RAFI GRAFMAN AND MYRIAM ROSEN-AYALON

THE TWO GREAT SYRIAN UMAYYAD MOSQUES: JERUSALEM AND DAMASCUS

... in that renowned place where once the Temple had been magnificently constructed ... the Saracens now frequent a quadrangular house of prayer, which they have built rudely, constructing it by setting planks and great beams on some remains of ruins: this house can, it is said, hold three thousand men at once.

The Christian Pilgrim Arculf, ca. 680

A recent summary review of the early history of al-Aqsa Mosque concludes that its earliest structure, erected not long after the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem, was built on the site, and utilized the ruins, of "the Herodian Royal Stoa, a huge structure destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D."

The evidence for this earliest Muslim structure on the site, scant as it is, provides a point of departure for determining the (albeit schematic) plan of the subsequent structure there, certainly initiated as part of the splendid project of 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) in al-Haram al-Sharif, though possibly brought to fruition or completion by his son al-Walid I (r. 705–15). The final phrase of Arculf's description of ca. 680, quoted above, indicates that the building was at least some 4,800 square meters in area.

In the same publication, it was supposed that "'Abd al-Malik's structure undoubtedly resembled the third mosque on the site, constructed under al-Mahdi (780 A.D.)," but this is a conclusion that cannot now be supported by the textual evidence. The final passage continues: "But why did its plan differ so greatly from that of another major mosque not too far from Jerusalem and of the same general period—the Great Mosque of Damascus, built by al-Walid I? ... the existence of a typical mosque-plan preceding al-Walid might serve as evidence, albeit circumstantial, for reconstructing the plan of 'Abd al-Malik's al-Aqsa Mosque." It is then suggested that the building was a broad-house, but a very long one ("Thus, the mosque may well have combined the common plan of early, broad mosques with the longitudinal scheme of the basilica") and thus there is no reason to assume that the plan of the mosque in Jerusalem differed so greatly from that in Damascus. If we reexamine the evidence concerning Jerusalem and the earliest phase of the structure in Damascus and compare the two, we will see that the mosque in Jerusalem was the inspiration for the one in Damascus and that therefore the latter can help us understand the earliest phases of al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

THE HERODIAN STOA AND ARCULF'S MOSQUE

A study two decades ago of the Herodian stoa as described by the ancient Jewish historian Josephus Flavius proposed a reconstruction that seems to match, in a significant part, the construction still extant in al-Haram al-Sharif. At the time of its construction Herod's stoa was probably the largest building in the world (excluding the Pyramids). As described by Josephus, it was a classical basilica, very elongated, running from one side of the Temple Mount to the other (fig. 1). It had three rows of freestanding columns, with a fourth row abutting the southern wall of the Temple Mount; the two side aisles were a third narrower than the medial nave. Josephus records a total of 162 huge columns, each of a size enabling three men to hold hands around their circumference. The two extra columns of the 162 left over from the four rows show the building to have been a classical basilica, since the central nave was surrounded on all four sides by aisles. The two very short, lateral aisles are the feature that led to an irregularity in the plan: the two extra columns on the longer axis of the building toward either end forming the lateral rows of columns separating the end aisles from the nave inherently introduce a larger intercolumniation at either end.
Fig. 1. The Herodian Temple Mount, with the basilical Royal Stoa along the entire southern side at top; the shaded areas represent the present-day al-Aqsa Mosque (top) and the platform of the Dome of the Rock (center).

The extant parts of the structure are divided today between the Islamic Museum and the Women's Mosque (an annex of al-Aqsa Mosque on the west). They display a system of vaults with piers that seem in part to correspond with the reconstructed positions of the huge columns of the Herodian structure (fig. 2). Since this part of the earlier structure included one of the irregularities noted above, and since one of the later piers also "unnecessarily" matches the position of an earlier column, the correspondence can hardly be accidental. Thus, the present structure partly reflects the ancient structure that, as we seek to demonstrate, served as the basis for the rough-and-ready building seen by Arculf sometime around 680. In Herod's stoa the northernmost row of columns was open to the elements, and this feature, too, would have been appropriate, for the earliest mosques also display such an arrangement.4

At the time of the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in 636, there was no reason for there not to have been remains of the Herodian structure still lying about on the site, for in the Roman period, following the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 A.D., no construction is recorded as having taken place in the southern part of the Temple Mount.5 Thus, Arculf's "remains of ruins" can safely be regarded as those of the Herodian structure. Many of the stone columns and column bases may well have disappeared, but the stylobates and other more ordinary upper members, including the numerous huge cedar beams6 and the like, could well have weathered the five or so centuries of exposure. Utilizing these, the jury-rigging initial Muslim builders would inherently have followed the general latitudinal plan of the Herodian stoa; only its length would have been determined anew, in accord with the needs of the new devotees on the site.

A means of ascertaining the length of this earliest al-Aqsa might be found on the basis of the minimum area required for "three thousand men at once" (i.e., ca. 4,800 sq. m). If we take the width of the Herodian stoa, approximately 39 meters,7 as the basis for the width of "Arculf's" mosque, then the length would be somewhere in the neighborhood of 124 meters.

A NOTE ON HAMILTON'S STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF AL-AQSA MOSQUE

The archaeological report of the limited observations and soundings made in al-Aqsa Mosque in the late 1930's, on behalf of the British Mandatory Department of Antiquities, "is in many respects defective"; it was "compiled from notes made during works of demolition . . . which did not always permit of exact observation."8 The archaeologists were able "to make small soundings, and to remove for study quantities of potsherds and other objects recovered from excavations on the site." The discoveries significant for our subject, "made by excavations beneath the floor" (p. iv), are treated in a special note of some ten pages, only three of which are devoted to interpretation of the
findings, though they are further dealt with in the "Historical Summary" (see pp. 70-74). The principal discoveries beneath the floors of the extant structure were a marble pavement (or traces thereof) and associated column plinths, and certain remains superimposed over it. "We may . . . equate the mosque of the marble pavement with Aqsa I, and the mosque of the superimposed blocks or secondary pier foundations with Aqsa II" (p. 60). "Aqsa I" is ascribed to the several "primitive" Umayyad and earlier building stages; "Aqsa II" is ascribed to the Abbasid "restorations" under Mansur and Mahdi. "The floor-level of Aqsa II must have been nearly the same as that of the present building, for it necessarily passed above the remains of the north wall of Aqsa I; and the threshold of its central door is still in use today. We conclude that the superimposed blocks exposed by excavations were in the nature of foundations, . . . not actually visible in Aqsa II" (p. 61).

In other words, Hamilton did not find a floor which he could ascribe to Aqsa II (but see his p. 60, where he mentions "the somewhat enigmatic intermediate pavement . . . which was found in the east aisles a few centimeters below the level of the present floor . . ."). But, he continues, "the data provided . . . enable us to restore a primitive mosque [i.e., "Aqsa I"] measuring 50 m. from north to south, but of unknown width from east to west. The southern wall of this building coincided with the present southern wall; the northern has since been abandoned. . . . The central north-south axis of the building has not been identified."

It is obvious that Hamilton was somewhat confused by the finds, though he tried to provide a rational picture. All through his account, we find evidence of his uncertainty: "... we are inclined to infer . . ." (p. 63); "At some point in time, which we hope to determine later . . ." (p. 60), and so forth. "To conclude the account of the excavations beneath the floor of the mosque . . . in the same figure [30] we have been content to mark on the plan the most substantial of
certain enigmatic fragments of apparently pre-Umayyad structures which were touched by the lower parts of many of the foundation pits excavated by the building contractors. Amongst these early remains there is a notable absence of all traces of monumental building of the Jewish period” (p. 65).

In other words, beneath the marble flooring denoted by Hamilton as “Aqsa I”, there were remains of an “enigmatic” nature which postdate all Herodian construction on the site. Since we know of no construction other than the mosque mentioned by Arculf and the early, truly Umayyad mosque(s) on the site, these enigmatic remains must necessarily represent the true Aqsa I and even Aqsa II.

Hamilton’s treatment of the pottery evidence found under the floors is also quite revealing of both the actual facts and of his reasoning:

Between the present floor and the marble pavement or its bedding the filling yielded consistently Roman or Early Byzantine sherds. Scarcely any fragments suggest a date later than the fourth century; the majority resembled first century types, and included a few Iron Age sherds. Close above the early pavement level some fragments of plaster painted grey, red, and yellow in imitation of marble were noted. These, judging from the similar plaster fragments found associated with the north wall of Aqsa I, probably belonged to the decoration of the primitive mosque. Otherwise it seems that whoever established the present floor-level, and we have seen reason to suppose that they were the Abbaside builders of Aqsa II, used predominantly Roman rubbish dumps to provide the filling required. ... Beneath the marble pavement or its bedding the pottery changed. Here the great bulk of the sherds collected were Byzantine types, the latest of which included hard-baked, metallic wares, often with a polished surface, characteristic of the latest pre-Islamic and earliest Islamic levels in other areas of Jerusalem. The pottery beneath the floor of Aqsa I was thus precisely what we should expect to find.10 The same Byzantine to early Arab types prevailed in the filling, cut by our Trench A, which immediately covered the back of the vaults leading to the Double Gate (Figs. 31-32). Both pottery and the soil which contained it may be attributed to rubbish dumps tipped on the derelict Temple area during Christian times. (p. 66)

Thus, all the fillings, above and below the marble flooring, were “tips” brought from somewhere other than the Temple Mount/Haram. For the lower of the two fills, there is no knowing when it was done—whether “during Christian times” or, for example, by Mahdi. In any case, Hamilton seems to have placed far too much emphasis on the date of the pottery itself, and not enough on the fact that it was fill. As such, it is irrelevant for dating the structure above it. Unfortunately, by missing this point, he allowed it to mislead him into believing that his Aqsa I was really the earliest Muslim structure on the site. The point was crucial to his argument, but the fact is that he never really penetrated the “marble pavement” level (below the fill underlying it), and the remains beneath, only briefly seen in pits and trenches dug by the contractors, were thus relegated by Hamilton to the category of “enigmatic” and left at that. He apparently regarded the “Christian” fill as a sort of virgin soil vis-à-vis the Muslim remains, and this methodological error proved his downfall in interpretation.

The interesting point about Hamilton’s discoveries is that, when he expanded the plan of his Aqsa I, the resulting reconstruction precisely fit Muqaddasi’s description of the mosque built by Mahdi: a building with fourteen side aisles and a slightly wider nave,11 running north–south, with a grand central doorway and secondary grand doorways at the middle of each group of side aisles (actually somewhat closer to the middle). The ten columns in each north–south row would have quite nicely allowed for the eleven doors noted by Muqaddasi as having been along the eastern outer wall. The resulting plan (fig. 3)12 shows the building to have been shorter than the Umayyad structure from east to west, but longer on the north-south axis. This is in keeping with the story related by the author of the Muthir, who cites al-Mahdi as saying “that the mosque had been too narrow, and of too great length—and thus it had not been used by the people, so now [in rebuilding it] they should curtail the length and increase the breadth.” Hamilton, too, noted this change in proportions, but ascribed it to his Aqsa III rather than his Aqsa I. This, in turn led him to conclude “that, unlike the contemporary mosque at Damascus, the aisles of the Aqsa Mosque from the earliest times ran at right angles and not parallel to the qibla wall” (p. 73).13 Hamilton admitted that “the recent works have thrown no light on ‘Umar’s mosque, of which we learn from the pilgrim Arculfus... Nor has observation enabled us to distinguish between the two phases of Abbaside reconstruction attributed respectively to Mansur and al-Mahdi.”14

Rafi Grafman and Myriam Rosen-Ayalon
Fig. 3. Schematic reconstruction of the Umayyad al-Aqsa Mosque (thick lines), with a schematic reconstruction of the mosque built by Mahdi (thin lines) over the older structure; the present-day building is indicated by shaded lines.

Tabulating the corrected sequence of the structures on the site of al-Aqsa, the following picture emerges:

Phase I. The mosque described by Arculf
Phase II. The first monumental mosque, built by 'Abd al-Malik/al-Walid
Phase III. Repairs under Mansur
Phase IV. Al-Mahdi’s reproportioned mosque (Hamilton’s Aqsa I)
Phase V. Various repairs, etc. (Hamilton’s Aqsa II)
Phase VI. The building plan still extant, initiated apparently under al-Dhahir

THE EARLY UMAYYAD AQSA MOSQUE

In planning his magnificent project on the Temple Mount, which in effect would turn it into al-Haram al-Sharif, 'Abd al-Malik would surely have wanted to replace the slipshod structure described by Arculf, for, though the entire enclosure was to represent a mosque, a more sheltered structure enclosing the qibla was surely a necessary element in his grand scheme. How much he modified the aspect of the earlier building cannot be known, but something of the length of the new building is indicated by the existence of traces of a bridge leading from the Umayyad palace just south of the western part of the Haram (fig. 4). The bridge would have spanned the street running just outside the southern wall of the Haram, to give direct access to the mosque. Direct access from palace to mosque was a well-known feature in this period, as evidenced at various early sites. Since this would have led directly into the interior of the mosque, the western wall of the structure must have been at some point near or slightly to the west of the western side of the bridge. Any farther west would yield a building far too broad for practical use.

The position of the western wall can probably be pinpointed on the basis of metrology: most monumental buildings—and we can surely regard 'Abd al-Malik’s planned structure as monumental—are constructed in round-number dimensions. The contemporaneous
buildings south and southwest of al-Aqsa are all built according to a unified standard cubit of 0.56 meters. Applying this to our data, the western side of the bridge lies approximately 100 Umayyad cubits west of the center of the main mihrab—and note that the width of the Herodian stoa, ca. 39 meters, very closely approximates 70 Umayyad cubits. Accordingly, the Umayyad structure of al-Aqsa Mosque would have measured 200 × 70 Umayyad cubits; i.e., 112 × 39 meters, not quite enough to yield ca. 4,820 sq.m., but not that far off either. Making the length 220 Umayyad cubits would bring it up almost exactly to our initial reckoning, and that figure is probably closer to the truth, putting the bridge access well within the building.

We are probably quite safe, then, to regard the present site of the central mihrab of al-Aqsa as being identical to that of the Umayyad structure, though not of the structure which preceded it. The western wall of the Umayyad al-Aqsa should be somewhere around (124 × 0.5 =) 62 meters west of the center of the main mihrab. The western edge of the traces of the bridge lies ca. 57 meters west of the center of the mihrab, 5 meters within our rough calculation, and thus we would seem to be on the right track in regarding the bridge as located very close to, and within, the assumed western wall of the Umayyad mosque.

The hypothetical plan (fig. 5) can be augmented somewhat, for we know that 'Abd al-Malik shifted the central axis of the mosque some 40 meters westward, in accord with his overall plan for al-Haram al-Sharif. The earlier axis is represented in the structure by the niche still known as the "mihrab of 'Umar"—that is, 'Umar the conqueror of Jerusalem in 636. Thus, we have three definite points of reference at set distances along the southern, qibla wall of the Umayyad al-Aqsa Mosque: the mihrab of 'Umar on the east; the main
mihrab of al-Aqsa Mosque in the middle; and the Umayyad bridge on the west.

Al-Haram al-Sharif was conceived by 'Abd al-Malik as an architectural means to achieve an omphalos—the site of the Tree of Life, interlocked with Judgment Day, Resurrection, and Paradise. The focal point of this conception was the Dome of the Rock, with its specific iconographic, decorative scheme. In placing emphasis on the Dome of the Rock, 'Abd al-Malik had his architects align his new al-Aqsa Mosque according to the position of the Rock, thus shifting the main north-south axis of the Temple Mount, a line running through the Dome of the Chain and the Mihrab of 'Umar.

The overall scheme encompassed not only these two structures, but the entire Haram, including the Double Gate on the south and the Golden Gate on the east; the inner platform and its stairways or mawasín; and even the compound outside the Haram proper, to the south and west, with a palace and other buildings.

THE GREAT MOSQUE OF DAMASCUS AND THE EARLY UMAYYAD AQSA MOSQUE

The Muslim utilization of the temenos in Damascus is remarkably similar to that of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, in several of its stages. The Great Mosque of Damascus as we know it today was begun by al-Walid in 706; work on it continued for close to a decade. It is significant that the building of the first true mosque on the site of Muhammad’s house at Medina occurred under al-Walid at this very same time, that is to say, in the years 707–9 (though it was used as a mosque earlier); and it is not unlikely that work on al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem was going on at the very same time as well. In Damascus, as in Jerusalem, some form of primitive mosque had existed; here the entire temenos of the Roman period appears to have been cleared of all earlier internal structures, pagan, Christian, and Muslim, and an overall plan was implemented. The minor structures in the sahn, as well as the arcades, are of secondary interest to us in the
The structure was built into the entire southern part of the temenos, completely filling it from the southeastern to the southwestern tower, and reaching a point some 39 m. north of the outer face of the southern wall. In other words, the covered mosque itself was, in Creswell's words, "nearly 136 m. (446 ft) in length and a little over 37 m. (121 ft) in depth, formed by three arcades running parallel to the south wall. A broad transept, running from north to south, cuts these arcades into two nearly equal halves, each half consisting of eleven arches" (p. 50).

Concerning the transept, Creswell noted that the position of the four middle piers was governed by the alignment of the arcades just discussed, and thus they must be ascribed to the same building phase as the rest; in other words, the four piers must have been intended to support an original dome. Creswell also noted that the present arrangement was not the original one, for the fire of 1893 revealed that the piers had later been bolstered to support the present stone dome, built by Malik Shah in 1082–83, and that "it must have closely resembled that of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem" (p. 52). In other words, the central bay of the transept, even though it was originally oblong, supported a dome, as is expressly mentioned by Nabigha al-Shaibani, a poet of al-Walid’s court, and by Muqaddasi (985). “On what did it rest? Presumably it was of wood and rested on great cross-beams, in much the same way as does Lajin’s dome in the Mosque of Ibn Tulun” in Cairo (p. 52).

On the back wall of the sanctuary are four mihrabs, two of which are the mihrab of the Companions of the Prophet in the eastern half and the great mihrab at the end of the transept (p. 53). Creswell would support the traditional location of the latter mihrab “under that part of the colonnade on the south side of the temenos, which lay to the east of the [original pagan] triple entrance” (p. 71). And “Ibn Shakir says that the mihrab of the Companions did not have the form of a niche until the time of al-Walid. It then became the third niche-formed mihrab in Islam” (p. 53).

Another feature evident in Damascus, and probably in the first Umayyad al-Aqsa as well, is the use of piers flanking pairs of columns. This pier-columns-pier arrangement can be seen in al-Aqsa today, but the dating—however clear to Hamilton and Creswell—is surely quite problematic. The entire northern, “open” façade of Damascus originally had such an arrangement, and Creswell seeks its origin in such earlier structures as St. Sophia. But the Umayyad architects were familiar with it, having already applied it successfully in Jerusalem, in the Dome of the Rock (the columns in twos or in threes), as well as in the mawazin, some of which, admittedly, are later, but several probably do represent original elements.

In delving into the architectural origins of the plan and elevation of the Great Mosque in Damascus, Creswell takes a rather round-about course. He starts with a palace in Constantinople, of which nothing survives but a mosaic depiction of another, later building which, it had been claimed, was modeled after it. There are several major objections to the comparative method employed here, particularly because the very functions of the two structures are entirely different, a point Creswell ignores. The element of function is primary in design, and not just in architecture. A palace is simply not a mosque, and though there may (or may not) be superficial resemblances in their façades, such similarities can only be superficial.

Thiersch’s comparison, fully supported by Creswell, ignores the existence of a highly visible dome in Damascus.

In seeking precedents for the Great Mosque, we must also take into account the motives behind the specific plan—especially this plan, which appears to have been so innovative. Why should the architects have included a transept or a dome at all? This is particularly odd, for the full visual effect of the gabled-transept façade in Damascus is surely rather restricted by the relatively shallow sahn before it. Unless attributed to a sudden brainstorm, there seems to be no raison d’être for such a plan in Damascus. Creswell wrote, “There is every reason for believing that, with the possible exception of the Second Aqsa Mosque, sometimes attributed to ‘Abd al-Malik . . ., the Great Mosque at Damascus was the first erected in Syria; whence, therefore, did al-Walid get his design?” It would almost seem to be a loaded question, but Creswell did not respond to his own cue.

The most logical explanation for the origin of the plan of the Great Mosque in Damascus is that it was directly taken over from the first Umayyad al-Aqsa
Mosque in Jerusalem (with several slight adaptations to the new site). In the new Haram al-Sharif, with its overall thematic scheme, such a plan finds a much more reasoned explanation. Not only must the earliest Umayyad structure have been a refined and much ornamented version of the rough building seen by Arculf, preserving its general north-south dimensions, it surely also must still have preserved the general lateral plan of Herod’s stoa. In Damascus, there would have been absolutely no reason to preserve the uneven lateral division of the space, for there were no earlier stylobates to be incorporated and taken advantage of, as there were in Jerusalem. But why should there have been a transept with a dome in al-Aqsa? The builders of the Dome of the Rock shifted the north-south axis of the Haram somewhat westward from the very middle, aligning it with the center of the Rock. In the Aqsa Mosque, this resulted in moving the site of the main mihrab from the locale of the present mihrab of ‘Umar to the position it now occupies, a shift of some 40 meters. Now, the axiality of the entire Haram is a basic feature of its plan (fig. 4): a uniform, broad building running across such an axis at its southern end, with no outward relationship to the main axis, would almost be unthinkable. To emphasize the axiality, and to give it an outward expression visible even from afar, the architects must have felt impelled to introduce a north-south transept precisely on the axis. In order further to strengthen the polarity, they topped its gabled roof with a small but pert dome, providing a counterpoint on the axis to the Dome of the Rock. It could hardly have been otherwise, bolstering and completing the thematic aspect of the Haram. Damascus possessed no such motive for its plan, so it must have drawn on Jerusalem for its inspiration, as can clearly be seen also in the interior decorations, especially the marble paneling and the mosaics.

What specific features of the Umayyad al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem can we point to as appearing also in the Great Mosque of Damascus, besides the basic, overall plan, which appears to have corresponded almost exactly in its primary dimensions? One of the most remarkable coincidences of correspondence in plan can be seen along the qibla walls of the two mosques (fig. 7): aligning the central mihrabs, we see that the mihrab of ‘Umar in al-Aqsa is precisely at the same distance eastward as is the mihrab of the Companions of the Prophet in Damascus. Further, the bridge leading to al-Aqsa from the Dar al-Imara in Jerusalem is precisely at the same distance westward as is the Bab al-Ziyada in Damascus.

One final matter concerning the common plan of Damascus and Jerusalem remains: the innovative fea-
ture of a dome at the center of the transept. Domes in churches in the Syrian region were not an uncommon feature, but they were generally to be found in association with a specific holy site, most often shrines with an adjacent or abutting church. The Dome of the Rock is the earliest such Muslim structure that openly emulates the Byzantine practice. But the form of dome we are dealing with is actually quite different: it is integrated into the central point of a much larger, broad building. The dome of the Constantinian Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem is at one end of a long basilica; and the dome of the Constantinian Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was actually detached from the basilical church.

The only building in any way comparable in concept seems to be the large monastery church at Qala'at Sim'an, some 35 km northwest of Aleppo (fig. 8). This is not to say that it was the direct source of inspiration for the dome in al-Aqsa Mosque, but it does show that the form was in existence in Byzantine times, albeit in a somewhat different form. In dealing with the Dome of the Rock, Creswell writes:

The most imposing example of a wooden dome, before Islam, must have been the dome of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites at Qal'at Sim'an... built after... 459 but before 560, and most probably before 500. The church consists of four great basilicas radiating from a central octagon, 27 m. (88½ ft) in diameter... Krencker, in 1933, carefully examined the fallen masonry on the floor of the octagon, block by block, and found voussoirs of which the radius was 2.20 m. (7¼ ft), belonging to the coupled windows which pierced the drum of the octagon. He... found... the remains of four squinches (of which there must have been eight to convert the octagon into a figure of sixteen sides), and several blocks of the moulded cornice which formed the summit of the octagon. Cut in the latter were transverse grooves... made to receive the transverse wooden wall-plates of a wooden dome, exactly as in the Dome of the Rock... where, however, they [were smaller], which is quite natural, for they belonged to [a smaller dome]. In any case, we are absolutely safe in saying that, whether the dome was actually erected or not, the architect designed the church to have a wooden dome, and arranged to set it on the drum by the very same method employed two hundred years later at Jerusalem.
TWO GREAT SYRIAN UMAYYAD MOSQUES

This description of the building is somewhat deceiving, for it must be regarded as a basilica divided in the middle by a large octagon, which was flanked by the two wings of a transept. In other words, it was simply a basilica with a transept and a dome at the center, basically, though not exactly, as in Jerusalem or Damascus. But the concept, in principle, is sufficiently close to enable us to consider a specific Byzantine Syrian type of building as the inspirational source. From the front, the exterior view was probably not so different from that of our two early mosques as viewed from the sahn, although the nave does jut forward much more prominently than in the mosques (fig. 9).

CONCLUSIONS

The picture outlined above reveals a new facet of the widespread, highly programatic efforts on the part of 'Abd al-Malik and his son al-Walid I to establish a broad, specifically Umayyad sphere of culture. Though eclectic in nature, Umayyad architecture in Syria as represented in Jerusalem and Damascus, and in other, later examples was highly imaginative, employing bold, innovative concepts, and it is readily distinguishable, both in its general lines and in its specific motifs. Thus, Creswell’s judgment that “the Dome of the Rock is a thoroughly Syrian building” is fully vindicated, for it can be seen merely as the first in a line of splendid Umayyad monuments, followed by the shortlived sec-
ond al-Aqsa Mosque, the Great Mosque of Damascus, the mosque at Muhammad’s house in Medina, and so on. A major feature of Umayyad architecture—and a not uncommon one in architecture throughout the ages—can be termed the “copycat syndrome”: Mu’awiya saw the square towers at the corners of the temenos where he prayed in Damascus and copied the concept for the minarets of the mosque of ‘Amr in Fustat; and al-Walid, when rebuilding the mosque in Medina, applied the Mesopotamian-type mosque plan manifest at Kufa or Basra, preferring it over the Syrian plan for its suitability to the desert climate of Arabia (where gabled architecture would be out of place). This same phenomenon is later exemplified in the Diyarbekr Mosque, built by Malik Shah in the eleventh century, which closely resembles the Damascus mosque—not at all surprising, for Malik Shah had carried out major repairs in Damascus, including the rebuilding of the dome. And, of course, in building the Dome of the Rock, according to Muqaddasi’s uncle it was ‘Abd al-Malik’s expressed desire to copy and exceed the Holy Sepulchre. Eutychius of Alexandria notes that al-Walid, too, sought to copy features of Christian churches.

Without underestimating the influence of the early mosques in Syria that had been converted from basilical churches (which may in fact have facilitated acceptance of the general architectural scheme), it must be emphasized that the basic influence in both al-Aqsa and Damascus, as far as the ground plan is concerned, is from an entirely different source. Much points to the non-Syrian origin of the plan, as Creswell says, but he and others have either relied on the influence of the converted churches, or have sought a geographical context outside Syria (e.g., the Thiersch theory). But it is in fact a different chronological context that must be sought. Such a time lapse is provided precisely by the fact that the builders of the first Aqsa Mosque followed the plan of the ruins found in situ on the Temple Mount, a plan at the time already quite obsolete, for it was the work of Herodian (i.e., Greek) architects more than five and a half centuries earlier, and for a building with quite a different function.

The influence of the plan of the Great Mosque of Damascus has long been considered primary in the early history of mosque architecture; this prominence should now be shifted to the Umayyad al-Aqsa Mosque,
of which few if any traces survive. The Great Mosque of Damascus was nonetheless most significant as an element in the entire early Umayyad building program, a major transmitter of the Umayyad tradition. In any case, these two major Syrian mosques, in Jerusalem and Damascus, need to be regarded as a pair: the first is essentially invisible without the second; the second is essentially incomprehensible without the first.

Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Jerusalem, Israel

NOTES


1. Myriam Rosen-Ayalon: The Early Islamic Monuments of al-Haram al-Sharif: An Iconographic Study, Qedem 28 (Jerusalem, 1989), chap. 1, "Al-Masjid al-Aqsa—Al-Aqsa Mosque," pp. 4-7; and bibliography. The quotation from Arculf at the head of this article is taken from p. 4. Ironically, on p. 5 we read, "We cannot delve here into the actual aspect, plan or dimensions of that very early Muslim house of prayer; indeed, in the absence of any archaeological data, such an exercise would be futile." The present paper is, of course, precisely such an exercise, but we hope, not futile.

2. Allowing 1.5 sq.m. per worshiper (i.e., the minimum needed for a person kneeling and bowing in the Muslim manner), the actual open floor space would have to have been at least 4,500 sq.m. To this we must add ca. 50 sq.m. for some 50 columns, 100 sq.m. for the southern wall and its abutting columns, 50 sq.m. for the western and eastern walls and their abutting columns, and an area of ca. 120 sq.m. for the restricted area including the minbar, etc., yielding a theoretical total of ca. 4,820 sq.m. for the entire structure.

3. R. Grafman, "Herod's Foot and Robinson's Arch," Israel Exploration Journal 20 (1970): 60-66, esp. p. 66 and fig. 5. It is interesting that K.A.C. Creswell, even in his Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture (Harmondsworth, 1958), p. 10, saw fit to give a relatively full description of this structure, though he did not make any use of it, or seek to relate it to any later Muslim building activity on the site.

4. The open, northern wall of early mosques stems from the portico of Muhammad's house in Medina; see Creswell, Short Account, p. 3.

5. It had long been supposed that the Byzantine Nea Church was built on the site of al-Aqsa Mosque; recent archaeological investigations, however, have revealed remains of that church on the hill opposite, to the west; see Rosen-Ayalon, al-Haram, p. 4 and n. 1, noting the late Professor Nahman Avigad's interesting finds on the Western Hill.


7. See Grafman, Herod's Foot, p. 61.

8. R. W. Hamilton: The Structural History of the Aqsa Mosque: A Record of Archaeological Gleanings from the Repairs of 1938-1942 (Jerusalem, 1949), p. iii; henceforth the work will be cited in this section by parenthetical page numbers in the text. In Creswell, Short Account, 2nd ed., pp. 79-82, we find an "Alternative History of the Aqsa Mosque," in which Hamilton has revised his dating of the first three phases which he detected during his investigations in the building in 1939-40. Unfortunately, Hamilton's basic error was, and still is, archaeological—not chronological. His new chronological conclusions—undoubtedly influenced by H. Stern's article in Ars Orientalis 5 (1965)—shift even further in the wrong direction. Seeking to bolster his "alternative history," Hamilton is forced to degrade and modify the early Arabic sources in order to make them fit his new theories. Methodologically, of course, this is very difficult to accept. Hence, his new chronology, like the old one, can safely be rejected a priori, since nothing in his basic archaeological thinking has changed.

9. Creswell, Short Account, 1st ed., was in full accord with Hamilton's interpretation; see p. 213 and passim.

10. This is only because Hamilton believed this to be the earliest Muslim structure on the site, and continued to think so in recent years: Robert Hamilton: "Once Again the Aqsa," in Bayt al-Maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem, pt. 1, ed. Julian Raby and J. Johns, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9 (Oxford, 1992): 141-44; and see above, n. 8.

11. Hamilton, Structural History (with Creswell, Short Account, p. 212, in to) did not consider the nave of his Aqsa I to have been wider than the other aisles. There does, of course, remain his "enigmatic" discovery of the square slab of limestone marked "c" in Hamilton’s Fig. 31 on p. 54, and another "slab or plinth of similar appearance 4.3 m. farther north of "c" ("d" on Fig. 31)," in trenches "A" and "B," respectively. It is interesting that "c" is described as having "projected 8 cm. above the surface of a narrow marble flag adjoining it"; this is quite different from the first such slab mentioned by Hamilton (p. 54), "which was sunk into the ground so that its top surface came about flush with that of the pavement," as well as that found by the contractors, 5 m. to the south, whose "top surface projected about 3 cm. above the surface of the pavement bedding"—that is, not above the pavement itself, and thus it, too, seems originally to have been flush. The character of these two slabs, "c" and "d" in Hamilton’s fig. 51, might differ from most of the other slabs, which had blocks or plinths placed above them. Interpretation of these two features, however, is difficult, lying as they do just off the north-south axis of the nave.

12. This reconstructed plan is developed from Hamilton, Structural History, fig. 30, and p. 57.
13. This, too, is entirely contrary to the facts. Again, Creswell supports Hamilton's conclusions concerning Aqsa I; see Creswell, Short Account, e.g., pp. 207ff. (on p. 210, Creswell, like Hamilton, uses such phrases as "the wall piers . . . are approximately on the axis . . . required by my theory"), and his fig. 41 on p. 211, as well as in his famous drawing reconstructing al-Mahdi's building, in the first edition of his monumental work, Early Muslim Architecture.

14. His self-delusion was summed up quite succinctly: "Otherwise the discoveries harmonize well enough with the recorded history of the mosque and confirm the main conclusions reached by Creswell" (Hamilton, Structural History, p. 73).

15. See Creswell, Short Account, p. 210, where, again, he fully follows Hamilton's ascriptions; but note his p. 205, where he ascribes this phase, in great part, to al-Dhahir.

16. This is the basic theme of Rosen-Ayalon, al-Haram.


18. See, e.g., Creswell, Short Account, pp. 180-81, and pp. 9 and 13, for the location of the palace immediately to the south of the mosque.

19. See Rosen-Ayalon, al-Haram, pp. 8-11; and note at Khirbat al-Mafjar: R.W. Hamilton: Khirbat al-Mafjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley (Oxford, 1959), passim, and, e.g., p. 21 ("imposts 55 cm wide"); K.A.C. Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture. Umayyads AD 622-750, 1/1-11, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1969), p. 20, speaks of "the cubit of 55.5 cm, which was used in monuments of the fourth and fifth centuries"; the 56-cm cubit seems to be more accurate for the Umayyad period, based on surviving monuments.

20. Rosen-Ayalon, al-Haram, pp. 28-29; where the central point of the earlier structure is also noted.


22. Ibid., chapter 7.

23. See Creswell, Short Account, pp. 6, 43-44.

24. See Creswell, Short Account, passim; this lack of sensitivity to Arabic usage (e.g., Rosen-Ayalon, al-Haram, p. 5) also misled many scholars as to the matter of half the "church" at Damascus being taken over by the Muslims. The Muslim conquerors of Damascus surely regarded the former temenos as "the church", and thus in taking over half they obviously took over half the entire complex, as realized, finally, by Creswell, Short Account, pp. 65-66 and fig. 10.

25. See Creswell, Short Account, p. 46; fig. 8 on p. 47; and p. 5. and Creswell, EMA, 2nd ed., 1, figs. 81-82. Ibn Shakir's dating its niche form to the time of al-Walid is an obvious reference to the latter's entire building-project there. Do we know anything of the form of the mihrab at Medina, built at about this same time? See Creswell, Short Account, p. 41, where possible Copt influence is noted. It is interesting that Creswell, Short Account, p. 71, should again see a need to refer to possible parallel phenomena in Damascus and Jerusalem: "If it be objected that Arculf's words [on Damascus] implies [sic] constructional work, I would suggest that the part of the colonnade used was perhaps enclosed by walls of mud brick, as desiring of the verdict 'vili fabricati sunt opere,' as was the first Aqsa mosque." (Creswell's third and fourth mihrabs in the Damascus mosque are later or even modern; see Creswell, Short Account, p. 53.)


28. The major exception to this are the various "revival" trends in architecture, such as the Neoclassic and Neogothic in relatively recent times, where styles are commonly misapplied in the most blatant manner; Fletcher Banister was still able to regard them in a favorable light (A History of Architecture, 11th ed. [London, 1943], p. 852: "The wonderful nineteenth century surpassed all its predecessors . . . [the] various revival which are specially conspicuous in modern architecture in England, and indicate that love of freedom and of liberty of choice which has always characterized the English race." For Creswell's comparison with the mosque in Constantinople, see Creswell, Short Account, pp. 73-74 and pl. 29c.

29. Creswell's text is contradictory. In Short Account, p. 78, he states: "First of all I believe that he [Walid] chose a sanctuary three aisles deep because the Muslims of Syria, in converting churches into mosques, had thereby become familiar with a sanctuary of that type. But what of the transept and the façade?" On p. 68, he notes, concerning the plan of "three aisles of equal height and almost exactly equal
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width": "Here again are two features unknown in Syria, where the central aisle is always very much wider than the side aisles, in fact generally double their width and greater in height also. Evidently we must admit that al-Walid pulled down the old [i.e., Roman-Byzantine] arcades, ... and rebuilt them on a new alignment. There remains the transept. As the position of the four middle piers is governed by the alignment of the arcades just discussed, it follows that their attribution stands or falls by the same argument." It is as if we should suppose that the earlier southern arcade had two (presumably parallel) arcades. But not even Creswell has claimed this.


The widths of the three aisles may already have been adjusted in this second Aqsa structure to make them uniform, but this is very doubtful. Ibn al-Fakhri (903), writing of al-Mahdi's building, noted: "In the Mosque (Al Aksa) there are three Maksurahs for the women, the length of each Maksurah being 80 ells, and its breadth 50 (I.R., iii. 367)" (quoted from G. Le Strange: *Palestine under the Moslems* [London 1890; rpt., Beirut 1965], p. 100). Le Strange noted that this could hardly have been within the mosque itself, and that these areas "may have stood in the outer court." On p. 191, Le Strange notes: "The only colonnade mentioned by Nasir [i Khusrau], of which no mention is found in Muqaddasi, is that of 'forty-two arches' running along the South Wall, west of the Aksa, from the western wall of the Mosque to the south-west angle of the Haram Area. This colonnade occupied the ground afterwards covered by the Armoury of the Templars." Now, this would be the "White (or Women's) Mosque", the very building mentioned by Grafman (*Herod's Foot*) as partly corresponding in the position of its piers with the restored plan of this segment of the Herodian stoa. The colonnade mentioned by Ibn al-Fakhri and the arches noted by Nasir-i Khusrau surely refer to this same feature, and taking into account several modifications still quite evident in the extant building, it is readily apparent (fig. 5) that the Women's Mosque of al-Mahdi's Aqsa must simply have been the western extension of the plan of the first mosque on the site, the one mentioned by Arculf. If traces of this plan survived into al-Mahdi's day (and even later), then surely it was still sustained in the structure built by 'Abd al-Malik/ al-Walid, prior to the major change in proportions initiated by al-Mahdi. Thus, the uniform widths of the arcades in the Great Mosque of Damascus must have been an innovation introduced there, and not in Jerusalem.

32. Axiality is a basic element of Umayyad architecture, as can clearly be seen, inter alia, in the Dar al-Imara at Kufa (Creswell, *Short Account*, p. 58), at Ukhardar, and in the desert hunting palaces.

33. For the bridge in Jerusalem, see above, n. 18. The doorway in Damascus is somewhat more problematic, for its date is not clearly established. Creswell, *Short Account*, p. 58, at Ukhardar, and in the desert hunting palaces.

34. "Mosques with a dome in front of the mihrab [sic] ... the only examples we have during the period covered by this work are the Great Mosque at Damascus, 705-15; the Aqsa Mosque of 780; the Great Mosque of Susa, 850 ... [and several other later examples]"; Creswell, *Short Account*, in his "Conclusions to Part Two," p. 518.

35. Creswell, *Short Account*, fig. 41; for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, see n. 51, below; for Qala'at Sim'an, see n. 39, below.


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43. How interesting it is that Creswell, *Short Account*, p. 80, did not include the feature of the Damascus dome, wooden or otherwise, among the primary "specific features which had a lasting influence" on subsequent mosque architecture. Was this an oversight, or was he simply perplexed? In comparing the façade of the Great Mosque to the palace in Constantinople, he also entirely ignores the dome (see n. 28, above).