# In Centro

## Collected Papers
## Volume II

## Memory

Editors:
Guy D. Stiebel
Doron Ben-Ami
Amir Gorzalczany
Yotam Tepper
Ido Koch

רשות העתיקות
ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY
TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

# In Centro

Collected Papers
Volume II

Central Region

TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

The Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology
The Jacob M. Alkow Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures
The Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies and Archaeology
The Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of Humanities

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Yotam Tepper and Ido Koch

Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology
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# Short-Term Memory: Historical Archaeology of Russian Compounds

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**Kfir Arbiv** | Israel Antiquities Authority
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## Introduction

Several Russian organizations and individuals were active in Ottoman Palestine in the second half of the 19th century. However, the main and most prominent were the Russian Foreign Ministry, the Russian Ecclesiastic Mission and the Imperial Palestinian Orthodox Society—a benevolent organization under the patronage of the Russian royal family. All were united in a joint effort to reinforce the positions of the Russian Empire and the Russian Church in the Orient and facilitate the pilgrimage of thousands of Russians willing to visit the holy sites of Palestine (Lisovoi 2000).

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 and the subsequent Russian Revolution of 1917 stopped the Russian pilgrimage to the Holy Land for almost a century. Today, the vestiges of the Russian presence in the Holy Land can be studied like any other archaeological material dated to later occupation periods in the Holy Land's historical cities.

The remains of demolished late 19th-century Russian buildings, as well as their infrastructure (water cisterns, drain channels) and traces of the preparatory building cycle (quarries, lime kilns and other installations) were discovered

in salvage excavations in Jerusalem in the large area around the "Russian Compound," the main Russian pilgrimage administrative and religious center in Ottoman Palestine (Kracheninnikova 2012). Together with the relevant archival materials, these finds may provide interesting insights into the city's development in the last third of the 19th century, when it combined European and local architectural elements.

The "Russian layers" cover and sometimes cut through earlier archaeological remains, making the detailed study of these upper layers essential for understanding the site's formation process, since they often alter the interpretation of the discovered ancient finds.[1]

## Archaeological Finds

### *The Russian Compound*

Between 2015 and 2017, three seasons of salvage excavations were conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority at the Russian Compound, in the very center of Jerusalem, in the area between the buildings of the Russian Holy Trinity Cathedral and the City Hall and Court, prior to the construction of the new Bezalel Art Academy campus (Fig. 1).[2] Six construction phases were exposed during the excavations, dating from the Hellenistic period to the 20th century CE. Two most interesting finds are mass burials of Judean Civil War victims dated to 93 BCE, from the days of the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus (Arbiv, Nagar and Lieberman 2018), and a fragment of the late 1st century CE "Third Wall" of Jerusalem with a battlefield

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1 This article summarizes the primary results of the archaeological study of remains related to Russian 19th-century construction and pilgrimage activity in Jerusalem. Other finds and various subjects of the study were reported within the first colloquium dedicated to this theme, "Russian Archaeological Project, 19th–21st centuries," held at Tel Aviv University on March 6, 2019.

2 The 2015 excavation season was directed by R. Avner and one of the authors (Kfir Arbiv), and the 2016–2017 seasons by Kfir Arbiv, with the assistance of N. Nehama (administration), M. Kahan and V. Essman (surveying), O. Rose (plans), A. Peretz (field photography), T. Lieberman (pottery reading), D. Tanami (metal detecting) and Y. Nagar (physical anthropology). Thanks are due to our colleagues, Y. Billig, A. Re'em, Y. Zelinger, A. Wiegmann, N. Szanton, R. Bar-Nathan (all of the Israel Antiquities Authority) and G.D. Stiebel (Tel Aviv University) for their help and valuable advice.

**Fig. 1:** Russian Compound: 19th-century lime-production installations, discovered in excavations (photo by Assaf Peretz, IAA)

display of the Roman artillery attack during the Great Revolt of 70 CE (Avner and Arbiv 2016). Finds from Stratum 4 are dated to the late 19th century, the period of the Russian building activity at the site.

Fundraising that aimed to purchase the land plots in Jerusalem and finance the future construction started already in the 1850s, under Russian state initiative and the patronage of the royal family. The most extensive land that was purchased, known as Meidan Square and measuring 71,687 m$^2$, was located only 300 m west of Jerusalem's walls. According to the project prepared by Russian architect Theodor Eppinger, the area was supposed to house the edifices of the Russian Ecclesiastic Mission, a consulate, pilgrim hospices for men and women, and a hospital with a pharmacy, all surrounding the central cathedral building. The Russian buildings, or *Moskobiya*, turned into the

largest construction project of this period in Jerusalem. Construction began on January 1, 1860 with a blessing ceremony; this primary stage of construction and the main building were completed in 1864. Nearly 1,500 local workers and some 40 skilled masters from Russia participated, under the direction of Martin Eppinger, brother of the chief architect. All the structures were built of local limestone. Wood and metal were brought from Russia, while glass, paint, tile and furniture were imported from France (Krasheninnikova 2012: 158–159). For various reasons related to church policy, the main Cathedral of the Holy Trinity was opened only in 1872, and the Church of St. Alexandra, located within the walls of the Ecclesiastic Mission, served as the compound's main prayer house for the first eight years. The whole Russian Compound complex, the first large European structure built outside the city walls, was encircled with a stone wall with two gates: a consular gate leading east, towards Nablus Road, and a church gate on the west, leading to Jaffa Road (Lisovoi 2000: 691).

Although the history of the Russian Compound land is well known and studied by Russian researchers, the remains discovered during the recent excavations are especially important since they shed light on the primary stages of the construction work, which were not documented in photos. For various reasons, the photographic documentation of the work took place only in the final stages of the project, during the construction of the Sergius Compound in 1886–1890 and related infrastructure work, such as the drainage system of the complex.

The remains of the preparatory work, predating the construction activity at the site, were discovered between the poorly preserved Byzantine remains and the Russian constructions of the late 19th century.

On this preparatory level, a series of installations testify to lime production at the site. Three rectangular installations, oriented north–south with a thick white lime layer covering their floors, were discovered in the northern part of the excavation area (Fig. 1). All three were built based on the same pattern: the foundations were hewn in the bedrock, and the walls were built of two parallel rows of large dressed stones (probably in secondary use and originating from earlier structures), with earth and quarrying waste in between. The best-

preserved installation rises to a height of 1.2 m. Thick layers of lime were discovered in almost all the site's excavated squares. It should be mentioned that the lime-kiln installations are clearly seen in the later photos documenting the last stages of the construction at the complex.

The number of Russian pilgrims and visitors grew constantly. At its peak, before the outbreak of World War I, it reached enormous numbers for its time: nearly 10,000 people annually (Lisovoi 2000: 623). Most chose to come for Easter and stay for a month or two within the premises of the Russian compound. Naturally, such a large amount of people required sanitary installations, and an ever-growing number of water cisterns and drainage systems were built (Fig. 2). To date, of the nine cisterns mentioned in the documentation, only one has been discovered: a large water reservoir measuring 5.7 × 17 m and 7 m deep, cutting through an ancient Byzantine quarry (Avner and Arbiv 2016: 84). Since the initial construction stages at the Russian compound were never photographed, this large cistern is known only from plans and projects of the complex. Watercolors of the Russian Compound project were often reproduced and published in 19th-century illustrated magazines in order to promote the project and to find potential donors. These orientalist views of the compound in Jerusalem, with the requisite palm trees, camels, visitors in European dress and locals in their exotic robes, presenting the regular French park and an open water cistern of complex shape (Fig. 3a), were always disregarded by specialists as unrealistic. Indeed, it makes little sense to build an open water reservoir in the Jerusalem hot climate, and also to not maintain the conventional rectangular shape. Surprisingly, the remains of the water reservoir discovered in the excavation point to a complex shape but with a vaulted ceiling (Fig. 3b).[3]

The remains of several drainage channels were exposed during the excavations, all within the limits of the dig. All are quite long, up to 10 m, and narrow, about 0.3–0.35 m wide. In specific spots, the channels were located at a significant

3 Remains of a water cistern were also discovered in the excavations of the Russian structure in the Veniamin Compound on Ha-Nevi'im Street (see Kagan 2011).

**Fig. 2:** Russian Compound: plan of drain and water-supply cisterns, 1897 (courtesy of AVPRI State Archive, Moscow)

a

b

**Fig. 3:** a) Project of Russian buildings in Jerusalem; b) the water cistern discovered (photo by Kfir Arbiv)

depth, cutting through a few strata, including the Jewish Revolt battlefield of 70 CE with its ballista stones (Avner and Arbiv 2016: Figs. 2–4). In the photos of the compound taken in the first years of the 20th century, some drainage channels are seen cutting—during their installation—not only through archaeological layers but the bedrock itself, to a depth of about 3–4 m (Fig. 4). The channels yielded no finds, but the field around them contained some pottery dating to the Late Ottoman period.

### *The Russian Consular House*

In 2018, a short-term salvage excavation was conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority at the southern edge of the Musrara neighborhood in Jerusalem, opposite the Old City walls and the New Gate, prior to the construction of a municipal parking lot at the site.[4]

Two construction phases were exposed during excavation (Tchekhanovets and Vach 2019). The early phase, dating to the Byzantine period, is represented by part of a single structure built on leveled bedrock. Based on the finds, this construction can be dated to the 6th–7th centuries CE and most probably forms part of a “monastic quarter,” an agglomeration of ecclesiastical institutions, probably the largest in Jerusalem, with residential units for the local monks and pilgrims, three small churches, three bathhouses and household units, located to the east, northeast and west of the current site (selected bibliography: Schick and Bliss 1894; Sukenik and Mayer 1930; Amit and Wolff 2000; Tzaferis *et al*. 2000).

The second, later, construction phase, dating to the late 19th century, is represented by massive foundation walls, which can be interpreted as the southwestern corner of a vast structure (Fig. 5), with a pillar base supporting

4 The excavation was directed by one of the authors (Yana Tchekhanovets), with the assistance of M. Shor (archaeological probes), K. Arbiv (inspection), N. Nehama and E. Behar (administration), E. Aladjem (surveying), D. Tanami (metal detecting), G. Bijovsky (numismatics), T. Winter (glass finds), C. Amit (studio photos), I. Lidsky-Resnikov (pottery drawing), C. Hersh (glass drawing), V. Nosikovsky (metal conservation), Y. Bugenholz (pottery restoration) and S. Itkis (drafting). Thanks are due to R. Elberger (historical buildings conservator), to D. Bahat and to our colleagues from the Jerusalem Region of the IAA, E. Kagan, A. Wiegmann and N. Sapir, for their valuable advice.

**Fig. 4:** Construction of a drainage channel, 19th-century photo (courtesy of GMIR Museum, St. Petersburg)

the balcony of the second storey and two water installations located in the yard of the structure. During the excavation, the foundation trenches of the building were also identified, penetrating deep and in certain places cutting into the ancient Byzantine remains. The floors of the structure were not preserved, and the structure yielded almost no material finds except for a few fragments of Marseille roof tiles and a fireplace glazed tile.

The identification of the structure was made possible through Conrad Schick's 1894/1895 plan, where it appears under No. 83: "Wohnung der Russischen Konsulatsbeamten" ("Residence of the Russian Consulate workers").[5] Armed with this identification, we consulted the list of Russian proprieties in the Holy Land, compiled by the Consul to Jerusalem, A.G. Yakovlev, in his letter from April 29, 1895. In this letter, our plot is mentioned as "*Homsi*, by the New Gate of Jerusalem, 3436 sq m, with the recently built house serving as a residence for consulate clerks" (Lisovoi 2000: 86–87). In addition to its proximity to the Old City walls, the plot was also very close to the Russian Compound located some 200 m to its northeast.

In the second half of the 19th century, the whole area west of the Old City walls was turned into a large construction field where large foreign institutions were erected: St. Louis Hospital in the 1850s and the large pilgrimage complex of Notre Dame between 1880 and 1904. The European building activity in the area was so extensive that in 1898, the Ottoman authorities opened a new gate in the city wall—the Gate of Sultan Abdul Hamid, or simply the New Gate—to facilitate the connection of the new structures to the holy places within the city limits.

Luckily, a complete documentation file related to the Russian Consulate Residence in Jerusalem was found in the Russian Foreign Policy Archive (AVPRI) in Moscow. Among the documents is official correspondence between various institutions, starting already in 1889, with the original projects by the Jerusalemite architect George Frangya, detailed estimates, a new, less costly project (ironically, making the final structure far more expensive) and a protocol

5 For a high-resolution version of Schick's plan, see http://beta.nli.org.il/en/maps/NNL_MAPS_JER002367923/NLI_MAPS_JER?_ga=2.50787373.501238889.1547672904-845179687.1542190313#$FL25567831 (accessed January 20, 2020).

**Fig. 5:** Foundation walls and water cistern of the Consular House, overlapping Byzantine walls, during the excavations (photo by Yana Tchekhanovets)

of the cornerstone-laying ceremony (for the archival documentation, see Vach and Tchekhanovets 2019). Preserved plans and photos clearly show the pillar supporting the balcony of the upper floor and the water cisterns discovered in the salvage excavations (Fig. 6).

The building's fate during the post-war period remains unknown, as the relevant documentation is missing. It seems that in 1918, and similar to other Russian proprieties in the country, the British Mandate authorities took control of the structure. The metamorphoses of the building can be followed through Jerusalem maps printed during the Mandatory period. Between 1918 and 1948, the structure successively housed the field cashier and district offices, a Barclay's Bank branch, the Scottish St. Andrews Hostel, the Wesley House (Methodist Church), and even a local office of the Pasteur Institute. In 1948, some 19th-century structures became located on the demarcation line. Severely damaged between 1948 and 1967, the structures were demolished after the Six-Day War. According to our inquiries, after 1948, the Russian building was settled by Jewish immigrants from Kurdistan. Nearly 20 families lived there until 1973, and a tiny synagogue had been set in one of the rooms on the first storey.[6] The building stood abandoned until 1978, when it was finally demolished. The chance discovery of the Consular House during the salvage excavations is one more in a series of finds in the last decade related to European building activity in Late Ottoman Jerusalem (for an overview, see Finkielsztejn, Nagar and Billig 2009).

## Discussion

The study of the Russian presence in Palestine should be regarded as an integral part of historical archaeology or included in the archaeology of the Late Ottoman period. The large cities of Ottoman Palestine, and first and foremost

6 We are grateful to our informants, I. Ankava and A. Daniel, both residents of the Musrara neighborhood.

**Fig. 6a:** Consular House in Jerusalem under construction, 1892
(courtesy of AVPRI State Archive, Moscow)

Jerusalem (Ben-Arieh 1984; Kark and Oren-Nordheim 2001) and Jaffa (Kark 1990), went through a true construction boom in the late 19th century, led by European imperial, ecclesiastic and private factors. This “late” material cannot be overlooked or neglected, for it makes up the upper layers in any excavation of an historic city and is studied today with the same thoroughness and accuracy as Bronze or Iron Age remains (to mention just a few of the numerous recent studies dedicated to Jaffa: Arbel 2014; 2017; Reʾem 2010; studies on Jerusalem: Finkielsztejn, Nagar and Billig 2009; Reʾem and Forestani 2017; Reʾem 2018). Some studies deal with the country’s agricultural hinterland in the Ottoman and British Mandate periods (Tsuk, Bordowicz and Taxel 2016; Taxel 2017), the archaeology of military campaigns (Peretz 2017) and civil engineering activities (Zilberstein and Shatil 2013).

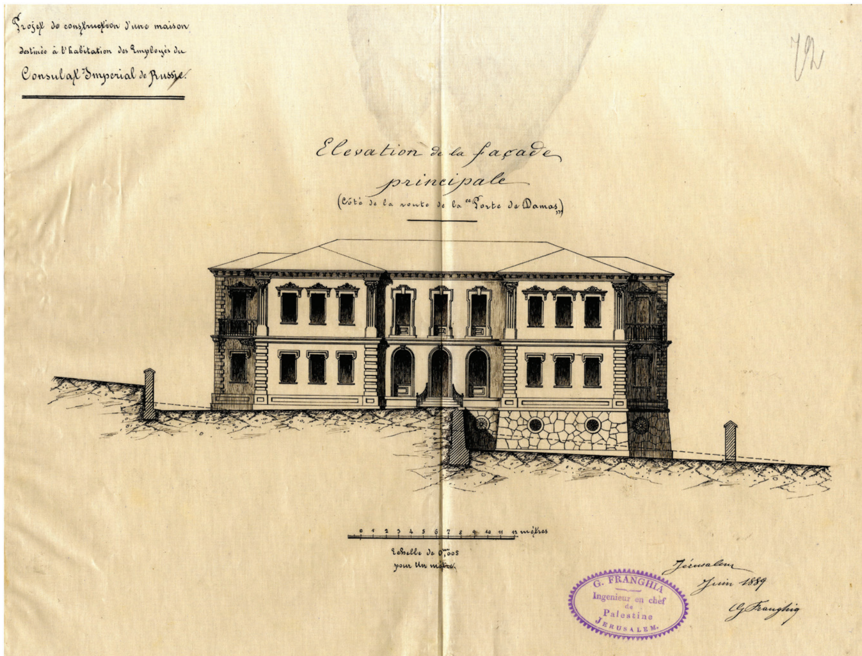


**Fig. 6b**: Architectural plan, 1889 (courtesy of AVPRI State Archive, Moscow)

The massive waves of Russian pilgrims to Palestine left numerous material vestiges which can be studied archaeologically, such as graffiti inscriptions scratched by pious visitors to the holy sites. The most ancient Russian inscription of the sort, dating to the 12th century, was discovered in the Nativity Church in Bethlehem (Artamonov, Gippius and Zaitsev 2013), but most date from the 19th century. Today, a systematic study of Russian pilgrims' graffiti at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and in minor monasteries in the Old City of Jerusalem is jointly carried out by Israeli and Russian archaeological teams (Tchekhanovets 2018; Belyaev and Vach 2019). Furthermore, an early 20th-century Russian commemoration book was recently discovered at Aceldama (Akeldama) in disturbed burials near the Greek Monastery of St. Onuphrius (Re'em and Tchekhanovets 2019). The book, belonging to a female Russian pilgrim buried at

the site, contains the names of relatives and friends to be commemorated at the holy places.

Other archaeological pilgrimage remnants include small souvenirs from the Holy Land, more particularly bottles with Russian inscriptions containing blessed oil and holy water collected from the Jordan River and other sites. Such bottles were recently discovered in archaeological excavations at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (Avni and Seligman 2003) and the City of David.[7] A few examples of this type of souvenirs can be found in Russian museums (Belyaev 2000; Iukhimenko 2009: 46–164; Gnutova 2012). Amazingly similar, the so-called *eulogia* ("blessings") bottles, decorated with Evangelical scenes and known from Byzantine Palestine, show the strong unbroken tradition of these pilgrimage practices (Grabar 1957).

World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917 ended Russian pilgrimage to the Holy Land. During this "century of absence," the Russian narrative became marginal, limited to the few picturesque ecclesiastic institutions, usually closed and inaccessible to visitors. The chain of new landlords of ex-Russian propriety, the movement of populations into the limits of the city, two wars and the complete change of the Jerusalem landscape—all of these factors led to the erasure and forgetting of the Russian chapter in the story of the Holy City, turning it into a sort of "forgotten heritage." Amazingly, in the case of the Consular House, even the identities of its builders were completely forgotten, just 40 years after its demolition. It seems, therefore, that the recently studied Russian sites in Jerusalem may serve as classic examples of "sites of remembering and forgetting" (Starzmann and Roby 2016), silenced sites reflecting materiality of memory, which are, notwithstanding, still present and able to be excavated.

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7 We thank S. Dan-Goor (IAA) for this information.

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