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Conflict of the Earthly and Heavenly Jerusalems

Michael Turner

Jerusalem — it is a city unique, and before all things a city of idealists, a city moreover in which the idealists through succeeding generations have torn each other and their city to pieces. Over 40 times has it changed hands in history. And perhaps partly because of all this and partly because of the grandeur of its site and surrounding landscape it is a city of singular romance and beauty.¹

Planners are forever idealists creating heavenly and ideal cities on earth, perhaps at the expense of citizens who are simply striving for an easier way to accomplish mundane chores. Jerusalem provides unusual insight into the way that the images different cultures have of a place come together in that place. The question about Jerusalem is not where the city is, but what the city is. Jerusalem is considered the navel of the earth, the fountain of cities, the alpha and omega. The consideration of what Jerusalem is can be divided into two approaches: empirical-historic and existentialist. Jerusalem is the merging of myth and reality; it is the disassociation of dreams and deeds.

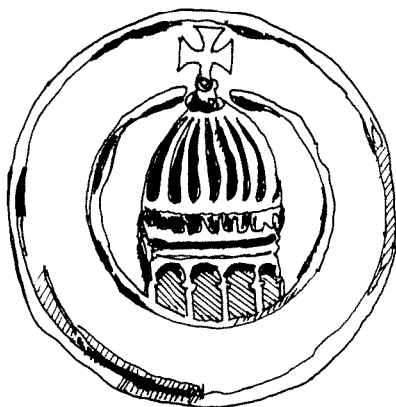
Jewish Jerusalem

Jerusalem became the Davidic capital of the Jewish state in 993 B.C. Founded on Mount Moria, where Abraham offered to sacrifice Isaac, Jerusalem was identified as the place where “God appears,”² thus establishing the rationale for asserting that the Axis Mundi, a connection that links Earth with Heaven, passes through the city. During the first 450 years of Jerusalem’s existence, a tradition of envisioning it as a Holy City emerged, with the regular annual appearance of God in the Temple.

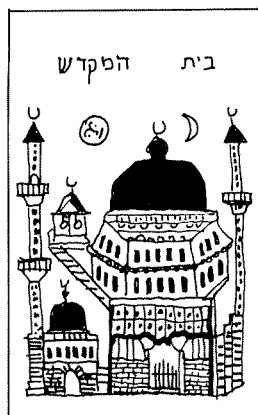
With the First Exile of Jews from the city, after the conquest of the city by Nebuchadnezzar in 564 B.C., Jews started yearning for a city that became increasingly disassociated from the reality of Jerusalem.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down: yes, we wept when remembered Zion ...

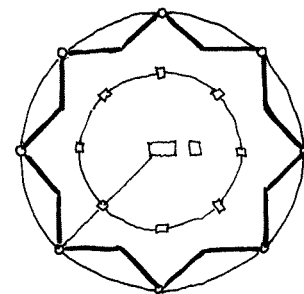
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand lose her cunning.³



Seal of the Knights Templar, twelfth century.



Temple, 1850.



Plan of Ideal City, Filarette, 1464.

The return of the Jewish people to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. under rule of the Persian kings prompted the first recorded public dispute in conservation, between those propagating a work of restoration and dissenters recommending a new and better style.

It was under the prophet Zacharia that one finds the first mention of Jerusalem as a metaphysic city — the city as an ideal place and as a dream:

*And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then I said, "Where are you going?" and he said to me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its breadth, and what is its length." And behold, the angel ... came forward to meet him and said to him, "Run and say to that young man, 'Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and cattle in it. For I will be to her a wall of fire round about, says the Lord, and I will be the glory within her.'"*⁴

The city is no longer a physical entity — its walls now consist of the Lord's fire. Later, Zacharia quotes "the Lord of hosts" counting 10 pledges

relating to the City of Truth, all relating to metaphysic and human qualities, for example:

*... Thus saith the Lord of hosts: There shall yet old men and women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the broad places of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the broad places thereof ...*⁵

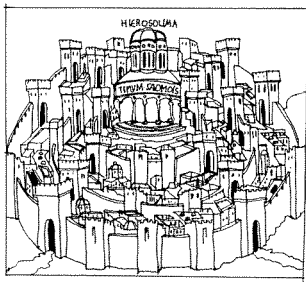
But Jews showed little interest in returning to Jerusalem, and financial incentives had to be offered to encourage families to relocate there. The Jewish community was enjoying living in the financial and cultural centers of Persia and Egypt, and the percentage living in the Holy Land dropped greatly. By the end of the Second Temple period, as documented in the writings of the Mishna in the first century B.C., Jerusalem was portrayed as a talisman: A question about ornaments being worn or carried on the Sabbath is accompanied by a list including a bracelet and a "city of gold" — this is interpreted as a gold headband inscribed with the word "Jerusalem" or an image of the city.⁶

Christian Jerusalem

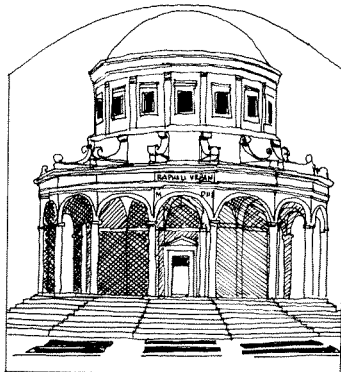
The Jerusalem of the New Testament also was held to be the City of God:

*And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has a great, high wall, with 12 gates. And he who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls ... twelve thousand stadia; its length and breadth and height are equal.*⁷

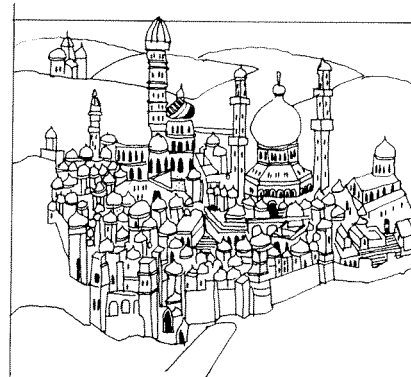
The measuring rod and the "city of gold" are familiar as Zacharian images from the Old Testament, but Jerusalem is again described as a tangible city with foundations, walls and ornament; a cube linking heaven and earth through its Axis Mundi. This is not to say that Jewish philosophy was metaphysic while the early Christian philosophy was physic, for we find that in the Talmud a discussion takes place as to what would be the ruling if the Temple would descend on a festival:



"Jerusalem," H. Schedel, 1493.



Marriage of the Virgin,
Raphael.



Jerusalem, French fifteenth-
century manuscript.

*The building of the Temple cannot supersede the Sabbath or Festival; this refers to a Temple built by human hands, but the Temple of the future is built by God and will be revealed and descend from Heaven.*⁸

It was during this same period of the Talmud, about 400 A.D., that St. Augustine wrote his treatise *The City of God*. He developed the “threefold meaning of the prophets, referring sometimes to the earthly Jerusalem, sometimes to the Heavenly City, sometimes to both at once.”⁹ And while the Celestial City depicted by Augustine set on fire the minds of the Christian community of Europe, Queen Helena, Emperor Constantine’s mother, was making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to survey the real places in the Holy Jerusalem.

By this time, the idea of Jerusalem as the City of God had become entrenched in Judeo-Christian beliefs and the representation of Jerusalem as such became a frequent subject of art and architecture. There was often little connection between these images of the ideal city and the realities of the earthly Jerusalem.

Islamic Jerusalem

With the growth of Islam, the architecture of the earthly Jerusalem became influenced by a local Islamic vernacular architecture. The Dome of the Rock, the minarets and the stone-domed roofs of domestic architecture generated an ambience that for the European, Jew and Christian alike became symbols of the Heavenly City. This exotic architecture was depicted in various art forms as embodying the difference between the Bible of the past, the mundane of the present and the City of God of the future.

Three centuries of European Crusades to Jerusalem generated yet further myths about the city and identified the city with martyrdom. The Knights Templar used the architectural form of the Dome of the Rock as their seal; by transposing the Moslem crescent with the Christian cross, they made it very clear as to who was in charge. Jewish manuscripts and decorated religious books also used the image of the Dome of the Rock, not bothering to change the crescent but simply adding the Hebrew words *Bet Mikdash* (Temple).

Images in Art and Literature

The images of Jerusalem that have been presented in various art forms throughout the ages have contrasted with the reality of the architecture of the earthly Jerusalem, many times using a synchronic manner. For the most part, these representations “treated the city as an organic whole and as part of a larger perceptual unity.”¹⁰

The ideal cities depicted in the fifteenth century highlighted the city’s circular form, with a single or double node usually identified as a church or market. The form proposed by Filarets in 1464 is just one of many examples. Not 30 years later the German scholar H. Schedel prepared a monumental history, *Liber Chronicarum*, depicting Jerusalem in the circular design of the ideal cities of the period, with the Temple of Solomon in the center.

The octagonal form of the Dome of the Rock, which the Knights Templar dedicated as the *Templum Domini*, influenced the design of temples and churches in Europe. The detail of Raphael’s *Marriage of the Virgin* (1604) depicts such a structure, although recreated in the characteristic Renaissance style of Bramante. After

the Great Fire of 1666, Christopher Wren convinced London’s Church Commissioners that the architecture of the Holy City was more in the spirit of the Renaissance than of the Gothic style, and succeeded in rebuilding London’s churches in the new Renaissance style.

Eighteenth-century philosophers “demolished the Heavenly City of St. Augustine only to rebuild it with more up-to-date materials.”¹¹ They, like St. Augustine centuries before them, wrote a new history, an imaginative reconstruction of vanished events. Becker contends that the Heavenly City had shifted to earthly foundations and responsibility for past events was transferred from divine to human hands, making it inevitable that God should be viewed differently — on the one hand scientifically, on the other with tangible reality.

Meanwhile, the physical image of the Islamic city image was visible into the nineteenth century. Mark Twain wrote in 1867 that “the appearance of the city is peculiar. It is as knobby with countless domes as a prison door is with bolt-heads.”¹² The representation of the fifteenth-century French manuscript comes to life in Twain’s words.

Conflicts of Concept Between Differing Cultures

The Hebrew word *a’m’t* can mean “colleague” or “conflict.” St. Augustine considers the matter of conflict and peace in the earthly city with the resigned conclusion that if a war is won, no one survives to resist, and for that reason there will be peace.¹³ Perhaps, as Woody Allen would have us believe, “history is written by the winners,” and the architecture that survives is living evidence of that point.

The division between the three religions with a claim on Jerusalem was very clear — the Jews prayed for Jerusalem, the Christians wrote about Jerusalem and the Moslems lived in Jerusalem. The architecture of Islam was the architecture of those who lived in Jerusalem, or the “winners.” But in the last 150 years, the camera has brought images of the real Jerusalem to everybody; the differing images of the city have merged and affected the present-day policies of conservation in Jerusalem. William Blake echoed the thoughts of a nineteenth-century pilgrim and planner about the city:
*I will not cease from Mental Fight
 Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand.
 Till we have built Jerusalem
 In England's green and pleasant land.*¹⁴

Development outside the city walls started after the Tanthamet, the procedures of land reform promulgated by the crumbling Ottoman Empire. The carving up of the world after the Crimean War in the 1860s resulted in the allocation of land in Jerusalem to the major powers and their allies. Each built compounds and colonies there (in a reversal of Blake, England was built in Jerusalem). The Russians, Germans, Greeks, Americans and Jews from central European countries, all exported their native architecture to Jerusalem, creating a city that differed dramatically from the biblical image.

Policies for Design and Preservation

The International Style bypassed Jerusalem. As architect C.F. Ashbee describes, the British Mandate, which saw itself as a latter-day Crusade, developed a historic sense towards the planning of the city. The planning controls in the Old City and its environs were intended to generate in a Jerusalem architecture of the British

school, with buildings faced in stone and stone-domed roofs. Ashbee, a strong supporter of the arts and crafts movement, brought to Jerusalem the love for detail in his architecture and supported Boris Schatz' newly created Bezalel Academy for Arts and Crafts. Patrick Geddes came from England to merge the ideals of the Garden City and Celestial City with the reality and earth of Jerusalem.

The paradox is that Jerusalem is a city of the world, and being international it must develop an antithesis to context. In Jerusalem, the international is indigenous — the interindigenous. Design policies should add and bring together the cultures of the world. They should not follow the lowest common denominator of mimicking the past, but gently allow growth, respecting both the past and the contemporary in place, time and activity. The Russian Church of St. Mary Magdalene, the English St. George's Chapel and the Italian Hospice all have brought their own architecture, making for the rich cultural and architectural mosaic of Jerusalem.

This *Axia Mundi* linking Earth with Heaven at Jerusalem has been best summarized by Ashbee:

*And one thing we whose concern is civics must always remember. In the conservation of a city, whether it be like London, Paris, Rome, or New York, well within the stream of the world, or whether like Jerusalem set upon a hilltop and remote: What we are conserving is not only the things themselves, the streets, the houses, spires, towers and domes, but the way of living, the idealism, the feeling for righteousness and fitness which these things connote and with which every city with any claim to dignity and beauty is instinct.*¹⁵

Notes

1. C.R. Ashbee, *Proceedings of the Pro Jerusalem Society, 1919-1922*.
2. Gen. 22:14.
3. Psalms 137: 1-5.
4. Zach. 2:1-5.
5. Zach. 8: 1-23.
6. *Mishna Sabbath*, chap. 6, para 1.
7. Rev. 21:10, 12, 15.
8. *Talmud Succab*; chap. 3, p41a, Rashi commentary.
9. Augustine, *City of God*, 17.3.
10. Arthur Kitcher, *The New Jerusalem — Planning and Politics* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973).
11. Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932).
12. Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad* (1867).
13. Augustine, *City of God*, 15.4.
14. William Blake, *Milton, The Preface* (1844).
15. Ashbee, *Proceedings*.