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Reassessing the Global Turn in Medieval Art History

Edited by
CHRISTINA NORMORE

CONTENTS

THE FATIMID HOLY CITY: REBUILDING
JERUSALEM IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

JENNIFER PRUITT

MEDIEVAL JERUSALEM WAS a city of contact, conflict, and change. Its glo-
balism was characterized by a confluence of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish popula-
tions within the city and in the movement of people from the eastern Roman Empire
(Byzantium), the Islamic world, and Latin Christendom. Architecturally, the monu-
ments of the Haram al-Sharif stand as some of the most iconic structures in the his-
tory of Islamic art. Scholarly analysis of Islamic Jerusalem often focuses on the mon-
uments of the Haram al-Sharif (known as the Temple Mount to Jews and Christians)
at the time of its foundation, under the Umayyad caliphate (661–750 CE). However,
the Umayyads only controlled the city for a little more than fifty years after their
construction of the Dome of the Rock (completed in 691/2).[1] In contrast, many of
the pre-Crusader monuments on the Haram al-Sharif were renovated and rebuilt
under the patronage of the Ismaili Fatimid dynasty (909–1171).

This essay explores the architectural history of Jerusalem in the period after
the Umayyads and before the Crusades. With a focus on the interrelationship
among confessional groups in Jerusalem and their identification with sacred space,
it examines the transformation of the city in the Abbasid and Fatimid eras. In par-
ticular, the renovations to the Haram al-Sharif under the Fatimid caliph al-Zahir
(r. 1021–1036) brought increased prominence and renewed building projects on
the Haram al-Sharif, in marked contrast to the treatment of the city by the Abbasid
rulers. This analysis of changes to and conflicts surrounding sacred, confessional
space illuminates global and local dynamics in architectural patronage patterns.

Compared to the time of the Umayyads, Abbasid-era Jerusalem was charac-
terized by a caliphal disinterest in the monuments of the holy city. However, it
also saw growth in the identification between local populations and their respec-
tive religious monuments. This contest over sacred space culminated under the
Fatimid dynasty, in the cataclysmic reign of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (r. 985–1021),
who is infamous today because he called for the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre.
Indeed, al-Hakim's incursion into the city was predominantly destructive.

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1 While the monuments at the time of foundation are most widely considered in scholar-
ship, Grabar and Necipoğlu have both tackled the subject of Umayyad Jerusalem's changing
meaning: Necipoğlu, "Dome of the Rock"; Grabar's *Shape of the Holy* and *Dome of the Rock*
remain the most useful and thorough exploration of its changing forms and meaning.

Nevertheless, his attention to the city would have productive results for eleventh-century Jerusalem. His successor, al-Zahir, was deeply invested in renovating the structures of the Haram al-Sharif, ushering in a chapter of architectural patronage and a resurgence of imperial interest in the structure. This essay argues that this patronage was carried out with the goal of undoing the excesses of al-Hakim's reign. In al-Zahir's reimagining of the sacred space, the platform's architecture emphasized the orthodox Islamic tales of the Prophet's night journey (*isrāʾ*) and ascension to heaven (*miʿrāj*), in direct contrast to the perceived heresies of the later years of al-Hakim's reign.

After the Umayyads: Islamic Jerusalem in the Eighth to Tenth Centuries

Sources for Jerusalem in the Abbasid period offer a hazy account of imperial interest in the city. However, an analysis of recorded events suggests a distant imperial concern with patronizing Jerusalem's architecture. Sources record that both al-Mansur (r. 754–775) and al-Mahdi (r. 775–785) visited the city; however, there is no mention of any of the subsequent Abbasid caliphs visiting Jerusalem.[2] The increased physical distance and decreased imperial interest in the city were exacerbated by a number of serious earthquakes, which led to major structural damage of the monuments on the Haram al-Sharif. However, Muslim residents of the city often rallied in support of the Islamic monuments in the face of the caliph's opposition or inaction. This dynamic is in contrast to the model of top-down patronage that is often assumed for medieval architecture. For example, records of al-Mansur's first visit to the city in 758 indicate that he found the monuments on the Haram al-Sharif and the former Umayyad palace in ruins, following earthquake damage in 746. The caliph's presence in the city suggests that it maintained a religious function. However, an account of the ruler's encounter with the city's Islamic monuments illustrates its more peripheral status for this dynasty. Muslim inhabitants of the city approached the caliph, requesting that he finance the restoration of the damaged mosque. The caliph replied:

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2 In fact, al-Mansur visited Jerusalem twice: once after his hajj in 140/758 and a second time in 154/771, to put down a revolt. For a summary of caliphal visits, see Goitein and Grabar, "Al-Kuds." Grabar (*Dome of the Rock*, 127) has suggested that these early visits may have been due to the temporary re-routing of the hajj route: during al-Mansur and al-Mahdi's reigns, the route passed through Jerusalem. However, by the reign of al-Maʾmun, the route bypassed the city.

"I have no money." Then he ordered that the plates of gold and silver that covered the doors be removed. It was so done and they converted them into dinars and dirhams which would serve to pay for the reconstruction.[3]

Thus, within a span of fifty years, the city's Islamic buildings had lost the premier status they held at the time of their foundation. Rather than the ruler, it was the Muslim population who acted in support of the monument, asking the reluctant caliph for the funds to restore it. The central mosque had become such a low priority to the Abbasid ruler that he was willing to pluck off the rich decor of the iconic structure in order to finance its rebuilding.

A similar example of Abbasid disinterest in Jerusalem's monuments can be seen under al-Mansur's successor, al-Mahdi (r. 775–785), who repaired the mosque again, following earthquake damage in 771. In this case, the tenth-century geographer al-Muqaddasi reports that the entire Aqsa mosque was destroyed, except a small portion near the mihrab.[4] Like his father had done, al-Mahdi insisted that the Abbasid treasury had no money to renovate the mosque. Instead:

> He wrote to the governors of the provinces and to other commanders, that each should undertake the building of a colonnade. The order was carried out and the edifice rose firmer and more substantial than it had ever been in former times.[5]

Once again, the reigning caliph refused to finance the renovation, instead marshalling his courtiers to repair the building.[6] Al-Mahdi also determined that al-Mansur's mosque was too narrow and not in much use, so that the builders should increase the width of the mosque, while shortening its length.[7] It was this mosque that was seen by al-Muqaddasi during his visit in 985. In his excavations during the 1930s, Robert Hamilton found al-Muqaddasi's description to be consistent with

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3 Mujir al-Din, *Histoire*, 41–42; cited in Peters, *Jerusalem*, 215–16.

4 Al-Muqaddasi, *Description of Syria*, 41–42.

5 Ibid., 41.

6 Al-Muqaddasi couches the restoration in the context of religious competition in Jerusalem. Prior to discussing the restorations under al-Mahdi, he argues that the mosque's proximity to the Holy Sepulchre made it even more beautiful than the mosque in Damascus. Ibid., 41. His account of the mosque's response to the beauty of the Holy Sepulchre echoes his famous statement that the Dome of the Rock was constructed so that the Holy Sepulchre would not "dazzle the minds" of resident Muslims.

7 This account is recorded by al-Gharam, as quoted in LeStrange, *Palestine*, 92–93.

the archaeological record,[8] noting that the mosque was made up of a wide central nave, a dome, and with parts of the older mosque incorporated into the structure.[9]

The next major event in the Abbasid patronage of Jerusalem's structures was under the reign of al-Ma'mun (r. 813–833), who sponsored the building of eastern and northern gates on the Haram al-Sharif and the refurbishment of the Dome of the Rock. Like his predecessors, al-Ma'mun refused to invest his own funds in the project, although the rebuilding nevertheless asserted his presence in the city. Al-Ma'mun's refurbishment also maintained the aesthetic style and architectural framework of the Umayyad originals so consistently that he simply replaced 'Abd al-Malik's name with his own in the Dome's inscriptional band—even mimicking the gold kufic lettering of the Umayyad original. The name of the Abbasid caliph thus looks like it could have been a part of the Umayyad original. Moreover, although the Umayyad caliph's name was replaced, the foundational date was unaltered.[10] Changing the name not only proclaimed the Abbasid ruler as the renovator of the site, but erased its Umayyad history, associating the very foundation of the Dome with Abbasid patronage. Al-Ma'mun's investment in Jerusalem was also visible in the Aqsa mosque, in a similar manner. The eleventh-century chronicler Nasir-i Khusraw described a bronze portal with his name on it within the confines of the mosque, said to have been sent from Baghdad.

In the tenth century, Abbasid control of Jerusalem waned, as the new Tulunid and Ikhshidid dynasties took over control of the city from their base in Egypt.[11] The details of this period are particularly murky, but it seems that the city gained greater significance in the Islamic imagination. Sufis (Islamic mystics) increasingly travelled to the city, focusing their practices around the Haram al-Sharif, which witnessed a proliferation of commemorative structures, marking sacred spots on the platform, most likely built sometime in the eighth and ninth centuries. While the rulers' role in patronizing these monuments is unclear, the rising status of the city can be seen by the fact that the Ikhshidid rulers' bodies were transferred for burial to Jerusalem, to be interred within the confines of the holy city.[12] But given

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8 Hamilton *Structural History*, 72.

9 For reconstructions of the Aqsa mosque, see Grabar, *Shape of the Holy;* Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture;* and Hamilton, *Structural History.* Al-Mahdi's visit took place during a time of intense wars with Byzantium: Gil, *History of Palestine*, 298.

10 This inscription is published in Grabar, *Dome of the Rock*, 60.

11 The Tulunid and Ikhshidid rulers did not seem to have made visits to Jerusalem. Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 136. For a discussion of these groups, see Bianquis, "Autonomous Egypt from Ibn Ṭūlūn to Kāfūr, 868–969."

12 Grabar also notes that there are a series of inscriptions from 913–14 from the beams of the ceiling, most likely recording repairs or restorations executed under the mother of the

the lack of written documentation of imperial patronage in this period, it is likely that the new structures represented a grassroots effort by the local population, suggesting an intimate connection between the populace and the city's sites.

Religious Competition in Eighth- and Ninth-Century Jerusalem

The eighth century witnessed a new shift in the physical makeup and population of Jerusalem, particularly under the reign of the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809) and the Carolingian ruler Charlemagne (r. 742–814). In this period, Latin Christianity began to alter the urban landscape. As Abbasid investment in the city waned, the Carolingian Empire's involvement increased substantially.[13] Charlemagne sponsored significant Christian structures within Jerusalem while recreating his own city of Aachen as a new Jerusalem in the West. In particular, a complex for the housing of Latin pilgrims was constructed near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, bolstering the presence of a Christian confessional identity in the city. Sources from the period suggest that many Christian monuments were in full operation, with generous funding for their upkeep and with treasuries supplied by foreign Christian powers.[14] Al-Ma'mun's renovation of the Haram al-Sharif was likely carried out in reaction to Christian renovation projects in Jerusalem, in particular the renovations to the Holy Sepulchre. Indeed, records of Abbasid-era events suggest flare-ups of religious tension and competition among different religious groups in the city. Prior to al-Ma'mun's restoration of the Haram al-Sharif, Jerusalem had suffered through several famines, including a plague of locusts, which resulted in a drastic decrease in its Muslim population.[15] Taking advantage of this turmoil,

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caliph al-Muqtadir, under the oversight of Labid. See Grabar, *Dome of the Rock*, 127. This is also mentioned in al-Muqaddasi, *Description of Syria*, 45.

13 Much has been written about the relationship between the Abbasids and the Franks during the reigns of Charlemagne and Harun al-Rashid. Arabic sources do not discuss this relationship; but according to an anonymous Benedictine monk, writing just after the First Crusade (1095–1099), Charlemagne visited the Holy Sepulchre with Harun al-Rashid and then covered the monument in gold and inscribed his name on it: Gil, *History of Palestine*, 285–87. Although the source is apocryphal, it points to the centrality of architecture in constructing religious and political claims of legitimacy in the holy city. For a discussion of Charlemagne's imperial vision, see Latowsky, *Emperor*, chapter 6; Nees, "Charlemagne's Elephant."

14 See Peters, *Jerusalem*, 217–20. For a discussion of Charlemagne in Jerusalem, see Gabriele, *Empire of Memory*.

15 Saʿid al-Bitriq noted that "only a few of them [Muslims] remained": see Gil, *History of Palestine*, 295.

the patriarch Thomas instituted large-scale repairs on the Holy Sepulchre.[16] It was soon after this renovation that al-Ma'mun ordered reconstruction on the Haram al-Sharif, asserting the importance of Muslim presence in the city.

The competition between Muslim and Christian populations became particularly tense in the tenth century, when inter-confessional strife broke out on both imperial and local levels. Mob violence against Christians occurred on a large enough scale to be recorded in medieval sources. Al-Muqaddasi's description of the city notes that, everywhere, Christians and Jews "have the upper hand." In particular, tales of the wealth concentrated in church treasuries aggravated local confessional conflict, centring much of the urban upheaval around these Christian spaces, particularly the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In 937, Christians were attacked by a mob during a Palm Sunday procession and the Holy Sepulchre was set on fire, damaging its gates, the Anastasis Rotunda, and Golgotha chapel.[17] In 966, mob violence damaged the Holy Sepulchre and other Christian buildings in the city, including the church of St. Constantine. Rioters set the doors and woodwork of the Holy Sepulchre on fire, destroying the roof of the basilica and the Anastasis Rotunda.[18] The rioting began in the architectural space but ended with the execution of the Christian patriarch.

At the same time, inter-confessional strife intensified between Byzantium and Islam. Byzantium embarked on a series of raids against Muslim powers, couched increasingly in terms of a holy war between Christianity and Islam.[19] In 964, the Byzantine emperor proclaimed that he would retake Jerusalem from the Muslims and, in 975, the emperor John Tzimiskes sent a letter to the king of Armenia, noting his military endeavours to secure the city and situating the Holy Sepulchre at the heart of this struggle. Offering the details of his campaign, he wrote that one of his goals was "the delivery of the Holy Sepulchre of Christ our God from the bondage of the Muslims."[20] The mob attacks against the Holy Sepulchre and the emperor's focus on the role of the monument both suggest that architectural space acted as a stage for inter-confessional rivalries.[21] As tensions between Christian

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16 For a list of sources, see Pringle, *The Churches*, vol. 3, 10.

17 This occurred when the city was under Berber control; the Ikhshidid ruler Kafur sent support: Goitein and Grabar, "Al-Kuds."

18 Ousterhout, "Rebuilding," 69. It took ten years to reconstruct the Anastasis and twenty to reroof the basilica.

19 Gil, *History of Palestine*, 344–48.

20 For a translation of the full text, see Peters, *Jerusalem*, 243. For a discussion of John Tzimiskes, see Walker, "The 'Crusade'."

21 The jockeying for confessional control may have been made visually manifest in the mid-tenth century. Some sources suggest that a mosque was constructed on top of a section of the

and Muslim populations in Jerusalem increased, both locally and on an imperial level, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre often acted as a proxy for these disputes.

In summary, Jerusalem's Islamic monuments played a significantly diminished role for the distant Islamic rulers in the post-Umayyad period. In the accounts of al-Mansur's and al-Mahdi's visits, we see that the rulers refused to fund the restoration of the central Islamic monuments, resorting to dismantling, in the case of the former, and marshalling support from provincial administrators, in the case of the latter. However, while the rulers may have withheld their support, the multi-confessional communities of Jerusalem rallied around their respective monuments. At times, the local identification with architectural space resulted in attacks, as in the tenth-century targeting of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The rising tension around sectarian space would reach its culmination in the eleventh century, with the reign of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah.

A Turning Point: Destruction in the Reign of the "Mad Caliph"

In the summer of 970, the Ismaili Shi'i Fatimid dynasty conquered Palestine, including Jerusalem, from their new capital in Cairo. The Fatimids believed that the rightful caliph of all Muslims must be descended from the Prophet Muhammad, through the line of his daughter, Fatima, and his cousin/son-in-law 'Ali. They also considered the ruler of the empire as the "imam of the age," the holder of all esoteric (*bāṭin*) and exoteric (*ẓāhir*) knowledge. Their religious and political ideology thus distinguished the Fatimids from the previous Muslim rulers of the city and from the majority Sunni population of Jerusalem.

Sixty years prior to their conquest of Egypt and Palestine, the Fatimids had declared themselves the rightful caliphs of all of Islam. This declaration would usher in a new era in Islamic history, in which the unified caliphate of the Umayyads and early Abbasids would be fragmented into three rival groups—the Abbasids in Baghdad; the Umayyads of al-Andalus (Spain); and the Fatimids. Following their conquest of Palestine, however, the Fatimids would fail to exert strong control in the region and their reign would be plagued by local, tribal uprisings and Byzantine incursions, generally making the Fatimid period a time of turmoil for Palestine.[22]

Holy Sepulchre. However, the details of this—if it occurred—are lacking: see Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 142. Van Berchem (*Matériaux*, 52–67) connected an inscriptional fragment with this mosque.

22 For a summary of events, see Gil, *History of Palestine*, 336–37. In addition to the Byzantines, various tribes rose up against the Fatimids during this period, including the group of Palestinian Bedouin called the Banu Tayy, led by the Jarrahids, the Qarmaṭis, and other Arab tribes in Syria.

Particularly troubling for the Fatimids, sources suggest that the Muslim population in Jerusalem did not generally accept these rulers as the legitimate caliphs.[23] Meanwhile, we have little record of architectural patronage by the early Fatimid caliphs in Jerusalem. Al-Muʿizz (r. 953–975) and al-ʿAziz (r. 975–996) do not appear to have sponsored major projects in the city. This fact is somewhat surprising, given their interest in expanding their rule further to the east. Instead, most of these early caliphs' architectural projects were focused on the new capital in Cairo.

Fatimid architectural interest in Jerusalem shifted dramatically under the notorious reign of the caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (r. 996–1021). Often derided as psychotic by modern scholars, al-Hakim is infamous as a cruel persecutor of Christians, Jews, and women; destroyer of churches and synagogues; and yet is also regarded as a divine figure by adherents of the later Druze faith. In Jerusalem, al-Hakim violently altered the city's architectural composition by presiding over the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre around 1010.[24] Since the church had been protected by an earlier treaty with Byzantium, this would spark years of discord between the Fatimids and Byzantines. Yet the precise reasons for the destruction are debated. Some sources suggest that the Byzantine emperor was often there, escalating tensions in the city; others suggest that the caliph was outraged that Christians visited the church as Muslims visit Mecca; other sources suggest that Muslims were angered by tales of the Miracle of the Holy Fire.[25] In any case, al-Hakim's destruction of the Holy Sepulchre asserted Muslim dominance over the contested city, putting a temporary end to the struggle over the sacred space. By 1020, only ten years after these large-scale destructions, al-Hakim allowed for the rebuilding of churches in Egypt and Jerusalem, a reversal that raised eyebrows for later Muslim geographers, as did his permission for recently converted Muslims to revert to Christianity and Judaism.

Although scholars have often dismissed al-Hakim's destruction of the Holy Sepulchre as a symptom of his madness, we have seen that the church had been attacked by the local Muslim populations several times in the previous centuries. It had stood as a symbol of Christian power among the local populations and as an

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23 Ibid., 352–53.

24 Sources disagree on the precise date of the church's destruction, with Muslim sources generally stating that the destruction occurred ca. 1007 and Christian sources suggesting a slightly later date of 1009 or 1010. The destruction of the church was followed by several years of massive church destructions authorized by the caliph, particularly in Cairo: Pruitt, "Method in Madness." For a thorough analysis of al-Hakim's reign, including a translation of many of the key sources, see Walker, *Caliph of Cairo.*

25 Canard, "La Destruction." For a contemporary Latin account, see Callahan, "Al-Hākim, Charlemagne."

impetus for holy war on the part of the Byzantine emperor.[26] Indeed, its destruction had further repercussions within the Byzantine Empire, which were also expressed through claims on sectarian space. In particular, it seems that at some point after the church's destruction, the Byzantines closed the mosque in Constantinople in retaliation for al-Hakim's act.[27] In this way, the religious spaces became pawns in imperial negotiations: the mosque in Constantinople acted as a proxy for the Fatimid state, while the Holy Sepulchre was a stand-in for Byzantium.[28]

Rebuilding the Fatimid City: Imperial Investment in the Reign of Al-Zahir (1021–1036)

The final seven years of al-Hakim's life was a period of upheaval for the Fatimids.[29] The caliph's actions became increasingly erratic, as noted above, and in 1014, he named his cousin Ibn Ilyas as his successor, rather than his son, al-Zahir. Given that the basis of Fatimid legitimacy was patrimonial lineage, this was a radically destabilizing move. In 1017, a new doctrine began circulating in Cairo, declaring the divinity of al-Hakim and claiming that he had superseded the Prophet Muhammad as God's representative on earth. Its initial promulgators were Hamza bin Allah and Muhammd ad-Darazi, from whose name this new Druze movement is derived. The Druze held that because the messiah had come, the Islamic sharia, based on the teachings of the Qur'an and hadith, should be abandoned in this new age. The new doctrine sowed discontent within the Fatimid ranks and further destabilized their legitimacy throughout the Islamic world. In 1021, when al-Hakim mysteriously disappeared, the Druze even maintained that he had not died and would return at the end of days.

Following the disappearance of al-Hakim, his powerful sister, Sitt al-Mulk (r. 1021–1023), took control of the Fatimid state.[30] She was largely concerned with undoing the chaos of the previous years, seeking to distance the Fatimids from

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26 Al-Muqaddasi's well-known comments on the founding of Jerusalem support the competitive discourse surrounding the city, suggesting that 'Abd al-Malik constructed the Dome of the Rock to rival the beauty of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre: see Ruggles, *Islamic Art.*

27 One can infer its closure from the reference to the mosque's reopening in Constantinople under al-Zahir: see al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, 2:176. See also Lev, *State and Society*, 40; Runciman, "The Byzantine 'Protectorate.'"

28 Anderson, "Islamic Spaces."

29 For an analysis of this period, see Walker, *Caliph of Cairo*, 239–62.

30 For a consideration of Sitt al-Mulk's fascinating career, see Cortese and Calderini, *Women*, 117–27; Halm, "Le Destin."

the Druze heresy and restoring order within the empire. Under her guidance, al-Hakim's son, al-Zahir, duly succeeded to the throne and immediately condemned those who proclaimed his father's divinity or who deviated from Islam. Many Druze adherents were imprisoned and killed, while others fled Egypt for the Levant.[31] As part of these efforts to counter the turmoil of his father's reign, al-Zahir also invested substantial resources in the restoration of Jerusalem, opening a new chapter of Fatimid patronage that made an indelible contribution to the city-scape.[32] Even within the context of the urban unrest in Cairo, wars, Bedouin insurrections, and plague, al-Zahir prioritized the reconstruction of Jerusalem's urban infrastructure, which was in great peril, and was further damaged by an earthquake in 1033.[33] Unlike the ninth-century restorations of its monuments, which were begrudgingly executed by the Abbasid rulers, al-Zahir supported a full-scale rehabilitation of the Haram al-Sharif's Islamic structures.

That these restorations were undertaken during a period of great strife for the Fatimids further emphasizes al-Zahir's commitment to Jerusalem, whose architectural framework changed dramatically as a result. The Aqsa mosque was reconstructed, with an elaborate mosaic program added to its new *maqṣūra* (see below, and **Plates 3.1–4**). The Dome of the Rock was repaired. According to sources, inscriptions naming the Fatimid ruler were added to the Haram al-Sharif. In addition, the city's reconstruction extended beyond Islamic holy spaces. The city walls were rebuilt. Al-Zahir even allowed the reconstruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. By the end of his reign, the two most prominent sacred spaces of the city would have intimate imperial associations, with the Byzantines claiming the Holy Sepulchre and the Fatimids claiming the Haram al-Sharif.

Moreover, the latter was more powerfully and overtly connected with the miraculous event of the Prophet's night journey (*isrā'*) and ascension (*mi'rāj*). I argue that al-Zahir's investment in Jerusalem and in sites more explicitly tied to these miraculous events were in reaction to the internal threats of the heretical Druze movement, which declared the divinity of al-Hakim and preached that his disappearance was a result of his occultation. al-Zahir's architectural argument against these claims was to restore and embellish the monuments of Jerusalem which emphasized the particular holiness of the Prophet Muhammad, by celebrating his ascension to heaven. This is especially evident in his renovation of the al-Aqsa mosque.

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31 Lev, *State and Society*, 36–37.

32 Grabar, "Fatimid City" in Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 135–69; Bloom, *Arts*, 81–83.

33 Events during the whole of al-Zahir's reign are difficult to make out. We have very detailed accounts preserved by al-Musabbihi, but these stop in 1025, at the peak of unrest. See Lev, *State and Society*, 38.

The current form of the Aqsa mosque includes many Crusader-era additions. However, at its core, it preserves much of the plan of al-Zahir's renovations (**Plate 3.1**).[34] Based on restoration work to the mosque in the 1920s and the description of the mosque by Nasir-i Khusraw, scholars have determined that the Fatimid structure was made up of seven aisles of arcades running perpendicular to the qibla wall. Each of these aisles consisted of eleven arches, with the exception of two on either side of the central aisle, which was twice the width and featured a clerestory, gable roof, and wooden dome.[35] Thus, it appears that the mosque of al-Zahir was significantly narrower than the Abbasid-era mosque of al-Mahdi, even as it possessed many of the same basic features.[36] Restoration work also uncovered a splendid Fatimid-era mosaic and painted decoration in the dome and its supporting arches. The lavish mosaic program, dating to the reign of al-Zahir, is executed in the pendentives leading to the dome, the drum of the dome, and in the archway through which one entered the domed space in front of the mihrab—an assemblage I will refer to as the *maqṣūra* (**Plates 3.1–4**).[37] The mosaic program here clearly harks back to the Umayyad mosaic program, as seen in 'Abd al-Malik's Dome of the Rock.[38] This is significant because, at the time of al-Zahir's renovations, mosaics appear infrequently in Islamic architecture.[39] Their inclusion in the mosque therefore linked the Fatimid-era program to the Umayyad prototype.[40]

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34 Much of the determination of the dating was carried out by Hamilton in *Structural History*. On Mimar Kemalettin's restoration work, see Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture,* vol. 2 121–22; and Yavuz, "Restoration."

35 Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, vol. 2, 121–22.

36 For a reconstruction, see Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 150; Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, vol. 2, 119–26; Hamilton, *Structural History*.

37 Grabar has referred to this assemblage as a "triumphal arch": *Shape of the Holy*, 149. The mosaic program as a whole has been studied by Stern, "Recherches." For a discussion of mosaics in Islamic art and architecture, see Bloom and Blair, *Grove Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 207–8. Here, I am calling the assemblage consisting of dome, archways, pendentives, and mini domes *maqṣūra*. This term refers to a special, elaborated space in the mosque but does not preserve the original meaning of a space reserved for the ruler.

38 Stern, "Recherches."

39 The practice is rare enough that one wonders if the same mosaicists may have been employed in the reconstruction of the Haram al-Sharif and of the Holy Sepulchre, which would also have had a new mosaic program: see Ousterhout, "Rebuilding," 70–71. For a discussion of mosaics in Islamic art, see Bloom and Blair, *Grove Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 207–9.

40 The most famous post-Syrian Umayyad use of mosaics in Islamic architecture is found at the Umayyad Great Mosque of Cordoba. In this case, the use of mosaics most likely hearkened back to Syrian Umayyad precedents: Dodds, "Great Mosque"; Khoury, "Meaning"; Ruggles, "Great Mosque." On Umayyad revivals, see Flood, "Umayyad Survivals."

However, the precise forms do not have any direct precedent. In the monumental arch, large-scale vegetal motifs sprout from small vases, and while the vegetal tendrils mimic those found in the Dome of the Rock, they are executed on a much larger scale and feature unusual floral motifs capping them off.

At the top of the arch, above the Umayyad-inspired mosaic program, is a long line of golden inscriptions, written in two bands (**Plate 3.2**). This inscription includes the first appearance of Qur'an verse 17:1 on the platform, associating this mosque directly with the *masjid al-Aqṣā* described in the Qur'anic account of the Prophet's night journey.

> In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Glory to the One who took his servant for a journey by night from the masjid al-haram to the masjid al-aqsa whose precincts we have blessed. [… He] has renovated it, our lord Ali Abu al-Hasan the imam al-Zahir li'Aziz din Allah, Commander of the Faithful, son of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, Commander of the Faithful, may the blessing of God be on him and his pure ancestors, and on his noble descendants. By the hand of Ali ibn Abd al-Rahman, may God reward him. The [job] was supervised by Abu al-Wasim and al-Sharif al-Hasan al-Husaini.[41]

While the style of the floral decoration on the arch recalls the Umayyad past, the inscription links the work directly with the Fatimid patrons. It not only names the current ruler of the Fatimid empire (al-Zahir) but ties him directly to his controversial father (al-Hakim). Moreover, it includes the specifically Shi'i formula calling for the blessings of God on the "pure ancestors" and "noble descendants." In this way, while the decorative form of the mosaics carries on the traditions of the past, the inscriptional content puts an emphatically Fatimid stamp on this holy space.

In addition to the inscriptional program on the arch, the Fatimid restoration inserted four highly unusual recessed roundels, executed in mosaic, on the pendentives of al-Aqsa's dome (**Plates 3.3–4**). Each of these is comprised of four concentric circles, executed on alternating planes of silver and gold. Moving from the outside of the circle inward, we find alternating palm fronds and eight-pointed stars on a silver background; a series of depictions of the peacock eye motif on a gold background; alternating rectangular and ovoid lozenges on a silver background, with a multi-lobed golden form in the centre. The recessed execution of the roundels results in the presence of four mini domes, surrounding the larger

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41 Translation in Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 151. See also Hamilton, *Structural History*, 452–53; van Berchem, *Matériaux*.

dome in the centre (**Plate 3.3**).[42] These devices are, as far as I know, unprecedented in the history of Islamic art and their meaning requires further contextualization (see below).

During the reign of the al-Zahir's son and successor, al-Mustansir (r. 1029–1094), the Persian Ismaili poet and philosopher Nasir-i Khusraw (d. 1077) wrote a highly valuable first-hand account of his travels (*Safarnama*),[43] which describes his impressions of al-Zahir's recently restored monuments.[44] His account begins in 1046, as he set out for the *hajj*. The text provides valuable insight into the Muslim perspective on Jerusalem as a holy city ("Quds") and the Haram al-Sharif as the site of the Prophet's night journey and ascension. He emphasizes Jerusalem's distinction as a pilgrimage destination, noting that Muslims could perform the rituals of *hajj* in Jerusalem if they could not make it to Mecca.[45] Pilgrims would have been particularly plentiful in the time of his visit, as the Fatimid ruler had advised Egyptians to forgo the *hajj* to Mecca on account of famine in that city. Nasir-i Khusraw also presented the city as a pilgrimage centre for Christians and Jews, whom he describes visiting the city's churches and synagogues.

In his detailed description of the Haram al-Sharif, Nasir-i Khusraw refers to the entirety of the site as *masjid* (mosque).[46] Taking the reader on a walking tour of the platform, he approaches the Haram al-Sharif through a gateway

> adorned with designs and patterned with colored glass cubes set in plaster. The whole produces an effect dazzling to the eye. *There is an inscription on the gateway, also in glass mosaic, with the titles of the sultan of Egypt.* When the sun strikes this, the rays play so that the mind of the beholder is absolutely stunned.[47]

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42 Nasir-i Khusraw comments on the effect of light in the mosque at different times of day, noting that "When all the doors are opened, the inside of the mosque is as light as an open courtyard. However, when the wind is blowing or it is raining, the doors are closed, and then light comes from skylights." Nasir-i Khusraw, *Safarnama*, 35.

43 Although he would later become a major figure in Ismaili thought, it is not clear whether his conversion to Ismailism occurred before or after his voyage: see Nasir-i Khusraw, *Safarnama*; Nanji, "Nāṣir-i Khusraw."

44 The travelogue is also particularly valuable for its description of Cairo and Mecca. Nasir-i Khusraw entered Jerusalem on the fifth of Ramadan 438 (5 March 1047): *Safarnama*, 27.

45 The account does not suggest that Jerusalem was meant to overtake Mecca as a pilgrimage centre.

46 At first he refers to the Aqsa mosque itself as *maqṣūra*, to distinguish it from the Haram al-Sharif, then later he calls it *masjid al-Aqsa.*

47 Nasir-i Khusraw, *Safarnama*, 28 (emphasis added). Nasir-i Khusraw calls it David's Gate but Oleg Grabar identifies it as the Gate of the Chain: *Shape of the Holy*, 146.

This vivid description demonstrates that the name of the Fatimid ruler—here, he is called simply "sultan of Egypt"—was displayed prominently as one entered the Haram al-Sharif, explicitly announcing the Fatimid rule's patronage of the sacred space. Nor is this the only instance of the ruler's name being prominently displayed on the Haram al-Sharif. In his description of the Dome of the Rock, Nasir-i Khusraw inventories the furnishings of the space and notes that

> [t]here are many silver lamps here, and on each one is written its weight. They were donated by the sultan of Egypt … *They said that every year the sultan of Egypt sends many candles, one of which was this one, for it had the sultan's name written in gold letters around the bottom*.[48]

Once again, the ruler is not named; however, in this instance, he describes the patronage as occurring annually, suggesting that the candles must have featured the name of al-Mustansir.

Nasir-i Khusraw's account suggests that, unlike the tepid, occasional support of Jerusalem offered in the previous centuries, the Fatimids were committed to regular upkeep of the holy sites. The display of the ruler's name on the gates and in the furnishings of the Dome of the Rock made the imperial support of Islamic architecture directly and frequently visible to visitors of the site, suggesting that imperial legitimacy was gained through architectural patronage. The practice of prominently featuring the ruler's name on the Haram al-Sharif is also consistent with the Fatimid promotion, in Cairo, of "public texts" in which exterior architectural inscriptions became an aesthetic hallmark of the dynasty.[49] While the reliance on mosaic decoration continued the Umayyad traditions of design, the prominence of names and titles in public spaces carried on a well-established Fatimid prerogative.

In describing the reconstructed al-Aqsa mosque, Nasir-i Khusraw also offers lengthy descriptions of its measurements, providing quantitative data for the number of columns and other architectural details, paying particular attention to a cataloguing of the soft furnishings in the structure, noting the presence of Magrebi carpets, lamps, and lanterns. However, his account does not describe the new, elaborate Fatimid mosaic program in the Aqsa mosque. While frustrating for the art historian, a lack of attention to aesthetic practice, as opposed to physical description, is not unusual in Arabic sources.[50] And although our medieval geographer fails to mention this elaborate mosaic program, his descriptions help to contextualize the visual

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48 Nasir-i Khusraw, *Safarnama*, 32 (emphasis added).

49 For an analysis of the Fatimid public text, see Bierman, *Writing Signs.*

50 Rabbat, "'Ajīb and Gharīb."

program of the new *maqṣūra*, particularly the inscriptional content and the curious inclusion of the mini domes in the pendentives.

Based on Qurʾanic passages and hadith, it is believed that Muhammad was miraculously transported by night from Mecca to Jerusalem on a heavenly steed named al-Buraq (the *isrāʾ*).[51] From Jerusalem, he ascended to heaven to meet with God (the *miʿrāj*). These are not only two of the most important episodes in the Islamic tradition, they are the moments that most distinctly mark Jerusalem (in general) and the Haram al-Sharif (in particular) as sites of Muslim veneration. Yet much ink has been spilt in attempting to determine exactly *when* the Dome of the Rock became known as the spot from which Muhammad ascended to heaven.[52] While Nasir-i Khusraw's account does not associate the Dome specifically with the Prophet's ascension, he makes it clear that the Haram al-Sharif itself was associated intimately with both the *isrāʾ* and the *miʿrāj*. He describes the Dome's rock outcropping as the first qibla (place of prayer oriented toward Mecca) and the Aqsa mosque as "the spot to which God transported Muhammad from Mecca on the night of his heavenly ascent."[53]

As Oleg Grabar has demonstrated, the Fatimid-era platform looked substantially different from the Umayyad-era platform, with numerous commemorative structures marking the sacred spaces of Islam.[54] As groups, these new monuments mark important sites in the prophetic tradition, significant places in Islamic eschatology, and sites associated with the *miʿrāj*.[55] For example, Nasir-i Khusraw's account describes the proliferation of domes, gates, and small commemorative structures on the sacred platform, especially four domes near one another, the largest of which was the Dome of the Rock.[56] Three of these domes he associates directly with the story of the *miʿrāj*:

> They say that on the night of the ascent into heaven the Prophet first prayed in the Dome of the Rock and placed his hand on the Rock. As he

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51 The episode is described in Qurʾan 17:1, which says, "Praise Him who made His servant journey in the night (*asrā*) from the sacred sanctuary (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) to the remotest sanctuary (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*)."

52 For discussions, see Mourad, "Jerusalem"; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*; Grabar, *Shape of the Holy* and *Dome of the Rock*; Rabbat, "The Meaning."

53 Nasir-i Khusraw, *Safarnama*, 20–30 and 34.

54 For a reconstruction of the Fatimid-era platform, see Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, chapter 4.

55 For an analysis of the monuments in relation to Islamic eschatology, see Necipoğlu, "Dome of the Rock."

56 Although the structures have been rebuilt over the centuries, the Haram al-Sharif still features many of these domes and gates. For an aerial view of the platform, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_Mount#/media/File:Israel-2013(2)-Aerial-Jerusalem-Temple_Mount-Temple_Mount_(south_exposure).jpg.

was coming out, the Rock rose up because of his majesty. He put his hand on the Rock again, and it froze in its place, half of it still suspended in the air. From there the Prophet went to the dome that is attributed to him and mounted the Buraq, for which reason that dome is so venerated.[57]

Thus, although the Dome of the Rock is not mentioned as the precise spot from which the Prophet is believed to have ascended into heaven, it is characterized as marking an important moment in the *miʿrāj* story. A similar meaning is ascribed to the Prophet's Dome. In addition to these two domes, Nasir-i Khusraw asserts that Gabriel's Dome is the spot whence "Buraq was brought ... for the Prophet to mount." In this way, the domes on the platform of the Haram al-Sharif commemorate moments in the ascension story.

Given this historical context and the religious associations attached to the Haram al-Sharif in the eleventh century, how might we make sense of the inscriptional program and circular shapes in the renovated Aqsa mosque's *maqṣūra*? As I have noted, the concentric circle of mini domes is very unusual in the history of Islamic art.[58] I would posit that they were meant to evoke the domed structures that sat just beyond the Aqsa mosque, on the Haram al-Sharif. For as one walks through the Fatimid-era arch into the domed *maqṣūra*, the visitor first encounters Qur'anic verse 17:1, which explicitly mentions the Prophet's Night Journey. Its presence within this structure appears to assert that the viewer is standing on the very spot to which the Prophet was transported during the miraculous event. Progressing through the arch, the visitor turns up to face the mosaic mini domes, which move the eye toward heaven while recalling the domes on the Haram al-Sharif. These domes commemorate the second part of this story, the Prophet's ascension. Taken as a whole, then, the new Fatimid *maqṣūra* functioned as a microcosmic representation of Jerusalem's sacred role in Islam.

Much of al-Zahir's reign was devoted to undoing the damage of al-Hakim's late days and the chaos of the rising Druze movement. Accordingly, he would have had a particularly strong motivation for promoting this orthodox, Islamic episode of the Prophet's direct encounter with God. Attempting to wipe away the heresy of the Druze proclamation of al-Hakim's divinity and occultation, al-Zahir invested lavishly in this commemoration of the Qur'anic argument for the Prophet's primacy in the faith. In Islam, the ruler does not ascend to heaven; only the Prophet is

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57 Nasir-i Khusraw, *Safarnama*, 39.

58 The closest parallel I have found are in the roundels often found in the pendentives of Ottoman-era mosques, most notably that of the Suleymaniye mosque. However, these roundels, in addition to being five hundred years later, are not recessed.

capable of this feat. But, one might ask, if al-Zahir was concerned with distancing the Fatimids from the heresy of the Druze movement and reversing the excesses of al-Hakim's late reign, why does he include his father's name in the *maqṣūra*'s inscription asserting that the renovation was carried out by "the imam al-Zahir li'Aziz din Allah, Commander of the Faithful, son of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, Commander of the Faithful"? It is highly unusual for a Fatimid inscription to include both the name of the reigning caliph and the name of his father.[59] However, including both names serves to discredit the Druze heresy and proclaims al-Zahir as the rightful successor to his father, rather than the cousin, Ibn Ilyas. It also counters the Druze teaching that al-Hakim did not actually die. Naming the order of rightful succession in the inscription asserts that al-Hakim was, indeed, dead and that al-Zahir was his legitimate successor. In effect, the inscription asserts that there was nothing unusual in the transference of power from al-Hakim to al-Zahir—a statement that couldn't be further from the truth.

Conclusion

The role of Jerusalem changed dramatically in the post-Umayyad, pre-Crusader period. In the centuries of Abbasid rule, the monuments of the Haram al-Sharif were of little interest to the rulers in Baghdad. However, the local population of Jerusalem was invested in the status of the Islamic structures, calling on the distant rulers to restore them, with lukewarm compliance by the Abbasid caliphs. Following the Abbasids, Jerusalem once again rose in status, with the destructive and turbulent reign of al-Hakim prompting a major shift in the role of the city and its Islamic monuments. The Fatimid renewal of the Haram al-Sharif under al-Zahir operated in concert with the Byzantine renewal of the Holy Sepulchre, following a 1030 treaty between the two empires.[60] These renovations symbolized both a new era of peace between the polities and a new distinction between Islamic and Christian spaces in the holy city.

Al-Zahir's renovations of the monuments on the Haram al-Sharif announced an intimate relationship between the dynasty and the sacred site, one that had not been encountered since the Umayyad era. Visitors to the platform saw elaborately refurbished monuments and encountered the ruler's name inscribed throughout. Inside the Aqsa mosque, the visitor marvelled at the new Fatimid *maqṣūra.* This

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59 It is *so* unusual that Caroline Williams mistakenly named the inscription on the Aqmar Mosque in Cairo (1125) as the *only* example of this formula. She interprets this much later inscription in the context of a similar twelfth-century succession crisis: "The Cult."

60 Ousterhout, "Rebuilding."

article has argued that through its arches and unusual mini domes, the *maqṣūra* functioned as a model-in-miniature for the commemorative monuments on the sacred platform—thereby reminding visitors of the city's sacred role in the *isrāʾ* and *miʿrāj.* The architectural form and inscriptional content of the renovations thus emphasized an orthodox Islamic view of man's encounter with the divine and insisted on the mortality of the late ruler, in direct contrast to Druze doctrine regarding al-Hakim's divinity and occultation. Ultimately, the destructive reign of al-Hakim acted as a catalyst for his successor's constructive investment in the city, which called increasing attention to Jerusalem as a global stage for architectural patronage—one that would have dramatic repercussions in the decades and centuries to come.

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Jennifer Pruitt (jpruitt@wisc.edu) is an assistant professor in Islamic Art History at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Her research investigates art and architecture in the medieval Islamic world; the role of the caliphate and sectarian identity in architectural production; the status of Christian art in medieval Islam; and cross-cultural exchange in the medieval world. She is completing her book manuscript, *Building the Caliphate: Construction, Destruction, and Sectarian Identity in Fatimid Architecture (909–1031).*

Abstract This essay explores the architectural history of Jerusalem in the Abbasid (751–970) and Fatimid (970–1036) periods. Compared to the time of the Umayyads (661–750), Abbasid-era Jerusalem was characterized by a caliphal disinterest in the monuments of the holy city. However, it also saw growth in the identification between local populations and their respective religious monuments. This contest over sacred space culminated under the Fatimid dynasty, in the cataclysmic reign of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (r. 985–1021), who is infamous today because he called for the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre. Indeed, al-Hakim's incursion into the city was predominantly destructive. Nevertheless, his attention to the city would have productive results for eleventh-century Jerusalem. His successor, al-Zahir, was deeply invested in renovating the structures of the Haram al-Sharif, ushering in a chapter of architectural patronage and a resurgence of imperial interest in the structure. This essay argues that this patronage was carried out with the goal of undoing the excesses of al-Hakim's reign. In al-Zahir's reimagining of the sacred space, the platform's architecture emphasized the orthodox Islamic tales of the Prophet's night journey (*isrāʾ*) and ascension to heaven (*miʿrāj*), in direct contrast to the perceived heresies of the later years of al-Hakim's reign.

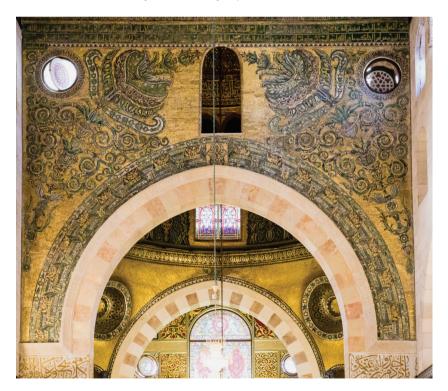Plate 3.1. The Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem, with a view toward al-Zahir's *maqṣūra* (added ca. 1031). © Jennifer Pruitt.

Plate 3.2. Al-Zahir's *maqṣūra*, with inscriptions featuring Qur'an 17:1 at the top. Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem. © Jennifer Pruitt.

Plate 3.3. Al-Zahir's *maqṣūra*, looking toward the central dome and one of four mini domes. Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem. © Jennifer Pruitt.

Plate 3.4. Detail of the concentric circle mini domes in the Aqsa Mosque, ca. 1031. © Jennifer Pruitt.