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Temple Ruins *versus* Temple Mount: Constructing Two Distinct Christian and Jewish Spaces in Late Antique Jerusalem

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Period	Ancient Cities and Religion (800 BCE – 600 CE)
Place	Aelia Capitolina; Beth-El; Caesarea maritima; Jerusale; Jerusalem; Mediterranean; Rabbat Moab
Person	Flavius Valerius Constantinus, Roman emperor, 272–337; Titus Flavius Vespasianus, Roman emperor, 39–81; Publius Aelius Hadrianus, Roman emperor, 76–138; Flavius Claudius Iulianus, Roman emperor, 331–363; Ammianus Marcellinus, Roman soldier and writer, c. 330–c. 395; Joshua ben Levi, Palestinian amora, early 3rd century; Eleazar Ben Pedat, Palestinian amora, 3rd century; Eusebius of Caesarea, bishop, c. 260–c. 340; Cyril of Jerusalem, bishop, c. 313–c. 386; Nebuchadnezzar II, neo-Babylonian king, c. 642–c. 562 BCE; Antiochus IV Epiphanes, king of the Seleucid kingdom, c. 215–164 BCE; Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus,

theologian and monk, c. 347–420; Eleazar ben Shammua, tanna, 2nd century; Barsauma, Monophysite monk, c. 384–456; Aelia Eudocia Augusta, Eastern Roman empress, c. 401–460; Flavius Theodosius Augustus, Eastern Roman emperor, 401–450; Yose ben Halafta, tanna, 2nd century; Gregory of Nazianzus, Christian theologian and bishop of Nazianzus and of Constantinople, 329–390; John Chrysostom, Christian theologian and bishop of Constantinople, c. 347–407; Tyrannius Rufinus, Christian writer and monk, c. 345–411; Theodoret of Cyrrhus, monk and bishop of Cyrrhus, c. 393–466; Salamanes Hermeias Sozomenus, lawyer and church historian, 5th century; Dionysius, Christian writer and bishop, † 264; Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, Christian writer and theologian, c. 160–c. 240; Victorinus, Christian writer and bishop, † c. 304; Lucius Caelius Firmianus, Christian writer, c. 240–c. 320; Irenaeus, Christian writer and bishop of Lyons, c. 135–early 3rd century; Sulpicius Severus, Christian writer, c. 360–c. 420; Apollinaris, Christian theologian and bishop, c. 310–c. 390; Basil of Caesarea, Christian theologian, monk and bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, c. 330–c. 379; Gregory of Nyssa, Christian theologian and bishop, c. 330–c. 395; Epiphanius of Salamis, Christian writer and bishop of Salamis, c. 315–403; Eutychius of Alexandria, in Arabic Sa'id ibn Batriq, Melkite patriarch of Alexandria, 877–940

Abstract

There are many uncertainties about the fate of the former Jewish Temple's site during the Late Roman Empire. The status of the area after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the refoundation of JerusaleJerusalem as a Roman colony in the 130s CE is unclear. Even though it became a public area, a group of people defined on a religious basis – the Jews – were seemingly forbidden from entering it. Starting from the reign of Flavius Valerius Constantinus, Roman emperor, 272–337Constantine, the erection of numerous shrines and churches served to Christianize locations of Biblical significance in the area which became progressively defined as the 'Holy Land'. The former Temple compound was excluded from this phenomenon because it was conceived as an utterly Jewish ritual space, deemed both obsolete and threatening by Christians. Christian theologians strove to define the site as an exclusively theological space. At the same time, rabbis introduced new on-site rituals to replace the former sacrificial cult while still maintaining the centrality of the Temple's surface area, which was expanded in the process. Thus, two distinct and competing religious spaces were simultaneously defined on the same physical location.

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Focus, applied concept and method

In Late Antiquity, the site of the former Jewish Temple, destroyed in 70 CE by the future Roman emperor Titus, functioned as a liminal space whose status was instrumental in religious polemics. According to all extant literature, the day the Roman army took the Temple marked the end of the official Jewish sacrificial ritual in Jerusalem. As far as we know, the site remained in ruins for most of the Roman period and was not physically altered following the Christianization of the Empire from 325 CE onwards.[1] In this article, I propose to apply the notion of co-spatiality (Lévy and Lussault 2003: 213–214) to the physical expanse of the former Temple compound. In doing so, I intend to refine the often-quoted words of Jonathan Z. Smith (1987: 79), who described the Christian Holy Land as a 'palimpsest laid over the old'. Indeed, the Rabbinic movement drew on an existing theology, but it did so to create a completely new ritual space, named the 'Temple Mount', while Christian theologians conceived the 'Temple ruins' as a solely theological space. Two distinct religioscapes were simultaneously created: on the one hand, a Jewish religioscape whose purpose was to remain an integral religious centre and, on the other hand, a Christian one which was theologically central but ritually non-existent.

State of the art

The status of the former Temple's site, as well as its topography, architecture and frequentation during the Roman era are intensely disputed topics. Those historical challenges are not restricted to Late Antiquity. There is no consensus on the fate of the area after the city's refoundation as a Roman colony named Aelia Capitolina under the emperor Hadrian, between 131 and 136 CE (Ecker and Cotton 2012). Was it included in the city limits (*pomerium*) and reorganized as a public space, possibly including the Capitoline temple, as some late documents claim (Mango 1992: 3)? Or did it lie in ruins, used as a quarry, and partially converted into agricultural lands (Belayche 2001: 138–139)? Regarding Late Antiquity specifically, there are some doubts about the legal possibility for Jews to visit the site. According to Christian authors from the 2nd century onwards (Justin, *First Apology* 47.5–6; Tertullian, *Against the Jews* 13.3–4; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.6.3), Hadrian had enforced a ban on Jewish residence, or even, on Jewish presence, within the city territory and maybe beyond, leaving Jewish entry subject to authorization. These assertions are somewhat contradicted by Rabbinic accounts (Safrai 1972) as well as by archaeological finds (Meyers 1971: 38; Aharoni *et al.*

1964: 80–82), but both types of material are of complex interpretation and dating. If some temporary and partial bans were implemented, they may not have always been enforced (Linder 1967: 1027–1029; Cotton 2010: 23–25). While the nascent 'Holy Land' underwent rapid spatial Christianization from the 4th century onwards, with a proliferation of shrines and churches, there is currently no trace of such building within the former Temple compound (Wilken 1992: 143–148; Goldhill 2004: 10). Most scholars believe that none was erected; attempts at proving the contrary have generally been disregarded as inconclusive since they are based on unprovenanced or undated archaeological finds (see Barkay and Dvira 2016: 54). Nonetheless, reports of archaeological excavations and publications of material found in the former Temple's vicinity often produce hypotheses on their significance (Ben-Dov 1985: 218; Peleg 2003: 150–151). In 2006, Yaron Z. Eliav published a comprehensive study of *God's Mountain: The Temple Mount in Time, Place and Memory* where he analysed the site's functions in both Jewish and Christian thoughts. Patristicians have highlighted the ambiguous and contrasted role of the site in ancient Christian theology (Walker 1990: 311–401). Post-colonial studies have shown how Jews served as both exotic *décor* and proof of authenticity for Christian pilgrims coming from the Western provinces of the Empire, and how their account appropriated Biblical narratives in a supersessionist perspective (Jacobs 2004; Irshai 2009).

Further debate surrounds the emperor Julian's short-lived attempt at rebuilding the Temple in 363 CE (Levenson 1990; Stemberger 2000). This project is mentioned by many Christian writers who elaborated on the miracles which prevented its completion. However, the silence of Cyril, who was at the time bishop of Jerusalem but did not once allude to this major undertaking – at least in any of his authentic preserved works – has long puzzled scholars. The authenticity of a fragmentary letter from Julian himself, announcing the reconstruction project, has been disputed, and the emperor's attempt is not documented anywhere in Rabbinic literature, prompting some to dismiss it as unhistorical (Van Nuffelen 2002). However, the testimony of the Antiochian writer Ammianus Marcellinus (*Roman History* 23.1.2–3), who fought in Julian's army, cannot be disregarded, especially since he ascribed it to Julian's well-documented policy of restoration of traditional cults (Aziza 2016: 347–361; Finkelstein 2018: 86–100). However, this imperial initiative may not have been enthusiastically received by rabbis since they had no specific role to play in the Jewish sacrificial cult. On the contrary, they derived their religious authority from the transformation of Judaism into a non-sacrificial religion (Sivan 2008: 100).

While the 'spatial turn' has initiated a plethora on studies of religious spaces (Kilde 2013; Rau und Schwerthoff 2008), and especially on 'shared sacred places' (Bowman 2012; Albera and Couroucli 2012; Massa and Attali 2023), to our knowledge, none of its methods has been applied to the site of the former Temple during the Late Roman Empire. Indeed, as already noted by Guy Stroumsa, 'there is remarkably little literature on the history of the Temple Mount from a comparative religious perspective' (Stroumsa 2015: 160 n. 2). The site has been studied with a constructivist approach, but the analysis of competitive claims usually begins in the 7th century CE in the aftermath of the Arab conquest of Jerusalem in 636 CE (Friedland and Hecht 1991). This lack of studies appears even more surprising considering the renewed attention in this site from the 2000's onwards and the number of related scholarly publications. Late Antiquity is generally referred to as a backdrop and often approached with the further knowledge of the site's fate through the ages as well as its current status as a disputed place of massive political and diplomatic implications (Mambelli and Marchetto 2019).

Historical and spatial exposition, agents

Divine Presence Disputed, Spatial Holiness Reconfigured

According to the Hebrew Bible (*Deuteronomy* 12:5; 2 *Chronicles* 6:1–11), the god of the Jews chose his holy city and the location of his Temple, where, as per common ancient theology, he dwelt. Late antique Rabbinic literature records several traditions about the theological status of the Temple after its demise (Levinson 2013: 113). According to one of them, the divine presence remained on the site. In the Babylonian Talmud (*Berakhot* 62b) compiled c. 600 CE in the Sassanian Empire, an opinion attributed to the 3rd century Joshua ben Levi, otherwise known as an authority on divine attributes, upheld the meaning of a Biblical verse where, once King Solomon had finished building 'the House of God', God appeared to him and stated that 'his eyes and heart shall be there perpetually' (*1 Kings* 9:3). The theological position asserting the enduring divine 'presence' – in Hebrew *Shekhinah,* from verb 'to dwell' (*Exodus* 25:8) – explicitly appears in a Rabbinic work of disputed date, placed between the 5th and the 9th century CE: according to the *Midrash Tanhuma*, Eleazar Ben Pedat claimed that 'even though it is a mountain, here he remains in his holiness' (Midrash *Tanhuma*, semot 10). This early 3rd century rabbi based his reasoning on the aforementioned Biblical verses as well as on another one (*Psalms* 3:5) which depicts God as listening from 'his holy mountain' (*har qadesho*), thus ascribing holiness to the whole topographical area of the hill on which the Temple stood. Indeed, already in c. 200 CE, the earlier Rabbinic legal compilation (*Mishna*) had established a concentric hierarchy of spatial holiness in which the 'Temple Mount' was considered holier than the rest of the city, but less holy than the platform (*chel*) or outer court of the Temple compound (Mishna *Kelim* 1.8; on spatial holiness in Ancient Judaism, see Harrington 2001). This theological construct was largely inherited from the Herodian period, when the purity and the identity of individuals served to determine how close they could get to the sacrificial altar (Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.417–420). By 200 CE, the architectural layout of the site, which once materialized the limits between each area of the compound, was not a reality anymore, only a memory. Since purity and personal status were only relevant in relation to sacrificial offerings, differentiating between degrees of spatial holiness had now become pointless. Consequently, when they spoke about the site as it existed in their own time, the rabbis used a name which defined the Temple not only by its ideal surface area of 500 cubits by 500 cubits (Mishna *Middot* 2.1 cf. *Ezekiel* 42:20 in Eliav 2003: 84–87) or by its ruined architectural enclosure – the 'double colonnade' (Palestinian Talmud *Taanit* 3.11; Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 33b, *Sukkah* 45a, *Pesachim* 13b and 52b) – but also by its unaltered geographical relief (Eliav 2003: 58–70): the 'Temple Mount', or, in the literal Hebrew, the 'Mountain of the House' (*har ha-bayit*). Before 200 CE, this specific phrase was not commonly used in Jewish Literature: it is only found once in the Hebrew Bible (*Micah* 3:12, quoted in *Jeremiah* 26:18) and once in Greek (*tô orei tou oikou*) in a Jewish Apocryphon (*1 Maccabees* 4:46). When deciding on a spatial denomination designed to be 'general' and 'all-inclusive' (Eliav 2003: 68), the rabbis may have purposefully chosen a phrase which originally referred to a ruined site. Indeed, the prophet Micah used it to announce the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple:

> Therefore because of you

> Zion shall be ploughed as a field;
>
> Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,
>
> and the mountain of the house a wooded height. (*Micah* 3:12)

Conversely, Christian theologians denied the idea that the divine presence had remained on the site after its destruction. In his *Proof of the Gospel* (8.2.112), written in the early 4th century, Eusebius of Caesarea, bishop of Caesarea maritima in *Palaestina Prima*, stated that 'it is fitting to believe that up to the Saviour's Passion there was some Divine Power guarding the Temple and the Holy of Holies', since otherwise Jesus would not have gone there to attend the Jewish pilgrimage festivals; however, after Jesus's death, the ground became unhallowed. For Eusebius, the site of the former Temple had forever lost its specific status. Not all Church Fathers thought exactly the same. Some thirty years later, Cyril of Jerusalem, preached in the church of the Resurrection (*Anastasis*), built opposite the Temple ruins. There, he claimed that the Antichrist would come when the building of the Holy of Holies would be entirely demolished, either from disuse, purposeful destruction for quarrying or any other cause (*Catechetical lectures* 15.15; see Heid 1993). Whether or not they conferred an eschatological role onto the former Temple, Eusebius and Cyril agreed that it should remain in ruins, in keeping with a prophecy found in the Synoptic Gospels:

> Jesus left the temple and was going away when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, 'You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down'. (*Matthew* 24:1-2 cf. *Mark* 13:2 and *Luke* 19:44)

According to Eusebius, the current demise of the Temple would differ from previous ones, enacted by the neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in the 6th century BCE and by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV in the 2nd century BCE. It was to be a 'final destruction' (*eschaton aphanismon*), with no possible renewal (*Commentary in Psalms* 73.1–10; *On Theophany* 4.20; see Walker 1990: 376–396). The bishop of Caesarea specified that not everyone interpreted the prophecy in a similar manner: some only applied it to the specific buildings Jesus was pointing out, and not to the whole of the Temple compound (*On Theophany* 4.18). However, Eusebius's exegesis soon became standard in Christian theology, transforming the ruined state of the former Temple's precinct into a theological space. As such, Jerome of Strido (*Commentary on Psalm* 86; *Commentary on Isaiah*, prologue to book 18; *Letter* 46.5.1–2) thought that a visit to the Temple ruins was beneficial to Christian pilgrims: it served as visual proof of the punishment God had enacted on the Jews and, as such, had an educational function (Kamimura 2019).

The Temple Mount: A Transformed and Expanded Jewish Ritual Space

Since the 'Temple Mount' was the reality of their time, rabbis sometimes used this phrase even when they referred to regulations pertaining to the Temple before its destruction, in relation with sacrifice, tithes and offerings (Mishna *Chagigah* 1.1). Rabbis regulated Jewish presence on the site, describing and prescribing how people should behave there. Prescribed conduct rules belong to two different

categories which differ in origin, nature, and purpose. A first set of behavioural rules are presented as already compulsory when the Temple was standing. According to rabbis, they should still be enforced, in keeping with the Biblical commandment to 'revere' the God-chosen place and the persisting divine presence. As such, the Mishna forbids anyone from entering the Mount with a staff, with shoes on, with his money-purse or with dusty feet; additionally, no one should spit inside the precinct nor use it as a short cut (*Berakhot* 9.5). The rabbis' reasoning is explained in the Babylonian Talmud (*Yebamoth* 6b and *Berakhot* 62b) where they refer to *Leviticus* 19:30, *1 Kings* 9:3 and *Exodus* 3:5. Such prescriptions are consistent with the maintained holiness of the site, setting it apart. In addition, several rabbinic authorities stated that Jews who visited the Temple Mount should perform specific and unprecedented actions there: mourning rituals, derived from Biblical mourning customs. Along with crying and lamenting aloud, their purpose was to manifest the anguish provoked by the destruction of the Temple. The central ritual was the rending of clothes (Palestinian Talmud, *Moed katan* 3.7; *Semahot* 9.19; Babylonian Talmud, *Moed Katan* 26a). In the Babylonian Talmud, a ruling ascribed to Eleazar ben Shammua stated that one should recite a specific verse from the *Book of Isaiah* (64:10) before doing so. This second set of prescriptions, documented in the latest redactional layers of the Talmud (*Guemarot*), indicate that, from the 4th century CE onwards, rabbis conceived the 'Temple in its desolation' as a ritual space. The change in its architectural configuration – the destruction of the cultic buildings – had initiated the transition to non-sacrificial rituals.

Those new rituals took place on a site whose access was no longer restricted and hidden to non-Jews, as was the case when sacrifices were still offered (Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.190); on the contrary, it had become a public space, where non-Jews could and did witness them. In the early 5th century, the famous theologian Jerome of Strido, who lived near Jerusalem, in Bethlehem, described the behaviour and outward appearance of the Jews who came to visit the Temple Mount on the anniversary of its destruction which, according to Rabbinic reckoning (Mishna *Taanit* 4.7), was commemorated on the 9th of Ab, the 5th month of the Hebrew cultic calendar, which corresponds to parts of July and August in the Gregorian calendar:

> Right up to the present day the treacherous inhabitants, having killed the servants and finally the Son of God, are prohibited to enter Jerusalem except to lament, and they pay a price to be allowed to weep over the ruin of their state. Thus those who once bought the blood of Christ buy now their own fears, and not even their grief is free. On the day when Jerusalem was captured and destroyed by the Romans you may see a mournful populace arrive, a confluence of decrepit females and old men 'covered with rags and years', demonstrating in their bodies and their condition the wrath of the Lord. The congregation is a crowd of wretches, but as the yoke of the Lord glitters, and His resurrection shines, and from the Mount of Olives the standard of His cross gleams, the populace keening over the ruins of their Temple is pitiable, yet not suitable to be pitied. So you have tears streaming down cheeks and arms blue from bruises and hair in disarray, and a soldier demands a fee for allowing them to weep more. And would anyone, when he saw these things, be in doubt about the day of tribulation and straitness ...? (Jerome, *Commentary on Zephaniah* 1.15–16; Latin text in Schürer 1973: 557 with translation in Goodman 2007: 549)

While the behaviour of the Jews as described by Jerome is in keeping with Rabbinic norms, the monk painted the Jews as pitiful beings, whose decrepitude was not the result of a purposeful and once-a-year ritual but a permanent trait. As such, Jerome's description reinforces the idea that Judaism has been defeated and superseded by Christianity.

The mention of a soldier paid by the Jews has been interpreted as proof that, at least in Jerome's time, Jews were normally forbidden from accessing the Temple Mount but were given a special authorization to visit it once a year on the anniversary of the Temple's destruction (Kiperwasser and Ruzer 2000: 107 after Nau 1927: 196–197). Does it mean that soldiers were charged with preventing the Jews from visiting the site, or even Jerusalem, during the rest of the year, but were instructed to let them pass on this specific day against a fee? If there was indeed an effective ban for Jewish presence on the Mount, then this ritual space was mostly theoretical. A similar question arises from the *Syriac Life of Barsauma*, probably written by a disciple of the eponymous Barsauma. In such hagiographical texts from the 5th and 6th centuries, facts are not always easily discernible from fiction. According to the *Life*, in 438 CE, Galilean Jews petitioned the empress Eudocia, the wife of the emperor Theodosius II for the permission to pray on the ruins of the Temple, which she granted (*Life of Barsauma* 91.1–5); she also forbade anyone from molesting them (*Life of Barsauma* 93.3). Jews from all over the Empire then met in Jerusalem on the first day of the feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), where Barsauma's disciples saw them and described them as 'clothed in black, who wept, shredded their clothing, sprinkled ashes on their heads, and sat down on the ruins of the temple, groaning' (*Life of Barsauma* 91.8). Once again, the rituals described in this Christian text are in keeping with Rabbinic prescriptions; however, their connexion with Sukkot is unheard of. If we take the narrative at face value, it might signify that Jews needed to ask for special permission if they wanted to gather on the Mount on any other day than the 9th of Ab. However, most commentators consider that the mourning rituals described by the author of the *Life* prove that he was in fact describing the same annual pilgrimage as Jerome (Kiperwasser and Ruzer 2000: 107). Indeed, it seems likely that the author of the *Life* combined disparate historical elements relative to Jews visiting the Temple ruins with a fictional background necessary for its own hagiographical purpose, as he did elsewhere. Previously, he had referred to a synagogue in Rabbat Moab as the Temple, to underline the importance of its destruction by Barsauma. The monk, aided by God, had supposedly defeated an army of 15,000 Jews there (*Life of Barsauma* 38–43).

Even if Jerome and the *Life*'s author were somewhat influenced by ulterior motives, the Jewish rituals they described fit with the ones rabbis prescribed or described as customary. Even tough Talmudic Literature does not explicitly mention the use of ashes and the dishevelled and unwashed hair in connection with visits to the Temple Mount, such practices do belong to the category of traditional Jewish mourning rituals, and rabbis did mention them in relation to the memory of the Temple's destruction (Babylonian Talmud, *Taanit* 16a and 26b). However, a much earlier Christian account from the Bordeaux pilgrim, who visited Jerusalem in 333 CE, described the standard mourning rituals along with a very different practice:

> A pierced stone (*lapis pertusus*) stands there which the Jews come and anoint each year. They mourn and rend their garments, and then depart. (Bordeaux pilgrim, *Itinerary* 591 in Wilkinson 1973: 157)

The presence, among Temple ruins, of a special stone which could be a focus of Jewish visits has Rabbinic parallels. According to the Mishna (*Yoma* 5.2), a 'foundation stone' (*even ha-shetiyah*), a remnant from the Ark of the Covenant, was located inside the Temple. In the Tosefta (*Yoma* 2.14), also compiled c. 200 CE, the name 'foundation stone' is explained by Yose, a 2nd century CE rabbi, as meaning that the Creation sprung from it. Even though several rabbinic passages (Palestinian Talmud, *Pesachim* 4.1 and *Taanit* 1.6) stated that this stone had been destroyed with the Temple, this opinion was not universal, and it would stand to reason that some Jews would look for this specific stone while on the Temple Mount. In Jewish Literature, stone anointment has only one precedent in the *Book of Genesis* (28:18–19) when Jacob, having experienced a divinely inspired dream, set up the stone on which he had fallen asleep as a pillar, poured oil on it, and named it Beth-El, 'the House of God'. Indeed, early medieval Rabbinic tradition identified the anointed stone of Beth-El with the 'foundation stone' (*Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* 35; see Koltun-Fromm 2019: 373). However, since this ritual has no documented parallel in historical Jewish practice, many scholars have found themselves at a loss to explain this seemingly odd ritual. Some have been tempted to dismiss it as an erroneous report by a clueless Christian witness; it has also been interpreted as a ritual parody imposed on the Jews by Christian authorities and performed under duress (Cohn 1982: 143–146). However, the anointing of stones invested with a special significance, especially those whose function was to mark the boundaries between two different spaces, was customary in the Greek world (Theophrastus, *On Characters* 16.5), and many such practices have been adopted by the Jews from the Hellenistic period onwards. Among the stones which were commonly anointed were tombstones, as Plutarch (*Life of Aristides* 21.5) recounted when describing the festival established in memory of the Greek soldiers who fell at the battle of Plataea in 479 BCE. Coincidently, some of the many recorded Late Antique Rabbinic traditions about the 'foundation stone' identified it as the tombstone of Adam, the first man (Gafni 1987; Eliav 2003: 102). When studied in such light, the anointing ritual described by the Bordeaux pilgrim can be interpreted as an attempt to maintain the Temple Mount as a unique ritual space. It was the only place where some specific rituals could be performed even after the Temple's destruction, in contrast with the mourning rituals, which could be performed anywhere. The anointed pierced stone was turned into a landmark manifesting the continuous centrality of the Temple Mount, even if its buildings were destroyed and its access restricted. The idea of the foundation stone's centrality would be picked up by early medieval rabbis (*Midrach Tanhuma*, Kedochim 10) who would identify it with the 'navel of the world', a notion already applied to the Jerusalem Temple by Hellenistic and Early Roman Jewish writers (Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 294; Alexander 1999). It was set up as a competitor to the Greek *omphalos* in Delphi on which a liquid (wine) was also poured during Antiquity (Defradas 1954: 102–110). Indeed, the proliferation of traditions about the foundation stone (Koltun-Fromm 2019) gave it the status of a *lieu de mémoire* (Eliav 2003: 99–103) whose significance was not restricted to a now anachronistic sacrificial ritual.

Late Antique Jewish traditions about the location of the Temple upheld and expanded the Biblical claim that the site was intrinsically holy because it had been chosen by God before the Creation, and identified with Mount Moriah, where Abraham bound Isaac (*Chronicles* 3:1). With the paucity of our sources, most of them of uncertain date, it is impossible to assess the number of Jews who visited the Temple Mount during Late Antiquity. It is similarly difficult to reconstruct the chronological evolution and the whole spectrum of rituals that might have been performed there. A series of glass vessels decorated with Jewish symbols and designed to hold liquid, probably manufactured in or near

Jerusalem, has been taken as proof that Jewish pilgrimage to Jerusalem was rather common (Barag 1970; see also Attali 2023), but many of these artefacts could date from the early Arab period rather than from the Roman period (Raby 1999: 150–158).

Mourning rituals, however, were moveable and not restricted to a specific place. This flexibility allowed for spatiotemporal extension. Indeed, the Talmud specify that mourning rituals should not only be performed when one has entered the Temple Mount, but also when one laid eyes on its desolated state. Rabbinic records of such visits indicate that most people were expected to reach Jerusalem by the northeast road, through mount Scopus, and tear their garments as soon as they saw the Temple Mount from their vantage point (*Sifre on Deuteronomy* 43). Sight as the criterion for ritual performance expanded the Rabbinic religioscape of the Temple Mount far beyond its topographical border. This process was further reinforced by the modification of the significance of the fast of the 9 of Ab, which, at least from 200 CE (Mishna *Taanit* 4.7), commemorated the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in addition to its previous destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. The day was kept with mourning rituals. Moreover, memory-keeping customs were progressively introduced into profane activities as well as into ceremonies taking place far from Jerusalem, in virtually every Jewish household. Already in the Tosefta, a Rabbinic legal corpus compiled c. 200 CE but less authoritative than the Mishna, we find opinions that individuals should not embellish their buildings by plastering, tiling, or painting (Tosefta *Baba Bathra* 9.17 and *Sotah* 15.11–12) as a reminder of the Temple's downfall. This ruling was later included in the Babylonian Talmud, which considerably limited its scope but added several other similar prescriptions: women should leave their cosmetic treatments unfinished, and some food should be left out from every meal. A ritual was also to be performed during wedding ceremonies: ashes should be placed on the groom's head (*Baba Bathra* 60b). Such practices also contributed to the upholding of the Temple Mount's centrality in Judaism, while on-site rituals aimed at maintaining a visible presence of Judaism in Jerusalem.

From the viewpoint of Christian authorities, allowing Jews to enter Jerusalem to lament the ruin of the Temple 'supported the Christian claim to have superseded the Jews and was therefore no concession to the Jews but a proof of their triumph' as Volker Menze (2016: 232) put it. However, this Jewish ritual performance was interpreted as a threat by several Christian theologians.

Jewish Ritual Space on the Temple Mount as a Threat for Christians

However fictional it might be, the *Syriac Life of Barsauma* explicitly interpreted the gathering of Jews on the Temple ruins as a threat to Christianity. His author included a fictional letter in which the Jews of Galilee invited all their co-religionists to Jerusalem. In it, the permission to celebrate the God-appointed pilgrimage festival of Sukkot – which also traditionally commemorated the building of the Temple by King Solomon – was presented as a major event. It prompted Barsauma to travel to Jerusalem to try to prevent it:

> There was great commotion in the city of Samosata on account of what the empress Eudocia had done, and Barsauma left for Jerusalem in order to be near the empress, who was there. All Syria and Palestine were in commotion, too. Even the emperor Theodosius came to hear of it.

(*Life of Barsauma* 89.1; translation by Palmer 2020)

The hagiographer constructed his narrative to show that God did not want the Jews to celebrate on the ruins of the Temple: he wrote that many Jews were maimed and killed by stones sent from the sky, and had the Jews admit that they fell to ‘God’s wrath’ (*Life of Barsauma* 94.3), with ‘everyone acknowledg[ing] that the blow which had fallen on the Jews had come from God’ (*Life of Barsauma* 95.2). Making excuses for having given her permission to the Jews, Eudocia claimed that she only did it because of ‘how the Jewish people oppress and persecute the Christians’ (*Life of Barsauma* 95.6). That such a ludicrous statement – no Jew had the power to pressure imperial authorities – would be put in the mouth of an empress clearly shows that Jewish ritual performance on the site of the Temple was perceived as a threat by some Christians, especially among clerics and theologians. This fear is expressed in the Christian accounts of Julian’s attempt at rebuilding the Temple, in which, exactly as in the *Life*, God himself rejected the project by miraculously putting an end to it. Gregory of Nazianzus (*Discourse* 5.3) described the reconstruction as a way to ‘let loose against [Christians] the Jewish tribe’. John Chrysostom (*Discourses Against the Judaizing Christians* 5.11.6–8) stated that ‘God wished [for the Temple] to stay destroyed’ and that ‘Christ forbade its rebuilding’. Rufinus of Aquilea (*Ecclesiastical History* 10.36) wrote that while the Jews were rebuilding, they insulted the Christians and ‘treated them cruelly’. A c. 400 CE apocryphal letter falsely attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem presented the earthquake that scuttled the rebuilding as a divine deliverance (Brock 1977). In the 5th century, Theodoret of Cyrrhus (*Ecclesiastical History* 20.1) claimed that Julian had armed the Jews against the followers of Christ, thinking he could prove the prophecy wrong. Sozomen (*Ecclesiastical History* 5.22.2) interpreted Julian’s project as a way to ‘vex (*lupein*)’ Christians. While the potential integral re-Judaization of the Temple was interpreted as an attack on Christianity by those writers, the conviction that the Temple would stay destroyed forever was not shared by all Christians.

Prominent Christian theologians disavowed some of their fellow exegetes for teaching that, at the end of times, the Jerusalem Temple would be rebuilt. In his *Commentary on Isaiah* (Prologue to book 18), written in 410, Jerome of Strido commended mid-3rd century CE Dionysius of Alexandria for rebuking Christians who interpreted the prophecies of the Messianic earthly kingdom (*Revelation* 21:9–27) literally. Indeed, according to many Biblical books, at the end of days, all nations would worship God in his Temple in Jerusalem (Arnold 2008). Jerome gave an extensive list of Christian writers he deemed guilty of Judaizing: Tertullian of Carthage, Victorinus of Petovium, Lactantius, Irenaeus, Sulpicius Severus and above all Apollinaris of Laodicea, Jerome’s own former teacher. According to Jerome (*On Illustrious Men* 18), they all professed that ultimately, all people would circumcise themselves and observe the Jewish commandments, including the offering of sacrifices in the restored Temple. Jerome thus accused them of following Jewish interpretation (in Greek, *deuterosis*). Indeed, while eschatological themes are not often developed in Rabbinic Literature, they are discussed in a series of famous passages which take for granted the rebuilding of the Temple (Milikovsky 2001). Restoration of the Temple’s service is part of the daily eighteen benedictions mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud (*Berakhot* 28b). The heavily Temple-based *décor* of Late Antique synagogues has also been interpreted as proof of the hope for the rekindling of the sacrificial cult (Wilken 1992: 200). That some of the Jews who visited the Temple Mount may have done so at least partially because of their faith in the Temple’s upcoming restoration seems supported by an archaeological find. A Hebrew inscription, etched between the 4th and the 7th century on the Western

wall (Ben-Dov 1985: 218–223), reproduces part of a Biblical verse. It describes how the faithful will feel when all nations come to worship in the restored Temple: 'You shall see and your heart should rejoice, and your bones like grass …' (*Isaiah* 66:14).

Jerome is not correct in accusing these six famous Christians theologians of sharing the Jewish conception of the End of Days. Studies such as (Newman 2001: 440–445) have shown that he conflated traits which belonged to different types of millenarianism. The actual teachings of Apollinaris, Jerome's contemporary, are the most difficult to reconstruct since most of his works are lost. Jerome was not alone in accusing him of preaching the upcoming restoration of the Temple: Apollinaris was also combatted by Basil of Caesarea (*Letter* 263.4 and 265.2), Gregory of Nyssa (*Letter* 3.24) and Gregory of Nazianzus (*Letter* 101.63–65 and 102.14). Apollinaris's positions on the Son's nature prompted his condemnation by the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE. Through quotations from his adversaries, it seems that Apollinaris did think that the sacrificial cult would resume, but only for those of the Jews who recognized Christ. Nevertheless, this exegesis was considered heretical by many of his contemporaries. Of particular interest for us is the refutation by Theodoret of Cyrrhus, who had himself travelled to Jerusalem to see the 'desolation [with his] own eyes' (*Cure of the Greek Maladies* 11.70–71). Theodoret argued that the Temple cult could never resume because side-by-side performance of both Jewish and Christian rituals would only generate conflict, a situation not compatible with the Second Coming of Christ (*Commentary on Ezekiel* in Migne 1864: 1248–1251). This internal Christian debate attests that institutional and permanent Jewish ritual performance on the Temple Mount was perceived as unbearable by the progressively self-defined Christian orthodoxy. This stance soon became the norm and was shared by many Christian groups, including those which were progressively branded as heretics. According to the Nestorian author of the *Life of Barsauma,* the Jews of Galilee invited their fellow Jews to join them in Jerusalem for Sukkot, a festival presented as eschatological in the *Book of Zechariah* (14:16), as Christians well knew (Jerome, *Commentary on Zechariah* 14:16). In their fictional letter, the Jews claimed that the permission of performing rituals on the Temple Mount fulfilled the prophecies on the restoration of Jerusalem:

> 'We write to inform you that the time of our people's diaspora is past. The day has come for our tribes to be reunited. The Roman emperors have decreed that our city, Jerusalem, is to be restored to us. Make haste, then, and come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles! Our kingdom is going to be established in Jerusalem!' (*Life of Barsauma* 91.4)

Christian theology conceived the Temple's site as a radically non-ritual space, unless the (Jewish) rituals were visibly dependent upon the authorities' goodwill and, as such, could be interpreted as proof of supersessionism. As noted by Robert Wilken (1992: 143–147), the sight of the ruins gave reinsurance and sometime exaltation to many clergymen, while the possibility of the Temple's restoration made them afraid. There, any ritual that could be conceived as common to both Christians and Jews, whether it was actually performed or only theoretical, was rejected. For Christian ecclesiastical authorities, the conception of the Temple ruins as a solely theological space prevented its conceptions as a permanent ritual space.

The site of the former Jewish Temple was invested with significant meaning by both Rabbinic and ecclesiastical authorities and was thus the focus of contested discourses. As Simon Goldhill phrased it:

> The Temple is so tied up with a view of the world that every struggle to possess it expresses a view of one's place in history: an act of self-definition in the order of things. It also expresses a view of the divine, of messianism and of the religious in the order of things. It becomes the object of myth, fantasy, and political idealism. (Goldhill 2004: 172)

The Former Temple Precinct as a Non-Ritual Space for Christians

The site of the former Temple was indeed also a *lieu de mémoire* for Christians (Eliav 2006: 46): several episodes of Jesus's life and ministry, as well as important events connected with his family and his disciples, took place within the Temple compound before its destruction. Christian Apocrypha from the 2nd and 3rd century CE (*Gospel of the Savior* 7–9; *Acts of Thomas* 79) emphasized the importance of the Temple cult among the first Christian generation, claiming that Jesus himself not only taught inside the Temple but also offered sacrifice there.

Indeed, many Christians who performed pilgrimages to Jerusalem from the early 4th century onwards visited the site; several left records of what it evoked in them. The richest biblically informed description of the site was handed down to us by the Bordeaux pilgrim (*Itinerary* 589–591 in Wilkinson 1973: 156–157) who came to Jerusalem in 333 CE from the province of *Aquitania Secunda*. Like his late 6th-century counterpart, the Piacenza pilgrim (*Itinerary* 23, v175 in Wilkinson 1977: 84) from the province of *Liguria and Aemilia*, he mainly associated the site with the figure of Solomon, builder of first Temple. Every Biblical and para-Biblical connexion made by the Bordeaux pilgrim was prompted by a visible architectural feature. When shown rooms described as part of Solomon's house – possibly underground vaulted Herodian chambers similar to those nowadays known as 'the stables of Solomon' – he recalled the writing of the Deuterocanonical *Book of Wisdom,* attributed to the king, and his ability to bind demons (cf. *Testament of Solomon*; Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.45–49 and Babylonian Talmud, *Gittin* 68a). He also identified a cornerstone as initially rejected by the Temple's builders, a tradition found in both the Hebrew Bible (*Psalms* 118:22) and the Gospels (*Matthew* 21:42). Some of the site's landmarks recalled Jesus's steps: the 'corner of a lofty tower' is interpreted as the pinnacle (*pterygion*) where he was tempted by the devil (*Matthew* 4.5–7 and *Luke* 4.9–12). The Bordeaux pilgrim also conflated different Biblical figures when he attributed to a 'Zechariah' a pool of blood that had seeped into the marble floor and was visible along with the marks of soldiers' hobnails. This Zechariah was said to be the son of Jehoiada, a high priest, stoned in the Temple court and executed by king Jehoash in the 9th century BCE (*2 Chronicles* 24:20–22). Following early Christian tradition (Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 23:29–36; Gallagher 2014: 127–128), which elaborated on a Gospel allusion (*Matthew* 23:35 and *Luke* 11:51), our pilgrim attributed the manner of the high priest's death to another man named Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. According to a 2nd century CE Christian Apocryphon, Zechariah was murdered by soldiers in the 'vestibule of the temple of the Lord', claiming 'I am the God's martyr' (*Protoevangelium of James* 23). After he died, a priest:

> saw clotted blood beside the altar; and he heard a voice saying: 'Zacharias has been murdered, and his blood shall not be wiped up until his avenger comes'. And hearing this saying, he was afraid, and went out and told it to the priests. And they ventured in and saw what had happened; and the fretwork of the temple made a wailing noise, and they rent their clothes from the top even to the bottom. And they found not his body, but they found his blood turned

> into stone. And they were afraid and went out and reported to the people that Zacharias had been murdered. And all the tribes of the people heard, and mourned, and lamented for him three days and three nights. (*Protoevangelium of James* 24)

This account, which was famous in Late Antiquity, turned a spot inside the Temple compound, located close to the altar as per the pilgrim's description, into the location of Christian martyrdom; it also identified a precise spot as a relic from a martyr who was a relative of Jesus (*Luke* 1:36). This interpretation was popular among Christians, still mentioned by the monk Epiphanius (*The Holy City and the Holy Places* 2.18 in Wilkinson 1977: 117) in the 6th or 7th century. However, the location of the Christian martyr's relics among the Temple ruins was not endorsed by theologians. When dealing with the difficulties of identifying the Zachariah mentioned in the Gospels (Gallagher 2014: 129–131), Jerome denied that he was the father of John and wrote that:

> Rather simple brothers point out the reddish stones among the ruins of the sanctuary and the altar, or at the exit of the gates which led to Siloam. They think these were stained by the blood of Zechariah. We should not condemn their error, because it arises from their faith and from the malice of the Jews. (*Commentary on Matthew* 23.35–36)

Jerome thus accused Jews of purposefully deceiving Christian visitors. Even if Jerome's criticism could only stem from his own incredulity, he seems generally hostile to the idea that the former Temple could hold any material significance for Christians, because it would lead them to revere a spot located within a Jewish ritual space. If Christians were presented with evidence that they beheld the place of Zechariah's death, they may feel a sense of kinship with those Jews who were lamenting nearby. For indeed, this Zachariah had been a Jewish high priest and, at the time of his death, was mourned in the same manner as Jews now mourned their Temple.

A similar phenomenon occurred for James 'the Lesser' who, according to a Christian tradition recounted by many – including Eusebius and Jerome – was thrown from the pinnacle (*pterygion*) of the Temple where he was teaching. He was stoned, killed by a blow in the head and buried on the spot 'near the Temple (*naos*), where his stele [could] still be seen' during the 2nd century (Hegesippus quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.12–18). However, even when early pilgrims recorded seeing a pinnacle among the ruins, they did not connect it with James's martyrdom. Only in the early 6th century did the pilgrim Theodosius (*The Topography of the Holy Land* 9 in Wilkinson 1977: 66) mention seeing a tomb of James: it was located on the slope of the Mount of Olives, which by this time had become an entirely Christianized space (Wilkinson 1977: 166–167; Walker 1990: 199–234). Theodosius claimed that this tomb had been erected by James to hold the relics of Zechariah before he was himself laid to rest there; but the location of these martyrs' shrines was disputed. Jerome knew that some people showed the tomb of James on the Mount of Olives but considered them mistaken (*On Illustrious Men* 2). Moreover, at some point during the 4th or 5th century CE, the tomb of Zechariah was identified with a 1st century CE funeral monument located below the Temple, in the Kidron valley, as attested by a Greek inscription reading 'Tomb of Zechariah, martyr, very pious priest' (Puech and Zias 2003).

Christian theologians denied that any place of shared interest could be found among the Temple ruins. In 333, the Bordeaux pilgrim identified within the Temple compound the palace of Hezekiah, an 8th-century BCE Biblical king who was recognized as a model of piety, but Jerome (*Commentary*

on Isaiah 38.4–8) denied it. Any landmark and architectural element of Christian significance that, on account of early literature, should be among the Temple ruins, was progressively removed and located inside theologically safe Christian ritual spaces. According to the Piacenza pilgrim (*Itinerary* 22, v174 in Wilkinson 1977: 83–84), in the late 6th century, the cornerstone rejected by the Temple's builders, which the Bordeaux pilgrim had identified among the ruins two and a half centuries earlier, had actually been displaced by Jesus himself, who had put it in the house of James the Lesser, now the church of Holy Sion. The Piacenza pilgrim stated that people held the stone in their hands and could hear a crowd when putting it to their ear: such a claim illustrates the Christian satisfaction at owning such artefacts for themselves. Additionally, every single Jewish tradition about the Temple's location was transferred to Golgotha, at the Martyrium or at the Church of the Anastasis, the 'new Jerusalem' which had been constructed 'opposite the old one' – that is to say opposite the Temple – according to Eusebius (*Life of Constantine* 3.33). The early 6th century anonymous *Breviarus* (Wilkinson 1977: 60) stated that Adam was created on Golgotha; already in the 4th century CE, Epiphanius of Salamis (*Panarion* 4.6.5) thought that the skull of Adam had been found there, a notion entertained by Jerome (*Letter* 46.3) before he finally disapproved of it (*Commentary on Matthew* 27.33). Similarly, Golgotha was identified as the Biblical mount Moriah, where Abraham bound Isaac (Theodosius, *The Topography of the Holy Land* 141; Piacenza pilgrim, *Itinerary* 19, v172 in Wilkinson 1977: 65–83). This theological and spatial transfer from the Temple was supported by a ritual transfer: in the late 4th century, the dedication of the churches of the Anastasis and of the Martyrium was commemorated during the *Encaenia*, a festival explicitly modelled after the Biblical episode of Solomon's dedication of the Temple, with the same length (*Egeria's Travel*, 48.2–49.1). The very name of the festival, *Encaenia,* is a Latin transliteration from the Greek *egkainia*, which, in the fourth Gospel (*John* 10:22), designates the Jewish festival commemorating the Temple's 're-consecration' (in Hebrew, *Hanukkah*) under the Hasmoneans in 165/164 BCE. As for episodes of Jesus's life which took place inside the Temple compound, they were commemorated elsewhere: the presentation of Jesus at the Temple, when his parents offered sacrifice and he was recognized as the Messiah by Simon and the prophetess Anna (*Luke* 2:22–40), was celebrated on the 40th day after Epiphany at either the Anastasis or the Martyrium (*Egeria's Travels* 26; *Armenian Lectionary* 13 in Wilkinson 1973: 263) where the corresponding passage from the *Gospel of Luke* was read. As opposed to most Christian pilgrims, Egeria, who attended this feast c. 380 CE and whose purpose was solely liturgical, never went to visit the Temple ruins (Limor 2014: 46).

The rapidly univocal definition of the Temple ruins as a radically non-ritual space appears to have been a unique Christian spatial strategy in Antiquity. Usually, sites of Jewish significance were Christianized by the invention – discovery or transfer – of martyrs' relics on the same spot (Lander 2017), as evidenced, for example, by the deposition of the otherwise unknown martyr Helpidius in the 'house of Abraham' in Carrhae (Harran, nowadays in Turkey) (*Egeria's Travels* 20.5). The former Temple's site is an exception: Christians conceived it as an integrally Jewish ritual space, and, as such, obsolete, not worthy of being represented on the 6th century Madaba mosaic map of the Holy Land (Avi-Yonah 1954: 59). This also explains why several Christian accounts of failed Temple restorations located either synagogues or active 'temples' (Gregory of Nazianzus, *Discourse* 5.3) on the site, even though there was none from the suppression of the second Jewish revolt until at least the Sassanid conquest of the city in 614 CE.

Explanatory hypotheses, potential generalisations, possible relations to other factors

The fate of the former Jewish Temple compound during the late Roman Empire appears to have been an exception in many ways. According to Christian sources, it was open to the public, but forbidden to a specific group defined on a religious criterion. The original interdiction, ascribed to Hadrian, can only be understood as a political punishment for the revolt and a way to ensure that the Temple would not be rebuilt. The upholding or reinstallation of this interdict by Christian emperors – it was ascribed to Constantine by the 10th-century patriarch Eutychius (*Annals* 1.466) – was enacted on a theological basis, devised to stage the demise of the Jews. As such, it fits into Robert Hayden's model of 'antagonistic tolerance' (2002). Christian authorities organized a limited spatial tolerance designed to evidence their domination. Even if the site itself was not located within the official city limits, this strategy only made sense in an urban setting, where Christians could see the Jews and witness the constraints that weighted on their ritual performance. The former Temple compound was a place of oppositional creation of competing religious spaces. The Christian space was elaborated against a pre-existing Jewish theological and ritual space, and, as a result, makes for a specific case of non-ritualistic but purely theological spatial appropriation. Simultaneously, a new Jewish space was created by the introduction of on-site non-sacrificial rituals. This construct resulted from a legal constraint – the impossibility of rebuilding the Temple – and served to preserve the visibility of Judaism in a now Christian city. While doing so, the Rabbinic movement expanded the ritual space of the 'Temple Mount', maintaining its centrality while making it ubiquitous. These two simultaneous religious dynamics were the first step in the religious co-production (Heyden 2022) of the site between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Fußnoten

1
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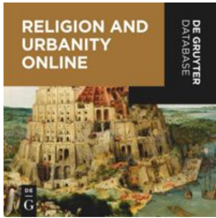

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