

EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION IN THE LEVANT – PARALLELS AND INFLUENCES

Michael Turner & Rachel Singer

ABSTRACT The aftermath of the Second World War left an indelible mark on the Levant as the new order of independence evolved with local interests overthrowing colonial order. The colonial styles were cast aside and new nationalistic priorities were instituted based on the international style, with architectural conservation demoted to the bottom of the list. Indeed, the year 1975 still saw most of the Levantine countries under the post-trauma of colonisation and mandate administrations; for the most part conservation remained in the realms of archaeology. This article discusses planning and conservation actions in the 1960s and 1970s leading to the present with the question – how European is the heritage conservation doctrine in the Levant? Following an introduction the article explores the historical context of the Levant after the Second World War until 1975, focusing on parallels found in the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage* (see appendix) and specifically Israeli Conservation during that period. The common evolutionary paths of the contemporary heritage efforts in Egypt, Israel and Lebanon are then examined to understand how heritage is being preserved and which principles have been guiding the process.

1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The post-mandate independence movements that emerged after WWII and continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s in the Levantine countries generated a love-hate relationship between Europe and the Levant that merits an evaluation in its historical context. Levantine countries struggled to come to terms with processes of independence and national identity, war and reconstruction, while still under the post-trauma of both colonisation and mandate administrations. We focus on examples from Egypt, Israel and Lebanon and examine the way these countries transitioned into the new era as they wrestled with both nationalism and nostalgia for the golden eras of the past. Levantine cities and countries formulated their heritage through architectural dialogue that reflected their conflicting attitudes towards the foreign influences that shaped much of the existing built environment since the break-up of the Ottoman Empire. Further north the *European Year of Architectural Heritage 1975* (EAHY 1975) was a culmination of attitudes that evolved through post-WWII euphoria and the ordeals involved in the reconstruction of Europe, promoting new important principles and values that were previously neglected. They stressed the need for integrated conservation planning with a holistic approach, legal, administrative, financial and technical support, education and social sensitivity (→ *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage 1975*; Jokilehto 2007).

The rapid urbanization that accompanied the industrial revolution of Europe in the 19th century was not a phenomenon apparent in the Levant; rather it was paralleled with a gradual effect initiated by the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms during 1839–1869 allowing a free-market for land. The railways of the late 19th and early 20th centuries opened up the main routes and hinterlands and brought modern materials and cultures to new edges and the peripheries. Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the

Great War and the establishment of French and British Mandates in the divided territories of the Levant conservation remained in the realms of archaeology, with the year 1700 as a key date in the determination of places and objects as stated in the non-ratified 1920 Treaty of Sèvres.

New immigrants and ex-pats in Alexandria, Beirut and Tel Aviv led the way for an architectural revolution on the Levant coast; each developed their own indigenous and syncretistic styles, while local communities established zeitgeist compounds, quarters and colonies. European styles culminating in the Modern Movement fired the imaginations of city dwellers and architects under French, Italian and British influences. The Modernist Movement gained a foothold in the 1920s with the import of concrete and the economic building opportunities it provided. In Beirut, during the first decades of independence from 1943 and into the 1950s a proliferation of Modernist and Brutalist buildings, designed with localized features adapted to the Middle Eastern climate and culture, projected an image of a western paradise on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean; earning the city of Beirut the title of “the Paris of the Middle East” (Shafiei 2013). Further down the coast the city of Tel Aviv was established in 1909 as a suburb of ancient Jaffa. The city possessed a number of unique historical assets from the 1920s Eclectic Style and the 1930s international style, prompted by a large influx of European Jewish immigrants fleeing Nazi persecution. Indeed Tel Aviv boasts the largest number of buildings constructed in this style, earning the title of “The White City,” eventually recognized as a World Heritage property in 2003 (Amit-Cohen 2005). Egypt was occupied by the British between 1882 and the 1952 revolutions, during this period the coastal city of Alexandria gained a reputation as a cosmopolitan hub with large and eclectic European communities that left an indelible mark on the city’s urban fabric (Awad 1990). This presence came to an end in the wave of nationalist sentiment following independence (Della Dora 2006).

The legislature regarding preservation in Levantine countries was a legacy of European rule and influences in the region. We place particular focus on the case of modern Israel, which is both interesting and typical. The *British Mandate Ordinances* included the *Antiquities Ordinance*¹ (Davis 2014) that was updated in 1978, while the 1936 *Planning Ordinance*, updated in 1965, continued with the cumbersome three-tier levels of government: national, district and local. Conservation featured in the objectives of the law as the British felt the responsibilities of the Holy Land as modern-day Crusaders, but little was actually done in this sphere.

Comprehensive re-developments in the 1960s and an inquiry of the 1970s reveal parallels between Europe and the Levant that are linked by three historical frameworks. The first are the League of Nations mandates, the second are wars with subsequent nation building, and lastly the personal and professional connections between international colleagues during this period. Across the Eastern Mediterranean awareness regarding heritage and conservation has evolved a great deal since 1975, becoming a matter of debate and attention on both the local and national scale, as countries seek to define identities and memories in post war reconstruction periods.

2. THE EUROPEAN CHARTER OF THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE OF 1975 – PARALLELS OF CONSERVATION IN ISRAEL

The mandated areas of the Levant took on a life of their own influenced by their European masters. In Palestine, it was left to civil society to be a driver for conservation with the *Pro Jerusalem Society* established by the citizens of Jerusalem in 1918 under the encouragement of the British authorities in the shadow of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The ‘Haussmannization’ of the French (Saliba 2013) in Beirut provided yet a different view and in parallel provided for European influences that were later to be discarded in favor of national identities. During the 1950s and 1960s, preservation laws still focused primarily on the protection of archaeological sites and their historic centers.

In Israel, the post-1948 independence euphoria generated massive local rebuilding with little reference to history. Nature conservation became entrenched in civil society fairly quickly, with the establishment

of the *Society for the Conservation of Nature* in 1954 and the *National Parks and Nature Reserve Authority* in 1964 – far before architectural preservation movements. As in many other places, culture in the form of building conservation followed on the heels of nature conservation and only began in earnest after a number of well regarded historic landmarks were destroyed in the rush to build large scale modern buildings. Little effort was given to conservation following the establishment of the State and following the war of June 1967 the focus shifted to a new mind-set, new development one hand while connecting to historic roots on the other. In 1969 the Planning Department of the Ministry of Interior published a survey entitled *Settlement Sites in Israel* authored by Efrat and Gavriely. This survey drew attention to numerous heritage sites from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries throughout Israel; there was little awareness of their historic value and no legal protection as these heritage sites lay outside the archaeological cut-off date of 1700. An extensive national project to classify places according to type and period was undertaken with sites divided into three groups:

1. Sites of historic importance;
2. Sites typical of the period architecture;
3. Sites relating to a particular event

An important component of Efrat and Gavriely's argument was the educational role that these sites embody as they state that "[t]hese sites are particularly important for the education of our children and the children of the coming generations" (Efrat and Gavriely 1969, II). Beyond the educational component the need to preserve the historic town cores as an intergenerational responsibility, while local knowledge was utilized to estimate the value and potential rehabilitation options (Efrat and Gavriely 1969). The need for a comprehensive and holistic preservation philosophy was eloquently described by Eliezer Brutzkus, then *Director of the Town & Country Planning Department* for the Ministry of the Interior in Israel, when he observed in his 1972 book

Prerequisites for Preservation of Historic Urban Quarters (Fig. 1) that:

"[a] further reason for preservation should be added. Historical Quarters become 'islands' of traditional non-standardized environments within a continuously expanding 'ocean' of a standardized world [...] Such 'islands' are not only monuments of history and art of past centuries but a reflection of the regional background of the city, its climate, and natural building materials, and of the long tradition of its craftsmanship [...] There is a distinct evolution from previous policies, which regarded as essentially only the preservation of outstanding historical or artistic monuments, to recent attitudes, which aim at preserving the complex of the historical 'ensemble' in its whole. This rela-

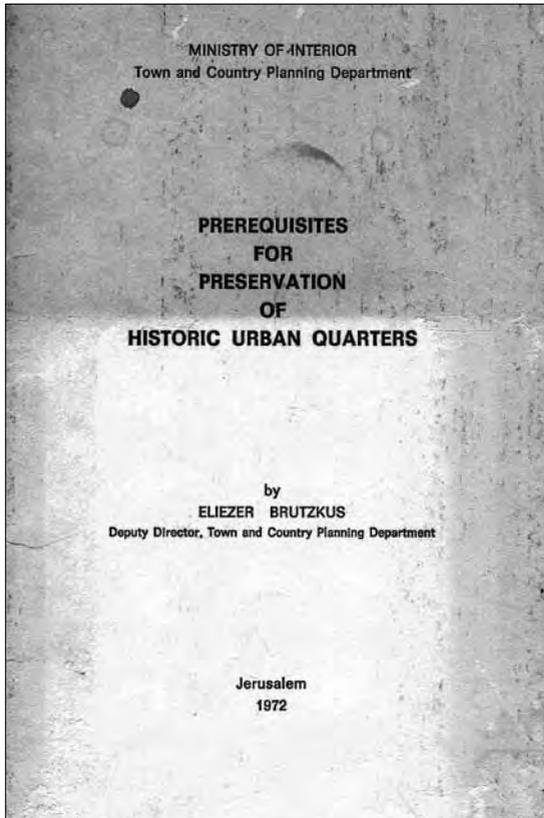


Fig. 1: Cover of the 1972 book *Prerequisites for Preservation of Historic Urban Quarters* by Eliezer Brutzkus, published in Jerusalem (Brutzkus 1972)

tively new attitude is not yet adequately reflected in legislation which accords protection primarily to specially recorded monuments and historical buildings and only partially and indirectly to the historic 'townscape'. The larger the spatial extent of the area of preservation, the more impressive would be the results" (Brutzkus 1972, 2–3).

To illustrate his arguments, Brutzkus provides examples from Rome and other places in Europe, highlighting the Eurocentric perspective of the discussion. Indeed, most of the citations in the book are by European authors, further highlighting the deep theoretical influence European heritage preservation had on this part of the Levant at a time leading up to the adoption of the 1975 → *European Charter*.

The debate on the reconstruction alternatives of the destroyed Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem's Old City might shed light on the pre-1975 thinking. Between 1948 and 1967 the quarter was heavily damaged and its restoration quickly became a national priority with great symbolic value resulting in a major conservation dilemma in the early 1970s. Examples of post-war architecture solutions were examined – including the tabula rasa approach taken in West Berlin and Frankfurt, which constructed modernist structures in place of the damaged pre-war buildings and the reconstruction of historic Warsaw, a replica of the destroyed core (Slæ, Kark and Shoval 2012). The example of Warsaw represented an aspiration to revive a past era and the complete recreation of an area that was destroyed does not fall under the category of conservation – rather it is a patriotic expression with a goal of healing national post war wounds (Earl 2003). The idea of razing the remains of the Jewish Quarter adding a new 'archaeological layer' was rejected and the Warsaw model was similarly deemed untenable for a mix of cultural and technical considerations (Slæ, Kark and Shoval 2012). The British urban conservation report of the four cities York, Bath, Chester and Chichester (Buchanan et al. 1968), also provided an important rehabilitation model that was carefully studied by Israeli planners and architects leading to a wide and contentious debate involving professional, academic and civil societies from local and international communities.

This burst of development between the late 1960s and the mid-1970s saw intensive civil society activities changing the direction of heritage conservation. The 1964 *Venice Charter* influenced the considerations of post – 1967 conservation, with emphasis primarily focused on architectural and cultural values, rather than on the social fabric. There were also few conservation professionals and very little awareness – substantial chunks of the Old City of Jaffa and Tiberias were demolished after the establishment of the State and other preservation attempts in Safed and parts of Jaffa were not wholly successful (Slæ, Kark and Shoval 2012). The *Council for a Beautiful Israel*, established in 1968, was the first NGO to start campaigns for heritage. Anglo-Saxon immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s brought with them new approaches (Turner 1981), chiefly in Jerusalem and fanned by the *Jerusalem Committee* established in 1969 by the former Mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek. This Committee was an international body of advisers on Jerusalem that included nearly 100 members from over two dozen countries handpicked by Kollek and included: "educators, urban planners, economists, architects, artists, writers, journalists, diplomats (retired), scientists, publishers, clergymen, lawyers, and state and municipal administrators" (Mozes 1985). This body convened periodically to provide feedback for the city's planning proposals. Noises from the European participants in this Committee, such as Nikolas Pevsner, Aldo van Eyck and Bruno Zevi were heard in the first three sessions 1970, 1973 and 1975 on the importance of conservation with strong reactions against large-scale infrastructure. Two passionate groups emerged, those in favor of modernization and those in favor of preservation. This international committee was vocal with its criticism of high rises and development that favored cars over pedestrians, ultimately contributing to charting the path for a modern Jerusalem (Rabinovich 1988).

In a parallel development, note should be made of two important events that took place in 1972 that were a major milestone for the conservation movement. The first was the UN Stockholm *Conference on the Human Environment* (UNEP 1972), which included the participation of Egypt, Lebanon and Israel. This marked the beginning of the many modern social and environmental policies, as well as recognizing and stating the need for integrated development. The second was the *World Heritage Convention* approved at UNESCO in November of that year.² However, the resulting situation in the wake of the

1973 October war and global oil crisis meant that there was less money available while more universal contacts prepared the stage for a recognition of conservation policies. While the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage* 1975 had no specific mention at the time in Israel, the application of the *Venice Charter* had become widespread through Israeli graduates from Italian Universities and Israel's membership at ICCROM as a founding member in 1958, albeit with a focus on archaeology. In Israel a number of influential planners maintained strong links to Europe – some immigrated to Israel and had strong cultural connections to their place of birth, while others traveled and were influenced by successful examples. References in literature from the period indicate a strong European influence in both the approach and methods of adaptation to the local cultures (Brutzkus 1972). During this period, the Israeli Planning Department was connected to international and European activities through their membership of the *International Society of City and Regional Planners* (ISOCARP) and the *International Federation for Housing and Planning* (IFHP), and knowledge-exchange was mainly developed through these associations. Furthermore, individual planners and architects participated in European courses, primarily in Holland and brought back ideas and issues on the conservation agenda.

Social agendas gave way to a new government in 1977 with neighbourhood rehabilitation as the new mantra. Nevertheless, although a far call from heritage it called for working with the existing social and physical fabric as opposed to redevelopment policies of the time (Turner 1985). An example of the earlier policy can be seen in the gentrification plans for the 19th century Yemin Moshe neighborhood located close to the Old City of Jerusalem; the neighborhood was turned into an exclusive artist colony during the 1960s, displacing the original residents who lived there (Rabinovich 1975). It was not until 1984 that in light of the extensive legislature promoted in Europe to protect heritage buildings and pressures from local civil society, that the *Society for Preservation of Buildings and Settlement Sites* was founded with the encouragement of the Knesset education committee to mitigate damage and preserve heritage in Israel from 1700 onwards that were not afforded legal protection.

Preservation efforts were prioritized in the wake of the continued destruction of historic fabrics falling victim to large-scale redevelopment schemes. The concern with preservation occurred especially at the municipal level in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa, as well as Safed and Tiberias. In Jerusalem the Town Planning Department and the Policy Planning Section published a report entitled *Landmark Preservation in Jerusalem* (1984) authored by Nimrod Salomon. A large appendix in the report reviews multiple landmark preservation programmes in Europe and North America as the city struggled to define a preservation policy to include the city's numerous historic structures and their environs. In the wake of these activities, the first conservation workshop was organized in Israel in 1986, bringing together representatives from the US and Europe, with a notable contingent from English Heritage headed by then deputy Chairman, Simon Jenkins.

3. CONTEMPORARY TENSIONS IN THE LEVANT

In the turbulent Levant a vicious circle of 'nationalism – war – reconstruction – reappraisal – heritage – universalism' seems to have held the day in some form or another in the changing attitudes to architectural heritage.

Commenting on Alexandria, Della Dora writes that "[n]ationalizations and revolutions do not leave a tabula rasa, but instead uncanny remains ready to surface through memorative signs (and absences) in the landscape and to produce nostalgia for a mythicized past. Alexandria is not an isolated case, but represents a category of postcolonial cities [...] which since their nationalization in the 1950–1970s have seen their (European) cosmopolitanism give way to a disturbing nonpresence [...] Recently, many former 'world cities' have been trying to reinvent themselves through nostalgic revivals of legendary cosmopolitan pasts [...] In a globalized world, dominated by image and high-speed communication networks, cities have engaged in a competition for global centrality, even if short-lived. Their success is largely determined

by their ability to create evocative but at the same time easily readable icons, which characterize them as unique.” (Della Dora 2006, 230–231).

Towards the end of the Lebanese civil war, Beirut, similar to Alexandria, experienced a nostalgic longing for a past era expressed through architecture. Thabet in his article, *Arab Architectural Heritage Between Mirrors and Idols* (Thabet 1998), opens up an interesting window on the heritage debates taking place in the Arab world. Unfortunately, it took the massive post-war redevelopment efforts, which included the eradication of souks and historic buildings to galvanize an outcry against the razing of heritage buildings. This was a significant departure from the previous public detachment, for aside from a small *Association of Old Historic Buildings and Sites* and left over legislation from the French Mandate period in the 1930s regarding the protection of archaeological ruins and nature sites, nothing had been done to protect Lebanese Heritage. Thabet questions whose heritage is being preserved and why? When the Old City of Beirut was demolished during the First World War to make room for more modern structures, the lamentations were not local; they were expressed by Frenchmen, the result of an Orientalist perspective and encouraged the production of “Arab Colonial Style” during the Mandate period. In comparison, Thabet asks, “Is Cairo today a traditional or a modern city or is it a combination of both? Are Beirut’s buildings of the 1930s and 1940s traditional or do they belong to a modern Western genre? Can we consider modernity simply as wallpaper that we can remove in order to return to our lost authenticity?” (Thabet 1998). He comments that much of the architectural heritage discipline is a Western construct and that it may not necessarily reflect the values that contemporary society wishes to preserve so much, so he is of the belief that the modern architecture following independence is a unique architectural heritage that should be preserved. An example of the search for to define a local architectural language can be demonstrated through the ‘La Maison Libanaise’. With a central space typology and a triple set of arched windows these buildings were hailed as a national icon, though this typology is prevalent throughout the Levant region (Shafiei 2013). This example illustrates how many of the unifying regional elements have become murky as nation states sought differentiation following independence.

Thabet’s searching questions highlight the dilemmas and the complexities that have accompanied the heritage movement in the Levant countries parallel to the processes that created the → *European Charter* and the subsequent effects.

In the Islamic world participants in the 1978 *Aga Khan Award for Architecture* seminar held in Istanbul, entitled *Conservation as Cultural Survival*, were exposed to European activities, including the EAHY 1975 (Fig. 2). The seminar brought together prominent architects and theoreticians from Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq, Iran, the UK, US and India. The conference proceedings were published in the 1980 se-

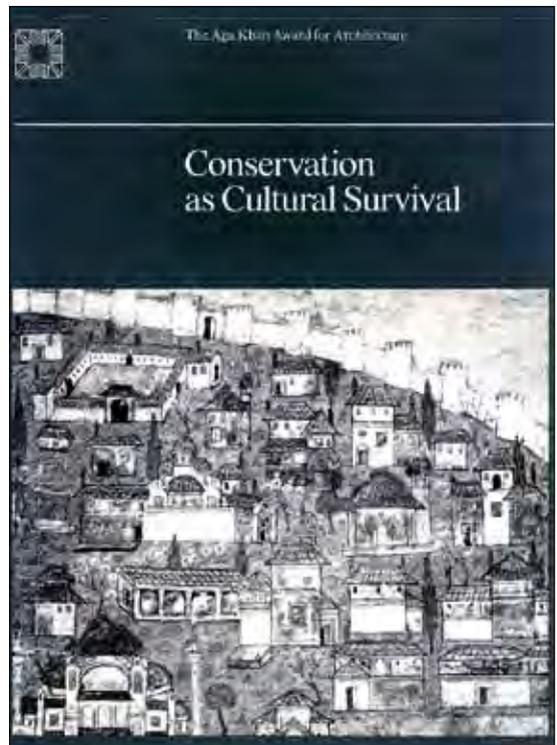


Fig. 2: 1980 cover of *Conservation as Cultural Survival*, Proceedings of seminar two in the series *Architectural transformations in the Islamic world*, held in Istanbul, Turkey, September 26–28, 1978

ries 'Architectural Transformations in the Islamic World'. Prof. Dogan Kuban in his paper, *Conservation of the Historical Environment for Cultural Survival*, mentions the 1975 campaign which he praises as an example of a method to gain public support for preservation efforts: "It has been shown in recent years that through a well-organized campaign, such as the European Heritage Year, the attitude of the public can become favourably disposed toward preservation proposals." (Kuban 1980, 4).

Over the past decades the *Aga Khan Trust for Culture* with the *Historic Cities Programme* has become a major player in large-scale rehabilitation and preservation projects across the Islamic World that offers an integrated conservation approach that embodies many of the 1975 campaign goals.

During the 1970s planning professionals in high level government positions in Israel were following what was happening in Europe and it is possible to find many parallels from principles in the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage* that feature in Israeli planning literature published by the Planning Department as recommendations (Brutzkus 1972), though legislature was slow to follow. The year 1989 brought the formal establishment of ICOMOS Israel as an independent NGO working towards the preservation of architectural heritage sites. However, it was only in 1992 that an annex was approved to the 1965 *Israeli Planning and Building Law* stipulating that local authorities are responsible for establishing a conservation committee and preparing inventories of sites affording minimal statutory protection to buildings with heritage value constructed after the year 1700. Over the years the newly named *Society for Preservation of Israel Heritage Sites* has developed a series of goals that encompass planning, education for professionals and the public, legislation and site management activities as well as "establish preservation principles, based on international standards but adapted to the situation in Israel" (Society for Preservation of Israel Heritage Sites – Aims). These aims stress a number of important points present in the *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage*. Furthermore, it promotes legal instruments to protect structures that would otherwise be vulnerable to developers while clearly stressing the desire to follow and incorporate international standards into preservation practices. This stand endeavors to link Israel with the international heritage preservation community, a stand that had not been delineated as clearly in other documents reviewed and were influenced by international preservation charters.

CONCLUSIONS

Forty years after the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage*, which brought heritage into the public realm, it is possible to see the application of its principles on multiple tiers in the Levant, with preservation work initiated by governments, academics and grassroots organization routinely trying to adhere to preservation charters and reviewing European case studies and strategies. A greater global awareness of the Levant countries that started during the 1980s developed through the ratification of the *World Heritage Convention* and international conservation actions. With the exception of individual membership ICOMOS, there was little official Eastern Mediterranean representation in European conservation organizations during the 1970s. However, from the start of the new millennium there has been a growing initiative on the part of the European Heritage campaigns supporting the benefits of inclusivity towards countries surrounding the continent, with a specific mention of the Southeastern Mediterranean (Hadjidemetriou 2000).

Realizations of the importance of the physical and social heritage component have also become very apparent in the Levant, though unfortunately, as we have demonstrated in this article, this was often as a reaction to massive destruction caused by war, redevelopment or both. Notwithstanding the political issues of national and commercial interests, the overtones of European influences have made the heritage debate more complex, questioning interpretations of vernacular. New legal frameworks have also been created over the past forty years in a number of Levantine countries, including Egypt, Israel and Lebanon expanding the dated laws from the Ottoman and Mandate eras. These frameworks have been struggling

and experienced both success and failures as the synergy between conservation and development remains extremely challenging as nation states attempt to define the values that are vital to preserve through architecture heritage. Another positive trend has been the social and educational achievements in the Near East in both creating a culture that values historic urban fabrics, as well as cultivating skilled professionals who are able to make appropriate decisions. While there is still a long path ahead there is increasing cooperation with international bodies, including: UNESCO, ICCROM and the *EuroMed Partnership for Peace and Neighbourhood Programmes*, providing knowledge and methods with a growing number of trained conservation practitioners. These mutual developments illustrate the positive effect that the 1975 → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage* was able to have beyond the borders of Europe, though in a number of places the values of the local architectural heritage was only made apparent after its devastation, when ways to retain, recover and restore were sought.

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¹ Annex of article 421 in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres (Bentwich and Goadby 1924).

² The World Heritage Convention was ratified by Egypt 1974 with the first properties listed in 1979, followed by Lebanon in 1983, with their first properties listed in 1984 and lastly Israel, which ratified the convention in 1999 and listed its first properties in 2001.