A New Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem? 
The Construction of the *Nea* Church (531–543) by Emperor Justinian

The buildings constructed by Emperor Justinian (r. 527–565) not only fundamentally changed Constantinople, but also Jerusalem. Justinian reshaped the urban structure of Jerusalem especially by expanding the *cardo maximus* and constructing a new Church of Mary, the so-called Nea. Two contemporary, completely independent authors and witnesses with very different intellectual backgrounds give us information about these building projects, which continued for a period of twelve years, from 531 to 543: the historian Procopius of Caesarea and the hagiographer Cyril of Scythopolis. These literary sources are complemented by archaeological findings. The part of Jerusalem where these Justinianic buildings stood was thoroughly investigated from 1969 to 1982 by Israeli archaeologists led by Nahman Avigad. The part of their research relevant to my topic was published by Oren Gutfeld in 2012 as volume 5 of *Jewish Quarter Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem*. In this article, I will discuss Procopius and Cyril’s statements about the Nea and compare them to the findings of the archaeological investigation (Section II). On this basis, I will ask what symbolic and theological messages Emperor Justinian associated with the building of the Nea in Jerusalem (Section III). In doing so, I will discuss the theory that Justinian wanted his church to be understood as a typological successor to the Jewish Temple: accordingly, Justinian intended the Nea to be not only a new church of Mary in Jerusalem, but also a new Temple of Solomon.¹ First, however, I will sketch a brief overview of Justinian’s building activity in the Holy Land, which provides the context for the emperor’s building measures in Jerusalem (Section I).

¹ This theory is not new, but was supported or considered by Amitzur 1996; Shahid 2006; Taylor 2008; Gutfeld 2012, 491–494, in part with various arguments that will be examined more closely in this article.
The reign of Emperor Justinian (527–565) may be considered the apogee of late-antique sacred building activity in Palestine, and especially in Jerusalem. AsProcopius lists in his *Buildings* in detail, the emperor himself furnished the money for monasteries, churches, poorhouses, hostels, cisterns and fountains, and even fortresses to protect the monks and pilgrims from desert nomads. He additionally invested in four major projects, three of whichProcopius describes at length: 1) the construction of the *cardo maximus* and Nea Church in Jerusalem; 2) the construction of a massive defensive wall around the Theotokos Church built by Zeno on Mount Garizim in Samaria, to protect it from Samaritan attacks; 3) the construction of a church on Mount Sinai and a fortress at the foot of the mountain; and 4) (missing in Procopius, perhaps because the project was not completed until after *Buildings* was composed) the restoration and expansion of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.² This list immediately raises the question of why the emperor carried out so many large and expensive projects in Palestine. What interest did Justinian have in Jerusalem and the Holy Land?

Two answers spring to mind: first, Palestine was vitally important for the emperor’s religious policy. In contrast to Egypt and Syria, after initial resistance the Chalcedonian definition of faith had largely prevailed in Palestine. The patriarchs of Jerusalem and especially the monks of the Judean desert had vigorously maintained their allegiance to Chalcedon in the face of the intervention of the anti-Chalcedonian emperor Anastasius. After the accession of Emperor Justin in 518, who again made Chalcedon the official orthodoxy, the Holy Land thus automatically became a bastion of the emperor’s religious policy in the East. The Church of Jerusalem played a key part in Justinian’s efforts to restore the unity of the Church and to find a compromise formula that all parties could accept. Bishops and especially monks from Palestine took a leading role in the negotiations. The emperor, in turn, vigorously intervened in person both with theological treatises and official resources when the unity of the Palestinian Church was threatened in the late 530s and early 540s by the so-called Origenists.³

Second, on account of the great number of pilgrims who traveled to the holy sites from every corner of the Empire, it was important to the emperor to remain on good terms with the local authorities. In this way, the emperor could take advantage of a particularly powerful stage for representation. Emperor Justinian used this stage and

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made the idea of the Holy Land a key element of his self-conception. In a novel from 536, Justinian praises Palestine as a province of distinguished cities, of good and learned citizens, of renowned men of God, and “what is the greatest of all,” the site where Jesus Christ appeared on Earth. Another decree from the same year awarded the Church of Jerusalem important financial privileges. The emperor offers the following justification, among others:

> When God, the lord of all and also creator of all things, deigned to give so great a privilege to it [Jerusalem] over other cities, namely that there he would rise from the dead after the flesh, it is clear why We too, who follow the Lord God and his great miracles, have given it a privilege over other churches: thus may it enjoy the benefit of Our law, which we offer to it as a gift, granting it advantages and honoring it in every way.

Benefactions for Jerusalem are part of the emperor’s ideological self-conception: as Justinian himself stresses, they are an expression of the *imitatio dei or mimesis theou* to which the emperor feels particularly bound. Like Constantine in the fourth century and – to a lesser extent – Empress Eudocia in the fifth, Justinian also honored the Holy Land with intense building activity – to an extent that is unparalleled outside Constantinople, even for this building-mad emperor, with the exception of the fortifications on the eastern frontier of the Empire.

Among Justinian’s building projects in the Holy Land, those in Jerusalem were undoubtedly the most significant, and not only on account of the site; the expenses the emperor had to meet to expand the *cardo maximus* and construct the Nea Church were several times greater than those for other buildings in the Holy Land. The mosaic map of Madaba, created in the second half of the sixth century, provides us with an especially vivid impression of contemporary Jerusalem. The map gives an astonishingly accurate picture of Jerusalem, provided one disregards two characteristic theological-ideological distortions: a) the Anastasis complex appears precisely on the major diameter of the elliptically shaped city and thus is placed by the creators of the mosaic in the center of the image, just as the Holy City itself stands at the center of the world; and b) the existence of the Temple Mount is hidden from observers of the mosaic. The topographical location of the *cardo maximus* and the Nea Church,

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4 For the context, see above my chapter on ‘The Making of the Holy Land in Late Antiquity,’ pp. 32–34.
5 Nov. 103, praeaf. (ed. Schoell/Kroll, p. 497, 3–13).
7 Cf. Klein 2011/12, 85–95.
8 Since all four building projects mentioned occupied symbolic sites, they were particularly well-suited to promote the process of de-Judaizing Palestine under the banner of Christianity – a goal clearly connected to Justinian’s anti-Jewish legislation. Cf. Shahid 2005, 374: “It is only natural for an emperor of such anti-Jewish cast of mind to direct his attention to Palestine in order to convert it from a Jewish Promised Land to a Christian Holy Land.” To that effect Shahid ibid., 382–384, convincingly interprets the prooemium of Nov. 103 (cited above), in which the emperor showers lavish praise not only on Jesus Christ, but also on the emperors Vespasian and Titus.
which extends eastward at its southern end, is indicated correctly on the Madaba Map, emphasizing the size and significance of these Justinianic building projects.⁹

II

In his Life of St Sabas, composed around 555, Cyril of Scythopolis relates how the aged desert father obtained several significant privileges for the Church of Palestine during his visit to Constantinople in 531.¹⁰ The Nea allegedly played an important part in the negotiations. According to Cyril, Sabas asked the emperor to build and decorate the Theotokos Church in the Holy City; its foundation had been laid not long before under the archbishop of Jerusalem, Elias (494–515).¹¹ As Cyril continues to relate, the emperor eagerly fulfilled the monastic leader’s wish, provided money, and sent the architect Theodorus to Jerusalem to build the church. Without encroaching on the overarching authority of Archbishop Peter, he commissioned Barachos, the bishop of Bakatha, to oversee the construction, which lasted twelve years until the dedication of the building. “It is superfluous,” Cyril remarks in conclusion, “to describe the size, the incredible brilliance, and the rich ornamentation of this venerable building; it stands before our very eyes, surpassing all previous marvels and tales at which men have wondered and that the Hellenes have recorded in their histories.”¹²

Cyril’s account stresses three things to put Justinian’s achievement in the right light: 1) By building the new Theotokos Church in Jerusalem, the emperor continues and completes a project initiated years before by Patriarch Elias. 2) The initiative to have Justinian build the church, as Cyril expressly emphasizes, was taken by the Church of Palestine and its envoy, the monastic leader Sabas.¹³ 3) The emperor carried out the task requested of him very eagerly by providing for its financing, a competent engineer (μηχανικός), and a suitable overseer. The division of labor Cyril describes precisely matches his ideal: the emperor proves and distinguishes himself as

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¹⁰ Cyr. Scyth. VS 70–73 (171,26–178,18 Schwartz); cf. Trampedach 2005, 279–284. Diekamp 1899, 11–15, has shown that a year must be added to Cyril’s dating after 529 so that Sabas’ journey to Justinian in Constantinople takes place in the year 531 (instead of 530). Stein 1944, 171–180, defended this conclusion against the objections of Schwartz 1939, 343–346, furnishing additional evidence in support; cf. also di Segni 2012, 261 with n. 4.

¹¹ Cyr. Scyth. VS 72 (175,11–15).

¹² Cyr. Scyth. VS 73 (177,14–178,4). It emerges from another passage in his work (Vit. Euth. 49 [71,16–20]) that as a young monk Cyril had personally participated in the dedication of the Nea in November 543.

¹³ Cyril’s account closes with the declaration: καὶ οὐτός μὲν τῆς τοῦ θείου Σάβα τετάρτης αἰτήσεως ὁ καρπός.
helper of the Church of Jerusalem, which is represented by its patriarchs and especially by holy desert fathers like Sabas.¹⁴

With the verdict quoted above, Cyril agrees with Procopius, writing at roughly the same time, who likewise praises the church as a marvel. In contrast to Cyril, Procopius fortunately did not consider a detailed description superfluous: he particularly emphasizes the enormous difficulties that had to be overcome to construct the church.¹⁵ The different focus of the two works derives from their different genres and intended audiences. While Cyril writes to glorify the Church of Palestine and its monks,¹⁶ Procopius’ work is an original, classicizing imperial panegyric, which uses the imperial building projects in Constantinople and the provinces to illustrate the emperor’s devotion to God as vividly as possible.¹⁷ The panegyrical nature of Buildings could explain why Procopius’s description of the Nea mentions neither the laying of the foundation by the patriarch of Jerusalem, nor the initiative taken by the desert father Sabas, nor the officials charged to carry out the construction, but rather heaps all praise for the undertaking on Justinian. According to Procopius, the emperor ordered the church to be built on the highest hill in Jerusalem specifying its width and length and other details.¹⁸ This contradicts Cyril’s report that Patriarch Elias had laid the foundation.¹⁹ Yet, even if Cyril did not invent this account, he certainly may have exaggerated it, and the claim that Sabas initiated the project could also be hagiographical exaggeration. Cyril similarly attributes Justinian’s later military successes in Africa and Italy to Sabas’ prophesies and prayers. In the case of the Nea, Cyril had a vested interest in crediting the Church of Palestine and its monastic leader with the initiative for the magnificent new building in Jerusalem. I will come back to this problem.

Procopius’ account of the building and the shape of the church accords well with the archaeological research directed by the Israeli archaeologist Nahman Avigad in

¹⁴ Thus, according to Cyr. Scyth. VS 72 (175,15), after asking the emperor to finish the Theotokos Church in Jerusalem, Sabas adds the patronizing remark: τούτο γάρ μάλιστα πρέπει καὶ τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ εὐσεβείᾳ. Justinian’s efforts to provide financing, materials, and responsible personnel recall Constantine’s orders for constructing the Anastasis Basilica: cf. Euseb. VC 3,31–32. The mechanikós Theodorus, sent by the emperor to Jerusalem from Constantinople, is probably the same man praised by Procopius (Bell. 2,13,26) as an outstanding engineer in connection with the successful defense of Dara against the Persians in 540 (ἐπὶ σοφία τῇ καλομεμένη μηχανικῆ λογίου ἀνδρός): cf. Martindale, PLRE III B, 1249 (s.v. Theodorus 13).
¹⁸ Proc. Aed. 5,6,4: ἐπέστελε γὰρ αὐτὸ Ἰουστινιανὸς βασιλεὺς ἐν τῷ προῦχοντι γενέσθαι τῶν λόφων, δηλώσας ὅποιον τὰ τέ άλα δείησε καὶ τὸ εύρος αὐτῷ καὶ μῆκος εἶναι.
¹⁹ This contradiction between Cyril and Procopius has curiously gone virtually unnoticed by scholars: cf. Bieberstein/Bleedhorn 1994, II 292; Shoemaker 2002, 101–102; Küchler 2007, 527; di Segni 2012, 259; Gutfeld 2012, 488–489. The authors’ different emphases, however, have been noted by Tsafrir 2000, 151. 154; Shahid 2005, 377 n. 15.
the 1970s, which led to the discovery of substructures and remains of the foundation of the church.²⁰ This is also true of the most spectacular find, which the excavators discovered in a cistern immediately abutting the church’s southern retaining wall, accessible from the north by a gallery furnished with stairs: on the south side, facing the entrance, they found a building inscription framed by a *tabula ansata*:

\[\text{Κ(αί) τοῦτο τὸ ἔργον ἐφιλοτήμαστο ὁ ἕυστεβ(ἔστατος) ἦμων βασιλεὺς Φλάβιος Ἰουστινιανὸς προνοίᾳ κ(αί) σπουδὶ Κωνσταντίνου ὁσιωτά(του) πρεσβ(υτέρου) κ(αί) ἐγουμέ(νου) ἰνδ(ικτίωνος) ἃγῳ +}\n
This work, too, our most pious emperor, Flavius Justinian, generously carried out, with the care and initiative of the most holy presbyter and hegumen, Constantine, in the thirteenth year of the indiction.²¹

The work mentioned here is naturally the cistern in which the inscription was placed. The inscription remained hidden from the public and could at most have been seen at the dedication of the building complex. In Justinian’s long reign, a thirteenth indiction year occurred three times: 534/5, 549/50, and 564/65. Since the substructures to which the cistern belongs undoubtedly must have been constructed before the church itself was built, several scholars have favored the first date.²² Mention of the presbyter and hegumen Constantine, however, whom John Moschus also calls “hegumen of holy Maria, Theotokos, the Nea,” argues against this date. It is highly unlikely that the monastery founded to supervise the sanctuary had already existed several years. Moreover, the introductory “too” (καί) in the inscription apparently refers to the already completed Nea. Thus, as argued by Leah di Segni, it seems most plausible to assume that the massive vaults on the southeastern side of the Nea complex were expanded with a subterranean cistern under Abbot Constantine in 549/50 and that the inscription documents this project.²³

The four main difficulties connected with the construction according to Procopius can easily be visualized in the archaeological findings: 1) the foundation and substructures; 2) the transport of building materials; 3) the construction of the

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²¹ CIIP 1,800; cf. now di Segni 2012.
²³ Di Segni 2012, 261–262, also considers the date 564/565 possible. Shortly after the Nea was dedicated, Patriarch Peter appointed the Origenist monk John the Eunuch, former abbot of the monastery of Martyrius, as the hegumen of the monastery attached to the Church (Cyr. Scyth. VS 86 [193, 17–18]). In light of the Origenist controversy, it is possible that John was replaced before 549/50 by the Constantine named in the inscription. Among the *hegoumenoi* of the Nea monastery mentioned in the stories of John Moschus, Constantine (6), Eudoxius (187), and Abramius (68, 187), the first-named is presumably identical with the local builder of the cistern. Also in this probable case, an early date would be incompatible with the internal chronology of John Moschus. Cf. also Avigad 1993, 134–135; Feissel 2000, 99–100.
roof; and 4) the columns. I will discuss these difficulties and the solutions found for them in order.

1. Procopius describes the hilly topography of Jerusalem, with its abrupt transitions between mountain and valley, as a particular challenge for the builders and architects. The top of the hill was actually too narrow for a church of the Nea's size; accordingly, massive substructures were built on the south-eastern side. The excavations confirm Procopius' account. Above all else, they revealed precisely this extensive foundation work, which still impresses modern observers (Aed. 5,6,2–7). Procopius' panegyrical exaggeration thus is not completely unfounded: “Thus the building rests partly on solid rock and partly floats in the air, after the emperor’s might added mass to the hill” (Aed. 5,6,8).

2. Procopius emphasizes the size of the stones used in the construction and the difficulty of transporting them (Aed. 5,6,9–13). These statements were also confirmed by the archaeo/logical investigation. The blocks excavated in the area of the apses and the southeastern corner are indeed of a remarkable size—particularly for a late-antique building.²⁴ Quarry's are conjectured to the north of the late-antique city and make it clear why it was necessary to widen the streets to build the Nea, as reported by Procopius, for logistical reasons alone. The archaeological excavations and restorations in the southern part of the Cardo give a particularly good impression of these measures: rock up to 6 m in height was removed to level the stairway, which presumably already existed on the hilly terrain, and it was widened so that ox-carts could deliver the blocks of stone needed to construct the church. The ground thus was also prepared for the representative colonnaded street that impressively linked the Nea and the Anastasis Basilica.²⁵

3. Procopius elaborates on the problem of constructing the roof, understandably in the case of the Nea: its naves measured 74.6 m and an inner width of 52.3 m had to be spanned. Procopius describes the long search for sufficiently large trees; at last, he writes, an extensive cedar forest was located, from which the church roof could be fabricated at a height appropriate to its length and width (Aed. 5,6,14–15). Naturally, there are no archaeological remains that could illustrate how this challenge was met.

4. According to Procopius, the columns presented the builders with a similar problem to the roof construction (Aed. 5,6,17–18). Initially, no columns tall and strong enough to support the roof were available. The city’s location in the mountainous inland, Procopius writes, hindered the importation of columns, which had to be monolithic according to late-antique custom. “But when the emperor,” Procopius writes, “was frustrated over the difficulty of constructing the work, God revealed a kind of stone suited to this purpose in the mountains nearby, whether it had lain

²⁴ According to Tsafrir 2000, 154–155, the blocks will have weighed four tons on average; some individual blocks weigh even twice as much. Ben-Dov 1985, 238, who excavated the southeastern corner immediately beyond the Ottoman city walls, mentions (probably inexacty) blocks weighing 5–15 tons.

there hidden before or was first created then. There is good reason in both cases to attribute the cause to God. We who measure all things with our humanly power consider many things sheerly impossible, but nothing on earth is impossible or undoa-ble to God. Thus a great number of massive columns from that place, which resemble the color of burning fire, support the church on all sides, some above and some below, and others in the stoas that surround the entire church except the side facing east. Two such columns standing before the door of the church are exceptionally massive and probably second to none in the entire world” (Aed. 5,6,19 – 22). Procopius then gives a brief description of the narthex, atrium, propylaea, and two hospices connected to the building complex for strangers and the destitute sick. This description ends with the remark that the emperor provided the church of the mother of God with considerable incomes (Aed. 5,6,23 – 26).² The lack of archaeological evidence has prevented us from forming a clear picture of these latter parts of the building.²⁷ Matters are different, however, in the case of the fire-red columns, the process of whose discovery leads Procopius to add theological reflections in his idiosyncratic manner. According to Yoram Tsafrir, the raw material for the columns may have been provided by the red-colored stone known today as mizzi ahmar, which may be found at sites to the north, northwest, and northeast of the present-day Old City of Jerusalem. Tsafrir interprets Procopius’ account of Justinian’s “miraculous discovery” of this stone as suggesting that Justinian’s stone masons used this stone for the first time on a large scale for a monumental structure. There is in fact no archaeological evidence that mizzi ahmar was used in any earlier period of Jerusalem’s building history. It was used, however, soon after: the almost fifty columns of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, probably renovated by Justinian, apparently come from the same source of stone. If this theory is correct, then the costly expansion of the Cardo southwards will have had an immediate, practical purpose in addition to representation and symbolism: as a smooth ramp that made it significantly easier to bring the very long column shafts from the quarries in the north to the construction site.²⁸

²⁶ The hospices for strangers and the sick (as well as the monastery) attached to the Nea are mentioned by the pilgrim from Piacenza (23), who wrote about his journey to the Holy Land around 570. In his account of the conquest of Jerusalem by the Persians in 614, the monk Antiochus Strategos includes among the thirty-five places where the victims of the Persian massacre were laid out after their departure: the Nea (no. 5 on the list), the library of the Nea (no. 8), and the imperial home for the elderly (no. 25); cf. Milik 1960/61, esp. 133, 145 – 151. ²⁷ Gutfeld 2012, 226 – 245, attempts to create a reconstruction with several illustrations that combines the archaeological findings and Procopius’ description. ²⁸ Tsafrir 2000, 162 – 164 (who incidentally also conjectures [cf. ibid. n. 35 and fig. 13] that the approximately 12 m long monolithic column of mizzi ahmar, which on account of a crack was left unfinished in the quarry near the Russian cathedral northwest of the Old City where it may be viewed today in a pit, was also intended for the Nea); cf. Gutfeld 2012, 490 – 491. The assumption of Ben-Dov 1985, 239 – 240 (accepted by Shahid 2005, 381) that Procopius’ language is an attempt to conceal the fact that the ruins of the Jewish Temple were plundered to erect the Nea, and that the columns in
On the basis of the conclusions reached thus far, I would now like to discuss the motives that led to the construction of the Nea. But first I must return to the question of authorship. In light of what has been stated above, I believe it is clear that Cyril’s account, despite his apparently accurate information, gives at least one false impression. The patriarch Elias can not have laid the foundation for a building of this size on this site. He would have severely lacked both the resources and the logistical capacity. At most, it is conceivable that he began to build a much smaller church for Mary, although it must remain uncertain whether he did so on the site of the future Nea or elsewhere in Jerusalem. Procopius explicitly states, as mentioned above, that the emperor personally chose the site, the form, and the dimensions of the church. This statement is naturally an exaggeration, but it is not a topos: Procopius makes no other such claim anywhere else in his Buildings.²⁹ Even in the case of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, he is much more reserved and indicates the importance of the experts, especially the architects and engineers Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus, who supported the emperor’s ambitions. He continues,

Indeed, this too was a sign of God’s honor for the emperor, namely that He provided him with the most suitable men to carry out the work to be done. And one might also marvel at the sagacity of the emperor for this reason: because he of all men was able to select the most suitable men for the most earnest of undertakings.³⁰

Despite its general formulation, Procopius ignores this thought in his description of the Nea and merely mentions “builders” (ἐπιδημιουργοὶ τοῦ ἐργου) who carry out Justinian’s plans. As with the Hagia Sophia, the sagacity of the emperor and God’s grace combine in the construction of the Nea so that the work is a success, but in the case of the Nea it comes without the intervention of eminent collaborators. “Emperor Justinian wrought these things with human strength and skill, but his pious faith rewarded him with honor and assisted him in this undertaking.”³¹ The panegyrical emphasis of this is in my opinion not empty words, but rather suggests that Justinian really was involved in the construction of the Nea with an intensity comparable only to that lavished on the Hagia Sophia. It is very probable that he made use of the collaborators mentioned by Cyril, especially the architect and engineer Theodorus, whom he sent from Constantinople to Jerusalem.³² The account of the laying of

particular came from it, is unconvincing. The columns of the Herodian Temple were ‘only’ 27 feet = 8.64 m high (i.e., smaller than those of the Nea) and were normally constructed of drums: Jos. Ant. 15,413; cf. Avigad 1983, 150–165.
³¹ Proc. Aed. 5,6,16. After this comes the account (quoted in part above) of the miraculous discovery of the quarry that provided the perfect raw material for the columns of the nave and atrium.
³² Above the substructures on the southeast side, where the large cistern with the dedicatory inscription was built presumably later (see above), the excavators uncovered the walls and stone floor of a building that may be identified as the monastery attached to the Nea or the hospices mentioned by
the foundation by Patriarch Elias (494–515), by contrast, is less convincing, particularly since it leaves unanswered the question as to why Elias’ successors John (515–524) and Peter (524–552) did not resume building after 518, when construction interrupted by the confusion caused by Anastasius’ interference with the Church of Palestine could have been continued. Be that as it may, since the hypothetical foundation of Elias will have lain idle for more than fifteen years, and since the concept realized by the emperor far surpassed the financial and logistical capabilities of the Church of Jerusalem, I think it is justified to conclude that Justinian built an entirely new Nea that had nothing to do with any such original plans (if they existed). We thus may now ask what symbolic and theological messages Emperor Justinian wanted to transmit by building the Nea in Jerusalem.

III

After the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, the Nea was the second largest and second most expensive church that Justinian had built. Its dimensions and lavish architecture surpassed even the rebuilt Church of the Apostles in Constantinople and the Basilica of St John in Ephesus.³³ This surely indicates the enormous significance Justinian attached to Jerusalem. But what scope was there for an ambitious ecclesiastical building project in Jerusalem? The key sites of the Gospels were already occupied. The Christian topography of Jerusalem in 531 already contained churches in remembrance of Easter and Pentecost and the miracles of Jesus, and churches built over the graves and relics of martyrs. The Nea, however, had no such associations; at the date of its construction, it was the only prominent church in Jerusalem that was not built, at, over, or on a Biblical lieu de mémoire.³⁴ It goes without saying that it is unlikely such a theologically ambitious emperor as Justinian would have built a monumental church in Jerusalem that made no reference to the biblical importance of the site.

A glimpse at the physical topography of Jerusalem reveals how this historical deficit was supposed to be overcome. Separated by valleys, the Nea sits at approximately the same height as the Temple Mount and the Anastasis complex. If one connects these three points, an equilateral triangle is made. “Emperor Justinian ordered that the church be built on the highest of the hills,” writes Procopius,³⁵ and we have seen that he had to make great efforts to achieve this goal. The elevated site thus must have been very important to him, and naturally it was also well-suited to in-

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³³ For comparisons with other churches built under Justinian, see also Gutfeld 2012, 487–488.
³⁵ Proc. Aed. 5,6,4.
crease the monumentality of the construction. Beyond this, the emperor apparently intended to use the special position of the church to connect it to the other two prominent points in Jerusalem: the Anastasis complex and the Jewish Temple Mount.

Not only its position on the opposite hill, but also its size and ornamentation made the Nea a rival to the central Constantinian church of the city. Yet the expansion of the Cardo created a direct, representational connection between the two monumental church complexes. The correlation between the two could be described as follows: with his basilica for Mary, Emperor Justinian placed a similarly ambitious Christian sanctuary alongside Constantine’s church for Jesus Christ as a worthy counterpart.³⁶ No amount of glory in the world, after all, could have made it surpass the site of the passion and resurrection of Christ.

After some 250 years of insignificance, Constantine had reestablished Jerusalem as a major Christian site. In his Vitae Constantini, the theologian Eusebius of Caesarea describes the emperor’s new Jerusalem “opposite that famed Jerusalem of old, which after the bloody murder of the Lord paid for the godlessness of its inhabitants with its overthrow in utter devastation.”³⁷ This sentence discloses the problem Eusebius saw in the existence of an earthly Jerusalem of Christians. What he and other theologians had considered one of the most important marks of difference from Judaism now threatened to vanish. Therefore, the new Christian city centered around the Holy Sepulcher was emphatically removed from the God-forsaken Jewish city focused on the Temple Mount in spatial terms and yet remained connected to it by supplanting the Temple Mount, interpreted as triumphing over it. The topography suggests a similar dialectic at work in the case of Justinian’s church, particularly since it rose above the ruins of the Temple Mount, by then used as a trash heap, more visibly than the Anastasis complex.³⁸

In Christian Jerusalem, the question of the relationship to the Jewish Temple arises all by itself, but it was also a delicate subject even in Constantinople at this time. Anicia Juliana, a wealthy aristocrat with imperial ancestors, commissioned the construction of what was at the time the largest and most magnificent church in Constantinople; dedicated to the martyr Polyeuctus, the church was completed in the 520s. From the dedicatory inscription, which praises the achievement and noble ancestry of the commissioner in poetical language, it emerges that Anicia Juli-

³⁶ According to Küchler 2007, 529–530, the Nea on the Madaba mosaic serves “wie ein Gegenstück zur Grabeskirche”: “Darin wird die ehrgeizige Absicht Justinians ersichtlich, am prachtvoll verlängerten Cardo maximus Konstantins die größte Marienkirche Palästinas zu errichten.”
³⁷ Euseb. VC 3,33,1.
³⁸ On the topography, see Gutfeld 2012, 4–6 (with fig. 2), 141, and the conclusion 491: “By emphasizing the construction of the church on the highest hill in the city, was Procopius referring to Justinian’s intent to have it overlook the ruins of the Temple Mount – and thus underscore Christianity’s superiority and victory over Judaism?” Cf. also Amitzur 1996, 171; Jacobs 2004, 151; Shahid 2005, 377–378.
ana intended the Church of Polyeuctus to surpass the Temple of Solomon. Justinian apparently interpreted the church and this claim as a challenge, to which he responded with the rebuilding of the Hagia Sophia. Accordingly, in the contemporary tradition the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople is repeatedly compared to the Temple of Solomon: in a famous hymn, Romanus the Melodist compared the reconstructed Hagia Sophia of Justinian in Constantinople to two models in Jerusalem, namely, the Temple of Solomon and the Anastasis and Church of Zion of Constantine and Helena. If this comparison suggested itself for theological reasons for the most important and largest church of the capital, that must have been even more true for a monumental church constructed in Jerusalem itself. And Justinian famously is supposed to have proclaimed at the dedication of the Hagia Sophia: “I have outdone thee, Solomon!” In the year 531, however, when the plans to build the Nea were being drawn up, Justinian could not have known that he would soon have the opportunity (in consequence to the devastation caused by the Nika Revolt in January 532) to rebuild the Hagia Sophia. Accordingly, the visit to Constantinople by the desert father Sabas may have presented Justinian with a welcome occasion to realize his goal of surpassing the Temple of Solomon (and the Church of Polyeuctus of Anicia Juliana) in Jerusalem, the biblical city, itself. It thus is also plausible from the perspective of Constantinople that the emperor conceived of the Nea in order to surpass the Jewish Temple.

The Nea is dedicated to Mary, Mother of God. As Mischa Meier has shown, Emperor Justinian embraced the growing reverence of Mary among the general population and promoted the cult of Mary throughout the Empire, presumably in response to the various crises of the time. Procopius emphasizes one aspect of the policy, namely, the building of churches: “Emperor Justinian built many churches dedicated to the Mother of God throughout the Empire of such magnificence and size and constructed at such extravagant expense that if one were to observe just one of them by itself, he would suppose that Justinian had built this one work alone and had la-

41 Script. Orig. Const. p. I 105,4–5 Preger. Although this statement is attested in a late and unreliable source, in light of the contemporary parallel evidence it should not be dismissed too easily as unhistorical, as Meier 2003, 189, stresses.
bored over it intensively for his entire reign." The Nea naturally belongs in this context.

The “old” churches dedicated to Mary in Jerusalem at the Pool of Bethesda and Gethsemane recalled Mary’s birth, celebrated on September 8, and her childhood home, over which the church was allegedly built, as well as her death and grave. The Nea, by contrast, as mentioned, is not directly connected to any biblical site. A connection to the events of the Gospels could be created only by integrating the church liturgically into the calendar of feast days in Jerusalem. But how was that managed? How was the Nea integrated into the liturgical calendar of Jerusalem?

The chronological proximity of the date of the dedication of the church, November 20 (543) and the ‘The Presentation of Mary’ (ἡ ἐν τῷ ναῷ εἴσοδος τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου) on November 21 is surely no coincidence. When exactly this feast was incorporated in the liturgical calendar of Jerusalem is unknown; the liturgical tradition puts the beginning of the feast in the mid-sixth century. Probably, therefore, the Presentation of Mary linked up with the dedication of the church and in that way entered into the liturgical calendar of Jerusalem (from where it spread first in the Eastern, then also in the Western Church). The feast of the Presentation of Mary celebrates the entry of the three-year-old Mary into the Temple and her nineteen-long stay there, as depicted in the apocryphal Protoevangelium of James. The hymns that are still sung today on this occasion in the Orthodox Church celebrate Mary as “living temple” (ναὸς ἐμψυχος) or as “God-bearing temple” (ναὸς θεο-χώρητος) or as the “most pure temple of the savior” (καθαρότατος ναὸς τοῦ Σωτήρος). This language, which apparently derives from Athanasius of Alexandria, was powerfully deployed by John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria and became downright conventional from the time of the Council of Ephesus on. In the age

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45 Cf. Bieberstein/Bloedhorn 1994, III 167–169 (on St Mary at the Pool of Bethesda). III 251–256 (on the Church of the Sepulcher of St Mary); Küchler 2007, 245–246, 470–471. No contemporary source explains the name ‘Nea’. In the unlikely view of Bieberstein 1989, the Nea took its name not in distinction to an earlier church of St Mary but in reference to the city district of Neapolis.
48 Protoev. Jac. 7–8.
49 ΜΕΓΑΣ ΙΕΡΟΣ ΣΥΝΕΚΔΕΜΟΣ, for November 21, 707–714.
of Justinian, the Mother of God was celebrated in countless hymns as ναὸς ἐμψυχος and with similar expressions. The Nea was the centerpiece of the stational liturgy of Jerusalem not only on the feast of Mary’s entry into the Temple, but also on other days, in connection with major feasts such as Epiphany, the Assumption, and Encaenia (enkainia), and also in commemoration of its founders Theodora and Justinian, as emerges from the Georgian lectionary. In the passages that were read or sung on these days in the Nea, at least those for the dedication of the church on November 20 and for the fourth day of the enkainia refer to the Temple. We thus may confirm that the Nea towered over the Temple of Solomon not only physically: as its liturgical integration into the church calendar makes clear, since it was dedicated to the Mother of God (theotokos) as the true, genuine Temple of God, it surpassed the Jewish Temple theologically as well. The Nea was thus not only the new Church of Mary in Jerusalem, but rather in a sense a new and better Temple.

For this assumption, however, we cannot cite the author Procopius, as Oren Gutfeld does, for instance, who discusses the relationship between the Nea Church and the Temple of Solomon in the concluding chapter of the excavation publication (chap. 23: “Discussion and Summary”). Since Gutfeld does not distinguish between the author of the text and the author of the building described in the text, he credits Procopius with astonishing theological knowledge: It seems that Procopius was also hinting at the prophet Isaiah’s vision of the End of Days: ‘In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.’ (Isaiah 2:2). This claim, however, stands in clear contradiction to the intellectual profile of a classicizing panegyrist interested more in the technology, logistics, and engineering artistry of the buildings he describes than in theological subtleties. Moreover, there is no

51 Rom. Mel. 35, stanzas 2 and 5 (Maas/Trypanis p. 277–278); Trypanis 1968, no. 1 (Akathistos Hymn), stanza 23 (p. 39); no. 11 (On the Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary), stanza 19 (p. 137); no. 12 (On the Dedication of the Hagia Sophia), stanza 3 (p. 142).
53 On November 20: Ps. 131 (David vows to build the Temple); Hebr. 3,1–6 (Christ is higher than Moses); on the fourth day after the Enkainia, cf. Leeb 1970, 77, 96.
54 Gutfeld 2012, 491–493, here 491: “it is hard to discern the great similarities between Procopius’ description of the Nea Church and biblical descriptions of Solomon’s Temple.”
55 Gutfeld 2012, 491; cf. Taylor 2008, 52, who vaguely states that its location on the highest hill in Jerusalem “recalls Isaiah 2:2.”
56 Howard-Johnston 2000, esp. 29, credits Procopius with such a marked interest in building materials and techniques that he proclaims him first and foremost an architect/engineer: “the expertise which he brought to Belisarius’ staff was technical rather than literary or legal or organisational.”
evidence that Procopius possessed any theological learning that would have enabled him to make subtle allusions to Old Testament prophets. When Procopius cites scripture, which is seldom, he does so openly, usually in abbreviated form, and sometimes incorrectly.⁵⁷

Gutfeld also associates the discovery of the cedar forest in Procopius with the story of the “cedars of Lebanon” in the Book of Kings, which King Hiram of Tyre had felled and sent to Solomon for the Temple.⁵⁸ Besides the unremarkable fact that cedar was used as a building material in both cases, there are no similarities to be found between the texts; Procopius does not even mention Lebanon. Again, there is not the slightest indication that Procopius knew the Old Testament text or was thinking of it; on the contrary, his account shows with perfect clarity why the discovery of the cedar forest was so important for the unusually broad roof and thus for completing the construction of the church.

It is another remark of Procopius’ that suggests a Solomonic motif, but of which he himself was unaware. Procopius mentions two especially tall and uniquely massive columns before the entrance to the basilica, without explaining their function or significance. Several scholars have filled this gap with reference to an analogy in the Old Testament:⁵⁹ according to 3 Kings 7:1–9 (LXX), King Solomon had two magnificent columns, called Jachum and Baaz (or Jachin and Boaz in the MT), erected in the vestibule of the main temple chamber. Unfortunately, we cannot tell from Procopius’ description where exactly in the Nea complex the two potentially analogous Justinianic columns stood. How should the location πρὸ τῆς νεώθυρας be interpreted? The columns could not have been erected in the narthex, which Procopius mentions next. As Gutfeld remarks, “the narthex was particularly narrow and such massive columns could not have been properly viewed, and certainly not properly appreciated by visitors. In addition, they would not have allowed for the presence

⁵⁷ Cf. Rubin, RE 23 (1957), 341–343 (s.v. Prokopios von Kaisareia). The Old Testament material that appears in Buildings is scanty and unspecific: Procopius mentions the Babylonian captivity of the Jews in order to explain the name of the northern Syrian town Cyrus (2,11,2). He reports that Moses is said to have received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai and then shared them with men (5,8,8), without discussing further Old Testament stories associated with the site (e.g., the legend of the burning bush). Procopius even mentions a Solomonic temple, not in connection with Jerusalem, but rather with the Libyan city of Boreium; there, he says, “the Jews had an ancient temple that they especially revered and honored since, they say, Solomon built it when he was ruling over the Jewish people” (6,2,22). Procopius does not quote or paraphrase passages from the Septuagint. In building the Nea, did Justinian perhaps have Isaiah 2:2 or even – as Amitzur 1996, 166–167 speculates – Ezekiel 40 in mind? There is no definite indication that he did. It is as a metaphor for the spiritual Church that the verse is understood in the commentaries to Isaiah of Eusebius of Caesarea (PG 24, 101–105), John Chrysostom (PG 56, 28–29) and Cyril of Alexandria (PG 70, 67–72).


⁵⁹ Amitzur 1996, 166; Shahid 2005, 377; Taylor 2008, 52; Gutfeld 2012, 243–244 (with fig. 5.23), 492–493.
of a gallery above the narthex, as required by Procopius’ account.” For lack of a better one, the excavators adopted a solution that in my opinion is still unsatisfactory:

With all the difficulties it entails, we propose that the two columns stood on either side of the central apse, and that Procopius’ description began in the east while facing west, his back towards the apse. First he surveyed the basilica, then turned back towards the apse and described the two massive columns, after which he proceeded westward to the narthex and atrium.\footnote{Gutfeld 2012, 243. The excavators believe they have found a foundation stone for a monumental column in the eastern wall on the north side of the apse; they reconstruct a column diameter of 2.40 m and a height of 17.75 m (including base and capital).}

This reconstruction not only contradicts Procopius’ wording; it reduces the analogy of the Nea columns to Jachin and Boaz, since they would not be standing before the church, as the latter did before the Temple of Solomon. The excavators did not consider the possibility that the columns may have stood in the atrium adjoining the narthex. Without any comparable cases, however, this idea seems likewise rather improbable. Hence the question can only be answered conditionally: if Justinian attempted to imitate the columns before the Temple of Solomon with the two giant columns before or in the Nea, he would have revived a tradition that could put his church in a particularly close relationship to God and compensate for its lack of a basis in the New Testament.

Another famous remark of Procopius is as mysterious as the exact location of the two giant columns. In his history of the Vandalic War, the historian reports that at Belisarius’ Vandalic triumph in 534, the Jewish treasure that Titus had brought with other booty to Rome in 70 after the capture of Jerusalem, and which the Vandals had seized and brought to Carthage in 455, was carried through the streets of Constantinople and into the Hippodrome. Procopius adds that out of fear, on the advice of a Jew, the emperor then quickly had the treasure transferred to the Christian churches of Jerusalem (ἐδεισε τε καὶ ξύμπαντα κατὰ τάχος ἐς τῶν Χριστιανῶν τὰ ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἱερὰ ἐπέμψεν).\footnote{Proc. Bell. 4,9,5–9.} Unfortunately, this imprecise remark in Procopius is the last information transmitted about the Jewish temple treasure.

This action already seems strange because late-antique emperors usually had no second thoughts about the repatriation of sacred objects, but rather on the contrary made great efforts to obtain relics from all parts of the Empire, and naturally from the Holy Land in particular, for the capital Constantinople and their palaces. If we follow Procopius, we might plausibly conjecture that Justinian had destined these objects to be kept and displayed in the Nea, his new temple in Jerusalem.\footnote{Taylor 2008.} Yet several pieces of evidence argue against the credibility of Procopius’ report:\footnote{Cf. Boustan 2008, 356–362.} in his account of the looting of Rome by Gaiseric, Procopius does not mention the Jewish
treasure. Instead, he mentions elsewhere that, during the sack of Rome in 410, Alaric looted “the treasures of Solomon, the king of the Hebrews, a most spectacular sight: for most of them were decorated with emerald; the Romans had seized them long ago from Jerusalem,” and brought the treasure to Carcassonne in southern Gaul (Bell. 5,12,41–42). Procopius does not comment on the contradiction. Other, earlier and independent sources, such as Jordanes and Victor Vitensis, who describe the looting of Rome by Gaiseric, apparently knew nothing about the κειμήλια of Solomon. The way in which Procopius justifies moving the temple treasures to Jerusalem is also utterly untrustworthy. It is a Jew who is supposed to have caused the emperor (through the intercession of someone in the emperor’s circle) to restore the valuables from the Temple to Jerusalem (“the place where Solomon the king of the Jews had once placed them”). According to Procopius, the Jew succeeded in convincing Justinian that his own palace in Constantinople might suffer the same fate as the palaces in Rome and Carthage because of the presence of the Jewish temple treasure. Yet how could these objects have presented a threat under the banner of orthodox Christianity? Has Procopius here ascribed his own superstition to the emperor? According to Shahid, who attempts to bolster Procopius’ account with two further arguments, “the existence of the Vessels in Constantinople would have been grist to the mill of the late Anicia Juliana, especially if they had been deposited in the Church of Polyeuctus, thus endowing it with an unusual sanctity.” But why would Justinian have placed the vessels in the Church of Polyeuctus? He could have had them temporarily kept in the palace church and then donated them to the Hagia Sophia in 537. Shahid’s second argument is no more plausible:

The superstitious emperor may have remembered from reading the book of Daniel in the Old Testament that the misuse to which the vessels had been put by the Neo-Babylonian king Belshazzar finally led to the destruction of his kingdom. After he used the Vessels at his banquet,

64 Proc. Bell. 5,12,41–42: ἐν τοίς ἵν καὶ τὰ Σολόμωνος τοῦ Ἐβραίων βασιλέως κειμήλια, ἀξιόθεατα ἐς ἄγαν ὄντα. προσίᾳ γὰρ λίθος αὐτῶν τὰ πολλὰ ἑκαλλωπίζεν, ἀπερ ἐξ Ἰεροσολύμων Ῥωμαίων τὸ πολλαῖον ἐῖλον. In connection with “Belisarius’ triumph,” Procopius similarly states (Bell. 4,9,5): τὰ Ἰουδαίων κειμήλια (…), ἀπερ ὁ Οὐσπασιανοῦ Τίτος μετὰ τὴν Ἰεροσολύμων ἀλωσιν ἐς Ῥώμην ἧν ἔτερος τινον ἴγνυκε.

65 But why should Procopius have invented this strange story? Boustan 2008, 360, gives the following answer: “It offers Procopius an effective rhetorical strategy for linking the triumph to the glorious victories of the Flavians over an earlier ‘internal enemy’ – in their case, the Jews rather than the Vandals – but without actually having to contend with the inconvenient traces that the vessels might have left behind in the capital.” This explanation gains in plausibility if one presumes Procopius has largely exaggerated (rather than invented) the account. Perhaps that is why Procopius avoids naming specific objects. At any rate, it is difficult to imagine that Procopius, who considers emeralds worth mentioning in the case of Carcassonne (see above) would pass over in silence spectacular objects like the seven-armed menorah or the golden showbread table, if they had been carried through Constantinople with Belisarius in triumph.
the moving finger appeared on the wall and prophesied his downfall, in the four mysterious words that Daniel interpreted for him.\textsuperscript{66}

But why would the orthodox emperor Justinian identify with the heathen king Belshazzar (Dan. 5:1–5 LXX)? Aside from his blasphemous treatment of the temple vessels, such an interpretation relies on the absurd assumption that Justinian as head of orthodox Christianity would not have considered himself the rightful owner of the temple vessels. According to all that we know about Justinian’s religious self-understanding, the opposite must have been the case.

If Belisarius did indeed bring any objects from the temple treasure from Carthage to Constantinople, and the entire story has not been fabricated by Procopius, but merely exaggerated, and if Justinian sent these objects to Jerusalem, then he did so not out of religious fear, but rather to lend visible support to the contention of the triumph of Christianity over Judaism at the place of the appearance, suffering, and resurrection of Christ. Such a calculation, however, would presume that the objects from the Solomonic (actually, Herodian) Temple would be presented to a broad Christian public. The Nea, which was already under construction in 534, would have been an ideal stage for this purpose. Yet the sources tell us no such thing. For lack of evidence, it must remain doubtful whether the Jewish treasure ever reached this church or any other place in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{67}

We unfortunately soon lose track of the completed building in the obscurity of history. The pilgrim from Piacenza, who traveled to the Holy Land in 570, and John Moschus in the early seventh century, mention the Nea.\textsuperscript{68} The Nea is also mentioned in a mosaic inscription that adorns the grave of one Kyriakos, who died on December 11, 566, in Jericho.\textsuperscript{69} The church was apparently damaged but not destroyed during the capture of Jerusalem by the Persians in 614. There is scattered evidence of cult continuity until the early ninth century, probably in a small part of the gigantic building complex.\textsuperscript{70} The \textit{Commemoratorium de casis dei}, dating to the year 808, lists the Nea as damaged by an earthquake and prescribes it a clergy of twelve persons.\textsuperscript{71} Eutychius of Alexandria in 935, however, reports that the Nea was destroyed in 614 and not rebuilt.\textsuperscript{72} Although this statement is not credible on account of mentions of the Nea in the sources until the early ninth century and the lack of archaeological evi-

\textsuperscript{66} Shahid 2005, 375–376.
\textsuperscript{67} Taylor 2008, 54, believes, on the contrary, that the treasure reached Jerusalem, but was hidden: “The absence of any reference to the Temple treasure in the few accounts we do have may be due to the fact that it was not on show but stored below in the vaults, guarded by the monks and by the apotropaic care of the Mother of God.”
\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Itin. Plac.} 23,1; Joh. Mosch. 6, 61, 68 and 187; cf. Küchler 2007, 530–532.
\textsuperscript{69} SEG 8,315; Milik 1960/61, 147; Gutfeld 2012, 250.
\textsuperscript{71} Cf. McCormick 2011, 103–111.
\textsuperscript{72} Breydy 1985, I 98–99, II 118–119.
dence, it at least shows that already in the tenth century the Nea had largely vanished from the scene. The destruction of the Nea is remarkable— a unique occurrence that demands an explanation: since the Nea was not tied to a lieu de mémoire in a narrow sense, but rather derived its significance from an artificial theological concept, despite its former monumentality and liturgical centrality, it could vanish from the sacred topography of Jerusalem after the ninth century unmourned and unsung. Besides, the theological concept lost its point (it was, so to say, “historically overcome”) as soon as the Temple Mount ceased to be in ruins—serving as a trash heap and thus referring to the destroyed Jewish Temple in a negative way— but was developed into the religious center of Islamic Jerusalem through the construction of the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque at the turn of the seventh and the eighth centuries.

Bibliography


