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„Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Perception and remembrance of Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages“

Impressions from a Fieldtrip to Jerusalem and the North of
Israel with Professor Eva Haverkamp, 18–27 November 2012

In the course of our advanced seminar, under the guidance of Professor Eva Haverkamp, on the different perceptions and memories of medieval Jerusalem among Jews and Christians, 16 participants elaborated on an array of questions concerning Jerusalem's role in Jewish and Christian religious tradition. How was Jerusalem described in pilgrim accounts? How was its holiness reflected in artistic, monumental, and liturgical testimonies? And above all, how did these two groups refer to each other?

On our excursion to Israel, an integral part of the seminar, we were able to address these questions vividly and in detail. We visited Jerusalem, Masada, and the north of Israel. In discussions featuring occasional guest lecturers and, most importantly, eight student presentations, we intensively studied biblical and medieval sources relevant to each destination. Often these discussions went on until late in the night.

On 18 November 2012 we arrived in Tel Aviv. It was the beginning of a journey not just to the medieval crusaders and Mamluks, but also to the First and Second Temple Period, the Hellenistic Era, the Roman occupation, and of course also to modern Israel, with all its vibrant cultural aspects. The large stack of medieval sources which accompanied us – a thick book quickly losing its shape from frequent use – was more than just an essential tool for broadening our knowledge about medieval thought. Writings by Benjamin of Tudela, Felix Fabri, and Obadiah of Bertinoro, Ernoul's chronicle, and many other texts were transformed from printed letters into living, unforgettable guides and companions on our journey through history

On our first day, we visited the Israel Museum, where we plunged into more than 2000 years of the Holy Land's narra-

tive. From manuscripts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Aleppo Codex to archeological exhibits and city models (e.g. the reconstruction of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period), we were able to study the topography and the settlement strata of Jerusalem, discovering the historical variety and richness of the city. A special exhibition on the past and present of Chassidic Jewry rounded out our visit.

In the afternoon, we visited the Mount Scopus Campus of the Hebrew University. Israel Yuval, director of the Scholion Research Center, and Reuven Amitai, dean of the Faculty of Humanities, gave us a warm welcome and an overview of the development of university studies over the last decades.

In the following days we explored the ancient and medieval sights of Jerusalem. A guided tour through the Western Wall tunnel revealed the monumental size of the Second Temple (of which the present-day wall constitutes a mere fraction) and introduced us to the architecture and its several phases. We visited the excavations at the "City of David," the oldest settled part of the city, descended to the Valley of Kidron and its numerous tombs, and inspected the unique water supply system built by King Hezekiah in the eighth century BCE to bring water from the Gihon spring to the Pool of Siloam. Visits to the holiest places of Christendom, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion, the Via Dolorosa, and the Garden of Gethsemane, showed us once again Jerusalem's importance as a religious city.

One of the highlights of our journey was the massive fortress of Masada. "As the sun rose, we found ourselves immersed in the world of 74 CE and the last days of the Jewish revolt against the Romans. Together with the overwhelming surroundings of the Judean Desert and the Dead Sea, the archeological remains not only evoked autarkic Jewish life on top of the desert hill, but also linked us seamlessly with the historical events. Reading Josephus' *De bello iudaico* and the medieval account of Josippon while wandering along the antique walls of palaces and housing units, we gained an impression of what life must have been like when collective suicide was considered a better choice than being held captive by the Romans." (Hannes Pichler, seminar participant and coauthor of this report.)

The last day of our journey we spent in the north of Israel. The ancient synagogues of Beit Alfa, Sepphoris and Capernaum and the necropolis in the Bet She'arim National Park impressed us with mosaics and relics of medieval Jewish spaces



and contemporary cultural identity. We could, for example, compare different symbolic illustrations of the Temple and the binding of Isaac. Discussing funeral rituals at Bet She'arim made us realize that Jewish communities were deeply influenced by their surroundings. 'I especially enjoyed the wide range of periods covered on our study trip, from the First and Second Temple up to the Middle Ages. Our visit to the excavations of Beit Alfa and Sepphoris was very impressive, particularly because of the interesting explanations by Dr. Shalev-Eyni, art historian at the Hebrew University. Analyzing the mosaics of the two synagogues presented us with the opportunity to discuss the impact of the Jewish-Christian theological dispute on art in the fourth and sixth centuries.' (Sophia Schmitt, seminar participant.)

The beautiful landscape of green plains and mountains framing the Sea of Galilee on our last day in Israel fittingly concluded a week full of impressions and academic input, a week of enrichment not only for our studies, but also for our personal growth.

1 Our student group with Professor Israel Yuval (Hebrew University) and Professor Eva Haverkamp on the Mount Scopus Campus.

PHOTO CREDITS
1 Privat.