

The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies

Old versus New
Preservation Policy in Jerusalem

Edited by Israel Kimhi

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Preservation Policy in Jerusalem**

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Foreword

This report is the product of a collective endeavor by a small group of professionals in the field of urban preservation. The initiative was launched at the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (JIIS) in 2007, after many observers determined that preservation efforts in the city had slackened. In response, JIIS approached the Goldman Foundation through its representative in Jerusalem, Bonnie Boxer, to seek assistance in the preparation of a report on preservation policy for Jerusalem, and the Foundation responded affirmatively. We take this opportunity to express our gratitude for their support.

The municipal Master Plan formulated about eight years ago for the city of Jerusalem has yet to be granted cogency. One section of the plan addresses the question of a preservation policy for the city. In the opinion of many planners and professionals, the plan still requires far-reaching amendments and improvements to this section. A group of leading architects and urban planners, sharing their efforts on a pro bono basis, formulated a new statement of principles that was adopted by the district council, which in turn recommended that the Municipality immediately formulate a comprehensive preservation policy for Jerusalem. The group included architects Ari Avrahami, Aliza Arens, Peter Bogud, Phillip Brandeis, Raz Efron, Randy Epstein, Gil Gordon, Elad Melamed, Tamar Koch, Simone Kube, Uri Peden, Osnat Post, Mandy Rosenfeld, Moshe Shapira, Amir Shoham, Giora Solar, Lital Yadin, Baruch Yoskovitch, Profs. Ariel Hirschfeld and Reuven Laster; district planner Dalit Zilber; Moshe Cohen, who is in charge of the statutory plan for the city; Renee Sivan, the curator of the Tower of David Museum; Israel Kimhi, at JIIS and Itzik Schwiki, of the Society for Preservation of Israel Heritage Sites. Together, they endeavored to formulate a statement of principles for the preservation of historical areas in Jerusalem, which was published in 2008 under the title *Jerusalem: The Historic City*, edited by Arens, Yadin, Avrahami, Sivan and Melamed. Elements of this endeavor contributed the study presented here, and we are grateful for this contribution.

The term “historic city” has since then taken hold within planning institutions and among the general public. It is one of the salient elements of Jerusalem’s

preservation, as it represents the most sensitive and important regions of the city in terms of preservation.

Public attention to the issue of preservation and the need for a comprehensive preservation policy led the Municipality to adopt a series of measures: it established the Jerusalem Municipal Conservation Committee, headed by the deputy mayor, as well as a specialized professional unit within the Municipal Planning Department dedicated exclusively to the city's preservation. A few years ago this unit undertook to update the city's preservation listed buildings, which had originally been compiled as part of Jerusalem's first Master Plan, during the early 1970s, and updated by JIIS in the mid-1990s.

To carry out the work of updating the register, the Municipality hired the services of six teams, which worked for a year to review and update the list throughout a large number of the city's neighborhoods. The updating work has concluded, and the lists are currently undergoing a sophisticated process of computerization. In addition, the city's Planning Department initiated a long series of master plans for Jerusalem's historic neighborhoods, with an emphasis on preservation issues. These plans, most of which do not have statutory backing, serve as a guide and source of recommendations for the preservation of historical sites; some of the plans do have statutory authorization.

The Municipal Conservation Committee, backed by the Municipality's professional preservation unit, operates according to a procedure that requires advance discussion and the formulation of recommendations for every town plan or building permit that include a structure or facility designated for preservation, and in particular all the neighborhoods within the area of the "historic city." The Committee's recommendations are presented to the municipal and district planning committees – both of which are statutorily based committees. The Conservation Committee is headed by a member of City Council and includes other Council members, a professional team from the preservation unit, the city engineer and deputy engineer, architects and preservation experts not employed by the Municipality, a representative of the Society for Preservation of Israel Heritage Sites, a representative of the public, a representative of the district committee, and representatives of other relevant municipal departments, including the Legal

Department. Within the Municipality the administrative and professional areas mentioned above have seen a great deal of improvement in recent years.

The report presented here comprises nine chapters: an overview of preservation in the city, the designation “historic city” and its significance, criteria for the selection of sites and neighborhoods for preservation, economic aspects of urban preservation – international and Israeli experience, planning tools and financial incentives for preservation measures in the city, the main problems in Jerusalem and the actual state of affairs vis-à-vis preservation, urban policy recommendations in the area of preservation, and statutory aspects, including the interim policy of the district committee. Appendices to the report contain a list of international treaties on the issue of preservation, a set of guidelines for creating a preservation documentation file, a glossary of terms, and a bibliography.

The report includes chapters by professionals in specific areas, including the chapter on economics and the chapter on tools for the promotion of preservation, which was authored by Aviel Yelinek from JIIS. Other chapters, including those on methodology and criteria for the selection of preservation sites, the state of preservation in Jerusalem, the appendices on planning and on international treaties, and some of the recommendations for preservation policy in the city were authored by the undersigned.

With gratitude to all contributors and appreciation for their efforts,

Israel Kimhi
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Chapter 1: Preservation in Jerusalem

What Is Preservation and Why Practise It?

The preservation of structures and neighborhoods encompasses all of the activities aimed at ensuring the continued existence of these edifices that have cultural, historical, religious, aesthetic, scientific, national, and architectural value. The preservation of cultural heritage in all its aspects has been recognized and accepted throughout the world as an issue that must be addressed and incorporated into planning and development processes. In other words, sustainable planning requires that structural assets embodying the cultural heritage of the past will be preserved and passed on to future generations.

Many countries have laws and mechanisms intended to ensure that the preservation of sites is implemented in practice. The international community also recognizes the importance of this issue. The rules of preservation are affirmed in several international treaties, including the Athens Charter (1933), the Venice Charter (1964), the Suzhou Declaration (1998) and more. Preservation laws were first passed in this country during the period of the British Mandate. These include the Antiquities Law, which protects archeological sites built before 1700.

The British sought primarily to protect the unique character of Jerusalem's Old City and, immediately upon conquering the country, established a series of guidelines for its preservation. Later, the newly founded State of Israel made it obligatory to preserve structures with architectural and historical value through the 1965 Planning and Building Law. In time, amendments were added to this law, reinforcing it and giving it more power to maintain the rich local heritage. In this context it is worth recalling the words of the late Yigal Alon: when "a people does not preserve its past, its present is uncertain and its future unclear." The variation between one structure and another or between one site and another is expressed in architectural design, the texture of the neighborhood, the contours of the streets and city squares, the public and religious institutions, and their surrounding environment. All these elements combine to create for residents an affinity with their place of residence as well as serving as a major drawcard

for visitors – and together they constitute cultural assets for today’s and future generations.

Alongside cultural heritage, economic assets are part of the preservation processes. Global annual tourism today sees hundreds of millions of individuals seeking a variety of cultural experiences, eager to learn about the past as well as the present that emerged from this past. Israel and Jerusalem are on that map. In addition to its social and cultural contributions, therefore, preservation also contributes to tourism and the economy. Jerusalem is the jewel in the crown of tourism in Israel, both from within and from abroad. Most tourists who visit Israel spend several days in Jerusalem. One of the main sources of attraction to the city is the abundance of sites with cultural, religious, historical, architectural, or national value.

Being a hilly city, Jerusalem is blessed with captivating panoramic views from the surrounding ridges towards the city and towards the "historic basin" and the holy sites in its center. Given that Jerusalem sits on the national watershed line, it is bordered on the east by the barren landscapes of the Judean Desert and Dead Sea and on the west by green, windswept vistas. All these elements, natural and constructed alike, make Jerusalem unique among the world’s cities. It is therefore universally agreed that Jerusalem’s special character, panoramas, neighborhoods, and sites, which combine to form a tapestry of life thousands of years old alongside modern development, must be preserved and nurtured. The old and the new are intertwined in Jerusalem, especially around the centrally located “historic city,” whose borders more or less correlate with the borders of the city at the time that the British Mandate came to an end (1948).

In addition to its history, archeology, natural vistas, and cultural landscapes, the city is characterized by traditional construction using limestone – “Jerusalem stone” – that makes Jerusalem unique among cities throughout the country and the world. Although modern construction uses other materials as well, this stone remains dominant and ever-present. The historical buildings, complexes, and neighborhoods constructed more than 160 years ago deserve to be preserved for coming generations, ensuring quality of life within them on the one hand while also maintaining the characteristic spirit of the place on the other. A combination

of appropriate preservation measures and wise planning policy will strengthen Jerusalem economically and socially and greatly benefit its residents and visitors.

The History of Preservation in Jerusalem

Preservation as a matter of principle and practice in Jerusalem is a direct consequence of the colonial European presence that took hold of the Holy Land during the 19th century. When the Egyptian army retreated from Palestine in 1840, European powers began to compete among themselves to establish their hold over parts of the declining Ottoman Empire, especially in Jerusalem.

At the time a small, mostly walled city, Jerusalem underwent an accelerated process of land purchasing and construction at the hands of various European governments. Thus there emerged a medley of building styles. A green-domed Russian church surrounded by guest accommodations for Russian pilgrims alongside an Italian hospital modeled after the Palazzo Vecchio of Florence; houses of prayer - churches, mosques and synagogues – of various style scattered throughout the city; neighborhoods that look like copies of East European villages alongside a German village built by Templers, not far from a local Arab village practicing centuries-old traditional agriculture. Thus, a rare combination of structures and surfaces, of varying designs and shapes, emerged in Jerusalem. The ruling empire of the time also contributed to the construction spree, especially in the Old City and sometimes atop the ruins of earlier communities and cultures. The jewel in the crown of Ottoman projects was a series of buildings marking the jubilee anniversary Sultan Hamid's rule, among them the clock tower at Jaffa Gate, the grand public water fountain near the Kishla fortress, and the ornate fountain in the center of Avtimus Market (Muristan).

The tapestry of structures in the Old City and its surroundings soon became, in essence, an architectural and historical museum under a halo of holiness, unmatched anywhere in the world.

As residents began to move out of the walled city during the 1860s, new Jewish neighborhoods were established along the axes of Jaffa Road, Geula Street, and Mea Shearim Street. Later, Arab neighborhoods were also established outside the

Old City walls along the road to Nablus, while the Christian population spread out towards the southwest – the German Colony, the Greek Colony, Katamon, Talbieh, and Bak’a. Each community built its neighborhood in accordance with its traditional construction style. For example, the German Templers, founders of the German Colony, built their homes inspired both by the villages of southern Germany and an awareness of their surroundings in Eretz Israel; Ethiopians built their neighborhood with a church in the center; Greeks built the Greek Colony; and Armenians built a closed quarter of their own within the Old City, surrounded by walls and gates. Once the exodus from the Old City began, more modern construction became possible, and it is the Armenians who built most of the structures near where Jaffa Road and Shlomtzion Hamalka Street of today begin. The Americans were also honorably represented in Jerusalem by the Spafford family, who founded the American Colony near the entrance to Sheik Jarrah. Most of these historical neighborhoods have survived and today are designated for preservation.

On December 11, 1917, the British General Edmund Allenby entered the gates of the Old City, marking the start of a new era in the history of Jerusalem. The English saw themselves as the heirs and descendants of Richard the Lionheart and Richard of Cornwall, and as keepers of the tradition of the Middle Ages in the Old City. They justified their rule, among other ways, by pointing to the need to defend the Holy City, which had been entrusted to their care for protection and preservation. Even before the cannons along the frontline fell silent, Ronald Storrs, the city’s first British governor, asked Alexandria’s city engineer, William Hannah McLean, to prepare a plan for Jerusalem. Storrs instructed McLean “not only to plan [Jerusalem] as much as to draw up regulations to protect its special character.” The theme of preserving the city’s character permeates all of the Mandatory plans for Jerusalem.

Immediately thereafter, the military governor issued an official declaration and order prohibiting construction without a permit within a 2.5-kilometer radius of Damascus Gate. The order also prohibited covering buildings with corrugated tin and established guidelines mandating that buildings be constructed using chiseled square stone. This instruction has had a tremendous influence on the character and appearance of Jerusalem, from that time to this day.

McLean's plan was approved in July 1918, making it the cornerstone for urban planning in Jerusalem and thereby establishing the principles of the city's preservation. The plan divided Jerusalem into two areas: "Heavenly Jerusalem" – the Holy City – that is, the Old City and hilly ridges east of it, and "Earthly Jerusalem" – the secular portions undergoing development and spreading westwards. The plan prohibited new construction in the Old City and placed severe restrictions on construction in the adjacent "rings" surrounding it, in order to preserve and protect the Holy City from any modern development that could impinge upon its character.

During this period, in addition to official instructions regarding preservation, the Pro-Jerusalem Society was established as a framework through which city dignitaries and financiers promoted planning and the urban environment. They took measures to protect important sites and nurture popular art and craftwork. The Society also had the clock at Jaffa Gate removed and sections of the Old City walls renovated, adding a walkway atop the walls and removing some of the adjacent structures.

The Mandatory planning apparatus included two additional preliminary plans: a 1919 plan by Patrick Geddes and a 1922 plan by Geddes and Charles Ashbee. The latter plan determined the locations of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus and of Mamilla Street as the commercial center of the new city. These plans, too, sought to protect the Old City using green beltways that would surround it and prevent development adjacent to it.

Two subsequent master plans, a 1930 plan by Clifford Holliday and a 1944 plan by Henry Kendall (published in 1948), completed the Mandatory planning system for Jerusalem. They underscored the importance of preserving the Old City but did not attribute much importance to preserving the Jewish neighborhoods that were founded between the 1860s and early 20th century. On the contrary, they saw these as inferior neighborhoods and slated them for destruction. Within this category are neighborhoods that we seek to preserve today, including Yemin Moshe, Nahalat Shiva, Even Israel, Ohel Moshe, Mazkeret Moshe, Zichron Tuvia, Beit Israel, and other Jewish neighborhoods along Jaffa Road and Bezalel Street. The plans contained written instructions prohibiting new construction in these

neighborhoods, which they defined as “reconstructed areas” where only sanitary improvements were permitted. Consequently, the physical condition of these neighborhoods was frozen in time for many years. During the 1960s, with the shift in perspectives on planning and recognition of the importance of preserving old Jewish neighborhoods as well, Jerusalem’s 1968 Master Plan designated several neighborhoods and sites for preservations. Thus, paradoxically, the Mandatory recommendations helped halt development in these neighborhoods and preserve them and their character.

Israel’s first plan for Jerusalem, prepared by the architect Heinz Rau in 1948, was also the first to identify various neighborhoods worthy of preservation, including the German Colony and some of the old Jewish neighborhoods. Some twenty years later, in 1968, the Master Plan for Jerusalem designated more than 1,000 structures, neighborhoods, and complexes for preservation and published the first list of structures for preservation in the city. On the basis of this plan (which does not have binding legal force), the Municipality prepared detailed and statutory plans for the preservation of many neighborhoods, residential buildings, and public buildings. A portion of these have been obliterated over the years and replaced with modern structures. Some have been expanded through annexes that changed them to the point that their original character is not recognizable. In recent years the issue of preservation has received more attention. New master plans and specific plans have been prepared that would ensure the preservation of worthy structures and complexes. Jerusalem’s new Master Plan also dedicates an entire section to preservation, but it has yet to be fully and properly implemented.