

PART TWO



The Original Site of the Temples at Jerusalem

Chapter 8

MANY MODERN SITES FOR THE TEMPLES IN JERUSALEM

NO SERIOUS SCHOLAR in modern times or any religious authority for the past eight hundred years has questioned that the area within the Haram esh-Sharif containing the Dome of the Rock was where the three original Temples were built. Over the past eight centuries the authorities have been assuming that the Temples built by Solomon, Zerubbabel and Herod were positioned somewhere within that Muslim enclosure. Historical records and eyewitness accounts, however, show the scholars and clerics are in error. Their false assumptions have corrupted and contaminated the true history of ancient Jerusalem. The conclusions they have reached are clearly counter to the plain statements of ancient historians who provided accurate information about these matters. But modern scholars (with the aid, support and dogmatic assertions of Jewish Rabbis, Muslim Imams and Chris-

tian ministers/priests) have selected the wrong spot for the former Temples. I wish I could be more kind with the authorities, but sadly, their false identifications are universally believed. In a word, no one disputes them.

The *New International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states:

“It is clear that the site of today’s ‘Dome of the Rock’ on Jerusalem’s eastern hill marks the location of Solomon’s temple (as well as that of the later structures of Zerubbabel and Herod); but it is difficult to be more precise.”¹⁴³

While religious and scholarly opinions have universally concluded that the region of the Haram esh-Sharif is where the biblical Temples were built, in modern times there have been at least *SEVEN* different areas within the Haram enclosure that have rivaled each other as the site for the Holy of Holies.¹⁴⁴ Those *seven*

¹⁴³ *New International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, p.760.

¹⁴⁴ Dogmatism of scholars and religious leaders (of all three major faiths in Jerusalem) centers on the area of the Haram esh-Sharif as the undisputed site of the former Temples. But the history of dogmatism in regard to holy areas of Jerusalem has not fared well. What was certain and undoubted concerning the location of Zion was completely overturned. The location of Zion was not about the identification of a stone, a room or a building (which many knew to be tenuous and difficult), but concerned an entire third of the former City of Jerusalem itself. In fact, Zion was a whole mountain called “Mount Zion.”

For 1500 years Christian authorities believed (or 1200 years for Muslims and 800 years for Jews) that the site of “Mount Zion” was the southwest hill of Jerusalem. As late as 1856 Professor Robinson (one of the early historians of Jerusalem) acclaimed that 20 years of intense research regarding the geography of Jerusalem demonstrated that the position of Zion being on the southwest hill was “unassailed” in the opinion of the top scholars and religious authorities in the world (George Adam Smith, *Jerusalem*, vol. I., p.165).

But little over a generation later, the “unassailable” opinion regarding that southwest hill was cast into the graveyard of erroneous theories. Zion was moved back to its true spot over 2000 feet east of the summit of the southwest hill. I will show that the original “Mount Zion” was moved from the southeast hill to the southwest hill in the time of Simon the Hasmonean about 170 years before the ministry of Jesus. It was relocated for a deliberate reason. But scholars have rightly moved back “Mount Zion” to its original location on the southeast hill.

Soon the present belief that the former Temple site is at the Haram esh-Sharif (and not at “Mount Zion”) will be buried in the graveyard of antiquated theories

different areas within the Haram are not the only contenders for the site of the Temples. There have been *four* other areas of Jerusalem *outside* the perimeters of the Haram esh-Sharif (accepted by people from the 4th century to the 11th century of our era) that were also thought to be the site of the Temple. In all, this makes *eleven different* areas in very dissimilar sections of the Haram and in various locations in Jerusalem that have been claimed to be the true site.

At one time or another, all of these disparate and separate regions for the Temple site have been acknowledged as certain and thoroughly sacrosanct to numerous authorities. The truth is, however, utter confusion has reigned over the past 800 years regarding the actual site for the Temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel and Herod, and it is time that all of us in our modern period realize this. Let us look first at the *seven* modern conjectures for the site, then we will consider the *four* that earlier authorities accepted.

Seven Modern Temple Site Theories Inside the Haram

The *two* most popular beliefs for the location of the Temples center around the Dome of the Rock. Among the Jews there has been a dispute as to whether the Holy of Holies was located directly over the highest point of the rock under the Dome or whether that protruding natural rock is where the Altar of Burnt Offering was located.

There is a *third* opinion. Professor Kaufman suggests a site for the Temple about a hundred yards north of the Dome, while the Israeli architect Tuvia Sagiv gives a *fourth* site. He believes the Temple was located south of the Dome, about half way to the Al Aqsa mosque and directly east of the Jewish "Wailing Wall."¹⁴⁵ A *fifth* site is that of Nathan Kaplan who places the Temple in the

about sacred sites in Jerusalem. The Temple site will soon be moved back to its true spot on the southeastern hill that was once called "Mount Zion." In the Bible, the terms "Mount Zion" and the "Temple Mount" were identical.

¹⁴⁵ What is excellent about the suggestion of Tuvia Sagiv is his correct identification that the "Rock" under the Dome of the Rock is the "Rock" mentioned by Josephus as a foundation for Fort Antonia. Yet Sagiv still places the former Temples about 300 feet south within the Haram (see his Web Page on the Internet for details: www.templemount.org).

eastern part of the Al Aqsa Mosque.¹⁴⁶

That does not end the guessing. In the early part of the last century a *sixth* site was suggested. Several scholars thought the extreme southwestern portion of the Haram was the actual place for the Temple.¹⁴⁷ There is also a *seventh* site. In the period of the Crusades it was believed that Solomon's Temple was located in the extreme south of the Haram esh-Sharif where the Al Aqsa Mosque now stands.¹⁴⁸ So, we have *SEVEN* different places within the Haram area alone that authorities over the past 800 years have accepted as possibly the true location.

All of this shows confusion among the scholars and religious leaders. The space of dispute within the Haram amounts to well over a quarter of a square mile in area. For such an important building as the Temple, held in the highest religious esteem by people of all ages, why is there such widespread diversity in selecting its former site? And the Temple was a large building. Josephus the Jewish historian/priest who was an eyewitness said its outer walls were a precise square of 600 feet on each side (an entire city block in most American cities). Surely one would think, such a large structure (or the remains of it) could be identified by modern scholars to a precise area within which we can place confidence. This is indeed the case if one pays close attention to Josephus. But all modern scholars and religious leaders are adept at ridiculing early eyewitness accounts of Josephus and others if they contradict present academic or religious opinion about sites and dimensions.

Yes, several eyewitness accounts do exist, but scholars and religious leaders have consistently repudiated them in favor of their own guesses. They maintain that suggesting any other area of Jerusalem is utterly preposterous and unworthy of serious consideration. But eyewitness reports differ about the size and location of

¹⁴⁶ See Internet: www.templemount.org/kaplan/index.html

¹⁴⁷ Professor George Adam Smith mentions "the theory of Fergusson, Thrupp, Lewin and others, advocated by W.R. Smith, article 'Temple,' *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, that Solomon's Temple, and, according to the last named, Herod's also, lay in the southwest angle of the Haram area, which projects on substructions over the Tyropoeon" (*Jerusalem*, vol.I., p.231, n.1).

¹⁴⁸ Benjamin Mazar, *Mountain of the Lord*, p.275.

the Temples from modern scholarly opinion. That presents no problem to our contemporary academics. They simply castigate the early historians (among them the accounts of Josephus) for giving “false accounts.”

Until recently the Jewish historian Josephus was often held in contempt by scholars for his so-called “wild exaggerations” and “erratic manipulation” of numbers, weights and distances in his description of the Temple and other buildings. His narratives giving dimensions of buildings and other parameters of sites seem incompatible with structures that scholars and religious leaders want to accept today. They do not realize that Josephus was actually discussing structures and building sites different than what the scholars imagine today. I will show that Josephus was giving reliable data, and when his accounts are analyzed, people will finally discover he was telling the truth all along.

Thankfully, the situation is not entirely hopeless. Some scholars have had second thoughts about Josephus and his geographical details. Among them, Professor Benjamin Mazar who expressed to me personally that his own archaeological investigations proved that Josephus more often than not was correct in his eyewitness accounts.¹⁴⁹ Professor Mazar felt Josephus should be respectfully reviewed once again and that scholars could benefit from his observations (if they would drop their modern prejudice that his accounts are imaginative and exaggerated).

In this book I accept the reliability of Josephus in his description of the Temple of Herod. It is amazing how clear Josephus makes the truth if we let him portray the buildings he saw without trying to force him to describe different buildings *of our own imaginations*. As an example, our modern academics assume Josephus is illustrating the Haram esh-Sharif when he records architec-

¹⁴⁹ Before his death three years ago Professor Mazar was the Dean of Israeli archaeologists and past Rector and President of Hebrew University, as well as a professional historian. I worked personally with Professor Mazar at his major excavation at the western and southern wall of the Haram esh-Sharif in Jerusalem from 1969 to 1974. Under Professor Mazar I directed the activities of 450 college students over that period of five years at that “dig.”

tural details of the Temple, its walls and buildings. Whereas the Haram was NOT even a part of the Temple, nor even a Jewish building in the time of Jesus. It is no wonder that Josephus' eyewitness accounts of the Temple do not fit what we see in the remains of the Haram.

It is time that we let the historical records speak for themselves without preconceived ideas. When we do, we realize that the early eyewitnesses were actually giving us accurate details about the buildings they saw and described. But why is the location of the Temple not easily found today? The problem in locating the exact site is because (as Josephus and other eyewitnesses have testified) that Sanctuary was totally destroyed beyond all physical recognition during and after the Roman/Jewish War of 66–70 C.E. Nothing was left of the interior or exterior parts of the Temple. No stone of its buildings or outer walls was allowed to remain in place. Not a trace of the structure survived. Nothing is left of the Temple for us to view today.

Four Different Temple Sites Outside the Haram

Several centuries after the destruction of the Sanctuary, when people began to look for the former site of the Temple, they had no physical remains of the Temple to aid them in their search. People in the fourth century of the Christian era began to pick various places in Jerusalem for its former site, and within 300 years *four* different spots had been selected. Remarkably, NOT ONE of those *four* places was located within the Haram esh-Sharif. It was not until 638 C.E. that an area within the Haram was finally looked on as a candidate for the location of the Temple. Of these *four* early sites, two of them are Christian, one Muslim and one Jewish).

Interestingly, the people who lived 300 years after the fall of Jerusalem did not arrive at the same conclusions that modern scholars have accepted. Modern historians normally promote the reliability of witnesses if they lived close to the events, and these *four* areas outside the Haram region had the advantage of being selected by authorities who lived much nearer in time to the events they describe. This principle of relying on earlier evidence should allow us to view these early conclusions as having more credibility. This

alone should cause these *four* different areas for the site of the Temple as being valid candidates for consideration.

Where were those *four* areas selected by early authorities? They were located as far as half a mile from each other. These *four* competing spots can be recognized and reviewed by summarizing a fourteenth century Muslim historical work entitled *Muthir al-Ghiram* (a book which synthesized all the early Muslim historical works concerning the first days of Islam).¹⁵⁰ Coupled with this is a tenth century Christian Arabic history that tells of the first days of Islam in Jerusalem. It is the history of *Said b. al-Bitrik*, also called Eutychius, Archbishop of Alexandria.

This evidence represents a preliminary geographical survey of the historical data regarding the real site of the former Temples from the documentary records that came down to us from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries of our era. This first chapter is intended to set the stage for the full historical evidence from the historical documents presented later.

Let us look at the Muslim account of the fourteenth century titled *Muthir al-Ghiram*. It summarizes early events at the beginnings of Islam by stating that Omar, the Second Caliph [the second successor to Muhammad], came to Jerusalem in 638 C.E. seeking to pray at the place where King David erected the altar that became the site of the Temple. This historical record states that Omar had been given a divine revelation from God (so this account relates) wherein the prophet Muhammad showed him the area from whence Muhammad ascended from the "Farthest Mosque" (which later Muslims believed was located in Jerusalem) and into heaven. The Christian authority in charge of Jerusalem at this period was Sophronius, the patriarch of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, who was summoned to a conference by Omar. Christian sources state that Omar appeared in a dirty camelhair garment. Sophronius offered Omar a regal garment to wear befitting the Commander of

¹⁵⁰ To read what is known as the classical Islamic account of the Muslims arrival in the City of Jerusalem, one can view the translation of *Muthir al-Ghiram* as recorded in Peters, *Jerusalem*, pp.187-9, and Eutychius in the same book, pp.189-90.

the Faithful, but Omar refused (though he did allow his camelhair garment to be washed for the interview).

The Muslim chief was religiously inquisitive. The first thing Omar did was ask Sophronius to reveal the exact place where David prayed (the former Temple site), because Omar and his Muslim colleagues were aware that different sites were being bantered about as possibilities. These Muslims had never been to Jerusalem before and they wanted to obtain expert advice on the whereabouts of the real site. True, Muhammad supposedly showed Omar in his visionary encounter certain geographical aspects associated with the place of David's prayer (which Muslims believed reliable), but no specific spot in Jerusalem was revealed. Thus, Omar felt it proper to inquire about the correct location. Sophronius responded quickly to the query of Omar, and told him without hesitation that the site of the Temple was where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was located. At the time, Sophronius and Omar were standing just outside the eastern entrance to the Holy Sepulchre. Sophronius pointed to that Christian basilica and stated with dogmatism that *the Church* was the place where David prayed — in other words, *where* the Temple of Herod formerly stood.

This identification by Sophronius may have appeared to Omar a strange and even an absurd suggestion for the patriarch to make (and it was, because it was common knowledge that Jesus had been crucified and buried *outside* the gates of Jerusalem and even *outside* the camp of Israel). In spite of these clear facts, it was a cardinal Christian teaching in the seventh century that the place where Jesus drove out the moneychangers from the Temple was located in the court just east of the Tomb and before the Martyrium of that Church. Some Christians were insisting that *this* eastern section of the Holy Sepulchre Church was a literal part of Herod's Temple. Consequently it would have been near the spot where David once prayed.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Sophronius was not trying to fool Omar. Christians in the previous three hundred years had erroneously transferred (by confiscation) many of the geographical factors of the Jewish Temple directly into the region of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It is difficult for us moderns to believe that such geographi-

Several factors led to this erroneous conclusion. For example, when the Emperor Constantine became sole ruler of the Roman Empire at the defeat of Licinius in 324 C.E., he issued a decree to God's "eastern nations" [all eastern nations in the Empire *including the Jews*] which contained his prayer to God for "*the restoration of thy most holy dwelling-place*" [House of God or the Temple]."¹⁵² And, since the Edict of Milan in 313 C.E. made between Constantine and Licinius was an attempt to restore the former religious properties to their earlier owners, the Jews interpreted the Edict as allowing them to rebuild the Temple at the proper site. They were constructing their new Temple for 12 years when Constantine forbade them from continuing in 325 C.E.¹⁵³ This Temple, other buildings and seven synagogues were built by the Jews during those previous 12 years. (I will give the evidence later.) Constantine, however, had in mind to build his own *new* Temple (not the former "Jewish" Temple).

When the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre commenced, its design was deliberately constructed to resemble another Temple. It was even oriented about 10 degrees north of east to mimic a *new* Jewish Temple being built in the time of Constantine that followed the same orientation of the southern wall of the Haram esh-Sharif which was also 10 degrees north of east. Adopting the 10 degrees aspect made the Church unique of all Christian buildings, but it was like the design of the Temple the Jews had recently built from 313 C.E. to 324 C.E.

But it does not stop there. Virtually all early Jewish traditions

cal nonsense about the Temple's location and artifacts could have been perpetuated among so-called intelligent people from the fifth to the seventh centuries who clearly should have known better. However, this farcical practice of the early Christians is a fact fully documented and I do not apologize for using appropriate adjectives to condemn the practice. Christians at the time believed they were building a new type of Temple to God to take the place of the old Jewish Sanctuary. In full defiance of the historical facts, they transferred many former events, artifacts and rituals belonging to the Jewish Temple to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. They did it without blushing and with an extent of arrogance that belied the very fabric of historical truth.

¹⁵² Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, II.55.

¹⁵³ See John Chrysostom, *Against Judaism*, V.10; VI.2.

regarding matters associated with the Temple Mount (whether true, mythological, emotional or symbolic) were appropriated by the Christians in the time of Constantine and associated with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Those early Byzantine Christians even adopted some of the rituals of the former Temple into their liturgies. They also brought over most of the Jewish historical and religious traditions (even myths) concerning the *site* of the Temple and made them to be a part of the Church.

The Jewish Temple and its rites, so to speak, were transferred to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. So, the Church became the new center of the world; it became the place of Adam's creation; that Adam's tomb and skull were there; that the Church was where Melchisedec offered sacrifice; that Abraham's altar intended for Isaac was there; that Jacob had his dream at the Church; that Zacharias' blood shed between the altars in the Temple was reckoned to be within the Church's precincts; the horn that anointed David and Solomon and the place where Solomon sealed certain demons with Solomon's ring of authority were also transferred to the Church.¹⁵⁴

All of the above items were appropriated by Christians ("stolen" would be a better word) from the former Temple site and re-assigned directly into the "New Jerusalem" in the western part of Jerusalem. It became the new "Temple of God" erected by Constantine. So, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre became a replacement for the Temple, not only in a spiritual or symbolic sense, but by the sixth century, it *was* the Temple in the crudest and most literal way. In a word, the Christians had "robbed" the Jews of their Temple.

We thus discover that Sophronius simply told Omar what Christians at the time believed. Of course, Sophronius was wrong. This early Christian opinion must be reckoned as the official *first spot* for the site of the Temple (among the *four* competitive suggestions that I am giving in this chapter).

¹⁵⁴ For other examples and excellent comments on some of these matters, see John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*, in his *Gazetteer*, p.177 col.a and also see his *Egeria's Travels*, pp.298-310.

The Christian belief is completely preposterous and even idiotic (and as a Christian I am ashamed to admit that this belief was foolishly accepted by early Christians, many of whom I admire for other reasons). Yet I do not apologize for the provocative words I use to condemn the practice and the wrong identifications. Such teaching was utterly irrational, and let's be honest, it represented a deliberate forgery; but this official farce sustained by church authorities at the time was believed with a passion by many Christians.¹⁵⁵

So, we find Sophronius telling Omar that the Holy Sepulchre Church was the true site of the former Temple where David prayed. This basilica was outside the region of the Haram esh-Sharif where the Dome of the Rock is standing.

With the suggestion of Sophronius freshly in the Caliph's mind, it did not take Omar long to decide on the matter. Omar viewed the area and then refused to pray in the Church. He said that the site

¹⁵⁵ This wrong identification was not only in regard to the site of the Temple. It was standard procedure for Christian authorities from the time of Constantine to rely on visions, trances and dreams of people to select the places or artifacts associated with people who lived in the time of the Old and New Testaments. As Wilkinson states, "The usual authentication of a site was thus either a tradition or by direct revelation. Thus a monk is told by God where to dig, and finds the coffin of Job, or a shepherd sees a vision which shows him where Moses is buried" (*Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*, p.38).

Wilkinson goes on to show that when Christians wanted to identify buildings, houses or rooms, they were able to find as many as they wished for pilgrimage purposes, but Wilkinson suspects that almost three quarters were arbitrarily selected (p.38). Their wild and often absurd guesses should be considered comedy (as any serious historian and theologian realizes), but to Christians living from the time of Constantine and through the Crusades, these wrong sites were often seriously accepted as proper and right. The early Christian historian Sozomen stated in discovering the supposed tomb of Jesus:

"Some say that the facts were first disclosed by a Hebrew who dwelt in the East, and who derived his information from some documents which had come to him by parental inheritance; but it seems more accordant with truth to suppose that God revealed the fact by means of signs and dreams; FOR I DO NOT THINK that human information is required when God thinks it best to make manifest the same" (Sozomen, *History* II.1).

Major mistakes were made by early Christians when they relied on such irresponsible means to locate the sites or artifacts connected with people in the Holy Scriptures.

did not fit the parameters of the visionary experience that God had earlier given him (with Muslim accounts stating that Muhammad also was present in the vision to Omar to vouch for the location). With this judgment in mind, Omar stepped aside a short distance, knelt down and prayed to God for the first time in Jerusalem.

Since Omar was viewed by early Islamic adherents as having prophetic and inspirational powers directly from God, that *first spot* where Omar initially prayed was selected (some decades later) as a holy site. A mosque was built over the area and they called it the Mosque of Omar (not to be confused with the present Dome of the Rock). Because all the actions of Omar were accounted “holy” by early Muslims, some Muslims later began to believe *this* might have been the true site of David’s prayers. After all, how could the Caliph (the Emir who was the successor of Muhammad) be wrong in the *first* place he chose to pray? The Mosque erected on that site was later destroyed in the time of the Crusades and no one accorded the area as holy after that period.

Omar was not satisfied. The various Muslim accounts then report that Omar asked Sophronius a second time to quit his craftiness (and his outright lying in trying to deceive the Commander of the Faithful). Sophronius was ordered to show Omar the real site of the former Temple. To comply, Sophronius made a suggestion that must at first have met with Omar’s approval. The Archbishop said: “Let’s go to Mount Zion.” This made sense to Omar because most people were aware that “Mount Zion” and “the Temple Mount” were almost synonymous in meaning within the Holy Scriptures. An abundance of verses in the Old Testament show the Temple was indeed located at a spot known as “Mount Zion” (or Sion, in Christian spelling). The terms were reckoned to be speaking of identical sites.

So, Sophronius took Omar about a third of a mile south of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to the area known at the time as “Mount Zion.” If this *southern* region represented the actual “Mount Zion” of the Bible, then it made biblical sense that it could well contain the former spot of the Temple.¹⁵⁶ This was the *second*

¹⁵⁶ Indeed, as late as the 1875 C.E. it was commonly accepted by all scholars

place contending as the Temple site. But Omar, after surveying the area, thought the locale did not fit the architectural or topographical ambience shown in his visionary experience with Muhammad. Omar rejected it too.

Omar once again asked Sophronius for the *third* time to quit his chicanery and identify the true spot of the former Temple. But, Omar added a new dimension to his request. He told Sophronius that he not only wanted to pray at the site where David prayed, but since Jerusalem was the first *qibla* in the initial years of Islam [the *qibla* was the site to which Muhammad and all Muslims should face when they prayed five times a day], Omar said he wanted to build a mosque or a shrine in the Holy City for Muslims to honor after Mecca and Medina.¹⁵⁷ In Sophronius' view this brought a new problem into the matter. Such a mosque or shrine could cause Jerusalem to become an important Muslim city as well as a city that Christians honored and revered. This could bring contention and competition between Muslims and Christians.

With this knowledge, Sophronius became thankful that Omar had not prayed in the Holy Sepulchre Church because (as Omar stated would happen) Muslims would have turned the Church into *their* Mosque and that would have been the end of Christendom's holiest spot on earth. But Omar told Sophronius he wanted to build a new place to revere David and Solomon, and to honor the first *qibla* of Islam. This information prompted Sophronius to suggest a different site. There was one other spot then recognized as being the site of the former Temples — the place the Jews accepted.

of all religious persuasions that the southwest hill was certainly (and without the slightest doubt) the true "Mount Zion" of the Bible. It was only with the vigorous research of Professor Birch in England (along with the discovery of Hezekiah's tunnel in 1880 C.E.) that within a score of years this "certain and sacrosanct" belief was proved wrong and scholars replaced "Mount Zion" rightfully to the southeast ridge.

¹⁵⁷ The first direction for prayer by Muhammad and his followers was toward Jerusalem. But about 18 or 19 months after his flight to Medina from Mecca (when the Muslim calendar began in 622 C.E.), he had a falling out with the Jews in Medina and he abruptly changed his direction of prayer [the *qibla*] to the Ka'aba stone in Mecca. In the time of Omar, all Muslims were praying five times a day toward Mecca.

Sophronius was well aware of the spot the Jews had claimed for their Temple site, but since the time of Hadrian the area had been turned into the city dump (and was reconfirmed as a dump in the time of Constantine). Only Jews had been interested in the location. The historical records showed that no major buildings of any kind had been built in the area either by the Romans before the time of Constantine, or later by the Byzantines. The area for all practical purposes was vacant and was a place where people of Jerusalem cast their refuse. It so happened that the Jews were the only ones interested in the site. Indeed, the Jews in the fourth century *twice* attempted to rebuilt a Temple in the area, once in the time of Constantine and the other under Julian the Apostate.¹⁵⁸

Christians had not been interested in constructing buildings in this region of Jerusalem. Christians would not build in the area in order to serve as a reminder of Jesus' prophecy that no stone would be left on another in that locale. And what may be surprising to modern scholars, this spot was NOT at or near the Dome of the Rock. It was NOT even located within the confines of the Haram esh-Sharif. This site was over and around the Gihon Spring in the Lower City of Jerusalem. Sophronius knew *this* was the spot the Jews held in honor and reverence.

Sophronius then made a deal with Omar, the Commander of the Faithful. He agreed to take Omar to the exact spot *that the Jews accepted as the true site of the Temple*, a place that Omar could build his new mosque or shrine. Sophronius asked only two requirements in his contract with Omar. One, that Omar would build *only ONE building* in Jerusalem, and that he would *forbid any Jews from living in Jerusalem*. Omar agreed with these terms and signed a document guaranteeing the two stipulations to Sophronius

¹⁵⁸ The first building of this new Temple took place from the issuance of the Edict of Milan in 313 C.E. until Constantine stopped construction in 325 C.E. The second attempt to rebuild was commenced in 361 C.E. when Julian the Apostate gave permission to the Jews to erect their Temple. Julian's death in 363 C.E. caused this second rebuilding to cease. These two attempts resulted in several ruins left in the area of the Temple Mount. Notable was a ruined part of a western wall from the Holy of Holies (and ruined relics of other buildings) that remained for several centuries. Of course, *nothing* was left of Herod's Temple.

and to the Christian community in Jerusalem.

When Omar signed the agreement, Sophronius then took Omar and his associates to *the place where the Jews believed the Temple site was*.¹⁵⁹ This was at the city dump located in the lower city of Jerusalem on the southeast hill just at the edge of the Kedron Valley. (Sometimes in this early period the southern end of the Kedron was identified with the Valley of Hinnom.) The spot was just above and near the Gihon Spring.

The “Stone and the “Rock”

There is an account that explains these events given by the first Christian Arab historian, *Said b. al-Bitrik*, whose Greek name was Eutychius. This Eutychius was a high Christian dignitary, the Archbishop of Alexandria. We need to read the statements of this early historian carefully because he presents several factors that forbid the Dome of the Rock as being the location shown to Omar (although later people erroneously thought Eutychius clumsily referred to the “Haram rock”). Yes, the account mentions a “rock” that was discovered at this final site that Sophronius pointed out to Omar as the place where David prayed. But *this* “rock” was a portable stone. It was NOT a permanent outcropping of rock like under the Dome of the Rock. A reading of the account confirms this.

The “rock” in Eutychius’ account was actually a “stone” that *could be carried by humans*. Omar even took that particular “rock” and *carried it* into the region of the Haram esh-Sharif. He then made this portable “rock” part of his *qibla* area in what was to become known as the Al Aqsa Mosque. Note the conversation between Sophronius and Omar. The account recorded by Eutychius is given as translated by F.E. Peters in his excellent book on Jerusalem.¹⁶⁰

“Then Omar said to him [Sophronius]: ‘You owe me a rightful debt. Give me a place in which I might build a sanctuary [*masjid*].’ The

¹⁵⁹ Later Jewish records state that an elderly Jewish man helped Omar discover a stone underneath the refuse that represented where the Holy of Holies once stood. See Peters, *Jerusalem*, p.191.

¹⁶⁰ Peters, *Jerusalem*, pp.189–190, citing from D. Baldi, *Enchiridion Locorum Sanctorum*, pp.447–8.

patriarch said to him: 'I will give to the Commander of the Faithful a place to build a sanctuary where the kings of Rum were unable to build. It is the rock where God spoke to Jacob¹⁶¹ and which Jacob called the Gate of Heaven and the Israelites the Holy of Holies. It is in the center of the world and was a Temple for the Israelites, who held it in great veneration and wherever they were they turned their faces toward it during prayer.¹⁶² But on this condition, that

¹⁶¹ Note that Sophronius said the "rock" was the one used by Jacob. The stone of Jacob was one he carried to a convenient spot and used for a pillow (Genesis 28:11). Jacob then had his dream (verse 12). The next morning "he took the stone that he had put for his pillow and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it" (Genesis 28:18). This stone of Jacob was suitable as a standing pillar, and was portable. In no way was this stone on which Jacob placed his head an "immovable rock" like the one under the Dome of the Rock. Jacob's "stone" could be carried.

¹⁶² Jewish belief was that Solomon took a stone for a "foundation stone" (called the 'shethiyah') to place as a footstep in the Holy of Holies of the Temple as a foundation for the Ark of the Covenant. It was only a few feet square. Since the Holy of Holies was 20 cubits (30 feet) in length and breadth, the stone had to be small enough to fit inside the inner sanctum. Tradition had it that Jacob's pillar stone was shaped in the time of David to be that "foundation stone." One can search the Bible throughout and never find that the Temples were built over a natural rock outcropping like the "Rock" under the Dome of the Rock.

The "foundation stone" called the *Even Shethiyah*, that the Jewish authorities said Solomon placed in the Holy of Holies, was a man-made slab of stone elevated three fingers above the flat floor of the Holy of Holies. Note Sanhedrin 26b: "For we learnt: A stone lay there [beneath the Ark] ever since the time of the Early Prophets [Samuel and David] and it was called 'shethiyah'." This reference shows the stone was portable. See also the Mishna portion of Yoma 53b:

"After the Ark had been taken away, there was a stone from the days of the earlier prophets [Samuel and David], called the *Shethiyah*, three fingers above the ground, on which he would place [the pan of burning coals]. He would take the blood from him who was stirring it, and enter [again] into the place [the Holy of Holies]."

In no way, can the *Even Shethiyah* of the early Jewish records be that natural "Rock" underneath the Dome of the Rock. In clear language, the *Even Shethiyah* "foundation stone" in Solomon's Temple was manufactured as a slab of portable pavement in David's time. It was carried back into a newly refurbished Sanctuary by the righteous King Hezekiah.

"But as for its interpretation as referring to Hezekiah and his party: where do we find the righteous designated as 'foundations'? — In the verse, For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and He hath set [*wa-yasheth*] the world upon them." (Sanhedrin 26b).

you promise in a written document that no other sanctuary will be built inside of Jerusalem.

Therefore, Omar ibn al-Khattab wrote him the document on this matter and handed it over to him. [Sophronius then remarked that this area was in ruins when] [t]hey were Romans when they embraced the Christian religion, and [when] Helena, the mother of Constantine, built the churches of Jerusalem. The place of the rock and the area around it were deserted ruins and they [the Romans] poured dirt over the rock so that great was the filth above it. The Byzantines [*Rûm*], however, neglected it and did not hold it in veneration, nor did they build a church over it because Christ our Lord said in his Holy Gospel ‘Not a stone will be left upon a stone which will not be ruined and devastated.’ For this reason the Christians left it as a ruin and did not build a church over it.¹⁶³ So

Note that this portable slab was likened to a pillar-like foundation stone.

¹⁶³ This “stone” shown at first to Omar was not the “Rock” underneath the Dome of the Rock. This is because Omar obtained this “stone” mentioned by Eutychius from a site in Jerusalem where no Christian church had ever been built. Sophronius was insistent that no early Roman building nor any Byzantine structure or church had ever been constructed in the area where Omar found this sacred “stone.”

However, records indicate that Helena ordered a minor church to be built over that “Rock” where the Dome of the Rock now stands. Construction began 30 years after her death and it was called the “Saint Cyrus and Saint John Church.” This church was later enlarged (and called the “Church of the Holy Wisdom”). The “Holy Wisdom Church” was built to enshrine the footprints of Jesus believed to be embedded in that “oblong rock” and supposedly inlaid there when Jesus was condemned before Pilate. There can be no doubt that that “Rock” at first represented a Christian holy place, not a Jewish one (nor was it a Muslim one until after the Dome of the Rock was built). This “Church of the Holy Wisdom” with its “oblong rock” was well known to Sophronius and he even wrote a poem in praise of it. That “Holy Wisdom Church” was not in existence when Omar arrived in Jerusalem. The Persians and Jews destroyed it in 614 C.E. but still well remembered by Christians.

I will show that Jesus’ footprints were reckoned to be in that “Rock” underneath the Dome of the Rock, and those footprints were accepted as authentic by Christians and Muslims until the time of the Crusades. Saladin’s court recorder said the “Rock” underneath the Dome of the Rock contained Jesus’ footprints (*Brill’s First Encyclopaedia of Islam*, article “Saladin”). For that reason two churches had been built over that “Rock” prior to the time of Omar’s arrival in Jerusalem.

Because the Dome of the Rock was a Christian holy area, no Christian would have thrown garbage on that holy site. But Omar was sifting through refuse at the dump. He was shown the city dump then located over the Gihon Spring. No

Sophronius took Omar ibn al-Khattab by the hand and stood him over the filth. Omar, taking hold of his cloak filled it with dirt and threw it into the Valley of Gehenna. When the Muslims saw Omar ibn al-Khattab carrying dirt with his own hands, they all immediately began carrying dirt in their cloaks and shields and what have you until the whole place was cleansed and the rock was revealed. Then they all said: 'Let us build a sanctuary and let us place the stone at its heart.'¹⁶⁴ 'No,' Omar responded. 'We will build a sanctuary and place the stone at the end of the sanctuary.'¹⁶⁵ Therefore Omar built a sanctuary¹⁶⁶ and put the stone at the end of it."¹⁶⁷

Roman or Byzantine church was in ruins there. There were, however, Jewish Temple ruins and I will show this as we continue.

¹⁶⁴ Note carefully that even the Muslims accompanying Omar and Sophronius could see that the holy "stone" selected by Omar could be carried and placed in a new Sanctuary. It appears as though Omar saw a larger outcropping of bedrock which he and Sophronius considered to be the site of the Holy of Holies and that Omar may have "cut off" a piece of that stone in order to place it in a different area where he wanted to build his "temple." It would there become a new "Temple of Solomon." This piece of stone could not be reckoned to be the portable *Shethiyah* ["foundation stone"] of the original Temple because it was already a slab of pavement that could fit inside the Holy of Holies. But, Omar's stone could be considered a type of that earlier stone (or a replica of it).

¹⁶⁵ Note again that the "stone" Omar selected was capable of being carried by humans. He said that he wanted it placed "at the end of the sanctuary." The emphasis is on a "stone" that was portable.

¹⁶⁶ Christians understood Omar to mean a "temple." Theophanes, writing in 814 C.E., said that Omar began to build his sanctuary (which Theophanes called a "temple" some 5 years after his first arrival in Jerusalem). "In this year [643 C.E.] Omar began to build a temple in Jerusalem" (translation by Turtledove, under year 6135, p.42). This was a new Temple that later people began to call "Solomon's Temple." The "stone" sanctified it through the ritual called by the Muslims *baraka* (an Arabic word) denoting the transference of spiritual power or influence from a person or an object to another through touching or other contact. See Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, p.168.

¹⁶⁷ Words in brackets are added. Some are Peters', some are mine. Professor Peters and most academic scholars prefer the more accurate spelling "Umar," not "Omar."

Again, to emphasize the "stone's" portability, Omar "put the stone at the end of it [at the end of the sanctuary]." It was like a pillar (or a slab) that would have been suitable as a pillow for Jacob that David had Solomon place inside the Holy of Holies as a foundation stone for the Ark of the Covenant. It was a shaped-by-man portable stone.

This portable stone was set up at the southern end of the Haram at what was later to become the Al Aqsa Mosque. This "stone" was NOT the "Rock" under-

Sophronius pointed out that this area had been the city dump from Roman times. The people of Jerusalem were aware that Hadrian in 135 C.E. in his disgust with the Jews and *their* Temple turned the site into the city dump. The region was never extensively built upon by the Romans or Christians.¹⁶⁸ There is even teaching in the Muslim records that Helena ordered this former site of the Temple be turned into (actually, returned to) the dump of the city, and that it was well known among people in Jerusalem.¹⁶⁹ Helena ordered this because in the early second century Hadrian had commanded it to be in that condition when the Jews wanted to rebuild the Temple.

Sophronius was well aware that this area *was where the Jews* attempted to rebuild the Temples in Constantine's and Julian's time and there were still some parts of walls standing of those former attempts. It was customary even in Sophronius' time for

neath what later became the Dome of the Rock. That "Rock" was not portable, but was (and is) a natural outcropping of rock. However, as the centuries passed, it became common for later historians — Muslim, Christian and Jewish — to confuse the issue and make the "stone" of the original story become the "Rock" under the Dome. One must be careful with the later records in this regard.

¹⁶⁸ In a Christian account of the early 6th century called Breviarium (a short account) of Jerusalem we are told that south of the Church of the Holy Wisdom "you come to the Temple built by Solomon, but there is nothing left there apart from a single cave." See Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*, p.61. Back in 333 C.E., the Bordeaux Pilgrim spoke of a "pierced stone" (which could mean a cave) at the Temple site. This cave became a prominent fixture to Jews who came to the Temple site after the time of Omar in 638 C.E. and to the time of the Crusades. We now have Jewish documents from the Geniza in Egypt that such a cave was used as a synagogue in southeast Jerusalem (as I will soon show) where Jews felt David had built his altar.

¹⁶⁹ Moshe Gil in his monumental work *A History of Palestine 634–1099* states: "According to Muslim tradition (and there is no reason to doubt it), the Byzantines turned the Temple Mount into Jerusalem's refuse dump from the time of Helena, the mother of Constantine" (p.65). It must also be recognized that later Muslims and Christians (as well as Jews) after the time of the Crusades who read the early records showing this fouling of the Temple Mount by Helena and other Byzantines, automatically assumed that the site she befouled was that of the Dome of the Rock. But Christians would in no way have desecrated such a Christian holy place where Jesus' footprints were thought to be and where two Christian churches had graced the spot before the Muslim period. Indeed, Jesus' footprints sanctified that spot.

Christian women to bring rubbish to the site and throw the refuse (especially their menstrual discards) onto this site over the Gihon Spring. And true enough, all that Omar saw in the area was a refuse dump and a few remnants of buildings and walls all in ruin. That is when Omar became saddened by what he saw and, at his own initiative, began to take some of the refuse in his cloak, carried it to the Valley of Hinnom and threw it into the area prophesied in Christian as well as Muslim theology as the place for the destruction of wicked things.

As early as the fourth century the Kedron Valley was called by Christians by the name Gehenna, primarily in the southern part adjacent to the dump of Jerusalem.¹⁷⁰ It is easy to imagine that there were then fires and smoke in the lower (southern) part of the Kedron where refuse was being thrown and burned. It was easy for Omar to walk east a few feet with refuse in his cloak in his attempt to clear the site of uncleanness. His associates witnessed the Commander of the Faithful, so they all pitched in and cleaned the spot as best they could. Later we find that Omar allowed Jews to return to Jerusalem and they were also ordered to keep this *south-eastern* spot clean.

The “Stone” Was Transferred to the Haram esh-Sharif

With the discovery of the “stone” from what Omar thought was the site of Solomon’s Temple, he looked around that part of Jeru-

¹⁷⁰ In the *Muthir al-Ghiram*, written in the 14th century (by that time much folklore had entered the story, and some sites and objects became mixed up), we read that one of Omar’s Jewish generals offered his advice on the place was where David made his prayers.

“Ka’ab answered [Omar]: ‘Measure from the well [water source] which is in the Valley of Gehenna [the Kedron Valley] so and so many ells [usually rendered “cubits”]; there dig and you will discover it,’ adding, ‘at this present day it is a dung-heap.’ So they dug there and the rock was laid bare” (translation in Peters, *Jerusalem*, p.189).

Notice that the stone Omar saw, and placed near the qibla in what was to become the Al Aqsa Mosque, was found by measuring from the water source in the Kedron Valley. It was in a straight line so many cubits from the Gihon Spring, the only water source in the Valley. This strongly indicates that the actual place of David’s prayer (that is, the Temple) was reckoned to be near the Gihon Spring. And so it was.

salem for the place to build his shrine or mosque as he had been told to do in his vision. Omar then looked north at the *southern* wall of the Haram esh-Sharif where he saw a gate allowing entrance into the enclosure. This *southern* gate was particularly important to Omar because of a prime teaching of Islam that was beginning to circulate at this period.

It concerned an account of Muhammad's vision (or dream) of a Night Journey on his fabled horse named *Buraq*. The account (known in Muslim circles as the *isra*) featured the Prophet being taken to what was called "the Farthest Mosque" (Al Aqsa) and from there into heaven where he saw many heavenly luminaries (and former righteous people who had lived on earth). A cardinal factor of the story was a *southern* gate through which Muhammad was supposed to have entered an enclosure from whence he went to heaven. Omar thought that this *southern* gate of the Haram might be the one associated with the Night Journey of the Prophet.

Omar and Sophronius took the "stone" from the Jewish Temple site *south* of the Haram and with the other Muslims went through the southern gate into the Haram. Omar looked at the geographical factors of the spot and he came to the dogmatic conclusion that *this* was the region shown in his vision associated with Muhammad's Night Journey. It was the spot he wanted to build his Mosque.

Omar then named the *southern* gate of the Haram the *Bab al-Nabi* (the Gate of the Prophet) in dedication to the holy event of the *isra* (the Night Journey).¹⁷¹ Once assured of the legitimacy of the site as Omar judged it, he then placed the "stone" from the *southern* Temple Mount (or perhaps a portion of it cut from the parent "stone") to this southern part of the Haram esh-Sharif. He put it at the "end" (the *southern* end) of the building and it became a part of the *qibla* that pointed toward Mecca. This was the place

¹⁷¹ Oleg Grabar in his monumental work *The Shape of the Holy*, concerning the history of the Haram and the Dome of the Rock, states:

"Anticipating the later names of gates to the Haram, many stories relate that the caliph Umar [Omar] entered the sacred precinct through the southern Bab al-Nabi 'Gate of the Prophet,' which would have been the gate through which the Prophet came on his mystical journey" (p.48).

that finally became the Al Aqsa Mosque [the “Farthest Mosque].

Up to this point, the *northern* “Rock” at the later Dome of Rock held no religious importance to Omar nor was it ever significant to him throughout any of his residences in Jerusalem. Indeed, Omar was decisively against any attention whatever being given by Muslims to the *northern* “Rock” now under the Dome of the Rock. I will say more about this *northern* “Rock” (it was a Christian holy place) and Omar’s persistent disdain for it.

Omar then concentrated his whole attention to the area of the Haram esh-Sharif adjacent to the *southern* wall, which is now the *southern* wall of the Al Aqsa Mosque. This *southern* region abutting to the *south* wall of the Haram was remarkable to Omar. It appeared like the area shown him in his original vision that prompted his trip to Jerusalem to search for the place David prayed. There was a feature of the *southern* wall that Omar must have liked (and he must have been amazed at it when it came time to set up his *qibla*). The fact is, the southern wall of the Haram is inclined about 10 degrees north of east in its east/west directional aspect. To Omar and his associates, this angle may well have appeared providential because a *qibla* placed perpendicular to the southern wall of the Haram would cause all people facing it or any part of the southern wall *to be looking directly toward Mecca*. The direction to Mecca happens to be about 10 degrees east of south from Jerusalem.

Note the natural advantages of this factor. Building a Mosque at this site would make the structure to be as high in elevation as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (which Omar wanted to mimic to compete properly with the Christians). But this location for the “stone” associated with the *qibla* also allowed faithful Muslims worshipping in the Al Aqsa Mosque to actually pray *through* the *real* Holy of Holies situated almost 1000 feet south — actually 10 degrees east of south and precisely in the direction of Mecca. So, the “stone” Omar retrieved from the area of Solomon’s Temple (as they believed) and the “Rock of Abraham” (the Ka’aba in Mecca) could be venerated in *straight-line* posture by Muslims praying in the Al Aqsa Mosque.

Omar brought the “stone” he found at the site of Solomon’s Temple to the new area where he was building his shrine (or Mosque) as a means of sanctifying Omar’s different holy spot in Jerusalem. Indeed, this maneuver by Omar was looked on by the people of the period as a relocation of Solomon’s Temple when the “sacred stone,” as well as other usable stones from the Temple ruins, were brought to the spot to build his Al Aqsa Mosque.¹⁷² That’s right, there were other rectangular stones from the previous Temple begun at the time of Julian the Apostate (362 C.E.) that were still at the site, and Omar took suitable ones to build the Al Aqsa Mosque. So, in one way of looking at it, the “Temple” was rebuilt to the north of its former spot over the Gihon Spring and placed at the *southern* end of the Haram esh-Sharif. From then on, it became common to refer to the Al Aqsa Mosque as “Solomon’s Temple” and it retained that designation through the Crusader period.

¹⁷² Many more than the single “stone” was transferred to the site on the southern side of the Haram. Jewish tradition has more information on what happened. In the words of a Jewish visitor to Jerusalem in 1334 C.E. (Isaac ben Joseph):

“The king [Omar, the Second Caliph], who had made a vow to build up again the ruins of the sacred edifice [the Temple], if God put the Holy City in his power, demanded of the Jews that they should make known the ruins to him. For the uncircumcised [Christians] in their hate against the people of God, had heaped rubbish and filth over the spot, so that no one knew exactly where the ruins stood. Now there was an old man then living who said: ‘If the king will take an oath to preserve the wall [probably the Western Wall of the Holy of Holies], I will discover unto him the place where the ruins of the Temple were.’ So the king straightway placed his hand on the thigh of the old man and swore an oath to do what he demanded. When he had shown him the ruins of the Temple under a mound of defilements, the king had the ruins cleared and cleansed, taking part in the cleansing himself, until they were all fair and clean. After that he had them all set up again with the exception of the wall, and made them a very beautiful Temple, which he consecrated to his God.”

E.N. Adler, *Jewish Travellers: A Treasury of Travelogues from Nine Centuries* (NY: Dover Pub.), pp.130–31. Italics are for emphasis, brackets are mine. In other words, Omar rebuilt the Temple from the ruins found at the Temple site.

It is interesting that Isaac ben Joseph (writing very late, in 1334 C.E.) goes on to quote the comments of Benjamin of Tudela who mistakenly places “the wall” under discussion as being in his time near the Dome of the Rock. By Benjamin’s time (as I will show) confusion in regard to previous holy areas was great.

Look at this transfer of stones from the earlier Temple site. From the point of view of the Muslims, they considered the “stone” (and the other stones from the ruins of the Temple of Julian’s time) as a rebuilding of the Temple. The main “stone” from the Holy of Holies, Omar transferred to the *southern* wall of the Haram esh-Sharif. This “stone,” over which the Holy of Holies once stood, signifying the Paradise of God, became the center piece near the *qibla* in Omar’s new Temple at Jerusalem.

They considered this “stone” to be reckoned as a part of the “foundation stone” for the Ark that Jewish tradition said Solomon placed in his Temple (or that it was at least a replica of that Solomonic “stone”).¹⁷³ This moving of the “stone” to the inside *southern* wall of the Haram (along with many other rectangular stones used for building purposes) answered to an official relocating of the holiness of Solomon’s Temple from its former spot over the Gihon Spring to this *new* site about 800 feet north.¹⁷⁴ That is why

¹⁷³ Izhak Hasson in his article “The Muslim View of Jerusalem: The Qur’an and Hadith,” in *The History of Jerusalem* gives reference to the Arab historian Muqaddasi who wrote in the fourteenth century about the early traditions recorded in the Muslim chronicles. He spoke of “the black slab of marble found in the Mosque of Jerusalem — at the entrance to Paradise” (p.375). This was a “stone” of the Muslims associated with the symbolic Garden of Eden (Paradise). Its purpose was similar to the “stone” in the “Holy of Holies” (also a symbol of Paradise) in the Temple at Jerusalem.

The Bordeaux Pilgrim in 333 C.E. saw a “marble slab” in front of the altar that was before the Holy of Holies (Paradise). The “slab of black marble stone” that was the Muslim entrance into Paradise” was surely a portable (and man-made) piece of flat stone that one could walk on. One similar to it (if not that stone) could have served as the foundation stone in a “Holy of Holies” in a Jewish Temple from the time of Constantine and/or Julian. The symbolism behind the two “stones” (both Muslim and Jewish) was identical. And, the “stone” Omar set up in the Haram and the “stone” found within the Mosque (if not identical) were certainly NOT the “rock” under the Dome of the Rock. Omar saw no Muslim value in the Dome of the Rock area in this early period in the history of Islam.

¹⁷⁴ Biblical people commonly understood that any holiness or divine importance associated with a sacred area or artifact could accompany the stone or artifact wherever it was taken. Thus, there was a “rock” carried with the Ark of the Covenant and the Cherubim by the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt. The apostle Paul said that “Rock” represented Christ (I Corinthians 10:4). That “Rock” was analogous in the Old Testament to the “sapphire stone” shaped like

it became common after the time of Omar by most people in Jerusalem to view the Al Aqsa Mosque as the place of "Solomon's Temple." Jerusalem now had a *new* "Solomon's Temple," but in a different place.

The *new* identification soon became "chiseled in stone." During the Crusades, the Christians finally had enough historical sense to abandon their belief that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had been part of Herod's Temple. They then joined the Muslims and took it for granted that the building called the Al Aqsa Mosque was the place where Solomon's Temple once stood.¹⁷⁵ Transferring

a throne (that is, as a footstool or a slab that represented a throne) that Ezekiel saw in vision with the Cherubim (Exodus 1:26).

Wherever the Tabernacle was pitched with the Ark (with that stone), that spot on earth became "holy." When the Tabernacle moved onward with the Ark and stone, the former area no longer had any holiness attached to it. Indeed, when the Philistines stole the Ark, the holiness of the Ark went with it (Dagon was destroyed before it). When Uzzah tried to stabilize the Ark when it was about to fall, the holiness associated with it was manifested. No matter where it was (like in the house of Obed-edom), the place was blessed.

Jesus gave a similar transference of holiness. He said the gold of the Temple was sanctified because it was associated with and was a part of the Temple. The gift on the Altar in the Temple was made holy because of its attachment to the Altar that was holy (Matthew 23:16-22). Even the stone that the builders rejected (because it appeared to be marred), not only retained its holiness, but it became the Head of the Corner, the top stone of the Temple (Psalm 118:22-24). When Judas Maccabee saw the Temple ruined in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Jewish authorities took the stones of the Altar and hid them in order for a prophet to put them into a new Temple so that it could be sanctified (I Maccabees 4:44-46). And when Herod rebuilt the Holy of Holies by moving its stones and placed it in the center (north to south) of his new Temple when he doubled the size of the Temple, the Holy of Holies was transferred northward about 225 feet from where it once was in Solomon's time.

So, when Omar took the stone from the Holy of Holies at the site of Solomon's Temple, and deposited it within his new Mosque some 800 feet north, Omar had many biblical and historical precedents (as seen by theologians at the time) that the holiness of the Temple accompanied the sacred stone. The Muslims believed this and called the practice *baraka* (that was a part of Islamic faith). See Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, p.168.

¹⁷⁵ Christians in the fourth century did a similar thing when they transferred almost all the symbols of the Jewish Temple to their new Church of the Holy Sepulchre and named it "the Temple." Later, Christians carried stones, etc. (relics) to all areas of the world with a view that the "holiness" attached to the original holy items accompanied the relics to their new homes. Islam also

that particular “stone” by Omar (with the other building stones) was enough to do the trick.

So, in Omar’s time, there now became two sites for the “Temples of Solomon.” One was the ruined Jewish site over the Gihon Spring and the second was the *new* Muslim site at what became known as the Al Aqsa Mosque. (And until the Crusades even a *third* Temple site was in Jerusalem if one accepted the Christian teaching that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was the Temple where Christ drove out the money changers). It was in this period *before* the Crusades that the Temple site began to be moved to different locations in Jerusalem. I will later show that even the Jewish authorities got caught up in this fashionable procedure during the Crusades. This resulted in biblical and Jewish traditions of the Temple (whether true or symbolic myths) getting transferred to either the *new* Christian “Temple” or Omar’s *new* Muslim “Temple” that had arrived in Jerusalem.

It was this practice of calling a *new* sanctuary by the same name as the *old* (even if it was a new building in a different place) that *begins the confusion* for us today over the proper spot of the true Temple, as well as which “stone” or “rock” is meant when we read early records. The mix up started with the false identification of the Christians from the time of Constantine to Sophronius, and perpetuated by the Muslims with the actions of Omar, and later finalized by the Jews themselves under circumstances that I will soon describe. These fallacious identifications have sadly governed even the supposed rational thinking of scholars and religious leaders ever since. They have been devastating to the truths of the biblical and historical records.

Confusion Now Begins Over the “Rock” and “Stone”

What about the “Rock” now under the Dome of the Rock? Also, what about the “Stone” that Omar took from the true Temple site

believed the same. It was believed that sanctification was transferred to the new site no matter where it was in the world. The question is not whether this was right or wrong. We need to realize that people accepted this belief as having intrinsic merit and that the belief was widely practiced.

over the Gihon Spring and placed in his new Al Aqsa Mosque (the *new* “Temple of Solomon”)? It may appear strange but Omar showed no interest in that “Rock” under the Dome of the Rock in any religious sense while he was in Jerusalem. In fact, after the Caliph decided where to place his *qibla* for his new Mosque (associated with the “Stone” on which David supposedly prayed), Omar always turned his back to that *northern* “Rock outcropping” each time he prayed toward Mecca. As time went on, Omar and the later Umayyad leaders in Jerusalem continued to show disdain for the “Rock” to the *north* of the Al Aqsa area. I will document that even in 692 C.E. when Abd al-Malik finally built the Dome over the “Rock,” he did so in order to diminish an budding devotion that Muslims were beginning to display to the supposed significance of the *northern* “Rock.”¹⁷⁶

Yet, something happened that brought Omar’s attention to the *northern* “Rock” while he was in Jerusalem. Omar had a Jewish general named Ka’ab, of whom I spoke briefly in a previous note. We are told in the early Byzantine historical work by Theophanes (ninth century) that Omar also had ten Jewish leaders from the Arabian peninsula in association with his army and all had recently given lip service to Islam. Omar did not entirely trust his Jewish allies and wondered if their conversions were genuine.¹⁷⁷ One day Omar saw Ka’ab taking off his shoes and walking upon the “Rock” over which the Dome of the Rock was later built. Omar became suspicious. When Omar queried the actions of Ka’ab, the Jewish

¹⁷⁶ The importance of the “Rock” under the Dome of the Rock changed dramatically and swiftly with the Abbasid Dynasty beginning in 750 C.E. Not only the footprints of Jesus (and even God’s) were believed to be on the “Rock,” but Muhammad’s footprint (and also his handprint) were discovered near 750 C.E. These new “facts” proved to many Muslims that Muhammad’s famous Night Journey to heaven took place at the “Rock,” and not at the Al Aqsa Mosque. From then on, a flood of folklore traditions descended upon the “Rock” that caused the Muslims to transfer almost all the events associated with the former Jewish Temple to the “Rock,” just as Christians earlier transferred Jewish rituals and traditions of the Temple to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. By Crusader times, the “Rock” had become the “Temple Site” itself. It has remained that way ever since. I will explain how later.

¹⁷⁷ *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, translated by Harry Turtledove (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p.34.

general made a secular excuse for walking bare foot on the rock. This reasoning did not suit Omar well because it was well known at the time that the place of the “Rock” was the former site of a Christian church called the “Church of the Holy Wisdom.” Sophronius himself had earlier written a poem mentioning its significance to Christians and their prophetic expectations. The “Rock” was of Christian importance, NOT Jewish!

The “Rock” Was of Christian Significance

The answer that Ka’ab gave to Omar did not satisfy the Caliph. Omar already had several conversations with Sophronius about holy places in Jerusalem and the Caliph was well aware that the “Rock” was symbolically important to Christians, NOT to Jews. The “Rock” underneath what later became the Dome of the Rock was such a Christian site. It was a place that Christians believed the *footprints* of Jesus were embedded into that “Rock” when he stood before Pilate.¹⁷⁸ Omar was aware that the “Rock” where Ka’ab walked barefoot was a notable Christian site. When Omar saw Ka’ab take off his shoes and walk barefoot on the “Rock,” this made him suspect Ka’ab of being a clandestine Christian.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ The central symbolism associated with the spot for Christians was their belief that Jesus’ footprints were embossed into that “Rock” that later came to be underneath the Dome of the Rock. Christians and even Muslims accepted those footprints as authentic until the time of the Crusades. Saladin’s court recorder said the “Rock” underneath the Dome of the Rock contained Jesus’ footprints. See *Brill’s First Encyclopaedia of Islam*, article “Saladin.” This was the very “pavement” where Jesus stood when condemned by Pilate before his crucifixion (John 19:13). This made the site of the “Rock” at first an important Christian holy place, NOT a Jewish or a Muslim one.

The story of those footprints of Jesus was not well liked by the Muslims because the Quran states in Sura 4:154–7 that Jesus did not die as the New Testament relates, but that a counterfeit person took the place of Jesus on the tree of crucifixion. The tradition of Pilate’s presence gave credence to the story of the footprints and provided a vindication that the New Testament was right and that Jesus did die because the Romans would have demanded it (along with the Jews). In other words, the story behind the footprints on the “Rock” was a famous one that seemed to contradict the Quran. No Muslim cleric would have perpetuated that teaching.

¹⁷⁹ And though many early Muslim records state that Omar was sensitive about Ka’ab’s Jewishness, it must be remembered that there were “Jewish Christians”

Look at the facts. The “Rock” under the Dome of the Rock is the most conspicuous natural feature within the entire 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 left us a record of his journey to Jerusalem was the Bordeaux Pilgrim who in 333 C.E 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.¹⁸⁰ He first described the Temple site (and several other buildings around it) in his initial account of Jerusalem; it was the first thing he was interested in. After discussing the Temple site at length, he discussed the imposing structure to the east of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with its walls within the valley. He did not call it the Temple site. He said it was the *Praetorium*, the area where Pilate condemned Jesus. The account of the Bordeaux Pilgrim must have been known in the time of Sophronius and Omar.

The Pilgrim clearly records that after he left the Temple area and after he entered the walled city of Aelia (the Roman name for Jerusalem), he then describes the Haram esh-Sharif as being east of the new Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and that the Haram was indeed the *Praetorium*. The Pilgrim from his description was looking mainly toward the southwest angle of the Haram and to the north toward the spot where the “Wailing Wall” of the Jews is presently located. The Pilgrim said this “walled area” contained the residence of Pilate. 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.

Within this walled enclosure was the “Rock” called in John’s

that could have influenced Ka’ab. It was known that Ka’ab had studied with a certain Abu Muslim from Galilee who was a Jew that apparently became a Christian monk. See Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine 634–1099*, note 70, p.68.

¹⁸⁰ I will later give the translation of the Pilgrim. See John Wilkinson’s excellent translation of the Bordeaux Pilgrim in his book *Egeria’s Travels*, p.158.

Gospel “the Pavement-Stone” which meant a type of *flagstone* (in Greek, *lithostrotos* and in Hebrew *Gabbatha*) where Jesus stood before Pilate (John 19:13).

The first description by Josephus (the Jewish historian of the first century and an eyewitness) of this particular “Rock” within the *Praetorium* area shows it had a “Pavement” or *flagstones* around it. That “Rock” was the central natural fixture associated with the *Praetorium* and part of Fort Antonia, the permanent Roman Camp located in Jerusalem in the time of Pilate and Jesus. Josephus said that the central feature of Fort Antonia was a major rock.

“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*.”¹⁸¹

Before construction of the fortress, the “Rock” was 50 cubits high (75 feet), but Herod later built a platform around it and it became the north/south center of the walled fortress). This made it not as high and it became accessible for judicial purposes. This provides a reasonable agreement in the descriptions of Josephus and the apostle John.

That “Rock” around which Fort Antonia was built and mentioned by Josephus was in his estimation 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” forming the literal outlines of Jesus’ feet. I have explained how Christians thought Jesus’ *footprints* got embedded in the “Rock.”

The simple truth is, Omar did not show in any way that he viewed any religious importance to the “Rock” now under the Dome of the Rock. But the story of Jesus’ *footprints* on the “Rock” reinforced the teaching of the New Testament that Jesus did in fact die and that Pilate made sure that he did. The Christian tradition

¹⁸¹ *Jewish War*, V.v,8 para.238.

concerning that “Rock” was not favorably acceptable by Omar because it seemed to contradict a central doctrine of the Quran.

The successor of Omar was Mu’awiya. He was also unconcerned or at least ambivalent to the “Rock.” Even later when their successor Abd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock it was not to show Muslims the religious significance of the “Rock” or to reinforce their beliefs. The building was constructed to show Christians that they should abandon their belief in Christianity and direct their attention to the Ka’aba in Mecca and the new religion of Islam. Omar, Mu’awiya and Abd al-Malik repudiated the Christian reputation that was attached to the “Rock.”

After the time of the three Caliphs just mentioned, Muslims began to attach new teachings (primarily from folklore accounts) that the “Rock” was part of the Muslim holy area connected with the Night Journey of Muhammad to heaven. By then (the ninth century C.E.), that “Rock” even replaced the “stone” set up by Omar in the Al Aqsa Mosque as having extreme importance to Muslims. But all of these folklore teachings emerged and were placed within Muslim tradition *after* the reigns of Omar, Mu’awiya and Abd al-Malik. Even later Muslim writers, however, condemned these later folklore teachings as being the highest form of falsehood, and that they were nothing more than lies.¹⁸²

The Proper Site for the Temple of Herod

Let us recall that even before Omar transferred the sacred “stone” from the actual site of the Temple over the Gihon Spring to his *new* Temple at the *southern* end of the Haram esh-Sharif, there were already *four* other areas outside the precincts of the Haram being accepted in Omar’s time as the site of the former Temples of Solomon and Herod. These *four* sites were well known to those in Jerusalem long before Omar came on the scene in 638 C.E. Remember, Sophronius pointed out the east part of the Holy Sepulchre as his *first* place for the Temple. A *second* candidate became the Muslim site where Omar first prayed (where later a

¹⁸² See the vociferous critique by Ibn Taymiyya who wrote in 1328 C.E. (his English translation can be seen in Peters, *Jerusalem*, p.377).

mosque called the “Mosque of Omar” was built near the Holy Sepulchre). The *third* area was at the *traditional* Mount Zion located on the *southwest* hill that was a third of a mile south of the Holy Sepulchre. I will later show how this *southwest* hill became the *new* “Mount Zion.”¹⁸³ However, the *traditional* “Mount Zion” of all religionists from the time of the Crusades, was NOT the true site of the Temples. Finally, there was the *fourth* area that the early Jewish people accepted, and this was the proper site. It was situated on the *southeast* ridge over and around the Gihon Spring.

This *fourth* (Jewish) region of Jerusalem is the place where all historians and archaeologists today recognize as the *original* “Mount Zion.” Since it was common knowledge to biblical readers that the site of the former Temples and the location called “Mount Zion” were identical terms in the geography of biblical Jerusalem, it should not be odd that the Jewish authorities would long remember the site of the *original* “Mount Zion” on the *southeast* ridge.

The terms “Mount Zion” and the “Temple Mount” in many biblical contexts are synonymous, and they both refer to the spur of the *southeast* ridge where the original “Mount Zion” and its northerly extension called the “Ophel” were located (and with a “Millo district” in between as a “fill area”). For accuracy, all the Temples were actually located on the “Ophel” prominence situated over and around the Gihon Spring. I will later show that the Temple was built on the “Ophel” (the “humped mount”), the northern extension of “Mount Zion,” that was over the Gihon Spring. But for now, note that in Isaiah 32:14 (where “Ophel” is translated “forts” in the KJV), Isaiah said some of the main geographical features of the Ophel were its “*caves*” (KJV: “dens”) located underneath and within the mountain ridge.

Indeed, there are numerous “caves” and “tunnels” (most man-

¹⁸³ Recall that the traditional “Mount Zion” of the southwest hill was believed to be accurate and true with utter dogmatism by scholars from the Crusades until the middle of the last century. Since the phrases “Mount Zion” and “Temple Mount” were identical in some biblical contexts, the information about the true site of the Temple could have been known over a hundred years ago. The Jews until the time of the Crusades knew the southeast ridge was the original “Mount Zion” area and that is where they recognized their “Temple Mount” to be.

made, but some natural) that lead from the top of the Ophel to the Gihon Spring and its tributaries. The “caves” and “tunnels” are so obviously a part of the Ophel that it is no wonder that the prophet Isaiah singled out those prime characteristics that dominated the site. These “caves” (plural in Isaiah) are a cardinal part of the landscape and one can enter them today at the entrance to the archaeological gardens above the Gihon Spring. There were (and are) “caves” and “tunnels” underneath the Ophel that were intentionally carved out of the rock downward to reach the waters of the Gihon Spring (which Spring was a necessary part of the Temple and its rituals) was recognized as an essential feature of the Temple. The great Jewish commentator Maimonides (born 1134 C.E.) spoke of the subterranean parts of the Temple beneath the Holy of Holies,

“There was a stone in the Holy of Holies at its western wall upon which the Ark rested. In front of it stood the jar of manna and the staff of Aaron. When Solomon built the Temple, knowing that it was destined to be destroyed, he built *underneath, in deep and winding tunnels* [that is, *caves*], a place in which to hide the Ark.”¹⁸⁴

As far as the “Rock” underneath the present Dome of the Rock is concerned, there is indeed a single “cave” carved out of the southeastern part of that “Rock,” but historical sources show *that* “cave” was hewn out of the “Rock” *in Muslim times*, at least 600 years *after* the destruction of Herod’s Temple. That “cave” is thus a late creation. That single cave in the “Rock” does NOT have numerous “caves” and “tunnels” underneath it. But the “caves” and “tunnels” under the Ophel about 1000 feet south have been there from at least a thousand years before the birth of Jesus and were a notable feature of the Ophel ridge. Those underground passages are there for all to see today. They lead directly from where the Temples were, to the Gihon Spring where it was essential to get water for Temple rituals.¹⁸⁵ The Jews in Omar’s time wanted to

¹⁸⁴ See the English translation of Maimonides in Peters, *Jerusalem*, p.227, where he cites the statement found in 1957:17 of Maimonides.

¹⁸⁵ I will present two chapters of information primarily from the Holy Scriptures to show that all early Israelites knew that spring waters (that is, the Gihon Spring waters) were an essential part of the Temple and that spring water was

move to this *southeastern* site of Jerusalem where the Temples once were. They got their wish and lived in that *southeast* part of Jerusalem until the Crusades.

But what is it that presently governs our modern geographical understanding of the Jerusalem of Herod and Jesus according to the scholars and religious leaders? Sadly, it remains traditional religious teachings that rely mainly on the acceptance of dreams, visions and supernatural revelations by “holy men and women” as the best guides at identifying sacred sites in Jerusalem, and *not* documentary evidence from the Bible or historical records. Acceptance of those visionary “proofs” — whether Christian, Muslim or Jewish — is tenacious even in the thinking of scholars, though they are reluctant to admit it.

But the time has come to return to the documentary evidence of the biblical and historical records and to jettison the visionary “evidences” ordained by religious authorities who govern our churches, mosques and synagogues. In the next chapter we will look at the original Jewish appraisals of where *their* Temples were located in Jerusalem. We will see that Jewish authorities until the time of the Crusades recognized that the *real* Temples were located over and around the Gihon Spring.