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Оригинални научни рад

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## World and World Views at the Time of the First Christians<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Central places like Rome, Delphi, or Jerusalem legitimize the respective cult community by directing all conditions in the world and in history towards their center. Accordingly, the world order is maintained in the microcosm of the temple. As the “navel of the world,” the temple thus serves the emergence and preservation of the cultic community. On the one hand, this makes it understandable that even the first Christians held fast to the Jerusalem Temple as a place of religious orientation. On the other hand, it explains why the Christian tradition soon identified the crucifixion site of Golgotha as the sacred world center.

**Key words:** Jerusalem, Temple, maps.

### 1. The perception of the World

Human beings perceive their surrounding environment from several different contexts: as a lived space, as space for action, as design space, as a source of raw materials and food, as shelter, or as a space of overwhelming threat.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, we orientate ourselves within this environment as three-dimensional space, comprised of four cardinal directions, and as well as an “up” and a “down.”<sup>3</sup> This world also has a temporal dimension; represented either as a cyclic system of becoming and passing away throughout the course of the year or of one’s life, or as a time axis with a creation at the beginning, history in its middle, and, finally, an end of the world.<sup>4</sup> The worldviews of classical *homo religiosus* as the basis of every description and manipulation of their surrounding

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Müller, 2001, 99–105.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gehlen, 1998, 377–398 (here: 380–384); Engeld, 1999, 408–411.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Mohn, 2004, 516–520; Tilly, 2012, 16–19.

reality therefore performs a key function with regard to the interpretation of religious traditions.<sup>5</sup>

The perception of the world by people in ancient Syria-Palestine<sup>6</sup> also took its starting point in their own local or regional living space, which was initially characterized by a sedentary or nomadic way of life. Familiarity with distant regions arose through flight or deportation, through military service and campaigns, long-distance trade and pilgrimages.<sup>7</sup> There were no holiday trips!

Since the construction of Roman roads during the Imperial Era — constructed, of course, for military and administrative reasons — led to the increased mobility of the provincial population throughout the Roman Empire and also in Syria-Palestine. This technology resulted in a significant increase in social, economic, and cultural interaction in the region. Taverns and roadhouses were available for the accommodation and catering of travellers and pilgrims. In addition to private accommodation, rooms in synagogue buildings and teaching houses were often used for overnight accommodation. The modes of transport available on land, in addition to walking, were riding on a donkey, on a mule, horse or camel — the latter often in the form of a caravan —, or riding on a carriage. When sailing on a ship, the dangers of wreckage and pirate attacks were always present.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Travel Literature and Maps

Such world experiences were literarily documented as well. In the literature of ancient Judaism, travel reports<sup>9</sup> began to proliferate — such as that of Aristeas from Alexandria, who reports in detail on his manifold travel impressions in the provincial metropolis of Jerusalem, offering an idealizing description of the city and its Temple.<sup>10</sup> In accordance with literary conventions, comparable sections and excursions on geography are also found in the encyclopaedic work of Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* III–VI) and the histories of Tacitus (*Hist.* V,1–13). Travel literature also arose in narrative form, wherein ideal geographic and naturalistic ideas as well as social orders, modeled as deliberately plausible, were often located at the margins of the known world (cf. the legend of the ideal state Atlantis by Plato, *Tim.* 20b–25d; *Krit.* 113c–120c). Likely a reaction to current social, political, and religious developments and situations that were perceived as rejectionable, impenetrable or deficient, such travelogues of “ideal” countries and peoples enabled the negation of the reality and present surroundings of the authors and their

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Zimmermann, 1999, 604–608.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Schmidt, 1990, 119–134.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Sonnabend, 2007, 14–23.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Sperber, 1986, 95–106; Hezser, 2011, 161–183.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Bianchetti, 1999, 420–423.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Tilly, 1997, 131–153.

addressees. They can thus serve as a projection surface for counter-designs and therefore be interpreted as an implicit critique of existing orders.<sup>11</sup>

Travels in the four cardinal points of the world were not only reflected in literary travel reports, but also in world maps on parchment, papyrus or ground mosaics, which were intended to illustrate geographical impressions and phenomena.<sup>12</sup> Ancient cartography typically consisted of two types of world maps: First, maps showing trade routes, harbours, coastlines, nautical marks, shallows, and cliffs of the sea.<sup>13</sup> These maps mostly showed what was needed to move forward quickly and safely. Second, there were world maps, on which ideal centers like Rome, Delphi, or Jerusalem took the focus.<sup>14</sup> The further away a country was from this ideal center, the less important its political and religious position was. In imperial Rome, for example, Asia and Africa were regarded as marginalized both in cultural and economic terms. So the ancient world maps not only reflected how the world was geographically shaped and structured, they also demonstrated how people perceived and interpreted it.<sup>15</sup>

The semiotization of geographical spaces or points as special central places in the ancient world served as the ideal representation of symbolic orders.<sup>16</sup> Their visualization is closely connected with the interpretation of the world and with the collective formation of identity of the respective community or society, ascribing a particular cosmological, political, or religious meaning and function to the respective part of the world.<sup>17</sup> From the beginning, the symbolic interpretation of such natural landscapes and separated sacred spaces contributed to the awareness of the individual and the collective self-image.<sup>18</sup> At no time did the assertion of the central position of such a sacred space serve solely spatial orientation. In fact, it often contradicted sensory perception or the visible geomorphological and urban planning conditions. For example, one could already see in antiquity that the Temple of Jerusalem did not stand in the center of the city.<sup>19</sup> So the meaning of sacred space such as the Jerusalem Temple did not depend solely on its perceived location. A temple as a separate sacred space is characterized by its past, present, and future significance for its builders; for those whose focal point of religious life it represents; and, finally, for all those, for whom it serves as a symbol of past or future salvation.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Rohde, 1900<sup>2</sup>, 178–309; Kerényi, 1927, 44–66; Anderson, 1984, 88–105; Hägg, 1991<sup>2</sup>, 117–121.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Sonnabend, 2007, 54–63.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Dilke, 1998, 112–144.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Wolska-Conus, 1978, 155–222 (here: 156–159); Talbert, 1998, 926–929; Talbert, 1999, 252–257.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Tilly, 2002, 176f.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Assmann, 1992, 39; Bieberstein, 2000, 16–69 (here: 16).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Assmann, 1992, 59f.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Tilly, 2002, 2f.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Bahat, 1990, 12–15; Bieberstein, Bloedhorn, 1994, 17–21.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. M. Tilly, 2002, 2.

### 3. World Order and Temple Cult

The claimed dominance of such a sacred central place is derived from the position of the human being in space with his own body as “coordinate zero point.”<sup>21</sup> The range of the ordering and binding function of the pictorial designation of any geographical place in the world as its “center” is thus closely connected with the organization and self-image of a society.<sup>22</sup> Just as it is the case with a special cult or a special ethics, the significance of this place as a special symbol can rest both in the interpretative legitimation of its current social, political, and cultic-religious claims to power or task and in the retrospective assertion of its cosmological or salvific-historical significance as “memory.”<sup>23</sup>

A temple is the material and empirically comprehensible center of the transcendent sphere that exceeds our human senses — viz., the divine. A temple serves to represent symbolic orders and enables them to survive in time.<sup>24</sup> As such a symbolic center, it does not necessarily attain its geographical centrality through the space enclosing it. Rather, it is able to shape and structure space by being perceived as the central point of reference for all other spatial dimensions surrounding it.<sup>25</sup> The mythical meaning of a temple, in its architecture and inventory, thus finds its concrete expression not only in the symbolic visualization of its location, size, spatial structures, aesthetic principles, and architectural forms, but also in the form of the historical experiences, beliefs, orders, and values linked to the temple building, practices, rituals, cult forms, social institutions, and, finally, in narrative and normative written traditions.<sup>26</sup> While the “official” cult at such a central place lends meaning to the cult community and thus serves its group identity, the mythical worldview of the pious individual is dominated by the idea of securing one’s existence through the transfer of power of this vibrant center.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the complex and the importance of its central sanctuary reflects the self-image of a religious society. As the two essential components of its self-perception, worldview and social image refer to and reflect each other.

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<sup>21</sup> Gehlen, 1998, 393.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Geertz, 1987, 47f.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Cassirer, 1953, 107f.; Fishbane, 1975, 6–27 (here: 7f.); Eliade, 1953, 24–36; Eliade, 1990, 105–129; Kauhsen, 1990.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Gehlen, 1998, 384.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Jeremias, 1932, 56–69 (here: 64); Deffontaines, 1948, 41f.; Schmidt, 1960, 204–217; Hoheisel, 1988, 102–120 (here: 113f.); Gehlen, 1998, 394f.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Shils, 1983, 538–557 (here: 551); Lundquist, 1993, 19–22.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Halbwachs, 1966, 274f.; Fishbane, 1985, 413.

#### 4. The Holy Center

The assumption of a geographical center is owing to the specific worldview which people in antiquity regarded as efficient. In contrast to the knowledge about the spherical shape of the earth already postulated in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. by the Greek philosopher Pythagoras (and generally valid today), many humans at the time of the emergence of Christianity (in accordance with their sensual perception) tended to assume that the earth was a kind of round and vaulted disk, covered by the firmament, including the sun, moon, and stars.<sup>28</sup> Its interior cavities functioned as the abode for the dead.<sup>29</sup> In its sublime center, an opening to the freshwater ocean of the primal flood existed, which in turn surrounded the entire cosmos from all sides.<sup>30</sup> This world disk was of central political, cultic, and cosmological importance for the respective community or society. There they communicated with the deity, offering sacrifices both to maintain the world order and to feed and sustain the world by cult and worship.<sup>31</sup>

A universal idea in the history of religion is the designation of such a central place, with primordial meaning for the collective identity of the community connected with it, as the “navel of the world.”<sup>32</sup> The mythical idea linked to this motive is derived from the spatial self-perception of everyone with his or her own body as “coordinate zero point.”

Accordingly, one not only felt himself to be the center of the world, but was also filled with the certainty of being at the top of the world. This self-perception was nourished by the observation of the falling horizon, especially on the sea. The very idea found its way into the mythical descriptions of the world, by which incomprehensible aspects of life can be made comprehensible and can be passed on to future generations. Such a myth has the potential to provide meaning and is well-suited to pass on basic knowledge over longer periods of time. The actual geographical location of “the navel” is thus less important than its mythological meaning.<sup>33</sup>

Equally important, however, is the life-creating aspect of the navel metaphor.<sup>34</sup> Just like the central place of worship for the benefit of the cult community, the belly button is of central importance for the origin, nutrition, preservation, and development of human life. Such a mythical interpretation is certainly not

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Szabó, 1992; Wright, 1995.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Kreuzer, 2005, 79–88 (here: 85f.).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Kreuzer, 2005, 87.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Tilly, 1997, 147f.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Cassirer, 19532, 112f.; Jeremias, 1932, 66; Tilly, 2013, 131–143 (here: 131).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Cancik, Mohr, 1990, 299–323 (here: 313); Talmon, 1995, 149–176 (here: 173).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Roscher, 1913; Roscher, 1915.

handed down strictly out of piety. It must work; it must stabilize society and support a vision of humanity.<sup>35</sup>

The eternal city of Rome, Jerusalem as the Jewish place of pilgrimage, and the Greek city Delphi gained special importance as antique central places. Delphi probably had the most extensive significance as a world navel.<sup>36</sup> The oracle of Delphi initially served the local priesthood as a cultic connection between the earthly and divine spheres.<sup>37</sup> The omphalos stone (ovoid or beehive-shaped)<sup>38</sup> in the adyton of the Apollon sanctuary of Delphi, to be found at the earliest in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.,<sup>39</sup> at first, served as the regional oracle seat of Gaia, later of Apollon, to sanction diplomatic decisions, political changes, laws, treaties, cult foundations, and ethical commandments via the oracle-spells of Pythia. From 590 B.C., it also served as a central site of political interaction and mediation between the twelve northern and central Greek city-states of the Phylaic-Delphic Amphictyony.<sup>40</sup> Since the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Greek literature has linked the symbolic tradition of this central navel of the world as the center of the known world and as the ideal *axis mundi* connecting heaven and earth.<sup>41</sup>

## 5. The Temple of Jerusalem

The Jerusalem Temple as the elevated center of the world and as the starting point and guarantor of all salvation<sup>42</sup> is already mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 2, 2f.; Ezek 5, 5; 38, 12; Mic 4, 1; Ps 48,1–3 etc.) and also in Jewish religious writings from the Hellenistic-Roman period (Tob 13, 14; 1Hen 26,1–5; Let. Aris. 88–91), in the works of Philo of Alexandria (*Legat.* 294ff.) and Flavius Josephus (*B. J.* 3,52; *C. Ap.* 1,198).<sup>43</sup> In this world model, which was obviously popular in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. in view of its broad testimony,<sup>44</sup> the Jerusalem Temple is viewed as the geographical center and highest point of the world. From its center, that is from the center of the world, salvation and blessing as well as fertility and life flow into the land all around (Ezek 47,1–8; Joel 4, 18; Zech 14, 8).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Patai, 1983, 47; Bieberstein, 2000, 26.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Rosenberger, 2001, 137–147; Wolf, 2010, 93–98.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Herrmann, 1959, 22; Müller, 1996, 69–75.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Fauth, 1979, 299f.; Melas, 1990, 20f.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Burkert 1977, 188.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Marinatos, 1993, 228–233 (here: 230).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Von Scheffer, 19482, 132–166; Egelhaaf-Gaiser, 1999, 646f.; Middleton, 1888, 282–322; Brown, 2000, 205; Rosenberger, 2001, 143f.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. M. Tilly, 2002, 240–249; B. Wolf, 2010, 57–80.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. M. Tilly, 2002, 87–205.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Alexander, 1997, 197–213.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Terrien, 1970, 315–338; Fuß, 2012, 114.

The Jerusalem Temple was understood as a scaled representation of the world.<sup>46</sup> The temple was conceived by most Jews in antiquity as the starting point of world creation,<sup>47</sup> the direct access point to the flood — closed off by God himself — and the foundation stone of the world on which they lived (M Joma V 2; T Jom ha-Kippurim III 6).<sup>48</sup>

The idea of the earth disk, which is surrounded by the cosmic ocean and in whose elevated center the place of worship is located, was generally retained in the biblical tradition.<sup>49</sup> As the basis of the common cult, however, it was broadly suppressed by a dominant understanding of reality based on the history of salvation. Especially the pilgrimage festivals as original marks of the cultic influence on natural agrarian processes were about to be given a new meaning by their historicization or by the present reference to fundamental (idealized) events of salvation history.<sup>50</sup> By the periodic cultic execution of these salvation events, the performance of the priests updated, now in public ritual, the salvation acts of Yahweh as world ruler and simultaneously affirmed, e.g., in the autumn festival Sukkot, his ongoing support in the course of the year to come.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to the individual or collective atonement function of the temple sacrifice, the idea of a representation of the whole cosmos by the Jerusalem Temple as a microcosm or a direct connection between sacrificial cult and cosmic order was of great importance. The sacrificial cult in the temple was believed to influence events in the world.<sup>52</sup> If the temple sacrifice was intact, the world order also was intact. The unobtrusive payment of the shekel tax by Jews of all social classes throughout the world indicates that this special understanding of sacrificial worship in the Jerusalem Temple can be regarded as a general and unifying characteristic of ancient Jewish piety in the whole *oikumene*.<sup>53</sup> This interpretation of the holy of holies as the throne of God and starting point of all his salvation in the world is also reflected in the Christian tradition (e.g., Matt 23, 21; cf. John 1, 14).<sup>54</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Philo, *Mos* 2. 117–126; Josephus, *A. J.* 3. 122ff., 179–187.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Wensinck, 1916, XI; Van Pelt, 1984, 50–55; Tilly, 1997, 145–147; Rubenstein, 1995, 127f.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Patai, 1947; Schäfer, 1974, 122–133; Tilly, 2002, 227f.; Tilly, 2004, 62–64.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. e.g. Judg 9, 37; Isa 42, 5; 44, 24; Ps 24, 2; 136, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Lebram, 1989<sup>2</sup>, 171–210 (here: 189).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Grunwald, 1923, 427–472; Otto, Schramm, 1977, 55–63; Rubenstein, 1995, 123; Tilly, 1997, 147.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Tilly, 2009, 585f.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Tilly, 2002, 23f.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Tilly, Zwickel, 2015<sup>2</sup>, 153f.



## 6. Temple and Society

Was this intentional reinterpretation of widespread cult forms supported by the majority of the Jewish population of Palestine at the time of the first Christians? Or was it an expression of an abstract “theologian religion” in the sense of a cult monopoly and a deliberate selection of the corresponding written tradition? Although a function of the cult in the temple as a direct discourse with nature is recognizably suppressed or negated in the Biblical tradition, we also find indications in more recent Jewish writings that corresponding ideas were still known. Numerous documents from the Hellenistic-Roman period show that some fundamental aspects of this understanding of the world have left their traces in the traditions of diverse groups in ancient Judaism. Thus we encounter here both the concept of the representation of the cosmos by the temple as microcosm and the idea of the Jerusalem temple as an elevated center of the world and as a starting point, or guarantor, of all salvation.<sup>55</sup> In the public cult, the idea was to influence the vital watering of the land through appropriate “magical” practices in order to attain, secure, and optimize sufficient conditions of existence. Everything that happened in the temple had its immediate effects in the world outside the temple. If the cult was in order, the world was also in order. And if one offered a water sacrifice in the temple at the Feast of Tabernacles, rain and fertility were ensured throughout the country (cf. Zech 14, 8–16).<sup>56</sup>

The temple as microcosm of the cosmos and a central place of healing (cf. Philo, *Mos* 2.117–126; Josephus, *A. J.* 3.122ff., 179–187) is a concept well-known in ancient near-eastern understandings and representations of the world-order. These concepts were suppressed in Biblical tradition and also during the Hellenistic-Roman time. Their usage no longer functioned as explanations of the Jewish cult. In the first-century A.D., however, they were still present in the thinking and acting of many people of all levels of education and remained *de facto* components of religious practice and metaphor.<sup>57</sup>

The “Enlightenment” accompanying Hellenism in this context exerted no uniforming influence on ancient Judaism. It neither extended, as the reception of archaic mythical ideas in Hellenistic-Jewish writings and even in the contemporary rite of the Succot Festival demonstrates, to all life situations of those who used the cult to cope with reality, nor to all strata of the Jewish population.<sup>58</sup> It would certainly be wrong to understand the influence of Greek thought in ancient Judaism and in early Christianity in general in the sense of a general progress. For example, the abstract idea already mentioned, that the world was a sphere

<sup>55</sup> Cf. e.g. Tob 13, 14; 11QTR *passim*; 1Hen 25, 3; 26,1–5; Philo, *Legat* 294; Josephus, *B. J.* 3.52; *C. Ap.* 1.198.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Feuchtwang, 1910, 535–552. 713–729; MGWJ 55, 1911, 43–63; Rubenstein, 1995, 117–131.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Maier, 1973, 371–390; Maier, 1990, 218–220.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Feldman, 1986, 83–111; Feldman, 1993, 3–44.



floating freely in space, had long been theoretically known to scholars of the first-century A.D.<sup>59</sup> This idea, however, was ultimately only “book knowledge,” which apparently contradicted the sensually experience of reality and never left the narrow boundaries of elitist circles.<sup>60</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

From the beginning, the perception of geographical spaces and places in the world has been directly related to the cultural encyclopedia of the perceiver. Ancient travelogues and world maps usually do not depict the world as it really is, but as it should be. Simultaneously, they can express different religious convictions and political power interests.

Sacred central places like Rome, Delphi, or Jerusalem objectify and legitimize the respective cult community by directing all conditions in the world and in history towards their center. The world order is maintained in the microcosm of the temple. As the “navel of the world,” the temple thus serves the emergence and preservation of the cultic community. On the one hand, this makes it understandable that even the first Christians still held fast to the Jerusalem temple as a place of religious orientation (cf. Acts 2, 46). On the other hand, it also explains why the Christian tradition since the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. shifted the “navel of the world” some meters away from the temple to the crucifixion site of Golgotha.<sup>61</sup> No longer was the temple the sacred, central place between world creation and hope for their salvation. It now centered around and emanated from the crucified and resurrected Jesus of Nazareth.

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. e.g. Strabo II 5, 10; Theophilus of Antiochia, *Antol.* II 32; III 2. Cf. Forbiger, 1842 (Repr. Graz 1966), 43–47; Szabó, 1992, 24–28; Wright, 1995, 37–55; Frenschkowski, 1995, 39.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Nilsson, 1988<sup>4</sup>, 702–711.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Jeremias, 1926, 40–43; Wolf, 2010, 174–186; Küchler, 2007, 481.

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## Свет и погледи на свет у време првих хришћана

Централна места као што су Рим, Делфи или Јерусалим легитимизују одговарајућу заједницу окупљену око једног култа, усмеравајући читав свет и читаву историју ка њеном центру. Сходно томе, светски поредак се одржава у микрокосмосу храма. Тако, као „пупак света“, храм служи настанку и очувању заједнице окупљене око једног култа. С једне стране, ово чини разумљивим чињеницу да су се и први хришћани чврсто држали храма у Јерусалиму, као централног верског места. С друге стране, објашњава зашто је хришћанска традиција убрзо идентификовала место распећа на Голготи као свето средиште света.

**Key words:** Јерусалим, храм, мапе.

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