

Glorious pre-industrial city

Chester Smolski

JERUSALEM — "There is Jerusalem" was the shout of joy as the convoy drivers crossed a low rise of the Judean Hills and saw ahead the outline of their destination. Bringing supplies into the city after independence in 1948 was a hazardous undertaking because snipers along the route were constant threats to the convoys that supplied this divided city, occupied by both the Jordanian army and the Jews. The stark reminder of that time is today memorialized by

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the numerous truck chassis found along the side of the highway and at which ceremonies are held to honor those drivers who died so that Jerusalem might live.

The Six Day War of 1967 brought about the city's reunification, and today Jerusalem serves both as capital and spiritual center for the Jewish state of Israel.

Its origin is lost in history but some evidence of its birth is revealed in the Bible, for example, Gen. 22, 2 tells us that 4,000 years ago Abraham took his

only son Isaac to a windswept hill (Jerusalem) in the Land of Moriah to offer him as a sacrifice. Archaeological work also gives information about this oldest city of Israel and one of the oldest in the world. We know, for example, that in 702 B.C. the Assyrians stormed the walls of the city, presaging a history of wars, conquest, decline and rebirth together with a multifarious influence of generations of peoples and cultures.

Canaanites, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Moslems, Crusaders, Mamelukes, Turks, and British were some of the 59 different groups over time who have controlled this land bridge area of three continents in which the city is located. Remnants of their influence in Jerusalem are to be found in the architecture (much of it from the Crusades), town plan including walls and gates (Roman), and religion (holy city for Christians, Jews and Moslems).

Present day Jerusalem is a modern city with high rise hotels, apartments and office blocks puncturing the sky. This largest city of Israel, with more than 10 percent of the nation's population concentrated here, is a thriving commercial, industrial and governmental center. Except for some notable historical and religious structures, such as Herod's Family Tomb and David's Tomb, the western or new part of the city is little different from that of any other 20th century type city.

It is eastern Jerusalem that serves as a magnet for the newly arrived visitor because here he found the city of Solomon, Jesus and Mohammed. The Old City, encased by walls erected by Suleiman the Magnificent over 400 years ago, is the locale to which the pilgrim, archaeologist, historian, scholar and tourist are drawn. Moshe Dayan says it well, "When I go into the Old City of Jerusalem I am almost dizzy with emotion because I am walking on ground where my Jewish ancestors walked almost 3,000 years ago."

The guide says that whether Christian, Jew, Moslem or non-believer, visiting the Old City is an emotive experience. To walk the Via Dolorosa or Way of the Cross where Jesus walked and carried the cross at the beginning of the Christian era; to touch the Western (Wailing) Wall that remains from the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. and leave a note with a request for Shalom (Peace); to walk around the Temple Mount, the place from which Mohammed is believed to have ascended into heaven, and examine the majestic 7th century Dome of the Rock and the El Aksa Mosque are experiences that one does not quickly forget, whether one is a neophyte tourist or seasoned traveler.

There is another aspect to this ancient walled city that is often not realized by the visitor. Cities originated in this general area more than 5,000 years ago and, subsequently, sprang up in Egypt, India, China, Greece and Rome before they spread to the rest of Europe and the world. To find a city today which has retained this historic character is most unusual.

Within the walls that form a two-

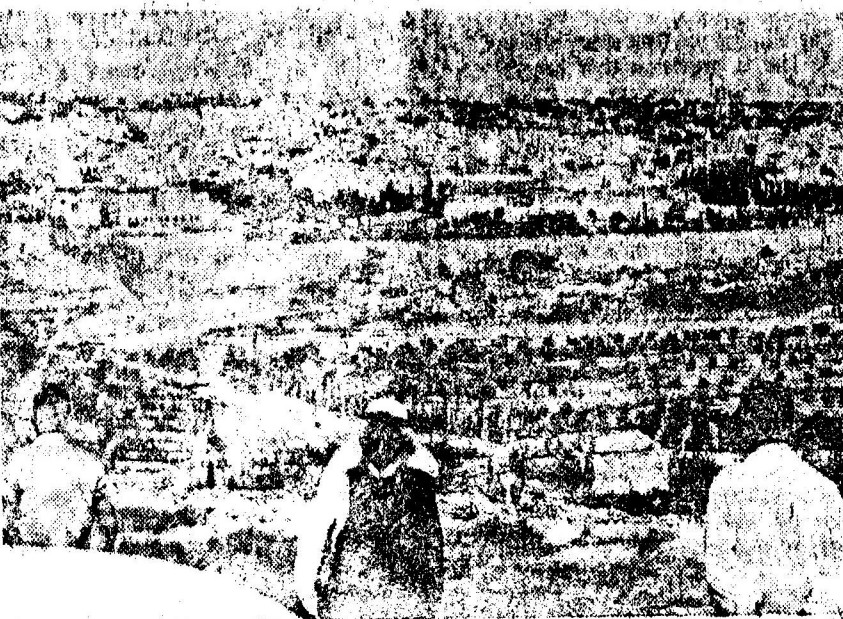
and-one-half mile perimeter of the Old City lies a maze of alleyways and walks. This is not a city for cars. This approximately 250 acres of intense urban development housed as many as 50,000 people early in its history, was as low as 6,000 in the early part of the 19th century, and today has a population of more than 30,000 housed in buildings no higher than four stories. The density of population here is four times that of Central Falls, Rhode Island's "most populated square mile."

Distinct separation of people in pre-industrial cities is still found in the Old City with its Armenian, Christian, Jewish and Moslem Quarters. Walking the alleyways one finds among the numerous shops that draw the tourist those that meet the needs of these four major groups as well.

As in cities of old when it was usually not safe to walk the streets at night, it is not wise to stay in the Old City once the sun goes down. My brief foray into the city at night convinced me of the truth of this statement.

There is just too much to say and too little space in which to go on about this glorious city of Jerusalem and the state of Israel. One can only come away from the experience with a greater respect for a nation which has gone through five wars in a generation's time; is living with an inflation rate six times that of our 18 percent rate; is trying to integrate a people who have come from over 100 different countries; and whose principal asset is its people because the land is devoid of resources. Israel and its major city of Jerusalem must be experienced to be fully appreciated.

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The Old City of Jerusalem