

## Chapter XIV

### The Haram al-Sharif: An Essay in Interpretation\*

It is only at a relatively late date that the Muslim holy space in Jerusalem came to be referred to as *al-haram al-sharif* (literally, the Noble Sacred Precinct or Restricted Enclosure, often translated as the Noble Sanctuary and usually simply referred to as the Haram). While the exact early history of this term is unclear, we know that it only became common in Ottoman times, when administrative order was established over all matters pertaining to the organization of the Muslim faith and the supervision of the holy places, for which the Ottomans took financial and architectural responsibility. Before the Ottomans, the space was usually called *al-masjid al-aqsa* (the Farthest Mosque), a term now reserved to the covered congregational space on the Haram, or *masjid bayt al-maqdis* (Mosque of the Holy City) or, even, like Mecca's sanctuary, *al-masjid al-haram*.

The reasons for this apparent proliferation of names are many and they reflect the long and complicated history of Jerusalem and of the Muslim holy places. I shall return to some of them in the course of this essay, but I mention them here to contrast this uncertain nomenclature with the clarity of the space itself. (It is a large trapezoidal platform measuring 281 meters at the south, 310 meters at the north, 461 meters at the east and 491 meters at the west.) These same dimensions were already established well over a thousand years ago, for we know that they were recorded in an inscription seen in the fourth century AH/tenth century AD. The dimensions of the Haram were established artificially, since the platform was cut out of the rock at its northern end and elevated upward from the sharply sloping terrain on most of its western and eastern sides and entirely on its southern one. For all of this latter perimeter, the massive wall of magnificent stone rises as high as 40 meters above ground level and is, without any doubt, the most spectacular man-made [2] structure found in any city. Its impact is all the greater because most of the southern wall of the Haram – and all of the eastern one – coincides with the outer edges of the city itself. Thus the Haram is clearly part of a walled city and occupies about one-fifth of its surface. Yet it is also at the edge of this city, forming a major part of the city's

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boundaries with its surroundings and with the rest of the world. It is forbidding because, to the east and to the south, the terrain slopes so abruptly. But it is also inviting, as it exhibits clearly marked gates both to the south and to the east. However, these gates are closed now, as they have been for many centuries, thereby giving further emphasis to the visual paradoxes of a stupendous space.

In order to explain the Haram, or at least to try to do so, I will follow two lines of thought. The first is a sort of historical topography, a reconstructed summary of the development of the space of the Haram – including its buildings, which altered or enhanced the character of the space and which affected each other. This kind of topography is archaeologically objective in the sense that dates, forms, patronage, or usage of architecture can be known or uncertain, true or false, always reflecting a positive and – at least theoretically – demonstrable reality. The second line of reasoning concerns meanings. What did patrons wish to convey or to express when they constructed or sponsored buildings on the Haram? How were these buildings understood in their time or over the centuries? What pious, political, or ideological associations were made between, on the one hand, the Haram and its buildings and, on the other, the Haram and the complex web of beliefs and emotions of the Muslim faithful or of all those, Muslim or not, who became aware of its existence, of its overwhelming presence in the city of Jerusalem? These questions are more difficult to answer because they entail the interpretation of many different, mostly written, sources and they require an awareness of cultural history, which has a logic all of its own. These are also questions that bring into play the attitudes toward the Haram held by those who are not Muslims and thus may contribute to an understanding of, if not agreement with, views which shape public and political opinion. I shall end this essay with an attempt to define the Haram as a visual experience.

Much that appears in the pages that follow is hypothetical. I have preferred to avoid precise references to primary sources or to secondary literature, for these are easily found. My intention is rather to illustrate two approaches to the reading of a space and to the elaboration of its history.

### Historical Topography

There are traces on the Haram of human activities going back to the Iron Age and even earlier. Such vestiges include the piercing of the Rock, the [3] highest point of the ridge upon which the Haram is located, and some walls constructed with massive stones that remain in one corner of what are now called the Stables of Solomon, found below the surface of the Haram, to the southeast. In a fashion that is still, for the most part, hypothetical, sections of the area occupied by the Haram were connected with the Iron Age ‘City

of David' to the south of the present city of Jerusalem. But these early activities are, at this stage of knowledge, impossible to date or to explain. And, despite the observation that the Rock – and the cavern within it – mark the highest point (753 meters above sea level) of the stony ridge, such activities did not, apparently, affect later developments in significant topographical terms, for nothing in the present structure of the Haram seems to require the existence of constructions from such an early period. As we shall see later, they did, however, affect developments in ideological and religious terms.

The Haram took its present shape during the reign of Herod the Great (37–4 BC), an ambitious and flamboyant ruler who transformed Jerusalem, giving it much of the physical shell that we see today. He erected the main platform of the Haram for the Jewish Temple – although its exact location there is unknown – by cutting into the rock in the northern side (the original rock formation still being visible in several places) and then building up the other sides to establish a surface appropriate for a complex of edifices on several levels. The result is still spectacular and few visitors can resist the sheer power of the Herodian masonry in the whole southern half of the space. In Herodian times, the Haram featured a grandiose colonnaded hall overlooking the lower city and the handsome steps which led up from it to the sanctuary; these have now been cleared of debris and are again visible. The location of many major gates to the Haram was also fixed during the same period – certainly the “Double” and “Triple” gates, which led to the platform from the south through an underground tunnel, and the southernmost ones on the western side, which were reached by means of a monumental stairway, traces of which still remain (the so-called Robinson's arch protruding from the southern part of the western wall). The same is probably true of the eastern gate, the “Golden Gate,” which is blocked, as are the others; in front of it, to the east, fragments of an extensive and monumental approach have been found. Thus, the locations and possibly the basic plans of many of the Haram's gates are certainly Herodian, but their contemporary elevations are not necessarily so.

The Herodian ensemble was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70 and the following centuries left no evident traces of construction. From written sources, we know that a Roman temple was built in the Haram and that it contained statues of divinities and of emperors, but all of this is nearly impossible to reconstruct with even a remote chance of [4] accuracy. These pagan buildings were either destroyed or left to decay in the early fourth century, when the emperor Constantine proclaimed Christianity to be the religion of the empire. Subsequently, the western part of Jerusalem became host to many churches, including major monuments such as the Holy Sepulcher complex and the Nea church, and to a series of ecclesiastical or pilgrim-related establishments. The large space of the Haram was left untouched and unrepaired. Perhaps it was indeed used as a place to deposit

the city's refuse, although this may have been a calumny of later times. It became a relatively rare instance of a space preserved in a destroyed state for iconographic purposes, that is to say, to demonstrate the abandonment of the old Jewish order and its replacement with the brilliantly successful one then being made manifest on the western hill of the city. It is possible that some of the work of clearing debris was accomplished during the brief period which followed the Persian invasion of 614 – and before the triumphal return of the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius, in 631 – but these matters are very controversial and, to my knowledge at least, have not found a clear archaeological demonstration. The masonry of the outer walls of the Haram, where it is visible, shows evidence of considerable damage and repair, but the exact chronology of this has not yet been established.

When Muslim Arabs took control of Jerusalem in 638, they appropriated what should be imagined as a large area of ruins, strewn with many cut stones and columns, and large heaps of capitals and decorative friezes, but without any significant social or religious use. Although usually not reliable as historical documents, many later sources describe how the caliph 'Umar, together with the Christian patriarch, Sophronius, began to clear the area of the Haram of the debris that covered it. Among their other achievements, or so the legend says, they made visible again the Rock with the cavern beneath it. It may be assumed that, with or without the actual example of the caliph himself, the Muslim community began to transform whatever they had inherited into a functioning space. There had to be a fairly plane surface upon which to build and thus were created the two platforms known today, the lower one extending over the entirety of the space, the higher one set asymmetrically more or less in the western half of the Haram. We can only speculate as to why the higher platform was located where it is. There may have been traces of something older that could not easily be removed or it may have been an area with a lot of accumulated remains from antiquity. It is also possible – in fact, even likely – that the Early Islamic patrons and artisans took into consideration, or themselves developed, the many cisterns which are located under this platform, for their chronology and growth have never really been investigated. [5]

Walls were partially rebuilt along the southern and eastern sides, but this particular task was a long and tedious one that went on for many centuries, as we know from several inscriptions from the ninth century. Gates had to be made accessible. We may surmise that the first gates to be repaired were the southern ones, which led to the large Early Islamic settlements that have been excavated there; thus, at present, most scholars agree that the elevation and decoration of the Double Gate are Early Islamic or Umayyad. It is also likely that old stones, carved or not, from older buildings were reused. Something similar must have taken place with regard to the Golden Gate on the eastern wall. This striking monument seems functionally useless from the outside of the Haram and hardly more comprehensible from the inside;

we can only be certain that it was constructed in the Early Islamic period with ornamented stones that were the product of an earlier time. On the western side, the stairway leading to a gate remained in place at the southern end of the wall. What happened farther north and on the actual northern side is presently unknown.

It is unlikely that all of these results were achieved immediately or that there was an early architectural master plan created to guide successive generations of patrons and artisans. It is easier to imagine that the space, inherited accidentally or not (more on that below), was gradually made amenable to the religious and social requirements of the newly arrived Muslim Arab community while, as we shall see shortly, reflecting the ideological purposes of the new empire. This rehabilitation, as it would be called today, depended upon the availability of funds and was a continuous process that took several centuries to be completed, if it ever was. For it is a remarkable peculiarity of the large space of the Haram that, precisely because it was not originally created for a Muslim purpose, it stayed flexible enough to incorporate changes in function and taste.

While this painstaking task of rehabilitation was going on, new buildings were constructed. The first one was a mosque. More accurately, it was a large and simple shed intended to accommodate many believers and may be construed as the covered or shaded part (*zulla*) of the whole Haram considered as a mosque, a *masjid*. It was probably located somewhere in the southern part of the larger and lower platform. Some scholars have interpreted archaeologically retrieved evidence found under the present Aqsa Mosque as remains from this earlier structure, but the general consensus seems to be that no known physical traces remain. It seems reasonable to assume, however, that the first mosque marked out for all time the emplacement of the covered area of the Muslim religious and restricted establishment. The date that this first mosque was built is a matter for speculation. Some sources attribute it to the brilliant [6] first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, Mu'awiyah, but it may have even been constructed by an earlier figure from Islamic history.

The next stage in the physical development of the Haram was a crucial one and it is unquestionably associated with the Umayyad dynasty and, especially, the reigns of 'Abd al-Malik and al-Walid (685–715). Its most forceful example is the Dome of the Rock, set over the stone and cave that mark the highest point of the hill. Its location, its nearly perfect geometry, the unusual height of its dome – like a cylindrical tube surrounded by an octagonal ring – its unique use of colored decoration on its exterior and the absence of significant buildings nearby all permit it to dominate much more than the esplanade of the Haram. Visually, it controls practically the whole city of Jerusalem and a great deal of its surroundings. Its construction also created a focal point on the Haram itself and it served as the axis upon which, at the southern end of the platform, a large and elaborately decorated

covered hall was built, with a wide central nave and a fancy dome, corresponding more or less to the present dome and axial nave of the Aqsa Mosque. There is some disagreement among scholars about the exact sequence of events involved and it is just possible that the mosque did not acquire its final Early Islamic shape until the end of the eighth century, but these are secondary details of chronology. The point is that, under the Umayyads, the Haram was provided with what may be called its “bone structure,” a set of fixed anchors and directions which have remained until this day.

The most problematic, probably Umayyad, monument on the Haram is the Dome of the Chain (*qubbat al-silsila*), located immediately east of the Dome of the Rock. It is a strange, eleven-sided, open building that was placed at the geometric center of the platform, but its early function has not been ascertained. Today, it looks a bit of an orphan, a sort of architectural offspring to the dominant masterpiece next to it.

Work continued over the following four centuries, until the unique times of the Crusades, beginning in 1099. The Aqsa Mosque was redone several times and eventually shrunk in size. Architectural devices serving to highlight the composition of the vast esplanade made their appearance: a colonnade along all but the eastern and part of the southern walls of the Haram, ornate steps to reach the platform of the Dome of the Rock, and short arcades to emphasize them and to accentuate a parapet that surrounded the upper platform. Many new gates appeared on the western and northern sides of the Haram with names which were sometimes pious (Prophet, Khitta) and sometimes simply references to adjoining quarters or landmarks. Several small domes on the platform served to commemorate various episodes of the Prophet’s mystical journey from Mecca (*isra*) and his Ascension into the heavens (*mi’raj*). From [7] contemporary sources, especially Nasir-i Khosro, a Persian traveler of the first half of the eleventh century, we know that several religious establishments existed there for the benefit of various sectarian and/or mystical organizations, especially in the northeastern quarter of the platform. A grandiose gate with mosaic decoration and a fancy inscription was also then erected on the location of the present Gate of the Chain (*bab al-silsila*), a contribution by the Fatimid rulers of Cairo whose beautiful mosaic inscription and decoration may still be seen in the Aqsa Mosque. During the Fatimid period, the walls of the city were shortened and the southern entrances into the Haram were at first neglected and eventually closed altogether, as they have remained ever since.

The Crusaders, whose building activities affected much of the city of Jerusalem, used the Muslim constructions of the Haram for their own military, religious and everyday purposes. They added some fixtures of their own, like the rose window that is still present on the eastern wall of the Aqsa Mosque and a handsome screen in wrought iron that surrounded the Rock (now kept in the Islamic Museum of the Haram). But, on the whole, their physical impact on the space of the Haram is not visible. In part, this is

because, as many sources point out, Saladin had most traces of the Crusader presence removed and the sanctuary restored to its pre-Crusader state when he recaptured the city in 1187. This task involved the recollection of memories more than three generations old, a feat which led to several misunderstandings interesting to the historian, but unimportant to the history of the space.

The Ayyubids and, particularly, the Mamluks (thirteenth to early sixteenth centuries) were the real creators of the Haram as we know it now. They maintained and repaired the old buildings as well as the walls and gates. But they also added two new elements. One was a large number of commemorative cupolas and pious spaces and signifiers of all sorts, such as *mibrabs* to emphasize the direction of the *qibla*, *minbars* for preaching and platforms for gathering. Many of these were in memory of the Prophet, of course, but some also honored Old Testament prophets and Jesus, whose cradle may still be seen in the southeastern corner of the platform. Thus did the Haram become a repository of small structures strewn around its large space in an apparently disorganized way, at least visually. The second new element to be introduced was a monumental architecture dedicated to the provision of social services: libraries, religious and legal schools (*madrasas*), retirement homes and pilgrim hostels (*khanqas*), fountains, cisterns and so on. Many of these establishments belong to an architectural typology of buildings common to Syria, Palestine and Egypt. The entrances to most of them were outside of the precinct of the Haram itself, while some of them were erected completely beyond the sanctuary, along the street leading up to it. When [8] they abutted on the Haram, however, their often heavily decorated walls created to the north and the west an ornate façade to the space occupied by the Haram. One of these monuments, located in the Haram proper, is the fountain of Qaytbay; connected to underground cisterns, it is an exquisite masterpiece of stone architecture. Altogether, a new visual and physical relationship was created between the vast platform, with its pious and commemorative monuments, and the mass of urban establishments with varying social purposes directed toward the city – even beyond the city, for many of the patrons of these buildings lived in Syria or Egypt – yet lining up the sacred space. The novelty of this vision is illustrated by the Gate of the Cotton-Merchants (*bab al-qattanin*) on the western side of the Haram which, by its shape and decoration, is no longer an entrance to the Haram from the city, but from the Haram to the city, through an eminently secular commercial establishment.

After 1512 and until the end of World War II, the Haram was controlled by the Ottoman Empire. Regulated by a strict administrative system affecting all Muslim holy places, the Haram was carefully maintained. Occasionally, it was rehabilitated in a spectacular way, such as when Suleyman the Magnificent, who had restored the walls of Jerusalem, provided the Dome of the Rock with the magnificently colorful tiles that, much and well restored, are still there. Buildings were added to provide offices and to house stores of

all kinds. Some of the *madrasas* began to be used for the education of schoolchildren or for other purposes altogether. With a few exceptions, these activities were not expressed in monumental form or in accordance with the architectural and decorative values of older times. Indeed, they reflect something of the banality of the late Ottoman centuries.

Such is a rapid sketch of the physical growth and development of what was, by then, the *haram al-sharif*. Its most amazing feature is the cumulative value of whatever was built upon it. Little was destroyed, everything could always be modified and additions were made to reflect the long and complex history of the city of Jerusalem. Much is still uncertain about the architectural history of the Haram. Surveys of its masonry and, of course, archaeological investigations are bound to alter conceptions of many of the features I have described, for instance, its imagined appearance at the time of the Muslim conquest. Three moments, however, emerge as essential to any understanding of the Haram as a space: the Herodian period, which set the stage by creating much of the space as well as its most basic elements, such as walls and gates; the first Islamic century (seventh to eighth centuries), which transformed a ruined and disorderly space into a focused one, complete with axes and visual magnets; and the Mamluk period, which provided what might be called the skin, still visible today, of the *haram al-sharif*. But none of these [9] developments would have occurred had it not been for the meanings associated with the space.

### Meanings

Whereas a certain degree of analytic objectivity is possible with respect to the evolution of the Haram's space, controversies abound when we turn to meanings. Indeed, a variety of contradictory views in written sources indicate that these were as numerous in the past as they are in the present. In the paragraphs that follow, I will try to sort out these meanings without necessarily choosing between them, for it seems to me that the main point is that most of them reflect genuine emotions and perceptions, as well as powerful historical events or mythological memories. These feelings and memories may contradict one another when expressed together, but at different moments or stages in any individual's life, most of them can have a significant impact. The fascination of the Haram lies precisely in the variety of associations that it may evoke. Below, I have divided – somewhat arbitrarily, to be sure – these associations into four categories of thought or behavior, although the boundaries between them are often blurred in practice. These categories – religious beliefs and practices, history and myth, expectations, and power and ideology – are not discussed in any chronological order, since we are often ignorant as to how and when any one of them developed. Some are medieval Muslim creations; yet others are Muslim transformations of older

and broader sentiments attached to other religions, primarily Judaism and Christianity.

#### RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

It is difficult, I believe, to argue that the Qur'an contains direct and immediate references to a holy place in Jerusalem or, in fact, to Jerusalem altogether. It is true, of course, that Jerusalem was the first *qibla*, or direction for prayer, and that the Qur'an contains references to the *mihirabs* of David (38:24 ff.) and of Zakariya (3:37). Both had to have been in Jerusalem and the early Muslims searched for them and eventually found them in various places – or, at least, identified where they once were. Quite early, the association was made between the Muslim space in Jerusalem and the *masjid al-aqsa*, the “farthest mosque” of Qur'an 17:1, to which the Prophet was transported during his mystical Night Journey. At some point, maybe as early as in the eighth century, the Night Journey was conflated with the Ascension. Thus began Islam's strongest and most powerful emotional, intellectual and theological association with the Haram and it culminated in the grandiose eleventh-century Fatimid inscription of the full quotation of the appropriate Qur'anic verse on the triumphal arch of the Aqsa Mosque. As is well known, this [10] entire event has been brilliantly illustrated in Persian paintings since the late thirteenth century.

Another Muslim practice connected with the Haram was the pilgrimage. In the ninth century, anti-Umayyad writers claimed that 'Abd al-Malik had wanted to replace Mecca with Jerusalem and the Ka'ba with the Dome of the Rock. This was certainly a piece of political disinformation, but visits to Jerusalem were nonetheless a common part of the pilgrim's journey and there were always local pilgrimages to the Haram, perhaps continuations of very ancient Palestinian practices.

Some religious authorities, especially the Hanbalites, rejected much in the esoteric traditions associated with the mystical voyage of the Prophet. They preferred to see the Haram quite simply as the *masjid* of Jerusalem, the place where the Muslim community gathered to pray and to deal with all matters pertinent to the proper behavior of Muslims. In this sense, the Muslim *madrasas* and other establishments of social import around the Haram are simply the natural late medieval expression of Sunni piety. Their presence around the Haram suggests that the latter acted as a sort of magnet of holiness. The reason for this can be found in Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima*. The great historian and philosopher argues that Jerusalem is indeed one of the three “*masajid* (mosques)” in the sense of “sanctuaries on earth which are privileged by God.” According to Ibn Khaldun, it follows Mecca, but precedes Medina, because it has been a sanctuary since “Sabeian (that is, pre-Hebraic)” times and was transformed into the Jewish Temple by Solomon. In other words, Ibn Khaldun argues that, whatever specific pious beliefs Muslims

brought to the Haram, the latter's holiness had already been established before the appearance of Islam or even of Judaism. The permanence of sacred places regardless of religion is a well-known phenomenon especially notable in Western Asia, where religious allegiances changed frequently throughout the Late Antique period.

Hence the Haram was simultaneously endowed with unique religious associations of its own (such as pilgrimage and the Prophet's Journey), interpreted as a routine urban congregational mosque (reflecting changes in Muslim piety) and simply the vehicle of long-established modes of behavior (such as coming to Jerusalem as a pilgrim).

#### HISTORY AND MYTH

Mujir al-Din's late-fifteenth-century description of Jerusalem, known as *Al-Uns al-jalil fi tarikh al-Quds wa al-Khalil*, is the best-preserved compendium of information about the entire area of Jerusalem and Hebron. It follows many other sources in identifying the following pre-Islamic, mostly biblical, figures with the Haram: David, Khidr, Solomon, Moses, Jesus, Joseph, Jacob, Zakariya, Isaac and Abraham. Although rejected by [11] classical Islamic theology and scholarship, a striking early tradition goes as far as to say that it was from the Rock in Jerusalem that God left the earth after having created it.

Each of these associations has a place on the platform or, as in the case of Jesus, on the stairway going down to what are known as the Stables of Solomon. Each one also has its own historical development. Many derived from the operation of popular Islamic devotional practices, about which little is known, but which must have been strongly influenced by local non-Muslim, Jewish and Christian conventions. Furthermore, it is important to recall that Jews and Christians developed their own associations with the Haram. It was upon Mount Moriah that – through a series of mistaken references – Abraham was believed to have prepared the sacrifice of his son, Isaac. For Jews, the Haram was, and still is, the site of the Temple built by Solomon and rebuilt by Herod the Great, and a complicated set of beliefs and attitudes are attached to the site. Its western wall has become a major focus of Jewish religious life. Matters are less clear for the Christians. There were, of course, episodes in the life of Jesus that were associated with the Temple. The Crusaders identified the Dome of the Rock as the Temple of the Lord and the Aqsa Mosque as Solomon's palace. The Golden Gate, on the eastern side, was seen as the place where Joachim and Anna, the parents of the Virgin Mary, had met; through it, Heraclius reentered the city in 631 bearing the fragments of the True Cross that the Persians had earlier taken away. The martyrdom of St Stephen was supposed to have taken place on the southeastern corner of the Haram. As late as the end of the nineteenth century, one western architectural historian even tried to argue that the

Dome of the Rock was, in fact, the Holy Sepulcher. In his wonderful Victorian way, he thought that the actual Holy Sepulcher was too cluttered and disorganized to commemorate the Passion of Christ, whereas the Dome of the Rock was more befitting because it was a beautiful monument dominating everything around it.

#### EXPECTATIONS

A very important dimension of the Haram lies in its eschatological meaning. At the end of time, according to some Muslim traditions, the Ka'ba will come from Mecca and settle near the Dome of the Rock. It is in and near the Haram that the Last Judgment will take place, inasmuch as the deep valley to the east of the Haram contains the entrance to the place of damnation, while the Mount of Olives leads to paradise. The chain of the *qubbat al-silsila* was understood as a means to separate the just from the wicked, while the two sides of the Golden Gate were known as *bab al-tawba* and *bab al-rahma* (the Gate of Repentance and the Gate of Mercy). Among the earliest – probably already Umayyad – inscriptions in the Dome [12] of the Rock, is one appearing on a bronze plaque that was originally located on its eastern gate; it calls for the Prophet's intercession on behalf of his *umma*, the collectivity of all Muslims, at the time of divine judgment.

The very location of the Haram between a living urban setting and the often very ancient cemeteries to the east of the city transformed it into a sort of mediating space between life and death or between transitory and eternal life. This dimension may be less significant to contemporary piety, but it was an important aspect of traditional mentalities and explains, among other things, why holy men, ascetics, or later members of Sufi mystical organizations spent time in the Haram. Occasionally, as in Fatimid times, there were special areas reserved for them. The Haram did not simply mediate between two worlds in the space of Jerusalem, but also in the spiritual growth of men of faith.

#### POWER AND IDEOLOGY

The last remaining dimension concerns power and ideology. The very location of the Haram, a large artificial platform at the edge of a walled city overlooking a deep valley, underlines its dominating function. This function is further emphasized by the height and colors of the Dome of the Rock, which may easily be seen from all sides, with the exception of the north. Thus the presence of Islam as a political force, as well as a system of beliefs, was made visible and prominent in what was, in the seventh century, a Christian city. The inscriptions inside the Dome of the Rock stress that the successful domination of the new faith will be the final stage of divine revelation. Even the peculiar occurrence of the 'Abbasid caliph, al-Ma'mun, substituting his

name for that of the Umayyad, 'Abd al-Malik, without changing the date of the building's construction, is a clear sign of an ideological takeover with political, rather than pious, implications.

This ideological, as well as visual, meaning is not peculiar to the Haram created by 'Abd al-Malik. Already, the Romans had supposedly erected a statue of the emperor there, probably next to a pagan temple. Then, in an event which is difficult to reconstruct in full because of confusion in the sources, it appears that Mu'awiyah, the very remarkable founder of the Umayyad dynasty, was consecrated as ruler of the Muslim world in Jerusalem, probably in the Haram, where he would have received a crown. A similar ceremony may have been held for his son, Yazid. Much later, Fatimid inscriptions of the eleventh century – preserved in the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque or removed from the western gate – also emphasized the power of ruling dynasties. And one may well argue that the Mamluks and the Ottomans continued to exhibit a presence and a domination through the visibility of their work on the Haram. [13] Such is one of the meanings of the construction of Qa'itbay's fountain or of the laying of beautiful tiles on the Dome of the Rock. Quite simply, the manner in which power was expressed changed over the centuries.

My argument has been that the *haram al-sharif* may be seen in two ways simultaneously. One is through a history of stones and other architectural features, which explain the evolution of the space that we know today. The other is through a set of meanings ranging quite widely in character and operating at varying rates of intensity due to changes in circumstance and individual choice. In following both of these lines of thought here, I have only sketched a few highlights and much remains unsaid and, as yet, unknown. Thus, one could ponder the history of trees and other forms of vegetation in the Haram, the vacillations of local Palestinian or pan-Islamic pilgrimages to it, or the sociology of the piety expressed within it, more particularly, the piety of women that is so obvious today. There are many more narratives that could be woven around the Haram and the task of finding congruencies among various of these in some significant moment of time or of composing a well-integrated description of a grand religious space is still awaiting its historian and, probably, its poet. The fact that all of these narratives are even possible is primarily the result of the rich texture of piety and of memories entwined around every stone of the sanctuary and nurtured, in Jerusalem itself and all over the world, by generations of Jews, Christians and, especially, Muslims. But these narratives were also affected by the aesthetic dimension of the Haram, particularly the Dome of the Rock, which occupies its highest point. Even the most jaded tourist least concerned with matters of faith cannot escape the visual and sensual magnetism of the space. It is apparent in the masonry of the Herodian walls or in the original steps leading to the Haram from the south; it is fully present in the Gate of

the Cotton-Merchants or in the fountain of Qaytbay; and it may be found, not only in the obvious power of the Dome of the Rock, but in the Ottoman tiles that adorn it. It is perhaps ironic that the very beauty of the Haram and of the masterpieces it harbors is what has preserved it from so many centuries of conflicts. Hopefully, it will sustain this beauty for centuries to come to satisfy the constantly changing needs of the faithful and the visual excitement and aesthetic pleasure of all mankind.

