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THE DOME OF THE ROCK:
THE HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS MOTIVATIONS
BEHIND ITS CONSTRUCTION

By

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B.A., Louisville, 1998
M.A., Louisville, 2005

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Art History
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2012

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B.A., Louisville, 1988
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A Thesis Approved on

April 11, 2012

By the following Thesis Committee :

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Gregory Hutcheson

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents

Jim and Mary Clark

who have always encouraged me to seek knowledge

ABSTRACT

THE DOME OF THE ROCK:
THE HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS MOTIVATIONS
BEHIND ITS CONSTRUCTION

Greg Clark

April 11, 2012

This thesis provides a hypothesis as to why the Dome of the Rock was built. I examine various scholarly theories concerning the construction of the first notable work of Islamic architecture, which was built in Jerusalem during the last decade of the 7th century CE. I argue that historic events and individuals, beginning in pre-Islamic Arabia and running through the establishment of the Umayyad caliphate at Damascus, acted as catalysts for the building's creation. It is my thesis that the construction of the Dome of the Rock was a potent weapon in the war of propaganda between rival Islamic factions, all of whom recognized the unique architectural heritage of Jerusalem that included both Christian and Jewish structures, foremost among them the site of the destroyed Solomonic Temple where the Dome of the Rock would be built.

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“The most holy spot [al-quds] on earth is Syria; the most holy spot in Syria is Palestine; the most holy spot in Palestine is Jerusalem [Bayt al-maqdis]; the most holy spot in Jerusalem is the Mountain; the most holy spot on the Mountain is the place of worship [al-masjid], and the most holy spot on the place of worship is the Dome.”¹

CHAPTER I

PURPOSE OF PAPER

Scholars conducting research on early Islamic architecture have found it difficult to identify a style that is uniquely Islamic in the period immediately following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE. Approximately sixty years later (692), the Umayyad caliph ‘abd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Thus, the Dome of the Rock is recognized as the first distinctive iteration of Islamic monumental architecture.

But the reason for the construction of the Dome of the Rock remains a mystery as does its original purpose and function. An often cited reason for the structure’s creation is that it served as a monumental landmark to commemorate the Prophet’s midnight journey from Mecca to the former site of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, from whence he ascended to heaven. The problem with this explanation is that neither the inscriptions found in the building nor early Islamic sources support this theory. Moreover, the preponderance of evidence

¹ Josef Van Ess, “Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock: An Analysis of Some Texts,” in *Bayt Al-Maqdis: ‘Abd al-Malik’s Jerusalem, Part 1*, ed. Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 89.

suggests that the belief that the Dome of the Rock marks the site of the Night Journey did not emerge until much later.²

In the absence of direct evidence from primary sources, scholars have attempted to reconstruct the historical, political and religious contexts within which the building was constructed and, thereby, interpreted its meaning using indirect references. In fact, it is necessary to look to secondary sources in order to address the questions such as: What role did Jerusalem play in the Umayyad caliphate of the 7th Century CE? What was the political climate of the time? Addressing these and other questions could provide insight into the circumstances that directly and indirectly influenced its construction.

From analysis of the scholarship on the Dome of the Rock a certain picture of the monument has begun to emerge: first Islam viewed itself as the ultimate fulfillment of Judaism and Christianity. By constructing a new and important building, the likes of which had never been seen in Islam, Muslims could assert their presence in a city that held major significance for both Jews and Christians. Secondly, the Caliph 'abd al-Malik ibn Marwan built the Dome of the Rock as a political statement against his Islamic rivals in Arabia. Third, by building on the site of the former temple, that was recognized as sacred to Jews, Muslims were not only illustrating what they saw as their culmination of the

² Nasser Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock," *Muquarnas* 6 (1990): 12. Rabbat states "this belief dates from the beginning of the eighth century, when the earliest Arabic sources, as far as can be ascertained, which connected the two events was codified by Ibn Ishaq (d. 761) under the title *Sinat al-Bani*." In his notes section, Rabbat describes Ibn Ishaq as being considered the first chronicler of the life of the Prophet. Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City Three Faiths* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 224. Armstrong notes that there is no specific mention of Jerusalem in the Quran as part of Muhammad's journey. She suggests that "probably some generations after Muhammad, Muslims had made this identification (of Muhammad's journey to the site of the former Temple mount)..

Abrahamic/Monotheistic-lineage mentioned above but the selection of this particular site reinforced what they saw as their close relationship to the Jewish faith.

The purpose of this research project is to assess the possible reasons for the Dome of the Rock's construction by using an approach that considers circumstances that are more relative than absolute. In addition to the political motives of the patron, this study also discusses those who viewed the Dome of the Rock, both externally and internally.

For this study to be successful, information from primary sources will be limited to those that have been translated into English. They will create a record of the cultural, political, religious and civic trends of the time. To contextualize these sources, it is essential that the interpretations of scholars working from historical and archaeological perspectives be consulted and critically evaluated.

I will then examine works of architecture that predate the Dome of the Rock as contemporary buildings. Doing so will allow for the posing of other questions such as: were there earlier works that influenced the Dome of the Rock; was the Dome of the Rock a reflection of contemporary building practices?

In order to address these questions, I will first discuss the early decades of Islamic history from Muhammad's death up to the Umayyad conquest of Jerusalem. From here the study will examine two different relationships in the Umayyad caliphate: their dealings with the Jews and Christians in Jerusalem and its environs; and with Meccan and Medinese Muslims who thought the Umayyad practice of Islam as unorthodox and a threat to the Prophet's

teachings. It will then be possible to analyze the cultural, political and religious climate, including their manifestation in the architectural trends in which the Dome of the Rock was created. Finally various scholarly interpretations for the construction and the function of the Dome of the Rock will be analyzed.

It should be noted that this thesis' focus is almost entirely on the causes that led to the building of the Dome of the Rock. I approach the study of Art History as a discussion of works of art as representations of the history, politics, society, etc of the people who created them. I believe the study of Art History is a necessary interdisciplinary academic tool to fully understand how, when and why people lived in particular times and situations in certain places. This thesis will thus focus on people, events and societal elements (namely politics and different religions) in the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant, of the 7th century that brought about the building of the Dome of the Rock. Without such an understanding I argue that one does not have the entire amount of information to appreciate why the building came about.

Thus greater emphasis will be placed on the political and societal factors that led to the building's creation and less about an analysis of the physical building itself.

The goal of this thesis is to provide insight into the reasons for the Dome of the Rock's construction. To do so, it is necessary to bring various strands together in order to evaluate how they worked collectively and exerted influence upon each other to bring about the building of the Dome of the Rock.

CHAPTER II

MODEL FOR PRESENTATION

While the history of Islam is more than fourteen centuries in length, this research project is concerned with a few decades at its inception, specifically the period from its origin in Arabia through the end of the 7th century, and its presence in Jerusalem. Scholarship suggests a lack of both quantitative and qualitative data on Islam in its early stages. Two scholars in particular, Oleg Grabar and Amikam Elad, disagree as to the nature of the data available.

In his book, *Shape of the Holy*, Grabar divides the history of Jerusalem into two periods: pre-Muslim conquest and post-Muslim conquest. He suggests that, while there were few primary texts written by Arabs that discussed pre-Islamic Jerusalem, there were several that provided evidence for the early period of Islamic Jerusalem.³ On the other hand, Elad contends that few data are available for post-conquest Jerusalem. He maintains that while “rich Arabic literature, in all its variations,” exists, the amount of information on Islam’s

³ Oleg Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 8. This thesis frequently uses two of books by Oleg Grabar: *The Shape of the Holy*, and *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006). Grabar is a well known and respected professor of Islamic art and architecture. The following is excerpts of a biographical description of Grabar found at www.dictionarofarthistorians.org/grabaro.htm: “Historian of Islamic art and archeology...Grabar’s work led to subsequent new disciplines within Islamic studies...Through his influence and those of his students, the scope of Islamic art was broadened beyond the traditional limits. He ‘posed sweeping questions about the nature of Islamic art, seeking to discover the impulses that generated its specific forms and dynamics of growth.”

presence in Jerusalem during the early Muslim period (638-1099 CE), is small.⁴ According to his account, the documents, that include Arabic and non-Arabic sources from the period, are unsatisfactorily scattered and short. He qualifies the nature of the sources by noting that non-Arabic sources on the topic (including Greek, Syriac, Armenian and Hebrew) are few and the information they contain is more sparse than what is provided in Arabic texts.⁵ In other words, the texts to which Elad refers cannot be brought together to construct a comprehensive history of the city.

Given these two assessments, an interesting challenge emerges: to evaluate a very limited number of texts that deal with early Islamic Jerusalem. From these sources, information must be gleaned that will help suggest why the Dome of the Rock was built by the Umayyads in this city. It is my contention that Grabar is correct and there are enough texts to provide a sufficient amount of information for this study to be successful. Clearly, there are no primary sources titled simply, "Here is why Muslims built the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem"; however, there are secondary sources that provide information about various topics related to pre-Islamic Jerusalem from which valuable information can be drawn. As a whole, they do not come from a single discipline within Islamic studies. Instead, their nature is interdisciplinary. Some deal with the history of the faith and its people. Others consider Islamic art and architecture. Still others present historic biographical sketches of Muslim leaders. While each field presents the subject matter from different methodological interpretations,

⁴ Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 1.

⁵ Elad, 3.

selected texts that draw from primary texts can be gleaned for information as to why the Dome of the Rock was built. The fact that these texts provide insights into the subject of this thesis from different perspectives makes it possible to attempt a reconstruction of the circumstances surrounding the construction. Dealing with subjects such as pre-Islamic Arabia, the region in which Islam originated; the cultural environment of Muhammad; the empires that surrounded the Muslim people; and the mutually beneficial relationships between caliphs and their people as the empire grew, these sources offer valuable perspectives on the topic of this study.

These secondary texts provide the common thread that I use to offer a linear model. For example, 610 CE was the date when Muhammad began to receive revelations.⁶ Another pivotal historical event was the establishment of the Umayyad Dynasty, in 661 CE, that represented the first time that Muslims were ruled by one family and its descendants.⁷ The date of the construction of the Dome of the Rock, in 692 CE, is key to this study.⁸ In the history of the Islamic caliphates, it appears that quite often one event acted as a catalyst for a future event. Therefore a cumulative or linear approach has been adopted here. In so doing, the reasons for the building of the Dome of the Rock, while not necessarily obvious grounds for its construction at the time they occurred, will be presented as a process of cause and effect, with the event as the cause and the Dome of the Rock as the ultimate effect.

⁶ Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2000 Years* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 52.

⁷ Christopher Catherwood, *A Brief History of the Middle East* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2006), 82.

⁸ Rabbat, 12.

By applying a method that emphasizes linear development, it can be argued that the critical events fall into three periods: 1) Islam's origins, 2) Pre-Umayyad Jerusalem and 3) the Umayyad caliphate. Each of these periods forms discrete historical units in terms of what occurred in the lives of the people, the political climate, and the concerns of society. Discussing these periods in the order of their occurrence strengthens the argument and clarifies the motives for building the Dome of the Rock.

CHAPTER III

ISLAM'S ORIGINS

The historical context for the development of the Islamic faith must be discussed with particular attention paid to its origin in the Arabian Peninsula, the life and revelations of Muhammad, Muhammad's immediate successors and its expansion beyond Arabia. Islam arose among the people of the Arabian Peninsula. For the purpose of this study, these people should be viewed from two qualitative perspectives: 1) as a whole group that had shared roots in Arabia and 2) as a group that was subdivided into individual tribes. At times, the tribes acted independently of each other while, at other times, they might join forces to work collaboratively. The decision to act alone or in groups was often affected by the actions of their Arab or non-Arab neighbors. This social structure persisted after the advent of Islam and continued into the Umayyad dynasty. An elastic social framework provided a similar environment in which the Dome of the Rock could be built.

In his *A History of the Arab Peoples*, Albert Hourani describes a loose collective of tribes that spoke various dialects of Arabic and adopted different

ways of life.⁹ At times the tribes acted as cohorts while, in other instances, they found differences with each other.¹⁰ Each tribe, headed by a leader, was of one of two persuasions: traveling nomads who often acted as traders or settled grain growers. The two groups forged an economic relationship which was essentially that of producers and agents. It was the nomads, who often carried arms, and their urban-based merchant traders, that dominated the economic and political landscape.¹¹

Marshall Hodgson, in *The Venture of Islam*, takes the fickle relationship between pre-Islamic-Arab people a step further to describe how they related to their neighbors. Hodgson notes that tribes would often strategically align themselves with Romans, Yemenis or Persians.¹² He explains these alliances with outside forces as an effort to build a base of support for their tribal wars.¹³

Both of these studies lend support to the notion of a continuity of social structure down to the period in that the Dome of the Rock was built. While it will be discussed in more detail later, it is important to note that these two studies present a people who, on the surface might appear to be a homogenous group, but were, in fact, a number of heterogeneous groups. While they were dependent on each other for survival, some groups attained a higher status or privileged position over others. This unequal relationship often caused struggles between the tribes. Also, when advantageous, a tribe might appeal to outsiders

⁹ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 10.

¹⁰ Hourani, 10.

¹¹ Hourani, 10.

¹² Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History In A World Civilization*, Volume 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977), 153. I am assuming that Hodgson is referring to the Byzantines when he names the Romans.

¹³ Hodgson, 154.

for assistance. Similar practices are found later between Muslims based in the Arabian Peninsula and the Umayyad caliphate that based itself in Palestine and Syria.

A final study that provides insight into pre-Islamic Arabia is Frederick Donner's, *The Early Islamic Conquests*. He suggests that the pre-Islamic Arabs were not isolated as a whole, with strategic alliances as their only ties to other societies. He describes an agriculture-based economy that was very strong and provided a foundation for Arab independence.¹⁴ A determining factor in the strength of various tribes (as Hourani labels them) was where they were located geographically in relation to rainfall or permanent bodies of water. Regions that contained perennial springs, wells and oases contained pockets of intense cultivation by settled groups of people. This led to a degree of prosperity that provided the means for particular groups to reach higher levels of development in areas such as the arts and trade.¹⁵ Surplus economic conditions led to the creation of centers for arts, merchants and religious leaders. Medina is an example of one of these centers.¹⁶ Donner notes that reaching such levels of wealth permitted a town to reach outside its borders to expand trade, relations and culture to other peoples along the routes. While not directly tied to Hourani and Hodgson's description of the frequently strained relations between tribes, Donner's comments enhance our understanding of the tribes, that were not only

¹⁴ Frederick Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 12.

¹⁵ Donner, 12, Donner specifically uses the terms "humanities and trade" without giving a further explanation of what he means. It could be interpreted that he is describing economic growth as well as the arts and culture.

¹⁶ Donner, 14.

growing economically and politically, but also enriching themselves internally and externally. The habit of acclimating to and selectively adopting the practices of others will be revisited later when early Islamic leaders found themselves at odds over whether they should strictly adhere to the faith's roots or change practices to meet the needs of an empire that was expanding beyond the geographic and cultural parameters within which it was originally founded.

The Prophet Muhammad was the founder of the Islamic faith and initially responsible for its dissemination. For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to focus on Muhammad's association with Jewish and Christian doctrines and traditions. Taking such a broad view provides insight into the importance of Jerusalem during the Prophet's life, and the influence this had later on the construction of the Dome of the Rock.

Studies that examine this relationship include Guy Le Strange's, *Palestine Under the Moslems*, Oleg Grabar's, *The Dome of the Rock*, as well as the texts already mentioned written by Donner, Hodgson and Hourani.¹⁷ As a group, these studies present Muhammad as someone who was not only familiar with the Jewish and Christian faiths but who was influenced by them, incorporating some of their tenets into Islam as time passed. Hourani explains that as he developed his teachings, Muhammad increasingly placed himself more directly in the "line of

¹⁷ Frederick Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).
Marshal Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History In A World Civilization, Volume 1* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977).
Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
Guy Le Strange, trans. *Palestine Under the Moslems: A Description of Syria and the Holy Land from AD 650 to 1500*, (Beirut: Khayats, 1890).

Jewish and Christian prophets.”¹⁸ Donner describes Muhammad as seeing himself as “last in a long line of prophets beginning with Adam, and including Abraham, Moses and Jesus.”¹⁹ Of this group, Abraham was recognized as the first monotheist, Moses as the prophet of the Jewish faith and Jesus as the prophet of Christianity. It was widely held that Muhammad viewed Islam’s tie to Abraham as a connection to the single God of monotheism and privileged that relationship over ties to Moses and Jesus.²⁰

The notion that Islam was the final fulfillment of the previous monotheistic faiths and, therefore, superior to them is articulated in Muhammad’s doctrine on how to deal with those who were disrespectful of God. Muhammad and his followers believed that when one was insolent and opposed God in some way, thereby rejecting Him, His apostles had permission to fight in order to protect Him.²¹ Evidence for this position is found in the case of Muhammad’s expulsion

¹⁸ Hourani, 17, Hourani does not provide a direct citation for this statement. In the notes for the chapter in which this is found (Chapter 1), Hourani, states “for these and later quotations from biographies of the Prophet, see A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (London, 1957), a translation of Ibn Ishaq’s *Sira* (Life) of the Prophet. In this text Guillaume translates biographical information about the Prophet that was written during and after Muhammad’s life. Upon reviewing it, I found it to be a very linear narrative of Muhammad’s life. Events and occurrences are broken down into several chapters. Unfortunately, I was unable to find any specific discussion or index noting of Muhammad aligning his teachings with that of Judaism and or Christianity which could lead one to consider Hourani’s points to be of his own view.

¹⁹ Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 52. According to Donner, “The best treatments of Muhammad’s life are William Montgomery Watt’s works, *Muhammad at Mecca*, *Muhammad at Medina*, and *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman*; Maxime Rodinson, *Mohammad*; Muhammad Hamidulla, *Le Prophète de l’Islam*; Tor Andrae, *Mohammad, The Man and His Faith*; and Frantz Buhl, *Das Leben Muhammeds*; note also the exhaustive compilation of sources by Leone Caetani, *Annali dell’Islam* of which the first volumes cover Muhammad’s career. The most detailed and careful synthesis on many points is that of Watt, whose work forms the starting point for all later efforts to elucidate Muhammad’s life, including the present study” (293).

²⁰ Hodgson, 178.

²¹ Hourani, 18. To support Hourani’s point, see: Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s, *The Holy Qur’an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, (Washington, DC: The American International Printing Company), page 447, states “Fight those who believe not in God nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden by God and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the *Jizya* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.”

of the Jews of Banu Qqunqa from Medina after the successful raid of the Badr caravan that was predominantly Jewish.²² Hodgson states that prior to the expulsion, Muhammad felt “threatened” by the Jews of Medina.²³ The Jews of Medina had denied Muhammad’s claim of being a prophet and mocked what they saw as his misapprehension of stories of the Bible.²⁴ The removal of the Banu Qaynuaq fused prestige for Muhammad within Medina.²⁵

These examples highlight two fundamental points in this thesis: Muhammad based much of his faith on Jewish and Christian precedents, which explains why Jerusalem would have been important to him. For Jews, Jerusalem was the site of the Temple, established by their second king, David. For Christians, who drew the prophesy of a messiah from Jewish scripture, the fact that Jesus’ last days were spent in Jerusalem, made the city significant to them as well. Muhammad’s belief that all three faiths were connected through these prophets to the one true God included an assertion that his faith was intended to supplant the other two. These two facts provide reason for some of Muhammad’s successors placing such importance on the city of Jerusalem a few decades after his death and why they chose to build an early work of architecture in the city.

To provide further support for the important role played by Jerusalem in the nascent Muslim faith, Grabar notes that, until 624 CE, the original direction to which Muhammad instructed his followers to pray was Jerusalem. It was in the

²² Hodgson, 177.

²³ Hodgson, 177.

²⁴ Hodgson, 177.

²⁵ Hodgson, 177.

second year of the hijrah (622 CE), when he moved from Mecca to Medina, that he proclaimed the Kaaba as the proper direction of prayer.²⁶ Though Grabar does not explain why such an important change was introduced by the Prophet, he may have had political reasons in mind, with the goal of stressing the importance of his city of origin, Mecca, that remained polytheistic and unaccepting of his faith. Hodgson shines light on this matter when he notes that, once in Medina and having quarreled with Jews, Muhammad concluded that Islam, not Judaism, was the truer practice of monotheism.²⁷ Prior to these disagreements, Muhammad assumed that his followers would continue various practices of the Jews, such as praying towards Jerusalem.²⁸ Thus, it can be concluded that Muhammad continued to acknowledge Islam's ties to Abrahamic monotheism while at the same time proclaiming its superiority over Judaism and Christianity.

Le Strange also observes another instance when Muhammad stressed the important role played by Jerusalem. During a stop in Jerusalem, Muhammad noted a large heap of both dung and women's clothing covering the "Mihrab of David."²⁹ Supposedly, this was done by Christians in order to offend Jews. The

²⁶ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 48.

²⁷ Hodgson, 178.

²⁸ Hodgson, 178.

²⁹ Le Strange, 140. This point made by Le Strange is very interesting but hard to confirm in other sources. Le Strange does not include a direct source for his comments but does mention a text, *Muthir Al Ghiram*, which according to him discussed 'Umar's conquest which includes mention of Muhammad's letter. Le Strange notes that the Muthir text has not been printed and is preserved in the Bibliothe'que Nationale in Paris. While I do not claim to having made an exhaustive search, I have examined many texts that serve as biographies of Muhammad and found that none of them mention the Prophet writing a letter to Caesar based on what he saw on the site of the former Temple when visiting Jerusalem. All mention his Night Journey. It is worth noting that R. V. C. Bodley's, *The Messenger: The Life of Mohammed*, (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1946), 43, lists Jerusalem as one the cities on Mohammad's "beat" while working as a traveling trader in the years prior to his revelations. It might be that he saw the debris on the site

Prophet was not pleased with this and wrote to Caesar asking him to have the heap removed.³⁰ Grabar and Le Strange both claim that Muhammad held Jerusalem in high esteem while claiming that Islam superseded both Judaism and Christianity.

Le Strange's assertion needs further attention. To suggest that Muhammad had specific knowledge of the location of the former Temple merits discussion. Unfortunately (see footnote 29) Le Strange, a 19th century historian, provides no accessible sources to prove his claim. It is possible to find evidence that might support Le Strange's assertion in an investigation of the trade route from the lower Arabian peninsula to the greater-Syrian region and the prominent role Muhammad's family played in this enterprise.

In his book, *"Caravan: The Story of the Middle East"*, Carleton S. Coon, provides insight into the role played by the Arabian peninsula in trade between the Indian-east and the European-west.³¹ Prior to the introduction of the camel to the greater Arabian peninsula, the major trade route from southern Asia to

of the former temple during one of these visits and wrote Caesar in later years with the site in his mind.

³⁰ This information is found in Le Strange's text, page 140. His point is of enough importance that one might consider viewing his sources for it. While Le Strange does not present a source for his claim on page 140, he does provide an interesting relative point on page 139 where he states "In the seventh year of the Hijrah, the Prophet despatched envoys to the Choaroes (Khusrû Parwiz) of Persia, and to the Caesar of Byzantium, calling on them forthwith to acknowledge his mission as Allah's Apostle". Le Strange, on page 11, explains that he used the text, *Muthir al Ghiram (or Exciter of Desire)*, by a native of Jerusalem called Jamâl ad Din Ahmad, who wrote a topographical description of the Holy City in the year 1351. According to Le Strange, an excellent MSS, of this work, which has never yet been printed, is preserved in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris. It is also worth asking to which Caesar, Muhammad wrote. Again, Le Strange is not specific. I would suggest that it is the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius to whom Le Strange refers. I base this on Heraclius's reign running from 610 to 641 and Muhammad's revelations beginning in 610 and his death in 632 as well as trade routes (see my footnote #29 which lists Jerusalem as part of Muhammad's trade route) being nearer Byzantium than what little still existed of the Roman West.

³¹ Carlton S. Coon, *Caravan: The Story of Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951).

Europe went from India across the Indian Ocean, north through the Persian Gulf, up through the Tigris and Euphrates rivers then northwest across land to Syria and the eastern Mediterranean coast.³² While this system worked, the incorporation of the camel into trade not only reduced the time that it took to transport goods from the place of origin to the final destination but decreased costs as well.

Coon's point is complemented by Aqil Kazim's, *The United Arab Emirates AD 600 to the Present*.³³ In his book, Kazim explains that the merchant class of Mecca, of which Muhammad was a member, depended on long distance trade that focused on the exchange of goods predominantly between the areas of Yemen and the Fertile Crescent.³⁴

The key to navigating the Indian Ocean was understanding and taking advantage of northeast monsoons that occurred regularly in the area.³⁵ They affected the currents, thereby making navigation reliable when traveling to and from India. By using camels, caravans could meet boats on the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, that eliminated the time previously required for goods to travel the Persian Gulf and Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. For this reason Arabia became a very important link in East-West trade.

³² Coon, 61.

³³ Aqil Kazim, *The United Arab Emirates AD 600 to the Present: A Socio-Discursive Transformation in the Arabian Gulf* (Dubai: Gulf Book Centre, 2000). While Kazim's book focuses on the history of the Arabian/Persian Gulf (as the title suggests), its second chapter provides a presentation of the history of the Arabian Peninsula. This is specifically done in two sections: 1) The Islamic Period in General and 2) Islamic Civilization and Identity. Kazim's central theme throughout his book is the importance the Arabian Peninsula and the waterways surrounding it played to trade over 1500-plus years. In Chapter 2, his discussion of trade during the life of Muhammad includes the importance of trade routes through the Peninsula and their reach into the greater-Syria area.

³⁴ Kazim, 19.

³⁵ Coon, 50.

One of the families of Arabia that would benefit from this new trade route was the Hashimite of the Quraish noble tribe into which Muhammad was born. Muhammad's paternal grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, was one of the most prominent men of the Quarish.³⁶ This family's prominence and success in trade provided Muhammad with exposure to not only the peoples of Arabia but beyond, as well, into the lands of the eastern Mediterranean. As a result of this experience and his business prowess, Muhammad gained recognition as a successful trader.³⁷

Using this information, it is reasonable to suggest that Muhammad would have traveled to the area that included Jerusalem during his lifetime. Thus it is not difficult to imagine that while on a visit to Jerusalem, Muhammad would have seen the site of the former Temple mount and witnessed its ruin. Based on this scenario, it is possible to envision the circumstances for Le Strange's claim that Muhammad saw how the site of the former Temple had been treated. However, there remains an absence of primary source evidence to prove his statement that Muhammad wrote to Caesar asking for the area to be cleaned. By virtue of his family connections alone, Muhammad could have had the necessary knowledge to contact the Emperor.

Muhammad died in 632 CE.³⁸ With his passing, Islam faced two weighty issues: one, internal, dealt with creating a structure to govern the faithful. The

³⁶ Coon, 89.

³⁷ Sydney Nettleton Fisher and William Ochsenswald, *The Middle East: A History, Seventh Edition* (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2011), 26.

³⁸ Rabbat, 12.

second, external, was the growth of the faith both in terms of the number of followers and geographical territory.

In his study, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800*, Jonathan Berkey describes Islam as being in an incubation-like stage.³⁹ At the time of the Prophet's passing, Islam was still in a state of formation. This formation was not a quick process; it took several decades. Islam increased steadily in land and people and hesitantly in organization and governance over many years in what the author describes as an "ill-defined period of gestation".⁴⁰ As they were crafting their identity, Muslims conceived of themselves as a small group that represented a departure from the large established empires and old traditions.⁴¹ Though Berkey does not explain what he means by "old traditions," Hodgson argues that they saw their group as establishing a new standard that replaced former civilizations.⁴²

But this new entity was not without internal difficulties. With Muhammad's death, there was a rupture between the Medinese and Meccans. Followers of the Prophet in Medina wished to separate themselves from what they considered his close knit group of contemporaries in Mecca. Various factors could have contributed to such a break. An obvious motive might have been that Muslims based in Medina considered themselves the true, original followers of the Prophet, as they devotedly accompanied and/or joined him in Medina when

³⁹ Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 57. Berkey states that "Islam was not fully formed", in his description of the faith and its people at this time.

⁴⁰ Berkey, 57.

⁴¹ Berkey, 57.

⁴² Hodgson, 196. Possibly Hodgson is referring to the standards of former civilizations.

Mecca was largely unfavorable towards him. Of course, the Medinese position could have been shaped by their desire to establish a prominent position in Islam both geographically and politically.

'Abu Bakr, the first caliph and Muhammad's father-in-law, was able to prevent this schism. Still, the incident created an internal struggle for control that persisted up to and beyond the building of the Dome of the Rock.⁴³ As the Islamic umma grew in numbers and area, factions sprang up within the faith, usually in support of popular leaders.⁴⁴ Developments included, according to Donner, the emergence of a "ruling elite within the state" that wanted to assert control by centralizing its authority.⁴⁵ It is worth asking what entity Donner means by "ruling elite within the state". While he does not elaborate on this subject, he may be referring to those Muslims in Medina and Mecca who considered themselves the original followers of the Prophet and continued to reside in the area where the Islamic faith began.⁴⁶

Externally, Islam was spreading quickly into distant lands.⁴⁷ One cause for the rapid expansion of Islam may have been that people in the cities that fell to the Muslims were less concerned with who ruled than they were with ensuring they paid less in taxes and felt safe.⁴⁸ As these Muslim victories occurred beyond Arabia, there was no emphasis upon individual conversions.⁴⁹ The reason, as Hodgson points out, is that Islam, among the Muslims, was

⁴³ Berkey, 70.

⁴⁴ Kazim, 17. I use the word umma to name the Islamic populace of the time. Kazim uses the word umma to describe what he calls Islamic society.

⁴⁵ Donner, 75

⁴⁶ Donner, 75.

⁴⁷ Hodgson, 198.

⁴⁸ Hourani, 23.

⁴⁹ Hodgson, 199.

considered to be principally, if not solely meant for Arabs, and only “within the Peninsula was there any sense that all ought to be Muslims.”⁵⁰ Also, new conditions emerged as the faith expanded: in areas that were more heavily populated, such as Syria and Iraq, Islamic governors wanted more autonomy over their territory with less influence or interference from Arabia.⁵¹

In his book *The Jews of Jerusalem*, Bernard Lewis provides further information that supports Hodgson’s and Hourani’s points.⁵² Lewis references the three following passages from the Quran: (1) “there is no compulsion in religion” (Quran, II,256), (2) “to you your religion, to me my religion” (Quran, CIX,6) and (3) “those who believe, and those who profess Judaism, and the Christians and the Sabians, those who believe in God and the Last Day and act righteously, shall have their reward with their Lord” (Quran, II,62) to support what he interprets as a “sense of kinship” that some “later commentators” have considered recognition of “religious pluralism, even of coexistence.”⁵³ Thus, Quranic verse existed that would have supported homogenous initiatives by Muslim leaders who were outside the Arabian Peninsula.

These developments should be expanded to consider a phenomenon that occurred within the leadership of Islam. As mentioned above, Islamic leaders who were outside, if not far beyond, Arabia, often found themselves acclimating

⁵⁰ Hodgson, 199. These two points made by Hodgson need some clarification which is not given. Does Hodgson mean that while the borders of Islamic influence were spreading that the common thought was only the conquerors needed to be Muslim and the conquered did not? Also, does this mean that Muslims living in the Arabian Peninsula thought that only the inhabitants of the Peninsula had the “right” to be Muslim?

⁵¹ Hourani, 24.

⁵² Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Jerusalem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

⁵³ Lewis, *The Jews of Jerusalem*, 13. The Roman numbers assigned to each verse from the Quran are provided by Lewis.

to and selectively adopting the practices of those whose lands they conquered, or their neighbors. Initially one might think of these leaders as deviating from the traditions that emerged at the time of the birth of faith. And, in fact, Arabian Peninsula-based Muslim leaders considered these later converts who became leaders with mistrust.⁵⁴ To counter this, leaders outside the Arabian Peninsula may have argued that, while it was important to follow the fundamentals of the faith, Islam was created within the boundaries of Arabia and did not take into consideration the differences of a world beyond its territorial origin. This is arguably a formational step in what will be discussed later: the Umayyad caliphate's concessions that helped deal with the new people and their cultures as they came under Muslim rule.⁵⁵ Thus, for these leaders, adapting to new cultures and people, while still following the basic teachings of Muhammad, was the best solution of expanding the Islamic territory and keeping it Muslim. It is possible that this division between Arabian-based and non-Arabian-based leaders, as previously discussed, mirrors the pre-Islamic Arab tribes' penchant for changing alliances internally with other tribes and externally with others such as the Byzantines, Yemenis and Persians.

Thus with the death of Muhammad and the continuation and expansion of Islam, a few points can be identified that support the theory that the reason for the construction of the Dome of the Rock was firmly rooted in Arab heritage and was a legacy of earlier traditions: the new faith saw itself as standing in a line of venerable older faiths. The successors of Muhammad struggled to remain united

⁵⁴ Hourani, 24.

⁵⁵ Bernard Lewis, *Islam in History, Ideas, People and Events in the Middle East* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), 297.

as new lands and people were incorporated within the sphere of Islam and power was delegated. As territorial rulers exerted their power over their subjects, they wanted Islamic authority to be locally based and less dependent upon Arabia. It was against this historical background that the Dome of the Rock was built by a caliph who was not based in Arabia and stands in the midst of a city imbued with centuries of Jewish and Christian tradition.

CHAPTER IV

PRE-ISLAMIC JERUSALEM

Historically, it is known that the Dome of the Rock was built in Jerusalem during the Umayyad period. However, there is little scholarly consensus that actions and initiatives, that occurred while the city was controlled first by Christians from 628 to 638 CE and then by pre-Umayyad Muslims from 638 to 661 CE, laid the groundwork for the building's construction. In this section these events will be discussed within the context of the reigns of the most significant Christian and Muslim leaders of the time, Heraclius and 'Umar respectively.

This chapter will also address the presence of Jews in Jerusalem. Though not in a leadership role, during the reigns of Heraclius and 'Umar, the Jewish community of greater-Jerusalem was treated differently as subjects by their rulers. Under Roman rule, at times this treatment was harsh, almost as adversaries, at others they were treated as allies. While under Islamic rule the Jews were considered brethren in religion. These differences in treatment would have an effect on the building programs in Jerusalem during rules of Heraclius and 'Umar.

In his book, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East*, F. E. Peters discusses the possibility that the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius attempted to appease the Jewish population of Palestine and encourage Christian interaction with them after centuries of antagonism between

the two groups by initiating a building program in Jerusalem that would be continued by the caliphs Mu'awiya and 'abd al-Malik, the earliest leaders of the Umayyad caliphate.⁵⁶ To assess the validity of Peters' proposal, it is important to understand the events that occurred in Jerusalem prior to Heraclius' reign during the first half of the 7th century. Beginning in 614 CE, Jerusalem was besieged by the Persian leader, Shahbaraz; the city fell to him the next year.⁵⁷ Jerusalem was not the only city in Palestine to suffer at the hands of Persia. Antioch had fallen in 611 and Damascus in 613.⁵⁸ Between the assaults on cities, the countryside was pillaged and churches were burned.⁵⁹ Among the consequences of the Persian attack on Jerusalem were: the capture of the city, the eventual poor treatment of the Jewish community and a lack of Persian interest in urban renewal to repair the damage caused by their siege. The ultimate treatment of the Jews by the Persians was not simply a continuation of the banishment policy of their Christian predecessors but even harsher enforcement of it.⁶⁰

However, it should be noted that there was an initial acceptance of the Jewish community by the Persians. Christian texts reveal that later generations of Jews who had been forced out of Jerusalem by Christian leaders in the 4th

⁵⁶ F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East* (New York: New York University Press, 1986) 95.

⁵⁷ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 22.

⁵⁸ Armstrong, 213.

⁵⁹ Armstrong, 213. Armstrong's specific mention of churches being burned is interesting as she does not mention any other houses of worship of other faiths, synagogues in particular. This perhaps contradicts her later description of the Persians' "destruction of all churches and shrines." See footnote 64.

⁶⁰ Armstrong, 214-215. Armstrong does not give an exact date for their dismissal of the Jews from Jerusalem. She does state that "(in) 616 (when) the Persians returned to Palestine, they took over control of the city."

century returned after the Persian conquest.⁶¹ While there, the Jews started to construct a building on the site of the former Temple. It is not known whether this was an entirely new structure or an attempt to rebuild the former one.

In her book, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths*, Karen Armstrong suggests that the initial cordial relationship between Persians and Jews was shared by both parties.⁶² Palestinian Jews who had more pleasant memories of Persian rule than Roman came to Shahrbaraz's assistance.⁶³ Armstrong's account of the Persian conquest of Jerusalem that describes the three week siege that led to the destruction of "all churches and shrines" is based upon the eyewitness account of the monk, Antiochus Strategos. He described the actions of the Persian army as 'wild boars, roaring, hissing and killing everyone in sight, not even women and babies were spared.'⁶⁴ Armstrong does not clarify to the extent of the role played by the Jews in the Persian sack of Jerusalem but she

⁶¹ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 39.

⁶² Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

⁶³ Armstrong, 214.

⁶⁴ Armstrong, 214. Armstrong quotes Antiochus Strategos's "Conquest of Jerusalem." Antiochus was a monk who witnessed the Persian invasion of Palestine in 614. Antiochus' level of bias or non-bias should be considered. Were his comments completely circumspect or did they reflect an anti-Jewish sentiment already held by Christians. This also compliments my comments in footnote 59. Armstrong's linear telling of the Persian conquest of the greater-Syrian area up to Jerusalem only singles out churches as the type of house of worship to be destroyed. Once the Persians began to take Jerusalem, Armstrong's quote from Strategos that both churches and shrines were destroyed suggests that the Persians only demolished Christian churches before entering Jerusalem in the greater-Syrian area and expanded their process to all religious buildings in Jerusalem once they entered the city. Armstrong's lack of explaining if there is a difference in religions when telling of churches and shrines causes confusion. Granted the churches were of Christianity but were shrines as well? If they were both Christian, this keeps with Persians destroying only Christian buildings. This could represent a quid-pro-quo agreement between the Persians and the Jews that Persians would not damage Jewish houses of worship in exchange for the Jews support of the Persian conquest. If (some of/the) shrines were Jewish, there seems to be a contradiction posing the question, why would Jews assist the Persians in their taking of Jerusalem if the Persians were destroying Jewish houses of worship at the same time.

does indicate that the Persians brutally ravaged the city and its residents with the support of the Jewish people of Palestine.

While Grabar does not indicate a particular catalyst, he explains that the Persians eventually fell out with the Jews, halted their work, and drove them out of Jerusalem.⁶⁵ One explanation for the expulsion is found in John Wilkinson's chapter, "Jerusalem Under Rome and Byzantium 63 BC – 637 AD".⁶⁶ According to Wilkinson, after taking Jerusalem, the Persian military moved on, while leaving the day to day governance of the city in the hands of the Jews. Later, after realizing the Jews were weak in this role, the Persians took control of the city away from them as well as drove them out.⁶⁷

The Persian rule of Jerusalem, which lasted for approximately fifteen years, was not marked by any notable architectural undertaking, such as repair of the damage resulting from the sack of the city and a failure to become involved in basic urban planning and maintenance of infrastructure. For example, in their quest to capture the city, they either seriously harmed or completely demolished most of the protective structures that were in place before their arrival.⁶⁸ Evidently the damage that they caused was of little concern as no Persian leader promoted any initiatives to restore and revitalize these city structures.⁶⁹

Such little care for repairing the damage they caused gives rise to the question: what were the Persians intentions for Jerusalem? According to

⁶⁵ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 40.

⁶⁶ John Wilkinson, "Jerusalem Under Rome and Byzantium," in *Jerusalem In History*, ed. K J Asali (Brooklyn: Olive Branch Press, 1990).

⁶⁷ Wilkinson, 102. While an interesting point, Wilkinson does not provide any sources for his statements regarding the Persian treatment of Jews during this period.

⁶⁸ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 22.

⁶⁹ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 40.

Wilkinson, it appears that the Persian attack may have been predicated on their view that Jerusalem was a vulnerable target. Evidently a level of co-existence existed in the city until a struggle broke out there between the Christians and Jews.⁷⁰ With this knowledge, the Persians laid siege to Jerusalem in 614, killed several citizens, destroyed the churches and, after forty days, took the city.⁷¹ Wilkinson construes that the Persians saw Jerusalem as an easy target and nothing more. As previously noted, at first the Persians left the city under the control of the Jews; however, once they found them incapable of proper leadership, they forced them out. Thus, it would seem that the Persians were most interested in territorial conquest, in this case Jerusalem, and its retention rather than the consideration of other matters including some of the basic aspects of physical infrastructure.

Jerusalem returned to Christian hands in 628 CE with the return of the emperor Heraclius, who returned the sacred Christian relic of the True Cross which had been seized by the Persians during the sack of Jerusalem.⁷² Heraclius' quest to restore the True Cross to Jerusalem was of great personal importance as the emperor considered the restoration of the cross to Christian hands the main goal of the Byzantine military activities.⁷³

In the aftermath of Heraclius' victory, it is important to compare Le Strange's, Peters' and Grabar's accounts of his activities. As mentioned earlier

⁷⁰ Wilkinson, 102.

⁷¹ Wilkinson, 102. Armstrong, on 214, states that "On 15 April 614, the Persian army arrived outside of Jerusalem."

⁷² Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 22.

⁷³ Geoffrey Regan, *First Crusader: Byzantium's Holy Wars*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), 132.

in this Chapter, Peters suggests that Heraclius initiated a building program on the site of the former Temple in an effort to curry favor with the Jewish community that had previously been treated poorly by the Byzantine Christians and Persians. Grabar's account of the two periods of Jewish exile lends credibility to Peters' hypothesis.⁷⁴ The reason for Heraclius' actions is not explained beyond Peters' suggestion. His reason may have been to gain the loyalty of the re-acquired subjects of the region. A population of Jews, who felt their current ruler was treating them better than their former ruler, would have been easier to govern.

One suggestion for Heraclius's special treatment of the Jews is found in Walter E Kaegi's, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*. According to Kaegi, Heraclius may have used Jews as spies against the Persians.⁷⁵ While the Persians were no longer in Jerusalem, they were still likely a concern for Heraclius. If he had been recruiting Jews into some sort of foreign intelligence it begs the question as to whether this provided as quid-pro-quo treatment for Jews in Jerusalem. In other words, it might be possible that Heraclius treated the Jews of Jerusalem well who were relatives of Jews assisting him as spies based afar from Jerusalem. If so, this would have benefited domestic relations between the Emperor and his Jewish subjects in the greater-Jerusalem area.

While his work is difficult to defend, Le Strange claims that Muhammad, after seeing how the Christians had desecrated the Temple Mount to offend the

⁷⁴ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* and Peters, *Peters Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology in the Near East*.

⁷⁵ Kaegi, 108.

Jews, wrote to Caesar asking him to have it cleaned up.⁷⁶ This supports Peters' notion that Heraclius had further reason to give attention to the site of the former Temple, which was vitally important to his Jewish subjects. If Heraclius is the Caesar to which Le Strange refers, a message from Muhammad to him, requesting the site of the former Temple be cleaned, could also complement Peters' suggestion.

When comparing Peters and Grabar in relation to the building program initiated by Heraclius, there is some discrepancy. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Peters proposes that Heraclius initiated a building program in Jerusalem. But Grabar asserts that the amount of construction in Jerusalem by the Christians after recapturing the city was small at best with such work being "limited mostly to monuments of piety or to ceremonial structures."⁷⁷ The fact that the city would come under Muslim control in 638 CE, just ten years after the Christians retook Jerusalem, gives rise to the question: what did Heraclius begin and how complete was it when taken by Muslim forces?⁷⁸

Possible answers to these questions follow in three points. First is the request from Muhammad to Heraclius concerning the condition of the site of the former Temple that, if true, could have played a role in Heraclius' program. Second, Heraclius' knowledge of the poor treatment of Jews under past leaders could have driven him to pacify his Jewish subjects by incorporating their interests

⁷⁶ Le Strange, 140.

⁷⁷ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 22.

⁷⁸ Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, *Islamic Art and Archaeology In Palestine* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2006), 25.

into his building program.⁷⁹ Third, while desiring to bring Christian prestige to Jerusalem, Heraclius outlined a building program that would bring splendor to the city, possibly including special treatment of the site of the former Temple. With this information, it is conceivable that when the Muslims took Jerusalem, they would have seen evidence of Heraclius' building program although its progress would have been limited.

Before moving to a discussion of Islam's early control of Jerusalem, it is important to examine how primary sources of the 7th and 8th centuries are viewed in current scholarship. Further readings of Grabar and a second book by Peters on the primary sources from the period of the pre-Umayyad occupation of Jerusalem create an image that is best described as fantastic-historical-fiction. Grabar explains that the first decades of the Muslim occupation of Jerusalem have been described as creating "a legacy for later times that was more mythical than visible and yet inescapable."⁸⁰ Peters suggests that personal accounts recorded about Muslims asserting their presence in Jerusalem have questionable authenticity. Those accounts that are accessible, which include Jewish, Christian and Muslim, were often edited by later generations to support specific political and religious agendas.⁸¹

Despite the question of the reliability of primary sources, there are secondary sources that responsibly use the primary sources to reconstruct a

⁷⁹ I am referring to Peters' assertion that Heraclius initiated a building program in Jerusalem (see footnote 37). Peters does not provide information as to what this building program would have been in design or scale.

⁸⁰ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*, 45.

⁸¹ F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City In The Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims and Prophets From the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 202.

Jerusalem of architectural growth and congenial relationships. For example, Myriam Rosen-Ayalon argues in her book, *Islamic Art and Archeology in Palestine*, that Islamic art was not created in Arabia but in the distant land of Palestine.⁸² According to Rosen-Ayalon, Jerusalem provided a foundation for Islamic architecture that could not have been achieved in Arabia. She identifies the years 638 to 661 CE, as an evolutionary period in which this happened.⁸³ Rosen-Ayalon indicates that a new Muslim civilization was finding inspiration beyond its original area in the Arabian peninsula. Subsequently, the Umayyads, ruling from Damascus, had a keen awareness of the cultural history of Palestine, in turn, provided much inspiration as Islamic art developed, namely the influence on Palestine of Hellenism from the east and the "(Persians) who were heirs of Oriental antiquity".⁸⁴

⁸² Rosen-Ayalon, 25. In her footnotes, Rosen-Ayalon refers to Oleg Grabar's, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), and Ernst Kuhnel's, *Islamic Art and Architecture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1966). Grabar explains that to define the origins of Islamic art one must comprehend "subjects, forms and attitudes" created over an immense area that extended beyond Arabia (Grabar, 19). Kuhnel complements Grabar's point by presenting a point in time in which material expression changed for Islam. According to Kuhnel, the first successors of Muhammad continued his commitment to resist lavishness that was not needed. Even though Muslim political and religious power increased each year, Muhammad's successors intentionally did not permit excessive presentation in their architectural works. With the move of the caliphate from Medina to Damascus, this changed notably. In Syria, it was imperative that the faith of victory portray houses of worship of grandeur that would eclipse those of the Christians. Just as significant for the caliphs was that Damascus not be overshadowed by Byzantium (Kuhnel, 31).

Rosen-Ayalon does not specify any particular Islamic works. Her description includes the following: "Significantly, the major artworks of this formative period were produced far from Arabia, the cradle of Islam, and were primarily associated with Palestine, where its monuments had a crucial impact on the development of Muslim art as a whole. It is also noteworthy that these artistic innovations followed upon one another within a relatively short period of time. Umayyad dynasty lasted just 89 years (661-750), and this period was even shorter in terms of artistic output. The term "Muslim art" only really becomes appropriate with the building of the Dome of the Rock in 72/691-692. Thus, only half a century was needed to lay the foundation of this new art and civilization."

⁸³ Rosen-Ayalon, 25.

⁸⁴ Rosen-Ayalon, 26. I exchange Rosen-Ayalon's use of the word Sasanian for Persian to keep this name uniform in my thesis.

This development appears to have taken place in a setting that was both positive and inclusive, particularly between Christians and Muslims. Christians likely welcomed Muslim control of Jerusalem, an event described by Peters as rather diplomatic and likely received positively by the Christian population that had been devastated by the “blood bath” brought on by the Persians.⁸⁵

Whether Heraclius initiated a new building program or not, by 640 CE, Jerusalem was heavily under (re)construction. New buildings constantly appeared while old ones were repaired.⁸⁶ Rosen-Ayalon’s argument agrees with Grabar’s, *The Shape of the Holy*, by describing the Muslim architectural program in Jerusalem as “visible and often impressive” and emphasizes that it occurred prior to the establishment of the Umayyad caliphate.⁸⁷ Thus a strong foundation for Islamic architecture was laid in Jerusalem before the beginning of the Umayyad caliphate. Rosen-Ayalon goes a step further by stating “these monuments had a crucial impact on the development of Muslim art as a whole.”⁸⁸

What drove this architectural initiative in Jerusalem under the Muslims? I would argue that there were two catalysts: one, the growing trend by Muslim rulers outside of Arabia who, while honoring the Prophet and his teachings, felt if the growing empire was to succeed outside its borders, they felt they had to break from those in Mecca and Medina. Two, it is clear that with the

⁸⁵ Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East*, 220.

⁸⁶ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 19. While this is an important point made by Grabar, he does not provide examples of new or old buildings. This is unfortunate as an actual listing and description would have been useful. Likely Grabar was attempting to make a broader statement about Heraclius’ treatment of Jerusalem and less about specifics such as actual buildings.

⁸⁷ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 45.

⁸⁸ Rosen-Ayalon, 25. This quote is found in the chapter titled “The Umayyad Period” within Rosen-Ayalon’s book. Pages 29 through 43 of this chapter list and describe the Dome of the Rock, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Haram al-Sharif, the Mawazin, the Dome of the Chain as well as the Double and Golden Gates as works which reflect Islamic architecture of this period.

establishment of Damascus as the capital of Umayyads, the caliphs and their courts began to accept and acknowledge the history and the heritage of newly conquered peoples whose influence would appear in Muslim architecture as argued by Rosen-Ayalon.

To understand why these first decades of the Islamic occupation of Jerusalem were apparently peaceful and to provide a basis for a seemingly large building program, two factors should be considered: how the three faiths engaged with and viewed each other in Jerusalem, and the second caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb's treatment of the city.⁸⁹

By 637 CE, non-Muslims living in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas acknowledged the growing dominance of the Islamic faith.⁹⁰ While the capture of Jerusalem represented a strategic expansion of Islam and its domination of a Christian city with Jewish roots, the new situation benefited the Jewish community. This is evident from the special attention paid by the Muslims to the site of the former Temple, on which the Dome of the Rock would later be built.

The importance of Jerusalem to Muslims, which goes back to Muhammad's early years, has already been discussed. For the conquering Muslims, the capture of Jerusalem validated their expansion beyond Arabia. Control of the site of the former Temple gave them a revered location that was more famous than any previously recognized in and beyond Arabia.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the Arab World: Faith, People, Culture* (New York: Random House, 1976), 13.

⁹⁰ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*, 46.

⁹¹ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*, 49. It is likely Grabar is speaking of the Kaaba when discussing the area of the former Temple as being more famous than any previously recognized in Arabia and beyond.

While Grabar notes the appeal of Muslims taking control of the site of the former Temple for the Christians, this highlights his disagreement with Peters' description of Heraclius' long-term building plan. Grabar states that the Christians would have welcomed the Muslim presence on the site of the former Temple because, for them, it would have been in keeping with their desire to keep Jews away from the area as they had done in the past.⁹²

It is necessary to take a pause here and note that there seems to be a contradiction in why both the Jewish and Christian communities saw a Muslim presence in Jerusalem each to its own benefit. Thus the question: If Jews considered a Muslim presence in Jerusalem positively, because they perceived Muslims to be kindred believers in the God of Abraham, how is it possible that Christians were proponents of a Muslim presence in Jerusalem as well, if the Christians hoped that the Muslims would continue to suppress the Jews? None of the scholars consider this question or note that the research they present creates a situation that could be argued to not make sense. I suggest that the Jews and Christians had differing motives, possibly wishing support of their own religion and suppression of the other, and simply did not discuss each other's perspectives and hopes.

Returning to Heraclius's building program, again, there seems to be a lack of consensus among scholars for the motives of Heraclius' speculative building program. One argument in favor of such a program is the fact that Heraclius' rule

⁹² Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*, 49. Grabar states "The Christians saw the Muslim takeover of the Temple Mount as a way to keep Jews out of an area they had twice (under Julian the Apostate and briefly during the Persian invasion) wanted to restore as the Temple."

ended just a few years (631 CE) before the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem. If Heraclius had wished to create a respectful atmosphere among Christians and Jews of the area, it would not necessarily have been continued by his successor, Constantine III.

I suggest Jews may have viewed the Muslim's plan to restore a location of religious significance to Judaism as a very positive initiative. According to Grabar, while Jews might not have had a complete understanding of Islam, they were aware of the connections Muslims made with Judaism; moreover, they were received very well after their generally poor treatment under Byzantine rulers.⁹³ Of course, not knowing specifically what the Muslims intended for the site of the former Temple could have given the Jews a cause for concern, as well. There is no evidence of communication between the two faiths concerning the Muslims' plans. I interpret Grabar's statement to mean that after the Jews had viewed the desecration of the site of the former Temple for so long, they likely welcomed the Muslim's interest and respect for the area.

Regardless of faith, the Umayyad presence, as well as their intentions for the built-environment of Jerusalem, that included the former site of the Temple, resulted in the creation of the Dome of the Rock. Jews could have appreciated Islam's recognition of Abraham. Christians would have perceived Islam as continuing the Christian attitude towards the Jews. Muslims would have wanted dominion over Jerusalem due to its significance dating back to the time of Muhammad and, before that, Abraham and Ishmael.

⁹³ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*, 49.

As observed by various scholars, not only are the number and authenticity of the primary sources for the early years of Islam questionable, but the sources themselves often verge on the fantastic. The account of the caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb's presence and activities related to the surrender of Jerusalem is no exception. While it has been accepted that Muslims took control during his rule, "some Western scholars" question as to whether or not he personally ever visited the city.⁹⁴ The capture of the city during his reign was likely symbolically important to him, since controlling Jerusalem would not have provided any military advantage.⁹⁵

Accounts based on 'Umar's visit and activities in Jerusalem can be narrowed to three events: the surrender of the city to him, his first visit to the site of the Temple, and his construction of a mosque on the site. He is presented as behaving humbly in the company of his new Christian subjects, who treated him poorly in return.⁹⁶ The Christians of Jerusalem appear to not change their opinion and level of respect to other inhabitants of Jerusalem regardless of whether the Christians were the rulers or subjects of the area. 'Umar is presented as a good conqueror who is wronged by the former Christian rulers

⁹⁴ Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City In the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims and Prophets From the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times*, 185. Peters lists H. Busse's "The Sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam." *Judaism* 17: 441-468, as his source for discussing some Western Scholars questioning if 'Umar visited Jerusalem during his rule. On page 185 of his book, which I am citing here, Peters provides a chapter note, number 7. In the Chapter Notes section in the back of his book, page 599, Peters supplies the information on Busse.

⁹⁵ Abdul Aziz Duri, "Jerusalem In the Early Islamic Period: 7th – 11th Centuries AD," in *Jerusalem In History*, ed. K. J. Asali (Brooklyn: Olive Branch Press, 1990), 106.

⁹⁶ This will be discussed in individual points in the next pages. The sources for this statement can be found in Abdul Aziz Duri's chapter "Jerusalem In the Early Islamic Period: 7th – 11th Centuries AD," in *Jerusalem In History*, ed. K. J. Asali (Brooklyn: Olive Branch Press, 1990), page 106, Oleg Grabar's *Dome of the Rock*, 44 and Peters' *Jerusalem: The Holy City In the Eyes of the Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims and Prophets From the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times*, 185.

who, prior to Islam's capture of Jerusalem, treated the Jewish population poorly.⁹⁷ In other words, there seems to be a recurring theme of Jerusalem being a better place for Jews to live under the authority of the Muslims as compared to their treatment by the Christians.

According to Duri, 'Umar's presence in Jerusalem was stipulated for the city's surrender.⁹⁸ A poll-tax was assessed in exchange for the safety of both the city's residents and its churches.⁹⁹ Central to this negotiation was the ceremonial exchange between 'Umar and Sophronius. Primary sources cited by Peters provide accounts that portray 'Umar as modest and Sophronius, who was the Christian patriarch of Jerusalem at the time, as arrogant.¹⁰⁰ 'Umar supposedly

⁹⁷ I base this statement on Peters's *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of the Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims and Prophets From the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times* and Grabar's *The Dome of the Rock*. See footnotes 98, 99 and 100 of this thesis. Peters names two sources: one Jabir ibn Nafir and the other Shadid ibn Aws. Grabar does not provide information regarding his sources. Neither author distinguishes whether their sources are Jewish, Christian or Muslim. It is likely that Shadad ibn Aws was a Muslim as he accompanied Umar as the caliph entered Jerusalem.

⁹⁸ Duri, 106. Duri's footnotes for this point state: Balādhurī, (from Abu Hafs al-Dimashqī), *Futūh*, 138-9; another report of Hishām b. 'Ammār al-Dimashqī from al-Awzā'a, from Saīd b. 'Abd al-Azīz, *Tārīkh*, I, 77; also see report of Yazīd b. 'Ubaida, *ibid*, I, 176; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh*, I, 553-4, al-'Azdī (from Hasa b. Ziyād al-Ramlī), *Futūh*, 242-5, 247-52. See Ibn A'tham, *Futūh*, 289, 291, 292, 296-301, who gives a similar report without indicating his sources. Khalīfa (from Ibn al-Kalbī), I, 124-5, like al-Awzāī in Balādhurī; Maqdisī, *al-Bad'*, V, 185.

Salim b. 'Abdullāh, in Tabarī, I, 2413, and Kalīfa, II, 12; Yazīd b. Abi Habīb in 'Ubaid, *Amwāi*, 224-5; Balādurī, *Futūh*, 139; Ibn Sa'd states the 'Umar came to Jabiya and attended the conquest of Jerusalem, III, pt 1, 203.

Abu 'Ubaid quotes Hisham b. 'Ammār al-Disashqī to the effect that 'Umar sent a commander from Jābiya to Jerusalem, and it surrendered to him, *Amwāl*, 225-6. The same report is in Ibn 'Asākir, *Dimashq*, I, 53. Saif b. 'Umar in Tabarī, I, 2397-2402. See Ya'qūbī, II, 160-1. In a weaker report (he states: *wa-yuqālu*), he refers to the presence of 'Umar, 2/167.

Eutychius (Saīd b. al-Batrq), *History*, II, 16-17 and 17-18, see Tabarī, I 2397-2402.

⁹⁹ Duri, 106. Duri's footnote for this point states: See 'Azdī, *Futūh*, I, 291; Tabarī, I 2404.

¹⁰⁰ Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City In the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims and Prophets From the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times*, 188. Peters provides two sources for Umar's visit to Jerusalem. One is Jabir ibn Nafir and the other is Shadad ibn Aws. Peters states that he is quoting Jabir ibn Nafir "on the authority of" without providing detail as to whether he is a primary or secondary source. Peters does state that Shadad ibn Aws accompanied Umar suggesting that this is a primary source.

entered the city crawling on his hands and knees as did his attendants.¹⁰¹ He wore the only robe he owned. He acted the equal of the companions who traveled with him to Jerusalem: he not only ate with them, but in sparing amounts. In comparison, Sophronius is described as clothed in stunning liturgical dress and accompanied by vibrantly clad clergy and attendants.¹⁰²

Upon his arrival, 'Umar requested that Sophronius take him to the site of the former Temple.¹⁰³ This episode not only presents a favorable image of 'Umar and a negative one of Sophronius, but portrays the latter as being dishonest. Having agreed to do so, Sophronius takes him first to the church known as Kumamah followed by the Church of Sihyûn. On both occasions 'Umar told the patriarch that he was lying to him. He explained that he knew so because of a description provided by the Prophet.¹⁰⁴ At this Sophronius led 'Umar to the true site of the former Temple that, as previously stated, was covered with dung and debris. A description of the scene has the amount of waste so large that it reached down the area's steps and into the street and so high that it almost touched the ceiling of the entrance to the area. Immediately upon recognizing the area as described to him by Muhammad, 'Umar had the area cleared of the

¹⁰¹ Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City In the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims and Prophets From the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times*, 188. See footnote number 97, regarding Shadid ibn Aws.

¹⁰² Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 44. In this book, Grabar does not footnote his text while presenting his bibliography in general sections according to themes (such as General Works, The Dome of the Rock and 700-1100) with the texts he used for each theme listed below the theme. This presents two difficulties for an individual who would like to review Grabar's resources. One is Grabar's method of presenting his sources does not allow for an exact reference. Also with the exception of three texts Grabar listed in his bibliography, all of his referenced sources were published from 1973 forward and thus there are no primary sources directly referenced. Of course, the sources he uses could themselves incorporate primary sources.

¹⁰³ Le Strange, 141.

¹⁰⁴ Le Strange, 141.

refuse and trash.¹⁰⁵ The various details of this episode have 'Umar, his attendants and the patriarch all using their robes to fill and carry away the debris until it was cleared as well as 'Umar not allowing any activity to occur there until it had been cleansed by heavy rain three times.¹⁰⁶

With this presentation of 'Umar/Islam in only the best light and Sophronius/Christianity in only the worst light, it is important to revisit Elad's claim (presented in the second chapter of this thesis) that Arabic texts written during and about this time are few.¹⁰⁷ While I remain committed to the proposition that enough information exists to discuss what led to the building of the Dome of the Rock, Elad's point should be considered when reading of the "greatness" of 'Umar/Islam and the "terribleness" of Sorphronius/Christianity. This of course is my assumption, but I doubt a Muslim writer of the time would have written an account that treated Christians only negatively and Muslims only positively.

Having reached the building of this mosque, it is important to review 'Umar's three initial activities in Jerusalem as they relate to the topic of this thesis. Based on the sources presented, it seems reasonable to suggest that Islam, with 'Umar as its representative, is described in a positive light whereas Christianity, with Sophronius as its representative, is described in a poor and negative light.¹⁰⁸ This is apparent in some of the basic details such as how each

¹⁰⁵ Dan Bahat, *Carta's Historic Atlas of Jerusalem: A Brief Illustrated Survey* (Jerusalem: The Israel Map and Publishing Company, 1976), 28.

¹⁰⁶ Le Strange, 143.

¹⁰⁷ Elad. *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

¹⁰⁸ See footnotes 95, 98, 99 and 100 of this thesis.

man dressed, conducted and presented himself. These examples, along with both Sophronius's disrespect for 'Umar's intelligence and continued impudence towards both Jews and the defilement site of the former Temple, increase the positive image of Islam. Given this dichotomy of good and bad, it is important to consider that Christianity, the religion of the ruling force of Jerusalem for several centuries, would have been perceived by Jews as being intolerant while Islam was the fresh new, and perhaps, tolerant face coming into control. The crowning event of this episode is 'Umar's cleansing of the dirt and disgrace that Christianity had brought to the site of the former Temple, which was viewed as a holy spot for the true followers of Abraham. Once he was pleased with the appearance of the site of the former Temple, 'Umar commanded that a mosque be built on it.¹⁰⁹

There are two topics remaining that need to be discussed about the pre-Umayyad period, both of which include 'Umar. One is the leader's evident agreement with Muhammad that, while Jews and Christians along with Muslims were "people of the book", Islam was the superior of the three. The second is the model of governance and delegation of authority initiated by 'Umar for the administration of the Umayyad Empire.

¹⁰⁹ Le Strange, 140.

Elad, 29. Elad states "It may be assumed that the Muslims erected a mosque immediately after their conquest of Jerusalem." Where exactly was this mosque, and who was responsible for its construction? If Caliph 'Umar conquered Jerusalem it would seem that he was responsible for the erection of the mosque.

Elad, 32. Elad quotes K. A. C. Creswell (*Early Muslim Architecture*, Volume 1, Part 1: volume I, part ii, Oxford 1969), "There is consequently no reason for doubting that 'Umar did erect a primitive mosque with a timber roof in the Temple Area..."

In *Studies in Jāhiliyya and Early Islam*, M. J. Kister provides a source that presents conflicting images of 'Umar's level of acceptance of Jewish scripture.¹¹⁰ According to this source, "Haddithū 'an banī isra'īla wa-lā haraja: A Study of Early Tradition," upon hearing of the discovery of the "Book of Daniel" in what was believed to be Daniel's grave, 'Umar had it translated into Arabic. 'Umar considered the book a source of information that provided important history as well as a model for how one was to conduct oneself in religion and speech.¹¹¹ This suggests that 'Umar not only had respect for the writing of his fellow "people of the book" but wanted Muslims, who may not know Hebrew, to be able to read it. But Kister also presents a different view of 'Umar's treatment of these writings. Supposedly, after hearing that a man had either read or copied the Book of Daniel, 'Umar had him brought forward. The man was then thrashed and beaten until he pledged to destroy the book and not read texts like these again.¹¹² For Kister to provide two differing approaches as to how 'Umar treated Jewish religious texts without analyzing why 'Umar did so is very confusing and poses the question: why would 'Umar personally embrace a text of Jewish importance while punishing a fellow Muslim who read it? While Kister's presentation is puzzling, for the purpose of this thesis, the conclusion drawn from this incident is that 'Umar had respect for religious history but insisted on orthodoxy among Muslims.

¹¹⁰ M. J. Kister, ed., "Haddithū 'an banī isra'īla wa-lā haraja: A Study of An Early Tradition" in *Studies in Jāhiliyya and Early Islam* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1980), 235. Kister lists "Israel Oriental Studies II. Faculty of Humanities, Tel-Aviv University, Tel-Aviv, 1972" as his source for this text.

¹¹¹ Kister, 235.

¹¹² Kister, 235.

By the close of 'Umar's reign in 644, all of the Arabian Peninsula, portions of the Persian Empire, Syria, Egypt and part of Byzantium were under Islam's rule.¹¹³ As the boundaries of Islam moved further away from Mecca and Medina, and particularly beyond Arabia, a new approach to governing the empire and its (new) subjects was taken. This new approach was a divisive issue among Arab Muslim leaders who considered themselves to be orthodox keepers of the faith and non-Arabian Peninsula Muslim leaders who viewed themselves as expanding the faith in a world that called for compromise. From the perspective of an Arabian-based Islamic leader, the teachings of the Prophet and the guidelines established during his lifetime were the only permissible practices. Anything outside of or contrary to these were considered heresy. Islamic leaders outside the Arabian Peninsula also traced their roots to the Prophet but acknowledged the need to find new ways of accommodating local practices when strict Muslim orthodoxy proved incapable of dealing with new people in new lands. By the end of 'Umar's reign, the entire Arabian Peninsula, part of the Sasanian Empire, and the Syrian and Egyptian provinces of the Byzantine Empire were under Islamic control.¹¹⁴ A policy of accommodation gave rise to a new ruling elite that included non-Arabians, something that was not well received by the followers of Muhammad living in Mecca and Medina. This dispute led to a split that gave rise to factionalism and arguments over territory and population between the original associates of the Prophet and the later converts under

¹¹³ Hourani, 23.

¹¹⁴ Hourani, 23.

'Umar.¹¹⁵ Hourani qualifies this further by explaining that, while this was a divisive event for Muslims, it caused both factions to become more cohesive within their own groups.¹¹⁶ Thus, not only did the expansion of Islam after the death of Muhammad cause a rift between those who viewed themselves as the original witnesses of the faith and those who took it beyond its regional origins, but it led to the creation of a public policy created and followed by those outside of the Arabian Peninsula to legitimize their rule and the next generation's power.

To bring this section to a close, several points have arisen that are worth reviewing. One is the treatment of Jews by Christians before and after the Muslim arrival in Jerusalem. While scholars do not agree completely, there appears to have been a move toward reconciliation between Jews and Christians after having been at odds with each other and the Persians. This improved relationship resulted in a program to rebuild the city under Heraclius with possible attention paid to the site of the former Temple. At the same time, Jews and Christians residing in Palestine were aware of the advancement of Islam towards them and, for different reasons, wished for them to take control of Jerusalem. Christians hoped the Muslims would continue to keep the Jews subordinate.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Hourani, 23.

¹¹⁶ Hourani, 24.

¹¹⁷ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*, 49. While the text for this citation in Grabar's book is found on page 49, one must look in the book's "Notes" section to find Grabar's commentary on the texts he uses for his statement of Christians welcoming Muslim presence in Jerusalem as a way to keep Jews subordinate. Grabar provides an endnote for this text which one will find on page 198 as part of Notes, Chapter One, endnote 72. Unfortunately for the purpose of this thesis, Grabar does not provide text that directly supports his claim that Christians thought a Muslim presence in Jerusalem would equal belittlement of Jews. But he does discuss an interesting text he finds in *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1997), by Michael Cook and Patricia Crone, which argues for an overall negative sentiment of the time towards Jews. This passage, which reads "the ill-focused and depressed Jewish world of Arabia, Palestine and Syria", definitely provides an attitude which seems to be negative towards the Jews. Again, Grabar does not state that he ties Cook's and Crone's text to his statement that

Christian lack of respect for Jews was demonstrated by their continued desecration of the site of the former Temple even though the activities of Heraclius showed Jews some respect. For Jews, while there was a lack of complete understanding of the Muslim faith, they were aware that Islam held Abraham and the god of Abraham in high regard. Once in Jerusalem, Muslims wanted to make all who were present aware that Islam was the superior of the three monotheistic faiths. Finally, there was Islam's expansion into Palestine. This included Jerusalem and other areas which created a division between those who saw themselves as the founders of the faith and those who were its expansionists. This extension into Jerusalem also included special treatment of the site of the former temple and the construction of a new mosque. It is within this environment that the Umayyads arrived on the scene to establish the first Islamic dynasty.

Christians welcomed Muslims to Jerusalem as continuing deprivation of Jews, but he does use *Hagarism* as a supporting text.

CHAPTER V

THE UMAYYADS

To understand the Umayyad caliphate's impact on Jerusalem and its relation to the creation of the Dome of the Rock, evidence will be presented from two directions. The first considers broadly the growing Muslim empire under the Umayyads, including the governance of the empire as well as the internal relationships and actions of the leadership between Arabia and Palestine. The second provides a more in-depth analysis of key leaders who guided both groups through this period of growth.

Mu'awiya ibn Sufyan's rise to the position of the fifth caliph in 661 CE marked a significant turning point in the Islamic world as a whole. In particular, it introduced a change in how power changed hands in the future, a new approach to governing the empire, and the transfer of the capital to Damascus. Mu'awiya's reign spanned the close of one period and the beginning of another. With his ascension, the Umayyads came to power; when power was transferred in the future, it would remain within the same family.¹¹⁸

The new dynasty not only took over an ever increasing body of land, but peoples who presented new traditions and customs that called for innovative approaches to government. In his *Islam In History: Ideas, People and Events In the Middle East*, Bernard Lewis explains that the Umayyad caliphate introduced a

¹¹⁸ Hourani, 25.

series of concessions.¹¹⁹ These were “interim arrangements” that held the Islamic polity collectively in place. This established a dominant Arab aristocracy in Damascus as well as an imperial system that slowly increased incorporating the organization and techniques of the people they had conquered.¹²⁰ Under Umayyad leadership a new manner of rule for the growing empire was introduced that better dealt with new people, cultures and lands under Muslim control.

This transition prompted two opinions: a negative one held that the new caliphs were more interested in themselves and less in preserving the faith.¹²¹ Those who shared this view were typically part of the original inner circle of the Prophet and lived in Medina and Mecca.

A positive attitude towards change was rooted in the belief that the empire was now greater in size than it had been and its leaders had to deal with foreign entities that were not present when the faith was growing within the borders of Arabia. Predictably, this view was held by those who typically lived outside the Arabian Peninsula and argued that such encounters called for compromises.¹²² This might support Hourani’s contention that, as the number of people under ‘Umar’s rule increased, he often gave preference in administrative appointments to those who converted and agreed to serve. It is possible that these initiates of ‘Umar were among those who thought that a new approach to the faith was

¹¹⁹ Bernard Lewis, *Islam In History: Ideas, People and Events In the Middle East*, (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), 297.

¹²⁰ Lewis, 297.

¹²¹ Hourani, 26.

¹²² Hourani, 26.

needed. Not only were they new to the faith but perhaps more interested in Islam's presence in their land than in where the faith originated.

To instill unity among new subjects and to maintain order across the empire, the Umayyads slowly adopted the organization and practices of those they had defeated.¹²³ Under Mu'awiya's direction, as a ruling body, the caliphate became an authority that was not rooted exclusively in Islam but was a "military and physical power supported by Islam."¹²⁴ During the period of the Umayyads' rule, Islamic governance changed drastically, becoming increasingly more like Byzantine and Persian models and less Arab.¹²⁵

As a result, the older families in Arabia, who had formed the original power base of the Prophet, were gradually deprived of their status and authority.¹²⁶ This created factionalism that, combined with Arab tribal wars, lasted throughout the 90 years of Umayyad rule.¹²⁷ During this period, Jerusalem played an ever increasing role in the empire.¹²⁸ As will be discussed below, some might have argued that a physical manifestation of the rift between the new and old powers of Islam is represented by the building of the Dome of the Rock under the direction of the Umayyad caliph, 'abd al-Malik.

Perhaps one of the most interesting overall descriptive summations of the Islamic state under the control of the first five caliphs is found in Hodgson's book. He describes the caliphates from Abu-Bakr to Mu'awiya as being "more

¹²³ Lewis, *Islam In History: Ideas, People and Events In the Middle East*, 297.

¹²⁴ Hodgson, 218.

¹²⁵ Lewis, *Islam and the Arab World: Faith, People, Culture*, 20.

¹²⁶ Hourani, 26.

¹²⁷ Lewis, *Islam and the Arab World*, 203.

¹²⁸ Elad, 12.

primitive.”¹²⁹ He bases his assessment on what he sees as the uncertain “character and durability” of the empire.¹³⁰ Hodgson seems to suggest that Muslims were not only still at a formative stage governmentally, religiously and socially but at risk of not surviving. Hodgson describes the “caliphal state” from 692 to 945 as being the period of the “High Caliphate.”¹³¹ I would propose that Hodgson’s conclusion is based on what he views as a disruptive Muslim populace (prior to the last decade of the 7th century) that the Islamic leadership of the time was unable to quell. Multiple factions, both within and outside of Arabia, were in disagreement as to how to coalesce as a unified body of Muslims, while they expanded their empire geographically and absorbed new cultures at the same time. Hodgson might be implying that a stronger caliph could have dealt with the situation of civil strife better as a unifier of the divisions. If so, I do not agree with this implication. I contend that given the scenario the first caliphs faced, they were barely able to keep the factions under the same leadership. Until now, the secondary sources discussed in this thesis describe two factions in disagreement as to the future of the empire: those in Arabia who considered themselves as the originators of the faith and, therefore, truer to the teachings of the Prophet and the second, those individuals who spread the faith beyond Arabia, as well as those who converted to it, outside of Arabia. Hodgson suggests that as leadership advanced chronologically from Abu-Bakr to Mu’awiya, each caliph further separated himself from Islamic-Arabia and identified more with the Islamic-Levant. However Hodgson’s comment fails to

¹²⁹ Hodgson, 233.

¹³⁰ Hodgson, 233.

¹³¹ Hodgson, 233.

consider that the caliphs were trying to appease both sides as best they could during difficult times. As leaders dealing with internal civil strife, these caliphs might have attempted to honor the roots of the faith that those in Arabia held dear while they accommodated those who were new to the faith by adapting to their culture. Though the majority of information available tends not to support an appeasement model, Hodgson's label of "primitive" has a negative connotation that could be reinterpreted. I would suggest that perhaps the first caliphs were actually effective leaders who were trying to limit factionalism among their people.

Thus Mu'awiya came to power at a time when the Muslim population was badly split.¹³² While trying to bring the empire under control, Mu'awiya, like his predecessors, looked away from Arabia and towards Syria and Palestine, with a particular focus on Jerusalem. Two events occurred in the early years of his rule that demonstrate his outward view. First, instead of being formally recognized as caliph in Mecca or Medina, his ceremony occurred in Jerusalem.¹³³ Second, as a replacement for Mecca or Medina, he chose Damascus as the seat of his government during his rule that occurred from 661 to 680.¹³⁴

¹³² Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East*, 92.

¹³³ Elad, 23. It should be asked if the first caliphs were installed in Mecca or Medina. In *The Heirs of the Prophet Muhammad: And the Roots of the Sunni-Shia Schism* (Great Britain, Abacus, 2006), by Barnaby Rogerson, one reads of the first three caliphs, Abu-Bakr (page 127), 'Umar (Rogerson refers to him as Omar) (page 168), and Uthman (page 232), all spending much of their time in Medina as well as being elected caliph there by companions of the Prophet who were also in Medina at the time. This information would suggest that Medina was the city of installation for at least the first caliphs.

¹³⁴ Hourani, 25 to 26. Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East*, 92.

Peters suggests that Mu'awiya may not only have held Jerusalem in special regard but may have wanted to rule from there instead of Damascus.¹³⁵ Peters mentions a text that describes Mu'awiya as "a lover of Israel" who intended to rule from Jerusalem.¹³⁶ This, Peters suggests, could mean that Mu'awiya had both political and religious plans for Jerusalem.¹³⁷

At this point, it is important to recall that Peters suggested that Heraclius began a building campaign that was continued by Mu'awiya and completed by 'abd al-Malik. Grabar states that many scholars made the case for Mu'awiya as the originator of a building plan that resulted in the construction of the Dome of the Rock.¹³⁸ This is carried further by the reference of Peters to the Jewish Apocalypse that describes Mu'awiya as "restoring the breaches of the Temple" and building "a mosque...on the Stone of Foundation."¹³⁹ These suggestions (as discussed on page 29) are in keeping with Peters' proposition of Heraclius' building plans and in line with this thesis that the Dome of the Rock was the result of earlier initiatives.

¹³⁵ Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East*, 93.

¹³⁶ Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East*, 93.

¹³⁷ Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East*, 94. The argument and information Peters uses to make his point regarding Mu'awiya's possible desire to rule from Jerusalem instead of Damascus is difficult to understand (see footnote 134 for additional relative information).

¹³⁸ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 47.

¹³⁹ Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East*, 93. As a followup to footnote 132, Peters writes that his source for these statements come from what he names "Jewish apocalypses" while not explaining what these sources are. Peters describes Jewish apocalypse as having a "kernel (that) goes back to the time of the conquest" as well as connecting it with "its version of early Islamic history" (both quotes, Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East*, 93). While confusing, I would suggest the Jewish apocalypse Peters writes of represents a belief that Muslims would have held during the early Islamic period that tied Judaism and Islam together as Abrahamic faiths. Thus by moving the Islamic seat of government to Jerusalem, the former capital of the Israelites, Mu'awiya was continuing a geographic symbol of importance.

To this point, it has been argued in this thesis that the reason for the building of the Dome of the Rock resulted from a set of circumstances, occurrences and relationships that stemmed from Islam's formative roots in Arabia, through the faith becoming a reality in that region and finally moving beyond to Palestine and Syria. Within this empirical study, two notable events occurred during the rule of caliph 'abd al-Malik (685 to 705)¹⁴⁰ that I argue are in accordance with it: a decisive split occurred between the Umayyads based in Palestine and the Medinese and Meccans based in Arabia that led to two rival caliphs, and the Dome of the Rock was built in Jerusalem by an Umayyad caliph.

As noted, Grabar and Peters question the qualitative authenticity of primary sources that describe pre-Umayyad Jerusalem. The circumstances surrounding the actual building of the Dome of the Rock and the date of its construction are much the same. Also as noted, one school of thought is that it was built to mark the location from where Muhammad ascended to Heaven during his Night Journey. This, again, has been disproven by the fact that it was not an accepted belief within the faith until some centuries after the Dome of the Rock was completed (see footnote 2 of this thesis).

I will focus on two explanations that have been identified by scholars as the catalysts for building of the Dome of the Rock, that either immediately preceded or occurred contemporaneously with its construction. In both cases 'abd al-Malik, caliph from 685 to 705 CE, was the person ultimately responsible for the Dome of the Rock's construction.¹⁴¹ One follows the linear, cause and

¹⁴⁰ Armstrong, 236.

¹⁴¹ Nahman Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), 247.

effect, model of this thesis; the second suggests a different course according to which the Umayyad caliphate expressed a wish to increase Islam's visual presence in Jerusalem surpassing that of the Christians.

'Abd al-Malik was the fifth Umayyad caliph and tenth overall. By now Jerusalem was "astir" under the Umayyad caliphate.¹⁴² Elad notes that the Umayyads continually worked to create and further traditions that praised and venerated Jerusalem.¹⁴³ Elad suggests that these traditions were created to cast Islam in a positive light, as a large number of these "traditions" praised 'Umar's exemplary role in all activities related to the conquest of Jerusalem.¹⁴⁴ It can be argued that the Umayyads were no longer viewed as the usurpers of the faith. Instead, they now held the reins of leadership over the empire and viewed the Arabian Muslims as radicals. Frustrated by the activities of the Umayyads, the Muslims of Mecca and Medina rose in opposition to the power of the caliphs in Damascus.¹⁴⁵ Their ultimate act of defiance against the Umayyads was to declare Ibn al-Zubair from Medina as their caliph.¹⁴⁶ With this appointment, al-Zubair became the spiritual and temporal head of the Arabian Muslims.¹⁴⁷

Predecessors of al-Malik, Yazid and Mu'awiya in particular, attempted to stem this revolt without success.¹⁴⁸ Al-Zubair planned to make sure Muslims

¹⁴² Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East*, 94.

¹⁴³ Elad, 29. Elad does not provide information as to what (he) means by "traditions" in (his) text. The footnote Elad provides states the following: See especially "The Sanctity of Jerusalem"; *idem*, "Omar b. al-Hattāb," (see Bibliography); Elad, "An Arabic Tradition," pp. 31-32; but cf. Gil, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53, no. 66-67 [=vol. I, pp. 43-44]; see also Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca*, pp. 89-90.

¹⁴⁴ Elad, 29 and 30.

¹⁴⁵ Le Strange, 115.

¹⁴⁶ Duri, 105.

¹⁴⁷ Le Strange, 115.

¹⁴⁸ Le Strange, 115.

throughout Arabia and the areas of Africa under Islamic control accepted his authority and recognized his official capital in Mecca.¹⁴⁹ In Amikam's article, "Why Did 'Abd al-Malik Build the Dome of the Rock?," the author asserts that al-Zubair must have been very convincing in his attempts. "He was eloquent so the people inclined towards him."¹⁵⁰ Financially, this was an important move for both al-Zubair and his supporters in Medina and Mecca. With the Umayyad capital based distantly in Damascus, the Meccan area benefited economically. Al-Zubair hoped to take control of Islamic pilgrimage and make the travelers pay allegiance to him.¹⁵¹ Through his efforts and persuasion, al-Zubair was successfully able to influence Muslims to continue to travel to Mecca and pay homage to him there.¹⁵² This practice continued for several years during which large crowds traveled annually to Mecca to visit the Kaaba.¹⁵³

For obvious reasons, the Umayyads saw al-Zubair's success as a threat to their authority. His influence became so great that al-Malik feared that his rule might end.¹⁵⁴ Hogsdon points out that to ensure that Muslims recognized his sovereignty, al-Malik focused on establishing his rule first through force and then concentrated on building allegiance based on faith.¹⁵⁵ The Umayyads consistently approached rule through military and physical strength that was backed by Islam, as demonstrated by al-Malik, in this instance.

¹⁴⁹ Le Strange, 115.

¹⁵⁰ Amikam Elad, "Why Did 'Abd al-Malik Build the Dome of the Rock," *Bayt Al-Maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, ed, Julian Ruby and Jeremy Johns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 34.

¹⁵¹ Cresswell, 66.

¹⁵² Elad, "Why Did 'Abd al-Malik Build the Dome of the Rock", 34.

¹⁵³ Le Strange, 115.

¹⁵⁴ Le Strange, 115.

¹⁵⁵ Hodgson, 223.

One of al-Malik's first steps was to stop Muslims from traveling to Mecca.¹⁵⁶ Just how far reaching al-Malik's edict was within the empire is unclear. There is evidence of some pushback on the part of al-Malik's subjects who questioned why they were not allowed to visit the sacred site in Mecca. In his defense, al-Malik referred to a passage authorized by the Prophet that placed locations in Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem on the same level of sacredness.¹⁵⁷ Elad suggests that al-Malik's efforts achieved enough success to raise al-Zubair's ire stating that "he detested al-Malik."¹⁵⁸ The Meccan leader despised al-Malik and the Umayyads.¹⁵⁹ He claimed that the Messenger of God had cursed the Umayyads and banished them.¹⁶⁰

Learning of al-Zubair's declaration, al-Malik devised a strategy that would redirect pilgrimage to Mecca from Jerusalem instead.¹⁶¹ To do this, al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock as a new rival location for pilgrimage and attempted to elevate it to a higher level of religious importance than the Kaaba. In so doing, not only would pilgrims journey every year to Jerusalem but their offerings would be given to al-Malik instead of al-Zubair in Mecca.¹⁶² Both Elad and Duri point to this incident as the reason for al-Malik deciding to build the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.¹⁶³ Elad states that "it was the struggle with al-Zubair that drove 'abd al-Malik to prevent (pilgrims) from going to Mecca...and to build the Dome of the

¹⁵⁶ K. A. C. Cresswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) 65.

¹⁵⁷ M. J. Kister, ed., "You Shall Only Set Out For Three Mosques: A Study of an Early Tradition," in *Studies In Jāhiliyya and Early Islam* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1980), 173.

¹⁵⁸ Elad, "Why Did 'Abd al-Malik Build the Dome of the Rock", 34.

¹⁵⁹ Elad, "Why Did 'Add al-Malik Build the Dome of the Rock", 34.

¹⁶⁰ Elad, "Why Did 'Abd al-Malik Build the Dome of the Rock", 34.

¹⁶¹ Le Strange, 115.

¹⁶² Le Strange, 115.

¹⁶³ Elad, "Why Did 'Abd al-Malik Build the Dome of the Rock", 34 and Duri, 110.

Rock as a substitute for the Kaaba.”¹⁶⁴ Duri refers to a 9th century source, Ya’qūbi, who stated al-Malik’s “motivation to build the Dome of the Rock was to divert pilgrimage to the Dome of the Rock to keep people away from the call of his rival, al-Zubair.”¹⁶⁵ But his actions did not stop at simply constructing a building for Muslims to proclaim their faith. In his text, *Early Muslim Architecture*, K. A. C. Cresswell writes that al-Malik stated that the Dome of the Rock was to be used in place of the Kaaba.¹⁶⁶ Hodgson agrees with Cresswell’s claim that the Umayyads, and al-Malik in particular, wanted their presence felt foremost as a mighty power. Secondly al-Malik wanted to strengthen his power, and weaken al-Zubair’s, by forbidding his subjects to travel to Mecca. Each of these steps represents a declaration of power and authority by al-Malik. Thus, in a maneuver supporting Hogsdon’s model, al-Malik declared his power first and then used religion second as a means of support.

Regardless of the order of al-Malik’s actions, they did have an effect on the Medenese and Meccans. In his article, *‘Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock*, Joseph Van Ess writes that leaders in Mecca and Medina “trembled out of fear” once they learned of al-Malik’s actions and claims.¹⁶⁷ If true, I would argue that for them, al-Malik’s statements and acts were sacrilegious. From their

¹⁶⁴ Elad, “Why Did ‘Abd al-Malik Build the Dome of the Rock”, 34.

¹⁶⁵ Duri, 110.

¹⁶⁶ Cresswell, 66. For his statement that al-Malik wanted the Dome of the Rock to be used in place of the Kaaba, Cresswell refers to Ya’qūbī who Cresswell states is “one of the earliest Arabic historians (874 AD).” He lists his reference to Ya’qūbī per G. Le Strange’s *Palestine Exploitation Fund, Q, St.*, 1887, p. 93 and Le Strange’s *Palestine Under the Moslems*, p. 116 as well as Gildemesiter’s, *Z.D.P.V.*, XIII, p. 16.

¹⁶⁷ Van Ess, 94. One of the Arabian Muslim leaders Van Ess refers to is Ibn ‘Umar. The report omits to mention what exactly terrified him; the view he attacks is obviously thought to be too scandalous to be repeated. For this, Van Ess provides a footnote and bibliography citation of Rabi’ ibn Habīb al-Farahidi, *al-Jāmi’ al-Sahīh. Musnad al-Imām al-Rabī ibn Habīb*, 4 vols, Cairo, n.y.

perspective, al-Malik was replacing God's important connection with the Kaaba instead with the Dome of the Rock.¹⁶⁸ This, too, supports a central theme of this thesis that Muslims in Arabia considered themselves to be the true keepers of the faith and believed that Muslims, such as the Umayyads, were not adherents to the original teachings of the Prophet. It is possible that al-Malik did not intend to simply weaken al-Zubair, but had grander plans for Jerusalem to totally usurp Mecca. Elad supports this idea by pointing out that al-Malik hoped to create "a new political and religious center" that would replace the Kaaba and Mecca.¹⁶⁹ Elad agrees with Van Ess' claim that Medinese and Meccan leaders were upset with al-Malik's actions and saw them as a threat to the faith by undercutting the religious priority of Mecca.

In his *Carta's Historical Atlas of Jerusalem: A Brief Illustrated Survey*, Dan Bahat, refers to the entire episode of al-Malik building the Dome of the Rock to beat his opponent al-Zubair and draw pilgrims away from Mecca and towards Jerusalem as a "tale."¹⁷⁰ Not only does the strategic deployment of this derogatory term give weight to other sources that have questioned the authenticity of sources but Bahat claims that the struggle between al-Malik and al-Zubair with the Dome of the Rock originated with Muslims who opposed the Umayyads. This explanation of al-Malik's actions could have been propaganda created by Arab Muslims to strengthen their assertion that they were the genuine followers of the Prophet.

¹⁶⁸ Van Ess, 94.

¹⁶⁹ Amikam Elad, "Why Did al-Malik Build the Dome of the Rock?" 40.

¹⁷⁰ Bahat, 28.

If al-Malik was attempting to moot the importance of Mecca by supplanting the Hajj with a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, it does not negate the previously discussed possibility that Heraclius began a construction program that continued after the Muslim conquest and culminated in al-Malik's completion of the Dome of the Rock, as suggested by Peters. Neither does it contradict the theory that al-Malik's contributions to this plan were based on his desire to make Islam's presence felt in a city that contained many monumental works of Christian architecture.

Along these lines it is important to consider that many of al-Malik's building initiatives may have been part of a larger plan in which he considered moving the capital to Jerusalem.¹⁷¹ According to Le Strange, had he been able to successfully shift Mecca's religious importance to Jerusalem, al-Malik planned to move the political capital from Damascus to Jerusalem.¹⁷² Rabbat suggests that though al-Malik was unsuccessful and Mecca continued to be the center of both political and religious influence, the Dome of the Rock was but a part of his building campaign. Once he came to power, al-Malik started many grand construction projects in Jerusalem.¹⁷³ His other construction projects included the al-Aqsa Mosque, two gates and repair work on the Haram wall.¹⁷⁴ In addition to these projects he is also credited with repairing the roads to Jerusalem.¹⁷⁵

Rabbat argues two important points regarding al-Malik's building of the Dome of the Rock. He states, al-Malik's goal was not simply to be known as "the

¹⁷¹ Le Strange, 116.

¹⁷² Le Strange, 116.

¹⁷³ Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, 26.

¹⁷⁴ Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, 25-26.

¹⁷⁵ Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, 25-26.

repairer of the platform or structure attributed to 'Umar" but "as the builder of the most impressive monument on Mount Moriah over the Sacred Rock."¹⁷⁶ This supplements Duri and Elad's claims that al-Malik wanted to outshine his rival in Mecca by undermining the uniqueness of the sacred stone of the Kaaba.

The second point argued by Rabbat challenges Duri's claim that al-Malik banned pilgrimage to the Kaaba and built the Dome of the Rock as the alternative site. Rabbat states that the building of the Dome of Rock "had nothing to do" with al-Zubayr's revolt.¹⁷⁷ Instead the Dome of the Rock was to provide an alternate site of pilgrimage, not a replacement for the Kaaba.¹⁷⁸ To make his point that the Dome of the Rock was not to discredit the Kaaba, Rabbat states that historians of this school of thought base "their theories on al-Ya'qubi (d. 874) and the Melkite priest Eutychius (d. 940)."¹⁷⁹ This calls into question whether al-Malik banned pilgrimage to Mecca. If the Dome of the Rock was an alternative and not a replacement as allowed by the Prophet, Muslims would have then had the option of which site they wished to venerate with pilgrimage. Rabbat does state that Oleg Grabar considers this to be a misinterpretation of Ya'qubi and Eutychius. According to Rabbat, Grabar finds inconsistencies in al-Ya'qubi's reporting and that no other primary Muslim source that gives a similar account.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Rabbat, 15.

¹⁷⁷ Rabbat, 16.

¹⁷⁸ Rabbat, 16. The footnote Rabbat provides when discussing "scholars" provides three sources. Grabar, Oleg, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," in *ARS Orientalis* 3, 1959, 35 – 36. Goitein, S D, "al-kuds," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd Edition*, 190-191. Peters, F E, *Jerusalem*, (Princeton, 1985), 333 – 348.

¹⁷⁹ Rabbat, 15.

¹⁸⁰ Rabbat, 16. In the Notes section of his article, Rabbat lists four different texts for his discussion regarding scholars finding discrepancies in Ya'qubi's and Eutychius' works. The texts

Rabbat's second point is worth expanding upon. Until now, the focus of this study has been on external factors as catalysts for al-Malik's building of the Dome of the Rock. It is just as vital to consider what catalysts within Jerusalem led al-Malik to build the Dome of the Rock.

In his text, *Islam: Early Architecture From Bagdad to Cordoba*, Henri Stierlin points out that Islam's taking control of Jerusalem was symbolic to both Jews and Christians.¹⁸¹ He goes on to note that Muslims often blended the cultures of those they conquered.¹⁸² Stierlin also makes the point that once Muhammad realized that Jews and Christians had been making pilgrimages to Jerusalem for an extended period of time he instructs Muslims that they as people of the book, should do so as well.¹⁸³

Approaching the Dome of the Rock from the standpoint of internal factors, two questions will be addressed: what existed in Jerusalem that motivated al-Malik to build the Dome of the Rock and what statement did he want the building to make to the residents of Jerusalem, particularly Christians and Muslims, in terms of its design and decoration. Al-Malik utilized the Dome of the Rock to send a message to his antagonists in Arabia and to his subjects in Jerusalem. As will be demonstrated, secondary sources provide evidence that al-Malik was

are: Oleg Grabar "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Ars Orientalis*, Vol 3 (Smithsonian Institution, 1959), Oleg Grabar *Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973), Oleg Grabar, "Kubbat al-Sakhra" in ed. C. E. Bosworth, *Encyclopedia of Islam 2 (EI2)*, Vol 5 (I was unable to locate exact publication information for the Encyclopedia of Islam but did find that it is often listed in connection with Brill Publishers which is located in Leiden, Netherlands. EI2 was printed from 1960 to 2005), Oleg Grabar, "al-Kuds," in ed. C. E. Bosworth, *Encyclopedia of Islam 2* (for publication information, see information for text immediately prior to this citation in this same footnote), F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1995).

¹⁸¹ Henri Stierlin, *Islam: Early Architecture From Bagdad to Cordoba* (Taschen, Köhnm, 2002),

17.

¹⁸² Stierlin, 30.

¹⁸³ Stierlin, 31.

motivated by situations within the city. Lewis asserts that the Dome of the Rock was “meant to be a victory monument” to celebrate triumph over the Byzantines.¹⁸⁴ To make this pronouncement stronger, Rabbat notes that al-Malik used “Christian-Byzantine forms” in his works of architecture to demonstrate Islam’s strength over them.¹⁸⁵ This is consistent with Islam’s claim that it was a continuation of the traditions of Jews and Christians and therefore, that the caliphs were the legitimate rulers of Palestine.¹⁸⁶

Based on the previously discussed point that Muslims found allies in the Jewish people, it is worth noting that Rabbat does not suggest that al-Malik used forms of Jewish architecture as well. Muslim leaders may have had little opportunity to see notable Jewish structures, since any distinguished Jewish architecture of prominence would have been removed or set to ruin before the arrival of the Muslims.

The Jerusalem that the Muslims captured was an urban setting that had existed for centuries. Oleg Grabar presents a description of the Christian architecture, and its image, that was present in 7th century Jerusalem in his books, *The Dome of the Rock* and *The Shape of the Holy*.¹⁸⁷ Grabar presents a cityscape dominated by Christian architecture which al-Malik responded with the building of the Dome of the Rock.

¹⁸⁴ Lewis, *Islam and the Arab World*, 61.

¹⁸⁵ Rabbat, 13. Rabbat does not explain what he means when using “Christian-Byzantine” as an adjective to describe “forms.” This possibly alludes to a combination of both west and near-east forms.

¹⁸⁶ Rabbat, 13.

¹⁸⁷ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, and Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*.

Grabar's discussion begins with the Madaba map, which was created around 600 CE.¹⁸⁸ For Grabar, the importance of the map is not its presentation of the shape of Jerusalem but what components make it up.¹⁸⁹ Jerusalem was "a city of churches" and "treasured holy buildings" that were placed along an erratic system of streets.¹⁹⁰ These buildings decorated and were often located behind adorned walls.¹⁹¹ The churches were complimented by a dozen more sanctuaries that marked a particular Christian "personage or event."¹⁹² Grabar best summarizes Christian architecture in Jerusalem by stating "pious (Christian) treasures abounded there."¹⁹³

Of these Christian buildings, two were of major visible importance: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the New Church of the Virgin Mary.¹⁹⁴ The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, that dominated the western half of the city, was the most significant.¹⁹⁵ It had a "socio-political agenda," that was to declare Christianity's triumph over both paganism and Judaism.¹⁹⁶ To complement this declaration, the steps to the Holy Sepulchre's entrance looked towards the empty space of the site of the former Temple.¹⁹⁷ Thus to enter the Holy Sepulchre, one

¹⁸⁸ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 30.

¹⁸⁹ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 30.

¹⁹⁰ The reference of "a city of churches" is found in Grabar, *Dome of the Rock*, 22. The reference of "treasured holy buildings" is found in Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 32.

¹⁹¹ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 32.

¹⁹² Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 25.

¹⁹³ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 25.

¹⁹⁴ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 32.

¹⁹⁵ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 22.

¹⁹⁶ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 25.

¹⁹⁷ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 32.

had to literally turn their back to the former landmark of Jewish importance creating a permanent statement of the Church's victory over Judaism.¹⁹⁸

Second only to this was the New Church of the Virgin Mary, that was built by the Emperor Justinian in 543 as a response to the Council of Ephesus elevation of Mary to Theotokos.¹⁹⁹ Like other leaders who have been discussed, Justinian desired to leave his mark on the city.²⁰⁰ The Emperor's New Church was "handsomely endowed" and included two hospices: one for foreign visitors and the other for the poor.²⁰¹ The New Church's placement made a statement to the Jewish community of Jerusalem. Justinian's church was built on the sharp rise of Mount Sion, a site which was a difficult space on which to construct.²⁰² Grabar states that it was likely placed there to "compete visually and conceptually" with Herod's "stupendous constructions" for the site of the former Temple.²⁰³ And just as the placement of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and its entrance were a statement to the Jews of Jerusalem, so too was the location of the New Church. The New Church's back faced the western portion of the city, that was predominantly Jewish, while its opening was located towards the eastern part of the city that was heavily Christian.²⁰⁴ This meant that someone would not be able to see the site of the former Temple when entering the New Church thus negating the former and replacing it with the latter.

¹⁹⁸ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 32.

¹⁹⁹ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 25. It should be noted that in his book *Dome of the Rock*, Grabar refers to this building as the New Church of the Mother of God while in his book *Shape of the Holy* he refers to it as New Church of the Virgin Mary.

²⁰⁰ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 25.

²⁰¹ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 34.

²⁰² Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 35.

²⁰³ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 35.

²⁰⁴ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 25.

An additional visual description of Christian religious architecture in Jerusalem prior to the construction of the Dome of the Rock can be found in Myriam Rosen-Ayalon's essay, "Art and Architecture in Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period."²⁰⁵ Rosen-Ayalon explains that the existence and visual affect of beautiful Christian buildings such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre held predominance over Jerusalem that was unsettling for Muslims.²⁰⁶ Thomas Indinopolis strengthens this sentiment even more by commenting that the visual impression of Christian buildings over Jerusalem both stirred and concerned al-Malik and his contemporaries.²⁰⁷ Grabar claims that in addition to the major sanctuaries already mentioned, nearly 50 Christian buildings can be noted for Jerusalem and its surrounding areas.²⁰⁸ This Christian landscape had evidently been on the minds of Muslim leaders of Jerusalem since the date of Umar's occupation. While Umar and the caliphs who succeeded him thought of their military successes as evidence of the superiority of Islam over Judaism and Christianity, they perceived a dilemma. Visually Jerusalem continued to be mostly a Christian city, and its Christian citizens, notably its priests and monks, "did not behave like conquered subjects."²⁰⁹

In the midst of an intensely visual culture, it is reasonable to think that Muslim leaders were concerned the built environment and how it affected Muslim

²⁰⁵ Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, "Art and Architecture in Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period," *The History of Jerusalem: The Early Period*, ed. Joshua Prawer and Haggai Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem: New York University Press, 1996).

²⁰⁶ Rosen-Ayalon, 387. While Rosen-Ayalon does not characterize this predominance, I would suggest that it was political in nature.

²⁰⁷ Thomas A. Indinopolis, *Jerusalem: A History of the Holiest City As Seen Through the Struggles of Jews, Christians and Muslims*, (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), 226.

²⁰⁸ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 36.

²⁰⁹ Indinopolis, 225.

as well as Christian residents. The predominance of the places of worship constructed by Christian rulers could have limited the pride of the local Muslims by serving as a constant reminder of their predecessors' accomplishments. While this may not have led the Caliph to question Islam's superiority over Judaism and Christianity, it could have bolstered the mindset of the conquered Christians.

Grabar points out that little record is available from around 600 telling about what existed architecturally in Jerusalem.²¹⁰ The Muslim writer Arculf provides the only qualitative account of a Christian building in Jerusalem during the 7th century, writing two generations after the Muslim conquest of the city. Arculf, who wrote his account in 670, provides a detailed description of the Church of Eleona, thus reinforcing Muslim recognition of the visual presence of Christian architecture in Jerusalem.²¹¹

Al-Malik and his associates sought to counter the visible signs of the strength of Christianity. Armstrong states "Islam had no great monuments, and in Jerusalem, a city with magnificent churches, the Muslims felt at a disadvantage."²¹² With the building of the Dome of the Rock, al-Malik could challenge the Christian domination of the landscape and send a strong message

²¹⁰ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 37.

²¹¹ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 37. Grabar's quote of Arculf reads as follows: "On the western side of the building were 'eight upper windows paned with glass. Inside the windows, and in corresponding positions, are eight lamps. Positioned so that each one of them seems to hang neither above nor below its window, but just inside it. These lamps shine out...with such brilliance that they light up...also the steps leading all the way from the Valley of Jehoshaphat to the city of Jerusalem, which are lighted, however dark the night. Most of the nearer part of the city is lighted as well. The remarkable brilliance of these eight lamps shining out by night from the holy Mount and the place of the Lord's Ascension brings to believing hearts a readiness for the love of God and brings awe to their mind and deep reverence to their soul."

²¹² Armstrong, 237. Armstrong states "Islam had no great monuments, and in Jerusalem, a city with magnificent churches, the Muslims felt at a disadvantage."

concerning Muslim legitimacy and superiority. It is also worth considering that al-Malik measured strength and legitimacy of a religious faith in Jerusalem in that faith's quantitative and qualitative amount of visible architecture.

Thus it seems logical that al-Malik wanted to shift the visual focus of the landscape away from the Christian churches with the construction of the Dome of the Rock. al-Malik and his contemporaries in Jerusalem wanted the Dome of the Rock to visually surpass these buildings. According to Grabar, the "Dome of the Rock (was) in the thick of competition, almost a confrontation, between Christianity and Muslims."²¹³

'Abd al-Malik's intention was to "give Jerusalem a distinctive Islamic signature."²¹⁴ By building the Dome of the Rock, al-Malik asserted that the religion of Islam was the heir of Judaism and Christianity.²¹⁵ This allowed al-Malik, and the caliphs who followed him, to express their respect for the sanctity of Jerusalem, that they considered the city of the prophets "from Abraham and Moses to Jesus, culminating with Muhammad, the seal of the prophets."²¹⁶ So not only was the Dome of the Rock a symbol of triumph for Islam but also its inheritance.²¹⁷

Timeliness was at issue as well. According to Jerry Landay, from al-Malik's perspective not only was it important for the Dome of the Rock to be built admirably but promptly.²¹⁸ Rosen-Ayalon, Indinopulos and Armstrong all echo

²¹³ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 54.

²¹⁴ G J Reinink, *Syriac Christianity Under Late Sasanian and Early Islamic Rule*, (Surrey, Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 230.

²¹⁵ Reinink, 230.

²¹⁶ Indinopulos, 207.

²¹⁷ Indinopulos, 226.

²¹⁸ Jerry Landay, *Dome of the Rock*, (New York: Newsweek, 1972), 67.

this sentiment: the monument must express Islam's "capabilities and financial resources",²¹⁹ this monument would equal al-Malik's "pride, power and wealth as well",²²⁰ the goal was to create a monument that was both "unique" as well as a "wonder to the world."²²¹ So al-Malik not only wanted to build a magnificent building but felt pressure to limit any negative sentiment that existed against Islam.

While discussing al-Malik's motives for building the Dome of the Rock, it is important to recall Rosen-Ayalon's point that Islamic art was created not in Arabia but in Palestine instead. Knowing this, it is understandable that al-Malik would not have had any Muslim architects to assist him in his building projects. Both Armstrong and Indinopolis provide insight into who was responsible for the design and execution of the building. Armstrong states that al-Malik "employed craftsmen and architects from Byzantium, and two of the three people in charge of the construction may have been Christian."²²² Indinopolis gives further information by providing the date of 685 as to when al-Malik "employed Greek architects, Armenian artisans and Syrian laborers" to construct an "octagonal structure in the Byzantine style."²²³ Thus, taking Rosen-Ayalon's argument further, it appears that not only did Muslim architecture begin in Palestine but was created under the design and construction of people of Palestine and Byzantium.

²¹⁹ Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, "Art and Architecture In Jerusalem In the Early Islamic Period," in ed. Joshua Praver and Haggai Ben-Shammai, *The History of Jerusalem: The Early Muslim Period 638-1099*, (Jerusalem: New York University Press, 1996), 387.

²²⁰ Indinopolis, 226.

²²¹ Armstrong, 237.

²²² Armstrong, 237.

²²³ Indinopolis, 226.

Understanding that al-Malik's second reason for building the Dome of the Rock focused on a visual signifier for the residents of Jerusalem, it is important to consider the visual impact the building provided and who al-Malik intended its audience to be. From the material discussed so far, I conclude that al-Malik wanted the immediate audience viewing the Dome of the Rock to be the residents of Jerusalem. This begs the question: was he able to do this and, if so, what is the evidence of his success? I conclude that he did reach his goal both inside and outside the building by providing research that suggests this. By again returning to Grabar's *The Dome of the Rock* and *The Shape of the Holy*, it is possible to conclude that al-Malik wanted the greater-public of Jerusalem to take note of the Dome of the Rock and that the interior of the building included decoration that was specifically placed there for not only Arab speaking viewers but people who were not as literate of the language.²²⁴

To fully comprehend the Dome of the Rock, one should understand how the building appeared to someone entering Jerusalem as well as to someone venturing about the building. The Dome of the Rock was visible from many points in "its surroundings," including from the two major Christian structures in Jerusalem.²²⁵ Atop the building was, and remains, a high gold dome that "glittered in the sunshine" and was visible from a very far distance.²²⁶ From afar,

²²⁴ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock and The Shape of the Holy*.

²²⁵ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 104. Grabar does not mention that the Dome of the Rock blocked the view of any Christian buildings in Jerusalem when viewing the city from a distance but when standing north of the city and looking southward the Church of the Holy Sepulchre might have been blocked by the Dome of the Rock (see map in Grabar's *The Shape of the Holy*, page 105).

²²⁶ Andreas Kaplony, "635/638-1099: The Mosque of Jerusalem (Masjid Bayt al-Maqdis)," in ed. Oleg Grabar and Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade*, (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2009), 106.

its' dome was higher than the dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.²²⁷ It also competes in height with the New Church.²²⁸

Al-Malik's placement of the Dome of the Rock on the site of the former Temple reversed the effectiveness of the location of both the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the New Church. While the two churches had been located as a way to have their visitors either turn their backs or block their view of the site of the former Temple. Now Christians exiting the Church of the Holy Sepulchre were forced to look directly at the Dome of the Rock while Christians heading towards the entrance to the New Church may have visually witnessed the Dome of the Rock to their right.²²⁹ Thus the new message from the Muslims to the Christians of Jerusalem was that Islam, signified by the Dome of the Rock, was the dominant faith and political power in Jerusalem.

Grabar describes the Dome of the Rock as "a beautiful Muslim shrine" located within the "walled Old City of Jerusalem."²³⁰ It contains two areas that resemble each other. The first, "a tall cylinder" that measures approximately 65 feet in diameter and 25 feet in height is capped with a "gilded dome", surrounds the Rock itself.²³¹ The second is an "octagonal ring", approximately 157 feet in diameter, "of two ambulatories on piers and columns."²³² The building is decorated extravagantly both internally and externally. Inside one sees "panels of veined marble", astonishing varieties of "mosaic compositions (basically of

²²⁷ Kaplony, 106.

²²⁸ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy* 104.

²²⁹ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 104.

²³⁰ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 1.

²³¹ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 1.

²³² Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 1.

Arabic writing and vegetal motifs), gilt wooden beams and a ceiling of leather embossed with ornament.”²³³

A brief discussion of the mosaics will provide information on the building’s designers. Complimenting Rosen-Ayalon’s previous argument that Islamic art was created in Palestine and not Arabia, Grabar states that the “source (of the mosaics) was the rich visual repertory of Late Antiquity in the Mediterranean and Iran.”²³⁴ According to Grabar, the Islam had not yet gained an “artistic personality of its own” nor were there any “religious” or “political” regulations directing such decorations.²³⁵ The mosaics, which are absent of typical images such as “people, buildings or landscapes” suggests that the “vegetal motifs” were to serve only to make the building beautiful.²³⁶

The use of an octagonal shape was not a new form of architectural design.²³⁷ Al-Malik might have not only incorporated the octagonal design into the Dome of the Rock but he may have simply continued to build on the foundation of an octagonal building that already existed when he began the construction of the Dome of the Rock. Armstrong explains “some scholars have recently suggested” that al-Malik used the foundation of an octagonal church Heraclius commissioned to mark Christian success over the Persians.²³⁸ Work had begun on the church but halted once the Muslims entered Palestine²³⁹ If this is true, it not only compliments Rosen-Ayalon’s point of Islamic art being created

²³³ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 1.

²³⁴ Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 72.

²³⁵ Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 72.

²³⁶ Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 73.

²³⁷ Indinopulos, 226. Indinopulos states that the Dome of the Rock shape was an “octagonal structure in Byzantine style.”

²³⁸ Armstrong, 239.

²³⁹ Armstrong, 239.

in Palestine but suggests that it was continuation or incorporation of art and architecture that already existed.

Whether the Dome of the Rock was constructed on a foundation that already existed or not, it was not unique in Jerusalem. As the name of the building suggests, it houses a rock. The Dome of the Rock is not a mosque.²⁴⁰ Instead it is a shrine or a reliquary.²⁴¹ At the time it was built, it was surrounded by many churches that “enshrined rocks and caves.”²⁴² The Rotunda of the Anastasis was built around a tomb-cave, the Martyrium housed the Rock of Golgotha, the Nativity Church was located above the “cave of Christ’s birth” and the Ascension Church encircled the rock credited with Jesus’ footprint all provide the architectural context of the Dome of the Rock.

Having mentioned the rock within the Dome of the Rock and references to how it replicated the form of other buildings in Jerusalem that includes caves, it is important to discuss the rock inside the building and the cave below it. Grabar describes the rock as being approximately 18 by 13 meters with a squared room beneath it.²⁴³ Like most of the limestone of Jerusalem, the rock was first “yellowish in color.”²⁴⁴ Today the rock is much darker in appearance after centuries “of cleaning, oiling, and otherwise prepping” for viewing by worshipers.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁰ Armstrong, 239.

²⁴¹ Armstrong, 239.

²⁴² Armstrong, 239.

²⁴³ Grabar, *Dome of the Rock*, 33.

²⁴⁴ Grabar, *Dome of the Rock*, 34.

²⁴⁵ Grabar, *Dome of the Rock*, 34.

What did the rock represent at the time of the building of the Dome of the Rock? Jews associated it with the location of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.²⁴⁶ An association with Jewish religious heritage could have certainly interested Muslims. Though later rejected, in during the late seventh century, Muslims believed imprints on the rock to be those of left by God's feet as he stepped from Earth and ascended to heaven after His completion of the creation.²⁴⁷

By constructing a building to house a rock and to be located over an underground space, Al-Malik was both mirroring an architectural design that he admired and using it to make a visual statement to those who saw it. Put another way, did he intend to claim Islam's superiority over Christianity or its succession of and therefore correctness to Christianity? If so, Christians might have interpreted the Muslim appropriation of their architectural forms to celebrate a site that they demeaned as an insult.

On the above point, Grabar provides more questions than answers such as: how did the design of the Dome of the Rock come about, was it arrived at by one person or a group, were there multiple plans, was the Dome of the Rock unique for its time or did other buildings similar exist at the time but are no longer present?²⁴⁸

As noted in Grabar's discussion of the building's mosaics, he again notes that Dome of the Rock's design and decoration belong to the "language of Late Antique art in the Mediterranean area."²⁴⁹ In all of its features, the Dome of the

²⁴⁶ Grabar, *Dome of the Rock*, 50.

²⁴⁷ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 52.

²⁴⁸ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 110.

²⁴⁹ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 110.

Rock could have been a work of 7th century Byzantine, Italian or western European architecture. But the question remains as to whether al-Malik was simply copying what was available because nothing else existed for him or he was doing so to make a political statement.

While the incorporation of Byzantine structural design may have been an intentional statement, the inscriptions on the interior make al-Malik's religious intent even more clear. To understand this, Grabar's *The Shape of the Holy* provides an enlightening perspective of what scriptural text found inside the Dome of the Rock may have meant.²⁵⁰ Grabar presents an interpretation of the inscriptions followed by a discussion of the reasons they were written for both their writers and readers.

The inscriptions are a continuous mosaic frieze that measure approximately 240 meters. They are located on either side of an octagonal arcade, immediately below the cornice that supports the ceiling.²⁵¹ Grabar suggests that the inscriptions inside the Dome of the Rock were created to explain the importance God placed on both Muhammad and Jesus. These inscriptions were likely made to be noticeable with little trouble in searching for them; they are large "visual signs" that "call attention" to them and are easy to see.²⁵² God's Oneness is proclaimed as well as the importance of Muhammad and Jesus as God's servants and envoys.²⁵³ They speak of the people of the book but evidently focus only on Christianity as there is no mention of Jews or

²⁵⁰ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*.

²⁵¹ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 56.

²⁵² Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 67.

²⁵³ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 67.

the Old Testament in the Dome of the Rock.²⁵⁴ Grabar claims that the inscriptions provide an explanation of Jesus that is “proper and true” and does not suggest any disrespect toward him.²⁵⁵ I interpret this to mean, in simple terms, that the inscriptions, when referring to Jesus, were created to “set the story straight” as to who he was, according to Muhammad’s teachings via the Quran, regardless of what the Christians believed of him.

A cognizant comparison is made between Muhammad and Jesus as noted by Grabar, in that, of the 93 verses in the Quran that mention Jesus, five were selected to use in the Dome of the Rock inscriptions.²⁵⁶ Grabar stresses that one should not try to determine why these selections were made but that the five that were chosen present Jesus in an “ecumenical” light that is “fairly neutral.”²⁵⁷ The exceptions to this, as Grabar notes, are that Jesus cannot be the Son of God and he is in no way diminished by being the “servant” of God.²⁵⁸ An example of the inscription stressing the Oneness of God and the role of Jesus is the following:

“(People of the Book, go not beyond the bounds in your religion, and say not as to God but the truth.) The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is the Messenger of God, and His Word that He sent to Mary, as a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers, and say not, ‘Three.’ Refrain; better is it for you. God is only one God. Glory be to Him – He is far from having a son! To Him belongs all that is the heavens and on earth; God suffices for a guardian.)”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 67.

²⁵⁵ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 67.

²⁵⁶ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 67.

²⁵⁷ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 67.

²⁵⁸ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 67.

²⁵⁹ Kaplony, 113.

I suggest that Grabar is not correct in his assessment of the inscriptions treating Jesus ecumenically and neutral. Muslims also venerated other notable Prophets that Jews and Christians held in high esteem, including Abraham, as discussed previously. To single out Jesus with script that supported what Islam saw as Jesus' "only" importance and denouncing what Christians saw as "additional" importance does not seem to be ecumenical or neutral. Instead I would argue the inscriptions were there to enforce what Muslims already or should already know about Jesus and to correct Christians in what Islam saw as their (Christian) misidentification of Jesus.

Who created these messages and towards whom were they directed? So far we have seen evidence that suggests that it al-Malik was responsible for their placement in the Dome of the Rock. According to Grabar, the people responsible for these inscriptions being placed inside the Dome of the Rock in "no doubt" were the "highest authorities in the Muslim realm."²⁶⁰

There are multiple possibilities as to whom the intended audience was and their intended response. Oleg Grabar suggests that the inscriptions addressed a tacit acknowledgement by both Christians and Muslims that Jerusalem remained a Christian city and that Christians dominated the visual landscape and could thus consider themselves both different and "superior to the upstart Muslims."²⁶¹

In order to read the inscriptions completely, the viewer would have to walk first clockwise inside the building and then circumambulate counter clockwise.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 68. Grabar does not provide names as to who these authorities were but does note that they likely lived in Damascus in 692.

²⁶¹ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 68.

²⁶² Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 68.

This would force the person to visually take in the building as a whole. The inscriptions acted as an educational tool in that the inscriptions addressed the social, political, religious and other challenges of the day.²⁶³

The physical process needed to view the inscriptions gives credibility to the suggestion that al-Malik wanted the Dome of the Rock to serve as a place for pilgrimage if not completely replacing the Kaaba. Circumambulation of the Kaaba in Mecca was, and remains, very important to the Islamic faith. If al-Malik truly wanted the Dome of the Rock to serve as a substitute for the Kaaba, it is understandable that he would want and need it to include a setting that would suggest the practice of circumambulation. The fact that Muslims are to circumambulate the Kaaba certainly compliments the need for Muslims to have to move in the same rotation movement within the Dome of the Rock to read the inscriptions. Grabar explains this further by noting that it is “easy to imagine how” circumambulation could have been practiced in the Dome of the Rock by also incorporating the “cave” or open space that was previously discussed that was located below the rock.²⁶⁴

Evidently to read the inscriptions while moving first clockwise and then counter-clockwise was not a passive task. Grabar describes the process as if the “viewer were walking in an unending alley framed by two rows of hedges.”²⁶⁵ It could be interpreted that such an arrangement could only be appreciated by a devoted Muslim who visiting the interior of the Dome of the Rock for personal religious practice.

²⁶³ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 68.

²⁶⁴ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 74.

²⁶⁵ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 75.

With the building of the Dome of the Rock, the Muslims now had a monumental building of their own in Jerusalem, one that commemorated their ties to Abraham within while subtly reinforcing their view that Islam was superior to Christians.

Grabar states that nothing is known as to who was allowed or commanded to enter the building nor if rules existed for such activity.²⁶⁶ I would like to suggest that al-Malik created the Dome of the Rock for a public that was general and broad in nature, including even non-Arabic speakers. Grabar notes the “diacritical marks” on the Dome of the Rock²⁶⁷ Over time these marks have come to represent short vowels, pronunciation symbols, grammatical endings, spelling variants in the Arabic language.²⁶⁸ While Grabar does not describe which marks are in the inscriptions, the fact that they exist is important. The last two decades of the 7th century and the first two of the 8th century are known as the time when diacritical marks are first seen in Quranic texts.²⁶⁹ A need for a “uniform and unambiguous system” was desired as people began to collect portions of the Quran.²⁷⁰ ‘Abū I-‘Aswad ad-Du‘alī, (d. 688?), is mentioned by Kees Versteegh as

²⁶⁶ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 106. With this description, it is important to note that Grabar’s description in *The Dome of the Rock* is one that was visually assessed and reported in 2006. After nearly a millennium and a half, the building has undergone some structural and ornamental changes. Indeed, Grabar states that the Dome of the Rock one sees today, both inside and outside, reflects work of the “second half of the 20th century.” To reinforce his belief that what one sees today reflects what was created in the 690’s, Grabar explains that “all restorations claim” to reflect what first existed gives reason for one to pause and wonder what changes to the building are authentic repairs and replications and which are completely new (in the case of this thesis, visually) since the buildings inception. While Grabar’s point is interesting to know, it is not germane to this thesis. Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 1.

²⁶⁷ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 62.

²⁶⁸ Kristen Brustad, Mahmoud Al-Batal and Abbas Al-Tonsi, Alif Baa with Multimedia: *Introduction to Arabic Letters and Sounds* (Washington, DC, Georgetown Press, 2007), 2.

²⁶⁹ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 62.

²⁷⁰ Kees Versteegh, *The Arabic Language* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 56.

the 'inventor' of grammar.²⁷¹ Ad-du'alī is believed to have introduced a "system" of colored dots that were located above and below letters to acknowledge different letter sounds.²⁷² They were added to assist the "reading of Arabic by foreigners" and to address "textual problems."²⁷³ I argue that these marks were included for the purpose of being seen by an audience that ranged from being knowledgeable of the Arabic language to one that had little grasp of it. If al-Malik wanted the interior of the Dome of the Rock to be viewed by a limited and select group, such as Grabar's "highest authorities," he would have had no reason to provide text with diacritical marks.

I will make one last comment regarding the diacritical marks in relation to the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock which Grabar does not discuss directly. On the outer face of the octagon, inside the building, one finds the following inscription of dedication:

*"(God bless him [ROSETTE] Has built this domed structure the servant of God, Abdallah, the imam al-Maumun, Commander of the Faithful, in the year seventy-two. May God accept it from him. Amen.)"*²⁷⁴

Grabar notes that Abd al-Malik's name was replaced with (al-Maumun's name while the date was not changed.²⁷⁵ While this is an interesting point, Grabar does not discuss whether diacritical marks are included in the inscription or not. Based on his discussion of the marks being found elsewhere in the inscriptions, one could assume that the marks are in the dedication as well. With more

²⁷¹ Versteegh, 56.

²⁷² Versteegh, 56.

²⁷³ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 62.

²⁷⁴ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 60.

²⁷⁵ Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 60.

detailed information, one could analyze whether there is a quantitative and qualitative difference between the Arabic inscriptions that remain from the original dedication and those found in the replacement of al-Maumun's name for al-Malik's.

I suggest by building the Dome of the Rock, al-Malik addressed what he perceived as weakness and vulnerability felt by Muslims of Jerusalem by building the Dome of the Rock as a visual counter to the Holy Sepulchre and the New Church. Not only was he making a statement to his rivals in Arabia but he was also addressing the dearth of Islamic visual markers in the city.

Rabbat raises one final, if dubious, motive for al-Malik to build the Dome of the Rock. There was a prophesy that stated that al-Malik was to build the Dome of the Rock. Rabbat points to a prophesy exploiting, in not invented by, al-Malik from Ka'b's claim, as Ka'b established many of Islam's traditions related to Jerusalem that stated that al-Malik was to build the Dome of the Rock.²⁷⁶ Ka'b al-Ahbar is recorded as stating "I have read in the Torah that God addressed the Rock of Jerusalem: 'I shall send my servant 'abd al-Malik to build you and adorn you'".²⁷⁷ Rabbat points out the improbability of the prophesy in that Ka'b died in 652 when al-Malik was six years old, living in Medina with no association with Jerusalem.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ Rabbat, 15.

²⁷⁷ Rabbat, 15. For this account, note 49 of his Notes section on page 20 of this article, Rabbat references *fadā'il* written by Abu al-Ma'ali ibn al-Marja which was being edited by E. Sivan. The words "was being edited" is my interpretation from Rabbat's note as Rabbat states "is being edited by". I gather that the *fadā'il* was being edited by al-Marja when Rabbat wrote his own article.

²⁷⁸ Rabbat, 15.

In conclusion, it is clear that the Dome of the Rock was built during the rule of the Umayyad leader, 'abd al-Malik. His reasons for undertaking the construction centers on two themes. First, al-Malik and the Umayyads felt that they must honor the religion of the Prophet. But while the origin of the faith was in the Arabian Peninsula, they believed that for the growing empire to sustain itself, leadership and governance had move beyond the area of Islam's origin. To do this, and counter Muslim detractors in Mecca and Medina, the Umayyads increased Jerusalem's importance and commissioned the Dome of the Rock to make both a political as well as a religious statement.

Secondly, al-Malik wished to make a statement to all Jews, Christians and Muslims living in Jerusalem that Islam was the state religion of the city. The preponderance of Christian architecture in the city made it even more important that the Dome of the Rock overshadow buildings such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Evidently al-Malik attained his goal: because the Dome of the Rock, as Grabar states, still stands today with the same design as it did when it was first built.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

There are three central themes that arise from the research presented in this thesis. One is Islam's belief that the God revealed to Muhammad was the same God worshiped by Jews and Christians. With this came a respect for many of the shared principles and locations venerated by all people of the book, that included Jerusalem.

The second is that two independent forces were at play during 'abd al-Malik's rule and influenced his decision to build the Dome of the Rock. One was external to Jerusalem, the other was internal. Externally, there was a divide that existed between Arabian Muslims and non-Arabian Muslims. At times the division ran so deep that the empire as a whole could have been split into two Islamic nations. Within the context of this political polarization Jerusalem gained in importance architecturally as well as religiously. 'Al-Malik proclaimed to all Jews, Christians and Muslims, that Islam was the true heir of the God of Abraham as well as the superior faith with the Dome of the Rock signifying this assertion.

Third is Peters' suggestion that there was a continued multi-decade building initiative in Jerusalem. Whether it was started by Heraclius and continued by his Muslim successors is less important to my argument. What is significant is the understanding that there does seem to have been a level of

continued urban renewal and growth in Jerusalem that began with Heraclius and increased over the following decades culminating with 'abd al-Malik's building of the Dome of the Rock. If true, al-Malik's architecture activities would have been a continuation of an urban renewal initiative that was not motivated solely by faith.

Each of these three themes is supported by a linear argument, or cause and effect model. Activity increases as time progresses within this timeline. I do not consider that these themes merely intersected, rather that all three of these developments acted synergistically, which is to say that they complimented and worked upon one another to produce the Dome of the Rock. Muhammad's purported request for a cleansing of the site of the former temple is complimented by Heraclius' wanting to appease mistreated Jews when he began to repair a city desecrated by Persians. Next, as his urban renewal program grew it was advantageous for al-Malik to build the Dome of the Rock as a means of architecturally surpassing his political rival in Mecca. Ultimately these three themes coalesced when the Dome of the Rock was built on a site that was accorded importance by the Prophet because of its ties to the people of the book.

With mention of the people of the book it is important to recall Stierlin's previously discussed point that Muslims understood Jerusalem's importance to both Jews and Christians who carried on a long tradition of taking pilgrimages there.²⁷⁹ Realizing this, Muslims felt that they themselves, as fellow people of the book, should hold Jerusalem in high esteem as well. We see here, again, how concerns of the three faiths were accommodated in the the Dome of the Rock.

²⁷⁹ Stierlin, 30.

Oleg Grabar, whose work has been central to this thesis, acknowledges that supporting texts and research dealing with the Dome of the Rock have “acquired so many layers of legend that we no longer know the truth.”²⁸⁰ Grabar argues that for contemporary historians to attempt to separate myths from facts on this topic would “betray their own calling as seekers after truth.”²⁸¹ Perhaps the myths themselves demand attention as they are an important component of nation building. Grabar argues that prior to the arrival of the Muslims, the site of the former Temple, along with Jerusalem as a whole, was a location that had been severely harmed physically and its population, emotionally.²⁸² Grabar suggests after the events of the 6th and early 7th centuries, with the arrival of Muslims, the resident Christians as well as the on again-off again residential status of Jews, brought a sense of hope for the future to Jerusalem during the latter part of the 7th century. The appearance of Muslims willing to rebuild a damaged city while respecting the monotheistic God of Abraham may have been welcomed by many.

A final thought comes from paraphrasing Grabar who suggested that it is important to know both the peculiar character of the events and the city over time while knowing what happened at particular instances to fully appreciate what happened.²⁸³ In other words, events did happen at separate, distinguishable moments, but it was the personalities, strategies and circumstances, or causes and cumulative effects that developed over time that tie them together.

²⁸⁰ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 57.

²⁸¹ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 57.

²⁸² Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 57.

²⁸³ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, 58.

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