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Patrick Geddes – not only a town planner but a poet too

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NOTATKI NAUKOWE

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Sir Patrick Geddes, one of the fathers of modern town planning, worked as a town planner in Palestine during the 1920's. He was motivated mainly by his Zionist feeling which can be seen in an unknown poem written by him concerning his attitude toward his work. This poem, which has never been published, presenting his admiration for the old-new Zionist ideology and the way that gifted man bonded together his knowledge of the Bible, his Scottish roots and his work into a poem, found in his unpublished private papers.

1. Introduction

The life and work of professor Patrick Geddes have been described in length in more than 60 books and articles published all over the world¹ (Boardman 1944, Defries 1972). His work, which was mainly concerned with England, India, Scotland and Palestine², dealt in numerous places but all that was written never dealt with one hidden point in Geddes' heart, his ability to write poems. This paper examines one of his poems, which has never been published, its background which presents connection between Geddes' work and his Zionist view, and also presents another poem which also has never been published.

2. Patrick Geddes and Palestine

In 1919, when he was 65 years old and was appointed emeritus professor of botany, Geddes was approached by Dr. Eder, a prominent British Zionist, who introduced him to Dr. Haim Weizman, the Zionist Organization leader³. Geddes was then to work on a plan for the University of Indore, in India. After discus-

¹ For a complete biography, see P. Boardman (1978, pp. 506–508).

² In India Geddes was involved in the town planning of Dacca (today Bangladesh), Ballarpur, Jubbulpore, Karpurthala, Lahore (now in Pakistan), Lucknow, Kanchrapara and Nagpur. In England he worked in Chelsea and in Scotland he worked with Edinburgh town planning.

³ Central Zionist Archive (CZA) Jerusalem, File Z4/1721, Dr. Eder to Geddes, private letter dated 11.5.1919.

sing the matter with Zionist officials⁴, Geddes accepted the commission to design the layout plan for the Hebrew University, which was to be built on Mount Scopus, in Jerusalem. Geddes went to Palestine, spent the autumn of 1919 in Jerusalem, drafting his plan for “The Proposed Hebrew University Of Jerusalem”⁵ and also a preliminary report for the British military Authorities, “Jerusalem Actual and Possible”⁶, setting out a basic city plan of Jerusalem.

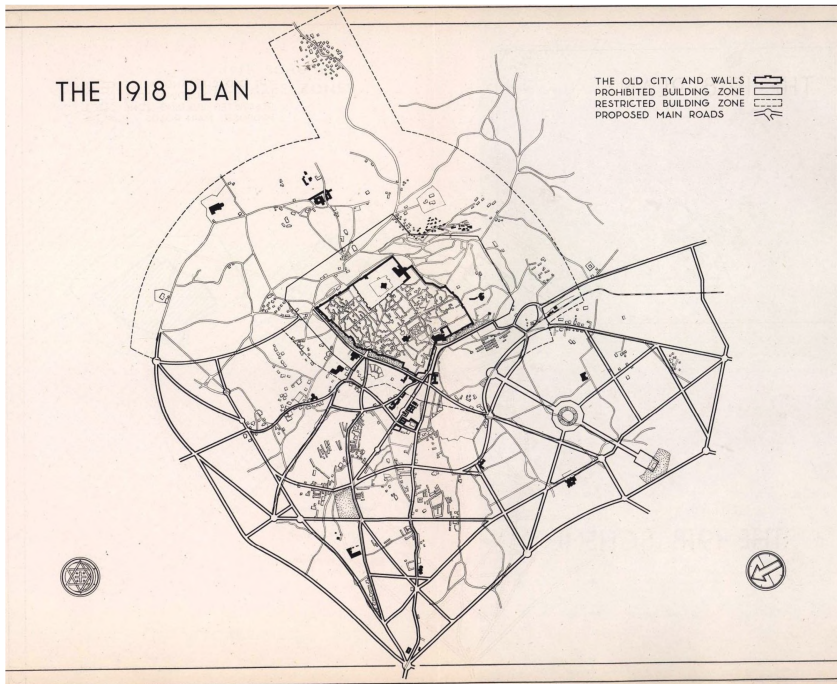


Fig. 1. Geddes plan for Jerusalem

Source: from H. Kendal, *Planning Jerusalem* (1948)

Geddes visited other parts of the country and drafted proposals for Haifa’s development, for a new Jewish suburb in Tiberias, on the mountain above the Sea of Galilee, and for the modernization of the Tiberias thermal baths, as well as for

⁴ One Zionist official (Dr. Sonne to Mr. Simon) recorded in his letter of 12.8.1919 that Geddes “brings such knowledge and experience to bear on the subject, as well as a total lack of prejudice, as are but seldom met with”. File Z/4 1721 in CZA.

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⁶ The Military Governor of Jerusalem to Geddes, 7.10.1919, File 10546 in the National Library of Scotland.

another Jewish settlement in Palestine⁷. In April 1920, Geddes returned to Palestine, was nominated as The Director of the Department of Planning of the Zionist Organization⁸ and spent a number of months reviewing his plans and preparing new ones. Later, in 1925, Geddes was invited to the official opening ceremony of Hebrew University in Jerusalem. While visiting Palestine he accepted the nomination for the design of the layout for the development of Tel Aviv, the first Hebrew City, then a small suburb, situated on the Mediterranean Sea, north of Jaffa.

Scholars have described and discussed Geddes and his accomplishments, including his proposals for Hebrew University and for the city of Jerusalem, although in the end, however, little was made of any of them (Mellor 1990). His plan for Tel Aviv, which influenced the development of that city, was also discussed (Biger 1992).

3. Patrick Geddes and Zionism – the poet

Geddes was also a worldwide known biologist, sociologist and town planner. Little is known for his Zionist view, which brought him to Palestine. The period after World War I, was a period in which many felt it was the time to create “The New World”, based on social and political justice. The Balfoure Declaration, the British “Christian” occupation of Jerusalem after 800 years of Moslem rule and the activities of the Zionist Movement, brought lots of non-Jews to work with the Zionists, in their efforts to revive Palestine and establish the Jewish National home. Those people, mainly British and American Protestants, saw the revival of the Jews in their old-new country, as a fulfillment of the Lord’s promised, which the whole world should accept with joy. More then this, according to them, everyone had to work for the fulfillment of that Promise. Many, who shared that idea, worked with the Zionist Movement, each according to his capacity, will and ability.

Patrick Geddes was one of them. His works in Palestine, described above, although were partly paid jobs, were something more than commissioned tasks. He devoted time and lot of thinking in order to help, as much as he could, the Zionist efforts to develop New Israel in Palestine. He saw his work in Tel Aviv as his “Most ambitious he ever undertaken” and his design for the Hebrew University was his masterpiece combining his philosophy with his architectural ability. His view about his work in Palestine and his attitude toward the Zionist ideology can be seen in his private poems.

⁷ Ettinger to Geddes, 30.9.1919, File L/6/723 in CZA.

⁸ Ettinger to Geddes, 30.9.1919. Files L/12/39 and S 55/253/2 in CZA.

4. Geddes poems

Sometime between 1923 and 1924 Patrick Geddes wrote a poem called “Concerning Palestine – Jerusalem Old and New” which expressed his view about the work he had done in Palestine which is presented here. The poem presented here is a printing of the original one, as was written by Patrick Geddes, including every punctuation mark. The poem is restored in Geddes private archive, at Glasgow University⁹.

CONCENING PALESTINE – JERUSALEM OLD AND NEW
(Rhyme-Letter, from a Scotsman, to his friend, a Jew).

I.

Be not of stony heart, blue-pencil-wielding Editor!
Call not trash my small cash, although admitted creditor
My fellows pay in gold. Turn not disdainng nose
From rude verse offered, ‘stead of polished prose!

Let not my lord be angry then, that thus I write:
‘Tis bright’ning convalescence – here on mountain-height
As summer snows on Hermon – makes me rough indite
Such thoughts as flow from life’s return, to health and light!

II.

Here India (1) – Europe – each by turn, enfantasy (2) my brain
With many dreams, – bright – sad- changing like sun and rain;
Rolling like clouds above, wisping like mists beneath;
Yet oft they meet – and midway – into changeful wreath –

Now sombre, yet gray-silvery, to blue and white, thence green and gold -
Encompassing – adoring – verduring, flowering – as foretold -
Earth very centre – Europe-Asia’s – as long around thus mapped of old; (3)
Ev’n Palestine – high Jerusalem! City changeful oft, since David’s hold;

Yeroushalaim! – Hierosolyma – Ville Sanite – El Kuds – name changing many
more,

Recalling different ages, masteries; each harsh oft cruel; each oppression sore
On ancient People, sacred Faith. No miseries spared, no agonies forborne,
But aye returning, on these both. – yet Faith, Folk, Holy City, ne’er (4) by Jew
forsworn!

What city thus had suffered? Troy’s siege was one of sev’n; (5) vast Delhi Plain
Shows range of cities ruined, eight; Verdun’s (6) been battered, shattered oft amain:
Sword, ravage, captivity’s bitter cup, each world-oft! Her’s, calamities twofold
Worse ev’n than Prophets presaged; deeper than all historians have told

⁹ Patrick Geddes private archive, Strathclyde University, Glasgow, File T/GED/8/2/11.

Tragedy on tragedy! – ‘yond all dream; Athens till now! – Of dire Catastrophe
 World-Focus! – Yet each, yet all, Preludes to fresh Metastrophe!
 City ever-renascent! Hearts, aye true to Templed Truth Sublime,
 Re-prophesy Unity – Heaven’s to World’s – rehealed Man’s New opening Time!

All this – no less – in Zionism – latent, patent! – ‘spite hates, ev’n crimes profaning
 Common Ideals – Israel returns, Jerusalem New regaining!
 Thus out of Past – ev’n Present – sad oft gory – rebuilds, worthy of founders hoary;
 Renewing Israel sacred Story; fulfilling Hopes – past ages’ Glory!

Thus come her people – long in exile celled –
 From out all lands, to long-loved Home of Eld!
 Expelled, the strong, stern Turk, that long withheld; (7)
 Arab fears, Christians’ quelled; – ay soon dispelled!

Comers in Peace, Goodwill; and yet by right, clear held:
 Thus by the world’s wide League of Nations (8) sentinelled,
 Yet not maintained by force, – War’s and hate’s day is quelled!
 Heralds of true world-Peace (9) – that yet shall be joy-belled!

III

“Organisation, Zionist”; “Zionist Commission”: These terms are plain
 To modern ears. Clear ordinary style, that of our day;
 Prosaic as we make it; distinct, intelligible, sane:
 Lacks thunder –Voice, – lacks Spirit’s fire, – sent Israel on her Way

Time spirit’s unhistoric: most read but daily paper,
 Soon cast aside. Most memories fade to vapour;
 And, beyond all, John Bull’s! (10) Alone we Celts (11), like Jews,
 Remember – at time only too well. He thought “Z.O.” fresh news!

At best thinks Hertzl founder! – Ne’er sees that that was – Moses!
 Hence longest enduring, firmest too, of Man’s Organisations;
 Full vitalised, continued; buds true from stock as Sharon’s roses!
 Religion, Literature, bind; ‘yond ties of transient Nations;

Ev’n now up-breaking – War’s protean Phantasmagoria! (12)
 Israel, throughout all changes, keeps fast Theo-Theoria,
 That Law gave, Prophets clarified; whence Folk-Faith’s, Culture’s long duration
 “Duree” of world’s Life-thinker, Bergson. (13) – ‘Twas thus, as Jew he learned it:

– Zion’s Organisation! – aye preparing Life’s more abundant Evocation!
 – In People’s Soul: – hope, faith in full Return! Well has that earned it!
 – Zionist Commission’ too much but modern sords, as if of yesterday:
 Seems so to Europe’s, Arab’s eye: new-hatched, an Anti-Semite jesters say!
 – Commission? – By Moses founded! – hands on Joshua’s head; henceforth
 “ Full of the spirit of Wisdom”! (14) Captivity renewed it; time and again
 King after king, repentant – Cyrus to Artaxerxes, (15) first to fourth,
 – Send back Zerubbabel (16) with thousands; Exiles glad Home-City thus regain,

Rebuild; God's House first. Darius (16) did them anew, and strong sustain;
 Above all, Artaxerxes, Thus Ezra the Priest; with exiles more. As fain;
 – Last, greatest of leaders, Nehemiah, Governor, stout-willed;
 As Joshua strenuous, vigilant, wise: full-skilled he, to rebuild
 Temple, Walls, Gates. Round all he strode, high-hearted to maintain
 Trowels at work, despite threats, gibes; courage to meet swords of Profane!
 – Thus now in sum: – “Organisation? Covenant! – continuous
 And aye renewed. – “Commission”? – Exile-Return! – courageous.
 And “Opposition”? – constant, malignant, slanderous! – This, Horonites! (17)
 Fixed prototype of “Anti-Semite” today, who same old hate incites.

Recall through history – take Egypt's – Dynasties clearly numbered:
 Let us now do the like for each of these; help memories enslumbered.
 – Covenant – still One! – Exile>Returns – how many? Speak, scholar! Eleven?
 – Nay more! Recount! Then Horonites? – The same – new batches, foul old leaven!
 So number Mandates! – King George's lined with Artaxerxes' – one Survey!
 – Point clear: such numbering, so sweep away, from minds sole read in news of day,
 Their notion, Horonite-instilled – “What's Zionism? But dream, of yesterday.
 – So cause work cease! Scrap paper! – Nay! Like Persian Law, unalterable; now and
 aye!

Patrick Geddes

Some notes for the poem are added in order to explain things, which seem to be needed an explanation.

1. Geddes spent about 7 years (1916–1923) working on town planning in India.
2. Geddes used lots of old words (enfantasy), and in his poem he performed the “Poetic Liberty” in using words like “wisping” and others, including French words “sombre”.
3. Middle Ages' mapping usually put Jerusalem in the center of the map. Those maps called “the T-O” maps were encircled by the ocean – “the O”. The map was oriented to the East, the “T” is on its side. The Mediterranean Sea is the latitude line; the Nile River is the down part of the T while the Don River (which separated Europe from Asia) in the upper part of the T. Thus, we have the three Known continents (Asia, Europe and Africa) all three meet in Jerusalem.
4. Geddes point to the known “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning...” PSALMS 137:5,6, 7.
5. Troy has at least seven layers of cities in which the Iliad's' Troy was only one.
6. Verdun – a French city that was under siege in 1916 during World War I. It became the symbol of French resistance. About 364,000 French and 338,000 Germans were the death toll of that siege.
7. The Ottoman (Turkish) Empire ruled Palestine and Jerusalem for 400 years, from 1517 to 1917.
8. The League of Nation was formed in 1920, after World War I, to solve international disputes by arbitration. It was dissolved in 1946 and was replaced by The United Nations.

9. The Peace Conference was held in Versailles in 1919 and produced the Treaty of Versailles (June 28, 1919) with the aim of creating a “New World”, a peaceful one.

10. John Bull is the symbol of England, especially the lower classes of England.

11. Geddes was a proud Scotsman of Celtic origin.

12. By this Geddes referred to World War I.

13. Henry Bergson, a Jewish French philosopher (1859–1941) who believed that time changes and development was the essence of reality.

14. “And Joshua the son of Nun was full of spirit and wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him”, DEUTERONOMY, 34:9.

15. Geddes presents the similarity between the Persian kings and the British Empire views concerning the Return of the Jews to Palestine. Cyrus the Great was the founder of the Persian Empire in 539 BC, allowing exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem. Artaxerxes, the fourth king, ruled the Persian Empire between 464–423 BC and during his regime, Ezra and Nehemiah came to Jerusalem.

16. Darius, who ruled the Empire in 522–486, gave the permission for the renewal of the Temple work (Ezra 6:6–7).

17. “But when Sanbalat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do” (NEHEMIAH, 2:19).

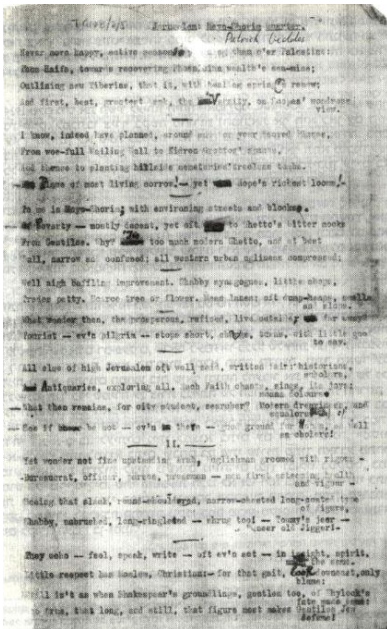


Fig. 2. The first page of the poem “Jerusalem – Meyo Shorim Quarter”
Source: Patrick Geddes private archive, Strathclyde University, Glasgow

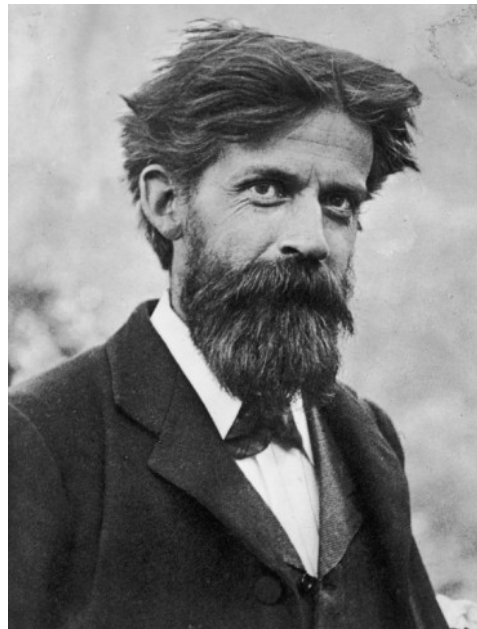


Fig. 3. Patrick Geddes
Source: Images of Patrick Geddes (Google)

Geddes wrote at least another, larger poem under the name “Jerusalem: Meyo-Shorim Quarter”¹⁰ in which he expressed his admiration for that ultra orthodox area in Jerusalem, which he described as a center of learning comparing it with “ten Oxfords plus ten Cambridge”.

In 1924 he sent the presented poem to “Menora”, a Jewish American journal along with a Rhyme letter, asking the editor to publish it. The editor replied to Geddes that he would be glad to accept and even to pay for any article dealing with Hebrew University, town planning in Palestine, or any other articles dealing with Jewish life, which can be of interest to the journal readers. Anyhow, the editor never accepted Geddes’ poem for publishing.

It seems that this rejection discouraged Geddes from publishing any other poem. He never tried to publish this poem or others he wrote.

The importance of the poems is not in their literature achievement but in their subject and more than this, in the man who wrote them. Reading one of these poems, which is presented above can open a window to the soul of a great man, who saw his work as a donation for all mankind. By his work for the Zionists he found an opportunity to fulfill a sacred obligation more than just doing a perfect job.

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¹⁰ Patrick Geddes private archive, Strathclyde University, Glasgow, File T/Ged/8/2/5.