

Dedicated to Oleg Grabar

SHAPE OF THE HOLY

Moshe Sharon

BACKGROUND

There is an Arabic tradition that says that in 17/638 (or thereabouts) Jerusalem surrendered to a minor Arab commander by the name of Khālid ibn Thābit from the clan of Fahm (Balādhurī 1956: 165). This tradition, copied by later authors with some additions from other accounts (cf. Musharraf 1995: 54 n. 4), is, to the best of my knowledge, singular among the mass of traditions that bestow the honour of receiving the capitulation of the Holy City on far more important personalities, whose names play a central part in the tales that make up the early history of Islam. This is the reason that this particular short tradition seems to be more trustworthy than all the rest. (Musharraf 1995; Balādhurī 1956: 164–165; Ṭabarī 1: 2402 *infra* ff. For the study of these traditions, see Busse 1968: 443–444; Busse 1984: 73 ff.; Busse 1986: 149–150; Busse 1998b: 96.)

Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, had by then lost all hope of relief from Constantinople, seeing that all the major cities of Syria, Damascus included, had opened their gates to the invading Muslim armies. (See Busse 1986: 150 and n. 2 for bibliography; Sharon 2007: 300–301.) Most of these armies had already moved either to the north or to the south, subjugating whatever remained of the Syrian and African provinces of the Byzantine – East Roman Empire. The Arabic sources report that Caesarea remained the only city on the Syrian littoral that refused for a long time to follow the example of the other major urban centres of Syria, and was brought under siege. This cut it off from the Palestinian hinterland but not from the marine lines of communication with the centre of the empire. It was, however, only a question of time before it fell into Muslim hands.

Among the many stories that connect the fall of Jerusalem with illustrious names, several bestow the honour of its conquest on Mu‘āwiyah, a member of the Arab, Meccan, aristocratic family of Umayyah, who was destined, 23 years later,

to be the first member of this family dynasty to rule over the newly created Islamic empire. (Balādhurī 1956: 166–168; Goitein 1982: 169)

Jerusalem was an isolated city at the best of times, built on the edge of the Judean desert and exposed to bands of bandits and nomadic marauders, particularly when effective rule of the central government was lacking. It had held out against the invading Arabs for a little longer since the latter spread themselves throughout the countryside and never actually laid proper siege to the city, or for that matter to any fortified city. They had neither the technical means, nor the experience or the need to besiege such a fortified town. Jerusalem of the early 7th century – the heart of the Christian world, the centre of religious sentiments, pious aspirations and practice, holy history and legend (Prawer 1996: 317, 326–327) – was a truly strong bastion. It was an example of a late antiquity Roman city, boasting imperial strength, with its thick walls, scores of towers, and imposing well-defended gates. (See the description of the city by Arculf, the late 7th-century Christian traveller, in Wright 1848: 1–2.)

Fortunately there is a non-Arabic source – an eyewitness description of the circumstances that led to the fall of Jerusalem: the testimony of Sophronius, the patriarch of Jerusalem. In his Synodic epistle of the year 634, at the very beginning of the Arab invasion, he still expressed the hope that God would grant power to the Emperor

to break the barbarian arrogance, and above all that of the Saracens who, because of our sins unexpectedly rose against us with their cruel and bestial mode of thinking and their evil and heretical impudence, and ransacked everything. (von Schönborn 1972: 89–90; Abel 1912)

These words reflect total faith in the Emperor's ability to halt the Arab invasion. Sophronius gives no details about the invasion itself nor of its repercussions, except for a general remark about the Arabs "ransacking everything". (Cf. von Schönborn 1972: 90–91.) However in the course of the next two years, when the ineffectiveness of the Imperial army in direct combat with the invaders became apparent, Sophronius's tone changed. In his Theophany sermon delivered in 637, or probably even before, he described with anguish the destruction inflicted by the invaders:

What has caused the invasions of the barbarians to multiply, and the legions of the Arabs to rise against us...? Why is the flow of blood continuous and why are the corpses the prey of the birds of the sky? Why are the churches destroyed and the Cross profaned? The abomination of the destruction was foretold by the prophet: the Saracens are overrunning the lands that were forbidden to them; sacking the cities; laying waste to the fields; surrendering villages to flames; demolishing the sacred monasteries. They resist the Roman armies, carrying off the spoils of war, adding victory to victory, aligning themselves against us and boasting that they will conquer the entire world. (von Schönborn 1972: 91, who quotes Abel's French translation, p. 120.)

The difference between Sophronius's two testimonies is striking both in content and spirit. In his sermon, a short time before he decided to capitulate to the Arabs, he speaks of the destruction of cities, villages and monasteries emphasizing the defeat of the Imperial armies, sees the destruction as the fulfillment of the words of prophecy, and describes other atrocities of the Arab invaders. In contrast to this, in his Synodic epistle, three years earlier, he had predicted that, with God's help, the Imperial armies would put an end to the Arabs' arrogance and would crush and humiliate them before the Emperor as they had done in the past.

Sophronius was witness to the new situation where Bedouin and their flocks were scattered all over the environs of Jerusalem and even the journey to nearby Bethlehem was fraught with danger. His sermon was, perhaps, one final plea to the Emperor to come to the aid of the Holy Land and the Holy City in repulsing the nomad invaders. It is clear from both his testimonies however, that the Arab presence around the city was not a real siege, and that the decision to capitulate was made not out of distress but rather out of despair. There was no point in refusing to follow the lead of the other major Syrian cities that sometimes even welcomed the invaders.

When the decision to capitulate was taken, Sophronius had only this one minor Arab commander on the spot to whom he could offer the Holy City. (The story reminds us of a similar event that occurred in 1917 when the keys of the city of Jerusalem were offered to two cooks from General Allenby's army, whom the notables of Jerusalem mistook to be the representatives of the victorious British army.)

Arabic sources describing the event, and colouring it with many details, do not add much to this short reference. They all introduced the tale that the Patriarch demanded ratification of the capitulation agreement by the Caliph himself, and history willed it that what seems to be the oldest tradition about the surrender of Jerusalem, to Khālid b. Thābit al-Fahmī should fall almost into oblivion. (Balādhurī 1956: 165) Since some three generations after its occupation, Jerusalem emerged in its full glory within Islamic religious thought and practice, and also became the chosen site for extensive Imperial building activity that aimed at transforming it from a predominantly Christian town into a holy city for the new religion.

The Islamic tradition about its conquest was shaped and recorded at least a century after the actual event took place. By then, its Islamic sanctity had already been well established, and its name became forever attached to Islamic hagiography. It was, therefore, no longer possible for the first association of Islam with Jerusalem to remain a mundane, or even obscure event. This is the reason why, not long after the fall of the city, its conquerors realized how important the event was, and many prominent Muslim personalities wished to crown themselves with the responsibility for this historical event. From the multitudes of traditions that evolved around the fall of Jerusalem, one in particular took precedence, and as time

passed, replaced all others as the “canonical report” about the conquest. (Ṭabarī 1: 2402 ff.) This tradition attributes the conquest of Jerusalem to Caliph ‘Umar (634–644), and describes the events of his taking possession of the city in great detail, culminating with his standing on the Temple Mount and establishing the first mosque there. The choice of ‘Umar for the occupation of Jerusalem and for the historical role of beginning its transformation into an Islamic holy place is far from being an accident. (For detailed study of the traditions about ‘Umar and Jerusalem, see Busse 1986: 151 ff., and the complete documentation there.)

THE MESSIANIC ASPECT

Jerusalem breathes messianism. Both Judaism and Christianity, each in its own way, regard Jerusalem as the place where their messianic aspirations will be fulfilled. For the Jews, the Messiah, a scion of the house of David, will establish his throne in Jerusalem, the city of his ancestor, renewing the Jewish kingdom and freedom. For the Christians the Messiah, who appeared in human form also as the son of David, and died, was resurrected, and ascended to heaven as the Son of God, will return to Jerusalem, the place of his passion, death and ascension, and will usher in the End of Days and the Millennial Age. (Cf. Prawer 1996: 323–324.)

The Islamic tradition about the conquest of Jerusalem is also imbued with messianic charge. Caliph ‘Umar is the most venerated figure in Sunnī Islam after the Prophet himself. This is not only because of his role as the great champion of Islam next to the Prophet during the formative years of the new religion, as described in the later canonized biographies, but also because these biographies emphasize the title of *al-fārūq* bestowed on him, and cherish the image that goes together with this title. Even the plain (and erroneous) interpretation of this word in the Arabic sources: ‘he who differentiates (*farrāqa*) between right and wrong’, is already charged with the idea of divine choice and divine grace, more so the true original meaning of the word which is of Aramaic origin and simply means, ‘Saviour’, ‘Deliverer’ – in other words: ‘Messiah’. (Cf. Bashear 1990.) The sophisticated Islamic tradition therefore describes ‘Umar’s, the “Saviour’s”, entrance into Jerusalem as a messianic event. (Busse 1984: 73 ff.; Busse 1986: 164–165)

Like Christ, ‘Umar reaches the city from the Mount of Olives and Gathsemane, enters through the Eastern (St. Stephen’s) gate, and goes to the Temple Mount, discovers the place of Solomon’s Temple and restores worship to the ancient holy place by building a mosque. (Busse 1986: 164–165; Ṭabarī 1: 2408–9)

All these tales were accompanied by ancient prophecies recited to the Caliph by Jews, who had access to the ancient Scriptures and esoteric knowledge (*ilm*). Thus on meeting ‘Umar, a Jew from Damascus “says” to the Caliph: “Peace be on thee O, *Fārūq*! Thou art the possessor of Jerusalem (Īlyā).” (Ṭabarī 1: 2403;

Bashear 1990: 67) Another Jew, a convert to Islam, on seeing the Caliph clearing the Temple Mount of the refuse that had accumulated there during the generations of deliberate Christian neglect, recites yet another prophecy to him: “Rejoice O Jerusalem, for the *Fārūq* will come to thee and clean thee from all that is within thee!” (Ṭabarī 1: 2409) These and many similar traditions, though developed, and receiving currency long after the events, nevertheless capture the mood of the time and the spirit of Jerusalem that the Muslims encountered early in the 7th century. (Cf. Musharraf 1995: 44 ff.) Messianic ardour was in the air, and let us not forget that Messianic or eschatological ideas are central to the Islamic message. Above all the Prophet emphasized the fact that the Day of Judgment was at hand, that God, the Lord of the Day of Judgment, was about to usher in the “Hour” and all was set for the judgment of the human race. Tradition tells us that the Prophet used to lift two fingers, touch one to the other, and say: “There is this much space between me and the Hour.” (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 1972: 132–135) The Qur’ān opens with praise to God the “Lord of the Day of Judgment”, and the Holy Book of Islam is rich with eschatological references and descriptions. (In spite of the modern works on the subject, it is worthwhile, in this context, to revive interest in Paul Casanova’s book *Mohammed et la fin du monde*.)

CHRISTIANITY IN JERUSALEM

Jerusalem, falling into Muslim hands in the early stages of the conquest, was the most natural place to be identified with the Qur’ānic and early Islamic eschatological ideas and visions. Both Judaism and Christianity had long recognized the city as the scene of the Last Judgment and the arena for the drama of messianic times. When the Muslims conquered Jerusalem it had already been under the rule of Christianity for 300 years. Christian holy places of all kinds stood as physical testimony to the holy history of Christianity, commemorating the life, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, as well as other events connected with the Virgin and the early martyrs and apostles. But above all, two Christian edifices told the story of the great expectations of the Second Coming that in 630 was felt to be more close at hand than ever. One was the complex of the Holy Sepulchre; the other, the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives. These two symbols of the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ stood, one opposite the other, kindling the faith that Jesus would soon return to the place from which he left earth, to establish the eternal new divine order. In between the two, on Mount Moriah, lay the huge rectangular space of the Jewish Temple in complete desolation, mute testimony to Jesus’s prophecy and proof, as far as the Christians were concerned, of the victory of their faith over Judaism.

The Muslims found the city throbbing with Christian piety and full of different Christian institutions, an impregnable fortress guarding its treasures, and one empty, unoccupied space – the Temple Mount. The Christian sanctity of Jerusalem had a shape: churches, basilicas, monasteries, pilgrim hostels, martyrions, chapels and scores of holy relics of various kinds. The holy shapes were living spaces, and piety was expressed in various kinds of rituals by the faithful who came to the city from all over the Christian world. On 21 March 630, Heraclius returned the remnants of the Holy Cross, which had been taken to Ctesiphon by the Persians some sixteen years earlier, to Jerusalem. (Sharon 2007: 308) True, the glorious procession of the Emperor in the Holy City marked the return of the Empire, but the sight of the Christian Emperor returning the true symbol of the death and resurrection of Christ to Jerusalem was a momentous event, which only heightened the messianic expectations. Was it not the time for the return of Christ himself once His Cross was restored to his sepulchre? It is not difficult to see that the atmosphere of messianic expectation, which existed for totally opposing reasons among the Jews and among the Christians, influenced the incipient Islamic eschatological ideas. There can be hardly any question that the sanctity of Jerusalem immediately attracted the Muslims, and the rather ephemeral eschatological visions of the Qur'ān found their physical expression in the Holy city.

ISLAMIZATION

The process of Jerusalem acquiring sanctity in Islam was only natural, taking into consideration that so many Qur'ānic figures could be identified with sites in Jerusalem.

All these Qur'ānic figures are Biblical; and once the Muslims came into contact with Jerusalem as the physical holy space, and with the people who belonged to the Biblical world of knowledge and faiths, all the Qur'ānic figures received concrete dimensions, and were set within identified locations in the city. Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, Mary, Jesus and other Biblical figures were identified with various holy places in Jerusalem when the Muslims came into contact with local popular tradition as well as with the more institutionalized holy geography. Jerusalem of the late 630s was a Christian city, as far as space was concerned, but underlying this physical space was a long established Jewish tradition. The 500 years, which had elapsed since the Jews were finally banished from Jerusalem by the Romans, and the 300 years of state-Christianity could not obliterate this tradition for many reasons. Not least is the fact that Christianity itself, though emphasizing the role of Jesus and the people who surrounded him, relied heavily on the Old Testament, and preserved the memory of its major personalities. But there was more than that. The place of the Jewish Temple, desolate as it had

been left, was nevertheless a space that could not be ignored. Its desolation was a reminder to the Christians about the success and truth of their religion, but at the same time even the negative attitude to the space of the Temple Mount preserved its memory. This was the place of the Temple, which could not be rebuilt until Jesus's Second Coming, yet *it was the place of the Temple*. It was therefore, not surprising that the Temple Mount, so intimately connected in tradition with such figures as Abraham, David and Solomon (the Muslims had no, or very little, knowledge about the Second Temple or about Herod), attracted the Muslims when their rulers embarked upon reshaping Jerusalem as a Muslim Holy place. (Cf. Busse 1986: 164–165; Busse 1998a.)

Mount Moriah and the unusual perforated rock on the top of it became the heart of this process of the Islamization of Jerusalem. It was from this point that the holy took its shape. Oleg Grabar's book, *The Shape of the Holy* is dedicated to the process whereby Islam reshaped Christian Jerusalem into an Islamic holy city allied to Mecca and Madinah, the two holy shrines of Islam in Western Arabia. Grabar identified the period in which the Islamization of Jerusalem, from a physical point of view, took place, as the one that began with the conquest and ended with the Crusader occupation, namely between 638 and 1099. During this period Jerusalem came under the rule of several Muslim rulers. The early years of the Caliphate of Madinah (Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān) from 632 until 656; the Umayyad Caliphate from 661 until 750; direct Abbāsīd rule from 'Iraq from 750 until 878, and then a series of rulers from Egypt: Ṭūlūnids, Ikhshīdids and Fāṭimids, from 878 until the coming of the Crusades in 1099. Grabar regards the Umayyads, of all these rulers, as the most important as far as the shaping of Jerusalem as a Muslim holy place is concerned; and of all the Umayyad buildings he rightly regards the Dome of the Rock as the most significant edifice representing, more than anything else, the core of the process by which the Islamic holiness of Jerusalem was shaped.

THE SHAPE OF THE HOLY

Oleg Grabar has been fascinated by the Dome of the Rock for nearly 50 years. His article "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem" in *Ars Orientalis* 3 published in 1959 is still one of the best essays written on the subject, in spite of a few corrections that Grabar suggests in the new book. He was also more fortunate than other non-Muslim scholars in that he had the full co-operation of the Muslim Waqf authorities, and was allowed to examine many places on the Temple Mount or *al-Haram ash-Sharīf* (as the Muslims call it) that no non-Muslim nowadays would be allowed to examine, let alone record in detail. Last but not least, he had with him a most talented photographer, Saīd Nuseibeh, and computer experts Muhammad al-Asad and Abeer Audeh, all of whom naturally had free access to the Dome of

the Rock, the Aqṣā Mosque and to every other place on the Temple Mount whether above or below ground.

Throughout the book Grabar gives ample expression to his indebtedness to the assistance given to him by the Muslim authorities, and to the invaluable contribution of Saïd Nuseibeh in the production of such a beautiful book in which, for the first time, there is a full photographic record of the outer face (facing the outer ambulatory) of the major inscription of the Dome of the Rock from the time of its construction in 72/691–692 together with a great number of high quality photographs of samples of the magnificent mosaics and other ornamental elements at the Dome of the Rock and (to a lesser extent) the Aqṣā Mosque. Added value is supplied by the original computer enhanced rendering of Jerusalem and its various edifices in the Byzantine and Muslim periods. All these visual elements accompany a very detailed study by Grabar, in which he also sums up the state of the research on the subject.

Though aiming at describing the process that led to the shaping of Muslim Jerusalem, Grabar goes far beyond the study of the art and architecture of the buildings that reshaped the face of Christian Jerusalem. He deals with the historical problems that were involved in the process of the Muslim building in Jerusalem, and although he leaves a few questions open, the final product is a coherent, artistic, and very well structured work.

The emphasis that Grabar places on the Umayyads and the Dome of the Rock stems from the fact that this period and this particular building represent the time and space focal points around which the Islamic reshaping of Jerusalem revolved. (Cf. Grabar 1959: 33 n. 1.) The Dome of the Rock, built merely two generations after the Islamic conquest, is regarded as one of the most beautiful and fascinating monuments of early Islam. Saïd Nuseibeh rightly decided to dedicate a whole book to the visual representation of the Dome of the Rock. The result is outstanding. Every single detail of the Dome and its environment is presented in true colours, as is the Aqṣā Mosque and many details therein as well, thus creating the necessary artistic connection between the two major buildings that shape the space of the Holy Sanctuary of Jerusalem. Nuseibeh's photography represents not only superb quality and professionalism, but also deep understanding of the subject, and spiritual involvement in it. This is the photography of a lover and an admirer; nothing less than the art of the faithful transmitted with unusual tenderness, which can be perceived in the soft lighting of almost every photograph.

Nuseibeh rendered great service to Arabic epigraphy too. This is the first time, to my knowledge, that a set of photographs of the inscriptions on the outer, more obscure side of the octagonal arcade of the Dome of the Rock, has been produced, alongside the full set of the more accessible inscriptions of the inner octagonal arcade. Oleg Grabar reproduced the Arabic text of the inscriptions in *The Shape of the Holy* (Appendix B, pp. 184–186) – unfortunately with quite a few

mistakes – and provided a translation (pp. 59–60). A different translation appears in Nuseibeh's *Dome of the Rock* (pp. 78–79, 106–107). In both cases the text of the outer octagonal arcade comes first and that of the inner octagonal arcade second (following Max van Berchem). In this way the historical part of the inscription, namely the part that contains the name of the builder and the date of the building, appears in the *middle* of the long inscription (some 240 m), unless one regards the inscription on the outer face of the octagonal arcade, and the one on its inner face as two separate inscriptions. Such a possibility, though very remote, cannot be ruled out, and only in such a case, the order of the inscriptions is immaterial. However, since the writing on both faces of the octagonal arcade is one text, the order should be the one found in most of the dated Arabic inscriptions in which the historical part of the inscription appears at the end of the whole text and not somewhere in the middle.

In Saïd Nuseibeh's book the inscriptions on the inner face and those on the outer face are physically separated, but even so, he preferred to produce the one on the outer face of the octagonal arcade first, and the inner one second. It is clear that this is not an accidental choice of order: it stems from the understanding that the inscriptions were meant to be read by the visitors of the shrine. This seems unlikely, taking into consideration the fact that the outer ambulatory between the octagonal arcade and the outer wall of the building is too dark and too narrow, which makes observation, let alone the reading of the writing, almost impossible. One may also question the ability of the majority of the faithful to read altogether, especially such an inscription. However, assuming that the inscription also had a practical function and was supposed to have been read, I imagine that the present authors maintain that the worshippers and visitors were supposed to read the outer inscription moving clockwise, and then move to the inner inscription. I believe that naturally the first inscription that the supposed reader saw immediately, after visiting the Rock and turning to the *qiblah*, was the one clearly visible from the *inner* ambulatory. He then moved, while also circumambulating the Rock anti-clockwise, with the rock on his left, from the south eastwards then northwards, westwards and back to the *qiblah*. He then crossed the arcade, away from the Rock, and moved in the opposite direction: south-west-north-east-south.

But if the inscription is to be completely ignored, then the circumambulation of the Şakhrāh would be in accordance with the tradition quoted by Musharraf b. al-Murajjā (1995: 66), which says that “it is recommendable for him who enters the Şakhrāh to have it on his right side, encircling it differently than the circumambulation of the Holy House of Allah” which is anti-clockwise, turning the left arm to the Ka‘bah (*yustaḥabbu li-man dakhala aṣ-ṣakhrāh an yaj‘alahā ‘alā yamīnihi ḥattā yakūn bi-khilāf at-tawāf ḥawla bayt allāh al-ḥarām*). This could explain why Nuseibeh preferred to produce the *second half* of the inscription on the outer face first. However, since the inscription represents a very early period in the

development of Islam, I am convinced that it precedes the above tradition by a long time. This tradition developed much later in the form of a recommendation, not a law (*yustahabbu*), when organized Islamic ritual called for drawing a line between the religious activity at the Ka'bah and elsewhere. Moreover, the presence of such a tradition urging the worshipper to turn his right side to the Şakhrah can only mean that Muslims used to turn their *left* side to it exactly as they did encircling the Ka'bah, and following the order of the inscription.

THE DOME

Far more important than these technical considerations (which admittedly can also have some ritual aspects) is the Dome of the Rock itself, its shape, its location and the reason for its building against the background of Christian Jerusalem. The building of the Dome of the Rock opposite the Dome of the Holy Sepulchre, which had towered for over 300 years over the desolated area of the Temple Mount, challenged the Christian dominance of the city. The beauty of the Islamic building, which stood higher than the Holy Sepulchre, was dazzling. It was, without a doubt, a great work of art, and as such Muqaddasī, the Jerusalemite Arab geographer was correct when he said that his uncle convinced him that it was built in order to compete in beauty with the splendour of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. (Muqaddasī 1987: 139; for a full translation of the whole passage, see Grabar 1996.) Referring to the beauty of the building Grabar justifiably writes:

much of its power as a work of art derives from the almost embarrassing beauty of its features and the absence of any immediately identifiable message. In this sense, it is a remarkably contemporary work of art, which imposes itself by its forms more than by its meanings. (Grabar 1996: 116)

This is, more or less what Muqaddasī thought when he wrote that the builder of the Dome of the Rock wished to build such a beautiful edifice for the Muslims that they would not be enchanted by the Christian holy places. But the Dome of the Rock has much more to it, and Grabar meticulously examines the evidence of the four “documents” relating to it: the epigraphic evidence, the decorations, the shape of the building and its location. (Grabar 1996, Chapter 2)

As for the reasons for the building of the Dome of the Rock, he reviews the various opinions on the subject, but correctly refrains from accepting any particular one. The sources, none of which were contemporary with the building, present various views and explanations. The only contemporary sources are the inscriptions, just mentioned, and two others on copper plates over the eastern and northern gates (now removed). (Arabic text, Grabar 1996: 186, after van Berchem; *CIA* 2, nos. 216–217, pp. 246–255) These inscriptions carry a clear message: the Unity of God and the Prophecy of Muḥammad are true and the Sonship of Jesus and the Trinity

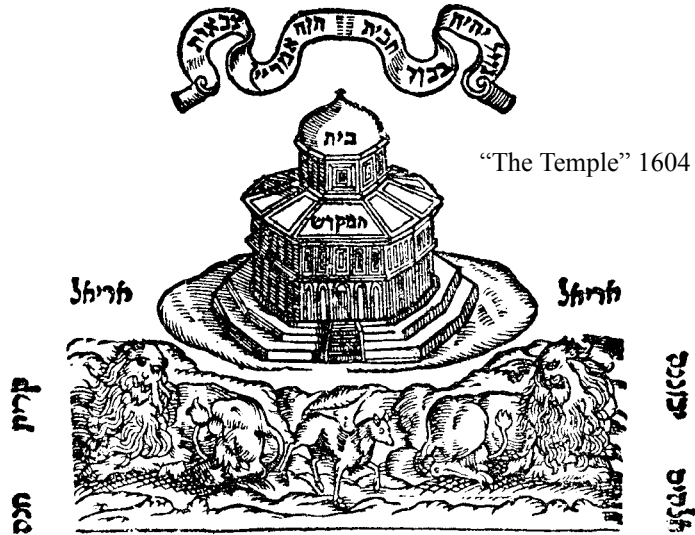
are false. Islam came to proclaim this ultimate truth which was the basis of Islamic life and the guidance for Imperial policy. This proclamation of Islamic truth which repeats itself many times in the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock also appears in abbreviated form on all the epigraphical material stemming from the time of the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705) the builder of the Dome of the Rock: on coins, milestones and other construction texts. (*CIA* 1: 17 ff.; *CIAP* 3: 94 ff.; Qedar 1988–1989: 27–28 and notes; Walker 1956: 353) Like many fashions, which began in the court and were imitated by the public, this simple declaration of faith became fashionable as well. “There is no God but Allah alone. He has no companion”, was the inscription that could be read on the new gold and silver coins that were entered into circulation around 696, and people, even privately, were probably repeating the verse or referring to it in graffiti. Thus I found a stone with an inscription in Rujm Šfār, a ruined Byzantine fortress on a route leading from the ‘Arabah to Beersheba, which reads: “I, Yūsuf ibn Zubayd al-Aylī do not associate anything with Allah (*lā ushriku bi allāh shay’an*).” The script of this inscription belongs to the later part of the 7th and early 8th century.

The anti-Christian policy represented by the Dome of the Rock is very clear from its inscription, but what otherwise was the function of this edifice? The choice of a dome over a circular structure surrounded by a double octagonal ambulatory is not accidental. This architectural shape was quite common, especially in buildings of a commemorative nature. Grabar points out that the Dome of the Rock belongs to a class of buildings that were built to make a statement, in this case to indicate the presence of Islam in full power and splendour, eclipsing both the Holy Sepulchre and the Nea (Justinian’s New Church of the Virgin). “It belonged to a relatively rare category of shrines, architectural compositions that seem more important because of what they are than by what happens in them.” (Grabar 1996: 106)

The Dome of the Rock was not a mosque, it was a shrine, which no doubt was built to honour and commemorate the rock over which the Dome itself was erected. What made the rock so important in the time of ‘Abd al-Malik? What did the Muslims know or learn about it which made it so important that they turned it into a symbol of Islamic presence, and statement of Islamic policy? The earlier sources call the building “The Dome of the Rock” – *Qubbat aṣ-Ṣakhrāh* or “Dome above the Rock” – *Qubbah ‘alā aṣ-Ṣakhrāh*, or “The Rock of the Temple” – *Ṣakhrat Bayt al-Maqdis*, or simply “The Rock” – *aṣ-Ṣakhrāh*. (Muqaddasī 1987: 139; Wāsiṭī 1979: 81; Musharraf 1995: 58–59) From the time of its construction the rock became the focus for scores of traditions of praise (*faḍā’il*).

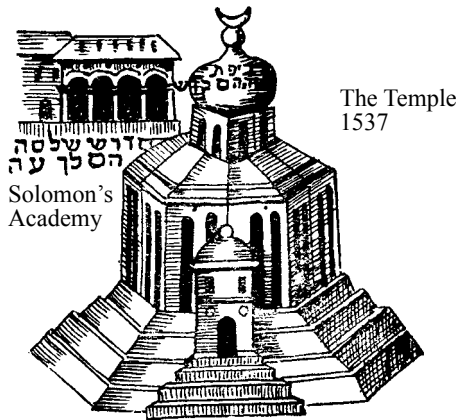
DOME AND TEMPLE

There is much that can be learnt from many of these traditions in spite of their late recording. They incorporate a number of ancient memories that are central to our discussion. The most important memory is that of the ancient Jewish Temple. It is impossible to decide when the tradition that the rock was situated inside the Temple, or that the Temple was built over it, was born, but the Muslims believed that it was the landmark of Solomon's Temple. The historical fact in this case is immaterial. It is common belief that turns a tradition into a historical fact. There is sound reason to assume that soon after the conquest, the Muslims together with Jews – who were permitted to return to the city and take up residence in it following the Muslim occupation – (Dinur 1975 (2): 134–135) attached themselves to the rock. The Jews had already uncovered it and they had developed around it annual pious rituals, first at the time of Emperor Julian who gave the Jews permission to rebuild the Temple in 362–363, and sometime later when they were permitted to visit the Temple Mount once a year on the 9th of the month of Āb to lament the destruction of the Temple. Some Christian sources say that when the Jews were allowed to visit the site of the ruined Temple under the Byzantines, they used to anoint the rock. (Avi Yonah 1970: 166–172, 192–194) This should not seem unusual for it follows an ancient Jewish tradition. Anointment, as a sign of consecration, is a Biblical practice, and one may well imagine the possibility that members of priestly families, joined by the common people, anointed the rock with oil every year, while others recited Psalms or Lamentations next to it. The fact that the Jews could show the Muslims the place of the (Solomonic) Temple was of great importance for the Muslim rulers in Syria.



“The Temple” 1604

The Dome of the Rock in Jewish books from 1604 (above) and 1537 (below)



The Temple 1537

Plate 1 The Dome of the Rock and the covered mosque (al-Aqṣā) in Jewish art.

In 1992 I proposed in an article in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (Sharon 1992), that the Dome of the Rock was built to symbolize the renewal of the Solomonic Temple, and thus served as the physical refutation of Christian belief in the necessity of its continued desolation. An early Jewish *midrash* entitled *Nistarot Rabbi Shim'on bar Yoḥay* (*Bet ha-Midrash* 3, 1967: 78–82; Küchler 1991: 121), though composed

some sixty years after the building of the Dome of the Rock, hailed the Muslims as the initiators of Israel's redemption, and a Muslim ruler as the builder of the "House of the Lord". (See Lewis 1976: 308–338 for interpretation and translation; Sharon 1992: 64 and notes.) In another Jewish apocalypse – *The Book of Zerubabel* (*Sefer Zerubabel*) – we find the direct identification of the Dome of the Rock with the Temple:

and he shall build the the House of the Lord the God of Israel. And he shall rule over the Islands of the sea and the people of the earth, more than anyone who had been before him and his name is 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān. (Wertheimer 1989 (2): 505)

The last Muslim ruler mentioned in this source is the successor of Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Malik ('Umar II); yet *The Book of Zerubabel* cannot be that early. It was well known to Jewish scholars in the 11th century, and must have been composed, at the latest, around the beginning of that century. (*JE* 1: 682) The fact that the identification of 'Abd al-Malik as the builder of the Temple continued to live for such a long time is proof that this must have been common knowledge, at least among the Jews. But around the 11th century it was still common knowledge among the Muslim traditionalists as well. In one of the earliest, pre-Crusade compilations of Muslim traditions about the Praises of Jerusalem (Wāsiṭī 410/1019), we find very elaborate Islamic traditions that refer to the Dome of the Rock as the Solomonic Temple. One tradition, speaking about the lighting of lamps in the Dome of the Rock simply says: "The Jews used to light the lamps of *Bayt al-Maqdis* (until the time of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz) – *kānat al-yahūd tusriju maṣābīḥ bayt al-maqdis.*" *Bayt al-Maqdis* is the exact Arabic rendering of the Hebrew *beit ha-miqdash* – the Temple – for clearly the tradition is not speaking about the lighting of the streets of Jerusalem. (Wāsiṭī 1979: 43, for the date, see the French introduction p. 8.)

The report about the Jews lighting the Temple's lamps (reminiscent of the lighting of the *Menorah* (candelabra) in the Temple) is repeated in elaborate traditions describing the rituals that used to take place at the Dome of the Rock (Wāsiṭī 1979: 81–82). It is impossible not to recognize in these rituals that were performed by the special "servants" (*khadam*) of the edifice using incense, holy ointment and oil lamps, the echo of the rituals at the Temple. But what is particularly interesting is that these traditions, while describing the service at the Dome of the Rock, move between it and the Temple service. They even mention the activity of the priests, the sons of Aaron (*wuld Hārūn*) and quote part of a Jewish prayer in Hebrew that the priests used to recite when they witnessed the miraculous descent of the fire of heaven: "and the sons of Aaron would then say: *bārūkh attā adunāyh* which means 'may the Compassionate be blessed, there is no god but He'." (Actually: 'Blessed [art] thou O Lord!' Clearly the transmitter of this tradition had no idea what the Hebrew words meant. Wāsiṭī 1979: 83) Only the sacrifices are missing to complete the picture of the Temple service superimposed on the Dome of the Rock.

There is nothing remotely Islamic in these rituals, and while reminiscent of the Temple service they also compete with the Church service when they describe in detail the use of candles, incense, special clothing, and hint at priesthood (the term *khadam* describing the servants in the holy sanctuary could easily mean priests). The traditions insist that all the ritual activity at the Dome of the Rock took place on Mondays and Thursdays (“and on each gate there were ten guards, and no one entered except on Mondays and Thursdays. Only the *khādim* could enter it on other days.” Wāsiṭī 1979: 83). Monday and Thursday have no meaning, and no ritual significance, in Islam; but these are days of particular sacredness in Jewish tradition and ritual (fasting, reading of the Torah in the synagogue, special supplications in the daily prayer and more). These traditions, which are not isolated, point in one direction: ‘Abd al-Malik’s building of the Dome of the Rock was meant to be a great and unusual statement of a political and religious nature. He refuted not only the major Christian articles of faith but skipped over Christianity altogether to the time of the greatest king-prophet of antiquity, to Solomon – Sulaymān – a major Qur’ānic figure who ruled men and demons (*uns* and *jinn*) from Jerusalem – and symbolically renewed his Temple and his rule. The Qur’ān appropriated Sulaymān for Islam, and ‘Abd al-Malik acquired his divine authority by rebuilding a mighty symbol for his temple, as if to say that with the rebuilding of the ultimate Temple, the glory of the great monotheistic *Muslim* king-prophet had finally been established defeating the polytheism of the Christian Trinity. Without saying it in so many words, ‘Abd al-Malik was the new Solomon, finally replacing the Emperor of Christianity. And by rebuilding the Temple of the great king of the past the Caliph gave shape to Islamic superiority not only as a ruling power but also as the ultimate divine truth. (Cf. Soucek 1976; Soucek 1993.)

It is significant to mention in this regard that in popular Jewish art the Solomonic Temple has been depicted in the form of the Dome of the Rock (Plates 1 and 2).



Plate 2 The Temple represented as the Dome of the Rock in the midst of Jerusalem on a Jewish ketubah (marriage contract) from Italy 1727. The Hebrew on top reads: ‘Jerusalem – mountains around it’ (Psalms 125: 2). (Original in the Jewish Museum in Berlin.)

Islamic tradition speaks about five Jewish families that were employed to clean the holy place and prepare wicks for the Dome's lamps immediately after it was built. There must be a kernel or more of truth in this tradition, which was faithfully kept by Muslim traditionalists for almost a thousand years. (Wāsiṭī 1979: 83; Mujīr 1973 (1): 274, 280–281) It is very difficult to imagine that the five Jewish families, who were said to have worked in the Dome of the Rock, were simple street sweepers. One would rather expect Jews from priestly families to be honoured with the task of serving in the place of the Holy Temple, even if this meant sweeping “the courts of the House of the Lord” (Cf. Psalms 92.). In those days there was no rabbinical prohibition against Jews entering the Temple area or even the possible site of the Holy of Holies. This prohibition was introduced into the Jewish rabbinical rules much later.

There was yet another function connected with the rock, which has to do with the messianic mood of the times. During my studies of inscriptions in the Negev I came across a very unusual inscription (0.40 x 0.39 m) incised into the natural rock in the vicinity of Kibbutz Sde Boker (Plate 3). The visible 6 lines of the inscription repeat several times part of the Qur'ānic verse Q 50:41 with a minor change. The original verse says: *‘*واستمع يوم يناد المناد من مكان قريب*’* and hearken unto the day whereon the crier shall call from a near place (*min makān^m qarīb^m*).

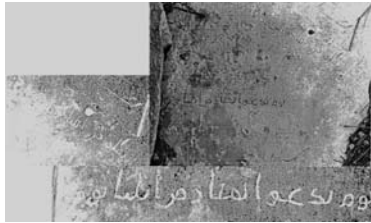


Plate 3 Inscription from the Negev relevant parts blackened and in negative.

The inscription, which is very worn, reads as follows:

(١) بسم الله (٢) رب موسى (٣) ومحمد يوم يدعو يوم [يدعو] (٤) المناد من
 ايليا يوم يناد [من] ايليا يوم ... (٥) ... الله رب عيسى وموسى (٦) حتى
 يوم يدعو المناد من ايليا يوم ...

In the name of Allah. The Lord of Mūsā and Muḥammad. In the day whereon the crier shall cry from Īlyā; the day whereon he shall call from Īlyā the day ... Allah the Lord of ‘Īsā and Mūsā. Until the day whereon the crier shall cry from Īlyā ...

Two changes are to be found in the inscriptions in comparison with the Qur'ānic verse. The first is the usage of the verb *yad 'ū* next to the usage of the original *yunādi*. The second change is the important one for our discussion: the words *min makān qarīb* ('from a near place') were replaced with the words *min ilyā* – from ilyā. The usage of the name ilyā for Jerusalem is significant for it means that the city continued to be called by its Roman Byzantine official name, and the traditions attributing to it its sacred name Bayt al-Maqdis had not been in circulation sufficiently long to bring about the changing of its name. Yet the person who repeatedly wrote and rewrote the same Qur'ānic verse had no problem in changing the words "from a near place" to "ilyā". The script of this inscription belongs to the beginning of the 8th century. It is possible that, by then, the very early commentaries on the Qur'ānic verses relating to the Day of Judgment were already in circulation and there was a clear identification of the "near place" with "the rock of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem". (Wāsiṭī 1979: 87–88 and notes)

The fact that such a text appears in an inscription over a rock in a remote place in the desert means that the idea of Jerusalem as the site of the Last Judgment had already been well spread among the Muslims. (Its Jewish and Christian origins are beyond doubt.) The verse, by the way, also shows that a Qur'ānic verse could easily be paraphrased at such an early stage of the development of Islamic tradition in the same way that the Jews made free use of Biblical verses, paraphrasing them when needed. However, no conclusions can be reached from these expository changes, or from the few Qur'ānic paraphrases in the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock, about the Qur'ānic text in general. In other words, if they exist they are not necessarily Qur'ānic variants.

Although the eschatological text from the Negev fits the function of the rock as the focus of the drama of the Day of Judgment, it is difficult to say, however, whether this tradition concerning the function of the rock was already in circulation at the time of 'Abd al-Malik and whether it played a significant role in his decision to build the Dome of the Rock, but there is hardly any doubt about its antiquity. Having said that, I am sure that the main reason for the building of the Dome was not to commemorate the site of the dramatic events of the Day of Judgment. The major evidence against such a conclusion is the text of the inscriptions both inside the Dome and over its eastern and northern gates. There is nothing in these inscriptions that even alludes to the Day of Judgment while their exaltation of Islam and its Prophet and the polemic anti-Christian message are clear and straightforward. (For various views on the subject, see Busse 1966; Busse 1968; Goitein 1950; Grabar 1988; Hamilton 1992; Khoury 1993; Mekeel-Matteson 1999; Najm 2001; Peters 1983; Rabbat 1989; Rabbat 1993; Rosen-Ayalon 1989.)

ARCHITECTURAL ORIGINS

The Shape of the Holy deals with many other buildings from the Umayyad period or attributed to that period on the Temple Mount and around it. It also offers a detailed examination of Jerusalem in the Fāṭimid period especially following the description of the city by the Persian traveler Nāṣir-i Khosraw, who visited Jerusalem early in 1047, two generations before the Crusades. (Nāser-e Khosrow 1977: 26–35) Making use of all that was published, and the Arabic sources, Grabar gives us a detailed description of the main mosque, which dominates the southern part of the Holy Sanctuary. In the Middle Ages, this mosque, which served as the major Friday Mosque of Jerusalem, was called *al-mughattā* – ‘the covered’ (cf. Muqaddasī 1987: 145) since the whole Temple Mount – *al-Haram ash-Sharīf* – was regarded to be the “Furthest Mosque” (*al-aqṣā*). The grand structure of the Mosque at the southern part of the enclosure of the Ḥaram was the covered prayer place, an integral part of the whole open space around it, which was, and still is, used for prayer when the weather permits. Incidentally, Wāsiṭī (1979: 81) quotes a tradition that says that ‘Abd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock “to protect the Muslims from the cold and heat”. The huge open courtyard is no less holy than the covered structure, which was completed by ‘Abd al-Malik’s heir and was subject to many repairs and modifications. This structure is far less problematic than the Dome of the Rock. It was originally built to serve as a Friday mosque adding to the glorification of the Temple Mount, and, in spite of its large size and imposing presence, accentuating the presence of the Dome of the Rock rather than diminishing it.

The two edifices, the Dome of the Rock and the covered Friday mosque, represent one plan. They are built on one axis (or symmetrical line) running through the middle of both of them. There is an open space between them and in it there is only the ablution pond, which is also built on the same axis. What we have therefore is an architectural document in which the two buildings and the space between them represent an architectural unity and express an architectural statement.

In a few places in his book Grabar points to the classical origins of the Dome of the Rock, which represents by its size and octagonal plan churches of great importance. Suffice it to mention the octagonal church on Mount Gerizim excavated by Y. Magen from 1979 until 1997 (Magen 2000a: 74–118; Magen 2000b: 136–138), and the octagonal church, the *Kathisma* (Κάθισμα), on the way from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, which was excavated, partly in 1992, and finally in 1997. The *Kathisma* is particularly important for the study of the Dome of the Rock. It was also built to commemorate a rock – the one on which Mary (*Theotokos* ‘mother of God’) heavy with child, sat to rest (hence the name Κάθισμα ‘seat’) on her way to Bethlehem. Similar to the church on Mount Gerizim, this church was also built in the 5th century, but unlike the former, retained its original plan. It was restored in the 6th century, converted into a mosque sometime in the 8th century

(a *mihrāb* was added to it), and was destroyed shortly afterwards. This particular church could well have been the model for the Dome of the Rock. In both edifices the rock was the focal point that determined the nature of the building and its form. (Avner and Pony 2001: 171–180)

But who actually built the Dome of the Rock, and why the octagonal shape? The usual answer is that ‘Abd al-Malik’s architects and artisans were Byzantine and once they were ordered to build an edifice which had to put emphasis on the rock, the octagonal church plan, similar to that of the Kathisma, was the most natural plan to use. But could the reason be completely different? What if the builders discovered at the place – on the Temple Mount – foundations ready for the building? Namely, what if the foundations and parts of the walls of a polygonal building already existed in place and ‘Abd al-Malik’s architects and builders only continued the building following an existing ground plan? Frank Peters (1983: 133) already raised the possibility that Heraclius might have started the building of an octagonal Church over the rock “as a reproach to newly kindled Jewish claims on the Temple Mount”. His work was only started and the unfinished building was taken by Mu‘āwiyah and completed by ‘Abd al-Malik.

Whether one accepts Peters’s theory about the beginning of the building of the octagonal church by Heraclius or not, at the basis of his suggestion lies the concept that the Dome of the Rock was not planned anew, but received its shape from the foundations of an earlier building. This is not unreasonable when we take into consideration that existing foundations are very helpful and amount to a great saving of time and expense.

But what about the much grander plan that assumes that the Dome of the Rock and the Friday (*Aqṣā*) Mosque were one architectural unit (Plate 4)? Is it mere coincidence that they represent such a coherent plan and architectural statement? Were they planned



Plate 4 Architectural unit: the Dome and the Aqṣā.
(Picture by Eli Schiller.)

together and only their construction took place during the reign of two caliphs? Or is it possible that the foundations for the whole ground plan of the complex of the Dome, the covered Aqṣā mosque and the open space between them already existed on the Temple Mount and the Caliph's architects had only to follow it?

A few years ago, Tuvia Sagiv, a young architect working on the plan of the Temple Mount and trying to determine the exact location of the Jewish Second Temple, suggested the theory that the whole complex of the the Dome, the open space and the "covered" Mosque were built on the existing foundations of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus that Emperor Hadrian had built on the Temple Mount, aiming to obliterate any remnant of the Jewish capital and the Jewish Temple. Accordingly, the name of Jerusalem was changed to Aelia Capitolina which embodied the Emperor's name, Publius Aelius Hadrianus, and that of the god protector of Rome. Jupiter's Temple at Baalbek had exactly the three features which we find in the Dome-Aqṣā complex: the polygon building in the front where the worshippers assembled, the open space where the god's statue stood, and the rectangular main temple. The same symmetrical line that goes through the three components of Jupiter's Temple

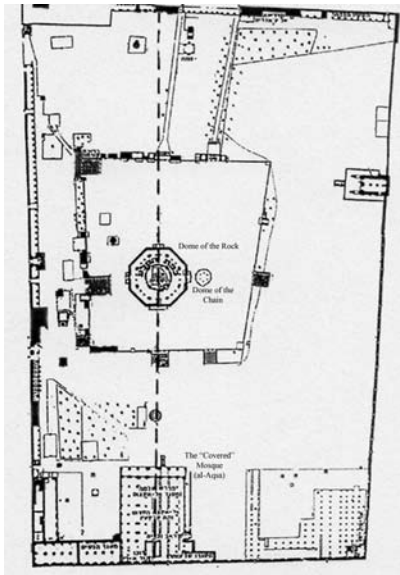


Plate 5 Plan of the Temple Mount – al-Ḥaram ash-Sharīf. Note symmetrical line going through the Dome-Aqṣā complex.

– the polygonal structure, the place of the god's (or the emperor's) statue, and the temple – also goes through the Dome of the Rock, the ablution basin (*al-ka's*) and the Aqṣā. Moreover, bringing the plan of the Temple of Jupiter in Baalbek and the plan of the Temple Mount to the same scale, Sagiv found that both plans fit each other perfectly (Plates 5, 6 and 6a). In other words, the Aqṣā-Dome complex represents the ground plan of the edifices that had existed at the same site since the early 2nd century. Even if the polygonal structure of the Temple of Jupiter on the Temple Mount was a hexagon, (but could just as well be an octagon, due to the variety of the plans of this part of Jupiter's temples), the *polygonal* foundations were already there.

If Peters is also correct in his theory then these polygonal foundations had already been there serving first the ambitious plan of Heraclius. (See Sagiv's discussion and plans

in his "Temples on Mount Moriah", www.templemount.org.)

THE “UMAYYAD SEAT OF GOVERNMENT”?

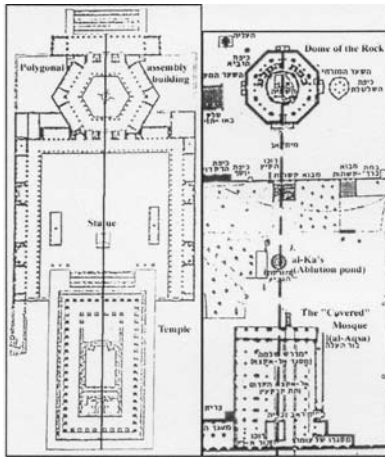


Plate 6 Plans of Jupiter's temple (left) and the Aqṣā-Dome complex (same scale).

There is, however, still one set of buildings the date and character of which must be very carefully considered. These are four very large structures, far larger and more massive than the Dome of the Rock and the Aqṣā Mosque together. (Grabar 1996: 105, fig. 56) They were built one next to the other creating an L-shaped assemblage around the south-western corner of the Ḥaram (Plate 6). All that we know about these huge buildings, the function of which is far from clear, is based on the reports of the excavations during which they were uncovered, and on the interpretation of some of the excavators who even decided to name them, no less, as “the Seat of the Umayyad Government”. (*NEAEHL* 2: 719–Plans, photographs and discussion, bibliography p. 726) Grabar (1996: 129) is perfectly correct when he says: “but as these excavations have not been published in full, one must rely on somewhat romanticized descriptions and reconstructions and on references to documents both published and unpublished, that are not always properly interpreted.” There could not have been more correct words written about these buildings, which should be fully reconsidered including the question of whether they are Islamic at all or whether they belong to an earlier period.

The immediate question that should be posed when dealing with these massive structures is why they are not mentioned in any Arabic source. The answer could be that the early medieval Arabic sources were more interested in political and religious issues, in gossip and wars, and less in building and similar activities. But then what about Muqaddasī, the Jerusalemite writer, who described his home town in detail? The answer could well be that in the 10th century these buildings were already in ruins. If so, what caused the destruction of such huge buildings, one of which local archaeologists called a “palace” (Reich & Avni 1999: 26–28) and “seat of government”? Conveniently enough the 749 earthquake is a god-sent solution to many of the ruins in the Holy Land. (*CIAP* 2: 198) It must have been an unusually selective earthquake because it succeeded in destroying

uncovered, and on the interpretation of some of the excavators

who even decided to name them, no less, as “the Seat of the Umayyad Government”.

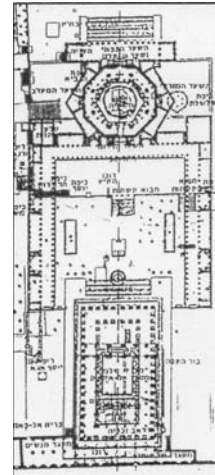


Plate 6a The plan of the temple of Jupiter superimposed on the plan of the Aqṣā-Dome complex.

such massive buildings but when it came to the flimsy Dome of the Rock it only brought down the dome! Besides, it is very questionable whether the Umayyads had the ability to undertake such a huge project considering the financial, engineering and administrative aspects, as well as the enormous manpower needed to achieve it. And suppose the Umayyads were responsible for it, who exactly carried it out? Walīd (705–715) who hardly finished the covered Aqṣā? Hishām (724–743) who never finished al-Maḡjar? Both were far smaller projects than these four (or even five) buildings. The other short-lived Caliphs seem even less promising candidates. After all, out of the fourteen Umayyad Caliphs, four caliphs (Mu‘āwiyah, ‘Abd al-Malik, Walīd and Hishām) occupy 70 out of the total 90 years of the Umayyad caliphate, none of whom was in a position to shoulder such a building project. One may also ask for what reason? There were very good religious reasons for building the Dome of the Rock and the covered Aqṣā Mosque, which required many years of dedication and effort and huge financial resources. But why these buildings? The idea of a “palace” or even palaces (in the plural) has become a commonplace among archaeologists and entered into all the tourist guide books, and even serious encyclopaedias. But why is there even one palace? For whom? Jerusalem was not a capital, not even a provincial capital, and one needs to have very good reasons to explain why the Umayyads would invest such effort in order to build this “palace”, or even “seat of government”, which nobody used.

THE PALACE OF *AMĪR AL-MU‘MINĪN* IN FUSṬĀṬ

However, since the idea of these “Umayyad buildings” has already sunk deep into scholarship we should still consider two points regarding them: one textual, and the other archaeological. The textual “evidence” is the much quoted Aphrodito Papyri from the time of the building of the Mosque in Jerusalem. Grabar has already pointed out that the Greek Aphrodito Papyri mentioning the building of a palace for *Amīr al-Mu‘minīn* by a certain official called Yahyā ibn Ḥaṇḍalah clearly refers to the palace of the Caliph (Walīd) built in Fustāt, Egypt – not in Jerusalem. There are a few papyri referring to this palace. In some, the exact location of the palace, Fustāt, is mentioned, in others not; but even when the location is not mentioned the name of the builder Yahyā ibn Ḥaṇḍalah is indicated.

The Papyri are official letters sent by Qurrah b. Sharīk (90/708–709 – 96/714–715) the governor of Egypt to Basil, the administrator of the village of اشقوه Aphrodito. They deal mainly with the taxes and other impositions that were due from the village and the few artisans that it had to supply for the Caliph’s building projects.

Most of these letters were written in the 8th indiction, that is to say in 710. Very few are from 711; in other words all are from the time of Caliph Walīd whose two

main building projects were the Mosque in Jerusalem and the Friday Mosque of Damascus (formerly the Basilica of St John). In addition, a palace was built for the Caliph in Fustāṭ (Babylon in the Papyri). Money, food, building material and laborers were levied for all these projects in Egypt. The Greek Papyri were already read and translated at the beginning of the 20th century by H.I. Bell and published in installments in *Der Islam* 2 and 3, between 1911 and 1912, 4 in 1913, and 17 in 1928. Each papyrus was given a number in the British Museum and the edition and translation follow these numbers. Max Kūchler published part of them again in the original Greek with German translation (Kūchler 1991[1992]).

In papyrus no. 1341, Qurrah demands “one person intended to work in the Mosque of Damascus for 6 months in the present 8th indiction (710)”. In a fragment of papyrus no. 1343 we find the words: “and construction [...] of the palace of the *Amīr al-Muʿminīn* now being built.” The name of the site of this palace was lost, but soon enough in subsequent papyri it is indicated. Papyrus no. 1362 is complete and it reads as follows:

Concerning articles for the palace of the *Amīr al-Muʿminīn*. In the name of God. Qurrah, etc. When we looked into the articles requisitioned from your administrative district for the palace of *Amīr al-Muʿminīn* which is being built by Yaḥyā b. Ḥaṇḍalah we found your district in arrear with the articles contained in the underwritten memorandum.

Still the letter does not mention the place where the palace was being built. There was no need to repeatedly mention something that was well known to the recipient of the letter. The key words in the letter concern the official responsible for the building: “the palace of *Amīr al-Muʿminīn* which is being built by Yaḥyā b. Ḥaṇḍalah.” However, no. 1378 gives full details about the builder and the place of the building:

We have apportioned to your administrative district palm-trunks and other articles for the roofing and requirements of the palace being built for the *Amīr al-Muʿminīn* at Fustāṭ near the river by Yaḥyā b. Ḥaṇḍalah in the present 9th indiction (711).

There was much wishful thinking when a fragment of papyrus no. 1403, speaking about exactly the same palace, was taken out of context to prove an *idée fixe* – that the excavated buildings in Jerusalem were indeed “Umayyad palaces”. This particular papyrus, like the others, speaks about “[t]he maintenance of the labourers and skilled workmen for the mosque of Jerusalem and the palace of the *Amīr al-Muʿminīn*...”. The ellipsis is in the original translation, which means that the papyrus is not complete. In fact the Greek original contains only part of the word “palace” and the word “*Amīr al-Muʿminīn*” had to be added by the editors (“του μασιγῖδα Ἱεροσολυμῶν και τε[σ] α]υλης [του Αμιραλμουμιν...”). (Kūchler 1991: 130)

The papyri, all of them, speak about the same workmen and materials, all come from the same years 710–711, and all refer to the same buildings: the Mosque

in Jerusalem and the Caliph's palace (or rather the *aule* – αὐλή, the court-yard, palace, mansion) at *Fustāṭ*. Papyrus no. 1414 sums up all the requirements from Aphrodito under the title: "Account of the public gold taxes and other imposts of the village of Aphrodito"; and here again there is a mention of "the cost of oil and labourers employed in the mosque of Jerusalem and the palace of *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, 3 persons for 12 months etc.". It is clear that the reference is to the same palace in *Fustāṭ* mentioned in the former detailed papyrus. Besides, judging by the materials demanded – 1500 palm branches, and palm trunks 10 and 12 cubits in length (no. 1378) and the number of the labourers and the fact that roofing was already underway in 710, this "palace" was not overly big or particularly splendid.

Finally we should consider papyrus no. 1433 from the 5th indiction (705–706), namely from the first months of Walīd's rule when the Caliph had just began to build the Aqṣā. This papyrus is an inventory of a whole year's taxes. The entries are registered according to the day of the month. An entry from the 24th of the month Choiach (3 January 706) speaks of a certain payment "for 1 labourer for 12 months, for the new building of *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* in Jerusalem". A fortnight later an entry from 8th of the month Tybi (January 17), speaks of a demand from the village to pay "for 15 cloven palm trunks for the building of the palace of *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* in Babylon", Babylon being the original Greek name of *Fustāṭ*. (For some reason, again, this part of the papyri in which the site of the Caliph's palace is clearly indicated is missing from Küchler's reading and translation of this papyri (Küchler 1991: 136).) The "new building" mentioned in the previous item was the mosque in Jerusalem which, in the 5th indiction had just been started, and, in the papyrus from the 10th indiction (710–711) when it had already taken shape, it appears as the "mosque of Jerusalem", and is mentioned next to the "palace of *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* at *Fustāṭ*". The term "new building" does not appear in any of the papyri subsequent to the one of the 5th indiction. It should be noted that the papyri mention all the important works of Walīd: the mosque in Damascus, the mosque in Jerusalem and the palace in *Babylon-Fustāṭ*. (It is not very clear why Küchler decided to omit all the documentation in which the Palace in Babylon-*Fustāṭ* is mentioned, including papyri nos. 1348, 1362 and 1372, although he was well aware of their existence (Küchler 1991: 125–126).)

It is very difficult to convince people who have already made up their minds about something that they might be mistaken, and so it is in this case. Grabar (1996: 130) feels that something is not right in the story of the palaces: "I keep feeling that the pieces provided by the standing remains do not quite fit with each other. If the double-gate was so important as an entrance [to the Ḥaram area] why was it partly blocked from the view by one of the buildings? [Plate 7] Something is still out of focus in the evidence about what we see." He is also not sure about the exact function of these buildings, and does not tend to accept the idea that one of them could have been the seat of the local governor (*dār al-imārah*), since Jerusalem was

not an administrative centre, and in all the lists of governors that are recorded in the Arabic sources there is no mention of a governor of Jerusalem. One cannot escape the feeling that for the sake of maintaining the theory of the “Umayyad palaces”, even proven historical facts could be bent. (Cf. Kūchler 1991: 125–126 and n. 34.)

I hinted above that one may rightly ask how is it possible that such an enormous and imposing complex built with huge ashlars, the like of which one hardly encounters in Islamic buildings anywhere, escaped the eyes of all the geographers, historians and travellers? When were these buildings deserted and destroyed, if they were indeed built early in the 8th century, and when did they fall into such oblivion that Muqaddasī does not mention them, in spite of their immediate proximity to the Ḥaram?

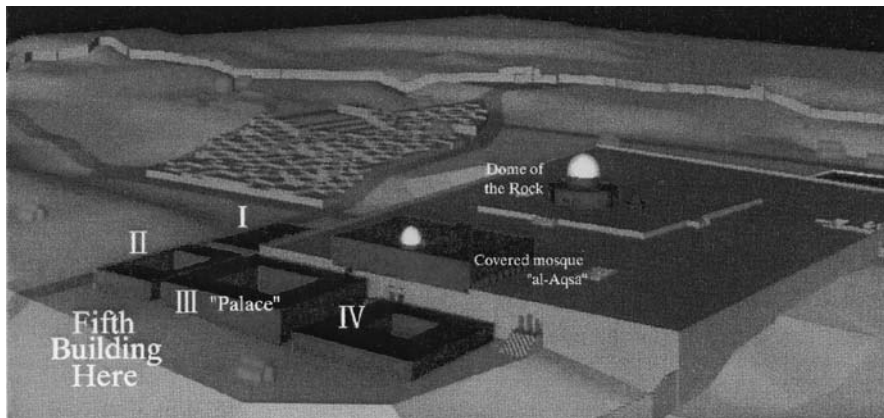


Plate 7 The four structures named “Seat of Government”, and the site of the fifth building. Note their huge size in comparison to the two edifices on the Temple Mount. The “Double-gate” is partly concealed by building no. IV. Source: Grabar 1996 fig. 63.

To continue the same line of thought, when did the Umayyads succeed in accomplishing such a huge building project, larger than any other that they built in Jerusalem or elsewhere? Quite a few unfinished Umayyad building projects exist simply because the dynasty did not survive long enough to complete them. (Ettinghausen & Grabar 1987: 46; Creswell 1958: 125, 144) The amount of money and manpower, skilled engineers and artisans needed for such a tremendous project, and the length of time needed for its completion was, to my mind, beyond the ability of the Umayyads; moreover, one cannot see the reason for attempting such a project.

The archaeological considerations for reviewing these buildings are connected with the latest archaeological excavations near the Dung Gate (late 1990s). In these excavations, the southern part of the eastern branch of the Byzantine Cardo was

fully exposed, and immediately to the east of it the foundations of yet another, fifth, huge building, were found. Does it also belong to the same complex? Yes it does; and this strengthens the argument against the “Umayyad origin” of the these huge buildings.

It is therefore very surprising that the grave doubts that Grabar (1996: fig. 63 and plan fig. 52) raised concerning these buildings did not outweigh his decision to accept their Umayyad origin and include them in the beautiful, computer-generated views of Jerusalem, in which they look absolutely out of place, justifying all of Grabar’s own reservations (Grabar 1996: 130). They, like other questionable projects (the “desert palaces” for instance), support the feeling that too many things were piled onto the few decades of Umayyad rule in Syria.

The origin of these colossal structures should be searched for somewhere in the Byzantine period, probably in the time of Emperor Justinian and in connection with the building of the Nea Church. (I know that the archaeologists will point to the so-called Byzantine “house” under the building which they call “palace” (Reich & Avni 1999: 32); to them the answer is: check the datings of your stratification again.)

The Shape of the Holy describes the process by which Jerusalem was transformed from a Christian city into a Muslim holy place, but the picture will not be complete if we do not point out the fact that the process was never concluded and can never be accomplished. True the “Holy” has an architectural shape, but the holiness of Jerusalem lives in the memories attached to many other shapes that could never be obliterated by the shapes of the relatively late Islamic holiness. In other words the Islamic shapes of holiness joined the earlier ones, Jewish and Christian, without supplanting them. It is not a coincidence that the Dome of the Rock was built to revive the Solomonic Temple on the one hand and to compete with the Holy Sepulchre on the other.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ABEL, F.-M. 1912. La Prise de Jérusalem par les Arabes. *Conférences de Saint Etienne 1910–1911*: 105–144. Paris.
- ABU AL-MA‘ALI. See Musharraf b. al-Murajjā.
- AVI YONAH, M. 1970. *In the Days of Rome and Byzantium*. Jerusalem (Hebrew).
- AVNER, R. & S. PONY 2001. Architectural evolution of the Byzantine period – the Kathisma church. In: Y. ESHEL (ed.), *Judea and Samaria Research Studies* 20: 171–180. Ariel (Hebrew).
- BALĀDHURI, Aḥmad b. Yahyā b. Jābir 1956. *Futūḥ al-Buldān* (ed. Munajjid). Cairo. (Ed. de Goeje. Leiden, 1866).
- BASHEAR, S. 1990. The title Fārūq and its association with ‘Umar I. *Studia Islamica* 72: 47–70.
- Batei Midrashot*. See WERTHEIMER.
- BELL, H.I. 1911–1928. Translations of the Greek Aphrodito Papyri in the British Museum. *Der Islam* 2(1911): 269–283, 372–384; 3(1912): 132–140, 369–373; 4(1913): 87–96; 17(1928): 4–8.

- Bet ha-Midrasch* 1967. *Bet ha-Midrasch Sammlung* (ed. A. Jellinek). Jerusalem (reprint).
- BURGOYNE, Michael Hamilton 2000. The east wall of the Haram al-Sharif: a note on its archaeological potential. In: S. AULD & R. HILLENBRAND (eds), *Ottoman Jerusalem, the Living City: 1517–1917*: 479–491.
- BUSSE, H. 1966. Der Islam und die biblischen Kultstätten. *Der Islam* 42: 113–143.
- BUSSE, H. 1968. The sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam. *Judaism* 17: 441–468.
- BUSSE, H. 1984. ‘Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb in Jerusalem. *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5: 73–119.
- BUSSE, H. 1986. ‘Omar’s image as the conqueror of Jerusalem. *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8: 149–168.
- BUSSE, H. 1998a. The temple of Jerusalem and its restitution by ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān. In: B. KÜHNEL (ed.), *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art: Studies in Honor of Bezalel Narkiss on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Jewish Art 23/24): 23–33. Jerusalem.
- BUSSE, H. 1998b. Oleg Grabar, the Shape of the Holy, und andere neue Bücher über das frühislamische Jerusalem. *Der Islam* 75: 93–103.
- CIA = van Berchem, M. 1922. *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*. 1: *Jérusalem “ville”*; 2: *Jérusalem “haram”*. Le Caire. (Reprint, Slatkine, Genève, 2001).
- CIAP = Sharon, M. 1997–2007. *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae*, 1–3, *Addendum*. Leiden.
- CRESWELL, K.A.C. 1958. *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*. London.
- DINUR, B. 1975. *Historical Writings* (Hebrew: *Bema’avaq ha-Dorot*). Jerusalem (reprint).
- ELAD, A. 1995. *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*. Leiden.
- ETTINGHAUSEN, R. & O. GRABAR 1987. *The Art and Architecture of Islam 650–1250*. London.
- GOITEIN, S.D. 1950. The historical background of the erection of the Dome of the Rock. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 70: 104–108.
- GOITEIN, S.D. 1982. Jerusalem in the Arab period (638–1099). In: Lee I. LEVINE (ed.), *The Jerusalem Cathedra*: 168–196. Jerusalem.
- GRABAR, O. 1959. The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. *Ars Orientalis* 3: 33–62.
- GRABAR, O. 1988. The meaning of the Dome of the Rock. In: M.J. CHIAT & K.L. REYERSON (eds), *The medieval Mediterranean: Cross Cultural Contacts* (Medieval Studies at Minnesota 3): 1–10.
- GRABAR, O. 1996. *The Shape of the Holy, Islamic Jerusalem*. With contributions by Muhammad al-Asad, Abeer Audeh, Saïd Nuseibeh. Princeton, New Jersey.
- HAMILTON, R.W. 1948. Some capitals from the Aqsa Mosque. *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* 13: 103–120.
- HAMILTON, R.W. 1992. Once again the Aqsa. In: J. RABY & J. JOHNS (eds), *Bayt al-Maqdis: ‘Abd al-Malik’s Jerusalem*, Part I (Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9): 141–144.
- INJ = *Israel Numismatic Journal*.
- JE = *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. 1925. New York.
- JELLINEK, A. See *Bet ha-Midrasch*.
- KHOURY, Nuha N.N. 1993. The Dome of the Rock, Ka‘bah and Ghumdan: Arab myths and Umayyad monuments. *Muqarnas* 10: 57–65.
- KÜCHLER, M. 1991[1992]. Moschee und Kalifenpaläste Jerusalems nach den Aphrodito-Papyri. *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 107: 120–143. Wiesbaden.
- LEWIS, B. 1976. An apocalyptic vision of Islamic history. In: B. LEWIS, *Studies in Classical and Ottoman Islam*. Variorum Reprints V: 308–338. London.
- MAGEN, Y. 2000a. Mt. Gerizim – a temple city. *Qadmoniot* 33, no. 2 (120): 74–118 (Hebrew).

- MAGEN, Y. 2000b. Mt. Gerizim during the Roman and Byzantine periods. *Qadmoniot* 33 no. 2 (120): 133–143 (Hebrew).
- MEKEEL-MATTESON, C. 1999. The meaning of the Dome of the Rock. *Islamic Quarterly* 43(2): 149–185.
- MUJIR ad-Dīn al-Ḥanbalī 1973. *al-Uns al-Jalīl bi-Ta'rikh al-Quds wa-al-Khalīl*. Amman.
- MUSHARRAF b. al-Murājī b. Ibrāhīm al-Maqdisī, Abū al-Ma'ālī 1995. *Faḍā'il al-Bayt al-Maqdis wa-al-Khalīl wa-Faḍā'il ash-Shām* (ed. Offer Livneh-Kafī). Al-Mashriq, Shfaram.
- NAJM, R. 2001. The Islamic architectural character of Jerusalem: with special description of the al-Aqṣā and the Rock. *Islamic Studies* 40(3): 721–734.
- NĀSER-E KHOSROW al-Marvazī al-Qobādiyānī 1977. *Safar Nāmeḥ*. Introduced and annotated by Nader Vazinpur. Tehran.
- NEAEHL 1992. = *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. Jerusalem (Hebrew).
- NUSEIBEH, S. & O. GRABAR 1996. *The Dome of the Rock*. Photography: Saïd Nuseibeh; Essay: Oleg Grabar with contributions by Jamāl ad-Dīn Ahmad & Saïd Nuseibeh. New York.
- PETERS, F.E. 1983. Who built the Dome of the Rock? *Graeco-Arabica* 2: 119–138.
- PRAWER, J. 1996. Christian attitudes towards Jerusalem. In: J. PRAWER and H. BEN-SHAMMAI (eds), *The History of Jerusalem, the Early Muslim Period 638–1099*: 311–348. Jerusalem.
- QEDAR, S. 1988–1989. Copper coinage of Syria in the seventh and eighth century. *INJ* 10: 27–39.
- RABBAT, Nasser. 1989. The meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock. *Muqarnas* 6: 12–21.
- RABBAT, Nasser 1993. The Dome of the Rock revisited: some remarks on Al-Wasiti's accounts. *Muqarnas* 10: 66–75.
- REICH, R. & G. AVNI 1999. *The Jerusalem Archaeological Park*. Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority.
- ROSEN-AYALON, M. 1989. *The Early Islamic Monuments of al-Ḥaram ash-Sharīf*. Jerusalem.
- SAGIV, T. n.d. Temples on Mount Moriah. At: www.templemount.org (visited June 2009).
- Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim = Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj 1972. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Beirut.
- VON SCHÖNBORN, CHR. 1972. *Sophon de Jérusalem: Vie monastique et Confession dogmatique*. Paris. (Transl. in: F.-M. ABEL 1912. La Prise de Jérusalem par les Arabes. *Conférences de Saint Etienne 1910–1911*. Paris.)
- SHARON, M. 1992. The 'Praises of Jerusalem' as a source for the early history of Islam. *Bibliotheca Orientalis* januari–maart XLIX 1/2: 56–68.
- SHARON, M. 2007. The decisive battles in the Arab conquest of Syria. *Studia Orientalia* 101: 297–358.
- SOUCEK, P.P. 1976. The Temple of Solomon in Islamic legend and art. In: J. GUTMANN (ed.), *The Temple of Solomon: archaeological fact and medieval tradition in Christian, Islamic and Jewish art* (American Academy of Religion (and) Society of Biblical Literature: Religion and the Arts 3): 73–123. Missoula.
- SOUCEK, P.P. 1993. Solomon's throne/Solomon's bath: model or metaphor? *Ars orientalis* 23: 109–134.
- SOUCEK, P.P. 1998. The Temple after Solomon: the role of Maryam bint 'Imrān and her mihrāb. In: B. KÜHNEL (ed.), *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art: Studies in Honor of Bezalel Narkiss on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Jewish Art 23/24): 34–41. Jerusalem.
- ṬABARĪ, Muḥammad b. Ja'fīr 1879–1901. *Ta'rikh ar-Rusul wa-al-Mulūk* (ed. de Goeje et al.). Leiden.
- WALKER, J. 1956. A Catalogue of the Arab-Byzantine and Post-Reform Umayyad Coins. London.
- WĀSIṬĪ, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad 1979. *Faḍā'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* (ed. I. Hasson). Jerusalem.
- WERTHEIMER, S.A. & A. WERTHEIMER (eds) 1989. *Batei Midrashot*. Jerusalem.
- WRIGHT, T. 1848. *Early Travels in Palestine*. London.