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# Review Essay

## ***Jerusalem Obscured***

### ***The Crescent on the Temple: The Dome of the Rock as Image of the Ancient Jewish Sanctuary***

Pamela Berger. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012. 393pp.

## Curtis Hutt\*

To begin with, what is it? In order to answer this question one must, of course, qualify it by asking—to whom? Pamela Berger in *The Crescent on the Temple: The Dome of the Rock as Image of the Ancient Jewish Sanctuary* has done a great service by supplying us with a history of the iconographic representation of Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock (the Qubbat al-Sakhrah). While no publication could ever exhaustively summarize the countless visual and literary portrayals of this world heritage site, Berger not only makes a valiant attempt at such but necessarily changes the way that almost all scholars and untrained alike look at this edifice in the present. The images she examines are worth far more than a thousand words. Various depictions of the holy site perched on Mt. Moriah in the *al-Haram al-Sharif* (“the Noble Sanctuary”) found across the world in Islamic homes and public buildings, on advertisements produced by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism, and memorabilia purchased by pilgrims—make this little understood but extraordinarily beautiful structure one the most well-known on the planet. Rising above white marble and once multicolored gold and glass mosaic, its famous, now gold-covered Dome has captured the attention of those looking upon the old city of Jerusalem from several directions since the end of the seventh century. Inside marble and elaborate mosaics, the largest preserved set from before the twelfth century anywhere in the area surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, provide a glorious ring around sacred rock and cave.

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Frankly, upon consideration of its long history and Berger's work on the history of its representation, this review author doesn't even know where to begin.

Though some would make religious war in its name (cf. *Al-Quds* Day leaflets are plastered with its image in Iran; contemporary fanatical Jewish and Christian proponents of a “third temple” call for its removal/destruction), very few if we are to believe the author of *The Crescent on the Temple* understand its historical significance—not simply for its Muslim builders over 1300 years ago, but astonishingly for countless Jews and Christians until the first decades of the twentieth century. What it is—for Muslims, Jews, and Christians today—is simply not the same as it was for their forebears. Many may pause at this last sentence. How could this be? But this simple conclusion, which causes the reader of *The Crescent on the Temple* to ask questions previously considered unnecessary and test unchallenged assumptions, is Pamela Berger's most important contribution. Her central thesis that the Dome of the Rock has regularly served as a representation of Solomonic, Herodian, and future Messianic Jewish temples over the last thousand years in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic iconography is startling given present-day prejudices. It is also, given Berger's detailed historical research, indisputable.

*The Crescent on the Temple*—to quote Nohad Ali, an expert on contemporary religious fundamentalism in Islamic and Jewish communities in Israel—elicits “shock” from the faithful *and* academics alike. This is not only because the evidence presented by Berger is convincing. The implications of her research are extremely troubling for several different reasons. Just a quick glance at the front cover of the book, where an image of the Dome of the Rock appears with the Hebrew label *Beth ha-Miqdash* (“House of the Holy”), to a focus group composed of Christian graduate students in Jerusalem recently (June 20, 2013) elicited initial confusion and consternation. Upon consideration of Berger's argument, her research was then deemed to be disturbing—after all, as a couple of students remarked, how could they have missed this—though not surprising! Yes, Jewish/Islamic relations have suffered greatly over the last century. The Dome of the Rock, furthermore, as noted by the eminent Israeli scholar Oleg Grabar in his work on the topic, is clearly not a mosque. To cite different Muslim sources, the entire platform upon which it sits—the *al-Haram al-Sharif*—is a holy site, with the al-Aqsa mosque serving as the primary congregational structure. Rather, the Dome of the Rock is most often described as a memorial shrine. But a shrine to what? And why should this majestic

building overshadow the *al-Aqsa* mosque, the Church of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulchre), and the rest of ancient Jerusalem? What did Caliph Umar, or more pertinently Caliph 'Abd al-Malik, know about the site upon which this spectacular structure was built? And why did the latter choose to build what they did—over thirteen hundred years later still one of the most recognizable buildings in the world?

### **A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION**

Pamela Berger begins the *The Crescent on the Temple* by reviewing written descriptions not of the Dome of the Rock but of the Jewish temples that reputedly occupied the same site in textual sources reaching back to Biblical period. Perhaps most significantly to contemporary critical historians and revivalists, in the sixth chapter of I Kings and Josephus (who also quotes from Hecataeus of Abdera) as well as the Christian Testament and Mishnah the Jewish temples occupying the site from the time of Solomon<sup>1</sup> until 70 CE are described as rectangular—not the octagonal shape of the Dome of the Rock. Daily sacrifices, amongst multiple sacerdotal and administrative activities, were performed there. This is the case not only for the most famous Solomonic and Herodian temples, but also for that of the often forgotten Zerubbabel. These Jewish temples as shown by Berger, however, were by no means identical structures performing “the same” religious/social functions. Zerubbabel's and Herod the Great's temples did not contain the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. As rulers and priestly administrators changed, so did the reputation of the temple in Jerusalem. Jeremiah and Jesus famously questioned the leadership of the temples existing during their times and efficacy of their sacrifices. Berger might have mentioned that some Jews, as evidenced by the ancient Temple Scroll discovered along the shores of the Dead Sea at Khirbet Qumran, believed that not even Solomon had constructed the perfect Jewish temple. On the ninth of the Jewish month of Ab when supposedly Babylonians and then Romans destroyed the temples occupying the site, divine retribution on sinful temple authorities was imposed by foreign conquerors. Roman pagan leaders, followed by Constantine the Great, subsequently banned Jews from Jerusalem. In keeping with the prophecy of Jesus (Mark 13:2), at the site of the former Jewish temples not a single stone would stand upon another until the Messianic age.

It is at this point that we get our first taste of Pamela Berger's expertise, with a review of the most ancient visual representations of the Jewish temples that have come

down to us today. From the first image discussed (11–12), it is important to note that what is depicted—for example, on a tetradrachma coin from the time of Bar Kochba in the early 130s CE—does not match past historical reality. Instead what was believed about the appearance of Solomonic and Herodian temples is conflated in the image on the coin. The columnated facade of the imagined Jewish temple found in this representation fashioned decades after the destruction of the last existing structure at the site, is similar to that of other Roman temples depicted on gold coins of Hadrian while the Ark of the Covenant—present only in Solomon's temple—is depicted within. Actually, the image of the façade doesn't even match Josephus' description of Herod's temple which had no columns! Likewise, the earliest surviving paintings of the Jewish temple and the tent of the desert Tabernacle found on a synagogue at Dura Europos (13–15) depict a rectangular shaped Roman-style temple. Depictions of the past Jerusalem temples produced before the most recent decades, never live up to the standards of critical historians in the present. Even the most carefully produced present-day reconstructions of past temples based upon precise readings of ancient texts and extant archaeological remains, often disagree with each other and many details are underdetermined. There is no guarantee that ancient descriptions of the site match what was actually constructed at any specific point in time. The *al-Haram al-Sharif* or Temple Mount, moreover, has to this date not been subject to extensive and thorough archaeological investigation. As is often the case in the study of the ancient world, it is easier to rule out what could not have been than to advance accurate reconstructions of historical sites. Contemporary image-based 3D modeling of heritage sites is certainly impressive, but also potentially deceives today's untrained viewer by providing an easily digested depiction of a much obscured past reality. The fundamental “strangeness” or “otherness” (cf. Hayden White, Elizabeth Wyschogrod<sup>2</sup>) of distant and even more recent pasts cannot be so easily erased.

As documented by Berger, Jews may have been excluded from Jerusalem and the site of their former temples by the Roman heirs of Titus and then Christian leaders, but they did not forget the significance of this place or the foundation stone/rock (*Even ha-Shetiyah*; cf. Isaiah 28:16, m. Tanhuma 10) over which their sacred religious structures were built. In 333 CE, in spite of the continuing Christian ban of Jewish visitation, a pilgrim from Bordeaux witnessed Jews mourning at the site of pierced stone and anointing it—something he writes was done annually, most likely on the ninth of Ab. St. Jerome and the Syrian monk Barsauma note similar activity in the fifth century CE.

When the apostate emperor Julian came to short-lived power and ordered the Jews to rebuild their temple and resume sacrifices in 363 CE, one can assume from the writings of the Church historians Sozomen and Theodoret that they knew exactly where to build. When the Persians took brief control of Jerusalem in 614 CE, Jews not only welcomed the victory over the Byzantine Christians but were welcomed to return to the city and resume sacrifices—presumably at the site of the Holy of Holies—by the conquerors. Clearly, Jews cheered the arrival of Caliph Umar to Jerusalem in 638 CE. Discerning precisely what occurred between Muslims and Jews at this time is difficult on account of a lack of primary written sources dated to this period. Later texts like the fourteenth century *Muthîr al-Ghirâm* by Jamâl ad Din Ahmad refer to a meeting between Caliph Umar and the Christian Bishop Sophronius where the former requests to be taken to the place where King David had prayed and “had access to the Divine presence” (Qur’an 38:21–25)—where it is traditionally presumed that Solomon built the temple and the Prophet Muhammed on his night journey ascended to the heavens. After attempting to trick Caliph Umar, Sophronius according to this source leads the new conqueror to a desecrated dung heap littered with the menstrual cloths of Christian women (the ultimate desecration). Another tradition cited by Berger, has the Jewish-Muslim convert Ka'b al Ahbar leading Caliph Umar to the sacred Rock (37–39). Almost all historians, however, date the building of the Dome of the Rock to the reign of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik over fifty years later. While it has been somewhat common practice to refer to the Dome of the Rock as the “Mosque of Umar,” as noted by Berger and several scholars before her, it is neither a mosque nor was it built by this second of the four “true Caliphs.”

Berger does not challenge the conventional views that the Dome of the Rock was built for political reasons (al-Ya'qubi: it is an alternative pilgrimage site established amidst political rivalry between 'Abd al-Malik and the rulers in Mecca; Maqaddasi: that it was built to trump the Christian Church of the Resurrection/Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem). Instead she argues that it was intentionally built as a kind of shrine on a site associated with Solomon and David that was sacred to Jews and Muslims (35–37). Following the historian al-Wasiti in his “Praises of Jerusalem,” a resident of Jerusalem 1000 years ago who relies on local traditions attributed to the Thabit family who lived in the city at the time of the building of the Dome of the Rock, Berger writes that the magnificent structure was “considered the direct heir to the temple of Solomon.” Citing Ka'b al-Ahbar, al-Wasiti argued the building was meant to be “the main temple of

the new religion.” In Arabic, the Dome of the Rock is referred to by al-Wasiti as the *Bayt al-maqdis* (“the Holy house”) and *haykal* (“temple”)—a direct translation from the Hebrew titles for the temple, *Beth ha-Miqdash* and *hekhal*. Berger, in agreement with Moshe Sharon (1992: 57–59) who is an authority on the medieval Islamic “Praises of Jerusalem,” believes al-Wasiti must be taken literally. Berger states: “It is very possible that when ‘Abd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock, the shrine was understood as the heir, if not the imagined re-creation, of the ancient temple of Solomon” (42). Not only did the Jews of the Middle East welcome the Muslim defeat of the Byzantine Christians and the re-sanctification of their holiest site (cf. the eighth century apocalyptic Jewish text “The Secrets of Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yohai”), according to Berger once again following Sharon (1992: 63–64), they assisted in the construction of the Dome of the Rock. Jews returned to Jerusalem at this time, establishing the medieval Jewish Quarter, but they also provided ‘Abd al-Malik’s builders with the instructions for where the new Muslim temple should be constructed. Extrapolating from al-Wasiti’s descriptions of the rituals performed in the Dome of the Rock, Berger suggests that these had Jewish origins as well. Ceremonies were only held on Mondays and Thursdays, times of Jewish worship with arguably no special significance in nascent Islamic traditions (48). Following the work of Heribert Busse (1998: 27), Berger asserts that the practices of attendants in the Dome of the Rock were similar to those of priests described in Exodus—ablutions necessarily preceded activity, which was conducted in special vestments, and that included the use of incense and preparing of special aromatic ointments that were applied to the sacred Rock (47–50). Even more surprising, as evidenced by the testimony in the year 903 of Ibn al Fakih, Jewish “servants” or “attendants” worked in the Dome of the Rock keeping it clean and maintaining the lamps. Astutely, Berger asks why Jews would agree to perform in this capacity if they did not consider the site to be holy or were antagonistic to its Muslim overlords. In the eleventh century, according to a Jewish source, Jews would go to the Dome of the Rock during the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*)—something they did as well on the ninth of Ab marking the destruction of the former temples. Muslim participation in these Jewish ritual practices cannot be ruled out, as the former festival according to the prophetic tradition was to be celebrated by all the nations in the Messianic age (Zechariah 14:16–19) and, as Berger shows via reference to the work of Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (194–95, 317) and Rabbi Meshullam ben R. Menahem of Volterra (212–13), Muslims also viewed the Babylonian destruction of the Jewish temple

as a desecration and kept the Jewish fast of mourning. While it is quite possible that the Jews of this time did not think that the polygonal Dome of the Rock and the rituals performed there were the precise equivalent to Solomon's rectangular temple and their former sacrificial practices, they certainly treated the site as exceedingly special. The Muslims as opposed to the Christians treated the Jewish holy site with the greatest respect and did not bar Jews from Jerusalem. Muslims pronounced no offense to Jews—as they did to Christians—in their inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock that would have prevented them from entering.<sup>3</sup>

### THE HOUSE OF THE HOLY

Pamela Berger's main contribution in *The Crescent on the Temple* are her analyses of Christian, Islamic, and especially Jewish iconographic representations of the Dome of the Rock. I am going to focus on primarily the latter, as this is most shocking and confusing to Jews and many Christians in the twenty-first century. This is not to say that Islamic representations of Solomon's temple in the form of the Dome of the Rock are not startling to many Muslims in their own right, but the images Berger examines from illustrated stories and pilgrimage itineraries are few and far between given traditional Islamic prohibitions against visual representations of human beings and animals. Chapter ten which alone deals with this topic, is the least developed in Berger's book. The absence of historical Islamic iconographic sources to turn to is augmented by Berger's relative silence on contemporary Islamic views concerning the significance of the Dome of the Rock. After quickly dealing with Berger's review of Christian iconography and then, in more detail, with images of the Dome of the Rock found in Jewish art, I will return in the final section of this review essay to current differing Muslim attitudes toward the *al-Haram al-Sharif* in general and present-day tension/conflict over this disputed site.

Berger in chapters four through nine assesses historical Christian images of the Dome of the Rock, what the Crusaders who conquered Jerusalem explicitly referred to as “the temple of the Lord” (*Templum Domini*). Even before Jerusalem was conquered by Godfrey de Bouillon in 1099, during which time Muslims, Jews, and local Christians residing in the city were massacred on the *al-Haram al-Sharif*, the image of the Dome of the Rock could be found in Christian representations of the “the temple of Solomon” (conflated with Herod's temple) at the time of Christ. Whereas for Byzantine Christians the Church of the Resurrection/Holy Sepulchre had replaced in importance the former



temple with the accouterments of its power like the ring of Solomon being transferred to this site, after the construction of the Dome of the Rock Christians began to associate the building with the temple of Solomon. Bernard the Monk, in the late ninth century, most intriguingly even refers to the temple of Solomon as containing a “synagoga of the Saracens” at this time—a possible Christian reference to the substantive performance of Jewish religious practices at the Dome of the Rock. In Carolingian Europe, as shown by Berger, the Dome of the Rock/temple of Solomon held special appeal. In addition to possibly serving as a model for similar buildings like the Palatine Chapel in the West, it appears in illustrations of scenes from the canonical Christian Gospels like the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist to his father, Zechariah the priest. Notably, the building is depicted as having a gilded dome, something which has not always been the case, corroborating early Muslim sources from this period stating the same (59). Elsewhere in the pre-Crusader Christian world, images of the Dome of the Rock can be found illustrating Gospel stories like the presentation of Jesus at the temple and the temptation of Christ as well images of events narrated in the Hebrew Bible such as Aaron and Moses in front of the desert tabernacle and priestly sacrifice at the temple.

In chapter five, Berger details the transformation of the Dome of the Rock into a distinctly Christian site. For Pope Urban II and sometimes Fulcher of Chartres, chaplain to the first Frankish king of Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock was more than the temple of Solomon (the latter equated this with the al-Aqsa Mosque) but the temple of the Lord Jesus where so many important Christological events occurred. Fulcher did associate the Rock with David and Solomon. He also acknowledged that it was a holy site for the Muslims before the Crusaders turned it into a church. Other Christians at the time amazingly denied its Muslim provenance completely, like the prior Archard of Arrouaise of the *Templum Domini* from 1112–1136 CE who wrote that the shrine was actually built by a Byzantine emperor. While it might be perplexing to some that the European Christians did not destroy the Dome of the Rock when they occupied Jerusalem, as they knew that Jesus had prophesied that not one stone of the former temple would be left on top of another until the return of the Messiah, following the classic work of Norman Cohn (1970) for many Crusaders this was the Messianic age. The transformed Dome of the Rock, the home of sundry powerful sacred objects including the Ark of the Covenant, quickly captured the imagination of the Western Christian world and held it for centuries. In the Crusader representations of Jerusalem, whether “at the time of Jesus” such as is

found the Psalter of Queen Melisande or in contemporaneous pilgrimage guides and maps, the image of the Dome of the Rock was used to denote the Jewish temple. On the reverse of the seal of Crusader King Baldwin IV the Dome of the Rock appears alongside the Church of the Resurrection/Holy Sepulchre. On a Knights Templar seal, the Dome of the Rock appears alone and is titled the “temple of Christ” (92).

Of course, Crusader hegemony over Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock did not last. In the aftermath of the loss of the city to Saladin and the restoration of the site to its former status as a Muslim shrine, Christians continued to deploy the image the Dome of the Rock in their iconography—in artwork found in European churches, in illustrated Bibles as the temple of the Old and New Testaments, and on pilgrimage guides and maps. The further away in time and place from Crusader Jerusalem, the more artists relied on faulty exemplars. In Biblical scenes, Jews will be depicted similarly to Muslims of the time (186–87) and a crescent will appear on top of the temple where the baby Jesus is presented (162–63). “Solomon's temple” (The Dome of the Rock) when depicted in scenes of Jerusalem also containing the Church of the Resurrection/Holy Sepulchre continues to be characterized as equal or greater in size and grandeur. Even when illustrating Biblical passages that describe a rectangular temple, the image of a circular—rather than polygonal—building resembling the Dome of the Rock takes precedence. While some representations more accurately depict the actual structure in Jerusalem, like those which copied the influential fifteenth century woodcut of Erhard Reuwich (155–57) who had actually traveled to Palestine, many simply drew their inspiration from what Berger describes as a “pictorial tradition” (159). Of the seventy-five Christian images examined by Berger in chapters four through nine, dated from the eighth to the late fifteenth century originating across Europe from Constantinople to Lisbon and Denmark, there can be no doubt that in the Christian imagination the Jerusalem temple so prominent in their sacred traditions took upon at least the semblance of the appearance of the Dome of the Rock.

After a short chapter on Islamic iconography of the temple of Solomon, Berger focuses six chapters on the use of the image of the Dome of the Rock in Jewish sources. Like Christians and Muslims, before the last century it was common for Jews to adopt the image of the Dome of the Rock as a representation of the Solomonic and Herodian temples. This iconographic practice is set against a backdrop of Jewish relief and optimism in regard to their relationship with the Muslim rulers of Jerusalem, pre- and

post-crusades. While Jews may not have thought that the Dome of the Rock functioned as the exact equivalent of their notion of the ideal Jewish temple, they were certainly happy that the site of the Holy of Holies no longer lay in ruins and that the Christian ban on their presence in Jerusalem had been overturned. Berger cites several written Jewish sources from the tenth century Karaite Salman ben Yeruham to the fourteenth century traveler Rabbi Isaac ben Joseph ibn Chelo in support of this view. When Caliph Umar conquered Jerusalem, according to the former, Jews returned to Jerusalem and lived there in large numbers. The “courts of the House of the Lord” were even handed over to them where they were permitted to pray for a number years. Salman ben Yeruham writes that this privilege was discontinued as a result of the drunkenness of “Rabbanite Jews” (198–9). Another Jewish witness to tenth century Jerusalem, Rabbi Samuel of Egypt, writes that in addition to charity offerings he brought “oil for the inner altar of the sanctuary at the western wall”—presumably, to a “synagogue cave” also mentioned in the letters of Solomon ben Yehuda in the eleventh century (199–200). Of course, everything changed with the coming of the Crusaders. Rabbi Abraham Hiyya, who visited Jerusalem during the Crusader period in spite of a ban on the presence of Jews in the city, wrote in his history of the temple that relations with Muslims had been good—they had even been allowed to go to the house/temple and build a prayer place there. In contrast, the Christians had erected graven images in the Dome of the Rock. This was bemoaned by another Rabbi named Petachia. This did not stop Moses Maimonides, however, a visitor during the Crusader occupation, from praying in the Dome of the Rock—such was the importance of this holy site. Both Rabbis Abraham Hiyya and Petachia longed for the return of the “Ishmaelites” (201–04). When the Muslims did recapture Jerusalem, Jews returned to the city with them. In the following centuries, marked by the rapid growth of Christian anti-Semitism in Western Europe which elsewhere Berger (2000) has tracked in another iconographic review, Jews will continue to travel east unhindered by Muslims to Jerusalem and other cities in Palestine containing holy sites like Hebron and Safed.

The earliest image of the Dome of the Rock found in Jewish art that is examined by Berger is dated to the fifteenth century. It is found in an illuminated manuscript of the *Mishneh Torah*—specifically, the Code of Maimonides—believed to have been produced in Lombardy for a wealthy Jewish patron. In Book Eight dealing with sacrificial practices at the temple, the desert Tabernacle of Leviticus is unmistakably depicted in the guise of the octagonal Dome of the Rock. This is curious as elsewhere in the Code, Maimonides

specifically describes a rectilinear temple. Berger places this representation in the context of visits made to Jerusalem at this time by Italian rabbis who describe religious events taking place at the Dome of the Rock—including Muslims fasting and candles miraculously ceasing to burn in the building on the date of the destruction of the Jerusalem temples (212–13), a version of which is reported by the Jerusalem resident Rabbi Joseph ben Joseph as recent as 1926 (316–17). By the sixteenth century in Italy, an image of the Dome of the Rock used in Christian depictions of the temple of Solomon in Italy (156) and of the Messianic temple (158) throughout Europe will begin to appear widely in Jewish books. On the title page of Maimonides Code of the *Mishneh Torah* printed by the Christian Marco Antonio Giustiniani in Venice (Jews at this place and time were not allowed to own their presses) the Jerusalem temple is clearly depicted as the Dome of the Rock. This image is clearly labeled with the Hebrew words “*Beit ha-Miqdash*” (House of the Holy). The same image and inscription is found on other Hebrew books published by Giustiniani as a printer's mark (214–17). In 1577, a copy of Giustiniani's mark appears on the first printed book produced in Palestine. On the last page of a commentary on the book of Esther printed by Eliezer ben Isaac Ashkenazi in Safed is found a woodcut of the identical image the Jerusalem temple with the same inscription (216). These depictions of the Dome of the Rock as temple have, however, taken upon a new specific meaning. On a banner floating above these inscribed images of the temple, can be found quote from Haggai 2:9—“The glory of this latter/last house shall be greater than that of the former one.” Following Shalom Sabar (1998), Berger reads the term “latter/last House” as a reference to the temple that will be built at the End of Days (217). In a woodcut illustrating an early seventeenth century manuscript of the Venice Haggadah, Berger examines another image of the Dome of the Rock deployed for the same purpose—one with the Messiah approaching Jerusalem with the prophet Elijah leading the way (219–20). The image of the Dome of the Rock during this period stands in for not just the Solomonic temple of the past, but also the temple of the future Messiah.

In chapter twelve, Berger turns her research to the image of the Dome of the Rock found on Jewish Pilgrimage Scrolls/Itineraries originating in Palestine. Like the Christian pilgrimage guides discussed in chapter five and Muslim pilgrimage “certificates” analyzed in chapter ten, these manuscripts provide lists of and maps to holy sites that should be visited. The images of the Dome of the Rock found in these illustrations are generally quite accurate, as at this time many Jews had taken up

residence in the Jerusalem and neighboring cities as a result of Christian persecution in Europe—especially on the Iberian peninsula. In representations described as “true” by their producer, one Pilgrimage Scroll examined in depth by Berger (229–32) describes the entire esplanade of the *al-Haram al-Sharif* containing both the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque as “the temple.” The Dome of the Rock is referred to as the site of the Holy of Holies containing the *Even ha-Shetiya* (the “floating” Rock of Foundation upon which sat the Ark of the Covenant) whereas the latter is labeled the *Midrash Shelomo ha-Melekh* (Solomon's School). The designations of these buildings are, as documented by Berger, commonly found on Jewish iconographic depictions until the early twentieth century. Moreover, attached to the top of these buildings as well as other sites sacred to Jews depicted on the Pilgrimage Scrolls and Itineraries is the Islamic crescent. In depictions—for example, found on the Benayahu Sheet produced in Jerusalem in 1549/50 and in the Pilgrimage Scroll created by Uri son of Simon of Biella in Safed in 1564—the image of the Dome of the Rock is clearly marked as or minimally substituted for the ancient temple of the Jews. This occurs, as documented in chapter fourteen, in illustrated Itineraries into the beginning of the twentieth century such as found in the “Souvenir Sheet” dedicated to Hayyim Abu Karasso (281). Once again, in Jewish iconography during this period and thereafter in Palestine and Europe, the label *Beit ha-Miqdash* (house of the Holy/temple) is startlingly—at least, for many religious Jews and Christians today—to images of the Dome of the Rock.

In chapter thirteen, Berger discusses a later development in the use of images of the Dome of the Rock—specifically, in Italy from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. These are evidenced on Jewish Pilgrimage scrolls and Itineraries, Esther scrolls, marriage contracts, as well as on Torah ark curtains, ritual cups and seals, and other arts and crafts. It is during this period where we find for the first time the inclusion of depictions of the Western Wall (to Muslims, the *Hā'iṭ Al-Burāq* or Buraq Wall named after the horse that carried the Prophet Muhammed to Jerusalem on his night journey) alongside images of the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque. This corresponds with stories of the unearthing of this Wall during the early Ottoman period. In keeping with earlier Italian usage, tri-partite images such as found on the 1722 wall-hanging titled “View of the Holy Land” by Shmuel ben Yishai are linked with the coming of the Messianic age (258–59). Elsewhere, images of the Dome of the Rock illustrating private Esther Scrolls (260–65; these are not found on those used for synagogue readings) and a lavish, silk Torah ark

curtain crafted by Simhah Meshullami depict a future polygonal Messianic temple (260–61). In the elaborate, beautiful marriage contracts of wealthy Italian families, the image of the Dome of the Rock as temple—sometimes replete with objects like the seven-branched Menorah and Ark of the Covenant and other times with the title, *Beit ha-Miqdash*—is found alongside the exhortation to the joined couple not to forget Jerusalem in their time of joy. In chapter fifteen, Berger adds a more thorough discussion of the image of the Dome of the Rock (along with that of the al-Aqsa Mosque and Western Wall) on decorative printed cloths oftentimes used by Jews on the Sabbath table. In her final chapter, devoted to the use of the image of the Dome of the Rock on Jewish lithographic amulets produced by Moshe Mizrachi in the early years of the twentieth century, Berger highlights the recognized apotropaic power of these items especially to Jews of Middle Eastern origins. While the building is often identified as being in “the place of our temple” it is by far the largest image on the amulets that also contain representations of other sites holy to Jews. These amulets are intended to protect the home, as well as mothers and babies during childbirth, from the “Evil Eye.” The image of the Islamic structure atop the Temple Mount is religiously “potent,” even with a crescent atop its Dome. Until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the presence of the image of the Dome of the Rock in Jewish homes was still “unproblematic” (313). Whether in the Jewish diaspora such as evidenced in a 1920 wall painting in a Romanian synagogue by Abraham Mendel titled “The Holy of Holies With the Even Ha-Shetiya” (315) or in a 1928 marriage contract signed only three weeks before the outbreak of violent riots in Jerusalem between Jews and Arabs (319), the image of the Dome of Rock was used to represent the Jewish temple.

As mentioned above, the one section of *The Crescent on the Temple* that readers will find wanting, is the short chapter on Islamic iconography. Once again, in many ways this is due to no fault of Berger's. Islam, generally speaking, is a highly iconoclastic religion. Throughout much of Islamic history, figurative decoration has been looked down upon if not forbidden. While there are exceptions to this rule—for example, in later part of the eighth century or in some Turkish and Iranian traditions—images of people, animals, and even buildings are absent from most Islamic iconography which is normally composed of the use of a wide range of geometrical patterns and calligraphic citations from the Qur'an. Berger's job is complicated further as it is not enough for her to analyze images of the Dome of the Rock which reference it as the “House of the Holy” and

mention its sacred rock—for one might argue that Muslims did this solely because of the connection of the site to the ascension of the Prophet Muhammed and not the fact that it sat on the site of previous Jewish temples centered around the *Even ha-Shetiya*. Instead, in chapter ten, Berger takes up the challenge of showing explicit references in Islamic iconography to the Dome of the Rock representing a prior Jewish temple.

The first example Berger examines is a sixteenth century illustrated copy of an eleventh century text from the popular genre “Stories of the Prophets.” In it Solomon, who is portrayed as a wise miracle-working prophet in the Qur'an, is depicted seated on a throne in the temple (*Bayt-al-Muqaddas*) he has just built discussing the “divinely commanded” project with an architect—a temple that is represented with an image of the Dome of the Rock (190–91). Berger also examines an illustrated Persian manuscript from the late fourteenth century with an image of a “domed” temple built by Solomon (192–93). From the early fourteenth century, Berger presents another similar image of the temple as the Dome of the Rock in a scene portraying its destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians (195). The earliest image of the Dome of the Rock/temple discussed by Berger is found on an Islamic pilgrimage certificate dated to the year 1205. In it the image of the Dome of the Rock is framed by two “knotted columns.” While these are not found on the *al-Haram al-Sharif*, they were famously found on the porch of Solomon's temple—a representation not only based upon 1 Kings 7:15–22 where these pillars are named but one found as well in Christian and Jewish art. They are a common pictorial marker of the Jewish temple. Priscilla Soucek, whose important work on the representation of the Solomonic temple in Islamic sources is drawn upon by Berger (195–96), goes one step further than the author of *The Crescent on the Temple*. Soucek (1976: 88, 96–8) and, more recently, Finbar Barry Flood (2001: 87–100), argue that the interior ornamentation of the Dome of the Rock was itself influenced by Islamic notions about the lavish decorations of Solomon's temple. Berger's overall argument might have been further strengthened by referencing early Islamic literary sources that explicitly connect the building of the Dome of the Rock by 'Abd al-Malik with the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies—that is, as the renewed temple.<sup>4</sup>

The dearth of visual illustrations of the ancient Jewish temples in historical Islamic iconography is mirrored today by the lack of connection made by Muslims in Palestine and elsewhere between the *al-Haram al-Sharif* and the historical site of the Jewish temples. The causes of these two deficiencies are not the same though. The latter,

as Berger as shown in her examination of Islamic iconography and even more convincingly in her review written Islamic and non-Islamic texts throughout the book (especially in chapters two and three), does not represent the way that Muslims from the period of 'Abd al-Malik up until the early twentieth century viewed the Dome of the Rock. From Ibn al Faik in the early tenth century to Ibn al-Murajja, al-Wasiti and al-Biruni in the eleventh century and Jamal ad Din Ahmad in the fourteenth, the Dome of the Rock was commonly associated with the site of the former Jewish temple(s). Why would the Crusaders when they conquered Jerusalem associate the Dome of the Rock with the prior temple(s) if the Muslims before them did not? Surely, as Jewish pilgrimage to Jerusalem rose dramatically in the aftermath of the Inquisition in Spain, Muslims knew that the Dome of the Rock was the site of the Holy of Holies to Jews? As cited by Berger, Jews as late as the early twentieth century thought beyond the shadow of a doubt that Muslims understood the Dome of the Rock to be the site of the earlier temples—why else would they extinguish candles at the site on the ninth of Ab as “they probably had been doing for over a thousand years” (316–67). Berger does not cite twentieth century Islamic scholars like the famous Indian translator of the Qur'an Abdullah Yusuf Ali, who still associate the *al-Haram al-Sharif* with the site of the former Jewish temples. In his commentary on Surah 17 (*al-Isra*; fn. 2168) that describes the Night Journey of the Prophet Muhammed, he wrote in the early twentieth century: “The Farthest Mosque must refer to the site of the Solomon's temple in Jerusalem on the hill of Moriah, at or near which stands the Dome of the Rock.”

### **JERUSALEM OBSCURED**

*The Crescent on the Temple* is a book that I wish that I had written. Berger once again makes a major unanticipated contribution to historical studies, using a careful review of iconographic sources to shed light on an obscured past (cf. 1985). She also, just as importantly, helps us to frame contemporary struggle over arguably the most disputed religious site in the world today where political and religious actors risk widespread global conflict. Berger presents incontrovertible evidence showing that what counts today as obvious for many Jewish, Christian, and Islamic believers about the “past” was understood very differently not so long ago. Over and over again I have shared Berger's book with colleagues, students, and friends in Jerusalem, Israel, and Palestine who come from a variety of different backgrounds. Without exception, they have been confused and



surprised by even cursory review of the over 125 illustrations examined by Berger in this book. I have heard the following responses repeatedly: “The Dome of the Rock isn't the Jewish temple, right?” “Why would anyone have ever thought this?” On one occasion a very learned historian of ancient Judaisms and Christianities told me: “I'm sure people in the past may have thought the Dome of the Rock was the temple, but of course today we know that this is not the case.”

To be clear, Berger never asserts in this book that the Dome of the Rock functions or functioned in the past in the same way as the Jewish temples of Solomon, Zerubabel, or Herod. For example, no levitical/priestly sacrifices have ever been performed on the *al-Haram al-Sharif* whether inside or outside of the Dome of the Rock. The former ancient temples were neither built as octagonal structures covered by a Dome nor were they managed by non-Jewish attendants. Nevertheless, Jews prior to the early twentieth century in their iconography often gave the title *Beit ha-Miqdash* (house of the Holy/temple) to the Dome of the Rock. It is hard to imagine Jews prior to the twentieth century viewing the structure with hostility or ever calling for its destruction, the latter of which is often heard in extremist Jewish and Christian circles in Jerusalem and elsewhere today. Today, as shown in the recent work of Yitzhak Reiter and Jon Seligman (2009) that is cited by Berger, many Jews view the Dome of the Rock as desecralizing the Temple Mount (332).

While writing this review, in fact, two prominent publications appeared evidencing such aggression. In the first, an op-ed by Rabbi Chaim Richman (the Director of the International Department of the Temple Institute which is dedicated to the rebuilding of the “Holy Temple”) published a day before “Jerusalem Day” on 7 May 2013 in the *Jerusalem Post*—the oldest and most well-known English language newspaper produced in the City—it was argued that the longstanding practice of leaving the management of the Temple Mount in the hands of the Islamic Waqf should be reversed. According to the writer, the sentiments of Minister-Without-Portfolio Menahem Begin in 1967 who wrote that the brief flying of the Israeli flag over the Dome of the Rock was an “unfortunate incident” and actions of Moshe Dayan who returned the keys of the *al-Haram al-Sharif* to the Islamic Waqf, were the results of a psychological malady which needs to be cured. The way that this is to be done is through the Israeli government and Jewish religious leaders assuming control over the *al-Haram al-Sharif*, and undoubtedly, if one attends to the author's professional agenda, of destroying the

Islamic sites and rebuilding a new Jewish temple in their place. Menahem Begin, Moshe Dayan and previous Israeli leaders feared just such sentiments—and several acting on such have been detained or arrested by Israeli authorities in the past. The Dome of the Rock was according to Dayan's view the equivalent of a priceless item in a store that one should steer clear of and not pick up, just in case it were to be dropped and one would be held responsible for the great loss and subsequent unmanageable repercussions. On June 7, 2013 in *Al-Monitor's* "Israel Pulse," former Israel Knesset member Daniel Ben Simon specifically analyzed the contemporary fervor amongst some millenarian-minded Jews and evangelical Christians who want the temple to be rebuilt and the threat that they pose to the status quo in Jerusalem. As seen in his interview with the undoubtedly licensed tour guide Rabbi Yehuda Glick, the soon-to-come temple will not be "built by itself," but instead by human hands. The traditional Rabbinic view still held by many religious Jews that the temple would be the result of Divine/Messianic activity, according to Glick, "is the sort of idea typical to Diaspora Jews." Ben Simon finishes his piece by describing a visit to the above-mentioned Temple Institute, where practical preparations for the building of the new temple are underway. While the Directors of the Temple Institute do not have the backing of the majority of the Israeli and Jewish public, their incendiary views have gained support in recent years especially from Christians in the United States promoting this project. During September 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ignited the second intifada with his visit to the disputed religious site. More recently, visits and attempted visits by Israeli government officials like the Minister of Housing and Construction Uri Ariel, new Knesset Deputy Speaker Moshe Feiglin, the head of the Internal Affairs Committee Miri Regev, and Deputy Transportation Minister Tzipi Hotovely have led to heightened tension at the site today which is unmistakably palpable. The extremist Temple Institute has definitely come out of the shadowy fringes of Israeli public life, recently erecting a large golden menorah that is "appropriate" for use in the future temple on the steps leading from the Jewish Quarter to the Western Wall plaza. The dangers accompanying heightened ideological conflict over the Dome of the Rock are clear to scholars studying pilgrimage and disputed holy sites. Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht's work comparing religious violence in Jerusalem and Ayodhya is most notable. Unbridled religious and nationalist fervor led not only to the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya but extensive loss of life and increased conflict between Muslims and Hindus on the Indian sub-continent. In the words of Yedidia Z. Stern, Vice

President of the Israel Democracy Institute, published in a September 21, 2013 Jerusalem Post article titled “Jews Challenge Rules to Claim Heart of Jerusalem” at the beginning of the Jewish feast of Sukkot/Tabernacles (one of the three dates Jews are commanded to make pilgrimage to the temple in the Torah): “We’re talking about something much deeper than visiting the place, we’re talking about a movement that wants to change the status quo from its roots....You’re dealing with the ultimate TNT in our national existence here.”

Today, the long-held Islamic tradition associating the *al-Haram al-Sharif* and the Dome of the Rock specifically with the site of the former Jewish temples has also been obscured, as it has for Jews and Christians, for at least a couple of different reasons. Berger, while she briefly discusses the cause of this forgetfulness for Jews (principally, of course, the Israeli/Arab conflict), is less explicit about the amnesia of Muslims—leaving the reader to assume that the origin is one and the same. Undoubtedly, this is the major cause. But there are others. Some Muslims today as exhibited in the comments of the controversial Wahabi/Salafi scholar Muhammed Saalih Al-Munajjid, completely deny the religious importance of the Dome of the Rock insinuating that it was built by 'Abd al-Malik because of a “trick” of the Jewish convert Ka'b al-Ahbar favoring Jews and some Christians who believed the site to be holy (<http://islamqa.info/en/ref/20903>). For others, more traditionally, the Night Ride of the Prophet Muhammed on the heavenly steed Buraq should not be understood as a literal journey and was unconnected to any physical site of theophany in Jerusalem. It happened solely in a vision that took place in the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca. The focus on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem during the *Lailat al-Mi'raj*, such as regularly occurs in the celebration on the evening of the fifteenth of Islamic month Shaban—in countries like Iran, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Turkey and Palestine by more mystically minded Sunni, Shia, and Sufi Muslims—for many extremely iconoclastic Wahabis is considered to be a form of idolatry. For these highly iconoclastic Muslims there is nothing in the Qur'an or hadith mandating this Islamic festival (<http://www.islamicvoice.com/december.98/dialogue.htm>). For them the al-Aqsa Mosque (“the farthest Mosque”) to which the Prophet Muhammed journeyed refers at best to the entire *al-Haram al-Sharif*. The prayer structure at its southern end is considered the primary structure, as it alone was built by Caliph Umar and attended by the “Companions of the Prophet.” Pilgrimage to the structure of the Dome of the Rock described by Muslims in the past like Muqaddasi and Nasir-i Khusraw (81–85) is simply

misguided. Still, while Muhammed Saalih Al-Munajjid ridicules the fascination of some Muslims with the Dome of the Rock, he doesn't doubt the connection of the *al-Haram al-Sharif* to Solomon's temple.

'Temple denial', a term coined by Dore Gold (the former Israel Ambassador to the United Nations) referring to those Muslims who deny that there ever existed Jewish temples on the *al-Haram al-Sharif*, is a more recent development which has its roots in Palestinian nationalism. In the 1920s, Haj Amin al-Husayni turned the *Lailat al-Mi'raj* into Palestine Day making the Dome of the Rock into the symbol of Palestine (Friedland and Hecht 1996, 115). In the wake of the deadly riots incited by al-Husayni in 1920 coinciding with the Nebi Musa pilgrimage that begins on the *al-Haram al-Sharif* and preceding the 1929 massacres of Jews in part caused by tensions at the Western Wall, the Dome of the Rock became a symbol of resistance to Jewish immigration to Palestine. On account of this fact, it is easy to understand why its image began to fade from Jewish usage. Palestinian Muslims, on the other hand, probably reacting to Jewish assertions that the Dome of the Rock occupied the spot of the ancient Jewish temples, viewed such historical claims as a serious threat. By denying that Jewish temples ever existed on the *al-Haram al-Sharif*, this clear and present danger was undercut. In the most famous instance of temple denial, President of the Palestinian National Authority Yasser Arafat at the 2000 Camp David Summit vehemently argued that the Jewish Temple was in Nablus and not on the *al-Haram al-Sharif* (Ross and Grinstein 2001). In combination with the vast majority of historians who have rebuked this fantastical claim, Berger's book constitutes another nail in the casket of Palestinian and Islamic temple denial. While I consider increased calls by some Jews and Christians to replace the Dome of the Rock with a new Jewish temple not only to be a great threat to Palestinians and Islamic interests in Jerusalem but also to peace in the Middle East and across the globe, the solution to resolving present and future conflict is not denying that Jewish temples ever existed on the site.

Berger's *Crescent on the Temple* is much more than a book about historical representations of the Dome of the Rock. It opens for twentieth century readers a portal through which to view a very different time not so long ago, where Jews and Muslims worshipped side-by-side in peace at shared religious sites throughout the "Holy Land." As evidenced on Jewish pilgrimage souvenir sheets and "Views of Holy Places" from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (278, 280–81), not long before the foundation of the

State of Israel crescents were commonly seen above sites not only associated with mutually acknowledged patriarchs, matriarchs, and prophets mentioned in the Hebrew Bible but Jewish sages like Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai in Meiron as well (283–84) where witnesses going back to a student of Nachmanides in the end of the thirteenth century testify that Muslims were not simply overlords of the holy site but gathered along with Jews for the celebration of the Second Passover as well (244). The days of Jews praising Muslim hospitality at the tomb of Abraham in Hebron (246–48) are over. Joint worship at Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem (242–43) has been discontinued by the building of the separation wall that wrests the site from Bethlehem and Palestinian control and places it in greater Jerusalem. Today, one can hardly imagine a Jewish religious leader like late fifteenth century Rabbi Meshullam ben Menahem of Volterra writing about the tombs of the seventy members of the Sanhedrin and of Shimon ha-Tzadik in Jerusalem “that the Moslems also honor all these places and that they have the same traditions about them as we” (242). Approximately one hundred years ago, Berger cites Wasif Jawhariyyeh who states that at the site of the latter tomb in Sheikh Jarrah, Sephardic Jews would gather and give musical performances in a celebration referred to as the “Yehudia” which was widely attended by Arab Muslims and Christians alike (287). At the same site in 2013, Arabs fight eviction from their homes while Jewish settlers—known to sing the praises on Purim of Baruch Goldstein, the murderer of Muslims at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron (Jerusalem Post, 5 March 2010)—develop the area protected by armed guards and barbed wire. The “Pro-Islamic Jews” of the nineteenth century, to cite a title used in the work of Bernard Lewis, have been replaced by Jews relying on the support of Christians who for centuries in the West were complicit in the most horrible atrocities against them.

I sincerely hope that Berger's work in *The Crescent on the Temple* will be widely read and carefully considered by scholars and the general public alike. Berger makes both a monumental historical contribution convincingly revealing a past that has been obscured as well as making us think about the times we live in. Hopefully, the “shock,” to quote Nohad Ali, produced by this book will have an influence on political and religious leaders alike—for the benefit of peace and returned inter-religiosity in Jerusalem. Instead of looking forward with millenarian believers to a future where rivals have been vanquished and exiled, perhaps a return to a past where Jews and Muslims lived and worshipped alongside each other is more preferable.

### NOTES

1. Most historians date the reign of Solomon to the tenth century BCE. Rabbinic sources date the building of the first Temple to 832 BCE.
2. See Hutt 2012: 15–16 for a discussion of White and Wyschogrod's "heterological ethics of historical interpretation."
3. On the Outer Face of the Dome of the Rock it reads: "Praise to God who begets no son and who has no associate in power." On the Inner Face: "So believe in God and in his envoys and do not say 'Three'; Desist, it is better for you. For indeed God is One God" (51–52).
4. See the comprehensive bibliography in Kaplony 2002: 8–10, 38–48.

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