

Mahon Murphy

## **The Records of the Pro-Jerusalem Society during the period of the British Military Administration**

This brief essay will introduce the Pro-Jerusalem Society and its proposed projects through a look at one of the most fascinating objects on Town-planning under a military occupation; the edited volume by British architect Charles Ashbee *Jerusalem 1918-1920: Being the Records of the Pro-Jerusalem Council during the period of the British Military Administration* (published in London in 1921). A link to the full text can be found here:

<https://archive.org/stream/jerusalembeingre00proj#page/n7/mode/2up>

The book offers a textual and visual representation of the proposed plans for the newly occupied city and highlights the combination of modern innovations and historical preservation that the planning committee had for Jerusalem. The planning refers mainly to Jerusalem within the city walls; the planners were clearly borrowing from the bible when Ashbee announced on the first page that ‘Zion is a city compact together’. (1) (Numbers in parenthesis will refer to pages from the book.)

In December 1917, British troops under General Edmund Allenby captured Jerusalem during the Palestine campaign against the Ottoman Empire. Perhaps the greatest prize of any European military expedition in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, this victory at a stroke gave Britain custody of the holiest city in Judaism and Christianity and of one of the holiest sites of Islam. For three years, from 1917 to 1920, Jerusalem remained under military rule, before being transferred to civilian authority. The Military Governor for that entire period, Sir Ronald Storrs, played a shaping role in the renewal and preservation of the old city in myriad ways. Amongst other initiatives, he established the Pro-Jerusalem Society. The society was created with the goal of an architectural redesigning of Jerusalem to fit in with Storrs’ own vision of the Holy City. This was a vision that was formed through a combination of biblical imagery, a knowledge of classics and antiquity, and Storrs’ self-proclaimed control over the city in much the same way as his predecessor Pontius Pilate. Even though the military situation in Jerusalem did not give Storrs a completely free hand to enact his vision, it did however ensure that other European voices could be controlled and while the society did recruit members from Jerusalem’s elites, Storrs would have the final say in how its plans were

to be enacted. 'Perhaps the greatest need of Jerusalem, after the preservation of its history and the cleaning of its streets, is gardens, shade and afforestation.' (19). Preserving Jerusalem's history was foremost in Storrs' mind as the previous quote shows, but the question was what aspects of the city's history were worthy of preservation and what was to be forgotten.

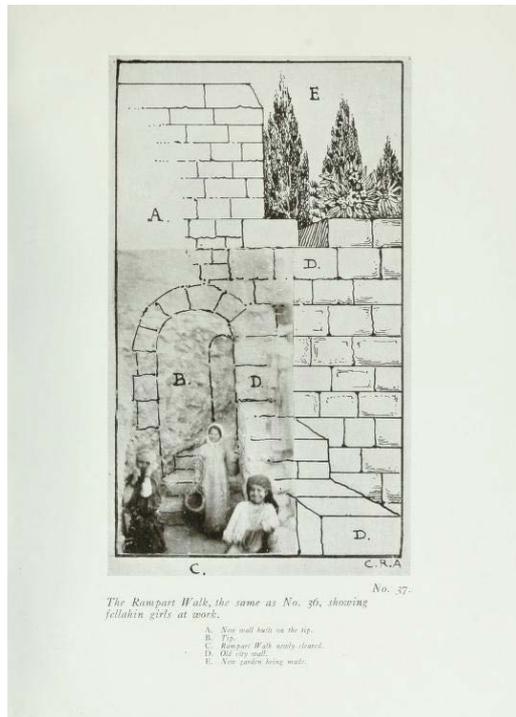
- (i) the protection of and the addition to the amenities of Jerusalem and its district.
- (ii) the provision and maintenance of parks, gardens, and open spaces in and around Jerusalem and its district.
- (iii) the establishment of museums, libraries, art galleries, exhibitions, musical and dramatic centres or other institutions of a similar nature for the benefit of the public.
- (iv) the protection and preservation, with the consent of the Government, of antiquities in and around Jerusalem.
- (v) the encouragement of arts, handicrafts and industries in consonance with the general objects of society.
- (vi) The administration of any immovable property in the district of Jerusalem which is acquired by the society or entrusted to it by any person or corporation with a view to securing the improvement of the property and the welfare of its tenants or occupants.
- (vii) To co-operate with the Department of Education, Agriculture and Public Health, Public Works so far as may be in harmony with the general objects of the Society.

(Fig. 1: The Pro- Jerusalem Society was founded in 1918 for the following objects.)

Figure 1 highlights the basic goals of the Pro-Jerusalem Society on its foundation. The seven declared aims of the society all connect to the preservation of Jerusalem's architecture and native industry. What is unclear from these general principles but explained in the records is the method to how these goals were to be enacted. In order to preserve and protect architectural antiquities, a labour force would be required. The Society believed that the wartime conditions provided such manpower, not in the British Forces but in Jerusalem's growing refugee population.

Jerusalem saw a huge influx of refugees from its surrounding areas and beyond as the First World War swept through Palestine. In addition many Armenians fled towards to the city to escape from Turkish troops and to seek refuge with the city's large Armenian community. Within the old city walls a number of refugees, mainly from Es Salt, gathered at the Citadel of David. The `Citadel and its surrounding fortifications were the first items on the society's agenda for renovation as part of a proposed project to

build a rampart walk to enable tourists to walk along the top of the city's walls (An attraction that remains in place today, fig.2). Using refugee labour to clean up the citadel, clear the rubble from the moat and make the ramparts accessible would all be part what the book refers to as 'tidying up their own house' (1).



(Fig. 2, A blend of photograph and sketch portraying the planned rampart walk.)

Along with putting Jerusalem's new arrivals to work, the society concerned itself with the promotion of craft and business. Industry was to be encouraged within the city walls, but business in the city was to be maintained in harmony with its biblical image. As noted (p.30) these industries (weaving, tile and glass making) were to be in the nature of revivals of old traditions rather than modern undertakings. The society was concerned about modern encroachments into industry and also closed down businesses that did not fit within its image of the city (the dung cake sellers at Stephens' gate were quickly moved on for example). Industry in the city had to relate to 'local life' and be 'implicit in the ancient traditions of the city, its structure and its crafts.' (30).

**Honorary President**

Sir Herbert Samuel (High Commissioner of Palestine)

**President**

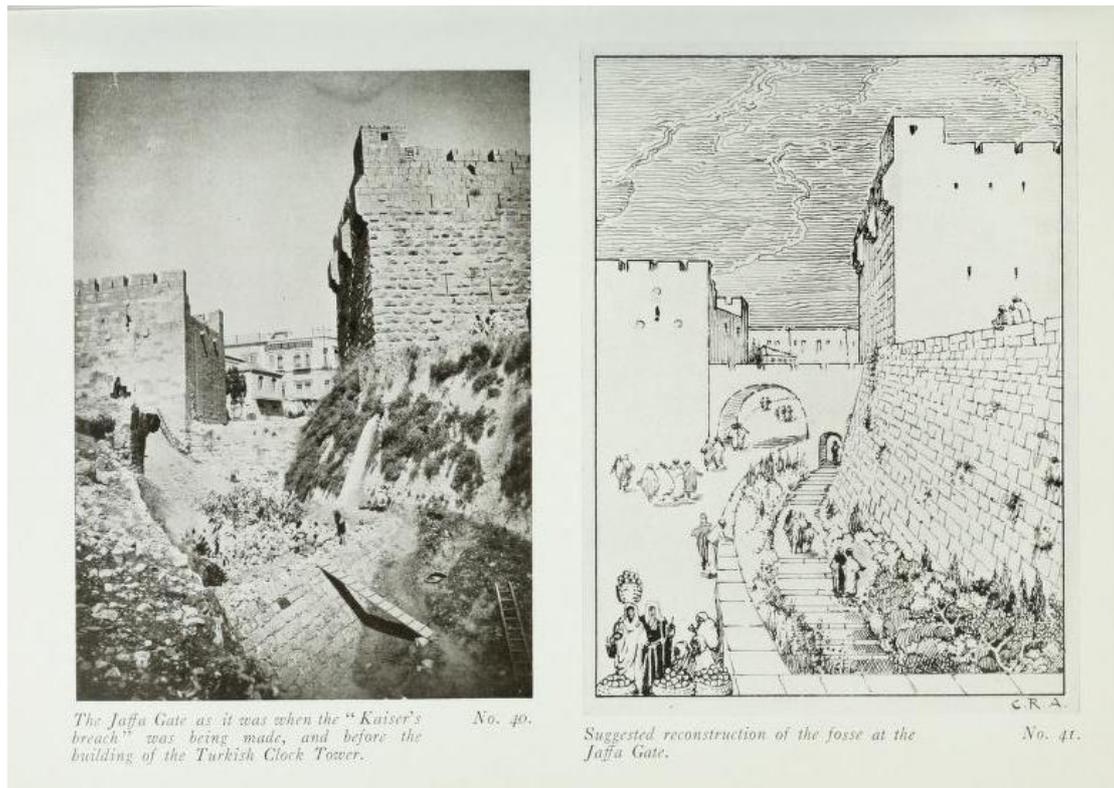
Ronald Storrs (Governor of Jerusalem)

<b>Council</b>
Viscount Milner
<b>Members</b>
The Mayor of Jerusalem
The Director of Antiquities
His Eminence The Grand Mufti
His Reverence the President of the Franciscan Community, (Custodian of the Holy Land)
His Reverence the President of the Dominican Community
His Beatitude the Greek Patriarch
The President of the Jewish Community
The Chairman of the Zionist Commission
Le Rev Pere Abel (Ecole Biblique de Saint-Etienne)
Le Capitaine Barluzzi
M Ben Yahuda
Capt. KAC Creswell (Inspector of Monuments)
Dr MD Eder
Prof. Patrick Geddes
RA Harari
Musa Kazem Pasha el Husseini (Ex-Mayor of Jerusalem)
Commander HC Luke
Mr Meyuhas
Le Capitaine Paribeni
Mr Lazarus Paul (Acting Representative of the Armenian Patriarch)
Lt-Col. EL Popham
Mr ET Richmond
Mr DG Salameh (Ex Vice-Mayor of Jerusalem)
Dr Nahum Slouschm (Director of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society.)
Mr Jacob Spafford (The American Colony Jerusalem)
Lt-Col. Waters Taylor
Le Rev. Pere Vincent (Dominican Convent)
Mr John Whiting Hon. Treasurer
Mr David Yellin
CR Ashbee Hon. Sec, Civic Advisor to the City of Jerusalem.

(Fig. 3: The Council of the Pro-Jerusalem Society.)

The Pro-Jerusalem Society was created under a military occupation but it was intended to deal with civil matters. Military Occupations, as noted (18) have difficulty in adapting to civil needs. The Pro-Jerusalem society was therefore devised by Storrs to draw together interests that could not in other ways be focused on the amenities of the

city. These differing interest groups can be noted through a glance at the society's membership (Fig. 3). However, this diverse membership was at all times subservient to Storrs' own ideas, while he may not have been as 'despotic' as some authors describe, through the society he was able to ensure that his vision of Jerusalem would endure long after the end of military occupation in 1920.



(Fig. 4. Detail showing a planned reconstruction between the Jaffa Gate and the Citadel.)

The object of the society was not merely architectural preservation. In some cases where buildings did not fit in with the biblical image of the city they were to be torn down. The hole punched in the city's walls for Kaiser Wilhelm's visit in 1898, was originally planned to be filled in, to restore the original look of the city. However, by the end of the First World War, it was clear that the hole served as an efficient access point for the city and that filling it in would be a momentous undertaking. The proposed archway (Fig.4) to link the walls and complete the rampart walk was also never realised. The council did manage to complete the removal of the clock tower that was placed over the Jaffa gate. The clock tower was planned in celebration of the jubilee of Sultan Abdul-Hamid in 1900 but not completed until 1907. It was intended to serve the

developing business district around the Jaffa Gate and to be a symbol of a modernising Jerusalem. However, the clock tower jarred with Storrs' vision of the biblical walls and was demolished.

*Jerusalem 1918-1920: Being the Records of the Pro-Jerusalem Council during the period of the British Military Administration* thus offers the reader an interesting insight into how military planners (particularly Ronald Storrs) approached their encounter with a living city. Jerusalem was to be presented as an international city, but not a modern one, reflected in the society's chief objective; 'The preservation and safeguarding of the amenities of the Holy City without favour or prejudice to race or creed'. (71).

### **Citation**

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