Part One:
The Centers of a New World Order
The search for the places where Jesus Christ had taught or worked miracles – even places where he had merely been physically present – were of little interest to the early Christians. Their religion and faith were influenced by a spiritual and eschatological reading of God’s revelation that differed greatly from the Jewish interpretation of the Bible. While earthly Jerusalem was necessarily doomed to destruction – according to Jesus’ prophecy in the Gospel (Matthew 24:1–2) – it was the heavenly Jerusalem that became the object of Christian yearning. Accordingly, the current unholy state of Jerusalem and Judaea could be both explained and justified by opposition to Judaism. Seen in this light, the destruction of the city and the Temple during the reign of Emperor Vespasian and the official obliteration of its name with the founding of pagan Aelia Capitolina under Hadrian were simply manifestations of God’s wrath toward the Jews for denying Christ. The Jews had all but lost the Holy Land, which therefore could now only exist spiritually.¹

The Christian Understanding of Palestine before Constantine

As time passed, however, some Christians felt the need to preserve their collective religious memory. To the best of our knowledge, Melito of Sardis at the end of the second century was the first Christian to visit the sites where the story of Christian salvation took place. His motivation was to compile a reliable list of the books in the Biblical canon.² Scholarly interest was also the reason why Origen, in the first half of the third century, travelled to find some of the places mentioned in the Gos-

¹ See Wilken 1985, 688–689; Wilken 1992, 80ff., esp. 96 – 97; Taylor 1993, 295: “There is no evidence at all that Jewish-Christians, or any other kind of Christians, venerated sites as sacred before the beginning of the fourth century.”
² Euseb. HE 4,26,14. On the motivation for Melito’s journey to Jerusalem cf. the different views of Taylor 1993, 311, and Murphy-O’Connor 2010, 78 – 79.
pels.\textsuperscript{3} Alexander of Cappadocia may be considered the first to show an interest that went beyond learned curiosity: he came to Jerusalem in the mid-third century “to pray and visit the Holy Places.”\textsuperscript{4} The exploration of Biblical topography, however, was not necessarily limited to its significance in the Gospels, as shown by the early writings of Eusebius: even when he was composing the \textit{Onomasticon}, a list of Biblical sites with geographical and historical descriptions, he adhered to the spiritual interpretation of the Gospels.\textsuperscript{5}

With Emperor Constantine’s rise to power and his support of Christianity, it was not only Eusebius’ parameters that fundamentally changed. Christianity suddenly acquired holy places located on earth, not in heaven, and growing streams of pilgrims set off for Palestine. Constantine, of course, was not solely responsible for this development; its roots lay deep in Christianity itself, particularly in the belief that Jesus of Nazareth was Christ or, to put it differently, that God had become flesh at a certain time and place. The divine revelation on which the new religion was based was part of a larger history. Hence, commemoration of the historical events of this revelation was at the heart of Christian tradition from the very beginning. Christians thus could not always remain indifferent to the places where the events of Gospels took place. As Robert Wilken puts it, “If there were no places that could be seen and touched, the claim that God entered human history could become a chimera. Sanctification of place was inevitable in a religion founded on history and on the belief that God ‘became flesh’ in a human being.”\textsuperscript{6} Real, existing sites bore witness to the truth of the Bible and the Christian religion. These sites were bound to be transformed sooner or later into ‘holy places,’ for which the cult of martyrs served both as a model and as a structural parallel.\textsuperscript{7} The tombs of the martyrs attested to the truth of Christian faith and were also venerated by believers. To a certain extent,

\textsuperscript{3} Orig. \textit{In Ioann.} 6,40–41.
\textsuperscript{4} Euseb. \textit{HE} 6,11,2; cf. also Firmilian in \textit{Vir. ill.} 54. Hunt, 1999, 25–40, suggests that there were indeed Christian pilgrims, but he also shows that, until Constantine constructed the central shrines commemorating Christian history, Christian visitors to Palestine found spiritual confirmation particularly in the ‘negative evidence’ it presented; cf. e.g. Hunt 1999, 31: “Pagan Aelia served as ‘witness’ for the worthlessness and insignificance of the ‘Jerusalem below’ which could no longer confine the glory of God.”
\textsuperscript{5} While the \textit{Onomasticon} was intended as a guide for those reading the Bible, it could also serve as a guidebook for pilgrims; see Wilken 1992, 99 – 100. For dating the \textit{Onomasticon} before AD 300, Barnes 1981, 106 ff. D.E. Groh convincingly describes the purpose of the work as bringing “biblical, Roman, and Christian realities together in such a way that Christianity in [Eusebius’] own day can be seen to be the successor of the biblical realities in the Roman world”, see Groh 1985, 23 – 31, esp. 29, and now Röwekamp 2017, 51 – 58.
\textsuperscript{6} See Wilken 1992, 91.
the idea of the Holy Land was inherent in Christianity itself, but political and social circumstances ultimately determined whether and in what form this idea would take shape in the Roman province of Palestine.

**Constantine’s Constructions**

Nevertheless, the swiftness, determination and certainty with which Constantine set the course of Palestine’s future were remarkable. At the very beginning of the fourth century, a Roman official had not even heard of “Jerusalem.” At the Church Council of Nicaea (AD 325), the bishop of Aelia was nominally granted honorary precedence, but *de facto* he remained subordinate to the metropolitan of Caesarea, the provincial capital. Immediately after the council, Constantine initiated a massive building program to lay the groundwork for the rise of Christian Jerusalem. Without the central holy places that Constantine ordered to be discovered and adorned, the subsequent pilgrim movement would not have been possible. The emperor’s approach shows remarkable theological and symbolic adroitness. The building program epitomized the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, just as they are mentioned in the Nicene Creed: the incarnation in Bethlehem, the passion and resurrection at Golgotha and the nearby sepulcher and, finally, the ascension on the Mount of Olives.

Constantine also did not neglect the sites of the Old Testament. At Mamre, where God first appeared to Abraham, the emperor built a church that demonstrated Christianity’s claim to all Biblical history: according to the Christian interpretation, Abraham’s theophany not only anticipated Christ’s appearance typologically, but, for many Church Fathers, also confirmed the consubstantiality of God the Son and God the Father, as decreed at Nicaea against the Arians. It is unclear whether Constantine had this specifically in mind; however, it shows that the sites of the Holy Land were highly charged with theological messages that could be directed toward different audiences.

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8 Euseb. *De mart. Pal.* 11, 10–12.
9 Canon 7 of Nicaea (325) [COD, S. 8,25–31]: Ἐπειδή συνήστεια κεκράτηκε καὶ παράδοσις ἄρχαία, ὡστε τὸν ἐν Ἁλίᾳ ἐπίσκοπον τιμᾶσθαι, ἐχέτω τὴν ἀκολουθίαν τῆς τιμῆς, τῇ μητροπόλει σωζομένου τοῦ οίκειον ἁξίωματος. According to Heyden 2014, 119–122, the canon should be understood as an expression of the emperor’s esteem for Jerusalem and as a “symbol of church unity”. On the conflict of the sees of Caesarea and Jerusalem cf. Irshai 2011, esp. 27–34.
The core element of Constantine’s building projects in Palestine was the Anastasis complex or the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. It was meant to be the central Christian sanctuary of Palestine, and perhaps of the entire Roman Empire.⁰¹ According to Eusebius, our main source for the period, Constantine “decided that he ought to make universally famous and revered the most blessed site in Jerusalem of the Savior’s resurrection.”⁰² Constantine began by ordering the pagan temple at the site, most likely the main shrine (capitolium) of Aelia, to be demolished and the rubble – tainted by idolatry – to be removed. Then, according to Eusebius, something totally unexpected happened: under the ruins of the temple, the tomb of the Savior came to light.⁰³ According to a letter preserved by Eusebius, the emperor ordered Makarios, the bishop of Jerusalem, to build the most magnificent basilica in the world. “It is right,” the emperor added, after giving the bishop instructions as to how the basilica should be decorated, “that the world’s most miraculous place should be worthily embellished.”³⁶ In order to organize the building project, the bishop was directed to two high-ranking helpers: the emperor’s “friend” and praetorian prefect per Oris-tem, Drakilianos, and the provincial governor. Makarios would coordinate with the emperor himself to select the columns and marble for the complex.¹⁷

But how did Constantine come upon the idea to transform Aelia into a/the “New Jerusalem”? According to Eusebius, the initiative derived solely from God’s providence. Beyond this claim, there is only speculation. Perhaps Makarios, as scholars often assume, brought the matter to Constantine’s attention at the Council of Nicaea, or perhaps the initiative came from Christian circles at court (e.g. the imperial women, western bishops) or even from the emperor himself. It is easier to understand why this idea was popular with the emperor. With his victory over Licinius, Constantine began the sole ruler of the Roman Empire. With the Council of Nicaea, he created, or so he thought, a homogeneous and united imperial church. From this moment on, he increasingly favored Christianity to the point of exclusion. Where else, if not in Jerusalem, could he pay homage to his new God in the most ostentatious manner? The presentation center of Rome was already occupied with pagan temples, and even an emperor like Constantine would not have dared to substantial-

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⁰² Euseb. VC 3,25.
⁰³ Bieberstein/Bloehorn 1994, I, 144 ff. and II, 184; Belaiche 1997; Murphy-O’Connor 1994 and 2010; Küchler 2014, 298; Klein (forthcoming), ch. 2. Against this view, cf. Gibson/Taylor 1994, 68 ff., who assume that only the temple of Venus, mentioned in Eusebius’ account, was located at the place of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, while they propose that the capitolium replaced the former fortress Antonia at the northeastern corner of the Temple Mount.
⁰⁶ Euseb. VC 3,26–28.
⁰⁷ Euseb. VC 3,31,3.
⁰⁸ Euseb. VC 3,30–32; cf. Sozom., HE 2,26,3.
ly transform this venerable heart of ancient Roman tradition. It is telling that all Constantinian churches in Rome were built at the edge of the city – even extra muros – and were not officially financed from the fiscus but rather from the imperial privy purse (the res privata or patrimonium). The new city on the Bosporus was not, as is often inferred from later developments, designed as a new Christian capital, but rather was intended through and through to glorify its founder. Constantinian churches in Rome were built at the edge of the city (extramuros) and were not officially financed from the fiscus but rather from the imperial privy purse (the res privata or patrimonium).

²² The new city on the Bosporus was not, as is often inferred from later developments, designed as a new Christian capital, but rather was intended through and through to glorify its founder. And where could the triumphant mood of Christians be better – and more obviously expressed than in the city that had rejected and executed the founding hero of the religion? Eusebius’ excitement is palpable when he describes the emperor’s New Jerusalem: it stood “facing the famous Jerusalem of old, which after the bloody murder of the Lord had been overthrown in utter devastation, and paid the penalty of its wicked inhabitants.” At the same time, this remark shows how the very concept of an earthly, Christian Jerusalem posed a problem for Eusebius. What, to him and other theologians, had been the most important feature distinguishing Christianity from Judaism was now on the brink of vanishing. The new Christian city, centered around the Holy Sepulcher, therefore had to be separated spatially from the old Jewish city centered around the Temple Mount. Dissociation from pagan Aelia, by contrast, was less politically charged; it sufficed to clear away its center, rearrange it, and invest it with new meaning. Apart from these adjustments, the new Jerusalem was also based on obvious continuities: it was to be expected that the tomb of Christ and Golgotha would be unearthed under the capitolium of Aelia. What other space would have been more fitting politically and theologically?

²⁵ Walk er 1990, 15 – 16.
²⁶ Drijvers 2004, 10 – 16. Cf. Klein (forthcoming), ch. 2.4, on the originally anti-pagan direction of impact of the Encaenia; it was no coincidence that September 13th, the dies natalis of Jupiter Capitolinus, had been chosen as the date of the inauguration which was to be liturgically commemorated every year.
Helena’s “Pilgrimage”

Constantine’s building program was not the only imperial initiative that served to express the special status of Palestine and Jerusalem. In 326, shortly after Constantine commissioned the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, his mother Helena set out on her famous tour on the Eastern provinces.  

Helena had received the rank of Augusta after the palace crisis culminating in the execution of Constantine’s wife Fausta and his son Crispus. Evidence suggests that her journey in addition to other purposes had a penitential character and was an attempt to repair a tarnished relationship with the Church. The empress’s active demonstration of imperial piety might have significantly improved the dynasty’s Christian reputation and served broadly as shining example. Helena combined her “pilgrimage” with the traditional arrival ceremonial of an emperor in the provinces.  

“As she visited the whole east in the magnificence of imperial authority, she showered countless gifts upon the citizen bodies of every city, and privately to each of those who approached her.” According to Eusebius, she supported soldiers, the poor and downtrodden, and granted amnesty to prisoners and exiles. This imperial generosity, of course, was not for its own sake. It was meant to influence public opinion and convey a new imperial image to the provincials. Combined with pilgrimage, however, the *iter principis* was fashioned anew in Christian form. The concept of the Roman Empire and the Roman monarchy, as represented symbolically by the journey of Helena Augusta, thus also changed. Upon reaching the destination of her pilgrimage, according to Eusebius, Helena applied “her outstanding intellect to enquiring about the wondrous land” and “accorded suitable adoration to the footsteps of the savior.”  

Helena’s journey to the Eastern provinces had a major impact on the development of Christian pilgrimage in Palestine. She and her son sponsored the construction of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives. She probably also oversaw the rapid progress made on constructing the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.  

Was Helena also involved in the discovery of the True Cross? The legend of her involvement first appeared in the latter half of the fourth century. If Eusebius’ account is reliable, Constantine himself considered travelling to Palestine to celebrate his thirtieth jubilee, to take part in the consecration of the Church

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28 Halfmann 1986.  
29 Euseb. *VC* 3.44. Drijvers 1992 is right to emphasize (65) that “she (sc. Helena) did not travel as a humble pilgrim but as an Augusta,” although his reconstruction of the political and diplomatic circumstances of her journey is not convincing; see Grünewald 1995, 53–54.  
31 Holum 1990, 66–81, convincingly interprets Helena’s journey against the background of the *itineraria principum*.  
32 Euseb. *VC* 3.41–43.  
33 Cf. below, n. 66.
of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and to be baptized in the River Jordan.³⁴ Be that as it may, Constantine’s journey never took place. The emperor nevertheless ensured that his new central church would have a magnificent dedication ceremony by ordering the Synod of Tyre to relocate to Jerusalem. The Anastasis compound thus was consecrated in the presence of imperial officials and numerous bishops from throughout the empire (although predominantly its eastern part). Eusebius reports that many speeches were held on this occasion, including his own, and emphasizes the connection with the emperor’s tricennalia.³⁵ According to Eusebius, the joint celebration in Jerusalem sealed the alliance between the Roman emperor and the Christian God: while the emperor guaranteed the worthy veneration of Christ by magnificently adorning the Holy Places, God himself granted a long and successful reign to the emperor.

Eusebius’ interpretation, of course, does not necessarily reflect the emperor’s original intentions in every detail.³⁶ As a matter of fact, the Constantinian building program is revealing enough all by itself. It is accompanied by two imperial letters, considered genuine, quoted in Eusebius’ text.³⁷ The first letter, to Bishop Makarios on the erection of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, has been quoted and discussed above. The second letter was sent to Makarios and all the bishops of Palestine. In this document, Constantine complains that the recipients failed to inform him of the pagan pollution of certain holy places, so that it was left to his pious mother-in-law, Eutropia, to alert him to the fact.³⁸ Constantine connects this accusation of idolatry to a pagan altar near the oak of Mamre and dispatches the comes Acacius to purify the site and – following the instructions of the bishops – build a basilica there worthy of the Catholic and Apostolic Church. This letter again shows how earnestly the emperor personally cared for the development of the sacral topography in Palestine. At this point, we may therefore conclude that both Constantine and Helena showed remarkable commitment in initiating a development that would ultimately transform Palestine into the Holy Land of the Christian oikumene.

³⁴ Euseb. VC 4,40,2. 4,62,2.
³⁵ Euseb. VC 4,33. 43–47. Eusebius’ speech on the consecration of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is most probably transmitted together with the tricennial oration: Euseb. LC 11–18; see Drake 1976, 30–45; Barnes 1977, 341–345, and Wienand in this volume.
³⁶ This interpretation is nevertheless important as an exemplary discourse. For Eusebius, the ideal Christian emperor had to take care of the Holy Places in Palestine. This argument was, as we shall see, taken up and modified as needed by several ecclesiastical dignitaries. On Eusebius’ impact on other writers, Winkelmann 1964, 91–119, esp. 107–108; Eusebius’ VC in particular was used by the church historians of the fifth century; see Leppin 1996, 40.
³⁷ Euseb. VC 3,30 – 32. 3, 52–53; see Dörries 1954, 84 ff. and 321–322. In the early 1950s, the discovery of a papyrus proved that another often-questioned document (VC 2,24–42) was authentic; debate over the authenticity of the documents quoted in the VC subsequently came to an end; see Winkelmann 1962, 187–243, esp. 197–205; Tartaglia 1984, 17 ff.; Sansterre 1972, 159.
³⁸ Hunt 1997a, 416.
The Bishop and the Emperor: Cyril of Jerusalem and Constantius II

Local church leaders embraced the opportunity that Constantine’s foundations offered them. With the publication of his *Vita Constantini* shortly after the emperor’s death, Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, might already have encouraged his successors to ensure the continuity of imperial policy toward Palestine. Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem openly expressed this expectation in a letter to Emperor Constantius regarding a cross of light that appeared in the sky over Jerusalem on May 7, 351. Cyril links the phenomenon to an apocalyptic prophecy of Christ: “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven” (Matthew 24:30).³⁹ In doing so, he recalled the common expectations of the return of the Lord, which was traditionally linked with the Mount of Olives. The cross of light should revive the conviction that the Holy Land was not only the place of Christ’s earthly presence, but also the future site of his return at the end of times.⁴⁰ At the same time, Cyril connects the auspicious sign with the reign of Constantius: “In the time of your blessed father Constantine of happy memory and most favored by God, the saving wood of the Cross was found in Jerusalem when God’s grace rewarded the piety of his noble search with the discovery of the hidden holy places. But you, most pious Lord Emperor, have surpassed your father’s piety with an even greater reverence for the divine, and in your time miracles have now appeared no longer from the ground but in the heavens.”⁴¹ According to Cyril’s interpretation of the cross, Constantius, who at the time was suppressing Magnentius’ usurpation in the West, had God on his side. The location of the phenomenon was far from immaterial: even more than Constantine’s discovery of the Christian holy places, the heavenly sign illustrated God’s favor toward the city where the events of the New Testament took place.⁴² Cyril thus offered the em-

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⁴⁰ Hunt 1982, 156.


⁴² Cyril obviously succeeded in convincing the people to accept and disseminate his interpretation, as can be seen from the reactions attested by Sozom. *HE* 4,5 (trans. Chester D. Hartranft): “Men, women, and children left their houses, the market-place, or their respective employments, and ran to the church, where they sang hymns to Christ together, and voluntarily confessed their belief in God. The intelligence disturbed in no little measure our entire dominions, and this happened rapidly; for, as the custom was, there were travelers from every part of the world, so to speak, who were dwelling at Jerusalem for prayer, or to visit its places of interest, these were spectators of the sign, and divulged the facts to their friends at home. The emperor was made acquainted with the occurrence, partly by numerous reports concerning it which were then current, and partly by a letter from Cyril the bishop. It was said that this prodigy was a fulfillment of an ancient prophecy contained in the Holy Scriptures. It was the means of the conversion of many pagans and Jews to Christianity.”
peror the charisma of the holy places as a means of legitimating his rule. Cyril calls it the first fruits of his episcopate, which he offers the emperor through his letter.\textsuperscript{43} It is not difficult to recognize Cyril’s attempt to raise the dignity of his episcopal see; it is likely that he hoped for imperial support in his ecclesiastical quarrels with his metropolitan, Acacius of Caesarea.\textsuperscript{44} Cyril’s letter thus proposed an alliance that would not be confirmed until a hundred years later: Constantius’ support for the Arians apparently precluded further steps down this path.

Julian’s Attempt to Rebuild the Temple

Paradoxically, the next emperor to show interest in Jerusalem as a religious center was none other than Julian the Apostate. The sources credibly relate that in 363 Julian attempted to relocate the Jews to Judea and to rebuild the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{45} His motives are to be found in his religious policy.\textsuperscript{46} Julian made a name for himself as restaurator templorum and attempted to promote and revive ritual sacrifice throughout the empire. By rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem, he would have enabled the Jews to venerate their God with sacrifices once more. Julian potentially also attempted to win over the large Jewish communities of Babylonia on the eve of his war against the Persians. According to Ammianus, he also attempted “to extend the memory of his reign by great works.”\textsuperscript{47} The reference to the actions of Constantine in the Holy Land forty years earlier is obvious.\textsuperscript{48} Julian, however, did not intend to undo Constantine’s actions, but rather outdo them and thus deprive them of their significance. To do this, he devised a plan – from a Christian perspective, a diabolical one – that undoubtedly drew on the emperor’s early religious upbringing. Julian intended to refute Christ’s prophecy about the Temple\textsuperscript{49} and, in doing so, strike at the heart of Christianity at the very site of its origin and recent glorification, since the destruction of the Jewish Temple was supposedly a sign sent by God signifying the transition from the old to the new covenant. The extent to which Julian’s plans stirred up the Christian imagination can be surmised from the agitated reactions pre-

\textsuperscript{43} Cyr. Jer. Ep. ad Const. 7.
\textsuperscript{44} Sozom. HE 4,25; Theod. HE 2,27.
\textsuperscript{45} A careful reassessment of all available sources can be found in Blanchetière 1980, 61–81, and Levenson 2004.
\textsuperscript{46} For the following, see ibid., 72ff.; Bowersock 1978, 88 – 90 and 120 – 122 (on the chronology of the events); Smith 1995, 216 – 217; Stemberger 1987, 163ff.; Drijvers 2004, 130 – 137.
\textsuperscript{47} Amm. Marc. 23,1,2 (trans. J.C. Rolfe): imperiique sui memoriam magnitudine operum gestiens propagare.
\textsuperscript{48} This reference even extends to practical matters; cf. Amm. Marc. 23,1,2 – 3: just like Constantine, Julian assigned the task of swiftly carrying out his plans to the highest imperial officials (his ‘friend’ Alypius and the provincial governors).
\textsuperscript{49} Matthew 24:2: “[...] verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down”; similarly, Mark 13:2; Luke 19:44, 21:6; cf. also Daniel 9:26.
served in the sources, sometimes even decades later. The project, however, failed, and the Christians naturally attributed this failure to God’s intervention and used it as an argument in their apologetic writings. In the end, Julian’s strategy accomplished the opposite of what he had intended: the importance of Jerusalem as an arena for religious competition became implanted in the Christian mentality. Only unrestrained possession of the Holy Land could secure the truth of the Gospels.

Julian’s immediate successors, however, had other concerns than promoting the holy places of Palestine; their adherence to Arianism further inhibited their collaboration with the Church of Jerusalem. Only after Theodosius I had restored ecclesiastical unity could the province again become relevant to imperial policy. Although Theodosius did not act as a builder in Jerusalem, he granted legal privileges to the clergy responsible for maintaining the holy places. Various personal connections to aristocratic ascetics from the Theodosian court who permanently resided in Jerusalem filled the gap left by the lack of imperial activity.

The (Female) Pilgrim’s Movement

I cannot discuss in detail every step of the theoretical elaboration and practical realization of the concept of the Holy Land. As early as the late 340s, Cyril included mention of Biblical places as visible and tangible testimonies to Christ in his baptismal catecheses. In doing so, he set the parameters for future theological reflection – especially, of course, in Jerusalem. His sermons also suggest a lively culture of pilgrimage. The first pilgrim account, however, authored by a pious traveler from Bordeaux, dates even earlier: the so-called Pilgrim of Bordeaux travelled to the Holy Land in 333, i.e. before the completion of the Constantinian churches. The next pilgrim account to come down to us is that of Egeria, who travelled through the Holy Land between 381 and 384. We also know of a large number of western noblemen and especially noblewomen in the late fourth and early fifth centuries who stayed in

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50 See n. 44; Drijvers 2004, 131–132.
51 In the tradition of Constantine, he may have claimed theologically important places for Christianity, but pace Bieberstein/Bloedhorn 1994, I, 155–156; II, 118 ff.; III, 243 ff.; Röwekamp 1995, 66–67; Maraval 1985, 68–69; Stemberger 1987, 64; Kühler 2014, 427–470, there is no evidence that he commissioned any buildings in Jerusalem, e.g. churches in the Garden of Gethsemane or on Mount Sion; Klein 2012, 95–107, here 98: “[…] for one hundred years after Constantine all new buildings in the city were commissioned, as far as we know, either by the clergy of Jerusalem using alms and donations from rich pilgrims or by these aristocratic pilgrims themselves, like Melania the Elder (monastery on the Mount of Olives) or the noblewomen Poemenia (the Imbomon).”
52 Cod. Theod. 16,2,26.
54 See Markus 1994, 259; Drijvers 2004, 154–156.
Jerusalem and Bethlehem for longer periods (and occasionally permanently) and became famous for founding pious establishments.⁵⁶ In some cases, their reason for moving to Palestine may have been the advance of barbarian tribes in the West.⁵⁷ Besides providing security, the Holy Land also functioned much more fundamentally and lastingly as a place of spiritual exile. Ascetic withdrawal from the world to Palestine did not entail a radical break with society;⁵⁸ it did, however, provide wealthy and important aristocrats an honorable means of escaping the burdens of their social status and professional duties. This new form of withdrawal was particularly attractive to Roman noblewomen.⁵⁹ By changing their lifestyle, they could gain power and influence in a different realm: honorable female aristocrats in Rome turned into revered ascetics and female benefactors in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.⁶⁰ Paulinus of Nola wrote about one such noblewoman, Melania the Elder: “Abandoning worldly life and her own country, she chose to bestow her spiritual gift at Jerusalem, and to dwell there in pilgrimage from her own body. She became an exile from her fellow citizens, but a citizen among the saints. With wisdom and sanctity she chose to be a servant in this world of thrall so as to be able to reign in the world of freedom.”⁶¹ Besides the promise of salvation, serving in Jerusalem could replace ruling in Rome. This form of serving, however, was merely another, more effective form of ruling, since it derived power from the true dominion in Heaven, for which it prepared one. To perform their new role successfully, noblewomen had to separate themselves from their usual environment spatially and socially. Not least in order to experience a distant echo of this heavenly freedom, Melania went to Jerusalem – as did her eponymous granddaughter and likewise Paula and Eustochium, the friends and sponsors of Jerome.⁶² Especially the example of Melania the Younger shows that this new lifestyle did not deprive them of their hereditary contacts: in 436 she travelled to Constantinople to help arrange the marriage of the western emperor Valentinian III and Eudoxia, the daughter of Theodosius II, the emperor in the East. Her saint-like


⁵⁷ Clark 1989, 167.

⁵⁸ The prolific writings of Jerome in Bethlehem show that besides the caring for pilgrims, he was still guaranteed active exchange with the outside world, see Rebenich 1992, 195ff.

⁵⁹ On the liberating call to asceticism cf. Feichtinger 1995, passim, esp. 238, 308ff. and 319ff. As Feichtinger shows, however, the greater possibilities ascetic women enjoyed met with corresponding strategies developed by male theologians and clerics to contain them. I would argue, however, that this ‘containment’ was more difficult to realize in the Holy Land than it was e.g. in the city of Rome or in Constantinople.


bearing endowed her with a great influence at the imperial court. It is likely that she also convinced the mother of the bride, the empress Eudocia, to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The Christian holy places were not, of course, attractive exclusively to women, even though the phenomenon emerges more prominently in connection with them. In addition to many pilgrims, important scholars such as Jerome and Rufinus, who resided in Palestine, also helped to promote the Holy Land and integrate it in the Christian mentality. Jerome called Jerusalem a “Christian Athens” and claimed that the most noble men and women of all nations gathered there to live according to Christian virtues. On the whole, these pious expatriates in Palestine had broad spiritual and political influence.

The Discovery of the True Cross (and other Relics)

The fourth century witnessed what would become potentially the most important foundation myth of the Christian empire: the discovery of the True Cross by Empress Helena. Neither Eusebius nor the pilgrim of Bordeaux, both contemporary sources, mention the lignum crucis. Soon afterward, however, Cyril of Jerusalem claims in his baptismal catecheses (348 – 350) that “the whole world has since [sc. since the crucifixion] been filled with the wood of the cross, piece by piece,” and, in the letter to Emperor Constantius quoted above, he dates the discovery of the cross to the reign of Constantine. In her account of her pilgrimage dating to 381 – 384, Egeria gives us a

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64 It is also possible that Melania encouraged the Iberian prince Nabarnugios, who lived as a hostage at the imperial court, to escape to the Holy Land, where he became a monk and adopted the name Peter; cf. John Rufus Vit. Pet. Iber. 40 – 44 (Horn/Phenix).
65 Jer. Ep. 46,9; see Vogüé 1993, 51ff. Jerome, however, also made different proclamations. In ep. 58,2ff. he refers to the spiritual representation of Jerusalem in order to discourage his addressee (Paulinus of Nola) from a pilgrimage or permanent stay in the holy places (on the reasons behind this, cf. Hunt 1973, 480); similar reservations are expressed by Gregory of Nyssa, ep. 2 (PG 46, 1013C); cf. Markus 1994, 260.
66 Heid 2001; Heid 1989; Hunt 1982, 38ff.; Drijvers 1992, 81 – 93, and 2004, 167 – 175; Borgehammar 1991, 123ff. argues for the historicity of the legend. Heinen 1995, 83 – 117, esp. 113, writes that “[nichts] spricht […] dagegen und vieles dafür, daß Helena in der Tat Kreuz und Nagel gefunden hat.” The arguments of Borgehammar and Heinen cannot be discussed here in detail, especially since the historicity of the legend is immaterial in the present context. It is noteworthy, however, that belief in the discovery of the cross did not become widespread until the late fourth century. Klein’s argument (forthcoming) ch. 2.2 – 3, is the most plausible, namely, that, given Eusebius’ silence on the matter, within one or at most two decades of the construction of the Anastasis compound a piece of wood was found that was believed to be the True Cross – and only later was connected with Empress Helena.
67 Catech. 4,10 (cf. 10,19. 13,A – trans. E. Yarnold); Ep. ad Constantium 3 (cf. n. 41); see Drijvers 2004, 157 – 158.
vivid description of the liturgical importance of the relic at the time. Neither Cyril nor Egeria, however, refer to Helena’s role in connection with this. The legend first appears almost contemporaneously in the writings of Gelasius of Caesarea, which Rufinus used for his ecclesiastical history, and in an obituary composed in 395 by Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, for the late emperor Theodosius I. Although the two accounts differ in details, they paint a similar picture of Helena’s role. Ambrose’s speech, which was part of a religious yet highly political ceremony, is noteworthy in the present context for his explicit reference to the political and theological consequences of the discovery of the True Cross. Ambrose notably integrates the legend into his praise of this remarkable Christian emperor. According to Ambrose, Theodosius upon his death entered the kingdom of Christ, where he now dwells with Constantine – as almost his only worthy successor. Constantine, however, the archetypical Christian emperor, not only symbolically raised the cross by making Christianity the favored religion of the Roman Empire; he physically raised it by sending his pious mother to Jerusalem to uncover the Christian holy places. According to the logic of this political theology, Helena was the only person who could find the cross. Constantine was out of the question, since, as was well known, he did not visit Palestine in his lifetime. The Ambrosian Helena, however, who was compared to Mary the mother of Christ, supposedly was not content with merely finding the cross; she moreover endowed the empire with the genuine attributes of Christian faith. According to Ambrose, she had the nails of the cross made into a diadem and bridle that she sent to her son: “Constantine used both, and passed on the faith to subsequent rulers,” Ambrose remarks, and after a few lines he continues: “a crown made from cross, so that the faith spreads its light; reins too from the cross so that power rules but here is just government, not unjust enactment.” In Ambrose’s account, the relics from Jerusalem with which Helena adorned the imperial insignia exemplify the connection between Christ and Roman imperial rule.

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68 Itin. Eg. 37,1–3.
69 Rufin. HE 10,7–8; Ambr. De obitu Theod. 40–51, Heinen 1995, 88ff. To Drijvers 2004, 173 “it seems [...] not improbable that Cyril [sc. of Jerusalem] was responsible for the origin and composition of the story of Helena’s inventio crucis.”
70 Heinen 1995, 91.
71 For the importance of the passage about Helena in the speech, see Steidle 1978, 94–112. The most important addressees of the speech were, of course, the sons of the deceased emperor, especially Honorius; see Steidle, 102ff.
73 See Hunt 1997, 52ff. who discusses the importance of the Helena legend in Ambrose’s funerary speech, esp. 57: “In his eternal realm in the heavenly Jerusalem Theodosius was brought closer to the faith of the holy places than he had ever been in real life.”
They compelled the successors of Constantine and Theodosius to maintain a piety that also included care for the Christian holy places.

In the fourth century, the self-conception of Roman emperors and the normative imperial ideal proposed by theologians did not always coincide. It was only later emperors who began, especially in the city of Constantinople, to present themselves ever more in accordance with such Christian theological guidelines. This development first peaked at the court of Arcadius and Theodosius II. The translation of several relics from Palestine to Constantinople attests to the process. In order to procure the most precious relics, the emperor had to grant favors to the Palestinian Church. An episode transmitted in Theophanes’ *Chronicle* will serve as an example: “In this year the pious Theodosius, in imitation of the blessed Pulcheria, sent much money to the archbishop of Jerusalem for distribution among those in need. He also sent a golden cross, set with precious stones to be fixed on the holy site of Calvary. The archbishop sent as a return gift the relics of the right hand of the first martyr Stephen, by means of Passarion, one of the holy men.” Pulcheria and Theodosius received the relics in Chalcedon and brought them to the palace, where they erected a magnificent church for St Stephen. The relics had been discovered in Palestine in 415, and parts had been brought to Constantinople in 421. It is likely that the timing of the translation was no coincidence: being engaged in an uncertain war with Persia at the time, the pious imperial court seems to have felt a special need for the divine support it expected to receive from the relics. The bishop of Jerusalem, who had apparently profited from Pulcheria’s generosity in the past, did not hesitate to underline Palestine’s special relationship with the emperor by duly donating the relics.

### Eudocia’s Pilgrimage and Patronage

As we have seen, Theodosius II’s patronage followed the precedent set by Constantine. Empress Eudocia’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 438/439 was an even more

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76 Theoph. AM 5920 (p. 8687 de Boor / trans. Mango/Scott 1997, 135f). The reception of the relics may be depicted on the Trier Ivory; see Holm/Vikan 1979, 115–133 (with illustrations); Holm 1982, 102–109. For a different view cf. Klein in this volume.
77 *Epistula Luciani*, *PL* 41,807–818; see Clark 1982, 141ff.
78 Cf. Holm/Vikan 1979, esp. 127ff. Theophanes’ credibility has been called into question by Wortley 1980, 381–394. Wortley notes that there is no mention of the translation prior to the ninth century chronicle. Reference to Passarion, who is known as an archimandrite and chorepiscopus from other sources, may, however, support its authenticity; cf. Cyril of Scythopolis, *VE* 16; *VS* 30; and Delmas 1900, 162–163.
prominent commemoration of Helena’s (by then) legendary journey. Like Helena, Eudocia travelled with a large entourage through the cities of the East, bestowing donations on them. Her entrance into Antioch seemed to have been the most impressive of all. Melania, whom the empress revered as a spiritual mother, came as far as Sidon to meet her on her way to Jerusalem. And in Jerusalem itself she was received not only by Bishop Juvenal, but also by Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria. She took part in the consecration of two martyrria that she generously supported and returned to Constantinople with several relics. Several years later, most likely in 444, Eudocia returned to the Holy Land, where she remained until her death in 460. The sources are too vague to determine what sort of court intrigue in Constantinople, if any, caused Eudocia’s exile. It was, however, an honorable exile, and there is no reason to assume that the empress did not enjoy her stay in Jerusalem. Even after finally breaking with the court a few years later, she resided in a palace in Bethlehem, received petitions, gave orders to soldiers and the local population and demanded strict obedience. The governor of Caesarea, as the local representative of imperial power, was allowed to interfere only at the empress’s request. Eudocia moreover must have commanded extensive financial resources, since she initiated the largest building activity in the Holy Land since Constantine. Not only did she build churches, monasteries, hospices, poor houses, and hospitals, she also erected or rebuilt or expanded Jerusalem’s city walls, referring explicitly to a verse of Psalm 50: “Do good to Sion in your good pleasure (eudokia) and let the walls of Ierousalem be built.”

Eudocia also had influence in ecclesiastical matters. She appointed important priestly office-holders, e.g. in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Even as an exile, Eudocia held sway over Jerusalem and its hinterland in a way that recalled every aspect of late imperial rule. The holy places gave her the ideal location to demonstrate her outstanding piety and to live a life that befitted an empress who was not bound to the regulations of court life. Eudocia’s example would become very popular among imperial women: in 470 her eponymous granddaughter died in Jerusalem.

81 The story related in John Malalas 14,8 (276–277 Thurn) does not seem to have any historicity.
83 Ps. 50:20–21 of the LLX (ed. Rahlfs, trans. A. Pietersma): ἀγάθουν ἐν τῇ ἐυδοκίᾳ τῆς Σιων Κυρὶ ἔν τῷ τῆς ἱερουσαλήμ; cf. Cyr. Scyth. Vit. Euth. 35; Vit. Ioann. 4; John Malalas 14,8 (277–278 Thurn); Evagr. HE 1,22; Chron. Pasch. p. 585 Dindorf; Armstrong 1969, 17–30, esp. 18–19; Hunt 1982, 237ff.; Bieberstein/Bloehorn 1994, I, 160–161; Klein 2012, 158–160; idem 2011/2012, 89–95. According to Weksler-Bdolah (this volume), who studied the archaeological evidence, the construction of the late antique walls of Jerusalem date to the late fourth century or early fifth century at the latest; her assumption, however, that the literary sources confuse Eudocia with Eudoxia does not seem plausible to me, since there is no indication that the latter was involved in any way in the affairs of Jerusalem.
84 Cyr. Scyth., VE 30.
after escaping from her Vandal husband Huneric; similar cases of high-ranking female expatriates are known from the sixth century.\footnote{Theoph. AM 5964 (p. 118 de Boor); Cyril of Scythopolis, VS 53 – 54. A roughly similar case from the late fourth century is mentioned by Zosimus 5,8,2: the widow and daughter of the eastern praetorian prefect Fl. Rufinus, who was murdered by troops outside Constantinople in 395, were granted safe conduct to sail to Jerusalem, where they lived for the rest of their lives.}

The Ecclesiastical Elevation of Jerusalem

The concept of the Holy Land influenced ecclesiastical relations in Palestine from the very beginning. As mentioned above, as early as the Council of Nicaea, the Bishop of Jerusalem received an honorary position in the province of Palestine although he had to accept the metropolitan privileges of the See of Caesarea.\footnote{See above, n. 19.} This compromise was not always uncontested. While Caesarea insisted on its traditional priority, Jerusalem could point to its continuously growing numbers of pilgrims. Jerusalem’s claim to the Apostolic tradition was even more important; dogmatic controversies added to the rivalry. Caesarea, however, was able to maintain its priority until Juvenal became Bishop of Jerusalem. During his long episcopal rule (422 – 457), Jerusalem experienced a rapid, albeit not always straightforward, rise in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Juvenal, being both ingenious and cunning, was not content merely to contest Caesarea’s position as his predecessors had done; his ambitions went much further. The honorific rank he intended to win for Jerusalem was ultimately to be labelled a “patriarchate” and endowed with special privileges; he even demanded jurisdiction over the See of Antioch and the entire Diocese of Oriens. The devious paths Juvenal took in ecclesiastical politics to achieve this goal cannot be discussed in detail here.\footnote{See the fundamental article by Honigmann 1950, 209 – 279; for the historical context, see also: Bacht 1953, 193 – 314, esp. 231 – 232; on the status of the episcopal see of Jerusalem after the Council of Chalcedon cf. Kötter, in this volume.} Suffice it to say he did not hesitate to exploit the dogmatic controversies of the day for his own purposes. Even though he was one of the main protagonists of the so-called “Robber Council” (latrocinium) of Ephesus, he still managed to be on the winning side at the subsequent Council of Chalcedon. He thus secured patriarchal rank for his see, which was granted jurisdiction – if not over the entire Diocese of Oriens – over the three provinces of Palestine, which were removed from the ecclesiastical authority of Antioch. This success would not have been possible without the support of both the emperors Theodosius II and Marcian. In Juvenal they found a suitable individual to oversee the Holy Land and guarantee the enforcement of their ecclesiastical policies. This was a matter of considerable importance: given the large numbers of international pilgrims and the significance of the holy places themselves for imperial self-representation, the emperors had to vigorously fight heterodox movements in
Jerusalem and its hinterland. For this, they needed a local supporter who enjoyed
great ecclesiastical authority. The emperor Marcian accordingly repeatedly termed
the See of Jerusalem “the See of the thrice-blessed Apostle Peter.”

Initially, however, the plan backfired. Juvenal’s ambiguous role at the Council of
Chalcedon had cost him the acceptance of his own community. Upon returning from
the council he was ousted from his episcopal see. In his place, a certain Theodosius,
a supporter of the deposed Alexandrian bishop Dioscurus, was elected patriarch by a
large number of clerics and monks. Empress Eudocia also initially supported Theo-
dosius. After many failed warnings and negotiations, and after Theodosius had con-
secrated numerous anti-Chalcedonian bishops, the emperor took drastic action. The-
odosius himself was ousted and Juvenal re-instated with the support of soldiers in
the summer of 453. Several letters by Pope Leo the Great, who was a prominent de-
fender of Chalcedon, show how important these matters were to church leaders.
Even though he had little patience for Juvenal’s intrigues and dogmatic inconstancy,
Leo nevertheless expresses his hope that the Palestinian defectors would soon obey
their legitimate bishop for “the sake of the testimony of the holy places” where they
dwelled, and that they would soon return to the true faith. In a letter dated Febru-
ary 4, 454, Leo congratulates Juvenal upon his return to the See of Jerusalem; Leo
writes that the error and ignorance of a Jerusalemite Christian was far less excusable
than that of anyone else. A Christian from Jerusalem gained knowledge of the Gos-
pels not from books but from the testimony of the places themselves. Whereas Chris-
tians elsewhere had to believe, those in Jerusalem merely had to open their eyes and
look around. With this, Leo postulated an indivisible connection between the Holy
Land and orthodoxy. According to this argument, the holy places themselves would
refute potential heretics. For Leo, the Holy Land was destined to become the strong-
hold of orthodoxy. This line of thinking fell on fertile ground in Jerusalem and be-
came a central aspect of the Jerusalemite self-conception.

Juvenal’s return, however, was not a happy one. His position was precarious
since most of the population opposed him. Two fortunate circumstances helped
him to regain lost ground for himself and his Chalcedonian cause: first, Eudocia
changed sides at the behest of Leo the Great and members of the eastern and western
imperial courts. She set an example for many monks and laymen by re-entering com-

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88 See Honigmann 1950, 256.
89 Bacht 1953, 244ff.
91 Cf. Ep. 139 (Schwartz, ACO II 4, 92,7ff. = 53,21ff. Silva-Tarouca): Quamvis enim nulli sacerdotum licet nescire quot praedicat, inexcusabilior tamen est omnibus inperitis quilibet Hierosolymis habitans Christianus, qui ad cognoscendam virtutem evangelii non solum paginarum eloquiis, sed ipsorum locorum testimonii eruditur. Et quod alibi non licet non credi, ibi non potest non videri. Quid laborat intellectus, ubi est magister aspectus?
munion with Juvenal. Additionally, Euthymius, a highly revered monastic figure, had accepted the doctrine of Chalcedon from the very beginning and had rejected the offers made by the episcopal usurper Theodosius. This had far-reaching consequences, and Euthymius’ authority may also have influenced Eudocia’s shift of allegiance. Moreover, his disciples became the most important group in Palestinian monasticism and consequently occupied the most eminent episcopal sees of the Holy Land, including the patriarchate. The spirit of compromise in ecclesiastical politics during the reign of Leo and Zeno bore fruit particularly in Palestine where the patriarchs staunchly implemented imperial policy. The *henotikon* edict of Emperor Zeno, issued in 482, which refrained from denouncing the Council of Chalcedon but certainly diminished its importance, resulted in the second Palestinian church union (the first was Eudocia’s shift of allegiance). Consequently, most remaining anti-Chalcedonian monks returned to the Catholic Church. This union also laid the basis for the political prominence of Palestinian monasticism in the sixth century.

**Holy Land Monasticism**

In the late fifth century, the monks of the Judean desert in Palestine – and not the local patriarchs or bishops – became the most influential ambassadors of the Holy Land. This development went hand in hand with the contemporary tendency to attribute extraordinary power to holy men on account of their ascetic lifestyle. The monks of Palestine, however, were uniquely positioned to give this trend new impulses. In contrast to monks in Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor, Palestinian monasticism was international. The monks came from all parts of the Roman world – partic-

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92 Cyril of Scythopolis, *VE* 27. Even though the historicity of Euthymius’s support for Chalcedon is undisputed, one can only speculate about his motives. The study by Binns 1994, esp. 186–187 is not particularly convincing on this matter. Euthymius may have realized that the Church of Jerusalem depended on imperial support.

93 Cyril of Scythopolis *VE* 30. Whenever Cyril recounts his heroes’ victories in the battle for orthodoxy, however, his testimony is of dubious value for the historian. Eudocia’s reconciliation with Juvenal and the Chalcedonian party did not stop her from continuing to support Monophysite monasteries, this time in compliance with the emperor Marcian; cf. Klein 2018a, 13–18; Binns 1994, 187.


97 Monasticism in Egypt also initially had a strong ‘international’ component (cf. e.g. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* or the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*). However, the devastating barbarian incursions in 404, 434 and 444 – and especially the doctrinal controversies following the Council of Chalcedon and Egypt’s drift toward Monophysitism reduced this internationalism to some extent; cf. Griggs 1990, 209ff. Cyril of Scythopolis (*VE* 32) mentions two archimandrites from Nitria who sought refuge from Monophysite attacks. One of them, Martyrius, originated from Cappadocia; the other, Elias, from Arabia. Both eventually became Patriarch of Jerusalem.
ularly, of course, from the East – and sometimes even from outside the borders of the empire. This heterogeneity and its consequences were somewhat softened by a unique self-understanding: the hermits of the Judean desert regarded themselves as elite monks. Moreover, because of their predominantly foreign origins, the monks had no local roots and few contacts among the local population; their uninhabited desert abode and consequent problems of communication, of course, will have contributed to this isolation. In contrast to what Peter Brown has shown for the densely populated rural areas of Syria, these reasons meant that the monks of Palestine neither could nor did act as intercessors or patrons for the population. Instead, they acted on account of an ecumenical responsibility and accountability that they derived from their geographical proximity to the Holy Sites. In their minds, they were truly “imperial monks.” Cyril of Scythopolis shows this in the first of his Lives by connecting the birth of Euthymius in Melitene in Armenia with the death of the Arian emperor Valens at the Battle of Adrianople. Cyril regards the coincidence as a sign of God’s providence, demonstrating the universal ecclesiastical and political importance of this monastic hero. Despite the catastrophic defeat of Roman troops, the coincidence is nonetheless a good omen: it stands for the beginning of the end of the Arian heresy. By means of this analogy, the hagiographer anticipates Euthymius’ prominent role as the paradigmatic champion of the Orthodox Church from the very day of his birth. Cyril of Scythopolis, our main source for these events, wrote in the mid-sixth century. His depiction of both the character and importance of the Judean monks is static and therefore should not simply be applied to the actions of Euthymius, who lived a century earlier. Nevertheless, Euthymius’ role marks the beginning of a development that extended to Cyril’s own time, which we will briefly discuss below.

Sabas (439 – 532), one of Euthymius’ disciples, perhaps accomplished best what Cyril of Scythopolis regarded as the divine mission of Judean desert monasticism. Sabas was not only a monastic hero; he also became famous as an organizer who literally colonized the desert with numerous monastic foundations. In 493, together with a certain Theodosius, he was ordained an archimandrite by the patriarch.

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99 Brown 1982, 103 – 152. In referring to monks as patrons of the rural population, Brown (ibid., 145ff.) also cites examples from Palestine; in contrast to Syria, however, these are exceptions, especially in the region of the Judean desert.
100 Cf. Hay 1996, 118 – 125, here p. 122: “In Palestine we observe an interesting progression. In the late fifth and sixth centuries, the leading monks repeatedly display an aggressive self-assurance that sees them present on the world stage, reflecting their re-integration, when deemed necessary, with the wider Christian community and their assumption of a leading role in theological and community affairs.” On the following, see also my article on “Reichsmönchtum” (as n. 96).
Sabas was now responsible for the lauras in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and Theodosius for the coenobitic settlements. With these appointments, the patriarch skillfully integrated the desert monks into the local church hierarchy. However, the arrangement also allowed monastic leaders to serve as representatives of the Church of Palestine.

The Roman emperors in the latter half of the fifth century pursued a conciliatory policy in their effort to resolve the divisions in the Church caused by the Council of Chalcedon. The policies of Emperor Anastasius (492–518) also, at least initially, took the same tack. However, when – in the second half of his reign – Anastasius himself became increasingly anti-Chalcedonian, conflict with the Church of Palestine became unavoidable. In 511, the situation had become so precarious that Patriarch Elias of Jerusalem decided to send an illustrious delegation to the imperial court in Constantinople. Cyril of Scythopolis quotes the letter of credence signed by the patriarch: “The elite of the servants of God, good and faithful and leaders in the whole desert, including our Lord Sabas, the colonizer and guardian of our desert and luminary over all Palestine, I have sent to entreat your Majesty.”

While the other monks quickly returned to Palestine, Sabas stayed in the capital for half a year to negotiate with the emperor. Yet, even though he found support among the female members of the imperial family, and even though Anastasius himself treated him with respect, Sabas obtained neither political guarantees nor tax remissions for the Church of Jerusalem. Anastasius, however, reassured the desert father that for the time being he would not take action against Patriarch Elias, who refused to follow the emperor’s ecclesiastical policy. Moreover, he consigned a large amount of money to Sabas, which the latter distributed among the desert monasteries upon his arrival.

The ‘cease-fire,’ however, was short-lived. Emperor Anastasius felt obliged to enforce his ecclesiastical policy in the Holy Land. Even when he had spoken with Sabas at the court in Constantinople, he had threatened to depose Elias “in order that the revered region that played host to God may not be sullied by the doctrines of Nestorius.” Two years later, he made good on his threat; in the meantime, Severus, the leading anti-Chalcedonian theologian at the time, was elected Patriarch of Antioch and enjoyed imperial support. As Elias continued to refuse to condemn the Council of Chalcedon and to enter into communion with Severus, the emperor eventually attempted to depose him. Anastasius, however, did not expect the monastic resistance organized by Sabas and Theodosius. They managed to expel both the imperial officials and their military reinforcements from the city. In 515 Anastasius again at-

107 Cyr. Scyth. VS 52.
tempted to depose Elias, this time by much more drastic means. He sent Olympus, the military commander (*dux*) of Palestine, to Jerusalem at the head of imperial troops. Olympus ousted Elias from his episcopal see and sent him to Aila (Aqaba) in exile. Elias was replaced by a certain John, who initially promised to re-enter into communion with Severus of Antioch and to condemn the Council of Chalcedon. However, John quickly broke his promise under the influence of Sabas and other leading desert fathers, since his ecclesiastical office depended on their regional support. The *dux* Anastasius, Olympus’ successor, immediately went to Jerusalem and imprisoned John. When the latter again promised to meet the emperor’s demands, he was released. Overnight, John summoned the desert monks to Jerusalem, where — according to Cyril of Scythopolis — more than ten thousand of them gathered. Only the basilica of St Stephen built by Eudocia was large enough to accommodate so great a number. In the presence of Hypatius, the emperor’s nephew who happened to have made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the *dux* Anastasius, and the civil governor and consular Zacharias, the patriarch John — together with the monastic leaders Theodosius and Sabas — ascended the pulpit and condemned all enemies of the Council of Chalcedon; their speeches met with fervent acclamations from the monks. Hypatius was the first to give in or rather to deviate from his previous dogmatic beliefs: under oath he testified to his orthodoxy and gave the monks a generous donation of money. The *dux*, however, withdrew from Jerusalem to Caesarea out of fear of the monks.¹⁰⁹

In this situation, with the emperor’s reaction imminent, Theodosius and Sabas, acting as “combatants for piety, and generals and champions of orthodoxy” (in the words of Cyril of Scythopolis), issued a highly remarkable letter to Anastasius on behalf of the monks. Formally styled as a petition for peace for the Church of Jerusalem, this letter might more accurately be described as a declaration of war. In the petition, the monks claim that as inhabitants of the Holy Land, they have consistently observed the true and genuine faith through the agency of the holy places and the holy apostles. “Who are we, dwelling every day at the holy places, at which the mystery of incarnation of our great God and Savior was accomplished, where we touch with the truth with our own hands, how then, more than five hundred years since the coming of Christ, are we of Jerusalem to learn the faith?” The monks announce to the emperor that they would never enter into communion with Severus or any other heretic. Moreover, they stress the complete agreement of all inhabitants of the Holy Land on this matter. Lastly, in the event of a violent intervention, they threaten the emperor with the following scenario: “the blood of all of us will willingly be shed and all the holy places be consumed with fire before such a thing come to pass in this holy city of God. For what benefit is there in the bare title of the holy

¹⁰⁹ Cyr. Scyth. VS 56.
places if they are so ravaged and dishonored?"¹¹⁰ We do not know whether this forceful and bold demonstration by the monks impressed Anastasius. For the last two years of his reign, however, he refrained from risking the massacre predicted by the monks by not intervening at all. At the end of his life, he was forced to acknowledge that his church policy had failed, not least on account of the resistance of the Holy Land.

The Contributions of Justinian

The new dynasty that came to power in 518 made an about-face and favored the adherents of the Council of Chalcedon.¹¹¹ Now the monks of Jerusalem and the Judean desert could profit from their successful resistance to Anastasius’ interventions. When Sabas – already over ninety years old – travelled to Constantinople for a second time to gain the emperor’s support for the Palestinian provinces devastated in the Samaritan uprising, Emperor Justinian gave him a lavish reception. According to Cyril of Scythopolis, he sent the patriarch Epiphanius and the bishop Hypatius of Ephesus on imperial galleys to meet him. When the holy man was received at court, Justinian rose from his throne and prostrated himself, thus inverting the usual ceremonial and abasing himself and his office. Sabas purportedly even affronted the empress: the holy man ignored her request for a prayer for an heir, since he disapproved of her anti-Chalcedonian tendencies. Cyril of Scythopolis describes the negotiations between the emperor and the monk as an affair that gave both sides tangible benefits. Sabas received from the emperor the favors he had wanted: (1) tax relief for the Palestinian Church; (2) the rebuilding of church buildings destroyed during the Samaritan uprising; (3) the establishment of a hospital for the sick and for foreign persons in Jerusalem; (4) the construction and adornment of the Theotokos Church in Jerusalem, the foundation of which had already been laid by the patriarch Elias; (5) and the building of a desert fortress to protect the monasteries from Saracen incursions.

In return, the emperor would profit from the prayers of the desert monks, and Sabas prophesized their success: God would remunerate the emperor’s beneficence toward the Holy Land with the acquisition of Africa, Rome, and the rest of the Western Roman Empire. At the same time, however, Sabas reminded the emperor of his duty to enforce orthodoxy everywhere. By regaining the West, Sabas says in Cyril’s account, the emperor should liberate the holy Church from the stain of heresies (explicitly mentioning the Arian, Nestorian and Origenist heresies).¹¹²


This is undoubtedly a *vaticinium ex eventu*. Cyril wants to show that the welfare of the empire depended on the emperor’s piety, which in turn manifests itself foremost in the fight for orthodoxy, reverence for holy men like Sabas, and care for the Holy Land. According to Cyril of Scythopolis, the prayers of the desert monks contribute significantly to the emperor’s success.\(^{113}\) As is well known, Justinian himself shared this view.\(^{114}\)

Even after Sabas’ death, the monks of Palestine enjoyed special status at the imperial court. Their delegates played a crucial role in the theological discussions with the anti-Chalcedonians in Constantinople in the 530s, culminating in the synod of 536, and also in the build-up to the fifth ecumenical council. However, they did not always speak with one voice. After the death of the great monastic leaders, controversy over the dogmatic reliability of Origen shook the solidarity of the Palestinian monks. Although the controversy was only a regional phenomenon, the emperor himself attended to the matter and condemned the Origenists in an edict in 544. The fact that even the fifth ecumenical council 553 addressed the issue and ruled in the emperor’s favor shows how important the question of orthodoxy in the Holy Land had become to the emperor and the Church.\(^{115}\)

Constantinople and Jerusalem now stood in a close relationship on several levels. Justinian made the idea of the Holy Land one of the primary aspects of his self-conception, as both his legislation and especially his building activity demonstrate.\(^{116}\) It was under Justinian and his successors, up to Heraclius, that the ideas of the Holy Land and sacral monarchy were transformed into complementary elements of a unified political theology.\(^{117}\) The alliance was not especially long-lived,

\(^{113}\) The relationship between holy man and emperor as described by Cyril is characterized by Flusin 1983, 207–208 as follows: “C’est lui [sc. Sabas] qui assure miraculeusement la sécurité et la prospérité de l’empire, la droiture et la réussite de la politique impériale. [...] L’empereur agit sur les conseils du moine; le moine prie, sans se mêler d’une tâche administrative; la collaboration des deux activités est nécessaire et efficace.”

\(^{114}\) E.g., in the preface to his constitution *Deo auctore* from 530, Justinian states that all achievements, both military and legislative, were to be ascribed to God, under whose authority the emperor governed the empire, and whose providence inspired all projects and brought them to fruition; cf. Meier 2003, 104–136. God’s support, however, on which Justinian purportedly based his rule above all else, was mediated not least by pious monks and especially by holy men like Sabas; cf. Hasse-Ungeheuer 2016, 120–129, 252–254.


\(^{116}\) See the contributions of Trampedach and Viermann on the Justinianic church-building and political discourse in Jerusalem and Constantinople respectively, both in this volume, and cf. Sivan 2008, 219–225.

\(^{117}\) For a case from the reign of Maurice (582–602) that illustrates the post-Justinianic link between the concepts of the Holy Land and sacred monarchy, cf. Theoph. AM 6094 with Trampedach 2005a,
since Jerusalem was conquered by the Arabs in 638 and thus irrevocably lost to the Roman-Byzantine Empire. Even independently, however, both concepts proved to have a great future ahead of them.

Bibliography


271f.; the link was further developed by the emperor Heraclius (610 – 641); see Howard-Johnston, in this volume and esp. Viermann 2021, ch. 6.


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