

# Erasure: eliminating the space of late ancient Judaism

Annabel Wharton

Antichlore  
Antichrist  
Antichristendom  
Antichristian  
Antichristianism  
Antichristianity  
Antichristianize  
Antichristianized  
Antichristianly  
Antichronical...  
Antiscript  
Antiscriptural  
Antiscripturian  
Antiscripturism  
Antiscripturist  
Antiscrofulous  
Antisepalous  
Antisepsis  
Antiseptic<sup>1</sup>

## Erasure: eliminating the space of late ancient Judaism<sup>2</sup>

The ##### was the center of Jewish religious life.

Erasure is a complex performance, revealing power on many different levels. Erasure is the act of rubbing or scraping out, of removing from existence. Most obviously, the act establishes the eraser's authority to suppress. But erasure leaves a mark that frustrates the gesture and reverses its effect. The mark of erasure preserves an emptiness that was once full, an absence that demands restitution, a void that generates possible meanings. Although whatever is introduced into the lacuna never has the same stability as the original, the mark of erasure records and confirms the threat of that which was once present. Erasing, to be sure, exhibits control; it demonstrates the power to destabilize. But in many instances erasure also witnesses the initiating power of the absent. Two forces, however unequal, are at play.

The politics of erasure are graphically demonstrated by a document obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (fig. 90).<sup>3</sup> Jean Seberg, a white actress and Black Panther sympathizer, was harassed to death by the F.B.I. This letter from the F.B.I. file was used by the artist, M. Kramer, in depicting an installation critical of the brutal racism of the state in the late 1960s and 1970s. The visually most compelling aspect of the work is its deletions. Instead of masking the repressive actions of authority, marks of erasure reveal it. The gaps provide the subject of persecution with a space for continued resistance.

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- 1 Alphabetical listing from the *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford 1971) vol. 1.366, 375.
  - 2 Erasure is a subject which has attracted considerable theoretical interest, especially since the appearance of J. Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris 1967 = *Of grammatology*, Baltimore 1974). In art-history, the notion of erasure has been considered by such scholars as M. Fried (but see B. Brown, "Writing, race, and erasure: Michael Fried and the scene of erasure," *Critical Inquiry* 18.2 [1992] 387-402, for what is really being erased.) More relevant to this paper is J. R. Branham, "Sacred space under erasure in ancient synagogues and early churches," *ArtB* 74 (1992) 375-94, which considers the appropriation of the sacrality of the destroyed Temple by synagogues and churches. Here I am more concerned with the act of erasing as an act of material, physical violence. More in this vein is work like that of K. Biddick, "Paper Jews: Inscription/ethnicity/ethnography," *ArtB* 78 (1996) 594-99. Of related interest now is H. L. Ecker, "The conversion of mosques to synagogues in Seville: The case of the Mezquita de la Judería," *Gesta* 36.2 (1997) 190-207.
  - 3 M. Kramer, *Essential documents: The F.B.I. file on Jean Seberg* (New York 1979). I might equally well have begun with a Roman example of *damnatio memoriae*.

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT  
Memorandum

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI (100-3-104-34) DATE: 10/22/64

FROM : SAC, NEW YORK (100-129002) (b)(1)

SUBJECT: COMMUNIST PARTY, USA  
COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM  
IS - C

ReBulet 10/2/64, which instructs the NYO to consider the possible development of sources at the "New York Times" and "Esquire" magazine, or other means of furnishing data to these publications in an effort to counteract or more accurately portray any article planned on the subject of communism.

*Handwritten:* [unclear] papers

[Large redacted block of text]

(b)(1)  
(b)(2)  
(b)(7)(C)  
(b)(7)(D)

2 - Bureau (RM)  
1 - New York

KRB:Jc  
(3)

REC-46 (b)(1)

REC-52

OCT 23 1964

Buy U.S. Savings Bonds Regularly on the Payroll Savings Plan

NY 100-129002

(b)(1)

Careful consideration has been given to the selection of the person we would attempt to develop as a source. There are 17 Security Index subjects employed by the "New York Times", in low level positions, mostly as proofreaders. In addition, [redacted] is listed on a caution card in the NYO. He wrote a critical review of one of the Director's books.

(b)(7)(C)

The NYO does not recommend contacting [redacted] who is writing the article to appear 10/27/64, as he may be identical with [redacted]. New York has no recent information on either of these subjects but the latter was [redacted] and the former was a [redacted] Communist, so either may be identical with the [redacted] now employed by the Times.

(b)(7)(C)

The NYO believes the most logical person to approach for development as a source would be [redacted]

(b)(7)(C)

[redacted] was found to be friendly and cooperative. In addition, he would be in a position to use information supplied by us without the approval or knowledge of anyone else.

There are many identical references to [redacted] in the NYO indices that apparently came about as a result of his employment. These references are as follows:

(b)(7)(C)

[Large redacted block of text]

(b)(1)  
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(b)(7)(C)  
(b)(7)(D)

Fig. 90. Margia Kramer, *Essential Documents, The F.B.I. File on Jean Seberg* (New York 1979).

This article investigates the erasure of late ancient Jewish space as an expression of political and religious hegemony. It identifies the different ideological grounds for destruction of different historical moments.<sup>4</sup> At the core of the paper are two observations: that the will to eliminate sites of Otherness corresponds to the threat that the Other poses to the culturally dominant, and that the act of erasure writes the threat of the Other differently into the landscape. A consideration of the varieties of destruction of the space of the Other nuances an understanding of the forms of the Other's power.

The erasure that most radically affected late ancient Judaism was that of the Temple in Jerusalem. Toward the end of the 1st c. B.C.E., Herod the Great constructed the massive successor to the Solomonic and Hasmonean Temples.<sup>5</sup> The Holy Land Hotel model of Jerusalem at the time of Herod exhibits the Temple's domination of the city (fig. 91). For Jews, the Temple was a site of unparalleled sacredness, the center of religious life and an unquestioned sign of the Jewish state. "Temple", for example, might easily fill the omission in my opening sentence, "The ##### was the center of Jewish religious life." In 66 of the current era, the Jews revolted against Rome; in the process of suppressing the uprising, Herod's new temple was devastated. In Rome this void was rendered as a permanent spectacle: the great marble reliefs of the

4 Ideology is a loaded term. I use "ideology" in this paper to refer to habits of thought that naturalize idiosyncratic social practice and mask the structures of authority which those social practices empower.  
5 For various aspects of the Temple's meaning, see the collection of essays edited by W. Horbury, *Templum amicitiae, essays on the Second Temple presented to Ernest Bammel* (JSNT suppl. 48, 1990). For a useful discussion of Jewish reactions to the destruction of the Temple, see S. J. D. Cohen, "The destruction: From scripture to Midrash," *Prooftexts* 2 (1982) 18-39.



Fig. 91. Jerusalem, Holy Land Hotel model of Jerusalem at the time of Herod.

Arch of Titus display booty from the absent Temple, including its great menorah.<sup>6</sup> A second Jewish revolt was suppressed between 132 and 135. Hadrian also marked his conquest through erasure. Jerusalem itself was eliminated. Its name was eradicated, all Jews were expelled from the city upon pain of death, its sacred center desolated. The destruction by the Romans of both the Jewish Temple and the Jewish State assured the identity of the two; the absence of the one stood for the absence of the other until the 20th c. — for many within the Jewish radical religious right it still does. The Temple was left a ruin. I have argued elsewhere that the emptiness of the Temple Mount was maintained by the Romans as a potent, permanent sign of the defeat of a rebellious people.<sup>7</sup> The void of the Temple was a *military* and *political* manifestation of Roman power; it marked the elimination of the *military* and *political* threat of the Jews to the Roman empire. Representations of the suppression of sites of revolt and conquest had long been constitutive of the ideology of Roman imperial authority.<sup>8</sup> The permanent, public depiction in Rome of Jewish defeat in Palestine was a conventional reification of state power. To emphasize the absence of the great ancient center of the defeated Jews, Hadrian constructed a new, gentile city on the old city's west hills, which he dedicated to himself and Jupiter Capitolinus, naming it *Colonia Aelia Capitolina* (fig. 92).

6 For a careful description and reconstruction of the *spolia*, see L. Yarden, *The spoils of Jerusalem on the Arch of Titus, a re-investigation* (Stockholm 1991).

7 A. Wharton, *Refiguring the post classical city, Dura Europos, Jerash, Jerusalem and Ravenna* (New York 1995) 98-100. For a text-based argument for the absence of a Roman temple on the site, Y. Z. Eliav, "Hadrian's actions in the Jerusalem Temple Mount according to Cassius Dio and Xiphilini Manus," *JSQ* 4.2 (1997) 125-44.

8 For insights into the ideological character of Roman triumphs, see D. Favro, "The street triumphant: The urban impact of Roman triumphal parades," in Z. Çelik, D. Favro and R. Ingersol (edd.), *Streets: Critical perspectives on public space* (Berkeley 1994) 165-76. My colleague S. Cormack suggests that the scenes from the Arch of Septimius Severus in Rome are an excellent example of the Roman use of destruction as propaganda: cf. R. Brilliant, *The Arch of Septimius Severus in the Roman Forum* (MAAR 29, 1967).



Fig. 92. Plan of Jerusalem.

The ideological significance of the Temple's absence shifted with the advent of Constantine, the first militantly Christian emperor, and with the consequent cultural dominance of Christianity. In 324, Constantine defeated his last serious rival for imperial power, Licinius, uniting the E and W parts of the empire under his control. Among the extensive building projects undertaken by Constantine in the cities of the East was the urban renewal of Aelia as a New Jerusalem. In addition to three large foundations on the periphery of the city, Constantine constructed a new cathedral church, commonly titled the Basilica of Constantine, on Hadrian's main forum. This structure also came to be identified as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre because, in the process of construction, the empty tomb from which Jesus reportedly ascended to heaven was miraculously discovered.<sup>9</sup> The Church of the Holy Sepulchre marked the new sacred center of the New Jerusalem. The Temple Mount was left conspicuously empty; the Temple remained a ruin — an ever-present reminder of the Jews' defeat. But the meanings of this defeat shifted. With the advent of Constantine and the new dominance of Christianity, the absence of the Jewish Temple came to represent religious displacement as well as military and political ruination. The physical juxtaposition of the dynamism of the new Christian nexus of the sacred and the vacant silence of the sacred center of the Jews was a powerful and present index of the dramatic relocation of *sacred* authority.

<sup>9</sup> Most recently, M. Biddle, *The tomb of Christ* (Stroud 1999); see also A. Wharton, "The baptistery of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the politics of sacred landscape," *DOP* 46 (1992) 313-25.

The importance to Christian theologians of maintaining the space of the Temple Mount as erased is demonstrated by the ubiquitousness of references to the event from late antiquity through early modernity.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the destruction of the Temple was perhaps the most familiar proof of God's disavowal of the Jews and the transference of his covenant to Christians in Early Christian literature. A virulent form of the argument in the Greek East is presented by John Chrysostom, priest at Antioch and later Archbishop of Constantinople. The destroyed Temple stands at the core of his Discourse 5 in *Adversus Iudaeos*:

Even now, if you go into Jerusalem, you will see the exposed foundations .... Consider how conspicuous our victory is .... Do you wish me to bring forward against you other prophets who clearly state the same fact, namely that your religion will come to an end, that ours will flourish and spread the message of Christ to every corner of the world?<sup>11</sup>

Western theologians also refer to the destruction of the Temple as proof of the Jews' loss of their special covenant with God:<sup>12</sup>

[T]he subsequent massive destruction under a Roman leader, in which temple, citizen, city and sacred objects were annihilated, taught this lesson. Indeed it was right that the Jewish race, who

10 The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem remained an important part of the argument for the Christian supersession of Judaism into modernity. A revealing example appears in Thomas Erskine's defense of reason at the trial of Thomas Williams. In defending Williams against the charge of treason for his publication of Tom Paine's "godless" *Age of reason*, Erskine argued that the treatise offers no threat to Christianity; the only necessary proof of the truth of Christianity occurred with the destruction of Jerusalem.

[Christian truth] should be gradually established by the irresistible evidence of super-human prophecy; which rendered the history of the Jewish nation most material in the manner the Old Testament has recorded it, of which surely the destruction of their [the Jews'] temple and the extinction of their government are most memorable instances; both having happened as predicted, *after the Messiah had come*: nor could imperial power [i.e., Julian], though purposely exerted to disgrace the prophecy, raise one stone upon another of the structure that had been destroyed ...

[T]he universal dispersion of the Jews throughout the world, their unexampled sufferings and their invariably distinguishing characteristics when compared with the histories of all other nations ... would be amply sufficient to support the truths of the Christian religion if every other record of testimony were sunk to the very bottom of the sea. [T. B. Howell and T. J. Howell, *A complete collection of state trials and proceedings for high treason and other crimes and misdemeanors from the earliest period to ... the present time*, vol. 26 (London 1819) 700, 702.]

Popular discussions of the veracity of Christian prophecy make the same claim, as evidenced in the title of G. P. Holford's best-seller of the early 19th c., *The destruction of Jerusalem, an absolute and irresistible proof of the divine origin of Christianity, including a narrative of the calamities which befell the Jews, so far as they tend to verify Our Lord's predictions relative to that event. With a brief description of the city and temple*. The text confirms the title:

In order to demonstrate the accomplishment of these predictions [Luke 21.24], we appeal, therefore, to universal history, and to every country under heaven. The undisputed facts are, that Jerusalem has not since been in possession of the Jews ... It has never regained its former distinction and prosperity ... The Jews themselves, still miraculously preserved a distinct people, are, as we see, scattered over the whole earth, invigorating the faith of the Christian, flashing conviction in the face of the infidel, and constituting a universal, permanent, and invincible evidence of the truth of Christianity. (6th American ed., Frankford, PA 1814 [first published in London in 1805] 102-5)

The persuasiveness of this theological argument has been eroded by modern skepticism about prophecy and by the Zionist establishment of a Jewish state.

11 *Adv. Iud.* 5.11-12; for the Greek text see PG 48.901; translation slightly modified from P. Harkins, *John Chrysostom, discourses against Judaizing Christians* (Washington, D.C. 1977) 5.11.10-5.12.1, 140.

12 For further examples and, more generally, an overview of Christian attitudes toward the Jews in late antiquity and late-antique historiography, see J. Lieu, "History and theology in Christian views of Judaism," in J. Lieu, J. North and T. Rajak (edd.), *The Jews among pagans and Christians* (London 1992) 79-96.

rejected the sacrificed Christ as their own and through whom he was a victim, should be stripped of their abode and of the site of their ancient ritual ....<sup>13</sup>

The significance of the Temple's absence for Christian ideology is demonstrated in a particularly trenchant manner in the invented narratives of the Temple's thwarted reconstruction during the short reign of Julian the Apostate (361-363). I employ the term "invented" with care. Some earlier scholars argued that the reconstruction episode was entirely fabricated by the Church Fathers.<sup>14</sup> It is now, however, broadly recognized that Julian did, indeed, undertake the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem during his brief rule.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the written sources for the event are remarkably ambiguous and the archaeological evidence of a Julianic foundation is non-existent. As a result, the historical "truth" of the attempted restitution of the Temple does not contradict the fictiveness of its representation in the texts. A characteristic description of the occasion by Sozomen, an ecclesiastical historian writing in the early 5th c., suggests the contrived quality of these narratives.

[The Jews] sought for the most skillful artisans, collected materials, cleared the ground, and entered so earnestly upon the task, that even the women carried heaps of earth, and brought their necklaces and other female ornaments towards defraying the expense ...

When they had removed the ruins of the former building, they dug up the ground and cleared away its foundation; it is said that on the following day when they were about to lay the first foundation, a great earthquake occurred, and by the violent agitation of the earth stones were thrown up from the depths, by which those of the Jews who were engaged in the work were wounded, as likewise those who were merely looking on. The houses and public porticoes, near the site of the temple, in which they had diverted themselves, were suddenly thrown down; many were caught thereby, some perished immediately, others were found half dead and mutilated of hands or legs, others were injured in other parts of the body ...

[I]nstead of regarding this unexpected earthquake as a manifest indication that God was opposed to the re-erection of their temple, they proceeded to recommence the work. But all parties relate, that they had scarcely returned to the undertaking, when fire burst suddenly from the foundations of the temple, and consumed several of the workmen.

A more tangible and still more extraordinary prodigy ensued; suddenly the sign of the cross appeared spontaneously on the garments of the persons engaged in the undertaking.<sup>16</sup>

Violence is heavily accented in this and other descriptions of the rededication of the Temple. The pronounced viciousness of divine intervention raises suspicions about the authenticity of the accounts. The texts' brutality discloses the importance of the Temple's absence to Christian conviction. But most critically for this paper, the ferocity of these narratives is an index of the escalating hostility of Christian leadership toward Judaism. These textual assaults found expression, I believe, in the physical sites as well. The fictionalized records produced in the later 4th and in the 5th c. describing the frustrated attempt to rebuild the Temple are the literary counterparts of the all-too-real violence that was contemporaneously directed against synagogues.

For the Jews in late antiquity, the lack of the Temple was filled with the synagogue, in the sense that I might introduce "synagogue" into the sentence with which I began this argument:

13 Paulinus of Nola, *Carm.* 31.341-50 (ed. Hartel, *CSEL* 30, 319; transl. P. G. Walsh (Ancient Christian Writers 40, 320).

14 M. Adler, "The emperor Julian and the Jews," *JQR* 5 (1893) 591-651, provides an early review of the sources, including the letter attributed to Julian, committing himself to the rebuilding of the Temple. Adler argues that the story of the attempted reconstruction was fabricated by Gregory Nazianzus.

15 S. P. Brock, "The rebuilding of the Temple under Julian: A new source," *PEQ* 108 (1976) 103-7; Y. Lewy, "Julian the Apostate and the building of the Temple," *The Jerusalem Cathedra* vol. 3 (Jerusalem 1983) 70-96; G. W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (Cambridge, MA 1978) esp. Appendix 1: "The chronology of the attempt to rebuild the Jewish Temple," *ibid.* 120-22.

16 Sozomen, *HE* 5.22 (PG 67, 1284B-1285C); transl. C. D. Hartranft, *A select library of Nicene and post-Nicene fathers* 2.1 (New York 1890) 344.

“The synagogue was the center of Jewish religious life.”<sup>17</sup> The blank space in the sentence is occupied; it is again a proper sentence, but the meaning is changed. The synagogue was the place of assembly which in the absence of the Temple had become the spatial focus of local Jewish religious life.<sup>18</sup> Synagogues were central to the large and flourishing Jewish communities in late-antique cities. Synagogues were also central to the broader community of which the Jews were an integral part. Recent historical scholarship emphasizing the vigorous interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish communities has replaced the traditional, theologically-conditioned understanding of the Jews in late Roman times as isolated and oppressed.<sup>19</sup> Architecture has contributed significantly to this revisioning of the late-antique cultural landscape. Literary and archaeological sources provide evidence that Jewish structures of significant scale and prominent location were found in the cities of the empire — Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, Edessa, Sardis, Apamea.<sup>20</sup> There is no evidence of the spatial isolation of the Jews comparable to their ghettoization in the later Middle Ages. Indeed, churches and synagogues might be located in close proximity. The most impressive example in the archaeological record is presented at Capernaum, where a distinguished synagogue stood next to the impressive Christian church built to memorialize the house of Peter.<sup>21</sup> B. Brenk explains the long-term co-existence of the church and the synagogue at Capernaum in terms of the strength of the Jews within the largely Jewish town.<sup>22</sup> I might point alternatively, or in complementary fash-

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- 17 In his comments on this paper, R. Goldenberg points out that it is commonly posited that the real substitution for the Temple as sacred center was not the synagogue but the Torah. He suggests the relevance of this notion to my topic. Although Torah scrolls might be burned, the Torah or Law is not material and cannot, in contrast to buildings, be “erased”. He suggests that I might “speculate as to whether the development of Torah-centered rabbinic Judaism was in part a reaction to the growing vulnerability of the building-centered religion that [my article] presumes ...”. I am in no position for such a speculation, but including these useful remarks gives me the opportunity of a disclaimer. I certainly do not wish to suggest that “synagogue” is the only noun that might be put into this space.
- 18 For an accessible discussion of the Rabbinic response to the substitution of the synagogue for the Temple and its importance in the construction of Rabbinic power, see A. J. Avery-Peck, “Judaism without the Temple: The Mishna,” in H. W. Attridge and G. Hata (edd.), *Eusebius, Christianity and Judaism* (Detroit 1992) 409-31. For an art-historical account, see Branham (supra n.2) 375-94.
- 19 For this renewed interest in Jewish-Christian interaction, see W. A. Meeks and R. L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the first four centuries of the common era* (Missoula, MT 1978); more recently, several volumes of collected essays have appeared which consider this area, including J. Neusner and E. Frerichs (ed.), *To see ourselves as others see us* (Chico, CA 1985), and Lieu, North and Rajak (supra n.12). For a recent investigation of the archaeological evidence of a single site, L. V. Rutgers, *The Jews in late ancient Rome* (Leiden 1995). For an introduction to the earlier work done on this question, S. Krauss, “The Jews in the works of the Church Fathers,” *JQR* 6 (1893-94) 225-61, provides textual evidence of the many attractions that Jewish practice had for gentiles. The popular, theological model is embedded in the Erskine and Holford quotes above.
- 20 For a recent analysis of the relative prominence of synagogues, with bibliography, see L. Rutgers, “Diaspora synagogues: synagogue archaeology in the Greco-Roman world,” in S. Fine (ed.), *Sacred realm* (New York 1996) 67-95. Also S. J. D. Cohen, “Pagan and Christian evidence on the ancient synagogue,” in L. Levine (ed.), *The synagogue in late antiquity* (Philadelphia 1987) 159-81. More particularly, for Constantinople, where apparently the conspicuously placed synagogue was replaced in the 5th c. by the Chalkoprataia: R. Janin, *Le géographie ecclésiastique de l’empire byzantin* vol. 1.3 (Paris 1953) 246; for Edessa, H. J. W. Drijvers, “Jews and Christians at Edessa,” *JJS* 36 (1985) 88-102; for Sardis, G. M. A. Hanfmann (ed.), *Sardis from prehistoric to Roman times* (Cambridge, MA 1983) esp. 148-61, 168-90; for Apamea, the excellent article by B. Brenk, “Die Umwandlung der Synagoge von Apamea in eine Kirche. Eine mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie,” in *Tesserae. Festschrift für Josef Engemann* (*JbAC Erg.* 18, 1991) 1-25.
- 21 For Capernaum, see V. Corbo, S. Loffreda, A. Spijkerman, *La sinagoga di Cafarnao dopo gli scavi del 1969* (Jerusalem 1970); for an argument about the late date assigned by Corbo *et al.*, see G. Foerster, “Notes on recent excavations at Capernaum,” *IEJ* 21 (1971) 207-11. Also see D. Chen, “On the chronology of the ancient synagogue at Capernaum,” *ZDEP* 102 (1986) 133-43.
- 22 Brenk (supra n.20) 19.

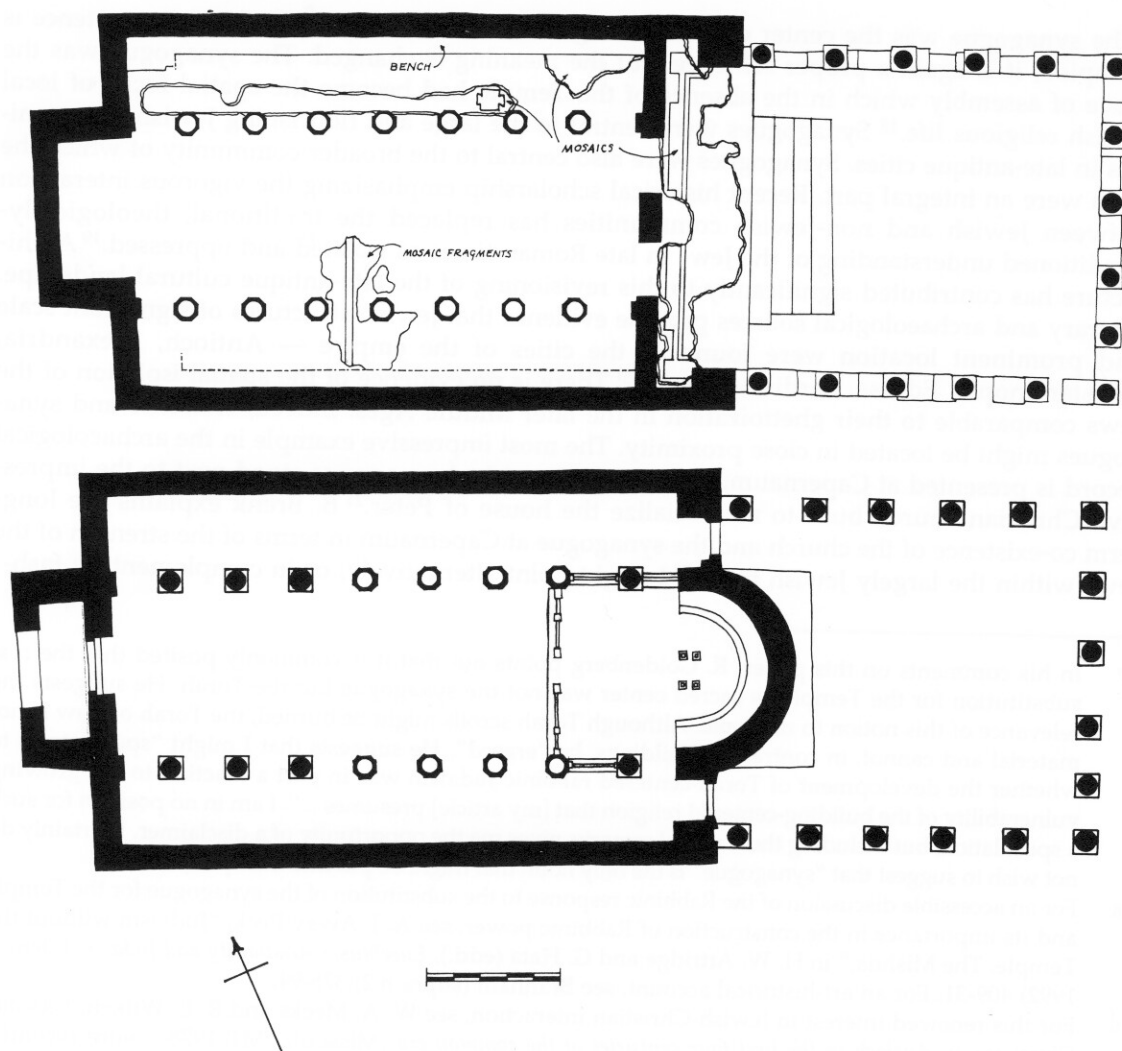


Fig. 93a (above). Jerash, synagogue, sketch plan. Fig. 93b (below) Jerash, synagogue-church, sketch plan.

ion, to the text on which the importance of the church is based: "And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught ... And immediately he [Jesus] left the synagogue, and entered the house of Simon [Peter] and Andrew ..." (Mark 1:21-29). The special identity of the site demands the proximate presence of a synagogue. Elsewhere, the close physical association of a church and a synagogue was less felicitous. For example, in Terracina the synagogue was near enough to the church so that the bishop might claim that the psalm-singing of the Jews disturbed the worship of the Christians. This he offered as the explanation of his confiscation of the synagogue in 591. The incident is recorded in the correspondence of Pope Gregory the Great, who directed the Bishop of Terracina to provide an alternative space for a new synagogue.<sup>23</sup>

The vulnerability of the late-antique synagogue and the community it served was not then the result of their isolation and inconspicuousness, but rather the consequence of their integration and prominence within the city. The synagogue at Jerash provides a model for understand-

<sup>23</sup> Pope Gregory I, *Ep.* 1.34 and 2.6 (*MGH* 1.1, ed. Ewald); S. Katz, "Pope Gregory the Great and the Jews," *JQR* 24 (1933-34) 121-22.



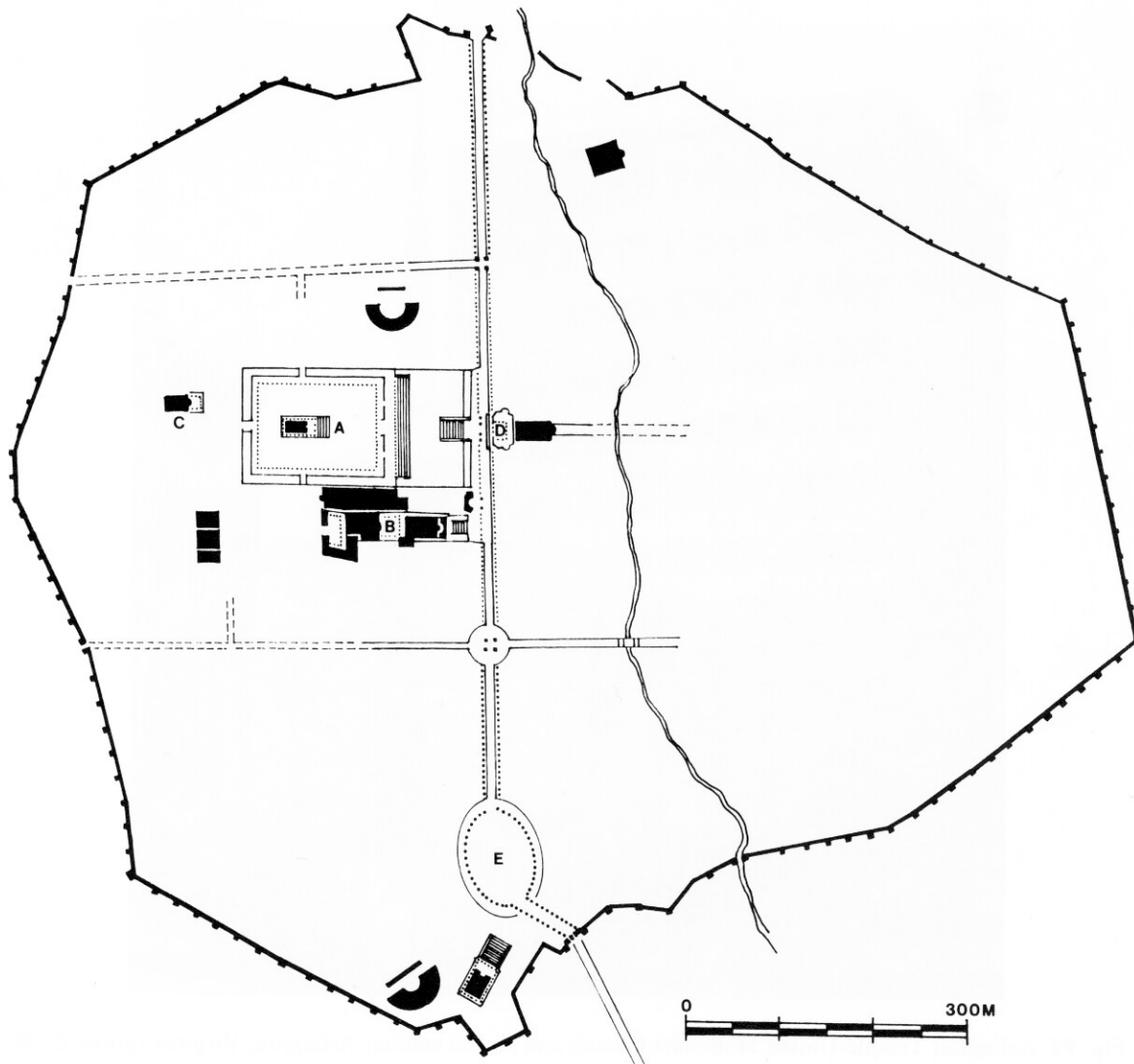


Fig. 94. Jerash, sketch plan of the city.

ing the functioning of the synagogue within the social and material fabric of the late ancient city. It also exemplifies one of the several common Christian solutions to the space of the synagogue.<sup>24</sup> The synagogue at Jerash was built probably in the later 4th or early 5th c. over the remains of an earlier structure, perhaps also a synagogue. In plan, the synagogue was a basilica with a nave and two aisles preceded by a generous courtyard and apparently culminating in a square niche for the Torah shrine (fig. 93a). This relatively large structure (nearly 25 m long and 15 m wide) was, like many synagogues, oriented toward the absent Temple in Jerusalem — that is, to the West. Judging from the surviving fragments of its mosaic floor, it was opulently decorated.<sup>25</sup> Represented in the pavement was the story of the flood: Shem, Japheth and processions of animals from the ark are arranged in three registers — birds, mammals, reptiles. The mosaic is framed by racing animals. At the entrance, facing those entering the building, were representations of a menorah, *shofar*, *etrog*, *lulav* and Torah cabinet; facing those exiting the building was a Greek inscription wishing peace to the congregation.

<sup>24</sup> J. W. Crowfoot and R. W. Hamilton, "The discovery of a synagogue at Jerash," *PEFQS* 30 (1928-29) 211-22; also in C. H. Kraeling, *Gerasa, city of the Decapolis* (New Haven 1938) 234-41.

<sup>25</sup> For the most recent publication of these mosaics, see M. Piccirillo, *The mosaics of Jordan* (Amman 1993) 290-91. Only the original Yale excavation photographs of the synagogue mosaics appear here. E. M. Meyers reports, however, that the synagogue mosaics were uncovered again after the Israeli-Jordanian peace accords were signed.



Fig. 95. Arlington Temple United Methodist Church and Exxon station, Arlington, Virginia (photo G. H. Friedman).

One remarkable aspect of the structure is its location. Like the synagogues of Apamea, Sardis, Edessa and Constantinople, the synagogue at Jerash enjoyed a particularly privileged location. But instead of occupying a place at the city-center, it was sited *above* all of the other major shrines in the city (fig. 94). According to often-articulated, but apparently-rarely-followed Rabbinic directions, synagogues were to be built at the highest point of the city.<sup>26</sup> The height of the synagogue at Jerash was ideal, not functional. Although it was located above the Temple of Artemis, the great cult complex of the goddess dominated the city, masking the synagogue's presence.<sup>27</sup> From the later 4th c. onwards, the Christian cathedral complex challenged the visual presence of the Temple, finally superseding it. Christianity's growing religious hegemony was expressed by its progressive usurpation of the city's space. By the middle of the 5th c., the Temple of Artemis was desolate; like the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, it seems to have been retained as a ruin to signify Christian conquest. By the middle of the 6th c., apparently all space of alternative religion in the city was eliminated. The synagogue was converted into a church in 530-31 (fig. 93b). Its core form and some of its architectural features, including its colonnade, were retained. But the earlier building's acknowledgment of Jerusalem

26 BT *Shabbat* 11a; cf. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prayer* 11.2. I wish to thank K. Bland for this citation. For further references, see S. Fine, *Synagogue and sanctity, the late antique Palestinian synagogue as "holy place"* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Univ., Jerusalem/New York Univ. 1993) 168-70.

27 For a general introduction to the site, with recent bibliography, see Wharton (supra n.7) chapt. 3. Still basic is Kraeling (supra n.24) esp. 234-39, 318-24, 473.

was suppressed; the structure was re-oriented, being sacralized from the east, not the west. The high-quality mosaic floor of the synagogue was also censored — covered over entirely by a few centimeters of fill and a new, poorer-quality mosaic pavement. At Jerash, erasure was by substitution.

The care with which Christians appropriated this Jewish sacred space suggests the numinous nature of the site. The sacral power of a piece of ground is a largely alien notion in turn-of-the-millennium America where the population is too transient to locate the sacred in something so stable as a topographical point. Churches now can be built on top of gas stations (fig. 95). In contrast to the present, in antiquity the force of a place was fully felt. Christians recognized the power of the synagogue and some identified that power as dangerous. The threat of the site of Jewish religious practice to some Christian leaders is clearly articulated by John Chrysostom. He reacts violently to the apparent attraction that the synagogue at Antioch had for members of his Christian congregation:

5. ... But since there are some who consider the synagogue to be a holy place, we must say a few things to them as well. Why do you reverence this place when you should disdain it, despise it and avoid it? "The Law and the books of the prophets can be found there," you say. What of it? You say, "Is it not the case that the books make the place holy?" Certainly not! This is the reason I especially hate the synagogue and avoid it, that they have the prophets but do not believe in them, that they read these books but do not accept their testimonies ...

6. ... While books do have a holiness of their own, they do not impart it to a place if those who frequent it are defiled. You should think about the synagogue in the same way. Even if there is not an idol there, demons inhabit the place. And I say this not only about the synagogue here in the city but also about the one in Daphne. For the pit of destruction there, which they call Matron's, is even more evil. For I heard that many of the faithful have gone up there to practice incubation in the shrine.<sup>28</sup>

The Church Fathers' animosity toward the Jews as expressed in such passages has been the subject of an important body of modern scholarship. Research demonstrates convincingly that Christian antagonism and the theology that it begot were a reaction to the continued vitality and attraction of Judaism during the 4th-6th c. W. Meeks and R. Wilken provide a model analysis of the relations between Jews and Christians in their demonstration of the appeal of Judaism for Christians in Antioch.<sup>29</sup> Although never explicitly argued, the material which they marshal suggests that this attraction was not intellectual or theological, but practical and material.<sup>30</sup> Ritual tradition and sacred space were the popular sites of contestation. Archaeological evidence of the synagogues of the diaspora has been cited in discussions of Jewish-Christian relations, but the centrality of the *space* of the synagogue in the attack by the Christian leadership on the Jews has not been fully appreciated.

Chrysostom's focus on the synagogue in his anti-Jewish sermons establishes space as an important element in the construction of late ancient Christian ideology and confirms the synagogue as a site of significant power. The Christian bishop does not deny the magic of the

28 John Chrysostom, *Adv. Iud.* 1 (PG 48.850-852), transl. Meeks and Wilken (supra n.19) 94-95.

29 Meeks and Wilken, *ibid.*; M. Simon, "La polémique anti-juive de S. Jean-Chrysostome et le mouvement judaïsant d'Antioche," *Mélanges Cumont, Annuaire de l'institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales* 4 (1936) 403-29; M. Simon, *Verus Israel: A study of the relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman empire (135-425)* (Oxford 1986) esp. 224-33.

30 In the same vein, Drijvers (supra n.20) 102, writes of the scene in Edessa:

The Jews at Edessa made their Christian fellow-citizens feel uncertain and often unsafe, whereas they themselves were self-confident as adherents of an old and traditional religion. As such they served as a real magnet to many Christians and gave rise to very ambivalent feelings, especially among church leaders and theologians, who warned their co-religionists against the Jewish danger with all the exuberance of traditional rhetoric ... And last but not least there were the ordinary people who went to the synagogue — Jews, many Christians and even some pagans. They at least saw the Jews as a source of help against the dangers of their lives.

synagogue's space. Apparently sick Christians even went to the synagogue to be healed through dreams.<sup>31</sup> The magic was real but, according to Chrysostom, it was generated by the forces of darkness. Chrysostom's model for understanding the attraction of the synagogue for Christians was not the doctor's office, but rather the theater or the whore-house. For Chrysostom, the synagogue was a site of insidious seduction:

What did the prophet say? "Yours was a harlot's brow, and you were resolved to show no shame" [*Jeremiah* 3:3]. A place where a prostitute offers her wares is a house of prostitution. But the synagogue is not only a house of prostitution and a theater, it is also a hideout for thieves and a den of wild animals.<sup>32</sup>

Chrysostom's sermons help explain the ambivalence with which the Christians at Jerash treated the space of the synagogue. The substitution of a synagogue by a church seems to be an acknowledgment of the place's potency.<sup>33</sup> The careful maintenance of some of the synagogue's attributes suggests that they preserved useful aspects of its ancient power; to control that power the synagogue's most dangerously Jewish aspects were censored.<sup>34</sup>

Many other synagogues were destroyed from the later 4th through the 6th c., although the subsequent history of the space is not always recoverable from the archaeological or historical record. B. Brenk has pointed out that the Christians in N Syria seem to have acted with particular violence toward the Jews.<sup>35</sup> In the Antioch of John Chrysostom, at least two synagogues were demolished in the course of the 4th and 5th c.<sup>36</sup> Synagogues were also destroyed in Apamea, Callinicum on the Euphrates and Edessa. But synagogues and their possessors were also under attack in the West.<sup>37</sup> Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, most famously exemplifies episcopal endorsement of violence against synagogues. In 388, Ambrose wrote to Theodosius, complaining about the emperor's order to rebuild the synagogue that had been burnt down at Callinicum at the instigation of the local bishop. In offering to take responsibility for the action, Ambrose smugly suggests that the synagogue in Milan was burnt down at God's direction, not his own, rather on the model of Julian's temple in Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup>

I declare that I set fire to the synagogue, at least that I gave the orders, so that there would be no building in which Christ is denied. If the objection is raised that I did not burn the synagogue here [in Milan], I answer that its burning was begun by God's judgment, and my work was at an end.<sup>39</sup>

31 For a gathering of amusing stories of dream-healings, M. Hamilton, *Incubation or the cure of disease in pagan temples and Christian churches* (St. Andrews 1906).

32 *Adv. Iud.* 1.3 (PG 48.846), transl. Meeks and Wilken (supra n.19) 90.

33 Even if that potency is only the representation of the Christian supersession of the Jewish.

34 For a revealing consideration of mediaeval Christian anxiety roused by Jewish animosity, see I. J. Yuval, "Vengeance and damnation, blood and defamation: From Jewish martyrdom to blood libel accusations," *Zion* 58 1 (1993) 33-90. For an equally revealing view of Jewish anxiety roused by the historical assessment of Jewish hatred of Christians, see the violent responses of E. Fleischer ("Christian-Jewish relations in the Middle Ages distorted") and M. Breuer ("The historian's imagination and historical truth") in *Zion* 59 2-3 (1994) 267-316 and 317-24 respectively; Yuval responds to his critics in the same issue (351-414) [all of the above in Hebrew with English summary].

35 Brenk (supra n.20) 24.

36 The synagogue which marked the site of the remains of the martyred Maccabees was apparently converted into a church sometime before Chrysostom's homilies against the Jews. Simon 1936 (supra n.29) 414 suggests that the Christianization of the Maccabees' synagogue occurred between 363 and 385. In 507, the synagogue in the Antiochean suburb of Daphne was burnt down and a *martyrium* dedicated to Leontius was erected on its site (Malalas, *Chron.* 16.6 [ed. Dindorf, 396]).

37 For a useful treatment of the usurpation of Jewish space in the media of monumental mosaics, see M. R. Miles, "Santa Maria Maggiore's fifth-century mosaics: Triumphant Christianity and the Jews," *HThR* 82 (1993) 155-75.

38 Ambrose's reference to the burning of the synagogue in Milan is not unlike Paulinus of Nola's description of slum clearance in Nola, cited above.

39 Ambrose (PL 16.1105A); transl. M. M. Beyenka, *Saint Ambrose, Letters* (New York 1954) 10.

In 5th-c. Ravenna, Bishop Peter Chrysologus vilified the Jews almost to the degree of Chrysostom, putting them at the head of a list of misbelievers that also included gentiles ("pagans"), Arians and Neoplatonists.<sup>40</sup> The spatial dimension of such denunciations of the Jews was revealed in 519, when a Christian mob burned down a synagogue in the city.<sup>41</sup>

The expropriations so far discussed indicate the violence of early Christianity; they may also reflect on the strength and visibility of the Jewish community in late antiquity. The prominence of the synagogue in many late ancient cities identifies it as a significant marker in the urban landscape. The materiality of the synagogue was spiritually charged. Its occupation of prime real estate contributed to its vulnerability to Christian attack. Attempts were made by emperors and a few bishops to protect the traditional rights of the Jews and their synagogues. Theodosius tried to legislate the reconstruction of the synagogue at Callinicum. Theodoric, Arian king of the Ostrogoths and ruler of Italy between 493 and 526, rebuked the Romans, the Milanese and the Genoese for their illegal attacks on synagogues.<sup>42</sup> At the end of the 6th c., Pope Gregory the Great, exercising civil authority in the absence of an imperial presence in the West, similarly attempted to maintain the legal rights of the Jews in the face of episcopal predators.<sup>43</sup> The efforts made by emperors and churchmen to protect synagogues only provide further documentation of the radical displacement of the sacred space of the Jews. Synagogues consecrated by their despoilers could not be recovered by the Jews, who were rather assigned an alternative (extrinsic?) space for new construction. By such means Christians confiscated those select pieces of property within the city that had been previously occupied by Jews. The usurpation of the space of the synagogue is evidence of the threat of the building and of the group with which it was associated. It is also an indication of the territorial dimension of Christian hegemony of late antiquity.

\* \* \*

An assessment of other episodes of erasure might nuance an understanding of the early Christian attack on Jewish space. Most obviously, the Christian destructions of Greco-Roman cult sites provide striking parallels with contemporary assaults on synagogues. Temples might either be expropriated for the new religion, as in Athens or Gaza, or left as a trophy of ruination, as at Jerash.<sup>44</sup> The same hegemonic desires contributed to both onslaughts, and the strategies of incorporation or elimination rendered similar archaeological remains. Further research might, however, reveal that the distinct legal history of the Jews and the Romans, and the deep ambivalence of the religious relationship between Jews and Christians, modified the official reaction to synagogues. Temples were subject to a brutal legislative attack. By the late 4th c., sacrifices were criminalized and priesthoods disbanded. The legal restrictions on Jews also increased with Christianization. Laws against the building of new synagogues were passed under Theodosius and renewed by Justinian; nevertheless, in contrast to the sites of sacrifi-

<sup>40</sup> Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 109 (PL 52.502D).

<sup>41</sup> T. S. Brown, "Ebrei e orientali a Ravenna," in A. Carile (ed.), *Storia di Ravenna, dall'età bizantina all'età ottoniana* vol. 2.1 (Ravenna 1991) 135-49; also see F. Millar, "The Jews of the Graeco-Roman diaspora between paganism and Christianity, AD 312-438," in Lieu, North and Rajak (supra n.12) 97-123.

<sup>42</sup> These incidents are recorded by Cassiod., *Var.* 4.43 (Rome) 5.37 (Milan) 2.27 (Genoa).

<sup>43</sup> Katz (supra n.23) 113-36. For Gregory's intervention in the conflict in Terracina, see above. In Palermo, a synagogue and its hospice were confiscated and consecrated by the Bishop Victor despite Gregory's admonition (Pope Gregory I, *Ep.* 8.25 and 9.38 [MGH 1.2]). In another peculiar instance of incursion, Gregory ordered Archbishop Januarius of Cagliari in Sardinia to remove the baptismal robe and a cross from a synagogue which had been put there in an act of pollution by a converted Jew on the day of his initiation, Easter 599 (Gregory I, *Ep.* 9.195).

<sup>44</sup> Generally, P. Chuvin, *A chronicle of the last pagans* (Cambridge MA 1990). More specifically, G. Fowden, "Bishops and temples in the eastern Roman empire, A.D. 320-435," *JThS* 9 (1978) 53-78. For a sympathetic view of Christian action, H. Saradi-Mendelovici, "Christian attitudes toward pagan monuments in late antiquity and their legacy in later Byzantine centuries," *DOP* 44 (1990) 47-61.

cial cults, synagogues were officially protected by imperial ordinance.<sup>45</sup> The distinct legislative treatment of synagogue and temple space provides the legal counterpart to the different meanings attached to spatial violence directed toward synagogues and temples. As the sermons of John Chrysostom and Peter Chrysologus suggest, the particular historical and theological relationship between Jews and Christians conditioned acts of synagogal erasure. The historiographies of the synagogue and the temple are also essentially different. The distinct framing of synagogues by both those who usurped them in the distant past and those of us appropriating them more recently in the name of scholarship provides me with an excuse for not contending with the massive evidence of the destruction of Greco-Roman temples in late antiquity.<sup>46</sup>

Also related to the destruction of the synagogue in the remote past is the continued destruction of late ancient synagogues in modernity. Here, too, the ideological grounds for elimination are distinct. Also different are the occasions and results of eradication. But the material is less extensive and less familiar. Further, consideration of the destruction of the late ancient synagogue in the late 19th and 20th c. provides particular leverage for a broader political understanding of the act of erasure. I offer examples of four different, modern vehicles for the continued elimination of late ancient synagogues.

*Racism.* This modern phenomenon has certainly destroyed more modern synagogues than ancient ones.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the desire to eliminate the ethnic Other from the cultural present involves the removal of the material evidence of their presence in the past. The synagogue at Ostia is one of the few late-antique synagogues excavated in the territories of the western empire.<sup>48</sup> It was a spacious basilica located in the suburbs of the ancient city, well appointed, with mosaic pavements and handsomely sculptured capitals decorated with menorahs. In 1987, the archaeological remains of this building were vandalized. The local authorities assured me that the damage to the site was the work of treasure-hunters who didn't realize that the original architectural sculpture from the synagogue was in the museum; on site were only plaster casts. The columns of the building had been systematically pulled down and thus broken; the decorative friezes had been damaged; there was evidence that the pavement had been recently fractured. For me, this had the look of sabotage. If the damage to the archaeological site was

45 CTh 16.8.25, 16.8.27; Justinian, *Novella* 131 (Mansi 9, 163-658); S. W. Baron, *A social and religious history of the Jews* (2nd ed., New York 1952) vol. 2, 398-99, n.13. Also, J. Cohen, "Roman imperial policy toward the Jews from Constantine until the end of the Palestinian patriarchate (ca. 429)," *Byzantine Studies* 3 (1976) 1-29, reviews the legislation involving Jews and argues that the legislation was not as anti-Jewish and polemical as is commonly assumed. This view is further developed by B. S. Bachrach, "The Jewish community of the later Roman empire as seen in the Codex Theodosianus," in Neusner and Frerichs (supra n.19) 399-421. The erosion of archaeological evidence of synagogues from the later 5th and 6th c. and its virtual disappearance outside Palestine after the 7th, however, demonstrates the limitations of legislative protection.

46 Fowden (supra n.44) 53-78, provides an excellent summary of the Christian offense against Greco-Roman cult sites, although his treatment of bishops seems to me oddly apologetic.

47 For a discussion of how in modernity the oriental form of a building might contribute to its vulnerability, see A. Wharton, "Westminster Cathedral: Medieval architectures and religious difference," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 26 (1996) 523-55. How this works for synagogues is explored by H. Hammer-Schenk, "Ästhetische und politische Funktionen historisierender Baustile im Synagogenbau des ausgehenden 19. Jahrhunderts," *Kritische Berichte, Mitteilungsorgan des Ulmer Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft* 3.2-3 (1975) 12-24; and his *Synagogen in Deutschland. Geschichte einer Baugattung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, 1780-1933* (Hamburg 1981).

48 For a thorough re-assessment of the archaeological evidence as a vehicle for understanding the broader social circumstances of diaspora Jews, see M. White, "Synagogue and society in imperial Ostia: Archaeological and epigraphic evidence," *HTHR* 90 (1997) 23-58. M. F. Squarciapino, "Ebrei a Roma e ad Ostia," *StRom* 11 (1963) 129-41; ead., "The synagogue at Ostia," *Archaeology* 16 (1963) 194-203; F. Zevi, "La sinagoga di Ostia," *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 38 (1972) 131-45; S. Fine and M. Della Pergola, "The Ostia synagogue and its Torah shrine," in J. G. Westenholz (ed.), *The Jews of ancient Rome* (Jerusalem 1995) 42-57 [non vidi].

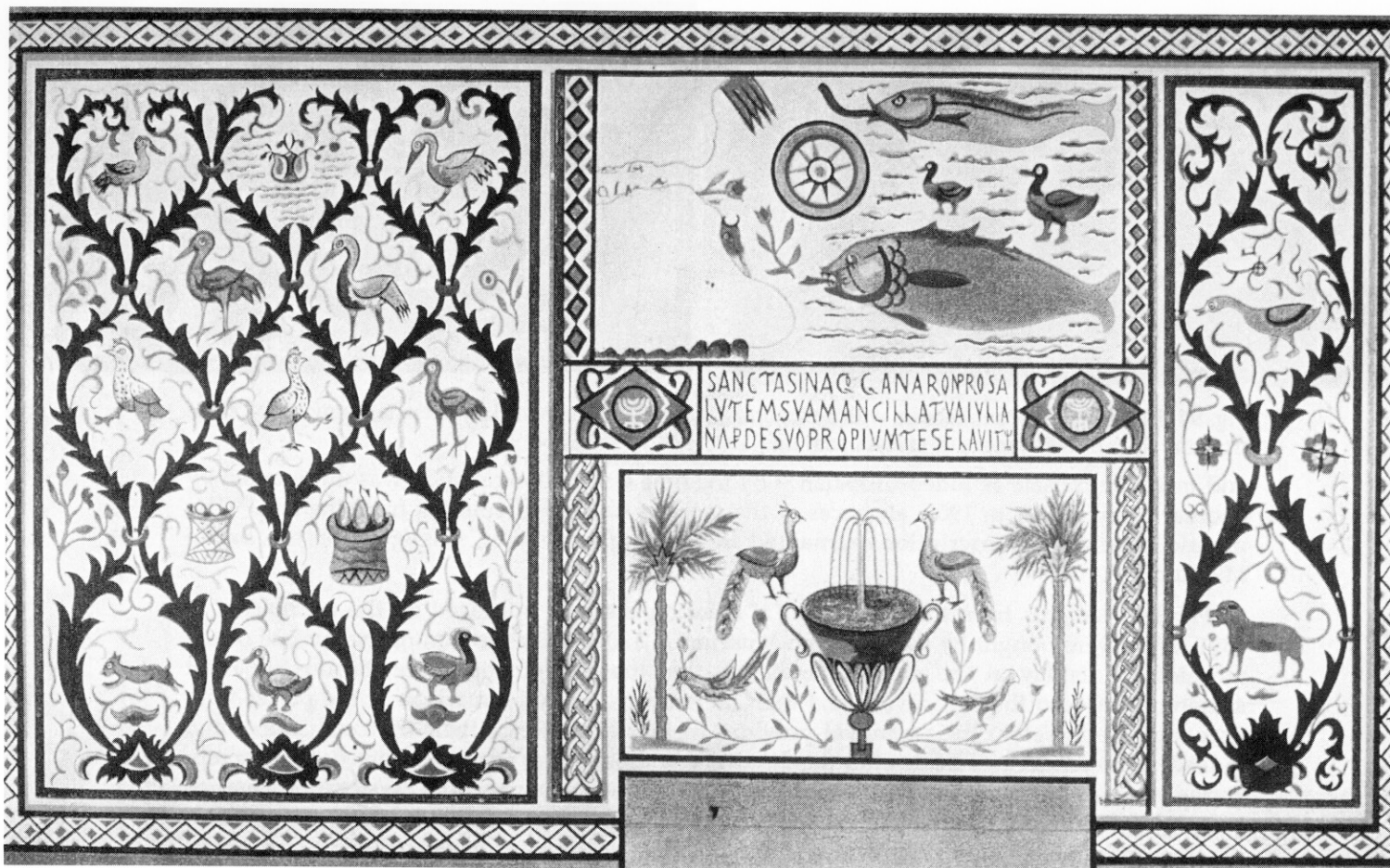


Fig. 96. Hammam Lif, Tunisia, synagogue, watercolor rendering of the mosaic floor (RA 3 [1884] pl. 7).

the work of the neo-Fascists who were active in Rome at the time, it might suggest that the hatred that concurrently was being directed toward Jewish shops in the capital may also have been expressed in an attempt to re-erase the evidence of the Jewish presence in ancient Italy.

*Commodification.* Whether the violation of the synagogue at Ostia was racially provoked or commercially motivated, both forms of vandalism are peculiarly modern phenomena linked with a capitalist economy. A remarkable mosaic pavement was discovered in 1883 at Hammam Lif, near Carthage in Tunisia, when a French army captain, Ernest de Prudhomme, was clearing ground for a garden.<sup>49</sup> The inscription in the floor mosaics as well as a representation of a menorah identify the structure as a synagogue (fig. 96).<sup>50</sup> The initial publication of the find, with its rich figural ornamentation of animals, birds and fish in vine scrolls, was met with considerable interest and some suspicion. S. Reinach, among others, expressed doubt that these figural mosaics could be from a synagogue, ingeniously hypothesizing that the synagogue inscriptions

49 I wish to thank R. Fazzini, Curator of Ancient Art at the Brooklyn Museum, for providing easy access to the museum's file on the mosaics, which includes a useful unpublished article on the mosaics by H. de Morgan. The discovery of the mosaics is described by de Prudhomme in his letter of 15 March 1883, published by E. Rénan, "Les mosaïques de Hammam-Lif," *RA* 1883, 157-63. This note also includes G. Schlumberger's impressions of the mosaic after his visit to the site. Also see D. Kaufmann, "Etudes d'archéologie juive. 1. La synagogue de Hammam-Lif," *REJ* 13 (1886) 45-61; F. M. Biebel, "The mosaics of Hammam Lif," *ArtB* 16 (1936) 541-51; Fine (supra n.20) cat. nos. 3, 70-71, 156; J.-P. Darmon, "Les mosaïques de la synagogue de Hammam Lif: un reexamen du dossier," in R. Ling (ed.), *Fifth international colloquium on ancient mosaics (Bath, England, September 5-12, 1982)* part 2 (*JRA Suppl.* 9.2, 1995) 7-29.

50 The inscription reads "Your servant, Juliana P, for her salvation at her own expense paved with mosaic this holy synagogue of Naro"; S. Reinach, "Notes sur la synagogue d'Hammam el-Lif," *REJ* 13 (1886) 217-23, and Darmon *ibid.* 18-23.



Fig. 97. Brooklyn Museum, mosaic with a menorah from the floor of the synagogue at Hammam Lif.

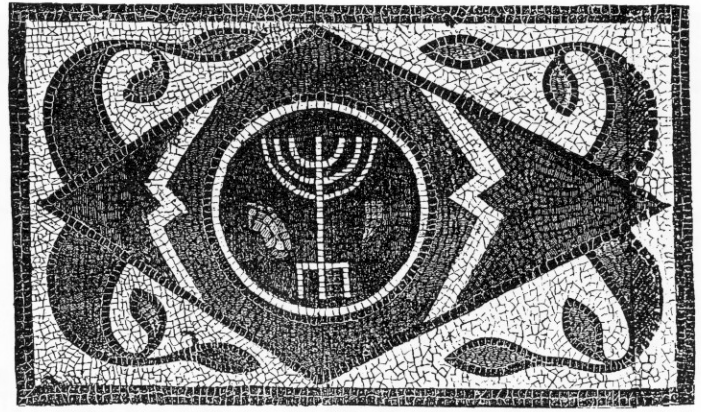


Fig. 98. Hammam Lif, Tunisia, drawing of same (RA 3 [1884] pl. 9).

and menorah mosaic as Judeo-Christian.<sup>51</sup> By the time a second excavation was undertaken by another army officer in 1909, all traces of the mosaics had been removed from the site.<sup>52</sup> The mosaic panels with inscriptions remained in the public domain, salvaged for the Bardo Museum.<sup>53</sup>

Figural elements from the Hammam Lif mosaic pavement appeared on the art market in 1891. They were bought by the Brooklyn Museum in 1905. An inspection of the surface of the mosaics on display in the museum indicates that these fragments were thoroughly reset sometime between their discovery and their merchandising. A comparison of the pieces with drawings made before their removal provides further evidence of their thorough remaking. Indeed, if the renderings made after the discovery of the mosaics are to be trusted, the discrepancies between them and the panels in the Brooklyn Museum suggest that “restoration” was so comprehensive that the ancient object has been replaced by a modern one. Compare, for example, the Brooklyn menorah segment and the drawing of the pavement at the left end of the central inscription (figs. 97-98). The *shofar* and *lulav* have been reduced to non-signifying abstractions. The duck in the Brooklyn Museum, represented in the watercolor in the lowest frame of the center vine scroll, indicates how the original mosaic was reframed as a conventional artwork to be hung on the wall — the image was extracted from the mosaic carpet, cut to a rectangle, and provided with a frame of black tesserae with the necessary white tesserae as infill (fig. 99). In the later western tradition, the quadratically-framed wall panel is the quintessential *objet d'art*. The synagogue's floor mosaic was converted into bourgeois wall decoration. It was destroyed to make it more marketable. Sacred space was treated as a source for possessable objects of cash exchange. Commodification erased Hammam Lif.

*Forgetfulness.* The most apparently innocent occasion for modern erasure, and probably the most common, might be called “forgetfulness”. The absence in the 1971 micro edition of the *Complete Oxford English Dictionary* of the word “antisemitism” exemplifies this form of elimination. Scholars commissioned to write articles for *Late antiquity* (Cambridge, MA 1999) were sent packets on the project which included a pilot list of its entries. The list included a number of building types — “church architecture”, “cathedral”, “baptistery”, “basilica”, “temple”, and “bathhouse”, but not “synagogue”. Although presumably this absence was a result of over-

51 Ibid.

52 Surviving fragments of marble revetment suggested to the excavator that the structure was of considerable importance. Further, small finds of both Jewish (including a dozen lamps with menorahs) and Christian character indicate that this synagogue, like that of Jerash, may have been frequented by Christians, as was the synagogue at Antioch, or appropriated by them, as at Jerash: see S. Icard in *BAC* 1910, clxxii-clxxiii.

53 The museum's exclusive interest in the inscriptions affirms an archaeological bias for texts common in the 19th c. After visiting the original excavation, G. L. Schlumberger commented, “Mais vous savez que le véritable intérêt réside dans les inscriptions, qui sont, deux d'entre elles surtout, d'une conservation parfaite” (quoted in Rénan [supra n.49] 158).





Fig. 99. Brooklyn Museum, mosaic with a duck in a vine scroll cut from floor of synagogue at Hammam Lif. Frame is modern addition (author).

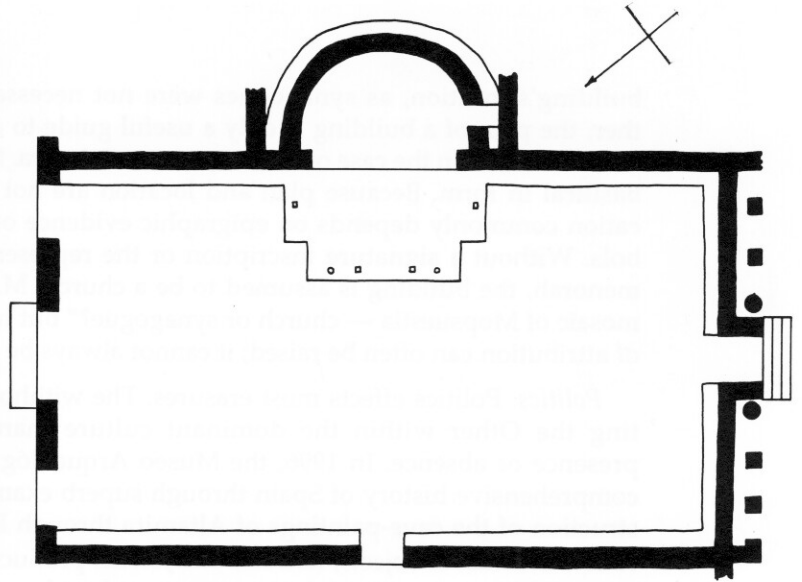


Fig. 100. Palmyra, rough sketch of the church/synagogue (author).

sight, omission is never entirely innocent. Doubtless we all are continually responsible for eliminating the Other through lapses in the idiosyncratic hegemonies of our own memories.

The late ancient synagogue disappears because the unexpected remains unseen. A recently-excavated building in Palmyra has been identified as the earliest cathedral of the city.<sup>54</sup> The building is a transverse hall with stone benches on four walls (fig. 100). To the southeast is an apse preceded by a raised *bema* which was at one time closed by parapet slabs. No parallels among early ecclesiastical structures are cited by the excavator. There is, however, a remarkable and unexamined resemblance between the plan of this structure and those of the synagogues of Apamea, Eshtemoa, Susiya, and even Dura.<sup>55</sup> The formal similarities between the building at Palmyra and the synagogue at nearby Apamea are particularly compelling. Both of these structures are finely-constructed transverse halls with apses set within a communal complex of rooms; they are also both very prominently located on the main thoroughfares of their respective cities. The size and wealth of the Jewish community at Palmyra is well attested by a synagogue in the city. Whether or not I am correct in my identification of this structure as that synagogue, the original absence of reference to the possibility marks this as an example of erasure issuing from a passive, established cultural hegemony. Blindness serves blindness. The relative lack of ancient synagogues contributes to the excavators' failure to recognize the evidence of their existence when one is uncovered. The Other disappears despite its trace.

Hegemony, here Christian hegemony, incorporates material culture in the construction of the history of its own dominance. Recognizing the archaeological residue of a subordinate group within an ancient society requires legible, identifying signs. Without such signs, a structure is absorbed by the prevailing culture. In the case of ancient synagogues, the sign cannot be the

<sup>54</sup> M. Gawlikowski, "Fouilles récentes à Palmyre," *CRAI* 1991, esp. 405-9; N. Duval, *BullMon* 150 (1992) 413-15, does remark that the building might be a synagogue, later replaced by a church.

<sup>55</sup> For Apamea, see Brenk (supra n.20). The most comprehensive study of the site is by J. Napoleone-Lemaire and J.-Ch. Balty, *L'église à atrium de la grand colonnade* (Fouilles d'Apamée de Syrie 1.1; Brussels 1969). This volume begins with the first phase of the church; the planned volume (1.2) by the same authors that would include the synagogue has not yet appeared. For Susiya, which was built at the end of the 4th c. and flourished until the 8th or 9th c., see S. Gutman, Z. Yeivin and E. Netzer, "Excavations in the synagogue at Horvat Susiya," in L. I. Levine (ed.), *Ancient synagogues revealed* (Jerusalem 1981) 123-28. For Eshtemoa, see Z. Yeivin, "The synagogue of Eshtemoa," *ibid.* 120-22.

building's location, as synagogues were not necessarily topographically particularized. Further, the plan of a building is only a useful guide to a building's religious affiliation when it is uncommon, as in the case of the structure at Palmyra. Most synagogues, like most churches, were basilical in form. Because plan and location are not reliable indices of a synagogue, identification commonly depends on epigraphic evidence or the presence of specifically Jewish symbols. Without a signature inscription or the representation of a recognizable token such as a menorah, the building is assumed to be a church. M. Avi-Yonah might ask the question, "The mosaic of Mopsuestia — church or synagogue?" but he cannot answer it definitively.<sup>56</sup> The issue of attribution can often be raised; it cannot always be resolved.

*Politics.* Politics effects most erasures. The withholding and the display of objects representing the Other within the dominant culture manifest the political ambivalence of their presence or absence. In 1996, the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid, which exhibits a comprehensive history of Spain through superb examples of its material culture, from a reconstruction of the cave-paintings of Altamira through Roman, Early Christian and Islamic works to late mediaeval objects, had not one Jewish production on display.<sup>57</sup> The high-quality figurative mosaic pavements of the synagogue at Jerash are known to me only from the photographs of the Yale expedition and the drawings apparently derived from them. Good authority has it that these mosaics are still *in situ* in Jerash. It is said that they were uncovered briefly by the archaeological authorities of Jordan after the establishment of peace with Israel. They were covered up again after the Israeli government approved appropriation of Arab land in Jerusalem.<sup>58</sup> Another example: in 1932, archaeologists from Yale University working in the Middle Euphrates site of Dura Europos excavated a synagogue which retained 60% of its elaborate narrative wall-painting.<sup>59</sup> The remarkable mid 3rd-c. frescoes of the synagogue of Dura Europos are presently installed in a full-scale reconstruction of the synagogue in the National Museum in Damascus. The presence of the synagogue frescoes in the museum is nowhere announced. Even in my foreign guide book, the synagogue itself is erased from the plans of the galleries. The Syrians have been at war with the Jewish state since 1948. What is surprising is not the masking of the presence of the Dura synagogue in Damascus, but the quality of its maintenance. The frescoes' lack of presence protects them from assault. The paintings of the Dura synagogue, in any case, have survived in Damascus in a way that the frescoes of the baptistery of the Christian building of Dura, shipped by the excavators to Yale, have not. The images from the baptistery survive now only as photographs or drawings.<sup>60</sup>

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- 56 M. Avi-Yonah, "The mosaic of Mopsuestia — church or synagogue?" *ibid.* 186-90. The structure at Mopsuestia is a basilica with an elaborate floor mosaic. At the center of the mosaic is a representation of "the redeeming ark of Noah" and an elaborate if badly preserved cycle of Samson. The building is commonly identified as a church in the literature. For the original excavation reports, see L. Budde, *Pantheon* 18 (1960) 116-26.
- 57 Remarked by K. Bland, who brought this to the attention of the museum staff. In response, he was told that the lack was recognized and a Jewish object was going to be introduced into the museum.
- 58 L. Levine wrote me on the matter: "It seems to be well known here at the [Hebrew] University that the mosaics were opened in March 1995, and covered by May of the same year". The Israeli government approved appropriation of 130 acres of mainly Arab land in Jerusalem on April 27th.
- 59 I take this argument from a more developed historiographic analysis in my article, "Good and bad images from the synagogue of Dura Europos: contexts, subtexts, intertexts," *Art History* 17 (1994) 1-25.
- 60 S. Matheson, Curator of Ancient Art at Yale University Art Museum, summarized for me the recent history of the frescoes of the Christian building. They were treated on site in Syria with a consolidant which, in interaction with the environmental conditions in New Haven, caused serious scaling of the paint. The reconstruction of the Christian building at Yale was dismantled in the 1970s, when the ancient works in the Yale collection were moved to air-conditioned quarters. At that time it was determined that little of the original paint surface survived.

The analysis of erasure offered here represents a critique of the dominant and, for the most part, Christian culture of late antiquity and modernity. The spatial markers of the Jews, regarded as dangerous or competing, come under assault. With the establishment of the Jewish state, the interpretative plane shifts.<sup>61</sup> At least within the boundaries of Israel, Jews are no longer the subordinate Other. Some marks of erasure are removed. A basilica excavated in Gaza was identified as a church before the Six Day War; after the Six Day War it was recognized as a synagogue.<sup>62</sup> A tourist map of Israel is dotted with ancient synagogues that have been made available through excavation.<sup>63</sup> But the same map is marked by erasures, as poignantly represented in the opening figures of B. Morris' *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem*.<sup>64</sup> J. Boyarin has written movingly on the ruins of the Palestinian village of Lifta.<sup>65</sup> There is also the imminence of erasure. Most spectacularly, the Islamic monuments on the Temple Mount/*Haram* are under threat. The Temple Mount, left desolate by Christians as evidence of Jewish defeat, became *Al-Haram al-Sharif*, locus of Moslem holiness after Jerusalem was conquered in the 7th c. The Moslems put the numinousness of the site back to work with new construction. Al-Aksa Mosque (c.639-640) and the remarkable Dome of the Rock (c.691) appropriated the holiness of this ancient site for the new religion and contributed to its generation of a new set of religious narratives — notably the ascent of Mohammed to heaven from the site. The power of the Dome of the Rock is evidenced in the two dozen attacks that have been launched against it by anti-Moslem fanatics since the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem in 1967.<sup>66</sup> In the early 1980s, a small group of Jewish settlers, the Gush Emunim, firm in the belief that their actions would precipitate a movement for national redemption, gathered the explosives and the intelligence necessary to blow up the structure. They even set up cameras to film the destruction. Ironically, their plot was foiled when another, less diabolical attack by an independent Jewish radical resulted in the tightening of security in the area. The plot of the Gush

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- 61 I am uninterested in protests about a lack of evenhandedness in this section of my paper. The use of the familiar excuse for outrageous behavior — “but they did bad things to me” — is no more acceptable an explanation of the present Jewish treatment of Palestinians than it is for past Christian treatment of Jews.
- 62 The building was identified as a church in a note recording its discovery by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities; see J. Leclant, “Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan, 1964-1965,” *Orientalia* 35 (1966) 135; A. Ovadiah, “Excavations in the area of the ancient synagogue at Gaza,” *IEJ* 19 (1969) 193-98; and his “The synagogue at Gaza,” in Levine (supra n.55) 129-32. Apparently, were it not for the Hebrew inscription identifying the representation of David as psalmist, this grandiose basilica might readily be designated a church because of its 5-aisled plan, the relatively late date of its elaborate mosaic pavement, and Talmudic law forbidding Jews from entering the idolatrous cities of Ascalon, Gaza, Acco and Scythopolis (BT ‘Avodah Zarah 11b). The other pieces of evidence for the structure’s function are not unproblematic: the Jewishness of the names mentioned in the mosaic inscriptions, and a sculptural fragment of a menorah found in Gaza and published in 1939. For the odd restoration of the head and hand of David, destroyed after the initial publication of the mosaic, see C. K. Green, “King David’s head from Gaza synagogue restored,” *BAR* 20 (1994) 58-63, 94.
- 63 The map (2) showing the sites of ancient synagogues in Fine (supra n.20) is surprisingly similar to the map of N Palestine found at the back of E. L. Sukenik, *Ancient synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (Oxford 1934).
- 64 B. Morris, *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge 1987) map 2. For a powerfully matter-of-fact description of the looting of Palestinian property, see T. Segev, 1949. *The first Israelis* (New York 1986) 68-91. I am indebted to D. Monk for discussions of the use of destruction in Israeli control of the Palestinians and for bibliography on the subject.
- 65 J. Boyarin, “Ruins, mounting toward Jerusalem,” *Found Object* 3 (Spring 1994) 33-47.
- 66 The contemporary political history of the Temple Mount is presented by R. Friedland and R. D. Hecht, “The politics of sacred space: Jerusalem’s Temple Mount/al-haram al sharif,” in J. Scott and P. Simpson-Housley (edd.), *Sacred and profane spaces, essays in the geographics of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York 1991) 21-61. For a recent, not unbiased account of legal conflicts over the site, see S. J. Adler, “Israeli court finds Muslim council destroyed ancient remains on Temple Mount,” *BAR* 20 (1994) 39.

Emunim group was uncovered only after they were arrested for their attacks on Palestinian mayors and their murders of Palestinian college students.<sup>67</sup>

In modern Israel, as in late Imperial times, the state does not sanction attacks on the space of the Other. Nevertheless, no state is without responsibility for outrages committed by the culturally dominant on the Other within it. It may be argued that the political offensives against affirmative action are not unrelated to the burning of more than 40 Black churches in 1995/96.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, the violent conservative denunciations of the United Nations cannot be completely disassociated with the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.<sup>69</sup> As it was these two phenomena — the destruction of Afro-American sanctuaries and the Oklahoma City federal building — that provoked this paper, it is appropriate that I should end with them. A recognition of the violence directed toward the space of the Other in the past may make us more conscious of threats to our own social openness in the present. Architectural history has traditionally been preoccupied with tracing the origins of buildings and describing their forms. I have argued here that the ends of buildings — who destroyed them, why were they destroyed, what use was made of their remains — is equally important.

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67 This particular incident is narrated in some detail in Friedland and Hecht *ibid.* 40-42.

68 N. Adams, "Churches on fire," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 55 (1996) 236-37.

69 A common extremist view is that the federal government has been infiltrated by the United Nations. Attacks on federal officers or federal sites is thus a defence against an alien invasion.