
Chapter 7

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE “ROCK” UNDER THE DOME OF THE ROCK

WE NOW LOOK MORE SPECIFICALLY at that single “Rock” under the Dome of the Rock. What is the history surrounding it? Documentary evidence shows that when Omar (the Second Caliph) entered Jerusalem in 638 C.E. looking for the place where David prayed, he displayed no interest in that “Rock” in any religious sense whatever. Neither did Omar’s successor Mu’awiya.¹²⁹ In fact, after the Caliph decided where to

¹²⁹ Professor Oleg Grabar writes:

“In 661, the head of the Umayyad clan, Mu’awiya ibn abi Sufyan, governor of Syria and one of the truly brilliant Arab leaders of that century, was elected to the caliphate and received in Jerusalem the homage of Arab Muslim leaders. On that occasion, Mu’awiya is said to have visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of

place his *qibla* for his new Mosque (he placed it at the southern end of the Haram esh-Sharif which later became the Al Aqsa Mosque). Omar consistently and deliberately turned his back to the northern "Rock outcropping" each time he prayed toward Mecca. Omar was not at all impressed with the supposed sanctity of that northern "Rock" and declined to venerate it.

Yet, something happened that brought Omar's attention to the "Rock" while he was in Jerusalem. Recall that Omar had a Jewish general in his army named Ka'ab. We are told in the early Byzantine historical work by Theophanes (ninth century) that Omar also had ten Jewish leaders from the Arabian peninsula in association with his army and all recently gave lip-service to Islam. Omar did not entirely trust them and wondered if their conversions were genuine.¹³¹ Still, one day Omar saw Ka'ab (who had never been to Jerusalem) taking off his shoes and walking upon the rock over which the Dome of the Rock was later built. Omar became suspicious. When Omar queried the actions of Ka'ab, the Jewish general made a non-religious excuse for walking on the rock with bare feet.

This answer did not satisfy Omar. The Caliph already persuaded Sophronius to point out the Christian view of holy sites in Jerusalem. So, Omar already knew that the "Rock" where Ka'ab walked barefoot had been a notable Christian site believed to contain the *footprints* of Jesus embedded in the "Oblong Rock" when he stood before Pilate. When Omar saw Ka'ab take off his shoes when he

Olives, and the tomb of the Virgin Mary in Gethsemane. No mention is made of a visit to the mosque on the Haram" (*The Shape of the Holy*, p.50).

This powerful Caliph that followed Omar, according to the records, also showed no interest in the "Rock" that later became the center of the Dome of the Rock. About twenty years later, the Gallic Bishop named Arculf visited Jerusalem and described the holy sites (including Muslim, the newly-built forerunner of the Al Aqsa Mosque) but he also said not one word about the "Rock" that was in the center part of the Haram. I will show that Abd al-Malik himself (though he built the Dome of the Rock over the "Rock") erected his magnificent shrine to wean people away from any religious significance or veneration toward the "Rock." Indeed, Abd al-Malik utilized every means possible to show disapproval of any adoration beginning to be shown by Muslims.

¹³⁰ See Appendix I, "Rocks" and *Holy Places in the Bible*.

¹³¹ *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, translated by Harry Turtledove (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p.34.

tread on that “Christian Rock,” this made the Caliph suspect Ka’ab of being a clandestine Christian.¹³²

The “Rock” Was of Christian Significance

The “Rock” under the Dome of the Rock is the most conspicuous natural feature within the whole of the Haram esh-Sharif. For anyone to build a magnificent shrine over it shows that the “Rock” had great symbolic meaning. Recall that the first Christian pilgrim who left record of his journey to Jerusalem was the Bordeaux Pilgrim who in 333 C.E. mentioned that the most significant building east of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (then being built) was the Roman *Praetorium* where Pilate sentenced Jesus. This structure had its walls centered directly within the Tyropoeon Valley. This was NOT the site of the Temple in the eyes of the Bordeaux Pilgrim. He already described the Temple site, and other buildings around it, several paragraphs before.¹³³

The Pilgrim was describing the Haram esh-Sharif as being the *Praetorium*. He was looking mainly toward the southwest angle of the Haram and northward toward where the “Wailing Wall” of the Jews is presently located. The Pilgrim said this “walled area” contained the residence of Pilate, the Roman *Praetorium*. In Roman usage, the *Praetorium* was the headquarters of a military unit and could refer to the whole camp or more particularly to the commander’s house.¹³⁴

Within the *Praetorium* area was the “Rock” of Judgment called in John’s Gospel (John 19:13) “the Pavement-Stone” (in Greek, *lithostrotos* meaning “paved with flagstones,” and in Hebrew *Gabbatha*). The “Rock” was connected with the *Praetorium* and was

¹³² Ka’ab had studied with a certain Abu Muslim from Galilee who was a Jew that apparently had become a Christian monk. See Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine 634–1099*, note 70, p. 68.

¹³³ Again, see Wilkinson’s excellent translation of the Bordeaux Pilgrim in his *Egeria’s Travels*, p.158.

¹³⁴ *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* states: “In permanent fortresses or forts it is distinguished from the *principia*, or headquarters building, and clearly refers to the commandant’s house, a separate structural entity (Livy 28.25; Tac. *Ann.* 1.44; RIB 1092, 1685–6, 1912)” (p.874).

part of Fort Antonia, the permanent Roman Camp. The central feature of Antonia was a major rock and it was associated with *flagstones*. Josephus said: "The tower of Antonia ... was built upon [around] a rock fifty cubits high and on all sides precipitous ... the rock was covered from its base upwards with smooth *flagstones*" (*Jewish War*, V.v,8 para.238). Indeed, before the construction of Fort Antonia, Josephus said the "Rock" was 50 cubits high (75 feet), but Herod later built a platform around it with appropriate *flagstones* (when it became the north/south center of the walled fortress) and this made it not as high and it became accessible for judicial purposes.

That "Rock" around which Fort Antonia was built was the chief geographical feature of the site. It was near this "Rock" that Pilate had his residence at the time of Jesus' trial. Later Christians believed indentations in that "Rock" came from the *footprints* of Jesus as he stood before Pilate, and God supposedly allowed his feet to sink into the "Rock." Though these indentions were *not* the *footprints* of Jesus, early Christians came to believe it. It is easy to explain how this conclusion came to be associated with the "Rock" under the Dome of the Rock.

The so-called *footprints* came into vogue when Christians noticed in the New Testament that a "Judgment Seat" was placed by Pilate on the "Rock," called in Greek a *bematos*. The word comes from the root word *bema* that literally means *footprint*, or by common usage a *footstool* where a king or a ruler in judgment would place his feet when sitting on a throne to sentence people in an official judicial event. Even the throne of God was reckoned in the Bible as a spot where God placed His feet below the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple when He sat or stood to make divine judgments (Psalms 99:5; 132:7; Lamentations 2:1). Each military governor of the Romans carried his official *bema* or *bematos* with him in order to make his judgments on behalf of the emperor; and Julius Caesar carried one with him everywhere he went in order to render official judgments.¹³⁵ Christians simply confused the literal meaning of *bema* [*footprint*] and the indentations seen in the natu-

¹³⁵ See "Praetorium," *Hasting's Bible Dictionary*.

ral outcropping of rock became “Jesus’ *footprints*.” Though an error, this reckoning became an unforgettable identifying mark on the “Rock” where Pilate made his judgment against Jesus.

This “Rock” (called “the Pavement”) was well known in the time of Constantine. Helena, the mother of Constantine, ordered that a small Christian Church with the name “St. Cyrus and St. John” be built over *that* “Rock” and construction started some 30 years after Helena’s visit to Jerusalem.¹³⁶ This church was enlarged, probably in the fifth century, as a major church called “The Church of the Holy Wisdom.” This church is described very well (and accurately) in a sixth century work written by the Piacenza Pilgrim. His words are important enough in our present research to be repeated.

“We also prayed at the *Praetorium*, where the Lord’s case was heard: what is there now is the basilica of Saint Sophia [the Holy Wisdom Church], which is in front [north] of the Temple of Solomon [located] below the street [east and downslope] which runs down to the spring of Siloam outside of Solomon’s porch [the eastern wall of Solomon’s Temple]. In this basilica is the seat where Pilate sat to hear the Lord’s case, and there is also *the oblong stone* [I emphasize this to identify the spot] which used to be in the center of the *Praetorium* [the *Praetorium* tent was moveable]. The accused person whose case was being heard was made to mount *this stone* so that everyone could hear and see him. The Lord mounted it when he was heard by Pilate, and *his footprints* [italized for emphasis] are still on it. He had a well-shaped foot, small and delicate.”¹³⁷

Note “*the oblong stone*” which the people thought had the footprints of Jesus embedded in it. Just as Josephus stated, the “Rock” was the most prominent part of Fort Antonia [the *Praetorium* area], so this “oblong stone” was the central feature of the “Church of the Holy Wisdom” (destroyed by the Persians and Jewish soldiers in 614 C.E). This “Rock” is now under the Dome of the Rock on the Haram esh-Sharif.

¹³⁶ See Life of Constantine in Wilkinson’s *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*, p. 204.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.60, or p.84.

The fact that later Christians thought the *footprints* of Jesus were embedded in this “Rock,” is a key identifier. There are other historical references, both Christian and Muslim, that attest to the “Rock” under the Dome of the Rock as the same “Rock or Stone” that had the footprints of Jesus inlaid as foot-like depressions into the “Rock.” This was confirmed by the Christian writers Peter the Deacon and Saewulf later in the Crusader period.¹³⁸ Indeed, a short time later even the court recorder of Saladin (the Muslim who reconquered Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 1187 C.E) said that Jesus’ footprint had been inlaid in the “Rock” under the Dome of the Rock.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ See Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels* (p.182) where this translation of Peter the Deacon is given,

“In the middle of the Temple [the Dome of the Rock] is a great mound surrounded by walls, in which is the Tabernacle [the early Arabic name for “tent” was *Kubbet* which came to mean “Dome”] ... on the left side of the Tabernacle the Lord Jesus placed his foot on the occasion when Symeon took him in his arms.”

This cannot mean the Symeon when Jesus was an infant because the footprint in the Rock was reckoned to be an adult footprint and this makes the reference as no doubt being a mistake for “Simon of Cyrene” who was in Jerusalem at the time Jesus stood before Pilate. The point that I wish to make is the fact that Christians during the Crusades were well aware that the footprint of Jesus was reckoned to have been on the “Rock” under the Dome of the Rock. In 1102 C.E., the Christian writer Saewulf stated: “There are still to be seen in the Rock the footsteps of our Lord.” See Zev Vilnay, *Legends of Jerusalem*, p.22, note.

¹³⁹ See “Saladin,” in *Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam*. His name was Imad Ad-Din. His mention in 1187 C.E. is the last time we hear of Jesus’ footprints in the “Rock.” When Islamic writer Ibn Taymiyya wrote about Jerusalem in 1328 C.E., he mentioned the footprint of Muhammad, but he said it was a lie that the footprint of God or of Jesus were then in the “Rock.” He said that what was formerly held to be the footprint of Jesus was a “cradle” (an indentation in the Rock) that was nothing more than a “baptismal font” that Christians once used See Peters, *Jerusalem*, p.377: Yes, Ibn Taymiyya was correct. But what he failed to realize is that the Church of the Holy Wisdom was built over that supposed footprint of Jesus for the express purpose of being a baptistery church in which that indentation (called a “cradle”) became the main baptismal font. And when Abd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock he followed the exact outlines (even with the Byzantine Dome) of the early Church of the Holy Wisdom. Note the comments of Professor Oleg Grabar on the design of the Dome of the Rock.

“As to the basic shape, a circle surrounded by a double octagonal ambulatory, there is little doubt that the model for the Dome of the Rock was a

There can be no doubt of the identification. The “Rock” of the Dome of the Rock (which is clearly oblong) and the “oblong stone” within the “Church of the Holy Wisdom” were the same and identical “Rock/Stone.” Sophronius, the Archbishop of Jerusalem in the time of Omar when the Muslims first conquered Jerusalem, called the “Church of the Holy Wisdom” (still standing before its destruction in 614 C.E) “the House and the Stone.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, Sophronius saw great significance in that “Rock/Stone.” To Sophronius it was the very stone called “the Pavement” mentioned in John 19:13, rendered in Greek as the *Lithostrotos*, and in Hebrew *Gabbatha*. The word “*Gabbatha*” had a different meaning from *Lithostrotos*. It was an architectural term widely developed in Byzantine official circles to mean a “Dome” or a “Judgment-Seat” of God.¹⁴¹ The “Dome” itself had the appearance of the heavenly

fairly common type in Late Antique and Early Christian or early Byzantine architecture. Originating in the mostly funerary architecture of the late Roman Empire (the tomb of Diocletian in Spalato, of Santa Costanza in Rome), it became a form for *baptisteries* [italics mine for emphasis] all over the Christian world and included the two monumental ones built in Ravenna for the Orthodox and for the Arians, with mosaic decoration, as we have mentioned, comparable in its effectiveness to that of the Dome of the Rock” (*The Shape of the Holy*, p.107).

In Byzantine churches it was common to place baptisteries under “Domes” (*Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol.I, pp.390–91). But Ibn Taymiyya did not think that the footprint of Jesus could in his time (1328 C.E.) be seen in the “Rock.” And he was correct. By his time, the footprint of Jesus had been cut away from the “Rock” and that “footprint” section of the “Rock” was placed in a new area of the Haram. I will show this in my comments on my Web Page on the Internet.

¹⁴⁰ See Sophronius, *Antacroeontica* as translated by Wilkinson in *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*, p.91.

¹⁴¹ Look at the Aramaic word “*Gabbatha*.” It has an interesting etymological history. Note the cogent remarks by Professor Moss in the prestigious *Hasting’s Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol.I, p.631.

“GABBATHA occurs only in John 19:13 as the Hebrew, or more correctly, Aramaic equivalent of *lithostrotos*. For the etymology of the word see E. Nestle in *Hastings’ DB* ii, 74f, with the literature there cited. The word is apparently connected with the root GBT, of which the fundamental idea is that of something curved or convex. Hence it cannot be taken as identical in meaning with *lithostrotos*, which implies a level tessellated surface. A surface of that kind on the summit of a hill, or with a rounded porch or an open cupola [a Dome] over it, beneath which might permanently stand, or be

sphere (wherein was God's throne). The "Dome" became a sanctified symbol of God's heavenly abode.

Byzantine Christians first developed use of the "Dome" as meaning the place for "God's Judgment," and the central area of their famous churches were graced with a "Dome" (Judgment-Seat, just like *Gabbatha* in Aramaic or *Kubbet* as the Arabic indicated). The "Dome" also depicted the whole of the sphere of the heavens where God had His domicile (or home). Thus, the "Rock" where Jesus was judged by Pilate (where the *bema* or *footprint* of authority used by Pilate was placed) finally became the "Church of the Holy Wisdom" (no doubt a domed octagonal building) originally a Christian holy place. The Aramaic word *Gabbatha* is equal in meaning with the Arabic *Kubbet* and *Kubba*. The words are all synonymous terms and all can signify "Dome" or "Judgment-Seat." And since the "Dome" is half a sphere that shows the whole of the sky or heavens of a twelve hour day, it also signifies God's heavenly throne. The "Dome" represented "*God looking down from heaven*" at that spot to render His judgment on any case being heard under the "Dome."

Since in the New Testament Jesus was judged by Pilate in the *Praetorium* (Fort Antonia), that judgment was also at the official place called *Gabbatha* (or, it was understood to mean: "the Place where God Judges"). To the Romans it signified the place where "Jupiter" renders decisions regarding matters of state and religion. It was reckoned in Rome itself to be Capitoline Hill. To the Jews

placed occasionally, the *bema* or 'judgment-seat,' would best meet the conditions of the case."

In short, the word "Gabbatha" meant a high and rounded (convex) type of structure (the equivalent of what we call a "Dome"). The word also described perfectly a "bald-headed man" or the "forehead" (Jastrow, *Aramaic Dictionary*, under the word "Gabbatha"). The Arabic (being close kin to the Hebrew and Aramaic) rendered Gabbatha as *Kubbet*, or shortened to *Kubba*, which is the common Arabic word for "Dome." In fact, the "Dome of the Rock" in classical and modern Arabic is *Kubbet al-Sakhra* (*Kubbet* is often shortened to *Kubba*). The words simply mean "Dome." Even the Greek word *kube* (Arabic *kubba*) that early Christians used to describe the central part of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had reference to its "Dome" (for more information, see Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, pp.64-65).

and others, it simply meant where “YHVH judges,” or the place where God allowed Gentiles to judge people regarding civil and government affairs. This meaning of *Gabbatha*, in its judicial sense, is why the Byzantines adopted their place of judgment in churches as being under a “Dome,” which meant to be officially judged under a *Gabbatha*.¹⁴² The Aramaic word *Gabbatha* is equal in meaning with the Arabic *Kubbet* and *Kubba*. The words are all synonymous terms and signify “Dome” or “Judgment-Seat.” The Romans and Greeks who at first were not used to the application of a “Dome” adopted a different term but it came to mean the same official designation. They called it the “*Lithostrotos*” (or, simply,

¹⁴² The Hebrew/Aramaic word *Gabbatha* also has a specific meaning “head” in a judicial and political sense. In simple terms, it came to mean “headquarters” (with an identical meaning in Latin as *Praetorium* and finally *caput* or “head”). The “head” was reckoned to be like a “dome” (a convex structure) that represented the “head” of a government or the regional representative of that government. Like our word “dominion,” it came to mean the site of government headquarters. In Arabic, *Gabbatha* came to be pronounced with a slight difference and became *Kubbet* or *Kubba* (for short). Professor Grabar states that classical Arabic thought was of *Kubbet* meaning temporary tabernacles or tents (*Shape of the Holy*, p.64), but in time it came to signify the place where the chief of the clan held audience. And though the word came to mean “Dome,” in the last century it was common to see the “Rock” under the Dome of the Rock covered by a symbolic “tent” suspended from the ornate columns under the Dome itself.

It is easy to see that *Kubbet* is seen in the Latin *caput* (head) from which we obtain our modern word “capitol” meaning the head of government. The rounded capitol dome resembles a man’s bald head and the meaning of “head” is very much attached to the etymology of the Latin word *caput*. For example one need only look at the capitol (head) building of the United States with its “dome” on top to represent the head of government. Indeed, the original “capitol hill” in Rome (as well as that in Washington) has the precise meaning of *caput* (head) or in Arabic *kubbet* (Dome) as in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, which in Jesus’ time was known as *Gabbatha*.

The word “Dome” was not only a later equivalent, but as *Gabbatha* in the New Testament was a place of judgment where Pilate judged Jesus, so the later “Dome” over such a site came to mean “Judgment-Place.” Our common phrase “Doom’s Day” for “Judgment Day” is actually the same as “Dome’s Day,” that is, a Judgment rendered at the “Dome.” It can easily be understood how *Gabbatha* became in Arabic *Kubbet* or *Kubba* (and in Byzantine Greek *kube*, as the “Dome” of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was first called), or the Latin *Caput*, like *Kubbet*, where we get “Capitol” or a Domed building. In Aramaic (John 19:13), it is “Judgment Place.”

“the Pavement”). This spot was so important that John singled it out in John 19:13.

The important point I wish to make as a means of identifying the site of the *Praetorium* with what was to become the Dome of the Rock, is that the Christians from the fifth century onward believed the *footprints* of Jesus were to be seen on the “Rock” when he stood before Pilate. This belief is a cardinal factor in making a proper identification of the site.

A Final Interesting Comparison

In concluding these chapters concerning the Haram esh-Sharif, let me give some interesting comparisons that I hope all of us who study history can appreciate.

1. Let us say that you or I could be transported back to Jerusalem before its destruction, say in the year 65 C.E. when the apostle Paul and the Jewish historian Josephus were still alive. When we arrive in Jerusalem we ask to see an area surrounded by four walls with four large towers at each corner, that has a prominent “Rock” near its center and the area around the “Rock” was large enough to comfortably house a legion of Roman troops, and the region resembled a town because of its size. We could say that a Jewish priest by the name of Josephus wrote us about it. Where in Jerusalem do you think people at that time would direct us? It would certainly be to the *Praetorium* otherwise called Fort Antonia because that is precisely how Josephus described the Fortress.

2. Now, almost 2000 years later (in our present day) let us go to Jerusalem and ask for an area that has four large walls around it, that has a prominent “Rock” in almost the center of the area, that the region within the walls was large enough to hold a division size army unit of the United States Infantry and that occupied an area the size of a small modern town. Where in Jerusalem would we find such a prominent “Rock” being featured as Josephus said was noted in his day? We would no doubt be shown the Haram esh-Sharif with its Dome of the Rock near its center.

3. Now, let us go back to 550 C.E. at the time of the Piacenza Pilgrim and ask to see an area then called the *Praetorium* (that is,

the former military encampment where the Roman army had its headquarters) and where there was a large "Oblong Rock" being featured at a major Church called the Church of the Holy Wisdom. This area was directly east of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and supposed to be famous because Christians were identifying it with the place where Pilate had his residence at the time of the trial of Jesus, and it is reported that Jesus' *footprints* could be seen on that "Rock." Where in Jerusalem in the sixth century would the populace show us such a prominent "Rock"? We would no doubt be shown the Haram esh-Sharif with its four walls standing there in all their magnificence.

4. Now, let us go back to 333 C.E. at the time of the Bordeaux Pilgrim and ask to see an area called the *Praetorium* (that is, the former military encampment where the Roman army had its headquarters) and with large walls located in the bottom of the Tyropoeon Ravine and positioned directly east of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (then being built). We could mention that the Bordeaux Pilgrim did not tell us of any other structure but this *Praetorium* that dominated the scene east of the Holy Sepulchre. Where in Jerusalem during the middle of the fourth century would the populace show us that satisfied this description? We would no doubt be shown the Haram esh-Sharif with its western and southern walls solidly founded within the Tyropoeon Ravine, standing in all their splendor because those walls survived the Roman/Jewish War that ended in 70 C.E.

5. Indeed, let us now go back to 70 C.E. just after the war was over and stand with the Roman general Titus as he was looking for a place to house the Tenth Legion he was leaving to guard the area. As Titus looked over the ruins of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, he could see the lower courses of the walls of the Haram esh-Sharif still standing in all their stateliness. The whole place looked almost exactly like the permanent Camp of the Romans in Rome itself (about the same size and shape). Within the Haram were 37 cisterns for an abundant water supply. Would this not be the best place to house the Tenth Legion? Would not Titus have thought that the site in front of him was so perfect that it would have looked like heaven itself sent down the most ideal spot for a

military encampment in the whole region of Jerusalem? And most importantly, the walls were still intact. Would common sense suggest to anyone in the shoes of Titus any other place for a military fort in Jerusalem? Without doubt, the Haram was the ideal place for the Roman Camp.

6. Now, let us go forward to 135 C.E. and the time of Hadrian just after the Second Roman/Jewish War. This time it would be Hadrian the Roman emperor and general who was looking for a place to continue housing the Tenth Legion in the Jerusalem area (now that he was planning a new city with his name describing it). Hadrian could look down from the Mount of Olives and see the lower courses of the walls of the Haram esh-Sharif still standing in all their eminence. The whole place looked almost like the permanent Camp of the Romans that he was used to in Rome itself (about the same size and shape). Still, within the Haram were 37 cisterns to provide an abundant water supply for the Tenth Legion and the walls surrounding the site were so perfect for a Camp that it would still have looked like heaven itself sent down the most ideal spot for a military establishment in the whole region of Jerusalem. Would common sense suggest to anyone in the shoes of Hadrian any other place for a Roman military Camp in Jerusalem? Without doubt, the Haram was the only place for a Roman Camp.

7. Let us finally look at the panoramic vista of the Haram esh-Sharif from another perspective. All permanent Roman forts had prisons associated with them for wayward military personnel and (in foreign lands) even for civilian criminals who could claim Roman citizenship. Permanent Roman forts had four solid walls around them to protect the troops inside the fortress from being besieged by external armies, but those walls also proved to be excellent ones to house imperial prisons (criminals would find it difficult to ascend and descend the walls among a whole contingent of Roman troops on constant vigilance). So, the apostle Paul as a Roman citizen was taken into the "encampment" (Fort Antonia) in order to be guarded both on the behalf of Roman security and to defend him from Jewish people who wanted to kill him (Acts 22:24). Paul stayed in such confinement until a cohort of Roman troops escorted him to Caesarea where he remained in Roman custody for two years. There was no place in Jerusalem more suited

for a permanent Roman Fort with its special prisons than the Haram esh-Sharif. Any military commander looking for a suitable fortress and an associated Roman prison in Jerusalem would be instantly gravitated to the Haram. Indeed, when the Crusaders finally commissioned the Knights Templars in Jerusalem, the Templars made their encampment and headquarters at the Haram. After the Crusades, however, because the site came to be reckoned at that time (wrongly) as being the former place of the Temples, its holiness made it to be inconsistent as a proper military fort. From the time of the Crusades, the main military camp and fort in Jerusalem became the Tower or Citadel of David located in the western part of the city near the Jaffa Gate. But before the Crusades, every military commander looked on the Haram esh-Sharif as the ideal place for a permanent fortress and prison. One would be daft to state otherwise because that is precisely the reason the fortress was built by King Herod in the first place.

Indeed, the very reason why Titus and later Hadrian kept the four walls of the Haram esh-Sharif standing in all their excellence was to provide housing and protection for the Tenth Legion. And why not? That precise spot was Fort Antonia before the Roman/Jewish War of 66 to 70 C.E., and it remained as Fort Antonia until 289 C.E. when the Tenth Legion left Jerusalem and went to Eilat on the Red Sea. And 50 years later in the time of the Bordeaux Pilgrim it was still the *Praetorium* (the Camp of the Romans) that had its walls in the Tyropoeon Ravine standing in all their loftiness.

Let's face it. These are common sense comparisons that most ordinary rational people would no doubt make. I have provided them along with other historical facts (that I will later present) that will make it outrageous and ridiculous to suggest anything else as possible. And as a matter of fact, no one did make such absurd statements to counter the comparisons, until the religious authorities in the seventh century began to turn the whole area (through folklore accounts provided by visions, dreams and revelations) into the very site of the former Temples of God. What nonsense! The Haram is the site of Fort Antonia, NOT the Temple!