INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME: THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE IN HISTORY, MEMORY, AND RITUAL

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The following group of essays emerged out of a seminar held at the Association for Jewish Studies conference in 2015. As section heads of Jewish History and Culture in Antiquity and Rabbinic Literature and Culture, tasked to think about how to address gaps in our fields, we recognized that despite a large amount of scholarship available on the Jerusalem Temple and its priesthood, there was a dearth of cross-disciplinary scholarly exchange, especially between ancient Jewish historians and those of us who engage in literary analysis of rabbinic sources. As a result, our divisions joined together to create “The Jerusalem Temple in History, Memory, and Ritual,” taking advantage of the “seminar” format at the conference. Twelve scholars, each working with different source material and employing different methodological approaches, participated.1

This special journal theme is the outcome of these seminar sessions. The five essays included here reveal something of the range of conceptions of the Temple discussed at the seminar, undermining the notion that Jews in antiquity remembered the Temple the same way. Indeed, physical sites serve as “magnets—organizing, classifying and calibrating … glu[ing] disparate details into cultural textures.”2 But, as these essays show, different cultural textures emerge depending on the sources that one uses to think about the Temple. Therefore, when viewed together, these sources prevent us from speaking about the Temple in Jerusalem and remind us how difficult it can be to make the leap from literature to history.3 If religion, as the work of Mircea Eliade and Jonathan Z. Smith shows,
is strongly connected to holy places, and for the Jews that holy place is the Temple, sources about the Temple can offer us a more nuanced sense of Judaism in antiquity: attitudes toward its priesthood and its ritual; reflections on the power dynamics that emerged between one group of Jews and another; the nature of its institutions; and its ideological struggles.

Our intention is for the essays included here to emphasize the significance of putting scholarly examinations of the Temple that contest one another into dialogue. Making sense of the Temple exceeds the work of one scholar, using one methodology and one set of sources. It points directly to the significance of thinking far more critically about the notion that rabbinic Judaism is the direct outgrowth of a crisis generated by the Temple’s destruction in 70 CE. Our seminar, as reflected in the articles included here, problematizes the Temple as a central space, its rituals as forerunners of post-Temple rites, and its priesthood as the leadership institution that Jews would protect and desire to reinstate. Each author opens up different aspects of a long-needed cross-disciplinary discussion, provoking further contemplation and reconsideration of the complexities of remembering the Temple, whether by working in historical frameworks or in literary ones. With each construction of the Jerusalem Temple we expose different issues and theological perspectives that do more to convince us that the Jews of antiquity were struggling with the burden of one central holy space, inasmuch as they wished to embrace and identify with it as well.

We begin this foray into the study of the Jerusalem Temple with Benjamin Gordon’s essay, “Sightseeing and Spectacle at the Jewish Temple.” It sets the stage for the collection of essays that follow in the way that it presents insights about the historical Temple alongside considerations of abstract conceptualizations of it. Before proceeding to discuss texts written outside the Land of Israel and/or that postdate the destruction of the Temple, Gordon’s essay serves to anchor this discussion by reminding us that even when the Temple was a fully functioning institution and priests offered sacrifices, it was already an imagined site as much in the Land of Israel as in the Diaspora. Much of the Temple Scroll, a text created in the Land of Israel, describes a Temple recalled (in the sense that it is presented as an ancient, authentic revelation) and anticipated (in that this instruction was never fulfilled), at a time when the pre-Herodian Temple was fully functioning. The Letter of Aristeas (83–99) as well as Philo in the Special Laws (1.70–76) both glorify the Temple, offering quite distinct recollections. Additionally, modifications to (or desecrations of) Temple praxis under Antiochus IV prompted eschatological imaginations of a new Temple (e.g., Daniel 7–12). Some of these imaginings of a coming Temple betray the anxiety that the Second Temple was impure from its beginning in the sixth century BCE. The only solution was a future divinely authorized sanctuary (1 Enoch 89:72–74, 90:28–29).


Gordon also emphasizes the role of pilgrimage, so central to accounts of Temple ritual. By looking beyond the sacrificial acts at the center of Temple pilgrimage, Gordon argues that much of what drew people to travel great distances and to incur steep costs was the sheer marvel of this Jerusalem holy site. Gordon draws on analogies with the emerging Greek literary genre of *periegesis*, or travel narrative. In the first century, for Jews as for others, curiosity and wonder were not entirely separable from the religious responsibility that offering sacrifices inspired. Indeed, pilgrims were just as much tourists as they were anything else. Scholars in recent years have sought to argue that Diaspora Judaism in the Second Temple period was less focused on the Temple than Palestinian communities. However, if Gordon is correct, Diaspora Jews were equally interested in religiously motivated and culturally fueled pilgrimages, whether they were interested in cultic practice or wished to imagine it. As such, Diaspora writers and their audiences took a strong interest in a literature that bridged the distance between audience and this faraway place.

Gordon’s essay prompts us to think about additional challenges presented by the sources we analyze. Periegetic literature of the type to which Gordon compares Jewish descriptions of the Temple was part of a Greek cultural reconfiguration under Roman imperial rule. Lucian of Samosata’s *The Syrian Goddess*, which plays a significant role in Gordon’s essay, has been studied both as ethnography of a Middle Eastern cult in the second century and as literary fiction. This is a significant observation for those of us studying the place of the Temple in contemporaneous or post-Temple Judaism. Indeed, the fullest descriptive accounts of the Jerusalem Temple, those of Josephus and the Mishnah, postdate the destruction of the Temple and open the question of the memory of the Temple even as they provide us much of the evidence from which we might hope to reconstruct the physical layout of its predestruction design.

Indeed, sources that offer reactions to the Temple following its destruction, including rabbinic sources, provoke us to think about a cycle that takes us from Temple to text and from text back to Temple. Although the authors of these sources look back on the institution of the Temple and do the work of textual commemoration, they present us with the challenge of how to read them. Do we look for, even expect, a burden of loss over the Temple and/or a desire for religious change? Do rabbinic depictions of a glorified Temple in Jerusalem parallel conceptions of the priests and the sacrificial cult in rabbinic literature? Where do our sources point and why do they point us there?

Naftali Cohn proposes the use of ritual theory to think through what we can learn about the Mishnah’s representational (and not “actual”) descriptions of the Temple, its priests, and its rituals. He emphasizes that while place is a key


component in thinking about Temple ritual, we also need to consider how ritual actions, ritual actors, ritual time, objects, and groups, as well as beliefs, attitudes, and emotions play a role in conceptualizing the rabbinic view of the Temple. The Mishnah’s representations point us toward how the rabbis (in the post-Temple era) framed and understood the function of ritual. In this way, studying the Mishnah for its reconceptualization of Temple rites and its priests leads us toward a keen sense of what changed in the era following the Temple’s destruction. What are the continuities and discontinuities as well as consequences of ritual when we compare the past Temple to the post-Temple world? Studying the Temple in rabbinic sources then becomes a way for us to make sense of the ritual developments posed by the rabbis.

Marjorie Lehman also examines the textualized ritual of tractate Yoma, exposing it as a place for the rabbis to conceptualize the rabbinic self. Like Cohn, she pays close attention to the transition in the tractate from the physical Temple-based Yom Kippur to a distinct rabbinic Yom Kippur. More pointedly, in thinking about the texts of tractate Yoma from a feminist perspective, rather than from the perspective of ritual theory like Cohn, she stresses the significance of the rabbis and their relationship to the priests by examining what their sources communicate through references to the physical body, specifically feet. In her feminist reading of the move from Temple to text and from text back to Temple she recognizes in the rabbis a desire to marginalize the priests and women in order to assert a position of legitimacy, authority, and power. Given the ways in which the Temple is glorified in so many rabbinic sources, Lehman pushes us to tread more carefully, focusing on the differences in how the priests are treated in Yoma as opposed to sources that focus on the Temple itself. She takes note of the differences in the way that feet are treated in the first seven chapters of the tractate in comparison to the final chapter that focuses specifically on the rabbinic Yom Kippur, as a way to think about its connection (or lack thereof) to the earlier Temple rite. Finally, she reminds us to think about the tractate and its overall agenda, as compared to other tractates and their treatment of the Temple and its priests, noting that the rabbinic view of the Temple and its priesthood is complicated even within rabbinic literature itself.

Michael Swartz, through his study of a papyrus found in the excavations at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, as well as other early examples of Avodah liturgy, such as the liturgical poem (piyyut) known as Shīv ʿat yamīm,8 indicates that post-Temple Jews (including the Diaspora community in late antique Egypt) ritualized the Mishnah’s rich descriptions of the Yom Kippur Avodah. By transforming the contents of Mishnah Yoma into verbal utterances, Jews “performed” their memory of the Temple. As such, ritual does not ignore the Temple, but rather functions to reenact what occurred there, glorifying its role and treating the Mishnah’s Temple narratives as actual memories, rather than as idealized or metaphorical descriptions of the past. Swartz challenges us, in our studies of the Jerusalem

Temple, to reconsider how we read later uses of the Mishnah’s narratives, recognizing them as verbal reenactments that were experienced as replacements for sacrifices so that prayer became “a sacrifice of the heart.”

Naomi Koltun-Fromm leads us in yet another direction, reminding us that Christians and Muslims also idealized the Temple in Jerusalem. She focuses our attention on the Temple as an imagined space. Koltun-Fromm demonstrates how the rabbis reinvigorated older biblical and ancient Near Eastern motifs to make claims on the space of the Temple, as well as reworked rabbinic traditions about a mythical foundation stone, the ’even shetiyah, to mark the physical space where the Temple stood. As she points out, the rabbis’ attachment to the ’even shetiyah is also enmeshed in competing claims to the spiritual and earthly Jerusalem that arose between Christians and Muslims, not to mention the rabbis’ desire to secure their attachment to it. In fact, by the early eleventh century, the Dome of the Rock, built by Muslims on the site of the Jerusalem Temple, will be consecrated as a church called Templum Domini by the Crusaders.9

Although Koltun-Fromm emphasizes the Jewish use of Temple imagery in late antique and early Islamic Palestine, her contribution reminds us that not only Jews, but Christians and Muslims, too, “recalled” the Temple. The production and manifestation of Jewish memories, she argues, is entangled in changing circumstances that include an ongoing debate about who has claims to this remembered sacred space. Continuing such discussions can deepen our understanding of the Temple Mount not only as a common source of religious empowerment, but also as a contested space, one that physically changed hands and religious faiths many times after the destruction of the Jews’ Temple. In addition, such responses to the Jerusalem Temple, whether as a destroyed holy site or as renewed sacred space, reveal much about Christian and Muslim relationships to Jews and Judaism. They expose significant cross-cultural influences between these three religions that developed in the same region. As such, we encourage further debate and interdisciplinary conversation regarding the issues we have raised here, in the interest of furthering our understanding of the complex relationship between the holy space of the Jerusalem Temple and the people who made its memory so central.

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