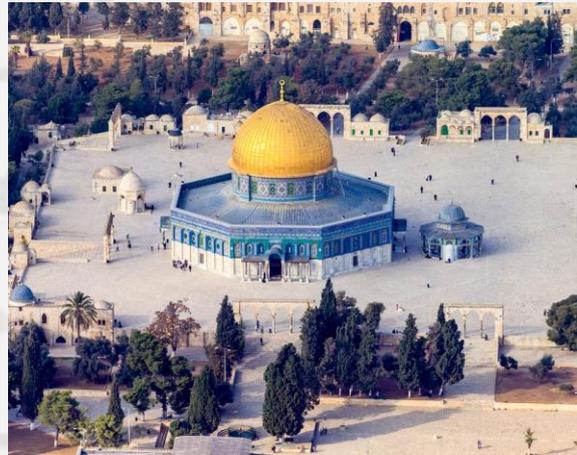




The Islam Research Group

Who Wrote the Qur'an?

VIII. The Masjid al-Haram



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The Masjid al-Haram in the Qur'an

A place that is central to the Qur'an's narrative is referred to in the Qur'an as:

the '*Masjid al-Haram*', **{2.144, 149-150, 191, 196 & 217}**,
{8.34}, **{9.7, 19 & 28}**, **{17.1}**, **{22.25}**
and **{48.25 & 27}**,

'*the House*', **{2.127}** and **{8.34}**,

'*the Sacred House*', **{5.97}** and **{14.37}**,

'*the Ancient House*', **{22.26}**,

(in the divine voice) '*My House*', **{2.125}** and **{22.26}**,

the '*station*' (or '*standing place*') of Abraham, **{2.125}** and **{3.97}**, and

'*the Ka'aba*' (literally '*The Cube*'), **{5.95 & 97}**.

In **{3.96}** it is linked to '*the first house created for mankind ... at Bakka*'

In the Qur'an's recounting of sacred history this place was

- '*assigned for Abraham*', **{22.26}**,
- the site of a building, the foundations for which had been raised by Abraham and Ishmael, **{2.217}**, and
- close by where Abraham '*settled his progeny*', **{14.37}**.

The place is described as the destination of the hajj and umrah pilgrimages, **{2.158, 189, 196 & 197}** and **{22.27}**, which are in their turn associated with:

- '*the rituals of Safa and Marwa and going to and fro between them*', **{2.158}**
- the new moon, **{2.189}**
- shaving one's head when an offering reaches a place of sacrifice and a place called Arafat. **{2.196-200}**
- circumambulation, standing bowing and prostrating'

In Qur'anic times:

- believers were told to make the hajj pilgrimage (see above)
- believers are told to face towards the Masjid al-Haram when they pray, **{2.144 & 149-150}**,
- it was the departure point for Muhammad to make a mysterious night journey to *'the furthest mosque'*, **{17.1}**,
- it was a place from which the Qur'an's audience has been expelled or *'turned away'*, **{2.191 & 217}**, **{8.34}** and **{22.25}**, but where God promised they would enter, **{48.27}**,
- but also a place where the Qur'an's community made a treaty with the *'mushrikun'* (idolaters), **{9.7}**, and from where, it was able to exclude them on pain of death, **{9.28}**,

Islamic tradition

Muslim tradition has no hesitation in holding that the Qur'an's *'ka'aba'* stood on the site of the present-day, Ka'aba, the rectangular, black curtain-draped shrine, at the centre of a colonnaded sacred piazza called Masjid al-Haram, at the heart of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The Qur'an's reference to this shrine as being *'the first house created for mankind'* and the multiple associations of it with Abraham are justified by imaginative traditions that:

- Adam and Eve descended to the land where Mecca now stands, following their expulsion from Paradise, which, in some mystical way, still exists directly above the Ka'aba,
- Abraham's first-born son Ishmael was taken as a baby to the same spot by his mother Hagar, and it was there that Abraham later found them many years later, whereupon he and Ishmael together built the first Ka'aba, as a shrine to God, and
- this shrine, that had once been established as a centre of monotheistic pilgrimage, had subsequently become corrupted by Arab polytheism.

Similarities between the Qur'an's Masjid al-Haram and the Jewish Temple

In fact, many of the attributes associated with the Qur'an's Masjid al-Haram are clearly intended to invoke the site of the Jewish Temple, in Jerusalem:

1. The name in Hebrew for the Temple is 'Beit Ha-Mikdad' (literally the 'Sanctified House'), similar to the 'Sacred House' of **{5.97}** and **{14.37}**,
2. According to the Hebrew Bible the First Temple had been built by King Solomon upon Mount Moriah (**2 Chronicles 3.1**), the same mountain upon which Abraham had been ordered to sacrifice Isaac (**Genesis 22.2**), giving the Temple a strong Abraham connection, as asserted for the Masjid al-Haram in the Qur'an, well as a connection to sacrificing animals,
3. Its inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies, is described in the Hebrew Bible as a cube ('twenty cubits long, twenty high and twenty wide' per **1 Kings 6.20**), as had been its forerunner, the portable tabernacle in the wilderness (based upon the figures provided in **Exodus 26**), and a mystical temple measured by Ezekiel (**Ezekiel 41.4**): this recalls the Quranic description of the Masjid al-haram as a 'Ka'aba' (cube) .
4. The temple was the site of three annual Jewish festivals, (**Exodus 23.14**), the word for which in Hebrew is 'ḥag', which involved similar rituals to the Qur'an's 'hajj'. The word is 'ḥag' occurs twenty-five times in the Torah to indicate a religious feast, and in particular denotes the feasts of
 - ❖ 'ḥag ḥammaṣṣōt', the Feast of Unleavened Bread/the Feast of the Passover; 'ḥag šābū'ōt',
 - ❖ the Feast of Weeks or Feast of the Harvest, and
 - ❖ 'ḥag hassukkōt', the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths.

These three festivals are listed together in **Deuteronomy** chapter 16 in which they are addressed collectively:

'Three times a year then, every male among you shall appear before the Lord, your God, in the place which he chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths. Nobody shall appear before the Lord empty-handed but each of you with as much as he can give, in proportion to the blessings which the Lord, your God, has bestowed on you.'

After the founding of the Jerusalem temple, the three festivals became the three great pilgrimage feasts ('shalosh regalim') of Judaism. During the First and Second Temple periods it was customary for pilgrims to sacrifice a lamb or goat at the Temple, pursuant to God's instruction in **Exodus 12.24-27**.

5. the date of the Passover was normally the first full moon following the Spring Equinox, which like the Quranic hajj is calculated by the lunar calendar.

6. the Quranic reference to Bakkah, **{3.96}**, recalls the words of the pilgrimage hymn, **Psalm 84**, composed to be sung during the journey to the Jerusalem Temple:

Happy are those who dwell in your house,
continually they praise you,
Happy the men whose strength you are,
their hearts are set upon the pilgrimage,
When they pass through the valley of Bakkah,
they make a spring of it, the early rain clothes it with a generous
growth.
They go from strength to strength,
they shall see the God of gods in Zion.

The Jewish Temple in the Qur'an

The children of Israel are mentioned very many times throughout the Qur'an. In particular:

- ❖ A very large part of the Qur'an is devoted to retelling the stories from the Jewish scriptures, including the story of Adam and his wife in the Garden of Eden, the Jewish patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael and Joseph), kings (Saul, David and Solomon) and prophets such as Moses and Aaron, Jonah and Job,
- ❖ Some verses of the Qur'an are specifically addressed to Jews (**{2.40, 47, 83-84 & 122}**, **{5.19 & 59-63}**, **{17.6-8}** and **{20.80}**),
- ❖ Many aspects of Shariah law set down in the Qur'an are similar to provisions in Jewish law (for example dietary restrictions, '*lex talionis*' ('*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth...*')) and traditional Islamic practices that are not in the Qur'an also replicate practices in Judaism (eg stoning to death as a punishment, circumcision, the avoidance of figurative art, rapid burial of dead bodies)
- ❖ The Qur'an twice alludes to the promise of God that the children of Israel have been promised the occupation of the Holy Land, **{5.21}** and **{17.104}**. However, in Genesis this promise had been made to the descendants of Abraham and therefore might be fulfilled through either the children of Isaac (ie the Jews) or those of his brother Ishmael from whom the Arabs traditionally considered themselves to be descended. In the early surahs of the Qur'an there are many passages referring to Abraham as holding a pure original faith that preceded the religions of Judaism and Christianity which the Qur'an calls that *hanifism*, and the Qur'an presents itself as conveying that original message. , **{2.135}**, **{3.67 & 95}**, **{4.125}**, **{6.79 & 161}** and **{16.120 & 123}**.
- ❖ The Children of Israel are initially described in positive terms in the Qur'an being described as the most favoured of God's people, **{2.47 & 122}** ... Say: '*We believe in that which was sent down unto us and was sent down unto you (People of the Book). Our God and your God are one, and unto Him are we submitters*'. Later they come to be the object of a litany of accusations. They:

- *'devour wealth'*, **{4.161}**, make illicit gains, **{5.41}**, and *'would not give men so much as the speck on a date stone'*, **{4.53}**,
- Are hypocrites and unreliable allies, **{59.11-12}**,
- have *'turned away'* from their covenant with God, **{2.64, 83, 93 & 100}**, **{4.155-157}** and **{5.13 & 70}**,
- have hidden or distorted with their tongues the revelation that had been given to them, **{2.75 & 79}**, **{3.78}**, **{4.46}** and **{5.81-82}**, and desire to turn believers away from belief **{2.109}**, and wish them ill **{3.120}**,
- have killed their prophets, **{2.61, 87 & 91}**, **{3.21, 112, 181 & 183}**, **{4.155}** and **{5.70}**,
- falsely boast of having killed Jesus **{4.157}**, slander Mary, **{4.158}**, and say that *'God's hand is shackled'*, **{5.64}**,

Destruction of the Temple in the Qur'an

The Jewish temple has been destroyed twice. The first occasion was by the Babylonian conquest of Israel in 587. A second temple was rebuilt following the end of the Babylonian captivity (c.537). This structure was later much expanded by Herod the Great c.20 BC, whose additions include the most recognisable part of the Second Temple visible today: the Western ('Wailing') Wall. The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70 and never rebuilt.

These two events are alluded to in the Qur'an **{17.4-8}**, (almost immediately following the 'night journey verse', **{17.1}**). In these verse the Jewish people in the Qur'an's audience are clearly being warned. They have been smitten by God twice previously for their disloyalty. The passage ends (in God's voice, of course) *'If you revert We will revert'*. In **{61.14}**, the Jews of Jesus's time are said to have included those who believed and those who disbelieved. The verse celebrates that the latter had come to prevail over the former. This passage is often interpreted as a reference to the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity at the start of the fourth century, which had placed Christians in a position of dominance over Jews within the Empire.

Consequently **Surah 17** seems to have been composed at a time when the Qur'an author was seeking to keep Jewish support by referring back to the destruction of the temple by the Romans, and by the time that **Surah 61** was composed, the Qur'an author had given up on retaining that support and was presenting the destruction of the temple as part of God's plan for the permanent punishment of the Jewish people.

The Arab focus on Temple Mount, 630-690

Within just a few years of the Arab capture of Jerusalem, its Christian patriarch, **Sophronius** (from 634 to his death in 638), described the conquerors immediate construction of a building upon 'the Capitol', presumably Temple Mount:

The godless Saracens entered the holy city of Christ our Lord, Jerusalem, with the permission of God and in punishment for our negligence, which is considerable, and immediately proceeded in haste to the place which is called the Capitol. They took with them men, some by force, others by their own will, in order to clean that place and to build that cursed thing, intended for their prayer and which they call a mosque (midzgitha).

In **pseudo-Sebeos's History** it was said that it had been Jews who had initially 'decided to rebuild the Temple of Solomon' whereupon 'the Ishmaelites being envious of them expelled them from that place and called the same house of prayer their own' .

Little more than a decade after pseudo-Sebeos completed his Armenian chronicle (661), at the opposite side of Europe, Adomnán, the abbot of Iona, wrote **De locis sanctis**, an account of the travels of a monk, Arculf, which included the following description of a rectangular Arab prayer hall on the site of the old Jewish temple.

However, in the celebrated place where once stood the temple, situated towards the east, near the wall, arose in its magnificence, the Saracens now have a quadrangular (quadrangulam) prayer house. They built it by erecting upright boards and great beams on some ruined remains the building it is said, can accommodate three thousand people at once.

The Dome of the Rock

Twenty years after Arculf's travels were written down, the Umayyads would make Temple Mount the site of the first great structure to be associated with Islam, the Dome of the Rock, adorned with a mosaic inscription dated 72 AH (692/3). This is an octagonal shrine consisting of two ambulatories around an unhewn stone, at the top of Temple Mount (probably its highest natural point). The date is certain because it is specified in the mosaic inscription of the arcade separating the two ambulatories.

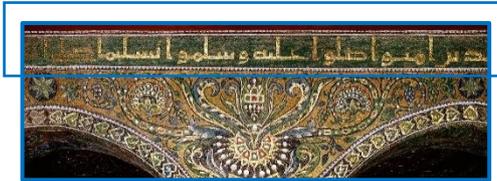
The inscriptions upon the outer façade are designed to be read as one circles the central rock in a clockwise direction (starting at the south side of the octagon), those on the inner façade as one circles again a starting at the south side, presumably having completed the outer circuit, in a counter clockwise direction.

Estelle Whelan in ***Forgotten Witness: Evidence For The Early Codification Of The Qur'an***¹ asserts:

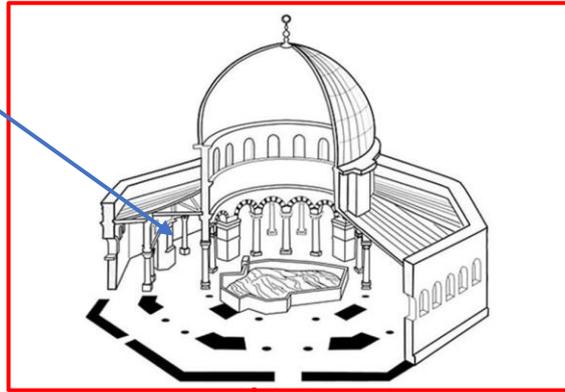
'(I)t is clear that the band on the inner face of the arcade contains the main message. The outer inscription is experienced first by those entering the building, who may read only the proximate segment, but the main text, on the inner face of the arcade, was meant to be read in its entirety by those who were returning as they had entered, which involved circumambulation of the middle ambulatory.'

¹ *Journal Of The American Oriental Society*, 1998, Volume 118, pp. 1-14, accessed the Islamic Awareness website.

The Dome of the Rock



*Inscription on the pillared arcade
dividing the two ambulatories*

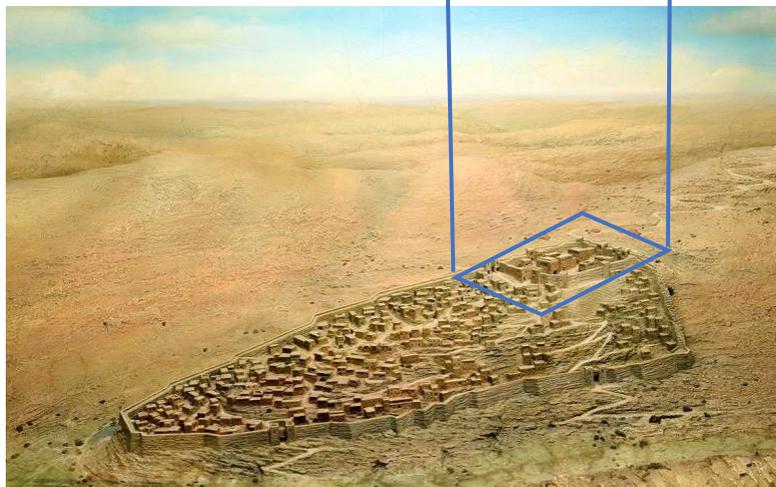
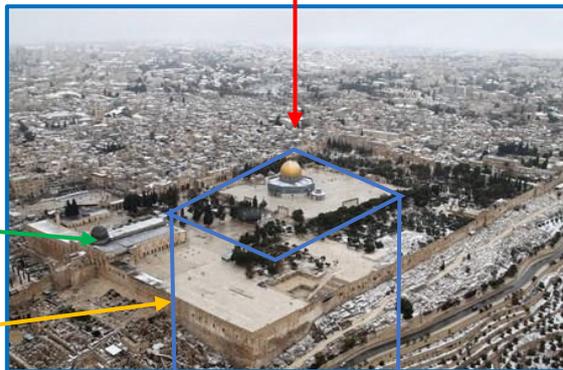


The Dome of the Rock

The Temple Mount
today

The Al Aqsa
(‘Furthest’) Mosque

Remains of the
Second Temple



Artists impression of early Jerusalem and the
First Temple built by Solomon.

*It is speculated that
the ‘rock’ around
which the Dome of
the Rock is built is the
highest natural point
of Mount Moriah,
selected by Solomon
as the site of the
Holy of Holies within
the First Temple
complex.*

Inscriptions on the outer face of the arcade

	Text of inscription (Qur'an verses in bold)	Qur'an reference
S	<i>In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate. Say: He is God, the One! God, the eternally Besought of all! He begetteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him. Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, the blessing of God be on him.</i>	'Say: He is God ... unto Him' reproduces all of Surah 112 .
SW	<i>In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate. Muḥammad is the Messenger of God. Lo! God and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet.</i>	'Lo! God an His angels...worthy salutation' reproduce {33.56}
W	<i>O ye who believe! Ask blessings on him and salute him with a worthy salutation. In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. Praise be to</i>	'Praise be to God ... magnificence' reproduce {17.111} (other than for omitting the first words 'And say'.)
NW	<i>God, Who hath not taken unto Himself a son, and Who hath no partner in the Sovereignty, nor hath He any protecting friend through dependence. And magnify Him with all magnificence. Muḥammad is the Messenger of</i>	
N	<i>God, the blessing of God be on him and the angels and His prophets, and peace be on him, and may God have mercy. In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate.</i>	
NE	<i>Unto Him belongeth sovereignty and unto Him belongeth praise. He quickeneth. And He giveth death; and He has Power over all things. Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, the blessing of God be on him. May He accept his intercession on the Day of Judgment on behalf of his people.</i>	'Unto Him ... Power over all things' represents a conflation of {64.1} and {57.2} .
E	<i>In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate. Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, the blessing of God be on him. The dome was built by servant of God 'Abd</i>	'The dome... praise be to God' is a foundational inscription of Abd al-Malik, later varied by Mam'un to insert his own name in the place of his father's.
SE	<i>[Allah the Imam al-Ma'mun, Commander] of the Faithful, in the year two and seventy. May God accept from him and be content with him. Amen, Lord of the worlds, praise be to God.</i>	

Inscriptions on the inner face of the arcade

S	<p><i>In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate. Unto Him belongeth sovereignty and unto Him belongeth praise. He quickeneth and He giveth death; and He has Power over all things. Muḥammad is the servant of God and His Messenger.</i></p>	<p>‘Unto Him ... Power over all things’ repeats the conflation of {64.1} and {57.2} from the outer face.</p>
SE	<p><i>Lo! God and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet. O ye who believe! Ask blessings on him and salute him with a worthy salutation. The blessing of God be on him and peace be on him, and may God have mercy. O People of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your religion</i></p>	<p>‘Lo! God an His angels...worthy salutation’ repeats the reproduction of {33.56} from the outer face.</p>
E	<p><i>nor utter aught concerning God save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a Messenger of God, and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not 'Three' - Cease! (it is)</i></p>	<p>‘The blessing ... may God have mercy’ is original.</p>
NE	<p><i>better for you! - God is only One God. Far be it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And God is sufficient as Defender. The Messiah will never scorn to be a</i></p>	<p>‘O People of the Book. Do not exaggerate... assemble unto him.’ reproduce {4.171-172}.</p>
N	<p><i>servant unto God, nor will the favoured angels. Whoso scorneth His service and is proud, all such will He assemble unto Him. Oh God, bless Your Messenger and Your servant Jesus</i></p>	<p>‘O God bless your Messenger ... Jesus son of Mary’ is original.</p>
NW	<p><i>son of Mary. Peace be on him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he shall be raised alive! Such was Jesus, son of Mary, (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt. It befitteth not (the Majesty of) God that He should take unto Himself a son. Glory be to Him!</i></p>	<p>‘Peace be upon him ... raised alive’ is a third person variation of Jesus’ reported statement in {19.33} and ‘Such was Jesus ...</p>
W	<p><i>When He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is. Lo! God is my Lord and your Lord. So serve Him. That is the right path. God (Himself) is witness that there is no God save Him. And the angels and the men of learning (too are witness). Maintaining His creation in justice, there is no God save Him,</i></p>	<p>That is the right path’ reproduces {19.34-36}.</p>
SW	<p><i>the Almighty, the Wise. Lo! religion with God (is) Islam. Those who (formerly) received the Book differed only after knowledge came unto them, through transgression among themselves. Whoso disbelieveth the revelations of God (will find that) Lo! God is swift at reckoning!</i></p>	<p>‘God (Himself) is witness ... swift at reckoning’ reproduces {3.18-19}.</p>

Inscriptions summarised

The inscriptions contain each of:

- ❖ **the bismala** (*'In the name of God the Compassionate, the merciful'*),
- ❖ the statement that **'There is no god but God, He has no associate'** (or in one instance a varied form *'There is no god but God. He is One.'*)
- ❖ the statement that **Muhammad is the Messenger of God** (in slightly varying forms)

six times: five times on the outer façade, once on the inner. It may be noted that the formulas of both elements of the modern shahada (*'There is no god but God'* and *'Muhammad is the Messenger of God'*) change slightly, and in only two of the six occasions in which the two limbs of the modern occur does the statement concerning Muhammad follow directly after the assertion of monotheism, indicating that the two statements were probably seen as separate in 690.

In addition, the inscriptions contain:

On both outer and inner façades

{33.56}: *'Lo! God and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet'.*

{64.1}/{57.2}: *'Unto Him belongeth sovereignty and unto Him belongeth praise. He quickeneth. And He giveth death; and He has Power over all things*

On the outer façade only

Surah 112. *'He is God, the One! God, the eternally Besought of all! He begetteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him.'*

{17.111}: *'Praise be to God, Who hath not taken unto Himself a son, and Who hath no partner in the Sovereignty, nor hath He any protecting friend through dependence. And magnify Him with all magnificence.'*

On the inner façade only

{4.171-172}: *O People of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning God save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a Messenger of God, and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not 'Three' - Cease! (it is) better for you! - God is only One God. Far be it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And God is sufficient as Defender. The Messiah will never scorn to be a servant unto God, nor will*

the favoured angels. Whoso scorneth His service and is proud, all such will He assemble unto Him.

{19.33-36}: *'Peace be on him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he shall be raised alive! Such was Jesus, son of Mary, (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt. It befitteth not (the Majesty of) God that He should take unto Himself a son. Glory be to Him! When He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is. Lo! God is my Lord and your Lord. So serve Him. That is the right path.'*

{3.18-19}: *'God (Himself) is witness that there is no God save Him. And the angels and the men of learning (too are witness). Maintaining His creation in justice, there is no God save Him, the Almighty, the Wise. Lo! religion with God (is) Islam. Those who (formerly) received the Book differed only after knowledge came unto them, through transgression among themselves. Whoso disbelieveth the revelations of God (will find that) Lo! God is swift at reckoning!'*

and two original composition, or possibly an otherwise lost non-canonical verse(s):

'Oh God, bless Your Messenger and Your servant Jesus'

and

'O ye who believe! Ask blessings on him and salute him with a worthy salutation. The blessing of God be on him and peace be on him, and may God have mercy.'

The repetitious nature of the inscriptions upon the outer façade suggest that they were intended to be chanted by a person walking around the outer ambulatory.

Clearly, the inscriptions have a clear focus upon denying that Jesus is the Son of God. However, it is hard to believe that the purpose for building such an elaborate shrine at such a location could have been primarily to project this anti-Christian propaganda.

The Night Journey

Orthodox Muslim belief is that the building was erected to mark the spot from which Mohammed ascended to heaven in the miraculous Isra ('night journey') described in the Qur'an **{17.1}**:

{17.1} *Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night
from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque,
whose precincts We have blessed,
that we might show him some of Our Sights.*

Truly He is the Seer, Hearer.

Ibn Ishaq describes Muhammad as having travelled to Jerusalem on a supernatural winged horse and from Temple Mount to have ascended to heaven there to talk to several prophets and God.

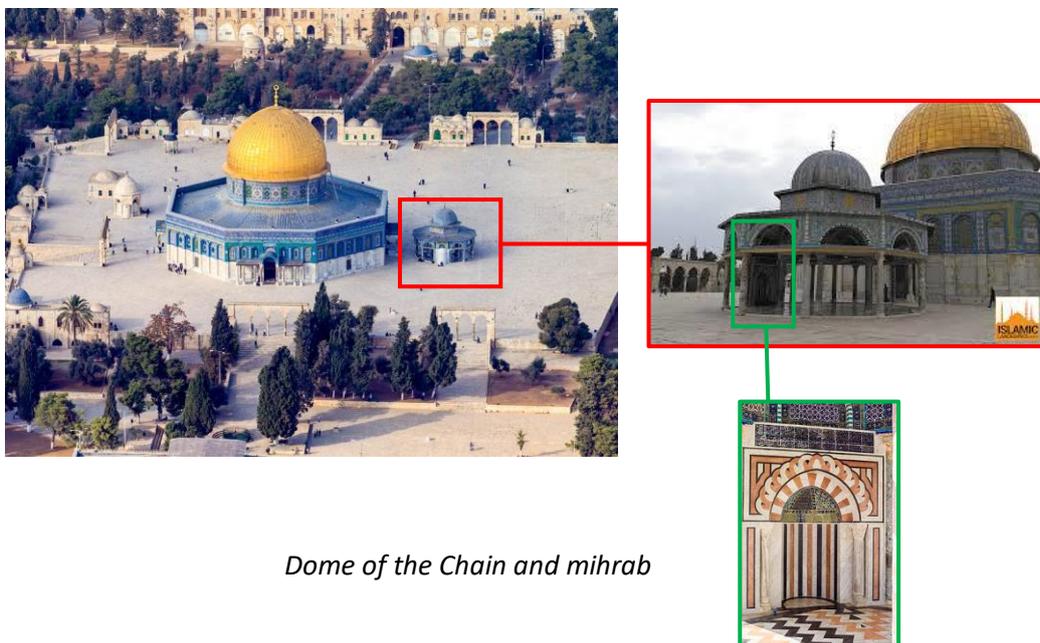
However, as can be seen, the Qur'an reference which is said to refer to this story is extremely brief for such a momentous event, and fails to specify the terrestrial location Mohammed visited as Jerusalem. In fact, setting aside the lack of purpose in God bringing Mohammed to Jerusalem merely to use as an intermediary point before his ascension to the heavens, Jerusalem makes little sense as the location for the '*furthest mosque*' (*al-majid al-aqsa*) since there was no worship place on Temple Mount at that time, and there is no category of place for which the adjective 'furthest' would be suitable. Indeed, Jerusalem was regarded as the religious focal point of Judeo-Christian world, to which, the traditional Islamic narrative states that Mohammed initially directed his followers to pray towards, making '*the furthest (place)*' a particularly unlikely way for the Qur'an to have described it.

It is also inconceivable that if the Dome of the Rock was built to commemorate the Night Journey, that **{17.1}** would not have been included in the verses around the mosaic. Consequently we can assume that Ibn Ishaq's account of Muhammad having made a Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem was a late invention to explain the early Arab rulers having built a shrine to mark the site of the inner sanctum of the former Jewish Temple.

The Dome of the Chain

Alongside the Dome of the Rock is a much smaller structure, the Dome of the Chain. This is an open sided structure built in the same style and from similar materials to the Dome of the Rock. It contains a mihrab. Dan Gibson has demonstrated that this is directed to Petra.

The Dome of the Chain



Dome of the Chain and mihrab

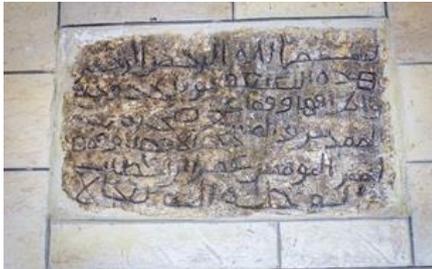
The existence of this structure seems to detract from the purpose of the Dome of the Rock which is to focus devotees' attention upon the site of the former Jewish Temple. It is possibly that it was intended that worshippers would circumambulate the Temple Rock, reading the inscription denying the divinity of Jesus, and then exit that large shrine and pray in the much smaller prayer hall towards a different location, but it seems more likely that either the Dome of the Chain was built for different, less populous group of believers to those attending the main shrine, or else it was built at a later time.

The fact that the Dome of the Rock mosaic is dated 72 AH (691) and the first mihrab was said to have been created in the renovation of the Mosque of the Qiblatain in 89 AH², suggests that the Dome of the Chain was built at least seventeen years after the Dome of the Rock.

² Ṭabarī 23, pg 141 per Dan Gibson website

The Mosque at Nuba

A monumental inscription has recently been discovered in a mosque in the village of Nuba, 16 miles south of Jerusalem, attesting its foundation to Umar, described, like Muawiyah, as *Amir al-mu'minin* (commander of the faithful).



'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, this territory, Nuba, and all its boundaries and its entire area, is an endowment to the Rock of Bayt al-Maqdis and the al-Aqsa Mosque, as it was dedicated by the Commander of the Faithful, Umar ibn al-Khattab, for the glory of Allah.

'Bayt al Maqdis' may be translated as *'holy temple'* and, juxtaposed with reference to the Al-Aqsa Mosque may be taken to refer to the structure known as the Dome of the Rock.

Obviously, this inscription was produced after the construction of the Al-Aqsa Mosque (to which it refers) in 705. Some see in the inscription evidence that in the eyes of the Arab conquerors, the Dome of the Rock was perceived to fulfil the role of a *'third temple'*, constructed upon the foundations of the earlier two.³

³ Andreas Kaplony, *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade*.

Conclusion

- 1. The many connections between the Qur'an's Masjid al-Haram/Sacred House/Ka'aba etc are all allusions to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and references to the Hajj are references to a pilgrimage to that place.**

The word '*masjid*' derives from the Arabic root s-j-d, which indicates making oneself lowly or submissive, leading to its use in '*masjid*' to indicate a place of worship. '*Harām*' is one of many Hebrew words in the Qur'an, the word '*herem*' referring, inter alia, to an expulsion from the Jewish community. As an adjective in Arabic it is generally translated as '*forbidden*'. In English translations, '*al-Masjid al-Harām*' has been translated, with increasingly free licence, as '*the sacred mosque*', (per Yusuf Ali), '*the inviolable place of worship*' (Pickthall), '*the holy sanctuary*' (Kaskas) or '*the restricted temple*' (the Monotheist Group). However, the simplest translation may be the most true to the Qur'an's meaning, since Temple Mount had become, literally, the '*forbidden temple*', not for Mohammed but for the Jews, owing to their exclusion from Jerusalem, first by the city's Christian population, then by the Sassanians and finally by Heraclius.

- 2. This army took control of Jerusalem between 636-638 and immediately built a structure on Temple Mount over the site of the former Holy of Holies. Later this was replaced by the Dome of the Rock shrine, designed to allow pilgrims to circumambulate the rock of the Holy of Holies (upon which Abraham had prepared to sacrifice his son).**

It may have been that Muhammed was still alive and composing the Qur'an when the Temple Mount was seized. There is no detailed account of the post-Byzantine Arab takeover of Jerusalem since the Qur'an refers to a treaty signed there, **{9.7}**, and instructs the expulsion from there of 'idolaters' (ie Jews and Christians), **{9.28-30}**.

By the time that the mosque came to be decorated, the alliance with the Jews that had prompted the focus upon recapturing the Temple, and the Quranic vision of the Arabs as a successor people to the Jews claiming seems to have waned in importance and the purpose of the inscription becomes a mere condemnation of trinitarian Christianity.

3. 'Makkah' was likely an invented place name to rhyme with Bakkah⁴. This became the name of present day Mecca in the eighth century.

Dan Gibson has proposed that during the rebellion of Abdullah Ibn Zubayr, Ibn Zubayr seized a pagan shrine at Petra (which he describes as the original Kaaba/Masjid al-haram/mecca) and the black stone that was its focus. He sent this stone south into the Hijaz in 680 to avoid it falling into the hands of his enemies. After the crushing of Ibn Zubayr's rebellion, Gibson speculates that the group whom he had charged with safeguarding the black stone established a new shrine for it in the Hijaz, evidenced by an inscription.⁵ After the Abbasi revolution (750) Ibn Ishaq wrote a largely unhistorical account of Muhammad's life, which he located in the Hijazi 'Mecca' (and which he imagined to be like Petra).

It is suggested that this is a plausible scenario for the founding of Mecca, which is unknown from any historical document prior to 741.

⁴ For Quranic pairs of rhyming names, see *Who Wrote the Qur'an? II Quranic Themes and sources*.

⁵ See *Who Wrote the Qur'an? VII Inscriptions*