



T+ H Hoene Foundation



Trip to Israel and Palestine

19. to 27. February 2025

We felt safe!

The frequently expressed skepticism: “Should you really travel to Israel during this time? Isn't it too dangerous?” I already know this from previous trips there. The last time I was there was 7 months after October 7, 2023, during the war in the Gaza Strip. But this time was no different than usual. Violence, war, and terror could only be found in the news and conversations. On two days, you could briefly hear military aircraft as Israeli army air strikes were flown in Gaza and Lebanon. But it could also have been military air maneuvers or loud civilian planes. In any case, it wasn't scary.

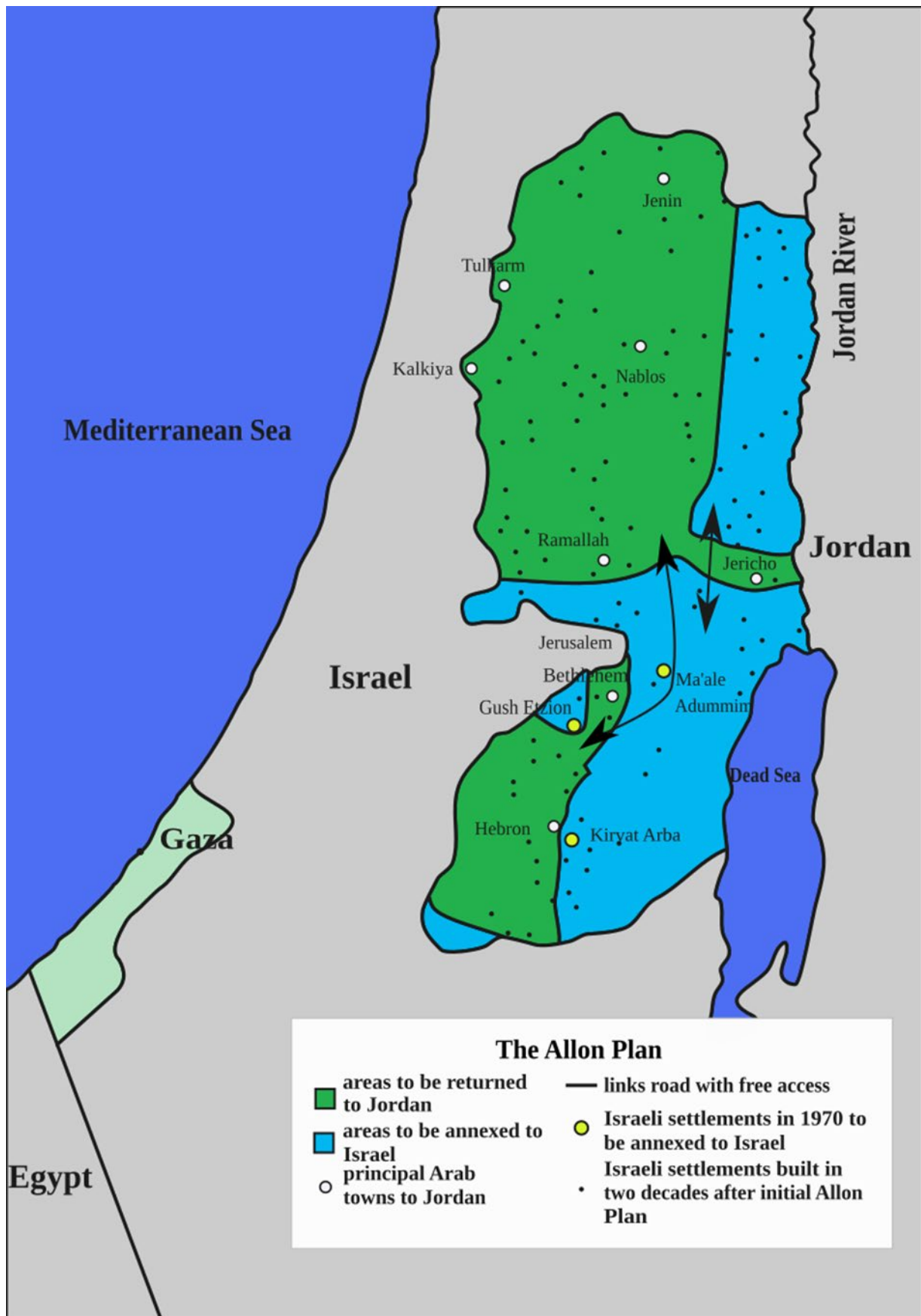
It does not work without dealing with politics in Israel/Palestine

And once again there were so many occasions to marvel at what is happening day in, day out, and to look to the future with hope. Hope is probably the most frequently used word in Israel/Palestine alongside “Shalom” (=peace) at the moment anyway, although unfortunately it is more of a wish than a statement. Israel/Palestine cannot be experienced without political talks, even if, like me, you want to avoid it. And unfortunately, the political worry lines of the people there - Israelis and Palestinians alike - have become deeper in the nine months since my last visit, despite the current



ceasefire agreement with Lebanon and Hamas. I think I can sense that this is due to the consequences of the war. On the Palestinian side, the remaining violent resistance fighters, at least terrorists according to the predominant Israeli description, are looking for new rallying points outside the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon to prepare for the continuation of their violent activities, namely in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Many in Israel assume that they are being supported in this by Iranian arms deliveries across the Jordanian border. On the Israeli side, it is above all the settlers in the West Bank and, driven by them and their supporters, the “right-wingers” involved in the government, who go by names such as Ben Gvir and Smotrich, who are becoming more radicalized. There is no longer only talk behind closed doors that those Palestinians in the West Bank who do not want to submit to Israeli ruling will be expelled from the country. Left-wing activists in Israel call this “intelligent ethnic cleaning”; a term that, when mentioned,

evokes a history-conscious Germans, among whom I count myself, as if frozen into a pillar of salt.



During my stay, my good friend Marcel from Jerusalem drew my attention to the so-called Allon Plan, which was conceived, discussed but not realized in Israel following the Six-Day War in 1967. Of course, I immediately researched it on the Internet.

It was developed by the then Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon with the aim of preventing Israel from becoming an occupying power after winning the Six-Day War by conquering the West Bank, among other territories. The areas marked in green on the map were to fall to Jordan, the blue areas to Israel. What I find most interesting about this ultimately failed plan are the markings of the three Israeli settlements that existed in 1970 (Kiryat Arba in the south, Ma'ale Adummin east of Jerusalem and Gush Etzion in the southwest of Bethlehem) and the more than 100 additional settlements marked with small black dots in the 20 years that followed. These settlements, and others that were added later, are the source of increasing aggression against the Palestinians living in the West Bank, partly in response to aggression by Palestinians, but increasingly as an original act of aggression against the Palestinians, which can only serve the purpose of driving them out. The police and Israeli military regularly do not intervene, or at best only with great restraint. The aforementioned politicians on the right fringes of the Israeli political scene make no secret of the latter. And many say that support for this policy among the Israeli population has increased and naturally increases when Hamas, as happened during my stay in Israel/Palestine, stages hostage handovers or the handover of the bodies of killed hostages as a media showcase for its determination to commit atrocities.

Nevertheless, my following report on the activities promoting peaceful coexistence between Palestinians and Israelis shows that there are so many positive things happening that should give cause for hope. I have to admit, these are mainly activities in Jerusalem. Between Israelis in other parts of the country and Palestinians in the West Bank, this does not happen with the same frequency, but it does happen. And: In the political efforts to find a solution in the past, Jerusalem was usually seen as the most difficult problem to solve. After many trips there over the last 6 years, I think it is rather the other way around, and I occasionally take the liberty of advising Israeli friends who think it is not possible to live together peacefully with Palestinians, as well as Palestinian friends who say the same thing in the opposite direction: "Look to Jerusalem and learn from the people there how it works."

Studying together at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem



For the first half day of the trip, I was a guest on Mount Scopus at the Hebrew University, hosted by Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten, director of the Jack Joseph and Morton Mandel School for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, and her assistant Irina Dostov. Elisheva is active in the demonstrations that take place several times a week against the policies of the current Israeli government and coordinates several projects that we fund together with the Mandel Foundation to support Palestinian students at the Hebrew University.

My first meeting at the university was with Ram Semo, head of the university's External Affairs Department, and Daniel Shriqui. The topic was my criticism of publications and the external presentation of the university in Germany, which I had mentioned before my trip, without reference to the activities of the Diversity Department, i.e. the activities we support to promote Palestinian students. Ram Semo explained this with the theme “We are one”. This stands for solidarity with students fighting in the war, war victims and war returnees. There are many and important donors abroad on this topic. However, he also emphasized the importance of the multicultural set-up with the programs of the Diversity Department. I pointed out how important it was to present the latter in particular as the only hopeful sign of a conceivable peaceful coexistence in the region in the world, in order to prevent the impression of an exceptionally and hopelessly entangled in violence, war and terror in Germany.



The second meeting was organized meeting with three Palestinian students Rasen (International Law and History/ BA), Asma (Middle Eastern History, Egypt Revolution - “Arab spring 2006 - 2011”/MA), and Tasneem (Arabic and Hebrew Language/ BA). At first glance, Rasen and Asma did not recognize that they come from Palestinian families, Rasen from East Jerusalem, Asma from a Bedouin village in the north of Israel. They are obviously not religious; their English is almost perfect. Tasneem is obviously a Muslim, dressed as such. Her English is also fluent, but with an Arabic accent. Our topic of conversation was communication between Israeli and Palestinian students. For Palestinians, learning Hebrew, the language of the “other side”, is a major socio-cultural

problem, at least initially, due to reservations in their family environment, and vice versa for many Israelis when they have to learn Arabic. My objection as to why the neutral English language, which everyone has to learn at school, is not used for communication was met with the objection that the Arabs' knowledge of English is currently rather poor despite their school education.

A third meeting took place at the Rothberg International School with Prof. Yael Levin, Carmen Batz and Luba Glikin. Since this year, the Sadara preparatory program for Palestinian students, which we support, has been integrated there. The program is very popular. The Mandel School would like to double the number of students this year. There are now over 1000 Palestinian students at the university, 30% of whom are male. The pressure on male school leavers to contribute to the livelihood of the mostly large families in which they live with their own income in the short term has increased rather than decreased since the start of the war.

Training of social workers from and for East-Jerusalem (Jerusalem Foundation)



Two days before leaving Israel, my travel companion Stefan (my wife's cousin) and I met with Amal Khayat, the project manager, and the two students Batool and Doreen, as guests of the Jerusalem Foundation (JF), led by Alexander Dubrau , Head of the German Desk at the JF. Batool and Doreen describe their experiences in the project. They started the project in the so-called first cohort, i.e. in 2022. They both come from different East Jerusalem suburbs. Their families also initially had reservations about them starting

their studies “on the other side” at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. But the young women prevailed, and their parents are now proud of them. The role of women has changed in Palestinian families. Amal reports how difficult it was for her to assert herself against her father, who traditionally saw her role as a housewife and mother. It was only when her parents divorced, and her mother supported her that she was able to start and complete her pharmacy studies at Al-Quds University in Abu Dis. The language differences (Hebrew-Arabic) were another hurdle they had to overcome. However, both students speak fluent English. Finally, there were technical difficulties. Both the language support and the provision of laptops through our financial support in the project helped them a lot. However, they report that their internet access is restricted in zones A and B, i.e. beyond the checkpoints. They have no access to many of the websites they need to study. In the course of this year, they will be able to complete their training and then start their work on the ground in community centers in East Jerusalem.

„Learning Together“



At the so-called “American Hub”, a US Embassy facility near the King David Hotel in West Jerusalem, we join a group of US visitors to follow the presentation of a project supported by the Jerusalem Foundation entitled “Learning Together”. Students from Israeli and Palestinian schools are brought together for themed workshops hosted at various institutions such as the

American Hub or the Israel Museum and taught in Arabic and Hebrew. We were presented with a teaching unit in Innovation & Technology, in which the pupils learn to build and program a software-controlled vehicle experimentally in small mixed groups under supervision. The project leaders reported on the challenges that students and parents had to overcome, but also on the successes. Immediately after the start of the war in October 2023, the project was almost “on the ground”. Fear and reservations caused the number of participants to drop drastically. In the meantime, however, the number of participants has almost returned to pre-coronavirus pandemic



levels. In the corridor, we are spontaneously approached by two Palestinian boys. They want to know where we come from. During the conversation, it became clear that they have gained a personal openness towards strangers, which is certainly due to this co-education project.

The German „Schmidt-Schule“ for Palestinian girls at Damascus Gate



I made an appointment with Dr. Dietrich Bäumer, the director of the German Schmidt School in Jerusalem. The school is located just a few meters from Damascus Gate, one of the main gates to the Old City of Jerusalem, which is surrounded by a massive wall. The Damascus Gate is, if you want to call it that, Palestine's entrance to the Old City. The atmosphere here is Arabic. On Saturdays, it is difficult to fight your way through the crowds of Arab women, usually accompanied by their daughters, who swarm into the Old City to go shopping. The Schmidt School teaches around 500 female pupils from Palestinian families. They learn Arabic, German and English from the first year of school. It was awarded the title of "Excellent German School Abroad" in 2015. A long-term plan of the principal, Dr. Dietrich Bäumer, is to make the school co-educational with Hebrew-speaking, i.e. Jewish, pupils. At the moment, financial concerns are weighing on his mind. The German state funding necessary for the school's further development is being drastically cut. According to a law recently introduced by the outgoing German government, a master plan for German schools abroad is now to be drawn up with the aim of "increasing output". The term "output" refers to the number of school leavers who subsequently study in Germany - in other words, the "production of skilled workers from abroad who are needed in Germany". At the same time, trouble is looming from the Israeli side. The current Israeli government has introduced a bill into the Knesset that

provides for an 80% tax on the income of foreign NGOs. If this is implemented, it could mean the end of the school. The situation of the school's Palestinian teachers, who live in the autonomous areas of the West Bank, is currently difficult. Their odyssey through the checkpoints, which are constantly opening and closing and in front of which there are often kilometers of traffic jams that prevent them from getting through in time until the next closing, is a torture and has a negative impact on school operations. But Dr. Bäumer is not giving up. The great daily successes in dealing with the students and their long-lasting enthusiasm for their school, even after graduating from high school, motivate him to persevere against all odds.

Infinity – Support for talented pupils from Ethiopian refugee families



For the fifth year now, the talented pupils from Jerusalem schools from Ethiopian refugee families sponsored by us are brought together once a week in a school near the university campus of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Givat Ram to receive support from students in the mentoring

program in subjects in which they are particularly interested or in which they need special help. A small group of the 19 students welcomed us for a round of talks. In the meantime, girls and boys have become teenagers. Certain typical behaviors of puberty are unmistakable, but overall, it was a lively discussion that brought out the special talents of the young ladies and gentlemen.

Insights into the critical nature of a crisis region

Jakob in a tent before the Knesset

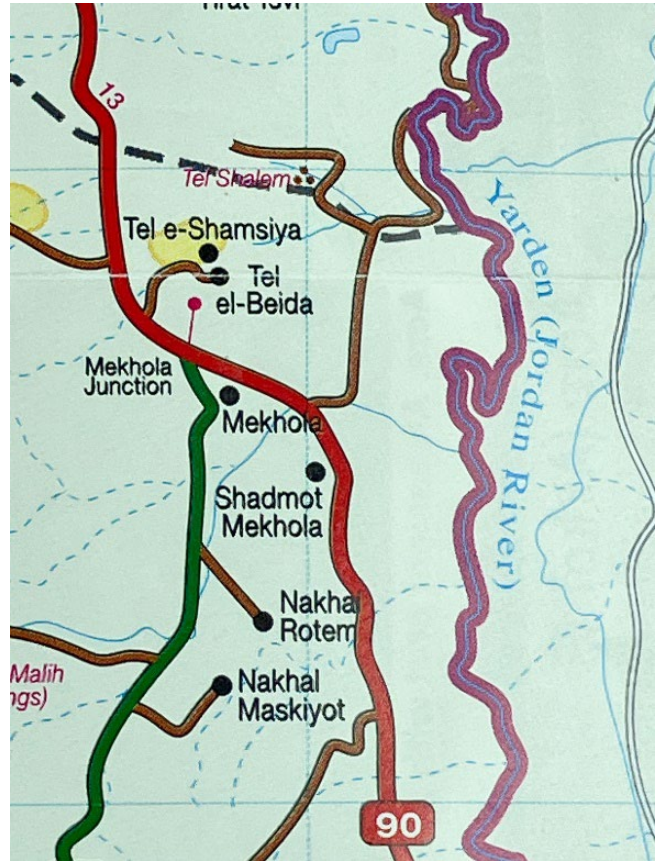


After a brief visit to the National Library of Jerusalem, an architecturally extremely interesting building, both inside and out, which is located right next to the Israeli parliament building, the Knesset, Marcel and I pay a visit to Jacob. Jacob, about 70 years old, has been living in a tent next to the Knesset since October 9, 2023. On October 7, 2023, his 32-year-old son was murdered by Hamas fighters in the shelter

of Kibbutz Be'eri on the Gaza Strip. He blocked the bunker's iron, unlockable entrance door with his body. The Hamas fighters shot through the door and killed him. His wife and two children were able to escape through the window. Jacob holds Benjamin ("Bibi") Netanyahu personally responsible for his son's death. He has vowed to stay in the tent in front of the Knesset until Netanyahu resigns. Around 20 activists have joined him and are also spending the night in the tent in shifts. Shortly after the Yom Kippur War in 1974, a former captain, Motti Ashkenazi, did something similar in front of the seat of then Prime Minister Golda Meir. Golda Meir resigned at the time.

In the Jordan Valley with the “shepherds”

On Thursday evening, 20.02.2025, several explosive devices detonated in, thank God, empty buses in a suburb of Tel Aviv. Three buses were destroyed. The attack was attributed to Hamas. We briefly reconsidered our decision to travel to the Jordan Valley on Friday morning to meet with Yair Bunzel, but decided to stick with it. However, we were glad that Marcel drove us there in his car - against his wife's protests. I have known Yair Bunzel since 2019; he was our Israeli tour guide on a political group trip through Israel and Palestine. He is married to a Swiss woman and speaks good German. He used to be an officer in the Israeli army. After the Lebanon War in 1982, he resigned from the army and joined peace activists (combatants for peace). Since the time



of the corona pandemic, he has no longer worked as a travel guide but as a software engineer for SAP. He lives in Tiberias on the southern edge of the Sea of Galilee in

northern Israel. He wanted to take me to visit the shepherds in the Jordan Valley, whom he currently supports as a member of the “Jordan Valley Activists”. He had originally suggested that we take the public bus to the Jordan Valley. In view of the events of the previous evening, we were glad to have found another alternative with

Marcel. The Jordan Valley is largely part of the Palestinian autonomous area (Zone A), in which Israel “only” exercises military supervision. From Jerusalem, we first drove about 30 km east on National Road 1 to the northern edge of the Dead Sea and then about 65

km north on National Road 90 along the western bank of the Jordan River, on the



Area). He bought honey there. The camp has a large herd of cattle. On the other side of the road is a spring that the shepherds used to use as a water source for their cattle. Some time ago, settlers came from a nearby Jewish settlement on a ridge and surrounded the spring with natural stones and fenced it off. A “park” is now marked there on Google Earth. Only a



the spring and protested that the settlers' actions were illegal. They were told by the police that they did not see a problem. There is a light pole at the road junction with a number of security cameras mounted on it. In addition, the names in Arabic are spray-painted in light blue on the road signs. Yair wants to lead us to a man, but he can't find him in his shepherd's camp. Instead, he

opposite bank of which runs the Jordanian border. We meet Yair in Mekhola directly on the national road south of the checkpoint. In an SUV provided to the Jordan Valley activists as a project vehicle, Yair drove us on road 578, the Allon Road, to a shepherd's camp at the junction of road 5799 (Palestinian Autonomous



small amount of water runs out of the enclosed small pond. The cattle are now trying to take up a little water there. However, according to Yair's account, young people come down from the so-called outposts of the settlements and chase away the cattle with stones. Yair says that he or his fellow activists called the police when the settlers created the pond at



receives a phone call that prompts him to take us to another location, where we find a Palestinian pickup truck with Palestinians dressed in Arabic sitting in it, stopped by an Israeli military vehicle. Yair found out that the military had stopped the pickup, taken the driver's keys and told him that he would not be allowed to drive for another two hours. Yair and Marcel asked the three soldiers why they had been stopped but were not told. They were kindly told to leave the area. Yair assumes it was pure harassment and calls



the actions of the settlers and the military an attempt at “intelligent ethnic cleansing”. Finally, we visit Buhan and his family at his campsite. Buhan keeps a flock of sheep and has 10 children; the three eldest daughters have studied or are still studying, the younger ones go to school. The wiry Buhan speaks fluent Hebrew and makes a very

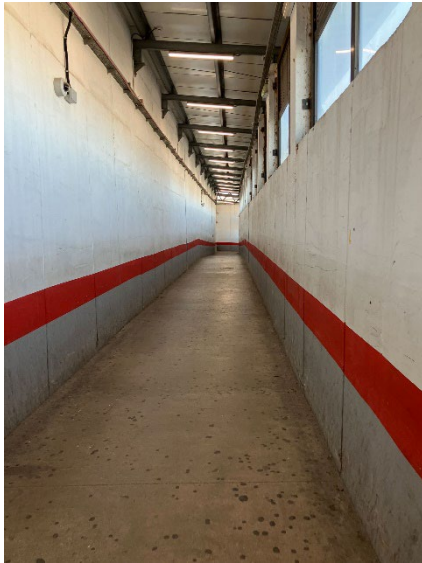
good impression. He kindly serves us tea. He tells us about the conflicts with the surrounding settlers. In particular, they are increasingly restricting the grazing areas for the sheep so that they have to buy expensive food. We thank him for his hospitality by helping him feed the sheep. As Marcel has to be back home in time for the start of Shabat on Friday and we have also received an invitation to the Shabat meal from Elisheva Baumgarten and her family, we have to drive back again after a short visit. During the entire journey through the Palestinian villages on National Road 90, we didn't notice anything that could have frightened us. Two days later, over lunch in Jerusalem, I talk to Prof. Kenneth Mann, co-initiator and head of LEAP (Legal Aid for Palestinians), about our experiences and his assessment of the situation. He also assumes that settlers and the Israeli military, driven by right-wing extremist politicians, are doing something like “cleansing” Zone A of as



many Palestinians as possible in order to be able to annex these areas more easily later. Incidentally, he is rather skeptical about the political situation in the region. He considers the current “Trump deal” to be highly dangerous. As the situation surrounding Russia and Ukraine in Trump's game shows, things can quickly develop in a completely

different direction than previously assumed. Kenneth Mann is currently on the lookout for a new trainee lawyer at LEAP. The organization primarily deals with recourse claims against the Israeli state, settlers and the military. However, it is also starting to deal with work permits and checkpoint permits for people living in the West Bank and working in Israel.

Life in Bethlehem/Palestine



To get from Jerusalem (Zone C) to Bethlehem (mainly Zone A, part of Zone B), you have to cross a checkpoint just over 10 minutes' drive from Jerusalem. The “Rachel” checkpoint is open to pedestrians in the morning but closed to vehicles. On the Israeli side, buses wait for a

few pedestrians to cross the checkpoint, on the Palestinian side there are lots of yellow cabs. In between, we pass through a tunnel that reminds us strongly of the Friedrichstrasse station border crossing in Berlin before reunification.

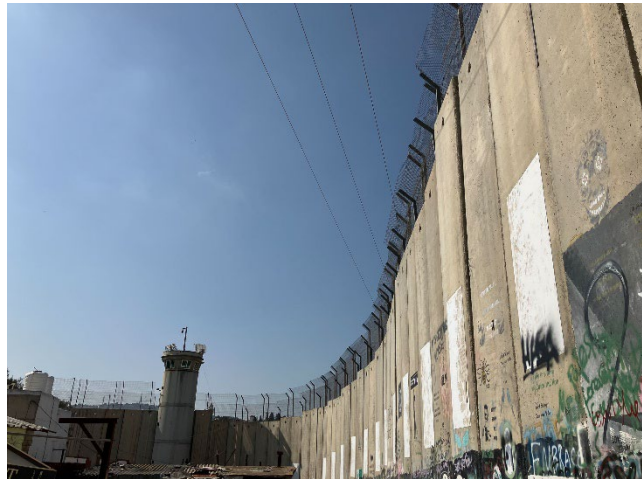


Mohaned, a German-speaking Palestinian whom I remember from a tourist trip in March 2023, is waiting for us among the advertising cab drivers, surrounded by the martial wall.



In his SUV, we drive to the Church of the Nativity of Jesus, the main tourist attraction in the center of the city. We sit in the sun in a café opposite, on the terrace of which the Popemobile, a gift from Pope Francis during his visit to Bethlehem in 2014, is parked. In front of it, also in the parking lot in front of the Church of the Nativity, we are besieged as recognizable Europeans by souvenir sellers and tourist guides who have run

out of business. Greater Bethlehem consists of three towns: Bethlehem (Arabic: Bait Lahm), Bait Jala and Bait Sahur. Bait Jala is predominantly inhabited by Christians. The town is home to St. Nicholas Church, the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary and four other Christian churches as well as two mosques. Bait Sahur is home to the so-called Shepherds' Fields, a popular pilgrimage site for Christian pilgrims from Europe and



the USA to commemorate the birth of Christ. According to Mohaned's description, around 200,000 people live in the greater Bethlehem area, most of whom are now Muslims. However, they live together like a family in peace. He has not been a tourist for 16 months and no longer knows how to feed his growing family (currently 3, in future 4 children) and pay off his debts. He has already started selling furniture from his apartment. The war has dramatically worsened living conditions in the West Bank. The



Israeli military acts arbitrarily. The checkpoints open and close several times a day without notice. The checkpoint we had come through was also closed to pedestrians in the afternoon. Our cab was able to drive through the checkpoint on National Road 60 near Bait Jala without any problems when we picked it up. Palestinians are often detained at the checkpoint for no reason or refused passage. He himself was once

arrested in his house in the evening, blindfolded and taken to an Israeli guard post, where he was repeatedly beaten by a female soldier while sitting on the ground before being let go. He could not tell us the reason for this. Around midday, while Mohaned shows my companion Stefan around Bethlehem, I drive to the house of a scholarship holder in Bai Jala. I am struck by the cleanliness and prosperity of the place, with stores selling international fashion goods, for example, and cars in the streets that are above average in standard. Marcel tells me later that this is due to the town's predominantly Christian population. In the afternoon, Mohaned takes us on a tour of the Palestinian refugee camp Aida, which is located in the north of Bait Jala, after visiting the wall painted with graffiti by Banksy and others. Around 4,000 refugees currently live there. The camp has existed since the civil war in 1948, so the refugees are already the 3rd to 4th generation to live there. "A private life is not possible here," says Mohaned. The walls of the houses are wall to wall. The entrance to the camp is symbolized by a large keyhole with a large key placed on top. This symbolizes the return of the Palestinians to their homes from which they were expelled during the war. When we ask why the refugees do not leave this camp and settle elsewhere in Bethlehem, Mohaned explains that if they leave the camp, they lose their refugee status according to the rules of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) and thus their entitlement to benefits from this UN aid organization. Only relatively few refugees have left and resettled in the camp since it was established.

Meetings with scholarship holders

Being in personal contact with our scholarship holders is very important to us. This time's trip to Jerusalem showed that the current conditions also make this difficult. I wanted to meet with six of our scholarship holders at Al-Quds University in Abu Dis (Zone A), three quarters of an hour's drive east of Jerusalem. That didn't work out. Firstly, there was a lack of communication and secondly, the medical students are extremely stressed due to the very difficult study conditions. They are all in the clinical semesters, which means that they have to travel to different Palestinian hospitals in various locations, some of which are far away, on a rotating basis in order to attend courses there. Because of the checkpoint situation, which I have described several times before, these are ordeals. Nevertheless, I have made it clear to the students that I don't like slow communication. Now we are all connected via WhatsApp. Maybe that helps. But I also had very nice, sometimes very touching personal encounters with scholarship holders:



I met Ghada and Mira at Damascus Gate one morning. Both are former scholarship holders. We financed Ghada's training as a midwife and Mira's training as a speech therapist. Ghada is engaged and works as a midwife at an Israeli hospital. Mira works with autistic children at a municipal facility in a community center in Beit Hanina. She also “runs” the household of the extended family that lives in Anata.

I was invited by Shahd to her home in Anata. Shahd is about to complete her master's degree in healthcare management. She still has to collect data at a few hospitals in order to complete her master's thesis. She wants to finish in May this year and then (plan A) work, or (plan B) work and write a doctoral thesis. She takes great care of her sick elderly father and her sister, who is a few years older and has cancer. She was very happy about my visit.



Elisabeth, who has started a master's degree in piano at the Jerusalem Academy for Music and Dance, visited us at our place of residence in the St. Charles German Hospice. We had lunch together. She would like to continue her studies in Vienna, but first has to finish her English

course in her Bachelor's degree, which she has already completed. On top of that, she has moved in with her boyfriend and gives piano lessons twice a week to earn money.

Yali & Naor also visited us. Yali is now studying piano in Tel Aviv and is winning one prize after another, while Naor is starting his studies at the Hanns Eisler Academy of Music in Berlin in April. However, he suffered a tendon injury to his right hand on his return from Berlin at the end of January, which will take some time to treat. If the university agrees, he may not start until the fall. He says he has already found a room in Berlin-Mitte at an affordable price. We talked about our foundation concert, which is also planned for this year. Both are determined to perform here in Warmbronn on 12 September 2025 and to put on a varied program for the evening. Should a second performance be “in the cards” somewhere, they would be more than happy to do so.



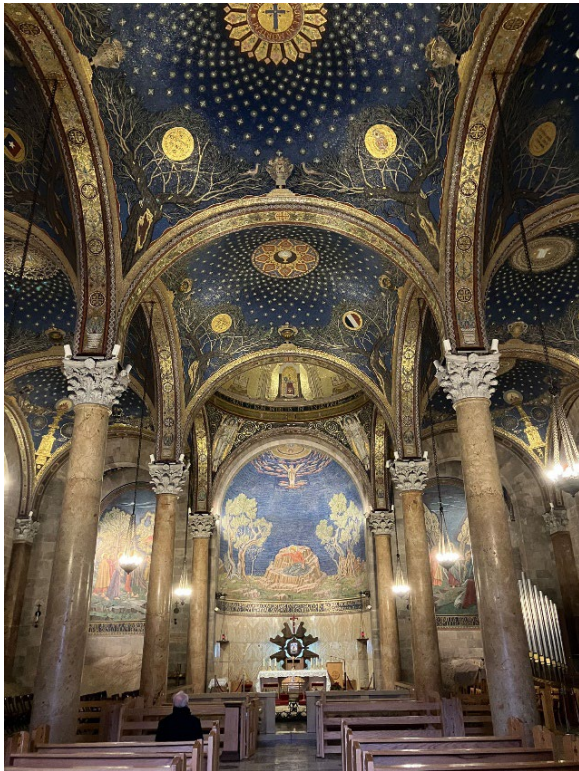
At the end of my trip, I visited Shrouq and her family in the Arab quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. Shrouq is now studying medicine in her 6th semester at An-Najah University in Nablus, also in the clinical semester. From Mondays to Thursdays, her mother takes care of her two children (2 years and 9 months old) while she fights her way through the jungle of checkpoints to the hospitals of her training throughout Palestine. Her husband works in a security



company. Their 9-month-old daughter doesn't sleep a wink at night and their son suffers from asthma. They also look after the 7 or 8-year-old son of Shrouq's husband's brother, who lives with them. The brother drowned in a swimming accident a few years ago. Shrouq is an admirable woman, how she manages it all.



About Tourism and weather



In October 2021, when I was allowed to travel to Israel with my wife and an exemption during the coronavirus pandemic, we thought it would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience to be able to visit the many tourist attractions in Jerusalem alone. But this time it was almost exactly the same. Sharing the All Nations Church in the Garden of Gethsemane alone with the church cat is a very special experience. Normally you have to wait in a long queue to enter the church.

This also applied to our accommodation, the place where I always stay when I am in Jerusalem, the St. Charles German Hospice. On the first morning for breakfast, we shared the hospitality of the seven Borromean nuns with a group of 15 pilgrims from Germany. After that, the two of us were the only guests. The infinite kindness and hospitality of Sister Daniela, Valentina and Emiliana and their four fellow sisters made us exclusively happy. Accommodation with spacious rooms, comfortable facilities, a beautiful garden and complete peace and quiet in the middle of Jerusalem, a real dream.



The weather was just as special for the Middle East. Very cold by local standards, sometimes no more than 3 to 5 degrees Celsius. Snow was even forecast for Sunday, a disaster for Jerusalem. The whole city would be at a standstill. But there was none. Instead, on Tuesday morning some water tanks on the roofs of Jerusalem burst due to the sub-zero temperatures during the night and poured their water onto the streets. On Saturday - Shabat - Jerusalem was clad in cold, wet drizzle and fog. From the lobby of the venerable King David Hotel, where a few Jewish families gathered for morning tea or coffee, not even the opposite wall of the Old City was visible.



A special unforgettable experience of my trip was the walk from Damascus Gate on Sunday morning, feeling like I was in the middle of Arabia with my eyes, ears and nose, followed by a 15-minute visit to the Viennese café of the Austrian Hospice in the Arab quarter of the old town with music by Johann Strauss, a cappuccino and apple strudel, surrounded by a few Europeans, then a 15-minute walk through the Via Dolorosa past shops smelling of spices, a few Greek Orthodox clergymen and a few ultra-Orthodox Jews, up to the Mamilla, a hypermodern shopping mall. In front of a fashion store, an ultra-orthodox Jew with a long beard, dressed like this, plays - as he always does - an electric guitar, usually pop songs like "Hotel California" - this time a Jewish dance song, and around him five Israeli soldiers, one with a machine gun slung over his shoulder, dance a typical Israeli dance.

Wow - what a rollercoaster of different cultures in just over half an hour. Where else in the world can you find this than in Jerusalem?