

Utopia in the Zionist Town Planning Under the British Mandate in Jerusalem:

The Antimus District

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Ever since the first visionary texts of the political Zionist movement appeared, their subject was not only the structure and the functioning of a Jewish state but also the urban space of the future country in a multiplicity of scales and configurations. The country would be *a priori* composed of cities, and 19th-century industrial civilization provided plenty of ready-made models. The ever-open question of the project's site conferred a technical and apolitical character to the task of creating a "model state" composed of "model cities".

Israeli historiography describes the opposing political strategies found in Zionist ideologies, though most often reduce these representations of the city to a utopian-literary appendage or leave them out altogether in favor of the town planning themes which since the very beginning have been associated with progress: the Zionist garden city and what came to be known as "Bauhaus". The present study addresses a contradiction of a different kind: the project of the State versus the vision of the city in the same Zionist texts. For the founding father of the movement, Theodor Herzl, to obtain a stamp of approval of the great powers alone would have been tantamount to establishing the State. Nevertheless, it is Herzl who initiated the literary tradition of urban space in his utopia, *Altneuland* (1902), where the kaleidoscopic fusion of the countryside, the cities, the villages, the urban practices and clothes overshadowed all references to the political State. The contradiction appeared as many of these oppositions, elements and prototypes, not to mention the very genre of utopia, stemmed mostly from the socialist, even anarchist, thought (e.g. the *Arts & Crafts*) that drew on the critique of the modern nation-state. The secondary question of genealogy of ideas aside, a real gap between Herzl and these visionaries of the city emerges from the fact that he inversed the order structuring his material universe by starting from the State and finishing with household appliances. Moreover, regardless of the ideological orientation of their authors, it is difficult to reduce these Zionist texts to a nationalist discourse despite the multiple borrowings from advocates of the nation-state, such as Giuseppe Mazzini.

In the light of these inconsistencies, the thesis consists in proposing a historical and

ideological frame of reference that organises Herzl's displaced descriptions of the city, his working notions as a *model*, and structuring oppositions as universal/particular, into a syncretic but more coherent vision. First of all, it incorporates Central and Eastern European Jewish Hegelian thought of the 19th century, as represented by Nachman Krochmal, Heinrich Graetz and Moses Hess. They were responsible for the politicization and historicist revision of intellectual heritage of Judaism, which integrated this heritage into social and national discourse concerning the forms of secular messianism and its agents. This frame of reference reveals a 'messianic paradigm' both utopian and ideological, structural and historical, as well as a persistent signifier of an ever variable and situational signified. The best illustration of the versatility of this messianic content would be Herzl's messianic nation state, responsible for the perpetual global synthesis of *technical knowledge* and for disseminating it in the form of *model* to the nation states of the world.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in another Zionist utopian novel, *Yerushalayim ha-Benuyah* (1918), the "technique" of Herzlian messianic paradigm is replaced by "Arts & Crafts". In 1903, its author, Boris Schatz, proposed to Herzl a project of a Bezalel school of arts in Jerusalem, of which Schatz would become a director in 1906. His utopian vision synthesizes the German, Russian and British intellectual sources into a coherent urban and philosophical vision. Despite his avowed affinity with *Arts & Crafts*, Schatz takes on the Herzlian state as a *sine qua non* condition. Nevertheless, the importance given to the urban components and to the future Bezalel centre is a powerful structuring factor, too. While using multiple elements from Scriptures, he pictures the Jewish state of the early 21st century inhabited by a new refined race, destined to become a *model* of a Man-God for the whole of humanity.

Schatz, as a successor of Herzl's utopian tradition, also represents a bridge between the European chapter of Zionist Organization and its urban enterprise in Palestine. It begins with the introduction of British Mandate in 1917. This axis of study also opens a second, *in situ* part of the present dissertation. Its starting point is the planning of the "commercial district" called Antimus (1922-1923), another blind spot in Israeli historiography, despite its central location in contemporary Jerusalem. The first "European" district in Jerusalem, Antimus reproduces a neoclassical urban plan that hardly fits among the classical topics of Israeli urban research. Schatz, as a vocal advocate of his ideas for the new capital and as a close friend of the architect of Antimus, Alexander Levy, was one of the figures behind the planning of the district. Moreover, the district borders with Schatz's school and the project included the first boulevard in Jerusalem that led to the entrance of Bezalel. It turns out that Schatz describes "this" boulevard is his utopia *Yerushalayim* written three years earlier, partly as a tribute to the majestic boulevards of Jerusalem in *Altneuland*.

This peculiar superposition of utopian and historic dimensions constitutes a “micro-event”, shedding light on a larger and more profound picture of the dynamics of power, brought by the political framework of the Mandate, between Zionist and Palestinian communities and British mandatory government. Given that, for each, the state under their respective political authority was at stake, the urban and architectural form of Jerusalem as a new capital became a field of their symbolical investments. The ever-fragmented map of land possessions – in contrast with its relative continuity in Tel-Aviv – made the symbolical aspect of urban and architectural elements, such as city centre, public buildings and spaces, built masses, visual links, contiguities, styles, toponyms and even municipal sewer system, crucial. The position of mandatory administration and its architects, according to which the urban undertaking in its progressive form (namely *Arts the & Crafts*) was essentially apolitical, universal, even curative vis-à-vis political frictions, played an important role in this symbolic rivalry. This idea was reflected in the preparation of the new town plans of Jerusalem, envisaging a *certain* city centre and *certain* public space shared by all communities.

The thesis investigates the modalities of this tacit confrontation in the dialectical relationship between the British and Zionist authorities and town-planning institutions. The Antimus project inaugurates the new Zionist strategy of dense urban construction, hitherto dominated by agricultural orientation and garden cities. The innovative form of the latter was approved by the British and was symbolic of the “new civilization in the Middle East” and of the fundamental mobilizing element of the Zionist ethos: universalism in the unique mission. However, the peripheral garden city prototype proved to be of little use in the symbolic conquest of the new capital. That is when the Herzlian and Schatzian images of Jerusalem as monumental metropolis and a city of international reception re-emerge in the neoclassical urban form of the Antimus quarter, a big novelty in Palestine. By the end of twenties it manages to bring the city centre *de facto* to the Zionist land plots (Antimus), and thus to the place other than envisaged by the British administration. Confrontation of the two “universalisms” mostly reveals their political particularities. Five years later, this neoclassical chapter in Palestine was forgotten while “Bauhaus” and Zionist universal Exhibitions of Levant became a new “universal” expression of the Zionist project. Since 1967, the notion of “universalism” has persisted in the discourse surrounding one or another project in Jerusalem, due to the yet unresolved political question: Whose Jerusalem?