EPILOGUE

APOCALYTIC MELANCHOLIA AND 9/11

If the melancholic response to trauma is truly rooted in unconscious human psychology, even as it is expressed publically in a variety of shared and received forms, then theoretically the specific motifs and qualities of apocalyptic melancholia should emerge even where there is no explicit attempt to cast the destructive event in the language of Jewish apocalypse. One such ‘apocalyptic trauma’ that uncannily reproduces in the responses to it many of the features of the Zion Apocalypses is the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001 (hereafter 9/11). If 9/11 was a traumatic loss of the same emotional and symbolic quality as the double destruction of Jerusalem in the ancient Jewish world, we should find that the popular and official American reaction to it reproduced in many key ways the melancholy apocalyptic fantasy exhibited in the ancient Jewish texts: a compulsion to return to the original trauma and repeat the loss over and over again; the misrecognition and censorship of what was actually lost, i.e., a core sense of security in the world and one’s future; a displacement of rage and annihilating fantasies onto innocent and inappropriate targets and their ongoing vilification; and the reproduction in fantasy of that which was lost in an idealized, impervious form.

Loss in the Present

The losses of 9/11 would seem obvious to most: 2,974 lives taken on American soil, which included New York City (NYC) business people, office workers, and tourists in the World Trade Center (WTC), a.k.a. the “Twin Towers”; Department of Defense personnel at the Pentagon in Washington D.C.; passengers and flight crews on four hijacked airplanes; NYC first responders among the firefighters and police; and any number of others on the ground and in the buildings who were just going about their day that morning in September. They included men, women, and children; citizens of numerous countries besides the U.S.; Christians, Jews, Muslims, atheists, agnostics, and members of many other belief systems; military officers and civilians; liberals,
conservatives, and the apolitical. Even though the Twin Towers and the Pentagon represented very specific, symbolic targets, in a very real sense the attacks affected everyone, in the U.S. and abroad. An outpouring of national unity and international solidarity followed.¹

But as a clearly traumatic event for the nation, certain aspects of the attacks offer some intriguing parallels with the factors at the heart of the Zion Apocalypses. Most inescapable is the fact that buildings of national symbolic significance were devastated—and, like the Temple in Jerusalem, this devastation repeated itself in uncanny ways that compelled Americans, individually and collectively, to return to the damage again and again.

The architect of World Trade Center, Minoru Yamasaki, wanted the building to be a

living symbol of man’s dedication to world peace... a representation of man’s belief in humanity, his need for individual dignity, his beliefs in the cooperation of men, and through cooperation, his ability to find greatness.²

Yet both its operation as one of the economic centers of the world and its dominance of and incongruence with the New York skyline relegated to it much less benign and idealistic signification. As the WTC literally and figuratively overshadowed the former architectural icon of Manhattan, the Empire State Building,

it was not New York but the United States that was the empire state, in its imperial power and outreach signified through the new euphemism, globalism. And its phallic icon, the World Trade Center... was uncannily doubled by twin towers, ensuring its indestructibility.³

If the doubling of the Towers were meant to reinforce its sense of permanence, it is cruelly ironic, then, that its very duality is the quality that made the trauma visible and inescapable to nearly every person with access to television around the globe. After the first hijacked plane punctured the north tower and caused the world’s attention to

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