Holy sites and sanctuaries of the pre-Islamic Near and Middle East: To what extent is there a link between pre-Islamic and Islamic notions of sacred space?

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Abstract

Islamic origins have been studied extensively in the past, however, there is a significant gap in scholarly knowledge in this area, particularly in the realm of sacred space. It is true that there have been discussions regarding the origins of Islamic sacred space in several academic texts, however, the persisting ambiguity surrounding the pre-Islamic influences on Islamic sacred space shows that there is a need for more research in this area. Thus, this thesis investigates the connection between pre-Islamic and Islamic sacred space in order to form tangible links between the two and accentuate the fact that many Islamic ideas concerning sacred space were rooted in the pre-Islamic Near and Middle East. This study will build on existing works of scholarship that have touched upon the topic of sacred space and revise those that require updating in an effort to close the gap that exists in the scholarship. Further, in order to answer several questions that concern Islamic sacred space and the foundations upon which it was established, this thesis shifts the focus from the heartlands of Islam in the Hijaz to other regions of the Near and Middle East which were likely to have had a significant influence that has been underrepresented in scholarship. The Fertile Crescent and the Levant are among the regions which will be explored in this regard. The examination of the origins of Islamic sacred space has yielded several results and has demonstrated a strong correlation between pre-Islamic notions of sacred space and those of Islam. This indicates that the Islamic rites and practices associated with sacred space have a long history and underwent an extensive process of evolution until they were subsumed into Islam and adopted an Islamic guise. These findings are important and contribute to closing the gap in scholarly knowledge on the subject, however, further research is required to better understand the different factors that embody Islamic sacred space and how they came to be.

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Notes on the text

The transliteration system used throughout this thesis for Arabic terms and phrases follows the system recommended by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). There are certain exceptions as, unlike the IJMES guidelines, there are instances when some proper nouns, namely place names, are fully transliterated, however, those with a common English equivalent are not, examples include Damascus (not Dimashq) and Medina (not al-Madīna). For the very rare transliterations of languages other than Arabic such as Syriac and other Semitic pre-Islamic languages the IJMES guidelines have also been followed. If not otherwise specified, the dates given in this thesis are Common Era (CE) dates and, if two dates are provided (e.g. 1/622), the first one is the year according to the Muslim *Hijri* calendar (AH) and the second is the CE date. On those occasions when only a *Hijri* date is provided, this is made clear and for those dates that preceded 1 AH only the CE date is provided.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The origins of Islam have been the focus of a considerable number of scholarly works in the past and they continue to be the focus of scholarship to the present day as this thesis illustrates. However, this work aims to approach Islamic origins in a way which differs from most of the scholarly works that have been published in the past. The reason being that this thesis will primarily focus on an area of study within the wider umbrella of Islamic origins that has not received sufficient attention in scholarship and that is sacred space. Therefore, this thesis will have as its focus the origins of Islamic sacred space and the degree to which pre-Islamic influences had an effect on its emergence and development. A series of different issues will be addressed to make it abundantly clear that though there are many instances of innovation in the Islamic faith in a general sense and in relation to sacred space in particular, this was counterbalanced by the preceding faiths having a degree of influence on Islam which was manifested through processes of appropriation and continuity in the realm of sacred space. This is a notion that will be highlighted throughout this thesis by applying it to various forms of sacred space in the Near and Middle East, each of which will be discussed in separate chapters which will be composed of a thorough examination of the origins of these spaces in the region, their role in an Islamic context, and the extent to which they were a product of innovation and appropriation.

The sacred spaces which will be explored will be the *ḥaram* or sanctuary, the mosque, the mausoleum, the commemorative site, the natural landscape as well as the sacred city. However, prior to a thorough investigation of the origins of these sacred spaces and their development in an Islamic context, there is a need to define sanctity and fully understand how it came to be applied to space and this is by no means a simple endeavour. The reason for this is that there are several ways through which sanctity can be understood and manifested many of which are not exclusive to Islam.

It is for this reason that among the questions that will be explored in considerable detail in this thesis are several which relate to sanctity and what its precise meanings are. Such questions will address the different ways through which sanctity as a concept is defined, why there are a variety of different meanings for it and how it was applied to space in the Near and Middle East. Further questions on the topic of sanctity will also address the degree to which Islamic sacred space can be understood as being an independent entity that may have drawn influences from preceding religions but which was also not pre-Islamic sacred space under a different guise. One key question on this topic that will be explored in this thesis is why certain aspects of pre-Islamic sacred space and its associated rituals were embraced by Islam and why others were wholly rejected. This thesis also aims to answer several questions regarding the process of appropriation and what role it played in the formation of Islamic sacred space and ritual in the Near and Middle East. A further question that will feature throughout this study concerns the close relationship between sacred space and ritual and how one gave meaning to the other.

This study also aims to accentuate the fact that this fusion of external influence and innovation is not a novel one in the Near and Middle East and this will be highlighted by making it clear that, in a similar manner to numerous faiths in the region and globally, Islam did not emerge and develop in isolation. Thus, it is inevitable that one can identify the hallmarks of previous faiths and cultures within Islamic ritual practices, beliefs, and sacred space as religion is, by its very nature, syncretistic meaning that it combines elements from pre-existing cults and religions to form a new system. However, this is not to say that religions borrow elements at random from other pre-existing cults almost by accident as there are several indications that new religious entities incorporated certain elements from older traditions in a systematic and well thought out manner. This is exemplified by the continued sanctity of the Ka'ba, in Islam despite the fact that the sacred shrine was at the center of a polytheistic cult during the pre-Islamic period. The Ka'ba is an excellent example as its establishment as the holiest site of Islam was completely intentional and was carried out by the Prophet and the early Muslims in an unmistakably deliberate manner. Therefore, this process cannot

be described as a random borrowing and this is emphasized further by the assertion that 'It is not useful to understand any coherently identifiable cultural form as grounded in superficial borrowings occasioned by circumstantial contact' (Martin, 1987, p. 10). Thus, throughout this thesis one of the notions that will be highlighted is that being influenced by internal and external forces simultaneously is a natural occurrence, especially for a faith and culture that did not emerge or develop in isolation. A point that will also be emphasised is that though pre-Islamic influences had a marked effect on Islamic sacred space, the relationship is not a 'historically genetic one' in which one monument, space, or feature leads to another. Rather, this thesis will demonstrate that certain forms, though paralleled in pre-Islamic sacred space, were incorporated in Islamic sacred spaces as they appeared to 'lend themselves to certain uses' (Grabar, 2006c, p. 107). This concept will feature throughout the thesis, however, the chapter on the mosque will demonstrate it most clearly.

Though Islamic sacred space has been examined considerably in scholarship in the past, there has been more emphasis on the architectural origins than the conceptual origins. Although the architectural origins of Islamic sacred space are highly important and will feature in this study, it is an error to allow this topic to overshadow the other equally important, but less tangible, aspects of Islamic sacred space, an error which this thesis aims to correct. There is much evidence to indicate that there was a considerable degree of architectural borrowing during the early Islamic period that ultimately resulted in the development of an architecture that was characterized by the fusion of the past and the newly established present. Yet, it must be highlighted that this sharing of ideas be it intentional or not was not only limited to architecture but also impacted the ideas that prompted the emergence and development of sacred architecture. These ideas, unlike the constantly changing nature of architecture, did not fade with the passing of time as many of them were absorbed into Islam once the faith emerged and began to spread across the Near and Middle East. The result of this was the emergence of Islamic architecture that was inspired by ideas that were similar to or were the same as those which were also responsible for the proliferation of the religious architecture of the pre-Islamic period. An illustrative example of this is the mausoleum which, for the most part,

regardless of the faith to which it was most closely associated, was constructed for the same reason, that being to memorialize and honour an individual in a monumental manner while also establishing a place to which devotees could flock for a variety of reasons, intercession and healing being prominent examples. Thus, in addition to discussing the ways through which Islamic religious architecture and space was influenced in a more physical and superficial sense, this thesis will also stress the importance of the conceptual origins of Islamic sacred space that have often been marginalized in scholarship.

Rituals and their close relationship to sacred space, is another topic that has been relatively underrepresented in past scholarship and it is one which will feature throughout this thesis as one can argue that a study on sacred space is not able to address the topic fully without also discussing the rituals that took place in or in relation to said spaces. This is by no means unique to Islamic sacred space but can also be applied to the sacred spaces of most faiths. This close relationship between ritual and sacred space is founded on many reasons but one of the most important yet simple reasons is that in many cases ritual is one of the factors that imparts sanctity to space as it is most often the case that rituals take place within or near spaces that come to be viewed as holy. One example of this would be the mosque which is not a consecrated space but which derives much of its sanctity from the performance of prayer and the reading of the Qur'an within its walls. Another close relationship which will feature considerably in this thesis will be that between the political and secular sphere and sacred space as though the impact of patrons on the proliferation of religious spaces and their expansion has been touched upon in scholarship, one may argue that these works have only scratched the surface as this dynamic is one deserving of closer scrutiny. The interconnectedness of politics and sacred space can be demonstrated by the fact that architecture was often used as a propaganda tool to further the reputation and power of the patron. This interconnectedness was given physical form by the fact that the main mosque of a given city often abutted the palace or *dār al-imāra* of the governor or caliph, as was the case in early Islamic Kūfa and Abbasid Baghdad.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

There have been many works on the origins of the Islamic faith as well as its early history in the Near and Middle East that have provided a firm foundation upon which further studies can be undertaken in this field. As it is not possible to discuss and analyse all the literature that has featured throughout this thesis, a limited number of texts will be discussed in this chapter. Though it is the case that all the scholarly works one has made use of offer a variety of perspectives and approaches to the history of Islam, there are certain texts that have made particularly notable contributions to the various discussions in the chapters of the thesis and have helped shape the thesis as a whole. Some texts also focus entirely on topics that have not been discussed in detail elsewhere, topics which are important to several chapters, indeed, some sections of this thesis would not be as effective without the aid of these texts. Though many of these texts may overlap at times with regards to their subject matter they have also shed considerable light on subject matters that have not always been afforded the attention they deserve. One such area is that of Islamic sacred space as despite the fact that this topic has been studied by numerous scholars it has not been the primary focus of their works. Such authors include F. E. Peters, Robert G. Hoyland, G. W. Bowersock, and Fred M. Donner whose works certainly shed light on the subject of Islamic sacred space and have featured in the forthcoming discussions in this thesis. However, these works often discuss sacred space alongside other subjects that have had the tendency to overshadow it.

The ultimate result of this relative lack of attention which the origins of Islamic sacred space has received is the existence of several gaps in scholarly knowledge that this thesis aims to fill by giving primary focus to the different forms of Islamic sacred space, their origins, the extent to which they were influenced by pre-Islamic faiths and cultures, and the degree to which Islamic innovation has

played a part in their establishment and development. The study of Islamic sacred space and its origins is also hindered by the imbalance that is the result of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina being the main focus of several texts that include discussions on the subject for much of Islamic history took place outside these cities. Though it may be true that in its fledgling years Islam did not venture beyond the two Hijazi cities and thus did not establish sacred spaces outside their borders during that period, this was not the case for very long as the Arab Conquests resulted in considerable territorial expansion. This was subsequently followed by the establishment of garrison towns which required a space for the Muslim armies to pray in resulting in the construction of mosques to accommodate them. Baṣra and Kūfa are two examples of such towns.

Soon, however, Islamic expansion resulted in the construction of sacred spaces across the Near and Middle East which, for the most part, was under Islamic dominion despite the fact that, initially, the Muslims were a ruling minority that were outnumbered by the non-Muslim populations of the region. This illustrates the fact that in order to fully understand the origins of Islamic sacred space one cannot focus entirely on the cities of Mecca and Medina as doing so would be a huge disservice to the field and to one's research. As will be demonstrated, the use of sources that discuss the role of regions beyond the Hijaz in the shaping of Islamic sacred space is of great importance as it makes it abundantly clear that in spite of its absolute primacy among the holy sites of Islam, the Ka'ba cannot be the sole architectural manifestation of early Islamic sacred space. The same can also be said of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. These structures may be the earliest and holiest Islamic sacred spaces yet they cannot be viewed as being representative of all Islamic sacred space in the Near and Middle East and it is therefore the case that this thesis has made use of sources that focus on sacred sites in areas such as the Levant, the Fertile Crescent, and areas within the Arabian Peninsula outside of the Hijaz such as the former territories of the Nabataean Kingdom in present-day Jordan as well as the area of modern-day Yemen. This does not only widen the geographical scope of this thesis but also the historical scope as it allows for one to trace the potential influence on Islamic sacred space from periods that long predated the emergence of Islam such as the era in which the Nabataean Kingdom

was flourishing (*c*. 4th century BCE – 106 CE). However, though the considerable focus given to the Hijaz in works concerning the early history of Islam and Islamic sacred space is certainly an issue it does not mean that these works are not valuable. Indeed, they are, as they provide ample information regarding sacred space in the Islamic Near and Middle East. Thus, this thesis will not only bring underrepresented topics to the surface but will also update past ideas by supporting them with further evidence that was not available previously.

Primary textual evidence features greatly in my thesis as, in many instances, it is our only source on certain aspects of pre-Islamic and early Islamic history and some texts feature excerpts of preceding works that are lost to us but survive, in part, within them. Primary sources in this context are best defined as texts which are first-hand accounts written by individuals who had a direct link to the events which they describe or were transmitting traditions or views from earlier writers who themselves had a link or were eyewitnesses. Thus the works of early jurists, travellers, polymaths, and court officials are some of the primary sources which shall feature in this thesis. Additionally, the thesis features the works of both local authors as well as travellers, providing both an insider's point of view as well as a foreign perspective, in an attempt to provide a coherent and rounded picture. This thesis has cited several primary texts, however, as the topics in this work cover a wide range of subjects, there is no single text that one can claim was more useful than another. There is, however, an issue with primary sources as they are rarely united in their views and can often be contradictory. This is best avoided by using other sources for support. A further issue with primary texts is that the early Islamic sources are mostly based upon a chain of transmission or *isnād* which is a list of authorities who transmitted a tradition or *ḥadīth* (pl. *aḥādīth*) attributed to the Prophet Muhammad or one of his Companions, however, as this is based on personal recollections it must be used with caution. The reason being that there is a possibility of human error or deliberate falsification at one or more points in the chain. Another difficulty surrounding primary texts is that they are critical of anything that does not adhere to their authors' views, religious or political, thus many works of Muslim authors on the history of Islam have a polemical undertone and are very critical of most pre-

Islamic notions, practices, and peoples. Thus, such works are not to be taken at face value and though primary texts will bolster my hypotheses they will be corroborated with other forms of evidence to enhance their accuracy.

A text that illustrates the difficult and sometimes contradictory nature of primary sources is Thomas Leisten's *Between Orthodoxy and Exegesis: Some Aspects of Attitudes in the Shari'a toward Funerary Architecture* (1990) as the author lists a number of traditions regarding the illicit and licit ways through which the dead may be memorialized and several of these traditions contradicted each other resulting in much confusion. Nevertheless, as the author bases much of his argument on an array of different primary sources they succeeded in providing a clear picture of the situation regarding funerary sites in the early Islamic period and beyond. This proved to be of great use to this thesis as one of the topics that is broached is why Islamic funerary architecture was established and endured despite early opposition by Muslim jurists. What also makes this text very valuable is that the author cites several different primary texts to present his argument, many of which feature in the section on the controversial nature of funerary architecture in Islam.[1] Secondary texts like Leisten's will also be an important source in the thesis as they provide crucial analysis for many primary texts and feature the varying arguments of their authors while perceiving them from many different, relatively modern lenses, creating further debate. Secondary texts are those which are not contemporary with the events which they discuss and describe, indeed they are texts which build upon the arguments and findings of the authors of primary sources. However, secondary texts are sometimes problematic as they are also subjected to the differing opinions of their authors which affects the reliability of the text. The way by which this problem is circumvented in this thesis is by corroborating this evidence to a sufficient degree so as to strengthen the arguments present in secondary scholarship. Alongside primary and secondary texts theological texts have been used as sources in this work, most notably, the texts of the Abrahamic religions, the Qur'an, the Bible, and the Torah which assist in widening the scope beyond the Hijaz in the study of the origins of Islamic

[1] See 6.2.

sanctuary ideas. To avoid encountering difficulties with regards to the use of sacred texts as evidence, such evidence is supported by sources with no religious affinity which allows for a well-balanced argument based partially on theological sources.

As has been highlighted previously, there are numerous scholarly works that have focused on the role of Arabia in the rise of Islam and the formation of the faith, however, the subject of Islamic sacred space has been touched upon but has not been explored in sufficient detail. This should not come as a surprise for these works are often broad ranging and are not designed to focus primarily on one particular topic. Yet such works are still useful as they provide important information on the social, economic, religious, or political environment out of which Islam and, more specifically, Islamic sacred space emerged. One example of such a work is G. W. Bowersock's *The Crucible of Islam* (2017). In this work the author asserts that though one cannot deny the importance of the Hijaz in the early years of Islam the area was not isolated as 'contacts between the region and the surrounding cultures of Palestine, Himyar, Ethiopia, and Persia inevitably contributed to a potentially explosive mixture' (Bowersock, 2017, p. 3) and explode it did in the form of the faith of Islam which soon spread throughout the Near and Middle East. By stating this, Bowersock makes it clear that the origins of Islam and Islamic sacred space cannot be linked solely to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and he demonstrates this effectively by stressing the various parallels between Islamic sacred space and sacred spaces beyond the Hijaz which also indicates that many Islamic elements were foreign imports. This latter point, which will be stressed throughout the thesis, is one which must be highlighted more in academic works as it is a fact that has been in contention with the widely held view that Islam was a distinctly Arabian faith. In spite of the many important points which Bowersock makes in this work that shed light on the external influences on Islam the conciseness of the work as well as its wide scope means that there is no in-depth exploration of the state of early Islamic sacred space and how it evolved. The work of Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (2001), also offers a wide ranging insight into the state of Arabia prior to the advent of Islam and, among discussions concerning the dynamics

between polytheism and monotheism in the region as well as the evolution of language, Hoyland also explores how sacred spaces are established, making note of the interactions between Arabia and the surrounding regions. This ultimately resulted in Arabia exhibiting much regional diversity, namely in the realm of art and architecture (Hoyland, 2001, pp. 167-168). This latter point is of great importance to my thesis as part of my investigation into the origins of Islamic sacred spaces will undoubtedly focus on the aesthetic impact of pre-Islamic cultures and religions on the sacred spaces of Islam, be they mosques, sanctuaries, or mausolea. Works such as these offer a clear picture of the state of Arabia and the Near and Middle East prior to the rise of Islam and in the years that followed the emergence of the faith. However, though these texts are crucial to one's understanding of the early Islamic period one must also make use of sources that primarily focus on Islamic sacred space as it is these texts that provide much needed insight on the subject for they tend to have a more narrow focus which is often coupled with in-depth analysis.

In order to achieve a full understanding of the origins of sacred space in an Islamic context this thesis has taken an interdisciplinary approach as such an area of research has involved the exploration of themes concerning history, religion, art, architecture, and archaeology, all of which cannot be studied through one universal lens. Thus, this thesis has made use of an array of sources belonging to all of these fields to form a well-rounded argument and to reach several coherent conclusions. It is the case, however, that even with the existence of abundant source material regarding the origins of Islamic sacred space in the Near and Middle East, there remain several gaps that this thesis aims to fill by addressing numerous issues that have not received the attention necessary and by providing answers to several research questions to the best of one's abilities. One such area of discussion will concern the matter of sanctity and what it means in the Near and Middle East before and after the emergence of Islam and how it was expressed throughout the region during both periods. It is of profound importance to study this topic in considerable detail for it will be a motif that will feature throughout the thesis for a fundamental aim of my research is to focus on the roots of the idea of sacred space as well as the dynamic between sanctity and space. The subject of sanctity is very

broad and there is no single text that is able to explore all its aspects, however, as the various manifestations of sanctity have been explored in all the chapters of this thesis many of the texts that have shed light on the origins of sacred space, several of which will be discussed within this chapter, also touch upon the origins of sanctity itself.

In addition to sanctity, one of the most important topics that will be a focus of this thesis is appropriation and continuity as one cannot deny that Islamic sacred space was partially established and formulated as a result of appropriation and this emphasises the continuity between pre-Islamic and Islamic sacred space. Elizabeth Key Fowden's *Sharing Holy Places* (2002) is a work that has demonstrated the role of appropriation in the formation of sacred space in the Near and Middle East in both pre-Islamic and Islamic contexts for she follows the manner by which the various faiths of the region continuously borrowed and adopted aspects of preceding faiths forming a chain of continuity. The Oak of Mamre in Hebron, Palestine is used as a prime example of this by Fowden for she highlights that it was not only holy to pagans but was also revered by Jews and Christians and she cites Sozomen, a fifth-century ecclesiastical historian who was a native of Gaza in Palestine (Fowden, 2002, p. 127), in order to highlight this for he clearly states that the reason why this place was viewed as holy by all these groups was rooted in one event, the hierophany, which is a moment during which God penetrates the human realm, that occurred in the shade of the Oak (Sozomen, 2.4.2-3). This accentuates the degree to which ideas concerning holy space were shared among different faiths and thus it would not be extraordinary if Islam adopted aspects of sacred space from the faiths which preceded it. *Sharing Holy Places* is also of profound importance as in addition to showing how one sacred space is deemed holy by various groups it also explores the manner by which the sharing of sacred space was manifested more physically. Ultimately, this text contributes greatly to one's understanding of appropriation, however, there were some instances within the text in which a topic that deserves in-depth analysis does not receive it, such a topic would be the hierophany that occurred at Mamre. Another of Fowden's works *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius Between Rome and Iran* (1999) is equally valuable as it primarily focuses on the physical aspect of

sharing sacred space. The author does so by discussing the Umayyad caliph Hisham's (r. 724-743) construction of a mosque that abutted the shrine of the Christian martyr St. Sergius at al-Ruṣāfa suggesting that the caliph chose to tap into the power and sanctity of the shrine instead of destroying it and supplanting it with an Islamic structure (Fowden, 1999, 179).

There are also texts which focus on other forms of appropriation such as the complete takeover of a pre-Islamic site for Islamic purposes. One example is Alain Fouad George's *The Umayyad Mosque of Damascus: Art, Faith and Empire* (2021) which focuses primarily on one of the most important examples of such a form of appropriation: the Great Mosque of Damascus. This text follows the considerable history of the Great Mosque of Damascus from its initial form as the temple to the Semitic God Hadad to its final form as the Great Mosque of Damascus which al-Walīd I (r. 705-715) built. What is more, this work, despite having the Great Mosque of Damascus as its focal point, also sheds light on the dynamic between Christians and Muslims in the Near and Middle East as well as the early history of the mosque in the region. Thus, in addition to contributing to the debate concerning appropriation it is also of great use in the discussions about co-existence among the different religions in the Near and Middle East. The author also highlights the manner by which the mosque became one of the most symbolic sacred spaces in Islam. However, the focal point of this work was Damascus and the Umayyad Mosque and therefore it was slightly limiting in its scope as the situation in early Islamic Damascus was not representative of the situation in other parts of the Near and Middle East. Though it may be true that the Great Mosque of Damascus is a prime example of the physical appropriation of a sacred space, it is not the only structure that witnessed this process as this kind of appropriation did not only come in the form of taking over a pre-existing site for a new purpose. It was also manifested through the reuse of structural elements of pre-existing structures in the architecture of the new religious community and the political elite that ruled them. This has been shown to have been motivated by practical as well as political purposes. Richard Ettinghausen, Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, and Oleg Grabar in their work titled *The Art and Architecture of Islam 650-1250* (2001) clearly state that during the early Islamic period the hypostyle layout of

mosques did not reflect a desire to imitate the structures of the past, instead it was the result of a need for a large space for the congregants to pray in coupled with the availability of construction units that were no longer in use (Ettinghausen et al, 2001, 21). This point is fundamental to the section of the thesis regarding appropriation yet the wide scope of this work prevents the authors from examining it in detail. The religio-political motivations for the use of spolia in Islamic structures have also been outlined in several texts including Finbarr B. Flood's *The Great Mosque of Damascus, Studies on the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture* (2001). In this text, the author asserts that during the Umayyad period it became important to present a religio-political identity visually, and architecture was a highly effective medium through which this could be accomplished (Flood, 2001, p. 185).

While appropriation is discussed in detail in this thesis and its impact on Islamic sacred spaces is evident, one must be cautious when stressing this impact. Although there are instances in which structural elements have been taken from other religious structures and incorporated within Islamic structures and certain pre-Islamic sites were taken over and converted into Islamic sacred spaces, this was not always the case. There are many instances in which appropriation was coupled with innovation, thus though pre-Islamic elements were used in Islamic sacred spaces, they were Islamized and their meanings and functions were altered to suit the needs of the Islamic community. An author who examines this is Oleg Grabar in his work *Islamic Art and Beyond: Constructing the Study of Islamic Art* (2006a). In this text, Grabar makes it clear that though Islamic sacred spaces made use of pre-Islamic elements this did not make the mosque any less Islamic, it was simply a sign that the Muslims were using pre-existing elements but ascribing to them new uses and meanings. This can even be viewed as a form of Islamic innovation. Thus, Grabar presents Islamic art as a blend of appropriation and innovation making his text very important as this is a key theme of this thesis and contributes to the shaping of the argument which is chiefly concerned with the degree to which Islamic sacred space was a product of innovation, appropriation or a fusion of the two. Grabar's text is also significant for it briefly explored the role of prayer in the sanctification of the mosque serving

to highlight a point which this thesis strives to highlight, that sacred space owes much to the rituals carried out in relation to it. As part of its endeavour to stress the pre-Islamic influences on Islamic sacred space this thesis discusses the impact of Christian sacred sites and rituals at a number of different points. The influence of Christianity is a given as the Near and Middle East was mostly Christian and remained so initially despite the penetration of Islam after the Conquests. This allowed for much interaction and integration which involved the exchange of ideas and this was to shape several aspects of the newly arrived Islamic faith in both the secular and religious realms. A text that pays ample attention to this exchange is Milka Levy-Rubin's chapter titled *The Coming of Islam* (2018) in which she accentuates the fact that though the spread of Islam throughout the Near and Middle East brought about change, there was also much that remained unchanged in the region. The example which she uses concerns the Christian populace who, apart from being made to pay certain taxes, did not have to convert and, for the most part, they continued living their lives as they did before. This relatively harmonious co-existence would have inevitably resulted in one community influencing the other and one area in which this was apparent was sacred space. Levy-Rubin emphasises the impact of Christian holy sites on Islam as she asserts that the Near and Middle East was one that was dotted with churches and ornamented with crosses, a fact that led to the Muslims, for religious and political reasons, to transform the character of the sacred landscape changing it from an overwhelmingly Christian one to an Islamic one. The author details how this was mainly carried out through processes of appropriation and Islamization, a fact that will be highlighted at several points in this thesis. The section in which the author discusses these processes is, however, quite short despite the fact that the topic has much more potential.

Though it may be true that this thesis will primarily discuss sacred spaces that are monumental, the most important sacred space of Islam is the *ḥaram* for it is the oldest and features at its center the Ka'ba which is the holiest site to Muslims from the time of the Prophet to the present day. Yet the *ḥaram* is not a monumental sacred site, indeed it is a demarcated open space that is sacred whether there is a shrine within it or not. In Islam, however, the shrine contributes greatly to the sacredness

of the *ḥaram* and Simon O'Meara's text, *The Ka'ba Orientations: Readings in Islam's Ancient House* (2020) highlights this by closely examining the Ka'ba, its pre-Islamic and cosmological origins and its sacred significance. The author underlines the sanctity of the Ka'ba by citing traditions which claim that the earthly Ka'ba in Mecca owes part of its holiness to the fact that it was closely linked to the celestial Ka'ba in heaven. O'Meara's work is a valuable source as it emphasises the connection between the shrine and its wider surroundings as reflected in the assertion that the Ka'ba lent its sanctity to the *ḥaram* in which it is located as well as the entire city of Mecca. This point is important as in this thesis several discussions cover the sanctifying role of shrines and the manner by which they render their respective regions holy. There are, however, certain sections of this book which concern topics that venture beyond the topic of the origins of sacred space, yet the chapters that are relevant provide a firm foundation for further discussions on the sanctity of the Ka'ba.

The *ḥaram* has featured as a key topic in several works yet it is often the case that one aspect of the *ḥaram* is given more attention than others, namely its inviolability as well as its association with a shrine. In order to form a coherent discussion concerning the *ḥaram* this thesis has studied the various characteristics of the *ḥaram* individually while exploring the roots of its sanctity, its various functions, and the extent to which its pre-Islamic nature endured in the Islamic period under a new, Islamized guise. Prior to delving into the discussion regarding the functions and sanctity of the *ḥaram* it is important to define it and Harry Munt in *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia* (2014) provides a clear and succinct definition that outlines the basic criteria of a *ḥaram*, namely that it must be a demarcated space dedicated to a deity and must be associated with at least one prophet in which certain restrictions must be in place such as those prohibiting the shedding of blood, the cutting down of plants, hunting, and carrying weapons (Munt, 2014, p. 24). This work is of profound importance to this thesis as unlike many works on the *ḥaram*, the Meccan *ḥaram* is not its focal point. It may be true that Munt discusses the *ḥaram* at Mecca often throughout this text, however he does not give it primacy, instead the *ḥaram* at Medina is at the center of this work. This is not to say that they are the only *ḥaram*s that are explored within this book as Munt also crucially

shows that there were several *ḥaram*s in Arabia prior to the rise of Islam. Yet, despite the fact that Harry Munt discusses other *ḥaram*s in his work, Medina's remains at the center of his discussion and he sheds considerable light on the process through which Medina's *ḥaram* was established by outlining the key clauses of the Constitution of Medina. This was a document compiled by the Prophet and the early Muslims which outlines the regulations one must follow within the *ḥaram* at Medina, many of which were also expected to be followed in Mecca. In addition to the important and informative discussions on the pre-Islamic and Islamic *ḥaram*s of the Hijaz and its surroundings Munt emphasises the relative dearth of evidence with regards to the cities of Mecca and Medina as well as their *ḥaram*s during the pre-Islamic period. Yet throughout this text he outlines how one can overcome this obstacle. For example, he claims that if one utilises 'as broad a range of materials as possible a relatively coherent picture can in some cases emerge' (Munt, 2014, 185). This is one among the many ways Munt claims that issues with the source material can be circumvented and this is of great significance as he is making it clear that though there are many issues with the source material regarding the Hijazi cities and their *ḥaram*s there are other avenues one may follow to reach coherent conclusions. Yet, despite there being various ways of overcoming issues with the source material, the issues remain a hindrance to works such as this one.

In addition to defining a *ḥaram*, this thesis briefly analyses the progenitors or contemporaries of this sacred space one of which is the *temenos* of the 'Awwām temple complex in modern-day Yemen which was analysed in Mohammed Maraqten's work titled *Sacred spaces in ancient Yemen – The 'Awām Temple, Ma'rib: A case study'* (2015). In this text, Maraqten highlights the parallels between the pre-Islamic and Islamic Meccan *ḥaram* and the *temenos* of the 'Awwām temple dedicated to Almaqah. Such parallels include the fact that like the Meccan sanctuary, the 'Awwām temple is also dedicated to a divinity and the temple is referred to as the 'House of Almaqah' in a similar manner to the Ka'ba which has as one of its epithets '*Bayt Allah al-Ḥarām*' or the Sacred House of Allah (Maraqten, 2015, pp. 108-9). This text was significant as it served to emphasise that the *ḥaram* has a long pre-Islamic history yet the criteria which all *ḥaram*s must meet did not undergo much alteration

during the long history of this sacred space in the Near and Middle East. Similarly, Michal Gawlikowski in *The Sacred Space in Ancient Arab Religions* (1982) shines a light on the pre-Islamic origins of the *ḥaram* in the Near and Middle East. While the author also discusses parallels between the *ḥaram* and the *temenos* like the above text, he does so through the lens of etymology. This was done by identifying other open-air sanctuaries and the terms used in reference to them as several of these imply protected and holy ground just as the terms *ḥaram* and *temenos* do. This is important as it explicitly demonstrates that the *ḥaram* and the *temenos* are not the only types of open-air sacred sites with a long history in the region and thus the *ḥaram* belongs to a family of such sites. Therefore this text proves to be useful as it supports the notion, that is one of the main arguments of this thesis, that sacred sites in Islam were influenced by pre-Islamic sacred spaces, and it may indeed be the case that certain pre-Islamic sacred sites were the progenitors of their Islamic counterparts. Both of these texts do indeed shed light on the *ḥaram*'s long history in the Near and Middle East yet they, like many other texts that explore the concept of the *ḥaram,* view the *ḥaram* as a limited and demarcated sacred space while overlooking the fact that the *ḥaram* can also be defined in other ways. This thesis goes beyond this standard definition of the *ḥaram* by exploring the idea of the term *ḥaram* being used in reference to entire cities which have *ḥaram*s within them. F. E. Peters' text, *Holy and Ḥaram: the Limits of Sacred Real Estate* (1996a) was immensely valuable as he elaborates on the idea of a city also being a *ḥaram* by focusing on the cities of Mecca and Jerusalem which he describes as being sanctified by their respective *ḥaram*s. In this work Peters also briefly explores the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane and this is significant as this dichotomy is a defining feature of the *ḥaram* as a sacred space for it is an inherently pure and sacred space in stark contrast to its profane surroundings. He does this effectively through the medium of etymology in which he clearly demonstrates that the very word 'profane' means 'outside the temple' and thus those who were deemed unholy and impure were to remain *pro fano* or outside the shrine (Peters, 1996a, p. 1).

Hava Lazarus-Yafeh in her text titled *Jerusalem and Mecca* (1999) also discusses both the concept of the *ḥaram* at the center of a city imparting its sanctity on its surroundings as well as the importance

of ritual purity in relation to the *ḥaram*. With regards to the notion of *ḥaram*s lending sanctity to their respective cities Lazarus-Yafeh makes it abundantly clear that this is certainly the case for Jerusalem and Mecca as both cities were sanctified in a similar manner for they became holy because God was said to dwell within them and this ultimately resulted in the blurring of the distinction between temple or shrine and the city in which they were situated. As for ritual purity, Lazarus-Yafeh describes the regulations concerning ritual purity in Mecca but also draws comparisons with similar regulations outlined in the Temple Scroll regarding Jerusalem. This work is helpful for despite demonstrating that there were parallels between Islamic and pre-Islamic customs concerning ritual purity, the author emphasises that they were not the same, for the rules expected to be followed in Jerusalem were far more strict than those a pilgrim to Mecca must follow and this was rooted in the perceptions of both cities by Jews and Muslims. This is made explicitly clear by Lazarus-Yafeh's statement that Jerusalem was not just a city but a symbol and an idea that was of great importance in Judaeo-Christian thought, contrastingly, the 'puritan, almost spartan' nature of mainstream Islam prevented this kind of symbolism to be applied to the city of Mecca (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1999, p. 297). This latter statement is indeed enlightening, however the notion that Mecca was not infused with symbolism is one that is difficult to accept as one cannot deny that the Ka'ba and Mecca embodied the Islamic faith in many different ways and did become a symbol in a similar manner to Jerusalem. The author does mention the possibility that the Ka'ba could be viewed as a symbol of Islam yet they state that they will not examine this notion in their text, this is unfortunate for it suggests that the author is glossing over this topic when it is deserving of in-depth analysis.

In addition to the *ḥaram*, another key sacred space that has received much attention in this thesis is the mosque. As the mosque is among the most effective symbols of the Islamic faith much has been written on the subject of its origins and its development, however, there are several texts that stand out for their in-depth analysis of the mosque. One of these texts is Essam Ayyad's *The Making of the Mosque: A Survey of Religious Imperatives* (2019) in which the author follows the chronology of the mosque's emergence as a distinctly Islamic place of worship by focusing on the various stages of

construction undergone in the building of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. Despite this focus on the construction of the mosque, Ayyad does highlight the important point that the term *masjid* did not necessarily connote a built structure. This book also proved of immense value to this thesis for it included a thorough examination of the key architectural components of the mosque, namely the *miḥrāb*, the minaret, and the *minbar*, closely examining their potential pre-Islamic progenitors as well as their functions in the distinctly Islamic mosque. What is especially important in this discussion is that Ayyad emphasises that these key features were not in place in the earliest mosques in the way they were at a later stage, namely after the Prophet's Mosque was rebuilt by 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz during his tenure as the governor of Medina during al-Walīd I's caliphate (Ayyad, 2019, p. 42). Ayyad does note, however, that the Mosque of the Prophet did include 'the rudiments of each of such long-established features of mosque architecture' (Ayyad, 2019, p. 210). This is a point that needs emphasising as it illustrates the important role of the Prophet's Mosque in inspiring the mosque type across the Near and Middle East and accentuates the notion that the mosque, though influenced by external factors, was also the result of Islamic innovation for it evolved in order to meet the needs of the Islamic community. Ayyad's work also features a detailed discussion on the various theories which concern the origins of the mosque and primarily focuses on two opposing views, one which championed the idea that the mosque evolved from the house of the Prophet and one which refutes such a claim and Ayyad makes it clear that he belongs to the latter group. He makes his stance clear by simultaneously pointing out the discrepancies in some of the theories promoting the former idea and adding credence to the notion that the Prophet's Mosque was a mosque from the very beginning and that the fact that it carried out non-religious functions is no reason to dismiss this. Ayyad's careful exploration of this topic is executed very well and helped shape the section of this thesis that focuses on the functions and origins of the mosque, however, there is a considerable reliance on textual evidence and the author himself admits this has caused some difficulties in deducing the exact origins of the mosque.

In contrast, Thallein Antun's work titled *The Architectural Form of the Mosque in the Central Arab Lands, from the Hijra to the End of the Umayyad Period, 1/622 – 133/750* (2016) is a scholarly work that approaches the origins of the mosque through an archaeological and architectural lens. She does this in an efficient and clear manner by examining the various layers of a number of early mosques with considerable attention given to the Great Mosque of Kūfa and the Aqsa Mosque. Her examination of the different phases of these two mosques sheds considerable light on the chronology of the mosque type in Kūfa and Jerusalem and also in the wider Near and Middle East. Antun also emphasises the existence of various types of mosque, asserting that the congregational mosque was not the only mosque type in the region for smaller and more simple mosques were also constructed showing that there was variety in mosques from an early stage. Antun also makes it clear that this variety did not only apply to the types of mosques but also to the potential influences on the mosque. She cites the example of the basilical layout of some early mosques, which was a topic initially propounded by Jean Sauvaget in his work titled *La Mosqueé Omeyyade de Medine: Etudes sur les origines architecturales de la mosquée et de la basilique* (1947), to highlight the fact that the mosque was influenced, to an extent, by pre-existing architectural forms in the Near and Middle East and also explores the various prompts for the resurgence of the hypostyle layout in the early mosques. However, although this work shed considerable light on the origins of the mosque it is primarily focused on the architectural origins of the mosque rather than its origins as an Islamic sacred space in the Near and Middle East. Regardless, Antun's approach and her detailed exploration of the mosque throughout the early Islamic period makes this book immensely valuable.

Another text that focuses on the architectural form of the mosque which also includes a thorough discussion concerning its evolution is Jeremy Johns' *The 'House of the Prophet' and the Concept of the Mosque* (1999). In a similar manner to Essam Ayyad's work mentioned above this work also focuses on the debate on the mosque deriving from the house of the Prophet while also discussing the other ways the mosque could have evolved. However, the author does not simply highlight the issues with the theories which promoted the notion that the mosque developed from the house of

the Prophet. Instead, Johns refers to pre-Islamic places of worship and their evolution to illustrate that though worship was initially performed in domestic spaces this is not an indication that the places of worship that later developed were based upon domestic structures. One example which he cites is that of Christian architecture as he asserts that in the early centuries of Christianity the faithful would congregate in simple dwellings for there was no distinctively Christian architecture. Yet, when Christian architecture started to appear it was not the house that was the prototype for it was clearly the basilica. This allows one to arrive at the conclusion that though the mosque carried out some non-spiritual functions, it primarily evolved from the Mosque of the Prophet and not his house. This work is of great value and Johns presents the debate concerning the origins of the mosque in a very clear way though he does not clearly state his position on the matter although one is inclined to think that he opposes the notion that the mosque evolved from the house of the Prophet. That being said, this work has been an important resource that has helped shape the discussion on the origins of the mosque in this thesis as it provides a more architectural and archaeological perspective which, coupled with the more textual approach of Essam Ayyad and the archaeological approach of Thallein Antun, resulted in the debate on the mosque being well-balanced.

Robert Hillenbrand, in *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning* (1994) also touches upon the aforementioned debate yet its value in the context of this thesis is predominantly due to its detailed analysis of the mosque's key components. It may be the case that several other works, including those mentioned above, explore the origins of the mosque's defining elements. Yet the way through which Hillenbrand carries out this task is particularly effective for he does not simply enumerate these features, briefly explaining their importance. Rather he engages in a careful examination of each one of them, revealing much about their history and how they came to be key parts of the mosque when at times it seems their incorporation within the mosque is not entirely necessary. This work also sheds light on the history of funerary architecture and burial practices in the Near and Middle East prior to the rise of Islam and studied the degree to which they impacted

Islamic funerary architecture and thus proved to be a valuable resource for the section of this thesis that examined the origins of the mausoleum as an Islamic sacred space. Hillenbrand's text is indeed a significant resource for this thesis, however, as its geographical and historical scope is considerably larger than that of this thesis much attention was given to areas of study that bear no relevance to this thesis. For example, there is a sizeable discussion on the architecture of Iran, Turkey, and North Africa, areas which do not feature greatly within this thesis. The work also involves a thorough discussion on such structures as the *madrasa* and the palace which also lie beyond the scope of this thesis.

Hillenbrand's work does indeed shed light on the origins of mausolea in the Near and Middle East allowing one to deduce the extent to which pre-Islamic practices affected Islamic ones in this regard, yet there are several texts which have this subject as their focal point and thus are able to closely examine this subject to a sufficient degree. One such work which proved to be of considerable importance to this thesis is Stephennie Mulder's text titled *The Shrines of the 'Alids in Medieval Syria: Sunnis, Shi'is and the Architecture of Coexistence* (2014). In this text, Mulder explores a topic that has not received much attention in scholarship and that is the history of the Shi'i shrines in Syria, how they developed and how they contributed to the creation of a sacred landscape in the region. Her in-depth analysis of the 'Alid or Shi'i shrines in such regions as Bālis, Damascus, and Aleppo is unmatched and her discussion on the *Bāb al-Ṣaghīr* cemetery in Damascus was of great value as in order to fully understand the significance of Islamic funerary shrines one needs to first achieve a good understanding of the significance of graves in and of themselves before shrines appeared throughout the region. This work also highlighted another topic that has received little attention in the past and that is the close relationship between commemorative and funerary shrines and the wider landscape in which they are situated. As part of this discussion, she explores the various manners through which a landscape becomes sacred giving much attention to the notion that a landscape is rendered sacred through historical events and actions and she dubs such a landscape a 'landscape of deeds' (Mulder, 2014, p. 254). This was of importance as it helped shape the discussion

on sacred landscapes that features in this thesis. Among the topics Mulder discusses in this text is yet another one that has been overlooked in scholarship and that is the subject of sacred routes. Mulder approaches this topic in a clear and detailed manner and focuses primarily on the route which the head of al-Ḥusayn took following the Battle of Karbalā' and the way through which this route resulted in the appearance of shrines along it that served to commemorate the martyred al-Ḥusayn and the tragedy that befell him. This discussion was of vital importance to this thesis as it contributes to fulfilling one of the thesis aims which is to shine a light on the role of Shi'ism in the creation of sacred space in the Near and Middle East. Daniella Talmon-Heller's work titled *Sacred place and sacred time in the medieval Islamic Middle East: a historical perspective* (2020) also proved to be of immense value for its considerable focus on the role which Shi'i figures and their shrines played in applying sanctity to the landscape of the Near and Middle East. In a similar manner to Mulder in her work discussed above, Talmon-Heller pays much attention to the figure of al-Ḥusayn and the way his shrines and his memory contributed to the sanctity of various regions in the Near and Middle East. She does this by highlighting the holiness of the head of al-Ḥusayn and its status as a holy relic which imparted sanctity wherever it went.

The topic of relics is one which is explored in much detail within this thesis and this is aided significantly by several works by Josef W. Meri which play a key role in shining a light on the sanctity of relics as well as the cult of saints of which the veneration of relics is a vital part. *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (2002) is one such text by Meri which, as the title suggests, comprises a thorough discussion on the concept of the cult of saints and its contribution to the sanctity of shrines as well as the wider landscape. Meri studies the cult of saints and its sanctifying nature through Muslim, Jewish and Christian lenses serving to emphasise the importance of this notion to all three faiths. However, though Christian perspectives are discussed in this work, there is more of a focus on the cult of saints and relics in Jewish and Islamic contexts. The author does admit that this is due to the sparsity of material on the attitudes of local Christians to the cult of saints and the rituals affiliated with it (Meri, 2002, p. 4). Though viewing the cult of saints from

different perspectives is important, Meri's discussion of the blessings or *baraka* which saints and their relics are infused with and the various manners through which this *baraka* emitted from them is of equal importance and played a key role in formulating the debate on the sanctity of relics that features within this thesis. Notably, Meri highlights that though the term *baraka* is often perceived as a distinctly Islamic idea, the notion of saints, their relics and their shrines conveying blessings upon the faithful pre-dated Islam and this allows one to make direct comparisons between pre-Islamic and Islamic perceptions of sanctity and sacred space. In another of Meri's works, *Aspects of Baraka (Blessings) and Ritual Devotion Among Muslims and Jews* (1999a) the concept of *baraka* is at the centre of the discussion. Here, Meri examines the role of *baraka* in sanctifying sites in the Near and Middle East while also acknowledging the other manners through which sanctity is applied to space. Meri's analysis of the concept of *baraka* in this work was also of great use as he made it clear that though shrines are holy as a result of their connection to holy figures, they are also holy as a result of a connection to the divine and this clearly illustrates the multifaceted nature of sanctity in the Near and Middle East, a point that this thesis strives to accentuate.

Another text by Meri, *The etiquette of devotion in the Islamic Cult of Saints* (1999b), is also valuable to this study. Like the author's other works this article emphasises that the veneration of saints, their relics and their tombs is both a feature of Islamic and pre-Islamic religious life as the three Abrahamic faiths had many saints in common. This is a key point as in this thesis the shared Abrahamic heritage will be put forward as one of the reasons for the proliferation of sacred sites in the Near and Middle East. Additionally, although the parallels between the different faiths of the Near and Middle East were discussed in this work, Meri also briefly touches upon the existence of differences not only between the faiths but within them. However, this was not elaborated on. The works of Josef W. Meri have helped shape a number of sections in this thesis as they illustrate their author's versatile research areas, he may focus primarily on relics but he does so in a number of different ways. This is shown in another of his works titled *Relics of Piety and Power in Medieval Islam* (2010) in which he explores the political side of relics making it abundantly clear that relics have both a religious and

political character. This made this text particularly useful as a motif that runs through this thesis is the inseparable nature of religion and politics. In Meri's above-mentioned works, in addition to several others including *Pilgrimage to the Prophet Ezekiel's Shrine in Iraq: A Symbol of Muslim-Jewish relations* (2012) and *The Cult of Saints and Pilgrimage* (2015), he also shines a light on the concept of superogatory pilgrimage or *ziyāra* or pious visitation and its importance in the Near and Middle East prior to the rise of Islam as well as during the Islamic period. A point which is made abundantly clear in his works is that *ziyāra* was undertaken for very similar reasons regardless of the time period and, that centers of pilgrimage, whether it was obligatory or superogatory, were imbued with a degree of sanctity that drew pilgrims from far and wide regardless of their faith. These works are important in general and in the context of this thesis as they have highlighted the fact that despite the primacy of obligatory pilgrimage, superogatory pilgrimages must not be dismissed as they are also instrumental in illustrating that pilgrimage practices did not undergo much alteration and that many of them, in various ways, were assimilated into Islamic ritual practice. A further text that emphasises the sacred and sanctifying nature of the relic is Richard A. McGregor's *Islam and the Devotional Object: Seeing Religion in Egypt and Syria* (2020). In this work, the author examines the relationship between the relic in Islam and the subsequent erection of a shrine dedicated to it. He explores the different types of relics that were enshrined while also discussing the role of the shrine and the relic in bridging a gap between the devotee and the saint. Both of these topics are immensely important to this thesis as they show the sacred power of relics, their role in the creation of a large number of shrines in the Near and Middle East, and also shed light on why the shrine became such an important sacred space in the region.

This thesis also stresses the sanctity of commemoration and commemorative structures in the Near and Middle East in both pre-Islamic and Islamic contexts and several texts have proved to be immensely valuable sources on this topic and have thus been utilized in this thesis. The Dome of the Rock can be argued to be the most important commemorative site in Islam and thus will be closely examined with much attention given to the possible reasons for its erection as well as the objects

and events it commemorates, all of which will be discussed further at a later stage. One significant work on the topic is Jacob Lassner's work *Medieval Jerusalem: Forging an Islamic City in Spaces Sacred to Christians and Jews* (2017) in which the author highlights the significance of the Dome of the Rock both as a site of commemoration as well as a political symbol signifying the dominance of Islam over the preceding faiths. Oleg Grabar's work titled *Jerusalem: Constructing the Study of Islamic Art* (2005) also explored the multifunctional nature of the Dome of the Rock emphasising that this was a structure that was a religio-political propaganda tool as well as a reliquary for a Rock that was sacred in both Judaeo-Christian and Islamic contexts. Though such texts are of considerable use, their focus is primarily on the commemoration being carried out through monumental means when there are other methods of commemoration that do not require such monumental expression. In order to emphasise this, this thesis discusses the manner by which Prophet Muhammad is memorialized and though this has been carried out through monumental means, it has also been achieved in other, more subtle ways. Finbarr B. Flood highlights this in his work titled *Light in Stone. The Commemoration of the Prophet in Umayyad Architecture* (1999), in which he discusses the various ways the Prophet is memorialized through different stones that were imbued with sanctity as a result of a prophetic connection. Flood also explores the concept of prophetic light and the way through which this attribute of the Prophet Muhammad was represented in the scalloped *miḥrāb* or prayer niche of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina that was installed in the mosque following its reconstruction during the caliphate of al-Walīd (Flood, 1999, p. 354). More importantly Flood states that the scalloped niched was used as an honorific device as well as a signifier of sanctity in the pre-Islamic Near and Middle East. This was an enlightening topic that has not been touched upon in other academic texts and proved to be of immense value to this thesis as it demonstrated that certain aspects of the Umayyad programme of commemorating the Prophet were pre-Islamic in origin. In his work Flood stresses the role of the *miḥrāb* in commemorating the Prophet yet he does not give mention to the commemorative function of the *minbar* which would have complemented the discussion on the *miḥrāb*. The *minbar*'s commemorative nature is, however, explored by Estelle

Whelan in *The Origins of the Miḥrāb Mujawwaf: A Reinterpretation* (1986) which is a valuable source for its detailed analysis of the *miḥrāb* as well as the *minbar* and their role in symbolising the intangible presence of the Prophet.

There are two other scholarly works that also pay considerable attention to the *miḥrāb* and the origins of the earliest mosques in the Near and Middle East, both are by Gideon Avni and they are *Early Mosques in the Negev Highlands: New Archaeological Evidence on Islamic Penetration of Southern Palestine* (1994) and *From Standing Stones to Open Mosques in the Negev Desert: The Archaeology of Religious Transformation* (2007). These two works are particularly valuable to this thesis as they provide archaeological evidence for the transition from pre-Islamic modes of worship to Islamic ones through the medium of the *miḥrāb* as well as the early mosque. What is particularly crucial is that they do not suggest that there was a complete separation between pre-Islam and Islam for they acknowledged that there was a degree of overlap. The most visual example which Avni focuses on in both articles is the progress from the worship of standing stones to their reuse as *miḥrāb*s in open-air mosques. This does not only shed light on the early history of the mosque, but also demonstrates that the emergence of Islam and its subsequent spread throughout the Near and Middle East did not fully erase pre-Islamic practice, indeed these works suggest that vestiges of pre-Islamic worship were present in the early mosque and *miḥrāb* although in an Islamized form. This meant that the sanctity of pre-Islamic objects of worship, though transformed, endured nevertheless. Avni provides much information on the relatively slow penetration of Islam into the Negev Highlands, however, he refrains from stating precisely why this was the case although he does state that it is difficult to know the exact reason due to the sparsity of the sources.

This thesis includes a chapter on the concept of sacred landscapes in which the sanctity of topographical features and entire regions is discussed in much detail. Sacred landscapes in the Near and Middle East are holy for many different reasons, one of which is their connection to eschatology and cosmology a connection that has not been subjected to in-depth analysis in many academic

texts. There are, however, a number of works that discuss the subject which have been important in shaping the discussion on the eschatological and cosmological importance of the Near and Middle Eastern landscape. One of these works is Amikam Elad's *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (1995) in which he discusses Jerusalem's central role in Muslim traditions on the End of Days and outlines Jerusalem's paradisiacal associations which played a key role in sanctifying the city during the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods. Elad's work is also of importance as he bases much of his discussion on early traditions that are likely to be more accurate than traditions that emerged at a later stage, he also cites the Qur'an, which can be argued to be the earliest written Islamic source, several times throughout the text adding further credence to his discussion. This book also highlights the fact that Islam inherited many ideas concerning the eschatological significance of Jerusalem and its environs from the preceding Abrahamic faiths and this serves to emphasise the fact that pre-Islamic ideas regarding sacred space shaped Islamic ones to varying degrees.

Elad's work places significant stress on the sanctifying function of eschatology, however, does not broach the subject of the role of cosmology in sanctifying the landscape of the Near and Middle East. This topic is addressed by Nasser Rabbat in his work titled *In the Beginning was the House: On the Image of the Two Noble Sanctuaries of Islam* (2002) in addition to Naomi Koltun-Fromm's *Jerusalem Sacred Stones from Creation to Eschaton* (2017). Both authors study the traditions which center on the link between cosmology and sacred space, the former focuses on the Ka'ba while the latter has the Rock within the Dome of the Rock as the focal point of their text. Yet, despite the fact that they are studying wholly different sacred sites both texts speak of them in similar ways. Both shrines are described as navels of the earth from which the rest of Creation spread highlighting their connection with the Creator. This is important as Koltun-Fromm does not cite Islamic traditions but Jewish ones as well whereas Rabbat bases his work on Islamic traditions and this makes it clear that cosmology was believed to have contributed to the sanctity of the land by Muslims and non-Muslims. This is important to this thesis for it is explicitly demonstrating the continuity of ideas concerning sanctity in

the Near and Middle East. A further text that also sheds much light on the role of eschatology and cosmology in sanctifying the landscape is Zayde Antrim's *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (2012). In this text the eschatological significance of the Temple Mount is a focal point with particular attention given to its role as the conduit between heaven and earth. This text also stressed the paradisiacal associations of the Rock in the Dome of the Rock, making it evident that Jerusalem, the Temple Mount in particular, were to be the setting of the End of Days. Antrim does not, however, focus solely on Jerusalem as she also discusses the cosmological character of Mecca describing both cities as the center of the world and the places from which Creation emerged. This text also acknowledges that though the *ḥadīth* places Mecca as the first city of the cosmos, this did not mean that other holy cities such as Kūfa and Jerusalem did not have cosmological significance. Additionally, the parallels between Mecca and Jerusalem that Antrim highlights were of much use to this thesis as the two cities feature prominently for they were both cities that had a considerable pre-Islamic past that was ultimately linked to Abraham and Islamized.

In addition to eschatology and cosmology and their contribution to the creation of an Islamic sacred landscape in the Near and Middle East, this thesis also pays considerable attention to the sanctity of individual topographical features. Several texts were of relevance to this section of the thesis, one of which was Ahmad Ghabin's article titled *The Zamzam Well Ritual in Islam and its Jerusalem connection* (2012) in which the Islamic sanctity of water is examined. Ghabin focuses on the Zamzam spring and the various qualities that infused it with sanctity including its curative properties, he also analyses the various *aḥādīth* about the Zamzam's sacred properties and explores the way this resulted in several rituals being developed around the Zamzam spring. In another of Ghabin's works, *The Well of Zamzam: A Pilgrimage Site and Curative Water in Islam* (2020) he also broaches a topic that has not been discussed in considerable detail in past scholarship and that is the holiness of rivers from an Islamic, specifically Shi'i, perspective by highlighting the sacred significance of the Euphrates to the sect (Ghabin, 2020, p. 77). Nancy Khalek's work titled *Damascus After the Muslim Conquest: Text and Image in Early Islam* (2011) also analyses the holiness of topographical features

by shedding light on the sanctity of mountains and caves. She does this by outlining the holy attributes of Mount Qāsiyūn in Damascus as well as the various caves within it by emphasising its connection to sacred martyrs and other holy figures on one hand and its eschatological role on the other. Khalek's work is a great resource for its close examination of the holiness of Mount Qāsiyūn, however this was only one subject explored by the author for her work also contributed greatly to the shaping of the discussion on mausolea and burial sites within this thesis.

The topic of the sacred city is also discussed within this thesis and one of the most useful texts in relation to this topic is F. E. Peters' *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East* (1986). This text proved to be of significant value for it covers a broad range of topics, many of which feature in the chapters of this thesis. The focus of this work may have been primarily on Jerusalem and Mecca yet it also sheds light on the sanctity of other cities in the Near and Middle East such as Karbalā' and Najaf by briefly discussing their growth from relatively obscure villages to large shrine cities with equally large populations to which pilgrims flocked from far and wide (Peters, 1986, p. 104). This is important as though these two cities have been discussed in past scholarship; sufficient attention has not been paid to their growth into fully established sacred cities prior to the pre-modern period. However, though this discussion is important, a more in-depth analysis is lacking in Peters' text despite their revered status in Shi'i Islam. In spite of this, when speaking of Jerusalem and Mecca, Peters ensures that the key aspects of their holiness are examined closely. Thus, in the case of Mecca, Peters follows its holy status prior to the rise of Islam and demonstrates how this holiness was maintained in the Islamic period with relative ease and he approaches Jerusalem in a similar manner; highlighting the sanctity of the city in the eyes of Jews, Christians and Muslims and discussing the manner by which the city became one of the holiest cities in Islam. In addition to exploring the sanctity of cities, this work is also of importance for its discussion on pilgrimage as many of the cities which are discussed within it were centers of pilgrimage. In this book, Peters also analyses the effect of pilgrimage on sacred cities highlighting its role in the expansion of key sacred cities such as Mecca and he also sheds light on the manner by which pilgrimage sanctified space.

Although there is no denying that this text is a profoundly valuable resource, there are times at which it appears dated for there are certain assertions within it that have since been disproved, one of the most important being that Mecca lay on a major trade route.

2.1: Concluding remarks

Islamic sacred space, in a similar manner to Judaeo-Christian and polytheistic sacred space, was influenced by pre-existent notions that were embraced by the new faith but which, for the most part, underwent varying degrees of change to better suit its beliefs. This process took place in a number of different ways and resulted in the emergence of new sacred spaces such as the Islamic mosque or it resulted in the transformation of ancient types such as the *ḥaram*, the mausoleum, and the commemorative site. This notion is widely supported in past scholarship as the above cited texts demonstrate. However, this area of study has, to its detriment, only been discussed briefly in most texts for it is frequently overlooked in favour of other topics that are supported by a larger corpus of evidence. This thesis, however, places Islamic sacred space and its pre-Islamic influences at its center. This is not the only manner by which this thesis offers something new to the field of Islamic history as throughout this thesis there is a pronounced effort to emphasise that despite the importance of Mecca and Medina to the origins of Islamic sacred space, they cannot be viewed as the only contributors to its establishment and development. This is ultimately a thesis focusing on the Near and Middle East, not just Arabia. Certain underrepresented topics also feature in this thesis which offer further insight on the pre-Islamic influences on Islamic sacred space in the Near and Middle East from unique perspectives. The purpose of this is to approach the concept of Islamic sacred space via as many avenues as possible to gain a clear and rounded insight into its origins in the Near and Middle East. However, in order to achieve this, one must make use of a considerable number of texts which cover a variety of topics and this chapter has shown that this is the very approach that this thesis has employed. Yet, despite this there remains much that has not been addressed and

explored to a sufficient degree in this thesis as a more thorough study lies beyond the scope of this work. Looking to the future, further studies need to be undertaken to erase the gap in the scholarship, as though this thesis has shed more light on the subject of the origins of Islamic sacred space, there is much left to do to completely fill the gap in our knowledge.

Chapter 3

Sanctity

3:1: The definition of sanctity

As it is the aim of this work to elucidate the foundations of Islamic ideas surrounding sacred space and sanctity it is of great importance to understand these concepts themselves independently prior to undergoing an investigation regarding their origins in the Near and Middle East. There is no shortage of discussions concerning the meaning of sanctity as it has been defined by different disciplines in different ways, the same may also be said of sacred space. Among those who attempted to define the notion of sanctity is Émile Durkheim who stated that the classification of an object as sacred or profane was a hallmark of all religions and that 'the sacred thing is par excellence that which the profane should not touch, and cannot touch with impunity.' (Durkheim, 1971, pp. 36-42). This is certainly a key aspect of sanctity, its separation from the profane, but it has also been argued that for an object or a space to be deemed as sacred there must be a semblance of separation from all that surrounds it whether it is classified as profane or not. In addition to separateness, sanctity must also be defined through its link to the divine for in many cases it is a direct or indirect connection with a divine being that renders an object or space holy and this is demonstrated clearly in many religious contexts in the Near and Middle East. Defining a term such as sanctity is not a simple endeavour but a connection with the divine is clearly an important aspect of it. This is alluded to in Rudolf Otto's attempt at defining the holy in which he separated his definition into two parts, and it is the second part which he argued 'cannot be strictly defined' that implies a link with divinity as he calls it the 'numinous'. The Latin root of the word, numen or 'divine will' suggests that the holy or the sacred, in Otto's view is intertwined with a divine power (Otto, 1950) thus lending credence to the notion that the sacred and the divine cannot be viewed independently

from each other as one lends definition to the other. It remains the case that there can be no single definition of sanctity yet the core characteristics of the term that feature in the considerable attempts to define it are its link with a God or deities and its separation from all that surrounds it.

Sacred spaces have been a feature of the Near and Middle East from time immemorial, indeed the region has provided numerous examples of places that have been ascribed with sanctity since the beginning of recorded history. To give one example, the Qur'an, in stating that the first House of worship was in Bakka (Qur'an 3:96) – which was understood to be Mecca by Muslim exegetes (McCants, 2012, p. 45) – implies the existence of other similar sacred spaces in the area (Munt, 2014, p. 16). Despite this awareness of the existence of sacred spaces across the Near and Middle East, attempting to define sacred space and to understand the reason for its creation is no easy task due to the ambiguous nature of sanctity and sacred space. Nonetheless, sacred space must be defined for it is the foundation upon which this thesis rests. Like sanctity, sacred space is defined in a variety of ways depending on one's perspective and field. This is reflected in the various attempts that have been made to define the term, indeed, the several definitions of the term can better one's understanding of it for they highlight the multifaceted nature of sacred space. One such definition claims that a sacred space is a point on the earth which has been recognised by individuals and groups as worthy of devotion and is sharply separated from the non-sacred world around it. It is also stated that sacred space is assigned sanctity as 'man defines, limits and characterises it through his culture, experience and goals' (Jackson and Henrie, 1983, p. 94). This definition highlights the importance of the relationship between mankind and their perception of the sacred as it is through their actions and through their declarations that a space is characterised as holy. Whether it is a man-made structure or a natural sacred site, the intervention of mankind is necessary for a space to be marked as holy and to remain so. In some cases this may be through the actions of a holy figure who has been commanded by God to sanctify a space as illustrated by the example of the Ka'ba in Mecca which Abraham erected when Allah ordered him to (Qur'an, 2:125-7). In other cases it may be the actions of religious devotees at a certain place that renders it sacred and encourages worship to

be performed there. On a more practical, everyday level a sacred space is one which usually serves the economic and social needs of the community that views it as sacred and in which certain regulations are adhered to. Holy sites are also places in which sacred space and sacred time interact and this is exemplified by pilgrimage, particularly obligatory pilgrimage which is only performed at certain times during the year. The Islamic *Hajj* that takes place in Mecca and its environs annually is a demonstrative example as it is restricted to a number of days during the twelfth month of the Islamic or *Hijri* calendar, *Dhul Ḥijja* (Munt, 2014, p. 5).

As with the definition of sanctity, separateness is of great significance with regards to sacred space as its segregation from the outside and profane world highlights the holiness of a site. This is not simply the creation of a physical border between the holy site and its surroundings, it is also reflected in the actions of visitors to the sacred space; the experience of the visitor must be one characterised by wonder and awe. That this experience is achieved through the creation of borders between the sacred and the profane is further emphasised by the assertion that the 'holy, or hallowed, means separated and dedicated' (Isaac, 1964, p. 29). It must also be understood that not all sacred spaces are stationary. This is most apparent in the case of exiled religious communities such as the exiled Jews whose idea of sacred space was not defined territorially but was represented in the Torah which they took with them into exile and which they believed embodied the *Shekhinah* or essence of God (Maier, 1975, p. 21). The prevalence of the idea of portable idols and stelae in the Near and Middle East demonstrates that movable sacred space was a notion with a considerable history in the region. The portability of shrines and idols may indeed have paralleled the lifestyles of those who venerated them. This is demonstrated by the Israelites and Arabs who, in their early history, had portable shrines which only found permanent homes once their affiliated peoples established sedentary lives (Peters, 1986, p. 21).

The concept of sacred space can also be understood as a manner through which the sacred became tangible and this is exemplified by the assertion that a shrine's holiness is dependent on the physical

interaction of devotees with it. This includes circumambulation, which is the ritual act of circling or moving around a sacred object, as well as the act of taking soil from a sacred place and rubbing oneself with it to absorb its unique blessings or *baraka* in order to cure an illness (Meri, 1999a, p. 56). This physical dimension of worship and devotion was not unique to one religion in the Near and Middle East as elements of physical worship can be deduced in the religious customs of the pre-Islamic religions in the region and continued to be of importance in the Islamic period. The need for sacred space to be rendered tangible is also important for visitors as it not only brings them into the presence of the holy, but also allows them to experience this presence in a manner beyond the spiritual and mental spheres. A need to touch, see and even smell the sacred is also a reason why sanctity was ultimately made tangible as 'memory that is purely mental, that is not anchored in things, will not endure' (Halbwachs, 1971, p. 126) and this led to the proliferation of tactile piety. This involved the touching, kissing, smelling, and siting of sacred spaces as well as relics which form the basis for a particular space's sanctity. In Jerusalem, this form of piety was a common phenomenon and was reflected in the acts of pilgrims to the city who travelled from far to kiss the wood of the Cross and to touch the bones of martyrs to be blessed by the holiness within them (Wilken, 1996, p. 131). The veneration of the Black Stone in the pre-Islamic and Islamic period through kissing and touching is another example which demonstrates the concept of tactile piety. Ultimately, it is clear that sanctity needed to take on physical form whether through natural or man-made means in order to enhance the worshipper's experience and bring them closer to those they worship as well as their venerated representatives.

The ways in which sanctity was made manifest are abundant but it is clear that it is through the medium of space that the concept of the sacred is most effectively presented. Space is an impactful way of portraying the sacred for it delimits areas which are wholly dedicated to a deity or primordial power in which worship was the main activity. It allows for the relationship between worshipped and worshipper to take on physical form and in many ways deepens the connection between the two. It is not only places of worship that are deemed as sacred as places such as mausoleums are venerated

due to the figure entombed there, however it remains the case that similar to the relationship between the worshipped and their worshippers, the relationship between a holy figure and their devotees is manifested and intensified through spatial means. Sacred space can take on a variety of forms and can be reinforced through many different ways. The temple is one such way through which the sacred is presented and in the Ancient and Late Antique Near and Middle East the temple functioned as a man-made environment that houses the deity to which it was dedicated and allowed limited access to their presence. It is in the temple that the divine-human communication was most keenly represented, and it was there that the link between heaven and earth was most apparent. In many ways the temple was a 'mixing of worlds – in effect, heaven on earth – with elements of both built into the architecture itself' (Hundley, 2013, p. 131). This symbolism attached to the temple illustrates how effective space, as a medium through which sanctity was portrayed, was in the region. As for the matter of how sanctity was reinforced in a given space, it is to ritual which one must shift their attention. It is through the undertaking of regular rituals that certain spaces are rendered holy and through which this holiness endures.

Yet, it is not through rituals alone that the sanctity of a space lasts for this also rests on the ability of the sacred site and its devotees to adapt to social and political circumstances thus maintaining the relevance of the site (Halbwachs, 1993, p. 224). The close link between the secular and the religious with regards to sacred space alludes to the fact that in order to fully understand sacred space as a concept, one must also define it from a political perspective. The political character of sacred space can be illustrated in various ways, however, the most important among these is the fact that it is a space that is often used as a means of propaganda, as a way for an individual or a group to assert their power and legitimacy. This is further emphasised by the fact that sacred spaces are also places over which ownership or possession may be claimed and this is accentuated by the claim that 'since no sacred space is merely "given" in the world, its ownership will always be at stake.' Thus, a sacred space is not only discovered or founded and subsequently constructed or demarcated, for it is also 'claimed, owned, and operated by people advancing specific interests' (Chidester and Linenthal,

1995, p. 15) and these interests tend to be political, or at least religio-political, in nature. A prime example of this is the case of Jerusalem which, for much of its history, has been a place of deep contestation and competition that is amply reflected in the sacred spaces within it. The Temple Mount in Jerusalem is a clear illustration of this as it is a space revered by Jews and Muslims, both of whom have made claims of ownership regarding this area as some of the holiest sites to these faiths demonstrate. The Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque are situated in close proximity to the Western Wall, which is believed to be the only remnant of the Herodian Temple destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. Indeed the two Islamic structures on the Temple Mount loom over the Jewish sacred site in a manner that has clear political connotations. It is evident that there is no single definition of sanctity and sacred space for one's perception of these concepts depends on numerous factors and approaches. It is for this reason that one must venture beyond mere definitions to deduce the nature of sacred space in the Near and Middle East and examine what made such spaces sacred and how did this contribute to the development of Islamic sacred space in the region.

3.2: What makes a space sacred?

There are myriad factors that can give a space a sacred character and it is often the case that it is a combination of said factors that forms the basis for a particular space's holiness. Such aspects include a connection with a holy figure, the burial of a holy figure, and the occurrence of a major event or miracle. However, one particular element that is fundamental to all sacred space is the link with the divine be it direct or indirect. Sanctity is portrayed and experienced in a variety of ways by the adherents of the different religions in the Near and Middle East, yet this connection with the divine remains the most significant aspect of sacred space. This can be exemplified in Jerusalem wherein the co-existence of the three Abrahamic religions is physically visible by way of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Western Wall, and the Aqsa Mosque, all of which have a divine

connection. In the case of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, it encloses two of the holiest sites in Christendom in separate shrines; the Rotunda, which is the believed place of Christ's burial and his subsequent resurrection, and the basilica wherein lies the alleged spot of Calvary or Golgotha, the traditional site of Christ's crucifixion (Fig. 1) (Bogdanović, 2017, p. 274). Thus, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre's divine connection is rooted in the fact that it is wholly dedicated to Jesus who is viewed as the embodiment of God on earth by Christians. With regards to the Western Wall, it is what remains of the Second Temple built to replace the Temple of Solomon which housed the Ark of the Covenant and represented God's intangible presence on earth (Peters, 1986, pp. 80-1). Lastly, al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as the *Ḥaram al-Sharif* upon which it stands, is revered by Muslims as it is believed to have been the place from which Prophet Muhammad ascended to the heavens following his miraculous Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem 'where he received the doctrinal principles of the new religion' from Allah (Rabbat, 1989, p. 12).

This belief that the presence of the divine renders a space holy is one which has its origins in antiquity as illustrated by the Ka'ba which was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael on the orders of Allah who commanded them to raise the foundations of his House and to purify it for those who come to worship him there (Qur'an 1:125-8). It has also been suggested that the divine presence was in the Black Stone, which was a betyl, a sacred rock that embodied and housed a deity, prior to its incorporation within the Ka'ba. Thus it was carried about with the nomadic Meccans who worshipped it wherever they went until they established a settled or semi-nomadic lifestyle and housed the Black Stone in a corner of the Ka'ba (Peters, 1986, p. 6). The divine associations of the Black Stone are further highlighted in the Traditions or *aḥādīth* which emphasise its preternatural nature. One tradition, for example, asserts that the Black Stone was the hand of al-Raḥmān, an epithet of Allah, and whoever had not acknowledged the prophecy of Muhammad could do so by touching the stone (al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 219). The notion that the Black Stone was initially a betyl is widely attested and upon its incorporation within the Ka'ba the two separate entities merged to form *Bayt Allah,* the House of Allah. This consequently enhanced the sanctity of the area around the

Ka'ba, the *Ḥaram,* as 'just as a betyl that represented a god was seen as the abode of god's presence, so the very presence of the god made sacred the sanctuary to which he or she was worshipped' (Taylor, 2002, p. 138).

The importance of the divine in creating sacred space is also highlighted by the fact that any space that witnessed the manifestation of the divine is rendered sacred. The Oak of Mamre is a prime example of this as, according to the Book of Genesis, it was in the shade of the tree that, Yahweh, the name for the god of the Israelites, and two angels appeared to Abraham and his wife Sarah in the form of three men to inform them of Sarah's conception of a son (Gen. 181:1-15). In this episode God had penetrated the human sphere and had also demonstrated his power for he had allowed Sarah to conceive despite her advanced years (Fowden, 2002, p. 126). Mircea Eliade expressed this phenomenon clearly in his statement that 'Every kratophany and hierophany whatsoever transforms the place where it occurs: hitherto profane, it is thenceforward a sacred area' (Eliade, 1958, p. 367). Eliade defined hierophany, a term which he coined, as the manifestation of the sacred and he separated it into two types: theophanies and kratophanies, the latter of which he also coined. The former is best defined as a manifestation of the divine, and the latter is when a 'hierophany manifests as an object of power' (Dadosky, 2004, p. 68), for example a thunderstorm or an earthquake. However, kratophanies have both positive and negative connotations as the brute power which they embody can be a source of awe, however, they can also be a sign of divine wrath (Dadosky, 2004, p. 69). Eliade himself claims that kratophanies have a dangerous quality about them as they 'preserve the sacred in all its ambivalence, both attracting and repelling with its brute power' (Eliade and Sullivan, 1987, p. 315). The definitions of the different hierophanies do often overlap, yet it must be noted that while every hierophany is a kratophany, not every kratophany can, strictly speaking, be termed a hierophany (Dadosky, 2004, p. 68). Guilford Dudley emphasises this by stating that a kratophany 'is only a manifestation of power, which may or may not take on an aspect of the sacred, while the hierophany is always a manifestation of the sacred'. Thus, while thunderstorms are manifestations of power, they are not necessarily manifestations of the sacred (Dudley, 1977, p. 51).

Another space that was rendered sacred as a result of a hierophany is the site of the Burning Bush on Mount Sinai as this was where God spoke to Moses and told Moses not to come any closer without taking his sandals off because the place where he was standing was holy ground (Ex.3:2-6). In this case, God manifested himself through the Burning Bush and rendered the space a sacred one.

It is often the case that in events involving hierophanies a holy figure is also present. Therefore, though the manifestation of the divine is the primary source of sanctity it is not the only one as a sacred space's affiliation with a holy figure intensifies its holiness. It may also be suggested that the presence of a holy figure is an indirect manner by which the divine is manifested as prophets, saints, and holy men were believed to be the representatives of the divine. The role of holy figures in making a space sacred is also witnessed at places with a considerable monotheistic history. One such space was the Great Mosque of Kūfa in which a thousand prophets, including Abraham, and a thousand *awṣīya'* or trustees are believed to have prayed. It was also the alleged location of the rod of Moses and the *muṣallā* or prayer place of Noah (Kister, 1996, pp. 32-33). The significance of the mosque at Kūfa was enhanced upon the assassination of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, the fourth of the Rashidūn caliphs who immediately succeeded the Prophet upon his death (r. 656-661), and the first *Imam* of Shi'ism (632-661), within it. Though this holiness stemmed from the commemoration of his death, the mosque is nevertheless closely attached to the holiness of 'Alī and venerated accordingly. This veneration has continued until the present day with the expansion of the mosque complex which grew to incorporate the shrines of Muslim ibn 'Aqīl (Fig. 2), the nephew of 'Alī as well as his companion Hāni ibn 'Urwa who were both martyred at Kūfa prior to the Battle of Karbalā' in 680 (Tabbaa and Mervin, 2014, p. 97). Thus upon visiting the mosque in recent years one is very much aware that they are entering holy ground whether it is because of the gold shrines that one visits to seek blessings or whether it is because one can visit the spot upon which Imam 'Alī was dealt a fatal blow (Fig. 3) which had major consequences for Shi'ism thereafter (Tabbaa and Mervin, 2014, p. 102).

The areas of the Near and Middle East which are referred to as 'the Holy Land' are also rife with sacred spaces associated with holy figures as illustrated in the pilgrimage account of Egeria who travelled there in the late fourth century and visited several sites associated with Moses. On her travels across the Holy Land she visited Mount Sinai where she was advised to say a prayer, for it was there that the Israelites made their golden calf and waited for Moses to return from atop the mountain. Egeria also encountered the spot where the Burning Bush was said to be as well as the place where Moses was urged to unloose his sandals (Wilkinson, 1981, pp. 96-7). Holy figures also contributed to the creation of sacred space through their burials as their tombs became centres of devotion which drew abundant pilgrims who sought to absorb some of the *baraka* of the entombed individual and seek intercession through them. In certain cases, the blood of saints and martyrs was sufficient to make a place sacred. This may appear to be unusual for the spilling of blood in sacred places and during sacred times was taboo (Talmon-Heller, 2020, p. 228) as is the case in the *ḥaram.* However the fact that it was sacred blood allowed for it to be a basis for sanctity and not desecration. Sanctity is also assigned to the burial places of prophets and saints once visitors experience or perceive extraordinary phenomena which include lights and sweet odours emanating from tombs in addition to visions of holy figures. It was believed that, at dusk, lights from heaven illuminated tombs, shrines, and other holy sites, or, in some cases, light emanated from them and such lights were believed to designate the tomb of a prophet (Meri, 1999a, p. 51).

In addition to the more widely acknowledged connections that render a space a sacred one such as the above-mentioned links to the divine and to holy figures, it would be a mistake to overlook the more implicit elements that contribute to creating a holy site. One of these more subtle factors concerns memories, more specifically, sacred memories. Some of these memories are made tangible through the erection of places of worship or commemorative monuments yet there are many which did not initially manifest physically. For example, in Jerusalem, the numerous sacred memories that were linked to holy figures such as David and Solomon created sacred space and maintained it as can be reflected in the continual perception of Jerusalem as a sacred city for which these two figures

were responsible, the latter more than the former. This holiness was only amplified by further memories attached to prophets, namely Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus who can be deemed 'the principal agents of memory' in the city (Grabar, 1999, p. 279). Sacred memories also play a key role in the maintenance of a given place's sanctity in cases when a site is holy to the adherents of different faiths as they were altered to adapt to changing religious circumstances. Thus a sacred space may have initially been imbued with a Jewish holiness which was later suceeded by a Christian holiness and later a Muslim one. This is exemplified by Jerusalem as much of the city's memories were initially Jewish yet they became Christian, and ultimately Christian and Jewish memories took on an Islamic character (Grabar, 1999, p. 285).

Although these memories were initially intangible, they did eventually result in the founding of holy sites, yet due to the fact that this city was an arena of religio-political power struggles these memories and the sacred sites associated with them did not remain static. This is demonstrated by the ascription of sanctity to Golgotha by the Christians who undermined the holiness of the Temple Mount by transferring the sacred memories previously associated with the Temple Mount to Golgotha. Two important memories which underwent this process were the memory of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in addition to the creation and death of Adam, both of which were believed to have taken place on the Temple Mount by the Jews but which were moved to the site of Golgotha by the Christians. This did not signify the end of this shift of sacred memories as just as memories associated with Abraham and Adam moved from the Temple Mount to Golgotha, they also became associated with Mecca which became yet another locale affiliated with the life of Adam as well as another sacrifice of Abraham, that of Ishmael[2] (Grabar, 1973, pp. 53-5). It is clear, therefore, that sacred memories were highly significant to the various religious communities in the Near and Middle East and their holy sites.

[2] For more on Abraham's attempts at sacrificing his sons, see 6.3, pp. 171-2.

In an Islamic context, although the sacred memories associated with prophets such as Adam, Moses and Jesus are important, the memories associated with the Prophet Muhammad played a much more meaningful role in the shaping of Islamic sacred space. This is not unusual for it simply reflects the fact that in Islam the hierarchy of holiness places the Prophet Muhammad above the previous prophets in importance. The pivotal role of the sacred memories linked to the Prophet in creating Islamic sacred space is most apparent in Medina as the holy sites within the city were created on virgin soil by rendering the sacred memories of the Prophet into sacred spaces. Illustrative examples are the sacred sites that developed around the various places the Prophet prayed or was believed to have prayed (Munt, 2014, pp. 111-12). These sacred memories connected to the Prophet were not unique to Medina as there are also places in Mecca which derive part of their holiness from them. However, these memories were more significant in Medina than Mecca for in Medina, there was no pre-existing sacred site which was transformed into an Islamic sacred space as was the case in Mecca. Beyond sacred memories associated with holy figures, spaces were also sanctified for their connection to memories connected to specific periods in Islamic history. This is particularly the case for mosques which were founded during the early years of Islam that were later expanded due to an increase in the Islamic population. In such cases, the foundational period of these places was 'evoked in later rebuildings to strengthen the aura of the mosque' (Guidetti, 2017, p. 139). Thus, the sacred memories of the early years of Islam, or the origins of Islam, contribute to the development of Islamic sacred space in more ways than one, serving to emphasise the key role memories had in creating a sacred landscape in the Near and Middle East.

While there are different ways by which a space can be rendered sacred, there are also different degrees of sanctity and this can be observed in the sacred spaces of the Near and Middle East in pre-Islamic and Islamic contexts. The most illustrative example of this concept is expressed in the tradition concerning the three distinguished mosques which the Muslims are urged to visit and pray in to achieve abundant rewards. There are different formulae for the tradition with certain mosques being added or replacing a mosque that was present in the earlier iterations of the *ḥadīth*, yet the

more well-known tradition is as follows 'You shall only set on pilgrimage for three mosques: The Sacred Mosque (in Mecca), my mosque (in Medina) and al-Aqsa Mosque (in Jerusalem)' (al-Wāsiṭī, 1978, p. 3-4, no. 1).[3] What can be understood from this tradition is that in addition to the *Hajj* and '*Umrah* to Mecca, the Prophet was licensing pilgrimage to Medina and Jerusalem, giving the latter two precedence over any other Islamic sanctuary which implies they are of a higher level of holiness. This tradition was an object of controversy for there were different views on its authenticity as well as its precise meaning. There were those who claimed that the tradition was prohibiting pilgrimage being made to '*any other place'* apart from the mosques mentioned, those who supported this reading of the tradition generally opposed visitations to graves and minor sanctuaries. However, those who approved of pilgrimages to the graves of saints and prophets and minor shrines concluded that the tradition was specifying that one should not set out to *'any mosque'* apart from those mentioned. Thus, if a Muslim desired to journey to a mosque for the purpose of prayer they should only visit *al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*, the Prophet's Mosque, or the Aqsa Mosque, but this did not mean they could not make visitations to other sanctuaries and holy places (al-Subkī, 2008, pp. 287-300). Despite the different readings of this particular tradition, it remains the case that it is inferring the existence of a hierarchy of holiness wherein certain sacred spaces are more holy than others.

This hierarchy of holiness is further emphasised by the traditions which concern the reward an individual attains by praying in one of the mosques mentioned that feature in numerous works.[4] There are a variety of traditions of this type in which prayer is used as a measure of sanctity. For example, one tradition states that prayer in Mecca is worth 100,000 prayers elsewhere, while a prayer in Medina is worth 1,000 prayers elsewhere, and a prayer in Jerusalem is worth 500 prayers elsewhere (al-Ḥanbalī, 1999, p. 1:350). It must be noted, however, that these traditions which assigned values to prayer in these mosques were contradictory and there was no unanimous agreement on the subject. Nevertheless, that these three mosques in particular merited the

[3] This tradition and its variants has been cited and discussed in several other texts. See, for instance, Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, XII, 177, no, 7191, 241 no. 7248; Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Thimār al-maqāsid,* p. 183.
[4] See, for example, al-Raba'i, *Fadā'il al-Shām* p.36, no. 64; al-Naysabūrī, *Raudatu l-wa'īẓīn,* 410.

assignation of value to a single prayer within them demonstrates that they were of significant holiness.

3.3: Sanctity and transition

The transition from one epoch to another can be witnessed in a variety of different ways but it must be emphasised that this process was by no means a straightforward one as transition often involves a period of overlap that can vary in length. It is also the case that this overlap resulted in the incorporation of elements of the past within the succeeding historical period. This was carried out for political reasons for the new elite sought legitimacy through emulating the ruling classes of the past in their political practices and their patronage of significant building projects. However, there were also religious motivations for this process, which is unsurprising due to the intertwined nature of religion and politics in the Near and Middle East prior to and following the advent of Islam. Yet again, it is legitimacy, this time religious, that is pursued, as, if a new religious authority aimed to assert their dominance in a region with a considerable religious history it could not do so without accommodating, to a certain degree, past religious traditions. Transition can be reflected in literature, art, and language, but it is also manifested through sacred space and its affiliated rituals and the ways in which they transformed. The Near and Middle East in particular is rife with sacred spaces that have echoes of past faiths within them while simultaneously symbolising the religions which supplanted said faiths.

It is not only individual sites which reflected the transition from one historical epoch to another but whole landscapes as well. Huge swathes of the landscape were transformed once Christianity became the dominant faith in the Near and Middle East particularly in the 4th to 6th centuries which saw the erection of a remarkable amount of religious structures, namely churches and synagogues, for the Jews and Christians appeared to compete with each other through the medium of

architecture. However, this was not to last as Judaism and other belief systems were curbed once the Eastern Roman Empire became fully established as a Christian state. Indeed, during the 5th century, the adornment of old synagogues and the establishment of new ones was forbidden. A similar restriction was imposed by the Muslim authorities once they came to rule the Near and Middle East (Caseau, 2001, p. 23). This ultimately resulted in the gradual disappearance of the sacred sites of Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, many of which were replaced by Islamic shrines and mosques. This process was certainly motivated by a desire to ensure that Islam was depicted and accepted as the triumphant faith in the Near and Middle East and it was particularly effective for in times when many were not literate in the language of the new faith the new rulers needed to proclaim their superiority through other means. Ultimately, they succeeded as the pre-Islamic shrines and sanctuaries that were falling into disrepair and were subsequently abandoned or transformed functioned as a different type of text, one that was 'universally comprehensible' (Klein, 2017, pp. 72-3) and which made it explicitly clear that Islam had triumphed over the pre-Islamic faiths in the Near and Middle East. The transformation of the landscape was also a means through which the Muslim rulers prevented Muslims from being exposed to the iconography and practices of the pre-Islamic faiths. Such exposure was feared by the Muslim authorities as it may have led to Muslims imitating pre-Islamic practices and compromising their faith. To give one example, the erection of funerary monuments was viewed by some orthodox theologians as an abhorrent practice for it was considered an imitation of pre-Islamic practice and the *sharī'a*, or Islamic law, 'bases many of its instructions on its oppositions to unbelievers and polytheists' (al-Ghumārī, ca. 1925, p. 16), namely Jews, Christians and the polytheistic Arabs. Despite such fears and the various attempts to allay them it is evident that in the context of the Near and Middle East during the early Islamic period, there is no line of separation as though many people converted to Islam, it was unlikely that they completely abandoned their old allegiances to specific sacred places and their associated ceremonies (Lassner, 2012, p. 229).

Sacred sites and the rituals observed in association with them are an effective way of depicting transition as they were extremely visible ways through which this process occurred. In most cases, they were also imbued with a substantial amount of sanctity throughout the ages making them ideal places for succeeding rulers and religions to express their dominance over a given region. The Temple Mount is one such site as it is difficult to find another site that is as versatile and resilient as this space that has managed to be of crucial importance despite periods when its significance was downplayed. It appears in the sacred and salvific history of the Abrahamic religions and has retained its 'deeply attractive power as the venue for a series of cultures transforming themselves and replacing one another' (Stroumsa, 2015, pp. 159-160). This was not, however, limited to overwhelmingly visible spaces that were invested with deep religio-political meanings as the transformation of the sacred landscape around Damascus, which was gradually reworked following the Islamic conquests to better fit the concept of an Islamic sacred landscape, testifies. This was achieved through the construction of Muslim shrines in villages that had previously been famous for their substantial monastic populace. The village of Dārayya, southwest of Damascus is one place that witnessed this physical and cultural transformation as most of its monasteries were converted into shrines and other holy places that commemorated the Prophet Muhammad's Companions and their descendants who lived and were subsequently buried there. By the late medieval period this city had achieved religious significance to the Islamic community as the number of tombs and sacred sites reached five hundred (Khalek, 2011, p. 121). Such cultural transformations were not simple processes wherein the past was abandoned in favour of a newly established present as the transfer of sacral power from one tradition to its successor always involves a degree of communication between the two be it conscious or unconscious (Stroumsa, 2015, p. 160). Discerning the extent of this communication may be difficult for there is a heavy reliance on texts and this obscures the fact that that an oral mode of diffusion must have existed as Muslims lived among non-Muslims and had a shared existence which would have inevitably aided the transformation of the region (Tannous, 2018, p. 431). It is apparent that in instances of religious change and transition, past traditions gave

meaning to the newly established ones and this is highlighted in the village of Dārayya whose pre-Islamic sanctity was rooted in the fact that it was full of monasteries. This pre-Islamic sanctity was acknowledged by the Muslims, and was then applied to the Islamic structures that supplanted the village's monasteries (Khalek, 2011, p. 121). Such a transfer of holiness is a common phenomenon in the Near and Middle East as sanctity is not a temporary concept that loses its meaning once a given sacred space undergoes a process of transformation, indeed there are many indications that sanctity is endemic, it is not affected by changes of gods, religions, and regimes, rather it endures regardless (Peters, 1996b, p. 39).

Though there is no denying that change did occur in the realm of sacred space in the transitory period between pre-Islamic Late Antiquity and the Islamic era, it certainly did not happen swiftly. Instead it was a staggered process which saw a considerable blurring of the lines between the old and the new and in which pre-Islamic customs and beliefs continued to be practiced throughout the early Islamic period. The pagan standing stone and stelae cults exemplify this as the nomads who lived in the Negev region in present-day southern Israel held onto these practices throughout the Nabataean, Byzantine, and Early Islamic periods (Avni, 2007, p. 125), a time period spanning centuries, from the 4th century BCE to the 8th century CE. The archaeological record in the Negev further accentuates the fact that the coming of Islam did not immediately impact existing cultic practices, with both Christianity and the standing stone cult prevailing in the region more than a century after the Islamic conquests. The most illustrative portrayal of sanctity undergoing a form of transition is the replacement of the ancient standing stones with formative open-air mosques. The Nahal Oded site (Fig. 4) witnessed this process wherein an open-air mosque replaced the standing stones but retained one standing stone and oriented it towards the south, which was the typical alignment of early open-air mosques in the Negev, indicating that this standing stone carried out the functions of a *miḥrāb* (Avni, 2007, p. 135) or prayer niche which functioned as a place of prayer and an indicator of the direction of prayer or *qibla*. The use of standing stones as *miḥrāb*s is not unique to Nahal Oded as several mosques in the Negev Highlands have *miḥrāb* niches that were constructed

out of standing stones which were reminiscent of stelae (Avni, 1994, p. 95). In addition to the open-air mosque, an Islamic presence at the Nahal Oded site is indicated by the graves found in a small cemetery at the site in which 'the bodies of the deceased were found lying on their side and facing south in typical Islamic burial position' (Avni, 2007, p. 132). The open-air mosque at Be'er Ora (Fig. 5) in the Negev also reflects transition but in a different manner as it appears to have two *miḥrābs*, one facing south and the other facing east, (Rothenberg, 1972, pp. 221-2) providing rare physical evidence for the change of the *qibla* in early Islam (Sharon, et al., 1996, pp. 108-9). The two prayer niches may also indicate that this structure was used by Muslims and Christians (Hoyland, 1997, p. 565), as Christian prayer to the east is alluded to by some Qur'anic commentaries and the southern niche was oriented towards Mecca (Bashear, 1991, p. 269).

Despite the transformation of cultic installations which occurred in the Negev and surrounding areas with the change from standing stones to open-air mosques, traditional cults predominated but under a different guise. There was much that the standing stones and the open-air mosques had in common because they were both humble constructions that were located near to or within a settlement, and the *miḥrāb* and the standing stones both functioned as the focus of rituals. This similarity between the two places of worship attests to the fact that there was no significant religious transformation immediately after the Islamic conquests. Ultimately, it is clear that the transition from pre-Islamic Late Antiquity to the Islamic period did not denote the abandonment of past practices such as the veneration of pre-Islamic sacred sites. The sharing of a holy site by several faiths is a testament to this. The Great Mosque of Damascus in Syria effectively demonstrates this as when Damascus was captured by the Muslim armies in 635 CE the terms of surrender stipulated that the church of the city would remain in the Christians' possession. This did not, however, negate the fact that soon after the conquest, the *temenos* of the church was shared by Muslims and Christians as reflected by the fact that the eastern side of the *temenos* was made into a mosque while the western side remained a church. This continued to be the case for more than seventy years, from the year 14 AH/635-6 CE until 86 AH/705 CE (Ibn Kathīr, 1998, p. 12:404). This situation was helped by the fact

that both communities had a shared commitment to the One God, despite the trinitarian tendencies of the Christians, and this allowed for this co-existence and cohabitation to endure until the reign of al-Walīd ibn ʻAbd al-Malik, the sixth Umayyad caliph (Fowden, 2002, p. 130). Although it was al-Walīd who transformed the site into a mosque, he was not the only caliph who sought to do so as his predecessors, Muʼāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān (r. 661-680), and ʻAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 685-705), had similar aims. The former was unsuccessful as the Christians refused his request to incorporate the church of St. John into a planned mosque, the latter made the same request and offered them money in exchange, yet they still would not hand it over. Al-Walīd, however, had no aversion to employing force, thus when the Christians also refused his request he took steps to demolish the church and incorporate it into the mosque regardless. This did not mean that there was no eventual legal agreement on this matter as al-Walīd's successor, ʻUmar ibn ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz, received many complaints from the Christians regarding the actions of his predecessor as well as from the Muslims who took issue with his initial decision to return to the Christians what had been taken from them. The ultimate solution was devised by a number of legal scholars at the time who proposed that the Christians were to be given all the churches that had been taken from them by force in the Ghūṭā, the rural area that borders Damascus to the east and south. However, the Christians were to give up the church in Damascus and refrain from asking for its return, a condition that the Christians agreed to and which was also confirmed by the caliph himself (al-Balādhurī, 2022, pp. 142-3).

The sharing of sacred space also occurred at Aleppo as reported by al-Balādhurī who stated that upon reaching the city, the general Abū ʻUbaida found the locals in a 'fortified position' and thus his army camped around the city. They did not have to wait long, however, before the locals sought to capitulate and make terms regarding their safety alongside the safety of their homes and churches all of which was promised to them apart from the site for the mosque (al-Balādhurī, 2022, p. 162). The latter was located on a plot of land that had initially been part of the cathedral complex, possibly a burial site or garden. Crucially, the mosque that was later built on this site did not replace the church, instead, from that moment on 'the church and the mosque shared a prominent place at the centre of

the city' (Guidetti, 2013, p. 254).[5] In such cases treaties were signed to facilitate the sharing of a sacred space, however, this did not always happen. An example would be those sacred sites that are frequented by adherents of more than one faith in a manner that did not require official agreements and naturally occurred without too much difficulty. The Kathisma Church on the road to Bethlehem on the alleged spot upon which the pregnant Virgin Mary rested on her journey to Bethlehem, according to the Protovangelium of St. James (Elliot, 1993, pp. 63-4) is one example in which it appears that space was shared in a peaceful manner. The sharing of the church is demonstrated by a niche, which has been understood to have been a *miḥrāb* due to its southern orientation, being installed inside the structure in the eighth century (Avner, 2010, p. 41). Adorned with a mosaic depiction of a trio of palm trees (Fig. 6), this *miḥrāb* could be perceived as a Muslim 'altar' within the Christian church that is a possible indicator of the early Muslim tendency of honouring Christian places, specifically those affiliated with Jesus and Mary (Guidetti, 2013, p. 250). This, however, did not indicate that the church had been converted into a mosque as a continued Christian presence can be inferred by an inscription that was decorated with a cross which was found in the mosaic floor of one of the annexes of the church that dates to the ninth century (Di Segni, 2003, pp. 187-8). This shows that despite the establishment of an Islamic praying space in the Kathisma, the church continued to be used for Christian worship, suggesting that Muslims and Christians prayed in the same building. It may also be the case that this floor mosaic was not installed by Christians but by Christian converts to Islam who were unwilling to completely abandon their previous beliefs (Avner, 2010, p. 42). This is an attitude that can be discerned in various sacred spaces in the Near and Middle East and one that contributed to the sharing of sacred spaces and the endurance of their sanctity.

Mamre also witnessed the sharing of a holy place by several faiths for it did not only welcome Jewish and Christian devotees but was also visited by polytheists such as the Phoenicians and Arabians. Thus the annual summer feast at Mamre was attended by the Jews who boasted their descent from Abraham, pagans attended as a result of their reverence for the angels that accompanied Yahweh in

[5] For more on this subject, see 3.4.

his hierophany.[6] Christians also attended as they believed that Abraham's divine encounter signified the moment when 'He who, for the salvation of mankind, was born of a virgin, there manifested himself to a godly man' (Sozomen, 2.4.2-3). Though the open veneration of this site by the pagans was quashed once the Emperor Constantine banned all worship that was not sanctioned by Christianity which involved the destroying of altars, the burning of images, and the erection of a church in their place, pagan worship endured (Fowden, 2002, p. 128). Sozomen, who was writing more than one hundred years after Constantine's reign emphasised that in spite of the emperor's efforts, Christian monopolization of the site had yet to succeed. This was supported by archaeological evidence as votive offerings dated to the fourth and fifth centuries were found around the well (Mader, 1957, pp. 107, 154). Cockerel bones, which may have been the remnants of offerings and sacrifices, were also discovered near the altar (Mader, 1957, p. 137). This is a further indication that the erasure of a sacred space and its supplantation by another does not mean that the sacred site loses its original sacred significance and this can be applied to the Near and Middle East as a whole.

Indeed, as the cradle of the three monotheistic faiths, the Near and Middle East has a multilayered sanctity that was maintained regardless of which religion was dominant. This was partially the result of the relatively tolerant attitude of the Muslims towards Jews and Christians, though this attitude certainly fluctuated depending on the reigning caliph. However, religious tolerance was not wholly dependent on the caliph for much of the interaction between different faiths occurred among the general population in the villages and cities which became hubs of co-existence from the early Islamic period and beyond. An illustrative example is the settlement of Umm al-Raṣāṣ in present-day Jordan which, following the conquests, did not witness a complete upheaval as reflected by the fact that the local Christians continued to conduct their lives as they had before (Levy-Rubin, 2018, p. 178). The archaeological record supports this as it reveals that the settlement was flourishing into the latter half of the eighth century. This is accentuated by the fact that at least fourteen churches

[6] See, 3.2

were ‘constructed, reconstructed, and renovated between the late sixth and late eighth centuries, as attested by the inscriptions in the mosaic pavements of the buildings’, demonstrating that even when the region was under Muslim hegemony there was considerable building activity by the Christians. This suggests that this was a time of stability and co-existence between Muslims and Christians and though there is evidence of iconoclastic activity, the view that the Muslims were to blame has been contested (Britt, 2015, p. 260). This is because though there is a tendency in Islam to avoid figural depictions, there were also several Christian groups who carried out iconoclasm. Indeed, the modification and disfigurement of figural church mosaics ‘was a specifically Christian movement of the mid-8th century’ suggesting that though their political masters were the Umayyads, there were communities in the region who continued to adhere to Byzantine iconoclastic beliefs (Shboul and Walmsley, 1998, p. 286).

Furthermore, although Islam is generally against figural representation, such an ‘attitude is not necessarily to be regarded as intrinsically iconoclastic in the true sense of the word’. That there was little evidence for Islamic iconoclastic activity beyond Arabia suggests that the Muslims tended to allow the Christians to worship as they wished. Although there was a brief period of iconoclasm that followed the Edict of Yazīd II (r. 720-24) promulgated in 721 which commanded that all Christian icons and images were to be destroyed in churches throughout the Muslim empire, this was very short-lived. The very fact that iconoclasm ‘is so specifically associated with Yazīd’s Caliphate’ in Christian and Muslim sources also suggests this was an anomalous occurrence (King, 1985, p. 267). The revocation of the edict by the succeeding caliph Hishām makes this abundantly clear (Vasiliev, 1956, p. 40). Despite this, the Byzantine sources connected the Edict of Yazīd with the later edict of the Byzantine emperor Leo III (r. 717-741) in 726 which had similar iconoclastic consequences (Sahas, 1972, p. 10). This view is based on the belief that the sudden adoption of iconoclasm by the emperor is difficult to explain without external influences such as the Edict of Yazīd which may have aroused ‘latent opposition among the Christians’ (Kitzinger, 1954, p. 134). However, the situation is far more complex as iconoclasm was deeply rooted within Christianity itself prior to the emergence of Islam,

this Christian opposition to images did not need Islam, as the extensive use of images in Christian worship was ‘sufficient to stimulate a profound objection to them among those Christians who felt that alien, pagan-like practices had intruded into their religion’ (King, 1985, p. 268). Thus, iconoclasm in the Near and Middle East was influenced more by Christianity than it was by Islam.

Thus, despite certain moments of tension between the Muslims and the other faiths, there was a considerable degree of co-existence in the Near and Middle East from a very early stage and though the Muslims did initially establish physical barriers between themselves and the conquered population, these were soon rendered porous as it was not a practical and sustainable way of life. Therefore, seperation was replaced by increased social, economic, and cultural contact and this was also aided by the fact that the non-Muslims, though not inclined to converting to Islam en masse, were not restive as their way of life did not undergo drastic change (Lassner, 2017, p. 153). In fact, many non-Muslims, specifically Christians, who were employed in the administration of the Byzantines often kept their jobs and provided their new Muslim masters with valuable experience and knowledge (Levy-Rubin, 2018, p. 178). This relatively peaceful co-existence was also helped by the fact that though there was certainly a degree of violence and bloodshed in the early years of the conquests, especially in instances of open field combat, this did not last. The reason being that more and more settlements chose peaceful surrender over violence and concluded treaties with the Muslims rendering violence unnecessary. This benefited both sides as many treaties protected the possessions of the locals who were allowed to uphold their faith upon payment of certain taxes, and the Muslims were not interested in ‘cutting off the hand that would feed them’ for they were there to stay.

This co-existence can be witnessed in a variety of manners, and one of the most visible ways is in sacred spaces. In such spaces, especially ones with a very long history, co-existence was necessary as the complete conversion of a site was not a simple process. This involved creating a distinctly Islamic history of the place, excluding adherents of other faiths, and establishing a uniquely Islamic ritual,

and this process could have lasted centuries and in most cases this extent of conversion was not achieved. The reason for this is that in many sites of the Near and Middle East, the reinterpretation of their source of holiness and the subsequent adoption of rituals such as visitation all rested and were built upon pre-existing cults. Furthermore, it has been attested by some medieval historians that 'the aura of sanctity' of a significant number of sacred sites in Syria was pre-Islamic in origin (Talmon-Heller, 2007, pp. 188-9). A clear example of this is the sanctification of the so-called chair of Jesus in Ḥammām Mughān in Northern Syria which Ibn Shaddād claims was part of a pagan fire temple in antiquity. The chair was later sanctified by the Jews and then by the Christians who claimed that Jesus had visited the place, finally, the sanctuary was appropriated by the Muslims (Ibn Shaddād, 1953-62, p. 142). This example demonstrates that in the multicultural and multireligious society of the Near and Middle East, co-existence was an inevitablity, this is partially due to the Abrahamic derivation of the major faiths of the region which resulted in the sharing of sacred spaces among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The Muslims also did not force conversion to Islam and thus interaction with the adherents of other religions could not be avoided. Although the establishment of the early garrison towns was an early attempt to separate the Muslims from the non-Muslims, it ultimately failed. What must also be noted is that though the advent of Islam may often be used to separate the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, the situation was far more complex. The reason being that the two periods cannot be viewed independently and must be discussed and perceived alongside each other. This is especially the case for the early Islamic period when a distinctly Islamic identity was still being formed and this is most clearly illustrated through the lens of sacred space.

3.4: Appropriation and continuity

Appropriation in its various forms which include the appropriation of space and ideas is a common phenomenon, and this is especially the case in the Late Antique Near and Middle East. As the

purpose of this thesis is to discern the origins of Islamic sacred space in the region, defining appropriation is of great importance as it is among the several processes which formed the foundations from which Islamic sacred space developed and fully established itself. Appropriation is carried out in various ways but the core definition of the term is the taking of something from another group for one's own use. Appropriation ranged from no change being made to a site beyond the fact that it had changed hands, to the partial takeover of space which included sharing it with another community, to the complete takeover of a site which often involved the demolition of a pre-existing structure. A further example of this process concerns the appropriation of specific pre-Islamic architectural features rather than space alone. Appropriation of sacred space can be understood as an inevitability, for it was a way for a new community or religion to assert its identity in a region within which the members of the nascent communities or religions were a minority in the newly conquered lands. This was effective as the conversion of a structure or its demolition and the erection of a new building in its stead on the same piece of land was often perceived as the herald of a new age.

The inevitability of appropriation should come as no surprise for there was abundant material *to* appropriate and several motivations for doing so as the conquering Arabs penetrated a world 'which was not only immensely rich in artistic themes and forms yet universal in its vocabulary, but also, at this particular juncture of its history, had charged its forms with unusual intensity', yet they were still a minority in the region which they now ruled. Thus, in order to lay claim to their newly acquired lands it was crucial for the Muslims to implement change in subtle and gradual ways. This was achieved by amalgamating the old with the new, the pre-Islamic with the Islamic. The reason for this is that the originality of Islamic art in its formative stages, both methodologically and intellectually, lies in its portrayal of the encounter between a new religious and social system that had no doctrinal requirement for visual expression, and the sophisticated and complex use of visual forms that have a considerable history in the newly conquered lands (Ettinghausen, et al., 2001, p. 8). Thus the intensity which was inherent in the pre-Islamic forms continued in the Islamic forms that took their

place, indeed, the fact that several key Islamic sacred spaces were located on spots that had long been hallowed only worked to increase their intensity as well as their sanctity. This is but one example that illustrates how important the process of appropriation was to the development of sacred space in general but also with regards to Islamic sacred space in particular. However, appropriation is not a simple process for it is rather multifaceted as there are several different components to it. One such component was imitation which can be clearly witnessed in early Islamic Jerusalem in which the Jewish and Christian past was superseded through 'controlled imitation and elaboration' which ultimately resulted in a further process of mutation in which the power of pre-Islamic symbols was channelled in new directions, but the same symbols remained the core of that power (Fowden, 2002, p. 141).

There are a number of different motivations for the appropriation of sacred space that range from seeking political legitimacy to asserting the triumph of one religion over others, however, one must not discount the fact that appropriation was frequently carried out for practical reasons. The lands which had been conquered in the *Futūḥ*, or Islamic conquests, were rife with the monumental architecture of the pre-Islamic religions, particularly Christianity due to the Byzantine dominance of the region immediately preceding the Islamic conquests. This practical appropriation is alluded to by al-Muqaddasī who claimed that a mosque at Istakhr was modelled on the mosques of al-Shām or Greater Syria and was 'supported on round columns and topped with a bull-headed capital' (al-Muqaddasī, 1906, pp. 435-6) the latter of which may have been reused after being taken from a previous structure of Achaemenid provenance (Creswell, 1969, i. 1, pp. 21-22). The reintroduction of the hypostyle layout in the Near and Middle East is also partly due to appropriation out of practicality. This is supported by the explanation provided by Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar in which they state that the re-emergence of the hypostyle layout in early Islamic architecture did not arise from a 'conscious mutation of the old models of Persian *apadanas,* Roman *fora,* or Egyptian temples'. Instead it arose from a combination of a need for a large space in the newly established Islamic cities for the congregations to pray in and the availability of disused, yet still useful, units of

construction (Ettinghausen and Grabar, 1987, p. 36). At Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi,[7] a palace complex in the middle of the Syrian desert, appropriation was evidently carried out for practical reasons. The mosque of the complex demonstrates this as ten different types of moulding which appear to have been taken from Palmyrene-style buildings were noted on the eleven remaining piers of the structure. What also confirms the practical reasons for this appropriation is the clear disregard for uniformity in the construction materials of the site as the spolia used ranges from the first to the fourth centuries CE indicating that the building materials were sourced from an older site (Antun, 2016, p. 80).

Practicality as a motivation for appropriation is also clearly illustrated in spaces which were appropriated but which did not undergo major alterations to their structure. This is effectively demonstrated by the case of the Persian *iwān* or vaulted hall at Madā'in in present-day Iraq, which, despite not being physically altered, was used as a Muslim place for prayer or *muṣallā* by the campaigning Muslim armies under the command of Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ. According to the sources this *iwān* formed part of a palace of the Sassanian King Khusraw II, known as Qaṣr Al-Abyaḍ which Sa'd took as his base. What demonstrates that this space was used in this way for practical reasons is the fact that the Muslims prayed in this *iwān* despite there being various statues of horses and men within it which contradicts the condition that Muslims should not pray in spaces in which idols and statues stand. Nevertheless, Sa'd erected a pulpit, or *minbar,* in the *iwān* and ordered the people to come and perform congregational prayers there (Antun, 2016, pp. 42-3). In this case, the only change which took place was the placement of a *minbar* in the *iwān*, a potentially portable feature that was unlikely to have considerably altered the space. The conversion of a site from one religion to another also reflects practical concerns in the creation of Islamic sacred space as in such cases no demolition occurred and relatively minor alterations took place to accommodate the new form of worship. Two churches in the Ḥawrān, a region covering parts of southern Syria and northern Jordan, that had

[7] For more on this palace, see Denis Genequand, *Les établissements des élites omeyyades en Palmyrène et au Proche-Orient,* Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2012.

been converted into mosques are a testament to this relatively non-destructive form of appropriation. The first of these is the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus at Khirbat Umm al-Surāb that is dated to 489 CE, the second is the Church of St. George to the northwest of Umm al-Surāb which dates to the same period. At both sites the Christian apse on the eastern side was blocked off to negate the Christian direction of prayer (Antun, 2016, p. 41), and one may assume that a *miḥrāb* was installed on the *qibla* wall though this is only an assumption as the evidence is too sparse to allow for any certainty (King, 1983, p. 134). Furthermore, in the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus, there is evidence that plaster coating had been used, suggesting that once the church had been converted into a mosque, its Christian character was erased by plastering the whole building (King, 1983, p. 133). The minor alterations to these spaces suggest practicality as a motivation for they indicate that the Muslims needed a place for worship as quickly as possible and thus they chose to convert an existing structure.

Such conversions were also cheaper, less time-consuming, and, in most cases the pre-existing monuments that were being converted were in a central location. What is more, converting a pre-Islamic site into an Islamic one in such a visible manner can be viewed as a means of Islamic proselytization and propaganda. Ultimately, these advantages outweighed the disadvantage of using a space that was not designed with Muslim prayer in mind. However, this was evidently not a permanent policy as evidenced by the construction of custom-built mosques in the first decade after the conquests. This situation brings to mind the earliest places of worship and congregation in Christianity which were not elaborate structures specifically designed for Christian worship for they were, for the most part, the homes of the faithful. The statement attributed to Jesus, ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, there shall I be among them’ (Mathew 18:20) accentuates the relatively little importance of outward forms in early Christianity. This is comparable to the take-over of pre-Islamic sites as houses of prayer by the Muslims after the conquests. What is more, the proliferation of custom-built mosques after the period of appropriating other sites for worship can also be compared to the spread of custom-built churches once Christianity and its respective

communities became fully established (Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 33). This was likely to have occurred following the conversion of Constantine to Christianity as it was in the period between the reigns of Constantine and Justinian, which was perceived as the Byzantine Golden Age, when the building of churches and monasteries and their proliferation, along with the increase in Christian pilgrimage and the founding of holy sites occurred (Idinopulos, 1996, p. 14). The lack of a distinctly Christian architecture before Constantine's conversion to Christianity is also highlighted by the fact that Constantine built the 'first imperially sponsored Christian monument' – the Holy Sepulchre (George, 2021, p. 76), the likes of which had not been seen in the Near and Middle East before.

Appropriation in its most complete sense involved the takeover of a pre-existing site, the demolition of what once stood there and the erection of an entirely new structure in its stead. The most conspicuous example of this was the Great Mosque of Damascus, for the Islamic structure was built '*ex novo* over the ruins of both the Late Antique church and the early Islamic mosque', (Guidetti, 2013, p. 255), which had, in turn, occupied the previous site of a temple dedicated to Jupiter who was assimilated with his Greek counterpart Zeus and the Semitic god of thunder, Hadad (George, 2021, p. 55). The mosque was thus able to accommodate congregational prayers effectively for it was built for that specific purpose. What is particularly striking, however, is that by constructing the Great Mosque of Damascus, al-Walīd and his architects established a unity with the classical architectural ensemble of the Temple of Jupiter that had been abandoned by the Christians once they repurposed the site for their church (Grabar, 2004, p. 267). This is reflected in the fact that the pre-Islamic temenos played a key role in determining the shape of al-Walīd's mosque for it 'imposed a wide and elongated plan' and reflects the building tradition of Greater Syria that was distinctly Byzantine (George, 2021, p. 349), which itself was influenced by Roman architectural ideas. This serves to demonstrate that Islamic sacred architecture was influenced to a great degree by classical, Hellenistic concepts and this was likely to have been one of the many ways by which the new Islamic rulers sought to establish a semblance of filiation with the great empires of the past in order to garner support and present themselves as legitimate rulers. The *temenos* was also not the only element of

the mosque that was determined by the Hellenistic origins of the site as the elevation of the mosque, which was to influence that of subsequent mosques in the region, was 'the accidental result of the dimensions and proportions of the antique sanctuary'. The reason for this is that many of the columns and stones used for the construction of the mosque were originally cut and carved for the ancient temple complex (Grabar, 2006b, p. 424) as illustrated by the fact that they still bear dedicatory inscriptions referencing the Temple of Jupiter (van Berchem, 1978, p. 519). Despite the use of spolia in several early Islamic mosques, it must be noted that the parallels between pre-Islamic and Islamic structures and styles was not entirely coincidental, in fact, it was 'a deliberate appropriation of a pre-existing vocabulary' that was reconfigured to adhere to Muslim beliefs and Umayyad political aspirations (Flood, 2001, p. 203).

There were also certain cases in which practicality and political motivations merged resulting in symbolic reuse. To give one example, al-Walīd transported construction materials from the church at Quris or Cyrrhus for reuse in his mosque at Aleppo according to Ibn al-Shiḥna who also claimed that the Byzantine emperor had offered to pay al-Walīd 70,000 dinars for three of the church's columns however the caliph refused (Ibn al-Shiḥna, 1984, pp. 61-2). Thus, this was not just a reuse of columns but was also a demonstration of power, a way by which al-Walīd could assert his claim over the region even further. Additionally, there are also appropriations which are rooted firmly in textual sources yet there is no indication of their occurrence in the archaeological record. The reuse of bricks from Ḥīra at the mosque and palace at Kūfa which was reported by al-Ṭabarī illustrates this (al-Ṭabarī, 1879-1901, I, pp. 2488-89; English trans. 13:72). The lack of archaeological evidence may suggest that the symbolism of appropriating these materials did not lie in the actual use of Ḥīrite materials, but was instead in the mere assertion that they were used at Kūfa (Antun, 2016, p. 80). Therefore, while it is true that practicality was often the reason for the appropriation of space and materials, there was also a religio-political undertone in many cases as appropriation was an effective means of symbolically declaring Islam's victory over its predecessors. It must be noted however, that this mode of symbolically manifesting Islamic authority and victory did not

characterise the period immediately after the conquests. Nevertheless, by the time of al-Walīd's reign, it became necessary to 'project a distinct politico-cultural identity in visual terms' (Flood, 2001, p. 185). This could possibly be due to the fact that by al-Walīd's time the political landscape had reached a semblance of stability with the civil wars that marred the late Rāshidūn and early Umayyad periods being left firmly in the past. As the political and religious spheres were almost inseparable in Islam many acts of appropriation fulfil functions which serve both spheres simultaneously. This is true for the Ka'ba in Mecca following the conquest of the city in 8 AH which resulted in the eradication of idol worship from the *ḥaram* and the restoration of the worship of the One True God, Allah, to the Ka'ba. At the same time, it also ended the dominance of the tribe of Quraysh in the city. Similarly, the erection of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem was at once making a religious and political statement. By rejecting the concept of the Trinity, as indicated by the anti-Trinitarian content of the inscriptions adorning it, the structure was making a religious declaration. The Dome of the Rock was also a vehicle through which 'Abd al-Malik was making a political statement as implied by a theory put forward by Oleg Grabar who claimed that the construction of the Dome of the Rock was part of a 'theological and political "cold war" between Islam and the other two monotheistic religions' (Grabar, 1959, p. 43).

There were less direct ways of appropriation, one of which is the establishment of contiguity between two sacred spaces, often an older one and a newer one. This mostly concerned churches and mosques in the Near and Middle East and can be suggested to be a way of dissuading the early Muslims or new converts to Islam from visiting Christian structures and visiting Islamic ones instead. It can also be viewed as a way through which the Islamic structure tapped into the power and sanctity of the church nearby. The establishment of a mosque in al-Ruṣāfa, located in present-day Syria, by the Umayyad caliph Hishām is a clear example of this as the mosque was attached to the Christian cathedral dedicated to St. Sergius (Fig. 7) which was an important pilgrimage center as it memorialized Sergius, a Roman senior officer, who was martyred for adhering to the Christian faith (Sack, 2015, p. 272). The mosque was not only adjacent to the church but also on part of its land as it

was built in the pilgrims' courtyard in which two passageways were built connecting the courtyard with the mosque and creating an 'architectural unity' between the church and the mosque. The contiguity between the church and the mosque at al-Ruṣāfa may reflect the tolerance of the Umayyads towards Christianity, however, it also shows a desire to build a symbol of the new faith on a site of significance to the local Arab populace (Caseau, 2001, p. 47). The mosque's proximity to the church can also be suggested to have been an effort to benefit from St. Sergius' 'miracle-working presence' while also providing Muslims with a place of worship close by (Fowden, 2002, p. 135). This relationship between church and mosque may also be interpreted as an attempt by the Muslims to encourage Christian conversion to Islam by not rejecting Arab involvement in Christian practices, an involvement that is apparent in the Syro-Mesopotamian steppe in which 'churches and monasteries were important fixed points in pastoral and semi-pastoral life' (Fowden, 2002, p. 137). One may also suggest that due to the widely acknowledged sacred authority of St. Sergius and the close proximity between the church and the mosque, al-Ruṣāfa became not only a place of worship, but one of arbitration and mediation. This was significant as though the frontier between Rome and Iran no longer existed following the Islamic conquests, the new local rulers still needed to exercise control over the populace and such places in which more than one community interacted provided an ideal space to do so. Thus, by establishing a mosque at al-Ruṣāfa, Hishām was stepping 'into the shoes of Anastasius, Justinian, Khusrau, and, perhaps in particular, the Ghassānid phylarch al-Mundhir', all of whom had hoped to benefit politically by allying themselves with the mediating influence of the saint (Fowden, 1999, pp. 181-2).

Al-Ruṣāfa is not the only region in which this contiguity between church and mosque occurred as a similar process took place in Aleppo in which the congregational mosque, that was built by either al-Walīd or his brother Sulaymān, was constructed on a plot of land to the east of the cathedral (Gatier, 2001) that was part of the church's property (Ibn al-Shiḥna, 1984, p. 61) and thus the mosque was flanked on its western side by the cathedral (Ibn al-Shiḥna, 1984, p. 82). This relationship between mosque and church in the Near and Middle East demonstrates the relatively peaceful co-existence

between Christians and Muslims during the early Islamic period. This is further emphasised by the fact that the cathedral appears to have continued to be used by the Christian community many years after the conquest of the city and the erection of the nearby mosque. It was only in the twelfth century, when it was seized and reconstructed as a *madrasa,* or teaching college for the religious sciences, that the cathedral ceased functioning (Antun, 2016, p. 41). This does not, however, negate the fact that this contiguity was a deliberate manner by which the Muslims established themselves in a given region that was primarily Christian by ensuring that they, by way of their mosque, were inherently visible in the landscape. This latter notion is highly significant as through the appropriation of pre-existing sacred space in the Near and Middle East, the whole sacred landscape of the region was also being appropriated for what was a visibly Christian land soon became a visibly Muslim one. This occurred in numerous ways, one of the most prominent ones being the transformation of a vast amount of pre-Islamic sacred spaces into distinctly Islamic sites by replacing past affiliations with new, Islamic ones, this was often accompanied by the establishment of Islamic rituals in relation to such spaces. Appropriation was, however, not the sole contributor to the creation of Islamic sacred spaces and Islamic landscapes as this process also involved the establishment of distinctly Islamic structures in the region including tombs of the Companions of the Prophet, *madrasas*, and public buildings whose façades were ornamented with Arabic calligraphy (Levy-Rubin, 2018, pp. 183-5). This is indicative of the fact that the creation of Islamic sacred space was the result of a fusion of innovation and appropriation.

The incorporation of pre-existing architectural forms and features into a newly established sacred space is another form of appropriation. The mosque is one such structure in which this form of appropriation is keenly felt as although the origins of the mosque are ascribed to the fledgling years of Islam, as the Prophet's Mosque in Medina was the first of this type, it does bear the hallmarks of pre-Islamic architecture. This is indicated by the echoes of the basilica and forum of Antiquity in the open court and the three-aisled prayer hall, both of which were prominent features of the early mosque (Kennedy, 2001, pp. 228-9). The layout of the mosque is one feature that is argued to have

derived from pre-Islamic sacred spaces one of which was the basilica. This argument formed the basis for Jean Sauvaget's basilical derivation theory which posited that the architectural model which had the strongest influence on the mosque was the basilica and he traces this form's development from the Hellenistic period in the Near and Middle East to its subsequent incorporation within the Islamic mosque. It must be noted, however, that this theory cannot be applied to all mosques as Sauvaget only based his findings on mosques that had an axial nave, thus excluding other forms such as the hypostyle mosque (Antun, 2016, p. 45). The mosque is not the only Islamic sacred space that incorporated pre-Islamic architectural features and forms and this is most clearly demonstrated in the Dome of the Rock which closely resembles the 'centrally planned buildings known as martyria' as well as the key Christian sanctuaries in Jerusalem, the Church of the Anastasis and the Church of the Ascension (Ettinghausen, et al., 2001, p. 17).

Indeed, much of the techniques and structural details of Islamic sacred spaces were pre-Islamic in origin and the early mosques are a testament to this. Whether it is the arches on piers or columns, the roofing, the towers, or the decoration, the features of the mosque, and other Islamic sacred spaces, had a pre-Islamic derivation. Even in instances of innovation, in which styles and techniques were modified to varying extents, it remained the case that it is pre-existing structural elements that are being modified. This is not to say that there was no innovation on the part of the early Muslim architects and patrons, rather it is simply a different form of innovation. It was one that did not necessitate the introduction of new structural elements but one which centred on the manner by which the early Muslims reused and rearranged the elements which they encountered to create coherent and distinctly Islamic sacred spaces (Grabar, 2006a, p. 131). Though it is clear that appropriation played a key role in the emergence and development of early Islamic sacred space in the Near and Middle East, there are also instances when appropriation did not occur. In such cases, Islamic spaces were established on virgin soil or places that were not occupied by pre-Islamic sacred sites. For example, the mosque of Ramla in Palestine, a settlement which in and of itself occupied a virgin site, stood in the marketplace of the locality and the city's churches and synagogues were left

untouched. Additionally, the early Islamic settlement of Ayla, modern-day ‘Aqaba in Jordan, and its mosque were located outside the pre-existing Byzantine walls indicating that appropriation did not contribute to the establishment of the mosque. The rarity of churches and synagogues being converted into mosques may have been due to the fact that the lives of the Christians and Jews did not undergo major upheaval upon the advent and spread of Islam across the Near and Middle East. They were allowed to practice their religion in their places of worship as long as they paid certain taxes, thus, many of these churches and synagogues were still in use (Hess and Pringle, 2018, p. 341), and converting them into mosques was not feasible or even necessary as the examples of Ramla and Ayla demonstrate.

3.5: Concluding remarks

As the above discussion has made clear, the concept of sanctity is a long-lived one in the Near and Middle East and this has given the concept a semblance of fluidity, allowing it to be applied and understood in various ways. Indeed, one may assert that the longevity of sanctity owes much to the consistent manner by which it has been redefined by a considerable number of religions throughout the ages. The same can be said of sacred spaces which retained their sanctity over long periods of time regardless of the emergence and diffusion of new religions which often aimed to alter pre-existing sacred spaces to better fit their narratives. This was partially a result of the continuation and adaptation of rituals affiliated with sacred spaces which involved the retention of past practices within newly established ones. This is not a novel process and can be witnessed across the Near and Middle East once a new religion came to dominate the region as aspects of preceding religions formed the basis of newly established ones, and this is certainly the case regarding Islamic sacred space. The reason for this is that in spite of an attempt at Islamicizing pre-existing holy sites there remained elements of earlier cults that were deemed worthy of assimilation. Examples of such rituals include the use of incense and lamps as well as the retention of relics which had a pre-Islamic

significance such as the head of St. John. The key factor which allowed for the absorption of previous practices is that much of the population who converted to Islam were themselves from the traditions that were assimilated to varying degrees into the new faith. It may be suggested that this absorption was politically motivated so as to ensure the conquered populace were not alienated by the novelty of Islam but encouraged to convert instead. Thus, this incorporation of previous traditions should not be perceived as a weakness or a flaw as newly formed rituals sought nourishment from those that came before them. What must be understood is that the Near and Middle East was rife with sacred spaces that had a long religious history with each religion adapting and adopting the practices of their predecessors and venerating the same places in different ways. What this illustrates is that originality and traditional religion do not often go hand in hand. Though it is true that there are numerous ways by which religions and cults of the Near and Middle East can be distinguished from each other, it remains the case that each successive religion assimilated and synthesised aspects of the religions that came before them thus eliminating the possibility of being deemed completely original (Fowden, 2002, pp. 133-4).

Chapter 4

The *Ḥaram*

4.1: The Concept of the *Ḥaram* and its Origins

Of all the sacred spaces that will be discussed in this thesis, the *ḥaram* is one which has proved to be significant from the very beginning in Islam for it was the space within which the Ka'ba, Islam's most holy shrine, stood. However, the *ḥaram* should not be understood as an Islamic concept that emerged once the new religion established itself for there is much evidence indicating that the *ḥaram* was a feature of the Near and Middle East long before the advent of Islam. Thus, the *ḥaram* is a sacred space which Islam adopted from pre-existing religions and reshaped to accommodate the new community's specific needs that did not differ greatly from the needs of preceding groups. In order to fully understand how the *ḥaram* became an Islamic sacred space, which is the aim of this chapter, one must first define it. This is no easy task for there are different opinions regarding what can be classed as a *ḥaram* with certain scholars favouring a strict criteria and others preferring to apply the term to areas that do not meet all the criteria a *ḥaram* is expected to. There is also the issue of sources as the evidence pertaining to sacred spaces in numerous areas of the Arabian Peninsula, including the Hijaz, is sparse. Additionally, the textual evidence concerning sacred spaces was written two centuries after the emergence of Islam and the establishment of Islamic sacred space. Thus, they were far removed from the events which they describe. Therefore, there is a need for 'imaginative reconstruction' (Healey, 2001, p. xi) in which models that are developed during the study of relatively comparable regions are applied to areas where the evidence is lacking (Munt, 2014, p. 19). However it remains the case that '[A]s long as our evidence remains so weak, the models we choose to apply will exert disproportionate power on our explanations' (Robinson, 2003, p. 131). Nonetheless, the *ḥaram* can be understood as a clearly demarcated space that is closely

associated with a divine being and, in some cases, one or several prophets where certain prohibitions were in place that were not active elsewhere and where a shrine was often located.

One of the key markers of a *ḥaram* is its clear boundaries that separate it from the area beyond its borders. In this sense the *ḥaram* is meeting a core requirement of a sacred space in its separation from the profane, outside world. The role and function of the *ḥaram* is also implied by the etymological roots of the word which bring forth several meanings, 'sacred' and 'forbidden' are among the different meanings of the root *ḥ-r-m* in various Semitic languages including Syriac and Moabite. The sacred meaning of the root is illustrated by the term *mḥrmt,* which possibly references a sanctuary similar in form and directly comparable to the *ḥaram*. This term can be found in Nabataean texts from Dūmat al-Jandal, also known as al-Jawf, in modern-day Saudi Arabia and Boṣra in southern Syria (Gawlikowski, 1982, p. 301). The root *ḥ-r-m* is often found in juxtaposition with the root *ḥ-l-l* from which the term *ḥalāl*, meaning 'permissible', derives and though it does imply that something is being forbidden, this root has a deeper meaning. What must be highlighted is that *ḥ-r-m* can be used in both a positive and negative way but in early Arabic poetry it is sanctity which is being referred to rather than prohibition. An example of this being the case is the term *al-shahr al-ḥarām* which is regularly translated as 'the sacred month' (Munt, 2014, p. 25). This notion that the root *ḥ-r-m* implies sanctity more than it does prohibition is further emphasised by the fact that words derived from the root appear in the Qur'an eighty-three times and most of these words appear in contexts when 'a sense of "sacred", beyond merely "forbidden", seems more clearly appropriate' (Badawi and Abdel Haleem, 2008, pp. 201-4). It is apparent that the *ḥaram* as a sacred space can be defined both in terms of holiness as well as prohibition. The former is indicated by the fact that the *ḥaram* is an enclosed and inviolable space dedicated to a deity and the latter is demonstrated by the fact that there are prohibitions in place within the *ḥaram* and not everyone could enter the space without performing certain rituals such as the donning of ritual garb known as *iḥrām*. The *ḥaram* is also defined by its inviolability which relates to the prohibitions that those within the *ḥaram* must adhere to as these prohibitions did not only limit social strife but also allowed

for the *ḥaram* and its environs to thrive. This is indicated by the fact that if there was sufficient water a *ḥaram* developed into a large settlement as it attracted as settlers those who considered security of property as essential and this security ultimately rested on the inviolable nature of the *ḥaram*. Therefore, many of the large towns of northern Arabia had a *ḥaram* at their center in addition to a sufficient supply of water (Donner, 2010, p. 30). Mecca is one such settlement with the *ḥaram* at its core in addition to the well of Zamzam.

The progenitors of the *ḥaram* are rather difficult to deduce as there is a dearth of evidence regarding the origins of this sacred space. The accepted definition of the *ḥaram* as an enclosed space affiliated with a god is relatively vague and thus it can encompass a series of different sacred sites that have some, if not all, the features of a *ḥaram*. One example of such a space is the open space at the center of the Jabal Ithlib, a natural mountain outcrop located near the city of Hegra or Madā'in Ṣāliḥ in modern-day Saudi Arabia. This open area was dubbed a natural *ḥaram* by the archaeologists Antonin Jaussen and Raphaël Savignac (Healey, 1993, p. 10). The cult niches surrounding this space in addition to the presence of an inscription nearby which refers to the 'Lord of the Temple' add credence to the notion that this site was indeed a *ḥaram* as they are both indications that this space was dedicated to one or more deities, possibly the Arabian deities Dushara and al-'Uzza (Healey, 2001, pp. 54-5). The Nabataean equivalent to the *ḥaram* appears to be a *mḥrmt* as reflected in Nabataean inscriptions which refer to the establishment of a *mḥrmt* for Dushara and it is evident that this refers to the setting up of a sanctuary for the Nabataean chief deity. One of the most informative inscriptions which refer to the creation of a *mḥrmt* for Dushara is the one found at al-Jawf in present-day Saudi Arabia which dates to 44 CE (Healey, 2001, p. 77), this highlights the considerable history of the *ḥaram* and its counterparts in the Near and Middle East, especially in Arabia where the first Islamic *ḥaram* appeared. The fact that the word *ḥaram* was known in the Qur'an may also imply that this may have been the usual term for a demarcated sacred space in the Hijaz.

Words derived from the root *ḥ-r-m* also appear in South Arabian contexts when a temple is most likely being referred to, yet the usage of this root in the region faded once monotheism started to spread in the late fourth century CE (Munt, 2014, p. 28). R. B. Serjeant expands this definition of the *ḥaram* in South Arabia by suggesting that the term did not refer solely to a temple but also, in certain cases, to the area surrounding it (Serjeant, 1976, p. 77). What is evident is that the *ḥaram* was present in the Near and Middle East from time immemorial, there were simply a number of different terms for this particular sacred space, some of which had the same root as the word *ḥaram*. It may also be the case that spaces which are now understood to have been *ḥaram*s did not require a limited definition in the past but were nevertheless treated as *ḥaram*s, this may be the case at Mamre as the site surrounding the Oak of Mamre has also been identified as a *ḥaram.* The reason being that it was a sanctuary where pilgrims gathered around a source of water as this was the site where the patriarch Abraham encountered God and his angels in human form and where Abraham subsequently erected an altar dedicated to the One God. Mamre meets the requirements of a *ḥaram* in the fact that it was a space dedicated to a deity but was also associated with a holy man which is also a defining feature of a *ḥaram* (Fowden, 2002, p. 126).

The characteristic features of the *ḥaram* can be witnessed at other sacred sites that were potential progenitors or contemporaries of the *ḥaram*. The *temenos* is one such sacred space as it was an enclosed sacred precinct that was dedicated to a god and was often affiliated with a shrine or temple. These spaces were commonly described using the term *temenos* which derives from the Greek verb *temno* meaning ‘to cut’, (Branham, 1992, 375) therefore, a *temenos* was a cut off space that developed to mean, specifically, a marked off space dedicated to a god that was isolated from all the regions around it. This definition of the *temenos* corresponds to that of the terms with the root *ḥ-r-m* in the Semitic languages, and demonstrates the resemblance between the *temenos* and the *ḥaram* (Peters, 1996a, p. 2) implying that regardless of what a demarcated space is called they all share essential attributes whether they are in the Near and Middle East or elsewhere. The *temenos* of the ‘Awwām complex near Ma’rib in Yemen illustrates the similarities between the *ḥaram* and the

temenos as it carries out functions similar to those of the *ḥaram*. In this case the term *temenos* describes both the walled enclosures of the temple complex as well as the area wherein the various structures affiliated with the temple were located (Maraqten, 2015, p. 114). In addition to the presence of this *temenos*, the term *mḥrmn* also appears in inscriptions found at the site in reference to the temple itself as indicated by the frequency of the epithet *mḥrmn d-ʿwm* in the inscriptions. This term derives from the same root as *ḥaram* and has a similar meaning of sacred enclosure or precinct. The ʿAwwām inscriptions also feature the term *byt* when the temple is referred to as the 'House of Almaqah' or *byt ʿlmqh,* notably, this epithet for a shrine at the center of a *ḥaram* is echoed at Mecca with the Ka'ba also being referred to as *Bayt Allah al-Ḥarām* or the Sacred House of Allah. Both the terms *ḥaram* and *bayt* emphasise the sacred status of the temple complex as they were the most common terms for a temple in ancient Yemen and it is clear that this meaning diffused across the Arabian Peninsula. The name of the ʿAwwām Temple itself also recalls the inviolable nature of the *ḥaram* as it means place of refuge or asylum. That the *temenos* and various structures of the ʿAwwām complex, also known as Maḥram Bilqīs, were dedicated to the worship of the god Almaqah, further accentuates the similar criteria which both the *ḥaram* and the *temenos* were expected to meet (Maraqten, 2015, pp. 108-9).

There were several other words for an enclosed sacred space which functioned in a similar manner to the *ḥaram* and the *temenos* including the North-Arabic term *ḥǧb* (Maraqten, 2015, p. 109) which indicates a shrine or enclosure and derives from the Arabic *hajaba* or 'to protect' and is attested at Palmyra (Gawlikowski, 1982, p. 302). The various instances of this term in Syriac texts, the Qur'an and Arabic poetry suggest that the term denotes a secluded sacred space, however there is no suggestion that this was necessarily a closed structure. In fact, in the Syriac translation of the Book of Chronicles, (2. Chron. 33:19) the term *ḥugbâ* 'renders the Hebrew *bamôt,* that is, open air sanctuaries' or high places, which were for the most part open-air spaces that were exposed to the elements. The term *dayrâ* also features in inscriptions and is understood to mean an enclosure or temple complex. It was used in reference to the Bel Temple at Palmyra in Syria and, at Hatra in Iraq, it

described a temple complex (Gawlikowski, 1982, pp. 301-2). The existence of such terms throughout the Near and Middle East is a clear indication that the concept of the *ḥaram* in both its pre-Islamic and Islamic senses did not emerge from a void as the idea of an enclosed sacred space dedicated to a deity and possibly connected to a shrine was prevalent in the region much earlier than the emergence of Islam.

However, the word *ḥaram* has not always been used to denote an enclosed sacred area as it has also been applied to entire cities. This is the case with Mecca as well as Jerusalem as the cities were described as *ḥaram*s as a result of the *ḥaram*s within them which lent their cities some of their sanctity. In such cases the sacred city can be viewed as an outer, secondary *ḥaram* while the *temenos* or *ḥaram* within the city can be classed as an inner, primary *ḥaram*. In Mecca, for example, the wider territory of the city was deemed a *ḥaram* and it enjoyed some of the privileges which were associated with the *ḥaram* immediately surrounding the Ka'ba, one of which was the prohibition of bloodshed and violence within its borders. In Jerusalem the concept of an inner and outer *ḥaram* can also be discerned. This is illustrated by the location of the Holy of Holies within the temple complex (Peters, 1996a, p. 3). This sacred area of the temple was, according to the Mishna (Kelim 1:6-9), 'merely the innermost in a cascading series of circles of holiness extending from the temple to the city of Jerusalem and thence to the entirety of Eretz Israel' (Peters, 1996a, p. 3). Ultimately, the Holy of Holies can be percieved as the inner *ḥaram* and its taboo status supports this notion, the cascading zones surrounding this space can, in turn, be viewed as outer *ḥaram*s. Notably, the gradually increasing holiness of the areas which encircle the Holy of Holies is echoed in Mecca as the city, though thought of as a *ḥaram*, was not imbued with the same level of sanctity as the *ḥaram* that enclosed the Ka'ba, also known as *al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*, in which all the prohibitions concerning a *ḥaram* were in place because it was the most taboo area of all. Nonetheless, it is clear that the concept of a city as a *ḥaram* predated Islam as the example of Jerusalem demonstrates, and, most importantly, it was an idea that endured as the *ḥaram* status of Mecca in the early Islamic period and beyond attests. This perception of holy cities such as Mecca and Jerusalem as *ḥaram*s is further

bolstered by the fact that they are often, like the traditional *ḥaram*, closely affiliated with God and his messengers or representatives. Mecca was the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and it was there that the Qur'an, which Muslims view as the word of God, was revealed. Furthermore, the House of Allah was within this city and among its builders were the figures of Abraham and Ishmael. Beyond an affiliation with Muhammad, Abraham and Ishmael, Adam is also closely connected to this region highlighting the fact that describing Mecca as a *ḥaram* is rather appropriate. Jerusalem, and indeed the whole territory of Palestine, is a region with numerous connections to the divine and to holy figures as indicated by the importance of David, Solomon, Abraham, Jesus and Muhammad in the city, an importance that finds expression in various ways, whether it be an empty tomb, a point of ascension to heaven or the location upon which the Solomonic Temple was established, there is no denying that Jerusalem and its environs had strong links with holy figures and ultimately to God, making *ḥaram* a suitable term to describe this holy city.

4.2: The Functions of the *Ḥaram*

It is widely attested that Mecca owed its prominence to the religious cult affiliated with the Meccan *ḥaram* that drew pilgrims from far and wide who were accommodated and welcomed in various ways. For example, the Quraysh, the clan of the Prophet Muhammad and the custodians of the *ḥaram* and its shrine, shared the different cultic responsibilities which included the provision of food and drink for the pilgrims, the preparation and selling of pilgrimage garb and the supervision of certain rituals. The Meccan *ḥaram* did not only accommodate pilgrims but their gods too as the pastoral nomads who joined the cult occasionally brought their own idols for safekeeping within the shrine (Donner, 2010, pp. 35-6). Allah and Hubal were the deities most closely associated with the Meccan *ḥaram* and the Ka'ba, although Hubal was reportedly an import from the north (Healey, 2001, pp. 184-5), and was not a home-grown deity despite his position as one of the titular deities of

the Meccan Ka'ba (al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 215-16). In addition to Allah and Hubal, Manat, al-'Uzza, Allat, Isaf, Na'ila, and Manaf were also prominent idols worshipped within the *ḥaram* at Mecca. This hospitality to other pagan gods is not unique to Mecca as it can be witnessed at sacred spaces across the Near and Middle East. Petra is one such region in which this concept is made manifest as a recently excavated underground shrine beneath the Khazneh or Treasury illustrates. This shrine is connected with the cult of the local deity, Dushara who was understood to have been the chief deity of the city. However, the presence of a stele depicting the goddess al-'Uzza indicates that Dushara was not the only deity that was revered at Petra. A dedication to the goddess Atargatis in Petra further emphasises this (Bowersock, 2017, pp. 50-1). Ultimately, it is evident that the *ḥaram*'s accommodation of a wide variety of idols and gods, despite the presence of chief deities, played a crucial role in creating and maintaining the sanctity of the Meccan *ḥaram* as well as the city of Mecca as a whole. This holiness endured despite the destruction of the idols in the early Islamic period as one of the most important deities of the pre-Islamic or *Jahiliyya* period continued to be worshipped at the Meccan *ḥaram*, Allah. This accentuates that much of the holiness of the *ḥaram* is derived from the presence of the divine.

However, despite the inherently religious character of the *ḥaram* it fulfilled other functions as well, specifically social and political ones. These functions are reflected in the different reasons for the establishment of a *ḥaram* in a given area. There were certainly religious motivations for the setting up of a *ḥaram* in an area that has holy affiliations, however, it has been suggested that pious reasons were not the only motive. A tribal leader could choose to establish a *ḥaram* in order to prevent social strife and feuds within the tribe and with other tribes. The *ḥaram* was the ideal solution for this issue, especially in the Hijaz, as quarrelling and violence was prohibited within the borders of a *ḥaram* and thus dealings within and between tribes adopted a non-violent character. For example, in pre-Islamic Arabia, agreements such as tribal alliances or treaties were frequently concluded in *ḥaram*s or sanctuaries where the deity was 'called upon to act as witness and guarantor' (Hoyland, 2001, p. 159). The *ḥaram*'s role as a solution to social strife is exemplified by the Medinan *ḥaram* as

illustrated by a number of clauses in the Constitution of Medina. This was the document that was drawn up after the *Hijra*, the emigration of the early Muslims from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE, which specified the rights of the Medinan populace be they Muslim or non-Muslim and established the *ḥaram* of Medina as well as the regulations attached to it.

The Constitution of Medina survives to this day as a result of two or three redactions whose authenticity, though debated extensively, has been confirmed as there are certain statements that appear within the text that would not have appeared in a later altered version. An example would be the various sentiments against Quraysh, the Prophet's tribe who were, at the time of the document's compilation deemed the enemies of Islam but who would monopolize the caliphate soon after the Prophet's death. The archaic language of the document and the inclusion of very few Islamic phrases which grew in popularity after the Constitution of Medina was put together further accentuate the authenticity and early date of the document (Wellhausen, 1884-99, pp. 80-1). There is no accurate and unanimously agreed upon information regarding the specific date of the document, however an early date is highly likely as reflected in the words of the Abbasid-era philologist Abū 'Ubaid al-Qāsim ibn Salām who, in his *Kitāb al-Amwāl* stated that the agreement was concluded shortly after the Prophet's arrival in Medina. Ibn Salam goes on to say that this was before Islam became victorious and strong and before the Prophet was ordered by Allah to levy a poll-tax on the People of the Book (Ibn Salām, 1976, p. 266, no. 519).

The clause which is of notable importance within this document is the one which declares the *jawf,* or valley, of Medina as a *ḥaram* 'for the people [who have concluded] this document – *Wa-inna al-madīna jawfuhā ḥaram li-ahl hādhihī al-ṣaḥīfa'* (Lecker, 2004, p. 20). The term al-Madina here is anachronistic as it is likely that the oasis had yet to change its name from Yathrib at the time of the document's compilation. This was possibly an attempt to 'replace the less dogmatically correct with the more so' at a later date by Abu 'Ubaid al-Qāsim ibn Salām to whom this redaction is attributed (Munt, 2014, p. 58). This attitude towards the use of Yathrib is also demonstrated by Ibn Shabba who

included several *aḥādīth* in which the Prophet expressed his disapproval regarding the use of Yathrib when referencing Medina (Ibn Shabba, 1996, pp. 1:105-6). In addition to the clause which declares the *ḥaram* status of Medina, there are also various clauses in the document which are chiefly concerned with regulating interactions and relations between the different groups in the region who had signed it. This makes the social role of the *ḥaram* abundantly clear. Among these groups were the Meccan emigrants known as the *Muhājirūn*, the *Ansār* which was comprised of the Medinan tribes of the Aws and Khazraj who converted to Islam and welcomed the Prophet, and a number of Jewish tribes. An example of a clause which is chiefly concerned with regulating social interactions and preventing conflict is the one that states 'The Jews who join us as clients will receive aid and equal rights; they will not be wronged, nor will their enemies be aided against them' (Lecker, 2004, p. 34). A further example would be the clause which states that 'The protected neighbour is like one's self, as long as he does not cause damage or act sinfully' (Lecker, 2004, p. 37). That the Prophet deemed it important to outline such regulations in the Constitution of Medina shows that there had been, for some time, social strife in the area that had the potential to result in physical disputes. It is possible that the reports detailing the instability of social life in Medina before the *Hijra* were exaggerations and attempts to portray the Prophet as a salvific figure 'who redeemed them from their miserable condition and united them [the Aws and Khazraj] all under the banner of Islam' (Rubin, 1995, pp. 176-7). However, there is no denying that there is a degree of truth in the portrayal of Medina as an unstable place on the eve of the *Hijra* as the presence of large tower houses and fortifications does suggest that there was a possibility for outbreaks of violence that may have negatively impacted the everyday life of the oasis. Therefore, it may have been the plan of Prophet Muhammad and the local Medinan elites to end Medina's internal conflicts through the creation of the Constitution of Medina and the subsequent signing of the document (Munt, 2014, p. 60). This highlights that a *ḥaram* can be set up to carry out socio-political functions in addition to religious ones, and this was clearly the case at Medina.

The *ḥaram* also fulfilled economic functions and these were connected to the ritual of the pilgrimage which was the lifeblood of the city's economy. In the case of Mecca, this was clearly illustrated in the different ways through which the Quraysh accrued profits as a result of their control of the economy of Mecca as well as their role as guardians of the Ka'ba and its *ḥaram*. Due to their control over the city and its shrine the Quraysh had exclusive rights which included the privilege of selling water to pilgrims as well as access to the Ka'ba. More importantly, the Quraysh also had the right to collect taxes, 'one from their fellow Quraysh to support and subsidize pilgrimage, and the other a duty tax on the commerce generated by that pilgrimage' (Peters, 1986, p. 161). The manner by which the *ḥaram* resulted in monetary profit for the Quraysh may shed light on the reason why the control of the spring of Zamzam within the *ḥaram* was the object of contestation, which al-'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the Prophet's uncle, and his descendants won (Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 1923, pp. 73-6). It is evident that the *siqāya* or distribution of the water was both a tremendous honour and also a lucrative source of income, therefore it is no surprise that there was a struggle of control with regards to it.

Additionally, it must be noted that despite its ancient sanctity, the Meccan *ḥaram* and its surroundings were initially uninhabited as the region did not possess any of the normal requirements for the establishment of a settlement (Peters, 1994, p. 19). It was only once the *ḥaram* and its shrine became closely linked to trade that a settled city grew around the *ḥaram* (Simon, 1989, p. 60). This shows that the *ḥaram* endured and remained an important aspect of the city due to the fact that it fulfilled functions that went beyond the realm of spirituality. The close connection between the *ḥaram* and trade is emphasised by the fact that the pilgrimage to the *ḥaram* and the trading activities at the markets surrounding the city were inseparable. The sources accentuate this further by frequently using the same term, *mawsim*, when discussing pilgrimage and trade (Simon, 1989, p. 62). This connection between religion and trade is also reflected by the fact that the markets of Mijanna, 'Ukāẓ, and Dhul Majāz seem to have been attended in the state of *iḥram* making it clear that 'the worldly and the holy were intimately imbricated' (al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 195). This connection

between the religious and economic spheres also resulted in these markets themselves being viewed as *ḥaram*s (Crone, 1987, p. 173). One cannot dismiss this possibility as Arabic sources do suggest that ʻUkāẓ, Dhul Majāz and Mijānna were part of the annual pilgrimage rites. Ukāẓ, in particular, has some of the hallmarks of a traditional Arabian *ḥaram* for it was the location of an idol named Jihār and it also had stones which were circumambulated as well as boundary stones known as *anṣāb* which was also the term for the boundary stones that demarcated the *ḥaram* at Mecca (Ibn Ḥabīb, 1942, p. 315). Thus *ḥarams* were evidently not only religious institutions for they were intertwined with the economic and socio-political life of their communities. They do, however, maintain their holiness nonetheless.

4.3: The Abode of the Divine

A divine connection is one of the key defining features of a sacred space and it is expressed in various ways. A space may be dedicated to a deity, it may be the space where a given deity was worshipped, and it can also be a place where a representative of a deity was buried. Yet, the notion of a sacred space being occupied by a divinity is one of the most effective manners through which a divine connection is manifested. Thus, it is this characteristic of sacred spaces as the abode of divinities that will be explored here, as the *ḥaram* is one example of such a space. The origins of this idea as well as the different ways it was given form will also be studied in detail. This idea of divine beings occupying sacred ground is very ancient and such spaces can be found across the Near and Middle East. In Arabia, for example, there was an abundance of these spaces and they were often described using terms relating to protection and prohibition, namely *ḥaram* and *ḥimā*. This belief that a space is occupied by a god was frequently based on an etiological myth which explained how the god, who was now personified, came to dwell in a given space. In the case of the Meccan *ḥaram* and the Ka'ba

within it, this myth was connected to Adam in the early Islamic period, and possibly in the pre-Islamic period. The reason for this is that God built the original Ka'ba for Adam, upon his expulsion from heaven, on the plan of his own residence in heaven (Peters, 1986, p. 10), the celestial Ka'ba known as *al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr* (O'Meara, 2020, p. 21). It could, therefore, be suggested that the earthly Ka'ba did not only mirror the celestial one in form but also in its function which ultimately rendered it the residence of Allah on earth.

The belief that the gods were present on earth in the spaces in which they were worshipped has a long history in the Near and Middle East. This belief was clearly expressed through betyls and stelae which ranged from being extremely aniconic, lacking any portrayals of human or animal forms to being profoundly anthropomorphic in nature, having human or zoological features and, in most cases, they were believed to house the deities to which they were dedicated and often depicted. This is highlighted by the events surrounding Jacob and the setting up of a pillar at Bethel as an abode of God. Jacob emphasises the function of the stele or *massebah* which he erected as an abode of God through his statement that 'This stone that I have set up as a pillar (*massebah*) shall be God's abode' (Gen. 28:19-22). Notably, the word betyl derives, via Greek, from the Hebrew term Beth-el which means house of God (Bartlett, 2007, p. 57). However, the case of Jacob and his establishment of a stele symbolising the abode of God was not unique. This is rather evident in Palestine as just as Jacob believed that the pillar which he erected was an abode of God, so too did the worshippers of Ba'al and other gods in the region who perceived the stelae depicting their gods as a 'kind of small sanctuary in which the god's presence abided' (Patrich, 1990, pp. 173-4). The Nabataean anthropomorphic idols also highlight the fact that it was a common belief that the essence of the god lay within their respective betyls. This can be illustrated in the betyls which are a fusion of the aniconic and anthropomorphic for they retain a basic plain and rectangular form yet have certain human features such as mouths, eyes, and noses. These betyls could be intended to represent a divinity that does not only observe, but also smells the sacrifices being made to them and potentially speaks, though via indirect means, possibly through a prophetic figure or natural phenomena such as

thunder (Bartlett, 2007, p. 59). This notion of spaces being occupied by the divine formed the basis for pilgrimage as 'pilgrimage was rooted in a fundamental religious fact: the gods appeared at particular places and locales' (Wilken, 1996, p. 119). Thus, the Sabaeans performed an annual pilgrimage to the temple of Almaqah in Ma'rib during the summer rains and the tribes of Sam'ay would go on pilgrimage to the mountainous abode of their patron god Ta'lab in Hamdan in modern-day Yemen (Hoyland, 2001, p. 161).

The Ka'ba itself can be described as being a betyl though on a much larger scale for it represented Allah and was viewed as his earthly abode as demonstrated by one of its most important epithets, *Bayt Allah*. The Ka'ba and its *ḥaram* also seem to follow the tradition of Semitic betyls and sanctuaries of the Near and Middle East as they are located by a sacred spring, in this case the Zamzam spring, and they are surrounded by sacred hills. Thus due to the idols that were accommodated within the Meccan *ḥaram* and the Ka'ba's status as the earthly abode of Allah it is clear that the Meccan *ḥaram* was indeed the abode of divinities in the pre-Islamic period and continued to be seen as one in the Islamic period, though in more of a restricted and metaphorical sense as no structure could confine Allah. However, the presence of the divine is also inferred by the absence of statues depicting them as can be exemplified by the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for 'the emptiness of the Temple Mount during the Byzantine period reflected the aniconic nature of God in the former Temple' (Stroumsa, 2015, p. 160). In a similar way, the Meccan *ḥaram* which was devoid of statues inside it depicting Allah could also signify His aniconic nature. However, in spite of the absence of any depictions these spaces maintained their holiness. Ultimately, it is clear that implying the presence of a divinity through the very absence of representations as well as the aniconic quality of representations when they do appear is a 'modest recognition of the impossibility of representing the unrepresentable' (Taylor, 2002, p. 122). This does not, however, negate the fact that betyls and other physical manifestations of the divine were among the most effective mediums through which the presence of the gods on earth was given form. This is emphasised by the prevalence of idols and betyls in sacred spaces across the Near and Middle East.

Although not every *ḥaram* has a shrine, one must not overlook its importance as, for the most part, it is the shrine which lends some of its sanctity to the wider area within which it is located, which is often a *ḥaram* or *temenos*. More importantly, it is through the shrine that the *ḥaram* is perceived as the abode of a deity. It must be noted, however, that though such spaces are conceived as abodes of the divine, it is in a symbolic sense and this is unanimously agreed upon by all three monotheistic faiths. This is illustrated by King Solomon asking 'But will God indeed dwell on earth? The heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this house that I have built?' (I Kgs. 8:27). Furthermore, Paul, in the Acts of the Apostles, is quoted as saying 'God that made the world and all things therein … dwelleth not in the Temples made with hands.' (Acts. 17:24). In a similar vein, the notable Muslim polymath, al-Ghazālī clearly stated that Muslims make the pilgrimage to the Ka'ba in Mecca although it is widely acknowledged that 'no house can encompass God and no town can cover him' (al-Ghazālī, 1993, p. 1:204). Despite the rejection of the notion that God physically dwelled within certain structures or spaces, this pre-monotheistic idea survived metaphorically, thus said spaces, and, indeed the city in which they are located, became holy as they encompassed the space in which God chose as his dwelling. Thus, Jerusalem was described as 'the city of God, the holiest dwelling place of God Most High' (Ps. 46:5) as a result of the presence of the Temple which initially housed the Ark of the Covenant. Similarly, the *ḥaram* of Mecca, which is often equated with the city as a whole, is viewed as the abode of Allah owing to the Ka'ba's presence within it. This is reflected in the fact that pilgrims who journeyed to these holy cities were considered visitors of God Himself and were advised to behave appropriately throughout the whole city and not only around the shrine which is the city's source of sanctity (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1999, p. 288).

The presence of the divine at *ḥaram*s is also reflected in the belief that temples were not so much roofed, congregational spaces where worshippers practiced their faith, but were abodes of the gods from which they could watch over their devotees. This concept is accentuated in the encounter between God and Moses in which Yahweh commanded Moses to 'Make me a sanctuary so that I can reside among my people' (Ex. 25.8). Notably, a courtyard, which bears the hallmarks of a *ḥaram,* was

often attached to such spaces. Its resemblance to the *ḥaram* is indicated by the fact that it was closely attached to a temple, and was commonly demarcated by boundary stones or a surrounding wall (Hoyland, 2001, p. 180). However, it is not simply through establishing sanctuaries or setting up idols from which the divine could watch over their faithful that the presence of a divinity is reflected. *Ḥaram*s and spaces where the divine is believed to reside in some form are also areas in which devotees directly communicated with their gods. One example of this is the *talbiya* or salutation uttered by the worshippers in the Meccan *ḥaram* in the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods. This was polytheistic in nature in the pre-Islamic period; however, the formula was changed in the Islamic period to accommodate the monotheism of Islam. The *talbiya* is an incantation that derives its name from the repeated motif of *labbayka, Allahuma labbayk,* and it was a way for the worshippers to formulaically reassert their attendance before their deity and express their obedience, veneration, and praise regarding said deity. This makes it abundantly clear that when reciting the *talbiya*, worshippers keenly felt that they were in the presence of their respective gods. The *talbiya* in its different forms carried out various functions; at times the salutatory formula contained entreaties and pleadings to the gods, while at other times it included propitiatory statements in an attempt to win or regain the favour of the gods. There were also instances when the *talbiya* was incanted as a means of requesting permission to access a sacred space such as a *ḥaram* (al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 228-9). Thus, it is evident that the notion of the divine being present in the human realm is expressed effectively through both tangible and intangible ways, through physical manifestations of the divine such as temples which are believed to house the deities in addition to the rituals which are performed in the presence and service of the gods.

4.4: The *Ḥaram*s of the Near and Middle East

Due to their status as the holiest sites in Islam, the cities of Mecca and Medina and their respective *ḥaram*s are often discussed and studied in relation to one another, this is not an error as the roots of

their holiness, the manner by which they function, and the perceptions regarding their holiness are similar. It is, however, important to note that despite these similarities there are also several factors that set the two *ḥaram*s apart. Such factors include the cosmological origins of Mecca, its *ḥaram* and the Ka'ba, the founding figures associated with the two *ḥaram*s, and the manner by which the concept of overlapping *ḥaram*s is applied to both areas. These aspects, all of which will be studied closely in this section, serve to emphasise the antiquity of the Meccan *ḥaram* in comparison to the relative modernity of the *ḥaram* at Medina and, to some extent, the superiority of the former. This superiority can be discerned in the Qur'an in which it appears that only one *ḥaram* is recognized and it is safe to assume that this *ḥaram* is that of Mecca as verse 29 in *Sūrat al-'Ankabut* attests to. In this verse, the Quraysh are being reminded that God had granted them a secure sanctuary '*ḥaraman āminan*' while those around them, who live beyond the *ḥaram*, are being 'snatched away' and being subjected to harm (Qur'an 29:67). This recognition of one *ḥaram* in the Qur'an does not suggest that there were no other *ḥaram*s in Arabia but highlights the importance of the one *ḥaram* that is mentioned in the Qur'an, that of Mecca. In the case of Medina, the city is only mentioned by its pre-Islamic name, Yathrib, once in the Qur'an.

The ancient nature of the Meccan *ḥaram* is emphasised by the various traditions which claim that the Ka'ba, and thus its *ḥaram*, had cosmological origins. The role of the Ka'ba in these cosmological traditions is of utmost importance as it is the presence of the prototypical celestial Ka'ba that temporarily descended to earth as a paradisiacal tent made of red hyacinth during the time of Adam (al-Azraqī, 2003, pp. 1:80-1) which ultimately resulted in the emergence of the *ḥaram* at Mecca. In this sense one can claim that the city of Mecca and its *ḥaram* are synonymous with the Ka'ba, they exist because the Ka'ba exists (O'Meara, 2020, p. 21). Therefore the Ka'ba being portrayed as the progenitor of all Creation also means the same can be said of the Meccan *ḥaram* and the city of Mecca highlighting their considerable history as well as their intertwined nature. The Ka'ba is described as such in many sources, each of which describes it as the place from which all of Creation was spread out, one example would be the tradition which states that 'He created the House two

thousand years before the earth (*al-arḍ*), and from it the earth was spread out (*duḥiyat minhu*)' (Ibn Isḥāq, 1976, p. 73). This does not only highlight that the Ka'ba was the source of all Creation but also stresses the fact that the Ka'ba predated Creation by two thousand years which affirms the Meccan *ḥaram'*s status as the oldest of its type. Other traditions add further details regarding the cosmoligical origins of the Ka'ba and its *ḥaram* as al-Azraqī demonstrates when he states that 'Before the creation of the heaven and the earth, when the Throne (*al-'Arsh*) was on the water, God sent a beating wind which drove the water back and exposed on the [future] site of the House a stony mount in the form of a dome (*qubba*). From under it, God spread out the lands' (al-Azraqī, 2003, p. 1:67). Here, al-Azraqī gives mention to the site of the House and one can suggest that this may have been an allusion not only to the site of the Ka'ba but also to the *ḥaram* in which it is situated thus cosmological origins are being applied to them both. The considerable amount of traditions which concentrate on the cosmological significance of Mecca do not, however, deny the fact that Medina also has cosmological origins, however, they do make it clear that chronologically Mecca was first.

A further point of difference between the *ḥaram*s of Mecca and Medina which accentuates the antiquity of the former as well as the comparative modernity of the latter concerns their founding figures. With regards to the Meccan *ḥaram*, its founding is mostly associated with three holy figures: Adam, Abraham and Ishmael who are credited in certain sources for building and rebuilding the Ka'ba. In Adam's case, God orders him to build a house of worship on earth and to circumambulate it just as the angels circumambulated God's heavenly throne. Adam subsequently does as he is commanded and builds the Ka'ba (al-Azraqī, 2003, pp. 1:72-82). The notion that Adam was first to build the Ka'ba is further supported by the verse in the Qur'an which refers to Abraham and Ishmael building the Ka'ba: 'And when Abraham, and Ishmael with him, raised the foundations of the House, [they said] "Our Lord, accept [this] from us! You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing"' (Qur'an 2:127). This verse implies that there were remnants of a previous structure in Mecca which was restored by Abraham and Ishmael. Thus, despite the variety and volume of Qur'anic exegesis 'a dominant narrative thread is that Abraham does not build the Ka'ba from scratch, but rebuilds what

Adam had either first built or received complete from heaven, namely, the prototypical Ka'ba' (O'Meara, 2020, p. 71). There are, however, concerns about the authenticity of traditions which connect Adam with the founding of the Meccan *ḥaram* and the building of the Ka'ba as though there are traditions which assert that Adam treated the space where the Ka'ba stands as a *ḥaram*, there are other traditions which claim that it was not Adam who built the Ka'ba but his sons (Webb, 2013, p. 8). One is on firmer ground with traditions linking the establishment of the Meccan *ḥaram* and the construction of the Ka'ba with Abraham as this event is mentioned in the Qur'an (Qur'an 2:127). The close connection between the figure of Abraham and the Meccan *ḥaram* is highlighted further by a tradition attributed to Prophet Muhammad in which he claimed that 'Every Prophet has a *ḥaram* and I have made Medina my *ḥaram* just as Abraham made Mecca his.' (al-Balādhurī, 2022, p. 25). In this tradition the phrase 'make a place inviolable' is simply another way of indicating the establishment of a *ḥaram*, therefore Prophet Muhammad is affirming the Abrahamic foundations of the Meccan *ḥaram* while also making it clear that Medina was his *ḥaram*. Through this statement, one can suggest that the Prophet is providing divine sanction for the *ḥaram* at Medina by making a connection with the Abrahamic origins of the Meccan sanctuary (Munt, 2014, pp. 52-3), this emphasises the fact that it was Mecca that was the original *ḥaram* which lent its legitimacy to Medina's later *ḥaram*.

It must be stressed that Mecca possessed a pre-Islamic *ḥaram* and this situation was not paralleled in Medina as there is no evidence to indicate the presence of a pre-Islamic *ḥaram* in the region. Though the two Medinan tribes of the Aws and Khazraj, whose members became part of the group known as the *Anṣār* worshipped the goddess Manat, Ibn al-Kalbī placed her sanctuary beyond Medina, close to the Red Sea coast near a place called al-Mushallal (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1969, p. 9). The sources also speak of an idol named al-Sa'ida that was located on Mount 'Uḥud, however they do not give mention to an attached *ḥaram* (Ibn Ḥabīb, 1942, pp. 316-17). Thus the arrival of Prophet Muhammad in what was then called Yathrib ultimately resulted in the creation of a *ḥaram* in Medina and imbued the city with its holiness as al-Samhūdī makes clear in his statement that 'Just as God

Most High established for His House … a *ḥaram* to increase its veneration, He established for His beloved and the most magnanimous of creation to Him a *ḥaram* of what surrounded his location' (al-Samhūdī, 2001, p. 1:214). The close connection between the *ḥaram*s and their founding figures meant that their holiness was, in part, linked to said figures. However, in Mecca, the holiness of the *ḥaram* could not be disputed even after the passing of Abraham and Ishmael, but, in the case of Medina, although the presence of the Prophet's tomb in the city maintained its holiness, it status as a *ḥaram* was questioned by certain scholars following the Prophet's death. This resulted in various caliphs going to great lengths to maintain Medina's *ḥaram* status and its sanctity through the establishment of a sacred landscape in the city by linking various places in Medina with the Prophet, his Companions and his descendants (Munt, 2014, p. 186). This was not necessary at Mecca as the Abrahamic associations and the connection to Prophet Muhammad instilled within the *ḥaram* a holiness that endured with no doubts being raised concerning its authenticity and relevance. The long history of the Meccan *ḥaram* compared to the relative novelty of the Medinan one may also have prevented the ḥaram status of Mecca being questioned. Despite these differences between the two *ḥaram*s, one must make it clear that they shared several regulations concerning how one must behave within a *ḥaram*, many of which were pre-Islamic in origin. However, in Mecca one was required to don the ritual garb of the *iḥrām* before entering the *ḥaram* (Munt, 2014, p. 66) whereas this was not the case at Medina, although some scholars encouraged ablution or *ghusl* prior to one's entry into Medina, though it was not obligatory (al-Kulaynī, 1968-71, p. 4:550).

Despite the fact that the sources generally discuss the Meccan *ḥaram* as a single entity, a place in which no non-Muslim may enter and a place in which certain prohibitions were in place, there are also indications in the sources that there was more than one *ḥaram* at Mecca, an innermost one and an outermost one both of which appeared to overlap. The inner *ḥaram* was made up of the sacred sanctuary immediately surrounding the Ka'ba, *al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*, and this was encompassed by a larger area also known as a *ḥaram* which was the wider city territory of Mecca (Peters, 1996a, p. 2). This concept of overlapping *ḥaram*s is not only witnessed at Mecca for it can also be witnessed at

Medina where the city is described as having two *ḥaram*s 'a *ḥaram* of the birds and the beasts from Ḥarrat Wāqim – that is the eastern *ḥarra* (pl. *ḥirar*) – to Ḥarrat al-'Aqīq – that is, the western; and a *ḥaram* of the plants one *barīd* by one *barīd* (al-Samhūdī, 2001, p. 1:211). *Barīd,* in this context is commonly understood to equate to twelve miles; one mile was roughly two kilometres during the Abbasid period and possibly slightly longer during the Umayyad period (Elad, 1999, p. 44). Although measurements did vary depending on the region, this is what *barīd* appears to have denoted in the Hijaz (Munt, 2014, pp. 76-7). Thus, there was a smaller *ḥaram* in Medina that spanned the area between two volcanic tracts or *ḥirar* in which hunting animals was prohibited, and this was encompassed by a larger *ḥaram* in which the cutting of plants was proscribed. One may assume that these *ḥaram*s overlapped and that in addition to a ban on hunting animals, the other prohibitions on violence and killing also applied in the smaller *ḥaram* at least (Munt, 2014, p. 73).

It is clear, therefore, that there were overlapping *ḥaram*s in both Mecca and Medina, however, there is a key difference nonetheless as in Mecca both the inner and outer *ḥaram*s were described using the term *ḥaram*, yet in Medina this was not the case as the term *ḥaram* featured in the sources alongside the term *ḥimā*. *Ḥaram* is generally understood to mean a sacred enclave or an inviolable sanctuary, whereas *ḥimā* sparked some debate concerning its precise meaning though there is a commonly agreed upon definition which describes it as a 'place in which there is fresh herbage, which is protected against people pasturing [there]' (al-Farāhīdī, 1980-5, p. 3:312). Therefore, a *ḥimā* can be understood as a protected space, but not a sacred *and* protected space like the *ḥaram*. The concepts of *ḥaram* and *ḥimā* are pre-Islamic in origin, however, the former has been defined as a sacred enclave dedicated to the worship of a deity while the latter was viewed as 'interdicted pasture' for grazing animals (Serjeant, 1962, p. 43), and only gained a sacred character occasionally when it was associated with a deity (Munt, 2014, p. 31). The use of both the terms *ḥaram* and *ḥimā* in Medina in reference to its outer and inner demarcated areas indicates that there were different levels of holiness in the city and the use of the different terms was a way through which this was expressed. Despite the inherent sanctity of Medina and its *ḥaram* it does come second to Mecca and

thus the sole use of the term *ḥaram* to refer to the Meccan *ḥaram*s is an indication of their superior holiness. The description of Medina as having a *ḥaram* within a wider *ḥimā* may also be a later development that was a result of the reshaping of Medina under the early Marwānid caliphs.[8] The reason being that the use of *barīd* as a unit of distance, which appears in various traditions on the *ḥaram* and *ḥimā,* does not feature as a unit of measurement in evidence from the pre-Islamic period and much of the early seventh century. The term appears to solely reference the early Islamic and potentially pre-Islamic postal system of the same name during these two succeeding periods (Silverstein, 2004). Rather, it is first recorded as a unit of distance during the Marwānid period (684-750) and thus Medina's separation into an internal *ḥaram* and external *ḥimā* may also have been established at this time. This separation soon lost traction, however, and over time the term *ḥimā* featured less in disussions on Medina, being replaced by the term *ḥaram* (Munt, 2014, p. 77). Yet it remains the case that though there were overlapping *ḥaram*s in both Mecca and Medina, in the former only the term *ḥaram* was used in reference to said *ḥaram*s, whereas in Medina there was initially a distinction between the holier *ḥaram* and the less holy but protected *ḥimā* and this is a further indication of the superiority of Mecca in terms of sanctity and the shifting holiness of Medina, particularly after the death of the Prophet.

What is apparent is that despite the fact that there are several manners through which the *ḥaram*s of Mecca and Medina can be thought of as closely connected sacred spaces, there are also a number of key elements that set them apart. The most important one is that the Meccan *ḥaram* is much older than the Medinan one and its antiquity is emphasised by the fact that its founders, whether it was Adam or Abraham, lived in the remote past whereas the *ḥaram* at Medina was founded by Prophet Muhammad and its establishment can be dated unlike the founding of the Meccan *ḥaram*. The *ḥaram*s of Mecca and Medina are also differentiated by the centrality of a shrine in the former and the initial lack of one in the latter. The Ka'ba contributed considerably to the holiness of the Meccan *ḥaram* while at Medina the *ḥaram* was sanctified due to the presence of the Prophet and

[8] For more on the reshaping of Medina's *ḥaram* see, 4.5.

that it was established on his authority as a 'recognized "holy man"' (Peters, 1994, p. 68). The close link between the Prophet and the Medinan *ḥaram* is further demonstrated by al-Samhūdi's opinion on the importance of said *ḥaram*. He states that Medina's *ḥaram* was established because of 'the alighting there of the noblest creature … [i.e. Muhammad] and the diffusion of his radiances and blessings in its land' (al-Samhūdī, 2001, p. 1:214). The Mosque of the Prophet which also became his burial place did eventually become the shrine closely associated with the Medinan *ḥaram* and just like the Ka'ba, it became a major pilgrimage destination. It can also be surmised that certain Muslims circumambulated the tomb of the Prophet at an early stage for there were measures put in place to prevent this from occuring as demonstrated by 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz ordering a screen to be built around the Prophet's tomb enclosure to discourage pilgrims from circumambulating it (Whelan, 1986, p. 221), an activity which was deemed inappropriate when undertaken around any structure but the Ka'ba. These parallels with the *ḥaram* at Mecca show that the Muslims viewed the *ḥaram* and shrine at Medina as equally holy, or at least a close second, to the Meccan *ḥaram* and this enhanced its holiness despite the fact that it had initially been a *ḥaram* without a shrine. This also illustrates that the actions of pilgrims contribute to the definition of a place as holy and that ritual practices did not remain attached to one space in particular but were diffused and applied to myriad sacred spaces across the Near and Middle East.

Despite the prevalence of the *ḥaram*s of Mecca and Medina and their position as the most holy sites in Islam they were by no means the only *ḥarams* in the Near and Middle East. This is supported by the pre-Islamic origins of the *ḥaram* as well as the various pre-Islamic *ḥaram*s within the Arabian Peninsula and beyond which have been discussed in the past despite various attempts by several Muslim scholars 'to restrict the number of acceptable *ḥaram*s to one or two – Mecca with or without Medina' (Munt, 2014, p. 24). The existence of *ḥaram*s other than those at Mecca and Medina has been attested to by the Islamic sources, though there is a notable lack of strong evidence pertaining to the establishment of pre-Islamic *ḥaram*s, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula. As a result much of our source material is textual and was written, for the most part, retrospectively which may have an

adverse effect on the accuracy of the text. Nonetheless, in spite of the lack of contemporary evidence to confirm the existence of pre-Islamic *ḥaram*s, the Islamic sources themselves acknowledge the existence of a number of pre-Islamic *ḥaram*s in Arabia. This is significant as the Qur'an speaks only of one *ḥaram* that is dedicated to Allah: the Meccan *ḥaram*. Regardless, according to certain Muslim scholars there was a *ḥaram* at Wajj that was located near to al-Ṭā'if in Saudi Arabia whence the Banū Thaqīf originated and was, as a result, connected with the tribe. The reports pertaining to this *ḥaram* came from the supposed letter or letters which Prophet Muhammad sent to the Thaqafis of al-Tā'if as, in some of these letters the Prophet allows for Wajj to retain its *ḥaram* status (Munt, 2014, p. 32). Though this has been a controversial issue with several Muslim scholars contesting Wajj's claim to *ḥaram* status, this very contestation may indeed reflect the early recognition of this space as a *ḥaram*. This provides some evidence regarding the existence of a *ḥaram* at Wajj, yet there is no information about the process of establishing said *ḥaram*.

There is, however, a *ḥaram* elsewhere in the Hijaz for which there is an account describing its establishment, this is the *ḥaram* at Buss whose existence is affirmed by Islamic sources. This *ḥaram* was located approximately 100 kilometres northeast of Mecca and was reportedly established by a branch of the Ghaṭafān tribe to rival the Quraysh's *ḥaram* at Mecca and was likely dedicated to al-'Uzza (Robin, 2012, p. 304). Although the accounts on the *ḥaram* do not specify this, Buss and Ghaṭafān are elsewhere linked to al-'Uzza (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1969, p. 13). The rivalry with the Meccan Ka'ba is further highlighted by the reports which state that the shrine at Buss was built to the exact measurements of the Ka'ba, between two stones which were supposedly taken from the hills of al-Safā and al-Marwā in Mecca to replicate them (Munt, 2014, p. 38). The account detailing the setting up of the *ḥaram* at Buss also describes the *ḥaram'*s destruction as it is told from the perspective of Zuhayr b. Janāb, the leader of the Banū Kalb who destroyed the *ḥaram* and desacralized it. According to this account a branch of Ghaṭafān, the Banū Baghīd, chose to set up a *ḥaram* for themselves following a victory against another tribe, the Suda' who had attacked them whilst they were traveling with their families and property. However, the Banū Baghīd fought back and triumphed. This

encounter made the Banū Baghīd wealthy as they took much plunder from the Suda' and this increase in wealth and power ultimately encouraged them to set up a *ḥaram* like the Meccan *ḥaram* 'in which no game may be killed, no tree be lopped, and no one comes to it seeking protection may be perturbed' (al-Isfahānī, 1927-74, pp. 19:15-16). The *ḥaram* was set up at a water spot of the Banū Baghīd called Buss. However, this *ḥaram* was not long lived as once the news of its establishment reached Zuhayr b. Janāb he vowed to prevent the Banū Baghīd from setting up a *ḥaram*, urging his tribesmen to join him as he raided their newly established *ḥaram*. Ultimately he triumphed and desacralized the area by beheading a prisoner from the Ghaṭafān within the demarcated space, thus declaring the *ḥaram* null and void (al-Isfahānī, 1927-74, pp. 19:15-16).

This report sheds light on why a tribe in the Hijaz would attempt to establish a *ḥaram*. In the case of Buss, the Banū Baghīd decided to set up a *ḥaram* to demonstrate their strength after defeating the Suda' tribe, more importantly, they established a *ḥaram* to make it clear that they no longer needed to depend on another tribe for they believed that they were powerful as an independent entity (Kister, 1986, p. 44). The *ḥaram* as a symbol of power and superiority is also accentuated by the potential motivations behind the destruction of the *ḥaram* at Buss as Zuhayr b. Janāb was mostly opposed to the *ḥaram* because it may have appeared to imply the superiority of the Ghaṭafān over his own tribe. It may also be suggested that Zuhayr b. Janāb was motivated by the fact that he was part of the *Ḥums* ('Alī, 1993, pp. 4:364-5), which was a confederation of tribes and individuals 'pledged to guarantee the security of Mecca, its House, and the holy Quraysh' (Peters, 1994, p. 29). Thus it could be suggested that Zuhayr destroyed the *ḥaram* at Buss to maintain the superiority of the Meccan *ḥaram* which he may have felt was threatened by the *ḥaram* at Buss. This account does appear to reflect the historical circumstances of the creation of the *ḥaram* at Buss, however, it must be noted that the two tribes in this account – the Banū Kalb and Ghaṭafān – were rivals for the majority of the Umayyad period, thus their rivalry in the latter period may have been projected back into pre-Islamic Arabia (Munt, 2014, p. 39). Nonetheless, this account provides some insight into the motivations for the establishment of *ḥaram*s in the Near and Middle East.

Due to the dearth of evidence regarding the creation of *ḥaram*s in the pre-Islamic period there is no extant list of guidelines which must be followed within a *ḥaram*. There are, however, numerous reports and Qur'anic verses which may shed light on some of the rules which could have been in place in pre-Islamic *ḥaram*s, particularly the Meccan *ḥaram*. According to these sources the rules of the pre-Islamic *ḥaram* were reaffirmed by Prophet Muhammad upon his takeover of the *ḥaram* following the conquest of Mecca in 630 (Munt, 2014, p. 33), which is a clear instance of continuity between the pre-Islamic and Islamic period. Chief among these regulations was the prohibition of killing and fighting within the limits of the *ḥaram* (Qur'an 2:191). The *ḥaram* as an area in which peace must be maintained is also attested to by Nonnosus, a Roman official who was part of an embassy sent on behalf of the emperor Justinian I to South Arabia in around 530-1 CE. He claimed that when the 'Saracens' met twice a year in their sacred site they were not only at peace with each other but also exercised peace with all those living in their country (Photius, 1959-91, pp. 2b, II, 28-31). South Arabian inscriptions that are connected to spaces known as *mḥrm*, which is commonly understood to mean temple and which may be likened to a *ḥaram* due to their inviolability, also indicate the existence of prohibitions pertaining to the carrying and use of weapons to kill or fight in these sacred spaces (Munt, 2014, p. 34). It was not only physical disputes that appear to have been prohibited within the confines of a *ḥaram* for there is evidence that disputes of a verbal nature were also banned. For example, in pre-Islamic South Arabian sanctuaries it was forbidden to conduct disputes (Ghul, 1984, p. 148). A similar prohibition appears to have been in place regarding the Meccan *ḥaram* for those performing the *Hajj* rites as outlined in the Qur'an (Qur'an 2:197) in which *jidāl,* meaning quarrelling, is among the forbidden actions. It is unknown whether this was a prohibition that was in place only during the temporary *Hajj* season or whether it was permanent, however, it is certainly feasible for it to have been in place year-round (Munt, 2014, p. 34). This would have made the Meccan *ḥaram* the ideal space wherein people from different tribes could mingle to settle quarrels, engage in trading activities, and arrange alliances and marriages (Donner, 2010, p. 30). The *ḥaram* was also a space in which hunting was not allowed in pre-Islamic and Islamic

contexts. This rule is outlined in the Qur'an in verses 1, 95, and 96 in *Sūrat al-Mā'idah* wherein God prohibits hunting while the people are *ḥurum* (Qur'an 5:1, 5:95-6). This term has been traditionally interpreted as meaning 'while in a state of *iḥrām*' however this may be slightly restrictive and a better alternative would be 'while in a *ḥaram*'. This suggests that the ban on hunting was a permanent rule rather than a temporary one (Munt, 2014, p. 35). The fact that such regulations pertaining to the *ḥaram* endured into the Islamic period shows that the emergence of Islam did not signify the erasure of all the pre-Islamic aspects of the *ḥaram*, indeed this highlights the similarity in the attitudes of the early Muslims and the polytheistic Arabs towards the *ḥaram*.

4.5: The *Ḥaram*: A Demarcated Space

One of the defining features of the *ḥaram* is the fact that it is a demarcated space in which certain regulations, which were not found elsewhere, were in place. The boundaries of *ḥaram*s and similar sacred spaces are delimited by visible markers that work to physically separate the profane world from the sacred one and they feature in numerous contexts. For example, in the case of Mecca, they are known as *anṣāb* and mark the point at which one enters the *ḥaram* surrounding the Ka'ba. A similar function was carried out by the Greek *hermae* (sing. *herm*) in antiquity which were placed at boundaries, including those around temples, and performed religious and defining functions. However, there was not always a single *ḥaram* area as shown in Mecca which had a cascading series of *ḥaram*s because the holy territory expanded over time to not only include the *Masjid al-Ḥarām,* the *temenos* at the center of which lies the Ka'ba, which can be described as the 'original *ḥaram*', but also encompassed the city of Mecca in its entirety. This latter expanded *ḥaram* was not the last phase of expansion as the *ḥaram* boundaries were extended further to encompass the *mawāqīt* (sing. *mīqāt*) which were the places where the pilgrim had to don the ritual garb and assume the taboo state known as *iḥrām* (Peters, 1996a, p. 2). These boundaries were, as the chroniclers assert,

redefined by Prophet Muhammad once he had political control over Mecca following the conquest of the city in 630 CE. It has also been claimed that the Prophet did not create new boundaries, instead he restored the sacred territory's Abrahamic boundaries. These limits were measured based on the time it took to journey from Mecca to the surrounding regions and 'they stood at 1 ½ hours of journeying outward along the Medina road, 3 ½ hours outward on the Yemen road, 5 ½ hours on the Ta'if road, 3 ½ and 5 hours out along the Iraq and Jedda routes respectively' (Wüstenfeld, 1861, p. 113). What can be inferred from this is that the Meccan *ḥaram* can be understood as a series of *ḥaram*s, most likely increasing in holiness in accordance with their closeness to the Ka'ba. It is also notable that despite this considerable expansion of the Meccan *ḥaram*, there were those among the Muslim elite who desired to extend this sacred territory further. One such individual was 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634-44), the second of the Rāshidūn Caliphs, who tried to render the Arabian Peninsula in its entirety a *ḥaram* by banning non-Muslims from entering the region.

This malleable nature of the *ḥaram* boundaries in the Near and Middle East is further emphasised by the fact that Medina's *ḥaram* boundaries seem to have expanded following the drawing up of the Constitution of Medina. This is indicated by the fact that there was no unanimous agreement regarding the boundaries of Medina's *ḥaram* among Muslim scholars suggesting that the boundaries of the *ḥaram* changed over time and different traditions reflected different extents of the *ḥaram*. One of the most cited definitions of the exact limits of the *ḥaram* claims that it lies between the mountains of 'Ayr and Thawr (Ibn Abī Khaythama, 1424/2004, pp. 1:357-8), while another similarly popular definition states that the *ḥaram* lay between *lābatayn* (sing. *lāba*) which is often translated as 'two volcanic tracts' (Ibn Anas, 1997, pp. 2:467-8).[9] There are also traditions which simply state that the *ḥaram* extended between two mountains (al-Samhūdī, 2001, p. 1:189). At first glance it may appear that it is not difficult to harmonise these traditions and reach a clear conclusion regarding the precise boundaries of the Medinan *ḥaram* as 'Ayr and Thawr can be the very same mountains cited

[9] The 'two volcanic tracts' can be translated to *lābatayn* as is the case here, however, the term *ḥirar* also carries the same meaning as has been indicated earlier on p. 95.

in certain traditions. However, there remain issues, for a mountain is not the same as a volcanic tract or *lāba*. Commentators such as Abū Zakarīyā al-Nawawī did attempt to explain this issue by claiming that they are both correct for the 'two volcanic tracts' of some traditions were the eastern and western boundaries of the *ḥaram* while the 'two mountains', which are likely to have been Thawr and 'Ayr, were the northern and southern boundaries of the *ḥaram* (al-Nawawī, 1987-90, p. 4:910). Despite the feasibility of this explanation, problems persist as the boundaries of the Medinan *ḥaram* are never described as lying between the two mountains and the two volcanic tracts in a single *ḥadīth,* rather, there were *aḥādīth* discussing one or the other and not the two together. Attempts at harmonisation notwithstanding it remains the fact that there are reports that provide *ḥaram* boundaries which cannot be harmonised with others. The reason for this is that a significant number of the toponyms mentioned in reports concerning the limits of the Medinan *ḥaram* lie a considerable distance away from the mountains or volcanic tracts which surround Medina (Munt, 2014, p. 69). However, it is possible that the *aḥādīth* on the limits of the Medinan *ḥaram* were not introduced simultaneously, instead they reflect the changing circumstances of the boundaries of Medina's *ḥaram*. Thus, it may be asserted that those traditions which provided extended boundaries for the Medinan *ḥaram* superceded and contradicted preceding traditions which described the *ḥaram*'s older and more narrow *ḥaram* boundaries. This suggests that the boundaries of the *ḥaram* at Medina were altered a number of times following the death of Prophet Muhammad and adds credence to the notion that the creation and development of a sacred space is a gradual process rather than a single event (Munt, 2014, p. 70).

It is unclear whence the idea of a demarcated sacred space emerged but it is evidently not unique to the Arabian Peninsula, or indeed the Near and Middle East as it can be witnessed elsewhere. This is indicative of the inherent need of people, regardless of their religious inclination, to mark a space as separate, demarcated and sacred. One example of such a sacred site would be the Temple of Asclepius in Epidaurus, Greece. This temple was, according to Pausanias, 'surrounded on all sides by boundary marks' (Pausanias, 1918, p. II:XXVII.2, English trans. p. 391). What is more, in a similar

manner to the *ḥaram*, there were regulations in place within such demarcated spaces that distinguished them from the profane area around them. These regulations prohibited the occurrence of a birth or a death inside the enclosure and it was also forbidden to consume offerings made in this space beyond its bounds (Zawakzki, 1953-54). Regulations such as these were an intangible means of emphasising the boundaries of holy ground and highlighting the difference between sacred and profane territory. This notion of of separating the holy and the profane was prevalent across the Near and Middle East as can be demonstrated by the fact that most religions saw it as imperative to draw a line between the two. However, words were not a sufficient means of keeping the profane and the sacred separate and thus this initially metaphorical line between the holy and the unholy needed to be expressed physically. Hence, as is the case in the Meccan *ḥaram*, Greeks, Romans and Christians marked the area around a sacred space so the profane could remain a safe distance away (Peters, 1996a, pp. 1-2). The enduring nature of these cut off sacred spaces is a testament to their importance to their respective communities, however, this metaphorical line of separation does not concern space alone as there are instances in which it applied to people. Those who are deemed to be ritually pure could enter a sacred precinct while others who were viewed as impure were barred from entering. Indeed, the eytmology of the word profane highlights this as those who are deemed unholy or impure were required 'to remain *pro fano'* literally meaning outside the shrine or holy place (Peters, 1996a, pp. 1-2).

Ritual purity, therefore, was of significant importance to the maintenance of the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. The demarcated nature of the *ḥaram* or *temenos* and the requirements regarding the ritual purity of their visitors effectively illustrates this. There is no universal form of ritual purity throughout the Near and Middle East, with certain religions requiring varying degrees of purity that were achieved through different manners. For example, to be perceived as ritually pure in Islam, which is compulsory for a Muslim when performing the *Hajj,* a pilgrim must wash their whole body, shed their ordinary clothes and dress in *iḥrām* which signifies their assumption of a state of holiness. They must also be in a state of cleanliness or *ṭahāra* at all times whilst in the *ḥaram*. It is

not simply this garb that classifies them as pure for the pilgrim has many prohibitions imposed upon them which forbid such acts as cutting one's nails, shaving, and cutting one's hair (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1999, p. 289). By avoiding such acts the pilgrim is protecting themselves from ritual defilement, essentially rendering themselves taboo (Peters, 1986, p. 68), to prevent their *Hajj* being deemed void. This donning of the *iḥrām* does not simply take place once a pilgrim enters Mecca, rather there are points at which this occurred – the *mawāqīt* – which were located at the edge of the holy territory and signify the boundaries of the Meccan *ḥaram* (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1999, p. 288). This highlights the close link between ritual purity and the demarcation of space for it is at the boundaries of holy ground, which in this case is the Meccan *ḥaram*, that one must enter a state of ritual purity.

The connection between ritual purity and washing oneself is also reflected in South Arabia, for example, in which most temples had facilities for washing such as wells, springs, or basins in their courtyards or throughout the complex if it was of considerable size. The 'Awwām Temple Complex near Ma'rib (Fig. 8) is one example of a sacred space which features numerous washing facilities. This allowed the visitor to assume the state of purity which was required in order to enter the temple as it was the place of communication with the divine, and purity, or *ṭahāra* 'is requisite before coming into contact with the god Almaqah' (Maraqten, 2015, p. 124). The regulations for ritual purity at the 'Awwām Temple were so stringently enforced that, according to a number of penitental texts, those who entered the temple without ritually purifying themselves were punished and had to pay compensation (Ryckmans, 1972). The stress on the importance of ritual purity is made abundantly clear by the fact that there were three places for purification before one would reach the most sacred space of the 'Awwām temple which was the Oval Sanctuary Precinct. The first of these was located within the Annex of the temple where there appears to be a room exclusively for washing, more specifically, ritual washing or *ghusl*. This was then followed by a bronze basin within the Peristyle Hall. The third and final place for ablution was located at the threshold of the entrance to the Oval Sanctuary Precinct from the Peristyle Hall and this was the main place for ritual washing.

These successive ablution facilities may have been transition points at which certain prayers were performed and they may also have been rites of passage (Maraqten, 2015, p. 125).

The notion of rites of passage has been explored in detail by van Gennep who suggests that there are 'three successive but separate stages: rites of separation, threshold or transformation rites … and rites of incorporation' (van Gennep, 1960). These successive phases may indeed be witnessed at the 'Awwām complex as the first separation stage in which one would withdraw from a place in order to enter another is symbolised by the initial act of ritual purification undertaken in the Annex of the temple. This stage also included the donning of clean garments and was followed by the rites of transformation which involved the movement from one phase of life to another. In the 'Awwām Temple, these rites are reflected at the main ablution place situated at the threshold between the Oval Sanctuary Precinct and the Peristyle Hall because the visitor is not only carrying out their last ritual wash but they are also assuming a new status by approaching the dwelling place of Almaqah. The third stage, that of incorporation, can be symbolised by the ritual banquet which was part of the pilgrimage rituals at the temple (Maraqten, 2015, p. 126). That these places for washing were located within the temple makes it clear that whatever lay beyond the temple was profane and did not require any kind of ablution. Hence, in addition to the physical borders of the 'Awwām Temple that marked the point at which the profane and the sacred encounter one another, the act of washing served as a less tangible means of demarcating holy ground. Similarly, for a pilgrim to Mecca the rites of separation can be understood to be the performance of *ghusl,* which is the common precursor to the assumption of the state of *iḥrām* (al-Ṭūsī, 2008, p. 160). This is then followed by dressing in the *iḥrām,* journeying to the *mīqāt* and entering the *ḥaram* territory of Mecca which symbolizes the rites of transformation as at this stage the pilgrim is rendered taboo. The last phase, that of incorporation, is represented by the performance and completion of the various *Hajj* or '*Umrah* rituals. Thus, it is evident that demarcated spaces and ritual purity go hand in hand in the Near and Middle East, in both pre-Islamic and Islamic contexts. It is also the case that the two can be

expressed in different ways, through physical purity and borders, as well as through less tangible means, all of which ensure the separation between the profane and the sacred is maintained.

4.6: Concluding remarks

The antiquity of the concept of a demarcated sacred space that was dedicated to a deity and was thus rendered inviolable is abundantly clear. Such spaces may not always have been described using the term *ḥaram*, however, for the most part, they functioned in a very similar way and had to meet much of the same criteria to be deemed sacred and to be treated differently to their surroundings. Due to the long history of the *ḥaram* and its counterparts in the Near and Middle East it is only natural that certain aspects of the space were redefined several times over the ages. Yet the core criteria remained unchanged even after the shift from polytheistic to monotheistic worship as was the case in the Meccan *ḥaram* after the conquest of the city by the Muslims in 630 CE. This relatively unchanged status of the *ḥaram* following the emergence and spread of Islam reinforces the notion that the Islamic *ḥaram* was heavily influenced by its pre-Islamic forebears. The Islamic *ḥaram*, therefore did not emerge from nothing, it was simply one among many iterations of a wider, long-lived sacred space that featured in the Near and Middle East and beyond. In many ways one cannot place the Islamic *ḥaram* firmly in the pre-Islamic or Islamic period as it is a fusion of the pre-Islamic past and the inherently Islamic present and future. This is illustrated most effectively in the fact that despite its Islamization which involved the destruction of the idols and the cleansing of the Meccan *ḥaram* from any vestiges of polytheistic worship, much of the regulations that were followed in the pre-Islamic period were maintained in an Islamized form.

Chapter 5

The Mosque

5.1: Functions and Origins

The mosque is the most defining architectural symbol of Islam and in order to fully understand the origins of Islamic sacred space and its development, understanding the mosque's origins and the way it functions is of great importance. It must be pointed out from the outset that though there are several types of mosques, this thesis will focus primarily on the congregational type. Prior to the discussions concerning the origins of the mosque it is important to define it. The mosque or *masjid* is the space in which a worshipper performs the act of prostration or *sujūd* and it is designed primarily to provide a space for the performance of regular prayer or *ṣalāt.* In a similar manner to the *ḥaram*, the mosque is a demarcated area with its only necessary structural feature being a device that 'assures worshippers' orientation towards the *qibla,* the direction of prayer in Islam, and their arrangement in straight parallel lines' (Ayyad, 2019, pp. 150-1). The *qibla* is among the key identifiers of the mosque as well as one of the components of the mosque that ascribes sanctity to it and will be discussed at a later stage.[10] Despite the demarcation of the mosque and the *qibla* which highlight its sanctity, the history of the mosque and its development is by no means simple as there have been a number of debates concerning its origins as a structure as well as an idea which will be discussed in detail in this chapter. Its status as a sacred space has also been put to question as a result of the secular activities that were said to have taken place within the mosque during the early years of Islam. This may be supported by the fact that the mosque was not initially consecrated in a similar manner to the church and the synagogue. However, the mosque was eventually invested with sanctity as reflected in the manner by which it was treated and revered for it was, above all else, the

[10] See, 5.3

place in which God Most High was and continues to be worshipped (Caseau, 2001, p. 46). Just as a worshipper must respect God, he must also respect the place dedicated to his worship.

The religious functions of the mosque and its sacred character are, therefore, evident and though one can speak of social and political functions it is difficult to completely detach the latter two from the former, especially regarding the mosque because it is, above all else, a place of worship. One reason for this difficulty in separating the religious from the social and political spheres is that Islam, from its birth, was not simply a faith but a social and political movement and this was ultimately reflected in the mosque. The *khuṭba* or sermon illustrates this clearly as it followed the distinctly religious act of communal prayers on Fridays and, in addition to covering religious matters, political, social, and moral topics also featured. That this was also the time and place when the Muslims expressed their allegiance to their rulers through the leader of the prayers, the *imam*, illustrates the political aspect of the Friday prayers as well as the mosque (Ettinghausen et al., 2001, p. 5). Hence, at the early stage of the mosque's development it was not solely a religious institution but also a political one. This is highlighted by the fact that it was in the Prophet's Mosque 'that delegates were received: new converts, who came to declare faith and allegiance, and non-converts who came for political purposes or for theological debate' (Ayyad, 2019, p. 168). The establishment of the *dār al-imāra* or governor's palace did eventually create some separation between the political and religious spheres. However, the close physical proximity between the two, which often abutted each other, as well as the continued involvement of the caliph or his representatives in the expansion and refurbishment of mosques meant that the political and religious could not be completely separated.[11]

As has been mentioned, there is a social aspect to the mosque in addition to the political and religious. This is reflected in the social circumstances that prompted the founding of mosques during the early Islamic period, particularly the years which followed the Islamic conquests. The conquests

[11] See 5.4.

had resulted in the establishment of garrison towns or *amṣār* in such towns as Baṣra and Kūfa and at the centre of these towns a congregational mosque was established around which the nascent communities would gather. These mosques, known as *masājid al-amṣār*, were often quite rudimentary, born out of necessity above all else, however with the increase in populations in these towns re-planning and expanding them was unavoidable. Thus, the influence of social change on the mosque is apparent for as the population increased so did the size of the mosques in their respective areas. This is effectively illustrated by the circumstances in Damascus 'where the Muslim authorities asked for, claimed, and finally obtained the whole precinct of the former temenos' which was previously occupied by the Cathedral of St. John which was flanked by the small mosque founded immediately after the conquest of the city (Guidetti, 2017, p. 231).[12]

The identification of the first distinctly Islamic mosque is important as one needs to differentiate between the Islamic *masjid* and the pre-Islamic *masjid* as the term *masjid* was also applied to pre-Islamic places of worship which suggests that the term initially denoted any place of prayer (Johns, 1999, p. 93). This suggests that the concept of the Islamic mosque had pre-Islamic provenance. For example, *masjid* is used in the Qur'an alongside places in which the One God was worshipped as can be demonstrated in the Qur'an in *Sūrat al-Ḥajj*: 'For had not God driven back one group of people by means of another, there would surely have been torn down *sawāmi'* [Christian hermitages], *biya'* [churches or synagogues], *salawāt* [places of prayer], and *masājid* in which the name of God is abundantly commemorated (Qur'an 22:40). This verse should be viewed with the notion of Islam as the heir of the preceding Abrahamic religions in mind as, in a general sense, these can all be described as *masājid* for they are places of prayer therefore it can be asserted that the Islamic mosque was merely another of type of *masjid*. It was, however, the last of this type in a similar manner to the Prophet Muhammad being the seal of the Prophets. Just as the Prophet belonged to a preceding family so too did the mosque (Ayyad, 2019, p. 181). The use of the term *masjid* to describe pre-Islamic as well as Islamic places of worship is not unusual as the etymological origins of the word

[12] See, 3.4.

are relatively vague. The term derives from the word *sajada* meaning 'he prostrates himself' therefore it means 'place of prostration' and this can indeed be true for the different pre-Islamic places of worship in addition to the Islamic mosque as prostration has a considerable history in the Near and Middle East in both secular and religious contexts. This is evidenced by the widespread nature of this act across the region from ancient times to the rise of Islam and, indeed, the present day in which peoples across the world continue to prostrate as part of their religious duties. Prostration is mentioned in the Old Testament using the Hebrew word *hishtawah* which is the counterpart to the Arabic term *sajada*. In the Old Testament prostration did not necessarily involve falling to the ground, rather it described a simple bow, however there are also passages which state that there were those who fell down prostrate before idols. Thus, the Muslim act of prostration, *sujūd*, is a continuation of an uninterrupted tradition (Tottoli, 1998, pp. 6-7). Hence, it would not have been unusual for prostration to take place in pre-Islamic places of worship ultimately making the term *masjid* applicable to them.

The use of the term *masjid* to describe pre-Islamic places of worship has occasionally been put forward as an argument against the existence of a uniquely Islamic mosque in the early Islamic period as it has been purported that the loose definition of the word *masjid* in the Qur'an makes it seem that it was yet to be associated with a particular architectural form such as the Islamic mosque (Johns, 1999, p. 93). Yet this is not sufficient evidence that the Islamic mosque did not exist in the early years of Islam as the Qur'anic use of the word *masjid* to describe pre-Islamic God-worship sanctuaries, does not necessarily imply that the term was not Islamized, instead such sanctuaries were considered Islamic (Ayyad, 2019, p. 182) as they were places in which the One God was worshipped. Additionally, the Qur'an alludes to the fact that the early Muslims had a number of mosques. One such verse in *Sūrat al-Baqara* outlines how Muslims should conduct themselves while 'secluded in the mosques' (Qur'an 2:187). There is also the verse, first revealed in Mecca, which emphasises that *masājid* belong to Allah and one should not invoke any other God along with Him (Qur'an 72:18). This infers that the Muslims had claimed pre-Islamic *masājid,* which had previously

been spaces where polytheistic worship took place, and Islamized them. However, despite the wide-ranging definition of the term *masjid* during the pre- and early Islamic period, the term did eventually come to refer solely to the Islamic place of worship. This can be illustrated in the Qur'an in *Sūrat al-Tawba*, which is believed to be the last chapter of the Qur'an to be revealed. It is the eighteenth verse in particular which highlights this as it asserts that 'the mosques of God shall be visited and maintained by such as believe in God and the Last Day, establish regular prayers and pay zakat or alms', (Qur'an 9:18) all of which are required of every Muslim. Thus this verse classifies the *masājid* as places specifically for Muslim worship. The Islamic nature of the mosque is indicated further by the fact that in the six times the term *masājid* appears in the Qur'an it is often coupled with Allah in some way. For example, the term *masājid Allah* is mentioned three times as in the aforementioned verse from *Sūrat al-Tawba* (Qur'an 9:18), additionally a verse In *Sūrat al-Jinn* states that 'mosques are for Allah' (Qur'an 72:18). These indicate that there was a need to differentiate between the Islamic mosques and other contemporary *masājid* where deities may have been worshipped alongside Allah (Ayyad, 2019, p. 183).

One mosque which was among the earliest *masājid* of Islam was the Prophet's Mosque in Medina however, scholars are not unanimously in agreement regarding the origins of this mosque. In fact, the subject has been fiercely debated by scholars with some favouring the theory that the mosque evolved from the abode of the Prophet in Medina and others firmly rejecting this notion for various reasons. A notable champion of the former theory was Leone Caetani who did not believe that the structure which the Prophet initially built at Medina was a mosque, instead he theorized that this was the Prophet's house. Caetani makes this clear by claiming that the Islamic mosque was unlikely to have 'sprung fully-formed from the Prophet's head on the very first day that he set foot in Medina' (Caetani, 1905-72, p. 1:432). This is not a sufficient enough reason to dismiss the possibility that it was a mosque that the Prophet Muhammad built once he had arrived at Medina because early Islamic sources state that the Prophet's Mosque was not the first. This is highlighted by the fact that the Prophet prayed at a mosque on his journey to Medina, the Mosque of Quba. The existence of

other mosques is also alluded to in the sources. For example it is stated that following his departure from Quba' on a Friday after spending four days there, the Prophet prayed in a 'mosque erected by Banū-Sālim ibn-'Auf ibn-'Amr ibn-'Auf ibn al-Khazraj' and this was the first Friday on which the Prophet led public prayers (al-Balādhurī, 2022, pp. 22-3). Therefore it is certainly possible that the Prophet had some ideas on how the Islamic mosque would function and what would be its rudimentary features. Caetani's theory is also flawed as the size of the structure at Medina contradicts the numerous reports on the Prophet's humble living. Additionally, the mosque's structure highlights its communal nature because, unlike the traditional Arab *dār* which only has one entrance, the Prophet's Mosque had three gates which were most likely designed to allow for the ingress and egress of many people (Ayyad, 2019, p. 149). A further error which Caetani makes concerns the chronology of mosque building during the early Islamic period for he maintains that the Prophet's 'house' was not converted into a mosque until 674 CE (Caetani, 1905-72, pp. 1:441-2), suggesting that it remained a 'house' during the caliphates of 'Uthmān and 'Alī, the third and fourth successors of the Prophet. This implies that the mosques of the *amṣār* were established before that of Medina (Ayyad, 2019, pp. 147-8), an unlikely notion as Medina was the *'dār al-hijra*' or 'home after [the] exile' of the Prophet and the early Muslims (Munt, 2014, p. 184) and it was far too important for its mosque to have been established after the death of the Prophet and after the establishment of other mosques outside of the Hijaz.

To strengthen his theory, Caetani referenced various *aḥādīth* which discuss certain activities and events taking place inside the mosque which did not befit its status as a space specifically dedicated to prayer. Here Caetani has taken the *aḥādīth* out of their original context for he uses them to highlight the occurrence of activities more suited for secular and domestic settings when the purpose of the *aḥādīth* was to teach the correct way one should behave inside the mosque. To give one example, there is a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet warns the Muslims against spitting in the direction of the *qibla* (al-Bukhārī, 1994, nos. 405-17) but this did not show that people treated the mosque as an ordinary house, rather the purpose of such a *ḥadīth* was to highlight that polluting the

mosque is wrong and one should refrain from doing so (Johns, 1999, pp. 72-3). The mosque is also reported to have accommodated other non-sacred activities which Caetani and supporters of his theory marked as inappropriate for a mosque. These included tending to the wounded after battles, receiving non-Muslim envoys, and the trussing of a prisoner of war. However, these apparently secular activities do not provide evidence that the Mosque of the Prophet evolved from his house, instead they highlight the multifunctional character of the mosque which was, in the years immediately following the *Hijra*, used for military, social, and political purposes and, of course, for prayer (Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 42). Thus, the notion that the Mosque of the Prophet was initially a domestic structure must be discounted for it functioned in ways that would not mark it as a house but rather a mosque and communal center.

Despite the dismissal of Caetani's theory the origins of the mosque remain relatively obscure as there is no clear evidence indicating whether the mosque was an original Islamic creation or whether it evolved over time from pre-Islamic architectural forms and ideas. Both of these theories are possible, yet it is important to note that the mosque was initially a relatively nondescript structure which was hypaethral in nature having four walls, each of which was pierced with an entrance except for the *qibla* wall (Ibn Sa'd, 2001, p. 1:206). Thus the rudimentary structure of the early mosque did not give it a specifically Islamic appearance as a distinctly Islamic architecture and aesthetic was yet to emerge. It may be true that the mosque later incorporated elements that could have been of pre-Islamic origin and had parallels with the places of worship of other faiths. At the same, it is also possible that the Islamic mosque was an Islamic innovation, a 'spontaneous local invention of an easily erected large space with shade provided by a flat or gabled roof on reused columns' (Grabar, 1973, p. 117). However, even in cases when a pre-Islamic feature is incorporated into the mosque, they were often 'transformed in ways that altered their cultural associations and re-created them as patently Islamic' (Khoury, 1998, p. 1). This emphasises the fact that though there is a line of demarcation between innovation and appropriation, it is most often a blurred line.

The distinguishing components of the mosque, such as the minaret, *minbar*, and *miḥrāb* developed over time although they may have derived from elements and practices included in the initial template of the Prophet's Mosque (Ayyad, 2019, p. 397). That some of the defining features of the mosque may have been present, albeit in embryonic form, in the Prophet's Mosque does not necessarily imply that the mosque as a type derived from this particular structure. Indeed, there is little evidence to support this and the blatant disregard of the early caliphs towards the Prophet's Mosque shows that there was little attempt at preserving the original mosque. The first caliph, Abū Bakr (r. 632-4) made no changes to the mosque during his tenure as leader of the community. However, his successor, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb extended it and even negotiated with the uncle of the Prophet, al-'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib 'to sell his house so that it could be incorporated in it' after which it was added to the mosque. 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (r. 644-656), the third caliph subsequently increased the mosque's size even further, rebuilding it with stone and plaster and roofing it with teak (al-Balādhurī, 2022, p. 24). There was some attempt at preserving some of the original elements of the Prophet's Mosque as demonstrated by the preservation of the precise positions of the columns of the mosque every time they were demolished and replaced by new ones (Ayyad, 2019, p. 395). Yet it is also true that there is nothing in Islamic tradition which suggests that the Prophet's Mosque 'was so specially revered that it could have served as a model for the mosque in Islam' (Johns, 1999, p. 108).

Nonetheless, though it may seem that the Prophet's Mosque in its original form was unlikely to have been the prototype for subsequent mosques, the concept of the mosque did emerge at an early stage and it was fully established not too long after. It has been suggested that a standard layout for the mosque emerged before the Marwānid phase of the Umayyad period (684-750) as the mosques built during this time had a similar layout. Unfortunately, as there is no archaeological evidence for mosques prior to the reign of 'Abd al-Malik one cannot be certain whence this layout originated (Hoyland, 1997, p. 549, n. 21). However, textual evidence provides some clarity, for example, according to al-Ṭabarī, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who was known to have built abundant mosques across

the Near and Middle East, was the caliph who decreed that all the congregational mosques should adhere to a common layout (Johns, 1999, p. 110). This is inferred from al-Ṭabarī's words after he described the foundation of the first mosque at Kūfa which was built according to 'Umar's instructions in 638 CE, as he states other mosques, excluding the *Masjid al-Ḥarām* in Mecca which was not duplicated at the time out of respect for its sanctity, were laid out in a similar way (al-Ṭabarī, 1879-1901, I, pp. 2488-2489; English trans. 1989-2007, 13:68-9). This suggests that the concept of the mosque and its standard layout came about during 'Umar's reign as caliph. This, however, did not mean that all the early mosques were exact duplicates of each other as this was not the case for there was considerable variety in the layout and elevation of the *muṣallā* or prayer hall, the decorative and constructional techniques, as well as the materials used. Yet it remains the case that the early mosques appear to derive from a common template and the later mosques mostly followed suit (Johns, 1999, p. 63).

The variety in mosques across the Near and Middle East is not unusual as each mosque was influenced to some degree by local, pre-Islamic building traditions. The early mosques of Kūfa , Damascus, and San'a', for instance, were influenced by building traditions that had roots in the pre-conquest cultures of their respective regions (Johns, 1999, p. 64). The influence exercised by pre-Islamic local traditions on the mosque, and other Islamic sacred spaces, is mostly due to the nature by which Islam diffused across the Near and Middle East. The reason being that Islam spread at great speed across a vast area encountering a considerable array of 'political, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic entities which succumbed to Islam' in rapid succession. This ultimately meant that the Muslims came into contact with a wide range of sacred spaces, elements of which they discarded or absorbed into their own sacred architecture (Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 33). The notion that the elaboration of the mosque only reflected a later, more 'liberal' attitude which developed after the Islamic conquests when the Muslims encountered other, supposedly more sophisticated cultures, is countered by the fact that the 'earliest architectural innovations made to the mosque were commanded by patrons known for their adherence to the Prophet's model rather than liberal attitudes' (Ayyad, 2019, p. 42).

Some of the key components of the mosque were not unique to the structure as they were common to other religious buildings, particularly those of Late Antiquity. Such components included an open courtyard, a covered sanctuary, and porticos surrounding the courtyard. The mosque was also not the only structure which arranged 'a colonnaded courtyard and a covered sanctuary symmetrically about the central axis of the complex' as this plan was also common in the church, the synagogue and the temple (Johns, 1999, p. 69). However, the presence of similarities between components of the mosque and their counterparts in other places of worship should not lead one to view the pre-Islamic structures as the forebears of the mosque as many of these elements did not appear in the mosque until the first century AH and beyond (Ayyad, 2019, p. 37). Furthermore, although the mosque was influenced by local styles to varying extents, it continued to be 'governed in the main by Islamic devotional determinants' (Ayyad, 2019, p. 401), making it abundantly clear that this was an inherently Islamic space that fulfilled distinctly Islamic functions regardless of its appearance and layout. Thus pre-Islamic places of worship certainly influenced the mosque, yet they did not contribute to its origins. Notwithstanding the pre-Islamic influences on the different mosques of the region, the fact remains that a standard template of the mosque regulated the layout of most congregational mosques from at least 703 CE. The mosque of Wāsiṭ built in this year appears to be the earliest archaeological mosque to follow the plan that became the standard layout of the mosque in subsequent years. This is not to say that Wāsiṭ was the first mosque to adhere to this layout for the earlier mosques of Baṣra and Kūfa, rebuilt in the 660s and 670s respectively, may have followed the same model (Johns, 1999, pp. 64-5), however they do not survive archaeologically whereas the mosque of Wāsiṭ does.

As with most topics concerning the early years of Islam, sources which are contemporaneous with the events which they describe are rare and this is certainly the case for the origins of the mosque. This issue has been partially resolved with the aid of archaeology. Yet there remains a significant gap in textual evidence regarding the origins of the mosque as the oldest sources available which discuss the early mosques were written a long time after the construction of the buildings which they

describe. However, there are ways through which this gap can be made smaller. It is a well-known fact that the majority of the Islamic sources are based on chains of authority or *isnād.* Thus, once the date of the written source is replaced by that of the first informant or transmitter upon whom the author of the text was relying, the hiatus between the written source and the events which are described is lessened. Furthermore, these transmitters may also have been informed by yet earlier local authorities who were eyewitnesses or relied upon eyewitnesses. One does still encounter issues with earlier transmitters as they have the tendency to blur the lines between the historical and the mythical in their storytelling, but this is not an insurmountable problem as the abundance of textual sources provides a 'workable framework of inquiry, where cross-checking and examination of incidental detail could lead to significant results' (Ayyad, 2019, pp. 90-1). This kind of evidence is significant to understanding the origins of the mosque as the topic was not deemed important among Islamic traditionists (Johns, 1999, p. 88), which suggests that much of our information on the origins of the mosque derived from incidental evidence.

It is evident that though there are several issues with deducing the origins of the mosque there are also several clues that assist us in understanding its various functions whether they are religious or not. Indeed, the multifunctional nature of the mosque sheds considerable light on the early Islamic period for it fulfilled several functions that could only be served by the mosque at the time. This reflects the central role of the mosque while also illustrating the close interaction between the religious and secular or political realms which seemed to co-exist harmoniously during the early Islamic period and beyond. As a sacred space and a place of worship the mosque must be seen as a hybrid structure as there is evidence of pre-Islamic influences in the fact that the mosque shared certain components with pre-Islamic places of worship. At the same time, the mosque also showcased the innovation of the early Muslims who established the mosque with the liturgical needs of the Muslim community in mind. They may have been influenced by pre-Islamic sacred spaces and the myriad cultures they encountered; however, the Muslims did not duplicate a pre-existent place

of worship rather they created a new one. Among the main reasons for this is that the early Muslims made it a priority to distinguish themselves from the other faiths.

Part of this process was the establishment of houses of worship that differed from those of the pre-Islamic faiths in the region and though there are instances in which pre-Islamic places of worship were transformed into mosques, such cases were relatively rare. The reason being that this would not have sufficiently distinguished the Muslim place of worship from Christian, Jewish, or Zoroastrian spaces. And, on the rare occasion that a pre-existing sacred space was transformed into a Muslim sanctuary, as was the case at Damascus, the resulting structure would not have been mistaken for a pre-Islamic one (Grabar, 2006a, pp. 130-1). Garrison towns did create some semblance of separation between the Muslim minority and the non-Muslim majority, yet not many were established as there were also cases in which existing neighbourhoods were taken over and transformed to meet the community's needs (Gharipour, 2015, p. xviii). Therefore, in these localities the mosque was a fundamental means of separation even if it was located in the very heart of the towns as was the case at Damascus and several other towns in Greater Syria. Thus, the mosque was a complex concept and space, simultaneously functioning as a sacred place of worship, a social and political hub, and as a distinguishing symbol that represented the presence of Islam in initially majority non-Muslim areas. The above discussion has focused on the mosque as a single entity and has shed much light on its origins, however, there is another approach that has the potential to reveal more on the mosque's origins and early development. This approach involves viewing the mosque as an amalgam of numerous features and will be followed in the next section.

5.2: The Features of the Mosque: Islamic origins and potential pre-Islamic influences

The significant lack of archaeological evidence for the earliest mosques, including that of the Prophet, and of the garrison towns of Kūfa and Baṣra, exacerbates the issues one encounters when

seeking to understand the origins of the mosque. It is for this reason that there is no precise mosque that can be deemed as the progenitor of the Islamic mosque nor is there an exact date for the emergence of a prototype for the mosque. These difficulties may indicate that in order to understand the origins of the mosque one needs to view the structure as a combination of different features rather than a single entity. The mosque may initially have been a very simple space but this simplicity did not endure for very long because the mosque developed several different features that soon ascribed to it an aesthetic quality, several of which also had liturgical significance. It is for this reason that the features of the mosque, particularly those which fulfilled a liturgical function, will be analysed in this chapter as such an approach may offer more information on the mosque's origins and the potential influences that may have affected its development.

The hypostyle prayer hall, which featured in the early mosques of Iraq, is one of the elements which came to be an essential component of the mosque. The hypostyle hall is a space which is comprised of a roof that is supported by pillars and it was not a newcomer in the Near and Middle East as it featured in Roman fora, Persian *apadanas*, and Egyptian temples. Yet the Iraqi mosques were not necessarily imitating such structures. It is highly likely that the hypostyle hall served the needs of the early community in the region who required a large space in their newly founded towns (Ettinghausen, et al., 2001, p. 21). There is another issue which arises when one attempts to form a link between the hypostyle structures of Antiquity, particularly the *apadana,* and the hypostyle mosques constructed during the early Islamic period, this is the role which the Arabian Peninsula played. If one were to assert that the hypostyle mosque was first built in Iraq, a link between the *apadana* can be viewed as feasible, however, there are reports that the hypostyle layout appeared in Arabia before it was introduced in Iraq. For example, though there are difficulties with reconstructing the earliest phases of the mosques of Medina and San'a', they seem to have followed the hypostyle layout which consisted of a 'pillared hall with a flat roof resting directly on supports without the intervention of arcades' (Antun, 2016, pp. 44-5). It may therefore be surmised that there were hypostyle mosques in the first few years after the *Hijra* when it was likely to have been reintroduced

for practical reasons. It subsequently featured in the mosques of Kūfa, Baṣra, and Wāsiṭ due to the Muslims' desire to replicate the Prophet's Mosque in Medina for commemorative as well as practical reasons. The prayer hall, or *muṣallā*, did not always have the capacity to accommodate all the worshippers during busy times and this was true for larger congregational mosques as well as smaller ones. In such situations the courtyard of the mosque 'held the overflow of worshippers' from the covered *muṣallā*. This often occurred during Friday prayers as well as festive ones such as those performed on Eid and this was the case for both large and small mosques. The courtyard did not solely fulfil this function as it is among the first spaces one encounters when entering the mosque and its sheer size 'gives the visitor pause and serves notice that he has left the workaday world behind him'. In a similar manner to the atrium in early church architecture, once one enters the courtyard, they are now in the 'sanctuary proper' (Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 55), away from the profane public street and inside the sacred house of worship making the courtyard a demarcating device.

Although the mosque primarily functioned as a place of worship, there are certain features which do not only have religious connotations as their origins imply a more secular descent. One such feature is the *miḥrāb*, one of the most important aspects of the mosque from the early Islamic period to the present day. The *miḥrāb* did not always denote the prayer niche in the mosque and this is made abundantly clear in the Qur'an where the term appears five times. What is significant is that in no case does the term *miḥrāb* in the Qur'an refer specifically to a prayer niche (Serjeant, 1959, p. 439). For example, the term *miḥrāb* occurs in *Sūrat āl-'Imrān* in verse 37: 'Whenever Zakarīyā visited her [Maryam] in the *miḥrāb*, he found food with her' (Qur'an 3:37). In this instance, the term *miḥrāb* appears to denote a room. The fact that, in Arabic, the term had primarily referred to the front part of a house as well as the most respected place within it (al-Azharī, 2001, p. 5:17), sheds considerable light on the *miḥrāb*'s secular and domestic character. On a grander scale, *miḥrāb* was also used in a secular sense to refer to royal buildings (Nöldeke, 1910, pp. 52, n. 3). The other meanings for the term *miḥrāb* which hint at the word being used to describe secular spaces appear in pre- and early Islamic poetry as it is used in reference to the part of a palace where the ruler stood or was seated, a

niche in which an image was placed, and the part of a house where the women resided (Horovitz, 1927, pp. 260-3).

Despite the *miḥrāb*'s secular character, it was also used to indicate a religious area, not necessarily a niche which would develop in the mosque at a later stage, but a religious space, nonetheless. This is reflected in the fact that although the term in the Qur'an does not refer specifically to a prayer niche, it does appear to speak of a chamber for prayer. This is demonstrated in *Sūrat āl-'Imrān* in verse 39, in which Zakārīyya is described as praying in the *miḥrāb*: 'So, the Angels called out to him while he stood praying in the *miḥrāb*, saying: "Allah gives you the good news of Yaḥyā…"' (Qur'an 3:39). The etymology of the term works to highlight the *miḥrāb*'s definition as a place of worship despite the obscure origins of the term. One group of scholars believe the term derives from the Abyssinian term '*mekurab*' which meant a temple, church, or apse in which a saint's statue was placed. In Najran, the Christian community used *mekurab* when describing the apse in the wall of a church (Ayyad, 2019, p. 231). In addition, as the term *mekurab* was used to translate the word *naos*, which means shrine or innermost area of a temple, from Greek evangelical writings, it appears to have originally referred to a sanctuary (Fraenkel, 1886, p. 274). Other scholars, however, refuted the Abyssinian origins of the term stating that the first recorded use of the term *miḥrāb* to mean 'sanctuary' was in the Qur'an and was thus relatively late. Instead some sought an Arabian origin for the term. One scholar, for example, linked the word *miḥrāb* with '*ḥarbah*' which was the spear that was used to symbolize authority in ancient Arabia (Rhodokanakis, 1911). Despite the fact that this link may hint at a political undertone for the *miḥrāb*, a religious connotation can still be maintained for this spear may be echoed in the *'anazah* of the Prophet which he is reported to have used to mark his prayer space and indicate the *qibla.* Notably, although the Prophet used the *'anazah* in prayer it could have simultaneously been perceived as a symbol of his authority in both a religious and a political sense.

Despite the *miḥrāb* not necessarily denoting a niche form during the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period, this soon changed as can be demonstrated by the early mosques that incorporated the

miḥrāb in the shape of a niche. To give one example, the mosques in the Negev Highlands, which are located in settlements dated to between the sixth and eighth centuries based on numismatic finds on the sites, had niches functioning as *miḥrāb*s[13] (Avni, 1994, p. 93). This is highly suggestive of a sixth to eighth century provenance for the mosques with a *miḥrāb* or proto-*miḥrāb*. There have been differing views on why the niche seemed to be the most appropriate form for the *miḥrāb*. Some scholars, such as Jean Sauvaget, claim that though the *miḥrāb* was especially designed for the imam to stand in prayer, it was not an Islamic invention for its origins lie in domestic and palatial architecture (Sauvaget, 2002, p. 138). Others such as Martin Briggs, contest the non-Islamic origin of the *miḥrāb* by claiming that the early Muslims 'were careful not to imitate Christian or other infidel ritual for their worship', therefore it is likely that the niche form was adopted due to its simplicity rather than because it was an established part of a Christian church (Briggs, 1924, p. 59). The popularity of this form in religious architecture is evidenced by the fact that it features in Coptic churches as the *haikal* or main altar and, as the place where the Torah scrolls were kept in synagogues. Although the theories posited above regarding the origins of the *miḥrāb* offer valuable insight on the issue, it remains the case that there is no clear ancestor to the form. This is likely due to the fact that the 'concave nice is both too common and too neutral a form to yield precise, incontrovertible sources of origin, let alone meaning' (Khoury, 1998, p. 2).

Despite evidence that may hint at its introduction in the early mosques of the Negev, the *miḥrāb mujawwaf* or concave *miḥrāb* (Fig. 9) is generally agreed to have appeared first in al-Walīd's reconstruction of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina before featuring in all subsequent mosques (Ettinghausen, et al., 2001, p. 24). This is in spite of the fact that its location within the qibla wall rendered it redundant as an orienting device as the qibla wall in its entirety signalled the correct orientation of prayer. Nevertheless, the *miḥrāb* endured. The enduring nature of the *miḥrāb* and its holy character can be a result of its liturgical role as its location within the *qibla* wall provided a focus for the imam whilst leading the prayers, it also functioned as the *sutrah* for the imam and, through

[13] See, 3.3.

him, the entire congregation. The *sutrah* can be defined as some sort of partition between the worshipper during their prayers and their surroundings and served to emphasise the need for undisturbed focus during prayer. The *miḥrāb* functioned as the *sutrah* of the congregants and their leader but an object would suffice as well. The *'anazah* of the Prophet Muhammad, for example, functioned as his *sutrah.* Therefore, the role of the *miḥrāb* in providing a focus for prayer as well as defining the prayer space of the imam and the worshippers evidently caused the *miḥrāb* to be adopted in all mosques, regardless of their size. The sanctity of the *miḥrāb* clearly has much to do with its connection to prayer, however, the fact that access to it is not restricted may lead some to question its sacred nature. This would be an error as viewing a sacred space as one that is not accessible by the masses is too narrow of a definition, instead one must acknowledge that there are different degrees of sanctity as has been discussed earlier. Thus the *miḥrāb* may not be as holy as other sacred spaces, nevertheless, it remains a sacred space.

The *miḥrāb* also maintained its importance and gained a degree of sanctity due to its commemorative nature as it is one of the ways through which Prophet Muhammad was memorialized. This is illustrated by the fact that the position which the Prophet favoured during his prayers, his *maqām*, was not affected in any way by the reconstructions of his mosque. 'Umar's rebuilding of the mosque involved moving the *qibla* wall further south which resulted in the Prophet's *maqām* being two bays to the north of the new *qibla* wall. At a later date, the *maqām* of the Prophet was given physical form by means of the *miḥrāb mujawwaf*. In this case, the importance of the *miḥrāb* as a commemorative device is accentuated by 'its placement two bays to the east of the main axis of the mosque' which indicates that architectural considerations were a secondary priority, being less important than the process by which the Prophet was commemorated after his death (Whelan, 1986, p. 214). The commemorative nature of the *miḥrāb*, particularly that of the Prophet's Mosque, is further emphasised by the different relics or commemorative features mentioned in various descriptions of the *miḥrāb* following its reconstruction during al-Walīd's caliphate (Flood, 1999, p. 319). One such feature was a piece of onyx which was set in the gold

plating lining the *miḥrāb* which is described by Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih as being the size of a child’s skull. It would be feasible to surmise that this piece of onyx was round, measuring approximately 10-20 centimetres in diameter. (al-Wāqidī, 1966, pp. 3:1021, lines 14-15). According to al-Samhūdī, who was quoting Ibn Zabāla and Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, this piece of onyx was parallel with the space between the eyes of the Prophet while he was standing in prayer (al-Samhūdī, 1869, p. 112). Yet, the *miḥrāb* featured in mosques which certainly had no relics of the Prophet; hence, one may argue that its primary purpose was liturgical (Whelan, 1986, p. 216).

However, relics were not necessarily required to commemorate the Prophet as a notable attribute of his, the prophetic light, was manifested in the *miḥrāb mujawwaf* at Medina based on reports which state that it was a scalloped niche. This form is one that long predates Islam as it has been used extensively as an honorific device and indicator of sanctity, it also became an effective manner of depicting light in religious contexts. This is evidenced by its use in Christian art and architecture in Byzantine Syria and Palestine where it appeared in niches and in depictions of Christ or a saint where a scallop motif appears to float behind their head. This simultaneously signified the individual’s sanctity and acted as a halo ‘by virtue of its shape and the ‘rays’ within it’. Thus, light and the scalloped niche or motif cooperate to create a symbolism that expressed a given individual’s holiness in an aniconic manner and, if the *miḥrāb* of the Prophet’s Mosque, following al-Walīd’s rebuilding, featured a scalloped half-dome it can be surmised that it was a deliberate continuation of the scalloped shell being used to indicate sanctity (Flood, 1999, pp. 353-4). Additionally, with or without the scallop motif, the *miḥrāb* commemorated the Prophet by symbolizing his presence after his death, giving the mosque a commemorative function. The aniconic quality of Islamic art has precluded any figurative representations of the Prophet and has ultimately resulted in the development of a type of non-figurative symbolism related to his person that has often been overlooked by scholars (Whelan, 1986, p. 215). The *miḥrāb* is arguably the most important of these as it marks the Prophet’s role as the leader of his *ummah* or community while also emphasising his status as *imam*.

It is also possible that secular motivations resulted in the *miḥrāb* becoming an essential part of the mosque as it can be interpreted as a 'throne apse transposed into a religious setting', a royal connection that is only intensified by the close proximity of another element with princely associations, the *maqṣūra* (Fig. 10). The textual sources appear to define the *maqṣūra* as an enclosed space surrounded by a screen or a railing (Rogers, 1976, pp. 144-45). It was situated along the *qibla* wall of the mosque, close to the *miḥrāb*, and was where the ruler performed his prayers (Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 49). The *maqṣūra* became fully established during the Umayyad period and spread across the region as demonstrated by the fact that Mu'āwiya had installed a *maqṣūra* at Damascus at the start of his reign as caliph which he enlarged four years later. That a *maqṣūra* was also added to the mosque of Baṣra by Ziyād ibn Abihi, Mu'āwiya's governor in Iraq (al-Balādhurī, 2022, p. 355), suggests that the Umayyad caliph had adopted a policy of 'taking measures to protect the imams in major congregational mosques of *Dār al-Islam*' by encouraging the incorporation of the *maqṣūra* at Damascus, Baṣra and other mosques. This was likely to have been motivated by the attempt on his life in 661 (Whelan, 1986, p. 211). It is also the case that 'Umar was assassinated while in the mosque which may indeed have coloured Mu'āwiya's insistence on the importance of the *maqṣūra.* There were, however, other potential motivations for incorporating a *maqṣūra* in mosques across the Near and Middle East as it provided the ruler with privacy while he performed his prayers. It also provided the ruler with easy access to his residence as demonstrated by the door beside the *maqṣūra* that allowed direct communication between the caliphal palace and the mosque (Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 49). This was the case at Damascus where the palace abutted the congregational mosque and several sources state that there was a dedicated gateway between the caliphal palace, al-Khaḍrā' and the congregational mosque (George, 2021, p. 92). It is, however, clear that while the *maqṣūra* was designed to provide a space for the caliph to pray, its incorporation within several mosques in the Near and Middle East likely had political motives as it did not fulfil a particularly ritual function.

The minbar, on the other hand, did have a liturgical origin and function despite the various theories which claim that it was originally a secular feature. These liturgical origins are reflected in the parallels between the minbar and the *ambo*, the lectern and pulpit found in early medieval churches. The *ambos* of Coptic churches bore the closest resemblance to the *minbar*. Unfortunately, no *minbars* that are of pre-9th century date have survived making it difficult to determine the relationship between the two and whether the former had an effect on the latter or whether this was simply a case of a common artistic language in the Near and Middle East. Despite this historical gap between the Christian *ambo* and the *minbar* there have been attempts to overcome this obstacle. This was done by comparing the earliest datable *minbar*, that of the Great Mosque of Qairawān (Fig. 11), with an *ambo* found in a typical Coptic monastery such as that of Apa Jeremias at Saqqara (Fig. 12), this revealed that there is indeed a similarity in form (Hillenbrand, 1994, pp. 46-8) as both feature steps leading up to an elevated seat. Thus the possibility that the minbar was a descendant or close relative of a Christian pulpit supports the notion that it was initially a liturgical feature that may have had secular functions applied to it at a later stage. The religious significance of the *minbar* is further highlighted by the fact that the *miḥrāb* was not the only feature of the mosque to fulfil a commemorative function as the *minbar* also symbolises the intangible presence of Prophet Muhammad. The connection between the Prophet and the *minbar* derives from the notion that the three-step pulpit that the Prophet mounted when delivering his sermons was the ‘‘embryo’ of the later *minbar’* (Ayyad, 2019, p. 149). However, it is not a matter of the *minbar* simply symbolising the pulpit of the Prophet, for it was the practice of leaving the top of the *minbar* empty and addressing the congregation from the steps below that effectively emphasised the intangible presence of the Prophet, for the top was perceived as his seat alone even after his death (Whelan, 1986, p. 215).

Thus far, the discussion has focused on the key features of the mosque that lie within the structure, yet the features that can be seen from outside the mosque are also important. The minaret is one of these features. A number of different terms have been attributed to the minaret: *sawma’a, manāra,* and *mi’dhana*, these terms are not synonymous but describe a certain aspect of the minaret and

they were used in different contexts. The first of these, *sawma'a*, originally meant a hermitage for a monk or a granary which was most often a square shaped tower. It came to be associated with the minaret following the Umayyad's expansion into North Africa and Spain where minarets took the form of square towers that resembled the hermitages and granaries of the pre-Islamic period (Bloom, 1991, p. 55). The second term, *mi'dhana,* refers to the function of the minaret as the platform from which the Islamic call to prayer, or *adhān*, was recited. As for the last term, *manāra*, which is the root of the English word, minaret, its etymological origins lie in the word *manār* meaning a place that acts as a source of light or *noor* which has no connection to the ritual function of the minaret. However, the term came to apply to the tower of a mosque due to its highly visible nature (Ayyad, 2019, p. 247). Eventually the three terms came to denote a tower attached to a mosque though the latter two appear to be more widely used. The fact that there were three different terms for the minaret may reflect its multiple functions, some of which had a stronger connection to ritual than others.

The function of the minaret and its establishment as a key component of the mosque may have been inspired by the actions of Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, one of the Prophet's earliest Companions as well as his *muezzin,* who recited the call to prayer from a high place near the Mosque of the Prophet. (Briggs, 1924, pp. 21-2). This is supported by Ibn Sa'd who stated that 'Once the Prophet put up [the *ẓulla* of] his mosque, Bilāl used its rooftop to call to prayer; an elevated platform was therein set for him' (Ibn Sa'd, 2001, p. 5:306). This platform was known as an *usṭuwān* or pillar, with some even referring to it using the term *manāra* (Ayyad, 2019, p. 248). Therefore, it is entirely possible that this elevated platform was the forerunner of the minaret and the close connection with the call to prayer is likely to have invested the minaret with a degree of sanctity. There are no precise details regarding when the first minarets appeared, however, there are reports which claim that the mosque of Baṣra had a stone minaret erected in 665 by the Umayyad governor of Baṣra at the time, Ziyād ibn Abihi (al-Balādhurī, 2022, p. 355). This would place the formal introduction of the minaret within the Umayyad period and this is supported by the fact that the Prophet's Mosque at Medina had four

minarets added to its corners by al-Walīd. Furthermore, several traditions report that the minaret first made an appearance in the newly conquered cities of Syria which provides further support for the Umayyad provenance of the minaret. The Syrian influences on the minaret can also be discerned in its shape which may have derived from the 'Roman *temenos* towers of Damascus or from church towers' in the region (Grabar, 2004, p. 268).

Despite the incorporation of the minaret in notable early Islamic mosques such as the Prophet's Mosque, the mosque of Baṣra, and the Great Mosque of Damascus, this feature did not become a common component of the Islamic mosque immediately after its introduction. That only a limited number of cities had erected minarets in their congregational mosques by the ninth century is a testament to this, indicating that the minaret was yet to be viewed as an important element of mosque architecture. However, this had changed by the eleventh century as the number of mosques with minarets had increased across the Near and Middle East which may have been the result of 'the conflation of the idea of a single tower opposite the *qibla* with the multiple towers that had long been associated with the holy shrines of Arabia'. The Prophet's Mosque at Medina had four towers as early as the Umayyad period, and, during the Abbasid period expansion, the *Masjid al-Ḥarām* in Mecca had seven (Bloom, 2013, p. 140). One must be cautious not to paint all minarets with the same brush as in cases when the minaret was of considerable elevation, it would not have effectively carried out the function of calling to prayer as the voice of the *muezzin* was unlikely to reach the faithful. This suggests that the minaret did not always have a liturgical purpose and may indeed have had other functions, this is emphasised by the fact that the minaret also fulfilled a symbolic role especially because it could be seen from a considerable distance. It represented the Islamic faith, more specifically, it represented Islam's presence and its dominance in the newly conquered regions which had a predominantly non-Muslim populace in the early Islamic period (Grabar, 2004, p. 268). There have been assertions to the contrary which argue that the early minarets were likely to have been too small to 'carry much of a propaganda charge' (Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 131). However, in the context of the early Islamic and medieval Near and Middle East in which the elevation of buildings

was unlikely to have been excessive, the minaret would have been visible from a distance. The dome, which later became a feature of the mosque, also served as a symbol of Islam's presence in the region, yet it also served to highlight the *qibla* for, in most cases, it was located directly above the *miḥrāb* and this was important in crowded areas which lacked orienting devices. Ultimately, one may surmise that the minaret as an idea predated the physical minaret, for there was a need for an elevated space from which the *muezzin* could call the faithful to prayer and this act formed the foundation from which the physical minaret emerged. It was when this had occurred that the minaret could fulfil its religious function as well as its symbolic role.

It is clear, therefore, that the features of the mosque in addition to the roles which they play and the context in which they are found shed light on the origins of the mosque, simultaneously highlighting the innovation of the early Islamic architects and patrons as well as the inevitable influence of the cultures which the Muslims encountered. Indeed it has been asserted that the mosque must not be assessed in isolation as the physical and cultural setting in which it is located must be taken into account. As has been alluded to previously, the Mosque of the Prophet was, of course built primarily for worship, yet it also fulfilled several other functions that served the Muslim community, hence it can be understood that the Prophet's Mosque in Medina suited the cultural life of the people for whom it was established but it may not have suited the needs of the Muslims of Damascus or Kūfa; this would have ultimately led to the variation in mosque forms but did not result in substantial changes in meaning. Furthermore, the innovation of the Muslims did not only involve the creation of new forms, rather much of it concerned the reuse of pre-existent models for new purposes that were unique to Islam (Ayyad, 2019, p. 396). There is, however, a key area that must be explored further to achieve a better understanding of the early development of the mosque and its sanctity, namely, the role of prayer and the *qibla* and their sanctifying quality.

5.3: Prayer and the *Qibla*

Although the mosque had a number of functions from the early Islamic period to the present, among the most important is its religious function, namely its role as the Islamic place of worship, wherein prayer, or *ṣalāt*, was performed. This ritual is one that retains a degree of ambiguity regarding its precise origins as despite the fact that the term *ṣalāt* is mentioned in the Qur'an sixty-five times little is known about the origins and development of the sequence of movements and utterances which Islamic prayer is comprised of. Additionally, in cases in which movements have a pre-Islamic history, there is no information about how they were incorporated into the fundamental Islamic ritual of prayer. Indeed, even the term *ṣalāt* was not initially used in reference to Islamic prayer as poetic evidence indicates the terms *du'ā'* and *sujūd*, meaning supplication and prostration respectively were more common during the fledgling years of Islam. One may suggest that because the terms for Islamic prayer were also in use in the pre-Islamic Near and Middle East, the movements themselves were likely to have been part of pagan rituals of the pre-Islamic period (al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 415-16). There are certainly similarities between pre-Islamic and Islamic worship, however, this does not necessarily mean that Islamic *ṣalāt* was pre-Islamic prayer with an Islamic façade. For example, the pre-Islamic practice known as *ṣalāt al-ḍuḥā*, a thanksgiving ritual performed by the Bedouins in the pre-Islamic period is said to have had two main elements, *takbīr,* a declaration that God was great, and *sujūd* (ʻAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʼānī, 1970, pp. 3:79-80, no. 4872). This is significant as these two elements also become a crucial part of Islamic prayer. However, despite these similarities, there is no clear indication that *ṣalāt al-ḍuḥā* had a significant influence on Islamic *ṣalāt*. The origins of *ṣalāt* are clearly difficult to discern as much of its development took place during the ten years between the *Hijra* in 622 and Prophet Muhammad's death in 632. This is problematic for this period is recorded mainly through textual means, be they Traditions or chronicles, and these sources commonly provide more questions than answers for they can be interpreted in many different ways. Documentary

evidence is also, for the most part, compiled and written retrospectively which affects the accuracy of the source (Grabar, 1973, p. 106).

It is, however, abundantly clear that the performance of *ṣalāt* was of considerable importance for it is a key tenet of the Islamic faith which all Muslims are obliged to perform. It must, however, be noted that though *ṣalāt* is primarily an act of worship, it is also an act of sanctification. This is reflected in the various texts which highlight the meritorious aspects of a given region known as *fadā'il* for, among the most popular manners through which an area was praised was through its mosques, more specifically, through the efficacy of prayer in them (von Grunebaum, 1962, pp. 31-2).[14] These traditions indicate that prayer in Islam contributes to the sanctity of the place in which it is performed. This is further demonstrated by the fact that although there are some key features of the mosque, the form it took varied across the Near and Middle East suggesting that it was not the form or the features of the mosque which imbued it with sanctity but the spiritual activities performed within it (Grabar, 2006a, p. 152), the most important of which is prayer. The sanctifying quality of prayer is also indicated by the fact that it brought the worshipper closer to God as reflected in the Qur'anic verse in which God issues the command 'Prostrate yourself and draw near' (Qur'an 96:19).

It is clear that prayer has a sanctifying role in the Near and Middle East, yet it did not only contribute to the creation of sacred space but also had an effect on the very spaces in which it was performed. This is illustrated by the role of prayer in determining the layout of the mosque, a role which manifested in the early years following the conquests once non-Islamic structures of worship were deemed 'inapt to accommodate the Muslim prayer on a regular basis' (Ayyad, 2019, p. 36). This unsuitability of the pre-Islamic places of worship was based on a number of different factors, among the most prominent is their architectural form which did not meet Muslim needs. For example, the fire temples of the Sasanians were not built to accommodate congregations as the ceremonies only

[14] As discussed in 3.2.

involved a limited number of priests while the congregation gathered in the open air. In addition, churches placed an emphasis on depth instead of breadth if they were following the basilical layout, and, in cases when the martyrium layout is being adhered to, it is centrality that is emphasised. This would have made the church unfit for regular Muslim worship as in order to guarantee the synchronization of prayer the mosque placed more architectural emphasis on breadth rather than depth. Synchronization was important to the performance of prayer in Islam as prayer was communal and a lack of synchronization 'would be visually chaotic and might even suggest spiritual discord'. As a result, worshippers were organized in lines that were parallel to the *qibla*, leading to the imam or leader of the prayers, to be widely visible to hundreds of worshippers who could ultimately follow the movements of the imam as they could see him clearly. This is not to say that the imam could be clearly seen by all worshippers in every mosque as in some large mosques this was not possible. Nonetheless, the arrangement of the worshippers in 'long and well-spaced lines close together, did ensure the easy intervisibility of worshippers and thus facilitated precise timing in the movements prescribed for prayer' (Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 36). Thus, though it may be true that the early Muslim architects and patrons were inspired by the pre-Islamic places of worship which they encountered during and after the conquests, the role of *ṣalāt* must also be taken into consideration. Indeed, the obligatory nature of the *ṣalāt* and the various *aḥādīth* concerning the virtue of performing *ṣalāt* in mosques were the 'foremost grounds for erecting mosques and attending them, giving scope for their architectural evolution' (Ayyad, 2019, p. 41). The mosque was also an oriented structure as praying in the direction of the *qibla* was of utmost importance as outlined in the Qur'an and various *aḥādīth* which also illustrates the degree to which rituals, in this case prayer, determined the size and layout of sacred spaces. Another indication of the influence of prayer on the size of the mosque was that the prescribed movements of *ṣalāt* including kneeling and prostration meant that an individual worshipper required approximately 1 x 2 metres of space to perform their prayers (Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 36), and this would have played a key part in ascertaining the size of a mosque.

Despite the role of prayer in sanctifying the mosque and determining its shape and size, there was a further feature that also had a profound impact on the Islamic place of worship, this is the *qibla*. The *qibla*, by virtue of its role in directing the worshippers in the direction of the Ka'ba has a close connection with the Meccan shrine and this imbues it with a degree of sanctity alongside the *miḥrāb* which is one of the physical manifestations of the *qibla*. However, although the *qibla* is of fundamental importance in Islam for it facilitates the performance of prayer, it also functions as a symbol of unity as illustrated by the fact that in the earliest Islamic texts, the Muslim community were known as '*ahl al-qibla*' or 'the People of the *Qibla*' (Hoyland, 1997, p. 560). Thus, the *qibla* is a sign of belonging in addition to one of unity. It has also been described as a spacialization of the Islamic tenet of *tawḥīd* for there is no better representation of the deeply monotheistic nature of Islam than the notion of prayer being conducted around one single place in concentric circles from the Hijaz and beyond (Schimmel, 1991, p. 164). The notion of sacred orientation is not a new one and is certainly not unique to Islam for it has a considerable pre-Islamic history in the Near and Middle East. This is supported by the fact that most of the religious communities in the region had a version of this concept as part of their core beliefs and, in a similar manner to Islam, it had a notable effect on their sacred spaces and rituals. This is reflected in the tendency of the Nabataeans at Petra to align some of their religious monuments towards the highest mountain, Jabal Hārūn. This has been interpreted as an indication that the mountain was the dwelling place of the chief deity of the city, Dushara, which may have contributed to its establishment as the sacred orientation of the Nabataeans (Alpass, 2013, p. 73). This is later paralleled in Judaism and Islam for adherents of both faiths also performed their rituals and prayed in the direction of a locality that has close connections with the divine, Jerusalem and Mecca. For the Jews, Jerusalem was the site of the Solomonic Temple and the initial location of the Ark of the Covenant, and for Muslims it was Mecca, which has the Ka'ba, the House of the Lord, at its heart. Although the *qibla* was initially oriented towards Jerusalem before the Prophet redirected it from Jerusalem to Mecca following a revelation from Allah (Qur'an 2:144). These two sacred orientations have manifested themselves most clearly in the worship of

their respective communities as they are the decisive spatial element that must be maintained for the faithful to carry out their worship in an organized and correct way. This even applies in cases when there is no dedicated building to worship in (Leonhard and Lustraeten, 2015, p. 438).

The importance of orientation in the Near and Middle East is also reflected in the incorporation of the axial peristyle forecourt in religious structures when it had previously been limited to secular and domestic architecture. This architectural feature appeared in religious structures long before the advent of Islam, yet it had a substantial degree of influence on the development of the mosque as a result of the considerable stress it placed on spatial orientation. This architectural plan can be seen in the Dura-Europos synagogue in Syria (Fig. 13) but this was the exception rather than the rule in synagogue architecture, particularly in Palestine as it occurred more regularly and at an earlier stage in the Diaspora. In the cases in which the axial peristyle forecourt was used for synagogues, it occurred in regions where the traditions of Roman public building were strongest (Seager, 1992, pp. 97-8). At about the same time many churches developed a similar layout with an apsidal hall and colonnaded forecourt arranged symmetrically around the direction of prayer along the central axis of the complex. The similarities were so extensive that synagogues and churches arranged in this way could only be distinguished through artefactual evidence (Johns, 1999, p. 98). The Nabataeans also made use of this arrangement in a number of their temples as can be seen in the Ḥawrān in which the temple of Ba'l Shamin at Shi' (Butler, 1907-19, pp. 365-385), and the one at Sur (Butler, 1907-19, pp. 428-30), have a cella that is positioned at the centre of a rectangular peribolos or enclosed court that has an axial peristyle forecourt in its front half. However, due to chronological and geographical distance there is no indication that any of these structures had a direct influence on the development of the mosque. This does not suggest that these structures did not have an influence on Islamic sacred spaces, instead, it illustrates that one cannot discern the ancestor of the mosque because there was no single ancestor. The mosque must be seen as an amalgam of different architectural ideas that were present in the Near and Middle East at the rise of Islam and were subsequently adopted or adapted by the early Muslims. One such architectural concept is evidently

the axial peristyle forecourt, and the fact that all these structures shared this feature indicates that its architectural function is crucial to all these environments of worship, and it is the reason why it endures. Ultimately its importance lies in two key functions, that it acts as a zone of transition between the public street and the sanctuary at the far end of the enclosure, between the profane and the sacred. More importantly, by accentuating the axial symmetry of the spaces, 'the forecourt contributed to the architectural pointers that orientated the congregation towards the direction of prayer' in a similar manner to the courtyard of the mosque (Johns, 1999, pp. 101-2).

It is true that the *miḥrāb* and the *qibla* contribute to the sanctification of the mosque as a result of their close connection with prayer. However, their significance also lies in their role in identifying an Islamic presence in a given locality as they are the clearest indicators that a structure was indeed a mosque. The mosque, particularly during the early Islamic period, was rather difficult to identify as it was initially a relatively simple structure. This was the case due to the fact that the performance of Islamic prayer did not need a distinct architectural feature other than an orienting device that could be a ditch, a wall, or a fence facing Mecca. It is only when the *miḥrāb* was introduced and became a feature of many mosques that one could discern a difference between the mosque and any other structure (Hess and Pringle, 2018, p. 340). The example of the mosque at Jarash effectively demonstrates the crucial identifying role of the *qibla* orientation and the *miḥrāb*. Jarash, also known as Gerasa, was the capital of the south-easternmost district of the province of *Jund* of *al-Urdunn*, located in the north of present-day Jordan (Walmsley and Damgaard, 2005, p. 363). It was the main city of Jordan during the Roman and Byzantine periods (Avni, 2011, p. 312) and had a sizeable Christian population that continued to flourish into the Umayyad period until an earthquake destroyed many of its churches (Walmsley, 2007, p. 86). The significance of the mosque of Jarash was that despite excavations carried out between 1929 and 1934 by the Yale Joint Mission during which the tower in the north-east corner of the mosque as well as its entrance were unearthed, it was not confirmed as a mosque until the *miḥrāb* was identified. This occurred in 2002 and corrected a misconception that the mosque was a guardhouse (Walmsley and Damgaard, 2005, p. 365). What is

also of importance is that two *miḥrāb*s, a large one and a small one, were found in the *qibla* wall, the larger one appeared to have been closed off probably at the same time as the insertion of a new one, 4 meters further to the east. It is yet to be known why there were two *miḥrāb*s, however, the change of *miḥrāb* indicates that the mosque had a long life before its destruction, most likely by natural means. (Walmsley and Damgaard, 2005, p. 370)

In addition to the *miḥrāb* which was likely to have played the most important role in conclusively identifying the structure at Jarash as a mosque, the orientation of the structure most likely made an important contribution as well. This was discerned by an aerial photograph taken in around 1928 for it showed that the building that was later identified as the mosque was deliberately out of alignment with the earlier Roman layout (Fig. 14) (Walmsley and Damgaard, 2005, p. 366). The deviation of the mosque from the Roman city grid is immediately apparent as it is located near to the junction of the two main arteries of the city, the *cardo* and the *decumanos* both of which are uniformly straight as are the other buildings of the city (Avni, 2011, p. 312). The mosque, however, due to the necessity of its orientation towards Mecca does not adhere to the uniformity of the grid and thus, it is clearly an Islamic structure designed for worship. The fact that the mosque deviated, however, was resolved through the addition of a market area alongside the eastern wall of the mosque that conformed to the Roman grid. This meant that though Islam had asserted its presence in the city by way of its mosque and the presence of a mint (Walmsley and Damgaard, 2005, p. 364), the pre-Islamic character of the city remained mostly unchanged until the earthquake that led to the destruction of several churches (Walmsley, 2007, pp. 86-7). Nevertheless, it is clear that the *qibla* played a key role in the identification of the mosque of Jarash and, with the identification of the two *miḥrāb*s within the *qibla* wall of the mosque, it provided incontrovertible evidence for the presence of a mosque at Jarash during the early Islamic period. The above discussion has demonstrated that the mosque, partially due to the *qibla*, the *miḥrāb*, and the performance of prayer within its walls was an inherently sacred space. Though this is true, one must also acknowledge that the mosque, as briefly alluded to previously, had functions that were not entirely grounded in religious matters for it also

had political functions. This is a defining characteristic of the mosque which has pre-Islamic precedents and will thus be the focus of the next section.

5.4: The Convergence of the Political and Religious Spheres

The intertwined nature of politics and religion in the early Islamic period finds physical expression in several sacred spaces, and the mosque is among them. This close connection between the secular and religious realms was not unique to the early Islamic period as the two were difficult to separate in other contexts as well, one example would be the contemporaneous Byzantine Empire where politics and religion co-existed seamlessly. Thus, attempting to forge a distinction between the two would have been considered unnecessary and artificial (Ayyad, 2019, p. 399). This has led some scholars to purport that the mosque cannot be viewed as a sacred space due to its political character which is reflected in its various features such as the *miḥrāb* and the *maqṣūra* which have princely associations. It is also the case that certain mosque types have political and royal associations due to the origins of their architectural form. Though it is true that the architectural form of mosques bears the hallmarks of the secular structures of the pre-Islamic era and some of the rituals that take place within the mosque echo those affiliated with courtly rituals, one cannot ignore the fact that the religious and the secular spheres can co-exist and have done so in the past. This does not negate the political or religious nature of the spaces in which this co-existence can be witnessed as in most cases there is a balance between the two. The Prophet's Mosque is a testament to this for it remained the primary place of worship for the early Muslims while also being the space in which secular matters were administered as the Prophet did not dedicate separate spaces for religious and political affairs. This did not follow the pre-Islamic tradition practiced by the Quraysh in Mecca where the *Dār al-Nadwa*, not the Ka'ba, was the place in which political assemblies took place. What was also unique

about the Prophet's Mosque was the fact that despite its political function, it remained accessible to everyone regardless of their standing in society (Ayyad, 2019, p. 170).

The inseparable nature of the political and spiritual spheres is made abundantly clear in the close physical relationship between the congregational mosque and the caliphal palace or the governor's palace known as the *dār al-imāra*. This 'architectural ensemble of the mosque with the *dār al-imāra* against its *qibla* wall' first appeared in Iraq in the garrison towns of Kūfa and Baṣra, with some historians asserting that it was first attested in Kūfa in 638 CE (Johns, 1999, p. 86). It soon spread to other regions in the Near and Middle East as evidenced by Mu'āwiya himself converting an office of the Byzantine governor of Damascus into a *dār al-imāra,* a structure that happened to be located alongside the *qibla* wall of the *temenos* in front of the Church of St. John, which was used as the congregational mosque by the local Muslim community at the time (Bruning, 2018, p. 50). This close physical proximity between the seat of government and the congregational mosque was likely to have been an attempt to imitate the position of Prophet Muhammad's house vis-à-vis his mosque (Ibn Hishām, 1858-60, pp. 1:79-80). It could be suggested that due to the controversy regarding his ascendancy to the caliphate, Mu'āwiya adopted this architectural ensemble to match that of the Prophet's house and mosque in Medina as a way of legitimizing his rule. It has also been claimed that Mu'āwiya may have intended to build an administrative complex or palace next to the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. This is based on the report that Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, the governor of Medina at the time, was ordered by Mu'āwiya to construct a *balāṭ*, which was later understood to mean an open, paved area, next to the Prophet's Mosque (Ibn Shabba, 1996, pp. 1:14-15). As the word *balāṭ* may derive etymologically from *palatium* in Latin which may be translated as 'palace', the suggestion that Mu'āwiya may have intended to embark on such a project is certainly plausible (Whitcomb, 2007, pp. 18-20). Soon after Mu'āwiya's establishment of the *dār al-imāra* in Damascus, Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān, who was the governor of Baṣra during Mu'āwiya's caliphate relocated the *dār al-imāra* to the *qibla* side of the town's congregational mosque in 665 (Whitcomb, 1994, p. 162). Zīyād subsequently rebuilt the mosque of Kūfa as well as the *dār al-imāra* in the 670s when he was the town's governor,

however, there was no need to relocate the *dār al-imāra* as it appears to have abutted the *qibla* side of the mosque prior to Zīyād's rebuilding. This is significant as it suggests that the practice of placing the *dār al-imāra* on the *qibla* side of the mosque predated Mu'āwiya's reign. This should not come as a surprise as it is highly probable that the notion of the palace or general place of jurisdiction being in close proximity to a religious building appears to have pre-Islamic antecedents. The location of the *Dār al-Nadwa* of the Quraysh in Mecca, which was the place in which the Quraysh settled their affairs, demonstrates this as it was situated on the northern side of the Ka'ba which was also the side of the pre-Islamic *qibla* (Ibn Hishām, 1858-60, pp. 1:80, 83, 323). The close physical relationship between the Ka'ba and the *Dār al-Nadwa* is also highlighted by the fact that Qusayy ibn Kilāb, the founder of the Quraysh tribe, created a door which led from the *Dār al-Nadwa*, that functioned as the political center of the Quraysh as well as Qusayy's residence, to the Ka'ba (al-Ṭabarī, 1879-1901, I, p. 1098; English trans. 1989-2007, 6:24). Thus the concept of the *dār al-imāra* abutting the mosque may have developed from the physical relationship between the *Dār al-Nadwa* and the Ka'ba in Mecca which certain members of the early Muslim elite may have been aware of given the fact that they belonged to prominent families of Quraysh. The door between the *Dār al-Nadwa* and the Ka'ba may even have been the progenitor of the door within or near the *maqṣūra*. The fact that the *Dār al-Nadwa* was also the residence of Qusayy accentuates another parallel with the *dār al-imāra* as the governor or caliph also resided there, it also highlights the notable influence which pre-Islamic Meccan practices had on the architectural relationship between the *dār al-imāra* and the mosque. This was an influence that was still keenly felt after the fall of the Umayyads as the physical proximity between the *dār al-imāra* and the mosque could still be witnessed in Baghdad, or Madīnat al-Salām as it was initially know, under the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754-775), where the caliphs palace, which was situated at the very center of the Round City, was attached to the *qibla* wall of the congregational mosque (Fig. 15) (Johns, 1999, p. 87).

The merging of the political and the religious in the mosque was most apparent in cases when the mosque was used to express power and dominion. There are several ways through which this

occurred, some were more subtle than others. Al-Walīd had the tendency to assert his power through the mosque as indicated by his actions at Damascus which involved the demolition of the cathedral of St John and the erection of a monumental mosque in its place. The Christians were consequently evicted following this 'architectural proclamation' that Umayyad Damascus had eclipsed Byzantine Damascus (Antun, 2016, p. 88). This was a reality that was made explicit in the clear wording of the foundation inscription which states that the caliph 'ordered the construction of this mosque and the destruction of the church that was in it' (al-Mas'ūdī, 1966-79, p. 3:366). Thus, al-Walīd was not only creating a proverbial wound for the Christians of the region, but he was also rubbing salt into this wound by making it clear this was no longer a Christian site, but a Muslim one. Through this action, al-Walīd had upset the balance between the Umayyad ruling elites and the local Christians which had not been upset in such a way before his reign. The establishment of an Islamic structure on the very same ground of a demolished Christian structure was an effective way by which al-Walīd highlighted the triumph of Islam over its predecessors. However, this was not the only way al-Walīd expressed his power in the mosque and this is reflected by the role that spoils of war played in funding the building project for they resulted in 'an influx of surplus income' that was utilized in monumental building projects such as al-Walīd's construction of the Great Mosque of Damascus (George, 2021, p. 342). This can be viewed as another manner through which the mosque became al-Walīd's most effective symbol of power for it emphasised his administrative prowess as well as the substantial financial resources he had access to, resources which were attained as a result of Islamic military triumphs. This expression of power was not only seen through the eyes of the Damascenes due to the fact that those who worked at the site eventually returned to their homelands and spread the news of the mosque's construction far and wide across the Near and Middle East. Several anecdotes even mention that the caliph himself intervened in the construction of the mosque and al-Walīd's panegyrists made sure to accentuate this with their hyperbolic language. For example, Jarīr, one of al-Walīd's court poets forcefully asserted that 'You [al-Walīd] leapt at the Christians – one bound; on landing/ It caused the mountains of Daylam to shake!/ The edifice of the church was razed

by force;/ there was crushing defeat for the slit nosed/ Your Lord showed you, when you broke their cross,/ bright guidance; you knew what we did not' (George, 2021, p. 167)

Despite the fact that al-Walīd was responsible for the expansion and rebuilding of a number of other mosques, the Great Mosque of Damascus was highly symbolic as it was located at the very center of Umayyad caliphal power. Thus, the convergence of the political and religious spheres is made apparent through al-Walīd's use of the mosque as a projection of his political power (George, 2021, pp. 342-3). What is more, al-Walīd is reported to have requested for craftsmen to be sent to him by the Byzantine emperor to help decorate the various mosques he constructed or rebuilt such as the Great Mosque of Damascus and the Prophet's Mosque. This was likely to have had one meaning for the Byzantine emperor and an entirely different one to al-Walīd. The former would have viewed this request and his subsequent acquiescence as an 'imperial act granting the "barbarians" the privileged use of highly technical training which, by its very quality, served to enhance the prestige of the Byzantine emperor' as well as bring the so-called barbarian into the Byzantine sphere of influence (Grabar, 2004, p. 276). In addition it has been suggested that this was a way for al-Walīd to 'learn the ropes' so the Umayyads could present themselves as suitable successors of the Byzantines in lands that had previously been part of the Byzantine Empire (Gibb, 1958, p. 232). Though it may certainly have been the case that al-Walīd's request for Byzantine workmen was partially fuelled by a desire to imitate the Umayyad's imperial predecessors in their new territories, there are signs that al-Walīd was making a political statement by making this request. The reason for this is that the decoration of the Dome of the Rock as well as the Umayyad palaces was of considerable quality however there is no evidence that this was carried out by Byzantine artists sent from Byzantium. In fact, the decorative program of the Great Mosque of Damascus refers specifically to Islamic ideas and was not a conscious attempt to imitate Byzantine models. If workers within the Islamic empire were available and had established Islamic decorative ideas it is feasible to propose that al-Walīd's request symbolized the 'subservience of the Byzantine Emperor, who, like a vassal, must provide his overlord

with artisans' (Grabar, 2004, pp. 276-7). This is yet another way through which al-Walīd emphasised his considerable power by using the mosque as a political tool.

The Great Mosque of Damascus was not the only mosque which al-Walīd was heavily invested in for he also rebuilt and expanded the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. The Great Mosque of Damascus may have been a means of demonstrating al-Walīd's caliphal power to Muslims and non-Muslims alike, however, his expansion of the Prophet's Mosque was likely to have been a way by which he illustrated his power exclusively to his Muslim subjects. This was achieved by enlarging the mosque, adding a few novel features such as a concave *miḥrāb* and four minarets, and incorporating the tomb of the Prophet within the mosque (Munt, 2014, p. 106), a process which took place between 706-7 CE and 709-10 CE (Ibn Rusta, 1892, p. 69). The incorporation of the tomb of the Prophet and its elaboration was likely to have been motivated by a desire for political legitimacy and formed part of the Umayyad programme of commemorating the Prophet which al-Walīd was actively involved in (al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 425). The use of the mosque to project political messages has a long history and it was manifested most clearly during the Umayyad period. This may have been a result of the Umayyads seeking legitimacy through the erection and elaboration of Islam's most significant structure as the Umayyad period was fraught with instability at various intervals. This is evidenced by the fact that the Umayyad caliphate was established as a result of a civil war and also witnessed a second civil war or *fitna* between 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān and the counter-caliph in Mecca 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr. The Umayyads also had no familial ties to the Prophet in the same manner as the Abbasids and the Fatimids did, thus it is certainly credible that they sought legitimacy through building mosques and commemorating the Prophet in said mosques. The mosque was evidently a means through which Umayyad propaganda was disseminated across the Near and Middle East and there were various motivations for this. Such a prominent and important space was evidently the most effective way through which its patrons could project their wealth and conceit, yet the mosque also provided the Muslim populace with a 'source of solace and pride in their own civilization' that

diminished their fascination in the grandeur of non-Muslim places of worship. Thus, the mosque was the architectural manifestation of 'competitive propaganda' (Ayyad, 2019, p. 399).

Mosques were also used by communities and individuals alike to reflect their political allegiances and declare enmity towards others. This is most apparent in 8th century Kūfa where the Twelver or Imami Shi'i Muslims, the larger branch of the Shi'i Muslim sect who sanctified and venerated the eleven male descendants of the Prophet through his daughter Fāṭima and her husband 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, classified mosques as 'blessed' as well as 'accursed' (Haider, 2009, p. 166). The classification of the former mosques as 'blessed' was a result of their sanctity, for example, the Great Mosque of Kūfa was regarded as such due to the fact that it was believed to be the space where all the messengers of God had performed prayers and it was also the 'home to people who would be granted intercession on the Day of Judgement' (Ibn al-Mashhadī, 1998, pp. 125-6). The ample reward a worshipper would earn as a result of praying in a particular mosque also reflected its sanctity. Thus, the performance of a two-cycle or *rak'a* prayer in another of the 'blessed' mosques, *Masjid al-Sahla*, was believed to earn a reward that exceeded two '*umrah* pilgrimages (al-Burāqī, 2003, p. 83), it has even been claimed that doing so would lengthen the supplicant's life by two years (al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1988, p. 26). Contrastingly, the mosques described as 'accursed' by the Imami Shi'is were deemed as such on poltical grounds. Three mosques that were perceived as accursed mosques were affiliated with figures that were reviled by the Imami Shi'i community in Kūfa. For example, *Masjid Jarīr ibn Abd Allah al-Bajali* was connected to a man of the same name who was initially a companion of 'Alī entrusted to deliver a letter to Mu'āwiya, but who secretly pledged his allegiance to the Umayyads and worked for them. There were also mosques in Kūfa that were deemed as 'accursed' mosques as, according to Muhammad al-Bāqir, the fifth Imam of the Shi'is, 'they were renovated … in celebration of the murder of al-Ḥusayn' (Ibn al-Mashhadī, 1998, pp. 118-19). This evidently shows how the mosque was a political tool as despite its primary purpose being the accomodation of prayer, an act that is most effective when performed communally, the mosque unfortunately appeared to have become an arena for the declaration of enmities between co-

religionists. Thus, the mosque was both a political and religious sacred space and it set an example for all subsequent Islamic sacred spaces which were, for the most part, characterized by the fact that they belonged both in the religious realm as well as the secular and poltical realm.

5.5: Concluding remarks

For a sacred space to be viewed as a bridge between the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods one may assume that this would mean the Islamic version was founded upon a pre-Islamic one. In the case of the mosque this is slightly more complex as it did not have a direct ancestor. It is important to be aware that the mosque of today cannot be compared to the mosque of early Islam and one should be cautious not to perceive it in this way. It did not begin life as a structure adorned with domes, minarets, courtyards and porticos, for it was rather rudimentary upon its inception. This meant that the mosque was consistently developing during the early Islamic period and beyond and, as it had emerged in a region with a rich pre-Islamic architectural heritage, it was exposed to a number of influences that contributed to various degrees in its development. This did not erase the Islamic nature of the mosque but gave its pre-Islamic features a new Islamic definition; they may have been pre-Islamic in origin but now had purely Islamic functions. The mosque can thus be understood as the product of pre-Islamic influence and Islamic innovation. However, though the inclusion of pre-Islamic sacred features may have contributed to the holiness of the mosque, it is the performance of prayer within its confines that played the most significant role in sanctifying it. This does not negate the fact that though it was primarily a place of worship, the mosque carried out political functions, however this is not to be perceived as an extraordinary state of affairs as one should not view the religious and political spheres as separate entities for this was not the case during the early Islamic period in the Near and Middle East, nor was it the case in the pre-Islamic period. It must also be noted that this dynamic did not only consist of politics having a greater impact on religion for the reverse was also true. Indeed, in the case of the mosque, and other sacred spaces, religion was

politicised and politics was sanctified (Rabbat, 2015, p. 102). This is demonstrated in the various ways through which al-Walīd sought to legitimize his position through the medium of the mosque, a method that echoed the actions of numerous pre-Islamic and Islamic rulers in the region who used sacred spaces to further their political aims.

Chapter 6

The Mausoleum and the Commemorative Space

6.1: The Mausoleum: Its Origins in the Near and Middle East

Funerary architecture is arguably one of the oldest forms of architecture and has been a feature of the Near and Middle Eastern landscape from time immemorial. This is due to the fact that burial of the dead has been a feature of the region's culture for an extremely long time. Indeed, excluding certain anomalies such as the Zoroastrians' practice of exposing their dead on raised platforms to be picked clean by animals, burial was widely practiced. The Zoroastrian practice was due to the fact that they held the view that corpses 'were thought to pollute the earth by their deadly spiritual infection' (Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 274), yet this was not a widely held view in the Near and Middle East and this can be demonstrated by the proliferation of funerary architecture and burial grounds ranging from antiquity to the Islamic period and beyond. Despite the negative position of the early Muslim theologians towards the mausoleum, which will be discussed later in this chapter,[15] it developed into an important and popular sacred space that significantly altered the landscape of the Near and Middle East. This chapter will explore the development of the mausoleum in an Islamic context, examining the potential influences of the pre-Islamic faiths and the cultures which the Muslims encountered and co-existed with while also exploring why they proliferated in the face of condemnation by certain early Islamic authorities. There are several indications that the pre-Islamic faiths, Christianity and Judaism in particular, had a notable impact on Islamic mausolea, one of which is rooted in the fact that Islam itself did not require a dedicated building for the burial of the dead and the absence of mausolea, in comparison to the numerous other Islamic buildings, during the early centuries of Islam illustrates this. Therefore, when Muslims began to construct mausolea, it is likely that they were inspired by pre-existing models and ideas, much of which were of Christian

[15] See, 6.2.

provenance, which, in turn, were influenced by classical Hellenistic notions and building types (Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 254). Thus, the central argument of this chapter is that pre-Islamic sacred space contributed significantly to the formation of the Islamic mausoleum in the Near and Middle East. An impact that is also reflected in the eventual construction of myriad Islamic mausoleums despite the controversy surrounding their permissibility. This indicates a desire by the Muslims to establish sacred spaces that were already quite prevalent in the Near and Middle East despite their pre-Islamic, and ultimately pagan, origins.

The construction of sepulchres to honour the dead in the Near and Middle East may have originated from a number of different practices, one of which was the placing of stelae known as *nefesh* upon the tomb of a deceased individual (Fig. 16). These have commonly been accepted to have been inhabited by the soul of the dead person and this is implied by the very term *nefesh* which is closely related to the root *n-f-s* or the term *nafs* in Arabic which denotes a soul or spirit of a person be they alive or dead. The term *nefesh* has been traced back to the Hellenistic period and featured in Nabataean, Palmyrene, Ituraean and Edessene funerary structures (al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 244-5). In fact, the concept of the *nefesh* and its expression through stele is likely to have originated from the beliefs of the migratory nomadic tribes that founded the Nabataean kingdom as well as the Ituraeans and others who ventured to Palmyra and lands beyond the Euphrates, all of whom brought their beliefs with them wherever they settled (Gawlikowski, 1982, pp. 302-3). This demonstrates that the practice of giving tombs some kind of monumental form has a long history in the region. Despite the fact that the *nefesh* was relatively small in size in comparison to the monumental tombs that would follow, it signified a starting point that resulted in the establishment and the spread of the monumental tomb.

Burial was evidently of great importance among the peoples of the Near and Middle East for a substantial amount of time and Bronze Age Ugarit, in modern-day Syria, is a clear demonstration of this as some basic features and beliefs are in evidence, most of which can also be discerned in

Nabataean attitudes towards the burial of the dead. The first and most important of these is the belief that the dead were to be treated with respect and care and this is made manifest through the burial of deceased individuals in fine-stone burial chambers which were found beneath what were likely to have been the houses of the deceased or of their family. This importance accorded to tombs is paralleled in a Nabataean context as can be demonstrated by the measures which the Nabataeans took to ensure that tombs were left undisturbed. These included inscribing curses and other threats on graves to deter anyone who intends to disturb the tomb and seems to relate to the 'basic traditional Semitic notions about the importance of proper burial'. Furthermore, the language surrounding burial emphasises the reverential attitude of Near and Middle Eastern peoples towards death and entombment, one example would be the notion that features prominently in later Aramaic texts which described the tomb as an 'eternal home' or *byt ʿlm'* (Healey, 1993, p. 38).

In general, the process of burial was fairly simple and this is apparent in the Arabian Peninsula in Antiquity and Late Antiquity where the degree of elaboration on one's tomb depended on their status and their possession of the means to fund the construction of a monument for themselves. If one possessed sufficient funds a funerary edifice would be built or carved out for them and there was a variety in the forms which these spaces took. In addition, such funerary buildings were not necessarily designed with individual burial in mind as exemplified by the large burial complexes found in Bahrain which date from the late third millennium BCE to the Parthian period (Hoyland, 2001, p. 174). Tower tombs, which are found at Palmyra as well as various sites along the Euphrates such as Dura Europos and Zenobia or Ḥalabiye in Syria (Butcher, 2003, p. 300), are also illustrative of funerary architecture that was designed with collective burial in mind. Those at Palmyra (Fig. 17), which were most likely constructed between the second half of the 1st century BCE and 120 CE, resembled lookout towers with internal staircases and graves at the base. These gradually increased in height as corpses were stacked one on top of the other in loculi which, in the early tombs, were sealed with breakstones and mortar upon which the name of the deceased was inscribed (de Jong, 2017, pp. 288-9). As the rock-cut tombs of Petra and Madā'in Ṣāliḥ attest, tombs were also carved

out of natural features of the landscape such as rock floors, valleys or *wādis*, and cliffsides (Hoyland, 2001, p. 174). However, the monumental tomb did not trigger the veneration of the dead and the belief that tombs were sacred spaces as these beliefs were prevalent prior to the emergence and subsequent spread of the mausoleum in the Near and Middle East. Thus, in order to better understand the development of mausolea into sacred spaces one must first address the holiness of graves and the cemeteries or areas in which they were located.

There is a degree of ambiguity regarding precisely when graves and cemeteries attained a degree of sanctity and became pilgrimage sites. It is clear, however, that this occurred in the pre-Islamic period in the Near and Middle East for the region was the burial place of biblical figures that were objects of pilgrimage for Christians and Jews alike. It has been asserted that the shrine, whether it took the form of a church, a temple, a synagogue or a saint's tomb was the most common type of sacred space found in the region (Munt, 2014, p. 17), this is further supported by the statement that 'Late-Antique Christianity, as it impinged on the outside world, was shrines and relics' (Brown, 1981, p. 12). This continued to be the case as the emergence of Islam did not result in a wholesale erasure of the pre-Islamic past and this is made clear by the veneration of pre-Islamic holy persons by Muslims. This was mostly due to the fact that as Islam was the third of the monotheistic faiths, key figures were venerated by Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The most notable of these figures is Abraham, however, other holy figures such as Ezekiel and Elijah were also venerated by adherents of all three monotheistic faiths (Meri, 1999b, p. 269). The endurance of the sacred nature of pre-Islamic and monotheistic graves is also illustrated by the presence of notable Islamic graves in burial sites that are significant due to their biblical associations. A prime example is Mount Qasiyūn which overlooks Damascus where the 'Cave of Hunger' or *Maghārat al-Jaw'* lies. This cave is reported to have been the burial place of forty prophets or holy men who starved to death in the biblical past yet it is 'marked at its entrance by the graves of two Companions, 'Abdallah ibn Abī Waqqās al-Laythī and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Fārisī' (al-ʿAdawī, 1956, p. 5). This demonstrates that pre-Islamic holy burial sites retained their sanctity despite the origins of said holiness being pre-Islamic in origin, it also

demonstrates the 'seamless continuity … between the age of the Prophets and more recent embodiments of holiness' (Khalek, 2011, p. 125). In addition to biblical sites that have been imbued with sanctity prior to the emergence of Islam, there are also burial sites and cemeteries that attained their sanctity during the early Islamic period and the holiness of such places increased over time as numerous individuals of significance were buried there. Two of the most notable ones are the cemeteries of *Bāb al-Ṣaghīr* in Damascus (Fig. 18) and *Baqīʿ al-Gharqad* in Medina (Fig. 19). These two cemeteries illustrate the inherent sanctity of burial grounds, a sanctity that was inevitably applied to mausolea which were, at their core, burial sites albeit more elaborate ones when compared to their sparser predecessors.

Situated outside the city walls, the *Bāb al-Ṣaghīr* cemetery, which was likely to have been named as such due to its close proximity to a small gate which was among the ancient gates into Damascus (Mulder, 2014, p. 114), was the site of numerous graves belonging to notable figures in early Islamic history.[16] The most important tombs are those of various members of the Prophet Muhammad's family whose burials established the cemetery as 'one designated for important burials at an early stage' (Khalek, 2011, p. 121). One such burial would be that of Sukayna bint al-Ḥusayn, the great-granddaughter of the Prophet (Mulder, 2014, p. 151). The classification of this cemetery as one in which notable figures were buried in the early history of Islam is further emphasised by the fact that several Companions and persons close to the Prophet Muhammad are also understood to have been buried within its grounds. This included Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, three wives of the Prophet, the Companions Faḍāla ibn 'Ubayd and Sahl ibn al-Ḥanẓalīya, both of whom belonged to the *Ansār*, Abu al-Dardā' and his wife and fellow Companion Umm al-Dardā' (al-Harawī, 2004, p. 30). In addition, among the most important burial sites in the *Bāb al-Ṣaghīr* cemetery is that in which the heads of the martyrs of the Battle of Karbalā' are interred excluding the head of al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī and his infant son 'Alī al-Asghar (Mulder, 2014, p. 151).

[16] For a recent work on the history of *Bāb al-Ṣaghīr* and the other gates of Damascus see, Jean-Michel Mouton, Jean-Olivier Guilhot, and Claudine Piaton, *Portes et murailles de Damas de l'Antiqué aux premiers Mamlouks: histoire, architecture, épigraphie* (Beirut: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2018).

The presence of the burial site of the heads of those martyred at Karbalā' is confirmed by medieval sources which speak of a gravesite of the *shuhadā'* or martyrs in the cemetery. Among them is al-Nu'aymi who reports that the grave of the historian Ibn 'Asākir was in the *Bāb al-Ṣaghīr* cemetery 'near the *shuhadā'* (al-Nu'aymī, 1988, p. 2:302). This assertion has provided further confirmation of the presence of the burial site of the heads of the Karbalā' martyrs in the medieval period as one may indeed see the grave of the Damascene historian a few hundred metres to the south of the mausoleum of the *shuhadā'* (Mulder, 2014, p. 152). The burial of the heads of al-Ḥusayn's martyred companions in the cemetery established it as a key pilgrimage site for Shi'i Muslims, indeed, one may argue that the *Bāb al-Ṣaghīr* cemetery was one of the most important sites of Shi'i pilgrimage outside of Karbalā', Najaf and Mashhad. The sanctity of the *Bāb al-Ṣaghīr* cemetery is also rooted in the fact that it marks a vital point in the history and development of Shi'ism as the mausoleum of the heads of the martyrs memorializes the struggle of al-Ḥusayn against the Umayyads, and indirectly that of his brother al-Ḥasan and his father 'Alī, which played a key role in the formulation of Shi'i religious identity and the subsequent propagation of Shi'i Islam. Ultimately, the mausoleum of the Karbalā' martyrs and the graves of other members of the Prophet's family made this cemetery, and on a broader scale, Damascus, a *locus sanctus* for the Shi'a, and to a lesser extent for Sunni Muslims (McGregor, 2020, p. 127). This is demonstrated by its development into a key site of pilgrimage and communal mourning from a very early stage in the Islamic period to the present day.

Another cemetery that has been deemed a sacred space from the years immediately after the *Hijra* to the present day is *Baqī' al-Gharqad* in Medina. The holiness of a number of individuals buried within contributed to the elevation of the cemetery's sanctity in a similar manner to the *Bāb al-Ṣaghīr* cemetery. As with the *Bāb al-Saghīr*, *Baqī' al-Gharqad* is venerated by Sunnis and Shi'is alike as notable figures including some of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad and members of his family, his *ahl al-bayt*, were buried there. That it was held by the tenth century that four of the twelve Imams of Twelver Shi'ism – al-Ḥasan, 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn, Muhammad al-Bāqir, and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq – were buried within *Baqī' al-Gharqad* ensured that it would become an important pilgrimage

site in Medina alongside the Prophet's Mosque. That it is also believed that the Prophet's daughter, Fāṭima, was possibly buried within the cemetery in an unknown and often disputed location serves to further heighten the sacred nature of *Baqīʿ al-Gharqad* (Munt, 2014, p. 126). The holiness attributed to this site is connected to its closeness to the Prophet's Mosque, which was to the southeast of the cemetery, as well as its very location in the city of the Prophet, however this connection between holy cemeteries and shrines is not only visible at Medina. This is demonstrated by the Islamic tendency of burying the dead near holy shrines whether they were mausolea or sites of commemoration. This can be seen as an Islamic counterpart or continuation of the practice of burial *ad sanctos*, which is best translated as burial near the body or the remains of a saint that was widely practiced in Christian contexts in both the west and the east by the fourth century. For example, the parents and elder sister of Gregory of Nyssa, the bishop of Nyssa in Cappadocia in present-day Turkey, were buried in the vicinity of relics of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste who were killed for their adherence to the Christian faith. This was done so that Gregory's family members would, upon the moment of resurrection, be resuscitated alongside these holy men who would advocate on their behalf. It was also believed that this close physical proximity between the martyrs and the deceased was a 'prefiguration of their heavenly being together' (Leemans, 2013, p. 198). These motivations may indeed have been part of the reason why Muslims also sought to be buried near the tombs of holy persons.

The shrine at Bālis in Syria, which was likely dedicated to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (Mulder, 2014, p. 56), is an illustrative example of a shrine being within the vicinity of graves as the team who were excavating there often encountered graves and though some of the graves were not disturbed out of respect, there were instances when the excavation of a grave was unavoidable. The graves did not provide much information regarding dates due to the simple burial practices of Islam which involved the burial of an individual in a white shroud without any grave goods, yet they do shed light on the way this site was used. It is, however, impossible to ascertain whether this site was first a graveyard in which a shrine was erected or whether the shrine predated the graves as both possibilities are

credible. Mulder claims that the possibility of the shrine predating the graves is logically more likely. Yet she does assert that it was also a common occurrence for a shrine to be built within a pre-existing graveyard. The presence of a number of graves below the walls of the *mashhad* or some which were cut into by its foundations provide potential evidence for this being the case at Bālis (Mulder, 2014, pp. 50-1). This nevertheless demonstrates the close relationship between cemeteries and shrines and reflects the growing religious significance of cemeteries which is noted by geographers of the tenth and later centuries whose works make it apparent that considerable 'attention was given to the places where people were buried; and it was a new form of piety to visit cemeteries and tombs' (Grabar, 1966, p. 12). The establishment of the shrine at Bālis in the eleventh century (Mulder, 2014, p. 55), would situate its erection within this period wherein cemeteries became sanctified and hallowed spaces. Thus, the holiness of the mausoleum was rooted in the holiness of notable graves.

The first distinctly Islamic mausoleum was that of Prophet Muhammad which al-Walīd and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz erected above his grave when they incorporated the tomb into the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. This may have been part of the Umayyad effort to memorialise the Prophet through various means across Medina (Munt, 2014, p. 111). However, it also marked the birth of the concept of the Islamic mausoleum which gradually gained traction in an Islamic context and soon proliferated across the Near and Middle East. The erection of monumental tombs and shrines was however subjected to heavy criticism from scholars during the early Islamic period who viewed it as a pre-Islamic practice that could not be allowed to continue, it was even the case that commemorative structures with no funerary associations were found to be objectionable as well. This attitude ranges from relatively moderate prohibitions regarding the use of particular materials to mark graves to the extreme words of figures such as Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj who urged for the levelling of all tombs to the ground (Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj, n.d., p. 3:61). This will be further explored later in this chapter.[17] In spite of the condemnation of the practice by Islamic jurists, Islamic shrines and mausolea proliferated across the

[17] See 6.2.

Near and Middle East. One can argue that this was heavily influenced by the presence of such structures in the region prior to the emergence of Islam as funerary architecture was important to the adherents of other faiths. The tombs of Christian martyrs and saints in Palestine and other areas of the Mediterranean world which had developed into places of veneration and pilgrimage by the end of the fourth century are a testament to the importance of funerary monuments prior to the emergence of Islam in the region. (Wilken, 1996, p. 131). The influence of pre-Islamic practices on the proliferation of Islamic mausolea and shrines in the Near and Middle East is also highlighted by Ignác Goldziher who claimed that the veneration of saints, which often involved the erection of a shrine and subsequent visitations to said site, was initially a pagan practice that adapted to Islamic customs. Goldziher continues by asserting that the veneration of saints in Islam aided people and entire communities of various ethnic backgrounds and geographical localities in the preservation of their own identities following the diffusion of Islam across the Near and Middle East, identities which the 'universalistic and levelling character of Islamic religion has been unable to stamp out' (Goldziher, 1967-71, p. 2:291). This implies that the manner by which Islam spread throughout the region aided the establishment of Islamic mausolea throughout the Near and Middle East.

The endurance of the sanctity of pre-Islamic shrines and mausolea is a testament to Goldziher's assertion as such sites continued to be venerated despite the spread and domination of a new faith in the region. Also, in many instances, the adoption of such spaces by the Muslims and the Islamic reinterpretation of the origins of a given site's sanctity were built upon a pre-existing cult (Talmon-Heller, 2007, p. 188). Thus the vestiges of pre-Islamic cultic tradition in the Islamic practice of saint veneration indicate that pre-Islamic influences made a key contribution to the spread of Islamic mausolea. The lure of pre-Islamic mausolea and shrines to early Muslims was apparent in the early Islamic period with the controversy surrounding the construction of such places dating to the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad who is alleged to have discouraged his Companions from doing so (Meri, 2002, p. 253). Among the reasons for the Prophet's supposed opposition to funerary architecture was his desire to avoid imitating the Jewish and Christian practices of venerating the dead, however,

it was clear, that not all the Muslims heeded the Prophet's words as the veneration of the dead and the erection of three-dimensional funerary art persisted (Leisten, 1990, p. 13). This shows that there was an awareness of Christian and Jewish funerary practices, which included the construction of shrines and mausolea above tombs in the Arabian Peninsula during the early Islamic period and this awareness coincided with a Muslim practice of veneration at tombs. This demonstrates that pre-Islamic practices regarding the establishment of mausolea and other forms of tomb veneration had a profound influence on Islamic customs and rituals pertaining to tombs. Indeed, it has been argued that the Prophet prohibited building monumental tombs in 'reaction to an already existing and widely practiced cult of the dead in the Arab Peninsula that had been found objectionable' (Leisten, 1990, p. 12).

It must be emphasised, however, that the appearance of Islamic funerary structures in the Near and Middle East cannot be attributed solely to pre-Islamic influences. The early view which the Muslims held towards any kind of funerary monument makes it evident that it was unlikely that pre-Islamic funerary architecture in the region would automatically result in the erection of similar monuments by the Muslims. Furthermore, there is very little evidence to suggest that any branch of Islamic art simply took over completed pre-existing forms without changing their shape or meaning. This is emphasised by the early Islamic monuments which are riddled with Byzantine and Sassanian imagery and which follow, to varying extents, Roman and Byzantine methods of construction and decoration but which cannot be described as Byzantine, Roman, or Sassanian monuments. Instead, they are Islamic monuments that reflect the needs of the early Islamic community as 'it is only when a facet of the new Islamic culture developed in a manner which demanded or permitted monumental expression that monuments developed to express it'. Ultimately, one may surmise that the establishment and subsequent spread of Islamic funerary architecture in the region was partially a result of a cultural change within Islamic communities across the Near and Middle East (Grabar, 1966, p. 8). This cultural shift allowed for the proliferation of shrines and mausoleums and, by the medieval period, such structures were viewed, for the most part, in a positive light to the extent that

they became ‘an integral part of devotional life throughout the medieval Near East and North Africa’ (Meri, 2002, p. 256).

This does not negate the fact that such figures as the Ḥanbali theologian, Ibn Mufliḥ viewed the funerary shrine as an innovation or *bid’a* (Ibn Mufliḥ al-Maqdisī, 1982-4, p. 2:272). This condemnation along with the view that Shi'i patronage or Shi’ism in general played a key role in propagating the erection of funerary architecture may lead one into viewing funerary shrines and their visitation as a purely sectarian issue. However, this tendency to view Shi’ism as the ‘prime motivating factor in the genesis of monumental commemorative and funerary architecture in the Islamic world’ is ‘fundamentally misplaced’ (Taylor, 1992, p. 4). This is supported by the fact that there was little specifically Shi'i or Sunni about the veneration of holy figures, the erection of shrines, or making visitations or *ziyāra* to shrines. For example, in the case of shrines dedicated to the descendants of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭima, their diffusion and popularity was not necessarily a sign of the spread of Shi’ism, rather it was an ‘expression of what may best be termed “Alidism”’ – the non-sectarian reverence for the Prophet’s descendants (Bernheimer, 2013, p. 4). The universal quality of these shrines is evidenced by the fact that even after the fall of the Shi'i Fatimids in 1171 (McGregor, 2020, p. 162), their Sunni successors, the Ayyubids, did not efface the numerous shrines their predecessors built. Instead, they built, in the midst of all the Shi'i shrines of the Qārafa cemetery in Cairo, ‘a shrine to a great Sunni teacher and saint, Imam al-Shāfi’ī, which was architecturally, decoratively, and functionally a successor to the Fatimid mausolea’ (Williams, 1985, p. 57).

The considerable increase in Islamic funerary architecture was also the result of the widening of the definition of a saint. The reason for this is that along with mausoleums in which Old Testament prophets and members of Prophet Muhammad’s family and those close to him were entombed, Sufi mystics, notable religious scholars and even secular leaders also mutated into saints and were subsequently venerated at shrines which were constructed over their tombs (Howard-Johnston,

1999, p. 13). These mausoleums did not adopt a singular form as they ranged from cairns, and sacred rocks and pillars to elaborate tomb complexes and were built alongside other types of shrines such as *mashhads* or vision-mausoleums which were often connected to the appearance of a particular holy figure in a dream or vision. These often served as a surrogate for the actual tomb of the saint in question. There was, however, a degree of overlap between the *mashhad* and the *qabr* or tomb, both of which were described using the relatively generic word *mazār* or place of visitation, as there were certain *mashhads* which were founded as a result of a dream or vision but which are believed to contain the remains of saints and were thus viewed as both a *mashhad* and a *qabr* (Meri, 1999b, p. 272). Despite the appearance of a considerable number of Islamic monumental tombs and shrines throughout the Near and Middle East this was still a controversial matter for the veneration of holy figures and visiting their shrines did not fall in line with the strict monotheism of Islam. This persistence of *ziyāra* and saint veneration in Islam was partly due to contradictory views on the topic. This is most clearly illustrated by a *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet in which he is reported to have said 'I previously prohibited you from visiting tombs, now visit them and do not say foul words' (al-Ghazālī, 1993, p. 1:192). What is more, there are a number of *aḥādīth* on this subject that were in circulation by the tenth century which encouraged the practice, these were collectively known as the *'man zāranī'* traditions as they often began with this phrase which translates to 'Whosoever visits me' (Munt, 2014, p. 132). One such *ḥadīth* states that 'Whosoever visits my [Prophet Muhammad] grave after my death, it will be as though he had visited me during my lifetime. Whosoever does not visit me has treated me harshly' (al-Subkī, 2008, pp. 155-7).

A further reason for the proliferation of Islamic mausolea is that a number of these sites were revered by Christians and Jews for they also venerated the entombed individual. Thus such sites were instilled with sanctity prior to the emergence of Islam and were subsequently Islamized following the spread of the religion across the Near and Middle East allowing them to retain their sanctity. One example is the shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel in the south-eastern Iraqi town of al-Kifl which was visited by Jews and Muslims alike as he was venerated by adherents of both faiths. Among

the reasons for the veneration of Ezekiel, also known as Ḥizqīl or Dhu'l-Kifl, and the pilgrimage to his shrine was its sanctity that was founded upon the presence of the holy figure as well as the reputation of the shrine as a place in which supplications were fulfilled and various illnesses were cured (Meri, 2012, p. 22). Similarly, the Cave of the Patriarchs at Hebron became an important Muslim center of pilgrimage, just as it had been and continued to be for Jews and Christians previously, reflecting the importance of Abraham to all three monotheistic faiths. Abraham is not the only holy figure to which members of the three monotheistic faiths made pilgrimage to as the putative grave sites of the pre-Islamic prophets ranging from Adam to Jesus, which were concentrated mainly in Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia, witnessed a significant amount of pilgrim traffic during the Islamic period (Peters, 1986, p. 13). This indicates that the pre-Islamic sanctity of shrines and mausoleums was maintained and even elaborated regardless of the dominant faith in the region, this is partially due to the revered status of the individuals buried within to all three monotheistic faiths.

As a result of the sanctity of mausoleums and their important role in society they soon developed into tools for the display of religio-political agendas. This was the case in both pre-Islamic and Islamic contexts as the inseparable nature of religion and politics characterised Near and Middle Eastern society prior to and after the emergence of Islam and though there were numerous mediums through which this was expressed, architecture is the most visible and arguably the most effective. One example of this is the actions of Constantine in the fourth century CE following his conversion to Christianity (Potter, 2013, p. 1), which were motivated by his desire to propagate his new Christian faith across the lands which he ruled. The erection of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem on Constantine's orders was the epitome of a religio-political move through which the emperor was declaring the triumph of Christianity over paganism while simultaneously demonstrating his imperial power. The churches built by Constantine, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, were particularly effective religio-political symbols as they were no longer situated in inconspicuous locations nor were they hidden behind domestic facades as they were prior to Constantine's

conversion and the state sponsorship of Christianity. Instead, Constantine's churches 'flaunted their important public locations and their great size as badges of the new public legitimacy of Christianity' (Kilde, 2008, p. 40). The importance of location with regards to Constantine's churches is most apparent in the case of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as, in choosing this site as the location for his church, the emperor was deliberately undermining the holiness of the Temple Mount which was consecrated by Solomon while also highlighting the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Furthermore, the fact that prior to the construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the pagan temple built by Hadrian which covered the site of Jesus's tomb was demolished, also served to emphasise the triumph of Christianity over other creeds, namely paganism (Lassner, 2017, p. 157).

Just as Constantine diffused his message concerning the victory of Christianity over previous faiths through the erection of a shrine in which the purported tomb of a holy figure was located so did the early Islamic patrons of mausoleums across the Near and Middle East. This indicates that the Muslims were very much aware of the impact such structures had on the political and religious attitudes of the populace and, as a result, sought to use mausoleums and shrines to further their political and religious aims. One cannot discount the possibility that the early Muslim elite were emulating their non-Muslim counterparts in the new territories by sponsoring the erection of structures such as mausolea to achieve specific aims through acts of piety. A notable example is the tomb of 'Alī, Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. Despite conflicting reports regarding the precise location of the tomb (Peters, 1986, p. 37), it is commonly accepted that the structure which the Abbasid caliph Harūn al-Rashīd commissioned in 786 was the first one to be built over the tomb of 'Alī. However, this structure was torn down and flooded by another Abbasid caliph, al-Mutawakkil, in 850, which was an unusual act for an Abbasid caliph to undertake (Tabbaa and Mervin, 2014, pp. 73-4). This could have been a negative reaction to the ''Alid piety of his predecessors' which resulted in al-Mutawakkil's destruction of another Shi'i sacred mausoleum, that of Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī in Karbalā' (Peters, 1986, p. 37), this may also have been an attempt by the caliph to stop pilgrimages to these two holy sites (Halm, 1996, p. 34). Regardless, the destruction instigated by al-Mutawakkil was soon

rectified by the restoration of the site by numerous different Shi'i dynasties that emerged across Syria and Iraq (Tabbaa and Mervin, 2014, p. 74). For example, the Ḥamdānid ruler of Aleppo and Mosul, Abū'l-Hayjā' (r. 905/6-913/14, 914/15, and 925-929) rebuilt the mausoleum and adorned it with a magnificent *qubba* or dome (Ibn Ḥawqal, 1964, pp. 232, text 240). Though this was an act of piety that was expressed architecturally, Abū'l-Hayjā''s restoration was also grounded in political symbolism (Peters, 1986, p. 37). This is due to the fact that the restoration of a site in which one of the most important figures in Shi'i Islam was buried asserted the presence of a significant Shi'i elite that was flourishing in spite of the dominance of Sunni Islam across the Near and Middle East. The construction, destruction, and restoration of the site of 'Alī's tomb makes it evident that the mausoleum was a sacred site that also functioned as a religio-political battleground for it was often used by caliphs and local rulers to make their religious and political stances abundantly clear. The political character of mausolea and shrines is reflected in the fact that many of the early Sunni shrines in the region were built in response to the significant growth of similar Shi'i structures. The Sunni shrines were mostly dedicated to notable scholars, Companions of the Prophet, and Old Testament prophets who are of considerable importance in Islam such as Abraham and Solomon (Sourdel-Thomine, 1952-4, p. 65ff). To give one example, upon conquering Aleppo, the first act undertaken by the Seljuq Turks was the establishment of a sanctuary to Abraham in the city in order to counterbalance the Shi'i shrine that predated this structure (Sauvaget, 1941, p. 124ff). Although it is true that the establishment of Sunni mausolea was triggered by the spread of their Shi'i counterparts, this cannot be true for all Sunni shrines as many of these structures were erected for other reasons and some were even older sanctuaries that had been taken over and Islamized such as those in which biblical prophets were entombed (Grabar, 1966, p. 39).

The mausoleum or shrine was, however, not always a site that symbolised sectarian, and ultimately political, division. The 'Alid shrines of Syria demonstrate this as they were unique among the dizzying array of shrines and mausolea that dotted the Near and Middle Eastern landscape due to the fact that they had such a broad appeal, being visited by Sunnis and Shi'is alike. The main reason for their

unique nature is that there are no other shrines that are ‘so easily infused with specifically Islamic meaning as these ‘‘Alid holy sites’ and the universality of their sanctity ascribed to them a unifying character that cannot be discerned in any other type of mausoleum in the region (Mulder, 2014, p. 261). One may argue that the mausoleum of Prophet Muhammad was also unifying for he was the most important holy figure in Islam, yet the fact that the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, are buried in the same enclosure may have caused some tension among the Shi’is who claimed that these caliphs usurped the caliphate from ‘Alī (Sonn, 2016, p. 31). The unifying character of the ‘Alid sites of Syria prompted the local elite, be they Sunni or Shi'i, to patronise them in order to promote their own ideological and political agendas. The degree to which this occurred is highlighted by the survival of these shrines in Syria despite the fact that Shi’ism was, for the most part, a minority sect in the region. Ultimately, the endurance of these shrines testifies to the ‘intersectarian quality of devotion to the ‘Alids’ (Mulder, 2014, pp. 261-2) and also emphasises the fact that the mausoleum or the shrine in the Near and Middle East was an effective means of religio-political expression. This ongoing patronage of mausoleums in the Near and Middle East does shed light on the social, political, and religious importance of said structures. However, this is also why one encounters difficulty when attempting to trace the architectural and artistic origins of mausoleums and shrines as the constant elaboration and expansion of these structures from their construction to the present day has almost erased any traces of the original structure. However, whether there are no traces of the original building or that some of the early structure remains, mausolea are notoriously difficult to excavate, thus it is difficult to discern the original form of the structure as well as what its key features were when it was initially built. Furthermore, many of these sites remain important pilgrimage centers to this day and as a result archaeological excavations were deemed to be unacceptable. Indeed, the shrine’s status as an important center of devotion means that even if archaeological excavation was possible, these sites would not remain static long enough for such investigations to be undertaken effectively (Mulder, 2014, p. 21).

6.2: Funerary architecture: licit or illicit?

As has been previously alluded to, the issue of funerary architecture in Islam was a controversial one as notable Muslim authorities vocally opposed the construction of mausolea and shrines in an effort to maintain the strict monotheism of Islam. Ibn Taymīya was the most prominent figure who strongly opposed the erection of funerary shrines and visitations to them for he asserted that such practices were heretical innovations (Ibn Taymīya, 1991, p. 27:151). This, however, does not mean that there was unanimity on the subject among the early scholars. Indeed amidst the prohibitions regarding the erection of funerary architecture there were also numerous contradictions and exceptions that blurred the lines between prohibition and acceptance. It is no surprise, therefore, that despite an early resistance to the establishment of Islamic mausolea in adherence to the views of the early authorities, eventually Islamic mausolea and shrines did start to appear across the Near and Middle East in great numbers. Yet this did not mean that this occurred without opposition, it simply meant that there were two opposing strands of thought on the matter. One side had no issues with the erection of mausolea and the performance of rituals therein, while the other took issue with this. These divergent strands remain with us to this day and have been the cause of massive destruction as the case of the levelling of monumental tombs by the Saudi/Wahābī state and the shocked and despairing response of the global community shows (Willis, 2017, p. 362). This process began in the al-Ḥasā province of Saudi Arabia in which shrines were destroyed and sacred trees were uprooted (Petersen, 2020, p. 210). This was followed by the destruction of the shrines in the *Jannat al-Mu'alā* cemetery in Mecca once the city was in Saudi hands following its conquest in 1804 (Fig. 20). This is a cemetery in which the graves of prominent early figures in Islam are located including Khadīja, the first wife of the Prophet, and Abū Ṭālib, his paternal uncle. The destructive attitude of the Wahābī state reached its zenith in 1926 with the destruction of the mausoleums in the *Baqī' al-Gharqad* cemetery in Medina. This was a particularly holy place as it was the burial site of numerous holy figures such as the grandson of the Prophet and the second *Imam* of Shi'ism, al-Ḥasan as well as 'Alī

Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, Muhammad al-Bāqir, and Ja’far al-Sadiq, the fourth, fifth, and sixth *Imams*. It was also where several of the Prophet’s wives were buried as well as his uncle al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (Willis, 2017, p. 362). This chapter will explore the origins of this antagonistic view of funerary monuments and why they were built in spite of this with particular attention given to primary Islamic sources.

Prior to exploring the reason for the endurance of the Islamic funerary monument in the Near and Middle East one must familiarize oneself with the various interdictions against such action. There are many interdictions thus, for the sake of conciseness, this chapter will discuss a limited number of them, however, as several of them cover the same issues this is not a significant hindrance. Among the main reasons for why early Islamic jurists opposed the erection of funerary monuments is that they viewed them as symbols of idolatry and this did not adhere to the monotheism of Islam and the Islamic tendency towards aniconism. These views were grounded in the *aḥādīth* which were either attributed to the Prophet or to his Companions and their followers, the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābi’ūn*. However, as aforementioned these views were not entirely in agreement but were presented side by side resulting in much confusion on the topic for they often cancelled each other out (Leisten, 1990, pp. 12-13). This effort to prevent idolatrous tendencies is reflected in the saying attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in which he ordered that any tomb one encounters must be levelled and any funerary statue one encounters must be destroyed as this was what the Prophet would have commanded (al-Sijistānī, 2009, pp. 5:124-5). Such statements were supported by a number of interdictions against funerary monuments which stress the avoidance of using lime mortar and brick on top of the grave, building a structure or place of worship on top of the grave, as well as marking graves or attaching an inscription to them (Ibn Mājah, 1372/1952, p. 1:498). The close link between idolatry and the funerary monument that resulted in these prohibitions is rooted in the cult of ancestors that was prevalent in the pre-Islamic Near and Middle East that deified the dead. This is clarified by Ibn Qudāma who asserted that ‘the beginning of idolatry was the veneration of the dead’ (Ibn Qudāma, 1981, p. 2:508). Thus, in addition to maintaining the monotheism of Islam, it may be suggested that

the early theologians opposed funerary architecture, or indeed any type of grave marker, to differentiate their faith from its polytheistic predecessors in the region.

However, these prohibitions were relatively vague as, initially, they did not specify what structures were forbidden and whether there were exceptions. These regulations only became more precise at a later stage when specific kinds of tomb structures were mentioned in arguments against funerary monuments. This suggests that the negative attitude towards mausolea in an Islamic context was triggered by the proliferation of this type throughout the Near and Middle East to the consternation of the orthodox theologians. What is more, although several of these scholars based their views on *aḥādīth* generally attributed to the Prophet and the early Muslims, these *aḥādīth* do not belong to the group of traditions that were transmitted by all *ḥadīth* collectors from the beginning. What causes further confusion with regards to funerary architecture is its classification changing from *ḥarām* (prohibited) to *makrūh* (disapproved off but not prohibited) which is a weaker admonition (Leisten, 1990, p. 16). It is best described as a deed for which a person will not be condemned but for which they will be praised for avoiding (Abū Zahra, n.d., p. 45). This emphasises the lack of unanimity regarding funerary monuments which, one can argue, played a key role in the subsequent establishment and spread of Islamic mausolea. The shift from absolute prohibition to disapproval also contributed to this.

Yet, the structure which had the most significant effect on the creation and proliferation of the Islamic mausoleum and commemorative shrine is the Prophet's Mosque, in which the tomb of the Prophet was located. The reason being that he was initially buried in one of the rooms of his house, and although this space was eventually absorbed into the mosque it remains the case that the Prophet was buried in a *bayt*, a one-room house that was commonly used for burial. This is significant as the *bayt* was a built structure above a grave which the early jurists strongly opposed, however, the most important tomb in Islam appeared to run counter to such views (Leisten, 1990, p. 17). There were attempts to justify the Prophet's burial in a built structure by highlighting his

unmatched holiness. For example, according to al-Ghumārī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, the zealous opponent to funerary monuments and their veneration, claimed that 'the burial of the Prophet took place in a building because it was an appropriate privilege for him by virtue of his exceptional position' (al-Ghumari, ca. 1925, p. 5). Such an assertion, however, cannot be upheld as the caliphs Abū Bakr and 'Umar were later buried with the Prophet and thus his unique position was not the reason for his burial in a built structure. Although there were numerous suggestions for the Prophet's burial site the *bayt* was chosen as Abū Bakr referred to the Prophet's own words by saying 'No Prophet died who had not been buried where he died' (Ibn Hisham, 1858-60, p. 1:1019). Furthermore, there are also sources which claim that the Prophet had already announced the location of his grave during his lifetime as reflected in the well known tradition in which he states that 'The space that lies between my grave and the *minbar* belongs to the gardens of paradise'. This located his tomb in the structure of either a *bayt* of his or his mosque where his *minbar* was located which suggests that he did not object to the location of his, or indeed any Muslim's, grave being inside a built structure (Ibn Ḥazm, 1974, p. 5:133). Thus, the authority to whom several opponents of mausolea turned when justifying their views was himself buried in a funerary structure that was only embellished further as the Prophet's Mosque expanded and incorporated the tomb. It is, therefore, evident that the desire to emulate the Prophet, and possibly also the early caliphs coupled with the confusing and contradictory state of the regulations concerning funerary architecture allowed for the emergence and abundance of the Islamic mausoleum.

6.3: Commemorative space: its origins and the roots of its sanctity in the Near and Middle East

In comparison to the mausoleum, the commemorative monument or site does not have a tomb as its focal point for it is designed to memorialise notable events, sacred objects, as well as sacred figures without the need for their bodily remains. Despite this, the mausoleum can be defined as a type of commemorative monument due to the fact that the construction of a mausoleum, its subsequent expansion and elaboration, and the pilgrimages to it can all be defined as processes of memorialisation. Thus, it is important to note that all mausolea can be defined as commemorative monuments, however, not all commemorative monuments are mausoleums as there is a wide array of sites of memory that are not wholly dedicated to the tomb of a notable sacred individual. To give one example of a space that has both funerary and commemorative characteristics one need look no further than the Prophet's Mosque at Medina which functioned as a mosque, a tomb complex, and a site that accommodated sites of commemoration such as the 'standing place' or *maqām* of the Angel Gabriel and the *minbar* of the Prophet (Munt, 2014, p. 96). However, these features were not solely responsible for the commemorative quality of the Prophet's Mosque as the mosque in and of itself can be understood as an architectural symbol of the Prophet. This is highlighted by the fact that the 'memorial, symbolic, and functional properties of the original structure became assimilated with the collective consciousness of the growing Islamic nation', this, in turn pointed to the memory of the Prophet Muhammad as the founder of this very nation. The commemorative nature of the Mosque of the Prophet is also highlighted by the subsequent attempts at imitating its layout and structure which were architectural expressions of the Islamic *ummah's* 'yearning to recapture the Golden Age of the Prophet' (Rabbat, 2002, p. 59).

Sites of commemoration were not always given architectural form, yet, in most cases man-made structures were erected over such spaces in the Near and Middle East prior to and following the

emergence of Islam and many terms were used for such constructions that described their various functions as well as their architectural form. For example, commemorative sites may be referred to as *qubūr,* or tombs (Mulder, 2014, p. 263), reflecting one of the most common functions of sites of commemoration (Grabar, 1966, p. 7). Furthermore, commemorative sacred spaces were also called *mashhads* or 'places of the witnessing of significant events' as well as *maqāms* that can be defined in a variety of different ways. Though the term *maqām* can allude to a built structure, it can also refer to a 'station' of a holy person that is manifested as a relatively simple marker. For example, though there was no unanimity regarding what the term *Maqām Ibrāhīm* denoted with some arguing that it refers to the whole Meccan *ḥaram*, the most prevalent opinion was that the *maqām* referenced the stone within the Meccan *ḥaram* that features the imprints of Abraham's feet (Kister, 1971, pp. 478-9). In a similar manner to the precise meaning of the term, there is no unanimity regarding why Abraham chose to step onto this stone and thus sanctify it. One theory puts forward that Abraham stepped onto this stone while he was building the Ka'ba alongside his son Ishmael and the walls of the structure became too high for Abraham which led to him mounting the *maqām* (al-Zarkashī, 1385 H/1965, p. 207). Another tradition purports that Abraham mounted the *maqām* to summon people to perform the *Hajj* once he had finished building the Ka'ba (al-Ṭabarī, 1879-1901, I, p. 287; English trans. 1989-2007, 2:80).

Despite there being no consensus regarding the circumstances surrounding Abraham's mounting of the *maqām*, the station is venerated by all Muslims as reflected in the numerous traditions that stressed the efficacy of prayers at the *maqām* asserting that one who performs the *ṭawāf* or circumambulation of the Ka'ba, and then prays at the *maqām* would have all his sins forgiven (al-Suyūṭī, 1318 H/1900, p. 120). Additionally, though the root of the *maqām's* sanctity is the Abrahamic connection, the sanctity of the *maqām* was also linked to Prophet Muhammad for it was reported that the size of the footprints on the *maqām* corresponded directly to the size of the Prophet's feet. This link is further emphasised by the traditions which point out that the *maqām* was used as a *qibla* by both Prophet Muhammad and Abraham for Abraham did not only mount the *maqām* but also

used it as his *qibla,* praying at the stone while facing the door of the Ka'ba (al-Suyūṭī, 1318 H/1900, p. 1:119), similarly Prophet Muhammad is said to have prayed behind the *maqām* when he circumambulated the Ka'ba (Ibn Ḥazm, 1966, pp. 83-4). The terms discussed thus far describe the *function* of the Islamic commemorative structure, however, there is a further term used to describe such spaces that is rooted in the *architecture* of sites of memory and that is *qubbah* or dome. The reason for this is that although the dome graced many pre-Islamic and Islamic structures, it 'was the hallmark of shrines' (Meri, 2002, p. 18). This variation in the names of commemorative structures and sites mirrors the considerable variety of reasons for why such structures were erected. It is also the case that some structures fulfilled several memorial functions, simultaneously commemorating a number of holy figures while also commemorating future eschatological events. An example of such a site would be The Great Mosque of Damascus for, according to Islamic tradition, the eastern minaret of the mosque would be the place where Jesus would descend at the End of Days (Ibn Jubayr, 1907, p. 282; English trans. 1952, p. 295) to lead the forces that will assemble there against the Antichrist or *Dajjāl* in order to prepare for the arrival of the *Mahdī* (Talmon-Heller, 2007, p. 55). Additionally, the mosque also contains a number of relics such as the head of John the Baptist or Yaḥyā ibn Zakarīyā (al-Harawī, 2004, p. 32) making it a site in which the holy figures of the past were commemorated alongside the future arrival of holy figures and the eschatological events they will partake in.

As is the case with mausolea, the great number of commemorative sites in the Near and Middle East during the early Islamic period had a notable impact on the subsequent diffusion of distinctly Islamic sites of commemoration. The Dome of the Rock, which will be the focal point of this chapter, was erected in the midst of several sites of memory that were of great importance to their respective communities. This included the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem which memorialized the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The impact of this monument on the erection of the Dome of the Rock is reflected in the words of the Jerusalemite historian, al-Muqaddasī, in his assertion that ''Abd al-Malik, seeing the greatness of the dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and its

splendour, fearing lest it should beguile the hearts of the Muslims, hence erected, above the Rock, the dome you now see there' (al-Muqaddasī, 1906, p. 159). This shows that among the motivations for the erection of the Dome of the Rock was the need to compete with the other faiths of the region which had stamped their presence in the landscape before the rise of Islam. Though a central monument, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was not the only commemorative space that may have contributed to the emergence of the Dome of the Rock as other sites of memory were located close by. This included the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives which marked the site from which Jesus ascended to heaven after his resurrection. A further monument was the Kathisma Church located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem which, in a similar manner to the Dome of the Rock, was built to house a sacred rock, in this case, it was the alleged space where the pregnant Virgin Mary rested on her way to Bethlehem. It is significant that in addition to potentially influencing the concept of an Islamic site of commemoration, the Rotunda of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Church of the Ascension (Fig. 21), and the Kathisma Church (Fig. 22) may also have influenced the form of the Dome of the Rock (Fig. 23) for all four monuments are octagonal (Grabar, 2006c, pp. 98-9).

The Dome of the Rock hosts a considerable number of memories of pre-Islamic and Islamic origin due to its location on the Temple Mount. The reasons for why the Marwānid caliph 'Abd al-Malik erected the Dome of the Rock have yet to be universally agreed upon. Some have suggested that his desire to assert his power and to divert the annual pilgrimage from Mecca to Jerusalem as a response to the Zubayrid revolt headed by 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca were his primary motivations (Lassner, 2012, pp. 227-8). This theory has been put forward by several scholars in the past, yet it is a weak theory that has several flaws including the fact that pilgrims at Mecca do not enter the Ka'ba during the *ṭawāf* whereas pilgrims would have had to enter the Dome of the Rock to circumambulate the *Ṣakhra* (Fig. 24). A further flaw relates to the the size of the structure, for despite the presence of ambulatories that may be viewed as a way through which *ṭawāf* was encouraged, they are too narrow to accomodate pilgrims in great numbers (Lassner, 2017, p. 158).

An alternative notion that is arguably more credible is that the erection of the Dome of the Rock was an architectural manifestation of 'Abd al-Malik's attempt to rival and eventually replace the key Christian structures in Jerusalem, namely the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Peters, 1996b, pp. 48-9). The Rock which the Dome shelters does, however, imply that the octagonal shrine was purposely constructed on that spot suggesting that the Rock was of considerable significance. More importantly, the Rock's holiness was pre-Islamic in origin, for though it was eventually linked with the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey which is the subject of the first *ayah* or verse of *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (Qur'an 17:1), it does not appear to have been the original reason for the erection of the Dome of the Rock. The reason for this is that the Rock was imbued with myriad pre-Islamic associations that were well-known during the early Umayyad period, the most prominent of which was the associations with Abraham as attested to by Islamic works of exegesis and the 'stories of the Prophets' or *'qiṣaṣ al-'anbīyā'.* This association stems from the belief that the site of the Dome of the Rock was also the site of the binding of Isaac and the divine intervention that prevented Abraham from sacrificing him (Peters, 1996b, p. 49). This episode involved God testing Abraham by commanding him to take his son, Isaac, to 'the land of Moriah', which can be equated to the area of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and 'offer him there as a burnt offering' (Genesis 22:1-2). Then when Abraham was preparing to sacrifice Isaac, and the latter had laid down upon the altar, God, having accepted that Abraham feared Him, stopped him from carrying out the sacrifice of Isaac by presenting a ram to be sacrificed instead (Genesis 22:4-13). This story is mirrored in the Qur'an in *Sūrat aṣ-Ṣāffāt* in which Abraham is described as having had a vision in which he is slaughtering his son and said son, upon being informed of the vision, says to his father that he should do as he is commanded. Then when preparing to deal the fatal blow, Abraham is stopped by a voice and presented with an alternate sacrifice for he had 'fulfilled the vision' (Qur'an 37:102-7). The Qur'anic version of the story provides less information when compared to its Judaeo-Christian counterpart as evidenced by the ambiguity surrounding Abraham's vision and what led to him viewing it as a vision that needed to be fulfilled. The fact that the name of the son is not mentioned in the Qur'an serves

to illustrate this vagueness even further, although in Islam there is a tendency to believe that it was Ishmael, and not Isaac who Abraham was ordered to sacrifice. This is not to say that there is full consensus among scholars of Islam on the identity of the son in the story of Abraham's sacrifice as there are those who maintain that it was Isaac while there are those who disagree and claim that it was Ishmael. It may be suggested that the latter view is more credible as almost immediately after the verses on the sacrifice, Abraham is informed of the birth of Isaac (Qur'an 37:112) making it clear that Ishmael was the son who was involved in the sacrifice narrative (al-Ṭabarī, 1879-1901, I, pp. 298; English trans. 1989-2007, 2:88). Nonetheless, in Judaeo-Christian belief, Isaac was the son who Abraham was ordered to sacrifice and thus the occurrence of this aborted sacrifice on the site of the Dome of the Rock sanctified this space and although this was primarily a Judaeo-Christian holiness, it may have mutated into an Islamic holiness during the Umayyad era. This is not unusual as Islamic perceptions of the holy were coloured to varying extents by pre-existing Jewish and Christian beliefs.

Thus, the association of the spot atop the Temple Mount with Abraham was likely to have formed the basis for 'Abd al-Malik's motivations for the construction of the Dome of the Rock, an association that may have been known to the Muslims from a very early stage. Indeed, it has been argued that 'at the time of the conquest, it is only through the person of Abraham that the ancient symbolism of the Rock could have been adapted to the new faith' as there was no other symbol that was of great Islamic significance which could have been affiliated with the Rock at such an early date (Grabar, 2005, p. 19). The relatively late emergence of the link between the Dome of the Rock and the Prophet's Night Journey suggests that the Abrahamic associations of the Rock were the most prominent until the Muslim community and their leaders became confident in their 'own independent religious identity'. It is only when this had occurred that the connection between the Rock and the Night Journey became widely accepted and gained popularity (Peters, 1986, p. 95). Ultimately, it is evident that the Dome of the Rock did not only commemorate a single event, rather it memorialised several events and was linked to different figures which only served to enhance the sanctity of the site.

Monumental shrines were not, however, the only manner through which the presence of a holy individual or key event was memorialized as some commemorative sites were manifested through such features as gates and relatively small open-air structures. There is an abundance of such sites with a long monotheistic history and the Temple Mount illustrates this clearly for it is the location of sites associated with David such as the Dome of the Chain which was believed to be where David had hung the chain that could only be reached by the innocent. Furthermore, the Gate of Mercy leading to the Temple Mount is the alleged site 'where God had accepted David's repentance'. The Temple Mount also features *miḥrāb*s, identified with Mary and Zakarīyā (Bloom, 1996, p. 214). This space also memorializes the figure of Solomon as it was he who built the First Temple on the site. These figures are of profound, yet varying, importance to the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam giving the Temple Mount a universally sacred character.

The prevalence of commemorative sites across the Near and Middle East in both the pre-Islamic and Islamic period, and the eventual Islamization of a considerable number of pre-Islamic comemmorative shrines is an indication of the importance of such spaces. It may be the case that due to their role as sites or containers of religious memories, commemorative shrines or objects allow a community to preserve its identity, highlighting where they came from and also what they are becoming (Nora, 1996, p. 12). Thus, such sites point to a given community's past and future and this is certainly the case for the religious communities of the Near and Middle East. In addition to being receptacles of memory, commemorative shrines were important due to their pan-religious appeal which is reflected in the 'persistence and continuity of these shrines from Christianity (and sometimes from Judaism) to Islam, as well as from Shi'ism to Sunnism' which demonstrated that they were institutions which stood outside the 'legalistic divisions of high religion' (Tabbaa, 1997, p. 105). Thus, it is clear that a pious desire to memorialize a sacred event, relic, or person resulted in the creation of Islamic commemorative spaces and this was influenced to a great extent by the pre-Islamic faiths and their respective sites of memory. However, political motivations also contributed significantly to the creation and spread of many commemorative sites.

As previously discussed, political motivations were often coupled with pious ones in the pre-Islamic and Islamic Near and Middle East.[18] Like the mosque and the funerary shrine, the commemorative site embodies the intertwined nature of politics and religion. The most illustrative example of this is the Dome of the Rock as it clearly expressed a religio-political message and motive. This is reflected in the way by which the Dome of the Rock was used to legitimize the leadership of ‘Abd al-Malik. The decoration of the Dome of the Rock and its very location on the Temple Mount are the clearest indicators of this. ‘Abd al-Malik’s desire to legitimize Islamic, and Umayyad, rule over Jerusalem and the surrounding regions was likely to have been fuelled by a series of factors including the threat posed by co-religionists such as the Zubayrids as well as non-Muslim rivals such as the Byzantine empire, which despite suffering defeats at the hands of the Muslims, remained ‘a serious threat to Muslim rule’. In addition, the Byzantines used rich Christian visual imagery which appealed to the former Christians who had converted to Islam and this prompted ‘Abd al-Malik to employ decorative motifs that would not only appeal to the Muslims who may have been enthralled by the striking imagery of the pre-Islamic structures in Jerusalem, but also the recently converted Jews and Christians as well as those who did not convert (Lassner, 2017, p. 151). Thus, the jewel and crown motifs that adorn the interior of the Dome of the Rock are reminisicent of the imperial regalia of the Sassanids and the Byzantines and can therefore be argued to symbolize the ‘victory of Islam over its Christian and Sasanian antagonists’. Furthermore, the vegetal and floriate decoration that also features in the decoration of the structure can also be understood as an expression of power as it alludes to an idyllic landscape, evoking an image of an ‘idealized complete world ruled over by Muslims’ (Grabar, 2004, p. 274). It can thus be concluded that the decoration of the Dome of the Rock was effective in providing the Muslims and the Umayyad dynasts with the legitimacy they sought, however, the location of the structure was equally as important in simultaenously declaring the triumph of Islam and legitimizing Islamic dominion in the region.

[18] See 5.4.

The location of the structure on the site of the Solomonic temple has prompted scholars such as Priscilla Soucek to convincingly argue that attributes of the Dome of the Rock merged with the memories of the Temple of Solomon, a house of worship which was not only revered by Jews but also by the Muslims who venerated its memory as a great religious structure associated with the figure of Solomon (Soucek, 1976). Muslims revered Solomon as he numbered among the prophets venerated in Islam. This is demonstrated by the Qur'anic references to him as he appears twice 'in lists enumerating different prophets' (Janssens, 2013, p. 242) such as verse 4 in *Sūrat al-Nisā'*: 'Indeed, We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], as We have revealed to Noah and the prophets after him. And We have revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the Descendants, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the book [of Psalms] (Qur'an 4:163). It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that the revered status of Solomon to Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike was utilized by 'Abd al-Malik to legitimize his kingship following an unstable period which was characterized by challenges to his right to rule. Thus, Solomon's establishment of the Temple on Mount Moriah, and the subsequent establishment of the Dome of the Rock on the same site by 'Abd al-Malik can be perceived as an attempt by the Umayyad caliph to declare himself as the heir to Solomon (Lassner, 2017, p. 160), who, along with his father David was viewed as the ideal king (Fowden, 2002, p. 17). Just as 'Abd al-Malik used decorative motifs that had a wide appeal; by building on the site of Solomon's Temple, he was evoking the memory of a holy figure that also had a wide appeal. Additionally, it has been suggested that by doing this 'Abd al-Malik was not only depicting himself as the successor of Solomon for he was also presenting the Dome of the Rock as the successor of the Solomonic Temple (Shani, 1999). Ultimately, the erection of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount served to accentuate the legitimacy of Umayyad and Islamic rule in Jerusalem and the wider conquered territories through a connection with the ideal prophet-king, Solomon while also functioning as a remarkably visual symbol of Islamic triumphalism. It can, therefore, be concluded that along with pious motivations, Islamic commemorative monuments

emerged and diffused across the Near and Middle East due to political competition and a desire for legitimacy

The inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock also indicate the political motive for the erection of the monument as though they are Qur'anic inscriptions their inclusion in the decorative programme of the Dome of the Rock, a monument that is conceived as a symbol of 'the superiority and the victory of Islam', implies that said verses were chosen for their political undertones (Grabar, 2005, pp. 40-1). For example, the inscriptions which assert the unicity of God and his various attributes can be viewed as an attack on the Christian concept of the Trinity which was condemned by Muslims 'for its implicit associationism' (Healey, 2001, p. 84). This is made explicitly clear in the inscription which states 'Do not say "three" … for indeed God is one God' (Qur'an 4:171) (Khalek, 2011, p. 95). The fact that the first part of the Islamic confession of God's unity or the *shahāda,* featured in the inscription a total of nine times (Neuwirth, 1996, pp. 491, n. 79) also makes it clear that deliberate stress was placed on the pure monotheism of Islam in order to distinguish it from and condemn the monotheism of Christianity which had the concept of the Trinity at its heart. The inscriptions that adorn the interior of the Dome of the Rock also issue a condemnation of the view that Jesus was the son of God, or that God could beget or be begotten through the incorporation of the entirety of *Sūrat al-Ikhlās* which stresses the onenness of Allah (Qur'an 112) in addition to a verse from *Sūrat al-Isrā'* which instructs the reader to 'Say praise to God who begets no son and has no partner in ruling and no protector from degradation' (Qu'ran 17:111).

The verses from *Sūrat Maryam* that feature in the inscriptions decorating the inner faces of the arches in the interior of the structure go on to emphasise that 'Jesus, son of Mary, is only the messenger of God' (Qu'ran 4:171). Interspersed among all these verses which can be understood to have been rebuttals of the Trinity are assertions of Muhammad's status as the messenger of God and as the intercessor for the faithful on the Day of Resurrection (Lassner, 2017, p. 173). Despite the inscription including a strong condemnation of the key Christian doctrinal concept of the Trinity

which is heavy with religio-political meaning, verse 19 from *Sūrat āl-'Imrān* which features in the Dome of the Rock's interior inscription is the most explicit expression of the superiority of Islam over its predecessors. It asserts that 'Islam is the religion formulated by God. Those [people] to whom the [revealed] Book had been given did not differ until they received the revelation [*al-'Ilm*] and became envious of one another. Whoever denies the [manifest] signs of God will face him who swiftly called [deniers] to account (Qur'an 3:19). Here, as Oleg Grabar stated, the inscription is carrying out a missionary role by urging non-Muslims to submit to the new and final 'religion formulated by God', at the same time, this inscription asserted the superiority and 'the strength of the new state and the faith based upon it' (Grabar, 2005, p. 37). The inscriptions decorating the interior of the Dome of the Rock ultimately portray the monument as the visual signifier of Islam's ascendance in Jerusalem, a land that was previously ruled by Christians, whose presence was by no means erased from the landscape. However, due to the fact that the inscription was inside the Dome of the Rock, it is likely that it was aimed at the Muslims who frequented the structure serving to cement their faith and dissuade any wavering Muslims from conversion to Christianity (Fowden, 2002, pp. 142-3). Regardless of whether the Christians saw the inscriptions for themselves, the adornment of an unavoidable monument in the heart of the Christian east with inscriptions explictly challenging key Christian beliefs is a clear example of a Muslim caliph making his religio-political stance abundantly clear through the medium of commemorative space (Khalek, 2011, p. 95)

Though there is much that the Dome of the Rock can shed light on with regards to potential influences and motives that resulted in its erection, and, indeed the erection of many other commemorative sites, one must be aware that a full understanding of the monument is beyond our grasp and this is unlikely to change. This is due to the dearth of contemporaneous Umayyad texts and the resulting dependency on Abbasid period texts which may have been coloured by anti-Umayyad views thus contributing to our distorted comprehension of the monument. A further difficulty that one faces is that the meanings associated with the Dome of the Rock, the Temple Mount, and even Jerusalem have not remained unchanged since the early Islamic period and this has

much to do with the region's violent and politically fraught history (Rabbat, 1989, p. 13). Regardless, the Dome of the Rock, as a monument can be classed as a source in and of itself and it reveals much on the commemorative monument in the Near and Middle East and how it was embraced by Islam.

Thus far, the structures that have been discussed have demonstrated that there are Islamic commemorative sites that are multifunctional in the sense that they memorialize a considerable number of events and persons. It is, however, the case that most Islamic commemorative spaces were founded as a result of a limited number of factors. Among the most common reasons for the founding of commemorative structures is the historical presence, at some point in time, of a sacred figure. This has led to the erection of commemorative shrines across the Near and Middle East which, in some cases, had a considerable impact on the city in which said structures were located. This is the case for medieval Aleppo which had a rich commemorative history that 'drew on the deep cultural and spiritual associations of specific locations in the city' and on the numerous holy figures which defined the pious history of Aleppo. This close connection between notable holy figures and the city is highlighted by the considerable number of commemorative sites associated with such individuals. An example of such a site would be the Great Mosque of Aleppo which, in a similar manner to the Great Mosque of Damascus, contained a shrine dedicated to Yaḥyā ibn Zakarīyā (Tabbaa, 1997, p. 25). This suggests that the mosque once contained the head of the martyred saint or a part of his skull. The presence of such a relic would certainly be a sufficient reason for the establishment of a shrine and the subsequent enhancement of the mosque's holiness, however, there is a further sacred association that adds to the holiness of the site as this relic was kept in *Maqām Ibrāhīm* which was the alleged spot where Abraham used to milk his flock. Thus the believed presence of Abraham and Yaḥyā served to establish and enhance the holiness of the shrine within the mosque, ultimately increasing the sanctity of the mosque itself (Talmon-Heller, 2007, p. 56). In addition to Abraham and Yaḥyā, the citadel of Aleppo memorialized other holy figures whose shrines were situated at different gates leading into the citadel. The shrine of al-Khiḍr is, for example, housed by Bāb al-Naṣr (Herzfeld, 1954-6, p. 31), and Bāb al-Maqām was the location of the shrine of al-

Arba'īn or the Forty Martyrs (Herzfeld, 1954-6, p. 18). The placement of these shrines suggests that they carried out a protective function that benefited the city of Aleppo as well as the citadel at its center, 'as if the city's sacred history stood in its defense in times of crisis' (Tabbaa, 1997, p. 26).

6.4: Holy figures and their role in the development of mausolea and commemorative sites

The cult surrounding holy figures played a pivotal role in the construction of commemorative shrines and mausolea of the Near and Middle East, and this was the case in pre- and early Islamic contexts. This process can be viewed as a continuation of the cult of saints which is defined by the veneration of saints and pilgrimage to sites associated with them and which has been an element of religious life in the Near and Middle East from Antiquity. The considerable history of the cult of saints in the region is not unusual as the three Abrahamic faiths emerged here and it is here that figures who are prominent to all three religions lived their lives and where many were buried thus marking the landscape with their holy presence. The ultimate result of this was the erection of many sites of veneration in the Near and Middle East associated with holy figures. This was also aided by the fact that a shrine dedicated to a holy figure did not necessarily require a relic or tomb to be deemed sacred. The cult of saints and its prevalence in the Near and Middle East can thus be held responsible for the spread of shrines across the region. The cult was primarily founded on the belief that men had a numinous quality about them whether they were alive or dead. This belief found expression in the notion of deified rulers, however, of far greater potency was the idea of the holy man as a source of sanctity through their role as representatives of God on earth. The cult of saints was very much site-oriented and this has ultimately resulted in the proliferation of shrines connected to holy figures since at least the third century during which the Christian martyrs started to be venerated (Peters, 1986, pp. 10-11). Christian martyrs who had died for their faith did not only become saints in the

religious sense but also became political saints and the same can be said for the heroes of early Islam, some of whom were also martyred. This ultimately resulted in the development of a concept of political sainthood in Islam that has been vital to the development of holy cities that centre on a shrine of a political saint such as Najaf, the holy city of ʻAlī. The allure of political saints was also ‘always ripe for revival in new political contexts’ (Peters, 1986, p. 142) and, as a result, also contributed to the continued patronage of commemorative and funerary shrines in the Near and Middle East. The fact that it was not necessary for a shrine to contain corporeal relics also rendered the region fertile ground for the establishment of shrines and their subsequent multiplication and the holiness of a great number of figures to Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike has also allowed for their cults and their shrines to endure (Meri, 2015, p. 505).

Saints and holy figures can be understood as mediators between humankind and the divine[19] and the cult of saints appears to have satisfied ‘within a monotheistic religion, a polytheistic need to fill the enormous gap between men and their god’ (Goldziher, 1967-71, p. 2:259). This may suggest that the cult of saints, despite becoming a key feature of the religious life of the Christians, Jews, and Muslims of the Near and Middle East, had roots in polytheistic religion, this is, however, far too simplistic of a view. It may be difficult to accurately describe the manner through which pre-Islamic rituals of veneration were incorporated into the rituals of Islam both by new converts and by Muslims who were influenced by their surroundings. Yet it is equally difficult to accept the simple assertion that rituals of veneration, many of which were common to all the prominent faiths in the Near and Middle East, were specifically pagan, Jewish, Muslim, or Christian. Indeed, the multi-faith nature of Middle Eastern society prior to and following the emergence of Islam made it so that similarities between the rituals of the different religions was not out of the ordinary. It can even be argued that ritual practices that are intrinsic to saint veneration were fundamental features of Middle Eastern religion in general (Meri, 1999b, pp. 264-5).

[19] See 3.2.

Therefore, although Islam originated in the Hijaz, the milieu in which it developed lay primarily beyond the region and this led to an encounter with the other faiths in the wider Near and Middle East wherein the veneration of holy figures had a considerable history. The fact that many of these figures were also prominent in the Islamic tradition meant that Islam inherited their cults thus contributing to the development of a distinctly Islamic form of saint veneration which ultimately influenced the way through which the Prophet and his family were memorialized by both Sunnis and Shi'is (Tabbaa, 1997, p. 106). The main site at which the Prophet was venerated was at the *Masjid al-Nabawī,* the Prophet's Mosque in Medina in which his tomb lies. This was, however, not the only place where the Prophet was memorialized as a series of sites which can be dubbed 'secondary' shrines appeared throughout Medina and Mecca which functioned as commemorative sites dedicated to the Prophet, his family, and his associates. An example of such a site was the house of the Prophet's wife Khadīja which became his house once they married, here their daughter Fāṭima was born as well as her sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. The Prophet's birthplace was also visited by pilgrims in addition to the houses of the early caliphs (Peters, 1986, pp. 141-2). The various sites in which significant moments in the Prophet's life occurred also belong to the category of secondary shrines as they all derive their holiness from the Prophet whose 'primary' shrine was located within their vicinity. Such places included *Masjid al-Jum'a,* where the Prophet led the first Friday prayer after arriving in Medina (al-Maṭarī, 1997, pp. 112-13) as well as *Masjid al-Qiblatayn* where it is believed that God commanded the Prophet to change the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca (Ibn al-Najjār, 1995, p. 190).

Though these mosques were notable in their own right due to the pivotal moments they witnessed, their holiness increased due to their affiliation with the Prophet. These are, of course, only two examples of secondary shrines associated with the Prophet, they do however demonstrate that a connection with a holy figure was sufficient enough to sanctify sites. Although the Prophet's veneration at a vast array of sites across Medina was not often a subject of controversy due to his universally hallowed status among Muslims this was not the case for other notable Islamic figures

whose ‘veneration divided along historical and doctrinal lines’ primarily due to the fact that Sunnis and Shi’is did not venerate the same figures, for the Shi’a did not venerate the first three caliphs who are accused of usurping the caliphate from ‘Alī in the same way that Sunnis do, if at all. Similarly, the Sunnis do not venerate the Shi'i imams in the same manner the Shi’is do (Meri, 1999b, p. 270). This also contributed to the proliferation of commemorative and funerary shrines in the Near and Middle East as the doctrinal divide was expressed architecturally through the erection of monuments that were distinctly Shi'i and Sunni, allowing for a new type of sectarian monument to emerge. This section has primarily focused on sacred spaces that did not require the presence of a physical object related to a holy figure to be instilled with sanctity. There are, however, numerous shrines which were established and were sanctified as a result of a tangible object as will be discussed in the coming section.

6.5: Relics and their sacred significance

Relics have been of profound importance in the Near and Middle East in both the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods and the evidence for this is available in abundance. This includes the extensive number of shrines dedicated to the housing of relics but also in the different roles which relics played in society and politics due to the holiness of the individual associated with them. Prior to proceeding to a detailed discussion on the subject of relics it is important to discern the precise meaning of the term which is commonly defined as a bodily part of a sacred individual or an object associated with them that is rendered sacred through this association. Relics were evidently of great significance to Christians as demonstrated by the various manners through which they were venerated in Christian contexts which also coloured Islamic attitudes towards relics. For example, in a Christian context, there were priests who translated the efficaciousness of relics to devotees, similarly, in an Islamic context there did eventually emerge a class of Muslim scholars who were responsible for the

protection of relics primarily by limiting access to them. A further similarity lies in the way relics were highly sought after to such an extent that a competition for relics developed among Christian and Muslim religious authorities. This competition for the possession of relics was founded upon a series of factors, the most prominent ones being that relics played a vital role in the consecration of space while also functioning as symbols of dynastic legitimacy and wisdom (Meri, 2010, p. 100). It must, however, be brought to attention that the cult of relics in an Islamic context did not emerge in the earliest years of Islam. However, due to the veneration of relics becoming a key part of popular religion, in later centuries 'people introduced the public recognition of the veneration of relics into the mosques in many parts of the Muslim world' (Goldziher, 1967-71, p. 2:322).

This acknowledgment of the sanctity and efficaciousness of relics by Muslims in the Near and Middle East ultimately resulted in the proliferation of relics and the construction of shrines to contain them whether they were independent structures or shrines within larger complexes. Al-Shām was a repository of a great number of relics connected to the Prophet and other holy figures and by the Ayyubid period the cult of relics was practiced openly in the region. This was manifested in the display of relics in spaces that had a long monotheistic history such as the Great Mosque of Damascus which was said to have contained a piece of stone from which Moses drew water during the Exodus (al-Harawī, 2004, pp. 34-5), in addition to the skull of Yaḥyā ibn Zakarīyā (Talmon-Heller, 2007, p. 55). Relics were also the impetus for the construction of religious buildings such as mosques as indicated by the *Masjid al-Qadam*, or Mosque of the Foot, in Damascus which was named as such for it contained and exhibited a footprint of Moses (Wheeler, 2006, p. 88). Though the presence of relics contributed to increasing the holiness of localities and mosques, the presence of relics in a given place was by no means permanent as many relics, by their very nature, were portable and the aforementioned competition regarding the possession of relics meant that they travelled far and wide. The example of the skull of Yaḥyā ibn Zakarīyā may illustrate this as Christian sources attest to the relic's presence in Emesa or Ḥimṣ in Syria as made abundantly clear in the writings of the Piacenza pilgrim who claimed that when he journeyed to Emesa he saw 'the head of John the Baptist

in a glass jar … and adored it' (Stewart and William Wilson, 1887, p. 36). The Muslim sources on the other hand firmly located the relic in Damascus within the Congregational Mosque (Ibn Jubayr, 1907, p. 273; English trans. 1952, p. 284). This may be an indication of the portability of the relic, but may also allude to the practice of duplicating relics which was not an uncommon practice. In Christian contexts, the fragmentation of relics was even seen as an inevitability that was not condemned but insisted upon as this 'is cast as a natural act that envisions the relics as a sort of sustenance' that nourished vast swathes of land through their very presence (Hahn, 2010, p. 295). Thus, the portable nature of relics is perceived as a natural occurrence in the realm of Christian saint veneration and relics were made portable primarily through the dismemberment of saints (Bartlett, 2013, p. 242). In Islam, on the other hand, a cult of bodily relics that was on a similar scale to the Christian cult, did not arise as Islam placed significant stress on the inviolability of human remains and the sanctity of the human body which must be treated in a dignified manner (Meri, 2010, p. 98). Additionally, in Islam, bodily remains of holy figures, are, for the most part, invisible and untouchable, whereas in Christianity they are often visible and even touchable (Collinet, Parsapajouh, and Boivin, 2020, p. 191). It is also the case that by the 11th century CE, it was a common belief that the Prophet Muhammad was 'understood as a conscious being who … is aware of the pious invocations, the personal greetings, and the hopes and fears of individual believers'. It was even believed that he accepted, acknowledged and reciprocated the efforts of his devotees (Katz, 2010, p. 148). A similar belief also applied to other members of the Prophet's family (Collinet, Parsapajouh, and Boivin, 2020, pp. 191-2) in addition to notable early Muslim figures such as the martyrs of the Battle of Uḥud (al-Bayhaqi, 1988, pp. 3:307-9) that took place in 625 CE between the early Muslims and the tribe of Quraysh and their allies. Therefore this belief in the holy dead having a degree of consciousness and awareness, in addition to the inviolable nature of the human body after death, means that the notion of disturbing the entombed holy individual was abhorrent. Even from a Christian point of view the disturbance of a tomb was viewed as a 'kind of violation' (Bartlett, 2013, p. 284) despite the considerable number of saints' relics that were distributed and venerated throughout the Christian

world. Thus, the differences in the handling of bodily relics indicates that though pre-Islamic practices regarding the veneration of relics influenced the Islamic practice, there are points at which this tradition diverged from the Muslim one.

However, while bodily relics are such a rarity in Islam there are certain cases when the remains of a holy figure result in the establishment of sacred spaces. One notable example is the blood of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʻAlī, the third *Imam* of Twelver Shi'ism and the grandson of the Prophet, which dropped from his decapitated head at various points during its journey from Karbalā' in present day Iraq to the caliphal palace in Damascus. These drops of blood consecrated the land by being absorbed into it (Reiter, 2017, p. 229), and this was manifested physically at a later stage by the establishment of shrines in al-Ḥusayn's honour on these sites (McGregor, 2020, p. 153). Though the notion of blood having sanctifying properties may seem unusual as the spilling of it in pre-Islamic Arabia during sacred months and within holy sanctuaries was taboo, the blood of saints and martyrs was an exception for it sanctified rather than desecrated space (Talmon-Heller, 2020, pp. 228-9). However, in this case the holy blood was not physically preserved in the same manner as other relics, corporeal or non-corporeal, were. Nevertheless, this shows that several shrines can be established as a result of the journey of one deceased holy individual's remains. Regardless of the manner through which relics were translated the sanctity of the relics remained with them wherever they were taken and this allowed for the 'successful implementation of their cult in their new abodes' (Talmon-Heller, 2007, p. 56). This does not indicate that the original locations of relics lost their sanctity which was rooted in the presence of the relics, instead it implies that several places can be rendered sacred as a result of a past or present affiliation with a single relic. The ultimate result of this is the sanctification of numerous localities as 'the burial site becomes holy by virtue of the presence of the holy relic' (Sindawi, 2010, p. 270) and this could be a past burial site or a present one.

Although relics tend to be small and easily transportable, there are those which are not portable due to their size, in such cases a structure is designed solely to act as its reliquary. The Dome of the Rock

is a prime example of this, as though the dome has led to some misconceptions resulting in the incorrect categorization of the Dome of the Rock as a mosque, it bears the hallmarks of a reliquary, albeit a monumental one that is entirely dedicated to sheltering the Rock (Grabar, 2005, p. 20). Though it may be true that shrines that contain relics function as reliquaries on a grand scale, they are not only receptacles of sacred objects for they are also repositories of *baraka* or 'blessings' which permeate said objects. *Baraka* can be understood as an 'innate force' which saints and holy figures, both living and dead possessed. This was an idea that was perpetuated in different ways, one of which was through recounting a holy person's miracles which simultaneously affirmed the individual's God-given *baraka* during his lifetime and announced that one could access this *baraka* after the holy individual's death by seeking him out at his shrine (Rapp, 1999, p. 65). Relics including garments, hair and nail clippings of saints and holy persons as well as the sites within which they are kept and displayed also possessed *baraka* (Meri, 1999a, p. 46). It was a force which was sought after by Muslims throughout the Near and Middle East and was transmitted to them through relics in a variety of different ways. To give one example, *baraka* was obtained through sensory means that often involves touching, kissing, and embracing a relic or even the container of the relic (Meri, 1999a, p. 63). This is supported by Ibn Jubayr's account of the sensory veneration of devotees that he witnessed during a visit to the shrine of the head of al-Ḥusayn in Cairo. Here, he 'observed men kissing the blessed tomb, surrounding it, throwing themselves upon it, smoothing with their hands the Kiswah [covering] that was over it, moving round it in a surging throng' (Ibn Jubayr, 1907, p. 46; English trans. 1952, p. 37). However, touch was not always necessary as indicated by Ibn Jubayr's reference to those devotees who moved around it, possibly circumambulating it, as this motion was also believed to be a manner through which *baraka* was acquired (Ayoub, 1999, p. 111).

There are parallels to such a process of seeking blessings through the senses in Christian and Jewish contexts in the medieval period and this was centred on the desire to be cured of ailments as 'religious intervention was thought by virtually all patients to be just as effective as a humour-balancing herb'. Hence, individuals would visit shrines to see and come into contact with the revered

relics within. Some devotees even went to great heights by crawling beneath saints' caskets and sleeping there in an attempt to engender the sympathies of the revered individual as well as God who could come to their aid (Hartnell, 2019, pp. 23-4). Similarly, in an Islamic context, *baraka* was transmitted to devotees through the act of pilgrimage to shrines wherein they rubbed, kissed, lay on and spent the night in the presence of relics. The traveller, al-Harawī, reports that there was such a shrine in an Aleppan village named *Burāq* which attracted the chronically ill who would either be offered a cure or somebody would take and rub their hands against the shrine after which the individual would be miraculously cured (al-Harawī, 2004, p. 14). Through these visitations pilgrims were not only seeking and being guaranteed cures but also emotional stability, relief, and prosperity (Meri, 1999a, p. 47). In addition to seeking miraculous cures, shrines containing relics proliferated as they became places in which a faithful individual could get closer to God through contact with objects and relics that have been imbued with divine blessing as it is understood by all that God is the ultimate source of *baraka* (Meri, 1999a, p. 65). It is for this reason that Muslim and Jewish shrines were described by contemporaries to have featured large tomb slabs on their floors which pilgrims could kneel down and kiss (Hartnell, 2019, p. 75). There were less sensory manners through which *baraka* could be obtained and which did not require pilgrimage to a shrine such as the attainment of knowledge from a saint, or through possessing relics associated with a saint, but *baraka* was most commonly accessed at shrines through sensory contact.

It was, however, not only pilgrims who sought and obtained *baraka* as the *baraka* in relics was viewed as an effective way for dynasts to further their legitimacy and their religious authority. The use of relics in this way took on a number of different forms with some political leaders deriving their legitimacy through possession of sacred relics while others constructed shrines to house a relic which they restricted access to and only displayed on holy days. For example, relics belonging to the Prophet or those associated with his family were used by the Fatimid dynasty to legitimize their rule (Meri, 2010, p. 103). There are also indications that relics were used to tighten control over the last remaining Fatimid strongholds which may have been the motivating force behind the 'discovery' of

the head of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʻAlī in Ascalon and the subsequent construction of a shrine in its honour in the city (Talmon-Heller, 2020, p. 49). The erection of a shrine in honour of the head of al-Ḥusayn reflects the Fatimid veneration of the household of the Prophet for al-Ḥusayn was the grandson of the Prophet yet it also enhanced the prestige of the dynasty as the establishment of this shrine can be defined as 'official royal sponsorship of a murdered … saint' (Cubitt, 2000, p. 55). The Abbasids utilized sacred relics in a similar manner as they possessed the staff or *qaḍīb* of the Prophet as well as his mantle or *burda* and derived their power and authority from it. The importance of these relics is underlined in the statement that the staff and the mantle were *min shi'ar al-khilāfa,* 'signs of caliphal authority' (al-Māwardī, 1966, pp. 222-3). This is illustrated by the fact that upon his triumph in the civil war against his half-brother al-Amin, al-Ma'mun (r. 813-833) was presented with the *burda*, the staff and the prayer rug of the Prophet alongside his former adversary's severed head (al-Ṭabarī, 1879-1901, III, pp. 924-925; English trans. 1989-2007, 31:195-6), signalling his ascendancy to the caliphate. What is more, the mantle of the Prophet was perceived as representing his person and was regarded as a symbol of the Prophet Muhammad's protection of the Abbasids which 'conferred upon them his *baraka*' (Meri, 2010, pp. 112-13).

The Fatimids and the Abbasids both had a familial link with the Prophet, the Fatimids through his daughter Fāṭima, and the Abbasids through the uncle of the Prophet, al-ʻAbbās b. ʻAbd al-Muṭṭalib and this afforded them with some legitimacy that was bolstered by the relics which they possessed or enshrined. However, the Umayyads did not have this luxury. Indeed, it was an Umayyad caliph who ordered the murder of al-Ḥusayn, whose head was the Fatimids' most important relic. This lack of familial ties to the Prophet may have resulted in the Umayyads choosing to legitimize their rule through other means, namely through the sanctification of John the Baptist's relics in the Great Mosque of Damascus. This was an act that effectively asserted al-Walīd's power while also undermining and attacking the Christian basis for the veneration of the Baptist's relics which was rooted in him witnessing the moment when God embodied human form through Jesus (Khalek, 2011, p. 93). Such actions are not unique to al-Walīd as this multi-layered assertion of power which

involved the acquisition and exploitation of relics was an effective manoeuvre employed by ruling powers prior to the emergence of Islam, for example, it was common among the Byzantine elite (Wilson, 1983, p. 33). Therefore, the efficaciousness of relics and their *baraka* in addition to their exploitation by the political elite demonstrates their role in legitimizing the rule of dynasties while also contributing to the proliferation of shrines which housed relics. The reason being that patronizing shrines was deemed to be a pious and political act at the same time which many took advantage of in order to showcase their power and appeal to a wide audience.

Thus far, much of the discussion has focused on physical objects or bodily relics, however, there is another type of relic that is also of significance as several shrines have been established to house them, these are imprint relics. These relics often consist of a natural material such as stone or earth that bears the imprints of a holy individual's feet, hands, elbows or heads. What sets this type apart from other relics is that the imprints simultaneously signal an absence and a presence in a tangible way as it makes available the location of the holy person at some point in the past, bridging the gap between devotee and the memorialized individual (McGregor, 2020, pp. 134-5). This is reflected in the words of al-Nabulusī with regards to the Prophet's imprint relic at the *Ribāṭ Athar al-Nabī* , a shrine for the relics of the Prophet in Cairo: Ṭā hā, the Messenger's passionate heart/Most noble, he trod upon this rock./Although my eye has missed him/It contents itself to see his relic (*athar*)' (al-Nabulusī, 1986, p. 240). Like the other relics, imprint relics have often been enshrined as is the case of the Stone of Moses, which is believed to bear the imprint of his fingers that he left when hiding from Pharaoh which can be found in a shrine outside of Cairo (al-Harawī, 2004, p. 96). The handprints of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib are also enshrined at an oratory in the northern Syrian city of Niṣībīn and are also alleged to have been found in the *iwān* or arch of Ctesiphon in present-day al-Madā'in in Iraq (al-Harawī, 2004, p. 196). This type of relic is also enshrined in non-Islamic contexts as the imprint of the hand of Jesus that was preserved in the Coptic Church of the Palm testifies (al-Harawī, 2004, p. 106). This along with the other imprint relics associated with biblical and Qur'anic figures

illustrates that the concept of venerating the space at which a holy figure once stood or had once touched was a popular and long-lived one.

The authenticity of relics has, however, been questioned in the past which begs the question of why such relics continued to be revered. For example, despite there being no indication that Prophet Muhammad dwelled in Syria, there were numerous reports attesting to the discovery of relics associated with him in various regions of Syria such as the village of al-Mālikiyya in Ḥawrān in which a wooden spear belonging to the Prophet was said to have been discovered (Yāqūt, 1866-70, p. 22). In addition to the authenticity of relics being brought into question due to the lack of evidence pertaining to a holy figure visiting or dwelling in a region, their authenticity was also doubted as a result of a considerable gap between the death of a holy figure and the establishment of a shrine believed to house their bodily relics. This is the case for the shrine dedicated to al-Ḥusayn ibn ʻAlī in Ascalon as pointed out by al-ʻUmarī who claimed that the notable gap between the death of al-Ḥusayn in 680 and the establishment of the *mashhad* at Ascalon during the Fatimid period made it unlikely that the shrine ever contained the relic of al-Ḥusayn. He claimed instead that the head of the holy martyr was sent to Medina to be interred alongside his brother al-Ḥasan in *Baqīʼ al-Gharqad* (al-'Umarī, 2003, p. 281). Alternatively, according to Twelver Shi'is, the head was returned to Karbalāʼ to be interred with the body of al-Ḥusayn forty days after his martyrdom (Ibn Ṭāwūs, 1993, p. 225). The tendency of a relic being purported to be buried in several places is not uncommon and the head of al-Ḥusayn is only one among many relics for which this is the case.

The large gap between the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn and the establishment of the shrine does suggest that it is unlikely that the Ascalon *mashhad* housed the relics of this holy individual. The lack of early textual evidence indicating that Ascalon was where the head was buried also supports the notion that the head was buried elsewhere. In addition, the various theories which located the head's burial place in other regions after it had been paraded by the Umayyad army from Karbalāʼ to Damascus serve to further weaken the notion that it was buried in Ascalon. It can, therefore, be

concluded that the Fatimid vizier Badr al-Jamālī, who founded the *mashhad* at Ascalon, was likely to have 'invented' the tradition. However, invented tradition or not, the shrine continued to be venerated in the medieval period demonstrating that in general, medieval Muslims were 'receptive to the miraculous unearthing of relics and the formation of new cults' resulting in the perpetuation of the veneration of al-Ḥusayn's head and the general acceptance of the tradition that the shrine at Ascalon housed the relic (Talmon-Heller, 2020, pp. 61-2). This easy acceptance of traditions concerning relics, no matter how weak said traditions may be, should not be viewed as unusual as the Near and Middle East is dotted with shrines that did not even require the presence of relics for they were founded as a result of a dream or vision. This demonstrates that the presence of relics, though important, was not always required for a given shrine to be deemed as a holy receptacle of *baraka* as it was sufficient for a shrine to be associated with a holy figure whether the evidence for such a link had strong or weak foundations.

6.6: Rituals and sacred space: an enduring connection

Thus far the focus has been on the crucial role of holy figures and events in the creation and sanctification of the shrine in the Near and Middle East. However, this overlooks the fact that the shrine owes a considerable amount of its sanctity to rituals. It is for this reason that this section will solely focus on the way through which ritual practice resulted in the sanctification of space, specifically the funerary and commemorative shrine, in pre-Islamic and Islamic contexts. This does not mean that the erection of shrines and other sacred structures throughout the Near and Middle East did not play an important role in the generation of sacred space, however, it is an acknowledgment that it is not only bricks and stones, but also lived ritual practice, that makes a space a place; that transforms an ordinary 'space' into an extraordinary 'place', for it is ritual rather than architectural practice that emplaces the sacred in the wider landscape (Mulder, 2014, p. 249). It

has, indeed, been asserted that a shrine's holiness is firmly rooted in the ritual interaction of devotees with it and this was both physical and spiritual in nature (Meri, 1999a, p. 58). In a similar manner to the act of prayer sanctifying the mosque, ongoing devotional practices at mausoleums and shrines resulted in their sanctification. What must be highlighted is that pilgrimage to these sites was not obligatory, rather pilgrims flocked to such places voluntarily for myriad reasons, most of which were rooted in the belief that actions undertaken at shrines and mausoleums were more efficacious than if they were carried out elsewhere. This belief can be gleaned from the available Arabic sources which state that people journeyed to shrines and mausolea to seek a cure from disease, to undertake a vow, to fulfil a vow, and to pray for rain. Most importantly, however, people visited these sites as they believed that the prayers offered there were more likely to be answered. The popular belief that actions undertaken and prayers offered at mausoleums were more efficacious was founded upon the belief in the intercessory powers of the holy figure buried within a mausoleum or who is affiliated with the shrine in some other way (Talmon-Heller, 2007, pp. 179-80). Thus the sanctity of mausolea is founded upon the holiness of the figure enshrined within coupled with the belief in the ability of the entombed individual to intercede on their devotees' behalf.

Ritual performance did not only attach sanctity to a place, for it also contributed to the endurance of the holiness of the space. There have been various theories put forward regarding the relative ease with which ritual action and, as a result, the sanctity of spaces and landscapes, endured in the Near and Middle East. Ignác Goldziher, for example, purported that this continuity was the result of 'the preservation of ethnic and geographical identities within the universal … *umma*' or Islamic community (Talmon-Heller, 2020, p. 3). He expresses this clearly by asserting that old traditions are bolstered by localized practices for when people make pilgrimage to a temple for centuries in order to worship and seek help in their time of need, they do not forget 'the help which they sought and believed they obtained at these places' (Goldziher, 1967-71, p. 2:303). Similarly, David Frankfurter states that the preservation of indigenous holy sites and local traditions was achieved through their incorporation into the new religious culture once they had been reconsecrated, and sometimes, even

revitalized in an effort to integrate them into the new faith (Frankfurter, 1998, p. 8). It must, however, be highlighted that though lived ritual practice played a crucial role in sanctifying space it has also been claimed that the construction of sacred structures is, in itself, a form of ritual practice as well as an architectural manifestation of ritual. Religious architecture is, therefore, a manner through which rituals are made visible, however, there are other, more discrete ways through which this was achieved. One example which is connected to the architectural manifestation of ritual is the creation of a wider landscape of interconnected sacred spaces that are linked together in tangible and intangible ways. The roads, markers, and pathways, some of which gradually formed part of sacred pilgrimage routes that physically connected myriad sacred sites fall under the former category, while the oral and textual sources that highlight the interconnected nature of the considerable number of holy sites in the region belong to the latter (Mulder, 2014, p. 250). Rituals also have an effect on the sacred places in which they are performed. For example, the circumambulation of a tomb was a custom carried out by visitors to the tombs of important Shi'i holy figures such as ʻAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his son al-Ḥusayn and involved walking to the side of the head and then progressing to the side of the feet as attested in various traditions concerning *ziyāra* and it may ultimately have resulted in 'the construction of an outer ambulatory around the tomb'. Furthermore, devotees often prostrated themselves and kissed the thresholds before or once they enter shrines and this may have prompted the construction of a doorstep for these specific purposes or it may have resulted in the enlargement of entrances (Meri, 2002, pp. 252-3).

Though there are countless rituals one may turn to when attempting to understand the sanctifying role of ritual practice one of the most important is pilgrimage, more specifically superogatory pilgrimage. This is commonly described using the term *ziyāra*. It is noteworthy that this term was not exclusively used by Muslims but also by Christians and Jews in the medieval Islamic world implying that there was a shared vocabulary of pilgrimage in the region. As the *ziyāra* was not an obligatory pilgrimage one may assume that it was not performed to a substantial degree, this thinking, however, is incorrect. The continuous practice of non-canonical pilgrimage, a process that allowed

for the reinforcement of the sacred status of many superogatory pilgrimage sites in the Near and Middle East, proves this. For example, though pilgrimage was no longer incumbent in Judaism, Jewish pilgrimage persisted nevertheless as reflected in Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabian accounts which mention that Jews visited sites of pilgrimage during their holy days. The encouragement of church fathers also contributed to the revival of Christian pilgrimage which became a more popular practice once the Byzantine emperors and their families led by example and also performed pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Meri, 2015, p. 508). In fact, the Christian zeal for venerating holy persons and places resulted in the popularity of *ziyāra* among Jews and Muslims despite the fact that both these faiths primarily focused on canonical pilgrimage that was, in the case of the former, restricted to the past, and, in the case of the latter, to Mecca (Walker and Hoyland, 2018, p. 311). The influence of Christian and Jewish pilgrimage may have contributed to the emergence of Islamic *ziyāra*, yet it is primarily based on the devotion of the Muslims across the Near and Middle East to Prophet Muhammad and his family to whom many shrines are dedicated in the region.

However, despite its popularity, *ziyāra* was not met with universal acceptance, in fact, there was concerted opposition to the practice that reached its apogee in ninth-century Baghdad as the city was a 'bastion of Ḥanbalī jurisprudence until the Mongol conquest of 1256 C.E.' and it was the followers of this particular school of jurisprudence who were the most vocal opponents of the *ziyāra*. Their opposition was primarily based on the notion that *ziyāra* and the various rituals it consisted of was a violation of the Qur'an and the *Sunna,* or practices and customs, of the Prophet for there was no precedent in the Qur'an nor in the *Sunna* for the veneration of saints. Ultimately, this meant that *ziyāra* was to be regarded as an 'innovation' (Meri, 2002, pp. 126-7), what is more, it was one which encouraged immoral practices including the intermingling of the sexes among others (al-Turkumānī, 1986, p. 1:214). However, this strong opposition appears to be contradictory as the Prophet himself visited the tombs of his Companions (Meri, 2002, p. 126), in addition to his own mother, indeed, it was reported that the Prophet did not only visit his mother's grave but also wept at her graveside (al-Ghazālī, 1993, p. 4:409). Thus, it may be the case that it was not the practice of *ziyāra* to which these

theologians objected to, rather, they took issue with the various rituals undertaken during *ziyāra* as they were viewed to be challenging 'the very foundations of Islamic orthodoxy'. Such practices included addressing the dead, praying directly to the dead, seeking intercession through the dead, glorifying and venerating saints through ritual acts, and 'asking the dead directly to answer prayers, fulfil supplication, and work miracles' (Meri, 2002, p. 126). In the Shi'i context, however, *ziyāra* was recommended by theologians with none opposing it, they even ascribed to it 'a similar obligatory status' to the *Hajj* despite its superogatory nature (Meri, 2002, pp. 140-1).

Though the recommendation of *ziyāra* by notable theologians contributed to its popularity in the Near and Middle East, one cannot overlook other motivations for embarking on this often quite difficult journey. These included the traditions which promised that one would receive ample reward for doing so, these traditions commonly used the *Hajj* or *'Umrah* as a measure as shown in the example pertaining to making pilgrimage to al-Ḥusayn's tomb which claims that 'Making *ziyāra* to Ḥusayn … is equal to and more meritorious than twenty pilgrimages to Mecca' (Ibn Qawlawayh, 1356 H, p. 161). Other traditions specified a particular day when guaranteeing extra reward such as those which claim that if one visited the shrine of al-Ḥusayn on the Day of 'Arafa 'God will record for him the recompense of one thousand accepted pilgrimages and one thousand *Umrahs* accepted into the grace of the Lord' (al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1988, p. 174). Contrastingly, there were also traditions with a slightly threatening undertone when discussing the *ziyāra* to the shrine of al-Ḥusayn, a notable example would be the tradition which asserts that 'Whoever [allows the] year [to lapse] and does not visit the tomb of al-Ḥusayn … God will diminish his lifespan by a year. Even if one should say that he will die thirty years prior to his appointed time, you would be correct for the reason that you have abandoned making pilgrimage to him', the tradition concludes with the statement that if one were to abandon visiting him, God will diminish their years in addition to their livelihoods (al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1988, p. 43).

As well as the promise of abundant reward for performing a pilgrimage, there were other religious motives for doing so. In a general sense, the desire to come into contact with a particular holy site that was made sacred by its association with a holy figure motivated pilgrims from different creeds as did the desire to come into contact with 'the historical or symbolic center of the faith' (Idinopulos, 1996, p. 11). For example, Christian pilgrims travelled to the Jordan river to bathe at the place where Jesus was baptized and even 'took home objects that bore a tangible relation to the place they had seen and touched' whether it was water, earth, wood, or bones (Wilken, 1996, p. 132). These objects, though far removed from their places of origin did not lose their sanctity for they were not simple mementoes that evoked pleasant memories but were 'a piece of portable sanctity which possesses and could convey spiritual power' to their owner (Vikan, 1982, p. 13). Similarly, in Islam, water from the well of Zamzam, was also brought back to a pilgrim's homeland due to its special properties and *baraka* and for its connection to the holiest city of Islam that was the setting for the religion's emergence. Furthermore, in the case of the Shi'is, the soil from the tomb of al-Ḥusayn was believed to cure every malady when consumed (al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1988, p. 125), thus it was transported by pilgrims to their homelands across the Near and Middle East and beyond (Meri, 1999a, pp. 51-2). This constant pilgrim footfall and the various ways pilgrims memorialized their experience meant that pilgrimage sites, particularly those affiliated with a holy figure, remained relevant and maintained their sanctity. Yet pilgrims were not always motivated to undertake *ziyāra* to attain spiritual satisfaction alone. This is evidenced by the connection between *ziyāra* and trade as for some it provided an opportunity to socialize and engage in trade, while for others it presented an opportunity to 'make illicit financial gain at the expense of devotees' (Meri, 2002, p. 212) as pilgrimage often involved the arrival of hordes of pilgrims from abroad who may not be well informed about the local economy and thus were at risk of being exploited.

6.7: Concluding remarks

Islam's emergence in the Near and Middle East, an area in which numerous cultures and faiths intermingled played a key role in the establishment and evolution of Islamic sacred spaces. The mausoleum and the commemorative sacred site are no exception to this. Their development as Islamic sacred sites was heavily influenced by the funerary and commemorative sites that predated the advent and subsequent spread of Islam. The deceased, particularly those of significant status have been accorded a deep sense of respect from the beginning of recorded history and one way by which this was manifested was through the erection of shrines, be they funerary or not, in their name. Similarly, from time immemorial sacred events, whether they took place in the past or were destined to take place in the future, have been memorialized in some shape or form in the Near and Middle East and the shrine was one of the key ways through which this was done. Thus, the emergence of the Islamic mausoleum and commemorative sacred space did not result in the complete erasure of their pre-existent counterparts, rather they drew inspiration from them. Islam shared several holy figures with Christianity and Judaism thus sites dedicated to such figures were deemed to be holy by adherents of all three faiths and this is applied to mausolea as well as commemorative sites that were not funerary in nature. What is more, the Near and Middle East is a region with a significant monotheistic history and it was also the setting for a majority of the biblical or Qur'anic past. Therefore shrines, in both pre-Islamic and Islamic contexts, should be viewed as a natural feature of the land that endured regardless of which religion was dominant. This continued perception of such places as sacred irrespective of the religio-political circumstances shows that the Islamic mausoleum and commemorative space were closely linked to their pre-Islamic predecessors in a number of ways as has been demonstrated in the above discussion.

Additionally, though there is no denying the significant role of the memorialized holy figure or event in sanctifying funerary and commemorative sacred space, one must not overlook the contribution of their devotees. Whether it is through the erection of structures atop hallowed ground or the creation

of borders around a sacred area, the sacred spaces of the Near and Middle East owe part of their existence as well as their endurance to individuals and groups ranging from patrons and benefactors to humble visitors. This highlights the close connection between sacred places and their devotees as though a place may be instilled with sanctity without the interference of man, its status as a sacred place partially relies on mankind perceiving it as sacred and enhancing its sanctity through ritual practice such as pilgrimage. This connection between holy places and their faithful devotees is a long lived one that predated Islam thus it was entrenched in the region's culture. It is therefore unsurprising that this relationship was maintained following the advent of Islam helping to shape Muslim devotional life as it had shaped the devotional practices of the pre-Islamic religions. This relationship between ritual practice and sacred space in which the former sanctified the latter was also aided by the fact that rituals are not easily erased from the memory of the devotees and communities who undertook them (Goldziher, 1967, p. 303). Therefore, the dominance of a new faith in the region was unlikely to lead to the abandonment of sacred spaces, instead, in cases when such spaces needed to accommodate the new faith, they were transformed to suit the new rulers and their community while maintaining their original sanctity. Ultimately, it is evident that ritual practice played an important role in both the generation of sacred space in the Near and Middle East as well as the reinforcement of the sanctity of such spaces.

Chapter 7

The Sacred Landscape

7.1: Near and Middle Eastern geography: How did it assume a sacred character?

The sanctity of man-made structures such as the shrines, mosques, and mausoleums previously discussed is profound for a variety of reasons among which are connections to the divine, links to holy figures, and their role in commemorating key events in the sacred history of the Abrahamic religions. This sanctity, however, is not unique to built structures as the natural world is also imbued with a considerable amount of sanctity. Whether it be an entire geographic area such as a sacred city or a topographical feature such as a mountain, the Near and Middle East boasts a sacred landscape that arguably surpasses all other regions in the world. One of the main reasons for this is that it features heavily in Scripture and exegesis, it is also associated with the eschatological traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam which served to further amplify its holiness.

The establishment of a link between geography and the divine is a long-lived practice in the Near and Middle East as reflected in the ancient notion that areas of lush vegetation and outstanding natural beauty were believed to be occupied by divinities. In fact, this notion can be claimed to have been the foundation upon which the concept of the *ḥaram* was based (Hoyland, 2010, p. 157). The antiquity of the practice of consecrating an area by means of an association with the divine is reflected in the fact that the Nabataeans attached geographical features to particular deities. This is demonstrated by the small sanctuary atop the Jabal Maḥjar in Hegra or Madā'in Ṣāliḥ where a Nabataean inscription was recently discovered which reads *dnh gbl 'l'z' w mr byt'* which when translated stated that 'This is the Jabal of al-'Uzza and the Lord of the House/Temple' (Nehmé, 2005-2006, p. 189). It has also been claimed that the high-places around Petra may have been dedicated to certain deities and that the Jabal Harūn, in particular, was the mountain of Dushara, the chief

deity of the city, however, the evidence is sparse regarding such assertions and, barring the example cited at Hegra above, one can only say for certain that the Nabataeans believed that the mountains within their kingdom had a religious significance. Yet this was the case with numerous other cultures in the Near and Middle East (Alpass, 2013, p. 144). Dedicating mountains to gods was not unique to the Nabataeans in the ancient Near East nor was it a novel concept in the region as the mountains, by their very nature, reached the skies prompting the diffusion of the belief that they reached the heavens and were the dwelling-place of the gods. To give an example, in Babylonian mythology the great gods were said to have been birthed on 'the Mountain of the World', the gods were also believed to assemble on a nearby mountain known as the Mountain of the East on New Year's Day to 'fix the destinies of the universe' (De Vaux, 1997, p. 279). The importance of mountains as a result of their divine connection can be demonstrated in different ways, one of which is through the invocation of gods and their associated mountains in official texts. This is illustrated by the treaty between the Hittite King Mursilis and the King of Amurru, Duppi-Tesub around 1305 BC which invoked the storm gods and their mountains (Pritchard, 1969, p. 205). Furthermore, in Phoenicia, the main god, Baal Saphon may be identified with the mountain known as Jabal Aqra' in northern Syria (Zayadine, 2003, p. 57) which was believed to be his abode (Rutherford, 2017, p. 618). In addition to mountains, there is also evidence that springs were dedicated to deities as evidenced by the shrine of the goddess Allat that was centred on a spring called 'Ayn esh-Shallaleh located in the south of modern-day Jordan. Confirmation of the spring's connection to Allat was provided by a series of inscriptions in its immediate vicinity which indicate that the goddess Allat was venerated there along with other deities (Healey, 2001, pp. 57-8).

Sacred landscapes often retained their holiness due to the fact that 'when spaces remain sacred the doctrines and associations attached to them' tended to develop and adapt to maintain the sanctity of the space (Munt, 2014, p. 9). What also contributes to this is the fact that regardless of which creed a sacred space is most closely associated with, devotees of other faiths recognized the holiness of sacred sites if they had a connection with a holy person, a sacred or miraculous event, or the

performance of ritual acts. They may not extoll the virtues of the sacred spaces of other faiths in the same manner by which they emphasized the sanctity of their own, but they nevertheless acknowledged the sacred quality of natural sacred sites despite the fact that they were more closely connected to other religions (Meri, 2002, p. 14). The reason for this is that the criteria which most of the sacred spaces of the Near and Middle East – man-made or natural – had to meet was universal. Thus, as discussed earlier in the thesis, many of the reasons for why a space is sacred are common to Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and pagan or polytheistic beliefs. The presence of communities in the vicinity of sacred spaces who frequented these sites also strengthened their sanctity while ensuring that they remained relevant to succeeding generations. The devotional practices of these communities were important as there is an abundance of sites around the world that were formerly sacred but did not remain as such because the beliefs attached to them lost their relevance (Munt, 2014, pp. 9-10). Thus sacred landscapes were not only holy due to the initial event that marked them as such but also as a result of the continuous devotional rites that took place there. The holiness of the land, particularly Damascus, Jerusalem, and other areas of Palestine, was disseminated by a wide variety of texts such as *faḍā'il* or works in praise of cities and regions, pilgrimage guides and geographical treatises (Talmon-Heller, 2007, p. 185). For example, in his geographical work, *'Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fi Ma'rifat al-'Aqālīm,* al-Muqaddasī states that 'Syria is the abode of the Prophets, the habitation of the righteous, the home of the successors of the Prophet … It contains the first *qibla,* the scene of the day of resurrection, and of the night journey of the Prophet' (al-Muqaddasī, 1906, pp. 151, 184). Here, he highlights the strong link between the landscape and the holy and pious figures that inhabited it serving to emphasise the importance of holy figures in rendering an entire region holy.

The landscape of the Near and Middle East also underwent a process of sanctification as a result of the sacred routes holy relics took which often resulted in the establishment of shrines along their journey. Among the most illustrative examples of this in the Near and Middle East is the head of al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, which was placed on a spear and carried off in a triumphal procession initiated by

‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyād, the Umayyad governor of Kūfa (Talmon-Heller, 2020, p. 29). The procession’s final destination was Damascus as ordered by the governor of Kūfa who also commanded that the heads were to be ritually exposed and paraded through every city and town the procession travelled through in order to ‘demonstrate the caliph’s triumph’ while also ‘underscoring the fate of those who sought to challenge Umayyad authority’ (Mulder, 2014, p. 255). The head of al-Ḥusayn therefore travelled through a series of towns and based on the works of Arab chroniclers and authors of pilgrimage guides, one can reconstruct its passage from Karbalā’ to Damascus (Fig. 25). According to al-Harawī, the head started its journey by following the path of the Tigris northwards to Tikrit and Mosul in modern-day northern Iraq before crossing into northern Syria by way of Niṣībīn (al-Harawī, 2004, p. 164). It followed the path of the Euphrates to the west, advancing from Raqqa to Bālis and then moved towards Aleppo. The procession then travelled southwards through Ḥamā, Shayzar and Ḥimṣ (al-Harawī, 2004, p. 295), it was then carried to Ba’labbak before finally reaching Damascus and being presented to the caliph, Yazīd ibn Mu’āwīyya (r. 680-683). Some of the accounts which discuss the transfer of al-Ḥusayn’s head from Karbalā’ to Damascus gave mention to the fact that the inhabitants of certain cities which the triumphal procession passed through rejoiced while others mourned. This may have been an attempt to indicate that there was equal opposition and support for Yazīd’s actions, however, it also implies that ‘even at this early period, there was a nascent topography linking cities and locations that valued the Prophet’s descendants’ (Sindawi, 2004, p. 246).

The route which was sanctified by the passage of al-Ḥusayn’s head soon became dotted with shrines commemorating the martyr which served to ritually inscribe ‘the memory of past action on the land’ (Mulder, 2014, p. 256) while also functioning as spaces wherein al-Ḥusayn and his companions could be venerated and memorialized. However, it was not simply the fact that the martyr’s head was paraded throughout this route which imbued the land with sanctity as it was alleged that the decapitated head of al-Ḥusayn performed miracles such as reciting the Qur’an and convincing monks and rabbis to convert to Islam and these miracles also contributed to the sanctification of this route

from Karbalā' to Damascus (Ayoub, 2011, p. 133). Miraculous pillars of light also marked the location of the head of al-Ḥusayn during its transfer to Damascus (Talmon-Heller, 2020, p. 229). Thus, the passage of a holy relic served to sanctify the landscape by means of its very presence at some point in time which contributed to the emergence of a distinctly Islamic sacred landscape in the Near and Middle East.

7.2: The Role of Eschatology and Cosmology

The development of the Near and Middle East into a sacred landscape was also aided by the fact that the region has numerous eschatological and cosmological connections. These have been stressed to a great degree in traditions or *aḥādīth* in addition to *faḍā'il* works that highlight the merits of different areas such as Jerusalem and the wide region of al-Shām in general. Eschatology can be defined as a branch of theology that is primarily concerned with the End of Days and the destiny of mankind in the Hereafter by exploring concepts surrounding Paradise and Hell. Cosmology, on the other hand, specifically religious cosmology, studies the origins of the universe from a religious perspective. Both cosmology and eschatology have been closely linked to the landscape of the Near and Middle East prior to the emergence of Islam and this connection only became more pronounced once Islam had spread across the region. The numerous *aḥādīth* and Qur'anic verses on the Last Days as well as the origins of the world highlighted the significance of eschatology and cosmology in Islam and it is the landscape of the Near and Middle East that expresses this most effectively. This is primarily due to the fact that numerous areas throughout the region became affiliated with the Day of Judgement, Paradise, and Hell, on one hand, and the creation of the universe on the other. This ultimately resulted in the sanctification of the landscape by means of its connection to the beginning of the universe and the End of Days. Indeed, it has been suggested that the sanctity of cities and

entire landscapes is partially derived from the soteriological and eschatological role of a given place in addition to the cosmological significance of a particular area (von Grunebaum, 1962, pp. 25-37).

The region which had the most pronounced connection to the End of Days was Jerusalem and its environs as this was the purported place where numerous eschatological events are destined to take place. The important role of Jerusalem, and the Temple Mount in particular, in eschatology was widely known prior to the emergence of Islam. This is illustrated by the Jewish view that the barren Temple Mount symbolised 'two opposite moments in time, past and future – when the Temple stood, and when it will stand again' in the eschatological future which would herald the arrival of the Messiah. Similarly, the Temple Mount also plays a key part in Christian eschatology as it is believed that the Temple's reconstruction would announce the advent of the Antichrist (Stroumsa, 2015, p. 161). This pre-Islamic messianic eschatology coloured Islamic attitudes towards the Temple Mount and its environs as demonstrated by the early Islamic authors who, in their works in praise of Jerusalem,[20] emphasised the key role of the Temple Mount in eschatology. They did so by describing the various events that would take place there at the End of Days. For example, it is believed that the Gate of Mercy, or *Bāb al-Raḥma,* 'will open to receive the Blessed' on the Day of Judgement (Neuwirth, 1996, p. 114). The Mount of Olives, or *Ṭūr Zayta,* is another location in Jerusalem that has been imbued with sanctity by means of the eschatological events it is expected to witness in the Latter Days. According to Muslim tradition, which was influenced by Jewish and Christian ideas concerning the End of Days (Elad, 1995, p. 144), on the Day of Judgement all mankind will be assembled on the Mount of Olives from which a bridge will be thrown across to the *Ḥaram* (Hirschberg, 1951-52, pp. 342-44). The identification of the Mount of Olives with the Qur'anic *as-Sāhira* (Qur'an 79:14), the place where all of mankind will be resurrected, serves to highlight its significant eschatological role. It must, however, be emphasised that the Mount of Olives was not the only place identified with *as-Sāhira* as scholars have attempted to locate *as-Sāhira* elsewhere including a region in al-Shām, the land of Jerusalem in its entirety and a mountain in or near

[20] See, for example Ibn al-Murajjā, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*; al-Raba'i, *Fada'il al-Shām;* al-Wāsiṭī, *Fada'il*.

Jerusalem (al-Ṭabarī, 1373 AH, pp. 30:35-8) which the Mount of Olives can be classified as. The Mount of Olives was also assigned a degree of eschatological importance due to the fact that it has a link to Paradise as it was here that Jesus ascended to heaven as reflected architecturally at a later stage by the erection of the Church of the Ascension (Elad, 1995, p. 144). The important role of Jerusalem during the End of Days is not the only indication of the region's eschatological importance for the city is not only the setting for the key events of the Latter Days but is also the portal to Paradise. In addition, certain Islamic texts which discussed Jerusalem's links to Paradise described the city of Jerusalem, or indeed, all the Land of Israel, as a fragment or remnant of the garden of Eden. This was not an innovative idea as though Eden's specific location is not mentioned in Genesis, it names one of its rivers, the Gihon, which was the name of ancient Jerusalem's one source of water, the Gihon spring, thus creating a 'fluid Eden-Jerusalem connection' (Koltun-Fromm, 2017, p. 420)

Although the city as a whole was linked to Paradise in different ways, the place that has the closest connection to Paradise is the Temple Mount for it was where the Rock was located. The eschatological significance of the Rock lies in the belief that it was the source of the earthly rivers as well as those of Paradise: 'Jaxartes (*Sayḥān*), Oxus (*Jayḥān*), Euphrates (*al-Furāt*), and Nile (*al-Nīl*)' (al-Wāsiṭī, 1978, pp. 68, no. 110). This view echoes the Jewish legends that proliferated following the destruction of the Temple (Mourad, 2008, p. 93). These paradisiacal connotations as well as the eschatological associations of the Rock and the Temple Mount are accentuated further in the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock which feature trees and floral motifs alongside a multitude of jewels all of which can be linked with Paradise that is described as an eternal and beautiful garden beneath which rivers flow in the Qur'an (Qur'an 2:266; 3:136; 4:13) a vision that is paralleled in Christianity and Judaism (Grabar, 2006c, p. 116). In addition to the Rock, which was enshrined by the Dome of the Rock during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, there was a black paving stone, commonly referred to as *al-Balāṭa al-Sawdā',* within the Dome of the Rock that was said to cover one of the gates of Paradise. Despite the fact that there was no mention of this paving stone in the accounts which covered the construction of the Dome of the Rock, works by al-Wāsiṭi and Ibn al-

Murajjā relate that it was present in 748 CE at the earliest. This relatively late date and the fact that there was no reference to the black paving stone in the accounts on the construction of the Dome of the Rock suggests that it was a later addition. Although the belief that it covered a gate of Paradise is feasible as the Rock enshrined in the very same structure was believed to be the portal to Paradise, it may be the case that the placement of the black paving stone was motivated by a desire to compete with the Ka'ba and Mecca's holiness. The reason for this is that within the Ka'ba there was also a slab, one which marked the prayer place or *muṣallā* of Prophet Muhammad and it was believed that prayer upon it would be particularly efficacious, a belief that was also attached to the black paving stone in Jerusalem (Flood, 1999, p. 327). This suggests that the black paving stone was an attempt at duplicating the Meccan slab and its attached *baraka* as part of a rivalry between the Ka'ba and the Dome of the Rock, and between Mecca and Jerusalem. Regardless of the authenticity of the tradition surrounding the notion that *al-Balāṭa al-Sawdā'* covered a gate of Paradise, the paving stone was revered and prayer upon it was recommended by numerous authors (Elad, 1995, p. 79). The connection between Paradise and the Dome of the Rock further enhances Jerusalem's considerable holiness as it emphasizes 'Jerusalem's connectivity, not only between heaven and earth but between this world and the next'. This connectivity is made abundantly clear in the fact that it is not only Paradise that will be manifested in Jerusalem during the End of Days as the valley lying to the east of the Temple Mount known as Wādī Jahannam was identified as the portal to hell (Antrim, 2012, p. 40).

Although Jerusalem has a central role in the eschatological future and the End of Days, other cities of the Near and Middle East also feature in traditions concerning the Day of Judgement and Paradise. To give one example, according to an utterance of the Prophet, during his Night Journey, the Angel Gabriel, showed him the mosque of Kūfa which prompted the Prophet to ask about the place. Gabriel answered by stating that it was 'a blessed mosque, containing an abundance of good (*kathīru l-khayri*) and possessing great blessing (*'aẓimū l-baraka*). God chose it for His people and it will intercede for them on the Day of Resurrection' (al-Naysabūrī, 1966, pp. 336-7). Furthermore, it is

also stated that there will be gathered seventy thousand believers in this mosque on the Day of Judgement who will enter Paradise without interrogation or judgement (al-Naysabūrī, 1966, p. 408). Similarly, Damascus has also been identified as an important sacred space during the End of Days as, according to a *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet, Jesus would ascend from Paradise on the 'white minaret in the east' of the city (al-Raba'i, 1950, pp. 71, 73, nos. 106, 108). Though a minaret is specified, and there have been traditions which state that it belongs to the Great Mosque of Damascus and that Jesus will descend there in the eschatological future (Ibn Jubayr, 1907, p. 282; English trans. 1952, p. 295), the Arabic phrasing of the tradition points to the east gate of Damascus as the setting for this event. Al-Raba'ī and later writers confirmed this further by identifying the gate as Bāb al-Sharqī (al-Raba'i, 1950, pp. 73-4, no. 109). Regardless of the precise location of Jesus's appearance in Damascus during the End of Days, the city is sanctified by the fact that it is destined to bear witness to one of the most important events of the Day of Judgement. Paradise was also linked to geography through the assertion that certain areas and geographical features originated in heaven. This can be applied to rocks or stones such as the Black Stone, also known as *al-Rukn,* in the Ka'ba and the *Maqām Ibrāhīm* whose holiness is often closely linked as demonstrated by the traditions which describe the the two rocks as 'sapphires from heaven' (Kister, 1971, p. 481). Rocks, stones, and other portable objects are not, however, the only geographical features that are endowed with heavenly associations as reflected in the belief that the springs of Silwān in Palestine and Zamzam in Mecca numbered among the springs of Paradise (al-Ẓāhirī, 1894, p. 22).

It was not only eschatology that contributed to the creation of an Islamic sacred landscape in the Near and Middle East as along with future events that are destined to take place, the remote past, specifically the cosmological past, plays a part as well. In a similar manner to its role in the eschatological future, Jerusalem also plays an important role in Islamic, Jewish, and Christian ideas concerning the cosmological origins of the world which imbues it with additional sanctity. For the Jews, as creation began in Jerusalem, it is the center of the universe as well as the point from which it emerged, representing 'the ultimate evidence of God's gift to humanity – earthly existence' (Dan,

1996, p. 60). These Jewish ideas concerning Jerusalem being at the center of the universe which were an amalgam of creation myths and biblical history soon became part of the Christian lore of the Temple Mount, and ultimately influenced Muslim traditions and ideas on the city. It can indeed be asserted that in order to fully understand the *faḍā'il* texts which praise Jerusalem, they need to be examined in tandem with their Christian and Jewish antecedents. A chronicler whose work illustrates this is Ibn 'Asākir who praised the Holy Land in a manner that bears a striking resemblance to the Jewish traditions in praise of Jerusalem for he states that the Rock on the Temple Mount lay at the center of the universe and was the 'fulcrum of several concentric places of holiness'. He makes this abundantly clear in his assertion that 'The holiest part of Filasṭīn is Jerusalem (*Bayt al-Maqdis*), the holiest part of Jerusalem is the temple … and the holiest part of the temple is the dome' (Ibn 'Asākir, 1951-, p. 142). One may assume that the dome refers to the Dome of the Rock which surmounts the primeval Rock, thus emphasizing the Rock's cosmological importance and sanctity. Ibn 'Asākir's statement mirrors an idea maintained by the ancient rabbis who claimed that the Holy Land was at the center of God's creation, 'the center of the Holy Land was in turn Jerusalem; the center of Jerusalem was the Temple; the sanctuary was in the center of the Temple, and positioned at the center of the sanctuary was the celebrated ark that stood directly on (or before) the primeval rock' (Midrash Tanhuma (Buber) 2:78). This shows the considerable influence previous ideas exerted on Islamic cosmology while also accentuating the adaptability of the Islamic tradition which allowed it to embrace these ideas. This is illustrated further in the parallels between the Jewish belief that the temples built by Solomon and Herod were constructed over 'a primeval rock whose waters slaked the entire earth' and the Muslim traditions which hold that the 'the rivers of Paradise, which emanate from under the Rock, water the whole earth' (Koltun-Fromm, 2017, p. 420).

The cosmological importance of the Rock is further emphasised by the various beliefs that describe it as the origin of all life. For example, according to Jewish belief, it was the place where humankind was initiated as Adam was fashioned by God from its dust (Jerusalem Talmud Nazir 7.2). The Rock was also believed to be the throne of God from which he created the heavens and the earth making

Jerusalem the ‘point of origin of all creation and the junction between the terrestrial and celestial realms’ according to the Torah (Ibn al-Faqīh, 1967, p. 97). This belief in the centrality of the Rock was most likely shared by the Christians as effectively demonstrated in artistic renditions of the world from a medieval Christian perspective which place Jerusalem at the very center, a notable example would be the Hereford Mappa Mundi (Fig. 26). Furthermore, the etymology of the name *Even Shetiya,* which was the name ascribed to the Rock in Judaism, also highlights the cosmological importance of the Rock as, in addition to meaning ‘to found or to create’, the root of the term ‘*shati’* can also mean ‘to weave’. Hence, the Rock simultaneously marks the starting point of creation as well as the process through which the world was woven and created ‘from this rock, like a divinely woven tapestry’. The concept of the primeval rock is likely to have evolved from and replaced the notion of a cosmic mountain (Koltun-Fromm, 2017, pp. 408-9) which was not a novel one in the Near and Middle East. It was a feature of ancient Near Eastern belief representing the earthly presence of gods for it lay between heaven and earth (Clifford, 1972, p. 3) and there are implicit references to it in early biblical texts that became more explicit in the Rabbinic texts that portrayed Mount Zion as a cosmic mountain (Levenson, 1985, pp. 109-22). Muslims also believed that the Rock or *Ṣakhra* was the center of the world and also held the view that all of God’s creation spread from it. This is made abundantly clear in such texts as al-Wāsiṭi’s work in praise of Jerusalem in which he states that God addressed the Rock saying ‘You are my earthly throne. From you I ascended to heaven. From beneath you I spread the earth, and every stream that flows from the mountains originates from underneath you’ (al-Wāsiṭī, 1978, pp. 69, no. 111). In addition to Jerusalem, Mecca, more specifically, the Ka’ba was also percieved as having a cosmological role as reflected by the epithets applied to it which emphasise its centrality, namely *ṣurrat al-dunyā* and *wasaṭ al-arḍ,* which when translated mean navel of the world and center of the world (Antrim, 2012, p. 40). Such a view is supported by a tradition related by Ka’b al-Aḥbār, an early Muslim convert from Judaism, in which he described the Ka’ba as ‘the froth on the water forty years before God Almighty created the heavens and the earth; from it the earth was spread out.’ (al-Azraqī, 2003, p. 1:66). Therefore, the Ka’ba did not only

precede creation but it was the 'point of origin from which the creation of all celestial and terrestial bodies emanated' (Antrim, 2012, p. 40). In a similar manner to Jerusalem, this view that the Ka'ba, and thus Mecca, was located at the center of the world was expressed artistically in the maps of the world from an Islamic perspective that depict the world as though it is uncoiling from beneath the Ka'ba (Fig. 27) (O'Meara, 2020, p. 50).

Another epithet of Mecca, *Umm al-Qurā*, which can be translated as 'Mother of the towns' has been associated with the notion that the Ka'ba stood upon the spot from which the entire earth was spread out as reflected in exegetical works such as the *tafsīr* of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, 2003, p. 359). This epithet is also bestowed on Jerusalem yet there are more Islamic sources that represent Mecca as the origin of Creation rather than Jerusalem and the sources which describe Jerusalem as such are relatively late, emerging in the tenth century CE. Additionally, the epithet *Umm al-Qurā* appears to have only been applied to Jerusalem on rare occasions and, as has been observed by Ofer Livne-Kafri the term seems to be more closely connected to 'the Qur'anic expression related to Mecca' (Livne-Kafri, 2013, p. 320). In addition to *Umm al-Qurā*, Mecca is also referred to as *Umm Ruḥm* which can be translated as 'Mother of Beneficience', here the city retains its maternal character which serves to highlight its cosmological role as the progenitor of all of God's Creation (Antrim, 2012, pp. 37-8). However, the fact that Mecca and the Ka'ba feature more prominently in traditions concerning the origin of Creation does not suggest Jerusalem was not part of the chronology of Creation. Indeed, there is a tradition which concerns Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem and their place in the chronology of Creation which states that 'God Almighty created Mecca and surrounded it with angels before he had created anything else on the entire earth at that point by 1,000 years. Then he joined [Mecca] to Medina and joined Medina to Jerusalem and then he created the entire earth after 1,000 years in a single gesture' (Ibn al-Murajjā, 1995, p. 10 (no. 2)). A different version of this tradition includes Kūfa as the fourth place (Ibn al-Murajjā, 1995, pp. 11, (no. 3)). Thus, although Mecca is given precedence in these traditions as the origin of Creation, the other holy cities of Medina, Jerusalem, and Kūfa are attributed with a degree of cosmological

significance that may not be equivalent to Mecca's but is 'at least comparatively distinct from the rest of creation' (Antrim, 2012, p. 50). However, cosmology and eschatology only partially contribute to the holiness of the cities of the Near and Middle East as the following discussion will make clear.

7.3: The Sacred City

The idea of a sacred city is one which has shaped the Near and Middle East in a variety of ways, it has made the region a place which emanates with holiness due to the sheer number of sacred cities which it encompasses and it has also meant that the area drew hordes of pilgrims from across the world to venerate at myriad sites. This sectiom will examine the way through which a city attains holiness whether it is a matter of inheriting, maintaining, and Islamizing the pre-Islamic holiness of cities, or a matter of establishing a distinctly Islamic holy city as a result of some association with a sacred figure or event. The concept of the holy city does, however, appear to contradict the notion, which is explicitly highlighted in Scripture, that God is omnipresent and thus can be worshipped everywhere, making the existence of sacred spots and sacred areas redundant. Such conundrums have not been resolved; rather, scholars of religion have chosen to work around them by establishing hierarchies of sanctity (Munt, 2014, pp. 7-8). In Islam, however, though sacred cities did emerge, the idea that God was present everywhere, '*ḥāḍir nāẓir*' or 'present and watching' was a key part of Islamic attitudes to sacred space and worship. Nonetheless, sacred spaces were singled out for their religious significance (Schimmel, 1991, p. 163) and the sacred city was no exception for it became an important concept in Islam just as it was for the pre-Islamic faiths. There are myriad manners through which a city becomes holy and the forthcoming discussion will address a number of them in order to demonstrate that the pre-Islamic past, specifically the pre-Islamic holiness of cities had a profound effect on the establishment of the Islamic holy city and the Islamization of the Near and Middle Eastern landscape.

Though there are numerous examples of places in the Near and Middle East that derive their holiness from miraculous events and manifestations of the divine at some point in time, places can also be marked as holy as a result of a historical occurrence. Stephennie Mulder dubs this sacred landscape which bases much of its holiness on 'actions and events in historical time' a 'landscape of deeds' as 'holy deeds performed in historical time, at particular locations within the landscape, created, marked, reinforced and mediated history; and history, in turn, created the sacred landscape, lent it legitimacy, generated it psychologically, spiritually and physically' (Mulder, 2014, p. 254). That some of these events were indirectly connected to the divine also served to enhance their ability to sanctify a space or city. To give one example, the acquisition of Jerusalem by David, and Solomon's subsequent construction of the Temple dedicated to God on a threshing floor belonging to a Jebusite named Araunah rendered the city a holy one for the Israelites and the succeeding peoples who came to dominate and rule over the city (Lassner, 2017, p. 16). This historical event was enshrined in the Solomonic Temple as well as the Second Temple that was built in its stead following its destruction in 586 BC (Bowersock, 2017, pp. 142-3). Even after the destruction of the First Temple the establishment of Jerusalem and the Temple became rooted in the landscape and memory of the city through physical means as a result of the endurance of the Temple Mount and its continued centrality in the city in addition to the remnant of the Second Temple, the Western Wall. One can conclude therefore that the emplacement of key historical and religious events by way of enshrinement made them a visible part of the landscape, allowing them to leave their mark on the landscape and live long in the memory of the area's inhabitants. The centrality of the Temple Mount and the fact that it has been and continues to witness rituals carried out by Muslims and Jews alike has bestowed upon Jerusalem the status of a sacred city as, 'a holy city is one where the shrine, temple, or cultus, plays a predominant role in urban life' (Peters, 1986, p. 22).

The role of the shrine in sanctifying the Near and Middle East is of great significance as, in many cases, it modifies the city in an untypical manner that is not witnessed at cities without a shrine (Peters, 1986, p. 3). This is exemplified by Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, and the Shi'i holy cities of

Karbalā', Najaf, and Mashhad which owe much of their sanctity to the shrines at their center. The sanctifying role of shrines is demonstrated effectively in the various regions of Syria and Egypt in which an 'Alid shrine is located, this is a shrine that has some relation to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his family. An architectural survey carried out in 2004-5 which covered the area between eastern Turkey to the north and Syria in the south, stretching from Aleppo to Damascus and then ending in Cairo found that there were some thirty-seven 'Alid shrines in the region, many of which are still extant. These sites were holy to both Sunnis and Shi'is as most of the 'Alid figures memorialized in these spaces were venerated by members of both sects and there connection with the Syrian landscape imbued the region with a sanctity that was manifested effectively through the medium of architecture. Thus the 'generation of an Islamic sacred topography quite literally "took place" in the form of an increasing number of architectural constructions' (Mulder, 2014, pp. 261-2). The importance of building Islamic monuments to contribute towards the creation of an Islamic landscape is also illustrated by the legal restriction imposed by the Islamic authorities on the construction of religious buildings by Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians. This mirrors the actions of the emperors of the newly Christianised Roman Empire who imposed similar restrictions on Jews who could no longer legally build new synagogues or adorn the old ones. Such actions were grounded in the notion that 'religious buildings attested to the vitality of a community and its right to practice its religion and publicize its cult', and, for imperial authorities, be they Roman or Muslim, who wanted to control the religious affiliation of those they ruled it was only natural for them to target religious buildings of those who did not adhere to the dominant religion (Caseau, 2001, p. 23). However, this did not necessarily have the results which some Muslims desired as there is evidence which suggests that churches continued to be constructed in the Near and Middle East, or were at least maintained, following the diffusion of the religion throughout the region. This is indicative of varying attitudes to church building among the early Muslim elite with some taking issue with it and others preferring to compromise out of a desire for co-existence rather than tension. The case of the city of al-Ruhā or Edessa, which is currently encompassed by the south-eastern Turkish city of Urfa,

testifies to this. This is due to the fact that in 825 CE, in the absence of the legitimate ruler ‘Abdallah ibn Ṭāhir (d. 944), his brother, Muhammad, who was left in charge, ordered the construction of a mosque and the destruction of several Christian buildings that he claimed were built after the Islamic conquests of the 7th century (Guidetti, 2009, p. 5). This included ‘the Church of the Forty Martyrs, the cubicula of the baptistery, the sacristy … and treasury of the Great Church, some basilicas, and a Melkite convent’ (Bar Hebraeus, 1872-7, p. 1:360). Such destructive action was, however, put to a stop by ‘Abdallah ibn Ṭāhir who decreed that those structures that had been demolished were to be rebuilt and that the destruction of churches had to stop (Bar Hebraeus, 1872-7, pp. 3:62-4). The destruction of the churches of al-Ruhā may be viewed as an attempt to erase the Christian sanctity of the city by replacing it with an Islamic holiness, however, the fact that such action was halted and the Christians were compensated indicates a preference for harmony by the Muslims.

The development of a sacred city is not, however, wholly reliant on the construction, or, in some cases, the destruction of shrines and other religious monuments and their ability to spread their holiness to their city. This is demonstrated by the fact that a city’s ‘sanctity is defined by its place in Scripture and exegesis’ (Meri, 1999a, p. 59). The Qur’an appears to have two focal points of sanctity, one is the sacred land of Israel and the other is the region of Mecca and its Sacred Mosque and this is reflected in the numerous references to both areas throughout the text (Rubin, 2008, p. 346). On one hand, the Qur’an describes the land of Israel as *al-arḍ al-muqaddasa* or ‘the sacred land’ (Qur’an 5:21) connecting it to various holy personages and events. For example, it is the land infused with *baraka* which Abraham and Lot escaped to (Qur’an 21:71) in addition to being the land that served as a safe haven for the Israelites after they had escaped the tyranny of Pharaoh (Qur’an 7:137). Similarly, though the name of Mecca is referenced in the Qur’an only once, the city is mentioned in the holy text more than once through the use of other names such as Bakka, other terms that are said to be synonymous with Mecca that feature in the Qur’an include *al-Masjid al-Ḥarām* and *al-Bayt* (Antrim, 2012, p. 37). What emerges as a point of difference between the cities also relates to holy texts, as Mecca is not only mentioned a number of times in the Qur’an just as the Land of Israel is,

but is also the place where the Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Qur'an 42:7). Thus, it may be argued that the Qur'anic revelation occurring there gave Mecca precedence over the Land of Israel (Rubin, 2008, p. 349). There are also cities that, despite there being no specific mention of them in the Qur'an, were ascribed with sanctity due to a potential allusion to them in the sacred book. Damascus is one such city and though there are doubts that it is referred to in the Qur'an, it was associated with a number of verses that include placenames that have been identified with Damascus. The first verse of *Sūrat al-Tīn* (95:1) swears by the fig and the olive which exegetes took to refer to a number of locations, such as Damascus, its congregational mosque, and Mount Qāsiyūn which overlooks the city (Ibn Kathīr, 1988, p. 4:834). Other exegetes go further and specifically focus on the fig in the verse stating that this is an allusion to Mount Qāsiyūn (Ibn al-Hawrānī, 1981, p. 97), possibly indicating that the olive in this context is a reference to the Mount of Olives in Palestine.

The fact that Scriptural allusions to sacred mountains in the cities of the Near and Middle East renders them holy underlines the sanctifying role of sacred natural features. Indeed, various elements of the holy landscape contribute to the sanctity of the cities in which they occur. This is true for both the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods as nature has been venerated from time immemorial as evidenced by the fact that in ancient Syria, for example, the Greek and Roman landscapes 'relied upon, and arose out of, features of the land itself' and were not primarily grounded in historical or mythological time. This is not to say that the emplacement of historical and mythological events did not contribute to the creation of a sacred landscape in the Near and Middle East, however, in most cases said events took place at sites in the landscape that had a pre-existing sanctity which was rooted in topographical features. Indeed, it has been asserted that the affiliation of certain events in history or mythology with natural features of the landscape is not the original source of their holiness, rather it serves 'to make the long-perceived holiness of topographical and natural features explicable' ultimately augmenting the holiness of a pre-existing sacred site in the landscape (Mulder, 2014, p. 253). The holiness of topographical features can also explain the existence of sacred cities, or cities in general, in an inhospitable area. The example of Mecca

illustrates this clearly as it is probable that the original source of the city's sanctity was the presence of springs, including the Zamzam, in the otherwise barren region. This is not unusual as it 'was indeed natural for man to sanctify and venerate a place where water flowed throughout the year' in an otherwise dry environment (Ghabin, 2012, p. 117). This is a concept that has pre-Islamic precedence as reflected in the words of the ancient Greek historian Diodorus Siculus who claimed that a fertile area in northern Arabia known as the Palm Grove which was surrounded by arid desert was sanctified as it provided the inhabitants of the region with food and water (Diodorus Siculus, 1933, p. 42). Rivers, along with the region through which they run are also imparted with holiness due to their association with pivotal moments in a faith, or a particular sect's history. The Euphrates, and as a result Karbalā' is an illustrative example of this as its holiness, in the eyes of the Shi'i sect, is rooted in the fact that the martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥusayn took place nearby (Ghabin, 2020, p. 77). Thus sacred topography contributed to the emergence of the sacred landscape in the Near and Middle East, more specifically, it was part of the reason why certain cities became sacred.

The sanctity of cities in the Near and Middle East can also be argued to have been established through cooperation. This is demonstrated by the assertion that Mecca, the place in which Abraham built the Ka'ba and established the rites associated with it, rites which were then restored by Prophet Muhammad upon his conquest of the city, and Medina which witnessed the self-assertion of Islam, could only be viewed as holy when linked to Jerusalem. The reason for this is that 'Islam conceives itself as a new rendering of those older Book religions – Judaism and Christianity – whose bedrock is the Rock of Jerusalem' (Neuwirth, 1996, pp. 115-6). The way through which cities reinforce the holiness of others also takes the form of highlighting the increased efficacy of ritual practice when undertaken at different holy places and cities. An example of this would be the assertion by some medieval scholars that visiting the tombs of both the Prophet Muhammad at Medina and Abraham in Hebron in the same year would guarantee one's entry into Paradise. Scholars also stressed that there were cities from which a pilgrim should embark on his pilgrimage to Mecca in order to reap considerable rewards, this is exemplified by the claim that anyone who begins a pilgrimage to Mecca,

or an *'Umrah*, from the mosque of al-Aqsa would have all their past sins forgiven by God (al-Albānī, 1992, p. 1:378, no. 211).

7.4: Concluding remarks

Although one may argue that the *ḥaram*, the mausoleum, or the place of worship with their considerable history in the Near and Middle East are the most ancient forms of sacred space, such a view disregards the sanctity of the landscape within which such spaces existed that naturally predated them all as the landscape of the Near and Middle East has been imbued with sanctity from time immemorial. This is true regardless of which religions were dominant as the natural landscape has been deified, revered, and even worshipped for eons. This may have changed with the advent of the monotheistic faiths which maintain that only God may be worshipped yet it did not mean that the natural world lost its holiness, it merely transformed to accommodate the new system of belief. This ultimately meant that Islam emerged in a region that was already holy and thus the Islamic perceptions of and attitudes towards the sacred landscape in which it had emerged were partially based on pre-Islamic notions of holiness that were built upon instead of being erased. The continued importance of the sacred city demonstrates this for it is an ancient concept that withstood the test of time and was equally as significant in Christian, Jewish, or Islamic contexts. Thus, the natural landscape of the Near and Middle East was instilled with sanctity from a very early stage and this sanctity only increased over time with the addition of countless holy sites and the establishment of numerous sacred cities and regions each of which had an intrinsic sanctity that hallowed the ground upon which it was built or established even further.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: The Inevitability of Pre-Islamic Influence

The similarities between Islam and the faiths which preceded its emergence in the Near and Middle East are abundant and they are in no way confined to a particular aspect. This is demonstrated by the fact that Islam and the preceding religions were monotheistic in nature, and in the case of polytheistic belief systems that were rife in the Near and Middle East, a notion of a High-God or omniscient Creator was present suggesting that even in polytheistic contexts, monotheistic ideas were present. This common belief in one God is among the most important similarities between Islam and the pre-Islamic faiths, however, it is one among many as illustrated by the parallels that can be seen in key tenets of the faiths as well as in the beliefs which all these religions had in common. While this thesis has emphasised these similarities as well as their importance, it has done so through the realm of sacred space, an area of study that has not received the scholarly attention it deserves which is unfortunate as there is much that this topic can shed light on with regards to the origins of Islam and the origins of Islamic sacred space. It is for this reason that this thesis is of considerable importance to the wider field of Islamic history as it explores topics that have emphasised the close relationship between Islam and the previous faiths and belief systems that coloured the world out of which Islam emerged, developed, and became fully established as a world faith. Indeed, if one were to use allegory, one can state that Islam was born in Mecca, spent its childhood in Medina, its adolescence in Umayyad Syria, and ventured far and wide in adulthood and these areas were homes to established faiths and cultures prior to the emergence of Islam. Thus, it is not inconceivable that throughout this metaphorical lifetime, Islam was influenced by a variety of factors which certainly impacted the different pillars of the faith and the way worship was conducted

while also influencing the development of Islamic sacred space as has been illustrated throughout this thesis.

The various pre-Islamic influences on Islam have been discussed in much detail in past scholarship, however, in most cases such works approach sacred spaces from an art historical approach, choosing to focus almost entirely on the origins of Islamic architecture. This thesis, on the other hand, has strived to adopt a different approach for though there are certainly discussions on the architectural influences on Islamic sacred space, this is not the only point of focus. Instead, this thesis focused on how the concept of sacred space emerged in an Islamic context and how this was ultimately made manifest in Islamic sacred spaces throughout the Near and Middle East. This study has also highlighted the fact that sanctity is not always applied to monumental architecture but is also imbued in the natural world and this is a topic that has not been discussed in sufficient detail in the past. This work also makes it evident that ritual is an effective generator of sanctity and this is accentuated in the case of pilgrimage and prayer which contribute to the sanctity of numerous sacred spaces. The fact that Islam as well as the preceding faiths of Christianity and Judaism all belonged to the wider umbrella of the Abrahamic religions meant that it is not unusual for there to be a great number of similarities between them, the most notable among them is the veneration of the same holy figures. This is not to say that all the figures venerated in Islam were equally revered in Judaism and Christianity and the example of Prophet Muhammad is a clear indication of this for he is not venerated by Christians or Jews in a similar manner as Moses and Jesus are in Islam. Nevertheless, this shared veneration of many holy figures by Muslims, Jews and Christians alike meant that it was inevitable for there to be sacred spaces that were regarded as holy by the adherents of all three religions which shows that it is not an easy task for one to detach the development of Islam and, more specifically, Islamic ideas concerning sacred space from pre-Islamic ideas.

This close connection between the faiths has been made apparent in different ways, however, the most visible manner through which this is emphasised is through the realm of sacred space and this has been demonstrated throughout the chapters of this work. The main thread running through all the chapters of this thesis is that despite the efforts of Islamic scholars, be they early or modern, to suggest otherwise, Islam was influenced by the preceding faiths though the extent to which this occurred varied with some sacred spaces showing hallmarks of a great deal of Islamic innovation, while others show clear signs of pre-Islamic influence. However, such influence should not be deemed as unusual as it is difficult to find a belief system or faith that was in no way impacted by the environment in which it emerged as all religious systems were syncretistic to varying extents and the dominant faiths of the Near and Middle East illustrate this clearly. Indeed, it has been asserted that the notion of a 'pure' religion that is not syncretistic is highly suspect for it can only be applied to a faith that has undergone no change and has been completely isolated from the outside world, a reality that cannot apply to the religions of the Near and Middle East or indeed any known community in the Mediterranean world (Healey, 2001, p. 15). Thus though the Islamic faith was a wholly separate entity to the preceding faiths, there is no denying that appropriation did occur. This was, however, paired with a degree of innovation that made it clear that Islam was a religion in its own right, not a Jewish or Christian heresy as some viewed it to be but a religion which, in its formative period, was weighing the debt to Judaism, Christianity and the pagan milieu in which it emerged against the 'emerging identity of a separate religious community' (Fowden, 2002, p. 131). The assimilation of elements from pre-existing faiths should not be regarded as a sign of weakness, in fact it shows that Islam was treading the same path as its predecessors, seeking nourishment from pre-existing monotheist traditions which serves to highlight that '[O]riginality is anathema to traditional religion' (Fowden, 2002, p. 133) and innovation always needed to be coupled with appropriation.

Thus, it can be concluded that this mixture of appropriation and innovation, though manifested in different ways, is made explicit through the medium of sacred space which in more ways than one

presented Islam as a fusion of the past and the present, the old and the new. The *ḥaram* at Mecca, for instance, which can be argued to be the most important sacred space in Islam, was a *ḥaram* before the emergence of Islam and continued to be one following the advent of the new faith. The Islamization of the Meccan *ḥaram* did result in the erasure of much of the polytheistic character of the *ḥaram* and its shrine, a prime example being the idols that were present in the *ḥaram* and within the Ka'ba. Yet the shrine itself did not undergo considerable change in its transition from polytheistic to inherently monotheistic status and some aspects of polytheistic worship pertaining to the *ḥaram* and the Ka'ba were retained by Islam though alterations were necessary in order to give them a monotheistic character. One example would be the inviolable nature of the *ḥaram,* which was of great importance during the pre-Islamic as well as the Islamic period. This indicates that even the most defining sacred space in Islam was shaped by appropriation as well as a semblance of innovation that was prompted by a desire to erase the polytheistic past of the sanctuary and replace it with a monotheistic present and future. It must also be highlighted that the notion of an inviolable and holy space charged with a numinous presence was not unique to the Meccan *ḥaram* for it was an idea that had a long history in the Near and Middle East, therefore the establishment of the *ḥaram* as one of the most important sacred spaces in Islam was also a continuation of a long-standing tradition. This underlines the fact that Islam, and, more specifically, Islamic sacred space, as well as many other religions and their sacred sites, cannot be fully understood when studied as independent entities as they owe much to their past and their environment. Pre-Islamic influences are also apparent in the mosque as there was also a degree of appropriation in the establishment of the Islamic mosque whether it was the use of spolia from pre-existing structures or the adoption and adaptation of architectural features that predated the advent of Islam and the subsequent establishment of the mosque as the primary place of Islamic worship.

A key point, which has been highlighted several times throughout this thesis is that the pre-existing faiths did not only impact the conceptual and architectural aspects of Islamic sacred space, for they also influenced the practices undertaken within or in relation to said spaces. This impact can be

discerned at several types of sacred space which have been discussed, however, it is most explicit in the wider sacred landscape as well as mausoleums and commemorative monuments. The reason being that Islamic practices within and attitudes towards these sacred spaces were, for the most part, a continuation of past practice that was redefined to fit the new religion. One way through which this pre-Islamic influence is highlighted is by examining the different acts of veneration that take place at mausolea and sites of commemoration for there are many parallels between Islam and the preceding faiths in this regard. Veneration was carried out at these sites in a variety of different ways including pilgrimage, seeking intercession through a holy individual, and seeking contact with the sacred through the touching and kissing of holy remains. More importantly, this veneration was carried out harmoniously at various sites in the region such as the tomb of the Prophet Ezekiel in Iraq where Jews and Muslims co-existed with relative ease. However, mausoleums were not the only sacred space at which the shared Abrahamic heritage was manifested as the commemorative site fulfilled this function as well. The Temple Mount in Jerusalem is a clear example as its considerable monotheistic past contributed to the endurance of the site and its holiness which centred around the Rock which is enshrined in the Dome of the Rock.

In addition to the various similarities between Islamic and pre-Islamic sacred space that have briefly been discussed above, Islam and its predecessors were also united in their beliefs concerning what made spaces sacred and this functions as the foundation for the close connections between the faiths in the area of sacred space. The three main factors that render a particular space as a sacred one that are common to the major faiths in the Near and Middle East are the presence and connection with the divine, the association of a holy figure, and the eschatological and cosmological nature of a particular sacred site. These three factors often overlap as in the case of Mamre which witnessed a theophany while also being associated with the figure of Abraham, additionally, the Oak of Mamre has cosmological associations for it has been asserted that it has stood in its location from the time of creation (Josephus, (n.d.), 4.533, English trans. 1847-1851, p. 2:97). The Temple Mount is also a prime example of all three factors overlapping and imbuing a given holy site with an

abundance of holiness. The reason for this is that the Ark of the Covenant, a symbol of God's intangible presence, was once housed within the Temple of Solomon that stood on the Temple Mount. What is more, the Temple Mount is also associated with a number of holy figures, three of which are revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, namely Abraham, David, and Solomon, and one who was the most important religious figure in Islam, Prophet Muhammad. Lastly, the Temple Mount and its environs have many eschatological and cosmological connections that feature in the traditions of all three Abrahamic faiths. The fact that the holiness of many spaces across the Near and Middle East was founded upon these three factors regardless of one's religion demonstrates that despite their differences, at their core, Islam, and its predecessors did not differ greatly on the subject of sacred space. This is not unusual as Judaism, Christianity and Islam were monotheistic faiths that revered the figure of Abraham as the father of their different renditions of monotheism, and whose adherents believed in Heaven and Hell and the apocalyptic destiny of the universe while also sharing ideas concerning the cosmological origins of the world.

Defining a space as sacred was also achieved through the medium of ritual. Though there are countless rituals one may bring forth as examples of this process, prayer and pilgrimage are the most important. The sanctifying nature of pilgrimage is rooted in the fact that this ritual action contributed to the affirmation of the holiness of a given sacred site as well as the endurance of said holiness. It can therefore be surmised that the performance of a pilgrimage whether it was motivated for matters regarding spiritual reward and satisfaction or commemoration and seeking cures, fulfilled several functions while also facilitating the endurance and continued relevance of holy sites throughout the Near and Middle East. What is more, the long history of pilgrimage in the region and its continued importance provides further evidence for the notion that Islam was influenced by those religions that preceded it. This reaffirms the previous point; that religious syncretism is an inevitability as though pilgrimage was undertaken in different ways by adherents of the different faiths of the Near and Middle East, at its core it did not differ greatly and managed to sanctify space while also allowing the faithful to fulfil their religious duties.

In addition to having similar views with regards to what criteria needed to be met for a space to be deemed as sacred in the Near and Middle East, polytheists, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, with particular stress on the latter two, also treated their sacred spaces as symbols of political power in addition to religious institutions. This is reflected in the tendency of rulers to embark on monumental construction projects in order to clarify their religio-political stance and attempt to displace the preceding religions which they had triumphed over. This is true for Constantine and his erection of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem following his conversion to Christianity as it was for ʻAbd al-Malik and his son al-Walīd in the former's construction of the Dome of the Rock and the latter's complete takeover and conversion of the ancient *temenos* to make way for the Great Mosque of Damascus. All three of these construction projects were motivated in part by political factors that were of considerable effectiveness when presented in a religious guise, indeed, the religious nature of these projects imbued them with deeper meaning while also serving to illustrate the desire of patrons like Constantine, ʻAbd al-Malik, and al-Walīd to achieve legitimacy both in the religious and political spheres. The religio-political function of sacred spaces in the Near and Middle East was also made manifest in the manner by which many sacred sites were constructed or established to compete with pre-existing religious structures. Constantine and his effort to replace and undermine Judaism through the construction of a church on the site of Golgotha rather than the Temple Mount is an illustrative example of sacred spaces being used as a means of competing and triumphing over other faiths. These parallels suggest that the early caliphs were continuing a long-held custom of using sacred sites as effective propaganda tools.

Though the Near and Middle East has provided ample material for an in-depth study of the origins of Islamic sacred space and the extent to which it was influenced by pre-existing ideas, there is no denying that there is much that has been left unsaid regarding this topic. The reason for this is that the areas beyond the Near and Middle East to which Islam spread are troves of information with regards to the influence of pre-Islamic religions on the Islamic faith, specifically on Islamic sacred space. Unfortunately, an in-depth study of Islamic sacred space outside the Near and Middle East lies

beyond the scope of this thesis, indeed this topic would require its very own research project, one which is of considerable importance for it would shed further light on the impact of Islam across the world while also demonstrating the extent to which it was influenced in return. In addition, despite the fact that the geographical scope of this thesis is the Near and Middle East, it has mostly focused on the Levant, the Fertile Crescent, and the Arabian Peninsula and though there were a few jaunts into Egypt, the region was not given as much attention as one would wish however this was a necessary part of limiting the geographical scope to form a well-rounded argument. This is due to the fact that the widening of the geographical limits of the thesis would have resulted in less attention being given to important topics. Furthermore, one also needs to take into consideration the limitations of the source material.

It may be true that this thesis has been aided to a great degree by many different sources some of which focus on the archaeological origins of Islamic sacred space while others offer a textual insight into the subject. Despite this, however, there are gaps in the evidence available for a wide array of reasons. This is particularly the case for the early years of Islam in the Hijaz as historians have agreed 'that there is a disquieting emptiness in much of what we know about the Arabs and their religion' during this period, which lies between 560 CE and 660 CE, a period which witnessed some of the most important events of early Islamic history that subsequently had an effect on the wider history of the Near and Middle East and beyond (Bowersock, 2017, p. 8). This lack of information regarding the early Islamic period in the Hijaz is partly rooted in the fact that archaeology has been virtually non-existent in the region until recent years, and despite the recent progress in the sciences of archaeology and epigraphy they both remain in 'relative infancy' in the region. As a result, historians have had no choice but to rely heavily on documentary sources which poses further problems as much of these texts were written and compiled many years after the events which they describe (Munt, 2014, p. 19). Additionally, as this thesis has as one of its primary foci the extent to which pre-Islamic faiths and cultures affected Islam, one is faced with some difficulty as the early Islamic sources were markedly ambivalent towards the period that preceded the advent of Islam. Indeed,

some scholars who studied pre-Islamic material such as pre-Islamic poetry performed expiation after doing so as this literature was a product of the pagan era which scholars tried their best to separate from the Islamic period. As a result, rather than shedding light on the degree to which Islam was influenced by the pre-Islamic faiths in general and in the realm of sacred space in particular, the early Islamic sources offer 'a presentation of the past that reflects the changes that Islam had wrought upon Arab society' (Hoyland, 2001, p. 9).

This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that the modern Saudi state has destroyed most of the archaeological remains that lasted to modern times, limited as they were, by improving the infrastructure of the modern cities of Mecca and Medina (Munt, 2014, p. 14). Additionally, the sources that survive on the early history of Islam in the Hijaz date to the Islamic period thus they lack corroboration from pre-Islamic texts (Webb, 2013, p. 6) as well as texts written by non-Muslims which were available for regions such as Syria and Egypt but which were absent in the Hijaz (Munt, 2014, p. 14). The poor state of archaeology in the Hijaz is, however, not the only reason for why there is a dearth of evidence pertaining to the most important early structures of Islam in the region, namely the Ka'ba and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. The Ka'ba is not featured in works of architectural scholarship due to the limited access to the building as only Muslims may enter the holy city of Mecca. Additionally, entry to the inside of the Ka'ba is also extremely rare (O'Meara, 2020, p. 3). There is also a lack of information regarding the foundation and construction of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina and though there is much that has been written on this momentous event which describe it in considerable detail there have been those that have doubted that the mosque could have existed as a concept when the Prophet's Mosque was built. It has, however, been argued that it is the role of the founders of new religions to 'create *ex nihilo,* grandiose new structures – scriptural, liturgical, and architectural' (Johns, 1999, pp. 107-8) and that is precisely what the Prophet did upon arriving in Medina. The language of the early Islamic texts which discuss sacred space also causes issues of understanding as certain terms were used that appear to be synonymous but may have had distinct meanings at the time of writing but which no longer do. This suggests that Muslim writers

did not have a uniform idea of sacredness. A demonstrative example is a tradition related by Abū ʻAbd al-Malik al-Jazarī in which he describes al-Shām as blessed (*mubāraka*), Palestine as holy (*muqadassa*), and *Bayt al-Maqdis*, i.e. Jerusalem, as the Holy of Holies (*quds al-quds*) (Ibn Manẓūr, 1984-90, p. 1:66).

As there are many issues with the source material of the early Islamic period with regards to the Hijaz, this thesis has strived to look beyond its borders to understand the influence of the pre-Islamic period more fully on the sacred spaces of Islam. However, the issues with source material are not limited to the Hijaz as there is also a distinct lack of contemporary texts with regards to holy spaces in other regions of the Islamic world that were incorporated within the Islamic territories following the Arab Conquests. This demonstrates how the differing views of historians also create problems as rather than stating historical facts objectively many historians infused their works with their patron's views in addition to their own which presented a distorted picture that one cannot accept as completely accurate. However, this thesis has nonetheless reached several coherent conclusions despite the considerable issues with the source material be it archaeological or documentary in nature. There are multiple reasons for this, one of which is that despite the lack of non-Muslim sources and the dearth of archaeological evidence one is provided with valuable information once these sources are supplemented by Islamic texts (Hoyland, 1997, p. 547) as well as secondary sources. In fact, the use of different forms of evidence in harmony contributes greatly to reaching a better understanding of many aspects of Islamic sacred space and this thesis is one example among many that serves to illustrate this.

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Appendix

Images and Maps

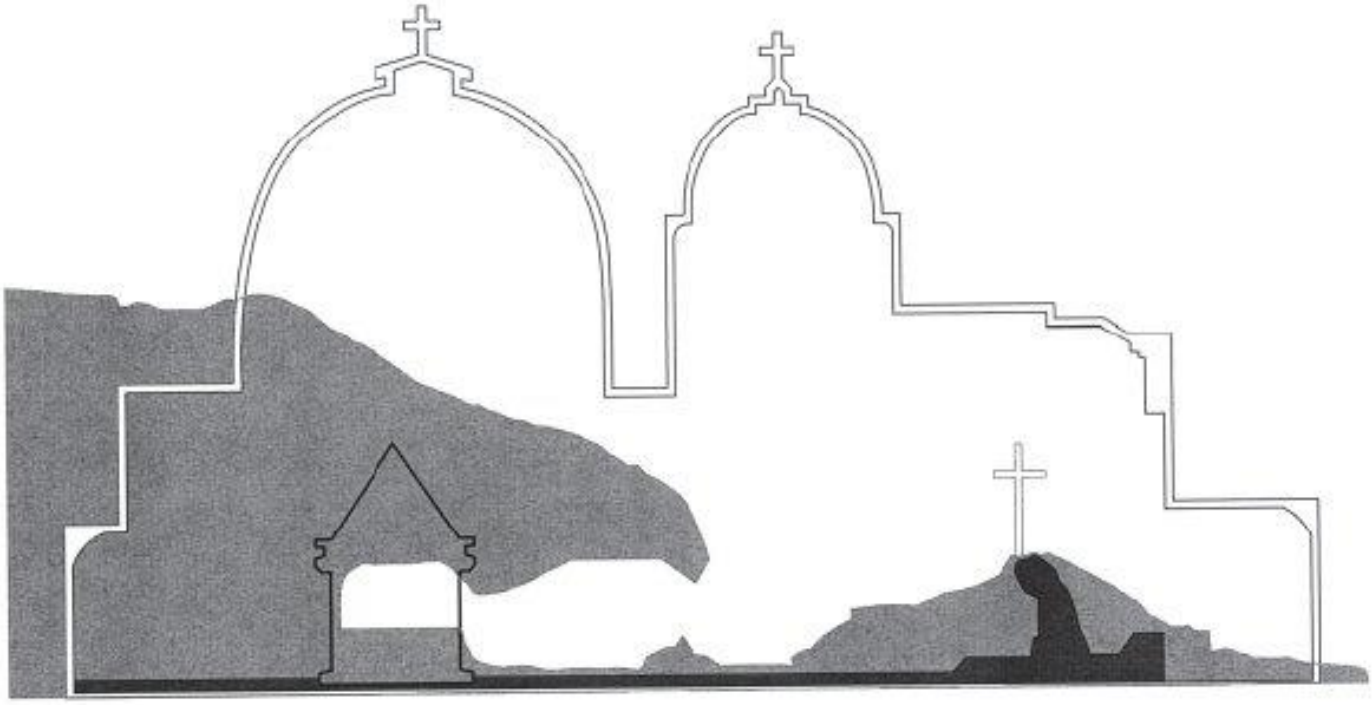

Figure. 1. The Holy Sepulchre and the Shrine Tomb of Christ in Jerusalem, ca. fourth-twelfth century, cross section showing the locations of the living rock of Golgotha upon which Christ was Crucified and the Tomb of Christ, first enclosed by an aedicula in the fourth century; the general outline of the church is from Crusader, twelfth century period and later (drawing: Heidi. Reburn and caption from J. Bogdanović, *The Framing of Sacred Space: The Canopy and the Byzantine Church.*

Figure. 2. The Great Mosque of Kūfa, present day., featuring the dome of the mosque and the dome above the shrine of Muslim ibn ‘Aqeel

Photo credit: Ali Alturaihi.

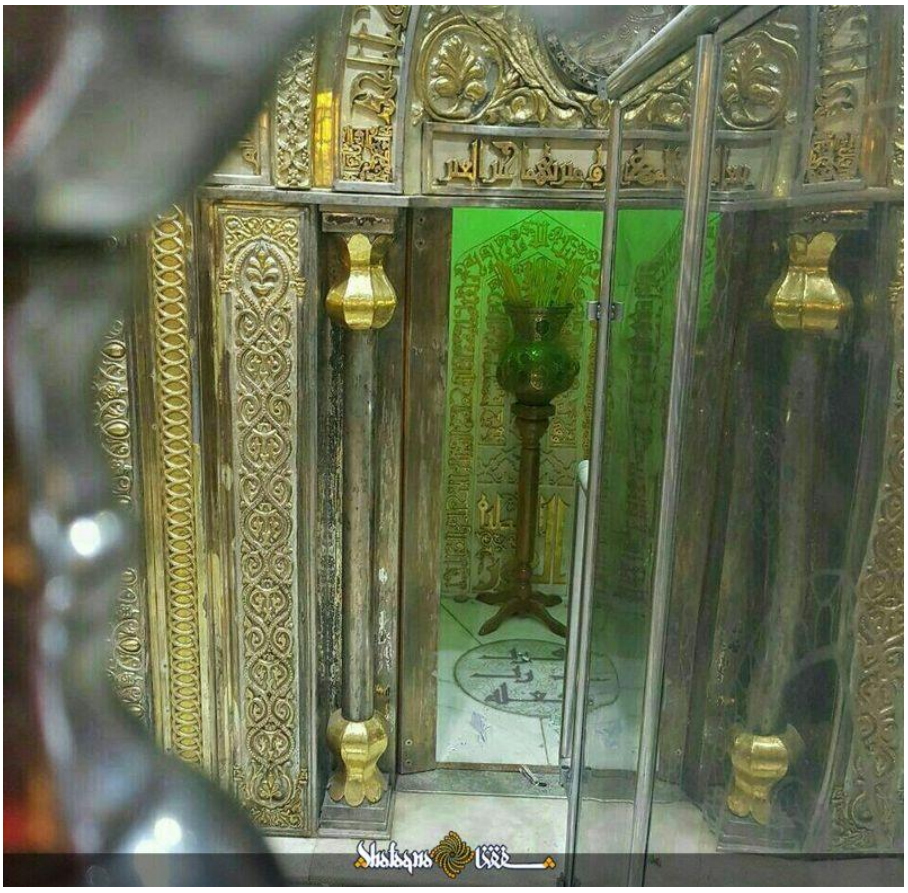

Figure 3. The *mihrab* of Imam ‘Ali on the spot where he was dealt a fatal blow while praying The Great Mosque of Kūfa

Image Source: https://en.shafaqna.com/211506/images-mihrab-of-kufa-mosque-the-place-where-imam-ali-a-s-wounded-by-a-poison-coated-sword/

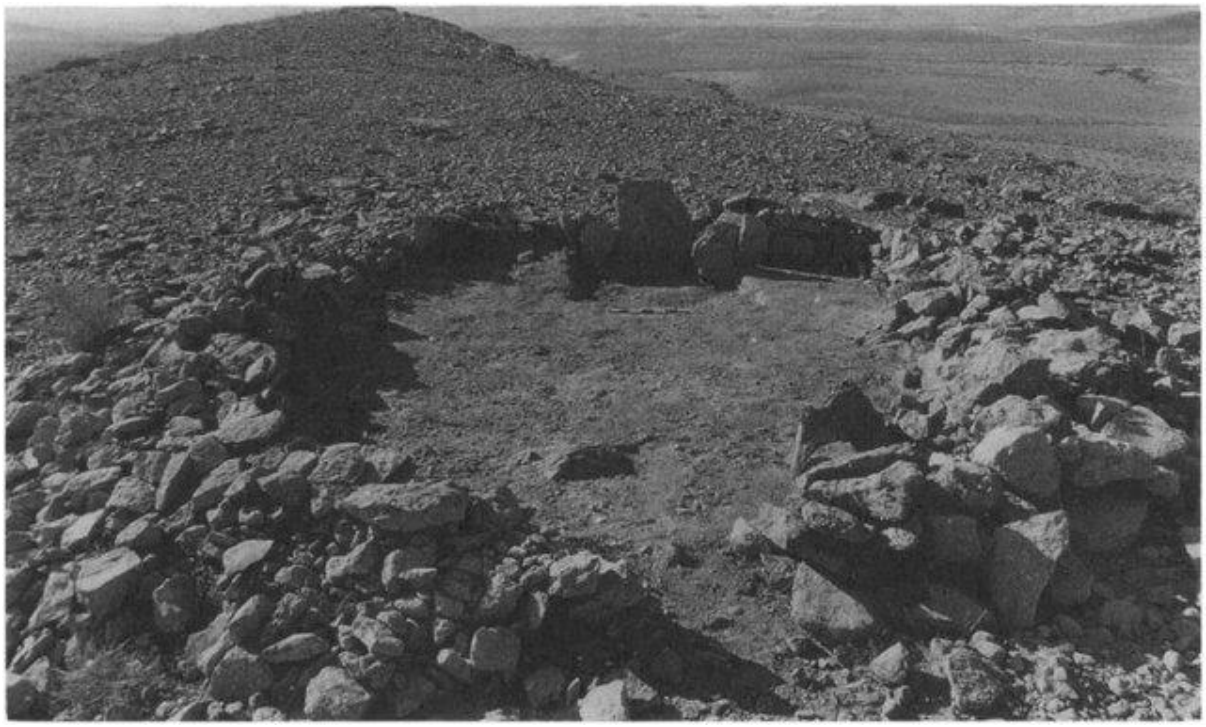

Figure 4. The open-air mosque at the Nahal Oded site in the Negev desert.

Photo credit: Gideon Avni

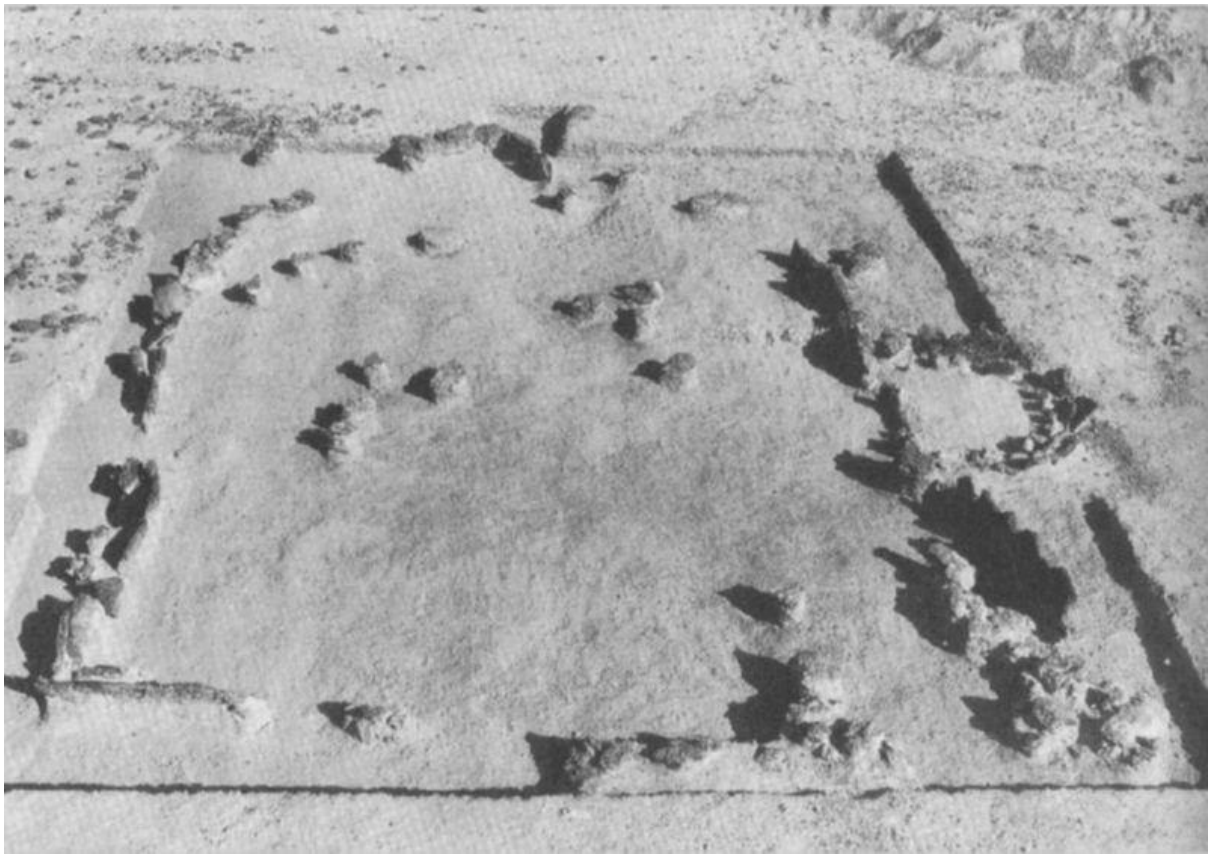

Figure 5. The open-air mosque at Be'er Ora with two *miḥrāb*s, one facing south, the other facing east.

Image source: Gideon Avni.

Figure 6. A mosaic found at the site of the Church of the Kathisma depicting a trio of palm trees.

Photo credit: Rina Avner.

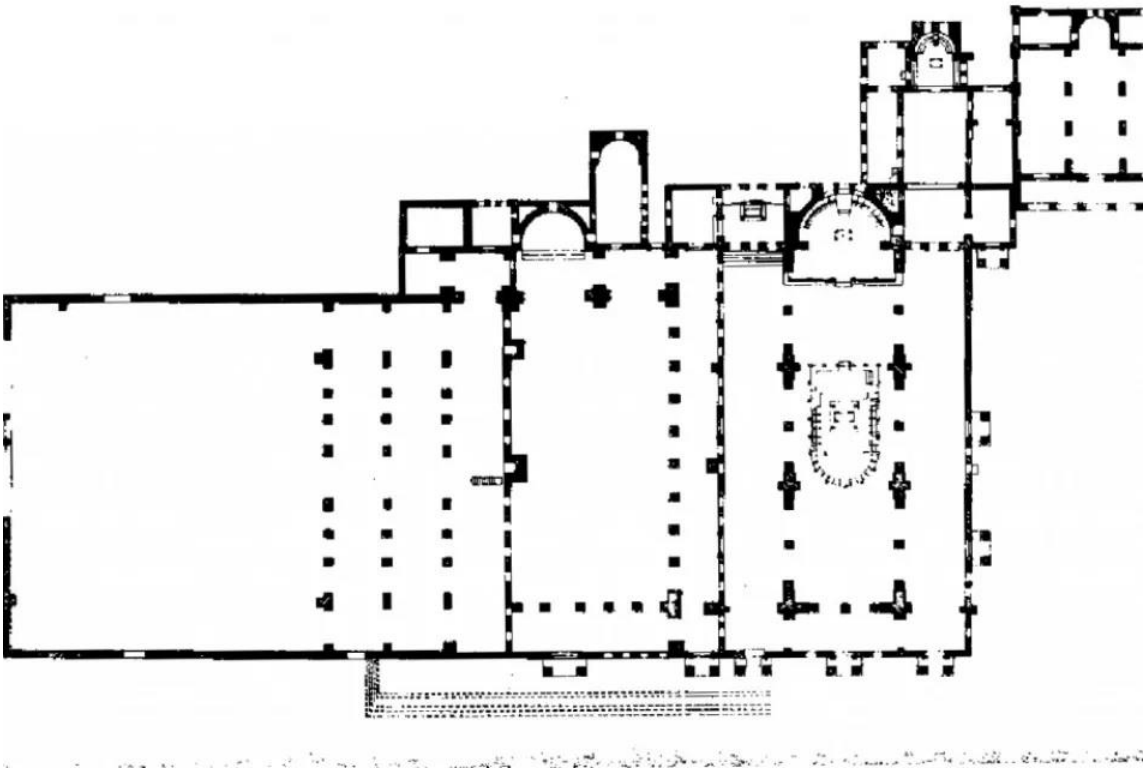

Figure 7. The Great Mosque at al-Ruṣāfa (left) attached to the Basilica of St. Sergius.

Image source: https://nabataea.net/explore/cities_and_sites/resafa-syria/

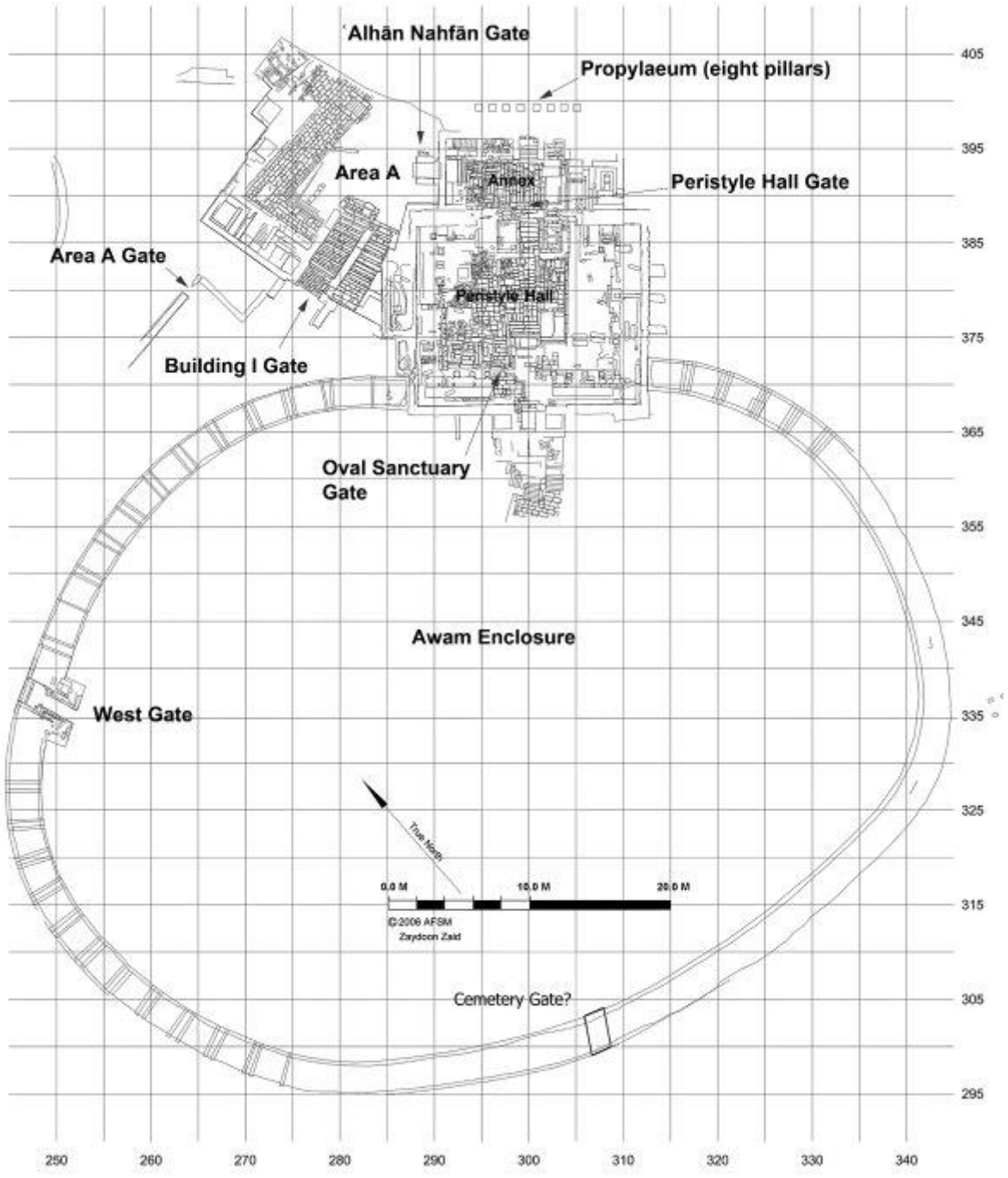

Figure 8. The plan of the ʻAwwām Temple near Ma'rib, Yemen.

Image credit: Mohammed Maraqten

Figure 9. The concave mihrab of the Great Mosque of Damasus

Photo credit: Jan Smith, Flickr

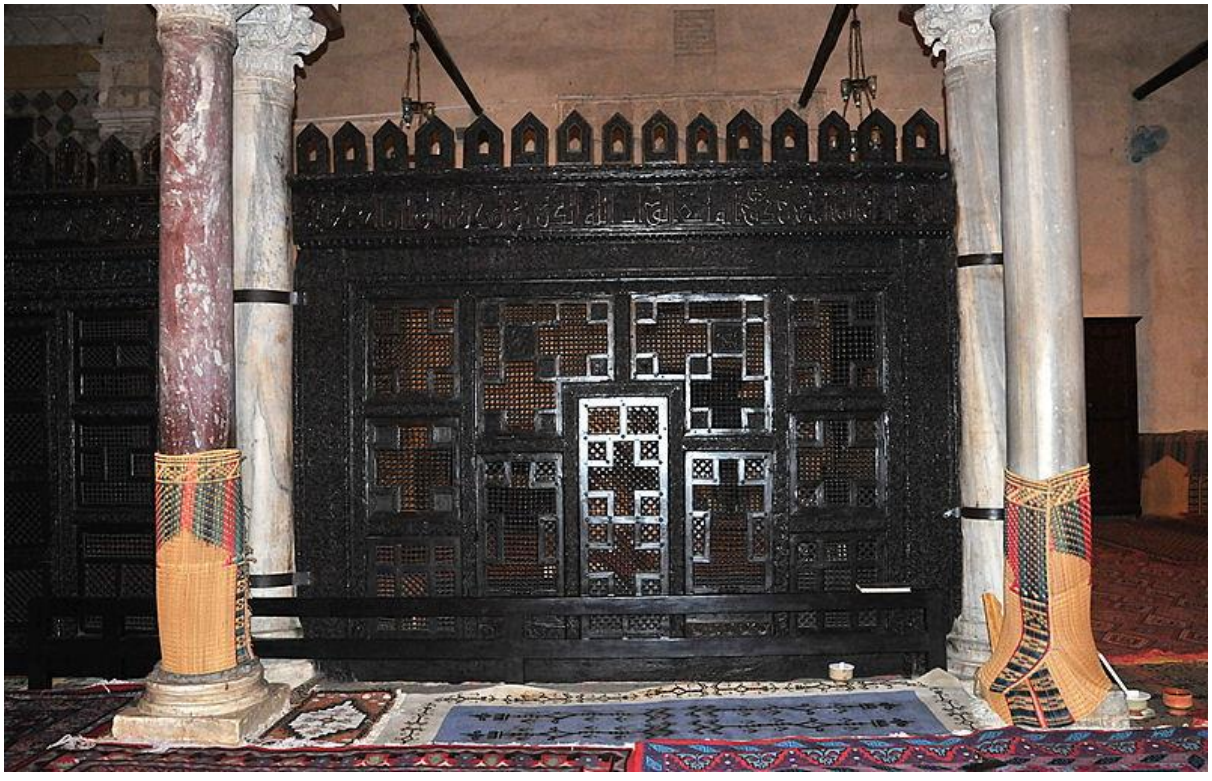

Figure 10. The *maqṣūra* of the Great Mosque of Qairawān.

Photo credit: Tab59, Flickr

Figure 11. (above) The minbar of the Great Mosque of Qairawān

Photo credit: Richard Mortel, Flickr.

Figure 12. (Left) The ambo of the Apa Jeremias monastery, Saqqara

Image source: http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/jeremiah.htm

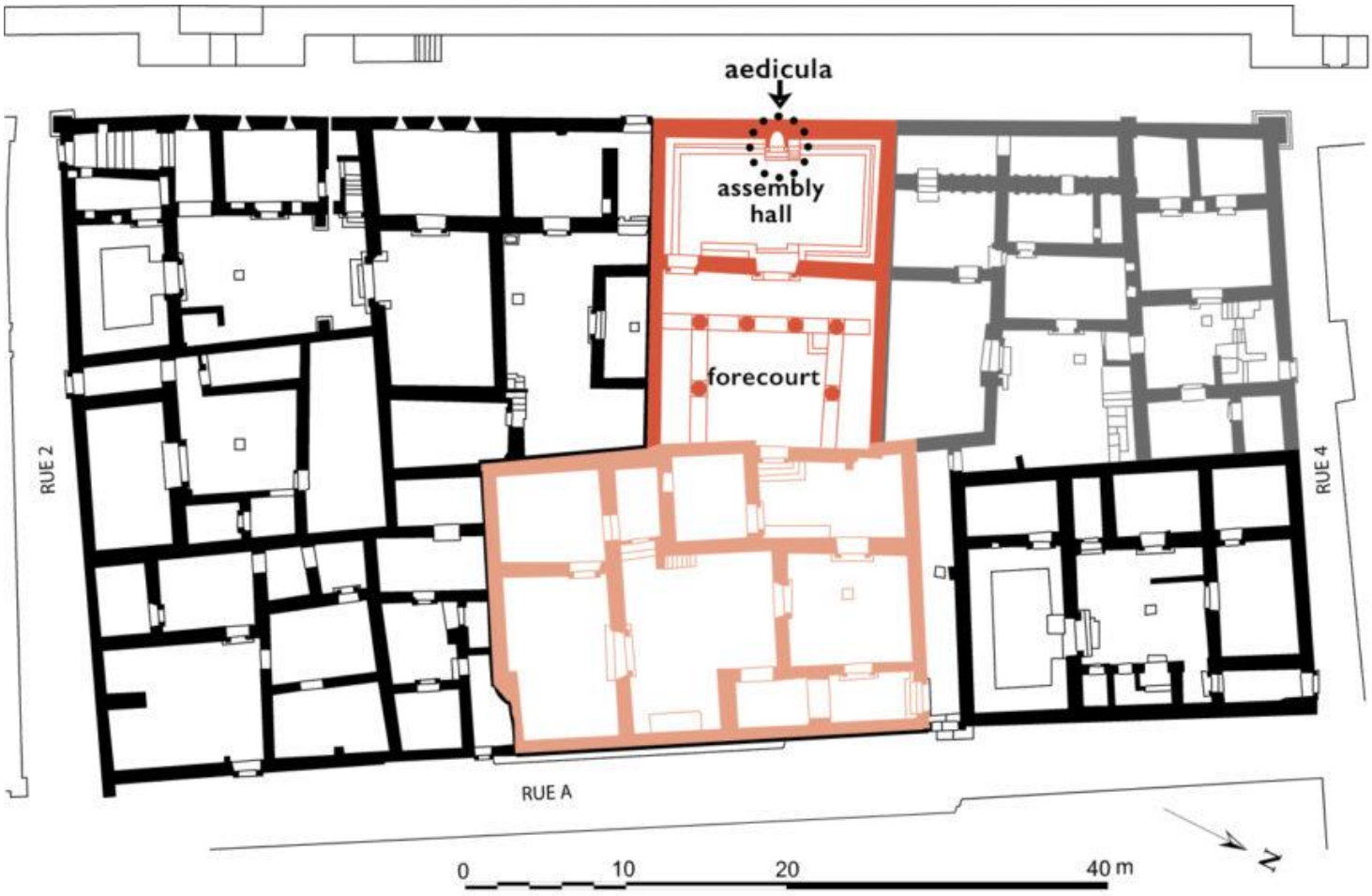

Figure 13. The plan of the Dura-Europos synagogue.

Plan after N. C. Andrews (1941) taken up in Hachlili, Ancient Jewish Art and Archeology in the Diaspora, 1998, 41 after Pearson in Hopkins e. a. 1936; plan: Marysas, CC BY-SA 3.0)

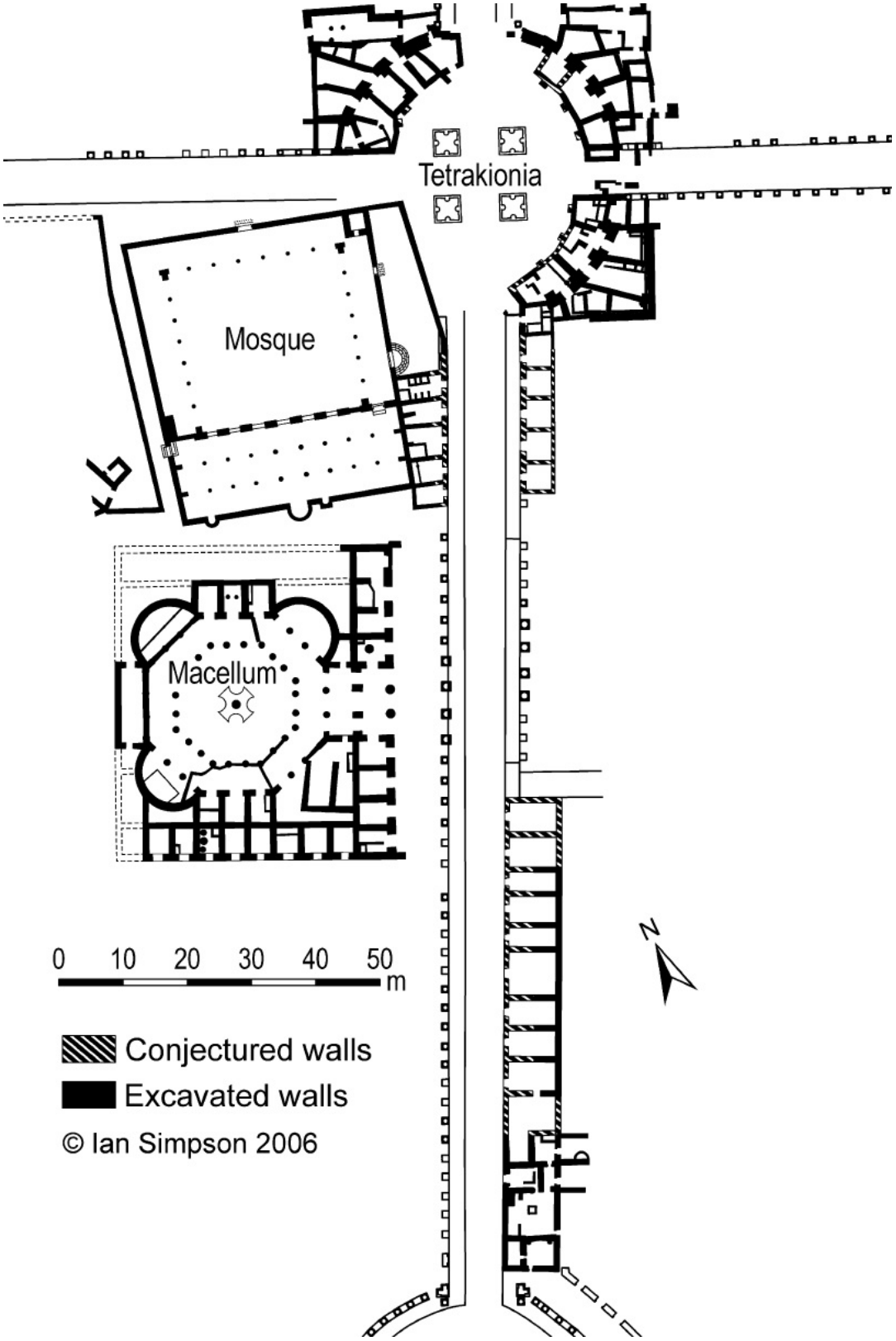

Figure 14. The mosque of Jerash within the wider city grid of the 8th century

Image credit: Ian Simpson

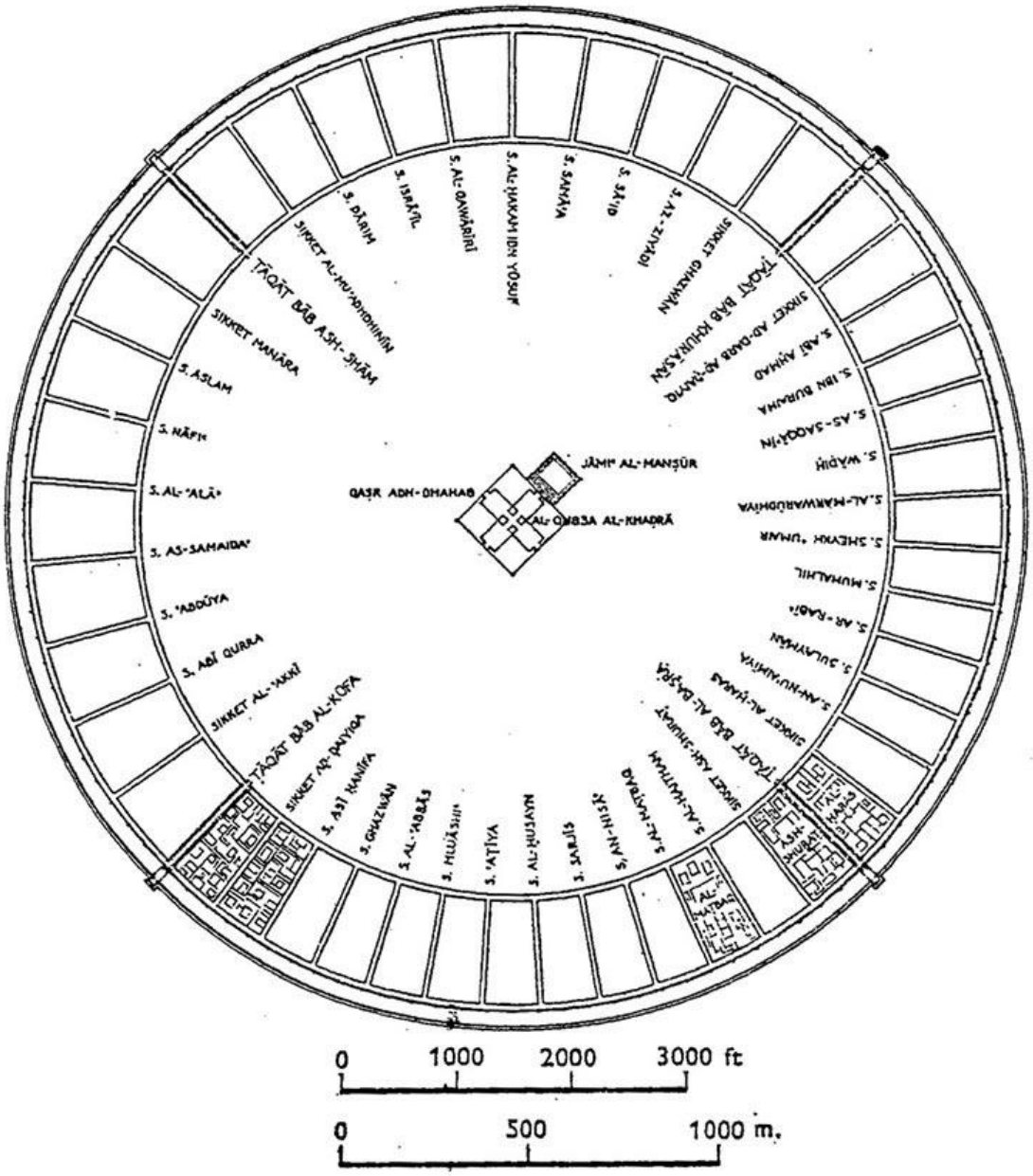

Figure 15. A reconstruction of the Round City of Baghdad with the caliphal palace at its center, flanked by the mosque.

Image source: https://socks-studio.com/2015/10/06/the-round-city-of-baghdad/

Figure 16. An inscribed *nefesh* stele, near Jerash.

Photo credit: F. Villeneuve Arscan, Ifpo

Figure 17. Tower-tombs, Palmyra, Syria

Photo credit: Bernard Gagnon

Figure 18. The *Bāb al-Ṣaghīr* cemetery, Damascus

Image source: https://commons.wikishia.net/w/images/c/c2/%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86_%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%BA%DB%8C%D8%B1.jpg

Figure 19. *Baqīʿ al-Gharqad* before the demolition of the early 20th century

Image source:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jannatul-Baqi_before_Demolition.jpg

Figure 20. The *Jannat al-Muʿallā* cemetery before demolition in the early 20th century.

Image source:
https://madainproject.com/jannat_ul_mualla_before_demolitions

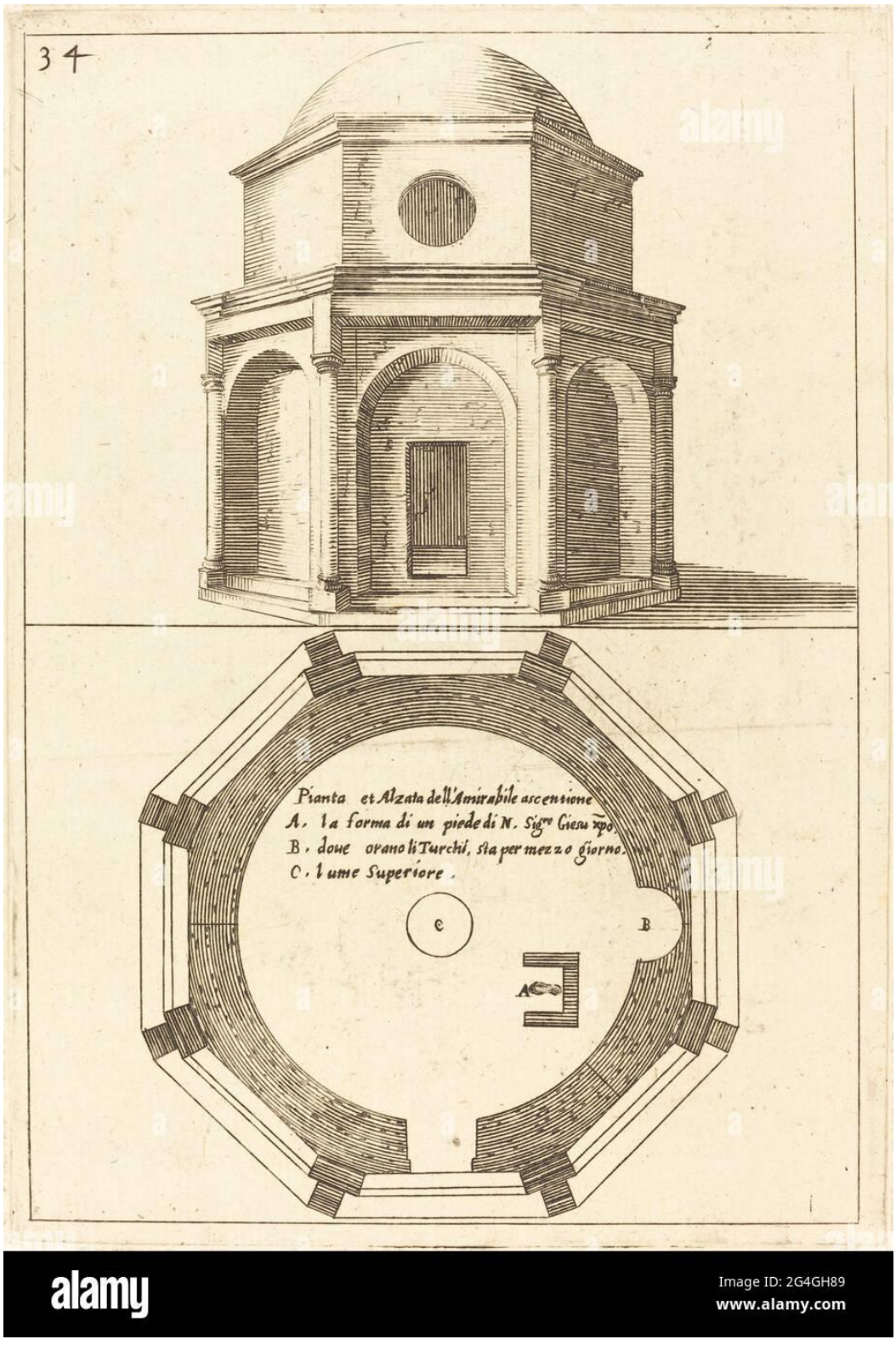

Figure 21. The octagonal plan of the Church of the Ascension, Jerusalem.

Image source: https://www.alamy.com/plan-and-elevation-of-the-church-of-the-ascension-1619-image433082617.html

Figure 22. The ruins of the Kathisma Church.

Image source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:KathismaJerusalemFeb162022_02.jpg

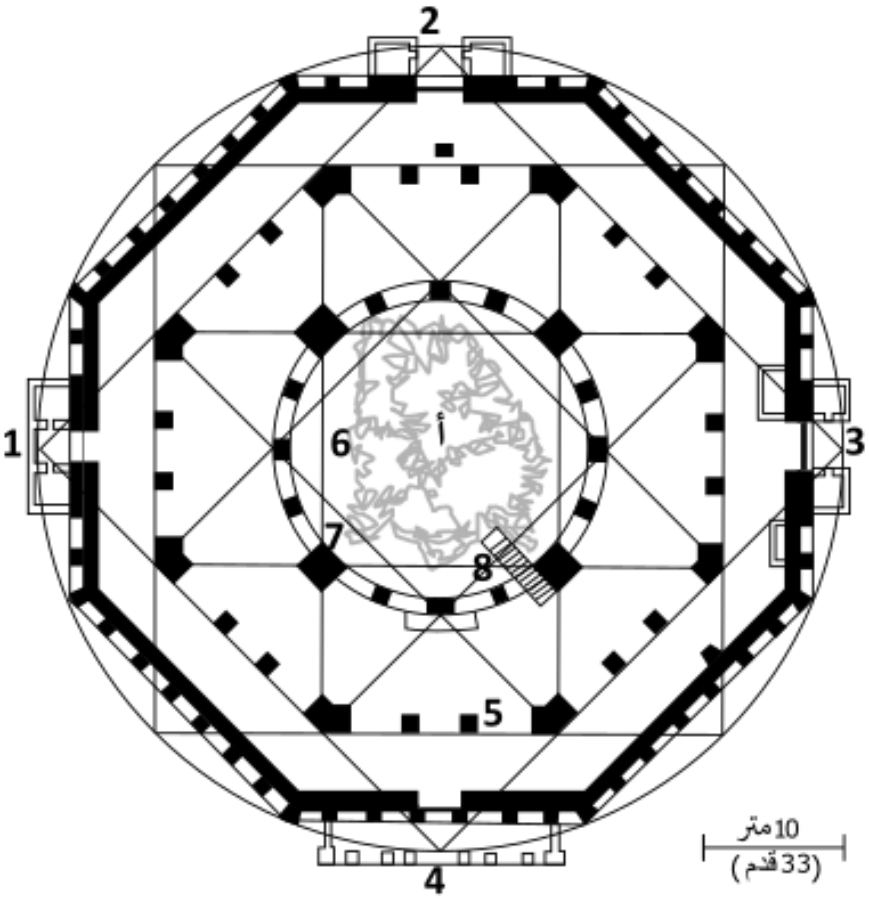

Figure 23. The octagonal plan of the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem.

Image credit: Bara'a Zama'reh

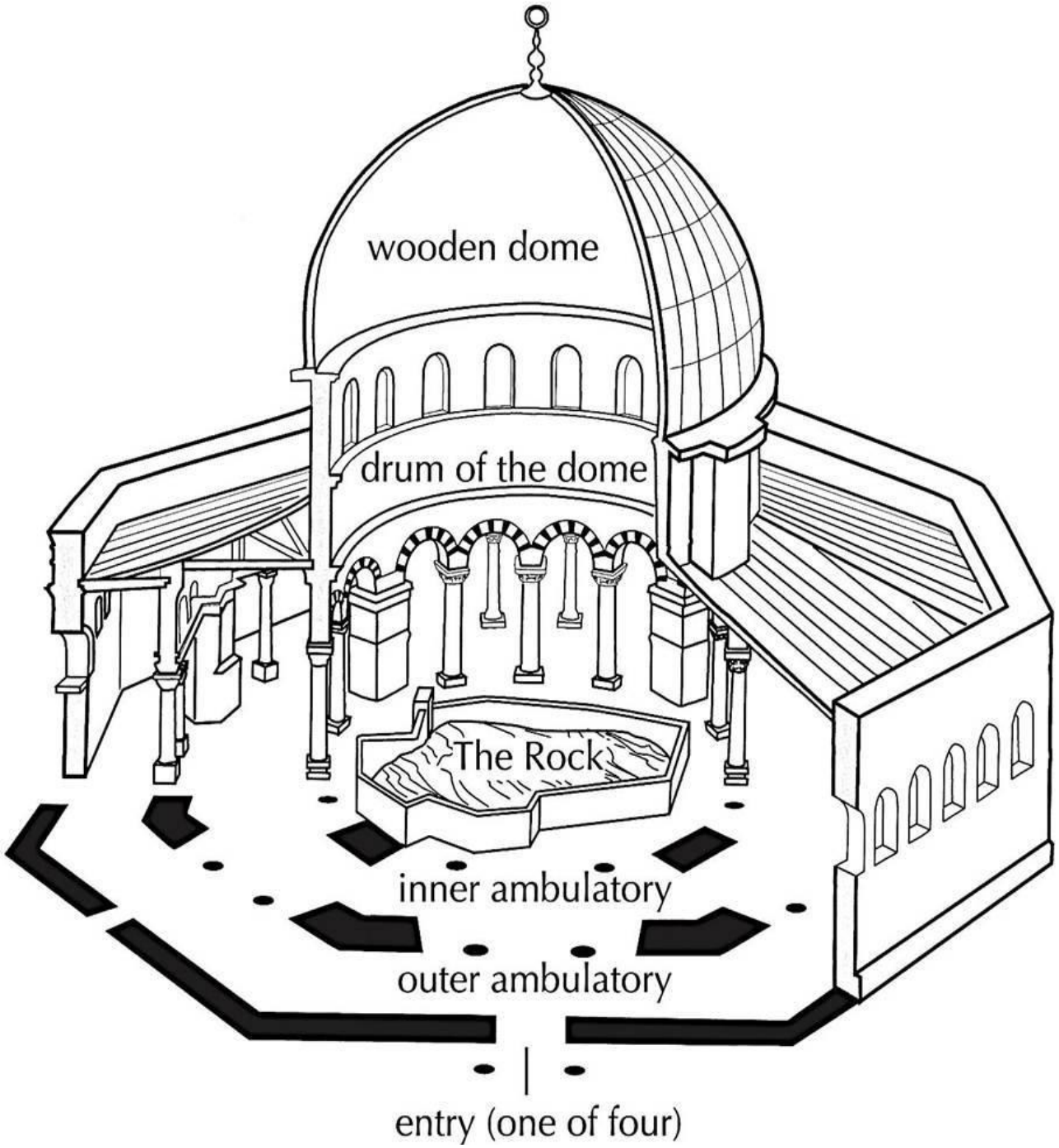

Figure 24. A cross-section of the Dome of the Rock displaying the ambulatories and the rock at the center.

Image source: https://nabataea.net/explore/cities_and_sites/dome-of-the-rock/

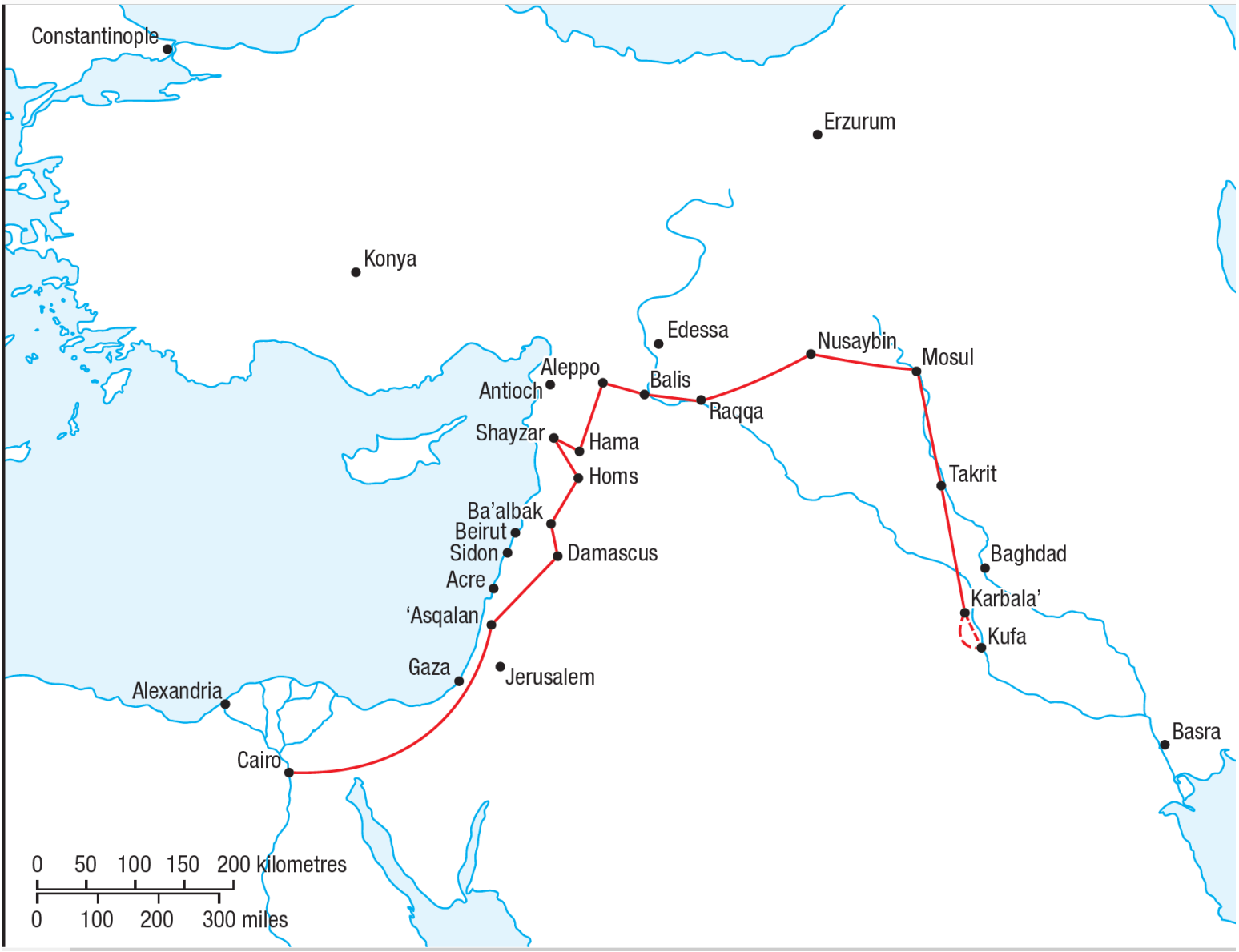

Figure 25. The route from Karbalā' to Damascus featuring all the cities the procession passed through.

Map found in Stephennie Mulder, *The Shrines of the 'Alids in Medieval Syria: Sunnis, Shi'is and the Architecture of Co-existence,* p. 256.

Figure 26. The Hereford Mappa Mundi.

Image source: https://centrici.hypotheses.org/584

Figure 27. Mappa mundi with the Kaʿba at the centre, dated 1060/1650 and pasted into a copy of an anonymous tenth/sixteenth-century Ottoman work, Tarih-i Hind-i garbi (‘History of the West Indies’). Gouache, gold and ink on paper; 13.6 × 23.2cm. Courtesy: Leiden University Library. MS Leiden, Or. 12.365, fol. 90b.

Image and caption found in Simon O’Meara, *The Ka’ba Orientations: Readings in Islam’s Ancient House,* p. 51.