

# CHAPTER NINETEEN

## UMAYYAD JERUSALEM

### From a religious capital to a religious town

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The city of Jerusalem is crowned with one of the world's most impressive architectural structures, the Dome of the Rock. This octagonal sanctuary, capped by its eponymous dome, has symbolized Islam's unequivocal link to the town that sits at the center of the religious universe of Judaism and Christianity. The Umayyads were literally the architects who cemented Islam's link to Jerusalem with their project of rebuilding the Temple Mount (known in Arabic as the Haram al-Sharif), including the construction of the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque (see Figures 19.1 and 19.2). Their religious and political interest in Jerusalem reflected their eagerness to present themselves as protectors and sponsors of the city and addressed both Muslims and Christians, as the two largest communities that they ruled. The Umayyads believed that their patronage would translate into popular support for the dynasty. Hence, the architecture they patronized carried religious symbolisms that resonated with two traditions, and directly shaped one – the long-standing Judeo-Christian tradition and the newly forming Islamic one.

The appropriation of the Judeo-Christian tradition took the form of narratives and practices that were common among Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity. They range from Biblical narratives about Jerusalem and its Temple and Temple Mount, to events and religious lore associated with precise locations and sites there, to pilgrimage and popular veneration. It is true that by the seventh century, the Christians had generally refocused their veneration away from the Temple Mount (a process that had started in the late fourth century). However, Christians still visited at least one location there – the Pinnacle where James the brother of Jesus was killed. As for the Jews, some kept coming to mourn the loss of their Temple at the site of the Foundation Stone (*even ha-shtiyya*).<sup>1</sup> What is not clear is how much of this Judeo-Christian lore the early Muslims knew. Obviously, as early as the eighth century, most of this knowledge became widespread. Before that, one can only speculate that it must have resulted from direct exposure and from the eagerness of Muslims to shape the new religion of Islam in ways that elevated it above its other monotheistic siblings (in the same way Christian groups drew on the ancient Biblical traditions to shape their respective forms of Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism).

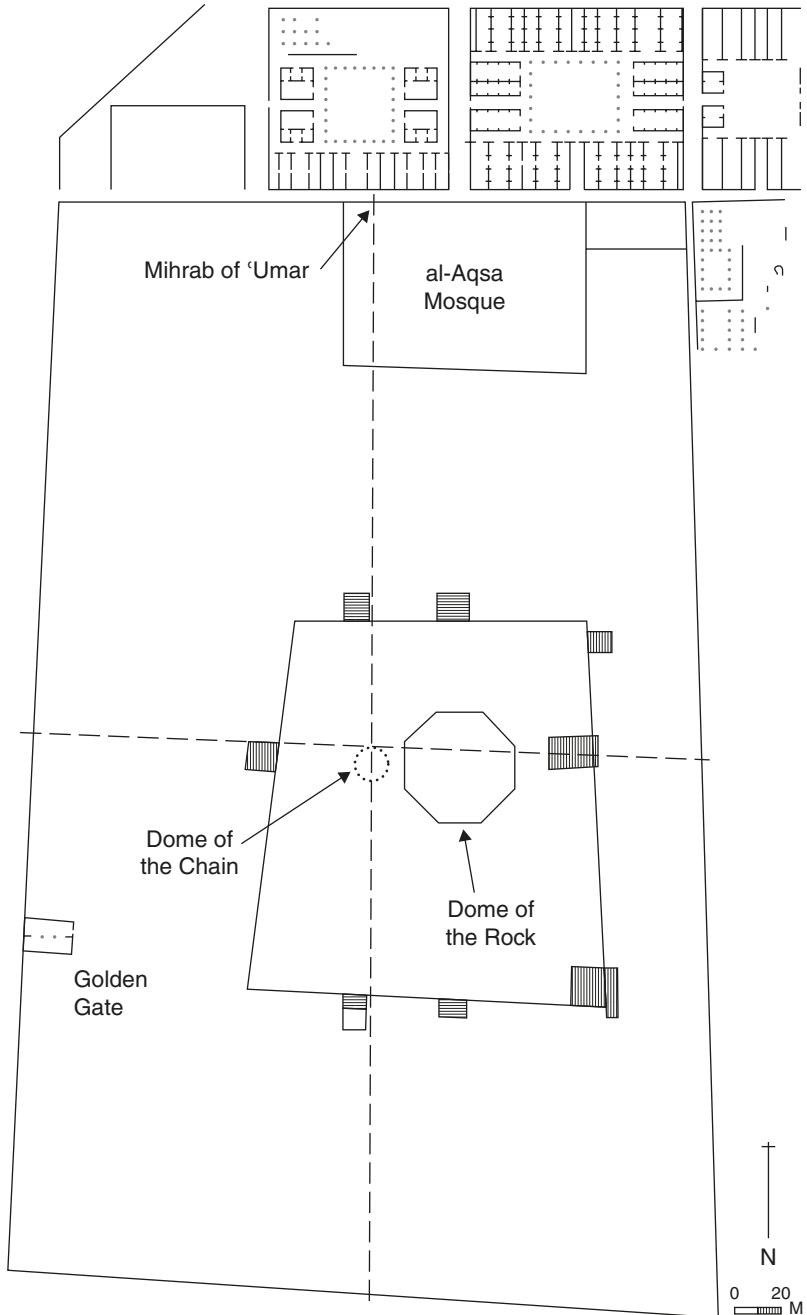
With respect to the Islamic tradition, it makes sense to start with the Qur'an. However, the Qur'an does not make any explicit reference to Jerusalem. There are



Figure 19.1 Dome of the Rock, with the Dome of the Chain to its left.  
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a few references to the Holy Land – for example, as *al-ard al-muqaddasa* (the Holy Land) in Qur'an 5:21, and as *al-ard allati barakna fiha* (the land which We blessed) in Qur'an 7:137 and Qur'an 21:71 – and many other references to Biblical history and figures. Aside from that, there are two instances that have traditionally been assumed to refer directly to Jerusalem: they relate to Muhammad's Night Journey (*al-isra'*) and the change of the *qibla* (direction of prayer). The former occurs in verse 17:1: 'Glory be to Him who made His servant journey by night from the Sacred Mosque (*al-masjid al-haram*) to the Furthest Mosque (*al-masjid al-aqsa*).'<sup>1</sup> The latter is supposedly encountered in verses 2:142–50, which begins, 'The fools among the people will say, "What has turned them away from the *qibla* which they used to observe?" and ends, "Wherever you come from, turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque (*al-masjid al-haram*) ...".'

However, neither of these verses unambiguously refers to Jerusalem. Verse 17:1 does not offer any clarity regarding the location of the Furthest Mosque (*al-masjid al-aqsa*), and seems to denote a sacred area of worship rather than a specific building. Some early Muslim scholars located the Furthest Mosque in heaven, and the link with Jerusalem only gradually became uncontested belief after the early eighth century, when the Aqsa Mosque was built by the Umayyads.<sup>2</sup> Verses 2:142–50, which discuss the change of the direction of prayer (*qibla*) to the Ka'ba (the Sacred Mosque) in



**Figure 19.2** Plan of the Temple Mount, with Marwanid-era buildings and imaginary lines of axes (after Rosen-Ayalon).

Based on: A. Marsham (2013) ‘The Architecture of Allegiance in Early Islamic Late Antiquity: The Accession of Mu‘āwiya in Jerusalem, ca. 661 CE’. In *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives*, edited by A. Beihammer, S. Constantinou and M. Parani, pp. 87–112. Leiden (map at p. 111, in turn based on a map from Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, *The Early Islamic Monuments of Al-Haram Al-Sharif: An Iconographic Study*. Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1989).

Mecca, supposedly occurred in the second year of Muhammad's presence in Medina. But 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 was Jerusalem. Again, over time, this association became cemented in the Islamic religious tradition.<sup>3</sup>

A third association, which also does not have clear Qur'anic grounding, is Muhammad's Ascension (although some suggest that verses 53:1–18 are where the Qur'an alludes to it). The location where it occurred was contested in early Islamic scholarship. Most early Muslim scholars distinguished it from the Night Journey and located it vertically above Mecca.<sup>4</sup> The earliest source that collated together separate narratives to produce the story of the Night Journey and Ascension seems to be Ibn Ishaq (d. 767), in his biography (*Sira*) of Muhammad.<sup>5</sup> Yet, once the connection to Jerusalem was cemented, the literature remained inconclusive about the precise location in the Haram of Jerusalem from which Muhammad supposedly ascended to Heaven. Much later, the Dome of the Ascension (a small dome with supporting columns likely recycled from Crusader buildings) was erected to the west of the Dome of the Rock, sometime after Saladin recaptured Jerusalem in 1187.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that the expression *al-masjid al-aqsa* is often mistakenly understood to mean specifically the mosque that was begun in 705 and called Aqsa. More often than not, when Islamic sources speak of the 'Aqsa Mosque', they in fact refer to the entire Haram. If one accepts that Qur'an 17:1 indeed refers to the Furthest Mosque as a place in Jerusalem, then it could not mean a structure because there was no mosque or structure of any kind that could be called a mosque on the Temple Mount of Jerusalem at that time. Interestingly, the verse also does not specify the Ka'ba as the place of departure, but rather speaks of *al-masjid al-haram* to mean the entire Haram of Mecca that includes the Ka'ba, and where also no mosque existed at the time.

Aside from the ambiguity that one gets from the Qur'an, Islamic scholarship also offers a confusing picture about what precisely is the 'Aqsa Mosque'. For instance, in his description of Jerusalem, the geographer Ibn Hawqal (d. after 977) says:

In Jerusalem, there is a mosque 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 massively 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.<sup>7</sup>

Ibn Hawqal, who was writing in the second half of the tenth century, makes it very clear that what he meant by mosque (Arabic, *masjid*) was the entire Haram area. The actual place of prayer – which he calls a structure (*bina'*) – was secondary

in comparison to the Dome of the Rock and the wider Haram. Al-Tabari (d. 923) displays a similar ambiguity when he relates two reports about the entry of Caliph Umar b. al-Khattab (r. 634–44) into the Temple Mount. One narrative says that Umar ‘proceeded to enter the Mosque’, and the other ‘he stood at the door of the Mosque’.<sup>8</sup> Again, there was no such thing as a *mosque* there when Umar purportedly visited the area. Indeed, the ambiguity in the expression ‘Aqsa Mosque’ remained even into the Crusader period, with such works as al-Qasim b. ‘Asakir’s *Kitab al-Mustaqlsa fi fada’il al-Masjid al-Aqsa*, where the term ‘Aqsa Mosque’ specifically indicates the Dome of the Rock.<sup>9</sup> So, in Ibn Hawqal, al-Tabari and many other historians and writers, unless the language is unequivocally indicating a mosque in the classical sense (a built structure for prayers), the Aqsa Mosque usually means the entire Haram, and can even refer to the Dome of the Rock.<sup>10</sup>

The ambiguities of the Qur’anic texts contribute strongly to a sense that the sacred status of Jerusalem in Islam was shaped, and perhaps even instigated, by the Umayyads. Furthermore, the massive construction project of the Haram, including the construction of the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque, left an ambiguity in the later Islamic sources, with the wider Temple Mount, or indeed the whole city, sometimes being referred to as the Aqsa Mosque. Something similar can also be seen in the use of the expression *Bayt al-Maqdis* (and sometimes *al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*) which indicates either the Temple or its specific site, all of the Temple Mount area, or the entire city of Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup>

In what follows, developments under three Umayyad caliphs, Mu‘awiya (r. 661–80), ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) and al-Walid (r. 705–15) are examined in detail, with particular attention to construction activity in and around the Temple Mount. It is argued that Jerusalem already held religious and political significance during the reign of Mu‘awiya, reaching its climax after his reign, during the period of the erection and completion of the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque. After that, the Umayyad patronage persisted as evidenced by the frequent presence of Umayyad caliphs and by the Umayyad palaces. But it should be noted that starting with the reign of Caliph al-Walid b. ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 705–15) the Umayyads became invested in other cities as well: Mecca for religious reasons, and, starting in the reign of Sulayman b. ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 715–17), Ramla, which became the political center in Palestine. This, however, should not be understood to mean that Jerusalem faded into insignificance.

## MU‘AWIYA

According to both Islamic and non-Islamic sources Mu‘awiya (r. 661–80 CE) chose to be proclaimed caliph in Jerusalem precisely because of the city’s political and religious symbolism.<sup>12</sup> *The Maronite Chronicle*, which is the closest source to the event, specifies that when Mu‘awiya came to Jerusalem, he prayed at the Golgotha, and then visited Gethsemane where he prayed at the tomb of Mary. Al-Maqdisi specifies that Mu‘awiya received the pledge of allegiance as caliph in the mosque.<sup>13</sup> According to al-Maqdisi, this was a mosque previously built (or rebuilt) by Jacob, al-Khidr, David, Solomon, and others, including the caliph Umar. Mu‘awiya’s choice to be declared caliph in Jerusalem, even though he belonged to one of the most prestigious and powerful families of Mecca, indeed attests to Jerusalem’s political and religious significance. However, one cannot accept al-Maqdisi’s statement that ‘Umar built the

mosque and then Mu‘awiya did the same, because it is very late and his use of the terms ‘build’ and ‘mosque’ are too vague and imprecise: Jacob did not build a mosque anywhere on the Temple Mount, and neither al-Khidr nor David. One adds here the fact, discussed earlier, that the Muslims generally referred to the entire Haram as ‘mosque’, thus ‘building a mosque’ could simply mean ordering some repairs to the Temple Mount, and not necessarily building a specific structure.

Supposedly, a Muslim space for prayer is described in two Christian sources from after 670: the sections added to John Moschus’ *Pratum spirituale*,<sup>14</sup> and Adomnán’s *De Locis sanctis* (where he alleges he reported information told to him by a certain Arculf who supposedly visited Jerusalem).<sup>15</sup> If one were to accept the authenticity of what is being discussed in these two sources as coming from the 670s, both reports associate the Muslims’ prayer space with the site of the old Temple, not on the south-western edge of the Temple Mount esplanade. So, if a mosque ever existed before the Aqsa Mosque was built during the reign of al-Walid, it was likely adjacent to the Rock.

Of all the structures on the Haram, it is likely that the Dome of the Chain was erected during the reign of Mu‘awiya, although one cannot completely dismiss the possibility that he did so when he was still governor.<sup>16</sup> The Dome of the Chain is an open structure with a dome standing on 11 outer columns, and six inner columns. It has been suggested that it was the model for the Dome of the Rock or functioned as a treasury,<sup>17</sup> both of which can be easily dismissed since the structure features an open upper space below the dome unsuitable to keep a treasury, and its plan is distinctively different from that of the Dome of the Rock.<sup>18</sup> Its location, on the exact center of the Haram, might suggest that it was intended to convey the first Muslims’ claim to the area, and carry some eschatological undertones. If this is correct, then it is likely this structure that is being described by contemporary sources as the Muslims’ mosque.

### ‘ABD AL-MALIK

The Dome of the Rock is a magnificent structure, both in terms of its design and its elaborate ornamentation. It was completed around 692 (and definitely before 695), built by order of the Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705). The inscriptions on the inner octagonal arcade of the Dome of the Rock give the building’s date as 72 of the Hijra which corresponds to the period between June 691 and May 692 CE. Some scholars have argued that this date refers to the commissioning of the building and not to its completion;<sup>19</sup> although one can dispute such a view on the basis that it lacks solid evidence and that for the inscription to be placed in that location, the structure must have been mostly finished. It has been suggested that the design was influenced by the style used for Christian churches and martyria in Palestine.<sup>20</sup> The discovery in 1992 of the Kathisma Church (fifth and sixth centuries) a few miles to the south of Jerusalem on the road to Bethlehem offers the most exact comparison in terms of architecture and function.<sup>21</sup>

The inscription inside the Dome of the Rock allows us to detect signs of an emerging new religion,<sup>22</sup> and the motivations for its construction. We find there one of the earliest forms of the classical *shahada* (testimony of faith), and the emphatic emphasis on God’s oneness: ‘There is no god but God, One with no partners.’ We find the emphasis on the prophethood of Muhammad. We also find the earliest dated

citations of the Qur'an in inscription (for example, Qur'an 3:18–19, 4:171–2, 19:33–6, and 112:1–4). The importance of these particular Qur'anic verses is that they dispute the divinity of Jesus, and therefore point to one of the reasons for the construction of the Dome of the Rock: to signal the claim that is being made for Islam on the city of Jerusalem, contesting the legitimacy of the Christian claim.<sup>23</sup>

However, as with so many such important sacred sites, one should not be eager to single out *the* reason that triggered 'Abd al-Malik and the Muslims to build the Dome of the Rock and launch the massive renovation of the Haram in Jerusalem. Christian sources, as seen earlier, attest that the Muslims were already coming to pray at the site of the ancient Temple, a claim corroborated by some Muslim sources, which add that the Dome of the Rock was built to shelter the Muslim worshippers.<sup>24</sup> There is also an emphasis on the sanctity of the Rock, which derived from its Biblical and even pre-Creation associations. In contrast, as noted above, there is no evidence that the belief that Muhammad ascended to Heaven from the Rock existed during the early Umayyad period. As for whether 'Abd al-Malik was rebuilding the Temple, it does not seem to have credible supporting evidence, as will be discussed below.

Another explanation focuses on the association of the Rock with the Day of Resurrection. The earliest *fada'il* narratives focus on this theme.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the inscription on the inner arcade of the Dome of the Rock makes reference to Muhammad's intercession on behalf of the Muslims on the Day the Judgment, so it can be said that at the time of construction the eschatological association of the spot with the Day of Judgment was present in the Muslim imagination. Additional, compelling evidence comes from the presence of the Dome of the Chain, which is located a few feet away to the east, and which, as noted above, is considered to be the oldest Islamic structure on the Haram.<sup>26</sup> The Dome of the Chain is linked in some Islamic narratives to an extra-biblical legend of the chain of justice of King David or King Solomon, which was located in front of the Temple and used as a divine mechanism to judge among the ancient Israelites.<sup>27</sup> But it is unlikely that the Muslims 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.

The other justification for the construction of the Dome of the Rock that is advanced in medieval chronicles (by the likes of al-Ya'qubi and Ibn al-Batriq) – and discredited in some modern scholarship – states that 'Abd al-Malik wanted the Dome of the Rock to be used as a pilgrimage site in lieu of the Ka'ba in Mecca, when the latter was under the control of his rival, Caliph Ibn al-Zubayr. This opinion has been dismissed on the grounds that it reflects a bias against the Umayyads on the part of pro-Shi'a or pro-Abbasid historians, and on the basis that the specific assertion that 'Abd al-Malik's intention was to divert the hajj away from Mecca is a clear manifestation of such bias, since it was so contrary to Islamic practice.<sup>28</sup> But entirely dismissing this view is problematic because the rationale for refuting it stems from an improper understanding of the fluidity of early Islamic creeds and rituals.<sup>29</sup>

It is unquestionable that the Muslims came on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Muslims went on pilgrimage to a variety of destinations (a practice that remained throughout Islamic history and goes on even today).<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, many Muslims who did so did not necessarily make a pilgrimage to Mecca, or saw their alternative pilgrimage as necessarily a replacement to the one to Mecca. Judging from a variety of later Muslim testimonies,

the rituals that were performed on the Haram area ranged from *ta'rif* (the customary prayer-while-standing that is part of the pilgrimage ceremony in Mecca on the day when pilgrims visit Mount 'Arafa, which was a widespread practice during the Umayyad period, convened in most major cities) to prayers and liturgical readings associated with specific sites.<sup>31</sup> 'Abd al-Malik could have ordered the development of the Haram, and especially the building of the Dome of the Rock, because it was a destination of pilgrimage, without this having had anything to do with the pilgrimage to Mecca. But, given that the primacy of Mecca as Islam's holiest city was still in flux at the time, rivalry with Mecca cannot be ruled out as one of the reasons for its construction.

One further thing has not been examined with any seriousness regarding the reasons for building the Dome of the Rock. It is the actual name of the structure. It is a dome on top of the Rock. If 'Abd al-Malik understood his mission as rebuilding the Temple, he would have called the structure by some other name. 'The Dome of the Rock' (Arabic, *qubbat al-sakhra*) celebrates the Rock itself. Aside from the name, the *fada'il* narratives bring overwhelming support to this suggestion in terms of the unambiguous focus on the sanctity of the Rock and its significance from the time God created Earth (as His throne and as the spot from which He ascended back to Heaven) to the Day of Resurrection (when the Rock will welcome the Ka'ba and Humanity will line up for judgment on either side of it).<sup>32</sup>

There is no doubt that the link between the Rock and the Biblical Temple and Biblical history was not lost on the Muslims. But what the *fada'il* literature adds attests to a very important layer of legends that deal with the Rock alone; probably this came out of Jewish lore that focused on the Foundation Stone (*even ha-shetiyya*) after the destruction of the Temple, and which was intended as a substitute for the loss of the Temple. It is here that one sees a difference in focus regarding the sacredness of the Haram area: in the period between the destruction of the Temple in 70 and Muslims' conquest of Jerusalem in c. 637, the Temple Mount (as the broad sacred area) and the Rock (as the specific focused site) became enshrined in Jewish religious imagination as holding the sanctity that was once invested in the Temple. How much of that the Muslims understood in the period before the construction of the Dome of the Rock can be debatable, and one can argue that some of it reflected the Muslims' eagerness to come up with more testimonies about the Rock's sacredness after the building was erected. Yet, there is no doubt that 'Abd al-Malik and the Muslims were engaging new meanings for the site that were not necessarily the ones of the distant Biblical past.<sup>33</sup>

In this light, it is not surprising that we find early Muslim narrators thinking of the Rock whenever they reflected on Biblical narratives and history. This is completely against what Biblical history and narratives say. The Rock that the Muslims revere does not exist in the Bible. It emerges in Jewish practice and Rabbinical lore only after the Temple is gone.

The example below gives an idea of the glosses that Muslims made on Biblical material in order to bring out an association with 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 [God's] saying, 'the land of Moriah' means Jerusalem, and 'one of the mountains' means the Rock.<sup>34</sup>

What we see here is an Islamic *midrash* on the Bible that tries to channel holiness to its precise epicenter: the Rock.

Last, there is one additional theory that has been posited, namely that 'Abd al-Malik was rebuilding the Temple.<sup>35</sup> It is based on a unique account attributed to Ka'b al-Ahbar (d. c. 652–6) that speaks of a prophecy that God would send 'Abd al-Malik to rebuild and ornament the Rock of Jerusalem.<sup>36</sup> This particular report is problematic in two ways. First, there is every reason to believe that the report attributed to Ka'b al-Ahbar was attributed to him at a later period in Umayyad history since Ka'b died long before 'Abd al-Malik reached adulthood.<sup>37</sup> Second, if 'Abd al-Malik and the Muslims had believed that the caliph was rebuilding the Temple, then one would expect the *fada'il* literature to reflect that with more than one report, which is not the case. One would also expect the inscription on the inner arcade to evoke something to that effect, which it does not.

## AL-WALID

It is likely that 'Abd al-Malik had envisioned a complete plan for the Haram, but we are not sure that his vision extended to the other parts of Jerusalem. At any rate, the role of his son al-Walid (r. 705–15) in seeing this plan through and adding his own marks are undeniable. The building of the Aqsa Mosque was completed around 710 CE, during al-Walid's reign. The Aqsa Mosque conveys the most unequivocal and unambiguous message of the Islamic character of the Haram. Al-Walid also had a significant role in envisioning Jerusalem as a royal city of some sort, which is seen in the construction of a palace and other structures adjacent to the Aqsa Mosque, during his reign and after it. Taken together, the major projects undertaken by 'Abd al-Malik and al-Walid demonstrate the attention they paid to Jerusalem and the transformative impact of their patronage in cementing Jerusalem's religious status in Islam. They also show that Umayyad Jerusalem extended much more to the south than previously believed.<sup>38</sup>

As noted above, lacking archaeological and contemporary historical evidence, the existence of a mosque prior to the reign of Mu'awiya, and even 'Abd al-Malik, is speculative at best. It is often argued that the Aqsa Mosque was first built by caliph 'Umar,<sup>39</sup> which is based on much later reports. In this connection, one also needs to recall the discussion above about the confusion of the expression *al-masjid al-aqsa* and that in early Islam more often than not it meant the entire Haram area and not a precise mosque structure. Having said this, there is no reason to doubt the story of 'Umar's visit to Jerusalem when the Muslims captured it around 637, and his efforts to clean the Temple Mount, and identify a spot for communal prayer. If one were to accept what the additions to John Moschus' *Pratum spirituale* and Adomnán's *De Locis sanctis* report as coming from the 670s, they attest only, as discussed earlier, to the presence of an ordinary structure or a designated space for prayer very close to the Rock, not on the location where the Aqsa Mosque was built.



Figure 19.3 Ruins of the Umayyad Palaces, with the Aqsa Mosque in the background.  
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Aside from the Aqsa Mosque, al-Walid also ordered the construction of a palace, located below the southern wall of the Aqsa Mosque (Figure 19.3). It forms part of a built complex on the southwestern corner and along the southern side of the Haram that was discovered during excavations by different archaeological teams in the years 1961–63, 1968–78 and 1994–96. This complex comprises structures, unmentioned in the literary sources, believed to represent two palaces and two administrative buildings. There seem to be traces of two other incomplete structures adjacent to them as well. They were all built during the Umayyad period, starting in the reign of al-Walid.<sup>40</sup>

The buildings have a broadly similar plan: a square structure with an inner open courtyard. The first palace has two stories and is located directly below the southern wall of the newly built Aqsa Mosque. The quality of the workmanship of the masonry and its frescos, along with the fact that it has direct access to the Aqsa Mosque, suggests that it was likely built as a residence for al-Walid. Indeed, several papyri from Egypt (dating to the period 706–14) speak of Egyptian laborers sent to Jerusalem to work at the construction sites of the mosque and the caliph's palace.<sup>41</sup> The other palace is to the west of the main palace, and is a little larger. It could have been intended as the governor's residence (*dar al-imara*). Along with the other buildings, they date to after al-Walid's reign and were likely used for governance purposes. Indeed, although it had been thought that they were destroyed in the 749 earthquake, these Umayyad palaces and buildings lasted until the eleventh century and their use probably in fact diminished as a result of the earthquake of 1033.<sup>42</sup>

## THE *FADA'IL* LITERATURE DURING THE UMAYYAD PERIOD

The Muslim pilgrimage to Jerusalem to pray at several sacred sites there, especially the Rock, along with the major construction works undertaken on the Haram by 'Abd al-Malik and al-Walid gave rise to the *fada'il* of Jerusalem literature which underscored the religious significance to the Muslims of the many sites on the Haram and around Jerusalem that they visited. One can describe it as an economy of demand-and-supply: on the one hand, we have a popular need for information about what made those places sacred; on the other hand, we have preachers and scholars, some of whom were employed by the Umayyads, producing and disseminating such information. Moreover, one should expect that some of the factors that triggered this demand-and-supply could have been shaped in imitation of the pilgrimage Jews and Christians undertook to the holy city, and the legends they circulated about Jerusalem's sacredness. We see the reverse of this happening a few centuries later (that is, Christian attachment to sacred sites in imitation of the Muslims), when the Crusaders seized Jerusalem in 1099 and confiscated the Dome of the Rock, calling it the Temple of God and reintroducing it as a principal sacred spot in Jerusalem alongside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, as well as linking specific spots to Biblical/Christian figures.<sup>43</sup>

One can even argue that it was during the Umayyad period that this literature started to form. Local scholars in Jerusalem took the lead in promoting and disseminating *fada'il* narratives, although we also have material that originated elsewhere. It is not farfetched that the Umayyads themselves could have had a hand in developing and shaping some of its features. For instance, it is reported that al-Zuhri (d. 742), who was very much involved in shaping the Umayyad religious program, confronted a local preacher in the Aqsa Mosque who was recounting the *fada'il* of Jerusalem when the latter refused to acknowledge the link of the place to the Qur'anic verse 17:1.<sup>44</sup>

On the basis of the *fada'il* narratives, it is clear that the Dome of the Rock and by extension the entire Haram are linked to the Biblical Temple and Biblical history (David, Solomon, the first Temple, and so on), and even back to pre-Creation when God molded the Earth. There is as well the association with Mary and Jesus, and several eschatological scenarios preceding the Day of Judgment.<sup>45</sup> What is totally new is the development of what can be described as 'exclusive' Islamic links to Jerusalem that resulted from the Muslims' own experiences and association with the city, and which were not the by-product of the Judeo-Christian tradition: for example, the link of the Haram of Jerusalem (*masjid bayt al-maqdis*) to Muhammad's Night Journey, the relocation to Jerusalem of Muhammad's Ascension, the visit of 'Umar and his prayer on particular locations on the Haram, a Muslim accidentally accessing Paradise through the cave underneath the Rock (see Figure 19.4), the disputation between 'Umar and Ka'b al-Ahbar as to whether to pray north or south of the Rock, and so forth.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, what is largely missing from the earliest *fada'il* literature, but which we find in more traditional historiography from the Abbasid period,<sup>47</sup> is the circumstances of the destruction of the Temple. There is the problematic report attributed to Ka'b discussed above. And there is the famous prophecy of Jesus: 'God will destroy the stones of this mosque because of the sins of its people.'<sup>48</sup> What are completely absent are reports about its actual destruction.



Figure 19.4 The Cave under the Rock.  
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### THE UMAYYADS' DIMINISHED INTEREST?

The interest in Jerusalem did not wane after the caliphate of al-Walid. The palaces and buildings discussed earlier, whose existence is not encountered in the literary sources, prove beyond any doubt the Umayyads' sustained investment in the city. Moreover, it is reported that upon being elevated to caliph, 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz arranged for the high officials of his predecessor Sulayman b. 'Abd al-Malik in all of Palestine to take an oath to him in front of the Rock in Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup> If such a thing did happen, it gives an additional proof of the continued political and religious significance of Jerusalem to the Umayyads.

That Jerusalem sustained itself as a significant religious and political center for the Umayyads does not necessarily mean that they did not consider other cities as equally important or worth investing in for a variety of reasons. Indeed, as al-Walid was investing wealth in the Aqsa Mosque and the palace in Jerusalem, he was renovating and enlarging the Great Mosque of Damascus, the Prophet's mosque in Medina and the Haram in Mecca.

The end of the Umayyad era did trigger a decline in the status of Jerusalem. The city did not lose its religious significance. On the contrary, Jerusalem's religious importance remained, which is seen in the popular practice of adding a mandatory stop in it as part of the Hajj ritual (which also included a stop in Medina that was not part of the 'original' pilgrimage). Here, irrespective of the reasons that could have motivated Mu'awiya, 'Abd al-Malik, al-Walid and other Umayyad caliphs to order massive construction projects for

the Haram, one needs to keep in mind the fact that the Umayyads saw themselves as the architects of Islam at a time when Islam itself was still very fluid. As God's caliphs, they were rather shaping Islam. The motivations that caused their interest in Jerusalem could have changed over time, in part perhaps precisely because of the transformative impact of their religious policies and projects. The Haram with the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque gained meanings and significance that were not there when they came to power. In this respect, the Umayyads made Jerusalem an Islamic city, and their legacy is that ever since, the Muslims have not been able to think of Jerusalem as other than that, often with the recognition that others have a claim to it too – a claim which at the same time does not diminish their own.

## NOTES

1 Tsafrir 2009.

2 Busse 1991, and Kister 1980: 189–90.

3 Rubin 2008: 350–51.

4 See, for instance, Ibn Sa'd 1958: 1.213–15 and al-Tabari 1969: 2.307–309. See also Busse 1991 and van Ess 1999.

5 Ibn Hisham 1990: 29–38; Ibn Ishaq (1955).

6 Elad 1995: 48–50 and 73–6; Kedar and Pringle 2009: 141–2.

7 Ibn Hawqal 1938: 171.

8 Al-Tabari 1969: 610–11.

9 Mourad 2010.

10 It is possible that the medieval Muslim historians were aware there was no 'mosque' there in the time of Muhammad and understood the reference to indicate the whole Haram platform.

11 *EI2*, 'al-Kuds. A. 2. Names' (O. Grabar).

12 Marsham 2009 and 2013.

13 Quoted in Marsham 2013: 97.

14 Hoyland 1997: 63.

15 Doubts have been raised about the trustworthiness of Adomnán's report, especially the 'eyewitness' report of Arculf; see the discussion in Nees 2015: 33–57.

16 Nees 2015: 96–9.

17 Rosen-Ayalon 1989: 26–27.

18 Nees 2015: 61.

19 Blair 1992; Milwright 2016.

20 Grabar 1959; Chen 1999.

21 Avner 2011.

22 Grabar 1996; Milwright 2016.

23 See, for instance, Grabar 1959: 53–6, and Milwright 2016: 239–40.

24 Mourad 2008: 94–5.

25 On which, see further below in this chapter.

26 Nees 2015: 58–99.

27 Elad 1995: 47–8. 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 of King David or King Solomon 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.

28 This view was first advanced in Goitein 1966.

29 Robinson 2005: 95–100; Elad 2008: 192–3.

- 30 See the sources discussed in Kister 1980 about the hadiths encouraging Muslims to make a pilgrimage to a few sacred places. I am using the word pilgrimage in a broad sense, and therefore it is not restricted to the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.
- 31 Elad 2008: 170–9; Elad, 1995; Hasson, 1996.
- 32 Mourad 2008.
- 33 Nees 2015.
- 34 Abu al-Ma'ali 1995: 115–16.
- 35 For example, Busse 1998: 25.
- 36 al-Wasiti 1978: 86, and Abu al-Ma'ali 1995: 63–4.
- 37 Rabbat 1989, Mourad 2008.
- 38 Rosen-Ayalon 2006: 43.
- 39 Kaplony 2009; Marsham 2013: 97–100.
- 40 Prag 2008: 101–6; Avni 2014: 134–6.
- 41 Prag 2008: 104; Elad 2008: 210; the cautious note by Prag that the papyri offer only ‘circumstantial’ evidence that the palace they refer to was in Jerusalem is to be rejected as a mistake on his part. Following Elad, the documents clearly name al-Walid and reference his mosque and palace in Jerusalem.
- 42 Prag 2008: 104. Cf. Avni 2014: 137; Magness 2003: 159–61.
- 43 Kedar and Pringle 2009: 136–42.
- 44 al-Wasiti 1978: 102, Mourad 2008: 96–7.
- 45 Mourad 2008, 2010.
- 46 Mourad 2008, 2010.
- 47 See, for instance, al-Tabari 1969: 1.538–57. Al-Tabari too, like many other historians, did not say much about the destruction of the second Temple, only stating that Titus destroyed it in revenge of the Jews killing Jesus: al-Tabari 1969: 1.606.
- 48 al-Wasiti 1978: 60; Abu al-Ma'ali 1995: 230.
- 49 Ibn al-Mundhir 2004: 4:217; Marsham 2009, 135.

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# THE UMAYYAD WORLD

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