

THE NEW CHURCH¹

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‘It is almost impossible for the layman to imagine that these sad piles of brick and stone once surpassed many of Justinian’s surviving churches,’ wrote William Dalrymple in November 1994². He was in Jerusalem, visiting one of the greatest of all Byzantine buildings: the New Church of Mary, the Mother of God, often known simply as the Nea. All he could see were lumps of wall and strange vaulted substructures scattered about the Jewish Quarter of the city. Procopius, Justinian’s court historian who wrote an account of his buildings, described the New Church as ‘a shrine [to the Mother of God] to which no other can be compared.’³

Cyril of Scythopolis [died 558CE], a native of Palestine, knew the building well. Justinian, he said, petitioned by St Sabas, ‘sent to Jerusalem one Theodorus, an engineer, to the end that he might build the New Church of the Holy Mother of God, the ever-Virgin Mary; and he gave orders to the farmers of the tax revenues of Palestine to provide money for the building. He gave supreme authority over the matter to Archbishop Peter, but he ordered Baruch, the Bishop of Bacatha to oversee the work of building. Thus through much zeal and many hands the New Church of the Holy Virgin was in twelve years built and fitted with all due ornament. It is needless to say more about the size of this holy temple, its radiant glory and its costly ornament, seeing that it is present before our eyes and excels all the ancient spectacles and wonders which man used to admire of old...’⁴

The Madaba mosaic map⁵ shows Byzantine Jerusalem, with its principal buildings and colonnaded main street, the *Cardo Maximus*. In the centre of the city is the great Church of the Resurrection built by Constantine, and at the southern end of the *Cardo Maximus* is another huge red roofed

¹ This paper was published in Sourozh. A Journal of Orthodox Life and Thought 103(2006).

² William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain*, London HarperCollins, 1997, p.328.

³ Procopius, *Buildings*, V,vi.

⁴ Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of St Sabas* 73

⁵ About one quarter of a mosaic map of the Holy Land, Egypt and Sinai has survived; it had been the floor of an ancient church in Madaba, Jordan. Dated to the last half of the sixth century, it was restored in 1965. The Greek Orthodox church of St George has been built over it

basilica, identified as Justinian's Nea. Nearby there seem to be steps, perhaps leading down to Siloam. If this was the Nea, then remains of it have been found.

In 1970, Nahman Avigad announced that Israeli archaeologists had uncovered a huge structure on the southern slope of the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem: a stretch of wall some 6.5 metres thick, built of enormous stones, and an apse orientated to the east⁶ In 1973 they found foundations of a huge building and a marble floor, and in 1975 the massive south east corner of the building and a vaulted subterranean cistern. The latter, built on sloping ground, had supported an upper building, some of whose walls and pavements were found. In May 1977 a Greek inscription was discovered high on the cistern wall: 'And this is the work which our most pious Emperor Flavius Justinianus carried out with munificence, under the care and devotion of the most holy Constantinus, Priest and Hegumen, in the thirteenth [year of the] indiction.'⁷ This Constantinus is mentioned by John Moschos as Hegumen of the Church of St Mary, the Mother of God.⁸ A building some 115m long and 57m wide, the largest known basilica in the Holy Land, suggests that it was indeed the 'shrine to which no other can be compared'. The Cardo was extended at this time, apparently to link the Nea and the Church of the Resurrection.

To have some idea of the Nea and its splendour, we should compare the churches built in Ravenna in the same period, for example Sant'Apollinare in Classe, whose mosaics are the best preserved. The width of this church is 31.7 metres [the central area of the Great Church in Constantinople is similar], but the width of the Nea was 57 metres, almost double. It was huge. Procopius emphasised the height of the building, the enormous doors and the arch rising to a great height at the entrance, preparing the visitor for what was within. The breathtaking mosaics of Ravenna must have been surpassed in a church dedicated to the Mother of God, and yet today there is almost nothing left. Stones from the Nea were reused in palatial buildings from the early Moslem period; 'the southeast corner of the Moslem palace is built of stones that are identical to those in the corner of the Nea (and are not to be found in any other buildings in Jerusalem.) To this we must add fragments of a stone lintel decorated with floral designs and a cross (which once belonged to the

⁶ N Avigad 'Excavations in the Jewish Quarter, Jerusalem', Israel Exploration Journal 20.3-4 (1970).

⁷ N.Avigad 'A Building Inscription of the Emperor Justinian and the Nea in Jerusalem', Israel Exploration Journal 27.2-3 (1977). The possible dates would be 534-5 or 549-50CE The earlier date would imply that the cistern was dedicated before the rest of the church was built, the latter, that it was an addition.

⁸ John Moschos *The Spiritual Meadow*, PG LXXXVII 2857.

large entry door of a magnificent church), plus a few dozen columns and other architectural elements bearing crosses, inscriptions, decorations, and broken marble latticework characteristic of Byzantine art in the sixth century churches of Palestine and Syria. The church from which the stones were taken must have been destroyed before the Moslem structure was built at the close of the seventh century.’⁹

A report compiled for Charlemagne in about 808 CE said the Nea had been thrown down by an earthquake and engulfed by earth. There were, however, twelve priests attached to the church.¹⁰ The Nea is likely to have been damaged by the Persians in 614CE, along with the other churches in the city, and those that survived their onslaught were torn down by the Jews, who fought with the Persians against the Byzantine rulers of Palestine. ‘When the people [i.e. the Patriarch Zechariah and his flock] were carried into Persia, and the Jews were left in Jerusalem, they began with their own hands to demolish and burn such of the holy churches as were left standing.’¹¹ This was probably the fate of the Nea. ‘The Jews could not overlook the fact that the stone used to build it had been taken from the Temple Mount, and their anger raged to the point of massacre. This must have been the reason for the enormous effort invested in destroying the Nea, which was far more heavily damaged than the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Afterwards, at the end of the seventh century, when the Moslems began to construct a complex of buildings below the Temple Mount, they hauled off stones from the ruins of the Nea, which the Christians had not been permitted to restore.’¹²

Building the Nea began in the time of Elias, Patriarch of Jerusalem from 494 CE to 518CE, but had been stopped by the revolt of the Samaritans in 529CE, when Christian villages and churches were destroyed. St Sabas was sent to the Emperor in 531 CE to seek money to make repairs, and he returned not only with money to complete the Nea but also with instructions to build in the midst of

⁹ Meir ben Dov *In the Shadow of the temple. The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem*, New York and London: Harper and Row, 1982, p. 241.

¹⁰ Commematorium,, translation in J Wilkinson *Jerusalem Pilgrims. Before the Crusades*, Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1977, p. 137

¹¹ F.Conybeare ‘Antiochus Strategos; account of the sack of Jerusalem in AD 614’, *English Historical Review* 25 (1910), pp.502-16.

¹² Meir ben Dov *In the Shadow of the temple. The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem*, New York and London: Harper and Row, 1982, p. 241.

Jerusalem a hospital of 100 beds - later increased to 200. In return, St Sabas promised Justinian, among other things, the reconquest of Africa.¹³ Procopius described a hostel for strangers attached to the Nea, as well as the hospital,¹⁴ and the remains of likely buildings have been found. Justinian endowed the whole complex with a large sum of money, which soon became a problem, and in 596 CE its hegumen Anastasius received a letter of admonition from Pope St Gregory¹⁵. The Piacenza Pilgrim, visiting the church in 570 CE, saw ‘a great congregation of monks, guest houses for men and women, a vast number of tables to provide for travellers, and more than three thousand beds for the sick’. Even allowing for the exaggeration of a traveller’s tale, the Nea must have been huge.

Justinian ordered that the church be built to a specified size on the highest of the hills, but the site was much too small. *The precise location and size must have been important, even though the site has no known Christian association.* Procopius noted that ‘a fourth part of the church, facing the south and the east, was left unsupported, that part in which the priests were wont to perform the rites.’ He described an extension to the site, supported by massive substructures.¹⁶ The remains of six barrel vaults have been found in the south eastern corner of the site, clearly over a cistern, as there are plastered walls and pottery pipes. Josephus said Solomon’s temple had been built in the same way: ‘Though the temple was seated on a strong hill, the level area on its summit originally barely sufficed for shrine and altar, the ground around it being precipitous and steep. But king Solomon, the actual founder of the temple, having walled up the eastern side, a single portico was reared on this made ground.’¹⁷ Both the original temple and the Nea were built into the eastern slope of a hill. Was this a factor in determining the site of the Nea?

We have to imagine a huge red building, dominating the western hill of Jerusalem, set into its south eastern slope and rising up from the valley like a great tower over the city. Construction work dominated the life of the area for twelve years. Procopius described the disruption, how huge foundation stones had been cut from the surrounding hills and how the engineers, struggling with the difficult site, had to devise new ways of working. Forty oxen were needed for each wagon carrying a single stone. ‘Since it was impossible for the roads leading into the city to accommodate

¹³ D.Chitty *The Desert a City*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1966, p. 116 citing Cyril of Scythopolis Life of St Sabas c.83.

¹⁴ Procopius, *Buildings* V.vi.

¹⁵ D Chitty *The Desert a City*, Oxford: Blackwell 1966, p.153 citing Gregory *Letters* 7.32.

¹⁶ Procopius, *Buildings* V.vi

¹⁷ Josephus, *War* V.184.

these wagons, they cut into the hills for a very great distance, and made them passable for the wagons as they came along there, and thus they completed the length of the church in accordance with the Emperor's wish.' The width of the church created a problem with the roof, and so cedar trees of exceptional height were located and felled. The Emperor was assisted in this great work, said Procopius, by 'his pious faith which rewarded him with the honour he received and aided him in his cherished plan.'

The Nea was dedicated on November 20th 543CE, and November 21st is still celebrated as the Feast of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple. It stood for just seventy years. There are many questions: Why was the Nea built on that far from ideal site, why was it so huge, why was it associated with the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple, and why did it disappear from history so soon after it was built?¹⁸

Justinian saw himself as a new Solomon,¹⁹ and it may not be coincidence that he authorised the building of the Nea in the fourth year of his reign, just as Solomon had begun the temple in the fourth year of his reign [3 Kms 6]²⁰. Everything now known about the Nea suggests that it was the temple rebuilt - but why on that site and not on the 'Temple Mount', and why dedicated to the Mother of God? A new temple would explain why the Nea was never rebuilt after the Persian attack and the Muslim occupation of the city. There had been earlier attempts by the Jews to rebuild the temple: they had tried shortly after the destruction in 70CE²¹, and then again in the time of Constantine. The Emperor Julian [361-363 CE] supported the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of sacrifice as one of his measures against Christianity, but the building work was halted by an unexplained fire. John Chrysostom [347-407CE], a boy in Antioch at the time, must have heard first hand reports from the Jewish community in his city. He wrote: 'They were just about the start building when suddenly fire leaped forth from the foundations and completely consumed not

¹⁸ And it has virtually disappeared from the study of history. *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. M.Maas, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2005, has one brief notice that it existed, p.358.

¹⁹ According to the collection of legends in the *Diegesis*, when he first entered the Great Church in Constantinople which he had rebuilt, he exclaimed 'Solomon I have surpassed you.'

²⁰ Most Mss of the Lxx do not have the 6.38 of the Hebrew text, that the temple took seven years to build.

²¹ *Letter of Barnabas* 16.

only a great number of the workmen but even the stones piled up there to support the structure.’²² A letter attributed to Cyril says the foundation was to be laid on Sunday May 18th 363 CE, but storms prevented the work, and during the night there was an earthquake. The scheme was abandoned.²³

Some of these stones may have been used in the Nea. When the difficulty of finding sufficient large pillars became apparent, ‘God revealed a natural supply of stone perfectly suited to this purpose in the nearby hills, one which had either lain there in concealment previously, or was created at that moment.’²⁴ Some archaeologists believe that Justinian pillaged the Temple Mount. ‘[Procopius’ account] sounds rather like an attempt to provide a literary and religious ‘cover’ for an incident the Byzantines would have liked to suppress. The description of the site involved makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that Justinian’s builders dismantled the porticoes of the ruined Temple Mount and hauled off their columns to build the church. In our excavation we found remains of the columns of the Royal Portico... The pillage of these columns was evidently a deed that the builders tried to conceal from the Jews of Palestine and the Diaspora.’²⁵

Impassioned statements such as this are easy to understand, but do not take account of what other ancient writers say about the fate of the temple stones, that they had been used and re-used in other buildings ever since the Roman destruction. Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, who knew Jerusalem well, wrote: ‘Utter desolation has possessed the land. Their once famous Mount Sion... is a Roman farm like the rest of the country. With my own eyes I have seen bulls ploughing there and the sacred site sown with seed.... All the inhabitants of the city choose stones from its ruins as they wish, for public or private buildings. And it is sad for the eyes to see stones from the temple itself, and from its ancient sanctuary and holy place, used for the building of idol temples and of theatres for the populace. These things are open for the eyes to see.’²⁶ This was written early in the fourth century. Any stones from Herod’s temple that were incorporated into the Nea had probably been

²² John Chrysostom *Against the Judaizing Christians* 16; this is the only account to mention the rebuilding under Constantine.

²³ S P Brock ‘A Letter attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem on the Rebuilding of the Temple’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 40 (1977) pp.267-86.

²⁴ Procopius *Buildings* V.vi

²⁵ Meir Ben Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple. The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem*, New York and London: Harper and Row 1982, p. 239.

²⁶ Eusebius, *Demonstration of the Gospel*, 8.3.406

reused already. A more likely source for the Nea would have been stone from the temple building project under Julian.

If Justinian was restoring the temple, it would have been Solomon's original temple, rather than the temple destroyed by the Romans in 70CE. *This is important.* The Christians and many others regarded the later temples as illegitimate and polluted²⁷, and looked for the restoration of the true, original temple. Jesus had prophesied the utter destruction of the temple He knew [Mark 13.2], but He also claimed to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah that the ancient ruins should be rebuilt [Isa. 61.4, part of the passage He read in the synagogue at Nazareth, Luke 4.18ff.]. Jesus prophesied the temple would be given to new tenants: the Lord would give the vineyard and its tower to others [Mark 12.9]. The polluted temple appears in the Book of Revelation as the harlot, drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus, the mother of abominations [Rev.17.5], the latter being word play on the older title: 'the mother of the Messiah'²⁸. The temple was often described as a woman: in St John's vision, the mother of the Messiah returns to the temple [Rev.12.1-5], and the holy city is the Bride, the wife of the Lamb [Rev.21.9-11]²⁹.

Everything Procopius says about the Nea suggests it was intended to be the true temple restored in the last days, but this involved far more than erecting a splendid building. Just before Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586BCE, there was a massive cultural revolution in Jerusalem. Restoring the temple meant restoring the older religion. The greatest change had been driving the Queen of Heaven from her city, and refugees who fled to Egypt had no doubt that this left the city without protection: 'Since we have left off burning incense to the Queen of heaven, and pouring out libations to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine. [Jeremiah 44.18 Lxx 51.18]. Restoration would have meant restoring the Queen to her rightful place, the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple.

In the centuries that followed, the Queen was not forgotten. The opening chapter of the Book of Proverbs depicts her calling to her wayward and foolish children. Jesus ben Sira, who lived in

²⁷ Thus the evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls and 1 Enoch.

²⁸ Messiah and abomination are similar words in Hebrew. Identical wordplay appears in Isaiah52.14 where the later Hebrew text describes the Servant as disfigured but the Isaiah scroll from Qumran describes him as the anointed. See my book *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 2000, p. 281.

²⁹ There was no separate temple in this heavenly city because it was, in its entirety, the holy of holies, and so St John described it as a golden cube with walls of jasper [Rev. 21.16].

Jerusalem early in the second century BCE, knew her as Wisdom. A century or so later, ‘Solomon’ in Alexandria, wrote about her in his book of Wisdom. In the Book of Revelation she appears in the sanctuary of the heavenly temple, the Woman clothed with the sun, giving birth to the Messiah. Her symbol had been the tree of life, and Juvenal, writing early in the second century CE,³⁰ sarcastically described a poor Jewish refugee woman as ‘a high priestess of the tree.’ The Mishnah, compiled about 200CE, has regulations against any Asherah, i.e. any tree used for idolatry.³¹ The Queen still had her devotees, and her symbols were forbidden well into the Christian era. .

Her tree of life³², had been represented in Solomon’s temple by the menorah. This, described as the Asherah, had been dragged from the temple during Josiah’s purges³³, burned, crushed to dust and scattered on common graves. It was utterly desecrated [4 Kms 23.6], but not forgotten. Jews longed for the restoration of the temple in the time of the Messiah, and they knew that the five things missing from the ‘second temple’ would return: the fire, the ark, the menorah, the spirit and the cherubim³⁴. On one of his heavenly journeys, Enoch saw the fragrant tree, and his angel guide told him it would be returned to the temple of the Lord, where its fruit would be food for the chosen ones [1 Enoch 25.5]³⁵.

The menorah - albeit the menorah of the second temple - was recovered when the Nea was being built. Procopius³⁶ described how Belisarius, Justinian’s general, returned in triumph in 534 CE, after the promised conquest of the Vandals in North Africa. Amongst the loot in Carthage were the ‘treasures of the Jews’ which Titus had taken from Jerusalem in 70CE: ‘the treasures of Solomon the King of the Hebrews, a most noteworthy sight. For the most of them were adorned with emeralds, and they had been taken from Jerusalem by the Romans in ancient times.’ Josephus, an eyewitness of Titus’ destruction of Jerusalem, described ‘a golden table, many talents in weight, and

³⁰ Juvenal *Satires*, 6.543-5.

³¹ Mishnah Abodah Zarah 3.7

³² Proverbs 3.18 describes her as Wisdom, the Tree of Life.

³³ In about 623BCE.

³⁴ Numbers Rabbah XV.10

³⁵ The Eucharistic imagery is clear.

³⁶ Procopius, *Wars* IV ix 55-7; *Wars* V.xii.41. The shewbread table given by Ptolemy II (285-247BCE) was elaborately decorated with emeralds and rubies, as were the vessels used with the table, *Aristeas* 66-82. Some treasure had been looted from Rome in 410CE, and some in 455 CE.

a lampstand, likewise made of gold, ... and after these, and last of all the spoils, was carried a copy of the Jewish Law³⁷. They are famously depicted on the arch of Titus. The golden furnishings were placed in the temple of Peace in Rome³⁸, and when the Vandals attacked and looted Rome early in the fifth century, they took them to Carthage, whence Belisarius brought them to Constantinople.

A Jew who saw the treasures in Constantinople warned against keeping them in the palace - perhaps Justinian had planned to put them in the Great Church of the Holy Wisdom which he had begun to build two years earlier. Keeping the stolen treasures, the Jew warned, had caused the fall of Rome and then the fall of Carthage. They should be returned to the place Solomon had intended for them. Justinian was afraid and immediately had everything sent 'to the temples [*hiera*] of the Christians in Jerusalem.' It is quite possible that the menorah did return to Jerusalem, that the symbol of the Queen did return to her temple. Some are sceptical, however, saying that some labourers had 'found metal implements' whilst picking over the ruins on the Temple Mount, and assumed they belonged to the temple. Procopius' account was 'outlandish, not to say tendentious, and seems designed to legitimise the presence in the Nea Church of what the Byzantines took to be implements of the temple. This was no act of thievery, the moral went, but precisely the opposite: the restoration of plundered treasure to its right place... The Jews remembered the deed and wreaked their vengeance at the first opportunity.'³⁹

Procopius says the Nea was to be a temple [*hieron*] beyond compare, built on the highest of the hills. [The western hill on which the Nea was built is about 100 feet higher than the Temple Mount.] Isaiah and Micah had prophesied a temple on the highest hill: 'In the last days the mountain of the Lord shall be manifest, and the house of the Lord on the highest of the mountains, and it shall be raised above the hills.' [Lxx Isaiah 2.2// Micah 4.1]. Micah's enigmatic prophecy continued first with the promise that the former dominion would come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem to the tower of the flock⁴⁰, the hill of the daughter of Zion [Micah 1.8]. The restored temple on the highest hill, then, would be a tower, linked to dominion returning to 'the daughter of

³⁷ Josephus, *Jewish War* VII 148-150

³⁸ The Law scroll was kept in the palace, and returned to the Jewish community in the time of the Emperor Severus. It became known as R Meir's scroll.

³⁹ Meir Ben Dov *In the Shadow of the temple. The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem*. New York and London : Harper and Row, 1982, p. 239.

⁴⁰ LXX has also 'from Babylon'

Zion.’ The prophecy concluded with the unnamed mother giving birth to the ancient ruler in Israel, the shepherd of the flock [Mic 5. 3-4]. *A restored temple on the highest hill was associated with the mother of the Shepherd of Israel.*

Ezekiel saw the restored temple revealed by an angel, ‘a man whose appearance was like bronze.’ [Ezek. 40.3]. In his vision, the prophet stood on a high mountain and looked south⁴¹ towards a city [Ezek.40.2], where he watched the angel give the precise measurements of the ideal temple. It was to be one hundred cubits long, with a courtyard in front one hundred cubits long, and the width of both was also one hundred cubits [Ezek. 41.13-14]. *This is almost exactly the measurements of the Nea, and may explain why the site had to be extended to make room for the correct dimensions.* Since the measure known as the ‘cubit of the Talmud’ was 555.955 mm⁴²; it cannot be coincidence that the 57 metre width of the Nea today and its overall length of 115 metres is so nearly 100 x 200 cubits.

The Nea required many columns, ‘whose appearance would not fall short of the beauty of the building and of such a size that they could resist the weight of the load that would rest upon them... The church was supported on all sides by a great number of huge columns.’ Pillars were not a feature of Solomon’s temple as described in 3 Kms 6-7, but were important in Enoch’s vision of the final temple at the climax of the curious ‘Animal Apocalypse’. This history of Israel, told as an animal fable, describes the temple as a tower. It condemns the ‘high tower’ built by those who returned from Babylon and set polluted bread on the table before the tower [1 Enoch 89.73]. Enoch saw this temple destroyed and its remains deposited in the south of the land⁴³; ‘The Lord of the sheep then brought out a new house, greater and loftier than the first, and he set it in place of the first temple... All its pillars were new and its ornaments were new, and larger than those of the first, the old one that had been removed.’ [1 Enoch 90.29]⁴⁴. This passage resonates with the prophecy in Micah 4, referring to the rebuilt tower and the Lord as the Shepherd of his flock. *The mother of the Shepherd must have been the mother of the Lord.*

⁴¹ Thus the Hebrew text

⁴² E Nicholson, *Men and Measures*, London, 1912, p, 27.

⁴³ Perhaps a reference to the Valley of Hinnom south of the temple, the rubbish dump for the city.

⁴⁴ A similar text is quoted in the first century *Letter of Barnabas* 16, but interpreted to mean the spiritual temple.

‘The Mother of the Lord’ is not a concept alien to the Old Testament, even though the phrase is not found in our current texts. The complete Isaiah scroll from Qumran, one of the greatest treasures of the Dead Sea Scrolls, is the earliest known Hebrew text of the prophecies, and it mentions the Mother of the Lord. The familiar passage: ‘The Virgin shall conceive and bear a son...’ is preceded by the challenge to Ahaz, which in current texts is: ‘Ask a sign of the Lord your God.’ [Isa.7.11]. The Qumran Hebrew, however - the only known example of the pre-Christian Hebrew of this prophecy - says: ‘Ask a sign of the Mother of the Lord your God.’ The difference is only one letter⁴⁵. Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries, and in their prophecies we glimpse the hilltop tower of the Lady of Zion, the Mother of the Lord, defending her city and scorning her enemies [Isa. 37.22].

The columns in the Nea were red ‘in colour resembling flames of fire,’ and the recovered parts of the Nea are red stone, of a type not used elsewhere in the city. There was no attempt to imitate the white marble of Herod’s temple, so why was a special red stone chosen? Perhaps because the heavenly city of St John’s vision had walls of jasper, a reddish brown stone [Revelation 21.18], and Procopius’ comparison with flames of fire is interesting. The two huge columns that stood before the door of the Nea ‘exceptionally large and probably second to no column in the whole world,’⁴⁶ must have been the new Jachin and Boaz, the mysterious pillars erected by Solomon for the vestibule of his temple [1 Kgs 7.15-22]. There were no pillars like this in the temple Jesus knew.

The water supply of the Nea is another temple feature. Although we have no details of the water supply to Solomon’s temple, a recurring image of the temple - for example in the Psalms - is the water flowing from it. Aristeas, a visitor from Egypt, described a complex of cisterns about 800 metres from the city, where he was able to hear the underground meeting of the waters, and he saw ‘something like abundant natural springs gushing up within the temple area.’⁴⁷. The water was used to swill the temple courtyards, he said, to remove the blood from the sacrifices, and the Mishnah says that the blood and water mixture, no longer sacred once it had left the temple precincts, was

⁴⁵ The ‘ayin of the Masoretic Hebrew is an aleph in the Qumran text 1 Q Isa ^a

⁴⁶ Procopius, *Buildings*, V.vi

⁴⁷ *Letter of Aristeas* 89. Scholars cannot agree on the date of Aristeas’ visit to Jerusalem. Tacitus *History* 5.12 mentions this perennial spring in the temple, but his information must have been second hand.

carried by channels towards the Kidron valley, where it was sold to gardeners to fertilise their plots.⁴⁸

The Psalms were not, however, describing a system for washing away blood from the temple courts, and the end time visions of Ezekiel [Ezek.47.1-12], Zechariah [Zech.14.8], Joel [Joel 3.18] and St John [Rev.22.1-2] of water flowing out from the temple, were not inspired by the plumbing. 'With thee is the fountain of life,' sang the Psalmist [Ps 36.9 Lxx 35.10]; 'There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High' [Ps 46.4 Lxx 45.5]. Enoch saw fountains in his vision of the holy of holies: the fountain of righteousness and the fountains of wisdom [1 Enoch 48.1], and 'wisdom flowing like water ... before him for ever and ever' [1 Enoch 49.1]. Solomon was anointed King by the gushing Gihon spring [3 Kms 1.38]. Wisdom described herself as water flowing out of the temple where she was established on Zion, pouring forth her teaching [Ben Sira 24.30-33].

Water flowing from the temple could reflect the older Canaanite religion, which depicted El, the chief of their gods, enthroned 'at the source of the rivers, at the midst of the springs of the two deeps'⁴⁹, but whatever its origin, it became part of the tradition of the Jerusalem temple. Water flowed from the throne of God in the holy of holies. Since nobody is certain where Solomon built the temple, it is not impossible that it was over the Gihon spring, the site of the original Sion. Why, then, were there cisterns under the east end of the Nea, 'that part in which the priests were wont to perform the rites'?. One possible answer is that the Nea needed water in the sanctuary, because it was built as the temple of the last days, restoring the original. In St John's vision of holy of holies were the throne, the tree of life, and the source of the water of life [Rev.22.1-2].

We cannot know what influenced the design of the Nea, but the Book of Enoch, a deposit of ancient temple tradition used by the early Christians⁵⁰, may contain information relevant to the design of the Nea. First, Enoch's temple seems to be located south of the area known today as the Temple Mount. On the heavenly journey when he saw the fragrant tree, he also saw the holy mountain to

⁴⁸ Mishnah Yoma 5.6

⁴⁹ KTU 1.4 iv.20 in N Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1998, p.99

⁵⁰ It was known in Constantinople around 800CE when it was quoted by George Syncellus in his *Chronographia*

which it would return: ‘and underneath the mountain to the east there was a stream and it flowed towards the south. And I saw towards the east another mountain higher than this, and between them a deep and narrow ravine and in it also ran a stream alongside the other mountain.’ [1 Enoch 26.2-3]. Enoch saw the Mount of Olives to the east, and dry ravines to the west and south. The stream under the mountain must have been the Siloam tunnel from the Gihon spring, and the stream flowing in the ravine must have been the Kidron⁵¹. The two dry ravines, however, are the most important information here. The holy mountain that Enoch described was between the Kidron and the dry Tyropoean Valley, and north of the Valley of Hinnom. The holy place Enoch knew must have been on the south eastern hill, above the Gihon spring, which was later known as the Virgin’s Spring, or the Spring of the Lady Mary. Enoch was not describing the ‘Temple Mount’ as we know it today.

Very little is known about the building of the second temple. The sources for this period of Jerusalem’s history are notoriously difficult to understand: the prophecy from the period - the latter chapters of Isaiah, Haggai, Zechariah - shows a divided society [Isa.65.13-16], with people excluded from the temple [Isa.56.3-8; 66.5], people questioning the value of the new temple [Isa.66.1-4], people unwilling to rebuild the temple [Haggai 1.2] and questioning the legitimacy of the high priest Joshua [Zechariah 3.1-5]. The histories - Ezra and Nehemiah - exist in many different forms, and the Enoch tradition condemns everything that happened in Jerusalem as the work of an apostate generation [1 Enoch 93.9] whose worship was polluted [1 Enoch 98.73, c.f. Malachi 1.6-9]. It is quite possible that the polluted temple condemned by Enoch was a new building on the Temple Mount.

Enigmatic words in Zechariah suggest that the second temple was on a new site: the great mountain was to become a plain before Zerubbabel, who had laid the foundation and would complete the building [Zech 4.6-9]. Flattening a mountain top would not have been necessary if the temple was rebuilt on the original site, but major earthworks such as flattening mountains have happened in Jerusalem. Simon Maccabaeus, for example, some four centuries after Zerubbabel, levelled the mountain that overlooked the temple and made it vulnerable to enemy attack⁵². Solomon had built

⁵¹ E.L.Martin *The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot* Portland, Oregon: ASK, 2000, p.278 makes this distinction between the two watercourses.

⁵² Josephus *Antiquities* 13.6.7: ‘It cost them three whole years work before it was removed and brought to an entire level with the plain of the rest of the city, after which the temple was the highest of all the buildings...’

up the original temple platform by a wall and earthworks on the eastern side⁵³. There were established rituals for building a new temple: a stone was removed from the old building and incorporated into the new, and there were laments and weeping until the new building was completed⁵⁴. This explains the ‘top stone’ [better translated ‘the former times stone’] brought out by Zerubbabel as he laid the foundations of the second temple [Zech 4.7-9], but the weeping of the older men who had known the original temple [Ezra 3.12 c.f. Haggai 2.3] could imply that they still regarded the ruined temple as the true temple. Isaiah’s anointed one would bring gladness to those who mourned in Zion and rebuild the ancient ruins [Isa. 61.3-4]. The new temple may also have changed orientation. A prayer prescribed for the feast of Tabernacles in the second temple affirmed loyalty to the Lord by worshipping towards the west: ‘Our fathers when they were in this place turned with their backs towards the temple of the Lord and their faces towards the east, and they worshipped the sun towards the east; but as for us, our eyes are turned towards the Lord.’⁵⁵

The most important question is: Which hill was Zion? Josephus said it was the western hill of Jerusalem, the higher of the two, and that the south eastern hill was the lower city⁵⁶, but most scholars now think he was mistaken, and that the original Zion had been on the south eastern hill, over the Gihon spring. This relocation of Zion has caused great confusion, and it is ‘among the most vexed questions in the topography of Jerusalem... Christians have called the south west hill Mount Sion since the fourth century, Josephus having placed the city of David on the site of the present citadel.’⁵⁷ Tradition then produced the site of Solomon’s palace on that hill, and a bridge or raised causeway across the central valley was supposed to have been the king’s way *up* to the temple⁵⁸. Tradition, aided by archaeologists, has produced other supposed structures.

In the Old Testament, Zion was the Jebusite stronghold captured by David and subsequently known as the city of David [2 Kms 5.7]. In some texts Zion seems to be distinct from the temple mount; Solomon brought the ark out of the city of David and up to the new temple [3 Kms 8.1-3; 2 Chron 5.2-5], but both these are second temple texts in their current form, and they may reflect later usage.

⁵³ Josephus, *War* V.184.

⁵⁴ See L.S. Fried *The Priest and the King . Temple Palace Relations in the Persian Empire*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004, pp.172-177.

⁵⁵ Mishnah Sukkah 5.4

⁵⁶ Josephus, *War* V.137

⁵⁷ G.A.Smith, *Jerusalem*, vol.1, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907, p. 47.

⁵⁸ Smith, *Jerusalem* p. 134.

The Chronicler -and no other biblical source -says the temple was on Mount Moriah [2 Chron.3.1], perhaps a new name, or perhaps a new place. Older texts imply that *the temple was on Zion*. Isaiah, for example, a prophet in Jerusalem in the eighth century BCE, implies that Zion was the place of the temple. The mountain of the Lord is Zion [Isa.2.3], the Lord would put the fire and cloud of His presence over Mount Zion [Isa.4.5], Lord descends to Mount Zion [Isa 31.4], His fire is there [Isa.31.9], and the Lord reigns on Mount Zion [Isa.24.23]⁵⁹. The prophet Amos, Isaiah's older contemporary, and Joel, who cannot be dated, both knew that the Lord dwelt in Zion [Amos 1.2; Joel 3.17]]. The Psalms - the temple texts par excellence - leave no doubt that the Lord dwelt on 'Zion my holy hill' [Ps. 2.6]. He had established his abode there [Ps. 76.2, Lxx 75.3; Ps. 135.21, Lxx 134.21]. The Psalmist prayed for help from the holy place, from Zion [Ps 20.2, Lxx 19.3 also Ps 14.7, Lxx 13.7]. He had chosen Mount Zion [Ps 78.68, Lxx 77.68]. People gathered on Zion to praise the Lord [Ps 102.21-2, Lxx 101.22-23].

The early Christians did not read the Old Testament texts as modern scholars do, assigning some parts to later periods and recognising the work of redactors and editors. They read what was there, and the texts which they deemed the most important sources of prophecy - Isaiah and the Psalms⁶⁰ - stated clearly that Mount Zion was the place of the temple. They believed, as Josephus had done, that Mount Zion was the western hill, and so must have believed that that was the site of Solomon's temple. We can only wonder what they believed about the 'Temple Mount', because it cannot, for them, have been the site of Solomon's temple. It is interesting that when Umar entered Jerusalem in 638CE and commanded the Patriarch Sophronius to show him the sanctuary of David, he was taken first to two places on Mount Zion. Umar rejected both of them, and eventually decided to build a place of worship on the Temple Mount⁶¹. Was Sophronius being devious, trying to protect the holy places? Or did he genuinely believe that the site of the original sanctuary was on Mount Zion and not on the 'Temple Mount'?

⁵⁹ There are many more examples.

⁶⁰ Isaiah and the Psalms account for the vast majority of OT citations in the NT, and Jerome, in the preface to the Vulgate of Isaiah, said Isaiah should be called an evangelist because of the accuracy of his prophecies.

⁶¹ The traditional Muslim account cited in G le Strange, *Palestine Under the Moslems* [1890] reprinted Beirrut: Khayats, 1965, pp 139-143

Another source of information about the Nea may be the *Book of Zerubbabel*, the best known of the mediaeval Jewish apocalypses, which is thought to have originated in Palestine in the sixth century. Zerubbabel asked the Lord to reveal the form of the 'eternal house'. He learnt of imminent war against the son of Satan whose mother was a beautiful stone statue set up in a house of shame. He learnt about the Mother of the Messiah, Hephzibah, who would do battle with two evil kings. She would have Aaron's staff of almond wood that had blossomed in the tabernacle, but had been hidden away. The Lord would descend on the Mount of Olives and all the strange gods and temples of images would be destroyed. Of the ten evil kings who were to come, Armilus son of Satan and the beautiful statue would be the last. He would conquer the whole world and set up asherahs all over the land. He would build four [or seven - the texts vary] altars, and, at that time a fountain would come out of the temple and water the Valley of Shittim [Joel 3.18]. All nations would come to worship the stone statue, to pour libations and burn incense.

Nothing is certain about the interpretation of any apocalypse, but the choice of Zerubbabel as the recipient of the revelations shows the apocalypse was concerned with rebuilding the temple - and so possibly prompted by a similar event. The stone statue in the house of shame may indicate that there was a statue of Mary in the 'temple', where libations and incense were offered. There is no other Jewish apocalypse with a role for the mother of the Messiah, so this was almost certainly prompted by the role of Mary in the Church⁶². The asherahs, an ancient symbol of the Queen, were probably the Christian crosses set up throughout Palestine⁶³, and the reference to the fountain would be consistent with the cisterns under the Nea. Are we to imagine the Nea, with a beautiful statue of Mary, with the restored menorah and with a fountain from the sanctuary?

There are also some curious pilgrim tokens, acquired by the British Museum in 1973, and dated between the mid sixth and early seventh century. Made of dark brown clay, with plain backs, a large number depict a curious tube like object and bear the inscription 'Solomon'. 'The image is indistinct... it seems to consist of two tubular forms... One stands vertically at the centre while the other is bent into a U shape. There are inverted crescents at the tip of the tubes.'⁶⁴ A variant of the

⁶² Suggested by M Himmelfarb in *Jewish Fantasies*, ed. D Stern and M.J.Mirsky, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990, p. 69.

⁶³ R.L.Wilken *The Land Called Holy*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 211.

⁶⁴ L.Y.Rahmani, 'The Byzantine Solomon Eulogia tokens in the British Museum', *Israel Exploration Journal* 49.1-2 (1999), pp. 92-1004, p. 93.

image has four tubes in a fan-shaped formation. These tokens were made for pilgrims visiting the holy places, and there is general agreement that the images on them reflect the apse mosaics or panel painting from the churches at those sites.⁶⁵ It has been proposed that these tokens were made for pilgrims visiting Solomon's tomb. Might they have been for pilgrims visiting Solomon's temple? The curious image does look like a crude representation of the menorah, with its crescent lamps at the top of each branch. The date would be consistent with the existence of the Nea, and, when Justinian returned the temple treasures to Jerusalem, it is most likely that the menorah, the ancient symbol of the Queen, was set in the church dedicated to the Mother of God.

Nothing remains of the building. It is likely that the Nea was destroyed by furious Jews, and that the Christians were not allowed to rebuild. It is unlikely that its stones were taken directly from the ruins of Herod's temple, but almost certain that they were used for a Moslem palace. The lasting memory of the Nea is the Feast of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple, but returned to its original temple context, we may perhaps glimpse more of the significance of the Feast.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 95.

⁶⁶ After completing this paper, I discovered H Amitzur 'Justinian's Solomon's temple in Jerusalem,' in *The Centrality of Jerusalem. Historical Perspectives*, ed. M Poorthuis and Ch Sarai, Kampem, Kok Pharos, 1996, pp.160-175. He makes the additional point, pp.163, 165, that Justinian went to great trouble to obtain cedar wood for the roof of the Nea. A wooden roof was itself unusual at that time, when arches and vaults were the norm. Nor does cedar grow in Palestine, so he must have been copying Solomon who made the temple ceiling of imported cedar, 1 Kgs 6.9.