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JERUSALEM'S
SACRED
ESPLANADE



1917 TO THE PRESENT: AL-HARAM AL-SHARIF / TEMPLE MOUNT (HAR HA-BAYIT) AND THE WESTERN WALL

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Introduction

The demise of the Ottoman Empire, based as it was on lethargic inaction, and the arrival on the scene in Palestine of a dynamic western power in the form of the British Mandate, were to have major consequences upon the relationship between the new Christian authorities and the Muslim guardians of the Haram al-Sharif. Furthermore, the rise of Zionism and the consequential influx of an ideologically vibrant Jewish community, whose clear aim was the formation of a renewed Jewish homeland, was a source of conflict between this community and the indigenous Arab population not only concerning the future of the country as a whole, but also in relation to the status of the holy sites within that future. The short period of Jordanian rule (1948–67), and following that Israeli control from 1967 onward, have left the issues of rights, ownership, control, maintenance, conservation, inspection, and law open and subjects of vigorous debate, that due to diametrically opposed interests are not likely to be resolved in the near future.

This conflict between the Jewish Zionist entity (and since 1948—the State of Israel), on the one hand, and the Palestinian Muslims and the Muslim world at large, on the other, has focused inter alia on the Sacred Esplanade—called by Muslims the Haram al-Sharif and by Jews the Temple Mount (*Har ha-Bayit*). Increasing political importance boosted the Sacred Esplanade's significance both as a powerful religious and a national symbol for both parties to the conflict. The fact that the Esplanade is sacred to Jews and Muslims alike has been an ongoing source of tension, particularly since Israel assumed control of East Jerusalem in 1967. Archaeology, as a state tool, as a field of enquiry that challenges basic assumptions of faith, and as a professional discipline that makes demands of those maintaining the Esplanade, has always been part and parcel of that tension. As shall be seen, the perception of the Esplanade for both sides and the way in which that

122 Above: Muslims praying at the Haram al-Sharif

123 Below: Jews praying at the Western Wall

Priests with heads covered with prayer shawls are blessing the worshipers

perception is presented often uses, exploits, and misrepresents archaeological scholarship and method.

With the British conquest of southern Palestine in late 1917 and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine came under non-Muslim rule after some 1,300 years of Islamic rule interrupted only by the Crusader interlude of the twelfth century. The struggle of the Arabs of Palestine (later identified as Palestinians) against both Zionism and the British Mandate in Palestine and the later ongoing conflict between the Palestinians and Israel significantly affected both the ideology and the reality of the Sacred Esplanade of Jerusalem. Since the 1920s the Haram al-Sharif / Temple Mount and the Western Wall have become religio-nationalist symbols for both Jews and Palestinian Muslims. The 1948 and 1967 wars, as well as the first and the second Palestinian uprisings (*Intifadas*), are landmarks in the history of the Esplanade.

The Haram al-Sharif / Temple Mount, the Islamic Waqf, and Archaeological Research

Modern scholarly interest in the Haram al-Sharif / Temple Mount began in the nineteenth century as the result of a series of motives, not all of them scholarly. These included religious—especially Christian—belief, romantic adventurism, imperial intrigue of the major western powers, and often also genuine scientific enquiry. Still, the results of often illicit sorties into the precincts of the site, that was closed to non-Muslims till the end of the Crimean War, form the basis for modern understanding of the site. Foremost of these early visitors were Frederick Catherwood (who produced a cartographic impression of the Haram), Titus Tobler, Melchior de Vogüé, James Turner Barclay, and others. The most important survey of this period, and indeed one of the most significant conducted ever, was the well-known works of Charles Wilson (1865) and Charles Warren (1884).¹ The knowledge they accumulated, both of standing and subterranean structures, is still the basis for all modern research of the Haram al-Sharif.

During the British Mandate period, two comprehensive studies were carried out, focusing on the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque. In 1924 Ernest T. Richmond published the results of an extensive survey of the Dome of the Rock, carried out in 1918,² and in 1938–42 Robert W. Hamilton, the British Mandate's Director of Antiquities, documented the Aqsa Mosque and conducted limited excavations in the building while wide-ranging repairs were underway.³ This scholarship was augmented by the descriptions and study of textual material by the Dominican fathers Louis-Hugues Vincent and Félix-Marie Abel (1914–26) on Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.⁴ In the 1920s an expert on Arabic inscriptions, Max van Berchem, documented and published dozens of ancient inscriptions discovered on the Temple Mount and in the surrounding buildings.⁵

Later Keppel A.C. Creswell compiled a detailed study of the structures of the Temple Mount, including many drawings and photographs, some of which were published in his monumental book.⁶ In 1967 Kathleen Kenyon carried out a small excavation south of the Aqsa Mosque, uncovering a section of the building that would later be identified as one of the Umayyad palaces.⁷ After the Six Day War, Israeli scholars made their contribution to the documentation of the buildings on the Temple Mount. Myriam Rosen-Ayalon published a comprehensive study of structures from the Early Muslim period⁸ and other researchers dealt with the reconstruction of the form of the Temple Mount in the Second Temple period, based on the written sources and the physical remains collated by their predecessors.⁹ Large scale excavations by Benjamin Mazar and Meir Ben-Dov in the area south of the Temple Mount exposed important remains of the Herodian structures around the Temple Mount and uncovered huge Umayyad buildings that transformed archaeological understanding of that period.¹⁰ The study of the Umayyad rebuilding and construction of the Haram al-Sharif was intensively highlighted by Andreas Kaplony's monumental study of all known data for that period.¹¹

During the past few decades extensive surveys of the Crusader, Mamluk, and Ottoman construction on the Temple Mount had been conducted as a joint effort of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem and the Archaeological Department of the Islamic Waqf.¹² The contribution of these studies to our knowledge of the Temple Mount, its structure, history, and development, has been considerable. Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that due to the religious importance and sensitivities of the site, no proper scientific archaeological excavation has ever been conducted, save for limited work during the Aqsa Mosque repairs in the Mandatory period.

The attitude of the Waqf authorities to archaeological research and archaeologists is demonstrated by both their formal and informal relations with government authorities and the official archaeological authorities, from the Mandatory period till the present.¹³ In general, the Waqf exhibited a consistent reservation to archaeological research and architectural documentation by external organisations. This reservation escalated throughout the periods of the British Mandate, Jordanian rule, and into that of Israeli control. Parts of the Muslim establishment considered the study of the Temple Mount by western scholars not as academic inquiry into the historical development of the site and its archaeological remains, but rather as an attempt to undermine the central status of the Islamic monuments of the Haram al-Sharif / Temple Mount—the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque. On the other hand, side by side with its suspicion of foreign scholars, the Waqf was always prepared to cooperate with professional archaeological and conservation organisations concerning themselves with the Islamic monuments of the site, an approach that changed with the involvement of the Israeli Islamic Movement in the development of the site from 1996.

The British Mandate Period

In the wake of World War I and the British conquest of Palestine, the new rulers left the Muslim administration of the Haram al-Sharif in place, regarding the site as possessing an informal immunity.¹⁴ The Supreme Muslim Council (SMC), established with the blessing of the Mandatory government, enjoyed wide-ranging autonomy over all Muslim religious matters. It administered the Haram al-Sharif, and situated both the Shari'a (Muslim law) Court and its own offices on the site.¹⁵ For the most part, the British police avoided entering the Temple Mount. The position of the SMC was further reaffirmed in July 1922 by articles 9 and 13 of the League of Nations' provision for a Mandate in Palestine:

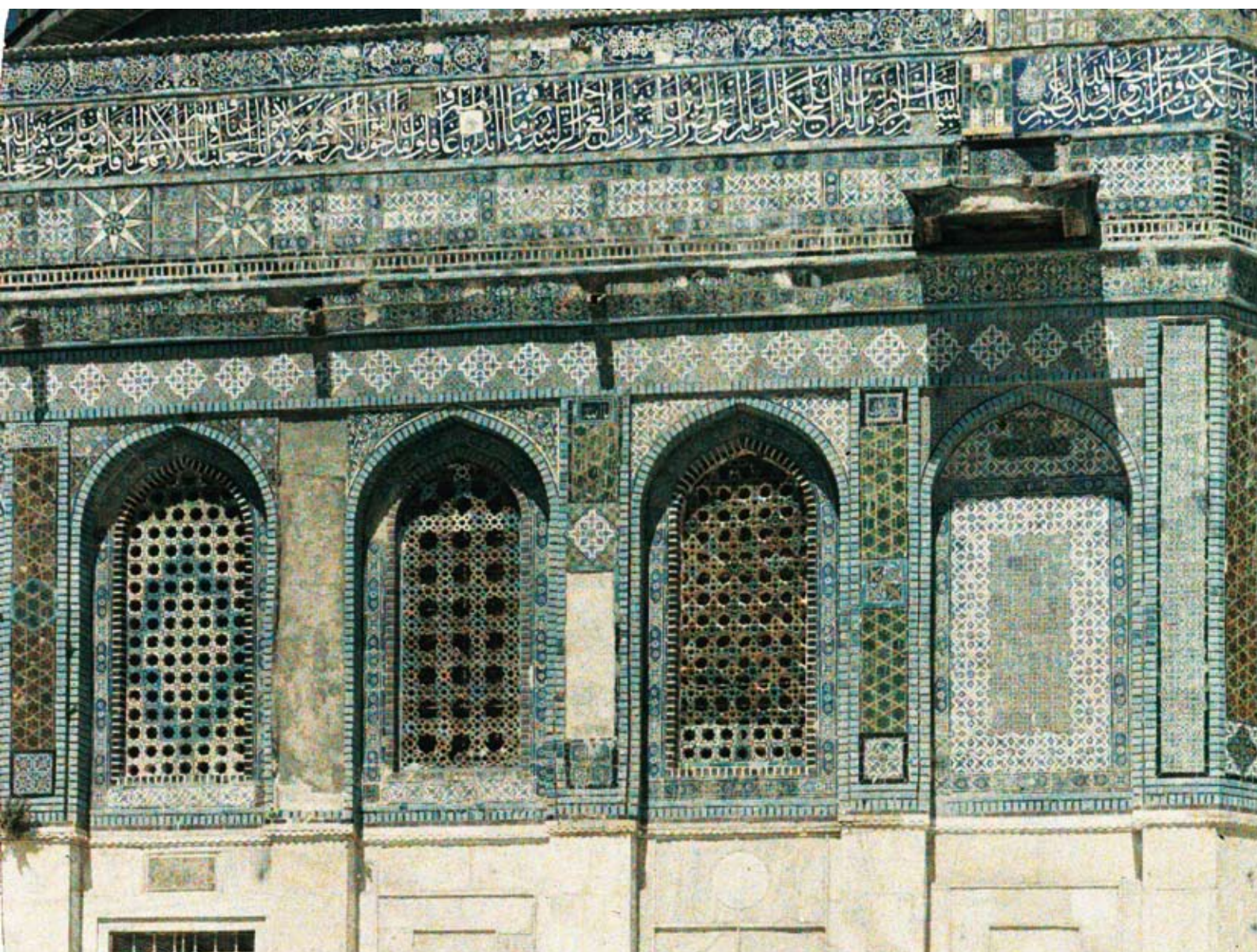
... nothing in this mandate shall be construed as conferring upon the Mandatory authority to interfere with the fabric or the management of purely Moslem sacred shrines, the immunities of which are guaranteed.

This immunity was later reinforced by the provisos of the Palestine (Holy Places) Order in Council 1924 which endorsed the Status Quo arrangement in the Holy Sites adopted by the Great Powers in the Treaty of Paris of 1856.¹⁶

Shortly after the British occupation of Jerusalem in December 1917 it became clear that the historic monuments on the Temple Mount were in a very poor state of preservation, owing to continual neglect during the last phase of Ottoman rule [fig. 124]. In a revealing letter dated 4 December 1918 the Grand Mufti, Muhammad Kamil al-Husayni, eloquently described the atrocious state of the monuments of the Haram al-Sharif in an appeal to fellow Muslims:

...This sacred Mosque, to which Allah translated His Prophet one night from the Mosque in Mecca ... is neglected and for several decades was overlooked, until decay has set in its frame, and its ornamentation has faded, and the whole edifice stands in peril of disruption, which may God avert. ... Now, when the men of the Occupying Power, and in particular H.E. Colonel Storrs, Governor of the Holy City, saw the ruined state in which stood the Mosque ... he expressed his deep regret ... and applied for an able engineer of those who have specialized in the repairs of ancient places of worship. ... His appeal met with prompt response, for very soon the British Government sent ... the most celebrated engineer ... Major Richmond. ... Having examined everything bit by bit, ... he drew up a report fully explaining what was required for the restoration and preservation of this noble edifice¹⁷

Ernest Tatham Richmond, who would later be appointed director of the Department of Antiquities, was an architect who had worked previously on the preservation of Islamic



124 A partial view of the Dome of the Rock, ca. 1921, showing the damage to its mosaics

This early color photograph is preserved in the collection of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem

monuments in Cairo. Upon the invitation of Ronald Storrs he conducted a detailed architectural survey of the Dome of the Rock published in a magnificent volume that provided the first modern overview of the site, including analysis of previous attempts to maintain the building.¹⁸ The attitude to preservation presented by Richmond was both modern and extremely professional, with clear understanding of the fact that an edifice like the Dome of the Rock is a living structure, changing with time in order to continue its existence, for, as he states: “Had there been no change the building would have disappeared.”¹⁹

The Dome of the Rock, especially the tiles that covered the building, required immediate attention, but it wasn't till 1921 that the administrative structure of the SMC and the Waqf (the official administration of Islamic endowments, an Ottoman apparatus which has continued to operate ever since) adapted itself to provide the framework for the task. The restoration of the Dome of the Rock continued for much of the twentieth century but started with a small grant from the Pro-Jerusalem Society, an intercommunity society formed by the British Military authorities for the "preservation and advancement of the interests of Jerusalem." The grant provided for the initial preservation of tiles by the Armenian ceramicist David Ohanessian.²⁰

In that same year the SMC established a Technical Department, under the Turkish architect Kamal al-Din Bey, with the aim of maintaining the monuments of the Temple Mount. One of the first actions undertaken by this department was the preparation of a plan to treat the ceramic tiles adorning the Dome of the Rock. In time, the Technical Department—which still exists—became an organ that documented and studied the monuments in the field of conservation, often in cooperation with recognised international institutions. Thus, between 1924–28 the Supreme Muslim Council (SMC), in cooperation with the British Mandatory government, undertook a project for the restoration of the Haram al-Sharif. Kamal al-Din planned the renovation and supervised its implementation. A committee of six experts, including two Egyptians and three British, approved the plan. The SMC dispatched six delegations to Muslim countries (Egypt, the Hijaz, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iran, and India), two of them headed by the Grand Mufti, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, to raise the money needed for the restoration.²¹ The delegations also sought to arouse awareness in the Muslim world to the struggle for Palestine as an Islamic territory, with the Haram at its center. When restoration began, Kamal al-Din engaged 104 foremen and 75 workers. Several crafts such as iron, wood, and wickerwork skills, were locally promoted, and mosaic tiles were obtained from Kütahya in Turkey.

The renovations included not only the two shrines but also al-Madrassa al-Manjakiyya, which housed the SMC and Waqf offices, al-Madrassa al-Tankiziyya, which housed the Shari'a Court (known as al-Mahkama—court building), and the complex of four *madrasas* on the western side, al-Jawliyya, al-Wajihyya, al-Subaybiyya, and al-Muhaddathiyya. The last named, which had been used by the Ottomans as barracks, was renovated and placed at the disposal of the Rawdat al-Ma'arif College.²² Two other buildings on the same side were renovated—al-Khanqah al-Dawadariyya and al-Madrassa al-Basitiyya—to serve the Islamic College. The Qubbah al-Nahwiyya (Dome of Grammar), a small building close to the Dome of the Rock, was restored and turned into an Islamic library (today serving as the Shari'a Court of Appeals). An Islamic Museum was established at the Maghribi Mosque on the southwest side of the Haram. Other small repairs were also undertaken to the gates, fountains, water reservoirs, and windows.²³ Already in 1925, a *Brief Guide to*

the *Haram al-Sharif* was published in English by the SMC and reprinted several times. The SMC aimed to elevate the importance of the Haram al-Sharif, and of Jerusalem in general, in the minds of Muslims everywhere.

From the archival material of the Mandatory Department of Antiquities we learn of a wide range of professional contacts that developed between SMC officials and those of the Department.²⁴ Immediately after the British had set up their military government in Jerusalem, the first formal contacts were made between the authorities and the SMC. Inspectors working for the Department of Antiquities had free access to almost every place on the Haram / Temple Mount and were allowed to record, measure, and photograph its major monuments. Through the years of Mandatory rule, documentation and surveys continued on the Temple Mount for preservation purposes, including that of the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque. These professional ties were maintained by the directors of the Department of Antiquities, who were personally active in the documentation work.²⁵

However, this system of chiefly professional contacts was not backed up by any legal authority of the Mandatory Government of Palestine, for according to law the Temple Mount was a recognised Holy Place and therefore the jurisdiction of the civil authorities, including those of the Department of Antiquities, was subject to certain restrictions.²⁶ Despite this, throughout the years of British rule good professional relations were maintained between the authorities and the Muslim religious authority, and the Waqf was generally willing to cooperate in professional matters with the Department of Antiquities or with other government agencies, such as the Public Works Department, or with government officials, scholars, and the High Commissioner himself. Department of Antiquities inspectors routinely visited the Temple Mount together with SMC officials to comprehensively document both the monuments and everyday activities. The visiting inspectors were often accompanied by professional teams from the Department of Antiquities and from other government agencies.²⁷

Good professional contacts between the Muslim religious establishment and the official archaeological and architectural organs of the Mandatory government continued till the end of British rule in Palestine. Surveys and documentation of the Temple Mount were conducted throughout the 1940s as a joint effort of the Department of Antiquities, the Public Works Department, and the SMC.

On 11 July 1927 an earthquake, whose epicenter was in the Jordan Valley, rocked Jerusalem. Within a year the SMC was ready to celebrate completion of the renovations in the Haram. The ceremony took place on 29 August 1928, to coincide with the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (*al-mawlid al-nabawi*). This occurred one month before the Jewish Day of Atonement and inflamed the struggle over the rights at the adjacent Western Wall. Coinciding with the event the SMC decided to introduce, for the first time in the history of the Sacred Esplanade, entrance fees for non-Muslim visitors.



125 An aerial view of the Haram from the southeast, ca. 1930

In a narrow area, only 3.5 metres wide in the Magharibah (Hebrew: Mughrabim) Quarter of the Old City, a remaining section of the Herodian temenos wall of the Temple Mount was still visible. Jewish prayer had, since the sixteenth century, been concentrated in the small space in front of the Western Wall (also known as the Wall of Lamentations or Wailing Wall) in which a tense *de facto* status quo had developed allowing Jews limited access to the site for prayer—backed by payment to the authorities (mainly the administrator of the Abu Midyan Magharibah Waqf), while strictly restricting Jewish requests to renovate the site.²⁸ Since the increase of Jewish immigration to Palestine in the 1880s there was a gradual growth in the number of Jews who came to pray and visit at the Western Wall and hence it developed into a collective symbol of the Jewish community.

Sensing the importance of the site to the Jews, the Arab owners consistently rebuffed Jewish attempts to purchase the area for prayer, though in essence the practice had developed by the end of Ottoman rule of allowing unrestricted Jewish access to the holy site.

The Muslims considered the Western Wall as part of the retaining wall of the Haram al-Sharif, and as such an integral part of that monument. An old Muslim tradition tells of a place at “the entrance of al-Aqsa” where the prophet Muhammad tethered his wondrous beast of burden, al-Buraq, following the nocturnal flight (*al-mi'raj*) from Mecca.²⁹ During the 1920s Muslims pointed to the Western Wall as this particular place. Furthermore, the tiny plaza fronting the Western Wall constituted part of the Abu Midyan al-Ghawth Waqf, a charitable institution of a North African who endowed the land and houses in 1320 CE in favour of North African Muslim immigrants to Jerusalem, the endowments being documented fully in the Shari'a Court records.

Zionist efforts to acquire ownership of the Wall were renewed immediately after the British occupation of Palestine. Speaking to members of the Zionist Commission in March 1918 while underway to Palestine, Chaim Weizmann maintained that the Western Wall is one of the Jewish holy places “which we must have,” adding that the Commission will attempt to immediately obtain permission from the British authorities in Palestine to clean up the place and deploy a Jewish guard there. On 1 May 1918 he sent a letter to William Ormsby-Gore—the liaison officer between the Commission and the British military administration in Palestine—in which he requested permission to explore the possibility of transferring the site to Jewish control. The British governor of Jerusalem, Ronald Storrs, attempted to help Weizmann, but this proved unsuccessful.³⁰ Following a protest by dignitaries of Jerusalem's Muslim community against any infringement of the pre-existing status quo, and due to the delicate intercommunal relations between Jews and Muslims in Palestine, the Zionist officials were requested by the new British administration to cease their efforts in this matter.³¹ During this early period of the Mandate the condition of the Wall also became a subject for concern. In 1920 the SMC began repairs of the upper courses of the Western Wall, leading this time to protests by prominent Jews and a temporary suspension of the work. A decision was then taken to place the maintenance of the small upper stone courses under the authority of the SMC, while the lower Herodian and Umayyad masonry were to be preserved by the Department of Antiquities, a decision protested by the Mufti of Jerusalem. This pattern of division of responsibility would repeat itself in later years.

Considering the situation that had developed, Jerusalem District Commissioner Ronald Storrs stated in a memorandum of 1925 that:

... though it is sometimes asserted by Moslems that they could legally erect a wall debarring public approach [to the Western Wall], no Mandatory Government could countenance so flagrant an infringement of the Status Quo. On the other

hand the Jewish right is no more than a right of way and of station, and involves no title, expressed or implied, of ownership, either of the surface of the Wall or of the pavement in front of it.³²

In this atmosphere of jockeying for an advantageous position, with neither side being really prepared to accept the compromises presented by the new British arbitrators, it was only a question of time before the next conflict would arise. This emerged around the right to bring seating to the site for prayer and placing a cloth partition to separate the genders in accordance with Jewish religious practice. Following Muslim objections, the British adopted the previous ruling of the Ottoman Government preventing the placing of any installation, even temporary, on the pavement before the Wall to prevent any challenge to established rights, until agreement could be reached between the communities on the matter. With time Jewish challenges of this ruling, Muslim protest, and British enforcement became one of the pretexts for an attack by a Muslim crowd upon Jewish worshippers at the Wall in August 1929. The unrest that followed led to widespread rioting in Jerusalem, during which more than 130 Jews were massacred in Hebron, Safed, and elsewhere, centered round the claim that Jewish prayer at the Western Wall endangered the sanctity of the Haram al-Sharif.

A Commission of Inquiry was appointed by the British government in May 1930 to investigate what became known as “the Western Wall incidents” and the conflicting Jewish and Muslim claims regarding the Wall. This Commission submitted its report in December of the same year and its recommendations formed the basis for an ordinance adopted by the Mandatory government—The Palestine (Western or Wailing Wall) Order in Council, 1931. The commission concluded that:

...the established custom should be a proper basis for deciding the existing rights of the Jews at the Wall...

A. To the Moslems belong the sole ownership of, and the sole proprietary right to, the Western Wall, seeing that it forms an integral part of the Haram-esh-Sherif area, which is a Waqf property. To the Moslems there also belongs the ownership of the Pavement in front of the Wall and of the adjacent so-called Moghrabi (Moroccan) Quarter opposite the Wall, inasmuch as the last-mentioned property was made Waqf under Moslem Sharia Law, it being dedicated to charitable purposes.

Such appurtenances of worship and/or such other objects as the Jews may be entitled to place near the Wall either in conformity with the provisions of this present Verdict or by agreement come to between the Parties shall under no circumstances be considered as, or have the effect of, establishing for them any sort of proprietary right to the Wall or to the adjacent Pavement.

On the other hand the Moslems shall be under the obligation not to construct or



126 A British police post at the entrance to the Western Wall, 1933



127 A British checkpoint in the Chain Gate Street of Jerusalem's Old City, 1938

build any edifice or to demolish or repair any building within the Waqf property (Haram area and Moghrabi Quarter) adjacent to the Wall, in such a manner that the said work would encroach on the Pavement or impair the access of the Jews to the Wall or involve any disturbance to, or interference with, the Jews during the times of their devotional visits to the Wall, if it can in any way be avoided. B. The Jews shall have free access to the Western Wall for the purpose of devotions at all times subject to the explicit stipulations...³³

The stipulation stated that the Jews had a proprietary right to pray at the site according to arrangements dating from the Ottoman era,³⁴ but they were not permitted to bring chairs or benches, to build a partition between men and women, or to blow the *shofar*. Thus, the British ruled that the status quo should prevail. Responsibility for maintenance of the Wall was placed upon the British administration in consultation with the SMC and the Rabbinical Council. This ruling would be challenged by Jewish groups and continue to be a source of tension until the end of the British Mandate in Palestine in 1948.

A major Islamic event associated with the Haram during this period was the Islamic Congress, which convened in Jerusalem in 1931 on the initiative of Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the SMC's president. Some of its sessions were conducted at Rawdat al-Ma'arif, adjacent to the Haram. The Congress resolved to establish a university in Jerusalem to be named Al-Aqsa University, but the resolution was never implemented. In 1931 al-Husayni also

opted to turn the western external portico of the Haram into a pantheon for important Muslim figures. Muhammad 'Ali, the leader of the Indian *Khilafat* (Caliphate) movement, and al-Husayn ibn 'Ali, the Hashemite leader of the 1916 Arab revolt, were both buried there in tomb chambers. In 1934, the president of the Arab Executive, Musa Kazim al-Husayni, was interred there, as was his son, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni—a prominent Palestinian hero, commander of irregular forces fighting the Jews in Palestine in 1948. In 2001, 'Abd al-Qadir's son, Faysal al-Husayni—a Palestinian Authority cabinet member—was buried in the same site.

After the outbreak of the Arab Revolt in 1936, Hajj Amin al-Husayni was sought for his involvement in the riots. He took refuge in the Haram al-Sharif, which he knew the British officials would not dare to enter to arrest him, because of the recognized immunity of the site.³⁵ In October 1937, after Hajj Amin had escaped and fled the country, the Mandatory government appointed a three-man committee to oversee the SMC's activities. Finally, in 1938—before the end of the Arab Revolt in 1939—the government established a police post on the Sacred Esplanade (based on an Ottoman precedent) manned by Muslim officers.

On 12 October 1937 a further tremor was felt in the city. While the Dome of the Rock remained relatively unscathed, the Aqsa Mosque, built above ancient vaults on the Umayyad reconstruction of the Herodian extension of the Temple Mount, was severely damaged, including collapse of the roof together with many of the ancient timbers. In view of this the Waqf commissioned a report on the physical state of the monument from Mahmud Ahmad Pasha, Director of the Department for the Preservation of Arab Monuments of Egypt, which was presented in May 1938. Major repair works, involving the heavy dismantling and rebuilding of extensive sections of the Mosque [figs. 128–131], were conducted from 1938 to 1942 under Egyptian supervision and sponsorship.³⁶ In a break from earlier practice the repairs were professionally, if partially, documented by Robert W. Hamilton and included for the first time limited archaeological excavation within the Mosque and documentation of the large twelfth-century Frankish vaulted structures east of the building prior to their removal around 1940. Hamilton sums it up thus: "It [the documentation] ... preserved some record, however imperfect, of an ancient building that has now suffered radical and irreversible transformation."³⁷

In another ground-breaking effort the decorated timbers which had previously adorned the Aqsa Mosque were removed for preservation to the newly founded Palestine (Rockefeller) Museum and are today divided between that institution and the Islamic Museum.

During the 1930s work was conducted to restore the magnificent Umayyad mosaics and further treat the tiles, for which the SMC was encouraged by R.W. Hamilton, the director of the Antiquities Department, to engage a specialist to deal with the surveying and preservation of the tiles.³⁸ After eight years of indecision the SMC turned to Arthur Hubert Stanley Megaw, then director of the Cyprus Department of Antiquities.



128 A defaced carving used as a paving stone in the nave
IAA 26.263



129 Uncovering a column and a capital within a pier
IAA 20.445



130 Placing a new column
IAA 22.011



131 Two rows of new columns set up in the nave, near the temporarily freestanding inner northern façade.
The monolithic marble columns were imported from Italy. IAA 22.124



132 9 April 1948: 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni's funeral procession passing near the Dome of the Rock.
'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, commander of the Palestinian Arab forces in the Jerusalem area, fell in battle with the Haganah at al-Qastal, a village overlooking the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road

The detailed report Megaw presented in 1946, and submitted finally to the Jordanian Department of Antiquities and the Waqf in 1952, showed that even though conservation had been conducted throughout the Mandatory period, the building was still in a very poor condition due to water leakage into the core of the walls. This report would form the basis for the repairs conducted under Jordanian rule.³⁹

Under Jordanian Rule—1948–67

In 1947 the political situation in Palestine deteriorated, leading to the departure of the British Mandatory government and UN resolution 181 for partition of Palestine, including provision for the internationalization of Jerusalem and its environs. The hostilities of 1948 left Jerusalem divided, with the Old City and East Jerusalem under Jordanian control. The Jews, who had been evacuated from their quarter in the Old City, expected that a special committee be formed, as guaranteed under article VIII of the Armistice Agreement of 1949 between the newly established State of Israel and Jordan, allowing access to Jewish holy sites—including the Western Wall—for devotional purposes, an agreement never implemented.

The Hashemite regime's attitude to the Holy City was ambivalent during its period of rule over the West Bank. On the one hand, Jerusalem, with the Haram al-Sharif at its heart, was the political stronghold of the Hashemite dynasty's enemies—the Husaynis



133 20 July 1951: Jordanian officials in the Aqsa Mosque; in front of them, the body of Mustafa Shuqri Ashu, the Palestinian extremist who assassinated King Abdullah I of Jordan while he was attending Friday prayers on the Haram

and their allies. On the other hand, Jordan's association with the Holy City enhanced its status in the Muslim world and provided legitimacy for the Hashemites. As the instigators of the Arab revolt against Ottoman rule, the Hashemites saw themselves as the liberators of Jerusalem in 1948 and the legitimate custodians of Islam's holy sites.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the Jordanians realized that Jerusalem was of considerable tourist and economic value.

Thus, the Jordanians pursued a middle ground for their Jerusalem policy. They developed the city economically and provided political supporters (many of them of Hebronite descent and long-time supporters of King Abdullah I) with important posts in the municipality and in the Haram al-Sharif's Waqf. Simultaneously, the regime developed Amman into the monarchy's most significant political centre at the expense of Jerusalem.⁴¹

King Abdullah I often attended Friday prayers at the Aqsa Mosque and liked to have the Jordanian army's military band play when he entered the Haram al-Sharif.⁴² This offended the sensibilities of the Palestinian religious leadership, who considered a British-style military band a violation of the site's sanctity. The annexation of the West Bank to Jordan in 1950 did not reduce tensions between the Palestinians and the Hashemite regime. King Abdullah was assassinated at the entrance of the Aqsa Mosque on 20 July 1951. According to one version, the assassin's trail led to Hajj Amin al-Husayni [fig. 133].⁴³ For several years after his coronation, the young King Hussein also attended public prayers at the Aqsa Mosque.

To a great extent, the Jordanians continued the Ottoman tradition of the site's



134 A part of the Frankish grille in the Islamic Museum

administration, which had been preserved by the British.⁴⁴ Some of the Muslim officials in Jerusalem who had been involved in the administration of the Haram al-Sharif during the Mandatory period continued in their posts after 1948. They became officials of the Waqf administration, subordinate at first to the prime minister's office and later to an independent ministry—the Religious Endowments (or Waqf) Ministry.

Seemingly, the good professional contacts between the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, under the leadership of Gerald Lankester Harding, and the professional functionaries of the Waqf were initially maintained, but soon a tendency developed pointing to a deterioration of that cooperation. This is indicated by a seemingly small incident in 1953, when documentation was required following the collapse of part of the mosaic covering the internal walls of the Dome of the Rock. In a letter sent by Lankester Harding to the renowned expert on Muslim architecture, K.A.C. Creswell, responding to his request to erect scaffolding so that the mosaics could be examined, Lankester Harding observed: "By the law I have no control over any religious buildings which are actually in use, but I might be able to pull a few strings."⁴⁵ In a curt reply the Waqf refused the request, explaining that it was unwilling for worshippers to be disturbed by photography.

In 1952 the Jordanians launched an appeal, based on Megaw's report, for the renewal of restoration of the Dome of the Rock, augmented in 1954 by the passing of a special law for this purpose by King Hussein.⁴⁶ Money donated by various Arab states led to the initiation of the work in 1956 by a Saudi contractor. Work proceeded slowly because of Jordan's lack of economic resources and the reservations of the Arab nations, whose



135 An aerial view of the Haram al-Sharif, the Western Wall and the destroyed Jewish Quarter to its west, under Jordanian rule

Lt.-Gen. Yitzhak Rabin donated in 1964 this photo, taken by the Israel Air Force, to Professor Joshua Prawer of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The red arrows point at the locations where the two main synagogues of Jerusalem's Old City had been standing until their destruction in 1948. The red arrows at fig. 51 point at the synagogues' domes while still intact. The domes are also visible on fig. 176

donations were small and slow in coming. During the works the foundations were reinforced, the mosaic ceiling decoration repaired, the twelfth-century Frankish grille around the *Sakhra* (the Dome's sacred Rock) dismantled and deposited partially in the Islamic Museum on the Haram [fig. 134], and the heavy lead dome—which had crushed its own supporting structure—was replaced by a gilded aluminium sheeting. Professional architectural and technical supervision was provided by the Egyptian government and the edifice was later carpeted by the Moroccan crown. The work was conducted without involvement or interference on the part of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities.

With the completion of the repairs on the Dome of the Rock in 1964,⁴⁷ Jordan celebrated the event with the attendance of heads of Arab and Muslim countries, and a special commemorative postage stamp was issued showing the Dome of the Rock and a portrait of King Hussein.⁴⁸ Subsequently, the Jordanians were able to attract many more Muslim pilgrims and tourists to the Haram al-Sharif and the Old City. They did not, however, enjoy the fruits of their labours for very long. In June 1967 the Six Day War broke out, and Israel took East Jerusalem.

Post-1967 Policy: Waqf Administration under Israeli Rule

Israel's conquest of East Jerusalem during the Six Day War, including the Old City, the Haram al-Sharif, and other Muslim holy sites, was a traumatic event for Muslims. Islam's third most important site had fallen to the Jews, who regarded the Haram al-Sharif as the site of their ancient Temples. Soon after the raising of the Israeli flag over the Dome of the Rock, Israel's Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, understanding the symbolic sensitivity of this action, ordered its removal.

Following Dayan's decision of 17 June 1967, the Waqf was granted full civil administrative authority and was returned to the area which had been taken by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) only ten days earlier,⁴⁹ while responsibility for security affairs was invested with the Israel Police. With this single decision Dayan had created the basis for the status quo that has existed till the present day. In his description of the events of that day Uzi Narkiss, at the time the IDF Chief of the Central Command, succinctly describes this new state of affairs:

The IDF will clear the Temple Mount platform and will redeploy outside it. The Israeli administration will be responsible for general security, but will not interfere with the internal guarding and the internal inspection of the running of the Mount.⁵⁰

The decision to leave the administration of the Sacred Esplanade in the hands of the Muslim clergy momentarily calmed both the Palestinians and the Muslim world. The Israeli government's policy was backed by the Chief Rabbinical Council's decision according to which Jewish religious law forbids Jews to enter the Temple Mount.



136 7 June 1967: Israeli paratroopers advancing from the east to Lions' Gate (Saint Stephen's Gate; Bab Sitti Maryam), on their way to the Temple Mount

Although Israel ceded the day-to-day administration of the Sacred Esplanade, the government did not feel that it was bound by the status quo. In fact, the opposite was true: it sought to initiate changes that would reflect Jerusalem's new political reality. East Jerusalem was unilaterally annexed by Israel immediately after the war.⁵¹ The state extended the jurisdiction of its laws and administration to East Jerusalem and thus the Temple Mount, obviously an active religious site, was from the 31 August 1967 also part of a registered antiquities site consisting of the Old City and its surroundings.⁵² The interpretation of civil control soon became a point of contention within the Israeli public over the level of control that could be exercised by the Israeli government and administrative authorities.⁵³ The Waqf and the Palestinian public viewed the Israeli occupation as temporary, rejecting the



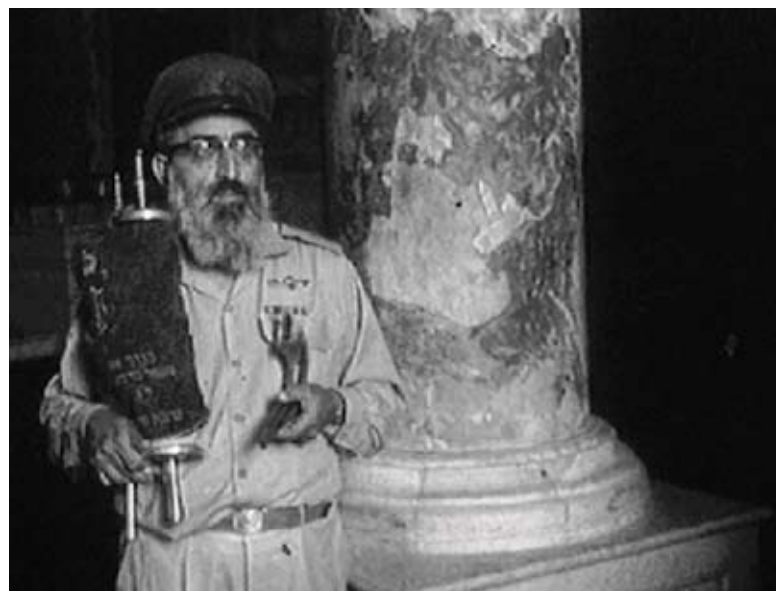
137 7 June 1967: Paratroopers gazing for the first time at the Western Wall
David Rubinger



138 7 June 1967: Paratroopers at the Dome of the Rock



139 A soldier about to smash the street sign "Tariq al-Buraq," the Arabic name of the lane in front of the Western Wall



140 7 June 1967: Maj.-Gen. Shlomo Goren, chief rabbi of the Israel Defense Forces, in the Dome of the Rock, holding a Torah scroll and a *shofar*



141 Bulldozing part of the Magharibah Quarter

imposition of Israeli civil rule while claiming that as occupied territory the Haram al-Sharif was to be dealt with within the context of international law which prohibited conquerors from changing the status quo. On the same grounds, they argued that Jordanian law, which had prevailed in the territories prior to their conquest, should continue to be in force.⁵⁴

Jewish exultation—even messianic fervour—that followed the speedy victory in Jerusalem presented the new authorities with a dilemma concerning the fate of the Western Wall. Nineteen years of Jewish exclusion from their most holy site and what had been seen by many as the site of Jewish humiliation led to the quick decision to clear the space fronting the wall. Despite international condemnation and Arab consternation,⁵⁵ the Magharibah (Mughrabim) Quarter, including a number of Islamic monuments (such as the Afdaliyya Zawiya and the small al-Buraq Mosque), was bulldozed beginning on the evening of 8 June 1967, leaving a large esplanade in front of the Wall to which thousands of Israelis flocked [figs. 141–143]. The conclusions of the 1930 Shaw Commission and the consequent rulings of the Order in Council of 1931, which had so dismayed the Jewish community, could now freely be ignored and uninterrupted Jewish prayer could be conducted with all the previously prohibited accoutrements, a situation that for Israel was never to be reversed. Israel unilaterally expropriated as national Jewish sites the Western Wall plaza as well as two sites in the Jewish Quarter that also included religious buildings and assets belonging to the Waqf.



142-143 14 June 1967, *Shavu'ot* (Feast of Weeks): West Jerusalemites streaming into the recently conquered Old City and trudging through the remains of the Magharibah Quarter to the Western Wall



On 11 July Israel's Minister of Religious Affairs Zerach Wahrhaftig informed the leading Muslim clerics that Israeli laws governing the status of the Muslim community in the State of Israel would henceforth apply to East Jerusalem's Muslims as well. This would include the right to monitor the Friday sermons delivered at al-Aqsa and the other mosques and to appoint a government committee to supervise the Waqf's administration (including the Haram al-Sharif).⁵⁶ In reaction, a group of 22 Muslim dignitaries convened on 24 July 1967 and wrote a memorandum, addressed to the Israeli military governor of the West Bank, claiming that the annexation of East Jerusalem was illegal and that the city is an "inseparable part of the Kingdom of Jordan." They declared themselves the Supreme Muslim Authority (*al-hay'a al-islamiyya al-'ulya*). The memorandum, that was accorded the force and effect of a religious legal opinion (*fatwa*),⁵⁷ stated the following:

Because Muslim religious law clearly stipulates that Muslims must take the initiative and run their religious affairs by themselves in the situations that exist today, and because Muslim religious law prohibits non-Muslims from running the religious affairs of Muslims ... therefore the signatories have appointed themselves the "Supreme Muslim Authority Responsible for all Muslim Matters in the West Bank including Jerusalem," until the end of the occupation.

A significant portion of the Supreme Muslim Authority's protest activities focused on protecting the Haram al-Sharif's status and preventing Israel from reducing the autonomy of the Waqf administration that controlled the site. In 1984, Shaykh Sa'd al-Din al-'Alami, who headed the West Bank's Islamic establishment, published a book containing hundreds of documents concerning these activities.⁵⁸ Subsequently, a book written by 'Abd al-Salam al-'Abadi, the Jordanian Waqf minister, credits Jordan with assisting the Supreme Muslim Authority in its struggle against Israel's attempts to expand its authority and influence on the Sacred Esplanade.⁵⁹

In fact, at the day-to-day level, the same Palestinian-Jordanian officials and clergymen who had administered the site before June 1967 continued to do so under Israeli rule by remote control from Amman, with Israel's tacit consent. They continued their administrative subordination to instructions from Jordan's Waqf Ministry and received their salaries as Jordanian government employees. Every local high-level bureaucrat had a corresponding official in the Jordanian Waqf Ministry in Amman to whom he was subordinate. Consequently the Haram al-Sharif's official administrator, Shaykh Muhammad Husayn, held the title "assistant director of the Haram al-Sharif" and was subordinate to the administrator in Amman.

Disturbances and Incidents, 1967–87

Throughout the twenty years from Israel's 1967 conquest to the outbreak of the first Intifada, there were ongoing tensions associated with the Haram al-Sharif. The first incident was the act of an Australian Christian fundamentalist, Michael Dennis Rohan, who saw the re-establishment of the Temple as a precursor for the return of the Messiah. On 21 August 1969 a fire he set caused heavy damage to the Aqsa Mosque [fig. 144], destroying the unique *minbar* created by Nur al-Din Zangi and donated to the mosque by Saladin. The extensive repairs following this event continued for the next two decades; the substitute *minbar* was installed in the mosque in February 2007. The arson attack was exploited by Arabs to mount a campaign to liberate Jerusalem from Israeli rule by employing the Aqsa Mosque as a religious symbol.⁶⁰ Two days after the fire the UN Security Council convened at the urging of Arab countries and adopted a resolution expressing deep concern over the desecration of the Haram al-Sharif.⁶¹ The Muslim claim was that the fire was set deliberately and Israel was held responsible.⁶² Egyptian President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser called for a war of purification against Israel, while Saudi King Faisal and other Arab political leaders called upon all Muslims to mobilize for *jihad* to liberate Jerusalem.⁶³ The event also served as Saudi King Faisal's impetus for the founding of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (*munazhhamat al-mu'tamar al-islami*), an intergovernmental grouping of 57 Muslim states.⁶⁴ In the fire's wake, King Hussein appointed the Royal Jordanian Commission for Jerusalem Affairs, headed by his brother, Crown Prince Hassan.

Another significant incident was a shooting attack staged on the Temple Mount on 11 April 1982 by Allen Goodman, a recent American immigrant to Israel who had been conscripted into the IDF and used his weapon to shoot at Muslims.⁶⁵ This incident was followed by various other events that offended the Palestinian Muslims. Violent demonstrations were conducted after the Goodman attack, in which a Waqf guard was killed and others were injured.⁶⁶

In 1984 an illegal Jewish underground cell of well-known activists of the settler movement Gush Emunim was uncovered whose plan had been the destruction of the Aqsa Mosque. Their arrest, jailing, and eventual pardoning did nothing to allay Muslim fears of actions by various Jewish groups and by the government, actions which they viewed as aiming "to de-Islamize and Judaize" the character of the sacred space and its surroundings.

A demonstrative visit to the Temple Mount by the Knesset Internal Affairs Committee in January 1986 also triggered Muslim demonstrations and violent encounters between Muslims and the security forces, resulting in harsh reactions from the Arab world.⁶⁷ During this period Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, Israel's Sephardic Chief Rabbi, issued a ruling in favour of building a synagogue on the Temple Mount. The Muslims viewed this with alarm as an official Israeli initiative, and their reactions intensified accordingly.⁶⁸



144 21 August 1969: The fire at the Aqsa Mosque

New Modus Vivendi (Waqf–Israel)

Despite the official discourse of conflict, ongoing informal meetings have been held regularly since 1967 between the Waqf's leaders and representatives of the Israeli police, the Jerusalem municipality, and the Israel Antiquities Authority (previously known as the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums). These gradually created a modus vivendi between the Israeli government and the Waqf officials, as well as the Jordanian government.⁶⁹ In practice, the Israeli government essentially abandoned the enforcement of its law wherever the Temple Mount / the Haram al-Sharif was concerned. The site's administrators were moderate Palestinian figures appointed by Jordan, and they generally adhered to all the tacit understandings that were reached with Israel's representatives.

The post-1967 modus vivendi was based on the following understandings: The Waqf administers the site, controls the gates, dictates the rules of behaviour, employs Muslim

guards (today there are 210 guards, 70 in each of the three shifts), is responsible for the ongoing maintenance and physical upkeep, and collects entrance fees from non-Muslim visitors to the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque. However, the Waqf is not allowed to raise flags within the Sacred Esplanade. Significant renovations and constructions were, until September 1996, unofficially coordinated with the Israeli Antiquities Authority. One of the physical changes conducted by the Waqf during this period and in accordance with these understandings was extensive planting of trees and landscaping to the northeast of the Dome of the Rock.

Israel, on the other hand controls the Mahkama building (al-Madrassa al-Tankiziyya), which houses a Border Police unit to overlook the Sacred Esplanade and the Western Wall plaza and to intervene in cases of violation of public order. It also demanded the keys to the Magharibah Gate, thus controlling the entrance of non-Muslim visitors through it. Israeli police guard the site from the outer circle and entrances and from a police post on the fringe of the Dome of the Rock platform to maintain public order on the Sacred Esplanade. However, some of the authority Israel claims to hold according to its post-1967 law is limited by the fear of large-scale Muslim violence. The major outstanding issues are the entrance of Jews into the Esplanade for prayer and the gradually reduced effectiveness of consultation concerning digging and construction. Some matters are coordinated between Waqf and Israeli authorities, such as visiting hours and the visits by high-ranking foreign officials.

The *modus vivendi* based on the above regulations and understandings prevailed until September 1996, when Muslim riots erupted following Israel's action to open the northern exit of the Western Wall Tunnel.

The Tunnel, the Western Wall, and the Israeli-Jewish Challenge

Soon after the inauguration of the plaza in front of the Western Wall the Chief Rabbinate and the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs initiated a project to cut a 320-metre long tunnel along the outer side of the Western Wall of the Temple Mount, from the vaults under Wilson's Arch to the so-called Hasmonaeen aqueduct which connected to the Struthion Pool at the northwest corner of the Mount. The work continued for over ten years without archaeological supervision—a source of tension between the religious authorities and the Israel Department of Antiquities—and without permission from the owners of the overlying structures, a further cause for Arab protest and international condemnation. Fear was expressed that the tunnelling would cause subsidence of the buildings above and that the tunnel would be used as a pretext to access the Temple Mount from below. Tension was increased by the discovery of cracks in the walls of al-Madrassa al-Jawhariyya, al-Madrassa al-Manjakiyya, and Ribat al-Kurd, buildings adjacent to the Wall and above the tunnel. These cracks were blamed on the tunnelling activities, and only consolidation

of the buildings calmed the situation. The Muslims also viewed the tunnel endeavour as an effort to change the Islamic character of the area.

In 1981 another incident in the tunnel caused anxiety amongst Muslim officials. During excavation work near the Warren Gate, which was revealed in the process of excavating the site, the Rabbi of the Western Wall, Yehuda Getz, started to remove stones separating the tunnel from Bir Sabil al-Qa'itbay (Cistern 31), located within the Haram and only 80 metres from the Dome of the Rock. A short fist fight ensued between Waqf employees and workmen under Getz's supervision. After the police put an end to the fight, the Government, aware of the consequences of the incident, ordered the opening's immediate sealing.

The Waqf, Arab governments, and Islamic organisations expressed concern about the physical consequences of the archaeological excavations conducted to the south and west of the Temple Mount and the excavation of the tunnel along the Western Wall, claiming destabilization of the walls of the Haram al-Sharif and the undermining of the Aqsa Mosque and the Mamluk *madrasas* to the west of the Sacred Esplanade. Complaints lodged with UNESCO by Jordan and other Arab states regarding the state of the Old City in general and the Haram al-Sharif in particular resulted in a long series of visits by Professor Raymond Lemaire as the personal representative of the Directors-General of that body. The conclusions of his reports⁷⁰ and the superior numbers and political clout of the Arab states led to annual condemnations of Israeli practice relating to the Haram al-Sharif area, to refuting the legal validity of the Israeli excavations south of the Temple Mount, and to the registering of Jerusalem on the list of "World Heritage Sites in Danger" in 1982.

Operation of the tunnel as a major tourist attraction, allowing the visitor to view the whole length of the Western Wall, the corner of the Antonia Fortress, the karstic fissure used for the aqueduct and the Struthion Pool, was limited by the fact that the tunnel was accessed only from the south. The site could not be truly opened to the public without a northern exit, inside the Muslim Quarter. Attempts to purchase a suitable exit failed and it was eventually decided to quarry a tunnel from the pool to a point on the Via Dolorosa, opposite the First Station of the Cross. The Israeli government procrastinated about the appropriate time to open the exit till September 1996, when some officials mistakenly viewed the opening of the northern exit as part of a quid-pro-quo arrangement between the government and the Waqf to allow the opening of the Hasmonaean Tunnel in return for the government's acceptance of the opening of Solomon's Stables for Muslim prayer.⁷¹ The results were catastrophic as the newly formed Palestinian Authority (PA) used the ill-timed Israeli decision as a catalyst for yet another round of violence, focusing on the conflict between the two peoples over the definition of rights in the Temple Mount area. In the clashes between protesters and the police three Muslims were killed and 31 people were injured, including 11 policemen.⁷² The riots quickly spread to East Jerusalem and the territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The events took on the character of



145 September 1996: Palestinian youths throwing stones on the Haram in the wake of the opening of the Hasmonaeen tunnel

a popular uprising, which was supported by members of the PA's police, who even opened fire on Israelis, with 57 Palestinians and 15 Israelis being killed in the riots. A consequence of this event as well as of similar ones has been Israel's intermittent restriction of access of Palestinian Muslims to the Haram according to criteria of age and residence.

Incidentally, radical Islamic factions called the Palestinian activities in reaction to the opening of the Western Wall Tunnel the "al-Aqsa Intifada"⁷³—the name that four years later was to be given to the Second Intifada. At the time it was claimed that the Israeli excavations constituted a physical threat to the Aqsa Mosque.⁷⁴ In the wake of this incident, the Islamic Movement in Israel organized the first convention (*mihrajan*) under the banner "al-Aqsa is in danger." This slogan transmitted to the Muslim public the message that Israel is seeking, in a deliberate and systematic manner, to destroy the Aqsa Mosque in order to build the Third Temple in its place.

The developments on the Jewish side after 1967 challenged the Palestinian Muslims and added fuel to the conflict. Despite the Israeli government's secular nature, the post-1967 nationalist-messianic wave and the Jewish settler movement in the Palestinian territories were religiously-motivated phenomena that increasingly influenced Israeli mainstream positions. The Temple Mount, together with the Western Wall, gradually developed into a national symbol. IDF induction ceremonies take place at the Western Wall, as well as other memorials and commemorations with the participation of Israel's president.



146 Memorial Day Ceremony at the Western Wall, honoring the fallen in Israel's wars

A few radical Jewish movements which aim to revive Temple construction and worship have been formed since 1967 (some of them funded by evangelical Christian organisations) and although they are marginal and opposed to government policy, their activity has offended Muslims.⁷⁵ Since the Oslo process there has been a significant rise in Israeli-Jewish awareness (including Jews who are not religiously observant) of the Temple Mount as a symbol of national and cultural identity.

Arab fear for the security of the sacred Muslim sites was reinforced by a number of incidents that Palestinians considered a threat to the very existence of the Haram al-Sharif. The fact that these actions came from the fringes of Israeli society, or even beyond it, did not affect their exploitation by the ascendant fundamentalist Islamic movements within Palestinian society, often with complete disregard for actual events. Although the official policy of the Israeli government is to prevent a change of the status quo on the Sacred Esplanade, many Muslims fear that Israel seeks to demolish the mosques and establish the Third Temple in their place—or alternatively, to change the status quo and permit corresponding Jewish worship on the site. Indeed, even though Jewish prayer upon the Temple Mount had been strictly prohibited by successive Israeli governments⁷⁶ there have, for a number of years, been a series of proposals made by ultra-nationalist Israelis to utilise the vast space of Solomon's Stables for Jewish prayer. In this context it must be remembered that *halakhah* (Jewish religious law) forbids Jews from coming up to the Temple Mount due

to the sanctity of the site. This ban was reinforced by the Chief Rabbinate following the Six Day War [fig. 147] and by other halakhic authorities on numerous occasions since then,⁷⁷ the ban receiving political clout through the decision to reassert the administrative control of the Waqf on the Temple Mount.⁷⁸ However a group of rabbis, led by Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, provided ritual backing for the visit of Jews to the site as long as they stayed outside the original 500 square cubit space occupied by Solomon's Temple,⁷⁹ including the Herodian expansion of the Temple platform of which Solomon's Stables was a part.⁸⁰ Pressure mounted to sanction Jewish prayer at the site;⁸¹ suggestions were even made to construct a synagogue above Solomon's Stables⁸² or to allow prayer within the confines of that structure.⁸³ These appeals did not pass unnoticed by Muslim ultra-nationalists and the decision by the Waqf and the Islamic movement to transform the site into a mosque was probably hastened to block any future possibility of the realisation of these proposals.

First Intifada and the Events of October 1990

The First Palestinian Uprising (Intifada) which erupted in December 1987 turned the Sacred Esplanade into a central locus of the national conflict. The Palestinian Muslims used the relative immunity of the site—where large crowds gathered after the Friday service and its large open space which Israeli forces usually do not enter—as a venue of political demonstrations and unrest. The deputy of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Shaykh Muhammad-Sa'id al-Jamal, stated that the Haram al-Sharif is an inseparable part of the land of Palestine and that it therefore was only natural that the Intifada should be conducted in the mosques as well.⁸⁴

The stormiest event in the history of Palestinian–Israeli violence at the Esplanade took place in October 1990, which the Muslims refer to as the “al-Aqsa Massacre.” This occurred when the radical Jewish Faithful of the Temple Mount Movement publicised provocative plans, including a cornerstone-laying ceremony for the Third Temple near the Dung Gate and the erection of a *sukkah* (a booth commemorating the Jews' wanderings in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt) next to the Magharibah Gate. In the Muslim version of the events, the Faithful of the Temple Mount Movement's cornerstone-laying ceremony was taken seriously by many Muslims, who organised for pre-emptive action. A month prior to this incident, al-Aqsa preacher Shaykh Fathallah Silwadi called upon Muslims to come and defend the Aqsa Mosque with their own bodies.⁸⁵ The police prohibited the planned ceremony from taking place near the Sacred Esplanade but permitted it to be conducted in the nearby Silwan area. In reaction, Muslims showered rocks from the Haram al-Sharif Esplanade onto Jewish worshippers praying below at the adjacent Western Wall. The police, summoned to the Temple Mount in order to disperse the demonstrators and stop the rock-throwing, opened fire killing 17 Muslims. Another 53 Muslims and 30 Jews (police and



147 The Chief Rabbinate's announcement prominently displayed at the entrance of the bridge leading to Bab al-Magharibah, the only of the Haram's gates open to Jewish visitors. The photo was taken in December 2008.

worshippers) were injured.⁸⁶ In the aftermath two books entitled *The Aqsa Massacre* were published in Arabic.⁸⁷ The Waqf also mounted an exhibition of photos and other artefacts of the incident at the Islamic Museum next to the Aqsa Mosque. Furthermore, the UN Security Council unanimously passed a resolution condemning the acts of violence committed by the Israeli security forces resulting in loss of human life and injury to many Muslims on the Haram al-Sharif, and decided to have the Secretary-General send a mission to the region to investigate the incident. The US also supported this decision,⁸⁸ but Israel did not consent to receive the delegation. One of the outcomes of the October 1990 events was the beginning of a campaign launched by Shaykh Ra'id Salah, the leader of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, claiming that Israel intended to bring about the destruction of the Aqsa Mosque (see below).

Arab-Muslim Competition for Involvement and Control of the Sacred Esplanade

The centrality of the Haram al-Sharif as a religious and political symbol resulted in competition between Arab and Muslim states and organisations as to who would control, or at least have a symbolic affiliation to, the Sacred Esplanade. Three Arab states actively seek to gain control or at least increase their standing in the Haram al-Sharif: Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco. Other Arab leaders, however, see Islam's holy sites in Jerusalem as belonging to the entire Muslim nation—that is, they too wish to play a role, if only a symbolic one.

As noted, Jordan has played a central role in the administration of the Haram al-Sharif since 1948. Indeed, King Hussein regarded this responsibility an essential tool for strengthening the Hashemite regime's legitimacy. Since the 1970s, the Saudis have provided financial support for radical bodies in Jerusalem. In the 1980s, a chapter of the General Islamic Congress headquartered in Saudi Arabia was active in the Haram al-Sharif. This fund financed renovations of the Aqsa Mosque and other Waqf assets. It also supplemented the salaries of the Waqf's employees (seventy five dinars each) and assisted various welfare and educational institutions in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Israel.⁸⁹ Moroccan involvement with the Sacred Esplanade included a personal contribution by King Hassan II, who donated



148 Israeli policemen at a deserted Western Wall, fleeing rocks which Palestinians are throwing from the Haram in the wake of the Hebron massacre of 25 February 1994



149 A Palestinian wounded near the Aqsa Mosque during a clash with Israeli police, 25 February 1994

carpets to the Aqsa Mosque in the 1980s, as well as by his chairing the “Al-Quds [Jerusalem] Committee of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.” As for Egyptian involvement, one can point to President Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat who, during his visit to Jerusalem, insisted on praying at al-Aqsa Mosque. He then declared: “No Arab nation will agree to relinquish the Aqsa Mosque or the Dome of the Rock.”⁹⁰ After the visit, his deputy, Hassan Tohami, informed Jerusalem’s mayor Teddy Kollek that the Egyptian government had decided to send engineers to help renovate the Aqsa Mosque.⁹¹

An incident reflecting inter-Arab competition over involvement with the Esplanade took place in 1992 when money was needed to conduct urgent renovations of the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque. Both King Hussein of Jordan and King Fahd of Saudi Arabia competed over who would donate the required funding. Finally King Hussein decided to contribute 8,249,000 dollars of his private and family fortune to the Haram al-Sharif’s renovation. The request of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia to contribute to the renovations through UNESCO (so as to circumvent the need for Jordanian approval) was rejected by King Hussein.

In the Oslo Accords signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in September 1993, it was agreed that the issue of Jerusalem would be deferred to the negotiations over the permanent status agreements. Jerusalem was not among the jurisdictions granted to the Palestinian Authority that was established in the territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank as part of the Oslo Accords. However, on 11 October

1993 Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shimon Peres, sent a letter to Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jorgen Holst assuring him of the following:

I wish to confirm that the Palestinian institutions of East Jerusalem and the interest and well-being of the Palestinians of East Jerusalem are of great importance and will be preserved. Therefore, all the Palestinian institutions of East Jerusalem, including the economic, social, educational and cultural, and the holy Christian and Moslem places, are performing an essential task for the Palestinian population. Needless to say, we will not hamper their activity; on the contrary, the fulfilment of this important mission is to be encouraged.⁹²

This letter was used as a trade-off in the negotiations for the agreement of the PLO chairman to establish the PA's centre outside Jerusalem, namely in Ramallah.⁹³ The formation of the PA in 1994 immediately created tensions between the Palestinians and Jordan, and between the two of them and Israel.

While negotiations between Jordan and Israel were being conducted, King Hussein insisted that the peace treaty between the two countries include a clause—which later became Article 9(2) of the agreement—stipulating that when Israel negotiates a permanent agreement with the Palestinians, it will give precedence to the Hashemite monarchy's historic and current role in Islam's holy sites in Jerusalem.⁹⁴ Shortly after, the Palestinians pressured Jordan into reaching an agreement with the PA whereby it stated that it is holding the Haram al-Sharif and the other holy places on a temporary basis only, until the PA is able to take full control following agreement with Israel.⁹⁵

On the ground, Jerusalem's Muslim establishment underwent a major transformation with the establishment of the PA in 1994. The PA immediately began intervening in the affairs of the Haram al-Sharif. For example, in July 1994, when Jerusalem's mayor Teddy Kollek invited King Hussein to pray at the Aqsa Mosque,⁹⁶ PA Chairman Yasser Arafat reacted by declaring that "Arab Jerusalem is under Palestinian jurisdiction," and thus Israel has no authority to proffer such an invitation. Only he could invite the king to come and pray with him.⁹⁷ These threats resulted in the cancellation of the visit.

The PA was also successful, in October 1994, in imposing its own candidate—Shaykh Ikrima Sabri—as Mufti of Jerusalem and the Palestinian areas, instead of the Jordanian nominee. At the beginning of 1999, Sabri moved his offices from a building that was adjacent to the outer section of the Sacred Esplanade, near the Gate of the Chain, to a building adjacent to its inner section. This manoeuvre established the seat of the Mufti of the PA within the Haram al-Sharif, as was the situation during the British Mandate period.⁹⁸

The post-Oslo peace process situation produced a new *modus vivendi* between the Palestinian Authority and Jordan. Most of the administrative policies regarding the Sacred Esplanade were coordinated by the Waqf administrators with both Jordan and

the PA. In 2006, Jordan still financed most of the Jerusalem Waqf's payroll, and the PA supplemented it. Thus, despite the efforts of the other players, Jordan has remained the major Arab country associated with the Haram al-Sharif.

The Muslim Campaign for al-Aqsa and the Rise of the Islamic Movement among Israeli Arabs

The political struggle over Jerusalem and its holy sites since June 1967 has enhanced the status of the Temple Mount / the Haram al-Sharif in the minds of Jews and Muslims alike. The Muslim side, which is the weaker side in the conflict, developed a new ethos of Jerusalem and its Sacred Esplanade. It is based on renewing, emphasising, and marketing to the masses early Muslim traditions (taken from the medieval literature in praise of al-Quds—the *Fada'il*) and introducing them into the forefront of public discourse.⁹⁹ Thus, al-Aqsa is often mentioned today in the context of its connection to the Sacred Mosque in Mecca through frequent emphasis on, and reference to, the Qur'anic verse (1.17) which tells of the Prophet Muhammad's night journey "from the Sacred Sanctuary to the Furthest Sanctuary"—in Arabic, al-Aqsa. It also revives the traditions according to which al-Aqsa was built by Adam 40 years after the Ka'ba of Mecca. According to this narrative, the Aqsa Mosque has been in existence since the dawn of mankind. This effort also employs eschatological and apocalyptic traditions which relate that on the Day of Judgement the Ka'ba will be transported to Jerusalem as a bride, along with all of the pilgrims who have visited it. The entire human race will then rise up on the Mount of Olives and from there a bridge will extend to the Rock—the place of judgement.¹⁰⁰

The Prophet's night journey (*isra'*) and the tradition concerning his ascension to heaven (*mi'raj*) have been elevated to a special celebration in the last two generations. In 1953 the Jordanians introduced *al-isra' wal-mi'raj* day, which traditionally takes place on the 27th of the Islamic month Rajab, as a formal holy day, with special prayers and official ceremonies and speeches.¹⁰¹

Early Muslim writers acknowledge that the Haram al-Sharif is the site of the Jewish Temple. Thus, *A Brief Guide to the Haram al-Sharif*, published in 1929 by the Supreme Muslim Council, maintains the following referring to the Haram:

Its identity with the site of Solomon's Temple is beyond dispute. This, too, is the spot, according to the universal belief, on which David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings (2 Samuel XXIV, 25).¹⁰²

However, since 1967 there is a growing tendency among Muslim writers in general and among Palestinian authors and politicians in particular to deny the Jewish attachment to the Sacred Esplanade. Firstly, they refer to the Jewish Temple (*haykal*) by adding the term

al-maz'um, whose literal meaning is “alleged.” Moreover, PA Chairman Yasser Arafat used to claim that the Jewish Temple had been in Yemen, not in Jerusalem.¹⁰³ His cabinet member Saeb Arikat was quoted by then Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Shlomo Ben-Ami as having said, during the July 2000 Camp David II negotiations: “This whole issue of the Temple ... is a Jewish invention lacking any basis.”¹⁰⁴ Sometimes such a denial is grounded in archaeology, although no excavations could ever be conducted under the Dome of the Rock. As an example, Palestinian-Jordanian historian Kamil al-'Asali maintained that “modern archaeology has not succeeded in proving that the site on which the Temple stood is located in this place, since no remnants of the Temple have survived.”¹⁰⁵

Secondly, current Islamic writing also tends to deny an authentic Jewish connection to the Western Wall. For example, the Mufti of the Palestinian Authority, Shaykh Ikrima Sabri, stated in an interview broadcast by the al-Jazeera television channel that the Western Wall was never, even for a single second, a Jewish structure and that the Jews have no connection to it. “Who decided that the Western Wall is a remnant of the Temple?” asked Sabri, answering with the rhetorical question: “Is it scientifically or archaeologically conceivable that Herod, who built the temple to Augustus in Caesarea, also built a temple for the Jews?”¹⁰⁶ According to Sabri, the Jews only began to pray at the Western Wall during the nineteenth century, when they began to develop nationalist aspirations. Shortly afterwards, in April 2001, Egyptian Waqf Minister Mahmoud Hamdi Zaquzuq stated that the Jews have no connection to the Western Wall which, according to him, “was never a holy site for them.” Zaquzuq added that no historical evidence exists to support Jewish claims regarding the existence of Solomon’s “alleged” Temple anywhere in the city.¹⁰⁷

Another interesting phenomenon related to the growing importance of the Sacred Esplanade in the national conflict over Palestine is the usage to designate the entire Esplanade as “al-Aqsa” rather than “al-Haram al-Sharif.” Since the post-Crusader era, Jerusalem’s Sacred Esplanade was upgraded to a *haram* by naming it “al-Haram al-Sharif.” However since the 1980s Palestinians gradually abandoned that designation, given in honor of Jerusalem’s status, in favour of its more traditional name: “al-Aqsa.” Evidently, since “al-Aqsa” appears in the Qur’an, all Muslims around the world should be familiar with it.

Increased use of the name “al-Aqsa” is particularly striking against the background of what is written on the website of the Jerusalem Waqf, headed by PA’s Mufti Shaykh Ikrima Sabri. There, it is asserted that “al Masjid al-Aqsa was erroneously called by the name the Haram al-Qudsi al-Sharif,” and that the site’s correct name is al-Aqsa.¹⁰⁸ In proof of this, Sabri quotes Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), a precursor of modern Islamic fundamentalism, who denied the existence of a *haram* in Jerusalem. Sabri also states that Arab historians such as Mujir al-Din al-Hanbali, author of the famed fifteenth-century work on Jerusalem, did not make use of the term *haram* in connection with the Aqsa site.¹⁰⁹ Since Hanbali sources

are being cited by Sabri, one should ask whether this is indicative of Saudi Arabian influence or pressure. The “al-Aqsa” designation has thus become popular and prevalent. The previous term is still used by official bodies (the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the Arab League) and by ordinary people, in contrast to religious entities.

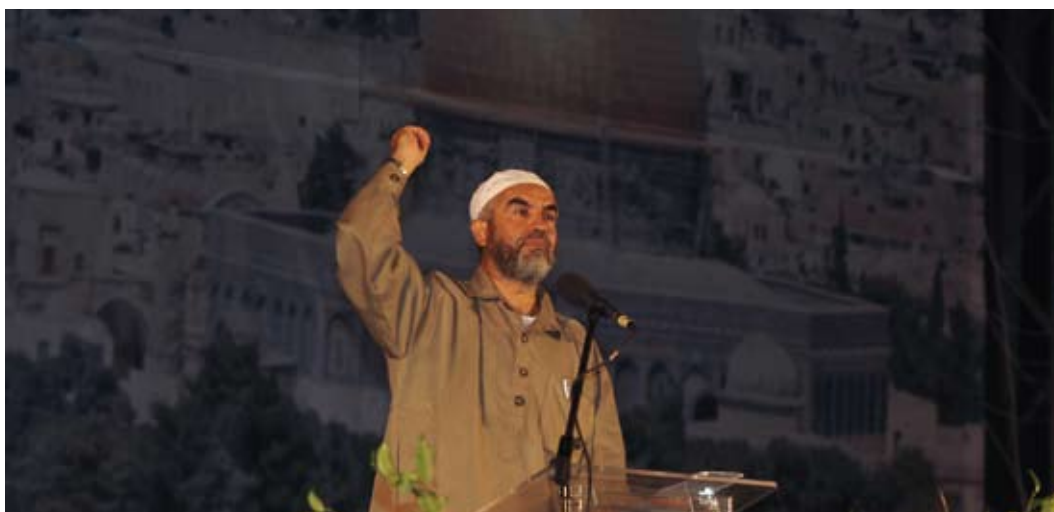
The growing political importance of the site for Muslims and the religious traditions associated with it entailed, since the late 1980s, a significant increase in the number of Muslim worshippers who arrive for Friday prayers on the site, especially during the holy month of Ramadan. This can be as many as 400,000 people on the last Friday of Ramadan, according to police counts.

The Arab Muslim citizens of Israel (about 350,000 in 1967 and 800,000 in 2007, not including Muslim residents in East Jerusalem and the Druze in the Golan Heights) have a vested interest in both a permanent solution to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and in Palestinian Muslim sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif. In June 1967 Israel’s Muslim citizens were able to access the Haram al-Sharif after a nineteen-year period of exclusion during Jordanian rule over East Jerusalem. Shortly after taking over East Jerusalem on 7 June, the Israeli government had an interest to show that Muslim worship in the Aqsa Mosque would be unhindered. The first prayer conducted there was broadcast in Arabic over the Israeli government radio station by religious programming editor Nur al-Din Darini (Abu Jarir), a Muslim citizen of Israel. The authorities also provided transportation for Israeli Muslims to attend the first Friday prayers after the war.

There are two interesting examples for the identification of Israeli Arabs with the Palestinian side regarding the battle over the Sacred Esplanade. After a demonstrative tour of the Temple Mount by members of the Knesset’s Internal Affairs Committee in 1986 and the publication of rabbinic decisions permitting Jews to enter the site, Ibrahim Nimr Husayn, chairman of the National Committee of Arab Mayors, issued the following declaration: “We shall not rest nor shall we remain silent until the status quo is preserved in the place we hold dear.”¹¹⁰ Another example is the declaration issued by *qadis* and employees of Israel’s Shari’a courts (Muslim religious courts) in February 1986 which stated that any attempt to violate the accepted agreements on the Temple Mount is liable to end in a clash between religions.

The Islamic Movement of Israel’s Arab citizens played a special role in the enhancement of the Haram al-Sharif’s political and religious status. Its Northern Branch coined the slogan “Al-Aqsa is in danger” and ingrained this in the consciousness of Muslims in Israel, the Palestinian territories, and throughout the Muslim world. This led to the movement taking an active leadership role in developments inside the Haram, especially in Solomon’s Stables and beneath the Aqsa Mosque. This issue will be dealt with in detail below.

On 10 October 1996 the Islamic Movement held a mass assembly under the slogan “Al-Aqsa is in danger” in Umm al-Fahm’s sports stadium, where a painted model of the



150 Shaykh Ra'îd Salah, leader of the Islamic Movement (Northern Branch), at the annual mass rally in Umm al-Fahm, 16 September 2005

Dome of the Rock was erected. This assembly has become an annual event, attended by some 100,000 Israeli Muslims [fig. 150].

Encouraged by its success at Solomon's Stables, the Islamic Movement continued to raise funds among its local supporters and from the Persian Gulf. Its leaders visited these countries, dwelling on the danger of a Jewish takeover of Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem. The funds were used to prepare additional prayer halls on the Haram al-Sharif's lower level, namely preparing the passage below the Aqsa Mosque, called al-Aqsa al-Qadima, as an additional roofed prayer hall. These comprehensive development projects had two objectives. One was to take over the lower level and thus prevent the Jews from finding a place for worship on the Temple Mount and from digging a tunnel underneath the site. A second objective was to develop as many prayer sites as possible, both covered and open, in order to transform the Haram al-Sharif into a Muslim focal point whose status would be equivalent to that of Mecca and which would attract Muslims from throughout the world.

Inspection of Antiquities and Relations with the Israeli Department of Antiquities and the Israel Antiquities Authority, 1967–96

During the first twenty years of Israeli rule in East Jerusalem, the Department of Antiquities and Museums of the Ministry of Education and Culture maintained regular contacts with the Waqf in all matters concerning the Temple Mount. From time to time departmental inspectors would visit the mount, sometimes accompanied by police officers or government representatives. On occasion, mainly when the Waqf was engaged in construction or earth-moving operations on the Mount, questions arose concerning archaeological supervision

and prevention of damage to antiquities. Such questions frequently had to be settled at the political level.¹¹¹

During this period of time, in particular from the mid-1980s onward, informal relations were established between representatives of the Israeli Department of Antiquities and the professional staff of the Waqf, mainly the engineers and architects responsible on behalf of the Waqf for development and maintenance work on the Mount. These relationships amounted primarily to occasional personal meetings in which views and positions were presented in various areas relating to activity in and around the Temple Mount. At the same time, the Waqf consistently declined to inform Israeli authorities, in an official capacity, of their plans for construction and development on the Temple Mount.

From 1988 the legal situation on the Mount changed following an appeal brought before the Israel Supreme Court by the Faithful of the Temple Mount Movement and in light of the directives issued by the Government Attorney General that reviewed the authority and the *modus operandi* of government agencies in relation to works on the Mount.¹¹² In accordance with these directives the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, and later the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), conducted regular tours of inspection on the Temple Mount, monitoring work of various types (construction, development, and conservation) and submitted regular reports of this inspection to the Attorney General.¹¹³ During the years 1990–96 good informal relations were maintained between the IAA staff and the professional personnel active on the Mount. These relations included regular meetings, during which information was received and updated and opinions exchanged as to activities on the Mount. In the course of these conversations, the Waqf staff gave the IAA representatives advance notice of planned activities, such as extensive repairs to the Dome of the Rock and preparation of the underground vaults in Solomon's Stables for visitors and worshippers. The IAA representatives, for their part, showed the Waqf staff their plans for excavation south of the Temple Mount and for developing the area for tourism.

It should be noted that work conducted at this time on the Mount, under the direction of the professional departments of the Waqf, generally adhered to universally accepted principles and rules for the treatment of historical monuments, with the cooperation and supervision of international professional agencies. Thus differences of opinion between the IAA staff and the Waqf on professional matters were almost non-existent.

Notable in this context is the extensive renovation, by an Irish contractor, of the Dome of the Rock in 1992–94, during which large portions of the dome were replaced. The work, including an extensive conservational survey of the existing dome, was commissioned by the Waqf and involved many foreign experts who conducted their work over many months inside the Temple Mount. During the work, access to the site by Israeli professionals was possible and they were able to communicate their advice.

The situation changed drastically in autumn 1996, with the active entry of the Islamic

Movement of Israel's Arab citizens into development projects and into the management of the Temple Mount. The work to prepare Solomon's Stables for worship was conducted for the first time with the participation of the Islamic Movement under the stewardship of Shaykh Ra'id Salah, mayor of Umm al-Fahm (and leader of the movement's radical Northern Branch). Utilising funds collected from supporters in Israel, the movement invested about \$500,000 in construction materials and converted Solomon's Stables into a huge prayer hall renamed the Marwani Hall or Mosque. This construction involved hundreds of volunteers, who carried out the project.¹¹⁴ The process involved operations in violation of conservation principles for the treatment of historical monuments; in some places antiquities were actually damaged (e.g., by drilling holes into ancient walls).

It came to the IAA's knowledge that some of the work had even been done without the consent of the professional staff of the Waqf, who had been barred at some points from entering the site of operations. During these years the IAA's ability to inspect the site and to conduct informal discussion with the Waqf was severely curtailed.

In 1998–2000 further work was carried out in the ancient underground passages and vaults beneath the southern part of the Temple Mount, encompassing, in addition to the work in Solomon's Stables, the renovation and utilisation of the derelict passage below the Aqsa Mosque, known as al-Aqsa al-Qadima. The works reached a zenith toward the end of 1999, when a monumental staircase and entrance were cut down into Solomon's Stables.¹¹⁵ In the process a tremendous pit was dug with heavy mechanical machinery without any archaeological supervision, causing major irrevocable changes to the site, in complete contravention of internationally recognised standards of management of sites of universal cultural value and sparking worldwide controversy over the management of the archaeological patrimony of the Temple Mount.¹¹⁶ The Director of the IAA, Amir Drori, described the event as an "archaeological crime." However the Waqf could not bring into the Haram heavy machinery without consent of the Israeli police and perhaps other high political authorities. The resulting political uproar in the Israeli body-politic has not subsided, with the ostensibly a-political Committee for the Prevention of Destruction to Antiquities on the Temple Mount placing an intense scrutiny upon the actions of the Waqf, Israel Police, IAA, and the Government within the site. Periodic petitions to the Supreme Court have been made challenging the decisions of the official bodies noted, these motions usually rejected as being beyond the jurisdiction of the court due to the highly sensitive nature of the site.¹¹⁷

One of the rare cases in which Israel implemented its control over construction works on the site took place in August 1999. The Waqf carved out a window in the southern wall of al-Zawiyya al-Khathaniyya in order to provide light and air to the underground prayer hall. Israeli authorities viewed this action as endangering the site's character, fearing that the Waqf will turn this window into a Muslim-controlled exit leading to the Israeli exclusively controlled excavation area south of the Esplanade. The closing of the window

could be carried out since the work could be done from outside the Esplanade. In contrast to this case, when the Waqf opened a large exit to the Marwani Mosque and caused damage to antiquities, Israel's Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein recommended not implementing Israeli law because "Restoring the pre-existing situation might bring to bloodshed and to a situation that might inflame Judea, Samaria and the entire territory of Israel." His position was backed by a ruling of Israel's Supreme Court.¹¹⁸

Two bulges, one each on the southern and eastern walls, were noted in 2000. While the structural causes of these bulges was a matter for some debate, with the usual mutual recriminations, the inherent danger of collapse, on the one hand, and the clear understanding that such a collapse would drag unwanted responses from extremists of both sides, on the other, created an urgent necessity to treat the problem. A debate ensued concerning the thorny subject who had the competence to repair the wall and especially who had the right. With the decline of the influence of the Palestinian Authority on the Temple Mount it was decided at prime ministerial level that the repair would be used as a pretext to enhance the influence of the Jordanians over the site. A specialist team from the Hashemite Kingdom was invited to investigate the structural needs and entrusted with the supervision of the works which were completed in 2006.

Camp David II Summit, Sharon's Visit, and the Outbreak of the Aqsa Intifada

The Sacred Esplanade issue was the bone of contention at the Camp David peace talks of July 2000 between Israel and the Palestinian Authority with US President Bill Clinton's mediation. The final compromise proposal suggested by Clinton was a vertical division of sovereignty, according to which the Palestinians would have supreme sovereignty over the surface levels and the buildings of the Haram, while Israel would have sovereignty beneath the surface at the level of the Western Wall and its plaza. The proposal was rejected by the Palestinians.¹¹⁹ Israelis were offended by Yasser Arafat's denial of the existence of the Jewish Temple. Israelis and Palestinians continued to discuss the issue of sovereignty over the Temple Mount at Taba. However, with the release to the media of information about Palestinian denials of a Jewish Temple, combined with information about the additional works that the Waqf was carrying out on the Temple Mount, the Israeli opposition exerted pressure on the government and on the Chief Rabbinical Council to change its traditional opposition to Jewish entry onto the Haram al-Sharif.

Finally, the demonstrative visit of Ariel Sharon (who was then leader of the opposition), six other Knesset members from his Likud party, and a large police escort on 28 September 2000 culminated in a violent clash. During the visit and the subsequent days of violence, three Palestinians were killed and many more were injured. The incident was the cause



151 1999: Large-scale mechanical earth-removal north of Solomon's Stables, in preparation of a new staircase and entrance



152 2008: The new staircase leading down to the Stables, now known as al-Musalla al-Marwani

for the outbreak of turbulent riots in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, which the Arabs named the “Aqsa Intifada.” Three weeks after the intifada’s eruption an Arab summit was convened in Cairo (21 October 2000)—a summit which received the title of the “Aqsa Summit.”

One of the outcomes of Sharon’s visit was the prohibition of all non-Muslim visitors from entering the Sacred Esplanade for about three years and a parallel intensification of Israeli access restrictions for Palestinians to the site. Israel restored the visits with the

tacit consent of the Waqf (in cooperation with Jordan, when Yasser Arafat was isolated in Ramallah) in August 2003. However, the repercussions of Sharon's visit were much more wide-ranging for the Israeli–Palestinian struggle.

In 2004 part of the ramp leading up to the Magharibah Gate collapsed, requiring the construction of a temporary wooden bridge. Israel decided unilaterally to remodel the ascent by excavation, partial demolition, and the future construction of a permanent bridge to the Magharibah entrance. The works regenerated Muslim condemnation and protest resulting in the dispatch of a UNESCO technical mission to investigate the issue which recommended the immediate cessation of the work. Excavation continued for some time and more modest proposals were submitted to the planning commissions for a simple bridge set upon the remains of the ascent. At the time of writing, the matter has yet to be resolved.

Conclusion

Since the 1920s the Sacred Esplanade of Jerusalem came to symbolise the bone of contention in the conflict over Palestine. The Haram renovations, side by side with the struggle over the rights to the Western Wall, have proven a strong tool in pulling together Palestinian Muslims and the Muslim world ever since the British Mandate period.

The maintenance and even definition of the lines of division between the communities was a clear aim of the British authorities, a situation which left neither side fully content and resulted in a series of incidents which the Mandatory government never succeeded in controlling on the political level. At the same time, the British authorities succeeded in introducing modern conservation methods for maintenance of the monuments on the site, though scholars were never able to carry out archaeological excavations or to properly document the subterranean spaces, due to a basic reticence of the Muslim guardians to activities which might, in their view, weaken the hold of Islam on the Mount by the exposure of early “non-Muslim” remains.

The period of exclusive Muslim control under Jordanian rule was characterised by two incidents displaying the continuation of the same inbuilt tension. The assassination of King Abdullah showed that the attraction of the site for extremists was not dimmed by Islam's full control of the Haram, while the important restoration of the Dome of the Rock demonstrated that the necessity for modern management, underscored by the British, was well understood by the site's new rulers. During the nineteen years of Jordanian rule, the Hashemites capitalised on their control of the Haram, using its renovation to enhance their legitimacy in the Arab and Muslim arena, and they have retained an element of control since then.

This conflict intensified after 1967 with the Israeli capture of East Jerusalem and other Arab-populated territory. From this time on Israeli Jews were also able to develop areas near the Esplanade, including the Western Wall, as a national symbol founded on their claim for



153 Ariel Sharon's visit, 28 September 2000

historical rights. Israel expected the Arab party to the conflict to recognise at least the Jews' historical connection to the Temple Mount. Tension was manifested in repeated attempts by nationalist religious Jewish groups of extremists to actively express their aspiration to renew Jewish rule over the Mount and even bring it about by force. These attempts have heightened the fears of the Muslim religious establishment of any challenge that might undermine the historical connection of Islam to the site. Accordingly, archaeological research by Israeli scholars close to the Temple Mount, and especially the excavations conducted south of the Mount between 1968 and 1982, are presented as a tool in the political and national conflict and as an Israeli attempt to test the Muslim control of the site.

For Jews and Muslims, Israelis and Palestinians, the Temple Mount and the Haram al-Sharif respectively are the physical embodiment of their religious and national aspirations. Both groups have at times tested the fragile lines of—often informal—understandings that provided periods of artificial tranquillity. Challenges to that delicate status quo were always a reason for discord. According to a poll conducted in February 2005, only 9 percent of the Jewish public is willing for sovereignty over the Temple Mount to pass entirely into Palestinian hands, while 51 percent insist on exclusive Israeli control of the site and 36 percent are prepared for joint Palestinian-Israeli control.¹²⁰

Without doubt, the Sacred Esplanade has been and will continue to remain a contentious issue between Israel and the Palestinians and is a major stumbling block to peace.

Notes

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- 18 Richmond, *Dome of the Rock*.
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- 20 *Jerusalem 1918–1920*, p. 8.
- 21 Kupferschmidt, *Supreme Muslim Council*, p. 88.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 23 *Ibid.*, loc. cit.
- 24 Avni and Seligman, *Temple Mount 1917–2001*, pp. 11–22.
- 25 Hamilton, *Structural History*; Avni and Seligman, *Temple Mount 1917–2001*, pp. 14–20.
- 26 Palestine (Holy Places) Order in Council 1924; Shmuel Berkovitz, *The Battle for the Holy Places: The Struggle for Jerusalem and the Holy Places in Israel, Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip* (Jerusalem, 2000), p. 26 (Hebrew).
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- 37 Hamilton, *Structural History*, p. iv.
- 38 Avni and Seligman, *Temple Mount 1917–2001*, p. 16.
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- 59 Al-'Abadi, *The Jordanian Hashemite Care for Jerusalem*.
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- 77 Shragai, *The Temple Mount Conflict*, pp. 28, 61; Yoel Cohen, "The Political Role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate in the Temple Mount Question," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 11, 1–2 (1999), 101–26; Ramon, "Beyond the Western

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- 78 Benvenisti, *Jerusalem, the Torn City*, p. 101; Ramon, "Beyond the Western Wall," pp. 114–17.
- 79 Shragai, *The Temple Mount Conflict*, p. 62.
- 80 Yisrael Medad, *Jerusalem's Temple Mount: A Jewish-Muslim Flashpoint*, ACPR Policy Paper 111 (Shaarei Tikva, 2000).
- 81 Ramon, "Beyond the Western Wall," pp. 121–35.
- 82 Shragai, *The Temple Mount Conflict*, p. 65; Ramon, "Beyond the Western Wall," p. 122.
- 83 Reiter, "The Third Most Holy," p. 168; Reiter, "Status-Quo on the Temple Mount," p. 309.
- 84 From the end of the First Intifada until the opening of the Hasmonaean tunnel's exit in September 1996, there were no unusual disturbances at the Temple Mount except for the Hamas Movement's non-violent parade on 12 June 1996 in which demonstrators set fire to Israeli flags. For a survey of these events see Berkovitz, *The Battle for the Holy Places*, pp. 115–16.
- 85 Kama, "Investigation of the the Causes of Death," p. 15. Another book, written in the spirit of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, describes the danger posed to al-Aqsa. See Yusuf Kamil Hasuna al-Husayni, *Palestine and Israeli Violations of the Islamic Holy Places* ([Hebron], 2000), p. 9 (Arabic).
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- 106 Sabri in an interview with *al-Jazeera*, 17 December 2000. See also *al-Ayam*, 22 November 1997.
- 107 Egypt, State Information Service, 28 April 2001.
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- 109 *Fatwa* of 21 Dec. 2002 on www.-alaqsa-online.net.
- 110 *Davar*, 3 February 1986 (Hebrew).
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- 112 Ibid., pp. 27–29; Shragai, *The Temple Mount Conflict*, pp. 299–306; Berkovitz, *The Battle for the Holy Places*, pp. 94–95.
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- 115 Avni and Seligman, *Temple Mount 1917–2001*, pp. 34–37; Reiter, "Status-Quo on the Temple Mount," pp. 308–16; Berkovitz, *The Battle for the Holy Places*, p. 62; Jon Seligman, "Solomon's Stables, The Temple Mount, Jerusalem: The Events Concerning the Destruction of Antiquities 1999–2001," *Atiqot* 56 (2007), 33*–54*.
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