

Religious Innovation under Fatimid Rule: Jewish and Muslim Rites in Eleventh-Century Jerusalem

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Abstract

This paper describes religious innovations introduced by Muslims in the (arguably) holy month of Rajab, and by Jews on the High Holidays of the month of Tishrei, in eleventh-century Jerusalem. Using a comparative perspective, and grounding analysis in the particular historical context of Fatimid rule, it demonstrates how the convergence of sacred space and sacred time was conducive to “religious creativity.” The Muslim rites (conducted on al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf / the Temple Mount) and the Jewish rites (on the Mount of Olives) shared a particular concern with the remission of sins and supplication on behalf of others, and a cosmological world view that envisioned Jerusalem as *axis mundi*. The Jewish rite was initiated “from above” by the political-spiritual leadership of the community, was dependent on Fatimid backing, and was inextricably tied to specific sites. The Muslim rite sprang “from below” and spread far, to be practiced in later periods all over the Middle East.

Keywords

Jerusalem – Fatimids – Jews – Muslims – religious rites – Rajab – Tishrei – sacred space – sacred time

Having noted the wealth of sources for a multi-religious study of Jerusalem during the Fatimid period—thousands of Geniza fragments, reports of Latin

pilgrims, Nasir Khosraw's travelogue, and the first *Faḍā'il Bayt al-Maqdis* (The Merits of Jerusalem) treatises—Oleg Grabar presents the following observation: “The overwhelming picture offered of medieval Jerusalem is that of separate religious communities, and the academic result is the ecumenical juxtaposition of the lives and activities of these communities in whatever sequence editors and organizers of symposia have chosen.”¹ Quite in agreement with Grabar, in the introduction to his meticulous study of the Ḥaram (Temple Mount) of Jerusalem as an area of spiritual power for Jews and Muslims (324–1099), Andreas Kaplony writes: “Despite the promising situation of the sources, research has often been restricted to the examination of one religious community. Not only has this method deprived us from the opportunity to see one and the same aspect from different sides, but it has also prevented from understanding how conceptions migrated between communities.”²

The following joint paper is an attempt to redress this state of affairs, focusing on rituals that were initiated by Muslims and Jews in eleventh-century Jerusalem. Although we are not claiming mutual influences or borrowings by one religion from another, neither do we necessarily assert that conceptions indeed migrated between communities;³ we do suggest that it is worthwhile to examine from a comparative perspective the different communities that shared the sacred space of Jerusalem. This is all the more so regarding the under-researched century of Fatimid rule in Jerusalem: 970–1099, with a Seljuq-Turcoman interval between 1074 and 1098.⁴ While Christians made up

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- 1 Oleg Grabar, “Space and Holiness in Medieval Jerusalem,” in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Lee L. Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999), 192.
 - 2 Andreas Kaplony, *The Haram of Jerusalem 324–1099* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002), 1–2. And see his later “Manifestations of Private Piety: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Fatimid Jerusalem,” in *Governing the Holy City*, ed. Johannes Pahlitzsch and Lorenz Korn (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004), 33–45, where, among others, he identifies Muslim, Christian and Jewish “hotspots” for ritual prayer within the city.
 - 3 Early Muslim sources do suggest such migration, inferring that it should be avoided. See, for example, a question posed, as it were, to two Companions of the Prophet: “Have you perceived what the people believe regarding this rock? Is it true that we have to follow, or is it something originating from the book [of the Jews and Christians], so that we should leave it?” (Ofer Livne-Kafri, “*Faḍā'il Bayt al-Maqdis* (‘The Merits of Jerusalem’) Two Additional Notes,” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 19 (2001): 61–70 at 63–64. See also Amikam Elad, “The History and Topography of Jerusalem during the Early Islamic Period: the Historical Value of *Faḍā'il al-Quds* Traditions—a Reconsideration” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 14 (1991): 41–70 at 55.
 - 4 An important recent work is: Omar Abed Rabo, “Jerusalem during the Fatimid and Seljuq Periods: Archaeological and Historical Aspects” (PhD dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012) [in Hebrew, English summary]. Regarding the short Seljuq occupation, see

several firmly established communities in Jerusalem, owned significant property, administered dozens of churches and monasteries and may have still constituted the largest group in the city,⁵ this paper concentrates on the Muslim and Jewish communities and pilgrims. A secondary purpose of this work is to suggest a fresh perspective on the dynamics of religious life in medieval Middle Eastern Islam and Judaism.

We begin with a short introduction to Fatimid Jerusalem, followed by a description and analysis of the religious innovations introduced by Muslims and Jews in eleventh-century Jerusalem, and then go on to reflect on the similarities and the differences between them. Finally, we attempt to explain the dissimilar courses of development taken by Jewish and Muslim rites during the Fatimid period and beyond it.

The Jerusalemite historian and geographer al-Muqaddasī, writing in the second half of the tenth century about Jerusalem's beauty, well-stocked markets and public institutions, famously complains that Christians outnumber the Muslims in the city. He also says that Jerusalem was smaller than Mecca, but larger than Medina, and more populous than many provincial cities. Goitein convincingly claims that the repeatedly mentioned number of 70,000 persons killed by the Crusaders in Jerusalem some 130 years later, in 492/1099, cannot be regarded as a reliable indication of the number of its inhabitants at the end of the Fatimid period. In any case, the numbers must have fluctuated considerably in the course of that tumultuous century, due to al-Ḥākim's persecutions, Bedouin raids, two serious earthquakes, economic dearth and the Turkoman incursion. Regarding Islamic learning in Jerusalem, al-Muqaddasī notes with sorrow that only few Muslim scholars spend their time and disseminate their knowledge in the city. Ibn Arabī, who visited the city shortly before its conquest by the Crusaders counted twenty-eight study circles (apparently of Muslims) and "many leading [Sunni] scholars together with the principle heretics (*mubtadi'a*) ... as well as Jewish Rabbis (*aḥbār*), Christian and Samaritan sages too many to be counted."⁶

In the middle of the fifth/eleventh century, Christians resided in the north-eastern part of the city, around the Holy Sepulcher and near St. James Cathedral in the south; Rabbanite Jews concentrated near the Western Wall and near the

Mustafa A. Hiyari, "Crusader Jerusalem 1099–1187 AD," in *Jerusalem in History*, ed. Kamil J. Asali (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2000), 130–176 at 135–137.

5 Moshe Gil, "Dhimmi Donations and Foundations for Jerusalem (638–1099)," *JESHO* 27 (1984): 156–174; esp. 157, 164–165.

6 J. Drory, "Some Observations during a visit to Palestine by Ibn al-Arabī of Seville in 1092–1095," *Crusades* 3 (2004): 101–124 at 121.

Damascus Gate; the Karaites lived in a separate quarter in the south of the city. Pilgrims from all regions filled the city, a topic we will return to later.⁷

1 The Islamic Rituals

The Andalusī scholar Abū Bakr al-Ṭurṭūshī (d. 520/1126), quoting an earlier eyewitness by the name of Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī, offers a vivid description of the emergence of a new supererogatory prayer on the 15th of the month of Shaʿbān (the eighth month of the *hijrī* calendar), and a short account of a new prayer assembly on the month of Rajab (the seventh month). Both months were generally, though by no means unanimously, regarded as especially blessed. Evidently, from Ṭurṭūshī's conservative, Māliki perspective, the two prayers were sorry cases of *bidaʿ*—unwarranted innovations, deviating from the way of the Prophet and the early Muslims.⁸

Ṭurṭūshī writes: “We never had this *ṣalāt al-raghāʿib* (prayer for great rewards) that [now] is prayed in Rajab and Shaʿbān in Jerusalem, before 448 [1056–7]. Then, a man from Nablus known as Ibn Abī al-Ḥamrā, a proficient reciter (*ḥasan al-tilāwah*), came to us to Jerusalem. He rose and prayed in al-Masjid al-Aqṣā⁹ on the night of mid-Shaʿbān, and one person entered the prayer behind him (*aḥrama khalfahu*), and then a third and fourth [man] joined them, and by the end of it they constituted a large group. When he came again the next year many people prayed with him and filled the mosque, and the prayer spread within the al-Aqṣā Mosque and in the homes of the people, and finally it became established as if it were a *sunna* until our own day ...

7 S. D. Goitein, S. D. and O. Grabar, “al-Ḳuds,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, ed. P. Bearman et al. Consulted online on 31 July 2016 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0535> First published online: 2012.

8 Abū Bakr al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Kitāb al-Ḥawādith wa-l-Bidaʿ*, ed. ‘A. M. Turki (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990), 266–7; for Spanish translation, see M. Fierro, *Kitāb al-ḥawādith wa-l-bidaʿ* (= *El Libro de las novedades y las innovaciones*) (Madrid: CSIC, 1993). For earlier treatments of this case, see Marion H. Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 149–153; Daniella Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 63–66; Daniella Talmon-Heller and Raquel Ukeles, “The Lure of a Controversial Prayer—*ṣalāt al-raghāʿib* (The Prayer of Great Rewards) in Sixth/Twelfth–Eighth/Fifteenth-Century Arabic Texts and from a Socio-Legal Perspective,” *Der Islam* 89 (2012): 141–166; Raquel Ukeles, “Jurists’ Response to Popular Devotional Practices in Medieval Islam,” in *Islamic Law in Theory. Studies on Jurisprudence in honor of Bernard Weiss*, ed. A. Kevin Reinhart and Robert Gleave (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 177–198, with references to earlier work on *bidaʿ*.

9 This must refer to the whole area, not only to the southern building, which came to be known by this name (Kaplony, *Ḥaram*, 89–95).

As for the prayer of Rajab (it) was instituted here in Jerusalem only after 480 [1087]. We had not seen it or heard of it prior to that year.”¹⁰

Ṭurṭūshī’s account expresses his negative stance towards religious innovation (*bidaʿ*). His depiction of the man who allegedly introduced the new prayer as a stranger, whose major merit lies in his being a brilliant performer, infers that this person lacked any religious authority. The description of the people who assembled behind him, one by one, hints at the inertial force of the ignorant crowd, and implies that the sheer acceptance of the new prayer by many people does not indicate its religious validity. While Ṭurṭūshī’s description may be regarded as a literary device, used to discredit the prayers, it may well have been based on actual occurrences in eleventh-century Jerusalem. Jonathan Smith has already pointed at the “imperialistic eagerness with which ritual takes advantage of an accident and by projecting on it both significance and regularity, annihilates its original character as accident.”¹¹

Al-Ghazālī, al-Ṭurṭūshī’s contemporary, confirms the report about the successful implementation of the new prayer in Jerusalem. He mentions in his encyclopedic *Iḥyāʾ Ulūm al-Dīn*, that in Rajab—it must have been in 1095–6, a period he had spent in the mosques of Jerusalem—he had “seen the people of Jerusalem collectively (*bi-ijmāʿihim*) performing it eagerly, refusing to forgo it.” He did not share al-Ṭurṭūshī’s negative appraisal of the ritual: in his view it was a recommended (*mustahabbah*) prayer. He goes on to quote a *ḥadīth* allegedly transmitted “only by the few,” a long communiqué from the Prophet, prescribing an intricate, demanding and ultimately very rewarding ritual on the night following the first Thursday of Rajab. We can note that while the proper time for the performance of the prayer is spelled out, a specific place is not designated. It reads as follows:

One who fasts on the first Thursday of Rajab, then prays between the evening and night prayers twelve *rakʿas* (prayer cycles), inserting the salutation (*taslima*) between each pair of *rakʿas*, with each *rakʿa* including one recitation of the *fātiḥa*, three repetitions of “We have indeed revealed this on *laylat al-qadar*” [Q. 97] and twelve repetitions of “Say: He is God, the One and Only” [Q. 112]; then after completing his prayer, he prays for me [i.e., the Prophet] seventy times saying, “O God! Pray for Muḥammad the

10 Al-Ṭurṭūshī, *al-Ḥawādith wa-l-Bidaʿ*, 266–267. The “interview” with his informant may have taken place during al-Ṭurṭūshī’s three-years sojourn in Jerusalem in the early 1090s (Hiyari, “Crusader Jerusalem,” 120). Abū Bakr Ibn al-Arabī records having met him then and there (see Drory, “Some Observations,” 121).

11 Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 54.

untutored Prophet and for his family,” then does a full prostration and says seventy times in the prostrated position, “Most majestic and holy, Lord of the angels and the spirit (*sabūh qudūs rabb al-malā’ika wa-l-rūh*),” and then he raises his head and says seventy times, “O Lord! Forgive and take pity, overlook that which You know, for You are the most powerful and kind,” and then prostrates a second time and repeats what he said in the first prostration, and finally, remaining in the prostrated position, he asks for his personal needs—they will be granted ... God forgives all the sins of the person who performs this prayer, even if they were like the foam on the sea, or numerous as sand, or weighty as mountains or as the leaves of trees, and when the Hour comes, he will be allowed to intercede for 700 members of his family, who are doomed to hell-fire.¹²

The idea, that in Jerusalem God forgives sins and answers prayers readily, appears explicitly in early Islamic traditions, and was manifested in several religious rites. Yet the Rajab “prayer of great rewards” (*ṣalāt al-raghā’ib*) was to enjoy great success beyond the city limits.¹³ In the second half of the twelfth century, communal gatherings for its performance became customary (*alā ‘adat al-nās*)¹⁴ in Baghdad, Damascus, Mecca, Medina, Cairo, Harran, the Hijaz, and the Yemen (see fig. 1). They were led, so it seems, by local prayer leaders (*imāms*), with the enthusiastic participation of commoners, who also endowed the supplies of oil, candles and food for the vigil. Most scholars, however, argued that it was an invented tradition, faultily based upon an unsubstantiated *ḥadīth* (“weak” or “fabricated”) and notwithstanding—incorrectly

12 Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Khayr, 1994), 1:268. Translated into English also in *Worship in Islam. Al-Ghazzālī’s Book of the Ihyā’ on the Worship*, trans. Edwin E. Calverley (London: Christian Literature Society for India, 1925), 210. A more complete version of the *ḥadīth* is cited in Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawdū’āt*, 2:436–7. For a preliminary discussion of medieval Islamic and modern scholarly understandings of the expiatory power of religious rites see Marion Katz, “The Ḥājj and the Study of Islamic Ritual,” *Studia Islamica* 98/99 (2004): 95–129, esp. 102–109.

13 For an elaborate discussion, accompanied by twenty-seven translated excerpts, see Talmon-Heller and Ukeles, “The Lure.” For an earlier compilation devoted to the medieval controversy over the prayer, see Muḥammad N. Albānī, *Musājala’l-Imīyya bayn al-Imāmayn al-Jalīlayn al-‘Izz b. ‘Abd al-Salām wa-Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ* (Damascus: Manshūrāt al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1960–61). For a discussion of the sanctity of Rajab, see Meir J. Kister, “Radjab is the month of God,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 1(1970): 191–223, repr. in *Studies in Jāhiliyya and Early Islam* (London: Variorum, 1980), no. XI1; *idem*, “Radjab,” *EP* 8:373–75.

14 Ibn Rajab, *al-Dhayl ‘alā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah*, ed. Muhammad H. al-Fiḳī, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba’at al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadiyyah, 1952), 1:318.

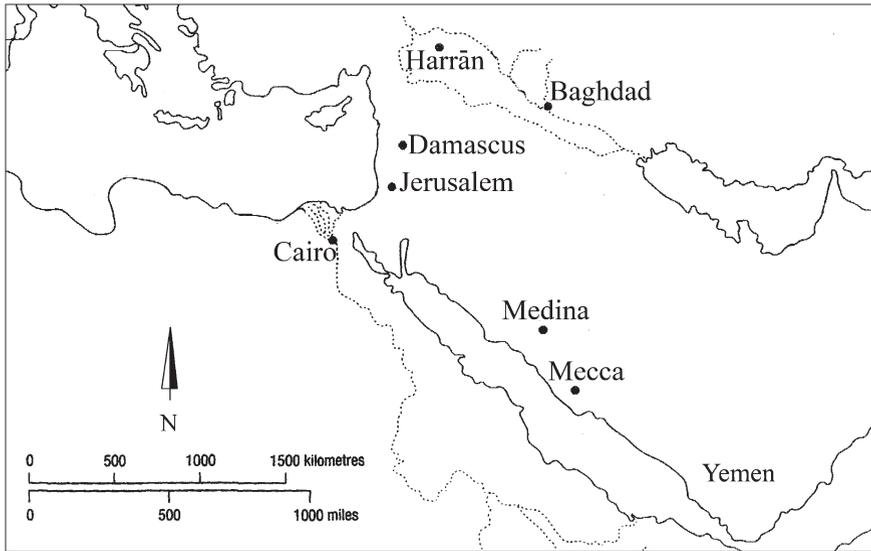


FIGURE 1 The documented dissemination sites of the prayer of great rewards in the Mamluk period

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performed.¹⁵ In 637/1239–40, the prominent preacher of the Great Mosque of Damascus Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām forbade its performance and even urged the Ayyubid ruler al-Malik al-Sāliḥ Ismā‘il to abolish it. Still, it was held in many cities, in large and heterogeneous crowds.¹⁶ At its height, the prayer of great rewards seems to have been a genuine expression of the piety of ordinary Muslims, living in an age of elevated religious devotion in the Middle East: the era of the Christian crusades, the Islamic counter-crusade, and the final stages of the Sunni revival. Moreover, as the biographical sources and historical chronicles reveal, despite the controversy, the prayer also attracted the sympathy and even the participation of some scholars.¹⁷

But let us return to Jerusalem, and to the appearance and popularization of this special prayer, initiated, according to our sources, by an indistinctive visitor to mid- or late-eleventh-century Jerusalem. Assuming that the short Seljuq interval did not have an immediate effect on religious life, we may seek

15 See, for example, Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, “*Risāla fī Radd Jawāz Ṣalāt al-Raghā’ib*,” 55–8; Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya*, 8:251–255.

16 Abū Shāma, *al-Bā’ith*, 158. ‘Izz al-Dīn does give permission to fast on Rajab and to vow to fast the whole month, and so did Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūri in one of his *fatwas* (Kister, “Rajab is the Month,” 207–208).

17 Talmon-Heller & Ukeles, “Lure of a Controversial Prayer.”

the explanation in the long years of Fatimid rule. On the one hand, there is a common view that Fatimid Shi'i ritual left few traces on the religious culture of Egypt or surrounding regions, evidenced by the rapid disappearance of Shi'ism following the Fatimids' demise. On the other hand, a few studies have identified lingering residues of Fatimid ritual on subsequent Egyptian popular religious expression. Recently Stephennie Mulder has drawn attention to a spirit of ecumenism that permeated Sunni and Shi'i popular practice at sacred sites in Syria.¹⁸ These works suggest that the Fatimids may have influenced later Egyptian and Syrian culture—not by spreading Shi'ism, but in the development of new forms of religious and ceremonial expression. Linking late-eleventh-century devotional practices performed by Sunni commoners on Rajab with the Fatimid accentuated veneration of Rajab—portrayed in various sources as dominated by the court¹⁹—may not be so far-fetched.

Even more probable, perhaps, is the assumption that Fatimid building activity on the Temple Mount influenced, or even shaped, the development of ritual. Here again, the works of Grabar, Kaplony and Abed Rabo on the one hand, and those of Livne-Kafri and Elad on the other hand, provide data and food for thought. Grabar highlights the Fatimid reconstruction of al-Aqṣā Mosque and the Dome of the Rock after the earthquakes of 1015 and 1033, and a number of additions to the Ḥaram, including inscriptions with dominant themes of Islamic piety: the Prophet's night journey, resurrection, and judgment.²⁰ Abed Rabo surveys in detail the Fatimid building projects on the Ḥaram.²¹ Kaplony suggests that the Fatimids, with immense financial investment, made the whole space of the Ḥaram into an imperial mosque complex with minor mosques girding it on all four sides: al-Aqṣā Mosque, the monumental east gate and the west gate, the chamber of David, the Mosque of the Cradle of Jesus, the Dome of the Chain and the Gate of Gabriel. Hence, a growing number of

18 Stephennie Mulder, *The Shrines of the 'Alids in Medieval Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

19 The religious justification of those particular occasions may be found in the 25th *majlis* of the *Kitāb al-Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya*, a collection of Ismā'īlī sermons held in the Fatimid palace during the reign of Caliph al-Mustanṣir (427/1036–487/1094). See Abū al-Qāsim al-Maliḡī, *Al-Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya li-l-Dā'ir 'Alim al-Islām Thiḡat al-Imām*, ed. Muhammad K. Ḥusayn, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1947). Shi'is based the veneration of the three months on their own version of the Prophetic *hadith* claiming that "Rajab is the month of God ...," namely: "Rajab is my ['Alī's] month, Sha'bān is the month of the Messenger of God, Ramaḡān is the month of God" (Kister, "Rajab," 198).

20 Grabar, "Space," 199.

21 Abed Rabo, "Jerusalem," 262–271.

sites gained special status.²² Most relevant for our case is the multiplication of prayer niches: inside the al-Aqṣā Mosque, in the four minor mosques, and in two minor domes on the platform. The first extant guide for the Muslim pilgrim, some seven folios included in a work entitled *Faḍā'il Bayt al-Maqdis wa-l-Khalīl wa-Faḍā'il al-Shām* (The Merits of Jerusalem, Hebron, and Syria) written by Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Musharraf b. al-Murajjā in the 430s/1030–1040,²³ recommends individual prayer—both ritual prayer and supererogatory prayer based on certain formulas and gestures—at those sites.²⁴ It may be argued, therefore, that all those new prayer niches served as an implicit invitation to create new prayer assemblies, adding onto earlier traditions and customs affixed to certain locations on the *Haram*, some of which were arranged in a circuit already in the eighth century.²⁵

Some of the traditions identify specific locations in the city (see fig. 2), at which the qur'ānic theme of repentance and reward plays out. The eastern wall, with the Gate(s) of Mercy (*Bāb al-Raḥma*), was known both as the qur'ānic “wall with a door in it, inside will be mercy, and outside it punishment (or doom)” (Q. 57:13 and 7:46), and as the place where David realized that God had accepted his repentance (Q. 38:24). This double designation made it into a spot at which all penitents may hope to be redeemed.²⁶ The south-western gate

22 Andreas Kaplony, “635/638–1099: The Mosque of Jerusalem (*Masjid Bayt al-Maqdis*),” in *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade*, ed. O. Grabar and B. Z. Kedar (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press/Austin: University of Austin Press, 2009), 117–123.

23 Ibn al-Murajjā, *Kitāb Faḍā'il Bayt al-Maqdis wa-l-Khalīl wa Faḍā'il al-Shām*, ed. Ofer Livne-Kafri (Shefaram: Aimashreq, 1995). For an introduction to this genre, stressing the antiquity of the traditions incorporated into it, see, for example, Amikam Elad, “The Historical Value of *Faḍā'il al-Quds* Literature,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 14 (1991): 41–90; Livne-Kafri's “The Muslim Traditions ‘In Praise of Jerusalem’ (*Faḍā'il al-Quds*): Diversity and Continuity,” *Annali* 58.1–2 (1998): 165–192, and other publications by the same author.

24 Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍā'il*, 64–81; Kaplony, “635/638,” 127.

Kaplony, “635/638,” 127. Ibn al-Murajjā also recommends the recitation of Sūrat Ṣāḍ and a formula based on al-Zabūr (The Book of Psalms) 108 and 151 at Miḥrāb Da'ūd by the city Gate, and the recitation of Sūrat Maryam at Miḥrāb Maryam (Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍā'il*, 80–81). He was preceded by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), who mentions these traditions some 200 years earlier. (Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍā'il*, 80–81; Livne-Kafri, “*Faḍā'il*,” 66). Regarding the citation of al-Zabūr, Livne-Kafri suggests that the Muslim text makes some use of motives from Psalms, taken from *ḥadīth* compilations of the ninth century and from early *adab* literature, rather than from contemporaneous Jewish or Christian liturgy in Jerusalem (Livne-Kafri, “*Faḍā'il*,” 67–68).

25 Elad, “Historical Value,” 69.

26 Kaplony, *Haram*, 71–72. Also connected to David's repentance are the above-mentioned *miḥrāb* by the city gate (mentioned already by Ibn al-Faqīh in the tenth century (*Kitāb al-Boldān*, ed. de Goeje, Leiden: Brill, 1885, 101), and “the hills of Jerusalem” (*Jibāl Bayt*

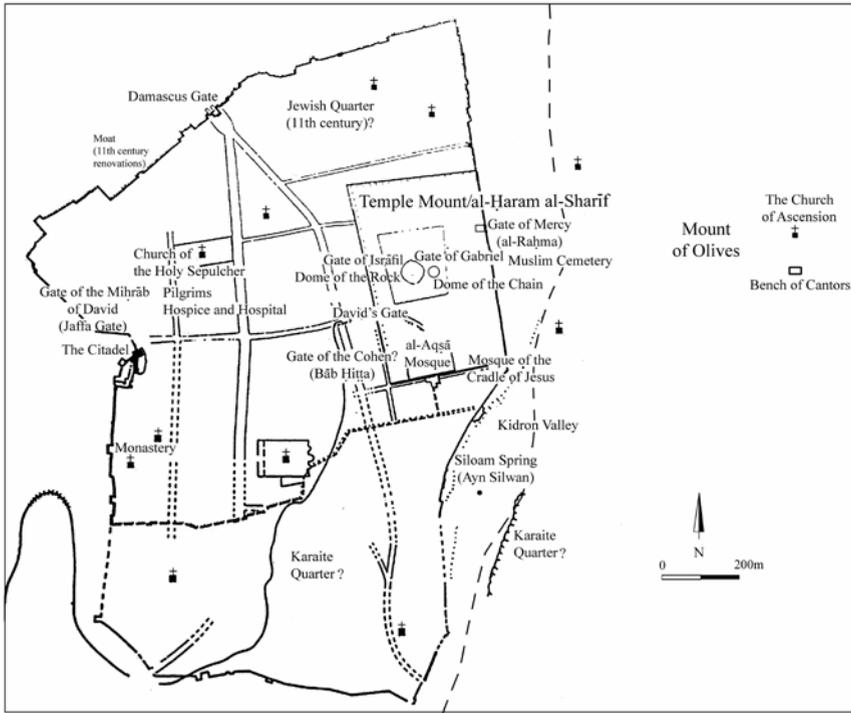


FIGURE 2 Jerusalem in the eleventh century: Jewish and Muslims sites mentioned in the article (Drawing: Patrice Kaminsky). Based on Amikam Elad's map of eleventh-century Jerusalem. We thank Prof. Elad for his permission to use his map.

known as the *Hittā* Gate, through which God ordered (in vain) the Children of Israel to enter, saying: "Enter the gate, prostrate, and say '*hittā*', and we shall forgive you your transgressions" (2:58).²⁷ The Dome of the Chain (Qubbat al-Silsila) and the Gate of Isrāfil were likewise known to be places where sinners should pray and repent. While ritual prayer was recommended for the Dome,

al-Maqdis), to which allegedly David, burdened by guilt, resorted to cry for his sins (Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍā'il*, 183).

²⁷ Kaplony, *Haram*, 607–609. See Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem & Islamic Worship* (Leiden: Brill 1995), 117, for account of an eleventh-century pilgrim performing a ritual at the gate. Ibn al-Arabī reports having entered through the gate in the year 486/1093 and adds: "I fell on my knees and prostrated and uttered "There is no God but Allāh, God relieved me of my iniquity and pardon me. I stayed there for years, and although I went through it often, I repeated this each time: 'We have heard and obeyed, Praise be to God Lord of the Universe'" (Drory, "Some Observations," 115–116).

at the gate it was advised to recite Muḥammad's special prayer for times of distress, or a formula allegedly composed by 'Ali b. Abī Ṭālib: "O Kāf Hā Yā'Ayn Šād [the "mysterious letters" opening Q. 19:1], O Light of Light, O Holy, O God, O Merciful [three times]. Forgive me the sins which ... make enemies increase ... hold back prayer ... which uncover the veil [seven times]."²⁸

A rock at the center of the Ḥaram was named "Solomon's Chair," to mark the place where Solomon had prayed after having completed the construction of the Temple and a location where all prayers are answered.²⁹ The Church of Ascension on the Mount of Olives was also a popular visiting place for Muslims, who believed it to be a privileged sacred place where prayers are received,³⁰ and they kept visiting it in spite of sharp criticism from religious authorities. Ibn Murajjā was prepared to accord the place recognition, by recommending, in his eleventh century guide for the Muslim pilgrim, that "the prayer Jesus offered when God made him ascend to heaven should be recited at the site of the ascension on Mt. Olives." As noted by Livne-Kafri, this is the only supererogatory prayer (*du'ā'*) that Ibn Murajjā recommends to recite at a specific location in Jerusalem.³¹

That said, it is not superfluous to note that the very character of Jerusalem as a pilgrimage town was likely to cultivate spontaneous expressions of piety, some of them innovative. We have explicit, even if impressionistic, tenth- and eleventh-century references to the volume of traffic to Jerusalem. Al-Muqaddasi states that "never for a day are its streets empty of strangers." The pious custom of donning the special clothes for the pilgrimage to Mecca in Jerusalem, and the highly contested notion that one could substitute for the *ḥājj* with repeated visits to Jerusalem and the performance of the *ta'rif* there, drew Muslims from distant countries to Jerusalem. There is particular evidence of the presence of Maghribī travelers, Muslims and Jews.³² According

28 Kaplony, *Ḥaram*, 99, 703. Both texts appear in Ibn al-Murajjā, *Fadā'il*.

29 Muḥjir al Dīn al-Ḥanbalī, *al-Uns al-Jalīl*, 11: 374; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 91.

30 Ora Limor, "Sharing and Competition: Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage in a Multi-Religious Perspective," in *Pilgrimage; Jews, Christians, Moslems*, ed. Ora Limor, Elhanan Reiner, and Miriam Frenkel (Raanana: Open University Press, 2014), 280–281 [in Hebrew]. See also Miriam Frenkel, "Politics and Power in Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Fatimid Period," in *idem*, 135–156.

31 Livne-Kafri, "*Fadā'il*," 66.

32 Al-Maqdisi, *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fi Ma'rifat al-Aqālīm*, trans. in B. Collins, *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions* (Reading: Garnet, 1994), 140; S. D. Goitein, and O. Grabar, "al-Ḳuds," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. Consulted online on 31 July 2016 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0535> First published online: 2012; Abd al-Aziz Duri, "Jerusalem in the Early Muslim Period 7th to 11th Centuries

to Nasir Khosraw's estimate, in some years, more than 20,000 people of the area came during the first days of Dhu al-Hijja alone, in addition to Christians and Jews from Byzantium and other places.³³ The Burgundian monk Rodulfus Glaber (980–1046) suggests that in his days an unprecedented number of “nobles and commoners” from Italy and Gaul made their way to Jerusalem. He also mentions “an innumerable multitude of people from the whole world ... finally, and this was something which had never happened before, numerous women, noble and poor,” that took the trip thanks to the opening of a new and safe route, via the newly converted Hungarian Danube valley.³⁴ An especially large German company, consisting of at least two thousand pilgrims (according to contemporary estimates seven or twelve thousand men left for the journey) arrived in 1064–65.³⁵ It can easily be imagined that some of those visitors were possessed by heightened religious fervor and were easily attracted to any curious gathering. Jerusalem, especially when sacred space (the Ḥaram) and sacred time (the month of Rajab)³⁶ converged, was an ideal setting for the appearance of contagious new forms of religious devotion among devotees of all denominations.

AD,” in *Jerusalem in History*, ed. Kamil J. Asali (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2000), 116–118. Duri notes that after the Seljuq takeover, Jerusalem was even more open to scholars and visitors (*idem*, 119). On the merits of performing pilgrimage to Jerusalem, especially on foot, as portrayed in early Islamic literature, see Livneh-Kafri, “Muslim Traditions,” 174, and Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 62–68.

33 *Nāṣer-e Khosraw's Book of Travels (Safarnāma)*, trans. W. M. Thackston Jr. (Albany: SUNY, 1986), 21.

34 See Iris Shagrir, *The Crusades: History and Historiography* (Raanana: The Open University of Israel 2014), 56 [in Hebrew], based on Rodulfus Glaber, *Opera*, eds. and trans. John France, Neithard Bulst, Paul Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 97, 199, 201. Rodulfus tells of one such pilgrim, who had achieved his desire to die in Jerusalem after having said a passionate prayer on the Mt. of Olives.

35 On this group, and on fluctuation in the volume of pilgrimage from Europe to Jerusalem in the course of the eleventh century, see David Jacoby, “The Economic Impact of Christian Pilgrimage on the Holy Land, Eighth–Sixteenth Century: A Long-Term Overview,” in *Religion and Religious Institutions in the European Economy, 1000–1800* (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2012), 698–701; and the earlier E. Joranson, “The Great German Pilgrimage of 1064–1065,” in *The Crusades and Other Historical Essays Presented to Dana C. Munro*, ed. L. G. Paetow (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1928), 3–43. On the intensive pilgrimage from Europe in the 11th century see also Ora Limor, “Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages,” in Limor, Reiner, Frenkel, *Pilgrimage*, 165–169 [in Hebrew].

36 For a discussion of propitious times for petitionary prayer, see Marion Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 39–40.

2 The Jewish Rituals

A letter written in 1057 by the head of the Yeshiva of Jerusalem, the Jewish center of leadership in the Fatimid era, Gaon Elijah b. Shlomoh, says: "... This is what we pray for in our synagogues, as well as on Mount Olives, when all our brethren, the house of Israel, assemble in the month of Tishrei, the mighty month (*hodes ha-eitanim*), to pray in front of the stones of Jerusalem and to kiss its earth, to circumambulate its gates, and to prostrate in prayers and supplications."³⁷

The Gaon's letter describes a series of ceremonies and rituals initiated or revived by the Jewish leaders, the heads of the yeshiva of Jerusalem and their entourage, and conducted by them. The ceremonies took place during the autumn High Holidays of the month of Tishrei, from the day of the Jewish New Year (*Rosh ha-Shana*), with the public ceremonial announcement of the intercalation and the order of the Hebrew calendar,³⁸ and ended on the day of *Hoshana Rabba* with public prayers for rain. Special festive prayers were conducted along the whole month in the synagogues as well as in the private homes of Jewish notables in Jerusalem. The heads of Jewish communities and other communal leaders from all over the country assembled in the city, as the month of Tishrei was also the time for official announcements about new appointments to various communal positions (*hakhrazot*), and for festive sermons delivered at the synagogues.³⁹ The most significant event was no doubt the central ceremony on the Mount of Olives on the day of *Hoshana Rabba*.⁴⁰

During the eleventh century, the Mount of Olives became the major Jewish ritual compound, serving as a substitute for the Temple Mount, which Jews were not allowed to enter.⁴¹ Mount Olives, overlooking the Temple Mount, was

37 Firkovitch 11 (Harkavi), unidentified manuscript, published by Moshe Gil, *Palestine During the First Muslim Period 634–1099* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University and The Ministry of Defense- Publishing House 1983), 111:16, no. 420 [in Hebrew].

38 Although a fixed calendar based on mathematical and astronomical calculations was established already in the 4th century, the Jerusalem Yeshiva, which perceived itself as the successor of the ancient Sanhedrin, still held the privilege of announcing ritually the order of the Hebrew calendar in the eleventh century. This was done each year, at these ceremonies of Tishrei.

39 TS NS 320.42, Gil, *Palestine*, 11:252–54, no. 141, lines 1–17 [in Hebrew].

40 For a spectacular description of this ritual, see: Elhanan Reiner, "Jewish Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages," in: Limor, Reiner, Frenkel, *Pilgrimage*, 94–101; 107–109.

41 Following the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem Jews were allowed to settle down in Jerusalem and to enter the Temple Mount, after being banned from doing so during Byzantine rule. The Umayyad caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (717–720) renewed the

already considered holy in the late Byzantine period, as manifested in several homiletic exegeses (*midrashim*) dating from late antiquity;⁴² but it was during the Fatimid period that the status of this place as a major holy site was shaped and institutionalized. The site itself acquired a new holy topography. A large rectangular rock at the very top of the mountain, previously unheard-of, was dubbed “the Bench of Cantors” (*kise ha-ḥazanim*). It was sanctified and identified as the place where the presence of God (the *shekhina*) resided after the destruction of the Second Temple, before ascending back to heaven, and as the place to which it will return at the time of salvation.⁴³ The “Bench of Cantors” (see fig. 2) was actually declared *axis mundi*, the universal pillar that connects heaven and earth and therefore is a point of intercession between men and God, a function traditionally attributed to the Temple Mount. In this respect, the sanctity of the Temple Mount was partially relocated to the Mount of Olives.

The ceremony on *Hoshana Rabba* started at the open space in front of the Gate of the Cohen (*sha'ar ha-Cohen*). Pilgrims from all over the Jewish world assembled there, to join a spectacular procession, led by the Gaon. Chanting special prayers of praise and litanies, the procession headed towards the Mount's summit, stopping at the various gates of the wall that surrounded the Temple Mount, to perform more prayers,⁴⁴ thereby renewing a practice known already from late antiquity. It was called *Sibuv ha-She'arim*, the

prohibition on the entrance of Jews to the esplanade, as explicitly mentioned in a Karaite bible exegesis (where it is attributed to the improper conduct of the Rabbinate on the compound). See Salomon ben Yeruḥam's Commentary on Psalms 30: 10, in Jacob Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1935), II: 18–19 (mentioned by Reiner, “Jewish Pilgrimage,” 64).

- 42 Reiner, “Jewish Pilgrimage,” 77–83; Haviva Pedaya, “Metamorphoses in the Holy of Holies: From the Margins to the Center,” *Jewish Studies* [Mada'ei ha-Yahadut] 37 (1997): 53–110 [in Hebrew]. On the parallel Christian site of the Stone of Ascension on the Mount of Olives and the close resemblance between the Christian and Jewish traditions concerning this mountain, see Reiner, “Jewish Pilgrimage,” 82–83 and the bibliography cited there; Ora Limor, “Sharing and Competition: Holy Places and Pilgrimage in a Multicultural Perspective,” in Limor, Reiner and Frenkel, *Pilgrimage*, 263–268 [in Hebrew].
- 43 Arabic Box 53.2, Gil, *Palestine*, 11:5–6. See also Kaplony, *Haram*, 241. On the parallel Christian site of the Stone of Ascension on Mount Olives and the close resemblance between the Christian and Jewish traditions concerning this Mountain, see Reiner, “Jewish Pilgrimage,” 82–83 and the bibliography cited there; Ora Limor, “Sharing and Competition: Holy Places and Pilgrimage in a Multicultural Perspective,” in Limor, Reiner and Frenkel, *Pilgrimage*, 263–268 [in Hebrew].
- 44 Shulamit Elizur (ed.), *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Pinhas ha-Kohen* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2004); Menahem Zulai, *Eretz Israel and Its Poetry* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995), 120 [in Hebrew].

circumambulation of the gates.⁴⁵ The revival and institutionalization of this old practice was another way to adjust to restrictions of access to the compound of the Temple Mount. The *Sibuv* outlined a new holy track which surrounded the esplanade without actually entering it, thus enacting its holiness through ritual circumambulation.

Upon arrival at the top of the Mount of Olives, the participants of the procession organized in a structured manner. Each community and every social class—notables, children, women, Torah scholars, etc.—had its own place, thus forming a representative panoramic picture of all the components of the “People of Israel.” The Gaon himself stood on the “Bench of Cantors” and delivered a festive sermon, at the end of which he also gave blessings to the various communities and especially to those persons who donated to the yeshiva.⁴⁶ Their names were written down in a “memory book” and announced publicly. Bans on community members who committed religious and other transgressions were also declared publicly. These included husbands who married a second wife without court permission, litigants who resorted to Islamic courts instead of Jewish ones, defaulted debtors, renters in arrears, those who withheld tax monies from the communal coffers, and anyone who failed to comply with a court decision or a communal edict.⁴⁷

It can be argued that it is the abundance of information concerning the eleventh century offered by the documentary Genizah, in contrast to the scarcity of historical sources for earlier periods, that distorts our perception of these rites, and that what seems to be an innovation of the eleventh century is actually a continuation of older traditions and practices that, in the absence of contemporary historical sources, did not reach our cognizance.⁴⁸ But it is our assertion that the new Jewish religious practices described above clearly bore the marks of contemporary political elements. The eleventh century brought about a new phase in the history of the Jewish community of Jerusalem. The main center of Jewish leadership, Yeshivat Geon Yaacov in Jerusalem, retained, for the first time, an official position granted formally by Muslim rulers. According to the Fatimid *Ismāʿīlī* world view, the head of the Jewish communities was considered an organic, albeit inferior, part of the ruling system of the

45 TS 13J 11.5, Gil, *Palestine*, 11:195, no.105, lines 14–16 [in Hebrew]; Reiner, “Jewish Pilgrimage,” 61–68.

46 Firk. 11, Gil, *Palestine*, no. 420, fol. 3, lines 19–20, 31–33.

47 Marina Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of the Community; The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 208–209.

48 Reiner believes that these eleventh century rites and ceremonies were indeed practiced as early as the ninth century and even earlier (see his “Pilgrimage”).

Empire.⁴⁹ Hence the yeshiva was financially supported by the Fatimid regime. The Gaon, the head of the Jerusalem Yeshiva, was appointed as the “head of the Jews” in the empire and derived his authority directly from the imam-Caliph.⁵⁰ This innovation imposed a new Jewish political order, and it demanded the recognition of the Jewish population. In its pursuit of legitimacy and loyalty, the new Jewish leadership promoted a series of religious innovations in the city of Jerusalem. The heads of the yeshiva, now recognized and backed by the Fatimids, re-sketched a sacred map, taking into consideration the city’s holy topography under Muslim rule. The rituals performed during the holy month of Tishrei were actually an amalgamation of religious rites with rites of power and authority. In this sense they resembled the public ceremonies conducted in Cairo by the Fatimid Caliphs, as depicted and analyzed by Paula Sanders, who claims that, “these ceremonies responded as much to the changing urban landscape of Cairo and Fustat as they did to dramatic political and religious changes.”⁵¹

49 For more on the Fatimid bureaucratic apparatus built after the model of the Ismāʿīlī Daʿwā, see Leila S. al-Imad, *The Fatimid Vizierate, 996–1172* (Berlin: K. Schwarz, 1990), chapter 4, esp. 161–162. See also Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany: SUNY, 1994). Sanders shows how the Fatimid conception of government was reflected in public ceremonies in Cairo.

50 Jacob Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs* (New York: Ktav, 1970), 1: 38–39; Mark R. Cohen, *Jewish Self Government in Medieval Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 53–54; Gil, *Palestine*, 1:452–453; Miriam Frenkel, *The Compassionate and Benevolent; The Leading Elite in the Jewish Community of Alexandria in the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2006), 154–155. Shulamit Sela and Elinoar Bareket tried to show that the Gaon held religious authority over the Rabbanite Jews alone, while it was actually the Head of the Jews (*Raʿīs al Yahūd*) who presided over all three Jewish congregations in the Fatimid Empire. See Shulamit Sela, “The Head of the Rabbanite, Karaite and Samaritan Jews: On the History of a Title,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and Arabic Studies* 52 (1994): 255–267; Shulamit Sela, “The Leadership of the Jews of the Fatimid State in Karaite Hands,” in *Masʿat Moshe: Studies in Jewish and Arabic Cultures in Honour of Moshe Gil*, ed. Ezra Fleisher et al. (Jerusalem, 1998), 256–281 [in Hebrew]; Elinoar Bareket, “Sar ha-ʿEdah Abraham ha-Kohen the Physician ben Isaac ben Furat,” *HUCA* 70–71 (1999–2000): 1–19 [in Hebrew]; Elinoar Bareket, “The Head of the Jews (*Raʿīs al Yahūd*) in Fatimid Egypt: A Reevaluation,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 67 (2004): 185–197. Their claims are still to be proven against Goitein’s finds about the nomination of the Gaon by the Fatimid caliph. See S. D. Goitein, “The President of the Palestinian Yeshivah (High Council) as Head of the Jews of the Fatimid Empire,” in his *Palestinian Jewry in Early Islamic and Crusader Times in the Light of the Genizah Documents*, ed. Joseph Hacker (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1980), 57–60, 77–78 [in Hebrew].

51 Paula Sanders, “From Court Ceremony to Urban Language: Ceremonial in Fatimid Cairo and Fustat,” in *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times*, ed. Clifford E. Bosworth et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 311–321.

Among the many prayers delivered during the whole month of Tishrei, there were traditional prayers, and also ad hoc prayers, composed in honor of new appointees to the highest positions at the yeshiva. “We prayed for him as a member” (*ṣalaynā‘alayhi ḥaver*) was the accepted way to announce that a certain person, endowed with his new title, was appointed to the much-desired position of member of the yeshiva. The senior positions of the yeshiva were declared through the prayers delivered during the first day of *Rosh ha-Shana*. On the other days of the month, nomination for lesser positions—such as judges (*dayyanim*) of the various communities—were declared in the same way.⁵²

The new public rites in Jerusalem were an efficient tool for the yeshiva leaders to promote loyalty, obedience and legitimacy to their newly enhanced rule, but they also fulfilled important functions of communication. The Jerusalem Yeshiva, which now stood at the head of a vast, scattered and heterogeneous community, had to find new ways of distributing its word to the remote communities in Egypt and Syria, now under its leadership. It had to develop a new language with which it could speak to the new public, a language legitimate and authoritative enough to capture the religious imagination of all groups within the Jewish rabbinic community.⁵³

It seems that the new rites responded to the deepest religious emotions of the Jewish people at that time and retained a truly popular character, as reflected in a contemporary letter, written in response to an attempt to prohibit the ceremony on the Mount of Olives by the Muslim authorities. The author describes collective stress and anxiety, saying: “Our holiday turned into mourning and sighing. Most of the people cry and moan and complain.”⁵⁴

Prayer at the holy places of Jerusalem, especially during the month of Tishrei, was considered much more effective than any other prayer. Moreover, pilgrims to Jerusalem took upon themselves to intercede for their families and acquaintances back home. As a matter of fact, all Jewish residents of Jerusalem, and especially the yeshiva leaders, were regarded as emissaries who pray constantly for the sake of all their Jewish brethren. Hence the Gaon and his entourage could not only communicate with the communities under their authority through the many pilgrims who arrived annually for the Tishrei ceremonies, but also managed to establish their image and the image of the yeshiva as faithful representatives of the whole Jewish people vis-à-vis God

52 Gil, *Palestine*, II:253, no. 141, fol. 1, lines 7–9.

53 Miriam Frenkel, “Politics and Power in Jewish Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Fatimid Period,” in: Yitzhak Hen and Iris Shagrir (eds.), *Ut Videant et Contigant; Essays on Pilgrimage and Sacred Space in Honour of Ora Limor* (Raanana: Open University Press, 2011), 135–156 [in Hebrew].

54 Bodl. Ms Heb c 13.23; Gil, *Palestine*, II:223, no. 122, fol. 1, lines 11–12 [in Hebrew].

in the most sacred places and as the custodians of these places. As the Gaon himself put it in one of his letters. "We are for you all like 'a peg in a firm place' (*yated ne'eman*, Isaiah 22:23)."⁵⁵ The annual ceremony on the Mount of Olives was also a way to demarcate the boundaries of the community and to mark outsiders who were not to be included in it, either because they had committed religious transgression or because they refused to accept the authority of official judges and communal leaders. The ceremony on the Mount of Olives served as a suitable occasion for the declaration of bans: The masses of people who witnessed the event provided it with social power, while the holiness of the place awarded it with religious intensity. The public announcement of the bans was an efficient way to warn the dissidents, and an effective demonstration of power by the leaders.

The political, communicative, and social functions fulfilled by the new religious practices in Jerusalem did not exclude other motives for their rise. The conspicuous presence of the Karaites in the city, especially of the members of the Karaite movement known as "The Mourners of Zion" (*Avelei Zion*),⁵⁶ who introduced new rites of mourning over the destruction of the Temple, was no doubt another major factor in the construction of the new Jewish rites.⁵⁷ The Mourners of Zion were an ascetic group that had developed from the Karaite movement, putting constant mourning at the heart of its religious doctrine. Its members settled in Jerusalem at the end of the ninth century and were very active in the city until its occupation by the Crusaders in 1099. For more than two centuries, Jerusalem was the Karaite intellectual center, home to the most conspicuous medieval Karaite theologians Salomon ben Yeruham, Daniel al-Qumisi and Yefet ben Eli. They encouraged Jews to conduct an ascetic way of life and to settle in Jerusalem, in the vicinity of the ruins of the Temple, in order to pray and mourn there over its destruction, until the day of redemption. The "Mourners of Zion" produced highly structured rituals of bereavement and mourning in Jerusalem: elaborate liturgy, the circumambulation of the Temple Mount, and special prayers at its gates and on the top of the Mount of Olives. These rituals resembled the rabbinic rites but were conducted separately,

55 Frenkel, "Politics and Power," 139.

56 Gil, *Palestine*, 1:505–508; Daniel Frank, "The Shoshanim of Tenth-Century Jerusalem: Karaite Exegesis, Prayer and Communal Identity," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. Daniel Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 199–245; Yoram Erder, *The Karaite Mourners of Zion and the Qumran Scrolls* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004) [in Hebrew].

57 Elhanan Reiner, "Destruction, Temple and Sacred Place: on Questions of Time and Space in the Middle Ages," *Kathedra* 97 (2000): 47–64 at 51–54 [in Hebrew]; Elhanan Reiner, "Jewish Pilgrimage," 68–72.

two–three months before the rabbinic rites on Tishrei—mainly on the ninth of Tamuz and on the seventh and tenth of Ab—designated by the Karaites as the proper days for fasting and lamenting over the destruction of the Temple.⁵⁸ The Karaite rituals in medieval Jerusalem differed from those of the Rabbanites not only because of their timing but mainly because they were essentially rites of mourning and grief over the destruction of the Temple, while the extravagant rabbinic rites with their hymns and litanies were constructed as a substitute for the absent Temple, not as expressions of grief over its loss.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the Karaite conspicuous presence in the city, besides arousing tension and hostility between the two Jewish denominations,⁶⁰ also challenged the rabbinic traditional cult in Jerusalem and affected it. The intricate ways in which the two rites affected and molded each other have yet to be studied.

The political and social analysis of the rise of the religious innovations offered so far, does not sufficiently explain their sweeping acceptance by contemporary Jews. We must assume that they were well attuned to sincere religious inclinations and feelings, and strive to explain how. This was well understood not only by the Gaon, but also by his political rivals. In 1039, Nathan ben Abraham, Solomon ben Judah Gaon's political opponent, tried to pull together many of his supporters at the *Hoshana Rabba* assembly in order to demonstrate the power of his political faction. In the instructions he gave to one of his men he wrote: "Each person, whose heart was touched by God, should voluntarily come to Jerusalem ... and you should pull towards you other people too, and God will grant you success."⁶¹ In these words Nathan ben Abraham expressed his conviction that ritual should be done "voluntarily," and his understanding that unless it arouses powerful affective responses in its participants, sophisticated political manipulation cannot do it. Nathan's words reflect well the intricate relations between orchestrated and authentic religious innovations—or at least suggest that the two may not necessarily be contradictory opposites. It remains for us to decipher how the new rituals succeeded in capturing the religious emotions and imagination of contemporary Jews and gaining such popularity among them. One possible explanation is that the new ceremonies relied on past Jewish rites, which were already deeply embedded in Jewish tradition. The ritual of circumambulating the Temple Mount and praying at each of its gates (*sibuv ha-she'arim*) was already practiced in the Byzantine

58 Rustow, *Heresy and Politics*, 200–236. The Rabbanite parallel fasts take place on Tamuz 16 and Ab 9.

59 Reiner, "Jewish Pilgrimage," 69–70.

60 Gil, *Palestine*, 1:652–660 [in Hebrew].

61 TS 10 j 9.25, Gil, *Palestine*, 11:320–21: 187 [in Hebrew].

era, and many of the new eleventh-century rites echoed the temple rituals, as minutely described in the Talmud. The ascension to the Mount of Olives, accompanied by the chanting of hymns and litanies, resembled the singing of the Levites during the festival of Beit ha-Shoeva, celebrated on the last day of the High Holidays (TB, Sukka 51/2). The circumambulation of the “Bench of the Cantors” seven times, as well as the recitation of the Hosannas, corresponded with the circumambulation of the external altar in the temple, as performed in antiquity on the feast of Tabernacles.⁶² The new rituals and their locations were actually designed after Temple images and were interpreted as a transmigration of the Temple cult. The same can be said about the rituals on the Mount of Olives, the sacredness of which can be traced already in the homiletic exegeses (*midrashim*) of late antiquity.⁶³

Moreover, the new ceremonies corresponded not only to traditional Jewish practices but also to a prevalent well-established cosmological world model, shared by contemporary Jews, Christians and Muslims. The perception of Jerusalem as the center of the world, or as the *axis mundi*, the universal pillar, which connects heaven and earth and therefore is a point of intercession between men and God, was at this period an indispensable component of an *imago mundi* shared by people of all three creeds and denominations.⁶⁴ The religious innovations introduced by the Jerusalem Yeshiva were mainly “rituals of contact,” deliberate attempts to communicate with the transcendent and to affect it. For such rituals, as for the Muslim rites of Rajab, Jerusalem and its sacred sites was an optimal location, especially on holy days.

3 Points of Resemblance

Besides their basic quality as innovative, yet allegedly based on ancient custom, the Islamic and Jewish rituals shared some joint features. The most conspicuous was the cosmological world view that underlay both of them and that envisioned Jerusalem as the navel and axis of the world. The rites of both were focused on a privileged sacred place that was identified as the place of ascension: a place on earth that stands symmetrically beneath the heavenly throne, open towards the transcendent, and from which heaven can be reached either

62 Reiner, “Jewish Pilgrimage,” 86.

63 Reiner, “Jewish Pilgrimage,” 77–83; Pedaya, “Metamorphoses,” 77–83.

64 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; The Nature of Religion; The Significance of Religious Myth, Symbolism, and Ritual within Life and Culture*, translated from the French by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1959), 68–115.

by ascension or through prayers and supplications. The new Muslim prayers were originally held in the mosque of al-Aqṣā, believed to be the place to which the Prophet Muḥammad arrived during his night journey (*al-miʿrāj*) and from which he ascended to the heavenly throne. The Jewish ritual was centered around the “Bench of the Cantors” on the Mount of Olives, which was identified as the terrestrial counterpart of God’s heavenly throne.⁶⁵ Hence the location of both Islamic and Jewish rituals was actually at the *axis mundi*, where God, or his messenger, ascends and descends, where heaven and earth meet.

Jerusalem’s cosmological valence turned it into a favorite place for communication with the trans-mundane.⁶⁶ Indeed, the rites of both exhibit a particular concern with the remission of sins and with supplication on behalf of others (*shafāʿa*). The participators in the Jewish ceremony implore God’s forgiveness for themselves and for their sinful relatives, and the Muslims who performed *ṣalat al-raḡhaʿib* likewise included prayers for the well-being of the visitors and of their absentee relatives.

The rites of both were regular and calendrical. Both were performed during a sacred month that bore cosmological significance. The Jewish ritual was performed on the month of Tishrei, the first month of the Jewish calendrical year, which is believed to be the month of creation and a month in which destinies are sealed, hence a proper time for supplications and pleas. The Muslim ritual was performed during the month of Rajab, a time especially singled out for communication between man and God, as stressed in a sermon devoted to the merits of Rajab in eleventh-century Cairo. It calls on the devout to engage in fasting, prayer, repentance and submission, and promises special closeness to God (*taqarrabūʿ fīhi ilā Allāh*).⁶⁷ Both rites were geared to arouse belonging and belief. The sharing of a sacred time at a privileged moment aligned people to one another, multiplying emotions.⁶⁸

65 See above.

66 See Timothy J. Nelson, “Transformations: The Social Construction of Religious Ritual,” in: John P. Hoffmann (ed.), *Understanding Religious Ritual: Theoretical Approaches and Innovations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 9–30. Nelson calls them “rituals that operate in the ‘in order to’ mode,” *idem*, 24.

67 Al-Maliḡi, *Al-Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya*, 112. See above n. 17 on those sermons.

68 James v. Spickard, “Centered in Time: A Sociological Phenomenology of Religious Rituals,” in Hoffmann (ed.), *Understanding*, 154–167, 154.

4 Points of Difference

In spite of the basic similarities between the Jewish and Muslim innovative rituals, they differed from each other in many significant aspects. The Islamic rite consisted of public prayers during one night at one location, while the Jewish rite, with its procession up the mountain and the circumambulation of the rock at its top, was a prolonged panoramic and elaborated ritual, performed in several locations. The Islamic rite was exclusively a ritual of communication and contact, based on an admittedly “weak” Prophetic tradition. The Jewish rite was also a ritual of contact, but it was firmly connected to the biblical Jewish High Holidays of Tishrei and included an important aspect of recollection, commemorating a glorious past when similar rituals were held in the Temple. Such scriptural and historical dimensions were typically totally lacking from the Islamic rite.

Although both rites combined private and public orientations, they did so in different ways. In the Islamic rite, individual desires were sought through the accrual power of the collective, while in the Jewish rite the welfare of the public and individual desires were sought through the intermediate power of religious leaders. The Islamic rite of *ṣalāt al-rahāʾib* manifested an intimate and personal access to the spiritual world and relied on internally generated motivations, trying to circumvent existing traditions and formalities. It sprang “from below,” spontaneously, and was criticized vehemently by the leading Syrian and Egyptian scholars of the twelfth–fourteenth centuries. The Jewish rite, on the other hand, was initiated “from above” and was led by the political-spiritual leadership of the community. It manifested institutionalized religiosity that relied on formal and regulated ritual procedures and allotted a central role to authoritative religious institutions.⁶⁹ The new Islamic rite was produced by a process of routinizing and sacralizing a fortuitous incident, “loading” it with traditional meanings only after it had gained popularity. The Jewish rite was consciously and thoughtfully produced as a substitute for an ancient abandoned rite, replicating it, as it were, in an updated new form in new political circumstances.

The dissimilarities between the two rites may be connected to the different historical phases of each of the faiths. Medieval Islam was a hegemonic religion in an advanced stage of institutionalization. Its adherents were in search of new alternative ways to establish links with the Sacred, as evident in the spread of Sufism on the one hand and the enthusiasm for *ihyaʾ al-sunna* (the

69 Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, Bennet Simon, *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 116.

revivification of Sunni Islam) on the other.⁷⁰ Judaism, at that stage was a minority religion, denied for many years of any possibility to display its strength and truth through public rituals. During the Fatimid period it had received a rare opportunity to demonstrate its genuineness in public. Jewish leaders, accorded formal political power by the Muslim state, needed to bolster their legitimacy also within the community. Following the Fatimid model, as it were, they initiated a series of rituals that combined political and religious elements, and demonstrated not only the strength of the Jewish creed but also that of its leaders.

These significant differences affected also the fate of the two rituals. The Muslim rite proved portable. It was first performed in Jerusalem, in the sacred center of the Ḥaram, yet from there it spread afar, and prospered in places distant from Jerusalem, in mosques, in *madrasas*, and in open spaces all over the Middle East for centuries to come. The Jewish rite, a procession inextricably tied to a sequence of specific sites overlooking the sacred center from which Jews were barred, proved to be non-transferable, and therefore short-lived.

The exceptional political privileges granted to the Jews during the Fatimid period were a unique historical event. With the occupation of Jerusalem and the decline of the Fatimids, no other chance was ever given to the Jews to display their creed in public until the late Ottoman period. The rituals in which the Jerusalem Yeshiva and its members played such a central role were doomed to disappear and be forgotten.

5 Conclusions

The comparative perspective, by its nature, sheds new light on each of the phenomena observed and raises new questions regarding common sources and mutual influences. We would like to suggest that it was the Fatimid context that facilitated the emergence of religious innovations in both religions in eleventh-century Jerusalem.

Concerning the Islamic religious innovations, it may have been the Fatimid innovative ways of celebrating the month of Rajab in Cairo that enhanced its significance and inspired popular new initiatives. The role of the Fatimids as (re)builders of the Ḥaram after the disastrous earthquakes of 1033 and 1068 may have been significant as well. Their building activities must have drawn renewed attention to the Ḥaram and enhanced the traffic of pious Muslim

70 See Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 189–202.

pilgrims. Moreover, it created new memorials and prayer niches (*miḥrābs*), hence additional spaces for prayer, and scope for new rituals. In the case of the Jewish religious innovations, we argue that it was only under Fatimid rule, with its unique Ismāʿīlī ideology and its tolerant attitude towards the *dhimmīs*, that these new Jewish ceremonies—performed publicly and even ostentatiously—could have taken place. We also suspect that Fatimid court ceremonial, with its exhibition of piety and power in Cairo, may have impressed not only Sunni but also Jewish onlookers, and inspired the creation of ceremonies displaying the piety and power of contemporaneous Jewish leadership, especially that under Fatimid patronage.

We would like to suggest that the mere volume and heterogeneity of pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the eleventh century may have been conducive to the “religious creativity” of all denominations that shared the notion of the sanctity of Jerusalem and its physical space, and to an effort to “outshine” the piety of others. This was all the more so on those occasions that combined the merits of sacred space and sacred time. Notwithstanding, we realize that each ritual reflected a specific phase of the respective religion in which it took place. Islam at this stage has reached a high degree of institutionalization, and its followers were seeking fresh ways to express their individual devotion and more intimate paths of communication with the sacred. Jews, for many centuries denied opportunities to demonstrate their truth publicly, empowered their religious leaders to seize this rare chance and construct new rituals that echoed and resembled the ancient rites of a glorious past but were also attuned to new political circumstances.

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