

## Management and conservation policies of cultural heritage in Jericho

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### Abstract

This paper presents the management and conservation policies of cultural heritage applied in Jericho since the British mandate time. It highlights the main jurisdiction, management and planning frameworks that have direct impacts on the conservation and safeguarding of its cultural significance. It also tries to show how various conservation and valorisation strategies cause irreversible damage to cultural heritage resources in Jericho.

**Keywords:** Conservation, Management, Valorization, Cultural Heritage, Jericho.

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### Cultural Heritage of Jericho

Jericho is known as the oldest city in the World. It is located 10 kilometres northwest of the Dead Sea in the Jordan Rift Valley (Anfinset 2006,63). It lies 250 meters below the sea level, making it also the lowest city on earth (MoTA 2005, 12-13). Its diverse geological formation and unique tropical, sub-tropical climate zones, and perennial springs have made it an attractive place for settling down and practising new subsistence pattern based on the domestication of plants and animals since the 10<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C (Rast 1992, 55). In the 8<sup>th</sup> millennium, it became one of the main centres of the Neolithic revolution in the World (Stein 2003, 1). A bird's eye view on the rift valley shows Jericho as a unique green oasis in the Jordan Rift Valley. Its cultural landscape and sky horizon has been shaped by numerous natural and cultural heritage components since thousands of years, including natural cliffs, archaeological sites, traditional mud-brick houses, palaces, irrigation installation, pools, hedges and monasteries (Anfinset 2006,63).

### Management of cultural Heritage in Jericho

Jericho has been the subject of archaeological investigations since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1868 Captain Charles Warren dug some experimental shafts in nine archaeological sites looking for

biblical Jericho (Kelso 1951, 34). On behalf of the German Oriental Society, Sellin and Watzinger conducted big scale excavations in Tell es-Sultan (1907-1911) and showed the great potential of the site. Between 1930s and 1950s, the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem conducted several important excavations under the direction of John Garstang and Kathleen M. Kenyon, revealing 23 phases of occupation in addition to the Neolithic town. From 1997-2010, several archaeological excavations were carried out in Tell es-Sultan and in other sites all over Jericho, such as Tell al-Mafjar, Khirbet al-Mafjar (Hisham's palace), Tawahin es-Sukkar, etc. (Taha 2010, 20). Among more than eighty archaeological places listed in Jericho, there are four managed sites and only two of which, Hisham's palace and Tell es-Sultan, are open to the public (DACH's Archive; Rjoob 2006, 146).

During the British Mandate (1919-1948) and Jordanian rule (1948-1967), the Palestinian Department of Antiquities supervised the archaeological activities in Palestine. After the Israeli occupation in 1967, archaeological affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories was transferred to Israeli Staff Officers for archaeology whom are part of the Israeli occupation authority (Greenberg & Keinan 2007,16). In early 1980s, the site of Tell es-Sultan was open to the public as a national park.

Since 1994, after the Palestinian Authority took over its responsibilities, the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (DACH), which is currently attached to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), has managed part of the Palestinian cultural heritage in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), including Jericho, by using the previous Jordanian laws pre-1967 (Rjoob 2006, 146-147).

### Legislative frameworks

The 1966 law of Antiquities applied focuses on the protection of archaeological sites with little mention of other cultural heritage remains. It defines Antiquities as “*any movable or immovable remains or any part of it that was constructed, or formulated, or decorated, or inscribed or built in any form or any addition by a human being before 1700 AD. It also includes any structure built after 1700 AD, which is declared by the Director of the Department of Antiquities to be ancient antiquities*” (1966 Law of Antiquities). This narrow scope definition leaves more than 300 years of Palestinian cultural heritage out the automatic legal protection. It severely affects approximately 400 traditional mud-brick buildings, several monasteries, churches and mosques in Jericho alone (Riwaq Historical Registry 2006). Although, the law gives the director of antiquities the power to announce the legal protection of any structure built after 1700 AD, unfortunately this provision has been never used by any authority that has managed the Palestinian cultural heritage since the British Mandate time ((Al-Ju'beh 2008, 3-4).

### Conservation Jurisdictions

The 1966 Antiquities law is the legal basis of all physical interventions inside archaeological sites in the OPTs, dating before 1700 AD; however, it does not oblige the excavator to upkeep or rehabilitate the uncovered archaeological remains during or after the excavations that always focus on uncovering archaeological features rather than conserving them (Diab 2006, 228). As a result, these legal provisions are technically insufficient to conserve or maintain cultural heritage sites in Jericho. They lack the appropriate conservation technical standards required to safeguard and manage cultural heritage assets. In this context, the conservation and valorisation interventions in Jericho, especially in Tell es-Sultan and Hisham's Palace, were carried out under different conservation methodologies based on funding

availability, rather than the conservation needs of cultural heritage sites. In most cases, the role of DACH has been very inconsequential due to lacking of financial and competent human resources. Thence, the donors impose their conservation methods, and priorities marginalizing the role of DACH. This is clear in the case of Tell es-Sultan (fig 1), when the conservation interventions of the Italian-Palestinian expedition (1997-2000) were focused on the Bronze Age ruins, leaving the Neolithic remains without any sort of interventions (ibid, 230).



Fig. 1. Deterioration of Trench I in Tell es-Sultan.

This obscure situation creates a sort of mandate dispute between DACH and other stakeholders over conservation and valorisation matters, especially the tourism private enterprises (Darwish 2008, 4). In the end of 1990s, for instance, DACH refused to license the Tell es-Sultan tourist centre project, which includes: a hotel, souvenir shops, restaurants and a cable car passing through the skyline of Tell es-Sultan. However, the project was supported by the political level and implemented even without the consent of the DACH (fig 2). Likewise, the Mountain of Temptation Hotel and Restaurant Project, south of Tell es-Sultan, was executed without the consent of DACH and/or the Municipality of Jericho, tremendously affecting the south horizontal view of Tell es-Sultan (Rjoob, 2006, 147). Recently, the owner tried to extend his project towards the western part of Tell es-Sultan to control all over the tourist services and facilities surrounding the site. The role of the DACH is very weak in such matters. Neither the out-of-date laws nor the political will of the PA help protect the cultural heritage sites in Jericho.



**Fig. 2.** The unlicensed cable- car passing over Tell es-Sultan.

### State of conservation of cultural heritage sites

Cultural heritage sites in Jericho are deteriorating due to numerous human natural threats. The human threat includes excavation activities, visitors' erosion, land-use patterns of direct surroundings, urban expansion, inadequate infrastructure, ineffective legislative, shortage of qualified human resources, lack of meaningful interpretation, and lack of sufficient database, etc. The natural threat includes the effects of rainfall, rising groundwater, wind, wildlife activities, especially birds which built their nests inside the mud-brick walls (Diab 2006, 228). Consequently, some excavated trenches are doubled in width since their excavation, resulting in irreversible loss of the stratigraphy of the site and exposing real conservation challenges. The vast majority of archaeological sites in Jericho are used for cultivation activities or located among arable plots. These sites are always at risk, because of the chemical fertilisers and pesticides used in agriculture. Actually, there is a lack of cooperation between DACH and other stakeholders, especially the Ministry of Agriculture and farmers' associations, in conducting assessment researches to identify the proper chemical and fertiliser material consistent with archaeological sites in or adjacent arable land.

### Financial resources

The Palestinian official financial and budget policies for cultural heritage are inefficient, causing irreversible disrepair of the archaeological sites in Jericho. These policies have no vision to encourage conservation and valorisation of these sites through public funding or through public-private partnership. The

revenue of open archaeological sites in Jericho pours into the case of the Ministry of Finance. None of it comes back to preserve or enhance the sites themselves (Rjoob 2006, 148). On the other hand, the entrance fees of cultural heritage sites create a kind of competition between the DACH and the municipality which does not get any revenue from these sites. In 2008, for example, the municipality manoeuvred into this issue to get some income from these sites. It initiated a valorising project for the area of 'Ain es-Sultan with the aim of imposing admission fees on visiting the spring. DACH rejected this attempt, considering the spring as a part of the site of Tell es-Sultan which is already charged. Yet, the municipality bulldozed part of the site before they were enforced to stop by DACH (fig 3). The same scenario was repeated by the municipality in 2010 and again it was stopped (DACH's Archive).



**Fig.3.** Bulldozing cultural heritage remains at the spring of 'Ain es-Sultan by the Municipality of Jericho.

### Cultural heritage sites and the urban regulation plan of Jericho city

The Urban Regulation Plan of Jericho is very old. It was drafted in 1957, and modified in 1997 (Alnojoom 2006, 62). It is officially announced to the public opposition in 2010 to be later on approved (Al-ayyam newspaper 2010, 11). It is rudimentary and limited to basic zoning plans, road networks, and building codes. The 1966 Jordanian spatial planning law no. 79, and the Palestinian bylaw no. 30 of the 1996, regulate the urban planning issues in the OPTs. Article no. 15 of the spatial planning law considers preserving sites, buildings, constructions, caves and significant archaeological and historical places essential part of preparing urban plans ( the 1966 law, articles no. 15). Nonetheless, the current Urban Regulation Plan of Jericho is not more than a map of network streets among of which

pieces of lands classified by the municipalities as residential and agricultural zones. These road networks pass through the landscape of Jericho, traditional agricultural fields and archaeological sites cutting them off from their cultural landscape and historic contexts (fig 4).



**Fig. 4.** The Beasan street cuts off 'Ain es-Sultan from the cultural heritage of the Tell es-Sultan.

The regulation plan of Jericho does not even consider archaeological sites as part of the plan itself. The area of archaeological zones is less than 1%, identified green spots to be excluded from any urban development programs

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(Alnojoom 2006, 74). As a result, the Urban Regulation Plan of Jericho neither has positive impacts on the cultural heritage sites, nor has safeguarded or integrated them within the urban or development plans of the city.

## Conclusion

Cultural heritage sites in Jericho are the most visited and vulnerable sites in Palestine. These sites, after various managing authorities succeeded since the British Mandate, are experiencing a lot of conservation and management challenges due to the lack of overall policies for maintenance, conservation, management, valorisation, and modern legislative frameworks. A management and conservation plan(s) is needed as a guiding basis for conservation and development of future activities in these sites and their environs. In doing so, a conservation and valorisation plan for the cultural heritage of Jericho, integrated with the Master Plan of the great Jericho's oasis which is being prepared, should be worked out through fruitful cooperation among all related stakeholders to secure appropriate management, conservation and valorisation of this irreplaceable heritage.