Sometimes power struggles over control of a city's symbols have implications that reach far beyond the boundaries of that city. This is especially true for cities that are considered sacred. I had this in mind when I gave the following paper at the annual conference of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah in 1996. (Provo, of course, is an important center of Mormonism.) The paper was later translated for publication in Russia.

CHAPTER 12

Sacred Cities and Geopolitics and Economics: The Case of Jerusalem

Introduction

In the history of the world, there have been two primary kinds of sacred cities: cities at sites where gods were believed to dwell or visit, and cities associated with the founder of a faith or associated with key historical events affecting that faith. The second kind came later than the first, but some of the first kind still exist.

When post-Axial Age rulers claimed to rule by divine right or with divine guidance, their political capitals became a third kind of city with religious connotations: for example, Paris/Versailles of Louis XIV or Holy Moscow.

Jerusalem is an especially vivid example among sacred cities because it exemplifies all three types. Not even Mecca can make that claim, since Mecca is not a political capital.

The Psychology of Symbols

Sacred cities are important for what they symbolize. There are differing opinions about the role symbols play in human psychology. Carl Jung believed that each individual has a personal unconscious, but also carries within him part of the collective unconscious. Certain symbols are archetypes projected out of that collective unconscious. These archetypes depict a perennial reality more true than what our everyday perceptions tell us.

Cities are the sites of symbolic forms such as gardens in various styles, squares or circles, spires or towers, domes, fountains, and processional ways. The forms signify the fundamental conditions with which gods once were connected: e.g., the lost paradise, chaos, order, life, death, and the sacred path. According to Jung, man projects forms out of his unconscious so that they can be assimilated into the ego.[1]

Most gods and their manifestations have signified power relationships. In a debate with Freud over whether sex is the primary determinant of human conduct and the deeper meaning of symbols, Alfred Adler contended that a drive for power and control underlies human behavior, including sexual relationships. Cities as manmade artifacts represent human power and control vis-à-vis nature.

A number of recent writers have been preoccupied with the symbols needed for identity formation, and symbols related to self/other distinctions, including

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self and the divine other.[2] All these various aspects of psychology underlie the controversy over Jerusalem and affect attitudes toward other sacred cities.

From Sacred Nature to Sacred Capitals of Empires

What characterized the pagan age was the belief that the divine was immanent in the world. The most important gods were those who created the world and sustained it. Nature and its gods were omnipresent because most people were rural. A sacred place might be a spring, river, lake, well, tree, or grove of trees, forest clearing, meadow, marsh, stone or pile of stones, hill, mountain, or valley, as well as man-made places. "Anything that stood out from its surroundings and ran counter to the natural order could be . . . a revelation of the divine."[3]

Gods existed before cities did, and might appear in animal form, as in early Egypt, or as a round or square block of stone, as in Nabatean Petra. God-blocks in the form of an obelisk appeared near Petra and at the chief shrine of Aphrodite in Cyprus. It was not that the images were themselves divine, but the god-force might become incarnate in the image.

Gods were forces and had to be propitiated. Especially when they became anthropomorphic, they had to be housed and fed. Therefore, temples were built and ritual feasts and ceremonies helped to renew their depleted energies.[4] Human sacrifices to gods occurred not only in the Middle East but also in such diverse places as Polynesia, Aztec Tenochtitlán, and among the Vikings.[5] Animal sacrifice was practiced in China, India, pre-Buddhist Tibet, Greece, and Peru, as well as in the ancient Near East. "[S]acrifice engendered feelings of joy and happiness at the working of Grace. It was seen as a renewal of the close relationship between Man and the deity, a sort of mystical union with God."[6]

The word "holocaust" applied to the 20th-century genocide of the Jews has connotations of ritual sacrifice: the mass ritual sacrifice of animals in pagan Anatolia and in the Temple in Jerusalem were called holocausts. Christian doctrine emphasized the connection between Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the redemption of believers. The wafers and wine in the Catholic ritual of holy communion symbolize the flesh and blood of Christ, the sacrificial lamb.

When early peoples were non-sedentary, it is not surprising that their gods also lived in temporary dwellings. The Ugaritic god, El, father of Baal, lived in a tent shrine on a mountain where the gods assembled each year to establish the laws of the universe.[7] Before the Israelite kingdom was formed in Canaan, the Israelite god Yahweh (Jehova) lived in a tent. "Deities in wagons seem to have been an ancient part of north European religion."[8]

Since most human life was rural, many gods were rural. Gods protected the fields in ancient Mesopotamia.[9] Rome's deities were originally guardians of the land.[10]

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Ancient China, Japan, Greece, Rome, and other places had household gods. Every Aztec house had an altar.[11] In Roman farmhouses, the door and hearth were sacred. When the Roman state was created, its religion was "domestic religion carried out on a collective scale."[12]

In the classic dichotomy between sacred and profane, many turn-of-the-20th-century American writers and Mao Tse Tung in post-1945 China placed cities firmly in the category of the profane. In both cases, it was because they associated cities with foreigners and with presumed moral decadence, i.e., loss of traditional rural-based values. On the other hand, in ancient Greece, all cities were sacred. The city belonged to the deity who watched over it.[13]

When some people moved from farm to city, they took their gods with them. According to Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, the sacred places in the City of Rome evolved from the fields and homes of farmers. A huge freestanding double door was placed in the northeast corner of the forum, dedicated—as farmers' door sills were—to the god Janus. On the opposite side of the forum, there was a hearth dedicated to Vesta, as farmers' hearths were dedicated to Vesta. Thus, the forum was like a house.[14] Many of the features of Chinese imperial capitals were like the features of a Chinese house.[15]

As cities developed, religion and urban power were closely associated. The earliest known settlements had shrines—for example, Çatal Hüyük in southern Anatolia in the 7th millennium B.C.E.[16] Each Egyptian early settlement appears to have adopted an animal as a totemic god.[17] The city gods of ancient Sumer had their own city-states with numerous lesser gods to serve them. The earthly ruler was the city god's representative. Temple architecture was well evolved in Sumerian cities by the 4th millennium B.C.E.[18] The prestige of a god began to depend in part upon the magnificence of his temple.[19] In turn, the great god of a Near Eastern city was the metaphysical reality of the city. If a god did not receive sufficient attention, he might withdraw his patronage of the city.

Great cities claimed to be axial centers—a center of the world and an axis between sky, earth, and netherworld. Babylon became such an axis. According to its legends, after the god Marduk created the world, he and humans worked together to build Babylon as its center. "Each year the deities would assemble there at the gate of the gods." Marduk, ruler of Babylon, imposed divine order on the world from his great palace-temple in the center of the city.[20]

In due time, Jerusalem claimed to be an axial center. Byzantine Christians called it "the navel of the earth." Rome, Chinese capitals, Aztec Tenochtitlán, and other places also claimed that distinction.

Sumerian and Babylonian gods reinforced law and morality. They had the power to forgive or to punish.[21]

Where there were multiple gods, they were usually arranged in a pantheon. Within cities in many parts of the world, gods helped establish and sustain the

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identity of different occupations. In ancient Sumer, each city had its hierarchy of gods that related to and reinforced the social order. For Indo-European speaking peoples, the arrangement of society in three classes—priests, warriors, and herdsmen—was paralleled by three categories of divinities and of rituals that honored them.[22] In classical Athens, a temple to the god of artisans looked over the Agora. Much later, in medieval England, individual guilds had patron saints, and guilds' religious festivals set the tone of pre-Reformation city life.

Gods not only reinforced social order and individual and group roles within that order; they also serviced geopolitical struggles. The rivalry between ancient cities was thought to be a rivalry between their gods, although the gods of many cities might convene, as they did in the sacred Sumerian city of Nippur, the headquarters of the cult of Enil, a chief god of the Sumerians.[23] Later versions of this central gathering place were Mt. Olympus for Greek gods after the Dorian invasions and the legendary Valhalla of Old Norse gods.

Over time, there was a transition of power from the gods to human rulers.[24] A ruler might claim to be descended from a god, he might become a god after death, or he might simply be a god's agent. The kings of ancient Ugarit in Syria were regarded as viceroys of El's son, the god Baal. The power of rulers was reinforced by great temples such as the Egyptian temple of Karnak at Thebes, first built between 1991 and 1971 B.C.E., or Luxor at Thebes, built some time after 1290 B.C.E., or the temple of Ptah, "creator of all things," built at Memphis after 1223 B.C.E.[25] Heliopolis, now a suburb of Cairo, was "the ancient holy city where the pharaohs came to have their power consecrated."[26]

When political arrangements evolved encompassing more territory than a tribe or city, religion played a key role. Early political federations were matched by federations of gods. In the continual power struggles of the ancient Middle East, a city might have an advantage if its god was suitable for syncretism. For example, kings of the Babylonian empire made the sky-god Marduk "the international god, for in this way they were much better able to identify their interests, religious and political, throughout their expanding empire . . . the members of the old Sumerian pantheon were allowed to survive as worthy prisoners of the state, but they had no authority comparable to that to Marduk, who by the time of Hammurabi [commonly dated 1792–1750 B.C.E.] was the undisputed master of both heaven and earth." "Marduk was the god of the nation; the king was his representative on earth; and everybody else was therefore the servant of the divinely appointed monarch."[27] This kind of tactic worked in a variety of later contexts, whether the sky god was the Indo-Europeans' Father Sky, the Greeks' Zeus, Rome's Jupiter, or Thor of the Norse.

Anyone traveling in the Middle East cannot help but notice how each successive empire coopted the gods and shrines of its predecessors.[28] The local deities of Canaan were known in general as El.[29] Armstrong writes: "It is highly

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likely that Abraham's God was El, the High God of Canaan."[30] According to the Bible, Abraham's son Jacob adopted the name Isra-El.[31] The covenant Yahweh is said to have made with Moses was in the form of ancient Near Eastern treaties such as those drawn up by the Hittites.[32] Jerusalem was the site of other gods nearly a millennium before the time when the Bible says Israelites took over.

Archaeologists and historians do not agree with Biblical accounts of how the Israelites came to Canaan or the degree to which they took over there. Some say the Israelites were originally Canaanites who went to settle in the hills around the site that became Jerusalem. Greenberg's *The Moses Mystery,* published in 1996, claims that stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were based on Egyptian mythology.[33] It was common in that era to have mythological ancestors. Moses, he says, was originally named Osarseph and was the chief priest for the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten. Akhenaten changed his name from Amenhotep when he became pharaoh and tried to enforce monotheistic worship of Aten, the sun disk. He was in rivalry with Thebes and the Theban god, Amen. Osarseph took the name Hormose or Ramose, which was shortened to Moses. When Akhenaten died, and Thebans came back into power, Moses fled and then returned with an army which included troops from the Canaanite kingdom of Shechem. When his attempted coup failed, a truce was negotiated and Moses' motley army was allowed to leave Egypt. This was the Exodus, Greenberg says.[34]

Over time, the Israelites, who [Greenberg claims] were primarily Egyptians, spread into what is now central western Jordan, then spread across the river into the largely unoccupied hills of central Canaan, then spread northward and southward. Because Sea Peoples were invading at this time, the Israelites in central Canaan formed an alliance with leaders of several northern city-states.[35] At this time, there were "Canaanite, Greek, and Egyptian deities and priests within the Israelite ranks, as well as Atenists."[36]

The stories about 12 Israelite tribes were a myth [Greenberg claims] borrowed from Egyptian mythology. The story of Joshua's conquest of Jericho was pure fiction.[37] Jebusites in Jerusalem remained in control there up until the time covered by the Book of Judges. At the period ascribed to Joshua, the Israelites were "constantly subjected to Canaanite domination."[38]

Greenberg concludes: "There is no established evidence that David, Solomon, or the vast and glorious empire over which they ruled ever existed." The name Solomon meant "peaceable." It could have been a title adopted by many Hebrew kings.[39]

Ahlström, the highly learned Swedish scholar, in a book published posthumously in 1993, states that David captured Jerusalem after he had conquered much of the rest of Canaan, and "for a short time Jerusalem became the political center in Syria-Palestine."[40] Later stories, which could have been political propaganda, describe his bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, thus

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signaling that Yahweh was the main god, though not the only god.[41] There is no evidence, Ahlström says, that David eliminated the Jebusite cult.[42] In Canaan El was now called Yahweh or Yahweh-El. But "what happened regarding religion in the capital did not affect the fertility rites in the villages."[43]

David's wars against the Moabites and Edomites were cruel. By modern standards, they were barbaric.[44] Ahlström says David was able to conquer because there was a power vacuum at that time. Even so, there were dangerous rebellions. "It has often been maintained," Ahlström says, "that Solomon ascended the throne through a panic-stricken palace intrigue."[45] Ahlström agrees with Greenberg that there are no extra-biblical texts for this period. "The name Solomon is of the same root as the god name Shalem, which is also part of the name of the capital of Jerusalem" in pre-Israelite tradition. The Syrian god Shalem was said to have founded the city toward the end of the 19th century B.C.E. It was first called Rushalimum.[46]

According to the Bible, Solomon built the first temple for Yahweh in Jerusalem. The story is that it was constructed like a Syrian imperial building, replete with symbols borrowed from Canaanite and Syrian myths, including myths about Baal, son of the great Canaanite god El.

A legendary palace had been built for Baal above Mt. Zaphon, about 20 miles from Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast. The people of Ugarit built a replica of that palace in their city so that "heaven would come to earth in their city and they would create an enclave of life as it was meant to be in the midst of a dangerous world."[47] Once the Israelites installed their Ark in the Temple in Jerusalem, they viewed their city as an axial center that linked heaven and earth and also had its roots in the underworld, represented by the primal sea. "The psalms often describe Yahweh enthroned in his temple as king, just as Baal, Marduk, and Dagon, the gods of their neighbors, presided as monarch."[48] The ancient Canaanite religions still flourished in Israel's fertility rites and sacred sects.[49]

By the time of Nebuchadnezzar II (604–561 B.C.E.), Babylon was still claiming to be an axial center. It had an "enormous holy precinct, Esagila, the temple of Marduk," main sanctuary of the city. A processional way extended from the temple to the Ishtar gate. (Ishtar was the goddess of sexual love, fertility, and war.)[50]

In Canaan, the Israelites were only gradually able to enforce among themselves the idea that Yahweh was their only god. In 742 B.C.E., when they were on the brink of war and extinction, most of them "believed implicitly in the existence of pagan deities."[51] Judah's king between 687 and 640 B.C.E. encouraged his people to worship pagan gods alongside Yahweh.[52] One foreign power after another came to dominate the land until 587–586 B.C.E., when Jerusalem was destroyed, its temple burned, and many Jews were taken away to a 70-year exile

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in Babylon. There, some of them worshipped Babylonian gods. When Persians conquered the Middle East, they allowed the Jews of Babylon to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. But then, the Axial Age had arrived.

After the Axial Age — From Holy Places to Holy People

In the pagan age, the divine had permeated the world. During the Axial Age of Zoroaster, Buddha, and the Greek philosophers, the divine began to be radically separated from the world, although traces of the pagan concepts of epiphany and incarnation reappeared.[53] A shift was taking place away from holy places to holy people (e.g., avatars in India, or the Jews as Chosen People or—later—Jesus Christ). Many centuries later came the Calvinist concept of the elect.

In the Axial Age, people were less locality-bound. This was especially true for Jews, who began writing their Bible at the time of Homer and added to it and edited it at the time when Persians were their overlords.[54] Access to the temple was not so important when the Bible could be taught in synagogues.

Then came Greek conquests in the Middle East and Israelite clashes with the Greeks and Romans. In 167 B.C.E., Greek rulers decreed that secular law should replace Mosaic law in Judaea. A statue of Zeus was added to the temple in Jerusalem. Under the Romans, the puppet king Herod, an Edomite who had been forcibly converted to Judaism, built a magnificent new temple in the city.[55] But, after a fierce rebellion, the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 C.E., and after a second rebellion in 132 C.E., Jews were expelled altogether from Jerusalem, which became the Roman city Aelia Capitolina. Some Jews lived in what we now call the West Bank. Most were in diaspora. By the 4th century C.E., many Jews regarded the temple in Jerusalem, drenched as it had been in the blood of animals, "as a primitive and barbarous institution."[56] Nevertheless, Jews did not forget Jerusalem—they prayed facing its direction; they mentioned it in their prayers. So did Christians. So, at first, did Muslims, and the city is still the third holiest of Muslim cities because Muhammed is believed to have ascended to heaven from there.

I would argue that the monotheism of the new age was less important than its belief that access to God was portable, a useful belief for diasporas and trading caravans. Theoretically, this could do away with the need for sacred places. As Christian theologians gradually evolved the doctrine of the Trinity, with its debt to earlier concepts of epiphany and incarnation, and the doctrines of atonement and redemption related to earlier concepts about blood sacrifice, it would seem as if all the old functions of a holy place had been preempted by a holy person. Yet, earlier concepts of a sacred place did not vanish.

Ancient Babylon "was supposed to be an image of heaven, with each of its temples a replica of a celestial palace."[57] Angkor, Tenochititlán, and Chinese imperial cities alike either replicated or provided a link to the cosmos. "Divine right" rulers built palaces and gardens that reinforced their claims.

Jungians point to the ubiquitousness of the mandala form in cities. In ancient Greek cities, festivals, processions, theater, and games were all aspects of religion. Before the Reformation in Europe, most holidays were religious. Religious symbolism and celebration set the rhythms of the city. The Mardi Gras still reigns in New Orleans and Rio. The city as theater helped people internalize religious values.

Earlier concepts of the immanence of the divine in the world still live among us. The Hindu Brahman is still the sacred power that sustains all things.[58] Shi'ite Muslims still believe "that divinities inhabit every distinct phenomenon in nature, including humans." There have been numerous epiphanies—for example, appearances of the Holy Mary. Some of them are convenient for rulers, such as an Indian's vision of the Virgin Mary at Guadalupe in 1531 in Mexico. Village people still pray to local gods in India.

God, National State, National Capital, and Personal Identity

Nevertheless, distancing of the divine from the world in the Axial Age led some peoples to seek their identity and group coherence from their own historicity. Jewish holidays celebrate specific events in Jewish history, not all of which took place in Jerusalem. Christians still celebrate Christmas and Easter. At one time, their calendars teemed with religious holidays. Key dates and places for Sunni Muslims are places and events in the life of the Prophet. Shi'ite Muslims commemorate events in their own special history, and consider sacred places, such as Karbala in Iraq, where those events occurred.

As national states increasingly became defined in terms of territory, and power centered in the capital, a place, rather than just in the person of the king, then that capital had a religious quality even when there was a conscious move toward secularization. Nevertheless, for religions of the book, there was no place like Jerusalem.

All three religions of the book have strong historic claims to the city. Arabs say that the West Semites who lived in pre-Israelite Canaan were their cousins. The Jebusites in Jerusalem are said to have been related to Indo-European speaking peoples. Certainly the Jewish kingdom preceded the Arab and Turkish empires, but it was always tenuous and, as an independent entity, it did not last very long. By claiming kinship with Greeks and Romans, Christians can claim to have held the land for over 1000 years. Newly converted to Christianity, the Roman emperor Constantine built the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at what was presumed to be Christ's tomb in Jerusalem. Palestinians, as the heirs of Arab conquerors, can claim to have held the city some 1300 years [although for

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a number of centuries they were under the jurisdiction of the (Turkish but Muslim) Ottoman Empire]. Muslims built a dome on the rock atop Temple Mount from which Muhammed is said to have ascended to heaven. The still-standing western wall that helped support Herod's temple became the Jews' Wailing Wall.

Down through the centuries, pilgrims from all three religions came to the city to pray. Even after Muslims took over Palestine, some Jews and Christians continued to live there, especially in Jerusalem. Christians were roughly one-third of Jerusalem's population in 1800, around 19 percent in 1946. They are now about 2.5 percent, mostly local Arabs divided between Catholics and Greek Orthodox plus fewer than 2000 Armenians.[59] In the age of nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Palestinians had reason to hope they could claim Palestine as their own nation-state. So did Zionists.

All these religions consider Jerusalem to be a sacred city, not just a secular capital. When the messiah comes (or returns, in the case of Jesus), a Day of Reckoning will be inaugurated in Jerusalem. The dead will rise again. Unbelievers will be punished, and the faithful will be rewarded.

Sacred Cities, Power, and Economics

There was a fierce and fearsome quality in early religions: the human and animal sacrifices, the massacres. 1 Kings 11.15 states: "When David was in Edom and Joab the commander of the Army went up to bury the dead, he killed every male in Edom." 2 Samuel 11.1 says: "Joab also ravaged the Ammonites living to the east of Jerusalem."

Fierceness in claiming possession of a sacred city still endures, whether we speak of Jerusalem or sacred sites in India. Certainly, power is believed to be at stake. Economic reward may be somewhere in the background. It has been written that David and Solomon massacred the Edomites because they stood in the way of Israelite control of lucrative north–south trade routes. It has also been written that Solomon took foreign wives, including the daughter of the pharaoh of Egypt, for the worldly power and economic gain they helped him to achieve.[60] The Crusader kings—or renegade Christian warriors—cast a covetous eye on the loot to be gained from Muslim pilgrims on the routes between Damascus and Mecca. To have exclusive control of Jerusalem today would be to have symbolic power over more than two billion Muslims and Christians. The Agudah, founded by Orthodox Jews in 1912, proclaimed in October, 1952: "The world was created for the sake of Israel. . . . This means that the *raison d'être* of the world is the establishment of the regime of the Torah in the land of Israel."[61] Also, the sacred city attracts a lucrative tourist trade, just as such sacred cities as Rome or Santiago de Compostela in Europe or Banaras in India

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have attracted pilgrims and tourists for many centuries. From ancient Sumer onward, economic gain has rarely been completely detached from administration of sacred precincts. Former Israeli vice-mayor of Jerusalem, Meron Benvenisti, wrote in 1996 that over one-third of the area annexed to Jerusalem since 1967 was private Arab land expropriated by the government and handed over to Jews.[62] "Patriotism—the refuge of scoundrels, charlatans, and the greedy—provides a cover for acts of folly and corruption."[63]

People do believe what their religions tell them, but it must be admitted that the subject of sacred cities is very complex. No more so than in the case of Jerusalem.

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