

## FACTSHEET: DEMOGRAPHICS OF HISTORIC PALESTINE PRIOR TO 1948



Ever since the founding of the Zionist movement, supporters of Zionism have downplayed the fact that historic Palestine had always had a healthy indigenous population. Zionists trumpeted the falsehood widely: “A land without a people, for a people without a land.” While this slogan encouraged Jewish emigration to historic Palestine, it also paved the way for one of the largest disposessions in modern history. Both the demographic statistics themselves, as well as the history of Jewish emigration to Palestine in the 1930s tell an important story.

### Demographics of Palestine under the Ottomans

The Ottoman Empire reigned over the land of Palestine during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Modern Zionism was a movement born in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, a number of disparate Jewish groups in Europe had begun cooperating to begin modest agricultural settlement in historic Palestine. These groups first came together formally in 1897 for the first Zionist Conference in Basel, Switzerland.

The population of Ottoman “Palestine” is difficult to estimate because:

- 1) There was no administrative district of Palestine. Ottoman census figures were for various districts, e.g. the Jerusalem, Acco and Nablus districts. The Acre district included areas in Lebanon, outside the borders of historic Palestine;
- 2) Both Arabs and Jews avoided the Turkish census for three reasons: a) to avoid taxes, b) to avoid military conscription, and c) to avoid questions of illegal residence;
- 3) The census figures didn’t include Bedouins and foreign subjects (i.e. individuals with foreign citizenship, without Ottoman residency status) of which there were about 10,000 Jews.

Nevertheless, the Ottoman census of 1878 indicated the following demographics for the Jerusalem, Nablus, and Acre districts:

<u>Census Group</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Muslim	403,795	85.5
Christian	43,659	9.2
Jewish	15,001	3.2
Jewish (Foreign-born)	Est. 10,000	2.1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>472,455</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Palestinian Demographics under the British Mandate Government

Jewish emigration to historic Palestine grew over the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially during the 1930s. The Arab population also grew during this period, due to a combination of high birthrates, British recruitment of workers from Syria, and workers from the Trans-Jordan lured by higher wages.

As the Jewish population in Palestine increased, the Arab population put pressure on the British government to control the immigration. Thus, in the 1920s, the British restricted Jewish immigration by fixing quotas and authorizing certain Jewish organizations to distribute immigration certificates as they saw fit. Nevertheless, with increased persecution of Jews in Europe, many Jews were not willing to wait years for immigration certificates. Thus, in 1934, the Vallos became the first chartered immigration ship to arrive in Palestine, carrying 350 Jews. By the time WWII had begun, tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants had arrived illegally in Palestine by ship. This illegal shipping of immigrants continued well into the 1940s. While the British intercepted some of the ships, almost all of the immigrants were eventually able to settle in Palestine.

The Jewish community found other ways to emigrate to Palestine, exploiting loopholes in the Mandatory government's immigration regulations. Students were not required to have immigration certificates to study in Palestine, so many enrolled at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and then remained in the country. Young women entered the country claiming fictitious marriages to Palestinian residents. Others arrived as tourists, and never returned to their former countries. In 1935 alone, almost 5,000 Jews entered the county illegally through these various means.

In 1939, concerned with the rising tensions in Palestine due to the massive Jewish immigration – both legal and illegal – the British government issued Parliamentary Document 6019, slated to limit the Jewish population in Palestine to no more than one third the total. If economic capacity permitted, 75,000 Jews would be allowed to come to Palestine, after which “no further Jewish immigration will be permitted unless the Arabs are prepared to acquiesce to it.”

## Emigration and Population Statistics of Palestine

The below estimates are based primarily on the reports of the British Mandate for Palestine and the Mandatory censuses, conducted only in 1922 and 1931. All figures following 1931 are estimates; most figures as of Dec. 31 of each year. A British-American commission of inquiry in 1945 and 1946 reported that, at the end of 1946, 1,269,000 Arabs (67.6 percent) and 608,000 Jews (32.4 percent) resided within the borders of Mandate Palestine. Source: Esco Foundation (1947.)

Net Emigration to Palestine					
Year	Jews		Non-Jews		Total
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	
1930	3,265	95.2	165	4.8	3,430
1931	3,409	81.4	778	18.6	4,187
1932	9,553	84.6	1,736	15.4	11,289
1933	30,327	94.8	1,650	5.2	31,977
1934	42,359	96.0	1,784	4.0	44,143
1935	61,458	97.0	1,906	3.0	63,364
1936	28,954	95.0	1,539	5.0	30,493
1937	9,647	88.1	1,300	11.9	10,947
1938	11,773	87.5	1,679	12.5	13,452
1939	15,386	93.6	1,051	6.4	16,437
Total	216,131	94.1	13,588	5.9	229,719

Total Population in Palestine									
Year	Total	Muslims		Jews		Christians		Others	
		Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
1922	752,048	589,177	78.34	83,790	11.14	71,464	9.50	7,617	1.01
1931	1,033,314	759,700	73.52	174,606	16.90	88,907	8.60	10,101	0.98
1931	1,036,339	761,922	73.52	175,138	16.90	89,134	8.60	10,145	0.98
1932	1,073,827	778,803	72.52	192,137	17.90	92,520	8.61	10,367	0.97
1933	1,140,941	798,506	69.99	234,967	20.59	96,791	8.48	10,677	0.94
1934	1,210,554	814,379	67.27	282,975	23.38	102,407	8.46	10,793	0.89
1935	1,308,112	836,688	63.96	355,157	27.15	105,236	8.04	11,031	0.85
1936	1,366,692	862,730	63.13	384,078	28.10	108,506	7.94	11,378	0.83
1937	1,401,794	883,446	63.02	395,836	28.24	110,869	7.91	11,643	0.83
1938	1,435,285	900,250	62.72	411,222	28.65	111,974	7.80	11,839	0.83
1939	1,501,698	927,133	61.74	445,457	29.66	116,958	7.79	12,150	0.81
1940	1,544,530	947,846	61.37	463,535	30.01	120,587	7.81	12,562	0.81
1941	1,585,500	973,104	61.38	474,102	29.90	125,413	7.91	12,881	0.81
1942	1,620,005	995,292	61.44	484,408	29.90	127,184	7.85	13,121	0.81