


# Book Review: Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History and The Future of the Holy City by Michael Dumper

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*Michael Dumper aims to plot a history of Jerusalem that examines how Christians, Jews and Muslims have contributed to the sense of borders within the city. Gary Wilson finds that the approach adopted is highly original and the book offers some genuine food for thought. The style of writing adopted avoids unnecessary jargon and phrasing, making this a very accessible text that can be read and enjoyed by scholars.*

**Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History and The Future of the Holy City.**  
**Michael Dumper. Columbia University Press. 2014.**

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Find this book: 

Few cities have played such a major role in history as that of Jerusalem, a place of sacred importance to the world's three great monotheistic religions. The contemporary significance of the city is underpinned by the extent to which its status features in ongoing initiatives to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This book by Michael Dumper, a well-established expert on Jerusalem at the [University of Exeter](#), seeks to further our understanding of issues concerning the status of the city through an exploration of the complexities of space and the various controls that are exercised over different areas of the city and aspects of everyday life there.

At the outset, Dumper outlines four themes which run through the book. Firstly, it is concerned with paradoxes in the status of Jerusalem, the highly internationalized nature of the city limiting its subjection to state sovereignty. Secondly, it considers the pattern of religious reclamation of Jerusalem. Thirdly, it considers Jerusalem's status as a divided and partially occupied city in comparative perspective. Finally, the role played by external actors in both the history of the city and its prospective future are considered.

Five substantive chapters make up the book, each of which is principally concerned with a different aspect of Jerusalem's status in broadly spatial terms. Chapter one is concerned with the 'hard borders' of Jerusalem. These have been a major source of dispute throughout time, the chapter tracing developments from the 1947 partition plan through to the present day. Israel's extension of its municipal boundaries to encompass the whole territory of Jerusalem following the 1967 six-day war is widely condemned as illegal under international law, a view reinforced by the International Court of Justice's pronouncement of its 'separation barrier' straddling through occupied territory as unlawful. Israel's de facto exercise of authority over the entire city has, however, increased the Palestinian population of the state of Israel and introduced various problems associated with the issue of travel permits which control everyday movement for Palestinians living and working in Jerusalem.

Chapter two gives consideration to 'soft borders' that are present within Jerusalem, those less formal mechanisms through which the population of the city is segregated. The case studies of elections and education are utilised to demonstrate ways in which Palestinian identity in the city has been fostered. Although entitled to vote in both Israeli and Palestinian municipal elections, the former have largely been boycotted by the Palestinian population, which at the same time has been able to develop an educational curriculum that is tailored and taught to Palestinian children.



*The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem. Credit: [jasonwain](#) CC BY-NC-SA 2.0*

The religious significance of Jerusalem for Christians, Jews and Muslims is well established. The 'scattered borders of holiness' is the title accorded to chapter three, which considers the extent to which these three religious communities have contributed to the sense of borders within Jerusalem. It is noted that each religion serves as an umbrella for various groups. Orthodox Judaism has contributed to a set of norms specific to its communities, albeit not necessarily supported by secular Jews. Christian communities have been in steep decline but retain a formidable role in key areas, especially tourism. The Muslim community enjoys some influence in relation to the Dome of the Rock. One key development of recent decades has been the growing influence of the Israeli settler movement, which has acquired important positions in key agencies, serving as a 'vehicle for Jewish encroachment' by the state of Israel. This, combined with Palestinian resistance, in the view of the author risks the 'Hebronization' of Jerusalem.

The penultimate chapter of the book is concerned with the role played by the international community in the affairs of Jerusalem, highlighting the limitations placed upon the exercise of any state's sovereignty over the city. This international interest in Jerusalem is not new, having historical antecedents which date back centuries. International support for joint sovereignty over Jerusalem is strong, and the UN has played a major role in the affairs of the city since the creation of the organization as the myriad of UN documents pertaining to the city and UN agencies involved with it stand testament to. A key role in the city is enjoyed by UNESCO today. Other particularly relevant external actors where Jerusalem's affairs are concerned include the European Union, United States, and Palestinian National Authority, each of which receive some attention.

The final chapter attempts to look forward and consider the status of Jerusalem in the twenty-first century, with reference to the possible resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in respect of the city. An overview is provided of the various initiatives which have been advanced to provide for a peaceful resolution of this issue, with detailed treatment given to two proposals for sharing sovereignty over Jerusalem – the Geneva and Jerusalem Old City initiatives – and the various problems which accompany them. Ultimately, the author is not overly optimistic about the prospects of peaceful resolution of the issues which continue to divide the Israeli and Palestinian communities sharing the same city. In light of the historic context amply presented in the book, this is understandable.

This is a very worthwhile addition to any library, bolstering as it does understanding of not only issues related to Middle Eastern affairs, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and life within Jerusalem, but also more generally the politics of space – both physical and theoretical – that operate within the context of a divided city. The approach adopted is highly original and the book offers some genuine food for thought in relation to the issues which it gives consideration to. The style of writing adopted avoids unnecessary jargon and phrasing, making this a very accessible text that can be read and enjoyed by scholars within the field as well as educated and informed readers with an interest in Middle Eastern affairs more generally.

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