Conflict of the Earthly and Heavenly Jerusalems

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Jerusalem — it is a city unique, and before all things a city of ideals, a city moreover in which the ideals through succeeding generations have torn each other and their city to pieces. Over 400 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 as the expression 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 disassociation of dreams and deeds.

Jewish Jerusalem

Jerusalem became the Davidic capital of the Jewish state in 933 B.C.E. Founded on Mount Moriah, where Abraham offered to sacrifice Isaac, Jerusalem was identified as the place where “God appears,” thus establishing the rationale for asserting that the Ark Marashi, 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 586 B.C.E., Jews started yearning for a city that became increasingly disassociated from the reality of Jerusalem.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we weep when remembered Zion...

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand lose her cunning.2
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 conserva-
tion, between those propagating a work of restoration and dissenters rec-
commending a new and better style.
It was under the prophet Zacharias
that one finds the first mention of
Jerusalem as a metaphysical city — the
city as an ideal place and as a dream:
And I lifted my eyes and saw, and beheld, 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
you 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 come of the
Lord’s fire. Later, Zachariah quotes “the
Lord of hosts” counting 10 pledges
relating to the City of Truth, all relat-
ing to metaphysic and human qualities,
for example:
... Thus said 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 encour-
age 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 cen-
tury B.C., Jerusalem was portrayed as a
talism: 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 had a great, high
wall, with 12 gates. And he who talked to
me had a measuring reed of gold to meas-
ure the city, its gates and its walls . . .
resolve thousand stadia, its length and
breath and height are equal.7

The measuring rod and the “city of
gold” are familiar in Zacharian images
from the Old Testament, but
Jerusalem is again described as a tangi-
ble city with foundations, walls and
ornament; a cube looking heaven and
earth through its Aisus Mundii. 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 ruining 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 descended from
Heaven.7

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, some-
times to the Heavenly City, some-
times to both at once.”8 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 because 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
corner architecture. The Dome of
the Rock, the minarets and the stone-
dommed roofs of domestic architecture
generated an ambience that for the
European, Jewish 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 iden-
tified the city with martyrdom. The
Knights Templar used the architectural
form of the Dome of the Rock as its
seal, by transposing the Mosaic cres-
cent with the Christian cross, they
made it very clear as to 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 crescent but
simply adding the Hebrew words Bet
Mikdat (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.”9

The ideal cities depicted in the fif-
teenth century highlighted the city's
geometric 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. Scheidel 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 octogonal form of the Dome of
the Rock, which the Knights
Templer dedicated as the Temple
Domini, influenced the design of tem-
ples 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.”10 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
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.”11 The representation of
the fifteenth-century French manus-
cripte comes to life in Twain’s words.

Conflicts of Concept between
Differing Cultures

The Hebrew word da‘an 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.12 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 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 Tanhumaht, the procedure 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-dotted 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's 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 ambivalence 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 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 Arba Mundu linking Earth with Heaven in Jerusalem has been best summarized by Ashbee:

And one thing ye whose concern is citizens must always remember. In the conservation of a city, whether it be like London, Paris, Rome, or New York, to be within the stream of the world, or whether like Jerusalem set upon a hilltop and remote. What we are preserving 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**

3. Psalms 137: 3-5.
5. Zach. 8: 1-23.
6. Mifra'ah Sabras, chap. 6, para 1.
7. Rev. 21:9-10, 12, 15.
8. Tz'ahel Sangu, chap. 3, p.41a, Randi commentary.
9. Augustine, City of God, 17.3.
12. Mark Twain, Innocents Abroad (1867).
13. Augustine, City of God, 15.4.