Dr Friedrich Löwenberg, a learned young Viennese Jew, impoverished and heartbroken and determined to put an end to his life, reads a mysterious ad in the newspaper. It leads him to Kingscourt, a German aristocrat who made his fortune in America. Löwenberg decides to accompany Kingscourt in carrying out his strange decision to retire to an isolated island in the Pacific. This is how Theodor Herzl opens his famous utopian novel, *Altneuland* (*Old-New Land*), published in 1902. On their way to the island, Kingscourt and Löwenberg decide to visit Palestine. Their ship anchors at Jaffa and they discover Palestine, desolated and provincial, just as Herzl experienced it on his famous visit in 1898. Twenty years later, the two would visit Palestine again and, to their amazement, discover a new world in the ancient land: *Altneuland*. Yet their first visit is disappointing. The blue sea is certainly spectacular, but Jaffa makes a horrible impression. The desolation cries out, and on the way to Jerusalem they see signs of degeneration and decline. Then they arrive in Jerusalem.

It was night when they reached Jerusalem—a marvelous white moonlit night. ‘*Donnerwetter!*’ shouted Kingscourt, ‘I say, this is beautiful!’ […] Again turning to the guide, the old man asked, ‘What’s the name of this region?’

‘The Valley of Jehoshaphat, sir,’ replied the man meekly.

‘Then it’s a real place, Devil take me! The Valley of Jehoshaphat! I thought it was just something in the Bible. Here our Lord and Savior walked. What do you think of it, Dr. Löwenberg? […] Ah, yes! Still, it must mean something to you also. These ancient walls, this Valley….’

* This article will be a chapter in my forthcoming book on the Mount of Olives. The research was supported by the Open University of Israel Research Authority.

‘The Valley of Jehoshaphat [...] it’s a real place!’ Herzl’s cry, in Kingscourt’s mouth, will accompany us on our journey through the Valley’s history. Like many travellers of his time, Herzl was disappointed. The imagined Jerusalem was much more appealing than the real city, where the glorious past was shrouded in a deteriorating present. Only one place seems to overcome this devolution: the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Not the Temple Mount, not Mount Zion or the Western Wall, but the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Herzl wrote a book setting forth a plan for a drastic change in reality, for the creation of a utopian new world. The Valley of Jehoshaphat is a place where the future is much more important than the past, a place that exists in its future or, as Herzl’s astonished protagonist puts it, ‘Then it’s a real place, Devil take me! The Valley of Jehoshaphat!’

**Place**

The name *Valley of Jehoshaphat* was ascribed to a short segment (not much over one kilometer) of the Kidron Valley, the segment that makes its way along the eastern wall of Jerusalem’s Old City, between the city wall and the slopes of the Mount of Olives to the east. It separates the city sharply from the Mount, bringing out its height and its isolation. The very essence of the Valley depends on these two neighbours closing in on it from both sides—the holy city from here and the holy mount from there.² The Valley of Jehoshaphat that Herzl saw was commemorated in nineteenth-century images, like the one by William Henry Bartlett in the middle of the nineteenth century (Fig. 14.1). It was no different from the Valley seen by thousands of pilgrims and travellers in earlier years: a valley almost devoid of edifices, dotted with several ancient tombs—the Tomb of Absalom (or of Jehoshaphat), the Tomb of Zechariah (known in Christian tradition as the Tomb of Zechariah and Symeon), the Tomb of the Sons of Hezir (known in Christian tradition as the Tomb of James the Less)—and, a little farther to the north, Mary’s Tomb, the place where she was assumed to heaven. Not far from there was the site of the stoning of St Stephen, competing with the same tradition in front of the Damascus Gate.³ The Valley

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