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SACRED SPACE IN MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS AND ITS HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Abstract. *This article examines the formation and historical development of the concept of sacred space in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from a comparative historical perspective. It explores the historical significance of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque and their role in the religious traditions, historical memory, and cultural heritage of the three monotheistic religions.*

Keywords: *Monotheistic religions, sacred space, sacred land, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa Mosque, historical memory, religious heritage.*

INTRODUCTION

Monotheistic religions occupy an important place in humanity's religious, cultural, and historical development. The concept of sacred space has been particularly significant in the formation and development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This concept not only defines the religious status of a particular territory or pilgrimage site but also plays an important role in shaping peoples' historical memory, religious worldviews, and cultural identity (Otto, 1923). In monotheistic religions, the concept of sacred space has developed with distinctive meanings and historical foundations, closely connected to religious sources, historical events, and particular territories. Throughout history, sacred space has manifested itself in distinctive ways within different religious traditions (Eliade, 1959). In Judaism, Jerusalem and its associated sacred sites have become essential components of religious belief and historical memory. In Christianity,

places such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth acquired sacred status through historical events associated with the life of Jesus Christ. In Islam, alongside Mecca and Medina, Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque hold particular religious and historical significance. Studying sacred spaces therefore makes it possible to compare the historical development of monotheistic religions. One important aspect of this topic is that the historical significance of sacred space extends beyond religious belief. Historical events, political processes, architectural monuments, pilgrimage traditions, and cultural values have developed around such spaces (Smith, 1987).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Alongside the Qur'an and hadith, ancient written sources, accounts by travelers and geographers, and archaeological discoveries are important sources for studying the history of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Research into the history of sacred space therefore requires an interconnected analysis of religious texts, historical sources, and archaeological evidence. This study aims to analyze the formation and development of the concept of sacred space in monotheistic religions from a comparative historical perspective and to reveal its significance in religious and cultural history. The research employs historical, comparative, and systematic approaches (Eliade, 1958). The historical method is used to examine the stages through which the concept of sacred space developed, while comparative analysis identifies similarities and differences among Jewish, Christian, and Islamic understandings.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

In Christianity, the formation of the concept of sacred space is characterized by the historical and religious significance acquired by places associated with the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The status of Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jerusalem, and Golgotha in Christian tradition is directly connected to events believed to have occurred there. Sacred space thus developed in Christian history as a setting that preserves religious memory associated with the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Although Jewish and Christian understandings of sacred space share historical roots, important differences emerged in their subsequent development. In Judaism, sacred land is strongly associated with a particular territory, the covenant, and the

historical destiny of the people. In Christian sources, by contrast, sacredness extends from geographical space toward the individual's spiritual condition. This demonstrates that sacred space did not assume a uniform form within monotheistic religious traditions; rather, it acquired distinctive meanings shaped by each religion's historical development and religious views. The concept of sacred space also occupies a special place in the emergence and historical development of Islam. Islamic sources identify Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem as important sacred spaces for Muslims. Mecca holds a special status through its association with the Kaaba and the qibla; Medina through the activities of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the formation of the first Muslim community; and Jerusalem through the history of the prophets and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. In Islamic history, the place of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque is primarily associated with the events of the Isra and Mi'raj, the Night Journey and Ascension. The Qur'an mentions that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was taken from Al-Masjid al-Haram to Al-Masjid al-Aqsa.

The term "Al-Masjid al-Aqsa" means "the farthest mosque" and is interpreted as a sacred space within Bayt al-Maqdis, or Jerusalem. This event was one of the important factors establishing the religious status of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Islamic tradition and strengthening its connection to the history of the prophets. Its historical significance is not limited to its status as a religious site. Traditions of worship, education, and pilgrimage developed in this area during different periods of Islamic history. Sources record that Muslims established madrasas, various buildings, and pilgrimage sites there. In this respect, the Al-Aqsa Mosque emerged as an important center of scholarly and cultural activity as well as Muslim religious life.

Sacred spaces are also important for the study of historical sources. Their histories are investigated through religious texts, written historical sources, accounts by travelers and geographers, and archaeological discoveries. In the case of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, archaeological materials, epigraphic inscriptions, and architectural remains help illuminate the area's historical development. Archaeological research in this area, however, has also raised contentious issues connected to religious and political perspectives.

Religious memory requires particular attention when examining the historical significance of sacred spaces. When a single territory is regarded as sacred by different religious communities, its historical meaning becomes more complex. Jerusalem is a

clear example, occupying an important place in the histories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The MDI study also specifically examines Jerusalem's status within the three monotheistic religions and its religious, historical, and political significance. Studying sacred spaces within only one religious tradition may therefore be insufficient to reveal their full historical meaning. Research into areas such as Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque requires comparison of sources from different periods, identification of similarities and differences among religious traditions, and assessment of historical events within their contemporary contexts. This approach makes it possible to identify the role of sacred space in historical processes alongside its religious significance. Jerusalem occupies a distinctive position in the history of monotheistic religions. Its historical importance lies in the fact that the same territory has been regarded as sacred by followers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam at different times. Consequently, examining Jerusalem's history within a single religious tradition does not fully reveal its historical meaning. Religious conceptions associated with the city developed alongside historical memory, religious sources, and political processes over many centuries. Studies also note that Jerusalem's status in the three monotheistic religions has been investigated as a distinct field of scholarship.

The Temple in Jerusalem was an important center of Jewish religious life. Its destruction left a profound mark on the historical memory of the Jewish people. The MDI materials state that the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE by the Roman emperor Titus and that Jewish religious memory associated with Jerusalem continued thereafter. In Christian history, Jerusalem's status developed through events associated with the life of Jesus Christ. Within Christian religious memory, Jerusalem is an important place connected to his life, death, and resurrection. In this respect, the historical significance of sacred space in Christianity developed from its role as the location of particular religious events. This approach demonstrates the direct connection between sacred space and historical memory.

In Islamic history, the status of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque was reinforced by the events of the Isra and Mi'raj. The Qur'anic account of the Night Journey from Al-Masjid al-Haram to Al-Masjid al-Aqsa established this site's particular religious significance for Muslims. The Al-Aqsa Mosque also holds a special place in Islamic history as the first qibla, or direction of prayer. At the same time, Muslims regard Jerusalem as a sacred territory associated with the activities of many prophets.

CONCLUSION

An examination of the history of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque shows that the historical status of sacred space has changed over time under the influence of various political and social processes. Construction and restoration work took place in the Al-Aqsa precinct during different periods. Its architectural character developed through processes extending from the Umayyad and Abbasid periods to the Ottoman era. Earthquakes, political conflicts, and military campaigns directly affected its historical development. The common feature of Jerusalem in the histories of all three religions is its recognition as a sacred space. However, the historical foundations of this sacredness developed differently within each religious tradition. In Judaism, Jerusalem acquired its important status through the Temple and the covenant; in Christianity, through events associated with the life of Jesus Christ; and in Islam, through the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Isra and Mi'raj, and the history of the prophets. Jerusalem thus demonstrates that, alongside the shared religious roots of sacred space, there are distinctive features reflecting the historical memory of each religion.

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