



Migrations in New Cinema

Maeve Brennan

Sirah Foighel Brutmann and Eitan Efrat

Katrin Wahdat

Lana Askari

Sasha Litvintseva

Maha Maamoun

Edwina Attlee

Nicholas Brooks

Ektoras Arkomanis ed.

Jerusalem Pink

Maeve Brennan

Jerusalem gold polished (high density), Jerusalem gold rough block, Jerusalem bone cream, Benjamin grey (hard), Deep blue (honed), Hebron gold, Hebron yellow, Hebron bone, Bone light (polished), Halila beige, Hebron white red veins, Hebron pink (brushed), Jerusalem royal, Ramon white, Birzeit gold, Jerusalem shells, Jerusalem rose, Jerusalem golden veins, Palestinian grey (honed), Palestinian cream (hard), Desert yellow, Negev fossil, Hebron snow, Jerusalem ivory, Jerusalem pink.

During more than twelve hundred years
the building has been exposed to the destructive attacks of
winter storms
of summer suns
of earthquakes
of fire
and of 'souvenir' seekers

The weather does not attack all sides of the octagon with
the same severity

Repairs have been made at distinct intervals
Change has been a condition of the building's existence
had there been no change
the building would have disappeared¹



Maeve Brennan, *Jerusalem Pink* (UK, 2015). A Jerusalem stone quarry in use at night. The quarry is located beside Qalandiya checkpoint, the main entry point between Jerusalem and the northern West Bank.

Travelling in the West Bank, I have the surreal but disturbingly common experience of driving alongside a mountain only to find that it abruptly stops halfway in a sharp vertical line, its interior made visible, containing traces of the industrial processes used to extract its stone. The architecture of the landscape is rapidly shifting due to the unregulated growth of the stone industry, now the backbone of the Palestinian economy. Inverse spaces appear where mountainous terrain would have once stood. Quarries are an architecture of by-product, born out of a process of extraction, physical evidence of the disappearance of the West Bank.

Much of the extracted stone contributes to the construction and expansion of Israel – stone cladding, settlements, suburbs. Faced with a convoy of lorries, each one filled to the top with construction materials, a sense of severe unease comes over me, a sort of anxiety bound to construction. I am aware of the constant expansion and development of 'facts on the ground' – that

these raw materials will soon conflate to form a settlement or outpost. I came to Palestine with the intention of researching my great-grandfather's role as architect during the British Mandate but was quickly waylaid by more current events.

I am in a 4x4 with Abdelhamid, driving to his limestone quarry in the mountains close to Nablus. On the ascent to Juma'een, I see what looks like a volcano erupting dust, with white plumes of smoke enveloping the surrounding village. On my right, there is a large pool of opaque white liquid coated with a pearlescent sheen. It seems that the limestone from the quarry is seeping into the local environment in whatever form. In fact, there are seventeen Jerusalem stone excavation sites surrounding this tiny village. A short walk through it leaves our clothes covered in a thin layer of white dust.

Abdelhamid's quarry cuts deep into the mountainside, exposing limestone walls 100ft high. The layers of strata are rough and beige at the top, smooth and pink further down. In a region so dense with historical significance, the sight of strata resonates. I think of Eyal Weizman's politics of verticality – the divvying up of contested sites into layers, like the Israeli archaeological digs spreading out beneath the Dome of the Rock, which are putting its foundations at risk.²

The Persian artists first clothed the Dome of the Rock
The tiles have been replaced in some form or other
We see today a complex result of the efforts made
by perhaps as many as fifteen generations of men

Ernest Richmond was invited to Palestine in 1917 by the British Mandate government. His role was to survey the condition of the Dome of the Rock. He spent six months in a drawing studio,



Fig. 55 bis. East face of Octagon. Northern half



'Fig. 55 bis. East face of Octagon. Northern half', from *The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem: A Description of its Structure and Decoration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924). A diagram, by Ernest Richmond, of the eastern face of the Dome of the Rock, depicting the six instances of tile restorations that were carried out on the exterior of the Dome of the Rock across fourteen centuries.

inside a small domed building in a corner of the Haram al Sharif, carrying out a forensic investigation of the building. He eventually published his findings in 1924 in a volume titled *The Dome of the Rock: A Description of Its Structure and Decoration*. At the back of the book there are sixteen drawings based on sixteen photographs. Each drawing depicts half a facet of the octagonal structure, with shading of various densities and patterns

that denote time periods (First Period, Second Period, Third Period...). The six time periods correspond to the six instances of major restoration carried out on the tile work that clothes the exterior of the building. These restorations took place across fourteen centuries.

The diagrams can at first appear abstract. The irregularly shaped shifts in surface disguise the architectural forms present (arches, windows, cornices). These forms are a reminder of the physical building that the drawings describe. We might read these drawings as diagrams of time. The constant maintenance and repair necessary for the building to endure is made visible in a patchwork of historical eras, the walls themselves rendered as historical documents.

Richmond writes in the introduction to his survey: 'The Dome of the Rock is, then, alive – almost in the same sense that a man is alive. It changes its tissues and it renews its structure in order to maintain power to enshrine the soul that is in it.'³

Some columns are encircled with iron bands
necessitated by the marble having split
no doubt caused by earth tremors
Metal ties are of no use in a serious movement
but they act as a safeguard when slight tremors occur

The columns are of coloured marbles with gilded capitals
Both columns and capitals belonged to former buildings

Jerusalem stone comes from indigenous Cretaceous and Tertiary rocks that belong to the Turonian period and consist of Limestone, Dolomite and sometimes chalk. The texture on the stone's surface that gives it its particular character is



Maeve Brennan, *Jerusalem Pink* (UK, 2015). A block of Jerusalem stone sliced by a stone-cutting machine.

owed to an abundance of marine carbonate sediments.⁴ It takes approximately 90 million years to form.

In 1918, during the British Mandate, Colonel Ronald Storrs (one of Richmond's colleagues) ordered that only local limestone should be used in the construction of buildings, extensions and rooftops in the Old City of Jerusalem. This stone bylaw was then more strictly imposed by Israel as part of the 1968 Master Plan, an urban development scheme for the 'unification' of the areas within the newly expanded boundaries of Jerusalem.⁵ Every structure within these boundaries was to be clad in Jerusalem stone. The aim was to produce a visual coherence across these disparate areas, 'helping them appear as organic parts of the city' that carry 'emotional messages that stimulate other sensations embedded in collective memory, producing ... strong associations to the ancient holy city of Jerusalem.'⁶ Socio-political forces, national identity and collective memory are all forged into the material fabric of Jerusalem stone.

with a circle. Over the course of the meeting he fills the A4 page with shapes, measurements and the odd word or half-word:

stone wheel
Byz
cistern
vessels
T mozaic [sic]
towers
beads
olive
Throne
Bed

Dr Ibrahim Mekharzeh is a well-known Palestinian archaeologist who has worked on many important excavations in the south. On our tour of the sites we are obliged to stop for five



Maeve Brennan, *Jerusalem Pink* (UK, 2015). Dr Ibrahim Mekharzeh gesturing at significant archaeological sites in the distance (southern West Bank).

visits with friends he has made during his time working in the area. A man with nine children – and two wives, the doctor quietly warns me – sits us in his garden and serves us coffee. It is time for prayer, and Dr Ibrahim brings out a jug of water to wash his hands. He carefully chooses a wild flower to kneel beside, making sure the excess water falls upon it.

Later we arrive at a Byzantine quarry. Dr Ibrahim gestures at the hilltop and narrates how ancient industry inscribed itself on the landscape. I begin to see remnants of carved stone steps where blocks of stone have been chiselled out in layers. He tells me that water was sometimes used in the extraction process, poured into cracks where it would freeze and expand, dislodging blocks of stone. He strokes the manmade marks still present on the limestone surface with his finger.

There was a tradition among the guardians of the building that when the remains of the mosaic were removed to allow the walls to be prepared for the tiles the mosaics were buried in various places in the Haram area Some under raised platforms others under flights of steps

A quantity of fragments were found It would be worthwhile to attempt their reassemblage and decipherment

I arrive in Jerusalem with the hope of getting inside the Dome of the Rock to film. I have been in touch with Beatrice St Laurent, a Canadian academic whose name came up when I entered ‘politics of the restoration of the Dome of the Rock’ into Google. She tells me she will be staying at the Albright Institute for Archaeological Research in East Jerusalem in January, and to

come for tea. She has been searching for a relative of Ernest Richmond, who remains something of a gap in her research.

During my visit, we discuss her work on Peter McGaw, Richmond's successor at the Haram al Sharif. Her research has been greatly aided by Isam Awwad, resident architect at the Dome of the Rock for the past thirty-two years but recently retired. He arrives during my visit and offers to assist me with getting access to the site. I am to draft a letter to the Awqaf stating clearly that I am the great-granddaughter of Ernest Tatham Richmond, and he will pass it on. A week later I receive their approval.

I am permitted to enter between dawn and midday prayer. The shrine is relatively empty at this time, except for the caretaker, who is vacuuming the vast octagonal carpet. The intricately patterned marble walls match the exterior. I think of something cousin Susanna recalled Ernest saying – 'Upon taking down the tiles of the Dome of the Rock, it was found that the underside was as carefully worked as the front.'

The central atrium that encloses the rock is boarded up like a building site, with a lattice of scaffolding climbing up toward the 20-metre-high dome. Isam leaves me with one of the conservators, who eventually asks if I would like to accompany him to the top. We ascend the scaffold, closely passing marble decorations, elaborate stained glass and shimmering gold leaf, usually only visible at a considerable distance. Prayer mats are slung over horizontal scaffold poles at various heights. We reach the top and come out onto a circumference of wooden plank flooring where eight men are at work on the green, red and golden relief that fills the giant dome. Isam told me that due to an unsuccessful restoration by the Egyptians, water had entered through the roof and damaged the ornate interior.

Standing inside it, the scale of the dome is stunning. The restorers working on the other side appear tiny but the sounds



Maeve Brennan, *Jerusalem Pink* (UK, 2015). Restorers at work on the dome's interior decorations inside the Dome of the Rock.

of their work echo round, and I hear the scratches of sandpaper as if they were right behind me. One of the men is singing as he's working, and his voice travels too. We approach the restorers, walking past a small seating area with plastic chairs, patterned cushions and a kettle for coffee. Two of the older men are working alongside two younger men, carefully observing their work and guiding them through the process. The older man puts on white latex gloves and begins to cut brown hessian into small pieces. The younger man dips them in PVA before inserting them into cracks in the relief. Up close the ornate detailing appears strangely large, and the damage is suddenly visible. Peeling green and red paint, cracked gold leaf, damp stains and gaps in the wooden structure forced open by years of rain and snow. One restorer is injecting glue into the loose surface with a syringe. I speak with the oldest conservator, who tells me he has worked at the Dome of the Rock for the past forty years, carrying out the constant restoration necessary for

the building's health. He says only one other woman has been up to the Dome in that time – Beatrice St Laurent, during the restoration of the 1990s. And that of course my great-grandfather would have stood where I am standing now.

Notes

- 1 Indented paragraphs are quotes from Ernest Richmond, *The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem: A Description of Its Structure and Decoration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924). Some of the original text and layout has been adapted.
- 2 Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007).
- 3 Richmond, *The Dome of the Rock*, 4.
- 4 Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 274.
- 5 This included the Old City, 28 Palestinian villages, the western Israeli city and the previously Jordanian-administered city.
- 6 The 1968 Master Plan, in Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 28.

References

- Richmond, Ernest. *The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem: A Description of Its Structure and Decoration*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924.
- Weizman, Eyal. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. London: Verso, 2007.