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**Rival Conceptualizations of a Single Space:
Jerusalem's sacred esplanade**

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Rival Conceptualizations of a Single Space: Jerusalem's sacred esplanade*

Benjamin Z. Kedar

A space that has been sanctified often continues to be regarded as sacred even when appropriated by another religion. A new religious sect takes over the space either by osmosis or by force, and the structure is converted to the new worship. Osmosis points to the underlining of the continuance of a sacred space; force generally implies the usurpation of such space.

*Romila Thapar, Somanatha:
The Many Voices of a History, p. 211.*

Cross-cultural comparisons of space conceptualization may discuss various holy lands, holy cities, holy mountains and holy sites, various physical markets and various types of villages, to give just a few examples. In all these cases we typically compare a number of different spaces belonging to the same category. The author intends, on the other hand, to deal with a single space—the space which, if we wish to use a strictly neutral term, may be called 'Jerusalem's sacred esplanade'.

The single space in question was conceptualized, both diachronically and synchronically, in different ways by the adherents of several religions over the past two millennia. In other words, a study of Jerusalem's esplanade amounts to a cross-cultural comparison of rival

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conceptualizations of the same sacralized area over a very long period. The overview of these conceptualizations that follows will highlight three themes: (a) the extent to which adherents of the religion who were in possession of the area during a given period were aware of the importance of the esplanade for adherents of another religion or other religions; (b) the extent to which the possessors of the area gave access to the esplanade to people they regarded as infidels; and (c) the way these possessors treated the remains of buildings that had been erected by earlier—from their point of view, infidel—possessors.



Fig. 1: An aerial photograph of the esplanade, from the north, 2010 (Duby Tal, Albatross)

While a succession of rival yet simultaneous perceptions of Jerusalem's sacred compound have existed during the past two millennia, in the eleven centuries that preceded them the area was perceived in just one way—as the site of the first and second Jewish temples.

The First Temple, so relates the Hebrew *Bible*, was built by Solomon, the third king of Israel, and was destroyed centuries later by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, who also exiled most of the

Jews to Babylon; modern research places King Solomon in the 10th century BCE and the Temple's destruction by the Babylonians in the year 586 BCE. During the Temple's existence it was typically called 'the House of God'—that is, the Temple was perceived, like the temples of the neighbouring cultures, as God's abode. Since no scientific excavations have ever been undertaken on Jerusalem's sacred esplanade, we do not know whether any remains of this First Temple are buried in the ground; surely nothing of it remains above ground level. In 2007, during maintenance works on the esplanade, some pottery shards dating from the 8th to the 6th century BCE were discovered about 50 cm below the surface. These fragments are the only finds from that period unearthed on the esplanade—but there is no reason to consider them as having belonged to the Temple. Still, a systematic comparison of the Temple's descriptions in the *Bible* with roughly contemporaneous excavated West Asian temples allows for the shrine's tentative visualization. It appears to have consisted of an Outer Court accessible to all, including Gentiles; an Inner Court, reserved for priests; the Temple proper, with two immense pillars flanking the entry way and an innermost part, the Holy of Holies, which only the officiating high priest could enter, and did so once a year, on the Day of Atonement. The large altar for animal sacrifice stood in the Inner Court; huge water-filled basins served for priestly ablutions and for washing the entrails of the sacrificed animals (Hurowitz 2009).

The Second Temple was erected, at the same location, after the Persian King Cyrus defeated the Babylonians and, in 538 BCE, allowed the Jews to return from their captivity and rebuild their shrine. Over the following six centuries, this Second Temple was enlarged on three occasions, most notably under King Herod the Great, who ruled from 37 BCE to 4 BCE. The boundaries of the sacred esplanade as we know it today were established by Herod's architects; measuring 144,000 meters square, it was one of the largest precincts of the Roman world, three or four times bigger than the First Temple had been. The lower courses of the esplanade's outer supporting walls, constructed of huge stones, the largest of which weighs about 400 tons, date from Herodian times. An aqueduct carried water from springs about 20 km south of Jerusalem and emptied it into cisterns still existing under the esplanade. Gentiles were forbidden, on pain of death, to enter the

Temple's upper precinct: inscriptions in Greek and Latin, set above the grille that delimited that precinct, spelled out this prohibition. It was this Herodian Temple that Jesus visited and whose destruction he foresaw, telling his disciples that 'there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down' (Matthew 24:2). The Temple was destroyed in 70 CE by the Romans while suppressing the Great Jewish Revolt (Patrich and Edelcopp 2013). Today, no vestiges of the Temple can be seen on the esplanade itself, but the lower courses of its outer walls, some of its gates, and remains of an arch erected to retain a staircase are visible from the outside. Archaeological excavations undertaken by Hebrew University archaeologists from 1968 to 1978 south and southwest of the esplanade revealed that the Temple was deliberately taken apart, with huge blocks from the dismantled buildings hurled down to the streets that bordered on it. The excavations unearthed the broad stairs that led to the Temple from the south, a number of decorated fragments, a portable sundial depicting on its reverse side the *menorah*—the seven-branched candelabrum daily lit in the Temple that was (and is) a major Jewish symbol—and much more (Mazar 2000). After the Temple's destruction, this candelabrum was one of the Temple objects earmarked for public display during the victors' triumphal parade in Rome. Carried by Roman soldiers, it is famously depicted on the Arch of Titus in Rome's forum.

The Roman emperor Hadrian (r. 117–138 CE) decided to build a new city in place of Jerusalem, razed after the suppression of the Jewish revolt, and to raise a new temple to Zeus/Jupiter on the place where the Jewish temple had stood. The move triggered another Jewish revolt that aimed at the rebuilding of the Temple, but the Romans suppressed it in 135CE. Henceforth Jews were not allowed to live in the new, Romanized Jerusalem, or even visit it. Recent excavations (Onn, Weksler-Bdolah and Bar-Nathan 2011) suggest that the esplanade became the site of a Roman Capitulum—that is, the temple of the Capitoline triad of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva. If so, the esplanade was being conceptualized for the first time in divergent ways: for the Romans it contained the main temple of their new city, symbolizing their victory over the Jews and their God; for the Jews it was the site of their vanished temple, for whose restoration they prayed every day,



and whose looted candelabrum was becoming their foremost symbol; while for the Christians the site signified the fulfillment of Jesus's prophecy that no stone of the Jewish temple would be left upon another. Christians also revered a spot on the esplanade where St. James the Less, Jerusalem's first bishop, had been martyred by the Jews.

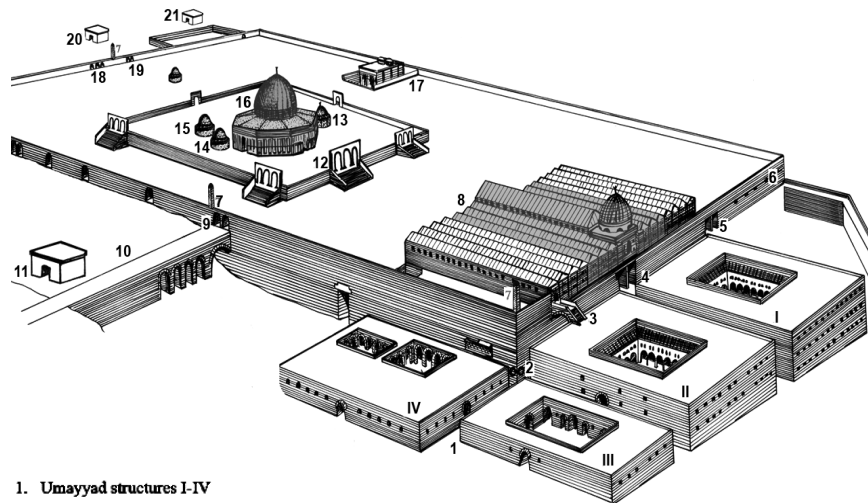
In the 4th century the Roman Empire became Christian. The pagan cult centre that stood on the esplanade disappeared, while the newly erected Church of the Holy Sepulchre, situated in Jerusalem's northwestern part, in considerable distance from the esplanade, became the city's main Christian shrine. It was the first—and only—time in Jerusalem's long history that its foremost holy place was not situated on the esplanade. The Christians deliberately left the Temple-less esplanade in ruins, so as to make manifest the fulfillment of Jesus's prophecy and to symbolize Judaism's defeat; their many liturgical processions through the city pointedly avoided the esplanade. The Christians also transferred to their main shrine several traditions that were originally attached to the Jewish Temple: for instance, the place of Abraham's sacrifice was now shown in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the traces of the blood of the martyred Zacharias, who according to the New Testament was slain 'between the Temple and the altar' (Matthew 23:35), could now be seen in front of Christ's empty tomb (Schein 1984). The one site on the esplanade that Christian pilgrims used to visit was the place of the martyrdom of St. James, now shown at the southeastern corner. In line with this Christian perception of the esplanade was the permission granted to the Jews to enter Jerusalem only on the anniversary of the Roman conquest of the city, so that they might lament on that day the destruction of their Temple. The annual sight of Jews arriving in mourning attire to weep over the Temple's ruins amounted to another powerful visualization of Christendom's triumph. Perhaps the Christians were not aware that the Jews were not only lamenting their loss but also praying for its reversal and that many legends and apocalyptic expectations pertaining to the Temple were cropping up in their literature.

This double, diametrically opposed conceptualization of the deserted esplanade—by Christians, as the permanent proof of their faith's superiority; by Jews, as the lamentable testimony of their

temporary fall from God's grace—prevailed until the Arab conquest of Jerusalem in 638. There were however two brief interludes. Between 361 and 363 the Roman emperor Julian, who attempted to revive polytheism throughout the empire, gave permission for the Jews to rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem; but the building activities were soon cut short, possibly by an earthquake, and Julian himself fell in battle with the Persians. The second interlude took place in 614, when the Persians conquered Jerusalem and, with Jewish help, massacred thousands of its Christian inhabitants. For a short while Jews could visit the esplanade freely, but very soon the Persians reinstated Christian rule over Jerusalem. A Hebrew inscription on a stone of the esplanade's outer western wall, which contains a part of a verse of the Prophet Isaiah on the Resurrection at the End of Days, may have been incised during the rebuilding attempt under Julian; a lintel with a meticulously engraved Christian cross flanked by two more hastily carved Jewish seven-branched candelabra may date from the days of the short-lived Persian conquest. Inscription and lintel were discovered during the 1968–78 excavations (Tsafirir 2009: 85–99).

The Arab conquest of Jerusalem in 638 inaugurated a new phase in the history of the esplanade: whatever remained of the Jewish Temple and of the Roman Capitolium gave way to a major holy space of Islam, to which the Prophet Muhammad travelled on his mystical Night Journey and Ascension, and which holds the breathtaking Dome of the Rock and the immense Aqsa Mosque. This phase continues of course down to the present day.

The architectural history of these Muslim shrines is quite well established: soon after the Arab conquest a modest mosque was built at the southern end of the esplanade; on its highest point the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik erected the Dome of the Rock in 691/2; his son, the caliph al-Walīd (r. 705–15), replaced the simple mosque at the esplanade's southern end with the Aqsa Mosque, which originally consisted of 15 naves. The four large structures bordering on the esplanade on its southern and southwestern sides, discovered during the 1968–78 excavations, date from the same period. Other, smaller shrines were later added on the esplanade.



1. Umayyad structures I-IV
2. Tying-up place of al-Buraq
3. Gate of the Palace*
4. Gate of the Prophet (with corridor to the courtyard)
5. Gate of Repentance or Gate of Mary (with Cradle of Jesus)*
Gate of the Spring (with corridor to the courtyard)**
6. Cradle of Jesus (inside wall)**
7. Minarets*
8. Wider Roofed Part (with 15 naves)*
Narrower Roofed Part or Aqsa Mosque (with 7 naves)**
9. Gate of David
10. Aqueduct
11. Market area
12. Ascent of the Prophet
13. Dome of the Chain
14. Dome of the Ascension
15. Dome of the Prophet
16. Dome of the Rock
17. Gate of Mercy
18. Gate of the Hashemites* or Main Gate**
19. Gate of the Tribes or Gate of the Children of Israel
20. Family grave of the Ikshidids
21. Two convents of mystics

Fig. 2: The Mosque of Jerusalem—the so-called Temple (*Bayt al-Maqdis*) or Furthest Mosque (*al-Masjid al-Aqsa*)—from the Umayyad construction to the Crusader conquest, showing parts that existed only before (*) or after (**) the earthquakes of the 1030s.

(The reconstruction of the Umayyad complex is based on the work of Meir Ben-Dov, who published his findings in 1972).

The Muslim conceptualization of the esplanade is a more contested subject. How early did the entire esplanade come to be regarded as a mosque? When was it acknowledged that ‘the farthest place of worship’ (*masjid al-aqsa*), to which (according to the Koran, Surah 17:1) Muhammad was carried during his Night Journey from Mecca, was in fact on Jerusalem’s esplanade, and that it was from its Rock



(or its immediate vicinity) that the Prophet ascended to Heaven? Especially disputed is the main motive behind the construction of the Dome of the Rock: some scholars maintain that it was rooted in internal Arab politics, with the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik wishing to turn Jerusalem into Islam’s centre and divert the pilgrimage (*hajj*) from Mecca to it; others argue that the message of ‘Abd al-Malik’s Dome was religious, calling on Christians and Jews to submit to Islam, and providing the Muslims with a shrine more splendid than the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Indeed, the major inscription of ‘Abd al-Malik’s Dome, some 240 meters long, reproduces Koranic passages that are intensely anti-Christian, rejecting the Trinity and Jesus as the Son of God, and extolling Muhammad as God’s Messenger and the Muslims’ intercessor at the Last Judgement. Still other scholars assume that ‘Abd al-Malik acted under the influence of the eschatological role that the esplanade in general, and the Rock in particular, were believed to play at the End of Days (Grabar 1959; Elad 1995: 158–63).

Yet when we turn to the themes central to the present overview—namely, Muslim awareness of the previous sanctity of the esplanade, and the access to it Muslims granted to adherents of other religions—scholarly consensus is wide-ranging. The Muslims took over the esplanade knowing definitely that it had been the site of the Jewish Temple and exhibited respect for its history. Indeed, the early Arabic name for the new Muslim holy place, and for Jerusalem in general, Bayt al-Maqdis, closely echoes the Hebrew term *Beyt ha-Miqdash*, which has habitually designated the Jewish Temple both before and after its destruction by the Romans. Bronze coins minted in Jerusalem sometime after 697 and asserting in Arabic, on both the obverse and the reverse sides, ‘There is no God except Allah alone’, show a seven-branched candelabrum on the obverse side (see Fig. 3). This combination of the *shahāda* (the Muslim declaration of the belief in the oneness of God) with the seven-branched candelabrum indicates that the Muslim mint authorities in Jerusalem chose to represent the Muslim-ruled City of the Temple (*Madīnat Bayt al-Maqdis*) with the age-old symbol of the erstwhile Jewish Temple (Barag 1988–89). And numerous traditions identify the Islamized esplanade as the site of the destroyed Jewish Temple and recount events that happened there to Old and New Testament protagonists, from Jacob and David and



Solomon to Zacharias and Mary; and while the Gate of the Prophet was the main entrance onto the esplanade, it could also be entered from the west by the Gate of David, from the south by the Gate of Mary, and from the north by the Gate of the Children of Israel. Moreover, the magnificent new mosque on the esplanade was initially perceived as the destroyed Temple rebuilt, though by the 9th century this conception gave way to the esplanade's perception as Jerusalem's Friday Mosque—that is, as the mosque in which the city's Muslims gather on Friday for communal prayer. In a similar way the bronze coins with the seven-branched candelabrum soon gave way to coins with five-branched ones, thus definitely moving away from the Jewish prototype and perhaps symbolizing the Five Pillars of Islam. At the same time, the Muslim esplanade was perceived as a place of extraordinary holiness—touched by God, close to Paradise, the place where the major events at the End of Days will be enacted (Kaplony 2002).



Fig. 3: Coin minted in Jerusalem after 697
 (The Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Coin Collection No. 5825. Photo: Gabi Laron)

As for access to non-Muslims, Jewish sources relate that ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb, the second caliph, annulled the Christian prohibition of Jewish residence in Jerusalem. Jews helped the Muslims to uncover the site of the Rock on the esplanade; later, Jews and Christians were employed as mosque servants charged with cleansing the esplanade shrines and making glass for lamps and goblets and wicks for the lamps. These Jews (and perhaps also others) were able to pray on the esplanade until the caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 717–20) forbade



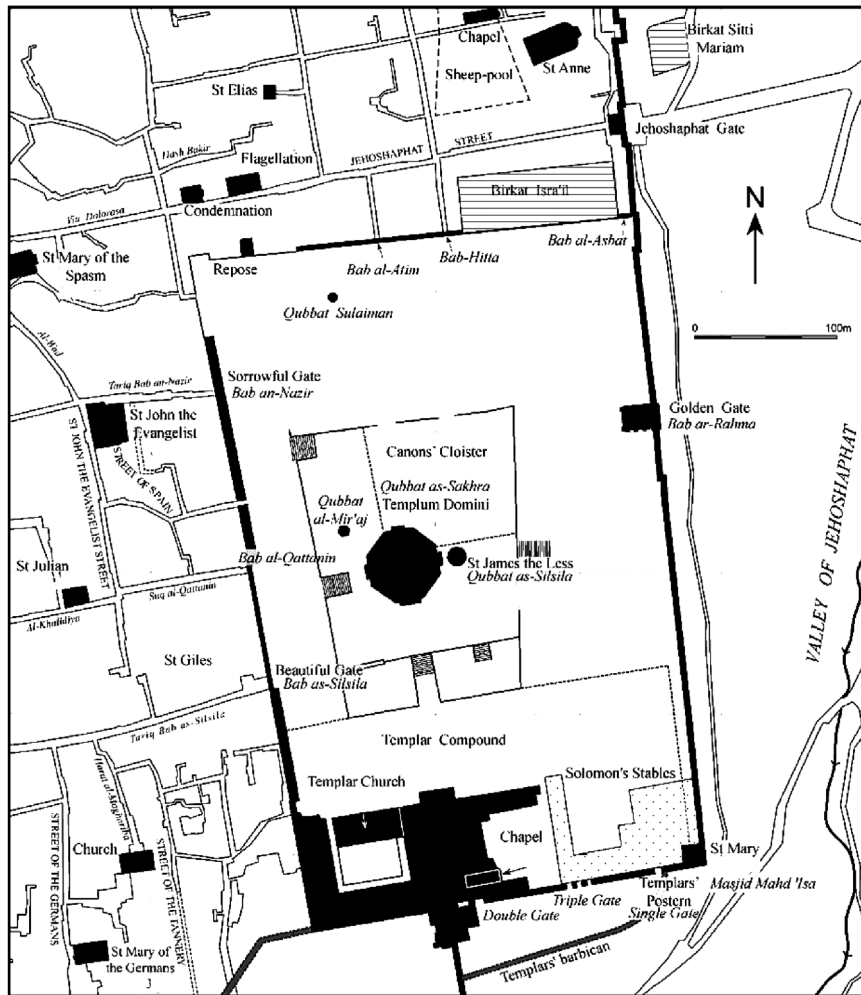
them to do so. Henceforth Jewish pilgrims made a circuit of the gates and prayed at each of them; the great annual ceremony of Jerusalem's Jews took place on the Mount of Olives that overlooks the esplanade from the east (Gil 1992: 71–72, 626–30).

The ancient aqueduct that carried water to the esplanade ceased to function in the first half of the 11th century, most probably in the wake of the regional climatic crisis that diminished the discharge of the springs that had fed it. Subsequently, Jerusalem and its esplanade depended on rain water that was stored in cisterns and pools (Ellenblum 2012: 196–227).

The next phase in the esplanade's history starts on 15 July 1099, when the warriors of the First Crusade conquered Jerusalem, massacred Muslims in the Aqsa Mosque and elsewhere in the city, and burned Jews in their synagogue. Henceforward, Jerusalem was under Frankish (Crusader) rule. Non-Christians—that is, Muslims and Jews—were not allowed to dwell in the city, although they were permitted to visit it. This state of affairs continued until the Muslim reconquest of Jerusalem under Saladin on 2 October 1187.

The 88 years of Frankish rule occupy a special place in the esplanade's history (see Kedar and Pringle 2009), for it was only during this brief period that its Islamic shrines came under Christian control. They were swiftly Christianized. The Dome of the Rock became an abbey church, served by Augustinian canons and known as the Lord's Temple. The Aqsa Mosque came to be known as the Temple or Palace of Solomon, serving first as the residence of the Frankish kings and later as the headquarters of the military order of the Knights Templar. The Dome of the Chain, east of the Dome of the Rock, was turned by the Franks into a dependent chapel of the Lord's Temple, dedicated to St James the Less, the first bishop of Jerusalem.

So it came about that, under Frankish rule, uniquely, Christian Jerusalem possessed two sacred foci: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Lord's Temple. Before 1099, the rivalry between the two was open, with the Islamic dome above the Rock erected expressly to outshine the Christian dome above the Sepulchre. After 1099, with



Based on Survey of Palestine, 1936

Fig. 4: The esplanade under Frankish rule
(Compiled by Prof. R. Denys Pringle, drawn by Ian Dennis)

both shrines in Christian hands, a more harmonious relationship evolved between them, although this did not prevent some rivalry between the clergy attached to them emerging from time to time. Of the two, the Holy Sepulchre had the full force of Christian tradition on its side, while the Lord's Temple had to be established from scratch as a Christian shrine. Achard of Arrouaise, the Temple's prior in the years 1112–36, left behind a poem in which he attempts to do just that. He surveys the site's history in considerable detail, from King Solomon,

the builder of the First Temple, down to Titus, the Roman destroyer of the Second Temple. Then, without wasting a word on the period subsequent to the destruction of the Second Temple, he proceeds to present the shrine of his own days as the work of some Christian emperor—Justinian or Heraclius—or of Helena, Emperor Constantine’s mother; its construction by the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik is simply blotted out of existence. Achard does not tackle the question of why a Christian ruler should have rebuilt the Temple whose destruction Jesus had foretold, but he goes on to thank God for having recently liberated ‘His Temple’ from infidel hands (Achard of Arrouaise 1941).

Thus, the Dome of the Rock acquires a new Christian past and significance. Various events of sacred history are now said to have happened there. An Anglo-Saxon pilgrim who visits Jerusalem in 1102–3 already asserts that it was in the Lord’s Temple that Jacob saw the heavenly ladder—betraying the influence of an Islamic tradition apparently transmitted to the Franks by some Oriental Christians. In the 1160s a German pilgrim is shown the imprint left by Jesus’s foot in the rock when he was expelling the merchants from the Temple. This must have been a Christian appropriation of what Islamic tradition sees as the imprint of Muhammad’s foot upon his ascension to heaven. The bulk of the shrine’s new Christian content, however, derived from the Bible, from the identification of the Rock in the shrine’s centre with the Holy of Holies of King Solomon’s Temple to that of a nearby crypt as the location of Christ’s encounter with the adulterous woman. Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac and the slaying of Zacharias, which had originally pertained to the Temple and were transferred to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, now moved back to their original location. Mosaic inscriptions in Latin added to the shrine’s exterior mostly reproduced biblical passages exalting the Temple as the House of the Lord, and aimed at imbuing the literate visitor with the certainty that he was indeed facing the rebuilt Temple. Yet the Franks left the original Arabic inscriptions untouched, including the one by ‘Abd al-Malik, some 240 meters long, which (as we have seen) reproduces Kuranic passages that are vehemently anti-Christian, rejecting the Trinity and Jesus as the Son of God. Probably the Franks were unaware of their content.

The written sources contain many details about the appearance of the Lord's Temple under Frankish rule. For the first fifteen years after the conquest, the Rock remained exposed; it was then covered over and paved in marble. Later, an altar was placed over it. A Muslim chronicler reported that one of the Frankish kings had ordered the Rock to be covered because the Frankish priests used to break off fragments of it to sell to pilgrims. It is possible that the wrought-iron grille with which the Franks enclosed the Rock—first mentioned in an Icelandic account of ca. 1150—served for its protection, besides acting as a chancel screen (Pringle 2007: 397–413).

Achard attempted to deny the Muslim origin of the edifice and attributed its construction to some Christian emperor; similarly, a German pilgrim who visited Jerusalem in the 1170s wrote that it was Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, who constructed the shrine (*Peregrinationes tres* 1994: 163). But some Franks had an inkling, or more, of the truth. Rorgo Fretellus, a canon of the cathedral of Nazareth, wrote—like Achard before him—that the Temple was built either by Helena or by Heraclius or Justinian. He added, however, that some believed the builder to have been an *Ammyrator* [amīr] of Memphis in Egypt, who erected it 'in honor of *Allachiber* [probably an attempt at transcribing the Arabic words *Allah kabār*], that is to say, God most high, and seeing that it is reverently adored, in His worship, by all tongues'. The canon remarked that this last possibility was the more likely one, since an Arabic inscription supports it (Rorgo Fretellus 1980: 32). William of Tyre, the great historian of the Frankish Kingdom of Jerusalem, also had no doubts about the shrine's builder; for him, however, it was not Helena, but the caliph 'Umar. William also knew of the shrine's continued importance for Muslims. He mentioned that Turks of the tribe that had ruled Jerusalem before the Crusader conquest came from afar to the Mount of Olives in 1152 and observed from there 'the Lord's Temple, which they hold in uppermost and exceptional respect' (William of Tyre 1986: 787–8). Evidently, the attempts to obliterate the shrine's Muslim past were only partially successful.

Against this background, it is remarkable that the Damascene mystic, theologian and poet 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (1641–1731)



assumed that the Dome of the Rock had been erected by none other than the Franks. Al-Nābulusī, who visited Jerusalem in 1690, believed that the Rock was miraculously suspended between heaven and earth and that the Franks built the Dome in order to conceal

[t]his conspicuous wonder that testifies to the distinction of Islam and the dazzling power of God most high. Especially since what is widely known among people had reached [the Franks]—that when our Prophet Muhammad, may God's prayer and salutation be upon him, ascended to heaven from the Rock on the night of Ascension, the Rock ascended behind him, but was held back by the angels and so remained hanging between heaven and earth.

Al-Nābulusī explained that on Saladin's reconquest of Jerusalem the Muslims thought that the Frankish-built edifice had been there originally and therefore did not demolish it. And he concluded that in the final analysis it was God who made the Franks conceal the miracle of the Rock (Akkach 2005). Thus, like Rorgo Fretellus half a millennium earlier, Al-Nābulusī envisioned the possibility that infidels had erected a God-inspired building.

The outward appearance of the Aqsa Mosque under Frankish rule is far less documented in the written sources. First a royal palace, then the headquarters of the Knights Templar, it was less accessible to Christian pilgrims and appears therefore but sketchily in their accounts. Still, it is clear that the Templars altered the edifice's appearance considerably. They added a church and two other buildings west of the Aqsa Mosque, and three barrel-vaulted halls to its east; in the southeast they constructed a chapel; the vaulted substructure under the southeastern part of the esplanade, known as Solomon's Stables, served as an underground stable for their horses. A painstaking study undertaken by British archaeologists during the renovation of the Aqsa Mosque in the years 1938–42 revealed the considerable extent of Frankish construction within and near the edifice (Hamilton 1949; Pringle 2007: 424–34).

And what about the access of non-Christians to the Christianized esplanade? A Christian pilgrim who visited Jerusalem in the 1160s

reports that Muslim worshippers were allowed to pray on a spot just south of the Dome of the Rock, at a sundial which the Franks regarded as having originally been the altar at which Zacharias met his death (*Peregrinationes tres* 1994: 92). At least one Jew managed to pray on the esplanade or even within the Dome of the Rock, for the great Jewish philosopher Maimonides writes: ‘I entered the Great and Holy House and I prayed in it on Thursday, the sixth day of Marheshvan [49]26’, that is, on 14 October 1165 (Prawer 1988: 142). And some prominent Muslim visitors were allowed to enter both the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque.

In Muslim eyes, the loss of Jerusalem to the Crusaders enhanced its standing among the holy places of Islam. The Christianization of the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque was increasingly perceived as a dishonour and an act of defilement that must be brought to an end. The *Treatises on the Merits of Jerusalem* dwelt on the importance of Jerusalem’s two holy shrines, and the yearning for their liberation played a central role in the Jihād propaganda of the sultans Nūr al-Dīn and Saladin. In 1168–69, Nūr al-Dīn commissioned a wooden preacher’s pulpit, earmarked for eventual installation in reconquered Jerusalem (Sivan 1967; Hillenbrand 1999: 150–65).

After Saladin’s decisive victory at the Battle of Hattīn on 3–4 July 1187 and his swift conquest of most of the Frankish Kingdom, he laid siege to Jerusalem on 20 September. Faced with the prospect of Saladin’s final assault, the Frankish leaders decided to negotiate for a peaceful evacuation. Evidently wishing to revenge the Crusader massacre of July 1099, Saladin initially declined to accept a Frankish surrender; but when the Franks threatened to pull down the Dome, tear up the Rock, and kill all Muslim prisoners, Saladin agreed to allow the Franks to leave Jerusalem, in return for a ransom. On 2 October 1187—the day on which Muhammad’s Night Journey and Ascension from the Farthest Mosque to Heaven was commemorated—the victorious Muslims took possession of the city, and the Franks began to leave it soon thereafter. The huge golden cross on top of the dome of the Lord’s Temple was brought down in triumph, dragged through the streets of Jerusalem and smashed to pieces. The slabs of white marble that covered the Rock were removed, and so were the

altars, images and Latin inscriptions. The preacher's pulpit, commissioned years earlier by Nūr al-Dīn, was installed in the Aqsa Mosque. The Dome and the Mosque were re-dedicated as Islamic shrines.

Under Saladin's successors, a considerable amount of construction took place on the re-Islamized esplanade (Burgoyne 2009a). Many of the new buildings were decorated with re-used Frankish sculpture, a striking example being the Dome of the Balance, which consists almost entirely of that. While many of the figural representations appearing on these works of Frankish art were defaced, some were left untouched—for instance, the animal head that appears on one of the capitals of the Dome of the Ascension of Muhammad, erected in 1200–1 (see Fig. 5). One may contrast such surprising survivals of Christian figural sculpture on the Haram al-Sharīf with the far more systematic defacement of the carved stones of the Jain temples that were used, about the same time, for the construction of the Qutb Minār in Delhi.

Most of Jerusalem reverted to Frankish rule in 1229. In that year the German emperor Frederick II and the Egyptian sultan Al-Kāmil reached an agreement according to which the Franks received the town of Jerusalem and its Muslim inhabitants had to depart, but the esplanade remained under Muslim control. Franks were allowed to pilgrimage to the Dome of the Rock and pray there, as long as they exhibited due veneration—which probably means that they had to take off their shoes. This was an unprecedented compromise solution that divided Jerusalem's holy space between Christians and Muslims. Not surprisingly, many Christians as well as Muslims decried the compromise as an act of sacrilege (Prawer 2001: vol. 2, 198–210). Frederick himself saw fit to leave unmentioned, in his letter to King Henry III of England, that the agreement gave the Muslims control over the esplanade: he boldly declared that the sultan 'restored to us the holy city [of Jerusalem]', and simply added that

[i]t is provided, however, that the Saracens [=Muslims] of that part of the country, since they hold the temple in great veneration, may come there as often as they choose in the character of pilgrims, to worship according to their custom.

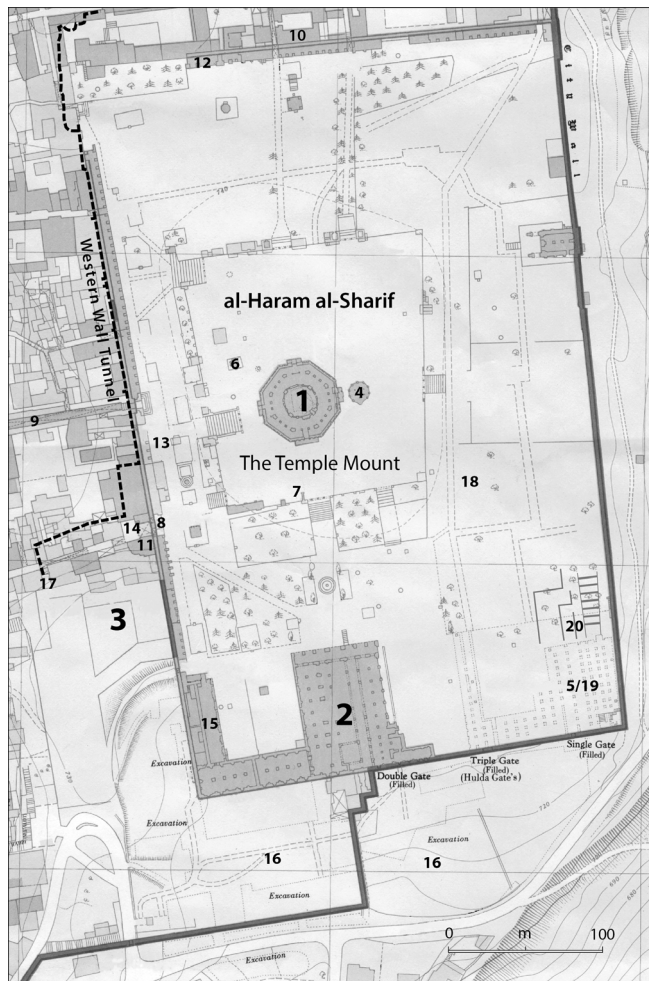


Fig. 5: Capital of the Dome of the Ascension of Muhammad, showing an animal head. (Benjamin Z. and Nurith Kedar Collection)

And we shall henceforth permit them to come, however, only as many as we may choose to allow, and without arms, nor are they to dwell in the city, but outside, and as soon as they have paid their devotions they are to depart (Frederick II 2013: 251–2).

The compromise remained in force for ten years, until 1239. It was followed by a sequence of abrupt changes: first, Muslim control of the entire city; second, a return to partition; third, Christian control of the entire city, and fourth, the Franks's definite expulsion from Jerusalem in 1244. From that date down to the present, the esplanade has served continuously as a Muslim shrine, while Christian perception of the site as a Christian holy place gradually diminished. For Jews it continued to be the site of their destroyed Temple, for whose rebuilding in messianic days they continued to pray.

During the Mamluk rule over Jerusalem, which lasted from 1260 to 1516, the esplanade came to be called ever more frequently the Noble Sanctuary (*al-Haram al-Sharīf*). It was augmented with many buildings, some erected by sultans, among them the college and fountain



- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Dome of the Rock | 11. Tankiziyya College |
| 2. The Aqsa Mosque | 12. Is'irdiyya College |
| 3. Western Wall and prayer plaza | 13. Fountain of Qa'itbāy |
| 4. Dome of the Chain | 14. Fountain of the Chain Gate |
| 5. Solomon's Stables | 15. Islamic Museum |
| 6. Dome of the Ascension | 16. Archaeological Park |
| 7. Dome of the Balance | 17. Western Wall Tunnel |
| 8. Chain Gate | 18. Prayer place commemorating the Sabra and Shatila massacre |
| 9. Market of the Cotton Merchants | 19. Marwānī Mosque |
| 10. Dawādāriyya Convent | 20. Stairs leading down to 5/19. |

Fig. 6: Structures on or near the esplanade mentioned in the present article. (Based on a map of the Survey of Israel; course of the Western Wall Tunnel: Dr Jon Seligman; final design: Tamar Soffer)



built about 1482 by the sultan Qā'itbāy (see Fig. 7), others erected by wealthy individuals—for instance, the Dawādāriyya convent for Sūfis, endowed by an amīr in 1295, and the Is'irdiyya College, founded by a merchant some time before 1345. Bordering on the Haram to the west was the complex foundation of Tankiz, the Mamluk viceroy of Syria, which comprised a college, a Sūfī convent, a school for orphans, a small bathhouse, a hospice and shops. A fountain supplied by the aqueduct that Tankiz restored in 1328 stands in the college's vaulted courtyard. The marble used in the construction of these buildings came in many cases from remains of the Frankish period (Burgoyne 2009b). As Oleg Grabar, the leading authority on the art of Islamic Jerusalem, remarked, the numerous buildings erected by the Mamluks on the Haram transformed it into

[a] kind of stage ... [It] became an open space, without clear foci and axes, but with opportunities for a wide range of activities. It was no longer a unified work of art, but it could contain remarkable works of art like the fountain of Qā'itbāy or the entrance to the Market of the Cotton Merchants, which are architecturally significant but play no role in the structure of the Haram as a whole (Grabar 2009: 306).

Access to the Haram was barred to non-Muslims, although an occasional European Christian succeeded in entering the esplanade in disguise.

During Ottoman rule over Jerusalem, which lasted from 1516 to 1917, several campaigns of repair and renovation took place on the Haram al-Sharīf, and in 1541 the aqueduct supplying water to Jerusalem and to the Haram was repaired. But only few new edifices were erected on the esplanade; some of those, among them the fountain constructed in 1537 by Sultan Sulaymān at the Chain Gate, incorporated Frankish remains. The prohibition on the entrance of non-Muslims was rigorously enforced until the 1850s; thereafter visits became possible, and European scholars were for the first time able to take scientific measurements of the esplanade and its monuments. Jewish prayer at the Western (or Wailing) Wall—that is, the western, Herodian, retaining wall of the esplanade—is attested from the 1520s

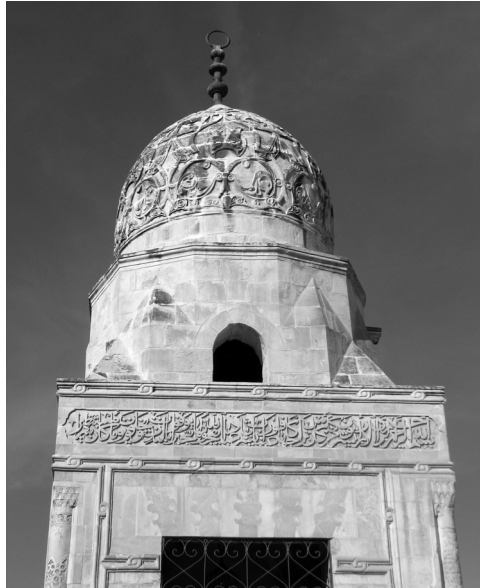


Fig. 7: Fountain of Qā'itbāy, ca. 1482
(Benjamin Z. and Nurith Kedar Collection)

onward, and the belief in the Wall's holiness became ever more widespread. Concomitantly, rabbis ruled that Jews must abstain from entering the esplanade—in Hebrew, *Har ha-Bayit*, the Temple Mount—because, ever since the Temple's destruction, they are ritually impure. Most orthodox Jews observe this ruling to this day.¹

From 1917 to 1948 Jerusalem was ruled by the British. Since the 1920s Jewish prayer at the Western Wall became a focus of the Arab-Zionist conflict. Such prayer was impossible between 1948 and 1967, when Jerusalem's Old City was under Jordanian rule, because the Jordanian authorities denied all Jews access to their kingdom. During that same span of time the Muslim authorities removed some conspicuous remains of the Frankish period. During the renovation of the Aqsa Mosque in the years 1938–42, three barrel-vaulted annexes that the Franks had added in the 12th century to the Aqsa Mosque

¹ For the period from 1516 to the present see the chapters by Amnon Cohen, Yitzhak Reiter and Jon Seligman, Nazmi Al-Jubeih, and Miriam Frenkel in Grabar and Kedar (eds), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet*, 2009.



were demolished (they are still visible on an aerial photograph from the 1930s; see Fig. 8). And, toward the end of Jordanian rule, the iron grille with which the Franks had surrounded the Rock was removed. A part of it can be seen now in the Islamic Museum on the esplanade.

During the Six-Day War of 1967 Israel conquered Jerusalem's Old City and established a new status quo on the esplanade. While Israel claimed sovereignty over the area and the Israeli police was invested with responsibility for its security, day-to-day administration of the Haram was left in the hands of the Muslim religious authorities. Israeli Jews were given access to the Temple Mount, and many have visited it, although the Chief Rabbinate of Israel has ruled that Jewish religious law forbids Jews to enter it (Hassner 2009: 112–33).² The



Fig. 8: An aerial photograph of the esplanade, from the northeast, 1930s. The 12th-century Templar vaults adjoining the Aqsa Mosque in the east, here clearly visible, do not exist anymore (compare with Fig. 1). (Benjamin Z. and Nurith Kedar Collection)

² Besides analysing the Jerusalem and Mecca compromises of 1967 and 1979, Hassner discusses several other clashes at sacred sites, among them Amritsar and Ayodhya.

Arab quarter west of the Wailing Wall was razed in order to create a vast prayer plaza in its stead; among the quarter's buildings that were demolished was a college erected by Saladin's son Al-Afdal in the 1190s (Kedar, Weksler-Bdolah and Da'adli 2012). Muslim access to the Haram has been repeatedly curtailed for security reasons.

It has been an unstable status quo, and the esplanade has repeatedly witnessed eruptions of violence, for instance in 1969, when an Australian Christian fundamentalist set a fire that caused heavy damage to the Aqsa Mosque, destroying the preacher's pulpit Saladin had installed there, or in 1996, when the Israeli government opened a tunnel along the northern continuation of the Western Wall, which Arabs believed to destabilize the Haram's walls. And when late in 1999 the Muslim authorities employed heavy mechanical equipment on the esplanade to dig a tremendous pit in preparation for a monumental entrance to the new Marwānī Mosque in the renovated Solomon's Stables, there was an outcry from Israeli archaeologists and the Israeli public against this major, unprecedented dig on the site, carried out without archaeological supervision. In the rubble from the pit, loaded by Palestinians onto trucks and dumped outside the Old City walls, Israeli archaeologists subsequently found shards from the Iron Age down to the Ottoman period, as well as glass fragments, glazed tiles, stone vessels, metal objects, and beads and coins from various periods. In September 2000 the demonstrative visit to the esplanade by Ariel Sharon, then leader of the opposition Likud party, triggered the turbulent riots in Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that came to be known as the 'Aqsa Intifada'.

In recent decades, the new plaza facing the Western Wall became an important focus of Israeli religiosity and nationalism, with its upper section becoming the site for ceremonies like the inauguration of Remembrance Day for Israel's fallen or the swearing in of new recruits of various military units, while the Haram al-Sharīf became a major symbol of Palestinian nationalism and a nascent Palestinian pantheon, with three leaders buried on it and with a prayer place commemorating the Sabra and Shatila massacre of 1982. (The term Haram al-Sharīf increasingly gives way to the Koranic term al-Masjid al-Aqsa.) Concomitantly, these decades have witnessed acute radicalization on



both sides. Some Jewish extremists hope for the imminent destruction of the Muslim shrines and are making preparations for the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in their stead. In 2009 Shmuel Rabinowitz, whose official title is ‘Rabbi of the Western Wall and the Holy Places’, published a book in which he and his co-author advise Jews that it is good to recite, upon seeing the Dome of the Rock, the Biblical verse: ‘The Lord will destroy the house of the proud’ (Proverbs 15:25); a footnote leads to the explicit statement of a little-known nineteenth century rabbi that the recitation of the verse amounts to an appeal to the Almighty to eradicate the building ‘they’ (that is, the Muslims) had erected there (Rabinowitz and Bronstein 2009: 403). On the other side, very many Palestinians deny nowadays that the Solomonic and Herodian Jewish temples ever stood on the esplanade; Yasser Arafat famously maintained, during the abortive Camp David peace talks of 2000, that ‘Solomon’s Temple was not in Jerusalem, but [in] Nablus’ (Ross 2004: 694). The denial of the Jewish shrines of the past parallels, or is the mirror image of, the wish to erase the Muslim shrines of the present.

* * *

What are some of the conclusions one may draw from this overview? First, different religions, over three millennia, have conceptualized the same Jerusalemite space as sacred, finding or seeking to find there the divine. At any given point during the past two millennia there co-existed at least two rival conceptualizations of this space. During just one period, that of the Christianized Roman empire of Late Antiquity, the space was desacralized by the ruling power, yet the site’s previous sanctity was not forgotten. Second, awareness of, and respect for, the space’s importance for the adherents of a different creed have varied considerably within any single religion, as well as over time; at present, awareness and respect appear to be losing ground. Third, denial of access to non-believers has been the rule, with relatively few exceptions. Fourth, appropriation of edifices and artifacts made by adherents of a different creed recurred on a number of occasions; their integration appears to have posed fewer problems in the 12th century than in the 20th. Finally, the one historical recourse to partition Jerusalem’s holy space—the 1229 compromise agreement

between Emperor Frederick II and the Sultan Al-Kāmil—was not only fiercely condemned by very many Christians and Muslims but was brought to nought within a few years. The American compromise proposal in 2000 to divide the sovereignty over the esplanade horizontally, with the Palestinians receiving control above ground and the Israelis below it, was far more rapidly proven to be a non-starter. And yet one should not despair of an equitable solution to the thorny problems that the opposing claims to Jerusalem's sacred esplanade pose. Clearly, such a solution must instate mechanisms to allay Jewish fears lest Muslim activities on the esplanade damage remains of the Second Temple buried underneath (or embedded in) the Haram, and Muslim fears lest Jewish activities in the Western Wall area endanger the Haram or its foundations. The emergence, after 1967, of the vast prayer plaza in front of the Western Wall, the creation of the archaeological park south and southwest of the esplanade, and the opening of the Western Wall Tunnel considerably enlarged Jerusalem's Temple-laden space, which allows Jews to commemorate the Temple's existence in an area very close to where it once stood, yet which is not claimed as sacred by Muslims. Consequently, a vertical partition of sovereignty over the esplanade and its immediate surroundings, which teem with Temple reminiscences, may have become more palatable. But this or any other working compromise will require mutual respect, goodwill, imagination and probably some sort of international chaperonage. In the meantime we may heed the Psalmist's plea, 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you; peace be within your walls and prosperity within your palaces"' (Psalms 122: 6).

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