

## **WHAT ELSE AT HARAM PLAZA....**

In the old city of Jerusalem, the tourists are not only attracted by the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque only but there are other footprints of the blessings, divine love & human values too which have left immortal impressions over the pages of history. Some of those monuments are mentioned below.

### **DOME OF THE CHAIN:**

It is a free-standing dome located adjacently east of the **Golden Dome** in the Old City of Jerusalem; was constructed during Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik [685 AD] **as model for [later] building of Sakhrah Golden Dome** in 691-92 AD. One of the oldest structure on the Haram Plaza; and surely was used as a proper mosque till the completion of construction of the Golden Dome and Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Dome of the Chain has no walls; the walls were not originally erected nor ever built later.

When the Crusaders got hold of the city in 1099 AD, they identified this dome as the spot where **St James was martyred**, and transformed the structure into a chapel dedicated to him within the Templum Domini [**the Golden Dome**]. In 1187 AD, the building was returned to Muslims after Saladin captured Jerusalem from the Crusaders. In 1199 AD, its ceiling and paving were renewed by the then ruling Ayyubids. The Christians had re-used the place once more during 1240–44 when they captured Jerusalem again for a short period. It was renovated by Mamluk Sultan Baybars in 1260–77; which mainly involved re-facing of the *mihrab* with marble. In 1561, under Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, the tiles of the *mihrab* were glazed. The last major restoration of this Dome was done in 1975-76.

In ancient religious histories, there is a mention of Nabi **Solomon AS's Chain** - said to be suspended between Heaven and Earth - where Dome of the Chain now stands. The chain had one characteristic. If two men approached it to

solve a point of litigation, only the honest and upright man could take hold of it; the unjust man could only see it moving out of his reach. The Jews and Christians rightly say it as **Dome of the Chain** because of Nabi Solomon's Chain but Arabs translated the word CHAIN as '**Silsilah**' without assigning any reason or event that what type of '*Silsilah*' is attached with it.

During construction of the **Golden Dome** in 691-92 AD and the **Al-Aqsa** in 715 AD, the place was used as mosque for the Muslim builders and others. But when the building work completed, the practice of regular prayers discontinued here because the two major places had their separate prayers arrangements regularly till today [except the intervals mentioned for Crusader's 90 years period]. Today there is no prayer held in the said Dome – thus the travelers often see the small children playing football there.

The building consists of a domed structure with two concentric open arcades but without walls. The dome, resting on a hexagonal drum, is made of timber but then covered by lead sheets to save it from bad weathers. The *qibla* wall contains the prayer niche and is flanked by two smaller columns. The Dome of the Chain has a diameter of 14 meters [46 ft], making it the third largest building on Haram Plaza after the al-Aqsa and the Golden Dome.

It appeals as fact that Dome of the Chain was used as a model for the Dome of the Rock – the **Golden Dome** – both contain two concentric polygons – but the Golden Dome is three times the size of the Dome of the Chain. The only difference is that the Golden Dome is octagonal whereas the Dome of the Chain is hexagonal – but the philosophy and proportionate dimensions are mathematically the same. The alternate purpose of the Dome of the Chain is unknown otherwise.

### **DOME OF ASCENSION:**

**Dome of Ascension** [Arabic: *Qubbat al-Miraj*] is a small, free-standing dome built by Crusaders in north of the **Golden Dome** [Dome of the Rock] at the Haram plaza. Though sign plate posted there in Arabic describes that Prophet Muhammad pbuh ascended to Heaven during his 'Night Journey' from this place but the doubts prevail because the Prophet pbuh was surely taken up from the holy rock now lying under the Golden Dome.

The scholars hold that this **Dome** was built by the Crusaders as part of the Christian *Templum Domini* [Crusaders' given name to the **Golden Dome**], probably as a baptistry [the ancient Christians used to build a small dome / place like this along side a big church to administer the baptismal rituals].

The structure and the column capitals are of Frankish style and construction, but some repair or renovation was done in or after the Ayyubid dynasty period. An Arabic inscription on the sign plate dated 1201 AD describes it as re-dedicated to waqf.

### **DOME OF THE SPIRITS [or TABLETS]:**

If you walk from the Golden Dome towards Dome of Ascension, you'll see another Dome further down in the same direction – standing alone and much lower in height. In Arab tradition this is known as the Dome of Tablets - to commemorate the Tablets of the spiritual Law like that of Ten Commandments for the Jewish people or the Ark of the Covenant **so there is also a theory that this is the Foundation Stone where the Holy of Holies was actually placed – NOT inside the Golden Dome.**

Some modern Jews researchers believe that the **Dome of the Tablets** is a place where their two Temples were built – though only few scholars agree with the theory. Below is an interesting account of this **Dome of the**

**Tablets** as researched by an Israeli scholar who worked on the '**mystery of Golden Dome**' and the holy ROCK in it; see an essay from [www.upi.com](http://www.upi.com):

### **Israeli scholar's major discovery:**

By DAVID E. ANDERSON, UPI Religion Writer  
**Feb. 26, 1983** - key points in **verbatim**:

*"WASHINGTON -- ..... Scholars have generally maintained that no trace of the Jewish temple is to be found on Temple Mount..... It has generally been assumed that both the Temple of Solomon and the Second Temple, reconstructed by Herod, stood where the Dome of the Rock now stands. **Dr Asher Kaufman** [a professor of physics & Archaeology at Hebrew University 15 years] **disputes that.***

*Kaufman, using ancient literary sources and measurements of hewn rock remains on Temple Mount, **concluded that the Jewish Temple originally was located on the northern end of the Dome of the Rock platform, about 330 feet north of the Dome of the Rock.....It is known in Arabic as the **Dome of the Spirits** or the **Dome of the Tablets.** Kaufman maintains that this flat rock is the Foundation Stone in the Holy of Holies on which the Ark of the Covenant rested.***

***Kaufman also contends that the Golden Gate, the primary ancient entrance to the Temple Mount area.....will run directly through the cupola known as the Dome of the Tablets."***

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### **AL-MARWANI PRAYER HALL:**

In western literature it is known as **SOLOMON'S STABLES** but during years 1996-99 it was made

a part of the Aqsa Mosque after converting it into a Muslim prayer hall. It is an underground vaulted space, some 500 sq m in area; at the bottom of stairs which lead down from the al-Aqsa Mosque to the base of the southern wall of the **Haram Sharif** [Temple Mount] in the Old City of Jerusalem. It lies 12½m below the courtyard and feature twelve rows of pillars and arches; later added lights and floor tiles and renamed it the **Al-Marwani Prayer Hall**.

The structure was mostly built by King Herod as part of his extension of the platform of the Temple Mount southward to the Ophel. The Herodian engineers constructed the enormous platform with a series of **vaulted arches supported by eighty-eight pillars** resting on massive Herodian blocks and divided into **twelve rows of galleries**. Originally it was a storage space of the **Second Temple** – but visitors are rarely permitted to enter the areas.

The underground space for the most part remained empty except for the Crusaders period who had converted it into a stable for the cavalry. The rings for tethering horses can still be seen on some of the pillars. The structure has been called **Solomon's Stables** since Crusader times of Baldwin II [King of Jerusalem in 1118-31 AD]. In the winter of 1996 the **Islamic Waqf** acquired permit to use Solomon's Stables as an alternative place of worship for 10,000 worshippers in occasional rainy days or the holy month of Ramadan. Later the Waqf created a mosque - the largest mosque there now.

### **DOME OF THE PROPHET:**

It is an octagonal dome structure located northwest of the Golden Dome in the Haram Sharif compound. Several Muslim writers, most notably **al-Suyuti**, claimed that the site of the dome is where Nabi Muhammad pbuh led the prophets and angels in prayer on the night of **Me'raj** before ascending to the Heaven. Endowment documents from the Ottoman period indicate that a portion of King's charity fund of

the al-Aqsa Mosque was dedicated to maintain the lighting of an **oil-lamp in the Dome of the Prophet** each night. Till now it is the common belief of Muslims.

In 1538 AD, Mohammad Bek, the Governor of Jerusalem had a prayer niche built in this location. The Ottoman Sultan Abdul Al-Majid later ordered the building of an octagonal dome that is based on eight marble columns over the niche. The dome is much smaller than the other free-standing domes in the vicinity. During 1620s AD it was re-constructed to present day's dome.

The **Dome of the Prophet** is also known as the **Dome of Gabriel** that serves as a symbolic monument rather than a religious building. Beyond this structure, there are no authentic sources which point to the accurate location of where the Prophet pbuh led the *salah* of all the earlier prophets during that blessed night. And Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) knows best.

### **DOME OF PROPHET'S LOVERS:**

It is a square building situated towards the northern side of **al-Aqsa**; was a place where sufi sheikhs used to gather for the *zikr* of Allah. This dome structure was built by the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II in 1808 AD. This open structure is based on four stone pillars built over a platform that is half a meter higher than the rest of al-Aqsa's grounds.

### **NABI SOLOMAN'S DEATH PLACE:**

A building, located at the rear end of the Haram Plaza is believed to be the place where the Prophet Suleiman AS passed away while leaning on his staff. It presently functions as a Girls School. Nabi AS ruled over Judea and Jerusalem for 30 years, and his public work was largely carried out by the *jinnns* [God's another creature about whom the people mostly believe that they are all-powerful] which were made [like the birds etc] subservient to Nabi Suleiman AS.

And then the time destined by God came for the death of Nabi Suleiman AS while sitting holding his staff, overseeing the *jinn*s at work - the *jinn*s could not know about his death for a long time because the Nabi AS had died sitting in this position. Days passed, and the king's death became known only when his supporting stick, eaten by termites, gave way and the body fell to the ground; **Al-Qur'an** 34:13-14 is referred for more details.

#### **SABEEL QASIM PASHA:**

It is an Ottoman era fountain located on south-western side of **Al-Aqsa** close to the Chain Gate; built by a prince of Jerusalem Qasim Pasha in year 1526-27 AD. The fountain is octagonal shaped with 16 faucets topped with a wooden sunshade; has been mostly used by worshipers for ablution & for drinking until the 1940s. Today, it stands as a colossal structure only.

#### **YOUSAF [Ayyubi] DOME:**

Built in 1191 AD by the conqueror Yusuf bin Ayyub, more famous as **SalaDin Ayyubi**. It was renovated in 1681 AD by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet IV. The dome's structure is open from all sides, except for the south which is sealed by a wall. It is built on two stone columns and contains two inscriptions. On the northern face of the southern wall, there are stone carvings and a marble-faced blind-niche. The exterior of the dome is covered in lead sheeting.

#### **DOMES OF AL-KHIDR:**

It is a small hexagonal dome built in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century AD on the far north-western corner of the Haram Plaza. This structure marks the spot where some Muslims believe a righteous man, **Al-Khidr** [see **Al-Qur'an** 18: 65-82]; a figure ascribed in the holy Qur'an possessing great wisdom and mystic knowledge used to sit. In various non-Islamic traditions, Khidr is described as a messenger, *wali*, slave of God or angel.

In the religious literatures from the world, the figure of **al-Khidr** has been syncretized or amalgamated over time with various other figures including but not limited to Vishnu in India, Sorush in Iran, Saint Sarkis the Warrior, Saint George in Asia Minor and the Levant, and John the Baptist in Armenia. However, there are no authentic sources to back the above claim. And Allah [Glorified and Exalted] knows best. The dome is based on six marble columns and includes a niche built **with red stone inside**.

#### **DOMES OF THE SCALE:**

[aka **Burhan ad-Din pulpit**]; is a Mamluk era pulpit located in the southern part of the Haram Sharif plateau. The Supreme Judge Burhan ad-Din bin Jamaa' ordered the building of a marble pulpit in 1309 AD to replace the portable one made of wood. The pulpit has an entrance and steps leading to a stone seat reserved for the speaker. It is topped with an attractive **Dome of the Scale** because of its adjacent location to one of the arched gates which were earlier known as scales. Later, only the Eid sermons used to be performed here but even that practice was stopped sometime in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **MOROCCAN GATE MINARET:**

[1<sup>st</sup> Minaret] It was built in 1278 AD on south-western corner of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by the Mamluk judge Sharif Ad-Din Al-Khalili. The 23-meters high minaret is the shortest minaret inside Al-Aqsa and stands without any foundations. The top of the minaret was damaged in the earthquake that hit Jerusalem on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1927 and was repaired by the Islamic Council which then complemented it with a dome; later covered with lead sheets.

It was built in the traditional Syrian style, with a square-shaped base and shaft. The niche is surrounded by a square chamber that ends in lead covered stone dome.

### **GHAWANIMA MINARET:**

[2<sup>nd</sup> Minaret] It was built at north-western corner of the Haram Plaza in 1298 AD by architect Sharaf al-Din al-Khalili. It is considered the most decorated tower and is almost entirely made of stone, apart from a timber canopy over the *muezzin's* balcony. It is squared shaped minaret located near Bani Ghanim's Gate in the Islamic Quarter. Six storeys high with a height of 38.5 meters it is the tallest minaret on the **Haram Sharif plateau** with a staircase of 120 steps.

The western tunnel dug by archaeologists in 1980s had weakened the minaret's foundations – thus was renovated in 2001 AD. Due to its firm structure, this minaret has nearly been untouched by the earthquakes. The stairway is externally located on the first two floors, but becomes an internal spiral structure from the third floor until it reaches the *muezzin's* balcony.

### **BAB AL SISILA MINARET:**

[3<sup>rd</sup> Minaret] It is a Mamluk era minaret built by Prince Saif Ad-Din Tankz in 1329 AD. It rises near Chain Gate along Al-Aqsa's western border with its square-shaped minaret and having 80 step stairs. The minaret was restored in 1927 AD after being damaged in an earthquake. Muslims are **NOT ALLOWED** to enter it or use this minaret because it lies just over the Western Wall.

This minaret is built in the traditional Syrian square tower type and is made entirely out of stone. Since the 16th-century, it has been the tradition that the best *muezzin* [saying the *adhan* - the call to prayer], is assigned to this minaret because the first call to each of the five daily prayers is raised from it, giving the signal for the *muezzins* of mosques throughout Jerusalem to follow the timings of *Salat* & prayer.

### **TRIBES GATE MINARET:**

[aka **Salaya minaret**] is located on northern edge of al-Aqsa Mosque; first built by the Governor of Jerusalem Saif Ad-Din Qatlo Pasha. It used to be a square-shaped minaret until the Ottoman rulers ordered its reconstruction in 1599 AD making it **the only cylindrical-shaped minaret** inside the Haram Sharif. Later, the minaret was renovated twice, first in 1927 AD after being damaged in an earthquake, and then in 1967 AD after being damaged during Israeli war; its dome is covered with lead sheets.

### **MINARET AL-ASBAT:**

It was the last but most notable minaret which was built in 1367 AD. It is composed of a cylindrical stone shaft [built later by the Ottomans]. The shaft narrows above the *muezzin's* balcony, and is dotted with circular windows, ending with a bulbous dome. The dome was reconstructed after the earthquake [of 11<sup>th</sup> July 1927].

There are no minarets in the **east of the Al-Aqsa Mosque**. However, in 2006, King Abdullah II of Jordan announced his intention to build a fifth minaret overlooking the Mount of Olives but not YET on ground.

### **UMAR MOSQUE AT HARAM:**

This small room, in the far left corner of the **Qibly Hall** in Al-Aqsa is known as Masjid Umar, in honour of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Caliph Umar bin Khattab RA who visited Jerusalem in 638 AD. After taking over the city, Caliph Umar RA asked Sophronius to take him to the Foundation Rock in al-Aqsa sanctuary because Prophet Muhammad pbuh had ascended to heavens from there. When they reached there, Caliph Umar RA was shocked to find it covered with rubbish as the Romans were using the area as a rubbish tip. Caliph Umar RA instantly knelt down and with his own hands started clearing the area. When the companions saw this, they followed the suit and soon the whole area was cleared.

It was in Caliph Umar's honour that this small room was built by the later Muslim rulers and named it Umar Mosque. Today, that room is being used as an emergency clinic.

### **THE ISLAMIC MUSEUM:**

It is in **Al-Aqsa Mosque** compound in its south-western corner; was established in 1923 AD; considered to be the first Islamic museum founded in Palestine. Initially, it was housed at Ar-Ribat Al-Mansour, which is located opposite the Islamic Waqf headquarters. In 1929 AD, the museum was moved from there to its current location - next to the **Moroccan Gate**.

The museum has two halls that form a right angle. This western hall was formerly a mosque known as the **Mosque of Moors** while the southern hall was the portion earmarked for the Women only. This Moroccan Mosque was built during the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD – in the Ayyubi era, however the accurate year for its construction and the name of its founder remains unknown. In the past the mosque was dedicated to the followers of the Maliki School of jurisprudence.

The Islamic Museum includes rare archaeological and artistic collections which pertain to the various Islamic historical eras. In addition, the museum has about 750 manuscripts of the Qur'an with the oldest copy dating back to the 8th Century AD. There is also a copy of the holy Qur'an from the Mamluk Sultan Barsbay which was written between the years 1422-37 AD. With its dimensions of 110cm x 170cm it is considered the largest copy of holy Qur'an in Palestine.

