

## **Jordanian Jerusalem: Holy Places and National Spaces**

*Kimberly Katz*

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For centuries, Jerusalem has been revered as the holy site of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; strategically coveted as a means to consolidate territorial gains; and conquered thirty-seven times between its foundation and the sequestering of its ancient hub by Israeli forces during the Six-Day War. As the region underwent significant change after World War II, the Holy City increasingly became contested. While the Palestinians nurtured concerns regarding land sales and the escalating influx of Jewish settlers, their appre-

hension became lost amidst the tussle for authority between Transjordan, which sought to affirm its role as custodian of the holy places, and the nascent state of Israel, which strove to strengthen its presence in the city. Charting the endeavors of King Abdullah and King Hussein to assert Transjordan's authority over Jerusalem despite international and Israeli rivalry, Katz affords a unique insight into the multifarious means used to court its residents through events, banknotes, and stamps between 1948 and 1967.

Over the course of seven chapters, the author imbues the text with illuminating figures and maps. Most notable is the 1946 "Palestinian Aid" stamp series initiated during the Bludan Conference in June 1946, during which Abdullah directed member states of the Arab League "to issue a Palestinian stamp whose revenue would be earmarked for Palestine" (p. 56). Yet Abdullah's pro-active stance – the Jordanian Parliament implemented the Arab League resolution on 22 July 1946, followed by the "Additional Stamps Law" Temporary Law 20 of the same year – was ultimately marred by his series of surreptitious meetings with the Jewish Agency. Despite this duplicity, the merit of stamps in preserving stable relations with the Palestinians is adeptly demonstrated throughout the chapter. Similarly, the political nuances behind postcards depicting King Hussein and Gamal Abdul Nasser affectionately united over the Dome of the Rock, as well as an additional series of stamps celebrating Pope Paul VI's pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1964, serve as visual reminders of Jordan's tentative grip on authority during the post-war period and the ever-present desire to retain amicable relations with neighboring leaders.

Drawing on royal speeches, legislation, newspapers, foreign archives, visual sources, and the recollections of individuals residing in Jerusalem during the given period, academic analyses are fused with personal accounts to produce a well-rounded insight into Jordanian Jerusalem. Opening with chapter 1, "Transjordan-in-the-Making," the Hashemites' politico-historical background and involvement in the Holy City is recounted, commencing with Sharif Husayn and culminating with Abdullah ibn al-Husayn. Establishing a foundation from which to venture into the Jordanian administration of Jerusalem, Katz explores the relationship between the Hashemite monarchy and the British during the mandate.

Equally noteworthy is the aforementioned Jewish Agency, with whom Abdullah discussed means of developing Transjordan in Palestine. Whether motivated by avarice or a dogged determination to save Jordan from ruin, Abdullah's "unholy alliance" with the Zionists is objectively accounted for, initially concluding that the unlikely union converged only on the intention of "preventing a Palestinian state from emerging between their two countries

under the rule of the mufti, al-Hajj Amin, their shared enemy” (p. 30). Nevertheless, the result of Abdullah’s action is candidly recounted:

For all of the scheming that transpired between Abdullah and officials in the political section of the Jewish Agency, there was no explicit deal struck. Abdullah and the Zionists, with help from the British and the weak military efforts of the Arab states, prevented the creation of a Palestinian state. (p. 31)

Chapter 2, “State and Nation-Building in Transition: King Abdullah, 1945-1951,” discusses the United Nations plan for partitioning Palestine and Jordan’s victory in the battle. This victory thwarted Israel’s bid to seize the eastern part of Jerusalem, which contains the holy places in the Old City. In addition, the official unification of the West and East Banks in 1950 and how this affected the kingdom’s policymaking are analyzed. The importance of stamps and banknotes for consolidating Jordanian Jerusalem is sustained, although the success is questionable; less perceived as a unifying element, the perseverance by Jordanian officials after 1948 was seen as an attempt “to erase Palestine and Palestinian identity” (p. 49). Indeed, as chapter 4, “Governmental Involvement in Religious Affairs: The Search for Legitimacy” reveals, by the 1960s such promotional films as “The Cradle of Religions” (1958) and “Jordan: The Holy Land” (1966) rarely observed the historical association between the Palestinians and Holy Land, while any potential connections that Israel might hold with the Jewish sites under Jordanian rule were omitted entirely.

Poignantly, in the *Holy Land Newsletter* (December 1962-63), the author praised tourists who visited “Bethlehem, the little Arab town in Jordan” (p. 123). Indicative of the enduring notion that the holy sites were Jordanian, the quip demonstrates the nonchalance with which Jordan appropriated the sites. As the British-appointed mayor of Jerusalem, R. M. Graves, previously censured, “we would be well advised to make it clear to the Jordan Government ... that we are not prepared to allow them to treat the Old City of Jerusalem as though it were nothing more than a provincial townlet in Jordan, without history or importance” (*Experiment in Anarchy* [London: 1949], 88).

The Palestinian people’s inexorable rise against Jordanian authority is charted through chapters 6 and 7, “The Establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization and Its Relationship to Jordan” and “The June 1967 War and Its Effect on Jordan’s Role in Jerusalem,” respectively. By now compelled either to support the stalwart Palestinian entity or prepare for severe

instability, Hussein participated in the PLO's creation. Once more, the significance of stamps and bank notes is lucidly exhibited:

Although creating a flag and national anthem are important steps for any nation-building project, they do not represent substantial power. The issuance of banknotes and postage stamps, while also important for the nation-building project, represent the power of a national state. (pp. 139-40)

The challenge of circumventing the popular notion of identity constructed around geographical and demographic realities is neatly met, as *Jordanian Jerusalem* provides an expansive regional overview of the relationship between state and non-state bodies, while affording a scholarly insight into alternative mechanisms active in the formation of identity during a period of national upheaval.

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