



**HAL**  
open science

# Building and Destroying Authenticity in Aleppo: Heritage between Conservation, Transformation, Destruction, and Re-Invention

Nora Lafi

► **To cite this version:**

Nora Lafi. Building and Destroying Authenticity in Aleppo: Heritage between Conservation, Transformation, Destruction, and Re-Invention. Christoph Bernhardt, Martin Sabrow, Achim Saupe. Gebaute Geschichte. Historische Authentizität im Stadtraum, Wallstein, pp.206-228, 2017, 978-3-8353-3013-9. halshs-01560321

**HAL Id: halshs-01560321**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01560321v1>**

Submitted on 11 Jul 2017

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## **Building and Destroying Authenticity in Aleppo: Heritage between Conservation, Transformation, Destruction, and Re-Invention**

Nora Lafi (Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin)

Published in: Bernhardt (Christoph), Sabrow (Martin) and Saupe (Achim) (eds.), *Gebaute Geschichte. Historische Authentizität im Stadtraum*, Göttingen, Wallstein, 2017, 328p., p.206-228.

Please quote as such.

The concept of authenticity, as defined in international circles between the 1960s and the 1994 Nara Conference on Heritage, has been one of the main instruments used to define policies aiming at heritage protection during the last few decades.<sup>1</sup> The concept also became more than an instrument: it shaped entire approaches to the question of the built heritage and to the process – social and political – aiming at its conservation and restoration.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, it has been the object of intense discussions, with scholars and activists denouncing some of its founding ambiguities as being tied to static and sometimes culturalist conceptions of history, to colonial visions, and to policies of social segregation.<sup>3</sup>

The object of this chapter is to reflect on such debates around the case of the city of Aleppo, and particularly around the way its medieval and Ottoman built heritage was dealt with in the period of the Ottoman reforms of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the period of French colonial occupation, and the various phases of independence up to its present-day tragic destruction.

Today is unfortunately not the first time that Aleppo is the theater of large-scale urban destruction and of acts of war traumatic for the population. From the 1819 revolt to the resistance against French colonial occupation in the 1920s, bombings and repression have caused great damage on

---

1 Randolph Sarn, *Authenticity and Historic Preservation. Towards an Authentic History*, in: *History of the Human Sciences* 15 (2002), pp. 1-16; Christina Cameron, *From Warsaw to Mostar. The World Heritage Committee and Authenticity*, in: *APT Bulletin* 39 (2008), pp. 19-24.

2 Eman Assi, *Searching for the Concept of Authenticity. Implementation Guidelines*, in: *Journal of Architectural Conservation* 6 (2000), pp. 60-69.

3 Michael Falser, *Cultural Heritage as Civilizing Mission. From Decay to Recovery*, Berlin, 2015; Hilde Heynen, *Questioning Authenticity*, in: Barry Bergdoll/Alice Thomine-Berrada (eds.), *Repenser les limites*, Paris 2005; Isabel McBryde, *The Ambiguities of Authenticity. Rock of Faith or Shifting Sands?* In: *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 2 (1997), pp. 93-100; Siân Jones, *Negotiating Authentic Objects and Authentic Selves. Beyond the Deconstruction of Authenticity*, in: *Journal of Material Culture* 15 (2010), pp. 181-203; Denis Bocquet, *Dresde et l'Unesco: questions sur les catégories de classement et la gouvernance des sites classés au patrimoine mondial*, in: Michel Clément (ed.), *Paysages urbains historiques*, Bordeaux 2009, pp. 73-78; Filippo De Pieri, *Conservation in the Age of Gentrification. Historic Cities from the 1960s*, in: *Contemporary European History* 19 (2010), pp. 375-385.

various occasions. The 1822 earthquake also resulted in severe destruction and counts on the sad list of deadly events in the history of the city. Knowledge of this chain of events has to be part of all reflections on the nature of historical authenticity in Aleppo: the city, including some of its most revered monuments, labeled medieval, has been partially destroyed and rebuilt several times. In Aleppo, just like in many cities, authenticity can't be just a matter of static chronological snapshots. On various occasions, the city has been reconstructed in accordance with specific practical and ideological choices. The inertia of such choices conditioned, at least partially, the local echoes of the notion of authenticity that was elaborated since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The very definition of the dimension of the historical heritage of the built environment was made in all these contexts, as part of broader reflections on reconstruction and urban transformation.

Processes of urban modernization, which in Aleppo have often been very aggressive against the built heritage, also contributed to weakening the historical substance of the city, as well as in its very definition in terms of nature, extension, and governance. As scholars have illustrated, the modern definition of heritage is also a mirror of the definition of a modern city that has often directly contradicted its relationship to the historical urban fabric and to the structure and morphology of the urban built environment.<sup>4</sup> The chronology of measures to protect the historical built heritage is sometimes a mirror image in a specifically defined space, or even enclave, of traumatic interventions in the urban fabric in areas not defined as historically valuable.

In other words, the various interpretations of the city's past implied not only choices to protect or not, but also a fashioning of the notion of heritage protection, with great historical inertia. For example, the inertia of the design of a protected area in contrast to an area of urban transformation is huge. The notions of authenticity and its content, nature, and ambiguities have to be analyzed in accordance with this framework.

### **Ottoman Urban Modernity and the Historical Built Heritage of Aleppo**

Every time the city was transformed, even before the Ottoman era, this process involved an interpretation of the past.<sup>5</sup> This is true of all cities, but in a city like Aleppo, one of the oldest

---

4 See: Françoise Choay, *L'allégorie du patrimoine*, Paris 1992; Jean-Baptiste Minnaert, *Le Mouvement moderne, le patrimoine et la figure des idéaux changeants*, in: Myriam Bacha, *Architectures au Maghreb, XIXe-XXe siècles. Réinvention du patrimoine*, Tours 2011, pp. 301-314; on earlier roots, see: Astrid Swenson, *The Rise of Heritage*, Cambridge 2013.

5 Kay Kohlmeyer, *The Temple of the Storm God in Aleppo during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages*, *Near Eastern Archaeology* 72 (2009), pp. 190-202; Daniel Knitter et al., *The Centrality of Aleppo and its Environs*, in: *Journal of Ancient Studies* 3 (2014), pp. 107-127.

permanent settlements in the world, this dimension has particular importance.<sup>6</sup> The interpretation of the past that was present in all projects for the future was the expression of precise ideological conceptions, but also of precise techniques of urban transformation, specific professional competences, a specific institutional framework, and more general cultural imaginaries of the city. In Aleppo, all transformation processes were indeed historically linked to previous processes of transformation. Those of the Ottoman era echoed medieval transformations, for example.<sup>7</sup> At least since the Middle Ages, knowledge of this heritage was kept in local chronicles and civic annals (*yawmiyyât*, *khitât*, and *hawâdith*) as well as in the archives of the *waqf* (pious and civic endowment) institutions.<sup>8</sup> This knowledge was vivid and institutionalized: it constituted the authentic sphere of heritage that the notions of *athâr* and *turâth* embodied. *Athâr* refers to the various traces of the past and of time. In the nineteenth century, the word was used to create an Arabic word for archeology. *Turâth* refers to heritage more as a social and cultural construction. The word was used in the twentieth century to create an Arabic equivalent of the French word *patrimoine*. Every building or amenity with a public function was the object of an institutionalized administration that collectively, and in the framework of the old regime municipality, followed all potential problems and renovation enterprises.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in addition to the general civic goods,

---

6 Heinz Gaube/Eugen Wirth, *Aleppo. Historische und geographische Beiträge zur baulichen Gestaltung, zur sozialen Organisation und zur wirtschaftlichen Dynamik einer vorderasiatischen Fernhandelsmetropole*, Wiesbaden 1984; Soubhi Saouaf, *Alep dans sa plus ancienne histoire*, Aleppo 1972; Yasser Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power and Piety in Medieval Aleppo*, Philadelphia 1997; Heinz Gaube/Mamoun Fanza, *Damaskus-Aleppo. 5000 Jahre Stadtentwicklung in Syrien*, Mainz 2000; Ross Burns, *Aleppo. A History*, London 2016.

7 André Raymond, *La ville arabe. Alep à l'époque ottomane (16e-18e s.)*, Damascus 2014.

8 'Izz al-Dîn Muhammad Ibn 'Alî Ibn Shaddâd, *Al-a'lâq al-Khatîra fî dhikr umrâ' al-shâm wa-al jazîra*, Aleppo, Library of Dr. Abû Hâdî M. al-Nûr al-Dîn b. Safût, p. 204f.; Shams al-Dîn Abu al-'Abbâs Ahmad Ibn Mohammad Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-a'yan wa-anba' abna al-zaman*, Cairo 1881; Kâmil b.K.b.Mohammed Al-Ghazzî, *Nahr al-dhahab fî ta'rikh Halab*, in: *Matba'a al-Mar'uniyya* 26 (1923); Nora Lafî, *Cronache civiche e microcosmi cittadini*, in: Paolo Militello (ed.), *Il Mediterraneo delle città*, Milan 2011, pp. 368, 233-240; Timur Kuran, *The Provision of Public Goods under Islamic Law*, in: *Law and Society Review* 35 (2001), pp. 841-898; Claude Cahen, *Réflexions sur le Waqf ancien*, in: *Studia Islamica* 14 (1961), pp. 37-56; Randy Deguilhem, *Le Waqf dans l'espace islamique*, Damas 1995, p. 437; Maya Shatzmiller, "Islamic Institutions and Property Rights. The Case of 'Public Good' Waqf", in: *JESHO* 44 (2001), pp. 44-74; see also: Stefan Knost, *The Christian Communities in Ottoman Aleppo and the Role of Religious Endowments (Waqf)*, in: Hidemitsu Kuroki (ed.), *Human Mobility and Multiethnic Coexistence in Middle Eastern Societies* 1, Tokyo 2015, pp. 41-57.

9 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA) *Dustur üçüncü Tertîb III*, 5 cild, p. 774: Belediye Kanun Halep.

all confessional communities had such registers.<sup>10</sup> The abundance of sources about this aspect illustrates its centrality in governance procedures on both the local and the imperial level in Ottoman times.<sup>11</sup> Keeping this dimension in mind is important in order to avoid having culturalist visions (i.e., visions that assume that no governance of the built heritage was in place before European influence) condition reflections on the concept of authenticity.

After the 1138 earthquake, one of the deadliest in the history of mankind,<sup>12</sup> during which many ancient buildings were destroyed, the reconstruction programs enacted by the Zengid and then the Ayyubid and Mamluk dynasties used the ruins of the ancient city as a reservoir of building materials for the reconstruction.<sup>13</sup> This is when most of the most famous medieval Islamic buildings of the city were built, like the bimaristan Arghun al-Kamili, the hammam al-Juhari il khan al-Qadi, and the al-Tarsusi mosque.<sup>14</sup> That is why authenticity was genuinely made as a patchwork. Authenticity in Aleppo, as it was constructed in the context of perceptions elaborated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, was indeed initially the result of traumatic destruction and practices of reuse. Its most genuine dimension was that of the *athâr* and *turâth* concepts: more pertaining to conscience and organization than just to the built dimension.

Starting in 1516, with Aleppo's integration into the Ottoman Empire, new commercial spaces and in general a series of buildings expressing the symbolic of power of the Empire were built.<sup>15</sup> Among the new suqs, Khusruwiyya and 'Adiliyya are the most famous. They represented more, however, than the mere projection of an Ottoman imperial architectural program onto the urban space of the

---

10 On the case of the Christian communities, see for example: Mor Ignatios Aphrem Baršaum, *Geschichte der syrischen Wissenschaften und Literatur*, Wiesbaden 2012, p. 506.

11 BOA daftar Halep: Bâb-i Âsafî Divan-ı Hümayun Sicilleri Halep Ahkam Defterleri; BOA, {A.DVN.ŞAHK.HL.d (years 1155.C 001, 1164h. ca 002, 1176. M 003, 1196.S 004, 1198.S 005, 1211.Ca 006, 1229.S 007, 1255.Ra 008, 1266.B 009) Bâb-i Âsafî Divân-ı Hümayun Sicilleri Halep Ahkam Defterleri.

12 Emanuela Guidoboni et al., The 1138–1139 and 1156–1159 Destructive Seismic Crises in Syria, South-Eastern Turkey and Northern Lebanon, in: *Journal of Seismology* 8 (2004), pp. 115-127; Jared Wade, The Deadliest Earthquakes, in: *Risk Management* 57 (2010), pp.18-19; Mohamed Reda Sbeinati et al., The Historical Earthquakes of Syria. An Analysis of Large and Moderate Earthquakes from 1365 B.C. to 1900 A.D., in: *Annals of Geophysics* 48 (2005), pp.347-435.

13 On these periods, see: David Morray, *An Ayyubid Notable and His World. Ibn Al-‘Adîm and Aleppo as Portrayed in His Biographical Dictionary of People Associated with the City*, Leiden 1994, p. 235 and ‘Adel ‘Abd al-Hâfiz Hamza, *Niyâbat Halep fî ‘asr salâtîn al-mamâlîk (648-923h./1250-1517)*, Cairo 2000, pp. 302-347.

14 Abdullah Hadjar, *Monuments historiques d’Alep*, Aleppo 2005, p. 206.

15 Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh, *The Image of an Ottoman City. Imperial Architecture and Urban Experience in Aleppo in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Leiden 2004.

medieval “authentic” urban fabric. They were also the reflection of a kind of pact of imperality between Istanbul and local elites.<sup>16</sup> Negotiations within the sphere of governance of the *waqf* institutions presided over their construction. The instrument that regulated the relationship between urban property, power, and the visions of the future of the city was indeed that of the *waqf*, in which euergetism (the practice in which urban notables offered public amenities to the city as an act of civic and pious generosity, but also to reinforce the civic aura of their family and to consolidate their patron-client relations) and policies of urban transformation converged.<sup>17</sup> The *waqf* system was so future-oriented that it comprised mechanisms to fund future repair work on the new buildings. It planned a dynamic evolution of the built environment, just as in medieval times, but with the additional dimension of full integration into Ottoman procedures of urban governance. Present-day conceptions of authenticity have to take into account this dimension and to avoid static visions. Concepts of *athâr* and *turâth* continued to define practices of heritage protection in Ottoman times in a way that was inherited from medieval practices, but reinterpreted in the Ottoman system. This is why André Raymond’s interpretations of the *waqf* system as a sign of the absence of any municipal system of urban governance need to be challenged. The *waqf* system was indeed one of the major expressions of an old-regime municipal system and the point of encounter between the imperial sphere and the civic organization of the local notability. Thanks to this system, the city evolved during the Ottoman classical age in a way that integrated new buildings into the medieval built environment.<sup>18</sup>

With the advent of various forms of modernity, impulses aiming at urban transformation evolved, but also developed as the continuation of such trends. Modernity was first embodied in the rise of new perceptions of the urban space and in the use of new techniques of surveying and mapping.<sup>19</sup>

---

16 Herbert Bodman, *Political Factions in Aleppo (1760-1826)*, Chapel Hill 1963; Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity. Aleppo in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, New York 1989, p. 418; Margaret Meriwether, *The Kin Who Count. Family and Society in Ottoman Aleppo (1770-1840)*, Austin 1999, p. 278.

17 André Raymond, *Les grands waqf et l’organisation de l’espace urbain à Alep et au Caire à l’époque ottomane*, in: *Bulletin d’études orientales* 31 (1979), pp. 113-128; Stefan Knost, *Die Organisation des religiösen Raums in Aleppo. Die Rolle der islamischen religiösen Stiftungen (auqāf) in der Gesellschaft einer Provinzhauptstadt des Osmanischen Reiches an der Wende zum 19. Jahrhundert*, Beirut 2009; Stefan Weber, *Damascus. Ottoman Modernity and Urban Transformation (1808-1918)*, vol. 2, Aarhus 2009.

18 Charles Wilkins, *Forging Urban Solidarities. Ottoman Aleppo 1640-1700*, Leiden 2010, p. 323.

19 André Raymond, *Aux origines du plan d’Alep par Rousseau. Le plan de Vincent Germain de 1811*, in: Peter Sluglett/Stefan Weber (eds.), *Syria and Bilad al-Sham under Ottoman Rule*, Leyden 2010, pp. 499-510; see also: Hussein El-Mudarris/Olivier Salmon, *Le Consulat de France à Alep au XVIIIe siècle*, Aleppo 2009, p. 509; Hussein El-Mudarris/Olivier Salmon, *Alep sous le consult d’Henri Guys (1838-1847)*, Aleppo 2009, p. 349.

An Ottoman form of urban transformation developed during the nineteenth century on the basis of such new expertise. The late Ottoman period was one of intense reflections on the relationship between the city as it was and the city that might be transformed by ideas of modernity and techniques such as regularization and planned extensions.<sup>20</sup> At this time, the administrative apparatus in charge of the governance of the city integrated new elements and procedures, aiming at a modernization of the city. New or newly defined professions, such as engineering and architecture, emerged, as well as new decision-making processes. What remained was the definition of the competences of the municipality (*belediyie*), reformed between the 1850s and the 1870s, in a sphere in which local notables were the most prominent figures. In spite of the modernization, *athâr* and *turâth* survived as concepts and practices, as did the culture and social networks behind them. The new municipal institutions were the result not only of modernizing reforms, but also of the negotiation of a new pact of imperial belonging between local notables and Istanbul. This pact also aimed at protecting the city against foreign appetites. Signs of modernity were introduced in the city during the last decades of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century: new squares, tramways, new infrastructural networks for public services, new streets. At this moment, the medieval city began to be conceived as a static element of the urban landscape. Until then, it had been seen in a more dynamic way: integrated into the daily functioning of the present. Modernity introduced a *caesura* between the past and the present. This was reflected in the competences of new administrative services. This change profoundly affected the cultural understanding of authenticity, as well as the relationship between the planning of the transformation of the city and the perception of its past.

A major change also followed the 1819 revolt, which was provoked by the refusal of local notables to pay, through the old-regime municipal budget, for the renovation of the Roman aqueducts. More than 1,000 old houses were destroyed in bombings during the repression of the revolt.<sup>21</sup> 19<sup>th</sup>-century reflections on the built heritage, from which modern conceptions of authenticity derive, did not develop in the context of an intact city. Aleppo was also severely damaged by the 1822 earthquake.

---

20 On this period: Bruce Masters, *Power and Society in Aleppo in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, in: *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 62 (1991), pp. 151-158; Bruce Masters, *The 1850 Events in Aleppo. An Aftershock of Syria's Incorporation into the Capitalist World System*, in: *IJMES* 21 (1990), pp. 3-20; Bruce Masters, *The Political Economy of Aleppo in an Age of Ottoman Reform*, in: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53 (2010), pp. 290-316.

21 See: Nora Lafi, *The 1819 Aleppo Riots and the Limits of the Imperial Urban Domestication of Factional Violence*, in: Nora Lafi/Ulrike Freitag (eds.), *Urban Governance Under the Ottoman. Between Cosmopolitanism and Conflict*, London 2014, pp. 58-75. For a narration of these events, see: Abrahâm Kûbilyân al-Armânî, *thawrat al-halabiyyîn 'alâ al-walî Khurshîd Bâshâ al-'uthmânî (1819-1820)*. *Yawmiyât al-mitrân Abrahâm Kûbiliân*, in: Mihran Minassian (ed.), *Manshûrât mitrâniyya al-Arman min al-Kâthûlik bi Haleb, Aleppo*, 2008, p. 171.

All the urban transformations of the years 1850-1914 took place in this context.

During the era of the Ottoman reforms (Tanzimat), the modernization of the urban space and the process of post-revolt and post-earthquake reconstruction were the elements of a change in the administration of the space of the city, too.<sup>22</sup> In the context of tensions between confessional communities, sometimes fueled by European interference, tensions marked by violent riots and massacres, the concept of heritage protection emerged in a very peculiar way.<sup>23</sup> This concept was also part of the negotiation of the new pact of Ottoman imperialism. The program of Ottoman modernization included the protection of selected monuments that later constituted the base of what was to be perceived as the historical dimension of authenticity. During the phase of Ottoman modernization (c.1850-1918), streets were enlarged, new squares created, existing ones enlarged, and new public buildings built.<sup>24</sup>

The main imperial decrees on the protection of the built heritage were published in 1889 and 1906, following the 1884 law on heritage protection and the work of Osman Hamdi Bey, the founder of the Istanbul archaeological museum.<sup>25</sup> With these decrees, protection of the traces of the past became a special administrative and legal category in the Ottoman Empire. The most decisive elements were the imperial property of historical monuments, the possibility to appropriate areas for the sake of archaeological research, and the protection of monuments perceived as belonging to the heritage of the city. This phase led to the emergence of a clear hierarchy between the various forms of built heritage. Contemporary concepts and perceptions of historical authenticity often derive from such initial choices. In the late Ottoman vision, traces of the past became elements of a

---

22 BOA. A. }MKT: UM 539/48 (report on Aleppo, 1861); Salnameh 1286 Halep, 3, 28p. BOA, BA 823 SAL Halep 1286.

23 Masters, *The 1850 Events in Aleppo*, pp. 3-20; Hidemitsu Kuroki, *The 1850 Aleppo Disturbance Reconsidered*, in: Markus Köbach et al. (eds.), *Acta Viennensa Ottomanica. Akten des 13. CIEPO-Symposiums vom 21.-25. September 1998 in Wien, Vienna 1999*, pp. 221-233; Yaron Harel, *Jewish-Christian Relations in Aleppo as Background for the Jewish Response to the Events of October 1850*, in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30 (1998), pp. 77-96; Feras Krimsti, *Die Unruhen von 1850 in Aleppo. Gewalt im urbanen Raum*, Berlin 2014, p. 523.

24 Jean-Claude David, *Les espaces publics à Alep depuis la fin du 19e siècle. Urbanisme et pratiques des usagers*, in: *Géocarrefour* 77 (2002), pp. 235-244.

25 George Young, *Corps de droit Ottoman. Recueil des codes, lois, règlements, ordonnances et actes les plus importants du droit intérieur, et d'études sur le droit coutumier de l'Empire ottoman*, vol. 6, Oxford 1906; On the emergence of a civic and institutional conscience about heritage protection in the Ottoman empire, see: Stéphane Yerasimos, *Le discours sur la protection du patrimoine en Turquie des Tanzimat à nos jours*, in: *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 19 (2014), URL: <http://ejts.revues.org/www.ejts.revues.org/5090>; See also: Edhem Eldem, *An Ottoman Archaeologist Caught between Two Worlds. Osman Hamdi Bey (1842–1910)*; David Shankland, *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia. The Life and Times of F. W. Hasluck 1878-1920*, Istanbul 2004, 896 p.



decorum in which the imperial modernity was deployed.<sup>26</sup> The protection of given monuments participated in the implicit definition of an ontological and morphological difference between what was inherited from the past and what constituted urban extensions of the present. In Aleppo, beyond the walled city, new neighborhoods, like Azizyie, were built during the late Ottoman era. They embodied the imperial modernity. Engineers and planners, including foreign experts, were asked to connect this new city to the old one, in a logic that was more one of integration than of juxtaposition. The heritage dimension was thus given a new role, between conservation and scenography. Elements of Ottoman architectural orientalism were included in this vision, as in the case of new public buildings and new mosques.<sup>27</sup>

### **The French colonial vision of the built heritage in Aleppo**

After the end of World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, war continued for several years in the Orient. France and Great Britain had signed the secret Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 to apportion the region between them in case of victory over the Ottomans<sup>28</sup> and now waged a war of conquest of the former Ottoman provinces. First British troops under the command of General Allenby occupied Aleppo at the end of 1918.<sup>29</sup> In 1920, France obtained a mandate over Syria from the League of Nations in Geneva and created a new administrative entity, the State of Aleppo (Etat d'Alep), along with other similar entities in the region it received as part of the mandate. In 1925, the French colonial administration created Syria as a single entity, only to separate Lebanon from it in 1926. The French interpreted the nature of the mandate over Syria in a very colonial way and implemented techniques of conquest and occupation that they had applied in Algeria and other former Ottoman provinces in earlier decades.<sup>30</sup> This had huge consequences for the way the built

---

26 Stéphane Yerasimos, *Occidentalisation de l'espace urbain: Istanbul (1839-1871). Les textes réglementaires comme source d'histoire urbaine*, in: Daniel Panzac, *Les villes dans l'empire ottoman*, Paris 1991, pp. 97-119.

27 Christoph Herzog/Raoul Motika, *Orientalism alla turca. Late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Ottoman Voyages into the Muslim Outback*, in: *Die Welt des Islams* 40 (2000), pp. 139-195.

28 Abdul Latif Tibawi, *Syria in Wartime. Agreements and Disagreements*, in: *Islamic Quarterly* 12 (1968) pp. 22-59; Jean-David Mizrahi, *Genèse de l'Etat mandataire. Service des renseignements et bandes armées en Syrie et au Liban dans les années 1920*, Paris 2003; Anne-Lucie Chaigne-Oudin, *La France et les rivalités occidentales au Levant. Syrie-Liban 1918-1939*, Paris 2006; Bruce Westrate, *The Arab Bureau. British Policy in the Middle East (1916-1920)*, Philadelphia 1992.

29 Matthew Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East*, London 1999; John Grainger, *The Battle for Syria (1918-1920)*, Woodbridge 2013.

30 Nadine Méouchy, *Les formes de conscience politique et communautaire au Liban et en Syrie à l'époque du mandat français (1920-1939)*, Paris 1989; Gérard Khoury, *Une tutelle coloniale. Le*

heritage was conceptualized. The conquest of the newly defined Syrian territory lasted at least until 1927. The French army bombed Damascus heavily.<sup>31</sup> Aleppo was conquered without fighting, but the repression outside and within the city was violent. In the whole of Syria, civil populations were the victims of numerous war crimes by the French army. Syrian notables sent petitions to the League of Nations, but French diplomats always managed to limit their echo.<sup>32</sup> The repression was ferocious.<sup>33</sup> In 1925, the French bloodily suppressed a large-scale revolt against colonial occupation.<sup>34</sup> In Damascus, the French did not hesitate to use aerial bombardments against civilian populations. This war also produced widespread damage to the built heritage. Monuments and *sucs* were destroyed. The emergence of French colonial concepts of heritage in Syria is to be analyzed in this context.

The French colonial vision of the urban past consisted of a mix of experiences obtained in colonial North Africa and of the participation of scholars specialized in archaeology and architecture in the campaigns of the *Armée d'Orient*.<sup>35</sup> A symbol of this latter dimension is Joseph Chamonard (1866-1936). A fellow of the Ecole française d'Athènes in the 1890s, he participated in various archaeological surveys in the Ottoman Empire alongside Osman Hamdi Bey (1842-1910). He joined the French Army at the Dardanelles during World War I and then became the director of the newly founded French colonial *Département des Antiquités de Syrie* in 1920. The vision of heritage promoted by this administration was colonial in nature, mixing influences from the colonial process of building a new institutional framework for heritage in Algeria and experiences accumulated by a whole generation of scholars that had been working in the Ottoman Empire at the interface between

---

mandat français en Syrie et au Liban. Écrits politiques de Robert de Caix, Paris, 2006; Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, Princeton 1987.

31 Alice Poulleau, *A Damas sous les bombes. Journal d'une Française pendant la révolte syrienne (1924-1926)*, Yvetot/Bretteville 1926; Sven Lindqvist/Linda Haverty Rugg, *Bombing the Savages*, in: *Transition* 87 (2001), pp. 48-64; Xavier Baron, *Histoire de la Syrie*, Paris 2014, pp. 91-96.

32 Archives de la Société des Nations, Genève, Commission Permanente des Mandats, Dossiers 477-518.

33 Thierry Millet, *Violence et réseau de résistance en Syrie de 1920 à 1925*, in: *Bulletin d'études orientales* 55 (2003), pp. 165-182.

34 Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism*, Austin 2005; Edmond Rabbath, *L'insurrection syrienne de 1925-1927*, in: *Revue historique* 467 (1982), pp. 405-447; Joyce Laverty Miller, *The Syrian Revolt of 1925*, in: *The International Journal of Middle East Studies* 8 (1977), pp. 545-563.

35 On colonial Algeria, see: Nabila Oulebsir, *Les usages du patrimoine. Monuments, musées et politique coloniale en Algérie (1830-1930)*, Paris 2004.

military intelligence and archaeology for decades.<sup>36</sup> Just like in Algeria, the colonial logic focused on the Roman and Hellenistic periods. The first consequence of this posture was the reinforcement of protection based on individual monuments, rather than the urban substance. The first colonial regulation framework in Syria came as early as 1920.<sup>37</sup> The only non-ancient monument to be classified was the citadel.<sup>38</sup> It was only thirteen years later, in 1933, that a new regulation integrated all monuments preceding the 17<sup>th</sup> century into the protected category. The classical Ottoman age was excluded again. It was not granted any patrimonial value. Leading French colonial experts like Jean Sauvaget even expressed total contempt for the Ottoman era.<sup>39</sup>

As for the colonial principles of urban transformation, they also referred to what the French theorized in Morocco. In 1920, General Henri Joseph Eugène Gouraud (1867-1946), heading the new colonial administration of Syria and inspired by General Hubert Lyautey (1854-1934), who headed the French colonial administration in Morocco, asked architect Edouard Redont (1862-1942) to reflect on possible transformations of Aleppo.<sup>40</sup> Together with Henri Prost and Léon Jaussely, Redont was among the founders of the *Société française des urbanistes* in 1911. In 1916, he became one of the publishers of the famous book *Comment reconstruire nos cités détruites*.<sup>41</sup> However, following the 1925 revolt and the repression that followed, nothing was done. Nevertheless, Lyautey's ideas were influential in the following decade. In Morocco, Lyautey had set up a strong dichotomy between the "European" city and the medina.<sup>42</sup> The preservation of the latter was part of this rhetoric of dichotomy.<sup>43</sup> Authenticity was a feature whose definition grew, in the

---

36 Margarita Diaz-Andreu Garcia, *A World History of Nineteenth Century. Archeology. Nationalism, Colonialism and the Past*, Oxford 2007; Wendy Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed. Museums, Archeology and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Berkeley; Jane Lydon, *Handbook of Postcolonial Archaeology*, Walnut Creek 2010; François Xavier Trégan, *Approche des savoirs de l'institut français de Damas. À la recherche d'un temps mandataire*, in: Nadine Méouchy et al., *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective*, Leiden 2004.

37 Arrêté n. 47 du Haut-Commissariat, 29 January 1920.

38 Fuad Ayntabi Othman, *Halab fi miat 'amm 1850-1950*, vol. 3 (1921-1950), Aleppo, Maad al-Turath al-Almi al-Arabi, 1994, p.10, and *Haleb fi mi'at 'âmm 1850-1950, Manchurât jâmi'a* Halab, Aleppo, 1993, vol. II 1902-1920, 269 p., p.42

39 Jean Sauvaget, *Alep. Essai sur le développement d'une grande ville syrienne*, Paris 1941.

40 Edmund Burke, *A Comparative View of French Native Policy in Morocco and Syria (1912-1925)*, in: *Middle Eastern Studies* 9 (1973), pp. 175-186.

41 See the review by Patrick Abercrombie, in: *The Town Planning Review* 6 (1916), pp. 201-203.

42 Paul Rabinow, *Governing Morocco. Modernity and Difference*, in: *IJURR* 13 (1989), pp. 32-46.

43 Helene Vacher, *La planification de la sauvegarde et le détour marocain (1912-1925)*, in:

context of the colonial occupation in Morocco, in contrast to the imposition of something extraneous, a new city of colonial nature just outside of the existing city.<sup>44</sup> The preservation of the medina and of its so-called indigenous authenticity was part of a strategy of separation, domination, and segregation.<sup>45</sup> The notion of differentiated and hierarchized spatial order is thus part of the historical process of elaborating the concept of authenticity. Moreover, there existed the idea of appropriating the memory of others for the sake of colonization. That's why conservation choices of the colonial era, in Aleppo as in Morocco, were far from neutral.<sup>46</sup> Urban transformations in Aleppo, too, were planned in the framework of the method proposed by Edouard Joyant.<sup>47</sup> Joyant was a member of the group of people reflecting on colonial town planning in Morocco in the 1920s. He authored, among other works, the *législation des plans d'aménagement au Maroc* in 1921 and a *traité d'urbanisme*.<sup>48</sup> But the first decade of French colonial rule in Aleppo was marked more by reflections and regulations than by actual plans. The effects of the 1925 law on urban planning in Syria (*Loi de remembrement urbain*) were not immediately felt in the city. The law had been conceived for Damascus, like the 1926 regulation on urban fires, which was meant to have important consequences for urban planning.<sup>49</sup>

In 1929, the High Commissioner of the colonial government, Henri Ponsot, asked the Danger brothers' private planning firm to draw up the first Aleppo planning document of the colonial era.<sup>50</sup> However, the vision of Aleppo's future that the Danger brothers promoted in their draft plan was so segregative that, for fear of protests from the League of Nations in Geneva, where the action of

---

Raffaele Cattedra et al., *Patrimoines en situation*, Beirut 2010; Alain Roussillon, A propos de quelques paradoxes de l'appropriation identitaire du patrimoine, in: Raffaele Cattedra et al., *Patrimoine en situation*, Beirut 2010; Mylène Théliol, *Le regard français sur le patrimoine marocain*, Bordeaux 2003.

44 Muriel Girard, *Invention de la tradition et authenticité sous le Protectorat au Maroc. L'action du service des Arts indigènes et de son directeur Prosper Ricard*, in: *Socio-Anthropologie* 19 (2006).

45 Helene Vacher, *La planification*.

46 Raffaele Cattedra, *La fabrication du patrimoine comme construction de l'identité urbaine*, in: *Patrimoines en situation*.

47 Edouard Joyant, *Traité d'urbanisme*, Paris 1923.

48 Ibid.

49 Christa Salamandra, *A New Old Damascus. Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria*, Bloomington 2004.

50 Franck Friès, *Les plans d'Alep et de Damas. Un banc d'essai pour l'urbanisme des frères Danger*, in: *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 73 (1994), pp. 311-325.

French authorities in Syria was subject to severe criticism, the colonial authorities asked them to revise it.<sup>51</sup> This is how heritage protection came back on the table. The Danger brothers accepted the directive to connect the new plan with the inventory of the buildings to be put on a heritage protection list. This list, produced in 1931 by Jean Sauvaget, was dedicated to monuments of Muslim culture and was conceived as a complement to existing lists of ancient and Christian monuments.<sup>52</sup> In French colonial Syria, the protection of non-Roman or Christian built heritage came as an argument against critics complaining about the colonial situation and about the caricatural vision of the city that its planners had developed. In this case, again, a crucial phase in the construction of the notion of authenticity unfolded in a highly ambiguous situation. That's how colonial planning also integrated the protection of the built heritage in a way that was different from the Moroccan colonial experience. Jean Sauvaget profited from this favorable context and published his inventory and an essay on the morphogenesis of the city.<sup>53</sup> His classification constitutes the base of all 20<sup>th</sup>-century attempts at defining what is authentic in Aleppo. In spite of the highly colonial aspect of the choices, or maybe because of it, one dimension connects the work of Sauvaget to the heritage of the *waqf* vision and system of administration of the built heritage: Sauvaget copied the work of two scholars of the *waqf* system who embodied the living dimension of *turâth* and *athâr*: Kemal al-Ghazzî and Mohammed Tabbakh.<sup>54</sup> Al-Ghazzî's central concept for heritage is *al-athâr*, a notion that connects 20<sup>th</sup>-century reflections with a whole history of chronicle writing and inventories of *waqf* goods as well as of urban topography. Such chronicles always included in their narration a link between the built heritage, the *waqf* institutions aiming at preserving it, and the notables in charge of this civic task. Sauvaget also used inventories drawn up by the Ottoman municipality (*beledyie*), while however always diminishing or even negating the value of the Ottoman period for the built heritage. Al-Ghazzî was the first president of the Archeological Society of Aleppo in 1924. He embodied continuity with the Ottoman system, but was marginalized by French colonial experts.

It was only in 1933, however, that the role of institutions for the protection of the built heritage was

---

51 Ibid.

52 Jean Sauvaget, *Inventaire des monuments musulmans de la ville d'Alep*, in: *Revue des études islamiques* 5 (1931), pp. 59-114.

53 Sauvaget, *Alep*.

54 Kâmil al-Bâlî al-Halabî Al-Ghazzî, *Kitâb nahr al-dhahab fî târikh Haleb*, Aleppo, 1999, 8 vols.; Sheikh Mohammad Ragheb al Tabbâkh al-Halabî, *I'lâm al-nubulâ' bi-târikh Haleb al-Shahbâ'*, Aleppo, 1988 (first edition 1923), 7 vols. See also: Lafi (Nora), *Esprit civique et organisation citadine dans l'empire ottoman*, Thèse d'habilitation à diriger des recherches, Université Aix-Marseille (2011), Leiden, Brill, 2017.

recognized in Aleppo. During this phase, the young urbanist Michel Ecochard (1905-1985), who later became one of the most famous planners of the next generation, worked with the Danger brothers. He was their local correspondent for Syria and Lebanon.<sup>55</sup> He had arrived in Syria in 1930 and had worked as an architect with French colonial archaeologists. In 1938, he was appointed first director of the French colonial Planning Administration in Syria, an institution he was asked to organize.<sup>56</sup> During this period, concepts of heritage protection and authenticity were revised in the context of new approaches to planning. The preeminence of the Hellenistic and Roman urban traces was confirmed, however, mostly at the expense of Ottoman forms.<sup>57</sup> The importance of medieval Islamic monuments was acknowledged. What saved some Ottoman monuments was the extension of protection to entire zones around the most important medieval objects. As for medieval monuments, many of the colonial administration's efforts aimed at confiscating supervision from existing *waqf* institutions. The creation of institutions of heritage protection also represented a process of colonial eviction.

Attitudes of this period other ambiguities also culturally elaborated, like the one pertaining to colonial ideas of the picturesque that would have a strong influence on later perceptions of the concept of authenticity.<sup>58</sup> Through the forced convergence between the work of colonial planners and heritage inventory takers and the extension of protection to entire zones around the main monuments, the Arab city was finally conceived as a cultural whole. But at the same time, it was conceived as a static object. For the Danger brothers and the planners of their firm, protecting the historical city meant underlining its physical limits and planning their vision of modernity around it. This endeavor implied the implicit choice of a time of reference: ancient and medieval. Traces of Classical Ottoman times were undervalued, as were traces of the Ottoman urban modernization of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>59</sup>

In 1938, Ecochard, together with the Syrian architect Chéhadé, modified the Dangers' plan. They confirmed that the historical city should not be touched in its substance. But at the same time, they pressed for the destruction of buildings that impaired the view around protected monuments. More

---

55 Franck, *Les plans d'Alep*; Eric Verdeil, Michel Ecochard in Lebanon and Syria (1956-1968), in: *Planning Perspectives* 27 (2012), pp. 249-266.

56 Ibid.

57 See: Watenpaugh, *The Image*.

58 On this notion, see: Gwendolyn Wright, *Tradition in the Service of Modernity. Architecture and Urbanism in French Colonial Policy 1900-1930*, in: *The Journal of Modern History* 59 (1987), pp. 291-316.

59 René Danger, *L'aménagement de la ville d'Alep*, in: Jean Royer, *L'urbanisme aux colonies et dans les pays tropicaux*, Paris 1935, pp. 252-258.

Syrian planners and architects were taken into the technical offices of the colonial administration.<sup>60</sup> Ecochard also confirmed the dichotomy between a modern outside city and an inner city meant to be protected. This favored the transfer of much of the local élites, thereby impoverishing the old city, to which new populations moved from rural areas. This movement became even more massive after independence and considerably changed the face of the inner city, as well as the perception of its social value. It also deeply affected perceptions of what authenticity is: the inner city became increasingly identified with a space occupied by populations unaware of its aesthetic values, to which only external expertise could bring salvation. This notion is instrumental in today's conceptions of authenticity, as well: the link between populations of rural origins and a city presented as too precious for them in the eyes of external experts.

### **Questions of heritage and authenticity in post-independence Aleppo**

The great sociological change that affected Aleppo's historical city in the post-World War II period had already begun during the last decade of the colonial period as a result of planning policies that introduced a new hierarchization of urban spaces and a new consideration of the built substance. At the time of independence in 1946, Syrian élites continued to move to the newly planned neighborhoods outside of the medieval city. This phenomenon posed a new challenge to the private built heritage: old private houses that had been in the hands of families of notables for centuries began to be neglected when these families moved to new neighborhoods and tended rent them to populations of rural or nomadic origins, who had other lodging needs and who did not necessarily share the cultural and sociological representations attached to the houses.<sup>61</sup> In any case, the families of notables themselves had often abandoned or neglected such representations, too, in the context of changing ideologies in independent Syria. After the coup d'état of 1963, a new élite contested the influence of old notables. This attitude was reinforced after 1970. The regime abolished the old definition of notability. The relationship between the private built heritage and the historically and sociologically rooted sphere of its governance, which had been weakened by colonization, tended to become even weaker. Historical houses were divided into numerous apartments, new floors were added, and the very structure of many buildings was altered. The culture of heritage as *athâr* and *turâth*, which had already been weakened and even attacked during colonial times, was further weakened by the various ideological changes of the post-independence era. Following the creation

---

60 Hayma Zeifa, *Les élites techniques locales durant le mandat français en Syrie*, in: Nadine Méouchy et al., *The British and French Mandates*, pp. 497-536.

61 Jean-Claude David, *Alep. Dégradation et tentatives actuelles de réadaptation des structures urbaines traditionnelles*, in: *Bulletin d'études orientales* 28 (1975), pp. 19-50.

of the state of Israel by the United Nations in 1948, the position of the Jews of Aleppo, a community that had been part of the city for thousands of years and whose position had been weakened by a century of geopolitical and colonial instrumentalization of their identity,<sup>62</sup> became even more precarious.<sup>63</sup> In the context of the war that followed, angry crowds protesting against what they perceived as a new form of colonization targeted Jewish people and houses. 76 Jews were killed in the events and about 300 Jewish houses and 11 synagogues were burned.<sup>64</sup> Most Jewish families of Aleppo were forced into exile, and only a small community remained. This geopolitical turmoil had huge consequences not only for the urban society of Aleppo, but also on the built heritage, thousands of historic houses being abandoned. Aleppo also received thousands of Palestinian refugees who had been expelled from their homes in Palestine.<sup>65</sup> This displacement of populations from Palestine to Syria had begun before 1948 and was further reinforced in 1967.<sup>66</sup> The built substance of the city was thus deeply affected by both geopolitical events and Syrian ideological changes.

In the field of urban planning, ideas and paradigms that French colonial planners had proposed since the 1930s continued to dominate. With the emergence of more resolute visions of modernism, however, the way the old city was perceived evolved. In 1954, for example, a master plan by French planner André Gutton (1904-2002), a professor at the *Institut d'urbanisme de l'Université de Paris*, included the project of various *percées* through the urban historical substance.<sup>67</sup> A new boulevard would have cut the Farafrah neighborhood into two parts. Gutton's aim was also to promote a scenographic vision heritage. Here again, a selective vision of authenticity served a general vision of the urban landscape that entailed strong culturalist choices.<sup>68</sup>

---

62 Moshe Ma'oz, *Changing Relations between Jews, Muslims and Christians during the Nineteenth Century*, in Avigdor Levy (ed.), *Jew, Turks, Ottomans: A Shared History*, p.108-118.

63 Walter Zenner, *A Global Community: The Jew from Aleppo, Syria, Detroit 2000*.

64 Malka Hillel Shulewitz, *Forgotten Millions: The Modern Jewish Exodus from Arab Lands*, New York 1999.

65 Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The War for Palestine. Rewriting the History of 1948*, Oxford, 2001.

66 Nathan Weinstock, *The Impact of Zionist Colonization on Palestinian Arab Society*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 1973, 2-2, pp. 29-63.

67 André Gutton, *Programme et rapport justificatif de l'aménagement d'Alep, Damascus 1954*; Jean-Claude David, *Production et occupation de l'espace urbain à Alep*, in: *Les annales de la recherche urbaine* 37 (1988), pp. 85-93.

68 Muhammad Talas As'ad, *Athâr al-islamiyya wal al-târîkhiyya fil-Halab, Matbû'ât Mudiriyyât al-Athâr al-'Amma fî Sûriyya*, Damascus, 1959.



During the 1960s and 1970s, however, with the Laws of 1963, 1969, and 1977, Syrian authorities converted to a vision of heritage that included entire zones around the monuments.<sup>69</sup> The complex ideological evolutions of this period had a strong impact on concepts of heritage, furthermore; the Ba'ath Party ruled Syria since 1963 after a period of Nasserian pan-Arabism.<sup>70</sup> The country then entered a period of pro-Soviet socialism until 1970 and the coup d'état of Hafez al-Assad. The new ruler, though keeping Syria in the pro-Soviet camp, enacted various economic reforms aiming at a partial liberalization. During this period, the built heritage was first reinterpreted in the framework of the pan-Arabic ideology as a mirror of the Arab character of the city and then in the framework of a more national vision. Only those parts of the Gutton plan were enacted that adapted the old city to automobile traffic. During the 1970s, various new avenues were constructed at the expense of the historical built substance. Scholars estimate the share of this built substance of the old city that was destroyed at about 10 percent.<sup>71</sup>

The Japanese urban planner Gyoji Banshoya (1930-1998) was one of the main planners in Aleppo in the 1970s. He had previously worked in the French colonial planning administration in Algiers with Gérald Hanning (1919-1980).<sup>72</sup> After Algeria gained independence, he refocused his work on Cambodia and the Levant, with works in Beirut, Damascus, and Aleppo, sometimes in connection with Michel Ecochard and Kenzo Tange.<sup>73</sup> Banshoya started teaching as a professor in Damascus in 1966. He proposed a master plan for the capital city of Syria in 1968. In 1970, he began to work on the old city of Aleppo and the Bab al-Faraj neighborhood. He became the director of the urban planning administration of the city and, in 1975, proposed a new master plan for the whole city together with his Polish assistant, Henrick Roral. A few years later, he resettled in Lebanon. He became a professor in Beirut and at the end of his life took part in reflections on the reconstruction of the Lebanese capital: his professional life thus spans from colonial times to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>

---

69 Carine Sabbagh, Damas. La reconnaissance patrimoniale en question, in: Autrepart 1 (2005), pp. 71-88.

70 Hussam Alhassoun, *Al-wahda al-sûriyya al-misriyya wa asbâb al-infisâl (1958-1961)* [The Syrian-Egyptian unity and the reasons for its dissolution (1958-1961)], Damascus 2011.

71 David, Alep.

72 Kosuke Matsubara, Gyoji Banshoya (1930-1998). A Japanese Planner Devoted to Historic Cities in the Middle East and North Africa, in: *Planning Perspectives* 31 (2016), pp. 391-423. On Hanning, a former assistant of Le Corbusier, and his work in Algiers, see: Aniss Mezoued, *Evolution des pouvoirs organisateurs de la forme urbaine à Alger. Les récits de l'urbanisme algérois*, Conference Paper Lausanne 2012. Hanning proposed a master plan for Algiers and its region in 1954-1955. He later worked on the master plan of the Ile de France region around Paris.

73 Kosuke Matsubara, The Work of Japanese Specialists for New Khmer Architecture in Cambodia, in: *International Planning History Society Proceedings* 17 (2016).

century. He reflected on the value of the built heritage in Aleppo together with French geographer Jean-Claude David, who then worked for the local municipality. Their idea was to soften Gutton's views without renouncing the purpose of better opening the old city. Their conception was one of both "conservation and activation".<sup>74</sup> The project that Banshoya proposed was still quite intrusive in the urban substance, however. It had a significant role in the emergence of public opinion in the city opposing such interventions: a new idea of authenticity emerged from the contestation of the dominant paradigms of the time, which people like Banshoya embodied. Although Banshoya was much less radical than Gutton in his vision of the relationship between modern infrastructure and the historical built environment, his choices aimed to adapt the old city to traffic in order to revitalize its economic and social functions. Pauline Bosredon studied how the planned partial destruction of the Bab al-Faraj neighborhood (a neighborhood that was also the showcase of the Ottoman modernity of the Tanzimat period) favored the voicing of new ideas among the cultural élite of the city.<sup>75</sup> A whole generation of Syrian architects and heritage conservationists managed to voice new concerns against the planned destructions. Just as Banshoya's cultural background was connected with that of Ecochard, Hanning, and Le Corbusier and with a whole sphere of modernist interventions in cities and modernist conceptions of heritage protection, their culture was internationally connected to the writings and teachings of people like Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs, and Aldo Rossi, who were all challenging this dominant culture and its damaging effects on the urban substance. It was among this new milieu of young professionals opposing Banshoya and the modernist visions he embodied, a milieu often composed of members of old élites of urban notables with a family culture of *athâr* and *turâth*, that the idea of seeking a UNESCO classification emerged. The Al-Adiyat Society of Archeology was their main instrument.<sup>76</sup> This was also part of a political negotiation with the central power in Damascus and its local bureaucratic apparatus. This generation rediscovered the old city and its cultural value and began demanding its preservation. In 1978, the mobilization of this expression of a civil society managed to obtain the regime's protection of the whole historic city. The regime also accepted the demand to endorse the idea of presenting Aleppo for inclusion on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites that had been created

---

74 Matsubara 2016.

75 Pauline Bosredon, *Habiter et aménager les centres anciens. Les reconfigurations du rapport des acteurs à la vieille ville par le classement au patrimoine mondial: une comparaison entre Harar en Éthiopie et Alep en Syrie*, Rennes 2009; see also: Pauline Bosredon, *La patrimonialisation de la vieille ville d'Alep entre stratégies de développement local et pratiques ordinaires*, in: Jean-Claude David/Thierry Boissière (eds.), *Alep et ses territoires. Fabrique et politique d'une ville (1868-2011)*, Beirut 2014, p.419-444.

76 The society published a monthly magazine and a yearbook on archaeology and heritage protection.

in 1972.<sup>77</sup> As in many other cities, the candidacy for UNESCO recognition was thus part of intense local debates not only on the philosophy of heritage protection, but also on the evolution of the networks of power in charge of the city. The first contacts between the municipality and UNESCO were established in 1978 and opened a long bureaucratic and diplomatic negotiation that was to profoundly change the relationship between the city and its built heritage.<sup>78</sup> The context was a change of attitude in the planning of the region's cities.<sup>79</sup>

Arno Heinz wrote the first ICOMOS report as part of the process of expertise for UNESCO.<sup>80</sup> This expert had worked in earlier years as an ICOMOS expert in Algeria.<sup>81</sup> He later also wrote expertises on Istanbul. The preparatory work for the dossier was done under the supervision of Stefano Bianca, whose 1983 report was used in the UNESCO debates on the classification of the old city. Together with Titus Burckhardt, Frank Foulon, and Frank van de Kerchove, Stefano Bianca was one of the consultants UNESCO paid in the late 1970s and early 1980s to prepare such reports.<sup>82</sup> The old city of Aleppo was included in the list of the World Heritage in 1986 under title 3: "to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared".<sup>83</sup> This choice betrays the international institution's difficulty in reading the reality of Aleppo's urban substance in relationship to its own rigid concepts of heritage. For Aleppo to be able to enter the general category of the world heritage program, the description of the reasons that could justify the classification had to be vague. In the Arabic translation of the UNESCO documents, however, the concept of heritage is defined as *turâth*, a much richer notion that ICOMOS experts did not really understand.<sup>84</sup>

---

77 Christina Cameron/Mechthild Rössler, *Many Voices, One Vision. The Early Years of the World Heritage Convention*, London 2016; see also: Bosredon, *La patrimonialisation*, p. 177.

78 Luna Khirfan, *From Documentation to Policy-Making. Management of Built Heritage in Old Aleppo and Old Acre*, in: *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 21 (2010), pp. 35-54.

79 Cattedra, *La fabrication*.

80 Arno Heinz, *La République arabe syrienne. Compte-rendu de mission*, Paris 1978.

81 Arno Heinz, *Algérie. La villa Mahieddine*, Paris 1976.

82 Christoph Brumann/David Berliner, *World Heritage on the Ground. Ethnographic Perspectives*, New-York 2016.

83 UNESCO, WHC, *The Criteria for Selection*, 3. See also: Rachid Amer Mabayyed, *Vestiges of Aleppo, The City of Aleppo, a Site of the International Patrimony (Âthâr Haleb)*, Al-Qalam al-'Arabî, Aleppo, 2008, 368 p.

84 Julien Bondez et al., *Les vocabulaires locaux du patrimoine. Traductions, négociations, transformations*, Zurich 2014; see also: Aline Martins Martelle, *Patrimônio e Turath*, Congresso Historia Jatai, 2014, [http://www.congressohistoriajatai.org/anais2014/Link%20\(7\).pdf](http://www.congressohistoriajatai.org/anais2014/Link%20(7).pdf). This author, however, ignores the historical dimension of the word *turâth*, reflecting only on its 20<sup>th</sup>-century

In 1990, the Syrian government, which had given the al-Adiyat archeological society a new seat and new competences in the field of heritage protection in 1988, reinforced the legal framework of heritage protection.<sup>85</sup> However, as Luna Khirfan underlined, this move had additional ambiguities.<sup>86</sup> This law indeed imposed a static vision of the heritage and made illegal most of the more or less local spontaneous efforts of requalification that came from the inhabitants. Nevertheless, the UNESCO classification helped change the vision of the old city: it became the object of a strong new symbolic investment, in contrast to decades of symbolic and concrete subordination to the modern city.<sup>87</sup>

The dimension of identity that is linked to the built heritage was the object of another turn during the 1980s with the growth of a conservative Islamic vision that challenged the narrative of the regime.<sup>88</sup> This deeply affected perceptions of authenticity: Islamists rejected both the visions of the heritage that were developed in the framework of the international sphere and the national narrative, and they denied that the Ottoman period had any dimension of authenticity; instead, they promoted a vision of heritage that was linked only to a representation and imaginary of the Middle Ages (and not necessarily to the spheres of *athâr* and *turâth*, as conservative Islamists also challenged the social influence of old notables). The regime itself was induced to insert additional central elements of Islamic narratives into its discourses on heritage, in the context of severe repression of all political manifestations of Islamist activism.<sup>89</sup>

Starting in 1993, a huge program of urban restoration was launched. It was enacted as part of an international cooperation with the German institution GTZ (*Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit*).<sup>90</sup> German discourses and practices, inspired by the philosophy of the IBA Berlin

---

meaning.

85 Law no. 39, 1990.

86 Khirfan, From Documentation.

87 Bosredon, La patrimonialisation.

88 Jamal Barout, The Islamic Brotherhood in Syria, in: The Encyclopedia of Islamic Movements and Parties, Damascus 2000.

89 Ibid.

90 Maan Chibli, The Urban Environment in the Historic Context. The Case of the Old City of Aleppo, in: Chiel Boonstra et al. (eds.), Sustainable Building 2000, Aenas 2000, p.316-318; Lieza Vincent, When Home Becomes World Heritage. The Case of Aleppo, Syria, Cambridge (USA) 2004; Meinolf Spiekermann, The Sustainability of Heritage Preservation. The Case of Aleppo, in: Inter-American Development Bank Discussion Papers 7 (2010); Hadya Salkini, Bashar Swaid, Laura Greco, and Roberta Lucente, Developing a Multi-Scale Approach for Rehabilitating the Traditional Residential Buildings within the Old City of Aleppo, World Heritage and Degradation, 2016, 10 p.; Ammar Ghazal, Sustainability and the Rehabilitation of the Old City. Aleppo, Syria, (Madīnat Halep, Aleppo City Development Strategy, GTZ:

of 1984-1987, insisted on citizen's participation and a soft approach. Private houses inhabited by poor people were restored with the aim of avoiding gentrification processes that would have resulted in their eventual expulsion. But this restoration process was proposed mostly in the form of loans to inhabitants, only a small portion of whom accepted this formula.<sup>91</sup> On the Syrian side, one of the main actors of this process was Maan Chibli. A former doctoral student of the Institut d'urbanisme de Paris,<sup>92</sup> he joined the GTZ Aleppo team and eventually became the mayor of the city (2003-2010).<sup>93</sup> Ambitious programs of urban renovation were launched, with specific attention to public spaces and to processes of heritage protection that avoided altering the social substance of the city. There were intense debates within and around GTZ at the end of the 2000s about applying this method to more recent neighborhoods.<sup>94</sup> During the time of the cooperation between GTZ, the municipality, and various associations aiming at heritage conservation, special attention was also given to artisanal workshops and the preservation of genuine commercial activities. In 1999, the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities and the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme implemented a program of cooperation. As in many cities, however, the development of tourism during the 2000s challenged the very notion of authenticity.<sup>95</sup> Gentrification processes began, as well. Many artisanal workshops tended to alter their production to cater to tourists.<sup>96</sup> Other critics of the work of the GTZ in the PROCA (Project for the Rehabilitation of the Old City of Aleppo) criticized the static vision of heritage that it promoted and the institution's difficulty in producing instruments of urban planning beyond the mere cartography of the existing built heritage to be protected.<sup>97</sup> During the 2000s, the Ottoman built heritage, which all conceptions of authenticity had neglected until then, was finally the object of a specific program: Hercomanes.<sup>98</sup> This dimension, however, did not

[https://issuu.com/m.ammarghazal/docs/7\\_rehabilitation\\_historic\\_center\\_al](https://issuu.com/m.ammarghazal/docs/7_rehabilitation_historic_center_al).

91 Vincent, *When Home becomes World Heritage*.

92 Maan Chibli, *Compatibilité énergétique urbaine. Le cas de la ville d'Alep en Syrie*, Paris 1994.

93 Maan Chibli then became a professor in Abu Dhabi in 2014.

94 Nicolai Ouroussoff, *Preserving Heritage, and the Fabric of Life, in Syria*, *New York Times*, 26 December 2010.

95 For such reflections, see, on the case of Brussels: Anaya Diekman/Laurence Gillot, *Heritage and Tourism. A Dialogue of Deaf?* In: *Rivista di Scienze del Turismo* 2 (2010), pp. 263-280.

96 Améziane Ferguene/Rabih Banat, *Artisanat traditionnel, valorisation touristique du patrimoine et dynamique territoriale. Le cas de la ville syrienne d'Alep*, in: *Cahiers de géographie du Québec* 57 (2013), pp. 87-114.

97 Khirfan, *From Documentation*.

98 Sabbagh, *Damas*; See also Galila El Kadi, *Cities and Districts of the late Nineteenth and*

eliminate all the ambiguity of the notion of authenticity.<sup>99</sup> In Aleppo, gentrification accelerated in the 2000s, leading to the expulsion of numerous poorer families to the peripheries. The political and ideological pact between the regime and the élites of the city was also fragile.<sup>100</sup> This fragility, combined with the growth of an Islamist opinion hostile to the regime, played a role in the civic mobilization of 2010, which the regime answered with cruel repression. A major role in the process of destabilization of the city and of the country was also played by forces acting in the geopolitical sphere; *agents provocateurs* and armed militias supported by foreign powers quickly transformed these events into a deadly war. The regime and its international allies started to bomb the city heavily. During these events, Aleppo has been immensely damaged and its population has been the victim of cruel acts by all sides.<sup>101</sup>

## Conclusion

When the reconstruction of Aleppo becomes a credible prospect, questions of authenticity will emerge again.<sup>102</sup> Beyond a necessary reflection on the incapacity of both local and global actors to refrain from destroying the heritage and targeting civilian populations, reflection on the category of authenticity itself will have to take various dimensions into account. As the pathetic example of Dresden's short stay on the world heritage list illustrates, the concept of authenticity that derives from the Nara conference is not suitable for conceiving the reconstruction of destroyed cities.<sup>103</sup>

---

Early Twentieth Centuries in Cairo and Aleppo. A Heritage in the Making. Proceedings of the 5th EC conference, May 16-18, 2002, Cracow, European Communities ICSC, 2003, pp. 105-109. On debates about a project of conservation of the Ottoman built heritage in a highly ambiguous context: Caitlin Davis, Conserving the Ottoman(s) at an Israeli World Heritage Site, in: *Archeologies* 9 (2013), pp. 320-343.

99 Jessica Jacobs, Re-Branding the Levant. Contested Heritage and Colonial Modernities in Amman and Damascus, in: *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 8 (2010), pp. 316-326.

100 See: Ammar Ghazal, Sustainability; Ebru Aras Miroğlu, The Transformation of the Urban Space at the Conjunction of the Old and New Districts, Ankara 2005; Bernadette Baird-Zars, *Developing Heritage. Activist Decision-Makers and Reproduced Narratives in the Old City of Aleppo, Syria*, Cambridge (USA) 2010.

101 Jean-Claude David/Thierry Boissère, La destruction du patrimoine culturel à Alep. Banalité d'un fait de guerre? In: *Confluences Méditerranée* 89 (2014), pp. 163-171.

102 A conference on this issue was organized in January 2017: Reconstruction post-conflit des villes historiques at Louvre-Lens, with the participation of ICCROM, ICCROM-ATHAR, ALESCO, ICOMOS, IRCICA, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, and the Direction générale des antiquités et des musées de Syrie.

103 Bocquet, Dresde et l'Unesco.

What the case of Aleppo's reconstruction might suggest is the necessity for a new concept of authenticity to emerge, one based not solely on the authenticity of the built substance. This new definition should avoid vague terms and should rather take into account the civic process of the reconstruction itself. It should also include in the definition of what is authentic the existence and strength of a local sphere of conscience and competence that goes with artisanal skills in building, decoration, and the transmission of this knowledge. The concepts of *turâth* and *âthâr* are a necessary starting point.