

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK ON JERUSALEM

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JERUSALEM IN EARLY ISLAM

The making of the Muslims' Holy City¹

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In 638 CE, the Muslims captured Jerusalem and laid a physical claim to its religious and historical legacy. Later Islamic traditions describe the entrance of caliph 'Umar (r. 634–644) and his tour of the holy city, which culminated in a communal prayer on the Temple Mount, known in classical Arabic as the *Haram* of Jerusalem. The various stories about 'Umar's visit convey two realizations. On the one hand, the Muslims believed they were legitimate heirs of the city and some of its sacred sites. On the other hand, it was also their conviction that Jerusalem was sacred as well to Christians and Jews, who have a right to it on the same par as the Muslims. The dynamic between these two convictions (at times pursued together, at other times one triumphing over the other) elevated Jerusalem to become one of Islam's most revered religious towns.

Nature of the Muslim veneration of Jerusalem

The Muslims veneration of Jerusalem is based on two types of elements: those emerging from the newly formed Islamic religion and those coming out of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Both types carried meaningful religious symbolisms for the early Muslims. Yet, over time, some elements grew in size and achieved greater circulation and popularity, whereas other elements came in and out of focus depending on circumstances. In other words, what initially attracted the Muslims to revere Jerusalem did not remain unchanged, and certain sites acquired over time additional meanings and associations.

The Judeo-Christian elements take the form of Biblical narratives and religious lore about Jerusalem and specific sites or figures associated with the city. The question here is how much of this Judeo-Christian lore did the Muslims know and when did they know it? Obviously, in the ninth century, most of this knowledge became widespread as evidenced in a variety of Muslim literature recording such narratives. Before that, one can only conjecture that it could have resulted from direct exposure to Jewish and Christian literature and informants.

With respect to the Islamic elements, there is no doubt that Jerusalem was revered by the movement of the prophet Muhammad (Rubin 2008). The city's sanctity and incomparable role in the history of monotheism and the future of humanity (e.g., as the site of the Last Judgment) were not lost on the early Muslims. Knowing how specifically they perceived of Jerusalem before it became theirs, however, is at best tentative and speculative. The Qur'an mentions the Holy Land, as "the holy land" (*al-ard al-muqaddasa*) in verse 5.21, and as "the land

which We blessed" (*al-ard allati barakna fiha*) in verses 7.137 and 21.71. It also speaks or alludes to biblical history and figures. Yet, it does not explicitly mention Jerusalem in a single instance. There are two occasions that have traditionally been assumed to refer to Jerusalem. They are verse 17.1 where we find a very brief reference to a night journey that Muslim scholarship associates with the prophet Muhammad, and verses 2:142–150 where the change of the direction of prayer is discussed.

The Night Journey (*al-isra'*) supposedly occurred around the year 621 when Muhammad was still in Mecca. Verse 17.1 reads, *Glory to Him who made His servant journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque, whose enclosure We have blessed, to show him of Our wonders. He it is Who is All-Hearing and All-Seeing.*² The verse does not offer any clarity regarding the location of the Furthest Mosque (in Arabic, *al-Masjid al-Aqsa*), and seems to denote a sacred area rather than a specific building. Although some early Muslim scholars disputed the association between the verse and Jerusalem, the link became uncontested belief over time.

Verses 2:142–150 discuss the change of the direction of prayer (*qibla*) to the Ka'ba in Mecca, which supposedly occurred in the second year of Muhammad's presence in Medina. Here as well, the Qur'an does not specify the location of the previous *qibla*, and one cannot assume from the Qur'an alone that it had anything to do with Jerusalem. Again, over time, the belief that Jerusalem was the Muslims' first direction of prayer became cemented in the Islamic religious tradition.

There is a third association, namely Muhammad's Ascension to Heaven, which too does not have a clear Qur'anic grounding (although some suggest that verses 53.1–18 to be where the Qur'an alludes to it). Most early Muslim scholars distinguished the Ascension from the Night Journey and located the former in Mecca, dating it to around the year 619 (van Ess 1999). The earliest source that collated together separate narratives to produce the story of the Night Journey and Ascension as both unfolding in Jerusalem was Ibn Ishaq (d. 767), in his biography (*Sira*) of Muhammad. Nevertheless, the precise location in the Haram of Jerusalem from which Muhammad supposedly ascended to Heaven remained inconclusive. The Dome of the Ascension – a small dome with supporting columns recycled from Crusader buildings – was erected to the west of the Dome of the Rock sometime after Saladin recaptured the city in 1187 (Elad 1995: 48–50, 73–76; Kedar and Pringle 2009: 141–142). The relocation of the Ascension to the Rock itself, which is the prevalent belief today, was done around this time.

There remains one important aspect to address early on in this chapter. It relates to the expression *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* (*Aqsa Mosque*), which is invariably mistaken to mean the mosque that was built around 710 and called Aqsa. It is often argued that it was first built by caliph 'Umar (Kaplony 2009; Marsham 2013: 97–100). This view is based on much later reports, and so far lacks archaeological and contemporary historical evidence. More often than not, when Islamic sources speak of the Aqsa Mosque, they mean the entire Haram/Temple Mount area. First, if one accepts that Qur'an 17.1 refers to the Aqsa Mosque as a place in Jerusalem, then it could not mean a structure because at that time there was no mosque or structure of any kind that could be called a mosque on the Temple Mount of Jerusalem. Later Islamic scholarship offers a similar inference about the expression Aqsa Mosque. For instance, in his description of the holy city, the geographer Ibn Hawqal (d. after 977) states the following:

In Jerusalem, there is a mosque (*masjid*) that has no equal in size anywhere else in the realm of Islam. On its southern side, in the western corner of the mosque, there is a roofed structure that extends half the width of the mosque. The rest of the mosque is not built, except for another structure atop the Rock, where that elevated stone sits like a solid mass. It is immensely huge, and its surface is uneven. Above the Rock is

a high and rounded dome coated with a thick cover of lead. Underneath this dome, there is this Rock whose height from the floor reaches up to a standing person's chest; it is known as the Rock of Moses. Its length and width are almost equal. Around it, there is a stone barrier that reaches to a person's waist; its radius measures in the teens of yards. One can descend into this Rock through a narrow opening that leads to a cave measuring around 5 by 10 yards. The ceiling is not high and the surface is neither round nor square, but one can stand comfortably in it.³

(1938, *Kitab Surat al-ard* 171)

Ibn Hawqal, who was writing in the second half of the tenth century, makes it very clear that what he meant by *mosque* was the entire Haram area. He calls the actual Aqsa Mosque a structure (*bina'*), which he does not even bother to describe. The Dome of the Rock was the focus of his attention.

Even historian al-Tabari (d. 923) displays a similar pattern when he reports about the entry of caliph 'Umar to the Temple Mount. In one narrative, he quotes an eyewitness who said that 'Umar "entered the mosque." In other narratives attributed to different eyewitnesses, the caliph came to "the gate of the mosque" and "the gate was opened for him" (al-Tabari 1992, *History* 12.193–194). Again, there was no such thing as a *mosque* there when 'Umar purportedly visited the Temple Mount. So, what did he enter and what gate was opened for him? The only logical explanation is that the gate was the entryway to the Temple Mount area, and the *mosque* signifies the entire Haram. Therefore, when early Muslim scholars spoke of the Aqsa Mosque, they often meant the entire Temple Mount as a sacred religious space, hence the other expression *al-haram* (the sanctuary) or *al-haram al-maqdisi* (the sanctuary of Jerusalem).

Similar to the expression *Masjid al-Aqsa*, there is the expression *Bayt al-Maqdis* (and sometimes *al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*)⁴ – literally, the sacred house – which signifies either the biblical Temple, all of the Haram/Temple Mount area, or the entire city of Jerusalem. The lack of clarity in the use of such expressions precludes any nuanced understanding of whether the early Muslims revered all of Jerusalem or only specific sites therein.

The Umayyads

Like the early Byzantine emperors who made Jerusalem a Christian city, it was the Umayyads (661–750) who turned Jerusalem into an Islamic city. They accomplished this through their political, religious, and architectural investments. Mu'awiya (r. 661–680), the first ruler of the dynasty, was crowned caliph in Jerusalem (al-Tabari 1987, *History* 18.6), even though he belonged to one of the most prestigious and powerful families of Mecca. The contemporary Christian *Maronite Chronicle* states that when Mu'awiya came to Jerusalem for this event, he prayed at the Golgotha (in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher), and then visited Gethsemane where he prayed at the tomb of Mary. It is evident, therefore, that he chose Jerusalem because of its political and religious symbolism to his powerbase, which at the time consisted of Muslims and Christians (Marsham 2009).

The first structure built on the Temple Mount was likely the Dome of the Chain, erected during Mu'awiya's reign; it is possible though that it was erected when he was still governor of Syria. This small structure was intended to cement the Muslims' claim to the area. More importantly, given its location, on the exact center of the Haram, it carried an eschatological vision that reflected how the early Muslims understood and meant to channel the religious significance of the entire site (Nees 2015: 96–99). The Haram was for them the setting of the Final Judgment that would unfold on the Day of Resurrection.⁵

Early Christian sources dating from around 670 CE describe a mosque on the Temple Mount, in close proximity to where the Dome of the Rock was built two decades later. For instance, in *De Locis sanctis* (*The Holy Places*), Adomnán (2002) reports such information as allegedly told to him by a certain Arculf who supposedly visited Jerusalem and saw a mosque.⁶ Sebeos, an Armenian historian from the same time, states that following the Arabs' capture of Jerusalem, the Jews built a structure on the exact site of the ruined Temple only to see it confiscated by the Muslims and turned into "their own place of prayer" (1985, *Sebeos' History* 131). Therefore, if one were to accept these testimonies as trustworthy, they attest to the presence of an ordinary structure adjacent to the Rock, and not in the location where the Aqsa Mosque was built during the reign of caliph al-Walid (r. 705–715).

The Umayyads' interest in Jerusalem reached its climax during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705 CE), under whose patronage the Dome of the Rock was built. The new edifice crowned Jerusalem with one of the most impressive architectural structures, symbolizing Islam's unequivocal link to the town that sits at the center of the religious universe of Judaism and Christianity. Yet, the Dome of the Rock was part of a major project – an Islamic project of Herodian proportions – to rebuild the entire Haram, including the mosque that came to be known as the Aqsa Mosque and adjacent palaces. As such, the Umayyads, and 'Abd al-Malik in particular, were literally the architects who spearheaded the project of Islamizing Jerusalem – a project comparable to Constantine's transformation of Jerusalem into a Christian city (see Verstegen, Chapter 5, this volume).

The Dome of the Rock

The Dome of the Rock is a magnificent structure, given its design and elaborate ornamentation (see George, Chapter 16, this volume). The inscriptions on the inner octagonal arcade give the building's date as 72 of the Hijra, which corresponds to the period between July 691 and May 692 CE. Some scholars (Blair 1992; Milwright 2016) have argued that this date refers to the commissioning of the building and not to its completion, although one can dispute such a view on the basis that it is speculative and that for the inscription to be placed in the location where we find it, the structure must have been mostly finished.

The architecture of the Dome of the Rock was influenced by the style used for Christian churches and martyriums in Palestine. One example in particular – the Kathisma Church, a few miles to the south of Jerusalem (on the road to Bethlehem) – offers a comparable prototype. The Kathisma was built around a sacred rock purported to have been the spot where Mary rested while pregnant with Jesus, and thus shares several architectural and functional features with the Dome of the Rock, especially as a pilgrimage destination (Avner 2009; on the rocks of Jerusalem, see Koltun-Fromm, Chapter 26, this volume).

The inscription inside the Dome of the Rock allows us to detect the obvious signs of an emerging new religion, the religion of Islam (Grabar 1996; Milwright 2016), and more importantly how the Muslims understood the site and by extension Jerusalem. We find there an early form of the *Shahada* (testimony of faith): *There is no god but God, One with no partners*, and the emphatic emphasis on God's oneness. We also find the emphasis on the prophethood of Muhammad. Moreover, we have the earliest dated citations of the Qur'an in inscription (e.g., verses 3.18–19, 4.171–172, 19.33–36, and 112.1–4). The importance of these particular Qur'anic verses is their content that disputes the divinity of Jesus, and therefore points to one of the factors for the construction of the Dome of the Rock: that the Muslims were laying a claim to the spiritual capital of Christianity and contesting the legitimacy of the Christian faith.

There are other reasons as well, and like so many complicated sites, one should not be eager to signal out *the* reason (as compared to reasons) that triggered 'Abd al-Malik to build the Dome of the Rock and launch the massive renovation of the Haram in Jerusalem. There is clear evidence that the Muslims (as well as some Jews and Christians) were already coming on pilgrimage to pray at the Rock and needed a structure to shelter them. There is also an emphasis on the sanctity of the Rock, and all evidence points to its sanctity being derived from its extra-biblical and especially its association with biblically based creation narratives; in this respect, there is no evidence that the Muslims at the time associated the Rock with Muhammad's ascension to Heaven (Mourad 2008). Aside from these elements, the inscription on the inner arcade of the Dome of the Rock mentions Muhammad's intercession on behalf of the Muslims on the Day of Judgment. It can be said, therefore, that at the time of construction, the eschatological association of the spot with the Day of Judgment was present in the Muslims' imagination. The existence of the Dome of the Chain, considered the oldest Islamic structure on the Haram, on the eastern side of the Dome of the Rock, lends additional plausibility to this scenario (Nees 2015: 58–99). The Dome of the Chain is linked in some Islamic narratives to an extra-biblical legend of King Solomon's chain of justice in front of the Temple, which was used as a divine mechanism to judge among the ancient Israelites.⁷ The Muslims could have realized the symbolic relationship between it and their own Dome of the Chain, but it is unlikely that they understood their building as a backward-looking replica. Much more plausible, as mentioned earlier, is that they meant it as a sign of the eschatological future: the Chain symbolizing the judgment to be, without it being necessarily an imminent one.

Given these factors, 'Abd al-Malik could have ordered the development of the Haram of Jerusalem, especially the building of the Dome of the Rock, because it was a destination for pilgrims. Muslims went on pilgrimage to a variety of sites, a practice that remained throughout Islamic history and goes on even today. Moreover, given the fluidity of early Islamic creeds and rituals, the primacy of Mecca as Islam's holiest city was still in flux at the time (Robinson 2005: 95–100; Elad 2008: 192–193). Even after Mecca became the uncontested spiritual heart of Islam, many Muslims did not consider their pilgrimage to other destinations as unjustified or as replacing the one to Mecca. It is possible though that 'Abd al-Malik intended the Dome of the Rock to serve as a temporary replacement of Mecca, which was under the control of his rival-caliph Ibn al-Zubayr (d. 692).

Judging from a variety of Muslim testimonies, the pilgrimage rituals that were performed on the Haram of Jerusalem in early Islam included *ta'rif* (the customary prayer-while-standing that is part of the pilgrimage ceremony in Mecca on the day when pilgrims visit Mount 'Arafa); this was a widespread practice during the Umayyad period and convened in other major cities as well (Elad 2008: 170–179). They also included prayers and liturgical readings associated with specific sites (Elad 1995; Hasson 1996).

The actual name of the building – *the Dome of the Rock* – offers one additional clue for its construction. The Dome of the Rock is a building that honors and celebrates the sacred Rock. Aside from the name, the *fada'il* narratives bring an overwhelming support to this suggestion. They offer an unambiguous focus on the sanctity of the Rock and its significance from the time God created Earth and made the Rock his throne and from which he ascended back to Heaven, to the Day of Resurrection when the Rock welcomes the Ka'ba and humanity lines up for judgment on either side of it. The importance of these narratives is that they attest to a very important layer of legends that deal with the Rock alone. Very likely, they came out of Jewish lore that focused on the Foundation Stone (*even ha-shityya*), a legend that emerges in Jewish practice and rabbinical lore only after the Temple is gone (Tsafirir 2009), and in some ways as a substitute for the Temple. In the period between the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and

the Muslims' conquest of Jerusalem in 638, the Temple Mount (as a broad sacred area) and the Rock (as the loci of this sacredness) became enshrined in some Jewish religious imagination as holding the sanctity that was once invested in the Temple. How much of this knowledge the Muslims possessed in the period before the construction of the Dome of the Rock and the development of the Haram is not evident. One can argue that the Muslims' eagerness to come up with more "testimonies" about the Rock's sacredness after the building was erected led them to turn to the Bible, biblical exegesis, and Jewish (and Christian) lore for more information. Yet, one thing can be stressed here. There is no doubt that the Muslims knew some of this information early on, yet they were engaging new meanings for the site that were not necessarily the ones of the distant biblical past or reflective of late ancient Jewish concerns.

In this light, it is not surprising that we find early Muslim narrators thinking of the Rock whenever they glossed on biblical narratives and history. The example below gives an idea of the type of glosses that Muslims made on biblical narratives in order to link them to the Rock:

It is written in the Torah that God said to Abraham: "O Abraham." He replied: "Here I am." [God said:] "Take your only son, the one you love, go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there on one of the mountains that I shall show you." His saying *the land of Moriah* means Jerusalem, and *one of the mountains* means the Rock.

(Abu al-Ma'ali 1995, *Fada'il* 115–116)

This Islamic *midrash* on Genesis 22.1–2 seeks to channel holiness to its precise epicenter: the Rock of Jerusalem.⁸

The link of the Rock to the First Temple and biblical history was not lost on the Muslims. But this does not necessarily mean that 'Abd al-Malik was rebuilding the Temple as some have contended (e.g., Busse 1998: 25). That idea is based on a singular account attributed to Ka'b al-Ahbar regarding a prophecy that God would send 'Abd al-Malik to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem (al-Wasiti 1978, *Fada'il* 86; Abu al-Ma'ali 1995, *Fada'il* 63–64). There is every reason to believe, however, that this specific report was forged at a later period in Umayyad history since Ka'b al-Ahbar died long before 'Abd al-Malik reached adulthood (Rabbat 1989; Mourad 2008). Nonetheless, one should distinguish between the rebuilding of the Temple and building a structure on the sacred site where the Temple once stood, by a group who had their own understanding of the site, agenda, and priorities.

Other structures

Other structures were gradually added to the Haram after 'Abd al-Malik. It is likely that a complete plan for the Haram was perceived during his reign, but we are not sure that it extended to the other parts of Jerusalem. The latter was likely the contribution of his son al-Walid, who pushed ahead with the construction of the Aqsa Mosque (completed around 710 CE). It is posited that the Aqsa Mosque could have existed before that date (Kaplony 2009; Marsham 2013: 97–100), although the evidence is very weak and speculative, as mentioned earlier. Al-Walid envisioned Jerusalem as a royal city of some sort (not as a capital city though). Aside from the Aqsa Mosque, he ordered the construction of a palace, located below the southern wall of the Aqsa Mosque. It comprised two stories and offers some important clues as to its tenant. The quality of the workmanship (frescos and masonry) and the fact that it has direct access to the Aqsa Mosque suggest that it was likely built as a residence for al-Walid himself. Indeed, several papyri from Egypt – dating to the period 706–714 – speak of Egyptian laborers sent to Jerusalem to work at the construction sites of the mosque and the caliph's palace (Elad 2008: 210).

The caliph's palace formed part of a complex that included a second palace and two Umayyad administrative buildings, stretching along the southwestern corner and southern side of the Haram. They lasted until the eleventh century when they were damaged by the earthquake of 1033 (Avni 2014: 137). They were discovered during excavations by different archaeological teams between 1961 and 1996 and share a similar broad plan: a square structure with an inner open courtyard (Avni 2014: 134–136). There are traces of two other incomplete structures adjacent to them as well. The second palace is to the west of the main palace and is a little larger. It could have been intended as the governor's residence and likely dates to the reign of al-Walid. The other buildings were constructed under later Umayyad caliphs for governance purposes.

The major project undertaken by the Umayyads to build the Haram, adjacent palaces, and administrative structures demonstrates the attention the dynasty gave to Jerusalem and the transformative impact their patronage had on cementing Jerusalem's religious status in Islam. They also show that Umayyad Jerusalem extended much more to the south than generally believed (Rosen-Ayalon 2006: 43).

Post-Umayyad

Jerusalem maintained its religious significance under the Abbasids (750–1258) and Fatimids (969–1171), the two dynasties that interchanged control (sometimes nominal) over the city in the centuries after the Umayyads. Even though no major projects were ushered, the Abbasids and Fatimids nevertheless maintained a level of interest that cemented Jerusalem's religious significance in Islam. One should say here that after the Umayyads, the status of Jerusalem was impacted by two factors. On the one hand, Mecca gradually established itself as Islam's sacred center, with other hallowed towns and sites emerging all over the Muslim world (e.g., Najaf in Iraq, Qunum in Iran, Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Husayn Mosque in Cairo, etc.). In this respect, Jerusalem had to compete with other locales in terms of official patronage and public popularity. On the other hand, the rise of regional rule took Jerusalem away from direct caliphal oversight. As such, Jerusalem settled as a regional holy city (the holiest in greater Syria), with attention towards it and investment in it waxing and waning according to circumstances.

It is precisely this change in the status of Jerusalem that preserved the city's legacy and importance in Islam. One could even say that the competition enhanced it in certain aspects by stimulating a wider circulation of *fada'il* narratives, which gave rise to the first compilations devoted to the religious merits of Jerusalem. This process was mostly spearheaded by scholars living in Jerusalem and Palestine who were eager to showcase the religious importance of their sacred city to fellow Muslims. As such, Jerusalem was promoted for its proximity to Heaven and exclusive eschatological role, thus attracting to it pilgrims seeking spiritual retreats or anxious to familiarize themselves with the site of the Day of Resurrection. One group in particular took advantage of that: the Muslim mystics. The celebrated scholar al-Ghazali (d. 1111) was a case in point.

It is also in this post-Umayyad period that Jerusalem became a highly desirable stop for pilgrims heading to Mecca. This did not mean that every Muslim came rushing. Given its heavily Christian character (i.e., the abundance of churches, religious symbols, and priests/monks), some Muslim scholars saw Jerusalem as a spiritual trap, so much so they advocated that it was best to avoid visiting it altogether. This was a direct contrast to those who believed Jerusalem surpassed all other locales (including Mecca), for it was in the city where things began and will end (a summary of the two attitudes is provided in al-Maqdisi's *Ahsan al-taqasim* [1991: 166–167]).

The aura of Jerusalem – disseminated through *fada'il* narratives and pilgrims' accounts – also impacted the Muslims' religious psychology. It can be said that political patrons – be

they caliphs, sultans, or regional rulers (Abbasids, Fatimids, Ayyubids, Mamluks, Ottomans, Palestinians, Jordanians, etc.) – have realized over the centuries the sense of religious obligation to maintain and protect the city, especially its Haram. We can see this through the several projects to reconstruct and maintain monuments following major earthquakes (especially the Dome of the Rock and Aqsa Mosque), such as those done by the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (r. 754–775) and Fatimid caliph al-Zahir (r. 1021–1036). We also see the efforts of many sultans and governors to bring water to the Haram or erect additional structures on the Temple Mount. Even at times when rulers failed to protect Jerusalem, the city's sway on the collective Muslim religious consciousness has caused public outcries, such as when the Crusaders captured the city in 1099 or when the Ayyubid sultan al-Kamil turned parts of it over to emperor Frederick II in 1229.

The year 1099 was a watershed moment in the history of Islamic Jerusalem, catapulting the city's religious symbolism to a new height, with some old meanings and significance supplanted by newer ones. Even though Muslim worshippers could still access the Haram under Crusader control, the fact that the city was politically not in Muslim hands did not sit well with many Muslims. The result was a well-orchestrated propaganda on the part of some scholars to remind Muslim rulers and the public of Jerusalem's importance to Islam, which led after its liberation by Saladin in 1187 to the transformation of Jerusalem into a major center of religious education (see Antrim, Chapter 9, this volume). But with its small size and geographically isolated location, Jerusalem could not keep pace with the likes of Damascus and Cairo, and by the late Mamluk period, it was reduced to a spiritually and politically peripheral town.

The *Fada'il* (religious merits) of Jerusalem

To the Umayyads, we ascribe the major architectural projects that adorned Jerusalem with a distinctive Islamic outlook, so much so that the Dome of the Rock became the city's image even until today for Muslims as well as Christians and Jews (on how this visual identification can be seen in maps of Jerusalem, see Rubin, Chapter 27, this volume). It was under the Abbasids and Fatimids that *fada'il* narratives about the religious significance of Jerusalem in Islam became widespread and the first books that collected them were compiled, turning what once were loose reports into an acknowledged genre of Islamic scholarship. The golden age of these *fada'il* narratives witnessed a concentrated effort to collect them on the part of scholars who resided in Jerusalem and its surrounding area. The first such book, entitled *Fada'il al-bayt al-Muqaddas* (The Religious Merits of the Sacred House), was compiled by al-Ramli (d. ca. 912), who hailed from the nearby town of Ramla (Mourad 2008). Al-Ramli's work, which is not extant, provided the main ingredients for all later books on the subject, especially the earliest surviving ones written in the first half of the eleventh century during the Fatimid rule of Jerusalem by al-Wasiti (the preacher of the Aqsa Mosque) and Abu al-Ma'ali Ibn al-Murajja (a local Hadith scholar). Then came the Crusader capture of Jerusalem, causing the wide dissemination of these works outside Palestine. For the first time, notable scholars in cities such as Baghdad and Damascus were drawn to compile their own books on the topic. Two very influential cases are *Ta'rikh Bayt al-Maqdis* (The History of the Sacred House of Jerusalem) by Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201), and *Kitab al-Mustaqsa fi fada'il al-Masjid al-Aqsa* (The Exhaustive Treaty on the Religious Merits of Jerusalem's Haram) by al-Qasim Ibn 'Asakir (d. 1203).

The diffusion of the *fada'il* narratives and the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to pray at several sacred sites there fed each other. The pilgrims were keen on learning about the religious significance of the sites they were visiting. The *fada'il* narratives supplied that, causing their wider

circulation as the pilgrims returned to their towns, which engendered more pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In turn, the demand inspired local scholars to look for more *fada'il* legends to satisfy the pilgrims' curiosity and enhance the appeal of their city. The success of this can even be seen in the way Christians reclaimed the Haram area during the Crusader period. The Europeans declared the Dome of the Rock to be the Lord's Temple as if the building was Solomon's Temple not one erected by the Muslims in the seventh century (see George, Chapter 16, and Boas, Chapter 8, both this volume). Also following Muslim practices, the Crusaders venerated several spots on the Haram (e.g., Mary's prayer niche, Jesus's cradle) and reattributed others to specific biblical/Christian figures (Kedar and Pringle 2009: 136–142). As such, they reintroduced the Temple Mount as a principal sacred center in Christian Jerusalem alongside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Several themes emerge from the *fada'il* of Jerusalem narratives that can help us understand the way Muslims venerated the Haram and the city. To start with, the focus of many stories was the Rock:

The Rock of Jerusalem is a rock from Paradise.

(al-Wasiti 1978, *Fada'il* 78; Abu al-Ma'ali 1995, *Fada'il* 102)

It is written in the Torah that God said to the Rock of Jerusalem: "You are my earthly throne. From you I ascended to heaven. From beneath you I spread the earth, and every stream that flows from the mountains originates from underneath you."

(al-Wasiti 1978, *Fada'il* 69; Abu al-Ma'ali 1995, *Fada'il* 106)

God revealed to earth: "I will be stepping on a part of you." The mountains proudly lifted themselves towards him, but the Rock humbled itself. God recognized what it did and placed his foot on it.

(al-Wasiti 1978, *Fada'il* 57–58)

When God rose to Heaven, he said to the Rock of Jerusalem: "This is my abode, the seat of my throne on the Day of Resurrection, and the spot where my creation gathers on the Day of Assembly. Here is my Paradise to its right, and here is my Hell to its left. I will erect my scale in front of it, for I am the Judge of Judgment Day." He then rose to the heavens.

(al-Wasiti 1978, *Fada'il* 70; Abu al-Ma'ali 1995, *Fada'il* 109)

As these legends attest, the Rock is identified as the place of creation, a piece of Heaven, God's resting place on earth, the spot on which he stepped before returning to the Heavens, and the location of the Final Judgment. Just to make sure that the divine attention to the rock never ceased, other reports, such as the following one, speak of angels standing guard to protect it from any harm:

Rustum the Persian once recounted: "A voice called me on the night of the earthquake and said: 'Go and make the call for prayer.' I hesitated about doing it. The voice called me a second time and said: 'Go and make the call for prayer.' I hesitated about that too. Then the voice called me a third time, scolding me harshly, and said: 'Go and make the call for prayer!' I walked to the mosque and noticed on the way that the houses have been destroyed. One of the guards of the Rock came to me and said: 'Go

first and bring me the news about my family and I will then tell you something unbelievable.' I went to his house and found it destroyed. I returned and informed him. He said to me: 'When it hit, angels came and lifted the Dome. We could see the sky and the stars. Then, it was brought back. We could hear them say to each other: "fix it, align it properly," until they brought it back the way it was.'"

(al-Wasiti 1978, *Fada'il* 79; Abu al-Ma'ali 1995, *Fada'il* 117)

Some of these narratives have clear biblical parallels (Mourad 2008; Koltun-Fromm, Chapter 26, this volume), showing the efforts some Muslims exerted in collecting as many legends as they could about Jerusalem's sacredness. The corollary is that by doing so, these legends became Islamically sanctioned.

The *fada'il* narratives are not restricted to the Rock. They extend to the entire city of Jerusalem. Some count the merits the Muslim receives for doing certain things in the city, such as fasting, praying, or giving alms. These merits become a credit that defrays any punishment the Muslim might incur for sins he/she committed.

Whoever fasts a day in Jerusalem it will be a shield for him from Hell.

(Abu al-Ma'ali 1995, *Fada'il* 252)

Whoever gives a silver coin to the poor in Jerusalem, it will be his ransom from Hell, and whoever gives a loaf of bread in it is like one who gives the equivalence of the world's mountains in gold.

(Abu al-Ma'ali 1995, *Fada'il* 250)

Whoever prays in Jerusalem the noon, afternoon, evening and night prayers, and then prays the morning prayer, he is purified from his sins as when his mother gave birth to him.

(al-Wasiti 1978, *Fada'il* 28; Abu al-Ma'ali 1995, *Fada'il* 90)

Finally, the *Fada'il* narratives describe the eschatological scenario of the Ka'ba in Mecca coming to Jerusalem:

On the Day of Resurrection, the Ka'ba will be gathered to Jerusalem, like the procession of a bride, suspending from it are all those who made the pilgrimage to it. The Rock will declare: "Greetings to the visitor and the one being visited."

(al-Wasiti 1978, *Fada'il* 93; Abu al-Ma'ali 1995, *Fada'il* 211)

As these *fada'il* narratives show, they were fashioned on the basis of two impulses: the appropriation of Jewish and Christian history and the invention of an Islamic dimension. This latter impulse can be described as the "exclusive" Islamic link to Jerusalem. It was not the by-product of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It came from the Muslims' own experiences and association with the city and their eagerness to create more of them. Hence, the identification of the Haram of Jerusalem as the location of Muhammad's Night Journey, the relocation of Muhammad's heavenly Ascension to Jerusalem, the importance of the visit of 'Umar and his prayer on particular locations on the Haram, the invention of fairytale legends such as a Muslim accidentally accessing Paradise through the cave underneath the Rock, etc.

Aside from the *fada'il* narratives, we also possess some early pilgrim itineraries addressing the sites to visit and avoid while in Jerusalem and what is to be done at each place (Elad 1995). The following report gives a brief idea about such an itinerary:

He who visits the *Mosque* of Jerusalem should also visit David's prayer place on the eastern side, and pray in both of them. He should too submerge himself in the spring of Siloam, because it comes forth from Heaven. He should not enter the churches nor buy for himself a dwelling-place because the sin in Jerusalem equals one thousand sins elsewhere and the good deed equals one thousand good deeds elsewhere.

(al-Wasiti 1978, *Fada'il* 44; Abu al-Ma'ali 1995, *Fada'il* 249)

Conclusion

It is often repeated that Jerusalem is the third holy city in Islam after Mecca and Medina. Irrespective of when such a statement was coined and put in circulation, it gives the misleading impression that Jerusalem is less important than Mecca and Medina. It also obfuscates the complexity of how the Muslims have understood such a listing. That these three cities are ranked in such a way signifies their unequivocal centrality to Islam and that what distinguishes one from the other is simply a matter of added significance.

Unlike Mecca and Medina, the Muslims had to share Jerusalem with Christians and Jews. The motivations that have triggered their interest in Jerusalem and sustained that interest changed over time. Some of it came from the Judeo-Christian lore and others came from exclusively Islamic associations. The construction of the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque had a transformative impact in defining the Islamic landscape in the city. Thus, Jerusalem and its Haram gained meanings and significance that were not there before these two structures. This cycle of new meanings and added significance kept repeating itself as a result of historical events (the Crusades) or religious dynamics (pilgrimage, *fada'il* narratives, eschatology). It only reaffirmed Jerusalem as an Islamic city, and the Muslims (even Christians and Jews) could not think of Jerusalem other than as an Islamic city, often with the realization that others have a claim to it as well which does not diminish theirs.

Notes

- 1 The research and writing of this chapter benefitted from the generous support of a Franklin Grant from the American Philosophical Society.
- 2 Translations of the Qur'an are according to T. Khalidi (trans.), *The Qur'an* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009).
- 3 Translations of classical Islamic sources are mine.
- 4 The only difference between the two expressions *Bayt al-Maqdis* and *al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* is orthographical, resulting from a peculiar rule of Arabic grammar. Both expressions mean "the Sacred House" and were also used to refer to the city of Jerusalem. Hence, the modern name of Jerusalem *al-Quds* (the Sacred).
- 5 Muslim scholars invariably refer to the Day of Judgment as the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyama*), when the dead will be resurrected for the Final Judgment.
- 6 Doubts about Arculf and his visit to Jerusalem are raised in Nees 2015, 33–57.
- 7 To my knowledge, no such chain of justice on the Temple Mount is known from Jewish or Christian lore before Islam. The legend of the chain could very likely have been an Islamic invention, based on the structure on which Solomon stood during the dedication of the Temple, referenced in 2 Chronicles 6.13.
- 8 It could be that the Muslims were contesting a Christian tradition that linked Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac to Golgotha. If so, this Islamic *midrash* was also meant to "transfer" the event to the Rock. I owe this thought to my colleague Naomi Koltun-Fromm.

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