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PART ONE

FOUNDATIONS: Memory, Identity, and the Construction of Symbolic Space

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CHAPTER 1

Israel, Jerusalem, and Exile: Memory and Messianic Hope in Rabbinic Thought

Piero Capelli

1 The Redemption of Israel: Biblical and "Parabiblical" Models

From the exilic period onward, the expectation of Israel's liberation or redemption (*ḥerut*, *ge'ullah*) from subjugation to pagan powers and the restoration of its political and religious autonomy became a central paradigm in the development of Jewish tradition. Certain Biblical ideas and passages were particularly influential for the persistence and development of this attitude. One was the nostalgia for forsaken Jerusalem as expressed in many psalms from the exilic period, such as Psalm 137, whose central verses (5–6: "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour")[1] are still found inscribed today on the walls of synagogues in the Diaspora. Another influential source was God's promise to Israel, expressed for instance in the post-exilic verse Isa. 59:20, that "He shall come as redeemer (*go'el*) to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn back from sin–declares the Lord."[2]

These concepts became an integral part of the theology of the Covenant between God and His people Israel, which took its definitive form during the Second Temple period. Writing at the beginning of the second century BCE in Jerusalem under Seleucid rule, Ben Sira was well aware of God's Covenant with Israel ("The righteous judge will uphold justice: God will not delay [...] until he has defended the cause of his people and made them happy through his protection," 35:22–25)[3] and particularly with David and his descendants (47:11). Ben Sira likewise reaffirmed that the Land is a heritage (*naḥalah*)

1 I quote the Hebrew Bible in the JPS Tanakh version of 1985 (with slight modifications).

2 The verse is quoted by Paul in Rom. 11:26 following the Septuagint, but with the significant Christological alteration of *eneken Siōn* (*le-Ṣiyyon* in the Masoretic text and in the Isaiah Scroll from Qumran) to *ek Siōn*, "from Zion".

3 I translate from the Hebrew text according to ms. B (Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, T.-S. 16.313), reproduced and transcribed on the website www.bensira.org.

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given by God to Israel (44:23; 46:9) and devoted a brief celebration to the reconstruction of Jerusalem carried out after the exile by Nehemiah (49:13). Nevertheless, despite living under Seleucid rule, Ben Sira showed little interest in the redemption of Israel, and the return of the Jews to their liberated Land was not even a literary motif for him. This theme would, however, reemerge as a central concern in the pseudepigraphal *Psalms of Solomon*, likely composed under indirect Roman domination in the second half of the first century BCE. For instance, Psalm 17 describes a political-messianic utopia strongly opposed to Hasmonean leadership, and centers on the expectation of a Messiah of Davidic descent, who will establish the kingdom of God throughout the world, but will above all redeem the Land of Israel: after the wars and the restoration of peace, the nation will be able to return to its Land, and the original Israel will thus be reconstituted:

> And [*the Messiah*] will gather a holy people, whom he will lead with justice (…). And he will distribute them throughout the Land according to their tribes, and there will no longer be any resident or stranger among them. (…) And he will cause the nations of the Gentiles to serve him under his yoke, and he will glorify the Lord in the most distinguished place on all the earth; and he will purify Jerusalem to a state of holiness as it was in the beginning, [so that] the nations may come from the ends of the earth to see his glory (…). The Lord himself is their king (…) and he will have mercy on all the nations [*who stand*] before him in awe (…). And he himself will be without sin, so that he may rule over a great people (…) (17:26–36).[4]

Such a vision, in which nationalism and messianism are inextricably intertwined, was not confined to the theological realm; rather, it became a cornerstone of political activism and contributed to shaping the expectations that gave rise to the wars of independence fought against Rome in 66–73 and 132–135 CE. During the second war the Jewish rebels minted tetradrachms bearing the image of the Temple and the inscriptions *Li-ge'ullat Ṣiyyon*, "For the redemption/liberation of Zion," and *Ḥerut Ṣiyyon* (or *Ḥerut Yiśra'el*, or *Ḥerut Yerushalayim*), "Freedom of Zion (of Israel, of Jerusalem)." These coins have been interpreted in various ways: as evidence of an actual, albeit temporary, conquest of Jerusalem by the insurgents, and even of a restoration of sacrificial worship; or merely as propaganda slogans that were all the more

4 I translate the text according to *Septuaginta*, ed. Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, second edition, 2006), 2: 486–488.

emphasized as the insurgents' forces began to prove inadequate.[5] There can scarcely be any doubt, though, that the meaning of these inscriptions was political, and that – as Ephraim E. Urbach argued – they were meant to reaffirm a concept of *ge'ullah* that had first emerged in the 160s BCE, following the successful conclusion of the Maccabean struggle for independence.[6]

From 135 CE onward, however, the Land could no longer be effectively liberated, nor the Temple be rebuilt (apart from Emperor Julian's project in 362).[7] As for the presence–or absence–of Jews in the Holy City and its surroundings in the years following the second war, Justin reports that after 135, Jerusalem was "deserted," that "none of them [the Jews] are permitted to live there," and that the Jews themselves "stand guard to ensure that no one enters, and the death penalty has been established for any Jew caught entering" (*First Apology* 47).[8] By the time of the Pilgrim of Bordeaux (333 CE), Jews were again permitted to travel to Jerusalem once a year (presumably for the ritual anniversary of the destruction of the First and Second Temples, on the Ninth of the month of Av) and to mourn at the Temple site according to a specific ritual: "There are also two statues of Hadrian, and not far from the statues there is a pierced stone to which the Jews go every year; they anoint it, lament with groans, tear their clothes, and then depart."[9] The Pilgrim also mentions one synagogue that remained of the seven that had once stood on Mount Zion. Eric M. Meyers maintained that the tombs excavated on the Mount of Olives near the Dominus Flevit church also attest to the presence in Jerusalem, even after 70 CE, of a Jewish community that practiced secondary burial in ossuaries; on the Mount of Olives there are also Jewish tombs from the 3rd and 4th centuries, and other Jewish secondary burials from the late 3rd century at Ramat Rachel, but these could have belonged to Jews who were transported

5 Ya'akov Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage* (New York: Amphora Books, 1982), 2: 122–123; Hanan Heshel, "The Bar Kochba Revolt, 132–135," in *Cambridge History of Judaism*. IV. *The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 115.

6 Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages. Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 668.

7 Heshel, "The Bar Kochba Revolt," 125–27, citing Peter Schäfer, *Der Bar Kokhba-Aufstand* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981), 194–235.

8 I translate the text according to Saint Justin, *Apologies*, ed. André Wartelle (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987). Cf. *Dialogue with Trypho* 16:2; James Rendel Harris, "Hadrian's Decree of Expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem," *Harvard Theological Review* 19 (1926): 199–206.

9 I translate the text according to *Itineraria et alia geographica*, ed. Paul Geyer, Otto Cuntz et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1965), 16.

there after dying (and possibly being buried a first time) elsewhere.[10] Apparently, funerary archaeology does not provide incontrovertible evidence of a stable Jewish settlement in Jerusalem during the period in question.[11]

From the 3rd through the 5th century, the period during which the Mishnah and the Talmud Yerushalmi were compiled, Jerusalem was a Byzantine city that, beginning with the era of Constantine and the Christianization of the Empire, underwent a major building boom. At the beginning of the 3rd century, the Mishnah refers to Jews traveling to the Land to settle there permanently:

> *Anyone may be brought to the Land of Israel, but no one may be sent away from it. Anyone may be brought to Jerusalem, but no one may be sent away from it. This rule applies equally to women and slaves* (Mishnah, *Ketubbot* 13:11).[12]

Yet this is a deliberate anachronism–the description of a utopian future, an *Endzeit*, meant to correspond to the *Urzeit* when the Temple still stood. On the other hand, in rabbinic literature from that period, Jerusalem in particular is systematically presented as a desacralized place in ruins. For example, declaring that an object was sacred "like Jerusalem" was deemed of no normative value, since the expression meant "nothing more than the wood and stones found there" (y. *Nedarim* 1:3, 37a).[13] This was an ideological stance, stemming from the fact that, following the failure of Emperor Julian's project to rebuild the Temple, the city no longer hosted any Jewish holy site and the Jewish presence in it was negligible, if not nonexistent (most of the Jews and the rabbinical class had relocated, primarily to Galilee). The Yerushalmi does contain references to trips to Jerusalem made by Jews, not on pilgrimage, but rather for commercial reasons, and these references in any case pertain to the period prior to the destruction of the Temple; the same applies to texts that mention Jews living in Jerusalem. Even in its exegesis of Biblical passages

10 Eric M. Meyers, *Jewish Ossuaries: Reburial and Rebirth. Secondary Burials in Their Ancient Near Eastern Setting* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), 36–38.

11 Cf. Michael Avi-Yonah et al., *Jerusalem. The Saga of a Holy City* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2002), 31.

12 I translate the passages from the Mishnah according to ms. Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, 3173 (De Rossi 138), reproduced on the website of the National Library of Israel (https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/manuscripts/hebrew-manuscripts/viewerpage?vid=MANUSCRIPTS#d=[[PNX_MANUSCRIPTS990007068002051 71-1,FL16112006]]); I keep the numbering of chapters and *mishnayot* of the *textus receptus*.

13 This halakhic saying is attributed to Rabbi Yehudah (Palestine, 1st cent. CE). I translate the passages from the Yerushalmi according to the edition *The Jerusalem Talmud*, ed. Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, 17 vols. (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2000–2015).

referring to Jerusalem, the Yerushalmi consistently adheres to the perspective of Scripture itself, thus speaking of biblical Jerusalem rather than of the contemporary one.[14] From the point of view of the rabbis, it was only in the dimension of memory that Jerusalem retained its Jewish religious significance. Yet, even in this sense, it was still (and would remain) perceived as a Jewish city and the heritage of Israel.

2 Land, Redemption, and Messianism in Rabbinic Liturgy

As the primary vehicle for transmitting religious values from the leadership to the group, rabbinic liturgy contains many examples of rabbinic engagement with the unrealizable hope to rebuild an independent Israel in its own Land. In the weekday morning '*Amidah* according to the Sephardic rite, God is implored to bring all Israelites dispersed in the Diaspora back to the Land at the sound of the *shofar* and to hasten the restoration of Jerusalem as the eternal capital of the independent Jewish people under the Davidic Messiah-King:

> Sound the great shofar for our liberation; raise a banner to gather our exiles; and gather us swiftly together from the four corners of the earth into our Land. Blessed are you, Lord, who gather the dispersed of His people Israel (…). Restore our judges as in the beginning and our counselors as at the start (…). Return in mercy to Jerusalem, your city, and dwell in the midst of it as you have spoken; rebuild it speedily, in our days, as an everlasting building; and establish the throne of your servant David in the midst of it speedily. Blessed are you, Lord, who [*re*]builds Jerusalem (…). Restore the worship in the Sanctuary (debir) of your House [*the Temple*] and the fires of Israel.[15]

14 On Jerusalem in early rabbinical literature see Gerson D. Cohen, "Zion in Rabbinic Literature," in *Zion in Jewish Literature*, ed. Abraham S. Halkin (New York: Herzl Press, 1961), 38–64; Charles Primus, "The Borders of Judaism: The Land of Israel in Early Rabbinic Judaism," in *The Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986, 97–108; Richard Sarason, "The Significance of the Land of Israel in the Mishnah," in *The Land of Israel*, ed. Hoffman, 109–136; Catherine Hezser, "The (In)Significance of Jerusalem in the Talmud Yerushalmi," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Catherine Hezser, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 11–49.

15 The "fires of Israel" are those that consumed the sacrifices when the Temple stood, or when, according to the formulated hope, it will be rebuilt. I translate from the text of the *Siddur Sefarad* according to the *Metsudah Linear Siddur* by Avrohom Davis (1981) as found on https://www.sefaria.org/Siddur_Sefard%2C_Weekday_Shacharit%2C_Amidah.100?ven=hebrew|The_Metsudah_siddur,_1981&lang=bi.

The Yerushalmi stipulates that when reciting the *'Amidah* on the Ninth of Av, the calendrical anniversary context must be explicitly stated by including in the prayer a special formula–the so-called *tefillat noḥam* or *tefillat reḥem*, "prayer of consolation" or "prayer of mercy"–which emphasizes the present desolation of the Holy City and the fact that it will return to Israel's possession, but only at the end of days:

> Have compassion, O Lord our God, in Your great mercy and in Your sure grace, upon us and upon Your people Israel, upon Your city and upon Zion, the dwelling place of Your glory, and upon the city in mourning, in ruins, destroyed and devastated, given into the hands of foreigners, trampled by the violent, and bequeathed as an inheritance to the legions (legyonot); the idolaters have desecrated it, but you have given it to your people Israel as a possession, and you have left it to the descendants of Jeshurun as an inheritance, for you set it ablaze with fire and in fire you shall rebuild it, as it is said: *And I Myself–declares the Lord–will be a wall of fire all around it, and I will be a glory inside it* (Zech. 2:9) (y. Berakot 4:3, 8a).[16]

In the Sephardic ritual, the blessing recited after a meal (*Birkat ha-mazon*) is preceded on certain days by the recitation of exilic psalms expressing longing for Zion (Psalms 87, 126, and 137). The version of the *Birkat ha-mazon* preserved in the *Siddur* according to Rav 'Amram Ga'on (Babylonia, mid-9th century) includes an invocation to God to:

> (...) have mercy (...) upon Zion, the abode of Your glory, upon the kingdom of the House of David, Your Messiah, and upon the great and sacred House [*the Temple*] that was called by Your name (...). May Elijah and the Messiah, son of David, come in our lifetime; may the kingdom of the House of David return speedily to its place; and may You alone reign over us. Save us for the sake of Your name; bring us up into its midst [*Jerusalem*]; make us rejoice in it; and grant us consolation in Zion, Your city. Blessed are You, O Lord, who [*re*]builds Jerusalem.[17]

16 This section of the Talmudic text is attributed to Rabbi Aḥa bar Isaac (Palestine, first half on the 4th century) in the name of Rabbi Huna Rabba from Sepphoris (beginning of 3rd century).

17 I translate from the edition *Seder R. Amram Gaon. Part I*, ed. David Hedegård (Lund: A.-B. Ph. Lindstedts Universitets-Bokhandel, 1951), 63 (Hebr.) (§ 78).

According to the Yerushalmi, even when reciting the *Birkat ha-mazon*, the idea of the rebuilding of Jerusalem must be linked to the hope for the arrival of the King Messiah, called the city's "comforter" (*menaḥem*) after Lam. 1:

> Rabbi Ba son of Rabbi Aḥa[18] [*says*] in the name of Rabbi: "If one does not mention the Covenant in [the blessing regarding] the Land, or in [*the blessing regarding*] the 'builder of Jerusalem' does not mention the kingdom of the House of David, he is made to repeat [*the blessing*]." Rabbi Ila[19] said: "If one says 'The Comforter of Jerusalem,' he has fulfilled the obligation" (y. Berakot 1:9, 3d).

Lastly, the Passover *Haggadah* is a ritualized re-enactment of Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt, during which the hope is repeatedly expressed that Jerusalem be rebuilt and that those present may soon gather there to celebrate the next *Seder* as free people. The narrative section (*Maggid*, "The Storyteller") begins with a blessing over the "bread of affliction" and the toast (part in Aramaic, part in Hebrew): "This year here, next year in the Land of Israel; this year in bondage, next year as free people!"[20] The section of blessings to God (*Barekh*) includes the exhortation: "Rebuild Jerusalem, the Holy City, speedily in our days. Blessed are You, O Lord, who [re]build Jerusalem with mercy." The concluding section of the *Seder* (*Nirṣah*, "It has been pleasing") ends with the *Ḥasal* ("It is concluded"), consisting of several lines from a *piyyuṭ* by Yosef Ṭov 'Elem Bonfils (France, 11th century) also invoking the redemption of Israel and its return to Jerusalem: "Lead back soon the shoots of [your] stock [Israel] | redeemed to Zion in exultation!"[21]

The expectation of redemption is thus reaffirmed at various key moments in Jewish prayer, both private and communal (the Eighteen Daily Blessings, the Blessing after a meal, and the Passover *Seder*). In prayer, this expectation is closely linked to the coming of the Davidic Messiah, which will occur as the end of time approaches. Throughout the formative period of rabbinic Judaism (from 135 CE through the 6th century), messianic expectations of varying degrees coexisted–some more politically oriented, others less so; but the predominant attitude was undoubtedly a depoliticized messianism entrusted to God's inscrutable will regarding the end of time. The disastrous experience of

18 Palestine, second half of the 2nd century.

19 Palestine, beginning of the 4th century.

20 I translate the passages from the *Haggadah* according to *The Passover Haggadah with English Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, ed. E. Daniel Goldschmidt and Nahum N. Glatzer, third edition (New York: Schocken Books, 1979).

21 The expression "the shoots of [your] stock" (*niṭ'e kannah*) is modeled after Ps. 80:16, "the stock (*kannah*) that Your right hand planted (*naṭ'ah*)."

the wars against Rome had taught the rabbinic class that messianic hope should no longer entail the active political and military collaboration of the Jews in a divine plan that was best left inscrutable.

3 Not Yet, but Already

In order to recast the relationship with the Land of Israel and the Temple in a solely eschatological and messianic perspective, while at the same time maintaining it as a living and active dimension within the shared faith, complex cultural tools were required. Yet no new ones were needed: mainstream Judaism already possessed a well-established one in use for a long time. These were the Deuteronomistic theology of history and the way in which it had made it possible to process the experience of the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile.

The Deuteronomistic theology (or perhaps more accurately, theodicy) of history explained the historical calamities that befell Israel as divine punishment for the violations of the Covenant committed by the kings and the people. If the First Temple had been destroyed and the king taken into exile along with the priestly class, this was not a gratuitous divine act signifying the annulment of the Covenant between God and Israel: atonement was still and always possible. In the Chronicler's reinterpretation of this theodicy during the period of Persian rule, YHWH's Anointed One is the Persian emperor, and the hierocracy of Jerusalem becomes as legitimate as the Davidic kingdom had been: Israel thus comes to possess "a theological justification for its subsequent existence without a state."[22] At the origin and at the heart of this vast and complex spiritual and intellectual undertaking lies the Book of Deuteronomy, which, as Jan Assmann observed, stands as "the basis of a form of collective mnemotechnics,"[23] in the sense that the institutional *lieux de mémoire* that serve to stabilize collective memory (the kingdom, the territory, the Temple of Jerusalem) are, in the biblical book, projected–and at least potentially transferred–into an inner dimension. Assmann writes:

> Egypt, Sinai, wilderness, Moab, and so forth. The truly foundational *lieux de mémoire* lay outside the Promised Land. This, then, was the basis of the mne-

22 I borrow and translate this expression from Claudio Balzaretti, "La storia deuteronomistica e cronistica," in *L'Antico Testamento. Guida storica e letteraria*, ed. Paolo Merlo (Roma: Carocci, 2008), 157.

23 Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 191.

> motechnics that made it possible for people to remember Jerusalem when they were away from it, for example, in Babylon.[24] Whoever is capable of thinking of Egypt, the Sinai, and the wandering in the desert while in Israel is also able to remain faithful to Israel while in Babylon.[25]

This as well as in any other diaspora and in any other era. From the perspective of the functionality of worship, any place can become the Land of Israel, provided that certain conditions are met, which rabbinic Judaism, drawing on Deuteronomistic theology and historical experience, undertook to define.

First, following the destruction of the kingdom and the Temple, the rabbis revived the dialectic of collective sin and punishment that had been characteristic of the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler. However, they did not specify a precise list of collective sins that would merit catastrophic punishments from God. No theology of history different from the previous one was developed: the problem of the meaning of history was shifted (or deferred) to the messianic-eschatological perspective, which in turn was relegated to a secondary position compared to the primary importance attributed to observance of the Written and Oral Law. The Oral Law, as formulated in the Mishnah, was completely removed from the dimension of history.[26] For example, the Deuteronomistic framework is explicitly restated in this passage from the Yerushalmi:

> We find that the Temple was not destroyed the first time except because they practiced foreign cults, engaged in forbidden sexual relations, and shed blood. And so it was the second time as well. (…) But the second time we know that they were committed to the Torah, were careful in [*observing*] the commandments and in [*setting aside*] tithes, and possessed every good standard of conduct; only, they loved money and hated one another with an unprovoked hatred. And unprovoked hatred is a terrible thing, because it is equated with foreign worship, forbidden sexual relations, and the shedding of blood. An example: Rabbi Ze'ura, Rabbi Ya'aqov bar Aḥa, and Rabbi Avuna were sitting and saying: "The most serious thing is that the Temple was rebuilt the first time but not the second." Rabbi Ze'ura said, "The first generation repented, but the second did not." Rabbi El'azar said, "The first generation's guilt was made known,

24 Cf. the aforementioned Psalm 137.

25 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 192.

26 Cf. Jacob Neusner, *Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishnah* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 307–28; Robert Goldenberg, "The Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple: Its Meaning and Consequences," in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, 4:199.

> and their fate was made known; the second generation's guilt was made known, but their fate was not." They asked Rabbi Eli'ezer: "Are the later generations better than the earlier ones?" He replied to them: "Your witness will argue this: the House of Election.[27] Our ancestors tore down the ceiling – *The covering of Judah has been stripped away* (Isa. 22:8) – and we have shattered the walls – *They cried, "Strip her, strip her to her very foundations!"* (Ps. 137:7)–". They replied: "Every generation during which [the Temple] is not rebuilt is held accountable as if they had destroyed it" (y. *Yoma* 1:1, 38c).[28]

The adaptation of ancient theological models to Israel's new situation following the wars against Rome was achieved primarily through the replacement of sacrificial worship with domestic prayer and synagogue liturgy, and of the sacred space of the Temple with that of the synagogue. This replacement was established and implemented in the Oral Law, as exemplified in the following passage from the Bavli, based on the exegesis of Ezek. 41:22 ("A wooden altar three cubits high and two cubits long and having inner corners; and its length and its walls were of wood. And he said to me, 'This is the table that stands before the Lord'"): "[This verse] begins with the altar and ends with the table. Rabbi Yohanan [ben Zakkai] and Resh Laqish[29] both say: 'In the days when the Temple stood, the altar atoned for a person; now it is that person's table that atones for him'" (b. *Ḥagigah* 27a).[30]

In a passage from the Mishnah, Rabbi Yehoshua' appears to adopt the position of his contemporary Yoḥanan ben Zakkai,[31] though without fully adopting it as his own ("I have heard …"):[32]

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27 *Bet ha-beḥirah*, a recurrent expression in classical rabbinical literature to indicate the Temple.

28 Cf. the saying of Rabbi Levi (Palestine, early 3rd century): "In the time of Greek rule (…) the sins [of the Jews] caused the cessation of the perpetual sacrifice and the destruction of the Temple" (y. *Ta'anit* 4:8, 68c). Along the same lines, we read in the late *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eli'ezer* (8th–9th century): "Rabbi Yehudah said: 'From the day the Sanctuary was destroyed, the Land of Israel has been cast down because of the wickedness of those who dwelt in it. Like a man who is sick and has no strength to stand, so the land is cast down and has no strength to yield its fruits, as it is said: *And the Land is defiled because of its inhabitants* (Isa. 24:5)'" (§ 34; I translate the text according to the edition *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser. Nach der Edition Venedig 1544 unter Berücksichtigung der Edition Warschau 1852*, ed. Dagmar Börner-Klein [Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2004], 423).

29 Both active in 3rd-century Palestine.

30 I translate the passages from the Bavli according to the standard Vilna text as found in the online *William Davidson Talmud* (https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Talmud).

31 Both rabbis were among the most authoritative of the period when the Temple was destroyed.

32 Thus Urbach, *The Sages*, 667.

> I have heard that sacrifices may be offered even if there is no Temple, and that sacred foods may be eaten even if the curtains [*of the Sanctuary*] are not in place, and that minor sacrifices and the second tithe may be offered even if there are no walls [*around Jerusalem*], because the original sanctity sanctified for its own time and sanctified for the future (m. ʻEduyyot 8:6).

In another dialogue (likely composed at a later date) between Yehoshua' and Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, the former laments the destruction of the Temple" the place where atonement was made for our sins – as irreparable, but ben Zakkai consoles him and corrects his view by emphasizing that "We have another form of atonement that is like that [i.e. the Temple's] (…): acts of mercy. In this regard it is said: 'I desire goodness, not sacrifice' (Hos. 6:6)" (*Abot de-Rabbi Natan A* 4:22–23).[33]

4 A Central and Sacred Land

The replacement of sacrificial worship with prayer, acts of mercy, observance of the Law, and the sanctification of its study enabled the Jews to maintain a shared system of religious and social values and practices, as well as to replace the lost ruling class (the priesthood) with a new one (the rabbinate). The subsequent replacement of the Temple with the synagogue made it possible for every Jew to encounter God in any place or at any time, even in the Diaspora (the likely meaning of the term *Maqom*, lit. 'place', a standard appellation for God in rabbinic literature, is precisely that of His omnipresence).[34] The fact remains, however, that the entire paradigm of civilization created by rabbinic Judaism was founded on an anachronism, an "already and not yet" of its own, in which the expectation of the Messiah's coming held the same significance as the expectation of Christ's second coming as judge (the *Parousia*) in Christianity. Messianic expectation and the persistence of its failure to materialize (for example with the revolt of Bar Kokhba, whom Rabbi ʻAqiva had proclaimed to be the Messiah) created a cognitive dissonance analogous to that experienced by the early Christian generations who vainly expected the Parousia to be imminent. To reconcile this dissonance, the idea was upheld that, even though God was still thought of as immanent among his scattered

33 I translate the text according to ms. Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. ebr. 44 as edited in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan. Synoptische Edition beider Versionen*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Becker and Christoph Berner (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 307.

34 Cf. Urbach, *The Sages*, 66–69.

people (as in the image of the Shekhinah following Israel into exile), his true dwelling place could still be only the Temple in Jerusalem. The expectation remains, and it still is an integral and generative part of the Mishnah, where it is presupposed throughout the fifth order (dedicated to sacrificial worship) and explicitly proclaimed in the first (dedicated to taxation on agricultural produce to the benefit of the priesthood) as follows:

> [*The produce of*] a vineyard in its fourth year is brought to Jerusalem from any location within a day's journey. (…) If there was an excess of fruit, they decreed that it could be redeemed [*even if it came from a vineyard*] near the walls [*of Jerusalem*]. And the condition was that, whenever they wished, the situation would return to the way it was [*before*]. Rabbi Yose says: "Since the Temple was destroyed, this has been the condition; and it is a condition that, when the Temple is rebuilt, the situation will return to the way it was [*before*]" (m. Ma'aśer Sheni 5:2).

Rabbi Yose, to whom the latter saying is attributed, lived after the Bar Kokhba war. As Ruth Gruber Fredman has observed, "a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem would place God in historical time, making possible the unity of the historical and the eternal–the messianic age of peace."[35]

Furthermore, the indissoluble bond between messianism and the Land–and Jerusalem in particular–could be firmly grounded in the theology of the Biblical Prophets. The most important texts in this regard are found in Isaiah and Zechariah. Isaiah 2 is a vision of universal peace centered on the Temple Mount (vv. 2–3: "In the days to come, the Mount of the Lord's House shall stand firm above the mountains and tower above the hills; and all the nations shall gaze on it with joy. And the many peoples shall go and say: 'Come, let us go up to the Mount of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob'"), often repeated in the book (cf. Isa. 56:7: "My House shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples"). Zech. 9:9 prophesies the arrival of a king in Jerusalem ("Rejoice greatly, fair Zion; raise a shout, fair Jerusalem! Lo, your king is coming to you. He is victorious, triumphant, yet humble, riding on an ass, on a donkey foaled by a she-ass") and was interpreted in a messianic sense in both early Christianity and rabbinic Judaism.

Thus, the Land of Israel continued to be perceived as the spatial center of God's intervention in history. This tradition was very ancient, being already attested in 4th-century BCE *Book of the Watchers*, which states that the place

35 Ruth Gruber Fredman, *The Passover Seder: Afikoman in Exile* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 34.

where the final judgment will be held, namely Jerusalem, is "the center of the earth."[36] Later, in the rewriting of *Genesis* by the author of the *Book of Jubilees* (mid-2nd century BCE), when the earth is divided into three parts among Noah's three sons, "there emerged as Shem's lot the center of the earth that he would occupy as an inheritance for him and for his children throughout the history of eternity."[37] This centrality of the Land was true for the Jews not only from a cosmological and eschatological perspective, but also from a protological one. According to a passage in the Mishnah, "since the time of the earlier Prophets," the so-called "foundation stone" (*even shetiyyah*) had been located in the Temple; it was "three fingers high above the ground" and situated at the spot where the Ark of the Covenant had stood in the First Temple (m. *Yoma* 5:2).[38] According to another rabbinic tradition, the foundation stone was located at the point where the creation of the world had begun and where Jerusalem would later be built: "It has been taught that the world was founded from it. [Regarding this *mishnah*] it has been taught, as [an Amora] says, that the world was created from Zion, as is taught [in a *barayta*]: 'Rabbi Eli'ezer says: The world was created from its center'" (b. *Yoma* 54b). Islamic tradition later identified the foundation stone with the rock upon which the Dome of the Rock is built. According to another passage from the Bavli, "Our teachers taught: 'The Land of Israel was created in the beginning, and the rest of the world was created at the end, as it is said: *He had not yet made earth and fields* (Prov. 8:26)'" (b. *Ta'anit* 10a).

In early rabbinic thought, this geographical, historical, and eschatological centrality of the Holy City and the Holy Land is reflected in a territorial hierarchy of their sacredness organized into ten progressive concentric circles, at the center of which lies the Holy of Holies, surrounded by the rest of the Temple and its precincts, then by the Holy City, and finally by the Land of Israel. The degree of sacredness increases progressively from the periphery toward the center:

36 *1 Enoch* 26:1. I quote from George W.E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch. The Hermeneia Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 45.

37 *Jubilees* 8:12. I quote from James C. VanderKam, *Jubilees 1. A Commentary on the Book of Jubilees Chapters 1–21* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 358. This cosmological schema, with Jerusalem at the center of Palestine and Palestine at the center of the earth, persisted in Christianity throughout the Middle Ages as well, as seen, for example, in the maps of the world following the so-called T-O schema, widespread from the 7th to the 14th century, in which Jerusalem was represented at the intersection of the arms of the T.

38 Cf. the passage from Meshullam of Volterra translated below (§ 7).

> There are ten [*levels of*] holiness: the Land of Israel is holier than all [*other*] lands. (…) The walled cities [*of the Land of Israel*] are holier than it (…). [*The area*] within the walls [of Jerusalem] is holier than they (…). The Temple Mount is holier than it (…). The wall (ḥel) is holier than it (…). The women's courtyard is holier than it (…). The courtyard of the Israelites is holier than it (…). The courtyard of the priests is holier than it (…). [*The space*] between the vestibule (ulam)[39] and the altar is holier than it (…). The hall (hekal)[40] is holier than it (…). The Holy of Holies is holier than it (…) (m. Kelim 1:6–9).

Another example of rabbinic discourse on the centrality of the Land is found in a passage from the Yerushalmi regarding the direction one should face when praying. Those who pray standing outside the Land must turn their faces toward the Land; those who pray standing within the Land must turn their faces toward Jerusalem; those who pray standing in Jerusalem must turn their faces toward the Temple Mount; those who pray standing on the Temple Mount must turn their faces toward the Temple; thus "all Israel will find themselves praying with their faces turned toward a single place. This is what is written: *For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples* (Isa. 56:7)" (y. *Berakot* 4:5, 8c-d).[41] This textual unit then proceeds to use the method of prooftexting (i.e. justifying a halakhic opinion on the basis of Biblical verse taken out of its original context and linked to the topic at hand by virtue of one or more verbal correspondences) in order to extend the validity of this rule even to the present, when the Temple is in ruins and its Mount has been stripped of its sanctity:

> Rabbi Yehoshua' ben Levi said: "*The front part* (*li-pnay*) *of the Sanctuary* (1 Kings 6:17), that is, on the inside (le-panim): *a Sanctuary toward which all faces* (panim) turn." This was true as long as it stood; but [*now that it is*] in ruins, on what basis [*is it determined which direction to face*]? Rabbi Abun said: "*Built in tiers* (le-talpiyyot)' (Song 4:4): a hill (tel) upon which all mouths (piyyot) pray, whether reciting a blessing, the Shema', or the Prayer [*of the Eighteen Blessings*]."

39 Cf. 1 Kgs. 6:3; 7:8.

40 Cf. 1 Kgs. 6:3.

41 Parallel versions of this passage are listed in *The Jerusalem Talmud. First Order: Zeraim. Tractate Berakhot*, ed. Heinrich W. Guggenheimer (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2000), 392 n. 231.

Even after the destruction of the Temple and the de-Judaization of the Land, rabbinic Judaism continued to regard this cosmological (and, as seen, also protological and eschatological) framework as valid, transferring it to the realm of myth and utopia: something to keep hoping for. The institutional ruin of Israel and God's exile had not nullified the sanctity of the places: where the Temple had stood, the Shekhinah continued to dwell. We have seen that, as early as the period immediately following the destruction of the Second Temple, the view was expressed by Rabbi Yehoshua' that "the original sanctity sanctified for its own time and sanctified for the future" (m. *'Eduyyot* 8:6). The development of this idea was also a complex intellectual endeavor, requiring support from Scripture and a lengthy process of elaboration.[42] Scriptural justifications were found, for example, in 2 Chron. 7:15–16 ("Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayers from this place. And now I have chosen and consecrated this House that My name be there forever. My eyes and My heart shall always be there") and in Ps. 132:14 ("This is my resting-place for all time; here I will dwell, for I desire it").

The development of this concept reached its culmination and received its standard formulation in Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, specifically in the treatise on Temple worship (*Sefer ha-'Avodah*), in the section titled *Hilkhot bet ha-beḥirah* ("Laws of the House of Election," i.e., the Temple itself).[43] Here (1:3) Maimonides cites the aforementioned verse Ps. 132:14, specifies that the site of the altar should never have been moved (2:1), reiterates *en passant* the Deuteronomistic explanation that the Temple was destroyed because of the sins of the Jews, and devotes two lengthy discussions (7:7–22; 6:14–16) to representing the doctrine expressed in the two passages from the Mishnah examined above–m. *'Eduyyot* 8:6 on the enduring sanctity of the Temple and m. *Kelim* 1:6–9 on the concentric sanctity of the land–:[44]

> Even though the Sanctuary now lies in ruins because of our sins, we are still obligated to treat it with reverence, just as was the custom when it still stood. (…) *It is forbidden to build a house modeled after the Temple, a portico modeled after the vestibule* (ulam), an open space comparable to the courtyard

42 On this theme in general see Maurizio Mottolese, "Luoghi e gradi di santità nell'epoca senza Tempio: tratti sacerdotali nel giudaismo rabbinico," in *Tempio e persona. Dall'analogia al sacramento*, ed. Francesco Valerio Tommasi (Verona: Centro Studi Camposstrini, 2013), 190–220.

43 See above, n. 25.

44 I translate the text according to Mosheh ben Maimon, *Sefer Mishneh Torah*. XII. *Sefer 'Avodah*, ed. Yosef Qafiḥ (Jerusalem: Mekhon Mishnat ha-Rambam, no date).

('azarah),[45] a table in the shape of the table of the bread of display,[46] and a candelabrum in the shape of the *menorah*. (...) The entire Land of Israel is holier than any [*other*] land. (...) In the Land of Israel there are ten [*levels of*] holiness, each higher than the one before it. Walled cities are holier than the rest of the Land. (...) Jerusalem is holier than the rest of the walled cities[47] (...). The Temple Mount is holier than it (...). The wall (ḥel) is holier than it (...). The women's courtyard is holier than the wall (...). The Israelites' courtyard is holier than the women's courtyard (...). The priests' courtyard is holier than it (...). [*The space*] between the vestibule and the altar is holier than it (...). The sanctuary (hekhal) is holier than [the space] between the vestibule and the altar (...). The cella (bayit) of the Holy of Holies is holier than it (...).

The site [*of the Sanctuary*] was not sanctified by his [*Ezra's*] actions, since neither a king nor the Urim and Thummim were present there. How, then, was it sanctified? Through the initial sanctification performed by Solomon, for he sanctified the courtyard and Jerusalem for their time and for eternity. Therefore, all sacrifices may be offered [*at the site of the Sanctuary*] even if the Temple is not built there; and the most holy things (qodshe qodashim)[48] may be eaten throughout the courtyard even if it lies in ruins and is not surrounded by any barrier; and the sacrifices of lesser sanctity (qodashim qallim) and the second tithe may be eaten throughout Jerusalem even if there are no walls: for the original sanctification had sanctified them for its time and for eternity. And why do I say of the Sanctuary and of Jerusalem that the original sanctification had sanctified for its time and for eternity, whereas regarding the sanctification of the rest of the Land of Israel–as for the sabbatical year, the tithes, and related matters – [*I say that the original sanctification*] had not sanctified for eternity? Because the sanctification of the Sanctuary and Jerusalem depends on the Shekhinah, and the Shekhinah cannot be nullified. For it is said: *I will* [...] *make your sanctuaries desolate* (Lev. 26:31); and the Sages said: "Even though they have been laid waste, they remain in their state of holiness" (b. Megillah 28a).

45 Cf. 2 Chr. 4:9; 6:13.

46 Cf. 2 Chr. 4:19.

47 For this reason, for example, a corpse cannot remain within the Holy City overnight, nor can human bones be brought inside.

48 Cf. Ezek. 42:13; 44:13.

5 Land of Israel vs. Babylonian Diaspora

Along with making the "double Torah" (Written and Oral) the highly effective "portable homeland" of rabbinic Jews,[49] in their collective memory Jerusalem and the Land of Israel remained, in their collective memory, alive, central and irreplaceable, and inextricably linked to the expectation of the Messiah. The Temple had been destroyed, but not the sacred: and the sacred remained at the center of everything, both in space (the concentric sacredness of the Land, the City, and the Temple) and in time, since Jerusalem and the Land were made the cornerstones of a myth of eschatological refoundation of the Israel of old. Around this mythology, a rhetoric gradually developed concerning the Land of Israel and the ideal obligation for Jews to settle there. Settling in the Land was promoted as an act of supreme piety; when it was impossible, having one's mortal remains transferred to the Land for final burial acquired vicarious value for actual relocation and residence during one's lifetime.[50] A whole collection of materials on this topic is already found in the Tosefta (3rd century), where one reads, for example, axioms according to which

> [*It is equivalent to*] a voluntary offering for a man to be present in the Land of Israel, even if in a city where the majority are Gentiles, rather than outside the Land, even if in a city inhabited entirely by Israelites. This teaches that residing in the Land of Israel is regarded as equivalent to [*observing*] all the commandments in the Torah [*taken together*]. And one who is buried in the Land of Israel is as if he were buried beneath the altar [*of the Temple*] (t. 'Abodah Zarah 5:2).[51]

However, it was not merely a question of the ideal supremacy of the Land of Israel over the Diaspora, but also of the right to legal supremacy over the Jews in the entire Diaspora–whether held by the Palestinian-Galilean rabbinate or the Babylonian one. A lengthy passage in the Yerushalmi (y. *Nedarim* 6:8[13], 40a) reports extensively on a disputation between Rabbi Yehudah ha-Naśi, the

49 The expression (*portatives Vaterland*) is taken form Heinrich Heine's *Confessions* (*Geständnisse*, from 1854). Cf. Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hans Kaufmann, vol. 13 (München: Kindler, 1964), 128.

50 Urbach, *The Sages*, 999 n. 87. On Jewish burial in the Land of Israel in late antiquity see Isaiah Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 79–95.

51 I translate the texts from the Tosefta according to ms. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Hebr. 20, reproduced on the web site of the National Library of Israel (nli.org.il/en/discover/manuscripts/hebrewmanuscripts/viewerpage?vid=MANUSCRIPTS#d=[[PNX_MANUSCRIPTS990001706630205171-1]]).

Patriarch residing in Galilee, and Rabbi Ḥananyah of Ono, residing in Babylon, regarding which of the two had the authority to declare the calendrical insertion of the additional month (the so-called Second Adar) required every two or three years to realign the Jewish lunisolar calendar with the solar cycle of the seasons–control over the calendar and the social structuring of time being a primary tool of general social control. At the conclusion of a complex debate, Rabbi Ḥananyah acknowledges that the rabbis of Galilee should have jurisdiction over the issue since they possess greater expertise in calendrical matters; he therefore finally declares his own intercalation of the month invalid. In the anonymous textual stratum (the *stam*) to which the final redaction of the Talmudic text is attributed, the Babylonian rabbis are acknowledged to have had valid reasons too for officially declaring the intercalation of the month: "If it is not possible to intercalated the month in the Land of Israel, then it is intercalated outside the Land (…): Jeremiah intercalated it outside the Land, Ezekiel intercalated it outside the Land, Baruch intercalated it outside the Land." But, at the end of the passage, the same *stam* reaffirms the authority and jurisdiction of the rabbis of Galilee (and thus the greater sanctity of the Land compared to the Diaspora) by stating that God Himself declared it: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'The elders of the exile are very dear to me, but a small circle [of rabbis] found in the Land of Israel is dearer to me than a great Sanhedrin found outside the Land.'"[52]

Texts of Babylonian origin as well confirm that the controversy over the supremacy of the Land over the Diaspora – in particular over Babylon–was intense. According to one of these sources (*Abot de-Rabbi Natan A* 26:3–6), the great Palestinian rabbi 'Aqiva–a believer in Bar Kokhba's messianic status who was killed by the Romans during the second war–advocated for Israel's independence and a policy of separation of Jews from pagans:

> [*Rabbi 'Aqiva*] said: "Do not go among the Gentiles, lest you learn their ways (…). And do not leave the Land, lest you practice a foreign religion. (…) David said, 'Anyone who leaves the Land of Israel and emigrates from the Land shall be regarded as having practiced a foreign religion'"[53]

Yet, immediately following these words, the same 'Aqiva is quoted as holding the view that there is no difference, in terms of sanctity, between being buried in the Land of Israel or far from it:

52 See the discussion of this *sugya* in Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora*, 106–111.

53 Cf. 1 Sam. 26:19. I translate the text according to ms. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 95 (Neubauer 408), as edited in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, ed. Becker and Berner, 208.

> Whoever is buried in the other lands is as if buried in Babylon; whoever is buried in Babylon is as if buried in the Land of Israel; whoever is buried in the Land of Israel is as if buried under the altar [*of the Temple*].

The relevance of the issue of being buried in the Land of Israel or outside (although the earliest halakhic sources, the Mishnah and the Tosefta, do not devote any specific discussion to it) is further attested by a large collection of sayings on the matter found in b. *Ketubbot* 111a, which further elaboration on the principle of sanctity gradually diminishing as one moves away from the Land of Israel toward the Babylonian diaspora and from there to the "other lands" of the diaspora:

> Rabbi El'azar[54] said: "Whoever resides in the Land of Israel leads a blameless life (…)." Rabbi 'Anan[55] said: 'Whoever is buried in the Land of Israel is as if he was buried beneath the altar [of the Temple] (…)." Rabbi Yehudah[56] said in the name of Shemu'el: "Just as it is forbidden to emigrate from the Land of Israel to [*move to*] Babylon, so it is forbidden to emigrate from Babylon to [*move to*] the other lands (…)." Rabbi El'azar said: "The dead who are outside the Land will not [*be*] resurrected."

6 Yehudah Halevi's Theology of the Land

Not only the material history of the Jewish people, but also that of their religion and thought, offer many concrete biographical examples of how the myth of the return to the Land of Israel continued to develop and exert its influence in the medieval Diaspora, in many cases even motivating major life decisions. The most notable cases are the '*aliyyot* undertaken by leading Jewish intellectuals from the Iberian Peninsula during the period of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (1099–1291): Yehudah Halevi (c. 1075–1141) attempted to immigrate in his old age but died in Tyre along the way; Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) immigrated with his family in 1165 but was almost immediately forced by economic necessity to return to Cairo; Moses Naḥmanides (c. 1194–1270), following the public debate he held in Barcelona in 1263 against the Dominican Paul Christiani, had to flee from Aragon and in 1267 settled in Acre, where he taught. According to some accounts, Yeḥi'el of Paris (d. 1286)–the defender

54 Palestine, second half of the 2nd century.
55 Mesopotamia, 3rd century.
56 Palestine, second half of the 2nd century.

of the Talmud at the 1240 trial held against it before the Parisian court–relocated to Acre in his late years as well.

I mentioned above Maimonides's views on the Land of Israel as expressed in his *Mishneh Torah*, and how largely they are based on the Mishnah. It was particularly in the thought and writings of Yehudah Halevi that the theme of the Land of Israel, its holiness, and the longing for it, took on a generative significance and function. The *Sefer ha-Kuzari* (1140) is a treatise in the form of a dialogue between a Jewish sage and the king of the Tatar tribe of the Khazars, who ultimately converts to Judaism with his people.[57] The discussion focuses on the significance of the Land of Israel for Judaism, specifically in passages 2:14–23 and 5:22–23. In 2:14–23, the Sage explains to the King that according to Scripture the people of Israel are the Lord's special possession (*segullah*, Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18) and his "inheritance" (*naḥalah*, 1 Sam. 26:19); accordingly, the Land of Israel is the "Gate of Heaven" (Gen. 28:17), "God's Footstool" (Ps. 99:5; Lam. 2:1), and "the Mount of His Holiness" (Ps. 99:9), assigned to Israel since the division of languages and for the benefit of all humanity; from there "shall go forth Torah" (Isa. 2:3), it is there that the prophets arose, and upon it the reckoning of the Sabbath and the festivals is based for all Jews throughout the world. The Sage then cites the passages discussed above from rabbinic foundational literature, according to which one can be compelled to immigrate to the Land but not to emigrate from it (m. *Ketubbot* 13:11), and one must always remain in the Land, even in a city inhabited mostly by Gentiles, and not outside of it, even in a city inhabited mostly by Israelites (t. *ʿAvodah Zarah* 5:2). Even the Gentiles used to offer sacrifices and recite prayers in the Temple and spend their money there, and they continue to respect the Land and make pilgrimages there, even though the Shekhinah no longer dwells there and the Israelites have been excluded from it by those very same Gentiles who also oppress them in the Diaspora.

But the King rebukes the Sage for not loving his Torah enough to have made Israel "*his* goal, nor *his* place of living and dying"; the Sage thus contradicts his own prayers, which implore the rebuilding of Zion, and his own faith, according to which the Shekinah will return to dwell there. Since all peoples direct the intent of their prayers toward that place and make it a destination for

57 In what follows, I cite the *Kuzari* according to Yehudah Halevi, *The Kuzari. In Defense of the Despised Faith*, trans. N. Daniel Korobkin (Northhvale, NJ/Jerusalem: Aronson, 1998), based on the Hebrew translation by Yehudah ibn Tibbon (1167). For a presentation of Halevi's thought on the Land of Israel see Giuliano Tamani, "Elogio di Ereṣ Yiśra'el in una lettera di Yehudah ha-Levi (*Devareka be-mor ʿover requḥim*)," in *"Alpaghian". Raccolta di scritti in onore di Adriano Alpago Novello in occasione del suo 70mo compleanno*, ed. Gianclaudio Macchiarella (Napoli: Scriptaweb, 2005, CD-ROM).

pilgrimage, the King points out to the Sage that "all *his* knee-bending and bowing toward Israel is mere flattery or insincere custom" if it is not accompanied by a real intention to move there. Thus, the King continues, the Sage's ancestors had done instead, leaving Egypt and settling in the Land even when it was still full of pagans and the Shekhinah had not yet manifested or taken up her residence there: indeed, "even during times of famine, they would leave only by Divine command. Further, they desired to have their remains transferred to Israel."

At the end of this lengthy dialogue and of the book (5:22–23), the Sage acknowledges that the King is right, and resolves to perform the *'aliyyah*, although now the King himself turns to represent the *pars destruens*: "What do you seek today in Jerusalem and the land of Canaan–the Divine Presence is gone from these places! Closeness to God can be achieved in any place, with a good heart and a strong desire. Why, then, should you place yourself in danger from deserts, oceans, and various hostile peoples?" The Sage concludes, however, that "many commandments are not practicable for one who does not live in the land of Israel. Furthermore, one's heart and soul cannot be entirely pure and refined except in a place that one knows is especially reserved for God (…). One's yearning is therefore aroused for Israel, and one's soul is purified through it. This is especially true for someone who is traveling from a faraway place."

Giuliano Tamani identified the three main roots of Halevi's discourse and ideology on the Land of Israel in the Bible, the Talmud, and the ideal of pilgrimage and piety that was particularly widespread among Christians at the time of the Crusades and of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. The same concepts that we have reviewed in the *Kuzari* are reiterated in Halevi's *Songs of Zion* (*Shire Ṣiyyon*), the first and most prominent part of his collection of poems (*Diwan*). The *Songs of Zion*, composed by Halevi in the run-up to his *'aliyyah* and during the journey, have been described as "the highest poetic celebrations of the relationship between the Jews and Ereṣ Yiśra'el" after the Psalms in the Bible, and are probably the most celebrated lyrics in the entire Jewish literary tradition. In the poem *Your Words Smell of Flowing Myrrh* (*Devarekha be-mor 'over requḥim*), Halevi revisits the idea, already expressed in the *Kuzari*, that religious inspiration is authentic only in the Land of Israel:[58]

58 I translate and cite Halevi's poems according to the text and the numbering of the edition *Selected Poems by Jehudah Halevi*, ed. Heinrich Brody (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1924, repr. 1974).

> Do we possess any inheritance other than the sanctuaries of God? How then could we forget His sacred Mount![59] Is there, for us, in east or west, any place of hope in which we may trust, except the Land that is filled with gatesbefore which the gates of heaven open –[60] like Mount Sinai, Carmel, and Bethel,[61] and the dwellings of the Prophets who were sent forth,[62] and the seats of the priests of the throne of the Lord, and the thrones of the consecrated kings? It is for us and for our children that He destined it,[63] even though now the beasts of the desert and the owls dwell there.[64] Was it not likewise given in ancient times to the Patriarchs, when it was still an inheritance (naḥalah) overgrown with thorns and briars?

The other predominant themes of the *Songs of Zion* are the longing to make '*aliyyah* ("My heart is in the East, and I am at the uttermost West", 1, v. 1), the poet's disputes against those who had tried to dissuade him from undertaking the journey, the anxieties that gripped him during the voyage by sea, and his six-month stay in Egypt before the final journey toward Tyre. Lastly, Halevi's celebrated *Zionide* (*Ṣiyyon ha-lo' tish'ali* [*O Zion! Wilt thou not ask*], 2), an intense elegy dedicated to the Holy City in ruins, entered the Ashkenazi liturgy for the Ninth of Av. Underlying this entire body of lyric poetry, as Luigi Cattani perceptively observed, is the same precise theory–or rather, the same faith–that Halevi expressed in the *Kuzari* concerning the election of Israel and the enduring validity of that election even in exile, while awaiting redemption and the rebuilding of the Sanctuary.[65] Israel's presence in the Land is indispensable, for "this elite nation cannot achieve Divinity anywhere else" (2:12); and only in the Land can Israel purify itself so that its "cleansing and rectification" enables Divinity, intrinsically attached to Israel, "to attach itself to the world" as well (2:44), since "Israel among the nations is like a heart among its organs" (2:36).

Throughout his poetic corpus, Halevi describes Israel in exile through the images of the abandoned bride and the woman "faint with love" from the Song of Songs ("How can I endure both love and separation?", 48, v. 7). Israel is also

59 Ps. 2:6; Isa. 11:9 and elsewhere.

60 Gen. 28:17.

61 Sinai is the mountain of Moses, Carmel that of Elijah, and Bethel signifies Jacob (Gen. 28:19).

62 Jeremiah (Jer. 3:17) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 43:7).

63 Gen. 13:15.

64 Isa. 13:21.

65 Jehudah Halevi, *Liriche religiose e Canti di Sion*, ed. and trans. Luigi Cattani (Roma: Città Nuova, 1987), 23–24.

likened to an *agunah*, an abandoned wife whose husband cannot be found, and who cannot remarry until his death has been proven. Nevertheless, if Israel keeps alive its hope of reunification and redemption, its relationship with its God will continue even in exile and dispersion. As Cattani observed, Halevi's God "remembers His people, keeps His heart and eyes fixed on Zion, and will soon have mercy on His children, remembering in their favor the merits of Abraham, so that they, at the rising of the messianic star, will be able to ascend from the pit of exile to the Sanctuary once again filled with divine glory".[66]

In the *Songs of Zion*, specifically, Halevi's *'aliyyah* is represented simultaneously as a new exodus and a return to God:[67] the poet strips himself of his wealth, his home, and his family, including his only daughter and his grandson, in order to set out in search of the Land after finally turning away from the worship of idols and from the service one is forced to render to kings and men rather than to God. It is in the Land that "the Shekhinah dwells" (2, v. 11); the Land is "the source of prophecies" (22, v. 47), "a land that is full of gates, before which the gates of heaven open" (2, v. 12; 6, vv. 31–32). It is thus only there that a Jew can experience the love of God in its true fullness and, freeing himself from the bondage of the body and the passions, finally offer his heart to God as a burnt offering ("Then I shall consider my heart as a burnt offering bound upon your altar", 11, vv. 29–30). Halevi further believes that the *'aliyyah* will earn him the remission of his sins, similarly to what Christians expected from pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Muslims from the *ḥajj*. Finally, the desire to be buried "near the graves of my fathers and in the domain of the pure" is insistently reiterated (11, vv. 31–32).

The exile to which Halevi continually refers is not solely the one resulting from the destruction of the Temple, but also encompasses the prohibition imposed by Baldwin I on Jews residing in Jerusalem.[68] Yet, it is to Israel that the Land is ultimately destined, even though it is now inhabited by "the beasts of the desert and the owls" (6, v. 38). The exile of the Jews from the Land is a source of profound sorrow; prayers are offered for the possibility of returning and restoring the worship of the Sanctuary. This exile mirrors that of the soul from the supernal realm, but – as Halevi writes, echoing the closing formula of the Passover *Haggadah* – it will be resolved "next year." Egypt, where Halevi sojourned during his journey, is likewise a sacred place by virtue of the many

66 Jehudah Halevi, *Liriche religiose*, 37–38.

67 Cf. again the analysis by Luigi Cattani in Jehudah Halevi, *Liriche religiose*, 38–45.

68 Cf. Joshua Prawer, *The History of the Jews in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 46–49 and 94–95.

Biblical memories associated with it; yet it is in Jerusalem alone that the Shekhinah dwells.

All the core themes of Halevi's religious thought and poetics are most fully recapitulated in the *Zionide*. The entirety of the Diaspora (described as the "pit of the captives," v. 51) yearns to return to the Land–a return that will be, above all, a redemption "from bondage" (vv. 7–8). The Land is God's dwelling place (v. 63), where his Shekhinah still abides despite the destruction of the Temple (v. 11); it is there that God revealed Himself to His chosen ones and His prophets (vv. 16, 20). The Jews should seek out and revere the holy sites associated with Biblical memory – like the tombs of the Patriarchs at Hebron (vv. 21–32) – and observe mourning over the ruins of the Sanctuary as in a time of bereavement (vv. 33–46). Yet, there remains an unwavering faith that in the end the kingdoms of idols will forfeit their diadem, while the crown of Jerusalem will be restored in its "ancient youth" and in everlasting splendor (vv. 61–68).

7 Pilgrims and Travelers from the Late Middle Ages

A source of considerable interest regarding the attitude of the European Diaspora toward the Land of Israel is the substantial body of travel accounts written by medieval and early modern Jewish merchants, pilgrims, and immigrants. Here I will examine three of the best-known accounts: those by Petaḥyah of Regensburg (12th century), Meshullam of Volterra, and ʻOvadyah of Bertinoro (both from the 15th century).

Like the itinerary of his most famous contemporary Binyamin of Tudela, who traveled between approximately 1165 and 1172/1173, that of Petaḥyah of Regensburg – a member of a distinguished rabbinical family of Ashkenaz – was not a one-way journey toward a Land in which to settle in the illusory hope of stepping outside of history, as the intellectuals of Sepharad had attempted to do in the 12th and 13th centuries, and as ʻOvadyah of Bertinoro would do later. Rather, it was a round trip undertaken with the deliberate intention of ultimately returning home in the Diaspora, to share with his relatives the experiences and impressions gathered along the way: the holy sites, the tombs of wonder-working rabbis, and the other *mirabilia Orientis*. During his lengthy journey (undertaken between approximately 1174 and 1185) through the Jewish diasporas of Central Asia, the Levant, and the Mediterranean, Petaḥyah – whose travel memoirs were filtered and committed to writing by another scribe upon his return – focuses primarily, and even more closely than Binyamin of Tudela's account, on the tombs of the great rabbis of old, as well as those of Prophets and Patriarchs, and on how such holy sites

were objects of veneration and modest local economic exploitation, both in Babylonia and in Palestine: much as Christians and Muslims had done from late antiquity to the present day, medieval Levantine Jews likewise maintained their own cults of "saints" and often derived their livelihood from the related revenue. Petaḥyah undoubtedly lacked the intellectual and spiritual depth of other Jewish pilgrim-narrators of the Middle Ages; what makes his account interesting and even entertaining – beyond the historical and archaeological data it provides– is precisely a sense of wide-eyed wonder, at times somewhat superficial, that brings him close to the modern mass tourist. When Petaḥyah finally comes to describe Jerusalem, the destination of his remarkably long journey, he briefly indulges his taste for *mirabilia* by alluding to a miraculous earthquake; he then offers a sparse account of the eschatological expectations of the Jews, yet without any personal emotional engagement, and closes with two brief scriptural quotations:

> In Jerusalem there is a gate called the Gates (sic!) of Mercy. The gate itself is filled with stones and mortar. No Jew is permitted to go there, nor is any Gentile. Once, the Gentiles wanted to remove the stones and mortar and open the gate, but the Land of Israel trembled and there was turmoil in the city until they stopped. Among the Jews there is a tradition that through that gate the Shekhinah appeared, and that through it she will return. It is situated opposite the Mount of Olives, though the Mount of Olives is lower, and whoever stands on the Mount of Olives can see it: *On that day He will set His feet on the Mount of Olives* (*Zech. 14:4*)*; For every to eye shall behold the Lord's return to Zion* (*Isa. 52:8*) through that gate, and there they pray. The Tower of David is still standing.[69]

And this is all that Petaḥyah relates about Jerusalem in his travelogue. The way in which he works through the cognitive dissonance between the expectation of returning to the Holy Land and the impossibility of doing so is, I would argue, eminently diasporic. Whether the reason lay in the prohibition on Jewish residence in Jerusalem under the Latin Kingdom, or rather in Petaḥya's necessity or convenience of going back to his former life in the Diaspora, never in his book *'aliyyah* is considered an option, and even messianic and eschatological expectations seem to concern other Jews more than himself.[70]

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69 I translate from the edition *Die Rundreise des R. Petachjah aus Regensburg*, ed. Lazar Grünhut, vol. 1 (Frankfurt a.M./Jerusalem: J. Kauffmann, 1904), 34–35. The "Gates of Mercy" are the Golden Gate of Christian tradition, through which Jesus entered the city on Palm Sunday.

70 Apart from a lengthy pericope on the subject preserved in a single manuscript: see Piero Capelli, "Sulla redazione e la tradizione testuale del *Sibbuv* di Petaḥyah da Regensburg,"

Three centuries after Petaḥyah, the travel diary of the Italian Jewish moneylender and dealer in precious stones Meshullam of Volterra (1481) likewise appears to be characterized, as Giulio Busi observed, by "an entirely modern nostalgia for the place of everyday life and personal affections, and by the sense of having concluded a troubled exotic adventure."[71] Meshullam attests to the enduring custom of mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem on the Ninth of Av, when the entire Jewish community, led by its prominent members, makes its way to Mount Zion "to weep and lament, and from there descends into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, then proceeds to the Mount of Olives, for from there they can behold the entire Temple and mourn its destruction."[72] Meshullam himself, upon arriving in the Holy City, participates with evident emotion in the historical mourning of the Jewish people, reaffirming in formulaic terms the traditional explanation–rooted in Deuteronomistic theology of history–that it was on account of the sins of the Jews that the city had been destroyed:

> When I beheld its state of destruction, my heart filled with bitterness, I tore my garments by a hand's breadth, reciting the prayer that is to be said, which was in a small booklet I had in my hand. It reads: "Jerusalem has no walls, on account of our sins"; only a small portion remains on the side from which I entered. (…) The Temple (may it be rebuilt and completed speedily in our days, amen!) is still surrounded by walls. (…) On the western side, at the center of the floor, there is a point raised about three finger-widths, which they say is the even hashetiyyah, above which stands a great gilded dome[73] (…). The walls of the Temple, where they had been destroyed and burned, have been rebuilt by the Ishmaelites, and the Temple Mount is now completely enclosed, though one can easily distinguish the walls built by the Ishmaelites from the original ones, which are still very high, though not as high as they once were, on account of our sins. (…) [*Facing the twelve gates of the Temple Mount*] you find wide and beautiful streets, built with covered arcades, with houses on both sides where

in *Counting the Miracles. Jewish Thought, Mysticism, and the Arts from Late Antiquity to the Present. Festschrift for Giulio Busi on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Silvana Greco and Judith Olszowy-Schlanger (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2025), 134–41.

71 Giulio Busi, "Prefazione," in Mešullam da Volterra, *Viaggio in Terra d'Israele*, ed. Alessandra Veronese (Rimini: Luisè, 1989), 8–9.

72 I translate Meshullam's text according to the only extant ms., Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 44,11, digitized on the library's website (https://tecabml.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/plutei/id/570672).

73 The Dome of the Rock.

> pilgrims used to live, and now, on account of our sins, the Ishmaelites have set up there shops selling all manner of goods.

The formulaic wish, drawn from the liturgy, that the Holy City and the Temple may soon be rebuilt is expressed by Meshullam also upon his departure from Cairo for Jerusalem ("May it be rebuilt and restored speedily in our days, *amen*!") and upon his departure from Jerusalem for Beirut and then Damascus on his return journey ("May it be the will of our Heavenly Father that it be rebuilt speedily in our days, *amen*!"). At the end of the journey and of the narrative, Meshullam expands these formulas into a broader messianic longing:

> May the Lord send us the Messiah, our redeemer, and bring us up to Jerusalem with joy, together with all our brethren of Israel; may this be His will, and we shall say amen and amen forever. Blessed be the merciful Savior.

In 1488, just seven years after Meshullam's journey, another Jew from Italy undertook the same voyage – this time a rabbi of considerable renown, 'Ovadyah of Bertinoro (c. 1455–c. 1515), whose commentary on the Mishnah was to be a cornerstone of rabbinic education for centuries. Unlike Binyamin, Petaḥyah, and Meshullam, 'Ovadyah did not set out to see and then return to give an account: his was a deliberate and intentional '*aliyyah*, like those – albeit never completed – of Yehudah Halevi and Maimonides. During the early years of his residence in Jerusalem (between 1488 and 1489 or 1491), where he founded and led a *yeshivah*, 'Ovadyah sent his father, his brother, and another unknown recipient three letters in which he recounted his lived experience – not only through participation in the mourning rituals for the destruction of the Holy City and the Temple nor through the customary formulaic wishes for its rebuilding, but also through a deeply felt adherence to the related hope for the coming of the Messiah. He describes his arrival in Jerusalem as follows:[74]

> There appeared before us the most celebrated city, the city of our joy. As required, we then tore our garments. When we had advanced a little further, there appeared before us our holy and glorious Temple, in ruins: for it we tore our garments a second time.

74 I translate 'Ovadyah's text according to the edition *Mi-Iṭalyah l-Yrushalayim. Iggerotaw shel R. 'Ovadya mi-Barṭenura me-Ereṣ Yiśra'el*, ed. Menachem Emanuele Artom and Abraham David (Ramat Gan: G.G. Foundation Jerusalem Project, Department of Land of Israel Studies, Bar-Ilan University, 1997).

When the Mamluk government abolished the additional taxes levied on minorities beyond the annual poll tax (*jizya*), ʻOvadyah interpreted the resulting return of many Jews to the Land as a possible sign of the approaching redemption:

> Many who had gone into exile are considering returning to settle in the Land. Perhaps it will please God to return and rebuild the City upon its ruins and the Palace in its place. The lost and the scattered from Judah and Ephraim will come to prostrate themselves before the Lord, on the Temple Mount and in Jerusalem. (…) Sent in haste from Jerusalem, the Holy City – may it be rebuilt and restored speedily in our days – on the 27th of Elul 249 [1489].[75]

Despite his deeply felt engagement with Jewish messianic expectation, ʻOvadyah, shaped by the rationalistic intellectual climate of Italian humanism, displays a marked skepticism toward the excesses of that expectation as found in Midrashic tradition and in Jewish folklore. When his brother enquires about the "signs and wonders that were said to have been seen on the Temple Mount and at the tombs of the righteous," and about a Sephardic Jew who had claimed to have seen "in the Temple" an old man wearing a cloak (*me'il*) – presumably the prophet Elijah, harbinger of the coming of the Messiah –,[76] a disenchanted ʻOvadyah replies:

> What shall I answer you, my brother, since we have not seen our signs? (…) There is no need to say that the matter concerning that Sephardic Jew of whom you wrote (…) is nothing but nonsense and falsehood. Believers such as yourself, my brother, must discern the truth of things and not build upon lies.

8 Rabbinic Judaism and Israel's Independence

The hope – grounded in the Bible and the Mishnah – of rebuilding the Temple and restoring all of Israel to its liberated Land was reaffirmed by rabbinic leadership throughout the Talmudic period, particularly in the Yerushalmi,

75 The wish for the rebuilding of Jerusalem also recurs in the valedictory formula at the end of ʻOvadyah's third letter.

76 Yet, in 1 Kgs. 19:13–19 and 2 Kgs. 2:8.13–14 Elijah is said to wear a "mantle" (*adderet*); cf. the "robe" (*śalmah*) worn by the prophet Ahijah (1 Kgs. 11:29–30). The *me'il* was properly a priestly vestment (Exod. 28:31; 29:5; 39:22), and indeed the only Biblical prophet who wears it is Samuel–who was also a priest–when he is conjured by the necromancer in Endor (1 Sam. 28:14).

even though much of it was redacted after the failure of Emperor Julian's project. However, such hope was not translated into a political program; rather, it was deferred to the messianic era and to the inscrutable intervention of God. This was due neither solely to disillusionment nor merely to concern that a third war of independence might inflict further massacres and destruction upon the Jews. The rabbinic standpoint on the Land and on Jewish political independence must also have been shaped by the consideration that a rebuilt Temple would have restored the priestly class, whose leadership – unlike that of the rabbis – derived its legitimacy from precisely those sacred Scriptures over whose interpretation the rabbis claimed to have acquired a monopoly.[77]

By displacing the expectation of redemption from the realm of 'concrete' of history to the unpredictability of the *eschaton*, the rabbis had developed the instrument needed to overcome the cognitive dissonance between traditional faith in Israel's election and the stark reality of historical catastrophe. This is the background against which the psychology relationship of Diaspora Jews with the Land of Israel must be understood–a relationship that persisted for almost two thousand years. Like all traumas from a psychoanalytical perspective, that of the destruction of the Temple and of exile continued to unfold incessantly for rabbinic Jews, in the metatemporal spaces of liturgy and messianic myth. It is true that throughout the history of rabbinic Judaism, messianic expectations have periodically given rise to ever-renewed waves of enthusiasm and disillusionment. Yet, a concrete Jewish nationalist political movement did not emerge until the 20th century, as the culmination of a historical process that had witnessed, in succession, the emancipation of the Jews, their so-called assimilation, and finally their acculturation to other nationalisms: Zionism would emerge only from a socialist, secularized, and largely de-rabbinized cultural *milieu*. Similarly, a critical Jewish historiography – one not purely commemorative in a 'lachrymose' perspective – became possible only with the acculturation of Jews in those countries that had granted them emancipation, thereby fostering assimilation, secularization, and reform. As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi put it, awareness of Jewish history became "a faith for fallen Jews"[78]–a substitute for the traditional faith and messianic expectations that had characterized Jewish religiosity for over two millennia.

77 Cf. Hezser, "The (In)Significance of Jerusalem," 49.

78 Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 86. See *The Faith of Fallen Jews: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and the Writing of Jewish History*, ed. David N. Myers and Alexander Kaye (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2014).

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