

ARCHAEOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE OF ISLAMICJERUSALEM PROBLEMS AND APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT: *It is always said that Archaeology and Architecture represent the existence and the identity of ancient people. Accordingly, history, sociology, chronology, dates, ethnics, etc. can be identified and understood. This is absolutely true anywhere in the world except in Islamicjerusalem. Archaeology and architecture of this city are misidentified and misinterpreted by most scholars. Objectivity is always restricted, not only as a result of the perplexing and contradictory ancient literary sources but also because of the current religious and political circumstances of the city. Consequently, the topic of this article is suggested, and the problem stated. In fact, what this article is attempting to address is very complicated; it deals with overlapping contradictory academic and non-academic layers of information existing in the city.*

KEYWORDS: *Archeology, Architecture, al-Aqsa Mosque, Jewish Temple.*

Introduction

Islamicjerusalem is a unique place, although archaeological discoveries and historical statements in literary sources indicate that it was always suffering lack of water resources, the most important basic element of human settlement and development (Kenyon, 1974: 38), but the association of God and religious significance were the main components that encouraged urban development there. Indeed, all believers of the three monotheistic religions agree that the historical names of the city mean, especially, reverence and veneration, but they differ in interpreting its identity, especially when it is based on the political backgrounds, religious intolerance and greed inherited from preceding generations. It is sad that nowadays Islamicjerusalem,

instead of being a model for multicultural and peaceful coexistence, has become a centre of conflict, causing suffering to the current generation. (Armstrong, 1997: 19)

Discovering Islamic Jerusalem

Since early times, many Jews, Christians and even Muslims have been competing to discover the historical roots and religious identity of Islamic Jerusalem in general, and al-Aqsa Mosque in particular. Other attempts were made by Islamic Jerusalem exploration missions to unravel the history and identity of the city by linking many of the discovered parts of the al-Aqsa enclave with their own beliefs. (Moscrop, 2000: 64) Their interpretations are not always based on solid scientific evidence nor do they even represent an objective point of view. (Al-Ratrout, 2004: 50) This conclusion can be easily reached by examining the political and religious backgrounds of many of the 19th century Islamic Jerusalem great scholars, such as Barclay, Wilson, Melchior de Vogue, Warren, Conder and Clermont-Ganneau (figure 1). This trend also exists among the contemporary Islamic Jerusalem key-scholars of archaeology, such as, Benjamin Mazar, Meir Ben-Dov, Dan Bahat, Eilat Mazar, Michael Avi-Yonah, Miriam Rozen-Ayalon, Yoram Tsafir, Oleg Grabar and others. An approach of this kind is raising more questions on the archaeology and architecture of Islamic Jerusalem hence the importance of this article. The aim of this study is to highlight the archaeology and architecture of Islamic Jerusalem in a scientific and academic way by discussing the results of some of the archaeological excavations including other technological and scientific tests. To achieve this principal objective, the article uses an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach, particularly history, archaeology and architecture, taking into account the religious interpretations on this subject.

The beginning of the 19th century was the time when many efforts were invested by several local, national and international authorities to study the archaeology and architecture of Islamic Jerusalem. These were, in most cases, sparked off by hidden agendas. This was the case of the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF). Its exploration missions were established at that time and

were supervised by military officers such as Captain Warren, Captain Conder and Captain Wilson. Indeed, the resultant information and maps on Islamic Jerusalem are very beneficial for Islamic Jerusalem students. Interpretation and identification of their work however has to be done with great care, especially when considering their backgrounds and objectives.



Figure 1: Jerusalem, some of the discoverers of the Holy Land from the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1867: Scholars from left to right; Warren, Danby, Phillips. Scholars in the front; Eaton; the figure at the rear is not known.
Source: Moscrop, 2000: 76.

There are two types of archaeological excavations carried out in Islamic Jerusalem so far:

- 1) Non-scientific excavations carried out by a number of scholars since the mid-19th and the 20th century C.E. According to Moscrop, these mostly had colonial objectives. (Moscrop, 2000: 64) The approach to their work and their interpretation was based on linking the archaeological discoveries with the Bible.

- 2) Scientific excavation based on stratigraphy. This was started in 1961 by Kathleen Kenyon. She is considered to be a pioneer in applying a scientific approach to her excavation based on stratigraphy. Her excavations focused on the area of *Silwan* pool, south of the al-Aqsa Mosque. (Kenyon 1974, 56) A year after the Israelis took control over Islamic Jerusalem in 1967, excavations were resumed in the city, focusing on al-Aqsa Mosque. It seems that a neo-colonial reality on Islamic Jerusalem has imposed itself; consequently, archaeological excavations in the city have been permitted only to Israelis, such as Benjamin Mazar, Meir Ben-Dov, Dan Bahat and Eilat Mazar and others. All of whom have their own agendas, being affiliated either to the Israeli military forces or to the political establishment of the Jewish state (figure 2). The aim of these excavations is to discover archaeological evidence confirming the existence of the Jewish Temple.

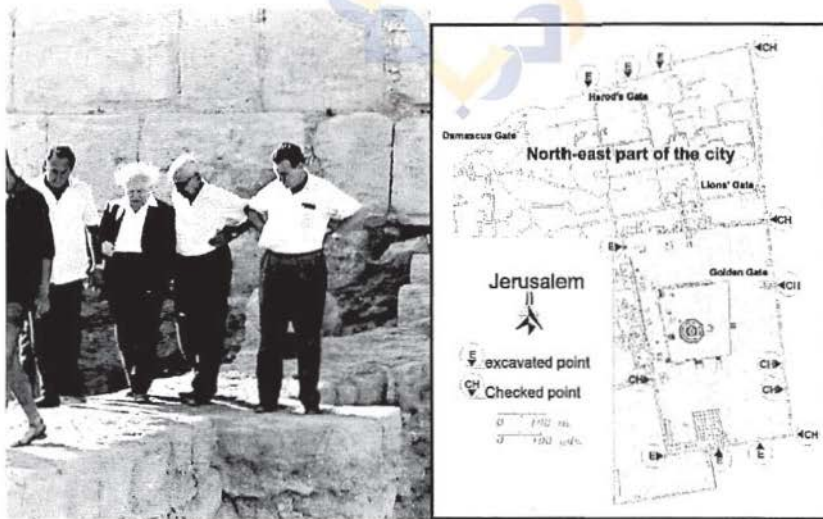


Figure 2: Jerusalem, the map on the right represents excavations conducted by a number of scholars on the eastern part of the city since the beginning of the 19th century until now. The photo on the left represents Benjamin Mazar, David Ben-Gurion (to his right) and Teddy Kollek (to his left) during the excavations adjacent to al-Aqsa mosque.

Source: Al-Ratrout, 2004: 113.

Contrary to what is hoped to be achieved from the results of archaeological excavations in the city, that is, answering questions on history, the identity of the place before the first Islamic conquest of Islamic Jerusalem in the 7th century C.E. becomes the most sensitive topic and controversial issue between Biblical scholars and Muslims.

Biblical interpretation

Biblical scholars do not consider at all the concept of the establishment of al-Aqsa Mosque in Islamic Jerusalem. They identified its existing foundations as part of the urban complex of the Jewish Temple, built by Herod the Great in the 1st century C.E. According to Biblical historical sources, this Temple was destroyed by the Roman commander, Titus, in 70 C.E. At the beginning of this century, another Biblical scholar, Ernest Martin, disputed the traditional Biblical argument on al-Aqsa Mosque which says that it represents the "Jewish Temple". He deliberately studied the ancient early Jewish and Christian historical and religious sources, such as, the 1st century C.E., Flavius Josephus, Bordeaux (333 C.E), Usebius (420 C.E.), Eucherius (427-440 C.E.) and Theodorus (530 C.E.). He argued in his study "Temples That Jerusalem Forgot" that the foundations remaining of the existing walls of the al-Aqsa Mosque do not represent the planning of the 'Jewish Temple' (Fig.3), but are the remains of the Antonia fortress erected also in the reign of Herod the Great. (Martin, 2000: 407)

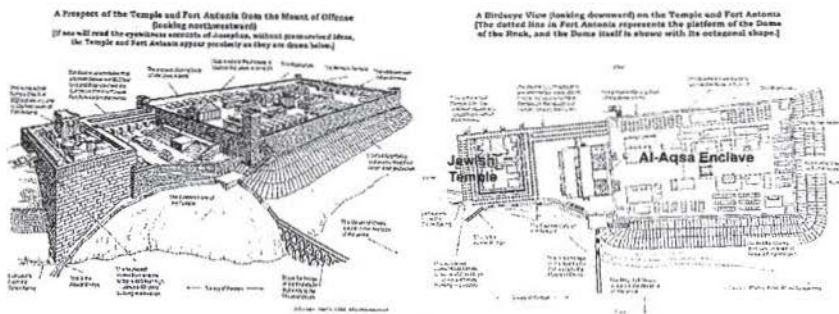


Figure 3: Jerusalem, the site of the Jewish Temple, which appears to be situated outside al-Aqsa Mosque. This is according to the research findings of the Biblical scholar, Ernest Martin. The floor plan on the right is of the Jewish Temple; while the picture on the left shows a reconstructed model for that Temple. Source: Martin, 2000, 407.

Tuvia Sagiv, a well-known Israeli architect in Tel-Aviv, disputes all Biblical arguments. He made both architectural and archaeological comparisons among all erected Roman temples. His conclusion in his study "The Temples of Mount Moriah" suggests that the ancient archaeological remains of the foundation of al-Aqsa Mosque should be dated back to the Roman Emperor Hadrian and not to Herod the Great. (Sagiv nd. 1-36)

Muslims' interpretation

Muslim scholars' opinion, however, contrasts with the traditional Biblical trend. They claim that the establishment and evolution of the place including its identity must be attributed to Adam, the builder of the First Mosque on earth as Muslims believe. Their argument is principally based on the Qur'ānic verse saying:

﴿سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ﴾ (الأنعام: 1).

Glory to He Who did take His worshipper for a journey by night from Al-Harām Mosque to al-Aqsa Mosque, which we have surrounded with Barakah, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the All-hearing All-Seeing.

While the Muhammad Tradition (*Hadīth*), quoted by Abu Dhar al-Ghafārī, said:

عن أبي ذر الغفاري رضي الله عنه أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال "يا رسول الله أي مسجد وضع في الأرض أول قال المسجد الحرام قال قلت ثم أي قال المسجد الأقصى قلت كم كان بينهما قال أربعون سنة ثم أينما أدركت الصلاة بعد فصله فإن الفضل فيه".

Abu Dhar Al-Ghafārī – May God be pleased with him said: "O Messenger of Allah: Which mosque was established first on earth?" He said: "Al-Masjid Al-Harām [in Makkah]." I said: "Then which one?" He said: "Al-Masjid Al-Aqsā [in Islamicjerusalem]." I said: "How much time was between them?" He said: "Forty years, and when it is time for prayer, wherever you are, pray, for that is where the merit is." (Al-Bukharī 2000 v.2, 661-676; Muslim 2000 v.1, 209-210)

The Qur'ān explicitly mentioned the history and the establishment of the First Prophetic Temple on earth for the people, saying:

﴿إن أول بيت وضع للناس للذي ببكة مباركا وهدى للعالمين﴾ (آل عمران: 96).

The first House [of worship] established for mankind was that at Makkah blessed and guidance for the worlds.

Based on the Qur'ānic verse mentioned before, the First Prophetic Temple was established in Makkah on the Arabian Peninsula (al-Damashqī, 1994: 509), while the foundations of al-Aqsa Mosque was established after. In other words, the establishment of al-Aqsa Mosque is historically linked with the founding of the First Prophetic Temple in Makkah. Judging these views and interpretations from an archaeological point of view, it is evident that the al-Aqsa enclave was a built-up area in the Roman period. (Kenyon, 1974: 205-236) Archaeology did not provide such physical evidence on the actual identity of the place however that it must be attributed only to the Roman Herodian Period. It also failed to verify that the Romans were the first to allocate and delineate the area of al-Aqsa enclave, or that they did not build on earlier borders of the place, regardless of the nature of those borders prior to the Roman period. Indeed, archaeology did not confirm that the urban planning of the al-Aqsa enclave was representing a Jewish Temple or a pagan Roman Temple or even a Muslim mosque. (Al-Ratrou, 2005: 3)

Archaeological and architectural challenges

The contradictory identifications of archaeology and architecture of Islamic Jerusalem, especially on al-Aqsa Mosque, have brought a crucial challenge to archaeologists and the excavations supervisors. They are always following the literary Biblical conception, and are convinced that the planning of al-Aqsa Mosque only represents the Jewish Temple. (Figure 4) The reason for this Biblical affiliation is due to their political and religious backgrounds. Hence, it seems that traditional Biblical scholars are unable to accept any conclusion which does not correspond to their convictions. They recognise that it would be a threat to the Zionist idea, and the destabilisation of the basis for the Jewish state. As a result, the Israeli excavations always lead to other excavations and not to scientific conclusive results. In that, an Israeli archaeologist from Bar-Ilan University Aren Maeir says:

If the scholars asked a hundred scholars (about the Jewish Temple), you will get a hundred and one opinions." (http://www.virtual.co.il/news/j_report/98n0v23/books.htm, 2)



Figure 4: Jerusalem, a reconstruction from the more common architectural models of the Jewish Temple in the area of al-Aqsa Mosque.

Source: Geva, 1994: 145.

Israeli excavation and interpretations in Islamic Jerusalem

Since Israel took control over Islamic Jerusalem in 1967, the intention of discovering the historical Jewish Temple has become their crucial objective. Israelis focused their excavations in Islamic Jerusalem around the al-Aqsa enclave. The first Israeli excavation was initiated in 1968 under the supervision of the Israeli archaeologist Benjamin Mazar, when one of the Umayyad palaces, located to the south of al-Aqsa Mosque, was completely revealed. It is worth remembering that this building was dated before to the Byzantine period. (Kenyon, 1974: 276) It seems that targeting the history of Islamic Jerusalem forms the next stage of the Israeli controlling plan over the city, so results of their archaeological excavation must follow the Israeli plan and agendas. This provokes Kathleen Kenyon, a well-known British archaeologist of Islamic Jerusalem, into saying:

An intriguing new possibility has been introduced by Israeli excavators in the area of the Jewish quarter on the eastern slope of the western ridge. (Kenyon, 1974: 148)

Israeli archaeologists such as N Avigad, who supervised Islamic Jerusalem excavations, say that the borders of the city were

extended to this point in the 8th century BC. On the contrary, Kenyon states that:

The evidence was firm that there was no occupation here until the first century A.D. (Kenyon, 1974: 148)

Indeed, the archaeology of Islamic Jerusalem must be questioned as long as it is under the control of the Israeli political establishment.

Not only are false results of the Israeli excavation in Islamic Jerusalem a reason for controversies among scholars; a further reason is the adoption of a large number of inherited erroneous identifications from the old traditional interpretations (Conder, 1909: 3), especially, from the period that preceded Islamic conquest of the city. These two reasons led most current Biblical and Israeli scholars alike to confuse a lot of urban and architectural achievements of Muslims there and, consequently, identify them as part of the Jewish Temple. This was exemplified in the discovery of the bridge, located above the level of Umayyad Street, adjacent to the Western Wall of al-Aqsa Mosque as it belongs to the Jewish Temple. This is currently known as "Wilson Arch" (Wilson being the name of its discoverer). Functionally, the bridge links the western part of the present city with *Bab al-Silsilah* (the Chain Gate) of al-Aqsa enclave (Figure 5). Warren emphasises that the history of this bridge cannot be dated to a period prior to the 5th century or even 6th century C.E. (Warren, 1970: 195) In 1931, Hamilton carried out an excavation at the western end of this bridge. His conclusion corresponds with Warren's results that it must be dated to the Islamic period. (Bahat, 1994: 177) The Archaeologist Mier Ben-Dov who directed many of Israeli excavations also believes this; he stresses that this arch, including the creation of its supports on the western wall of al-Aqsa Mosque, **originated in the Islamic period** and did not exist previously. (Ben-Dov, 1985: 176) Indeed, such results make it difficult to justify why Israeli scholars insist, including Meir Ben-Dov himself, on the traditional architectural model reconstruction of the Jewish Temple, which includes this bridge, despite the contradictory scientific evidences.

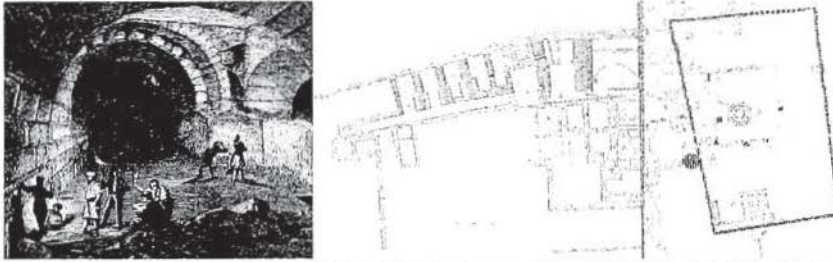


Figure 5: Jerusalem, Wilson Arch; a bridge connecting Bab al-Silsilah (the Gate of the Chain) with the western part of the city of Islamic Jerusalem (identified by the vast majority of Israelis as part of the Jewish Temple). The picture on the right shows the location of the bridge and the middle represents its plan. On the left, is a historical drawing of the Arch in the 19th century C.E.

Source: Warren, 1876: 369; Burgoyne, 1987: 236; Al-Ratrouf, 2004: 405.

The twisted logic of interpretation to the archaeology and architecture of Islamic Jerusalem did not stop at this point, continuing in another Israeli excavation at the southern end of the Western Wall of al-Aqsa Mosque. When a stone pier was discovered there, archaeologists linked it with a supporting stone arch in the Western Wall of al-Aqsa Mosque. This arch is currently known as 'Robinson arch' from the name of its discoverer. Israeli archaeologists interpreted it as a surviving part of the supporting piers carrying the stairs of the Jewish Temple. To justify this, the Israeli scholars invented an architectural reconstruction of a three-sided stepped ramp. Kenyon is not the only one with reservations on such interpretation (Kenyon, 1974: 217), Lalor has also found it difficult to accept this strange invented architectural model, especially since it does not exist at all in the Roman architecture. (Lalor, 1997: 207) This leads to the question: from where did Israeli archaeologists draw their ideas on architecture of the Jewish Temple? (Figure 6). Despite these unsatisfactory and contradictory results on the traditional architectural model of the Jewish Temple, Israeli archaeologists are very encouraged. They aim to expand their excavations to provide physical evidence to support their claims. Consequently, in the seventies of the last century, the excavated area adjacent to al-Aqsa Mosque, established by Mazar in 1968, was expanded south. Under the supervision of Meir Ben-Dov the excavation covered all the area alongside the southern wall of the al-Aqsa and that adjacent to its south-western corner.

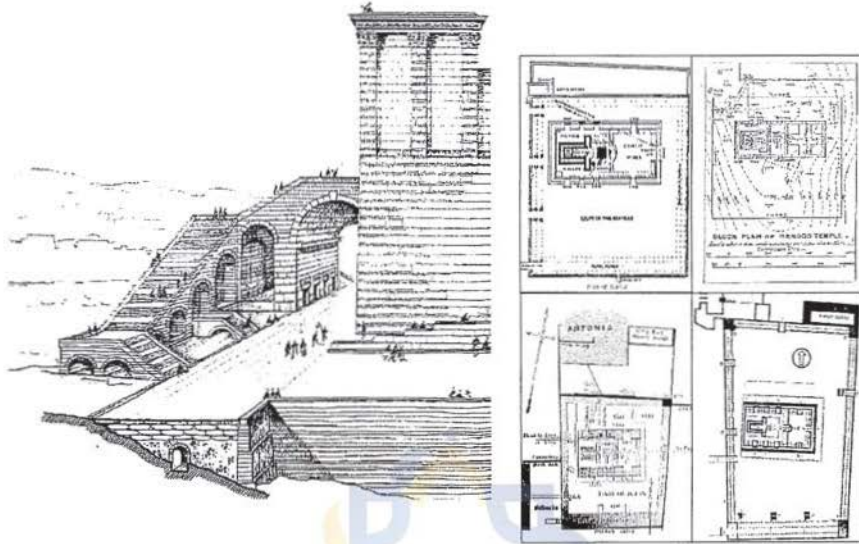


Figure 6: Jerusalem, shown on the right are some of the different models of the Jewish Temple as Biblical scholars believe. On the left is a reconstruction of an architectural model of the arching system carrying the stairs of the Jewish Temple. Source: <http://templemount.org>; Kenyon 1974, 210; Ben-Dov, 1985: 128.

Six Muslim Umayyad palaces were revealed including Dar al-Imarah (the Governor House) (Figure 7). Among the discoveries was a network of streets linking Umayyad palaces with the city and al-Aqsa Mosque as well as a number of its entrances also built by Umayyads.

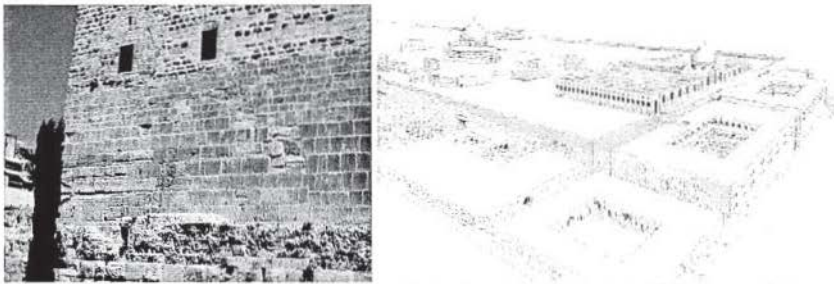


Figure 7: On the left is shown the southern area of al-Aqsa Mosque where Mazar and Ben-Dov have carried out their excavations since 1968. On the right can be seen the Umayyad palaces discovered adjacent to the southern wall of al-Aqsa Mosque. Source: the researcher; Ben-Dov, 1985.

It seems that the large-scale architectural and urban Muslim building achievements in IslamicJerusalem were a surprise to many. Nevertheless, it has been difficult for some well-known Israeli archaeologists, such as Ben-Dov and Bahat, to accept those results and change their beliefs on the Jewish Temple. Their interpretations of Muslim archaeological remains were given in a Biblical template. For example, it has been claimed that the *Bab Hatta* (Hatta Gate), adjacent to the *Buraq* Mosque and known among archaeologists as Barclay Gate, represents one of the Jewish Temple gates. (Bahat 1995: 22; Ben-Dov, 1985: 142) There is no archaeological evidence to justify Ben-Dov and Bahat's claims. On the contrary, the conclusive evidence from the excavations of Ben-Dov contradicts their claim. Archaeologically, the level of the lower threshold of this gate is contemporary with the Umayyad street level and with one of the drainage channels located below, all of these dating to the Umayyad period (Figure 8). It is worth noting that the difference in level between the Umayyad street and Roman street adjacent to the Western Wall and that located south of the al-Aqsa Mosque is more than 4 metres. (Ben-Dov, 1985: 142) To make more of this archaeological falsification, it is ironic that this Roman street itself has been identified by the vast majority of Israeli archaeologists to be Herodian. But archaeologists Roni Reich and Yaakov Biligs have found coins below this street paving dating to a later period. (Reich& Biligs, 1999: 117 5759) If this is so, Israeli Herodian identification cannot be accepted even by beginner students of archaeology and the street, therefore, cannot be Herodian. (Sagiv, 2006: 1) This coincides with the **definite identification** of the Byzantine *Cardo* of IslamicJerusalem by some British archaeologists when they excavated it and identified it to be Herodian. (Ben-Dov, 1985: 227) Ben Dov, who was working in an excavation close by and has the same stratigraphical sequence, rejected their conclusion, confirming that the Roman stratigraphical level is below. (Ben-Dov, 1985: 227) In spite of Ben-Dov's conclusion, that Muslims created this gate, he himself inexplicably assumed that the gate of the Jewish Temple must be at a lower level of the gate threshold. A simple study of the Roman street level there and investigating the stone courses below Umayyad gate threshold

adjacent to the Roman street shows that there is no stone cut in the wall to support Ben-Dov's assumption.

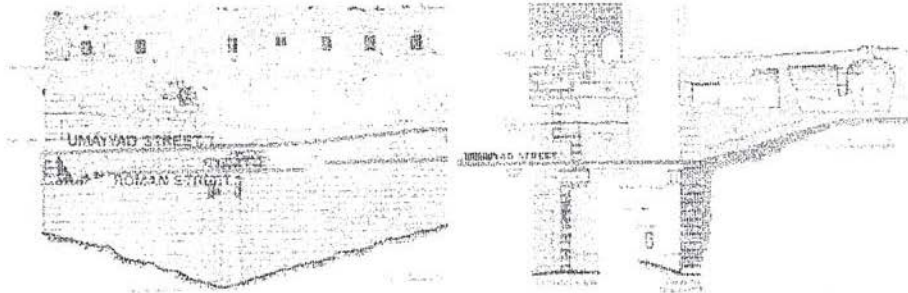


Figure 8: Al-Aqsa Mosque, the picture on the right shows the Bab Hatta (or Barclay Gate) leading to al-Aqsa Mosque. This was established by Umayyads. The level of the gate's threshold is at the same level as Umayyad street. The picture on the left shows the difference in level between the Roman street and the Umayyad street in the area adjacent to the southern wall of al-Aqsa Mosque, where it is estimated to be nearly 4 m.

Source: After Bahat, 1995: 22; After Mazar, 1969: 26.

The shocking conclusion is the result revealed by Ben-Dov and Bahat's archaeological excavation alongside the Western Wall of the Aqsa Mosque in the nineties of the last century. With the help of a tunnel that was dug under the Islamic buildings, it is evident that the Roman building constructional work at the northern end of the Western Wall, as well the street adjacent to its foundations, which all date back to the 1st century C.E., is not finished for some reason. This excavation also confirms that the material culture and architectural features, which date to the same period, have completely disappeared, after a distance of about 448 metres north of the southwest corner of the al-Aqsa Mosque. Based on this archaeological evidence, Bahat concluded that the Western Wall of al-Aqsa Mosque did not extend northward after this point in the 1st century C.E. (Bahat, 1994: 189; Geva, 1994: 15) (Figure 9) This means that the Roman architectural work at the present northern area of al-Aqsa Mosque was not completed in the second half of the 1st century C.E. This contrasts with the traditional Biblical interpretation that the present area of al-Aqsa Mosque was the Jewish Temple, which was fully completed before its destruction in the 1st century C.E. This conclusion corresponds to the results of Warren's exploration established before at the northeast corner of

the al-Aqsa enclave. He excavated the Roman foundations of the wall, where he discovered that there was no detectable corner of the surrounding walls of the Jewish Temple or there is no stone interruption in the stone courses. (Warren, 1970: 195) The foundations of the wall confirm its continuity as part of the city wall. Again, this contrasts with the shape and area of the Jewish Temple as believed by Biblical archaeologists.

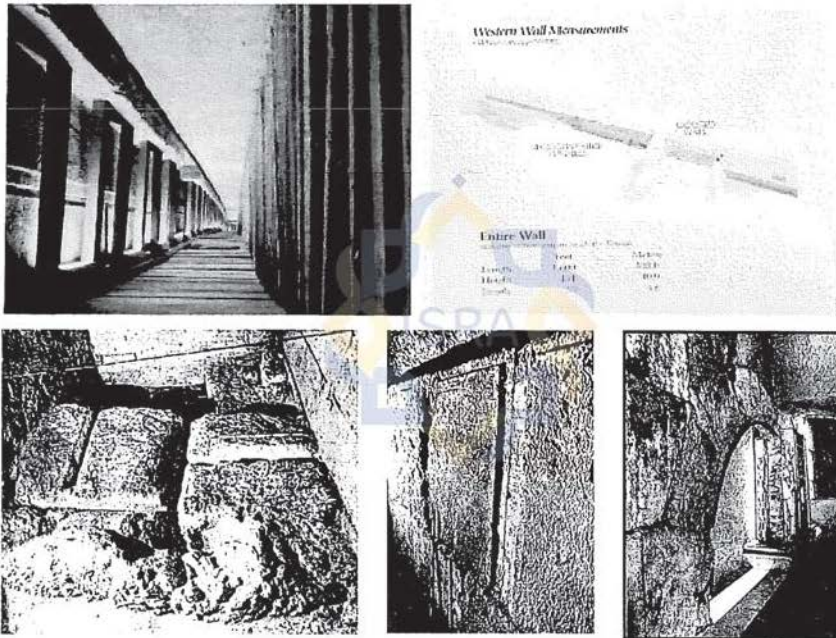


Figure 9: Pictures showing the Israeli excavations alongside the Western Wall of al-Aqsa Mosque: The upper pictures represent the location and the extent of the excavations. The lower pictures show some of the archaeological discoveries of one of al-Aqsa Mosque gates, the foundation stone courses of the Wall and the stone quarry of the enclave. Source: the researcher and others.

It seems that the scientific results of Israeli excavations were not intended to be purposeful, but as a means to an end, to interfere and conflict with the political agenda. This was clearly said by the Turkish Technical Committee of experts who were sent by the Turkish Foreign Ministry in 2007 to assess the Israeli excavations in the area of *Mughrabi* Gate located on the Western Wall of al-Aqsa Mosque. They state:

The tunnelling and excavation works and the large amount of soil extraction shown to our mission along the Wailing Wall give the impression that this is an intervention of great scale and depth, and this intervention goes beyond scientific purpose... (Turkish Foreign ministry, 2007: 64).

It is obvious that the presented results of the Israeli archaeological excavation were against their goals. Instead of revealing evidence on the Jewish Temple, the discoveries are clarifying the Muslim building achievement in Islamic Jerusalem on the one hand and on the other revealing information that contradicts the Biblical narratives. Hence, Israeli scholars tried to look for other approaches to deal with the archaeology and architecture of Islamic Jerusalem particularly that of al-Aqsa Mosque.

Technological and scientific tests in Islamic Jerusalem

In 1983, an Israeli architect, Tuvia Sagiv, adopted technological and scientific tests to approach al-Aqsa Mosque. By using Ground Penetration Radar (GPR), Sagiv was able to explore the ground levels below the Southern and Western Walls and part of the Eastern. The results confirm that al-Aqsa Mosque has number of natural gaps existing below its Double and Triple Gates. So it was not standing on the system of arches as expected in building the Jewish Temple. (<http://www.templemount.org/radarir.html>) (figure 10). Sagiv carried out another test on the site of the Dome of the Rock, considered by some Israeli scholars, such as Dan Bahat, to be the location of the holy of holies of the Jewish Temple. By using Thermal Infra-Red imagery test, which monitors changes in the thermal radiation of objects of different density, he obtained a set of images at different hours of the day for the building. The results confirmed that the bedrock below the Dome of the Rock has pentagonal shape and there is no evidence of architectural remains below this building (Figure 11). (<http://www.templemount.org/graphics3/Fig2-3.html>). This result corresponds with Clermont-Ganneau's excavation, carried out in 1873 C.E., in the intermediate arcade of the Dome of the Rock. He reached virgin soil 91 cm from the existing ground level of the building. All the discovered material culture belongs to the Islamic period (Clermont-Ganneau, 1899: 216). So the reasons

behind the Israeli claim that the site of the Dome of the Rock was the location of the ‘holy of holies’ of the Jewish Temple are not scientifically understood.

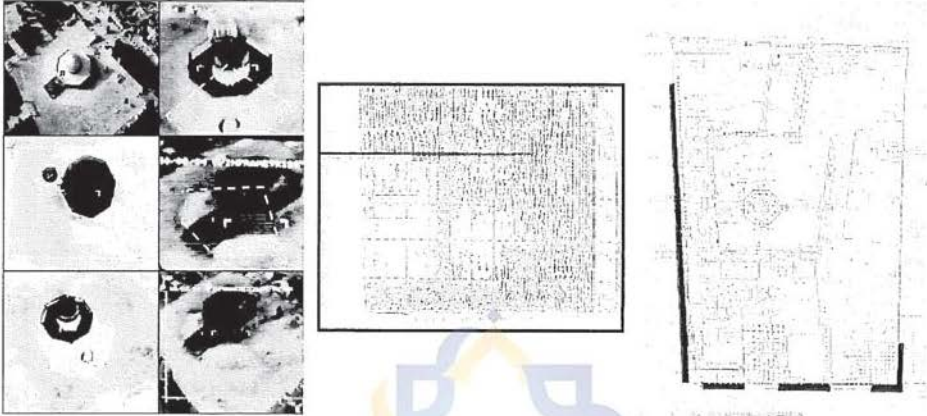


Figure 10: Pictures showing scientific tests performed in the area of al-Aqsa Mosque: the picture on the right represents a location of the radar test. The picture at the bottom represents the results of the radar test showing the gaps in the rock below the southern wall of al-Aqsa Mosque. The picture on the left represents a Thermal Infra-Red imagery test for the Dome of the Rock, which shows the natural rock below has a pentagonal shape.

Source: <http://www.templemount.org/graphics/Fig32.html>

<http://www.templemount.org/graphics/Fig33.html>

<http://www.templemount.org/graphics3/Fig2-3.html>

Israelis have attempted to achieve their own agenda by inventing so-called archaeological and architectural evidence, regardless of any scientific facts. Their archaeological interpretations and political actions in IslamicJerusalem seem to imply that they deliberately intend to undermine the Islamic identity of the place, regardless of their claims of objective research and their scientific goals of archaeological excavations. This clearly appeared in the Israeli excavations of *Magharbah* gate in 2007 where remains belonging to the periods of Umayyad, Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman have been revealed and largely destroyed (Figure 11). According to a statement made by Gideon Avni from the Israel Authority of Antiquities, the objective for removing the street leading up to the *Mughrabi* Gate, instead of restoring it, is to expand the Western Wall plaza to the south, and is not due to the

unstable unsecure construction of the street as the official statement of the Israel Authority of Antiquities claims. (Turkish Foreign Ministry, 2007: 40) The Turkish experts' committee on the work of the Israeli excavations say:

It is clearly seen that, if appropriate measures are not taken in the excavations performed by the Israeli authorities, no data or remains belonging to the Ayyubid, Mameluke and Ottoman periods, which are the most recent cultural structural remains of the Mughrabi Neighbourhood, will survive. The ongoing activities indeed give the impression that they are a planned and systematically implemented effort that aims at destroying values associated with cultural assets, and the sources of information relating to said cultures... (Turkish Foreign Ministry, 2007: 43)

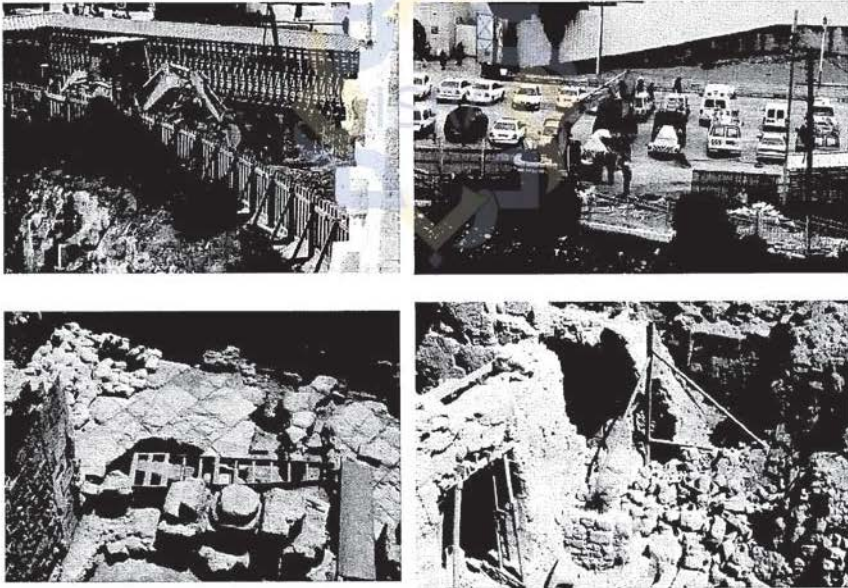


Figure 11: Israeli excavations at the Mughrabi Gate, 2007. Upper pictures show that using an Israeli bulldozer in the excavation is not justified, while the bottom pictures show some discovered residential houses that belong to the Islamic periods. Source: the researcher.

Muslims' information on Islamic Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque, especially on the period that precedes the Muslims' conquest of the city, is not less difficult to verify than Biblical

claims. This is due to the primary sources of information on Islamicjerusalem which fluctuate between the old historical literature that narrated Biblical stories, and the Israeli excavations that have colonial objectives. Objective researchers must deal with these dilemmas with great caution. The difficulty was in presenting a scientific methodology that could deal with various different sources of information, as well as the need to review and to examine all contradictions and inaccuracies in information and interpretations. As a result, most Muslims scientific research focused on studying Islamicjerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque from the time of the conquest of the city. Earlier periods have been totally ignored, which is considered a barrier for Muslim researchers. So they accepted information on the earlier periods from Biblical or Israeli origins, without studying or investigating such sources or even analysing the different circumstances that influenced them.

Nevertheless, an important study on Islamicjerusalem has emerged by this researcher (Haitham al-Ratrout of An-Najah National University) discussing the subject of the architectural model and planning of al-Aqsa Mosque since its establishment. On the basis of inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary approaches, using historical and architectural comparisons and analysis based on archaeology, al-Ratrout was able to find a link between Muslim traditions about the place and archaeological discoveries. His study also demonstrated the relationship between the Sacred Mosque in Makka and al-Aqsa Mosque in Islamicjerusalem and discovered their original architectural prototype, from which they were developed (Figure 12). Al-Ratrout also attempted in his studies to answer many questions and solve problems that have been raised on the historical building of al-Aqsa Mosque, i.e. the reasoning behind its orientation, shape, plan etc. His study calls researchers to reconsider the methodology of studying the architecture and archaeology of al-Aqsa Mosque and Islamicjerusalem, especially in the earlier periods that precede the Muslim conquest, taking into consideration Israeli control over the sources of information. (Al-Ratrout, 2005: 1-31)

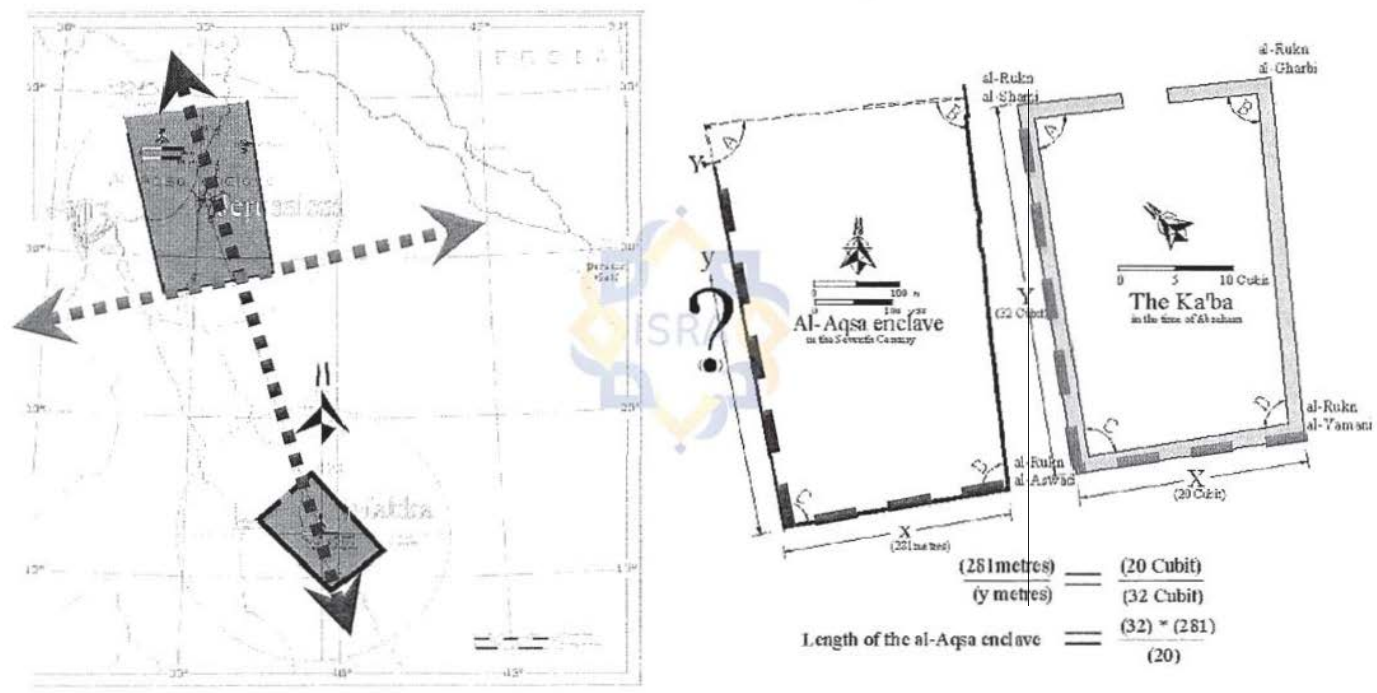


Figure 12: Existing geographical link between the Sacred Mosque in Makkah and al Aqsa Mosque in Islamic Jerusalem and the architectural relationship between them. The picture on the right represents plan similarities between the Sacred Mosque and al-Aqsa Mosque at the time of establishment. The picture on the left represents the orientation of the area al-Aqsa Mosque towards the Sacred Mosque in Makkah. Source: Al-Ratrout, 2005: 24, 28.

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Conclusion

To sum up, information and interpretation on IslamicJerusalem were generated from different sources encountered by earlier researches and information. Erroneous identifications and false interpretations on archaeology and architecture of IslamicJerusalem do not merely result from the present situation in IslamicJerusalem but were inherited from the past. The questions of archaeology and architecture are not as easy as they look. The problems of how scholars of IslamicJerusalem identify its archaeology, and how they define and view Islamic architecture have to be addressed clearly. All results of the conducted excavations in IslamicJerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque, some of which are scientifically reviewed, oppose their excavations goals. Instead of confirming Biblical identity of the place and proving the existence of the Jewish Temple, the findings verify the Islamic identity of IslamicJerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque and clarify the Islamic architecture and urban planning there. Still, most of the well-known Israeli excavators insist on their fantasy image of the Jewish Temple, which dominated them, so they identify many Islamic architectural achievements as parts of the Jewish Temple. It is sad that now archaeology and architecture of IslamicJerusalem are controlled by Israelis working on the behalf of the Israeli political or military establishments. The scientific evidence and archaeological remains discovered so far in al-Aqsa Mosque and IslamicJerusalem conflict with traditional Biblical interpretations. The Israeli archaeologists are not ready to give up their convictions that they will one day in the future provide physical evidence that will prove their claims on the Jewish Temple and IslamicJerusalem.

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