

From Still to Moving Image:

Shifting Representation of Jerusalem and Palestinians in the Western Biblical Imaginary

Sary Zananiri

In this essay, I will look at the shifting representation of Palestine and Palestinians in the Western biblical imaginary, initially focusing on European and then later North American imaging modes. I will consider the trajectory of Bruno Piglhein's *Panorama of Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion* within the lineage mid-nineteenth century Western photographic practices.¹ In analyzing the role of his work in popularizing the New Testament as a mode of mass entertainment, I will consider how he assimilates nineteenth-century traditions of *scientific* methodology, that most notably engaged with fields such as biblical history, ethnography, and surveying, to establish their influence on Hollywood New Testament epics of the twentieth century. I will then compare Piglhein's panorama to Cecil B. de Mille's *King of Kings* (1927) and George Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), both of which take as their subject the life and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.²

In drawing together these different generations of representation of the crucifixion narrative, I will consider how supposedly objective nineteenth-century modes of imaging present, or indeed *do not* present, Palestinians and how such representations changed in response to their respective contexts. Several factors had particularly important roles in shaping nineteenth-century imaging of Palestine: the growth in European interest in the region, both colonial and scientific; the birth of photography in 1839 and its development as a medium; and the confluence of Romanticism and a renewed interest in biblical studies.³ Issam Nassar, in his book *Photographing Jerusalem*, notes that the introduction of

photography to the Middle East also coincides with the rise of Western archaeological interest in the region.⁴

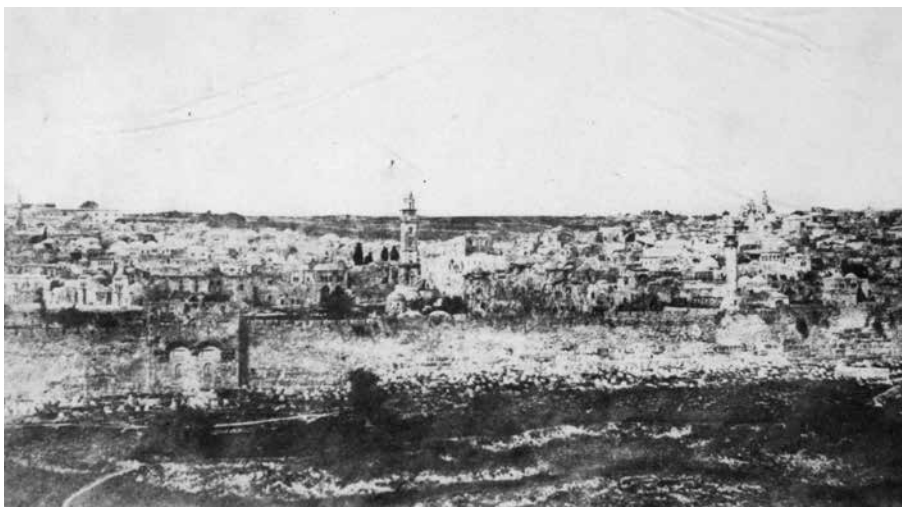
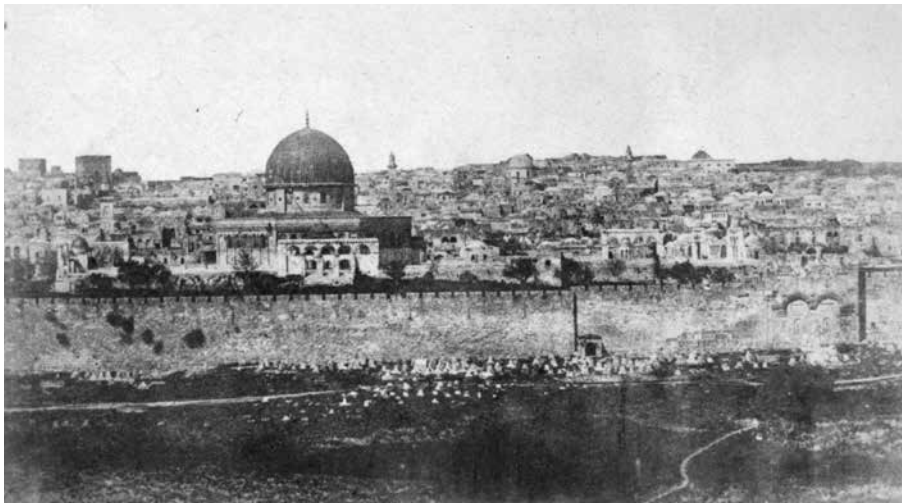
Among the earliest examples of the adoption of *scientific* methodology in the production of images of Palestine are August Salzmänn's photographic explorations in the 1850s. In 1854, Salzmänn published the first travel guide lavishly illustrated with photographs about Palestine.⁵ Informing Salzmänn's photographic practice was Louis Félicien Joseph Caignart de Saulcy's theory that the physical remains of Jerusalem date from the period of King Solomon (ninth century BCE).⁶ Salzmänn's methodology, which aimed to prove and illustrate de Saulcy's contentions, in many ways could be seen as typifying the scientific and exploratory endeavors of nineteenth-century imaging and indicative of a broader Western biblical imaginary. The tightly cropped images of buildings, landmarks, and archaeological remains in Salzmänn's book are geared toward this investigation. He includes few images of Jerusalem's contemporary life or its inhabitants. Instead, his focus is solely on historico-biblical narrative.

The imposition of this biblical lens for reading Palestine's landscape – where the landscape is mapped through the mediation of Biblical text to create a bibliified cartography – sets the tone for later generations of imaging. The assumed accuracy of what the camera captures in combination with its reproducibility are central to the construction and maintenance of a bibliified cartography, the flipside of which is the marginalization of Palestinian modernity in Western imaging. Like later nineteenth-century image-makers, Salzmänn's emphasis on the landmarks and material remains of the city focuses its imaging on past histories of the city, not the thriving and developing urban center that Jerusalem was becoming during this period.⁷ In this way we begin to see the roots of Palestinian effacement in Western imaging.

The Jerusalem Ordinance Survey of 1866 by Charles Wilson of the British Royal Engineers is a second early example of the privileging of this scientific methodology.⁸ An example of growing colonial interest in the region, the survey mapped the city photographically with the intention of providing accurate maps and images for potential public works.⁹ Once again, the focus is the architecture and landscape of Jerusalem. Beyond this, the concern of the survey's *objectivity* is premised on a divorce between the landscape (and its histories) and the contemporary realities of a growing and increasingly sophisticated, cosmopolitan, and diverse city, thus excluding Palestinians from any imaging that may denote a sense of indigenous modernity.

The dearth of representation of Palestinians in Western photography in these *scientific* modes is notable. Issam Nassar writes:

The absence of Palestinians from most of these photographs attests to the fact that they were absent, on some levels, from the European consciousness of their photographers. Palestine was reduced to a backdrop upon which the biblical story could be substantiated, rather than recognized as a real place in the real world – attesting to real histories other than the Judeo-Christian narrative.¹⁰



Auguste Salzmann. Jerusalem, *Enceinte du Temple Vue générale de la face Est* Pl 1-3. Photographic print on salted paper.

Of course, Palestinians are not entirely excluded from such photography. Biblified landscapes were populated by images of figures relatable to Western viewers along ethnographic lines – such Samaritans, Jews, Muslims, Christians and Bedouins – along with those who practiced trades of biblical symbolism such as fishermen, carpenters, or shepherds.¹¹ Any sense of Palestinian modernity is effaced. Palestinians of nineteenth-century Western portraiture are reduced to a cast of extras that populate a theatrical first-century Palestinian landscape of the Western imaginary. The absence of Palestinians and primacy accorded to the historico-biblical narrative privileges a biblified cartography. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Prof Bruno Piglhein's *Panorama of Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion*.

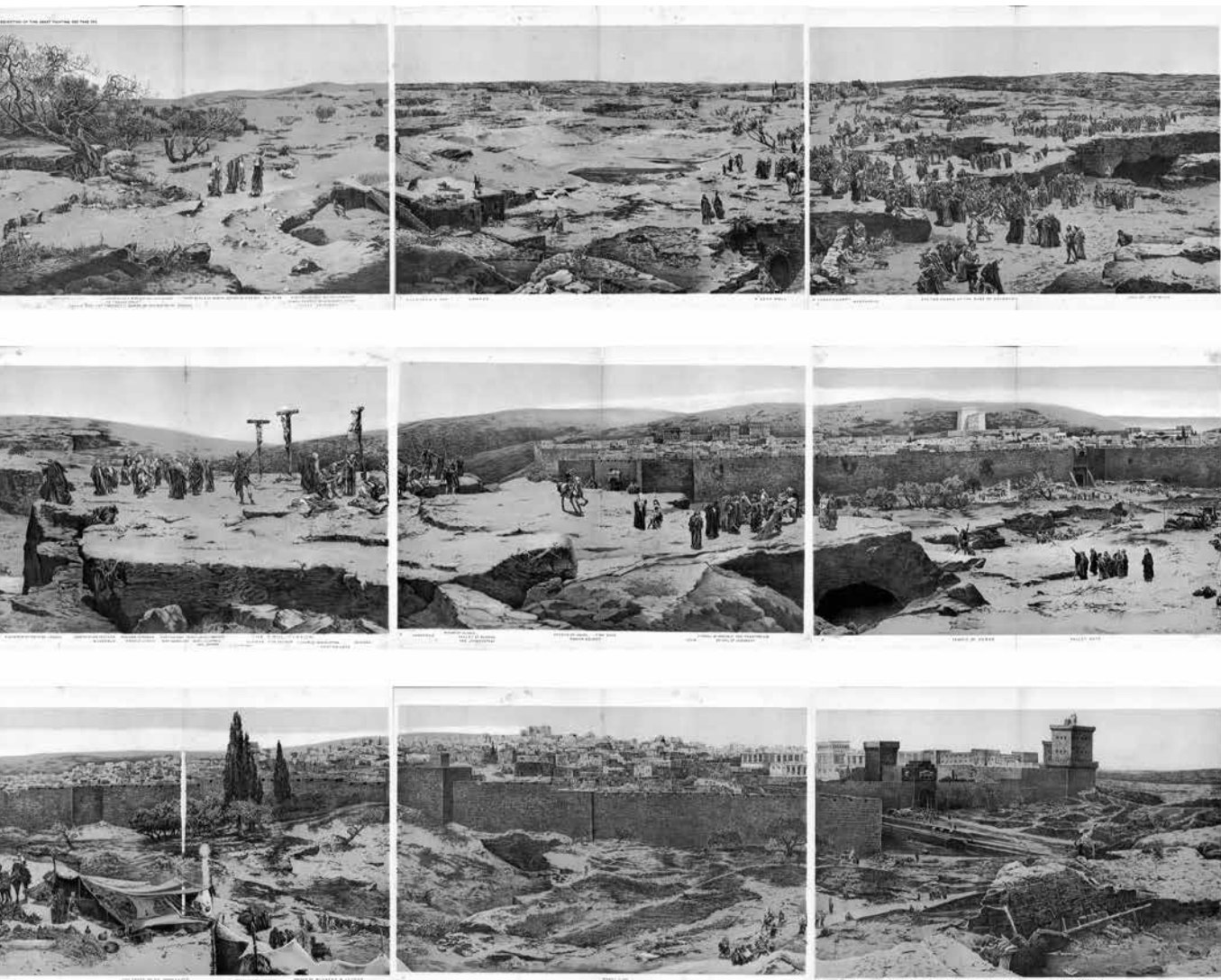
Piglhein's Panorama

Piglhein's *Panorama of Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion* was painted in the 1880s in Munich. Originally conceived as a German nationalist response to one of the major Belgian panorama company's refusal to hire non-Belgian painters, the panorama was marketed as the most realistic portrayal of biblical Jerusalem.¹² Two features of the panorama are of particular relevance to this paper. The first pertains to its content and to the purported historical accuracy and realism of the painting's portrayal of historical Jerusalem circa 30 CE. The second is the marketing machinery behind the panorama and its perception and reception by Western audiences. I will explore these two aspects of the panorama to better understand late nineteenth-century Western perceptions of Jerusalem and the city's privileged position as a center of Christianity.

I first came across this work looking for images of Jerusalem in old biblical tracts. A nine-plate reproduction was included in *Manger to Throne*, a book conceived as an interpretation of the Bible for children.¹³ The panorama's presence in this book is evidence of the successful marketing machinery behind the panorama as an educational display of the events of Good Friday. Its educational value, meanwhile, was based on its purported historical accuracy. As the text accompanying a biblical panorama based on Piglhein's original produced by Paul Philippoteaux on display in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Quebec,¹⁴ states:

this Munich painter [Piglhein] decided that something should be done about the public ignorance of daily life in biblical time. Though many religious paintings existed, they rarely gave a historical idea of customs, dress or the countryside . . . which would convey the sense of reality to an episode, not just another religious painting, but a canvas that would bring alive a period in time.¹⁵

Piglhein's panorama was produced under contract for Halder and Hotop Company as a unique artwork, not to be reproduced. When he was commissioned, Piglhein hired two artists, Joseph Krieger and Karl Frosch, and eventually set off for Jerusalem in 1885 with



Plates 1-9 of printed reproduction: Bruno Piglhein *Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion* 1890 (original produced 1886) In: Thomas deWitt Talmage, *Manger to Throne: A New Life of Jesus Christ*, (The historical publishing company: Philadelphia 1890).

a camera to commence initial research and produce a sketch for the panorama, with letters of introduction from various powerful German clergymen.¹⁶ When it was first presented to the public in 1886, the panorama was well received by its Munich audience.¹⁷ *The Panorama of Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion* became not only a commercial success, but also the progenitor of a new painting genre in the panorama industry. Its impact on Western perceptions of Jerusalem gives us a valuable insight into the popular imaging of the city in the latter part of nineteenth century.

The panorama became such a success that it was copied and its copies displayed on tours throughout Europe and North America, leading to various legal actions.¹⁸ Piglhein had been contractually commissioned to produce the panorama as a one-off

original, not to be reproduced; the associates Piglhein subcontracted, however, were under no such legal obligation. Frosch and Krieger produced, together and separately, another seven versions of the original, these with other artists' renditions produced up to fourteen panorama copies by the early twentieth century, particularly in North America where European copyright legislation was not so strictly enforced.¹⁹ A major lawsuit unfolded in London in 1890–1891, where one of the Frosch-Krieger panoramas was installed. The suit ensued when Halder and Hotop, the commissioners of Piglhein's original, planned to exhibit the panorama in London, only to find out that a Frosch-Krieger panorama painted in the United States had already been installed and was on display.²⁰ The American-backed company prevaricated during the legal proceedings to maximize the amount of time they could show their version before the expected verdict against them. They were quite successful in this regard, drawing between 1,500 and 2,000 visitors a day for over a year and making in excess of five thousand pounds. Ensuing copies of the panorama were changed slightly in an effort to minimize potential lawsuits, though there remained a distinct family resemblance among versions.²¹ The proliferation of these large-scale images indicates the considerable public interest in Jerusalem and its biblical history across Europe and North America, and the lucrative commercial market it generated.

In 2009, I travelled to Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré to view the Philippoteaux panorama. The experience of entering the panorama is something between entering a cinema – with its ticket queue, long darkened hallway, and stairs to mount the viewing platform – and entering the sacred space of a church. The experience of viewing the panorama is to be made witness to the events of the crucifixion. As the viewer-turned-pilgrim witnesses the events of the crucifixion, a voice-over describes the events depicted in the painting. This voice-over acts as a series of oral annotations that mirror the texts found in the nineteenth-century *Manger to Throne* reproduction as well as the twenty-first-century souvenir guide. In this respect, the voice-over annotates the bibliified cartography in lieu of text.

The voice-over regulates and mediates the viewer's encounter with the panorama. Beginning at a single point, the voice, detached and omnipresent, guides the viewer through the larger-than-life image. It sets a duration through the use of lighting effects that highlight the area being discussed, moving the viewer forward to keep pace with the narrative. The way time unfolds through the voice-over buttresses both the purported empiricism of its subject and the formal character of the painting as an immersive 360-degree image. From describing the details painted into the Bedouins' tent to noting biblical landmarks and, of course, the narration of the events of the crucifixion itself, the voice-over is marked by the projection of its own authority. This authority fixes the meaning of the painting and embeds this fixed meaning within the historico-biblical narrative. The voice-over thus asserts the accuracy of the painting and the events it depicts.

Though the panorama was a (very successful) commercial venture, it was ostensibly a means to educate Western audiences in the history of biblical Jerusalem. The educational nature of the panorama immediately places the New Testament at the center of research for the production of the painting. The catalogue guide from Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré states

that Piglhein realized he would have to go to Jerusalem “after studying everything available from that period.”²² As Issam Nasser writes of Jerusalem in the late Ottoman period:

The written history of Jerusalem presents, indeed, an excellent example of myths becoming history by way of writing and transmission of memory – two necessary acts for the formation of the historical imagination.²³

Ultimately, biblical text formed a lens through which the landscape was read and mapped, literally overlaying the historico-biblical narrative, with the crucifixion narrative at its center, onto the landscape.

Piglhein’s methodical approach stitches together a seamless view of the crucifixion from a set of evidence, projecting an imagined likeness of what *may* have been, which is inscribed upon the physical landscape to produce an ostensibly authentic 360-degree view of Jerusalem with the events of the crucifixion. The putative objectivity of photography in this way buttresses the claims and authority of biblical narratives. At the project’s final realization, photography and the host of biblical readings give way to brush strokes, as the biblical imaginary becomes rooted in the landscape itself through the act of painting. The panorama/painting becomes a spiritual experience, and in this sense enters the lineage of religious art.

The act of viewing the panorama, a painting in proto-cinematic form, is premised on the narrative unfolding through its circular format. In viewing the panorama, I found myself circling the viewing platform to *read* the landscape, particularly as the voice-over was playing. The circular format becomes a repetitive exercise in spectatorship acting in both a physical and a visual sense like a video loop. The immersive experience of the panorama succeeds because it precludes the possibility of ever seeing the entire 360 degrees of the painting.

Two assumed truths – that of biblical claim and the objectivity of photography – are synthesized, thus changing the relationship between audience and object through the panoramic format. Piglhein’s use of photography is evident in the replication of the landscape and the city layout that corresponds to the contemporary Old City area. However, more importantly, how does the scientific/objective authority of photography interact with the art historical/biblical imaginary involved in constructing the panorama? And, what impacts did the panorama have on its nineteenth-century audience?

In counterpoint to most of the photography of the period, which is depopulated of indigenous inhabitants and reduces historical Palestine to a backdrop for biblical narrative,²⁴ Piglhein’s panorama is a populated space. The imagery posits traders and peasants, agricultural activity, Roman soldiers, and the events of the crucifixion. Notably, nineteenth-century Palestinian costume is remediated into a sort of biblical uniform. This conflation of the nineteenth-century Palestinian with the first-century Jew speaks volumes about Western assumptions of the Arab’s stasis. Building on the precedents set by biblified portraiture, the insertion of the nineteenth-century Palestinian into the first-century landscape – particularly when read against the effacement of Palestinian modernity in the Western imaginary – creates a temporal collapse in which Palestinians primarily exist

to support biblical narrative and populate a bibliified landscape. The nineteenth-century Palestinian is cast as an anomalous vestige of an ancient and biblical past in a time of self-declared Western modernity, thus locating Palestinian indigeneity in the Jewish landscape of the Western biblical imaginary. The panorama's biblification is thus the inverse of that described by Issam Nassar, in which the emphasis on biblical narrative works to absent Palestinians from Western photograph imaging of the landscape.²⁵ Biblification of the landscape in Piglhein's panorama is not a process of absencing or evacuation, so much as insertion. This collaging introduces biblical personages, important architectural sites and monuments and the crowd of on-lookers watching the proceedings *into* the landscape.

What we see in Piglhein's panorama is a process that stitches together the landscape and city walls from photographs taken during his site research and inserts within the city walls the fantastical architectural details from historico-biblical accounts to create a backdrop against which the crucifixion narrative plays out. In Piglhein's panorama, the major buildings and monuments of c. 30 CE have been inserted into the landscape of the city in their approximate locations according to biblical and historical sources. Piglhein captured a contemporary sense of the organic and irregular layout of the Old City, with houses and structures chaotically cascading over hillsides, and a sense of the landscape itself. Despite the potentially accurate placement of the buildings, the architectural style of the buildings themselves is an educated guess, bearing little resemblance to any form of architecture within Jerusalem. The buildings portrayed by Piglhein are box-like, rather than the domed and vaulted nature of Old City buildings in the nineteenth century. Until Piglhein's panorama of Jerusalem, the primary subject matter for the panorama industry was largely contemporary reproductions of cities or battle scenes from recent history.²⁶ Such subjects were easily corroborated by military veterans or by visitors to and citizens of various cities or indeed by the landscapes themselves. Apart from topographical studies and sketches in the locations that a panorama purported to represent, it became common practice in nineteenth-century panorama production to interview veterans of battles about the events depicted. In fact, entrepreneurial military men would often make sketches to sell to panorama companies once the format had become widespread.²⁷ Putative conformity to reality thus became a hallmark of panorama marketing, especially with the popular genre of battle scenes, where "it was not uncommon to see a soldier turn up and at a panorama with family and friends so that he could show them in situ, or almost, his contribution to the battle."²⁸

The privileging of historical accuracy was thus well entrenched in the panorama painting industry before Piglhein's work. This legacy of historical accuracy became another factor in the legitimation of Piglhein's representation of the crucifixion.²⁹ Piglhein's panorama, unlike those of battle scenes, could not rely on contemporary eyewitness accounts. Instead, its historical legitimacy was derived from the primacy of biblical text, which was familiar to the audiences in Christian Europe and North America. The accuracy of the event would have been taken for granted, with the gospels of the New Testament or Josephus accorded the role of eyewitness in lieu of contemporary subjects. Thus, readings of the Bible become an unquestionable framework from which to read the landscape itself.

The creation of Piglhein's panorama is a complicated process of biblical text generated from biblical sources in the same manner an oral history might have been for another panorama. In replacement of eyewitness account, the text serves as a bridge into a theatrical setting, not unlike the textual intertitles in silent movies, once again reinforcing the proto-cinematic qualities of the panorama format.

In this respect, Piglhein's panorama and its copies can be seen as a culmination of nineteenth-century Western imaging of Jerusalem, while as a proto-cinematic form, it can also be seen as a contribution to establishing later cinematic forms. The experiences of visitors to the panorama in the nineteenth century parallel those of today's cinemagoers, both formally but also with regard to the commercial concerns involved in both ventures. In considering the panorama as both a culmination and establishment of a popular genre, I will now turn my attention to Hollywood cinema in the twentieth century, where nineteenth-century assumptions of the primacy of biblical text established a new bibliified cartography of Palestine for mass entertainment.

Hollywood's New Testament Epics

New moving image technology impacted Western audiences in ways similar to the impact of photography on nineteenth-century imaging. This can be seen first in silent pictures, such as Cecil B. de Mille's *King of Kings* (1927), and later in the development of films accompanied by sound, such as George Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), allowing for ever more narrative nuance in the articulation of the New Testament genre. Both de Mille's *King of Kings* and Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told* deal with the New Testament narrative, and specifically with the crucifixion. Like Piglhein's panorama, each film is indicative of shifts in popular Western imaging of Jerusalem. And just as Piglhein's image cannot be imagined – or adequately read – without considering its nineteenth-century colonial context, so too must the analysis of these films be posed in terms of the political realities of the period. Where nineteenth-century Western imaging of Jerusalem is predominantly British and European, the production of this new genre of film shifts to the United States with the establishment of the Hollywood cinema industry.

Another factor in the shifting representation of Palestine in Western biblical narrative is the broader context of political upheaval. Despite the effacement of Palestinian modernity in nineteenth-century Western imaging, Palestine, as part of the broader Ottoman Empire, had been relatively stable for around five hundred years. The advent of Zionism in the late nineteenth century, World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the establishment and failure of the British Mandate, the creation of Israel and consequent ethnic cleansing of Palestine, and the shift of Western power from Britain and Europe to the United States created an instability that would produce dramatic shifts in Jerusalem's imaging for political purposes.

Hollywood cinema, and its focus on spectacle, saw a shift from the notional authenticity of nineteenth-century imaging to a focus on popular appeal. This populism privileged commercial value over accuracy, but continued to borrow from the vocabulary of

nineteenth-century imaging. While there is still an implicit educational value attached to the cinematic biblical epic, authenticity is derived from an evolving set of conventions established in the nineteenth century that project a biblical past, rather than being rooted in the physicality of *Terra Sancta*.

Produced five years after the official establishment of the British Mandate in Palestine, Cecil B. de Mille's *King of Kings* can be seen as a transition – both politically and formally – from nineteenth-century European imaging to later generations. The film deals with Jesus's adult life, a number of miracles and ultimately his crucifixion and resurrection. De Mille's remediation of New Testament narrative into (silent) film entails a number of re-characterizations to develop the plot. This is most notable in the treatment of Mary Magdalene who is transformed into a Roman courtesan, but of more relevance to this essay are the roles of the High Priest Caiaphas and Roman Procurator Pontius Pilate.

There is lavish use of studio sets which stand in for the landscape in counterpoint to Piglhein's attempts at its reproduction. It is worth noting, however, that the format of the silent film harks back to Piglhein's panorama in the use of intertitles, often with Biblical quotations, which serve to annotate what effectively becomes a series of moving image tableaux. The scene where Jesus ministers to children who are olive picking in an ancient grove typifies de Mille's visual quotation of nineteenth-century imaging practices, albeit through sets, and is punctuated "Suffer little children unto Me, and forbid them not – for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven!" (Mark 10:14). The interaction between text and image functions similarly to previous generations of images in these biblified tableaux with the set/image constructed in a derivation of the original landscape.

King of Kings opens with title card that proclaims: "The events portrayed by this picture occurred in Palestine nineteen centuries ago, when Jews were under the complete subjection of Rome – even their own High Priest being appointed by the Roman procurator." This introduction sits comfortably alongside the notional authenticity of Piglhein's panorama "which would convey the sense of reality to an episode . . . a canvas that would bring alive a period in time."³⁰ The declaration of the setting borrows from the language of Piglhein's panorama genre without engaging in his rigorous, if flawed, research methodology.

While the narrative is dramatized, or perhaps even abstracted, de Mille directly borrows from Piglhein and his photographic forbears the adoption of nineteenth-century Palestinian costume as biblically authentic. This direct lineage from nineteenth-century ethnographic photography to Piglhein's representation of the crucifixion becomes codified in early Hollywood biblical epics and continues even in contemporary biblical cinematic productions, such as Mel Gibson's 2004 epic *The Passion of the Christ*.³¹ The opening title card in combination with costuming in *King of Kings* denotes how comfortably the biblified nineteenth-century Palestinian could be collapsed into the first century Jew with a double implication of indigeneity in the biblical imaginary. This conflation – presumed as cultural truth – sees the anachronistic nineteenth-century biblified Palestinian constructed as a vestige of the biblical past in a manner that, retrospectively, borders on the naïve, if not outright racist.

Arab clothing (albeit through a Western lens) ranging from dishdash and ‘abaya to headdresses that reference the kufiya and ‘agal for men and hijab for women are deployed en masse in costuming the filmic population. Ethnic demarcation in de Mille’s first-century filmic landscape is limited to Roman administrators and Jewish populace, unlike the complexity of Stevens’s landscape inhabited by diverse, if not highly coded, categorizations like Judeans, Idumeans, and Samaritans, or the deployment of the Philistines in other films. The homogeneity with which the Western biblical imaginary represents the filmic populace during the interwar period speaks to the assumptions of Palestine’s contemporary homogeneity, particularly when read against later twentieth-century generations of imaging that construct distinctly separate filmic categories of identity.³²

Meanwhile, the high priest Caiaphas’s clothing is exceptionalized in *King of Kings*. At his introduction, his costume mixes Arab and Jewish motifs, including a head covering referencing a yarmulke. In what can only be described as a blatantly anti-Semitic cinematic device, Caiaphas’s costuming becomes increasingly fantastical to reflect the growing sense of threat posed by Christ. (As his introductory intertitle attests: “The High Priest, Caiaphas . . . cared more for Revenue than for Religion – and saw in Jesus a menace to his rich profits from the Temple.”) This reaches an apex as Caiaphas attempts to convince Pontius Pilate to condemn Jesus, by which time his robes are grander and his yarmulke has grown into a headdress divided in two, reminiscent, at certain angles, of devil horns. Where the general populace – Jews, presented as nineteenth-century Palestinians – are essentially redeemable, Caiaphas is morphed into an incarnation of the Devil himself.

The relationship between Christianity and Judaism is necessarily complicated in the New Testament epic, with films on the life of Christ demanding decisions around Jewish representation.³³ The addition of a Roman occupation creates another variable in the New Testament epic. *King of Kings*, reflective of the early inter-war context of the British Mandate – specifically the United States repositioning its relationships with Britain and France in opposition to Germany – treats the Romans as benign, if ineffectual, overlords disinterested in the local community’s political struggles, tacitly lending support to British and French ambitions in the Middle East. The film’s localized struggles can perhaps be seen as representative of the growing tensions in Palestine between the indigenous Palestinian population and the growth of Jewish (Ashkenazi) immigration to the region under Zionism. While the troublesome Caiaphas and the Pharisees are parceled out from the general population, it would seem doubtful to argue that this might be anti-Zionist stance by de Mille, so much as a reflection on the general state of Western anti-Semitism in the lead up to World War II.

Blame for the crucifixion is primarily laid upon the Roman-appointed high priest, Caiaphas, and the Pharisees. Biblical excerpts used as intertitles reinforce this: “But the Chief Priests and Scribes sought to destroy Him. And they assembled together unto the palace of the High Priest, in Jerusalem” (Luke 19:47). This apologist tone for the Roman role in the crucifixion sees a Romanized Judas presented as effeminate and toga-clad, with short-cropped hair, pleading to Caiaphas for Jesus’s life at the film’s climax. His political and material interests in *this* world, rather than the *hereafter*, hints at the establishment of a politicized demarcation between the old colonial powers of Europe,

vested in accumulation of wealth, and the rising power of the United States, vested in the spread of Christianity that becomes openly equated with democracy in later generations of New Testament epic.³⁴

Meanwhile, Pontius Pilate says of Jesus: “I find no fault in this Man – no cause of death in Him! I will therefore chastise Him, and let Him go.” De Mille’s posits Pilate as a neutral party, while Pilate’s dress and demeanor speak to the formal, rational, and civilizing power of Rome. This is buttressed through the film set of Pilate’s palace, rich with classical motifs from columns and arches to a giant eagle, which sits behind his throne lending an austere authority to his position as procurator. Outside, ornamentation on the façade includes sculpted reliefs, wrought iron gates and marble balustrading, the architecture a conflation of Western Neo-Palladian and the original Roman from which it was partially derived. This is reinforced in a number of intertitles which have a silhouette of the Roman Eagle behind the text. These trappings of empire become a visual double entendre linking empires both ancient and modern.

Where a veneer of authenticity is derived from the conventions established around costuming in *King of Kings*, the veracity of set design is questionable at best. In the same way that the film production process and moving image technology allowed greater nuance leading to the abstraction of narrative, studio sets become signifiers of authenticity in replacement of the original landscape. These fantastical settings are premised on supporting filmic narrative, rather than constructing biblical fact. At best it can be said that there is a nod to authenticity in their production, whether Pilate’s Palace or rustic olive grove. In contrast, George Stevens’s *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), which works with many of the conventions that de Mille codifies, has highly defined ethnic divisions. Interestingly, Stevens also makes extensive use of filming on location, solely in the United States.

The Greatest Story’s ethnic demarcations, established firmly from the outset as the three wise men arrive at Herod’s Palace in Jerusalem, are vital to the politicized subtext of the film, both in relation to the Cold War generally and more specifically the rise in tensions that lead to the 1967 War. The wise men’s garb, though entrenched within a mode of Orientalist costuming, is clearly not Arab; Arab costuming is reserved for the Jewish population of the film. Herod quickly tells the wise men: “I am an Idumean, not a Judean. The priests here in Judea mock me in their Temple. Their temple, which I built.” This effectively strips Herod and his dynasty of their Judaism by highlighting their roots in Edom, initially in current day southern Jordan, and slowly displaced westward into southern Palestine by the first century.

As the three wise men discuss their purpose with Herod, even Jerusalem itself is demarcated as outside of the Middle East:

Herod: And who told you about such a child who is to be born a king in my kingdom?

Balthazar: We saw the rising of his star and the star has been our guide.

Herod: You have followed a star from Asia to the center of the world?

Palestine, firmly rooted in Asia, albeit on its Western periphery, is stripped of any geography that might mark it as Eastern, Oriental, or overtly Arab. This is further reinforced in Herod's discussion with his advisors as he recalls the prophecy of Jesus's birth: "From you Bethlehem shall he come forth who is to be ruler in all Israel." In affirming geography, particularly through the lens of Old Testament prophecy (the invocation of Micah 5:2), a landscape that what was uncontestedly Palestinian in de Mille's film is transformed into Israel by Stevens. This new landscape effaces Palestine while actively demarcating itself from the monarchical Idumean Herodian dynasty. The delegitimization of the despotic Herod becomes a thinly veiled reference to the Hashemite dynasty of Jordan who, at the time of the film's release, controlled East Jerusalem and the West Bank.³⁵ This opening scene sets up a narrative in which Christianity will be a force for liberation and, in the Cold War context of the film's production, come to be equated with democracy. Effectively, the filmic landscape of Israel is brought into the Western democratic tradition.

Given that *The Greatest Story Ever Told* was released in the context of rising tensions that ultimately lead to the Six Day War, the world of first-century historical crisis constructed for the filmic landscape – and indeed the narrative of crisis played out upon that landscape – becomes a basis for the remediation of contemporary geopolitical relations. This opening scene distills a remarkably succinct introduction to Stevens's filmic terrain. The spate of biblical epics in the 1950s and 1960s almost universally create a narrative of Christians or Jews struggling against the oppression of empire and constructing an alternative nationalism with an individualistic emphasis.³⁶ Fundamental to this leap into the biblical imaginary is a demarcation of ethnicities amongst its filmic populations and their twentieth-century referents.

The Greatest Story Ever Told treats Judaism as a precursor to Christianity. Bruce Babington and Peter Evans describe this as "de-judaicizing Judaism" – Hollywood cinema making Judaism more acceptable to Christian audiences.³⁷ Where the filmic denizens of *King of Kings* are nineteenth-century Palestinians conflated with first-century Jews, postwar cinema depicts a Jewish population conflated with Christian/democratic narrative. This cinematic assimilation of Judaism into Christianity is important in several respects. First, it assumes the Jewish characters depicted in cinematic representations are soon-to-be Christians. Second, the Jewish population is indigenized into this new terrain and defined in opposition to other discretely marked groupings, a marked difference from the amorphous populations of *King of Kings*. Third, this assimilation is predicated upon the historical assumption of Christianity's expansion and, given the politicized version of Christianity posited by the film, the implicit spread of liberal democratic values.

The proto-Christian nature of Judaism is further reinforced through the extensive filming on location in the American southwest. The now-Israeli filmic landscape is literally mapped onto American soil through location shoots. The decision to substitute the landscape of the American southwest for Israel (Palestine) represents an integration of the Jewish population in the film into the American-Christian tradition. This also serves to position Israel, poised to shortly capture the remainder of historical Palestine, as an

extension of the Western liberal tradition while linking American (and Americanized) audiences to an iteration of the Judeo-Christian tradition, vested in democracy, in a landscape remade in their own image.

Despite scouting locations in Europe and the Middle East for the film, Stevens ultimately decided to shoot in the United States:

I wanted to get an effect of grandeur as a background to Christ . . . and none of the Holy Land areas shape up with the excitement of the American Southwest . . . I know the Colorado is not the Jordan, nor is Southern Utah Palestine . . . But our intention is to romanticize the area, and it can be done better here.³⁸

Where Piglhein's research methodology sought authenticity in locating biblical narrative within the landscape, Stevens's methodology saw him focusing on narrative itself. In fact, Stevens's intention to *romanticize* entirely disregards the nineteenth-century mode of depiction *in situ* as authentic. As part of his development process, Stevens sought consultations with a host of parties, most notably Pope John XXIII and then-prime minister of Israel David Ben-Gurion.³⁹ This hints that the core Stevens's methodological focus on narrative was rooted in the active remediation of ethno-nationalist depiction to the first-century world of historical crisis, in particular through the lens of the Church and Zionist narrative. It could be argued that, despite the general political subtext of the biblical epic in the period, Stevens actively rooted cotemporary political actors in ascribed historical antecedents.

The scene where Jesus meets John the Baptist is very telling of political views current in the period:

John the Baptist: Who are you? I do not know you, yet I know you.

Jesus: Baptize me, John.

John the Baptist: Your name?

Jesus: Jesus.

John the Baptist: You were born?

Jesus: Bethlehem.

John the Baptist: Is it not you who should baptize me?

Jesus: Why do you ask me this?

John the Baptist: In the scriptures it is written: from you, Bethlehem, shall he come forth who is to be ruler in all Israel, whose coming has been of old, from time ever lasting.

John the Baptist's reiteration of Old Testament prophecy (Micah 5:2), already referenced by Herod in the opening scene, again implicitly reinforces the coalescence of Christianity and democracy. But, in the linking of a (Jewish) Old Testament past to a (Christian) New Testament landscape and the implication of an (American) democratic future a temporal conceit is enacted. This interaction between Jesus and John the Baptist becomes a highly

politicized metaphor for the Zionist narrative of ancient *birth* and contemporary *rebirth*. This is then narrated through historico-biblical text that will ultimately be enacted through the film's climax: the resurrection of Jesus. Further, Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River – filmed on location in the Colorado River – remakes Israel (Palestine) in the image of America. The complexity of confluences and remediations that *The Greatest Story* makes also need to be considered in context of the film's release in 1965 against the backdrop of the mass escalation of American involvement in the Vietnam War in the early to mid-1960s, but before the Western public's general disillusionment with the war by 1968. Within the filmic context the appropriation of Micah 5:2 effectively stitches together Judaism and Christianity, Israel and the United States, and defines itself in overtly Cold War terms in opposition to Communism and, implicitly, neighboring Arab states.

While Arabs are tacitly referenced – and effectively transformed into antagonists by virtue of the Herodian Dynasty's Idumean roots and their conflation with the Hashemites of Jordan – the question of Palestinian indigeneity is neatly effaced. Instead, indigeneity is ascribed to the Jewish proto-Christian population, who inhabit the filmic landscape of Israel, remediated to America, and whose costumes claim authenticity through their derivation from the biblified Palestinian in nineteenth-century imaging systems. In this respect, the Zionist narrative of *a land without people for a people without land* that enabled Palestinian displacement in 1948 can ultimately be traced back to the Western biblical imaginary of the nineteenth century.

Much of the early Hollywood film industry was dominated and established by Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, a fact that Neal Gabler discusses at length in the introduction to his book *An Empire of Their Own*.⁴⁰ Gabler discusses the splits that occurred within the Jewish filmmaking community between the more traditionalist older generation and the American-assimilated younger members of the Jewish community.⁴¹ The success of assimilation and the increasing secularization of the American Jewish community in the interwar period resulted in some community members being surprised to find they were of Jewish descent.⁴² Cecil B. de Mille, though baptized as a Protestant, was of partially Jewish background, a fact notable in Adolph Zukor's argument to the Paramount Pictures board to fund the remake of *The Ten Commandments* released in 1956.⁴³ George Stevens, though of Anglo descent, can be seen as vested in the democratic iteration of the Judeo-Christian tradition. His last film prior to *The Greatest Story* was an adaptation of *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), which again dealt with Jewish narrative albeit in a different context, against the backdrop of fascist – rather than communist – antagonism. The cinematic treatment of Jewish-cum-Christian population of the New Testament epic is as much about integrating the marginalized Jewish-American community into the gentile mainstream as they are about making a political argument for the liberal and democratic nature of Israel in the context of the Cold War.

The complexities of the Hollywood biblical imaginary are beyond simplistic propaganda. It reflects a community attempting to assimilate through the location of Jewish roots in a biblified, but nonetheless assimilated, filmic landscape. By constructing a shared and unconflicted Judeo-Christian setting, graced by liberal democracy, these films tacitly assimilate American-Jewish communities into the American-gentile mainstream, through

what is ultimately a process of de-Judaicization, which relegates their Judaism to a past tense.

This assimilation is reflected politically in growing gentile American support for Israel. With the creation of Israel in 1948 came an enthusiastic response from evangelical Christian Zionists, who attempted to interpret the religious significances of these events in the post-1948 period.⁴⁴ The 1967 War (and the capture and annexation of Jerusalem) marked a dramatic rise in evangelic influence in the United States and also a massive growth in American support for the Israeli state through money, arms, and diplomacy.⁴⁵

The shift in politicized representations of the crucifixion narrative can be seen in an altering depiction of Pontius Pilate. His rendering in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* is much less sympathetic than that in *King of Kings*. Masculine, with a shaved head and at times clad in leather armor, he is a stern, military machine. Whereas Pontius Pilate the enlightened, toga-clad statesman of *King of Kings* “find[s] no fault” in Jesus, deciding to “chastise Him, and let Him go,” the Pontius Pilate of *The Greatest Story* tells John the Baptist: “I care nothing either for your superstitions or your god. I’m here to keep order in this desert land and that I will do. I want to hear nothing more about this troublemaker or anyone like him.”

In Stevens’s film, Rome, and not the priestly hierarchy, is the aggressor. The priests maintain a semblance of neutrality until Jesus’s blasphemy is confirmed when he says he is the son of God. Even after this, allegations of blasphemy divide the Pharisees, as Nicodemus attempts to defend Jesus against Caiaphas’s judgment. Meanwhile, the Idumean king of the Galilee, Herod Antipas, is cast as the ineffectual client king of Rome. While he beheads John the Baptist at the request of Pontius Pilate, he is either unwilling or politically unable to order the crucifixion of Jesus, showing that ultimately he is an impotent ruler, a coded message to Israel’s neighboring state Jordan, who still controlled Jerusalem and the West Bank at the time. The film ultimately focuses on Roman culpability for the crucifixion, pushing Christianity as a liberatory force against the authoritarianism of the Roman Empire.

Conclusion

Where Piglhein methodically rendered the landscape around Jerusalem and overlaid biblical events, Hollywood made use of costuming, sets, and locations as biblical markers in filmic landscapes that are considerably more malleable. Hollywood privileged narrative play over the historical accuracy so important to Piglhein. While the development of technology shifts narratives, first with the remediation from still to moving image and later with the development of audio in film allowing for greater nuance to be imparted to audiences, ultimately the major shifts in representation are fundamentally in response to Western social and political attitudes of the day.

Though construed as a form of mass entertainment, Piglhein’s panorama is a pivotal culmination of nineteenth-century methodology that attempted to synthesize biblical text and documentation of the physical landscape through surveys and photography to construct a cartography to prove biblical claim. This synthesis tacitly linked photography to a broader

colonial project resulting in the systematic effacement of Palestinian modernity.

The legacy of Hollywood cinema can be seen as operating in the same colonial mode of imaging as nineteenth-century imaging, by attempting to symbolically authorize the claiming of land. However, in contemplating the shift between nineteenth-century European imaging, aiming for authenticity, and American Hollywood imaging that fictionalized, through a historicized setting, it is hard to ignore how political malleability, particularly in the post-Nakba period, is reflected in the vast changes to the landscape of historical Palestine, both politically and physically.

Where Piglhein scratches at the landscape with biblical evidence in an attempt to map an authentic bibliified cartography, Hollywood negates the physicality of landscape and instead moves toward a Christian narrative of liberation in an historical world of crisis allowing for the collapse of Jewish/Christian categorizations by the 1960s. Ultimately, the commercial viability of both panorama and Hollywood cinema is predicated on story that is relatable to an audience on some level, a fact that would merit the study of later generations of imaging from 1970s onward, particularly in relationship to the developing trope of Palestinian as transgressor.

In looking at these films, it is evident that they are new generations in the lineage of Western imaging derived from photographic modes established in the nineteenth century and codified by Piglhein. In this comparison we can see the plasticity of landscape in the Western imaginary as linked, if not in reaction, to the social and political views of their respective contexts. This is particularly acute in the explicitly political tone of Hollywood cinematic production by the 1960s which can be seen as a continuity and development from the colonial subtext of nineteenth-century bibliified landscape cartography.

Sary Zananiri is an Anglo-Palestinian artist living in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia. He teaches at Monash University, where he received his PhD in 2013.

Endnotes

- 1 Bruno Piglhein, *Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion*, 1886, originally displayed in Munich, since destroyed by fire.
- 2 *King of Kings* (DVD), directed by Cecil B. de Mille (New York: Criterion Collection, 2004, originally released 1927); and *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (DVD), directed by George Stevens (New York: MGM Home Entertainment, 2011, originally released 1965). All quotes in this article refer to the available DVD versions.
- 3 Issam Nassar, *Photographing Jerusalem: The Image of the City in Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Boulder, CO: Eastern European Monographs, 1997), 25–26. Nassar notes that the introduction of photography to the Middle East also coincided with the rise of Western archaeological interest in the region.
- 4 Nassar, *Photographing Jerusalem*, 26.
- 5 Emmie Donadio, “Seeing Is Believing,” in *Jerusalem: Idea and Reality*, ed. Tamar Mayer and Sulieman A. Mourad (New York: Routledge, 2008), 144–45.
- 6 Donadio, “Seeing Is Believing,” 145.
- 7 Rochelle Davis describes the impacts of Ottoman land reforms in 1839 and 1856, which saw the beginnings of foreign, primarily colonial, economic investment in the city. Rochelle Davis, “Ottoman Jerusalem,” in *Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighborhoods and Their Fate in the War*, ed. Salim Tamari (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2002), 11.
- 8 Charles Wilson, *Ordinance Survey of Jerusalem Made in the Years 1864 and 1865* (Southampton: Royal Engineers, 1866).
- 9 Shimon Gibson, *Jerusalem in Original Photographs, 1850–1920* (London: Stacey International, 2003), 17.
- 10 Issam Nassar, “Colonization by Imagination,” in *City of Collision: Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism*, ed. Philipp Misselwitz and Tim Rieniets (Basel: Birkhauser, 2006), 222–23.

- 11 Nassar, "Colonization by Imagination," 223.
- 12 Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 274.
- 13 Thomas DeWitt Talmage, *From Manger to Throne: A New Life of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Historical Publishing Company, 1890).
- 14 In addition to the panorama located in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, two other extant panoramas can be found in Altötting, Germany, and Einsiedeln, Switzerland.
- 15 *Cyclorama: The Unforgettable Moment*, published as an accompanying guide to the Quebec panorama in 1995, 2.
- 16 Annabel Jane Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, Theme Parks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 169.
- 17 Oettermann, *Panorama*, 276.
- 18 Oettermann, *Panorama*, 278.
- 19 Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem*, 171; Oettermann, *Panorama*, 279.
- 20 Oettermann, *Panorama*, 278–79.
- 21 Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem*, 173.
- 22 *Cyclorama*, 2.
- 23 Issam Nassar, "Jerusalem in the Late Ottoman Period: Historical Writing and the Native Voice," in *Jerusalem*, ed. Mayer and Mourad, 207.
- 24 See Nassar, "Colonization by Imagination."
- 25 See Issam Nassar, "'Biblicization' in the Service of Colonialism: Jerusalem in Nineteenth-century Photography," *Third Text* 20, no. 3–4 (May–July 2006): 317–326.
- 26 Bernard Comment, *The Panorama* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 129. Jerusalem appears to be the only in city that has been imaged in an historical context. Cairo and Constantinople, other Middle Eastern cities with ancient pasts, were imaged as contemporary nineteenth-century cities. Jerusalem, as far as I am aware, is unique in this respect.
- 27 Comment, *Panorama*, 129.
- 28 Comment, *Panorama*, 129.
- 29 The quest for realistic portrayals in the production of panoramas produced somewhat zealous scenarios. Stephan Oettermann describes the fanaticism towards detail that marks the production of the panorama at Altötting, which included painting models tied to crucifixes. Oettermann, *Panorama*, 285.
- 30 *Cyclorama*, 2.
- 31 *The Passion of the Christ* (DVD), directed by Mel Gibson (Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, 2004).
- 32 The splitting of the Jewish and Palestinian categories into discrete identities can particularly be seen in the morphing of the Palestinian (and the Arab more generally) through the course of the twentieth century. This reaches a turning point with the transgressive trope of the Terrorist by the 1970s. Eisele argues that the events of the early 1970s, particularly the 1973 oil embargoes and Arab-Israeli war, as well as the expansion of PLO operations against Israel "led to the Arab being represented as embodying the antithesis of Western values and rationality in the popular narratives of films and television." See John Eisele, "Wild East: Deconstructing the Language of Genre in the Hollywood Eastern," *Cinema Journal* 41, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 72.
- 33 Bruce Francis Babington and Peter William Evans, *Biblical Epics: Sacred Narrative in the Hollywood Cinema*, 2nd ed. (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1993), 106–7.
- 34 Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945–2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 43–47.
- 35 Interestingly, by 1965 King Husayn of Jordan was building a royal palace at Tal al-Ful in Jerusalem, which was never completed as a result of the war two years later. It can perhaps be seen as drawing a parallel to Herod's palace in the film, but is also said to have been built in response to the construction of Israeli President's residence in West Jerusalem.
- 36 McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 61.
- 37 Babington and Evans, *Biblical Epics*, 33–36.
- 38 Quoted in Harry Medved and Michael Medved, *The Hollywood Hall of Shame: The Most Expensive Flops in Movie History* (Melbourne: Angus and Robertson, 1984), 136–37.
- 39 Medved and Medved, *Hollywood Hall of Shame*, 135.
- 40 Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*, 2nd ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 1–7.
- 41 Gabler particularly delves into the split between Jack and Harry Warner of the Warner Bros Studio, examining the two opposing positions and the impacts on what was a family business that led to Jack buying his brother's interests in the company by subterfuge in 1956. See Gabler, *Empire*, 408.
- 42 Gabler, *Empire*, 284.
- 43 Cecilia de Mille Presley and Mark A. Vieira, *Cecil B. de Mille: Art of the Hollywood Epic* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2014), 371.
- 44 Yaakov Ariel, "An Unexpected Alliance: Christian Zionism and Its Historical Significance," *Modern Judaism* 26 (2006): 80.
- 45 Ariel, "Unexpected Alliance," 81–82.