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## Jerusalem in Early Islamic Tradition (1)

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### Abstract

The article describes major early Islamic traditions in which Jerusalem has been designated as the third holiest city in Islam. Their content has been analyzed based on the historical context and religious, inter-religious and political circumstances in which they were forged. Particular attention has been paid to textual and material sources, their authenticity, dating and their interpretation by prominent orientalist and art historians. The article addresses specific themes, such as Jerusalem in Islamic canonical texts, Muhammad's Night Journey to al-Aqṣā, the legends of Caliph 'Umar's conquest of Jerusalem, names for Jerusalem in Early Islamic chronicles, the influence of Jews and Jewish converts on early Islamic traditions, and the construction, symbolism, ornaments, and inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock. In the concluding remarks the author considers the question of to what degree attributing holiness to Jerusalem in Islam has been based on autochthonous early Islamic religious traditions, and to what degree on Muslim-Jewish interaction in Palestine, political processes, such as *fitnah* during early Umayyad rule, 'Abd al-Malik's struggle with Caliph Ibn al-Zubayr in the Hejaz, the Crusades, and the present-day Arab-Israeli conflict.

*Key words:* Jerusalem; Islam; Muslims; Jews; Caliphate; al-Quds; Temple Mount; al-Haram al-Sharif; Dome of the Rock; Comparative Religion

### 1. Introduction: Jerusalem as an Object of Longing and Conflict

The rich and exciting history of Jerusalem is the topic of an enormous historiographic opus and the object of numerous analyses. Consequently, one easily gets the impression that we know all that is relevant about that fascinating and intriguing city.<sup>1</sup> The city, whose holiness is recognized by all three great monotheistic religions, imposed itself as the frequent topic of sacred traditions, ancient narratives, esoteric myths and perplexing legends, academic polemics, spiritual longings and religious competitions. In the last fifty years or so it has become the stage of fierce political and military struggles, challenging the security of Israel and other Middle Eastern countries. However, the holiness of Jerusalem for Islam and Muslims has been, up until rather recently, known in the West only as a matter of factual information; its context and contents have been almost completely foreign to westerners. It is only recently that Jerusalem's holiness in Islam has been more seriously and, at least seemingly, more deeply recognized in international political contexts, as well as in those that are cultural and historical. That has, *inter alia*, resulted in the UNESCO resolutions of October 2015<sup>2</sup> and April 2016,<sup>3</sup> and the UNESCO World Heritage

<sup>1</sup> This paper is an expanded version of the lecture *Jerusalem in Early Islamic Tradition* held on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at the Department of History of the University of Zadar.

I am thankful to Moshe Sharon, professor of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, for his advice on the sources and interpretations of early Islamic texts, which I received both as his student, and in many later conversations and correspondences. The

responsibility for the interpretations, conclusions and possible mistakes is entirely mine.

<sup>2</sup>http:

//unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002351/235180e.pdf, accessed 11/11/2017.

<sup>3</sup>http:

//unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002443/244378e.pdf, accessed 11/11/2017.

Committee resolution from July 2017.<sup>4</sup> From these documents one may detect tendencies to primarily identify Jerusalem as an Islamic sanctuary: the city in which the Al-Haram al-Sharīf is found along with the wall of Al-Buraq.<sup>5</sup> The political message conveyed by those documents is overt and not new; it is consistent with interaction of many of the UN's international organizations and the State of Israel for the past few decades. What is new is the introduction of the Islamic narrative about Jerusalem to the non-Islamic world, essentially by including Jerusalem in that interaction and in Arab-Israeli political polemics. Thus has the place, linked in the Christian world traditionally almost exclusively to the Jewish Temple due to Biblical stories about Jesus and his disciples which occurred in and around the Temple became attractive as never before also because of exotic Muslim narratives, and magnificent Islamic buildings whose picturesque ornaments have transposed some of these narratives since the Early Middle Ages. Throughout history, up until just a few decades

<sup>4</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2017/whc17-41com-18-en.pdf>, accessed 11/11/2017. Due to these and other, similar decisions, the State of Israel decided to drop out of UNESCO at the end of 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Hebrew and Arabic terms are explained in the text. Translations to Croatian, including parts taken from academic papers and books in English, are those of the author. Most terms transliterated from Hebrew or Arabic are written with lowercase letters since there are no capital letters in Hebrew and Arabic. Transliterated words are written in italics. Capital letters are used where there are well-known or cited work (*Sirat Rasul Allah*, *Futuh al-Maqdis*) or names (Yerushalayim, al-Quds), which are not written in italics. For this reason, depending on the context, some words are written sometimes with a lowercase and sometimes with a capital letter. Transliteration and transcription from Hebrew and Arabic to Croatian has been done directly and not through English according to guidelines found in B. HAVEL & M. KASAPOVIĆ, 2016: xvii-xxii.

<sup>6</sup> Jews, the people who made Jerusalem famous, were obviously an exception. They had far more knowledge about Jerusalem as the center of their faith and eschatological hope. In the words of Psalmist: "If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy" (Psalm 137: 5-6, NIV). Jews in the *galut* (exile) maintained contacts with the Jewish communities in Jerusalem and Palestine throughout history.

<sup>7</sup> Academic research and excavations in Palestine were intensified from the mid-nineteenth century, mostly due to enterprises of British archaeologists. Texts from that era, and many translations of earlier texts, including primary sources, have been published by the Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society. Many of their texts are available at the website

ago, few in the West knew what Jerusalem and its central part, the Temple Mount, looked like.<sup>6</sup> The same is true of the traditions about Jerusalem produced by Islam. With the exception of orientalist, archaeologists,<sup>7</sup> art historians and their students, almost no one was aware of their existence, and almost no one was particularly interested in them.<sup>8</sup> Much has been written on Jerusalem but, as pointed by Oleg Grabar, one of the foremost experts on the Islamic architecture of Jerusalem, most texts dealt with the Jewish history of the city from David to Herod and the last decades of the Ottoman rule in Palestine.<sup>9</sup> European pilgrims to Jerusalem and those who heard their stories about the Holy City upon their return made up a small percentage of Europe's population. Even so pilgrims' stories primarily concerned topics of interest to Christians.<sup>10</sup> With the mass media advancement, a wider public became visually acquainted with beauties of Jerusalem. Yet the Holy City became a frequent topic of discussion only after the Six-Day War, when it was united under Israeli political rule. The Islamic, generally Arab world, initiated a

<https://archive.org/search.php?query=creator%3A%22Palestine+Pilgrims%27+Text+Society%2C+London%22> (accessed 1/31/2018).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. LASSNER, 2017: 2.

<sup>9</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 15.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, M. MODRIĆ, 2016, where the author describes history of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, especially the travels of Franciscan Vjenceslav Bilušić from 1937 who, in a comprehensive description of Jerusalem, did not reflect on the city's importance for Muslims at all (M. MODRIĆ, 2016: 220-275). In a short chapter entitled *The Temple Square* Bilušić does not question that the Jewish Temple stood there and cites Jesus' prophecy from Mark 13: 1-2 about its destruction. On the Dome of the Rock, which he incorrectly calls 'Umar's mosque he writes only: "'Umar's mosque rises from the place where the Temple of Solomon stood. It is constructed as an octagon. That monument is full of beauty and majesty. Yet, the Christian heart cannot find any inspiration or beauty in it" (M. MODRIĆ, 2016: 272). Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrims' Progress* originally published in 1869, is to a degree an exception to what is said above. Twain describes the visit to the "Mosque of 'Umar" and refers to some Islamic traditions which he heard from a local guide, but he retells them with cynicism which at times transposes into subtle mocking. He describes the guide's explanation that every Muslim leaves a lock of hair by which Muhammad pulls him into the Heaven and out of the Hell that is found under 'Umar's mosque, and concludes: "The most of them that I have seen ought to stay with the damned, any how, without reference to how they were barbed" (M. TWAIN, 1984: 462).

series of campaigns in order to contest Israel's right to control Jerusalem, or at least over its eastern part with the Old City and the Temple Mount. As part of that political endeavor Muslims began to acquaint the Western world, as well as many uninformed co-religionists of theirs, with the traditions through which Islam attributes holiness to Jerusalem.

Notwithstanding presence of Jerusalem in Muslim narratives from Islam's earliest era, a historian can hardly overlook the fact that vast parts of the Muslim world remember the importance of Jerusalem only in the context of its rather recent political contest with the Jews. During the previous centuries under Muslim rule, Jerusalem was mostly a neglected, almost forgotten city. Muslims, unlike Christians and later Jews, did not show much interest in the archaeological research of the city in pursuit of their own history. The intent of extensive excavation and research around the Temple Mount conducted by Charles Warren, Charles Wilson and other archaeologists in the mid-nineteenth century was "to measure, draw, and capture every part of the Holy City for Christian and Jewish believers or for antiquarians and historians in search of the setting for biblical events."<sup>11</sup> Grabar points out that the first significant work dedicated to Islamic Jerusalem was not published until 1922 and 1927.<sup>12</sup> The Muslim-Jewish dispute over Jerusalem began in the early 1920s with Muslims' violent attacks against Jews.<sup>13</sup> During the Israeli War of Independence 1948–1949 Jordanian troops occupied the eastern part of Jerusalem and expelled Jews from the Old City. Israel returned to East Jerusalem in 1967, and Muslim loss of the city to Jews was a shock from which the Muslim

world never recovered. The dispute over Jerusalem, primarily over the area of the Temple Mount, is one of the most intensive in the modern world, and the odds of coming to an agreement acceptable to both sides are virtually non-existent at this point.<sup>14</sup>

In his 1996 book *The Shape of the Holy*, Grabar wrote that "new concern for medieval, and more specifically early medieval, Jerusalem has arisen over the past fifteen to twenty years for reasons both political, in a broad and generally very favorable sense of the word, and scholarly."<sup>15</sup> It should be pointed out that in academic research on early Islamic<sup>16</sup> Jerusalem, Christian (such as Oleg Grabar) and Jewish archaeologists, historians and Arabists are still prevalent. Among others we should mention Dan Bahat, S. D. Goitein, Michael Avi-Yonah, Moshe Gil, M. J. Kister, Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, Moshe Sharon and Jacob Lassner. Lassner's recently published monograph *Medieval Jerusalem: Forging an Islamic City in Spaces Sacred to Christians and Jews*, might well be the most comprehensive academic compilation of knowledge on early Islamic Jerusalem available today. It is only in the last few decades that many Muslim scholars of Jerusalem have emerged and produced fine, noted studies. Some of their works on early Islamic Jerusalem can be found in Brill's annual publication *Muqarnas*<sup>17</sup> in which the emphasis is on topics concerning Islamic architecture and art. Political dispute has prompted not only academic research, but also novel Muslim claims related to Jewish history, and to Islamic theology and tradition. With regard to the former, we may mention the absurd claim that there have never been any Jewish temples in Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup> With regard to the latter, Jerusalem has been, for

<sup>11</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 16.

<sup>12</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 16. The French Institute in Cairo published the work of Swiss researcher Max van Berchem *Matériaux pour un Corpus inscriptionum Arabicarum* in three volumes. The 1894 edition of the work is available at archive.org (<https://archive.org/stream/materiauxpourunc00berc#page/n7/mod/e/2up>, accessed 4/5/2018).

<sup>13</sup> For more on the initial conflicts see B. HAVEL, 2013: 499-502.

<sup>14</sup> For more on the role of Jerusalem and especially the Temple Mount in the Arab-Israeli and Muslim-Jewish conflict see, for example, M. MA'OZ, 2014: 60-70.

<sup>15</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 17.

<sup>16</sup> *Early Islamic* in this text refers mainly to the period from the birth of Islam until first half of the second century AH (after *hijra*), or until the end of the Umayyad period. As a majority of the sources originated later, as well as due to difficulties in the dating of textual and material sources, texts and traditions originating up to the end of the tenth century are included in this study. With the Crusades and subsequent

events new Islamic traditions about Jerusalem appeared, which are not the topic of this study, although they are at times referred to.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the journal and the contents of different issues: <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/22118993>, accessed 4/6/2018.

<sup>18</sup> For more on that phenomenon see D. GOLD, 2007: 11-18; D. BARNETT, 2011 and F. M. LOEWENBERG, 2013. Possibly the first Islamic religious authority who questioned the very existence of Solomon's temple – albeit ambiguously – was haj-Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem during the 1920s and 1930s (H. E. EL-HUSEINI, 1943: 6-7). It is interesting that in 1925 the Supreme Muslim Council under the chairmanship of the same haj-Amin al-Husseini published a treatise entitled *Al-haram al-Sharif*, in which the author writes that the square on which Dome of the Rock and al-Aqṣā stand today is the location of the Solomon's Temple (AL-A'LĀ, 1925: 4). The majority of prominent Islamic historians and theologians do not question the former existence of Jewish temples on the Temple Mount; not even

example, described as the city that Muhammad visited and *only then* assigned for the *qiblah*.<sup>19</sup> In part due to such frivolous “neo-traditions” (no such claims can be found in early Islamic texts), it is advisable to consider serious Islamic traditions in which Jerusalem is regarded as a place worthy of special piety. In this article we will attempt to distinguish traditions which can be traced back to the period of the Islamic conquest of Palestine, with the emphasis on those in which holiness is attributed to Jerusalem based on arguments deriving from Islamic canonical texts, inter-Muslim political processes, Islamic religious and aesthetic competition with the Christian Byzantium, and on the ideas brought to Islam by Jews and Jewish converts to Muhammad’s religion. Indeed, Islamic historiography, theology, and mythology do abound with such traditions. Probably the earliest such tradition is the one according to which Jerusalem was the first city in whose direction Muhammad turned in prayers to the deity he worshiped.

## 2. Jerusalem in the Context of Early Muslim-Jewish Relations

Prayer is the second of the five pillars of Islam. According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad designated Jerusalem as *qiblah* at the very beginning of the existence of Islam,<sup>20</sup> and he faced towards it during the first period of Mecca (610–622). Even after the *hijra*<sup>21</sup> in 622, Muslims faced Jerusalem while in prayer for a full sixteen or seventeen months, and it is only from the month Sha‘bān in the year 2 AH that they began to face the Ka‘ba<sup>22</sup> in Mecca instead.<sup>23</sup> Sources do not reveal the reasons for that change; in fact, early Islamic texts do not mention Jerusalem at

the radical sheik Yusuf al-Qaradawi (cf. Y. AL-QARADAWI, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> See TALHAMI, 2000: 114 where the author writes: “Following news of the [Muhammad’s night] journey, Muslims were ordered to face Jerusalem during the act of prayer.” As we shall see later, this statement is not consistent with early Islamic traditions and canon, inasmuch as Jerusalem was *qiblah* even before the Prophet’s secretive Night Journey, and Jerusalem was not linked to that journey until the end of the seventh century or later. The author further states that Mecca became *qiblah* only after “purification of its temple in 630” (p. 114), which is erroneous since Mecca became *qiblah* a year and a half after the *hijra* of 622 AD, while it was still a center of polytheist worship (IBN-ISHAK, 2004: 289; cf. Quran 2: 142-144). *Qiblah* is the Arabic word for the direction to which Muslims turn in prayer, and today that is the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad received his first revelations when he was forty, in the year 610 AD. For more on the beginnings of Islam see IBN-ISHAK, 2004: 104-115.

all (Quran), or not by that name (Ibn Ishaq’s *Sirah*). However, Muhammad’s constitution of the Ummah upon his arrival in Medina does not leave much room for questioning the tradition according to which the first *qiblah* was actually Jerusalem. The Quran implies, though, that Muhammad’s true desire from the beginning was that the *qiblah* should be changed to Ka‘ba, which he was later allowed to do by a revelation:

We have seen the turning of thy face to heaven (for guidance, O Muhammad). And now verily We shall make thee turn (in prayer) toward a Qiblahh which is dear to thee. So turn thy face toward the Inviolable Place of Worship, and ye (O Muslims), wheresoever ye may be, turn your faces (when ye pray) toward it.<sup>24</sup>

The reason for Muhammad’s choice of Jerusalem as the first *qiblah* was not explained in early Islamic texts. As Muhammad faced Jerusalem in prayer after the first revelations, one may cautiously assume that the reason may be that he regarded the city as a symbol of monotheism, and monotheism was the central theme of Muhammad’s message. Ka‘ba, on the other hand, was at that time the center of Arab polytheism.<sup>25</sup> We may take it as certain that he imitated the ritual of Jews who faced Jerusalem during their prayers. That choice also seems to reflect Muhammad’s effort to approach Jews in the hope that they would accept him as the final Prophet in the line of prophets of the Hebrew Scripture. There is a similar example found in the celebration of Ashura, which derives from the Jewish Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. According to tradition Muhammad introduced that celebration upon his arrival in Medina, modelling it after the Jewish fast and observation

<sup>21</sup> *Hijra* or *hegira* is Muhammad’s flight from Mecca (whose inhabitants did not accept his message and attempted to kill him) to Medina in June 622. That event marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

<sup>22</sup> Islamic terminology in Croatian version of this article has been taken from Arabic and not from Turkish language, even though in the historical Croatian lands a derivation of terminology from Turkish is more common. For this reason, we use Ka‘ba instead of Ćaba, *kafir* instead of *ćafir*, etc.

<sup>23</sup> IBN-ISHAK, 2004: 289; Quran 2: 142-144.

<sup>24</sup> Quran 2: 144. All Quranic verses are from Pickthall’s translation.

<sup>25</sup> The *qiblah* was redirected to Mecca during the second year AH, while Mecca was still a polytheistic sanctuary. Muslims only took over Mecca in the eighth year AH (630 AD). Also, Ibn Ishak transmits tradition that Muhammad performed circumambulation (*tawāf*) around the Ka‘ba during the first Meccan period, that is while Mecca was still the center of polytheist worship (IBN-ISHAK, 2004: 165).

of the Day of Atonement, even though he later reassigned fasting to the month of Ramadan.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Muhammad made a distinctive contract with the Jews of Medina by which he recognized them as part of the Ummah,<sup>27</sup> which is an honor the Muslim Prophet granted to no other non-Muslim community, neither before nor after that.<sup>28</sup> The Jews of Medina, however, with a few exceptions, did not accept Muhammad's message nor did they convert to Islam. In fact, they ridiculed the Prophet and his revelations because of Quranic anachronisms and anapisms related to Biblical themes.<sup>29</sup> Later, they also opposed him politically and militarily by aligning themselves with his enemies from Mecca. In the next few years Muhammad destroyed the three Jewish tribes of Medina, and captured the Jewish town of Khaybar.<sup>30</sup> A political and theological schism emerged between the Muslim community and the Jews of Hejaz which, as history would show, was not entirely unbridgeable, but Jews ceased to be part of the Ummah, and never came even close to become part of it again. Muhammad gave up on theological courting of Jews, and from the sources one gets the impression that, other than being a sporadic object of ridicule and an example of deceitfulness and unbelief (though

<sup>26</sup> M. FIERRO, 1994: 193-208. This celebration of Ashura is not related to the Shia holiday in which the martyrdom of Imam Hussain is commemorated, which developed later.

<sup>27</sup> The Arabic word *Ummah* (أمة) is the term for the entire Muslim community, much like the word Church in Christianity.

<sup>28</sup> The agreement dates from the early period of Medina, before the battle of Badr (M. GILL, 2004: 25), which is confirmed by Ibn Ishak's *Sirah*. The text of the agreement is found in its entirety in IBN-ISHAK, 2004: 231-233. Of particular interest is sentence "Jews [...] are one community with the believers [Muslims] (the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs)" (p. 233). Crone and Cook, and also Wellhausen, consider this aspect of the agreement puzzling (P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 7, 158, note 41). Gill called the entire Constitution of Medina "one of the most remarkable documents in the history of early Islam" (p. 44) and he analyzed it in his article *The Constitution of Medina: A Reconsideration* (M. GILL, 1974: 44-76; Gil's conclusion about the Constitution differs, however, from traditional interpretations). It is interesting that Baladhuri only mentions the existence of the agreement (AL-BALADHURI, 1916: 33). See also N. A. STILLMAN, 1979: 115-118; A. HARUN & IBN-HIŠAM, 1998: 106-109; M. RODINSON, 2000: 190; F. M. DONNER, 2010: 72-7ff.).

<sup>29</sup> S. D. Goitein points to the fact that Muhammad developed an enmity towards the Jews due to their mocking of his "inevitable blunders in referring to the biblical narratives and laws" and as an example of such a mistake refers to Quran 28: 38 according to which "he [Muhammad] has Pharaoh ask his vizier *Haman* (!) to erect a 'Tower of Babel'" (S. D. GOITEIN, 1955: 64).

according to some traditions they remained a reliable source of information about Biblical figures mentioned in the Quran<sup>31</sup>), they lost their importance for the further development of Islamic thought prior to the Muslim conquest of Syria. Jews were recorded in the Islamic canon as the greatest opponents of Islam, who corrupted their Holy Scriptures by removing prophecies of Muhammad's advent. In the decades that followed, however, in many lands that fell under Muslim rule, such as Persia, Iraq, Syria, Palestine and later Spain, somewhat unexpected relationship was forged between the new Muslim authorities and the local Jewish communities. They were not conditioned by Muslim-Jewish animosities during Muhammad's career in Medina, nor by Islamic anti-Jewish canonical texts. Instead, they were rather often marked by an active Jewish collaboration.<sup>32</sup> Many Jewish communities in Byzantine lands greeted Arab Muslim conquerors as deliverers, sometimes providing help in their conquest of Byzantine strongholds, as was the case in Hebron<sup>33</sup> and Caesarea,<sup>34</sup> and later even in Spain.<sup>35</sup> Muslims, on the other hand, ended the centennial Jewish expulsion from their most holy city, Jerusalem. Ever since Emperor Hadrian crushed the Bar

<sup>30</sup> For more on the relations and conflicts between Muhammad and the Jews see B. HAVEL, 2013: 297 ff. On the destruction of the three Jewish tribes of Medina and Khaybar from primary sources see IBN-ISHAK, 2004: 363 (Banu Qaynuqā), 437-445 (Banu al-Naḍīr), 461-482 (Banu Qurayza), 510-523 (Khaybar), AL-TABARI, vol. VII: 27-41 (Banu Qurayza), 116-139 (Khaybar).

<sup>31</sup> M. J. KISTER, 1972: 215-239.

<sup>32</sup> We do not know how much the first Muslims, or Jews of Syria, Egypt, Iraq or Persia knew about Muhammad's and the Quranic attitude toward the Jews. Those regions were conquered before the Quran was collected and made available (according to tradition that happened during the era of the third Rashidun Caliph 'Uthmān), that is before the end of the seventh century or later. Crone and Cook point out that "There is no hard evidence for the existence of the Koran in any form before the last decade of the seventh century, and the tradition which places this rather opaque revelation in its historical context is not attested before the middle of the eighth" (P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 3). With regard to the remaining texts (*Sirah*, ḥadīth) their origin postdates the Arab conquest of Spain. Goitein believes that fate of the Jewish communities in Arabia was different from Jewish communities in other lands conquered by Muslims (S. D. GOITEIN, 1955: 63).

<sup>33</sup> M. GILL, 1997: 57-58.

<sup>34</sup> Arabs, with the help of Jews, conquered Caesarea after a seven-year siege (M. GILL, 1997: 59; N. A. STILLMAN, 1979: 23; AL-BALADHURI, 1916: 217), and the conqueror was Mu'āwiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan, the future first Umayyad Caliph (AL-TABARI, vol. XII: 193).

<sup>35</sup> S. D. GOITEIN, 1955: 62-63

Kokhba revolt in 135 AD, Jews were banned from settling, indeed even approaching Jerusalem. To the outrage of Christians, the new Muslim authorities abolished those Roman and later Byzantine restrictions. Seventy Jewish families settled in Jerusalem from Galilee at the alleged behest of Caliph ‘Umar,<sup>36</sup> and thus was a Jewish presence in the City of David restored after more than five centuries. With the exception of a brief but fierce persecution of Jews and Christians by the Fatimid Caliph al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allah (996–1021), Jews lived under quite benevolent Muslim rule in their most holy city until the Crusades.<sup>37</sup>

Jewish converts to Islam had an important role in shaping early Islamic traditions about Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, which will be addressed later in this text. What remains unclear is why the episodes of conflict between Muhammad and the Muslims on one hand, and Arabian Jews on the other, did not influence the subsequent development of Muslim-Jewish relations in Syria and elsewhere. It is possible that persecution of Jews of Medina and Khaybar was not known to Syrian Jews, nor even to Muslims, since most Muslims who encountered Jews in Syria and Mesopotamia converted to Islam after those events, and possibly did not originate from the Hejaz. Another possible explanation is that by the time of the Muslim conquest of Syria those traditions were still not written down and canonized. Orientalists such as Wansbrough have already proposed dating of the Quranic text later than what is established by official Islamic chronology.<sup>38</sup> Even if we accept Islamic historiography, to which some orientalists refer as *Heilige Geschichte* because of its wanting or unverifiable historicity,<sup>39</sup> at the time of the Muslim conquest of Syria, the Quranic text had not yet been collected and compiled. Compilation

<sup>36</sup> N. A. STILLMAN, 1979: 154-155. The primary source to which Stillman refers is unreliable and contains certain anachronisms (see footnote 2), and the very presence of ‘Umar in Jerusalem is part of later traditions, which shall be discussed later in the text.

<sup>37</sup> Goitein writes on the topic: “Although there was but one incident of officially-inspired persecution of non-Muslims, the avaricious emirs and unintelligent sheiks dealt stringently with the population as a whole, particularly with those under their patronage” (S. D. GOITEIN, 1981: 169).

<sup>38</sup> J. WANSBROUGH, 1977.

<sup>39</sup> M. SHARON, 2007: 316. For more on the origin of the use and meaning of “Salvation History”, which is also called *Heilsgeschichte*, see G. HAWTING, 2006: i-viii.

<sup>40</sup> AL-BALADHURI, 1916: 46, 50.

<sup>41</sup> See M. SHARON, 2007: 352-353 in which the author concludes that “more or less what be said about the ‘Jews of Muhammad’ – a certain group of believers in Jesus who were distinguished from the other ‘messianic’ Christians, and

of the Quran was completed by the third Rashidun Caliph ‘Uthmān ibn Affān (644–656) and the conquests were mostly completed during the era of his predecessor, the second Caliph ‘Umar (634–644). On the other hand, Baladhuri writes that ‘Umar exiled the Jews of Khaybar to Syria,<sup>40</sup> which would mean that they brought with them the stories of the fate of the Arabian Jewish communities independently of Muslim texts and traditions. It is also possible, but not probable, that Syrian Jews preferred the messianic perception of Islamic conquest to their concern over the fate of their Arabian co-religionists. Finally, the extent to which Arabian and Syrian Jews were truly a part of the same national and religious corpus may be questioned. Moshe Sharon believes, on the basis of the Quranic reference to Uzair, that it was not Jews, but Christians, who lived in Medina.<sup>41</sup> Plausible as it is, that claim cannot be uncritically accepted either. For example, Muhammad on his deathbed ordered that two religions must not remain on the Arab Peninsula,<sup>42</sup> which Caliph ‘Umar understood as a command to exile the remaining Jews from Khaybar.<sup>43</sup> The third faith, Christianity, according to this instruction, did not exist in Arabia.

### 3. Muhammad’s Night Journey to al-Aqṣā

A year before the *hijra*, in 621, Muhammad travelled from Mecca to al-Aqṣā during his mysterious Night Journey, riding the mythical creature Al-Burāq, and then rising to the heavens where he met up with ‘Ibrāhīm (Abraham), Mūsā (Moses) and ‘Īsā (Jesus).<sup>44</sup> The Night Journey is known as *isrā* and the Celestial Journey as *mi’rāj*. It is described in the first *āyah*<sup>45</sup> of the Surah Al-Isra (17).

called *Yahūd*. Everything else consists of the stories of later authors who were very far from the time of the Prophet but met Rabbinical Jews in the conquered lands and projected whatever they saw among the Jews of their time to the past” (p. 353, Note 25). The Quranic verse 9: 30 opens with the statement: “And the Jews say: Ezra [i.e. Uzair, عَزْرِي] is the son of Allah”. However, there is no evidence of any Jewish sect in Arabia or elsewhere which adhered to such a belief. Wansbrough notes that “identity [of the Jewish community in Medina] is anything but clear and the polemic heavily stereotyped” (J. WANSBROUGH, 2006: 109).

<sup>42</sup> IBN-ISHAK, 2004: 689; AL-BALADHURI, 1916: 48.

<sup>43</sup> AL-TABARI, vol. VIII: 130.

<sup>44</sup> IBN-ISHAK, 2004: 182. According to Ibn Ishak’s report they found themselves in the company of some prophets, and Muhammad led them all in prayer.

<sup>45</sup> A line in the Quran, a verse.

Glorified be He Who carried His servant by night from the Inviolable Place of Worship to the Far Distant Place of Worship the neighborhood whereof We have blessed, that We might show him of Our tokens!

In the Commentary of Korkut's translation of the Quran this verse is explained as follows:

The Holy Temple is the Ka'ba in Mecca, which was built by Ibrahim and Ismail, and the Far Distant Place of Worship is the Temple in Jerusalem, which was built by Dawud [David] and Suleiman [Solomon]. In the first verse is discussed the *mi'rāj*, Muhammad's a.s. journey to heaven.<sup>46</sup>

The term translated here as "the Far Distant Place of Worship" in Arabic is Al-Masjid al-Aqṣā (المسجد الأقصى), and it is traditionally interpreted according to Korkut's commentary to translation as the Temple in Jerusalem. Abdallah El-Khatib explains that "All Muslim exegetes are unanimous about the reference of this verse to Jerusalem."<sup>47</sup> Many contemporary Muslims view the importance of Jerusalem in early Islamic tradition as vital for their religious identity, which is the principal message of El-Khatib's article. Muhammad's Night Journey to al-Aqṣā and his ascent into celestial realm are its key part. The importance of the al-Aqṣā Mosque on the Temple Mount or the "Noble Sanctuary," as the Arabic *Al-Haram al-Sharīf* (الحرم الشريف) is translated, and the Western Wall, to which the mythical creature al-Buraq was tied, derives from that legend.

The interpretation of this mythical episode from the Prophet's life, the only one which directly connects him to Jerusalem, is problematic from the perspective of history inasmuch as it contains an obvious anachronism: There were no sanctuaries in Jerusalem at the time of Muhammad's Night Journey, least of all the Masjid al-Aqṣā. The Jewish Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD, and the first Islamic shrines on the Haram, according to even the most optimistic Islamic traditions, were built six years after Muhammad's death; the Masjid al-Aqṣā was

built at the beginning of the eighth century. This is a possible reason for the discontinuity between the first decades of Islam and the earliest identification of Jerusalem as the destination of the *isrā*. Despite El-Khatib's creative attempt at interpretation in which he claims the opposite, Jerusalem is not mentioned in the Quran under any name whatsoever, not even as an insinuation.<sup>48</sup> All known Islamic sources which relate Muhammad's Night Journey and Masjid al-Aqṣā to Jerusalem were created two or more centuries after Muhammad's death. Among the well-known sources in which this tradition appears are Ibn Ishak's (or Ibn Hishām) *Sirah*, and the historiographic and geographic works of Al-Tabari,<sup>49</sup> Al-Baladhuri and Al-Muqaddasī. The exegetic authorities which El-Khatib cites, Muḥammad Fakhr al-Dīn b. 'Umar al-Rāzī and Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī wrote in the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century AD respectively, which El-Khatib does not mention in his article.<sup>50</sup> Since at the time of *isrā* and *mi'rāj* (621) the *qiblah* was still directed towards Jerusalem – which may be considered undisputable even though, as we have seen, the name of the city was not explicitly mentioned in the sources – it is remarkable that the name of the destination of such an important and marvelous voyage is not specified, but substituted with a name of rather ambiguous meaning. Possibly the first early Islamic text in which Jerusalem is named as the destination of Muhammad's Night Journey is Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah*: "Then the apostle was carried by night from the mosque at Mecca to the Masjid al-Aqṣā, which is the temple of Aelia."<sup>51</sup> His biography of the Muslim prophet Muhammad, *Sirah Rasul Allah*, was written in the middle of the eighth century, but the original form of the work is now lost, and the *Sirah* which has survived is the ninth century version by Ibn Hisham, edited and supplemented with commentaries. Thus, two centuries have elapsed between the sources that we have and the events described in those sources.<sup>52</sup> Due to *isrā* and *mi'rāj*, and some other events connected to the

<sup>46</sup> B. KORKUT, 2011: 616.

<sup>47</sup> EL-KHATIB, 2001: 34.

<sup>48</sup> M. SHARON, 1992: 56.

<sup>49</sup> Some of the Arabic names in this paper have been transcribed and/or transliterated differently in the text and in the citations and bibliography. In the bibliography the transliteration is taken from the English language, in the same manner that it is given in the bibliographical unit. In the text itself, however, the names are transcribed phonetically, directly from Arabic to Croatian, so that Tabari in the text is at-Tabari or simply Tabari, but in the citations and literature is Al-Tabari (الطبري); the same principle is used

for al-Balazuri or Balazuri, which is Al-Baladhuri (البلاذري) in cited sources, etc.

<sup>50</sup> Muḥammad Fakhr al-Dīn Razi (1149.–1209), Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī (1372.–1449).

<sup>51</sup> IBN-ISHAQ, 2004: 181. Aelia (Iliā or Iliyā in Arabic) is that name used by early Islamic historians for Jerusalem, which is explained in more detail later in the text.

<sup>52</sup> Ibn Ishak died in 768 and Ibn Hisham around 833. Ibn Ishak's work has been lost and his text has only been preserved in Ibn Hisham's edition, and in al-Tabari's *History*. It is known that Ibn Hisham altered the text to some degree, especially in those parts in which the then-reigning Abbasid Caliphs held positions different from those of their

City, Jerusalem eventually became a place of special reverence for Muslims. Texts known as *faḍā'il al-Quds* or *faḍā'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* (فضائل بيت المقدس), that is *Virtues of Jerusalem* were thus produced, and they form part of the literary opus of the ḥadīth. The oldest texts of that genre available today originate from the eleventh century.<sup>53</sup> We may assume that they have been based on earlier traditions which date as far back as the seventh and eighth century,<sup>54</sup> mainly from the era of the Umayyad Caliphate.<sup>55</sup> A key question to be addressed is following: When did Islamic tradition begin to identify Jerusalem as the destination of Muhammad's Night Journey? In other words, when did Muslims begin to attribute holiness to Jerusalem *because of events related to Islam*, and to venerate it as their third holiest city? This point is important because Islam both recognizes and appropriates Jewish patriarchs and prophets<sup>56</sup> (as well as personalities from the New Testament, of which Jesus and Mary are practically the only ones mentioned), and consequently assumes that all places holy to Jews are also holy to Muslims by default.<sup>57</sup> In pursuit of an answer to the question of when these events from the Islamic tradition began to be

linked to Jerusalem, it is essential to look back to the Muslim conquest of Palestine and the first Islamic constructions in Jerusalem.

#### 4. Palestine under Muslim Rule

Arab-Muslim troops captured Jerusalem in 638, during the rule of the second, and according to Sunni tradition most important, Rashidun Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (634–644). According to earliest Islamic sources Jerusalem was conquered by the little-known commander Khālīd b. Thābit al-Fahmī.<sup>58</sup> By the end of 'Umar's ten-year rule, the Islamic empire extended from Persia to Egypt. Palestine was merely one of the conquered Byzantine regions in Asia, and Jerusalem one of many cities in which Muslim rule replaced Byzantine. In order to govern the newly occupied regions it was necessary to establish an administrative center. The choice fell on Caesarea, the last Palestinian city conquered by the Muslims, and the province's administrative center also during Byzantine rule. At the beginning of the eighth century Muslims in Palestine built a new administrative center, the

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Umayyad predecessors. For more on *Sirah* see the *Introduction* from the translator of the *Sirah* into English, Alfred Guillaume (IBN-ISHAK, 2004: xiii-xlvii).

<sup>53</sup> J. LASSNER, 2006: 179. El-Khatib believes the first book of that genre to be the work entitled *Futūḥ Bayt al-Maqdis* from 206 AH/821 AD (EL-KHATIB, 2001: 27). Grabar, however, states that "The *faḍā'il* or religious guidebooks for pilgrims of later times provide us with an answer for the period which followed the Crusades, but it may be questioned whether all the complex traditions reported about the Ḥaram at that time had already been formulated when the area was taken over by the Arabs" (O. GRABAR, 1959: 33).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. O. LIVNE-KAFRI, 2006: 382.

<sup>55</sup> O. LIVNE-KAFRI, 1998: 165.

<sup>56</sup> For example, in Quran 3: 67 is written that "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was one inclining toward truth, a Muslim" (translation by Sahih International; see also IBN-ISHAK, 2004: 260). In Korkut's translation "Ibrahim was neither Jew nor Christian, but a true believer ...", but this translation is rather incorrect, since in the Arabic original we find the word *Muslim* (مُسْلِمًا in the original text) and not *believer* (مُؤْمِن). Korkut likely made this change in order to avoid the obvious anachronism, seeing as Abraham lived two and a half millennia before Islam and term "Muslim" appeared. Similarly, Pickthall wrote: "Abraham was not a Jew, nor yet a Christian; but he was an upright man who had surrendered (to Allah)."

<sup>57</sup> H. Busse begins his famous article *The Sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam* with the sentence: "The sacred character of Jerusalem in Islam is, on the whole, based on Muhammad's conception of himself as the one who fulfilled the religion of the People of the Book, Jews and Christians" (H. BUSSE, 1968: 441). See also J. LASSNER, 2017: 191.

<sup>58</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 5: 323 (s.v. al-Ḳuds); M. SHARON, 2006: 24. Cf. AL-BALADHURI, 1916: 213-214 who cites the tradition according to which Palestine and Jerusalem were conquered by 'Amr ibn al-'As, the famous conqueror of Egypt. According to Tabari 'Amr sent 'Alqamah ibn Ḥakīm and al-'Akkī to the battle against the inhabitants of Jerusalem (AL-TABARI, vol. XII: 186). There is also a tradition according to which the conquest of parts of Palestine including Jerusalem is attributed to Abu Ubaydah. Most later traditions, though, regardless of who is merited with the conquest of the city (Khālīd ibn Thābit al-Fahmī, 'Amr, or Abu Ubaydah), linked the act of surrendering Jerusalem to 'Umar's arrival. On the various traditions and sources see H. BUSSE, 1986: 149-168. Busse points out that details about the Arab conquest of Palestine are not known, and that Islamic traditions offer four different versions of the narrative of the conquest of Jerusalem (H. BUSSE, 1968: 443-444). 'Umar's role in the conquest of Jerusalem and his arrival in Palestine can be questioned in any context, for if such an important event had indeed occurred, one would expect that it would have been well documented and that far more detail would have been provided (see B. HAVEL, 2010: 432-433). Mecca lies at a distance of one-month travel by caravan from Palestine (IBN-ISHAK, 2004: 182-183), and it is hard to assume that the Caliph would undertake such a voyage without serious cause. The conquest of Jerusalem, if Jerusalem was at the time perceived as a holy and eschatologically important city, would represent such a cause. Or, as implied by Crone and Cook, the linking of 'Umar and Jerusalem in later traditions properly served for the elevation and sanctification of both the Caliph and the City (H. BUSSE, 1968: 447; P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 5).



city of Ramla, founded between 705 and 714.<sup>59</sup> Ramla remained the capital city of Arab Muslim administration in Palestine until an earthquake in 1068 destroyed a greater part of the city.<sup>60</sup> The political and administrative center of that wider region was Damascus, the capital of the Umayyad dynasty, and the capital of the Islamic empire until the Abbasids transferred the center of government to Iraq after the revolution of 750. Damascus was more important than Jerusalem to the Umayyads,<sup>61</sup> even though there are alternative opinions: Israeli historian Amikam Elad, along with the observation that there are no “explicit written testimonies” on the matter, wrote that the capital city of the Umayyads was Jerusalem.<sup>62</sup> The governor of Damascus was Mu‘āwiyah ibn ‘Abī Sufyān, who had ruled there since the Rashidun Caliphate. After the murder of the third Rashidun Caliph, Mu‘āwiyah’s cousin ‘Uthmān ibn Affān (656), Mu‘āwiyah refused to swear allegiance to the fourth Caliph, ‘Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib (656–661). The disputes between the two of them became known in early Islamic tradition as the era of the first *fitnah* (فتنة) which is usually translated as Civil War. In 661 Caliph ‘Alī was killed in a mosque in Kūfa by a member of the radical Muslim sect of Kharijites, after which the title of Caliph should have been inherited by his eldest son Hassan. Hassan, however, ceded power to Mu‘āwiyah for the price of five million dirhams and returned to Medina.<sup>63</sup> The same year,

Mu‘āwiyah proclaimed himself Caliph and with his twenty-year rule (661–680) the period of the Umayyad Caliphate begins. From the time of the second Rashidun Caliph ‘Umar who appointed him governor, Mu‘āwiyah’s capital was Damascus. From the capital of the governor, Damascus proceeded to serve as the capital of the Caliphate founded by Mu‘āwiyah. As stated by al-Tabari, however, Mu‘āwiyah was “crowned” as Caliph in Jerusalem.<sup>64</sup> Without any explanation and in only one sentence Tabari states that “In this year Mu‘āwiyah was rendered allegiance as Caliph in Jerusalem (Iliyā)” and then explains that after ‘Alī’s death he was called *Amir al-Mu‘minīn*<sup>65</sup> not only in Iraq, but in Syria as well. An earlier source, Ibn Sa‘d (784–845), states that Mu‘āwiyah made an alliance with ‘Amr ibn al-‘As in Jerusalem in 658 against ‘Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib.<sup>66</sup> Until the end of Mu‘āwiyah’s rule as described in the eighteenth volume of Tabari’s *History of Prophets and Kings*, Jerusalem was no longer mentioned. Mu‘āwiyah died in 680 and was buried in Damascus,<sup>67</sup> the city from which he ruled, which he built,<sup>68</sup> and which he – during the century of the Umayyad dynasty – turned into the “heart of one of the greatest empires that the world has ever known.”<sup>69</sup> A series of Umayyad Caliph’s followed – ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan being one of the most successful – a dynasty which ruled the Islamic Orient until the mid-

<sup>59</sup> Suleiman ibn ‘Abd al-Malik founded Ramla on sandy dunes while he was the governor of Palestine, before he became Caliph in 715. On the early history of Ramla see M. ROSEN-AYALON, 1996: 250-263.

<sup>60</sup> For example, Muqaddasī states at the beginning of the list of cities of Palestine, which according to his division makes up one of the six regions of Syria (al-Sham), that Palestine’s capital was al-Ramla (AL-MUQADDASI, 2001: 123).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. H. BUSSE, 1986: 162.

<sup>62</sup> A. ELAD, 1999: 300-314. Elad bases this assumption on the observation that the Umayyads invested an enormous amount of material and human resources into Jerusalem, but that is only partially true and is applicable only to the construction of the Dome of the Rock. This theory of Elad’s is disputable and he is, as far as I know, the only prominent expert on early Islamic Jerusalem who adheres to this theory. Lassner in his book (J. LASSNER, 2017: xii, Chapter 4) dedicates much space to the refuting of Elad’s statements. Even earlier authors noticed the logic in the assumption that the Umayyads, due to the enormous construction venture which they undertook in Jerusalem, perhaps had the intention of making it their capital city, but there is no evidence that they ever actually did it. Few Caliphs, according to the evidence available, even visited Jerusalem, and not even ‘Abd al-Malik held up there (M. ROSEN-AYALON, 1989: 1). In support of Elad’s theory it should be noted that in the past few decades there have been archaeological excavations on the south side of the Ḥaram which have revealed a

complex of “secular” buildings from the Umayyad era, among which a house from which one could directly approach the mosque (al-Aqṣā or one that stood in that spot). Robert Hoyland presented some of the non-Islamic texts in which the early importance of Jerusalem for Muslims is mentioned. Hoyland is one of the most famous scholars of non-Islamic sources on early Islam (but not also as an expert on Islamic Jerusalem). In the context of a description of Jerusalem by Bishop Arculf (written in the 670s or 680s) he mentions that between Jerusalem and Damascus there were new paths built and the old repaired, and that he believes that Jerusalem was not only a cult center for Muslims, but also “initially the capital of Muslim Palestine” (R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 223).

<sup>63</sup> AL-TABARI, vol. XVIII: 4-5, 7-12.

<sup>64</sup> AL-TABARI, vol. XVIII: 6.

<sup>65</sup> Arabic for “Commander of the Faithful,” a title attributed to the Caliph.

<sup>66</sup> R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 222. Mu‘āwiyah was the administrator of Syria, and ‘Amr the conqueror (640) and the administrator of Egypt.

<sup>67</sup> O. GRABAR, 1966: 18.

<sup>68</sup> Grabar cautions though that “Little is known about Mu‘āwiyah’s secular constructions in Damascus, but it is not likely that they were done on a very lavish scale” (O. GRABAR, 1959: 34).

<sup>69</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2: 280 (s.v. Dimashk).

eighth century. During the Umayyad era numerous traditions appeared, according to which religious importance was attributed to the Syrian lands, in Arabic known as Bilād al-Sham (بلاد الشام), which also included Palestine.<sup>70</sup> In these traditions, Syria is placed along with the Hejaz, the cradle of Islam. Thus “Umayyad claims to [religious and political] legitimacy and Muslim attempt to promote the sanctity of Jerusalem were inextricably linked.”<sup>71</sup> Ḥadīth appeared which suggested a visit to al-Khalīl (Hebron) and other Syrian cities to Muslims.<sup>72</sup> Traditions were also created by which the mosque of Damascus<sup>73</sup> was elevated to the fourth most important mosque in Islam, and prayers in it valued as thirty-thousand prayers elsewhere.<sup>74</sup> The Umayyads fabricated many ḥadīth and traditions containing such claims, which in turn prompted the invention of ḥadīth with opposite messages, in which the importance of Syria and Syrian cities was mitigated, and the unchallengeable importance of Mecca and, to a lesser degree, of Medina, that is *ḥaramayn*, emphasized.<sup>75</sup> Older than the Islamic are Christian sources in which, usually in short fragments, Jerusalem of the Umayyad era was described. The Frankish bishop Arculf is the source of “The only authentic eyewitness account of the new Muslim Jerusalem.”<sup>76</sup> Arculf lived in Jerusalem in the 670s and upon return to Europe stated that “In that famous place where once stood the magnificently constructed Temple, near the eastern wall, the Saracens now frequent a

rectangular house of prayer which they have built in a crude manner, constructing it from raised planks and large beams over some remaining ruins. This house can, as it is said, accommodate at least 3000 people.”<sup>77</sup> In his work written in the 680s and 690s, the monk Anastasius of Sinai, who spent a period of time in Jerusalem during his journey of many years,<sup>78</sup> “witnessed” in 660 “demons participating in the clearing work commissioned by the Muslims on the Temple Mount.”<sup>79</sup> Here is also the work entitled *Pratum spirituale* (The Spiritual Meadow) by John Moschus (Μόσχος), a Byzantine monk and friend of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius, which was revised after his death in 619 or 634, according to many sources by Sophronius himself.<sup>80</sup> Short portions of the texts are dedicated to early Muslim constructions on the “Capitol” which is interpreted as being the Temple Mount.<sup>81</sup> If these elaborated works and interpretations are accepted, Muslims began the construction of the Temple Mount immediately upon conquering Jerusalem, while Sophronius was still alive, that is, in 638. Hoyland explains that it is possible that already at that time some structures were built, but were destroyed in the earthquake which hit Palestine in June of 659, for which reason the space was “cleared” in 660.<sup>82</sup> In conclusion, Muslim construction in Jerusalem, which likely implies an early Muslim attribution of importance and perhaps holiness to Jerusalem, may be considered unquestionable even before erection of the Dome of the Rock, the oldest

<sup>70</sup> Bilād al-Sham or simply al-Sham denotes a region much wider than Syria today. According to medieval Muslim geographers it includes the lands from the Euphrates to al-Arisha of Sinai. Lassner notes that this corresponds to the region promised to Abraham in Genesis 15: 18, which points to the search for a common Abrahamic tradition for the three monotheistic religions (J. LASSNER, 2017: 5-6). See Lassner’s interpretation of a possible etymology for the word *Sham*, the region which according to Islamic sources is enveloped by it, and the religious symbolism on pp. 2-7.

<sup>71</sup> J. LASSNER, 2017: 17.

<sup>72</sup> I. GOLDZIJER, 1971: 45.

<sup>73</sup> Caliph al-Walīd (705–715) began the construction of the Great Mosque in Damascus in the year 706 after he destroyed the Church of John the Baptist, and the construction lasted almost one entire decade. Al-Walīd, at the same time, constructed the “first real mosque” in Medina, at the place where Mohammed’s house stood, and it is possible that al-Aqṣā mosque in Jerusalem was built at that time (R. GRAFMAN & M. ROSEN-AYALON, 1999: 7).

<sup>74</sup> M. J. KISTER, 1969: 189.

<sup>75</sup> Al-Ḥaramayn (الحرمين) means “two sanctuaries” and refers to the cities of Mecca and Medina in the Hejaz.

<sup>76</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 45.

<sup>77</sup> R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 221. Arculf survived a shipwreck near the island Iona in the west Scottish archipelago, and his

experiences from his travels to the Holy Land were told to the monk Adomnán in the monastery in which he was recovering. Adomnán described them, with revisions, in his work *On Holy Places (De locis sanctis)*.

<sup>78</sup> R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 92.

<sup>79</sup> R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 101.

<sup>80</sup> John Moschus described events that he and Sophronius saw and experienced, and before his death he entrusted Sophronius to continue to add onto his text. John of Damascus, who wrote in the 730s, therefore believed Sophronius to be its author (R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 61).

<sup>81</sup> R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 63. That part of the text reads: “the godless Saracens entered the holy city of Christ our Lord, Jerusalem, with the permission of God and in punishment of our negligence, which is considerable, and immediately proceeded in haste to the place which is called the Capitol. They took with them men, some by force, others by their own will, in order to clean that place and to build that cursed thing, intended for their prayer and which they call a mosque (*midzgitha*)” (p. 63).

<sup>82</sup> R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 65. For more on the texts which are attributed to John Moschus and Sophronius, and from which the beginning of a Muslim presence and construction in Jerusalem can be seen, see R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 61-73.

edifice that can be dated. However, even here one must be cautious in drawing conclusions. The construction *per se* is not evidence of the attribution of holiness to the city, as Muslim prayer-houses and other edifices with time came to be built around the Islamic empire, even in places without any particular religious importance. An early attribution of holiness to Jerusalem may be argued on the basis of choice of location – the Temple Mount. On the other hand, the Temple Mount was a convenient place because it offered a wide area for construction, with no need for the destruction of older buildings, such as the destruction of the Cathedral of John the Baptist in Damascus in order to build the Umayyad Mosque on its site.

### 5. The Early Islamic Name for Jerusalem

From the first mention of Jerusalem in Tabari's *History of Prophets and Kings*, Tabari (839–923) uses a somewhat surprising toponym by which that city, by the tenth century AD already a long-time revered by Muslims as holy, is referred to. In the original Arabic text, Tabari calls Jerusalem "Iliyā" (إيلياء), or Iliyā madīnat bayt al-maqdis.<sup>83</sup> It means "Aelia, city of the Temple", with Iliyā being the Arabicized Latin name Aelia, *madīnat* is the Arabic word for city, and *bayt al-maqdis* (or *maqdis*) is the Arabicized Hebrew term for the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem *bait ha-mikdash* (בית המקדש)<sup>84</sup> which means "the Holy House" or "the Temple". According to Brill's *Encyclopaedia of Islam* "In practice, Iliyā', or, more commonly, *bayt al-maqdis*, were used,"<sup>85</sup> although the earliest Islamic sources mention only Iliyā, and not Bayt al-maqdis. Thus, an early eighth century archaeological finding from the Negev Desert in modern Israel comprised of a modified Quranic text, indicates an early use of the toponym Iliyā, while the name Bayt al-maqdis was still unknown.<sup>86</sup> The same terms are used by other prominent Islamic chroniclers, such as Ibn Ishaq who also uses the toponym Iliyā,<sup>87</sup> Ibn Sa'da

(784–845),<sup>88</sup> and Baladhuri (?–892) who used *al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* more often, even when he wrote about the Jerusalem of the First Temple period.<sup>89</sup> The current Muslim name for Jerusalem, al-Quds, is not mentioned at all, nor does it appear anywhere in literature of that time. The author of the entry "al-Ḳuds" in *EI* states that the name al-Ḳuds is "still unknown to Ibn Sa'd, Baladhuri, Tabari, the *Agkani*, the '*Ikḍ al-farīdu* and other classics of the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>90</sup> Moshe Sharon, in the description of an Arabic inscription from 785 found near Kibbutz Sde Boker, explains that Iliyā was the name "by which the city was known to the Muslims until the 10th century."<sup>91</sup> The name al-Quds' is first used more frequently by an Arab historian born in Jerusalem, al-Muqaddasī or al-Makdisi (المقدسي, 945–991), who wrote at the end of the tenth century AD. In his famous geographical work, *Ahsan al-taqasim fi-ma'rifat al-aqalim*, however, he also uses the name Bayt al-Maqdis. It appears at the beginning of his account of Palestinian cities, and at the beginning of the description of Jerusalem.<sup>92</sup> It is a rather unusual and unexpected toponymic and historiographic phenomenon that the name of a city today considered to be the third holiest in Islam was not known to Muslim chroniclers who wrote during the first three centuries of Islam, neither in its original Hebrew form Jerusalem or Yerushalayim (ירושלים) nor in its Arabic form al-Ḳuds (القدس). It is, however, beyond dispute that both "Iliyā" and "Bayt al-Maqdis" in the works of early Islamic historians refer to Jerusalem. The use of the name Iliyā is particularly indicative and perhaps unexpected inasmuch as "Aelia" has never been used by Jews in religious context, not even prior to the Muslim conquest of Palestine, and Muslims borrowed many traditions relating to the city from the Jews. To a certain extent that name was also improper for Christian, primarily religious use. Emperor Hadrian (117–38) renamed Jerusalem to Aelia Capitolina following his suppression of the Jewish revolt under Bar Kohba in 135 after three years of bitter struggle

<sup>83</sup> AL-TABARI, vol. XII: 144. In English transliteration "Iliyā madinat bayt al-maqdis". In the English translation "Jerusalem" is written, and in the same way the names Mecca, Baghdad, Damascus and Yemen are translated, because they are considered "Well-known place names" as explained in the Foreword (ibid. viii), while the names of less-known places are transliterated.

<sup>84</sup> The Hebrew *ha* (ה) and Arabic *al* (ال) represent definite articles.

<sup>85</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 5: 322 (s.v. al-Ḳuds).

<sup>86</sup> M. SHARON, 2009: 298-299. It is a stone inscription of verse 50: 41 "And listen on the day when the crier crieth from a near place" in which the part "from a near place" (من مكان قريب) is replaced with the words "from Iliyā" (من إيلياء).

<sup>87</sup> IBN-ISHAQ, 2004: 181.

<sup>88</sup> Ibn Sa'd in his famous biographical collection *Kitāb tabaqat al-kubra* (4.2, 2) writes that Mu'āwiyah made an alliance with 'Amr "*bi-bayt al-maqdis*," that is, in Jerusalem (R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 222, footnote 24).

<sup>89</sup> AL-BALADHURI, 1916: 30; cf. AL-BALADHURI, 1916: 213ff.

<sup>90</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 5: 323 (s.v. al-Ḳuds). The centuries cited in the citation are the Islamic way of denoting time, according to the Christian calendar (third century AH or tenth century AD).

<sup>91</sup> M. SHARON, 1992: 56.

<sup>92</sup> AL-MUQADDASI, 2001: 132, 140.

and much difficulty. The Jews who survived the Roman slaughter were exiled from Jerusalem and the surrounding Judaeen region, and were prohibited not only to enter but also to approach the city on pain of death. This ban applied to Christians of Jewish descent as well, that is, to all who were circumcised.<sup>93</sup> Along with Jerusalem Hadrian also renamed Judaea, or the Land of Israel (ארץ ישראל) to Palestine, in order to eradicate its Jewish identity.<sup>94</sup> The name Palestine took hold and has been in use to this very day, while the name Jerusalem slowly came back into use and eventually entirely ousted the name Aelia Capitolina from Christian use. Among the key reasons for this is the importance of Jerusalem in Christian tradition as the place of Jesus' Passion and Resurrection, as well its status as a city which is mentioned in the Bible more than eight hundred times.<sup>95</sup> Another reason was Hadrian's transformation of Jerusalem into a "conspicuously Roman colony" which included pagan sanctuaries constructed *ad hoc* in order to suppress the Jewish and Christian faith. The name Aelia Capitolina referred to the dominance of the chief deity of the Roman pantheon, Jupiter

<sup>93</sup> M. AVI-YONAH, 1960: 111.

<sup>94</sup> B. LEWIS, 1980: 1-12. Judaea and the land of Israel could have been considered synonyms at that time; see, for example Matthew 2: 19.

<sup>95</sup> "The name 'Jerusalem' occurs 806 times in the Bible, 660 times in the Old Testament and 146 times in the New Testament; additional references to the city occur as synonyms" (*Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*: 392).

<sup>96</sup> For more on Hadrian's renaming of Jerusalem see D. GOLAN, 1986: 226-239.

<sup>97</sup> See C. DAUPHIN, 1997: 146-148.

<sup>98</sup> Hrvoje Gračanin, an expert from the University of Zagreb's Faculty of Philosophy on historical writing from late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, as well as on the history of Byzantine civilization, sent me a series of examples of the name for Jerusalem in the works of Christian authors from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The following citations are from his letter dated January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018:

Eusebius (4<sup>th</sup> cent.) in *Church History* 2.12.3: τῆς νῦν Αἰλίας, *of the Aelia of today*; 6.20.1: εἰς ἡμᾶς ...κατ Ἀιλίαν, *until today... in Aelia*.

*Itinerarium Burdigalense* (333./334) *Itineraria Romana*. Vol. 1: *Itineraria Antonini Augusti et Burdigalense*, ed. Otto Cuntz, Leipzig: Teubner, 1929, 86-102 use the name Hierusalem exclusively (588,7-8; 589,4; 589,5; 589,7; 591,7; 594,5; 596,4; 598,4; 600,1). *Sanctae Silviae Peregrinatio* (end of the 4<sup>th</sup> cent.) *Itinera Hierosolymitana*, ed. Paul Geyer 9.7: in Helia, id est in Ierusalem.

Eucheria from Lugdunum, *De situ Hierosolimitanae urbis atque ipsius Iudaeae epistola ad Faustum presbyterum* (5<sup>th</sup> cent.) *Itinera Hierosolymitana*, ed. Paul Geyer, p. 127,7: Hierusalem ab Aelio Adriano Aelia uocatur, p. 128,4: Aelia.

Capitolinus, over that rebellious city.<sup>96</sup> Under the rule of Emperor Constantine (306–337) pagan Roman sanctuaries were destroyed, and Jerusalem became a destination of Christian pilgrimage, particularly after Constantine's mother, Saint Helena, initiated construction of churches in places connected to events from Jesus' life in Jerusalem.<sup>97</sup> During the entire Byzantine period which, except for a brief period of Persian rule at the beginning of the seventh century, lasted until the Islamic conquest, the Latin name Aelia remained in sporadic use in its Greek or original Latin form,<sup>98</sup> even though "In written sources, Christians generally referred to the city as 'Hierosalym.'"<sup>99</sup> The name Aelia was thus adopted by Muslim conquerors. They arabicized it and continued to use it for centuries. The origins of the name Aelia, or Iliyyā, was unknown to Muslims, and they interpreted it in different ways, relating it *inter alia* to the Biblical prophet Elijah, in Hebrew Eliyahu (אליהו) who is called Iliyyās (إلياس) in the Quran (6:85; 37:130).<sup>100</sup> In most translations of early Arabic texts into English, the name Aelia (Iliyyā) was simply translated as "Jerusalem", sometimes with a short

*Acts of the Chalcedonian Council* (451) *Concilium Universale Chalcedonense*, in: *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum* t. II, vol. I: *Acta Graeca*, Pars III: *Actiones VIII-XVII*. 18-31, ed. Eduard Schwartz, Berlin-Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1965. Actio XVI, 16: *to the bishop of Aelia, that is, Jerusalem*.

Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicles* (6<sup>th</sup> cent) a. 419.3 ...Montem oliveti Hierosolymae vicinum (...over the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem). A. 439.2 Hierosolymis; a. 444.4 Aeliam urbem and Aeliam civitatem; a. 453.1 Hierosolymam; a. 516.2 Hierosolymitanae urbis.

Adomnan from Iona, *De locis sanctis libri tres* (7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> cent.) *Itinera Hierosolymitana*, ed. Paul Geyer. The name Hierusalem is used more often, but in 1.20: Helia (twice) and 2.7: Helia.

Beda, *Liber de locis sanctis* (7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> cent.) *Itinera Hierosolymitana*, ed. Paul Geyer

the name Hierusalem is used more often; cap. 1: sed ab Helio Adriano Caesare, a quo etiam nunc Helia uocatur; Helia also in 3,7,8,9 and 15. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Hrvoje Gračanin for his kindness and for the effort that he put into collecting the examples mentioned above.

<sup>99</sup> J. LASSNER, 2006: 165, footnote 2. The tenacity of the name Aelia even during the mostly Christian Byzantine Empire seems unusual when taking into consideration that there already existed the canonized text of the New Testament in which Jerusalem, and not Aelia, is mentioned, seeing as the name originated several decades after the writing of the text of the New Testament. Furthermore, the emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363) expressed his anti-Christian point of view through his support of the Jews in their attempt to renew the Temple in Jerusalem, not in Aelia, and the Jews certainly did not call their holy city Aelia.

<sup>100</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 5: 322-323 (s.v. al-Ḳuds).

translators' note explaining that it was done in order to coordinate the terms, as in the foreword of several volumes of Tabari's *Histories*. There are, of course, exceptions. Orientalist Guy Le Strange (1854–1933) offered an explanation for the names for Jerusalem used by Muslims in the first centuries of rule in Palestine, including the name Iliyā.<sup>101</sup> Jacob Lassner points to the difficulties in understanding under which circumstances the Arabic toponym Iliyā is later substituted with names which reveal attribution of holiness to the city, Bayt al-Maqdis and al-Quds.<sup>102</sup> Generally, this phenomenon has not attracted much attention from historians of Early Islam and orientalists.<sup>103</sup>

## 6. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb as the conqueror of Jerusalem

Islamic sources are not in agreement regarding the year of the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem. Al-Tabari as the year of the conquest lists both year 14<sup>104</sup>, and year 15 AH<sup>105</sup> (636 and 637 AD), while Baladhuri lists the year 17 AH<sup>106</sup> (638 AD), which corresponds to some non-Islamic sources, in particular those which refer to the patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius.<sup>107</sup> The year 638 AD has been generally accepted as the year of the fall of Jerusalem under Muslim rule. As we have seen, according to the earliest sources Jerusalem was conquered by an almost anonymous commander, Khālid b. Thābit al-Fahmi.<sup>108</sup> Later traditions, however, according to which the conquest of Jerusalem is attributed to Caliph 'Umar appear, and those traditions are eventually generally accepted.

<sup>101</sup> G. LE STRANGE, 1890: 83 ff.

<sup>102</sup> J. LASSNER, 2006: 165.

<sup>103</sup> Along with the aforementioned works by Le Strange, Moshe Sharon, Jacob Lassner and some other Arabists we ought to mention that this topic has been covered in greater detail in Lassner's recent book *Medieval Jerusalem: Forging an Islamic City in Spaces Sacred to Christians and Jews* published in 2017.

<sup>104</sup> AL-TABARI, vol. XII: 144.

<sup>105</sup> AL-TABARI, vol. XII: 186. In Tabari's *Histories* we sometimes find obvious errors; thus, that otherwise extremely valuable source should be taken with caution and compared to other sources whenever possible. An example of such an error is Tabari's description of the Byzantine defense of the city of Ramla from a Muslim siege at the same time as Jerusalem, a matter which 'Amr reported to the Caliph 'Umar (AL-TABARI, vol. XII: 185). The city Ramla, however, was founded by Suleiman ibn 'Abd al-Malik at the beginning of the eighth century, that is, decades after the Byzantine Empire lost the entire Syrian and Palestinian region (see also 691 on p. 185).

<sup>106</sup> AL-BALADHURI, 1916: 214. Gill mentions the years 15 and 16 AH as the years of the conquest of Jerusalem, which

The course of 'Umar's conquest of Jerusalem is described differently in different sources. Heribert Busse, who dedicated much of his research on early Islamic history to legends of 'Umar's entry into Jerusalem, points out that in Islamic tradition there are four different accounts on the conquest of Jerusalem.<sup>109</sup> In each of these it is 'Umar who conquers the city and the difference lies in the way and purpose for his arrival to Syria/Palestine. A dominant account is the one in which messianic attributes were bestowed upon 'Umar. According to this, the inhabitants of a besieged Jerusalem announced that they would surrender the city only to the conqueror whose coming was prophesized in the Scripture. As 'Umar was in the Hejaz at that time, at a one-month caravan-travel distance from Palestine,<sup>110</sup> the Muslim conquerors attempted to deceive the defenders by introducing general Khālid ibn al-Walīd as the Caliph, but they, being well-informed about the prophecy, knew that it was not him. As a result, 'Umar was compelled to undertake the long journey to Palestine. Legends of 'Umar's entry into Jerusalem abound with messianic and eschatological features taken from Jewish and Christian traditions. According to them, 'Umar approached Jerusalem from the East, over the Mount of Olives, dressed in worn-out clothes symbolizing humility, and riding on a camel.<sup>111</sup> 'Umar then went through the city, prayed in David's *mihrāb*,<sup>112</sup> and searched for the place where the Temple stood. The Christians, led by the patriarch Sophronius, who saw in the destruction of the Temple the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecies<sup>113</sup> and the triumph of Christianity over a despised Judaism for which reason they also

Tabari cites (M. GILL, 1997: 51); one must keep in mind, however, that the Hijri and Julian calendar do not completely correspond.

<sup>107</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 45.

<sup>108</sup> See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 5: 323 (s.v. al-Quds); AL-BALADHURI, 1916: 213-214; M. GILL, 1997: 52; M. SHARON, 2009: 283 etc.

<sup>109</sup> H. BUSSE, 1968: 443-444; see also H. BUSSE, 1986: 156-158.

<sup>110</sup> IBN-ISHAK, 2004: 182-183. A rider could make the same trip more quickly. Grabar cites that two pilgrims in 1047 took 15 days to travel from Jerusalem to Mecca (O. GRABAR, 1996: 137).

<sup>111</sup> There also exists a tradition according to which 'Umar rode an old horse, which is told by Tabari, and a donkey (AL-TABARI, vol. XII: 193). Muqaddasī states that 'Umar waited for the surrender of the city for several days on the Mount of Olives (AL-MUQADDASI, 2001: 144).

<sup>112</sup> AL-TABARI, vol. XII: 193-194. *Mihrāb* in this context means *chamber*.

<sup>113</sup> See Luke 21: 6.

turned the Temple Square into the city garbage dump,<sup>114</sup> attempted to mislead the Caliph to some other place, but ‘Umar saw through their trick. A Jewish convert to Islam, Ka‘b al- Aḥbār, brought him to the Temple Mount, and he also determined the exact location of the Temple through measurements derived from Mishna.<sup>115</sup> ‘Umar commanded that the space be cleared, and led the faithful to prayer. Then he identified the place to which Muhammad arrived during his Night Journey, as well as the starting point of his celestial trek.<sup>116</sup>

The tradition of ‘Umar’s conquest of Jerusalem is the source of several differing but related ideas by which a messianic aura around ‘Umar’s character is established. Caliph ‘Umar, also known by the title al-Faruq, which according to Aramaic (but not Arabic) etymology means “savior,”<sup>117</sup> exhibits his messianic mission through his festive entry into Jerusalem and the renewal of the Temple.<sup>118</sup> Islam established its theological postulate according to which Muhammad’s revelation replaced the former revelations – Jewish and Christian – and brought God’s ultimate message to humanity. The construction of the Islamic sanctuary on the Temple Mount is proof of the primacy of Islam over Christianity, just as the destruction of the Jewish sanctuary in the same place was proof of Christian primacy over Judaism. Islam builds up upon Biblical characters, of which Abraham (Ibrāhīm), David (Dāwūd), Solomon (Suleimān) and Jesus (‘Īsā) are among the most important, and the Islamization of Judeo-Christian history through the Islamization of their territory, in this case the city of Jerusalem, from the perspective of Islam demonstrates that metaphysical truth. According to Islamic traditions which we will address later, Jerusalem is a place of unique eschatological importance because the Resurrection and Judgement Day will take place in it. A key difference between Jerusalem and the two Islamic

sanctuaries in the Hejaz is that Mecca is home of Ka‘ba, Medina is center of Muhammad’s political-religious career, and Jerusalem is the scene of the Last-Days events.<sup>119</sup> Muqaddasī, a true-born Jerusalemite, also confirms the eschatological importance of Jerusalem<sup>120</sup> even though, while praising his native city, he was cautious not to overemphasize religious significance of the Holy Land at the expense of *ḥaramayn*.<sup>121</sup> But Jerusalem’s importance was established and it already became a destination for *hajj* according to a famous ḥadīth in which Muhammad assigns three mosques as the destinations for pilgrimage during the early Umayyad period.<sup>122</sup> According to another ḥadīth, prayer in the al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem is five hundred times more valuable than prayer in other places, with the exception of Mecca and Medina.<sup>123</sup>

Traditions about ‘Umar’s conquest of Jerusalem derive from later sources, such as Baladhuri and Tabari, which is their main historiographic problem. The earliest available sources derive from “chronicles first assembled two centuries and more after the Muslim conquest.”<sup>124</sup> They refer to earlier sources whose existence or reliability cannot be simply dismissed, but those sources are today lost. Traditions about the conquest of Jerusalem are also found in some ḥadīth, although Busse points out that “there is practically no *ḥadīth* that does not contain in a rather anachronistic manner elements from different stages [of events related to the conquest of Jerusalem].”<sup>125</sup> Similar to traditions concerning Muhammad’s Night Journey, traditions about ‘Umar’s conquest of Jerusalem gradually gained more acceptance, and were eventually deemed unquestionable, and they also grew more flamboyant. Comparing the works of early Islamic authors with a text from 1350, Le Strange notes:

<sup>114</sup> H. BUSSE, 1986: 167. The Temple Square is actually a flat surface on the Temple Mount on which Temples used to be, and today the Dome of the Rock, al-Aqṣā mosque and other smaller Islamic sanctuaries are found there. Unlike the Temple Mount, the Temple Square does not include the Western Wall.

<sup>115</sup> Mishna is part of rabbinic literature, or the “oral Torah”, and the main text of the Talmud.

<sup>116</sup> H. BUSSE, 1986: 167-168.

<sup>117</sup> P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 5.

<sup>118</sup> P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 5. Busse notes that “Apart from the fact that the legend has the purpose to credit the Caliph ‘Umar with the conquest of Jerusalem and thereby to increase the status of the city, it also serves to increase the status of ‘Umar” (H. BUSSE, 1968: 447).

<sup>119</sup> J. LASSNER, 2006: 179.

<sup>120</sup> AL-MUQADDASI, 2001: 141; J. LASSNER, 2017: 182.

<sup>121</sup> AL-MUQADDASI, 2001: 140-144; more on Muqaddasī’s description of Jerusalem will be discussed further in the text.

<sup>122</sup> M. J. KISTER, 1969: 173-196; I. GOLDZIEHER, 1971: 45. More on this ḥadīth will be discussed in the chapter on the Dome of the Rock.

<sup>123</sup> EL-KHATIB, 2001: 29. According to the ḥadīth cited here by El-Khatib, prayers said in the mosque in Mecca have the same value as 100,000 prayers said elsewhere, and prayers said in the Prophet’s mosque in Medina have the value of 1000 prayers said elsewhere. Kister cites the ḥadīth according to which a prayer in al-Aqṣā is valued at 10,000 prayers said elsewhere, and 10 times more than a prayer in the mosque of the Prophet in Medina (M. J. KISTER, 1969: 185).

<sup>124</sup> J. LASSNER, 2006: 165.

<sup>125</sup> H. BUSSE, 1986: 161.

The story of Omar's conquest and visit, and 'Abd al Malik's building of the Dome of the Rock, as given by the Muslim Annalists, from Tabari down to Ibn al Athîr, is confined to a simple statement of the facts, and is devoid of all the details which abound in the present text.<sup>126</sup>

Inconsistencies and dilemmas related to different traditions on 'Umar's conquest of Jerusalem were demonstrated by Oleg Grabar, along with the proposition of his own "speculative story." According to it, "Umar [...] on his own, led by Sophronius, or inspired by Jewish converts or by other companions"<sup>127</sup> went through Jerusalem and arrived at the Temple Mount. Different versions of the narrative are found in later expanded texts. They describe how 'Umar cleaned a desolate Temple Square, found the Rock – by himself or with the help of Sophronius, or with the help of Jews – cleaned the debris and remains of earlier structures, and prayed there. Not one source, however, mentions of what importance the Rock was for 'Umar, nor the space where Jewish Temples once stood.<sup>128</sup> Somewhat discretely, in the endnotes of his book, Grabar expresses doubt that 'Umar ever visited Jerusalem:

Whether Umar really came cannot in fact be established, and on the whole, the argument against his undertaking such a long voyage for the purpose of accepting the surrender of Jerusalem seem stronger to me than those in favor, mostly because all the accounts, without a single exception, contain anachronisms or biases that weaken their credibility.<sup>129</sup>

Goitein explains that the Arab conquest of Jerusalem was "embellished [...] with legends and imaginary stories, according to which only the most illustrious military figures had been engaged in the various stages of the conquest. [...] In reality, due to the minimal strategic and administrative importance of the city, very little reliable information has remained about the course of the conquest and the first centuries of Jerusalem under Muslim rule." Goitein also calls that process "historiographic tendency, that increased in later generations."<sup>130</sup>

Islamic textual sources, in which importance of Jerusalem for Muslims during the Rashidun and Umayyad Caliphates was described, reflect later perceptions far more than they contain contemporary descriptions. However, an understanding of the problem of the historicity of

these texts does not mean *per se* that the importance of Jerusalem during the entire early Islamic period should be questioned. Quite on the contrary, it pleads for an attempt to distinguish between the substantial, original importance of the city on one hand, and the narrative of events, personalities and processes which were additionally woven into it precisely due to its importance on the other hand, that is between the cause and effect of the fabrication of history. For that purpose, there is a source of great importance, which is not a text but a structure, and it has been preserved in an almost unaltered form from its inception around 72 AH/692 AD to this day: The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

(To be continued...)

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*Western Wall*

<sup>126</sup> G. LE STRANGE, 1887: 251.

<sup>127</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 47. Grabar's description of the Muslim conquest is found on pp. 46-50.

<sup>128</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 47.

<sup>129</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 198, note 63.

<sup>130</sup> S. D. GOITEIN, 1981: 169.

# Lamed-E

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## Jerusalem in Early Islamic Tradition (2)

By Boris Havel

### 7. History, Importance and Meaning of the Dome of the Rock

Among the most valuable sources on the early Islamic perception and importance of Jerusalem is the Dome of the Rock, or *Qubbat al-Sakhrah* (قبعة الصخرة) in Arabic. The magnificent, ornamented, octagonal building on the Temple Mount, or Al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf, is “not only the earliest remaining monument of Islam, but, in all likelihood, the earliest major construction built by the new masters of the Near East.”<sup>1</sup> Of all historical sources that can be dated it is the oldest on which the word “Muslims” is found.<sup>2</sup> It was completed in 72 AH (691/692), during the reign of the fifth Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (685–705). According to some sources, construction of the Dome of the Rock was not completed but inaugurated that year.<sup>3</sup> Most historians, however, do not consider those accounts to be authentic.

Probably the greatest enigma related to the Dome pertains to its purpose. There is no agreement among scholars about it, and it is still a debated issue.<sup>4</sup> The Dome of the Rock is not a mosque, nor was it built like mosque. There has long

existed the now well-established perception that it is the place which marks Muhammad’s *isrā* and *mi’rāj*,<sup>5</sup> but that, as we shall see, cannot be substantiated from evidence available on the structure. The shape of the Dome is rather unusual for Islamic architecture, which has been explained as an attempt to imitate and surpass the beauty of Byzantine architecture, as it is in close proximity to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, covered with a similar dome. This argument has been based on historical circumstances from the late seventh century and an explanation by Muqaddasī, and is generally accepted by scholars.<sup>6</sup> However, it is certainly not the only, and probably not even the most important, reason for the Dome’s construction and architectural design.

Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921), the famous orientalist, explained the construction, shape and purpose of the Dome of the Rock entirely in the context of struggle between the Umayyad dynasty of Damascus and ‘Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr of Mecca (683–692) during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik. Both ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Zubayr claimed the title of Caliph and accused the other of being a usurper. Al-Zubayr’s advantage was that he ruled in Mecca in the Hejaz, the original center and cradle of the Muslim faith and state.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Al-Zubayr had a special reputation as the first child born to Muslims after the *hijra*, and his mother Asma was daughter of the first Rashidun Caliph Abu Bakr and a half-sister of Muhammad’s dearest wife ‘Aisha.<sup>8</sup> ‘Abd al-

<sup>1</sup> O. GRABAR, 1959: 33.

<sup>2</sup> P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 8.

<sup>3</sup> See S. BLAIR, 1992: 59-87.

<sup>4</sup> EL-KHATIB, 2001: 31.

<sup>5</sup> O. GRABAR, 1959: 36.

<sup>6</sup> “The Dome of the Rock is the earliest [...] Muslim structure that openly emulates the Byzantine practice [of constructing a dome]” (R. GRAFMAN & M. ROSEN-AYALON, 1999: 10). Levy-Rubin, however, suggests that a key reason for building the Dome of the Rock was Islamic competition with the Constantinople and its sacred buildings, particularly the Basilica of the Hagia Sophia (Levy-Rubin, 2017: 441-464).

<sup>7</sup> Al-Zubayr is, according to some traditions, regarded as the sixth Rashidun Caliph, although it is generally agreed upon that there were only four Rashidun Caliphs: Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib. On the other hand, the manner in which the Umayyad Caliphs established their dynasty represented a departure from the Rashidun transfer of power which was based on, or perhaps more precisely called upon, a consensus of the Ummah (*ijmā al-ummah*). For this reason, an attempt to contest Umayyad rule and a return to Rashidun principles is not an unexpected process, especially in the Hejaz. For more on this see B. HAVEL, 2015a: 27-35.

<sup>8</sup> AL-TABARI, vol. VII: 9.



Malik, on the other hand, ruled in Damascus, far away from the *ḥaramayn*. He came from a family that converted to Islam only after Muhammad's conquest of Mecca,<sup>9</sup> and received his title of Caliph through a dynastic hereditary succession, which traditionalists held against the Umayyads from the beginning of their rule. Zubayr had ruled over most of the Muslim East during a certain period of the conflict.<sup>10</sup> 'Abd al-Malik relied on his Syrian troops, and they eventually brought him victory. Mu'āwiyah was first Umayyad Caliph to recognize a need for a holy place, by which Syria would claim religious and political relevance. That was the reason for his coronation in Jerusalem. 'Abd al-Malik took this a step further. According to Goldziher, he initiated the construction of the Dome of the Rock so that Jerusalem – all the while called Iliyā by the Arabs – could be converted into an alternative destination of *hajj*. His apparent goal was to redirect Syrian pilgrims from Mecca to Jerusalem so that they would not pledge allegiance to the Meccan ruler, his rival Zubayr.<sup>11</sup> If we are to accept this argument, the shape and position of the Dome – an octagonal structure built in the middle of a wider empty space of the Ḥaram – becomes logical, since as such it is suitable for *tawāf*.<sup>12</sup>

Goldziher explained in that context the creation of the ḥadīth by which Muhammad, along with the regular *hajj* and *umra* to Mecca, also allowed pilgrimages to Medina and Jerusalem. It is a well-known, canonic ḥadīth which reads: "The saddles (of the riding beasts) shall not be fastened (for setting out for pilgrimage) except for three mosques: The Sacred Mosque (in Mecca), my mosque (in Medina) and al-Aqṣā mosque (in Jerusalem)."<sup>13</sup> M. J. Kister believes that at the beginning of the second century AH (first half of the eighth century AD) there was probably a consensus among Muslims about the special importance of those three mosques. Before that, the importance of Jerusalem was disputed, even through ḥadīth. Tradition transmits several ḥadīth

of equal content, save for the fact that Muslims were instructed to make pilgrimage to only two mosques: the one in Mecca and the one in Medina.<sup>14</sup> It seems that the importance of Jerusalem evolved partly due to the rivalry between those two cities and their mosques.<sup>15</sup> The fact that different beliefs on the importance of Jerusalem, either promoting or refuting it, have been based on ḥadīth, is not something unexpected, particularly if we recognize that the dispute was primarily political, and only then and within that context also doctrinal. On the political and doctrinal argumentation based on ḥadīth Goldziher explains:

...among the hotly debated controversial issues of Islam, whether political or doctrinal, there is none in which the champions of the various views are unable to cite a number of traditions, all equipped with imposing *isnāds*.<sup>16</sup>

The importance of Jerusalem, therefore, cannot be unequivocally related to the traditions which we find in the ḥadīth. Goldziher's interpretation of the Dome of the Rock as the place to which 'Abd al-Malik wanted to redirect *hajj* is mainly based on the writings of a historian from the ninth century, al-Ya'qūbī (اليقويبي).<sup>17</sup> Similar claims are found in the works of other, later authors, but of those from the early Islamic period there is only one more, Eutychius of Alexandria (877–940), a Christian chronicler who wrote in Arabic.<sup>18</sup> Ya'qūbī was a pro-Shiite Abbasid historian, biased against the Umayyads. It is therefore hard to base an understanding of this topic on his allegation of the Umayyad Caliphs' apostasy by the abolition of Quranic regulations and the introduction of innovations. Most historians today dismiss his charges against 'Abd al-Malik as implausible.<sup>19</sup> Eutychius was Melkite patriarch of Alexandria, of whom Goitein notes that, much like Ya'qūbī, "connect[s] with this allegation other statements which by their obvious untruth invalidate it."<sup>20</sup> Ya'qūbī's and Eutychius' allegations were repeated by some later Islamic

<sup>9</sup> Mu'āwiyah converted to Islam the year that Mecca was conquered, after which he served as Muhammad's scribe (see AL-BALADHURI, 1924: 273).

<sup>10</sup> M. SHARON, 1983: 15.

<sup>11</sup> I. GOLDZIHHER, 1971: 44.

<sup>12</sup> *Tawāf* (طواف) means "circumambulation", or pilgrims' ritual walk around the Ka'ba.

<sup>13</sup> M. J. KISTER, 1969: 173. First part of the ḥadīth has been taken from footnote one, since it corresponds with the original Arabic.

<sup>14</sup> M. J. KISTER, 1969: 178-179.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. M. J. KISTER, 1969: 188.

<sup>16</sup> I. GOLDZIHHER, 1971: 44. It should be mentioned here that Goldziher was one of the greatest authorities for the

interpretation of the ḥadīth in the world. *Isnād* is the chain of transmitters through which a certain tradition is transferred.

<sup>17</sup> J. LASSNER, 2017: 131. Al-Ya'qūbī in his text also mentioned the tradition according to which Muhammad, before his trek to celestial realm, stepped on the Rock on al-Ḥaram (O. GRABAR, 1959: 37).

<sup>18</sup> S. D. GOITEIN, 1950: 104; O. GRABAR, 1973: 49-50.

<sup>19</sup> S. D. GOITEIN, 1950: 104; N. N. N. KHOURY, 1993: 58.

<sup>20</sup> S. D. GOITEIN, 1950: 104. See also the comprehensive analysis of the possible credibility of Ya'qūbī and Eutychius' citations on 'Abd al-Malik's possible ambition of directing the *hajj* to Jerusalem, as well as the interpretation which Goldziher and later orientologists offer in J. LASSNER, 2017: 131-149.

authors, including the great fourteenth century historian Ibn Kathir. But it cannot be found in chronicles of early historians, such as Tabari and Baladhuri, who also did not favor the Umayyads. Almost all Islamic texts about the Umayyad Caliphate known to us today were created after their reign. Umayyads were viewed from the perspective of their introduction of a dynastic rule instead of the consensus (*ijmā*) of the Ummah which was, basically, how pre-Umayyad Rashidun Caliphs were appointed. Even though the Muslim empire continued to expand during the time of the Umayyads so that Spain and, for a short while, France up to Poitiers were conquered for Islam, later Islamic historians did not forgive their introduction of a hereditary Caliphate. Because of it, the supreme leadership of the Ummah became an issue of family ambitions, intrigues, and inter-dynastic court violence.<sup>21</sup> Resentment towards Umayyads existed both among Sunni and Shia authors. Sunnis were longing for the Rashidun era, as demonstrated by messianic names they gave to each Rashidun Caliph and to all four together.<sup>22</sup> Shiites, on the other hand, believed that leadership of the Ummah does belong to a dynasty, but that of the Prophet, that is *ahl al-bayt* made up of ‘Alī, his sons by Muhammad’s daughter Fātima and their descendants. It is hard to overestimate the Umayyad crime of altering the way of obtaining and transferring the title of Caliph, which has not been forgotten to this day.<sup>23</sup> If the Umayyads had had the ambition and attempted to change the destination of *hajj*, Tabari, Baladhuri, Muqaddasī and other historians would have been only too pleased to register it in their chronicles.<sup>24</sup> In that context one ought to note that Goldziher’s interpretation of the construction of the Dome of the Rock as an alternate destination for pilgrimage suitable for *ṭawāf* was challenged by later orientalist, who had insight into more sources than Goldziher.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Goitein points to the fact that historians who wrote about the

<sup>21</sup> Caliph ‘Umar ibn Abdul Aziz (‘Umar II) was poisoned (AL-TABARI, vol. XXIV: 78) and his inheritor was Yazid II, and al-Walīd ibn Yazid (Walīd II) was killed (AL-TABARI, vol. XXVI: 126-180).

<sup>22</sup> For more on that topic see P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977. Al-Rashidun means *rightly guiding*, while some of the titles of the Rashidun Caliphs are al-Siddik (Abu Bakr) and al-Fārūk (‘Umar).

<sup>23</sup> These issues are re-actualized in the context of the origin and self-promotion of the Islamic State (former ISIS) on which topic see B. HAVEL, 2017: 215-233.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. LASSNER, 2017: 132; O. GRABAR, 1959: 35.

<sup>25</sup> Elad is also here an exception (A. ELAD, 1999: 300-314), since he believes that Goldziher’s sources are reliable, and ignores the arguments of researchers such as Goitein, and later Lassner (see further in the text).

conflict between ‘Abd al-Malik and Zubayr “never made the slightest allusion to ‘Abd al-Malik’s alleged intention of making Jerusalem instead of Mecca the center of Islam.”<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, Tabari explained that ‘Abd al-Malik’s soldiers participated in the pilgrimage to Mecca which ‘Abd al-Malik’s army commander al-Hajjaj lead in 692.<sup>27</sup> That same year, ‘Abd al-Malik’s army conquered the city, and Zubayr was killed. Lassner explains that a change in the destination of *hajj* from Mecca to Jerusalem would be an act of apostasy and, if it had indeed happened, “with their customary thoroughness and anti-Umayyad bias [...] the great chroniclers who were closest to the event would surely have mentioned it.”<sup>28</sup>

Goitein, Lassner, and other authors believe, therefore, that it is not likely that the Dome of the Rock was built as a destination of pilgrimage. Even a powerful ruler such as ‘Abd al-Malik could not afford a political act by which apostasy would be implied and which would make him a *murtadd*<sup>29</sup> in the eyes of many orthodox Muslims who would not have to submit to him any longer because of it. This, however, does not mean that the endeavors of the Umayyads to elevate Syria and Jerusalem to a level of holiness by which their political domain would gain some form of metaphysical value, in part competitive with the *ḥaramayn*, would be by default illegitimate. That they had such a political-religious ambition, in fact, remains unquestionable, but it is almost equally unquestionable that their aim was not to found a new center of Islam at the expense of the original.<sup>30</sup> The *Qubbat al-Sakhrāh*, thus, despite the tempting but unsustainable interpretation by Goldziher, remains unknown.

One of the most influential scholars and interpreters of the Dome of the Rock, especially with respect to its architectural and artistic aspect, is Oleg Grabar (1929–2011), a French-American orientalist, archaeologist and historian of Islamic art. Grabar researched the sanctuaries on the

<sup>26</sup> S. D. GOITEIN, 1950: 104.

<sup>27</sup> AL-TABARI, vol. XXI: 208.

<sup>28</sup> J. LASSNER, 2017: 132.

<sup>29</sup> Arabic: someone who abandons the faith, an apostate. Goitein uses the word *Kāfir*, or “unbeliever” here, (S. D. GOITEIN, 1950: 105; S. D. GOITEIN, 2010: 138) and so does Grabar (O. GRABAR, 1959: 36).

<sup>30</sup> On that Grabar writes that “...it may be suggested that ‘Abd al-Malik, while ‘islamizing’ the Jewish holy place, was also asserting a certain preeminence of Palestine and Jerusalem over Mekkah, not actually as a replacement of the Ka‘bah, but rather as a symbol of his opposition to the old-fashioned Mekkan aristocracy represented by Ibn al-Zubayr” (O. GRABAR, 1959: 45).

Haram in the middle of the last century as one of the rare non-Muslim researchers who had unlimited access to the Dome of the Rock. Even today scholars frequently refer to his research, interpretations, and translations of Arabic inscriptions on the Dome.<sup>31</sup> Grabar believed that most of the information on the motive for the construction of the Dome and its purpose can be extracted from the sanctuary itself: its locality, architecture, decoration and inscriptions, in which it abounds.<sup>32</sup> The Dome of the Rock was built on the place where Jewish temples once stood, but it was neglected until the Muslim conquest of the city. Caliph ‘Umar, according to legend, had wisely concluded that in the choice of that spot Islam would claim that it was founded on earlier revelations, but without the unnecessary destruction of Christian holy places. In the immediate vicinity of the Haram the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is located, which ‘Abd al-Malik, just like ‘Umar before him, did not want to seize and turn into a mosque.<sup>33</sup> During ‘Abd al-Malik’s rule Byzantium posed a serious threat to the Muslim State, and Damascus evaded war with the powerful Christian empire by paying a costly tribute. In addition, ‘Abd al-Malik warred for years with Muslims from Arabia, and also from Iraq, from where Shiites struggled to depose Umayyad rulers and place ‘Alī’s and Hussein’s descendants on their throne. The destruction of the Basilica, had the Caliph desired it (which is also questionable considering the referential attitude of tolerance which ‘Umar allegedly showed towards Christian sanctuaries in Jerusalem, but not towards other Christian sanctuaries in Syria<sup>34</sup>), would probably provoke a wide-scale Muslim-Byzantine conflict,<sup>35</sup> which Umayyad rulers could not afford. A balance of powers was necessary in general since

<sup>31</sup> E.g. J. LASSNER, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> O. GRABAR, 1959: 46. Grabar’s article *The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem* was published in 1959 and is referred to by most authors who later wrote about the Dome of the Rock. That study of Grabar’s was later expanded, and in 1996 published as the monograph *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*.

<sup>33</sup> According to the tradition described by Eutychius of Alexandria, the patriarch Sophronius offered to ‘Umar to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, but the Caliph refused so that Muslims would not later convert that Christian sanctuary into a mosque.

<sup>34</sup> For example, the great mosque in Damascus was built on the spot where the church of John the Baptist formerly stood, which Muslims destroyed (O. GRABAR, 1964: 73). The Bishop of Jerusalem, Sophronius (d. 369), noted, among other things, the following: “Saracens [...] plunder cities, devastate fields, burn down villages, set on fire the holy churches, overturn the sacred monasteries...” (R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 72-73).

“Domination was rarely total in medieval times.”<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, it was necessary to create something striking and impressive which would show the splendor of Islam not only to Muslims, but to the Christians, too.<sup>37</sup> *Qubbat al-Sakhrāh* was built to be impressive, and the price of its grandeur was enormous: ‘Abd al-Malik paid for it “seven years of revenue from Egypt, his richest province.”<sup>38</sup>

The oldest known Islamic building in the Middle East was built in the Byzantine and Persian style, not in the Arab style, because on the one hand “from its Arabian past the new Muslim art could draw almost nothing”<sup>39</sup> (the first minarets built in Syria were modelled on already existing Roman turrets and church towers<sup>40</sup>), and on the other hand Mediterranean artistic expression was, to use a modern term, popular. Signs of a visual and aesthetic competition with Byzantine religious forms, according to Grabar, may be seen in the composition of decorations on the inner side of the Dome. A space of 1280 square meters was covered in mosaics, which is unprecedented in comparison to all other edifices with mosaics from the Early Middle Ages.<sup>41</sup> It is inwrought with forms which do not violate the Islamic prohibition of image portrayal. There are shapes, patterns, and decorations which cannot be considered to be objects of veneration as they do not depict humans or animals.<sup>42</sup> They are, for the most part, plants with stems, buds, leaves, treetops and bunches. Bulbs are noticeable, as well as the *acanthus*,<sup>43</sup> a Mediterranean plant whose ribbed leaves were frequently used as pattern for Greek, Roman and Byzantine ornaments. A part of the decorations is made up of symmetrical geometric objects, decorative items and imperial ornaments such as crowns and jewelry in the Byzantine and occasional Persian

<sup>35</sup> It was the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher during the reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim (also known as the Mad Caliph) at the beginning of the eleventh century that provoked Christians to plan a re-conquest of the Holy Land. At the end of the same century the First Crusade began.

<sup>36</sup> O. GRABAR, 2001: 681.

<sup>37</sup> In the words of Grabar, Muslims “for political and historical, but especially for ideological, reasons, gave a new holiness to the most ancient sacred spot in the Holy City” (O. GRABAR, 1964: 73).

<sup>38</sup> S. D. GOITEIN, 1950: 106.

<sup>39</sup> O. GRABAR, 1964: 79.

<sup>40</sup> O. GRABAR, 1964: 74. Grabar points out here the lack of studies on the origin of the minaret and refers to the famous work by K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (K. A. C. CRESWELL, 1969: 38-40).

<sup>41</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 71.

<sup>42</sup> O. GRABAR, 1973: 93.

<sup>43</sup> S. BLAIR, 1992: 84.

style, and decorations and luxurious jewelry of Byzantine sacred art such as is found in pictures of Christ, Mary and the Saints, without the images themselves, of course.<sup>44</sup> Ornaments also consist of well-proportioned, symmetrical plexus of stems with buds, amphorae beneath circular ornate decorations, and a pair of spread wings fashioned in the Sassanid Persian style.<sup>45</sup> Despite the eclectic style of the decoration, it is unquestionable that the entire structure, “both architecture and decoration show remarkable clarity and consistency consonant with a single [architectural-artistic] campaign.”<sup>46</sup> The Sassanid royal symbols, according to Grabar, proclaim the triumph of Islam over unbelievers.<sup>47</sup> The decorations taken from Christian sacred art point to an artistic competition, inasmuch as Christian Byzantium, through its magnificent art and aesthetics, stood as a serious religious contestant to Islam. Muqaddasī explicitly names this competition as a reason for the construction of the Dome of the Rock:

Now, talking to my father’s brother one day said I: “O my uncle, surely it was not fitting for al-Walīd to expend the resources of the Muslims on the mosque at Damascus. Had he expended as much in building roads, or the water tanks, or in repairing the fortresses, it would have been more proper and more to his credit.” Said he: “You simply do not understand, my dear son. Al-Walīd was absolutely right, and it was open to him to do a worthy work. For he saw that Syria was a country settled by the Christians, and he

noted there their churches so handsome with their enchanting decorations, renowned far and wide, such as are the Qumāma,<sup>48</sup> and the churches of Ludd (Lydda) and al-Ruhā. So he undertook for the Muslims the building of a mosque that would divert their attention from the churches, and make it one of the wonders of the world. Do you not realize how ‘Abd al-Malik, seeing the greatness of the dome of the Qumāma and its splendour, fearing lest it should beguile the hearts of the Muslims, hence erected, above the Rock, the dome you now see there?”<sup>49</sup>

Grabar in his commentary on the quoted text from Muqaddasī asks to what extent modern historians can accept the perception of reasons for the Dome’s construction as explained in the tenth century to understand the motives for its building that existed while it was being built,<sup>50</sup> that is, whether or not Muqaddasī’s explanation is anachronistic. There are no other Arabic sources which would confirm or refute Muqaddasī’s statement. According to some interpretations of early sources one may also ask yet another question: to what extent did Muslims, during the period of the construction of the Dome, view Christians<sup>51</sup> and Jews as members of different religions, and to what extent they viewed themselves as part of the Judeo-Christian tradition which they had a mission to divert from heresies (such as belief in the Incarnation and the Trinity) through Muhammad’s ultimate and final revelation.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Cf. O. GRABAR, 1959: 48-50. Sheila Blair observes that artists who had worked a decade before on the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem might have worked on the inside of the Dome of the Rock (S. BLAIR, 1992: 85).

<sup>45</sup> Superb photographs of the decorations of the Dome of the Rock were made and published by Saīd Nuseibeh (Nuseibeh and Grabar, 1996; for photographs of the interior octagon see O. GRABAR, 1996: 92-99). Saīd Nuseibeh is the first photographer to have received approval to photograph the mosaic of the Dome of the Rock in colour with the assistance of professional equipment, which included setting up scaffolding and lights (O. GRABAR, 1996: xiii).

<sup>46</sup> S. BLAIR, 1992: 62. The author offers this observation in the context of proving that the construction of the Dome of the Rock did not take decades and was not undertaken during the era of Mu‘āwiyah, twenty years earlier, as was assumed by F. E. Peters (F. E. PETERS, 1983: 119-138).

<sup>47</sup> O. GRABAR, 1959: 52. Persians during the era of Islamic conquest – especially the elite who were in power – were followers of Zoroastrianism which Muslims considered to be a polytheistic religion due to dualism.

<sup>48</sup> The Church of the Holy Sepulcher is called *qumama* (قمامة) in Muqaddasī’s text, which in Arabic means “garbage”, but which sounds similar to the actual Arab name for the Church

*qiyama* (قيامة) or *kanisat al-kiyama* (كنيسة القيامة), that is, the Church of the Resurrection. See also O. GRABAR, 1996: 53.

<sup>49</sup> AL-MUQADDASI, 2001: 135-136. Earlier in the text Muqaddasī cites that al-Walīd hired artisans from Persia, Indian, West Africa and Byzantium for the construction of the mosque in Damascus. The expenses for the construction amounted to the seven-year revenue of Syria, and eighteen ships which brought gold and silver and materials for the creation of the mosaic from Cyprus, which were sent by the Byzantine emperor (pg. 134).

<sup>50</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 54.

<sup>51</sup> Mostly those who did not accept the doctrine on the Trinity, although it is debatable to what extent orthodox Christians would consider followers of such sects to be Christians.

<sup>52</sup> For a more extensive examination of this topic see the subchapter *Ecumenism* in F. M. DONNER, 2010: 68-74. Donner, one of the most respected Arabists and experts on early Islam, offers here an explanation of early Islamic “confessional openness” and “ecumenism” which is based on an unorthodox yet persuasive interpretation of early Islamic history and the messages of the Quran. On this topic as well, Donner reminds us, Islamic sources are incomplete, often unclear and multifaceted. This also has to do with their

The part of the Dome's decoration that is historically and theologically perhaps most valuable abounds in precisely those messages: the most valuable, that is, both for the interpretation of the structure's purpose, and for the interpretation of the perception of Jerusalem's importance during the earliest decades of Islam. Those decorations consist of written texts, mostly verses from the Quran, in which *Qubbat al-Sakhrah* is very rich. Most of the texts date from the Umayyad period. The length of inscriptions inside the Dome is 240 meters,<sup>53</sup> and all of them originate from the same period as the building, save for the text on which the name 'Abd al-Malik was replaced by the name of al-Ma'mūn, the Abbasid Caliph who ruled from 813–833.<sup>54</sup> We cannot here describe in detail their contents, nor are their nuances and linguistic details relevant for the topic of this paper.<sup>55</sup> The theme that noticeably prevails in the inscriptions is the polemic with Christian Christological doctrine as understood by the authors of the inscriptions. Grabar suggests that the inscriptions from the inner part of the Dome be divided into six portions of varying length, with the first transposing Surah 112 in its entirety: "Say: He is God, the One; God the Eternal; He has not begotten nor was He begotten; and there is none comparable to Him."<sup>56</sup> The message of this Surah represents the refutation of the Christian understanding of the Trinity and the Embodiment as, for example, is found in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed: "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father."<sup>57</sup> Many of the remaining inscriptions convey a message similar to the Surah 112. Those are Quranic verses 3:16-17, 4:169-171, 9:33, 2:130 etc. Almost all of the texts are of religious content and refer to earlier revelations (Jewish and Christian) as predecessors to the Islamic revelation, with a certain open or latent

representation of Islam not as a new faith, but as a faith that perfected earlier revelations and rectified errors which developed in them. Not one Old Testament prophet is mentioned by name in the inscriptions; the accent is on Jesus and Mary.<sup>58</sup> The inscription with a text from Surah 17 is significant for the topic of this paper. However, it is not the Surah's first verse in which Muhammad's Night Journey is mentioned, but verse 111, which is again a polemic with the Christian doctrine.<sup>59</sup> The Dome of the Rock does not contain any references to *isrā* or *mi'rāj*, which points to the fact that Muhammad's Night Journey and al-Aqṣā were not linked to Jerusalem before the end of the seventh century. Had they been, it would be hard to believe that such an important event would not warrant an inscription at the place related to it. At the Ḥaram, near the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah*, there stands today a memorial to the Night Journey in the form of a small, octagonal pedestal surrounded by eight columns with a vaulted dome. This is the *Qubbat al-Nabi*, the Prophet's Dome, known also as the *Qubbat Jibril*, by which the Prophet's journey to Jerusalem is marked. The structure is of a much later, Ottoman origin. Nearby is the *Qubbat al-mi'rāj*, a memorial to the Prophet's celestial journey, built during the Crusades, likely as a baptismal font, and ornamented during the Ayyubid dynasty. It is known, however, that those domes existed in some form even earlier. Other than the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah*, Muqaddasī mentioned three more domes on the Ḥaram by name (*Qubbat al-Silsilah*, *Qubbat al-Nabi* and *Qubbat al-mi'rāj*).<sup>60</sup> Based on sources in which they were first mentioned we may conclude that *Qubbat al-Nabi* and *Qubbat al-mi'rāj* likely originate from the Umayyad period.<sup>61</sup> There would not be a need to construct these two domes were the Dome of the Rock originally intended to be a memorial to the *isrā* and *mi'rāj*, or were the Rock related to the place from whence Muhammad ascended to heavens. A reconstruction of the course of the building of the Domes on the Ḥaram, however, from which more conclusions about their correlation might be

"non-ecumenical" interpretations, according to which traditions developed from the messages according to which "Qur'anic words, *islam* and *muslim*, could subsequently have acquired their more restrictive, confessional meanings as a new faith distinct from Christianity and Judaism" (p. 72).

<sup>53</sup> O. GRABAR, 1959: 52.

<sup>54</sup> O. GRABAR, 1973: 61-62.

<sup>55</sup> More complete contents of the inscription may be found in O. GRABAR, 1959: 52-62 and O. GRABAR, 1996: 59-61; the Arabic text of the inscription in O. GRABAR, 1996: 184-186.

<sup>56</sup> O. GRABAR, 1959: 53.

<sup>57</sup>

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\\_css/archive/catechism/cr-edo.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/cr-edo.htm) (The Nicene Creed; accessed 10/12/2018).

<sup>58</sup> O. GRABAR, 1959: 54.

<sup>59</sup> Surah 17: 111 states "And say: Praise be to Allah, Who hath not taken unto Himself a son, and Who hath no partner in the Sovereignty, nor hath He any protecting friend through dependence. And magnify Him with all magnificence."

<sup>60</sup> AL-MUQADDASI, 2001: 142.

<sup>61</sup> A. ELAD, 1999: 48-50.

reached, is made considerably more difficult because, with the exception of the *Qubbat al-Silsilah*, they were all reconstructed after the Crusade period.<sup>62</sup>

*Qubbat al-Silsilah*, or the Dome of the Chain, is located east of the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah*, right next to it. It is the third largest building on the Ḥaram and it is not related to legends of the *isrā* and *mi'rāj*, but rather to the Chain of Judgement Day which will let the good through on their path to heaven and block the evil. Of the smaller domes it is the only one which dates from the Umayyad period in its current form, likely from the time of the Caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik. The purpose of the construction of the dome with such an unusual shape is also unknown; Grabar even suggests the possibility that it was built from construction material left over after the completion of other edifices on the Ḥaram.<sup>63</sup> He, in his description of the Dome of the Chain, cites the observation of Myriam Rosen-Ayalon that it has been built exactly in the middle of the Ḥaram, and is, furthermore, the only building on the Ḥaram that is found in the center of anything. Grabar suggests that her observation "may be more fruitful than all the earliest ones."<sup>64</sup> Even that does not contribute much to the understanding of the motive of the construction and the purpose of the Dome of the Rock. Rather the opposite, it only added to enigmas concerning the early Islamic construction ventures in Jerusalem and on the Ḥaram.

Probably the most logical conclusion to which an analysis of the architecture, decorations and inscriptions of the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah* brings us is that the main purpose of the building is, on the one hand, to deter the attractive Christian religious buildings and ornaments which were bountiful in Jerusalem and which had a not insignificant missionary purpose, from attracting Muslims, and on the other providing "the [Muslim] faithful with arguments to be used against Christian [doctrinal] positions."<sup>65</sup> To this can be added the Muslim ambition to impress the Christian population by showing not only the convincingness of their religious arguments, but also the ability to shape them into an aesthetic form which does not lag behind the Christian aesthetic enterprises. Thus, *Qubbat al-Sakhrah* becomes also "a missionary monument that is meant to impress and convince [...]."<sup>66</sup> Material evidence collected from the Dome confirm, to a certain degree, the ḥadīth and traditions from the Umayyad period. Between

Jerusalem and Mecca, or Haram and the Ka'ba, there was a political-religious rivalry, which should be recognized, but should not be over-emphasized. The same is true of the rivalry between Christian and Islamic structures – which include architecture, location, theology, aesthetics and prestige – within the same city. Despite the richness of material that offers a solid look into 'Abd al-Malik's aspirations and motives for construction, the basic question of the essence and purpose of the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah* remains unanswered. The persistent and unanswerable mystery of that great building calls for caution when being interpreted by researchers. It calls the believer to something else entirely: offering him an almost endless space for historic, textual and eschatological interpretation it appeals, challenges, and attracts him to approach the structure from the position of participation in the current processes of the eternal battle between good and evil. Jerusalem has from time immemorial – and not all of Jerusalem, but primarily the Temple Mount, the Hebrew *har ha-bayit* (הר הבית) and later the Arabic *Al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf* – represented the main battleground and supreme value to which one may arrive in the *dunyā*.<sup>67</sup> The polemic and instructive messages from the Quran which, thanks to the life project of 'Abd al-Malik, dominate on that spot, symbolize in the eyes of Muslim believers the spiritual domination of Islam over Judaism and Christianity, and that is in principle a key message of Islam as a worldview. The devastation of the Jewish holy place symbolized to the Christians the abandonment of the Old and a shift to the New Covenant, and a confirmation of the Replacement Theology.<sup>68</sup> The implicit Islamic polemic with Christianity – which is explicitly stated in the inscriptions of the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah* – is seen in the Muslim adoption of the tradition of the construction of the Temple; construction, and not devastation, as the Christians treated the space of the Jewish Temples and the Temple Square. Thus, Grabar correctly perceives that the Dome of the Rock should always be viewed in the context of the Jerusalem milieu in which it was built. By no means does it facilitate its interpretation: "What complicates matters is that it is a building with a continuous history of nearly 1300 years in a city with more numerous and more contradictory emotional, pietistic, and political associations than any other urban entity in the world."<sup>69</sup>

<sup>62</sup> G. NEPICOĞLU, 2008: 24-27.

<sup>63</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 132.

<sup>64</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 131.

<sup>65</sup> O. GRABAR, 1959: 56.

<sup>66</sup> N. N. N. KHOURY, 1993: 59.

<sup>67</sup> Arabic "this world" (دُنْيَا).

<sup>68</sup> Cf. M. SHARON, 1992.

<sup>69</sup> O. GRABAR, 1973: 49.

## 8. *The Role of Jewish Converts in Creation of Early Islamic Traditions about Jerusalem*

In considering the development of early Islamic thought and theology, especially in the context of elevating Jerusalem to the level of an Islamic holy city with eschatological significance, it is necessary to regard the role of Jewish and, to a lesser if not negligible degree Christian converts to the new faith. Islam, as it arrived from Arabia, was a simple religion, with only a few key theological themes of which the most important was comprised of the *shahada*.<sup>70</sup> That was monotheism. The first sources do not even mention Muhammad's mission, only that "there is no god other than God", sometimes with the addition "and he does not have a companion,"<sup>71</sup> which is acceptable to Jews in its entirety. Of the remaining themes there are also the belief in Judgement Day, the resurrection of the dead, heaven and hell, and angels and demons. There were no sophisticated theological theories and doctrinal nuances in these much-generalized dogmata. In Islam at the end of the seventh century there was nothing comparable with the complicated creeds found in Christianity, nor even in Judaism which was (from the point of view of doctrine) much simpler religion compared to Christianity. If we accept the traditional Islamic narrative, the text that Muslims had with them when they arrived at the Byzantine lands in the north was made up of fragments of the Quran,<sup>72</sup> and not much could be concluded about anything on the basis of them, including the life of its author, the origin of the Islamic revelation, or the aforementioned dogmata. In the words of F. E. Peters, "The Holy Book of Islam is text without context, and so this prime document, which has a very claim to be authentic, is of almost no use for reconstructing the events of the life of Muhammad."<sup>73</sup> The first available traditions which place the Quran in a historic context derive from the mid-eighth century.<sup>74</sup> The conquest of Syria a bit more than a decade after the *Hijra* and the contact with ancient Syrian traditions were of enormous importance to the development of early Islamic thought, especially

<sup>70</sup> The Muslim confession of faith which states, "there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger."

<sup>71</sup> F. M. DONNER, 2010: 112.

<sup>72</sup> Crone and Cook warn that "There is no hard evidence for the existence of the Koran in any form before the last decade of the seventh century" (P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 3).

<sup>73</sup> F. E. PETERS, 1991: 300.

<sup>74</sup> P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 3.

<sup>75</sup> M. SHARON, 1992: 56-68.

with regard to Jerusalem. Islamic rule in Syria consolidated rather quickly, and the multitude of Jews and Christians joined with the new rulers both in their faith and in their administration.<sup>75</sup> Their Biblical and non-Biblical traditions were key in the formation of an Islamic view of Jerusalem as the holy city, and thereby mainly as a city of particular eschatological importance.<sup>76</sup> According to Jewish traditions, Jerusalem will be the place of the resurrection of the dead on Judgement Day. We find nothing similar in Islam before the conquest of Syria, even though Islam was preoccupied with eschatological topics from its very founding. Islamic eschatological thought developed on the trail of Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian messianic eschatology. Thus, the concept of Mahdi<sup>77</sup> which will "fill the earth with justice and equity as it is now filled with tyranny and oppression"<sup>78</sup> appeared in Islam.

Among early Islamic eschatological traditions, the one found in Muqaddasī's geographical work is of particular importance. At the beginning of his description of Jerusalem, Muqaddasī states that the climate of the city is "the very description of Paradise."<sup>79</sup> He then cites the well-known tradition according to which Jerusalem will be the place of resurrection, the place to which the resurrected dead will arrive on Judgement Day, and continues:

Now it is true that Makka and al-Madīna are in the ascendant with the Ka'pa and the Prophet – God's peace and blessing be upon him – but truly, on the Day of Resurrection, they will both hasten to Jerusalem, and the excellence of all of them will be encompassed there together.<sup>80</sup>

Another curiosity found in the Muqaddasī's description is his statement that majority of the inhabitants of Jerusalem was made up of Christians and Jews, while Jerusalem's "mosques [are] devoid of congregations and assemblies."<sup>81</sup> Not only was there no Muslim majority in Jerusalem by the end of the tenth century AD, but the Muslims there were far surpassed in numbers. Thus, the transmission of traditions from the communities which made up a majority, that is, the Christians and Jews, to the Muslim minority

<sup>76</sup> O. LIVNE-KAFRI, 2006: 382; A. MEDDEB & B. STORA, 2013: 108.

<sup>77</sup> Mahdi is an Islamic messianic figure whose arrival, or departure, is connected to the end of the world and the arrival of Judgement Day. Today, the anticipation of Mahdi is much more present in the Shia rather than the Sunni community.

<sup>78</sup> B. LEWIS, 1950: 308.

<sup>79</sup> AL-MUQADDASI, 2001: 140.

<sup>80</sup> AL-MUQADDASI, 2001: 141.

<sup>81</sup> AL-MUQADDASI, 2001: 141.

seems to be a natural and logical process, particularly when the other earlier mentioned factors are considered.

The eschatological expectations of the Jews at the beginning of the seventh century in Syria reached a centennial peak after Persia captured Palestine from Byzantium for a short period of time. The Persians took over Jerusalem in 614 and the Jews, partly because of their low status in Christian Byzantium, and partly due to comparable historical circumstances which happened more than a thousand years earlier, and which are registered in the Bible,<sup>82</sup> wholeheartedly supported the Persian invasion. Namely, at the end of the sixth century BC Persia conquered the Babylonian lands, among which was Judaea. The Babylonians, or Chaldeans, destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC and exiled the Jews from Judaea to Babylon.<sup>83</sup> Seventy years later the Persian king Cyrus allowed for the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem and to restore the Temple.<sup>84</sup> Restoration of the Temple worship began in the time of Ezra, and the walls of Jerusalem were built by Nehemiah, with the permission and financing of the Persian king Artaxerxes I. Due to similar historical circumstances, the Persian invasion of the Byzantine lands at the beginning of the seventh century AD prompted similar expectations among the Jews, including those concerning the rebuilding of the Temple. The defeat of the Persians and the return of Byzantine rule at the end of the 620s ruined that hope. The Emperor Heraclius (610–641) triumphantly entered Jerusalem in a ceremonial procession on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 630, carrying the cross of Christ which the Byzantines recaptured from the Persians.<sup>85</sup> Upon their return to Jerusalem, the Byzantine rulers exposed Jews to an even harsher persecution due to their collaboration with the Persians. Jews were baptized by force, their

settlement in Jerusalem was prohibited again, and those among Jews who were accused of abusing Christians during Persian rule were put to death.<sup>86</sup> The Arab conquest of Byzantine lands which followed only a few years later rekindled messianic and eschatological expectations among the Jews. It seemed that the Jewish longing for the return to Zion was about to be fulfilled, since Muslims immediately upon conquering Jerusalem, despite the opposition of the Christians, allowed Jews to again settle in Jerusalem, the Jewish holy city. What is more, according to one Armenian source, immediately following the Islamic conquest a Jew was appointed the administrator of Jerusalem.<sup>87</sup> The perception of the Arab invasion as divine intervention was, it is certain, dominant in Syrian Jewish communities for some time.

Jewish texts originating during the period of the Arab conquest of Syria offer a look into the extent and nature of that perception. In the pseudepigraphic work *Nistarot shel rabban Shimon ben Yohay* (Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohay, henceforth referred to as *Nistarot*<sup>88</sup>) the author describes the arrival of Ismael's<sup>89</sup> kingdom which will destroy the kingdom of Evil, Eda (which symbolizes Byzantium<sup>90</sup>), and renew Israel. The author of the *Nistarot* writes that "The second king who arises from Ishmael will be a lover of Israel" and he will build a "mosque" on the Temple rock on Mount Moriah, that is the Temple Mount.<sup>91</sup> This prophecy could easily be interpreted as referring to 'Umar, especially in later accounts. Of the remaining Jewish texts in which the Islamic conquests were interpreted in eschatological terms, with references to Biblical prophecies and promises and the expectations of the restoration of Israel, there are also *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer*, the *Jewish Apocalypse on the Umayyads*, the *Signs of the Messiah* and

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, the Book of Ezra and the Book of Nehemiah, especially its introduction.

<sup>83</sup> 2. Kings 24: 10-25: 21.

<sup>84</sup> Ezra 1: 1-4.

<sup>85</sup> A. LOUTH, 2008: 227-228.

<sup>86</sup> M. AVI-YONAH, 2006: 34.

<sup>87</sup> P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 6, 156, note 30.

<sup>88</sup> Simon ben Yohay is a rabbi from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, while the text of the *Nistarot*, or rather his original version, originated during the era of the Arab conquests. The text was later revised, and there are parts of it which relate to the end of the Umayyad Caliphate and the arrival of the Abbasids. During the time of the Crusades he wrote the text *Tfila shel Simon ben Yohay* (The Prayer of Simon ben Yohay). For an analysis and entire translation of the *Nistarot* see B. LEWIS, 1950: 173-196, and for fragments which are relevant to the topic of this paper, also with an added commentary, see R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 308-312. See also P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 35-38.

<sup>89</sup> In Jewish and Arab tradition, the Ishmaelites are Arabs. The idea that Arabs are the descendants of Abraham's son Ismael, the son of Hagar, appears in Jewish texts during the era of the Second Temple, a tradition which was received from the Jews by the Arabs themselves. With the founding of Islam, it becomes a key element of Muslim identity, so that in the Quran (2: 125-127) we find that Abraham and Israel cleaned the Temple (Ka'ba) in Mecca (S. D. GOITEIN, 1955: 22).

<sup>90</sup> In rabbinic literature (The Talmud, Midrash) the name Edom, which is the second name of Isaac's son Ezav, Jacob's twin brother, is the customary name for Rome, and later for Byzantium, when they are mentioned as Israel's enemies (see H. SIVAN, 2002: 277-306).

<sup>91</sup> B. LEWIS, 1950: 324-325; R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 311. Hoyland specifies that the word translated as "mosque" is "*hishtahawāyā*"



the apocalyptic song *On That Day* and others.<sup>92</sup> Grabar also cites a medieval Midrash according to which ‘Abd al-Malik “shall build the house of the God of Israel.”<sup>93</sup> Jewish messianic hopes were also recorded in Christian texts of the time. Perhaps the earliest such record is the anti-Jewish text *Doctrina Jacobi* from 634, in which Jews were described as celebrating the “prophet [who] had appeared, coming with the Saracens, and [...] proclaiming the advent of the anointed one, the Christ who was to come.” A Jewish convert to Christianity opposed them and rejected such a perception of Muhammad, explaining that he is “false [prophet], for the prophets do not come armed with a sword.”<sup>94</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor in a letter composed between 634 and 640 writes that Jews are “[more than any other] deprived of faith in the world and are so the most ready to welcome hostile forces.”<sup>95</sup> The Muslim conquerors from Arabia also arrived with eschatological expectations. Arab Muslims were fascinated by the civilization to which they came. They established an active interaction with it, which included the Muslim imitation and adoption of ideas to a degree almost inconceivable from a modern perspective. This interfaith interaction is found in Islamic texts and, as pointed out by Lazarus-Yafeh, it was at least partially based on numerous personal contacts by which ideas were exchanged.<sup>96</sup> The Quranic verses on the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah* point to an early understanding of the unacceptability of basic Christian dogma concerning the Trinity, but it was different with Jews. Muslims and Jews shared similar points of view regarding strict monotheism, and were connected by some ritual resemblances, a religion based on the revealed law, and the symbolically important circumcision. Goitein, thus, believed it to be unusual that most Jews from Arabia did not accept Muhammad as the prophet of the non-Jews inasmuch as “before the pagan rites of the pilgrimage to Mecca were incorporated into Islam, there was nothing

repugnant to the Jewish religion in Muhammad’s preaching.”<sup>97</sup> Some Jews did embrace Islam, but in that early period they could maintain many Jewish religious principles, beliefs, and eschatological expectations, since alternative, especially opposite expectations, did not exist in Islam. Anticipation of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem is an example of that. According to almost all Muslim sources, it was a Jewish convert to Islam, Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, who showed Caliph ‘Umar where the Jewish Temple stood and, according to the somewhat unclear description of Tabari, attempted to persuade him to shift *qiblah* towards it.<sup>98</sup> Ka‘b al-Aḥbār informed ‘Umar about the five-hundred years old prophecy according to which he, al-Fārūk, would clear the space where the Temple once stood, and God would smite the Byzantines for destroying the House of God.<sup>99</sup> Many Jews, and not only converts to Islam, perceived the Muslim construction of sanctuaries on the Temple Mount as the beginning of the renewal of Temple worship and the fulfilment of Biblical prophecies. Thus, Jewish converts to Islam represented an “extremely important factor in the creation of the Muslim apocalyptic traditions, including those on Jerusalem.”<sup>100</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Muslim-Jewish interactions in Palestine is the question of Muslim openness to ideas from Judaism. Jews, unlike Christians and Muslims, did not attempt to attract converts. Jewish ideas did not enter into Islam due to Jewish proselytizing ambitions, but rather due to Muslim curiosity and religious pragmatism: the new religion needed to be equipped with beliefs wherever there was lack of theory and vacuum. As Moshe Sharon puts it, “The conversion of many Jews and Christians to Islam [...] created a direct, and legitimate channel through which Biblical and extra-Biblical traditions were introduced into Islam.”<sup>101</sup> During the first decades after *hijra* not only was Islam still developing; according to Crone and Cook, it

<sup>92</sup> R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 312-320.

<sup>93</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 54-55. Midrash is a type of rabbinic literature through which some part of the Bible is interpreted, most often the Torah, or an oral narrative. Grabar mentions that this medieval Midrash is “as usual almost impossible to date” (p. 54).

<sup>94</sup> R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 57.

<sup>95</sup> R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 78.

<sup>96</sup> H. LAZARUS-YAFEH, 1992: 133.

<sup>97</sup> S. D. GOITEIN, 1955: 63.

<sup>98</sup> AL-TABARI, vol. XII: 194-195; H. BUSSE, 1986: 167-168. More on that episode further in the text, in the portion on anti-Jerusalem traditions.

<sup>99</sup> AL-TABARI, vol. XII: 196. This fragment has a series of interesting details. A Jewish convert admits that ancient

books of prophecy contain prophecies connected to the advent of Islam, which is one of the key polemic topics between Muhammad and the Jews of Medina. Thereupon he calls ‘Umar by the name Farūk, which is a Messianic name and could mean *deliverer* (P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 5). There is also the anachronism, not unusual in early Islamic texts, according to which the aforementioned prophet goes to Constantinople and threatens the Byzantines for that which “your people did to My Home.” In the time of the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD Byzantium still did not exist, nor did Constantinople, which the author used as a substitute for the Romans and Rome.

<sup>100</sup> O. LIVNE-KAFRI, 2006: 383.

<sup>101</sup> M. SHARON, 1992: 56.

was still in the process of creation.<sup>102</sup> Even if there existed a more developed religious thought, few of the Muslim conquerors of Syria could have had any deeper knowledge of it. Their understanding of Islam was in the best case limited to a certain number of Quranic verses and some ḥadīth. All that they knew they learned after converting to the new religion, and that was more-or-less recently. It is easy to overlook that the Muslim conquerors of Syria, unlike the members of other faiths or later generations of Muslims, did not have the opportunity to learn about their religion from their ancestors, family, or inside the community in which they grew up. In fact, they had to repress their original religious views gained in the *jahiliyyah* and exchange them for ones that they had to learn from scratch.<sup>103</sup> If we add to that the general illiteracy<sup>104</sup> and lack of education among Arabs<sup>105</sup> the picture becomes even more gloomy. Even knowledge of those Muslims who were familiar with Quranic verses and Islamic traditions about Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishak (Isaac), Yusuf (Joseph), Musa (Moses), Harun (Aaron), Dawud (David), Suleiman (Solomon) or Uzair (Ezra) was, without acquaintance with Jewish and Christian Scripture, books of apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, or texts of various Judeo-Christian sects which abounded in Syria, very limited.<sup>106</sup> It is logical that a dilemma arose about whether or not it is religiously legitimate for Muslims to acquire information about their religion from the followers of other faiths, primarily Judaism. That question, of course, was not posed in this manner. As we have already seen, Islam perceived itself

<sup>102</sup> P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 3-9.

<sup>103</sup> The Arabs in the Hejaz, according to Islamic sources, worshiped various divinities before the advent of Islam, and all of their pre-Islamic cults and traditions were regarded as *jahiliyyah* (ignorance) in Islam, and thus rejected. Conversion to Islam meant a radical discontinuity of all earlier religious expressions and identity.

<sup>104</sup> Literacy was rare in the time of the advent of Islam, such that Baladhuri names all seventeen men from the Quraysh tribe who were literate at the time of the advent of Islam (among which were all of the Rashidun Caliphs except Abu Bakr), and the names of a few literate women. Muhammad was illiterate and used scribes in writing down the revelations and other text, scribes whose names are also mentioned by Baladhuri (AL-BALADHURI, 1924: 272-273). Baladhuri writes also that "Writing in Arabic was rare among the [Arab tribes] Aus and the Khazraj" and mentions that some Jews learned to write Arabic. The author lists those who, along with writing, also knew how to shoot and swim, and the possession of those three skills meant that they were addressed as *kāmil*, that is "perfect". Finally, he also mentions that Zaid ibn Thābit, one of Muhammad's scribes originally from Medina, learned to write in Hebrew at the behest of the Prophet (AL-BALADHURI, 1924: 274).

not as a new faith, but rather as an annex to already existing faiths. From such a framed point of view there is nothing debatable in the assumption of the traditions of the *ahl al-kitāb* (people of the book), mostly Jews. Thus the well-known and often referred-to ḥadīth *ḥaddithū 'an banī isrā'īla wa-lā ḥaraja* appeared, according to which Muhammad encouraged his followers to assume Jewish traditions.<sup>107</sup> Muslim thinkers were aware of the fact that without knowledge of the Tawrah (Torah) and other Jewish books few things from the Quran could be contextualized.<sup>108</sup> To that we must add the question of the influence of the aforementioned Jewish messianic perceptions of Islamic conquest and the attribution of a divine mission to the "Ishmaelites" and their message in the context of the conquest of Byzantine lands. Such flattering acknowledgement from the most respected monotheistic community of the Early Middle Ages and their "philo-Arab sentiments"<sup>109</sup> must have contributed to the ready, willing and perhaps sometimes uncritical openness of Islam to the ideas of Judaism. Early Christian sources speak of a "burning of churches, the destruction of monasteries, the profanation of crosses, and horrific blasphemies against Christ and the church," as well as of the invitation of the "Ishmaelite ruler" to the Emperor of Byzantium to renounce "that Jesus whom you call Christ and who could not even save himself from the Jews."<sup>110</sup> Crone and Cook conclude that as "There is nothing here to bear out the Islamic picture of a movement which had already broken with the Jews before the conquest [of Syria], and

<sup>105</sup> Donner observes that the troops of Arab tribes which joined the "believers" (Muslims) in the *Jihad* during the War against apostasy (in the time of the first Rashidun Caliph Abu Bakr, 632-634) were extremely rudimentarily informed on Islam: "Their knowledge of the doctrines of the [Islamic] movement, then, was probably limited to the idea that God was one and enshrined mainly in enthusiastic slogans such as "God is Great!" (*allahu akbar*), which they used as a battle cry" (F. M. DONNER, 2010: 116).

<sup>106</sup> A partial exception to this was Yusuf (Joseph) whose life was described in the twelfth *surah* of the Quran, Surat Yusuf. This is also the only one of the 114 *surah* which is made up of a chronologically arranged narrative.

<sup>107</sup> For a comprehensive study on the mentioned ḥadīth see M. J. KISTER, 1972: 215-239.

<sup>108</sup> Official Islamic tradition on dating the composition of the Quran was maintained for the purpose of writing this article, even though researchers have brought that tradition into question (J. WANSBROUGH, 1977; P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977).

<sup>109</sup> P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 6.

<sup>110</sup> P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 6; cf. R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 219.

regarded Judaism and Christianity with the same combination of tolerance and reserve.”<sup>111</sup>

It is logical to assume that Jews were also aware of the situation. The nation which at the time of the Islamic conquests had been without any political and military power for over half a millennium, but with a rich monotheistic heritage, and the nation which was the most powerful politically and militarily in the Orient, but almost without any religious traditions, met at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in, one could almost say, a natural religious-political symbiosis. Sharon explains:

‘Abd al-Malik wished to rebuild the Temple of Solomon. In so doing he created a direct link between himself and Solomon, the Qur’ānic king-prophet, leaving Christianity out. He was wholeheartedly assisted by the Jews of Syria and Palestine, who regarded the Islamic conquest and the replacement of the Byzantine-Christian rule by Arab rule, as the beginning of the redemption of Israel. Moreover, there is clear evidence that the Jews regarded the building of the Dome of the Rock as the renewal, at least in a symbolic way, of the Temple.<sup>112</sup>

The former is evident from some rituals related to the Dome of the Rock which are of Jewish origin, and which existed at least until the sixteenth century, such as the anointing of the Rock (*Sakhrāh*) with oil on Mondays and Thursdays, days which are not important in Islam but are in Judaism. “Jews were actively involved with the service in the Dome of the Rock: they were in charge of lighting the candles, preparing the wicks for the oil lamps and cleaning the sanctuary.”<sup>113</sup> There is also the naming of the *Qubbat al-Sakhrāh* by the Arabicized Hebrew name *Heykal* (Hebrew *היכל*, Arabic *هيكل*), which in the Bible refers to the Temple, Sanctuary, and the like.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>111</sup> P. CRONE & M. COOK, 1977: 6. Hagarism is difficult to read, at parts barely legible, aimed at readers who are already well versed in the traditions and interpretations of early Islamic history. The authors refer to this spot as a “separation from the Jews” such as the one which happened in Medina after Muhammad rejected the treaty by which Jews would be accepted as part of the Ummah and expelled or enslaved and killed their tribes. More in depth on these relations, events and sources in B. HAVEL, 2013: 297-376.

<sup>112</sup> M. SHARON, 1992: 63.

<sup>113</sup> M. SHARON, 1992: 65. Sharon mentions that these traditions were preserved until the era of Mujīr ad-Dīn (1456–1522), a qadi and chronicler from Jerusalem.

<sup>114</sup> M. SHARON, 1992: 65; Cf. Isaiah 6: 1; 44: 28; 66: 6 Ezra 3: 6, Nehemiah 6: 10, Ezekiel 8: 16 etc.

A short and puzzling description of Islamic construction on the Temple Mount under the influence of Jews is found in an Aramaic text written in the 660s whose author is unknown but is often attributed to Bishop Sebeos of Bagratunis. This is the first known Christian text in which the self-perception of Muslims is taken into consideration in the description of Islam, and the early inter-Islamic dispute, or *fitnah*, is described.<sup>115</sup> Sebeos writes that the Jews found the place of the Holy of Holies,<sup>116</sup> built a foundation and superstructure there, and gathered for prayer. The “jealous Ishmaelites,” however, drove Jews away, and called Jewish structures Muslim place of prayer.<sup>117</sup> This tradition does not align with the Islamic tradition, according to which the Muslims were from the very beginning the builders on the Ḥaram, and Jews were only their advisers.

### 9. Early Muslim Anti-Jerusalem Traditions

The topic of Jerusalem in early Islamic tradition would not be complete without a reference to yet another phenomenon of the same genre, and that is anti-Jerusalem Islamic traditions which in varying scope and form are also found in the same textual corpus in which we find the *faḍā’il al-Quds*.<sup>118</sup> Direct opposition to the elevation of Jerusalem on the pedestal of Islamic holy city and the messages of caution against excess in the praises of al-Quds is found in the ḥadīth and in the words of Islamic historians and chroniclers. The Quran is, of course, silent on the topic. We have already mentioned the ḥadīth in which Muslims make pilgrimage to only two mosques, those in Mecca and Medina, which implies that pilgrimage to Jerusalem is unacceptable.<sup>119</sup> Kister cites a series of ḥadīth according to which it is “among scholars of Islam in the first half of the second century AH there was some reluctance to give full recognition of sanctity to the third

<sup>115</sup> See more on this text in R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 124-132.

<sup>116</sup> The Holy of Holies, the Hebrew *kodesh hakodashim* (קֹדֶשׁ הַקֹּדָשִׁים) is the central and most holy place in Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 6: 16) in which the Arc of the Covenant of God was kept (1 Kings 8: 6).

<sup>117</sup> R. G. HOYLAND, 1997: 127.

<sup>118</sup> It is very much due to Lassner’s study that I have concluded that this genre needs to be addressed for a comprehensive understanding of the image of Jerusalem in Early Islamic Tradition. For more on anti-Jerusalem texts and Muslim dilemmas, see J. LASSNER, 2017: 184-201.

<sup>119</sup> M. J. KISTER, 1969: 178-179. It is interesting to note that one of such ḥadīth has been transmitted (*isnād*) by Aisha.

mosque and to grant Jerusalem an equal position with the two holy cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina.”<sup>120</sup> According to these ḥadīth Muhammad discouraged votive pilgrimages to Jerusalem, although he did not prohibit them outright. One of his wives did the same when she suggested to a woman who had vowed to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem if she were to be cured, and after being healed, headed there, that she should rather pray in the mosque of the Prophet in Medina, than go to Jerusalem.

The same author cites also a ḥadīth from the collection of ‘Abd al-Raziq ibn Hammam, according to which the Caliph ‘Umar, while attending to camels, saw two men passing by. When asked where they had been, they replied: “In Jerusalem”. ‘Umar began to beat them with a whip, believing that they had gone to Jerusalem on a *hajj*, as pilgrims go to Mecca. He stopped only when they had explained to him that they had only passed through Jerusalem, and that they had only stopped briefly to pray.<sup>121</sup>

An unusual tradition about ‘Umar, *Sakhrāh* and the Ḥaram is recorded by Tabari. ‘Umar, having entered Jerusalem, asked the Jewish convert Ka‘b al-Aḥbār where a place for prayer should be constructed.

Ka‘b said: “Toward the Rock.” ‘Umar said: “O Ka‘b, you are imitating the Jewish religion! I have seen you taking off your shoes.” Ka‘b said: “I wanted to touch this ground with my feet.” ‘Umar said: “I have seen you. Nay, we shall place the qiblah in the front of it; the Messenger of God likewise made the front part of our mosques the qiblah. Take care of your own affairs; we were not commanded to venerate the Rock, but we were commanded to venerate the Ka‘ba [in Mecca].”<sup>122</sup>

Despite the existence of many traditions according to which the importance and holiness of Jerusalem is diminished or entirely denied, not one ḥadīth with such a message has been found in the canonical collections of the ḥadīth.<sup>123</sup> It is almost certain that such ḥadīth originated during inter-Muslim disputes, especially the dispute between the rulers and worshipers in the Hejaz on the one hand, and the Umayyads in Syria on the other. After the end of these disputes a ḥadīth on the legitimacy of three mosques as the

destinations of *hajj* “was granted consensus of the orthodox scholars.”<sup>124</sup>

Inasmuch as political background of the ḥadīth in which the holiness of Jerusalem is denied is almost certain, it is logical to posit the question of the political background in which the same holiness is attributed to Jerusalem. One must be careful, however, when making any conclusions. Although the idea of the reciprocity of the origin of the two diametrically opposed traditions is logical and consistent with earlier-mentioned observation of Goldziher on the political ḥadīth,<sup>125</sup> the origin of the pro-Jerusalem ḥadīth and traditions certainly cannot be fully explained by it. The early Islamic empire viewed from the Hejaz and *ḥaramayn* was simpler and the brunt of deliberation was naturally borne by inter-Muslim relationships, mainly on the rivalry between Arabia, on the one hand, and Syria, on the other. It is logical that the political establishment in the Hejaz never fully accepted that the seat of the Islamic empire was relocated to the remote northern region, while the center of the faith, that is, the native land of the Prophet, remained neglected and lost its social importance, political power and tax revenue. Logical also was the fear that the change of the center of political power might be reflected in the change in the religious center as well. The world as viewed from Syria was much more complicated. Along with inter-Muslim conflict there were also relations with local Christians, the Byzantine Empire, Persia, the followers of Zoroastrianism and other non-Islamic protagonists. The Umayyads needed a holy city, but not primarily as a center for political battles with Arab Muslim rivals – as this battle was certainly won in their favor thanks to the notorious commander al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf – but as the center of competitive propaganda with the Christian rival whom they defeated militarily, but not culturally; Christian culture, architecture and art continued to be a menace to Islam, since through aesthetics and beauty Christianity carried a religious and political message inconsistent with the Umayyad vision of the world. ‘Abd al-Malik’s other reforms should be understood in that context, like the introduction of coins on which at first there was the image of the Caliph (on Byzantine coins, which were until then used even in the regions of the Umayyads, there was Christ’s image and the inscription *King of kings*),

<sup>120</sup> M. J. KISTER, 1969: 180.

<sup>121</sup> M. J. KISTER, 1969: 181.

<sup>122</sup> AL-TABARI, vol. XII: 194-195. See also the footnote on p. 195 where the translator considers what ‘Umar asked and what Ka‘b answered, seeing as the topic of the *qiblah* came up in conversation. In transliterating into Croatian, it is easy

to mix up the name of the Jewish convert Ka‘ba and the sanctuary in Mecca, Ka‘ba, which are not related.

<sup>123</sup> M. J. KISTER, 1969: 193.

<sup>124</sup> M. J. KISTER, 1969: 196.

<sup>125</sup> I. GOLDZIHAR, 1971: 44. It must be mentioned here that Goldziher was one of the greatest experts and authorities in the world for the interpretation of the ḥadīth.

or the extrusion of the Greek language from the administrative system of the empire and the introduction of Arabic. Jerusalem as an Islamic holy city, with the Dome of the Rock and later the al-Aqṣā mosque, built on the place whose ancient religious importance was recognized by both Jews and Christians, in the long term became more important in that complex competition for asserting Muslim claims to non-Muslims than the Umayyad claims to the post-Rashidun rulers of the Hejaz. Even with that competition “Muslims realized that [Jerusalem] was a holy city primarily for Jews and Christians.”<sup>126</sup>

Ibn Taymiyyah (1262–1328), who studied theology and Islamic law in Damascus, fiercely opposed Muslim veneration of sanctuaries in Jerusalem. He approved of Muslims prayers in Jerusalem, much as the Prophet did on his Night Journey. The Dome of the Rock, however, had no particular importance according to him, Muhammad’s footprints were not found on the rock,<sup>127</sup> Caliph ‘Umar did not pray there, and the entire Ḥaram was built by Umayyads so that they could redirect the *hajj* there. According to him, there are three Ḥarams in the world, but not one of them in Jerusalem.<sup>128</sup> The veneration of the sanctuary whose importance was based on Judaism, much like other, similar sanctuaries, including the grave of the Prophet, was according to Ibn Taymiyyah a sign of apostasy from the Islamic faith, which is punishable by death.<sup>129</sup>

### 10. Conclusion: Past and Future of Islamic Jerusalem

The importance of Jerusalem in the development of the Islamic thought, and of identity of parts of the Muslim world from the earliest years of the new religion, may be considered undisputable. Equally undisputable fact that Muslim perception of the importance of Jerusalem was to a great extent determined by political circumstances, and the effort of the Umayyad Caliphs to elevate the region of Syria to religious importance in the likeness of the Hejaz, does not diminish that importance. The same is true of the theological, architectural, mosaic and aesthetic competition with Christian Byzantium, which is primarily

seen in the construction of the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah* sanctuary. Different parts of the Ummah during different periods interpreted the concept of the holiness of Jerusalem for Islam differently. To these should be added the early Islamic traditions according to which the attribution of merits to Jerusalem was perceived as a religious innovation (*bid‘ah*, which in Islam is a grave sin, second only to *shirk*<sup>130</sup>), and a reprehensible political and religious competition with Mecca.

Among the rare originally Islamic traditions of attributing holiness to Jerusalem not connected to political events is the one concerning the first *qiblah*. That *qiblah*, however, was abandoned, and the focus of the prayer became, and has remained ever since, Mecca. For this reason, Grabar correctly cautions that it is “psychologically most unlikely that the spot of the original [abandoned] *qiblah* would have been commemorated [by attributing holiness to it].” He proceeds to explain that the reasons for attributing holiness to Jerusalem should be looked for in traditions connected to Caliph ‘Umar and the *isrā’*<sup>131</sup> which brings us back to later events permeated with political motives and eschatological expectations.

Much like in the research of other topics from early Islamic history, research on early Islamic Jerusalem has been made difficult and limited by the lack of contemporary sources.<sup>132</sup> Islamic sources known today were produced two or more centuries after the events which they describe. The early Islamic narrative is in those sources intertwined with the Umayyad or, more rarely, with the Abbasid political interpretations of the past, often to such an extent that it is difficult or impossible to distinguish the original religious tradition from a calculated, official government’s promotion of politically suitable beliefs which were then themselves transformed into traditions “equipped with imposing *isnāds*,”<sup>133</sup> and in which history is presented “not as it was, but rather as it should have been.”<sup>134</sup> In pursuit of the perception of Jerusalem in early Islamic tradition, therefore, archaeological and material sources, especially the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah* and the Ḥaram on the one hand, and Jewish and Christian texts which mention Jerusalem and were produced after the

<sup>126</sup> S. D. GOITEIN: *Jerusalem in the Arab Period (638-1099)* in Levine, 1981: 169.

<sup>127</sup> According to the tradition transmitted by al-Ya‘qūbī, Muhammad stood with his foot on the Rock on the Ḥaram before ascending to heavens (O. GRABAR, 1959: 37), and his footprint which is, according to some legends, still visible, proves it.

<sup>128</sup> These are Mecca, Medina and a nearby place, Taif, also in the Hejaz.

<sup>129</sup> C. D. MATTHEWS, 1936: 2-6.

<sup>130</sup> Arabic: idolatry.

<sup>131</sup> O. GRABAR, 1996: 47-48.

<sup>132</sup> An excellent, categorized, and critical review of the sources for the academic study of Jerusalem in the early Islamic period is found in O. GRABAR, 1996: 8-20.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. I. GOLDZIHNER, 1971: 44.

<sup>134</sup> M. SHARON, 1988: 225, *The Birth of Islam in the Holy Land*. See also the article by Francis Edward Peters, *Quest of the Historical Muhammad* (F. E. PETERS, 1991: 291-315).

Islamic conquest on the other, are of the utmost importance. The origin of the later sources can hardly be attributed to inter-Muslim political processes, and the eschatological prism through which some of them were written is not reason enough to reject the historiographical part of the content in which events or objects are described. A more serious problem is that even non-Islamic sources whose origin can be dated nearer to the period and events which they describe are rare, incomplete, and were usually later revised. Perplexity, ambiguity and dissensus related to the early Islamic perception of Jerusalem are not a reason to problematize or question present-day importance of Jerusalem for the Muslims, or its exalted position as the third most holy city in Islam. In fact, it is as though they cover the city with a hazy, mysterious enchantment from which the messianic sensation is emerging and eschatological culmination of history can be anticipated. If the religious importance of Jerusalem for Islam was related to political processes – that it is so can be perceived even after the periods covered in this article, for example before<sup>135</sup> and during the Crusades<sup>136</sup> – then it should not come as a surprise that in recent years Jerusalem has become the object of religious zeal and longing for Muslims around the world, much more than ever before in the history of the city. Earlier inter-Muslim conflicts, and the conflicts between Muslims and Christians over Jerusalem, have transformed the city into a desirable property, but the thrill that came with possessing it was generally not rigid and unrestrained; prospect for pragmatism and political compromise had always existed. The negotiated surrender of Jerusalem to Frederick II by the Ayyubid ruler al-Kamil, which brought peace for some time to Palestine, is but one example. In addition, we may recollect that no Islamic state in history made Jerusalem its capital, while in the period before the Crusades, Muslims perceived it as a “provincial city of no special importance.”<sup>137</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Goitein cites that the Muslims only recognized the strategic importance of the city thirty years before the arrival of the Crusaders (S. D. GOITEIN, 1981: 169).

<sup>136</sup> Cf. C. D. MATTHEWS, 1936: 1.

<sup>137</sup> S. D. GOITEIN, 1981: 169.

<sup>138</sup> Dhimmis, or *ahl al-dhimma* (أهل الذمة) are Jews and Christians who live in areas under Islamic political rule under conditions of obedience and with the payment of a special tax collected from non-Muslims.

<sup>139</sup> Christians made up the largest community, often members of differing monophysite denominations. On the number of Jews in Jerusalem, as well as their settlements in

An aspect of the medieval theological interaction and competition of Islam with Judaism and Christianity in the context of Jerusalem is worth of particular attention because today it has political implications which originally could have been discerned but were not explicit. Upon conquering the city, and even after building sanctuaries on the Temple Mount, Muslims never completely appropriated Jerusalem, but rather viewed their presence in it as a superstructure founded upon the earlier traditions. Jews and Christians, protected by *dhimmi*<sup>138</sup> status, lived according to their own traditions fairly peacefully under Islamic rule, while Muslims during the 461 years that had passed between the Islamic and Crusader conquest of the city, remained a minority in it.<sup>139</sup> The influence of Jewish converts to Islam on the development of Islamic traditions was substantial, and in some aspects, such as the attribution of eschatological merits to Jerusalem, it was probably crucial. At any rate, it was a process, for Islamic theological thought during the first century AH was not yet formed with regard to many key questions, but it was open, curious and heterogeneous. If we accept, however, the official Islamic dating of the Quranic text, then one of the theological aspects was defined and articulated rather early, and that is the Islamic view on what we call today Comparative Religion. Islam is, according to self-perception, the bearer of the final revelation, whereas the previous revelations (Judaism and Christianity) were practically, even though not *de iure*, abrogated through a peculiar application of *naskh* (نسخ).<sup>140</sup> In the words of Lassner “The Arabization of monotheism was key to Islam’s debate with Jews and Christians,”<sup>141</sup> and the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah* inscriptions are among the oldest and best examples of it. Jews and Christians interpreted Islamization and Arabization of Biblical concepts and personalities as a way to pursue a common monotheistic expression, but their interpretation was not entirely correct. Without necessarily rejecting possible presence of a common monotheistic

the city and the place from whence they came, not much is known (cf. O. GRABAR, 1996: 132-133).

<sup>140</sup> Arabic: “abrogation”. The concept *al-nāsikh wal-mansūkh* is used in Quranic exegesis and refers to the interpretation of which messages are abrogated (*nāsikh*) and replaced (*mansūkh*) by chronologically newer messages. The concept is found for the first time in the context of the so-called “Satanic verses” (IBN-ISHAK, 2004: 165-167; Quran 53: 1-20) but its application became wider with time. Wansbrough interprets this word in the meaning of the replacement of the Biblical revelation with the Islamic (J. WANSBROUGH, 2006: 109-114).

<sup>141</sup> J. LASSNER, 2017: 191.

expression, the primary effect of those processes was Islamization of Jewish and Christian history. The Islamization of Jewish and Christian history made the Islamization of Jewish and Christian territory a natural and logical consequence,<sup>142</sup> as has been evident from the first Islamic state founded in Medina in the first year of the *hijra* up to this day. That project, however, often did not necessarily imply the treading on and suppression of previous monotheistic traditions, but rather an enforcement of interaction with them under conditions dictated by Islam; an interaction refashioned in accordance to prevalent political circumstances. Contest over Jerusalem has been a typical example of that interaction.

Muslim conflict with the Jews over Jerusalem, which began during the time of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Hajj-Amin al-Husseini (1897–1974), brought a determined, fanatic and aggressive possessiveness in the Islamic perception of the holiness of the city,<sup>143</sup> which has been without precedence in the former historical interaction of Islam with Jerusalem and Jerusalem's Jews. What is more, such possessiveness contradicts some principles of their historical interaction. It transforms early Islamic traditions according to the political need of the moment, more and more severely as time goes on. Further retroactive assignment of the importance of Jerusalem for Islam and the Jerusalem-centric interpretation of past events and Islamic myths, which are at times anachronistic and yet acceptable even to serious scholars,<sup>144</sup> despite the possible short-term political benefit, overshadows the splendor, and impair early Islamic narratives, traditions and historiography. Yet, judging by the entirety of historical experience up until now, the political benefit will most certainly gain the upper hand. For that reason, the question of Jerusalem in early Islamic tradition is partly the theme of historiographic and theological research, and partly a political-religious process which has not yet been completed, nor is its end on the horizon.

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<sup>142</sup> I am indebted to Professor Moshe Sharon for bringing my attention to this in one of our conversations.

<sup>143</sup> For more on al-Husseini's role in the incitement of a religious conflict between Muslims and Jews see B. HAVEL, 2014 and B. HAVEL, 2015.

<sup>144</sup> An example of this are the historiographic analyses of the importance of Jerusalem in Islam founded on traditions according to which Muhammad viewed Jerusalem as the

place in which a mosque (that is a *masjid*, which other than mosque might indicate another place of prayer) had already been built. It is clear that in the time of the legendary *isrā* and *mi'rāj* there were no places of prayer on the Temple Mount, let alone a mosque, the mention of which in Jerusalem before the Islamic conquest of Palestine is but an absurd anachronism.

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