

SIMONE RICCA

# REINVENTING JERUSALEM

ISRAEL'S RECONSTRUCTION OF THE  
JEWISH QUARTER AFTER 1967



ED. TAURIS

# REINVENTING JERUSALEM

## *Israel's Reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter after 1967*

Simone Ricca

I.B. TAURIS

LONDON · NEW YORK

Published in 2007 by I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd  
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU  
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010  
www.ibtauris.com

In the United States of America and Canada distributed by Palgrave Macmillan  
a division of St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

Copyright © Simone Ricca 2007

The right of Simone Ricca to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted  
by the author in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988.

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or any part  
thereof, may not be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or  
transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,  
recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Library of Modern Middle East Studies 65

ISBN: 978 1 84511 387 2

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library  
A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: available

Copy-edited and typeset in Berkeley Oldstyle by Oxford Publishing Services, Oxford  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall  
From camera-ready copy edited and supplied by the author

# Contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations	ix
Acknowledgements	x
Preface	xi
Introduction	1
<i>Structure of the book</i>	9
<i>Historic context</i>	15
1. Planning, Nationalism, Heritage and the Reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter	25
<i>Zionism, the city and Jerusalem</i>	25
<i>Urban planning and the creation of the Jewish capital</i>	29
<i>Heritage, history and ideology</i>	34
<i>The new symbolic meaning of the ‘restored’ Jewish Quarter</i>	37
<i>Conclusion</i>	45
2. Creating the Jewish Quarter	47
<i>The legal framework and the land confiscation</i>	47
<i>Israeli architecture: from prefabrication to restoration</i>	56
<i>Israeli archaeology: an overview</i>	61
<i>Jewish Quarter archaeological excavations</i>	66
<i>Conclusion</i>	69
3. Building the Jewish Quarter	71
<i>Guidelines for reconstruction</i>	71
<i>Analysis of the urban and architectural plans</i>	79
<i>Economic and social analysis</i>	88
<i>Conclusion</i>	98
4. Building the Jewish Quarter: Case Studies	101
<i>Selection of the case studies</i>	101
<i>The Hurva synagogue restoration</i>	103

<i>The Wailing Wall area</i>	113
<i>The Cardo project</i>	118
<i>Conclusion: what's in a name?</i>	125
5. UNESCO and Jerusalem	127
<i>Introduction</i>	127
<i>The legal system for the protection of cultural heritage</i>	128
<i>Cultural heritage, UNESCO politics and the case of Jerusalem</i>	132
<i>Urban transformation: technical data (from official reports)</i>	136
<i>Lemaire's reports and UNESCO policy for Jerusalem:         an interpretation</i>	146
<i>Conclusion</i>	153
6. Urban Restoration and Ideology in Israel and Palestine: A Comparative Approach	156
<i>Methodological introduction: criteria for the comparison</i>	156
<i>Jewish quarters in the Arab world: an assessment</i>	160
<i>Urban restoration and Arab heritage in Israel</i>	161
<i>Urban conservation in Palestinian National         Authority (PNA) cities</i>	176
<i>Conclusion: the role of ideology, similarities and differences</i>	193
Conclusion	196
Notes	205
References	237
Index	253

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

BSAJ	British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem
CDC	Centre for Development Consultancy
CDRJQ	Company for the Development and Reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter
DG	director-general
HRC	Hebron Rehabilitation Committee
ICCROM	International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
LWHD	List of World Heritage in Danger
NGO	non-governmental organization
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WA	Welfare Association
WHC	World Heritage Committee
WHL	World Heritage List

# Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to the development of this book, sharing with me their knowledge and their friendship; to all of them goes my sincere gratitude. I would like to express my special appreciation to: the Ford Foundation, and notably Dr Steven Lawry, for generous financial support that allowed me to complete the Ph.D. dissertation that constitutes the basis of this book; Dr Shadia Touqaan, my 'boss' during the period I worked in Jerusalem, and a true friend, for her devotion to safeguarding the Old City of Jerusalem, her continuous encouragement and support throughout all the phases of the research, and for having introduced me to Dr Dumper; Dr Mick Dumper who, more than being just the extraordinarily knowledgeable and stimulating supervisor of my dissertation, has become a friend always motivating me to pursue my efforts; and Professor Léon Pressouyre, who has not stinted on his precious time to help me understand the complex political environment of UNESCO, and has read and commented on part of the manuscript.

I would also like to thank architects Peter Bugod, Shalom Gardi, Yochanan Minsker, Uri Ponger, Claude Rosenkovitch, and engineer Ya'acov Schaeffer, who openly shared with me their professional experiences and their perceptions of the Israeli activities in the Old City; Brigitte Curmi – then working at the French consulate in Jerusalem – who introduced me to her rich library and to her many acquaintances in Jerusalem; Ms Marie-Jeanne Geerts – whom I have known since the time of my Master's degree in architectural conservation – for granting me access to the private archives of the late Professor Lemaire in Leuven; Nicola Migliorino, for his friendship and hospitality during my stays in Exeter; and John Measor for his support and for the efforts he made in helping to edit my text.

Finally, I want to express my love and deepest gratitude to my wife Nada for her unconditional encouragement and insightful comments on this work. Without her this book would never have been published.

# Preface

The driving force that pushed me to step out of my professional career as a conservation architect and to write this book has been the feeling that the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem represented a violent fracture in the long history and evolution of the city. It was the artificiality of this new neighbourhood within the Ottoman city walls that struck me most on my daily visits to the site. But ‘artificial’ literally means ‘made with art’, with skill, made according to an idea, to a design; the very perception of the existence of such a plan seemed to call for its analysis.

The Jewish Quarter embodies the ‘artificiality’ of Israel as a whole – a dream realized, built anew over a short span of time, a utopia made of square, stone-faced houses, of clean well-paved streets, of Western rationality amid eastern ‘shapelessness’. The reconstructed neighbourhood’s rejection of the original built environment echoes the overall attitude of the new state to the existing Palestinian landscape; the renewed Jewish Quarter may be considered a condensed version of the entire Israeli experiment.

Built after 1967, following the Israeli conquest of the Old City, the new Jewish Quarter is intimately connected to the ideology that made the creation and development of Israel possible, and proved integral to the earlier state-making phase that had followed the 1948 war. In its formative period the new State of Israel had developed without – and partially in opposition to – the Old City. However, the Zionist call for a ‘return to the fatherland’ required the full appropriation of Jerusalem – as it represents the most important and powerful symbol of Judaism – and its subsequent transformation according to the plans put forth by the Israeli leadership. It appears then that the Jewish Quarter constitutes an essential and central element for the State of Israel, its special status being confirmed by the widespread support for its reconstruction coming from almost all Israeli political parties and personalities. Indeed,



the new Jewish Quarter is rarely associated with the other East Jerusalem settlements, or with those in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip.

Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter is often portrayed as the Jewish symbol *par excellence*, the proof of the 'historic right' to the land, the core of the Jewish religious faith and at the same time the heart of the secular state. Israelis saw its destruction under the Jordanians as proof of the need to create the Jewish state, and the city's rebirth as bearing witness to the achievements and possibilities of a modern and rational country. From within this positivist framework, most commentators – foreigner and Israeli alike – would regard it as almost blasphemous to consider it as yet another settlement. Still, the neighbourhood communicated to me essentially the sense of being an artificial island, an inwardly turned *enclave*. It looked to me like the very proof of the 'otherness' at the centre of the Zionist enterprise, just the opposite of the much sought after idea of continuity and rebirth, of a bridge between ancient Israelites and modern Israelis. Its contemporary shapes and conscious use of ancient heritage and archaeological ruins conveyed a message of simplification, of fabrication or, at least, of misplaced rationality. Its small size, and the dramatic contrast between the rebuilt neighbourhood and the rest of the Old City, seemed to affirm the futility of the whole idea, the impossibility of shaping a living and dense city according to an abstract ideological design.

To most visitors walking through its lanes, however, the reconstructed neighbourhood is self-evident proof of the effectiveness of the Zionist project. The rewriting of the ancient and recent history of the site and the complete erasure of the previous reality are not visible, so the new version conveyed by the reconstructed neighbourhood is willingly endorsed.

To the Israelis, the Jewish Quarter is a lively, charming and emotional site; to north-American tourists it is an 'authentic' ancient city and an extraordinary archaeological park connected to the biblical myths that shape their own country and national consciousness; to Jews from all over the world it has come to represent the core of their identity; and finally, and even more surprisingly, to many Palestinians it is seen to be a successful model of urban reconstruction, to be eventually copied and imitated.

Realizing that my feelings and perceptions were not unanimously shared, that, on the contrary, most visitors saw the renewed quarter as a

## PREFACE

happy island, a successful mix of modernity and tradition, as proof that modern Israel was not only made of concrete blocks and hilltop projects, but also of imposing stone buildings, forced me to question the whole concept of urban restoration and its inevitable and intimate connection with political ideologies.

This book confronts these contradicting perceptions and sets out to explain why and in what ways the Jewish Quarter reconstruction developed.