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Anthony Bale

Chapter 10

From Nidaros to Jerusalem; from *Feginsbrekka* to Mount Joy

Several sources testify to pilgrims' ritualized emotional responses at high-lying spots from where they first could lay eyes on their sacred destination. The hill Mount Joy outside Jerusalem is often referred to as the prototype for such practices. This short chapter questions this assumption and shows how readings of sacred landscapes in the Latin West came to shape the pilgrims' perception of the Holy City.

Above the Norwegian city of Trondheim rises the hill known as *Feginsbrekka* (literally "hill of joy/grace").¹ The hill provides a panorama of the city, known in the Middle Ages as Nidaros (Niðaróss). *Feginsbrekka*'s utility was as a place from which pilgrims could view the object of their pilgrimage, the shrine of St Olav (d. 1030) at Nidaros. The main pilgrims' route from the south would have taken visitors via *Feginsbrekka* (pilgrimage to Olav's shrine having been established by 1070, when Adam of Bremen mentions it). It is then perhaps unsurprising that, at least according to *Sverris saga*, Sverre Sigurdsson (d. 1202), king of Norway and alleged descendant of St Olav, knelt at *Feginsbrekka* and prayed towards Nidaros. The text describes how at *Feginsbrekka* Sverre "alighted from his horse, fell upon his knees, and said his prayers" and then delivered a stirring speech to his men, for the victory they could claim in Nidaros.²

As Bjørn Bandlien says, "Sverrir (Sverre) never went to the Holy Land . . . Instead, he made the Holy Land come to him".³ At Nidaros, Sverre had already built a fortress called Zion, a *translatio imperii* which not only made Sverre a new

¹ For previous brief notices of the site see Kristin B. Aavitsland, "Defending Jerusalem: Visualizations of a Christian Identity in Medieval Scandinavia," in *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem*, ed. Bianca Kühnel, Galit Noga-Banai and Hanna Vorholt, 121–32, Turnhout: Brepols, 2014; Bjørn Bandlien, "Hegemonic memory, Counter-Memory, and Struggles for Royal Power: The Rhetoric of the Past in the Age of King Sverrir Sigurðsson of Norway," *Scandinavian Studies* 85 (2013); Edmond-René Labande, *Pauper et peregrinus: problèmes, comportements et mentalités du pèlerin chrétien* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 227–31.

² *The Saga of King Sverri of Norway*, ed. and trans. J. Sephton, London: David Nutt, 1899.

³ Bandlien, "Hegemonic memory, Counter-Memory, and Struggles for Royal Power," 356.

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Noah, Moses, or David, gazing from the mountain to his Promised Land, but made of Nidaros a new Jerusalem. Feginsbrekka, a joyous mountain overlooking the city, resonated too with a Holy Land memory: that of Mount Joy (*Mons Gaudii*, *Monjoie*), a hill outside Jerusalem from which it became customary for pilgrims coming from Europe to take their first view of the Holy City and pray, weep, and experience a kind of divine joy. Crusader-era Palestine had not one but two Mount Joys: one at or near Mount Scopus, founded by the Spanish crusader Rodrigo Álvarez (d. 1187), whose Order of Mount Joy endured for only a handful of years;⁴ and another, at Nabi Samwil, about seven kilometres north-west of Jerusalem, a site which endured for much longer and was home, during the twelfth century, to crusader fortifications and a Premonstratensian abbey, the remains of which survive today (Fig. 10.1).⁵ The church structure at Nabi Samwil is a fascinating hybrid building, still simultaneously a church, mosque, and synagogue.⁶ European Christian pilgrims travelling from Jaffa to Jerusalem, from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries, regularly stopped there and, whilst they rarely mention the building, they do mention the vista of the holy city, partaking of an emotional, pious ritual similar to that performed by Sverre.

The pilgrims' custom of viewing Jerusalem and praying to it may long predate Sverre and the Crusades. Indeed, Jewish encomia to Jerusalem are concerned with its status as a joyful thing beheld: *yefeh nof*, a beautiful view, as the city is still sometimes called, based on the description in Ps 48(47):2–3 (“the city of our God, in his holy mountain. / With the joy of the whole earth is mount Sion founded”). As early as the sixth century, the Piacenza Pilgrim described in his vivid account how he and his companions fell down and kissed the ground as they approached Jerusalem, in a precursor to the emotional rituals of devotion we see in the later Middle Ages.⁷ Certainly, within a few years of the Frankish crusaders' conquest of Jerusalem, an emotional ritual had developed at the Mount Joy sites on the approach to the city. By 1106–8 (therefore within a decade of the Frankish conquest of

⁴ See Benjamin Z. Kedar, “Jerusalem’s Two *Montes Gaudii*,” in *Crusader Landscapes in the Medieval Levant: The Archaeology and History of the Latin East*, ed. Michaela Sinibaldi, et al. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016).

⁵ See Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993–2009), 2: 85–93.

⁶ Today, Nabi Samwil (Palestine) contains little more than the religious building and extensive archaeological remains; the surrounding village was destroyed by the Israeli army in the early 1970s and the surrounding area is designated a National Park. It is located just north of the settlement of Ramot, and is accessible by bus from west Jerusalem. The synagogue is located in the crypt of the building and is easily visited; the mosque and the church are often open to visitors.

⁷ Aubrey Stewart, ed. *Of the Holy Places Visited by Antoninus Martyr (c.560–570 A.D.)* (London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1884), 15.

Jerusalem in 1098–9) the abbot Daniil, visiting from Kiev, described a “flat hill about a verst [just over 1 km] from the road to Jerusalem.” He continued,

on this hill all dismount from their horses and place little crosses there and bow to the Church of the Resurrection on the road to town. And no one can hold back tears at the sight of that desired land and the Holy Places where Christ our God suffered his Passion for the sake of us sinners.⁸

Slightly later travellers, like the German pilgrim Theoderic, explicitly record their “joy” on first seeing the city; Theoderic writes of “a small church” from which “pilgrims have their first view of this city [of Jerusalem] and, moved with great joy, put on their crosses. They take off their shoes, humbly trying to seek the person who for them was pleased to come to this place as a poor and humble man.”⁹ In Theoderic’s account, the joy resides in the view, which stimulates a moment of imitative penitence in which to enter the holy city barefoot, “poor and humble.” Similar accounts proliferate throughout the crusader period (although not all pilgrims mention Mount Joy) and it is clear from maps and images of the period that Mount Joy had become an established, named locus.¹⁰

However, the Premonstratensians abandoned their monastery at Mount Joy/Nabi Samwil in 1187, a prelude to Saladin’s capturing of Jerusalem. Even so, Ambroise, the Norman chronicler of the Third Crusade (1189–1192) writing in the early 1190s, records the continuity of the ritual at Mount Joy in the context of conflict with Saladin’s forces:

we came to Mountjoy. There our hearts were filled with joy at the site of Jerusalem. We went down on our knees, as all should. We could see the Mount of Olives, the starting point for the procession when God submitted to His Passion. Then we came to the city where God conquered His inheritance.¹¹

Apart from a brief moment in the 1240s, when the site may have been briefly ceded to the Franks, 1187 marks the end of formal western Christian occupation of Nabi Samwil. Yet Mount Joy continued as a Latin Christian pilgrimage site throughout the Middle Ages. From the 1240s onwards, there does not appear to have been a

⁸ John Wilkinson, Joyce Hill, and W. F. Ryan, eds, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage 1099–1185* (London: Hackluyt Society, second series 167, 1988), 127.

⁹ Wilkinson, et al., *Jerusalem Pilgrimage*, 310.

¹⁰ For example, “Mons Gaudii” appears, with a supplicating pilgrim, on the famous crusader map of c.1170 (The Hague, Royal Library MS 76 F5, f. 1r). In a crusader diagram of the Holy Land, “Mons Gaudii” appears as an important nodal point on the way to Jerusalem, adjacent to Samuel’s tomb (London, British Library Harley MS 658, g. 39v). On a later twelfth-century pilgrimage map (Brussels, Bib. Roy. MS 9823–24, f. 157r), a group of pilgrims stands on “Mons Gaudii”; the pilgrims face Jerusalem and one of them gestures towards it from the hill’s summit.

¹¹ *The History of the Holy War: Ambroise’s Estoire de la Guerre Sainte*, 2 vols, translated by Marianne Ailes, ed. Marianne Ailes and Malcolm Barber, Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003.



Fig. 10.1: Mount Joy: Nabi Samwil (Palestine).

church or formal (Latin) Christian shrine on Nabi Samwil, although there were well-established sites of Jewish and Muslim worship within what had been the crusaders' church. Nonetheless, to take the vista of Jerusalem from Nabi Samwil remained a venerable and recognised part of the pilgrimage route. Intriguingly, the view itself seems to have been the shrine as it were; once the church had become a mosque and synagogue, there was no institutional shrine, but rather an emotional and ritual marker, embodied in the taking of the vista.

Sir John Mandeville, whose widely-read *Book of Marvels & Travels* (which first appeared in French or Anglo-French, c.1356) offered a kind of *summa* of western European knowledge of the Middle East and was translated into most vernacular languages from Gaelic to Danish, wrote that

Two miles from Jerusalem is Mount Joy, a fair and pleasant place. And there lies the prophet Samuel in a fair tomb. And it is called Mount Joy because there pilgrims may first see Jerusalem, the sight of which gives them great joy after their labours.¹²

The Christian pilgrims' hearts and eyes were focussed on the final attainment of Jerusalem, shimmering in the distance and full of spiritual promise, as feeling and viewing were mapped onto the landscape.

The Frankish crusaders adapted local religious customs, especially those of the Greek Christians, but they also imported their own religious and cultural sensibilities.¹³ It is clear that one of the traditions they imported from Europe concerned the act of looking at the object of one's pilgrimage from afar and emotionally marking that moment of laying one's eyes on this object. The fact that this was a ritualised sensibility imported to Palestine becomes evident if we look at the European parallels on which the site was clearly modelled. The term "Mount Joy" is not a proper noun referring to a specific place but was rather a noun of place given to a mountain from which a pilgrim viewed the object of their journey. Sites called Mount Joy were widespread in Western Europe and had in common with each other an elevated location from which the vista of one's destination could be taken and a feeling of joy felt thereon. It is hard to establish which is the earliest place known as Mount Joy, but several examples certainly pre-date the First Crusade. The site formerly known as Montjovis (Mount of Jupiter) at Limoges may have been renamed Mons Gaudii as early as the 940s, to honour the body at St Martial in whose name a chapel was erected;¹⁴ the Monte do Gozo (literally "mount of joy") overlooking Santiago de Compostela, the hill from which the cathedral of St James at Santiago comes into view from the pilgrims' *camino*, is a direct parallel to the Jerusalem site; and Monte Mario near Rome, familiar to almost any pilgrim or visitor approaching Rome from the north, was known as Mount Joy by the eleventh century.¹⁵ Each of these sites was

12 "ii myle fro Ierusalem is the Mount Joiye that is a faire place and lykyng. And ther lith Samuel the prophete in a faire tounge. And it is yclepid Mount Joiye for there pilgrymes may first se to Jerualem, of whiche sight thei have grete joiye aftir here traveyl," M. C. Seymour, ed. *The Defective Version of Mandeville's Travels*, Early English Text Society OS 319 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 39.

13 On interactions between the Crusaders and local religious traditions see Anthony Bale, "God's Cell: Christ as Prisoner and Pilgrimage to the Prison of Christ," *Speculum*, no. 91 (2016); Andrew Jotischky, "Holy Fire and Holy Sepulchre: Ritual and Space in Jerusalem from the Ninth to the Fourteenth Centuries," in *Ritual and Space in the Middle Ages*, ed. Frances Andrews (Donington: Harlaxton Medieval Studies, 2011); Hans Eberhard Mayer, "Latin, Muslims and Greeks in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem," *History* 63 (1978); Christopher MacEvitt, *The Crusades and the Christian Worlds of the East: Rough Tolerance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

14 Henri Diament, "Une interprétation hagio-toponymique de l'ancien cri de guerre des français: Montjoie Saint-Denis!," *Romance Notes* 12 (1971).

15 Referred to as Mount Joy in the twelfth-century *Chronica regia S. Pantaleonis* and by Otto of Friesing (d. 1158); see Charles du Cange, *Glossarium Ad Scriptores Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*, 3 vols. (Niort: Favre, 1883), s. v., *Mons Gaudii* for further references. Kedar 2016, "Jerusalem's Two

referred to as a “Mount Joy” in the period around 1096, when the First Crusade was launched and the Mounts of Joy were identified in the Holy Land and they too provide a context for Sverre Sigurdsson’s display of piety at Feginsbrekka.

Far from being based on any one “original” site, a Mount Joy could be anywhere. Hugh of St Cher (d. 1263) wrote, in a commentary on Prov 26:8 (“As he that casteth a stone into the heap of Mercury . . .”) that pilgrims made a pile of stones at the point from which they first see the monastery to which they are travelling, and any such pile is called *Mons gaudii*.¹⁶ The Frankish crusader Raymond d’Aiguilers records a story in which the Count Bohemond is instructed, upon his return home from Jerusalem to Provence, to have a church built there for the Holy Lance and “this spot shall be called Mount of Joy.”¹⁷ This sensibility seems to have endured in the West and is reflected in the sense of “Mount Joy” in the pilgrimage narrative known as *Purchase His Pilgrimes*, dated to 1425:

Here begins the route that is marked, and made with Mount Joys, from London in England to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, and thence to Rome, and thence to Jerusalem, and back to England, and the names of all the cities on the way, and their system of government, and the names of their currency that they use along this route.¹⁸

So the whole Christian world was made legible – punctuated as it were – with “Mount Ioiez” which acted as markers, via ascent and vision, of the landscape’s direction and the spiritual rewards it held. There were literally dozens of these sites throughout Europe; in England, it is clear that there was a hill known as “Munjoie” in an area just outside the Yorkshire town of Pontefract;¹⁹ and Harbledown, overlooking Canterbury, played a similar role although there is no record as far as I am aware of it being called Mount Joy.

These sites thus provided the template on which the crusaders modelled their emotional experience of this landscape, as the hills around Jerusalem were differentiated and marked by their spiritual uses to the Latin Christians; in turn, the

Montes Gaudii” gives further examples of twelfth-century Mount Joys, including those at Oviedo and Arles.

16 See further Pierre Irgoin, “Montjoies et oratoires,” *Bulletin Monumental* 94 (1935).

17 Raymond d’Aiguilers, *Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Iherusalem*, edited and translated by John Hugh Hill and Laurita L. Hill, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1968. This story emerges from Provençal legends about St Trophimus of Arles.

18 “Here beginneth the way that is marked, and made wit Mount Joiez from the London of Engelond unto Sent James in Galis, and from thennez to Rome, and from thennez to Jerusalem: and so againe into Englelond, and the namez of all the Citeez be their waie, and the maner of her gouernaunce, and namez of her silver that they use be alle these waie.” The medieval manuscript on which this account is based is now lost. Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 20 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1905–1907), 7:526.

19 Laura Slater, “Finding Jerusalem in medieval Pontefract,” *Northern History* 60 (2014).

Mount Joy in the Holy Land gave rise to new Mount Joys, authorised through pilgrims' experiences, and reading about pilgrimage, in the east. So, whilst Sverre's Norse Mount Joy seems to have been modelled, at least in part, on the crusaders' Palestinian Mount Joy, the Palestinian Mount Joy was itself modelled on European sacred hills.

These sites did not only shape the pilgrims' understanding of the landscape but also the emotional and visual rituals associated with the landscape. Similar rituals concerning vision and emotion developed around the Holy Land pilgrimage, including ceremonies of prayer that took place in Venetian galleys when the coast of the Holy Land was first spotted; and ritualised lamenting and viewing that took place from the Church of *Dominus Flevit*, which commemorated Christ's weeping over Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-39; Luke 19:41-44). The Mount Joy subjected the landscape to scopic and emotional regimes, in which the pilgrim could see what they were trained, in their mind's eye, to see, and feel what they were trained, in their emotional and ritual *habitus*, to feel.