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# The Sacred Site in Civil Space: Meaning and Status of the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif

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ABSTRACT: *The tension between the sacred and the civil unfolds on myriad levels in Israel and the Palestinian territories. The purpose of this paper is threefold: first, to sketch the evolution of the tension between the sacred and the civil in the modernisation process of the Middle East and in the birth of Israel in particular; second, to point out the limitations and ultimate failure of both governmental and peace-building approaches that ignore the paradoxical nature of this opposition; and third, to attempt to find an alternative, phenomenological approach to religious space. The analysis is organised around four nested spheres: the Middle East in general, the Holy Land, Jerusalem and, finally, the Temple Mount/al Haram al-Sharif at the centre. Though the Temple Mount/al-Haram al Sharif is not a simple illustration among others, it constitutes the most powerful and comprehensive symbol of the forces at work in the constitution of religious space.*

## Introduction

On 28 September 2000, Ariel Sharon, then the leader of the opposition Likud party, tightly guarded by an Israeli security cordon, led a group of legislators for a sunny stroll on the bitterly contested Temple Mount.[1] The politics of the gesture were thinly veiled. Then Prime Minister Barak was pushing forward with failing talks with Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat and facing a vote of no confidence in the Knesset. Benjamin Netanyahu, Sharon's primary rival in Likud was growing in popularity. With one swoop, Sharon completely derailed the peace process and secured his position in the Likud. The event set off six days of rioting, leading to four deaths and hundreds of casualties. 'I am a man of peace', Sharon proclaimed after the brief walk, as billowing smoke darkened the gilded Dome of the Rock.[2] 'Jerusalem is under Israeli sovereignty', he later argued, 'and I don't need anyone's permission' to visit the Temple Mount. 'It's my absolute right to be there'.[3] In terms of the rationality of political sovereignty, Sharon was absolutely right: He was an Israeli citizen circulating in Israeli sovereign territory (provided, of course, that one accepts the legitimacy of that sovereignty based on the results of the Six-Day War of 1967 and given UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338). But Sharon was making a political gesture. He did so by playing upon the ambiguity of a sacred site in civil space. His aim was to create political meaning, a political effect, by

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penetrating a sacred space, itself part of the politically organised sovereign space. According to the principles of modern civil society no civil *space* has privileged status.

Civil space frequently overlaps religious space. The religious activities that might take place within sacred space, activities perhaps completely incompatible with modern principles of rule of law, are nonetheless protected as within the tenets of the civil state. At the same time civil space *enables* sacred space. It provides the parameters, forms and conduits for the unfolding of religious life. Sacred space, in turn, engages and transforms the social relations at the heart of any polity. Further, in a more Weberian perspective, the modern state then re-sanctifies private property through the market while at the same time serving as its perimeter (Friedland and Hecht, 1996, p. 23). Thus Ariel Sharon's stroll was neither the first, the last, nor even the most visible instance of a long tradition of incursions between sacred place and civil space of similar acts, undoubtedly the very condition of the opposition between the sacred and the profane into which modernity hurled humanity a millennium ago.

The purpose of this paper is threefold: first, to sketch the evolution of the tension between the sacred and the civil in the modernisation process of the Middle East in general and in the birth of Israel in particular; second, to point out the limitations and ultimate failure of both governmental and peace-building approaches that ignore the paradoxical nature of this opposition; and third, to attempt to locate an alternative, phenomenological approach to religious space.

The tension between the sacred and the civil unfolds on myriad levels in Israel and the Palestinian territories. The following analysis is organised around four nested spheres: the Middle East in general, the Holy Land, Jerusalem and, finally, the Temple Mount/al Haram al-Sharif at the centre. Clearly, the Temple Mount/al-Haram al Sharif is not just one simple illustration among others, it constitutes the most powerful and comprehensive symbol of the forces at work in the constitution of religious space. It will serve as the anchoring point for this work.

## 1. The Sacred and the Civil in the Birth of Israel

### *The Pre-Ottoman Period*

Israelis and Palestinians alike — though to a larger degree the Israelis — draw upon pre-modern, indeed pre-historic sources in order to legitimate their presence in the Middle East.[4] Jewish presence is dated to biblical narrative of the presence of the Canaanite tribes in Palestine, the arrival of Abraham and their captivity and liberation in Egypt. The earliest archaeological evidence of human presence on the site that became Jerusalem dates to about 1800 B.C.E. (Dumper, 1997, p. 12; Franken, 1989, p. 15). King Salomon, according to this account, constructed the first temple in Jerusalem around 1000 B.C.E. after two tribes of Israel, those of Judah and Benjamin, had been united by his predecessor King David. Israelites ruled Jerusalem until the invasion of the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E., themselves displaced by the Persians in 539 B.C.E. During

the Hellenic period (332–170 B.C.E.) Jewish culture and law flourished; and Jewish control over the city was re-established in 141 B.C.E. In 63 B.C.E. Jerusalem was conquered by Rome, continuing until the Muslim invasion, around 638 C.E.

It is in the latter half of the Roman period that the Christian presence in Jerusalem becomes central. After the death of Jesus, the economically important traditions of Christian pilgrimage began. With the conversion of Constantine, Jerusalem became an imperial city. Churches, hospices and hostiles were extensively developed (Dumper, 1997, p. 13.). Though downplayed in the current Middles East conflicts, the Christian presence is essential because it provides the basic categories for the development of administrative procedures and legal categories.

The Christian high period ended with the Muslim invasion of Jerusalem in 638 by 'Umar ibn Khattab', the successor to the Prophet Muhammad and the First Caliph in Islam. Muslims ruled in the city of Jerusalem, interrupted by the Medieval Crusades, until 1967. Between 685 C.E. and 709 C.E. both the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa were built within the al-Haram al Sharif (Noble Sanctuary).

### *Ottoman Empire*

What might be called the modern period of Jerusalem's history begins with the Ottoman occupation of Jerusalem in 1517 after a gradual, century-long rise to imperial power, from the empire of the caliphs to the greater European Ottoman Empire. Though the Ottoman Empire retained its rigid bureaucratic form for over two centuries, the economic and military growth of the European states in the eighteenth century lead to both a decline in power and a corresponding rise in European cultural, political and economic influence (Hourani, 1991, pp. 207–8).

### *Jerusalem in the Process of Political Westernisation*

As religions, neither Judaism nor Islam possessed (nor possess) particular affinities with Western models of political organisation. On the contrary, Christianity has not only adapted to modern Western political systems, it has provided impetus to their emergence, their ethical and spiritual viability, and, in the industrial and post-industrial era, contributed to their fusion with the liberal market economic world system. Judaism and Islam share much more than meets the eye, particularly in the remarkably warm, often maudlin political and financial support granted to it by the American religious Right (Gorenberg, 2000, pp. 30–54). They are very similar in the importance placed on religious law and in the relatively decentralised and non-hierarchical arrangements of their religious specialists (the ulama for Islam, the rabbinate for Judaism). There is nothing like the Christian congregation and its immediate transferability to political organisation (Brown, 2000, p. 79).

On the one hand, it has been convincingly argued that Israeli policy in the context of the Palestinian question is at odds with democratic principles. The

declaration lodged in the ill-fated UN Security Council Resolution 3379 That 'Zionism is racism' constitutes an affirmation that political organisation established along the lines of religious demarcation, ensconced in the Law of Return, is counter to democratic principles.[5] No other modern nation can claim that it is reserved for the adherents of one religion alone. The modern state is a plural one.

On the other hand, Islamic political thought emphasises unity and community, valuating individualism far less than Christianity, despite the mediatised radicalism of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the movement to create an Islamic state in Pakistan, and the overtly political implications of al-Qaeda's ideology, the vast majority of Islamic political movements and governing parties are relatively secular. Only a few decades ago the political discourse of the Islamic world was quite different, far more secular, far more open to modernisation (Brown, 2000, p. 81).

Thus the primary delimitation of this demonstration is its focus on the modernity of the Middle East conflict. The conflict, be it in the sphere of the greater Middle East, as in the spheres of Israel, Jerusalem and the Temple on the Mount, is simultaneously an insipient conflict or crisis in the historical development of modernity.

To what degree can processes of modernisation contribute to the preservation of religious traditions, and to what degree do they directly hinder them. To approach this question more directly we now turn to the concrete problem of the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif.

## 2. The Legal Status of the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif

The Temple of the Mount is many things, an intersection point of Judaism and Islam, but also of Christianity. Jews refer to the platform and its wall as the 'Temple Mount' (*har ha-hayit*) and the 'Western Wall' (*kotel ha-ma'aravi*). For Muslims they are the 'Noble Sanctuary' (*al haram al-sharif*) and '*al-buraq*', a reference to the Prophet's magical steed, which was tethered to the wall.

For Jews, the Temple Mount is the place of the near-sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham. It is the site of the first Temple constructed by King David and his successor King Solomon, the second Temple, constructed after the Babylonian exile, expanded into the third Temple by King Herod, finally demolished by the Romans in 70 C.E. Some kind of representation of it is present in the architecture of any synagogue. The sanctity of the Temple Mount is implicit in Jewish prayers and rituals. The Temple is inseparable from the Messianic vision, as well as the Jewish national movement.

For Muslims the platform of the *al-haram al-sharif* is the site from which Muhammad departed on his 'flight' to heaven. Architecturally, it contains two immense structures, al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock itself built around the stone from which Muhammad is said to have departed. It is the third most holy place in Islam, after Mecca and Medina, and thus one of the obligatory pilgrimages.

For both groups, this site is a source of enormous spiritual, social and thus political power. It provides an enormously strong basis for ethnic and religious

identity. Its religious contestation has unavoidable political meaning (Friedland and Hecht, 1996, p. 23). Yet despite the enormous and undeniable power of this site — emotional, spiritual, social, cultural, ethnic and political — both standard histories and traditional political approaches to its conflicts have failed to follow the trail from the religious to the political. The traditional politics — of both peace and conflict — insist on regarding this site (and others) as a fixed dimension. Religious interpretations — again, by both religious authorities, historians and politicians — remain resolutely apolitical. The legal administration of this site, however, remains and others thus falls to the state, to its political concepts and legal categories (Friedland and Hecht 1996, p. 23).

### *The Legal Status of the Holy Sites*

As far back as the mid-eighteenth century the principal holy sites of Palestine have enjoyed special legal and administrative status. Respect for the value of the religious objects and sites has through several centuries been expressed through articulation of rights and obligations, general regulations about access and comportment, maintenance and preservations, ritual and practice to be carried out by any and all who might visit them.

What I wish to underscore through several illustrations are the terms in which the special needs of such religious sites are addressed. In conformity with modern European principles of rule of law, the sites are handled as particular points of interest that must be organised and regulated according to universal norms and values.

#### *1. Ottoman edict: Status Quo arrangement for Christian Sites (1757, 1852)*

Ottoman edicts specify a list of sites to be considered as holy as well as a set of rules and procedures for the maintenance, restoration, cleaning and ritual use of Christian Holy Places (Dumper, 2002, p. 23). Among these, only two are actually in the Old City of Jerusalem: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and its dependencies and the Convent of Dayr al-Sultan.[6] During the British Mandate period the mandatory authorities introduced a number of non-Christian sites, extending the list to include the Western Wall, Rachel's Tomb (between Jerusalem and Bethlehem), and the Cenacle on Mount Zion.

#### *2. British Mandate under the League of Nations 24 July 1922*

Article 2 of the British Mandate states that 'The Mandatory shall be responsible for […] safeguarding the civil and religious rights of all inhabitants of Palestine, irrespective of race and religion'. In other words, access to the privileges associated with any of the holy sites will be not be the object of discrimination. The principle of universal rights, already ensconced in the founding principles of the League of Nations, are brought to bear on the holy sites. In the same way, Article 5 assures a general protection of the sites from the control of 'the Government of any foreign Power', again without discrimination. Article 13 guarantees for all the 'existing rights' and 'free access to the Holy Places,

religious buildings and sites and the free exercise of worship' while ensuring the requirements of public order and decorum is assumed by the Mandatory'. Article 14 calls for the formation of a special Commission to 'study, define and determine the rights and claims in connexion with the Holy Places and their rights and claims relating to the different religious communities in Palestine'. Finally, Article 15 assures 'complete freedom of consciences and the free exercise of all forms of worship, subject only to the maintenance of public order and morals, are ensured to all' (Laqueur, 2001, p. 33).

### *3. UN General Assembly: Resolution on the Future Government of Palestine (Partition Resolution) (29 November 1947)*

The General Provision of the so-called Partition Resolution on 'Holy Places, Religious Buildings and Sites' largely re-affirms the universally valid principles laid down by the League of Nations, affirming (Article 1) that 'Existing rights in respect of Holy Places and religious buildings or sites shall not be denied or impaired', that (Article 2)

> [i]n so far as Holy Places are concerned, the liberty of access, visit and transit shall be guaranteed, in conformity with existing rights, to all residents and citizens of the other State and of the City of Jerusalem, as well as to aliens, without distinction as to nationality, subject to requirements of national security, public order and decorum. Similarly, freedom of worship shall be guaranteed in conformity with existing rights, subject to the maintenance of public order and decorum.

The terms of preservation, maintenance and care are specified in way similar to the Ottoman edict of 1757: (Article 3) 'Holy Places and religious buildings or sites shall be preserved. No act shall be permitted which may in any way impair their sacred character […]'. Finally Article 4 spells out the economic status of the holy sites in terms of tax exemption. 'No taxation shall be levied in respect of any Holy Place, religious building or site which was exempt from taxation on the date of the creation of the State' (Laquer, 2001, pp. 74–75).

### *4. Israeli Knesset: Protection of the Holy Places Law (27 June 1967)*

Some of this same language is absorbed by the Israeli law for the protection of the holy places, passed immediately after the Six-Day War (1967). Most notably Article 1 specifies that the holy sites shall be protected from desecration, and reaffirms universal freedom of access 'of the members of the different religions' (*Laws of the State of Israel*; Dumper, 2002, p. 19).

The Knesset adoption of the Protection of Holy Places Law in 1967 presents a concentration of the political paradox we are trying to puzzle out. The new law guaranteed free access to all holy places in Jerusalem, stipulating that each community would administer them. The status quo, in its British, expanded incarnation, discriminated against the Jews, to the extent that it prohibited them from setting up any ritual objects to the site under the clause of violations of public order and decorum. The Six-Day War left Israel in a position of

sovereignty over the entire Temple Mount, while at the same time exposing them as violators of the rules of the British arrangement.

> The state had chosen to extend full sovereignty over the *haram* without allowing Jews, in whose name they claimed that sovereignty, to have access to the site which undergirds the very nature of that sovereignty.
>
> The Six-Day War produced a bitter truth — Jews were denied access to the Temple Mount by their own government.
>
> The right that had been gained (though through an act of war) was the abstract right of political sovereignty, which could not reconcile itself with the rules of religious practice. (Friedland and Hecht, 1996, pp. 38–39, 44)

## 3. Opposition Between the Sacred Place and Civil Space

*Evolving Modes of Historical Representation*

In his recent book, *An Aesthetic Occupation*, Daniel Bertrand Monk presents an extended critique of the relation between architectural sites and the political reality that organises our relation to them. Roughly put, Monk attacks the complacency of political analysis of the Middle East conflict, with regard to its treatment of monuments and holy sites. Typical commentary, he claims, treats the holy sites as transparent, unproblematic, as simple real estate whose 'value' is ascertained as a function of territorial equations. Such commentary ignores the fact that

> [t]here is a significant conceptual difference between writing a history that assumes we understand, prima facie, the workings of monuments and holy sites in the perpetuation of a conflict, and one that examines how the conflict *itself* has fashioned and refashioned its own explanation of the monument's political role, in the process disclosing its own understanding of history. (Monk, 2002, p. xviii)

Monk basically advances an anti-essentialist view of the holy sites in the Middle East conflict: the holy sites do not possess a distinct and timeless meaning in the context of the conflict. The sites are not simply corroborating causes in a conflict, which results in part from their existence, but whose meaning essentially surpasses them. The conflict will rage on with or without the holy sites. Or, to use the terminology of the social sciences, the holy sites are an independent variable. Monk argues that the conflict creates the holy sites. The holy sites are profoundly historical, their political meaning changing as a function of the different stages of the conflict and the different stages of political requirements. The blind spot of both historical commentators and good-willed attempts at peace-building is that they overlook how much is already agreed upon.

The canonical perspectives of analysis assume what Monk calls the 'political immediacy' of architecture. Friends and enemies, analysts, commentators, and peace-builders alike tacitly — and erroneously — agree that when witnessing

the holy sites they are participating in the intuition of something 'immediate'. The assume that in the holy site or architectural monument a political reality presents itself to view, 'directly and without mediation' (Monk, 2002, p. 2). They assume that the antagonism already lies waiting in the holy site, and that it is only a question of understanding what triggers it. Monk uses the example of the Tunnel to show how the holy sites are used as a loaded gun, as a bomb's fuse to be lit or as artillery ready to be deployed by either side against the peace process. There is no debate on the essential violence in the holy sites; the only relevant question is who will deploy it, how and when (Monk, 2002, p. 3).

What evolves is the kind of political immediacy accorded to sites and monuments, giving form to history, and meaning to the conflict. Architecture is a 'cipher of history, […] Architecture *itself* assembles and re-assembles the constellation of possible positions actually assumed by participants in this conflict' (Monk, 2002, p. 9). According to Monk, this evolution falls into three discrete phases, three historical modes of construction of political meaning of the holy sites in modern times, and thereby three understandings of history.

The first phase begins with Napoleon's invasion of the Holy Land in 1798 and extends to England's conquest and occupation in December 1917. During this period the scientific study of the holy sites was identical with the 'geopolitical imperatives' of European Orientalism (Monk, 2002, p. 10; Said, 1985, pp. 49–73).

The second phase covers the English occupation up until the Wailing Wall riots in 1929. During this period both sides used the holy sites and monuments as weapons in the struggle for political identity. These were, according to Monk, attempts at adequation, at imposing the political meaning of the holy sites as an act of political self-creation.

The third phase covers events since 1929. This period is marked by a near-constant crisis in attempts at adequation between holy sites and political identity. Political discourse is shifted to a formal level in which art historical arguments and demonstrations of the cause of violence are presented commissions and delegations in 1928, 1937, 1938. The political meaning of the holy sites is negotiated as testimony of interpretations.

## *Against Functionalism*

In his analysis of the third phase of political meaning, Monk provides a lengthy presentation and interpretation of the work of the Shaw Commission. The Commission was formed with the objective of finding the cause of the Arab riots in the aftermath of the landmark Wailing Wall incident of 1919. After interrogating numerous witnesses and viewing exhibition after exhibition, the Commission came to the conclusion that (1) the violence occurred due to 'racial animosity on the part of the Arabs, consequent upon the disappointment of their political and national aspirations and fear for their economic future', that (2) the Arabs feared economic domination by a group who appeared to the Arabs to have unlimited funding from abroad, that (3) ambiguity in the various British statements to both Arabs and Jews had caused misunderstandings. The

proceedings of the Shaw Commission demonstrate the functionalism of the third phase of the historiography of the holy sites (Monk, 2002, pp. 99–124).

The Commission is a cavalcade of documents and testimonies. One concrete symbol after another is presented, univalent, monolithic definitions of the meaning of the Holy City and the holy sites. The third phase of Jerusalem's historiography is an atomistic rendering of political reality, pure bureaucracy and instrumental action. The political meaning of the holy sites is cooked down to the set of documents produced by the commission.

> A historiography of immediacy cannot culminate in transcendental perspective, as if in moving between the positions/accusations potentiated in monuments' inadequacy they represent, one is somehow deposited outside the conflict and above fray. (Monk, 2002, p. 126)

This atomisation of understandings of the holy sites constitutes the *modus operandi* of sacred essentialism. The political meaning of the holy sites is the construction of power struggles, struggle for political identity and political legitimacy. That legitimacy is derived from the use-value of the holy sites, not from one kind of implicit value or meaning. As time wears on, the transparency of holiness becomes more apparent: the sacred is a means to an end. A holy site is the site of a power transaction is made.

## 4. Phenomenology of Sacred Space

In the first pages of his elegant book *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard describes his inquiries into the significance of real and imagined as *topophilia*:

> [These studies] seek to determine the human value of spaces of possession, of spaces defended against adverse forces, of spaces of adoration. […] To their protective value, which can be positive, must be added imagined values. These values quickly become the dominant ones. Space that is seized by the imagination cannot remain indifferent, delivered to measure and to the reflexion of the geometer. Such space is lived. And it is lived not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. (Bachelard, 1992, p. 17)

I have suggested that legal categories of Occidental modernity force a homogenisation upon the holy space in Jerusalem. A phenomenological approach will defend the position here underscored by Bachelard, that space itself is heterogeneous, partial, interested, asymmetrical in its meaning, and thus that it resists the functional and instrumental determinations of bureaucracy, categorical administration and legalistic universalisation, in other words the jewels in the crown of democratic modernisation. If one adds to the phenomenological resistance of 'ordinary' space the dense and concentrated deep meaning and historical reference of sacred space, the effect of the misfit with modern institutionalisation becomes even sharper.

The most well known approach of this kind to religious space is to be found in the work of Micea Eliade, and other members of what in the 1960s and 1970s came to be known as the Chicago school, itself based on principles developed

by Durkheim in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* from 1912. In his extensive work Eliade develops an entire vocabulary for understanding and analysing religious objects and experience as discontinuous with ordinary reality. His theory of religion is a metaphysics of the ordinary. It demonstrates, through unusually meticulous historical study, that the essence of religious objects and religious experience is radically different from 'ordinary' objects and experience, while at the same time coexisting with them.

In his 1954 *The Myth of Eternal Return*, for example, he argues that religious objects aren note said to possess intrinsic value, but rather participate in one form or another of cosmic network. Religious objects are not autonomous. The key term he uses to describe this otherness is *hierophany*:

> Among countless stones, one stone becomes sacred — and hence instantly becomes saturated with being — because it constitutes a hierophany, or possesses mana, or again because it commemorates a mythical act, and so on. The object appears as the receptacle of an exterior force that *differentiates* it from its milieu and gives it meaning and value. This force may reside in the substance of the object or in its form; a rock reveals itself to be sacred because its very existence is a hierophany: incomprehensible, invulnerable, it is that which man is not. (Eliade, 1991, pp. 3–4)

This description of the religious object — the rock — coincides perfectly with the kind of religious value give to the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif by Jews and Muslims, respectively. According to Eliade, space, for the religious person, is not homogeneous. It shows ruptures, breaks. Certain parts of it are qualitatively different than others. Moreover, the experience of the contrast with profane space — unstructured, inconsistent, neutral — is at least as significant.The experience of sacred space is an orientation in value and meaning, within the surroundings of amorphous chaos (Eliade, 1965, pp. 25, 26; Heidegger, 1990).

For Eliade, the experience of sacred space is directly existential. It contributes to forming the world, to orientating oneself in it, and to drawing from that world meaning and value. The experience of profane space maintains the homogeneity, and thus the relativity of space. Orientation in terms of value or meaning disappears, since the 'fixed point' no longer enjoys a unique ontological status: it appears and disappears according to daily needs. There is no longer a 'World', but only an amorphous mass of an infinity of 'places' in which individuals and societies circulate (Eliade, 1991, p. 27).

If we pass over for a moment the anti-modern bent of Eliade's philosophy of religion, we can at the least find a key to understanding the failure of universal administrative compromise in the conflicts surrounding the holy sites of Jerusalem. The regulatory approach advanced in the British mandate in 1922, by the UN General Assembly in 1947, even by the Israeli Holy Places Law in 1967, all depart from the laudable notion that democratic principles of rights, freedom, indidividuality, territoriality and property can and should be applied to some of the most holy sites in the world. In Eliade's sacred topophany,

however, all space is not equal. Like an Einsteinian theory of special relativity, religious space is curved, indeed it is fractured, fragmented and discontinuous.

*Eliadean Administration of Holy Sites*

Religious significance, unlike technocratic rationality, possesses no fixed axis against which to measure political consequence, 'delivered to measure and to the reflexion of the geometer' as Bachelard put it. For this reason, technocratic approaches to the administration of the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif are doomed to failure.

An Eliadean administration would certainly dispense with the universality of rights. It would be extremely local, focusing on the particularity of the experience of the site itself, instead of on its generality, perhaps even isolating the Dome of the Rock from the Aqsa Mosque.

Religion does indeed legitimate politics, bureaucracy and democratic institutions. But religion's legitimating power ebbs and flows as a function of other types of changes, cultural, social, economic, and political.

Sacred space is place. But it is not place that is simply reducible to here and now, never simply this stone, this dust. Sacred space is the site of the creation of meaning — historical, cultural, spiritual. The archaic understanding of holy sites as places of sacred presence, of otherworldliness is simply in opposition to positive sciences of history and politics.

One must reasonably see that the religious space of the Temple Mount/al Haram al-Sharif is indeed also material, can be rolled over with a tank, fought for and defended with machine guns or stones. The challenge for analysts and peacemakers is to navigate this paradox.[7]

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**Notes**

1. Many thanks to Andrew John Feltham for research assistance in the preparation of this paper.
2. 'Sharon Touches a Nerve, and Jerusalem Explodes', *New York Times*, 29 September 2000.
3. 'Unapologetic, Sharon Rejects blame for Igniting Violence', *New York Times*, 5 October 2000.
4. For example the Palestinian 'Declaration of Independence' of 15 November 1988 (Laqueur and Rubin, 2001, pp. 354–57).
5. '§1. Every Jew has the right to immigrate to the country […] §4 Every Jew who migrated to the country before this law goes into effect, and every Jew who was born in the country either before or after the law is effective

enjoys the same status as any person who migrate on the basis of this law' (Laqueur, 2001, p. 87).

6. The other sites on the Status Quo list are: the Sanctuary of the Ascension (on the Mount of Olives), the Tomb of the Virgin Mary (near Gethsemane), the Church of the Nativity (in Bethlehem), the Milk Grotto (in Bethlehem), and the Shepherds Field (near Bethlehem) (Zander, 1971, pp. 47–54).UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (proposing the partition of Palestine extended the list of holy places to include the Dome of the Rock, the Aqsa Mosque, the Mosque of the Ascension, the Tomb of David, the Church of St. Anne (Old City), the Church of St. James (Old City), the Church of St. Mark (Old City), House of Caiaphas, the Pool of Bethesda, the Tomb of Absalom synagogues (some in the Old City), the Bath of Rabii Ishmael, the Pool of Siloam, the Cemetery of Mt. Olives, and the Tomb of Zachariah (Dumper, 2002, pp. 20–21).'And yet, in this experience of profane space, there continue to intervene values that recall more or less the non-homogeneity that characterizes the religious experience of space. Certain privileged places, qualitatively different than the others, subsist: one's native countryside, the site of ones first love, or a street or a street corner of the first foreign city visited in one's youth. All these places retain, even for the most frankly non-religious person an exceptional 'unique' quality. These are the holy places of one's private Universe, as if this non-religious being had had the revelation of an *other* reality thatn that to which s/he participates in his/her daily existence'. (Eliade 1991, p. 28).
7. In a later work from 1965, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade himself attempts to confront this living contradiction (Eliade, 1965, p. 18).

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