

Values of Heritage in Great Religious and Cultural Areas From Existentialism to Historicism – a view of the Holy Land and the sites of Jesus and the Apostles,¹

**Professor Michael Turner, UNESCO Chair for Urban Design and Conservation
Studies, Bezalel Academy for Arts and Design, Jerusalem**

Jerusalem, the navel of the Earth, revered and contested, with a multiplicity of values and attributes, changing in time and place is the epitome of the Everyman. How can we understand and comprehend the depth of its meaning? A review of early Jewish tradition will shed some light on the dilemmas. The Talmud² relates the story of the Roman soldier who goes to the eminent Rabbi Shammai and asks him to expound the Tora, while he stands on one foot. To this Shammai vehemently castigated him for the audacity. On turning to his colleague Hillel, the Rabbi had no problem in informing him that the whole Torah is embodied in the phrase ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’ – the rest is commentary. Perhaps we can discern the emerging approaches between existentialism and empiricism.

This started the period of Diaspora, and the sacking of Jerusalem by Rome (to our Italian hosts, I can safely say ‘all is forgiven’), concluded the disassociation of the Heavenly and Earthly Jerusalems’. The earlier physical loss of the Holy Land at the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE contributed to the emerging transcendental nature of the religion and these events in the territory of Palaestina put a final nail in the coffin of reality.

Jewish thought had always been somewhat ambivalent to the issue of Holy sites. Moses the greatest of leaders and prophets died in an unknown tomb³ highlighting the irrelevance of the event and the greatness of the person. The prevention of the deification of place was thus enshrined.

The second century Mishna compiled in the wake of the exile debates the issue of holiness in a hierarchal scale. One can sell the public square and buy with the money a synagogue, sell a synagogue and buy an ark, sell an ark and buy books.... on the contention that one can only ascend in holiness⁴. The physical immoveable land estate is less holy than the book and the words that then can be memorised and carried away in your mind. Perhaps this was ‘sour grapes’ on behalf of the remnants of Zion, but it was convenient and workable.

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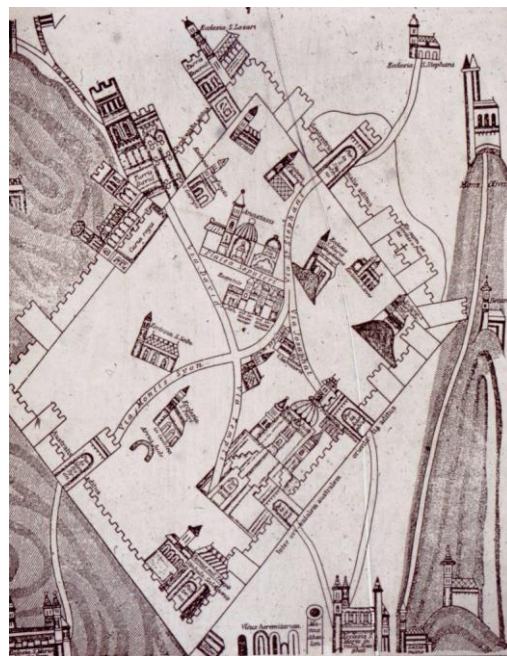
² Talmud Babli Shabbat 31a

³ Deuteronomy Chap 34, 6 And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.

⁴ Mishna Megilla Chap 3,a

The polemics of the Talmud devote time to the idea of ‘each generation and its expounders’ and each generation and its sages’⁵ implying the necessity of re-interpretation for each generation. It is also incumbent upon every Jew to see himself as if he was personally at Mount Sinai receiving the Tora, again underscoring the importance of re-interpretation. The disputes between the Pharisees and Sadducees and the later interpretations by the Karaites, leaves us in no doubt that Judaism, while tending towards existentialism was by no means devoid of its empiric roots – the Written and Oral Law were always considered as the nexus of the two entities.

What is to be considered authentic, the empiric site or the existentialistic memory? Our views of sites, both real and sensual, are based on an inherent approach which affects our understanding and interpretation. With the emerging Christian faith, it was the early Judeo-Christian tradition that coloured the disputations and attitudes to place. The evolving narratives of the Holy Land from the first place-naming of Queen Helena in the fourth century have created a series of landmarks that locate our recollection.



The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem is a polyglot of the ages and peoples that have venerated the site each with their architectural language. It brings together the age of Constantine, identifying the sites of the evangelical facts and the findings of locations for its recollections, and the later Crusader kingdom, resurrecting these images into the collective Christian memory. As time progressed the images and maps were prepared in the minds of the artists and cartographers and the preservation of this memory was achieved through the representation of the art and architecture of the buildings.

Over the years as events became more distant, a collective memory developed from the many strands of images slowly construing the Holy Land and the Holy City thus creating the theatre and backcloth for the events of the time.

⁵ Talmud Babli, Sanhedrin 38,b

We might consider these points of view through the spectacles of existentialism, empiricism or historicism, and even preterist eschatology, allowing us to appreciate other approaches to conservation in the complexity of religious and cultural sites. A number of personas have provided us with insights to these approaches thus changing our values and points of view. Representing these changing views I have chosen three unique persons from the pantheon to indicate the varying perspectives – Francis Bacon, David Hume and Jean Paul-Satre.

Francis Bacon in *de verulamis scripta in naturale et universali philosophia* led the scientific revolution with his new 'observation and experimentation' theory. Here he developed the four idols including the "Idols of the Tribe", attributed to the race and "Idols of the Cave", which are peculiar to the individual. Their ways of understanding are brought into question. David Hume subsequently highlighted the question of belief and reality questioning the miracle and the comprehension of resurrection. Over the centuries, interpretation has swung like the pendulum leaving us to contend with the doubts of our attitudes to the Holy sites.

While existentialism celebrated the human existence, it was very subjective and emphasised the meaning within each individual. It doubted the external reality giving prominence to the present. Jean Paul Sartre in his book *l'existentialisme est un humanitairisme* of 1946 mentions that both religious and atheistic existentialists believe that *existence* comes before *essence* – in other words, it begins from the 'subjective'.

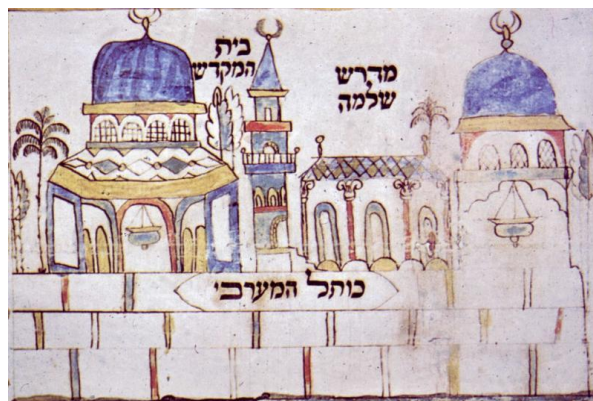
In this paper we can suffice with two diverging trends or interpretation, but it is important to note that we are considering the attributed values, not of the object but of the beholder. Nothing is more relevant than the seminal work of Maurice Halbwachs where he coined the current term of *collective memory* separating the notion from the individual memory. The collective memory is shared, passed on and also constructed by the group, or modern society. His conclusion in *The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land* weaves the two millennia narrative between the real woof and the virtual warp. The collective memory of a nation is represented in part by the memorials it chooses to erect. These were the religious buildings erected over the events. Perhaps more significantly, what was not memorialized was the real indicator of the collective memory.

Halbwachs differentiates between the ministering in the Galilee and the events in Jerusalem. The former sites are represented as an inner transcendental sense, while the latter as a real sense linked to the events of the outer world. Halbwachs subsequently asks how recollections are to be located. To this he answers that with the help of landmarks we always carry within ourselves, it suffices to look around, to think about others, and to locate ourselves within the social framework in order to retrieve them.

The disassociation of the Earthly and Heavenly World and City was not confined to Judaism, as Christianity also created a new dimension of idealism with the treatise of St Augustine, the City of God, written around 415 CE in the wake of the fall of Rome to the Vandals. Images were created, destroyed, recreated and reinterpreted with the relevance of each generation and with the political necessities. The texts in Revelations of the New Jerusalem lent physical specifications to the mosaics of Ravenna, whereas the maps of Jerusalem for the uninitiated Crusader showed a

preference for the imaginary. While the road to Jerusalem was filled with inconveniences, the promise of absolution was too great to miss out and the reincarnation of the Holy City was part of an everyday environment. We need only to look at the Labyrinth at Chartres, the Churches at Lalibela, Ethiopia, the Sacra Monti, Piedmont and even a Via Dolorosa as far away as Salta, Argentina to gain an insight into the depths of understanding that continues to recreate sites even in the Mammon of Las Vegas. In Simon Schama's words⁶ there appeared Calvaries of Convenience. Saint Francis in 1224 had retreated to Mount Verna for fasting and prayer receiving the stigmata, setting the stage for the alternative Calvary from the followers of the Saint. Mediaeval Europe transformed into the Renaissance and Baroque periods and brought with them a representation at an even grandeur scale. The depiction of the scenes of Christ contained all the ingredients for the collective memory. They certainly knew their Bible, and to meticulous detail. Andrea Mantegna in the Agony in the Garden (1455), depicts the walled city of Jerusalem, then under Roman rule, includes an equestrian statue, a column with relief sculpture and a theatre like the Coliseum, all inspired by monuments surviving in Rome, while the Crucifixion (1460) has the eternal city on the hill-top providing the necessary fuel to the fires of imagination.

With this imagination running wild, it was only a short step till the images were hijacked in a round robin, between the three contending religions of Jerusalem. The exquisite Dome of the Rock completed in 691 CE by Abd el-Malek became the Temple image, the octagonal format developing from the Holy Cube of Revelations.⁷ While the Crusaders gently removed the crescent from the roof, the Jews simply added the text 'Temple' to the existing building. Religious recycling was in fashion. During the following centuries we witness art forms, manuscripts and incunabula galore that evidence these styles.



The World Heritage Convention, 1972 highlights the need for a statement of Outstanding Universal Value⁸. This might be based on typology, chronology, topology and finally the narrative. Outstanding Universal Value, OUV, could here be interpreted as Outstanding Ubiquitous Valle. *Ubique*, has the meaning of space and time, the collective, or perhaps selective, memory is recalled in the cultural landscape and itinerary by the individual, while the authenticity is validated by the tribe. The

⁶ Landscape and Memory pp 436-442

⁷ Revelations 21:16 The city lies foursquare, and its length is as great as its breadth. He measured the city with the reed, Twelve thousand twelve stadia. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.

⁸ Operational Guidelines paragraph 151

historic identity is recaptured and recalled by each generation adding layers to the narrative. This layering between the real and imaginary continued during the centuries when the battle-lines between the religions were clear: the Muslims lived in the Holy Land the Christians wrote about the Holy Land and the Jews prayed towards the Holy Land. This all changed in 1840 when the first pictures of the newfangled camera sent the reality around the world.



Let us return to our text of Maurice Halbwachs; the memory and authenticity together with the integrity, represent the collective texts and canon; the cultural landscape and itinerary represent the tribal form.

“Sacred places thus commemorate not facts certified by contemporary witnesses but rather beliefs born perhaps not too far from these places and strengthened by taking root in this environment.”⁹

He sums up in his conclusions that “social beliefs, whatever their origin, have a double character; they are collective traditions or recollections, but they are also ideas or conventions that result from a knowledge of the present. With this in mind let us accompany Mark Twain to the Holy Land in *Innocents Abroad*. The biblical images of his Sunday School are smashed to smithereens. “Travel and experience mar the grandest pictures and rob us of the most cherished traditions of our boyhood. Well, let them go. I have already seen the Empire of King Solomon diminish to the size of Pennsylvania; I suppose I can bear the reduction of the seas [Galilee] and the river [Jordan].”¹⁰ On reaching Jerusalem he writes that a fast walker could go outside the walls in an hour, it appearing as a compact mass of houses being the knoggiest town in the world, except for Constantinople.

⁹ Halberwachs, p. 199

¹⁰ *Innocents Abroad*, p. 477



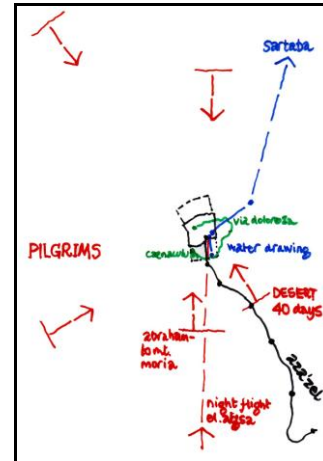
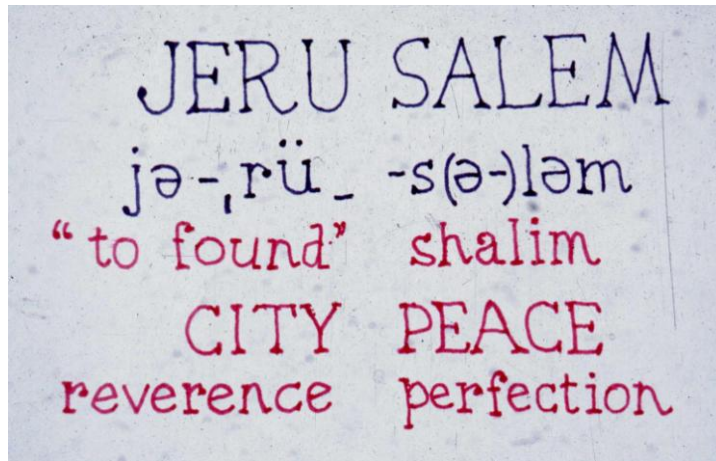
But we all walk 'in the footsteps of.....' The sense of arrival to Jerusalem has been a unique experience over the ages in all religions. First documented with the patriarch Abraham's journey to Mount Moriah for the sacrifice of Isaac, these experiences continued with the Christian pilgrims' first views of the Old City and the night flight of Muhammad to Al-Aqsa. They are re-enacted in the ceremonies of the city, in the ethereal, in the ideas and the events of Jerusalem.

The Via Dolorosa and the Stations of Cross in Jerusalem were the archetype for spiritual meaning allowing the pilgrim a supernatural experience while colouring the images of reality. I would like to recall, that in my research of narratives in the Old City, one morning I documented a group of pilgrims by the vii station of the cross on the Via Dolorosa. The cleric accompanying the group read the relevant text and pointed out to the celebrants, correctly, that the physical environment of the time of Jesus was some metres below the current street-level and what we are seeing is the modern city. He asked that the group join hands, close their eyes and pray together. I found myself at the same spot in the afternoon observing yet another group of pilgrims with yet another cleric at the same vii station, reading the same texts. This cleric asked his group to look around and observe. He asked them to note that this is exactly the same milieu as the time of Jesus, the same bustling market, the same pilgrims, the same commotion and uproar. Which of the clerics depicted the truthful and authentic Jerusalem? I am sure that both were right.

The question whether 'people sanctify place' or 'place sanctify people' raises yet again the representation of the changing values and attitudes.

“Beliefs (standards), which have significance for a cultural group or an individual, often including, but not being limited to spiritual, political, religious and moral beliefs. Places may have a range of values for different individuals or groups and values are continually renegotiated.”

The procedures of the World Heritage Convention determining cultural significance and validating authenticity and integrity make renewed demands on the sites where intangible attributes are inherent. In the multi-cultural world, the process of their evaluation is more critical than the project of inscription.



Here in Florence, how could we not conclude without thoughts from Dante as considered by Umberto Eco in his book *Serendipities*?¹¹ Here Christian revelations are founded on Old Testament texts in Hebrew with New Testament texts in Greek, while the true meaning might be discovered through the Latin translation which was authenticated at the Council of Trent at its fourth session in 1456. He relates that the divisions of languages occurred because man by custom, by habit, and by language is a changeable animal.

Dante writes in the final canto of the *Divine Comedy* that language is unable to express all what he sees so we will have to continue to actually walk in the footsteps, to see for ourselves, observe and touch to understand the real meaning.

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