

Jerash-Gerasa: Urban Environment of Two Antagonistic Towns

Protection and development proposals

Before dealing with the proposals for the protection and development of Jerash, I would like to say a few words about the evolution of the ideology which has guided the protection and the administration of the historical heritage in recent years.

Introduction

Since the beginning of this century a gradual evolution has taken place, within western culture, in the concept of a historical monument, from that of an isolated entity to that of an entire historical environment. A monument cannot be considered, in fact, independent of the urban or natural environment in which it is situated and from which it derives its culturally dependent autonomy. This principle, together with theories of a historical nature, emanates from the consciousness of the irreversible alteration of the environmental and historical patrimony, due to the uncontrolled development of production and fruition systems, as well as the social evolution of an industrial civilization.

Until very recent times, the attention of those responsible for the management of historical property has been mainly devoted to artifacts of artistic value, in many cases resulting in their abuse and falsification.

On the other hand, a great number of monuments considered of little or no artistic value have been destroyed or disconnected from their historical or natural context. In the last thirty years, due to the effects of the Second World War and mostly to the very accelerated progress of industrial and technical development, political and public opinion has become aware of the urgency of planning and legislating for the safeguarding of cultural heritage¹.

A definition can be given of the context of historical interest: this is the organic whole of objects, buildings or sites defined by topographical, architectural or geographical limits. This entire historical environment, rather than a single

privileged monument is the result of collective human experience, therefore any alteration to such a context brings about a definite loss; it must be asserted that cultural heritage is neither replaceable nor repeatable.

In addition, we know very well how the rapid expansion of the phenomenon of urbanization caused the abnormal crowding of cities as well as the disregard of minor centres, each having its own 'raison d'être' in its peculiar environment. The increase of individual and public transport, the growth of technical and industrial infrastructures, the mechanization of agriculture and the growth of mass tourism has produced a brutal fracture in the harmonious balance created by mankind through the ages².

Current opinion is that the historical environment must play a role in present life; it is then evident that we should deal with cultural heritage more in the sense of integration than of mere conservation. Better still, the essential aim should be the transformation of the attitude of a passive conservation into an active one in such a way as to revitalize and give a new destination to the ancient capital investments, operating by means of profitable long-term strategies through political-economical actions³.

Present situation

Jerash represents indeed a very evident example of two independent contrasting aspirations. The town on the east side of Wadi Jerash, the ancient Chrysorhoas, subject to casual growth, is clearly in opposition to the vocation of its territory, this being pre-eminently agricultural⁴; Gerasa on the other hand represents one of the most conspicuous historical features of the country, although it is essentially considered as a mere touristic resource.

²Cp. P. Gazzola, *The past in the future*, ICCROM, 1975.

³For exemplary applications of such strategies, see P. Gazzola, *ibid.*, pp 56-81.

⁴This is fundamentally due to its position between Amman and Irbid which is the cause of an uncontrolled phenomenon of commutation between Jerash and the two major urban work centres of the country. Jerash has, in fact, a double role: as a cheap place of residence for people unable to reside in Amman, and as a commercial centre for the people of its large territory. Employment potentiality and commercial activity are thus inconsistent with the actual capacity of the town, the first is proportionally inferior, the second proportionally superior to the number of the inhabitants.

¹UNESCO, which since 1949 has launched programmes of technical assistance, and ICOMOS operating since 1957, are the most important organizations in the field; they are among the promoters of the following fundamental statements: International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (Venice 1964); Carta del Restauro 1972, European Charter of the Architectural Heritage (Amsterdam 1975).

I have been encouraged to prepare the study for the rehabilitation of the town by means of a 'Jerash special plan', through the support of Dr Adnan Hadidi. Additional direction was given by the guidelines of the Five Year Plan 1981–1985 (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *Five Year Plan for Economic and Social Development 1981–1985*, National Planning Council). In this, the characteristics of the problems with regard to the cultural heritage are clearly and objectively exposed. Its main guidelines are as follows:

- a) Touristic development is centred on the evaluation of the Jerash–Dibbeen/Ajloun area, this being suggested to serve domestic and Arab tourism as well as tourism by Jordanians working abroad.
- b) As for Antiquities, the most interesting general characteristics indicated in the Plan are the following:
 1. (p. 144) *Weakness of public consciousness with regard to the importance of protecting antiquities or preserving the historical heritage.*
 4. *Insufficient co-operation and integration between the activities related to tourism and those of the Antiquity Department.*
 5. *Encroachment of urban, industrial and agricultural expansion on archaeological sites and landmarks.*
 6. *Inadequacy of existing legislation with regard to providing a proper framework for the protection of the archaeological heritage from the vicissitudes of trading and loss.*
- c) The goals foreseen are as follows:
 1. (p. 144–145) *To ensure the adoption by the Antiquity sector during the present Plan period of the motto of 'developing and restoring the ancient city of Jerash', preserving its historical character and ensuring its proper integration with the tourist development plan for the Jerash–Dibbeen/Ajloun area.*
 2. *To protect antiquities from human and natural encroachment and rescue threatened ruins by proper and authentic restoration.*
 7. *To protect archaeological sites and areas from urban, demographic, agricultural and industrial encroachment. Also to acquire privately-owned land in which new archaeological finds are unearthed and enact legislation protecting the archaeological heritage from trading, abuse and loss.*
- d) The following organizational measures are foreseen:
 1. *Implementing an integrated Master Plan for the historical city of Jerash which calls for continued excavations for buried remains, restoration and maintenance of uncovered works, prevention of urban encroachment and construction of the city in a manner consonant with its historical character and which ensures co-operation between the local authorities and the Department of Antiquities for the proper execution of the plan and the acquisition of the necessary lands.*

e) Among the proposed projects we have:

1. (p. 146) *Reconstruction and maintenance of the archaeological city of Jerash.*
5. *Development of local museums.*

f) Besides the suggestions contained within the Plan for the protection and the rescue of the historical heritage, the chapter concerning the implementation of traffic infrastructures is of particular interest. The improvement of the Amman–Ramtha road specifically provides for the two following segments:

— *Old Jerash Junction–Zarqa River–Jerash Road* (p. 184):

The project aims at upgrading the existing 25 km. road between the Old Jerash junction and the city of Jerash into a four-lane road in order to accommodate the anticipated heavy traffic between central and northern Jordan.

— *Jerash–Thaghrit Asfour Road* (p. 185):

This project aims at aligning the 12 km. road segment between Jerash and Thaghrit Asfour with the four-lane primary road which connects Amman with the northern region and Syria.

Protection and development proposals

It becomes evident from the above exposé that there is a clear consciousness, at government level, of the importance of protecting the cultural heritage as well as an awareness of the inadequate integrations among the various departments with respect to operating in multifunctional contexts, such as the case of a town like Jerash. The modern town is being threatened by a strong development of urbanization, overwhelming the ancient town⁵ (FIGS. 1, 2) which is itself seen, by mass tourism, as a mere reserve for photographic safari. The north–south main road of the country which separates the archaeological centre from the modern settlement is at the same time a national, regional and urban road. Ostensibly a facility, it represents an insurmountable obstacle towards the integration of the two complementary aspects of the town.

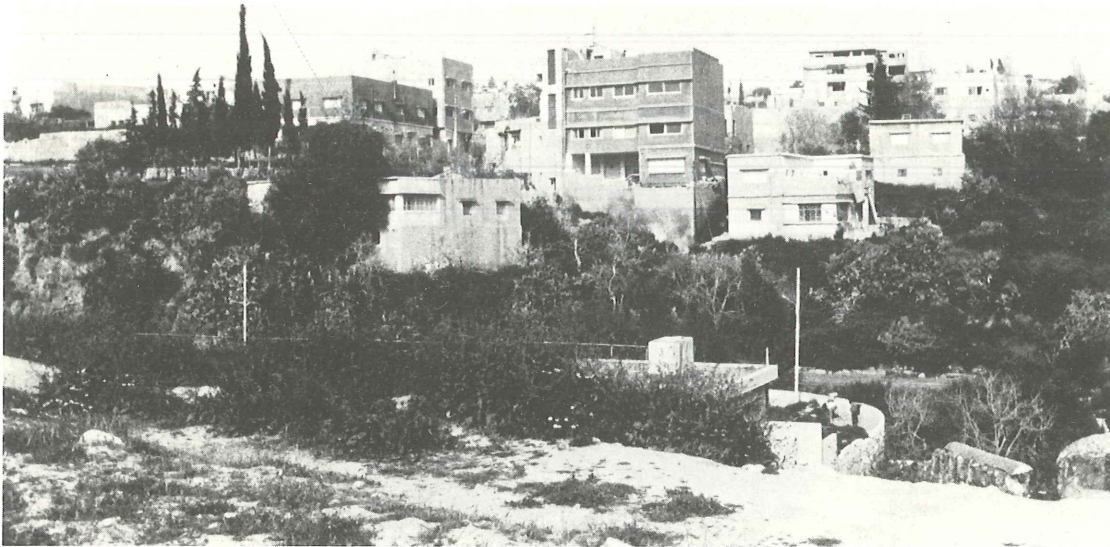
It is a matter of fact that urban planning, if one is to deal with urban re-evaluation, must be applied through the means of zoning by a Master Plan at national, regional and urban levels; the objective of zoning being that of giving land and/or urban areas the destination compatible with the general framework of the Plan⁶.

In synthesis, four main points can be indicated for an

⁵ A certain number of edifices of the 19th and early 20th century Circassian settlement is still preserved in spite of the continuous demolition perpetrated to give place to very modest r.c. buildings.

⁶ Implementation of an integrated Master Plan with legal authority will be the only viable means for the requalification of the town. Administrative delay in the implementation of such a plan would, however, reduce its effectiveness; a series of actions with immediate application in terms of a 'Special Plan' would be able to check the severe encroachments which day after day are threatening the urban environment of Jerash.

1. The architectural paisage on the east bank of the wadi from the west.



integrated re-evaluation of the town of Jerash:

- (a) *Rescue*
- (b) *Urban development*
- (c) *Historical research*
- (d) *Cultural development*

The measures to be taken in order to achieve the first two goals, through multidepartmental participation are: for the first phase;

- 1) To study an adequate alternative route for the north-south highway east of Jerash⁷.
- 2) To repeal existing and stop new building or alteration permits or land use permits inside the ancient city walls⁸. These can return into effect or be reassessed after archaeological investigations have been carried out.
- 3) To maintain privately-owned free plots inside the city walls in their present state; if these are cultivated, use of mechanical equipment must be prohibited.
- 4) To survey the areas surrounding the city walls in order to determine the presence of historical or archaeological remains. Specific surveys of a geological and hydrogeological nature should also be carried out in the same areas, in order to prepare a series of thematic maps serving as a guide to the direction of future urban development.

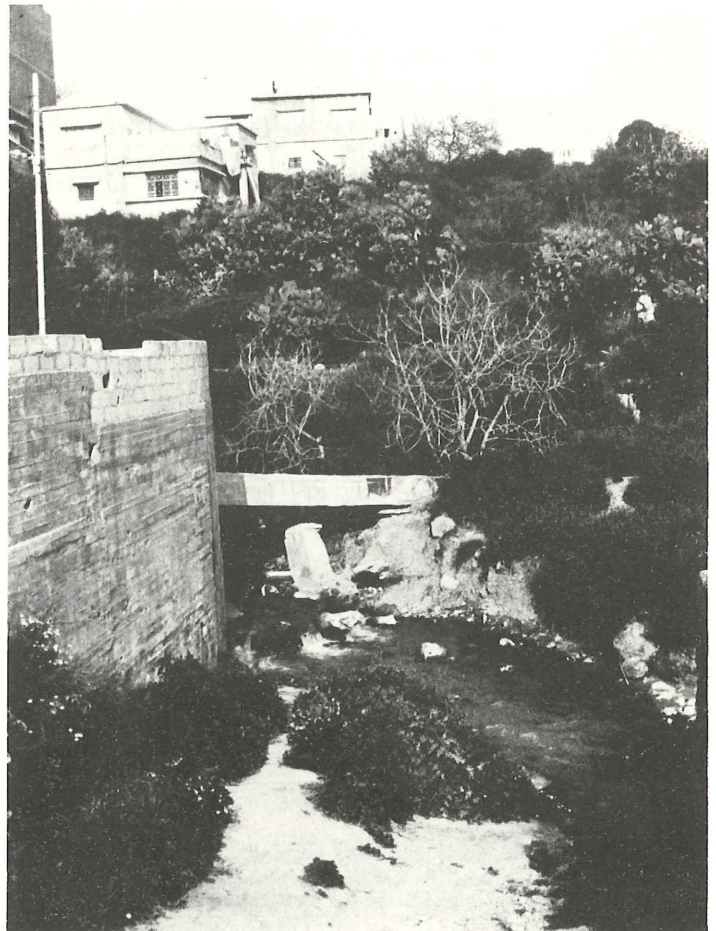
subsequent measures of the second phase are the following;

- 1) To expropriate by a gradual process and to allocate to the administration of the Department of Antiquities the privately-owned free land inside the city walls, in order

⁷This action should foresee at the same time demolition of the present road stretch from the Ministry of Tourism Visitors' Centre to the Jerash Power Station in order to allow for the re-integration of the two sectors of the city. Furthermore, doubling the present road, now in progress, should be stopped 1.5 km. south of the Triumphal Arch.

⁸In addition a 100 m. wide "respect" zone should be created outside the city walls.

2. The location of the Water Gate immediately inside the city walls from the west, on the left the structures of the agricultural market.



3. The road connecting at present the national road to the Bus Station in the area of the East Baths from the south.



to define a public domain on the east side of the city similar to that which presently exists only on the west side.

- 2) To expropriate those lands outside the city walls on which archaeological or historical structures have been recognized.
- 3) To expropriate and demolish those constructions which create an obstacle to the appreciation of archaeological and historical structures.
- 4) To define the following zoning:
 - Agricultural area.
 - Areas of urban conservation and restoration⁹.
 - Areas of urban development:
 - A₁ completion of the existing plots.
 - A₂ definition of plots according to a block-units typology.
 - A₃ definition of plots according to a row-house typology.
 - Archaeological park¹⁰.
 - Green belt around the walls on the east side of the city.
 - Organized park along the banks of the wadi (Chrysorhoas Park) (FIGS. 3, 4).

⁹The area included within the city walls will require, apart from restoration of buildings of historical interest and localization of areas for archaeological investigation, a specific plan for the creation of pedestrian zones as well as parking areas and public transport terminals. Particular care would be taken for the requalification of the "Old Market" quarter where the traditional urban texture of the Circassian town can be still appreciated.

¹⁰This should be created in order to integrate the city's remains from east of the wadi (especially the East Baths which are now occupied by the bus station) to the western protected area through the Roman Bridge and the reconstruction of the Sanctuary of Artemis bridge.

—Organized artery supporting the main civic structures¹¹ (FIG. 5).

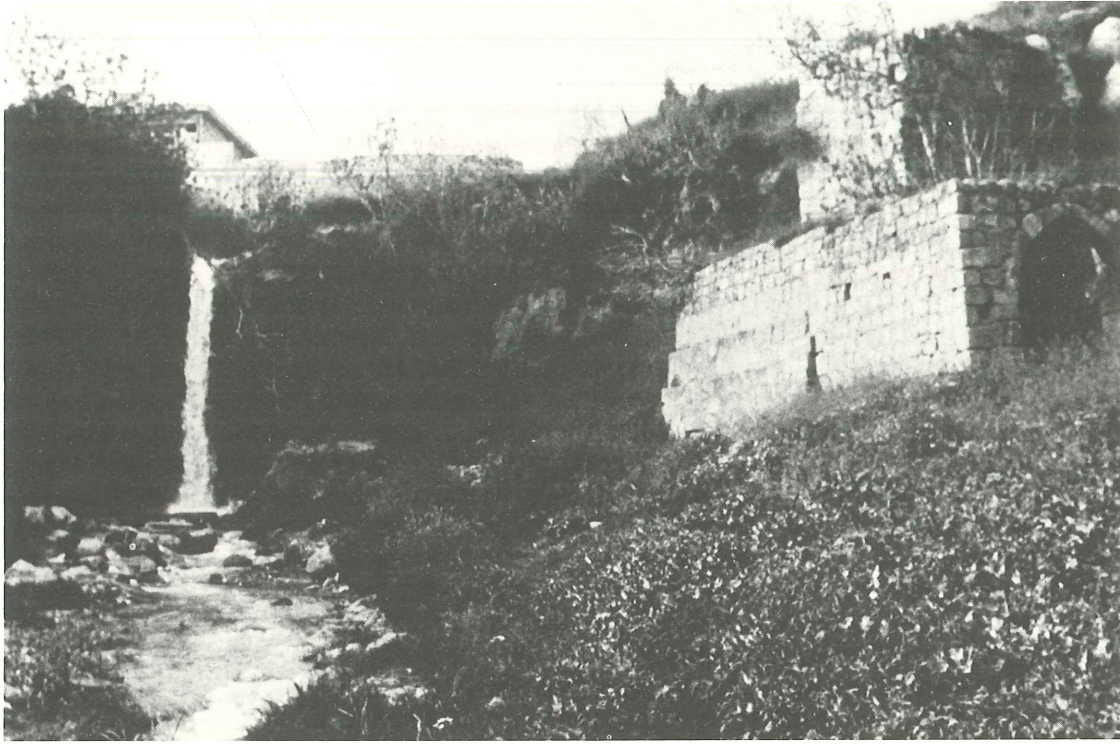
- 5) To define plot ratios and code regulations according to the aims of the zoning plan.

As for the goals (c) and (d), apart from the archaeological research already in progress, cultural development should be undertaken as follows by the Ministry of Antiquity and Tourism:

- 1) To diffuse research through publications and documentary films at different levels.
- 2) To create local museums by rehabilitating suitable ancient buildings such as the cryptoporticus of the Sanctuary of Zeus, the East Baths, the West Baths, the houses of the last century presently uninhabited but in a good state of preservation.
- 3) To create a store-room for the conservation of finds not exhibited in the museum, for the use of scholarly researches.
- 4) To install didactic facilities at each building and site of the archaeological park.
- 5) To restore the bridge in order to re-create the link between the two banks of the town.

¹¹The proposed by-passing highway east of the town should be connected to an articulated artery of infrastructures for future urban development. Along such an artery the following civic structures should be located: a regional bus and taxi station; a central wholesale fruit and vegetable market which should replace the present one on the bab el-Amman road; an area for commercial and handicraft activity; an area for light industrial activity; an area for sports activity.

4. The water fall from the south, on the right the ruins of a 19th century mill.



5. The area of the proposed urban development from the north, at the middle the existing football yard.

