

## Placing an Idea: The Valley of Jehoshaphat in Religious Imagination

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Dr Friedrich Löwenberg, a learned young Viennese Jew, impoverished and heartbroken and determined to put an end to his life, reads a mysterious ad in the newspaper. It leads him to Kingscourt, a German aristocrat who made his fortune in America. Löwenberg decides to accompany Kingscourt in carrying out his strange decision to retire to an isolated island in the Pacific. This is how Theodor Herzl opens his famous utopian novel, *Altneuland* (*Old-New Land*), published in 1902. On their way to the island, Kingscourt and Löwenberg decide to visit Palestine. Their ship anchors at Jaffa and they discover Palestine, desolated and provincial, just as Herzl experienced it on his famous visit in 1898. Twenty years later, the two would visit Palestine again and, to their amazement, discover a new world in the ancient land: *Altneuland*. Yet their first visit is disappointing. The blue sea is certainly spectacular, but Jaffa makes a horrible impression. The desolation cries out, and on the way to Jerusalem they see signs of degeneration and decline. Then they arrive in Jerusalem.

It was night when they reached Jerusalem—a marvelous white moonlit night. ‘*Donnerwetter!*’ shouted Kingscourt, ‘I say, this is beautiful!’ [...] Again turning to the guide, the old man asked, ‘What’s the name of this region?’

‘The Valley of Jehoshaphat, sir,’ replied the man meekly.

‘Then it’s a real place, Devil take me! The Valley of Jehoshaphat! I thought it was just something in the Bible. Here our Lord and Savior walked. What do you think of it, Dr. Löwenberg?’ [...] Ah, yes! Still, it must mean something to you also. These ancient walls, this Valley...<sup>1</sup>

\* This article will be a chapter in my forthcoming book on the Mount of Olives.

1 Theodor Herzl, *Old-New Land* (*Altneuland*), trans. by Lotta Levensohn (New York: Bloch, 1941), p. 43. See Dimitry Shumsky, “‘This Ship Is Zion!’: Travel, Tourism, and Cultural Zionism in Theodor Herzl’s *Altneuland*,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 104 (2014), pp. 471–93.

‘The Valley of Jehoshaphat [...] it’s a real place!’ Herzl’s cry, in Kingscourt’s mouth, will accompany us on our journey through the Valley’s history. Like many travellers of his time, Herzl was disappointed. The imagined Jerusalem was much more appealing than the real city, where the glorious past was shrouded in a deteriorating present. Only one place seems to overcome this devolution: the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Not the Temple Mount, not Mount Zion or the Western Wall, but the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Herzl wrote a book setting forth a plan for a drastic change in reality, for the creation of a utopian new world. The Valley of Jehoshaphat is a place where the future is much more important than the past, a place that exists in its future or, as Herzl’s astonished protagonist puts it, ‘Then it’s a real place, Devil take me! The Valley of Jehoshaphat!’

### Place

The name *Valley of Jehoshaphat* was ascribed to a short segment (not much over one kilometer) of the Kidron Valley, the segment that makes its way along the eastern wall of Jerusalem’s Old City, between the city wall and the slopes of the Mount of Olives to the east. It separates the city sharply from the Mount, bringing out its height and its isolation. The very essence of the Valley depends on these two neighbours closing in on it from both sides—the holy city from here and the holy mount from there.<sup>2</sup> The Valley of Jehoshaphat that Herzl saw was commemorated in nineteenth-century images, like the one by William Henry Bartlett in the middle of the nineteenth century (Fig. 14.1). It was no different from the Valley seen by thousands of pilgrims and travellers in earlier years: a valley almost devoid of edifices, dotted with several ancient tombs—the Tomb of Absalom (or of Jehoshaphat), the Tomb of Zechariah (known in Christian tradition as the Tomb of Zechariah and Symeon), the Tomb of the Sons of Hezir (known in Christian tradition as the Tomb of James the Less)—and, a little farther to the north, Mary’s Tomb, the place where she was assumed to heaven. Not far from there was the site of the stoning of St Stephen, competing with the same tradition in front of the Damascus Gate.<sup>3</sup> The Valley

<sup>2</sup> In Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the Mount of Olives was called ‘the Holy Mount’. See Ora Limor, ‘The Place of the End of Days: Eschatological Geography in Jerusalem’, in *The Real and the Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art: Studies in Honor of Bezael Narkiss on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. by Bianca Kühnel, *Journal of Jewish Art*, 23/24 (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Art, 1998), pp. 13–24.

<sup>3</sup> On sites in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, see Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus*, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993–2009), III: *The*



FIGURE 14.1 Tombs in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, drawn by W. H. Bartlett, engraved by E. Brandard, 1847 (PHOTO: AUTHOR).

*City of Jerusalem* (2007), no. 320, pp. 185–89 (the tombs of the Valley of Jehoshaphat), and no. 337, pp. 287–306 (Mary's tomb); Ora Limor, 'Christian Traditions of the Mount of Olives in the Byzantine and First Muslim Period' (unpublished master's thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 37–41, 113–19, 145–52 (Hebrew); and Elchanan Reiner, 'Pilgrims and Pilgrimage to Eretz Yisrael, 1099–1517' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 198–202 (Hebrew). The empty tomb of Mary draws its meaning from the Valley's eschatological lore and adds to it. See Ora Limor, 'Mary in Jerusalem: An Imaginary Map', in *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem*, ed. by Bianca Kühnel, Galit Noga-Banai, and Hanna Vorholt (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 11–22. The stoning of St Stephen in the Valley is mentioned by Raoul of Caen in *Gesta Tancredi*, in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades, Historiens occidentaux*, 5 vols (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1844–95), III (1866), p. 685. A medieval tradition recounts that the bridge over the Valley was made of the wood of the cross. See, for example, Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Libro d'Oltramare (1346–1350)*, ed. by A. Bacchi della Lega and B. Bagatti (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1945; repr. 1996), chap. 81; Niccolò of Poggibonsi, *A Voyage beyond the Seas, 1346–1350*, trans. by T. Bellorini and E. Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1945). The place where Judas hanged himself was also connected to the region; see Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Libro d'Oltramare*, chap. 69.

was not inhabited, but hermits used to dwell in its caves.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the magnificent sealed Golden Gate, or Gate of Mercy, also magnified the aura of the Valley: a small, gloomy valley concealing a formidable ancient myth, that of the resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgement.<sup>5</sup>

Lying at the foot of the Mount of Olives, the Valley of Jehoshaphat is part of the latter's eschatological lore. Together with the Mount, it constitutes the arena of the End. This strong, rich, and consistent tradition is based on a small number of biblical verses that fired the religious imagination, evoked primordial fears, and became a starting point for legendary plots, some schematic and others detailed, pictorial, and thick. While the myth of the Mount of Olives as the scenery of the apocalyptic events of the 'Day of Lord' is based on the book of Zechariah (14. 2–3), the career of the Valley of Jehoshaphat as the place of the ultimate resurrection and Judgement relies on a few verses in the book of Joel (4. 1–2, 12):

For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem. I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land. [...] Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about.

It is hard to tell whether Joel was referring to a specific place or to an undefined location where the future judgement would take place. In Hebrew, 'emek Jehoshaphat' means 'the valley where God will judge'. The identification of the Valley of Jehoshaphat with the Kidron Valley at the foot of the Mount of Olives is first attested by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Onomasticon* (beginning of the fourth century). Eusebius writes, 'The Valley of Jehoshaphat lies between Jeru-

4 See, for example, the *Commemoratorium casis Dei*, in Michael McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey of the Holy Land: Wealth, Personnel, and Buildings of a Mediterranean Church between Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2011), pp. 203–07; John of Würzburg, in *Peregrinationes tres: Saewulf, John of Würzburg, Theodoricus*, ed. by R. B. C. Huygens, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis, 139 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994), p. 110; John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage, 1099–1185* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1988), p. 270; and John Phocas, in Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage*, p. 326.

5 On the Golden Gate, see Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, no. 293, pp. 103–09; Reiner, 'Pilgrims and Pilgrimage', pp. 172–79.

salem and the Mount of Olives'.<sup>6</sup> Eusebius was creating and consolidating a Christian biblical map of the Holy Land, and some of his identifications may have earlier Jewish roots that left no traces in the sources. In the case of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, he may have drawn on the Septuagint, which translates the words 'emek Jehoshaphat' not literally (the valley of God's Judgement) but geographically, that is, as a place name, Ἰωσαφάτ (Iosaphat), although its location is not specified. In another part of the *Onomasticon*, Eusebius writes, 'The Valley of Hinnom [...] lies near Jerusalem, and it is called until this day "the valley of Jehoshaphat"'.<sup>7</sup> Eusebius here connects the Valley of Jehoshaphat with the neighbouring Valley of Hinnom, in Hebrew *Ge-hinnom*, understood by many as the Gehenna, hell. The ancient apocalyptic myth of the Mount of Olives, mentioned in the book of Zechariah, combined with Joel's vision, inspired (if not created) the image of the region to the east of Jerusalem as an eschatological landscape. The summit of the Mount of Olives is where God will come down, and the sentenced will be resurrected and will gather in the valley at its foot. Following Eusebius, Eucherius (fifth century) identified the Valley of Jehoshaphat with Gehenna: 'Beside the east wall of Jerusalem, which is also the wall of the Temple, is Gehenna. This is called the Valley of Jehoshaphat. It runs from north to south, and the Brook Kidron runs through it whenever there has been rain to provide it with water.'<sup>8</sup>

The unequivocal geographical understanding of Joel's words was not universally accepted. In Targum Jonathan, an early Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Valley of Jehoshaphat is translated as 'the plain of the giving of judgement', not as a specific location, while Midrash Tehillim, a collection of medieval homilies on Psalms, says, 'There is no valley called Jehoshaphat, and what is emek Jehoshaphat? The place where God will judge the nations.'<sup>9</sup> But since, as S. G. F. Brandon writes, 'the human mind is always prone to think in concrete imagery', the geographical identification prevailed and was eventually accepted by Christians, Jews, and Muslims.<sup>10</sup> An event, even a future event,

6 Eusebius, *Onomasticon: The Place Names of Divine Scripture, Including the Latin Edition of Jerome*, trans. and comm. by R. Steven Notley and Ze'ev Safrai (Leiden: Brill, 2005), no. 618, p. 114.

7 Eusebius, *Onomasticon*, no. 934, p. 159; see also no. 332, p. 68.

8 Eucherius, *De situ Hierusolimae, Epistula ad Faustum Presbyterum*, 9, ed. by J. Fraipont, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina [henceforth CCL], 175 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1965), p. 238; English trans. in John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 2002), p. 95.

9 *Midrash Tehillim*, ed. by Solomon Buber (Vilna: n. pub., 1892), p. 78.

10 S. G. F. Brandon, *The Judgment of the Dead: An Historical and Comparative Study of the Idea of Post-Mortem Judgement in the Major Religions* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967), p. 112.

needs a location. While most holy places serve to situate remembered scenes and traditions of the past, the Valley of Jehoshaphat serves to situate not what we remember but rather what we imagine. It is a place-holder for future hopes and fears.<sup>11</sup>

The eschatological impetus of early Christianity augmented the importance of the Valley. Christianity also changed the meaning of Joel's prophecy from an ethnic to a universal promise. While Joel speaks of a judgement of God against the enemies of Israel, Christianity understands 'Israel' as the entire body of believers and the Last Judgement as including all of mankind.<sup>12</sup> Yet, in one way or another, all three monotheistic religions accepted the idea that the Last Judgement and the resurrection of the dead will take place in Jerusalem, and that this is where the kingdom of heaven on earth will be launched. Although certain other places competed for the honour (for example, Damascus in Islam), there can be little doubt about the seniority of Jerusalem as the arena of the eschatological events.<sup>13</sup> Jerusalem, and especially the Mount of Olives and the Valley of Jehoshaphat, bound together like a knot eschatological beliefs and apocalyptic fears, giving them coherence.<sup>14</sup> The Valley as the scene of the Last Judgement became a constant signpost in pilgrimage narratives and Holy Land descriptions. The Short Description of Jerusalem (c. 530) instructs the visitor, 'To the right of that [Gethsemane] is the Valley of Jehoshaphat where the Lord will judge the righteous and the sinners. There too is the little brook which will belch flame at the end of the age.'<sup>15</sup> Epiphanius the Monk (late seventh–early eighth century) described the location of the future events quite specifically:

<sup>11</sup> According to Edward S. Casey, a 'place *holds in* by giving to memories an authentically local habitation: by being their place-holders'. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 189.

<sup>12</sup> On the Last Judgement in Christianity, see Brandon, *Judgment of the Dead*, pp. 98–135.

<sup>13</sup> On the Last Judgement in Islam, see Ofer Livne-Kafri, 'Jerusalem in Muslim Traditions of the "End of Days"', in Livne-Kafri, *Jerusalem in Early Islam: Selected Papers* (Jerusalem: Yad Itzhak Ben-Zvi, 2000), pp. 44–77 (Hebrew). On Damascus, see Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 35–38.

<sup>14</sup> Here I use Kathleen Biddick's definition: 'Like a knot, the Holy City bound together genealogies and time lines and gave them coherency.' Biddick, *The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> *Breviarium de Hierosolyma*, ed. by R. Weber, CCL, 175, p. 112; English trans. in Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, p. 121.

And near here [the tomb of the Virgin] there is the holy cave where the Lord took refuge with his disciples: and in the cave is the Throne of the Son of God and of his twelve apostles, where he is going to sit to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And at the head of the Lord's throne, is a little hole, so deep you cannot see the bottom, and from it there comes a murmur, or rather a loud crying, and they start to tell you that this is the spirits.<sup>16</sup>

'And they start to tell you', says Epiphanius, using a common way for pilgrims to recount a tradition without committing themselves to its veracity. This is the strategy used by Niccolò da Poggibonsi (mid-fourteenth century), who also locates the future site of the judgement in Gethsemane. There he saw two big stones, 'and it is said that in that place Christ will stand with all his apostles to judge the just and the unjust; therefore the pilgrims pass the place on the right and say: Jesus Christ, make me stand on this side, me and my relatives'.<sup>17</sup> While the Short Description speaks of a brook and Epiphanius of a cave, the ninth-century traveller Bernard the Monk tells of a church that claimed the honour as the site of the Last Judgement: 'There is another Church in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is in honour of St. Leontius, and to this the Lord is said [*dicatur*] to be coming for judgement'.<sup>18</sup> Specific places are also mentioned by Jewish travellers. A Jewish pilgrim guide from the Cairo Genizah, written in the eleventh century, reads: 'Near it [the church of James, brother of Jesus Christ] grows a palm tree. A tradition from the fathers [says] that this place is in face of the gate of Gehenna, according to the passage "for there will I sit to judge all the heathen"'.<sup>19</sup> This description echoes the Talmudic tradition: 'There are two palm-trees in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and between them smoke rises [...] and this is the gate of Gehenna'.<sup>20</sup> As we have already seen, there is both geographical and conceptual proximity between the Valley of Jehoshaphat and the Valley of Hinnom, so it is no wonder that a tradition would move from one to the other. The opening of hell in the Valley of Jehoshaphat is attested to by

16 Herbert Donner, 'Die Palästinabeschreibung des Epiphanius Monachus Hagiopolita', *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, 87 (1971), pp. 42–91 (p. 88); English trans. in Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, p. 212.

17 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Libro d'Oltramare*, ed. By Bacchi della Lega and Bagatti, chap. 80.

18 *Itinerarium Bernardi, Monachi Franci*, in *Descriptiones Terrae Sanctae ex saeculo VIII., IX., XII. et XV.*, ed. by Titus Tobler (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1874), p. 94; English trans. in Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, p. 267.

19 Moshe Gil, *Palestine during the First Muslim Period (634–1099)*, 3 vols (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1983), II: *Cairo Geniza Documents*, p. 5.

20 Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 19a.

many visitors, including Moses Basulla, a rabbi from Pesaro in Italy, who writes in 1521:

Jerusalem is situated on a mountain opposite the Mount of Olives. A narrow valley lies between them; this is the Valley of Jehoshaphat to which I descended. At one hand there is a large hole, where what appears to be some sort of cave is visible. They say that this is the mouth of Gehenna, which will open in the future, when Gog comes.<sup>21</sup>

After the Arab conquest (638), the Muslims joined the other two religions in many of their beliefs, dressing them in distinct Islamic garb.<sup>22</sup> An early tradition speaks of the *sirat*, a narrow bridge across hell, which will be set between the Mosque of Omar in Jerusalem, where the divine judge will preside, and the Mount of Olives, where the dead will be resurrected. The righteous will pass across it and the wicked will fall down into hell.<sup>23</sup> Ibn el-Arabi of Seville, who visited the Holy Land in the late eleventh century (1092–95), records the tradition that when ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattāb conquered Jerusalem, he stood on the Mount of Olives and said that this is the land of the gathering of the dead on the day of resurrection, and he erected a mosque there. Between this mosque and the el-Aqsa mosque there is a vale named the Jahannum Valley (Wadi Jahannum). The mosque has a gate named the Gate of Repentance and Mercy. It is said that a bridge will be erected there.<sup>24</sup>

A place named al-Sâhira is mentioned in the Qur’an as the area where all mankind will assemble.<sup>25</sup> Like the Valley of Jehoshaphat, al-Sâhira received two interpretations, one literary—a plain or a plateau—and the other geographical. Several places competed for the honour; the one that prevailed was on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. The tenth-century geographer Muqaddasi writes that beyond the church of the Ascension is the place called al-Sâhira, which, according to Ibn Abbas, will be the land of the resurrection, ‘a white area on which no blood has been spilled’.<sup>26</sup> Mujir al-Dīn at the end of the

21 *In Zion and Jerusalem: The Itinerary of Rabbi Moses Basola (1521–1523)*, ed. by Abraham David, trans. by Dena Ordan (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University, 1999), p. 72.

22 Livne-Kafri, ‘Jerusalem in Muslim Traditions’, pp. 44–77.

23 Livne-Kafri, ‘Jerusalem in Muslim Traditions’, p. 60.

24 Joseph Drory, *Ibn El-Arabi of Seville: Journey to Eretz Israel, 1092–1095* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1993), p. 108 (Hebrew).

25 Qur’ān, Sura 79, 14; Livne-Kafri, ‘Jerusalem in Muslim Traditions’, pp. 53–55; Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage*, 2nd edn (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 141–44.

26 Al-Muqaddasi, cited by Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, p. 144.

fifteenth century reports that the place that in his day was called al-Sāhira lies outside the northern wall of the city, where there was a large cemetery on a high mountain.<sup>27</sup>

### Burial

The eschatological myth regarding the area east of Jerusalem made it a favourite burial place. According to an old Jewish tradition, attested in the Babylonian Talmud, before the resurrection of the dead those who live outside the Land of Israel will roll painfully to Jerusalem through underground cavities.<sup>28</sup> To avoid this painful route, Jews sought to be buried close to the place of resurrection, as did people of other religions as well. Later *midrashim* located the place of resurrection, to which the dead will roll, at the Mount of Olives.<sup>29</sup>

Similar beliefs struck root in Islam and the practice of bringing the dead to be buried in Jerusalem came to be shared by Muslims, too. Shlomo Dov Goitein mentions tenth-century rulers who died elsewhere but were buried in Jerusalem: 'Isa ibn Muhammad al-Nushari, the first ruler of Egypt after the end of the Tulunid reign, died in Cairo but was buried in Jerusalem (909); and the Turk Muhammad ibn Tughj, founder of the house of the Ikhshidids, rulers of Egypt from 935–69, died in Damascus (946) but was buried in Jerusalem together with several members of his family.<sup>30</sup>

Obsessed with the burden of sin, devout pilgrims also sought to be buried in Jerusalem, close to the place of the resurrection. Raoul Glaber tells of Lethbald of Autun, who, upon reaching the Mount of Olives, asked to die in the place where Jesus ascended to heaven; Caesarius of Heisterbach describes the pilgrim Theodericus de Rulant who, while visiting the Holy Sepulchre, asked God to die there. Both requests were granted.<sup>31</sup> These pilgrims believed that

27 Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, p. 144, n. 333.

28 Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 111 a–b.

29 See, for example, *Psiqta Rabati* 31:5; *Maase Daniel*, in *Midreshe Ge'ulah (Jewish Apocalypses)*, ed. by Yehuda Even Shmuel (Jerusalem: Moshad Bialik, 1954), p. 225.

30 Shlomo Dov Goitein, 'Jerusalem in the Arab Period', in *The Jerusalem Cathedra*, ed. by Lee I. Levine (Jerusalem: Yad Itzhak Ben-Zvi, 1982), II, pp. 168–96 (p. 183); and Livne-Kafri, 'Jerusalem in Muslim Traditions', p. 60.

31 Raoul Glaber, *Histoires*, ed. and trans. by M. Arnoux (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), pp. 254–57; English trans. in Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, pp. 272–73; Caesarius of Heisterbach, 'Distinctio undecima: De morientibus', XI, 24, *Dialogus miraculorum*, ed. by Joseph Strange, 2 vols (Cologne: Heberle, 1851), II, p. 291. See also Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Mediaeval Religion* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), pp. 128–36.

Jerusalem was the closest place to heaven on earth and thus the most desirable place to meet death. Nâsir-i-Khusrau, a Muslim traveller from Persia who visited Jerusalem in 1047, recounts:

When you have passed out of the mosque [al-Aqsa], there lies before you a great level plain, called the Sâhirah, which, it is said, will be the place of the Resurrection. [...] For this reason men from all parts of the world come hither to make their sojourn in the Holy City till death overtakes them, in order that when the day fixed by God—be He praised and exalted!—shall arrive, they may thus be ready and present at the appointed place. [...] Lying between the mosque and this plain of the Sâhirah is a great steep valley [...] the Wâdi Jahannum. [...]. The common people state that when you stand at the brink of the valley you may hear the cries of those in Hell which come up from below. I myself went there to listen, but heard nothing.<sup>32</sup>

Nâsir-i-Khusrau's text reveals a somewhat ethnographic attitude on his part. He passes on to his readers the traditions he heard in Jerusalem, probably because he deemed them worthy, but at the same time he does not accept everything told him by the locals but rather questions, makes his own tests, and notes his own conclusions. 'It is said', he writes, that the Sâhirah, the great level plain, will be the place of resurrection. His source of information is 'the common people', a general designation that never includes the designator. Through them an author can pass on traditions transmitted by the locals without being persuaded by them or committing himself to their veracity. Nâsir-i-Khusrau provides evidence of the wish of people 'from all parts of the world' to be buried in Jerusalem. Their aim is to be present there on the day of resurrection. As we have already seen, this wish united people of all religions over many generations, gave birth to traditions and legends, and made Jerusalem a city of the dying and the dead in numbers much larger than its living population. In the 1480s, on his tour of the walls of the city with a Jewish guide, the Dominican friar Felix Fabri came to a Jewish neighbourhood near the Valley. Commenting on the location of the neighbourhood, Fabri remarked:

we went down from the wall, and came into the city of the Jews, which is on the slope of the hill above the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and here we

<sup>32</sup> Nasir-i-Khusrau, *Diary of a Journey through Syria and Palestine*, trans. and notes by Guy Le Strange, Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 4 (London: PPTS, 1897), pp. 24–26.

mocked the Jew who was our guide, and told him that the Jews were wise in having placed their city in the place of judgement, that they might rise without the trouble of journeying thither to be eternally damned.<sup>33</sup>

We shall come back to Felix Fabri shortly. Here it is worth noting that he was not the only pilgrim to tour the region in the company of Jews. The Valley was a clear case of a shared holy place. Naturally, it aroused the curiosity of visitors as to the traditions that neighbouring faiths held about it.<sup>34</sup> John Sanderson, a British tradesman who visited the Holy Land in 1601 in the company of eight Jews, reports some of their beliefs and opinions. They told him:

that in what parts soever of the world they die and are buried, their bodies must all rise to judgement in the Holy Land, out of the valley of Jehoshaphat; which causes that the greater and richer sort have their bones conveyed to some part thereof by their kindred or friends, by which means they are freed of a labour or scrape thither through the ground. [...] Other talk I had from them, offering as little taste of truth as this last reasonless likelihood.<sup>35</sup>

### Dimensions

Pilgrimage narratives can be located at the meeting point between the imagined and the real, or, better, between the myth and its concretization in space. Sometimes the two clash. Obviously, the sights that pilgrims fantasized in their

33 Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Aegypti Peregrinationem*, ed. by Konrad Dietrich Hassler, 3 vols (Stuttgart: Societatis Literariae Stuttgardiensis, 1843–49), II (1843), p. 129; English trans. in Felix Fabri, *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri (circa 1480–1483 A.D.)*, trans. by Aubrey Stewart (London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1896–97), II, Part I (1897), p. 132.

34 On shared holy places, see Ora Limor, 'Sharing Sacred Space: Holy Places in Jerusalem between Christianity, Judaism and Islam', in *In laudem Hierosolymitani: Studies in Crusades and Medieval Culture in Honour of Benjamin Z. Kedar*, ed. by Iris Shagrir, Ronnie Ellenblum, and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 219–31, and bibliography there.

35 *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant, 1584–1602: With his Autobiography and Selections from his Correspondence*, ed. by William Foster (London: Hakluyt Society, 1931), p. 120. On the Jewish cemetery in the Valley, see Elchanan Reiner, 'Pilgrims and Pilgrimage', pp. 198–202.

'eyes of mind' were ten times better than those seen by 'the eyes of flesh'.<sup>36</sup> In the case of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, it was hard enough to give shape to a future event never experienced by human beings and even harder to imagine it in its designated location. Simply put, the Valley was too small. Its dimensions raised uneasiness and doubts, dangerous feelings for the believer.

The above-mentioned Niccolò, a Franciscan friar from Poggibonsi in Tuscany, who made a long journey (1346–50) to the east and recorded his experiences in an appealing, lengthy work, writes:

Leading down to the straight road to the east is a path a bowshot long; and then facing northeast I began to discover the Valley of Jehoshaphat, wherein the world will be judged. The Valley of Jehoshaphat is very small and narrow; know that it is not in length a mile, and at the end of the valley it is not [...] paces in width.<sup>37</sup>

Niccolò's words sound like a warning: 'know' (*sappiate*). Probably the small dimensions of the valley bothered him, although he does not say so explicitly. Its smallness was also noted by Obadiah of Bertinoro, a fifteenth-century Italian rabbi known for his popular commentary on the Mishnah, who came to Jerusalem in 1488 and became the spiritual leader of the Jewish community there. In a letter to his father, he writes: 'And the Valley of Jehoshaphat is a very small valley between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives, and there is where the Jews are now buried.'<sup>38</sup> It would seem that Niccolò and Obadiah mentioned the smallness of the Valley for a reason, although they refrained from specifying it. The same problem was also noted by another Franciscan friar, Francesco Suriano, who between 1493 and 1515 twice held the office of Guardian of Mount Zion, overseeing the Franciscans in Jerusalem and assisting European pilgrims there. Aware of the problem, he supplies a simple answer:

36 On the mind's eyes, see Madeline H. Caviness, 'Images of Divine Order and the Third Mode of Seeing', *Gesta*, 22 (1983), pp. 99–120, repr. in Caviness, *Art in the Medieval West and its Audience* (Aldershot: Variorum, 2001), no. III.

37 'La valle di Iosafat si è piccolo molto, e stretta; sappiate che la detta valle nonn'è lunga uno miglio, e, in piè della detta valle, non è larga ... passi.' Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Libro d'Oltramare*, ed. by Bacchi della Lega and Bagatti, chap. 66, p. 42; Niccolò of Poggibonsi, *A Voyage beyond the Seas*, trans. by Bellorini and Hoade, p. 36.

38 *Igrot Erets Yisra'el (Letters from the Land of Israel)*, ed. by Abraham Yaari (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1971), p. 135 (Hebrew).

This Valley, according to St. Jerome is one ballista shot wide. And though it be small, yet all the world will congregate there for judgment; and this because with God nothing is impossible. Let us pray him that he grant us the grace to be placed on the right hand side together with the saints.<sup>39</sup>

Some travellers were more troubled. In 1349, after getting involved in a duel that he regretted immediately, Niccolò's compatriot and contemporary Dolcibene of Florence, known as 're dei buffoni' (king of clowns), went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem as an escort and entertainer of two Florentine noblemen, Messer Galeotto of Rimini and Messer Malatesta Ungaru. He was the protagonist of several novels by the Italian poet and novelist Franco Sacchetti (c. 1335–c. 1400) in the latter's collection of stories, *Il Trecentonovelle*. Two of the stories deal with this pilgrimage, and one of them tells of his visit to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.<sup>40</sup> When the three Italians arrived at the Valley, Sacchetti recounts, Messer Galeotto said, 'In this valley all will have to stand in judgement.' 'But how will all humankind stand in such a small valley?' asked Dolcibene. 'By God's power', said Messer Galeotto. Then Dolcibene dismounted, took off his pants and relieved himself, saying: 'I must leave a sign so I can find the place and won't be suffocated in the crowd. A wise man must be prepared for the future.' Messer Galeotto replied: 'Perhaps you should leave your entire corpse so the sign will be bigger?' and Dolcibene answered that this was not good advice because the falcon would take him away and the place would remain with no sign, and also in this case, the two gentlemen would be bereaved of his company.

Dolcibene, stress Sacchetti's editors, was a devout believer, as can be seen from his rhymed itinerary, *Avemaria*, written during his pilgrimage and enumerating the sites he saw.<sup>41</sup> His vulgar behaviour, typical of Italian humour at the time, was an expression of his frustration upon seeing the small dimensions of the Valley.<sup>42</sup>

39 Francesco Suriano, *Il trattato di Terra Santa e dell'Oriente*, ed. by Girolamo Golubovich (Milan: Artigianelli, 1900), chap. 45; Francesco Suriano, *Treatise on the Holy Land*, trans. Theophilus Bellowini and Eugene Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1949; repr. 1983), chap. 45, p. 112.

40 Franco Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, ed. by Antonio Lanza (Florence: Sansoni, 1984), Novella x, pp. 20–21; see Antonio Lanza, 'Noterella sacchettiana', *La Rassegna della letteratura italiana*, ser. 8, 92 (1988), pp. 38–40.

41 *Rime pie edite e inedite di Messer Dolcibene*, ed. by Giovanni Tortoli (Prato: Passerini, 1904).

42 Sacchetti's other novel about Dolcibene's pilgrimage tells of a dispute he had with Jews in Jerusalem and his relieving himself in the synagogue. See Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, Novella xxiv.

### Stones

Sacchetti's story attests to a custom that took root among devout pilgrims: to leave a mark in the Valley of Jehoshaphat in order to secure a place for the Last Days. Unlike other sites they visited, pilgrims viewed the Valley as a place to which they were bound to return. The mark, usually a stone or a pile of stones, was a kind of substitute for their actual burial. It could also ease concerns raised by the valley's small dimensions. The custom is recorded by the German monk Theoderic, who went on pilgrimage to the holy places sometime between 1169 and 1174. Theoderic writes that the Valley of Hinnom goes around two sides of the city. There is a plain in it 'in which heaps of stones be placed. The simple pilgrims (*simplices peregrini*) like to collect them together since they say that on the day of judgement they will sit on them.'<sup>43</sup> Riccoldo da Monte Croce, a Dominican friar who visited the Holy Land in 1288 before travelling as a missionary to eastern Asia, writes in his *Liber peregrinacionis*:

There, in the Valley of Josaphat (which in fact is believed to be the place of Judgement, between the Mount of Olives and Mount Calvary) we sat waiting for Judgement, crying and trembling. We debated where the Most Just Judge would sit on high, and which side would be to his right and to his left. Then we each chose a place to his right, and each marked his own spot with a stone as evidence. I too picked up a stone and placed it there, taking a place to the right for myself and for all those who had heard the Word of God from me [...].<sup>44</sup>

Riccoldo, a scholar and a preacher, does not hide behind 'simple pilgrims' as Theoderic did. His description gives voice to the great fear the Valley aroused and to pilgrimage customs. As a preacher and missionary, Riccoldo and his companions try to envision the future scene and to prepare themselves for it. Pilgrims always used to (and still do) leave marks and signs in places they visit—signatures, graffiti, inscriptions and dedications. Here, however, the stones are more than merely proof that the pilgrim had been there. They are placeholders. They secure a place for the End of Days, when the pilgrim would inevitably return there. As a good shepherd, Riccoldo secures places not only for

<sup>43</sup> Theoderich, in *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 179; Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage*, p. 305.

<sup>44</sup> Riccoldo de Monte Croce, *Liber Peregrinacionis*, in *Peregrinationes Medii Aevi Quatuor*, ed. by J. C. M. Laurent (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1864), p. 111; English trans. in Rita George-Tvrtković, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq: Riccoldo da Montecroce's Encounter with Islam* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp. 183–84.

himself but also for his flock. The same custom is described in a dry, laconic way by Lorenz Egen, who went on pilgrimage in 1385: 'In the Valley of Jehoshaphat that lies before the city, in that same valley will be the Last Judgement. There I prepared a place for all my friends and for myself.'<sup>45</sup>

The beliefs and customs connected with the Valley, as well as the frustration caused by the encounter between the imagined and the real, were opulently detailed by the Dominican Felix Fabri. He twice set out on a pilgrimage to the East, once in 1480 and again in 1483. After returning from his second journey, Fabri settled down at a monastery in Ulm and recorded his experiences in several works, first and foremost his lengthy *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae*, the most comprehensive, vivid, and rich travel narrative of the late Middle Ages; Donald Howard called it 'the Proust of the genre'.<sup>46</sup> At the request of the sisters of the Observant reformed women's cloisters of Medingen and Medlingen, he also wrote a shorter German work, *Die Sionpilger*, a day-by-day guide in vernacular Swabian for a 'mental' pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Rome, and Compostela.<sup>47</sup>

In his *Evagatorium*, Fabri has a lot to say about the topography of Jerusalem in general and that of the Valley of Jehoshaphat in particular. He uses the landscape as a platform for a prolific sermon on sin and punishment and the sentence of God. The entire region—the holy city, the Dead Sea, and the Kidron Valley that links them together—is the focus of the sermon. One can imagine the friar back home in Swabia, asking his listeners to imagine what he had actually seen with his own eyes. In Fabri's mind, the Kidron Valley (of which the Valley of Jehoshaphat is a part) functions as a kind of drainpipe, carrying all sinners down to the Dead Sea, where the mouth of hell opens. Fabri writes:

This place is dreadful, because of the casting down of sinners into hell [...] As soon as those dreadful words of the Judge shall be heard, 'Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire' [Matt. 25. 41], there will break forth from the northern side of this valley a stream of fire, turning exceeding swiftly, which will enfold all the wicked, and will roll them violently

45 Christiane Hippler, *Die Reise nach Jerusalem: Untersuchungen zu den Quellen, zum Inhalt und zur literarischen Struktur der Pilgerberichte des Spätmittelalters* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1987), pp. 262–263: 'In das tale Josaphat das ligt vor der Stat in dem selben tal wirt das jungst gerichte da han ich allen meinem freunden unde mir ein stat verfangen.'

46 Donald R. Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims: Medieval Pilgrimage Narratives and their Posterity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 38.

47 Felix Fabri, *Die Sionpilger*, ed. by Wieland Carls (Berlin: Schmidt, 1999). See Kathyne Beebe, 'Reading Mental Pilgrimage in Context: The Imaginary Pilgrims and Real Travels of Felix Fabri's "Die Sionpilger"', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 25 (2008), pp. 39–70.

along from the valley of Jehoshaphat into the dreadful valley of Toph, Tophet, and Hennon [...] From thence they will be brought by the stream through that great valley into the Dead Sea, which is also called the Sea of Devils, into whose jaws that fiery river will be received, and soon, as it pours in, the whole sea will be set on fire by it, and beneath the sea hell will open its mouth, boundless in width, and will swallow up the whole.<sup>48</sup>

For the believer, sacred space is never neutral or incidental. It is conceived, pre-planned, and shaped by God for its future purpose. Fabri uses the actual topography of the Valley of Jehoshaphat to teach a lesson. In his mind, the Valley resembles a sewer, a drain through which the wicked people pass. He plays on the symbolic contrast between up and down, high and low. Jerusalem, the holy city, is situated on a mountain, close to heaven, while the Dead Sea is located far below, on the verge of hell. He also plays on the real function of the Valley, which served then, and still serves, as a sewage outlet for the city—mundane and ritual waste at one and the same time.<sup>49</sup> In Fabri's description, filth and dirt become a metaphor for sin and evil, for the fate of humankind and the fearful wrath of God:

So the valley of Jehoshaphat will be the place of those who are to be damned, who will stand in the brook Cedron, as unclean; for this place was ever a sink of all uncleanness, or rather a sewer down which uncleannesses ran into the sink, that is, into the Dead Sea.<sup>50</sup>

Several examples from the Old Testament help to make the point. As Fabri reports, King Asa destroyed the Priapus, the exceedingly filthy idol of his mother, and burned it in the Cedron brook, with all the uncleanness of the idols (1 Kings 15); the priests brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the Temple of the Lord and carried it into the brook (2 Chron. 29. 16); and the children of Israel broke the idols and altars and threw them into the Cedron (2

48 Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium*, ed. by Hassler, I, p. 391; Felix Fabri, *Wanderings*, trans. by Stewart, I, Part II (1896), pp. 489–90.

49 See Mishnah Yoma, 5:6; I am grateful to my friend Israel J. Yuval for this reference. See also Adamnan's *De locis sanctis*, 1,1, ed. by Denis Meehan, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, 3 (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1958), pp. 40–43; Ora Limor, 'Wondrous Nature: Landscape and Weather in Early Pilgrimage Narratives', in *Jews and Journeys: Travel and the Performance of Jewish Identity*, ed. by Orit Bashkin, Adam Beaver, and Joshua Levinson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

50 Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium*, ed. by Hassler, I, p. 392; Felix Fabri, *Wanderings*, trans. by Stewart, I, Part II, p. 491.

Chron. 30). Finally, the Valley is a disposal site not only for the altars and the abominable idols, but for regular refuse as well: 'Besides this, all the other filth from the city used to drain down into the brook Cedron, and when the brook was in flood it was all carried down with a rush into the Dead Sea.'<sup>51</sup> The Valley is not only a channel for the disposal of the unclean and the accursed, it is unclean and accursed in itself, because devils used to be worshipped in it, as we read in 2 Chronicles 28.

After explaining the nature of the Valley of Jehoshaphat and linking together its past history with its eschatological future, Fabri finally comes down to earth and takes a look at the place itself. So far, all his explanation and preaching could have been based on books and maps, but things looked different once he became acquainted with the scenery. To paraphrase a verse in a lovely Hebrew song, 'what you see from there, you do not see from here'. In other words, standing in the concrete Valley one must cope with the problem of dimensions.

A clever and experienced preacher, Fabri uses a familiar device and puts his concerns into the mouths of others, the familiar 'simple folk'. They are troubled to such a degree that they must take steps to calm their anxiety, as Fabri notes in great detail:

Now, as is commonly believed and taught, all kindreds of the earth will be assembled together in this valley. Wherefore men are wont to inquire of those who have been in the Holy Land, how large that valley is, whether it be so wide that therein all men can stand on the day of judgment. Simple folk care for nothing else, but are anxious about the size of the valley of Jehoshaphat; and sometimes it has happened, and does still happen, that pilgrims pile up stones for themselves in that Valley, wishing before the day of judgment to secure a place for themselves whereon they may sit on the day of judgment. And sometimes simple folk give money to pilgrims about to set out to Jerusalem, to mark a place for them with a stone in the valley of Jehoshaphat, to which place they believe that they will come on the day of judgment. When such men question one about the size of the valley, in good sooth one is forced to answer that the valley is of no great size, and that in its present form it would hardly be able to take in one nation, for all the Swabians who are now actually alive could

<sup>51</sup> Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium*, ed. by Hassler, I, p. 392; Felix Fabri, *Wanderings*, trans. by Stewart, I, Part II, p. 491.

barely find standing room in it, without mentioning those who have been, or who will hereafter be.<sup>52</sup>

Much can be made of this delightful vignette. The collective designation 'simple folk' or 'common people' is used as a source for accepted but dubious traditions, as already noted above; pilgrimage habits (also mentioned above); and such other well-known phenomena as pilgrimage by proxy and pilgrimage through objects.<sup>53</sup> But the main problem the story raises, put in a somewhat humorous way, is the disappointment and concern raised by the sight of the tiny valley, a concern Fabri now sets out to resolve. His solution, for the simple-minded simple folk, rests on the authority of the Scriptures:

But on the day of judgment the shape of that valley will be different, as will be that of the whole earth also; for before the judgment the world will burn and be freed from all uncleanness. [...] That this valley will be enlarged is evident from Zach. 14, where we are told that the Mount of Olives shall be riven from the east to the west, and one part of the mount shall be upon the south side, and the other on the north side [...] When this division is made, let no one be anxious about the room [...] for the cleft in the Mount of Olives towards the east hath beyond it the exceeding wide plain country of Jericho, and the vast wildernesses of Jordan, which could contain all the people in the world.<sup>54</sup>

And for those who are not yet convinced, Fabri offers yet another answer that he deems an even better one: in the day of judgement, those who have spent their lives righteously and virtuously will have unmolested places to stand, prepared for them by their angels, while the wicked will have wretched places and will stand in great misery. Therefore there is no reason to secure a place in the Valley, because

If thou art wicked, and hast set up a stone for thyself, that stone shall cry out against thee, neither will the evildoer have any place wherein to rest; for the just will miraculously and gloriously stand in the air, but the unjust

52 Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium*, ed. by Hassler, I, p. 392–93; Felix Fabri, *Wanderings*, trans. by Stewart, I, Part II, pp. 491–92. See also Felix Fabri, *Die Sionpilger*, ed. by Carls, p. 136.

53 Leigh Ann Craig, *Wandering Women and Holy Matrons: Women as Pilgrims in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 222–39; Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, pp. 295–302.

54 Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium*, ed. by Hassler, I, p. 393; Felix Fabri, *Wanderings*, trans. by Stewart, I, Part II, pp. 492–93.

will stand on the earth in the fire, in disgrace and misery, shrieking and howling.<sup>55</sup>

Felix Fabri, Francesco Suriano, Dolcibene, and other Renaissance travellers coped with the conflict between the imagined landscape and the real one because the latter did not seem to fit its designation. In a broader sense, we can define this conflict as a clash between the literal and the allegorical and also between reason and faith. In the same way, medieval commentators coped with biblical stories that were not in line with reason. A clear case is the story of Noah's ark.<sup>56</sup> Many details of the story do not stand up to reason: the dimensions of the ark, its shape, the chronology of the flood, and secondary questions such as what the animals had to eat during the flood, did they multiply, and so on. Questions were already raised in the Middle Ages, but they became troubling, as Don Cameron Allen observes, at a time when the 'leaven of rationalism had obviously been at work'.<sup>57</sup> 'Conscious of the dilemma', he writes, 'men sought to arrange a compromise between what they wanted to believe and what they had to believe'. As most of them were unaware that there could never be a treaty between reason and faith, the men of faith were forced 'to keep their mathematics, if they have any, in the side pocket of their minds'.<sup>58</sup>

Felix Fabri also encountered the need to bridge the discrepancy between the physical, actual geography that the traveller met and the sacred tradition based on scriptural evidence, at the place believed to be the centre of the earth.<sup>59</sup> In the choir of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, pilgrims were shown a round stone with a hole in the middle, believed to be the centre of the earth. According to ancient traditions, bodies situated above this point on the lofty vaulted roof of the choir would cast no shadow when the sun shines directly overhead at midday. One of Fabri's companions actually tested this belief and attested to its veracity. The learned Fabri, however, did not accept this as

55 Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium*, ed. by Hassler, I, pp. 393–94; Felix Fabri, *Wanderings*, trans. by Stewart, I, Part II, p. 493.

56 Don Cameron Allen, *The Legend of Noah: Renaissance Rationalism in Art, Science, and Letters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963).

57 Allen, *Legend of Noah*, p. 75. All questions and answers concerning Noah's ark were assembled by Nicholas of Lyra in the fourteenth century.

58 Allen, *Legend of Noah*, p. 174.

59 Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium*, ed. by Hassler, I, pp. 306–07; Felix Fabri, *Wanderings*, trans. by Stewart, I, Part II, pp. 374–77; Dorothea R. French, 'Journeys to the Center of the Earth: Medieval and Renaissance Pilgrimages to Mount Calvary', in *Journeys Toward God: Pilgrimage and Crusade*, ed. by Barbara N. Sargent-Baur (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1992), pp. 45–81 (pp. 69–75).

certain proof that that spot is the centre of the world. He had read of other places where at certain times men's bodies cast no shadow. He was also familiar with new discoveries in cartography and aware of the possible discrepancy between beliefs and secular science. His solution is to accept both but to prefer the sacred proof of the Scriptures. Jerusalem is the centre of the earth because 'the infallible truth of Holy Scripture proves by its testimonies that Jerusalem is in the middle of the world.' The Christian authorities maintain that Jerusalem is the centre of the earth because the True Cross stood there, and as Christ is the central person in the Trinity, the mediator between God and man, and holds the middle position in the scheme of redemption, 'He chose the middle point of the world and set up His cross in the same'.<sup>60</sup> The place where the redemption of mankind began is, for Fabri, the centre of the world, a truth more real and stronger than any scientific proof.

The problem of the Valley of Jehoshaphat was solved in the same way. While Francesco Suriano said bluntly 'with God nothing is impossible', Felix Fabri was carried away in a burst of creativity. Yet both gave the same answer: because the authoritative text cannot be changed, the geography is bound to change. Authority defeats doubt. The Valley of Jehoshaphat is indeed the place of the Last Judgement, but the future Valley is not identical to the present one. Like a text whose simple, literal sense hides a sublime allegorical meaning, the present landscape conceals a future geography, ready for its eschatological purpose. In other words, the sacred place is only a metaphor and, as noted by Eitan Bar-Yosef, 'the literalization of the metaphor had never succeeded in surpassing the metaphor itself'.<sup>61</sup> While Felix Fabri had to go as far as Jerusalem to realize that, other Christian authors were aware of it from the start. For Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth century, the Valley of Jehoshaphat and the Mount of Olives were metaphors for sin and virtue, punishment and salvation. He writes:

To climb the Mount of Olives one must go down into the valley of Josaphat, so that in contemplating the richness of divine mercy you may not forget the fear of judgment. [...] Into this valley the proud stumble and are crushed; the humble descend and suffer little harm. The proud man excuses his sin, but the humble man accuses himself, knowing that

60 Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium*, ed. by Hassler, I, p. 308; Felix Fabri, *Wanderings*, trans. by Stewart, I, Part II, p. 377; French, 'Journeys to the Center of the Earth', pp. 73–75.

61 Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture, 1799–1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 294.

God will not judge him a second time (Nahum 1. 9–LXX), and that if we judge ourselves we shall assuredly escape judgment (1 Cor 11. 31).<sup>62</sup>

Coming back to Kingscourt's amazement, we may now ask with him: is the Valley of Jehoshaphat a real place? For Bernard of Clairvaux, Felix Fabri, and Herzl, the answer was twofold. There indeed exists a traditional place by that name, and tradition matters. And yet, it is a place whose significance is in the future, a place in time rather than in space, a no-place. If, as Bianca Kühnel writes, 'in many ways, Jerusalem is a creature of the imagination', then the Valley of Jehoshaphat is an extreme example, even a symbol, of this assertion.<sup>63</sup> More than a place, the Valley of Jehoshaphat is an idea.

62 Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of the New Knighthood: A Treatise on the Knights Templar and the Holy Places of Jerusalem*, trans. by M. Conrad Greenia, intro. by Malcolm Barber (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000; repr. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010),

p. 59

63 Bianca Kühnel, 'The Holy Land Beyond the Sea', in *Ut Videant et Contingant: Essays on Pilgrimage and Sacred Space in Honour of Ora Limor*, ed. by Yitzhak Hen and Iris Shagrir (Raanana: Open University, 2011), pp. 249–66 (p. 249) (Hebrew).