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War on Sacred Grounds

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Similarly, Molinaro holds the outlier view that the 1924 Mandatory Order-in-Council removing issues of Holy Places from the Mandate courts and placing them in the executive branch was a temporary measure designed to facilitate funneling of those controversies to the (never created) multi-religious Holy Places Commission (or failing that, to a committee of the League of Nations). However, while this view has been considered heterodox, recent work by Raymond Cohen in *Saving the Holy Sepulchre* suggests that Viscount Samuel, the then British High Commissioner for Palestine, had something like this view in mind (i.e., reference to an international body) when the Order was proposed in 1924.

This said, Molinaro presents an important reminder that the international aspect of Jerusalem cannot easily be ignored and that the solution to the challenge of Jerusalem may well require arrangements with parties beyond Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Indeed, there was a time when Israel itself seemingly recognized this, as when Abba Eban stated (November 15, 1971) that Israel does not wish “to exercise unilateral jurisdiction or exclusive responsibility in the Holy Places.”

Molinaro’s volume is a welcome addition to the growing bookshelf of studies on sacred space in the Holy Land.

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War on Sacred Grounds, by Ron E. Hassner. Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2009. xvii + 179 pages. Acknowledgments to p. 182. Notes to p. 216. Index to p. 222. \$29.95.

Reviewed by Chad F. Emmett

I write this review from Jerusalem, where during the past few months (fall 2009), I have witnessed firsthand the ongoing rumblings of potential war on sacred grounds. During the weeks spanning from Ramadan to Succoth, Palestinian Muslims expressed fear (real or rumored depending on whom you ask) of Jewish advances on the Temple

Mount/Haram al-Sharif, which in turn led to Israel limiting access of Muslim males to the mosques in order to protect Jews praying at the Western Wall, which in turn led to greater Arab protests and condemnation. It was with great interest then that I read Ron Hassner’s important and engaging work.

He approaches the topic of sacred turf with refreshing new insights and perspectives and, while not offering any concrete solutions, he does propose new approaches that could prove fruitful. While the main case studies are Middle Eastern, Hassner is to be complimented for his inclusion of sites from many different religious traditions and countries. Hassner begins with introductory chapters in which he analyzes conflicts over sacred sites, explores from a political science perspective why sacred places are contested, and then examines why the “indivisibility” of sacred sites makes them more problematic to solve than common territorial disputes.

Hassner then turns to case studies of successful and not-successful approaches to the management of disputed sacred sites. His examples of mismanagement of sacred space come from India and Israel/Palestine. He uses the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem as examples of how forced partition does not lead to peaceful sharing. Ayodha, India, where Hindus and Muslims contend over a destroyed mosque at the birth site of the Hindu God Ram, serves as an example of failed conflict resolution due to the “absence of strict neutrality and overwhelming power preponderance” (p. 76). According to Hassner, the Camp David meetings in 2000 collapsed because of the contentious Temple Mount issue. This, he suggests, happened because of the “failure to incorporate religious actors and experts in preparing for the negotiations,” which meant that negotiators were “caught off guard by the demands [of opponents] concerning sacred space” and because religious leaders excluded from the process hampered the progress from without (p. 82).

The primary focus of the book then turns to the theory and practice of successful sharing of sacred space as a result of the direct involvement and input of religious leaders — something Hassner sees as miss-

ing from most negotiations — who in turn must work with their religious constituencies and with the political elite in reconfiguring sacred space. The first case study of successful conflict management revolves around the 1967 Israeli conquest of East Jerusalem. Hassner describes the inner workings of the Israeli government and Jewish leaders who opted to prevent Israeli/Jewish control of the Temple Mount in order to avoid increased conflict with the Muslim world. Allowing Muslims to continue to control the Haram al-Sharif was facilitated by an October 1967 rabbinic ruling (by 56 rabbis with the eventual endorsement of 300 additional rabbis) that forbade Jewish entry on the Mount because of purification issues and the possibility of desecrating the unknown site of the Holy of Holies. According to Hassner, the “genius of the rabbinical ruling” was that it was done not through redefining rules, but in “convincing the public that no redefinition had taken place.” The success of the rabbis is such that to this day “the majority of Jews from across the religious spectrum accept the ruling as the natural extension of an ancient tradition that barred Jewish access to the Mount” (p. 126).

A second example of success is illustrated by the thwarted attempt in 1979 by Muslim insurgents to take over the Grand Mosque of Mecca. Once again religious leaders (this time the *‘ulama’*) played a key role as they offered a reinterpretation of Muslim law that allowed for the use of force in the sacred precincts of the mosque.

These two accounts make for fascinating reading, but unfortunately the Temple Mount ruling brought only a few decades of calm and the Mecca ruling compelled the likes of Usama Bin Ladin to other acts of violence. Both events were certainly the exception rather than the rule. Hassner himself refers to the 1967 ruling as happening at a “unique historical juncture” that he calls a “perfect storm” (p. 123). We can only hope that political leaders in control of sacred places will read Hassner’s book and that more religious leaders will then be included in peace negotiations so that they can creatively shape and reshape “the meaning, value, and parameters of sacred

space” in order to “ameliorate or even resolve disputes over sacred space” (p. 154).

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The Golan Heights: Occupation, Annexation, Negotiation, by Elisha Efrat. Translated from the Hebrew by Shoshana Michael-Zucker. Jerusalem: ABC Publishers, 2009. 269 pages. Gloss. to p. 275. Sel. Bibl. to p. 279. Index to p. 284. n.p.

Reviewed by Will Harris

Israel and Syria are the dominant states in the Levant, and have been locked in hostility since the foundation of Israel in 1948. Israeli occupation of Syrian territory in the Golan Heights has been the principal concrete issue between them since Israel seized the Golan in the Six Day War of June 1967. Any new book on the Golan Heights and their place in the Israeli-Syrian relationship should therefore be of interest, even though the border dispute has not been a primary concern of either state in recent years. The fact remains that there cannot be an Israeli-Syrian peace without a mutually acceptable resolution regarding the Golan.

Professor Efrat, a respected Israeli geographer, certainly has the expertise to give a cogent, detailed portrayal of developments on the Israeli-Syrian front-line from a centrist Israeli perspective. In this monograph he gives useful historical and physical data on the Golan, including a valuable depiction of the armistice regime between 1949 and 1967. He then outlines in detail the fate of the territory under Israeli rule, including the flight of most Syrian residents, the infusion of Israeli settlements, the resistance of the residual Syrian Druze community, and the 1981 annexation of the Golan to Israel. He finishes with a lengthy consideration of the tortuous, so far abortive Israel/Syria interchanges concerning the resolution of their territorial conflict. Throughout, Professor Efrat takes pains to interpret Syrian perspectives, and makes plain his view that the territory will have to be restored to the Syrians. The qualification is the position of a final Israeli/Syrian border, given the contradic-