



Renata TARASIUK

University of Siedlce, Poland

Institute of Security Studies

renata.tarasiuk@uws.edu.pl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8919-6713>

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GEOSTRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE TEMPLE MOUNT IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

ABSTRACT: The following article analyzes the geostrategic importance of the Temple Mount in one of the longest-lasting conflicts in the modern world, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The aim of this narrative is to attempt to answer the question about the causes of the conflict-generating nature of the Temple Mount. Attention was drawn to the paramount importance of the Temple Mount in the policies of both sides, with both sides emphasizing their ‘eternal’ right to this site due to historical, cultural, political, and religious ties. Taking into account the specific ‘sacred’ character of the Temple Mount and the fundamental sites for Judaism and Islam present there, the special nature of symbolic institutionalization used in the political narratives of both sides was emphasized, especially the ‘messianic’ aspects of the Israeli narrative of the current political elites. Both sides use various means to achieve their goals, including violent solutions and acts of discrimination, which generate negative social and political consequences, fueling a spiral of violence. The conflict-generating nature of the Temple Mount is one of the aspects that contribute to the impossibility of resolving the conflict. In accordance with the formulated research problem, research methods commonly used in social sciences were used to solve it: critical and comparative analysis of source materials (legal acts and documents, press materials taking into account the positions of both sides, websites of organizations, profiles on social media, films) and literature on the subject. Where necessary, a historical narrative was also used to show the nature of the conflict in a diachronic perspective.

KEYWORDS: Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Jerusalem, geopolitics, sacred geography, Temple Mount

GEOSTRATEGICZNE ZNACZENIE WZGÓRZA ŚWIĄTYNNEGO W KONFLIKCIE IZRAELSKO-PALESTYŃSKIM

ABSTRAKT: W poniższym artykule dokonano analizy geostrategicznego znaczenia Wzgórza Świątynnego w jednym z najdłuższych trwającym konfliktów współczesnego świata – konflikcie izraelsko-palestyńskim. Celem niniejszej narracji jest próba odpowiedzi na pytanie o przyczyny konfliktogennego charakteru Wzgórza Świątynnego. Zwrócono uwagę na nadrzędne znaczenie Wzgórza Świątynnego w polityce obu stron, przy czym obie strony podkreślają swoje „odwieczne” prawo do tego miejsca ze względu na historyczne związki kulturowe, polityczne i religijne. Uwzględniając specyficznie „sakralny” charakter Wzgórza Świątynnego i obecnych tam miejsc fundamentalnych dla judaizmu i islamu podkreślono szczególnie charakter instytucjonalizacji symbolicznej, wykorzystywanej w narracjach politycznych obu stron, zwłaszcza „mesjańskie” aspekty izraelskiej narracji obecnych elit politycznych. Pokazano, że do realizacji swoich celów obie strony sięgają po różne środki, nie wykluczając rozwiązań siłowych i aktów dyskryminacji, które generują negatywne skutki społeczne i polityczne, nakręcając spiralę przemocy. Konfliktogenny charakter Wzgórza Świątynnego to jeden z aspektów rzutujących na niemożność rozwiązania konfliktu. Stosownie do sformułowanego problemu badawczego, wykorzystano, niezbędne dla jego rozwiązania, powszechnie stosowane w naukach społecznych metody badawcze: krytyczną i porównawczą analizę materiałów źródłowych (akty prawne i dokumenty, materiały prasowe uwzględniające stanowiska obu stron, strony internetowe organizacji, profile na portalach

społecznościowych, materiały filmowe) oraz literaturę przedmiotu. Tam, gdzie to niezbędne, zastosowano również narrację historyczną dla ukazania charakteru konfliktu w perspektywie diachronicznej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: konflikt izraelsko-palestyński, Jerozolima, Wzgórze Świątynne, geopolityka, geografia sakralna

INTRODUCTION

In the relationship between the centers of power and the geographical environment and a specific community in a given spatial/geographic area, there are places of special importance, marked by cultural or, to paraphrase Huntington, more broadly, ‘civilizational’ specificity¹. Tools for a systematic description of this phenomenon can be provided by political geography, which deals with the interaction of geographical space and political processes, as well as by sacred geography, which aims to study the religiously assigned meanings of geographical space².

From this perspective, religions sanctify places or spaces, giving them great symbolic value. The Encyclopedia of International Public Law defines sacred places as those to which one or more religious communities attribute an extraordinary nature, and they may be anthropogenic (temples, caves, tombs) or non-anthropogenic/natural (hills, rivers, forests) in nature. The jurisdiction of local authorities in relation to such places may be limited by generally applicable law, and they may also be protected by international law³. An example of a sacralized space is *Dar al-Islam* (the world of Islam)⁴. Sacralization of places of strategic importance may have serious political consequences, as in the case of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount located there. Oxford Public International Law defines holy places in the strict sense, using this term to refer to politically disputed sites in Israel and Palestine, including the Temple Mount⁵.

Terrorist attacks based on the idea of jihad and religious or quasi-religious wars of the last two decades have brought increased interest in geopolitical research in religion as an important element of competition for influence, conflicts over territory, and political divisions⁶.

For both Jews and Muslims, East Jerusalem, along with the Temple Mount located there, is a strategic place of religious, cultural, political, and national importance. The Zionist movement that began in the late 1880s considered Jerusalem (Zion) to be the political and

¹ In the geocivilization approach proposed by Huntington, the basic contradictions of the world are of a cultural nature. See S.P. Huntington, *Zderzenie cywilizacji i nowy kształt ładu światowego* [*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*], 9 ed., Warszawa 2007.

² Both political geography, which determines the perspective of the state in terms of space, and geopolitics, its reverse vector – describing space from the perspective of the state; indicate a strong relationship between politics and the place, its history and culture. In the context of sacred geography, see A. Danek, *Przestrzeń jako ciało. Archetyp geografii sakralnej* [*Space as a Body. Archetype of Sacred Geography*], May 15, 2013, geopolityka.net; geopolityka.net; <https://geopolityka.net/przestrzen-jako-cialo-archetyp-geografii-sakralnej/> (7.12.2023).

³ Ch. Rumpf, *Holy Places*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia of Public International Law*, vol. 2, ed. R. Bernhardt, 1995, pp. 863-866.

⁴ A. Abel, *Dar al-Islam*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. E.J. van Donzel, Leiden 1993.

⁵ H.F. Koeck, *Holy Places*, [in:] *Oxford Public International Law*, January 2008, <https://opil.ouplaw.com/display/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e1295> (7.12.2023).

⁶ T. Klin, *Rola religii w badaniach geopolitycznych* [*The role of religion in geopolitical research*], [in:] *Religijne determinanty polityki* [*Religious determinants of politics*], R. Michalak (ed.), Zielona Góra 2014.

cultural center of the Jewish nation, while the Palestinian-Arab national movement active in the 1920s established its political and cultural center in East Jerusalem, giving a special place to the Temple Mount (*Haram al Sharif*), especially due to the presence of the Al-Aqsa Mosque there, as *Awla Al-Qiblatayn* (the first direction of prayer before Mecca); *Thani Masjidayn* (the second mosque after Mecca) and *Isra' and Mi'raj* (the place from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven)⁷.

In this context, we can speak of a political form of “metaphysics of place”, in the sense given to it by Martin Heidegger, situated at the center of the competing national claims of Israelis and Palestinians⁸.

The basic research postulate constructed in the narrative below focuses on the role that the Temple Mount plays for both conflicting parties and on the policy vectors of both sides that are important in solving the problem of sovereign control of the Mount. The starting point for the considerations is an attempt to answer the following questions: Why is this place so conflict-prone? What is important to both sides regarding the political future of the Temple Mount and Jerusalem? By what means are both sides able to achieve their goals?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the longest lasting conflict in post-war political reality and only a small part of Israel’s military potential is used in it⁹. Soft power, the cultural factor and symbolic institutionalization, plays an important role¹⁰. The concept of ‘soft power’, as coined by Joseph Nye, allows one to take into account the importance of non-material factors, including cultural systems, in geopolitics and international relations¹¹. In the postmodern approach, exemplified by critical geopolitics, the concept of “cultural constructions of space” is used. The project of ‘imaginative geography’ allows for the designation of mental spaces that

⁷ For an explanation of the “civilizational distinctiveness” of Judaism, see: M.M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American Jewish Life*, with a new introduction by M. Scult, Philadelphia 2010. The ‘civilizational’ distinctiveness of Judaism is evidenced, among others, by: ‘isolated’ (Old Hebrew) language of holy books. Judaism is a non-missionary religion based on inheritance, which is fundamentally different from the other monotheistic religions of the Book: Christianity and Islam. In the 1930s, the Jewish scholar Mordecai Kaplan presented a new way of perceiving Judaism as a civilization, adapted to social, political and cultural conditions, emphasizing Jewish distinctiveness based primarily on a mental paradigm.

⁸ K. Makocka-Wojciat, *Metafizyka rzeczy i przestrzeni. Refleksje wokół eseju Martina Heideggera „Budować, mieszkać, myśleć”* [Metaphysics of Things and Space. Reflections on Martin Heidegger's Essay “Building, Living, Thinking”], [in:] *Małe miasta. Kultura materialna* [Small Cities. Material Culture], M. Zemło (ed.), Białystok-Pilzno-Supraśl 2022, pp. 15-26. On the ‘metaphysics of place’ see also: R. Tarasiuk, *Metafizyka miejsca w literaturze Holokaustu* [Metaphysics of Place in Holocaust Literature], [in:] *Święte miejsca w literaturze* [Holy Places in Literature], Z. Chojnowski, A. Rzymska, B. Tarnowska (eds.), Olsztyn 2009, pp. 507-517.

⁹ On the hybrid and asymmetric dimension of the conflict, see: J. Makowski, *Hamas jako hybrydowy przeciwnik* [Hamas as a Hybrid Opponent], [in:] *Asymetryczny i hybrydowy charakter konfliktów izraelsko-arabskich na początku XXI wieku* [The Asymmetric and Hybrid Nature of Israeli-Arab Conflicts at the Beginning of the 21st Century], P. Paździorek (ed.), Warszawa 2018, pp. 177-199.

¹⁰ More on this topic: R. Tarasiuk, S. Wierzbicki, *Interpretacje działań wyprzedzających w polityce kulturowej i militarnej Państwa Izrael* [Interpretations of Pre-Emptive Actions in the Cultural and Military Policy of the State of Israel], [in:] *O terroryzmie jako zagrożeniu dla bezpieczeństwa społecznego* [On Terrorism as a Threat to Social Security], M. Lipińska-Rzeszutek, A. Indraszczyk (ed.), Warszawa 2017, pp. 189-204; R. Tarasiuk, *Geocultural Aspects of the Security Policy of Contemporary Israel*, „Security Dimensions. International & National Studies” 2021, 36(36), pp. 138-154.

¹¹ Joseph Nye does not ignore religious aspects as elements constituting power, but treats them marginally.

generate an understanding of geopolitics in geocultural categories¹². Such spaces are related to the location of national identities in specific territories and places. From this perspective, geopolitics becomes an ideological way of viewing the world, a specific “game of spatial imagination”, based on the mythologization of archetypes and symbols rooted in the historical memory of a specific community, legitimizing its right to occupy a specific place¹³. When tensions in the area of soft power imply the use of hard power by both conflicting parties, they most often take the form of a hybrid conflict¹⁴.

Although cultural, ethnic, and religious differences are sometimes cited as the causes of conflicts in the sphere of international relations, the claim that religions generate violence is not obvious¹⁵. Recognizing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict solely as a religious conflict may raise concerns¹⁶. The Israeli-Palestinian dispute analyzed in the narrative below is strongly related to the Temple Mount, although literally, the source of the conflict around the Temple Mount, and more broadly, East Jerusalem, are contradictory territorial claims present in the dispute over the ‘eternal’ right to the territory, justified and validated on religious grounds. Mostly for this reason, tensions over the Temple Mount constitute one of the main flashpoints of the entire Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SYMBOLS

The institutionalization of symbols, including symbolic places, as significant elements of identity is permanently present in the historical policy of the State of Israel¹⁷. The consolidation of the constitutional principle of Israel as a “Jewish state” at all levels of its functioning is regulated by the so-called Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People, in force since July 2018, the content of which directly results from the so-called ‘symbolic violence’, resulting in, among others, weakening of the position of the non-Jewish (Arab) minority¹⁸.

The recognition of ‘Jewish symbolic sites’ sanctions and justifies the right to settle in the West Bank and is permanently embedded in the discourse of current Israeli right-wing politicians, echoing the justification of the first right-wing head of the Israeli government,

¹² Edward Said, a left-wing activist of Palestinian origin and literary scholar, is considered to be the creator of the concept of “imaginative geography”; See: D. Gregory, *Imaginative geographies*, “Progress in Human Geography” 1995, 19(4), pp. 447-485.

¹³ Cf. J. Macała, *Religia jako element badań geopolitycznych [Religion as an Element of Geopolitical Research]*, “Chrześcijaństwo-Świat-Polityka. Zeszyty Społecznej Myśli Kościoła” 2021, No 25, pp. 166-167.

¹⁴ M. Gerstenfeld, *Israel’s Multifaceted Power*, “BESA Center Perspectives Paper” 2021, No. 1, 953, March 8.

¹⁵ Cf. P. Powers, *Religion and Violence. A Religious Studies Approach*, London 2020, (especially chapter *The Special Case of Islam*).

¹⁶ The various functions of religion translate into the role it can play in a specific space of socio-political relations and the strength of collective identity. The construction of spatial meanings through religion has a strong impact on the legitimization of centers of power and political activities.

¹⁷ The process of institutionalization of memory referred to as historical politics according to Paul Ricoeur. See: P. Ricoeur, *Pisanie historii a przedstawienie przeszłości [Writing History and Presenting the Past]*, trans. J. Górnicka, “Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria” 2001, 3(39), pp. 259-274.

¹⁸ *Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People*, July 19, 2018, The Knesset, <https://main.knesset.gov.il/en/news/pressreleases/pages/pr13978pg.aspx> (7.12.2023).

Menachem Begin, who claimed that in the absence of a clear sovereign, Israel has the right to a legitimate claim to these lands based on the heritage of ancient ancestors of the Jews in the areas identified in the holy books as *Eretz Yisrael*. Therefore, you cannot annex your own country where a nation was born¹⁹. The inhabitants of the Jewish settlements (*hitnachdut*) created in the West Bank since the Six-Day War are covered by the civil law in force, and the settlements operate within the administrative boundaries established by the Israeli government in the 1990s. In protest against the Oslo Accords, unauthorized settlements were also created: *outposts*²⁰.

State-building symbolic violence, important in building collective identity, also includes the statutory granting of a special status to the Hebrew language, as the only official language of Israel, constituting a constitutive symbol of Jewishness in the State of Israel, connecting people and places in time and space²¹. The memory of the Holocaust, cultivated since the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, which consolidated the importance of the Shoah in Israeli collective identity, is also crucial for historical policy²². Religious symbolism, expressed literally in accordance with *halakhah* (Jewish Law), is also present in determining the principles of granting citizenship under the Law of Return, which, on the basis of belonging to the Judaism of ancestors up to the third generation, gives the opportunity to acquire citizenship to anyone who meets these criteria and comes to Israel as an *oleh* (emigrant)²³. It should be noted that religious rabbinical courts are part of the Israeli judiciary and conduct proceedings in civil cases of followers of Judaism in accordance with Jewish law²⁴. Judaism understood

¹⁹ The above justifications are also an expression of the Jewish values contained in the formula *tikkun olam, ger lo tilhaz, b'tselem elohim, kevod haberiyyoth, mipene darkhe shalom i ben adam l'havero* that is, establishing peace in the world in the Name of God and holy blessings.

²⁰ Under international law, all Jewish settlements in the West Bank operate illegally and are the result of the Israeli occupation of these areas. Michael Lynk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, emphasized in 2021 that the operation of these settlements constitutes a violation of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and bears the hallmarks of a war crime. Meanwhile, the Israeli side emphasizes that the State of Israel, as the state of the Jewish nation, represents Jewish-democratic values, which also include Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank and the development of settlements in these areas. See: M. Galchinsky, *The Jewish Settlements in the West Bank: International Law and Israeli Jurisprudence*, "Israel Studies" 2004, 9(3), pp. 115-136. Israeli officials and lawyers believe that external entities, including the UN, are manipulating international law regarding the West Bank to Israel's detriment. Ibidem, pp. 119-120.

²¹ *Basic Law: Israel as the Nation- State of the Jewish People*, July 19, 2018, The Knesset, https://main.knesset.gov.il/en/news/pressreleases/pages/pr13978_pg.aspx (7.12.2023). Before the law came into force, there were two official languages in Israel: Hebrew and Arabic. A legislative initiative to specify at the Basic law level the special role of the Hebrew language as a constitutive symbol of Jewish identity in the State of Israel was submitted already in 2011 by Avi Dichter and 39 other Knesset members. See: Lori Sagarin, *Modern Hebrew: Culture and Identity*, The ICenter, https://theicenter.org/aleph_bet/modern-hebrew-culture-and-identity/ (7.12.2023).

²² 12th April is International Holocaust Remembrance Day (*Yom ha-Shoah*). For more on this topic, see: R. Tarsiuk, *Schwytac Eichmanna. Izraelskie sluzby wywiadowcze w projekcie narodowej historii [Capturing Eichmann. Israeli Intelligence Services in the National History Project]*, "Secretum: sluzby specjalne – bezpieczenstwo – informacja" 2016, No. 2, pp. 137-151.

²³ The principles of The Law of Return formulated on July 5, 1950, were extended in 1970 to include the possibility of obtaining citizenship of the State of Israel also for persons married to a Jew. *Israel's Basic Laws: The Law of Return*, July 5, 1950, Jewish Virtual Library. A Project of AICE, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israel-s-law-of-return> (7.12.2023).

²⁴ There are 12 regional rabbinical courts in Israel: in Jerusalem, Ariel, Ashdod, Haifa, Tel Aviv, Rehovot, Safed, Petah Tiqwa, Netanya, Tiberias, Ashkelon and Be'er Sheva, and the function of the court of appeal is performed by the Grand Tribunal in Jerusalem, whose president heads the rabbinical court system and also serves as the Chief Rabbi of Israel. In February 2023, a bill was proposed in the Knesset to provide rabbinical

in this way, demonstrated in the official symbolism and various decision-making areas of the state, may in this case play the role of co-creating a center of power²⁵.

JERUSALEM

Contemporary Jerusalem, divided and full of political and religious tensions, is a strategic place not only for Israel and Palestine, but for the entire Middle East. The three most influential religions in the world: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam recognize the sacred nature of the city, which also involves competition for sovereign control over it.

In light of rabbinic tradition, the city of Jerusalem in all its splendor is estimated by nine out of ten possible measures of beauty that descended from heaven²⁶. In Hebrew, *Yerushalayim* means “founded by God”, but is also associated with the word *shalom* (peace), hence the “city of peace”, and its Arabic name is *Al-Quds* (The Holy). The first mentions of Jerusalem date back to the 3rd millennium BC. Egyptian texts indicate the original name of the city: Uru Shalem. At the beginning of the 10th century BC, King David, in the process of unifying the country, captured the city, expanded it, and established it as a religious and political center and a permanent royal seat. The choice was dictated, among other things, by the geostrategic location of the city in the center of the country, and its location on a hill increased its defensive advantages.

Of particular importance for the development of Jerusalem was the construction of a temple in a place that in ancient times was called *Moriah*, which in Hebrew means ‘chosen by God’. This place, referred to as the *axis mundi*, according to Mircea Eliade, means the central principle of organizing the sacred, the symbolic axis of the world connecting heaven and earth²⁷. Its special significance in the tradition of Judaism is associated with the act of *akedah* (binding), that is, the offering of Isaac by Abraham²⁸. In Islamic tradition, this sacrifice was to be the second of Abraham’s sons, Ishmael. Mount Moriah is called “The Foundation Stone” by the followers of Judaism, and “the rock” (*es-Sakhra*) by Muslims. Islam associates the Temple Mount with Muhammad’s night vision (*isra*), during which he was carried from Mecca through the Arabian desert on a horse given to him by the archangel Gabriel and ascended to heaven from Mount Moriah (*miraj*). Therefore, the Qubbet as-Sakhra mosque, built here around 691/892 by the Arab

courts with civil arbitration, based on religious law. See: *The Rabbinical Courts*, https://www.gov.il/en/departments/the_rabbinical_courts/govil-landing-page (7.12.2023).

²⁵ H.J. Morgenthau, K.W. Thompson, *Polityka między narodami: walka o potęgę i pokój [Politics Among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace]*, Warszawa 2010, p. 27.

²⁶ R. Livingston, *The Jewish Connection: Judaism, Jerusalem, and the Temple*, “Sigma: Journal of Political and International Studies” 2001, 9-1, vol. 19, pp. 7-19.

²⁷ D. Sperber, *Jerusalem: Axis Mundi*, “Jerusalem and Eretz Israel” 2020,12-13, pp. 7-90.

²⁸ The Hebrew name for this act, *akedah* means binding; R. Lawrence, *Sacrificial Prognostication within the Akedah: Genesis 22:1-19*, November 30, 2012; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330970531_Sacrificial_Prognostication_within_the_Akedah_Genesis_221-19?channel=doi&linkId=5c5dd25d92851c48a9c2e9d7&showFulltext=true (7.12.2023); G. Nyeville-Blay, *Sacrificing the only son for blessings?*, “Intercultural Reformed Theology”, 2017, https://www.academia.edu/41181353/SACRIFICING_THE_ONLY_SON_FOR_BLESSINGS_Genesis_22_1_18_By_George_Nyeville_Blays (7.12.2023).

conquerors of Jerusalem, commonly known as “The Dome of the Rock”, is of particular importance to modern Palestinians, and its golden dome is the hallmark of the Temple Mount²⁹.

The construction of the Temple (*beit ha-mikdash*) allowed Jews to institutionalize religious practices. It was a central place of worship and a center of national identity until its complete destruction by the Romans, which gave rise to the Jewish experience of *galut* (exile)³⁰. Judaism, especially in the mystical sources of Kabbalistic masters, emphasizes the connection between the *axis mundi* and the tradition of *zaddiqa*, the just³¹. The move to the Temple of the Ark of the Covenant connected the religious facility with all of Jerusalem and the Israelite monarch. The city flourished during the reign of Solomon, who expanded the Temple and architecturally strengthened the city, transforming it into a political, religious, and cultural center, and surrounded it with a wall³². At that time, the geopolitical position of the United Kingdom of Israel, which included the land of today’s State of Israel, Syria, Jordan and the Palestinian territories in the West Bank, was leading in the entire Middle East, but the death of King Solomon ended the period of prosperity, of which the following became clear symbols: the first destruction of the Temple in 597 B.C. and the Babylonian exile. After the state weakened as a result of the division into two separate kingdoms: Judah and Israel, Jerusalem – the capital of Judah, was captured and destroyed by the Babylonian army, which destroyed the Temple³³. After returning from Babylonian captivity, the Israelites rebuilt the Temple, but in subsequent periods it was repeatedly, like all of Jerusalem, under the rule of ‘foreigners’, until the city was destroyed by the Romans after the bloody suppression of the uprising of Simon Bar Kokhba³⁴. Jews were banned from entering Jerusalem, which was transformed into the Roman metropolis of Aelia Capitolina, until 333. After the fall of the Roman Empire, Jerusalem was taken over by the Arabs in 638 and from the 7th century, when the construction of the Dome of the Rock was completed, it became an important religious center and economic development of the Muslim world until the Crusades, during which in 1099 Jerusalem was conquered and established as the capital of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Under Ottoman-Muslim rule in the years 1453-1918, the city lost its former political and economic status, and the few remaining followers of

²⁹ D. Sperber, *Jerusalem: Axis Mundi*, op. cit, p. 7.

³⁰ The experience of *galut* (exile) is one of the fundamental experiences in Jewish history; M.R. Cohen, *Sociability and the Concept of Galut in Jewish-Muslim Relations in the Middle Ages*, [in:] *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication and Interaction*, B. Hary, J. Hayes, F. Astren (eds.), Leiden 2000, pp. 37-51.

³¹ A. Green, *The Zaddiq as Axis Mundi in Later Judaism*, “Journal of the American Academy of Religion” 1977, 45(3), pp. 327-347.

³² S.S. Montefiore, *Jerozolima. Biografia [Jerusalem: The Biography]*, trans. M. Antosiewicz, W. Jeżewski, Warszawa 2011.

³³ On 18 July 586 BC Babylonian troops led by King Nebuchadnezzar II finally captured Jerusalem several years after crossing the city walls, which sanctioned the mass displacement of the Jewish population to Babylon that had been ongoing for several years. This event, together with its central figure – King Nebuchadnezzar II, permanently entered the ideological canon of the Iraqi state, becoming particularly present in Saddam Hussein’s propaganda.

³⁴ Jerusalem was, among others, under the rule of the Ptolemies, then the Seleucids, who dedicated the Temple to Olympian Zeus. After the victorious Maccabean Revolt, Jerusalem was handed over to Simon Maccabee, but soon Pompey the Great captured the city. During the reign of Herod I the Great, the Temple was rebuilt, the citadel, Antonia fortress, palaces, and an amphitheater were built; See: S.S. Montefiore, *Jerozolima. Biografia...*, pp. 15-135. See also: U. Dokras, S. Dokras, *The Temple Mount*, Indo Nordic Author Collective 2020, pp. 8-12.

Judaism were considered *Ahl Al-Kitab* (“people of the Book”) or *Ahl Al-Dhimma* (“protected people”), thus granting them a lower political and social position than the followers of Islam³⁵.

The renewed development, along with its increasing political and economic importance, occurred during the Great War, when British troops entered Jerusalem in 1917, and after the cessation of hostilities, it remained the capital of the Mandate of Palestine until 1948 under British administration.

In 1931, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin Al-Husayni, an icon of the Palestinian national movement, convened a pan-Islamic congress in Jerusalem to support the protection of the Al-Aqsa mosque and to oppose British demands regarding the Jewish right to settle there. The Grand Mufti used the Temple Mount as part of a pan-Islamic and pan-Arab campaign against Jewish settlement, including demanding that the British authorities establish a ban on Jewish prayers at Al-Buraq (The Western Wall)³⁶.

Significant changes occurred after the end of World War II, in connection with the British declared intention to resign from managing the mandate of the League of Nations, when the United Nations General Assembly in November 1947 adopted Resolution No. 181, assuming the submission of Jerusalem to a special international administration (*corpus separatum*) under the control of the United Nations³⁷. However, the contents of this resolution never entered into force due to their lack of acceptance by the Arab side, which resulted in the outbreak of the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948. After the end of the war, under the Israeli-Jordanian armistice of 3 April 1949, Jerusalem was divided into the western part (incorporated by Israel) and the eastern part (incorporated by Jordan). The districts separating the two parts: Mamillah and Sheikh Jarrah became a ‘no man’s land’ administered by the UN.

In 1950, Israel moved most of the government institutions and the seat of the Knesset to West Jerusalem, which gave the entire city of Jerusalem the status of the capital of the Jewish state despite the official annexation of its eastern part (*Mizrach Yerushalaim*) by Jordan. However, both sides: Jordan and Israel did not consent to the internationalization of the city, forcing the United Nations to accept in 1952 the status quo of Jerusalem based on Israeli-Jordanian arrangements. However, not only did the Jordanian side fulfill the joint responsibility for access to holy places, it also destroyed a number of Jewish monuments on Mount of Olives and the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, including Jewish necropolises, and the followers of Judaism

³⁵ M. Ma’oz, *The Role of the Temple Mount/Al Haram al. Sharif in the Deterioration of Muslim-Jewish Relations*, “Approaching Religion” 2014, 4(2), p. 61.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 63. See also: Y. Taggar, *The Islamic Congress of Jerusalem 1931*, [in:] *The Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine Arab Politics 1930-1937*, Thesis to be submitted for the Degree of Ph.D. in the University of London, 1973, pp.163-181.

³⁷ *UN General Assembly Resolution No. 181 (A/RES/181/II)*, *Resolution adopted on the Report of the ad hoc committee on the Palestinian Question*, 1947, p. 146, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/038/88/PDF/NR003888.pdf?OpenElement> (7.12.2023).

were deprived of access to the only remnant of the former Temple; also the economic importance of the city decreased³⁸.

On the third day of the Six-Day War, on 7 June 1967, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) entered eastern Jerusalem. The then Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, and the Chief of the General Staff, Yitzhak Rabin, went to the Western Wall, where the acceptance of Jordanian control came to a symbolic end, and the Prime Minister Levi Eshkol publicly announced that all of Jerusalem is the 'eternal capital of Israel'. On the same day, the Israeli radio Voice of Israel released a broadcast depicting the liberation of the Temple Mount by the Israel Defense Forces³⁹. General Moshe Dayan, initially expressing fears about the political consequences of full Israeli control over the Temple Mount, under pressure from other members of the Israeli cabinet, issued a statement about the IDF's liberation of the capital of Israel and thus the return to the 'holiest Jewish sanctuary' (*Har ha-Bayit*) after the *galut* period lasting more than 2,000 years⁴⁰. The Temple Mount has since become a key political challenge for Israel. For the followers of Islam, especially the Palestinian community, this event became a huge trauma and defeat (*naksa*)⁴¹.

In August 1967, Chief Rabbi of the Israel Defense Forces (later Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel), Brigadier-General Shlomo Goren, began organizing public prayers on the Temple Mount, leading to clashes with protesting Muslim guards and Israeli police⁴². Despite Israel taking control of the Temple Mount and the entire East Jerusalem, the Israeli authorities left the Jordanian authorities with a *waqf* (charitable trust) allowing them to administer the holy places of Islam with the provision that Jews have the right to enter there, but will not pray there⁴³. Despite the existence of the *waqf*, the events of 1967 sparked fierce opposition from Muslim religious and political leaders to Israeli control of the holy sites, taking the extreme form of a call for jihad to free the sites from Israeli hegemony. In 1968, Islamic religious leaders organized a special conference in Cairo, at the Al-Azhar Academy, attended by Muslim representatives of most Arab countries, revealing Judeophobic attitudes. In the late 1970s, the position

³⁸ *History of Jerusalem: Jordan's Desecration of Jerusalem (1948-1967)*, "Jewish Virtual Library". A Project of AICE; <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jordan-s-desecration-of-jerusalem-1948-1967>

³⁹ *The Six-Day War: The Liberation of The Temple Mount and Western Wall (June 7, 1967)*, "Jewish Virtual Library". A Project of AICE, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-liberation-of-the-temple-mountain-and-western-wall-june-1967> (7.12.2023). In the "live" broadcast, one can hear the sounds of the liberation of Old Jerusalem, the sounds of gunshots, the footsteps of Israeli soldiers, the order of General Uzi Narkiss, the recitation of the prayer of remembrance by Shlomo Goren, and the words of Colonel Mott Gur that the dreams of many Jewish generations are coming true.

⁴⁰ L. Wright, *Forcing the End: Why do a Pentecostal cattle breeder from Missisipi and an Orthodox Rabbi from Jerusalem believe that a red heifer can bring change?*, "Frontline", <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/readings/forcing.html> (7.12.2023).; *The Status of Jerusalem*, chapter II: *1967 war and the military occupation of East Jerusalem and other Palestinian Territories*, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴¹ *From the 1948 Nakba to the 1967 Naksa*, "Badil Occasional Bulletin" 2004, No. 18, June.

⁴² A. Edrei, *Divine Spirit and Physical Power: Rabbi Shlomo Goren and the Military Ethic of the Israel Defence Forces*, "Theoretical Inquiries in Law" 2005, 7(257), pp. 257-299.

⁴³ H. Suleiman, R. Home, "God is an Absentee, too": *The Treatment of waqf (islamic trust) Land in Israel/Palestine*, "Journal of Legal Pluralism" 2000, 59, pp. 49-65.

of Arab Muslim leaders changed to a more pragmatic one, with the exception of anti-Israel Iran and radical Muslim militants⁴⁴.

Old Jerusalem, an area of 0.9 km², surrounded by 16th-century defensive walls reinforced with towers and a citadel, is informally divided into four quarters: Muslim, Armenian, Christian, and Jewish. The Jewish quarter, devastated by Jordan in 1948, rebuilt after Israel's victory in the Six-Day War, is represented by numerous synagogues, including one of the oldest synagogues in Jerusalem, the Ramban⁴⁵. The Western Wall is undoubtedly the most important for the followers of Judaism, as evidenced by the fact that synagogues all over the world face it.

In addition to places of worship, the Temple Mount is also a religious decision-making center. The Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem are based here, as well as the highest-ranking local hierarchs of Christian religious institutions. This is legally supported by the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel from 1948, which states that the State of Israel, based on respect for the principles of democracy, ensures full equality of rights, including guarantees of full freedom of worship and ensures protection and inviolability of holy places of all religions⁴⁶. However, contrary to Resolution 237 (1967) of 14 June 1967 of the UN Security Council, calling for the respect for the obligations of the Geneva Conventions toward the occupied territories, Israel extended its legislation, administration and judiciary to the eastern part of the city, and the territory of Jerusalem was granted the status of 'united Jerusalem' under these decisions, thus leading to discrimination against the non-Jewish community⁴⁷.

In 1980, the Knesset passed the Basic Law of 1980, Jerusalem, Capital of Israel, act of constitutional rank, which established that 'whole and united' Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Israel, the seat of its president, government, Knesset, and supreme court⁴⁸.

It should be emphasized that the basic laws of the Knesset form the basis of the legal system of the State of Israel. Therefore, the rudimentary nature of the Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel emphasizes the fundamentality and irreversibility of the legislative decisions

⁴⁴ M. Ma'oz, *The Role of the Temple Mount/Al Haram al. Sharif in the Deterioration of Muslim-Jewish Relations*, "Approaching Religion" 2014, 4(2), p. 61.

⁴⁵ The construction of a synagogue in this place by the medieval Jewish scholar Moshe ben Nachman (known as Ramban) was intended to integrate the dispersed Jewish community and strengthen its cultural identity. Muslim authorities closed it at the end of the 16th century, making the building available to the local community for commercial purposes.

⁴⁶ *The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel*, 14.05.1948, Ministry of The Foreign Affairs, <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/general/declaration-of-establishment-state-of-israel> (7.12.2023).

⁴⁷ *Resolution 237 (1967) of 14 June 1967 (S/RES/237)*, United Nations Security Council, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/240/89/PDF/NR024089.pdf?OpenElement>; On June 27, 1967, the Knesset sanctioned these actions in two amendments to the Constitution, establishing the scope of Israeli jurisdiction over the entire area of Eretz Israel, which became the basis for the incorporation of East Jerusalem and the expansion of the existing administrative area of the city to include rural areas previously inhabited by the Palestinian population. In the next Resolution 252, issued in May 1968, the UN Security Council stated the inadmissibility of acquiring territory, including changing the status of Jerusalem, using armed force. See: *Resolution 252 (1968) of 21 May 1968 (S/RES/252)*, United Nations Security Council, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/248/33/PDF/NR024833.pdf?OpenElement> (7.12.2023). During the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Arab countries intensified their activities to defend the Islamic character of Jerusalem, establishing the Jerusalem Committee (*Al-Quds*).

⁴⁸ See art. 1 Basic Law: *Jerusalem, Capital of Israel*, 30 July 1980, www.mfa.gov.il (7.12.2023).

made so far and is of a political nature. The Jerusalem, Capital of Israel law sparked strong opposition from the UN Security Council, which on August 20, 1980, pursuant to Resolution No. 478 (S/RES/478), recognized its content as an unauthorized violation of international law, calling at the same time on the states that had diplomatic missions there for their relocation, which was met with a positive response from the majority, resulting in the transfer of 13 diplomatic offices to Tel Aviv. Only two diplomatic missions of Latin American countries returned to Jerusalem: Costa Rica in May 1982 and El Salvador in April 1984⁴⁹. The supporter of establishing a diplomatic representation in Jerusalem, and thus recognizing it as the indivisible capital of the State of Israel, remains Israel's main strategic ally – the United States, which, pursuant to the Jerusalem Embassy Act passed by the US Congress in 1995, undertakes to establish an American diplomatic mission in Jerusalem and recognizes Jerusalem as the sovereign and indivisible capital of the State of Israel⁵⁰. The implementation of the provisions of the above act carries the risk of radicalization of attitudes toward the US not only among Palestinians, but also among the entire Muslim community in the Middle East. However, this did not stop the anti-Palestinian rhetoric of the Donald Trump administration in January 2020 under the slogan 'peace for prosperity', one of the key threads of which was the suspension of funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA),⁵¹ the closure of the Palestinian diplomatic mission in Washington, and the recognition of the legality of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, while emphasizing US participation in the process of normalizing Israel's diplomatic relations with four Arab countries⁵². In the rhetoric of the current American administration of Joe Biden, these achievements are not particularly apologetic, but show a significant strengthening of Israel's role as the hegemon of the Middle East, including towards parts of the Arab world, which implies breaking the principle of a united front of its support for the Palestinians. The phenomenon of Israel as a hegemon in the region is also strengthened largely due to the so-called 'mythical power', present not only in the real but also in the mental world of those who confirm Israel in this position, including many diplomats⁵³.

⁴⁹ *Resolution 478 (1980), adopted by Security Council on 20 August 1980 [on the status of Jerusalem]* <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/25618>. This document is not binding because it was not issued on the basis of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, but the UN Security Council directly defined the annexation of East Jerusalem.

⁵⁰ The provisions of the act of Congress obliged the United States to move the US diplomatic mission to Jerusalem by 1999; however, the act was adopted in defiance of both the administration of then US President Bill Clinton and the then Israeli government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and subsequent US presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, citing the need to "protect the national security interests of the United States", effectively postponed moving the embassy to Jerusalem. However, it became one of the promises of the presidential campaign of Donald Trump, who thus demonstrated a sharp change in the vectors of Barack Obama's policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

⁵¹ More about UNRWA's activities see: R. Tarasiuk, *Rola organizacji międzynarodowych i pozarządowych w zapewnianiu bezpieczeństwa uchodźcom palestyńskim [The Role of International and non-Governmental Organizations in Ensuring the Safety of Palestinian Refugees]*, [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo Polski w kontekście wyzwań i zagrożeń XXI wieku [Poland's Security in the Context of the Challenges and Threats of the 21st Century]*, A. Arucz-Boruc, S. Zakrzewska (eds.), Siedlce 2023, pp. 123-141.

⁵² S. Nowacka, M. Wojnarowicz, *Konflikt izraelsko-palestyński 2020. Rok złego przełomu [Israeli-Palestinian Conflict 2020. A Year of Bad Breakthrough]*, Raport Polskiego Instytutu Spraw Międzynarodowych, June 2020, pp. 17-19.

⁵³ M. Gerstenfeld, *Israel's Multifaceted Power*, op. cit.

In the Israeli political perspective, Israel's sovereignty over a united Jerusalem, and in particular over the Temple Mount, is derived from general Israeli legislation, extended to the territory of East Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount, and guarantees, within the framework of the right of every citizen to religious freedom, freedom of access to sacred places and their protection. The Israelis also explain, citing legal experts' opinions, that after the expiration of the British Mandate in Palestine, a 'vacuum of sovereignty' was created, which the UN wanted to fill, among others, by internationalization of Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount⁵⁴.

In 2004, the Jerusalem-based World Zionist Organization adopted the so-called Jerusalem Program, which emphasized the strategic importance of Jerusalem for the unity of the Jewish people and its connection to history⁵⁵. It should be noted that control over all of Jerusalem and the West Bank is important for Israel not only in the broad geostrategic sense but also in the strict geocultural sense. Due to Israel's unlimited sovereignty, followers gain unlimited access to culturally strategic places not only in East Jerusalem, but also in the West Bank, where in Hebron, in light of the tradition of Judaism, *Ma'arat ha-Machpelah* (The Tomb of the Patriarchs) is located, transformed into the Muslim site *Haram al-Khalil*, where entry for Jews was prohibited until 1967⁵⁶.

East Jerusalem has the status of a particularly protected cultural property of universal historical value. In December 1982, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee decided to accept the Jordanian proposal to include Jerusalem's Old City and its walls on the World Heritage in Danger list, given the alleged threat from Israel, in accordance with the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage adopted on November 16, 1972, of which Israel is currently also a signatory⁵⁷. In 2014, this list included Cultural Landscape: Land of Olives and Vines in East Jerusalem,⁵⁸ and in 2017 also Al-Khalil Old Town in Hebron⁵⁹.

THE CONCEPT OF THE 'THIRD TEMPLE' AND THE HOLY PLACES OF ISLAM

"Any generation in which the Temple is not built, it is as if it had been destroyed in their times", it is written in the Yerushalmi Talmud⁶⁰. The first attempts to rebuild the Temple probably took place shortly after it was desecrated by the Romans, but they met with strong political opposition from the Roman authorities, which became one of the pretexts for the outbreak of

⁵⁴ S. Berkovitz, *The Temple Mount and the Western Wall in Israeli Law*, Jerusalem 2001, p. 16.

⁵⁵ The World Zionist Organization is a non-governmental organization promoting Zionism, established on the initiative of Theodor Herzl at the Basel Congress in 1897 to create a "Jewish homeland" in *Eretz Yisrael*. Official website: *World Zionist Organization*, <https://www.wzo.org.il/en> (7.12.2023).

⁵⁶ According to tradition, *ha-Machpelah* was purchased by Abraham for the burial of his wife Sarah. In the light of tradition, Abraham, his son Isaac with his wife Rebekah, and Jacob were also buried in the cave. *Hebron. Tomb of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs (Ma'arat HaMachpelah)*, Jewish Virtual Library. A Project of AICE, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tomb-of-the-patriarchs-ma-arat-hamachpelah> (7.12.2023).

⁵⁷ M. Ma'oz, *The Role of the Temple Mount/Al Haram al. Sharif in the Deterioration of Muslim-Jewish Relations*, "Approaching Religion" 2014, 4(2), p. 17.

⁵⁸ *Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir*, UNESCO. The World Heritage Convention, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1492> (7.12.2023).

⁵⁹ *Hebron/Al.-Khalil Old Town*, UNESCO. The World Heritage Convention, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1565>

⁶⁰ Jerusalem Talmud Yoma 1:1.

the unsuccessful uprising, which forced the followers of Judaism to adopt new rules of religious worship, from then on transferred to the synagogue and the replacement of priests by Torah-scholar rabbis⁶¹. The essence of the rabbinic reorientation of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple was its replacement by the institution of the synagogue, which was supposed to perpetuate and strengthen the ‘Temple mentality’⁶². The content of the daily Jewish *Amidah* prayer also refers to the reconstruction of the Temple⁶³.

The reconstruction of the Jerusalem Temple according to Jewish tradition can only be done in the place where, according to preserved sources, the Temple destroyed by the Romans was located, i.e., on the Jerusalem Hill. After Israel regained the eastern part of Jerusalem, along with the Temple Mount, in 1967, the prospect of building the Third Temple returned to both Israeli politics and various decision-making and opinion-forming circles related to Judaism.

Although the tradition of Orthodox Judaism assumes that the rebuilding of the Temple cannot take place before the arrival of the Messianic era, a number of social organizations strive for the immediate construction of the Third Temple⁶⁴.

The Third Temple’s messianic activism emerged in the early 1980s, but at that time it was marginal. Its main advocate at that time was Yisrael Ariel, a candidate for Knesset from the list of Meir Kahane’s “Kach” party, who founded the Temple Institute. Activism intensified only a decade later, as a result of the failure of the Oslo peace process, which offered Israel a number of territorial concessions to the Palestinians, which caused tensions in religious Zionist circles. They then recognized the need to reconceptualize the legal status of the Temple Mount. In 1996, The Committee of Yesha Rabbis, from which religious Zionists were recruited, decided that traditional halakhic precedent no longer applied, which meant not only permission, but even necessity for the appearance of Jews on the Temple Mount, and in the future rebuilding the Temple, which will consolidate Israeli sovereignty over this place⁶⁵.

Activism on the Temple Mount gained momentum in the early 21st century. In 2010, in the religious community of *Mitzpeh Yericho* in the West Bank, a group of activists led by Rabbi Yehuda Kroizer began a project to build a life-size replica of the Temple⁶⁶. *Otzma Yehudit*, a formation representing religious Zionism with an extremely anti-Arab profile, also wants to rebuild the Temple, additionally postulating the annexation of the entire West Bank and complete Israeli sovereignty in the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea⁶⁷.

⁶¹ W. Chrostowski, *Trzecia świątynia: utopia czy czas na budowę*, “Collectanea Theologica” 2009, 79(2), pp. 113-132.

⁶² S.J.D. Cohen, *The Temple and the synagogue*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. 3, *The Early Roman Period*, part. 2, W. Horbury, W.D. Davies, J. Sturdy (eds.), Cambridge 1999, pp. 298-325.

⁶³ Odmawiane tej modlitwy zastępuje kult ofiarny od czasu zburzenia Drugiej Świątyni. Po zniszczeniu Drugiej Świątyni w 70 r. rada rabinów w Yavneh zdecydowała, że *Amidah* zajmie miejsce kultu ofiar składanych w Świątyni Jerozolimskiej. H.H. Donin, *To Pray as a Jew. A Guide to the Prayer Book and the Synagogue Service*, New York 1991, pp. 69-121.

⁶⁴ See M. Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism and The Temple Mount: Who Will Build the Third Temple?*, New York 2009.

⁶⁵ J. Leifer, *The Nationalist Heresy of Temple Mount Activism*, “Jewish Currents” 2023, January 18.

⁶⁶ See official website of *Mitzpe Yericho*. *Overlooking the cradle of Israel*, <https://sites.google.com/site/mitzpeyericho/home> (7.12.2023).

⁶⁷ E. Breuer, *Ben-Gvir evades question on change to Temple Mount status quo*, “The Jerusalem Post” 2022, November 27.

Itamar Ben-Gvir's appointment as Minister of National Security brought temple activism to the political mainstream in Israel. The ideology of the current ruling elites can be described as 'theocratic post-Zionism', which is to result in a political model in which messianic aspirations will become present, with the full return of Jews to the 'Temple' – the former place of religious worship and political center at the same time⁶⁸.

The concept of building a Third Temple on the Temple Mount is a subject of dispute due to the presence of an Islamic sanctuary – the Dome of the Rock – built on the site of the former Temple, as well as the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the last of the three holy places after Mecca and Medina, which, in the light of tradition, Prophet Muhammad ordered to be visited. However, there is a significant political difference between the mosques in Mecca and Medina, which are located in the Muslim Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Al-Aqsa mosque – located on land that, in Palestinian eyes, is illegally occupied by Israel. Therefore, Palestinian followers of Islam continue an unceasing formal and informal boycott of Israeli control of this place, especially treating visits of Israeli politicians to this place as provocations that constitute a symbolic and legally unjustified "superiority" of followers of Judaism on the matter of rights to the Temple Mount.

For Palestinian followers of Islam, it is also important to protect this place from any attempts of interference that could cause permanent damage. Since the Six-Day War, the greatest political and cultural crisis in the Middle East broke out after the fire in the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969, which was deliberately set by Australian citizen Denis Michael Rohan⁶⁹.

In 2017, Islamic leader Kamal Khatib reported on Qatari Al-Jazeera television about Israeli interference using strong, destructive acid in the foundations of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, which may result in a threat to architectural security, which is a pretext for Israel to initiate construction and conservation works, which will be a symbolic form of incorporation of the Temple Mount⁷⁰. Since the Palestinians treat the issue of Israeli interference in Islamic holy places as an element of a political game, they also interpret demolition campaigns in this context, which became particularly intense in September 2020. An example is the order issued by the Israeli authorities to demolish a two-story Al-Qa'qa' mosque built in 2012 in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem, due to an alleged lack of building permits⁷¹.

Restrictions on access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque are also a problem. Since the beginning of

⁶⁸ Cf J. Leifer, *The Nationalist Heresy of Temple Mount Activism*, "Jewish Currents" 2023, January 18.

⁶⁹ A. Rabinovich, *How an Australian sheepshearer's al.-Aqsa arson nearly torched Middle East peace*, "The Time of Israel" 2019, 23, August, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/how-an-australian-sheepshearers-al-aqsa-arson-nearly-torched-middle-east-peace/>; M.M. Saleh *The Arson of al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969 and its Impact on the Muslim World As Reflected in the British Documents*, "Dirasat, Human and Social Sciences" 2006, 33(2), pp. 413-423.

⁷⁰ *Israeli Islamic Leader Kamal Khatib on Jazeera TV: Israel Inserted Chemical Substances into Al-Aqsa Mosque Wall to Cause Corrosion*, Middle East Media Research Institute, Jul. 16, 2017, (video) <https://www.memri.org/tv/kamal-khatib-israel-injects-chemical-substances-into-al-aqsa-mosque> (7.12.2023).; T. Staff, *Islamic Movement Official: Israel „using chemicals” to corrode Al.-Aqsa Mosque*, "The Times of Israel", 21 July 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/islamic-movement-official-israel-using-chemicals-to-corrode-al-aqsa-mosque/> (7.12.2023).

⁷¹ The order to demolish it was first issued in 2015, but it was not implemented. A.R. Arnaout, *Israel to Demolish Mosque in Jerusalem*, 14 September 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-to-demolish-mosque-in-jerusalem-1972995> (7.12.2023).; *Israel to demolish mosque in occupied Jerusalem*, "Middle East Monitor", 15 September 2020.

the armed conflict between Israel and Hamas on 7 October 2023, Palestinian media have increasingly reported on the denial of access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque by the Israeli police to Palestinian Muslims, including strict restrictions, such as age, which only allow access to the mosque people over 65 years of age⁷².

SACRED – VIOLENCE – POLITICS

The strategic location of Jerusalem and its unclear international status are one of the main points of contention in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and more broadly the Israeli-Arab conflict. The Palestinians claim the Israeli-controlled eastern part of the city and seek to recognize it as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

Both sides of the conflict have competing claims on East Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. Israel recognizes ‘United Jerusalem’ as its capital, positioning itself as the only entity entitled to sovereign power over the city, which is contested by the Palestinian side, which treats Israeli ‘unification’ as a violation of the city’s status. The Palestinians’ gain of control over East Jerusalem is a permanent slogan for their national liberation and state-building aspirations, supported by the official position of the United Nations, which, starting in June 1967, adopted several resolutions condemning the actions of the Israeli side. According to the UN, the Israeli government is using all means, including jurisdiction and administration, to subjugate the sovereignty of those annexed after the Six-Day War⁷³.

The dispute over the status of Jerusalem, including the right to sovereign power in the city, takes place simultaneously on two levels: political, as an expression of the political aspirations and territorial claims of both nations, and ethnic, as a cultural dispute between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority.

The United Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel has not been recognized *de jure* by most UN countries, and the international legal status of the eastern part of the city remains unregulated⁷⁴. Although the status of ‘Jerusalem as a whole’ has been the subject of extensive debate in the international community since 1948. A breakthrough in this matter occurred after 1967 due to the change in the civil status of the Palestinian population living in East Jerusalem, completely dependent on Israeli jurisdiction, resulting in a constant threat of displacement⁷⁵.

From the Palestinian side, East Jerusalem, together with the Temple Mount, annexed by the Israeli army in June 1967 and then integrated into the territory of the State of Israel, has the status of an occupied territory in the same way as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. From this

⁷² A.R. Arnaout, *Israel restricts Palestinian access to Al-Aqsa Mosque for 2nd Friday in row*, 20 October 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-restricts-palestinian-access-to-al-aqsa-mosque-for-2nd-friday-in-row/3027024> (7.12.2023).

⁷³ *The Status of Jerusalem, Prepared for, and under the guidance of, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People*, United Nations, New York 1997, p. 12.

⁷⁴ In practice, this means that only the western part of the city (West Jerusalem or the New Jerusalem) legally belongs to Israel, while its eastern part (including the Temple Mount) has remained under Israeli administrative and military control since 1967, contrary to the provisions of international law.

⁷⁵ Y. Ben-Hillel, *The Legal Status of East Jerusalem*, Norwegian Refugee Council, December 2013, p. 9.

point of view, Palestinian claims to sovereignty in this area are still perceived as groundless. From the perspective of Israel, the Palestinians have never had *de jure* rights to sovereignty over the city, so its eastern part cannot be called a disputed occupied territory, and Israel has the right to dispose of this territory as its own and act there as a sovereign.

The Temple Mount, due to the presence of the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, is an important symbol of the Palestinian aspirations for independence. Therefore, the catalyst for the second intifada, which derives its name from the name of the mosque as the Al-Aqsa intifada, was the provocative visit to the Temple Mount on September 29, 2000, by the then leader of the opposition and one of the most important politicians of the Israeli right wing, Ariel Sharon, during which he made several symbolic gestures, causing anger and indignation of the Palestinian community, leading to riots⁷⁶. The second intifada was also an implication of the failure of the Camp David summit and the political defeat of its main actors: Bill Clinton, Ehud Barak, and Yasser Arafat in resolving the conflict, including the lack of decision by both sides regarding the division of the Holy City, which led to the intensification of violence and the forcing of concessions from Israel by force⁷⁷. Unlike the first intifada, commonly called the Stone Uprising, the Al-Aqsa intifada was no longer spontaneous, but was part of a carefully prepared action, symbolized for Israelis by suicide bombings in public means of transport and other public places, and for Palestinians by brutal pacifications carried out by the Israeli army⁷⁸. During the intifada, a Palestinian armed group was created and given the significant name Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, referring to the symbolism of the Temple Mount, although they represented (like Al-Fatah) the line of secular Palestinian nationalism⁷⁹.

The image of the Al-Aqsa mosque, next to a black crescent, two crossed rifles, and the Arabic inscription: *Arin al-Usud* is a symbol of the armed group Lion's Den (*Arin al-Osoud*) created by the youngest generation of Islamic fighters⁸⁰. Members of the Arin al-Osoud organization not only use the symbolism of the Al-Aqsa mosque in the logo of their group, but also

⁷⁶ W. Mustafa, *Al-Aqsa Intifada. Why?*, "The Arab World Geographer" 2000, 3(3), pp. 159–163.

⁷⁷ See D.A. Jaeger, D.M. Paserman, *The Cycle of Violence? An Empirical Analysis of Fatalities in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*, "IZA Discussion Paper" No. 1808 October 2008.

⁷⁸ In 2002, then already as Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon decreed Operation "Defensive Shield", the aim of which was to attack the most important Palestinian urban centers in the West Bank in order to destroy the Palestinian combat infrastructure. At the same time, in 2003, the construction of a barrier separating the Palestinian territories began to prevent attacks from the West Bank, while at the same time occupying part of the areas belonging to the Palestinian community.

⁷⁹ The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades represented (like Al-Fatah) a line of secular Palestinian nationalism, but they modeled their tactics on the actions of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, including the use of women in suicide attacks for the first time. In 2008–2009, during Operation Cast Lead, members of the Brigades carried out operations in the territory of the Gaza Strip against the Israeli army. In 2010–2011 the Brigades' fighters carried out rocket fire at the city of Sederot and Israeli targets in the Negev Desert, in 2012 they carried out missile fire during the Israeli Operation Defense Pillar, and in 2014 in the Gaza Strip during Operation Protective Edge. *Al-Aksa Martyrs Brigades*, Mapping Palestinian Politics, https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_palestinian_politics/al_aqsa_martyrs_brigades_amb_fatah/ (7.12.2023).

⁸⁰ U. Dekel, *The Lion's Den: A Wake-Up Call for Imminent Challenges*, "INSS", No. 1651, October 19, 2022; <https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/No.-1651.pdf>

refer to the tradition of combat activities of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, as well as jointly within the so-called urban guerrillas carrying out actions on the streets⁸¹.

During the so-called Knife Intifada in 2015, where the main attacks took place in Jerusalem, the source of Palestinian unrest was seen, among other things, in Israeli efforts to change the 'status quo' of the Temple Mount. At that time, the Islamic Movement in Israel was involved in the protests on the Temple Mount, represented by two Palestinian groups, *Mourabitoun* for men and *Mourabitat* for women (defenders of the faith, steadfast, soldiers of the garrison), active since 2012, organizing *taiweed* in the Al-Aqsa mosque, that is, chanting verses of the Quran⁸².

In April 2023, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, clashes with the police took place at the Al-Aqsa Mosque during the *Taraweeh* night prayer, as a result of which dozens of Palestinians were injured and mass arrests occurred. In the light of Palestinian opinions, this attack was of a strategic nature in connection with an attempt by Israel to fundamentally change the *status quo* of the Temple Mount, which aims to destroy the mosque and rebuild Solomon's Temple on this site. Palestinians barricaded themselves in the mosque when learning that Jewish extremists were preparing to sacrifice the Passover lamb on the Temple Mount, in remembrance of the times of the Temple before its destruction by the Romans, which was encouraged by leaflets scattered in East Jerusalem by the Jewish organization Return to the Temple Mount (*Khozrim La-Har*)⁸³. According to the findings of the Israeli police, people trying to enter the Temple Mount contrary to applicable regulations were detained, while Palestinians barricaded in the Al-Aqsa Mosque forced an assault police unit to intervene in the mosque, where clashes broke out between the two sides. In retaliation for this intervention, Hamas directed rockets from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, to which Israel responded by bombing Hamas' strategic targets in Gaza⁸⁴. This was not the first incident of this type. In May 2021, Israeli security forces also carried out an action on the Temple Mount against Palestinian rioters near the Al-Aqsa Mosque⁸⁵.

It should be noted that during Ramadan, the month of Muslim fasting, the Jewish holiday of Passover (*Pesach*) usually falls, which causes both Jews and Muslims to arrive at the Temple

⁸¹ *Palestinian militants from "Arin al-Usud" and "al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades" (AMB) take turns firing at IDF forces from one of the city's main streets, as a crowd of hundreds of bystanders gathers to watch*, „Abu Ali Express” 2023, February 23, (video), <https://abualiexpress.com/en/palestinian-militants-from-arin-al-usud-and-al-aqsa-martyrs-brigades-amb-take-turns-firing-at-idf-forces-from-one-of-the-citys-main-streets-as-a-crowd-of-hundreds-of-bystanders-gathers-to-watc/> (7.12.2023).

⁸² M. O'Toole, *Inside al-Aqsa. Who are the guardians of al-Aqsa?*, „Al-Jazeera”, 2016, <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2016/al-aqsa-mosque-jerusalem-360-degrees-tour-4k-video/the-protectors-of-al-aqsa-jerusalem.html> (31.07.2023); C. Larkin, M. Dumper, *In Defense of Al-Aqsa: The Islamic Movement inside Israel and the Battle for Jerusalem*, „Middle East Journal” 2012, 66(1), pp. 31-52. On the place and importance of tajweed in Islamic culture, see: *A Quick Guide to Tajweed*, „Quranic” 2021, November 1; <https://www.getquranic.com/a-quick-guide-to-tajweed/> (7.12.2023).

⁸³ Return to the Temple Mount (*Khozrim La-Har*) is a non-profit organization whose main goal is to carry out activities aimed at rebuilding the Temple on the Temple Mount, <https://www.facebook.com/enmikdash> (7.12.2023).

⁸⁴ L. Farook *Israeli attack on Al Aqsa Mosque: Latest move to demolish the masjid and built Solomon's Temple*, „Muslim Mirror” 2023, April 7, <https://muslimmirror.com/eng/israeli-attack-on-al-aqsa-mosque-latest-move-to-demolish-the-masjid-and-built-solomons-temple/> (7.12.2023).

⁸⁵ J. Sharon, *Fire on the Mount? How the new government might shift policy at flashpoint holy site*, „The Time of Israel” 2022, 6 November.

Mount at the same time, which increases tension in Israeli-Palestinian relations. Other Jewish holidays that do not conflict with the Muslim liturgical calendar also become an opportunity for provocation. A remarkable situation took place in July 2023, during the Jewish holiday of *Tisha B'Av*, when the Minister of National Security in the Israeli government, Itamar Ben-Gvir, made a spectacular visit to the Temple Mount for the third time since taking office. The leader of the Jewish Power party calls the current *status quo* of the Temple Mount racist discrimination because followers of Judaism can only visit the Temple Mount during a four-hour window in the morning hours 5 days a week and without prayers, while Muslim prayer is allowed. As a gesture of opposition, he regularly visits this place, especially during times of increased tension. Both Ben-Gvir and other members of his party are strong apologists for establishing absolute Israeli control over the Temple Mount. The first provocative visit by an Israeli minister to the Temple Mount took place on 3 January 2023 and was interpreted (by both sides) as a symbolic beginning of the renewal of messianic hopes for the reconstruction of Solomon's Temple. It sent a clear message to both sides that the political power currently dominating in Israel seeks to realize the messianic aspirations of returning the Jews to the temple.

Although Minister Ben-Gvir represents the option of religious Zionism, his actions regarding the Temple Mount, including changing the *status quo*, are met with opposition from religious authorities representing various branches of Judaism, as being contrary to halakhic law. The Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel Yitzhak Yosef and the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem Shlomo Moshe Amar called the minister's gesture a public violation of Torah law, and the opinion-forming periodical *Yated Ne'eman* representing the Haredi community condemned Ben-Gvir's act as a violation of the halakhic law contrary to the tradition of many generations of Torah scholars⁸⁶. Entering the Temple Mount is treated by religious authorities as a violation of the rabbinical consensus, which was clearly shaken after Israel occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank in 1967⁸⁷.

The actions of Israeli politicians to maintain full sovereignty on the Temple Mount are actively supported by the non-governmental activist organization *Beyadenu*. Returning to the Temple Mount, disseminating knowledge about the Temple Mount as Jewish heritage and Israeli culture, and postulating that the Temple Mount should be included on the list of holy places in Israel, which would give the followers of Judaism the right to pray there, including on *Shabbat*⁸⁸. Tom Nisani, who heads the organization, also proposes building a synagogue on the

⁸⁶ T. Staff, *Degel Hatorah coalition faction mouthpiece pans Ben Gvir for Temple Mount visit*, "The Times of Israel" 2023, 4 January, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/degel-hatorah-coalition-faction-mouthpiece-pans-ben-gvir-for-temple-mount-visit/> (7.12.2023). Orthodox rabbinical authorities maintain a position consistent with Jewish law that prohibits followers of Judaism from entering the area of the former Second Temple, especially since the exact location of the destroyed Temple is not known, entering this place involves the risk of desecrating *Kodesh Hakodashim*, the most holy place in which was the Ark of the Covenant.

⁸⁷ Both ultra-Orthodox (*haredim*) and Orthodox rabbis authorized to issue halakhic rulings (*poskim*) maintain the ban on visiting the Temple Mount.

⁸⁸ Official website of *Beyadenu*. *Returning to the Temple Mount*, <https://beyadenu.org/en/%D7%90%D7%95%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%A7%D7%A8%D7%9F-%D7%9C%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%A8-%D7%94%D7%91%D7%99%D7%AA-%D7%90%D7%A0%D7%92%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%AA/> (7.12.2023).

Temple Mount, which would allow for the institutionalization of religious life in this place⁸⁹.

The President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, has the ambition to make the Temple Mount the center of Islam and thus oppose Israeli attempts to ‘Judaize’ the city, which harms Palestinian interests, which he exposed during the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of ‘Nakhba Day’ (Catastrophe Day) on 15 May 2023. At that time, he emphasized the lack of documented Jewish connections with the Temple Mount and the right of *al-Haram al-Sharif* (the Temple Mount) to belong to *Al-Buraq Wall* (the Western Wall) to the Islamic *Wakf*⁹⁰. The Palestinian Minister of Religious Affairs, Mahmoud al-Habbash, also drew attention to this, claiming that for political reasons, many followers of Islam from various Arab countries had not visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque since 1967. He also recognized that Palestinians have unlimited right to the Temple Mount and the Al-Aqsa mosque is also a defense of Islam, the Koran, and the entire Islamic nation against Israel⁹¹. In this context, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, a symbol of Palestinian national identity, in addition to its religious dimension, also gains strategic importance.

The Temple Mount is also a controversial topic between Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, who has ambitions to become the guardian of all Islamic holy places, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and Abdullah, the king of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In the background of this dispute, there is also a hypothetical normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia, although there is no clear position of Saudi Arabia on this issue, as well as an indication of the conditions and date when a new opening would appear in the area of the *status quo* of the Temple Mount⁹². However, a significant violation of the current *status quo* on the Temple Mount could lead to a diplomatic crisis with Jordan, which still has the informal status of guardianship over the holy places in Jerusalem – and in particular over the Temple Mount and the mosques located there.

CONCLUSIONS

The strategic location of Jerusalem and its unclear international status are one of the main points of contention, with the Temple Mount a flashpoint for nationalist claims by both sides in the decades-long conflict. The escalation of violence and the use of ‘hard power’ usually originates from (often religious) events that take place on the Temple Mount. The site, together with the Al-Aqsa Mosque, is the center and starting point for many subsequent

⁸⁹ In the culture of Judaism, the synagogue is not identical with the Temple. The modern synagogue, especially on Shabbat, also plays an integrative role for the Jewish community, especially in the diaspora. See: N. Davidovitch, *The Function of the Synagogue in Leisure Culture*, “Philosophy Study” 2019, January, 9(1), pp. 1-15.

⁹⁰ T. Lazaroff, *Abbas disavows Jewish ties to Temple Mount, compares Israel to Nazis*, “The Jerusalem Post”, May 15, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-743145>.

⁹¹ JNS and ILH Staff, *Adviser to Mahmoud Abbas incites violence against Israel*, “Israel Hayom” 2022, August 6, <https://www.israelhayom.com/2022/06/08/adviser-to-mahmoud-abbas-continues-to-incite-violence-against-israel/> (7.12.2023).

⁹² Z. Bar’el, *Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa Is Waiting for Saudi Arabia’s Mohammed Bin Salman*, “Haaretz” 2023, August 22, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-08-22/ty-article-magazine/premium/temple-mountain-is-waiting-for-saudi-arabias-mohammed/0000018a-1c49-dcde-abfe-1fefa6e80000> (7.12.2023).

political and force decisions, including military operations.

The armed conflict initiated on October 7, 2023 by the military arm of Hamas, although taking place on the territory of the Gaza Strip, is codenamed the Al-Aqsa Flood. One of the hypotheses is that it was a response to Israeli provocations related to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Temple Mount and in the background also to the growing wave of violence by Israeli settlers in the West Bank⁹³. A similar scenario, although not on this scale, occurred twice in quick intervals: Israel attacked military facilities in Gaza following events on the Temple Mount, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque during Jewish and Muslim holiday celebrations in April 2023,⁹⁴ and in September, Israeli aircraft struck military facilities in Gaza following earlier night attacks by Israeli police on worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque, to which Hamas responded by firing four rockets from the Gaza Strip⁹⁵.

The factor escalating tensions is undoubtedly the importance of Judaism in Israeli politics and its position consolidated by ultra-Zionist ruling elites, emphasizing the civilizational distinctiveness of the Jewish nation and its 'uniqueness'. On the issue of the Temple Mount, contemporary Israeli religious Zionism breaks with the orthodox interpretation of Jewish law, relying on a 'mythic-messianic ethnocentrism' that also sanctions and justifies any use of hard force in defense of the Jewish interest. The religious mission, and at the same time an element of the fight for the identity and independence ambitions of the Palestinians, is to free the Al-Aqsa Mosque from Israeli occupation and thus change the status of the Temple Mount.

The 'geopolitical curse' of two nations on one land that justifies their unquestionable and eternal (religiously sanctioned) right to the same territory makes the conflict insoluble in the long run without prejudice to one of the parties.

The involvement of the international community: the United Nations, the European Union, the United States, Jordan and Turkey has not brought results so far. However, the possible escalation of the conflict is disturbing, especially since the reconstruction of the Third Temple is a priority of ultra-right circles in Israel supported by the ruling elites. The possibility of coexistence on the Temple Mount of the two holy places of Islam and the future holy place of Judaism seems impossible, given the 'long duration' of mutual hostility, implying armed confrontations between Jews and Palestinians.

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⁹³ A. Raouf Arna'out, *Israel restricts Palestinian access to Al-Aqsa Mosque for 2nd Friday in row*, AA, 20.10.2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-restricts-palestinian-access-to-al-aqsa-mosque-for-2nd-friday-in-row/3027024> (7.12.2023).

⁹⁴ *Israel attacks Gaza after Al-Aqsa Mosque raid*, "AlJazeera", 5 April 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/5/israel-attacks-gaza-after-israeli-forces-raid-al-aqsa-mosque> (7.12.2023).

⁹⁵ A. Bou Jbara, *Palestinian Islamic Jihad: 'Al-Aqsa Flood was a preemptive strike against the enemy'*, "The Cradle.co", October 30, 2023, <https://new.thecradle.co/articles/palestinian-islamic-jihad-al-aqsa-flood-was-a-preemptive-strike-against-the-enemy> (7.12.2023).

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