

## Visual Constructs of Jerusalem

### International Conference

Jerusalem, 14-20.11.2010

Sixty-five scholars from all over the world participated in an international conference on “Visual Constructs of Jerusalem” that took place in Jerusalem in November 2010. Dozens of international scholars presented their research along with twenty-three Israeli scholars, among them advanced students. The conference was initiated by the European Forum at the Hebrew University, with the support of the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University, the Israel Science Foundation, and the ERC (European Research Council), as well as the assistance and support of a number of foreign embassies in Israel.

The papers presented dealt with two key issues: physical and mental images of Jerusalem in Europe, and the status of Jerusalem in European culture. Lectures examined the image of Jerusalem as it is conveyed in monumental complexes, maps, devotional objects, and written pilgrimage accounts, while the depictions of Jerusalem in different media were compared.

Analyzing the status of Jerusalem as a medium that creates identity within European society (west and east), the studies pointed to changes in the meaning of the city – as a greatly desired place and as an image – in different periods and places. Emphasis was given to manifestations of Jerusalem in three monotheistic cultures – Christianity, Judaism, and Islam – with the focus on its status as a common denominator between cultures and societies. Within the discussion on particular items in the various sessions, lectures dealt with the effectiveness of the different media for the viewer.

As a whole, this conference expanded the discourse on the image of Jerusalem beyond the domain of art history into other areas, such as sociology and anthropology.

Following the session dedicated to “Holy Geography,” the conference participants were invited to the National Library of Israel where they were shown the collection of Holy Land maps in the Eran Laor Map Archive.

Several study excursions were conducted during the conference. Three of these were undertaken in Jerusalem, focusing on Christian, Jewish, and Muslim sites. Different time periods and their visibility within the current city were explicated, and elaborate discussions were held on the topics of the conference. The movement through the city clarified the spatial relations between holy places that had been addressed theoretically in the conference.

The last phase of the conference was a two-day study trip to the Galilee, allowing comparison of the themes and sites discussed in Jerusalem with *loca sancta* in northern Israel.

The conference enabled an exchange of ideas between scholars from different disciplines. The lectures presented will continue to affect the scholarly discourse when they see light next year in a special publication edited by Prof. Bianca Kühnel, Dr. Galit Noga-Banai, and Dr. Hanna Vorholt.

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