

The sanctification of antiquity sites in the Jerusalem section of the 'Peace to Prosperity' plan

For the last twenty years, the settlers together with successive right-wing governments have invested efforts in creating a Bible land in Jerusalem. An examination of the section on Jerusalem's Historic Basin in President Trump's 'Peace to Prosperity' plan reveals elements of a Messianic vision that characterizes parts of the settler movement .

The plan addresses the religious importance of the three monotheistic faiths and continues to note a list of holy sites. Upon examining the list of sites, it becomes clear that several of them are not holy, but rather antiquity sites or historic structures with no sacred significance. Among the holy sites listed in the document, some are sacred to more than one religion, such as the Gihon Spring/Ein Umm Al-Daraj/the Pool of Siloam .

Another issue relates to whether all holy sites are sacred to the same degree. Those who drafted the plan seem to understand that the Temple Mount/Haram a-Sharif is the holiest site in Jerusalem for Judaism and Islam. Yet can the value of the Sambuski Cemetery (which only a handful of people can identify) be compared with that of the Via Dolorosa?

It appears that beyond indicating the city's sanctity, the list of sites is indicative of how dangerous it is for Jerusalem to remain under the sovereignty of one party which has an interest in underscoring and enhancing its own religious and historical connection to the city. Emek Shaveh's publication *Selectively Sacred: Holy Sites in Jerusalem and its Environs* (2016), details how Israel has recognized Jewish sites as holy, without formally recognizing Christian or Muslim sites .

In our opinion, the assumption articulated in President Trump's plan, according to which Israel optimally or equitably protects historical and holy sites, is mistaken. Over the past 20 years we have witnessed the opposite phenomenon, in which the Jewish narrative at heritage sites has been highlighted while non-Jewish connections to sites have been played down or ignored. Settler organizations and the Israeli government have initiated several plans, most notably the Shalem Plan, which aims to reinforce the Jewish connection to Jerusalem through archaeological excavations and tourism. To our knowledge, no projects exist that aim to strengthen Christian or Muslim connections to the city .

The following is a description of the religious and/or archaeological significance and status of the sites listed in Trump's plan:

The Temple Mount/Haram a-Sharif – The holiest site in Jerusalem for both Jews and Muslims. The Israeli state and established Jewish law prohibits Jews from praying on the Temple Mount. To date, it is the most important prayer site for Muslims in the country, and a national and religious symbol. Any perceived threat to the Muslim connection to the Mount leads to unrest. It is hard to predict exactly how a change in the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif would play out through the Muslim world .

The Western Wall – The Western Wall is physically part of the Temple Mount compound. Following 1967, Israel decided to solely permit Jewish prayer on site, setting the basis for the unwritten status quo that Jews pray at the Western Wall and Muslims on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. During the British Mandate Period (1920-1948), this was a mixed Jewish-Muslim place of worship. Incidents between Jews and Muslims at the Western Wall in 1929 led to riots associated with the start of the violent struggle between Jews and Palestinians .

Christian sites ranging from The Church of St. Anne to the 'House of Abraham' – Sites under the authority of the church, with some under the direct authority of various countries. They do not currently appear to be politically contentious, though settler organizations are applying pressure to shift the status quo on some of these sites, such as the "Room of the Last Supper" among others. Yet to date, these countries have managed overall to preserve their properties and status .

Mount Scopus – The state of Israel has not recognized Mount Scopus to be sacred at all. In relation to other sites in Jerusalem, the site is hardly mentioned as part of the Jewish, Christian, or Muslim traditions .

The Hurva Synagogue – A synagogue built at the end of the 18th century and destroyed after the 1948 war by the Jordanians. It is not considered a holy site beyond its existence as a Jewish place of worship.

The Tomb of Absalom/Tantur Faron ('Pharaoh's hat' in Arabic) – A monumental structure located in the Kidron Valley, east of the Old City, dating to the first century BCE. The site is identified with various Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions regarding who is buried within site, ranging from Absalom, son of King David, to Isaiah, Zecharia, and more .

Zecharia's Tomb – A burial structure from the first century CE located next to Absalom's Tomb. It was likely used for the burials of honorable individuals during the Second Temple period. The structure is empty and is not currently used for burials .

' Path of the Pilgrims' – An archaeological excavation site under the homes of the Palestinians in the neighborhood of Silwan. The excavations are being carried out by the Antiquities Authority, and are funded by the Elad Foundation and the state of Israel. The excavation unearthed a road from the first century. The excavations are still ongoing and no scientific reports have been published. Identification of the site remains unclear, therefore its branding as the 'Path of the Pilgrims' has not been backed by any publicized research. This is certainly not a holy site .

The Tombs of the Prophets Haggai, Zecharia, and Malachi – A site on the Mount of Olives. The tradition that associates the site as the tombs of Haggai, Zecharia and Malachi is not corroborated by scholars and not supported by many clerics. Its entire identification is scientifically problematic and based on very rare Christian traditions adopted by settlers .

Gihon Spring/Ein Umm Al-Daraj/the Pool of Siloam – A Jewish, Christian, and Muslim holy site located in the neighborhood of Silwan. The City of David/neighborhood of Wadi Hilweh is located on the eastern slope of the site. Archaeological excavations subsidized by the Elad Foundation have been conducted on site for 25 years. The site is considered holy among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, since the period of the British Mandate, and Israel still relates to it as such. It appears on Israel's official list of holy sites .

The Mount of Olives – A Jewish cemetery and Christian holy site. The State of Israel recognizes it as a holy site for Jews .

The Sambuski Cemetery – Not a holy site. A cemetery in Jerusalem established in the 19th century on the slope of Mount Zion facing the Ben Hinnom Valley. The Nature and Parks Authority renovated the site in 2010. The site is neither well known by the Israeli public nor by Jewish clerics .

Pool of Siloam – A holy site for Christians. Located at the foot of the Wadi Hilweh neighborhood in Silwan. The Antiquities Authority excavated part of it in 2004, following which it became part of the City of David National Park .

In conclusion, the lack of a distinction between of holy sites and historical sites in the plan reveals a lacuna in specific knowledge of the sites and history of the city. In

addition, the plan does not make a distinction between central holy sites and peripheral sites or sites that are of varying importance to more than one religion .

These matters seem to warrant rewriting the plan's section on Jerusalem and its holy sites, with an in-depth recognition of the city's diverse traditions, and a familiarity with archaeological research and the sociopolitical changes that have occurred over the past several decades.

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