



# SACRED SITES IN THE HOLY LAND: HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES



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**Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation**



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## PREFACE

As Executive Director of the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation, I am pleased to present the following case studies of three sacred sites in the Middle East. The work contained in this report represents an overview of historical and religious perspectives on these specific sites. The Sacred Sites project represents a multi-year joint effort initiated and conducted by two leading scholars, an Israeli, Yitzhak Reiter and a Palestinian expert\* who produced substantial work. I wish to express my gratitude and thanks to them.

Unfortunately the circumstances in the region obstructed their continued joint cooperation and the project was therefore adjusted to reflect this reality. The resulting narratives are built on their thorough research, and supplemented with other scholarly work from Palestinians, Israelis and others. The IHJR is, however, solely responsible for the content of the report.

The studies presented should be seen as an attempt to trace the deep history of the current divide in particular over two major sacred sites in Jerusalem, and one lesser known one, with the hope that they will contribute to fostering a better understanding of the conflicting narratives over these holy sites.

I would like to express my gratitude in particular to Shoshana Iten for her major contribution in synthesizing this material and to Dr. Menachem Klein and Dr. Mahmoud Yazbak for their guidance and review of the text. We are also grateful for the important contributions of Professor Mustafa Abu Sway and Rabbi David Rosen.

Thanks are due also to the public and private funders that include the Partnership for Peace Program of the Commission of the European Union, the Ford Foundation, the Arcadia Trust, the Sigrid Rausing Trust, and the family foundations of Dr. and Mrs. Richard M. Hunt, and Drs. Robert and Marina Whitman. Without their commitment and support this project would not have been possible.

*Catherine Cissé-van den Muijsenbergh*

\*The Palestinian scholar requested to remain anonymous





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## INTRODUCTION

The Sacred Sites project is part of a broader initiative, intended to provide “building blocks” from which current or future peace initiatives can benefit. The general objectives of all projects include sharing narratives with the “other” and engaging public figures, political and religious leaders, educators, and public commentators, in bringing the results to broad public attention within and outside the region.

Since the 1920s, holy places, and particularly those situated in Jerusalem, have been symbolically employed by nationalist politicians when addressing the conflict.<sup>1</sup> Since the conflict involves pursuing claims of sovereignty over the Holy Land’s territory, and the legitimization of establishing national entities, historical and religious attachments to holy places

are often used by the opposing parties to solicit domestic and international popular support (including from the international and religious communities) and to delegitimize the Other,<sup>2</sup> or that which is different.

A first expression of the moral dimension of the conflict may arise through addressing the question: which of the two conflicting parties has established historical rights to the Holy Land? The answer is not easy. Is it those who represent the first monotheist religion? Who, according to the Bible, established a great kingdom some 3,000 years ago in the Land and centered their worship of God on the rituals at the Temple of Jerusalem, but, after more than a thousand years in the land, were driven away? Or those who have inhabited the Land for

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: Buried History of the Holy Land Since 1948* (2001); Doron Bar, “Wars and Sacred Space, the Influence of the 1948 War on Sacred Space in the State of Israel”, in Marshall J. Breger, Yitzhak Reiter and Leonard Hammer (eds.), *Holy Places in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Confrontation and Co-Existence* (2009), pp. 67-91; Mahmoud Yazbak, “Holy Shrines (Maqamat) in Modern Palestine/Israel”, in Breger, Reiter and Hammer (eds.), *Holy Places in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 231-248; Glenn Bowman, “Nationalizing the Sacred: Shrines and Shifting Identities in the Israeli-Occupied Territories”, *Man*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1993), pp. 431-460; H. Ben-Israel, “Hallowed Land in the Theory and Practice of Modern Nationalism”, in Benjamin Z. Kedar and R.J. Zvi Werblowsky (eds.), *Sacred Space: Shrine, City and Land* (1998), pp. 278-294.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of the “Other” was coined by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and was applied among others by Edward Said in his influential book *Orientalism* about false assumptions underpinning Western ideas regarding the Middle East.

much of the last 13 centuries, and who claim ancestry to ancient tribes and peoples who were nomads in the Land some 5,000 years ago?

The Jews maintained an identity as a separate nation during the roughly 2,000 years of dispersion in the *Diaspora* through their religious identity and conviction, including a yearning and fundamental belief in the “return to Zion”. This is enumerated in the Bible and is accepted by many observant (and even many non-observant) Christians, particularly Protestants. On the other hand, Muslims who see themselves as the true followers of Abraham, the first believer in one God, refer to the description in the Qur’an (17:1) of the divinely “blessed land”. Holiness and holy spaces in this case are cognitive “assets” in the debate on historical rights to the land. The best known example is the al Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem (Arabic: *Al-Quds*). For both Palestinian Muslims and Jews living in the Holy Land, this site and surrounding Jerusalem became a source for national

inspiration.

The overall aim of this report is to encourage tolerance and understanding by familiarizing both sides with the narrative of the Other, while also working towards a common narration of the histories and religious significance of holy places in an area and time of heated conflict in which some of these sites are major symbols of national strife.

The concept of the Other may help explain an individual’s understanding of the constitution of a society. By distinguishing between the “Self” and the “Other”, a cognitive map is drawn between which individuals, groups or societies are included or excluded from one’s own society. “Othering” is arguably a key process in building national identities involving the “construction” or the “imagining” of history, to draw on the term put forward by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).





All too often, in this process, the stories of the Other are excluded or denied, in whole or in part. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict there is an apparent gap in understanding or empathizing with the “Others” narratives, and often the histories or attachment regarding spaces that hold joint significance are denied by both national groups. Instead of placing focus on the shared veneration, sacred spaces often become sites of “alienation.”

A distinction is made between competition over sovereignty over sacred sites on the one hand and the contested histories and religious significance on the other. It is true that today many “shared sacred sites” are venues of antagonism and contest, as Robert Hayden argues,<sup>4</sup> and that these can hardly be divided between (or jointly shared by) the parties, as Ron Hassner asserts.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, as it is so difficult to share the site at present, and presumably in a future

solution, perhaps the past can be more easily shared. Perhaps the issue of sovereignty and other aspects of a future solution could be more easily negotiated and resolved after historical and religious narratives have been addressed. If those leaders who shape and disseminate narratives to their people could adopt more inclusive versions, it is possible that the different communities could embrace mutual respect and empathy.

It should be mentioned, however, that the notion of an inclusive narration, sometimes referred to as “shared”, is not meant to indicate that parity exists between the two sides. From the Palestinian perspective, a shared status is viewed as an imposition by Israel. From the Jewish-Zionist (*yeshuv*) perspective before 1948, shared use with Christians and Muslims was also viewed as an imposition. We recognize that history provides a core dimension of national identity and it would be impossible to agree on a common history between peoples of nations locked in conflict. However, if we

<sup>4</sup> R. Hayden, “Antagonistic Tolerance”, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (April 2002), pp. 205-231.

<sup>5</sup> R.E. Hassner, “To Halve and To Hold: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility”, *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Summer 2003), pp. 1-33.

limit ourselves to narrating the history and mainstream religious significance of particular sites separated as much as possible, from the general context of the territorial debate, we may succeed in weaving “a joint narrative” which is inclusive in nature and through academic articulations.

The role of holy places in conflicts, though by no means a new concept, has received little scholarly attention especially in the context of the Middle East. Several other publications have focused on the historical narratives from different perspectives, including Marshall J. Breger, Yitzhak Reiter and Leonard Hammer’s *Holy Places in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, a compilation of experts from different national identities who examine religious, political and legal issues, bringing attention to examples of conflict and cooperation. Another notable contribution is *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem’s Sacred Esplanade*, a collection of essays written by Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars on the history, aesthetics, archaeology and politics surrounding the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Among the monographs specifically

addressing the role of sacred sites in the conflict is Ron Hassner’s *War on Sacred Ground*. Hassner uses numerous examples from different conflict areas, including the Holy Land, to argue that sacred sites are characterized by indivisibility, and prevention and resolution of conflicts become difficult if not impossible in relation to sites that are considered highly central and vulnerable. While seemingly pessimistic in regards to highly important sites, Hassner contends that religious leaders have a potentially significant role in peacemaking, especially those deemed highly respectable and charismatic. Another noteworthy publication on the religious dimension is Michael Dumper’s *The Politics of Sacred Space: The Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict*, where the complex relations and rivalries between the three religious groups, and the possibilities for a final status agreement are examined. Marc Gopin, in his book *Holy War, Holy Peace*, strongly recommends the engagement of Islamic and Judaic resources in any serious peacemaking efforts. There are also numerous policy-oriented works advocating for the inclusion of the religious dimension in the



conflict.<sup>6</sup>

These works are undoubtedly contributing to deepening awareness on the multiple perspectives, whether Israeli and Palestinian, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, or religious and historical, which play an active role in contributing to the ongoing conflict, but also in finding solutions. This report is, in part, a continuation of these efforts.

While religion is often perceived as contributing more to the conflict than to peaceful solutions, this dimension could potentially play a significant role in current and future discussions. One of the lessons learned from the stalled Oslo talks was that its overly secular focus did not take into consideration the conflict's religious dimensions. Finding solutions to disputes involving religious sites requires, in addition to the political and practical aspects, knowledge of the historical as well as the religious attachments. Following the Camp

David negotiations in 2001, Menachem Klein, an adviser to the Israeli team and a member of several Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy groups, explained the Israeli delegation's attitude towards religious experts:

The lack of a religious discourse within the Israeli establishment that prepared for the summit and the failure to initiate a religious dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian representatives were critical once the question of the Temple Mount was raised in the way it was raised. The religious issue seems to have deterred the Israeli decision makers. They were afraid to deal with it because they themselves were not religious and lacked familiarity with the philosophical and legal world of Judaism.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, from the Palestinian delegations

<sup>6</sup> For such examples, see P.E. Weinberger, "Incorporating Religion into Israeli-Palestinian Peacemaking: Recommendations for Policymakers", May 2004, <http://www.gmu.edu/depts/crdc/docs/recommendations.pdf>; and Y. Landau, "Healing the Holy Land: Interreligious Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine", *Peaceworks*, No. 51 (August 2003), pp. 44-45.

<sup>7</sup> M. Klein, *The Jerusalem Problem* (2003), pp. 162-163.

at the negotiation, leaders were unprepared<sup>8</sup> and unauthorized to make critical decisions regarding the Haram on behalf of the entire Muslim world without support from internationally recognized Muslim leadership. According to Abdul Fattah Salah, Jordan's Minister of Religions Affairs, if the Palestinians "want to let go of an area in the West Bank, no one from the outside is going to say anything. But when it comes to Jerusalem, they can't. It is tied to all Muslims."<sup>9</sup>

It is evident that certain religious sites have attained an unimaginable symbolic standing for both nations in search of symbols around which to rally their people. While the narratives included here admittedly graze the surface of numerous underlying issues involved in a nation-building process of two groups in conflict (with differences of identity, memory, motivation and hopes within each group) with strong interests from various powerful global and regional actors, they nonetheless reveal the powerful symbol these sites maintain in

relation to the overall conflict.

### *Methodological considerations*

The challenge was to write deliberately on the disputed views and narratives in an inclusive way such that people of any religious conviction or national identity would be able to relate to the text and be exposed to or be able to acknowledge the narratives of other parties without being offended. While the initial scope of the report included 13 sites sacred to Christians, Jews and Muslims, it was eventually decided to reduce this to three, two of which are considered by many the most contentious. These include al Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem and the Cave of Machpelah/Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron, both highly significant in both Judaism and Islam where numerous violent clashes between Jews and Muslims have taken place. The third site discussed, Tomb of Samuel/Nabi Samu'il is of lesser significance to both religions, but has nonetheless been an important site for local

<sup>8</sup> E. Said, "The Price of Camp David", 23 July 2001, <http://www.mediamonitors.net/edward33.html> (accessed: 20 December 2010)

<sup>9</sup> H. Schneider, "Temple Mount, also Known as Noble Sanctuary, Is a Jerusalem Flash Point", *The Washington Post*, 17 November 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/16/AR2009111603669.html> (accessed: 7 February 2011).



Jewish and Muslim inhabitants for centuries and continues to be so. It was at times presented as a “shared” site where Jews and Muslims prayed side by side, yet special arrangements enforced by the Israeli occupation after 1967 and the Israeli civil and military presence remind visitors and worshipers that a “shared” space faced “Judaization”.<sup>10</sup>

There were several issues debated in regards to the presentation of this narrative. Would the aim be to create a pure scholarly narrative or a popular one? If the narrative adopted a purely academic approach, this would require questioning the authenticity of the sites. In addition, there is more than one narrative for the religious perspectives, both in Islam and Judaism. By choosing to present popular or religious narratives the question would remain whether all of them should be mentioned even if they contradict each other. In the end it was decided to present the historical/academic narrative and apply academic standards to the written sources on which assertions are based, as well as

the mainstream religious/national narrative from the Islamic and Jewish religious perspectives. The two forms of narration (historical/academic and religious) are meant to complement and complete each other, and are not intended as a form of judgment in regards to the authenticity or validity of their respective assumptions.

In debating the presentation of the religious significance of the most disputed site included in this report, the Haram al-Sharif/ Temple Mount, religious experts from Islam and Judaism were asked to present their respective narratives, thereby allowing the reader to understand for him or herself the complexities and paramount place this site holds in both religions, as well as for both nations. Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway contributed an essay entitled “The Holy Land, Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Qur’an, Sunnah and Other Islamic Literary Sources” and he is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Islamic Studies and Director of the Islamic Research Center at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem/Palestine. Rabbi David Rosen, who contributed his essay on “Jerusalem in

<sup>10</sup> See Mahmoud Yazbak, “Holy Shrines (Maqamat) in Modern Palestine/Israel”, in Breger, Reiter and Hammer (eds.), *Holy Places in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 237-239.

Jewish Tradition”, is Honorary Advisor on Interfaith Relations to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel; serves on its Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, and represents the Chief Rabbinate on the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land. The religious perspectives for the other sites were compiled based on secondary research.

One of the most debated issues was how to present the most recent past and the current situation of the site. It was eventually decided that the present situation, including issues related to current sovereignty, major disputes, and any practical information could be relayed in a distanced and neutral tone in the introduction of each site. Since the scope of the narrative was defined as the historical and religious perspectives, the most recent “history” was deemed too young, and thus too politicized, to be included in a just manner, though some key events are highlighted. Claiming to give voice to all perspectives, events, causes, actors, etc. would require an analysis and discussion in an inclusive way such that, if realized, it would be the envy of any mediator or negotiator familiar with the region.

Finally, the terminology and sequence of the sites’ names and narratives were debated. The name for the most central religious site in Jerusalem is referred to using various terms including the Temple Mount (English translation of the Hebrew name), Har haBáyith (Hebrew name), al-Haram al-Sharif (Arabic name), and Noble Sanctuary (English translation of the Arabic name). In order to maintain a degree of simplicity while striving for impartiality, we decided to refer to the sites using the names that are most commonly used in English from the Jewish/Israeli and Muslim/Palestinian perspectives, applying both when they were used contemporaneously, and using only one during the periods when sovereignty, retrospectively, was clearly defined. When both names are used, they follow the alphabetical order in English such that the site above becomes the Haram al-Sharif/ Temple Mount.

The work was reviewed by two experts from the region. Menachem Klein teaches at Bar Illan University in Ramat Gan near Tel Aviv and has participated in several Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy groups on the topic of sacred sites, as well as in the Camp



David talks, and has several published works including *The Jerusalem Problem*. Mahmoud Yazbak is a senior lecturer teaching Palestinian history at the Department of Middle Eastern History at Haifa University and specializes in Palestinian social history. He has recently published an article entitled “Holy Shrines (Maqamat) in Modern Palestine/Israel and the Politics of Memory” in M.J. Breger, Y. Reiter and L. Hammer’s *Holy Places in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.

## Overview

The report is divided into three sections. Following this introduction, a general historical overview of the sites is provided which will enable the reader to navigate through the main events that have influenced the relation between people and the sites of worship. It seeks to provide an inclusive overview beginning with the biblical times and moving through the Roman, Byzantine, Umayyad, Fatimid, Crusader, Ayyubid, Mamluk, Ottoman, British Mandate, and Jordanian periods. This is followed by the third and main section which includes the religious and historical narratives of the three sites, up to the 1967 War and its immediate aftermath.

It is genuinely believed that the treatment of the historical and religious narratives is a fair starting point, which others could use and develop. There are numerous other sites which could be of interest for future studies, and it is hoped that the lessons learned from this process could be applied to other cases. The texts represent neither a mainstream narrative, nor an official one, nor are they intended to be an ultimate version.





## HISTORICAL/RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF SELECTED SITES

*The narratives in this publication are complex. While the individual texts speak for themselves, they can be placed in the broader picture of a seemingly endless flow of actors who have struggled over rights to access, worship and live in one of the most disputed regions in the world. To help orient the reader, this section aims to place the three sites in a broader historical landscape.*

Tradition has it that the tribes of the Israelites, a nomadic people who migrated from the dry pastures of the Syrian Desert to the fertile shores of the Mediterranean, founded a kingdom called Judah sometime before 1000 B.C.E. It seems that a shared ancestry – centered around the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob – and an exclusive belief in a deity called Yaweh, constructed a strong sense of shared identity. The prophetic figure of Samuel (931-877 B.C.E.), according to the canonical texts, played an important role in uniting the Israeli tribes against common enemies, and after his death, the people of Juda turned his grave into a site of worship. It is unclear if the site known today as the “Tomb of Samuel” indeed holds his remains.

The First Temple in Jerusalem, exclusively dedicated to the Hebrew God Yaweh, is

said to have been built by King David’s son and successor, Solomon in 957 B.C.E. David’s choice for Jerusalem as both his political and religious capital, and Solomon’s forceful confirmations of this, has undoubtedly had a tremendous influence on the development of regional history. Jerusalem’s central and sacred position was adopted in Christianity and later shared with Islam. Because Jerusalem, since the time of King David, became the paramount symbol of religious identity, all great Middle Eastern Empires, from the Babylonians to the Ottomans have thought it necessary, at some stage, to add this holy city to their realm.

Not long after the death of Solomon, the Israelite kingdom, for reasons that are not entirely clear, fell apart into two different entities: Judah in the south, and Israel in

the north. In 722 B.C.E., Israel fell to the Assyrians. The political end of Judah came in 587 B.C.E., when the Babylonians, under King Nebuchadnezzar, conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple of Yaweh, by then the paramount symbol of Jewish religious identity. The religious and political elite of Judah were transported to Babylon. Their captivity ended in 539 B.C.E. when Babylon was conquered by the Persians. Thereupon, the Jews were allowed to return to their land and rebuild their temple. The Second Temple, completed around 516 B.C.E., resumed its function as the center of religious and political life, despite the fact that Judah was reduced to a puppet state of the Persian Empire for the subsequent centuries.

Jerusalem experienced a series of conquests and came under control of Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.E. After Alexander's death, his general Ptolemy seized power in the region in 301 B.C.E. The Ptolomaic house would rule over Jerusalem during the century to come. After 200 B.C.E., the increasing power of the Seleucids of Syria ended Ptolomaic hegemony in the region and during the rule of the Seleucid king Antiochus III (r. 223-187 B.C.E.); Jerusalem came under full Seleucid control. His successor, Antiochus IV Epiphanes

(175-164 B.C.E.) was the first king to introduce radical measures against the Jews, including renaming the city Antiochia, looting the temple treasures, and desecrating it by sacrificing a pig on its altar. This resulted in the Hasmonean (Maccabean) Revolt in 164 B.C.E. when Judas Maccabaeus entered Jerusalem and cleansed the temple (an event commemorated by the holiday of Hanukkah). It was not until 141 B.C.E. that the city finally came under Jewish (Maccabean) control, under Simeon the Hasmonean.

In 64 B.C.E. the Roman military leader Pompey conquered much of what is present day Syria and Lebanon, and the next year marched on to Jerusalem, making Judah pay tribute to Rome. In 37 B.C.E. the Romans installed Herod as the first king of Judea, as the puppet state was now called. King Herod is said to have carried out multiple prestigious projects in several cities, most notably in Jerusalem and Hebron. In this last city he is said to have renovated the probably much older 'Cave of the Patriarchs' – since the advent of Islam more prominently known as 'The Ibrahimi Mosque' – where Jews, later joined by Muslims, venerate the figure of Abraham and his offspring.



In the centuries that followed, the region and especially Jerusalem (or the city of *Aelia Captiolina*, which is how it was called by the Romans) was again identified with the biblical Jerusalem after the Romans converted to Christianity. The Christian Romans apparently did not worship at the same place as the Jews, thereby demonstrating and ensuring a clear break from the previous religious regime.<sup>11</sup> During the reign of Constantine (274-337), Jews were not allowed to live in Jerusalem, though they made pilgrimage to the Western Wall in Jerusalem once a year.

Between 634 and 638, Byzantium, the successor state of the Roman Empire in the East, was weakened by a full-scale war against the Sassanid Empire,<sup>12</sup> and ceded its land in the Levant to the Arab armies. The period of Muslim rule in the Middle East began. In 638, Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, handed over the keys of the city to Umar, the second Caliph to succeed Prophet Muhammad, as the leader of all

Muslims. The shift in the population from Christians and/or Jews to Islam changed drastically as a result of migration and conversion. The conquered Christians of Greater Syria/Bilad al-Sham, as the land was called by the Arabs, would keep their freedom and were allowed to practice their religion, under certain restrictions. According to some sources, Jews were not allowed to live in Jerusalem at this time, though this remains disputed.<sup>13</sup>

Because of Islamic beliefs in and familiarity with the holy figures of Judaism and Christianity, many Jewish and Christian sacred sites soon began to accommodate Muslim worshipers and pilgrims. At the same time, many of the sacred sites acquired a distinctly Islamic character from the earliest days of Islamic presence onwards, in particular as Islamic culture and architecture bloomed under the Umayyad Caliphs (661-750)

<sup>11</sup> O. Grabar, "The Haram al-Sharif: An Essay in Interpretation", *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (BRIIFS)*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Autumn 2000) [http://www.riifs.org/journalessy\\_v2no2\\_grbar.htm](http://www.riifs.org/journalessy_v2no2_grbar.htm) (accessed: 7 January, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> The Sassanid Empire is considered the last pre-Islamic Persian Empire, ruled by the Sassanian Dynasty from 224 to 651.

<sup>13</sup> For the interpretations mentioned in the text, see Tabari, *History of al-Tabari: The Battle of al-Qadisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine* (Albany NY, 1992) (translated by Yohanan Friedmann). p. 191. The historicity of the "Covenant of 'Umar" – the agreement 'Umar made with the Christian population – is disputed, and according to some sources, some Jews were later allowed to return.



**Figure 1:**

Titus' men carrying the spoils of war: The seven-armed Menorah that was taken from the Temple is clearly visible. Detail from the Triumphal Arch of Titus on the Forum Romanum in Rome.

– and their Abbasid (750-909) successors. Of course new sites were also built. The best example of an early Islamic structure that was newly built under the Umayyads was al-Haram al-Sharif.

Prior to the Crusader period, more peaceful relations between the Muslim world and the West predated these violent, military expeditions. A lively trade had developed between Italy and the lands of the Fatimids, who ruled the Levant from their capital Cairo since 969. Also the tradition of Christian pilgrimage that had begun during the time of Constantine continued after the Arab conquests.

The first crusade led to the defeat of the

Fatimid rulers in Palestine and the establishment in 1099 of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem that included much of what is today Israel-Palestine. After a long siege, the armies of Godfrey of Boullion (d. 1100) managed to conquer and ransack the city. The Muslim response to the crusades was a phased one, where it was initially treated, by and large, with indifference. Then, around 1147, resistance was rallied by an Iraqi governor called Nur al-Din Zengi (1118-1174), stressing the need for *Jihad*. The advent of the strong figure of Salah al-Din (Saladin) to the sultanate of Egypt opened a third phase that saw the end of the first Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1187. In 1228, however, during the sixth crusade, Palestine fell into Christian hands again when a peace treaty was skillfully negotiated with the Ayyubid sultan al-Kamil (1218-38).

In 1250 the Ayyubid dynasty was overthrown by a rebellious slave regiment from the Egyptian army. At the beginning of the 14th century these emancipated slave-soldiers, called Mamluks, created what would be the longest-surviving Muslim state in the Middle East between the Abbasid and the Ottoman Empires. Christian and Mamluk rule overlapped in the Levant during the early sultanate. Baybars took



many Christian strongholds but was unable to take Acre (Akko), which was the last remnant of the 'Kingdom of Jerusalem'. Acre finally fell in 1291 after a siege led by the Mamluk Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil (1262-1293), and with it, the last crusaders state ceased to exist. Only some smaller towns would remain in Christian hands.

During the Mamluk period, Islamic architecture along with other art forms experienced a blossoming. Many examples of Mamluk architecture can still be admired in the old city of Jerusalem and other cities today. The Mamluks made way for the Ottomans in Palestine around 1520.

At the end of the 19th century, the Sultans Abd al-Majid I and Abd al-Aziz, took a renewed interest in Jerusalem. They undertook several projects to renovate Islamic sites, especially on the Haram al-Sharif, to substantiate their aspiration to become leaders of the entire Islamic Umma (all Islamic believers). The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire had already proceeded too far, and soon the nationalistic sentiments that were brewing everywhere in the Middle East would erupt during World War I and its aftermath. During the period leading up to World War I, the Arab leadership in Palestine was facing internal

strife and fragmentation, which would enable another group of people to gain the footing required to establish a political presence.

The first political Zionists, under the leadership of Theodor Herzl, began to immigrate to Palestine in the late 19th century with the vision of establishing a Jewish nation. As Jews were facing increased threat in Europe due to the rise of anti-Semitism and pogroms in Eastern Europe, along with the growing support for Zionism, the number of immigrants increased. The Balfour Declaration in 1917 affirmed a British policy to support a Jewish Homeland, which was confirmed by the League of Nations in 1922 when Great Britain was granted the Mandate for Palestine. As Jewish immigration continued, tension between Jews and local Arabs, along with the future implications, led to the 1920 Palestine Riots, or Nabi Musa riots, around the old city of Jerusalem. With the rise of Jewish persecution by the Nazis, the 1930s saw additional waves of Jewish immigration, leading to the mobilization of a national Arab Palestinian movement and the subsequent Arab Revolt 1936-1939. In the face of the growing Arab resistance, the British reversed their support for a Jewish

national home in the White Paper of 1939,<sup>14</sup> though they remained in the difficult position of mediating between two groups with growing national aspirations.

In November 1947, the aftermath of World War II, the United Nations voted in favor of a partition, whereby there would be a Jewish state alongside an Arab one, and a United Nations-administered Jerusalem (*corpus separatum*). The Holocaust had led to the death of six million European Jews, roughly two-thirds of the Jewish population in Europe, and European leaders were faced with enormous guilt about the horrors that had taken place in their midst. European and American leaders supported the establishment of a Jewish state, and in so doing overlooked the major consequences this would have to the local Palestinian population. Though the United Nations partition plan was accepted by the Jewish leaders, it was rejected by the Arabs, and when Israel declared independence in May 1948, Arab states launched an attack the following day, leading to the 1948 War. After one year of fighting, a ceasefire was

declared and temporary borders were established, known as the Green Line. Egypt took control of the Gaza Strip, while Jordan annexed what would later become the West Bank and including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The war displaced 750,000 to 800,000 Palestinian refugees,<sup>15</sup> about 50% of the Arab population of Palestine. There were also a few thousand Jewish refugees during and because of the war in Palestine from Jerusalem's Old City and small settlements. The Jewish state of Israel was accepted by the United Nations as a member state in 1949.

Between 1948 and 1958, the Jewish population of Israel increased from 800,000 to 2 million. Tension in the region amplified. In 1967, in what is considered a pre-emptive strike, Israel went to war with the surrounding Arab states in what became known as the War of 1967. At the war's end, Israel had taken control of the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza from Egypt, the West Bank including East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. The Sinai Peninsula and part of the Golan Heights

<sup>14</sup> B. Kimmerling and J.S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (2003).

<sup>15</sup> B. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (1986), pp. 397-399 (Hebrew edition).





were eventually returned. The war resulted in an additional 280,000 to 325,000 Palestinian refugees. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), established in 1964, came to prominence as political movement along with other groups committed to “liberating the homeland”; meanwhile, Israel began establishing settlements in its new territories of Gaza<sup>16</sup> and the West Bank, most notably around the city of Hebron, near the Ibrahimi Mosque/Cave of the Patriarchs. In 1988, the State of Palestine was declared in exile in Algiers by the PLO’s National Council, and declared Jerusalem as its capital, though only a limited number of states have accepted this. The recent past has seen numerous violent confrontations between state and non-state actors, and a just presentation of the events is beyond the scope of this brief overview. Numerous formal and informal peace talks have been held over the years, but to date no permanent solutions have been found on the core issues: the status of Jerusalem, refugees, borders, and security.<sup>17</sup>

The three sites included in this report are all located in disputed land. The Ibrahimi

Mosque/Cave of the Patriarchs and Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu’il are both located in the West Bank, while the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount is in the heart of Jerusalem’s Old City, in what is considered occupied East Jerusalem under international law.

The events and personalities discussed in this overview have had a significant impact on shaping the broader landscape of the history and religious significance of the sacred sites. The narratives which follow focus specifically on three of these sites, beginning with the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, followed by the Cave of Machpelah Ibrahimi Mosque, and finally the Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu’il.

<sup>16</sup> In 2005, Israel withdrew settlements from Gaza and ended its military presence, despite the ongoing conflicts with the Hamas-led government of Gaza.

<sup>17</sup> For more information on the core issues, the reader is referred to “Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”, at ProCon.org, <http://israelipalestinian.procon.org/> (accessed: 6 February 2011).





## AL HARAM AL-SHARIF

## TEMPLE MOUNT

The Noble Sanctuary (Arabic: *al-Haram al-Sharif*) or Temple Mount (Hebrew: *Har ha Báyith*), referred to here as the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem (Arabic: *al-Quds*) is thought to be one of the most serious obstacles to be overcome in the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations. Although the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount is considered a holy place by Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike, the dispute over its sovereignty is limited to Muslims and Jews – Christians have made no demands



**Figure 2:** The Noble Sanctuary/ Temple Mount location.

for control of the site. The nationalistic and religious emotions associated with it have increased in the atmosphere of linking sacred sites with national interests, through which the site has become, to some, a symbol of the obstacles and solutions to the overall Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The significance of this holy site has developed over hundreds of years through numerous changes of hands, and played a prominent role in shaping the current struggle, especially symbolically. As the associations between the site and national and religious figures continue to grow, so has the complexity of the issue. And despite years of unrelenting efforts by official representatives of each party, external political leaders, academics, and informal negotiators to reach an acceptable solution for this conflict, no such solution has been forthcoming. Among some, it is felt that an acceptable and suitable solution for the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount will ultimately lead to a comprehensive solution of the conflict; others fear that the controversy over the site will provide the spark that will continue to re-ignite the

conflict. The struggle over Jerusalem in general and the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in particular, differs from other final status issues given the heightened international interest, consequences, and partnerships involved.

The most sacred part of Jerusalem, the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount is situated on a stone hill within the bounds of ancient Jerusalem and is identified in Jewish tradition as the area of Mount Moriah where Abraham offered to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22:1-18). For Muslims, the site is associated with Muhammad's miraculous nocturnal journey (Isra' and Mi'raj) from Mecca to Jerusalem (Sura 17:1). The compound encompasses over 35 acres of more than 40 smaller historical monuments and structures including fountains, gardens, buildings and domes.<sup>18</sup> The most important of these are the Dome of the Rock at its center and the al-Aqsa Mosque in the southern part. The Western Wall, of which one section is known among Jews as the Wailing Wall, is believed to be the remains

<sup>18</sup> For a virtual walking tour guided by Oleg Grabar, please visit <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200901/al-haram/>.



of the Second Temple. Muslims refer to this same section of the wall as the al-Buraq Wall, considered to be the site where the Prophet Muhammad tethered his winged steed al-Buraq on his night journey, and has long been venerated by Muslims. The entire compound comprises nearly one-sixth of the walled city of Jerusalem.

For the last 1,370 years (aside from the Crusader interregnum of some 90-odd years) the site has served as the third Muslim sanctuary (*haram*), including the Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al-Sakhra) and the al-Aqsa Mosque structure, and

numerous adjacent buildings and artifacts. It is overseen by the Muslim Waqf administration, though with Israeli involvement since 1967.

**Figure 3:**  
Al-Haram al-Sharif of Jerusalem, seen from the South-West. The Dome of the Rock is clearly visible in the center. Al-Aqsa Mosque is located on the Southern edge of the plateau (on the left). Its basilica-shaped structure is a recognizable feature.



## RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

*This section will begin by providing religious narratives from the three monotheistic perspectives, though emphasis will be placed on the Muslim and Jewish perspectives as Christians claim no sovereignty. These are provided by Prof. Mustafa Abu Sway and Rabbi David Rosen respectively, who reveal through their contributions in detail and through the Scriptures the connections between their faith and the city of Jerusalem, and to this particular site.*

### ***Al-Haram al-Sharif/The Temple Mount in Islam***

*The Holy Land, Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Qur'an, Sunnah and Other Islamic Literary Sources*<sup>19</sup>

*By Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway, Al-Quds University*

Coming from the same divine source as previous revelations, Islam embodies many things that are common to them such as the special status that the Holy Land and Jerusalem enjoy. Islam recognizes the fact that the Holy Land is sacred to the People of the Book. When Muslims

say that the Holy Land is the “Land of the Prophets”, certainly the prophets of the Children of Israel are included and constitute a continuum in the line of prophecy, which culminated with Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon them all).

Almost every prophet lived in the Holy Land, or had a special relationship with it, including those who were born elsewhere. An example of the latter is Prophet Abraham, the prototype iconoclast. After he destroyed and mocked the idols of his people, they planned violence against him, but he was destined to go to the Holy Land.

<sup>19</sup> This is an abridged version of a lengthier paper, “The Holy Land, Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Islamic Sources”. The first version was published in the *Journal of the Central Conference of American Rabbis* (CCAR) (Fall 2000), pp. 60-68.



The following verse uses inclusive language to reflect the nature of Abraham's new home:

But We delivered him and [his nephew] Lot [and directed them] to the land which We have blessed for the nations.

(Qur'an, 21:71)

An example of a prophet who had a special relationship with the Holy Land and Jerusalem in particular is that of Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an stated in the chapter of the "Children of Israel" (*Banu Isra'il*), or the "Journey at Night" (*Al-Isra'*), that he was taken on a night journey miraculously from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque (Al-Masjid al-Aqsa):

Glory be to [Allah] Who did take His Servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque [Al-Masjid Al-Haram] to the Farthest Mosque [Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa] whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might

show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One who hears and sees [all things].

(Qur'an, 17:1)

Scholars of Hadith,<sup>20</sup> Qur'an commentators, and all of Islamic tradition take this particular verse seriously and consider the Sacred Mosque to be in Mecca and the Farthest Mosque to be in Jerusalem. No Muslim scholar challenged this position throughout the Islamic intellectual history which expands for more than fourteen centuries. The parameters of this blessed land go beyond what is between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. Ibn Kathir (d. 774 A.H./1373 C.E.), a medieval Muslim scholar, reported the commentary of several early Muslim scholars on verse 21:71.

According to the famous Ubayy Ibn Ka'b, the blessed land is Al-Sham [i.e. Greater Syria, which includes Jerusalem]. The great early commentator, Qatadah, adopted the same position. In addition, there is another

<sup>20</sup> A collective body of traditions relating to the Prophet Muhammad and his companions.

verse in the Qur'an with reference to this line of blessing:

Between them and the cities on which  
We had poured Our blessings, We had  
placed cities in prominent positions,  
and between them We had appointed  
stages of journey in due proportion:  
'Travel therein secure, by night and by  
day'.

(Qur'an, 34:18)

According to Mujahid, Al-Hassan, Sa'id Ibn Jubayr, Malik, Qatadah, Al-Dahhak, Al-Sadiyy, Ibn Zayd and many other respected early Muslim scholars, the blessed cities are those of Al-Sham. Ibn 'Abbas (d. 68 A.H./687 C.E.), the prominent early scholar of the Qur'an who was also a cousin and companion of the Prophet, maintained that the "blessed cities" is a reference to Bayt Al-Maqdis [i.e. Jerusalem].

Though there are several references to the land, the term "Holy Land" [*Al-Ard Al-Muqaddasah*] is mentioned only once in the Qur'an:

Remember Moses said to his people:  
'O my People! Call in remembrance  
the favor of God unto you, when He  
produced prophets among you, made  
you kings, and gave you what He had  
not given to any other among the  
peoples. O my People! Enter the Holy  
Land which God has assigned unto  
you, and turn not back ignominiously,  
for then will you be overthrown, to  
your own ruin.'

(Qur'an, 5:20-21)

But when the Children of Israel disobeyed God, He said:

'Therefore will the land be out of their  
reach for forty years: in distraction will  
they wander through the land: but  
sorrow you not over these rebellious  
people.'

(Qur'an, 5:26)

According to these verses, the right relationship with God, which means submission to His will, is the absolute criterion for inheritance of the Land.



The terms “al-Aqsa Mosque” and “Bayt Al-Maqdis” (i.e. Jerusalem) are used interchangeably whereby one of them is used as a metaphor of the other, as in the following Hadith:

Maimuna said: “O Messenger of Allah! Inform us about Bayt Al-Maqdis!”

He said: “It is the land where people will be gathered and resurrected [on the Day of Judgment]. Go and pray in it, for a prayer in it is the equivalent of a thousand prayers in other [mosques].”

I said: “What if I couldn’t reach it?” He said: “Then you send a gift of oil to it in order to be lit in its lanterns, for the one who does so is the same like the one who has been there.”<sup>21</sup>

The Hadith shows that it is the religious duty of Muslims all over the world to maintain the al-Aqsa Mosque both physically and spiritually. The relationship with the al-Aqsa

Mosque is primarily fulfilled through acts of worship, but the physical maintenance of the Mosque is also part of the responsibility of all Muslims. The fulfillment of both duties will be impaired as long as the al-Aqsa Mosque remains under occupation! The truth of the matter is that under Israeli occupation, Muslims do not have free access to the Mosque. Those who are prevented from having freedom of worship at the al-Aqsa Mosque include, but are not restricted to, all Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and occasional restrictions to Jerusalemite men younger than 45 years of age.

Since the miraculous Night Journey of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), the al-Isra’ wa al-Mi’raj took place more than fourteen centuries ago, Muslims have established a sublime and perpetual relationship with the al-Aqsa Mosque. The Prophet was taken from Al-Masjid Al-Haram in Mecca to Al-Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem. This event marked a twinning relation between the two mosques. The beginning of Surah Al-Isra’ (17:1) reminds Muslims and

<sup>21</sup> Abu Dawud, Sunan # 457; Ibn Majah, Sunan # 147; Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Musnad # 6/463; Al-Bayhaqi, Sunan # 2/441.



non-Muslims of this important event.

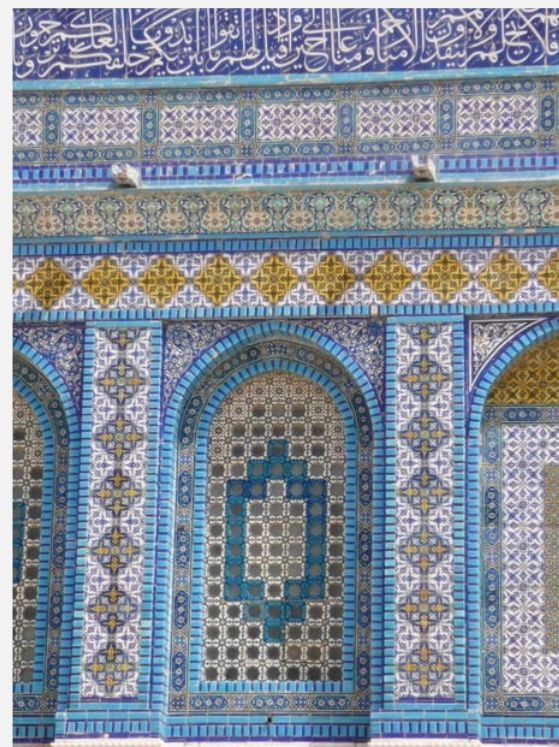
When the Prophet (Peace be upon him) reported the event to the people of Mecca, they challenged him to prove it by describing Jerusalem to them, because they were familiar with it through their caravan trading. They used this story to undermine his credibility as a prophet; they knew that the journey from Mecca to Jerusalem would take several weeks during that time in each direction. They were considering Prophet Muhammad's abilities, not that of the Omnipotent God!

There are many references to this event in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (Peace be upon him), to the extent that it is not possible to cover all the details of the Isra' and the Mi'raj in such an article. The basic story is that Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) was taken by the archangel Gabriel on a supernatural animal (Al-Buraq), from Mecca to Jerusalem and then to heaven, where he received the commandment for the five daily prayers. On his way back, the route of the journey passed through Jerusalem and there he led the other prophets in prayer. The part of the journey from Mecca to Jerusalem is called Isra' and the ascension to heaven is called

Mi'raj. The journey took place during what is described as the Year of Sorrow ('Am Al-Huzn). It was during this year that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) lost two of his most important supporters: his wife Khadijah and his uncle, Abu Talib, who despite the fact that he never embraced Islam defended his nephew against the powerful tribes of Mecca.

**Figure 4:**

Sultan Abd al-Hamid (Abdülhamid) II (1876-1909) embellished the exterior of the Dome of the Rock with Quranic verse, written on ceramic tiles (see top of the picture). By doing so, he was the last Muslim ruler to distinctively change the building's appearance.







Mujir Al-Din Al-Hanbali (d. 1522) used “Al-Masjid Al-Sharif Al-Aqsa” in the first page of his introduction to *Al-Uns Al-Jalil fi Tarikh Al-Quds wal-Khalil*. But the order of the words differed in the chapter on the description of the al-Aqsa Mosque; he used “Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa Al-Sharif”.<sup>22</sup>

Muslim scholars understood that the name ‘al-Aqsa Mosque’ predates the structures, and that no building could be called as such. It is anachronistic to call the southern-most building the al-Aqsa Mosque; Al-Hanbali called it “Al-Jami` Al-Kabir Al-Qibliyy” (The Grand Southern Friday-Mosque).<sup>23</sup>

It is quite remarkable that Al-Hanbali offered, in the year 900 A.H./1495 C.E., the following definition:

Verily, ‘Al-Aqsa’ is a name for the whole mosque which is surrounded by the wall, the length and width of which are mentioned here, for the building that exists in the southern part of the Mosque, and the other ones such as the Dome of the Rock and the corridors and other

[buildings] are novel (*muhdatha*).<sup>24</sup>

The paragraph that preceded the definition of the al-Aqsa Mosque was dedicated to its measurement. Twice, the measurements of the Mosque were taken under the supervision of Al-Hanbali to make sure that they were accurate. He mentioned that the length of the Mosque was measured from the southern wall to the northern corridor near Bab Al-Asbat (i.e. Lions’ Gate), and the width was measured from the wall overlooking the cemetery of Bab Al-Rahmah (i.e. Golden Gate) to the western corridor, beneath the Tankaziyya School. In both cases, the width of the walls themselves was excluded.

Bayt Al-Maqdis became the first Qiblah or direction of prayer. Al-Bara’ said:

We have prayed with the Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him) in the direction of Bayt Al-Maqdis for

<sup>22</sup> Mujir Al-Din Al-Hanbali, *Al-Uns Al-Jalil fi Tarikh Al-Quds wal-Khalil*, Vol. 2 (1973), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

sixteen or seventeen months. Then we were directed to the Ka`bah [in Mecca].

(Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

The reason for the change is that Abu Dhar Al-Ghafari – May God be pleased with him – said:

I said: O Messenger of Allah: Which mosque was established first on earth?

He said: Al-Masjid Al-Haram [in Mecca].

I said: Then which one?

He said: Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa [in Jerusalem].

I said: How much time was between them?

He said: Forty years, and when it is time for prayer, wherever you are, pray, for that where the merit is.

Moreover, the importance of the al-Aqsa Mosque in the life of Muslims is reflected in the many other traditions of the Prophet.

One of these traditions – narrated by Al-Bukhari (# 1115) and Muslim (# 2475) – makes it clear that *traveling* in order to visit mosques for religious purposes, is permitted to three mosques only: Al-Masjid Al-Haram (in Mecca), Al-Masjid Al-Nabawi (in Medina) and Al-Masjid al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem).

Imam Al-Nawawi (d. 1277), who belonged to the Shafi`i school of jurisprudence, said that the majority of scholars (*jumhur Al-`Ulama`*) understand the Hadith as saying that “there is no [extra] merit in traveling to other mosques”.<sup>25</sup>

One should remember that the Umayyads developed the site of the al-Aqsa Mosque before the end of the 1st century A.H.<sup>26</sup> They moved the capital of the Islamic state from Medina to Damascus. Thereafter, no Muslim ruler took any of the three sacred cities, Mecca, Medina or Jerusalem as a capital. It is rather the religious importance of these cities that led them to their decisions, not the opposite.

Another tradition extolling the special merits of Jerusalem, including the view that praying at the al-Aqsa Mosque is far more

<sup>25</sup> Al-Nawawi, *Sahih Muslim bi-Sharh Al-Nawawi* (Commentary on Hadith # 2475).

<sup>26</sup> Based on the Islamic lunar calendar, and corresponds to 622-719 C.E.



efficacious than prayers in other locations (with the exception of the two mosques of Mecca and Medina). In addition, Um Salamah wife of the Prophet said:

I have heard the Messenger of God (Peace be upon him) saying:

“He who initiates the minor Hajj [the ‘Umrah] or Hajj at Al-Aqsa Mosque, God will forgive his prior sins.”<sup>27</sup>

There is an addendum to the previous Hadith stating that Um Hakim daughter of Umayyah Ibn Al-Akhnas, who reported the Hadith of Um Salamah, traveled from Medina all the way to the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and initiated the minor Hajj from there.

There are many other traditions that reflect the importance of Jerusalem and the

al-Aqsa Mosque in Islam that for brevity I did not include in this article. Yet, to conclude, I would like to refer to ‘Umar Ibn Al-Khattab.<sup>28</sup> After entering the Old City of Jerusalem, the Archbishop of Jerusalem invited him to pray inside the Holy Sepulcher church. ‘Umar declined politely and stepped outside the church to pray.<sup>29</sup> He feared that Muslims in the future would claim this as a right. This wise decision of ‘Umar, I believe, established the best normative model for interfaith relationship, especially in relation to the religious space of the other.<sup>30</sup>

Muslims ruled Jerusalem for most of the last fourteen hundred years; they have respected the religious space of the other, and maintained a healthy distance, literally. This is the way forward.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* # 25347.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Umar Ibn Al-Khattab is the second in the line of Righteous Caliphs (*al-Rashidun*), who captured Jerusalem peacefully in 638. See Y. Natsheh and M. Hawari, “Jerusalem and the Haram al-Sharif: The Qibla of Palestine”, in *Pilgrimage, Sciences and Sufism: Islamic Art in the West Bank and Gaza*, 2nd ed. (2010), p. 68.

<sup>29</sup> The location was next to *Cardo Maximus*.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Umar seems to have set the precedent of tolerating, but not imitating, Christian practices. In other words, by his refusal, he avoided possible confrontation with Christians.

## *Al-Haram al-Sharif/ The Temple Mount in Judaism*

### *“Jerusalem in Jewish Tradition”*

*By Rabbi David Rosen*

While the city of Shalem is mentioned in Genesis in connection with Abraham and his meeting with Malchizedek of that city, the full name Jerusalem (together with its synonym Zion) enters onto the biblical stage in connection with David and its establishment as his royal city (II Samuel 5:5-9), serving as the capital around which all the tribes of Israel are united. However, it is the erection of the Temple by David's son Solomon (I Kings 6) that endows the city with holiness, in accordance with the instruction given to the Children of Israel recorded in the book of Deuteronomy 12:5 concerning the place for sacred offerings:

And you shall come there...to the place which the Lord your God will choose from amongst all

your tribes to place His Name there.

(cf. II Kings 21:4)

Accordingly, the people would come up from far and wide in pilgrimage to the city, to the Temple – three times a year – on the Festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles as commanded in Deuteronomy 16:16.

The unique sanctity of the Temple site not only invested the whole city with a special holiness, but also lent to its identification in tradition with major biblical events, not least of all Abraham's binding of his son before God on the mountain in the land of Moriah as narrated in Genesis 22. Thus the Temple Mount is known as Mt. Moriah (as we find in II Chronicles 3:1). Reflecting the emanation of holiness from the Temple Mount to the city as a whole, the other name for the mount – Zion – was used to embrace the whole of Jerusalem (cf. I Kings 8:1; Isaiah 1:27). This extended relationship is perhaps most powerfully expressed in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple (I Kings 8), where he speaks of the



various persons, Israelites and foreigners; as well as the various opportunities that will bring people to the Temple or make them focus their minds and hearts on it from elsewhere. In verse 44 Solomon speaks of

they (who) will pray to the Lord,  
via the city which You have  
chosen, and the house which I  
have built for Your Name.

The greatness and splendor of Jerusalem are described in the Bible in hyperbolic poetic imagery, such as "beautiful in elevation, the joy of all the earth" (Psalm 48:3) and "perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth" (Lamentations 2:15); and in the Song of Songs (6:4), the beloved is compared to Jerusalem as the symbol of beauty and loveliness. Similarly in the "Songs of Ascents" (Psalms 122, 125, and 132) the pilgrims praise Jerusalem in hyperbole.

It was also mentioned how the whole city became an extension of the

Temple Mount; in Psalm 137, "Zion" and "Jerusalem" become symbols of the whole land. Similarly, the name and the concept of Jerusalem are frequently employed in prophetic literature to represent the whole of Judah. Indeed Jerusalem embodies the conduct and the deeds of the people of Judah and is identified with them, as well as with the whole of Israel, for good or ill.

The destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem with it (5 and 6 B.C.E.), are thus seen in the Hebrew Bible as the ultimate catastrophe and in the ominous term "the day of Jerusalem" in the book of Lamentations, the city symbolizes the humiliation of the land, the people and their exile, so graphically described in that book. Accordingly the weeping exiles by the rivers of Babylon declare:

If I forget you O Jerusalem let  
my right hand forget its ability.  
Let my tongue cleave to the roof  
of my mouth if I do not  
remember you, if I do not raise  
Jerusalem above my greatest  
joy.

Nevertheless, destruction and exile are seen only as a temporary situation and prophetic literature expresses the total trust in Divine Love and commitment to His eternal promise in keeping with Leviticus 26:44-45, that will ultimately bring about the city's restoration and reunification with the people. Accordingly the chapters of consolation in the book of Isaiah (Chapters 40 to 66), contain an abundance of expression of fervent love for Zion and Jerusalem on the one hand and on the other, descriptions in hyperbolic poetic style of its anticipated future greatness and splendor, with its expected restoration. The Prophetic view of an exalted future for Jerusalem includes both physical splendor and a sublime religious-spiritual significance referring both to the near future and to the end of days. In Jeremiah's detailed vision of the rebuilt Jerusalem (Chapters 30 and 31), not only the Temple but the whole city will be "sacred to the Lord". Ezekiel (Chapters 45 and 48) to an even greater degree endows this vision of the restored Holy City with a

transcendent aspect in which the whole city, entirely sanctified to God as the abode of the Divine Presence, will be called "The Lord is there". The vision of Zechariah recorded in the eighth chapter of the book (vs. 3-5) looks towards that day when Jerusalem will be called "the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts, the holy mountain", and once again its "streets will be filled with old men and old women and boys and girls will play there". However, later on in Chapter 14 (vs. 16-21) his vision goes even beyond that of Ezekiel viewing the sanctity of the city of the Temple as having a universal nature which will be recognized by all the nations serving as international focus for universal pilgrimage. This is in keeping with the vision of Isaiah, echoed by Micah, in which the place named "the mountain of the House of the Lord" and "the House of the God of Jacob" are identified with Zion, Jerusalem, from whence learning, justice and peace will emanate to all the nations. Jewish tradition ascribes seventy names to Jerusalem, attesting to her spiritual significance and beauty.



As mentioned, tradition identifies Jerusalem/the Temple Mount with the central events of biblical history. Not only was it here that Abraham demonstrated his supreme dedication to God, but Creation itself began here. The foundation stone, “even hashtiyah” of the Temple, was considered the center of the world from whence Creation had commenced and the place from which the earth for the creation of the first human being was taken. Furthermore, this site is also identified with the place of Jacob’s dream (which he had on his journey from home when fleeing from his brother Esau) in which he received Divine revelation and promise (Genesis 28:11-22). Moreover, in rabbinic Judaism, Jerusalem acquires further cosmic significance both as the divine footstool underneath God’s throne (and thus as the natural fulcrum, as it were, of spiritual energy in the world) and also as a mirror image of the Heavenly Jerusalem that will eventually be united with the earthly Jerusalem.

After the Roman destruction of

Jerusalem and the Second Temple – with the ensuing exile and dispersion – this vision that sees Jerusalem’s future as integral to the establishment of the universal Divine Kingdom on Earth, became even more inextricably connected with the messianic hope for the ingathering of the exiles and the reestablishment of independent Israelite sovereignty.

**Figure 5:**

Segment of the Western Wall often referred to as the Wailing Wall in English and al-Buraq Wall in Arabic, with the Western Wall plaza in the foreground. A portion of the Dome of the Rock is visible atop the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.





These expectations that placed their trust in Divine mercy and promise, found their expression in the daily and weekly prayer services as well as in grace after every meal. The mention of Jerusalem was obligatory in all the statutory prayers, and again it is largely used as a synonym for the Land of Israel as a whole.

The most important of the many references is the 14th blessing of the daily *Amidah* prayer, which is entirely devoted to Jerusalem. It begins

“and to Jerusalem Your city, return in mercy ... rebuild it soon in our days” and concludes, “Blessed are You, O Lord, who builds Jerusalem.”

On the Ninth of Av, the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, a moving prayer of comfort to “the mourners of Zion and the mourners of Jerusalem” and for the rebuilding of the city is added to this blessing in the *Amidah* prayer in the afternoon service, and the concluding blessing is changed to refer to He “who comforts Zion and rebuilds Jerusalem.”

The 17th blessing of the *Amidah* is an invocation for the restoration of the Temple

service, which concludes with the words

and may our eyes behold Your return in mercy to Zion. Blessed are You, O Lord, who restores Your Divine Presence unto Zion.

The same combination of prayer for Jerusalem with the hope for the restoration of the Divine Service in the Temple is the theme of the 4th blessing of the additional service on the New Moon and Festivals. The Sabbath additional service refers to the return to “our land” and the additional prayer for the New Moon and Festivals includes a prayer for “the remembrance of Jerusalem Your holy city.”

The 3rd benediction of the Grace after Meals is largely devoted to Jerusalem and includes prayers for Jerusalem/Zion, the restoration of the Davidic dynasty, and the rebuilding of the Temple. It concludes with the same benediction as the 14th blessing of the *Amidah*, but with the addition of the Hebrew word meaning “in Your mercy”.

Arguably the most striking phrase in the liturgy concerning Jerusalem is to be found in the blessing that Jews continue to recite after the Scriptural readings in the Sabbath





morning service:

Have mercy on Zion, O Lord, for she is the house of our life. And deliver the grieving soul (i.e. the people of Israel) speedily in our days. Blessed are You O Lord who makes Zion rejoice with her children.

The memory, meaning and hope of Jerusalem is similarly sustained in the Hebrew calendar, and not only on the fast days that commemorate Jerusalem's devastation – above all the Ninth of Av – when Jews mourning the destruction of the Temples recite the Book of Lamentations and various special laments composed over the ages mourning the destruction of Jerusalem and praying for its restoration. Regardless of how far away from Jerusalem Jews may be and no matter what season it may be there, the calendar that determines their liturgical year and its festivals celebrates the agricultural seasons of Zion. Moreover, in addition to facing towards Jerusalem for all prayer, the order of the Temple offerings are still recited as they were offered up on each calendar occasion, almost two millennia ago. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the two most prominent

religious ceremonies in the Hebrew calendar; the holiest day of the Jewish year, the Day of Atonement, when Jews fast for twenty five hours; and the Passover meal celebrating the seminal festival of Jewish life and history, Jews continue to recite the words that nurtured the vision of return through the generations – “leshanah haba’ah biYerushalayim” – next year in Jerusalem. Similarly the wedding ceremony is usually concluded with the breaking of a glass in memory of the destruction of Jerusalem; and indeed the blessings of the ceremony express the hope of the city's rejuvenation through the return of the exiles so that in keeping with the vision of Isaiah,

in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, the sound of joy and the sound of happiness, the sound of the groom and the sound of the bride shall be heard.

Recognition of the unequalled sanctity of Jerusalem was also maintained in Jewish religious consciousness as it continues to be today, through restricting certain prayers and religious rituals to Jerusalem alone, thus heightening the ideal of living in the city.

However, many who were unable to realize this goal were sent for burial in Jerusalem (in particular to the Mount of Olives), both so that their final resting place should be on holy ground and above all to await the ultimate messianic resurrection at the center stage of those final events.

The ultimate vision for Jerusalem as envisaged by the Prophets and Sages, anticipates the final realization of Jerusalem's name as city of peace, in which it will no longer be a city of pain, but only of beauty and joy (Psalm 48:3; Exodus Rabbah, 52). However, in order to facilitate this vision, the different communities that love Jerusalem will need to see its diversity as its beauty; and to seek to live together in mutual respect above and beyond our differences. Then we will achieve "the peace of Jerusalem" and "all who truly love Jerusalem will prosper" (Psalm 122:6).

### ***Al-Haram al-Sharif/The Temple Mount in Christianity***

*This report recognizes the centrality of the significance of Temple Mount in Christianity. The choice to focus on the meaning of this sacred site in Islam and Judaism by no means*

*diminishes its importance and relevance. The reasons for this selective approach are purely technical.*

The significance of the Temple Mount in Christianity is shaped by the broader role of Jerusalem in the life of Jesus Christ. The city, seen as the place where Jesus was crucified and died, is also where the prophesized heavenly city will descend and replace the inferior earthly one (IV Ezra 10:25-56; Epistle to the Galatians 4:24-26). Regarding the Temple in particular, there were several events in Jesus' life that took place here; perhaps most significantly, it is here where Jesus issued his challenge against the Temple authorities, an act which contributed to his arrest and eventual crucifixion. He also predicted the imminent destruction of the Temple and its replacement (Mark 13:1-2 and 14:58). Specific places within the complex also have significance in Christianity. The Golden Gate was seen as the place where Joachim and Anna, parents of the Virgin Mary, had met. Last but not least, the martyrdom of St. Stephen was supposed to have taken place on the south-eastern corner of the Haram.



## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*The following section seeks to provide a historical perspective which can be confirmed through historical evidence, either physical remains or reliable documentation, following the various empires and rulers that have shaped it into its current form and grandeur. The historical narrative begins in the period from which physical remnants can be traced. In narrating the physical history of the site, it is also possible to glean the emotive significance attached to the site from social, religious and political perspectives. As the history becomes more and more politicized and moves from history to the present, it becomes increasingly difficult to place events into a narrative which the distance of time might allow in the future. The text therefore covers the period until the aftermath of the 1967 War, and then briefly describes some of the more recent events that have impacted only the physical characteristics, without delving too deeply into the political situation.*

### **Roman and Byzantine Period (63 B.C.E-634 C.E.)**

In 63 B.C.E. Pompey captured Jerusalem for Rome and installed Herod in 37 B.C.E. as the first king of Judea. Herod the Great (r. 37-4 B.C.E.) extended the area of the Mount which, according to tradition was built under the Hasmoneans, though this cannot

be confirmed through historical evidence, creating a surface for a complex of structures on several levels, renovating and expanding the Second Temple. The location and basic layout for many of the present-day al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount's gates probably stem from the Herodian period, though their current elevation is likely different.<sup>31</sup> The plan of the Temple followed the dimensions and plans of the previous

<sup>31</sup> Grabar, "The Haram al-Sharif".

buildings, believed to be in accordance with the revelation received by Moses and David. Herod was afraid of violating any forbidden areas, and according to tradition, because it was unlawful for anyone but priests to enter the temple, he employed one thousand priests as masons and carpenters to conduct the work.<sup>32</sup> The work itself is said to have taken eighteen months. In addition to the Temple buildings, he also took it onto himself to extend the platform, an immense project which took eighteen years and eighteen thousand workers to complete.

In 70, after the failed Great Jewish Revolt, a Roman army headed by Titus re-conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Second Temple, taking the *menorah*<sup>33</sup> to Rome. Part of the western retaining wall remained standing after the destruction and is known today among Jews as the Wailing Wall, considered by most rabbinical authorities the holiest accessible site for Jews to pray. Following this, a punitive expedition, headed by Emperor Hadrian (r. 117-138), destroyed the city of Jerusalem to the last stone, and on the smoking remains of the

old city, the Romans built a new one, calling it Aelia Capitolina. The previous Jewish Temple became a site of worship to the Roman god Jupiter and was used to sacrifice pigs. Meanwhile Hadrian issued a decree prohibiting circumcision, and combined with the other signs of desecration, this provided sufficient reason to launch the Second Jewish Revolt (Bar Kokhba Revolt) in 133. It was a failed uprising, and in the aftermath Jews were forbidden to live in the city; meanwhile Judea was renamed Syria Palaestina, after the Philistines.

There are no discernible remains from the Roman period other than what can be gleamed from some written sources. According to these, a Roman temple was built in the space with statues of divinities and emperors, but with the Roman conversion to Christianity under the Emperor Constantine, the large space of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount appears to have been deliberately left untouched and unrepaired. This was likely in part due to Jesus's prophecy, mentioned in Matthew

<sup>32</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths* (1997), p. 130.

<sup>33</sup> A seven-branched candelabrum.



24, that “not one stone will be left here on another.” In addition, it also made an iconographic statement, demonstrating the abandonment of the old Jewish order, and its replacement with the new one.<sup>34</sup> It is during this period, of course, that the perceived *omphalus* of the earth, was transferred to another hill, Golgotha, also in Jerusalem, where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was built.

### *The Advent and Classical Age of Islam (634 – 1099)*

Following a brief period of Persian rule, Jerusalem was captured in 638 by ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab, the second in the line of Righteous Caliphs (*al-Rashidun*), it is considered a peaceful conquest.<sup>35</sup> The treaty which was signed guaranteed peace and protection to all Christian inhabitants and their possessions.<sup>36</sup>

It is unclear under whose rulership the first mosque was built. ‘Umar may

have constructed a simple wooden structure reflecting the austere ideal of early Islam after his conquest of Jerusalem, though nothing survives of this. According to tradition, ‘Umar erected the mosque around the year 635. The first written source acknowledging the existence of this mosque is that of Arculf, a Gallic monk who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem between 679 and 682, and who describes a wooden mosque of modest dimensions that accommodated nearly three thousand worshipers.<sup>37</sup> The first full account of the Prophet’s Night Journey to Jerusalem appears in the biography written by Muhammad Ibn Ishaq (d. 767), where the mosque was referred to as al-Masjid al-Aqsa, or “the remotest mosque”.<sup>38</sup> During the Umayyad period (660-750), great efforts were made to build the second mosque, referred to as the al-Aqsa

<sup>34</sup> Grabar, “The Haram al-Sharif”.

<sup>35</sup> Natsheh and Hawari, “Jerusalem and the Haram al-Sharif”, in *Pilgrimage, Sciences and Sufism*, p. 68.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Please see P. Mickley (ed.), *Arculf: eines Pilgers Reise nach dem Heilige Lande, um 670* (1917).

<sup>38</sup> O. Grabar, “The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem”, *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959), p. 8.

Mosque. It may have been Mu'awiyah Ibn Abi Sufyan (661-680), the governor of Great Syria at the time and founder of the Umayyad Dynasty (660-750), who ordered the actual construction, and who also made additions to the building, though there is no verifiable account of this.<sup>39</sup> Others maintain that Caliph 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan (685-705) or possibly his son al-Walid (705-715) built it, while still others claim that it may have begun under 'Abd al-Malik and was completed under al-Walid.<sup>40</sup> The al-Aqsa Mosque, which still stands today, is half the size of the second mosque, which was built to accommodate 15 porticos, of which only seven remain. In addition, Caliph 'Abd al-Malik repaired the supporting walls constructed under Herod and extended them upward, rebuilt gates at the southern end of the platform, and erected numerous buildings

including a large palace, a hostel for pilgrims, a bathhouse, barracks and other public structures.<sup>41</sup>

According to tradition, in the year 691, the structure of the Dome of the Rock was built under the patronage of Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan (685-705) who endorsed pilgrimage to the site. To this day, the Dome of the Rock is considered one of the most beautiful buildings in Islam and in religious architecture in general. Not only is it the earliest remaining monument of Islam, but also the earliest construction of the new masters in the Near East.<sup>42</sup> The reason for the construction of the Dome has been the topic of debate and disagreement among Muslim scholars from the 9th century until today. What is clear is that the Umayyad Caliphs turned Jerusalem into an important religious-political

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-62.

<sup>40</sup> This is also debated. For further reading, see Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (1995), pp. 29-43.

<sup>41</sup> Armstrong, Jerusalem, p. 243.

<sup>42</sup> Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem", pp. 33-62.



center, with a dramatic assertion that Islam would endure, and where the fifth Caliph Mu'awiyya was enthroned in 661 C.E. During this time, the Muslim community transformed the complex into a functioning space, adapting it to serve the religious and social needs of the arriving Muslim communities while also reflecting ideologies of the new empire.<sup>43</sup>

An earthquake in 747 caused serious damage to the buildings. Renovations of the al-Aqsa Mosque following the earthquake began under Abu Ja'far al-Mansur (754-775), who noted that as funding was insufficient, the plates of gold and silver overlaying the gates should be stripped off and made into coins,<sup>44</sup> and the resulting money was then meant to finance the renovation. A second earthquake curtailed these efforts, and it was only during the reign of his successor that the Mosque was rebuilt, around 780.<sup>45</sup>

Over the next several centuries, two additional earthquakes (1016 and 1033) caused significant damage to the structures. Renovations following the earthquakes began during the reign of the sixth Fatimid Caliph, al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (996-1021) and were completed during the reign of his son, Caliph al-Zahir li-'Aziz Din Allah (1021-1036).

The history of the Haram al-Sharif during this period is poorly documented, but it seems apparent from the reconstructive efforts of the Muslim rulers that they were concerned for its maintenance. In addition, testimony of geographers such as Ibn al-Faqih and al-Muqaddasi reveal that by the 10th century stairways leading up to the platform and porticos along the west and north sides of the Haram had been built.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, minarets, various shrines, *maqams*, *qubbas* and *mihirabs*

<sup>43</sup> Grabar, "The Haram al-Sharif".

<sup>44</sup> Guy Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems: A Description of Syria and the Holy Land from A.D. 650 to 1500* (1890), p. 93.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Hamilton Burgoyne and D.S. Richards, *Mamluk Jerusalem: An Architectural Study* (1987), p. 46.

commemorated the Night Journey of the Prophet, the biblical patriarchs and prophets, and various eschatological subjects.<sup>47</sup>

In general, this period of more than 400 hundred years is considered to have been relatively peaceful and stable. Under ‘Umar, Jews and Christians were protected minorities, which enabled them to continue practicing their religion even if they were not necessarily considered equal. Still, compared to the previous Byzantine rulers who persecuted Jews and Christians, this was a welcome change. This reflects a paradigm of *Convivencia*<sup>48</sup> between Jews and Muslims, as well as between Christians

and Muslims, in Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup> It was only under the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, that Christians and Jews were persecuted, most likely as a result of a turn-around of the religious policy of the Isma’ili leadership.<sup>50</sup> Under the eighth Fatimid Caliph, Abu Tamim Ma’add al-Mustansir bi-Allah (1036-1094), the situation may have improved. In an account from Persian adherents: “The Christians and Jews come here too in a great number from the provinces of the Byzantine empire and other countries to visit the Church and the Temple”.<sup>51</sup> It is possible that during that time devotees of the three monotheistic religions enjoyed freedom of worship. This is supported by a report from a Muslim Hadith scholar from Spain, Ibn

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> A term used to describe a situation in Spain 711-1491, when Catholics, Jews and Muslims lived together in relative peace. Though a slippery term, the term is often used to describe a degree of cultural interplay, and more significantly, religious tolerance.

<sup>49</sup> From M. Abu Sway, “Islam and Muslims on Judaism and Jews”, *Search for Common Ground News*, 18 March 2010, <http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=27806&lan=en&sid=0&sp=1&isNew=0> (accessed: 5 January 2011).

<sup>50</sup> S.D. Goitein and O. Grabar, “Al-Kuds”, in P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 5 January 2011, [http://www.brillonline.nl.ludwig.lub.lu.se/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_COM-0535](http://www.brillonline.nl.ludwig.lub.lu.se/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-0535).

<sup>51</sup> Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (2000), p. 44.





al-'Arabi, who traveled to Jerusalem in 1092 in search of knowledge, recounting that the city was the meeting place for religious scholars of all three faiths.<sup>52</sup>

### *The Crusades (1099-1187)*

After the Crusaders took control of the city, Jerusalem became Christian. The number of people estimated to have sought refuge in the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount is around ten thousand.<sup>53</sup> An account of a Provencal eyewitness Raymod of Auguiles reveals one of the most gruesome events in the history of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount along with a disdainful image of those conquered:

If I tell the truth it will exceed your powers of belief. So let it suffice to say this much, at least, that in the Temple and the Porch of Solomon, men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins. Indeed, it was a just

and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of unbelievers since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies.<sup>54</sup>

During the Crusader period, Jewish and Islamic worship were forbidden, and non-Christians were prohibited from taking up permanent residence in the city,<sup>55</sup> but in the course of time were allowed to enter for business and prayer.<sup>56</sup> Christians, this time from Western Europe, asserted their dominance over the city and the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, which housed the Muslim Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque. The latter became the location for the influential Order of the Knights Templar, a military group of pious and ascetic Christians, whose name is derived from their residence on the Temple Mount. The Crusaders, who believed that they were the new Chosen People, identified the Dome of

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> Mustafa A. Hiyari, "Crusader Jerusalem 1099-1187 AD", in K.J. Asali (ed.), *Jerusalem in History* (1989), p. 138.

<sup>54</sup> A.C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eye Witnesses and Participants* (1921), p. 266; and Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths* (1997), p. 274.

<sup>55</sup> Goitein and Grabar, "Al-Kuds", in Bearman, Bianquis, Bosworth, Van Donzel and Heinrichs (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 5 January 2011, [http://www.brillonline.nl.ludwig.lub.lu.se/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_COM-0535](http://www.brillonline.nl.ludwig.lub.lu.se/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-0535).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

the Rock as the Temple of the Lord and transformed it into a church, while the al-Aqsa Mosque became Solomon's Palace,<sup>57</sup> and was turned into the Knights Templar's administrative headquarters. In 1115 they began altering the Dome of the Rock, including placing a cross on top, covering the Dome of the Rock with marble facing, constructing an altar and choir, and covering the Qur'anic inscriptions with Latin text. The Temple of the Lord was consecrated in 1142.<sup>58</sup> The marble facing may have been a reaction to defacing. According to this interpretation, pastors would chisel out parts of the Rock and present them to pilgrims to take back to their countries, thereby encouraging European kings to protect the Dome with a coat of marble and surround it with a fenced iron rail to protect and maintain the site.<sup>59</sup>

### Ayyubid and Mamluk Period (1187-1517)

During the Crusades, and especially after the loss of Jerusalem to the Christian armies

in 1099, the city was a source of inspiration to Islamic movements, whether religious or political. The Ayyubid ruler Salah al-Din (Saladin) succeeded in galvanizing the Muslims to pursue a holy war (*jihad*) aimed at liberating the holy city of Jerusalem, and conquered the city in 1187. It was believed that the expulsion of the Crusader armies from Jerusalem, and indeed from the Levant, should start from the city's most sacred and symbolic place.

**Figure 6:**

Eastern view of the Dome of the Rock with a structure known as the Dome of the Chain (Qubbat al-Silsila) in the foreground.



<sup>57</sup> Grabar, "The Haram al-Sharif".

<sup>58</sup> For a description of the Crusaders' endeavors on the Temple Mount, see Hiyari, "Crusader Jerusalem 1099-1187 AD", pp. 137-140; and Hillenbrand, *The Crusades*.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Hamilton Burgoyne and D.S. Richards, *Mamluk Jerusalem: An Architectural Study* (1987), p. 47.



Therefore, the Islamic rhetoric of war emphasized the liberation of the al-Aqsa Mosque, which the so-called infidels, by turning it into a church, had so gravely deconsecrated. The “Zangi project” (after Mahmud and Nur al-Din Zangi) was specifically aimed at liberating the al-Aqsa Mosque from the Crusaders.<sup>60</sup>

Salah al-Din established *Waqfs* (endowments) and other institutions to safeguard the city’s importance, and beginning in 1178, he sought to restore the Dome of the Rock to its previous state prior to the Crusaders’ arrival. This included removing structures and decorations such as the refectory, the church and dividing partition within the al-Aqsa Mosque, and all additions made to the Dome of the Rock.<sup>61</sup> The golden cross atop the Dome of the Rock was replaced by an Islamic crescent finial, the *mihrab* of the al-Aqsa Mosque was

rebuilt and plated with marble, and a *minbar*, especially made by order of Nur al-Din for the re-conquered city, was brought from Damascus and installed.<sup>62</sup>

The Mamluk sultans who ruled Jerusalem from the mid-13th century until the Ottoman conquest in 1516/1517 also showed a strong interest in Jerusalem, even though their capital was Cairo. In contrast to the sporadic progress made under the Ayyubids, the Haram experienced a period of major and sustained growth under the Mamluks.<sup>63</sup>

Inscriptions testify that al-Mu’azzam sponsored the rebuilding of parts of the al-Aqsa Mosque, the arcades of the Haram al-Sharif, and other monuments, and suggest an awareness of the site’s religious importance.<sup>64</sup> In addition, the rulers renovated the Haram compound including the walls and gates, and built dozens of new

<sup>60</sup> This term was also used in relation to war efforts of the Ayyubids. Today, the situation is applied to a number of Islamic and non-Islamic political movements. They also draw legitimacy from the slogan of liberating the al-Aqsa Mosque from Israeli occupation. For a detailed account of Islamic perspectives of the Crusades, refer to Hillenbrand, *The Crusades*.

<sup>61</sup> Hiyari, “Crusader Jerusalem 1099-1187 AD”, in K.J. Asali (ed.), *Jerusalem in History*, p. 167.

<sup>62</sup> O. Grabar, “Al-Masjid al-Aqsa”, in *Jerusalem, Constructing the Study of Islamic Art*, Vol. IV (2005), first published in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Vol. 6 (1988), pp. 707-708.

<sup>63</sup> D. Little, “Jerusalem under the Ayyubids and Mamluks 1187-1516 AD”, in K.J. Asali (ed.), *Jerusalem in History* (1989), p. 191.

<sup>64</sup> Hillenbrand, *The Crusades*, p. 213.

structures in and around the compound.<sup>65</sup> According to the scholar Oleg Grabar, during this period the Haram acquired two new elements. One was that new sacred and commemorative spaces were built in honor not only of Muhammad, but also of other prophets from the Old Testament as well as Jesus. The other element was the construction of new structures to provide for social services, such as libraries, legal and religious schools (*madrasas*), retirement homes, pilgrimage shelters, as well as other structures such as fountains and cisterns.<sup>66</sup> These structures were directed at patrons in the city as well as from more distant places including Syria and Egypt.

### ***Ottoman Period (1516-1916)***

The history of the Dome of the Rock entered a new and long era during the Ottoman period, lasting four centuries, during which time the maintenance and renovation of the Rock continued. The most ardent restorations and additions were made during the reign of Suleiman the

Magnificent (1520-1566), when ablution fountains were built, the Dome of the Rock was extensively restored, and the al-Aqsa Mosque was restored and provided with a *mihrab*, *minbar*, and minaret.

The Ottoman sultans dedicated many endowments for the Haram and continued the construction of Islamic institutions in and around the site,<sup>67</sup> such as offices and stores, and focused attention on expanding the educational activities of the *madrasas*. The al-Madrassa al-Ashrafiyya was considered a magnificent building (though constructed prior to the Ottoman rule), and was visited by students and scholars throughout the Ottoman rule. A Turkish traveler named Evlia Celebi described it in 1669-1670 as such: "The Madrasa al-Sultaniyya is the best madrasa in Jerusalem." He found eight hundred salaried imams and preachers employed at the Haram.<sup>68</sup>

He also reported that there were around two hundred rooms for *madaris* surrounding the Haram. Similarly, the sufi scholar 'Abd

<sup>65</sup> For a detailed overview of the architectural developments under the Mamluk, see Hamilton Burgoyne and Richards, *Mamluk Jerusalem*.

<sup>66</sup> Grabar, "The Haram al-Sharif".

<sup>67</sup> Y. Natsheh, "Architectural Survey", in S. Auld and R. Hillenbrand (eds.), *Ottoman Jerusalem: The Living City 1517-1917*, Part II (2000), pp. 893-899.

<sup>68</sup> Asali, "Jerusalem under the Ottomans", Asali (ed.), *Jerusalem in History*, p. 213.



al-Ghani al-Nabulsi, who stayed there in 1690-1691, related that it was a *madrasa* of immense importance.<sup>69</sup>

Under Ottoman rule, frequent official edicts (*firmans*) were issued regarding holy places, including one allowing Jews to pray at the Mount. Previously, Jews had been praying at the Mount of Olives, facing Jerusalem. But under the relative tolerant rule of Suleiman, a site was designated at the Mount for Jewish worship by excavating downward and building a wall parallel to it so that the Jewish oratory would be separated from the Mughrabi Quarter.<sup>70</sup> The resulting enclave measured only 3-4 meters wide and almost 28 meters long, which later became the center of Jewish religious life.

With the death of Suleiman (1566), the Ottoman Empire began to show signs of weakness, but the sultans did not neglect the Haram. Still, with the decline of the empire, the main activities of the Ottomans were focused on the continuous repair of the main buildings at the Haram. Using

*Waqf* revenue, pashas were tasked with keeping order on the Haram, and ensure that the shrines were always clean and in good repair. Under Sultan Mehmet III, the

#### **“Wailing Wall”/“Al-Buraq Wall” versus “Western Wall”**

There is often confusion about these terms, most notably at the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Camp David and Taba. The term “Western Wall” refers to the entire Western Wall of the Haram/Mount, while the term “Wailing Wall” or “Buraq Wall” refers to part of the Western Wall of the Haram/Mount, which is approximately 28 meters long and 3-4 meters wide, which had been used for Jewish worship from the 16th century until the year 1967. Following the destruction of the Mughrabi Quarter by Israel in the same year, the Wailing Wall/Buraq Wall was expanded by Israel to reach its current length of 60 meters, whereas the length of the Western Wall of the Haram al-Sharif, including the Wailing Wall/Buraq Wall, measures about 470 meters.

<sup>69</sup> Y. Natsheh and M. Hawari, “Jerusalem and the Haram al-Sharif: The Qibla of Palestine”, in *Pilgrimage, Sciences and Sufism: Islamic Art in the West Bank and Gaza*, 2nd ed. (2010), p. 90.

<sup>70</sup> Asali, “Jerusalem under the Ottomans”, Asali (ed.), *Jerusalem in History*, p. 212.

Dome of the Rock was restored in 1597, and again by Sultan Ahmad I in 1603 and Sultan Mustafa I in 1617.<sup>71</sup> The Qubba al-Nahawiyya carries an inscription written in the Ottoman naskhi script, making a reference to a fountain built in 1724-1725 under the patronage of Hassan al-Hussayni, but the fountain did not survive.<sup>72</sup>

According to Oleg Grabar, contributions made by the rulers of the late Ottoman period (1831-1916) were not in a monumental form or in accordance with the decorative and architectural values of the previous period.<sup>73</sup> Needless to say, some of the most significant renovations were implemented during the reign of Sultans ‘Abd al-Majid (Abdülmeçid) I (1839-1861) and ‘Abd al-Aziz (Abdülaziz) (1861-1876), who installed stained glass windows on the al-Aqsa Mosque. Perhaps the most significant physical mark the Ottoman’s left is the resplendent decorations of the façade

of the Dome of the Rock with Persian tiles. External experts and architects were invited to reinforce and maintain the basic building and its internal and external ornaments. During the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid (Abdülhamid) II (1876-1909), Persian carpets were laid out in the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. But as the wealth of the Ottoman Empire decreased, so did the quality of the repairs and the overall status of Jerusalem. By the 18th century, the madaris were in decay, and students seeking higher education had to search elsewhere. This was, in part, because Jerusalem had lost its previous importance, and was entering a period of social and economic crisis, through which the *Waqf* was under threat.<sup>74</sup> Restorations and additions to the Haram therefore experienced a lull until a new wave of architecture came from European influences in the late 19th century.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Natsheh and Hawari, “Jerusalem and the Haram al-Sharif”, in *Pilgrimage, Sciences and Sufism*, p. 87.

<sup>73</sup> Grabar, “The Haram al-Sharif”.

<sup>74</sup> For further details on the *Waqf* and how it became threatened during the latter part of the Ottoman rule, please refer to Asali, “Jerusalem under the Ottomans: 1516-1831 A.D.”, in Asali (ed.), *Jerusalem in History*, pp. 200-227.

<sup>75</sup> Goitein and Grabar, “Al-Kuds”, in Bearman, Bianquis, Bosworth, Van Donzel and Heinrichs (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 5 January 2011, [http://www.brillonline.nl/ludwig.lub.lu.se/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_COM-0535](http://www.brillonline.nl/ludwig.lub.lu.se/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-0535).





### **Post World War I**

In 1918, following World War I, Jerusalem came under British military control, and the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount fell under the British Mandate's rule by 1922. Muslim administration of al-Haram al-Sharif was left in place, as the site was regarded as possessing informal immunity and was placed under the administration of the Supreme Muslim Council (SMC),<sup>76</sup> headed by the Grand Mufti – Hajj Amin al-Husayni, who placed both the Shari'a Court and his own office adjacent to the site (the Tankaziyya known today as the Mahkama).<sup>77</sup>

In the late 19th century, the section of the Western Wall known among Jews when not referring to it in Hebrew as the “Wailing Wall” began to be seen by Jews in the country and abroad as a symbol of redemption and national unity.<sup>78</sup> Important visiting Jewish figures such as Montefiore or Rothschild were taken to the Wall for

special prayers and celebration. As the Wall grew in nationalist significance for Jews, it also gained increasing political and religious importance for Muslims who began to feel threatened by the rise of Jewish presence in the city. The first confrontation between Jews and Muslims in the wake of World War I escalated in the 1920s and culminated in a tragic violent confrontation in 1928. Until 1925, Jews had been granted permission to conduct prayers at the segment of the Western Wall, which was and still is considered part of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount by Muslims. In 1918, Jews praying at the Wall brought chairs and benches, raising Muslim fears that they were trying to establish an open synagogue, or even a temple, which would go against the “status quo”.<sup>79</sup> According to Tom Segev, both Arab and Jewish political leaders made demagogic use of religious symbols. The SMC, under Mufti Hajj Amin

<sup>76</sup> Yitzhak Reiter, *Islamic Institutions in Jerusalem: Palestinian Muslim Administration under Jordanian and Israeli Rule* (1997), p. 89.

<sup>77</sup> For the Supreme Muslim Council, see Uri M. Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Muslim Council: Islam under British Mandate for Palestine* (1987).

<sup>78</sup> Armstrong, *Jerusalem*, p. 328.

<sup>79</sup> On the status quo laws, see Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Sacred Space: The Old City of Jerusalem and the Middle East Conflict* (2002), pp.18-27.

al-Husayni began a campaign raising fears that these attempts were part of a larger Zionist plot to seize control of the mosques on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and to replace them with the Third Temple. At the same time, Zionists exploited the religious yearnings for the temple, and publications and fundraising efforts employed images of a magnificent domed structure on the Temple Mount.<sup>80</sup> When another attempt at bringing tables and chairs was made on Yom Kippur in 1928, it set in motion a chain of disturbances that led to severe violent Muslim riots in August 1929, referred to in Arabic as “Thawrat al-Buraq” and in Hebrew as “Pra’ot Tarpat/1929 riots” resulting in the deaths of more than two hundred Arabs and Jews, and many more wounded.

In response, the Sir Walter Shaw Committee<sup>81</sup> was formed to review the causes of the rebellion and concluded in its report that the Western Wall itself fell under full Muslim ownership and that the praying pavement was a Muslim *Waqf*. However, it

decided that the Jews had a proprietary right to pray at the site according to

#### Use of the Term al-Aqsa

The Haram al-Sharif refers to the entire site located within four external walls, in the south-east corner of the old city of Jerusalem. This includes mosques, monuments, terraces and other structures. Some people would call this site the “al-Aqsa, or “distant” Mosque, referring to the most important mosque on the premises. Therefore, “al-Aqsa Mosque” can be used interchangeably with “Haram al-Sharif”. Because of its Quranic connotations, the name “al-Aqsa” affirms the holiness of the entire site, almost as if the holiness of the “al-Aqsa Mosque” extends beyond its proper building. Technically speaking, though, the name “al-Aqsa” is preserved for the mosque only. It can be said that the debate on this issue is not only restricted to terminology, but also includes the political struggle attached to the site for so many centuries.

<sup>80</sup> T. Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate*, translated by Haim Watzman (2001), pp. 303-304.

<sup>81</sup> Eliel Löfgren, Charles Barde and J. Van Kempen, *Report of the Commission appointed by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with the approval of the Council of the League of Nations, to determine the rights and claims of Moslems and Jews in connection with the Western or Wailing Wall at Jerusalem* (UNISPAL doc A/7057-S/8427, 23 February 1968). First published in London 1931.





arrangements dating from the Ottoman era as an old established practice, but they were not permitted to bring chairs or benches, to build a *mechitza* (dividing wall between men and women) or to blow the *shofar* (ram's horn). This solution was only temporary, and relations between Jews and Muslims increased with the heavy immigration in the 1930s and more extremist influences in the Zionist movement.<sup>82</sup> The burial of the Indian leader Muhammad Ali at the Western Portico of the Haram in 1931 raised the interest of the Muslim world, and Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husayni managed to raise funds for the repair of the Haram from India and elsewhere.<sup>83</sup> Following an earthquake in 1927, major restorations were made in 1938-1943.

### ***Under Jordanian Rule (1948-1967)***

Mortar bombing in the fighting in 1948 caused some damage to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. As a result of the establishment of the State of Israel,

Jerusalem became a "divided city", where Jordan controlled Eastern Jerusalem, including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, and Israel the Western part. The salaries of the administrators and religious functionaries, as well as the costs of renovations, were financed from Amman.

During the Jordanian reign, renovation works of the Mosque continued through the Revitalization Committee of the Blessed al-Aqsa Mosque and the Holy Dome of the Rock.<sup>84</sup> Jordan restored the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock from 1956 to 1964,<sup>85</sup> in which the domes of both structures were replaced by a layer of anodized aluminum. The exterior mosaic work of the upper walls and drum of the Dome of the Rock, replaced with Kashani tiles in the 16th century, were renewed in 1958-1962 in a complete structural renovation. The buildings were taken apart by a team of Egyptian architects and engineers, who restored and returned them in what was considered a success.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Michael Hudson, "The Transformation of Jerusalem 1917-1987 AD", in Asali (ed.), *Jerusalem in History* (1989), p. 255.

<sup>83</sup> Goitein and Grabar, "Al-Kuds", in Bearman, Bianquis, Bosworth, Van Donzel and Heinrichs (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 5 January 2011, [http://www.brillonline.nl/ludwig.lub.lu.se/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_COM-0535](http://www.brillonline.nl/ludwig.lub.lu.se/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-0535).

<sup>84</sup> The Committee is still carrying out its responsibilities today.

<sup>85</sup> A special law was enacted: Law No. 33. See also 'Abd al-Salam al-'Abadi, *Al-Ri'aya al-Urdunniyyah al-Hashemiyyah lil-Quds w'al Muqaddasat al-Islamiyyah fi al-Quds al-Sharif* (1995), p. 30 (in Arabic); *Majalat al-Akhbar al-Islamiyya*, Vol. 13, Nos. 1-2 (December 1971), p. 43.

<sup>86</sup> S.D. Goitein and O. Grabar, "Al-Kuds", in P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 5 January 2011 <http://www.brillonline.nl/ludwig.lub.lu.se/subscriber/entry?>

Amman developed into the monarchy's most significant political center at the expense of Jerusalem; nonetheless, these rulers saw the Haram as their symbol of legitimacy. King 'Abdullah I often attended Friday prayers at the al-Aqsa Mosque <sup>87</sup> where he was later assassinated, in July 1951.

Following the Israeli-Jordanian truce talks, Jordan agreed to allow Jewish worship at the Wailing Wall/al-Buraq Wall <sup>88</sup> in Article VIII of the 1949 Armistice Agreement. But this agreement was never implemented. Reasons given included that there was a continuing state of war and Israel's refusal to allow Arab refugees to return to their homes. <sup>89</sup> During this period, Jews prayed at a place on Mount Zion from where the Wall could be viewed.

### **Post - 1967 War**

After Israel unilaterally annexed East Jerusalem following the 1967 War, Israeli soldiers placed a flag over the Dome of the

Rock, which set in motion a series of events and conflicts that continue to fuel the ongoing disputes. Indeed, the history of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount since June 1967 through to the present has become a symbol of the conflict itself. Conflict over control, access, and security of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, archaeological excavations within, around and under the site, Jewish settlement activities nearby, expressions of constructing a Third Temple, as well as other issues such as the Western Wall tunnel and the Mughrabi Gate, continue to shape the discussions about any future solution between Israelis and Palestinian.

Following the act of placing the flag over the Dome of the Rock, the chief Rabbi of the Israeli army, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, who would later become chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Israel, led soldiers in religious celebration to the Haram and proceeded to pray in the direction of the Holy of Holies. <sup>90</sup> Some sources argue that Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan ordered to remove the flag

<sup>87</sup> See the picture in *Majalat al-Akhbar al-Islamiyya*, Vol. 13, Nos. 1-2 (December 1971), p. 41.

<sup>88</sup> Nazmi al-Ju'beh, "Bab al-Magharibah: Joha's Nail in the Haram al-Sharif", *Jerusalem Quarterly* (June 2003), pp. 17-25.

<sup>89</sup> Hudson, "The Transformation of Jerusalem 1917-1987 AD", in Asali (ed.), *Jerusalem in History*, p. 260.

<sup>90</sup> Dumper, *The Politics of Sacred Space*, p. 24.



and leave the Mount only after Shaykh ‘Abjulhamid al-Sa’ih, the Grand Imam of the al-Aqsa Mosque, refused the call for prayer, unless the flag was removed.<sup>91</sup> According to other interpretations, Dayan on his own behalf decreed this order to avoid the likely outburst of bloodshed and violence.

Regardless of whose initiative it was, this symbolic act probably did postpone, even if only temporarily, more bloodshed.<sup>92</sup>

This is not to say that Israel did not take advantage of renewed access to the site. The first major post-war destruction was highly symbolic for both Palestinians and Israelis. Residents of the Mughrabi Quarter, a *Waqf* property, were forcibly evacuated and the area was bulldozed and transformed into rubble within a few days.<sup>93</sup> The new plaza was created to be utilized for Jewish Israeli religious and civil purposes,<sup>94</sup> which was promoted as part of its strategy of “urban renewal”; and a few days after the war ended, ca. 200,000 Jews flocked to the Western Wall and the plaza.

The Chief Rabbinate, an institution recognized as the spiritual head of Orthodox Jewry, faced an immense decision: for the first time since the destruction of the Second Temple, Jews could claim sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. This could either lead to a dramatic revolution in Jewish worship in that Jewish worship at the site would be re-introduced, or a compromise in which the capture would be incorporated into current and existing Jewish practice. In a notable move, a declaration was published in the summer of 1967 by the most authoritative rabbis, prohibiting any Jew entrance to any part of the Temple Mount. The reason given was the threat of desecrating the holiest site in Judaism: “With the passage of time we have lost knowledge of the precise location of the Temple, so that anyone entering the Temple Mount area today might mistakenly enter the Temple and the Holy of Holies.”<sup>95</sup> The undersigned suggested that any attempt at

<sup>91</sup> Nazmi al-Ju’beh, “1917 to the Present: Basic Changes, But Not Dramatic: Al-Haram al-Sharif in the Aftermath of 1967”, in Oleg Grabar and B.Z. Kedar (eds), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem’s Sacred Esplanade* (2009), p. 275.

<sup>92</sup> R.E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Ground* (2009), pp. 117-121.

<sup>93</sup> Hudson, “The Transformation of Jerusalem 1917-1987 AD”, in Asali (ed.), *Jerusalem in History*, p. 268.

<sup>94</sup> This includes military celebrations, aiming at enhancing the “nationalist” relation between the Israelis and the Wall, and in which the Israeli soldiers pledge loyalty towards their state after completing military training.

<sup>95</sup> R.E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Ground*, (2009) p. 121.

breaking the ruling would constitute a sin, and the ruling was swiftly enshrined into civil law by the Israeli courts. The reason for the rabbinical ruling and its acceptance by the general public are debated,<sup>96</sup> though they are likely the result of ingredients comprising a “perfect storm”.<sup>97</sup>

After the 1967 War, Israel imposed a new order on the site with the tacit understanding of the *Waqf* <sup>98</sup> officials based on the following arrangements: The *Waqf*, still under the control of Jordan, would administer the site, control the gates, dictate the rules of behavior, employ Muslim guards, be responsible for the ongoing maintenance and physical upkeep, and execute the right to impose visiting fees to roofed mosques (excluding open plazas). However, the *Waqf* would be forbidden to raise flags within the compound. Israel assigned itself the responsibility for public security, security outside of the Haram

gates, and an Israeli police station inside of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Moreover, Israeli authorities confiscated the keys to the Mughrabi Gate in June 1967, and permitted only the passage of non-Muslim visitors. This new *modus vivendi* based on the above understandings and regulations was tacitly followed until September 1996, after the opening of the northern exit of the Western Wall Tunnel.

Suspicion among the Palestinian community was strongly raised after the destruction of the Mughrabi Quarter and the confiscation of the key to this gate, as well as the confiscation of the Madrasa Tankaziyya (a large building overlooking the plazas of al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and the new plaza in front of the Wailing Wall/al-Buraq Wall, and adjacent to the Chain Gate, a main gate to the Haram). Some Israelis <sup>99</sup> consider the Israeli military control over the Mughrabi Gate to be a step

<sup>96</sup> Cohen, “The Political Role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate in the Temple Mount Question”, *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 11, No.1-2 (Spring 1999), pp/ 101-126.

<sup>97</sup> For further reading, see Hassner, *War on Sacred Ground*, pp. 118-129; and Cohen, “The Political Role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate in the Temple Mount Question”, in *Jewish Political Studies Review*, pp. 101-126.

<sup>98</sup> Despite the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1995, Jordanian rule continues to be deemed the most feasible solution for controlling the *Waqf*. See Nazmi al-Ju’beh, “1917 to the Present: Basic Changes, But Not Dramatic: Al-Haram al-Sharif in the Aftermath of 1967”, in Grabar and Kedar, *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem’s Sacred Esplanade* (2009), for further discussion on this point.

<sup>99</sup> Please see Uzi Benziman, *Jerusalem: a City without Walls* (1976), p. 99.



towards the dream of Jewish extremists of controlling the entire Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The Islamic *Waqf* Department held that this indeed amounted to a rejection of absolute Islamic control over the site and the beginning of further and gradual Israeli interference, not only in the administration of the site, but also in the freedom to worship and to access the holy places.<sup>100</sup>

The themes which to this day continue to be central to the debates surrounding the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount can be discussed from practical, political and religious points of departure, though they are undoubtedly tightly intertwined. Of particular interest in this study are the attempts at changing the physical character of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount's environs including the space and structures beneath, above and adjacent, which base their legitimacy to gain sovereignty on historical and religious narratives.

Soon after the plaza in front of the Western

Wall was occupied by Israeli forces and inaugurated in June 1967, the Chief Rabbinate and the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs initiated a project to build a 320-meter long tunnel along the Western Wall.<sup>101</sup> Permission in its construction from the *Waqf* was not sought, causing protest and condemnation both locally and internationally. It also raised fears that the tunnel would be used to gain access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount from below, and that it would cause structural damage to the building above. The tunnel which became known as the "Hasmonean tunnel" has become one of the most problematic issues; when it was completed in September 1996, Israel's then Prime Minister Netanyahu permitted the opening of an additional exit, resulting in extensive protest and violent confrontations the following week. The "tunnel riots" which spread from East Jerusalem to the West Bank and Gaza Strip led to the deaths of seventy-five Palestinians.<sup>102</sup>

Beginning in 1996, the Islamic *Waqf* began

<sup>100</sup> Nazmi al-Ju'beh, "1917 to the Present: Basic Changes, But Not Dramatic: Al-Haram al-Sharif in the Aftermath of 1967", in O. Grabar and B.Z. Kedar (eds.), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade* (2009), p. 279.

<sup>101</sup> Yitzhak Reiter and Jon Seligman, "1917 to the Present: Al-Haram al-Sharif/Tempel Mount (Har Ha Bayit) and the Western Wall", in Grabar and Kedar (eds.), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet*, p. 257.

<sup>102</sup> Hassner, *War on Sacred Ground*, p. 130.

to renovate an area known by Muslims as the Marwani Mosque and also referred to as Solomon's Stables <sup>103</sup> by excavating the ground in the southeastern corner of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount's courtyard, and (re)opening a third mosque, the Marwani Mosque, larger than the space of the al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock combined. <sup>104</sup> This caused protest from many Israelis who saw this as a radical change from the status quo in which such construction should not be allowed without consultation with the Israeli authorities. The *Waqf* firmly held on to its position that it had complete sovereignty over the entire compound based on the operative British Mandate and Jordanian Antiquities Laws, and was thus entitled to conduct renovations and maintenance. <sup>105</sup> It also claimed that the Marwani Mosque was a renovation of a mosque dating to the pre-Crusader (Islamic) period. In response, some Israeli parties accused the Islamic *Waqf* of destroying remains of the Second Temple, which *Waqf* officials insisted were only rubble and dirt, <sup>106</sup> of not conducting

the work under professional archaeological supervision, and of causing damage to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount's southern wall.

The denial of the Other's attachment to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount continues to raise fears among both Israelis and Palestinians. From the Palestinian perspective, physical infringements on the site initiated by Israelis under "Judaization", as well as the numerous attempts by religious groups and orthodox rabbis, as well as political leaders to enter and take control of the site, thereby changing the status quo, combine to communicate a strong message of denial of the Muslim or Palestinian attachment. Perhaps the most well known occurrence was in September 2000, when Ariel Sharon, who was at that time the opposition Likud Party leader, made a provocative visit to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. As a result of an ongoing struggle against the occupation, Palestinians saw this event as a trigger to the al-Aqsa *Intifada*, or Second *Intifada*. One

<sup>103</sup> The vaulted space on the lower level of the Haram/Mount is called by Muslims the Marwani Mosque after the Umayyad Caliph, 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan. The Crusaders called it Solomon's Stables, when they used the space as stables.

<sup>104</sup> Nazmi al-Ju'beh, "1917 to the Present: Basic Changes, But Not Dramatic: Al-Haram al-Sharif in the Aftermath of 1967", in Grabar and Kedar (eds.), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet*, p. 281.

<sup>105</sup> Nazmi al-Ju'beh, "Bab al-Magharibah", p. 17-25.

<sup>106</sup> On these events, see *ibid*.



of the outcomes of this is that while the Waqf maintained control over access since 1967, following 2000 it made the decision to forbid non-Muslim entry. Israel thus changed the status quo (or *modus vivendi*) relating to the access of non-Muslims to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount by assigning itself the role to protect public order. The Israeli police thus escorted Jews and members of the Temple Mount Faithful group through the Mughrabi Gate, while those who announced their intention to pray there in advance were prohibited from entering, and those who entered were escorted out by the Israeli police. Israel's police force continues to prevent access to the site to Jews, except occasionally for Jewish tourists wearing secular clothing. It also ensures that non-Muslims are not allowed access on Fridays, and during periods of possible escalation of violence, they forbid access to men under the age of 40. In addition, the fundamentalist streams of Christianity and Judaism have raised fears of a Jewish-Christian collusion to build a Third Temple.<sup>107</sup> While these streams were originally perceived as extremist religious

expressions, they have gained significant traction in recent years, and are moving into the mainstream.

From the Jewish perspective, Muslim and Palestinian rejection of the Jewish attachment to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount is growing in popularity even though it is a relatively recent political phenomenon. The rejection surfaced at the end of the 19th century, when the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount began to be associated with the Zionist settlement policy project and the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. Since Zionism first emerged as a secular movement, the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount had not been emphasized as a holy place, but rather as a Jewish national feature. Hence, the denial of this relation came as a result of the defiance of the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine; in other words, one can argue that it was political rather than religious in nature. As defiance grew, the status of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount gained more importance in Israeli policy and, as a result of the rapid and increasing overlap of political and national issues, the visibility of

<sup>107</sup> Klein, *The Jerusalem Problem*, pp. 73-74.



denial has increased. For example, Yasser Arafat, in moments of rage, used to claim that the Jewish Temple was in Yemen, not in Jerusalem.<sup>108</sup> The previous Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, who was replaced in 2006, has repeatedly denied the Jewish attachment to the holy sites including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. He is quoted as saying that “No stone of the al-Buraq (Wailing) Wall has any relation to Judaism. The Jews began to pray at this wall only in the 19th century, when they began to develop (national) aspirations.”<sup>109</sup>

The historical narrative of Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount includes many other trajectories, especially since 1967, when the religiously motivated wave and the Jewish settler movement began to present a great challenge to both the secular Israeli government and Palestinian Muslims. The events and aspects included in the narrative here are intentionally limited in order to present a narrative which can be understood as historical, and which can be reflected on with the benefit of time. The most recent events taking place here,

including activities of national-religious movements, changes to the physical structures and violent clashes among others have undoubtedly strongly shaped people’s perceptions of and relations to the site. To remain within the scope of the report’s overall aim, however, these discussions will not be addressed fully. It is evident from these discussions, however, that the historic and religious narratives continue to fuel to current debates and motivations.

<sup>108</sup> Y. Reiter, *From Jerusalem to Mecca and Back: The Islamic Consolidation of Jerusalem* (2005), p. 31 (in Hebrew).

<sup>109</sup> Kul Al-Arab, 18 August 2000.



## CAVE OF THE PATRIARCHS CAVE OF MACHPELAH

## SANCTUARY OF IBRAHIM IBRAHIMI MOSQUE

The large rectangular complex, known as the Sanctuary of Abraham or Ibrahimi Mosque (Al-Haram al-Ibrahimi) in Arabic and Tomb of the Patriarchs or Cave of Machpelah (Me'arat ha-Macphella) in Hebrew, is situated in the heart of Hebron's Old City. It is one of the oldest monotheistic shrines of worship in the world, having been in use for more than twenty centuries. It centers around a



**Figure 7:** Cave of the Patriarchs/Machpelah: Sanctuary of Ibrahim/ Ibrahimi Mosque location.

double-chambered cave and is believed to contain the burial chambers of the three biblical couples – Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah. The enclosure is divided into three rooms, each with a cenotaph of a patriarch and his wife, and is believed to have been built under Herod (1st century B.C.E.) with some additions during the Fatimid, Crusader, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. Today it encompasses minarets, domes, arches, doors, marble columns, richly decorated cenotaphs covered with decorated tapestries, inscriptions, a synagogue and two mosques.

As the site of the tomb of Abraham, who is seen as the founding figure of monotheism, this sacred site is venerated by Jews and Muslims and remains one of the most contested

sites in the region. For Jews, the Cave of Machpelah/Ibrahimi Mosque is the second most important after the Temple Mount <sup>110</sup> and has been the site of pilgrimage and study for millennia. <sup>111</sup> It is considered the fourth most important Islamic holy site (after Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem), and the second most important in Palestine after Jerusalem's Holy Sanctuary. <sup>112</sup> After the Muslim-Arab conquest Hebron became the fourth most holy Muslim city in the world, <sup>113</sup> and together with the Haram the mosque forms the "Haramayn" whereby pilgrims in Jerusalem would usually continue to Hebron to pay their respects to the prophets buried there. <sup>114</sup> Christians took control of the site during the Byzantine and Crusader periods but make no actual claims despite the fact that the Patriarchs

<sup>110</sup> The Jewish tradition concerning Hebron, Abraham and the Me'arat haMachpelah Cave is illustrated in detail in O. Avishar, *Sever Hevron* (1970).

<sup>111</sup> Dumper, *The Politics of Sacred Space*, p. 144.

<sup>112</sup> Nazmi al-Ju'beh, "Hebron: The City of Abraham", in Museum with no frontiers (eds.), *Pilgrimage, Sciences and Sufism*, p. 202.

<sup>113</sup> Ahmed A. Rjoob, "Contested Management in Archaeological Sites in the Hebron District", *Present Pasts*, Vol. 2, No.1 (2010), pp. 75-88.

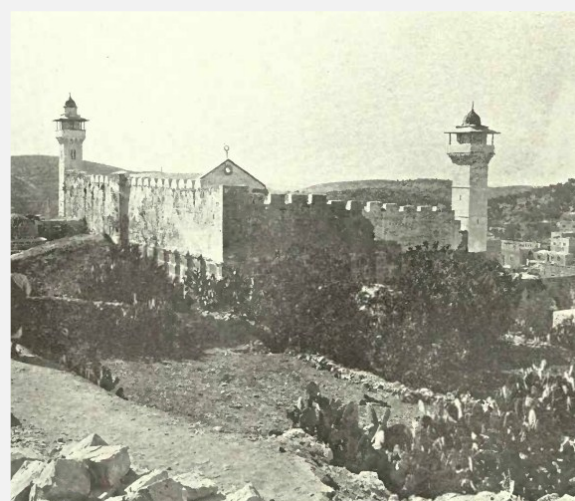
<sup>114</sup> Dumper, *The Politics of Sacred Space*, p. 144.



play an important role in Christianity. Following the Israeli occupation of Hebron in June 1967, the site became a perennial source of religious and political friction, with the most notorious event occurring in 1994 when an Israeli settler opened fire on Muslim worshipers, killing 29 people and wounding many more. Following the Wye Accords in 1996, the *Waqf* was given control over most of the site as part of a temporary status agreement, though actual power is vested in the Israeli army. Today, mainly Muslim worshipers have to undergo several phases of inspection before gaining access to the complex, and the unilateral division and intensive military presence have transformed the atmosphere from a spiritual site into that of a military one. In addition to those Jews living in Hebron, Jewish worshipers travel from Israel to the site. The site is divided between the Muslim and Jewish worshipers, both in terms of space and holidays. Generally, Muslim worshipers are not allowed to enter the site during Jewish Holidays, and

Jewish worshipers are not allowed to enter the site during Friday prayers, and the morning prayers of two Muslim holidays – the `Id al-Adha (Grand Holiday) and the `Id al-Fitr (Breaking the fast). Muslims are given access to the Isaac Hall and the adjacent Jawliya Mosque, while Jews are given access to the Abraham Hall and the Jacob Hall, as well as the court between the two halls. Jews and Muslims are separated by a double iron gate, and the two groups are not able to view each other except through a window onto the room with Abraham's cenotaph.<sup>115</sup>

**Figure 8:**  
View of Cave of Machpelah/Ibrahimi Mosque from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



<sup>115</sup> For further details on the separation, see Y. Reiter "Contest or Cohabitation in Shared Holy Places", in Breger, Reiter and Hammer (eds.), *Holy Places in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 172-173.

In February 2010, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that the site would become part of a heritage sites program, a move strongly criticized by many Palestinians and the United Nations.<sup>116</sup> In October of the same year, UNESCO announced its decision that the site was an integral part of the occupied Palestinian Territories, and that any unilateral action of Israel was against international law, the UNESCO Conventions and the United Nations and Security Council resolutions.<sup>117</sup> A response by the Israeli Prime Minister's Office stated that "the attempt to detach the Nation of Israel from its heritage is absurd." It asked rhetorically "If the nearly 4,000-year-old burial sites of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs of the Jewish Nation – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah – are not part of its culture and tradition, then what is a national cultural site?"<sup>118</sup> The move has led to prob-

lematic relations between UNESCO and Israel.

## RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

Abraham is the common or shared ancestor of monotheism and is often cited as a unifying figure for the three faiths. Jews believe they are descended from his union with his astonishingly aged first wife Sarah, who gave birth to Isaac, while Muslims believe they are descended from his second wife Hagar, who gave birth to Ismail. Both Islam and Judaism hold Abraham to be buried at the Cave of Machpelah/Ibrahimi Mosque along with the other Patriarchs and Matriarchs including Isaac and Jacob and their spouses, Sarah, Rebecca and Leah. Other narratives mention additional religious figures in association with the site such as Adam and Eve as well as Joseph.

According to Jewish tradition,

<sup>116</sup> Chaim Levinson, "Hebron Jews to Celebrate MK's Role in Holy Site Funding", *Haaretz*, 1 April 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/hebron-jews-to-celebrate-mks-roles-in-holy-site-funding-1.283690>.

<sup>117</sup> UNESCO, "Executive Board Adopts Five Decisions Concerning UNESCO's Work in the Occupied Palestinian and Arab Territories", 21 October 2010, [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/executive\\_board\\_adopts\\_five\\_decisions\\_concerning\\_unescos\\_work\\_in\\_the\\_occupied\\_palestian\\_and\\_arab\\_territories/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/executive_board_adopts_five_decisions_concerning_unescos_work_in_the_occupied_palestian_and_arab_territories/) (accessed: 20 December 2010).

<sup>118</sup> Hillel Fendel, "UNESCO Erases Israeli Protests from Rachel's Tomb Protocol", 11 April, 2010. <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/140377>. (accessed: 20 February, 2010).



Abraham was born in the city of Ur in Babylon in ca. 1800 B.C.E. The son of an idol merchant, he began to question the faith of his father from early childhood, and soon came to believe that the universe was the creation of one creator. He began to spread this message, thereby coming to be known as the founder of monotheism.

The Lord appeared to Abraham in a series of visions, the first of which asked him to leave the country with his family with the promise to make him a great nation (Genesis 12:1-3). In a later appearance, the Lord promised him abundant progeny which should inherit the land of Canaan:

And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said: 'Unto thy seed will I give this land'; and he built there an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

(Genesis 12:7)

The idea of *brit* is central to Judaism.

It is a covenant with the Lord involving rights and obligations, which over time became more explicit until the time of the Giving of the Torah. Abraham was given ten tests of faith in order to earn this Covenant: perhaps the most well known is the final test, the Binding of Isaac, when the Lord ordered Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. At the last second the Lord asked for a ram instead, and Abraham had proven his faith (Genesis 22:1-24).

According to the Midrash,<sup>119</sup> the cave is the threshold to the Garden of Eden. In this tradition, Adam saw a ray of light emanating from the ground and recognized the uniqueness of the site, and dug a cave in which he and Eve could be buried. The site today referred to among Jews as the Cave of Machpelah is identified as the land Abraham purchased from Ephron the Hittite for four hundred silver shekels as a burial plot for his wife Sarah. According to tradition, when Abraham

<sup>119</sup> A type of rabbinic literature explaining biblical text from the ethical and devotional point of view.

<sup>120</sup> Compare Genesis 18:7.

went to fetch a calf for his guests,<sup>120</sup> he found the animal in the cave; upon entering, he saw the bodies of Adam and Eve who were buried there and thus decided to purchase the site. His burial place is mentioned in Genesis:

Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave on the plot of land at Machpelah to the east of Mamre, which is Hebron, in Canaan.... [Abraham's] sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave at Machpelah... with his wife Sarah.

(Genesis 23:19 and 25:9)

There is a strong sense of connections between Judaism and Hebron. It is considered to be the first place that Abraham inhabited after his arrival in Canaan, and where the Lord ordered him regarding circumcision. Abraham's son Isaac was born and educated in Hebron, and according to tradition, it was in Hebron that David was anointed King.

The proximity of Jews and Arabs is evoked through the paternalism of Ibrahim and his offspring. As in

Judaism, Islam considers Ibrahim the founder of the three monotheistic faiths, and thus the primordial Muslim. He is also considered a *hanif*, or a person before the time of Muhammad who followed a non-pagan monotheistic religion.

The Qur'an states that:

Ibrahim was not a Jew nor yet a Christian, but he was a *hanif* resigned, and not of the idolaters. Verily, the people most worthy of Ibrahim are those that follow him and his prophets, and those that believe.

(Qur'an, Sura 3:67/68)

Muslims also believe him to be the spiritual mentor of the Prophet Muhammad, and is considered a prophet, a patriarch and a messenger. Ibrahim is considered a friend of Allah (*Khalil Allah*), and the Arabic name for Hebron is thus *al-Khalil* and the site, named after Ibrahim is *al-Haram al-Ibrahimi*.

As in Judaism, Islam maintains that Ibrahim was rejected by most of his family and community (except for his nephew Lot and his wife Sarah), whereupon God commanded him to leave behind his family



and people, and emigrate to the land of Canaan. In this land, Allah chose to bless Ibrahim with his progeny. There are numerous stories in the Qur'an associated with Ibrahim. Later in his life he traveled to Mecca together with his son Ismail, where they are believed to have erected the Ka'ba, the most holy site in the world for Muslims. It was here that God made a covenant with Ibrahim and Ismail that they should sanctify Ka'ba, and that this should be a future site towards which people could bow and prostrate themselves:

And when Ibrahim and Ismail were raising the foundations of the House, (Ibrahim prayed): Our Lord! Accept from us (this duty). Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Hearer, the Knower... Our Lord! And make us submissive unto Thee and of our seed a nation submissive unto Thee, and show us our ways of worship, and relent toward us. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Relenting, the Merciful.... Our Lord! And raise up in their midst a

messenger from among them who shall recite unto them Thy revelations, and shall instruct them in the Scripture and in wisdom and shall make them grow. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Mighty, Wise.

(Qur'an, Sura 2:127-129)

The "Maqam Ibrahim", or Station of Ibrahim, is still marked within the sacred enclosure at Mecca; and the footsteps of the patriarch are believed by the worshipers still to be there.<sup>121</sup> The story of the sacrifice is also recounted in Islam, though Muslims believe it is Ismail instead of Isaac who was saved at the last moment.

Due to the central role of Hebron in the life of Ibrahim, it follows that Hebron has been of religious significance to Muslims. Together with the Haram al-Sharif, the Ibrahimi Mosque formed a part of the "Haramayn" pilgrimage during Mamluk and Ottoman rule whereby pilgrims visiting the Haram in Jerusalem would continue on to visit the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron.

<sup>121</sup> C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Het Mekkaansche Feest* (1880), p. 40 (in Dutch).



In Christianity, Abraham is also a prominent figure and is mentioned 72 times in the New Testament, and Isaac's suffering is symbolically equated with that of Christ.<sup>122</sup>

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

In the attempt to distinguish between religious and historical narratives, we turn towards the first historical documentation, which provides a sketch of the structure's creators and first venerators. It is interesting to note that the Roman historian Josephus (37-100 C.E.), though not a reliable source, had listed all structures built by King Herod, but this site is notably missing, and there is no mention in any other literary sources to support the theory that Herod built the structure. Josephus does make record of the belief that Abraham purchased Ephron's field at Hebron and that this was a place of burial. He also acknowledges the belief that

the tombs were built by Abraham and his descendants, without, however, mentioning the name "Machpelah".<sup>123</sup> While difficult to prove that the original structure was built under Herod, the construction is clearly Herodian in style, and dates back to the late 1st century B.C.E. or the early 1st century C.E., while some prominent researchers believe it to be older than the period of Herod.<sup>124</sup> Meanwhile, the sanctity of the site prior to the enclosure is likely much older.

There is no evidence relating to the time when veneration of the site began. Indeed, before the Second Temple was destroyed in 70, the tradition among Jews to build synagogues and worship in mausoleums had not yet been established and according to literary sources the site has been in use as a place of active worship only since the 4th century B.C.E.<sup>125</sup> Reports of a Christian structure during the Byzantine period in the 5th century are not confirmed unless they refer to a holy site rather than an actual church. Other sources mention a church built by the Byzantines, called St. Abrahamus.<sup>126</sup> Still, at this point the popular

<sup>122</sup> Reiter, "Contest or Cohabitation in Shared Holy Places", p. 165.

<sup>123</sup> "Ant." i. 14. 22, from [http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=29&letter=M&search=tomb of patriarchs](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=29&letter=M&search=tomb%20of%20patriarchs).

<sup>124</sup> Some of these archaeologists include Conder, Benzinger, Robinson, Warren, and Heidet.

<sup>125</sup> About the architectural history of the building and the different traditions associated with it, see L.H. Vincent and E.J.H. Mackay, *Hebron* (1923).

<sup>126</sup> Reiter, "Contest or Cohabitation in Shared Holy Places", p. 165.





tradition of visiting tombs is well documented in literary sources for Jewish and Christian pilgrims alike;<sup>127</sup> a similar tradition of visiting tombs has slowly established itself in Islam.<sup>128</sup> Towards the end of the 6th century, the Piacensia pilgrim reports that porticos had been constructed around the sides, and that a screen had been erected to separate Christian from Jewish worshippers.<sup>129</sup>

In 614 Persians conquered the area and destroyed the church or previous structure, leaving behind ruins, and in 637 the area came under the control of Muslims. Unconfirmed reports mention that Caliph 'Umar (634-644) established the first mosque atop of the Patriarchs' tombs, while more accurate reports date this mosque to the Umayyad period (661-750). According to the account of the Persian traveler Nasir Khusraw in 1047, before Islamic rule, the Sanctuary had no opening, and thus visitors were only able to perform their visitation outside. During the Fatimid Caliph Mahdi, orders were given that a door should be

opened, and that utensils, carpets, and rugs should be provided.<sup>130</sup>

During Fatimid rule (969 to 1171), Joseph's tomb (some Jews believe this to be the tomb of Esau) was added and covered by a dome; at the same time, domes were built over the tombs of Abraham and Sarah. An account written in 985 by Al Muqaddasi, a Muslim geographer who grew up in Jerusalem, confirms that there was a mosque used for Friday prayers, and that it was known to be the tomb of Abraham and Isaac along with their wives, with another tomb at the back of Jacob and his wife.<sup>131</sup>

In his report, Al Muqaddasi also wrote:

Habra (Hebron) is the village of Abraham, the Friend of God. Within it is a strong fortress, which, it is said, is of the building of the Jinns, being of great squared stones. In the middle of this place rises the Dome, built of stone – and since the times of Islam – which covers the

<sup>127</sup> This is mainly the account of the traveler of Piacensia. Concerning the Byzantine church and the discussion about the position of the site in Christendom, see J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (1977); and also H. Donner, *Pilgerfahrt ins Heilige Land, die ältesten Berichte christlicher Palaestinapilger* (4.-7. Jh.) (1979).

<sup>128</sup> More information concerning the visitation traditions and the accounts of travelers, see Donner, *Pilgerfahrt ins Heilige Land*.

<sup>129</sup> Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Period of Jerusalem: A Corpus*, Vol. 1 (1993), p. 224.

<sup>130</sup> Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems: A Description of Syria and the Holy Land from A.D. 650 to 1500* (1890), p. 315.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

sepulcher of Abraham. In the Sanctuary at Hebron is a public guest-house, with a kitchener, a baker and servants.... These present a dish of lentils and olive oil to every poor pilgrim who arrives, and it is set before the rich if perchance they desire to partake of it.<sup>132</sup>

During this time a large endowment was dedicated to feeding the poor and pilgrims and for centuries pilgrims were provided with meals. Nasir Khusraw reported that he visited the mosque and pilgrim dormitories in 1047 C.E. where he also received a daily meal of lentils and olive oil. According to him there were at times five hundred pilgrims receiving these meals daily.<sup>133</sup>

In 1100 Godfrey of Bouillon took control of the site as part of the Crusades, destroying the mosque and

pilgrim dormitories, after which it was garrisoned and became part of the headquarters of the lordship of Hebron, with Galdemar Carpenel as its first recorded lord.<sup>134</sup>

They constructed a church in gothic style and the complex became referred to as the Castle of St. Abraham. Various additions were made, such as an annex, later used as *caravanserai*,<sup>135</sup> religious schools and barracks. According to unconfirmed sources the location of the burial caves was discovered in 1119, and it is said that the bones of the Patriarchs were found.<sup>136</sup> According to this account, the bones were exhumed and placed in reliquaries, but later most were brought back down under the court, while some may have been sold to pilgrims and brought to the West. The current covered mosque inside the enclosure is the remains of a Crusaders Romanesque church,<sup>137</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 309-310.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>134</sup> Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Period of Jerusalem: A Corpus*, Vol. 1 (1993), p. 224.

<sup>135</sup> An inn providing accommodation for caravans.

<sup>136</sup> For a detailed and colorful narrative of these various accounts, see Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Period of Jerusalem*, pp. 225-228.

<sup>137</sup> See the account of the Persian traveler, Nasir-i Khusrau, *Diary of a Journey Through Syria and Palestine*, trans. and with a preface by G. Le Strange (London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society), 1893,



though all but the northeast wall and the western corner tower were demolished in the 1960s.

Following Saladin's conquest, Hebron became more prominent during the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. In an interesting account by a Catholic monk who made a voyage to the region in 1119, a narrative tells of how Jews aided the Muslims in re-taking Hebron, under the condition that they were allowed to build a synagogue near the site of the tombs of the Patriarchs, though the location and source cannot be confirmed.<sup>138</sup> It is most likely that Saladin transformed the Crusader church into the mosque without any structural changes other than the addition of a prayer niche (*mihrab*) commissioned by the commander of the Fatimid army, the Amir Badr al-Jamali, in 1091/1092, and a pulpit (*minbar*) constructed by Mashhad al-Husayn from 'Askalan (Ashkilon), dating back to the Fatimid period.<sup>139</sup> This unique wooden pulpit is

considered the oldest in use in the Islamic world.<sup>140</sup>

Reports from the 12th century reveal that the Cave of Machpela/Ibrahimi Mosque began to attract visitors and pilgrims, thereby arousing the curiosity of the local inhabitants. The traveler Benjamin of Tudela wrote in ca. 1170:

The ancient city (Hebron) of that name was situated on the hill and lies in ruins at present, whereas the modern town stands in the valley, even in the field of Machpehla. Here is the large place of worship called St. Abraham, which during the time of the Mahomedans was a synagogue. The Gentiles have erected six sepulchers in this place, which they pretended to be those of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac and Rebecca and of Jacob and Leah; the pilgrims are told, that they are the sepulchers

<sup>138</sup> Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine 634-1099*, Vol. 1 (1997), p. 207.

<sup>139</sup> Al-Ju'beh, "Hebron, The City of Abraham", in Museum with no frontiers (eds.) *Pilgrimage, Sciences and Sufism*, p. 203.

<sup>140</sup> Mugiraddin 'Ulaimi, *Al-Uns al-Jalil fi Tarikh al-Quds wal-Khalil* (1968) (in Arabic).

of the fathers and money is extorted from them. But if any Jew come, who gives an additional fee to the keeper of the cave, an iron door is opened, which dates from the times of our forefathers who rest in peace, and with a burning candle in his hands, the visitor descends into a first cave, which is empty, traverses a second in the same slate and at last reaches a third, which contains six sepulchers: that of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and of Sarah, Rebecca and Leah, one opposite the other. All these sepulchers bear inscriptions, the letters being engraved, thus upon that of Abraham 'this is the sepulcher of our father Abraham upon whom be peace' even so upon that of Isaac and upon all the other sepulchers. A lamp burns in the cave and upon the sepulchers continually, both night and day, and you there see tubs filled with the bones of

Israelites, for it is a custom of the house of Israel to bring thither the bones of their relicts and of their forefathers and to leave them there, unto this day. On the confines of the field of Machpelah stands the house of our father Abraham, who rests in peace, before which house there is a spring and in honor of Abraham, nobody is allowed to construct any building on that site.<sup>141</sup>

In this vivid account, it was likely that Muslims were guardians of the site, though it is unclear how much the site was visited by either Muslims or Jews. Another account is available from Samuel Ibn Samson, a rabbi from France, who visited the cave in 1210 and wrote that the visitor must descend twenty-four steps in a passageway so narrow that the rock touched both hands.<sup>142</sup>

During the Mamluk period (1250-1517), a series of architectural activities

<sup>141</sup> Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, edited by A. Asher, pp. 76-77, <http://www.archive.org/details/itineraryofrabbi01benjuoft>.

<sup>142</sup> "Pal. Explor. Fund", *Quarterly Statement* (1882), p. 212, quoted in E.G. Hirsch and M. Seligsohn, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, published between 1901-1906, from <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=29&letter=M>.



were carried out in the structure, including general renovations. In 1318-1320, under Sanjar al-Jawili, the Mamluks added a second mosque to the historic structure, the al-Jawiliyya Mosque. In the center of the mosque is a stone dome with corners exhibiting *muqarnas* decorations.<sup>143</sup> Christian sources report that during this time Christians were no longer allowed into the mosque, though they were allowed to approach the door of the former church and look in.<sup>144</sup> A platform for prayer leaders was built in 1331-1332, distinguished by marble capitals and various columns. Under the Amir Tankiz, the Viceroy of the Sultanate in Syria, work was conducted in 1332-1333 on the mosque including decorating the walls with colored marble in the typical Mamluk fashion.<sup>145</sup> Embellishments were made in the northern part of the enclosure, large sarcophagi were placed over the

tombs, and inscriptions were added on the marble in different parts of the mosque. Al-Nasir Nasir al-Din Muhammad (first reign: 1293-1294, second reign: 1299-1309, third reign: 1309-1341) converted the citadel into a madrasa named after him. A portico known today as Jami' al-Nisa' (Women's Mosque) was added under the sponsorship of Amir Shihab al-Din al-Yaghmuri in 1393.<sup>146</sup> The Mamluks also added a number of rooms including a library which contains a collection of manuscripts dating to the Mamluk times.<sup>147</sup> The current gates and the two minarets are also remains of the Mamluk period.

In 1335, Ibn Batutah, a Moroccan scholar, visited the Sanctuary and wrote that the passage to the cave below was closed.<sup>148</sup> This is echoed by a later report by the Jewish Ovadia of Bartinura in 1495, who noted that the

<sup>143</sup> Muqarnas are stone or wooden stalactite or honeycomb ornaments that adorn cupolas or corbels of a building. See Al-Ju'beh, "Hebron", in Museum with No Frontiers (eds.), *Pilgrimage, Sciences and Sufism*, p. 205.

<sup>144</sup> Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Period of Jerusalem*, p. 228.

<sup>145</sup> Al-Ju'beh, "Hebron", p. 203.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems: A Description of Syria and the Holy Land from A.D. 650 to 1500* (1890), p. 319.

cave was inaccessible to both Jews and Muslims. At this time, Muslims lowered candles into the cave, while Jews were allowed to pray outside near a small window looking into the cave, believed to be situated across from Abraham's grave.<sup>149</sup>

During the Ottoman period (1516-1914) the site experienced less activity, but acquired a special significance to Sufi sects.<sup>150</sup>

Since the Arab-Islamic conquest of the area in the 7th century, the site was exclusively used as a mosque, and access to the Ibrahimi Mosque was for many centuries restricted to Muslims. Jews did not inhabit Hebron after the destruction of the Second Temple, nor under the Romans, Byzantines, Arabs or Crusaders. Benjamin of Tudela (ca. 1170) reportedly found only a single Jew at St. Abraham, though he asserted that the church had been a

synagogue under Muslim rule.<sup>151</sup> Samuel Ibn Samson (ca. 1210) also made no mention of Jews in the city. Since the early Mamluk period, Jews (by order of Sultan Baybars I [r. 1260-1277]) could worship on the staircase outside, and were not allowed past the seventh step. Indeed, it was rare that non-Muslims would be granted access, and then only with special permission. As a result of fears caused during the Spanish Inquisition in the 15th century, many Jews migrated to areas under Islamic and Ottoman rule, and a sparse population of Sephardic Jews in Hebron grew. In 1540 the Abraham Avinu Synagogue was built, but throughout this period, the Jewish population remained small. In 1823, the Lubovicher Hasidic movement established a community in Hebron. Under the British Mandate (1920-1948) an increasing number of groups and pilgrims were allowed to enter the cave. A tragic event occurred in 1929,

<sup>149</sup> Reiter, "Contest or Cohabitation in Shared Holy Places", p. 166.

<sup>150</sup> For further reading on Sufism in the West Bank, including at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron, see Nazmi al-Ju'beh, "Bab al-Magharibah: Joha's Nail in the Haram al-Sharif", in *Jerusalem Quarterly* Vol: 5, no. 1, Spring 2003, pp. 17-24.

<sup>151</sup> Gotthard Deutsch, M. Franco, Emil G. Hirsch and M. Seligsohn, "Hebron", at [www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=497&letter=H](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=497&letter=H).



when due to the growing tensions violent struggles broke out between Arabs and Jews resulting in the deaths of 67 Jews and 9 Arabs.<sup>152</sup> Under the Jordanian period (1948-1967), when Israel and Jordan became enemy states, Israeli Jews were not allowed to enter Jordanian-annexed land (including Hebron). In the wake of the 1967 Israeli Occupation of Hebron, the Cave of Machpelah/Ibrahimi Mosque became a perennial source of religious and political friction. Following the Israeli conquest of Hebron, the restriction limiting Jews to the seventh step was lifted for the first time in seven hundred years, and the stairs were symbolically removed. The Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan arranged with the *Waqf* for the joint use of the building, but in reality official Israeli control began with allowing Jews to pray at certain times and ended with almost full control of

the site. Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful), a messianic and fundamentalist settler movement,<sup>153</sup> settled in the heart of the Old City of Hebron/Al-Khalil and continues to be protected by the Israeli army.<sup>154</sup> The right of Muslims to pray was left to the procedures of the Israeli army. Since the establishment of the Jewish settlement in the heart of Hebron, the route linking the Jewish stronghold to the site has seen more terrorist strikes (by both parties), rioting, army raids, random shootings and assassinations than any other Jewish outpost in the West Bank.<sup>155</sup> Following the assault of a Jewish settler in 1994, resulting in the killing of 29 Muslim worshipers and the wounding of scores of others, the Israeli Shamgar Commission recommended dividing the place and separating Muslims and Jews.

<sup>152</sup> Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, translated by Haim Watzman, p. 324.

<sup>153</sup> Gush Emunim follows the teachings of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook who ruled that settling in the West Bank was a religious duty, especially in those areas of biblical importance which are/were inhabited by Palestinians. They also attempted to destroy the Dome of the Rock.

<sup>154</sup> For a discussion on the incremental steps taken by the Israeli government in eroding Palestinian control, see Dumper, *The Politics of Sacred Space*, pp. 14-148. Also see Yazbak, "Holy Shrines (Maqamat) in Modern Palestine/Israel", p. 239.

<sup>155</sup> Hassner, *War on Sacred Ground*, p. 73.





## KEVER SHMUEL

## NABI SAMU'IL

On a tall mountain overlooking Jerusalem/al-Quds stands a structure surrounded by archeological ruins, presumed to be the tomb of the Prophet Samuel. This mountain was of strategic importance in many eras, and has hosted many battles. It was from here, in 1099, that the Crusaders first saw the holy city – and thus named the place Mons Gaudii, “the Mountain of Joy”. Samuel, the biblical prophet who lived some three thousand



**Figure 9:** Nabi Samu'il / Kever Shmuel location.

years ago, is revered in Christianity, Islam and Judaism and is a central figure in I Samuel in the Bible, and who also appears, albeit unnamed, in the Qur'an (2:47).

While the Prophet Samuel may not be as central as other figures in either Islam or Judaism, the site has been important for the local population of Jews and Muslims since the end of the Crusader era.<sup>156</sup> Indeed, Muslims and Jews would offer their prayer and bring votive offerings here, also making the tomb an important site for interactions between Jews and Muslims.<sup>157</sup> It is unique in that a mosque operates above an active Jewish prayer room which has many features of a synagogue. But a visitor today will immediately note the political and military presence. Following the 1994 massacre at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Cave of the Patriarchs, the Israeli army (in the form of the Civil Administration) took control over the area and fenced it in,

including the archaeological excavations.

Soldiers were permanently posted by the entrance to the structure to check all visitors. The army unit was removed in 2004, and the task of guarding the site was turned over to a private company employed by the Israeli "National Authority for Holy Places" (today under the Israeli Ministry of Tourism), which controls holy places inside of Israel. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Muslims *Waqf* Authorities continue to administer the mosque, employing a permanent administrator who lives in the adjacent village.

Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu'il remains a contested site. The site is located close to a village named after it, where today some twenty Muslim families reside, and which Israel has declared to be part of a National Park. Residents are prevented from constructing or restoring buildings in the village, which they see as an

<sup>156</sup> In the last thirty years, the activity of Christian revival movements has given new momentum to evangelism, paving the way to restoring Samuel's status, including this site with which his name is associated, as key elements of the Christian belief in resurrection.

<sup>157</sup> Yazbak, "Holy Shrines (Maqamat) in Modern Palestine/Israel", p. 237.



imposition of Israel, while Israel wishes to preserve the site for archaeological and historic reasons. In the 1990s, Muslim worshipers came from Jerusalem for Friday prayers. After Israel constructed the Separation Wall, Palestinians, including those living in the adjacent village, are no longer able to enter the site, which is considered fully “Judaized”. This section will be presented first through the religious narrative, focusing on the Jewish, Christian and Muslim perspectives, and followed by the historical narrative beginning in the Roman period through to the present.

**Figure 10:**  
Façade of Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu 'il.



## RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

According to the Jewish Bible, Samuel was born to Elkanah and Hanna, a barren woman who made a vow to God that if she would give birth to a child, she would dedicate the services of the child to the Lord. After giving birth, she presented him to a priest where he should serve the Lord until the Lord was revealed to him.

Samuel was the last leader of the Israelite tribes in the generation of the Judges. In his youth, the Philistines defeated the Israelites and stole the Ark of the Covenant which contained the Tablets of Stone on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. Samuel was also the only judge to become the leader of all these tribes, and called together his people at Mizpah, one of the highest hills in the land, where he organized his army, leading to a crushing victory over the Philistines. In his thrust to unite the tribes he paved the way for a political monarchy, even if he was forced to agree to this against his will. This also led to a separation between

the monarchy – to which he anointed Saul as king – and spiritual leadership, which he retained. When Saul did not wholly fulfill the commandment to destroy the Amalekites (he spared their king, Agag), Samuel secretly anointed David, the son of Jesse, to rule in his place. While Samuel is an important figure in Judaism, he is not as central as the Patriarchs.

Islam recognizes and accepts all the prophets and messengers of God who preceded Muhammad. The depiction of Samuel, as recorded in the *Qisas al-Anbiya*’ (narratives of the prophets) and in popular Islamic consciousness is positive and similar to the biblical account, though differs slightly. When the Israelites decided that they needed a king to rule over their country and unite the tribes in their fight against the Philistines, Allah sent the prophet to anoint Talut (Saul in the Hebrew Bible). It is said, in the Qur’an:

Art thou not aware of those elders of the children of Israel, after the time of Moses, how

they said unto a prophet of theirs, ‘Raise up a king for us, [and] we shall fight in God’s cause’?

Said he: ‘Would you, perchance, refrain from fighting if fighting is ordained for you?’

They answered: ‘And why should we not fight in God’s cause when we and our children have been driven from our homelands?’

Yet, when fighting was ordained for them, they did turn back, save for a few of them; but God had full knowledge of the evildoers.<sup>158</sup>

The prophet told them that Allah had chosen Talut (Hebrew: *Saul*) to be their king. Although he was mocked by the Israelites for being of poor parentage, the Qur’an praises Talut. According to the Qur’an, Samu’il provided the Israelites with a prophesy stating that the sign of Talut as their king would be the return of the Ark of the Covenant.

Subsequently, Talut was forced to go to war with only a handful of

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<sup>158</sup> Sura 2 (Muhammad Assad), Ayah 246.



followers who believed that Allah would grant victory to the few against the many. Among those who went to war was David, who killed Goliath and was raised to kingship by Allah. Christians are familiar with Samuel through his depiction in the Bible. During the Crusader period, the Old Testament narratives enjoyed a status equal to those found in the New Testament, and it was during this period that the Tomb of Samuel acquired the importance that was passed down to succeeding generations.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

One of the key debates surrounding Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu'il concerns identifying the site with names of places mentioned in the Bible. The Bible says, "Samuel died, and all Israel gathered to mourn him; they buried him at his home in Ramah".<sup>159</sup>

Archaeologists Yitzhak Magen and Michael Dadon questioned whether Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu'il is the biblical Ramah, usually identified as al-Ram, north of Jerusalem. Until the early 1920s, the site of Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu'il was identified with biblical Mitzpah, a central city in the land of Binyamin. But following excavations at Tel al-Nasba (12 km north of Jerusalem), researchers started to identify this site with biblical Mitzpah. Other researchers attempted to identify Mitzpah with the high place of sacrifice in Gibeon<sup>160</sup> or Beeroth, one of the cities of the Gibeonites.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>159</sup> I Samuel 25:1; see also I Samuel 28:3.

<sup>160</sup> Based on I Kings 3:4.

<sup>161</sup> Based on Joshua 9:17.

The only archaeologist to identify Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu'il as Mitzpah was W.F. Albright, over 80 years ago. Other researchers have weighed in against this because the area was considered too small to hold a central settlement, and revealed no archeological evidence dating it to the biblical Mitzpah. However, in light of the most recent archeological digs, conducted by Magen and Dadon, ruins dating from the period of the First and Second Temples were discovered, leading the researchers to point out that it is worth reconsidering identifying Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu'il with Mitzpah.<sup>162</sup> In fact, Magen and Dadon argue that Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu'il is not Ramah, the place where the Prophet Samuel was buried according to the Bible, but is Mitzpah, a place central to Samuel's prophetic activities, and a gathering place to go to war against the enemies of the Israelites.<sup>163</sup> As important as the ar-

chaeological findings linking the site to various periods are, they do not confirm that the site can be positively associated with the Prophet Samuel.

### *Roman and Byzantine Period (64 – 648)*

Procopius, the historian and biographer of the 6th century Roman Emperor Justinian, mentions a church or a monastery named after Samuel, where Justinian built a wall and dug a well, though he is unable to specify the site's location.<sup>164</sup> Other sources mention that Justinian ordered the construction of a church where it was thought that St. Samuel was buried.<sup>165</sup> If the reference is to the present-day Tomb of Samuel, then the place was held sacred by Christians in the Byzantine period.

There is no clear evidence that the site was used in earlier periods, though this is not unlikely due to its geographic dominance. Researcher

<sup>162</sup> Y. Magen and M. Dadon, "Nebi Samwil (Montjoie)", *Kadmoniyot*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1999), pp. 123-138.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, V, IX, 15, edited by G. Downey, Loeb Classical Library (1914-1940), p. 359.

<sup>165</sup> M.A. Khalaf and N. al-Ju'beh, "The Course of Khans and of Sufism", in Museum with No Frontiers (eds.) *Pilgrimage, Sciences and Sufism: Islamic Art in the West Bank and Gaza*, 2nd ed. (2010), p.153.





Yoel Elitzur offers the hypothesis that ancient pagan rituals performed at the site became institutionalized during the Byzantine period, and later became sanctified in honor of the Prophet Samuel. According to him, the site was considered holy because of its proximity to the area where Samuel was active, between Shiloh, Rama, and Mitzpah.<sup>166</sup>

This corresponds to archaeologists Magen and Dadon's theory that the site's sanctity for Jews of the Second Temple period was recognized and adopted by Byzantine Christians, who also venerated Samuel.<sup>167</sup>

### **Early Muslim Period**

**(638-1099)**

Pottery fragments from the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, which were discovered in the Tomb of Samuel excavations in the 1990s, mention the name "Dayr Samwil".<sup>168</sup> The word "dayr" refers to a Christian

monastery, apparently dating from the Byzantine period. According to the archaeologists Magen and Dadon, the large number of jars indicates that Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu'il was a center for producing pottery jars used as containers for exporting olive oil during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Al-Muqaddasi, a 10th-century Arab geographer, notes a high place called Dayr Samu'il, located one *parasang* (about 4 miles) from Jerusalem. He does not cite this as a place of worship for any particular religion, nor does he indicate that it may hold Samuel's tomb.<sup>169</sup> It is thus unclear if the site was a place of worship during this period.

### **Crusader Period**

**(1099-1244)**

Although the site has been associated with Samuel since the Byzantine period, it is only since the time of the Crusaders when the church was built

<sup>166</sup> Y. Elitzur, "The Origin of the Tradition on Nabi Samuel", *Kathedra*, Vol. 31 (April 1984), pp. 75-89 (in Hebrew).

<sup>167</sup> Y. Magen and M. Dadon, "Nebi Samwil (Montjoie)", *Kadmoniyot*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1999), pp. 123-138.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Al-Muqaddasi, *Kitab Ahsan al-Ta'asim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim*, M.J. de Goeje (ed.), *Bibliothecum Geographorum Arabicorum*, Vol. 3 (1st ed. 1877, 2nd ed. 1906), p. 89.

above the tomb cave, that the place has been considered the actual burial site of Samuel. It was on the morning of 7 June 1099, during the First Crusade (1096-1099), that the legions of Crusaders first saw Jerusalem and its fortifications from the Tomb of Samuel after an arduous three-year trek. These Crusaders “rediscovered” the site and transformed it from a Byzantine monastery named after Samuel to being regarded as his burial place.<sup>170</sup> The site was re-sanctified to St. Samuel and a Crusader church and fortress including stables were built, which to this day form the basis of the site.

The Russian Archbishop Daniel visited the Holy Land in 1106 before the church and fortress were completed and mentioned the existence of Prophet Samuel’s tomb on a promontory near Jerusalem, to the right of the road leading to Jaffa. At this station overlooking Jerusalem, he

wrote, travelers alight from their horses and every Christian took delight in the view that was afforded of the holy city.<sup>171</sup> The Crusader King Baldwin II (r. 1118-1131) offered the Cistercian order a thousand gold coins to settle at the tomb and build a monastery at the site. The order declined for fear of attacks by Muslims, and of the harsh winters that would have to be endured at that elevation. Instead, at their suggestion, a monastery and church were built by another order, the Premonstratensians.<sup>172</sup> The church on Mount Joy (*Mons Gaudii*) is mentioned as early as 1157 in documents of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and is elsewhere referred to as the Church of St. Samuel. In 1187, shortly before Jerusalem’s capture by Saladin, the monastery was plundered and the monks took shelter in St. John’s Monastery in Acre.<sup>173</sup>

12th-century Jewish travelers drew no connection between Samuel and the

<sup>170</sup> The Crusaders gave high importance to the narratives of the Old Testament and identified a large number of Scriptural sites in the Holy Land, thereby creating their own sacred geography. It is easy to understand that a biblical connection would be found for this key stop on their way to Jerusalem.

<sup>171</sup> C.W. Wilson, *Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society*, Vol. IV (1895), p. 9.

<sup>172</sup> A Roman Catholic religious order founded in 1120.

<sup>173</sup> Magen and Dadon, “Nebi Samwil (Montjoie)”, *Kadmoniyot*, pp. 123-138.



site considered to be his tomb.<sup>174</sup>

In fact, Benjamin of Tudela (who visited in ca. 1170) took issue with this Christian tradition and reported that Samuel's tomb was in Ramla (which the Crusaders confused with Rama) at the Jewish community, and that the Crusaders moved it to the Church of St. Samuel. "There the Crusaders built a large platform [church] named for Samuel of Shiloh."<sup>175</sup> With the end of the Crusader period, Jews and Muslims again worshiped at the Tomb of Samuel, which had not been possible under Crusader rule.

### ***The Ayyubbid and Mamluk Periods (1187–1517)***

In 1187, Saladin and his army conquered Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu'il. In a pre-emptive move to prevent the Crusaders from re-conquering the site, Saladin destroyed the fortified church. What remained of the church

was converted into a mosque and a tomb (*maqam*) named after Samuel, both of which are mentioned in almost all Muslim traveler accounts.<sup>176</sup> There is no mention of Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu'il in the writings of Jewish travelers before the mid-13th century, and worship of the site remained local.<sup>177</sup> However, due to the restrictions Jews faced in Jerusalem by the 13th century, and even more so between the 15th and 18th centuries, Jewish worship at the site surpassed that of Jerusalem, and the central Jewish ceremony in the Land of Israel was the pilgrimage to Rama, namely Tomb of Samuel.<sup>178</sup> Muslim rituals were also held at the site during this period, though there is less information about them. Two Jewish sources, including Yitzhak Ibn al Fara from Malaga (in 1441) and Rabbi Ya'akov in the late 13th century, relate that a Muslim structure existed in

<sup>174</sup> Reiter, "Contest or Cohabitation in Shared Holy Places", p. 164.

<sup>175</sup> Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, edited by A. Asher, pp. 76-77, [http://www.archive.org/details/itineraryofrabbio1benjuoft](http://www.archive.org/details/itineraryofrabbio1benjuoft/Shmuel_Hanavi_Synagogue_is_mentioned_in_the_year_1013_as_being_administered_by_the_Karaim_but_its_location_is_unknown.See_S.H._Qooq,_%20%22Notes_on_%27The_History_of_Synagogue_at_Shmuel_Hanavi_Tomb%27%2C_Bulletin_of_the_Israel_Exploration_Society,_Reader_B_(1965),_pp._248-249_(Originally_Vol._6,_pp._143-144).); Shmuel Hanavi Synagogue is mentioned in the year 1013 as being administered by the Karaim, but its location is unknown. See S.H. Qooq, "Notes on 'The History of Synagogue at Shmuel Hanavi Tomb'", *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society*, Reader B (1965), pp. 248-249 (Originally Vol. 6, pp. 143-144).

<sup>176</sup> "Guide to the Tomb of Samuel", Report commissioned by the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (2007), p. 11 (unpublished).

<sup>177</sup> J. Ben-Dov, "Nebi Samuel" (2006), pp. 62-63 (in Hebrew).

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

front of Samuel's tomb.<sup>179</sup>

A student of Nahmanides<sup>180</sup> (15th century) tells of finding at the site "a very handsome structure and in front of the structure an Islamic house of worship."<sup>181</sup> At the same time, the head of the Franciscan monastery on Mount Zion wrote in 1429 of a Chapel of St. Samuel near Jerusalem that was used in Jewish worship services.<sup>182</sup>

Accordingly, there are numerous rabbinical accounts of the pilgrimages to the site and the miracles and rituals which apparently took place there.<sup>183</sup> It is not until the 15th century that testimony begins to appear concerning quarrels between Jews and Muslims over the site's maintenance and right to worship. Such documents proliferated during the Ottoman period.<sup>184</sup>

## Ottoman Period

### (1577-1918)

In 1670, written reports from J. Goujon, a French sculptor and architect, note that a mosque was located on top of the ruins of a church, indicating that the site continued to be a site of Muslim veneration.<sup>185</sup>

During this time, both Jews and Muslims worshiped at the site, and there are several written records attesting to the debates surrounding rights to worship and control. A document of the Shari'a court in Jerusalem from 1550, for example, describes a complaint lodged by a Muslim from the nearby village of Bayt Iksa, alleging that Jews who came to "maqam al-sayyid Shmu'il" did not take proper care of their pack-animals

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>180</sup> A medieval Jewish scholar, also known as Rabbi Moses ben Nahman Girondi, Bonastruc ça Porta and by his acronym Ramban.

<sup>181</sup> Sh. Asaf, "Jerusalem", *Compilation of the Hebraic Society of the Exploration of Eretz Israel and Its Antiquities in Memory of Luntz*, p. 58 (in Hebrew); A. Shohat, "History of the Synagogue on the Tomb of Shmuel ha-Navi", *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society*, Reader B (1965), pp. 141-145 (originally Vol. 6, pp. 81-86).

<sup>182</sup> E. Reiner, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage to Eretz Yisrael 1099-1517*, PhD Dissertation (1988), p. 310.

<sup>183</sup> As an example, in 1538 according to the registers of the Nablus Tax Checkpoint 128 Jewish pilgrims arrived, see Amnon Cohen, "Damascus and Jerusalem", *Sfunot*, 17 (1973), p. 98 as quoted by E. Reiner, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage to Eretz Yisrael 1099-1517*, PhD Dissertation (1988), p. 288. Also see Y. Magen and M. Dadon, "Nebi Samwil (Montjoie)", *Kadmoniyot*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1999), p.77.

<sup>184</sup> A. Shohat, "History of the Synagogue on the Tomb of Shmuel ha-Navi", *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society*, Reader B (1965), pp. 141-145 (originally Vol. 6, pp. 81-86).

<sup>185</sup> Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Period of Jerusalem: A Corpus*, Vol. 1 (1993), p. 87.



and their belongings.<sup>186</sup>

Another interesting document, dated 1554, mentions a petition sent by the Jewish community of Jerusalem to Istanbul, complaining that Jews customarily made pilgrimages to an ancient synagogue called “Sidi Nabi Allah Samwil” but were being forbidden to visit the site after its conversion to a mosque. The Sultan ordered the *qadi* and the governor of Jerusalem to investigate the complaint and, if valid, to stop harassing the Jews on this matter.<sup>187</sup>

By the 16th century, a Jewish Charitable Trust (*hekdesb*) of Our Master Samuel existed at Kever Shmuel/Nabi Samu'il, which financed the site's maintenance and gave charity to the poor in Jerusalem and to *kolell*<sup>188</sup> students. The Portuguese traveler de Aveiro wrote in 1560 that the Jews maintained the site and that

all the nations tended to refer to it as “Santo Samuel”.<sup>189</sup> Some time afterward, custody of the site was taken from the Jews and non-Muslim visitors were required to pay an entrance fee. In response, Jews boycotted the site, possibly in order to deprive the Muslims of that revenue.<sup>190</sup> A report dated 1590 relates that after making certain appeals the Jews regained access to the tomb in return for payment.<sup>191</sup> Testimonies from the 17th and 18th centuries speak of peaceful relations of Jews and Muslims worshiping at Tomb of Samuel, but also instances of continuing friction between the two communities. Vilnai relates that Muslims showed respect to Jews by lighting candles, serving as guarding of the tombs, and receiving payment from them by authorization of the governor.<sup>192</sup> According to another

<sup>186</sup> A. Cohen, *A World Within, Jewish Life as Reflected in Muslim Court Documents from the Sijill of Jerusalem (XVIth Century)* (1994), p. 78 (Sijill 23\460).

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 98 (Sijill 29\167). For a similar document from 1599, see p. 202 (Sijill 80\344a).

<sup>188</sup> A *kollel* is a *yeshiva* (institute for Jewish learning) for married men.

<sup>189</sup> A. Shohat, “History of the Synagogue on the Tomb of Shmuel ha-Navi”, *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society*, Reader B (1965), pp. 141-145 (originally Vol. 6, pp. 81-86).

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, “A Jewish Settlement Near the Tomb of Shmuel ha-Navi”, *Yediot be-Haqirat Eretz Israel ve-Atiqoteyha*, Vol. 2 (1953), p. 254.

<sup>192</sup> Z. Vilnai, *Holy Gravestones in Eretz Israel* (1963), p. 58 (in Hebrew). In the 18th century Jews used to burn dresses and other precious items as sacrifice for God. See Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, “A Jewish Settlement Near the Tomb of Shmuel ha-Navi”, *Yediot be-Haqirat Eretz Israel ve-Atiqoteyha*, Vol. 2 (1953), p. 250.

account, however, the mufti of Jerusalem, Shaykh Muhammad al-Khalili, built the shrine and mosque above it.<sup>193</sup>

After this time, Jews were barred from entering Samuel's tomb.<sup>194</sup> An 18th-century report states that the *qadi* ordered money to be collected from every Jew wishing to enter the cave and that the president of the Sephardic community in Jerusalem was arrested on his orders for leading a group of Jews to the tomb without authorization.<sup>195</sup>

Heavy fighting during World War I between Turkish and British forces caused serious damage to the Crusader and Ottoman structures, as well as the minaret.<sup>196</sup> The Supreme Muslim Council restored the site in the 1920s.

During the Jordanian period (1948-

1967) the site was used as a mosque. In the War of 1948, the Palmach failed to occupy this strategic place,<sup>197</sup> and from 1948-1967 the site was used by the Arab Legion of Jordan military to guard access to Jerusalem.

### **Post 1967 period**

Following the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967, Jewish worship alongside Muslim worship was gradually renewed. The Jewish Bratslavers group removed the Muslim mats covering the floor of the cave and replaced the green Muslim covering (*kiswa*) of the tomb with another covering decorated with Hebrew calligraphy.<sup>198</sup> A subterranean level containing a grave marker, which had been closed and sealed, became accessible again after 1967, when the

<sup>193</sup> Khalaf and Al-Ju'beh, "The Course of Khans and of Sufism", p. 154.

<sup>194</sup> Y. Ben-Zvi, "A Jewish Settlement Near the Tomb of Shmuel ha-Navi", *Yediot be-Haqirat Eretz Israel ve-Atiqoteyha*, Vol. 2 (1953), p. 250.

<sup>195</sup> A. Shohat, "History of the Synagogue on the Tomb of Shmuel ha-Navi", *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society*, Reader B (1965), pp. 141-145 (originally Vol. 6, pp. 81-86). For pictures of Nabi Samu'il, see M. Michelson, M. Milner and Y. Salomon, *The Jewish Holy Places in the Land of Israel* (1996), pp. 62-65.

<sup>196</sup> B.Z. Kedar, *The Changing Land Between Jordan and the Sea: Aerial Photographs from 1917 to the Present* (1999), p. 111.

<sup>197</sup> B. Morris, 1948: *The First Arab-Israeli War* (2008), p. 130.

<sup>198</sup> "Guide to the Tomb of Samuel", Report commissioned by the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (2007) (unpublished).



Jewish Bratslavers *kollel* group cut an opening into the chamber and began praying there. In March 1971, the Israeli Minister of Defense evacuated 200 people from the adjoining village and ordered the bulldozing of ca. 50 houses.<sup>199</sup> Residents fled to Jordan, returning ten years later when they were permitted to rebuild their houses. In response to Jewish settlers trying to take control of the site in 1972, the Muslim *Waqf* Administration and Islamic Affairs Department submitted complaints to the Israeli military governor of the West Bank.<sup>200</sup> In the early 1990s a *kollel* was established next to the structure and, in 1996, was moved into the burial chamber, making it both a full-fledged synagogue and a *kollel*. Later, the *kollel* was removed from the structure to a mobile trailer at the entrance to the site.

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<sup>199</sup> For more information on this event, see “Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Occupied Territories”, 5 October 1971, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/o/858C88EB973847F4802564B5003D1083> (accessed: 20 December, 2010).

<sup>200</sup> Yazbak, “Holy Shrines (Maqamat) in Modern Palestine/Israel”, p. 238.





## CONCLUSION

The narratives presented in this report have attempted to show the perspectives of Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims in regard to sites considered sacred by both sides. The narratives underscore the fact that these sites involve not only religious considerations but also practical issues related to preservation, maintenance, security and access. The current political and social tensions, as well as new realities that have been created through security measures, present serious obstacles to finding practical solutions to many of these challenges.

The three case studies in this report also make clear that many of these challenges are hardly new. These holy sites have existed for centuries in a complex religious, social and political context fraught with exclusionary claims and exclusionary practices that have become an integral part of their identity. They have been subjected to conflict and destruction. But they have also enjoyed better times, when there

was shared access and mutual respect. In the course of time, the holy sites themselves have demonstrated their capacity to accommodate both the Muslim and Jewish communities. Today, as in the past, it is left to forward looking leaders who possess the conviction and courage to permit these sacred places to provide space for worship for all members of the Abrahamic faiths.

The IHJR hopes that these narratives can contribute to promoting an understanding of the respective significance and sensitivity of these holy places, and also open space for further research and dialogue not only on these three sacred places but also for other sites in the Middle East and other regions with disputed historical and religious legacies. In doing so, the IHJR hopes to make a modest contribution to advancing peace and reconciliation.



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