Conservation of Architecture, Urban Areas, Nature & Landscape

Towards a Sustainable Survival of Cultural Landscape

Vol I

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Civilisation Processes over the Long Period of Time: Lydda and Ramleh

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Abstract

This paper, based on research for my PhD in Architectural Composition, is focused on the ancient Palestinian towns of Lydda and Ramleh, occupied by the Israeli army in 1948. After several visits to the sites, I realized that one of the most distinguishing features of Lydda and Ramleh today is a feeling of tension and social discrimination among peoples differing in ethnos, tradition and culture. The creation of the Israeli state in 1948 changed the frail equilibrium between natural resources, landscape and the life of different communities, affecting the previous urban and rural socio-economic structures. In a context such as this, any identity of places, any sense of belonging, seems to have been lost. In both Lydda and Ramleh we come across the main civilization processes that have shaped the Palestinian landscape in *long durée* and through the Twentieth cent., when a sharp break from the past became most evident. My point is that, to gain some kind of understanding of the present state of things (besides any ideological approach) we should have a deeper knowledge of what 'identity' means in such places. Which are the concrete aspects of permanence? Which are the constant (structural) features that have remained over the long period of time? To answer such questions, I considered the historical point of view, investigating the role that both towns and their surrounding countryside played in the past, as strategic hubs in a network of continental routes. By re-reading and actualizing these traits, we could build a critical consciousness by putting the present landscape into a historical context, in order to regain the identity of place. Using the words of Ana Valbuena, *"the short history of a human being can't reveal the extent of the History; nevertheless, it is worth raising the voice to tell it and build the memory of our imperfect present."*

Keywords: consolidated urban landscape; cultural identity; civilization processes; aspects of permanence; continental trade and religious routes.

1 Lydda & Ramleh: Mixed Communities in Segmented Spaces

The two ancient towns of Lydda and Ramleh are located in the central region of Israel, 15 km due East of Tel Aviv. One of the main features that characterizes these towns is their complex internal cultural variety. The present population in Ramleh (data by the Municipal sites and by Lucas) consists of 71.216 inhabitants: 22,7% of Arabs and 77,3% of Jewish including, among those, 29% immigrated after 1989, 12.000 from Boukhara, 7.000 Falashas Ethiopians and others from India, Caucasus, Uzbekistan and Bulgaria. The population of Lydda consists of 74.000 inhabitants: 27,5% of Arabs and 72,5% of Jewish including, among those, 33% immigrated after 1989 and others from Russia, Ethiopia (11.860 Russians and 2.680 Ethiopians only between the students under eighteen years), North Africa and many other places. In 1952 the 65% of Jews were Eastern European immigrants (especially Polish and Romanian) and 35% were Mizrahim. Around 1955 the Mizrahim become 50% of the Jewish population. In both towns the Arab population represents more than 20% of the total, including also Bedouins evicted from the Negev and Arabs coming from nearby villages, some of which were destroyed in 1948. Small minorities of Christians of different origin also live there: Catholics, Greeks Orthodox and Armenians. Lydda and Ramleh are often defined as 'mixed towns'; in situations such as these, however, as also well expressed by Yacobi, the coexistence of different cultures often creates conflicts, manifested in urban space, with the result of 'segmented' towns, more than 'mixed', with a tendency for separation.

2 The Longue Durée in the Wide Territorial Connections: Ancient Structures and Aspects of Permanence
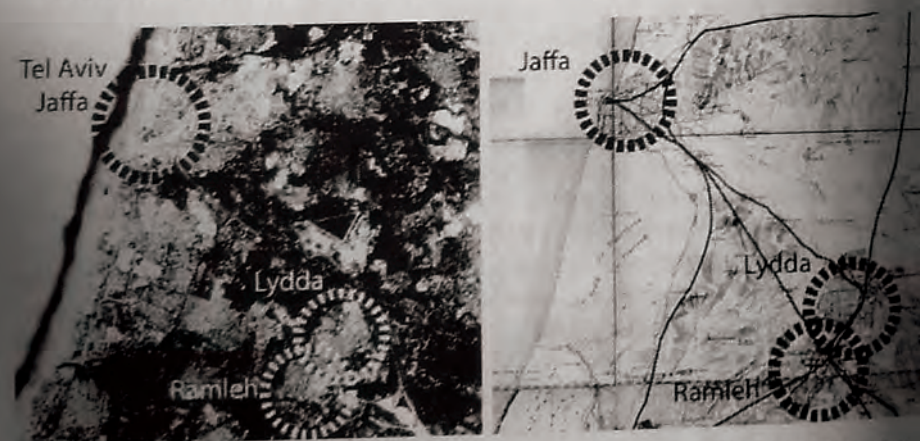

Fig.1: Tel Aviv Metropolitan area today   Fig.2: Map of Central Palestine, 1878

In my opinion Lydda and Ramleh could be read as paradigmatic cases in relation to the different civilization processes that have shaped the Palestinian landscape, throughout history and in recent times. The different settlement strategies of the late XX century and the violence of the ongoing conflicts are reflected on urban and rural settlements, leading to situations different from each other and apparently conflicting; this covers, however, only the surface of territorial conformations; below lye ancient structures, underneath the current urban sprawl, as lines of force that should be taken into consideration if we are to interpret the complexity of the present landscape. Looking at the Google map today (Fig.1, elaboration by A.Terenzi) one might think that these two towns are suburbs of the Tel Aviv metropolitan area; on the contrary, looking at the map of 1878 a different territorial layout comes out (Fig.2, PEF map, elaboration by A.Terenzi). In the attempt to interpret these settlement processes, I will try to point out some focal structural features and aspects of permanence.

First of all, due consideration should be given to the geographic location of Lydda and Ramleh, structural nodes in the complex network of continental routes connections. All religious-commercial facilities, as khans, markets, oil mills and churches, can be related to road systems and large-scale relationships.

In this complex networks connection, we should also consider the geography of religions, where the main itineraries are traced by the presence of religious structures developed along them. These buildings represent a central key to the reading of different focal aspects, first of all in their relation with trade life and with the touristic development of the area, but also for their use as tools for the ambitions of control by foreign powers.

A third character deals with the dualism between the architecture of the town and the architecture along the road. Their relationship changed over time, also due to the progressive displacement of the main road in relation to the urban fabric, but along the road we always find commercial & religious structures built.

Another aspect concerns the long sedentarization processes that consolidated, over time, the urban structure of this landscape introducing it into a wider trade route: first of all, the acclimation phenomena related to arboriculture around the olive, oil and soap production, an aspect of permanence that continued to play a key role until very recent times; but also the new elements established in the rural landscape with the advent of Islam in Palestine.

The last structural feature to consider, deals with the constant influence that the wider panorama of different urban landscapes and civilizations played in the evolution of the two cities, with the transmigration of architectural and urban models. A focal aspect here concerns the foundation of Ramleh, which is part of the wider context of the emerging Islamic civilization, marked by the immediate search for a dialogue and an interaction with different cultures.

2.1 The Sense of Place: Urban Landscapes along the Road

Centres of cultural and commercial exchanges, as well as power bases in the region, both Lydda and Ramleh lay between the ancient Via Maris, from Egypt to Damascus, and the caravan route from Jerusalem to the port of Jaffa (Fig.1, elaboration by A.Terenzi); their strategic position provided the central role of those towns as focal nodes, not only within the circuit of trade, as inner ports of Jaffa (then the main port of the region) but even within the religious itineraries, being important stages on the way to Jerusalem.

Fig.1:Via Maris and Jaffa-Jerusalem route.   Figure 2: Lydda, Khan.

Photo n.2 (by A.Terenzi) shows one of the ancient khans still existing in Lydda, used both for trade and to host pilgrims. The role of those khans, as well as of the religious buildings, must be read in their belonging to a wider network of cities along the main caravan routes, a comprehensive system of connections, both for trade and for religious and cultural exchanges in the Middle East and with the European countries: landmarks and structural nodes, they provide a concrete demonstration of the role played by road infrastructures in the evolution of this urban landscape. Although with periods of decay, until the XX century, the relation between the main continental itineraries and the life of Lydda and Ramleh has always ruled their role in a wider scenario. Since the XIX century European designs of control in the Middle East, led to significant changes in the intermodal system of the region, marked by the advent of the first steam railways (Fig.3, elaboration by A.Terenzi). In this new framework the role of the Eastern Mediterranean port cities came back to take a central position. The life of Ramleh and Lydda in this period can be read in the context of these transformations on a large scale, where they regained a vital role, as central

nodes not only at the regional level, but also in the connections between East and West, as also demonstrated by the first railway constructed in Palestine in 1892, going from Jaffa to Jerusalem and crossing both Lydda and Ramleh (Fig.4). With the advent of the British Mandate both towns and their surrounds became strategic basis for the British control of the area leading, in 1918, to the construction of the largest railway Junction of the region (Fig.5). At this time the most part of goods directed to the coastal regions of the Near East were shipped to Port Said and from there by land to the railway Junction of Lydda, then the largest point of sorting for goods directed to the different areas.

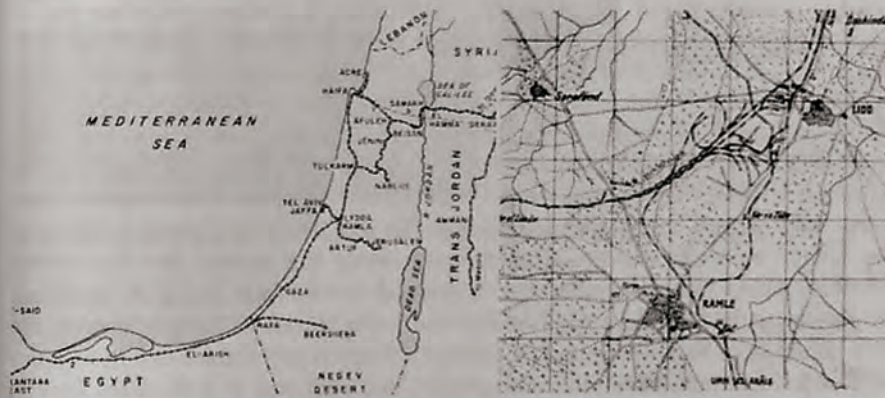Figure 3: First road, rail and sea connection in the beginning of XX century.

Fig.4: Railways in Palestine, 1920.
Photo by book: *"The Railways of Palestine and Israel"*.

Fig.5: British Railway Junction 1918
Photo by: Geographical Map Library,
Tel Aviv.

2.2 The Geography of Religions along the Caravan Routes

Observing the distribution of the religious buildings in the region, we could highlight different itineraries, including those of the franciscans, the greek orthodox church, the armenian church and the muslim mosques. The role and the location of religious buildings could represent a fundamental key to the reading of different focal aspects in the investigation of this landscape. First of all in their relation with trade life: along with khans, also religious structures played a fundamental role in the wider network of connections: according to the principles of the Islamic word, as confirmed by A.Eslami, the Souk develops adjacent to the Mosque, establishing a close relation between commercial and religious sphere, as we can see in the White Mosque of Ramleh in the past. The same happens with the Christian buildings, not only in Ramleh and Lydda, but in all the main urban cores along the way from Jaffa to Jerusalem, representing integral part of the trade life in their important role for the accommodation of merchants, products and animals. After the construction of the Franciscan Latin Hostel in Jaffa, in 1654, a greek Orthodox convent and an Armenian one were established there, being also used as hostels and leading to the recovery of a permanent settlement in Jaffa of Muslims, Christians, Europeans and a few Jews; this, combined with the friendly relations between France and the Ottoman Empire, marked the increase in traffic of goods at the port.

The second aspect, related to religious structures, deals with the strong connection with the education system and the touristic development of the area, not only for pilgrimage travels. The development of pilgrimage routes in Palestine started with the settlement of several Benedictine monks in the IV century, when monasticism became a pole of attraction for pilgrims and a valid support for travelers: they gave hospitality for the night and became also tourist guides; then, the travelers used to pass their nights in convents, monasteries or inns. Since the X century a significant increase of pilgrimage to the Holy Land led to the establishment of specific "hospitals" for the hospitality and assistance to pilgrims and travelers, especially along the way from Jaffa to Jerusalem; care facilities had a considerable improvement, including many cultural and educational functions in which the Benedictines played a central role, starting to organize a regular education system. With the arrival of the Franciscans, in the early XIII century, cloistered monasticism felt into decay and monasteries were no longer built *extra moenia* but directly inside the towns. The Franciscan presence along the main itineraries is marked by convents and care facilities. Along the Jaffa-Jerusalem way we find the Latin Hostel in Jaffa, with also the two churches of St.Anthony and St. Peter, the Franciscan Hospice and Monastery in Ramleh and numerous other monasteries and churches in Jerusalem, Jericho and also on the way, in Emmaus, Ain Karem, Betania, Betfage, Betlehem. After periods of crisis due to the conflict with the Greek Orthodox Church, the Franciscan order came back to play a central role in Palestine during the XIX century, where the general lack of hostels for accommodating of the growing tourist demand led to the creation of numerous specific structures, called *Casa Nova*, located in strategic points of passage; at the beginning of the XX century

about five thousand tourists and fifteen thousand pilgrims were passing each year for Jaffa. Furthermore, new education structures, also managed by the Franciscans, started to develop adjacent to their convents, as we can see in the Franciscan monastery of Ramleh, where a school, still working today, was opened for Muslim and Christian children.

Another important feature deals with the relation between religion and the ambitions of commercial control by foreign powers: in many cases, along the history, religious topics have been used as tools to gain control over certain areas; here we could only mention some examples. Around the late XIII century, with the disappearance of the Crusader States in Palestine, the sea travels to Jaffa increased significantly. Then the main ports of departure were Venice and Marseille; with the rise of the "Eastern Question" (the dispute between the Latin and the Orthodox community) both Venice and France took the side of the Latin part, due to their profitable involvement in trade and pilgrimage routes; the same happened with the Greek Orthodox community in the XIX century, when Russia decided to become their protector because of the strong interests that were developing at that time towards the Eastern Mediterranean regions.

These issues, briefly mentioned here, try to highlight the reasons that lye below the religious geography, in its strong integration into a broader and more complex picture that extends well beyond the religious aspect in itself.

2.3 Architecture in the Town and Large Itineraries

Fig. 6: Ramleh today   Fig.7: Hertzl Street, after the new highway

Figure 8: Map of Ramleh in 1947 (numbers explained in the text below)

In photo n. 6 (from palestineremembered.com) we see the Ramleh White Tower, with the remains of the adjacent mosque. Its position, as confirmed by investigations published by R.Ayalon, still indicates the place of the ancient city, different from the city of the XIX century and of the city of today. The White Tower then marked the center of the town, in the proximity of the Via Maris, a major caravan route. After the earthquake of 1068 A.D. Ramleh was rebuilt a few kilometres away, encompassing the Via Maris. Nowadays the ancient tower stands outside of the city. As well analyzed by Jamo in his research, the displacement of the town and its changing relationship with the main roads directly affected the distribution of the main public buildings.

The British Survey Map of Ramleh of 1947 (Fig.8, elaborated by A. Terenzi) shows the ancient Jaffa-Jerusalem road, crossing the city from the Ottoman time (dashed line). In the map, following the work of Guy Jamo, I highlighted the main architectural structures built along this route throughout the centuries, such as the White Mosque (1), the Franciscan Monastery of S. Nicodemus (2), the Greek Orthodox Church (3), the Armenian Church (4), el Jami el Kabir (6) and the position of the Moskovia Khan (5), which, according to the investigation by Jamo, were sited there once. The solid line marks the new road from Jaffa to Jerusalem, called today Hertzl Street that, in 1869, was broadened and paved, replacing the old one. Changes in the transportation and road system, especially the paving of the train track line, gradually led to a decrease in the use of the monastery hostels by pilgrims. While, since the end of the 19th century, new educational structures have been build along the new Jaffa-Jerusalem road, as we can see in the map. This kind of changes in the architecture along the road, related to the displacement of the main streets in relation to the urban layout, can be also seen in very recent times. Over the years, these educational structures were also integrated by business and commercial facilities to serve the main road, such as gas stations, restaurants and shops of various kinds, which operated in virtue of their location along this street. During the second half of the XX century, with the construction of the new highway passing besides the urban center, the previous main road, Hertzl Street, lost its extra-urban role of transit,

becoming a regular urban road. Because of this, all the structures built along it lost their function, leading to the gradual closing of the most part of them, as we can see in photo n. 7 (Photo by A. Terenzi).

2.4 Sedentarization Processes and Construction of a Consolidated Landscape

The amount of oil mills still existing at Lydda (Fig. 10 by A. Terenzi), in what used to be the productive and commercial area of the town, bear witness to long sedentarization processes, providing concrete evidence to intense process of civilization in this area over the long period of time, consolidated around oil production and trade with other countries. The wide variety of different kinds of soil in the region increased the production of a different range of products exchanged locally and abroad, identifying both towns as important centres of import and export to Syria, Egypt, the actual Iraq and more distant lands.

Lydda was then a centre for production of soap from olives, to be sold in Islamic countries, shipping the products from Jaffa; export of pure olive oil and soap was directed especially to Egypt, where olive trees could not grow. As affirmed by Biger, industries in the past were not based on the site, but on the natural resources of the area; the oil was produced everywhere, but the wisdom in the production of soap throughout the Middle East was most in Ramleh, Lydda and Jaffa, even because elsewhere, the soap was often made from animal fat. The medieval historian Muqaddasi, among others, describes Ramleh as a city full of life, important commercial centre for agricultural and industrial products, crafts and international trade, with merchants and travelers filling its streets and its markets. The area remained an exporter of oil and soap until the first decades of twentieth cent. In photo n. 9 (by palestineremembered.com) we have a view of the surrounding countryside in the beginning of XX century.

Figure 9: Lydda, countryside.   Figure 10: Lydda, Oil Mill.

Further developments in the consolidation of this area took place with the advent of Islam and the consequent appearance of new elements in the rural landscape; this led to the introduction of new architectural structures and work processes related to these activities. The most important was the introduction of citrus, whose cultivation is related to a process of redistribution and export. However, it is since the second half of the XIX century that the oranges of Jaffa, Lydda and Ramleh began to be shipped in very large quantities, especially in Britain, decreasing the export of other traditional products such as wheat, olive

oil and soap. In the early XX century Jaffa was the largest Arab city in Palestine and its port, exporting about five million cases of oranges a year, the third most active in the Eastern Mediterranean, after Alexandria and Beirut. Much of the labor came from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco and Algeria. Another important aspect of the Islamic sedentarization process deals with the production of cotton in this area, linked to the first processes of industrial transformation. As confirmed by Gibb, although the largest plantations of Palestine were in the Jezeer Valley, numerous plantations existed also in Jaffa and Ramleh. The biggest development of cotton production took place in Palestine and Syria after the fall of the Crusaders, when farmers lost their major markets provided by the Crusades city, with the consequent decrease in demand for grains. The export of cotton became a primary sector for the commerce in the Levant, with exports of large quantities in Egypt but also in Europe, where it was praised for its special characteristics. Even the cultivation of sugar cane was part of the Islamic acclimation process in the area: after having learned from the Persian the art of manufacturing sugar in solid form, the Arabs brought with them their abilities implanting the sugar cane in Palestine, where existing technologies, such as the edge-runner mill, a machine for crushing olives for oil and grapes for wine, were used to refine sugar.

2.5 Osmosis and Intercultural Dialog between Different Civilizations

Ramleh, founded by the Arabs in the early period of Islamic expansion, just when Baghdad was founded on the Southern area of the Fertile Crescent, was meant to become a capital and a vital node of Islam's expansion towards the Mediterranean shores. Its foundation is not an isolated event, but part of the large context of the emerging Islamic civilization and of its wider settlements policy: a complex network of cities, hubs of passage and transit along continental caravan routes; as part of this policy, Ramleh was founded close to Lydda, a consolidated historical center: actually, the rise of a new capital was often achieved at the price of existing ones and soon after the foundation of Ramleh, Lydda fell into decline. The key issue here is to highlight the structural character of the Islamic culture, "*the civilization of movement and transition for excellence*" (Braudel). As affirmed by Eslami, the rise of Islamic architecture is marked by immediate search for a dialogue and comparison with other cultures, developing composite models imbued with all the richness of different local cultures and gathering together aspects of permanence and of innovation. With the advent of Islam the relationship between coastal and inland port cities changes: Islamic urbanization is focusing initially on the inland cities and roads, staying away from a sea considered hostile. Taking advantage of the inland ports, Islam transforms them in "urban islands" along the caravan routes. The huge space outside had no rules and was inhabited by nomadic Bedouins. In relation to the Roman configuration of the Palestinian landscape, the Islamic structure follows the previous boundaries, as well as the infrastructural system and the settlement distribution, but a new hierarchy of the different urban nodes comes out, by moving the capital from the coastal port of Caesarea to the inland city of Ramleh.

In this period many new towns were founded, generating very different shapes, based on indigenous traditions and cultural areas. Ramleh could then be compared to Roman or Hellenistic cities and also to others of Islamic foundation. According to the assumption of Luz, the original layout of Ramleh was planned as a typical orthogonal Roman city, surrounded by a defensive wall with gates and towers. Its ancient structure consisted of wide and straight streets with two main roads, Cardo and Decumano, meeting in the center of the city with the Government Palace and the White Mosque that was described by Muqaddasi as "the Mosque in the Souk": actually the Cardo, north of the mosque, consisted of an arcade avenue, whose presence implied the existence of a Souk adjacent to the mosque. A few hundred kilometers further north, in Lebanon, we find the town of Anjar (Figg. 11,12, by *Ramla in the Middle Ages*), founded in the same period of Ramleh and by the same dynasty and sited, as well as Ramleh, along a main east-west caravan route from the city port of Beirouth to Damascus. Anjar is another case of Roman layout: a walled settlement divided into four sectors by the Cardo and Decumano; its urban plan, in the opinion of some historians, could help reconstruct the plan of ancient Ramleh, due to the strong similarities between the two cities. The researches of Le Strange have demonstrated that the ancient Ramleh was originally huge, extending for 2.2x2.5 square Km, including both the Ottoman Ramleh (the 'Old City' of today) and the actual modern area. As proved by many Israeli scholars as Ayalon, Shmueli and Gat, its re-founding at the end of the XI century, brought with it a dramatic shift in Ramleh's status, from a major center to a second rate provincial town. This could be related to the progressive changes of the privileged routes in the wider Middle East region.

Fig.11: Plan of Anjar.   Fig. 12: Aereal view of Anjar, Lebanon.
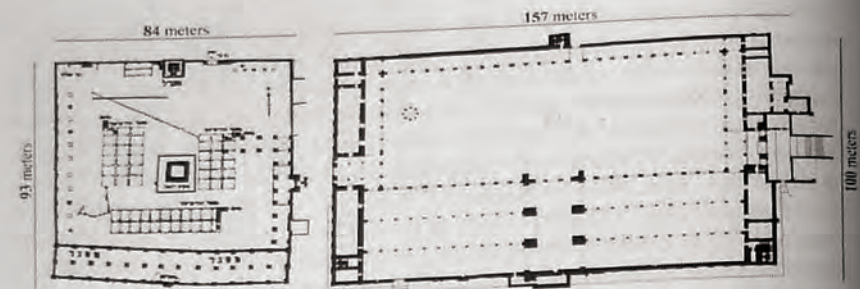
Fig.13: Ramleh White Mosque, Plan.   Fig.14: Damascus Big Mosque, Plan.

The large size of the White Mosque (Fig.13, by *Ramla in the Middle Ages*), whose plan recalls the Byzantine basilica, also demonstrates this assumption. Its size is actually very close to the Damascus Mosque (Fig.14, by *The Great Mosque of Damascus*) that, built in the same period, influenced significantly on the architectural style and on the layout of the White Mosque. At this time Damascus, being the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate, was a huge city: the size of the White Mosque would not have any sense if compared to the small extension of the later Ottoman Ramleh. The important influence of different civilizations is not limited to architectural and urban patterns: the Islamic material culture, as we saw, led also to the introduction of new types of production in this area: from the plantations of cotton and sugarcane to the production of citrus, which became focal aspects of a consolidated landscape.

The past experiences of coexistence among different cultures in Ramleh and Lydda are part of a wider scenario of sharing and interaction that is evident, not only in the vocation to cultural exchange of the rising Islamic civilization, but also from 1482, with the expulsion of Arabs and Jews from Catholic Spain, followed by a massive displacement of populations on a large scale that led to the consolidation of new coexistences. This kind of interpretation would suggest investigating the issue of Israel and Palestine, going beyond the exclusive inner perspective of the Jewish people and of this country and connecting it to a wider picture of historical coexistence among different cultures.

3   The Metamorphosis of a Country: Abandonment of the Main Route and Conurbation of Tel Aviv

"History is permanent evolution, the life of man in his conscious perception, in his use of life, in his customs. Architecture represents this use of life. At times, the present represents continuity, the normal evolution of time, without marked divergences from the period that preceded it and without conflict. At other times a fracture in time occurs, determining emergency and facts not found in the past, or present in the past but only in opposition to the new period. In any case, there is a relationship in time between the present time and the period that preceded it.

Therefore, it will be a question of looking at this relationship, the reasons for it, its character and its consequences". (E.N.Rogers).

The XIX cent. is marked by a deep crisis in the cohabitation processes and by the emergence of the first phenomena of nationalism and intolerance. Palestinian cities, with the advent of Zionism, suffered a gradual dissolution of the frail equilibrium of coexistence between local Arab and Jewish communities. The XX cent. is marked by intense Jewish sedentarization phenomena (reclamation, regulation of water flow, new towns, agricultural villages and schools) upsetting the previous territorial structure. In the '47 UN Partition Plan Lydda and Ramleh were part of the proposed Arab state, but the strategic position on the main route to Jerusalem made them a point of contention and of continuing attacks during 1948. With the State of Israel the ancient axis between Jaffa and Jerusalem lost its previous role as main connection for inland penetration in the Middle East; new emerging centers of economic development, consolidated mostly in the large coastal cities, led to the population growth and concentration of different functions in Tel Aviv metropolitan area. These events created a dramatic shift in the urban landscapes along the axis, with direct consequences for Ramleh and Lydda, initiating a process of gradual abandonment, urban decay and social-economic crisis, which still today characterizes both cities. Ramleh lies at 97th place for socio-economic level in Israel and only 31.3% of students studied more than 8 years. Looking at the events of the XX cent. we could highlight opposing settlement strategies that led to strife, destroying the identity of these places.

Fig.15: Lydda today, market ground.

Fig.16: Ramleh, Wall fencing Juwarish.

Fig.17: Lydda in 1920.
Photo from palestineremembered.com

Fig.18: Lydda today.
Photo by A. Terenzi

Figure 19: Lydda today. Photo by A. Terenzi.

Fig.20: Ramleh; Juwarish neighborhood.

Fig.21: Ramleh, Jewish district.

What looks like a parking lot (Fig.15, by A.Terenzi) is an important weekly market ground in Lydda, replacing a previously tightly built-up area. Photos 17-18 show the area of St. George's Church, in the old city; the difference between 1920 and today is evident. Following 1948, the intense destruction of the old urban centre, also due to the bad conditions of many buildings, led to the creation of many gaps, which now break the previously compact urban fabric (Figg. 18, 19). As documented by Monterescu and Rabinowitz, most of the Arab inhabitants were expelled, leaving the place to new Jewish immigrants; until the beginning of the fifties, the remaining Arab population was enclosed in a restricted area of the old town, then known as "the Ghetto", which was fenced and none was allowed to exit this compound without special permission.

With the Sharon National Plan of the 50s (a Bauhaus graduate and architect of Israel's Labor Movement), many weak ethnic Jewish and Arab groups were concentrated in this area, leaving the coastal cities to people of higher social status; the same happened with the migration of Russians and Ethiopians (among others), in the 80s and 90s. The results of social discrimination and spatial exclusion are manifested in the different districts in which the urban fabric is divided. The contrast between the Arab neighborhood of Juwarish, in Ramleh (Fig. 20, by A.Terenzi), with a new Jewish district (Fig. 21 by A.Terenzi) is striking, as well as the wall fencing around the Arab confined neighborhood (Fig. 16, by A.Terenzi). As documented by Rapoport, the Mayor of Ramleh initiated the erection of this wall with the aim to separate the Jewish neighborhood and the Arab one, also in order to contrast the high level of corruption of this last one, expressed with criminal acts against other Jewish and Arabs inhabitants.

4 Conclusion Remarks

According to Said, because the world has shrunk and people undergo the most rapid transformations in history, ours has become an era of a search of roots, of people trying to discover in the collective memory of their race, religion and community, a past that is entirely their own. If this could be generally valid, it becomes particularly relevant in a place as Israel and Palestine, whose landscape functions in the memories of Jews, Muslims and Christians entirely differently, where at least two memories, historical inventions and geographical imaginations coexist and fight. As for this landscape, the most significant part becomes the historic one, able to investigate, in different periods, the progressive changes in urban structures, historicizing the experiences of cohabitation that emerge from history as a recurring character of these landscapes.

My contribution aims to propose a methodology of investigation about the cities, based on the theoretical background of the "School of Milan", where the city is also seen as geographical location, natural landscape in which the city is built over time. The research is so based on the interaction between an *internal history*, about the specific events of Arab and Jewish Palestinian people and the urban development processes, and an *external history*, related to a wider context of historical, geographic and economic events on large scale, connected to the transformation of these cities. In this regard it is also necessary to investigate the two cities in their relationship both with the roads along which they developed, and with the transformations of the privileged communication itineraries on a large-scale. Following Braudel's thought, the history of the world appears as a succession of *world-economies*, generated by a system of relocation of their center; whenever you have a *décentrage*, you operate a polarization around a new center, as if every *world-economy* could not live without a center of gravity. The historical point of view allows a kind of reading based on different levels, as explored by Braudel: the deeper one, related to an almost static history, where transformations happen very slowly and the main actors are the characters of structural permanence, which remain below the surface of contingent transformations, and a more superficial level, that of history of different groups, of collective structures and fates, that shows the changes immediately readable within the urban fabric. According to a methodological process, whose aim is to look at the structural features and to understand how "to read" them, we should try to build a critical consciousness, by putting the actual urban structures into a historical context, that is by transporting the past to us. Studying the history of these places, we cannot but consider the main civilization processes, the ancient structures and the aspects of permanence, underneath the current urban sprawl. Despite the visible decay of these settlements, their apparently lost identity and the attempts, made after 1948, to erase any memory of the past, these two cities deserve an investigation about the landscape that has been in the past. In this particular case we have to go back, not just to the end of the XIX century, when Lydda and Ramleh became strategic in the new infrastructural transformations, but also to ancient times, where each town played a vital role within a wider

territorial scene. My point is that grasping the meaning of history could give significance to us, to our present, and to the complexity of the current landscape.

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