UMAYYAD JERUSALEM AND THE PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL SPACES

by

Michael W. Zhang

B.A., McGill University, 2014

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Art History)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

August 2016

Abstract

Following the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem in the early 7th century, the new rulers of the city almost immediately began a series of architectural, administrative, and urban development projects. I will be focusing specifically on several projects undertaken at a slightly later date, during the Umayyad dynasty. So far, there have been extensive discussions locating the ways in which the Umayyads made political and religious claims to Jerusalem. I will expand on this scholarship by integrating into the discussion a third theme: the social facet. By examining how, during the Umayyad period, new public spaces were produced and used in Jerusalem, how construction projects attracted and retained skilled workers in the city, and how the government and the community encouraged and demonstrated an amenability towards a dynamic economy, we will broaden our understanding of city building in both medieval and current contexts. More specifically, this examination will reveal how the Umayyads were able to make a claim to the city using, in part, a social method. This method, at the same time, helped them establish Jerusalem as a destination point for travelers of diverse backgrounds.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Michael W. Zhang.

Table of Contents

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all my family, friends, colleagues, professors, and mentors who have given me encouragement, support, and constructive criticism along the way.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the mid-7th century, a new power emerged on the world stage. Over the course of the next century, the Umayyad dynasty spread from the Caucasus to the Iberian Peninsula, and contributed significantly to the Islamization of not only large geographic areas, but also transformed specific, key cities within the caliphate. The Umayyads achieved this mainly through the execution of a series of architectural and urban development projects. In the process, such developments appointed several towns in the caliphate as cultural, religious, and political centers.

My interest, in particular, is in the Umayyads' revitalization of Jerusalem and the city's transformation into a social hub. I argue that the construction of several significant monuments and structures on the Haram al-Sharif was vital to the establishment of a dynamic medieval city. Architecture, urban planning, and the enactment of administrative policies all contributed to the emergence of Jerusalem as an important destination point that attracted all sorts of travelers, skilled workers, migrants, and important guests. In certain cases, by focusing on how the city of Damascus, as the capital of the caliphate, functioned as a global city, I will provide support and parallels in order to bridge gaps or address uncertainties within the early social history of Umayyad Jerusalem.

Studying the changes in the dynamics of Jerusalem after it became an Umayyad city can potentially provide new insights into city building in both historic and contemporary contexts, as the Umayyad conquest of Jerusalem resulted in the acquisition of a city that offered neither a

military nor strategic advantage to the caliphate.[1] Within decades, however, Jerusalem became a significant urban center. This development was motivated, in part, by the spiritual essence contained within Jerusalem. This longstanding religious significance was crucial as Jerusalem, acting as both a physical place and a spiritual locale, was integral to the histories and sanctity of each of the three Abrahamic faiths. Each of these three faiths, throughout history, made various claims to Jerusalem. How did the Umayyad caliphate, as a fledgling representative of both a political and religious entity, assert its claim to the city? I will explore the ways in which the Umayyads made political, religious, and social claims to Jerusalem, and how these claims contributed to the city's dynamic growth over this period.

---

[1] Abdul Aziz Duri, "Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period: 7th-11th Centuries AD" in *Jerusalem in History,* ed. K. J. Asali (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2000), 106.

Chapter 2: Body of Thesis

The Muslims, led by the caliph Umar, began construction in Jerusalem soon after their conquest of the city sometime between 636-638 CE.[2] Following the establishment of the Umayyad dynasty in 661 CE, it seems that there was an unprecedented level of urban development in Jerusalem, centered mostly on the Haram al-Sharif. The collaborative efforts of the Umayyad caliphs culminated in a large urban development project that resulted in the planning and execution of new religious and political structures, the establishment of new rituals, and the construction of new roads in and out of the city. Furthermore, there have been excavations revealing administrative and residential buildings near the Haram al-Sharif that date back to this time period.

Most scholarship to date has focused on the political aspects of the space on and around the Haram al-Sharif, in which the ambitions of caliphs are traced and located. Specific buildings on the Haram, such as the Dome of the Rock, have also been analyzed in a similar way. Likewise, most analyses of the space and structures on and around the Haram al-Sharif are also grounded in a religious perspective, as the site holds a special sanctity in all three Abrahamic religions. While there are certainly undeniable religious and political overtones at play here, there is a third facet that has not received as much attention, but should be as equally significant to consider – the social aspect. I will focus, then, primarily on how architecture contributed to the

---

[2] Ibid. Although there are discrepancies between different sources, the general consensus is that Umar took the city sometime between 636-638 CE.

production of new social spaces within early Islamic Jerusalem. The result is the fabrication of Jerusalem into a social center within the Umayyad caliphate.

It is important to consider the socio-political facet within analyses of architectural history. This is because architecture re-configures large spaces within communities, where people en masse could walk through buildings and interact with their façades and interiors. In other words, the function and contemplation of architecture are applied on a communal scale. On this, Henri Lefebvre says:

> "What does the city create? Nothing. It centralizes creation. And yet it creates everything. Nothing exists without exchange, without union, without proximity, that is, without relationships. The city creates a situation, the urban situation, where *different* things occur one after another and do not exist separately but according to their differences. The urban, which is indifferent to each difference it contains, often seems to be as indifferent as nature, but with a cruelty all its own. However, the urban is not indifferent to all differences, precisely because it unites them. In this sense, the city constructs, identifies, and delivers the essence of social relationships: the reciprocal existence and manifestation of differences arising from or resulting in conflicts."[3]

In his discussion of late 1960s France, Lefebvre suggests that the right to the city is not based on territorial claims, but is rather grounded in a social claim. Liette Gilbert and Mustafa Dikeç state that Lefebvre's "right to the city represents the right to participate in society through everyday practices." These rights are not "granted from above, but rather rights to be defined and

---

[3] Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 117-118.

redefined through political action and social relations."[4] Rob Shields adds that "a right to the city enfranchises a new citizen, who is not simply a user of the city but a participant in its creation and interpretation. The *citadin* has stronger ties to local community than to a national political community."[5] The examination of participation within a city, as a result, cannot effectively be conducted solely from a top-down approach. It must include an examination of ordinary people who live, participate, and interact with others within localized spaces. Such an analysis also requires looking into the interactions between locals and visitors, and the usage of space as a mediator between such encounters.

Drawing from this concept of the quotidian claim to the city, my approach will focus on understanding how architectural elements promoted an engagement between people and spaces within Umayyad Jerusalem. In *The Urban Revolution*, Henri Lefebvre outlines the three levels of society: the global, the urban, and the private. Power is situated within the global, which is the most dominant level. The "global level projects itself into part of the built domain: buildings, monuments, large-scale urban projects, new towns. It also projects itself into the unbuilt domain: roads and highways, the general organization of traffic and transport, the urban fabric and neutral spaces, 'nature preserves,' sites." Beneath, the urban layer hosts structures and spaces that reside between the institutional and the private, such as "streets, squares, avenues, public buildings such as city halls, parish churches, schools, and so on." Lastly, the private is the level of the "lived experience."[6]

---

[4] Liette Gilbert and Mustafa Dikeç, "Right to the City: Politics of Citizenship," in *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, eds. Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom, and Christian Schmid (New York: Routledge, 2008), 259.
[5] Rob Shields, "Lefebvre and the Right to the Open City?" *Space and Culture* 16, no. 3 (August 2013): 346.
[6] Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 78-81.

For Lefebvre, one of the greatest remaining problems is "the extraordinary passivity of the people most directly involved, those who are affected by projects, influenced by strategies."[7] While Lefebvre concentrates on the conflicts between the three levels, my impression, however, is that there was a relative harmony between the global spaces and the lived experiences in the case of early Islamic Jerusalem. The urban changes and renovations undertaken by the Umayyad caliphs and officials seemed to have improved the private experience in many aspects. In any case, the focus here will remain on reclaiming and revealing the experiences of the users within Umayyad Jerusalem. Additionally, I will explore how users may have responded to and were affected by the city's urbanization and Islamization, and examine the compromises made between caliphs and their grand visions, and the user and quotidian practicality. The architectural projects launched by the Umayyads were successful in establishing a cohesive Islamic language but, at the same time, encouraged social engagement for people of diverse backgrounds living in and visiting Jerusalem. Concurrently, I will be looking at the ways in which Umayyad architecture addressed or fulfilled larger socio-political requirements necessary to transform Jerusalem into a dynamic, political city.

This social approach will touch on the themes of the public and the community – how did the Umayyads address local and communal needs through architectural development and public planning? How did people respond to these changes and use these new spaces? In my discussion of early Islamic Jerusalem, I will focus on three aspects: 1) the production of social spaces; 2) the attraction of skilled workers and urban professionals; and 3) the eagerness of the local

---

[7] Ibid, 181.

government to support economic dynamism.[8] These elements contributed to the Islamization of spaces within Jerusalem, but also fostered intercultural and interfaith interactions throughout the city.

First, the production of social spaces is crucial for the formation of a vibrant, dynamic cityscape. A group of architectural theorists and urbanists have noted that "in well-designed and well-managed public spaces, the armor of daily life can be partially removed, allowing us to see others as whole people… There may be a spontaneous exchange of smiles and, perhaps, a conversation… Such a space encourages cross-group socialization and tolerance."[9] These spaces, in other words, were places where people of diverse backgrounds could meet and encounter others, where people could carry out quotidian tasks and participate in communal events, and where people could positively influence the cultural dynamics of a city. The spaces on and

---

[8] Chris Ling, Jim Hamilton and Kathy Thomas, "What Makes a City Liveable?" *Community Research Connections*, published December 19, 2006, http://crcresearch.org/case-studies/case-studies-sustainable-infrastructure/land-use-planning/what-makes-a-city-liveable.
This sustainability study conducted in 2006 emphasizes that the sustainability of a community is critically bound to its liveability. At the most foundational level, a community needs to be liveable for people to stay. Three similar themes were explored in this study in relation to their conductivity for a liveable community. These themes are:
1. social space;
2. talent attraction and retention as well as economic dynamism; and,
3. the overall amenability of local governments to the development of a progressive economy.

The writers of the case study mention that a multi-university group were in the process of investigating these themes in further detail. My understanding is that the results of these investigations were published in the Special Section of *Environments Journal* 35, no. 1 (August 2007).

While this particular study, grounded in analyses of the city of Vancouver, British Columbia, and the town of Okotoks, Alberta, is obviously produced under a much different context than the conditions of Umayyad Jerusalem, this set of criteria could be useful as tool to enhance our general understanding of how cities become liveable and sustainable. More specifically, it will contribute to an improved understanding of how architectural developments undertaken in Jerusalem during the early Islamic period contributed to the city's dynamic transformation. If development on the Haram al-Sharif was motivated by an Umayyad desire to re-build Jerusalem as a vibrant and active community, the three themes mentioned above could provide an insight into the foundations of medieval city building as fulfilled by Umayyad city planners, whose ultimate objective was to establish Jerusalem as a vitalized city.
[9] Stephen Carr, Mark Francis, Leanne G. Rivlin, and Andrew M. Stone, *Public Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 344-345.

around the Haram al-Sharif, then, became sites where people could gather; these spaces became sites of public and social activities and encounters.

The notion that public spaces have the ability to foster tolerability and diversity is corroborated by written records, as several primary sources demonstrate that developments on the Haram al-Sharif played a major part in promoting Jerusalem's new role as a destination point for people from various faiths and regions. Reports from travelers and pilgrims indicate that the city played host to various annual festivals. The bishop Arculf, who visited Jerusalem in the late 7th century, noted that people from various regions and nationalities gathered in the city on September 12th for a large annual fair that lasted several days. During this event, there were a number of exchanges and trades conducted.[10]

These records from the period also provide insight into how architecture played a role in facilitating social activities in Jerusalem. In his account, Arculf describes a mosque constructed on the Haram al-Sharif as a crude oblong structure that was capable of hosting approximately 3,000 people.[11] Similarly, there are mentions of a teaching hospital from Nasir-i Khusrau's mid-11th century travel narrative. In addition, Khusrau mentions that the markets in the city were abundant, with a different market for each craft, and that there were a large number of craftsmen in Jerusalem.[12] Moreover, there were areas in the city that were dedicated to hosting foreign visitors. Khusrau's account mentions two Sufi hostels in the city.[13] Bernard the Wise, who set

---

[10] Adomnán, "The Holy Places," in *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*, trans. John Wilkinson (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 2002), 170.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Duri, "Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period," 118-119. Duri obtained this information from Nasir-i Khusrau' *Rihla.*
[13] Ibid, 119.

out for Jerusalem sometime before 867, stayed at a hospice that Charlemagne had built to provide accommodations for Latin pilgrims in Jerusalem. This structure was located next to a church dedicated to St. Mary. This church complex included twelve mansions and a library, a garden, vineyards, and a market forum.[14] These accounts demonstrate that Jerusalem was receptive to social congregations even in the earlier Islamic period, and that while different groups sometimes catered to their own people, the city generally welcomed visitors from various origins and faiths. Further, these records show that the city was progressing both culturally and economically, and that there was ample space in Jerusalem to host the travelers and crowds who came to visit.

Amikam Elad states that these developments reveal an intention by the Umayyads to "develop Jerusalem into both a political and religious center which, if not intended to surpass Mecca, would at least be its equal."[15] Whether or not this is true is a contentious issue. An 11th century account from Tartushi criticized a belief among pilgrims that by convening and praying at the al-Aqsa Mosque on the Day of Arafah every four years, it could act as substitute for undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca.[16] In his *Rihla*, Khusrau mentions that as many as 20,000 pilgrims came to Jerusalem, rather than Mecca, to make sacrifices on the Haram al-Sharif for Eid al-Adha.[17] Furthermore, it is well documented that following his conquest of Jerusalem, Umar

---

[14] Bernard the Monk, "A Journey to the Holy Places and Babylon," in *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*, trans. John Wilkinson (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 2002), 265-266.
[15] Amikam Elad, "Pilgrims and Pilgrimage to Jerusalem during the Early Muslim Period," in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Lee I. Levine, (New York: Continuum, 1999), 301.
[16] Duri, "Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period," 116. Duri is citing from Tartushi's *Kitab al-Hawadith wa-'l-Bida.*
[17] Ibid.

cleared the site of the Haram al-Sharif and built a mosque there; Abdul Aziz Duri interprets this act as a deliberate designation of the site by the caliph to be a space of prayer.[18]

Al-Ramli's 10th century *Fada'il* provides us with another point of insight. An olive oil merchant and a practicing scholar, al-Ramli incorporates testimonies from 37 people living in Jerusalem in his text. His *Fada'il* documents various perceptions of Jerusalem during the 10th century. Some of the 37 informants were originally from Syria and other parts of Palestine, but the four who were most commonly quoted were local to Jerusalem. While the original *Fada-il* is lost, much of al-Ramli's work has been preserved through the 11th century works of Abu al-Ma'ali and al-Wasiti.[19]

Al-Ramli begins his text with the hadith that establishes the three sole destination points of pilgrimage: the mosque in Mecca, the mosque in Medina, and the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. However, al-Ramli follows up by tracing the sanctity of Jerusalem back to the original Temple.[20] It is made clear that "no one visits the Temple but receives the blessing of Solomon's prayer."[21] Suleiman Ali Mourad proposes that the passage promotes "a certain validity on Solomon's plea for blessing that is associated with the site, irrespective of whether or not the Temple stands there, as if the Temple were synonymous with the Temple Mount area. Hence… [the] prayer of Solomon… is not time-restricted, and therefore, the 'current' visitor to the Dome of the Rock receives the blessing of Solomon's prayer."[22] Nasser Rabbat has traced a

---

[18] Ibid, 108.
[19] Suleiman Ali Mourad, "The Symbolism of Jerusalem in Early Islam," in *Jerusalem: Idea and Reality*, eds. Tamar Mayer and Suleiman Ali Mourad (New York: Routledge, 2008), 88-89.
[20] Ibid, 91. Mourad refers here to both al-Wasiti and Abu al-Ma'ali's works.
[21] Ibid, 92. Mourad quotes this passage from Abu al-Ma'ali's *Fada'il*.
[22] Ibid.

lineage from Muhammad back to Solomon – as Solomon was a messenger supported by God, so too was Muhammad. In making this connection, the validity of the Islamic claim to Jerusalem becomes strengthened, establishing new Islamic traditions as a continuation of older Biblical narratives.[23]

Extending the connection between Islam and the spiritual significance of the Haram al-Sharif, a passage from al-Ramli indicates that ʿAbd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock "to shelter the Rock of Jerusalem so that the Muslims would not be exposed to the heat or cold [when they visit it] [sic]."[24] Al-Ramli explains that the Rock holds special sanctity as it is the site of God's earthly throne. Al-Ramli's encouragement to visit the site, however, seem to contradict the concerns raised by several early Muslim scholars that these practices were continuations of Jewish traditions, and therefore would not be sanctioned by Muhammad.[25]

Although it is clear that Jerusalem offered spiritual access and palpability, it was unlikely that the city could surpass the spiritual importance of Mecca, especially since visits to Mecca are encouraged by the Quran. There was a claim circulated around the 9th century by al-Ya'qubi that ʿAbd al-Malik sought to establish the Dome of the Rock as the new central site of pilgrimage. A similar theory was proposed by Eutychius in the 10th century. In bolstering the sanctity of Jerusalem, it was claimed that ʿAbd al-Malik was seeking to undermine his rival caliph Ibn al-Zubayr's power by reducing the spiritual potency of Mecca.[26] Taymiyyah, a theologian writing

---

[23] Nasser Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Muqarnas* 6, no. 1 (1988): 14.
[24] Mourad, "The Symbolism of Jerusalem in Early Islam," 94-95. Mourad quotes this passage from both al-Wasiti and Abu al-Maʿali.
[25] Ibid, 93-94.
[26] Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock," 16.

during the 13th and 14th centuries, provides a similar narrative. According to Taymiyyah, ʿAbd al-Malik established regular pilgrimage to Jerusalem to undermine the authority of his rival. In light of this, Taymiyyah warns his readers that only ordinary prayer could be performed in Jerusalem, and even then only at the al-Aqsa Mosque. Furthermore, Taymiyyah noted that the Dome of the Rock itself possesses no special sanctity, and that the tawaf must be reserved exclusively for the Kaʿaba in Mecca.[27]

Oleg Grabar would agree that Jerusalem could not match the sanctity of Mecca. However, Grabar rejected the notion that ʿAbd al-Malik desired to supplant Mecca with Jerusalem. Grabar provides three reasons for the unlikeliness of this narrative. Firstly, such an action by the caliph, one that would transform Islam's sacred geography, would be "politically unsound"; secondly, the Dome of the Rock does not appear compatible with such an idea, especially when considering that the Umayyads actively worked to restore the Kaʿaba; and lastly, the Dome of the Rock would have been too small to host the tawaf.[28] Furthermore, Nasser Rabbat points out that there is a general lack of written accounts that date from the Umayyad period, and that the Abbasids "sponsored a school of history writing that was openly anti-Umayyad."[29] As a result, these records, dating from the Abbasid dynasty, must be taken with a degree with caution.

While the extent of religious motivations behind the Umayyad development of Jerusalem is a topic of dispute, what is known with more certainty is that Jerusalem saw major citywide

---

[27] Charles D. Matthews, "A Muslim Iconoclast (Ibn Taymiyyeh) on the 'Merits' of Jerusalem and Palestine," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56, no. 1 (March 1936): 5.
[28] Oleg Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Ars Orientalis*, no. 3 (1959): 35-36.
[29] Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock," 13.

construction during this time. The degree and pace of the developments in Jerusalem – and also

Damascus – increased as funding and tax revenues became centralized within the caliphate.

Previously, under Byzantine rule, Syria was "a net exporter of wealth," where resources from the

region were exported in favor of Constantinople.[30] In the early Islamic period, the government

was still too decentralized to have a designated financial center. Often, provinces spent collected

revenue internally within the region rather than sending it to Medina, the capital, for

consolidation and distribution. Even when Muawiyah established Syria as the capital of the

Umayyad caliphate, the administration was not yet capable of centralizing revenue. It was under

the leadership of caliphs 'Abd al-Malik and Hisham that wealth began to flow and accumulate in

a specific destination within the empire, into the capital. This wealth was then used to fund new

architectural projects in both Jerusalem and Damascus, including the Great Mosque of

Damascus, as well as the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock on the Haram al-Sharif.[31]

Chronologically, these major monuments were built within a few short decades at the crossroads

of the 7th and 8th centuries, marking a moment during which grandiose visions were being

translated into reality.

 The al-Aqsa Mosque was a key structure on the Haram al-Sharif, and was possibly the

earliest attempt for the Muslims to claim the site through architectural means. As mentioned

previously, Arculf recounts a crude mosque standing on the Haram in the late 7th century.

However, the exact origin of the al-Aqsa Mosque is under much debate. It is possible that the

mosque was first built by Umar following his conquest of Jerusalem, as the narrative

---

[30] Hugh Kennedy, "Islam," in *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, eds. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 223.
[31] Ibid.

traditionally goes. But a mid-10th century account from al-Mutahhar b. Tahir al-Maqdisi states

that the al-Aqsa Mosque was actually built by Muawiyah.[32] Other accounts from the 11th century

onwards attribute both the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock to 'Abd al-Malik. These

sources include al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja. Additionally, a similar claim is found within a 14th

century book, *Muthir al-Gharam*. Al-Suyuti also makes this statement in a late 15th century

text.[33] Furthermore, Ignaz Goldziher claimed that 'Abd al-Malik expanded the area of the

Mosque to include the Rock.[34] Amikam Elad suggests that Goldziher may be basing this on

accounts from Sa'id b. al-Bitriq, al-Maqrizi, and ibn Khaldun, all of whom made similar

statements.[35] To make matters even more uncertain, it is possible that it was al-Walid, the son of

'Abd al-Malik, who built the al-Aqsa Mosque. The Aphrodito Papyri, dated to 709-714 CE, refer

to workers and craftsmen working on the Mosque of Jerusalem. It is possible that this is a

reference to the al-Aqsa Mosque.[36] However, S.D. Goitein concludes it is more likely that the al-

Aqsa Mosque was erected at beginning of Umayyad period and that al-Walid contributed only

renovations to the structure.[37] Elad concurs with this, and, drawing from an account from al-

Yaqubi, goes on to suggest that al-Walid possibly performed repairs on the structure following a

series of earthquakes in 713-714 CE.[38]

---

[32] Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage (*Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 24.
[33] Ibid, 36.
[34] Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies Vol. 2* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 45, n. 5.
[35] Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, 24-25.
[36] Ibid, 26.
[37] Shlomo D. Goitein, "Jerusalem in the Arab Period (638-1099)," in *The Jerusalem Cathedra: Studies in the History, Archaeology, Geography and Ethnography of the Land of Israel, Vol. 2*, ed. Lee I. Levine (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute, 1982), 178.
[38] Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, 39. Elad is referring here to al-Yaqubi's *Ta'rikh*.

If the al-Aqsa Mosque was an attempt to claim the Haram al-Sharif through architecture, then other structures soon provided reinforcement in this quest. The Dome of the Rock might not have only been central to the Haram al-Sharif as a result of its visual brilliance, but its architectural elements, infused with its social, political, and religious functions, rendered it one of the most significant Umayyad building in Jerusalem. As the minority rulers of Jerusalem, the Umayyads had to establish a framework that could unite members of their faith. Under the reign of Muawiyah, Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair suggest that Jerusalem had still "retained its Christian character, and when [Muawiyah], governor of Syria and founder of the Umayyad dynasty, received homage as caliph there in July 660 he reportedly prayed at Golgotha, Gethsemane and the Tomb of Mary, in acknowledgment of the Christian antecedents of Islam."[39]

By the time of 'Abd al-Malik's reign, however, there was a stronger degree of Islamization within Jerusalem and elsewhere in the caliphate. This transformation was accomplished through a combination of architectural developments and administrative policies. In particular, the construction of the Dome of the Rock in 691 CE boldly proclaimed the presence of a new authority. The most aesthetically captivating building in a dense group of structures on the Haram al-Sharif, the Dome of the Rock's "nearly total sheathing of the building with colorful decoration, in this instance marble and mosaics" is considered quite unusual.[40] In fact, exterior decoration of such an extent was, at the time, an entirely original innovation within Mediterranean architecture. In previous cases where exterior ornamentation was present, there

---

[39] Jonathan M. Bloom, and Sheila S. Blair, "Jerusalem," in *The Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art and Architecture Vol. II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 347.
[40] Oleg Grabar, "The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," in *Jerusalem* (Burlington, Ashgate Publishing, 2005): 154.

were specific messages being conveyed through the façade.[41] In the specific example of the

Dome of the Rock, however, anointing the building with such bold colors accomplishes

something grander. It was an effective method in drawing the eye to the dome along the

Jerusalem skyline, and visually centralizes the city around this new building that possessed a

distinctive and novel architectural language. It proclaimed an innovative Islamic style of

architecture within a city that was quickly becoming transformed by the presence of a relatively

new political power and faith. Architecture became a method to establish a cohesive language for

the Islamic faithful.

The monument, for Lefebvre, is generally a paradoxical structure. It is, on one hand, a

site of oppression, as the monument is a structure "raised to glorify conquerors and the

powerful."[42] Yet at the same time the monument asserts control, it unites people by offering "a

sense of transcendence, a sense of being *elsewhere*" within an urban center.[43] It becomes not

only a political place that projects a conceptual view of the world, but also a meeting place that

enhances the social element of the city.[44] The Dome of the Rock may have very well provided

such mediation between the political and the quotidian layers of urban life.

One way that the Dome of the Rock provided such mediation was through its formal

aspects. At the same time that its architectural form was a stylistic innovation and a declaration

of sovereignty, the Umayyads expanded upon architectural styles derived from Late Antique and

Roman architecture. For example, the Dome of the Rock's use of color on the exterior and the

---

[41] Ibid, 154-155.
[42] Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 21.
[43] Ibid, 21-22.
[44] Ibid, 21.

extent of color applied in the interior were unprecedented, and the use of calligraphy as part of

the building's ornamentation would not be seen elsewhere until the twelfth century. But while

the Dome of the Rock is unlike any previous examples of Mediterranean architecture, its

architectural style evolved from Late Antique and Christian styles. Octagonal buildings that date

back to the Late Antique period have been found in Aachen, as well as in Palestine itself, such as

the Chapel of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives.[45] Furthermore, out of the three supervisors

– Raja b. Hayawa, Yazid b. Salam, and Baha' b. Yazid – responsible for overlooking the

construction of the Dome of the Rock, the latter two, who were father and son, might have

originally been Christian.[46] The two were perhaps able to help transmit Christian architectural

knowledge during the construction of the Islamic monument.

An example elsewhere of Umayyad architectural re-interpretations can be found in Spain

during the 8th century, during which the Spanish Umayyads continued to adopt and incorporate

architectural elements from native Christian and local traditions. A specific example is the

horseshoe arch. Commonplace within Late Antique Spanish architecture, these arches became

appropriated and integrated by the Umayyads within Spanish Islamic architecture.[47] Evidently,

Umayyad architects and artists sought inspiration from the cultures under their political control,

and infused these motifs with their own artistic production. Through this, they were able to

establish an innovative style while concurrently continuing local cultural traditions.

---

[45] Oleg Grabar, "Formal and Decorative Features of the Dome and Their Sources," in *The Dome of the Rock* with Said Nuseibeh (New York: Rizzoli, 1966), 63, 66.

[46] Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine, 639-1099*, trans. Ethel Broido (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 92.

[47] Jerrilynn D. Dodds, "Islamic, Christianity, and the Problem of Religious Art," in *The Art of Medieval Spain, A.D. 500-1200*, ed. John P. O'Neill (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1993), 27-28.

The constructions on the Haram al-Sharif not only provided spaces for social and

religious congregations, but they also brought in an influx of skilled workers into the city. At the

time, Jerusalem was not a major artisan center, and would not have been a destination point for

artisans seeking employment. With the construction of the Dome of the Rock, however, the

Umayyads sought to employ artisans and architects from Byzantium. This project, as a result,

required not only financial support, but had to factor in logistical and managerial support. This is

to say that 'Abd al-Malik's financial investments not only went into construction and materials,

but also into the salaries of workers, the logistics of transportation and recruitment, and the

formation of organizational and managerial support that were necessary in the construction of the

Dome of the Rock. [48]

Although the Dome of the Rock offered, to an extent, an accommodating reception

towards non-Muslims, certain aspects of the building were quite political and exclusive. The

integration of local architectural elements may have been a way to claim ownership or to assert

superiority in technique over the conquered cultures. Moreover, a more specific analysis of the

interior walls of the building reveal both internal and external political motivations that might

have informed certain political agendas during the building's conception. One such internal

motivation can be extracted from an inscription integrated within one of the building's mosaics,

marking the date of its completion and the name of the reigning caliph at the time, 'Abd al-

Malik.[49] As the Dome of the Rock was the first example of monumental Islamic architecture,

---

[48] Grabar, "The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," 149. See also Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), 237.
[49] The inscription dates the construction of the building at year 72 of the Islamic calendar. This corresponds to 691-692 CE.

'Abd al-Malik might have desired recognition for the construction of a symbol that declared the presence of Islam on top of a site that was significant to all three Abrahamic faiths.[50] This claim to history did not go unchallenged – after the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun came into power in 813 CE, he modified the inscription and replaced 'Abd al-Malik's name with his own. This act indicates that this particular inscription contained a potent political aura, where being identified as the monument's builder functioned as a display of power. But such an action also weakens the credibility of the various Abbasid sources that claim 'Abd al-Malik intended to divert pilgrimage from the Ka'aba to the Dome of the Rock. In this context, Al-Ma'mun's action would be hypocritical as it clearly denotes the significance of the monument to the Abbasids.

Similarly, external political motivations can be extracted from the walls within the Dome of the Rock. For the most part, the mosaics on the interior walls of the building consist of vegetal motifs, vases, and cornucopias.[51] However, on the inner wall of the octagonal colonnade around the Rock, a different pattern emerges. Jewelry, armor, and crowns appear here, offering spectacular reflections against the light. Oleg Grabar argues that these motifs did not serve only an aesthetic purpose, but were used as a device to achieve a larger, political objective. In particular, the presence of crowns on the inner wall is decidedly political. These crowns, and the other decorative motifs – identified as Byzantine and Persian imperial artifacts – serve as a symbolic conquest of the contemporary and historic enemies of the Umayyad caliphate. For Grabar, these ornaments played a part in fulfilling a substantial ambition to display the

---

[50] Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock," 44.
[51] Ibid, 47.

caliphate's victories, and subsequently asserted the presence of a new Islamic dynasty in Jerusalem.[52]

There are, however, some issues that remain unresolved through a political reading of the Dome of the Rock. First, the victory motifs do not appear on any other wall besides the octagonal colonnade. It seems strange for such a politically-charged declaration to be restricted to such an exclusive interior space within the building. Grabar proposed that this placement allows the ornamentation to appear more luminous when lit by sunlight. But wouldn't this political declaration to the caliphate's enemies be more powerful if the crowns and jewels were embedded on the building's façade? An exterior presence would be an explicit declaration to the caliphate's enemies, and illumination by sunlight would be possible throughout the entire day rather than the select, optimal hours that would fully illuminate the interior. These inconsistencies seem to indicate that the political nature of the Dome of the Rock's interior spoke to an exclusive, internal audience, whereby the building's interior features reminded Muslims themselves of their victories rather than declare to the world the dominance of Islam.

Like the politically dependent reading, a reading that is predominantly dependent on religious inspirations also fails to offer a complete history of the Dome of the Rock. While the center of the monument lies the Rock, the building's origin was probably not inspired by a Quranic origin. A common fallacy that has circulated since medieval times is that the building was, from the beginning, constructed around the Rock as a monument to mark the site of Muhammad's ascension to heaven on his Night Journey. But this is a rather unlikely explanation

---

[52] Ibid, 48.

at the time of construction. First, there exists a separate Islamic building in Jerusalem, located north of the Dome of the Rock, with clear and coherent ties to this Quranic narrative. This is the Dome of the Ascension. Secondly, during the time of the construction of the Dome of Rock, there was no firm consensus on the actual site of Muhammad's ascension. Even today, this remains a point of contention within Islam.[53] As a result, it is unlikely that the Dome of the Rock was built with this memorialization in mind. Thirdly, while there is a visible religious theme that informs the contemporary reading of the Dome of the Rock, the building did not acquire this overtly religious significance until approximately two decades after its completion, when the nearby al-Aqsa Mosque was re-built and its mihrab became aligned with the Rock at the center, therefore incorporating the structure into a larger religious complex, and into ritual.[54]

A religious reading of the interior of the building seems to falter as well. While a Quranic inscription wraps around the octagonal arcade, Oleg Grabar argues that "it is unlikely that viewers would crane their necks and walk twice around the octagon to read it sequentially from its beginning on the southern end of the building."[55] Grabar goes on to further state that

"There is no holy spot or thing with a generally accepted meaning; no obvious ceremonies are held there; there is no sacred sign, like a cross, to identify the community to which the building and its sensory impressions belong. This, I suggest, is because at the time the Dome of the Rock was built and throughout the subsequent centuries, the forms were charged with meanings that were lower than the community's agreement to

---

[53] Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock," 36-38.
[54] Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock," 18.
[55] Oleg Grabar, "Formal and Decorative Features of the Dome," 56.

accept them as expressions of the holy. For this reason, the building changed very little,

whereas it attracted many different associations. In that sense, the Dome of the Rock is,

indeed, a very Islamic building, as the social consensus of the community is what

identifies a work of architecture, not a combination of forms."[56]

Grabar's statement, compounded with the aforementioned reasons, indicates that the construction

of the Dome of the Rock conveys a malleable message – one that signifies a necessity to look

toward an amalgamation of religious, political, and social inspirations to fully comprehend the

building's origins and the ways in which the Dome of the Rock functioned as a space.

There is one additional, broader problem with the traditional approach to analyzing the

Dome of the Rock. This problem is a logistical one. While the Umayyads sought to establish a

physical presence within Jerusalem, the choice to build the Dome of the Rock on the Haram al-

Sharif might have been informed by logistics rather than religion or politics. The Haram

certainly did offer an advantageous location for an architectural declaration from Jerusalem's

new rulers – it offered an elevated point that allowed the Dome of the Rock to claim the horizon.

However, while the Umayyads were looking for a space to construct a monumental building, it

had to be a space that did not infringe on Christian property. This condition was decreed by the

caliph Umar following his conquest of Jerusalem sometime between 636-638 CE.[57] The location

of Mount Moriah, then, was suitable for constructing the Dome of the Rock for a few reasons. At

the time, the site's sanctity was significant only to the Jews, and less so to the Christians. Before

---

[56] Ibid, 66.
[57] Duri, "Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period," 106. Duri refers to a text by Ya'qubi: "You [Christians] are given safety of your persons, properties and churches which will not be encroached upon [lit. inhabited] or destroyed unless you cause some public harm."

the Umayyads claimed the location, the Christians had been using the site as a landfill.[58] To preserve the fulfillment of the prophecy of the destruction of the Temple, no construction took place on the Haram during the Roman and Byzantine period, when Christians held control of Jerusalem.[59] Robert Ousterhout suggests that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at the site of Christ's tomb could be considered a symbolic and physical continuation of the Temple, and by extension, the Old Testament.[60] The result was that the Haram al-Sharif remained an unused, empty lot during the period of Christian rule in Jerusalem. On the other hand, the site provided the topographical features necessary to establish a visible edifice on the horizon that proclaimed a new era of development and prosperity under Umayyad rule. At the same time, though, the site was perhaps not necessarily the preferred choice of the caliph, but one chosen because it was the best choice out of a limited range of possibilities. Nonetheless, the ramifications of this decision were significant. The Dome of the Rock became arguably the most prominent building on the skyline, and re-focused the geographic orientation of the city.

Essentially, our understanding of the Dome of the Rock requires a compromise between looking for royal messages and recognizing its amenability to social engagements. Most studies have concentrated on these political and religious questions. What has been neglected in the study of the Dome of the Rock is its role in creating social space and amenities that helped promote a new Islamic identity of Jerusalem. Here, an analysis of the Great Mosque of Damascus will provide an example of how social spaces functioned during the Umayyad period.

---

[58] Armstrong, *Jerusalem*, 229-230.
[59] Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock," 39.
[60] Robert Ousterhout, "The Temple, the Sepulchre, and the *Martyrion* of the Savior," *Gesta* 29, no. 1 (January 1990): 44-46.

In addition, this analysis could bridge certain gaps within our current understanding of the Dome of the Rock. There is much written on the social usage of the Great Mosque, so the overlaps between the architectural forms of the two buildings could possibly reveal a parallel in function. A comparison could potentially open up new readings of the Dome of the Rock as a place of encounter, congregation, and movement. By extension, this could deepen our understanding of the social aspect of the Haram al-Sharif as a whole.

The most visible overlap in architectural form between the two buildings is the presence of a dome. While domes had been common in this region at this time in Christian architecture, the Dome of the Rock was the first Islamic building to incorporate such a feature. The Great Mosque of Damascus evidently continued this appropriation, but it also incorporated another element from church architecture: the transept. The inclusion of the transept at the mosque arguably serves no aesthetic advantages – the courtyard at Damascus partially blocks the transept and obscures its visibility.[61] This could be another instance of Umayyad builders fusing together Christian and Islamic architectural languages. Here, however, it seems that the act of fusion comes at the expense of practicality in form. A second commonality between the two buildings is the presence of vegetal motifs used as ornamentation at both sites. Grabar has theorized that the vegetal motifs at the Dome of the Rock hark back to Solomon. More specifically, the ornamentation refers to "the bejeweled trees and other forms of vegetation that appear in post-Biblical descriptions of the Temple and palace."[62] As mentioned earlier, Rabbat has pointed out the significance for Islam to establish a connection to Solomon. However, this visual connection

---

[61] Rafi Grafman and Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, "The Two Great Syrian Umayyad Mosques: Jerusalem and Damascus," *Muqarnas* 16 (January 1999): 8-10.
[62] Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006), 115.

can be extended even further back in time, back to the Garden of Eden. Echoed in the gardens of the Great Mosque of Damascus, similar themes and connections perhaps prevail in the decorative mosaics revealing an idyllic world of vegetation, rivers, and edifices.[63] This achieves a connection to Biblical paradise and establishes another continuation of Islam to the Old Testament. The vegetal motifs potentially signal to the future as well, offering a preview of the paradise that is promised to believers.

The Great Mosque was built on a site that originally hosted a cathedral built and dedicated to St. John in the fourth century. Before this, the site was the location of a temple, dated to the first century, and dedicated to Jupiter.[64] The appropriation of former sites of worship is nothing unusual; Christians too built new churches adjacent to or over old religious complexes as a way to desacralize these spaces. The Muslims continued this practice with the construction of mosques and other monuments, such as the Dome of the Rock.[65]

The original temple precinct in Damascus was the focal point of the city, as it contained not only the temple of Jupiter, but also a market.[66] Roman temple precincts were historically sites of social activity, in addition to religious congregations. Another well-known example of a Roman precinct is in Pompeii, where the volcanic eruption in 79 CE preserved much of its remnants. The forum at Pompeii was the center of the city's urban life. In addition to temples, the site was host to various government buildings, the city's main market, and several cult

---

[63] Bethany J. Walker, "Commemorating the Sacred Spaces of the Past: The Mamluks and the Umayyad Mosque at Damascus," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67, no. 1 (March 2004): 31.
[64] Ibid, 28.
[65] Béatrice Caseau, "Sacred Landscapes," in *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, eds. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 46.
[66] Ibid, 47-48.

buildings.[67] In Herodian Jerusalem, too, the center of social life in the city was near the Temple. Although not situated within a forum, many shops flanked the main street of the city, and a paved public plaza has been discovered near the Southern Wall.[68]

In Damascus, the Great Mosque continues the social history of the space, becoming a place of congregation. At the mosque, caliphs addressed audiences, and judicial buildings, law courts, and educational institutions were located here.[69] In addition to continuing a social history, the architecture of the Great Mosque also harks back to the first constructed mosque, the House of the Prophet in Medina. Although this structure was basic, it featured a large courtyard intended as a gathering space for the faithful. At the same time, the open court of the Great Mosque is reminiscent of a forum, further enhancing the social intention of the structure. What is markedly different about the Great Mosque, however, was that previous mosques, such as those found in Jerash and Subeita, were modest structures. The mosque in Damascus, on the other hand, was built on a far grander and more complex scale.[70] This provided ample space for social activities to take place on site. The scale of construction seems to provide an emphasis on the social functions of the structure. Lefebvre argues that such spaces – sites that facilitate exchange and trade – encounter active resistance from political entities.[71] At the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Damascus, however, this does not appear to be the case. The site appears to be a

---

[67] John J. Dobbins, "The Forum and its Dependencies," *The World of Pompeii*, eds. John J. Dobbins and Pedar W. Foss (New York: Routledge, 2007), 150.
[68] Benjamin Mazar, "Herodian Jerusalem in the Light of the Excavations South and South-West of the Temple Mount," *Israel Exploration Journal* 28, no. 4 (January 1978): 234-237.
[69] Walker, "Commemorating the Sacred Spaces of the Past," 26-28.
[70] Kennedy, "Islam," 229.
[71] Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 9-10.

testament to the amenability of the Umayyad administration to a dynamic economy, supported in part by a diverse population of inhabitants and visitors.

The mosque's colonnaded courtyard, as reported by the 14th-century traveler Ibn Battuta, eventually accommodated market stalls catering to visiting scholars, pilgrims, and an estimated six hundred people that gathered at the location every day for Quranic readings and daily and nightly prayers. The Great Mosque would also host rallies and public announcements. It was also where public officials were chosen, and where Muslims volunteered to fight against the Crusaders. Temporary housing for the poor was made available at the site**.** In addition, the Great Mosque became host to Sunni law schools, Sufi meeting areas, and shrines would be set up on site by Sunni, Sufi, and Shia groups.[72] In short, there certainly appears to be a tolerance of interfaith and intercultural activity at the mosque by the government and by the local community for, evidently, several centuries. There was clearly no shortage of visitors and travelers within the vicinity of the Great Mosque.

On a similar note, previous accounts have shown Jerusalem to be a site of congregation and a destination point for pilgrims and travelers. However, it was not only ordinary people who were travelling to Jerusalem – there were structures built to host important guests to the city. An official complex has been discovered to the south and southwest of the al-Aqsa Mosque. Beyond the Southern Wall of the Haram al-Sharif, excavations have revealed a large complex consisting of at least six components. The largest of these buildings appears to be an Umayyad palace. Its plan is reminiscent of other palaces found in Jordan and Syria. The complex is integrated with

---

[72] Walker, "Commemorating the Sacred Spaces of the Past," 26-28.

the Haram al-Sharif, as a bridge connects the rooftop of the palace to the interior of the al-Aqsa

Mosque.[73] This palatial space was likely reserved for the governor of Jerusalem, while other

parts of the complex likely hosted important guests to the city.[74] Moreover, residential and

administrative buildings have been found in modern excavations to the south and west of the

Haram al-Sharif, indicating that there had been significant mixed-use development in the area

that included residential and administrative spaces in addition to religious centers.[75] Likely, these

areas would have included commercial components as well.

The movement of goods and people to Jerusalem might have been deliberately

encouraged by the Umayyads, and this becomes evident by examining the functions of several of

the other buildings constructed around the same time as the Dome of the Rock on the Haram al-

Sharif. Historical references have been made to other domes on the Haram: the Dome of the

Scales, the Dome of the Prophet, the Dome of the Ascension, and the Dome of the Gathering.[76]

But our attention here should turn towards a treasury – another feature that can also be found at

the Great Mosque of Damascus – built to the east of the Dome of the Rock, which housed the

money that was used to pay for the construction of the monument and other structures on the

Haram.[77] There is debate, however, on whether or not the treasury was in fact located at the

---

[73] M. Ben-Dov, "The Area South of the Temple Mount in the Early Islamic Period," in *Jerusalem Revealed: Archaeology in the Holy City 1968-1974*, ed. Yigael Yadin (New Haven: Yale University Press and the Israel Exploration Society, 1976), 97-99.
[74] Duri, "Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period," 111.
[75] Bloom and Blair, "Jerusalem," 347.
[76] Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, 48, n. 115. In Elad's note, he states that al-Muhallabi "mentions several Domes on the Haram during al-Walid's reign (705-715)" but cautions us that al-Muhallabi also attributes the Dome of the Rock to al-Walid, so his account should be treated with reservation.
[77] Ibid, 47.

Dome of the Chain, constructed by 'Abd al-Malik.[78] Nonetheless, the idea remains the same: in holding the treasury in Jerusalem, the caliph clearly establishes Jerusalem as a key city within Palestine, as Umayyad treasuries in Syria and Egypt were located in capital cities.[79] The presence of the treasury designates Jerusalem as an important financial city in the caliphate, in addition to its religious significance.

Additionally, a mint was established in Jerusalem by the Umayyads, who began striking their own coins beginning in 691 or 692 CE. The situation of a mint in the city further consolidates Jerusalem as a key city within the caliphate. Damascus, the capital, was another city where coins were minted. The mint was crucial to the process of Islamization during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik – it marked a departure from an economy that was based on silver Sassanian currency and gold and copper Byzantine coinage.[80] There was a clear political motivation behind the caliph's decision to strike his own coins; such an act functions as a declaration of sovereignty. These coins contributed to a more cohesive movement of goods, currency, and people within territories controlled by the Umayyads, and it was another way, along with the consolidation of wealth, to establish a more unified government. Furthermore, in addition to architectural constructions, 'Abd al-Malik continued to improve the infrastructure of the city as

---

[78] Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus: Volume III: The City of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 182. While the Dome of the Chain has been attributed to the caliph 'Abd al-Malik, there continues to be debate surrounding its original usage. Denys Pringle mentions a 14th-century text, the *Muthir al-Gharam*, that discusses a treasury located near the Dome of the Rock, and that several scholars read this and postulate that the treasury is in fact the Dome of the Chain itself. However, Pringle is dubious of this reading, as the Dome of the Chain's open form would not be suitable to the functions of a treasury. Additionally, an account by al-Wasiti from the 11th century refers to the treasury and the Dome of the Chain as separate structures. However, there still remains a division in the field. For instance, Amikam Elad treats the Dome of the Chain and the treasury as two separate buildings on the Haram al-Sharif, while Johnathan Bloom and Sheila Blair suggest that the Dome of the Chain and the treasury could be one and the same.
[79] Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, 47.
[80] Duri, "Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period," 111. See also Wijdan Ali, *The Arab Contributions to Islamic Art from the Seventh to the Fifteenth Centuries* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1999), 47-48.

he repaired and built new roads to and from Jerusalem.[81] Compounded with the advent of

improved infrastructure, the production of centralized currency surely contributed to the

promotion of travel to and from major Umayyad cities such as Jerusalem and Damascus,

encouraging a movement of people across the empire.

Traditionally, in areas that were popular with travelers, there was often an instrument

available – including in Damascus and Jerusalem – that becomes important in facilitating the

social movement of people: the water fountain. Such an instrument is present at the courtyard of

the Great Mosque of Damascus. At the Haram al-Sharif, the al-Kas fountain provides a source of

water. There is a connection between fountains and the production of social spaces in Classical

architecture and urban planning. This connection continues in the early Islamic context. The

presence of fountains in ancient Rome had both a ritualistic and a pragmatic function that

fulfilled social needs. These fountains were a source of drinking water for pilgrims and travelers,

and were also used as part of ablution processes at certain religious sites.[82] The traditions of the

fountains situated at the Great Mosque of Damascus and the Haram al-Sharif are not only linked

to the histories of ancient fountains within Rome, but share a more specific continuity to the

social history of fountains within the Levant. Fountains that date back to the Classical period

have been discovered in Apamea, Jerash, and Palmyra.[83] Furthermore, nymphaea in Roman

Palestine can be traced back to the second century CE. These were large-scale, ornamental

structures that featured a public fountain as part of their façades. The water components of these

---

[81] Elad, "Pilgrims and Pilgrimage to Jerusalem," 300.
[82] Julian Richard, *Water for the City, Fountains for the People: Monumental Fountains in the Roman East*
(Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2012), 186.
[83] Ibid, 201.

structures were meant to accentuate the already-decorative natures of these nymphaea. The Roman nymphaea typically rose two storeys high and possessed highly ornamental details, such as sculptures and columns incorporated into the façades of these structures. The integrated water displays were meant to provide sensual pleasure in their visual appeal and the reposing sound of running water contrasted with the sounds of hectic and noisy city life.[84]

Although many of these fountains were not built to provide potable water, the archaeologist Julian Richard argues that "the utilitarian potential of public fountains should not be underestimated: they could be used for all activities theoretically requiring 'subpotable' or 'unpotable' water as well."[85] Families without access to local or household cisterns probably drew their water from public fountains, and a source of water was also a necessity for commercial spaces, such as shops and workshops.[86] Fountains, then, further attracted social movement and congregation in public areas. There certainly would have been enormous demand for water in places like the Haram al-Sharif and the Great Mosque of Damascus – bustling sites that stitched together residential, commercial, administrative, and religious activities.

Evidently, the nymphaea of the Classical period, with their open-air pools of water, elaborately ornate architectural structural frames, and heavy utilization of decorative elements, were quite different in appearance and style than the Umayyad al-Kas fountain. The fountain on top of the Haram al-Sharif is not embedded within a monumental façade, nor endowed with significant ornamentation. However, fountains from Classical times that are similar in

---

[84] Arthur Segal, *From Function to Monument: Urban Landscapes of Roman Palestine, Syria, and Provincia Arabia* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1997), 151.
[85] Richard, *Water for the City*, 181.
[86] Ibid, 180-181.

description to that of the al-Kas fountain do exist. In Jerash, small fountains were built along the Cardo. These water displays featured a "lower, quadrangular basin surmounted by a pedestal-like body with two lion-headed waterspouts."[87] Other small fountains were circular in shape and equipped with spouts. These fountains in Jerash seem comparable in size and style to the al-Kas fountain, which has waterspouts installed all around the perimeter of its circular body. In Jerash, these small fountains were placed along the Cardo Maximus and close to important monuments.[88] At the Great Mosque and the Haram al-Sharif, the Umayyad fountains, too, were in a position that could provide and maximize utilitarian usage in these public spaces, and were located at busy crossroads of interfaith and intercultural encounters.

Many of Rome's historic fountains were located at religious sites, but the emphasis appeared to be on situating these fountains within open urban spaces such as busy streets and open squares that had potential for abundant foot traffic.[89] Similarly, the al-Kas fountain, located in-between the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque, seems to follow this trend. Built in 709 CE under the caliph al-Walid, the fountain does date after the axial re-alignment of the Haram al-Sharif, which suggests that there was potentially a religious aspect conceived with the construction of the fountain. While this seems to indicate that the fountain served a ritualistic purpose at the same time religious overtones at the Haram al-Sharif were growing, the fountain does also fulfill new communal needs as Jerusalem continued to grow. Although religious overtones were becoming more potent on the Haram al-Sharif at this time, a historic parallel demonstrates that religious and social functions of fountains were not mutually exclusive. In

---

[87] Ibid, 90.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid, 186-188.

other words, even though the complex at the Haram al-Sharif recently asserted a religious presence through the realignment of the axis of the al-Aqsa Mosque, the fountain concurrently fulfills the social obligations that come with the increased traffic as a result of this transformation. The fountain mediated between the spaces on the Haram al-Sharif and the influxes of pilgrims, travelers, inhabitants, and other visitors coming to the site, offering, like in Roman Palestine, an aesthetically-pleasing space of tranquility in the midst of a bustling urban space, as well as a practical source of water.[90]

While the al-Kas carried out an important social function, it was also decidedly political. Julian Richard states that the construction of aqueducts within a city can signal one of two contrasting phenomena. The construction of an aqueduct can be indicative of an established economy and a settled urban population, or it can be a project that is meant to generate new levels of economic or urban growth. In either case, aqueducts – and by extension, fountains – "represent… a structure necessary to urban life or, the manifestation of conspicuous consumption, luxury, urban pride or even waste."[91]

When Jerusalem was first settled, it had only one water source: a series of springs known as Gihon, or the Virgin's Fountain. Its output was quite significant – it was recorded in both Latin and Greek that the city of Jerusalem contained an abundant supply of water. Conventionally, the estimated minimum yield of the springs would provide two buckets of water per day for approximately 10,000 people. John Wilkinson, however, contends that there was

---

[90] Segal, *From Function to Monument*, 166.
[91] Richard, *Water for the City*, 12.

unlikely "ever as many as 10,000 in Jerusalem when it still depended on Gihon alone."[92] Much

of the water likely went to irrigation, and the yield does not take into consideration the amount of

water that was wasted during drawing. Wilkinson estimates that as much as 75% of the water

went to waste, which meant that Gihon alone was able only to support a town of 2,500 people.

Consequently, other sources of water must have been discovered and re-routed as the population

of Jerusalem grew.[93] It became necessary to extend these water networks over time, and each

successive phase ushered in more extravagant additions. Over time, practicality and luxury

formed a complex relationship.

Under Solomon, Jerusalem's population grew and its standards of living increased as a

result of a new connection via aqueduct between Jerusalem and "Solomon's Pools." These pools

were formed from three reservoirs that collected water from springs approximately twelve

kilometers south of Jerusalem. This network was extended further south by Herod the Great

during the Second Temple period as the population again outgrew the yield. Along with this

extension, Herod likely constructed a private branch that supplied water to his palace at

Herodium.[94] While Herod carved out a slice of personal luxury for himself at the expense of the

general population, there were other instances when certain innovations were not shared with the

rest of the city at all. At the palatial Umayyad complex south of the Haram al-Sharif, a planned

sewer network has been excavated. This network did not extend out to the rest of the city and

---

[92] John Wilkinson, "Ancient Jerusalem, Its Water Supply and Population," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 106, no. 1 (January 1974): 33.
[93] Ibid, 36.
[94] Ibid, 36-39.

remained solely for the benefit of members of the elite who were able to access this restricted space.[95]

The paradoxical relationship between functional urban needs and a royal desire for excess complicates the history of the al-Kas fountain. The fountain is at once a political instrument and a facilitator of social activity in the city, providing water for travelers and worshippers, as well as families and markets that were situated in the vicinity. Like the buildings on the Haram al-Sharif, the al-Kas fountain is an example of how quotidian interests occasionally came at odds with royal ambitions. In certain cases, the various structures in Jerusalem and in Damascus created a rift between the political and the social layers of society, but at other times, the two symbiotically helped the other to fulfill their objectives.

---

[95] Ben-Dov, "The Area South of the Temple Mount," 97.

Chapter 3: Conclusion

Exclusively social, political or religious readings falter by themselves in our quest to discover the history of Jerusalem. In the case of Umayyad Jerusalem, the lived experiences of people translated the broader visions and blueprints of city builders into a quotidian reality, but these lived experiences in themselves also depended on and were transformed by the infrastructural, administrative, and architectural initiatives undertaken by the state. These initiatives allowed the city to be able to attract and support a growing number of people who came to live and visit, and helped mediate encounters between them. At the same time, these initiatives allowed the Umayyad caliphate to establish a cohesive projection of political power, and rendered Jerusalem a key city that was at once Islamized, but receptive to foreigners. Thus, the history of Umayyad Jerusalem is a complex one, but it can only begin to be unraveled when a top-down approach meets a method that examines the situation from the bottom-up, and when the city is understood as a place that exists between the crossroads of the lived and the envisioned.

Bibliography

Adomnán. "The Holy Places." In *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*, translated by John Wilkinson, 167-206. Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 2002.

Ali, Wijdan. *The Arab Contributions to Islamic Art from the Seventh to the Fifteenth Centuries.* Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1999.

Armstrong, Karen. *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2005.

Ben-Dov, M. "The Area South of the Temple Mount in the Early Islamic Period." In *Jerusalem Revealed: Archaeology in the Holy City 1968-1974*, edited by Yigael Yadin, 97-101. New Haven: Yale University Press and the Israel Exploration Society, 1976.

Bernard the Monk. "A Journey to the Holy Places and Babylon." In *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*, translated by John Wilkinson, 261-269. Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 2002.

Bloom, Jonathan M., and Sheila S. Blair. "Jerusalem." In *The Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art and Architecture Vol. II*, 346-353. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Carr, Stephen, Mark Francis, Leanne G. Rivlin, and Andrew M. Stone. *Public Space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Caseau, Béatrice. "Sacred Landscapes." In *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, edited by G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, 21-59. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001.

Dobbins, John J. "The Forum and its Dependencies." In *The World of Pompeii*, edited by John J. Dobbins and Pedar W. Foss, 150-183. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Dodds, Jerrilynn D. "Islam, Christianity, and the Problem of Religious Art." In *The Art of Medieval Spain, A.D. 500-1200*, 27-37. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993.

Duri, Abdul Aziz. "Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period: 7th-11th Centuries AD." In *Jerusalem in History,* edited by K. J. Asali, 105-129. New York: Olive Branch Press, 2000.

Elad, Amikam. "Pilgrims and Pilgrimage to Jerusalem during the Early Muslim Period." In *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, edited by Lee I. Levine, 300-314. New York: Continuum, 1999.

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

Gil, Moshe. *A History of Palestine, 639-1099*, translated by Ethel Broido. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Gilbert, Liette and Mustafa Dikeç "Right to the City: Politics of Citizenship." In *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, edited by Kanishka Goonewardena,

Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom, and Christian Schmid, 250-263. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Goitein, Shlomo D. "Jerusalem in the Arab Period (638-1099)." In *The Jerusalem Cathedra: Studies in the History, Archaeology, Geography and Ethnography of the Land of Israel, Vol. 2*, edited by Lee I. Levine, 168-196. Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute, 1982.

Goldziher, Ignaz. *Muslim Studies Vol. 2*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971.

Grabar, Oleg. *The Dome of the Rock*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006.

Grabar, Oleg. *The Dome of the Rock*, with Said Nuseibeh. New York: Rizzoli, 1996.

Grabar, Oleg. "The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem." In *Jerusalem*, 143-158. Burlington, Ashgate/Variorum, 2005.

Grabar, Oleg. "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock." *Ars Orientalis*, 3 (January 1959): 33-62.

Grafman, Rafi and Myriam Rosen-Ayalon. "The Two Great Syrian Umayyad Mosques: Jerusalem and Damascus."*Muqarnas* 16 (January 1999): 1-15.

Kennedy, Hugh. "Islam." In *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, edited by G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, 219-237. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Urban Revolution*, translated by Robert Bononno. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Ling, Chris, Jim Hamilton and Kathy Thomas. "What Makes a City Liveable?" *Community Research Connections*. Published December 19, 2006. https://crcresearch.org/case-studies/case-studies-sustainable-infrastructure/land-use-planning/what-makes-a-city-liveable.

Matthews, Charles D. "A Muslim Iconoclast (Ibn Taymiyyeh) on the 'Merits' of Jerusalem and Palestine." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56, no. 1 (March 1936): 1-21.

Mazar, Benjamin. "Herodian Jerusalem in the Light of the Excavations South and South-West of the Temple Mount." *Israel Exploration Journal* 28, no. 4 (January 1978): 230-237.

Mourad, Suleiman Ali. "The Symbolism of Jerusalem in Early Islam." In *Jerusalem: Idea and Reality*, edited by Tamar Mayer and Suleiman Ali Mourad, 86-102. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Ousterhout, Robert. "The Temple, the Sepulchre, and the *Martyrion* of the Savior." *Gesta* 29, no. 1 (January 1990): 44-53.

Pringle, Denys. *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus: Volume III: The City of Jerusalem.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Rabbat, Nasser. "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Muqarnas* 6 (1989): 12-21.

Richard, Julian. *Water for the City, Fountains for the People: Monumental Fountains in the Roman East: An Archaeological Study of Water Management*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2012.

Segal, Arthur. *From Function to Monument: Urban Landscapes of Roman Palestine, Syria, and Provincia Arabia*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1997.

Shields, Rob. "Lefebvre and the Right to the Open City?" *Space and Culture* 16, no. 3 (August 2013): 345-348.

Walker, Bethany J. "Commemorating the Sacred Spaces of the Past: The Mamluks and the Umayyad Mosque at Damascus." *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67, no. 1 (March 2004): 26-39.

Wilkinson, John. "Ancient Jerusalem, Its Water Supply and Population." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 106, no. 1 (January 1974): 33-51.