NOTES ON THE VIRTUAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE HERODIAN PERIOD TEMPLE AND COURTYARDS

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Our paper and presentation revolve around theoretical issues pertaining to a small part of a pilot project that will hopefully become the work of a lifetime. The dream is a project called “Jerusalem Reborn” whose ultimate goal is to create an interactive virtual reality model of Jerusalem throughout the ages, recreating the city using three-dimensional images created by the sophisticated computer software and hardware of the Experiential Technology Center (ETC) at UCLA, formerly directed by Prof. Bernard Frischer and at present directed by Prof. Dianne Favro. CAVE (= computer assisted virtual environment) allows for both examination and change. Rebuilding is inherent in the research.

The pilot project is the Herodian period Temple Mount and its structures, and the initial phase, and undoubtedly one of the hardest, is a recreation of the Herodian period Temple. The irony is that in spite of the fact that there was no site holier for the Jewish people than the Temple Mount of Jerusalem on which both the Biblical and Second Temple period temples stood, including the temple of the Herodian period, nobody really knows what these temples looked like. There are no archaeological remains of any of these temples themselves, although extensive remains have been found from the Temple Mount area which will help us in later stages of the project. Lacking archaeological data, the building blocks of our reconstructions are different than those who are fortunate enough to have enough tangible reality

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1 The concept of “Jerusalem Reborn” was based on the project “Rome Reborn” (www.romereborn.virginia.edu), developed initially at the ETC and later at the IATH (notes 2–3). At the moment we can only dream of accomplishing even a fraction of what the Rome Reborn team has done.
2 www.etc.ucla.edu.
3 Prof. Frischer at present directs the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities (IATH—www.iath.virginia.edu) at the University of Virginia.
to serve as the basis for their virtual reality. Not even the UCLA ETC or the IATH can solve all the problems.

Our paper relates to both the reconstructions of Temple and Temple courtyards as well as to attendant methodological issues. It is important to stress that our paper, and indeed even the reconstructions, should be considered as prolegomena. Our purpose is to advertise this project as a research tool and we are aware that some of the aspects of the reconstruction might seem difficult.

Reconstructions of Sorts

Lack of information did not necessarily result in a lack of reconstructions; the intrinsic holiness of the Temple, for Jews and even for Christians, ignited religious and architectural imaginations. The total absence of physical remains, coupled with complex and manifold interpretations of difficult texts, elicited imagined reconstructions throughout the ages; and they come in every shape and form and are too numerous to number. This being the case, one might well ask why there is a need for a new set of reconstructions, namely ours. Are there not enough reconstructions of the Jerusalem Temple and its environs? Indeed, there are hundreds of such reconstructions, though many not more than flights of religious imagination. For the most part, however, these are literary and wholly imagined reconstructions, and while these might be important for the history of art, or even for the history of religion, they provide very little in terms of accurate historical reconstruction.

There are, of course, also “scientific” reconstructions. One of the most well-known reconstructions is that of Michael Avi-Yonah, done in concert with Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer. Recently there have

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4 The literature on all aspects of the Temple and Temple Mount is voluminous and there is no way that we can provide thorough and complete citations of all relevant literature. We shall perforce make do with bibliographic highlights.
