

THE FORGOTTEN STREET

Dominique-Marie Cabaret – When you survey a town district, there's always a trace of its past, an imprint of the original street layout of the area. It's simply due to the lack of funding - not everyone can afford to play Baron Haussmann - , to a lack of strong political will; moreover, Antiquity knew no bulldozers or explosives and ignored modern techniques; as a result, people were wont to rebuild on top of existing constructions!

As I live in Jerusalem, I've always been amazed by the Madaba Map - a rather strange map designed in mosaic; it's on the floor of a Jordanian church and it's very precious because it actually displays a good bit of the Holy Land and especially Jerusalem toward the latter part of the 6th century, at a time when the towns were Christian with large Christian monuments, the Holy Sepulchre and large avenues with colonnades. As it happens, the map also shows one of the most famous entrances to the city, Damascus Gate, which is still well-known today. And it's interesting to note that on the Madaba Map, there are two main avenues that start at the Damascus Gate; these are the two main streets of today's Jerusalem: one leads into the Old Town and to the Holy Sepulchre, and the other goes from the Gate to the Wailing Wall.

Well, using satellite images or poring over the oldest maps drawn of Jerusalem, dating from the late 19th or early 20th centuries, I realized that in fact there were not two, but three such streets! The two streets seen on the Madaba Map are the westward street toward the Fork, and the main street. Not shown on the Madaba Map is the eastward street, the one that went farther East, toward the Mount of Olives. And there's a mistake in the overall perspective, because many people, knowing that the Madaba Map is the oldest map of Jerusalem, actually spontaneously link it to the 2nd century, whereas it really dates from the 6th century... And I had to ask myself, how was it that this street was forgotten on the Madaba Map, when it led from the Fork to the Mount of Olives and to the royal Hasmonean palace? Well, Herod first lived in his predecessors' palace, and in the latter part of his reign, he built his own palace on the other, western side of town. Hence, the former main street lost its importance and fell into oblivion..

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