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*Sacred Stimulus: Jerusalem in the Visual Christianization of Rome* by Galit Noga-Banai (review)

Jan Willem Drijvers

*Journal of Late Antiquity*, Volume 12, Number 1, Spring 2019, pp. 262-264  
(Review)

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out of business in the first two centuries of Roman rule, and attempts to revive it in the fourth century were unsuccessful. The now traditional view that the Apiones were *compelled* to take on fiscal responsibilities, and that they paid the *pronoetai* to collect taxes, will hold.

There is an odd “appendix” of texts referred to on pp. 127–8. It does not identify where these texts are mentioned in the book itself. The critical chapter 2 and the section on “scale” in chapter 3 (in expanded form in *BASP* 53, 2016, 355–66) are the best parts of this up-to-date book.

### *Sacred Stimulus: Jerusalem in the Visual Christianization of Rome*

GALIT NOGA-BANAI

Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xvii + 200; 16 color plates, 54 black-and-white figures. ISBN 978-0-19-087465-0

Reviewed by Jan Willem Drijvers  
(University of Groningen)

This book examines earthly Jerusalem as a source of inspiration and stimulus for the visual Christianization of the city of Rome in the fourth and fifth centuries. It does so not from the perspective of textual evidence (of which there hardly is any to sustain the Jerusalem-Rome connection), but it approaches Jerusalemite traditions and perceptions in Rome through visual culture. Although the study of Rome’s Christian conversion through architecture, reliefs, decorative programs, and funerary art has a long tradition, this is (as far as I know) the first time that the relationship between earthly Jerusalem and the creation of a local Christian narrative in the eternal city has been studied in depth from the angle of visual language and portable objects. The book makes clear how important visual vocabulary

and materiality, textual material, is for understanding the past. The main argument of the art historian Noga-Banai is that the use of Jerusalemite images constructed Rome’s Christian identity and associated the city with the biblical past in Palestine, and thereby made that past part of Rome’s cultural memory.

The book consists of four chapters. The first chapter discusses Jerusalemite spoils and relics. It starts with an exposé of the presence of Jerusalem in Rome by way of the war spoils brought by Titus after the suppression of the Jewish Revolt in 70 CE. The representation of the arrival into Rome of the sacred vessels from the Temple and a Torah scroll on the Arch of Titus and preserved in Vespasian’s Temple of Peace, marks a physical and visual connection with the Old Jerusalem. The first physical association with the New Jerusalem (i.e., Christian Jerusalem) dates probably from the 330s when a relic of the Cross was deposited in the church of S. Croce in Gerusalemme, the former residence of Helena Augusta, who is alleged to have found the Cross. Noga-Banai then moves on to a discussion of the (heavily restored) mosaic *Dominus legem dat (Dld)* in S. Costanza. She hypothesizes that this visual representation of Christ presenting the law to Peter in the presence of Paul may have been inspired by the presence of the Torah scroll in Rome. That the Torah was part of the cultural memory in Rome is reflected by Talmudic references that the Temple treasures were preserved in Rome. Wall paintings in Jewish catacombs under the Villa Torlonia with representations of the Ark and the Torah scroll are suggested by Noga-Banai to be a Jewish response to the Christian *Dld*. These visual statements seem to represent the Jewish-Christian dialogue about which group constituted

God's chosen people. The same dialogue was also going on in fourth-century Jerusalem where the victorious Cross kept in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was juxtaposed with the Temple and the sacred objects once kept there. The failed restoration of the Temple by Julian in 363 according to Noga-Banai refreshed the collective memory of Jews and Christians in Rome of Jerusalemite objects and traditions in their city.

The second chapter examines representations in Rome of narratives which had their origin in Palestine. In the first part of the chapter the focus is on images of the Christogram and its adoration by Peter and Paul as for instance represented on sarcophagi and gold glass. Noga-Banai suggests that the various representations of the Christogram adored by the two apostles in Rome had their origin in Jerusalem narratives about the discovery and celestial appearances of the Cross which had first appeared in the fourth century in Jerusalem under the episcopate of Cyril (ca. 348–386). Noga-Banai also discusses the Crossing of the Red Sea sarcophagus (now in Split) which has a Christogram likewise venerated by Peter and Paul. In the second part she discusses the so-called Bethesda sarcophagi which depict the healing of the lame man, a popular image in Roman funerary art. Noga-Banai suggests that Jerusalem and Galilee *loca sancta* traditions, such as the Bethesda healing miracle, were influential for Christian iconography in Rome. This chapter is the most hypothetical and speculative of the four. Would a depiction of Christogram or the healing miracle on the sarcophagi indeed imply a connection with Jerusalem or the Galilee for the viewers as Noga-Banai suggests? These visual narratives could, I believe, also evoke other associations.

Chapter 3 is about the creation of *loca sancta* and memory-making in Rome. Noga-Banai's main argument is that several of Rome's holy sites, in particular those related to Peter and Paul, displayed a connection with Jerusalem in their decorative visual narratives and portable objects. One of these sites is the Basilica Apostolorum on the Via Appia built in commemoration of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. Not only was their death commemorated at this site, but so also was the Jerusalem connection that they had established by bringing to Rome the knowledge of happenings and sites in Jerusalem (and Palestine) dating back to the days of Jesus himself. Most interesting is the comparison Noga-Banai makes between the bishops Damasus of Rome and Cyril of Jerusalem. Although the two men never met, their strategies were very similar: they both were agents of the sanctity of their cities. Both bishops deepened the Christian roots of their cities by creating and marking sites that were connected to the earliest beginnings of Christianity and incorporating these into the sacred urban landscape and the liturgy of their communities. For Damasus, Jerusalem was "the 'undercover' stimulator" (p. 118) in his attempts to transform Rome into a sacred city attractive to pilgrims. The last part of the chapter discusses S. Paolo fuori le Mura built in the beginning of the fifth century. This new basilica emphasizes the importance of Paul next to and in association with Peter in enhancing the status of Rome as a sacred city in the late antique world of Christendom. The spiritual brotherhood of the two apostles with their Jerusalem connection is displayed in the decorative art of the new church and in portable objects such as ivory panels. In this context Noga-Banai elaborately discusses

the ivories on the casket from Samagher, a reliquary for pieces of the Cross, dating from the beginning of the fifth century and translated from Jerusalem to Rome.

The fourth and final chapter discusses visual representations of earthly Christian Jerusalem in fifth-century Rome predominantly in mosaics in S. Pudenziana, S. Maria Maggiore and in the architecture of S. Stefano Rotondo. The latter church was built in honor of the protomartyr Stephen who was stoned to death just outside Jerusalem; the cross-shaped architecture of the church is reminiscent of the True Cross found in Jerusalem as well as of concentric churches with ambulatories in Jerusalem, such as the Rotunda of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. S. Maria Maggiore displays strong connections with Jerusalem, not only because it kept the manger of Christ, but also because of the mosaics representing Jerusalem and Bethlehem figuring as Roman icons of the Holy Land. The apse mosaic in S. Pudenziana has a unique representation of Jerusalem and Golgotha and the crowning of Rome's principal martyrs Peter and Paul. In this mosaic we see Jerusalem and Rome being visually united.

This book is not an easy read. However, Noga-Banai does an excellent job in presenting and carefully analyzing visual material and material objects that may be interpreted as establishing a link between Jerusalem and Rome. That material and Noga-Banai's (sometimes speculative) interpretation of it, makes convincingly clear that Christian authorities in late antique Rome were adopting images and narratives that originated in and/or are associated with the city of Jerusalem, and in doing so these authorities were appropriating the biblical past of Jerusalem in order to make Rome as sacred as Jerusalem itself.

***Being Christian in Vandal Africa:  
The Politics of Orthodoxy in the  
Post-Imperial West***

ROBIN WHELAN

Oakland: University of California Press, 2018.  
Pp. xv + 301. ISBN: 978-0-52096-868-4

Reviewed by **Éric Fournier**

(West Chester University of Pennsylvania)

This is an excellent book and an absolute delight to read. Despite an outpouring of scholarship on the topic in recent decades, Robin Whelan successfully presents a profoundly original contribution to our knowledge of Vandal Africa. Victor of Vita's shadow traditionally has loomed ominously over any account of Vandal Africa and seemed nearly impossible to escape. Whelan sidesteps this important limitation by including a wide range of previously neglected anonymous and pseudonymous sermons and imaginary dialogues, heresiological texts which he successfully analyzes in order to present a counter-balance to Victor of Vita's gloomy and polarized perspective.

The book's main argument is that Vandal Africa's Christian conflicts—rather than a one-sided “Arian” persecution of “Catholics”—should be situated within the history of debates over the nature of the true Christian faith. The fascinating result is no less than a remarkable reassessment of the role of Christianity in the political, social, and cultural life of Vandal North Africa. In Whelan's interpretation, Vandal exceptionalism yields to a late antique polity firmly anchored within the Mediterranean post-Roman culture. Rather than taking Victor of Vita's perspective as normative, as historians traditionally have done, Whelan relativizes by situating it within the whole spectrum of beliefs and, crucially, by presenting alternatives to his dominant