**Building the Capital**

**Thoughts, Plans, and Practice in the Process of Making West Jerusalem the Capital City of the State of Israel, 1948-1967**

**Abstract**

The Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel makes no mention of the country’s aspirations regarding its borders; neither does it mention the name of the state’s capital. The absence of these features was due to the state of war that the country faced at the time of the declaration, as well as the fact that according to the Partition Plan (UN Resolution 181), Jerusalem was supposed to come under international control. During the war, control of Jerusalem was divided between the State of Israel and the Kingdom of Jordan. Given this reality, Israel (and Jordan) withdrew consent to the Partition Plan, and Israel began to act in the west of the City. This article discusses Israel’s actions in the area of Jerusalem under its control. In December 1949, it was officially decided to transfer the institutions of government to Jerusalem. The state institutions were initially scattered around the city, but a government compound began to be developed later. The article will focus on the development of this compound, presenting the decisions that were implemented in order to turn it into a capital within a city. Despite serious difficulties and the absence of systemic development, significant changes occurred in the urban landscape of Jerusalem during this period.

Toward the end of the Ottoman period, the urban space of Jerusalem underwent significant changes. Residential neighborhoods were established outside the Old City, roads were paved, and municipal infrastructures established. During the same period, the city’s status was upgraded and a governor was appointed, though this administrative development did not include the definition of a new status for the city on the national level.[[1]](#endnote-1) During the period of rule of the British Mandate, Jerusalem was defined for the first time since the Crusader era as the capital of the country, and its spatial development continued. In keeping with this new status, a small number of governmental institutions were established in the city, most notably the High Commissioner’s residence. Most of the governmental institutions were housed in existing buildings (rented or confiscated), and these were dispersed around numerous sites across the city. When the British left Jerusalem in May 1948, they did not leave behind a clearly-defined governmental space.[[2]](#endnote-2) After the establishment of the State of Israel and the end of the 1948 War of Independence, the leaders of the state worked to transform West Jerusalem into the young nation’s capital. Their success in creating a defined governmental compound within a divided city (see below) dramatically changed the urban landscape, and this change is the subject of our article. The article will focus on the first two decades following the establishment of the state (through 1967). During this period, the governmental compound in the city was defined and the first construction works were undertaken in the compound. The article will present the plans for the development of the capital, illustrating the changes that occurred in the urban landscape within the above-mentioned period. Exposing the planning, development, and building processes will serve as the basis for sketching a profile of the process by which the capital was integrated in the urban space of Jerusalem, and for determining the spatial significance of this process for the city. The article is based on diverse historical sources enabling a presentation of the decisions taken concerning the capital city and the spatial changes that occurred.

Capital cities constitute a quintessential manifestation of government presence and of the inherent symbolism of the ruler, and as such they have formed an integral part of most forms of government and most rulers throughout history.[[3]](#endnote-3) The existence of capitals has been regarded as an obvious feature since the earliest times, and all the more so in the modern era. Accordingly, the capital has become part of the mental map of any state, and capital cities enjoy special status and conditions.[[4]](#endnote-4) Researchers have found it difficult to identify any single model or method for the process of the selection and creation of a city as a capital. What is clear is that the selection and building processes of these cities reflect political, diplomatic, social, and economic processes and are dependent on time and place.[[5]](#endnote-5) Throughout history, tradition has played a significant role in the selection of cities to serve as capitals. However, tradition is only one of a large number of factors that have influenced the selection and development of these cities. Indeed, in other cases the desire to innovate and to create a new tradition have led to the decision to grant a city the status of capital and to transfer the governmental institutions to this city (an example of this is Ankara as a replacement for Istanbul).[[6]](#endnote-6) In other instances, neither tradition nor its breaking have been important factors, and the decision regarding the capital has instead reflected a desire to create something new and unifying (Washington, DC, and Brasilia).

In terms of the functions that should be included in a capital city, the main factors that are usually mentioned include governmental institutions: the office and residence of the head of state; a building representing the people, certainly in the case of a democratic regime; and government ministries. In addition, the capital also includes facilities and buildings that have symbolic significance and are intended to promote the consolidation of national identity in general (memorials, religious monuments, tombs, and so forth) and the identity of the capital city in particular.[[7]](#endnote-7)

In addition to the selection of the capital and the determination of the institutions it will house, two other key factors influence the shaping of the capital’s landscape: the duration (and intensity) of the process and the budget available for spatial development. Regarding duration, even at this point we can assert that the process has not been completed in the case of Jerusalem. Numerous actions have been taken over the years to promote spatial change and renewal in the capital, for diverse reasons: functional needs, new governmental requirements, and so forth. Meanwhile, the financing of the construction process is influenced by the economy of the state, and of the city in particular.[[8]](#endnote-8) In this article we will not discuss the economic aspects of the transformation of Jerusalem into a capital. Rather, we will focus our discussion on the following questions: When and by whom was the decision taken to grant this status to the city? How did the capital integrate within the existing urban fabric? And what changes occurred in the urban landscape during the period 1948-1967?

The decision to transform Jerusalem into a capital city has been examined in the past, and studies show that tradition and the status of the city in collective Jewish and national memory played an important role in the decision. Due to the security circumstances that emerged in Jerusalem following the 1948 War of Independence, no official status was attributed to Jerusalem. However, this position later changed. The change in Israeli policy toward the city occurred against the background of the plans to deprive the State of Israel of control of the city.[[9]](#endnote-9) During the early days of the state, Tel Aviv was the seat of the state institution, while the capital waited, as it were, for a time when it would be possible to transfer these institutions to Jerusalem.[[10]](#endnote-10) Pending the implementation of this decision, several decisions were taken regarding the space in the city (see below), and these influenced the development of the capital.

After describing the security situation in the city, we will offer a chronological review of several issues relating to the establishment of national buildings and institutions in and around the governmental compound. This description will allow us to examine the process by which Jerusalem became a capital. The establishment of a dedicated government compound in the divided city of Jerusalem – the capital area – was, as mentioned above, an innovation in terms of the city’s history. This innovation was based on the tradition about the central importance of Jerusalem, rather than on the basis of the geographical conditions.[[11]](#endnote-11)

**From Opposition to Internationalization of the City to Defining a Dedicated Compound for Governmental Institutions**

According to the Partition Plan approved by the UN General Assembly (Resolution 181), Jerusalem was supposed to remain under the management of the United Nations for ten years, alongside the two states (Jewish and Arab) that were due to be established. The various reactions to this plan led to the outbreak of a violent conflict between the Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine. Following the outbreak of the war, the leadership of the Yishuv acted to ensure the wellbeing and security of the Jewish community in the city, which numbered some 100,000 people just before the war erupted. By the time the State of Israel was declared (14 May, 1948), the Jewish forces already held extensive areas in the west of the city. After the Kingdom of Jordan (together with additional armies) joined the battle against the State of Israel, the urban reality in Jerusalem changed again. The soldiers of the Jordanian League managed to conquer the Old City and threatened Jewish control of Mount Scopus (which was home to the Hebrew University and Hadassah hospital). In July 1948, the battle for the city stabilized, and control was divided between the armies. At the end of November 1948, the sides signed the “honest truce agreement” and the partition of the city between Israel and the Kingdom of Jordan became an accomplished fact.[[12]](#endnote-12)

In light of the military achievements of the IDF in the Jerusalem area, a change occurred in the position of the Israeli leadership regarding the future of the city. The leadership was no longer willing to accept the United Nations’ decision concerning Jerusalem. Although the government of Israel did not declare this position publicly (for the present), it began to act to thwart any attempt to bring the city under international control.[[13]](#endnote-13) During the period of August 1948 through February 1949, a military governor was appointed for the city and charged with the task of ensuring civilian control in the areas of the city held by the IDF.[[14]](#endnote-14) In effect, the governor’s mission was to prove Israeli control over the western section of the city, and actions began within this reality. During the period of the military governor, the Supreme Court began to operate in the city. The decision to activate a Supreme Court was not taken on the basis of any clearly-formulated plan, but reflected technical and professional circumstances. The availability of a facility for the court (in the court buildings that had served the Mandate government) and the fact that the justices appointed to the Court lived in the city were among the factors that led to this decision.[[15]](#endnote-15) The activation of the Supreme Court was the first harbinger of the official presence of the State of Israel in the divided city.

In February 1949, the military government was abolished and the Jerusalem Municipality resumed its operations. The task of planning the city was allocated to the Planning Division in the Prime Minister’s Office (under the responsibility of architect Heinz Rau). As part of the planning work, the government adopted the proposal of the geographer Zalman Lifschitz to reserve (and plan) an area for the government within the confines of the western city.[[16]](#endnote-16) Following Lifschitz’s proposal, actions began to expropriate the intended area.[[17]](#endnote-17) After the completion of this process, an area of some 1600 dunams was made available for the government within and adjacent to the western city, earmarked for the governmental compound (Figure 1).[[18]](#endnote-18)

MAP

Figure 1: Area expropriated for the establishment of the governmental compound (area surrounded by the green line). As of the date of expropriation, this area actually lay outside the municipal boundaries as established by the British. In the mid-1950s, the borders of Jerusalem were expanded and the area of the future government compound was brought within the city limits (source: Map of Jerusalem 1:10,000; State Archives Area of Compound in Jerusalem, Maps C-5442/2).

By December 1949, when the official status of Jerusalem was publicly changed, the central government had already begun to have a presence in the city. The first institution absorbed in the city was integrated in urban space on the basis of functional tradition and the availability of buildings. During this period, the first seeds of change were also sown ahead of more substantial spatial change in the form of reserving space for the future development of the capital in the city.

**From Actions to a Decision**

From February to December 1949, when the government and the Knesset announced the change in Jerusalem’s status, several more actions were undertaken to strengthen the Israeli presence in the west of the city.[[19]](#endnote-19) One of these actions was to relocate the tomb of Benjamin Ze’ev Herzl, the founder of Zionism, from Vienna to Jerusalem.[[20]](#endnote-20) The decision on this matter was taken following the approval of a law on the subject by the Knesset. Later, the municipal boundaries of the city were amended to include the burial place. The reinternment ceremony for Herzl was held in August 1949 and attended by tens of thousands of people. The decision to locate the “new” tomb in Jerusalem reflected the sense of confidence among the nation’s leadership regarding the future of the city. In November 1949, it was decided to establish one of the country’s two military cemeteries close to Herzl’s tomb. A few years later, the central memorial site for the Holocaust was also established on a nearby site on the same mountain (Yad VaShem, 1953). Thus an area of national remembrance and perpetuation was created in the southwest of Jerusalem.[[21]](#endnote-21) This area would later become a focal point for national activities and for hosting foreign dignitaries, according to standard diplomatic practice. Thus the development of a national commemorative space in this part of the city was both an example of spatial change and a platform for reinforcing the city’s status in terms of consciousness.

Even before December 1949, the government acted to change the patterns of its presence in the city. As part of this effort, the government adopted several decisions concerning the transfer of various government ministries to the city. The implementation of these decisions encountered numerous difficulties and was achieved in a restricted manner.[[22]](#endnote-22)

During the deliberations of the United Nations General Assembly in the winter of 1949, a proposal to revive the plan to internalize Jerusalem was discussed. The Israeli government and the Knesset addressed this issue. In response to the United Nations discussion, the Knesset decided (in accordance with a government decision) to transfer the institutions of state to Jerusalem. The joy that erupted in the Knesset following this decision, including applause, was accompanied by concern at the possible response of the international community.[[23]](#endnote-23) However, the chief concern from this point on was to implement the decision. At this time, the state was in possession only of land earmarked for the establishment of a governmental compound and a general outline for the development of this compound. There were no practical plans for establishing a capital in the city.[[24]](#endnote-24)

**Planning the Governmental Compound**

The day after the Knesset adopted the decision to transfer the state institutions to Jerusalem, David Ben-Gurion visited the city to search for a location for his offices.[[25]](#endnote-25) Ben-Gurion did not have many options, and his office was duly established in the National Institutions building. Other government ministries later “migrated” to the city, with the exception of the Foreign Ministry (see below) and the Ministry of Defense. The ministries that moved to Jerusalem were housed within the built-up area of the city, taking advantage of vacant buildings and expropriating additional properties. The deployment of the ministries was not systematic and was based on the availability and size of the rooms.[[26]](#endnote-26) Parallel to this process, work began to plan and develop the dedicated compound.

Even prior to the decision of the government and the Knesset in December 1949, a general outline had already been formulated for the construction of the governmental compound. This generalized outline included the division of the area for various functions (civilian-cultural centers; various services; housing for civil servants, and so forth).[[27]](#endnote-27) This general outline provided the basis for the commencement of orderly planning works for the area. A committee named the Compound Committee was established for the purpose of planning and executing the establishment of the governmental compound and was active through June 1954. Following the formation of the committee, it was decided to hold an architectural competition to plan the compound – a familiar and accepted practice. The Compound Committee considered two options regarding the type of competition: an open competition (intended for all architects) or a restricted competition in which the competitors would be invited in advance. The decision to opt for a restricted competition reflected concern that an open process would reveal to the public the fact that, contrary to official declarations, the government did not have a plan for building the capital.[[28]](#endnote-28) For the purpose of the competition, the Compound Committee prepared a document in January 1950 that presented technical and thematic information concerning the desired appearance of the government compound. The discussions regarding the formulation of this document have not been identified. It may be assumed that the organizational reality in which the state institutions operated in Tel Aviv formed a significant factor in formulating the plan for Jerusalem. According to the document, the government compound was due to include: The Knesset building; the President’s Office; the Prime Minister’s Office; four government buildings; ancillary buildings; a square for holding parades; and an ornamental garden (intended for receptions). The document also included a requirement to fence in the area in order to separate it from the city, and in all probability also for security reasons. The document did not make any mention of or reference to any building with national-religious significance, perhaps because its authors anticipated that such a space would develop on Mount Herzl. Only a decade later, in 1958, was an official national-religious center inaugurated in Jerusalem – the Chief Rabbinate building.[[29]](#endnote-29) The Heichal Shlomo building was funded by donations from the Wolfson family and constructed close to the city center, rather than in the government compound. The reason for this was that the plot of land for the building had been purchased during the Mandate period (1946), and in the absence of any demand to the contrary, the promoters of the project adhered to the original planning.

The guidelines for the competition to design the governmental compound did not specify the desired architectural features. The document did, however, address the subject of the location of the chief building in the compound: “The Prime Minister’s Office will be one of the five emphasized blocks of buildings, with a representative appearance…”[[30]](#endnote-30)

The architectural proposals were submitted for adjudication in April 1950. A few days later, the Adjudication Committee convened. The brief period available to prepare and adjudicate the plans testifies to the pressure facing the government regarding the construction of the governmental institutions in the city. The committee members examined nine proposals according to predetermined criteria. After discussing the various plans, a plan prepared by architects Alfred Mansfeld and Munio Weinraub was chosen as the winning bid. In their grounds, the adjudicators noted the ‘fine composition. The emphasis of the groups and clusters of buildings is positive […] The planning establishes the compound as an autonomous unit with an attractive and representative center, yet there is also appropriate dispersal.”[[31]](#endnote-31) The plan was approved by the government, but immediately after the publication of the results, it was clarified to those involved that changes might be made in the final plan. This was indeed the case, despite protests by the successful architects.[[32]](#endnote-32) The final plan for the construction of the government compound, published in September 1950, differed from the winning bid. The request by the successful architects to be involved in planning and implementing the changes was rejected by the Compound Committee, and the changes made to the plan were many.[[33]](#endnote-33) Moreover, the actual construction was undertaken without regard to the agreed-upon planning. The first buildings constructed were three government ministries, including the Office of the Prime Minister. These offices were built on a ridge intended as part of the government compound, close to the entrance to the compound; but rather than facing east, they were located on the western edge of the ridge.[[34]](#endnote-34) The expropriation of the area for the government compound restricted the government to a specific area and was ostensibly a positive feature. As we have seen, however, bureaucratic procedures, and probably also budgetary difficulties and the lack of resources, prevented systematic development in accordance with the planning. This process hampered the work, and the form of the government compound changed many times during the period under discussion.

**Institution-Building**

The guidelines for the architectural competition stated that the governmental compound would also include the Knesset building. According to Mansfeld and Weinraub’s plan, the building was supposed to be situated in the northwest section of the compound, close to buildings earmarked for the state president and the Office of the Prime Minister. After it was decided not to establish the compound according to the winning plan, it was proposed that the Knesset building be positioned in the center of the governmental compound.

As discussions continued regarding the planning and development of the area, the Knesset began to operate in Jerusalem. Immediately after Hanukkah (5710), the Knesset resumed its sessions at the National Institutions building in the city, while a search began to find a suitable location for its ongoing operation. A committee established by the Knesset Speaker was charged with responsibility for this search. The committee invited government officials to its meetings, but did not include representatives of the municipality. During the course of the discussions, several options were mentioned, including the Anglo-Palestine Bank building (at the end of Jaffa Street close to the borderline) and Beit Ha’am (near the city center; the building had not yet been completed at the time. After extensive discussions, it was decided to prepare Frumkin House in the city center for use as a temporary home for the Knesset.[[35]](#endnote-35) Frumkin House was chosen due to its location and accessibility. Other factors included its relative distance from the borderline and the potential to adapt the building for the Knesset’s operations (Figure No. 2). In March 1950, the Knesset held its first session in the building, where it operated through 1966.

Photo

Figure No. 2: The Knesset in Its Home in Frumkin House in the Heart of Jerusalem, 1956

(Source: National Photograph Collection, Photograph No. D660-032)

In February 1955, some five years after the decision to move the institutions to Jerusalem, the government decided to establish a new building for the Knesset. The winning plan in an architectural competition was submitted by architect Ossip (Joseph) Klarwein. After the decision was announced in public, serious criticisms were raised in various quarters. Following this pressure, the architect was sent abroad to study the design of national institutions and the implementation of the plan was postponed. Further delays were caused following the decision to involve additional architects in planning the building.[[36]](#endnote-36) Before the planning work was completed, it was decided to lay a cornerstone for the building on the intended site. In October 1958, a ceremony was held, attended by representatives of the donor family (the Rothschilds). Although the location of the building was determined, the planning activities were completed only six years later. Construction could then begin, and the Knesset building was eventually dedicated in August 1966.[[37]](#endnote-37)

The decision taken by the Knesset and government in December 1949 determined that both institutions would move to Jerusalem. The situation was less clear concerning the President’s Residence. Dr. Chaim Weizmann was elected to serve as the President of the Provisional Council of State in May 1948, and in February 1949 he was sworn in as President under the provisions of the Transition Law. This law defined the functions and electoral process for the president, but did not specify the place where he was to be based.[[38]](#endnote-38) After he was sworn in, Dr. Weizmann returned to his home in Rehovot, from where he continued to serve in his position. His poor state of health and the lack of appropriate infrastructures for hosting guests in Jerusalem appear to have been the main reasons why Weizmann did not relocate to the city.[[39]](#endnote-39) After Dr. Weizmann’s death, Member of Knesset Yitzhak Ben-Zvi was elected to replace him as state president. As a resident of Jerusalem, the newly-elected president preferred to remain in his home (in the Rehavia neighborhood of the city) and to perform his position from there. Ben-Zvi justified his decision by explaining that he wished to serve among his people, perhaps hinting that the proposed location for the government was detached from the city and the people.[[40]](#endnote-40) In light of his decision, Ben-Zvi’s period of office (which ended in 1963) also failed to see the relocation of the President’s Residence to the governmental compound. Until 1971, when the new Residence was constructed, the compound prepared in Rehavia served as the de facto residence of the state presidents.

As noted, the area of the city intended as the governmental compound was determined as early as April 1949. During the initial construction phases, significant changes were made not only in terms of the deployment of the buildings, but also in deciding which buildings would form part of the compound. Various factors were involved and it is not possible to isolate a single, primary cause. The Compound Committee appears to have enjoyed limited strength and faced strong pressure. Together with the financial difficulties, this hampered orderly development. These difficulties did not prevent the ongoing work to transfer the activities of the state institutions to Jerusalem, and the city duly came to be identified as the nation’s capital. Within slightly less than five years from the date of the decision to transfer the institutions to the city, there were preliminary but clear signs of the emergence of a distinctive government compound. This presence was overt, despite the fact that not all the governmental functions were concentrated in this area.

**A Green Area and Progress in Developing the Government Compound**

The architectural plan for the compound stated that a park was to be established in part of the area. The features of the park were not defined in the initial period, but it was clear that the compound would not be built up intensively and that it would include open areas. At the first meeting of the committee established to plan the gardens in the compound, a plan was presented for the development of a central park and the committee discussed the location of pools and the connection between the park and the government offices. The construction of the park was based on the planting of trees in 1949 and on land preparations undertaken in the area from 1950 onward. After the completion of the landscaping work, the park was fenced off and citizen were not permitted to enter.[[41]](#endnote-41) The park area was used for ceremonies and state events. Over time, the park came to be known as “President’s Park,” since it was mainly used for events featuring the state president (on Independence Day and other occasions).[[42]](#endnote-42) Immediately after the preparation of the park was completed, the Jerusalem public insisted that the site be opened to local residents. Given the dearth of parks and infrastructures for leisure activities, residents demanded that they be allowed to use this facility to meet their needs. The Compound Committee, and later other official bodies, opposed this demand, fearing damage to the park’s infrastructures. A little later the park was indeed opened to the general public, but in the absence of a suitable maintenance budget, its condition soon deteriorated and it fell into neglect. In the late 1970s, the park was renovated and redesigned.[[43]](#endnote-43)

While most of the government ministries began to relocate to Jerusalem almost immediately after the Knesset decision, the Foreign Ministry only moved to the city in the summer of 1953. In April 1951, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion firmly advocated the relocation of the ministry to the city, but the decision taken at the government meeting did not require immediate execution.[[44]](#endnote-44) In May 1952, the subject of the Foreign Ministry was again raised for discussion by the government and a decision was taken that mandated the transfer of the ministry to Jerusalem.

Photo

Figure No. 3: Foreign Ministry Shacks against the Background of Several Homes from the Village of Sheikh Bader, 1954

(Source: National Photograph Collection, D543-074)

The opposition of the Foreign Ministry officials, and particularly Minister Moshe Sharett, to the transfer of the ministry to Jerusalem was due mainly to concern for the country’s foreign relations. The relocation of the ministry was eventually implemented after the ministry officials were convinced that the move would not damage Israel’s foreign relations.[[45]](#endnote-45)

The ministry’s relocation was undertaken in a single day (12 July 1953), and the next day it began to function in Jerusalem. The Foreign Ministry was absorbed within the government compound in a makeshift area, in part using buildings from the Arab village of Sheikh Bader but mainly using shacks established for the purpose (Figure No. 3).

In contrast to other government ministries, which were initially dispersed around the city, the Foreign Ministry was based from the outset in the dedicated compound. However, the circumstances of its move to the city mandated hasty solutions and construction. The presence of the ministry in this format in the government compound continued for many years. In terms of Jerusalem’s international status as the capital of Israel, the “implantation” of the Foreign Ministry in the city constituted a victory for the strategy of actions rather than words. Not all the country’s diplomatic affairs were conducted from Jerusalem, but the ministry’s presence in the city, as the body responsible for the nation’s international relations, illustrated the stabilization of the city’s status as the seat of power.

In July 1953, the main phase of the absorption of the government ministries in the compound was essentially completed. The Ministry of Defense did not move to Jerusalem and remained in Tel Aviv, and the same was true of ancillary units of various ministries. The decision not to relocate the Ministry of Defense to the city was due to various considerations. In February 1949, a decision was taken to transfer the Ministry of Defense to Tel Aviv (the Sarona area). This decision also entailed the construction of a permanent home for the ministry on this site.[[46]](#endnote-46) The location of the ministry close to the base of the IDF’s Supreme Command (the Chief-of-Staff Base) created a cluster of security-related institutions. It may be assumed that the considerable financial investment involved in planning and constructing the home for the Ministry of Defense was one of the reasons behind the decision to leave the institution in Tel Aviv. In addition, the decision also appears to have been influenced by security considerations (the proximity to the border with Jordan in Jerusalem).

**Spontaneous Development**

Following the 1948 War, the Hebrew University campus on Mount Scopus (along with Hadassah hospital) was left as an Israeli enclave surrounded by Jordanian territory. According to the armistice agreement signed by the two countries (April 1948), there was supposed to be free access to and from the mount and the institutions based there. In practice, the Jordanians prevented free movement, and the area was only accessible as part of a weekly convoy. From the early stages of the war, the university began to move some of its operations to other parts of the city. In the absence of an orderly plan, and given the lack of suitable buildings, the various departments began to locate themselves in a random manner around the urban area.[[47]](#endnote-47) Following the decision to resume studies (in the spring of 1949), the university’s units were spread around dozens of buildings throughout the city. This expansive spatial distribution severely impeded the routine functioning of the institution. In light of these difficulties, the senior management of the university began to seek a site for an alternative campus. After it became apparent that it would not be possible to return to Mount Scopus, the university intensified its efforts to find a location for a new campus. The university’s discussions regarding this campus were conducted through direct contact with the government and civil servants, without the involvement of Jerusalem Municipality officials. Various proposals were raised during the discussions, and Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion even intervened in the matter personally. Ben-Gurion attempted to promote a decision to locate the new campus in the southwest outskirts of the city (near the neighborhood/village of Ein Kerem).[[48]](#endnote-48) One of the alternatives raised by the university was a site adjacent to the government compound. During the negotiations, the government expressed its opposition to allocating this area to the university. In 1953, however, after extensive pressure, the government decided to approve the proposal.

Photo

Figure No. 4: Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Establishment of the New Campus of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem alongside the Government Compound, June 1954

(Source: Photo Archive, External Relations Division, Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Another year would pass before the plans were consolidated and construction work began in the approved area.[[49]](#endnote-49) In June 1954, the groundbreaking ceremony was held for the new campus, attended by the leaders of the nation, the heads of the university, and numerous guests (Figure No. 4).

Four years later, in 1958, the dedication ceremony was held for the campus.[[50]](#endnote-50) The inauguration of the campus close to the government compound, and on part of the land intended for this compound, reflected a further change in the construction plans for the area. Moreover, this development illustrated the fact that, in the absence of an orderly plan for the construction of the government compound, the nation’s leaders were exposed to pressure regarding the uses of the expropriated area. And so the construction of the compound continued in a random and disjointed manner.

However, this was not the end of the impromptu actions in the area. To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the nation’s independence, and ahead of the military parade planned in the city, the reconstruction of the stadium close to the government compound was completed. The idea of establishing a stadium on this site appeared in the master plan for Jerusalem (Rau, 1949). In honor of the Independence Days celebrations in 5710, Ben-Gurion asked the committee responsible for organizing the festivities to determine the location of the military parade for Independence Day in Jerusalem. From the prime minister’s standpoint, holding such a military event in the city was an opportunity to manifest Israel’s clear presence. Following his demand, the Compound Committee worked to prepare a stadium suitable for a military parade within the area of the government compound, in accordance with the plans.[[51]](#endnote-51) However, after the celebrations the stadium was neglected and its infrastructures damaged. Ahead of the celebrations, it was decided that the military parade would march in Jerusalem.[[52]](#endnote-52) Holding a parade in the city featuring tanks, canons, and armored troop carriers constituted a violation of the armistice agreement with the Kingdom of Jordan. Despite the anticipated tension, Israel was not deterred from holding the parade in the city.[[53]](#endnote-53) To this end, work was undertaken to reconstruct the stadium. The state decided to reach an agreement with the university and to grant the stadium a dual purpose, under the title the University National Stadium. In terms of the definition of functions, it was determined that the principal goal of the stadium was to serve national needs (ceremonies, parades, and so forth). The additional goals related to the civilian needs of the university and the city’s residents.[[54]](#endnote-54) The stadium was constructed in a short period under the supervision of university staff. The parade in the city was attended by tens of thousands of soldiers, together with heavy armament, and became an important show of strength for the state in the capital area.

After the celebrations ended, the stadium was used mainly by local sports associations and by the university. International sports events were held at the National Stadium in Ramat Gan. Although the stadium alongside the government compound was only rarely used for national events, it had a prominent spatial presence in the capital.

**Present but Not Belonging**

In addition to the construction of the stadium, the tenth anniversary celebrations also saw the completion of the construction of Binyanei Ha’uma. The guidelines for the architectural competition specifically started that a plan was to be developed to separate this building (whose construction had begun prior to the competition) from the remainder of the government compound. The building was established by a special company established for this purpose, in cooperation with the Zionist institutions. The building was intended to serve as the central gathering place of the Jewish people and as a local cultural center. Even before the construction work was completed, the 23rd Zionist Congress convened in the building.[[55]](#endnote-55) In 1953, an international exhibition entitled “Conquering the Wilderness” was held in the building, serving as a significant magnet drawing tourists and visitors from Israel and abroad to Jerusalem.[[56]](#endnote-56)

In preparation for the tenth anniversary celebrations, the relevant committee planned to hold a major national exhibition – “The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition.” The decision regarding the desirable venue for the exhibition was brought before the Ministerial Committee for Economic Affairs. During the committee’s discussions, it was decided that the exhibition would be held in Jerusalem, with the goal of reinforcing the city’s status and importance as a capital. Immediately after this decision, work began to construct Binyanei Ha’uma. The exhibition opened in the summer of 1958 and brought visitors flocking to the city over a period of some five weeks.[[57]](#endnote-57) Although this building was not formally part of the government compound, the activities it houses undoubtedly strengthened Jerusalem’s function as a focus for national events and ceremonies, thereby reinforcing its essence as a capital. In terms of the changing of the landscape, the building had an extremely prominent presence.

In addition to this building, the Israel Museum was established in the southeast section of the government compound. The process of establishing the museum began in the 1950s. In addition to discussing the collections it was to include and its purpose and function (including the question as to whether it would serve as the national museum), the initiators of the museum also discussed its location. By the late 1950s, when the main discussions took place regarding the choice of a location, the Compound Committee was no longer active, having been dissolved in 1954. Accordingly, the discussions on the subject took place between the initiators and the government. The argument was settled following a recommendation provided by an external expert on behalf of UNESCO, Franco Manisi, who proposed an area above the Valley of the Cross as a transitional area between the historic city and the developing city.[[58]](#endnote-58) As the tenth anniversary approached, it was determined that the area where the museum would be established would be close to the government compound, but not part of it. In the mid-1960s, after the land for the neighborhood of Neve Sha’anan was expropriated, the museum was duly constructed in accordance with a plan prepared by Alfred Mansfeld and Drora Gad. The museum had a prominent presence in the area and its content certainly served national themes. Yet, despite its proximity to the government compound, this building was not established as part of the compound plan or as part of the components of the capital.

**Conclusion**

In the years following the establishment of the State of Israel, the government, the Jerusalem Municipality, and additional institutions engaged in actions to build and develop the western part of Jerusalem. Following these actions, part of the area under Israeli control became the seat of the governmental institutions of the state: the capital.

This article has presented the ideas, plans, and actions that led to the development of this area over the first twenty years following the establishment of Israel. The process of the construction of Jerusalem as the nation’s capital began with the integration of the governmental institutions in the urban space. The integration of the capital in the urban area was not undertaken in accordance with any plan and was based on the free space available in the area. Naturally, this form of integration did not facilitate the routine functioning of the institutions, and had an impact on the city as a whole. As we have seen, the process of integration in urban space took place without the meaningful involvement of the municipality. The reasons for this included the weakness of central government and the lack of political symmetry between central and local government but above all, it would seem, was the pressure the state applied to produce visible achievements in the city.

After December 1949, work began to plan the government compound adjacent to the city. As this article has described, and despite the formulation of plans for the development of the government compound, the actual implementation was not consistent with an agreed-upon plan. The reasons for the deviation from the approved plan probably included economic difficulties and problems in the mechanism responsible for monitoring the process. However, another factor leading to the delays in the construction process was a lack of resolve. The de facto nullification of the orderly construction plans led to a reality in which different players could apply pressure on the government and demand a share in or close to the government area. These pressures ultimately led to the inclusion in this compound of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and both Binyanei Ha’uma and the Israel Museum operating adjacent to and in association with the compound. An observer who looks today at the governmental area will ostensibly identify a logical connection between the different institutions in the area: between the government ministries and the Israel Museum; between Binyanei Ha’uma and the government area. As described here, however, this creation was the product of chance rather than planning.

The construction works in the west of Jerusalem led to significant spatial change in the city. The network of roads constructed around the compound and the zealous determination of the national authorities to prevent any construction for local and municipal purposes within the compound effectively isolated it from the city. The result of the lack of dialogue with the municipality was the creation of governmental space that was detached from the urban space, within a divided city that continued to develop to the southwest.

In addition to the physical construction, the state also initiated further actions to ensure the city’s status. The creation of a memorial compound (such as the one on Mount Herzl), and the integration of significant one-time events (such as the Tenth Anniversary celebrations) also helped to consolidate the city’s status as a capital – in the local and certainly in the global context. These actions also helped to shape the urban space, creating a unique compound in the southwest of the city that included special facilities (the stadium).

Jerusalem has never enjoyed impressive features in terms of location or position. Although Tel Aviv, and even Haifa, could present more convenient conditions for the emergence of significant national space – a capital – tradition and the internationalization plan both certainly helped to establish Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. During the period covered by this article, Tel Aviv continued to develop. The economic, social, and political status the city had acquired during the Mandate period was reinforced and stabilized. Haifa, as a port city and a regional industrial center, also developed in economic terms. Since ancient times, Jerusalem has struggled to compete with such economic and social processes. However, these limitations did not, as noted, prevent the progress of the historical process of determining the city as Israel’s modern capital.[[59]](#endnote-59)

Unlike capital cities that were created ex nihilo, such as Washington, D.C., or Brasilia, Jerusalem’s essence is closer to that of such historical capitals as Berlin, Paris, London, and Rome. In these cities, as in Jerusalem, there was need to integrate the government compound within a developing urban fabric. Over the course of history, this process of integration entailed numerous challenges, and urban changes were made over the generations in order to regulate the operations of the capital within urban space. In Jerusalem during the early decades following independence, initial actions were taken to integrate the capital in the city. As we have seen, this integration was at first a dramatic process due to the pressure to show a presence in the city. Later, this presence transmuted into an isolation from urban space. This was not the end of the story, however: the geographical changes that would occur in Jerusalem after 1967 would once again change the government compound. This, however, is a subject for a separate study.

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4. A.W. Daum, ‘Capital in Modern History. Inventing Urban Spaces for the Nation,’ in: A.W. Daum and C. Mauch (eds.), *Berlin – Washington 1800 – 2000: Capital Cities, Cultural Representation and National Identity* (Cambridge: Publisher, 2005), pp. 3-28. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
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6. A. Erdentug and B. Berrak, ‘Political Tuning in Ankara, a Capital, as Reflected in the Urban Symbols and Images,’ *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22 (1998), pp. 589-91. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. A.W. Daum, ‘Capitals in Modern History,’ pp. 5-28. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. For detailed discussion of Jerusalem’s economy during the relevant period, see: M. Oren, ‘Capital and Industrialization: The Industrialization of Jerusalem 1948-1967,’ in: K. Cohen-Hatov, A. Saltzer and D. Bar (eds.), *A City through Its Research – Studies in the Historical-Settlement Geography of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Publisher, 5771), pp. 311-47 (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
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10. N. Mann, *The Compound in Its Years of Establishment, 1948-1955* (Jerusalem: Publisher, 2012), pp. 34-57. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Concerning the relation between the geographical conditions of the city and its status, see: D. Rubin, ‘Jerusalem and Its Environs: The Impact of Physical Conditions on the Settlement of Jerusalem,’ in: S. Achituv and E. Mazar (eds.), *The Jerusalem Book – Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Publisher, 2000), pp. 1-12. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
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19. Golani, “Longings,” p. 272. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. ‘Law concerning the Repatriation of the Bones of Herzl,’ dated 15 Av 5709,’ SA C-2/6. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. M. Azaryahu, ‘Mount Herzl: The Creation of Israel’s National Cemetery,’ *Israel Studies* ½ (1996), pp. 46-74. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Kats and Paz, ‘The Transfer,’ pp. 246-52. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Y. Rosenthal, ‘This Time I Did Not See the Flash of Confidence in the Old Man’s Eyes – Documenting the Decision by Ben-Gurion to Move the Government Ministries and the Knesset to Jerusalem, December 1948,” in: E. Bareli (ed.), ‘Divided Jerusalem – 1948-1967: Sources, Summaries, Selected Affairs, and Ancillary Material,’ *Idan* 18 (1994), pp. 55-60 (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. ‘Transfer of the Knesset and the Government to Jerusalem,’ *Knesset Protocols*, 1st Knesset, Vol. III, Second Session, Meetings 96-97, 14-23 December 1949, p. 281; see also the preliminary discussion held during the United Nations deliberations, *Knesset Protocols*, 1st Knesset, Vol. III, Second Session, Meetings 93-95, 5-7 December 1949, pp. 223-24. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. *Journal of David Ben-Gurion*, 14 December 1949, Ben-Gurion Archives Item No. 3783. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Information about the location of the government ministries can be found in the government yearbooks. For example, see: *Government Yearbook 5711* (Tel Aviv: Publisher, Eve of the New Year 5711) (Hebrew), which provides details about the various ministries. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Letter (and map) from A. Brechman to the Economic Representative of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Trade and Industry in Jerusalem, dated 29 August 1949, SA C-2/5442. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion made a declaration concerning the government’s preparations regarding Jerusalem during a Knesset debate on 13 December 1949. During the debate, he claimed that “immediately after the end of the fighting, we began to transfer the government ministries to Jerusalem and to install the required conditions for the capital city – proper means of transportation, economic and technical arrangements. We are continuing to implement the transfer of the government to Jerusalem, and we hope that this will be completed as soon as possible.” Kats and Paz, ‘The Transfer,’ pp. 246-52. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. In a greeting published by Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog marking the dedication of the building, as part of the celebration of Israel’s first decade of independence, the rabbi preferred not to mention the connection between the building and Jerusalem as a capital: “This day, the day of dedication of Heichal Shlomo, the house of the spiritual center and the offices of the Israel Chief Rabbinate in the heart of Jerusalem, the Holy City and the city of the Temple, is a great day for Israel and for its Torah. Happy are we that we have been privileged to see this. We must praise and thank the God of Zion and Jerusalem who has preserved and kept us until this time.” ‘Heichal Shlomo – Israel Chief Rabbinate – Spiritual Center, Jerusalem, 33rd Day of the Omer 5718’ (undated). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Instructions for the Request to Submit Proposals for a Building Plan for the Compound Area in Jerusalem and the Location of Buildings Thereon, SA GL-19/3092, p. 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Minutes of the Meetings of the Adjudication Panel, undated, SA GL-1/9225. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Letter from M. Weintraub and A. Mansfeld to the Compound Committee, 25 June 1950, in Efrat, *The Israeli Project*, p. 771. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Construction of the Compound Plan, Scale 1:5000, 6 July 1950, SA G-2/5442; the plan includes specification of the differences between the plan prepared by Weinraub and Mansfeld and the plan finalized by the Compound Committee ahead of implementation. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. D. Kroyanker, *Architecture in Jerusalem – The Modern Construction outside the Walls, 1948-1990* (Jerusalem: Publisher, 1991), pp. 94-99 (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Minutes of Meeting No. E/2 of the Subcommittee to Arrange the Work of the Knesset on Its Return to Jerusalem, Wednesday, 22 Tevet 5710, SA GL-12/9250. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. S. Hatis Rolf, ‘The Knesset Building at Givat Ram: Planning and Construction,’ *Cathedra* 96 (5660), pp. 137-48 (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Regarding the ceremony and the speeches made on the occasion, see: Dedication Ceremony of the Knesset Building, Knesset website, last accessed October 2015 (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
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39. M. Hazan, ‘A Statesman in Winter: The First State President,’ in: A. Cohen, M. Hazan (eds.), *Weizmann the Leader of Zionism* (Jerusalem: Publisher, 5776), pp. 548-73 (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. A. Ramon, *One Doctor Living Next to Another: The Rehavia Neighborhood of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, Publisher: 1998), pp. 138-42 (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. S. Goldstein, ‘The Establishment of the President’s Park and Its Function as a Representative Park between 1950 – 1978,’ Proseminar Study as Part of the Course Building a Capital, Department of Geography, Hebrew University of Jerusalem of Jerusalem (Jerusalem, 2003) (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Regarding the presence of the “President’s Park” in the compound area, see: *Map of Jerusalem* (Drawn by Shlomo Ben-David), unscaled (Jerusalem: Steimatzky, 1955), held at the Maps Library of the Department of Geography, Hebrew University of Jerusalem of Jerusalem. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Since 1978 the park has been known as the Wohl Rose Garden. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Minutes of a Government Meeting, Meeting 39/311 28 Adar 5711, 5 April 1951, section 309, pp. 10-13. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. A. Gravis-Kobalsky and Y. Katz, ‘The Delay in the Transfer of the Foreign Ministry to Jerusalem as a Reflection of the City’s Status in the 1950s,’ *Cathedra* 140 (5771), pp. 142-51 (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Mann, pp. 98-114 [what source does this refer to?] [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
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48. Minutes of a Government Meeting, Meeting 54/310, 20 Tammuz 5710, 5 July 1950, section 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. *Official Publications* 339, 20 Adar II 5714, 25 March 1954, p. 769. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
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51. Minutes of the 17th Meeting of the Compound Committee in Jerusalem, 31 October 1950, SA 65/C 10/2770. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. M. Azriyahu, ‘The Independence Day Parades,’ in: B. Donner (ed.), *Glory and Splendor – Israeli Sovereign Ceremonies, 1948-1958* (Tel Aviv: Publisher, Spring 2001), pp. 62-79 (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Z. Shalom, ‘The Tension Surrounding the IDF Parades in 1958 and 1961,’ in: A. Bareli (ed.), *Divided Jerusalem*, pp. 61-68 (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Memorandum of a Meeting Held on 27 February 1957 at the Compound Administrative Building, University Archive 35 (1957/58). [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. See the Instructions for Inviting Proposals for the Building Plan for the Compound Area, which specifically state: “This fence shall not include the area of the conference center and the amphitheater [which was supposed to be constructed alongside the conference center – A.Z.]. See note 28 above. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. A. Gravis-Kobalsky and Y. Katz, ‘The Exhibition Conquering the Wilderness: The First International Exhibition in Jerusalem, 1953,’ *Israel* 29 (2012), pp. 153-80 (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. G. Limor, ‘The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition – The Exhibition that Disappeared,’ Dissertation toward a Master’s Degree in the Humanities, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem, 2002), p. 109 (Hebrew). [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
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