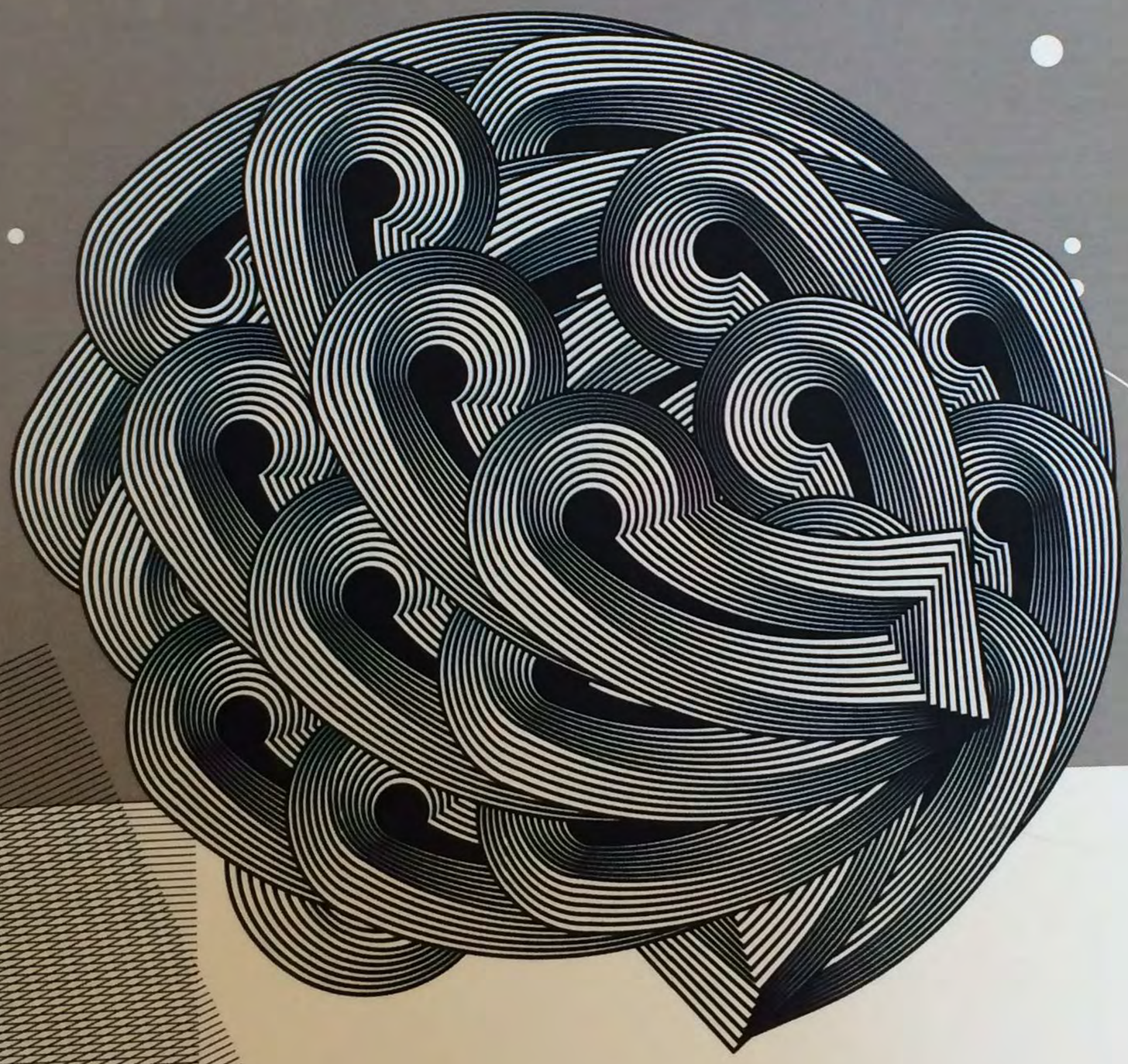
SYMPOSIUM

MUSEUMS IN MOTION

PROCEEDINGS



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DEMUCITY

DESIGNING THE MUSEUM
OF THE CITY OF VOLOS:
HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF INNOVATIVE
INTERACTIVE CONTENT FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE

2011-2015

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Symposium proceedings

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LANDSCAPE REVOLUTIONS IN THE LEVANT:

MASSIVE MIGRATION FLOWS & NEW ECONOMIC STRUCTURES

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Abstract: Since the mid-19th century the Levantine urban and cultural landscape undergoes profound transformations. The ancient region of Bilad al-Sham is upset in its own cosmopolitan identity, by the emergence of new processes of nationalism. In Palestine the situation is enriched by flows of Jewish immigrants, many of them fleeing from anti-Semitic pogroms. From the historical city port of Jaffa, leading up to Jerusalem, the settlement revolutions, together with economic transformations and new infrastructural systems, have changed the structure of these existing landscapes. New Jewish immigrants, with their multiple origins, cultures, traditions and customs, moved into a limited and rich in history geographic area. With the advent of Zionism the urban and rural landscapes became theatres of conflict with indigenous peoples. Ancient and forgotten sites were re-evaluated by the Zionist ideology; they became the instrument for establishing a link with the biblical history, actualized in contemporary purposes related to the control and the possession of the land.

Keywords: settlement processes, ethnic conflicts, contested past, nationalism, Zionism, migrations

Introduction

Since 2007 more than 50% of the world population lives in cities (concentrated in only 2% of the total area of the planet) while in 25 years this percentage is expected to increase up to 80%.

This phenomenon of radical transformation originates from the industrial revolution. During this time, human population has grown from 1 to 7 billion and the fastest growth rate was registered in urban environments.

In the Levant this phenomenon is particularly evident, where huge population flows and settlement revolutions, together with new infrastructural systems, played a focal role in the broadening of cultural horizons and new economic structures.

Looking at this region today, the deep conflict that is upsetting its identity, is a so radicated reality that seems to exist for a so long time and the case of Israel and Palestine is paradigmatic in this context.

However this is a recent phenomenon: in the late 18th century, when Palestine becomes a strategic interest for the European powers, new settlements arise, increasing in the second half of the 19th century, along with new agricultural villages, infrastructures and productive areas.

But in this period two phenomena begin to break the previous cosmopolitan balance of the Levant: the growing Arab nationalism and the advent of Zionism, born in connection with the anti-Semitic persecution.

Thousands of Jews start to migrate to Palestine, not only from Russia and Poland but also from Arab and Islamic countries, producing impressive economic, social and territorial effects.

Different origins and traditions are transplanted in a small geographical area rich in history, in which the Islamic civilization is also shaped by Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine roots.

New Tensions arise, not only between Jews and local Muslims, but also between Zionist Ashkenazi Jews and the Mizrahim Jews, coming from Arab countries and considered backward compared to Zionist ideals.

The landscape becomes an opportunity to 'restore' a link with the land. Ancient sites become the scene of conflicts and tools of new settlement strategies, evoking antagonistic myths and symbols.

In this context the road from Jaffa, main port of Palestine, to Jerusalem, the Holy City, is particularly relevant (Fig.1).

Jaffa lies along the ancient Via Maris, linking Egypt to Mesopotamia and Jerusalem lies along the Ridge Road; further east runs the Via Regia, through Aleppo, Damascus and Amman.

The road from Jaffa to Jerusalem, crossing the ancient cities of Lydda and Ramleh, and continuing up to Baghdad, integrates the north-south connections, forming a structured network of caravan cities (Blake et al, 1985).

The Arab towns and villages along this road undergo radical change. In the countryside new crops and new farming techniques lead the passage from subsistence farming to intensive farming for export.

The ancient caravan networks aggregate the new settlements, but entire urban cores lose their identity and the ethnic component becomes a distinguishing element.

Figure 1: The main roads of Palestine through the Jesreel Valley and the Plain of Sharon, along which there are the Franciscan monasteries. In italics are marked cities that host the major monasteries, while round are marked the major cities. Map elaborated by the author.

The Sunset of Jaffa

The road to Jerusalem starts from Jaffa, the port city that the Arabs, impressed by its beauty, called Bride of the Sea (La Guardia, 2002).

A first image of Jaffa offers a limited and superficial touristic model of the East. The patterns of Islamic architecture are re-evaluated, although formally and emptied of any content.

This strategy, promoting an idealized western vision of the typical exotic and romantic city, attracts foreign capital and real estate investments.

But traces, still readable, reveal the profound identity of Jaffa, ancient Phoenician city, historical port of Palestine and node for the passage of products, people and cultures between Mediterranean and Middle East.

Jaffa was a vibrant port-city, with an economy linked to the international trading system.

Especially from the 17th and 18th centuries, the road from Jaffa to Jerusalem catalysed the interests of the European powers.

The 19th century was globally marked by a strong demographic, economic and urban growth. The population of Jaffa grew from 5,000 to 50,000 inhabitants.

Thousands of them were Jews, coming from multiple cultures and traditions, who moved into a limited geographic area rich in history, where the Islamic culture merged with Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine roots.

New Jewish colonies started to arise around Jaffa, together with villages founded by Egyptian soldiers, who arrived in Palestine to work in the building industry and agriculture, as well as European legations, who built religious structures that, together with the commercial buildings, formed an integrated system with the port, for managing the flows of people and goods to Jerusalem (Baedeker, 1912).

Such massive migration flows, together with the opening of the Suez Canal and the introduction of steam navigation, produced impressive effects on the economic, social and territorial structure of the region.

In Palestine new roads were built and others were paved; in 1892 the first railway was also built, running from Jaffa to Jerusalem.

Jaffa doubled its trade, becoming the largest industrial and commercial city of Palestine and the third port of the Levant, after Beirut and Alexandria (Bassi, 1857).

This period was also marked by two factors: the growing phenomenon of Arab nationalism and the first manifestations of the Zionist ideology. These events upset the previous balance of coexistence, not only between Arabs and Jews, but also between Mizrahim Jews, who came in Palestine from Arab countries in the first half of the 18th century, and Askenazi, who were Americans and Europeans Jews, arrived in Palestine in the second half of the century, fleeing anti-Semitic persecutions.

In 1909 a group of Zionist Jews founded Tel Aviv, a new neighbourhood out of Jaffa – which soon became the first Jewish city – while Jaffa continued to attract the Arab population.

With the British Mandate, the Balfour Declaration in 1917 promoted the creation of a 'Jewish homeland in Palestine' that favoured further Jewish migration in Tel Aviv.

Jaffa began a phase of decline: whole parts of the city were demolished. The Zionist ideology manifested in settlement strategies that juxtaposed to ancient landscapes changing their character (Yacobi, 2004).

In 1925 the English town planner Patrick Geddes draw up a master plan for Tel Aviv, merging the western town planning with the local architecture.

Tel Aviv became the economic and administrative centre of the country, destroying the economy of Jaffa and incorporating its neighbourhoods (Agnon, 2000).

On the Way: Landscapes in Transformation

The Zionist strategy for the conquest of the 'promised land' and the foundation of the future Jewish state is evident even along the route from Jaffa to Jerusalem.

This landscape, theatre of conflict with local people, became instrument through which Zionism established a link with history, re-evaluating forgotten archaeological and religious sites and causing population displacement.

Also agricultural landscapes changed: new crops and new farming techniques caused the passage from a subsistence economy, based on the production of oil and soap from olive trees, to a large-scale export economy, based on the intensive cultivation of fruit trees (Delmaire, 1999).

At the beginning of the 20th century Jaffa produced five million boxes of oranges – second only to Spain – which were exported to Egypt, Asia and Europe. This production increased until 1948, but passing from Arab hands to Jewish ones.

The first Jewish agricultural colony was Mikveh Israel, founded in 1869: a pre-Zionist school that became a reference model for the next agricultural centres.

In 1882 a community of Russian Jews founded the agricultural colony of Rishon Le Tzion. Further south lies a rural landscape of vineyards, citrus groves and orchards surrounding the colony of Rechovot founded in 1890, today seat of the Department of Agriculture at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and of the Weizmann Institute of Science, internationally recognized for scientific research.

In the colony in Beer Yaakov – founded in 1907 by Jews originating in Dagestan – now is the Israel Institute for Biological Research. In 1921 the Agricultural Research Organization was also founded, for integrating the activities of Mikveh Israel with intensive mixed agriculture.

A network of *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* completes this rich landscape settlement related to agricultural activity.

New realities, related to productive activities, were added to emerging agricultural settlements. In Holon – today the second industrial centre of Israel, on the outskirts of Jaffa – a group of Polish Jews created a textile industry in an area which was previously agricultural (1935).

In the first decades of the 20th century, the Jewish settlement policies outlined a coexistence of different and juxtaposed territorial countryside, very different from the existing landscape.

The existing Arab cities were compromised; they lost their identity and the ethnic component became a distinguishing element.

The previous Arab villages were destroyed and replaced, often through undue appropriation; or they were flanked by new settlements, creating new identities: military zones, research centres, specialized schools, industrial and production areas, agricultural colonies, new towns, refugee camps, prisons and new infrastructures.

Lydda & Ramleh: Poor Suburbs of Tel Aviv

Lydda and Ramleh are located approximately 15 km away from Jaffa. They are two ancient cities that still maintain a strong Arab identity.

Lydda was founded as a Greek colony. Ramleh was founded with the advent of Islam near Lydda and became the new capital of the Islamic region. Lydda, then flourishing, multicultural, religious and commercial city, consequently lost its relevance.

Nevertheless, both cities retained – over the centuries – a strategic role, as nodes on the way from the port of Jaffa to Jerusalem.

The urban layouts of Lydda and Ramleh still show the evidence of the key moments in history that, by the end of the 19th century, have changed the Palestinian landscape: the new road and rail infrastructure, which, defined a time of great growth for both cities and have definitively transformed the role of these ancient urban structures.

Their development increased during the British Mandate, when Lydda became the home of the largest railway station in Palestine: the products for the Near East, reached Port Said by sea and continued by train to Lydda, where they were sorted and redistributed.

In 1936 the British built also the first international airport, north of Lydda that is still one of the largest in the Middle East.

The borders of the ancient cities were overpassed, by building new neighbourhoods defined by a hybrid architectural style, hanging between Western models and Eastern characters.

The demolitions in their old centres lead to the creation of urban gaps, upsetting the original urban structures.

Wealthy Jews moved in the greater Tel Aviv, while the economically weak Mizrahim Jews, were forcibly placed in Lydda and Ramleh.

Many Palestinian residents fled, others were expelled, the few remaining were concentrated in ethnic enclaves.

The situation worsened with the birth of Israel, when the ancient axis lost its connection role with the Middle East.

Huge flows of Jewish immigrants arrived in Israel and the strongest economic growth was concentrated in large coastal cities. Lydda and Ramleh lost the role of regional centres, becoming poor cities, characterized by unemployment, urban and social decay.

The Future Capital of Israel

In Jerusalem these phenomena occur to the nth degree (Halbwachs, 1988).

Here, the topography of the holy places was consolidated over the centuries in a constant renewal of the city, also passing through desecrations, destructions and functional reorganizations.

Archaeological sites are also religious places, full of symbolic values. These sites, concrete evidence of the biblical landscape, provide an invaluable key to recall the history and the myth of the Jewish people (Mitchell 2002).

The debate on the role of the Holy City in the new Jewish state is indeed crucial, and the major projects are closely linked to the idea of the future capital of Israel.

This involves the construction of a new urban image that Zionism prefigures through representative projects: among them, the Hebrew University and Hadassah Hospital.

The role of Jerusalem as a holy city par excellence – consolidated over the long term – is then converted to new secular functions, creating a new city that, in the context of the emerging Jewish state, would have represented the cultural capital.

The first project is the Hebrew University, emblem of the Zionist ideology, designed by Patrick Geddes in 1919 for the Jews from around the world.

The project is characterized by a strong orientalist mark, where Jerusalem is seen as fence of archaeological and sacred sites, to be retained as concrete evidence of the biblical landscape, used by Zionist ideology as the key to evoke the myth of the Jewish people.

The site is Mount Scopus, one of the world's largest sacred parks, that in the project is symbolically and visually compared with the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount, the sacred Islamic emblem.

Still on Mount Scopus in 1934 Eric Mendelsohn designs Hadassah Hospital, for Jews and Arabs.

Mendelsohn offers new alternatives based on a great sensitivity to the significance of the place and searching for a dialogue between the Arab localism and Bauhaus modernism. Its Hospital creates a symbolic dialogue with the ancient Arab villages, visible from the Mount.

The idea of Mendelsohn was based on the creation of a symbol of cultural belonging that would have formed people from different cultures and countries, in order to build a new nation, based on intercultural dialogue between East and West.

Conclusions: Nation-State and Cosmopolitism Today

Even today, as in their cosmopolitan past, the cities along this historic axis reveal a multi-ethnic character, between Jews, Christians and Muslims.

This coexistence, however, hides a dimension of conflict and contradictions, related to the rapid changes that have upset the delicate social and environmental equilibrium, built on the relationship between different communities and space.

Sectarian and ethnic dynamics represent one of the hallmarks of these cities, which structure still reflects a class division, from the wealthiest class, the Ashkenazi Jews, to the Sephardic Jews, then the Mizrahi Jews and finally the Israeli Arabs, who live in areas of urban and socio-economic decay.

In such controversial contexts, characterized by a perpetual conflict, to be contested are not just places and landscapes, but also aspects of material civilization, related to the *longue durée*, to legitimize historical, cultural and religious appropriations (Braudel, 1982).

Along the route from Jaffa to Jerusalem the settlement Zionist strategy manifests itself, as a prelude to the foundation of the future Jewish state.

Zionism bursts through the Jewish migration to Palestine and re-evaluates archaeological and religious forgotten places, recognizable in biblical landscapes and manipulated to initiate population displacements and to conquer the territory.

However, the histories of these cities are integral part of a process of constant renewal, leading to overlapping of civilizations, ideas and visible marks, related not only to a long-term of secular cultures, but also to a vibrant present, characterized by the concentration of multiple realities that characterize the varied picture of people and landscapes of the Levant (Cerasi, 2005).

Thus, going beyond the respective inside stories of the two countries, this scene recalls the urgent need to reconsider Israel and Palestine within the

broader context of the Middle East, a melting pot of multiple realities, continuously evolving through the interweaving of civilizations and cultures.

Overcoming the 'Zionist project', the ancient traces built on the relations between East and West, become then fixed points of reference with respect to contingent changes, where this area still represents a strategic connection node for the intercultural exchange between East and West, confirming the continuity in the role played by the Levantine port cities, now adapted to the new dimension of the global city.

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Museums in Motion – symposium proceedings

'Museums in Motion' international symposium, held in Volos, Greece, during July 3 and 4 2015, was dedicated to exploring the emergent reconsideration of both the content and the role of city museums. It aimed to promote dialogue and knowledge exchange among experts drawn from museum institutions and academia, as well as researchers, artists and designers actively involved in addressing questions on the nature of the technologically mediated urban activity and experience.

'Museums in Motion' symposium was inscribed in the framework of the Thales DeMuCiV Research Program of the University of Thessaly. 'DeMuCiV: Designing the Museum of the City of Volos: Historical Research and Development of innovative interactive content for the dissemination of knowledge' was funded by the Greek Ministry of Education and the European Union and focused on the development of interactive content for the Museum of the City of Volos, in central Greece.

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