Conflict of the Earthly and Heavenly Jerusalems [Speaking of Places]

Title:

Author:

Turner, Michael

Publication Date:

1992

Publication Info:

Places

Permalink:

http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0mc4p771

Acknowledgements:

This article was originally produced in Places Journal. To subscribe, visit www.places-journal.org. For reprint information, contact places@berkeley.edu.

Keywords:

places, placemaking, architecture, environment, landscape, urban design, public realm, planning, design, Jerusalem, Michael Turner

Copyright Information:

All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author or original publisher for any necessary permissions. eScholarship is not the copyright owner for deposited works. Learn more at http://www.escholarship.org/help_copyright.html#reuse
Conflict of
the Earthly
and Heavenly
Jerusalems

Michael Turner

Jerusalem — it is a city unique, and
before all things a city of ideals, a city
moreover in which the idealize through
successing 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 par-
tly because of the grandeur of its site and
surrounding landscape it is a city of singu-
lar romance and beauty.1

Planners are forever idealism creat-
ing heavenly and ideal cities on earth,
perhaps as the caprice of citizens who
are simply striving for an easier way to
accomplish mundane chores. Jerusalem
provides unusual insights 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 disassoci-
tion of dreams and deeds.

Jewish Jerusalem

Jerusalem became the Davidic capital
of the Jewish state in 993 B.C.1
Founded on Mount Moria, where
Abraham offered to sacrifice Isaac,
Jerusalem was identified as the place
where “God appears,” thus establish-
ing the rationale for asserting that the
Arm Mandel, a connection that links
Earth with Heavens, 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 rives of Babylon, there are our
days; yet, we urge when we remembered
Zion:

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my
right hand lose her cunning.9

Seal of the Knights Templar.
Tenth century.

Temple, 1650.

Plan of Ideal City, Fiatello, 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 controversy, between those propagating a work of restoration and dissidents recommending a new and better style.

It was under the prophet Zachariah that one finds the first mention of Jerusalem as a metaphorical 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, “Rise 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.’”

The city is no longer a physical entity — its walls now consist of the Lord’s fire. Later, Zachariah quotes “the Lord of hosts” counting 18 pledges relating to the City of Truth, all relating to metaphorical 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 headdress inscribed with the word “Jerusalem” or an image of the city. 6

Christian Jerusalem

The Jerusalem of the New Testament also is 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 ... resolve thousand stadia, its length and breadth and height are equal. 5

The measuring rod and the “city of gold” are familiar in Zacharian images from the Old Testament, but Jerusalem is again described as a tangible city with foundations, walls and ornament, a cube looking heaven and earth through its Aisus Mundi. This is not to say that Jewish philosophy was metaphysic while the early Christian philosophy was physics, for we find that in the Talmud a discussion takes place as to what would be the railing if the Temple would descend on a festival.
The building of the Temple cannot 
supervise the Sabbath or Festival; it 
refers to a Temple built by human hands, 
but the Temple of the future is 
given by God and will be revealed and 
descended from Heaven. 9

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.” 10 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 archi- 
tecture 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 
more myths about the city and iden- 
tified the city with martyrdom. The 
Knights Templar used the architectural 
form of the Dome of the Rock as their 
sanctuary, by transposing the Modern 
church crest with the Christian cross, they 
made it very clear to all who was in 
charge. Jewish manuscripts and deco- 
rated religious books also used the 
image of the Dome of the Rock, not 
bothering to change the crest 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 “treat- 
ed the city as an organic whole and as 
part of a larger perceptual unity.”

10 The ideal cities depicted in the fif- 
teenth century highlighted the city’s 
circular form, with a single or double 
node usually identified as a church or 
market. The form proposed by Filarete 
in 1464 is just one of many examples. 
Not 30 years later the German scholar 
H. Scheidt 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 
Dominii, influenced the design of tem- 
ples and churches in Europe. The 
detail of Raphael’s Marriage of the 
Virgin (1504) 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, 
rewrote 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 
write 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 manu- 
scripts comes to life in Twain’s words.

Conflicts of Concept between 
Differing Cultures

The Hebrew word d’vna 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 Per- 
haps, as Woody Allen would have us 
believe, “history is written by the win- 
ners,” and the architecture that sur-
vives 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 ease from Mortal Fight
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand.
Till I have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.14

Development outside the city walls started after the Tanhumet, 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-dusted 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 come 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 affinity to context. In Jerusalem, the international is indigenous — the interdenominational. 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 Magdalen, 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 Asia Mundi linking Earth with Heaven in Jerusalem has been best summarized by Ashbee: And one thing we whose concern is cities 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 hilling and remote. What we are conserving is not only the things themselves, the stones, the houses, shops, 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

5. Zach. 8: 1-23.
6. Midrash Sifreth, chap. 6, para 1.
7. Ren. 21:10, 12, 15.
8. Tehillim Seahir, chap. 5, p. 141 a, Radic commentary.
9. Augustine, City of God, 17.3.
12. Mark Twain, Innocents Abroad (1867).
13. Augustine, City of God, 15.4.