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Gustave Flaubert's Journey to the Holy Land: Anticipation, Disenchantment and Enduring Fascination

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Recommended Citation

Zielonka, Anthony. "Gustave Flaubert's Journey to the Holy Land: Anticipation, Disenchantment and Enduring Fascination." *Aller(s)-Retour(s): Nineteenth-Century France in Motion*, edited by Loïc Guyon and Andrew Watts, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, pp. 125-135.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT'S JOURNEY
TO THE HOLY LAND:
ANTICIPATION, DISENCHANTMENT
AND ENDURING FASCINATION

ANTHONY ZIELONKA

Jérusalem est d'une tristesse immense. Cela a un grand charme. La malédiction de Dieu semble planer sur cette ville où l'on ne marche que sur des merdes et où l'on ne voit que des ruines. C'est bougrement crâne.¹

This was the first impression that Flaubert set down of Jerusalem, writing to his mother upon his arrival in the holy city at the beginning of August 1850. In this, the first of a series of letters he sent from Jerusalem to Madame Flaubert, who had remained at the family home in Normandy while he and Maxime Du Camp travelled firstly through Egypt, and then to Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and Syria, Flaubert was expressing his first reaction to the sensory experience of first setting foot in the Holy Land? It was, as these few lines make clear, predominantly a reaction of sadness and of profound disappointment.

In contrast to that first, disturbing and negative impression, in a long letter to his close friend, Louis Bouilhet, written on 20 August 1850, Flaubert chose to give a much more positive account of his first encounter with the city, revealing the exhilaration and the excitement that he had suddenly felt as he caught his first glimpse of Jerusalem, which he had long dreamed of visiting:

¹ Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. by Jean Bruneau, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1973-98), I, 660. Subsequent references to the first volume of Flaubert's *Correspondance* are to this edition and appear in parentheses in the body of the text, preceded by the numeral I.

J'ai arrêté mon cheval que j'avais lancé en avant des autres et j'ai regardé la ville sainte, tout étonné de la voir. Ça m'a semblé très propre et les murailles en bien meilleur état que je ne m'y attendais. Puis, j'ai pensé au Christ que j'ai vu monter sur le mont des Oliviers. Il avait une robe bleue et la sueur perlait sur ses tempes. — J'ai pensé aussi à son entrée à Jérusalem avec de grands cris, des palmes vertes, etc, la fresque de Flandrin que nous avons vue ensemble à Saint-Germain-des-Près, la veille de mon départ. — A ma droite, derrière la ville sainte, au fond, les montagnes blanches d'Hébron se déchiquetaient dans une transparence vaporeuse. Le ciel était pâle, il y avait quelques nuages. Quoiqu'il fit chaud, la lumière était arrangée de telle sorte qu'elle me semblait comme celle d'un jour d'hiver, tant c'était cru, blanc et dur. Puis Maxime m'a rejoint avec le bagage. Il fumait une cigarette. Nous sommes entrés par la porte de Jaffa et nous avons dîné à 6 heures du soir (I, 664).

What is immediately striking about this passage is the dichotomy between, on the one hand, Flaubert's casually realistic impressions and the anecdotal details he gives of his arrival in Jerusalem and, on the other, the manifestly profound emotional and spiritual impact of at last seeing and experiencing the Holy City for himself. It was clearly an experience that he found emotionally overwhelming, as he meditated on the city's unrivalled and central significance for the Christian and Jewish faiths, and for their history and cultures. Flaubert has consistently been thought of as an unambiguously anticlerical individual, as a lifelong agnostic and sceptic who was always interested in the diversity of religious beliefs and practices, but who rejected adherence to any one faith, and often expressed his doubts and his cynicism in matters of religion, in the many letters that he wrote throughout his life.² Yet, in this passage, he writes movingly of Christ's entry into Jerusalem and of seeing him, as though in a mystical

² Writing to Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie on 18 March 1857, he states: "Je suis un pèlerin de la Terre Sainte" (Flaubert, *Correspondance*, II, 692). In his next letter to the same correspondent, Flaubert clarifies his personal views on religion and explains that while he had never felt the need to believe in an afterlife or to practise any religious faith himself, religious belief itself, in all its diverse forms, had always deeply fascinated him: "Je n'aime point la vie et je n'ai point peur de la mort. L'hypothèse du néant absolu n'a même rien qui me terrifie. Je suis prêt à me jeter dans le grand trou noir avec placidité. Et cependant, ce qui m'attire par-dessus tout, c'est la religion. Je veux dire toutes les religions, pas plus l'une que l'autre. Chaque dogme en particulier m'est répulsif, mais je considère le sentiment qui les a inventés comme le plus naturel et le plus poétique de l'humanité. Je n'aime point les philosophes qui n'ont vu là que jonglerie et sottise. J'y découvre, moi, nécessité et instinct ; aussi je respecte le nègre baisant son fétiche autant que le catholique aux pieds du Sacré Coeur." (Flaubert, *Correspondance*, II, 697; 30 March 1857).

vision, walking on the Mount of Olives, as he did on the eve of the Crucifixion. He even mentions the poignant detail of the beads of sweat that he saw, or thought he saw, on Christ's forehead. Clearly, even though it may be an exaggeration to think of the writer as harbouring any covert Catholicism or even any incipient Christian belief, it emerges, from what he wrote to Bouilhet, that Flaubert was undergoing some kind of profound spiritual experience as he set foot in Jerusalem for the first time. Fleeting visions of the supernatural, such as this one, as well as many other kinds of mystical experiences, recur throughout the *Voyage en Orient*, and these were later to be echoed and transmuted into other mystical visions or hallucinations that feature in his fictional works, such as *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, especially in the version of 1874.³

Setting sail from Alexandria just a few weeks before he wrote those lines, in July 1850, after a stay in, and travels through, the land of the Pharaohs that had taken eight months, Flaubert left the shores of Egypt full of eager anticipation at the opportunity he was now about to have to see and to explore Palestine and the Holy Land for what was to be the first and only time in his life. His lengthy exploration of Egypt, with extended stays in Alexandria and Cairo, and the journey southwards by sailboat up the Nile to Upper Egypt and Nubia, as far as the border with Sudan, and then back down the river, visiting the most significant temples and ancient sites along the way, had also been marked by two contrasting reactions: astonished amazement and admiration at the huge and extensive monuments that he discovered, but also a profound sense of melancholy and disappointment at the passing of a once great civilization and at the chaotic mass of sand-covered ruins and scattered, often fragmentary, artefacts that were the only visible remains of that civilization.⁴

Flaubert's steamship made landfall in the port of Beirut in the early morning of 19 July 1850, and over the next two and a half months he and

³ See Sylvie Laüt-Berr, *Flaubert et l'antiquité, Itinéraire d'une passion*. (Paris: Champion, 2001), especially pp. 241-44. Laüt-Berr's book is a magisterial study tracing the importance of Flaubert's meditations on Antiquity in all its forms, including early Christianity, and of its multiple and complex influence on his writings. On Flaubert's obsessive and life-long fascination with the early history of Christianity, as well as with the religious and scientific debates of nineteenth-century France, see also Mary Orr, *Flaubert's Tentation: Remapping Nineteenth-Century French Histories of Religion and Science* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴ For details of these contrasting and contradictory impressions and reactions, see: Anthony Zielonka, "Flaubert in Egypt: Confronting the Exotic", *Romance Quarterly*, 51.1 (Winter 2004), 29-39.

Maxime Du Camp, accompanied by their assistant and general factotum Joseph, and by their Corsican friend Louis Sasseti, travelled overland from Beirut, down the Mediterranean shore, on horseback, often riding literally along the beach, down through Lebanon and Palestine, towards Jerusalem, by way of Sidon, Tyre, Acre, Mount Carmel, Jaffa and Ramla.

Following their sojourn in Jerusalem, which lasted approximately two weeks, they visited Bethlehem, the river Jordan, Jericho and the Dead Sea, Nablus, Jenin, Nazareth, Cana, Tiberias, the Sea of Galilee and Genesareth, before travelling onwards to Damascus and parts of Syria, including the extensive ruins of the ancient city of Baalbek. They then returned to Beirut to begin the long homeward journey westwards, across the Mediterranean Sea, sailing from the port of Beirut for the island of Rhodes at the end of September 1850.

Flaubert recounts his impressions of that journey in his *Carnets de voyage*, a new edition of which was published in 2006 as part of his *Voyage en Orient*, in Gallimard's Collection Folio. In that edition, the account of Flaubert's journey through the Holy Land itself takes up approximately ninety pages. It is an account filled with fascinating, if contradictory, impressions and insights, yet it has hitherto been virtually ignored by scholars of Flaubert's writings.⁵ Flaubert also notes his reactions to what he saw and experienced in the Holy Land in a number of the letters that he sent during this journey, to his mother and to close friends, including Louis Bouilhet, who had remained at home in France.

While the section of the *Voyage en Orient* dealing with Palestine and the Biblical lands is of great interest to readers and to Flaubert scholars, I shall restrict my analysis in this essay to those sections of Flaubert's account that are devoted to the holy city of Jerusalem itself. It was, and of course still is, a pre-eminently important city, because of its religious, political and symbolic significance and Flaubert found it fascinating for all of these reasons. However, attempting to express both his real sense of wonder and his profound disenchantment, he set down impressions of the city that were contradictory, as we have already glimpsed in the passages from the two letters quoted above.

⁵ It is truly puzzling why scholars have commented at great length on Flaubert's *Voyage en Egypte*, but practically not at all on his written account of the time he spent in the Holy Land. One possible explanation for this may be that the only edition of that text that was accessible before Claudine Gothot-Mersch's recent edition of the entire *Voyage en Orient* appeared in the Collection Folio (Paris: Gallimard, 2006) was somewhat hidden away in the last section of Volume 10 of Flaubert's *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Club de l'Honnête homme, 1973), 551-614.

Flaubert was deeply interested in the religious, historical and social dimensions of all that he observed in the Holy Land. He had already spent years researching the origins of Christianity, Middle Eastern religions and mythology and the lives of the early saints, as evidenced by the documentation he had amassed for the first, 1849, version of *La Tentation de saint Antoine*. He continued to be fascinated by doctrinal and theological matters, a fascination that stayed with him for the rest of his life. Clear traces of it are to be found in the later versions of *La Tentation*, as well as in all of his novels and all three of the stories in his last published book, *Trois Contes*. The very fact of travelling to the Holy Land, the land of the Old and the New Testaments, in which Christ and his disciples had lived, was an immensely important goal for him personally. The night before he was to see Jerusalem for the very first time, he was unable to sleep at all, partly because of the annoying mosquitoes buzzing around him, but also because of the excitement and anticipation he reports having felt at the occasion. The travellers spent that night camping in Ramla, about twenty-five miles west of Jerusalem: “Nous campons en déval de la ville sous des oliviers—à cause des moustiques, des muletiers, des chevaux et de l'idée que je dois voir Jérusalem le jour suivant, nuit blanche.”⁶

In the *Carnets de voyage*, the tension and suspense of anticipating that very first sighting of the city are heightened in Flaubert's description of the road the travellers took as they approached:

On monte encore pendant une grande heure — arrivée sur le plateau, tous les terrains des montagnes ont une couleur de poudre de bois rouge foncé, ou mieux de mortier — à chaque instant je m'attends à voir Jérusalem et je ne la vois pas — la route (on distingue la trace d'un ancien chemin) est exécrable, il n'y a pas moyen de trotter— enclos de pierres sèches dans ce terrain de pierres. Enfin, au coin d'un mur, cour dans laquelle sont des oliviers, j'aperçois un santon — c'est tout — je vais encore quelque temps — des Arabes que je rencontre me font signe de me dépêcher et me crient el-Kods, el-Kods ... quelques femmes vêtues de blouses bleues qui m'ont l'air de revenir du bazar — au bout de trois minutes, JERUSALEM. (*Voyage*, 243-44).

Flaubert masterfully evokes the directness and the unique impact of the experience by using the present tense to narrate what he saw and

⁶ Gustave Flaubert, *Voyage en Orient (1849-1851)* ed. by Claudine Gothot-Mersch. (Paris: Gallimard, Collecton Folio, 2006), 242. Subsequent references to this edition are parenthesised in the main text and signalled using the abbreviation *Voyage* followed by the relevant page number.

encountered. He does this consistently in the entire account, thereby conveying a powerful sense of the presentness and immediacy of these experiences and encounters. The reader is thus fully and vividly able to visualize and imagine the scenes being evoked. We do not know what kind of readership, if any, Flaubert had in mind for his *Voyage en Orient*. He certainly never wrote anything about any intention he may ever have had to publish it. It may, therefore, be more accurate to view these *Carnets de voyage*, quite simply, as evidence of Flaubert's compulsion to set down in writing his impressions and reactions to what he was experiencing and witnessing, while these were still fresh in his mind. He clearly looked back over them and ruminated on them in later years, when he was back in France and engaged in the laborious and painstaking work of writing each of his novels. It was only then that, as Adrienne Tooke has shown, direct visual and sensory impressions of places he had visited went through a complicated process of refinement, transmutation and effacement, over time and within the author's imagination, leaving only subtle echoes or shadows of the original experiences that he had had in his mature texts.⁷

On entering the city of Jerusalem, Flaubert looks around with fascination and admiration at the entire spectacle that presents itself to him. He is moved to write a paragraph that is very similar in tone to that of the letter to Louis Bouilhet that has already been cited. Once again, he describes seeing Christ walking up to the Mount of Olives. This brief sighting or vision is striking because it is inserted into a passage of rather unexceptional, even mundane, observations:

Comme c'est propre ! Les murs sont tous conservés — je pense à Jésus-Christ entrant et sortant pour monter au bois des Oliviers — je l'y vois par la porte qui est devant moi. Les montagnes d'Hébron derrière la ville, à ma droite, dans une transparence vaporeuse ; tout le reste est sec, dur, gris ; la lumière me semble celle d'un jour d'hiver tant elle est crue et blanche — c'est pourtant très chaud de ton, je ne sais comment cela se fait. Max me rejoint avec le bagage, il fumait une cigarette. Piscine de Sainte-Hélène : grand carré à notre droite — nous touchons presque aux murs, la voilà donc ! nous disons-nous en dedans de nous-mêmes (*Voyage*, 244).

What is striking, here, is the contradiction between the overall impression of the city that Flaubert formed, based on his preliminary exploration of it, as one of desolation, ruin and decay, and the emphasis he gives in this section of the *Voyage*, to the brightness, whiteness and

⁷ Adrienne Tooke, *Flaubert and the Pictorial Arts, From Image to Text* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially pp. 128-48 and 159-68.

cleanliness of its walls. These much more positive impressions appear at moments when Flaubert is genuinely moved by the spiritual and transcendent dimension or power of the city of Jerusalem, as here, when he evokes Christ walking out through its gates and up onto the Mount of Olives.

At other moments during his peregrinations through the city, Flaubert appears to have been overwhelmed by a disturbing sense of Jerusalem as a place of decadence, a setting within which ancient religions are in an irreversible state of decomposition, in a process of falling apart and disintegration. This is exemplified by the pitiful state of most of the stones, of the buildings, streets and alleyways he sees around him: "Jérusalem me fait l'effet d'un charnier fortifié — là pourrissent silencieusement les vieilles religions — on marche sur des merdes et l'on ne voit que des ruines — c'est énorme de tristesse" (*Voyage*, 244) It is interesting that Flaubert's description here mirrors that given in his very first written impression of the city, in the letter to his mother quoted at the beginning of this essay.

The experience of sadness, melancholy and disappointment at what he found in celebrated and revered ancient and sacred places was, of course, not a new or an unusual one for Flaubert. We have already noted that these were some of his dominant reactions throughout his travels in Egypt. But they had also marked his much earlier journeys to the Pyrenees, to Corsica, Italy, and even the trip he had taken to Brittany, also with Maxime Du Camp, in 1847 (which they retold in the posthumously published *Par les champs et par les grèves*). Moreover, such melancholy and negative meditations were standard fare among Romantic travellers to the Middle East and to the Holy Land. We find them in the *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (1811), of Chateaubriand, and in the writings of Lamartine, Nerval, Fromentin, Alexandre Dumas, and Pierre Loti, amongst many others.⁸

As he walks around the city in the following days, Flaubert's reaction of disappointment steadily intensifies. Desolate ruins and endless heaps of rubble seem to lie wherever he walks and wherever his gaze turns in this decaying city. The physical signs of decomposition that surround him in this supposedly holy place are matched by a sense of the deception and

⁸ On these writers' accounts of their encounters with the Holy Land, and with the Middle East and Orient as a whole, see Sarga Moussa, *La Relation orientale: enquête sur la communication dans les récits de voyage en Orient (1811-1861)* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1995). Moussa traces the origins of those melancholy reflections back to the Comte de Volney's influential book, *Les Ruines* (1791).

dishonesty being perpetrated by its population, in their dealings with the hordes of often gullible and naïve pilgrims and visitors.

Flaubert seems to have been particularly shocked by the fact that the keys to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are held by Turkish, that is to say Muslim, guards, who are, in fact attempting, with great difficulty, to keep the peace among the various rival Christian sects and groups—Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholics or Latins, Armenians, Protestants, and Copts. In the birthplace of Christianity: “On hait le voisin avant toute chose”, he notes (*Voyage*, 249).

The feeling of disappointment that overwhelms him at the sight of such conflicts in what is supposed to be the most sacred of holy places must, in fact, as he speculates, be very similar to that felt by many earlier generations of pious pilgrims, who had made it a central goal of their lives to visit these same sites (*Voyage*, 250).

A number of astonishing passages do, nonetheless, stand out in this otherwise unremittingly negative account of Flaubert’s impressions of his visits to the churches and shrines in and around the city of Jerusalem. One of these is the account that he gives of his visit to the Church of the Nativity, in Bethlehem, a mere six miles south of the city. Here, his precise, detailed and realistic description of the church’s interior and of his emotional reaction to this revered shrine contrasts with the predominant sense of disappointment that has previously been noted. Flaubert describes the columns, the fabrics, the lamps and the star marking the site of the Nativity itself. He immediately reports his own emotive and personal reaction to what he was seeing, a rather startling reaction of mystical identification, rather than of cynical agnosticism: “Je suis resté là, j’avais du mal à m’en arracher ; c’est beau — c’est vrai — ça chante une joie mystique” (*Voyage*, 253-54). Flaubert was clearly moved by the experience of seeing a place that, even for him, had unanticipated and intensely joyful, even mystical, resonances.

In a very real sense, then, Flaubert was looking for a material reality and actual physical signs or visible evidence, amid the streets of the holy city, that would in some truly convincing way reflect, or correspond to, the core values of the Gospels, for which he had a lifelong respect and admiration. Even though he was in no sense a believer in the literal truth of the Bible, his disappointment at not finding any incontrovertible or certain evidence of the truth and authenticity of the Christian faith, in the holy places in which it had originated, is intense and poignantly genuine.

In the letter to Louis Bouilhet quoted from at the beginning of this essay, Flaubert writes:

Et puis on est assailli de saintetés. J'en suis repu. Les chapelets, particulièrement, me sortent par les yeux. Nous en avons bien acheté 7 ou 8 douzaines. Et puis, et surtout, c'est que tout cela n'est pas vrai. Tout cela ment, tout cela ment. Après ma première visite au Saint-Sépulcre, je suis revenu à l'hôtel lassé, ennuyé jusque dans la moelle des os. J'ai pris un saint Matthieu et j'ai lu avec un épanouissement de coeur virginal le discours sur la montagne. Ça a calmé toutes les froides aigreurs qui m'étaient survenues là-bas — On a fait tout ce qu'on a pu pour rendre les saints lieux ridicules. C'est putain en diable : l'hypocrisie, la cupidité, la falsification et l'impudence, oui, mais de sainteté, va te faire foutre (I, 666).

These are indeed scathing and disobliging remarks about the reality of what Flaubert actually found on the ground during his stay in Jerusalem. There was much to be annoyed about, or outraged at, in a decaying city that was full of ruins and rubble, and whose inhabitants were shamelessly exploiting and deceiving credulous visitors and pilgrims, at every turn. And yet, while he was there, as he tells Bouilhet in this letter, Flaubert was prompted to turn away from the ambient chaos and to reread selected passages of the Gospels. He is stating quite openly, in this text, that he is not at all unwilling to believe, and that he does, in fact, find consolation and meaning in Jesus's words. He was genuinely moved on rereading the Sermon on the Mount, that day and in that city, while reflecting upon the spiritual and moral teachings and example of Christ.

These few weeks of exploration of, looking at, and directly experiencing the city of Jerusalem were to leave a permanent mark on Flaubert's literary consciousness. His experiences in the Holy Land undoubtedly influenced the author's portrayal of Emma Bovary and her distortions and psychological misapplication of religion, during her convent upbringing, and in her expectations of an ideal and mystically Christ-like husband, in the months and years during which he worked on *Madame Bovary*, immediately following his return to France in the summer of 1851. They also left their mark, in later years, on *Salammbô* and on the re-writing and the 1856 and 1874 versions of *La Tentation de saint Antoine*.⁹

Amid the overwhelming consciousness of the ruin and decay of all civilizations, cultures and religions, which is the central subject of

⁹ On the influence of Flaubert's experiences in and of the Orient on the writing of these two novels, see Sylvie Laüt-Berr, *Flaubert et l'Antiquité*, especially pp. 237-58 and 276-87. See also Frank Paul Bowman, "Flaubert's Temptation of St. Anthony", in *French Romanticism, Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Readings* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) pp. 182-200.

Flaubert's considerations in *Salammbô*, in *La Tentation* of 1874, and in *Hérodias*, but also in all three of the *Trois Contes* (1877), there is also a sense, in all of these works, that there is still a place for an instinctive and emotional response to spirituality, a yearning for transcendence, and an impulse towards religious faith that can mysteriously overwhelm human consciousness at key moments in one's life. This is clearly a major theme in *Un Cœur simple*, the first of the three stories, where Flaubert evokes its ironies and ambiguities, portraying them in Félicité's experiences of mystical sensuality.¹⁰

A similar readiness to embrace a mystical and sensual religious faith, which can appear at the most unexpected of moments, is found in the Christmas Eve episode at the end of Chapter VIII of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881). Flaubert's two antiheroes, exasperated and confused after reviewing a wide range of contradictory and incompatible philosophical ideas, finally decide that the only option that remains open to them is to commit suicide. At that very moment, suddenly seeing the village church lit up and crowded for Midnight Mass, they stumble inside and immediately find themselves caught up in an atmosphere of mystical fervour and mysterious happiness.¹¹

To take one final example, the impact of Flaubert's experiences was still resonant and influential twenty-seven years after his stay in Jerusalem, when he was writing *Hérodias*, the last of the *Trois Contes*. In that story, Mannaëï, the Samaritan serving Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Judaea, gazes at the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Flaubert writes:

Il l'aperçut dans l'écartement de deux collines. Le soleil faisait resplendir ses murailles de marbre blanc et les lames d'or de sa toiture. C'était comme une montagne lumineuse, quelque chose de surhumain, écrasant tout de son opulence et de son orgueil.¹²

¹⁰ See: Anthony Zielonka, "La 'sensualité mystique' dans *Un Cœur simple*" in *Révolutions, Résurrections et Avènements: mélanges offerts à Paul Viallaneix*, ed. by Simone Bernard-Griffiths et Stéphane Michaud (Paris: SEDES, 1991), 201-06.

¹¹ "La tiède atmosphère leur procura un singulier bien-être. Et leurs pensées, orageuses tout à l'heure, se faisaient douces, comme des vagues qui s'apaisent. . . L'hostie fut montrée par le prêtre, au bout de ses deux bras, le plus haut possible. Alors éclata un chant d'allégresse, qui conviait le monde aux pieds du Roi des anges. Bouvard et Pécuchet involontairement s'y mêlèrent; et ils sentaient comme une aurore se lever dans leur âme" (Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, ed. by Stéphanie Dord-Crouslé (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1999), 303).

¹² Gustave Flaubert, *Trois Contes*, ed. by Marie Basuyaux (Paris: Gallimard, Collection Folioplus classiques, 2003), 106.

Flaubert reconstitutes the splendour of the scene based upon his memories of the brilliantly bright marble walls he had seen with his own eyes, and which he had commented on in his travel notes, almost three decades earlier. Later in the *Voyage en Orient*, the account that is almost contemporaneous with Flaubert's own stay in the city, as the small group of travellers ride out of Jerusalem, heading north towards Nazareth, Flaubert's very last glimpse of the city turns out to be completely anticlimactic, as its walls, buildings and ruins, far from dominating the horizon, suddenly simply disappear from sight:

Jérusalem à mesure qu'on la quitte s'enfonce dans la verdure des oliviers qui sont du côté du tombeau des Rois, et du côté nord les lignes droites de ses murs s'abaissent et saillissent à travers les espaces du feuillage. Je croyais la revoir encore et lui dire adieu en me tournant vers elle — une petite colline me l'a cachée tout à fait. Quand je me suis retourné, elle avait complètement disparu (*Voyage*, 268).