Protecting the "Enemy's" Heritage:
How Can the Bayarat Houses of Jaffa be preserved?

Iris Kashman. Advisor: Jorge Otero-Pailos

The 20th century has been defined by forced migrations of people around the world, who have had to leave their houses behind to escape war. This fact raises difficult philosophical and moral questions for the victors who take over the care of those houses. The Bayarat houses and irrigation centers built in the historic orange groves of Jaffa can be used as a study case for this type of preservation challenge.

The mid 19th century Bayarat are significant not only as records of a gone culture but also as documents of the city’s historic urban growth. They were the first buildings built along the roads that radiated from the center of Jaffa into the country side, and served as the backbone of all further urban development. As a group they form a spatial arrangement through which we can read the city’s history. Moreover, the Bayarat houses speak to an urban reality that has been overshadowed by the attention given to the Modern "White City" of Tel Aviv.

The present sad state of the Bayarat houses is that many are deserted and others contain damaging uses. Only less than a third of the houses are presently protected by local plans. Given the high market values of all lands in the Tel Aviv vacancy and the houses physical state of deterioration their preservation today is an urgent matter.

Raising awareness to the houses’ historic value in the context of animosity towards the culture they represent is a challenging but crucial step toward their preservation. As Tel Aviv–Jaffa has the most advanced preservation policy in Israel, it can be utilized and expanded toward the realization of this less conventional preservation task. The conflict of ownership of the Bayarat - private Palestinian owners according to the UN while publicly owned according to Israel - is a challenge requiring the co-operation of different preservation agents but also an opportunity to utilize the buildings for public uses leaving them in public hands for future property agreements. While the preservation of the buildings as purely memorials to the gone Palestinian civilization or alternatively as ruins is currently unrealistic, the use of the houses for locals’ present needs as community facilities can make history more approachable through their daily use. Preservation and
interpretation of the *Bayarat* to carry meaning to both Palestinians and Israelis can show that cleansing of historic fabric must not always follow ethnic displacement.