

jerusalem's zions
annabel jane wharton

ABSTRACT

The human desire to embody the sacred, to give it a physical place and a material form, is nowhere better demonstrated than in Jerusalem. As one of the world's oldest continuously occupied, politically contested and religiously invested cities, Jerusalem's natural and architectural landscape has been overlaid with scripture and interpreted to death. This paper examines one site of this phenomenon: Mount Zion. "Zion" is often used synecdochically, as a part of Jerusalem standing in for the whole of the city. But "Zion" has also acted as a toponym for the ancient citadel of David. This specific piece of real estate shifted its location in antiquity in order to retain its biblical associations, inciting innocent and not-so-innocent claims of holiness where holiness may not belong.¹

Keywords: Jerusalem, archaeology, Zion, topography, Early Christian

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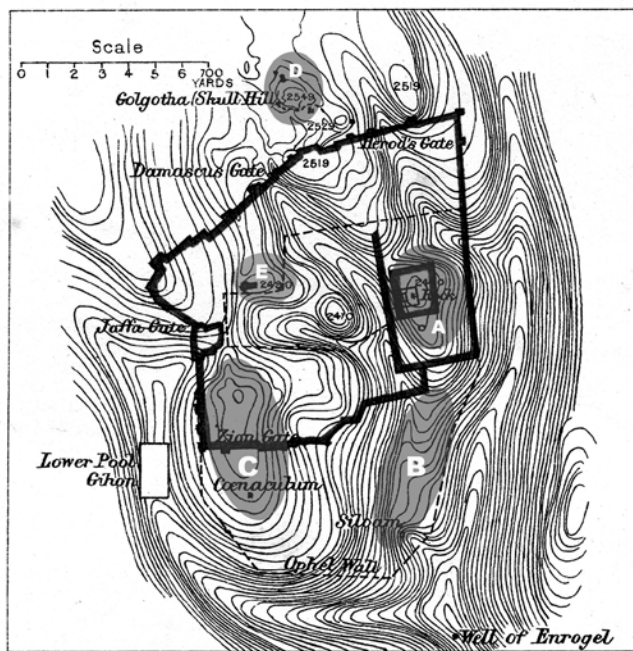
Slippage

The heights or centers of cities induce totems. Social elites exert their authority by monumentalizing prominent sites with those institutions through which their powers are exercised—economic, governmental, religious. Because of their association with control, such heights are dangerous places. The Old City of Jerusalem encompasses several such heights (Figure 1). Best known for both its holiness and its violence is the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif. Less familiar, though just as constantly contested, is Zion. In contrast to the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif, however, Zion has migrated.

Zion (from Hebrew; Sion from Greek), perhaps the Jebusite name of the fortress that fell to King David and the Israelites, appears often as a synonym for Jerusalem in the Hebrew Bible (Leithart 2002). Though Zion occurs more rarely in the New Testament, its prominence in Psalms—that book of the Bible, Old Testament or New, most used by Christians—assured the name’s familiarity to Christians of all varieties. Christians, like Jews, also commonly deployed “Zion” synecdochically, as a part of Jerusalem standing in for the whole of the city. But the subject of this essay is that “Zion” which acts as a specific toponym for the ancient citadel of King David. Scholars agree that this Citadel of David/Zion occupied the southeast hill of the present city, now named the City of David (Mazar et al. 1975; Shanks 1995). It was there, they

220

FIG 1
Jerusalem without “debris,”
topographical map, by Sir Charles
Warren, *The Temple and the Tomb*
(1880) as reproduced by George
Gordon, *Reflections in Palestine*
(1884). High points of Jerusalem:
A. Temple Mount/Al-Haram al-Sharif;
B. Southeast hill/City of David;
C. Southwest hill/Zion; D. Gordon’s
Tomb; E. Holy Sepulcher (modified
by the author).



posit, that King David was buried in the tenth century BCE (I Kings 2.10).²

The biblical prominence of Zion and its association with kingship presumably contributed to its migration. Solomon expanded the walled city to include his new Temple to the north. Under Jerusalem's Hasmonean and Herodian rulers, the wall was extended to the west, encompassing the city's highest promontory, the southwest hill. On the northern part of that height, Herod constructed a new palace. By at least the first century CE, the toponym Zion had slipped from the long-occupied, slummy southeast hill to the recently invested southwest hill, achieving a greater height at the same time as retaining a proximity to royalty. Although the new identity of the southwest hill is first clearly articulated in Josephus' description of Jerusalem with which he prefaces Titus' conquest of the city (Wars 5.4.1), it may have been assumed already decades earlier at the time of Jesus. The southwest hill retained its new identity even after the city shrank following Titus' conquest in 70 CE, leaving it again beyond Jerusalem's cincture.³ Thus from Late Antiquity the ancient site of Zion has been misidentified with the highest outcrop of the city, the southwest hill. "Mount Zion" remains a fixed toponym on the map of the city for the height just outside Zion Gate/Bab el-Daoud. The southwest hill has proved extremely fertile for the generation of sacred places. The site's sacred fecundity depended on its misnaming.

Materializing the Sacred

A Roman building constructed some time after 70 CE has proved the most generative locus of aura on "Mount Zion." This hall was later incorporated into a succession of religious complexes. Built at least in part with reused Herodian ashlar, it was about 34½ feet (10.5 meters) in length and of an indeterminable width. A photograph of the east side of the surviving structure and Louis-Hugues Vincent's drawing of the same wall show original masonry rising to a height of more than 23 feet (7 meters), suggesting that the original structure may have been two-storied, at least at its east end (Figures 2 and 3). An interior apsidal niche was sunk high into the eastern end of the north wall of the lower floor. Whatever its initial form and function, by the fourth century this structure was a two-storied church dedicated to the Apostles. The second level of the structure was iconographically significant for the members of the Early Christian community of Jerusalem, who identified it with the "upper room" of the Gospels (Mark, 14.15; Luke, 22.12; Acts 1.13; 2.1). In his catechetical lectures, Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem (350–86), refers specifically to the Upper Church of the Apostles as

FIG 2

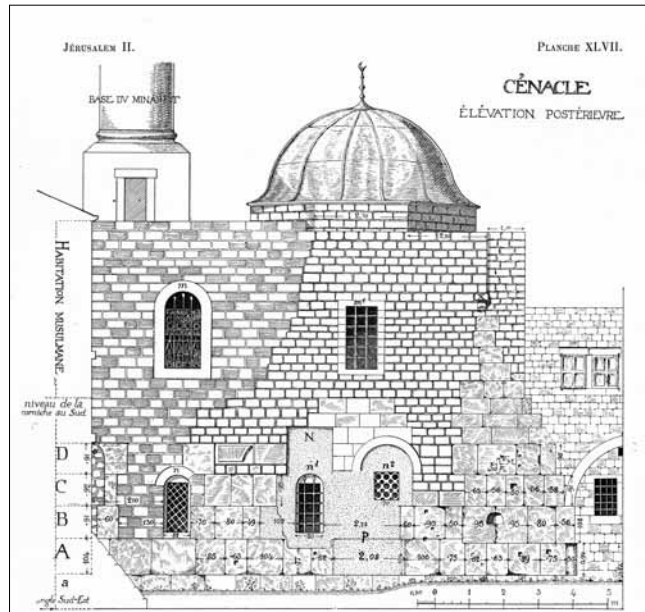
Jerusalem, Cenacle and Tomb of David, view from the east taken between 1910 and 1946. G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, LC-DIG-matpc-08584 (Library of Congress, public domain).



222

FIG 3

Jerusalem, Cenacle and Tomb of David, elevation drawing of the east wall by Louis-Hugues Vincent, from Vincent and M. Abel, *Jérusalem: recherches de topographie, d'archéologie et d'histoire* (Paris: J. Gabalda for l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 1912–26), 2 vols, 2.47.



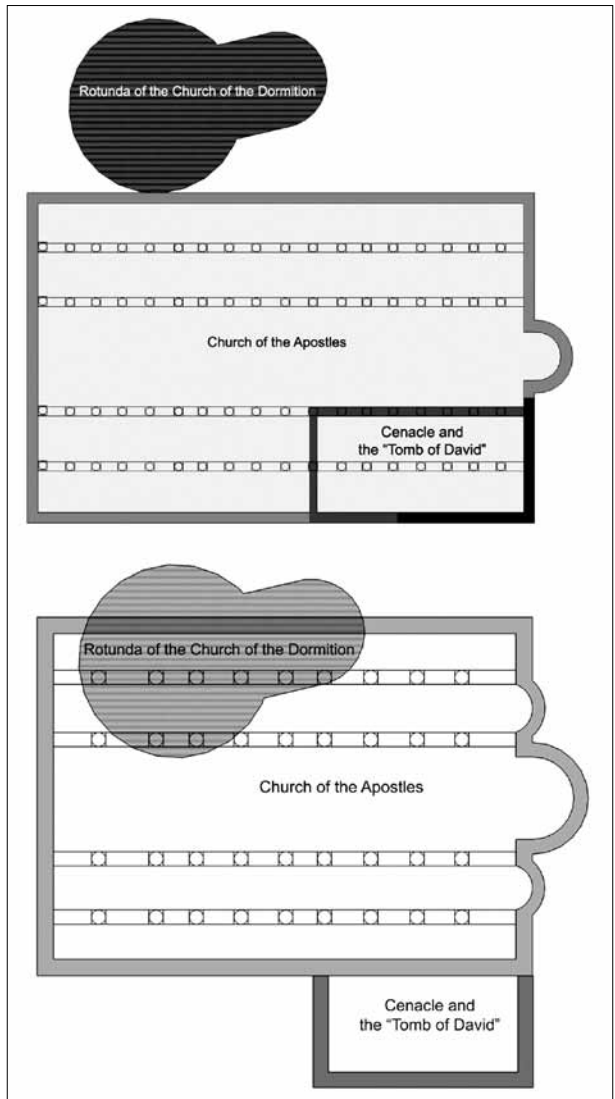
the site of the descent of the Holy Spirit fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, an event subsequently celebrated in the Christian Church as the Feast of Pentecost:

We know the Holy Ghost, who spoke in the Prophets, and who on the day of Pentecost descended on the Apostles in the form of fiery tongues, here, in Jerusalem, in the Upper Church of the Apostles. (Cyril of Jerusalem 1800–75: 923A; 1894: 116)

By the late fourth or early fifth century, the Roman building had been enfolded into a new ecclesiastical complex controlled by a great five-aisled basilica, though how exactly the two structures were related is unclear from the fragmentary archaeological evidence (Figure 4).

FIG 4

Relationship of the Cenacle/Tomb of David to the late ancient and medieval Church of the Apostles and to the rotunda (gray footprint) of the modern Church of the Dormition according to Vincent (top) and Renard (bottom) (sketch plans by author).



The Apostles Church was also known as “the Mother of All Churches” because of its traditional association with the first congregational space of the new Christian religion. Like many holy places, the grand establishment on Mount Zion accrued the sacred aura that clings to Christian narratives by generating their material embodiment.⁴ In addition to the site of the Pentecost mentioned by Cyril in his catechetical lectures, early pilgrims also saw in the Church of Zion the column on which Jesus was flagellated. By the sixth and seventh centuries, the places of the Last Supper and pre-supper Foot Washing as well as the slab on which the Virgin died and the stones used in the martyrdom of Saint Stephen were also exhibited.

Though the basilica was badly damaged during the Persian invasion of 614, the new building, reconstructed by Patriarch Modestus (632–4), retained its many sacred associations. The festival events enframed by the building—the Foot Washing, the Last Supper, Jesus’ post-Crucifixion appearance to the Apostles (Doubting Thomas), Pentecost and the Death of the Virgin—were codified in a poem by Modestus’ successor on the patriarchal throne of Jerusalem, Sophronius (634–8):

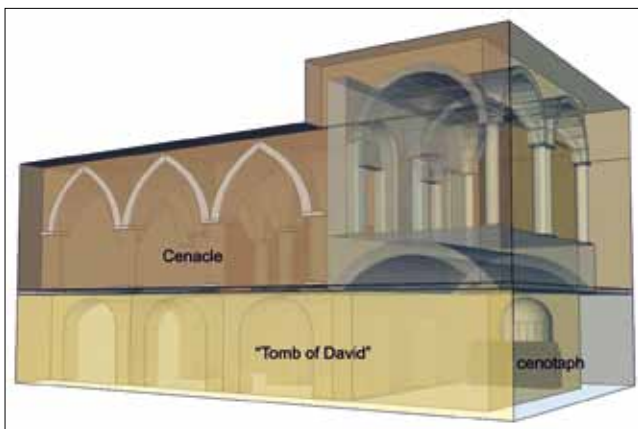
And, speeding on,
may I pass to Sion
where, in the likeness of fiery tongues,
the Grace of God descended;
where, when he had completed
the mystic supper, the King of All
teaching in humility
washed his disciples’ feet.
Blessings of salvation, like rivers,
pour from that Rock where Mary,
handmaid of God, childbearing for all men,
was laid out in death.
Hail, Sion, radiant Sun of the universe!
Night and day I long and yearn for thee.
There, after shattering hell,
and liberating the dead,
the King of All, the Shatterer
appeared there, the Friend.

(Sophronius, Bishop of Jerusalem 1957:
55–72; 2002: 158–60)

In 1009 the Caliph Hakim destroyed the great basilica once again. The structure was rebuilt by the Crusaders in the twelfth century, arguably again as a five-aisled basilica, though it may have been vaulted (Pringle 2007: 274). It was then known as the Church of Zion or Saint Mary’s. The Roman hall that had been incorporated into the earlier basilicas was also a part of the new one. The floor level of the lower story was raised and an anonymous monolithic

FIG 5

Jerusalem, Cenacle/Tomb of David as it was in the Middle Ages (Google Sketchup model for Second Life by the author).



granite cenotaph was introduced into its northeast corner (Pinkerfeld 1960: 42–3). It was probably during the Crusader period that the structure took on the form, if not all the details, of the surviving building (Figure 5). Pilgrims’ descriptions indicate that the church’s biblical associations survived its ruination and reconstruction. Several of the sacred sites and holy objects associated with the church— notably the locus of the death of the Virgin and the stones of Stephen’s martyrdom—were remarkably mobile in their locations within it. The place of the Last Supper and Pentecost—known as the Cenaculum or Cenacle—was, however, consistently identified with the upper room of the Roman hall. The site of the Foot Washing was visited downstairs.⁵

The physical instantiations of biblical events associated with the Church of Zion continued to be recorded by pilgrims through the Middle Ages. The textual attestations of pilgrims’ accounts are the most familiar means of accessing the sacred thingness of past epiphanies. But other media also document a pre-modern insistence on the material manifestation of sacred narratives. For example, the miniatures of an early Middle Byzantine manuscript provide further evidence of the persistent association of holy happenings with Zion. The Chludov Psalter (Moscow, Historical Museum, cod. 129) is dated by various scholars to between the middle of the ninth and the early tenth century; its generally accepted provenance is Constantinople (Corrigan 1992: 124–34). Folio 51r of the codex is ornamented with an elaborately rendered church. The structure is composed of a tower, a galleried basilica and a distinct, arcaded, lower level emphasized by its gilded columns and vermillion intercolumniations, as well as by the steep stairway that leads up to its entrance (Figure 6).⁶ This miniature has been persuasively identified as a representation of the basilica on Mount Zion



FIG 6
 Moscow, Historical Museum,
 Chludov Psalter, cod. 129, fols
 50v–51r. From M. V. Scepkina,
*Miniatjury chludovskoj psaltyri:
 greceskij illjustrirovannyj kodeks IX
 veka* (Moscow: Iskossstvo, 1977).

(Grabar 1965).⁷ Overlooked in art-historical assessments, however, is the possible significance of reading the base stratum, not as city walls or an atrium as heretofore, but rather as a foundation level, undercroft or lower church. Thus interpreted, the miniature expresses the building’s most iconographically significant feature: a double-storied program of the upper and lower levels.

The setting of the Chludov Psalter miniature confirms the church’s biblical associations and their importance for a Christian audience. A blue marker in the left margin of the page indicates the passage in the text that the miniature illustrates, the Septuagint Psalm 50, which is read as the Orthros antiphon at Pentecost (Mateos 1963: 2.136–7). A second blue mark, painted above the church, points across the page to the painting of Jesus washing the Apostles’ feet in the left margin of folio 50v, thus alluding also to the Last Supper, to which the Foot Washing is inevitably attached. The ability of a building, even a painted one, to reify the events it commemorates is fully exploited: the text accrues meaning from the image. But, of course, the image also acquires meaning from the text: King David, author of the Psalms and founder of biblical Zion, is rendered below the church in conversation with “the Holy City.”⁸ The miniature exhibits the special faculty of powerful medieval images—vacillation between the mimetic and the metonymic. King David is rendered as a physical presence at the church.

The painting illustrates one way in which a sacred space materialized physical proofs of its auratic associations: the image of Zion generated the body of the King. The same thing happened on the faux Mount Zion. The identification of King David's body with Zion, visually expressed in the Chludov Psalter, begins to be literalized in pilgrimage texts. Most accounts make no mention of King David on Mount Zion, but from the time of the Crusades, descriptions of the Holy Land start to associate King David's burial with the site occupied by the Mother of All Churches. An anonymous traveler of the twelfth century, for example, observes that "In Mount Zion David and Solomon and other kings of Jerusalem are said to be buried," indicating the absence at the time of a specific, recognized location of the tomb (Wilkinson 1988: 202; for the Latin, Anonymous 1860: 428).

A much more detailed reference to the indeterminacy of David's burial on Mount Zion is made in the mid-twelfth century by the formidable Jewish traveler, Benjamin of Tudela:

In front of Jerusalem is Mount Zion, on which there is no building, except a place of worship belonging to the Christians. Facing Jerusalem for a distance of three miles are the cemeteries belonging to the Israelites, who in the days of old buried their dead in caves, and upon each sepulchre is a dated inscription, but the Christians destroy the sepulchres, employing the stones thereof in building their houses. These sepulchres reach as far as Zelzah in the territory of Benjamin. Around Jerusalem are high mountains.

On Mount Zion are the sepulchres of the House of David and the sepulchres of the kings that ruled after him. The exact place cannot be identified, inasmuch as fifteen years ago a wall of the church of Mount Zion fell in. The Patriarch commanded the overseer to take the stones of the old walls and restore therewith the church. He did so, and hired workmen at fixed wages; and there were twenty men who brought the stones from the base of the wall of Zion. Among these men there were two who were sworn friends. On a certain day the one entertained the other; after their meal they returned to their work, when the overseer said to them, "Why have you tarried to-day?" They answered, "Why need you complain? When our fellow workmen go to their meal we will do our work." When the dinner-time arrived, and the other workmen had gone to their meal, they examined the stones, and raised a certain stone which formed the entrance to a cave. Thereupon one said to the other, "Let us go in and see if any money is to be found there." They entered the cave, and reached a large chamber resting upon pillars of marble overlaid with silver and gold. In front was a table of gold and a sceptre and crown. This was the sepulchre of King David. On the left thereof in like fashion was the sepulchre of King Solomon; then followed the sepulchres of all the kings of Judah that were buried there. Closed coffers were also there,

the contents of which no man knows. The two men essayed to enter the chamber, when a fierce wind came forth from the entrance of the cave and smote them, and they fell to the ground like dead men, and there they lay until evening. And there came forth a wind like a man's voice, crying out: "Arise and go forth from this place!" So the men rushed forth in terror, and they came unto the Patriarch, and related these things to him. Thereupon the Patriarch sent for Rabbi Abraham el Constantini, the pious recluse, who was one of the mourners of Jerusalem, and to him he related all these things according to the report of the two men who had come forth. Then Rabbi Abraham replied, "These are the sepulchres of the House of David; they belong to the kings of Judah, and on the morrow let us enter, I and you and these men, and find out what is there." And on the morrow they sent for the two men, and found each of them lying on his bed in terror, and the men said: "We will not enter there, for the Lord doth not desire to show it to any man." Then the Patriarch gave orders that the place should be closed up and hidden from the sight of man unto this day. These things were told me by the said Rabbi Abraham. (Benjamin of Tudela 1907: 24–5/38–41)

Benjamin, who stops off at Jerusalem on his way to Baghdad and Persia, retells an "eyewitness" account of a local rabbi of the small community of Jews in Crusader Jerusalem: the story of an opulent rock-cut tomb chamber discovered during the repair of the foundations of a Christian church. Benjamin observes that the specific location of the tomb was, fifteen years later, no longer known.⁹ This Ali-Baba-esque incident on Zion has no other medieval witnesses. Indeed, it uncannily resembles Josephus' account of Herod's thwarted theft of booty from David's tomb.¹⁰ The magical core of the tale—the miraculous discovery of a great and historically significant treasure and its mystical loss—is, in any case, a ubiquitous topos of tall tales from the *Thousand and One Nights* to *The Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Benjamin might be blamed by a modern reader for a lack of practical skepticism in the deployment of his oral sources, but he certainly could not be charged with flagrant deception. Obviously literary texts served as models for these pilgrims' accounts. But they may have also been generated in response to objects in the sacred landscape. These objects demanded explanatory stories. It seems at least possible that the cenotaph set in the lower level of the Cenacle contributed to King David's manifestation on the site.

Latin control of Jerusalem famously ended with the Crusaders' ignominious defeat by Salah al-Din Yusuf Ibn Ayyub (Saladin) in the Battle of Hattin in 1187. The Mamluks displaced the Ayyubids as the Muslim masters of Jerusalem in 1250. Latin Christians retained a precarious hold on some properties in the Holy Land by buying them.

An agreement between James II of Aragon (r. 1291–1327) and Sultan Al-Malik al-Nasir Muhammad (r. 1310–41) secured the convent and Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem for the Franciscans as early as 1327 (Arce 1974: 141–55; Ordoardo 1943). In 1333, the same sultan promulgated a firman or decree awarding the Franciscans the right to live permanently in the Holy Sepulcher and celebrate Latin Christian rites there. They were also given custody of the Cenacle on Mount Zion.¹¹

The Franciscans yet again restored the church, now as a three-aisled basilica. The Roman hall, reconstructed by the Crusaders, was part of the revived complex (Plommer 1982: 145). It retained its connections to familiar Gospel events. The mendicants are still in the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem and in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem (Collin 1982: 3–5). But after the Mamluks were superseded by the Ottomans as overlords of Jerusalem in the early sixteenth century, the Franciscans were evicted from the heights of the southwest hill. First they lost their church, then their monastery. Much of the Franciscan complex was destroyed. Surviving bits, including parts of the Roman hall, were incorporated into a mosque.¹²

The Franciscans were displaced by the body of David. The Franciscan, Francesco Suriano, writing contemporaneously in 1524, was explicit:

From the foundations of the church of Mount Zion can be gathered its size: the length is 100 braccia [a braccio is the length of a man's arm—a little more than two feet/61 centimeters] and the width 50: it has three naves, all covered with slabs of the finest marble with a mosaic floor. Of which building nothing remains save the apse of the high altar, the Cenacle of Christ and the Chapel of the Holy Ghost. [This last was built by Duke Philip of Burgundy, who ordered that after his death, his heart be removed and buried in it.] ... This chapel then so beautiful and so ornate out of envy and hate for the Christian faith was again by the fury of the populace brought to ruins and at the same time were destroyed and broken all the rooms and cells of the cloister within the place. And the reason of such ruin were the dogs of Jews, because they told the Saracens that under the chapel was the tomb of David the prophet. When the Lord Sultan heard this he ordered that the tomb and place be taken from the Friars and dedicated to their cult, and so it was done. And the Saracens, considering it a shame that the Friars should celebrate above them, who regarded themselves as superior, destroyed it. (Suriano [1524] 1949: 123)

Suriano's interpretation of the circumstances of the Franciscan eviction from Zion must be read in the context of Suleiman the Magnificent's interest in Jerusalem's restitution as an Islamic holy city (Cuneo 2000: 213–14).

The passage, nevertheless, reveals the power of the presumed body of David to displace the Franciscans and destroy their basilica. From the sixteenth through the first half of the twentieth century, both under Ottoman rule and during the British Mandate, the Cenacle and its basement functioned as a Muslim holy place. A minaret and dome were added to the structure; a mihrab was also let into the south wall of the upper chamber.¹³ The Crusader cenotaph was read as a marker of King David's presence. Non-Muslim visitors were not permitted free access.¹⁴ The state's authority was expressed on the height of the faux Mount Zion by a mosque; the prominence and aura of the site was put to work for Islam.

Politics of Material Culture

An intimate relationship between political ideology and auratic space can be argued for pre-modern sites, but it is best documented in modernity. Mount Zion provides excellent examples of how material evidence is produced to support contradictory claims about sacred history. One arena for such claims in modernity was the new science of archaeology. From the late nineteenth century, archaeology in Jerusalem, like contemporary foreign construction undertaken there, indexes both the increased presence of colonizing Western powers in the Ottoman Empire and their nationalist and sectarian rivalries.

In 1910, the height of Mount Zion came to be controlled by a new marker. The mosque of the Cenacle and David's Tomb—the surviving bits of the Mother of All Churches—was overshadowed by a massive Rhineland-Neo-Romanesque church, dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin. The modern structure was built on land gifted to Kaiser Wilhelm II by Sultan Abu-al-Hamid II. It was constructed by Heinrich Renard, the diocesan architect of Cologne and well-established designer of Romanesque Revival churches (Kohler 2005; Meyer 1984). Renard undertook an archaeological survey of the German holdings on the southwest hill in preparation for his construction, publishing his findings in 1900 (Renard 1900: 66). According to his plan, the Roman-era structure remained separate from the later, five-aisled Early Christian basilica, attached externally to the east end of its south wall (Figure 4, bottom). Renard argued that he positioned the new church in such a manner that its central-planned crypt overlapped the exact site in the northwest corner of the lost basilica where the Virgin died. For Renard, the reclamation of at least this part of the earlier church was compensatory for the loss to the Christians of the Cenacle. As Renard wrote, “The lost possession of the Cenacle feels as sad to us as the thought that so many Christian

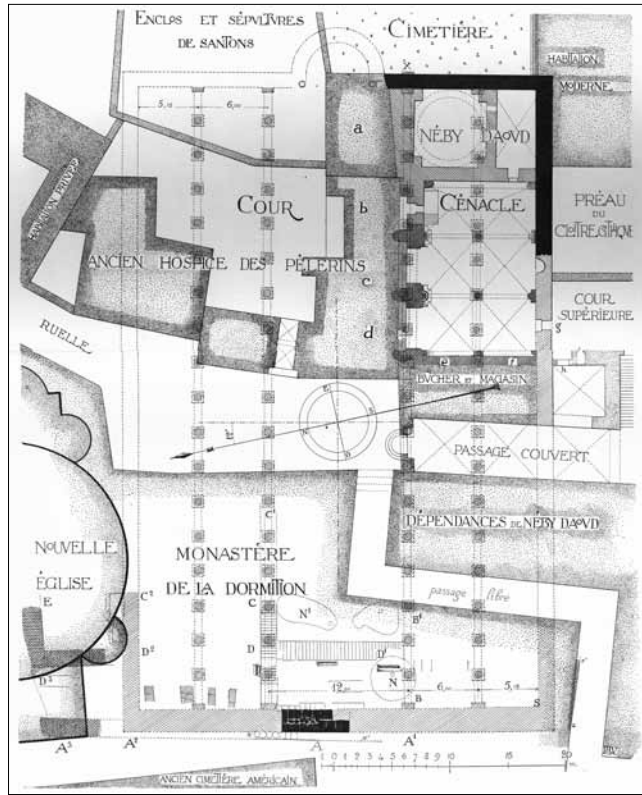
pilgrims, who bravely journeyed to Jerusalem, now rest there in their graves, so far from their homeland" (1900: 66). Renard's conclusions about the arrangement and location of the Virgin's death and of the original church on Mount Zion were buttressed by Carl Mommert, a German Catholic priest and theologian, with a thorough—sometimes too literal and occasionally quite imaginative—review of the literary accounts of Late Ancient and medieval visitors to Mount Zion (Mommert 1898; Mommert 1905).

An alternative rendering of the site was offered by the French Dominican archaeologist, Louis-Hugues Vincent, who published a beaux-arts ground plan of the Early Christian basilica as well as exquisite renderings of the plan, sections and elevations of the Cenacle in 1922 (Figure 3) (Vincent and Abel 1922: pl. 49). Vincent positioned the five-aisled basilica further to the southeast than Renard, arguing that the Roman-era hall was incorporated within the easternmost bays of its south aisle (Figure 4, top). The site identified as the place associated with the Virgin's death was thus, according to Vincent's plan, well beyond the walls of the new, German Church of the Dormition. The rational, elegant, detailed "restauration schématique" of the five-aisled basilica is so aesthetically compelling that it is often read as a factual account of the ancient Mother of All Churches (Figure 7). As the distinguished archaeologist, Yoram Tsafrir, has pointed out, Vincent's understanding of the topography, plan and relationship of the Late Ancient Hall and the Early Christian basilica may have been affected by his treatment at the hands of the Germans: he was not allowed to take notes or photographs within the German-held parts of the site during Renard's investigations (Tsafrir 1975: 183–91). In the absence of further excavation, all assertions made about the original site of the building and its form must remain hypothetical.

The debate on the location of the church on Zion was superseded by another archaeological controversy. In 1957, the Roman-era hall, housing the Cenacle above and Tomb of David below, was investigated by the archaeologist, Jakob Pinkerfeld. Pinkerfeld, a Jewish scholar, worked on the site at the direction of the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs in preparation for repairs necessitated by bomb damage incurred during the 1948 war (Pinkerfeld 1960). Pinkerfeld remains, so far as I am aware, the only archaeologist to be permitted to undertake a serious investigation of the structure's fabric whose findings have been published. Pinkerfeld dated the building's origins to the first or second century CE and described the three distinct pavement levels that

FIG 7

Jerusalem, "restauration schématique" of the Church of the Apostles by Louis-Hugues Vincent, from Vincent and Abel, *Jérusalem: recherches de topographie, d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 2.49.



Jerusalem's Zions
Annabel Jane Wharton

he found as evidence of Roman, Late Roman/Byzantine and Crusader occupation. Pinkerfeld concluded that the structure originally functioned as a Late Ancient synagogue. Later, Pinkerfeld's findings were used by another archaeologist, Bargil Pixner, to argue that the structure was built not as a synagogue, but as a Judeo-Christian church.¹⁵ Pixner was a Christian of the Benedictine Order. These two identifications continue to be debated; other possibilities, like that of a pagan shrine, are oddly ignored (Tsafrir 1975: 201). All archaeological findings, like all interpretations, have an ideological dimension, whether sectarian or nationalistic. But competing claims for sacred space may well have impeded scientific study more in the Holy Land than elsewhere (Abu El-Haj 2001).

More public and invidious than the ideological claims made by scholars on the basis of the residue of lost buildings are those made by politicians and entrepreneurs about surviving ones. The Arab-Israeli War of 1948 changed the state religion occupying Mount Zion. The Old City was held by the Jordanians; parts of the southwest hill outside the walls of Jerusalem came under the control of the Israelis. King David, as a celebrated military and

FIG 8

Visitors to the Tomb of David on Mount Zion, photo by Alfred Eisenstaedt for *Life Magazine*, January 1, 1955 (courtesy *Life Magazine*/Getty Images).



spiritual leader, presented a persuasive standard for rallying both secular and religious Jews. Indeed, his so-called tomb assumed a new and highly charged political significance. It became a physical focus of Zionist enthusiasm as well as of traditional Jewish religious veneration. Its rooftop performed as a viewing platform, providing a visual entrée to the Old City, from which Jews had been excluded (Figure 8). The Wailing Wall/Western Wall/Kotel, an accessible section of the Herodian retaining wall of the Temple Mount, had served as the locus of Jewish piety since the Early Modern period. After 1948, like other structures within the walls of the Old City, the Wall became inaccessible to Jews. By the 1950s, some of its rituals had been transferred to the Tomb of David (Bar 2004). For more than a decade, Mount Zion was a major Jewish pilgrimage destination for both religious Jews and for Zionists.

The rich ritual and political life of the faux Tomb of David became poorer with the Israeli capture of the Old City from the Jordanians in 1967. The site of the Western Wall was spectacularized by the clearing of a great plaza for its display—within hours of capturing the city, the Israelis bulldozed the ancient monuments of the Magribi quarter for its creation. Old and new rituals of religious tradition and of national identity migrated to the newly theatricalized venue. The same year, the Tomb of David and the complex of which it was a part were entrusted by the Israeli Ministry for Religious Affairs to the ultra-Orthodox, now settler-identified, Diaspora Yeshiva.¹⁶ The Diaspora Yeshiva is an Orthodox rabbinical school established by an American rabbi, Mordecai Goldstein, for assimilated Jews who wish to return to their religious roots. The Yeshiva's site was provided to Goldstein by

Shmuel Z. Kahane, Director General of Israel's Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1967, in order to ensure a Jewish presence in a Jerusalem neighborhood populated between the first century and twentieth century almost exclusively by Christians and Muslims.

In order to maintain popular interest in the site, its possessors now retail the Tomb of David as the real thing and attempt to sell off objects associated with it as contact relics. The Diaspora Yeshiva supports a website on the Tomb of David (www.davidstomb.com) which appears to have only those two principal functions:

You have now entered the holy site of Mt. Zion. The structures you see about are built upon foundations that go back to biblical times ... The spirit and personality of King David can be sensed all around. Visitors can feel his humility, his humanity, his joy and his towering faith, which made him G-d's [sic] anointed one. King David united the Jewish People. He built Jerusalem and the foundation of our Holy Temple ...

For more than a thousand years Jewish tradition has identified Mount Zion as being the last resting place of King David and his descendants, the Kings of Judah. The fearless Jewish traveler, Benjamin of Tudela, traveled from his native Spain to visit Jerusalem in the twelfth century. His chronicles tell the story of how King David's Tomb and the other royal graves were discovered.

... You are now standing in the presence of a huge stone monument, hewn of a single piece of black Granite. It blocks the way to the cave wherein King David lies buried.

The text misrepresents Benjamin of Tudela's account as credibly verifying Mount Zion as the site of King David's tomb. The claim that the cenotaph that now occupies the tomb chamber blocks the entrance to the actual tomb is a groundless fabrication.

The other objective of the website is the promotion of the Yeshiva's collection of objects associated with the tomb. Indeed, most of its web pages display not structures, but artifacts (Figure 9). The ahistorical authentication of the tomb on the website provides a mythologized sacred provenance for King David's pre-State [pre-1948] tomb cover, "two-hundred-year-old magical and mystical charity box," bronze charity box, "stone well cover to King David's well of blessings and miracles," a metal-clad door, and three wooden, pointed-arch window frames "of transforming light." The works shown on the website are offered there for sale:

In order to help facilitate, promote and maintain the growth of our institutions on Mount Zion, to protect and guarantee the Historical Jewish Ownership of this Holy Place and bring

FIG 9

"From King David's Royal Tomb," available through the Diaspora Yeshiva's website at kingdavidsheritage.com (captured by author April 10, 2010).



back the dignity and glory of King David it has now been deemed necessary to sell the above mentioned one of a kind artifacts.

As of June 2010, these items were on auction for something less than a hundred million dollars or your best offer.

The gifting or theft of a relic tends to increase the veneration of its progenitor; the sale of a relic, in contrast, corrodes devotion (Wharton 2006: 27–47). The older, but historically possible, association of the old Roman building with Jesus' apostles has been replaced by the newer, but historically impossible, identification as the Tomb of David. The aura of the site is almost gone.

Depreciating Aura

Not only has Mount Zion lost its ideological status to the Kotel, but modern Jerusalem is so expanded that the dominant structure on the southwest hill has also lost its status of being the highest in the city. Claims to being

most elevated point in Jerusalem have been made over the years on behalf of the Augusta Victoria Hospital, the tower of the YMCA, Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, Mount Herzl Memorial Cemetery, Gilo, even the first Jerusalem Hilton Hotel.

The long and often violent history of the Roman-era structure now at the core of the Diaspora Yeshiva has driven it to a certain kind of architectural schizophrenia. The two floors of this old, core building have very different forms. The lower level is an oblong hall divided into two aisles by low piers (Figure 10). The chamber, as the foundation for the structure above, is, like many basements, squat in its proportions, artificially illuminated and architecturally unadorned. The monolithic Crusader cenotaph, set under the high niche in the east end of the northern wall of the room, provides its off-axis focus (Pinkerfeld 1960: 42). The upper level is the Cenacle, venerated as the site of the Last Supper and Pentecost since Late Antiquity (Figure 11). Like the room below it, it is double-aisled, but in contrast to its substructure, the upper room is elegantly proportioned. The present configuration of the space dates from the Middle Ages: its six bays are

FIG 10

Jerusalem, Mount Zion, "David's Tomb," interior view of the north aisle to the east, now the women's side of the site (author's photograph, 2006).



FIG 11

Jerusalem, Mount Zion, Cenacle, interior view towards the southwest, before the new lighting installed for the Pope's visit in 2009 (author's photograph, 2005).



ribbed-vaulted; modified Corinthian capitals adorn the columns; three large, pointed-arched windows generously light the interior.

Now the upper and lower rooms of the structure are disassociated in function as well as in appearance. The two chambers have different audiences. Tourists, Jewish school children and new recruits to the Israeli army visit the lower room, now presented by rabbis who should know better as the true Tomb of David. Tourists and Christian pilgrims visit the upper room. The two sites have different and independent circulation patterns. The entrance to the Tomb is in its south wall; the entrance to the Cenacle is from the north face. Their distinct publics only marginally overlap. The upper and lower rooms also now have different meanings. The upper room has lost many of its empowering narratives. Though still identified as the site of the Last Supper and the Pentecost to those pilgrims who visit it, the upper chamber is empty, unoriented and desacralized. At the same time, the lower room has accrued meaning and numinousness through its misrepresentation as the Tomb of David. The discordant functions and multiple meanings accrued by the late Roman hall in popular pre-modern practice continue, remarkably, to be promoted in modernity. It remains empirically impossible to prove that the two-storied, late-Roman hall, identified as the Church of the Apostles in the fourth century, was visited by Jesus in the first century, though some scholars argue that it is possible. In contrast, archaeologists agree that it is utterly improbable that David was buried beneath that same structure.

The misidentified Mount Zion with its Gothic chapel and pseudo Tomb of David exemplifies the religious compulsion for the material embodiment of the sacred.

It is a desire that, in pre-modernity, led the pious to reify significant scriptural events within distinct local topographies. It is a desire that, in modernity, motivated archaeologists to read texts and draw boundaries to legitimate national and sectarian claims about the location of the holy. It is a desire that, in the present, tempts Orthodox teachers, to whom students' religious and ethical training is committed, to abuse biblical and literary sources as well as the archaeological record. The Tomb of King David is rather like the Garden Tomb of Jesus, located beyond Damascus Gate on the opposite side of the Old City (Figure 1). Both tombs are recognized by all competent scholars as faux and both are treated by some religious fundamentalists as authentic. It is well known that the Garden Tomb was a Protestant invention of George Gordon in the nineteenth century (Monk 2002: 18–33). The sources of the fabrication of King David's tomb are older and more obscure. This paper certainly cannot dispel that obscurity, but, through an assessment of the architectural embodiment of the sacred on "Mount Zion," it offers a context for its production.

notes and references

¹ I am grateful to Professors Anthony Cutler, Kathleen Corrigan, Ora Limor, and Jodi Magness for their helpful comments on various drafts of this article. I am also indebted to Professor Kalman Bland for his critical reading of various versions of this piece and for his valuable suggestions for its content.

² "Royal tombs" were discovered in excavations on the southeast hill at the beginning of the century. See Weill 1920: 157–73; Mazar 2006.

³ In the Byzantine period, the southwest hill was again included within the city walls. It was, however, left outside the walls once more under the Fatimids. The last great reconstruction of the fortifications by the Ottoman Sultan, Sulieman the Magnificent,

between 1537 and 1541, also excluded Zion. These last walls and their gates were restored under the aegis of Ronald Storrs, Governor of Jerusalem, during the British Mandate. For a comprehensive and scholarly assessment of the history of the walls of Jerusalem, see Wightman 1993. The most comprehensive overview of the archaeology of the site remains that of Yoram Tsafrir, see Tsafrir 1975: Chapter 2. A recently completed excavation in Jerusalem uncovered sections of the Hasmonean and Byzantine city walls on Zion; see Resig 2008. For the few excavations that have been undertaken on the southwest hill, see: Eshel and Prag 1995; Stern et al. 2008: 1814–15.

⁴ The sources on Zion from the fourth through the eleventh

centuries are conveniently gathered by Baldi (1955: 471–96) and Wilkinson (2002). Just as a new Wal-Mart spawns further box stores and retail outlets, the Mother of All Churches led to the proliferation of venerated places on Mount Zion: the House of Caiaphas, the site of Peter's repentance and the first tomb of the proto-martyr Stephen. For a diligent review of the primary sources and a good secondary source bibliography, see Pringle 2007.

⁵ For the sources of the Crusader period, see Baldi 1955: 496–501 and Wilkinson 1988. Pixner claims that the Crusaders invented the tombs of David and Solomon to complement the empty tomb of Stephen, but provides no references in support of his claim (Pixner 1990: 34).

⁶ An ornamental and unillusionistic depiction, modern viewers tend to read the image as a conventional signifier of a generic religious site. Specialists, too, have often understood the rendering as an idealized type. In a learned discussion of this manuscript's illuminations, Anthony Cutler, for example, describes the painting as "a miniature showing a female personification of Sion pointing to an elaborate edifice representing Jerusalem" (Cutler 1980–81: 24, n.47). The illustration has been most recently read as Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (Meyer 2009).

⁷ The idiosyncratic features of the miniature were noticed by the distinguished Islamic architectural historian, Oleg Grabar, who argued that its prominent staircase allows the depiction to be identified as the south end of the Haram al-Sharif (Grabar 1983).

⁸ The figure's inscription is illegible in the 1977 reproduction of the manuscript (Scepkina 1977). It is, however, visible in the 2006 facsimile (Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii ... 2006). The two other figures interacting on the left side of the lower margin of the page, Doeg the Edomite and King Saul, illustrate the heading of Psalm 51.

⁹ For a discussion of Benjamin of Tudela's identification of the location of the Tomb of David and a refutation of those who use that account to support any claims of the tomb's authenticity, see Arce 1963 and Baldi 1938: 202–10.

¹⁰ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 7.393; 16.179–83. The episode does not seem to be recounted in the medieval Hebrew redaction of Josephus; see Josephus 1981. But also see Ginzberg 1954: 119–21. I am grateful to Professor Kalman Bland for bringing these references to my attention.

¹¹ Bulls of Clement VI, *Nuper charissimae* and *Gratias agimus*, Avignon, November 21, 1342, record this history and accord papal approval to the arrangements. For a scholarly review of the establishment of the Franciscan custody of the holy sites, see Lemmens O. F. M. 1925.

¹² For an outline and references to a more complex history of the conversion, as well as for a description of the Muslim additions to the structure, see Natsheh 2000: 659–64. The building was not accessible for a survey of the monument. As stated in the text, the assessment of the architecture depends on Vincent and Abel.

¹³ Whatever the date of the carving of the mihrab, its introduction into the space is relatively recent. It does not appear in photographs of the Cenacle published by Camille Enlart: Enlart 1925–8: fig. 96.

¹⁴ For Muslim travelers' accounts, see al-Asali 1992: 212, 66, 73, 81, 87, 92, 300, 06.

¹⁵ Pixner 1990. Wilkinson argues that the structure is the surviving part of the Byzantine church, not a building incorporated into it. His thesis does not account for the Roman, Early Byzantine and Crusader floor layers identified by Pinkerfeld: Wilkinson 1978. Wilkinson is followed by Pringle: Pringle 2007: 272.

¹⁶ The assignment was made by Dr S. Z. Kahane, then Director of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the State of Israel, see Introduction to the Diaspora Yeshiva nd.

- The Diaspora Yeshiva is now a politically active organization with close ties to settlers in the Occupied Territories, particularly in Ma'ale Amos. Most recently it has vociferously opposed the state's attempt to return custody of the Cenacle to the Catholic Church in exchange for the Spanish government's gift of a medieval synagogue to a newly formed Jewish community in Andalusia. For a discussion of the attempts of the Dajani family, the long-established caretakers of the property, to regain their home and the graveyard of their family from the state, see, Natsheh 2000: 659–60, n.4.
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