Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem

The most famous Islamic site in Jerusalem is the Dome of the Rock (Qubbat as-Sakhrah). An impressive and beautiful edifice, the Dome of the Rock can be seen from all over Jerusalem. It is the crowning glory of the Haram es-Sharif ("Noble Sanctuary"), or Temple Mount.

The Dome of the Rock is not a mosque, but a Muslim shrine. Like the Ka'ba in Mecca, it is built over a sacred stone. This stone is believed to be the place from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended into heaven during his Night Journey to heaven.

The Dome of the Rock is the oldest Islamic monument that stands today and certainly one of the most beautiful. It also boasts the oldest surviving mihrab (niche indicating the direction of Mecca) in the world.

History of the Dome of the Rock

The sacred rock over which the Dome of the Rock is built was considered holy before the arrival of Islam. Jews believed, and still believe, the rock to be the very place where Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac (an event which Muslims place in Mecca). In addition, the Dome of the Rock (or the adjacent Dome of the Chain) is believed by many to stand directly over the site of the Holy of Holies of both Solomon's Temple and Herod's Temple.

The Dome of the Rock was built by the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik from 688 to 691 AD. It was not intended to be a mosque, but a shrine for pilgrims. According to tradition, the Dome of the Rock was built to commemorate Muhammad's ascension into heaven after his night journey to Jerusalem (Qur'an 17). But there seems to have been more to it than this, since the Dome of the Ascension was later built nearby.

Actually, according to the Oxford Archaeological Guide to the Holy Land, "Abd al-Malik's purpose was more complex and subtle." He wished to erect a beautiful Muslim building that could compete with the majestic churches of Christendom and would be a symbolic statement to both Jews and Christians of the superiority of the new faith of Islam. "His building spoke to Jews by its location, to Christians by its interior decoration." [1]

In the 10th century, the Jerusalem visitor Mukaddasi wrote of the magnificent structure:

By the 11th century, several legends had developed concerning the Dome of the Rock and its sacred stone, including the following:

In the Middle Ages, Christians and Muslims both believed the dome to be the biblical Temple of Solomon. The Knights Templar made their headquarters there during the Crusades and later patterned their churches after its design. [4]

The exterior mosaics that once adorned the Dome of the Rock suffered from exposure to Jerusalem winters. They were repaired in the Mamluk period, and then completely replaced with tiles by Sulieman the Magnificent in 1545. At the same time, he created the parapet wall with its intricate inscription by filling up the thirteen small arches that originally topped each
facade. The windows of the Dome of the Rock date from this period as well. The tiling was completely replaced in the last major restoration in 1956-62.

What to See at the Dome of the Rock

The extraordinary visual impact of the Dome of the Rock is in part due to the mathematical rhythm of its proportions. All the critical dimensions are related to the center circle that surrounds the sacred stone. For example, each outer wall is 67 feet long, which is exactly the dome's diameter and exactly its height from the base of the drum.

The same principles were used in Byzantine churches of Italy, Syria, and Palestine, but none compare to the integration of plan and elevation seen in the Dome of the Rock.

The great golden dome that crowns the Dome of the Rock was originally made of gold, but was replaced with copper and then aluminum. The aluminum is now covered with gold leaf, a donation from the late King Hussein of Jordan. [6]

The dome is topped by a full moon decoration which evokes the familiar crescent moon symbol of Islam. It is aligned so that if you could look through it, you would be looking straight towards Mecca.

The beautiful multicolored Turkish tiles that adorn the shrine's exterior are faithful copies of the Persian tiles that Suleiman the Magnificent added in 1545 to replace the damaged originals. The lower half of the exterior is white marble.

The Arabic inscription around the octagonal part of the Dome of the Rock are verses from the Qur'an. The inscription dates from the renovation under Suleiman. The tiled area just below the golden dome is the drum. Its glazed tiles were made in Turkey, and its Arabic inscription tells of the Night Journey of Muhammad as described in the Qur'an (surah 17).

Inside the shrine, an arched wall called the octagonal arcade or inner octagon follows the exterior shape. An open space between this and the central circle forms the inner ambulatory around the Rock, carpeted in lush red. The area between the inner octagon and outer octogan (exterior wall) forms a smaller, outer ambulatory, carpeted in green. The two ambulatories recall the ritual circular movement of pilgrims around the Ka'ba in Mecca.

The cupola, the interior of the great golden dome, features elaborate floral decorations in red and gold, as well as various inscriptions. The main inscription in the cupola commemorates Saladin, who sponsored extensive restoration work on the building.

The mosaics of the interior feature both realistic and stylized representations of vegetation and related themes (Muslim law forbids the representation of living beings in art). The mosaics evoke an exotic garden, perhaps the gardens of Paradise. Rich jewelry is also depicted in abundance, including breastplates, necklaces, and a Persian crown with features gathered at the base. The caliph Omar had conquered Persia in 637, and the mosaics symbolize the Persian crowns he sent to hang in Mecca.
The founding inscription is a monumental 240-meter long line of Kufic script running along the top of both sides of the octagonal arcade inside the Dome of the Rock. On the outer side of the arcade, the inscription quotes Quranic verses glorifying God.

On the eastern side, an inscription gives credit for the building's construction to the Abbasid caliph al-Mamun in the year 72 AH (691 AD). However, al-Mamun reigned from 813-33 AD, so the inscription clearly represents an Abbasid effort to claim credit for the achievement of the previous dynasty.

Much of the inscription on the inner side of the octagonal arcade exhorts Christians to depart from error of the Trinity and recognize the truth of Islam:

The columns supporting the inner octagon and the center circle are of different sizes; they were recycled from previous structures. The crosses on some show them to have been taken from churches. The carved ceilings on either side of the inner octagon were not part of the original design; they first appeared in the 14th century and have been restored since then. The Mamluk star is the dominant motif.

The small, flat mihrab (niche showing the direction of Mecca) belongs to the original building, and is the oldest mihrab preserved in the Islamic world. The wooden screen around the sacred rock was donated by the Ayyubid sultan al-Aziz in 1198. The Crusaders protected the rock from relic-snatching pilgrims by erecting a wrought-iron screen between the columns of the circle; it remained in place until 1960 and is now on display in the Islamic Museum.

The sacred rock that is the central focus of the shrine is a large, ancient rock that may have once stood in the center of Solomon's Temple. For Jews, it is the rock on which Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac. For Muslims, it is the rock from which Muhammad's winged horse leapt into the sky, accompanied by the Archangel Gabriel, on the "Night Journey" into heaven (Qur'an 17). The rock is said to bear the horse's imprint. Muslim tradition holds that an angel will come to the rock to sound the trumpet call of the Last Judgment at the end of the world.

The reliquary next to the rock dates from the Ottoman period and contains a hair of Muhammad's beard.

The cavity beneath the rock, accessible by a staircase near the south entrance, is known as Bir el-Arwah, the "Well of Souls." It is said that here the voices of the dead mingle with the falling waters of the lower rivers of paradise as they drop into eternity.

Another legend says that the dead meet here twice a month to pray. In earlier days, those who prayed here after having walked around the rock were given a certificate entitling them admission to paradise; it was to be buried with them.

The Dome of the Rock
Jerusalem became known as Al-Quds, The Holy. Many of the Prophet's Companions travelled to worship at the blessed spot to which Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, was brought by night and from which he ascended through the heavens to his Lord. According to the authenticated tradition of the Prophet, travel for the sake of worship is undertaken to only three mosques; the Sacred Mosque in
Makkah, the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, and the Furthest Mosque in Jerusalem.

In 685AD the Umayyad Khalif, 'Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, commenced work on the Dome of the Rock. Essentially unchanged for more than thirteen centuries, the Dome of the Rock remains one of the world's most beautiful and enduring architectural treasures.

**The Dome of the Rock from the East**

The gold dome stretches 20 metres across the Noble Rock, rising to an apex more than 35 metres above it. The Qur'anic verse 'Ya Sin' is inscribed across the top in the dazzling tile work commissioned in the 16th century by Suleiman the Magnificent.

**Dome of the Rock**

Also known as Kubbat as-Sakhra, Kubbet es Sakhra, “Mosque of Omar,” Qubbet el-Sakhra, Templum Domini

Built atop the earlier location of the Temple, the Dome of the Rock was erected by the Muslim ruler Abd el-Malik in 688-691. Because of its situation on bedrock, the numerous earthquakes over the centuries have not caused significant damage to the structure (unlike its neighbor Al Aqsa mosque). This shrine was covered by a lead dome from 691 until it was replaced with a gold-colored covering in the early 1960s. Because of rust, the anodized aluminum cover was again replaced in 1993 with a gold covering.

**Dome with Mount of Olives**

The Mt. of Olives overlooks the Temple Mount from the east and gives a picture of Jesus’ weeping over the city from the Mt. of Olives (Luke 19:41). From the Temple Mount Jesus delivered the famous “7 Woes” against the Pharisees (Matt 23), probably pointing at tombs on the Mt. of Olives in his discourse (v. 27). Jesus’ ascension probably took place some distance behind the tower of the Russian Orthodox Church.

**View from Southwest**

Sometimes referred to as the “Mosque of Omar,” actually the Dome of the Rock is neither. Omar built an earlier structure, but not the Dome of the Rock. And this building is considered a shrine and not a mosque. Men pray instead at the Al Aqsa mosque located 200 meters to the south. Muslims believe that this is the place where Abraham nearly sacrificed his son Ishmael.

**Founding Inscription**

Inside the building in classical Arabic is inscribed, “O you People of the Book, overstep not bounds in your religion, and of God speak only the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only an apostle of God, and his Word which he conveyed unto Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from him.
Believe therefore in God and his apostles, and say not Three. It will be better for you. God is only one God. Far be it from his glory that he should have a son.”

**Al Aqsa Mosque**

More important to the Muslims than the Dome of the Rock is Al Aqsa Mosque. Believing that this is the place referred to in the Koran as “al aqsa” (the furthermost), Muslims have sanctified this as the third most holy place in the Muslim world (after shrines in Mecca and Medina, both in Saudi Arabia). The original mosque was built in 715 but it has been destroyed numerous times by earthquakes.

**Al Aqsa from north**

The mosque witnessed a turbulent 20th century. King Abdullah of Jordan was assassinated in front of Al Aqsa in 1951. A deranged Australian tourist set fire to the mosque in 1969, destroying the beautiful 12th century wooden pulpit. Controversy now rages over building activity on a larger mosque constructed underneath this one.

**Dome of the Rock History**

Originally a mashhad, a shrine for pilgrims, the Dome of the Rock was commissioned for not only religious but also political purposes.

Chaliph Abd El-Malik placed the monument on the Haram as-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, in order to enshrine the sacred rock from which, Muslims believe, Muhammad made al-isra’, the Night Journey and ascended to visit Allah in heaven (Koran 17:1).

Along with the theological component, however, there was also a political purpose for the construction of the Dome.

During the late seventh century, the Muslim world was torn by conflict between a variety of Muslim groups, each of which claimed to be Muhammad’s sole heir.

According to tradition, Muhammad first selected Jerusalem as the qibla, the direction the faithful should face during prayer.

Later, the prophet redirected his followers to face the city of Mecca when praying, to symbolize Islam’s independence from the other monotheistic religions that had chosen Jerusalem as their most holy city.

In the late seventh century, however, Chaliph Abd El-Malik wanted to discourage his followers from making the pilgrimage to Mecca because he feared that they might fall under the influence of one of his Muslim rivals.

He, therefore, constructed the Dome in the hopes of establishing Jerusalem as the major Muslim pilgrimage destination, so that he could keep his followers and attract new ones.
While Mecca has remained the qibla for Muslims, Jerusalem is revered by Muslims as the third holiest place in the world.

The pilgrimage to Jerusalem, known as the taqdis, is the final destination of the main pilgrimage (hajj), allowing Muslims to commemorate the significance of the city to their faith.

A glorious mystery

One of the most iconic images of the Middle East is undoubtedly the Dome of the Rock shimmering in the setting sun of Jerusalem. Sitting atop the Haram al-Sharif, the highest point in old Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock’s golden-color Dome and Turkish Faience tiles dominates the cityscape of Old Jerusalem and in the 7th century served as a testament to the power of the new faith of Islam. The Dome of the Rock is one of the earliest surviving buildings from the Islamic world. This remarkable building is not a mosque, as is commonly assumed and scholars still debate its original function and meaning.

Between the death of the prophet Muhammad in 632 and 691/2, when the Dome of the Rock was completed, there was intermittent warfare in Arabia and Holy Land around Jerusalem. The first Arab armies who emerged from the Arabian peninsula were focused on conquering and establishing an empire—not building. Thus, the Dome of the Rock was one of the first Islamic buildings ever constructed. It was built between 685 and 691/2 by Abd al-Malik, probably the most important Umayyad caliph, as a religious focal point for his supporters, while he was fighting a civil war against Ibn Zubayr. When Abd al-Malik began construction on the Dome of the Rock, he did not have control of the Kaaba, the holiest shrine in Islam, which is located in Mecca.

The Dome is located on the Haram al-Sharif, an enormous open-air platform that now houses Al-Aqsa mosque, madrasas and several other religious buildings. Few places are as holy for Christians, Jews and Muslims as the Haram al-Sharif. It is the Temple Mount, the site of the Jewish second temple, which the Roman Emperor Titus destroyed in 70 C.E. while subduing the Jewish revolt; a Roman temple was later built on the site. The Temple Mount was abandoned in Late Antiquity.

The Rock in the Dome of the Rock
At the center of the Dome of the Rock sits a large rock, which is believed to be the location where Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son Ismail (Isaac in the Judeo/Christian tradition). Today, Muslims believe that the Rock commemorates the night journey of Muhammad. One night the Angel Gabriel came to Muhammad while he slept near the Kaaba in Mecca and took him to al-Masjid al-Aqsa (the farthest mosque) in Jerusalem. From the Rock, Muhammad journeyed to heaven, where he met other prophets, such as Moses and Christ, witnessed paradise and hell and finally saw God enthroned and circumambulated by angels.

The Rock is enclosed by two ambulatories (in this case the aisles that circle the rock) and an octagonal exterior wall. The central colonnade (row of columns) was composed of four piers and twelve columns supporting a rounded drum that transitions into the two-layered dome more than 20 meters in diameter.

The colonnades are clad in marble on their lower registers, and their upper registers are adorned with exceptional mosaics. The ethereal interior atmosphere is a result of light that pours in from grilled windows located in the drum and exterior walls. Golden mosaics depicting jewels shimmer in this glittering light. Byzantine and Sassanian crowns in the midst of vegetal motifs are also visible.

The Byzantine Empire stood to the North and to the West of the new Islamic Empire until 1453, when its capital, Constantinople, fell to the Ottoman Turks. To the East, the old Sasanian Empire of Persia imploded under pressure from the Arabs, but nevertheless provided winged crown motifs that can be found in the Dome of the Rock.

Mosaics

Wall and ceiling mosaics became very popular in Late Antiquity and adorn many Byzantine churches, including San Vitale in Ravenna and Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Thus, the use of mosaics reflects an artistic tie to the world of Late Antiquity. Late Antiquity is a period from about 300-800, when the Classical world dissolves and the Medieval period emerges.

The mosaics in the Dome of the Rock contain no human figures or animals. While Islam does not prohibit the use of figurative art per se, it seems that in religious buildings, this proscription was upheld. Instead, we see vegetative scrolls and motifs, as well as vessels and winged crowns, which were worn by Sasanian kings. Thus, the iconography of the Dome of the Rock also includes the other major pre-Islamic civilization of the region, the Sasanian Empire, which the Arab armies had defeated.

A reference to Burial Places

The building enclosing the Rock also seems to take its form from the imperial mausolea (the burial places) of Roman emperors, such as Augustus or Hadrian. Its circular form and Dome also reference the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The circular Church of the Holy Sepulcher in
Jerusalem was built to enclose the tomb of Christ. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Dome of the Rock have domes that are almost identical in size; this suggests that the elevated position of the Dome of the Rock and the comparable size of its dome was a way that Muslims in the late 8th century proclaimed the superiority of their newly formed faith over Christians.

The Inscription

The Dome of the Rock also contains an inscription, 240 meters long, that includes some of the earliest surviving examples of verses from the Qur’an – in an architectural context or otherwise. The bismillah (in the name of God, the merciful and compassionate), the phrase that starts each verse of the Qu’ran, and the shahada, the Islamic confession of faith, which states that there is only one God and Muhammad is his prophet, are also included in the inscription. The inscription also refers to Mary and Christ and proclaim that Christ was not divine but a prophet. Thus the inscription also proclaims some of the core values of the newly formed religion of Islam.

Below the Rock is a small chamber, whose purpose is not fully understood even to this day. For those who are fortunate enough to be able to enter the Dome of the Rock, the experience is moving, regardless of one’s faith.

Essay by Dr. Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis

Dome of the Rock, Arabic Qubbat al-Ṣakhrah, shrine in Jerusalem built by the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān in the late 7th century ce. It is the oldest extant Islamic monument. The rock over which the shrine was built is sacred to both Muslims and Jews. The Prophet Muhammad, founder of Islam, is traditionally believed to have ascended into heaven from the site. In Jewish tradition it is here that Abraham, the progenitor and first patriarch of the Hebrew people, is said to have prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. Both the Dome and Al-Aqṣā Mosque are located on the Temple Mount, the site of Solomon’s Temple and its successors, an area known to Muslims as Al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf. The Dome’s structure and ornamentation are rooted in the Byzantine architectural tradition, yet its construction in the 7th century represents an early stage in the emergence of a distinct Islamic visual style.

An inscription in the Dome of the Rock establishes its date of completion as 691–692—some 55 years after Muslim armies captured Jerusalem, then a predominantly Christian city, from the Byzantine Empire. The structure, positioned near the centre of a wide raised platform, comprises an octagonal base topped by a gilded wooden central dome. The Dome of the Rock’s composition relates it to a class of Byzantine religious buildings known as martyrria—typically circular or polygonal shrines erected to mark the graves of saints or to commemorate events of special religious significance. The dome, which is approximately 65 feet (20 metres) in diameter and is mounted on an elevated drum, rises above a circle of 16 piers and columns. Surrounding this circle is an octagonal arcade of 24 piers and columns. Below the dome a portion of the sacred rock is exposed and protected by a railing. A stairway leads to a natural cave beneath the surface of the rock. The outer walls also form an octagon, with each of the eight sides being approximately 60 feet (18 metres) wide and 36 feet (11 metres) high. Both the dome and the exterior walls contain many windows.

The interior and exterior of the structure are decorated with marble, mosaics, and metal plaques. Although the mosaics are similar in technique to those found in Byzantine public
buildings and churches, the Dome’s mosaics exclude any representations of human or animal forms, instead featuring Arabic script and vegetal patterns intermixed with images of items such as jewels and crowns. Arabic religious inscriptions run around the octagonal arcade.

The original function and significance of the Dome of the Rock are uncertain. The building is not a mosque and does not fit easily into other categories of Muslim religious structures. After the advent of the ʿAbbāsid dynasty in the 8th century, some Muslim historians began to report that ‘Abd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock as a substitute for the Ka’bah in an attempt to relocate the site of the Muslim hajj from Mecca, then under the control of rebels led by Ibn al-Zubayr, to Jerusalem. Modern scholars have questioned this interpretation, citing the strong anti-Umayyad bias of ʿAbbāsid historiography as well as evidence that Mecca remained the destination of the hajj throughout Ibn al-Zubayr’s revolt.

Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages believed the Dome of the Rock to be the Temple of Solomon (Templum Domini). The Knights Templar were quartered there following the conquest of Jerusalem by a Crusader army in 1099, and Templar churches in Europe imitated its design. The Dome was used as church until a Muslim army recaptured Jerusalem in 1187.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

In modern times the original purpose of the Dome of the Rock remains a source of debate. It is commonly held that the Dome commemorates the Miʿrāj, the Prophet Muhammad’s ascension into heaven. However, the Dome’s construction appears to predate the emergence of traditions identifying Jerusalem as the site of the Miʿrāj, and none of the building’s inscriptions make reference to the episode.

Some scholars have argued that ‘Abd al-Malik built the Dome to proclaim the emergence of Islam as a supreme new faith linked to biblical tradition yet distinct from the religions of the conquered people, especially Christianity. The Dome’s grand scale and lavish decoration may have been intended to rival that of the Christian holy buildings of Jerusalem, especially the domed Church of the Holy Sepulchre. According to this view, the message of Islam’s supremacy was also conveyed by the Dome’s Arabic inscriptions, which present a selection of Quʾrānic passages and paraphrases that outline Islam’s view of Jesus—i.e., denouncing the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, while emphasizing the unity of God and affirming Jesus’ status as a prophet.

Other scholars have posited an eschatological motive for the Dome’s builders, arguing that the Dome’s placement, architecture, and decorative motifs correspond to images associated with Islamic and Byzantine beliefs about Judgment Day and heaven.

Since its construction the Dome of the Rock has been modified several times. One significant restoration, ordered by the Ottoman sultan Süleyman I in the 16th century, replaced the exterior mosaics with coloured ceramic tiles. In the 20th century, damaged interior and exterior ornaments were repaired or replaced, and the dome was given a new gold covering.

Dome of the Rock

Following a brief period of Persian rule, Jerusalem was captured in 638, six years after the death of Muhammad, by the Muslim Caliph Umar. Soon after his occupation of the city, Umar
cleansed the Temple Mount, built a small mosque and dedicated the site to Muslim worship. The most imposing structure the Muslims found in Jerusalem was the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Nearby the Arab conquerors undertook to build a more spectacular edifice, the Dome of the Rock, not only to proclaim the supremacy of Islam, but also to ensure that the new followers of Islam would not be tempted by Christianity. The site chosen was the very same rock where previously had stood the Jupiter temple of the Romans and before that, the two temples of the Jews.

Yet there was another reason for the Muslim veneration of this particular site, one more important than the political expediency of usurping another religion's holy place. A certain passage in the Koran links the Prophet Muhammad with Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. That passage, the seventeenth Sura, entitled 'The Night Journey', relates that Muhammad was carried by night 'from the sacred temple to the temple that is most remote, whose precinct we have blessed, that we might show him our signs...-' Muslim belief identifies the two temples mentioned in this verse as being in Mecca and Jerusalem. According to tradition, Muhammad's mystic night journey was in the company of the Archangel Gabriel, and they rode on a winged steed called El Burak (meaning `lightning'), which according to Islamic Hadith tradition was a winged, horse-like creature that was "smaller than a mule, but larger than a donkey." Stopping briefly at Mt. Sinai and Bethlehem, they finally alighted at Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and there encountered Abraham, Moses, Jesus and other prophets, whom Muhammad led in prayers. Gabriel then escorted Muhammad to the pinnacle of the rock, which the Arabs call as-Sakhra, where a ladder of golden light materialized. On this glittering shaft, Muhammad ascended through the seven heavens into the presence of Allah, from whom he received instructions for himself and his followers. Following his divine meeting, Muhammad was flown back to Mecca by Gabriel and the winged horse, arriving there before dawn.

At this hallowed site, known in Arabic as Haram al Sharif, the 9th Caliph, Abd al-Malik, built the great Dome of the Rock between 687 and 691. Besides its association with the `Night Journey' of Muhammad, Jerusalem was also chosen as the site of this first great work of Islamic architecture for political reasons. For a brief period between 680 and 692 Mecca had become the capital of a rival caliphate established by Abd Allah ibn Zubayr who controlled most of Arabia and Iraq. Following the retreat of the Umayyad army from its siege of Mecca the construction of the Dome was undertaken in order to discourage pilgrimages to Mecca. Often incorrectly called the Mosque of Umar, the Dome of the Rock, known in Arabic as Qubbat As-Sakhrah, is not a mosque for public worship but rather a mashhad, a shrine for pilgrims. Adjacent to the Dome is the Al-Aqsa Mosque wherein Muslims make their prayers. Designed by Byzantine architects engaged by the Caliph, the Dome of the Rock was the greatest monumental building in early Islamic history and remains today one of the most sublime examples of artistic genius that humanity has ever produced (the Great Mosque of Damascus, being a true mosque, is the earliest surviving monumental mosque). The dome is 20 meters high, 10 meters in diameter, and its supporting structure, made of lead, was originally covered in pure gold (the real gold was removed over the centuries and the dome is now made of anodized aluminum). The sacred foundation stone is encircled by sixteen arches that formerly came from different churches in Jerusalem, which were destroyed during the Persian occupation of the city in 614 AD. Writing of the sublimely beautiful structure with its heavenly dome, its columns of rare marble and its brilliant mosaics, the British authority on Muslim architecture, K.A.C. Creswell, exclaimed:
"Under a scheme whereby the size of every part is related to every other part in some definite proportion, the building instead of being a collection of odd notes becomes a harmonious chord in stones, a sort of living crystal; and after all it really is not strange that harmonies of this sort should appeal to us through our sight, just as chords in music appeal to our hearing. Some of the ratios involved are fundamental in time and space, they go right down to the very basis of our nature, and of the physical universe in which we live and move."

The Dome of the Rock, while certainly one of the world's great architectural masterpieces, is often incorrectly understood to be an Islamic creation. Writing about the non-Islamic influences on the architectural style of the Dome, the author of Muslim Religious Architecture, Dogan Kuban, comments that,

"Art historians have kept up an unceasing flow of studies of the Dome of the Rock. In the context of Islamic architecture it remains unique, but in that of Roman architecture its form is directly in line with the late tradition in Syria. All of its important features, from the interior double colonnades to the great wooden dome, have been shown to be faithful reproductions of features of the Cathedral of Bosra in southern Syria. Its well-known mosaic decoration is Islamic only in the sense that the vocabulary is syncretic and does not include representation of men or animals. The entire building might be viewed as the last blossoming of the Hellenistic tradition before the Islamic synthesis created its own formulas."

The holy rock of Sakhrah in Jerusalem was for a few years the primary sacred site of Islam. When Muhammad had fled to Medina (the second sacred city of Islam) he told his followers to make Jerusalem the kiblah, as was the Jewish tradition. Following a quarrel with the Jews in Medina, Muhammad received a revelation from Allah (Sura 2:45) that directed him to reorient the direction of the kiblah from Jerusalem to Mecca, where it has since remained.

The Muslims in power before and during the Dome's construction period had tolerated Christianity and Judaism, allowing pilgrims of both religions to freely visit the Holy City. This era of peaceful coexistence ended in 969 however, when control of the city passed to the Fatimid caliphs of Egypt (a radical and somewhat intolerant Shiite sect) who systematically destroyed all synagogues and churches. In 1071 the Seljuk Turks defeated the Byzantines, displaced the Egyptians as masters of the Holy Land, and closed the long established pilgrimage routes. The prohibition of Christian pilgrimage by these less tolerant Muslim rulers angered Western Europe and became a contributing cause of the Crusades, a series of invasions that culminated in the capture of Jerusalem in 1099. The Christian Kingdom lasted almost 90 years, during which time the Dome of the Rock was converted to a Christian shrine and named Templum Domini (meaning Temple of the Lord), the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was rebuilt, and hospices and monasteries were founded. The city was recaptured by the Muslims again in 1187, was ruled by the Mamlukes from the 13th to 15th centuries (except for the brief periods of Christian control in 1229-1239 and 1240-1244) and the Turks until the 19th century. The Jews, who had been barred by the Christian crusaders, returned from the 13th century onward, by the middle of the 19th century nearly half the city's population was Jewish, and in 1980 Jerusalem was officially made the capital of Israel.

The entire area of the Old City of Jerusalem has been charged since antiquity with the powerful energy of holiness, devotion and spiritual love. Over more than three millennia the control of the city's primary sacred places has shifted frequently between the religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It must be understood however, that the energy or presence of the
sacred is not monopolized by any of these faiths but rather gives rise to each of them. And this sacred presence, besides knowing no limitations of dogma, philosophy or politics, has the wonderful quality of accumulating, or increasing in intensity, over time. The holy rock of Mt. Moriah was first a Jebusite place of worship, then the site of the Jewish Temples, next the sanctuary of the Roman god Jupiter, later capped by the Muslim's Dome of the Rock, next taken over by the Christians, and still later a Muslim shrine again. This same continuity of sacred use also occurred at the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which, prior to its Christian use, was the location of a temple of Aphrodite. We may thus speak about these two sites, and the many other pilgrimage destinations in Jerusalem, as containers of the accumulated spirit of holiness. That spiritual energy has been enriched over thirty centuries, like fine wine in a wooden cask, and it radiates today throughout the city of Old Jerusalem with a magnificent power.

Besides the sites discussed above, the following places are also much visited by pilgrims in the Holy City. For the Jews, the most venerable locations are Mt Zion, the traditional site of King David's tomb, and the Western Wall, where stands the only remaining part of the original temple of King Solomon. Devout Christian pilgrims will visit the fourteen stations of the Via Dolorosa, or 'Way of Sorrows'. Walking this route, the holiest Christian thoroughfare in the world, the pilgrim symbolically relives the events of Jesus' passion. Additionally, there are the shrine of the Ascension on the summit of the Mount of Olives, the garden of Gethsemane, and Mt. Zion, the site of the Last Supper. In the Dome of the Rock, beneath the ancient sacred stone, is a cave-like crypt known as Bir el- Arweh, the Well of Souls. Here, according to ancient folklore (not Islamic), the voices of the dead may sometimes be heard along with the sounds of the rivers of paradise.

Interesting Facts
The Dome of the Rock is built on the place where, according to Muslim’s belief, Muḥammad ascended to heaven.
The Dome is built on the place where, according to Jews, Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice.
The building is built over a sacred stone
The Dome is octagonal in shape.
Its most distinct feature is the gold dome.
The Dome of the Rock is the oldest Islamic building to survive.
The marble and mosaic parts of the dome were added centuries after it was built.
The building suffered many damages over the years and it was rebuilt several times. Last major rebuilding was done in 1035.

Dome of the RockThe Dome of the Rock is a 7th-century edifice located in Jerusalem.

It enshrines the rock from which Muḥammad is said to have ascended to heaven.

Sometimes erroneously called the Mosque of Umar, from a tradition that it was built by Caliph Umar I, the Dome of the Rock was actually built by Caliph Abd al-Malik between 687 and 691.

The first domed shrine to be built, the Dome of the Rock is a masterpiece of Islamic architecture.
The octagonal plan and the rotunda dome of wood are of Byzantine design. The Persian tiles on the exterior and the marble slabs that decorate the interior were added by Suleiman I in 1561.

The Dome of the Rock is located on a rocky outcrop known as Mount Moriah, where, according to Jewish belief, Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice. The inscriptions inside the building glorify Islam as the final true revelation and culmination of the faiths of Judaism and Christianity. The building is actually not a mosque but a ciborium, erected over a sacred site.

According to later Islamic tradition, the Rock (al-Sakhra) in the midst of the building was the spot from which Mohammed ascended to heaven after his miraculous night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem on the winged steed al-Buraq.

A tradition states that by building the dome, Abd al-Malik was attempting to transfer the Islamic hajj to Jerusalem from Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The 60-foot-diameter, timber-framed double dome, covered internally with colored and gilded stucco and originally roofed with lead covered in gold, rises 35 meters over the holy rock.

It is carried on a tall drum, originally faced with glass mosaics, which rests on a circular arcade of 12 marble columns, set in threes between four large rectangular piers. At the top of the drum, 16 colored glass windows light the central space. Inside and outside, the Dome of the Rock was enriched with marble columns and facings and floral mosaic patterns.

During the Crusades, the Dome of the Rock was commandeered as a Christian shrine before returning to Islamic hands. Many medieval people believed it to be the famous Temple of King Solomon.

Today, it is at the very core of a bitter dispute between Palestinians and Israelis. Although sometimes referred to as the Mosque of Omar, the Dome of the Rock is in fact not a mosque. Nevertheless, as the oldest extant Islamic monument, it served as a model for architecture and other artistic endeavors across three continents for a millennium.

The Dome of the Rock is a famous and one of the oldest Islamic shrines in the world. It was built in the year 691 and houses the Foundation Stone which is considered as a sacred spot in Judaism. It is located in the Temple Mount and called, “The Noble Sanctuary” by the Muslims.

The Foundation Stone is sacred to both Jews and Muslims for different reasons.

The sacred rock located at the Dome of the Rock is believed to have been there even before the arrival of Islam. It is also the place where Abraham brought Isaac as a sacrifice. During the Middle Ages the Dome of the Rock was considered as the Temple of Solomon by the Christians and Muslims. The exterior mosaics were damaged during the winters and later repair works were done during the Mamluk period and in the year 1545 Suleiman the Magnificent replaced the mosaics with tiles.

The golden dome was first made of gold and was later replaced with copper, then again replaced with aluminum. Again the aluminum dome is wrapped with a golden leaf which can be seen in the present day. The dome features a full moon on the top and it represents Islam’s
moon symbol. It is also said that a person who looks at this moon will be looking straight to Mecca.

The Dome of the Rock features multicolored Turkish tiles on the exterior. The octagonal part features Quran verses and a number of Arabic inscriptions. These inscriptions are a fine example of modifications at the time of Suleiman.

The golden domes interior features a number of flower ornamentations in gold and several other inscriptions. These mosaics can also be seen at the shrines garden which resembles a paradise.

The sacred rock is the most important site to be seen here. It is the place where the prophet Muhammad supposedly ascended to heaven accompanied by Angel Gabriel.

The Dome of the Rock is a major shrine. It opens at 8:30 am and closes and 3 pm. It is closed to visitors on Friday and Muslim holidays.

The Secret Key to the Dome of the Rock

By Ernest L. Martin, PH. D., October 1999

There is a key message found within two inscriptions in Arabic inscribed on the first cornice supported by large columns that encircles the interior region of the Dome of the Rock. One inscription is found on the outside area of the cornice and the other on the inside area. Both writings provide the real secret to the meaning of the significance behind the Dome of the Rock.

Once that secret is known, a whole new understanding of early Islam in its relation to Christianity comes on the scene that greatly enhances our comprehension of the theological history of the period. It reveals religious attitudes that existed between early Muslims, Jews and Christians.

There is a linguistic key that has great relevance in knowing why the Dome of the Rock was constructed and it provides the true meaning for its existence. Once this is realized, it will help divert Muslim attention away from their present attitude of reverent holiness toward the Dome and it will redirect their attention to the Al Aqsa Mosque located to the south, and it will further emphasize the importance of Mecca in the eyes of all Muslims. This new information will also aid Christians to know that the Dome of the Rock was actually built by Abd al-Malik in 692 A.D. as a rebuilt Christian Church that once stood in its place. The Rock that sanctified the shrine was first an important Christian holy place and NOT an early Jewish sacred spot (nor was it the site of the former Temples).

The first inscription on the outside is meant for all Muslims and the inner inscription is written for Christians ALONE. Jews are not even considered in the context of the inner (or even the outer) inscription. The analysis of these two inscriptions shows that Abd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock to satisfy Christian religious matters and it shows that the Dome of the Rock HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH JEWISH MATTERS WHATEVER! The historical evidence shows
conclusively that no Jewish person was ever interested in any religious or national manner to the "Rock" under the Dome of the Rock until the time of the First Crusade. The area was NEVER considered a sacred spot of Jews until the time of Benjamin of Tudela in the twelfth century (check other articles on the ASK Web Page on the Internet for proof of this). The site of the Dome of the Rock was ONLY of Christian significance BEFORE the time of Omar and Abd al-Malik. It only became important to Muslims in the eighth century to the eleventh, and only important to Jews in the twelfth century.

In actual fact, Omar (the Second Caliph and the first Muslim leader to enter Jerusalem) and Abd al-Malik about 50 years later actually honored the real site of the Jewish Temple that were shown to them on the southeast ridge and over the Gihon Spring (that is the very thing that Omar came to Jerusalem to accomplish) but these early Muslim leaders did NOT show the same type of reverence to the Rock now under the Dome of the Rock. The Dome was built by Muslims to wean Christians from the site, NOT to make it a more sanctified spot in Islam nor did the building of the Dome of the Rock have anything to do with Jewish religious matters or aspirations. Indeed, the "rock" underneath the Dome of the Rock was specifically and significantly of Christian importance and that the Jews up to the time of the Crusades showed no interest whatever in this former Christian spot that Abd al-Malik rebuilt as a Christian type of building (with its characteristic Byzantine dome) in order to wean Christians (who comprised at least 90% of the population of Jerusalem in the seventh century) from New Testament teachings and to win them over to the doctrines then being taught by Islam in and through the Koran.

Now for a question: What was happening at the time the Dome was built that inspired this display of theological symbolism in the erection of certain buildings in Jerusalem and also in Mecca? The answer has relevance in knowing prophecy for us today.

One of the most volatile geopolitical hot spots on earth today revolves around the national or religious possession of this natural outcropping of an oblong rock located in the City of Jerusalem. That spot is the Rock that is presently situated under the building now known as the Dome of the Rock. The building itself is without doubt the most beautiful piece of architecture in the City of Jerusalem and it represents the centerpiece of religious importance in the Holy City for both Muslims and Jews. But strange as it may seem, history shows that Christians also have a stake in its symbolic relevance. Little do Christians know, but that "Rock" was at first considered by both Muslims and Jews (in the early days of Islam) as being a Christian holy place and NOT one that Muslims or Jews thought as having high religious value. That’s right! The spot is actually of Christian importance. The real story behind the significance of the site of the Dome of the Rock will cause Muslims and Jews to reevaluate its meaning in relation to their own belief systems that they have erroneously accepted over the centuries since the beginning of Islam.

The proper identity of the "Rock" under the Dome of the Rock will truly be a revelation to all modern religious groups when they discover the truth of its biblical relevance. They will be amazed when they realize that the area was NOT the site of the former Temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel and Herod. It was a "Rock" purely of Christian importance and it was formerly recognized by Christians until the seventh century (and even historically until the time of the Crusades) as a most prominent Christian site that was singled out in the Gospel of John as a "Rock" that dealt directly with the mission of Christ Jesus to this earth. The early Christians, Jews and Muslims knew this. The reason the Dome was built by Abd al-Malik in 692 A.D. was to
direct Christians away from that "Rock" and to orient them toward the newly constructed Al Aqsa Mosque (which they reckoned to be the re-christened Muslim Temple of Solomon) that was located near the south wall of the Haram esh-Sharif. This in turn was intended to further lead Christians directly toward the City of Mecca where Allah (the Arabic for "God") now had symbolic residence.

To understand why the Dome of the Rock was built by Abd al-Malik, we first have to understand how Muslims looked (and still look) upon the significance of their central shrine in Mecca that is shaped as a cube (as was the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s Temple). That holy building of the Muslims contains the black meteorite stone that the ancient Arabs used to worship in their pagan days but which Muhammad placed in the southeast corner of his building called the Ka’aba toward which all Muslims must pray five times a day (and, if possible, visit on pilgrimage at least once). Wherever Muslims find themselves in the world, they must direct their prayers toward the Ka’aba in Mecca. When they go on their pilgrimage, they gather at the southeast angle of the cube-style sanctuary. Though the ground level design is a perfect square, the building is angled so that the corner where the meteorite stone is located is just south of east (at about 100 degrees in direction). The required circumambulation (walking or trotting around) the building begins opposite this stone with the people at first facing north toward the region of the heavens to which all biblical peoples believed God dwelt in His heavenly abode (Psalm 75:6). The Muslim ritual at the Ka’aba has profound astronomical (that is, astrological) significance and it is designed to mimic the motions of the inner and outer planets within our solar system. The Temple at Jerusalem had a similar astronomical basis but with an entirely different liturgical motif. There was in both sanctuaries deep symbolism involved and what was ritualistically accomplished was of religious value.

What did Muslim pilgrims perform at the Ka’aba in Mecca? In the monumental work by Sir Richard Francis Burton in the last century (who was the first Christian or European to clandestinely enter the sacred area of Mecca and describe it in detail), we are informed of the liturgical factors that Muslims were expected to perform when they made their pilgrimage to Mecca. They were to assemble at the southeast corner of the Ka’aba and face northward. Each person’s left shoulder was always to be toward the building housing the meteorite stone (idol) as they circle the structure in a counterclockwise fashion (this is the same manner the Jews entered the Temple and exited it). They are required to circle the building seven times (the first three with a slow pace "like walking in sand" and the last four with a faster pace). This represents the movements of the heavenly bodies. The three outer planets as viewed from the earth (Saturn, Jupiter and Mars) move slowly in the heavens relative to the fixed stars, while the inner celestial bodies (Sun, Mercury, Venus and Moon) appear to move faster. In early astrological view, the earth was believed to be the center of the universe with Saturn being the furthest planet away from earth, with Jupiter nearer and Mars nearer still. Then came the Sun, Mercury, Venus and the nearest of all was the Moon. Thus, the first circuit of the Ka’aba was in honor of Saturn, the second Jupiter and on through to the seventh, the Moon. The last circuit symbolically confirmed the pilgrims as being true Muslims and their astronomical symbol became the Moon (the Moon was singled out in the seventh circuit of the Ka’aba). At the end of the seventh circling (and after having recited certain prescribed prayers at various points in their seven circlings), the Muslim pilgrims found themselves back at the place they started opposite the black stone and again facing north to where God was actually thought to have His residence in heaven. There was much mimicking by early Muslims of the Temple rituals performed in Jerusalem by the Jews as demanded in the Scriptures and in Jewish tradition. Muhammad kept the same themes in his ritualistic interpretations. This is important to know in
viewing the architectural design of the Dome of the Rock and the ritual focus intended by Abd al-Malik.

The "Rock" at the Dome of the Rock Was of Christian Value, NOT Jewish or Muslim

The "Rock" under the Dome of the Rock is the most conspicuous natural feature within the whole of the Haram esh-Sharif. For anyone to build a magnificent shrine over it shows that the "Rock" must have had great significance. And it did. The first Christian pilgrim that has left us a record of his journey to Jerusalem was the Bordeaux Pilgrim who in 333 A.D. mentioned that the most significant building east of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (then being built) was the Roman Praetorium where Pilate sentenced Jesus. This structure had its walls centered directly within the Tyropoeon Valley. This was NOT the site of the Temple in the eyes of the Bordeaux Pilgrim. He had already described the Temple site (and several other buildings around it) a few paragraphs before. But only later (after concluding his account of the Temple and its associated buildings) did the Bordeaux Pilgrim mention the imposing structure to the east of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with its walls within the valley which he called the Praetorium where Pilate judged Jesus (see John Wilkinson’s excellent translation of the Bordeaux Pilgrim in his book Egeria’s Travels, p.158). Clearly, the Pilgrim was describing the Haram esh-Sharif as being the Praetorium. He was looking mainly toward the southwest angle of the Haram and northward toward the spot where the "Wailing Wall" of the Jews is presently located. The Pilgrim said this "walled area" contained the residence of Pilate. It was the Roman Praetorium that also went by the name of "Fort Antonia." In Roman usage, the Praetorium was the headquarters of a military unit and could refer to the whole camp or to the commander’s tent. There was associated with the military fort a prominent "Rock" The apostle John was well aware of its significance in Christian history. Within this walled enclosure of the Praetorium was the "Rock" called in John’s Gospel (John 19:13) “the Pavement-Stone” (in Greek, lithostrotos and in Hebrew Gabbatha).

This particular "Rock" within the Praetorium area had a "Pavement" or flagstones around it. The "Rock" was associated with the Praetorium and was part of Fort Antonia, the permanent Roman Camp that was located in Jerusalem in the time of Pilate and Jesus. And what did Josephus say (he was the Jewish historian of the first century and an eyewitness to the early Praetorium of the Romans called Fort Antonia)? He stated that the central feature of Fort Antonia was a major rock. He said: "The tower of Antonia...was built upon [around] a rock fifty cubits high and on all sides precipitous...the rock was covered from its base upwards with smooth flagstones" (Jewish War, V.v,8 para.238). Before construction of the fortress, the "Rock" was 50 cubits high (75 feet), but Herod later built a platform around it (when it became the north/south center of the walled fortress) and this made it not as high and it became accessible for judicial purposes. That "Rock" around which Fort Antonia was built (and mentioned by Josephus) was the chief geographical feature of the site. It was near this "Rock" that Pilate had his residence at the time of Jesus’ trial. Later Christians believed that some indentions in that "Rock" must have come from the footprints of Jesus as he stood before Pilate and God supposedly allowed his feet to sink into the "Rock." Though these indentions were not the actual footprints of Jesus (a great deal of Christian folklore became associated with the "Rock"), early Christians came to believe they were the literal outlines of Jesus’ feet. It is easy to explain how this conclusion came to be associated with the "Rock" under the Dome of the Rock.
The so-called footprints came into vogue when later Christians noticed in the New Testament that a "Judgment Seat" was placed by Pilate on the "Rock" (called in Greek a bematos). That word comes from the root word bema that literally means footprint, or by common usage a footstool where a king or a ruler in judgment would place his feet when he sat on a throne in order to sentence people in any official judicial event. Indeed, even the throne of God was reckoned in the Bible as a spot where God placed His feet below the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple when He sat or stood to make His divine judgments (Psalms 99:5; 132:7; Lamentations 2:1). Each military governor of the Romans carried his official bema or bematos with him in order to make his judgments on behalf of the emperor, and Julius Caesar carried one with him everywhere he went in order to render official judgments (see "Praetorium," Hasting's Bible Dictionary). Later Christians simply confused the literal meaning of bema [footprint] and the indentions they saw in the natural outcropping of rock became "Jesus’ footprints." Though this was error, the reckoning became an indelible identifying mark associated with the "Rock" where Pilate made his judgment against Jesus. This "Rock" (called "the Pavement" by the apostle John) was well known in the time of Constantine. The records show that Helena, the mother of Constantine, ordered that a small Christian Church with the name "St.Cyrus and St.John" be built over that "Rock" (see Life of Constantine in Wilkinson’s Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades, p. 204). This small church was later enlarged probably in the fifth century to become a major church in Jerusalem called "The Church of the Holy Wisdom." This church is described very well (and accurately) in a sixth century work written by the Piacenza Pilgrim. He said (with words in brackets mine):

"We also prayed at the Praetorium, where the Lord’s case was heard: what is there now is the basilica of Saint Sophia [the Holy Wisdom Church], which is in front [north] of the Temple of Solomon [located] below the street [east and downslope] which runs down to the spring of Siloam outside of Solomon’s porch [the eastern wall of Solomon’s Temple]. In this basilica is the seat where Pilate sat to hear the Lord’s case, and there is also the oblong stone [I emphasize this point about the "oblong stone" to help identify the spot] which used to be in the center of the Praetorium [the Praetorium tent was moveable]. The accused person whose case was being heard was made to mount this stone so that everyone could hear and see him. The Lord mounted it when he was heard by Pilate, and his footprints [italicized for emphasis] are still on it. He had a well-shaped foot, small and delicate."

This Church of the Holy Wisdom (which the Pilgrim had just described) was built over "the oblong stone" which the people thought had the footprints of Jesus embedded in it. Just as Josephus stated that the "Rock" was the most prominent part of Fort Antonia [the Praetorium area], so this "oblong stone" was the central feature of the Church of the Holy Wisdom (that was destroyed by the Persians and Jewish soldiers in 614 A.D.). This is the same "Rock" that is now under the Dome of the Rock in the Haram esh-Sharif. The fact that later Christians thought the footprints of Jesus were embedded in this "Rock," is a key for identification. There are historical references both Christian and Muslim that attest that the "Rock" over which the Dome of the Rock now stands was the same "Rock or Stone" that had the footprints of Jesus inlaid as foot-like depressions sunk into the "Rock." Indeed, even as late as the period of the Crusades we read that the court recorder of Saladin (the Muslim who reconquered Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 1187 A.D.) made mention that Jesus’ footprints had been embedded in the "Rock" underneath the Dome of the Rock (see article "Saladin" in Brill’s First Encyclopaedia of Islam). There are several other Muslim references to these footprints of Jesus in the "Rock" under the Dome of the Rock that I have present in a more extended context in my new book "The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot." In fact, in the book I will show in a future article that
those footprints of Jesus were sawed away from the "Rock" and placed in a location within the Haram esh-Sharif about 200 yards north of the Dome of the Rock. This later fact is a most interesting and important aspect of the story.

In short, there can be no doubt of the identification. The "Rock" of the Dome of the Rock (which is clearly oblong in shape) and the "oblong stone" within the Church of the Holy Wisdom were one and the same "Rock/Stone." Sophronius, the Archbishop of Jerusalem in the time of Omar when the Muslims first conquered Jerusalem, called the Church of the Holy Wisdom (when it was yet standing before its destruction in 614 A.D.) as "the House and the Stone" (Sophronius, Antacroeontica as translated by John Wilkinson in Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades, p.91). This fact shows that Sophronius saw great significance in the "Rock/Stone." That "Rock" that later became the spot for the Dome of the Rock to Sophronius was the very stone called "the Pavement" mentioned in John 19:13 (rendered in Greek as the Lithostrotos, and in Hebrew Gabbatha).

Why the Dome of the Rock Was Built by Abd al-Malik in 692 A.D.

During the first hundred years of Muslim rule in Jerusalem (since more than 90% of the population was Christian) was one of conciliation and ecumenism between Muslims and Christians and between Muslims and Jews. This does not mean that the Muslims wanted to embrace some of the teachings of Christianity. The Muslims abhorred what they believed to be outright idolatry among Christians with their statues, pictures and pagan practices within the Christian community, but they still thought in this early period that they could wean Christians away from their religious beliefs unto the new Islam that God had now revealed to the world by Muhammad. This was the central reason why Abd al-Malik first devised and designed the building called the Dome of the Rock to be built over the Christian spot where once the Church of the Holy Wisdom had stood. His attempt was ecumenical in its spiritual intent, but still to show the superiority of Islam over what Abd al-Malik believed to be a decadent type of Christianity. The fact is, the Dome of the Rock was built exclusively to vie with (and to appeal to) Christians in Jerusalem to accept the new truth of Islam which was (in the Muslim view) a major advance in proper religious interpretation that the "Peoples of the Book" (the Christians and Jews) ought to have enough sense to accept. And though Jews were also accounted as being "People of the Book," the construction of the Dome of the Rock was NOT intended in any manner to influence Jews. After all, Jews would NOT have reckoned as important a "Rock" that was exclusively a Christian religious site because it was identified with "the Pavement" recorded in the Gospel of John (John 19:13). In a word, Abd al-Malik and the early Muslims felt they could effectively (in an intellectual and philosophical way) convince Christians that Islam was correct by constructing the Dome of the Rock and to include within it a message from Islam that would glorify Muslim theology.

So, Abd al-Malik set out in 692 A.D. to woo the Christians to Islam. What he did was to rebuild in the exact spot and in the precise form "The Church of the Holy Wisdom" that had been destroyed by the Persians and Jews in 614 A.D. (and he desired it to have as much architectural grandeur as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre). He then built what looked like a grand Byzantine "Church" directly over the very "Rock" that Christians believed contained the footprints of Jesus. Abd al-Malik did not design the Dome of the Rock as a Muslim type of building. He wanted it to appear as a rebuilt Church of the Holy Wisdom (the reason for this I will explain in my new book on the Temples). The Muslim Caliph designed the building to be like a "Church," but one that contained the new and advanced teaching of Islam. Within this
new (or renewed) "Church," Abd al-Malik placed two inscriptions in Arabic. One was to Muslims in general (the outer inscription), and the other was exclusively for Christians (the inner inscription next to the "Rock" itself). That inner inscription specifically mentions Jesus and the supposed errors of some Christian doctrines. Abd al-Malik was appealing exclusively to Christians by emphasizing this Christian holy spot through Muslim eyes, NOT to Jews who did not yet accept Jesus as the Messiah as did Muslims and Christians. And in attempting to wean the Christians from their former beliefs unto the new Islam, Abd al-Malik used every architectural artifice and symbolic nuance he knew in a brilliant maneuver to woo the Christians of Jerusalem to accept Islam in a non-offensive way. He did so with a deliberate and steadfast allegiance to Muhammad that made Islam the dominant religion for all mankind, including those who then accepted Christianity.

One must carefully notice every architectural device used by Abd al-Malik to see what his intentions were and they must be minutely observed with utmost precision to the dotting of an "I" to the crossing of a "T." Every detail of the architecture that the Caliph designed was meant to systematically lead Christians (NOT Jews, in this case) to the advanced teachings of Islam as he believed them to be. And what a master he was in his endeavor! Though he built the Dome of the Rock as a facsimile of the Church of the Holy Wisdom (there was NOT the slightest intention on the part of Abd al-Malik to give heed to ANY JEWISH PERSON OR EDIFICE WHATEVER in the architectural design of the Dome of the Rock), he changed the entrance to the octagonal building from its original design with its entrance on the west. Abd al-Malik deliberately altered the entrance to Dome of the Rock to be from the south. This is most UN-Muslim! The ideal for those north of Mecca is (like the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem) to enter from the north and pray toward the qibla (the direction to Mecca) in the south. Not so the Dome of the Rock! Abd al-Malik designed it to be entered from the south with one's back to Mecca (at the start of the liturgical theme)! Why do we know this? Because the two inscriptions in Arabic (containing vital information from cardinal verses in the Koran and also a religious commentary by Abd al-Malik himself as the successor of Muhammad) are a direct appeal to Muslims in general (the outer inscription) and then to Christians exclusively (the inner inscription that is written closer to the "Rock"). A significant feature of the inner inscription is the fact that it can only be read with one's back to the "Rock." This was intended to give a negative emotional reaction to the reader of the inscription that the architecture was designed to evoke. The inner inscription was not designed to be read by Jews who did not believe in Jesus in the first place (like the Muslims and Christians). The writings on the cornice were to give definite and decisive positive and negative psychological impressions through liturgical and ritualistic themes that Abd al-Malik designed into the architecture. Again (and it is important to note) the Caliph did NOT address any Jews nor did he show the slightest interest in Jewish matters or religious beliefs when he designed the Dome of the Rock. He built the Dome of the Rock to appeal strictly to Christians, NOT Jews! [To read what the two inscriptions state in English, read the excellent translations with outstanding pictures and explanatory text in Professor Oleg Grabar’s book titled The Shape of the Holy.]

A Historical Review of What Happened Surrounding the Site of the "Rock."

In 638 A.D., when Omar (the Second Caliph) went to Jerusalem, he asked Sophronius the archbishop to show him where King David had prayed before the building of the Temple. Omar said he wished to pray in the same spot. Sophronius showed him, first, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which Omar rejected. Then Sophronius took the Caliph to the traditional Zion on the southwest hill. Omar rejected that spot too. Then, when Omar stated that he wished to build a
shrine at the place where David prayed, Sophronius then took him to the place over and near the Gihon Spring where the Jews had attempted to rebuild the Temple in the time of Constantine (as permitted in the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. and with construction continuing to 325 A.D.) and also in the time of Julian the Apostate (362 A.D.). At that former Temple site over the Gihon Spring, Omar was impressed. He dug through the filth and found a stone that he removed and took it through the South Gate of the Haram esh-Sharif. There he placed it near the qibla [the site toward which Muslim pray as they bow toward Mecca] on the elevated platform directly abutting the southern wall. He called the place the Al Aqsa (and a Mosque was soon built there). But one of Omar’s generals named Ka’ab (a recent convert from Judaism who had extensive Christian indoctrination) found the place of the “Rock” where the former Church of the Holy Wisdom once stood. He told Omar that it would be better to place the qibla NORTH of this "Rock" and NOT down at the southern end of the Haram. Omar rejected this suggestion of Ka’ab and chided the general for making such a suggestion. That would have given much prestige to that "Rock" in the north, and Omar steadfastly refused. He turned his back on that "Rock" where the Christian church once stood, and went back south to the qibla of the Al Aqsa area. The truth is, Omar (in his role as the Second Caliph and the divine successor of Muhammad in Muslim theology) totally rejected that northern "Rock." And later, Abd al-Malik wanted to show a further rejection by building the Dome over that northern "Rock" some fifty years afterwards.

Let me explain how this rejection is designed into the Dome. The original entrance designed by Abd al-Malik was from the southern most octant of the octagonal design. Once a person entered the Dome, he was directed to read the start of the first inscription that was located at the top of the cornice on the far right side of the southern octant. Since Arabic (like Hebrew) is written from right to left, the first inscription contained no message for Christians and it was meant for Muslims in general. To read the whole inscription one must start with one’s back to Mecca (this is important to note), but then circle around the whole of the Dome clockwise (just the opposite from what Muslims do in circling the Ka’aba at Mecca) until one comes to the exact spot where one commenced his reading (when one returns to this southern point the person can conveniently turn his back to the "Rock" and pray directly toward Mecca in the south). The design of the outer message is to circle the "Rock" in the wrong direction (which gives a negative impression to any early Muslim, Jew or Christian). But the complete encirclement requires one to return to the south once again and the person is forced to face Mecca when one leaves the Dome with one’s back to the "Rock" as Omar insisted one must do (and Abd al-Malik designed this symbolic stance – with one’s back to the "Rock" – into the liturgy associated with the architecture of the Dome of the Rock).

The inner inscription is different. One must go further into the Dome to the other side of the same cornice and look upward at the same southern octant, but to its far-left side if one is facing the "Rock" (indeed, one must look at its far left side only when facing the "Rock" itself, but inside the inner area of the Dome one must look southerly and also upwards at the start of the inscription which will be seen on one’s upper right side – this requires a person to have his back to the "Rock" and looking toward Mecca). To read the inner inscription one must crane the neck upward to see the start of the inscription that is circling and facing the "Rock." One then begins to read the inscription in Arabic devoted strictly to Christians (NOT to Jews) because the whole emphasis of the message is about the importance of Jesus in Muslim theology. One must read this inscription which completely encircles the Dome (like the outer one in the opposite direction), but one must do so in a counterclockwise manner as one does at Mecca (a positive
sign) but this time with one’s back to the "Rock" (another positive sign from a Muslim point of view, and a negative one as Christians would view it).

Now note this important point. All the time a Christian is reading the teaching from Abd al-Malik in the inner inscription, he has to do so with his back deliberately turned away from the "Rock" and with his head craned upward in the most uncomfortable position that one can imagine. The whole anatomical awkwardness forced upon the human observer is a deliberate attempt to show disdain for the symbolic meaning that Christians had placed on the "Rock." The original symbolism for Christians was different. The Christian entered the Domed Church from the west and looked eastward toward the Mount of Olives. Once the circuit of the "Rock" was made, the Christian could again look through the "Rock" eastward toward Olivet in symbolic anticipation for the Second Advent (Christ is to come back from the east – as the sun in its circuit of the earth).

However, Abd al-Malik designed the Dome of the Rock to be entered from the southern octant. But even if a Christian entered from the south (as designed by Abd al-Malik), though his circuit around the "Rock" would be all negative to Christianity because his or her back would always be away from the "Rock" (while reading the inner inscription), the Christian upon completing the circuit could simply refuse to face Mecca when his circuit ended in the south. He could then turn directly northward and pray through the "Rock" (which symbolized the rule of Christ in his or her life) and direct his ultimate attention to the north quarter of the sky where all people knew God the Father had His residence. If Abd al-Malik saw a Christian do this after the circuit deposited the person in the south, then Abd al-Malik knew that the person would never be a Muslim and the Christian would be accepted as a "Person of the Book" (the Holy Scriptures) but inferior to Muslims. Thus, the person would then pay the poll tax to the Muslims and carry on with his own beliefs.

Still, when one completed the circuit by reading either the outer or the inner inscription in order to exit the Dome of the Rock as intended by Abd al-Malik, the person is forced to face directly toward Mecca. But there is one other thing. The person is also facing directly toward the Al Aqsa Mosque established by Omar the Second Caliph, and directly through the former site of the Holy of Holies of Solomon’s Temple (because the Muslims knew then where Solomon’s Temple was formerly located over the Gihon Spring). The prayer of the Muslim would transverse Solomon’s Temple and focus onward to the Ka’aba in Mecca. Every device imaginable was used by Abd al-Malik in his building of the Dome of the Rock to direct people (both Muslims and Christians) AWAY FROM any significance of the "Rock" (just as Omar had demanded when he was first in Jerusalem). This is because it was well known in the seventh century that the "Rock" was actually a Christian holy spot.

What is most important for us of modern times to realize is the fact that the site of the "Rock" under the Dome of the Rock is purely and simply a Christian holy place (before the time of Omar and Abd al-Malik), and it did not become a Muslim holy site until many folklore traditions about the "Night Journey" of Muhammad began to be associated with the "Rock" from the eighth century on to the time of the Crusades. I explain in my book "The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot" how the many Muslim mythic accounts (which were outright fables and lies that even Muslim historians admit to be so) erroneously got attached to the "Rock" under the Dome of the Rock. As for the Jews, NO JEW showed any interest whatever in the "Rock" and the Dome of the Rock until the time of the First Crusade. This is a fact! For more information see further articles on this subject on our ASK Web Site.
So, the Dome of the Rock was built over a prime Christian holy place (where the Church of the Holy Wisdom was once situated). Abd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock with the intended purpose of getting Christians to forget the "Rock" on which Jesus was judged at the time of Pilate. Abd al-Malik wanted Christians to abandon the Christian significance to the "Rock" by having them turn their "backs" on it and he wanted Christians to convert to Islam and then to focus on the Ka’aba stone where Muslims supposed Abraham erected at Mecca in Arabia for the true worship of God. My book "The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot" provides more details to this important historical fact.