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## Dome of the Rock

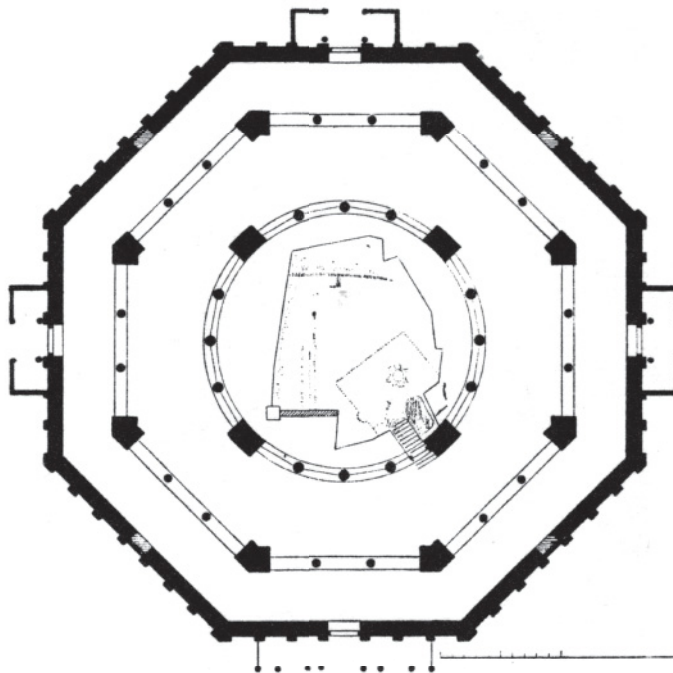
At the dawn, when the light of the sun first strikes the dome and the drum catches the rays, then is this edifice a marvelous sight to behold, and one such that in all of Islam I have not seen the equal; neither have I heard tell of anything built in pagan times that could rival in grace this Dome of the Rock<sup>1</sup>

Late in the summer of the Christian year 688, 56 years after the death of the prophet Muhammad, a small group of men gathered on the highest point of Temple Mount, the Noble Sanctuary, *al-Haram al-Sharif*, as the Islamic rulers of the city had named it. They carried with them the surveying tools and ropes they would use to lay out on the bare rock ledges the form of a circle within an octagon (Figure 5.1). This figure would be centered on the place where the rocks folded to form a cave large enough to enter. It was the ground plan for a new building, and, long before the marks were made, much thought had been given to determining the form it should take and why. Though it was consciously formed to duplicate the dimensions of the Anastasis, the dome and the rotunda behind the Church of the Holy Sepulcher built over the rock-cut chamber which the Christian faithful believed to be the tomb of Christ, and though it would utilize the craftsmen and skills that Islam inherited in the occupation of Byzantine Syria, the building that resulted – the Dome of the Rock – was a wholly original product of this new religion. The Dome of the Rock was the first work of Islamic architecture.<sup>2</sup>

It was also formed with a keen awareness of the way in which the physical presence of Hagia Sophia had centered the Christian world.

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2. JERUSALEM: DER FELSENDOM.

Figure 5.1 Dome of the Rock: Plan. From Georg Dehio and Gustav von Bezold: *Kirchliche Baukunst des Abendlandes*. Stuttgart, 1887–1901.

The Qur'an, from the Arabic "Recitation," the sacred text of Islam, comprises 114 books called *Sura*. In *Sura* 17 the voice of the Prophet speaks of Jewish history and the fate of the Temples of Solomon:

And We had made known to the children of Israel in the Book: Most certainly you will make mischief in the land twice, and most certainly you will behave insolently with great insolence.

So when the promise for the first of the two came, We sent over you Our servants, of mighty prowess, so they went to and fro among the houses, and it was a promise to be accomplished.

Then We gave you back the turn to prevail against them, and aided you with wealth and children and made you a numerous band.

If you do good, you will do good for your own souls, and if you do evil, it shall be for them. So when the second promise came (We raised another



people) that they may bring you to grief and that they may enter the mosque as they entered it the first time, and that they might destroy whatever they gained ascendancy over with utter destruction.<sup>3</sup>

“As they entered it the first time” refers to the destruction of the first Temple of Solomon, which was overcome by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. Here Muhammad was citing the direct involvement of the Islamic peoples in the millennial struggles of the Jews. Islam – literally to surrender to God – was, for Muhammad, a quality that marked all the believers in the religions of the book: Jew, Christian, and Muslim alike. Ibrahim (Abraham) was the first Muslim; the first to demonstrate the meaning of complete surrender by his willingness to sacrifice his son if God had wished it. The tribes of Arabia believed they were as blessed as the Jews; both were the Children of Abraham, the Arabs the descendants of Abraham’s son Ishmael, child of the union with his servant Hagar.<sup>4</sup>

Muhammad had been led to religion through his disgust with the greed and faithlessness of his fellow merchants in Mecca. According to the *Life of the Prophet*,<sup>5</sup> he began to feel he was under divine guidance in 610 CE. He first preached in public in 613 and over the years attracted a dedicated community of followers. He also attracted fierce resistance because of his persistent attack on the lingering polytheism within the religious traditions of his people. In 622, hostility from the leading families in Mecca led Muhammad to flee with his most dedicated followers to Medina, 200 miles to the north. This journey was the *Hegira*, or migration, and marks the inception of Islam: 622 CE is year one in the Islamic calendar.

In the months after the migration, Muhammad followed Jewish tradition and faced Jerusalem as he prayed, facing the memory of Solomon’s Temple. Then a dawning awareness of the distinction of his teaching caused him to turn his back on that city and make Mecca, and its ancient sacred shrine the *Ka’ba*, the direction in which prayer should be made: this is the *qiblah* in Arabic. It is explained in the Qur’an:

The fools among the people will say: What has turned them from their qiblah, which they had? Say: The East and the West belong only to Allah; He guides whom He likes to the right path.

And thus We have made you a medium [just] nation that you may be the bearers of witness to the people and [that] the Apostle may be a bearer of witness to you; and We did not make that which you would have to be the qiblah but that We might distinguish him who follows the Apostle from him who turns back upon his heels, and this was surely hard except for those

whom Allah has guided aright; and Allah was not going to make your faith to be fruitless; most surely Allah is Affectionate, Merciful to the people.

Indeed We see the turning of your face to heaven, so We shall surely turn you to a qiblah which you shall like; turn then your face towards the Sacred Mosque, and wherever you are, turn your face towards it, and those who have been given the Book most surely know that it is the truth from their Lord; and Allah is not at all heedless of what they do.<sup>6</sup>

The Sacred Mosque is the Ka'ba,<sup>7</sup> and Sura 2: 145 is explicit "And even if you bring to those who have been given the Book every sign they would not follow your qiblah, nor can you be a follower of their qiblah, neither are they the followers of each other's qiblah, and if you follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, then you shall most surely be among the unjust." Despite having been given ample evidence of his prophetic mission, the Jews in Arabia had refused to follow Muhammad.

Later commentaries on the Qur'an acknowledge Muhammad's initial wish to draw the Jews to his teaching, but offered different explanations. In one, it was the memory of the "Holy House," the Temple of Solomon, that had caused him at first to direct prayer to Jerusalem: one Al-Rabi ibn Anas relates, on the authority of Abu al-Aliya:

the prophet of God was given his choice of turning his face in whatever direction he wished. He chose the Holy House [Temple of Mount] in Jerusalem in order that People of the Book would be conciliated. This was qibla [sic] for sixteen months; all the while, however, he was turning his face towards the heavens until God turned him towards the house.<sup>8</sup>

Another commentary asserted that Muhammad's attention to Jerusalem was explicitly to draw Jews to his teaching:

It is related, on the other hand, on the authority of Ibn Abbas: When the Apostle of God migrated to Medina most of whose inhabitants were Jews, God commanded him to face Jerusalem, and the Jews were glad. The Prophet faced it for some time beyond ten months, but he loved the qibla [sic] of Abraham [the Ka'ba]. Thus he used to pray to God and gaze into the heavens until God sent down [the verse] "We have seen you turning your face toward heaven."

The Jews became suspicious and said, "What has turned them from their qibla, toward which they formerly prayed?" Thus God sent down (the verse) "Say, to God belongs the east and the west . . ."<sup>9</sup>

And there were Jewish converts within the communities around Medina, but mostly there was open hostility between the Jews and the followers of

Muhammad, who were known to be capable of violence. Despite this, the message in the Qur'an is clear:

And do not dispute with the followers of the Book except by what is best, except those of them who act unjustly, and say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him do we submit.<sup>10</sup>

Most commentaries on the emergence of Islam take issue with the lack of evidence of a developed artistic culture within Arabia.<sup>11</sup> The tribes are portrayed as semi-nomadic, residing in a land of deserts and oases; primitive in contrast to the grandly Hellenized cities of Syria to the north. Historians rely so much on cultural artifacts – a conscious architecture, an evolved literature – to provide a path into the character of a people that the absence of any such material surrounding the birth of Islam gives the Qur'an a disembodied authority. Mecca, however, was far from being remote from the affairs of the world, though its worldview was profoundly different from that found anywhere else within the Byzantine sphere of influence. Its culture and economy had developed out of its position on a centuries-old trade route linking the Mediterranean with India and the Far East. The trade was in spices. For a millennium, Arab fleets had been carried by the westerly winds to the Malabar Coast of India then to what is now Karalla, and on to Sri Lanka. The ships returning on the northeasterly “trade winds” sailed into the ports of Aden and Cana on the southern coast of Arabia, carrying spices: cinnamon, cassia, cardamom, ginger, and turmeric, and other precious goods drawn from across southern Asia. The journey was managed by a succession of closely held trading monopolies protected by deception and myth. The cassia spice, it was claimed, grew in shallow lakes guarded by winged animals, and cinnamon was only found in deep glens infested with poisonous snakes.<sup>12, 13, 14</sup>

These precious cargoes would arrive into a confusion of ships unloading at the Arabian ports. The merchants would begin to bargain with the ships' masters on the quality of the goods, and share information on the state of nations in India and beyond; unrest could be bad for trade. Once bought, the bundled spices would be loaded on to the backs of hundreds of camels for the journey north. From the coast the journey was by Sana in Yemen, to Mecca, where many of the major trading families lived. From there the passage led to the oases of Medina and Philadelphia (now Amman), then across the desert and through the mountains to Petra, into Syria, and Busra al-Sham, all splendid Hellenized cities.<sup>15</sup> After Busra al-Sham the

path would divide: east to Damascus or west to the coast at Gaza and from there across the Mediterranean. This was journey of a thousand and more miles; a routine yet complex passage fraught with uncertainty, taking many months and involving hundreds of people. It was a passage on which the economy of Arabia depended. As key agents in this process, the merchants of Mecca would have had as keen a sense of the politics of Southern India and maybe China as they would of Byzantium.

Mecca was a major stop on the passage north; goods here may have been transferred to new agents.<sup>16</sup> According to the *Life of the Prophet* it was north to Busra al-Sham, a meeting point of the caravan routes, that Muhammad traveled with his uncle at the age of 12.<sup>17</sup> And here, even as late as the seventh century, Muhammad would have experienced the character and the ways of life of a Hellenized culture. Excavations over the last century have recovered enough to convey the strength of its architecture and the strangeness of a town all built in black basalt. The great theater survives intact,<sup>18</sup> as does the market square where the caravans unloaded their cargoes.<sup>19</sup> The Byzantine cathedral, dedicated to Syrian martyrs SS. Sergius, Bacchus, and Leontus was built in 512–513. Its vast dome, long since collapsed, spanned 36 meters, greater than the dome of Hagia Sophia built 25 years later. The cathedral was 80 years old when Muhammad first came to the city, and it was within its walls that tradition has the 12-year-old meeting the Christian priest Bahira. He had sought the boy out and questioned him closely on religious matters, and from this exchange the priest predicted, “This is the master of all humans. Allah will send him with a Message which will be a mercy to all beings . . . I can recognize him also by the seal of Prophethood, which is below his shoulder, like an apple. We have got to learn this from our books.”<sup>20</sup> When he was 25 years old, Muhammad made this journey again on a commission to manage the passage of goods for a successful businesswoman Khadija, who would later become his wife. He may have made such a journey many times and on each occasion he would have passed close to Jerusalem – less than a day’s passage; close enough to attract someone who had heard of the divine power of the Holy House, the lost Temple of Solomon.

### Muhammad and the Fall of Jerusalem

It was in 610, the year Persian armies invaded the eastern lands of Byzantium, that Muhammad began to preach.<sup>21</sup> In Sura 30 of the Qur’an, he hailed the initial loss of Rum (Byzantine) Syria, to the Persians in 614:

*Dome of the Rock*

123

The Romans are vanquished,  
In a near land, and they, after being vanquished, shall overcome.<sup>22</sup>

He then prophesied that the Romans would recover only to fall to Islam: "Within a few years. Allah's is the command before and after; and on that day the believers shall rejoice."<sup>23</sup> Such total war between such powerful nations, which was waged to the very borders of Arabia, must have been of great interest to Muhammad. So also would have been the resultant damage to the military strength and the economies of both Persia and Byzantium. He certainly would have known how the conflict had weakened the border defenses between Arabia and Syria.

In his sixtieth year, the unchallenged spiritual and political leader of the tribes of Arabia, Muhammad led an army of 30,000 to the borders of Syria, seizing the mainly Christian cities and the regions around them. In taking control, he offered generous treaties that protected the rights of the conquered and, in so doing, established a tactical procedure for conquest that would guide all who would come after him.

The Qur'an called on the followers of the Prophet to conquer the world by faith, not force; yet Muhammad's death in 632 CE initiated a military campaign which in the following decades spread Islam and established Islamic administrations across all of Eastern Byzantium and beyond.

**Umar in Jerusalem**

In 637 the forces of second Caliph, Umar, Companion of the Prophet, arrived at the gates of Jerusalem after taking Damascus. It was Christmas, and the siege blocked the path to Bethlehem and the "Cradle of Jesus." The sermon given by the patriarch of Jerusalem Sophronius, in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, has survived intact:

For now the slime of the godless Saracens, like the gentiles at the time, has captured Bethlehem and does not yield the passage but threatens slaughter and destruction if we leave this Holy City and if we dare to approach our beloved and sacred Bethlehem.

Therefore I call on and I command and I beg you for the love of Christ the Lord, in so far as it is in our power, let us correct ourselves, let us shine forth with repentance, let us be purified with conversion and let us curb our performance of acts which are hateful to God. If we constrain ourselves, as friendly and beloved of God, we would laugh at the fall of our Saracen adversaries and we would view their not distant death and we would see their

final destruction. For their blood-loving blade will enter their hearts, their bows will be shattered and their shafts will be fixed in them. They will furnish a clear way for us having neither hills nor thorns nor impassable points so that we, running boldly and dauntlessly, may prostrate ourselves before the Holy Manger.<sup>24</sup>

Again, there is the sense that in a godly ordained world, adversity is the punishment for sin. In calling the attackers “the slime of the godless Saracens” could the patriarch have been unaware that these forces were united by a new religion?

Contrary to Sophronius' forebodings, the Arab commanders took the city without blood being shed, and sometime thereafter<sup>25</sup> Caliph Umar “entered the Holy City in camelhair garments all soiled and torn, and making a show of piety as a cloak for his diabolical hypocrisy.”<sup>26</sup> So wrote the Christian Theophanes early in ninth century. Far from hypocrisy, this show of piety was reflected in Umar's first official act; he formed a treaty between the invaders and the Christian population:<sup>27</sup>

In the name of God, the Merciful Benefactor! This is the guarantee granted the inhabitants of Aelia by the servant of God Umar, Commander of the Believers. He grants them the surety of their persons, their goods, their churches, their crosses – whether these are in a good or a bad condition – and the cult in general.

Their churches will not be expropriated for residences nor destroyed; they and their annexes will suffer no harm and the same will be true of their crosses and their goods. No constraint will be imposed upon them in the matter of religion and no one of them will be annoyed. No Jew will be authorized to live in Jerusalem with them. The inhabitants of Jerusalem will pay the poll-tax in the same manner as those in other cities. It will be left to them to expel from their city the Byzantines (*Rum*) and the brigands. Those of the latter who leave will have safe-conduct. Those who wish to stay will be authorized to do so, on condition of paying the same poll-tax as the residents of Aelia. Those among the inhabitants of Aelia who wish to leave with the Byzantines, take with them their goods, leave behind their churches and their crosses, will likewise have a safe-conduct for themselves, their churches, and their crosses . . .<sup>28</sup>

This is the so-called Covenant of Umar and it appears in one of its fullest forms in a text by the tenth-century Muslim historian Tabari.<sup>29</sup> Jerusalem was referred to by its Roman name Aelia, and the covenant guaranteed generous protection to the Christian population, promising safe passage to those who wished to leave. The document was remarkable for the repeated



commitment to safeguard the symbol of the Christian Cross. In a last desperate act, the Byzantine forces had managed to get the True Cross out of the city and back to Constantinople. The decree that no Jew would be allowed to live in the city was premature. Jews were a sizable population in Syria and influential in business: three years after conquest Umar granted them the right to resettle. However, he gave the Christian patriarch control over the numbers that would be admitted.

Some time after concluding the treaty, the Caliph asked to be taken to what he called the "Sanctuary of David":<sup>30</sup>

Umar, as soon as he was at leisure from the writing of the Treaty of Capitulation made between him and the people of the Holy City, said to (Sophronius) the patriarch of Jerusalem: "Take us to the sanctuary of David." And the patriarch agreed to do so. Then Umar went forth girt with a sword and with four thousand of the Companions of the Prophet who had come to Jerusalem with him, all likewise wearing swords, and a crowd of us Arabs who had come up to the Holy City followed them, none of us bearing any weapons except our swords. And the patriarch walked before Umar among the Companions, and we came behind the caliph.

Thus we entered the Holy City.

And the patriarch took us to the church which is called the *Kumamah*<sup>31</sup> and he said: "This is David's sanctuary." Umar looked around and pondered, and then he answered the patriarch: "You are lying, for the Apostle [Muhammad] described to me the Sanctuary of David and this is not it." Then the patriarch went with us to the Church of Sion and again he said: "This is the Sanctuary of David." But the caliph replied to him: "You are lying." So the patriarch went on till he came to the Noble Sanctuary of the Holy City [Temple Mount] and reached the gate later called the Gate of Muhammad.

Now the dung which was then all about the Noble Sanctuary had settled on the steps of this gate so that it even came out into the street in which the gate opened, and it had accumulated so greatly on the steps as to reach almost up to the ceiling of the gateway. The patriarch said to Umar: "It is impossible to go on further and enter, except crawling on one's hands and knees." So the patriarch went down on hands and knees, preceding Umar and we all crawled after him, until he had brought us out in the court of the Noble Sanctuary of the Holy City. Then we arose from our knees and stood upright. Umar looked around him, pondering for a long time. Then he said: "By Him in whose hands is my soul [sic], this is the place described to us by the Apostle of God."<sup>32</sup>

Emphasizing the filth that had gathered over the centuries must have been intended as an indictment of the Christians. The most surprising note,

however, is the indication that Umar was on a mission for the Prophet: "the Apostle [Muhammad] described to me the Sanctuary of David and this is not it." It will never be known from whence Muhammad could gain such a clear sense of the place he may not have visited.

There are many versions of Umar's recovery of Temple Mount. They vary in the detail, but these details are revealing.<sup>33</sup> The following is from the Christian historian Eutychius, writing in 876. Umar does not ask to see David's Sanctuary but says to the patriarch "Give me a place in which I might build a place of worship."

The Patriarch said to him: "I will give to the Commander of the Faithful the spot to build a place of worship where the Kings of Rome were unable to build one.

They were Romans when they embraced the Christian religion and Helena, the mother of Constantine, built the churches of Jerusalem. The place of the rock and the area around it were deserted ruins by then and they poured dirt over the rock so that great was the filth above it. The Byzantines, however, neglected it and did not hold it in veneration, nor did they build a church over it because Christ our Lord said in his Holy Gospel 'not a stone will be left on the stone which will not be ruined and devastated.' And for this reason the Christians left it as a ruin and did not build a church over it."

Though written by a Christian about an Islamic invader, it illustrates the persistent presence of Christ's prophecy six centuries later. The text continues:

So Sophronius took Umar by the hand and stood him over the filth. Umar taking hold of his cloak filled it with dirt and threw it into the Valley of Gehenna. When the Muslims saw Umar carrying dirt with his own hands, they all immediately began carrying dirt in their cloaks and shields and what have you until the whole place as cleansed and the rock was revealed. Then they all said: "Let us build a sanctuary and let us place a stone in his heart." "No," Umar responded "we will build a sanctuary and place a stone at the end of the sanctuary." Therefore Umar built a sanctuary and put the stone at the end of it.<sup>34</sup>

Some understanding of why Umar did not build in the center of the Noble Sanctuary is explained in a text from the fourteenth century, based on much earlier material. It introduces *Ka'b*, a Jew who converted to Islam in the first caliphate. He was a scholar on the histories of the prophets in the court of the second caliph.<sup>35</sup> The text records Umar looking for a specific rock, a proposition mentioned nowhere else, and determining where to build a

sanctuary on Temple Mount and place the qiblah marking the direction of Mecca:

Then the caliph himself went there [to Jerusalem], and Ka'b [al-Ahbar] with him. Umar said to Ka'b: "O Abu Ishaq, do you know the position of the Rock?" Ka'b answered: "Measure from the well which is in the Valley of Gehenna so and so many ells; there dig and you will discover it," adding, "at this present day it is a dung-heap." So they dug there and the rock was laid bare. Then Umar said to Ka'b: "Where do you say we should place the sanctuary, or rather, the qibla [sic]?" Ka'b replied: "Lay out a place for it behind [that is, to the north of] the Rock and so 'you will make two qiblas, that, namely of Moses and that of Muhammad.'" And Umar answered him: "You still lean toward the Jews, Abu Ishaq. The sanctuary will be in front [that is, to the south of] the Rock." Thus was the Mosque (al-Aqsa) erected in the front part of the Haram area.<sup>36</sup>

Al-Aqsa Mosque, the "furthest mosque"<sup>37</sup> now refers to the great hall at the southern edge of Herod's great platform, but for most of its existence it indicated the entire southern platform used for prayer; this area was and remains the third holiest place in Islam. And the qiblah set up at the southern end was placed facing Mecca; would be free from any metaphysical presence emanating from the site of Solomon's Temple. However, a later caliph would take possession of what he believed was the qiblah of Moses. The sole contemporary account of the mosque that Umar built comes from the Christian priest and traveler Arculf. On his return from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land around the year 680, Arculf was driven by storm to the coast of Scotland and so arrived at the monastery on the island of Iona, where he related his adventures to the abbot, St. Adamnan, who published them in *De locis Sanctis*:<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, in that renowned place where once had been the magnificently constructed Temple, placed in the vicinity of the wall from the east, at this time, the Saracens fabricated in a crude manner a quadrangular house of prayer, constructing it with raised planks and great beams on top of certain remains of ruins; this they frequent; and this house is able to hold, it is said, three thousand men at the same time.<sup>39</sup>

It was formed to allow the 3,000 Muslims in the city to come together for Friday prayers. As Umar laid bare the surface of the sanctuary there was no mention of ruined structures. Be that as it may, there were enough ruins elsewhere in the city to provide the material for a house of prayer.

Both Jewish and Muslim sources recorded that there was strong Jewish participation in the reclamation of Temple Mount:

It was God's will that we found favor with the Ishmaelite rulers. At the time of their invasion and conquest of Palestine from the Edomites, the Arabs came to Jerusalem and some Jews showed them the location of the Temple. This group of Jews has lived among them ever since. The Jews agree to keep the site clear of refuse, in return for which they were granted the privilege of praying at its gates.<sup>40</sup>

In a text from the years immediately following the invasion, a rabbi hailed the Islamic conquest as liberation for the Jews: "And Israel will be freed of all their sins. And will no more be kept far from the house of prayer."<sup>41</sup> Perhaps a not-so-surprising expression of hope, given the bitter conflict with the Christians in the decades preceding the invasion.

Umar was assassinated in 644, and this led to four decades of war and dispute over who was authorized to give leadership to Islam. Umar was succeeded by Uthman, also one of the companions of the Prophet, and a member of the Umayyad clan. In 656, he was killed by followers of Ali ibn Abi Talib,<sup>42</sup> son-in-law of Muhammad, who was then named caliph. This assassination would divide Islam henceforth between those who believed that leadership must come from the direct descendents of Muhammad – the *Shi'a* – and those who recognized the first caliphs as all Muhammad's rightful successors – the *Sunni*. In 661 the Shi'a Ali was defeated and killed by the Sunni Mu'awiyah, fifth caliph and founder of the Umayyad dynasty. He ruled from 661 to 680, and brought unity to what had become, after 30 years of spreading conquest, a vast Islamic empire. In the east it stretched across Iran and northeastern Afghanistan to the mountains of Kurastan and in the west through Egypt and across North Africa.

For Mu'awiyah, Jerusalem had an importance far beyond any of his predecessors. Archeology has uncovered extensive remains of a palace complex below the southern wall of Temple Mount that dates from his years in power, 661–680. His deep feelings for the Noble Sanctuary survive in a collection of prophetic phrases from the lessons he preached in Umar's al-Aqsa Mosque. They speak of that place "where people will gather and arise on the day of judgment; as the chosen land of Allah to which he lead the best of his servants," and most extravagantly: "God loves the area between the two walls of this Mosque more than any other place in the world."<sup>43</sup>

In 680 Mu'awiyah named his son Yazed, a Sunni, caliph. In reaction a Shi'a army led by the son of Ali ibn Abi Talib attacked, only to be defeated

and slaughtered in Karbala; henceforth, Karbala<sup>44</sup> would be the holy city of the Shi'a. Yazed died in 684 and Umayyad Abd al-Malik was named caliph and ruled until to 705. He was a gracious leader who expanded the empire and made it more secure and prosperous, but his most lasting achievement was to build the Dome of the Rock on Temple Mount, the Noble Sanctuary in Jerusalem.

### The Dome of the Rock

Nowhere in the culture of the peoples of southern Arabia or in the emerging rituals and performance of the new religion, was there any apparent demand for a monument. The mosque in Medina had been shaped to maintain the memory of the home of Muhammad; it was an unadorned columned hall facing an equally unadorned courtyard around which lived the wives of the Prophet. It was of sufficient scale to hold the community of the faithful. This simplicity can still be seen in the mosque in Busra al-Sham, constructed soon after the death of the prophet. Presumably it was this simplicity that led the pilgrim Arculf to describe the first al-Aqsa Mosque as crude. In their modesty these early mosques can hardly be seen as consciously formed architecture. The Dome of the Rock however, is in total contrast. It is a powerful and confident demonstration of the triumph of Islam, which arrived, fully formed, seemingly from nowhere. This is the first great work of Islamic architecture.

Arabia spanned many regions and different peoples, and on coming to power Malik faced opposition in every direction from the tribes in the north, the Iraqis in the west and most dangerously the Shi'a armies of the anti-caliph in the south. Step by step his generals tackled each enemy as was opportune, first by bringing the northern tribes to submission then in 691, defeating an Iraqi force weakened by internal fighting, leaving the anti-caliph Abdulla ibn Zubayr in Mecca, as his final foe. Malik's forces besieged and bombarded Mecca. Then, along with many Christians, they invaded the city, gutting the Ka'ba, setting it on fire and causing vast damage. They fractured the sacred Black Stone that was kept in the inner sanctum; this was an ancient meteorite, a gift from heaven. Malik's violation of Islam's most holy place would be long remembered and would affect the way his enemies would later view his rule.

In September of 692, with Mecca in his possession, the Shi'a caliph dead and the Ka'ba in ruins, Malik returned to Jerusalem to complete

the Dome of the Rock. Construction had begun in 688, and documents survive naming Sa'id the Good, Raja'b. Hayawa, Yazid b. Salam, and his son Bahia b. Yazid<sup>45</sup> as governing the construction. The last two, father and son, are thought to have been Christians. Such was Abd al Malik's belief in the far-reaching significance of this work that before building he sought approval from leaders in all lands under Muslim control. Once approved, a full-size model of the proposed structure was erected on Temple Mount to ensure complete understanding of Malik's vision for the building. Builders and craftsmen were brought to Jerusalem not only from the lands under Islam, but also from Byzantium. The skills of Syrian builders must have heightened the ambition of the project. From the glory days of the Roman Empire and Herod, through the Christian years, Syria had maintained one of the strongest and most creative architectural cultures outside of Rome, and the major architectural elements that form the Dome of the Rock, the timber framing of the dome, the arches, and reuse of antique columns (termed *spolia*), were all formed within the Byzantine Syrian tradition.

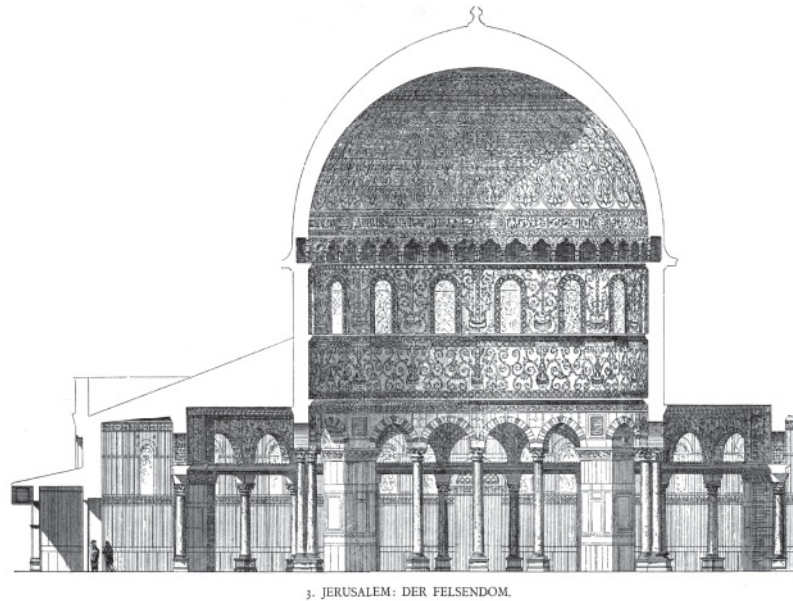
Several elements came together to form the Dome. It was explicitly a physical manifestation of the singular nature of this God, in contrast to the confusing Christian position of God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, resolving the divine nature of Christ, agreed to at the Council of Nicaea in 325. It was conceived by those who had seen or at least knew of the power of Hagia Sophia, which also has a distinct singularity of form, a reflection of the Monophysite view – God in one person – held by some in Justinian's court. It covered the highest point on Mount Moriah, close to what had been remembered as the “holy of holies” in the temples of the Jews. The dome and the cylinder on which it sat replicated almost exactly the dome over the high altar of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher: the span of the dome and the height from the ground to the springing of the arch were both in the order of 20.44 meters (67 feet). Though not in the Qur'an, Islamic tradition held that there were eight paths into paradise hence the third element, an octagonal plan which held eight gates to the divine path. The most mysterious element was the cave that still folds into the rock beneath it. There are several elusive references to such a rock in texts from the third century onwards, beginning with the “pierced stone” mentioned by the Pilgrim of Bordeaux. There was passing reference to a “rock” by the guide who led Umar to rediscover Temple Mount. When allowed, Jews did gather annually on Temple Mount to mark the day of the destruction, the Ninth of Ab, and must have erected an altar where they believed the sanctuary had stood.

A treatise in a Mishna from the second century, on the divine service for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement tells of an ancient stone: "After the Ark was taken away, a stone remained there from the time of the early prophets; it was called 'the foundation.'<sup>46</sup> It was higher than the ground by three fingerbreadths." Within this tradition, the Ark of the Covenant would have sat upon this rock, the highest point on Mount Moriah; the "Stone of the Foundation" *Aben Shetiyah* in Hebrew. Yet nothing connects either a Jewish altar or the "Stone of the Foundation" with the cave beneath the Dome. This fold in the rock, evidently a natural cave, could have been a product of the force with which Caliph Umar stripped and cleansed the surface of Temple Mount. His rigor may have uncovered a more ancient mystery.

There have been alterations small and large over the centuries, yet the Dome's dominance over the old city of Jerusalem remains essentially unchanged. On the outside, only the marble at the base of the octagon is original. The tiles which long ago replaced the mosaic that once covered the exterior have themselves been many times replaced. It is pleasing to imagine how it once appeared, to see the walls beneath the dome covered with the same glowing mosaic of natural forms that saturate the interior. Hidden behind a continuous inscription from the Qur'an that runs around the parapet at the edge of the octagon is a stone balustrade of small columns and arches. This, in a distinctly Islamic manner, was suppressed so as not to detract from the words of the Prophet. The walls became as pages in a book. The elaborate structure below the surface has suggested to some a pre-Islamic existence for the building, but rather it is the assertion of Islamic forms over the building conventions of Byzantine Syria.

In the interior, the drum of the dome sits on a base of reused Roman and Byzantine columns – a cross remains carved into one capital – which alternate with massive, marble-clad piers. The combination of the alternating dark and light marble covering the arches of the double ambulatory, create an energetic and harmonious composition. Gold mosaic is everywhere above and brilliant in effect. Beneath the dome, depictions of vases and cornucopia, formed in glass mosaic and mother of pearl, rise above the capitals and piers, sitting within a bed of intertwined stylized plants, which swarm up to envelope the dome (Figure 5.2, Plate 16).

Over the centuries the dome has suffered a few collapses, bringing the mosaic down with it. However, in the upper walls and coffers of the ambulatories the decoration has survived almost as Malik would have seen it. Here, the vases and cornucopia of the central volume are repeated, but they share the wall with figures that at first sight are curious and strange.



**Figure 5.2** Dome of the Rock: Section showing mosaic decoration on the interior. From Georg Dehio and Gustav von Bezold: *Kirchliche Baukunst des Abendlandes*. Stuttgart, 1887–1901.

In contrast to the glass and mother of pearl that enrich the other figures, these are encrusted with precious stones. One pattern closely resembles the crown in the mosaic portrait of Empress Theodora in Ravenna, and this clue helps deduce that they are representations of crowns and bracelets, breast plates, earrings and necklaces; all the regalia and jewelry of the emperors and empresses of Byzantine and Persian courts and also the adornment of saints: there is even a trace of the Virgin.

A scholar's interpretation<sup>47</sup> of the more elusive figures in these mosaics proposes that they are the exact equivalent of the collection of trophies held within the cube of the Ka'ba. Whereas the objects in the Ka'ba were real – jewelry, lamps, precious objects of veneration from the leading clans of Islam (Malik himself is known to have contributed two necklaces to the collection, after he both destroyed and restored it) – the figures on the walls of the Dome are abstractions. They symbolize Islam's possession of the wealth of Byzantium and Persia: their subjugation to the one true faith. As such they would have been understandable to pilgrims of all faiths.<sup>48</sup>



*Dome of the Rock*

133

In the inner face of the innermost ambulatory, above these evocative figures, is a text in mosaic<sup>49</sup> from the Qur'an chosen to compliment the symbolism of the building. It forcibly carries the message that Malik built the Dome to convey. It is a continuous sequence<sup>50</sup> and there is much repetition, but these extracts are explicit: beginning on the South East [SE] inner face of the Octagonal Arcade:

People of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your religion [E] nor utter aught concerning God save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a Messenger of God, and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not "Three" – Cease! (it is) [NE] better for you! – God is only One God. Far be it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And God is sufficient as Defender. The Messiah will never scorn to be a [N] servant unto God, nor will the favored angels. Whoso scorneth His service and is proud, all such will He assemble unto Him. Oh God, bless Your Messenger and Your servant Jesus [NW] son of Mary. Peace be on him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he shall be raised alive! Such was Jesus, son of Mary, (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt. It becometh not (the Majesty of) God that He should take unto Himself a son. Glory be to Him! [W] When He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is. Lo! God is my Lord and your Lord. So serve Him. That is the right path. God (Himself) is witness that there is no God save Him. And the angels and the men of learning (too are witness). Maintaining His creation in justice, there is no God save Him.<sup>51</sup>

And on the outer face of west and northwest walls:

In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no God but God. He is One. Praise be to God, Who hath not taken unto Himself a son, and Who hath no partner in the Sovereignty, nor hath He any protecting friend through dependence.

These texts chosen do not simply assert the fundamental principle of Islam and the power of its prophecies in comparison to those who had gone before – they focus on Christ. While offering praise for Jesus (Isa) and Mary (Mariam), no other prophets or family of prophets are mentioned by name. They attack the Christian claim of Christ's divinity with the forceful and insistent cry that Jesus could not have been the son of God.

The most ominous command is taken from Sura 4, *The Women*:

followers of the Book! do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak (lies) against Allah, but (speak) the truth; the Messiah, Isa son of Marium is only an apostle of Allah and His Word which He communicated to Marium and a spirit from Him; believe therefore in Allah and His apostles, and say not, Three. Desist, it is better for you; Allah is only one God; far be It from His glory that He should have a son, whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and Allah is sufficient for a Protector.<sup>52</sup>

In conceiving of the Dome, Malik invited comparison, not only with the Holy Sepulcher, but also between Christian and Muslim on the essential nature of God's power and mercy. The Dome would stand as a symbol of the profound difference between the God of Abraham sparing the life of Isaac, and the Christian God allowing his so-called son Jesus Christ to die brutally on the Cross. This had been incomprehensible to Muhammad; no God of Abraham would act in such a way. Christ did not die on the cross nor was he divine. This was the lesson that Malik chose to carry across the walls of the Dome of the Rock.

There were scholars in the nineteenth century who refused to believe that Islam, emerging so quickly from a culture of nomads, could have formed any architecture, let alone object of such power as the Dome of the Rock. They searched for other possible authors, raising the question whether under Persian occupation between 614 and 617, when the city had a Jewish administration, work had begun on rebuilding the Temple. Some have considered the possibility that the Byzantines, in repossessing the city in 627, built over the foundations of what the Jews had begun.<sup>53</sup> A circular plan, similar in scale to the Dome, had been used in building the Jewish shrine on Mount Moriah, but the armies of Umar took the city before it could be completed.

There are two compelling arguments against the proposition that Dome was not an Islamic creation. First, it would seem utterly improbable that the Christian community, on regaining power in the city in 617, would have allowed anything to survive that would contradict Christ's proclamation that nothing be built on the Temple Mount. And second, they would never have given support to the construction of a building that would have both emulated and overshadowed the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, diminishing its significance.

Muslim sources offer various explanation as the why Malik built the Dome. An explicit and in many ways disingenuous reason comes from the

*Dome of the Rock*

135

tenth century. It begins with an explanation of why Malik's son had to construct the mosque in Damascus:

Now one day I said, speaking to my father's brother, "O my uncle, truly it was not well of Caliph al-Walid to spend so much of the wealth of the Muslims on the mosque at Damascus. Had he expended the same on making roads or for caravanserais or in the restoration of fortresses, it would have been more fitting and more excellent of him." But my uncle said to me in answer, "O my little son, you have not understanding! Truly al-Walid was right and he was prompted to do a worthy work. For he beheld Syria to be a country that had long been occupied by the Christians, and he noted herein the beautiful churches still belonging to them, so enchantingly fair and so renowned for their splendor; even as are the Holy Sepulcher and the churches of Lydda and Edessa. So he sought to build for the Muslims a mosque that should prevent their admiring these and should be unique and a wonder to the world. And in like manner, is it not evident how Caliph Abd al-Malik, noting the greatness of the Dome of the Holy Sepulcher and its magnificence, was moved lest it should dazzle the minds of Muslims and so erected, above the Rock, the Dome which is now seen there.<sup>54</sup>

By this record, the Dome was built to counter the influence and "the greatness of the Dome of the Holy Sepulcher and its magnificence . . . lest it should dazzle the minds of *Muslims*." The reference to the Cathedral in Edessa is relevant; its form could have been one of the models for the Dome. It is the subject a Syrian poem from around 600 CE:

Small though it is it resembles the universe.

Its vaults expand like the heavens and shines with mosaics as the firmament with stars.

Its soaring dome compares with the heaven of heavens, where God resides and its four arches represent the four directions of the world with their variegate colors like the rainbow.

It soars like the mountains of the earth,

Its marble walls shine like the image that is not man-made.<sup>55</sup>

Save for the four arches that represent the directions of the world, this could be an evocation of Malik's vision for the Dome of the Rock.

Some texts suggest a political intention behind the construction, stating that the Dome was built to displace the *Ka'ba* as the focus of the prayer:

Then Abd al-Malik forbade the people of Syria to make the pilgrimage [to Mecca], and it is by this reason that Abdullah ibn Zubayr was wont to

seize on them during the time of the pilgrimage and force them to pay him allegiance – which, Abd al-Malik having knowledge of, forbade the people to journey forth to Mecca. But the people murmured thereat saying “How do you forbid us to make the pilgrimage to God’s house, seeing that the same is a commandment of God upon us?” But the caliph answered them, “Has not Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri [the traditionalist who knew many of the Companions of the Prophet] told you how the Apostle of God did say ‘Men shall journey to but three mosques, the Holy Shrine (at Mecca), my mosque (at Medina) and the mosque of the Holy City (of Jerusalem)?’ So this last is now appointed to you (as a place of worship) in place of the Holy Shrine of Mecca. And this Rock, of which it is reported that the Apostle of God set his foot when he ascended into heaven, shall be to you in the place of the *Kaaba*.” Then Abd al-Malik built above the rock a dome and hung it around with curtains of brocade, and he instituted doorkeepers for the same, and the people took up the custom of circumambulating the rock, even as they had paced around the *Kaaba*, and the usage continued thus all the remaining days of the dynasty of the Umayyads.<sup>56</sup>

For Sunni Islam this text is difficult, as it suggests that this much-admired caliph would have considered displacing the Ka’ba and forbidding pilgrimage to Mecca: the most fundamental obligation of the religion. Yet circumstances could be seen as lending credence to the allegation. Given the fierceness of the struggle, building the Dome could have been a strategic part of his war with the Shi’a in Mecca; a struggle that ended with the destruction of the Ka’ba, and triumph of the Sunni.

Whether or not the intent was to displace the Ka’ba, so strong was the form and presence of the Dome that it inevitably became a destination for the faithful – a place of pilgrimage:

It was the fifth of Ramadan of the year 458 [March 5, 1047 CE] that I thus came to the Holy City; and the full space of a solar year had elapsed since I had set out from home, having all that time never ceased to journey onward, for in no place had I yet sojourned to enjoy repose. Now the men of Syria and of the neighboring parts call the Holy City [Bayt al-Muqaddas] by the name of al-Quds [“the Holy”]. And the people of these provinces, if they are unable to make the hajj, will go up at the appointed season to Jerusalem and there perform their rites, and upon the feast day slay the sacrifice, as it is custom to do (at Mecca on that same day). There are years when as many as 20,000 people will be present in Jerusalem during the first days of (the pilgrimage month of) Dhu al-Hajj.<sup>57</sup>

Umar’s appropriation of Temple Mount for Islam was a brilliant tactical act. It established an ancient foundation for the new religion, voiding the

prophecy of Christ and resanctifying the ground of the Jews. It was the importance of Mount Moriah and its association with Abraham in the books of the Jews that led Umar to commandeer it. Malik's Dome then affirmed the superiority of the new faith and the victory of Islam. Its symbolic decoration and above all, the texts, enforced his message. However the conception and construction of the Dome should be seen as but one part – albeit the most lasting – of Malik's vast plan to Islamize the peoples in all the lands under his control. By the end of the Umayyad period the Islamic empire stretched from the Himalayas to Gibraltar. Malik restructured the administration of all territories, never excluding those of other faiths from holding power, and made Arabic the official language, which had begun to displace Greek as the language of the church even before he came to power. And finally he issued a new and singular coinage across the empire, imprinting on it the same message as in the Dome of the Rock – “there is no God but God.”

The Dome (Figure 5.3) possesses exceptional qualities of oneness and universality. In ancient Rome the power of any one object was always secondary to the power of the city. The structure of Christian Jerusalem was similar, where even the most sacred of the Christian shrines the Tomb of Christ, and the Holy Sepulcher, were contained within the overall order of the city. In part, the dominance and independence of the Dome was achieved because of the Christian abandonment of Temple Mount, but it was also part because the new rulers had no physical place in the past history of Jerusalem. The followers of the Prophet who came to the city in the decades after the conquest made no attempt to occupy Christian districts. This detachment gave Malik the opportunity to create a structure that not only confirmed the power of the new faith and the new administration, but also gave it an authority wholly independent of Christian reality. The Ka'ba in Mecca had clearly established for the Arab peoples the divine force of a single dominant structure. In the Dome of the Rock, the idea of Allah is separate from the human. It is a heavenly vessel, either just arrived or preparing to engage the heavens. It could not fail to inspire the most extravagant myths (Figure 5.4).

### The Rock

The Noble Sanctuary became a necessary stop on the path to Mecca, on the Hajj, and, as the numbers of pilgrims grew so did the myths and traditions attached to the Dome, and especially to the Rock it sheltered. These myths and traditions were encouraged by religious leaders, but also



Figure 5.3 Among the earliest photographs of the Dome on Temple Mount from the east. From *Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem*, photographs by Sergeant J. M. McDonald and P. Bergheim. 1865.

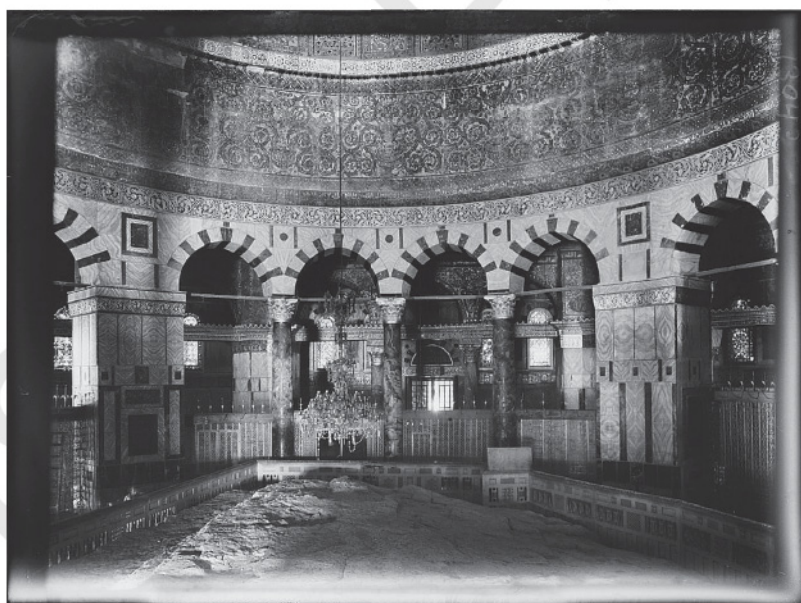


Figure 5.4 The interior of the Dome in the early twentieth century. From the Matson (G. Eric and Edith) Photograph Collection in the Library of Congress, call number LC-DIG-matpc-00526.

desired by the pilgrims; they enhanced the aura of sanctity on the Mount and stimulated the imaginations of the faithful. In this, Islam was learning from the Christians, for whom pilgrimage and tales of the miraculous were central, not only in sustaining the faith, but in maintaining the finances of the church. In Islam, some myths grew out of the Qur'an and some from the *Hadiths*, the elaborate texts that sought to clarify the words of the Prophet.<sup>58</sup> Many had echoes in Jewish and Christian myth, and as they evolved their many forms became intertwined one with another.

By the ninth century, these traditions were circulated widely; they strongly suggested the spiritual benefits of visiting Temple Mount. Among them was the assertion that al-Aqsa on the Noble Sanctuary was the first place of prayer after the formation of the Ka'ba, and only forty years younger. Here the concern was not with the age of the building, but of prayers that had been offered here since the time of Solomon. A prayer said here was five hundred times more valuable than prayers said elsewhere (there were variations in these estimates of worth). It was believed to be one of the few places where God permitted the creation of a building in his name and in which his unutterable name could be spoken. It was here that God lifted Jesus to Heaven, and Muslim myth agreed with the Christian view that here Christ would return to earth. As this Rock was the first land to appear above the waters after the flood, it was therefore closest to heaven. And its divine power would prevent the creatures of the apocalypse from getting to it. This is where the first man, Adam, was created, and where he died. It is where Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac and where his bones are interred (Figure 5.5).<sup>59</sup>

The most powerful of these traditions grew out of the first lines of Sura 17, titled *The Children of Israel*:

Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the remote mosque of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our signs; surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing.

Much of the Qur'an is thus engaging, demanding explanation and explication, and it was the interpretation of this passage that gave form to both al-Isra, Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Jerusalem, and to the Mi'raj, his ascent to heaven and audience with God. Where was "the remote mosque," the furthest temple, al-Aqsa, in Arabic? How was the servant, Muhammad, carried by night? And slowly the answers emerged: he was carried by the



**Figure 5.5** The surface of the Rock beneath the Dome, A superb photograph from the early twentieth century. Stereoscopic image taken between 1900 and 1920. From the Matson (G. Eric and Edith) Photograph Collection in the Library of Congress, call number LC-M32-A-64.

Angel Gabriel on a great winged steed, al Buraq, (Lightning), carried from Mecca to the Sinai, to Bethlehem and on to Jerusalem. Finally swooping down on to al-Haram al-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, where it was tethered to the ring in a rock that had been used by all past prophets as they began their journey to heaven. Here he was greeted by all the prophets who had preceded him; Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and the many others. Then there



Dome of the Rock

arose from a fissure in the Rock that now lies beneath the Dome a golden ladder reaching into the heavens. This he slowly ascended to enter and into the presence of God. And it was then that the word of God was revealed as it had been to those who preceded him, but Muhammad would be the final prophet (Figure 5.6).

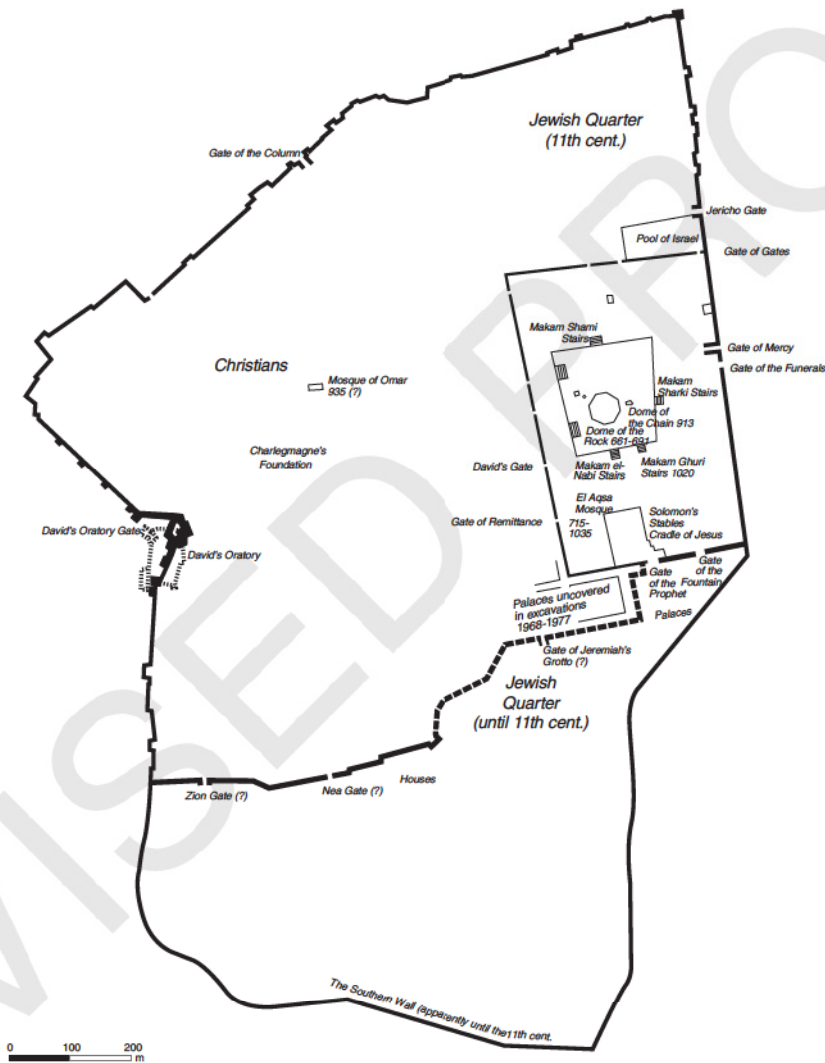


Figure 5.6 Islamic Jerusalem. Maps © Carta Jerusalem, have been redrawn by permission.

Within the Dome of the Rock believers are in the presence of the place where the prophet was carried to heaven. Al-Isra and wal-Mi'raj the "Night Journey" transformed Temple Mount into al-Haram al- Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary.

### Notes

1. From Al-Muqadasi: *Description of Syria including Palestine* 22–23. In Guy Le Strange (1971), *Palestine Pilgrims Text Society* 3, Reprint. New York: AMS Press New York 1971. In Peters, *Jerusalem*, p. 239. Al-Muqaddasi, Arab traveler (946–1000), was a geographer, and author of a noted work on the culture and life of the diverse peoples of the Islamic empire.
2. The Ka'ba pre-dated Muhammad's formation of Islam. His house in Medina was evolved into a gathering place and was not formed as architecture.
3. Sura 17, *The Children of Israel*: 4–7, The Holy Qur'an. All quotations from the Qur'an are from the University of Michigan Library On Line eBook Initiative *The Koran*, translated by M. H. Shakir and published by Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1983.
4. Most Muslims believe that it was Ishmael not Isaac whom Abraham (Ibrahim) planned to sacrifice and it was Ishmael himself who convinced Abraham that his dream would be fulfilled in the sight of Allah.
5. All the modern commentaries are based on the early biographies (eighth and ninth century), especially the Sirah of Ibn Ishaq.
6. Sura 2, *The Cow*: 142–144, The Holy Qur'an.
7. The concept of the mosque is any setting in which prayers said; it need not be a building.
8. E. F. Peters (1993), *The Distant Shrine, The Islamic Centuries in Jerusalem*, p. 49. © 1993 AMS Press, New York, with permission.
9. From Mahmoud M. Ayoub (1984), *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*. Albany: State University of New York Press. In Peters, *Jerusalem*, pp. 168–169,
10. Sura 29, *The Spider*: 46, The Holy Qur'an.
11. The Romans had named it *Arabia Felix*, literally "Arabia the Happy."
12. Pliny the Elder (CE 23–79) ridiculed these stories and boldly declared that "all these tales, however, have been evidently invented for the purpose of enhancing the price of these commodities." It was around this time that the delegation was sent out by the Emperor of China to make formal contact with Rome [*Rum* to the Chinese]. Arab traders created so many difficulties that the mission was abandoned. The imperial court in Rome first became interested in China when they captured silk banners during a battle of the Persians; they had never seen such a luxurious fabric.

*Dome of the Rock*

143

13. Such a business depended not only on close ties with the families controlling the shipping but on knowledge of the countries with whom they would trading: not just what they produced, the nature of their produce, but the character of their cities, their ways of life, their religion. The exchange was based not only on the spices that had long been sought-after in the West but in understanding the tastes and desires of those at the other end of the exchange. So the people of Mecca, by necessity, were not only aware of the wealth of the great cities of Byzantium; they would have had an equal sense of the much more extensive cultures and peoples of Asia.
14. The stability of this trade and its importance to economies would have produced a key awareness of political events in India and beyond. The political structure of southern India was well developed. Trade was conducted with the trinity of Tamil powers in the region (namely the Cara, Coga, and P'ya kingdoms). Records from the region in CE 200 tell of the purchase of Roman gold and lamps and the pleasure of Roman wine; a tantalizing glimpse of the richness of the trade exchange. They might have been aware of the unification of China in the Sui dynasty and beatific influence of Buddhism, which set the stage for the great and stable dynasty of the Tang.
15. It is estimated that Syria had lost more than half its population to the bubonic plague during the sixth century (see chapter IV, notes 39 and 40). The plague continued to meander across the Middle East until well into the eighth century.
16. Money was made at each point of transfer along the way, greatly multiplying the price of the goods by the time they reached their final destination.
17. It was one of the most prosperous market centers in the region, a meeting point of the caravan routes from the south and the crucial roads that linked Baghdad, Persia, and Transoxiana with the Mediterranean.
18. Protected by being transformed into a fortress centuries ago.
19. Adjacent to the enigmatic *Cryptoporticus*, an elegantly shaped subterranean tunnel whose function remains a mystery.
20. Ibn Hisham 1/180–183; Za'd Al-Ma'ad 1/17.
21. Led by King Khosrow II grandson of the warrior king Khosrau I.
22. Sura 30, *The Romans*: 2–3, The Holy Qur'an.
23. Sura 30, *The Romans*: 4, The Holy Qur'an.
24. From W. E. Kaegi (1969) "Initial Byzantine reactions to the Arab Conquest," *Church History* 38: 139–149. In Peters, *Jerusalem*, p. 175.
25. Christian sources record that the patriarch would only surrender the city to the caliph, so Umar was summoned.
26. Guy Le Strange (1965, reprinted from the original edition of 1890), *Palestine under the Muslims*, p. 140. Beirut: Khayats.
27. In general terms this takes the form of the treaties that Muhammad had made in establishing a hold on the cities of southern Syria.

28. From Tabari, *Annals I*. In Peters, *Jerusalem*, p. 186.
29. He died in 923 CE.
30. This text is clear about its source: "on the authority of al-Walid ibn Muslim, it is reported as coming from a shaykh of the sons of Shadad ibn Aws, who had heard it from his father, who held it from his grandfather."
31. Literally "dunghill"; this was a conscious corruption of the Arabic word for the Anastasis, *al Kayama*.
32. Le Strange, *Palestine under the Muslims*, p. 141.
33. The most elaborate is from Islamic sources and concerns the reaction of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius to a letter from Muhammad inviting him to commit to Islam:

Al-Walid states on the authority of Sa'id ibn Abd al-Aziz that the letter of the Prophet [calling on world leaders to acknowledge his prophethood] had come to the emperor [Heraclius] while he was residing in the Holy City. Now at that time there was over the Rock in the Holy City a great dungheap which completely masked the prayer niche of David and which the Christians had put there in order to offend the Jews; and further, even the Christian women were wont to throw their (menstrual) cloths and clouts in the place so that there was a pile of them there. Now when the emperor had read the letter of the Prophet, he cried out: "O men of Rum, you are the ones who will be slain on this dungheap because you have desecrated the sanctity of this sanctuary. It will be with you just as it was with the Children of Israel who were slain because of the blood of John, son of Zakariyya." (Le Strange, *Palestine under the Muslims*, p. 139).

34. Peters, *The Distant Shrine*, p. 51.
35. According to Guy Le Strange in *Palestine Under the Muslims*, he was a liar.
36. Peters, *The Distant Shrine*, p. 50.
37. The term al-Aqsa has only been applied to the building in the last hundred years; previously it was known as al-Mugatta, which translates as the covered place: al-Aqsa referred to whole area.
38. Among the places Arculf visited were the sacred sites of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee; Damascus and Tyre; and the Nile River and the volcanic Aeolian Islands (modern Eolie Islands). He drew plans of the churches of the Holy Sepulcher and of Mount Zion in Jerusalem, of the Ascension on Olivet, and of Jacob's Well at Shechem. His journeys came to the attention of the Venerable Bede, who inserted a brief summary of it in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Bede also wrote a separate and longer digest that endured throughout the middle ages as a popular guidebook to the eastern holy places.
39. *Pilgrimage of Arculfus in the Holy Land*, Translated by Rev. James Rose Macpherson, B. D. (1895), London.

*Dome of the Rock*

145

40. Ed. A. Holtz (1971), *The Holy City, Jews on Jerusalem*, pp. 122–123. New York: W. Norton.
41. Bernard Lewis (1974), “On That Day . . .” *Melanges d’Islamologie*. Leiden: E. J. Brill. It continues:

And Israel will be freed of all their sins  
 And will no more be kept far from the house of prayer.  
 Israel will go forth from the City and turn eastwards,  
 And taste no bread for five and four days.  
 And their Messiah will be revealed and they will be consoled.  
 And they will share pleasant secrets with their King;  
 And they will raise praises to their King;  
 And all the wicked will not rise up in the Judgment.

42. Reigning from 656 to 661.
43. Armstrong, *Jerusalem*, p. 235.
44. Shiite Muslims consider burial in Karbala a path to paradise.
45. Peters, *Jerusalem*, p. 377.
46. *The Mishna Yoma* 5:5. Translated from Hebrew by H. Danby: Oxford U P, Oxford, 1933.
47. Oleg Graybar (1959), “The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,” *Ars Orientalis* III, 33–62. Ann Arbor, 1959. Also in *The Haram Al-Sharif; An Essay in Interpretation* BRIIFS vol. 2, 2, 2000 ([http://www.riifs.org/journal/essy\\_v2no2\\_grbar.htm](http://www.riifs.org/journal/essy_v2no2_grbar.htm), accessed April 2, 2012). Graybar is the most insightful scholar on the Dome.
48. Graybar, “The Umayyad Dome.”
49. Apart from the insertion of the name of a later caliph.
50. In Islam where an image of any kind was suspect, truth lay in the word.
51. [www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/DoTR.html](http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/DoTR.html) (accessed April 2, 2012).
52. Sura 4, *The Women*: 171, Holy Qur’an (U. Michigan).
53. Peters, *The Distant Shrine*, p. 60.
54. Le Strange, *Palestine Under the Muslims*.
55. Peters, *The Distant Shrine*, p. 63.
56. Le Strange, *Palestine Under the Muslims*.
57. From Nasir-i Khusraw (1971), *Diary of a Journey through Syria and Palestine*, G Le Strange, Palestine: Pilgrims Text Society 4. Reprint, New York: AMS Press, New York. In Peters, *Jerusalem*. p. 244.
58. The earliest collections are associated with Muqati b Suleimani, who died in 767 only two generations after the Dome was complete.
59. This last may have been a confusion of the Land of Moriah with the Mount Moriah, confusion present, as we have seen, in the writings of Josephus.