

Jerusalem and Other Holy Places as Foci of Multireligious and Ideological Confrontation

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Introduction

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Archibald L.H.M. van Wieringen*

It seems that the concept of a holy place is as old as the concept of religion itself, if not older. Holy places are a source for empowerment, but they are also a major ground for confrontations between cultures and ethnic groups. This volume is not intended to blur conflicts, but rather to observe and analyse them from the perspective of cultural studies.

Although holiness is an abstract concept, the holy place is a concrete one. We tend to attribute holiness to a certain geographical location, and this location tends to become a space which transcends human lives and human time. Under the impression that the 21st century has ushered in a new and increased interest in the idea of holiness and the dialogue between the holy and the sacred, this volume wishes to propose a contribution to the subject dedicated to the geographical and metaphysical aspects of this issue.

Holy places play a leading role in many religious traditions. Most important to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Jerusalem is considered to be a holy city and a religious centre that contains numerous sacred places. Occupying a place of pride in the experience of believers, the sacred places commemorate historical events or venerate awe-inspiring features in nature.

Although at first it appears that holy places are only significant to the adherents of a specific religion and not to those of other beliefs, upon closer investigation the matter is more complex. Often a holy place seeks to obscure an earlier or simultaneous veneration of the same spot by a different religion.

Holy places continue to display a multi-religious character despite religious and political efforts to obscure that fact. Curiously, despite the antagonism that often exists between two religions, a site's sanctification by one religion seems to attract veneration by another. Apparently, the rejection of holy places by one religion does not always lead to physical distancing by another.

This volume is the outcome of a multi-disciplinary international conference that took place at the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem in May 2018, with the participation of Israeli, American, and Dutch scholars. The fields of interest which were represented were Jewish thought, anthropology, geography, Jewish literature, biblical studies, rabbinic studies, liturgy studies, communication studies, Israel studies, and Islam studies.

This is the 37th volume which has been published in the Jewish and Christian Perspectives series of Brill publishing house. This project has been ongoing for over 15 years, dealing with cultural aspects of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam and their continuing interaction. We hope that the articles in this volume will contribute to the study of holy places as a focus of interest for varied disciplines.

Contents of the Volume

This volume comprises eighteen articles. Four of them focus on sacred sites in the Netherlands, two on sacred sites in Israel, and one on a sacred site in Asia Minor. One deals with a current museum, one with PC games, and one with art. The other eight articles focus on literary writings. This wide spectrum of cultural phenomena and their interpretation demonstrates the interest in holy places by the scholarly community in our days.

Doron Bar discusses the attitude towards the graves of the Zionist leaders. In his article he argues that the diminished attention accorded to sites associated with the Zionist past is a result of the many changes that Israeli society has undergone in the past few decades. During the early years of statehood there was a strong need to bind together the different communities gathered from the Diaspora, and civic holy sites—many of them tombs of Zionist visionaries and heroes—were used as a powerful tool to create national empathy and forge national identity. More recently, however, as Israelis feel more secure as a society, they no longer need this Zionist “cult” and sites such as Mount Herzl are almost devoid of pilgrims.

On dealing with Nazareth, Cana, Kursi (= Gergesa), Bethsaida, Korazim and Capernaum, places which are mentioned in the Gospels where Jesus is reported to have worked miracles, Eyal Ben-Eliyahu is of the opinion that this is the reason why these evolved into sites of Christian pilgrimage during the Byzantine period. Jews lived in all of these places, but the mention of these settlements is very limited or non-existent in rabbinic literature. This is not a mere coincidence. The evolution of spaces in the land of Israel as sacred to Christianity and the phenomenon of pilgrimage to sites in which miracles were attributed to Jesus reflected the Christianisation of the Galilee. This is the backdrop to the sages’ deliberate strategy of ignoring these sites in rabbinic literature.

Frank G. Bosman notes that the PC games *The Talos Principle* and *The Turing Test* combine the ludological form of the maze, intended to prevent reaching the end, with the narratological form of the labyrinth, intended to stimulate

the player to reflect upon his/her life. For gamers, these games function as postmodern pilgrimages in search for the experience of holiness.

Katia Cytryn-Silverman discusses the Dome of the Rock from the perspective of art and architecture and in light of its historical and mythological context. By tightly linking the Rock to biblical figures such as Adam and Abraham, who are both also identified with the construction of the Kaaba, Jerusalem became not third in importance for Islam after Mecca and Medina, but at least an equal to the site towards which all Muslims pray.

Steven Fine considers questions of multi-religious and ideological confrontation in regard to the holy concerning the Sardis synagogue. This synagogue stands as a monument of a wealthy, powerful, and well-integrated Jewish community of a kind that scarcely existed throughout Jewish history until most recent times. It reflects the status of Jews in the very centre of Roman Sardis, apparently having no ambiguity or insecurity. Fine claims that we do not have enough evidence for the life of this community to judge whether it suffered confrontations. What is clear, however, is that whatever problems did come along down the road, the Jewish community at Sardis—with its “cathedral synagogue”—withstood them, and that the decline of this distinctly Jewish holy place was part and parcel of the destruction of Sardis by the invading Sasanians in 616 CE.

David Frankel focuses on Ps 47 as having a major role in Sigmund Mowinckel’s famous and controversial hypothesis concerning the existence of an ancient Israelite New Year festival of divine enthronement. Although Ps 47 was differently interpreted by the early religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity, the author suggests that it must be read in its original context. This shows that it combines a strong sense of political nationalism with a robust and inclusive universalistic impulse.

Pieter B. Hartog explores the connection between sacred spaces, the cultural and religious identities of their visitors, and ideals of universal knowledge in the early Roman Empire. Hartog argues that visits to sacred spaces activated aspects of the multi-faceted identities of their visitors that would not, or less easily, have been activated elsewhere. These aspects often appeal to an ideal of universal knowledge, as literary works from the early Roman Empire could represent sacred spaces as loci of universal wisdom. As a result, these sacred spaces obtained a transformative potential that stimulated their visitors to embrace global wisdom and to construct a localised cultural or religious identity for themselves. The results of this study and the theoretical framework it adopts challenges the distinction between “Judaean,” “Christian,” “Greek,” and other groups, and the apologetic readings that imply such distinctions. The message of Christ, as Luke’s Paul formulates it, is a multi-layered and

context-dependent global *mélange* that takes up elements from a wide range of other traditions in the Roman Empire without implying that these other traditions have become invalid with the advent of Christianity, even if they have been revealed to provide only partial wisdom.

Willem Jan de Hek describes a public ritual that has taken place in the heart of the Oosterpark neighbourhood in Amsterdam since 2012. This ritual was designed for, and has been annually organized at, this particular location, taking into account its historical context. De Hek uses the public ritual at Kastanjeplein as a case-study to illustrate how sacredness can be seen as a dynamic concept. Sacredness is experienced in the dynamical and complex interaction between the attribution of otherworldly meaning and value to an urban environment on the one hand, and certain situational typologies of sacred place on the other. De Hek illustrates how sensing the sacred in the everyday world seems to relate to the experience of the fulfilment of emotive human desires, resulting in the attribution of otherworldly meaning and value to the environment in which the experience occurred.

Robin B. ten Hoopen notes that the Eden narrative in Gen 2:4–3:24 does not contain explicit references to a temple, sacredness or holiness. It might thus come as a surprise that both ancient and more recent interpretations of this narrative attest that the garden in Eden is a sanctuary, a depiction that implies concerns about holiness and purity. His article discusses whether the idea of the garden in Eden as a holy place was already part of the Eden narrative as it is found in the book of Genesis or should be seen as part of the reception history of the story, founded on a desire to connect the garden and the temple in Jerusalem. Particular attention is given to Ancient Near Eastern sources that have been used to contextualize and interpret the story. This illustrates how this holy place has become a metaphorical place of ideological confrontation.

Tamar Kadari and Gila Vachman contribute to the understanding of the importance of Jerusalem and Hebron as foci of pilgrimage during the early Islamic period by analysing an 11th-century addition to MS Oxford Bodleian library 102 featuring midrash Song of Songs Rabbah. On the basis of the presence of the name Elijah, the term “the poor of Jerusalem,” and the mention of the Cave in Jerusalem and the Cave of Machpelah, Kadari and Vachman conclude that this is a late addition to the midrash.

Gert van Klinken deals with the impact of secularization in Dutch society, which has found its way into current school programs. Thus, the perception of holy places shows a shift away from Christianity to pre-Christian or pagan roots of holy sites. The interpretation of holy sites is moving away from a Christian interpretation of holiness towards a vindication of secular principles of human bonding. As this trend is reflected in the curriculum of

secondary schools, the traditional exposition of Christianisation is becoming hard to maintain. A modern treatment of the subject requires both a careful assessment of material (archaeological) data and a willingness to explore non-religious explanations of what was formerly understood as a clash between two sets of religious beliefs (Christianity and paganism).

Shulamit Laderman explores a selection of works of art that describe Jerusalem in light of Maurice Halbwachs's theory of collective memory. Viewing Jewish, Christian, and Islamic artistic images of cultural memories helps her to understand the way in which Jerusalem has been visualized not as a reflection of how the city actually appeared throughout different periods, but rather as how it was perceived by artists, especially during periods in which they had no physical access to the city. The collective memory of Jerusalem in Jewish artistic works is based on the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem and the desire to preserve the memory of the Temple as a symbol of God's presence. The collective memory of Jerusalem for Christians is grounded in the events surrounding Jesus's life and death that became signs of his divine nature, and, in time, were hallowed, with Jerusalem being thought of as the hub of the universe and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as its centre. The collective memory of Jerusalem for Muslims is influenced by concepts such as the *'even ha-shtiya*, upon which the Dome of the Rock was built.

Leon Mock raises the question as to whether and how a religious building can be re-used by another religious tradition. He describes a recent case of converting a church building into a synagogue in Amstelveen, the Netherlands. This case was commented upon by two authors of orthodox rabbinic responsa, a rabbi of the orthodox Dutch Jewish Community, and the other from Israel. Mock analyses their arguments so as to see what their perspectives are on Christianity from a halakhic standpoint, and whether the cultural background has some influence on the discourse.

Eric Ottenheim is of the opinion that the museum "Inn of the Good Samaritan" in the Judaeen Desert stages an impressive choreography of plurality of cultures and religions, inculcating civic ethos using an alleged local story. Samaritan, Christian, and Jewish culture are all visibly presented in such ways as to create a multi-religious context buttressing the parable's message of how to become a neighbour. Moreover, the performance of the Christian parable in the museum reclaims it as local culture and as part of early Jewish heritage, abandoning notions of theological supremacy.

Eyal Regev discusses two texts which deal with the Temple and sacredness—the biblical book of Psalms and the Temple Scroll found in cave 11 in Qumran. He argues that different people with different ideologies or agendas may experience the same geographical sacred space in very different ways. A holy place

is not merely a site to which people ascribe sacred traditions and rites, but it is rather a space to which people attach meaning in various ways, even within the same religious tradition.

Lieve M. Teugels focuses on the religious repurposing of synagogues. In most cases in the Netherlands, this means that the synagogues came to be used as churches or for other activities related to Christian religious communities. In the case of the great synagogue of The Hague, which is at the centre of her contribution, the synagogue was converted into a mosque. She uses the anthropological term “iconic field” to describe the various factors at work in the emotional reactions of old and new congregants, and neighbours, with respect to the repurposing of religious buildings. This concept provides a vision of holiness that is related more to emotions than to rules.

Vered Tohar focuses on Jewish folktales describing the miraculous wandering of the remains of the holy Temple all over the land of Israel, the Middle East and Europe, spreading holiness by serving as the basis for new synagogues. These narrative traditions confirm a primeval connection between the concepts of holiness, space, and symbolic object in Jewish culture.

Archibald L.H.M. van Wieringen describes how Jerusalem is made present in biblical texts without being mentioned, by using an alternative expression, or by being a part of a technical expression. This leads to the conclusion that the textual Jerusalem does not fully coincide with the historical Jerusalem. A reading of sacred texts in which the world of the text has a one-to-one relation with the world outside the text can be considered to be a kind of theological fundamentalism.

Lastly, the editors express their gratitude to Maurits Sinninghe Damsté, who has corrected the English of this volume.

Many of the contributions to this volume are multi-disciplinary and deal with issues of holiness from a diachronic perspective. Moreover, most of the articles refer in one way or another to Jerusalem as a focus of holiness for all three monotheistic religions. As the title of the volume suggests, Jerusalem is the principal subject of nearly all the essays. The city always has been and continues to be the central protagonist in the major drama of holy space in the three monotheistic religions, which is why we decided to arrange the eighteen articles in alphabetical order. If we had divided them into artificially devised sections, the reader would have missed the diversity and complexity that characterize each article and the volume as a whole. Thus, we preferred to skip the obvious and to challenge the expected. We prefer to let the reader roam among the subjects, the disciplines, and the areas of discussion. We see the reader of this volume as one who wanders along the timeline and seeks to experience

an intellectual journey through the texts and their scholarly interpretations. Reading the volume this way will endow the reader with the essence of the mystery and transcendental features that create holy spaces. This kind of reading emphasises that, taken together, the contributions to this volume create one big picture built up of many small details.

This collective research not only demonstrates the variety in the study of holy places, but also the flexibility of the concept of holiness through geographic and historic aspects. From a diachronic perspective, holiness is an always changing idea, helping to shape group identities all the way from ancient times to our days.