Ron E. Hassner

Names without Places:
how Pilgrims and
Mapmakers invent Sacred
Places
Introduction

The authenticity of sacred places poses a unique puzzle for students of pilgrimage and students of pilgrimage maps. How do pilgrims and mapmakers locate sacred events in a landscape, given the paucity of information at their disposal? This question has led some cynical observers of pilgrimage to conclude that there is nothing authentic at all about sacred places, that they are sites of no historical significance placed in random locations.

Take, for example, Mark Twain’s impressions from his 1869 visit to the Holy Land, recorded in The Innocents Abroad. Twain expressed growing skepticism about the authenticity of the sacred sites he saw throughout his tour, suggesting at one point, that “there is nothing genuine about them... they are imaginary holy places created by the monks.” He visited several holy sites in Jerusalem, including a stone, embedded into the wall of a local house and worn smooth by the kisses of generations of pilgrims. This, explained Twain’s guide, was the stone Jesus referred to when he proclaimed that the very stones of Jerusalem would cry Hosannah if the crowds did not do so. A pilgrim in Twain’s group naturally objected to the guide’s assertion, suggesting that since the crowds had cheered, there was no reason to assume that this stone had done anything at all. The guide remained adamant:

He said, calmly, “This is one of the stones that would have cried out.” It was of little use to try to shake this fellow’s simple faith - it was easy to see that."

In all likelihood, the story of “the stone that would have cried out” is the product of Twain’s imagination, an anecdote designed to convey his ridicule of the worship of sacred places and the blind devotion of pilgrims to these sites. We know of no such stone in 19th century Jerusalem. Yet his critique, though often unfair and always irreverent, is not entirely without merit. The correct identification of sacred places poses a series
of near insurmountable obstacles for pilgrims and mapmakers alike. How, then, do believers locate sacred places?

I argue that pilgrims do not choose the locations for sacred sites at random. Instead, they locate new sacred places based on a spatial relationship to existing sacred spaces. Pilgrims place new sites along "focal axes" that connect existing sacred sites. Maps are an indispensable tool in locating old sites, identifying the axes that connect them and communicating the location of new sites to the next generation of pilgrims. Pilgrims have offered no explicit confessions about the process by which they invented sacred places but their records, their maps and the sacred places they have founded offer significant substantiating evidence. Below, I examine the founding of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the 4th century, accounts by medieval pilgrims, and the invention of "Gordon's Garden Tomb" in the 19th century.

The difficulty in determining the precise location of sacred sites should not lead us, along Twain's path, towards a wholesale rejection of the authenticity of sacred places. The uncertainties about the correct identification of sacred places raise questions about the choice of location, not about the veracity of biblical events or their significance. Consequently, I have chosen a neutral term to describe the act of producing new sacred sites. "Invent" can be understood in its modern usage, signifying a contrivance, but also in its traditional usage, stemming from the Latin for "to find" or "to come upon," signifying the miraculous discovery of a lost relic.

The Puzzle

There are six reasons in particular why we might want to challenge the confidence with which pilgrims have identified sacred sites. Three of these reasons are theoretical: they stem from difficulties having to do with the passage of time between the religious event to be commemorated and the founding of the sacred site. The other three arguments are empirical: they draw on physical evidence that seems to suggest a confusion about the authentic location of sacred places.
The first reason for skepticism has to do with the development of religious traditions, from their founding moments to their full realization. There is often a significant time lag between the occurrence of a key moment in a religious tradition and the realization, later on, that such a moment of significance had indeed occurred. It is often only in hindsight that believers realize the importance of an event and seek out its location. The less significant the event recorded by a sacred place, therefore, the more skeptical we should be about it having been recognized and marked as sacred by contemporaries.

A 17th century map of Jerusalem composed by Francisco Quaracinius, for example, locates dozens of sites relating to the New Testament, including "the accursed fig tree", a reference to Matthew 21:19. In that passage, Jesus curses a fig tree on the way to Jerusalem for bearing no fruit. It seems unlikely that any one of the disciples present at the occasion took the time to mark the site and pass its location onto future generations of believers. It seems even less likely that future pilgrims managed to identify the precise tree referred to in the passage. This uncertainty did not, however, prevent Quaracinius from locating the tree precisely on his map.

As a result of such uncertainties, those wishing to locate sites of importance had to rely on hints in the original sources. Regrettably, most sacred texts are vague and often contradictory in their placement of key religious sites. The Old Testament, for example, lists two locations for the Tomb of Rachel, as do the Gospels when it comes to the sites of the Transfiguration or the Ascension. The New Testament is entirely unhelpful as a geographic aid to pilgrims, even when it comes to sites of crucial importance, such as the room of the Last Supper or the Tomb of Christ. To complicate matters further, the scriptures often mention several sites that share one name, leading pilgrims to merge separate locations into one or split one location into many.

A third reason for doubt has to do with the effects of time on those sites that have been recognized and perhaps even marked. Erosion, accidental and willful destruction of monuments
and shrines are common and inevitable. These destructive effects were at their most extreme in Jerusalem, a city razed and completely rebuilt time and time again in the centuries following the crucifixion. By the time Christian pilgrims began arriving in Jerusalem, in the 4th century, few traces of the 1st century city, its streets, walls or structures remained. In the intervening three centuries, Christian leaders had shown little to no interest in maintaining or developing the sites related to the Passion in Jerusalem. As a result, even the recovery of the location of the most prominent sites relating to the gospels involved a significant amount of speculation. The 4th century church historian Sozomen, for example, described the difficulties in identifying the site of the Holy Sepulcher, since the enemies of Christianity “had had recourse to every artifice to exterminate it, had concealed that spot under much heaped-up earth and built up what before had been a depression… and had moreover ornamented the entire area and paved it with stone.”

So far I’ve listed three theoretical reasons to question the placement of sacred sites. There are also three empirical clues that suggest we regard the authenticity of sacred places with a healthy dose of skepticism. The first of these clues is the existence of multiple sites marking one and the same event. Disagreements between believers about the correct locations of sites have stemmed either from innocent confusion or from competition between religious sects, each wishing to exert sole control over a holy place. Jerusalem, for example, holds several tombs for King David and several birthplaces for Mary. Even though the pilgrims Egeria, the pilgrim from Bordeaux and Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea, visited Jerusalem within the same fifty year time span in the 4th century, they could not agree on the significance of the Imabomon on the Mount of Olives. The Bordeaux pilgrim claimed that it was the site of the Transfiguration whereas Egeria claimed that it was the site of the Ascension, an event that Eusebius, in turn, placed at the Eleona, a different site entirely.

Since pilgrims relied mainly on local guides and the reports
of other pilgrims for the identification of sites, any mistake in identification was likely to be reproduced and propagated. Pilgrims tried to mitigate this problem by describing the locations they visited as clearly as possible, but in the absence of more precise means for documenting what they saw, their efforts produced descriptions that remain relatively ambiguous. Descriptions of distance, for example, are often stated in terms of “bowshots” or “stone’s throws” away.

Competition between religious movements, the potential profit to be made from the control over a sacred site and an authentic desire to reveal as many of the earthly manifestations of a religious revelation as possible, also lead to a proliferation of sacred places. Paradoxically, the passage of time increases the quantity of sacred sites relating to a past event, rather than diminishing their number. This is a fifth reason to question the authenticity of many commonly accepted shrines. Fourth century visitors to Jerusalem, for example, were familiar with about a dozen sacred places in the city, that they described with great precision and care. Today’s pilgrims to Jerusalem may choose from among several dozen sites.

These include variations on, or duplicates of, sites known to early pilgrims, such as an additional Calvary, Tomb of Christ and Tomb of Mary. They also include several sites that early pilgrims would not have recognized, such as nine additional stations of the cross that were only permanently located in the 19th century. The site of St. Stephen’s martyrdom, for example, was unknown before 415 A.D., the year his bones were miraculously discovered outside the city gates. This overall increase in sacred sites over time is particularly remarkable given the number of early sites now lost to us, such as the two great Jerusalem churches, the Eleona and Nea, now in ruins and no longer accessible to pilgrims. In spite of this attrition, Jerusalem now hosts more sacred places associated with the Gospels than ever, a number that is likely to continue to grow in the future.

Finally, and most revealing of all, are testimonials by pilgrims themselves about the confusion over sacred sites. These
disclosures are particularly jarring, given pilgrims' incentives
to offer a confident account of their visit to holy sites. After all,
their doubts about the authenticity of the sites they visited would
have placed the very purpose of their pilgrimage in question.
Nevertheless, several of these disclosures exist. The monk
Theoderic, visiting Jerusalem on and around 1170, was shown
the purported location of the Pool of Siloam, but admitted,
"this information seems doubtful to me... this question must
be left unanswered." Theoderic's contemporary, the pilgrim
John of Wurzburg, rejected local beliefs about the locations of
Jacob's dream ("...This is not true... it did not happen here. It
happened a long way away..."), voiced disbelief about the site
of Christ's arrest ("Whatever the truth of this is..."), recorded
disagreement about the site of Christ's imprisonment ("Other
people think differently about this place...") and expressed a
personal preference in the debate regarding the exact location
of the crucifixion ("Certain people say it was the latter place.
This seems right and suitable.")

The Abbot Daniel, who preceded Theoderic and John's
visit to Jerusalem by some sixty years, summarized the state
of knowledge among pilgrims to the city: "Many others who
have reached these holy places have been unable to examine
them properly and have been mistaken about these places,
and others who have not reached them have lied much and
deceived." The Third Church Synod held in Carthage in 597,
less than a century after the first pilgrims began identifying
sacred sites in Jerusalem, expressed grave concerns of its own
when it deplored "the altars that are being set up through the
dreams and empty so-called revelations of various men."

To conclude, there are several theoretical and empirical
reasons to question the current location of sacred sites. These
uncertainties and ambiguities raise an obvious question: How do
pilgrims locate religious events? I posit that they combine hints
gleaned from the scriptures with an intuitive understanding of
the manner in which sacred places are located in relation to one
another.
Focal Points and Focal Axes

Worshippers have little to rely on when trying to determine the location of a sacred site. Aside from local knowledge or information passed on by previous pilgrims, their main source of data is the scriptures. Sacred texts are not, however, designed with geographic or architectural precision in mind. The data in them is often scant, ambiguous, or contradictory. Early Christians could determine, for example, that the site of the crucifixion was outside the city walls, on a hill and near a garden. Not surprisingly, they encountered a plethora of hills and gardens to choose from. Their efforts were further hampered by uncertainty about the location of the city walls in Jesus’ time. The existing information thus left too many available options for the location of the Sacred Tomb. How were pilgrims to choose between these alternatives?

The economics literature on bargaining and coordination offers one possible answer to this puzzle, in the form of “focal points”. Focal points are solutions to ambiguous situations that stand out as prominent or conspicuous. They are particularly attractive or “magnetic” points onto which expectations can converge. In a landscape, a focal point might be a particularly prominent landmark, an elevation or depression, a valley, river or cave. Pilgrims seeking the location of a religious event can use existing sacred sites as focal points for locating new sites.

The link between two or more focal points forms a focal axis. In the realm of geography, these links are the lines of sight or movement between focal points, such as a road or a valley connecting two sacred sites. Every focal axis carries meaning. That meaning is derived from the meaning of the focal points through which it runs. The axis connecting two tombs, for example, might signify death whereas an axis connecting two churches might signify salvation. Every focal axis suggests a continuum of locations for future sacred sites that correspond to its meaning. Particularly prominent locations arise where two focal axes cross. Sites located at such crossroads draw their significance from both axes and their respective focal
points. The intersection of two axes symbolizing death and salvation, for example, might suggest a site for an event related to martyrdom or resurrection.

Pilgrims rely on focal points and focal axes in placing new sacred sites because they have an inherent understanding of sacred order. Sacred places embody this order. Their architecture, layout and decorations reflect the underlying structure of the universe. This order is then reflected in "mirror sites," smaller sites that emulate a central sacred space, such as a synagogue that mirrors the Temple in Jerusalem or a mosque that mirrors the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Finally, sacred cities echo the design of the sacred places that lie within them, a dialogue captured in the relationship between the cities of many ancient civilizations and the temples at their core. Roman, Babylonian and Assyrian cities reflected in their layout the design of sacred spaces in their center, which in turn reflected the perceived order of the cosmos.\(^9\)

Pilgrims arriving at a sacred city such as Jerusalem might employ the following heuristic in seeking the location of an unknown sacred site. In the first stage, they recognize existing sites that bear a significant relationship to the place they wish to locate. These function as focal points and the lines connecting them form focal axes. In the second stage, they place their new site on one or more of these focal axes, depending on the meaning they attribute to their site. Their new site confirms the significance of the focal axis and, in a third and final stage, becomes a new focal point and a source for future focal axes.

This three stage process can be illustrated with an example from "civil religion," the construction of national monuments in the United States of America's capital, Washington D.C. Three sites served as focal points for city planners in the 1920s, when the decision was made to erect a memorial to Abraham Lincoln. These focal points were the White House, completed in 1800, the Capitol (1850s) and the Washington Memorial (1894). These three sites formed three axes that Jeffrey Meyer has termed the "Axis of Power" (White House to Capitol), the "Axis of Enlightenment" (White House to Washington
Memorial) and the "Axis of Memory" (Capitol to Washington Memorial). The designations for these axes reflect the meaning they draw from the sites they connect. By placing the Lincoln Memorial on the Axis of Memory, the city planners expressed their opinion about the meaning of the memorial but also confirmed the meaning of that axis. A similar process occurred in 1945, when the Jefferson Memorial was placed in line with the White House and the Washington Memorial, on the Axis of Enlightenment.

There is, of course, some danger in explaining these placements with the benefit of hindsight. Certainly, each of these memorials could have been placed elsewhere. It is however worth noting that, consciously or otherwise, not one memorial has since been placed off a prominent axis. Moreover, every choice of location has had implications, intended or otherwise, for the meaning of previous memorials, the axes linking them, and the significance of potential locations for new memorials.

Locating Sacred Sites in Jerusalem

How might the process of locating sacred sites have taken place in Jerusalem? When Christian pilgrims first began arriving in Jerusalem in the 4th century, most of the sacred sites known to us today were as yet unknown. In choosing the locations for these sites, the pilgrims availed themselves of already existing axes that drew on sacred Jewish sites as focal points. They then added further sites of their own, and thus additional axes, to the city structure.

The most important axis running through the city is its east-west axis. This "sacred axis" stretches from the Mount of Olives, across the valley of Yehoshafat that borders the city from the east, through the Golden Gate of the Temple Mount, across the former site of the Temple sanctuary (today's Dome of the Rock) and west from there. This axis traces the route of the sun over the city, the transition from desert to urban civilization as well as the future path of the Jewish Messiah into the city.
The location of two "profane" axes is suggested by the valleys that border Jerusalem in the east and south. Along these axes are Jewish sites associated with death, betrayal and sacrifice, such as the Tomb of Absalom or the site of heathen sacrifices in biblical times. The fourth and final axis was suggested by the layout of the Byzantine city. This "martyrdom axis" ran along the Cardo Maximus, the main thoroughfare of 4th century Jerusalem. It completed a square of axes that crossed at four points: in the valley of Jehoshaphat under the Golden Gate; where the valleys of Jehoshaphat and Hinnom crossed; in the valley of Hinnom at the southernmost point of the Cardo; and finally on the Cardo, in the heart of the city, across from the Dome of the Rock.

Sites draw in their significance from the axes on which they were located. Sites located at junctures draw on the meanings of axes that cross at that juncture. Thus sites associated with death and resurrection were located where the sacred axis crosses the profane axis. These include the Garden of Gethsemane, the Rock of Agony, the Grotto of the Betrayal and the Tomb of Mary. The second location, where the two profane axes cross, marked the most despicable of sites, the Blood Acre, where Judas committed suicide. The third location expresses ambivalence similar to the first. Here we would later find the site of Peter's betrayal, Caiaphas' palace, the Room of the Last Supper and the original site of the Flagellation and Pilate's Palace. The fourth and final location marks the pinnacle of the city's spiritual landscape, where the sacred axis crosses the axis associated with martyrdom. This site would be chosen for the construction of the Holy Sepulcher. Once these sites were located, additional sites sprang up in relation to them, affirming the initial meaning of the axes on which they were positioned.

Can we be sure that the process described above offers an accurate portrayal of the manner in which sacred sites were located in Jerusalem? The evidence available to us is sparse and ambiguous. In Washington D.C., formal and informal records of the deliberations that preceded the location of lot sites offer
an insight into the role played by focal points and focal axis. We have no such data for the location of sacred sites in Jerusalem. We are, however, left with five pieces of circumstantial evidence to support the argument above: Reports of the decision making surrounding the construction of sacred sites; descriptions of the spatial relations between sacred sites in pilgrim accounts; the order in which sacred sites in Jerusalem were identified and mentioned; portrayals of the city’s layout in early maps of Jerusalem; and information about the invention of Jerusalem’s “youngest” sacred site, the Garden Tomb.

Sacred Places in Pilgrim Accounts

The first clue as to the considerations that went into locating Jerusalem’s sacred sites stems from the few accounts that are available to us about the construction of these sites. It is quite clear, for example, from descriptions of the founding of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher that the axis of martyrdom, formed by the Cardo and the sacred axis running through the Temple Mount, were on the minds of planners when the site was chosen. Eusebius wrote of Constantine’s desire to found a church “attractive and worthy of veneration by all.” Its entrance was “right in the middle of the shops in the market... a marvelously ornate entrance, which allowed a breath-taking view of the interior to those passing by,” with doors “facing east receiving the crowds going inside.” The basilica too, “looked towards the rising sun.” Eusebius makes an even more interesting reference to the Temple Mount when he writes:

On the monument of salvation itself was the new Jerusalem built, over against the one so famous of old which, after the pollution caused by the murder of the Lord, experienced the last extremity of desolation and paid the penalty for the crime of its inhabitants. Opposite this the emperor raised, at great and lavish expense, the trophy of the Savior’s victory over death...”
The Church of the Holy Sepulcher was thus constructed as a contrast to the former Temple, directly to its east. It also drew in its design on that temple, with the Tomb of Christ and the site of the Crucifixion paralleling the Holy of Holies and the Altar in the Temple. Events formerly located on the Temple Mount now shifted their location into the Holy Sepulcher, including the site of Zechariah's martyrdom, the site of Isaac's near-sacrifice and relics associated with Kings David and Solomon. Saint Jerome, who resided in the Holy Land between 385 and 420 A.D., followed Eusebius in conceiving of the Holy Sepulcher, as well as the Christian sites on the Mount of Olives in the east and Bethlehem in the south, in relation to the Temple platform. ¹⁰ Egeria, a contemporary of Jerome's, continuously refers to the Holy Tomb, located west of Calvary, as being "behind the Cross".¹¹ This suggests not only that she oriented herself along the sacred axis, but that she perceived that axis as having a clear direction, from east to west. The orientation is implied again, nearly one millennium later, in the itinerary of the aforementioned John of Würzburg, who notes of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher that "this location makes it necessary that the face of the Lord hanging on the cross should have been turned towards the east,"¹² that is, facing the Temple.

Pilgrims' accounts of their travels demonstrate constant awareness of the spatial and symbolic relations between sacred sites. Whereas later guides tended to define the location of a site in terms of its distance to other known sacred sites, earlier guides in particular tended to relate new and old sites to one another in terms of the cardinal directions. The inevitable result of thinking about holy places in this relational manner was the pilgrim circuit, an increasingly fixed route that pilgrims took from one site to another, thus linking various sites into a coherent whole. The monk Bernard, for example, who visited Jerusalem about 870 A.D., started his itinerary from the Holy Sepulcher and walked along the four axes in a counter-clockwise manner.¹³ Bernard used the four axes to link all the critical sites marking the last days of Jesus in
Names Without Places

Jerusalem, in backwards chronological order, from crucifixion to the triumphal entry into the city.

The order in which some of the more minor sites in Jerusalem appear in the chronology of pilgrimages to Jerusalem offers additional evidence for a process of locating sacred sites that relies on focal points and axes. The 11th century Ortothikon Guide, for example, is the first to locate the Church of St. Anne. This site, located by the Temple Mount along the "sacred axis", appeared in pilgrims' itineraries only after the Holy Sepulcher had been identified and the location of that axis had been affirmed. The founding of the Holy Sepulcher also reaffirmed the martyrdom axis, stretching along the Cardo to the sites on Mount Sion. In 460 A.D., the Empress Eudocia identified the site of St. Stephen's martyrdom further north along this axis and constructed churches on the site of Pilate's Praetorium and Caiaphas' residence south on the axis, all outside the city walls.

A century later, the Emperor Justinian located his church to the Virgin, the Nea, on a prominent elevation along this axis, between the Sepulcher and Mount Sion.

Justinian's project, one of the largest churches in Christendom at the time, confirmed the significance of the martyrdom axis, so that by the 9th century the Center of the World could be marked between the site of the Crucifixion and the Tomb of Christ, where the sacred axis met the axis of martyrdom. When, after the conquest of Jerusalem by the crusaders and the spread of the cult of the Passion in Europe, the Good Friday processions shifted from the axis of martyrdom to the sacred axis, pilgrims began identifying, one by one, sites associated with the Way of the Cross along that axis that had not been previously located, including the Ecce Homo Arch, the meeting place of Christ and Mary and the sites where Jesus encountered Veronica and Simon of Cyrene.

Maps and the Invention of Sacred Places

Evidence concerning the process of locating sacred sites can be found beyond pilgrims' descriptions of sites, their spatial relation
to one another and the order in which they were identified. Pilgrims have also left us with several maps of Jerusalem that display the prominent role played by the four axes in deciding the placement of sacred places. Most prominent among these is the 6th century mosaic map commissioned by the Bishop of Madaba that highlights the location of the Holy Sepulcher and Sea along the Cardo. It may in turn have been based on an earlier map, now lost, that might have guided Theodosius in his visit to the Holy Land in the early 6th century. Pilgrims relied on these maps, as well as descriptions by their predecessors and local guides, not only in order to identify the location of sacred places, but also in order to gain a perspective on the spatial relations between sites that could not be obtained from the ground.

It is only natural, then, to find pilgrim maps, particularly from the crusader period, adopting an idealized symmetric layout. These maps usually take one of three dominant designs. The earliest of these maps assume the "cross in circle" or "T-in-O" format. These represent not only the circular walls of Jerusalem with the two central axes, meeting at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, but are miniaturized versions of the Orbis Terrarum maps, thus exemplifying the city of Jerusalem as a microcosm of the world. Examples include the Paris Map of 1260, the Hague Map of 1170, the 12th century Stuttgart Map, the 12th century Copenhagen map, the Brussels crusader map and the Uppsala crusader map. Later maps simply highlight the main streets of the city and the location of the sacred sites on their crossings. This schema is visible in the Cambray crusader map of 1150, Marino Sanudo’s early 14th century map and in the 14th century Imaginary Map of Jerusalem by Burchard of Mount Zion. Early modern maps adopt a scheme similar to the one suggested by the pilgrim of the Ottoman Guide and his peers, in which the city of Jerusalem is arrayed around, and takes the shape of, the Temple and its courts, usually as a series of concentric rectangles. Christian van Adrichom’s map of 1584 (and its many derivatives), Braun and Hogenberg’s map of 1688 and de Hooghe’s map of 1715 are exemplary of this style.26
Most of these maps and panoramas are oriented with the west at the top of the illustration, that is they position the viewer on the Mount of Olives, the origin of the sacred axis, looking out towards the Holy Sepulcher along that axis. All share a stylistic, and often imaginary, manner of portraying the layout of Jerusalem. They draw on the focal points and focal axes suggested in pilgrim accounts and, in turn, lead new pilgrims to view the sites in the city as structured around these points and axes. These maps are thus not only evidence for the process of locating sacred space, as suggested above, but also play a crucial role in the production and reproduction of that space.

Francisco Quaresmius’ map, for example, in spite of its fanciful detail, such as the aforementioned “accursed fig tree”, assumed significant importance when the Holy See appointed Quaresmius Superior and Commissary Apostolic of the East. That map accompanied his Historical, Theological and Moral Study of the Holy Land, with which Quaresmius sought to fix the locations of various sacred sites throughout the city. Only later, in the 17th century, as more reliable and precise information about the topography and geography of Jerusalem began to arrive in Europe, did mapmakers gradually abandon this symbolic and geometric style in their maps.

Gordon’s Garden Tomb

A final piece of evidence regarding the role played by focal points and maps in identifying the sacred places of Jerusalem comes from the curious history of a new site for the crucifixion and resurrection, discovered in the late 19th century. This site, just outside the walls of the Old City near the Damascus Gate, was first identified in 1867 by German bible scholars. It has become associated, however, with General Charles Gordon, of Khartoum fame, who visited Jerusalem in 1853, fourteen years after Mark Twain’s tour of the city.

Gordon offered several explanations for his choice of the final site, including the presence nearby of rock that resembled, in his opinion, a skull. The core of his argument was not,
however, archeological or theological. It was aesthetic, and had
to do with the spatial relationship between that site and other
focal points in Jerusalem. "I feel, for myself, convinced that
the hill near the Damascus Gate is Golgotha," he wrote. "From
it you can see the Temple Mount, the Mount of Olives and the
bulk of Jerusalem. His stretched out arms would, as it were,
embrace it."

In Gordon's papers we find a hand-drawn sketch that serves
as the visual rationale for the choice of location. It shows a
skeletal torso superimposed over a topographical map of
Jerusalem, with its feet resting on the Pool of Siloam, the base
of its spine on the Dome of the Rock and its skull on the site of
the new Garden Tomb. Gordon explained:

From the skull hill the crown of the Eastern hill follows a
line which is aslant, or askew, to the valley of Kidron until it
reaches, at about two thirds of its entire length, another bare
rock, now covered by the Mosque of Omar... Leviticus says that
the victim was to be slain "shaltwise to the altar northwards".
From the skull hill, on the northwest, the body lies – as did that
of the victim – aslant or askew to the altar of burnt sacrifice.

Gordon combined his analysis of Jerusalem's topography
with his own eclectic interpretation of the scriptures. He
concluded that the correct site for the crucifixion had to be
diagonally north-west of the Temple Mount. This harmonized
with his interpretation of distances in the city and their
symbolic meaning: He calculated that the ratio of the distances
Pool of Siloam-Temple and Temple-Garden was the same as
the distance from a human's feet to the base of the spine and
from there to the skull. Finally, the location of the skull in his
diagram matched the name of the site (Calvary, from calvarium,
the place of the skull) and his identification of a local rock
with the shape of a skull. Not coincidentally, though perhaps
subconsciously, Gordon placed that new site on the axis of
martyrdom, just north of the city.

Upon his return to England, Charles Gordon collected funds
to purchase the grounds of the Garden Tomb. The Garden Tomb Association, founded by Gordon, owns and manages the site to this day. On an average year, 50,000 pilgrims visit this, the youngest sacred site in Jerusalem.29

Conclusion

The history of the site now known as "Gordon’s Garden Tomb" offers yet another illustration of the role played by focal axes and maps in understanding and representing the spatial relations between sacred places. This case also entails a warning about the limits of the argument presented above. Instead of placing the Tomb within the city's traditional system of axes, Gordon and his followers subverted that framework and offered an alternative framework of their own. This illustrates how the ambiguity inherent in any process that relies on focal points and focal axes makes it impossible to explain ex ante where a site will be placed and creates temptations for ex post analysis.

The invention of Gordon’s Garden Tomb also demonstrates that pilgrims rely on more than maps and axes in placing new sites. They rely on hints in the sacred texts, often imaginatively interpreted. They also rely on the locations of sacred sites from other religious movements, not only by using them as focal points but also by constructing on top of, or instead of, the older site. Doing so offers a double advantage: It clears the competing site and also draws on a significance already present at that location.29 Gordon relied on the location of the Temple Mount to place his site but ended up locating it at Eudocia’s Church of St. Stephen. Similarly, Constantine may have relied on the two axes to identify the Tomb of Christ, but the location he chose was also occupied by a Roman temple to Aphrodite that he would have wanted to displace. The practice of piling sacred sites on top of competing sacred sites does not weaken the argument about focal points and axes, since these older sites may have relied on an axis framework of their own, perhaps even the same framework, but it does complicate the interpretation of decisions made by pilgrims.
Finally and most importantly, pilgrims rely on revelations and miracles to locate sites. This is a phenomenological point that we should not forget as we critically assess the practice of inventing sacred places. This, after all, is how the pilgrims themselves explained the identification and location of sacred sites. It would be reckless to simply dismiss their own understanding of this process. Indeed, their confidence in the power of the divine guidance that would lead them to the correct site was so great as to turn the logic of inventing sacred places on its head: The existence of a sacred place was taken as proof that the event reported in the scriptures had truly occurred. “Should you doubt [the crucifixion],” the very place which everyone can see proves you wrong,” wrote Cyril, the Bishop of Jerusalem in the 4th century. “Deny not the crucified... Gethsemane bears him witness.”

We do not need to choose, as did Mark Twain, between this phenomenological account of locating sacred places and the critical account that prevailed throughout much of this chapter. An intuition, guided by an understanding of spatial relations, can manifest itself in many ways, including the experience of miracles. Divine guidance works in mysterious ways. Focal points and focal axes may just be one of those ways.

NOTES

The author thanks Laura H. Paxton for her outstanding research assistance.


2. Twain, ibid., p. 422.


4. Guerresmius’ location of a 1,600 year old fig tree is even more problematic given the claim by the Roman historian Josephus that the Roman army had cut down all the trees in Jerusalem in 70 AD. Guerresmius may have been noting the former location of the tree only. But three early visitors to Jerusalem claimed to have seen an actual palm tree involved in Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. They are the Bishop of Jerusalem, Cyril, the Pilgrim from Bordeaux and Epiphat. John...
NAMES WITHOUT PLACES

2 Wilkinson, Egeria’s Travels, ibid., pp. 14-16 and 79.
5 Wilkinson, Jerusalem Pilgrimage, ibid., pp. 244-273.
6 Wilkinson, Jerusalem Pilgrimage, ibid., p. 121.

Cited in Wilkinson, Egeria’s Travels, ibid., p. 197. St. Augustine was among those present at that Synod.

13 For the relationship between Jewish and Christian sacred sites see Wilkinson, Egeria’s Travels, ibid., pp. 6, 26 and 195.
16 Wilkinson, Egeria’s Travels, ibid. throughout.
17 Wilkinson, Jerusalem Pilgrimage, ibid., p. 259.
19 Wilkinson, Egeria’s Travels, ibid., p. 86, note 4.
21 These are in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; the Royal Library, the Hague; and the Württembergische Landesbibliothek in Stuttgart, the Arnamagnæisches Institut, Copenhagen; the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, and the Universitetsbiblioteket, Uppsala, respectively. See Dan Bahat and Shalom Sabar, Jerusalem: Stone and Spirit: 3000 Years of History and Art (New York, NY: Rizzoli, 1998); Yaacov Shauli, Jerusalem: A Biography (Tel Aviv, Israel: Am Oved, 1999); Rehav Rubin, Image and Reality: Jerusalem in Maps and Views (Jerusalem: Israel - Magnes Press, 1999).
22 These three maps are located in the Bibliothèque Municipale, in Cambrai, France: the Biblioteca Laurenziana, in Florence, Italy; and in the British Library, London, respectively.

175
26 All three maps can be found in the Eian Lao Cartographic Collection, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.
27 See F. E. Peters, Jerusalem, ibid., pp. 501-2 and note 4, above.
30 Private communication with site manager, May 2003.
32 Cyril of Jerusalem, Catecheses, 10.19 and 13.38 cited in Wilkinson, Egeria’s Travels, ibid., p.64.