

Israel Genealogical Society

<http://www.isragen.org.il>

Censuses in Eretz Yisrael End of 19th Century - 20th Century *Shmuel Shamir*

Population registers and censuses are an important tool in genealogical research. A number of censuses have been carried out in Eretz Yisrael at different times – toward the end of the Ottoman rule, during the British Mandate and in the State of Israel.

End of the Ottoman Empire Period

The Nafus Books

These books contain the censuses taken in Eretz Yisrael between 1875 and 1918. They are written in Turkish, in Arabic characters. Together with the Books of the Mukhtars, [mukhtar = head of village or community] the records of the Consuls and the records of the Muslim Courts and the Christian Churches, they provide personal details on the population in this country during the 45 years preceding the British Mandate.

In 1977, the Israel State Archives published a study on these censuses by Jonathan Fagis. Fagis states that the Ottoman censuses and the Nafus books are one of the most important sources for the research of demography and economics, and the understanding of the reality of life, in Eretz Yisrael in those years. 463 Nafus books are deposited in the State Archives, in the form of microfilm, open to the public.

These books contain rich and accurate information: records of marriages, divorces, change of address, information about the military, details on local and foreign population and their addresses abroad, as well as religious, communal and institutional affiliation. The books are arranged by locations: districts, towns, villages, suburbs, and communities. In some of them, the distinction between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi population is also recorded, and even between Hasidim and others, especially in Jerusalem.

The Censuses Recorded in the Nafus Books

In 1884, the census was carried out only in the Old City, including Mount Zion (Har Tzion). The Muslim residents were recorded according to the Quarters of the City, the Jews and Christians by community affiliation only.

Other censuses were taken by the Ottoman authorities in 1905, 1911, 1912 and 1915. The best, although partial, is the one of 1905, because of its accuracy and the amount of material it contains. This census was supplemented by the censuses of 1911 and 1912. In 1915 the census was taken in the “New City” (outside the walls) of Jerusalem and only among the Jewish population, and it concerns mainly the appeal of the Jewish leaders to adopt Ottoman citizenship. As mentioned, these censuses are important for the study of demographics and economics of the times.

The Cataloguing of the Nafus Books

- a. 101 early books of population census contain the following details: name of town, settlement, village or suburb, name of quarter, name of the head of family, profession, religion, year of birth and details about the other members of the family.
- b. 225 basic books contain complete lists of the questionnaires used in all censuses since 1905. The recording was done on a large page, so that it was possible to add on the margin details about the newly born children, people that moved to the same courtyard, as well as houses built after the census was taken.
- c. 38 books contain details of births, deaths, marriages and divorces. These data were recorded according to the date that was given by the person who notified the regional

Israel Genealogical Society

<http://www.isragen.org.il>

office about the event, and this was not always the real date of the event. In the book of births only the surname appears, in most cases, and not the first name of the newborn.

- d. Other books contain lists of persons serving in the army, lists of foreign residents and "Mukhtar books" that were not recorded in the lists of the former censuses.

The Census of Jewish residents

In March-July 1916, a census was taken by the "American Aid Committee" that was part of the Eretz Yisrael Office of the New Zionist Organization. It was taken for administrative reasons, to enable orderly distribution of the produce and money that was sent from the United States in May 1915 as aid to the Jewish population. In Jerusalem 50,000 individuals were recorded: 24,445 Ashkenazi, 22,207 Sephardi and 3,340 Yemenites. Details about the census and aid distribution are found in the book by the journalist Avraham Almaliyah *Eretz Yisrael and Syria during the World War*, Vol. II p. 166. Another number (26,605) for the Jewish population in Jerusalem is given by D. Gurevich, in *Counting the Jews of Judea, Samaria and Galilee*, brochure 1, and *The Population of Jerusalem*, 1940. p. 14.

This census, which was a sort of Population Register of the Jewish Residents at that period, is mentioned as well in the book by Shmuel Moshayoff (who was the secretary of the Aid Committee): *Within Jerusalem*, p.48-53.

The Department of Statistics and Information, established by "The Board of Delegates" (Va'ad Hatzirim) in January 1920 continued processing the material (see Survey of the Activities of Va'ad Hatzirim of Eretz Yisrael, 1921, p. 27).

Censuses during the British Mandate

The first census was taken on 22 October 1922. The census lasted 6 days and comprised 757,206 residents. This number was amended by Prof. Roberto Bachi to 763,600 persons, in his book *The Population of Israel*, 1977, p. 366.

According to the condition imposed by the Arab Executive Committee before the census began, the residents that were abroad on the day of the census were counted as well. 757,182 individuals were recorded. Of them, 83,000 (11%) were Jews.

This was a "de facto" census, concise and somewhat primitive, and the entire population was recorded, including soldiers and foreign citizens. Its main purpose was to establish the community affiliation of the residents of Eretz Yisrael, in view of the approaching elections for the legislative council. Since the Arabs boycotted the elections, the Mandate Government rejected the idea as well and decided to establish a "Council of Eretz Yisrael" instead, whose members were to be appointed by the government.

The census was under the supervision of J.B. Baron, the Director of Customs and Commerce. He published the results in his "Palestine Report and General Abstract of the Census of 1922. Jerusalem, 1923".

This census was performed somewhat hastily and was not properly prepared (see E Schmeltz, *Cathedra* 36, p. 133).

The second census in Eretz Yisrael during the British Mandate was taken on 18 November 1931. In this census, 1,035,154 persons were recorded: 175,606 Jews (about 17% of the residents counted), 759,952 Muslims, 90,607 Christians and 9,589 others.

It is believed that this census is reliable and without significant errors. It was supervised by E. Mills. His report is "Census of Palestine 1931, Population of Towns and Villages and Administration Areas. Jerusalem, 1932".

The census registers of 1922 and 1931 were stored in the library of the Department of Statistics. During the War of Independence, the library was transferred, under fire, to a safe place. The material was stuffed in bags, and was apparently left in one of the rooms of the present Department

Israel Genealogical Society

<http://www.isragen.org.il>

of Statistics, without supervision. It is doubtful whether it is possible at the present to use the material and study it.

Census of the Jewish Adults of “Kneset Yisrael” [Kneset Yisrael = the organized Jewish Community under the Mandate]. This is a census of “Jewish volunteers in the service of the people”, and was performed by the *Yishuv* (the Jewish population in Eretz Yisrael before the establishment of the State) on 12 September 1939, and 136,000 Jewish residents were counted.

The records of this census are stored at the Central Zionist Archives, and are marked J/4. In Jerusalem the data of the census were recorded by neighborhoods and streets.

The list of adults of “Kneset Yisrael” 1942, arranged alphabetically, can be found at the CZA as well, marked J1/2332. The Jewish population in Eretz Yisrael was then 457,000 persons. In Jerusalem 80,850 persons were recorded (75,150 + 5,700 from Agudat Yisrael), which is 61% of the population in Jerusalem.

Censuses in the State of Israel

In Israel censuses are taken approximately every 10 years.

On 8 November 1948 a census of the entire population of Israel was performed, in collaboration with the Department of Statistics, for the purpose of establishing a **Population Register**. The result of the census was 782,000 souls, 713,000 Jews and 69,000 Arabs (according to the Hebrew Encyclopedia the result was 716,678 persons).

Following this census, the list of voters for the first Knesset (Parliament) was prepared and identification cards were issued. The records include surname and first name, details about parents and children, date and place of birth and death, sex, family status, date of Aliya, citizenship, nationality, religion, language, literacy, profession, residence and work address, family status – marriage, divorce, adoption and guardianship, time spent outside the country. For details see the Residents Register of the Department of Statistics 8.11.1948, Volume II Ch. 5.

A detailed analysis of the mass aliya (immigration) to Israel during 1948-1953, its extent and its influence on the Israeli population was done by Moshe Sikron.

The second census in the State of Israel was taken on 21 May 1961, in conformance with the Law of Population Register. 2,234,200 persons were counted, of them 1,981,700 Jews, 174,900 Muslims, 51,300 Christians and 26,340 Druse. The data recorded served also to update the addresses in the Residents Index.

Individual sheets of this census are deposited in the Israel State Archives.

The data of both censuses are classified, except for the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Defense, the Attorney General, the Chief of Police, the Marriages Registrar and others who were authorized by a court of justice.

The regulations (from 1975) concerning the retrieval of data from the population register state that a person who has apparent interest is allowed to receive the following data: name of parents, location of birth, family status, sex, nationality, date of entering Israel, identification number, birth certificate and death certificate.

A third census was taken on 22 May 1972. 3,225,000 persons were counted, 2,752,700 Jews and 472,300 non-Jews.

A fourth census was performed on 4 June 1983 and 4,037,600 souls, 3,349,900 Jews (83% of the population) and 687,600 non-Jews (10.6%).

Israel Genealogical Society

<http://www.isragen.org.il>

A **fifth census** was performed on 5 November 1995. The result was 5,612,300 souls, 4,522,300 Jews (80.6%) and 1,090,000 non-Jews. In Jerusalem it reported a total of 602,700, 420,900 Jews (69.82), 181,800 non-Jews (30.2%).

A **census in Judea, Samaria, Gaza and Northern Sinai** was performed in September 1967 by the military administration and the result was 600,000 persons in Judea and Samaria and 38,000 in the Gaza region and Northern Sinai. In East Jerusalem 68,600 persons, non-Jews, were counted. The census was taken under the direction of Prof. Bachi, Mrs. Even-Tov, R. Bar-On, Rotter, and Dr. Schmeltz.

In the census in the territory annexed to Israel a status of Permanent Resident was granted to those who fulfilled the following two conditions: (1) physical presence in the area at the time of the census (2) was a resident in the area. The result of this census was 598,637 in Judea and Samaria, 33,441 in Northern Sinai, 356,261 in Gaza and 6,396 in the Golan Heights – 994,735 persons altogether. Residents of East Jerusalem who were temporarily abroad at the time of the census, were not counted.

Population Censuses in East Jerusalem during the Rule of the Hashemite Kingdom

Two censuses were taken under the Hashemite rule, in 1952 and 1961. In November 1961, 75,000 individuals were counted in East Jerusalem under Jordanian rule: 54,081 Muslims, 10,795 Christians and 981 persons of other religions, as well as 96 Jews in the compound of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus (all this in the framework of the political-geographic situation at that time).

Details about these censuses can be found in E. Schmeltz: The Arab Population in Jerusalem since the Mandate 1918 to 1990, in *Hamizrah Hehadash* (The New Orient) 1992, 35, p.6-43.

Databases- Sources Open to the Public with no Limitations

Various databases contain a large amount of helpful material that enables the researcher to cross-reference information and receive additional non-classified details from the censuses.

Registers of voters to the Kneset, municipalities and regional councils. These registers contain limited information, such as age, residence and nationality. It is possible to cross-reference this information according to identification numbers and/or addresses of residence. These registers are stored in the archives of the municipalities and regional councils.

Registers of real estate records. These registers contain information about property rights of real estate. The information retrieval is limited to a particular property or a particular individual, and is obtained from real estate books where the numbers of the lot and the individual are recorded.

Telephone directories. They contain the phone numbers and addresses, except for some classified numbers that are unlisted.

Who's Who books. These books appear once a year, and contain original material, often verified, about the person, his family and his work. The information in the books is limited to persons of prominent families or occupying a high social position. The information is in most cases accurate, and it is assumed that it was checked by the person listed. Sometimes, though, we can find unnecessary exaggeration and self-praise. The books can be examined in the Bibliographical Service of the National and University Library at the Givat Ram campus, Jerusalem, and in the other University Libraries in Israel.

The Hevrot Kadisha [burial societies] **registers.** These registers contain information on the deceased, starting from 150 years ago. Sometimes information about family members and addresses are included.

Israel Genealogical Society

<http://www.isragen.org.il>

Information in the media. This is information published in print or other media. It often deals with sensations, political and criminal matters, or other matters of daily life, and should be checked for accuracy. It can be nevertheless cross-referenced with other sources. It is found in the archives of the daily newspapers such as Haaretz, Ma'ariv, Yedi'ot Aharonot and Jerusalem Post.

The use of databases should be considered in the light of the Law of Protection of Privacy.

Law of protection of privacy 1981. This law brought about a reform in the matter of secrecy and privacy. Its purpose is to regulate the prohibitions and limitations on the use of information obtained from various databases by means of: detective work, telephone tapping, photography, copying letters or other documents, as well as using the name, nickname, picture or voice of a person, or publishing matters concerning his personal life, his health, economic situation, professional status, opinions and beliefs, or anything obtained through violation of privacy.

The law states that the registrar must keep an orderly register of the database, and that data about a person can be retrieved by the person him/herself, his/her guardian, or representative by written authorization.

It is possible to obtain information from public institutions, within the framework of the law of protection of privacy, if the information is not classified by law or by rules of professional ethics.

Law of freedom of information. This law regulates the accessibility of information available at public authorities. It establishes the right of every citizen to obtain information – on tape, film, photographed or computerized – from the municipal or state authorities and from the corporations controlled by them, concerning their activities and areas of responsibility. The law does not apply to the legislative, executive and judiciary authorities.

In conclusion, we should mention that the genealogical researcher can obtain information from the various censuses if he presents a written authorization from the person the information is about, or if he had received the information from another source. For a deceased person, the authorization is given by a close relative.

See also:

Great Britain. Military Hand Book on Palestine. Cairo, 1910.

Great Britain. Government of Palestine. Village Statistics, 1938, Jerusalem, 1938.

Great Britain. Government of Palestine. Village Statistics, 1945. Jerusalem, 1945.