capitals, while patriarchs and bishops--Greek and Russian Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant--fought over apparently insignificant issues related to the control of Christian holy sites.

British occupation began in December 1917. During the following three decades, the history of the holy city was marked by a bitter Jewish-Arab conflict, while the British Mandate Government acted as an impartial, yet unsuccessful source of balance. In 1948, the struggle between Israelis and Arabs, along with the British withdrawal, resulted in the partition of the city. The mainly Arab-populated East Jerusalem--including the Old City--fell to the Jordanians, while the predominantly Jewish West Jerusalem fell to the Israelis. During the next nineteen years, the western section of the city served as Israel's capital, while the eastern section lost its administrative role and declined to a provincial dimension within the Hashemite Kingdom. In 1967 the Israeli army conquered East Jerusalem (along with the West Bank). The area was eventually unified and formally annexed (with expanded municipal boundaries) under Israeli rule. Yet, as Wasserstein points out, in spite of the Israeli measures to implement unification, Jerusalem remained a divided city in which "the Jewish proportion of the total had shrunk" (p. 356).

Beginning in the 1940s, Wasserstein argues, various plans were developed to address the "Jerusalem Question," with particular attention paid to the occupation of the city and the collapse of any idea of a *corpus separatum*--a project sponsored mainly by the United Nations and the Vatican. Wasserstein, however, does not pay a great deal of attention to the evolution of the Catholic Church's policy toward Jerusalem since 1967.[2] His decision not to pursue this topic seems to be related to the loss of Christian influence in the city's administration and the dramatically decreased Christian presence during the twentieth century. Unfortunately this subject becomes one

of his most interesting, yet less-traveled lines of investigation.

The exploitation of religious feelings by national and political interests is further developed in the book's concluding chapters. Wasserstein explains that Jerusalem itself was the problem that "ultimately prevented any agreement" (p. 313), though for other scholars the refugee problem was, and remains, the core issue. Unlike conventional approaches to this topic, Wasserstein believes that the decline of the Oslo peace process, that ended with the failure of the Camp David negotiations in July 2000, was not related to incompatible religious positions. In his opinion, the Beilin-Abu Mazen draft agreement of October 1995, which became the platform for the Camp David talks, shows that an agreement for the Holy City based on separating religious issues from national interests is indeed possible. Wisely, Wasserstein does not offer a specific solution to the Jerusalem question. His sympathies are with the Beilin-Abu Mazen draft and its diplomatic developments. Yet, in the conclusion of this meticulous and articulate analysis, he points out that demographic trends showing higher Arab growth figures may, in the end, shatter "the dream of many Israelis, after 1967, of Jerusalem as predominantly a Jewish city," and determine its diplomatic and political future (p. 358).

Notes

[1]. Paolo Pieraccini, *Gerusalemme: Luoghi Santi e comunit  religiose nella politica internazionale* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1996); Farouk Mardam-Bey and Elias Sanbar, eds., *Jerusalem: Le sacr  et le politique* (Arles: Sindbad-Actes Sud, 2000); Menachem Klein, *Jerusalem: The Contested City*, trans. Haim Watzman (London: Hurst & Company, 2001); Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Sacred Space: The Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2002); and Raphael Israeli, *Jerusalem Divided: The Armistice Regime*,

1947-1967 (London and Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 2002).

[2]. This argument was discussed by various Italian scholars: Andrea Giovannelli, *La Santa Sede e la Palestina: la custodia di Terra Santa tra la fine dell'Impero ottomano e la guerra dei sei giorni* (Roma: Studium, 2000); and Silvio Ferrari, *Vaticano e Israele: dal secondo conflitto mondiale alla guerra del Golfo* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1991).

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Citation: Lorenzo Medici. Review of Wasserstein, Bernard. *Divided Jerusalem: The Struggle for the Holy City*. H-Levant, H-Net Reviews. February, 2003.

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