

I Dream of Jerusalem

Drs. Weininger and Henze,

The both of you know how I feel about your course. Whether it was in private conversation, our class forums, or meetings with Jewish advisory boards and college counselors, I have professed my adoration for RELI392 and, by proxy, Jerusalem. Now, I find myself in a curious position—having to somehow reframe my feelings about the Holy City in an altogether unique fashion, as to not only set my work apart from that of my peers but also to distinguish it from my own past dialogues.

I must acknowledge that Jerusalem cannot be adequately captured or explicated in any number beautifully strung phrases, adeptly shot video, or any other medium but firsthand experience. Stating this explicitly, I no longer operate under any mistaken assumptions that I will do the city justice with my writing or the final project I have created below.

Jerusalem is a city of irony. For those who come to its various sites seeking answers, I believe some leave more bewildered than when they arrived. For all the religions in Jerusalem which preach peace and love, there is more apprehension and fear of the “other” than in many places (although perhaps this is an unfair claim for me to make, hailing from the United States.) For all its ironies, however, Jerusalem remains steadfast in the hearts and cultural memories of billions of people. Why?

Because Jerusalem is a city of the imagination. It is not the daily contradictions which define the city for the visitor, nor is it the squabbles between religious sects which change the understanding of home to the resident. It is the ideation of Jerusalem, the unique constitution of the city conjured in each person’s head which make it important. Certainly, the factual history of Jerusalem has created some context of that idea, but it is the interpretation of the image which defines its significance. The cultural memory of Jerusalem directly shapes the imagined Holy City.

I arrived in Jerusalem with certain expectations. In most cases, my expectations did not line up with my realities. I expected to be emotionally or religiously moved at the Western Wall. I ended up being moved--right along, by an Orthodox man vying for a spot (a bit of cringe-worthy satire--there was plenty of room on the men’s side.) I did not expect to be moved by our visit to Bethlehem, but our walk through the market made me feel intrusive and unwanted in a most eye-opening fashion. I made friends I never would have otherwise, with whom I became close through discussions about faith and conflict, in the city and beyond.

Above all, our trip to Jerusalem taught me that while realities can change your perspective, and hearing different opinions can better inform your own opinion, these events won’t necessarily change how you feel. As I’ve mentioned, my grandmother used to read me stories about Jerusalem during the British Mandate. At the time these stories were written, Jerusalem was still a foreign idea—a sort of oasis of British civility in the Orient. While today many of us would gasp at this controversial and offensive perspective, the youthful fascination they issued me remained intact. If anything, Jerusalem’s appeal has been aggravated into a sort of frenzy. Fantastical scenes of ancient miners digging two tunnels and meeting in the middle. King David secreting up a well in order to surprise the Jebusites and take the city via subterfuge. Tales of the archaeological treasures which reside under the Temple Mount, which remain enshrouded in mystery today due to religious and political tensions.

In this preface I hopefully convey my feelings and thoughts which might not be discernable in the poetry below. RELI392 radically changed the way I see the world. The class impassioned me to be bolder in my opinions and, more importantly, to truly listen and strive to understand and respect other opinions. Drs. Weininger and Henze, thank you for a tremendous trip and semester.

– Isaac Schultz

The Flag

Above the ramparts
The flag billows
Swelling with pride
Bursting at the seams

David's star, the heart upon its sleeve
Declaring to the world
That "we" are one Israel

But pockmarks
and barricaded windows
Mar the idyll
Testimonies of a darker truth
Absconded in the statehood story

Disregarding a history, the star shines
Disregarding the tumult, it loftily looks
Out over its people
And its residents
And its visitors
And its friends
And its many, many enemies

The flag waves euphemistically
Claiming the land
The realization of the Zionist dream



Gethsemane

Ancient life breathes
Placemark of the son of God
Blood pools at the trees



Ode to Rugelach

Not all of Israel is so political
Some of it is chocolate-filled
Some of it is glazed in sugar
Some of it makes one reconsider
Why fight when you can bite?

The rolls of rugelach come in racks
Hot, sticky tubes, oozing peace of mind
Chocolate granules stick to one another
And find homes in the crevices between your
bicuspid and your molars

Oh! How the little ones have been prepped
Since their conception, bred for slaughter
Nonetheless, they line up unceasingly
Proud of their purpose, determined in mission
To be ground up by relentless, detached jaws

Each roll follows its fallen comrades into the fray
And is similarly shredded, chewed up, up and
away
Beautiful, deluded rugelach, a tool of joy
For man's little indulgence after another day
In the otherwise intensely political Israeli climate



The Dome of the Rock

Slick stone parquet
Peppered with people
and chilled puddles
Play plaza to the main
attraction:
The Dome of the Rock.

The golden centerpiece
of Jerusalem
Loses no luster on a
rainy day
It is a symbol of strength
It is a beacon of faith



The Kidron

From the base of the Moriah

We looked at the unadorned double-arched Gate

Stony walls stand as guardians to the graves

Of the children

Of Abraham

I mean Avraham

I mean Ibrahim

Mustard tones and palm leaves adorn

The vibrant array at the **doorstep of history**

Desert sands, marred by oasis

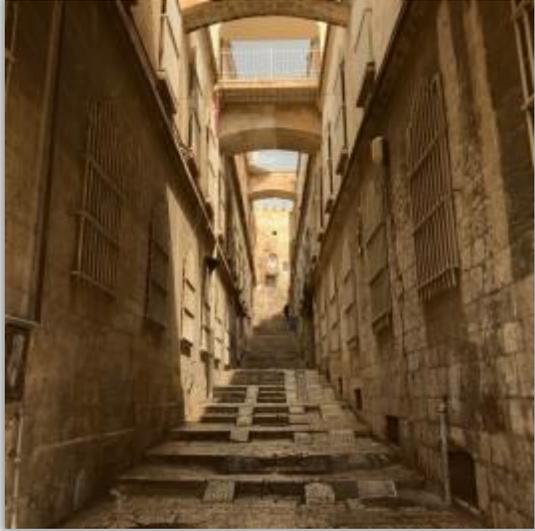
Promise Land, facing Resting Places

The dappled plain is undeveloped

A testimony, perhaps, to time-tested tradition

No one wants to live in Hell

No one dreams of blest perdition



Alleyways

Jerusalem conjures reveries
Of faith and quiet
Of faith and chaos
Of conflict and coexistence
Of golden domes and holy tombs

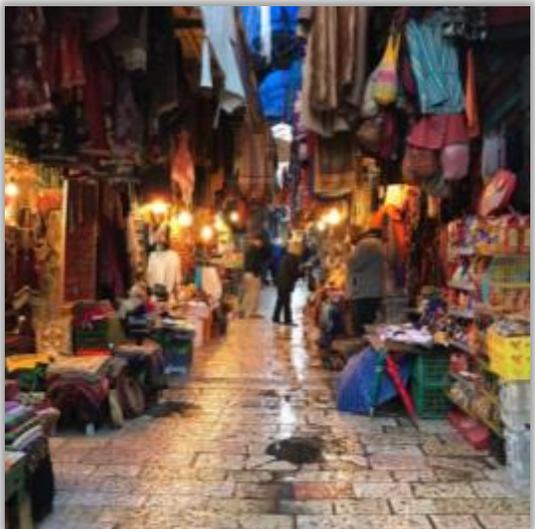
But these little moments don't
Capture
These little thoughts don't
Consider
Corridors of existence

Jerusalem stone is anything but white
The color palette consists of moods
The Muslim Quarter: a declaratory gold
The Jewish Quarter: Somber blacks and greens
The Christian Quarter: the vibrant allure of tourist traps



I will miss
Near symmetry
Which seem to pull you in
An Orthodox man returning home
With his groceries
A Jerusalem cat
Slinking down the stairs
After some unseen Jerusalem rat

The alleys are not like postcards
They do not advertise
They consist of realities
And in doing so
Capture the imagination





Things Heaven and Hell
About 18 inches
Separate Heaven from Hell
Haven from Cell
“Us” from “them”

There is no exact equation
To find the price of safety
But it’s something like
The reciprocal
Of freedom
Multiplied by wellbeing
Divided in two

A promised land, split
Because apparently what was promised
Was already owned

The greyness spans forever
Separating the blue sky from brown earth
Freedom from grounded
Heaven from Hell

The Market
In Bethlehem
One can see the Church
Off the tourist trail
One can see Bethlehem

In Palestine, we are voyeurs
A different life subsists
On hand-me-downs and tension
On “national” pride and strife

We walk to the market
A man in boots with black plastic bags
Child in tow
Eyes us

Looks of suspicion, discomfort
“Why are they here?”





The Wall Pt. 1

Sorry
You can't come this way
We know you have before
But now it's different

You'll have to go
The l o n g w a y
Just up some ways and
Through the checkpoint

Your credentials
Check out
Please get in line
I mean crowd
I mean clusterfuck

We apologize
For the inconvenience
But the detour is necessary
For our safety

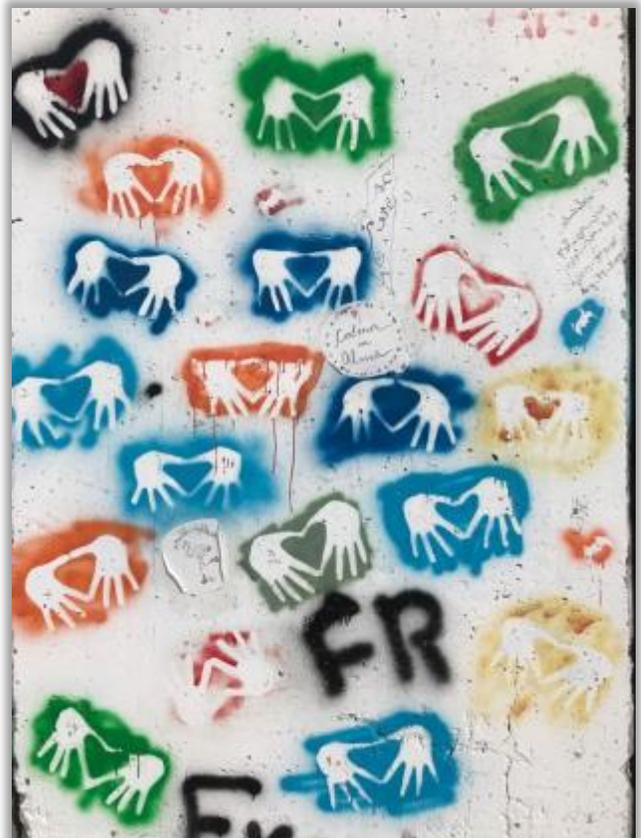
The Hands Point Downwards

The Hands point downwards as they push up
Against oppression
They finger form hearts
On cold cement

Messages scrawl testimony
To opinion, not struggle
Testimony of struggle is not on the wall
It is Beyond it

And the Hands point downwards
But faces look up
At the vastness
The messages stretch only
Up eight feet or so

Between the sky and the spraypaint
There is just the grey
of Concrete realities.





ISAWIYA

An Arab village sits
Beyond West Jerusalem
Abutting freedom

I think it was not long ago
That barriers were put up
Because bottles and things
Were thrown by Arabs
Towards students' cars

My town is a dog in kennel
Surrounded by high lands
and Jewish people
The Wall backs it into a
corner

With nowhere to turn
The dog lashes out

Judea

Desert hills undulate
East of Jerusalem
Rocky aridity
Spans from city to sea

Across Israel and into Jordan
Sunbeams dance across the sands
While people in suits
Play Risk with the borderlands

Here, the Bedouin roam
Here, Jesus walked
Here, lives unravel
Get put together
And once assembled, fray

In a country of dichotomies
The Judean is the great equalizer
Neither Palestinian nor Israeli
Survives; in this heat, man wilts

So the desert remains untouched
While the rest of the country is swallowed up





Canyon

The group stood at the edge
A natural, mottled brown precipice
Hewn by water and time

The stone space dwarves visitors
Who stand
In awe of the world
And its
Wonders

Hyrax yowls
Birds, zoom and chirp
Captivated humans
Had forgotten
Natural beauty

All they really wanted
After all
Was to return
To the WiFi zone!

Megafauna

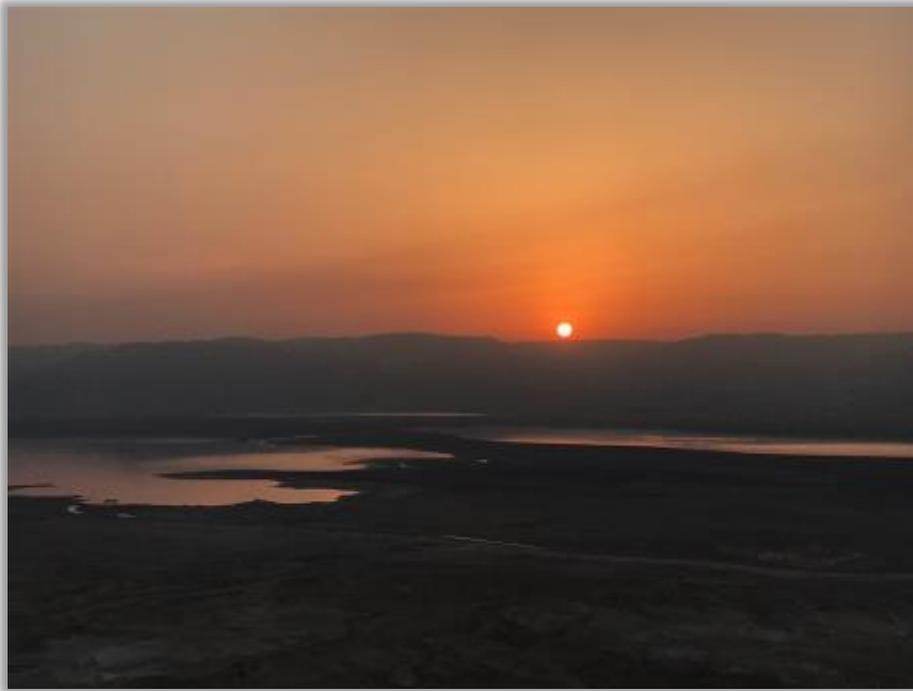
Above the waterfall of David
Where he laid in wait
To spring upon Saul

Biblical proportions abound
Ferns as big as Goliath
Beget spores and
Seedlings which tower over
Enshroud you, cool and safe
In shadow

The lush oasis, too,
Is dwarfed
By the straddling cliffs

Mythic world and mortal men
Ever since David
A match made in Heaven





Sunrise

Gasping for air
Which is thin atop
Masada

Eking out each molecule
Body shudders, head aches
Saline drips and the group
collects
Itself

Disc peeks
Judean haze, pierced
By rays
Which seek out the students

It bathes them
Cleansing them
Of sweat and pain

The Oldest Sickle

No way...
Are they
For real?

It seems a bit
Presumptuous
To label this
As they did

Even if it is
Y'know
The Oldest Sickle
How would they know?

Have they dug up
Every sickle
Ever?

A failed ploy,
I think
This none-too-subtle claim
Does not convince me
Of anything
But some motives





The Wall Pt. 2

Come now, come!
To see the great Wall
Of Jerusalem

It may not be the one
You hear about these days
But if these walls could talk
They would speak of ages

Plight
And Peace
And more Plight

So come one, come all!
Okay not all
But come, some
To the great Walls
Of Jerusalem



The Wall Pt. 3

| | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Come now, come! | On the eve of Purim | Rejoice at the Wall | This wall is safety |
| To see the great Wall | It seems fitting | and its fortitude | It is proximity |
| Of Jerusalem | To pray here | And its security | To God's love |