The Dome of the Rock and its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions

Marcus Milwright

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Series Editor's Foreword

'Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Art' is a new venture that offers readers easy access to the most up-to-date research across the whole range of Islamic art. Building on the long and distinguished tradition of Edinburgh University Press in publishing books on the Islamic world, it is intended to be a forum for studies that, while closely focused, also open wide horizons. Books in the series will, for example, concentrate in an accessible way on the art of a single century, dynasty or geographical area; on the meaning of works of art; on a given medium in a restricted time frame; or on analyses of key works in their wider contexts. A balance will be maintained as far as possible between successive titles, so that various parts of the Islamic world and various media and approaches are represented.

Books in the series are academic monographs of intellectual distinction that mark a significant advance in the field. While they are naturally aimed at an advanced and graduate academic audience, a complementary target readership is the worldwide community of specialists in Islamic art – professionals who work in universities, research institutes, auction houses and museums – as well as that elusive character, the interested general reader.

Professor Robert Hillenbrand

Acknowledgements

Notes for the Reader

The transliteration of Arabic follows the conventions employed in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Dotted consonants and long vowels are not, however, included for personal names and toponyms (unless they appear italicised within translations of Arabic inscriptions). English spellings (Jerusalem, Mecca, Medina and so on) are preferred when these are in common use in modern scholarship. In early inscriptions of a religious nature, including those of the Dome of the Rock, the *alif khanjariyya* ('dagger *alif*') is not marked in. This presents a problem in the transcription of some commonly occurring words. As a means to account for both their proper vocalisation and the actual appearance of the words in the inscriptions, I have marked the absent *alif khanjariyya* as (ā). Hence, *All(ā)h*, *al-raḥm(ā)n* and *al-qiy(ā)ma*. While the *shadda* is not employed in the inscriptions surveyed in the book, doubled consonants have been added as appropriate in the transcriptions. When transliterating Arabic inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock and elsewhere I have left personal names without capitals.

For personal names in Greek, I have adopted the forms that most commonly appear in publications. For example: Sts Sergius and Bacchus rather than Sts Sergios and Bakkhos, Juliana Anicia rather than Juliana Anikia, and Tiberius rather than Tiberios. The transliteration of Greek terms follows the system employed in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*.

Inscription on the Outer Face of the Octagonal Arcade

Areas shaded grey mark the point where the inscription passes around an angle or re-entrant corner. Areas marked in black indicate where part of a word continues onto the next side of the octagonal arcade.

South

Southwest

West

Northwest

North

Northeast

East

Southeast

Introduction

Twenty-two percent Roman, 22 percent Byzantine, and 55 percent Syrian: this is K. A. C. Creswell's (d. 1974) well known summation of the factors informing the plan, superstructure and ornamentation of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (Figure I.1).[1] This claim was based on a table listing the individual structural or decorative elements in the first column and their presumed sources in the second. Contained within volume one of the first edition of his *Early Muslim Architecture* (1932), this bold characterisation of relative influence in percentiles was abandoned by Creswell in the revised edition of 1969. He did, however, retain

Figure I.1 *General view of the Dome of the Rock. Photograph courtesy of Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom.*

the table of themes and influences, the latter group now defined as Roman, Byzantine, Syrian, Persian and Greek.[2] Perhaps one reason for this change to the concluding section of the long chapter devoted to the Dome of the Rock was an acerbic remark in Albert Gabriel's (d. 1972) review of the first volume of *Early Muslim Architecture*, published in the journal *Syria* (1933). He writes: 'One will observe that one hundredth part of influence has stayed at the bottom of the test-tube.'[3]

While both *Early Muslim Architecture* (1932–40) and *Muslim Architecture of Egypt* (1952–9) attracted lavish praise from reviewers, concerns were raised about Creswell's methodology and wider conceptual framework. In particular, his critics focused upon his additive approach to architectural analysis and his resulting failure to engage fully with the aesthetic and human aspects of architectural space.[4] Also problematic was his rigid adherence to chronology in the presentation of all forms of physical and textual evidence. A strict sense of temporal order was clearly vital in the recovery of the building phases within a given monument, but the same quality was much less helpful for assessing the nuances of the larger evolutionary pathways of early Islamic architecture. Creswell's preoccupations left him ill-equipped to decode the symbolism contained within these buildings and their ornamental programmes; indeed, it was an issue for which he exhibited little interest in his publications. One of the least sympathetic reactions to *Early Muslim Architecture* came from Jean Sauvaget (d. 1950), an Arabist and archaeologist with a radically different conception of the significance of Late Antiquity for the study of early Islamic visual culture. As Julian Raby observes, 'his [Sauvaget's] quest was for *originality* in Umayyad art, while Creswell's was for its *origins*'.[5]

Reviewing the scholarly writing upon the art and architecture of the early Islamic period produced in the last fifty years one might reasonably conclude that Sauvaget's emphasis upon the study of 'originality' has largely triumphed over Creswell's more traditional art-historical concerns. It is rare now to find a book or article on the formative phase of Islamic visual culture that devotes itself solely to the search for origins and influences. While researchers remain ever mindful of the past in the construction of Umayyad or Abbasid monuments and artefacts, most attention is likely to be directed towards the interpretation of the ways in which existing elements were creatively synthesised in order to fashion new 'Islamic' meanings and identities. Our understanding of a pivotal monument like the Dome of the Rock has been transformed through the dominant focus upon the meanings communicated by its location at the summit of Mount Moriah, its topographical and symbolic relationships to other buildings on and around the Temple Mount, the precise arrangement of its structural elements, and the content and symbolism of its decorative programmes. This search for meanings allows one

to move beyond the physical building in order to assess the wider cultural environment of late seventh-century Syria and to speculate upon the original intentions of its extraordinary patron, Caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685–705). There has also been a tendency to make imaginative use of early Arabic textual sources dealing with the building (summarised in Chapter 1).

In this context it is worth asking whether there is any value in re-evaluating the Dome of the Rock using such 'Creswellian' tools as chronological sequencing and the isolation of potential influences or forerunners of the building in the architecture, architectural decoration and portable arts of Late Antiquity. Two interrelated factors make such approaches valid in the study of this monument. First, like all buildings, the Dome of the Rock was brought into existence through a series of processes, each of which can be broken down into three basic stages: conception, planning and execution. We can imagine that these stages would have occurred during the sinking of the foundations, the erection of the superstructure and the cladding of the walls with their ornamental components. All ancient monuments of architectural significance were built over a relatively extended period (from a few years to a period of decades or centuries); during the phases of construction and ornamentation there are likely to have been adjustments or changes of mind – some subtle and unobtrusive, and others more obvious – that led the finished building to differ from whatever drawn plans were made at the outset. The disparity between the finished building and the patron's initial conception is probably going to be even more marked. Second, while there is no denying that the Dome of the Rock is brilliantly original in many respects, all originality is constrained by the environment in which it is born. This might be a matter of the available artisans for a given project and the fact that they will operate within the parameters of the craft traditions in which they were trained. Also one needs to consider the audience for which an object or building is produced; if the visual and symbolic vocabularies step too far beyond existing norms, then an artefact will fail to communicate its intended message.

These factors are of considerable relevance to the Dome of the Rock. This is the first architecturally significant Islamic monument to survive substantially in its original form. It was erected only seven decades after the *hijra*, the migration of the nascent Muslim community to Medina in 1/622. Nothing that we know of Islamic architecture before this time – either through physical survivals in the archaeological record or from textual descriptions – hints at the sheer ambition of the Dome of the Rock.[6] Given the scale of this enterprise (which is even greater when one considers the remainder of the building programme within and around the Temple Mount during the Umayyad period; see Chapter 1) and the relative inexperience of caliphal patrons in executing such projects, is it not reasonable to assume that there might be evidence of adjustments as the

building progressed from its foundations to its superstructure and decorative cladding? How would such changes affect the meanings communicated by the building as a finished entity? We should also be aware of the fact that the Dome of the Rock may have developed a new set of meanings relatively soon after its completion, and there is abundant evidence for the accretion throughout the Islamic period of further iconographic readings to the structure. In other words, it is necessary to try to reconstruct, insofar as the evidence allows, how the monument was conceived by its patron and designers, and the ways in which this initial conception was adapted in the years leading to its consecration as a locus of ritual.

The evidence concerning the early meanings of the Dome of the Rock employed in this study can be divided into three categories. The first comprises the physical data that can be gathered from the building itself. There is little prospect of controlled excavations beneath the current floor of the Dome of the Rock or around the exterior of its perimeter wall (the only site on the Temple Mount to have attracted limited archaeological investigation of this sort is the Aqsa Mosque[7]), and all 'archaeological' work must concentrate upon the superstructure and the decorative programme. In this respect, it is important to recognise that the building has undergone many renovations through the course of its existence. This can be attributed to its importance within Islamic culture; it was incumbent upon all the dynasties that have controlled this part of the city of Jerusalem to maintain the Dome of the Rock and the other structures on the Temple Mount. The oldest monuments in this area have been transformed through the attentions of pious caliphs and sultans, and, of course, Frankish rulers during the Crusader phase (1099–1187).[8] This is particularly apparent in the case of the Aqsa Mosque.[9] The changes to the Dome of the Rock have been less dramatic, but it is clear that elements of the superstructure (for example, the dome and the roofing of the ambulatories) have been replaced on more than one occasion, as have many ornamental components of the interior and exterior.

There are still many seventh-century elements in the physical make-up of the building, however. Creswell studied in detail the plan and superstructure, and this work has been supplemented by specialised studies undertaken by later scholars. The physical characteristics and visual vocabulary of the Umayyad mosaics were examined by Marguerite van Berchem (these works are discussed in Chapter 2). This documentary information forms one plank of the numerous interpretations of the potential meanings of the Dome of the Rock at the time of its construction. The building is also a source of texts, and this forms the second category of information. Crucially, there is one text that can be dated with absolute certainty to the period of the construction of the Dome of the Rock by Caliph 'Abd al-Malik. This is a mosaic inscription that is located

on the interior running around the two faces (outer and inner) of the octagonal arcade (see foldouts). The inscription carries the date of 72/691–2. Two further texts of this phase (or perhaps slightly later in the Umayyad period) can be found on two painted and gilded copper plaques originally placed in the north and east gates of the building (Chapter 2). The mosaic inscriptions form the principal focus on this book. I argue that an integrated study of this mosaic inscription – its physical characteristics, morphology and textual content – reveals important new information about the Dome of the Rock at the time of its initial construction and reception.

Other primary textual sources (in Arabic and Greek) are relevant to the present study. These comprise objects that can be dated to the 690s or to earlier decades of the seventh century: papyri, coins, seals and monumental inscriptions carved onto stone or laid in mosaic. None of these primary sources refer directly to the Umayyad transformation of the Temple Mount, though many carry phrases or extended passages of scripture relating closely to those found in the mosaic inscriptions and copper plaques of the Dome of the Rock. In addition, this body of objects from the first decades of the Muslim era is significant for understanding the evolution of formal Arabic script, and particularly its use in the public declaration of religious belief and state ideology (these two areas often overlapping). Fragments from Qur'anic manuscripts also survive from the first century of Islam. Ranging from single pages to dozens of bound folios, these fragments are all undated. Some are palimpsests, either showing evidence of earlier script (that has been partially erased) or later additions, including diacritical marks and other orthographic conventions. Despite the difficulties they present, these fragments cannot be ignored. One of the many reasons why they have attracted considerable scholarly attention is that they represent the formative period in the evolution of Arabic sacred book scripts.[10]

The interpretation of the Dome of the Rock has also relied upon another group of texts, principally in Arabic, that refer directly to the building, the other structures on the Temple Mount and the political life of the rule of 'Abd al-Malik. These form the third category of sources and comprise a variety of genres, most important of which are chronicles, geographical works, topographic histories and collections of information about the 'merits' of the holy city of Jerusalem (faḍā'il al-quds).[11] For the purposes of this book, these will be designated as secondary sources because they were not written at the time of the events they purport to describe. While it must be the case that these sources contain accurate reports from the 680s and 690s, it is very difficult to assess the extent to which the kernel of 'genuine' primary source material has been redacted – for example, through the process of oral transmission – prior to the point at which it was committed to written form. In addition, we need to be mindful of the possibility, or indeed probability, that enmity towards

the Umayyads in later periods (either by supporters of the Abbasid dynasty or by those with Shiʿa sympathies) is likely to colour the later accounts of the actions and motivations of important figures such as ʿAbd al-Malik.

The issues outlined above are part of a larger historiographic problem, and it is worth summarising the main points before moving to a discussion of the aims and content of the present book. The rise of Islam is particularly well documented in historical writing produced in the Arabic-speaking world from the late eighth century onward. This is also the time when the canonical collections of the *ḥadīth* (the sayings and actions of the Prophet and his companions) were made. The first biography of the Prophet Muhammad (*sīrat al-nabī muḥammad*) also dates to the eighth century, though this text is only known through later adaptations. Literary sources of this nature form the foundation of the reconstruction of the historical narrative of Islam from its inception in the Hijaz through the phase of the 'Rightly Guided' (*rāshidūn*) caliphs, the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) and the early decades of the Abbasid dynasty (749–1258). Our stock of written sources from the first century is much more limited, although the ongoing study of early Arabic papyri, coins and inscriptions is having an increasing impact on historical scholarship. The writings of non-Muslims of the seventh and early eighth centuries have also been explored as a source on the earliest phases of Islamic history.[12]

The Qurʾan itself may be regarded as a text of the seventh century, though the debate continues about when the precise arrangement of chapters was finalised. The presence of divergent readings within the earliest Qurʾan fragments suggests that the definitive written recension was not completed, as Muslim tradition asserts, during the caliphate of ʿUthman (r. 644–56), but occurred in the latter part of the seventh or even the early eighth century (discussed further in Chapter 8). Whatever the precise date of the final stages of this process of creating an authoritative version of Muslim scripture, one must acknowledge that the Qurʾan was never intended to be read as an historical account of the nascent Muslim community. This fact limits the usefulness of the text for those wishing to reconstruct the events from the life of the Prophet and his community during the 'Meccan' (*c*. 610–22) and 'Medinan' phases (622–32). While one can assume that Muhammad and his followers were guided by principles enshrined within the Qurʾan, the content of the book itself does not bring us much closer to the motivations of the key players of this formative period.

The historians and collectors of *ḥadīth* during the early Abbasid period did employ a critical apparatus in their evaluation of source material. Their information tended to be transmitted from one authority to the next in an unbroken chain (the Arabic term is *isnād*) going back to the event itself. Oral transmission was much more

prevalent in this respect than the written word. Early Islamic scholars sought to evaluate the reliability of individual transmitters – this was most important for the recording of *ḥadīth*, but is also relevant for other types of historical data. There is certainly something impressive about this critical approach to source material, but the method contains flaws. Particularly significant is the tendency to privilege traditions – and, therefore, transmitters – that accord well with the attitudes of the time in which the scholar was working. Thus, information that appeared 'unorthodox' from the perspective of the late eighth or ninth centuries would be given less weight in subsequent Islamic scholarship. Other information coming through the same 'unreliable' transmitters could be ignored or suppressed.[13] Conversely, modern scholars of early Islam have sometimes devoted considerable attention to descriptions of seemingly discordant elements in the earliest phases of Islamic history. While the apparent oddness of a given event or practice is in itself no guarantee of its veracity, there is at least the potential of using these snippets of information to uncover some aspects of the initial evolution of the rituals and political structures of early Islam.[14]

The historian Stephen Humphreys has noted that modern historians of Islam are well placed to discuss the ways in which the literate elite of the early Abbasid period understood the earliest phases of Islam. The writings dating to the early Abbasid period do not, however, offer such an unimpeded route to the 'real' history of the seventh and early eighth centuries. He continues:

> The Arabic narrative sources represent a rather late crystallization of a fluid oral tradition. These sources can become an adequate foundation for 'scientific' history only when we have learned a great deal more than we presently know about this oral tradition: its origins, the social and cultural institutions by which it was shaped and transmitted, the variations and transformations it underwent in the course of transmission, the circumstances in which it was first committed to writing, the degree of alteration suffered by early written versions before they at last reached their definitive form in the mid 3rd/9th century, etc. Questions of this kind have been discussed over and over by modern scholars, but so far their conclusions remain more in the realm of speculation than demonstration. The evidence is such, in fact, that reasonable certainty may be beyond our grasp.[15]

Referring specifically to the first seventy years after the *hijra*, Humphreys concludes that these decades are the necessary focus of attention both for their intrinsic importance to Islamic history and 'because of the extraordinary methodological problems posed by our principal sources for it'.[16] The present study is informed by the assessments made by Humphreys and others concerning the

problematic nature of Arabic sources on early Islam. I will return to the historical narrative later (especially Chapter 8), but the Arabic sources – dating from the ninth century to about the sixteenth century – commonly cited in scholarly interpretations of the Dome of the Rock will not feature prominently in this book. The reason for this omission can be stated plainly: to the best of my knowledge, there is no way of establishing the absolute reliability of the information contained within them. Even those sources of information that might go back to oral accounts of the early eighth century cannot be considered as truly contemporary records of the initial planning or execution of the Dome of the Rock itself in the late 680s and 690s. Instead, I argue that the meanings associated with this building probably began to change very soon after it was first consecrated for use. By the early years of the eighth century some of the initial symbolism of this extraordinary structure was fading from memory, or had ceased to be useful to the regime responsible for commissioning it in the first place, only to be replaced by other, more potent and enduring readings.

A corollary of Humphrey's presentation of the narrative sources is that archaeological evidence (here meaning buildings, portable artefacts, manuscript fragments, monumental inscriptions and seventh-century habitation levels recovered during excavations) takes on an enhanced significance as an apparently unmediated record of attitudes and values of individuals and groups within the early Muslim community (*umma*). The potential of archaeology as an alternative source on the earliest phase of Islam has been the subject of some lively debate.[17] The evidence itself is too sparse (even allowing for the pace of new discoveries in papyrology and early graffiti) to compete with the comprehensive character of the conventional historical narrative. The geographical coverage of the physical material is also uneven, while the range of themes covered by the inscriptions is rather limited.[18]

Clearly, the interpretative process varies according to the type of evidence, and there is no need here to review the ways in which an archaeologist would approach ceramic distribution or changing patterns of agriculture. Most relevant in the present context are the questions that can be posed when a researcher is confronted by inscriptions, whether on documents, portable artefacts, rock faces, tombstones, road markers or buildings. These types of inscribed objects invite questions about the identity of the patron, the content of the inscription, the language chosen, the medium employed, and the location and placement of the inscription (encompassing issues of lighting, distance from the observer at ground level, the size and colour of the script and so on). The intended audience, or audiences, must also be considered. At one level, it may help to isolate what sorts of people are addressed by the text itself. A more significant calculation, however, is the extent to which the audience would

have possessed the literacy to read the text in the first place. We can assume that prior to the modern period, only a small proportion of the adult population would have been fully literate, though there also exist other levels of familiarity with text that might have allowed people to comprehend some of the meanings of the inscriptions they encountered. A related concern is the question of legibility; it is often the case that early inscriptions are difficult to read, particularly due to the very sparing use of diacritics (i.e., the small marks above and below the script that allow one to distinguish different letters sharing the same basic form, or grapheme). The questions of legibility and function are discussed in greater detail in the last section of this chapter.

Before moving to an outline of the book, some words are needed about terminology. The seventh century was clearly a period of fluidity and experimentation within Islamic culture. This has an impact on how one approaches the content of inscriptions produced during this period, because it is common practice to adopt descriptive labels that might not have existed through the course of the seventh century. Hence, the term *rāshidūn* ('Rightly Guided') as a designation for the first four caliphs is a later creation. We have no evidence that the community of believers that developed around the person of Muhammad called themselves Muslims. The earliest terms of identification in primary documentation (a papyrus dated 22/643) are in Greek and comprise the words, *sarakênôn* (i.e., Saracens, an ancient name for the peoples of Arabia) and *magaritais* (possibly deriving from the Arabic, *muhājirūn*, or 'those who undertook the *hijra*').[19] The absence of a given term or name on an inscription does not, of course, mean that it was not in use in speech (and in written sources now lost to us) in earlier decades, but it is striking that one has to wait until the reign of Caliph Muʿawiya ibn Abi Sufyan (r. 661–80) to see the caliphal honorific, *amīr al-muʾminīn* ('commander of the faithful'), and until 71/691 (on a tombstone from Aswan) to find an explicit reference to Islam in the phrase *ahl al-islām* ('people of Islam').[20]

These issues have particular relevance in the present context when one considers the *shahāda*, or profession of faith. The voicing of the *shahāda* has a central place in Islam as one of the five 'pillars' (*rukn*, pl. *arkān*) along with prayer, fasting, hajj (pilgrimage) and alms-giving. In its Sunni form this phrase announces the oneness of God (Allah) and the status of Muhammad as His prophet or messenger (*rasūl*),[21] while the Shiʿa version appended the phrase 'and ʿAli is the friend/viceregent (*walī*) of God'. The written form of this statement (i.e., the *kalima*) is a recurrent feature of Islamic public inscriptions from the eighth century onward. The situation is, however, less clear-cut for the seventh century; not only is there no evidence for the use of the term *shahāda* among the Muslim community in the seventh century, the profession itself takes a wide variety of

forms. Furthermore, the profession of faith itself is not found in its relatively full form until 71/691 with the Aswan tombstone. From the year 72/691–2 come examples in the Dome of the Rock and on coinage (the first of which are written not in the original Arabic, but in a Pahlavi translation). The shorter phrase simply naming Muhammad as the prophet of God appears first on a silver coin minted in Bishapur in 66/685–6 (these issues are discussed further in Chapter 8).[22]

Thus, when terms such as *shahāda* or *basmala* (i.e., the Muslim invocation) are employed later in the book, it is done for the purposes of convenience in the knowledge that they are, strictly speaking, anachronistic. Similarly, it will be necessary to refer to the Muslim *umma* of the first decades after the *hijra*, and of the religion of Islam, even though we cannot be certain that these terms were actually meaningful within the period itself. Scholarly labels for forms of script – most importantly Hijazi and Kufic – are problematic for the same reasons, but will be adopted because they are now an established component of current academic discourse.[23] This is not to gloss over the considerable challenges that exist in assigning categories to the scripts that are utilised in the writing of Qurʾanic manuscripts and monumental inscriptions in the first century of the Islamic era (see Chapters 5–7). The designation of passages within inscriptions as 'Qurʾanic' or 'non-Qurʾanic' presents further difficulties that should be addressed briefly now (see also Chapter 2 and the Conclusion).

When considering the written statements that have the character of scripture (i.e., both those passages that correspond closely to the standard Qurʾanic recension and those that appear to derive from other sources) through the course of the seventh century, it is prudent to avoid overly rigid identifications. The mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock have long been recognised as the most extensive dated compilation of 'Qurʾanic' material from the seventh century. If one looks at the way the text has been read by epigraphers (Chapter 2), it is common practice to identify the correspondences with verses in the Cairo edition of the text printed in 1137/1925. One can identify divergences from this edition, as well as cases where the designers of the Umayyad inscription appear to have 'conflated' parts of separate verses (*āya*s) of broadly similar content. Other material, such as the reference to Muhammad as an intercessor for the Muslim community, do not belong to the Qurʾan as it now exists.[24]

Quite how the content of the mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock should be related to the Qurʾan – whether in oral or written form – in the late 680s and early 690s is a particularly challenging problem. Just as the profession of faith seems to have taken a variety of forms in this period, it is possible that variant compilations of Muslim scripture existed. These different versions presumably shared a very substantial corpus of *sūra*s (assembled in

much the same order), and the divergences in the reading of specific *āya*s were probably relatively slight. In the context of the Dome of the Rock, one cannot be certain that those passages designated as 'non-Qurʾanic' did not at one time form part of a Muslim scriptural tradition.[25] Equally, those apparent divergences from the standard Qurʾan and the supposed conflations of material from separate verses may, in fact, be direct quotations from a lost manuscript or oral source of the period (this issue is discussed further in Chapter 8 and the Conclusion). Alternatively, those responsible for the design of the inscriptions may have exercised freedom in the adaptation of scripture for the specific purposes of the building. To conclude, the presentation of the mosaic inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock (and of other early inscriptions, including the copper plaques in the same building) later in the book will follow the method employed by Max van Berchem and others, but with an acknowledgement of the problems inherent in this approach.

The first part of the book (Chapters 1–6) is concerned with the history, content and form of the Umayyad inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock. Chapter 1 provides a broad introduction to the building and its location. The monument is established in relationship to the other buildings in and around the Temple Mount (Arabic: Ḥaram al-Sharīf). The second section gives a brief summary of the modern scholarly interpretations of the Dome of the Rock and the evidence – architectural, archaeological and textual – on which these interpretations have been based. Chapter 2 is an introduction to the Umayyad inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock, and discusses the different transcriptions and translations. Chapter 3 is concerned with the creation of monumental scripts for writing Greek and Latin, as well as Semitic languages.

The remainder of part one (Chapters 4–6) is devoted to the detailed study of the mosaic inscriptions, their sources, and the chronology of their planning and execution. Chapter 4 isolates comparisons in the assemblage of surviving Arabic inscriptions – graffiti, milestones, Qurʾan fragments, papyri, coins and portable artefacts – of the seventh and early eighth centuries and uses these data to account for the presence of three relatively distinct scripts on the outer and inner faces. Chapter 5 focuses on specific details within the mosaic inscription. Chapter 6 takes the findings from the previous chapters and presents a hypothetical sequence for the laying of the mosaic panels of the outer and inner faces of the octagonal arcade. I propose in the chapter that there exists a temporal gap between the planning and execution of the inscription bands of the outer and the inner faces.

The second part of the book (Chapters 7 and 8) takes as its starting point the premise that the mosaics were laid in a sequence, and the consequences this has for the identification of meaning within the inscriptions and, by extension, the entire building. Chapter 7

surveys the concentric inscriptions (principally Greek, Latin and Arabic) produced between the third century and the early eighth century. The dominant themes are isolated in concentric inscriptions with a particular concentration on the Greek and Arabic texts of this nature found in the eastern Mediterranean. The chapter assesses the extent to which concentric inscriptions can be considered as a distinct genre in Late Antiquity and early Islam. Also considered are the symbolic resonances of the colour scheme of the mosaic inscription (gold on blue) and of the octagon in Late Antique art and architecture.

Chapter 8 analyses the political history of the 680s and 690s. The first section addresses the late 680s through to the end of the second civil war (*fitna*). Important themes of this section are the emergence of public statements of doctrine on portable artefacts and architecture and the potential role of the outer face inscription in the ritual functions of the structure. The second section looks at the key events of the remainder of the 690s, with a particular attention given to the Kharijite threat and relations between the caliphate and both the Byzantine Empire and Christian populations living under Muslim rule. The final section considers briefly the implications of the historical context for the understanding of the remainder of the decorative programme in the Dome of the Rock.

It should be apparent from the preceding paragraphs that the intention of this book is not specifically to provide an interpretation of the symbolism of the Dome of the Rock in the Umayyad period that is entirely distinct from other readings offered in the last century of scholarship. Rather, it is to isolate the solid ground of primary source material (defined according to the categories given above) on which it is possible to base future interpretations of the functions performed by the Dome of the Rock and the meanings that might have been conveyed by its location, plan, superstructure and ornamentation at the time of its completion. The Conclusion seeks to establish the parameters of what can (and cannot) be claimed about the building through analysis of this primary source material. I have suggested above reasons why the secondary writing about ʿAbd al-Malik and the construction of the Dome of the Rock (dating from the ninth century onwards) cannot form a secure basis for interpretation, and this exclusion of what is normally considered to be fundamental evidence dictates the approach taken in the analytical sections of this book.

It is in these mosaic inscriptions, and in the other inscriptions appearing on the copper plaques, that one finds some of the clearest statements concerning the meanings to be conveyed by the building. The mosaic inscriptions are especially significant because they illustrate some of the changes that occurred through the execution of the decorative programme. I argue that these changes, both to the form and content of the inscriptions, are crucial for an understanding of

the transformations of meaning that probably occurred as the Dome of the Rock was being constructed and ornamented.

The inscriptions show evidence of the adaptation of Late Antique craft practices. Comparison with mosaic inscriptions in Greek, and a variety of other languages from the fifth to the seventh centuries (see Chapters 3 and 7) highlights the particular challenges faced by the mosaicists working in the Dome of the Rock. Quite simply, they had to construct a proportional system for a written language that had not been represented previously in mosaic. The surviving epigraphic evidence of the period – in documents, Qur'anic manuscripts, coins, seals and monumental inscriptions – indicate that Arabic was still in considerable flux, and this cannot have made the mosaicists' task any easier. It is this issue of craft practice that is central to the search in the second part of the book for links between the features of the Dome of the Rock and the architectural heritage of Late Antiquity. Thus, the study becomes a search for the ways in which skilled artisans, architects/engineers and scribes of Late Antiquity sought to address significant problems, such as the design of an encircling inscription around the exterior or interior of a building or portable object. One also needs to consider why it was held to be important to inscribe a space with a text; in what ways does the text band affect those who enter the space, and is this feature meant to facilitate a specific function or ritual?

It hardly needs to be stated that the overt presence of writing is a defining characteristic of Islamic art and architecture. Islamic visual culture is not, of course, unique in making conspicuous use of epigraphy, nor is it alone in investing the written word with aesthetic importance through the creation of elegant and proportionate scripts (i.e., calligraphy). That said, the ubiquity and sheer inventiveness of the use of the written word in Islamic art and architecture may reasonably be said to exceed anything encountered elsewhere. Already in the seventh century there appears to have been a clear understanding that art and architecture meant for religious purposes was to be devoid of representational imagery, and this aniconism certainly encouraged the elevation of text as a primary carrier of meaning. In this respect the Dome of the Rock represents a crucial early demonstration of this phenomenon. Arabic had the additional status as the vehicle of divine revelation, and this served to elevate the practice of writing the language (whether one was writing Muslim scripture or merely texts of a secular nature). Thus, one finds that inscriptions without explicit religious content are often invested with considerable aesthetic value. This veneration for the written Arabic also encouraged scribes and artisans to engage with other languages, particularly Persian, in an aesthetic manner.[26]

The development of these different decorative scripts – in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish and other languages – is beyond the scope of the present study, but there are recurrent issues of interpretation

of these inscriptions (particularly on architecture) that are relevant to the study of the mosaics in the Dome of the Rock. Many scholars have questioned the extent to which monumental inscriptions were meant to be legible to the people who made use of the buildings on a regular basis. A cursory survey of Islamic architecture will reveal numerous examples of inscriptions that are physically difficult to read due to their placement. In the case of interior inscriptions, this can be a product of their elevation from the ground, the angle at which they can be seen, and the inadequate or variable lighting. Exterior inscriptions share some of these problems, and one also encounters bands of script that wrap around features such as domes or towers/minarets. Even if an inscription of this type can be viewed satisfactorily from the ground, one is still faced with the task of making a circuit of the building in order to take in the entirety of its message (something that is not always possible to achieve). Lastly, there is the issue of the stylised nature of the monumental scripts themselves; these diverge considerably from the characteristics of the handwritten languages, and are often given additional ornamental features (such as wrapping or knotting into one another or interlocking) that do not facilitate legibility. In the case of early Arabic scripts such as Hijazi and Kufic, it is common to find the sparing employment of diacritics, with vowelling and grammatical markings completely absent.

What functions were monumental inscriptions supposed to perform? Were they primarily for the attention of the patron of the building and his or her immediate entourage, making their relative legibility by others an issue of secondary importance? In some cases, could the installation of monumental inscriptions represent simply an act of piety that only needed to be seen by God? Might it be the case that the reading of difficult or inaccessible passages of text could have been facilitated through the provision of guides who were conversant with inscriptional programme? In the case of very challenging inscriptions (for example, the interlocking panels of 'square Kufic' that appear on eastern Islamic architecture from the eleventh century onward), is it possible that deciphering the meaning represented an act of religious devotion? The use of monumental script is so varied across the Islamic world that it is unwise to be prescriptive in the approach to the question of legibility and function. It is not uncommon for individual structures to combine readily accessible inscriptions (written in fully dotted cursive script and placed relatively near to eye level) with others that are less legible due to their elevation or mode of representation. In such cases, it seems likely that visitors to the building were meant to direct their close attention to the meanings conveyed by the more accessible texts and allow other unread inscriptions to create a general tone of reverence.

There is some evidence that patrons and scribes were concerned with ensuring legibility for architectural epigraphy. For example, Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Hasib, the ninth-century calligrapher

responsible for the design of the inscription bands of the Nilometer at Rawda, is recorded as making use of lapis lazuli (blue) 'so that they [the words] could be read from a distance'.[27] Similar attention was paid to the epigraphic content in imperial Ottoman mosques of the sixteenth century.[28] The relative degrees of legibility of inscriptions within a building could also relate to the familiarity of the texts contained within them. For example, it would have been important in many cases to ensure that the specific information about the patronage, function and date of construction were presented in a manner that would aid those who were meant to read it. By contrast, some doxological content – the *kalima* or frequently cited scriptural passages such as *āyat al-kursī* (the 'Throne Verse'; Q 2:255) or *sūrat al-ikhlāṣ* (Q 112) – seems to have become sufficiently familiar that it could be recognised almost immediately by those with some degree of literacy and knowledge of the Qur'an.[29] Other verses developed close relationships with specific features of buildings, meaning that the location almost predetermined the meaning of the inscription. The classic example of this meshing of architecture and text is the employment of *āyat al-nūr* (the 'Light Verse'; Q 24:35) within or around the *miḥrāb* in mosques and other religious buildings. Indeed, the carved representation of a lamp within the niche can even stand as a metonym for the content of the verse itself.

All of this presupposes some level of literacy among viewers, whether through a direct ability to read (at whatever level) or through the availability of people able to read on their behalf.[30] It is clear, however, that the written word also had an impact upon those who were functionally illiterate. This could involve an appreciation of the letter forms as angular or curvilinear shapes in relation to the negative space surrounding them; but more important in the present context is the widespread belief in the talismanic qualities of script, or indeed pseudo-script (i.e., repetitive linear designs that are designed to imitate visual qualities of written language). It is notable that the scripts were often held to have greater potency when they were written to enclose something, either in a single concentric band or, in the manner of the so-called Aramaic incantation bowls, as a spiral running from the outer face towards the centre. Jamal Elias has taken these concepts further to suggest that script in Islamic culture can develop icon-like characteristics; just as Christians are likely to view a representational icon both as a depiction (of a person or event) and as a form of spiritual mediation between the believer and the divine, so the passage of beautifully written text might possess for the Muslim observer a tangible content (e.g., a Qur'anic verse) and/or a less defined capacity to elicit a range of responses that are appropriate to the contemplation of the divine.[31]

The ability of words, or even individual letters, to stand for other concepts is something that is well developed in medieval Christian art. A good example of this phenomenon is the pairing of the alpha

(A) and omega (ω). While the association of these letters with the image of Christ is a feature largely of the early Christian catacombs, there are many examples of the alpha and omega flanking the chi–ro monogram or the cross in Western medieval art.[32] The letters refer obviously to the sentence 'I am the alpha and the omega' (Revelation 1:8, 22:13), with its powerful evocation of God, Father and Son as the beginning and the end. The 'iconicity' of these letters is indicated by their employment in art and architecture in regions where Greek was little understood. This is strikingly seen in Merovingian and Carolingian manuscripts in which the central component of the frontispiece is these two Greek letters. Evidently it was not felt necessary to transliterate them into Latin. Other manuscripts of this period have initial Ts for the *Te igitur* (the prayer requesting Jesus' blessing of the Eucharist) that represent the crucified cross. The direct equation of the letter and the cross follows from an observation in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (I.3.9).[33]

Lastly, it is worth asking the extent to which the actual choice of Qurʾanic material is always meaningful. This question is pertinent to the study of the increasingly formulaic relationships between specific verses and certain building types or parts of buildings. In addition, there is the issue of placing Qurʾanic texts in places (such as the upper bands of tall minarets) that cannot, in practical terms, be read.[34] Does this mean that much of the epigraphic content of Islamic religious architecture is simply generic ornamentation not meant to attract detailed contemplation as one entered the space (a similar case could be made for the inclusion of the tradition feast cycle of images, or *Dodecaorton*, within most Orthodox churches). Some scholars have viewed this as a relatively banal repetition of themes exhibiting little originality across swathes of Islamic history.[35] Thus, the main areas of interest are the interpretation of the occasional introduction of 'unorthodox' choices of Qurʾanic material and the appreciation of the aesthetic dimensions of the scripts employed to carry the message. This understanding of religious text as a rather neutral component in much Islamic architecture has not gone unchallenged. What remains a problem for those who wish to argue for a more active symbolic or ritual role for monumental script remains, however, the paucity of supporting evidence (e.g., in the writings of pre-modern Muslims).

The issues of legibility and choice of content are both relevant to the present study. I argue that the choice of content, as well as the way in which the scripts were formed, was of considerable interest to the Umayyad caliph and his court. The shifts of direction evident in the mosaic inscriptions are a clear indication that the textual content was deemed by the Umayyad elite to have a central role in the functioning of the Dome of the Rock. Whether the finished inscriptions were, in fact, effective in communicating those ideas to a wider audience is a more difficult issue. While no conclusive answer is offered in following chapters, I hope that the evidence

assembled in this study will contribute to our understanding of the formation of meaning in the seventh century. I suggest later reasons why some messages proved to be transient while others endured and prospered in the history of Islamic art and architecture.

Notes

1. K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932–40), I.1, p. 89. The complete quote reads:

   > Let us now try to estimate the relative percentage of Roman, Byzantine, and Syrian influence by the somewhat crude process of giving one mark for each feature, and half a mark where the feature is common to two fields. Then we get: Roman 3 = 22 per cent. Byzantine 3 = 22 per cent. Syrian 7 ½ = 55 per cent. If we allot two or more marks for the really fundamental features such as the plan and the wooden dome, the Syrian percentage, already leading, will become still more dominant.

   In a footnote on the same page, Creswell adds: 'Somewhat crude because it assigns equal importance to each feature, which of course is not really the case, the plan, for example, being a more fundamental than the gilding of the dome.'
2. K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, revd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), I.1, p. 123.
3. 'On observera qu'un centième d'influence est resté au fond de l'éprouvette.' Albert Gabriel, 'Review of *Early Muslim Architecture* 1.1 (1932)', *Syria* 14(2) (1933): 210–15 (quoted passage appears on p. 212). The translation appears in: Julian Raby, 'Reviewing the Reviewers', *Muqarnas* 8 (1991): 7. See pp. 7–8 for further criticisms of Creswell's methodology and conclusions offered by Meyer Schapiro and Arthur Pope.
4. Summarised in Raby, 'Reviewing the Reviewers', pp. 7–9.
5. Raby, 'Reviewing the Reviewers', p. 9.
6. For the archaeological evidence for structures pre-dating the Dome of the Rock, see Marcus Milwright, *An Introduction to Islamic Archaeology*, New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 27–8. On mosque architecture in the seventh century, see Jeremy Johns, 'The "House of the Prophet" and the Concept of the Mosque', in Jeremy Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis: Jerusalem and Early Islam*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.2 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 59–112.
7. Robert Hamilton, *The Structural History of the Aqsa Mosque: A Record of Archaeological Gleanings from Repairs of 1938–1942* (London and Jerusalem: Oxford University Press, 1949).
8. On these periods, see Sylvia Auld and Robert Hillenbrand (eds), *Ottoman Jerusalem. The Living City: 1517–1917* (London: Altajir Trust, 2000); Sylvia Auld and Robert Hillenbrand (eds), *Ayyubid Jerusalem. The Holy City in Context: 1187–1250* (London: Altajir Trust, 2009); Michael Burgoyne and D. S. Richards, *Mamluk Jerusalem. An Architectural Study* (London: British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem/World of Islam Festival Trust, 1987); Jaroslav Folda, *The Art*

of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1098–1187 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

9.   The phases of this building are summarised in Marcus Milwright, 'Aqṣā Mosque in Art and Architecture', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd edn, 1 (2007), pp. 136–7.

10. For this topic with references to other studies, see Alain George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy* (London and Berkeley, CA: Saqi, 2010); François Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l'islam: Le codex Parisino-petropolitanus*, Texts and Studies in the Qur'ān 5 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2009); François Déroche *Qur'ans of the Umayyads: A First Overview*, Leiden Studies in Islam and Society 1 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2014).

11. Nasser Rabbat, 'The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock', *Muqarnas* 6 (1989): 12–21; Nasser Rabbat, 'The Dome of the Rock Revisited: Some Remarks on al-Wasiti's Accounts', *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 66–75; Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship. Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 1995).

12. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writing on Islam*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Islam 13 (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1997) (for an evaluation of these writings as a source for the reconstruction of Islamic history, see pp. 523–98); James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and the Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). See also comments in Stephen Humphreys, *Muʿawiya ibn Abi Sufyan: From Arabia to Empire*, Makers of the Muslim World (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), pp. 12–14. On the reconstruction of Theophilus of Edessa's history from later sources, see Robert Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), introduction (particularly pp. 7–29).

13. This problem has been addressed by numerous scholars. Good summaries appear in Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 85–92; Adam Silverstein, *Islamic History. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 80–93.

14. For example, see comments in Chase Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, Makers of the Muslim World (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), pp. 90–3.

15. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*, revised edn (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1991), pp. 69–70. Discussed in Jeremy Johns, 'Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years', *Journal of the Economic & Social History of the Orient* 46(4) (2003): 412–14.

16. Humphreys, *Islamic History*, p. 70.

17. Johns, 'Archaeology and the History of Early Islam'; Robert Hoyland, 'New Documentary Texts and the Early Islamic State', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies* 69(3) (2006): 395–416.

18. Hoyand, 'New Documentary Texts', pp. 406–8 and *passim*. The inscriptions of this period can be found at the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org, last accessed 12 December 2014.

19. On this document, see Allan Jones, 'The Dotting of a Script and the Dating of an Era: The Strange Neglect of PERF 558', *Islamic Culture* 72(4) (1998): 95–103; Milwright, *An Introduction to Islamic Archaeology*, p. 27, fig. 2.2. Illustrated and transcribed on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness. org/History/Islam/Papyri/PERF558.html, last accessed 12 December 2014.

20. Hoyland notes that 'commander of the faithful' appears in Persian on drachms dating to 41/661. Other examples appear on a bilingual papyrus protocol and a mosaic from Hammat Gader. See Hoyland, 'New Documentary Texts', p. 399.

21. The two phrases, *lā ilāha illā llāh* and *muḥammadan rasūlu llāh*, appear separately in the Qurʾan (Q 37:35 and 47:19 for the former and Q 48:29 for the latter), though there is nothing in their context of use to suggest that the profession of faith (*shahāda*) is Qurʾanic in origin. The emergence of this formulation, and variants of it, are discussed later in the book (particularly Chapter 8). On the *shahāda*, see Andrew Rippin, 'Witness to Faith', *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* (Brill online, 2015) and publications cited in notes to Chapter 8.

22. Johns, 'Archaeology and the History of Early Islam', pp. 426–7.

23. On the earliest scripts, see Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*; George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 55–93.

24. The fundamental reading of the inscriptions was undertaken by Max Van Berchem (d. 1921) in his *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicum. Deuxième partie: Syrie du sud* (Cairo 1927; reprinted Geneva: Slatkine, 2001), II, pp. 228–46.

25. Several scholars have discussed the possibility that some of the 'non-Qurʾanic' components in the inscription reflect lost written or oral Muslim scripture. For example, see Oleg Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy. Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 62–4; Tilman Nagel, 'Die Inschriften im Felsendom und das islamische Glaubensbekenntnis. Der Koran und die Anfänge des Ḥadīt', *Arabica* 47(3) (2000): 329–65 (see especially pp. 350–65); Rizwi Faizer, 'The Dome of the Rock and the Qurʾān', in Khaleel Mohammed and Andrew Rippin (eds), *Coming to Terms with the Qurʾān: A Volume in Honor of Professor Issa Boullata, McGill University* (North Haledon, NJ: Islamic Publications International, 2008), pp. 77–106 (see especially pp. 87–90); Finbarr Flood, 'The Qurʾan', in Helen Evans and Brandie Ratliff (eds), *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th–9th Century* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press and Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), pp. 265–9. This position has been challenged by scholars such as Estelle Whelan and Nicholas Sinai. These issues are discussed in greater detail with further references in Chapter 8 and the Conclusion.

26. For example, see Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Fahmida Suleman (ed.), *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qurʾan and its Creative Expressions*, The Institute of Ismaili Studies: Qurʾanic Studies Series 4 (London: Oxford University Press, 2007).

27. Ibn Khallikan, *Wafāyāt al-aʿyān*; translated in Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (1932–40), II, pp. 297–8. See also comments in Bernard O'Kane, 'Medium and Message in the Monumental Epigraphy of Medieval Cairo', in Mohammad Gharipour and İrvin Cemıl Schick

(eds), *Calligraphy and Islamic Architecture in the Muslim World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 417–18.

28. Gülru Necıpoğlu, 'Qurʾanic Inscriptions on Sinan's Imperial Mosques: A Comparison with their Safavid and Mughal Counterparts', in Fahmida Suleman (ed.), *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qurʾan and its Creative Expressions* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 69–104.

29. There exist numerous studies dealing with the legibility, or otherwise, of Islamic monumental inscriptions. Authors have also considered the extent to which the 'meaning' of inscriptions is contingent upon being able to read the content. Significant studies include: Erica Cruikshank Dodd, 'The Image of the Word: Notes of Religious Iconography in Islam', *Berytus* 18 (1969): 35–79; Richard Ettinghausen, 'Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation', in Dickran Kouymjian (ed.), *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy, and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1974), pp. 297–317; Robert Hillenbrand, 'Qurʾanic Epigraphy in Medieval Islamic Architecture', *Revue des études islamiques* 54 (1986): 171–87; Irene Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Los Angeles and Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

30. It appears to have been common practice in early medieval Europe and the Byzantine world to read inscriptions (and manuscripts) out loud. On the relevance of this issue for the understanding of architectural inscriptions, see Amy Papalexandrou, 'Text in Context: Eloquent Monuments and the Byzantine Beholder', *Word and Image* 17(3) (2001): 259–83.

31. Jamal Elias, *Aisha's Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 268–82.

32. On the used of the chi–ro and tau cross in early Christian art, see Robin Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 137–51.

33. Rosamond McKitterick, 'Text and Image in the Carolingian World', in Rosamond McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 304–8; Ben Tilghman, 'The Shape of the Word: Extralinguistic Meaning in Insular Display Lettering', *Word & Image* 27(3) (2011): 292–308. On the icon-like qualities of the written word, see Jeffrey Hamburger, 'The Iconicity of Script', *Word & Image* 27(3) (2001): 249–61.

34. There are many examples of studies that seek to relate the meanings of monumental religious inscriptions to their architectural settings. For example, see Sheila Blair, 'The Epigraphic Program of the Tomb of Uljaytu at Sultaniyya: Meaning in Mongol Architecture', *Islamic Art* 2 (1987): 43–96; Anthony Welch, Hussein Keshani and Alexandra Bain, 'Epigraphs, Scripture, and Architecture in the Early Dehli Sultanate', *Muqarnas* 19 (2002): 12–43; Stephennie Mulder, *The Shrines of the ʿAlids in Medieval Syria*, Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Art (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 82–99, 119–29. A series of significant contributions to this topic can also be found in Mohammad Gharipour and İrvın Cemıl Schick (eds), *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

35. Hillenbrand, 'Qurʾanic Epigraphy'. *Contra* Elias, *Aisha's Cushion*, pp. 261–3.

CHAPTER 1

The Setting of the Dome of the Rock

THE DOME OF the Rock dominates the skyline of the old town of Jerusalem; the building occupies the highest point of land (the summit of Mount Moriah), and the golden dome can be seen from any elevated vantage point within this densely settled part of the city. The visual impact of the monument is also powerful from beyond the confines of the old town, and is particularly dramatic when seen from the Mount of Olives to the east (Figure 1.1). The view across the Kidron Valley (Wadi al-Juz) allows one to appreciate the scale of the masonry platform on which the Dome of the Rock is located. This platform, the Temple Mount, is more ancient than the Dome of the Rock and the other Islamic structures that now populate it. The construction of the Dome of the Rock permanently altered the sacred topography of Jerusalem; it represented, among other things, a Muslim statement of religious and political authority within the spiritual heartland of both Judaism and Christianity. There can be little doubt that this was one facet of 'Abd al-Malik's plan for his building, but what he cannot have foreseen was the enduring potency of the Dome of the Rock and the ways in which its meaning adapted and expanded under later dynasties.

Before examining the inscriptions that form the principal subject matter of this book it is necessary to situate the Dome of the Rock within the history and geography of Jerusalem and its hinterland. The aim of this section is to establish the significance of the Temple Mount in the phases prior to the construction of the Dome of the Rock. In addition, there is a discussion of the nature of the architectural patronage on and around this platform during the early Islamic period (encompassing pre-Umayyad, Umayyad and early Abbasid phases of activity). The second section provides a preliminary assessment of the scholarly interpretations of the Dome of the Rock. This section is particularly concerned with the dominant areas of discourse that have developed since the 1950s, starting with the ground-breaking research of Oleg Grabar.
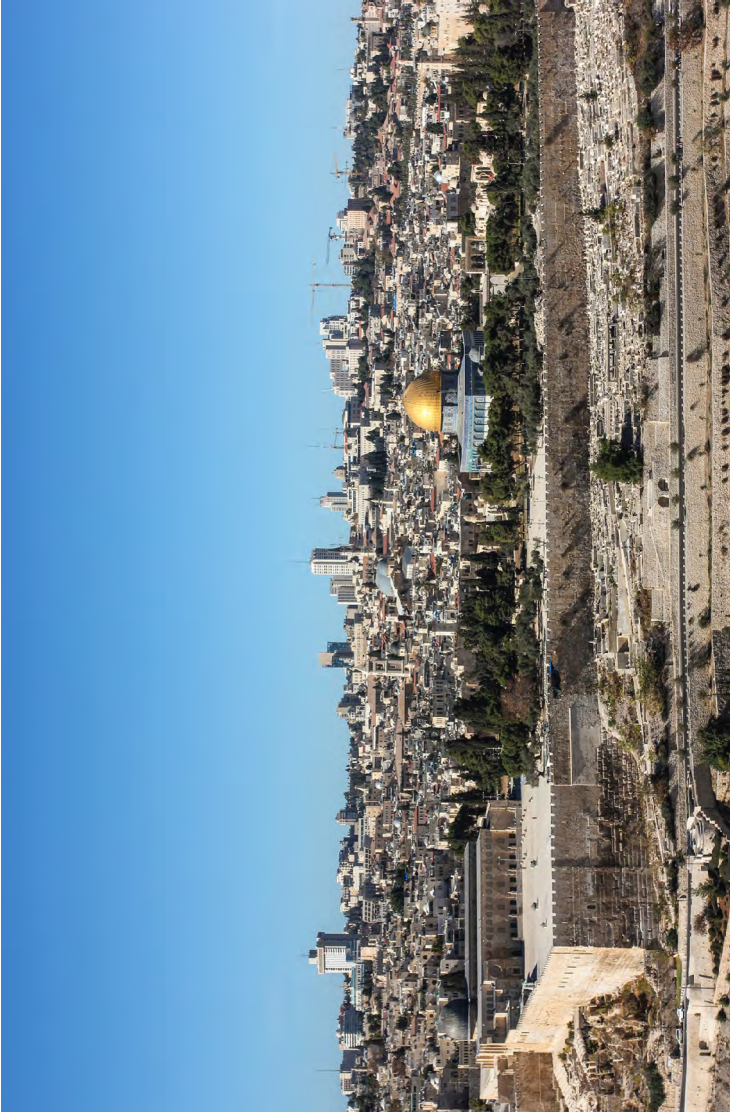
Figure 1.1 *Dome of the Rock seen from the Mount of Olives. Photograph: Askii (Wikimedia Commons).*

The Dome of the Rock and the Area of the Temple Mount

The Temple Mount is broadly rectangular construction, measuring 488 m along its west side, 470 m along its east side, 315 m on its north side and 280 m on its south side (Figure 1.2). The scale of this piece of ancient civil engineering is best appreciated from the south and south-west from where it is possible to see the huge ashlar masonry making up the outer walls. The Temple Mount itself is built around the hill known as Mount Moriah. Numerous Muslim religious buildings now occupy this elevated section of the old town of Jerusalem. The most prominent of these is the Dome of the Rock, located in the central zone of the Temple Mount on a raised trapezoidal platform (approximately 80 m north–south × 75m east–west) accessed by steps. The precise location of the Dome of the Rock is dictated by the Rock itself, the highest point of Mount Moriah. This means that the building is not actually located on the central north–south axis, but is pushed slightly to the west. Other structures, the Dome of the Chain, the Dome of the Ascension (*mi'rāj*) and the Dome of the Spirits, also occupy this platform. The last two are, in their present form, post-Umayyad in date.

The four principal entrances of the Dome of the Rock are located on the cardinal points.[1] Two of these, the east and the south, face towards significant structures of the early Islamic period. The east entrance leads towards the Dome of the Chain. This small domed building is unusual for its eleven-sided plan (Figure 1.3). The outer arcade is composed of nine classical marble columns and two masonry piers (on the south side), while the inner arcade comprises six marble columns. The inner arcade rises to a small dome, and the ambulatory around this space is covered with a shallow pitched roof. The Dome of the Chain is open on all sides save the south, where there is now a masonry wall containing on its interior face a *miḥrāb*. This wall might not be part of the original building, while the present *miḥrāb*, with its decorative opus sectile marblework, is probably Mamluk in date.[2] The central north–south axis of the Temple Mount cuts through the middle of the Dome of the Chain, while the central east–west axis, as Rosen-Ayalon has demonstrated, passes the southern side of the building where the *miḥrāb* is now located.[3] The date and function of the Dome the Chain remain mysterious, though Lawrence Nees has recently proposed that it should be assigned to the caliphate of Mu'awiya.[4]

The south portal of the Dome of the Rock takes one to the Aqsa Mosque (Figure 1.4). In its present form the building comprises a portico on the north side and a prayer hall made up of seven aisles arranged perpendicular to *qibla* (south) wall. The central aisle is wider and taller than the others and provides a central axis. There is a dome one bay north of the main *miḥrāb* that marks the intersection of the central aisle and a transept. The symmetry of the building is disrupted by additional covered spaces. The annex known as Jāmi' 'Umar is
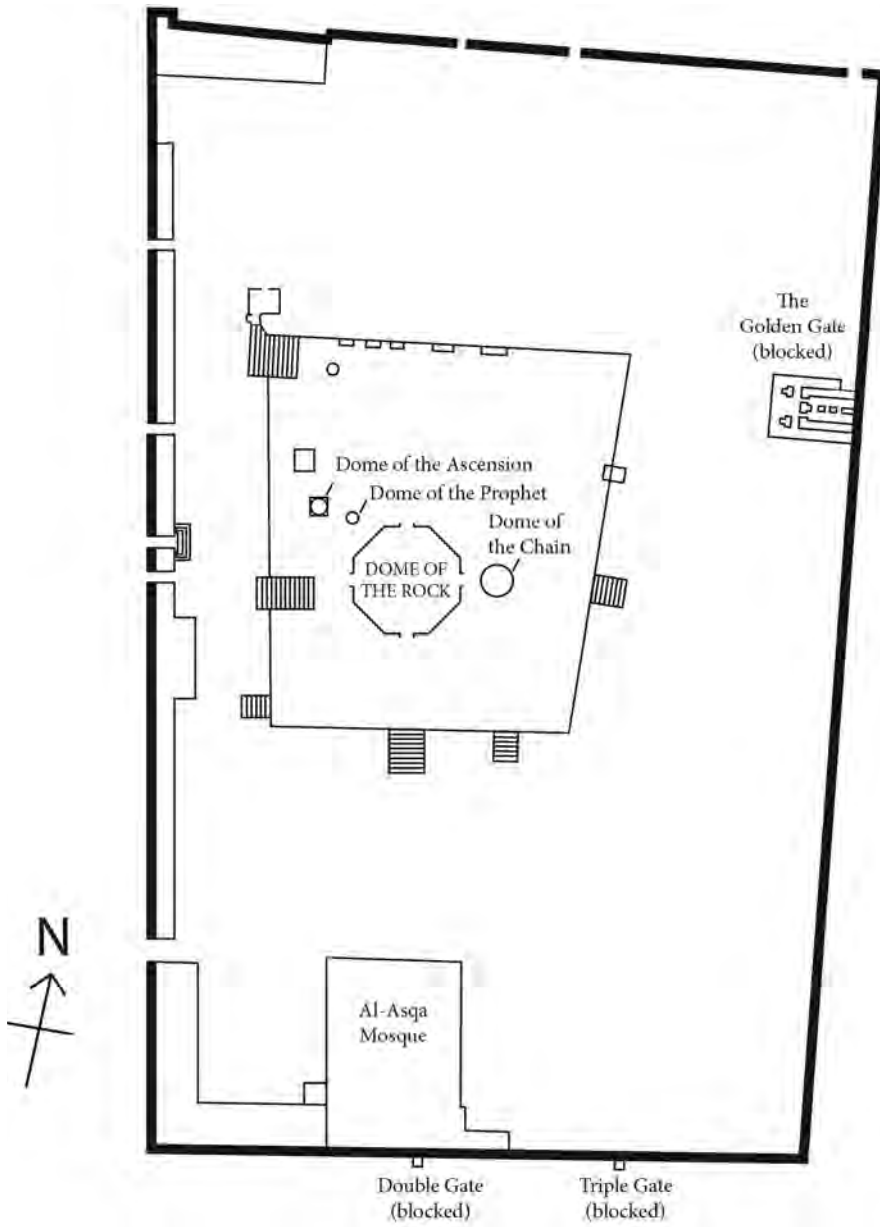
Figure 1.2 *Simplified plan of the Ḥaram al-Sharīf (Temple Mount) showing the location of the principal buildings and gates. Drawing: Naomi Shields.*

Figure 1.3 *Dome of the Chain, seventh century and later. Seen from the south. Photograph: Andrew Shiva (Wikimedia Commons).*

Figure 1.4 *Exterior of the Aqsa Mosque. Seen from the north. Photograph: Andrew Shiva (Wikimedia Commons).*

located east of the main prayer hall, and contains a prayer niche of uncertain date, known traditionally as the *miḥrāb* of ʿUmar (i.e., the second caliph). This *miḥrāb* sits at the centre of the south wall of the Temple Mount and on the axis, which passes the Dome of the Chain.[5]

The name of the mosque comes from Q 17:1: 'Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from *al-masjid al-ḥaram* to *al-masjid al-aqṣā*, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing.' *Al-masjid al-ḥaram* refers to the sacred enclosure in Mecca, but the location of the 'furthest mosque' (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*) is not specified in the Qurʾan. While the first explicit reference to the *isrāʾ* ('night journey') of the Prophet did not appear in the epigraphic programme of the mosque until 426/1035, there is evidence that an association was made between the Temple Mount and *al-masjid al-aqṣā* of Q 17:1 in the first half of the eighth century.[6] The association could conceivably date back to the rule of ʿAbd al-Malik, although this has not been demonstrated. A Muslim place of worship does seem to have existed on the Temple Mount prior to the erection of the Dome of the Rock. This may have been on the site of the current Aqsa Mosque. There are references to the erection of a place of Muslim worship in Jerusalem following ʿUmar's visit, but these have the character of legend and should not be accepted at face value.[7] Another description of a mosque appears in Adomnán of Iona's (d. 704) treatise, *De locis sanctis* ('On Holy Places'). His information is attributed to a pilgrim, Arculf, who reports seeing a substantial, but architecturally rudimentary structure in the 670s. The reliability of this account has been challenged; without this evidence we are left with little to support the existence of a mosque on the site of the Aqsa during the rule of Caliph Muʿawiya (r. 661–80).[8]

Robert Hamilton conducted an extensive architectural survey of the Aqsa Mosque prior to the major structural renovations in the mid-twentieth century.[9] Hamilton was also able to test some of his hypotheses with limited excavations under the present floor of the building and the paving immediately to the east. Of greatest significance in the present context is Hamilton's isolation of three distinct phases (known as Aqsa I–III) in the period prior to the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 492/1099. The first phase, Aqsa I, left the fewest physical traces, but seems to have consisted of a broadly rectangular prayer hall – even in its earliest manifestations the building is notable for the absence of an enclosed courtyard – comprising aisles arranged perpendicular to the *qibla* wall. Supported on marble columns, these aisles terminated about 19 m south of the present portico (Figure 1.5). The date of Aqsa I is uncertain, and scholars have identified both Muʿawiya and ʿAbd al-Malik as potential patrons.[10] The problem with assigning this first phase to the latter caliph is that the relative crudeness of the mosque stands in such sharp contrast to the architectural sophistication and rich ornamentation of the Dome of the Rock to the north.
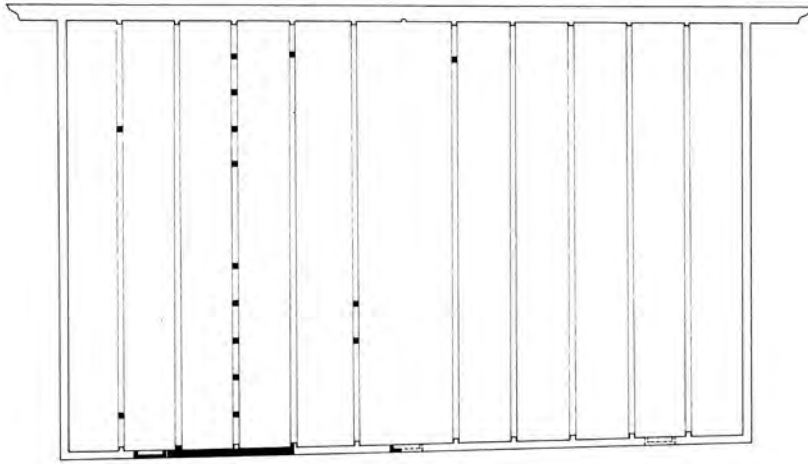
Figure 1.5 *Proposed plan of Aqsa I reconstructed by Julian Raby. After: Johns (ed.),* Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 2: Jerusalem and Early Islam, *Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.2 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).*

Aqsa II seems to be a better complement to the Dome of the Rock (Figure 1.6). The reconstruction of this phase, and the following one (Aqsa III) relies not just on Hamilton's survey and excavations, but also upon the testimony of al-Muqaddasi (d. *c.* 990) and other early primary sources. The interpretation of this evidence has proven controversial, with even Hamilton offering different reconstructions in his publications. The most radical departure from Hamilton's views appears in article by Rafi Grafman and Rosen-Ayalon.[11] They link the structural history of the mosque to the Herodian stoa running along the south wall of the Temple Mount and propose that the Umayyad mosque originally occupied the same stretch of the wall. Their reconstruction of the prayer hall draws upon that of al-Walid's Congregational Mosque in Damascus. By contrast, Hamilton proposes that Aqsa II comprised only fifteen aisles. The central aisle is widened and, in common with the current building, intersects with the transept at the domed space in front of the *miḥrāb*. Major renovations appear to have occurred with the third phase (Aqsa III), most importantly the replacement of the columns of the wide central aisle with larger limestone piers. These supported a wider span than was possible with columns. It seems most likely that it was Aqsa III that was seen and described by al-Muqaddasi in the late tenth century. Assuming the great earthquake of 131/749 damaged the Aqsa, the transition from Aqsa II to III can be attributed to the Abbasid caliphs, al-Mansur (r. 754–75) and his successor, al-Mahdi (r. 775–85).[12]

Papyri from the Egyptian site of Aphrodito note the provision of workers to the 'mosque' (*masgida*) and 'palace' (*aulê*) of Jerusalem
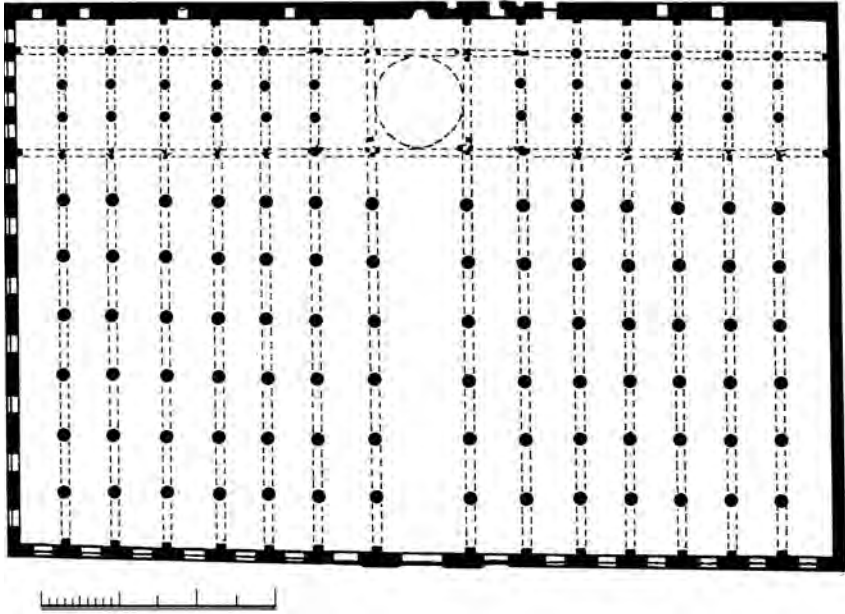
Figure 1.6 *Proposed reconstruction of Aqsa II. After: Hamilton,* The Structural History of the Aqsa Mosque *(1949). Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

during the reign of al-Walid II; this might indicate that work on 'Aqsa II' was still continuing beyond the rule of 'Abd al-Malik, though it might constitute restoration work. The 'palace' could be identified with extant structures recovered during archaeological work. Clustered around the south side and the southwest corner of the Temple Mount, this set of buildings was excavated in the second half of the twentieth century, but only partially published (Figure 1.7). The structures were still operating into the early Abbasid period.[13]

The function of these substantial buildings has yet to be determined. Some may have served administrative or ritual functions. A central courtyard dominates each of the larger compounds and it has been assumed that the rooms were arranged in two storeys around the four sides. Of crucial importance is the fact that the main structures on the south side of the Temple Mount had access to the sacred areas on the esplanade above. This was achieved through two gateways in the south wall of the Temple Mount, known as the Double Gate and the Triple Gate (Figure 1.8). The first of these led to a tunnel dating to the Herodian period that entered the esplanade just to the north of the Aqsa Mosque (the present mosque now covers the point where the tunnel would have emerged). The Double Gate was refurbished in the Umayyad period, and the Herodian tunnel was elongated to account for the dimensions of the Aqsa Mosque. The Triple Gate connected to the upper floor of the central palatial/
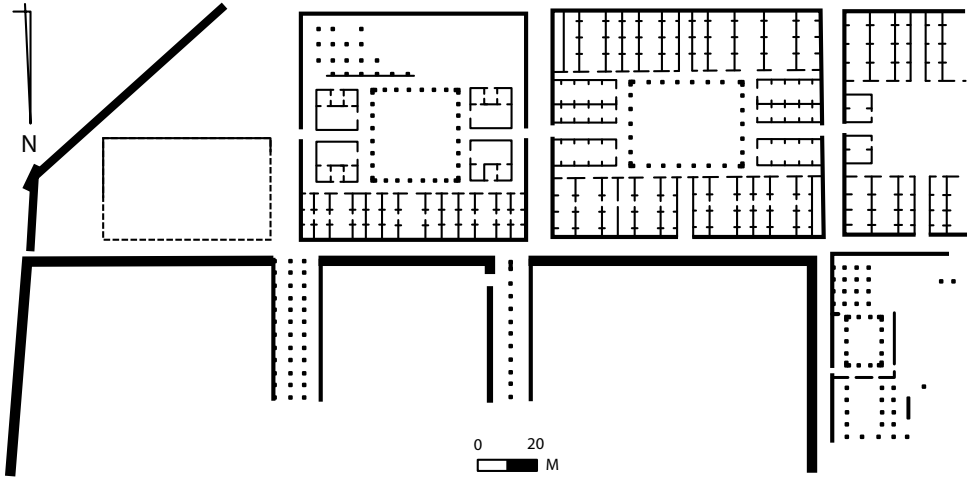
Figure 1.7 *Plan of the buildings to the south of the Ḥaram al-Sharīf. After: Ben-Dov,* In the Shadow of the Temple *(1985). Drawing: Naomi Shields.*

Figure 1.8 *(a) View of the eastern side of the south wall of the Ḥaram al-Sharīf; (b) view of the Double Gate; (c) view of the Triple Gate. Photographs: Oren Rozen (Wikimedia Commons); Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom.*

residential structure and passed through the eastern section of the
qibla wall into the prayer hall.[14] This appears to have been the more
private entrance to the prayer hall of the Aqsa, perhaps reserved for
the caliph and his entourage. There are later textual references to
special servants whose role it was to bring aromatic oil (*khalūq*) to
the Temple Mount in order to anoint the Rock. From the details of
this description it can be inferred that the oil was prepared in an area
near to the gates on the west side of the Temple Mount.[15]

Other gates lead onto the Temple Mount. Those on the west and
north sides connect directly into the Old Town of Jerusalem and
must have been the busiest thoroughfares leading onto the Temple
Mount itself.[16] The east side of the Mount faces the Kidron Valley, an
area not given over to domestic, commercial or industrial functions.
The area beyond the west wall of the Temple Mount is, however,
employed for burial. The west wall is provided with one gate located
roughly at the level of the north side of the rectangular platform sup-
porting the Dome of the Rock and the Dome of the Chain. Known
as the Golden Gate, it is built on a monumental scale rising above
the remainder of the west wall (Figure 1.9). The exterior façade is
dominated by an elaborately carved entablature with two round

Figure 1.9 *View of the exterior of the Golden Gate, seventh century(?).
Photograph courtesy of Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom.*

arches. While one might have expected these two openings beneath these arches to be entrances to the inner part of the gate, they are in fact blocked in with ashlar masonry; it is unclear whether the Golden Gate was ever provided with openings to allow free access from the Kidron Valley onto the esplanade of the Temple Mount. The interior of the Golden Gate comprises a vaulted chamber made up of six bays and a set of steps leading to the esplanade. The date and possible functions of the Golden Gate have been the subject of debate. It has been linked to the patronage of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (r. 610–41) following his victory over the Sasanian Empire and his restitution of the fragments of the True Cross to Jerusalem in 630. Alternatively, the structure may belong to the Umayyad period, and has given rise to speculation that the Golden Gate had an eschatological function (see below).[17]

The decision to erect Muslim buildings on the Temple Mount should be seen in the context of the meanings that this area carried for the Jews. It is likely that the Muslim elite was conversant with some the aspects of the early history of the site; presumably these were relatively common knowledge in Jerusalem, but it is also relevant that the Umayyad court included some prominent converts from Judaism who acted as advisers to the caliphs. According to the account in the Old Testament (I Kings 1–51), the First Temple was constructed by King Solomon in the mid-tenth century BCE. The First Temple was destroyed during the Babylonian sack of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. The Second Temple is believed to have been begun in 538 (Ezra 1–5) and dedicated during the reign of Darius the Great (r. 522–486) in c. 515. Herod the Great (r. 37–4 BCE) substantially renovated the Second Temple in c. 20 BCE. The Herodian Temple, as it is often known, was part of a larger construction project that also incorporated a substantial stoa along the south wall of the Temple Mount. It is not known precisely where the First and Second Temples stood on the esplanade, though most reconstructions place them in the central part of the space (i.e., over the area now occupied by the Dome of the Rock and Dome of the Chain).

The Temple and the other buildings of the esplanade were razed during the Roman suppression of the Jewish Revolt in Judaea (66–74 CE). The sacred items seized from the Holy of Holies, including the giant menorah, were paraded through the streets of Rome in triumph in 70 CE; this pivotal event in Jewish history is recorded on the carved reliefs of the Arch of Titus in Rome (dated 81 CE) (Figure 1.10). The late first-century Jewish historian, Josephus gives the most detailed contemporary account of the destruction of Jerusalem. He describes the fire that consumed the Temple, and the burning of much of the rest of the city by the forces led by Titus (later emperor, r. 79–81).[18]

The destruction of the Herodian Temple had a profound impact on the subsequent evolution of Judaism, including the rise of the Rabbinate and the synagogue as the foci of religious authority and

Figure 1.10 *Triumph relief from the Arch of Titus, Rome, c. 82 CE. Photograph: Marcus Milwright.*

practice. The traumatic events of 70 CE did not, however, end Jewish hopes regarding the Temple Mount; there were attempts in later centuries to reconstitute the Temple on its former location. The first of these was during the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–6 CE). The crushing of this challenge to Roman authority resulted in the expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem. It is also believed that Emperor Hadrian (r. 117–38) commissioned a temple dedicated to Jupiter on the Temple Mount. The location of this pagan sanctuary is unknown, though it is possible that some of its architectural elements were reused in Aqsa I. A later emperor, Julian (r. 361–3) is reputed to have given permission to reconstruct their Temple. According to Ammianus Marcellinus (d. after 391), this project was entrusted in 363 to Alypius of Antioch. The enterprise never progressed beyond the digging of foundation trenches. It is not apparent the extent to which the rebuilding of the Temple was supported by local Jews. There is evidence of the continuation of rituals in this area: a fourth-century Christian pilgrim from Bordeaux reports that the Jews of the city would ascend the Temple Mount in order to anoint a 'perforated rock' (*lapis pertusis*). Lastly, there are references to attempts by the Jews to reconstruct the Temple during the Sasanian occupation of
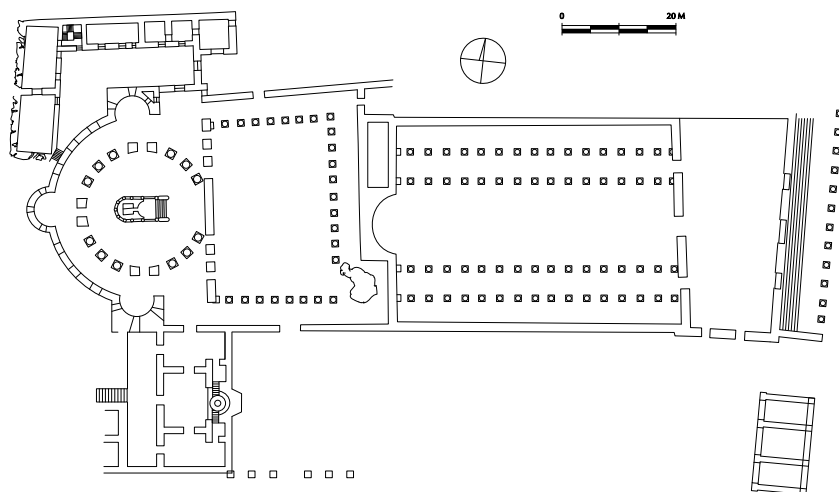
Figure 1.11 *Reconstruction of the fourth-century Church of the Holy Sepulchre. After plan by Virgilio Corbo. Drawing: Naomi Shields.*

Jerusalem (614–28). It is unclear how much was achieved prior to the Byzantine recapture of the city.[19]

The events on the Temple Mount should be understood in the context of the wider transformation of Jerusalem during the Late Antique period. Most important in this respect is the adoption of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. In common with most towns and cities across the empire, the character of the urban landscape of Jerusalem was transformed through the imposition of churches and other institutions associated with the new faith. Quite when Hadrian's pagan building on the Temple Mount ceased to function is unknown, but by the fourth century the empire was enthusiastically supporting the erection of Christian monuments in the city, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Figure 1.11). The visit in the late 320s of Empress Helena (d. 330) was a key event in this process. According to Eusebius (d. 339/40), the site of Golgotha was venerated by Christians in the second century, but had been covered by a temple dedicated to Aphrodite.[20] Excavations at the site prior to the sinking of the foundations of the new church revealed both a tomb and, according to tradition, fragments of the True Cross.

Comprising a basilica and a rotunda housing the Tomb of Christ, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was the pre-eminent Christian monument in Jerusalem. Located to the west of the main thoroughfare (the Roman Cardo Maximus) running south from the Damascus gate, this massive and lavishly appointed new church effectively shifted the spiritual focus of the city away from the Temple Mount. Later descriptions of the supposed visit of ʿUmar to Jerusalem following its capture claim that the caliph found the esplanade to be strewn

Figure 1.12 *Representation of Jerusalem in the Madaba mosaic map, sixth century. Church of St George, Madaba, Jordan. Photograph: Marcus Milwright.*

with refuse; whether or not one accepts these claims, it seems probable that the Christians of the Late Antique period did not pay a great deal of attention to the Temple Mount. This is demonstrated well in the famous topographic representation of Jerusalem preserved on the sixth-century mosaic map in the Church of St George in Madaba (Figure 1.12). Predictably, it is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre that dominates the landscape of the town. Also prominent in this image of the city are the walls and gates, the colonnaded *cardo* and the Nea Ekklesia (New Church) commissioned by Emperor Justinian (r. 527–65). The Temple Mount appears as a vestige in the upper part of the Jerusalem – this is quite out of keeping with actual area of land it occupies within the city walls.[21]

The patronage of Emperor Heraclius in Jerusalem has been the subject of debate.[22] His victorious march to the city in order to return the True Cross was evidently charged with symbolism. The True Cross was restored to Jerusalem on 21 March 630. The Jews were expelled because of their perceived collaboration with the Persian occupiers. Heraclius seems to have encouraged associations between himself and the Old Testament king David. Notable examples of this phenomenon are the so-called David plates, beautifully crafted silver vessels dated to the rule of Heraclius and probably commissioned by his court.[23] In this context it is easy to imagine that the emperor would have wished to cement the Davidian characteristics of his rule by investing in the urban infrastructure of Jerusalem itself.

An Overview of the Scholarly Interpretations of the Dome of the Rock

The Dome of Rock has probably generated more publications than any other Islamic building. The bulk of this activity has been the since the 1950s, though there are foundational studies from the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Indeed, one could extend this search for interpretations further into the past: the pressing need for Muslims and non-Muslims to make sense of this enigmatic monument can be seen in the claims concerning the ritual functions, location, superstructure or decoration of Dome of the Rock offered by the likes of al-Yaʿqubi (d. 897–8), al-Muqaddasi (d. c. 990), and the Melkite priest, Eutychius (d. 940). Early traditions concerning the building appear in later works, most notably the genre of *faḍāʾil al-quds* ('merits of Jerusalem') that develops from the eleventh century.[24] Muslim, Christian and Jewish pilgrims to Jerusalem also offered their thoughts on the layered meanings of the Dome of the Rock; these are certainly interesting as a record of the changing symbolic profile of the building over the centuries, but are less useful as a guide to the intentions of ʿAbd al-Malik, his court, and the engineers and artisans working for him.[25] Modern scholars have pressed these primary sources into service in a variety of ways. The most influential of these interpretations are discussed below,[26] but this should be prefaced with some comments about the documentary research on the Dome of the Rock itself as this must form the essential starting point for all subsequent interpretative work.

The first serious attempt to make a structural record of the Dome of the Rock was undertaken by Charles-Jean-Melchior de Vogüé (d. 1916). His book, *Le temple de Jérusalem*, was published in Paris in 1864. Among the major achievements of this study was de Vogüé's recognition that the patron named in the octagonal arcade inscription (Caliph al-Maʾmun, r. 813–33) could not have been responsible for the erection of the building. He notes the unusual orthography, the compression of the letters, and the hue of the blue tesserae framing the letters in this section of text at the beginning of the southeast side of the outer face. He reasons that al-Maʾmūn had expunged the name of the true patron, ʿAbd al-Malik (Figure 1.13).[27] This interpretation of the chronology is accepted in all later scholarship. The first book-length study of the building in English is Ernest Richmond's (d. 1955), *The Dome of the Rock*, published in 1924. Richmond provided more accurate drawings of the ground plan and elevations of the building.[28] These, and other early studies, are largely superseded by the documentary efforts of two scholars, Max van Berchem (d. 1921) and K. A. C. Creswell (d. 1974). Their work on the inscriptions and the architecture of the Dome of the Rock is of crucial importance for subsequent scholarship.

Van Berchem's principal contribution appears in the second

Figure 1.13 *Drawing showing the addition of Caliph al-Maʾmun's name to the southeast side of the outer face mosaic inscription of the octagonal arcade. After Max Van Berchem,* Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicum, Deuxième partie: Syrie du sud, *vol. 2 (1927).*

volume of his *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicum. Deuxième partie: Syrie du sud*, published in 1927. The second volume deals with the Arabic inscriptions on the Ḥaram al-Sharīf, and devotes a substantial section to the material dating from the Umayyad period, both in the Dome of the Rock and elsewhere on the platform. Van Berchem provided the first accurate readings of the two painted and gilded copper plaques (originally from the north and east portals of the Dome of the Rock), as well as the mosaic inscription band running around the outer and inner faces of the octagonal arcade.[29] In both cases he rendered the Kufic script of the originals into a modern cursive; this is important because the Umayyad texts were written with very sparing diacritical marks (see Chapters 2, 4–6). Other markings for features including those for missing dagger *alif*s, vowelling, doubled consonants and case endings are also absent from monumental inscriptions and Qurʾan manuscripts of this early period. Thus, van Berchem's achievement was to allow the difficult Umayyad inscriptions of the structure to be legible for students of Arabic; his transcriptions are fully dotted with vowelling added when it was required to clarify the meaning of a given passage. He subdivides the inscription according to its sixteen sides and also notes the placement of the decorative spacers on the outer face. He is careful to record unusual or apparently defective forms of words, and also identifies the correspondences between selected passages of the mosaic inscription and the relevant Qurʾanic *sūra*s and *āya*s in their canonical form. The very legibility of van Berchem's transcription is, however, somewhat misleading if one wants to get a sense not just of the content of the inscription, but also the manner in which it is communicated.

As Kessler noted in her later study of the inscriptions (see below), van Berchem had to make his transcription of the mosaics in difficult conditions and accumulated lamp soot and other dirt obscured some passages. Thus, he was not able to offer a definitive reading; this is evident in his own annotations, particularly on the inner face inscription. One of the aspects of the inscription that was especially difficult to appreciate at the time of his visit was the sporadic use of diacritics, which in the Dome of the Rock take the form of long or short dashes above or below the letter forms. Van Berchem was, however, alert to the issues raised by the archaic scripts of the Dome of the Rock; for example, he cites the inscribed

milestones from the rule of 'Abd al-Malik by way of comparison. The subsequent discussion is peppered with significant observations, some of which will be discussed in greater detail later in the book. Pertinent to later scholarly publications is his comment that the building is described in the inscription itself as a *qubba* (dome) rather than specifically as a martyrium (for which a term like *mashhad* might have been more appropriate). He also elaborates upon de Vogüé's conclusions concerning the original patron. The section dealing with the Umayyad inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock is notable too for its referencing of earlier transcriptions and translations.

Creswell brought the same meticulous attention to the documentation and analysis of the architectural dimensions of this seminal monument. The Dome of the Rock is discussed in the first part of volume one of his *Early Muslim Architecture*, first published in 1932 and republished in a revised edition in 1969.[30] It is beyond the scope of this brief survey to summarise all of the significant observations made by Creswell in his examination of the Dome of the Rock. It can be stated, however, that his efforts provided later scholarship with the most comprehensive account of the building, supplemented by an exhaustive bibliography of earlier secondary sources (and many of the relevant primary Arabic accounts) and an extensive assemblage of black and white photographs and measured drawings. He was able to correct previous ground plans by making new measurements, although he continued to rely upon Richmond's drawings for the elevations.[31] The reader is left with a clear sense of the materials and construction techniques employed in the Umayyad construction as well as in the later phases of renovation. A chapter on the mosaics written by Marguerite van Berchem complemented Creswell's scholarship. She had the opportunity to study the mosaics at close range. She makes valuable comments about issues including the shapes and sizes of the tesserae, the colour variations in the glass (e.g., between the outer and inner faces of the octagonal arcade), and the different ways in which the gold cubes were laid across the ornamental programme. This study also breaks down the decorative motifs into a typology, which is then compared with early motifs in the Persian and Graeco-Roman traditions.[32]

Creswell wished to establish with as much certainty as possible the dates that buildings were founded and completed (this also led him to consider subsequent renovations undertaken to structures in later centuries), and the patrons associated with them. Chronology also informed his treatment of buildings: he consistently arranges the data on the structural elements and ornamental characteristics in order to establish the sequence in which they were placed within the building. He pays particularly close attention to the separation of distinct phases of activity (whether these were separated by a short interval or periods of decades or centuries). This method allowed

Creswell to establish a temporally organised list of Islamic buildings through the early Islamic centuries.[33]

Creswell's concern with chronology meant that he saw most aspects of Umayyad and Abbasid architecture and decoration in terms of earlier building traditions. He provides extensive comparanda across the Late Antique world for specific features of buildings; for example, the centralised domed plan of the Dome of the Rock is discussed in relation to a diverse range of monuments across the Mediterranean. While Creswell's approach was not dissimilar to those of many contemporary architectural historians, it was flawed in that it failed to establish causal links that might account for how a ground plan, proportional system, structural form or decorative motif moved through time and space to be utilised in a later building. His chronological focus lacked sufficient sensitivity to regional styles and indigenous craft traditions, preferring to look for all earlier comparisons rather than focusing upon those that were most likely to be relevant.[34]

The iconographic dimensions of Islamic architecture and portable arts are seldom the focus of Creswell's attention. Muslim patrons were clearly seeking, however, to express religious and political preoccupations through the synthesis of an existing Late Antique vocabulary with new elements drawn from the nascent Islamic culture. The epigraphic content of early Islamic architecture is a powerful example of this phenomenon, but neither the content nor the morphology of the scripts receives meaningful coverage in Creswell's work. In the case of the Dome of the Rock, he relied on the reading of the Umayyad inscriptions by Max van Berchem. Creswell's interest is solely in recording the date (he believed 72 to be the year the building was completed) and clarifying the name of the patron. No mention is made of the other components of the inscriptions despite the possibility that they might bear upon the meanings conveyed by the Dome of the Rock and the functions the monument would have performed in the Umayyad period.

The ritual dimensions of the Dome of the Rock were, however, being debated by other scholars from the late nineteenth century onward. Ignác Goldziher (d. 1921) discussed the claim made by al-Ya'qubi and Euthychius that 'Abd al-Malik had constructed the Dome of the Rock as an alternative site for Muslim pilgrimage.[35] The historical context for this interpretation was the second civil war (*fitna*); unable to make the hajj to the Ka'ba because the city of Mecca was occupied by the 'counter-caliph' Ibn al-Zubayr, the followers of the Umayyad caliph could instead circumambulate a new shrine in Jerusalem. This explanation was supported in part by the form of the Dome of the Rock itself with its ambulatories allowing free access around the central rock. A similar accusation is made later against one of the Abbasid caliphs of the Samarran period (probably al-Mu'tasim, r. 833–42); the tenth-century geographer al-Muqaddasi,

claims that a structure was erected in the city as a 'Ka'ba'. It could be that this is a reference to the octagonal monument known as the Qubbat al-Sulaybiyya.[36]

Other scholars, most notably Shlomo Goitein (d. 1985), rejected the idea that the Dome of the Rock was conceived as an alternative locus of the hajj.[37] He argued that, aside from being written long after the events, the testimony of al-Ya'qubi was compromised by his dislike of the Umayyads (his writings suggest a sympathy for Shi'ism). As a Christian scholar, Eutychius' representation of the events of the late 680s and 690s was held to be equally suspect. Goitein also pointed to the absence of references to this attempt to divert the hajj in the chronicles of al-Tabari and al-Baladhuri, as well as the geographical work of the Palestinian, al-Muqaddasi. In Goldziher's defence it should be noted that more recent scholarship has identified other Muslim sources that make the same claim about the Dome of the Rock as a site of pilgrimage. Not all of these can be characterised as antithetical to the Umayyads.[38] Caskel, van Ess and Raby have, among others, discussed the possible ritual dimensions of the Dome of the Rock in the Umayyad period (see also Chapter 8 and the Conclusion).[39]

Some studies in the second half of the twentieth century continued the tradition of recording characteristics about the physical structure and epigraphy of the Dome of the Rock. Christel Kessler wrote two important contributions to the early phases of the building. Published in 1964, the first of these provided a detailed description and photographic record of the wooden cornice that surmounted the mosaic panels on the outer face of the octagonal arcade (see Chapter 2). Kessler's second article is of greater significance in that she sought to correct the reading of the octagonal arcade inscriptions published by van Berchem in 1927. Using ladders she was able to view the mosaics at close hand; this effort resulted in a drawing of the inscription that conveys the actual form of the archaic script, including its sporadic and inconsistent application of diacritics. She also notes comparisons for the unusual features of the mosaics in earlier dated Arabic inscriptions.[40]

Kessler's drawings remained the most accurate record of the inscriptions until the publication of a complete set of colour photographs by Saïd Nuseibeh in *The Dome of the Rock* (1996).[41] The circuit of the inner face of the octagonal arcade appears in Grabar's *The Shape of the Holy* (1996).[42] Other studies are also worthy of mention, including Doron Chen's analyses of the metrology of the building and H. R. Allen's discussion of his scale model of the Dome of the Rock. The former was able to demonstrate that the unit of measurement, the cubit (Arabic: *dhirā'*) and certain compositional proportions in 'Abd al-Malik's structure are identical to those of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The latter reflects upon the presence of mosaic decoration on the exterior of the building and adduces

evidence in favour of an Umayyad date for the alternating dark and light marble veneer (*ablaq*) forming the voussoirs of the arches on the inner arcade.[43]

The seminal 'The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem' by Oleg Grabar signalled a new direction in the study of the Dome of the Rock.[44] Published in *Ars Orientalis* in 1959, this article summarises the main strands of earlier scholarship, with particular attention paid to the textual sources employed to support the notions that the Dome of the Rock was a new site for Muslim pilgrimage, and that the rock itself was revered as the place from which the Prophet embarked on his heavenly journey (*mi'rāj*). He demonstrates the problems and inconsistencies in both interpretations of the building, and concludes that the most reliable points of departure are the architecture and decoration of Dome of the Rock itself, its location on the Temple Mount, its relationship to other structures in Jerusalem, and the earlier traditions associated with the Rock. The last issue leads Grabar to consider the spurious tradition concerning Abraham's sacrifice on Mount Moriah and the changing views concerning the location of the *omphalos*, and with it the grave of Adam, the first man. Grabar highlights the fourth-century record of the anointing of a 'perforated rock' by the Jews of Jerusalem, for it suggests connections to older beliefs concerning the location of the Holy of Holies of the Jewish Temple. The article also deals with the status of Abraham within the early Islamic tradition, and the relevance this has for both the politics of the period of struggle between 'Abd al-Malik and Ibn al-Zubayr and for the relationship between the spiritual centres of Mecca and Jerusalem.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of this article is its treatment of the building and its decoration. Grabar moves beyond the level of documentation and the search for stylistic parallels in earlier artistic traditions in order to assess the available evidence for its iconographic potential. This decisive move towards the interpretation of meaning defined the course of most subsequent scholarship on the Dome of the Rock (and, more generally, early Islamic visual culture). The author devotes considerable attention to the representations of jewellery and crowns (drawing upon Byzantine and Sasanian prototypes) in the mosaic panels of the interior. While this might echo the practice of hanging votive crowns as a means to express the sanctity of the space, Grabar sees a more political function. There is textual evidence for the sending of crowns and other royal items to the Ka'ba in Mecca, and he concludes that the representations of imperial regalia in the Dome do the Rock can be associated with the idea of the victory of Islam.[45] This interpretation is supported, in Grabar's view, by the content of the mosaic inscriptions running around the two faces of the octagonal arcade. Most significant in this context is the Christological aspect of the inner face inscription for this shows the direct engagement with Christians and, by extension, the most

powerful Christian polity of the period, the Byzantine Empire. This use of architecture and architectural decoration as a means to wage an ideological battle with the emperors of Constantinople is also apparent in the Congregational Mosque erected by Caliph al-Walid in Damascus from 706.

Grabar himself revisited and refined these ideas in later publications, through to his last book on the subject in 2006.[46] He attempted to locate the Dome of the Rock within the larger patterns of early Islamic patronage in Jerusalem in his book, *The Shape of the Holy*, while his 2006 publication, *The Dome of the Rock*, provided an accessible study of the structure from its inception through to the present. The latter study focused on the ways in which different meanings have accreted to the Dome of the Rock over time. There is insufficient space to deal with the wealth of publications since Grabar's 1959 study, and the following paragraphs will only mention some of the most significant directions in later scholarship. Predictably, archaeological and textual research has unearthed new material for the study of the building; these include the discovery of Late Antique octagonal martyria in Palestine and the close reading of medieval Arabic writings on Jerusalem (including the corpus of *faḍāʾil al-quds* treatises). Before assessing the most important contributions, however, it is worth emphasising the extent to which these are informed by Grabar's insistence upon the integration of physical and textual evidence in the interpretative process. This remains a cornerstone of subsequent scholarship, though it leaves unresolved the central difficulty (acknowledged by Grabar) with the analysis of the Arabic written record: with the exception of the inscriptions within the Dome of the Rock, all of it was written after the erection of the building, and we cannot be sure what parts of it reflect the realities of the 680s and 690s.

Myriam Rosen-Ayalon takes as her subject the entire Umayyad construction project on and around the Temple Mount, although the Dome of the Rock is subjected to detailed scrutiny.[47] The Palestinian geographer, al-Muqaddasi, records the tradition that the two *ḥaram*s of Mecca and Medina would travel to Jerusalem at the end of time.[48] His claim seems to reflect a long-held belief, in Greater Syria at least, in the special status of Jerusalem, and this is employed as part of the evidence for an eschatological reading of the Umayyad monuments. Rosen-Ayalon's interpretation has the benefit of establishing symbolic relationships between the key buildings, including the Dome of the Rock, Aqsa Mosque, Dome of the Chain, Golden Gate, and the complex of buildings to the south and west of the platform. She makes extensive use of Jewish writing, particularly with apocalyptic themes, and Late Antique visual sources. The book also reviews the octagonal plans of Christian baptisteries and the association between the number eight and the resurrection of the chosen. Thus, the Muslim monument becomes the Temple and the Throne on the

Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*). Raya Shani and Carolanne Mekeel-Matteson further develop these themes.[49]

Nasser Rabbat has drawn attention to the importance of the earliest surviving *faḍāʾil al-quds* work, a text completed by the religious scholar, Abu Bakr al-Wasiti prior to 1019.[50] Rabbat reflects on the role of Jewish converts to Islam in elevating the spiritual status of Jerusalem within the Umayyad court. He also notes their probable role in the creation of anti-Christian propaganda (a notable feature of the inner face inscription in the Dome of the Rock). Importantly, he brings forward evidence to show that ʿAbd al-Malik was trying to model his rule upon the Old Testament kings and Qurʾanic prophets, David and Solomon, and that this factor encouraged the creation of a domed edifice on the site of the Solomonic Temple. Other researchers, most notably Priscilla Soucek and Raya Shani, have discussed the Solomonic dimensions of the Dome of the Rock.[51] Another form of commemoration is suggested in Finbarr Flood's study of the dark stone disk set into the flat *miḥrāb* in the cave beneath the rock. Acknowledging that the *miḥrāb* is probably a later creation (dating perhaps to the eleventh century), Flood collects evidence that the black stone can be regarded as an aniconic symbol of the Prophet or, more accurately, of the divine light believed to emanate from him.[52]

The date of the construction of the Dome of the Rock appears at first sight to be an uncontroversial issue: the outer face inscription clearly gives 72 (691–2) as the date for the *qubba* (dome) commissioned by ʿAbd al-Malik, and this has usually been assumed to be the year in which the building was completed. Hence, the construction phase stretches back into the period of the second *fitna* (there have even been suggestions that some activity associated with the planning of the building can be traced back to caliphate of al-Muʿawiya).[53] Sheila Blair questions this assumption in a chapter written for the influential volume, *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 1: ʿAbd al-Malik's Jerusalem*.[54] She notes that foundation text for al-Walid's mosque in Damascus records the year in which building work commenced, and that we cannot exclude this possibility in the case of the Dome of the Rock. She adduces historical evidence to demonstrate the relatively weak financial and political situation of ʿAbd al-Malik prior to the capture of Mecca and the death of Ibn al-Zubayr. The later dating for the completion of the Dome of the Rock (at sometime in the mid-690s) correlates with a rise in the fortunes of the Umayyad caliph and also with crucial developments in coinage. Most notable in this respect is the introduction of the first fully epigraphic *dīnār* in 77/696–7, a coin that employs two key features of the inscriptional programme of the Dome of the Rock: the 'long' form of the profession of faith and, in a slightly adapted form, Q 112 (see Chapter 8). Other scholars have contested this later dating; for example, Jeremy Johns offers a different view of the economic vitality of the Umayyad lands in the years prior to 72/691–2

and argues that the year represents the date of completion. Some support for Blair's argument comes in Robinson's biography of 'Abd al-Malik. Robinson questions the validity of regarding Ibn al-Zubayr as a 'counter-caliph' and emphasises the weakness of 'Abd al-Malik's position through much of the second *fitna* (Robinson does, however, accept 72 as the year of completion for the building).[55]

The fullest treatment of the Umayyad inscriptional programme of the Dome of the Rock has been offered by Gülru Necıpoğlu in a long article published in *Muqarnas* (2008).[56] Her interpretation builds upon earlier attempts, and like that of Grabar, seeks to integrate the inscriptions with other aspects of the ornamentation, as well as the relationship of the Dome of the Rock to the other buildings on the Temple Mount (and their inscriptions). Importantly, she makes extensive use of the inscriptions on the two copper plaques and also argues (on the basis of the testimony of the twelfth-century traveller, 'Ali al-Harawi) that the entire programme of inscriptions was completed by the inclusion of the Throne Verse (Q 2:255) somewhere in the dome of the building (this issue is considered in greater detail in Chapter 2). What results from her analysis is a nuanced programme of inscriptions that builds towards the themes of the oneness and transcendence of God, the absolute sovereignty of God over heaven and earth, the prophethood of Muhammad, and the judgement of souls at the end of days. She believes that 'Abd al-Malik had a meaningful role in creation of the textual component in the building (see also Chapter 8).

Finally, archaeology has contributed to our understanding of the origins of the octagonal martyrium in Late Antique Greater Syria. These include the structure excavated in the 1990s at Caesarea Maritima and the Kathisma church on the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem (see Figure 7.22, below).[57] It is now clear that the Dome of the Rock was not the first structure in the region to incorporate octagonal ambulatories around a central domed space. The Kathisma church is of particular significance as it was constructed around a central rock, the *kathisma*, on which the Virgin Mary was reputed to have rested on the way to Bethlehem. The church itself was founded in the fifth century, and comprises a rounded apse to the east and a set of smaller chapels around the other sides. The plan of Kathisma church does not facilitate the free movement around the domed space that is evidently part of the function of the two ambulatories of the Dome of the Rock, and it should also be noted that the church has an axial dimension introduced by the apse. The excavators of the site have identified intriguing evidence that the building remained in use into the early Islamic period, and that a *miḥrāb* was constructed into the south wall of the interior. There are also floor mosaics, including a depiction of a palm tree, that echo some of the panels on the walls of the Dome of the Rock. Taken with the metrological links established between the Dome of the Rock and the Church of

the Holy Sepulchre,[58] these archaeological finds strengthen the view that the design of the Dome of the Rock was reliant upon the building traditions and visual culture of Late Antiquity.

Notes

1. The published plans of the building indicate that there are two smaller openings on the southeast and southwest walls. These are no longer accessible.
2. Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, *The Early Islamic Monuments of al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf. An Iconographic Study*, Qedem 28 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University, 1989), pp. 25–9.
3. Rosen-Ayalon, *Early Islamic Monuments*, pp. 27–9, fig. 25.
4. Lawrence Nees, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Art in Jerusalem*, Arts and Archaeology of the Islamic World 5 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, forthcoming).
5. Rosen-Ayalon, *Early Islamic Monuments*, fig. 26.
6. Heribert Busse, 'Jerusalem in the Story of Muḥammad's Night Journey and Ascension', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 14 (1991): 1–40.
7. For translations and analyses of these passages, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 63, 101, 127, 311. On the association of ʿUmar and Jerusalem, see Heribert Busse, 'ʿOmar's Image as the Conqueror of Jerusalem', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): 149–68.
8. John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 2002), p. 79 (book 1.14); Lawrence Nees, 'Insular Latin Sources: "Arculf" and Early Islamic Jerusalem', in Michael Frassetto, Matthew Gabriele and John Hosler (eds), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Essays in Medieval Europe in Honor of Daniel F. Callaghan*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 174 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2014), pp. 81–100; Nees, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Art in Jerusalem*. On Adomnán and Arculf, see also Robert Hoyland and Sarah Waidler, 'Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* and the Seventh-century Near East', *English Historical Review* 129(539) (2014): 787–807.
9. Hamilton, *The Structural History of the Aqsa Mosque*. Hamilton did not publish all the material from his excavations in this report. The unpublished materials included a mosaic pavement beneath the present floor of the mosque that appeared to belong to an official building of the Byzantine period, most probably a church. Underneath this layer was evidence for what might be an ancient *mikvah* (Jewish ritual bath). See Etgar Lefkovits, 'Was the Aksa Mosque Built Over the Remains of a Byzantine Church?' *Jerusalem Pos*, 16 November 2008, available at: http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Was-the-Aksa-Mosque-built-over-the-remains-of-a-Byzantine-church, last accessed 9 October 2014.
10. On this issue, see Johns, 'The "House of the Prophet" and the Concept of the Mosque', pp. 62–4.
11. Rafi Grafman and Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, 'Two Great Syrian Umayyad Mosques: Jerusalem and Damascus', *Muqarnas* 16 (1999): 1–15.
12. Hamilton, *The Structural History of the Aqsa Mosque*, pp. 70–5. For a later statement concerning the chronology of Aqsa I–III, see Hamilton, 'An Alternative History of the Aqṣā Mosque', in K. A. C. Creswell

(ed.), *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, revised and supplemented by James Allan (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), pp. 79–82. Creswell's own chronology (with corrections offered in the footnotes by Allan) appears on pp. 76–9. See also Henri Stern, 'Recherches sur la mosquée al-Aqṣā et sur ses mosaïques', *Ars Orientalis* 5 (1963): pp. 27–47; Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, pp. 117–22.

13. B. Mazar and M. Ben-Dov, *The Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem near the Temple Mount: Preliminary Report on the Second and Third Seasons, 1969–1970* (Jerusalem: The Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University and Israel Exploration Society, 1971); Kay Prag, *Excavations by K. M. Kenyon in Jerusalem, 1961–1967, vol. 5: Discoveries in Hellenistic to Ottoman Jerusalem*, Levant Supplementary Series 7 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008), pp. 102–41; Jodi Magness, 'Early Islamic Urbanism and Building Activity in Jerusalem and at Hammath Gader', in John Haldon (ed.), *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria: A Review of Current Debates* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 147–53.

14. Hamilton, *The Structural History of the Aqsa Mosque*, pp. 53–70, figs 30–3, pl. XXXVIII. Also Michael Burgoyne, 'The Gates of the Ḥaram al-Sharīf', in Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns (eds), *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 1: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 110–11, fig. 6.

15. Julian Raby, '*In vitro veritas*: Glass Pilgrim Vessels in Seventh-century Jerusalem', in Jeremy Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 2: Jerusalem and Early Islam*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.2 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 169–79.

16. On the gates, see Burgoyne, ''The Gates of the Ḥaram al-Sharīf'.

17. On the date of the Golden Gate, see Cyril Mango, 'The Temple Mount, AD 614–638', in Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns (eds), *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 1: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 7–16. See also F. E. Peters, 'Who Built the Dome of the Rock?', *Graeco-Arabica* 2/3 (1983): 124–8.

18. Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, VI. The relevant passages are conveniently assembled in F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 111–20.

19. Mango, 'The Temple Mount, AD 614–638', pp. 4–6; Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City*, p. 143; Raby, '*In vitro veritas*', pp. 176–7. Also for notes on the Temple in Late Antique sources, see Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, p. 173.

20. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, III.26–8. For a translation of this passage, see Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City*, p. 132.

21. Grabar, *The Shape of Holy*, pp. 21–40 (for the Madaba map, see figs 10–11); Herbert Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba*, Palestina Antiqua 7 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992), pp. 87–94, and illustration D on the foldout page.

22. On this phase, see Mango, 'The Temple Mount, AD 614–638', pp. 6–16.

23. Suzanne Alexander, 'Heraclius, Byzantine Ideology, and the David Plates', *Speculum* 52(2) (April 1977): 217–37. For a short summary of recent research, see Helen Evans and Brandie Ratliff (eds), *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th–9th Century* (New Haven, CT and

London: Yale University Press and Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), pp. 15–16, Cat. No. 6A–F.

24. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, pp. 1–3, 6–22. For other sources, see Andreas Kaplony, *The Haram of Jerusalem, 324–1099*, Freiburger Islamstudien 22 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002), pp. 315–70.

25. On the evolving symbolism of the building in Islamic and European sources, see Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 205–12; Kathryn Moore, 'Textual Transmission and Pictorial Transformations: The post-Crusader Image of the Dome of the Rock in Italy', *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): pp. 51–78; Pamela Berger, *The Crescent on the Temple. The Dome of the Rock as Image of the Ancient Jewish Sanctuary*, Studies in Religion and the Arts (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2012).

26. This is not intended to be a comprehensive review of the modern scholarship on the Dome of the Rock. Not all the significant studies are included in this discussion (though many are noted in the notes to later chapters), and I have also omitted those that I consider to be eccentric or implausible. For a critical compilation of primary sources dealing with the Temple Mount and its buildings during Late Antiquity and early Islam (also containing an extensive bibliography of secondary scholarship on the Dome of the Rock and other Umayyad structures), see Kaplony, *The Ḥaram of Jerusalem*. The scholarship on the Dome of the Rock is scrupulously recorded in Gülru Necıpoğlu, 'The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest. ʿAbd al-Malik's Grand Narrative and Sultan Süleyman's Glosses', *Muqarnas* 25 (2008): 17–105.

27. Charles-Jean-Melchior de Vogüé, *Le temple de Jérusalem. Monographie de Haram ech-Chérif* (Paris: Noblet & Baudry, 1864), pp. 80–5.

28. Ernest Richmond, *The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem: A Description of its Structure and Decoration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924).

29. van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicum*, II, pp. 228–46.

30. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (1932–40), I.1, pp. 44–94; Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, revd edn (1969), I.1, pp. 65–129.

31. The problems inherent in matching the new ground plan to the earlier drawings of the superstructure have been noted by Doron Chen, 'Sir Archibald Creswell's Setting Out of the Plan of the Dome of the Rock Reconsidered', *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 117 (1985): 128–32.

32. Marguerite van Berchem 'The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and of the Great Mosque in Damascus', in K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, revd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), I.1, pp. 213–372.

33. K. A. C. Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

34. These were criticisms most powerfully voiced by Jean Sauvaget. See his review of *Early Muslim Architecture* I.1 in *Revue des études islamiques* 12 (1938): 10–12. Also discussed in Raby, 'Reviewing the Reviewers', p. 9.

35. Ignác Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1889–90), II, pp. 35–7; translated by C. R. Barber and Samuel Stern as *Muslim Studies* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967–71), II, pp. 44–6.

36. Alastair Northedge, *The Historical Topography of Samarra*, Samarra Studies 1 (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq and Fondation Max van Berchem, 2005), pp. 231–3. Northedge translates the relevant

section of al-Muqaddasi's *Ahsan al-taqāsīm* as (p. 232): 'And he had built there a Ka'ba, and made a place of circumambulation, and adopted [the ceremonies of] Mīna and 'Arafāt, by which he deceived *amīr*s who were with him, when they sought the *hajj*, for fear that they would leave him.' While Northedge does not accept this accusation at face value, he speculates that the Qubbat al-Sulaybiyya was designed in order to prepare his Turkish soldiers for the rituals of Muslim pilgrimage.

37. Shlomo Goitein, 'The Sanctity of Jerusalem and Palestine in Early Islam', in Shlomo Goitein (ed.), *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), pp. 135–48.

38. Amikam Elad, 'Why Did 'Abd al-Malik Build the Dome of the Rock? A Re-examination of the Muslim Sources', in Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns (eds), *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 1: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 40–5; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, pp. 158–9.

39. Werner Caskel, *Der Felsendom und die Wallfahrt nach Jerusalem* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1963), pp. 28–30; Josef van Ess, ''Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock', in Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns (eds), *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 1: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 89–104; Raby, '*In vitro veritas*', pp. 169–73.

40. Christel Kessler, 'Above the Ceiling of the Outer Ambulatory in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3/4 (October, 1964): 83–94; Christel Kessler, ''Abd al-Malik's inscription in the Dome of the Rock. A Reconsideration', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1 (1970): 2–14.

41. Saïd Nuseibeh and Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (New York: Rizzoli, 1996), pp. 82–105. The photographs of the bands of text are rather difficult to use due to their small scale and poor resolution. In addition, several are misidentified and one is missing.

42. Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, pp. 92–9, figs 42–9 (the outer face is partially reproduced on figs 38–41).

43. Doron Chen, 'The Design of the Dome of the Rock', *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 112 (1980): 41–50; Doron Chen, 'The Façades of the Dome of the Rock and the Rotunda of the Anastasis Compared', in Jeremy Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 2: Jerusalem and Early Islam*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.2 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 191–6; H. R. Allen, 'The Original Appearance of the Dome of the Rock, Bayt al-Maqdis', in Jeremy Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 2: Jerusalem and Early Islam*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.2 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 197–213.

44. Oleg Grabar, 'The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem', *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959): 3–62; reprinted in Oleg Grabar, *Constructing the Study of Islamic Art, vol. 4: Jerusalem*, (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2005), pp. 1–46.

45. On the claims that the Dome of the Rock held the crown of Kisra, the pearl known as al-Yatima and the horns of ram sacrificed by Abraham, see Rabbat, 'The Dome of the Rock Revisited', pp. 71–2. The significance of these items is addressed further by Nasser Rabbat in 'The Transcultural Meaning of the Dome of the Rock', in Munir Akash with Fouad Moughrabi (eds), *The Open Veins of the Jerusalem* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), pp. 71–107.

46. Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*.

47. Rosen-Ayalon, *Early Islamic Monuments*.

48. Translated in Heribert Busse, 'The Sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam', *Judaism* 17 (1968): 467–8. Quoted in Rosen-Ayalon, *Early Islamic Monuments*, p. 69. The passage reads: 'Jerusalem's great hour will come on the Day of Judgement, because it will then acquire the highest rank and even surpass Mecca; while the Mosque of Mecca was founded forty years before that of Jerusalem, Jerusalem will survive Mecca and Medina by the same period of time. All mosques, even the Kaʿba, will journey to Jerusalem on the Day of Resurrection and Paradise will be the bride of Jerusalem; the Kaʿba too, will come there, so that the people will cry, "Hail to you, who come as pilgrims and hail to her [i.e., Jerusalem] to whom the pilgrimage is made".'

49. Raya Shani, 'The Iconography of the Dome of the Rock', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 23 (1999): 158–207; Carolanne Mekeel-Matteson, 'The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock', *Islamic Quarterly* 43(3) (1999): 149–67.

50. Rabbat, 'The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock'; Rabbat, 'The Dome of the Rock Revisited'.

51. Priscilla Soucek, 'The Temple of Solomon in Islamic Legend and Art', in Joseph Guttman (ed.), *Archaeological Fact and Medieval Tradition in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Art* (Missoula, MT: Scholar's Press, 1976), pp. 73–123, 184–93; Shani, 'The Iconography of the Dome of the Rock', pp. 167–76. On Solomonic themes in Byzantium, see Robert Ousterhout, 'New Temples and New Solomons: The Rhetoric of Byzantine Architecture', in Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson (eds), *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010), pp. 223–53.

52. Finbarr B. Flood, 'Light in Stone: The Commemoration of the Prophet in Umayyad Architecture', in Jeremy Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 2: Jerusalem and Early Islam*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.2 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 311–59. See also Eva Baer, 'The Mihrab in the Cave of the Dome of the Rock', *Muqarnas* 3 (1985): 8–19.

53. For example, Peters, 'Who Built the Dome of the Rock?', pp. 130–1.

54. Sheila Blair, 'What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?', in Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns (eds), *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 1: ʿAbd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 59–88. See also Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, p. 115. For notes on the debate about the dating, see Necıpoğlu, 'The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest', p. 83 nn. 20–1.

55. Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, pp. 1–8, 31–48.

56. Necıpoğlu, 'The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest'.

57. On these structures, see Rina Avner, 'The Dome of the Rock in the Light of the Development of Concentric Martyria in Jerusalem. Architecture and Architectural Iconography', *Muqarnas* 27 (2009): 31–49; Rina Avner, 'The Account of Caesarea by the Piacenza Pilgrim and the Recent Archaeological Discovery of the Octagonal Church in Caesarea Maritima', *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 140(3) (2008): 203–12.

58. Chen, 'The Design of the Dome of the Rock'; Chen, 'The Façades of the Dome of the Rock and the Rotunda of the Anastasis Compared', pp. 191–6.

CHAPTER 2

Initial Description of the Mosaic Inscriptions

THE INTERIOR OF the Dome of the Rock measures a little over 50 m across (the outer circle that can be inscribed around the exterior corners of the octagonal perimeter wall has a diameter of 53.75 m) (Figures 2.1 and 2.2).[1] This space is divided into three main zones: an outer ambulatory, an inner ambulatory and a central area enclosing the Rock (Figure 2.3(a) and (b)). In its present form, the Rock measures a little less than 20 m along its longest axis (roughly north–south). The two ambulatories are separated by an octagonal arcade a little over 10 m in height. The arcade comprises eight

Figure 2.1 *Plan of the Dome of the Rock. Simplified after Richmond,* The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem *(1924). Drawing: Munazzah Akhtar.*
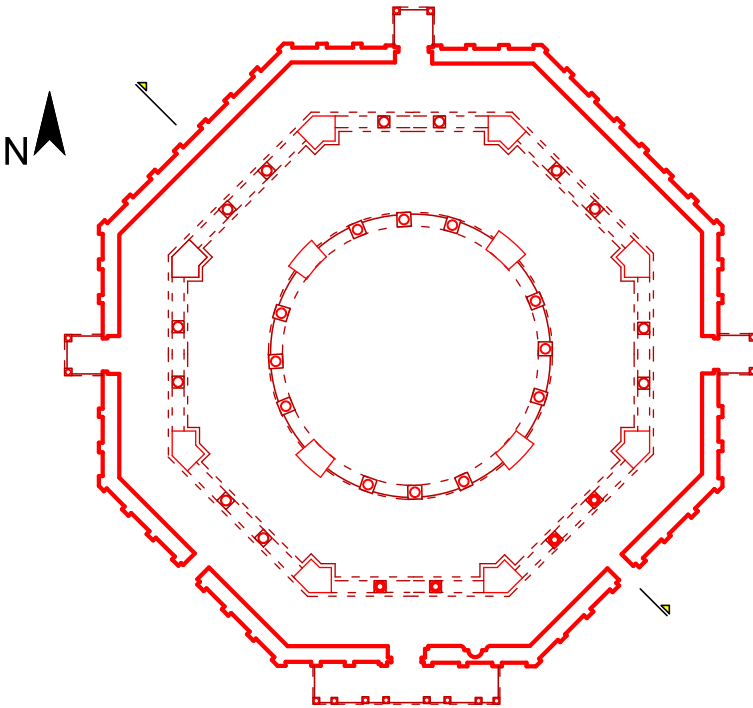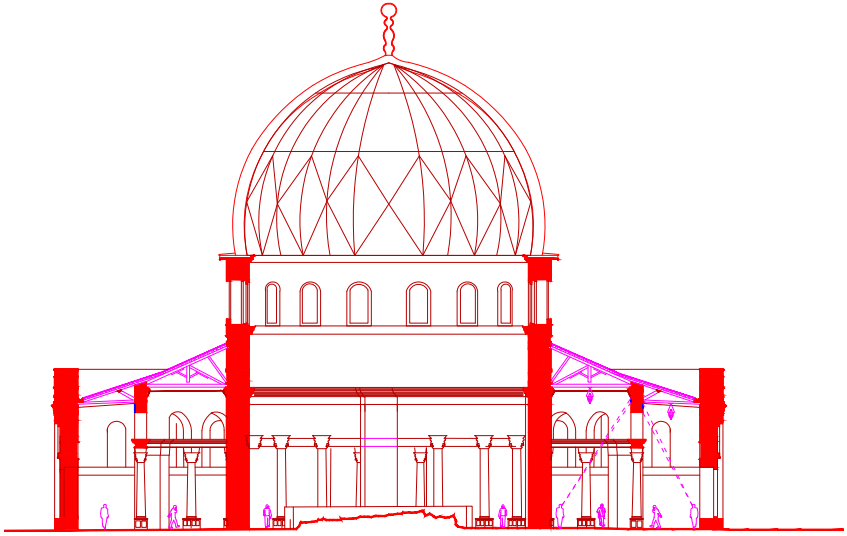
Figure 2.2 *Interior section of the Dome of the Rock. Simplified after Richmond,* The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem *(1924). Drawing: Munazzah Akhtar.*
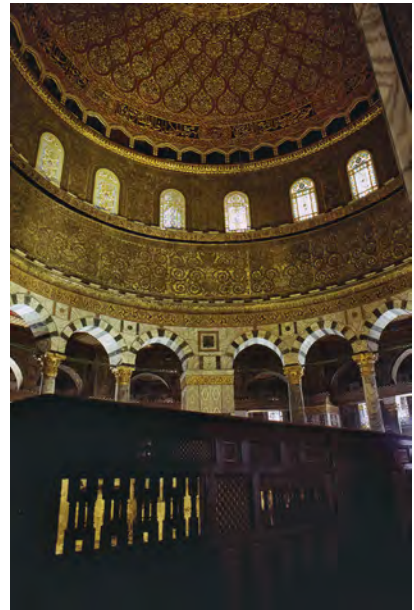
Figure 2.3 *Interior views of the Dome of the Rock: (a) interior ambulatory and inner face of the octagonal arcade; (b) drum and dome. Photographs courtesy of Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom.*

polygonal piers (located at the corners of the octagon) and sixteen marble columns. These marble columns support arches. The pitched roof covering the two ambulatories is supported by the octagonal arcade and the outer curtain wall (this junction is obscured on the exterior of the building by a parapet). The roof also attaches to the outer wall of the drum of the dome. The Rock is surrounded by a circular arcade, *c.* 20.4m in diameter on its inner face, made up of four polygonal piers and twelve marble columns (Figure 2.3(b)). Above these columns are arches, the voussoirs of which are made up of marble veneer in an alternating pattern (known as *ablaq*). The circular arcade carries the drum and the dome above. The cave beneath the Rock is accessed by a set of stairs in the southeast part of the circular arcade. The circular arcade is not exactly aligned to the north–south and east–west axes established by the rest of the plan; this subtle, and deliberate, adjustment to the overall symmetry of the interior has the effect of reducing the visual clutter of columns and piers as one looks across the interior.[2] Such 'twisting' of the interior arcade is not a feature of earlier centralised structures in the region.

There are sixteen windows in the upper drum and a further thirty-six running around the outer perimeter wall of the building. The carved stucco lattices and coloured glass of these windows date to the Ottoman period, and it is not known how they would have looked in the 690s.[3] Many other features of the interior have also been changed through the Islamic period. These include the decorative ceilings of the ambulatories (see below), the placement of a flat prayer niche in the cave beneath the Rock, and the structure and decoration of the dome. The mosaics, too, have undergone changes over time, though substantial parts of the Umayyad scheme remain. The mosaics presently cover both sides of the octagonal arcade, the outer face of the circular arcade, the lower drum and the upper drum (i.e., the area of the drum pierced by windows). The post-Umayyad mosaic work includes the addition of the name of the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun on the outer face of the octagonal arcade (see Figure 1.13, above); the cursive inscription band (Q 20:1–21) at the base of the lower drum (Figure 2.4), added after the Ayyubid recapture of Jerusalem; a small Kufic inscription (dated 428/1037–8) in a rectangular panel within the decorative band between the lower and the upper drum (Figure 2.5); and substantial parts of the upper drum. There are probably other minor restorations across the whole surface of the mosaic, though this issue has yet to be studied in sufficient detail.[4] Other elements of the original ornamental scheme on the interior include the carved, painted and gilded marble band running around the perimeter wall (Figure 2.6); the gilded copper plaques adorning the beams around the entrances (Figure 2.7); and the two copper panels carrying *repoussé* inscriptions (Figures 2.8 and 2.9). This writing on these panels is picked out in gold on a blue ground.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Figure 2.4 *Opening invocation of the Ayyubid-period mosaic inscription at the base of the drum of the dome. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

ومرمه بمكا الله ورقى فى سنه نمان عشر واربعمه

Figure 2.5 *Drawing of inscription in the lower drum, dated 428/1037–8. After photograph in Rosen-Ayalon,* Early Islamic Monuments of al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf *(1989). Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*
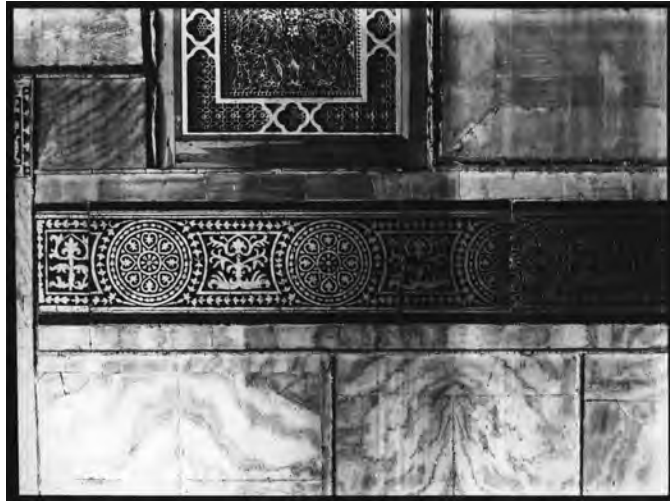
Figure 2.6 *Carved, painted and gilded marble band running around the perimeter wall. Ashmolean Museum, Creswell Archive: EA.CA.525. By permission of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.*

Figure 2.7 *Gilded copper plaque adorning the tie beam on the octagonal arcade. Ashmolean Museum, Creswell Archive: EA.CA.115. By permission of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.*

Figure 2.8 *Squeeze from a section of the blue and gold copper panel carrying* repoussé *inscriptions, originally from the east entrance of the Dome of the Rock. After: Max van Berchem,* Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicum, Deuxième partie: Syrie du sud, *vol. 3 (1927).*
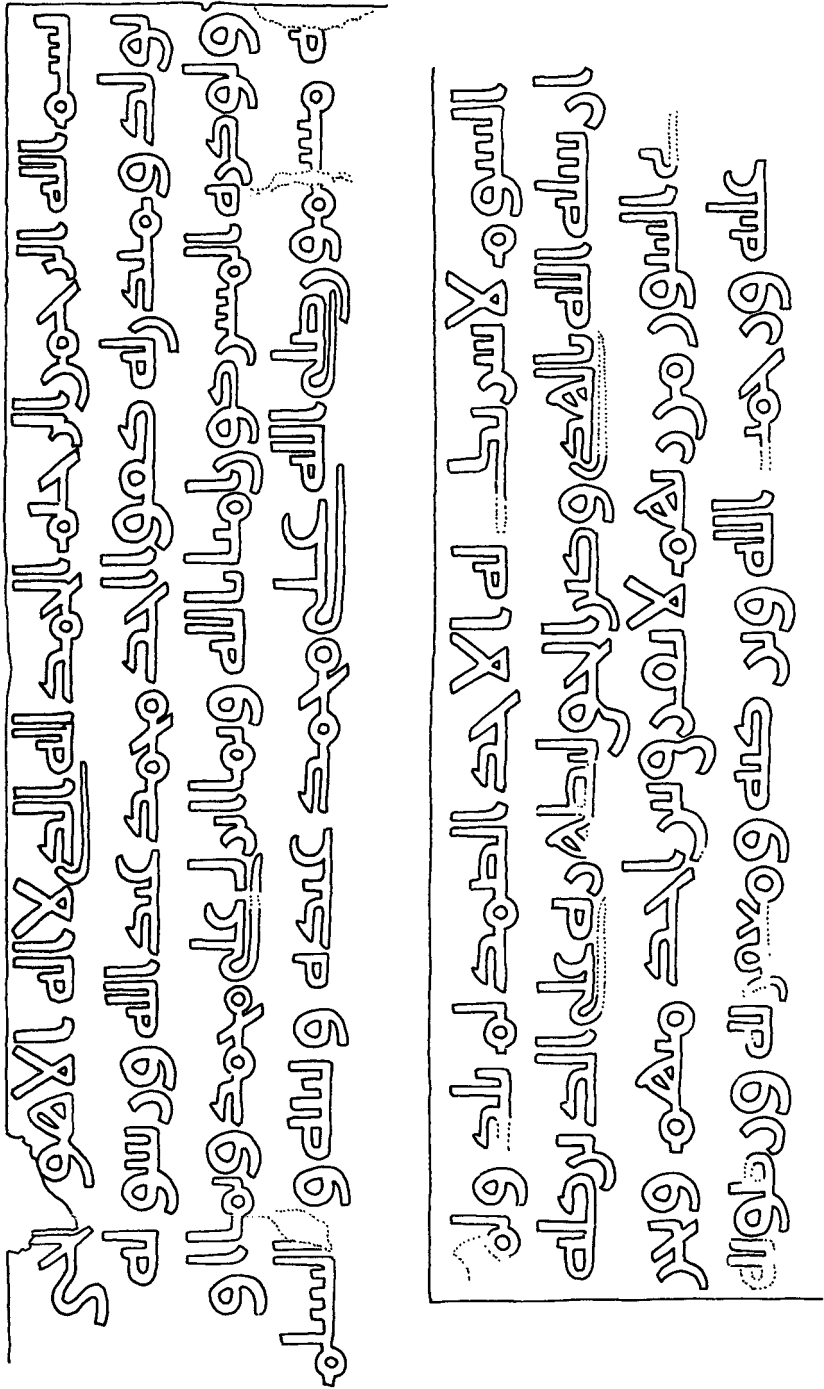
Figure 2.9 *Sketch drawing of the blue and gold copper panel carrying* repoussé *inscriptions, originally from the north entrance of the Dome of the Rock. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

Figure 2.10 *Mosaic frieze from the outer face of the octagonal arcade (west side). Ashmolean Museum, Creswell Archive: EA.CA.2027. By permission of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.*

They were once located on the north and east portals, and could have formed part of a set of four (i.e., one for each entrance).[5]

The exterior walls were once decorated with mosaic in the area between the marble revetment and the pitched roof. No significant trace of these survives to the present.[6] The interior mosaics are located above the marble revetment in a manner that accords with Byzantine church architecture of the fifth to seventh centuries. The mosaics employ a range of coloured glass cubes and glass cubes faced on one side with gold leaf (usually gold leaf would be placed onto red glass). The Dome of the Rock also makes use of pale marble cubes and cut sections of mother-of-pearl (usually in the form of circles that are slightly larger than the glass cubes). Gold, greens and blues predominate, with more sparing use of red and other colours. The exposed mortar between the cubes does not seem to have been coloured, though the use of paint is encountered in some other early Islamic mosaics.[7]

The mosaic programme of the interior of the Dome of the Rock begins on the outer face of the octagonal arcade. The space is divided into a series of panels between the arches. The panels are framed at the top by inscription bands (see below) and at the junctions between the eight sides of the octagon by vertical bands containing framed vegetal designs stacked upon one another (Figure 2.10). The lowest framing band comprises repeated rosettes and sits directly above the marble revetment and the column capitals and runs continuously around the arcade. This band wraps itself around the soffits of the arches. Elaborate 'plant' forms occupy the panels established within these bands. Each is formed around a central stem with branches and tendrils spilling out on either side and often carrying fruit. The fleshy

Figure 2.11 *Mosaic decoration of a soffit of the octagonal arcade. Ashmolean Museum, Creswell Archive: EA.CA.31. By permission of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.*

leaves attached to the central stem and the curious outgrowths at the summit of these plants exhibit Persian influence. While some elements of these motifs correlate with actual plant forms (e.g., the fruit attached to the branches), the whole impression lacks any sense of naturalism. There is little clear articulation of the central trunks with different elements attached together with no obvious logic. One encounters plants that sprout more than one type of fruit (e.g., the specimen on first panel on the south side includes grapes, citron and pomegranates). There is little doubt that this lack of naturalism is a deliberate strategy, although the meanings conveyed by these strange creations are not made explicit.

The soffits of the arcade carry a range of repeated designs, including repeated fruit, leaves, vine scrolls and rosettes. Some carry pairs of cornucopias. Interestingly, the bands of designs in the soffits are not always symmetrically arranged (Figure 2.11). The mosaics of the inner face of the octagonal arcade may be regarded as an elaboration upon the themes developed on the outer face. The profile of the inner face is more complex, and allows for a greater range of panels. The long sides are arranged in a similar manner to the outer face with plant forms comprising vertical trunks with leaves, branches and tendrils filling the remainder of the space (Figure 2.12). The vegetal elements have taken a further step away from their notional prototypes in the natural world. This is particularly noticeable in the proliferation of mother-of-pearl and gold cubes within the plants. The branches are represented as if they are studded with pearls and gold-framed rubies and emeralds, while the trunks are adorned with lavish jewellery. The crowns and pectorals depicted on the inner face panels

Figure 2.12 *Mosaic frieze from the inner face of the octagonal arcade (east side). Ashmolean Museum, Creswell Archive: EA.CA.182. By permission of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.*

are ornamented with hanging pearls, a feature commonly employed on imperial regalia in Constantinople. The three faces of each pier carry rather different designs. The shorter sides carry representations of indigenous trees (such as date palm and willow) (Figure 2.13). Leaving aside the tendency to add jewels on to some of the trunks, these trees are relatively naturalistic in character and invite comparisons with the Late Antique and early Islamic mosaics elsewhere in Greater Syria (Figure 2.14).[8] The largest panels on the piers have scrolling branches (studded with mother-of-pearl and with arrangements of mosaic cubes imitating the appearance of gemstones) that rise from acanthus plants. The inclusion of identifiable plant species, albeit in a somewhat stylised form, stands in stark contrast to the otherworldly quality of the remainder of the inner face mosaics.

The mosaics around the outer face of the circular arcade again employ acanthus at the bases of the largest panels on each of four the piers (Figure 2.15). In the spandrels of the arches the vegetal elements spring from pearl-encrusted and bejewelled vases. The principal change in this part of the mosaic programme is in the vegetal elements: the branches are tightly curled to form spirals, each one composed of a series of interconnecting elements. They are fashioned largely in shades of green and lack the representations of pearls and gemstones that appear on the inner face of the octagonal arcade. In common with the outer face of the octagonal arcade, the branches terminate in a variety of fruit (such as grape, citron and pomegranate). In their current state, these designs lack framing bands. Instead, the frames are provided on the underside by the marble veneer cladding the impost blocks, around the arches and in the soffits.
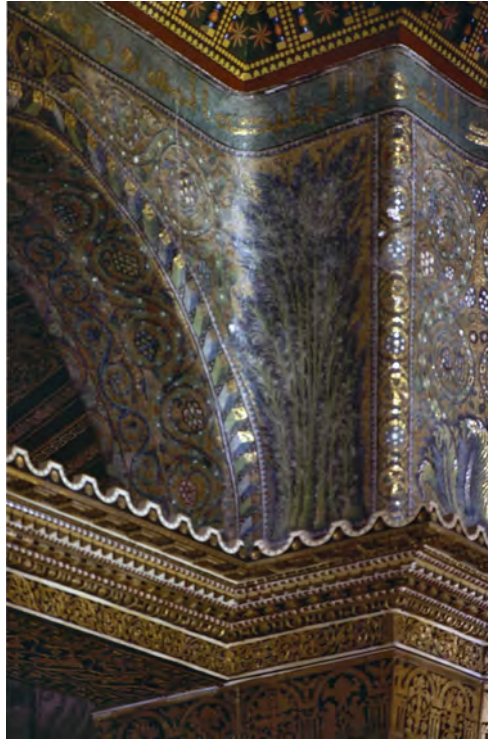
Figure 2.13 *Tree from the mosaic friezes of the inner face of the octagonal arcade. Photograph courtesy of Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom.*

Figure 2.14 *Mosaic panel from the Church of the Acropolis, Ma'in, Jordan, 719–20. Now housed in the Mosaic Museum, Madaba. Photograph: Marcus Milwright.*

Figure 2.15 *Mosaic panel from the outer face of the circular arcade. Photograph courtesy of Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom.*

The final part of the mosaic programme is located in the lower and upper drum. It is not known whether an Umayyad mosaic inscription once occupied the band of cursive script at the base of the lower drum. Above the present Ayyubid-period inscription is a large continuous frieze framed above and below by bands carrying dense geometric designs and rosettes (Figure 2.16). The frieze is perhaps the most impressive element of the Umayyad decorative scheme in the Dome of the Rock both in terms of its motifs and its thematic coherence. The frieze is dominated by curling stems corresponding broadly to those found on the outer face of the circular arcade. They differ in that they are less tightly wound, are made up of longer component parts and are studded with pearls. Different fruit and flowers are attached to these branches. These vegetal forms spring from twelve large vases, each thickly encrusted with gems and pearls. Rising directly upwards from these vases are vertical designs combining vegetal elements with representations of imperial jewellery. A notable feature is the inclusion of wings rising from some of the upper crowns; these are presumably a reference to the winged crown adopted by several of the later Sasanian shahs (Figure 2.17). The mosaic panels of the upper drum are arranged between and above the windows. While these panels have evidently undergone more extensive restorations, it is apparent that they
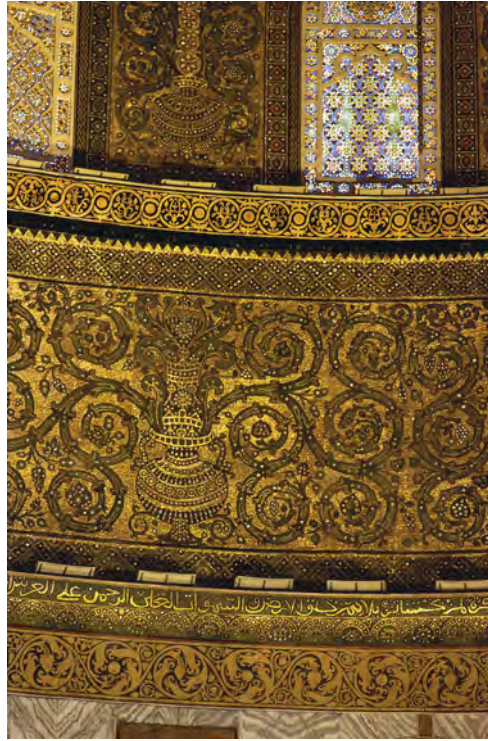
Figure 2.16 *Section of the mosaic frieze of the lower drum. Photograph courtesy of Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom.*

employ many of the themes of the lower drum. One encounters jewelled vases from which spring vegetal elements and imperial regalia derived from Byzantine and Sasanian sources. The panels of the upper drum are framed at the top by a band of dense geometric ornament.

The two surviving Umayyad mosaic inscription bands are located on the outer and the inner face of the octagonal arcade (see Figures 2.10 and 2.11, above; see also foldout sheets). The outer face inscription is read in a clockwise direction (starting on the south face of the octagonal arcade) from the outer ambulatory, and the inner is read in a counter-clockwise direction (again starting on the south face) from the inner ambulatory (Figure 2.18). The legibility of the inscriptions is affected by their placement at the top of the mosaic panels ornamenting the sides of the outer and inner face of the octagonal arcade. These two inscriptions are approximately 0.3 m high (equivalent to about thirty-five mosaic cubes). The script and the diacritical marks are constructed from gold mosaic cubes, while the background is made up of blue glass cubes (for illustrations and further discussion, see Chapter 4). Marguerite van Berchem reports that the colour of

Figure 2.17 *Obverse of a drachm minted during the reign of Khusraw II, 590–628. Collection of the author. Photograph: Iona Hubner.*

the gold and the blue cubes varies somewhat around the two faces of the inscription (this can also be seen in modern photographs).[9]

These long bands are located at the junction with the present ceiling of the structure, although it seems likely that the original appearance would have been somewhat different. The present ceiling was redecorated in the Ottoman period, but its structural elements (i.e., the wooden planks) probably date to the fourteenth century. There is a gap between this painted wooden ceiling and the beams supporting the roof. This space is about 1 m in height at its greatest extent on the outer ambulatory and over 2 m on the inner ambulatory (i.e., the point where this joins the drum of the dome). A wooden cornice of early Abbasid date runs around the outer face of the octagonal arcade (Figure 2.19). Some roof beams were also found to be painted on the three sides that would have been visible from the ground. Kessler concludes that in its Umayyad and Abbasid phases the Dome of the Rock lacked a ceiling on the outer ambulatory.[10] Presumably, the inner ambulatory would have been treated in the same way.[11] Whether the Abbasid cornice replaced an earlier Umayyad feature is not apparent, but Kessler's discoveries indicate that there would have been more wall space above the point where the mosaics terminate on the outer face of the octagonal arcade. One can speculate that lamps would have been suspended from the roof
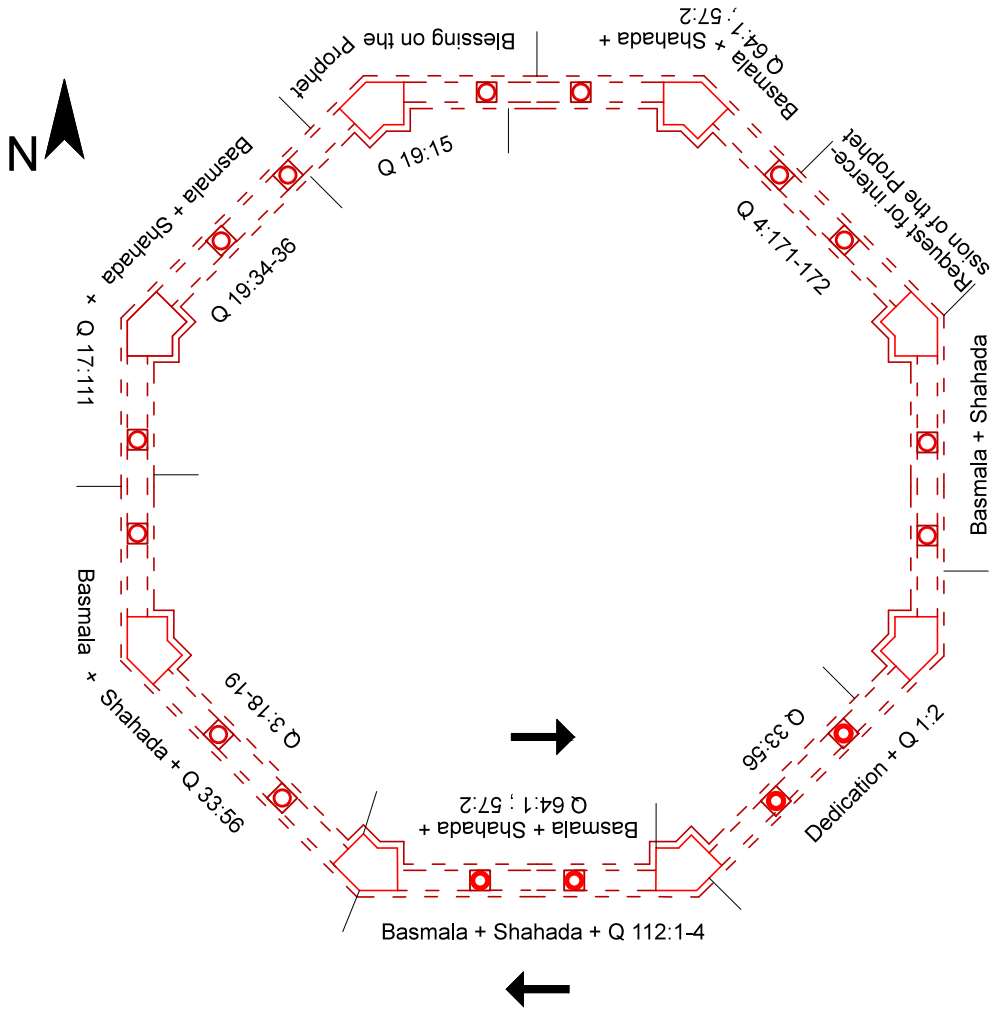
Figure 2.18 *Schematic plan of the octagonal arcade showing the placement and direction of the inscriptions. Qur'anic citations according to the translation by Andrew Rippin. Drawing: Munazzah Akhtar.*

beams of the outer and inner ambulatories (Figure 2.20(a) and (b)). If this were the case, then the lamps would have provided greater illumination to the inscription bands. With the addition of the wooden ceiling (perhaps in the fourteenth century) lamps would have been suspended at a lower level, reducing the illumination to the uppermost sections of the mosaic.

That the inner ambulatory is wider (by as much as 50 per cent) than the outer means that one's experience of the inscription bands of the two faces of the octagonal arcade is somewhat different. The outer ambulatory is only about 5 m wide. Standing at the outer wall

Figure 2.19 *(a) View and (b) detail of a carved and painted wooden cornice (now obscured by the ceiling of the outer ambulatory), early ninth century. After Christel Kessler, 'Above the Ceiling of the Outer Ambulatory' (1964). Courtesy of the Royal Asiatic Society.*

of the building an adult of average height needs to look at an angle of approximately 63° from the horizontal to see the mosaic text. This compares with a somewhat more comfortable angle of 57° for the inscription band on the inner face (Figure 2.21). The interior of the building is now provided with electric lighting, reducing the potential differences there might have been in the relative visibility of the mosaics. If one considers only the natural light, then the outer face catches more sunlight from the windows in the perimeter wall and the four entrances. Conversely, the inner face inscriptions receive less natural light. The viewer also has to contend with the contrast created as one looks towards the lighter areas around the entrances to the building.[12]

The mosaics of the outer face comprise eight flat sides, each long rectangle pierced by two slightly pointed arches. The length of each face was measured by Creswell, providing a total distance for the inscription band of the outer face of 125.91 m (S =
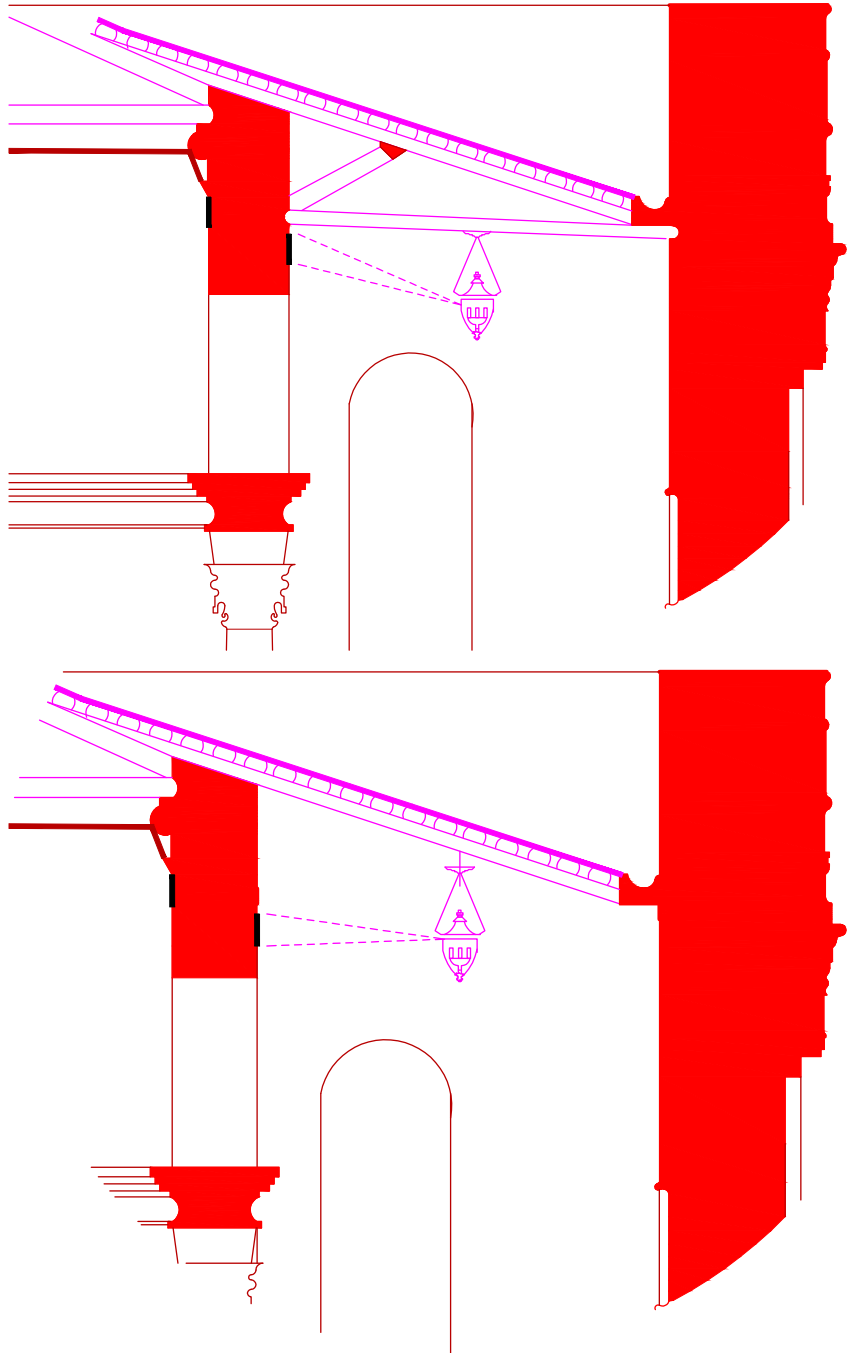
Figure 2.20 *Reconstruction of the upper part of the outer ambulatory (a) with and (b) without the wooden ceiling. The speculative placement of lamps is to illustrate the different ways in which the inscription band could have been illuminated before and after the introduction of the ceiling. Drawing: Munazzah Akhtar.*

Figure 2.21 *Diagram showing how the outer and inner face inscription bands are viewed from ground level. Drawing: Munazzah Akhtar.*

15.55 m; SW = 15.96 m; W = 15.69 m; NW = 15.75 m; N = 15.74 m; NE = 15.69 m; E = 15.74 m; SE = 15.79 m). On the interior face Creswell measured the distances between the centre points of the eight piers, and these measurements appear on his plan published in *Early Muslim Architecture* (Figure 2.1). Adding these together one comes to a total distance of 112.35 m (S = 13.86 m; SW = 13.95 m; W = 14.08 m; NW = 14.06 m; N = 14.11 m; NE = 14.02 m; E = 14.09 m; SE = 14.18 m). On the basis of these measurements, the total length of the two inscription bands is commonly reported as being in the region of 240 m.[13] This is to ignore, however, the fact that the eight piers project from the inner face of the octagonal arcade towards the centre of the building. The extent of this projection is not specified on Creswell's plan, but the accuracy of the 1:200 drawing allows one to estimate a distance of about 1 m. If one takes account of the two faces on each of the eight piers, the total distance for the inner inscription band becomes *c.* 128.35 m, and the total length of the two bands becomes *c.* 254 m rather than *c.* 240 m. This means that the inner inscription band is, in fact, longer than the outer.

The inscription on the outer face of the building contains a crucial piece of evidence regarding the date of the Dome of the Rock. In addition to naming the patron of the building, 'Abd al-Malik (his name was later replaced with that of the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun), the final section of the inscription on the southeast face provides the year of 72 H = 691/92 CE. According to the inscription, 72 represents the year in which the patron 'built this dome (*qubba*)', though

the meaning of this phrase is not without ambiguity (see Chapter 1). It is generally agreed that a monument of the sophistication of the Dome of the Rock could not have been completed in a single year – a period of three to five years seems reasonable – and therefore 72 should most probably mark either the date of completion or the foundation date. I will return to this issue later in the book (Chapters 6, 8 and the Conclusion), but one general observation can be made at this point: the probable date of the mosaics – being one of the last features to be added prior to the completion of the structure – is obviously affected by one's interpretation of the meaning of this crucial part of the inscriptional programme. If 72 is the date of completion, then the mosaics were probably placed into the building in the last year of the 680s or the first one or two years of the 690s, while the opposing interpretation would locate the mosaics in the middle years of the 690s.

The two encircling mosaic inscription bands were first transcribed in full by Max van Berchem in the second volume of his *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicum. Deuxième partie: Syrie du Sud* (1927).[14] Van Berchem rendered the text into standard Arabic – including all the diacritics and other orthographic conventions – and provided a French summary of the content. He had to contend with the poor lighting conditions and the accumulation of dirt and lamp soot over some patches of the mosaic. Working in more conducive conditions in the 1960s, Christel Kessler was able to correct aspects of van Berchem's reading. She also produced a schematic drawing of the Arabic text in its original form (Figures 2.22 and 2.23). Most significant in this respect is the sparing use of diacritics on the inner band and their virtual absence from the outer band. Kessler also noted the decorative spacers that appear between sections of text on the outer band. Her article includes some detailed photographs taken by Creswell. *Early Muslim Architecture* contains several large-scale black and white photographs of the mosaics of the octagonal arcade in which the inscriptions can be clearly made out. Creswell did not publish the complete circuit of mosaics on the outer and the inner faces, but they are now available in colour photographs by Saïd Nuseibeh within *The Dome of the Rock* (1996, with Oleg Grabar). The inner band is also reproduced complete in Grabar's *The Shape of the Holy* (1996).[15]

The inscriptions of the outer and inner bands have been translated several times. In order to explore the tone and content of these inscriptions I have included two slightly different translations, the first by Sheila Blair and the second by Andrew Rippin.[16] Note that both scholars replaced the passage referring to ʿAbd All(ā)h ʿAbd All(ā)h al-Imām al-Maʾmūn that appears on the last part of the east face of the outer band and the beginning of the southeast with its probable original wording, ʿAbd All(ā)h ʿAbd al-Malik (servant of God ʿAbd al-Malik).[17] Blair's original translation shortens the invocation (*basmala*), but I

S بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك

له وهو الله احد الله الصمد لم يلد ولم يولد ولم

يكن له كفوا احد محمد رسول الله صلى الله عليه

SW بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم لا اله الا الله

وحده لا شريك له محمد رسول الله

ان الله و ملئكته يصلون على النبي

W يا ايها الذين امنوا صلوا عليه و سلموا

تسليما بسم الله الرحمن

الرحيم لا اله الا الله وحده الحمد

NW لله الذي لم يتخذ ولدا ولم يكن له

شريك في الملك ولم يكن له ولي

من الذل وكبره تكبيرا محمد رسول ال..

N له صلى الله عليه و ملئكته ورسله و السلم

عليه ورحمة الله بسم الله الرحمن

الرحيم لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له

NE له الملك و له الحمد يحيي و يميت و هو على

كل شيء قدير محمد رسول الله صلى الله

عليه وسل شفعته يوم القيمة في امته

E بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم لا اله الا الله وحده

لا شريك له محمد رسول الله صلى الله

عليه بني هذه القبة عبد الله عبد...

SE ..د الله الامام المامون امير المومنين في سنه

اثنين و ستين تقبل الله منه و رضي

عنه امير د.. العلمين لله الحمد

Figure 2.22 *Kessler's transcription of the inscription of the outer face of the octagonal arcade. 'Abd al-Malik's inscription in the Dome of the Rock' (1970). Courtesy of the Royal Asiatic Society.*

Figure 2.23 *Kessler's transcription of the inscription of the inner face of the octagonal arcade. After Kessler, ''Abd al-Malik's inscription in the Dome of the Rock' (1970). Courtesy of the Royal Asiatic Society.*

have replaced the full wording in order that it better reflects the true length of the text in the Dome of the Rock. Rippin chooses to italicise all parts of the text that conform to sections of the Qur'an, including the invocation. The principal differences between the two are in the precise identification of the Qur'anic content. First, Rippin identifies the phrase, 'The Lord of the Worlds', as deriving from Q 1:2 (this appears earlier on a graffito found near Karbala', dating to 64/683–4).[18] Blair describes the long section running from the north to midway across the west side of the inner face as a paraphrase of Q 19:33–36, while Rippin prefers to identify part of this ('May peace be upon him the day he was born, the day he dies, and the day he is raised alive') as coming from Q 19:15. Interestingly, this verse refers not to Jesus, but to Yahya b. Zakariya (John the Baptist).

In the translations below the asterisks indicate the spacers employed on the outer face. It is important to note that, aside from running in the opposite (counter-clockwise) direction to the outer, the inscription on faces (S, SE, E, NE, N, NW, W and SW) on the inner arcade do not conform exactly to those on the outer face. Thus, instead of starting at the centre point of pier 8 on Creswell's plan (Figures 2.1 and 2.18), the inner inscription begins at the northeast corner of this pier and continues to the northeast corner of pier 1; the southeast runs from the northeast corner of pier 1 to the east corner of pier 2 and so on. A further complication is that the inscription moves from the front face of the pier, to the side of the pier, to the main section of the arcade and to the side of the next pier. It is not possible to indicate this on the translation below, but I have added shading on my drawings in order to indicate the points where the inscription wraps around an angle or re-entrant corner (see foldout sheets).

Outer Face

S: ⋆ In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate. There is no god but God alone, without partner. Say: He is God, One, God, the Everlasting, who has not begotten and has not been begotten. He is without equal. [Q 112] Muhammad is God's messenger, may God bless him.

SW: ⋆ In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate. There is no god but God alone, without partner. Muhammad is God's messenger. God and His angels send blessings on the Prophet.

W: O you who believe, send blessings on him and salute him with all respect. [Q 33:54/56] ⋆ In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate. There is no god but God alone. Praise

NW: to God who has not taken a son and who does not have any partner in dominion nor any protector out of

humbleness. Magnify Him with repeated magnificats. [Q 17:111] Muhammad is God's messenger,

N: may God, His angels and His messengers bless him and God grant him peace and mercy. * In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate. There is no god but God alone, without partner.

NE: To Him belongs dominion and to Him belongs praise. He gives life and He makes to die; He is powerful over all things. [conflation of Q 64:1 and 57:2] Muhammad is God's messenger, may God bless him and accept his intercession on the day of resurrection for his community.

E: * In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate. There is no god but God alone, without partner. Muhammad is God's messenger, may God bless him. * Servant of God,

SE: 'Abd al-Malik, commander of the believers, built this dome (*qubba*) in the year seventy-two, may God accept [it] from him and be pleased with him. Amen. Lord of the worlds. Praise to God.

Inner Face

S: In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate. There is no god but God alone, without partner. To Him belongs dominion and to Him belongs praise. He gives life and He makes to die; He is powerful over all things. [conflation of Q 64:1 and 57:2] Muhammad is God's servant and His messenger.

SE: God and His angels send blessings on the Prophet. O you who believe, send blessings on him and salute him with all respect. [Q 33:54/56] May God bless him and grant him peace and mercy. O people of the book, do not go beyond the bounds of your religion,

E: nor say anything but the truth about God. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only God's messenger, His word that He committed to Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him. So believe in God and His messengers. Do not say 'three.' Refrain,

NE: it is better for you. For God is one god. Glory be to Him – that he should have a son! To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth. God suffices for a guardian. The Messiah will not disdain to be

N: God's servant; nor will the angels who are stationed near to Him. Whoever disdains to serve Him and waxes proud, He will muster them to Him, all of them. [Q 4:169–171/171–172] O God, bless your messenger and servant, Jesus

NW: son of Mary. Peace be upon him the day he was born, the day he dies, and the day he is raised up alive. That is Jesus son of

Mary, in word of truth, about which they are doubting. It is not for God to take a son. Glory be to Him.

W: When He decrees a thing, He only says to it 'Be' and it is. God is my lord and your lord. So serve Him. This is the straight path. [Q 19:34–37/33–36 paraphrased] God, His angels, and men possessed of knowledge and upholding justice bear witness that there is no god but He. There is no god but He

SW: the all-mighty, the all-wise. The true religion with God is Islam. Those who were given the book did not dissent except after knowledge came to them, when they became envious of each other. Whoever disbelieves in God's signs, God will swiftly call to account [Q 3:16–17/18–19].

<p align="center">⋆ ⋆ ⋆</p>

Outer Face

S: *In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate.* There is no god but God alone; He has no partner. *Say: 'He is God, the One. God, the Undivided. He did not give birth, nor was He born. There is no other equal to Him'* (Q 112:1–4). Muḥammad is the messenger of God, may God bless him.

SW: ⋆ *In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate.* There is no god but God alone; He has no partner. Muḥammad is the messenger of God. *God and His angels bless the prophet;*

W: *O believers, bless him and greet him with salutations* (Q 33:56). ⋆ *In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate.* There is no god but God alone. *Praise be*

NW: *to God who has not taken a son and who does not have a partner in dominion nor a protector out of humbleness. Magnify Him greatly* (from Q 17:111). Muḥammad is the messenger of God

N: May God, His angels and His messengers bless him and may the peace and mercy of God be upon him. ⋆ *In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate.* There is no god but God alone; He has no partner.

NE: *To Him belongs dominion and to Him belongs praise* (from Q 64:1). *He gives life and He makes to die; He is powerful over all things* (from Q 57:2). Muḥammad is the messenger of God, may God bless him and accept his intercession on the day of resurrection for his community.

E: ⋆ *In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate.* There is no god but God alone; He has no partner. Muḥammad is the messenger of God, may God bless him. ⋆ Having built this dome the servant of God

SE: 'Ab[d al-Malik, the commander] of the believers, in the

year 72, asks that God accept [it] from him and be pleased with him. Amen. *The Lord of the Worlds* (from Q 1:2). To God belongs praise.

Inner Face

S: *In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate.* There is no god but God alone; He has no partner. *To Him belongs dominion and to Him belongs praise* (from Q 64:1). *He gives life and he makes to die; He is powerful over all things* (from Q 57:2). Muḥammad is the servant of God and His messenger.

SE: *God and His angels bless the prophet O believers, bless him and greet him with salutations* (Q 33:56). May God bless him and may the peace and mercy of God be upon him. *O people of the book, do not go beyond the bounds of your religion,*

E: *nor say anything but the truth about God. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the messenger of God and His word which He imparted to Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not say 'Three'. Refrain,*

NE: *it is better for you. Rather, God is one god. Praise be to Him that He should have a son! To Him belongs what is in the heavens and on the earth. God suffices as a guardian* (Q 4:171). *The Messiah does not disdain to be*

N: *a servant of God nor do the nearby angels. Whoever disdains to serve him and is proud, He will gather them to Him all together* (Q 4:172). *O God, bless your messenger and servant, Jesus*

NW: *son of Mary. May peace be upon him the day he was born, the day he dies, and the day he is raised alive* (Q 19:15). *That is Jesus, son of Mary, a statement of the truth about which you are in doubt* (Q 19:34). *It is not for God to take a son. Glory be to Him!*

W: *When He decrees a thing, He only says to it 'Be' and it is* (Q 19:35). *God is my Lord and your Lord. So worship Him. This is a straight path* (Q 19:36). *God testifies that there is no god but Him, as do the angels, and those who possess knowledge. He upholds justice. There is no god but Him,*

SW: *the All-mighty, the All-wise* (Q 3:18). *The religion with God is Islam. Those to whom the book was given only differed after they received knowledge, because of jealousy among themselves. Whoever disbelieves the signs of God, God will quickly call to account* (Q 3:19).

It is possible to break this long inscription down into basic categories. The outer band is composed of the *basmala*, or invocation, followed directly by the *shahāda*, or profession of faith (four times);

the *basmala* followed by a longer form of the *shahāda*, comprising the addition statement of Muhammad's status as God's messenger and of divine blessings upon him (once). These same components are given on their own (i.e., not directly joined to the credal statement concerning the oneness of God) on three occasions. There are also four selected Qur'anic verses (the one on the northeast side interpreted as a conflation of two separate verses[19]), some short non-Qur'anic statements of a religious nature, and a foundation text.

Some points are worth noting about this group of texts. First, there are differences in the treatment of *shahāda* across the inscription band. When combined with the invocation, the mosaic band includes the first two parts of the *shahāda* in three instances ('there is no god but God alone, without partner'), but omits the second part, 'without partner' (*lā sharīka lahu*) on the north face. The east side, by contrast, contains the invocation followed by a 'complete' profession of faith ('there is no god but God alone, without partner. Muhammad is God's messenger, may God bless him').[20] Second, the wording of the second half of this *shahāda* (which also forms the first half of Q 33:56[21]) is also variable with, most notably, one reference to Muhammad acting as an intercessor for Muslims on the day of resurrection (northeast side). This claim also appears on the copper plaque originally located above the east gate (see below). The assertion of his role as an intercessor is not found in any earlier written source (however, cf. Q 17:79) and does not reappear in Islamic inscriptions for another century.[22] Third, the choice of Qur'anic verses projects a consistent set of messages, emphasising the oneness of God and His almighty and life-giving character. One also encounters in these verses the need to offer praise and respect to God, the status of Muhammad as the messenger of God, and the blessings sent by God and His angels to the Prophet.

The inner band starts with the *basmala* followed by a *shahāda* omitting the information about the Prophet (though the last section of the south side contains a similar statement, 'Muhammad is the servant of God and His messenger', that suggests links with the description of Jesus (Q 19:15) on the north side). The remainder of the inner band is made up of five selections from the Qur'an of varying length (from one to three consecutive verses). Notably, the pairing of Q 64:1 and 57:2 on the south face is also employed on the northeast side of the outer face, while Qur'an 33:56 (southeast on the inner face) appears also on the west side of the outer face. The content of the Qur'anic verses on the inner face reiterates themes found in the Qur'anic passages quoted on the outer face, but adds significant new elements. These can be briefly summarised as a warning to adhere to the truth of God; the assertion of the human nature of Jesus, his status as a prophet, and his role on judgement day; the denial of the Christian concept of the Trinity; the assertion that Islam is the true religion; and a warning concerning the consequences of failing to

adhere to God's message (for more on the meanings potentially conveyed by these inscriptions, see Chapter 8 and Conclusion).

Thus, one can point to areas of continuity between the two inscription bands, such as the presence of similar categories of inscription (*basmala*, *shahāda* and Qur'anic verses), and the assertions of the oneness and omnipotence of God, the prophethood of Muhammad and the divine praises given to him. One might also argue that the inscription of the inner face represents a natural continuation and elaboration of the outer inscription band. It is the differences that are perhaps even more striking. The outer band contains categories of text not found on the inner (non-Qur'anic exclamations and the foundation text). The outer face inscription employs a distinctly repetitive structure through the repeated use of the *basmala* combined with the *shahāda* (in a variety of forms). The invocation and profession of faith are employed only once on the inner face (at the beginning of the inscription). The rhythmic character of the outer band is further emphasised in the repeated blessings offered to the Prophet. Grabar has observed that such features of the mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock exhibit intriguing formal similarities to Christian liturgy. He writes:

> The progression of the text is strikingly comparable to the liturgy of catachumens in the Christian mass. A series of litanies and what liturgical books call 'exclamations' (the proclamation of 'honor, glory, and worship to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever unto ages and ages') precede and follow formal readings from the Scriptures. I am not, at this stage, proposing a Christian model for the inscription inside the Dome of the Rock, but I am suggesting that the rhetorical, psychological, and emotional pattern of prayers, praises, and blessings leading to a long combination of divinely revealed passages is a model probably used in many faiths with a revealed text and a transcendental God.[23]

The mass or liturgy of Catechumens (in the Catholic Church now called the Liturgy of the Word) refers to the first half of the service known as Divine Liturgy. This part could be attended by those who were candidates for baptism (catechumens). Grabar cautions, however, that no evidence exists for the adoption of any aspect of Christian practice by those responsible for the design and building of the Dome of the Rock, or any other early Islamic structure.[24]

The inscriptions on the outer and inner faces of the octagonal arcade should be viewed in the context of the wider inscriptional programme of the Umayyad period. The two other elements of this programme to survive are the copper plaques that were originally attached to the wooden lintels at the east and north entrances to the structure (it is possible that each of the four entrances once carried

an inscription plaque of this type). The lettering is raised from the surface of the two plaques. The words are given further emphasis through gilding, while the background is painted blue. In common with the mosaic inscriptions, the words on the plaques are written in Kufic script. The treatment of this script shares numerous formal similarities with the mosaic inscriptions, although one can also draw comparisons with the scripts employed on portable artefacts (this issue is dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 4). The plaque from the east door (facing the Dome of the Chain, and known in later Arabic sources as Bāb Dāwūd) contains an addition on the lower section (Figure 2.8). This text dates to the Abbasid period and identifies the Caliph al-Maʾmun and carries the date Rabīʿ II 216/May–June 831. The upper section carries no date. Max van Berchem attributes it to 72/691–2, though there is no direct evidence to support this. While the plaques may have been manufactured on or before that date, they could equally belong to the latter part of ʿAbd al-Malik's rule or to the remainder of the Umayyad period. The use of gold lettering on a blue ground continues through the rule of Hisham and probably beyond,[25] while the principal characteristics of the script style on the plaques continues on coinage through the eighth century.

The east entrance plaque carries the following inscription in the upper section (the Qurʾanic quotes and conflations are written in italics):

> In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate. *Praise be to God except whom there is no god, the Living, the Everlasting, the Creator of Heaven and of earth, and the light of Heaven and of earth* (Q 2:255, in part, or parts of 3:1; 2:112 or part of 6:101), the Upholder of Heaven and earth, *One, Eternal, He does not beget nor is He begotten and there is none like him* (Q 112, missing one word), One, *Lord of power, You give power to whom You please and You take away power from whomever You please* (Q 3:26). All power is to You and comes from You, our Master, and it returns to You, Master of power, Merciful, Compassionate. *He has written mercy for Himself, His Mercy extends to all things* (Q 6:12 and 7:156, adapted). Glory to Him and He may be exalted over what polytheists associate [to Him]. We ask you, our God, by Your mercy, by Your beautiful names, by Your noble face, by Your immense power, by Your perfect word by which Heaven and earth stand together and by which, and with Your mercy, we are preserved from the devil and we are saved from Your punishment on the day of resurrection (*yawm al-qiy[ā]ma*), by Your abundant grace, by Your great nobility, by Your clemency, Your power, Your forgiveness, and Your kindness, that You bless Muḥammad, Your servant and Your Prophet, and that You accept his intercession (*shafʿahu*) for his community. May God bless him and give him peace and the mercy of God.[26]

The opening *basmala* is not followed, as one might expect on the basis of the mosaic inscriptions, by the profession of faith, but with a conflation of Qur'anic verses. The passages that form the first lines of the copper plaque look to be somewhat free interpretations of scripture. Apparent conflations and adaptations of Qur'anic verses are also a feature of the mosaic inscriptions of the octagonal arcade. Notably, the scriptural choices do not correlate with those of the mosaic inscriptions. They do, however, bear on some similar themes, particularly the oneness, eternal nature and omnipotence of God. The Christological component of the inner face inscription is, however, avoided on this, and the other extant, copper plaque. Non-Qur'anic components appear between sections of scripture in the first half of the copper plaque. The second half of the text is wholly non-Qur'anic, dwelling upon the qualities of God and the fact that resurrection depends upon divine mercy. Interestingly, the panel also reiterates the claim found on the outer face inscription (northeast side) that the Prophet could act as an intercessor for the community (*umma*) of believers. The more cramped script in the lower part of the plaque records:

> This was ordered by the servant of God, 'Abd All(ā)h, the imām al-Ma'mūn, commander of the believers, may God prolong his rule! – under the authority of the brother of the commander of the believers, Abū Isḥāq, son of the commander of the believers, [Hārūn] al-Rashīd, may God prolong him. And this work was entrusted to the hands of Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā, client of the commander of the faithful in the month of Rabī' II in the year 216.

It is conceivable that this addition to the plaque replaced an original attribution to 'Abd al-Malik. The north entrance plaque contains the same additional text from the time of al-Ma'mun (Figure 2.9). This upper part of this plaque (i.e., the part probably dating from the Umayyad period) is incomplete, but has been read as:

> In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate, *praise be to God except whom there is no god, the Living, the Everlasting* (Q 2:255, in part, or 3:1). There is no partner to Him, One, *Eternal, He does not beget nor is He begotten and there is none like Him* (Q 112, missing opening words). Muḥammad is the servant of God and His messenger, *Whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth to proclaim it over all religion, even though the polytheists hate it* (Q 9:33 or 61:9[27]). Let us believe in God and what was revealed to Muḥammad and *in what was given to the prophets from their Lord; we made no difference between one and the other and we are Muslims to Him* (Q 2:136 or 3:84, slightly adapted). God bless Muḥammad, His servant and His prophet, and peace be upon him and the mercy of God, His forgiveness, and His pleasure.[28]

The text is not identical to the plaque from the east entrance, though it is clear that similar themes are being developed in the Qur'anic and non-Qur'anic sections. Again emphasis is given to the oneness, eternal and omnipotent characteristics of God and the prophethood of Muhammad. There is another adaptation that seems to be drawn from the 'Throne Verse', or other comparable passages in the Qur'an. Qur'an 112 is also employed here, suggesting its importance in the Umayyad period. The east entrance plaque dwells at length on the issue of resurrection and the role of the Prophet as intercessor, but this plaque strikes a different note with the inclusion of the more strident Q 9:33 (or 61:9), sometimes known as the 'Prophetic mission'. This verse is notably employed on the first epigraphic coin of 77/696–7 in conjunction with Q 112 (discussed further in Chapter 8 and the Conclusion).

Were there additional inscriptions within the Umayyad Dome of the Rock? There is an undated text on the flat *miḥrāb* in the cave beneath the Rock, though this was probably written in the tenth or eleventh century.[29] The inscriptions on the cornice now located beneath the ceiling and the roof in the outer ambulatory is from the early tenth century and names Caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 908–29).[30] Necıpoğlu has pointed to the description of the Dome of the Rock written by ʿAli al-Harawi in the late twelfth century. This Persian pilgrim records the presence of the 'Throne Verse' (Q 2:255) in the dome of the building. He writes that the 'ceiling' (*saqf*, this can mean roof, but presumably here refers to the inner shell of the dome) contained a piece of writing in gilded silver (*kitāba bi'l-faḍḍ al-mudhahhab*).[31] This seems to indicate that it was fashioned in sheets of silver with gilded lettering rather than in the form of a mosaic inscription. Unfortunately, he does not specify whether it was a plaque or a band running around the dome. A band running around some upper part of the dome would have required the viewer to move around the full circuit of the inner ambulatory in an anticlockwise direction. If the words of such a band were spaced in a similar manner to those of the octagonal arcade (between five and seven graphemes per metre; see Chapter 4), then they would be insufficient to complete the circumference of the drum. If the inscription seen by al-Harawi was arranged as a continuous circuit, it must have been located at some point in the upper dome where the circumference is smaller.

The Throne Verse occupies an important place in the history of Islamic monumental epigraphy, and is used in buildings across the Islamic world. There are already hints of its presence in the inscriptions of the two copper plaques (though these could be adapted from Q 3:1). Qur'an 2:255 is featured in the long mosaic inscription that ran the length the *qibla* wall of al-Walid I's Congregational Mosque in Damascus.[32] The opening line is also found at the Umayyad residence at Jabal Says (dated 93/711) in southeastern Syria.[33]

Necıpoğlu also offers the tentative suggestion that the cursive inscription at the base of the lower drum (Q 20:1–21) followed the content of an earlier Umayyad inscription in the same location.[34] Her interpretation of the meaning of the Dome of the Rock builds upon the earlier work of Grabar, but places increased emphasis on the epigraphic content of the building. Her reading of these inscriptions follows from the plaques above the four entrances to the outer and inner faces of the octagonal arcade and finally to the inscriptional content within the domed area containing the Rock. She is also sensitive to orientation, noting relationships to the *qibla* and the topographic relationship between the Dome of the Rock and the Dome of the Chain and the Golden Gate. She builds into this schema a consideration of the shifts in the motifs represented in the mosaics of the interior. What results from her analysis is a highly nuanced programme of inscriptions that build towards the themes of the oneness and transcendence of God, His absolute sovereignty over heaven and earth and the prophethood of Muhammad, and the judgement of souls at the end of days.

Some points can be made about the chronological challenges presented by the evidence. In essence, the only inscription that carries a date belonging to the Umayyad period is located on the outer face of the octagonal arcade. Even here there are problems of interpretation: was this the date of the foundation or completion of the structure? The inner face inscription is clearly closely allied to that of the outer face, but we cannot be sure that it was planned and completed in precisely the same phase as its partner (discussed in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 6). The copper plaques from the east and north doors appear to be Umayyad based on stylistic similarities with the mosaic inscriptions, but this does not mean that they necessarily belong to the years when the interior decoration was being placed within the building. Although it is certainly plausible that these plaques (and another two that might once have adorned the south and west entrances) date to the 690s, their script and presentation could equally be placed in the early eighth century. Even if they belong to the 690s, they may not have formed part of the initial epigraphic programme of the interior of the Dome of the Rock.

Greater uncertainties surround the silver gilt inscription (Q 2:255) described by al-Harawi. Given that he saw it in 1173, during the period of Frankish occupation, this feature must date prior to the fall of Jerusalem to the forces of the First Crusade in 1099. This allows for three main possibilities: first, that it belongs to the Umayyad period (i.e., *c.* 690–749); second, that it was put in during the restorations to the building during the rule of the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun; and, third, that it can be associated with the Fatimid work on the building in *c.* 428/1037–8. The last of these seems most likely given the references to the collapse of the dome in 434/1032. This event is described by Ibn al-Athir (d. 1233). His account is too brief to be

able to make an assessment of the extent of the damage, though it is improbable that an Umayyad-period inscription located in the dome would have survived. Necıpoğlu suggests that the inscription seen by al-Harawi is a Fatimid restoration of an Umayyad original, though this is not directly supported by the available sources. No description of the building written prior to 434/1032 mentions an inscription carrying Q 2:255.[35] The Fatimids invested the Aqsa Mosque with new inscriptions in 426/1035, notably including the first in the structure of Q 17:1. This verse describes the *isrāʾ*, or 'night journey', to the *masjid al-aqṣā* ('furthest mosque'). In this context, one can imagine that Q 2:255, with its powerful statement of the transcendence of God, would have made a suitable counterpoint in the Dome of the Rock. The dynasty certainly did make use of the Throne Verse on other monumental architecture.[36] Even less can be said about an Arabic inscription that might have existed prior to the cursive rendition of Q 20:1–21. The Ayyubid inscription probably replaced a Latin text of the Crusader period.[37] In the absence of available evidence it seems prudent to omit this text from further consideration in the study of the Umayyad epigraphic programme.

Notes

1. The outer circle that can be inscribed around the exterior corners of the octagonal perimeter wall has a diameter of 53.75 m. These measurements are taken from the plan published in both editions of Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, I.1.

2. The first person to publish this observation was Richmond, *The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem*, p. 14. See also Meyer Schapiro, quoted in Raby, 'Reviewing the Reviewers', p. 8.

3. On the present windows, see Finbarr Flood, 'The Ottoman Windows in the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque', in Sylvia Auld and Robert Hillenbrand (eds), *Ottoman Jerusalem. Living City: 1517–1917* (London: Altajir World of Islam Trust, 2000), pt 1, pp. 431–63 (see particularly pp. 453–63, apps 28.1–3).

4. See notes in Marguerite van Berchem, 'The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock', I.1 (both editions), *passim*; Kessler, ''Abd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock', p. 2, n. 6. An excellent recent example of the close examination of Late Antique mosaic work is Ann Terry and Henry Maguire, *Dynamic Splendor: The Wall Mosaics of the Euphrasian Cathedral at Poreč* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

5. Lawrence Nees has pointed out that there is no conclusive evidence to support the idea that there must once have been four such plaques, one for each of the entrances to the building. He suggests that the north and east entrances carried a greater symbolic significance in the Umayyad building. This draws upon later traditions concerning the gate through which one entered (north) and exited (east) the structure. The east gate leads in the direction of the Dome of the Chain, a building that Nees attributes to the rule of Caliph Muʿawiya. These observations

are contained in his forthcoming, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Art in Jerusalem*. My thanks to him for sharing these observations with me.

6. For evidence concerning the presence of exterior mosaics, see Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, revd edn, I.1, pp. 97–8; Allen, 'The Original Appearance of the Dome of the Rock', pp. 208–9.

7. Marguerite van Berchem, 'The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock', I.1, pp. 311–12. On the pigmentation of the mortar between the mosaic cubes at Samarra, see Thomas Leisten, *Excavations in Samarra, vol. 1: Architecture. Final Report of the First Campaign, 1910–1912*, Baghdader Forschungen 20 (Manz am Rhein: Phillip von Zabern, 2003), pp. 54, 97–8.

8. For example, see Michele Piccirillo, *I mosaici di Giordania* (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 1986), figs 33, 36, 47, pls V, VI; Avner, 'The Dome of the Rock in the Light of the Development of Concentric Martyria in Jerusalem', fig. 9. Scholars have also drawn attention to the similarity between the 'plant' forms in the nave mosaics of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and those in the Dome of the Rock. It is clear that mosaics were placed in the building in the 1160s, but it has been suggested that the panel representing the major church councils (from Nicaea in 325 to Constantinople III in 680) was constructed in *c.* 700. See Henri Stern, 'Les representations des conciles dans l'église de la Nativité à Bethlehem', *Byzantion* 11 (1936): 101–52; Henri Stern, 'Les representations des conciles dans l'église de la Nativité à Bethlehem, Pt. 2: Les inscriptions', *Byzantion* 13 (1938): 415–59. For the subsequent debate concerning the date of this panel, see Folda, *The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1098–1187*, pp. 360–4.

9. Marguerite van Berchem, 'The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock', I.1, pp. 309–10. See also Nuseibeh's photographs in Nuseibeh and Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, pp. 82–105.

10. Kessler, 'Above the Ceiling of the Outer Ambulatory'.

11. On the wooden ceiling of this area, see James Allan and Marwan Abu Khalaf, 'The Painted Wooden Ceiling in the Inner Ambulatory of the Dome of the Rock', in Sylvia Auld and Robert Hillenbrand (eds), *Ottoman Jerusalem. Living City: 1517–1917* (London: Altajir World of Islam Trust, 2000), pt 1, pp. 465–72.

12. Saïd Nuseibeh related in an email that during his photographic campaign the electrical circuits in the building failed, removing all artificial light for a short period. He noted that the interior was very dark, and that the windows provided insufficient illumination to be able to see the decoration. One can assume, therefore, that lamp light was always required within the building, and that only limited areas of the mosaic could be viewed without artificial illumination (e.g., on the areas of the exterior face of the octagonal arcade closest to the four entrances). I am grateful to Mr Nuseibeh for this observation.

13. I believe that the first place this calculation appears in print is in Oleg Grabar's 1959 article, 'The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem', p. 52.

14. van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicum*, pp. 229–31.

15. Nuseibeh and Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, pp. 82–105; Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, pp. 92–9, figs 42–9. See also Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (1932–40), I.1, pls 5–24 (revd edn, I.1, pls 6–9, 11–26); Kessler, ''Abd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock', figs 9–13; George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, figs 38–43.

16. Blair, 'What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?', pp. 86–7; Andrew Rippin's translation appears in Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin (eds and trans.), *Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of Religious Literature*, revd and expanded 2nd edn (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 134–7. Oleg Grabar also gives a translation of these two inscriptions. These can be found in his *Shape of the Holy*, pp. 59–60; and Nuseibeh and Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, pp. 78–81, 106–9. Also see the discussion of the inscriptions in Erica Dodd and Shereen Khairallah, *Image of the Word: A Study of Quranic Verses in Islamic Architecture* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1981), I, pp. 18–26. For a German translation, see Nagel, 'Die Inschriften im Felsendom', pp. 333–5.
17. I added these words to the drawing of the inscription on the outer face (see foldout) prior to the publication of an undated graffito bearing the name, 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwan. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only example of his name in a monumental inscription. The manner in which the graffito is written conforms well to my reconstruction except for the fact that the graffito omits the long *alif* from Marwān. It has been suggested that this was written before his accession in 65/685. Frédéric Imbert, 'Califes, princes, et poètes dans les graffiti du début de l'Islam', *Romano-Arabica* 15 (2015): 59–78 (see pp. 67, 76, fig. 4). See at: http://araba.lls.unibuc.ro/?page_id=63, last accessed 4 January 2015. Also reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/malik7.html, last accessed 4 January 2015.
18. Reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/sumer.html, last accessed 16 December 2014.
19. On the extent to which the mosaic inscriptions reflect the Qur'an in the 680s and 690s, see comments in Chapter 8. For a convenient summary of the debate, see Nicholas Sinai, 'When Did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach its Closure? Part I', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies* 77(2) (2014): 277–8.
20. These issues will be addressed in greater detail in later chapters. See, however, comments in Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 98–9.
21. On the history and meaning of this verse, see Sheila Blair, 'Invoking the Prophet through Word, Sound and Image: Written, Verbal, and Visual Signs in the Religious Art Of Islam' (forthcoming). My thanks for allowing me to see this text prior to publication.
22. Johns, 'Archaeology and the History of Early Islam', p. 429. On the concept of intercession (*shafāʿa*) in the Qur'an, see Valerie Hoffman, 'Intercession', *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. Jane McAuliffe (Brill online, 2011), II, p. 551, column 1.
23. Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, p. 67. On the chanting of psalms in Late Antique Jerusalem, see Peter Jeffrey, 'The Lost Chant Tradition of Early Christian Jerusalem: Some Possible Melodic Survivals in the Byzantine and Latin Chant Repertories', *Early Music History* 11 (1992): 151–90; Peter Jeffrey, 'The Sunday Office of Seventh-century Jerusalem in the Georgian Chantbook (Iadgari): A Preliminary Report', *Studia Liturgica* 21 (1991): 52–75.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 67. On the nature of the liturgy in Jerusalem in Late Antiquity,

see John Baldovin, *Liturgy in Ancient Jerusalem* (Bramcote: Grove Books for the Alcuin Club and the Group for the Renewal of Worship, 1989). On the catechumenate, see pp. 11–15.

25. Elias Khamis, 'Two Wall Mosaic Inscriptions from the Umayyad Market Place in Bet Shean/Baysan', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies* 64 (2001): 159–76.

26. Based on the translation in van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicum*, pp. 248–9. Also Estelle Whelan, 'Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'ān', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118(1) (1998): 6–7; Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, p. 61; Heribert Busse, 'Monotheismus und islamische Christologie in der Bauinschrift des Felsendoms in Jerusalem', *Theologische Quartalschrift* 161 (1981): 171–2.

27. The first part is also found in Q 48:28.

28. van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicum*, p. 250; Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, p. 61.

29. Baer, 'The Mihrab in the cave of the Dome of the Rock', pp. 16–18; Flood, 'Light in Stone', p. 315.

30. Kessler, 'Above the Ceiling of the Outer Ambulatory', pp. 87–94. Kessler concludes (p. 94) that van Berchem was probably correct in assigning the inscription and the associated restoration to 301/913.

31. Al-Harawi, *Kitab al-isharat ila maʿrifat al-ziyarat*; translated in Necıpoğlu, 'The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest', p. 46.

32. This inscription is translated in Finbarr Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture*, Islamic Civilization, Studies and Texts 33 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2001), pp. 247–54.

33. Reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/usays1.html, last accessed 16 December 2014.

34. Necıpoğlu, 'The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest', pp. 46–7.

35. This information is summarised in Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, revd edn, I.1, pp. 92–6. Necıpoğlu, 'The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest', p. 46.

36. For example, Bab al-Futuh, Bab al-Nasr, Bab Zuwayla and the mosques of al-Azhar al-Hakim in Cairo. See Dodd and Khairallah, *The Image of the Word*, II, p. 10. The verse does also appear earlier in such locations as al-Walid's mosaic inscription on the qibla wall of the Congregational Mosque in Damascus, the Cairo Nilometer (247/861), the mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo (265/877) and a marble slab, dated 290/903, in the Dome of the Rock.

37. Folda, *The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1098–1187*, pp. 251–3. Theodorich, writing in *c*. 1174, indicates that the inscription running around the dome comprised Isaiah 56:7 and Matthew 7:7–8 and 21:13. There was a secondary inscription higher in the dome made up of I Kings 8:28 and Deuteromy 26:15. There were other Latin inscriptions in the interior, as well as a long band of text running around the eight sides of the exterior. Folda dates the inscriptions to the 1140s.

CHAPTER 3

Mosaic Scripts in Late Antiquity

THE MEDIUM OF mosaic had been employed for the creation of inscriptions prior to the construction of the Dome of the Rock. The bulk of the surviving examples from the Mediterranean region dating from the fifth to the seventh centuries are in Greek (in the east) and Latin, although other languages are represented. The mosaic texts vary considerably in the quality of their execution and in the relative size of the letters themselves (defined by the number of mosaic cubes). One can break this assemblage into two groups. The first group comprises large-scale inscriptions where the mosaicists have varied the thickness of the strokes (from one to two or three cubes) making up the letter forms. This type of inscription is primarily the domain of glass mosaic found in the superstructures of churches and other official buildings. This variable thickness of stroke is encountered on some floor mosaics, though in Greater Syria it appears to be relatively rare (see below). The second group is defined by the fact that the strokes making up the letters are consistently one cube thick. The letters range in height and width across the surviving examples; some are remarkably simple in their construction (the smallest being no more that five or six cubes in height). Most inscriptions in floor mosaic from eastern regions conform to this group. Glass mosaic on walls, vaults and semi-domes also contains this type of inscription, usually playing a subsidiary role (such as the texts identifying saints and other figures).

Since the letter forms within the mosaic inscriptions of the octagonal arcade of the Dome of the Rock are also more than one mosaic cube thick (in fact, ranging between three and six on the horizontal and vertical strokes, and down to a single cube at the beginning of the ʿayn and ghayn and at the termination of the tails of the yāʾ and alif maqṣūra; see Chapter 4), the initial section of the chapter will concentrate on the first group of Late Antique inscriptions (i.e., those exhibiting variable width). The first goal of this short chapter is to examine the ways in which mosaicists of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries dealt with the challenges of forming scripts in the intractable medium of mosaic. To what extent does the surviving evidence support the notion that mosaicists adhered to common principles in

the planning of such issues as the overall proportions of given letters (e.g., the relationship of the height to the width); the precise shapes and angles of strokes making up a given letter; the curvature of the rounded strokes; and, in cases where the practice was employed, the graduation of the width of the strokes?

The second goal is to look at the possible sources for these mosaic scripts in other types of monumental inscription as well as in scripts found in manuscripts and portable arts. This is based on a restricted group (i.e., those dating from the fifth to the seventh centuries that have been published with well-defined photographs of the letters), and the conclusions should be appreciated in this context. It would be desirable to be able to rely on more wide-ranging and sustained studies of this nature performed by experts in the conventions of Late Antique Greek and Latin scripts.[1] Nevertheless, there are good reasons for undertaking this preliminary study. It seems probable that the mosaicists working in the Dome of the Rock had prior experience of laying inscriptions in Greek (the evidence for this is presented in Chapters 5 and 6). Mosaicists creating large inscriptions in Greek and Latin during Late Antiquity must surely have drawn upon proportional guidelines and other epigraphic conventions that already existed in either monumental or miniature scripts. If it is possible to find plausible evidence for these processes of borrowing (and, potentially, adaptation) in the creation of mosaic inscriptions in Greek and Latin, then this strengthens the case for identifying similar processes of transmission in the formation of the seventh-century mosaic inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock.

General Characteristics of Late Antique Monumental Scripts

A small number of glass mosaic inscriptions survive from the period before the construction of the Dome of the Rock. These are mainly located in narrow bands running along the base of the semi-domes (particularly the apses) within churches. The remaining area of the semi-dome is typically occupied by a figural design. There are important extant examples of mosaic inscriptions from Italy, Croatia and Egypt. Two of these – the Euphrasian basilica at Poreč and the church of the monastery of St Catherine's in the Sinai[2] – have been reproduced in large-scale photographs that allow for a detailed examination of the arrangement of mosaic cubes. The former is in Latin, while the latter is in Greek; clearly this limits the comparative comments that one can make, though there are numerous graphemes that share the same basic shape.

The inscription in the church in Poreč is held within a wide band and is divided into four lines of text (Figure 3.1). The letters chosen for the following analysis comprise A, B, C, D, E, F, I, L, M, N, O, R, S, T, V (Figure 3.2). In cases where there are slight divergences in the treatment of a given letter (e.g., the addition of serifs at the top

Figure 3.1 *Drawing of the main inscription (broken into four sections) in the Euphrasian basilica in Poreč. Drawing: Genevieve Neelin.*

Figure 3.2 *Representative letters from the principal mosaic inscription in the apse of the Euphrasian basilica in Poreč, sixth century. Drawing: Genevieve Neelin and Naomi Shields.*

or bottom of strokes) I have included more than one image. If we discount the serifs from the calculations it is possible to make some observations about consistent practices in the creation of the letters within this mosaic inscription. All the letter strokes are either one or two cubes thick. The T is unusual in that the vertical line tapers from two cubes thickness to one as it meets the upper horizontal stroke. A more common practice, however, is to maintain line thickness along a stroke. In the case of the letter I, the line is maintained at a thickness of two cubes. Where a letter is made up of two or more vertical or sloping lines (A, M, N, V) the thickness of the first stroke (reading from left to right) is greater than all the others. The vertical stroke is also two cubes thick in the cases of the letters E, F and L. The horizontal strokes of the first two are only one cube thick, while the larger horizontal of the L is two cubes thick in order to lend it greater visual weight. This accords with the treatment of the horizontal stroke of the T.

The letters containing curved strokes (B, C, D, O, S) are treated in a slightly subtler manner. B, D and R all possess a main vertical stroke two cubes thick, while the curved stroke varies in width between one and two cubes. The thickest part of the curved stroke is to be found at the mid point (in the case of the B this registers only on the lower curved stroke). The R thickens the centre of the curved stroke and also of the lower part of the sloping line. The widest sections of C and O appear at the mid point of the height of the

letter. The central oblique line is the widest part of the S. The desire to differentiate the widths of the strokes suggests a relationship to the practices of writing with an implement (quill or reed) cut to an oblique angle (see below).

With few exceptions the letters in the inscription of the Euphrasian basilica are of a consistent height. This conforms to between ten and twelve mosaic cubes (the close-up photographs indicate some variability in the shape and dimensions of individual cubes), with eleven being the most common. Thus, if we exclude the serifs, the ratio of height to width of the simplest letter (I) can be given as eleven cubes high to two cubes wide, or 1:0.18. In all other cases the height of the letter also exceeds the width. The proportions (height:width) are as follows: A (1:0.80 and 1:0.83); B (1:0.81); C (1:0.70); D (1:0.84); E (1:0.36); F (1:0.48); I (1:0.18); L (1:0.46); M (1:0.94); N (1:0.86 and 1:0.58); O (1:0.78); R (1:0.56); S (1:0.67); T (1:0.7 and 1:0.73); V (1:0.85). The verticality of these letters is worth emphasising; it might be that this factor is partially explained by the requirement to introduce some optical correction for viewers seeing the inscription at ground level.[3] Some letters show a degree of variability in width. This is particularly notable for the N. Adaptation of letter width is encountered in other monumental inscriptions, and can be a convenient means to cram the remaining words at the end of a line. An example of this practice can be seen a mosaic inscription in the fifth-century Church of San Stefano Rotondo in Rome (Figure 3.3). One can also see the process of expansion and contraction of letters in the encircling inscription running around the interior of Sts Sergius and Bacchus

Figure 3.3 *Detail of a mosaic inscription band in an apse of San Stefano Rotondo, Rome. Fifth or sixth century. Photograph: Evanthia Baboula.*

Figure 3.4 *Detail of the inscription band in Sts Sergius and Bacchus, Istanbul, 527–36. Photograph: Filiz Tütüncü Çağlar.*

Figure 3.5 *Drawing of the complete inscription band running around the interior of Sts Sergius and Bacchus, Istanbul. After: van Millingen,* Byzantine Churches in Constantinople *(1912).*

in Constantinople (Figures 3.4 and 3.5).[4] This important example is discussed further in Chapter 7.

The church of St Catherine's Monastery comprises a large inscription running around the base of the semi-dome of the apse. There are additional smaller inscriptions, mostly the names of saints, elsewhere in the mosaic panel. The letters of the large inscription surveyed in the following paragraphs are (Figures 3.6 and 3.15): A (alpha); B (beta); Γ (gamma); E (epsilon); H (eta); I (iota); K (kappa); Λ (lamda); M (mu); N (nu); O (omikron); Π (pi); P (rho); Σ (sigma, written in the inscription as C); T (tau); Y (upsilon); Ω (omega, written in the inscription as ω).[5] The letter forms in St Catherine's differ from the Euphrasian basilica in Poreč in some important respects. The former allows for a maximum thickness of three mosaic cubes for

Figure 3.6 *Representative letters from the principal mosaic inscription band in the apse of the church of St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai, Egypt, sixth century. (Also included on the lowest register are smaller letter forms and the symbols for the combinations: K/κ + A/α and O/o + Y/υ.) Drawing: Genevieve Neelin and Naomi Shields.*

vertical strokes. This means that the mosaicists can sometimes allow secondary strokes to be two cubes thick rather than one (as is the case at Poreč). The letters of the St Catherine's inscription are largely without serifs (although they do appear at the summit of the A and Λ. There are also decorative additions – at the central junction of Ω /ω and the horizontal stroke of the E. If one considers letters that have the same basic shape, then it is also possible to find minor differences, such as the oblique connecting stroke of the A; the flat horizontal stroke at the base of the B; the carinations created at the top and bottom of the O; and the shortened oblique strokes of the K.

In other respects, however, one senses some degree of consistency in the approach adopted by the mosaicists in St Catherine's and the Euphrasian basilica. This is demonstrated by looking at the predominant verticality of the letter forms. The proportions of the letters (height:width) are as follows (see also Figures 3.2,

Figure 3.7 *Representative letters from the carved inscription band running around the interior of the Church of St Polyeuktos, Istanbul, sixth century. Drawing: Genevieve Neelin and Naomi Shields.*

3.6 and 3.15): A (1:0.83 and 1:0.77); B (1:0.50); Γ (1:0.53); E (1:0.51); H (1:0.67); I (1:0.22 and 1:0.15); K (1:0.69); Λ (1:0.83); M (1:0.78); N (1:0.60 and 1:0.71); O (1:0.63); Π (1:0.53 and 1:0.61); P (1:0.43); Σ (1:0.52 and 1:0.49); T (1:0.61 and 1:0.52); Y (1:0.70); and Ω (1:1.04). In cases such as the A, C/Σ and T, it can be seen that the width has been further reduced in relation to the height. This can also be contrasted with the treatment of the letter forms in the carved stone inscription band in the sixth-century church of St Polyeuktos in Constantinople (Figure 3.7).[6] The proportions of the letters (height:width) are (see also Figure 3.15): A (1:0.80); Δ (1:0.71); E (1:0.74); Θ (1:0.83); H (1:0.81); I (1:0.16); K (1:0.75); M (1:0.81); N (1:0.78); Π (1:0.74); Σ (1:0.75); T (1:0.88); Y (1:0.89); X (1:1.13); Ω (written as ω, 1:1.1). In cases where a direct comparison can be made (A, E, H, I, K, M, N, Π, T, Y and Ω/ ω) the letters at St Polyeuktos have a greater horizontal emphasis in the majority of cases. Only A, I and M are equivalent in proportional terms to the letters from St Catherine's Monastery.

The letter forms in the St Polyeuktos inscription do not conform to those of St Catherine's in other respects (Figures 3.7 and 3.15). In the former there is a relative consistency in the thickness of the strokes making up the letters. The St Polyeuktos letters make more

extensive use of serifs and some letters (e.g., A, E, M, Σ/C, Y and Ω/ ω adopt a radically different shape to their counterparts in St Catherine's. Similar evidence is also available in the broadly contemporary monument of Sts Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople (Figure 3.4). Given that all three examples are the result of patronage by the imperial elite, this suggests the existence of different proportional systems for the formation of monumental inscriptions in mosaic and carved stone. This result is somewhat predictable, but it does leave open the question of the nature of the prototypes being employed by the respective teams of artisans. In the case of stone carving, prior to the sixth century, there existed a long tradition of monumental epigraphy.[7] One can expect to see relatively slow formal adaptation within a stable tradition. There is less reason to look for external influences. Mosaic presents a different set of issues because of the more rapid emergence of monumental inscriptions (in Latin and Greek) from the fifth century onwards. Here one might expect to find evidence for mosaicists (and the scribes who might have designed the inscriptions) looking to other types of writing for inspiration.

This issue is considered in greater detail in the final section, but some words are needed about the inscriptions placed on floor mosaics. This is a vast topic, and the comments offered below are merely speculative observations based on a selection of Late Antique inscriptions from the south of Greater Syria. The published examples are principally in Greek, though there are few written in Aramaic.[8] In the majority of the examples examined as part of this preliminary study the strokes making up the letters are one mosaic cube thick; no attempt is made to differentiate the width, though there are inscriptions in which letters are given serifs. This means that the primary distinctions are in terms of scale (the number of cubes required for the height and width of letters), and in the proportional relationships between the height and the width. The greater simplicity of the letter forms suggests that the practices of floor mosaic did not have a direct influence upon the creation of the more ambitious letter forms seen in glass mosaics discussed above.

The table at the end of the chapter (Figure 3.15) contains analyses of letter forms in two Jordanian mosaic floors, one from the Church of St George in Madaba (Figure 3.8), and the other a panel from the Kayanus church at 'Ayoun Musa (Figure 3.9).[9] Both date to the sixth century. These have been chosen because they are representative of two modes of letter formation. The mosaic inscription from Madaba illustrates how sparingly inscriptions can be laid out. The individual letters are between five and six cubes in height and no more than five cubes in width. Even at this level of simplicity, it is still possible to describe the curves and ovoid shapes necessary to represent the Greek alphabet. The 'Ayoun Musa inscription comprises letters
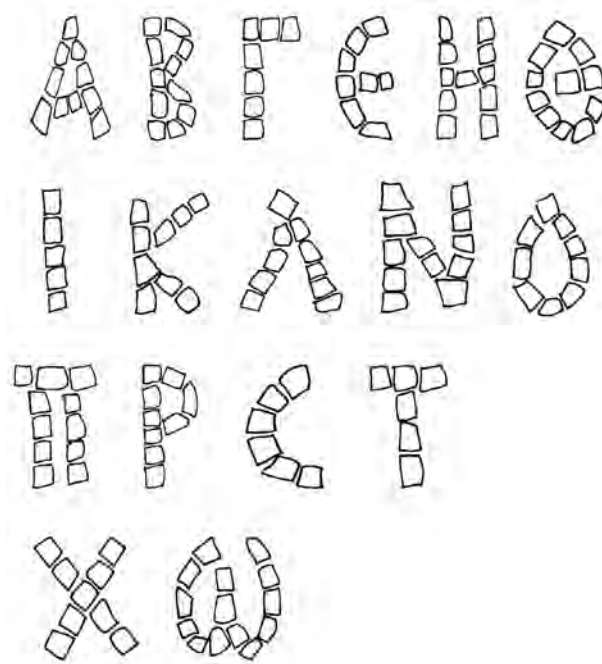
Figure 3.8 Representative letters from the floor mosaic of the Church of St George in Madaba, Jordan, sixth century. Drawing: Genevieve Neelin and Naomi Shields.

Figure 3.9 Inscription from the floor mosaic of the Kayanus church at 'Ayoun Musa, Jordan, sixth century. Drawing: Genevieve Neelin.

that vary from seven to nine cubes high (the rectangular cubes themselves are rather variable in size and shape), while the widest letter (ω) appears to be about seven cubes across. A greater level of sophistication is suggested in the practice of using triangular pieces of stone for the end of letter strokes and the addition of a decorative cube beneath the junction of the two oblique strokes of M (this
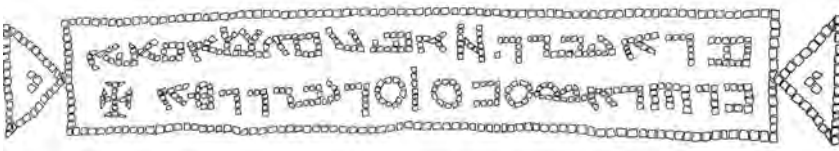
Figure 3.10 *Aramaic mosaic inscription from Hayyan al-Mushrif, Jordan, sixth century. Drawing: Genevieve Neelin.*
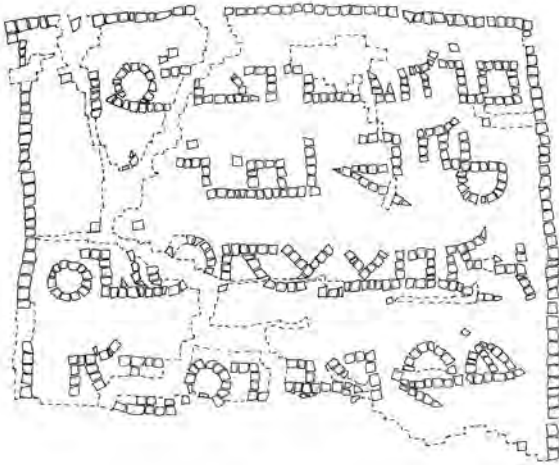
Figure 3.11 *Aramaic mosaic inscription from ʿAyoun Musa, Jordan, sixth century. Drawing: Genevieve Neelin.*

is also found in the treatment of the same letter in the church at St Catherine's). If one compares the proportions of the letters from Madaba and ʿAyoun Musa with those of St Catherine's, it becomes apparent that the floor mosaicists also favoured a vertical emphasis. Indeed, some letters (M, N, Π, P and Σ/C) are noticeably more attenuated than their counterparts at St Catherine's. Letters such as E, O and Ω/ω show considerable proportional similarities across the three mosaic inscriptions.

Aramaic is a cursive script. This makes it difficult to form direct comparisons with the Greek inscriptions surveyed above. Their principal significance in the present context is that they represent forerunners of early Arabic mosaic scripts in the joining of letters with horizontal ligatures, the adoption of circular (rather than ovoid) strokes and the presence of tails that dip below the line. The drawings of two examples – from Hayyan al-Mushrif (Figure 3.10) and the Kayanus church at ʿAyoun Musa (Figure 3.11) – again illustrate how scripts can be formed using relatively few mosaic cubes (four or five being sufficient for the vertical extension of most letters). It should be noted, however, that there appears to be less standardisation in

the letter forms. This is perhaps explained by the fact that Greek was the preferred language for formal inscriptions (less attention having been paid to the creation of consistent mosaic scripts in Aramaic).

Comparison with Other Formal Scripts

If we can discount the idea that the mosaic letters used in the large inscription of St Catherine's Church relied upon the conventions employed in floor mosaics (the influence is likely to be the other way around), then one is faced with the task of identifying potential visual sources for this distinctive script. The tendency to vary the width of letter strokes is intriguing, and largely distinguishes the monumental script of St Catherine's from those of St Polyeuktos and Sts Sergius and Bacchus. These variations in width along the course of a curved stroke or between straight strokes in a given letter are features that are commonly encountered in book scripts.[10] The movement of a nib cut at an oblique angle will naturally produce such shapes. Can we see evidence of a relationship between Greek mosaic script and the modes of writing found in Late Antique manuscripts? This question will be examined using three examples dating from the sixth and seventh centuries: the Sinope Gospels, the Codex Purpureus and the London Canon Tables (Figure 3.12).[11] Each is written in an uncial script usually termed 'Biblical majuscule', commonly employed in Christian religious manuscripts until *c*. 800.[12] The two main issues considered are the proportions of the letters (height:width) and the degree of similarity between the book scripts and those of found in glass mosaic.

Starting with the question of proportion, it is immediately obvious that there is a greater horizontal emphasis in the book scripts (Figure 3.15). While there are variations between the three examples, rounded letters such as E, Θ, O, Σ/C are all wider than they are high (this can also be seen in the rounded element making up the centre of the Φ, though the overall proportions are affected by the long vertical stroke). The greatest horizontal extension (140 per cent of the height) is found in the O from the Codex Purpureus. By contrast, the width of the same letter in St Catherine's is 63 per cent of the height (those of Madaba and ʿAyoun Musa register as 62 per cent and 52 per cent, respectively). Other letters in the book scripts (A, Γ, H, K, M, N, Π, T) are also notably wider than their mosaic counterparts. The difference between book and mosaic scripts is less apparent in the cases of I and Λ. Some letters in the book scripts (such as P, Y, Φ) have vertical strokes that dip below the line. This means that their overall proportions (though not necessarily their shape) tend to conform more closely to those in St Catherine's and the Jordanian floor mosaics. The presence of long extensions to the horizontal strokes (e.g., the Δ in the London Canon Tables and the Π of the Codex Purpureus) lends some letters a particularly horizontal character.

	SP	CP	LCT
A			
Γ			
Δ			
E			
Θ			
H			
I			
K		and	
Λ			
M			

Figure 3.12 *Representative letter forms from the Sinope Gospels (column 1), the Codex Purpureus (column 2) and the London Canon Tables (column 3). Table: Naomi Shields.*

	SP	CP	LCT
N	Ν	Ν	
Ξ (ξ)			ξ
Ο	Ο	Ο and Ο	
Ρ	Ρ	Ρ	Ρ
Σ (C)		C	C
Τ	Τ	Τ	
Υ	Υ	Υ	
Φ	Φ		

Figure 3.12 (continued)

A morphological comparison brings up points of convergence and divergence between the two groups. Naturally one would expect some differences to emerge from the precise requirements of these two media. Characteristics peculiar to book script include the elegant oblique strokes added to the vertical tails of letters (P, Y, Φ); the extreme differentiation of width within rounded strokes; and the range of serif shapes. Despite the obvious contrasts at a technical level, however, one gets the sense that the mosaicists working in St Catherine's were attempting to adopt some aspects of book script. This is seen in the employment of thicker and thinner strokes to make up specific letters (A, B, Γ, E, H, K, Λ, M, N, O, Π, P, Σ/C, Ω/ω). A, Γ, H, I, Λ, N and P at St Catherine's appear to be closest in form to comparable examples in one or more of the surveyed manuscripts. The A and the Λ are perhaps the clearest examples of mosaic imitating the natural strokes formed with a pen (note how the A differs from the one at St Polyeuktos and the equivalent letter shape in the Latin inscription at Poreč).

There are several letters (E, K, M and Y) that have little in common with counterparts in the three manuscripts. Notable features of the mosaic letters are the decorative central bar of the E; the thick oblique strokes of the K; the short oblique strokes of the M (and the decorative addition below the junction); the tapering vertical strokes of the T and Y; and the downward tilt of the terminals of the two oblique strokes of the Y. It might be that these can be compared with letters found in other Late Antique manuscripts, though I have not encountered them. The tapering of the vertical stroke of the T and Y is, however, something that would be difficult to emulate when writing with a pen. This feature perhaps originates in mosaic or in the portable arts.

There are some striking similarities between the mosaic letters at St Catherine's and those found on examples of Syrian liturgical silver vessels. The most important of these are from the Hama treasure (two chalices), the Stuma treasure (a lamp and a paten) and the Riha treasure (a chalice, a paten and two ewers).[13] Notable features that are common among this group include the short oblique strokes of the K (often with a decorative flourish added to the lower stroke); the addition of an ornamental flourish at the central junction of the Ω/ω; and the flat horizontal line at the base of the B. The combination of omikron and upsilon found in St Catherine's is frequently used in the metalwork inscriptions. Several of the inscriptions exhibit a horizontal emphasis in the letter forms. This is also a characteristic of other Greek inscriptions on metalwork, including the famous pilgrim ampullae in Monza and Bobbio (Figure 3.13).[14]

The nielloed inscriptions of the Stuma lamp and the two Riha ewers present the closest parallels to the St Catherine's inscription, both in terms of proportion (all the characters are strongly vertical) and morphology (Figure 3.14). The combination of black lettering
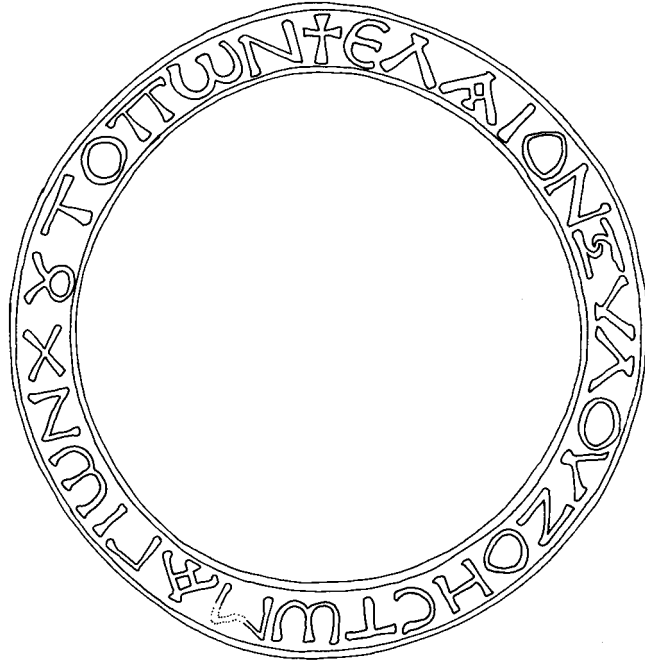
Figure 3.13 *Inscription band from a tin–lead ampulla, Monza Cathedral, sixth century. After: A. Grabar,* Ampoules de Terre Sainte *(1958). Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

on a metallic ground also bears comparison with the dark lettering on a gold ground employed in the St Catherine's mosaic inscription. While the inscriptions on these objects are the closest to the mosaic, there are significant divergences, including the absence of tapering in the verticals of the T and Y, and the shape of the oblique strokes in the Y. The Stuma lamp employs an oblique stroke for the connecting bar of the A, though this is not found in the Riha ewers. Other media – painted icons, glass, ornamented textiles and relief-moulded ceramics – appear to possess relatively few points of comparison with mosaic inscriptions surveyed above. Latin and Greek inscriptions with a strong verticality are found on some ivory consular diptychs, though they are not closely comparable in morphological terms.[15]

Conclusion

It is worth reiterating that this chapter makes use of a very limited body of evidence. First-hand observation of a larger number of architectural inscriptions, in carved stone and mosaic, might alter, even reverse, some of the preliminary conclusions offered below. However, the general tendencies identified in the previous sections

	Stuma lamp	Riha ewer 1	Riha ewer 2
A	A	A	A
B		B	B
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ
Δ		Δ	Δ
E	Є	Є	Є
H	H	H	H
I	I	I	I
K	K		K
Λ		Λ	Λ
M	M	M	M
N	N	N	N

	Stuma lamp	Riha ewer 1	Riha ewer 2
Ξ (ξ)		Ζ	Ζ
O		O	O
Π	Π	Π	Π
P	P	P	P
Σ (S)		S	S
T	T	T	T
Y	Y	Y	Y
X	X		
Ω (ω)	Ω	Ω	Ω
O + Y	Ȣ	Ȣ	Ȣ

Figure 3.14 *Representative letter forms from Stuma lamp (column 1), Riha ewer 1 (column 2) and Riha ewer 2 (column 3). After drawings in Mango,* Silver from Early Byzantium: The Kaper Koraon and related Treasures *(1986). Drawing: Marcus Milwright and Naomi Shields.*

are helpful when considering the challenges faced by the mosaicists (and scribes) responsible for planning and executing the mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock in the late seventh century (see Chapters 4–6).

The mosaic inscriptions are characterised by the verticality of the individual letter forms. In the case of those located on walls or

vaults, this characteristic may have resulted in part from the need to offer some optical correction for viewers at ground level. While this is one potential explanatory factor, the broadly similar proportions of Greek characters on many floor mosaics suggests that the verticality can also be viewed as a compromise between aesthetic considerations and the need to cram in as many words as possible into a single band. Indeed, there are examples of mosaic inscriptions where the verticality is increased in the latter part in order to conserve space. The aesthetic possibilities of vertical script are explored in portable arts of the fifth–seventh centuries, including metalwork (such as liturgical silver) and ivory.

It might have been thought that the two closest relatives of mosaic lettering at St Catherine's would have been monumental inscriptions in stone and formal book scripts. Those of the churches of St Polyeuktos and Sts Sergius and Bacchus exhibit few significant areas of comparison. The contrast to book scripts (three manuscripts were examined) is even more stark. While it remains probable that the practice of varying the width of letter strokes derives ultimately from writing in pen and ink, the proportional character of the book scripts is entirely different from that of mosaic. Some letter forms correlate well, though many of those employed by mosaicists appear to derive from different sources. This lack of correspondence between monumental and book scripts has been noticed in the study of early medieval Italy.[16] Intriguingly, the scripts possessing the greatest correspondences with the St Catherine's mosaic inscription are found on liturgical silver (particularly those picked out in niello). One can imagine that these were commonplace in churches, large and small, across Greater Syria and Egypt in the sixth and seventh centuries.

The fact that none of the metalwork inscriptions exhibits a complete correspondence with the lettering of the mosaic in St Catherine's is predictable; mosaicists (and the scribes who probably collaborated with them on the most ambitious inscriptions) would have relied upon more than one visual source when designing a mosaic script. While the close relationship between metalwork and mosaic scripts deserves further attention, it does not mean that ideas and practices necessarily flowed directly from the artisans of one medium to the other. There might well have been other, now lost, objects in other media that acted as intermediaries or prototypes in this process. In addition, we should not discount the possibility of innovation within a given medium; not all the features of mosaic inscriptions must necessarily derive from conventions employed in other media.

	SP	CP	LCT	StC	StP	MA	AM
A	1 : 1.11	1 : 1.1		1 : 0.83 1 : 0.77	1 : 0.8	1 : 0.65	1 : 0.52
B				1 : 0.5		1 : 0.43	
Γ		1 : 0.82	1 : 1	1 : 0.53		1 : 0.47	
Δ	1 : 1.16		1 : 1.71		1 : 0.71		
E	1 : 1	1 : 1.1	1 : 1	1 : 0.51	1 : 0.74	1 : 0.47	1 : 0.4
Θ	1 : 1.25	1 : 1.34	1 : 1.06		1 : 0.83	1 : 0.67	
H	1 : 1.03		1 : 1.06	1 : 0.67	1 : 0.81	1 : 0.5	1 : 0.58

Figure 3.15 *Table showing the width of selected letters shown as a percentage of the height (allowing for the omission of the serifs in the monumental letters). SG = Sinope Gospels (Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, Suppl. gr. 1286); CP = Codex Purpureus (British Library Cotton Titus C XV); LCT = London Canon Tables (British Library Add. MS 5111); StC = St Catherine's Monastery; StP = St Polyeuktos, Istanbul; MA = Church of St George, Madaba, sixth century; AM = Kayanus church, 'Ayoun Musa, mid- sixth century. Drawing: Marcus Milwright and Naomi Shields.*

	SP	CP	LCT	StC	StP	MA	AM
I	1 : 0.21	1 : 0.25	1 : 0.33	1 : 0.22 1 : 0.15	1 : 0.16	1 : 0.21	1 : 0.11
K	1 : 1.4	1 : 1.18	1 : 1.38 1 : 1.06	1 : 0.69	1 : 0.75	1 : 0.64	
Λ	1 : 0.91	1 : 1.02	1 : 1	1 : 0.83		1 : 1	
M	1 : 1.33		1 : 1.68	1 : 0.78	1 : 0.81		1 : 0.55
N	1 : 1.23	1 : 1.22		1 : 0.6 1 : 0.71	1 : 0.78	1 : 0.77	1 : 0.41
Ξ (ξ)			1 : 0.8				

Figure 3.15 (continued)
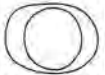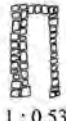
	SP	CP	LCT	StC	StP	MA	AM
O	1 : 1.24	1 : 1.31 1 : 1.4		1 : 0.63		1 : 0.62	1 : 0.52
Π				1 : 0.53 1 : 0.61	1 : 0.74	1 : 0.67	1 : 0.64
P	1 : 0.42	1 : 0.46	1 : 0.49	1 : 0.43		1 : 0.45	1 : 0.38
Σ (C)		1 : 1.24	1 : 1.18	1 : 0.52 1 : 0.49	1 : 0.75	1 : 0.63	1 : 0.35

Figure 3.15 (continued)

	SP	CP	LCT	StC	StP	MA	AM
T	1 : 1.26	1 : 1.45		1 : 0.61 1 : 0.52	1 : 0.88	1 : 0.64	1 : 0.63
Y	1 : 1	1 : 0.75		1 : 0.70	1 : 0.89		1 : 0.55.2
Φ	1 : 0.525					1 : 0.92	1 : 0.75
X					1 : 1.13	1 : 0.85	
Ω (ω)				1 : 1.04	1 : 1.1	1 : 0.85	1 : 0.76

Figure 3.15 (continued)

Notes

1. The proportional systems employed in Late Antique mosaics scripts have not, to the best of my knowledge, attracted scholarly attention. Important studies of mosaic technique in this period include Irina Andreescu-Treadgold, 'The Mosaic Workshop at San Vitale', in Anna Maria Iannucci, Cesare Fiori and Cetty Muscolino (eds), *Mosaici a S. Vitali e altri restauri: Il restauro in situ di mosaici parietali. Ravenna, 1–3 ottobre 1990* (Ravenna: Longo, 1992), pp. 31–41; Terry and Maguire, *Dynamic Splendor*, I, pp. 71–98.

2. I have used photographs from George Forsyth and Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1973); Terry and Maguire, *Dynamic Splendor*.

3. For example, on optical correction in Middle Byzantine mosaics, see Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration: Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium* (1948; 3rd impression, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), pp. 16–35. On p. 32 he makes the following comments about the mosaic images of saints, the Virgin and Christ: 'Seen from below they appear in normal proportions – that is, they appeared so to the Byzantine beholder who, from what we know of his reactions, must have registered the optical facts in a more straightforward way than the modern spectator, who is apt to see more analytically and to correct perspective distortions automatically if he has a chance to measure distances and angles. In Byzantine decorations the painters themselves anticipated the distortions which would appear to the view from below and corrected them by elongating the figures accordingly.'

4. A drawing of the inscription appears in Alexander van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople* (London: Macmillan, 1912; reprinted: London: Variorum, 1974), p. 74. For a translation and interpretation of the encircling inscription, see Jonathan Bardill, 'The Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople and the Monophysite Refugees', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 54 (2000): 1–11.

5. The character representing the combination of O and Y is not included in the following comments.

6. R. M. Harrison, *Excavations at Saraçhane in Istanbul, vol. 1: The Excavations, Structure, Architectural Decoration, Small Finds, Coins, Bones, and Molluscs* (Princeton, NJ and Guildford: Princeton University Press and Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1986), pp. 117–21, figs A, B, pls 91, 93–100; R. M. Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium: The Discovery and Excavation of Juliana Anicia's Palace-Church in Istanbul* (London: Harvey Miller, 1989), pp. 82–3, 86–9, figs 86–9, 95–6, 98–9.

7. On the practice of creating monumental epigraphy in Antiquity, see Greg Woolf, 'Monumental Writing and the Expansion of Roman Society in the Early Empire', *Journal of Roman Studies* 86 (1996): 22–39. On the techniques involved (though little is said about the proportions of the letters themselves), see Giancarlo Susini, *The Roman Stonecutter: An Introduction to Latin Epigraphy*, ed. E. Badian and trans. A. M. Dabrowski (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), pp. 21–38.

8. These are discussed in Robert Hoyland, 'Mount Nebo, Jabal Ramm, and the Status of Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Old Arabic in Late Roman Palestine and Arabia', in Michael Macdonald (ed.), *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language*, Supplement to the

Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 40 (Oxford: Seminar for Arabian Studies and Archaeopress, 2010), pp. 29–45. For the Kayanus church in ʿAyoun Musa, see also Piccirillo, *I mosaici di Giordania*, p. 181, Cat. No. 14.

9. Illustrations and drawings of these can be found in Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba*, foldout illustrations; Piccirillo, *I mosaici di Giordania*, p. 181, Cat. No. 13.

10. On Greek book scripts from Late Antiquity to the tenth century, see Sir Edward Thompson, *An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912; reprinted New York: Burt Franklin, *c.* 1964), pp. 198–217. Also Ruth Barbour, *Greek Literary Hands, A.D. 400–1600* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. xvi–xviii, Cat. Nos 1–8; B. A. van Groningen, *Short Manual of Greek Palaeography* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1955); Guglielmo Cavallo and H. Maehler, *Greek Bookhands of the Early Byzantine Period, A.D. 300–800* (London: University of London, Institute of Classical Studies, 1987). On discussions of proportion in Greek and Latin literature, and their relevance to the design of early Islamic scripts, see George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 95–144.

11. For illustrations of these manuscripts, see Kurt Weitzmann, *Late Antique and Early Byzantine Book Illumination* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977), pp. 17–19, 115–16, fig. xiv, pl. 43; David Buckton (ed.), *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art* (London: British Museum Press, 1994), pp. 76–9, Cat. Nos 68, 71; Michelle Brown (ed.), *In the Beginning: Bibles before the Year 1000* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2006); Evans and Ratliff (eds), *Byzantium and Islam*, pp. 40–1, Cat. No. 21 A, B.

12. On this script, see Cavallo and Maehler, *Greek Bookhands of the Early Byzantine Period*, pp. 4–5.

13. Marlia Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium: The Kaper Koraon and Related Treasures* (Baltimore, MD: Trustees of the Walter's Art Gallery, 1986), pp. 155–8, 175–9, Cat. Nos 33, 37, 38.

14. On these objects, see André Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza-Bobbio)* (Paris: C. Klinksieck, 1958). Other examples of pilgrim vessels with Greek inscriptions can be found in Gary Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection Publications 5 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1982), pp. 22–5, fig. 16 and cover illustration (ceramic ampullae with similar encircling Greek inscriptions are illustrated on figs 6, 9, 12); Evans and Ratliff (eds), *Byzantium and Islam*, pp. 91–2, Cat. No. 59. A similar ampulla in the British Museum has been dated on stylistic grounds to the eleventh century. See Buckton, *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art*, pp. 188–9, Cat. No. 203.

15. For examples of Late Antique ivory panels containing inscriptions, see Buckton, *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art*, pp. 70–4, Cat. Nos 62, 64; Lyn Rodley, *Byzantine Art and Architecture: An Introduction* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 89–91, figs 63–4.

16. For example, see John Mitchell, 'Literacy Displayed: The Uses of Inscriptions at the Monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno in the Early Ninth Century', in Rosamond McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 217–18.

CHAPTER 4

Visual Sources for the Mosaic Script of the Dome of the Rock

FOR THE PURPOSES of the present argument, it is important to note a shared characteristic in the scholarly interpretations of the mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock as they were realised in the time of ʿAbd al-Malik (Chapter 1). These interpretations involve the implicit assumption that the surviving inscriptions in the Umayyad building (and those which have been inferred on the basis of descriptions in primary sources) were planned in advance, and that there would have been no significant disparity between the planned programme and the way in which they were executed in the actual building. The same assumptions have informed the analysis of other aspects of the decorative programme of the building. In this respect, the figure of ʿAbd al-Malik, apparently one of the noted religious scholars of his day, has taken on an additional prominence in the choice of Qurʾanic verses and other content included in the building.

   Before embarking upon a detailed examination of the physical evidence in the mosaic bands, it is important to make some basic, and perhaps rather mundane assertions. First, the inscription bands of the outer and inner faces of the octagonal arcade in the Dome of the Rock are the first extant representations of Arabic script in the medium of mosaic of the Islamic period. To the best of my knowledge, there is only one extant mosaic inscription prior to the birth of Islam that might be written in Arabic characters. This is a funerary dedication, perhaps reading *bi-salām* ('with peace'), written after the name of Saolo (in Greek characters) in a mid-sixth-century floor mosaic in a church in the village of Nebo (Khirbat al-Mukhayyat), Jordan.[1] Second, the inscriptions running around the interior of the Dome of the Rock exceed in scale and sophistication any previous monumental Arabic text of the Islamic era (including the surviving copper plaques from the same building and textual descriptions of lost inscriptions on other structures[2]). Third, these are the first encircling inscriptions to appear upon either the exterior or the interior of an Islamic building. (It should be noted in this context that the planning and execution of a long inscription, which starts and finishes at the same location having girded an architectural space, represents a challenge of greater magnitude than the more standard format of

successive lines of text within a rectangular frame.) Fourth, these mosaic inscriptions were in all likelihood laid by craftsmen whose principal language was not Arabic (if, indeed, they were conversant with the language either through speech or writing).[3] We may assume, however, that they were closely supervised in this endeavour by scribes or masons who were familiar with rendering Arabic script on stone plaques or sheets of papyrus and parchment. Fifth, the inscriptions were commissioned by ʿAbd al-Malik, a ruler who at that time possessed little prior experience as an architectural patron. Furthermore, there is scant evidence in the textual or archaeological record to encourage the idea that the Muslim ruling elites of the previous decades were interested in, or capable of, commissioning monuments that might emulate the finest achievements of the Late Antique world.

It seems probable, therefore, that we should be able to detect some experimental qualities in the mosaics inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock, and perhaps also more-or-less subtle adjustments made to the treatment of the script through the course of the project (refer to the foldout drawings in the following discussion). Generally speaking, the visual qualities of a programme of architectural decoration – aesthetic character and degree of clarity according to the lighting conditions and elevation – are not going to be entirely predictable to the patron/viewer (standing at ground level) until the decoration is in place and the scaffolding has been removed. If we imagine the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock being laid within the building in some kind of sequence, then the completion of a given section of the mosaic, and the removal of the scaffolding, would have allowed viewers at ground level to assess the relative legibility of both the inscription bands and the motifs contained in the panels beneath them. Perceived weaknesses identified in an already completed section of the mosaics could then be remedied by those responsible for the design and application of the subsequent panels of mosaic. It has been suggested that the mosaicists of the Dome of the Rock may have been drawn from the team of skilled artisans responsible for the mosaic decoration of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.[4] If this were the case, then such experienced workmen would probably have been able to predict and/or rectify many potential problems as they worked. Running all the way around the building and in a language never before represented in glass mosaic, the inscription bands of the Dome of the Rock would, however, have represented an unprecedented challenge even for such experienced workers.

The mosaic inscriptions are written in a form of script commonly termed 'Kufic'. The successor to the earlier Hijazi scripts, Kufic was adopted as the standard script for the writing of the Qurʾan and for Umayyad official inscriptions from the time of ʿAbd al-Malik onward.[5] Examples of Kufic inscriptions securely dated to the twenty years of his rule include those in the Dome of the Rock; a substantial

group of gold, silver and copper coins; a single lead seal (possibly a weight; now in the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul); and a series of milestones discovered in Greater Syria.[6] The variants of Kufic script present in the last decade of the seventh and the early part of the eighth century share some formal characteristics with the earlier Hijazi script. Kufic represents an attempt to regularise the proportions of this angular form of written Arabic. Most conspicuous is the straightening of the *alif* and the other tall vertical components (with the exception of the *lām-alif*), though there are also other, more subtle factors. As has been demonstrated by Alain George, Kufic scripts are governed by relatively consistent principles, particularly in the degree of their extension above and below the baseline. George has shown how these proportional systems can be elucidated by the imposition of equally spaced horizontal lines laid parallel to the baseline (what he calls 'interlines'). The height of the letters and the extent to which letters dip below the baseline could be established beforehand through this system of 'interlines'.[7]

The presence of a date on the mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock lends them considerable importance in the study of the evolution of Kufic script. Their value is further magnified by the fact that the script found on the two inscription bands is not entirely uniform in nature (suggesting their experimental nature). The disparity between the outer and the inner inscription bands was first remarked upon by Robert Hamilton in an unpublished lecture, and was discussed in greater detail by Kessler in her article in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1970).[8] Both scholars were intrigued by the diacritical marks (i.e., the dots or oblique signs used to differentiate consonants sharing the same grapheme). These had been largely invisible to Max van Berchem, but could clearly be made out in the photographs produced by Creswell and published in the first edition of volume I.1 of *Early Muslim Architecture* in 1932 (and the revised edition of 1969). Crucially, the diacritics were not applied consistently throughout the text (many letters are left without dots or oblique lines), and all but one of the words carrying diacritics (the word *yattakhidh* from the phrase, 'Praise to God who has not taken a son' found on the northwest side of the outer face[9]) are to be found on the inner face of the octagonal arcade. It is also noteworthy that diacritics are also absent from the south side of the inner face. Lastly, the outer face employs another feature – decorative spacers – that are not found on the inner face.

The inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock are not the first example of the employment of diacritics in the writing of Arabic; they are already present in the earliest dated Islamic papyri (two of which carry the year 22/643–4), and were evidently in use some time earlier.[10] For example, diacritics appear earlier on a charred piece of wood found at a church in Petra (inscribed with a word that reads either *nāyif* or *nāyiq*) that has been dated by its archaeological context between
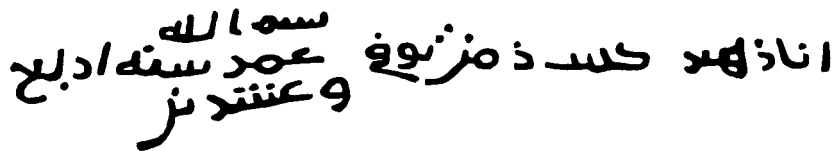
Figure 4.1 *(a) Inscription by Zuhayr, dated 24/644. Qaʿ al-Muʿtadil, near al-Hijr, Saudi Arabia. Photograph courtesy of ʿAli al-Ghabban. (b) Sketch of the inscription. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

the second quarter of the sixth and the early seventh century.[11] Diacritical marks make their first appearance on a monumental inscription in 24/644, the famous passage inscribed on a rock face near to al-Hijr by one Zuhayr to record the 'death of ʿUmar' (i.e., Caliph ʿUmar, r. 634–44) (Figure 4.1).[12] They are present in the inscription (dated 58/677–8) from Taʾif commemorating the construction of a dam by Caliph Muʿawiya (Figure 4.2), and some later graffiti and milestones dating to the seventh century.[13] Dots and dashes are also recorded as diacritical marks on pages of Qurʾans written in Hijazi script (and in 'transitional' scripts between Hijazi and fully developed Kufic).[14] It is not yet clear why these early examples employ diacritics to distinguish some graphemes and not others within a single passage of text. In the case of the fragmentary milestone from Bab al-Wad, diacritics appear on only one word, *thamaniya*, or 'eighth' (actually given as '*tamaniya*' because of the two dashes above the first grapheme of the word). This addition suggests the need to clarify the most important information on the slab (i.e., the number of miles (*mīl*) being recorded).[15]

Hamilton and Kessler reached similar conclusions regarding the mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock. They decided that the more extensive employment of diacritics on the inner face reflected a desire for greater legibility and the elimination of potential ambiguities in the reading of key passages.[16] It seems reasonable to follow this logic; those sections of text that must have been utterly familiar to Muslim readers – such as the *basmala* and *shahāda* – hardly needed the addition of diacritics. By contrast, the extended Qurʾanic

قد ا السد لعبد الله معويه

اما الموم بنيه عبد الله رطهر

اكر ,الله لسيه ثمر ودمسبرا

للهما عمر لعبد الله معونه ا

مد المومسر و ثبثه و انصده و منجرا

[امدا] لمومنبر به حبب عمرو برحابـ

Figure 4.2 *(a) Transcription of the graffito inscription on a dam near Ṭaʾif, Saudi Arabia (58/677–8). After: Miles, 'Early Islamic Inscriptions' (1948). (b) Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

quotations on the inner face are more generously furnished with diacritics because of the greater possibility of ambiguous readings of individual words or whole clauses. As a result they saw the differences between the treatment of the Arabic of the outer and the inner faces in a teleological light; the designers simply adjusting the mode of representation as a natural corollary of the more challenging content of the verses contained on the inner face. A significant problem is presented by the inclusion of diacritics for Q 33:56 on the south and southeast sides of the inner face. The same passage appears the outer face (southwest and west), but without any diacritics. Why then would it have been necessary to add them for the purposes of clarity if they were not deemed necessary on the outer face?

The presence or absence of diacritics is, however, only one aspect of the variability in the treatment of Arabic script on the two inscription bands. Neither are these differences divided simply between the outer and the inner faces. Alain George has recently proposed three basic divisions in the treatment of the Arabic script within the two mosaic bands. The first is that employed for the outer inscription band (his 'part A': Figure 4.3); the second appears on the south and southeast sides of the inner face ('part B': Figure 4.4); and the third occupies the remainder of the inner face ('part C': Figure 4.5).[17] For part A he notes a consistent treatment of the letters *ṣād / ḍād* and the final *hāʾ / tāʾ marbūṭa*, which is dictated by the system of interlines (the two horizontal strokes and the void between each taking up one interline and the top of the vertical stroke being four interlines high). In parts B and C the vertical stroke is made shorter, and in C the whole letter is compressed to fit within three interlines. The medial stroke of the letters *bāʾ, tāʾ* and *thāʾ* is also unusually high in A (three or four interlines = ten–twelve cubes). In B and C, this is reduced to two or three interlines (= five or six cubes). The script in B and C

Figure 4.3 *'Script A', outer face, northwest side. Photograph: Bernard O'Kane.*

Figure 4.4 *'Script B', inner face, south side. Photograph courtesy of Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom.*

Figure 4.5 *'Script C', inner face, northeast side. Photograph: Bernard O'Kane.*

adheres less closely to the interline system, creating, in George's judgement, a 'more accomplished script'.[18] He identifies the crucial role played by the mosaic cube as a basic unit dictating the proportions of individual letters: in A the letters remain five cubes thick at all times (save for the hook of the initial *ʿayn* and the final section of the tails of some letters like the *alif maqṣūra*). The letter forms in part B fluctuate between four and five cubes thick, and in C between three and four cubes. There are also differences in the upper and lower borders employed to frame the inscription bands of the outer and inner faces. In order to account for these numerous divergences, George offers the following reconstruction of the working practices:

> The differences of execution suggest that two or three teams of mosaicists – who could have been masters and pupils from the same atelier – were at work on this project. Having each been assigned a different part of the text, they responded to the same requirements, based on the same template, in slightly different ways.[19]

This is a common-sense solution that accords well with other aspects of the mosaic programme. George makes a general observation that the decoration is 'relatively crude on the outer side and more refined on the inner side'.[20] Oleg Grabar reports discrepancies in the mosaics of the soffits of the octagonal arcade; he notices that the laying of mosaic cubes on one side of a given soffit was often more fluently achieved than the other. From this point he inferred that a master mosaicist had completed one side, leaving an assistant to copy the design on the other.[21] These features correlate with evidence found in other Late Antique mosaics; it appears to have been common practice to divide an area between two groups of artisans, each working with the materials and skills available to them.[22]

In her detailed study of the mosaic decoration of the Dome of the Rock, Marguerite van Berchem detected considerable variation in the quality of the mosaic work. She found differences in the hues of blue, green and other colours of glass as well as in the sizes of the mosaic cubes themselves.[23] She was the first to notice the practice of laying some gold cubes at a 30° incline from vertical (already known in sixth-century decorative programmes, including Hagia Eirene in Istanbul and the Euphrasian Basilica in Poreč) in order to catch the light more effectively. Where the 30° incline is apparently employed consistently upon the outer face; the inner face introduces a further refinement in which the gold cubes of the background are laid at a different angle to those that appear within the plant forms or representations of jewellery and regalia.[24] She was unable to find any parallel for this subtle distinction in the laying of gold cubes in a single design. In the final section of her analysis in the revised edition of *Early Muslim Architecture* (1969) she reasons that the rapidity of

the building work necessitated the recruitment of craftsmen from neighbouring regions.[25] She reaches a similar conclusion to George:

> What is certain is that groups of mosaicists of unequal talent and of different formation worked at this vast decoration, succeeding, nevertheless, in imparting thereto a remarkably harmonious and uniform character considering its vast dimensions, and in adapting it in so perfect a manner to the architectural structure.[26]

Examination with a magnifying lens of the most detailed published photographs by Creswell and Nuseibeh of the mosaics allows one to establish further differences in scripts A, B and C of the mosaic band. The extent of the differences is best seen in a comparison of sections of the scripts A and C (Figures 4.6 and 4.7). First, the baseline of the letters in A starts six blue cubes above the lower framing band and in C it is seven cubes. Second, in A the tops of the long vertical strokes are separated from the upper framing band by one blue cube, while in C they abut the upper framing band. Third, in C there is general tendency to make the horizontal strokes three cubes thick and the verticals four cubes (A employs five cubes for both). Fourth, the teeth of the *sīn* / *shīn* rise seven cubes from the horizontal in A and only four cubes in C. Fifth, the unjoined *alif* dips below the baseline in A and rests on the baseline in C. Sixth, in A the *wāw* has a more rounded closed section and has a tail that dips below the baseline at an oblique angle. In C, the *wāw* adopts a more triangular closed section with a tail running parallel to the baseline. Seventh, in A the hook of the initial *ʿayn* / *ghayn* is three cubes thick where it meets the horizontal stroke, while in C it is two cubes thick. Eighth, there is a tendency for the *hāʾ* / *tāʾ marbūṭa* in C to be shorter than the *ṣād* / *ḍād*, where in A they are generally the same in their horizontal extension.

As noted by George, the letter forms of part B share characteristics of both those in parts A and C. In common with A, the letters of B are generally the same thickness in both the horizontal and vertical strokes (i.e., four or five cubes). In common with C, the tall vertical strokes abut the upper framing band. Furthermore, the *wāw* in B adopts the rather flatter profile of C with a triangular closed section and a tail that dips less beneath the baseline than the *wāw*s of A.

Returning to part A, it is apparent that the decision to maintain a constant thickness of five cubes for the horizontal and vertical strokes (as well as the gaps between the two horizontal strokes in the *ṣād* / *ḍād* and the final *hāʾ* / *tāʾ marbūṭa*) had implications for the visual qualities of the inscription. Two letter forms are worthy of further attention. The *wāw* is a particularly prominent letter in the inscription band of the outer face due partly to the decision to make the enclosed section of the upper part of the letter five blue cubes in height (to match the height of the space usually allocated
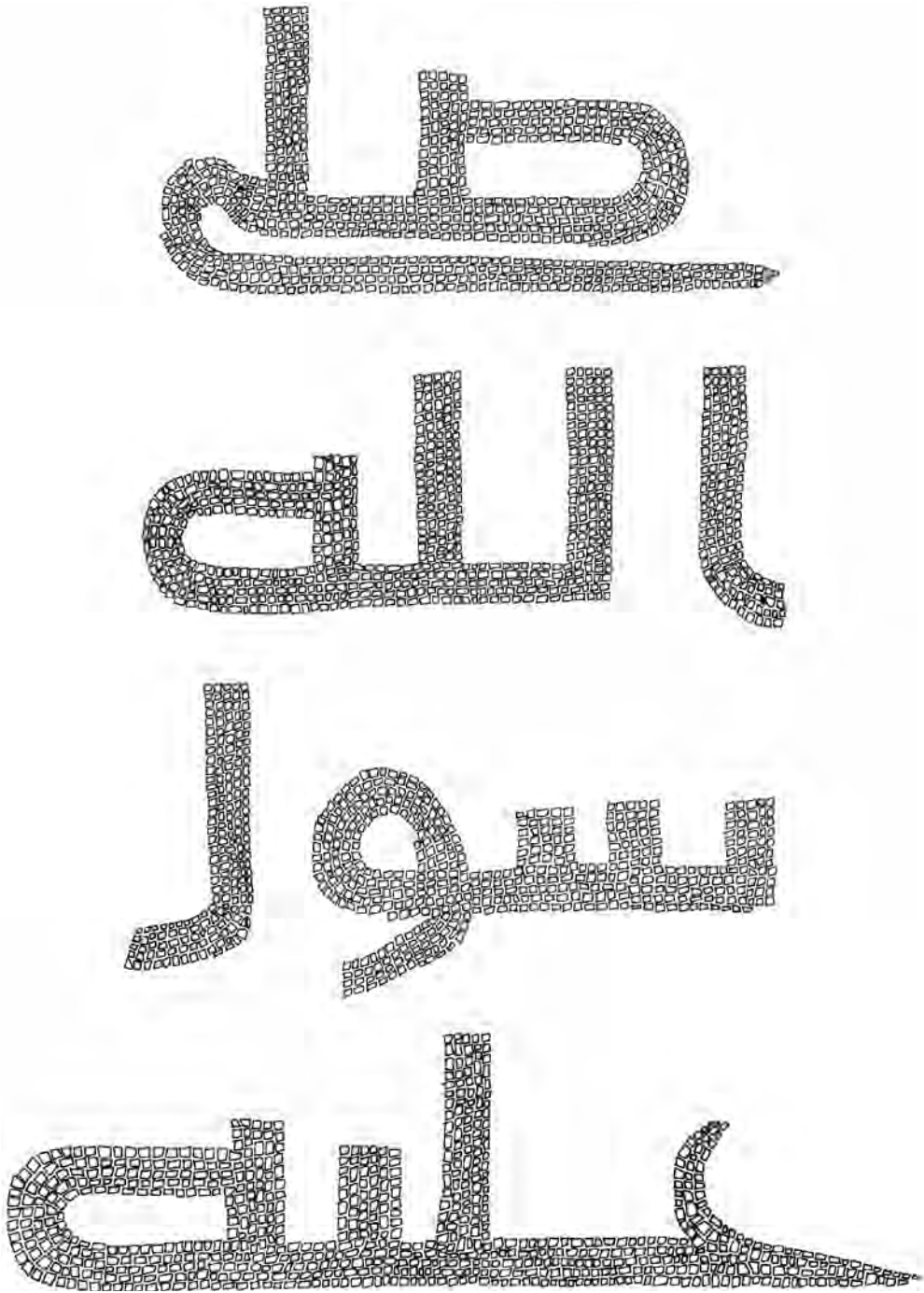
Figure 4.6 *Drawings of words, and sections of words written in 'script A', outer face. Drawings: Genevieve Neelin.*
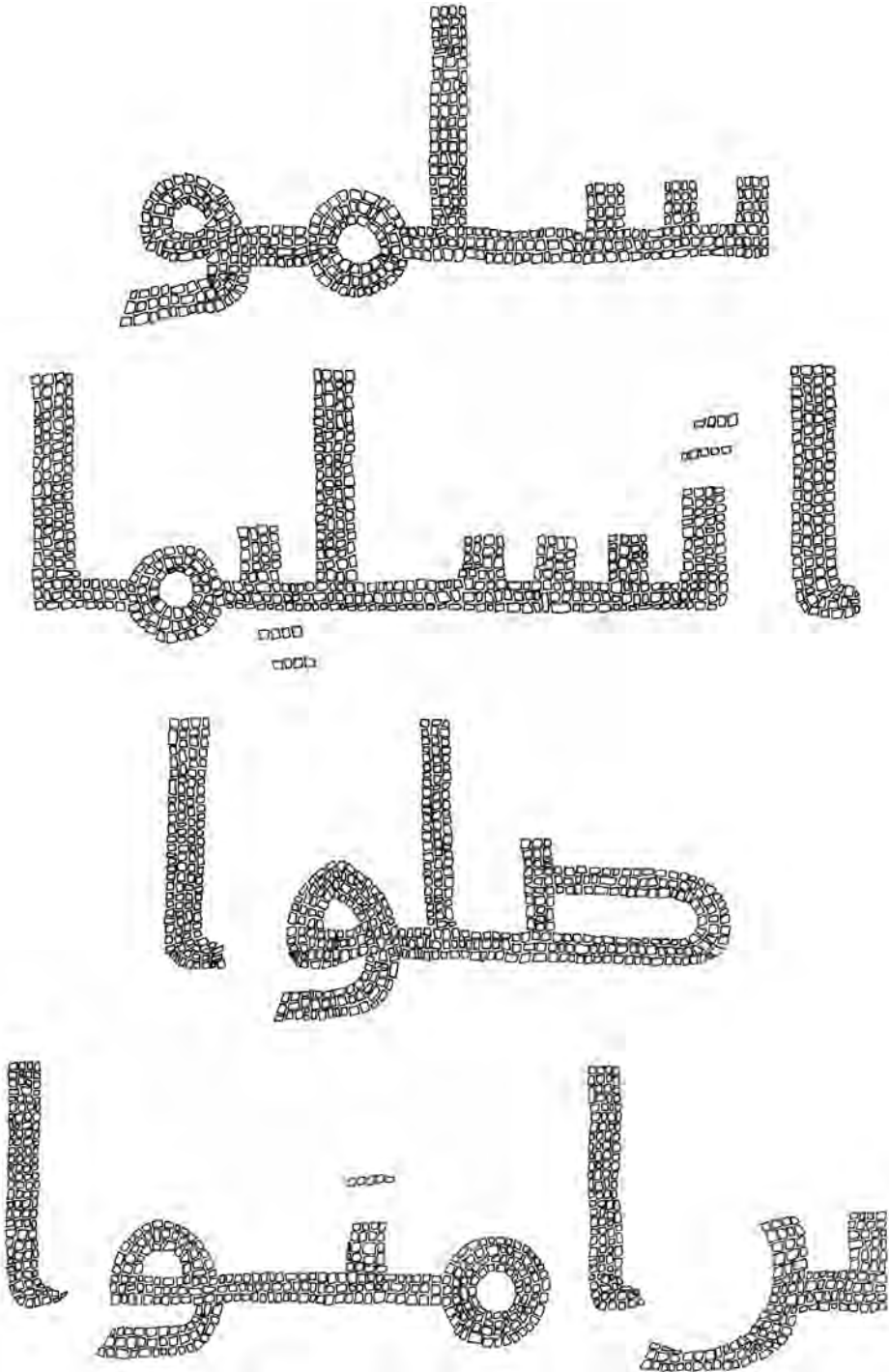
Figure 4.7 *Drawings of words, and sections of words written in 'script C', inner face. Drawings: Genevieve Neelin.*
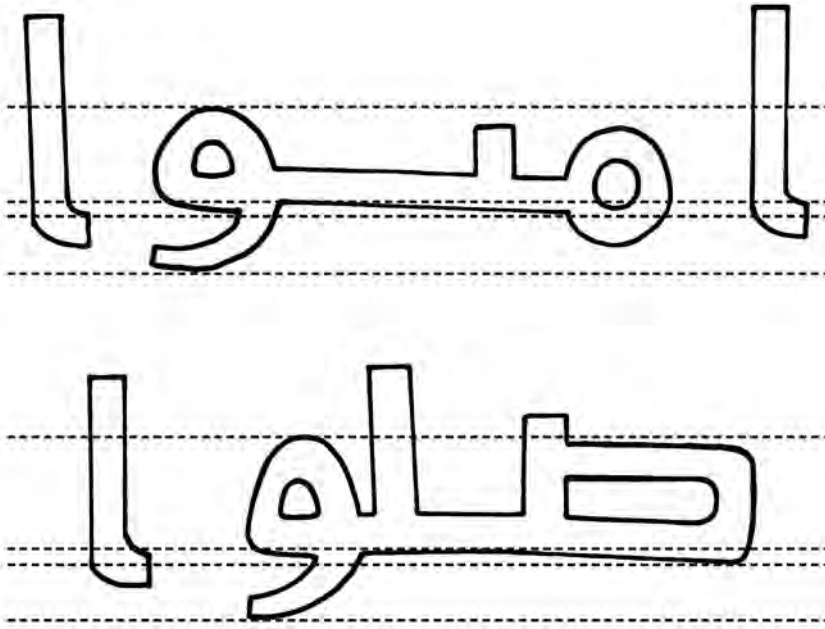
Figure 4.8 *Two words from the west side of the outer face in which the baseline is tilted to accommodate the shape of the* wāw. *Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

between the two horizontal strokes of the terminal *hāʾ* and four or five cubes wide at its base. The fact that the lower margin of part A is only six cubes in height makes the relatively long, diagonal tail of the *wāw* seem uncomfortably large, even touching the lower framing band in some examples. In order to avoid this problem, two words on the west side of the outer face adopt the awkward solution of tilting the horizontal stroke joining the medial *nūn* to the *wāw* from the baseline by a distance of two cubes (Figure 4.8). This adjustment made greater room for the tail of the *wāw*. In both B and C we encounter an attempt to reduce the scale of the *wāw*. First, the tail is tucked under the enclosed section and runs more or less parallel to the baseline. Second, the upper part is reduced in size and the rather rounded shape of part A is replaced by a triangular profile. The *wāw* in part C differs radically from those of part A: the lowest point of the tail of the former is either two or three cubes distant from the lower framing band and the enclosed section of the letter is formed of somewhere between five and nine blue cubes, arranged with three or four at the base and a second, shorter row of cubes above (and occasionally a third line above that). This latter feature may be compared with the typical arrangement in part A where the enclosed area of the *wāw* comprises five horizontal rows of blue cubes, and a total number of about fifteen cubes.
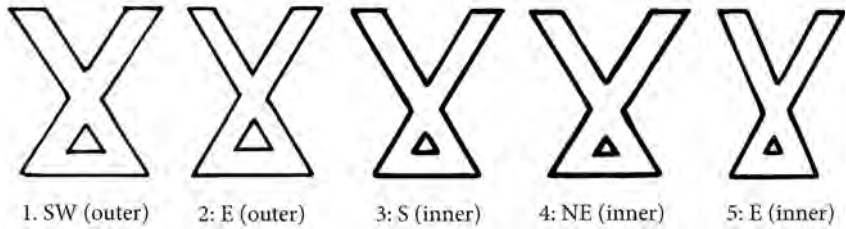
Figure 4.9 *Treatment of the* lām-alif *in scripts A (1, 2), B (3) and C (4, 5). Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

Another problematic feature of part A is the *lām-alif*: the thickness of the strokes (five cubes throughout) makes the lower triangle notably wide and tall in relation to the two diagonal strokes of the upper section. In parts B and C, the enclosed section is reduced in size, while the narrower strokes of the *lām-alif* (three cubes both for the horizontal and the diagonal strokes) create a much more elegant effect (Figure 4.9).

The extent of the variations between the different parts (A, B and C) of the mosaic inscriptions bands is somewhat surprising. Even in relatively small photographs it is possible to discern that the script in parts A and C does not conform to the same proportional systems. The most important distinctions are those observed by George: first, the shift from a constant thickness for the horizontal and vertical lines in A to a more subtly modulated system in C; and the loosening of the reliance upon the interline divisions in C, resulting in a slight flattening of the *wāw*, *ṣād / ḍād* and the final *hāʾ / tāʾ marbūṭa*. Should we accept, however, George's explanation that the evident variations were the result of teams of mosaicists interpreting their brief in different ways? Another scenario is suggested by a consideration of the types of writing that may have informed the designers of the inscriptions.

We do not know how the inscriptions were initially designed or how the calligraphers interacted with the mosaicists. The only evidence we possess is the mosaics themselves and the observations left by those who were able to study them at close hand. The fact that the green/blue cubes follow the profiles of the golden cubes strongly suggests that the letters were laid into the band prior to the background.[27] Marguerite van Berchem also observes that the underdrawing of the gold and silver cubes is red, while dark grey was utilised for those areas to be covered with green or blue cubes.[28] George hypothesises that the interline grid could have been marked onto the plaster and the letter forms drawn in with pigment as a guide to the mosaicists. Just like painters of 'true' fresco, the mosaicist then has a limited time period (usually about 6–8 hours) in which to embed the mosaic cubes into the freshly laid plaster. Any remaining plaster would have to be cut away prior to the next day's work.

This manner of working would presumably necessitate a master plan for the inscription band covering, at least the length of one of the eight sides, if not the entire circuit. This could have been written in relatively small characters and then scaled up using the interline system. Intriguingly, the dimension of the inscription band (about 0.3 m) correlates closely with the standard height of a papyrus roll in Antiquity (this generally ranged from 0.24 m to 0.32 m).[29] It can only be a matter of speculation, but perhaps the inscriptions were mapped out full size on a series of papyrus rolls (the standard length was twenty pasted sheets, or *c*. 3.5 m, though it is known that these could be joined to make longer rolls). This method would certainly have the advantage of accuracy as the letter forms could be pricked directly on to the wet plaster. Whether or not papyrus was used, however, it seems unlikely that the notarial scripts commonly employed on early papyri were a source for the monumental scripts (A, B and C) utilised on the inscription bands of the Dome of the Rock.[30]

The constant thickness of the letter strokes and the specific forms taken by the *wāw* and *lām-alif* are significant features of the script in part A. Surveying the dated examples of Arabic epigraphy from the mid-seventh century to the end of the rule of ʿAbd al-Malik, one encounters examples in which the line thickness of the letters remains constant.[31] These comprise gold and silver coins of the late 680s and 690s; the lead seal (or possibly weight) of ʿAbd al-Malik bearing the name of the province of Filastin; two graffiti from Taʾif (58/678) and Hafnat al-Abyad near Karbalaʾ in Iraq (64/683–4); a tombstone in the name of ʿAbassa bint Jurayj dated 71/691; and the intaglio inscriptions on the milestones and dedicatory stone plaques from the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik.[32] The inscriptions hammered in *repoussé* onto the copper plaques on the gateways of the Dome of the Rock are not dated, but may belong to this phase (Figures 2.8 and 2.9, above). Of these, the coins are perhaps the least useful due to the diminutive scale of the inscriptions, although it is worth noting the common occurrence of the rounded form of the closed section of the *wāw*, the initial *alif* that sometimes dips slightly below the baseline; and the relative width of the lower triangle of the *lām-alif*. In this last combination of letters the die-cutter often attempted to show the empty space that should exist within the lines of the lower triangle.[33] The same features can also be seen well on ʿAbd al-Malik's seal because of the slightly larger scale of the encircling text on the reverse (Figure 4.10). In this example the lower triangle of the *lām-alif* is wide at the base, clearly containing an open space, and is almost equal in height to the two diagonal strokes above. Also noteworthy are the rounded *wāw* (though here the entire letter is located above the baseline) and the height of the terminal *hāʾ*. Finally, there is a spacer, looking like a simplified drawing of a tree, separating the beginning and the end of this inscription band.[34]

Figure 4.10 *Reverse of a lead seal or weight made for the province of Filastin, during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik. Archaeological Museum, Istanbul. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

Among the Arabic graffiti the inscription recording the construction of a dam near Taʾif by Caliph Muʿawiya is perhaps the first to bring a degree of standardisation to the letter forms (Figure 4.2). Among the most notable characteristics in the present context are the rounded upper part and long, often diagonal, tail of the *wāw* and the relative height of the *ṣad* / *ḍād* and the terminal *hāʾ*. Unlike the inscriptions of part A in the Dome of the Rock, however, the 58/677–8 graffito employs extensive diacritical marks.[35] The graffito of Hafnat al-Abyad near Karbalaʾ (Figure 4.11) exhibits more points of comparison with the script of part A.[36] In addition to its rather rectangular character and absence of diacritics, it is also worth noting the shapes of letters such as the *wāw*, *rāʾ*, *mīm*, *sīn* / *shīn* and the terminal *yāʾ* / *alif maqṣūra*. The *lām-alif* is particularly wide at the base (the same width as the diagonal strokes) and the lower triangle occupies half of the total height. Finally, the inscription also employs a simple spacer, in the form of a rhomboid, to separate two sections (praises to God and the request for forgiveness by the writer of the inscription). The gravestone of ʿAbassa bint Jurayj (71/691) employs a *lām-alif* that is much taller and narrower, and other letter forms also suggest a greater affinity with the script of part C in the Dome of the Rock

Figure 4.11 *Drawing of the graffito of Hafnat al-Abyad near Karbala', dated 64/683–4. After: Al-Sanduq, 'Ḥajar Ḥafnat al-Abyadh' (1955). Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

(for instance, note that the *alif* starts on the baseline and not below it). That said, there are similarities to part A in the round profile of the *wāw*, and the height of the *ṣad* / *ḍād* and the terminal *hā'* (Figure 4.12).

The inscription recording the levelling of a pass to create a road at 'Aqabat al-Fiq in the Golan has lost part of the lower section, though it is most probable that it dates to 73/692–3 (Figure 4.13).[37] Particularly notable are the lack of diacritics, the rounded *wāw* with a diagonal tail, the shape of the terminal *yā'*/ *alif maqṣūra* and the broad-based *lām-alif*. In general, the closed letter forms are, like those of part A, both rounded in profile and relatively tall. The milestone from the same site shares many of these characteristics. The undated milestone from Bab al-Wad adopts a somewhat different script, though again the *wāw* is very rounded and the other closed letter forms are all relatively tall (Figure 4.14). In all these inscriptions the *alif* begins on or slightly above the baseline (rather than below, as is seen in the script of part A). The script of the north and east door plaques of the Dome of the Rock share some features with part A of the mosaic band, such as the rounded upper section of the *wāw* and the height of the teeth of the *sīn* / *shīn* and medial *bā'*. The

Figure 4.12 *Gravestone of ʿAbassa bint Jurayj (71/691). Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo. After: El-Hawari, 'The Second Oldest Islamic Monument' (1932). Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

tail of the *wāw* (generally curving closely beneath the upper section rather than descending as a diagonal line) and the more attenuated profile of the *lām-alif* suggest a greater affinity to the script of part C, however. The height and visual prominence of the initial *ʿayn* and initial *hāʾ* are unlike all three script styles of the mosaic band, and perhaps reflect technical aspects of forming these letters through the process of hammering sheet metal.

If we turn to the script employed in part C of the (inner face on all sides except the south and most of the southeast) it becomes apparent that there was a deliberate decision to adopt a new aesthetic.[38] The vertical strokes are often subtly distinguished from the horizontals (four cubes thick for the former and three cubes for the latter, although there are exceptions to this general rule[39]). The use of thin strokes (usually three cubes thick both in the horizontal and the diagonal) in the *lām-alif* allows the mosaicists to reduce the width and height of the lower triangle and to emphasise the two upper diagonals. There is a flattening of the *ṣād* / *ḍād* and terminal *hāʾ* / *tāʾ marbūṭa* with fewer cubes employed for the empty spaces inside these letters. The closed section of the *wāw* is less prominent and takes on a slightly triangular character (containing significantly
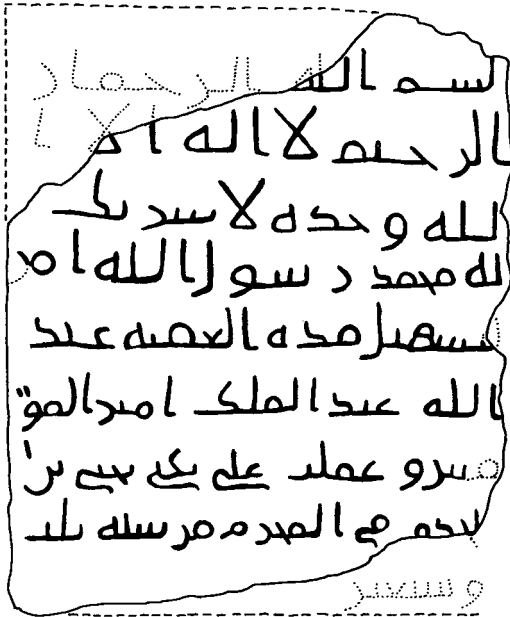
Figure 4.13 *Drawing of a milestone from ʿAqabat al-Fiq, near the Sea of Galilee. After: Sharon, 'An Arabic Inscription from the Time of the Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik' (1966). Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*
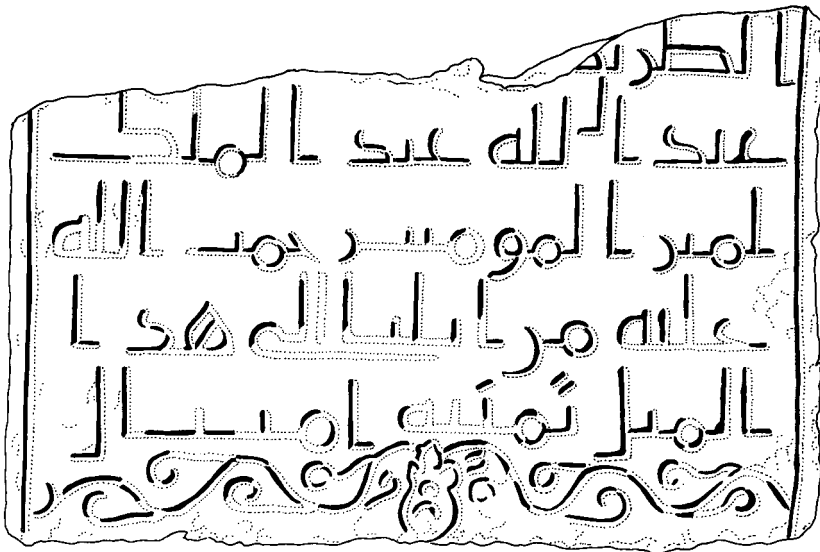
Figure 4.14 *Undated milestone from Bab al-Wad, on the road from Jerusalem to Ramla. Photograph: Département des Antiquités orientales, Musée du Louvre. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

fewer cubes in the empty space), while the tail runs horizontally just beneath the baseline. By contrast, the tail of the *nūn* possesses an elegant curved shape that reaches as far as the lower framing band. Many of these features suggest a detailed familiarity with the writing of Arabic in contemporary Qur'anic manuscripts (see also Chapter 5). The slight differentiation of the width of the horizontal and vertical strokes is a natural result of writing with an obliquely cut reed pen and is commonly encountered in both Hijazi and early Kufic Qur'an pages. Likewise, the triangular form of the closed section of the *wāw* or the initial *hā'* results from the number and direction of the pen strokes required to complete these letter forms. It is also common for the tail of the *nūn* to sweep lower than the tails of the *wāw* or *yā'*. Another significant feature of the early Kufic manuscript pages is the tendency to allow the bottom of the initial *alif* to sit on the baseline rather than dipping slightly below it.[40]

Allowing for the fact that the comments in the previous paragraphs do not represent a comprehensive survey, can any preliminary conclusions be drawn from the evidence? The considerable differences between the scripts employed in parts A and C (with B as a 'transitional' state between the two) appear to derive in large part from the prototypes employed in each case. Lacking any prior examples of Arabic script reproduced in mosaic, the designers of the inscriptions of part A (the outer band) probably relied upon existing conventions for the writing of monumental Arabic, particularly intaglio carving onto stone and, if the copper plaques predate the mosaic inscriptions, hammered metal. This reliance upon a monumental mode meant that the vertical and horizontal strokes maintained a consistent thickness, closed shapes are relatively tall and round, and the *lām-alif* is somewhat squat in proportion. Part C represents a radical innovation: the decision to adopt the orthographic conventions of a script already being employed for the writing of Arabic in Qur'anic manuscripts. Elements of this manuscript source remain in specific letter forms and the differentiation in the thickness of the horizontal and vertical strokes. It is almost as if a giant reed pen had been employed to write the Arabic characters of part C: the miniature epigraphic mode of the late seventh century has for the first time been transformed into the monumental context of architectural inscriptions (the similarities with book scripts are explored at greater length in the final section of Chapter 5).

These changes in the script across the mosaic inscription band carry with them the implication of a chronological sequence. While it is still possible to maintain that the entire inscription was under way at the same time but in the hands of three separate workshops, one can entertain an alternative scenario. First, the outer band was completed and the scaffolding removed. Second, those responsible for planning the ornamentation of the building (and perhaps also the

patron) were able to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of the outer inscription band and the mosaic panels below it. On the basis of the judgements formed during this assessment, adjustments were made to the design of the inner inscription band. Such a sequence does not necessarily preclude the notion that the entire inscriptional programme, as envisaged by its designers, found its way unchanged onto the walls of the interior of the Dome of the Rock. It becomes more difficult to support this idea in an unquestioning manner, however.

Another possible piece of evidence for the sequential creation of the two inscription bands is provided by the distribution of letters across the sides of the outer and inner faces of the octagonal arcade. The following calculations are based upon counting the individual graphemes, with each assigned the same value. This calculation is made possible by the fact there is relatively limited evidence for the stretching of the ligatures and of selected letter forms (though these practices become commonplace in later periods). The count does not take account of variant widths of letters and follows the assumption that there is a fairly regular distribution of 'wide' graphemes (such as *sīn* / *shīn*) and 'narrow' graphemes (medial *bā'* / *tā'* / *thā'* / *nūn* / *yā'*, initial *alif*, and so on). For the same reason no account is taken of the spaces between individual words. The spacers of the outer band are noted separately. Based on these methods one arrives at the following count of letters per side on the outer band (assuming that the name of 'Abd al-Malik replaced that of Imam al-Ma'mun): S = 112 (+ one spacer); SW = 81; W = 74 (+ one spacer); NW = 74; N = 88 (+ one spacer); NE = 84 (+ one spacer); E = 86 (+ one spacer); SE = 79 (+ one spacer). This creates a total of 678 letters and six spacers. The inner band is more difficult to count because of the presence of the projecting piers. Following Kessler's method of calculating the start and end point of each side of the inner face of the octagonal arcade (see Chapter 2), the count of letters on the inner face is as follows: S = 98; SE = 112; E = 111; NE = 94; N = 92; NW = 101; W = 118; SW = 117. This creates a total of 843 characters on the inner face.

If we relate these figures to the actual length of the inscription it becomes apparent that the designers were making use of relatively few letters per metre of the inscription band: an average of 5.94 letters per metre across the entire *c.* 254 m with an average of 5.39 letters per metre (excluding the spacers) on the outer and 6.57 letters per metre on the inner face. Reviewing the distribution across each side of the octagonal arcade, it is apparent that the greatest disparity exists between the south side (7.2 letters per metre) of the outer face and the remainder of the sides on the outer face (consistently around 5 words per metre). Indeed, the south side of the outer face has the greatest concentration of characters on the entire mosaic inscription band, outer and inner faces. Intriguingly,

the south side of the inner face contains one of the shorter passages of text on the inner face (98 characters), but is flanked on both sides (southeast, east, west and southwest) by the most densely packed sections of text.

One explanation for the curious concentration of text on the south side of the outer face is that this was dictated by the message it was to convey. This message was important enough that it had to be placed in its entirety on one side. Necıpoğlu has noted that this is both the beginning of the outer inscription band and the first part that would confront a viewer entering by the south gate.[41] (In this reading the south is given preference because it faces the *qibla*, though one could argue that the north gate would be more important for those entering because they would be facing south.[42]) The south side inscription on the outer face contains Q 112 framed on either side by the *basmala* and extended *shahāda*. Thus, the viewer is acquainted in abbreviated form with the basic tenets of the faith of Islam: the oneness and omnipotence of God and the prophethood of Muhammad. That the Umayyad elite deemed this basic combination of the texts successful is indicated by their inclusion on the first epigraphic dinar issued in 77/696–7 (see Chapters 7 and 8). The relative shortness of the text on the south side of the inner face, and the fact that it echoes the message (if not the precise content) of the corresponding side on the outer face, is perhaps a reflection of the fact that this is one of the most difficult to read: where the south gate provides natural illumination for the south side of the outer face (of all four gateways, this one will let in the most natural light during the day), the viewer looking at the south side of the inner face has to contend both with the lack of fenestration in the inner ambulatory and the visual contrast caused by the daylight from the south gate.

There are two problems with the interpretation of the south side of the outer face offered in the previous paragraph. First, there is abundant evidence elsewhere on the outer face that the mosaicists were not overly concerned about restricting phrases or individual words from running around the corner between two sides. Two 'broken' words are of particular consequence: 'Allāh' on the junction of the northwest and north sides and the name of patron on the junction of the east and southeast sides. Elsewhere, Q 17:111 starts on the west and continues on the northwest side. This same pattern of allowing Qur'anic passages to run around the different faces of the octagonal arcade is also commonplace on the inner face. Second, the text of south side of the inner face conveys a very similar message through the *basmala*, *shahāda* and a combination ('conflation') of Q 64:1 and 57:2 (already employed on the northeast side of the outer face). This choice of Qur'anic material allowed the assertions concerning Islam – the oneness and omnipotence of God and the prophethood of Muhammad – to remain consistent with the opening section of the

outer face, but also represented an economy of characters (98 = 6.17 letters per metre), thus avoiding a congested visual effect.

It is possible to make some general points about the character of the scripts and the distribution of graphemes on the two faces of the octagonal arcade. First, the script of the outer band (part A) adopts the existing conventions for Arabic monumental inscriptions (partially developed during the rule of Muʿawiya and reaching a more definitive form in the late 680s and early 690s) and transposes them into the medium of mosaic. Part B is a transitional form of script, involving modifications of part A and sharing some characteristics with part C. The designers responsible for part C took the bold step of adopting the orthographic conventions of a script originating in Qurʾanic manuscripts. The highly uneven distribution of graphemes, particularly across the eight sides of the outer face, is significant and cannot be explained merely in terms of the content of the text. Rather, it should be seen as further evidence for the experimental nature of this long inscription band. All these features suggest that the inscriptions were placed into the building in sequence rather than having been conceived and laid in one phase. Further evidence for this is presented in the following chapter.

Notes

1. Robert Schick, 'Inscribed Objects', in Helen Evans and Brandie Ratliff (eds), *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th–9th Century* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press and Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), p. 101, Cat. No. 67. Schick discusses the controversy over whether the left-hand inscription is written in 'Old Arabic' or Christian Palestinian Aramaic (in which case, a reading of 'give repose [and] give salvation' is appropriate). For a detailed argument in favour of Aramaic, see Hoyland, 'Mount Nebo, Jabal Ramm and the Status of Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Old Arabic'. The mosaic is also illustrated on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/nebo.html, last accessed 20 December 2014.
2. For a list of early inscriptions, including those that are only known in textual sources, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 687–95.
3. On this topic Oleg Grabar observes: 'Furthermore, it is still open to question whether the mosaicists of the Dome of the Rock knew Arabic and designed the inscription directly on the wall or copied a prepared model, probably painted or inked on some construction material like wood.' See *The Shape of the Holy*, p. 62.
4. For example, Dodd, 'Image of the Word', pp. 48–54.
5. On these scripts, see Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 101–21 (see also pp. 77–100 on early developments in the writing of Arabic); George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 31–4, 55–93; Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran*, *passim*; Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, *passim*.
6. Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, revd and enlarged edn

(New Haven, NJ and London: Yale University Press, 1987), pls 16–21; Steve Album and Tony Goodwin, *The Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period*, Sylloge of Islamic coins in the Ashmolean 1 (London: Ashmolean Museum and Spink, 2002); George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 60–74. These inscribed objects are also illustrated on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness. org/History/Islam/Inscriptions, last accessed 12 December 2014.

7. Alain George, 'The Geometry of the Qur'an of Amajur: A Preliminary Study of Proportion in Early Islamic Calligraphy', *Muqarnas* 20 (2003): 1–15; George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 56–60.

8. Kessler, ''Abd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock', pp. 11–12. See also Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, p. 62.

9. Grabar claims that another word (*taqabilu* [*sic.*] on the southeast side) has diacritics. I have been unable to verify this claim on the basis of close examination of photographic evidence. The word should be read as *yaqbilu*. See Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, p. 58.

10. Jones, 'The Dotting of a Script and the Dating of an Era', pp. 95–103.

11. 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/charc.html, last accessed 20 December 2014.

12. On this inscription, see 'Ali al-Ghabban, 'The Zuhayr Inscription, the Oldest Islamic Inscription (24/644–45). The Rise of Islamic Script and the Nature of the Early Islamic State' (trans. Robert Hoyland), *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19 (2008): 210–37 (this publication was issued in book form by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, Riyadh, in 1432/2010); 'Ali al-Ghabban, 'The Evolution of Arabic Script in the Period of the Prophet Muhammad and Orthodox Caliphs in the Light of New Inscriptions Discovered in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia', in Michael Macdonald (ed.), *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language*, Supplement to the Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 40 (Oxford: Seminar for Arabian Studies and Archaeopress, 2010), pp. 98–9, fig. 10; Hoyland, 'New Documentary Texts', p. 404.

13. On the Ta'if dam, see George Miles, 'Early Islamic Inscriptions near Ṭā'if in the Ḥijāz', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 7(4) (1948): 236–42 (the inscription on the dam is dealt with on pp. 236–41). It is also discussed in Johns, 'Archaeology and the History of Early Islam', pp. 418–25. For illustrations and the transcription of the text, see the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/muwinsc1.html, last accessed 20 December 2014.

14. Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran*, pp. 51–75. Déroche has designated a series of scripts to the Umayyad period. Most relevant in the context of the present study is his 'Omeyyade I', or 'O I', On the 'O I' script manuscripts, see his, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads*, pp. 75–105.

15. On this milestone, see George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 68–9, fig. 54. For other milestones from the rule of 'Abd al-Malik, see *ibid.*, pp. 69–71, figs 45–6; Moshe Sharon, 'An Arabic Inscription from the Time of the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 29 (1966): 367–72; Sheila Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 41–2, fig. 3.16; Blair, 'What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?', pp. 67–8, fig. 8.

16. Kessler, ''Abd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock', pp. 10–12.

17. George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 60–8.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 64–5.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
21. Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, p. 100.
22. Terry and Maguire, *Dynamic Splendor*, pp. 82–4. The authors acknowledge that this interpretation derives from Irina Andreescu-Treadgold. See her article, 'The Mosaic Workshop at San Vitale'.
23. Marguerite van Berchem, 'The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock', I.1, pp. 309–10, 312. This sort of variation in colour (and even in the materials employed) is often reported in Late Antique mosaics. For example, the mosaicists of the Euphrasian Basilica in Poreč had to substitute red and gold glass tesserae with cubes made of red and yellow brick. These economies appear to have been forced upon them by shortages in the more valuable materials. See Terry and Maguire, *Dynamic Splendor*, pp. 78–82.
24. Marguerite van Berchem, 'The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock', I.1, p. 311. The author describes this latter feature as, 'a masterly refinement of which I do not know any other example'.
25. This is a common characteristic in major architectural and urban projects of the early Islamic period. See comments in Marcus Milwright, 'Fixtures and Fittings: The Role of Decoration in Abbasid Palace Design', in Chase Robinson (ed.), *A Medieval Islamic City Reconsidered: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Samarra*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 89–91.
26. Marguerite van Berchem, 'The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock', I.1, p. 322.
27. van Berchem's observations are correlated with studies of the mosaics of the Damascus Mosque and the plaque from the market at Baysan (commissioned by Caliph Hisham). See George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 67–8 and notes. Also Khamis, 'Two Wall Mosaic Inscriptions', pp. 164–5.
28. Marguerite van Berchem, 'The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock', I.1, p. 311.
29. William A. Johnson, 'Pliny the Elder and Standardized Roll Heights in the Manufacture of Papyrus', *Classical Philology* 88 (1993): 46–50. On the length of the rolls, see Naphtali Lewis, *Papyrus in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 54–5; Theodore C. Skeat, 'The Length of the Standard Papyrus Roll and the Cost Advantage of the Codex', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 45 (1982): 169–75; Henry Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Books* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 44–5 and notes.
30. On the scripts employed on early papyri, see Geoffrey Khan, *Arabic Papyri: Selected Material from the Khalili Collection* (London: Nour Foundation in association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 27–46.
31. Cf. the table for letter forms from the inscriptions from Shivta (probably *c.* 700–60). See Bilhar Moor, 'Mosque and Church: Arabic Inscriptions at Shivta in the Early Islamic Period', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 40 (2013): 112–15 (table 1).
32. On this grave marker, see Hassan Mohammad El-Hawari, 'The Second Oldest Islamic Monument Known, Dated AH 71 (AD 691), from the Time of the Omayyad Calif 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān', *Journal of the Royal*

Asiatic Society 2 (1932): 289–93; Jere Bacharach and Sherif Anwar, 'Early Versions of the *Shahāda*: A Tombstone from Aswan of 71 A.H., the Dome of the Rock, and Contemporary Coinage', *Der Islam* 89 (2012): 60–9. Illustrated on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/abasa.html, last accessed 20 December 2014. The vowelling of the last name of ʿAbbasa bint Jurayj is not certain. It is likely, however, that her father ('little George') was Christian.

33. This feature is seen particularly clearly in the 'standing caliph' coppers. See Album and Goodwin, *The Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period*, pls 41–3 (nos 620, 624, 626, 629, 635, 659, 662, 664, 671). Arab–Sasanian drachms carrying this feature include, pl. 15 (nos 216–17).

34. The inscription reads: *lā ilāh illā allāh waḥdahu lā sharīka lahu muḥammad rasūl allāh*. Reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/seal2.html, last accessed 5 January 2015.

35. Miles, 'Early Islamic Inscriptions near Ṭāʾif', pp. 240–1; George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 29–34 (see especially p. 32, fig. 12). On the use of diacritics in early Islam, see Kessler, 'ʿAbd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock', pp. 12–14.

36. On this graffito, see ʿIzz al-Din al-Sanduq, 'Ḥajar ḥafnat al-abyaḍh', *Sumer* 11 (1955): 213–18; George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, p. 60, fig. 36; 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/sumer.html, last accessed 20 December 2014.

37. On this milestone and the other found in the same region, see Sharon, 'An Arabic Inscription from the Time of the Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik', pp. 367–72; Amikam Elad, 'The Southern Golan in the Early Islamic Period: The Significance of Two Recently Discovered Milestones of ʿAbd al-Malik', *Der Islam* 76(1) (1999): 33–88; George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 69–70, fig. 56; 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/golan1.html, last accessed 20 December 2014.

38. George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 66–7.

39. In 2013 I made a detailed examination of the glass plate negatives and scanned photographs of the mosaic inscriptions taken by Creswell (this archive is housed in the Ashmolean Museum). Not all portions of the inscription were visible in these images, but some observations can be made on the basis of the available evidence. There were sections of George's 'script C' that did clearly distinguish between the widths of the horizontal and vertical strokes, but there were many other areas in which the horizontals and verticals appeared to be of the same thickness (either three or four cubes). The thickness of the horizontals and verticals of 'script A' remained consistent throughout at five cubes. My thanks to Francesca Leoni and Aimee Payton for making it possible for me to spend time with this archive.

40. Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran*, pls 2, 4, 6, 8, 10.

41. Necıpoğlu, 'The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest', pp. 49–50.

42. On the tradition that one should enter the building from the north, and on the significance of the eastern entrance (sometimes called Bāb Isrāfīl), see Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, pp. 79–82. I am grateful to Lawrence Nees for bringing this to my attention.

CHAPTER 5

Focus on Details

THIS CHAPTER LOOKS more closely at specific aspects of the outer and inner face inscriptions (see foldout drawings and figures in the text). Particular attention is paid to the morphology of individual graphemes; the treatment of commonly occurring words; the application of diacritical marks; the use of spaces between both whole words and unjoined letters; and the relationship of the passages of text to the principal dividing points (external angles and re-entrant corners) provided by the architecture itself.

Outer Face

The obvious starting point in this analysis is the south side of the outer face as this is the opening of the inscriptional programme. This side contains the greatest concentration of letter forms (112 in total, including one spacer, and an average of 7.2 words per metre). If one considers this in relation to the average concentrations across the whole of the outer face (5.39 per metre), the contrast becomes obvious. The designers of the inscription seem to have been willing to make some visual compromises in order to fit Q 112, the *basmala* and the *shahāda* on to a single side of the octagon. The inscription on the south side is bounded on the west end by a rectangular decorative spacer. This feature wraps around the curved angle forming the junction between the south and southwest, and forms a visually satisfying way to mark the beginning of a new passage of text on the southwest side. Logic would suggest that the spacer marking the beginning of the text on the south side would also be placed over the other curved angle (at the transition with the southeast side). There is indeed a rectangular spacer at the beginning of the inscription, but it is located a little under half a metre past the angle on the southeast side of the outer face (Figure 5.1). The placement of this spacer also means that the very first section of the inscription (the first part of the word, *bism* from the invocation) is to be found on the southeast side and not on the south as might be expected. To the best of my knowledge, this anomaly has never been remarked upon.
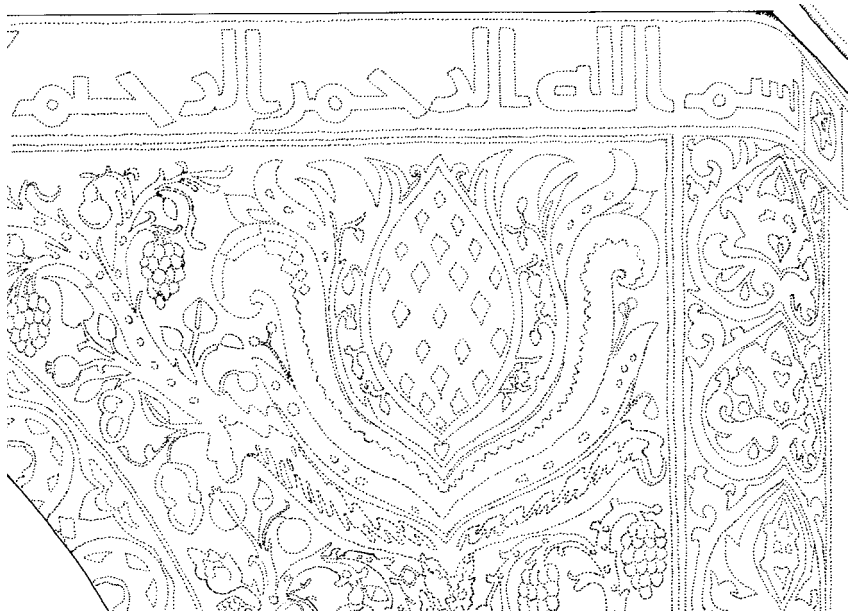
Figure 5.1 *Sketch of the first section of the south side of the outer face of the octagonal arcade, showing the junction to the southeast side. Drawing: Marcus Milwright, after photograph by Saïd Nuseibeh.*

My concern at this stage is not with content and meaning, but with the treatment of the text within the allotted space (15.55 m + the additional section on the southeast side). The characteristics of the south side inscription are best appreciated if one splits this part of the outer face into three roughly equal sections. The first section, comprising the *basmala*, first half of the *shahāda* ('there is no god but God alone, without partner'), and the first three words of Q 112, is the most compressed passage of text on the entire inscription band (47 letters within a distance of about 5.5 m, assuming *lām-alif* is counted as one letter form). This compression is achieved in a variety of ways. First, the ligatures between linked letters are seldom extended. The obvious example of this practice is between the *sīn* and the *mīm* of *bism*, and even here the lengthening of the ligature is very slight. Even more subtle are the fractional extensions between the *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* of *al-raḥm(ā)n* and the *ḥāʾ* and *yāʾ* of *al-raḥīm*. In all other cases the ligature is kept to a minimal length, usually corresponding to the width of the vertical characters (i.e., five mosaic cubes), although some look to be a little longer. The two transitions, from *lām* to *rāʾ* in *al-raḥm(ā)n* and *al-raḥīm*, have no ligature, allowing the two letters to touch. Second, comparison between this part of the south side inscription and the other two parts reveals that horizontal expansion has been restricted; this is most obvious for the letter *hāʾ*, which appears repeatedly. The only

example of the slight stretching of the terminal form of a letter is the *kāf* of *sharīka*, but this is minor compared with examples found later on the outer face.

The other significant issue to note in this first part of the south side is the treatment of the spaces between unjoined letters within words and between individual words.[1] The gaps between letters vary slightly, but all are restricted along the horizontal axis. In the case of vertical characters, the distance looks to be the same as the ligatures (i.e., five mosaic cubes). The distances allowed before or after the *lām-alif* are somewhat greater (with the exception of the example after *waḥdahu*). The widest space is before the unjoined *ḥāʾ*, though this is simply a result of accounting for the backward slope of this letter. The *rāʾ* does not dip below the baseline, meaning that a relatively large gap is required between this letter and the following *ḥāʾ* in *al-raḥm(ā)n* and *al-raḥīm*. By comparison, the *nūn* of *al-raḥm(ā)n* dips below the line allowing this letter to wrap underneath the initial *alif* of *al-raḥīm*, thus economising on space. In many cases the distances allocated between individual words are no greater than those between letters within words. Notable examples of extreme compression are the gaps between All(ā)h and *waḥdahu* and between the end of the profession of faith (*lahu*) and the first word of Q 112. This latter example is significant as it marks the transition between two separate pieces of text; one might have expected the designers of the inscription to have introduced at this point a wider interval, or perhaps even some form of verse marker for the purpose of increased legibility.

The second and third parts of the south side inscription can be dealt with in less detail. The second part comprises the remainder of Q 112, while the third part has the second half of the *shahāda* ('Muhammad is the messenger of God, may God bless him'). In both parts the treatment of the letters and words is less cramped. In the second part this relaxation of the script is achieved in several ways. The ligatures are consistently wider than in the first part of the south side inscription. Between vertical characters they stretch to as much as double the width of the vertical graphemes (i.e., about ten mosaic cubes). Ligatures that connect curved letter forms tend to be rather shorter, however. Letters such as *ṣād*, *ḥāʾ* and *dāl* are allowed greater horizontal extension. Other letters have changed their form in comparison with the first part; note, for example, the lack of a vertical shaft for the two *kāf*s (this does appear earlier for the *kāf* of *sharīka*) and the tail of the *wāw* that is allowed to dip beneath the baseline both in its separate and terminal forms. The differences between the two types of *kāf* seem to have been an established convention: the vertical shaft was employed in cases where the letter appears in words such as *mulk* and *sharīka* and in the pronominal suffix referring to God (such as *rasūlak wa ʿabdak ʿīsā ibn maryam* on the north and northwest sides of the inner face inscription).[2]

The gaps between letters become more consistent in the last two-thirds of the south side. The same is true for the intervals between words. What remains from the first part, however, is the visual ambiguity created by the fact that the gaps between words and those between letters within a word (such as the *alif* and *lām* of the definite article in *al-ṣamad*) are much the same. The last part of the inscription is very similar to the middle part, although the ligatures are further widened. An example of this is the line joining the two *lām*s of All(ā)h. A greater stretching of the ligature is seen in the *ḥā'* and *mīm* of Muhammad. Other notable features are the long tail of the *alif maqṣūra* tucked beneath the rest of the word (*ṣallā*) and the flattened tail of the terminal *lām* that no longer dips below the baseline (as it did for the first word, *qul*, of Q 112). The gaps between words vary in width and do not exceed the widest gaps between the unjoined letters within words.

If we return to the stone inscriptions that compare most closely with script A of the mosaic band of the Dome of the Rock, it becomes apparent that the south side inscription possesses some rather unusual characteristics. Most important in this respect are the ways in which the letters are squeezed in order to fit the required text within the allotted space (cf. comments about Greek and Latin mosaic inscriptions in Chapter 3). As noted above, this is most pronounced in the first third of the text with its shortened ligatures, compression of the horizontally defined letters, and narrow gaps allowed between unjoined letters and whole words. These features are not apparent in Arabic inscriptions dating prior to 72/691–2. For example, neither Mu'awiya's inscription on the dam at Ta'if (58/677–8) (Figure 4.2, above) nor the graffito found near Karbala' (64/683–4) (Figure 4.11, above) possess the shortened ligatures seen in the south side inscription. Indeed, both carry examples of the extensions to ligatures and to terminal letter forms. This comparison should not be taken too far, however, as neither inscription is written in an entirely proportional manner along straight baselines. The tombstone of 'Abassa bint Jurayj (dated 71/691) does show evidence of the shortening of the intervals between words, but this may be because a series of baselines were inscribed on the plaque prior to the addition of the text (Figure 4.12, above).[3] The text itself is notable for the elongation of many of the ligatures and the verticality of the *lām*s and *alif*s.

The reign of 'Abd al-Malik includes several milestones (those carrying dates belong to the latter part of his rule). These all maintain a relatively consistent interval between the words. This distance allows clear identification of each word, and is usually greater than the gaps between unjoined letters (Figures 4.13 and 4.14, above). The ligatures between the vertical characters are relatively wide, in contrast to the first third of the south side inscription in the Dome of the Rock. Perhaps the closest comparison can be made with the two

undated, painted copper plaques that were originally from the same building (Figures 2.8 and 2.9, above). The morphology of the script exhibits differences to those of the south side mosaic, but there are points of comparison, including the short ligatures – particularly for the writing of All(ā)h – and narrow gaps between the *alif* and *lām* of the definite article. The intervals between words are also consistently short. Similar characteristics are also apparent in the Arabic inscriptions on coinage from the late 680s and early 690s (Figures 5.2 and 5.3).[4]

The feature of the south side inscription that is absent from all

Figure 5.2 *'Standing caliph' copper, Hims (Homs)*, c. *693–7. Ashmolean Museum: SICA 696. Collection of Christ Church College. Photograph: Luke Treadwell. By permission of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.*
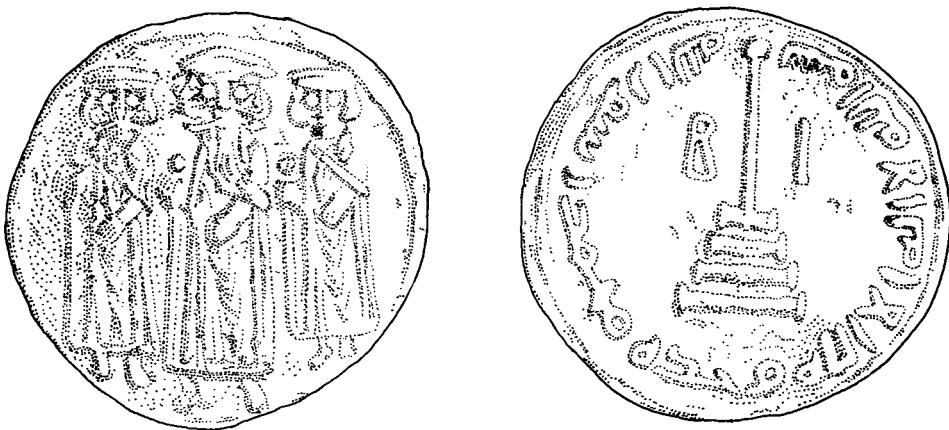
Figure 5.3 *Obverse and reverse of 'Arab–Byzantine' solidus. Minted in Damascus,* c. *692–4. Shamma Collection 2. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

the comparanda list above, however, is the gradual horizontal expansion of the words and intervals as it tracks from the beginning (on the southeast side) to the decorative spacer on the angle between the south and southwest sides. The nature of this progressive expansion can be appreciated by looking at the name, All(ā)h, as this is repeated five times (*ilāh* also appears once within the profession of faith). Within a single side of the inscription, and across the entire outer face, one might expect this to be treated in an identical manner. On the contrary, on the south side one encounters the shortest version of the name at the beginning (this is similar to the treatment in the opening line of the copper plaque from the east entrance of the Dome of the Rock). From then on the spaces, ligatures and the width of the final *hā'* are all progressively extended through to the widest example (an expansion of about 40 per cent from the first one) at the western end of the south side (Figure 5.4).

How can one account for the unusual features of the south side and also for the fact that this inscription actually starts on the southeast? If one assumes that there was an initial plan to frame this crucial passage of text within two ornamental spacers, each located at the angles to the contiguous faces of the octagon, then
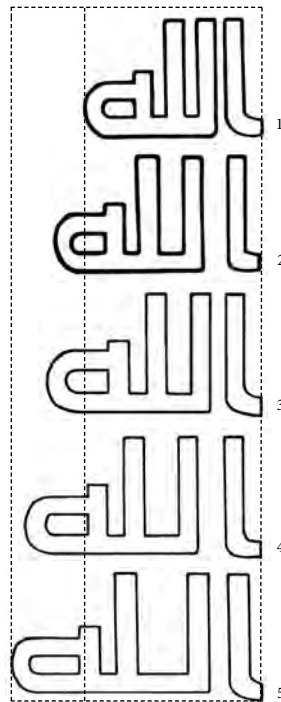
Figure 5.4 *The word 'All(ā)h' as it appears on the south side of the outer face. 1 is the first appearance (east end of the south side) and 5 is the last (west end of south side). Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

it becomes necessary to envisage the circumstances that led to the visual compromises apparent in the mosaic as we see it today. It is reasonable to suppose that the scribes wrote out the inscription (on sheets of parchment or papyrus) prior to the application of the mosaic. This could have been done on a smaller scale using gridded sheets, but it is more probable that the scribes produced a full-size drawing for this important project. Such a process would have allowed for the creation of an under-drawing on the lower plaster layer. Given that the scribes could have ensured the inscription fitted well within the space, one is left to question why there should exist such a disparity with the completed mosaic. Perhaps the key issue here is that the calculation of distance in mosaic (comprising cubes of approximately equal dimensions grouted on four sides by thin layers of mortar) can never be as precise as would be possible with a reed pen or brush working on a writing material like papyrus. Minimal differences in the widths of individual letters, ligatures and intervals between the master drawing and the actual mosaic could have led, over the course of such a long and tightly packed inscription, to some degree of disparity (such as the 0.5 m overlap onto the southeast face).

What remains to be explained is why this problem should have registered itself at the beginning of the south side inscription and not at the end. Given that there was no indigenous tradition of wall mosaic (i.e., mosaic using predominantly coloured and gilded glass cubes) among the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, one can assume that the teams of artisans responsible for the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock came from elsewhere. It has been suggested that the Dome of the Rock was ornamented by workshops that had been operating in Greater Syria prior to the 690s. Stylistic links have been made with the craftsmen who added the mosaic panels within the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in the mid-seventh century (Chapter 4). While this connection is not definitive, it is probable that the mosaicists of the Dome of the Rock were accustomed to decorating churches and other Christian monuments prior to their employment by ʿAbd al-Malik. Presumably, these men had previously laid Greek mosaic inscriptions (on which see Chapter 3).

With no prior experience of laying large-scale Kufic inscriptions in glass mosaic (and perhaps also little knowledge of written Arabic), the craftsmen working on the south side inscription in the Dome of the Rock appear to have reverted to their normal practice when laying out a Greek inscription (note also that Late Antique Greek inscriptions and formal book scripts generally do not allow the gaps between words to be greater than the gaps between individual letters within a word). Thus, the mosaicists started the Arabic inscription at the end, working from left to right.[5] At some point during this process the mosaicists, or their overseers, started to appreciate the extent of the disparity between the master drawing and the design

on the wall. It is in the first third (i.e., the part reached last by the mosaicists) that the greatest efforts were made to contract along the horizontal axis both the words and the intervals between them. These corrective efforts were only partially successful, leaving the rectangular spacer and about half of the word *bism* tucked around the angle on the southeast side.

The remainder of the inscription on the outer face exhibits signs of an attempt to regularise both the script itself and the horizontal extension of letter forms, ligatures, gaps between unjoined letters and intervals between words. While the remaining sides of the octagon are not characterised by complete consistency with regard to these issues, there are no radical contractions of the script of the type seen in the south side inscription. (I am excluding from consideration the cramped section of text that resulted from the substitution of the name of ʿAbd al-Malik with that of al-Maʾmun.) The long text of the outer face is separated by rectangular spacers; since these mark divisions in the content of the inscription, and probably represented phases of activity in the laying of the mosaic, the following discussion focuses on the texts contained between the spacers rather than dealing with each face individually (see outer face foldout and Figure 2.18). The first section runs from the junction of the south and southwest sides through to midway along the west side. It is worth noting first the contrast in the length of the invocation and *shahāda* (as far as *lā sharīka lahu*) in this case and in that of the south side inscription. This second version on the southwest side is about 40 per cent longer. This is achieved through the slight expansion of all aspects of the inscription from the dimensions of the horizontally defined letter forms (such as *hāʾ* and *dāl*) to the ligatures (now about twice the width of the vertical letter strokes), and the gaps between words and unjoined letters within words. The last part of the phrase, the reference to God's Prophet, is the only section to contain greater stretching of ligatures (particularly between the *hāʾ* and *mīm* of Muhammad) and widening of gaps. Notably, the distances between unjoined letters are much the same as the intervals between individual words.

The remainder of this section comprises Q 33:56, and adopts the same horizontal proportioning employed in the last words of the *shahāda*. The words are generously spaced as are the unjoined letters within words. The treatment of the verse also allows for the provision of several elongated ligatures. Quite why these are introduced for some words and not others is difficult to discern; there is no sense in which these visual accents are being employed to emphasise significant words within the verse. Another notable feature of this section of the outer face inscription is the treatment of the letter *wāw*, both unjoined and when linked to a preceding letter. On the south side the relatively small tail of the unjoined *wāw* sits on or just below the baseline. The top of the unjoined *wāw* thus reaches

above the tops of horizontal letters such as *hā'* and *dāl*. When joined, the round body of the *wāw* sits on the baseline and the tail is tucked directly beneath. The tail of the *wāw* becomes slightly larger on the southwest and west sides; this creates a visual problem for the joined form of the letter (see Chapter 4 for the tilted ligatures within some words).

The third section runs from the spacer in the middle of the west side to the spacer in the middle of the north side. This section starts with the invocation and opening of the *shahāda* given in abbreviated form (finishing with *waḥdahu*). The words themselves show signs of further stretching across the horizontal axis. Note the ligatures between the two *lām*s of All(ā)h that are now about three times the width of the vertical shafts of the letters. There is no obvious logic behind the decision to introduce extended ligatures between the *sīn* and *mīm* of *bism* and the *ḥā'* and *yā'* of *al-raḥīm*, while leaving *al-raḥm(ā)n* in a rather contracted form. The first *lām-alif* of the profession of faith is taller than other examples on the outer face inscription (including the other one located on the second half of the west side). It is unclear why this larger version of the *lām-alif* appears at this point; in order to accommodate the additional height, the horizontal stroke of this character sits considerably below the baseline. The Qur'anic verse (17:111) and latter part of the profession of faith make up the remainder of this section. Aside from the introduction of diacritics on *yattakhidh*, there are also changes to the treatment of the grapheme indicating the terminal *yā'* and *alif maqṣūra*. The unjoined *yā'* of *alladhī* (beginning of the northwest side) comprises simply a backward-facing curve linked to a horizontal tail that wraps beneath the remainder of the word. Later on the northwest side the terminal *yā'*s of *fī* and *walī* have the tail resting on or just beneath the baseline, extending considerably further back from the rest of the word. In both cases, the first letters (*fā'* and *lām*, respectively) are pushed above the baseline. In the case of the *lām*, this also necessitates a shortening of the vertical stroke. A last notable feature is the contraction of the second part of the *shahāda*. This may result from a desire to economise on space so that this third section would, like the second one (southwest–west), terminate midway along one of the sides of the octagon.

The fourth section of text takes up the remainder of the north side and the entire length of the northeast. As in previous examples, the Qur'anic verse (usually given as a conflation of Q 64:1 and 57:2) is 'bookended' by the invocation and two halves of the profession of faith. This section of text lacks the spacious quality of the majority of the third section (west–north); for example, the ligatures between *lām*s of All(ā)h are now only about twice that of the width of the vertical strokes. The gaps between unjoined letters and the intervals between words are also noticeably shorter. The *basmala* is more regular than in the third section; there are still extended ligatures,

but those on the words *al-raḥm(ā)n* and *al-raḥīm* are now the same length. Extended ligatures are uncommon in the remainder of this section, perhaps indicating a desire to fit the text onto the northeast side without impinging on the east side. The penultimate word of this section, *fī*, adopts a different solution to the treatment of the terminal *yā'*: where the upper edge of the tail is placed on the baseline in the writing of the same word in the third section, here it is placed below, allowing the round body of the *fā'* to be brought to the same level as the *tā' marbūṭa* of the preceding word, *al-qiy(ā)ma*. The *tā' marbūṭa* is written as an undotted *hā'*, though the feminine suffix appears earlier in the inscription (the word, *raḥma*, just before the spacer on the north side) as an undotted *tā' ṭawīla*.[6]

The fifth section comprises only the *basmala* and *shahāda*, and takes the first two-thirds of the east side. The treatment of the letter forms, ligatures, gaps between unjoined letters and intervals between words in these key phrases is very close to that of the fourth section (north–northeast). The final, northeast–southeast, section is the only one to omit the *basmala* and the profession of faith. The following comments are based on a probable reconstruction of the destroyed text as: ʿabd All(ā)h ʿAbd al-Malik amīr al-muʾminīn. The text of the sixth section is more spread out than the previous two, particularly along the bulk of the southeast side. In many respects, the text on the southeast side shares the more elongated character of the third section (west–north). The sixth section also adopts the same form for the word, *fī*, with the rounded part of the *fā'* elevated from the baseline. The words become especially attenuated at the end of the sixth section, presumably in order to fill up the remaining area before the spacer. The somewhat more compressed nature of the final word (*al-ḥamd*) was probably the result of slightly misjudging the extent of the expansion required in the final five or six words. Finally, the sixth section also contains a notable element: the word, *ithnayn* (two), from the statement of the year of construction, is written in the inscription with an additional tooth (i.e., *ithnatayn*).

Inner Face

The inscription band on the inner face has to make its way around a more complex circuit comprising the eight flat faces of the octagon and the eight piers (each comprising a front face and two shorter side walls). Since the inner face inscription is not subdivided with spacers, the following comments deal first with the area written in script B (i.e., the south and southeast sides), and second with the remainder of the inscription (written in script C). As already noted in the previous chapter, script B shares with A much of the proportional system and the relatively constant thickness of the horizontal and vertical strokes of the letter forms. The inscription begins on the south side with the *basmala* and *shahāda* (as far as the phrase *lā sharīka lahu*).

This is laid out in a similar manner to the opening of the second section on the outer face inscription; note, for example, the absence of diacritics, the long ligatures between the *lām*s of All(ā)h, and the generous spaces allowed between both unjoined letters and individual words. There are also elongated ligatures for the words, *bism* and *al-raḥm(ā)n*. The length of the ligature between the *ḥā'* and *yā'* of *al-raḥīm* is less easy to judge from photographs as this is the point where the word wraps around the curve of the re-entrant corner. It is the first point in the inner face inscription where the mosaicists had to deal with this problem. Elsewhere on the inner face inscription this point of transition is usually occupied by a vertical character (*alif* or *lām*) or an elongated ligature.

The remainder of script B – to judge by the available photographs, this script terminates just before the words, *yā ahl al-kitāb* (the opening of Q 4:171), a little before the junction with the pier – comprises two Qur'anic passages employed on the outer face inscription (the combination of Q 64:1 and 57:2, and Q 33:56), and a reference to Muhammad as the servant and messenger of God. The last of these continues to two-thirds of the way along the southwest side. The south side is distinguished from the others on the inner face inscription by the absence of diacritics. The Qur'anic material on this side is elegantly spaced, and makes use of several elongated ligatures, both within and at the ends of words. The final phrase, *muḥammad ʿabd all(ā)h wa rasūluhu*, is slightly more compressed, perhaps because of the desire to allow Q 33:56 to start at the west corner of the long side of the second pier (i.e., the beginning of the southeast side according to the way in which the inner face inscription is laid out). The southwest side inscription is relatively dense, with a reduction in the width of the ligatures in relation to the south side. There are few elongated ligatures and the intervals between words are often compressed, particularly in the opening words of Q 4:171 (script C; see Figure 5.5). The single occurrence of *fī* employs the form with the tail of the *yā'* resting on the baseline. Most important, however, is the introduction of diacritics. This is done rather sparingly: only three words prior to the opening Q 4:171 receive the narrow horizontal strokes above or below the baseline. Though the logic of this is not easy to understand, one might assume this was done to clarify meaning. For example, *raḥma* appears without diacritics on the north side of the outer face, but on the southeast side of the inner inscription has two dots above the *tā' ṭawīla*.

With the beginning of Q 4:171–172, the inscription shifts into the new mode, script C. The principal characteristics of this script have been summarised in Chapter 4 and need not be repeated here. The key point in the present context is that the imposition of script C onto the remainder of the sides of the inner face is accompanied by a more consistent approach to the spacing and horizontal extension of the words. On the remaining sides of the inner face it is difficult
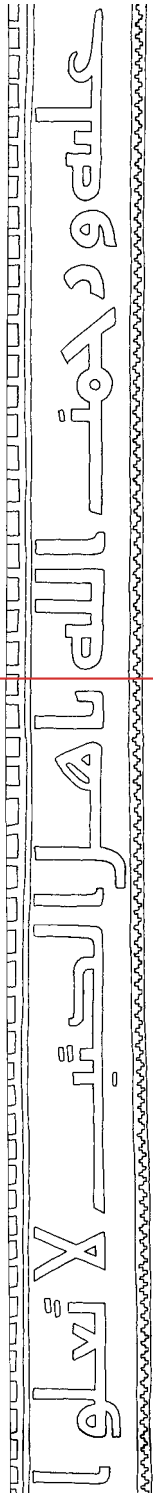
Figure 5.5 *Sketch of the last part of the inscription on the southwest side of the inner face of the octagonal arcade. Red line marks the point of transition between script styles. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

to detect significant fluctuations in the intervals between words, the gaps between unjoined letters, the ligatures, and the horizontal dimensions of graphemes such as *hā᾿* / *tā᾿ marbūṭa*, *dāl* / *dhāl*, *ṣād* / *ḍād* and *kāf* (in both forms). Elongated ligatures are used rather sparingly. The most obvious examples of extensions to letters are the horizontal strokes at the ends of words. The curved transitions around the piers are generally not handled with elongated ligatures; rather, the letters are carefully placed to avoid these challenging areas. The outer face inscription contains several experiments with writing *fī*, but in script C the form of this word is resolved: the tail of the *yā᾿* is placed just below the baseline, thus lowering the rounded body of the *fā᾿* (which itself is now smaller and flatter than in script A). The terminal *yā᾿* / *alif maqṣūra* is also made consistent on longer words, wrapping just below the other letters and extending beyond the beginning of the word by a distance of a few mosaic cubes. The only obvious innovation in the letter forms themselves is in combination of the elaborate tail of the *qāf* in *al-ḥaqq* (east side).

Script C is employed only for the quotation of Qur᾿anic verses. The fact that these excerpts could be fitted within the remaining six sides of the inner face without causing visual difficulties is a demonstration of the increasing confidence of the scribes and mosaicists. They found no need to resort to the tactic of subdividing the long inscription band with spacers. It is worth reiterating that the complex profile of the inner face must have represented a greater challenge to all involved in designing and implementing the mosaic panels. The main element of script C that still exhibits an experimental character is the application of diacritical marks. Not only are there different types of stroke employed in the mosaics, but the same letter is sometimes treated differently (Figure 5.6). In addition, the application of diacritics is still relatively sparse and does not always serve to make explicit the meanings of ambiguous words. For example, why does *thal(ā)tha* (east side) only have three strokes above the second *thā*? It is also difficult to understand the application of diacritics to a straightforward word such as *fīhi* on the northwest side and *ibn* from ῾Īsā ibn Maryam (east side).

The typology of the diacritical marks has been discussed in detail by Kessler, and her observations are summarised below.[7] She notes that there are two types of mark, one a long stroke and the other very short. These often appear in photographs to be circular or ellipsoid. In the complete drawings of the inscriptions (see foldouts) these short marks are given a round or sub-round
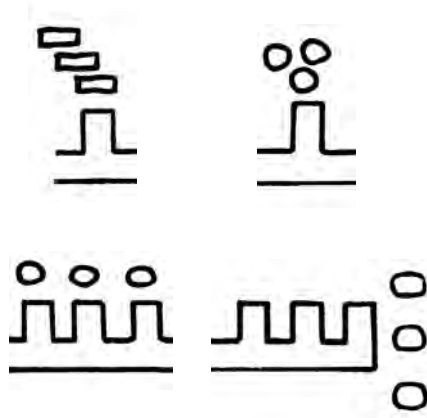
Figure 5.6 *Drawing showing different uses of diacritics for* thāʾ *(above) and* shīn *(below) on the inner face inscription of the octagonal arcade. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

character to distinguish them from the longer strokes. One might expect these different strokes to be proportioned and regular – as is the case with the script that carries them – but this is not the case; even the longer horizontal strokes seldom seem to be represented as measured rectangles. Perhaps the unevenness was meant to give them the character of marks made swiftly with a reed pen. The strokes themselves are either formed parallel to the baseline or inclined slightly to the left. Doubled strokes are not placed, in accordance with later practice, next to one another. Rather, they appear one above the other, either directly or at an oblique angle (either to the left or the right). The tripled diacritics of the *thāʾ* are arranged either as an upturned pyramid (e.g., *yubʿathu* on the northwest side) or three strokes, one above the other obliquely to the left (*thal(ā)tha* on the east side). The initial and medial *qāf* is identified by one stroke below the baseline rather than two above as becomes normal practice in later centuries. Lastly, Kessler remarks that the three strokes of the *shīn* are arranged with one above each of the three teeth. She does not discuss the other variant of this letter; the *shīn* of *shahida all(ā)hu annahu lā ilāha illā huwa* on the west side is preceded by three short strokes arranged vertically. This motif is not directly connected to the grapheme (*sīn / shīn*) and cuts across the baseline.

Diacritics, Verse Markers and Specific Letter Forms in Qurʾan Manuscripts

Kessler discusses dated examples of Arabic script (on stone and papyri) marked with diacritics. Additional examples have been

identified since the publication of her article in 1970, but her general observations are still valid.[8] Another significant area of study in this respect is the assemblage of early Qurʾanic manuscript fragments. These are particularly relevant to the Dome of the Rock because of the possibility that script C (occupying most of the inner face inscription) was drawn from contemporary book scripts (on the relationship between book script and mosaic script in Late Antiquity, see Chapter 3). The study of the earliest phase of the manuscript tradition is hampered, however, by the absence of dated manuscripts. The discovery of a cache of early fragments in the Congregational Mosque of Sanʿaʾ greatly increased the number of examples from the seventh and early eighth centuries. While the dating of the 'Hijazi' and earliest 'Kufic' scripts remains the subject of debate, there is now a sufficient scholarly apparatus to allow for comparative analysis.

François Déroche has recently published a critical summary of the evolution of Umayyad Qurʾans.[9] First, he proposes that the 'Hijazi' Qurʾans continued to be produced until at least 695. Second, the rather free script style and the page arrangement found in these manuscripts was replaced by a more controlled mode (designated by him as script 'Omeyyade I', or 'O I'; Figure 5.7). Fragments corresponding to this new script include what Déroche terms the 'Umayyad codex of Damascus' (TIEM ŞE 321) and the 'Umayyad codex of Fustat' (St Petersburg NLR Marcel 11, 13, 15; Paris BNF Arabe 330 c). A more lasting change is signalled by the third group of Qurʾans (e.g., Sanʿaʾ DAM Inv. 20–33.1; Dublin CBL Is. 1404; Kairouan, Musée des arts islamiques R 38).[10] These large format codices are believed to be associated with the patronage of Caliph al-Walid, and seem to represent a conscious effort to establish guidelines for the production of 'imperial' Qurʾans.

This last group is notable for the reduction in the number of words per page (necessitating the use of more parchment sheets), the employment of gold and the increasing presence of illumination. The decorative themes within the illumination are broadly consistent with Umayyad ornament.[11] It is the second group of manuscripts that is most relevant in the present context because this group probably belongs largely to the rule of ʿAbd al-Malik.[12] As noted by both George and Déroche, the ornamental bands in folios such as Marcel 13 and TIEM ŞE 321 f. 54a bear interesting comparisons with the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock.[13] Significantly, there is the tendency to omit *alif*s from selected words (a practice that is commonplace in earlier manuscripts such as the 'Codex parisino-petropolitanus'). This is also encountered in the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock.[14]

Diacritics appear sporadically in early Qurʾans. Where graffiti often made use of dots, most of the Qurʾan manuscripts surveyed seem to have employed oblique dashes above or below the line.[15] In cases where one or two dashes are required, these are usually placed

Figure 5.7 *Qur'an page, late seventh century. Ms Marcel 13, fol. 3a. Courtesy of the Russian National Library, St Petersburg.*

directly above or below the tooth of the grapheme. The exception to this rule is the *tā' ṭawīla*, where they tend to appear above the first part of the horizontal stroke. The two dashes (for letters such as *tā'*, *yā'* and, occasionally, *qāf*) are always placed one above another, sometimes vertically and other times with the upper one slightly to the left of the lower. Greater variability is apparent in the treatment of the three diacritics for *thā'* (Figure 5.8). This includes three dashes
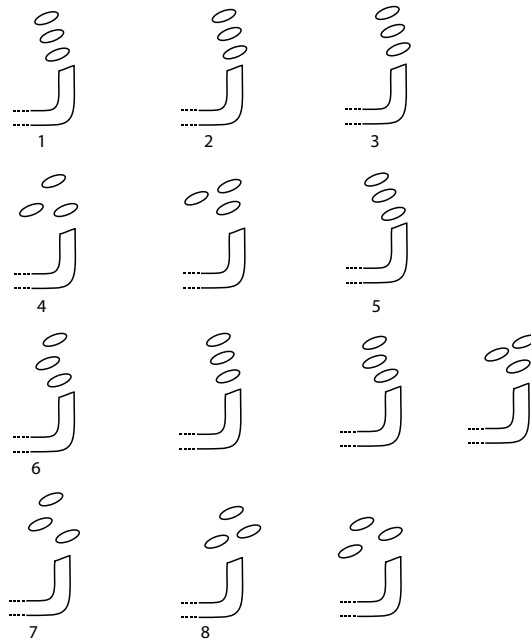
Figure 5.8 *Schematic representation of the dotting of the* thā' *in early Qur'an manuscripts. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

Sources: 1 = Codex San'a' I; 2 = Codex San'a' DAM 01–21.1; 3 = Bibliothèque nationale, Paris (BNP) Arabe 6140a; 4 = BNP Arabe 330g; 5 = British Library Or. 2165; 6 = John Rylands Library, Mingana Collection M.1572; 7 = Khalili Collection KFQ 34; 8 = KFQ 59, 61; 9 = KFQ 42, 62.

rising above the tooth of the grapheme (either vertically or angled to the left), a triangle of dashes above the tooth and an upturned triangle above the tooth. The first two variants are much more common than the third in early manuscripts. In some cases the first two are employed within the same manuscript, with the first for the initial position and the second for the medial. The upturned triangle of dots appears on the inscription on the dam constructed by Mu'awiya at Ta'if in 58/677–8 (Figure 4.2, above),[16] but does not seem to be a common feature of the earliest Qur'an manuscripts. Examples carrying this unusual marking are Marcel 13, KFQ 34 and Beit al-Qur'an 1611-mkh235. These have been dated to the late seventh or eighth centuries, and in all cases the *thā'* is marked with both the triangular form and the upturned triangle. KFQ 34 also employs vertically aligned dashes for the *thā'*.[17]

The Zuhayr inscription of 24/644 contains a *shīn* marked with three dots (Figure 4.1, above). One dot appears above each of the three teeth. This notation appears also on a contemporary papyrus (PERF 558, dated 22/642).[18] In Qur'an manuscripts the *shīn* is usually marked with one oblique stroke above each of the three

teeth. This is a feature of both Hijazi and early Kufic manuscripts, and there appear to be no significant variations. The three dots prior to the *shīn* of *shahida* (west side, inner face) are probably to be understood as diacritical marks (inner face foldout; Figure 5.6), though this differs from the other *shīn*s of the inner face inscription. This type of mark has its origins in Qur'an manuscripts as a symbol to separate two verses. It is also used to separate the initial *basmala* from the first verse in a given *sūra*. This convention appears in the earliest Hijazi fragments from San'a' and continues into the Kufic examples produced during and after the period of the construction of the Dome of the Rock. There is considerable variation in the marks used for this purpose (Figure 5.9), and there is no apparent chronological development. The most common practice consists of a series of vertically arranged oblique lines, which slope in the same direction as the diacritics. The number of lines varies (according to the pages reproduced in print or online) from two to about ten, though they are most common in the range of five to seven lines. Usually the lines are in black, though red can be introduced for decorative effect. All other verse markers are made up of oblique strokes. These include a square (four), a small diamond (four), a large diamond (eight or nine), a small triangle (three), a large triangle (six), a long rectangle (six), a tall rectangle (six), a hexagon (seven) and a horizontal line (typically, four to seven). The small triangle and square are also encountered on the marginal legends on some 'Arab–Sasanian' drachms of the 680s and 690s (Figure 5.10). Comprising pellets rather than dashes, these motifs are used to separate the *basmala* from the second component of the inscription. They also appear at the ends of marginal legends.

The pattern of three vertically arranged oblique strokes appears early in the writing of the Qur'an. Two early fragments in the Khalili Collection (KFQ 59, 61) employ the three-stroke motif consistently, but in most fragments the number of dashes is not so tightly controlled.[19] Most pertinent to the present study is its appearance in manuscripts produced in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. It is used fairly consistently in Marcel 13, while some others vary between three and five strokes.[20] Another, of slightly later date, that uses the three-dash verse marker is in the Khalili Collection (KFQ 27).[21] While it is fairly clear, therefore, that the three strokes were adopted from a manuscript convention for separating verses, this does not seem to have been the case in the Dome of the Rock inscription. Had the three strokes been intended to function in this way, one would expect to find them elsewhere on the inner face inscription. In other words, the designers of the mosaic chose to transform a verse marker into a diacritical mark. Why they should have done it this way is unclear, particularly given the more conventional notation employed elsewhere.

Also significant are the diacritics used to distinguish the *fā'* and *qāf*. These letters are not always marked with diacritics in early
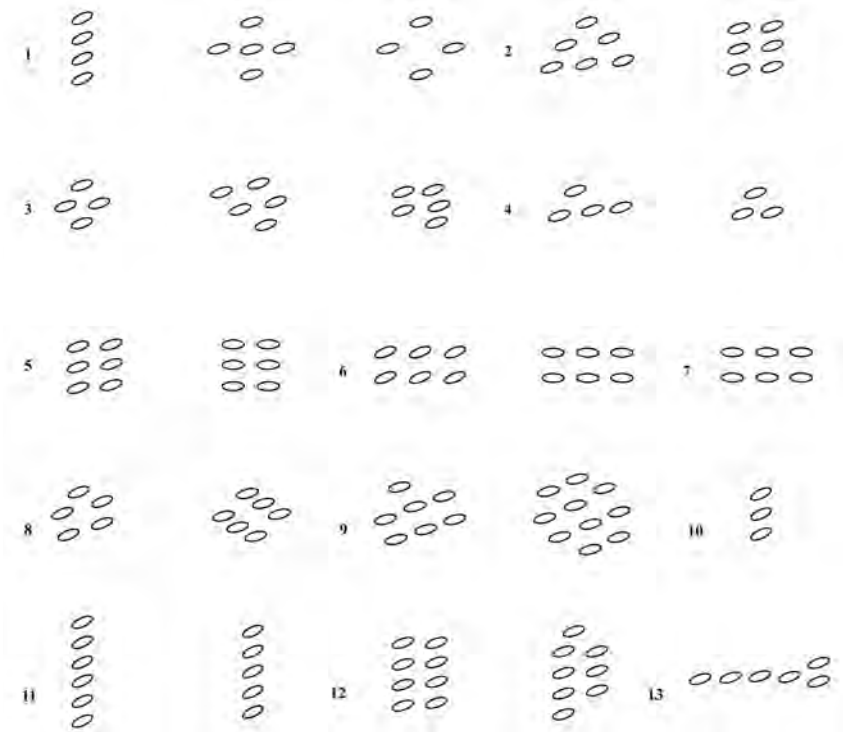
Figure 5.9 *Verse markers in early Qur'an manuscripts. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

Sources: 1 = Codex San'a'I; 2 = Codex San'a'DAM 01–21.1;
3 = Bibliothèque nationale, Paris (BNP) Arabe 6140a; 4 = BNP Arabe 330g;
5 = BNP Arabe 328a; 6 = British Library Or. 2165; 7 = John Rylands Library
Mingana Collection M.1572; 8 = Tareq Rajab Collection QUR-1-TSR; 9 =
Khalili Collection KFQ 59, 61; 10 = KFQ 34; 11 = KFQ 42, 62; 12 = KFQ 60;
13 = 'Qur'an of 'Uthman', Institute of Oriental Studies, St Petersburg (and
other collections).

Figure 5.10 *Pellet designs found on the marginal fields of 'Arab–Sasanian'
coins of the late 680s and 690s.*

Source: Album and Goodwin, The Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic
Period (2002). Drawing: Naomi Shields.

manuscript fragments. Where they appear, it might be to clarify the
spelling. If the meaning of a word is obvious (e.g., *fī*), diacritics are
often omitted. When it is marked, the *fā'* is consistently given with
one oblique stroke above the rounded part of the grapheme. The
most common marking of the *qāf* is with a single oblique stroke

below the line (this is the convention used in the mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock).[22] *Qāf*s with two strokes above, either horizontally or vertically aligned, appear on TIEM ŞE 321 and an eighth-century ''Uthmanic Qur'an' held in various locations, including the Institute of Oriental Studies, St Petersburg.[23] The most common solution, however, is to mark the *fā'* and leave the *qāf* without diacritics. In its terminal position the latter is distinguished by an elaborate serpentine tail that is quite unlike any other Arabic letter.[24] Although the precise form of the tail of the terminal *qāf* varies, it is found in most early Qur'ans (Figure 5.11). As the tail passes directly beneath the rounded section of the grapheme, scribes seldom chose to add an oblique stroke under the line.

There are several surviving Qur'an fragments that employ scripts closely corresponding to script C in the Dome of the Rock. These are all written in an early form of Kufic that is now usually dated to the end of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth centuries.[25] The most important of these are the 'Damascus Umayyad Qur'an' (TIEM ŞE 321), Codex San'a' DAM 20–33.1, the Codex Wetzstein (Staatsbibliothek, Berlin: Wetzstein II 13), Topkapı H.S. 44/32, BNP Arabe 324a–d (also
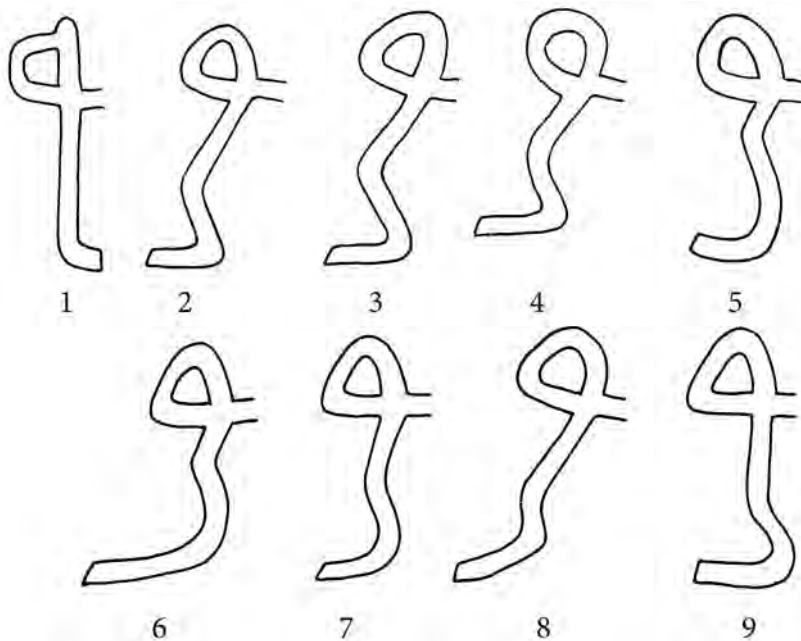
Figure 5.11 *Form of the terminal* qāf *in early Qur'an manuscripts. Drawings: Marcus Milwright.*

Sources: 1 = John Rylands Library Mingana Collection M.1572; 2 = Khalili Collection KFQ 60; 3 = Bibliothèque nationale, Paris (BNP) 6140a;
4 = Codex San'a' DAM 01-21.1; 5 = Codex San'a' I; 6 = KFQ 42, 62; 7 = KFQ 59, 61; 8 = Arabe 328; 9 = Tareq Rajab Collection QUR-1-TSR.

Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya, Cairo, Ms. 139; Gotha, Ms Orient A. 462),
Marcel 13, the single page now in the David Collection in Copenhagen
(26/2003) (Figure 5.12), and four fragments from the Khalili Collection
(KFQ 33, 42, 50, 60).[26] The evolution of Arabic script in this period
has been dealt with extensively by other scholars, and the comments
here will pick up points that are of most relevance to the Dome of
the Rock. Persuasive evidence exists for the creation of proportional
systems governing formal scripts. There are, however, clear differ-
ences between the approaches taken on manuscripts and monumental
inscriptions. In the case of the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock, one
can point to the relatively narrow space below the ground line of the
text. Qur'an manuscripts tend to allow more space and the tails of
several letters are given wide, looping forms (these sometimes impinge
on the verticals of the letters in the lower line of text). The tails in the
mosaic are much smaller and tend to terminate parallel to the base of
the inscription band. The only exception is the tail of the terminal *qāf*,
but even this is much less pronounced than its manuscript counter-
part. The other significant difference is in the vertical shafts. Writing
with a reed pen allows these verticals to be completed at an oblique
angle. On both the outer and the inner face inscriptions the tops of the
verticals are all arranged parallel to the baseline

Some key points can be identified about the treatment of letter
forms in script C in the Dome of the Rock. The shape of the *lām-alif*
changes between script A and C. In the latter, the space beneath the
intersecting diagonals is decreased. This adaptation allows the diago-
nal strokes to be lengthened, a change that correlates well with the
visual characteristics of broadly contemporary book scripts. Where
most of the manuscript *lām-alif*s differ, however, is in the shape of
the diagonals. The latter are sometimes curved so that they come
together near the summit of the motif, while other examples of the
lām-alif allow the first upward stroke to be nearly vertical (e.g., David
Collection 26/2003). The only manuscripts to adopt the shape seen
in script C are Marcel 13 and TIEM ŞE 321. Several letter forms are
treated fairly consistently across the manuscript group and bear close
resemblance to script C. These include the *wāw*, initial *ʿayn / ghayn*,
the initial *jīm / ḥāʾ / khāʾ*, *kāf* (both forms) and *yāʾ / alif maqṣūra*. It
is, however, noticeable, that the closed forms of many letters are not
fully circular, and often have a slightly triangular shape.[27]

The scripts of Marcel 13 (Figure 5.7), David Collection 26/2003
(Figure 5.12), TIEM ŞE 321 and Khalili Collection KFQ 62 (Figure 5.13)
seem to offer the closest parallels for script C at the Dome of the Rock.
The first two are likely to have been produced in Syria in the last decade
of the seventh century or soon afterwards. Marcel 13 differs from the
mosaic script in the compressed *sīn / shīn*, the solid upturned triangle
of the *ʿayn / ghayn*, and the somewhat triangular shape of the rounded
letter forms. The David Collection folio is particularly notable for the
straightness of the *alif*s and other verticals. The principal differences

Figure 5.12 *Qur'an page, late seventh or early eighth century. David Collection, 26/2003 (verso). Photograph courtesy of Pernille Klemp.*

are in the shape of the terminal *hā' / tā' marbūṭa* and the sloping *'ayn / ghayn* and *lām-alif*. The third, TIEM ŞE 321, has been dated to the eighth century. Most of the letter forms correlate well with script C, with the exception of the compressed shape of the *sīn / shīn*, the sloping *'ayn / ghayn* and the triangular *mīm*. KFQ 62 is also designated as eighth century, but has the closest correlate for the medial *hā'* in the Dome of the Rock inscriptions. The *lām-alif* and the *'ayn / ghayn* take

Figure 5.13 *Recto (a) and verso (b) of Qur'an page, eighth century. Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, KFQ 62. Nour Foundation. Courtesy of the Khalili Family Trust.*

a different form, however. A new style seems to come into existence in the first quarter of the eighth century, and is exemplified by the Codex Sanʿaʾ DAM 20–33.1 and Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, Arabe 324a–d (and related sections in other collections).

The script style of the last phase of the mosaic inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock can also be seen in graffiti made in the years soon after 72/691–2. Two examples from Mecca are dated to 80/699–700, each carrying Qurʾanic content (discussed further in Chapter 8) (Figures 5.14 and 5.15). Both are written by one ʿUthman b. Wahran and show close correlates with script C in most respects (except the tail of the *nūn*). Unlike the bulk of the early Qurʾan manuscripts, the diagonals of the *lām-alif* are completely straight, and the *ʿayn / ghayn* is made up of two straight diagonal strokes that rise from the baseline to create a shape that is symmetrical through the vertical axis (in most manuscripts the first stroke is nearer to the vertical axis). The *lām-alif* also differs from most early graffiti (one of the visual sources for scripts A and B) in that the triangle forming the intersection of the three strokes is small in relation to the rising diagonals. The terminal *qāf* is unusual in the 80/699–700 inscription in that the tail curves backwards in the manner of the terminal *yāʾ / alif maqṣūra*. A third undated Meccan inscription by ʿUthman b. Wahran introduces one novel feature: the medial *ʿayn / ghayn* grapheme now consists of two loops.[28] A similar script is used for an undated Qurʾanic quotation (Q 33:56) at Taʾif (Figure 5.16).[29]

Lastly, some comments should be made about the decorative spacers that appear on the outer face inscription. These cannot be considered as entirely equivalent to the verse markers of Qurʾanic manuscripts in that they are employed to separate both Qurʾanic and 'non-Qurʾanic' textual content. Furthermore, the spacers often enclose more than one distinct component (e.g., a Qurʾanic verse 'framed' by two sections of the *shahāda*). An unadorned square spacer performing a similar function appears on a graffito found near Karbalaʾ dated 63/683–4 (Figure 4.11, above), but in visual terms the best comparisons are to be found in manuscript art. The six spacers from the Dome of the Rock are all approximately square in shape (taking up most of the height of the inscription band) and contain within them relatively simple designs of a geometric character.[30] These can be compared with the markers used to designate the completion of five or ten verses in early Qurʾan manuscripts (Figure 5.17). In the earliest manuscripts these usually take the form of circles surrounded by dots or dashes, but by the late seventh and early eighth centuries they become more elaborate. Some remain circular and others are contained within a square frame. The second spacer on the outer face inscription of the Dome of the Rock comprises a circular motif looking rather like a windstar from a Portolan map. This same basic motif appears on manuscripts within a square frame.[31] The fifth spacer at the Dome of the Rock is comparable to a marker of

Figure 5.14 *Graffito near Mecca containing Q 4:87, written by ʿUthman b. Wahran in 80/699–700. Photograph courtesy of Saad Abdulaziz Al Rashid.*

Figure 5.15 *Graffito near Mecca containing Q 38:26, written by ʿUthman b. Wahran in 80/699–700. Photograph courtesy of Saad Abdulaziz Al Rashid.*
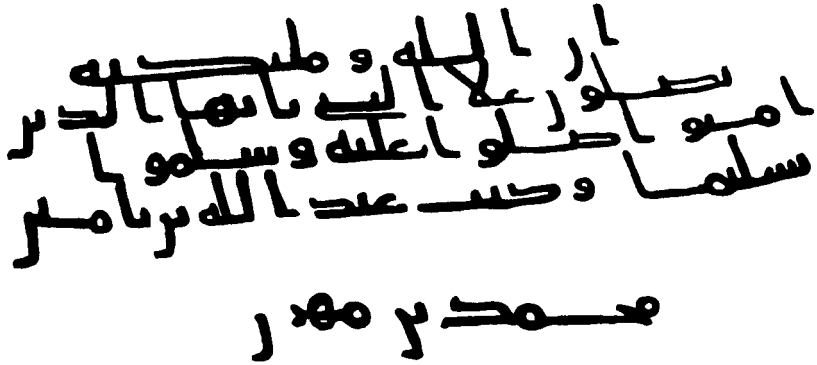
Figure 5.16 *Undated graffito with Q 33:56. Found near Ta'if, late seventh or early eighth century. After: Miles, 'Early Islamic Inscriptions' (1948). Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*
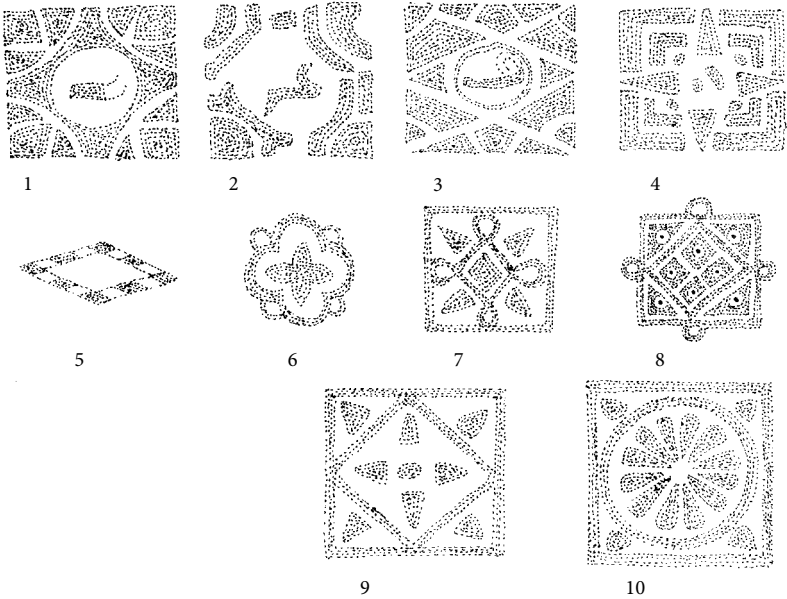
Figure 5.17 *Sketch drawings of five- and ten-verse markers on early Qur'an manuscripts.*

Sources: 1–4 = 'Qur'an of 'Uthman', al-Hussein Mosque, Cairo; 5 = Khalili Collection KFQ 50; 6–8 = 'Qur'an of 'Uthman', Egyptian National Library; 9–10 = sketch drawings of selected decorative spacers on the mosaic inscription on the outer face of the octagonal arcade of the Dome of the Rock. After: Kessler, ' 'Abd al-Malik's Inscription' (1970) and online photographs. Drawings: Marcus Milwright.

ten verses in Codex Sanʿaʾ DAM 20–33.1. This manuscript has been associated with Damascus during the rule of al-Walid I.[32] Marcel 13 is unusual among the manuscripts of this period as it lacks large circular or square motifs marking five and ten verses.

The larger five- and ten-verse markers are more a feature of those Qurʾans associated with the late seventh and early eighth centuries. The markers found on earlier manuscripts are considerably simpler. A cautious conclusion to be drawn from this is that the designers of the outer face inscription were aware of developments in contemporary Qurʾans, even if they chose to derive the script itself from other sources. A more difficult problem is why decorative spacers were omitted from the inner face inscription. This decision had probably already been taken when the section written in script B was installed. Given that script C is made up of Qurʾanic quotations, one would have expected the designers to have made full use of the available motifs in contemporary manuscript art. That they did not do so indicates that monumental scripts were not wholly reliant upon the conventions adopted in Qurʾanic manuscripts.

Summary

Having devoted the previous paragraphs to a small-scale focus upon selected details of the outer and inner face inscriptions, one can conclude with some broader observations about the characteristics of these two inscription bands. Perhaps the most important point is that the entire inscription shows signs of experimentation. These experimental characteristics are manifested in different ways across the outer and inner face inscriptions. The former illustrates the initial difficulties experienced in calculating how much text could be fitted within a given area of the inscription band. This is apparent in the south side inscription (argued in this book to be the first side to have been completed), though it can also be detected in the contraction and expansion of passages of writing on other sides of the octagon. Clearly, those planning textual content in the remainder of the outer face learned to be more conservative in the estimation of the words to be accommodated on a single side (or section). There is also experimentation with the proportions of problematic letters (particularly *wāw*) and words combining rounded letters with the *yāʾ / alif maqṣūra.*

Most of these issues appear to have been resolved in the inscription band running around the inner face. The obvious area of continued experimentation is the use of diacritics. While most of these have comparanda in rock inscriptions, papyri and early Qurʾan folios, some of the examples in the Dome of the Rock are highly unusual. It is also noteworthy that the mosaics seem to employ two or more modes of diacritic application simultaneously. It is conceivable that this variability resulted from several scribes having planned the

sections of text making up the inner face inscription. The analysis of the three marks added prior to the word, *shahida*, suggests that the designers adopted a form of contemporary manuscript verse marker as a means to identify the letter *shīn*.

Notes

1. On the conventions of letter spacing in early Qur'anic manuscripts, see Estelle Whelan, 'Writing the Word of God: Some Early Qur'ān Manuscripts and their Milieux: Part I', *Ars Orientalis* 20 (1991): 114.
2. Kessler, ''Abd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock', p. 13, n. 24.
3. On these objects, see Miles, 'Early Islamic Inscriptions near Ṭā'if'; Bacharach and Anwar, 'Early Versions of the *Shahāda*'; George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, p. 60, fig. 36; 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/sumer.html, last accessed 20 December 2014.
4. For example, see the '*Shahāda* solidus' and 'standing caliph' (gold and copper) issues illustrated in Album and Goodwin, *The Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period*, pls 41–6. (See Chapters 7 and 8 for further references to the 'experimental' issues of the 690s.) On the proportional characteristics of the script on early epigraphic coinage (i.e., from 77/696–7 until the early eighth century), see George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 71–4. More distant comparisons can be made with the two seals (*c*. 44/664) announcing Muʿawiya's dismissal of the governor of Basra. The authenticity of these objects has, however, been questioned. I am grateful to Stefan Heidemann for his thoughts on these problematic objects. For illustrations and bibliography, see 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/seal1.html, last accessed 21 December 2014.
5. I owe this observation to Evanthia Baboula.
6. See also technical notes on the inscriptions in Kessler, ''Abd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock', pp. 5, 7–9.
7. *Ibid*., pp. 10–14.
8. On the issue of the early use of diacritics, see also Jones, 'The Dotting of a Script and the Dating of an Era'; al-Ghabban, 'The Evolution of Arabic Script'; Khan, *Selected Arabic Papyri*, pp. 43–4. Further references appear in the notes to Chapter 4.
9. Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads*. This book also contains an extensive bibliography of earlier studies on this issue. His summary of the dating of the three main phases appears on pp. 137–42.
10. Another comparable example (Arab Museum for Modern Art, Doha 224) is published in Jochen Sokoly, *Languages of the Pen: Arabic Calligraphy from the Collection of the Arab Museum for Modern Art, Doha* (Doha: Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts, Qatar, 2006), Cat. No. 1 (unpaginated text).
11. François Déroche, 'Colonnes, vases et rinceaux. Sur quelques eluminures d'époque omeyyade', *Académie des inscriptions et belle-lettres, Comptes rendus des séances de l'année* 2004 (2006): 227–64; Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads*, pp. 84–94. Also comments in George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 74–89; Flood, 'The Qur'an', pp. 265–77 (especially pp. 266–72).

12. Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, p. 132. Déroche allows for the continued use of O I script in smaller Qurʾans even after the emergence of the third style under al-Walid.

13. George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, p. 78, figs 50–1; Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, pp. 84–94.

14. For example, the dagger *alif* is absent from *wāhidun* and *subhānuhu* (both: inner face, northeast side). Other examples of *scriptio defectiva* are given in the notes to Kessler's transcription of the inscriptions. See Kessler, 'ʿAbd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock', nn. 24–6, 32, 35, 42, 49. On this issue in early Qurʾans, see Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, *passim*.

15. The following survey is based on those published Qurʾan pages (print and online), generally dated to the late seventh and eighth centuries. The sources for these illustrations are François Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition: Qurʾans of the 8th to the 10th Centuries AD*, Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (London and New York: Nour Foundation in Association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 27–49, Cat. Nos 1–4; Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, figs 19–45; Sokoly, *Languages of the Pen*, Cat. No. 1; George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, p. 75; Flood, 'The Qurʾan'. Additional examples are illustrated on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Text/Mss, last accessed 21 December 2014.

16. Miles, 'Early Islamic Inscriptions near Ṭāʾif', p. 240.

17. This might also be a feature of Marcel 13, though the published photographs are not entirely clear on this point. See Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, pp. 31–2, Cat. No. 2; George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, figs 50, 51; Flood, 'The Qurʾan', pp. 270–1, Cat. No. 189 (fols 3, 8, 11 and 15 are illustrated). Also 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Text/Mss, last accessed 22 December 2014.

18. Al-Ghabban, 'The Zuhayr Inscription'; Jones, 'The Dotting of a Script and the Dating of an Era', p. 97; George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 28–30, fig. 9.

19. Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, pp. 32–3, Cat. No. 3.

20. Marcel 13 is illustrated in Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, fig. 25; George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, fig. 50. Those employing both three and five strokes include published pages of BNP Arabe 324c, 'Qurʾan of ʿAli b. Abi Talib' [the Sanʿaʾ *muṣḥaf*], and an Umayyad-period fragment sold at Sotheby's in 2004.

21. Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, p. 53, Cat. No. 7. The same pattern can be seen on Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha 224. See Sokoly, *Languages of the Pen*, Cat. No. 1.

22. Examples from the seventh and eighth centuries include Codex Sanʿaʾ I (DAM 01–27.1), Marcel 13, Mixt. 917 (Austrian National Library) and an 'ʿUthmanic Qurʾan' in the Topkapi Library (H.S. 44/32).

23. Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, figs 19–24.

24. Some comparisons might be made to the tails of Greek letters in monumental and book scripts. For example, the *zita* used in the London Canon Tables. See Chapter 3, Figure 3.15, above.

25. Déroche defines this as script OI. See his *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*. Also comments in George, *Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 79–80; Flood, 'The Qurʾan', pp. 265–7.

26. Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, pp. 31–2, 48–9, 49–51, 60, Cat. Nos 1, 4, 5, 13.

27. Exceptions to this include David Collection 26/2003 and Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, Arabe 324.

28. On these inscriptions, see Hoyland, 'New Documentary Texts', pp. 407–8. Illustrated with further bibliography on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/makkah5.html; http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/makkah2.html, last accessed 22 December 2014.

29. Miles, 'Early Islamic Inscriptions near Ṭāʾif', pp. 241–2; Blair, 'Invoking the Prophet'. Also illustrated on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/muwinsc2.html, last accessed 22 December 2014.

30. These features are not adequately illustrated in any publication known to me. Kessler provides sketches of them in her transcription of the outer face inscription ('ʿAbd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock') and they also appear in the small photographs of this inscription band in Nuseibeh and Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, pp. 82–105.

31. Examples include the 'ʿUthmanic Qurʾans' in Tashkent and al-Hussein Mosque, Cairo. Unframed examples include Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, Arabe 324a–d; Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya, Cairo, Ms. 139; Gotha, Ms Orient A. 462; Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha 224. The last of these is illustrated in Sokoly, *Languages of the Pen*, Cat. No. 1.

32. Flood, 'The Qurʾan', p. 265.

CHAPTER 6

Proposing a Sequence

CHAPTERS 4 AND 5 established the experimental character of the mosaic inscription covering the outer and inner faces of the octagonal arcade in the Dome of the Rock. Broad stylistic distinctions were offered in Chapter 4, and it was suggested that these derived, in large part, from the visual sources for three scripts. Chapter 5 focused more closely upon specific details of the outer and inner face inscriptions. I also suggested some of the ways in which unusual features of this inscription might have resulted from the difficulties the mosaicists experienced in interpreting the information provided to them by the scribes who penned the master drawings.

This chapter uses these findings in order to provide a speculative reconstruction of the temporal sequence involved in planning and laying the mosaic inscription. Scholars such Marguerite van Berchem, Oleg Grabar, Christel Kessler and Alain George have observed stylistic and technical disparities between the mosaics (both the inscriptions and the elaborate vegetal designs below them) of the inner and outer faces of the octagonal arcade (summarised in Chapters 2 and 4). Indeed, careful examination of the mosaics on the exterior of the circular arcade and the drum of the dome would probably reveal further disparities of this type. There has been a tendency, however, to assume that these differences are due to the activities of two or more teams of mosaicists operating more or less simultaneously within the Dome of the Rock. One should also include in this respect the work required for the mosaics that once covered the exterior. This interpretation allows for the notion of a consistent iconographic programme – one that was planned in advance by 'Abd al-Malik's chosen designers and engineers – encompassing the superstructure and ornamentation of the building. If, however, one can establish that the inscriptions were placed into the building in a sequence, and that decisions taken in the initial stages had an impact upon the textual content elsewhere, then it becomes necessary to approach the symbolism of this key Umayyad building in a rather different manner.

The south side of the outer face inscription is particularly important to the development of this argument (Chapter 5). There are

several features of the inscription on the south side – most notably, the fact that it starts on the southeast side and the contraction of the letter forms, ligatures and spacing from left to right – that indicate this inscription was laid by mosaicists who were familiar with Greek monumental inscriptions. As noted in Chapter 3, Late Antique Greek texts (in monumental form and in manuscripts) tend to arrange the individual letters relatively closely together with no wider gaps allowed between words. Working from left to right (rather than in the actual direction required for Arabic script) they were forced to compress the inscription, particularly as they reached the first half of the *shahāda* and the *basmala*, ending with the first part of *bism* and the spacer tucked onto the southeast side. These difficulties cannot be ascribed simply to errors by the mosaicists as they sought to copy the inscriptions; the decision to pack so much textual content on to one side (*basmala*, *shahāda* and Q 112) is probably a sign of over-ambition and lack of experience on the part of the scribes and their overseers/patrons. The relative compression of the script across the south side, and particularly in the first third of the inscription, stands in contrast to the expansive quality of next section of script on the southwest and west sides.

This contrast is significant for our understanding of the entirety of the outer face inscription. Logic would suggest that a pre-planned inscription running around the entire circuit of the outer face (and, for that matter, the inner face as well) would have been written out in a script employing a consistent set of rules governing the proportions (particularly along the horizontal axis) of letter forms, ligatures and spaces. This being the case, the intrusion of the south side inscription on to the southeast side would have created problems for those responsible for laying the mosaic. Simply, using a closely packed script like that of the south side where would they find the opportunity to economise and thus make allowances for this loss of space? There are other points to take into consideration. First, the sections of text enclosed within the spacers no longer demarcate a single side of the octagonal arcade; rather, they are of variable length and can terminate either at the junction of two sides or approximately in the centre of a side. Second, there are areas where the script between two spacers becomes more compressed, but these are generally midway through, or towards the end, but not in the opening parts. Third, is the repetition of the *basmala* and variant forms of the *shahāda*. Why should this be needed given that these formulae are already stated on the south side? Could not the designers of the outer face inscription have come up with short, but powerful Qurʾanic (or non-Qurʾanic) material to fill these spaces in the outer face inscription?

Jere Bacharach puts forward the inventive suggestion that the repetitive quality of the outer face inscription was deliberate, and meant that those entering the building through its four portals would have been confronted in each case by the same sort of textual

content, particularly the *basmala* and *shahāda*.[1] It is the case that the *basmala* and opening of the *shahāda* do appear in slight variations on the south, west, north and east sides (i.e., facing the four entrances), but Bacharach's idea does not adequately account for why these occur at different places on the four sides nor for the choice of other Qurʾanic and non-Qurʾanic components used between them. As noted in Chapter 2, Grabar also likened the recurring themes of the outer face inscription to the structure of a Christian mass.[2] The reading proposed here takes a different perspective and starts with the assumption that the south side inscription was the first to be placed in the building. The inscription was carefully thought out in terms of content (concisely reflecting the Umayyad polemics found on coinage in the 690s) and form (see Chapter 8). While it was probably accurately written to scale by scribes, the mosaicists chose to follow their normal practice and laid the inscription from left to right. This decision contributed to the problems outlined above.

The disparity between the treatment of the text on the south side and of the texts that follow argues against the idea that the entire inscriptional programme of the outer face was finalised prior to the completion of the south side. If this had been the case, one would expect the remaining parts of the inscription to be more closely packed than they are. In any case, there would have had to have been adjustments made when it became apparent that the south side inscription had exceeded the boundaries set for it. A more probable scenario is that the remainder of the outer face text was not yet planned or that it was conceived in rather generalised terms. This might have involved the selection of certain passages of scripture and the reference to Muhammad as intercessor for the faithful, as well as the decision to terminate the outer face with the name of the patron and a year. Having had time to reflect upon the relative strengths and weaknesses of the south side, those involved in choosing the texts and writing them continued their work running clockwise towards the southeast side. The fact that most of the spacers are no longer placed on, or near the junctions between the sides suggests that those planning the remaining sections no longer felt constrained to delimit the texts to the dimensions of one side of the arcade; indeed, sections 2–6 vary in length from just under two sides of the arcade (section 3: west to north) to about two-thirds of one side (section 5: east side). The absence of compressed pieces of writing just after the spacers (i.e., at the beginning of each section, 2–6) probably results from the mosaicists changing their working practices and laying the inscriptions from right to left.

The most important point to be drawn from this is that the evidence does not support the notion that the outer face inscription was conceived in its entirety prior to the laying of the mosaics of the building. This has obvious implications for the meanings one can draw from the whole text. It would be perfectly possibly to

add or subtract one or more of the whole or partial professions of faith and still end up with an inscription conveying the same set of messages about the intrinsic tenets of Islam. In other words, the designers may have allowed for this repetition in order to provide some flexibility in filling the 125.64 m of space. In contrast to the more ambitious character of the scriptural quotations on the inner face, the Qur'anic passages of the outer are relatively short, and generally employ the *basmala* and parts of the extended profession of faith as 'bookends'. That these initial experiments with the use of specific Qur'anic verses/conflations were deemed successful, however, is confirmed by the reuse of some of the same formulae on the inner face inscription. It is also striking that the *shahāda* itself is not employed in a completely consistent manner on the outer face inscription (see above). A last point is the rather abbreviated name and titulature of the founder himself. Judging by the space allocated to this section, he is referred to simply as ʿAbd All(ā)h ʿAbd al-Malik *amīr al-muʾminīn*. This space does not appear to allow room for the title, *khalīfat all(ā)h* ('representative of God'). Admittedly, this title is also absent from the surviving milestones of the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik, but it was prominently displayed on some of his coin issues (see Chapter 8).

One further element of support for this vision of a somewhat ad hoc creation of the epigraphic content of the outer face is provided by the content and form of the mosaic inscriptions added to religious buildings in the eighth century. We know from written sources that the principal inscription of the Great Mosque of Damascus ran along the *qibla* wall in four registers. Like those of the Dome of the Rock, it was made in gold cubes on a blue background. The first register shares most in common with the outer face inscription in that it started with the *basmala* and terminated with the information about the founder, al-Walid, and the date of the start of construction (87/706). Here the similarities end, however, because the remainder of the first register of text in the prayer hall of the Damascus Mosque is entirely composed of the 'Throne Verse' (Q 2:255). The other three lines are all made up of Qur'anic verses.[3] A mosaic inscription (this time with a gold ground with dark coloured or black letters) was added over the portal of the Banū Jumaḥ in the northwest corner of the Haram in Mecca and recorded that the extension to this area ordered by Caliph al-Mansur (r. 754–75) in 140/758. The mosaic begins with the *basmala*, continuing with Q 9:33 (or 61:9 or 48:28, adapted) and Q 3:96, before recording the details of the foundation.[4] In other words, later designers of mosaics abandoned the type of foundation inscription established on the outer face mosaics of the Dome of the Rock. The repetitive character of this inscription is clearly rejected in al-Walid's and al-Mansur's foundation texts, even to the extent of eliminating the *shahāda* altogether. Also missing are the extra-Qur'anic references to the Prophet. The mosaic inscription

of the outer face may be regarded in some senses as an unsuccessful experiment.

The presence of a date on the last part (southeast side) of the outer face is worthy of further comment. The words, *sana ithnatayn* (sic.) *wa sabʿīn* ('year of 72') appear about midway along the southeast side and are followed by some blessings to fill out the remainder of the space. The combination of a year and the name and title of the patron at this point lend the outer face inscription the character of a Late Antique foundation inscription. There are examples of this practice that, like the Dome of the Rock mosaic inscription, are arranged to enclose some part of an architectural space (Chapter 7). Foundation texts might be quite brief, but they could also incorporate poetic or religious passages placed after an initial invocation and prior to the information about the patron and date. Thus, when seen in the context of Late Antiquity, the outer face inscription can be understood as a coherent text in its own right; the inner face inscription is not required in order for it to be meaningful. One might object that al-Walid's inscription on the *qibla* wall of the Damascus Mosque does continue after the foundation information with a selection of Qur'anic verses (on lines 2–4), but this mosaic panel was produced later and, presumably, drew some inspiration from the ornamental programme of the Dome of the Rock in its completed form.

Why then was ʿAbd al-Malik's name and title and the year 72 placed at the end of the outer face and not the completion of the inscription on the southwest side of the inner face? This deliberate choice raises the possibility that the initial intention was to have only one encircling mosaic inscription within the Dome of the Rock (i.e., the one running around the outer face of the octagonal arcade). Aside from the shift in textual content and, from the latter part of the southeast side onward, the visual qualities of the script on the inner face inscription, there are other factors that might support this interpretation. First, the outer face must have represented a more attractive surface for a mosaic inscription because it was composed simply of eight flat faces connected by gently curved corners. By contrast, the inner face was complicated by the presence of the eight piers. Second, although neither of the locations of the inscription bands (just below the roof) can be described as well lit, the outer face is certainly the better illuminated by the four portals and the windows in the curtain wall. Third, the placement of a second inscription on the inner face meant that the entire sequence of inscriptions could be appreciated only by making one circuit clockwise (outer face) and another anti-clockwise (inner face). This point is highly important because the employment of two texts arranged in this manner represents a fundamental break with prior architectural practice; I am aware of only one earlier building in the Mediterranean region in which there are encircling inscriptions running different directions (Chapter 7). Their presence in the Dome of the Rock demands

further consideration (particularly with regard to the issue of ritual circumambulation. See the Conclusion).

Lastly, one is left to question to what the year 72 actually refers. As already mentioned in Chapter 2, scholars have debated whether this represents the year the building was completed (the majority position) or the year in which construction began. The more recent arguments assembled in favour of each interpretation have relied upon the interpretation of political events during the course of ʿAbd al-Malik's reign, features of the coin issues of the period, or upon the fragmentary economic data available for Greater Syria and Egypt during the late 680s and 690s.[5] It seems unlikely that significant new sources will come to light that will definitively prove either position, however, leaving one with a subjective choice about whether the years prior to or after 72/691–2 provided the best circumstances for the erection of this ambitious monument.

Curiously, the inscription itself has not been examined in sufficient detail as a source of evidence on this chronological issue. Whether or not one accepts the idea that the inner face inscription was part of the inscriptional programme of the Dome of the Rock as it was initially conceived, one is still left with the fact that the year, 72, would have been placed into the building relatively early in the schedule for laying the mosaic. (It is worth noting in this respect that the total surface area covered by the interior mosaics has been estimated at approximately 1,280 m². This is apparently the largest expanse of surviving wall mosaic on any building prior to the twelfth century.[6]) The increasing complexity of both the inscriptions and of the decorative motifs (the latter continuing in yet more elaborate forms on the outer walls of the inner arcade and on the upper and lower parts of the drum of the dome) strongly suggest that the mosaics were laid in sequence, starting on the interior with the outer face of the octagonal arcade and terminating in the area surrounding the rock itself. We have no information about how long it took to install the mosaics,[7] but it would have been a brave decision to estimate the date of completion of this process at the point that the mosaicists started to lay the glass tesserae of the east and southeast faces of the outer face of the octagonal arcade. Thus, one is left with the possibilities that the year refers to the inception of the building process or, less plausibly, to a time prior to the completion of the decorative programme when the Dome of the Rock first performed some ceremonial function. Taking the year to refer to the foundation of the building, one can posit a broad chronology with the planning stage occurring sometime in the one or two years before 72/691–2, and the building and decoration in the phase through to the mid-690s.

The elapse of time between the completion of the outer face inscription (and of the mosaics covering the lower parts of this face of the octagonal arcade) and the planning and execution of the inner

face inscription cannot be estimated on the basis of the physical evidence. The soffits of the arches mark the point of transition between the two faces of the octagonal arcade, but no detailed study has been made of the mortar between the different phases of work in these crucial areas. For the purposes of the present argument, however, the length of time is not a central concern; indeed, it is even possible that the content of the inner face inscription was being considered before the outer face was actually completed. More significant is the notion that the inner face inscription was not part of the initial plan, and that the ad hoc evolution of the outer face inscription took place at a time when this enclosing text was still viewed as an independent entity. This teasing apart of the outer and inner face inscriptions has major implications for the understanding of their intended iconography (on this issue, see Chapters 7 and 8).

The inner face inscription also shows evidence for phases of evolution, although they are less pronounced than those of the outer face. Most obvious is the change in script: the first two sides (south and southeast) are occupied by script B and the remainder (last part of the southeast to southwest) with script C. As already noted, script B represents a slight evolution from script A. Script C is a more radical change with the adoption of the proportional systems and orthographic conventions of contemporary book scripts used in writing the Qur'an. The most important difference between the outer and the inner face inscriptions is in the content: the inner face abandons the repetitive character of the outer face and its emphasis upon the *shahāda*, and embarks upon a more ambitious programme of Qur'anic passages that seem to be addressing principally the nature of Jesus (according to the Muslim tradition) and the rejection of the Christian notion of the Trinity (on the interpretation of these passages, see also Chapter 8). In some senses this represents an elaboration upon the statements of the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad that are such predominant features of the outer face inscription.

The decorative panels below the inscriptions also show interesting evidence for evolving ideas. Most important in this respect is the contrast between the 'plant' forms of the south side and those of the remainder of the inner face Figures 6.1 and 6.2). While those on the south are certainly more elaborate than the equivalent designs on the outer face panels (such as the addition of jewel-encrusted 'trunks' and golden bracelets set with pearls and rectangular gems), they seem almost austere when compared with the designs on the other seven long sides of the inner face. It is in these other panels (running from the southeast to the southwest sides) that one comes across representations of lavish pectorals, tiaras, necklaces and bracelets, all of which are fringed with hanging pearls. In other words, the decision to include explicit representations of Byzantine

Figure 6.1 *'Plant' forms from the south side of the inner face. Ashmolean Museum, Creswell Archive: EA.CA.190. By permission of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.*
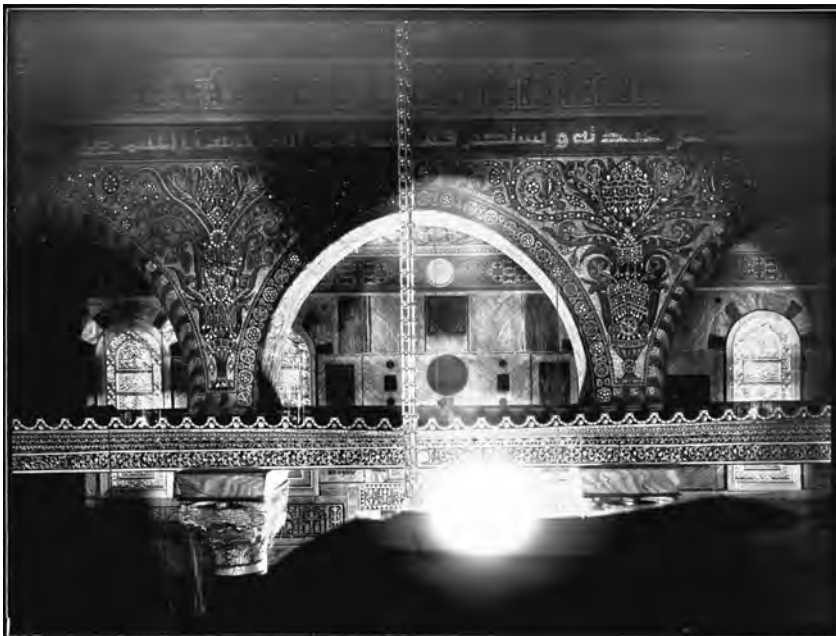
Figure 6.2 *Mosaic panel on the east side of the inner face. Ashmolean Museum, Creswell Archive: EA.CA.184. By permission of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.*

imperial jewellery is not apparent on the initial side of the inner face (written in script B), but occurs on first on the side where both the script style (from script B to C) and the textual content make their radical shift. It could be argued that the decorative panels of the southeast side ought to look more like those of the preceding south side given the fact that the inscription above is mainly written in style B. However, it is worth noting that the mosaics will have been laid from the top downwards. In other words, having made the decision to alter the appearance and tone of the inscriptions in the latter part of the southeast side, it made sense for the designs beneath to reflect this new approach (on the engagement with Orthodox Christianity, see comments in Chapter 8).

In terms of planning and execution, there are clear signs that the scribes and mosaicists (as well as those overseeing their work) were better able to estimate the spaces required for relatively long passages of text. The absence of spacers is also an indication of their increasing confidence in using monumental text as a means to communicate ideological concerns. This is done without awkward areas of congested text and also deals well with the larger number of angles and re-entrant corners running around the inner face of the octagonal arcade. The most important question, therefore, is whether the complete text was decided upon prior to the commencement of the laying of the cubes by the mosaicists? This question hinges upon a consideration of the transition from script B to script C and of the differences in content between these two parts.

The section of the inner face inscription written in script B shows some developments from the outer face, though these are relatively subtle. The basic proportions of the two scripts are very similar. Diacritical marks are not a significant feature of script B; indeed, the south side of the inner face contains no words marked with diacritics. Even more significant is the content of the text written in script B because all this is can be seen already on the outer face inscription: the *basmala*, a version of the long profession of faith split into two halves, two short Qurʾanic passages (Q 33:56 and the combination of Q 64:1 and 57:2), and a blessing upon the Prophet. This evidence can be set against the more novel features. The south side avoids the problems encountered on the corresponding side of the outer face by replacing the longer Q 112 with the shorter Q 64:1/57:2. This adjustment does not harm the meaning, as the latter passage conveys a similar message about the oneness and omnipotence of God. The second passage (Q 33:56) follows on this message with a statement of about Muhammad as the messenger of God; a further blessing makes up the remainder. It is in these last two sections that one encounters a more extensive employment of diacritics. Their presence is particularly noteworthy in the case of Q 33:56 (*malāʾikatahu* and *ʾamanū*) because the same passage is unmarked on the outer face. Presumably, this must have addressed perceived problems with

the legibility of the same verse on the outer face inscription. The other marked word, *raḥma*, from the blessing also appears with an undotted *tāʾ tawīla* on the outer face (north side).

The abiding impression from script B, therefore, is of continuity with the outer face. Both in general appearance and in content, the mosaics cover familiar territory. The observations collected in the previous paragraph certainly do not represent definitive proof concerning the overall planning process, though they do open the possibility that script B was to continue across the remainder of the inner face inscription. Would then the character and content of the inner face inscription have echoed those of the outer face? This can only be a matter of speculation, however, as the decision to place Q 4:171–172 along the next section (end of the southeast, all of the east and northeast, and half of the north sides) marks a significant new departure in several respects. First, there is a change of script coupled with a more extensive employment of diacritics. Second, the text chosen addresses new issues (particularly the status of Jesus as prophet and the criticism of the Christian Trinity) not covered previously in the inscription band of the octagonal arcade. Third, the Qurʾanic passage is considerably longer than any of the other pieces of scripture before it. The next set of Qurʾanic verses (Q 19:15 or 33 (paraphrased), and 34–36) dwell on similar themes and are also relatively long, covering the remainder of the north, the whole of the northwest and the first half of the west. The last quotation (Q 3:18–19) comprises a potent call to follow scripture and the signs provided by God.

Taken as a whole, the texts written in script C are impressive both for their thematic coherence and for the manner in which they are placed within the available space. There can be little doubt that they were carefully planned and executed (allowing for the fact that they remain difficult to see in this rather dark zone of the interior), and one can assume that the mosaics closely corresponded to the (full-scale) preparatory drawings prepared by scribes. There are no obvious signs that the mosaicists had to struggle to fit words on to the longer flat sides of the piers making up the inner face of the octagonal arcade. One is left, therefore, with alternative scenarios for the inner face inscription: in the first, the inscription was planned completely in advance, but executed in two scripts; while in the second, the south and majority of the southeast sides were completed before a change of mind occurred concerning the script and content of the remaining sides. Circumstantial evidence in favour of the latter scenario has been assembled above, and it is this sequence of events that will form the basis of the interpretation of historical evidence in Chapter 8. The iconographic dimensions of the format, placement and colour of the inscriptions are considered in Chapter 7.

Notes

1. Jere Bacharach, 'Signs of Sovereignty: The *Shahāda*, Qur'anic Verses, and the Coinage of 'Abd al-Malik', *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 1–30. This is the most sustained examination of the profession of faith, both within the Dome of the Rock and in other early monumental and portable inscriptions. See also Bacharach and Anwar, 'Early Versions of the *Shahāda*', pp. 60–9; Luke Treadwell, 'The "Orans" Drachms of Bishr ibn Marwān and the Figural Coinage of the Early Marwanid Period', in Jeremy Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 2: Jerusalem and Early Islam*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.2 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 243–5; Stefan Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire and its Religion on Coin Imagery', in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicholas Sinai and Michael Marx (eds), *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, Text and Studies on the Qur'ān 6 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), pp. 173–86. On the Arab–Sasanian drachms, including the statement of Muhammad as God's messenger, see Lutz Ilisch, 'The Muhammad Drachms and their Relationship to Umayyad Syria and Northern Mesopotamia', *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society* 193 (suppl.) (Autumn 2007): 17–24.

2. Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, p. 67 (the relevant section is quoted in Chapter 2).

3. Étienne Combé, Jean Sauvaget and Gaston Wiet (eds), *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1931), No. 18; Dodd and Khairallah, *Image of the Word*, II, p. 10; Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus*, app., pp. 247–51 (the original sources are given in the notes). These verses are Q 2:255; 1:1–7; 79:1–46; 80:1–42; 81:1–29.

4. Combé, Sauvaget and Wiet (eds), *Répertoire chronologique*, I, No. 38; Dodd and Khairallah, *Image of the Word*, II, pp. 29, 55. For a convenient table listing the Qur'anic verses employed in the Dome of the Rock, the mosques of Damascus and Medina, and in Shivta, see Moor, 'Mosque and Church: Arabic Inscriptions at Shivta', p. 103.

5. Blair, 'What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?'. *Contra* Johns, 'Archaeology and The History of Early Islam', pp. 421–6. See also Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, pp. 1–8, 31–48; Necıpoğlu, 'The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest', p. 83 nn. 20–1. For a critique of Johns' use of the economic data in the Nessana papyri, see Hoyland, 'New Documentary Texts', pp. 399–401.

6. Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, p. 71 (no source is given for this calculation). There would, of course, have been buildings of this period and later that originally contained even larger expanses of mosaic. Obvious examples include the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (there being campaigns of mosaic decoration from the sixth to the fourteenth centuries) and the Congregational Mosque in Damascus, commissioned by al-Walid I. The latter contained friezes of mosaic decoration in the upper parts of the facades of the courtyard, the arcades and the interior of the prayer hall. On the mosaics of these two structures, see Cyril Mango, *Materials for the Study of the Mosaics in St. Sophia, Istanbul* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1962); Robin Cormack, 'Interpreting the Mosaics of S. Sophia at Istanbul', *Art History* 4 (1981): 131–49; Marguerite van Berchem, 'The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock', revd edn, I.1, pp. 217–322; Klaus Brisch, 'Observations on the Iconography of the Mosaics in the Great Mosque

at Damascus', in Priscilla Soucek (ed.), *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World. Papers from a Colloquium in Memory of Richard Ettinghausen* (University Park, PA and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), pp. 13–23; Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus*, pp. 15–56.

7. Some very broad calculations can be made on the basis of the surface area of mosaics indicated by Grabar (n. 6). The surface area of 1,280 m² would require approximately 19,200,000 mosaic tesserae. The labour involved in installing would break down into the following categories: provision of scaffolding (112 man-days); laying the base layer and bedding layer of mortar (2 × 645 = 1,290 man-days); and applying the glass and stone cubes. Estimates for the laying of mosaic range from 2.8 to 14 man- days per m². Using the lower estimate one reaches 3,800 man-days for the entire mosaic scheme. This provides a total of 5,202 man-days for these activities (adjusting the calculations to a rate 5 days per m², one arrives at 6,400 days for the mosaic and a total of 7,690 days). Many other factors would have to be considered, however. For the mosaics these include the manufacture of the coloured glass; the beating of gold leaf for the gold cubes (approximately 40 per cent of the total); and the cutting of the coloured glass, gold and stone cubes and the sheets of mother-of-pearl. For example, the approximately 376 m² of gold leaf required for the gold cubes would have to be beaten from about 83 oz of gold (according to the description of gold-beating given by Pliny the Elder). At a rate of 15 man-days per oz this amounts to 1,245 man-days. Glass manufacture is a particularly labour- and fuel-intensive activity. The interior decoration also requires many other activities, including the shaping, sawing and polishing of marble veneer panels; the carving, painting and gilding of marble bands; and the manufacture and gilding of the copper plaques on the tie beams. One should also account for the time and labour required for the provision of materials and fuel to the building site.

Calculations of materials and labour coefficients are drawn from Janet DeLaine, *The Baths of Caracalla: A Study in the Design, Construction, and Economics of Large-scale Building Projects in Imperial Rome*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Supplementary Series 25 (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1997); Milwright, 'Fixtures and Fittings', pp. 95–101.

Symbolic Dimensions of Inscriptions in Late Antiquity and Early Islam

Chapters 4–6 brought together circumstantial evidence to support the idea that the mosaic inscription bands of the two faces of the octagonal arcade were laid in a sequence. These observations lead one to question the meanings the patron and designers might have wished to convey through the placement and content of the decorative programme. If the inscriptions were not completely worked out in advance, with perhaps only their main concepts and not their specific wording established at the planning stage, then we must downgrade our expectations concerning the complexity and coherence of the resulting accumulation of texts (and these same concerns could also apply to other aspects of the interior ornamentation). We need to focus greater attention on the steps involved in bringing a structure from the 'drawing board' to a finished form, and the likely practical, aesthetic and iconographic choices made through that process.

This chapter concentrates on another aspect of the inscription that might have formed a component part of its intended message from the time it was initially conceived. This set of meanings is not contingent on either the specific choice of Qur'anic and non-Qur'anic source texts or the language in which they were written, but relates to the fact that they were deliberately designed to encircle part of the interior. In the concluding section, I relate the observations made about Late Antique and early Islamic encircling inscriptions to other potential iconographic dimensions: the colour scheme and the octagonal plan of the arcade around which the inscriptions are placed.

The decision to surround the interior of the structure with bands of inscriptions was probably taken early in the process. As already noted, the planning and execution of encircling inscriptions are significant challenges, particularly given that formal Arabic script had not yet fully developed its ability to stretch selected characters along the horizontal (or, indeed, the vertical) axis. The implications of planning such extended inscriptions and the potential meanings conveyed by encircling texts have elicited little comment in the scholarly investigation of the Dome of the Rock. It is possible to

suggest some reasons for this. First, is the implicit assumption that it is relatively common in the architecture prior to the Dome of the Rock to arrange the inscriptions of a centralised building such that they run around the entire circumference of the exterior or some feature of the interior space (the outer wall, an arcade, the base of a dome and so on). After all, a centralised building seems to encourage circumambulation around some central point or zone, so why not arrange the inscriptions in order that they do the same? Second, encircling inscription bands became a common feature of Islamic architecture in later phases. It is natural to assume, therefore, that this represents a common preoccupation from the inception of Islamic history. The Dome of the Rock therefore stands at the beginning of this ubiquitous practice in Islamic religious and secular architecture. These assumptions require closer examination.

I argue that encircling inscriptions (i.e., those that run in a continuous sequence around all, or most of the circumference of a building or object) have characteristics that differentiate them from more conventionally arranged pieces of formal text. Important in this context are the actions they impose upon the viewer.[1] A rectangular inscribed plaque on a monument can be appreciated from a single perspective (assuming that the inscription is adequately illuminated and the letters are of a sufficient size). By contrast, a complete encircling inscription – whether around the outside of a structure or some part of the interior – requires the viewer to move through 360° in order to appreciate its full content. In the case of encircling inscriptions on portable artefacts, the viewer is left with the choice of moving around the object (as one is required to do when looking at displays of Islamic artefacts in museums) or holding and moving the object itself. Again, the encircling inscription requires the active participation of the viewer. There also exists a potent symbolism of enclosing (and 'protecting') an architectural space or some part of a portable artefact within a circuit of words.

Encircling Inscriptions in Early Islam

What evidence do we find for the practice of placing encircling inscriptions on the earliest Islamic buildings? On the basis of both archaeological and textual evidence, it is almost certain that the Dome of the Rock is the first Islamic structure to have attempted this type of inscription band. Mosaic inscriptions in later Umayyad buildings. such as the market constructed by Caliph Hisham (r. 724–3) at Baysan, take the form of rectangular plaques.[2] The long (and now lost) mosaic inscription of the prayer hall of the Great Mosque in Damascus was arranged in bands running along the *qibla* wall; the only feature to encircle the entire prayer hall was a carved, gilded and bejewelled marble vine-scroll known as the *karma*.[3] The tendency for inscriptions to take over the space normally reserved

Figure 7.1 *Column capital with carved inscription from Muwaqqar, Jordan, 720–4. By permission of the Jordan Archaeological Museum: 5085J.*

for decoration is shown well by the epigraphic capital discovered at the ruined *qaṣr* of Muwaqqar in Jordan (Figure 7.1). Only one face is covered with inscription, though the manner in which the words start to push towards the acanthus leaves covering the remaining carved area perhaps anticipates the development of encircling programmes of inscriptions in later architecture.[4] There are numerous descriptions of the ornamentation of al-Walid's reconstruction (undertaken by ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAziz, the Umayyad governor) of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina between 707 and 709–10. The principal inscription was a mosaic band located along the length of the *qibla* wall, and, like that of the Great Mosque of Damascus, it was composed of several Qurʾanic verses laid out in gold on a blue ground.[5]

Encircling inscriptions are also found on portable artefacts of the early Islamic period, and in this case we also possess a few examples that can be dated with confidence to the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik. One can probably exclude the vessel known as the 'Basra ewer' in the Georgian State Museum, Tbilisi. The Kufic inscription around the rim states that the vessel was made by Ibn (or Abu) Yazid in Basra in 69/688–9. More likely is that the century has been omitted from

the date and that it was actually produced in 169/785–6.[6] Inscribed textiles are also items that could potentially encircle those who wore them, and two polychromatic silks bearing *tirāz* bands do give the name of the Caliph Marwan (most probably Marwan II, r. 744–50). A turban fabric from the Islamic Art Museum in Cairo carries an inscription proclaiming that it was made for one Samuel b. Musa in 88/707–8.[7] The Kaʿba is known to have been covered with textiles (usually ikat silks from Yemen known in Arabic sources as *wāshī*) prior to the revelation of Islam and that this practice continued under Islamic rule. There is no indication, however, that the textiles covering the building bore inscriptions before the Abbasid period.[8]

The lead seal, or weight, bearing the name of ʿAbd al-Malik (Figure 4.10, above) has several areas devoted to inscriptions. Most important in the present context is the encircling band on the reverse of the seal. Written in a bold script is a form of the *shahāda* with a tree-like motif separating the beginning and end of the inscription.[9] Intriguingly, the obverse also has an encircling outer band, though in this case it is occupied by a simplified vine-scroll motif, perhaps suggesting that the encircling vine already possessed some symbolic value for the Umayyad elite prior to the construction of the *karma* in the Great Mosque of Damascus. In this case the vine encircles the name, Filastin, and a pair of confronting lions below.

It is not apparent when in ʿAbd al-Malik's reign the seal/weight was produced, nor do we know whether others produced for other provinces of his empire took the same form. By contrast, the chronology of the Islamic coins of the late 680s and 690s is relatively well established allowing one to trace the progression of the inscriptional programmes and their placement on the two faces of gold, silver and copper issues. Both 'Arab–Sasanian' and 'Arab–Byzantine' coins feature margins – either on the obverse or the reverse – containing Arabic text. By the 680s a significant portion of the margin is often occupied by Arabic inscriptions. For example, in 66–7/686–8 drachms were issued in Bishapur by ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAbd Allah, a Zubayrid governor, and carry the words: *bism all(ā)h / muḥammad rasūl / all(ā)h*. The first Arab–Sasanian issue in which the margin is, with the exception of the four traditional Sasanian crescent and star motifs, completely filled with text was minted in Anbir in 68/688–9 (Figure 7.2). Anbir was the capital of the province of Juzjan in Khurasan, and the coins carry Pahlavi, Arabic and Bactrian inscriptions. Particularly interesting in the present context is the margin of the reverse, which combines the mint and what may be the name (*zoolooo gōzogono*) of an Ephthalite king of Juzjan.[10]

The so-called 'long *shahāda*' appeared (in Pahlavi, and occupying the central field of the reverse) on a drachm minted in Sistan by the Zubayrid governor, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz ibn ʿAbdallah in 72/691–2 (Figure 7.3. See also comments in Chapter 8).[11] By 73/692–3 the formula of *bism all(ā)h / lā ilāh illā all(ā)h / waḥdahu muḥammad / rasūl all(ā)h* was

Figure 7.2 *Reverse of 'Arab–Sasanian' drachm minted in Anbir in 68/688–9. Shamma Collection 7427. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

Figure 7.3 *Drachm minted in Sistan by the Zubayrid governor, 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abdallah in 72/691–2. Foroughi Collection. Photograph: Stuart Sear.*

appearing in Arabic around the margin of drachms issued at 'Aqula by 'Abd al-Malik's brother, Bishr ibn Marwan (cf. Figure 8.4, below). With the exception of the upper part of the crown of the shah and the recurrent pellets and crescent and star motifs, this text effectively occupies the entire margin of the coin.[12] Two more drachms, both minted in Damascus, make use of the long *shahāda* around the outer margin of the obverse (the top of the headgear of the shah again separating the beginning and the end of the text. The first is the 'standing caliph' drachm probably dating to 74/693–4 (adapting the gold prototype; see below), and the second is the famous silver coin carrying the *'anaza* (spear) and sacral arch issued in several variants between about 75/694–5 and 77/696–7 (Figure 8.5, below).[13]

The so-called '*shahāda* solidus' was probably minted in Damascus between 72 and 74 (691–4). Not only has the Greek/Latin text been removed and replaced with Arabic (with the exception of the simplified monograms flanking the pole-on-steps), but this new text

Figure 7.4 *'Standing caliph' dinar. Minted in Damascus between 74 and 77 (693–7). Ashmolean Museum: SICA 705. By permission of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.*

forms a coherent entity – the 'long *shahāda*' (Figure 5.3, above). This occupies the circumference of the reverse margin with the knob at the summit of the pole. The 'long *shahāda*' is adopted in the next gold coin, the famous 'standing caliph' dinar minted in the Umayyad capital between 74 and 77 (693–7). In contrast to the '*shahāda* solidus', the profession of faith (sometimes omitting the *basmala*) is transferred to the obverse (Figure 7.4). The encircling inscription is cut at the bottom by the caliph's feet and at the top by his head-dress. On the reverse the inscription occupies the same portion of the margin as the *shahāda* solidus, but with the following wording: *bism all(ā)h ḍuriba hadhā al-dīnār sanat* [+ the year] ('in the name of God, this dinar as struck in the year . . .').[14]

The famous resolution of this experimental period of Islamic coinage is the epigraphic dinar first struck in 77/696–7, probably in Damascus (Figure 7.5). The coin combines three horizontal lines of Arabic text in the central field of the obverse and reverse. On both sides there is a marginal legend that fully encircles the central field and contains no spacers to designate the beginning and end of the text. The reform dinar moves the *shahāda* to the central field of the obverse and surrounds it with the 'Prophetic mission' (Q 9:33 or 61:9, or 48:28 (adapted)) on the margin. The reverse comprises *sūrat ikhlāṣ* (Q 112, slightly adapted) in the central field and the *basmala* and the date of minting around the margin. This basic formula was adopted on silver coins in 78/697–8.[15]

The experiments with the content and placement of text in the late 680s and 690s allowed Islamic coinage to establish visual char-acteristics that marked it out from the currencies of contemporary non-Muslim polities. While marginal legends appear on Late Antique coinage, the only ones to allow the text to wrap around the entire circumference of either the obverse or reverse are, to the best of my

Figure 7.5 *Epigraphic dinar first struck in 77/696–7, probably in Damascus. Shamma Collection 11. Courtesy of the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar.*
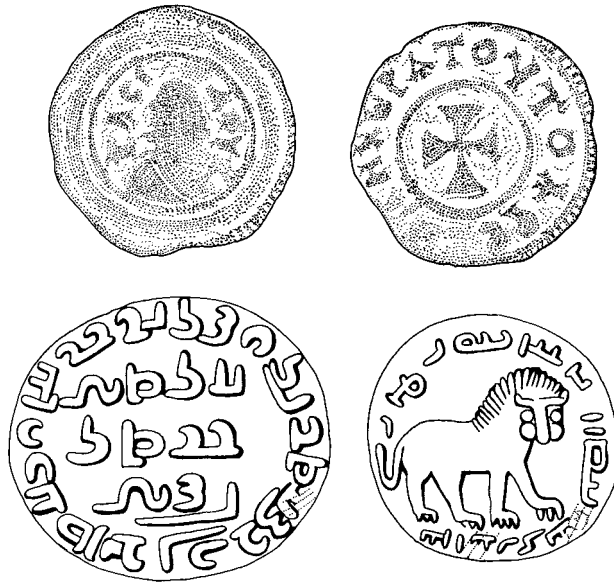
Figure 7.6 *Upper row: Ethiopian copper coin, c. 350–400, unknown ruler. British Museum. After: Phillipson,* Ancient Ethiopia, *fig. 28. Lower row: Sasanian seals recovered from excavations of Qasr-I Abu Nasr, Iran, fifth–seventh centuries. After: Frye,* Sasanian Remains from Qasr-i Abu Nasr *(1973), Nos D.181, D.207. Drawings: Marcus Milwright.*

knowledge, a few Ethiopian issues and one Sasanian drachm.[16] Fully encircling inscriptions are also a feature of some Sasanian seals.[17] The elimination of all motifs in favour of script has no precursors in coinage, though Robert Hillenbrand has noted that this reliance solely upon script is seen occasionally on seals of the Sasanian period (Figure 7.6).[18] Monograms enclosed within encircling inscriptions

are also encountered on sixth-century Byzantine metal and glass weights. In other cases, the encircling marginal legend surrounds a portrait bust.[19] Evidence is, however, lacking as to whether the coins, seals and weights mentioned above had any direct impact on the design of Umayyad coinage.

Encircling Inscriptions on Late Antique Architecture

Given the presence of numerous surviving churches, both basilical and centralised in Greater Syria, one might expect to find encircling inscriptions on the interior or exterior walls (in mosaic, carved stone or painted in fresco). The reverse appears to be the case; I am unaware of a surviving example of this type of inscription dating between the third century and 72/691–2. This is not to say that they did not once exist. Many churches are only known in plan with most of the super-structure now lost. Other standing buildings – either completely or partially preserved – have either lost their interior decoration over time or the earlier phases of decoration have been obliterated by later ornamental programmes. It is striking, however, that no trace of an encircling inscription survives in fragments of carved masonry; where inscriptions do appear, they always take the form of rectangular plaques or carved lintels.[20] Another pertinent issue is the absence of references to encircling inscriptions in descriptions of pilgrimage sites and churches.[21]

This general picture is also confirmed in the much larger number of floor mosaics surviving from churches, synagogues and elite houses in Greater Syria. Inscriptions usually conform to a narrow range of categories. First, are single words (e.g., identifying saints, tyches and other mythological figures, and representations of towns) or short phrases added into appropriate spaces without any framing element. Second, are framed inscriptions that are generally either rectangular or circular with the text arranged in evenly spaced horizontal lines. The text is usually oriented so that it can be read by a standing viewer facing east (e.g., Figure 2.8, above). This principle is followed even when the remainder of the mosaic has a strongly centralised charac-ter, such as the sixth-century Church of the Virgin in Madaba (Figure 7.7). Roundels might also be divided into segments, each with a rep-resentational motif and a title. Examples include the zodiac (such as the synagogues of Beth Alpha, Naʾaran and Hammat Tiberias) or the months of the year (the hall of the monastery at Baysan).[22]

Three exceptions to this general pattern can be seen in the floor mosaics of the synagogue of Sepphoris and the churches of the Apostles in Madaba and the *diaconia* associated with the Propylaea church in Gerasa (Jarash). The Sepphoris example comprises a Greek foundation inscription running around an image of Helios.[23] This roundel sits at the centre of a Zodiac. The sixth-century mosaic of the nave of the Church of the Apostles in Madaba contains a central

Figure 7.7 *Mosaic pavement of the Church of the Virgin, Madaba, Jordan, sixth century. Photograph: Marcus Milwright.*

roundel depicting the classical personification of the sea, Thalassa (Figure 7.8). Of greatest interest in the present context is the Greek inscription running in a circular band around the figure of Thalassa (the beginning and end of the text are separated by a simple vegetal motif directly above the head of the personification). The inscription band reads: 'And God who made the heaven and the earth, give life to Anastasios and Theodora and Salamanios, the mos[aicist]*)'. The last word of the inscription is abbreviated (presumably because the designer ran out of space), and contains only three letters – ΨΗΦ – probably forming the first part of ΨΗΦΟΠΟΙΟΣ (mosaicist). The first phrase, the invocation to God as creator of the heavens and the earth, draws upon phrases in the Old Testament, particularly Psalm 146:6 (cf. Genesis 1:1 and Acts 17:24). More important is that this general formulation of words also comprises part of the opening of the creed adopted at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and revised at the First Council of Constantinople in 381 ('I believe in the one God, the Father almighty, maker of the heaven and the earth, of all things visible and invisible').[24] The remainder of the inscription should probably be regarded as a foundation text.

The roundel of the mosaic pavement of the *diaconia* is located on the north side of the atrium of the Propylaea church in Gerasa (Figure 7.9). This is a more complex roundel and the interlace design bears comparison with the mosaic floor of the Church of the Virgin in Madaba. Where the latter carries an inscription in the central roundel, the *diaconia* of the Propylaea church has two: one in a central roundel (referring to the structure as a 'blessed temple'), and a

Figure 7.8 *Central roundel of the mosaic pavement of the Church of the Apostles, Madaba, Jordan, sixth century. Photograph: Marcus Milwright.*
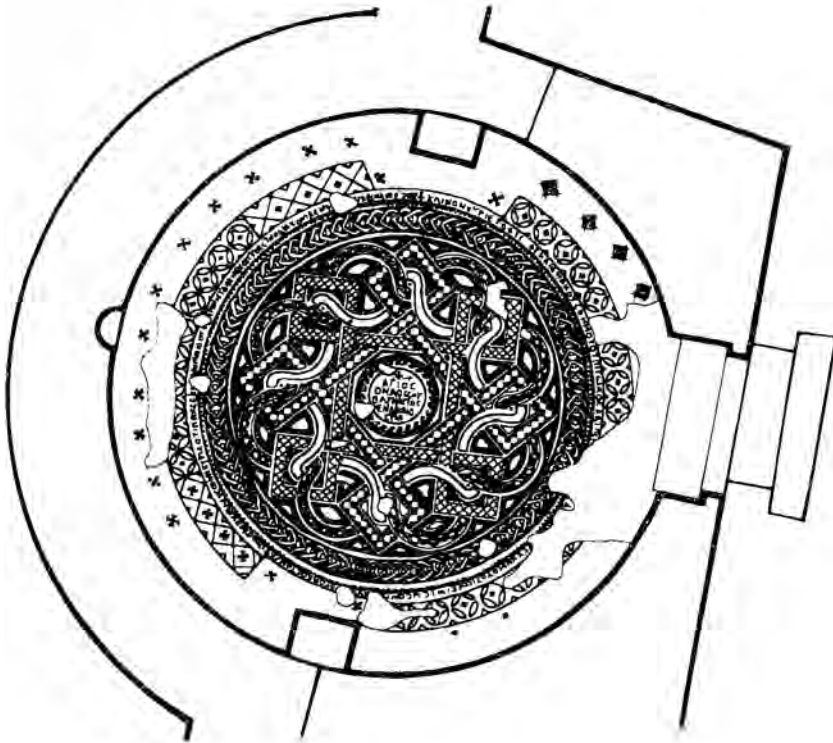
Figure 7.9 *Mosaic pavement of the* diaconia *of the Propylaea church in Jerash (Gerasa). After: Crowfoot,* Early Churches in Palestine *(1971).*

second in an encircling band running around the interlace. The final section of the circular band takes on the dedicatory character with the function of the space and the date of construction (equivalent to May 565) included. The remainder is made up of the first three verses from Psalm 86: 'Hear me, Lord, and answer me for I am poor and needy. Guard my life, for I am faithful to you; save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God; have mercy on me, Lord, for I

call to you all day long.' These verses are certainly appropriate to the function of the *diaconia*, an establishment meant for the care of the destitute and for the distribution of charity.

The sophisticated interlace design is composed of interlocking squares and circles. John Crowfoot has called attention to the similarity between the geometric principles underlying this design and those employed in laying out the plan of the Dome of the Rock (according to the observations of Mauss and Creswell).[25] More recently Alain George has returned to this issue and noticed that the same combinations of interlocking circles and squares are used in the construction of Qur'an frontispieces of the Umayyad period.[26] Perhaps most important in this context, however, is the observation made by Amy Papalexandrou that the inclusion of two psalms (65 in the central roundel and 86 in the encircling inscription) might be 'an instance of what could be interpreted as ritualized movement involving physical circulation with spoken prayer'.[27] The relationship between an encircling inscription and ritual has been noted in Armenian churches (see below), and this too might involve some element of reading aloud.

Looking elsewhere in the Middle East there is little solid evidence for the existence of encircling inscriptions being placed on architecture. The church in the monastery of St Catherine's in Sinai contains a sixth-century mosaic representation of the transfiguration in the niche hood of the apse. The lowest section of this mosaic – located just above the marble veneer – is an inscription band made up of a single line of dark blue Greek letters on a gold ground (Figure 7.10, See also Chapter 3).[28] The inscription does not continue around the arch in order to encircle the central scene, however. By contrast, the small sixth- or early seventh-century painted niche from a chapel within a church at Bawit (now in the Coptic Museum in Cairo) incorporates an inscription band around the arch. Given the damage to the lower section, it is conceivable that the text continued around the lower part of the niche hood. Other Coptic buildings of the Late Antique period exhibit evidence of extensive decorative programmes, particularly in carved masonry and fresco. Generally inscriptions are not a conspicuous feature of the ornamentation. It is striking, for example, that the fresco cycle within the sanctuary of the church of the Red Monastery in Sohag includes no encircling inscription bands despite the broadly centralised plan of this zone of the building.[29]

The employment of script is a ubiquitous feature of the architecture and portable arts of ancient Yemen. While the inscriptions are often applied on to more than one surface, this seldom takes the form of an encircling inscription. The stele of Abraha, the Axumite governor for southern Arabia and later king of Saba' (Yemen) (d. after 553), illustrates this process well in that the faces of the stele are covered with text, but each face was to be read as a separate

Figure 7.10 *Apse mosaic of the church of St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai. Sixth century. Photograph: CCA, Centro di Conservazione Archeologica, Rome.*

rectangular panel arranged in horizontal lines from top to bottom. Other inscriptions of the Late Antique period in Yemen adopt this conventional formula of arranging the text into horizontal lines whether on a rectangular plaque or in a sculptural form.[30] The Hijaz provides no physical evidence of this type of inscription, though it is intriguing that the famous 'hanging poems' (*al-muʿallaqāt*) are reputed to have been suspended around the walls of the Kaʿba.[31]

Constantinople provides two outstanding examples of encircling inscriptions, and it is certainly possible that others existed in churches, palatial and administrative buildings within the Byzantine capital. The first example is the band found during the excavations of the Church of St Polyeuktos, an elaborate building commissioned by the imperial princess Juliana Anicia, and constructed around 524–6. It was known prior to the excavation of the site that there had been a poetic encircling inscription within the church; the content is recorded in a tenth-century work known as the *Palatine Anthology* (I.10).[32] The carved masonry recovered from the excavations revealed the accuracy of the textual account (Figure 7.11. See also Figure 3.7, above). The majuscule script carved in high relief, with the letters – each about 0.11 m tall – touching the lower and upper frames of the band. Analysis of the band has demonstrated that

Figure 7.11 *Inscribed masonry block from the Church of St Polyeuktos, Istanbul, 524–7. Photograph: Anthémios de Tralles (Wikimedia Commons).*

the inscription was originally painted: blue in the background with the letters picked out in white.

The inscription running around the nave records the initial foundation by Eudokia of a 'temple' (*nêon*) dedicated to Polyeuktos, claiming that its relatively modest size and decoration were due to a premonition that a descendant would 'know well how to provide better embellishment'. This descendant, Juliana Anicia, is recorded as the person who 'by her righteous sweat has built a house worthy of the immortal Polyeuktos'. She is lavishly praised in the remainder of the nave inscription, as is her family line in the past, present and future. Lines 42–76 continue the themes of praise to Juliana, who claimed to follow Constantine and Theodosius, as well as surpassing 'the wisdom of Solomon, raising a temple to receive God, the richly wrought and graceful splendour of which the ages cannot celebrate'. The inscription continues with eulogies to Juliana's church before concluding: 'Such is the labour that Juliana, after a countless swarm of labours, accomplished for the souls of her parents, and for her own life, and for the lives of those who are to come and those that already are.' The reference to Solomon is intriguing as it creates a link between the church and the Temple in Jerusalem.[33]

The   second   example   of   an   encircling   inscription   from

Figure 7.12 *Detail of inscription band in Sts Sergius and Bacchus, Istanbul, 527–36. Photograph: Filiz Tütüncü Çağlar.*

Constantinople is located in the Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus, a building commissioned by Emperor Justinian (r. 527–65). The church was built sometime after 527 (probably between 530 and 533), and originally stood within the palace of Hormisdas. References to religious officials attached to the Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus in a document of 536 provides a *terminus ante quem* for the construction and presumably also the decorative programme. Its original function has been the subject of controversy, though the centralised plan does suggest the idea of a martyrium.[34]

The inscription is carved into the entablature running around the nave (Figure 7.12. See also Figures 3.4 and 3.5, above). There is no obvious sign of pigment on the words or the background, though a similar colour scheme to the Polyeuktos inscription is plausible. The monumental text starts at the junction of the nave and the apse on the southeast side and terminates at the northeast corner (i.e., the apse is the only part of the interior not to contain the inscription band). In common with the inner face mosaic band in the Dome of the Rock, the carved inscription of Sts Sergius and Bacchus wraps around the projecting piers. Although the basic form inscribed by the text band is complicated by the fact that four faces are concave (because of the exedrae) rather than flat. Jonathan Bardill gives the translation as follows:

> Other sovereigns have honoured dead men whose labour was unprofitable, but our sceptered Justinian, fostering piety, honours with a splendid abode the servant of Christ, Begetter of all things, Sergius; whom not the burning breath of fire, nor the sword, nor any other constraint of torments disturbed; but who endured to be

slain for the sake of Christ, the God, gaining by his blood heaven as his home. May he in all things guard the rule of the sleepless sovereign and increase the power of the God-crowned Theodora whose mind is adorned with piety, whose constant toil lies in the unsparing efforts to nourish the destitute.[35]

In common with the inscription in St Polyeuktos, this one takes the form of an elaborate dedication. While the inscription does invoke the name of Christ, it is notable for the absence of quotations from scripture (these are also absent in the text employed by Juliana Anicia for her church).

A last architectural artefact can be mentioned in this context because of its probable association with the Byzantine capital in the sixth century. This is a small ciborium (0.63 m high) carved from a single block of Proconessian marble. The object is now housed in the Treasury of St Mark's Cathedral in Venice. Presumably one of the many treasures looted from Constantinople in 1204, it is unclear in which religious institution this object may originally have been located. Four columns topped with Corinthian capitals support four arches and a simple dome. An intaglio inscription in Greek runs around the exterior faces of the arches, which reads: 'For the blessing and salvation of the most illustrious Anastasia.' If 'Anastasia' is the name of a Byzantine noblewoman, then the inscription takes on a straightforward dedicatory character. An alternative explanation is that the word refers to the family chapel in the city used by Gregory of Nazianzus during the years he served as a bishop (379–81). This chapel was attended by devotees of the Nicene Creed, and came to be considered as a bastion of Orthodoxy at a time when Arianism held sway in Constantinople.[36]

Encircling inscriptions were also employed in the architecture of Late Antique Europe, though again the surviving evidence suggests that they were rare. Strikingly, such inscriptions (in mosaic, paint or carved stone) are absent from centralised monuments such as the Neonian (Orthodox) and Arian baptisteries, the Church of St Vitale, and the mausolea of Galla Placidia (d. 450) and Theodoric (r. 493–526 in Ravenna). In common with the church of the monastery in St Catherine's, the Euphrasian basilica in Poreč places a mosaic inscription around the base of the apse mosaic (see Chapter 3). Similar inscriptions appear around the base of the apse mosaics in churches in Rome, such as San Stefano Rotondo (Figure 3.3, above).

The baptistery constructed in the late fourth century (c. 379–81) by Ambrose in Milan is claimed to have contained an inscription that emphasised the importance of the octagonal baptismal font; the eight sides of both the font and the building evoking the paschal meaning of baptism, Christ having risen on the eighth day (see also comments in the conclusion of this chapter).[37] That the fonts themselves sometimes incorporated inscriptions running around their rims is

demonstrated by a well-preserved example dating to the sixth century located in Kélibia (ancient Clupea) in Tunisia. Originally attached to a church dedicated to St Felix, the font is lavishly decorated in mosaic. In addition to symbols of baptism and paradise, the mosaic adornment around the outer rim comprises two concentric inscription bands separated by rosettes and diamonds inset with circles.[38]

One Italian building preserves physical evidence of encircling inscriptions. This is the complex around the tomb of the third-century martyr, St Felix constructed by Bishop Paulinus (d. 431) in the necropolis of Cimitile, outside the town of Nola. Paulinus was made bishop of Nola in 410, and must have constructed the complex dedicated to St Felix sometime after this date. The content of the decoration and the accompanying inscriptions are described in some detail by Paulinus in a long letter to Sulpicius Severus. There is a strong emphasis upon Old Testament scenes in the account given by Paulinus. The rectangular arcade surrounding the tomb of St Felix is interesting in the present context because it preserves sections of the fifth-century mosaic (Figure 7.13). Those of the inner face are composed of an upper band of two lines of monumental Latin script (in gold) on a blue ground with relatively simple inhabited vine-scroll designs on a gold ground located in the spandrels of the arches. A further inscription appears on the outer face.[39]

Armenia is the other region of the Late Antique Christian world to preserve examples of encircling inscriptions. They are found on

Figure 7.13 *Mosaic from the mausoleum of St Felix, near Nola, Italy. Fifth century. Photograph: Carlo Ebanista.*

Figure 7.14 *Band inscription from the Ałaman church, Armenia. Seventh century. After: J.* Strzygowski, Die Baukunst der Armenier und Europa *(1918).*

churches and run counter-clockwise around the exterior of the buildings in a continuous horizontal band. These bands vary considerably in height from the ground, and cover anywhere from approximately half to three-quarters of the complete circuit. Timothy Greenwood identifies four relatively complete inscriptions on the churches of Bagaran, Ałaman (Figure 7.14), Bagavan and Naxčavan (the first three from the second quarter of the seventh century and the fourth undated, but probably, *c.* 630–50). Two more fragmentary examples exist at Ełvard and Ojun.[40] That the creation of a single band of text completing a circuit of part of a given building represented a significant challenge is indicated by the example at Bagaran. The band starts on the north face of the western apse and remains a single line of text until the north side of the apse where it becomes two lines. Greenwood hypothesises that this change in the format results from an attempt to fit too much text into the final section of the band. He points to differences in the content of the first and second parts of the inscription: the first is dedicatory in character naming the king, But Aruełean and his wife (who completed the church following his murder) and the date (8 October 629), while the second asks for intercession on behalf of the wife, Annay, her children and another woman called Šušan.[41]

Bagaran is exceptional, however, and the remainder make use of

a single register of script. The bands are dedicatory with a strong emphasis upon establishing the exact date (presumably usually marking the consecration of the church, although the text at Bagavan gives both the date the building was begun and finished). These features suggest that the inscriptions had a processional character – requiring the circumambulation of the structure – and were perhaps connected with the annual service of commemoration of the founders. The inscription at Bagaran explicitly mentions the desire for intercession on behalf of (living) members of the family of the founder. It would appear that the desire that the annual services would mediate on behalf of the souls of the founders represented a contributory factor in the creation of these bands of text.[42]

Encircling Inscriptions on Portable Artefacts of the Late Antique Period

As might be expected, many of the encircling inscriptions on portable artefacts have a dedicatory function. In their simplest form, this can be merely the name of the patron or recipient of a given artefact. An example is the votive crown of the Visigothic king, Recceswinth (r. 653–72) from the Guarrazar treasure. In this case, the regnal name and title of the king are spelled out in golden letters that hang on chains from the base of the diminutive crown: [R]ECCEVINTUS REX OFFERET ('Recceswinth, king, offers this').[43] Rather more elaborate dedicatory phrases are to be found on other royal artefacts.[44]

It is not until the fifth century that fully encircling inscriptions appear regularly on portable artefacts.[45] This seems to be part of a larger change in art in the Late Antique Mediterranean in which the written word takes a more prominent place within ornamental programmes. This is seen particularly vividly in the silver objects – crosses, chalices, patens, lamps, spoons and so on – made for the practise of Christian liturgy. While figural and vegetal representations are certainly still present on some pieces, it is not unusual for the relatively stark decorative programme to consist solely of inscription bands (often picked out in niello, although they may be in *repoussé* or chased) and symbols such as the cross or *chi-ro*.

Both the linear and the encircling inscriptions on these silver artefacts carry broadly comparable texts, most of a dedicatory character. I concentrate here upon the main themes within the encircling inscriptions. Some simply identify the saint to whom the church is dedicated and the name of the village or town.[46] More ambitious dedications include the name of the donor and expressions of the desire for salvation (*sotêria*). Another chalice from the Hama treasure dating from the mid-sixth century carries an inscription of this type ('+ In fulfilment of a vow and [for] the salvation of Symeonios magistri[anios], and of those who belong to him'). A somewhat different formulation appears on a sixth- or seventh-century chalice from

the Phela treasure ('Elpidios in thanksgiving to the Theotokos presented [this chalice] for his salvation and [that] of this household').[47] Some inscriptions also mention both the living patron and dead relatives, adding the hope for the 'repose' (*anapauseôs*) of the deceased.[48] This combination of salvation for the living and repose for the dead is found on two ewers and a paten from the Riha treasure (late sixth–early seventh century) and a paten from the Stuma treasure (dated 574–8).[49] A silver chalice of Byzantine manufacture bears a gilded band beneath the lip with a simple inscription, probably dating to the seventh century, dedicating the vessel to the Church of the Virgin of Pelgisôk in the village of Bursh in the Fayyum Oasis. What is most interesting about this Coptic inscription is its use of the characteristically Islamic invocation, 'In the name of God' (Figure 7.15. See also Chapter 8).[50]

None of the published inscriptions on these Late Antique liturgical artefacts contains scriptural content; the dominant themes are dedicatory and the desire for salvation. One exception to

Figure 7.15 *Silver chalice dedicated to the Church of the Virgin of Pelgisôk in the village of Bursh in the Fayyum Oasis. Musée du Louvre: OA 11311. © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource NY. Photograph: Daniel Arnaudet.*

Figure 7.16 *Silver chalice with inscription in niello, Riha, Syria, c. 527–65. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection: BZ.1955.18. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.*

these themes is a chalice from the Riha treasure dating to the mid- sixth century. The encircling inscription on this example is picked out in niello and reads, '+ Thine own, from thine own, we offer Thee, Lord (Κ[υρι]ε)' (Figure 7.16). This text comes from the divine liturgy of John Chrysostom, and is also found in similar forms in the liturgies of St Basil and Alexandria.[51] The same phrase has been identified on a ceremonial cross (the 'Moses Cross') from the monastery of St Catherine's in the Sinai and on several broadly coeval architectural contexts.[52] Two other references to the use of this phrase appear in the history of George Kedrenos (fl. eleventh century). One of these ran around the restored altar table of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and was commissioned by Justinian and Theodora. This lost inscription invokes the name of the crucified Christ in the protection of the Orthodox faith and of Constantinople, and also concluded with the request for the intercession (*presveia*) of the Theotokos, Mother of God, for the city.[53] The practice of encircling an altar table with inscriptions can be seen in the silver revetments of the Sion treasure, now exhibited in Dumbarton Oaks. The text of this example comprises a straightforward dedication.[54]

Bread stamps were employed for marking the bread used for the Eucharist and other purposes.[55] Relevant in the present context are

Figure 7.17 *Bronze seal for eucharistic wafer, carrying the image of St Philip. Fifth–eighth century. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund 66.29.2. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Photo: Travis Fullerton.*

the stamps used for marking what is known as *eulogia* ('blessing') bread. Most contain the image of a cross, although a few are known with the image of Christ or a saint. The theme of *eulogia* is a consistent feature of the encircling Greek inscriptions, with the most common formula reading, 'The blessing of the Lord upon us, amen.'[56] The most complex inscription appears on a bronze stamp bearing an image of St Philip, whose resting place was at Hierapolis in Anatolia (Figure 7.17). Running around the central image is a band of (grammatically incorrect) Greek text reading, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord Saboath, Heaven and Earth are full of Thy Glory' (cf. Isaiah 6:3, see below). George Galavaris has identified this as coming from the hymn of victory, or Sanctus, which forms part of the *anaphora* of the liturgy.[57]

Encircling inscriptions written in Greek are a common feature of pilgrim flasks (ampullae) constructed either of tin–lead alloy or ceramic (Figure 3.12, above). Such objects were made to hold oil – for example, the spent olive oil from lamps within churches – and are associated with Jerusalem and the sites of important martyrs such as St Sergius (in Rusafa/Sergiopolis) and the Egyptian, St Menas (Lake Mariout, near Alexandria). The largest surviving group of tin–lead vessels of this period is in the treasury of Monza Cathedral

Figure 7.18 *Ceramic pilgrim flask carrying an image of St Thekla, Egypt, sixth or seventh centuries. Musée du Louvre: MNC 1926. © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource NY. Photograph: Hervé Lewandowski.*

near Milan, while another cache of related ampullae were found in a burial at the nearby Abbey of St Columba in Bobbio.[58] Most of these carry an encircling inscription written in an elegant majuscule framing a central figural design that reads, '+ Oil from the wood of life, of the holy places of Christ.' Another phrase which appears both on linear and encircling inscriptions is '+ Emmanuel, God is with us.' The flasks associated with St Menas are all manufactured in ceramic, and the saint is occasionally paired with St Thekla (whose sanctuary was in Meriamlik in Anatolia). Some of these vessels carry encircling inscriptions (Figure 7.18).[59]

The Monza–Bobbio collection also contains two pressed clay discs. The first carries the phrase 'Blessing of the Mother of God, of the stone of [B]oudiam(?)', and the second, 'Blessing of the Lord, of the refuge of St Elizabeth.' Similar discs, made from the earth in the vicinity, were made for those venerating the pilgrimage site of the stylite St Symeon the Younger. Aside from the standard blessing in the encircling inscription, some of these bear additional texts in the central field, such as 'Receive, O saint, the incense, and heal all.' There are also specific references to 'health' (*hygeia*), indicating the partially medicinal purpose of such earthen tokens.[60]

Hygeia is also a recurrent theme in Late Antique metal artefacts of an amuletic character. These range from armbands to marriage rings,

Figure 7.19 *Obverse and reverse of bronze amulet,* c. *100–500. KM 26119, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan.*

lockets and individual medallions. Numerous armbands, made in bronze or silver, have been published, and these commonly combine four or eight round or oval medallions carrying figural designs or text with sections of text that run around the circumference of the object. They seem to have been manufactured mainly in Greater Syria and Egypt (Figure 7.19).[61] The most popular inscription, appearing either around the entire band or in the medallions comes from the opening verses of Psalm 90/91:

> 1. He that dwells in the help of the Highest, shall sojourn under the shelter of the god of heaven. 2. He shall say to the Lord, Thou art my helper and my refuge: my God; I will hope in Him. 3. For He shall deliver thee from the snare of the hunters, from every troublesome matter. 4. He shall overshadow thee with His shoulders, and thou shalt trust under His wings: His truth shall cover thee with a shield. 5. Thou shalt not be afraid of terror by night; nor of the arrow flying by day; 6. Nor of the evil thing that walks in the darkness; nor of calamity, and the evil spirit at noonday.

Armbands may make use of anything from the first few words to the entire six verses quoted above. Gary Vikan notes that the same passage is also found on lintels in Late Antique houses in northern Syria as well as on tombs, clearly indicating its significance as a form of magical protection. Other common phrases found on these armbands are the acclamation, 'One God who conquers evil', the *Trisagion* (the traditional prayer drawn from Isaiah 6.3: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Hosts'), the name, Solomonos (i.e., the Old Testament king, Solomon), and the word, *hygeia*.[62]

Figure 7.20 *Octagonal ring, gold and niello, Constantinople(?), seventh century. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, BZ.1947.15. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.*

Similar inscriptions appear on other amuletic objects of this period. Campbell Bonner publishes a bronze medallion, which carries on the obverse the first part of Psalm 90/91 around the outer band and the *Trisagion* in the central field. The reverse carries an encircling inscription reading, 'Seal of the living God, protect from all evil him who wears this phylactery.'[63] Like the armbands, finger rings were also intended to encircle part of the body. Late Antique rings often take the form of lobed bezel (face) attached to a hoop that is octagonal on the exterior. The inscriptions running around the hoop may include simple invocations such as, 'Lord, help the wearer', and 'Womb amulet'. Psalm 90/91 also appears as does Psalm 5:12 ('Thou hast crowned us with a shield of favour'). A seventh-century gold marriage ring now in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection is inscribed around the bezel with 'Lord, help thy servants, Peter and Theodote', and on the two narrow edges of the hoop with quotes from John 14:27 ('My peace I leave with you' and 'My peace I give unto you') (Figure 7.20).[64]

A few observations can be made about the most important themes that have come from this survey. First, coins and seals are the only other Islamic objects of the 690s to carry encircling inscriptions (for more on their textual content, see Chapter 8). There are significant points of comparison between the texts chosen on the coins and those on the outer face inscription of the Dome of the Rock, most notably the *shahāda* (in its different versions) and, on the first epigraphic issue of 77/696–7, Q 112.

The theme of dedication is consistent among the Late Antique architectural inscriptions. The inscription attached to the church at Bagaran mentions the desire for intercession, and it seems likely that this is one of the primary motivations for attaching personal names. The founders named in encircling inscriptions on churches in Constantinople are also the subjects of lavish eulogies. In addition to the names of the founders we sometime also encounter other elements, such as the date (in the Armenian examples including the month and day) and the intended function of the structure.

The other textual content is more variable. The inscription within the nave of St Polyeuktos includes information about a former founder (Empress Eudokia) and the martyr Sergius (whose relics were housed in the building), although the majority of the text is devoted to Juliana Anicia. Likewise, the inscription within Sts Sergius and Bacchus is basically a eulogy to Justinian and Theodora, though it also celebrates Sergius, whose remains had been located either on the site of the church or nearby in the grounds of the Hormisdas palace. In this case, the tomb of St Felix at Cimitile, the extensive epigraphic programme included passages from both Old and New Testaments. Reflections upon the meaning of baptism are, predictably enough, brought up in the inscriptions around baptisteries and fonts. Perhaps the two most interesting encircling inscriptions – not least for their proximity to Jerusalem – are the mosaic roundels from Madaba and Jarash because they both precede the final dedicatory section with passages from scripture. The Jarash mosaic employs three verses from Psalm 86 in order to reflect upon the primary function of the *diaconia* (alms-giving), although it is also a statement of faith and a call for mediation from the divine ('guard my life, for I am faithful to you; save your servant who trusts in you'). The shorter inscription on the floor mosaic of the Church of the Apostles in Madaba has a less specific scriptural passage (the closest being Psalm 146:6). More significant in the context of the outer face inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock is the fact that it also forms part of the Nicene Creed, the central statement of Christian faith.

Distinct themes are apparent in the diverse assemblage of portable objects, some of which transcend specific functional groupings. In common with the previous sections, the dedicatory role of the encircling inscriptions is conspicuous, whether the patron is a member of the imperial family or a person of more humble means. Within these inscriptions one encounters the wishes for personal salvation (and for the salvation of the families and households) of the patron. The theme of blessing (*eulogia*) is common on items such as pilgrim flasks, clay tablets and bread stamps. More interesting in the present context, however, are the less common themes, such as the chalice bearing the phrase from the *anaphora* of the Divine Liturgy and the bread stamp with an acclamation akin to the *Trisagion*. Objects made with an amuletic purpose in mind show a distinct preference

for the *Trisagion* and Psalm 90/91, a passage commonly believed to have protective properties. Also striking is the explicit assertion of the oneness of God in the phrase, 'One God who conquers evil' (monotheistic statements of this nature are considered further in Chapter 8).

It is important to emphasise that these different iconographic dimensions of Late Antique encircling inscriptions are not necessarily directly pertinent to our understanding of the original symbolic vocabulary of the inscription bands in the Dome of the Rock. However, it is reasonable to conclude that the Umayyad elite and the scholars and skilled artisans working for them were aware that encircling inscriptions were employed in buildings and on portable objects in order to convey certain types of message. In other words, the decision to employ these long bands of text (rather than placing inscribed plaques at strategic points around the interior space) was done in the knowledge that this was a meaningful way to treat a monumental inscription. For example, the grandest Late Antique encircling texts possessed clear imperial connotations. This must be a relevant consideration in the interpretation of the inscriptions in ʿAbd al-Malik's building. Mosaic inscriptions also give us the combination of a dedication with doxological material, while the portable arts suggest that encircling texts had a protective quality.

We can take this examination of iconography further by considering additional aspects that might have conveyed messages to the informed Late Antique viewer. The arrangement of the texts encourages the circumambulation of the interior space, which itself is focused around the exposed Rock (the relationship between these actions and the *ṭawāf* performed around the Kaʿba is explored further in the concluding chapter). Some brief comments are warranted about two other physical characteristics of the building: the colour scheme of the mosaic (blue and gold); and the fact that the words run around the interior and exterior sides of an octagon.

The combination of gold text on a blue background already features on numerous mosaic inscriptions in Late Antique buildings dotted around the Mediterranean. It is also a feature of a few preserved inscriptions in luxury manuscripts of the period, such as the dedication page of the Herbal made for Juliana Anicia in 512 (Figure 7.21). The employment of gold words on a blue ground has been considered in detail by Lawrence Nees, and the following observations are drawn from his work.[65] He identifies two problems relating to terminology. The first relates to the Dome of the Rock mosaics and the common practice of referring to the background of the inscription bands as simply 'blue'. As Marguerite van Berchem observed in her examination of the mosaics, the mosaic cubes of the outer and inner face inscriptions are not uniform in tone and colour to the extent that one might reasonably call a proportion of these green.[66] This variability might result from later restoration, though

Figure 7.21 *Dedication page of the Herbal made for Juliana Anicia, Constantinople, 512. Cod. med. gr. 1, fol. 7b. © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.*

it is equally conceivable that the original mosaics deliberately employed cubes with a range of hues from deep blue to bottle green. The second difficulty is the fact that writing of Late Antiquity fails to make any distinction between what we might define as 'blue' and closely related colours, particularly purple (a colour with clear imperial connotations in the Roman and Byzantine contexts). This

problem is compounded by the apparent absence of a generic word for blue in Greek, Latin and Classical Arabic. Thus, one is left to question whether blue and purple were understood as being largely synonymous by Late Antique viewers.

Nees does, however, infer persuasive distinctions between purple and blue in terms of their employment in Late Antique portable arts (especially book illustration) and architectural decoration. He makes a perceptive analogy between the encircling blue bands formed by the octagonal arcade inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock and the creation of an encircling ocean on world maps and church mosaic floors. One might also add in this context the sixth-century *ekphrasis* by Paul the Silentiary in which the coloured marble floor and ambo of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople are compared with the 'white-capped billows' of the sea around an isthmus of land.[67] The likening of marble floors to the sea appears to have been widespread in the architecture of the Late Antique Mediterranean, while a more explicit link is forged in the representation of Thalassa, personification of the sea, in the central roundel of the mosaic pavement of the Church of the Apostles in Madaba, dated 578–9 (Figure 7.8).[68] If the inscription of the Dome of the Rock may be seen as the surrounding ocean, then the space inside comprises the world and the dome, the vault of heaven. Nees links these ideas to the Rock as the *omphalos*; this is an attractive notion, though it should be admitted that the concept cannot be traced in written sources earlier than the first half of the eighth century.[69] Lastly, the author explores the association of blue with the peacock, a bird that has been linked to King Solomon. Peacocks are included among the carved decoration of St Polyeuktos, a structure replete with Solomonic references. No mention is made of peacocks in the Qurʾan, and it is unclear whether we should accept the historical veracity of claims that ʿAbd al-Malik was aware of the association (hinted at in the frescos of Qusayr ʿAmra, dating from the early 740s) of peacocks with the throne of the Old Testament king.[70]

The presence of eight-sided Christian buildings in Palestine has already been noted (Chapter 1), but it is also worth considering the relevance of the octagon upon monumental inscriptions. Unfortunately, there is no evidence concerning the presence or absence of continuous band inscriptions in the Kathisma church (Figure 7.22) or the octagonal structures excavated at Caesarea Maritima and Hims. There are indications that architectural inscriptions were designed to run around octagons. The continuous band of the text within the Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus (Figure 7.23, and see above) does make a circuit of seven sides of an octagon, albeit one that it complicated by the addition of four exedrae. A clearer example is provided by the octagonal baptistery in Milan, constructed under the patronage of Ambrose in the fifth century. According to a ninth- or tenth-century manuscript source, this
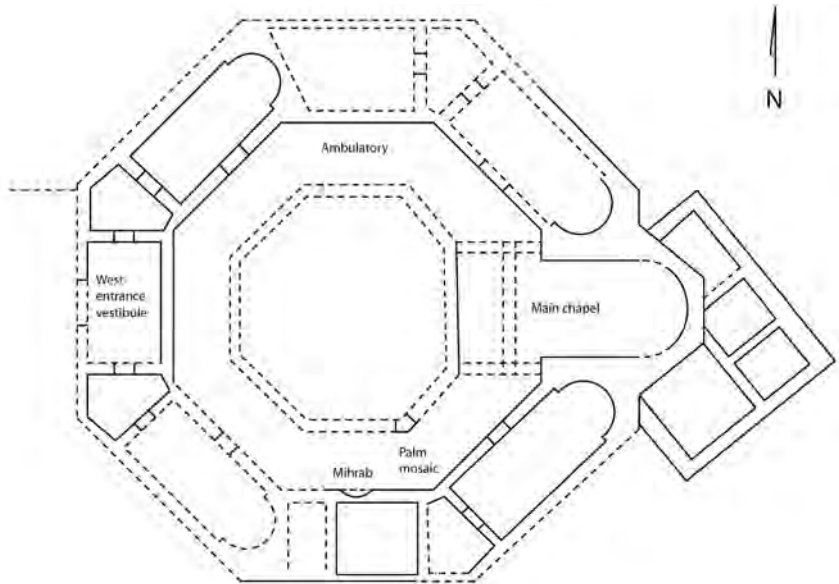
Figure 7.22 *Sketch plan of the Church of the Kathisma of the Virgin, fifth century and later. After: Avner, 'The Dome of the Rock' (2009). Drawing: Naomi Shields.*
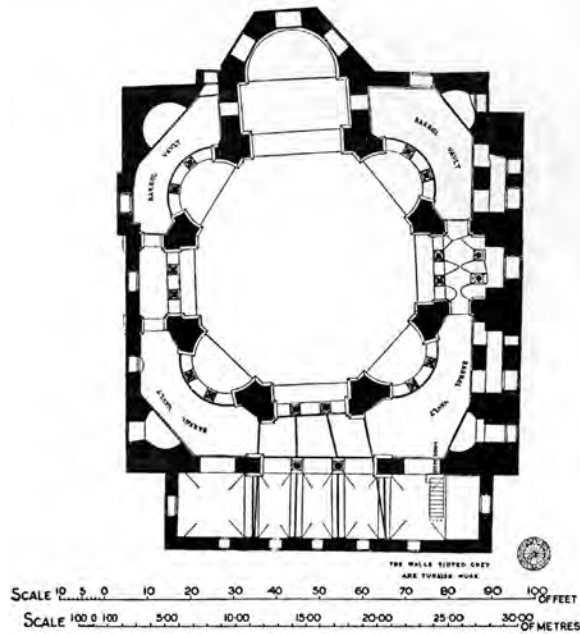
Figure 7.23 *Plan of Sts Sergius and Bacchus, Istanbul, sixth century. After: van Millingen,* Byzantine Churches in Constantinople *(1912).*

monument contained an inscription running around the eight sides of the interior. In translation the first half of this reads:

> The eight-sided temple has risen for sacred purposes.
> The eight-sided font is worthy for this task.
> It is seemly that the baptismal hall arises in this number
> by which true health has returned to people
> by the light of the resurrected Christ, who loosens the bond of
>   death
> And revives the lifeless from the tombs.
> Absolving those who have confessed from their sordid crime,
> he washes them in the flow of the purifying font.[71]

The symbolic association between the number eight and the rite of baptism is clearly made, and in other writing Ambrose reflects upon the fact that the baptismal font is like a coffin from which one is reborn.[72] Thus, one can establish how both the number and the creation of octagonal fonts and baptisteries relate to the concept of resurrection. St Augustine (d. 430) draws a distinction between Judaism and Christianity that also bears upon this issue. He notes the Jewish custom of ordering circumcision on the eighth day of life, and that this is replaced in Christianity by baptism (something that he describes in metaphorical terms as 'circumcision of the heart').[73] The octagon was also imbued with magical/medical connotations in Late Antiquity. For example, Alexander of Tralles (fl. late sixth–early seventh century) claims that eight-sided rings would cure colic. A ring dating to the third or fourth century carries a Greek inscription reading, 'Good luck to she who wears this.'[74]

Assessing the significance of the octagonal shape of these finger rings, Walker concludes that: 'an eight-sided band did not qualify a ring as a medical amulet; rather the octagonal shape operated more generally, strengthening the magical properties of the object'.[75] It seems probable that such concepts were in circulation in seventh-century Greater Syria; amulets of various types were evidently produced in some numbers in Palestine and the surrounding regions (to judge by the archaeological evidence), while the octagon makes its appearance in the plans of Christian commemorative architecture.[76] In this context one can, at least, state that an octagonal building placed in a highly visible location in Jerusalem would have stimulated a range of meanings, including those outlined above, in the minds of contemporary Christian, and perhaps also Jewish and Muslim observers. Rosen-Ayalon has pointed to the importance of the number eight in Muslim descriptions of Paradise (*janna*).[77] Admittedly, these sources are written after the seventh century, but they may preserve some elements that can be traced back to the time of the foundation of the Dome of the Rock.

Lastly, one can point to an imperial dimension, in that the
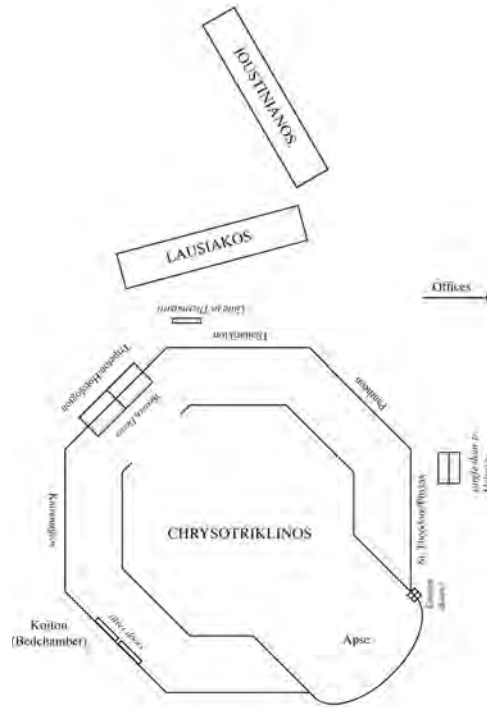
Figure 7.24 *Reconstructed plan of the Chrysotriklinos, Constantinople. After: Featherstone, 'The Chrysotriklinos seen through* De Cerimoniis'. *Drawing: Naomi Shields.*

Chrysotriklinos, the golden audience chamber, in Constantinople was octagonal in plan (Figure 7.24). Constructed by Justin II (r. 565–74), this structure connected the private apartment of the emperor to the more public parts of the palace.[78] According to the tenth-century *De Cerimoniis*, this throne room was employed for banqueting and administrative functions, such as the investiture of officials and what was known as the 'everyday procession'.[79] Octagonal chambers of this type were also known in other Late Antique palaces in Constantinople and elsewhere. No plan of the building survives, though it might be that it bears some similarity to the layout of the Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus in the same city. The Chrysotriklinos was probably the inspiration for the octagonal Palatine chapel in Aachen. The influence of Byzantine palatial architecture is evident elsewhere. Al-Walid chose to make a conscious reference to the imperial vestibule (Chalke) in the façade of the prayer hall of his mosque in Damascus (Figure 7.25).[80] The now lost palace of Theodoric in Ravenna (Figure 7.26) also draws upon the Chalke. One can speculate, therefore, that ʿAbd al-Malik was aware of the plan and general appearance of the Chrysotriklinos at the time of the construction of the Dome of the Rock.

Figure 7.25 *Central section of the façade of the prayer hall, Congregational Mosque of Damascus,* c. *706–16 (with later additions). Photograph: Marcus Milwright.*

Figure 7.26 *Representation of the façade of Theodoric's palace in Ravenna, St Apollinare Nuovo. Photograph: Nick Thompson, University of Auckland.*

Notes

1. On this issue, see also Papalexandrou, 'Text in Context', pp. 264–71.

2. Khamis, 'Two Wall Mosaic Inscriptions'.

3. Combé, Sauvaget and Wiet (eds), *Répertoire chronologique*, No. 18. Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus*, pp. 247–54 (app.). On the *karma*, see pp. 57–113. Flood makes an interesting comparison between this feature (which he views in Solomonic terms) and the mosaic ornamentation of the soffits of the octagonal arcade of the Dome of the Rock.

4. Mohammad al-Asad, 'Al-Muwaqqar Water Reservoir', in anon., *The Umayyads: The Rise of Islamic Art*, International Museum with No Frontiers Exhibition Cycles: Jordan (Vienna: Electa and Museum with No Frontiers, 2000), p. 118. For a study of the capitals from the site, see Robert Hamilton, 'Some Eighth-century Capitals from al-Muwaqqar', *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine* 12 (1948): 63–9.

5. On the interior decoration, see Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, revd edn, I.1, pp. 145–7; Jean Sauvaget, *La mosquée omeyyade de Médine: Étude sur les origines de la mosquée et la basilique* (Paris: Van Oest, 1947), pp. 79–81. Creswell draws attention (I.1, p. 145) to a long inscription that the tenth-century writer, Ibn Rustah, claims ran around the courtyard of the building 'above the arcades (*ṭāqāt*) and below the level of the cresting (*shurrufāt*)'. This is Abbasid in date, having been incorporated during the rebuilding phase of al-Saffah in 135/752, and added to by al-Mahdi in 162/779. See Ahmad ibn Rustah, *Atours précieux*, trans. Gaston Wiet (Cairo: Société de géographie de l'Égypte, 1955), pp. 79–80. Also Sauvaget, *La mosquée omeyyade de Médine*, pp. 54–5; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 702–3.

6. Oleg Grabar, 'Review of Epigrafika Vostoka I–VIII', *Ars Orientalis* 2 (1957): 548; Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, pp. 117–18. Also reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/basra.html, last accessed 30 December 2014. The later dating places the ewer in the same period as the famous hawk-shaped aquamanile in the Hermitage Museum that, according to the inscription encircling the neck of the bird, was produced by Sulayman in 180/796–7. See Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, pp. 103–4.

7. Florence Day, 'The Tirāz Silk of Marwān', in George Miles (ed.), *Archaeologica Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld* (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1952), pp. 39–61; Mina Moraitou and Mariam Rosser Owen, 'Fragments of the so-called Marwan *Tiraz*', in Helen Evans and Brandie Ratliff (eds), *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th–9th Century* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press and Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), pp. 238–41. On the turban of Samuel bin Musa, see also the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/turban.html, last accessed 30 December 2014.

8. On the early history of the *kiswa*, see Abdelaziz Gouda, *Die Kiswa der Kaʿba in Makka* (Berlin: Freie Universität, 1989), pp. 22–34 (for the Abbasids, see pp. 35–42). For further references, see Avinoam Shalem, 'Made for Show: The Medieval Treasury of the Kaʿba in Mecca', in Bernard O'Kane (ed.), *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 269–83. On the use of Yemeni *wāshī* textiles to cover

the Ka'ba until the caliphate of 'Uthman, see John Baldry, *Textiles in Yemen: Historical References to Trade and Commerce in Textiles from Antiquity to Modern Times* (London: British Museum, 1982), p. 7.

9. Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*, pl. 21; Elias Khamis, 'A Bronze Weight of Sa'id b. 'Abd al-Malik from Bet Shean/Baysan', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Northern Ireland* 12(2)(2002): 151–2. The marginal inscription reads: *bism allāh lā ilāh illā allāh waḥdahu lā sharīka lahu muḥammad / rasūl allāh*. Also reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/seal2.html, last accessed 4 January 2015.

10. Album and Goodwin, *Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period*, pp. 22–3, Cat. Nos 7–9, pl. 1. Cf. the 'Arab–Sasanian' drachm illustrated in Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*, pl. 16. In this example the fire altar and attendants are replaced by a standing soldier with sword and spear.

11. Malik Iradj Mochiri, 'The Pahlavi Forerunner of the Umayyad Reformed Coinage', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Northern Ireland* 2 (1981): 168–72; Album and Goodwin, *Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period*, p. 27; Johns, 'Archaeology and the History of Early Islam', pp. 426–7, fig. 7; Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire', pp. 168–9, fig. 16. Illustrated on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Coins/drachm32.html, last accessed 30 December 2014.

12. Treadwell, 'The "Orans" Drachms of Bishr ibn Marwān', p. 230, fig. 2 (left-hand coin). By contrast, Bishr ibn Marwan's drachms minted in 75/694–5 in both 'Aqula and Basra employ the 'short *shahāda*' (first encountered in Bishapur in 66/686–7) with the Arabic text only occupying about one-third of the obverse margin.

13. George Miles, 'Mihrab and 'Anazah: A Study of Early Islamic Iconography', in George Miles (ed.), *Archaeologica Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld* (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1952), pp. 156–71; Luke Treadwell, '"Mihrab and 'Anaza" or "Sacrum and Spear"? A Reconsideration of an Early Marwanid Silver Drachm', *Muqarnas* 22 (2005): 1–28.

14. Album and Goodwin, *Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period*, No. 705, pl. 45; Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire', pp. 174–7. Some coppers carrying the 'standing caliph' have encircling inscriptions on the obverse, including *li 'abd allāh 'abd al-malik amīr al-mu'minīn* ('for 'Abdallāh 'Abd al-Malik, commander of the faithful') and the 'long-*shahāda*'. For example, coppers minted at Qinnasrin, Hims and Damascus illustrated on Album and Goodwin, *Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period*, pls 43–5.

15. On the first epigraphic issues, see Blair, 'What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?', pp. 66–7; Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire', pp. 184–6; Bacharach, 'Signs of Sovereignty', pp. 16–19. On the economic dimensions of the reform, see John Grierson, 'The Monetary Reforms of 'Abd al-Malik: Their Metrological Basis and their Financial Repercussions', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 3(3) (1960): 241–64.

16. David Phillipson, *Ancient Ethiopia: Aksum, its Antecedents and Successors* (London: British Museum Press, 1998), pp. 71–4, fig. 28. The coins in the centre row with the encircling inscriptions are dated

c. 350–400 and late fifth century, respectively (the Greek inscription of the copper coin has been read as: ΤΟΥΤΟ ΑΡΕΣΗ ΤΗ ΧΩΡΑ. The Sasanian drachm is illustrated in Robert Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics* (New York: Sandford J. Durst Numismatic Publications, 1990), pl. 5.80 (Hormizd II, r. 303–9). The encircling inscriptions on the obverse faces of most Roman, Byzantine and Sasanian coins are broken by the lower part of the portrait bust of the ruler (in some Persian coins the upper part of the frame breaks the inscription).

17. Richard Frye (ed.), *Sasanian Remains from Qasr-i Abu Nasr: Seals, Sealings, and Coins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), figs D.62, 63, 98, 181, 194, 199, 207, 238, 259, 269. Some epigraphic seals and sealings are illustrated in Michael Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), fig. 2.d–g.

18. Robert Hillenbrand, 'For God, Empire, and Mammon: Some Art–Historical Aspects of the Reformed Dīnārs of 'Abd al-Malik', in Martina Müller-Wiener, Christiane Kothe, Karl-Heiz Golzio and Joachim Gierlichs (eds), *Al-Andalus und Europa. Zwischen Orient und Okzident* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2004), pp. 20–38. Against this interpretation and viewing the inscriptions in the light of the conflict with the Kharijites, see Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire', pp. 185–6 (this interpretation is discussed further in Chapter 8). For examples of fully epigraphic seals, see Frye (ed.), *Sasanian Remains from Qasr-i Abu Nasr*, figs D.12, 44, 99, 177, 191, 194, 199, 201, 203, 204, 206, 207, 209, 211, 212, 216, 219.

19. Buckton, *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art*, pp. 87–9, Cat. Nos 81, 86–8.

20. For examples of carved and mosaic inscriptions in the Late Antique churches and synagogues of Greater Syria, see Piccirillo, *I mosaici di Giordania*; Ignacio Peña, *The Christian Art of Byzantine Syria*, trans. Eileen Brophy and Francisco Reina (London and Madrid: Garnet, 1997); Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, 2nd edn (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2005); David Milson, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine: In the Shadow of the Church*, Ancient Judaism and early Christianity 65 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2007). See also contributions in G. Claudio Bottini, Leah Di Segni and L. Daniel Chrupcala (eds), *One Land – Many Cultures. Archaeological Studies in Honour of Stanislao Loffreda OFM* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 2003). For a general discussion of the use of inscriptions, see Ruth Leader-Newby, 'Inscribed Mosaics in the Late Roman Empire: Perspectives from East and West', in Zahra Newby and Ruth Leader-Newby (eds), *Art and Inscriptions in the Ancient World* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 179–99.

21. For example, see the primary sources collected in Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*. Other accounts of church decoration of the Late Antique period can be found in Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1972; reprinted: Toronto: University of Toronto Press in association with the Medieval Academy of America, 1986), pp. 24–32, 36–9, 57–72.

22. On these mosaics, see Jodi Magness, 'Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues', in William Dever and Seymour Gitin (eds), *Symbiosis, Symbolism and the Power of the Past:*

Canaan, Ancient Israel and their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age to Roman Palaestina (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), pp. 363–89. Also Steve Fine, 'Jews and Judaism between Byzantium and Islam', in Helen Evans and Brandie Ratliff (eds), *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th–9th Century* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press and Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), pp. 102–6, figs 42, 44, 49, 50.

23. On the Sepphoris synagogue mosaic, see Ze'ev Weiss and Ehud Netzer, *Promise and Redemption: A Synagogue Mosaic from Sepphoris*, 2nd edn (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1998); Steve Fine, 'Art and Liturgical Context of the Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic', in E. Meyers *et al.* (eds), *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), pp. 227–37. On the symbolic dimensions of zodiac images, see Jodi Magness, 'Heaven on Earth: Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in ancient Palestinian Synagogues', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 59 (2005): 1–52.

24. This translation was made by Evanthia Baboula. On the dedicatory inscriptions within these Jordanian mosaics, see Lihi Habas, 'Donations and Donors as Reflected in the Mosaic Pavements of Transjordan's Churches in the Byzantine and Umayyad Periods', in Katrin Kogman-Appel and Mati Meyer (eds), *Between Judaism and Christianity: Art Historical Essays in Honor of Elisheva (Elizabeth) Revel-Neher*, The Medieval Mediterranean 81 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2009), pp. 73–90.

25. John Crowfoot, *Early Churches in Palestine* (College Park, MD: McGrath Publishing, 1971), pp. 139–40, pl. XXII. On this mosaic, see also Dodd and Khairallah, *Image of the Word*, I, pp. 20–1, fig. 12.

26. George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 80–3, fig. 56.

27. Papalexandrou, 'Text in Context', pp. 272–4 (the quote appears on p. 274).

28. Forsyth and Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St Catherine*, pls CIII, CLXXII–CLXXIII.A–D; John Galey, *Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1985), pls 119, 125.

29. For discussion and illustrations of these architectural paintings, see Alexander Badawy, *Coptic Art and Archaeology: The Art of the Christian Egyptians from the Late Antique to the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1978); Pierre du Bourguet, *Coptic Art*, Art of the World 30, trans. Caryll Hay-Shaw (London: Methuen, 1971), pp. 46–7, pl. on p. 53; Anon., *L'art copte en Egypte: 2000 ans de christianisme* (Paris: Gallimard and Institut du Monde Arabe, 2000), pp. 146–50.

30. St John Simpson (ed.), *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from Ancient Yemen* (London: British Museum Press, 2002), pp. 56–7, fig. 18. One has to look to more ancient phases of the region's history to find true encircling inscriptions: for example, the model of a temple, dating to the eighth century BCE, incorporates a continuous epigraphic frieze in the upper section of the four exterior facades. *Ibid.*, p. 152, fig. 56.

31. This is probably to be regarded as a legend. Among those to make this claim that the poems were placed on textiles and hung around the circuit of the building are Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi and Ibn Khaldun. For a translation, see Arthur Arberry (trans.), *The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1957).

32. Harrison, *Excavations at Saraçhane*, pp. 5–7; Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium*, pp. 33–4, figs 31, 34. Marginal notes in this manuscript also give the locations where the verses were to be found: lines 1–41 ran around the nave of the church. This section of the text started at the east end of the south aisle and ended either within the sanctuary or above it. The remainder (lines 42–76) were placed on five separate tablets located outside the narthex and in the courtyard.

33. Harrison, *Excavations at Saraçhane*, pp. 410–11; Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium*, pp. 137–44. See also Jonathan Bardill, 'A New Temple for Byzantium: Anicia Juliana, King Solomon, and the Gilded Ceiling of the Church of St. Polyeuktos in Constantinople', in William Bowden, Adam Gutteridge and Carlos Machado (eds), *Social and Political Life in Late Antiquity* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2006), pp. 339–70. On the use of Solomonic symbolism in Byzantine culture, see Ousterhout, 'New Temples and New Solomons', pp. 223–53. Also Magness, 'Heaven on Earth', p. 46.

34. Attempts have been made to associate it with a martyrium of St Sergius described by John of Ephesus (d. *c.* 586) in his *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, and to the activities of the Monophysite refugees housed within the Hormisdas palace by Empress Theodora at some time after she and her husband moved out of this residence in 527. Jonathan Bardill has suggested that Sts Sergius and Bacchus was erected following the collapse in about 530 of the hall that had served as the martyrium chapel of the Monophysites. Thus, unlike the Church of St Polyeuktos, Sts Sergius and Bacchus does not have a direct relationship with the relics of one of its eponymous saints. See Bardill, 'The Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus', pp. 1–11.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 2, slightly adapted.

36. Slobodan Ćurčić and Evangelia Hadjitryphonos, with contributions by Kathleen McVey and Helen Saradi, *Architecture as Icon: Perception and Representation of Architecture in Byzantine Art* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press and Princeton University Art Museum, 2010), pp. 246–7, Cat. No. 37.

37. Robin Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual and Theological Dimensions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), p. 208.

38. Anita Stauffer, *On Baptismal Fonts: Ancient and Modern* (Bramcote: Grove Books for the Alcuin Club and the Group for the Renewal of Worship, 1994), pp. 38–9, colour pl. 1.

39. On the inscriptions of the arcade, see Carlo Ebanista, *Et manet in mediis quasi gemma intersita tectis: La Basilica di S. Felice a Cimitile: storia degli scavi, fasi edilizie, reperti* (Naples: Accademia di Archeologia Lettere e Belle Arte: Arte Tipographica, 2003), pp. 184–5. The inner face reads: *Parvus erat locus ante sacris angustus agendis | Supplicibusque negans pandere posse manus | Nunc populo spatiosa piis altaria praebet | Officiis medii martyris in gremio | Cuncta deo renovata placent novat omnia semper | Christus et in cumulum luminis amplifi-cat | Sic et dilecti solium Felicis honorans | Et splendore simul protulit et spatio*. The outer face reads: *Felicis penetral prisco venerabile cultu | Lux nova diffusis nunc aperit spatiis | Angusti memores solii gaudete videntes | Praesulis ad laudem quam nitet hoc solium*. See also Ćurčić and Hadjitryphonos, *Architecture as Icon*, pp. 51–2, fig. 4. Paulinus' descriptions are translated in Caecilia Davis-Weyer (trans. and ed.),

Early Medieval Art, 300–1150: Sources and Documents (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), pp. 20–3.

40. Timothy Greenwood, 'A Corpus of Early Medieval Armenian Inscriptions', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 27–91. The buildings are dealt with on pp. 30–3.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–42, 68–70.

42. Exterior band inscriptions were taken up later in Georgia in the Church of Sion at Samšvildē (third quarter of the eighth century) and in Byzantine architecture (such as the monastery complex of Constantine Lips) from the second half of the ninth century. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

43. Gisela Ripoll López, 'Symbolic Life and Signs of Identity in Visigothic Times', in Peter Heather (ed.), *The Visigoths from the Migration Period to the seventh Century: An Ethnographic Perspective* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), pp. 403–31 (see especially pp. 425–6); Max Martin, 'Wealth and Treasure in the West', in Leslie Webster and Michelle Brown (eds), *The Transformation of the Roman World, AD 400–900* (London: British Museum Press, 1997), pp. 58–9, pl. 18.

44. Although it does not complete a full circuit, the inscription running around the upper two-thirds of the silver missorium made to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the rule of the Emperor Theodosius II (r. 379–95). The inscription reads: D[OMINUS] N[OSTER] THEODOSIVS PERPET[UUS] AUG[USTUS] OB DIEM FELICISSIMVM X ('Our lord Theodosius, emperor forever, on the most happy occasion of the tenth anniversary'). For an interpretations of this object, see Ernst Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making: Main Lines of Stylistic Development in Mediterranean Art, 3rd–7th Century* (1977; reprinted Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 31–4, fig. 57; Ruth Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity: Functions and Meanings of Silver Plate, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 11–60.

45. See, however, a silver dish made for Emperor Licinius in 317 and a fourth-century gold glass design depicting a married couple with a statue of Hercules (both British Museum). This is framed by a fully encircling Latin inscription: 'Orfitus and Constantia. Live happily in the name of Hercules, Conqueror of the Underworld'. Buckton, *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art*, pp. 25–6, 31–2, Cat. Nos 1, 9.b.

46. M. Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, pp. 138–40, Cat. No. 28. Comparable inscriptions in Latin are found on silver in Italy. For example, see Martin, 'Wealth and Treasure in the West', pp. 60–2, fig. 26 (Galognano hoard). On inscriptions in Late Antiquity, see Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity*, pp. 61–120.

47. M. Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, pp. 68–70, 232–3, Cat. Nos 1, 62.

48. For example, two *respoussé* inscription bands on a mid- or late sixth-century flask from the Hama treasure read: '+ In fulfillment of a vow and [for] the salvation of Megale' (upper band) and '+ and of her children and her nephews and for the repose [of the soul] of Heliodorus and Akakios'. See *ibid.*, pp. 108–11, Cat. No. 15.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 159–70, 175–9, Cat. Nos 34, 35, 37, 38.

50. Anne Boud'hors, in anon., *L'arte copte en Egypte*, p. 181, Cat. No. 190; Schick, 'Inscribed Objects', p. 188, Cat. No. 128. The inscription is in a Fayyumi dialect of Coptic.

51. It is spoken by the priest at the end of the *Anaphora* (the section

between the Creed and the Consecration). See Baldovin, *Liturgy in Ancient Jerusalem*, pp. 23–8.

52. Kurt Weitzmann and Ihor Ševčenko, 'The Moses Cross at Sinai', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 385–9. These comprise a round plaque carved on the side of a baptismal font in the basilica at Mount Nebo, the door lintel of a church at Anderin and the Church of St Sophia at Iznik.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 393–4. The authors note that the wording of the latter section of the inscription perhaps suggests that it dates later than the period of Justinian.

54. On the inscriptions, see Susan Boyd, 'A "Metropolitan" Treasure in a Church in the Provinces: An Introduction to the Study of the Sion Treasure', in Susan Boyd and Marlia Mango (eds), *Ecclesiastical Silver Plate in Sixth-century Byzantium* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1992), pp. 5–38 (for the inscriptions of the revetments, see pp. 31–2). In the same volume, see Ihor Ševčenko, 'The Sion Treasure: The Evidence of the Inscriptions', pp. 39–56.

55. George Galavaris, *Bread and the Liturgy: The Symbolism of Early Christian and Byzantine Bread Stamps* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), pp. 117–28 and *passim*. The principal criterion for establishing a Late Antique date is palaeographic, particularly the archaic shape of the Greek letters, A and Ω.

56. These, and another which refers to the 'chief captain of the host' (i.e., the archangel Michael. See Joshua 5:13–15), were presumably used for the production of *eulogia* bread to be distributed on the relevant feast day. See Galavaris, *Bread and the Liturgy*, pp. 143–5, fig. 78.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 149–51, fig. 80.

58. Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre Sainte*. Flasks with remarkably similar designs continued to be manufactured in Palestine until the eleventh century, and perhaps later. See Buckton, *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art*, pp. 188–9, Cat. No. 203.

59. Where encircling inscriptions are employed they take a simple form reading, 'Blessing (*eulogia*) of St Menas, amen'. The same formula is employed on a tin–lead flask probably made in Rusafa, and providing the blessing of St Sergius. Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, p. 13, 16, figs 6, 9 (St Phocas), p. 17, fig. 12 (St Elizabeth), pp. 27–8, 30, figs 22, 24 (St Simeon the younger) 16 fig; Anon., *L'arte copte en Egypte*, p. 41, Cat. No. 7 (St Thecla); Evans and Ratliff (eds), *Byzantium and Islam*, pp. 97–8, Cat. Nos 65.A B (St Simeon, but dated to the tenth or eleventh century); Martina Bagnoli, Holger Klein, C. Griffith Mann and James Robinson (eds), *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (London: British Museum Press, 2011), p. 44, Cat. No. 24 (St Sergius).

60. Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, pp. 33–5.

61. One of the armbands also employs the invocation, 'blood of Christ' after Psalm 90/91. Other invocations include, 'One God [who] preserves, guard [your] servant Severinam' and '*Theotoke*, help Anna; Grace'. See Gary Vikan, 'Two Byzantine Amuletic Armbands and the Group to which they Belong', *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 49/50 (1991/2): 33–51; reprinted in Vikan, *Sacred Images and Sacred Power in Byzantium* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2003).

62. Vikan, 'Two Byzantine Amuletic Armbands', pp. 34–5; Gary Vikan,

'Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984): 65–86; M. Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, pp. 266–7, Cat. No. 94 (employing the *Trisagion*). See also Jeffrey Spier, 'Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993): 25–62; Anna Kartsonis, 'Protection Against all Evil: Function, Use, and Operation of Byzantine Historiated Phylacteries', *Byzantinische Forschungen* 20 (1994): 73–102. On the use of textual amulets in Late Antique and early Medieval Europe, see Don Skemer, *Binding Word: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), pp. 21–58.

63. Campbell Bonner, 'Two Studies of Syncretistic Amulets', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 85(5) (1942): 466–71. Another example is illustrated in Anon., *L'arte copte en Egypte*, p. 122, Cat. No. 96. Others carry messages against evil such as, 'Flee, hated creature, Solomon is pursuing thee'. On the doctrinal dimensions of the *Trisagion*, see Glenn Peers, 'Vision and Community among Christians and Muslims: The al-Muallaqa Lintel in its Eighth-century Context', *Arte Medievale* (n.s.) 6 (2007): 39. For a later use of the Trisagion on a pair of silver liturgical fans from Egypt, see Evans and Ratliff (eds), *Byzantium and Islam*, pp. 72–3, Cat. No. 44A.

64. Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, p. 43, fig. 35a–c. Also octagonal in form is a tenth- or eleventh-century reliquary locket in the British Museum which carries carries two encircling inscriptions: 'Secure deliverance and aversion [from] all evil' and 'of Ss Cosmas and Damian'. See Bagnoli, Klein, Mann and Robinson (eds), *Treasures of Heaven*, p. 50, Cat. No. 33.

65. Lawrence Nees, 'Blue behind Gold: The Inscription of the Dome of the Rock and its Relatives', in Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair (eds), *And Diverse are their Hues: Color in Islamic Art and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 154–73. See also comments in Erik Thunø, 'Inscription and Divine Presence: Golden Letters in the Early Medieval Apse Mosaic', *Word and Image* 27(3) (2011): 279–91.

66. Marguerite van Berchem 'The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock', revd edn, I.1, pp. 309–10.

67. Fabio Barry, 'Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages', *Art Bulletin* 89(4) (2007): 627–56. For the text and translation of Paul the Silentiary's account, see app., p. 647. Also Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 95–6. For more on the writing about decorative stone in Late Antiquity and Islam, see John Onians, 'Abstraction and Imagination in Late Antiquity', *Art History* 3 (1980): 1–24; Marcus Milwright, 'Waves of the Sea: Responses to Marble in Written Sources (9th–15th Century)', in Bernard O'Kane (ed.), *The Iconography of Islamic Art. Studies in Honour of Professor Robert Hillenbrand* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 211–21.

68. On the connections between marble pavements and the sea, see Barry, 'Walking on Water', pp. 639–42 and *passim*. Nees also notes the practice of framing floor mosaics with marine representations. See Nees, 'Blue behind Gold', pp. 163–5, figs 102, 103.

69. Nees, 'Blue behind Gold', p. 164; Necipoğlu, 'The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest', p. 35. Citing a *hadīth* within commentary on the Qur'an by Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d. 767–8).

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 170–1. On the fresco at Qusayr 'Amra, see Garth Fowden,

Quṣayr ʿAmra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), p. 181, figs 50, 51.

71. Translated in Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery*, p. 208. The manuscript in which this appears is in the Vatican Library, *Palatino Latin Codex* 833. It was transcribed by an unknown author in the ninth or tenth century, and the original authorship of Ambrose is contested. This inscription is interpreted in greater detail in Franz J. Dölger, 'Zur Symbolik des altchristlichen Taufhauses I. Das Oktogon und die Symbolik des Achtzahl. Inschrift des hl. Ambrosius im Baptisterium der Theklakirche von Mailand', *Antike und Christentum: Kultur- und Religionsgeschichtliche Studien* 4 (1934): 153–87.

72. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery*, p. 162. Ambrose reflecting on the fact that the baptismal font is like a coffin (i.e., from which one is reborn). Ambrose's own font was octagonal. On font design in Late Antiquity, see Stauffer, *On Baptismal Fonts*, pp. 17–44 (on octagonal fonts, see pp. 22–9). On the symbolic links between baptisteries, the number eight and paradisiac themes, see Paul Underwood, 'The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950): 43–138 (especially pp. 44–6, 53–6). During the papacy of Sixtus III (r. 432–40) the circular font of the Lateran baptistery in Rome was surrounded by eight porphyry columns and inscribed with eight distichs that develop the ideas of rebirth through baptism and the font as a 'fountain of life' (full translation given on p. 55).

73. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery*, pp. 86–7. Augustine notes that Judaism orders circumcision on the eighth day and this is replaced in Christianity by baptism (circumcision of the heart) on the eighth day (*Sermon* 260.1, 260A.4).

74. Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, p. 43; Alicia Walker, 'A Reconsideration of Early Byzantine Marriage Rings', in Sulochana Asirvatham, Corinne Pache and John Watrous (eds), *Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and Society* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p. 155, fig. 9.6. On the magical qualities of eight-rayed motifs on Late Antique mosaic floors, see Henry Maguire, 'Magic and Geometry in Early Christian Floor Mosaics and Textiles' *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 44 (1994): 265–74 (especially pp. 265–6); reprinted in Henry Maguire, *Rhetoric, Nature and Magic in Byzantine Art* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), ch. 8.

75. A. Walker, 'A Reconsideration of Early Byzantine Marriage Rings', p. 156.

76. Nessib Saliby and Marc Griesheimer (with an addition by Noël Duval), 'Un martyrium octagonal découvert à Homs (Syrie) en 1988 et sa mosaïque', *Antiquité Tardive* 7 (1999): 383–400; Rina Avner, 'The Recovery of the Kathisma Church and its Influence on Octagonal Buildings', in G. Claudio Bottini, Leah Di Segni and L. Daniel Chrupcala (eds), *One Land – Many Cultures. Archaeological Studies in Honour of Stanislao Loffreda OFM* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 2003), pp. 173–86; Avner, 'The Dome of the Rock in the Light of the Development of Concentric Martyria in Jerusalem'; Avner, 'The Account of Caesarea by the Piacenza Pilgrim'. For a detailed description of the octagonal space created in the cruciform martyrium church of Nyssa, see St Gregory of Nyssa, epistle 25, trans. in Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 27–9. The Syriac hymn about the octagonal church at Edessa is

translated on pp. 57–60. This last text is also discussed in Nees, 'Blue behind Gold', p. 163.

77. Rosen-Ayalon, *Early Islamic Monuments*, p. 66. On Late Antique Christian interpretations of the significance of eight, see Dölger, 'Zur Symbolik des alchristlichen Taufhauses', pp. 160–82; Underwood, 'The Fountain of Life', pp. 44–6, 53–6; George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 96–101. See also comments about the octagonal room in the Domus Aurea in Magness, 'Heaven on Earth', p. 16.

78. Michael Featherstone, 'The Chrysotriklinos seen through *De Cerimoniis*', in Lars Hoffmann (ed.), *Zwischen Polis und Peripherie. Beiträge zur byzantinischen Kulturgeschichte*, Mainzer Veröffentlichungen zur Byzantinistik 7 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), pp. 833–49; Michael Featherstone, 'The Great Palace as Reflected in *De Cerimoniis*', in F. A. Bauer (ed.), *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft. Frühmittelalteriche Residenzen – Gestalt und Funktion*, BYZAS 5 (Istanbul: Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Istanbul, 2006), pp. 47–62 (see especially pp. 50–3). For a ninth-century description of the structure, see Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 184.

79. On the 'everyday procession', see Featherstone, 'The Great Palace', pp. 54–5.

80. On the references to Byzantine imperial architecture in the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, see Creswell, *A short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, pp. 68–69; Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus*, pp. 139–83.

CHAPTER 8

The Inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock in their Historical Context

THE ONE PIECE of information that anchors the mosaic inscriptions in absolute terms is, of course, the date of 72/691–2. The general characteristics of the mosaic inscription do not support the notion that this date marks the year of completion of the building (Chapter 6). The year 72 more probably refers to the foundation of the Dome of the Rock. Thus, we are left with a building that was started in 72/691–2 and completed in the mid-690s. We can, however, envisage that the initial planning (or, at least, the initial conception) of the building occurring a little earlier. It is worth noting that the Dome of the Rock sits on a raised platform that is shared with other structures, most importantly in this context the Dome of the Chain.[1] It seems probable that some degree of construction or remodelling of this platform was required prior to the sinking of the foundations for the Dome of the Rock.[2]

We need to look to the historical circumstances of the years prior to, during and after 72/691–2 in order to come to a better understanding of how the Dome of the Rock and its decoration were meant to have functioned. The previous chapter considered aspects of the symbolic vocabulary of Late Antique inscriptions. I argued that the creation of an encircling inscription represented a significant decision in itself, and that such inscriptions could contain certain meanings that were extrinsic to the precise message expressed by the words themselves. Other possibilities in this respect include the colour scheme (gold on blue) and the symbolism of the octagon. This chapter evaluates the mosaic inscriptions in the context of the political history of the 680s and 690s. The central question to be answered is the extent to which the changing content (and presentation) of the two sides of the mosaic inscription relates to the concerns of the Umayyad elite during this significant phase in early Islamic history.

The methodological problems presented by the Arabic and non-Arabic textual sources on this period were discussed in the Introduction. Fundamentally, the difficulty is that the chronicles providing most abundant information on the events (and of the motivations of the key players) were composed some time afterward. The fact that some of these texts were made for later ruling elites is also

significant; for example, the histories penned under the patronage of the Abbasid caliphs are unlikely to represent an unbiased view of the previous dynasty. Some chroniclers were Shi'a or, at least, harboured sympathies for this branch of Islam, and would be unlikely to present in a positive light the dynasty responsible for the martyrdom of Husayn. Conversely, there are 'primary' official documents – coins, seals, papyri and inscriptions on buildings – from the late seventh and early eighth centuries. In addition, one can find other broadly contemporaneous perspectives from surviving Arabic poetry and from the writings of seventh-century non-Muslim chroniclers (though the former tends to take the form of panegyric and the latter frequently exhibits hostility towards the Islamic elite).[3]

Chase Robinson has demonstrated some of the difficulties we encounter in trying to understand of the personality and rule of 'Abd al-Malik. Robinson reviews the biographical evidence about the caliph and identifies the presence of literary tropes that should alert the reader to the possibility of later interpolation into the textual record. A telling example is the representation of 'Abd al-Malik as an avid collector of Muslim traditions (a practice also attributed to his father Marwan). The future caliph is said to have exhibited his expertise in this area by debating with the leading theological scholars of Medina. For example, Necıpoğlu writes in her article on the Dome of the Rock:

> The pious caliph, who in his youth had distinguished himself as one of the foremost religious scholars of Medina, was a leading authority on sacred law and on matters of dogma. He is reported to have scrupulously consulted his provincial deputies and those of sound opinion before implementing his construction project, as did Ibn al-Zubayr for the rebuilding of the Ka'ba. According to a well-known tradition, 'Abd al-Malik asked his consultants to write their views about his plan 'to build a dome (*qubba*) over the Rock of Bayt al-Maqdis, in order to shelter the Muslims from cold and to construct the mosque'.[4]

In itself the Arabic written sources, including al-Wasiti (fl. eleventh century), employed in this reconstruction appear to show the caliph as a prominent religious authority in his day, as well as one engaged in a wide consultative process prior to the erection of the Dome of the Rock. Al-Wasiti is one of the earliest and most important sources on the construction of the building.[5] Neither assertion about the caliph is necessarily untrue, but neither can they be satisfactorily demonstrated. The way in which the young 'Abd al-Malik is depicted as a scholar of law and dogma is particularly problematic. As Robinson notes, the caliph is depicted 'transacting' this knowledge in a manner that only became usual practice from the second half of the eighth century.[6] This sort of anachronism points to the unreliability

of the anecdote as a form of historical information. While it reflects well the ways in which later Muslims would have expected a learned caliph to behave, such anecdotes cannot be cited as definitive proof that ʿAbd al-Malik actually possessed such erudition.

Robinson's presentation of the early rule of ʿAbd al-Malik (i.e., the period from 65/685 to 72/692) is particularly striking. He does not accept the conventional narrative of this period, and presents instead the 'caliphate' of Ibn al-Zubayr. He reasons that it is illogical to cast Ibn al-Zubayr as a 'counter-caliph' simply because he was ultimately defeated. Ibn al-Zubayr's claims to caliphal authority were as strong or stronger than those of the Umayyads, and there is little to suggest that the notion of succession through a family line (first instigated at the time of the accession of Yazid I in 60/680) was widely accepted across the Muslim community in the 680s. Seen in these terms, ʿAbd al-Malik's claims to the caliphate look rather hollow in 65/685 and continue to be so until about 71/690–1. For Robinson, the true caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik dates from the time of his victory over the Zubayrids. Tensions remained within the nascent Islamic empire, but ʿAbd al-Malik could at least promote himself as the sole caliph.[7] The period from 72/691–2 to his death in 86/705 demonstrates the scope of his administrative brilliance, and in the course of a little over a decade he radically transformed Islamic society.

A full consideration of the events of the 680s and 690s is obviously beyond the scope of a single chapter, and what is presented below focuses on issues that are of most direct relevance to the Dome of the Rock and its decorative programme. The chapter is split into three sections. The first considers the history and primary source material from the period up to and including 72/691–2. The second section analyses the evidence from the rest of the 690s. The final section assesses the importance of these data in the interpretation for the Dome of the Rock.

The First Phase: 65–72/685–92

The future of the Umayyad dynasty cannot have looked assured in 65/685.[8] His father, Marwan (r. 64–5/683–4), had designated ʿAbd al-Malik as heir instead of Khalid, the son of Yazid I (r. 60–4/680–3). Marwan had married Yazid I's widow (a Christian belonging to the powerful Kalb tribe) in an attempt to gain the support of the tribes of southern Syria, but had reneged on his promise to hand the caliphate to Khalid. His new Christian wife responded to this affront by murdering Marwan. The question of succession was already highly contentious prior to these events. Muʿawiya had abandoned the principle of election in favour of hereditary succession (to his son Yazid). This was met with opposition in different parts of the Islamic state. Most important in this respect was the figure of ʿAbd Allah b. al-Zubayr in Mecca, who had pressed his own claims to the caliphate

following the death of Husayn b. 'Ali in 61/680. Ibn al-Zubayr was recognised as caliph by Muslims in Iraq and parts of Iran, as well as by Qaysi tribes in Syria. The situation of the Zubayrids had only strengthened with the death of Yazid I in 64/683 and the demise of his son and successor, Mu'awiya II (r. 64/683) later the same year.

The opening years of 'Abd al-Malik's rule must be seen in the context of the civil war (*fitna*). At the beginning he did not enjoy complete control over Greater Syria, though he could rely upon Egypt, which from 65/685 was governed by his brother, 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Marwan. The Yamanis also supported the Umayyads. 'Abd al-Malik's first military foray into Iraq was a failure, resulting in the death of his general 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad in 67/686 at the hands of a Shi'a force led by Mukhtar b. Abi 'Ubayd (the ruler of Kufa from 65/685). The weakness of his position is indicated vividly by the terms of the ten-year truce agreed with the Byzantines: an annual sum of 365,000 solidi supplemented by the release of prisoners of war and the ceding of some sovereignty and tax revenues in Cyprus, Armenia and Iberia (eastern Georgia). These harsh terms did, at least, result in the withdrawal of the Christian Mardaites from Syria, allowing 'Abd al-Malik to concentrate his military resources else-where. He was also faced with a consolidation of Zubayrid authority to the east, Mukhtar having been defeated in 67/687. An Umayyad offensive against Iraq in the summer of 69–70/689 had to be abandoned in order to deal with an uprising in Damascus. 'Abd al-Malik also faced opposition from the Qaysis in the Jazira who had allied themselves with Ibn al-Zubayr.

The Qaysis, led by Zufar b. al-Harith al-Kilabi, were defeated allowing 'Abd al-Malik to turn his attention to the other allies of Ibn al-Zubayr. The turning point in the struggle between the Umayyads and Zubayrids was the successful campaign in Iraq by al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf. After Mu'sab b. al-Zubayr was killed in 72/691, al-Hajjaj was dispatched by 'Abd al-Malik to the Hijaz. The general's first order was to negotiate with Ibn al-Zubayr. When these talks broke down al-Hajjaj besieged Mecca, even bombarding the city. The siege lasted six months and terminated with the capture of the city and the death of Ibn al-Zubayr in Jumada I or II 73/October–November 692. In the summer of the same year 'Abd al-Malik also defeated the force of Justinian II (r. 685–95, 705–11) at Sebastopolis. The victory effectively released 'Abd al-Malik from his obligation to pay annual tribute to the Byzantine emperor. This, and the conquest of Iraq, had the effect of expanding the financial resources of the Umayyad state; the minting of coinage greatly increased at this time, including striking of gold and silver issues in the capital of Damascus.[9] The Umayyad caliph continued to prosecute his military campaign against the Byzantine Empire and its client states in the latter part of his rule (see below).

Some aspects of the coinage of the later 680s and early 690s have

been discussed already in Chapter 7, but this area warrants further discussion in the context of the ideological concerns of this period. Where the designers of earlier 'Arab–Sasanian' coinage had been content to make relatively minor adjustments to the Sasanian proto-types (particularly in the addition of short pious statements around the outer margins of the obverse), the drachms of the second *fitna* become increasingly ambitious in their inscriptions.

We are poorly informed about the precise motivations behind this change, but there appears to have been a realisation that coins were a means to propagate matters of doctrine as well as political allegiance. The portable nature of coins offered the Muslim elite possibilities for communication that greatly exceeded the static inscriptions on built structures, rock faces and grave markers.[10] Of course, it is impossi-ble to know quite how these statements were received by the wider populace. Levels of literacy among the adult population would have been low, and we can presumably discount the idea that coins were avidly read for their content. Rather, it seems probable that coins were reflecting messages that were being distributed by other means, for example, during the *khuṭba* (sermon) made after communal prayer. Scholars have noted the intensely political nature of such speeches during the late seventh and early eighth centuries. A strik-ing example of this phenomenon is the threatening sermon given by al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf in 75/694 to the inhabitants of Kufa.[11] As the Umayyad governor of Iraq he purposed to quell the rebellious move-ments in the city, and left them in no doubt about the consequences of challenging the authority of the state. Thus, coins are most likely functioning as a means to cement ideas that were already in circula-tion. The small size of a coin does require ideas to be expressed in abbreviated form, whether textual or representational.

The first major development in the inscriptional content of Islamic drachms came in 66/685–6. A coin minted by the Zubayrid governor of Bishapur, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿAbd Allah, contains a marginal text on the obverse reading, *bism all(ā)h / muḥammad rasūl / all(ā)h* ('In the name of God. Muhammad is the messenger of God').[12] Although the essential statement of the oneness of God is missing from this inscription, the presence of the phrase, *muḥammad rasūl all(ā)h*, is significant. It is the first dated occurrence of the name of the Prophet of Islam on any object produced for the Muslim elite. Furthermore, it can be argued to represent a form of the *shahāda* in that it seeks to establish a central tenet of Islam. It is the status of Muhammad rather than the oneness of God that the Zubayrid governor appears to regard as a suitable subject for public pronouncement. In 70/689, the same affirmation of Muhammad as the messenger of God appears on a coin issued in Kirman. This time the pious formula is given in Pahlavi (MHMT PGTAMI Y DAT) in the central field of the obverse. The outer margin on the same side contains an Arabic formula, *bism all(ā)h walī / al-amr* ('In the name of God, the Master of Affairs').

Figure 8.1 *(a) Obverse of 'Arab–Byzantine' fals with two 'standing caliph' figures between pole-on-steps. No mint name. British Museum. After: Walker,* Arab–Byzantine Coins, *Nos A5, A6; (b) obverse of 'Arab–Byzantine' fals with two standing emperors, Ba'albak mint. After: Goodwin,* Arab–Byzantine Coinage, *No. 25. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

The latter phrase is associated with the Kharijites.[13] The name of the governor is not given on this coin.

It is also worth noting that the 66/685–6 coin was issued by a Zubayrid governor, suggesting that the Umayyads were not the first to appreciate the doctrinal potential of public inscriptions. An interesting contrast to this approach is presented by an undated fals (copper issue) minted by 'Abd al-Malik (Figure 8.1(a)). The obverse of the coin perhaps derives its composition from a copper minted in Ba'albak. This coin has two Byzantine emperors on either side of a cross-on-steps (Figure 8.1(b)). Clive Foss argues that this coin dates to the first year of his rule, though a later date is certainly possible. Foss reasons that the obverse design of two standing figures represents the caliph and his brother, 'Abd al-'Aziz, the proclaimed successor. If this is correct, it suggests an early use of the powerful motif of the 'standing caliph' (see below). Equally significant is the Arabic of the reverse for this too focuses attention upon the status of the caliph rather than elements of the faith: *bism all(ā)h 'abd all(ā)h 'abd al-malik amīr al-mu'minīn* ('In the name of God. The slave of God 'Abd al-Malik, Commander of the Faithful').[14] In this respect, 'Abd al-Malik is following in the tradition of caliphal inscriptions established by the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, Mu'awiya, in giving prominence to his title as head of the Muslim *umma*. It is, of course, also the title he is accorded on the outer face inscription in the Dome of the Rock.

It is not until 72/691–2 that the mints controlled by the Umayyads produced coins with the 'short' *shahāda* like that of Bishapur issue of 66/685–6. A drachm issued in Damascus bears on the obverse margin the words, *bism all(ā)h*, with the additional phrase, *muḥammad*

raṣūl all(ā)h, arranged in two vertical registers to the right of the ruler in the main field.[15] The visual separation of the two elements into different fields of the coin is innovative, suggesting that they are not to be considered as one formula, but as two autonomous elements each with its own resonance. The same year witnessed a more radical development. This is a drachm issued by the Zubayrid governor, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz ibn ʿAbd Allah ibn Amir, in Sijistan (Figure 7.3, above). The obverse combines Arabic and Pahlavi inscriptions, with the phrase on the outer margin reading, *bism all(ā)h al-ʿazīz* ('In the name of God, the Great'). The most important message is carried in the central field of the reverse.[16] The standard fire altar and attendants are no longer present and are replaced by five lines of text:

1. DWHPTʾT ('seventy-two')
2. YZDTʾ-I BRʾ ʿLH ('One God, but He')
3. ʾHRN YZDTʾ L ʿYTʾ ('another god does not exist')
4. MHMTʾ PTGMBI Y YZDTʾ ('Muhammad is the messenger of God')
5. SK ('Sijistan')

The central three lines (2–4) have been interpreted as a literal translation of the profession of faith from Arabic into Middle Persian. This coin is extremely rare, perhaps indicating that it was minted in limited numbers. It is not apparent the extent to which coins of this design were distributed elsewhere in the Islamic world. Nevertheless, this is a highly significant moment, and there are several aspects of the inscription on the reverse that warrant additional comment.

The fact that the inscription is written in Pahlavi must have been a deliberate decision (the designer of the die for the obverse being able to produce Arabic inscriptions). The Muslim elite evidently intended that this doctrinal statement should be made available in the local language. Presumably, the intended audience for this would have been members of the wealthy and literate elite (followers of Zoroastrianism and other faiths, as well as recent converts to Islam).[17] The same motivation presumably exists behind the employment of both the Arabic and Pahlavi forms of the *basmala* (BPRWY) on a drachm minted by Musʿab ibn al-Zubayr in 69/688–9, probably in Kirman.[18] Even to those who could not read the text, the omission of the usual Sasanian fire altar must have been a powerful indication of the changing socio-cultural balance in the latter part of the seventh century. The exclusive use of script is also striking and has no parallel in earlier coinage. Seals are the only other type of official artefact from the Persian-speaking world to which the coin can be compared. While most include the representation of a monarch or a royal animal, there are some that comprise just writing in Pahlavi.[19]

The literal nature of the translation on the Sijistan coin suggests that the Arabic formula already enjoyed familiarity among the Muslim elite of the region, and was presumably communicated both

orally and in written form. The wording of the *shahāda* conforms to the Arabic, *lā ilāh illā allāh muḥammad rasūl allāh*. The *basmala* is omitted, having being employed in Arabic on the obverse. This separation of the two components mirrors the Umayyad drachm of the same year (see above). If one compares the content of the Pahlavi formula with the mosaic inscriptions from the Dome of the Rock and with the tombstone of ʿAbāssa bint Jurayj from Aswan (Figure 5.12, above; dated 14 Dhū al-Qaʿda 71/21 April 691), it is apparent that the coin inscription lacks *waḥdahu* ('alone') and *lā sharīka lahu* ('he is without associates'). Jere Bacharach and Sherif Anwar argue that this provides evidence for regional variations (see below).[20] The 'shahāda solidus' minted by ʿAbd al-Malik in Damascus may date as early as 72/691–2, and continued to be produced until about 74/694 (Figure 5.3, above). This is the first Umayyad issue to carry a longer form of the *shahāda* (including the *basmala* at the beginning). These formulae appear around the margin of the reverse, with the latter including the word *waḥdahu*. In iconographic terms, this gold issue is also important in that the horizontal bars of the crosses have been removed from both the obverse and the reverse (these features are apparent in 'Arab–Byzantine' Heraclius solidi carrying Greek script that presumably predate the introduction of the '*shahāda* solidus'). The mutilated cross is also in evident in copper coins produced in mints across Greater Syria. Some may predate the gold issues with the same characteristics.[21]

The removal of the crossbar is more than simply a means of neutralising the potency of Byzantine prototypes. The cross stands for the death and resurrection of Christ (and the specific cross represented is the monumental example erected at Golgotha). From this follows the Christian conception of Jesus as the son of God and one of the Trinity. These beliefs conflicted with the Muslim view of Jesus as a prophet. Theophanes the Confessor (d. 817 or 818), deriving his information from Theophilus of Edessa (d. *c*. 785), claims that ʿAbd al-Malik took the initiative of minting coins with the mutilated cross in 692 in order that these were sent to pay the annual tribute to Constantinople. Some historians have asserted that Justinian II's refusal to accept these provocative gold coins (this could refer either to the '*shahāda* solidi' or, if the events are placed a little later, to the 'standing caliph' issues) was employed as pretext for war (resulting the battle of Sebastopolis).[22]

While Theophanes offers a plausible explanation for the evolution of the '*shahāda* solidus', this need not have been its only intended function. One can also consider the impact this coin would have had upon Christians living within the Islamic state. Bacharach observes that the addition of *waḥdahu* on Umayyad coin issues (and *lā sharīka lahu* on monumental inscriptions) is probably to be understood as a Muslim challenge to the Christian Trinity. This would have been more relevant in the context of Christian-dominated Greater Syria

and Egypt than it would have been in the more heterodox regions controlled by the Zubayrid governors in the east. Although it is not an officially sanctioned monument, the grave marker of ʿAbassa bint Jurayj helps to confirm this; her name indicates that she was a convert (Jurayj meaning 'little George'), and it is conceivable that the inclusion of the *shahāda* and the reference to the *ahl al-islām* ('people of Islam') in the inscription was an important means of differentiating herself from her Christian neighbours.[23]

The same issues must also have been relevant in Greater Syria in the years prior to the erection of the Dome of the Rock. Notably, there is evidence for the circulation among the confessional communities of statements asserting the oneness of God. The *Shema Yisrael*, the Jewish prayer taken from Deuteronomy 6:4, reads: 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.' The latter part can also be translated as, 'the Lord alone'.[24] Somewhat similar ideas appear elsewhere in the Old Testament, including Jeremiah 10:6 and Baruch 3:35. Mark 12:29–32 records Jesus reciting Deuteronomy 6:4 to a scribe, who replies with an equivalent formula. The concept of the oneness of God was central to the Samaritan creed. The statement made by the priest comprises:

> There is no God but One (*lyt 'lh 'l' 'ḥd*), Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one. There is no God but one. My faith is in thee, Yahweh, and in Moses the son of Amram, Thy servant, and in holy Torah, and in Mount Gerizim, House of God, the chosen and hallowed [place], the choicest of earth. There is no God but One.[25]

The monotheist sentiments are repeated in this formula for further emphasis. Significant too is the assertion of a pre-eminent prophet, Moses (bringing to mind the status of Muhammad in Islam as the final and definitive messenger of God). These links are intriguing, though it is worth noting that the Samaritans were not a major religious force by the seventh century, and there is no direct evidence of the transfer of religious concepts.[26] The oneness of God is also referred to in the letters of Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:4, Romans 3:30 and 1 Timothy 2:5. Broadly equivalent formulae appear on Late Antique Christian architecture. Although inscriptions naming the Trinity are more common, there are those that dwell on the singularity of God. For example, a lintel in house in Deir Salib, dated 595, carries the words, ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ Ο ΜΟΝΟΣ ('The one and only God'). Also in the region of the 'Dead Cities' is tomb at Has, dated 378, carrying a similar message: ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ ΜΟΝΟΣ ('One God alone'). It has been suggested that the latter should be seen as a reaction to pagan practices prevalent in rural areas, though it could well have been appreciated in differently in later periods.[27] It is also possible that these phrases come from an allegiance to Monophysite beliefs (i.e., the notion that Christ only possessed a divine nature); for example, John of Ephesus

(d. *c.* 588) records the Egyptian Monophysite creed being employed in Nubia as 'the true God is One and there is no other god but He'.[28]

Given the existence of these monotheistic statements in both liturgies and monumental inscriptions, one can imagine the potential advantages for the Umayyad elite of adding clarifying clauses of *waḥdahu* and *lā sharīka lahu* to the simpler form of the Muslim profession of faith.[29] *Waḥdahu* performs a similar role to the Greek *monos* in the Christian inscriptions mentioned previously. *Lā sharīka lahu* is perhaps the more important in this respect in that it seeks to establish clear ground between the monotheism of Islam and the Christian Trinity (according to a Muslim perspective). Writing in *c.* 690 the Diophysite monk, Anastasius of Sinai (d. *c.* 700), indicates that Muslims ('Arabs') were willing to confront Christians on the precise nature of God. He writes:

> Before any discussion we must first anathematise all the false notions, which our adversaries might entertain about us. Thus when we wish to debate with Arabs, we first anathematise whoever says two gods, or whoever says that God has carnally begotten a son, or whoever worships as god any created thing at all, in heaven or on earth.[30]

Anastasius repeats the point about the mistaken (from his point of view) association of God with carnal union in a later passage. His comments exhibit some awareness of Qur'anic assertions about the nature of God, most notably Q 112.[31] A later writer, Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) gives more detail concerning the Muslim appreciation of Jesus as the Messiah and as the Spirit of God and Word of God (Q 4:171). He continues that they do, however, deny his status as God or son of God (Q 5:72, 75). The letter in which these observations appear is unfortunately undated.[32]

The omission of the crossbar from coins is not the only evidence for Umayyad action against the central symbol of the Christian faith. Most of the literary sources address events after 72/691–2, but there are indications that the Muslim elite was acting against crosses and other Christian imagery before this date.[33] An anonymous Maronite chronicle claims that Muʿawiya tried unsuccessfully to remove the crossbar from his coins. The validity of this assertion is questionable, though there are 'Arab–Byzantine' coppers dating to his reign in which the standard crossbar has been replaced by a short horizontal bar at the summit of the pole (Figure 8.2). More substantive is an account of the reign of Isaac (Ishaq), the forty-first patriarch of the Coptic Church (686–9) in the *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*. The relevant section of this chapter recounts some of his dealings with the Umayyad governor of Egypt, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz. Some aspects of the author's representation of this relationship seem to be positive. He notes that the patriarch was

Figure 8.2 *Reverse face of 'Arab–Byzantine' solidus with Heraclius and co-emperor and taf cross-on-steps. No mint (Damascus?), c. 660–80.* Islamic Coin Auctions *11 (2006), No. 13. Drawing: Marcus Milwright.*

able to repair his residence and the Great Church of St Mark.[34] Isaac also built a church at Helwan and used this to have audiences with the Muslim governor. In other words, there is evidence for freedom of worship as well as the construction and renovation of churches. The next part of the chapter describes a more problematic episode for the patriarch:

> In those days the patriarch addressed letters to the king of the Abyssinians and the king of the Nubians, bidding them make peace together and praying that there might be no ill will between them; and he wrote this on account of a dispute there was between the two. Thereupon certain intriguers seized upon the opportunity of slandering Abba Isaac before 'Abd al-'Aziz, who was greatly incensed, and sent his officers to bring him that he might be put him to death. But the secretaries wrote letters different from the patriarch's letters, and gave them to the messengers whom he had sent to the Abyssinians, and took those first letters from them, in fear for the patriarch. This they only did lest evil should befall the Church. And before the patriarch was brought before the Amir, they informed him that the messengers were there, and the letters with them. So he sent in haste to seek them, and took the letters; and when he had perused them, he found nothing in them of what he had been told. Thus his anger was pacified, and he sent at once, and bade the patriarch return to Alexandria, and did not cause him again after this to come up southwards.
>   Then he commanded to destroy all crosses which were in the land of Egypt, even the crosses of gold and silver. So the Christians of the land of Egypt were troubled. Moreover he wrote certain inscriptions, and placed them on the doors of the churches at Miṣr and in the Delta, saying in them: 'Muhammad is the great Apostle

of [He who is] God, and Jesus is also the Apostle of God. But verily God is not begotten and does not beget.'[35]

The wording of the inscription ordered by ʿAbd al-ʿAziz is as follows: *muḥammad al-rasūl al-kabīr alladhī llah wa ʿīsā ayḍan rasūl allāh wa anna allāh lam yalid wa lam yūlad* (the last part corresponding to Q 112:3).[36] It should be emphasised that the manuscript copies of the *History of the Patriarchs* are comparatively late, and one cannot discount the possibility that this section of the text (apparently penned by an Archdeacon George, and dealing with events up to the time of Caliph Sulayman ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, r. 715–17[37]), was not subject to changes, particularly when it was translated from Coptic to Arabic in the eleventh century. Having said that, it is striking that the form of the profession of faith – if one can call it that – does not accord to the formulation that would have been commonplace after the mid-eighth century. This, at least, gives his text some credibility (and one can point to other unusual formulations on inscriptions of the late seventh or early eighth centuries[38]). It is unclear the extent to which the events recounted in the first paragraph can be considered as the cause of the destruction of crosses and the placement of Muslim religious slogans on churches. These policies could well have been a form of punishment of Egyptian Christians, though they might have been designed to placate local Muslims. Whatever the cause, however, they signal an understanding between both communities of the significance of the cross. The inscriptions emphasise the status of Jesus in Muslim eyes: a prophet, but one of lesser status than Muhammad (the latter being described as *al-rasūl al-kabīr*). The second part of this credal statement is also significant in that it dwells upon the fact that God was not born and could not beget, rather than concentrating upon his singularity. This might indicate that in the late 680s the Umayyad elite were refining their doctrinal stance in relation to Christianity.

There is little archaeological evidence to support the idea that the Muslim authorities in Egypt and Syria were conducting purges against crosses and other Christian imagery in the period prior to 72/691–2. Late Antique Coptic churches are extensively decorated with religious fresco paintings, and these appear to have suffered no damage. Neither the mosaics nor the Late Antique icons of St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai were desecrated. The situation with the churches of Greater Syria is more difficult to assess because few are preserved above ground level. The seventh century did not witness the level of church construction seen in the previous century, but dated mosaics demonstrate that Christians were able to construct and renovate religious buildings following the Arab conquest.[39] One Greek inscription, commemorating the rebuilding of a bath at Hammat Gader in 42/662–3, starts with an image of a cross before naming both the Caliph al-Muʿawiya (ΑΒΔΑΛΛΑ ΜΑΑΥΙΑ),

Figure 8.3 *Rectified digital photograph of the mosaic panel from the nave of the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem. Late seventh century(?) with later additions. Photograph: Tang07174 (Wikimedia Commons).*

the governor 'Abd Allah ibn Abi Hashim (ΑΒΔΑΛΛΑ ΥΙΩ ΑΒΩ ΑΣΕΜΩ) and Christian called Ioannes.[40] The dating of the mosaics of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem remains uncertain, though it is possible that they belong to the decade prior to 72/691–2. The mosaics carry representation of ornate jewelled crosses (Figure 8.3), along with tall, symmetrical vegetal designs that echo those found in the Dome of the Rock.[41] They can hardly have been placed so conspicuously within this prominent structure in the face of direct opposition by the Umayyad elite.

After 72/692

The principal political and military objectives of the period until *c.* 700 can be briefly summarised.[42] 'Abd al-Malik was able to concentrate on the consolidation of his rule over the Islamic state. In addition, there is evidence for some territorial expansion, though this was not on the same scale as that of his son, al-Walid I. The caliph was faced with Kharijite rebellions in southern Iraq and Iran. The first victory against the Kharijites is recorded in 73/692–3, but it required the appointment of al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf as governor in Kufa to provide a lasting answer to this threat. It took until 77/697 for al-Hajjaj and his deputy, al-Muhallab, to suppress the Kharijites in southern Iraq and Mesopotamia. Al-Muhallab was subsequently tasked with clearing up the disorder that had erupted in Khurasan in 78/697. Al-Hajjaj continued to deal with other disturbances in Iraq into the early eighth century. Syrian troops were important in this respect, and in 83/702 al-Hajjaj constructed the garrison city (*miṣr*) of Wasit to provide them with a permanent base. The threat offered by the Kharijites was not simply military, however; their assertion that authority came directly from God, and not through the caliph, clearly represented a profound challenge to the legitimacy of the Marwanids (see below).[43]

'Abd al-Malik's policy of expansion was directed towards Byzantine territories and those of client-rulers under the emperor in Constantinople. One of the caliph's goals seems to have been the recovery of the sovereignty that he had ceded to the emperor

in the treaty signed during the second *fitna*. Following the victory at Sebastopolis, the ruler of Armenia submitted to Islamic authority. There were also campaigns against the areas occupied by the Mardaites in Anatolia. The Umayyads received the submission of the Byzantine client-ruler of Lazica (on the eastern border of the Black sea) in 77/696–7. Another major locus of activity was the port of Carthage. This and the fertile lands of Byzacena (i.e., Ifriqiya) were captured in 77/697. Carthage was briefly retaken by a naval expedition dispatched by Emperor Leontius, but this force was unable to stop an Umayyad land army and fleet in 78/697. Another consequence of this defeat was that Leontius was overthrown in favour of the Germanic leader of the Byzantine navy, Apsimaros (crowned as Tiberius III, r. 698–705).

Robinson argues that it is during the caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik (which he dates from 72/691–2) that one can identify the creation of a functioning state.[44] This can be distinguished from the tribal mechanisms operated by Muʿawiya and earlier caliphs. The ambitious scale of the building projects (including road construction, the extensive renovation of the Haram in Mecca and the transformation of the Haram in Jerusalem) and the transition to an increasingly professional army both required a steady revenue stream. Given that this was no longer going to come from conquest booty, the Umayyad elite needed to undertake cadastral surveys and establish an effective means of tax collection. The papyri recovered from Nessana, a settlement in the Negev, suggest that this process was already under way in some Umayyad controlled regions in the second half of the 680s;[45] it seems likely, however, that the elimination of the Zubayrid threat would have facilitated the expansion of the tax system across the empire. The caliph moved towards establishing Arabic as the sole language of administration. Surviving papyri of the late seventh and early eighth centuries illustrate that this process was incomplete by the end of ʿAbd al-Malik's reign. There are still bilingual (Greek and Arabic) protocols dating to the rule of al-Walid I. These continue to provide a date according to the Byzantine indiction in addition to the *hijrī* dating system.

There is evidence that the caliph was to be understood by the *umma* as the ultimate authority of matters of religious practice and law. His pronouncements might be communicated through letters and sermons delivered in the principal mosques of the empire. (The influence he had upon the practise of the hajj in the early eighth century is discussed in the concluding chapter.) His conspicuous patronage within the sacred areas of Mecca and Jerusalem must have been motivated in some part by a desire to bolster his standing as the leader of the Muslim community. Furthermore, ʿAbd al-Malik seems to have had an active interest in the establishment of an authoritative version of the Qurʾan that could be disseminated around the empire. He commissioned al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf to make

a revisions to the ʿUthmanic recension. This endeavour (called by Omar Hamdan, al-Hajjaj's '*Maṣāḥif* project') occurred in 84–5/704–5, and is, therefore, too late to be directly relevant to an understanding of the proportional character and orthography of Qurʾanic text in the Dome of the Rock.[46] Al-Hajjaj's revisions to the text of the Qurʾan are described in later Muslim and Christian sources, though they offer different accounts of what was achieved. There has been disagreement concerning the extent to which the ʿUthmanic recension was adjusted by al-Hajjaj. Al-Hajjaj may have authorised rather technical issues, such as the establishment of a count of the consonants, words and verses, the division of the text into equal sections, and the addition of diacritics and even vowel markings. Alternatively, was there a more extensive rewriting of the Qurʾan at this time?[47] An earlier Umayyad governor, ʿUbaydallah ibn Ziyad (d. 67/686), is also claimed to have made changes to the Qurʾan. Again, there has been debate concerning the nature and extent of these revisions.[48]

The importance of the Dome of the Rock in this context is clear. While the inscriptions of the outer and inner faces, as well as those of the copper plaques from the east and north entrances, clearly contain scriptural quotations that correspond exactly to their standard Qurʾanic counterparts, there are other features (apparent conflations, the switching of first-person statements into the third person, and the reference to Muhammad as an intercessor) that have led scholars to question whether the text of the Qurʾan was entirely fixed in the late 680s and 690s. Important problems follow from these observations. Several scholars have suggested that the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock may preserve evidence of lost recensions (textual or oral) of the Qurʾan, and that ʿAbd al-Malik was responsible for bringing the text to its final authorised form. The absence of independent evidence for Q 112 in the earliest manuscripts even leaves open the possibility that this powerful statement was an Umayyad addition to the scriptural corpus.[49] The other early evidence for a 'non-standard' recension is the lower text of the palimpsest known as 'Ṣanʿāʾ I' (DAM 01-27.1), probably written prior to 660.[50]

Arguments can be advanced against the notion that the Qurʾan was brought to a finished form during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik. Estelle Whelan contends that the adaptation of Qurʾanic quotations in the Dome of the Rock was done in such a way that they would fit with the sense of the complete inscription. This procedure is consistent with practices encountered in later Islamic monumental epigraphy.[51] There is also evidence in early graffiti for slight changes to Qurʾanic verses, suggesting that there was always some scope for subtle modifications of scripture where the precise context of an inscription required it.[52] A critical review by Nicholas Sinai of the available evidence for the codification of the Qurʾan indicates that the fundamental content and structure (the 'consonantal skeleton' or *rasm*) could indeed have been assembled, as Muslim tradition

asserts, during the caliphate of ʿUthman. Sinai argues that there is no compelling evidence to disprove this assertion and that the ʿUthmanic dating should remain our 'default view'. In his view, later revisions were limited to more minor matters of orthography.[53]

On this basis one can return to the question of what issues ʿAbd al-Malik and the Umayyad elite might have been concerning themselves with in the 690s and early 700s. The mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock suggest an increasing interest in the role of diacritics from the outer to the inner face.[54] This is also intriguing evidence for involvement by the elite in the visual dimensions of Qurʾanic manuscripts, from the proportional characteristics of the script to the arrangement of text on the page and the addition of decorative elements. Déroche sees important differences between the scripts of earlier 'Hijazi' Qurʾans, such as the 'Codex Parisino-petropolitanus', and those written in his 'O[meyyade] I' script (his particular comparison is with London BL Or.2165, the 'Umayyad codex of Damascus', and the 'Umayyad codex of Fustat'). While all four were written by several hands, Déroche notices a crucial difference in the production process as one moves to the later phase (script O I). He writes:

> The latter [BL Or.2165] on the one hand and well as both of Damascus and Fustat codices witness a completely new feature in the – young – history of Arabic script: the deliberate iteration of a style of writing. Two hands cooperating in the transcription of Or.2165 or the two (or more) copyists of the two other copies of the Qurʾan were able to transcribe the text in such a way that the difference between the hands was not immediately detectable. In other words, they belonged to a world where scribes had a professional approach to their trade, learning a specific style and using it. We may go a step further: we have before our eyes the beginnings of a new concept, that of Qurʾanic script. Such specialization is perhaps not completely new in the area, but it is assuredly new in the Arabic manuscript tradition, a style becoming specific to a certain use. These elements point into the same direction: at the end of the first/seventh century, under the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik, a fateful change occurred in the chancery of the empire. Arabic, both language and script, became the official medium of administration.[55]

The Umayyad elite was clearly investing in the creation of new scripts, and this is also seen in the coinage of the 690s and in other broadly contemporary objects, such as seals and milestones.[56] The copper plaques from the Dome of the Rock seem to sit between script A (and B) and the miniature 'Kufic' scripts employed for coins and seals. It should be noted, however, that script C in the mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock does not find an exact match in the surviving

Qur'ans of the period. Where Déroche notes increasing consistency in the Qur'ans of the O I group, script C still exhibits slightly perplexing variability, for example, in the dotting of *thā'* and *shīn* (Chapter 5, Figures 5.6 and 5.8). This perhaps indicates that the writing on the inner face of the arcade can be placed prior to the full standardisation of Qur'anic script. I have argued earlier (Chapters 4 and 5) that scripts A (outer face) and B (south and southeast sides of the inner face) are less connected to book scripts and should be understood more in the context of monumental writing in the late 680s and early 690s.

Silver and gold coins minted between 72–7/691–7 provide important evidence for the ideological concerns of this period because these state-sponsored artefacts contain both images and texts.[57] The de-Christianising of the content of the '*shahāda* solidus', and of the Arab–Byzantine solidi with Greek inscriptions (probably dating from 72–3/691–4) is an important move. It has been proposed that mints producing coppers in Greater Syria were experimenting with imagery of this type before 72/691–2. This has also led some numismatists to conclude that one of the key developments in the imagery of early Islamic coinage – the replacement of the emperor with a full-length figure in Arab dress holding a sword across his body (usually known as the 'standing caliph'; Figure 7.5, above) – originated in base metal (in *c.* 690, though, according to Tony Goodwin, the examples from the Jerusalem (Īliyā) mint carrying the M motif on the reverse may be earlier) and was only later adopted on gold (in 74/693–4) and silver in the central mint in Damascus.[58] The man represented in this powerful design is commonly held to be 'Abd al-Malik himself. If such a reading is maintained, it further emphasises the extent to which the Umayyad elite was focusing attention on the position of the caliph, and the dominant personality of 'Abd al-Malik. This is an image of authority meant to compete with the condensed visual vocabulary of the standing Byzantine emperor.

The adaptation of the cross on the copper and gold issues has been discussed above in relation to the Umayyad attitudes towards Christian doctrine in the period prior to 72/691–2. The evidence from the remainder of 'Abd al-Malik's reign is limited. The author of the *History of the Patriarchs* reports that in 76/695 Justinian II was deposed by Leontius (r. 695–8) and the amir of Egypt (i.e., 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Marwan) decided that this fact should be communicated to 'the magistrates of the provinces, the people of Alexandria and the bishops and the Muslims'. Following his public pronouncement on this event, the amir:

> commanded on that day that the liturgies of the Christians should be forbidden. For the Muslims said that the Christians were in error, giving God a wife (*zawja*) and a son (*walad*), and uttering many falsehoods in their religion; and the Amir rebuked their want of agreement in the doctrines of religion.[59]

A public debate follows about Christian doctrine between the heads of the different churches. Disagreements among them serve to highlight the divisions indicated by the Muslim governor.[60] If we accept this as an accurate representation of events (and it may well be unreliable), then it again reveals the willingness of Muslims to pronounce upon the central concepts that differentiate Christianity and Islam. The oneness and transcendence of God are clearly the most important issues to be communicated in this respect. It is under 'Abd al-Malik's successors, particularly Umar II (r. 717–20) and Yazid II (r. 720–4) that there is more compelling evidence for the active engagement with Christian iconography, both the cross and figural designs. This seems to have culminated in the 'iconoclastic edict' under Yazid II, although the historicity of this event is still questioned.[61] Furthermore, there is little evidence for its impact in the archaeological record; while iconoclastic damage is apparent in some church mosaics, the careful removal of figural motifs was probably the work of local Christians rather than Muslim troops.[62]

Other ideological concerns are addressed by the experimental coinage of the 690s. The 'long' *shahāda* remains a key component of the inscriptional programme, but the imagery moves in new directions. A group of 'Arab–Sasanian' drachms abandons the fire altar and attendants in favour of a composition of three standing male figures in Arab dress. The middle one stands frontally with two arms raised (akin to the Christian orans mode of prayer) (Figure 8.4). These coins are associated with mints in Iraq during the governorship of Bishr ibn Marwan (dating from 73–5/692–6).[63] Whether they indicate a moment of prayer or the delivery of the *khuṭba* is unclear, but they are important in the present context as an experiment in the depiction of political authority and religious practice. Another drachm (probably minted between 75/695–6 and 77/697–8) has on its obverse a design of a spear on a triangular stand enclosed within an arch (Figure 8.5). The latter feature was commonly believed to represent a *miḥrāb*, but has more recently been interpreted as a sacral arch. The latter reading fits well with an Umayyad tendency to adopt and redefine well-established Late Antique motifs. The spear (*'anaza*) has been identified as the one carried before Muhammad into the mosque in Medina; this can be read as a visual commemoration of the Prophet and as a potent military symbol.[64]

Luke Treadwell relates the imagery of the *'anaza* and sacral arch back to the mutilated crosses found on the '*shahāda* solidus' and 'standing caliph' issues. He points to the fact that there would have been a strong visual association between the sacral arch and the cross due to the fact that these were commonly combined in Christian imagery of Late Antiquity. Examples can be located in church silver (Figure 8.6), decorated glass and pilgrim ampullae from Greater Syria as well as Axumite coinage. The Menorah also appears enclosed within a sacral arch on some impressed glass

Figure 8.4 *'Arab–Sasanian' drachm with 'orans' image on reverse. Issued by Bishr ibn Marwan, 'Aqula mint (Kufa), 73/692–3. Shamma Collection 3. Courtesy of the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar.*

Figure 8.5 *'Arab-Sasanian' drachm with reverse image of* 'anaza *and sacral arch. No mint (Damascus), 76/695–6. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society: 1944.100.612.*

Figure 8.6 *Gilded silver book covers, Constantinople(?), c. 570. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection: BZ 1936.36.9 & 10. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.*

pilgrim vessels (presumably produced in Jerusalem).[65] Thus, the replacement of the expected feature (the cross) with a Muslim emblem (the spear with its stand and attached pennant) carried a similar iconographic charge to the removal of the crossbar from the cross-on-steps motif. Interestingly, the concept of the repeated arch is taken up in the architectural decoration of the Dome of the Rock (the carved and gilded marble band running around the interior of the perimeter wall) and in the woodwork of the Aqsa Mosque (Figure 8.7).[66] In both cases, the arches enclose rather more neutral plant forms.

Another significant feature of this experimental drachm is the slogans added on either side of the spear (*naṣr all[ā]h*) and to the left and right of the arch (*amīr al-mu'minīn* and *khalīfat all[ā]h*). The references to the victory (*naṣr*) of God and to the official title of the caliph, at least from the time of Mu'awiya, would presumably have been relatively familiar, but the last phrase sets a new tone. 'Abd al-Malik asserts through the coin that his status is no longer simply as the 'representative' (*khalīfa*) of the Prophet on earth, but now should be considered as the representative of God.[67] It is significant in this context that this title is not employed on the foundation text at the end of the outer face inscription in the Dome of the Rock. One interpretation for this could be that the phrase had not yet become central in the public expression of 'Abd al-Malik's political identity. Indeed, the assertion of the Umayyad ruler as 'caliph of Allah' can be viewed in part as a response to the Kharijite insistence upon authority deriving only from God.[68] God is defined on a Kharijite coin minted in Kirman province in 72/691–2 as *walī al-amr* ('master of the affair'), while another coin from Bishapur (dated 75/694–5) has *lā ḥukm illā lill[ā]h* ('judgement belongs to God [alone]').[69] The shift in caliphal titulature can be seen as another manifestation of the centralising of authority – spiritual and political – in the person of the caliph.[70] This fits well with the decision to make his own image the focus of the obverse on the 'standing caliph' issues.

Robinson has also pointed to the production of panegyric poetry in this period. Again, the themes of these verses magnify the importance of the caliph.[71] For example, al-Akhtal's ode eulogising 'Abd al-Malik in the aftermath of the victory over Ibn al-Zubayr contains the following striking lines:

18. To a man whose gifts do not elude us,
         whom God has made victorious
     So let him in his victory
         long delight!
19. He who wades into the deep of battle,
         auspicious his augury
     The Caliph of God (*khalīfat allāh*)
         through whom men pray for rain.[72]

Figure 8.7 *Wooden console panels with vegetal designs within arches, Asqa Mosque. Eighth century. After: Hamilton,* The Structural History of the Aqsa Mosque *(1949).*

Many of the surviving copper issues of the 'standing caliph' series have reverse designs where the pole-on-steps includes also stars and a disc or circle around the pole. Nadia Jamil suggests an association with ideas of authority developed in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. In this context, the tribal leader constitutes the pole or axis (*quṭb*) around which the millstone (standing for the community) revolves (on the issue of circumambulation, see also the Conclusion). Links between the ruler and the pole star are also a feature of this poetic tradition, one which endured and remained potent in early Islam.[73] It is also possible that the undated lead seal/weight from the period of his rule (inscribed for the region of Filastin) employs the twin lions and encircling vine as a means to establish links between 'Abd al-Malik and the archetypal kingship of Solomon.[74]

The epigraphic dinar of 77/696–7 represents the definitive conclusion of the experimental phase of Umayyad coinage (Figure 7.5, above; though 'Arab–Sasanian' issues continued to be minted in some eastern regions into the eighth century). The content of this coin has been discussed in Chapter 7, though it is worth repeating the extent to which the texts correlate with themes developed on the two faces of the mosaic inscription of the Dome of the Rock. As noted above, there is an earlier Islamic coin, a drachm minted in Sijistan in 72/691–2, that fills the reverse face with text in Pahlavi. Looking elsewhere one comes across epigraphic seals from Sasanian Iran and the Byzantine Empire (Figure 8.6).[75] These observations are not meant to deny the radical nature of 'Abd al-Malik's coin reform, and it seems unlikely that the significance of the eradication of all figural imagery would have been lost upon users of such dinars (and the dirhams that followed in the next year). The exclusive employment of text becomes part of the meaning communicated by the gold coins, whether not one could read the words. Features such as the new weight standard and the purity of the metal reflected the authority of the caliph in more subtle ways.[76]

Scholars have debated the reasons for this change. One potential factor is the introduction of a solidus bearing the image of Christ during the first reign of Justinian II (685–95). This coin marked a new direction in Byzantine currency in that it was the first to include a bust-length frontal image of Christ on the obverse (Figure 8.8). The composition itself may derive from the image of Christ in the Chrysotriklinos, or golden audience chamber, in the imperial palace in Constantinople (Chapter 7). The coins are undated, though they are believed to have been minted from about 692.[77] The argument is that this uncompromising image could not be adapted and neutralised in the same ways that die cutters had achieved in 'Arab–Byzantine' gold and copper coinage. Not only is there a cross (as part of the halo), but also Christ is represented in the guise of Pantokrator. It is, however, difficult to detect in the Arabic chronicles evidence this coin excited the enmity of Muslims.[78] Coins bearing the image

Figure 8.8 *Solidus with image of Christ Pantokrator (obverse) and Justinian II (reverse), Constantinople, 692–5. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection: BZC.1957.4.62. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.*

of Christ might well have been melted down soon after arriving in Umayyad territory.

While these points are relevant to an understanding of the ongoing ideological struggle between the Umayyad and Byzantine polities, they lack force as explanatory factors for the introduction of the epigraphic coinage. Justinian II's solidus had probably already been in circulation for some years prior to the introduction of the epigraphic dinar, and so one would have to consider the Umayyad experimental issues to be the genuine response to this Byzantine innovation. Heidemann argues persuasively that the introduction of epigraphic coinage is better seen as an ideological response to Kharijite viewpoints.[79] In this respect it is possible that the content of the inner face inscription in the Dome of the Rock (the section written in George's script C) can be seen as an assertion of caliphal status in the face of Kharijite assertions about divine authority.

The textual content of the epigraphic dinar can also be seen as a culmination of processes that were occurring both on coins and on other dimensions of state-sponsored material and visual culture in the 690s. The experiments with the public transmission of the *shahāda* (in its various forms) are evident on monumental inscriptions and coins from 72/691–2. The mosaics of the Dome of the Rock have further significance in that they are the first to include substantial quotations from the Qur'an. Qur'an 112 is employed in the first phase of the mosaic inscriptions (south side of the outer face) and was clearly held to be important by the Umayyad elite in the first half of the 690s. The same *sūra* also appears, in truncated form, on the undated copper plaque made for the east portal of the Dome of the Rock (this can also be read as Q 3:1; see Chapter 2). Intriguingly,

the plaque from the north portal contains Q 9:33 (or 61:9), the very verse chosen in modified form for the epigraphic dinar of 77/696–7.

Coins continue to be employed for the purposes of polemic in later periods. An early experiment with Qur'anic material is seen in a copper Arab–Sasanian issue minted in Arrajan in 83/702–3. The obverse bears the marginal legend, *muḥammad rasūl all(ā)h wa'lladhīna yatlūna maʿahu ashiddāʾu ʿalā al-kuffār ruḥamāʾu baynahum* ('Muhammad is the messenger of God, those who recite with him are severe [in their dealings] with unbelievers, compassionate among themselves'). This passage comes from Sūrat al-Fatḥ (Q 48:29), with the addition of the word *yatlūna* (meaning 'they recite'). This is interesting in that it again seeks to distinguish between the believers and those who have failed to understand the Prophet's message, but does so using a different scriptural selection. The insertion of *yatlūna* also seems to indicate that the reciting the Qur'an, and the keeping of tradition, confers some additional authority within the Muslim community. This feature has led scholars to speculate that it is an anti-Umayyad slogan adopted during the rebellion of ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Muhammad b. al-Ashʿath against the governor al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf between *c.* 700 and 703.[80]

The next dated monumental inscriptions to incorporate explicit Qur'anic content after the Dome of the Rock appear a few years after the epigraphic dinar. The inscriptions from 80/699–700 are near Mecca and were written by one ʿUthman b. Wahran and comprise Q 4:87 and 38:26, respectively (Figures 5.14 and 5.15, above).[81] Both are written in scripts that show distinct similarities to those employed on the inner face mosaic band of the Dome of the Rock. The two verses lack the Christological focus of the inner face inscription. This is perhaps explained by their location; away from the Christian lands of Greater Syria there was less need to employ such polemical material. The graffiti produced by ʿUthman b. Wahran pick up on another dominant theme in the Dome of the Rock: the preparation for the end of days. This is expressed as the *yawm al-qiy(ā)ma* ('day of resurrection') in Q 4:87 and *yawm al-ḥisāb* ('day of reckoning') in Q 38:26. The former term appears in the Dome of the Rock in the context of a non-Qur'anic passage on the second half of the northeast side of the outer face: 'Muhammad is the messenger of God, may God bless him and accept his intercession on the day of resurrection for his community.'

Another undated graffito by ʿUthman b. Wahran from the same site is written in a slightly different script and comprises Q 56:28–40.[82] This marks a distinct change of tone, away from the uncertainties of the judgement of souls to the evocation of the paradise that awaits the elect. It is tempting to see this as a move towards the paradisiac themes that are explored in the decorative programmes of the Congregational Mosque of Damascus (*c.* 706–16) and the renovation of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina (after 709).[83] Both are, of course,

associated with 'Abd al-Malik's successor, al-Walid I, and appear
during an expansive phase in Umayyad history. Another undated
graffito written in a style akin to the mosaic bands of the Dome of
the Rock appears at Ta'if (Figure 5.16, above). This example is inter-
esting for its use of Q 33:56, a verse offering blessings to the Prophet,
that appears on both the outer and the inner face inscriptions (scripts
A and B). Other graffiti of early date containing Qur'anic material
include two from Mecca dating to 84/703–4. These carry Q 20:130
(exalting the faithful to praise God throughout the day) and a blend
of Q 4:1, 2:21 and 2:189 (stating that believers should fear their
Lord).[84] Faith and judgement appear to be recurrent themes, while
Christological polemic is noticeably absent.

Summary

If we return to the inscriptions on the outer and inner faces of the
octagonal arcade in the Dome of the Rock it is possible to draw some
general observations about the relevance of the wider political and
religious context of the late 680s and 690s. In terms of establishing a
tighter chronology for the planning and execution of the two bands,
I suggest that the appearance of the title, *khalīfat all(ā)h*, on the
'anaza drachm of *c.* 75/695–6 is significant. The ideological conflict
with the Kharijites seems to have been a stimulus for the adoption of
this title. Had this powerful epithet have been in common use prior
to 75/695–6, it surely would have been incorporated into the founda-
tion information that appears on the latter part of the east and the
southeast sides of the outer face inscription. Given that the lettering
on these sides is generously spaced, it is conceivable that the addi-
tional words, *khalīfat all(ā)h*, could have been accommodated before
or after *amīr al-mu'minīn* (on the treatment of the text, see Chapter
5). Thus, the outer face inscription most probably belongs to the
period between the foundation of the building in 72/691–2 and the
first minting of the silver coin bearing the image of the *'anaza* and
sacral arch. It should be emphasised, however, that this dating does
allow that the general concepts embodied in the outer face inscrip-
tion relate in meaningful ways to the circumstances of the last years
of the second *fitna*.

The evidence collected for the period up to 72/691–2 suggests that
the public pronouncement of the central beliefs of Islam had become
an important issue for the elites of the Zubayrid and Umayyad
camps. Muhammad is first named on a Zubayrid coin, and it is a
Zubayrid governor who first commissions a drachm carrying a rec-
ognisable *shahāda* (in Pahlavi). The Umayyads soon adopt the same
idea, though one sees the addition of the key element, *waḥdahu*
('alone'). That more elaborate forms were circulating in Umayyad
territories is indicated by the grave marker of 'Abassa bint Jurayj
in Aswan (71/691). In common with the mosaic inscriptions in the

Dome of the Rock, the Egyptian inscription incorporates the phrase *lā sharīka lahu* ('He is without associates'). The initial impetus for this addition must be, as Bacharach indicates, the religious milieu in which these Muslim professions of faith are produced. I adduced evidence for the proclamation of monotheistic beliefs (in the form of prayers, creeds and inscriptions in Late Antique Syria, Egypt and areas such as Nubia); these powerful statements would have encouraged a nuanced Muslim response, particularly when confronting Monophysite and Dyophysite Christian groups. Other dimensions of this confrontation include the mutilation of images of crosses (e.g., on 'Arab–Byzantine' coinage) and the references by Christian writers to the theological challenges Muslims were beginning to offer against the Trinity, and particularly the concept of God begetting a son. These Christian texts cannot be precisely dated, and one can assume that their concerns reflect activities occurring before and after 72/691–2. Although the information cannot be independently verified, the *History of the Patriarchs* indicates that 'Abd al-'Aziz, governor of Egypt, occasionally took radical action against the belief structures and sacred imagery of local Christian groups (his decisions prefigure the policies of later caliphs such as 'Umar II).

The anti-Trinitarian quality of the inner face texts has been remarked on by all scholars who have concerned themselves with the Umayyad inscriptions in the building.[85] The more ambitious Qur'anic quotations written in script C can be seen as a logical extension of the statements developed in the earlier phases of the inscription band of the octagonal arcade. Where the outer face concentrates upon the oneness of God and the fact that He was neither begotten nor able to beget, the inner face moves to a more detailed consideration both of the Trinity ('say not three') and the precise status of the Jesus: as Messiah, messenger of God and Word of God (*kalimatuhu*). There is also a reference in Q 4:172 to 'a spirit [proceeding] from Him' (*rūḥun minhu*). There is no verb in this phrase, though the context indicates that the spirit derives from God, and not from Jesus. This phrase might suggest an awareness of the Nicene Creed as it was used by the Eastern Orthodox Church. The relevant passage reads: Καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, τὸ κύριον, τὸ ζῳοποιόν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον ('And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, from the Father proceeding').[86]

Where the message about the oneness of God on the outer face text could be directed at both Monophysite and Dyophysite groups (and potentially other religions espousing monotheistic beliefs such as Jews and Samaritans), the choice of verses in the sections of the inner face written in script C look to be more squarely aimed at the Eastern Orthodox Church. If one assumes that this inscription was planned and executed in the mid-690s, then the active engagement with Eastern Orthodox beliefs takes on considerable relevance. Justinian II had asserted his role in the Church by convening the Quinisext

Council in Constantinople in 692. He was also responsible for the placing of the image of Christ Pantokrator on solidi (this innovation is undated, though it could well have occurred around the time of the council).[87] 'Abd al-Malik moved to neutralise the crosses on his own 'Arab–Byzantine' coinage, and in 74/693–4 replaced the image of the emperor with his own on the 'standing caliph' gold issues. The caliph was also pursuing a vigorous military policy against Byzantine territories and those of their client rulers. This activity resulted in the victory at Sebastopolis, the capture of Carthage, and an increase in his authority in Anatolia and the southern Caucasus.

One does not need to look only to the messages in the mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock that might be directed at Christians. The outer face inscription can be read as a series of statements about the central beliefs of Islam. This encompasses the variant forms of the profession of faith and the employment of Qur'anic verses, most notably Q 112:1–4 and the combination of Q 57:2 and 64:1. In addition to the nature of the divinity, one also finds the outer face reflecting upon the prophethood of Muhammad and the blessings that are conferred upon him (Q 33:56). These are messages with an applicability to all Muslims, but there is perhaps a change of tone when one looks at aspects of the inner face inscription. The phrase, 'O people of the book, do not go beyond the bounds of your religion, nor say anything but the truth about God' (from Q 4:171) moves on to discuss Jesus and the Trinity. While it is logical to associate this directly with the sections that come after it, this exhortation could be understood independently as a message to the *ahl al-kitāb* as a whole, Muslim and non-Muslim, to follow the truth set out by God. Indeed, the latter part of Q 4:172 indicates that Jesus himself will do this: 'The Messiah does not disdain to be a servant of God nor do the nearby angels. Whoever disdains to serve him and is proud, He will gather them to Him all together.' The adherence to the 'straight path' appears on the penultimate (west face) with Q 19:36. Qur'an 3:18 reiterates the oneness of God, while the final verse on the inner face (Q 3:19) again reflects upon the importance of understanding the true message of God, concluding: 'Whoever disbelieves the signs of God, God will quickly call to account.'[88]

This suggests a universal message of a 'true' Islam under the aegis of the Umayyad caliph. Not only is 'Abd al-Malik being styled in inscriptions as *khalīfat all(ā)h* from the mid-690s, one also sees the appearance in poetry written during his caliphate and later in the Umayyad period of the idea of the imam as providing *hudā*, or guidance. For example, Farazdaq (d. *c.* 730) refers to the *imām al-hudā* ('imam of guidance') and makes the claim that it is through him that God 'guides mankind after the *fitna*'. Jarir ibn 'Atiya (d. *c.* 728), writing for al-Hajjaj, claims that the Umayyad elite offers the Muslim community *subul al-hudā* ('paths of guidance'). This same quality of *hudā* is attributed to the Prophet (Q 9:33, 48:28,

61:9); the showing of the true path will ensure salvation for the believers. ʿAbd al-Malik's ongoing struggles through the 690s with the Kharijites carried a distinct ideological charge, with the latter groups claiming that ultimate authority came from God without the mediation of the caliph. In this context, the assertions found particularly on the inner face inscription look like an Umayyad response to the Kharijite challenge. Coins form another dimension of this ideological battle concerning the proper practise of Islam; the first epigraphic dinar of 77/696–7 comprises versions of both Q 112 and 9.33 (or 61:9). The latter reads: 'It is He Who hath sent His Apostle with Guidance (*hudā*) and the Religion of Truth, to proclaim it over all religion, even though the Pagans may detest [it].' This same passage also appears on the copper plaque originally placed in the northern entrance of the Dome of the Rock. Robinson has written about ʿAbd al-Malik's status as 'caliph-imam', and his centrality in matters of religion is indicated in early historical accounts.[89]

One last dimension of this striving after the 'straight path' of Islam is that this represents the proper preparation for the end of days. Muhammad's role as an intercessor for the faithful is recorded on the outer face inscription, while the inner face employs verses which mention the gathering of souls (Q 4:172), the 'raising alive' of Jesus (Q 9:15 or 9:34, adapted), and God calling disbelievers to account (Q 3:19). The copper plaque from the east gate of the building (Figure 3.8, above) carries a further non-Qurʾanic passage dealing with similar themes: 'we are preserved from the devil and we are saved from Your punishment on the day of resurrection (*yawm al-qiy[ā]ma*) . . .' It is intriguing in this context that the next dated inscriptions to carry Qurʾanic content (from 80/699–700) also choose scripture relating to the 'day or reckoning' (Q 38:26) and 'day of resurrection' (Q 4:87). An undated graffito by the same scribe concerns itself with paradise (Q 56:28–40).[90] Direct textual support is lacking, but it is possible that this collection of Qurʾanic material – from the Dome of the Rock and the Arabian graffiti – reflects an apocalyptic mood among Muslims and others in the 690s and into the early years of the eighth century. There are many apocalyptic texts of this general period (though it is difficult to date any of them with precision).[91] Some echo of these ideas are perhaps to be found in al-Muqaddasi's (d. *c.* 990) well-known account of the special role played by Jerusalem at the end of time.[92] Similar claims appear later in al-Wasiti's, *Faḍāʾil al-bayt al-muqaddas*.[93]

Notes

1. Nees, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Art in Jerusalem*.
2. For example, Peters, 'Who Built the Dome of the Rock?'; Oleg Grabar, 'The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock', *Medieval Studies at Minnesota*

3 (1988): 1–10; reprinted in Oleg Grabar, *Constructing the Study of Islamic Art, vol. IV: Jerusalem* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 143–58 (see especially pp. 148–9).

3. On the non-Christian sources, see Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (especially pp. 3–38); Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (the principal characteristics of these diverse sources is dealt with on pp. 32–49); Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle*, pp. 1–42; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, *passim*. On the poetry, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002). On the potential value of poetry as a source for understanding concepts of Umayyad authority (and for critiques of this approach), see n. 67.

4. Necıpoğlu, 'The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest', pp. 37–8.

5. On al-Wasiti, see Rabbat, 'The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock'; Rabbat, 'The Dome of the Rock Revisited'; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, pp. 6–22; Kaplony, *The Ḥaram of Jerusalem*, pp. 8–9.

6. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, pp. 88–9. Also Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, pp. 505–6.

7. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, pp. 39–48.

8. For summaries of the events of this period, see Gerald Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 48–56; Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, pp. 31–48; Faizer, 'The Dome of the Rock and the Qur'ān', pp. 80–1; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, pp. 495–501.

9. Blair, 'What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?', p. 70.

10. Documents produced by chanceries might well have carried ideological content, though too few have survived from eastern regions of the Islamic state to assess this issue. On the protocols attached to papyri, see Robert Lopez, 'Mohammad and Charlemagne: A Revision', *Speculum* 18 (1943): 26–7; Hoyland, 'New Documentary Texts', p. 399. For a general discussion of the role of coins in the dissemination of ideology, see David Wasserstein, 'Coins as Agents of Cultural Definition in Islam', *Poetics Today* 14(2) (1993): 303–22.

11. For a brief biography, see E. Dietrich, 'al-Ḥadjdjādj b. Yūsuf', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn (Brill online), available at: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com, last accessed 4 January 2015.

12. Johns, 'Archaeology and the History of Early Islam', pp. 426–7; Treadwell, 'The "Orans" Drachms of Bishr ibn Marwān', p. 243; Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire', pp. 167–8. On the drachms carrying the name of the Prophet, see Ilisch, 'The Muhammad Drachms'.

13. Reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Coins/drachm31.html, last accessed 4 January 2015.

14. The twin 'standing caliph' coin is in the British Museum. See John Walker, *A Catalogue of the Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum, vol. 2: A Catalogue of the Arab–Byzantine and Post-Reform Umaiyad Coins* (London: British Museum Press, 1956), Nos A5, A6; Clive Foss, *Arab–Byzantine Coins: An Introduction, with a Catalogue of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection*, Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection Publications 12 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

and Dumbarton Oaks, 2008), pp. 60–1. On the twin Byzantine emperor coin, see Tony Goodwin, *Arab–Byzantine Coinage*, Studies in the Khalili Collection 4 (London and New York: Nour Foundation in association with Azimuth Editions, 2005), p. 37, No. 25, pp. 68–70, Nos 1–14a.

15. Reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Coins/drachm13.html, last accessed 4 January 2015. *Dimashq* appears in the central field of the reverse. The present whereabouts of the coin is unknown.

16. Mochiri, 'The Pahlavi Forerunner of the Umayyad Reformed Coinage'; Johns, 'Archaeology and the History of Early Islam', pp. 426–7, fig. 7; Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire', pp. 168–9, fig. 16.

17. On the monotheistic dimensions of Zoroastrianism, see Almut Hintze, 'Monotheism the Zoroastrian Way', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd series, Pt 2 (2014): 225–49.

18. John Walker, *A Catalogue of Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum, vol. 1: Arab–Sassanian Coins (Umaiyad Governors in the East, Arab–Ephtaletes, Abbasid Governors in Tabaristan and Bukhara)* (London: British Museum, 1941), pp. 102–3. Reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Coins/drachm23.html, last accessed 4 January 2015.

19. For example, Frye (ed.), *Sasanian Remains from Qasr-i Abu Nasr*, figs D.177, 188, 191, 194, 199, 201, 204, 206, 207, 209, 211, 212, 216, 219; Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, fig. 2.d–g. Two epigraphic seals, both from apparently from *c.* 44/664 and issued by the *dīwān* of Caliph al-Muʿawiya, were recently offered for sale. There is doubt about the authenticity of these objects, however. These objects are reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/seal1.html, last accessed 4 January 2015.

20. Bacharach, 'Signs of Sovereignty', p. 8; Bacharach and Anwar, 'Early Versions of the *Shahāda*', pp. 64–9. On this gravestone and the significance of *ahl al-islām*, see also Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 20–1.

21. Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire', pp. 178–82. There are also issues dating from the caliphate of Muʿawiya in which the cross bar is replaced by a shorter horizontal at the summit of the pole (akin to a Tau cross). This is not a mutilation so much as a visual reaction to the favoured Byzantine form of cross. Hence, it can be considered as a 'de-Byzantinising' image. I am grateful to Stefan Heidemann for sharing his knowledge on this question.

22. On the different accounts that derive from Theophilus of Edessa's chronicle, see Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle*, pp. 7–23. Also comments in Blair, 'What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?', pp. 81–2; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, pp. 499–500.

23. Bacharach and Anwar, 'Early Versions of the *Shahāda*', p. 64.

24. Rudolf Macuch, 'Zur Vorgeschichte der Bekenntnisformel *lā ilāha illā llāhu*', *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 128 (1978): 22; translated by Gwendolin Goldbloom as, Rudolf Macuch, 'On the Pre-history of the Credal Formula "There is no god but God",' in Gerald Hawting (ed.), *The Development of Islamic Ritual*, The

Formation of the Classical Islamic World 26 (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 5. Also James Montgomery, *The Samaritans, the Earliest Jewish Sect: Their History, Theology, and Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: John C. Winston, 1907; reprinted Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), p. 208.

25. Macuch, 'On the Pre-history of the Credal Formula', p. 12; Montgomery, *The Samaritans*, pp. 207–8.

26. Macuch, 'On the Pre-history of the Credal Formula', pp. 12–13. Cf. M. J. Kister, 'Labbayka, allāhumma, labbayka . . . : On a Monotheistic Aspect of Jāhiliyya Practice', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 33–57; reprinted in M. J. Kister, *Society and Religion from Jāhiliyya to Islam* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1990), ch. 1. The standard form of the *talbiya* (prayer associated with the hajj) in pre-Islamic Arabia is given (p. 33) as: *labbayka allāhumma labbayka, lā sharīka laka illā sharīkun huwa laka, tamlikuhu wa-mā malaka* ('Here I am, O God, here I am; Thou hast no partner except such partner as Thou hast; Thou possessest him and all that is his').

27. Peña, *The Christian Art of Byzantine Syria*, pp. 177, 213. See also the Coptic chalice bearing the words, 'In the name of God' (Figure 7.16) in Evans and Ratliff (eds), *Byzantium and Islam*, p. 188, Cat. No. 128.

28. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* III.4.7 (= *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. E. W. Brooks (Louvain, 1952), III, 185:10). Discussed in Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 116; Macuch, 'On the Pre-history of the Credal Formula', p. 17.

29. This is the argument developed by Jere Bacharach. See his 'Signs of Sovereignty', pp. pp. 6–8. On the *shahāda*, see also A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (London: Frank Cass, 1965), pp. 17–35; Busse, 'Monotheismus und islamische Christologie'.

30. Anastasius of Sinai translated and discussed in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 92–103. Muʿawiya might also have engaged in challenges to Christian beliefs. The Armenian bishop, Sebeos, describes a letter apparently sent by the caliph to the Byzantine emperor, Constans II (r. 641–68): 'If you want to spend your life in peace', he wrote, 'abandon that foolish faith which you learned from childhood. Deny that Jesus and turn to the great God whom I worship, the God of our father Abraham.' Muʿawiya's closing words are: 'how can that Jesus whom you call Christ – who was unable to save himself from the Jews – possibly save you from me?' From chapter 36 of Sebeos' *History*. According to the translation of Robert Bedrosian in 'Armenian Historical Sources of the 5–15th Centuries. Selected Works', available at: http://rbedrosian.com/seb11.htm#36, last accessed 4 January 2015.

31. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, p. 94.

32. Jacob of Edessa in *ibid.*, pp. 165–6.

33. Geoffrey King, 'Islam, Iconoclasm and the Declaration of Doctrine', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies* 48 (1985): 270–1. Also Patricia Crone, 'Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 59–95.

34. *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria* (*III: Agathon to Michael (766)*), ed. and trans. Basil Evetts in *Patrologia Orientalis* 5 (1910): 24. The author continues 'by his means the liturgies in the churches of the orthodox, where they could not be performed

before, were restored'. The English translation is also available at: http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/severus_hermopolis_hist_alex_patr_03_part3.htm#ISAAC, last accessed 23 March 2015.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 24–5. Cf. Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's statements on the Christian creed. Discussed in Sidney Griffith, 'The *Kitāb miṣbāḥ al-ʿaql* of Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ: A Profile of the Christian Creed in Arabic in the Tenth Century', *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 2 (1996): 15–42 (especially pp. 33–9); reprinted in Sidney Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim–Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), ch. 8.

36. The word *alladhī* appears ungrammatical and rather superfluous in this context. I am grateful to Andrew Rippin for his thoughts on this passage.

37. The Coptic text was translated into Arabic by Mawhub ibn Mansur ibn Mufarrij (d. *c.* 1100). The description of the activities of 'Abba George' appears in Evetts, *History of the Patriarchs*, pp. 90–1. On the question of authorship, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 446–8.

38. This issue is considered in detail in Frédéric Imbert, 'L'Islam des pierres: l'expression de la foi dans la graffiti arabes des premiers siècles', *Revue des Mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 129 (2011): 57–78. There is considerable variability in the types of statements found on graffiti. An example of an extensive statement of faith is an undated graffito from Mount Salaʿ near Medina, which reads: 'I testify that there is no god / [but G]od and I testify that Muhammad is his servant (*ʿabd*) / [and] His [messenger]. With Thy mercy O God. There is no god but / [Him. I]n God is my trust and He is the Lord / [. . .] of the exalted throne.' Another undated inscription on the Byzantine fortress at Rujm Sfar (Rogem Safir), Israel reads: 'I, Yusuf bin Zubayd al-Ayli, do not associate with anything but God.' See Moshe Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicum Palaestinae, vol. 3: D–F, Handbuch der Orientalistik* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 1999), fig. 57. Also the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/sfar.html, last accessed 27 February 2015.

39. Robert Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 2 (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995), pp. 184–5, 190–1, tables 7 and 10; Allan Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria, An Archaeological Assessment*, Duckworth Debates in Archaeology (London: Gerald Duckworth, 2007), pp. 120–6.

40. Leah Di Segni, 'The Greek Inscriptions of Hammat Gader', in Yizhar Hirschfeld (ed.), *The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader, Final Report* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society 1997), pp. 185–266 (for the text of the Muʿawiya inscription, see p. 239). On the mosaic inscription and the archaeological context, see Magness, 'Early Islamic Urbanism and Building Activity in Jerusalem and at Hammath Gader', pp. 153–61 The inscriptions are also reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/hammat.html, last accessed 4 January 2015.

41. On the mosaic designs and inscriptions of this building, see Dodd, 'Image of the Word', pp. 49–54, figs 1–4; Rosen-Ayalon, *Early Islamic Monuments*, pp. 56–60, fig. 38.

42. For more detail, see Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, pp. 57–71; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, pp. 501–7.

43. For a summary of Kharijite belief, see Patricia Crone, *God's Rule. Government and Islam: Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 54–64.

44. Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, pp. 105–21.

45. For differing viewpoints on the Nessana papyri and their significance for the economic history of the Islamic state in the late seventh century, see Johns, 'Archaeology and the History of Early Islam,' pp. 421–4; Hoyland, 'New Documentary Texts', pp. 399–401.

46. On this, see Omar Hamdan, 'The Second *Maṣāḥif* Project: A Step Toward the Canonization of the Qurʾanic Text', in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicholas Sinai and Michael Marx (eds), *The Qurʾān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu*, Texts and Studies on the Qurʾān 10 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), pp. 795–835. See, however, the critical evaluation of this in Sinai, 'When Did the Consonantal Structure of the Quran Reach its Closure? Part I', pp. 279–85.

47. Nicholas Sinai notes that the more radical representations of the activities of al-Hajjaj and his collaborators appear first in the writings of Christian authors such as ʿAbd al-Masih al-Kindi in the ninth century. See Sinai, 'When Did the Consonantal Structure of the Quran Reach its Closure? Part I', p. 280.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 278. While the account of this in Ibn Abi Dawud's *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif* mentions the changing of *alfay ḥarfin* (either 'two thousand letters' or 'two thousand words'), Sinai argues for a minimalist position: i.e., that the adjustments refer to the plene spelling of ā.

49. Bibliography on this is collected in the Introduction (n. 24). In addition, see Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, pp. 100–4; Stephen Shoemaker, *The Death of the Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 136–58. The arguments are summarised in Sinai, 'When Did the Consonantal Structure of the Quran Reach its Closure? Part I', pp. 277–8.

50. Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, pp. 11–14; Sinai, 'When Did the Consonantal Structure of the Quran Reach its Closure? Part I', pp. 275–6. Carbon dating of a single folio (believed to have originally been part of 'Ṣanʿāʾ I' yielded a date range of 578–669 CE, with a probability of 91.8 per cent that it was older than 655.5 and 95.5 per cent that it was older than 660.5.

51. Whelan, 'Forgotten Witness', p. 6.

52. Robert Hoyland, 'The Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1997): 77–101 (see especially pp. 87–8).

53. Sinai, 'When Did the Consonantal Structure of the Quran Reach its Closure? Part I'; and Nicholas Sinai, 'When Did the Consonantal Structure of the Quran Reach its Closure? Part II', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies* 77(3) (2014): 509–21.

54. Note, however, that the purpose of this addition of diacritics is complicated by the fact that the conflation of Q 64:1 and 57:2, and Q 33:56 on the outer face is unmarked on the outer face, but receives limited diacritics on the inner face (southeast face). Diacritics are also a feature

of monumental inscriptions in earlier decades. On this, see Chapters 5 and 6.

55. Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, pp. 94–5. On the 'Codex Parisinopetropolitanus', see also Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran*.

56. George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 68–74.

57. The drachms are often dated, while the chronology of the gold issues has been satisfactorily established in prior scholarship. The copper *fulūs* of this phase are much more diverse in character, having been produced by regional mints (principally in Greater Syria and Egypt). Most of the copper coinage cannot be dated so precisely, and there has been considerable debate about the chronology. These debates are summarised in Album and Goodwin, *Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period*, pp. 99–107. On the minting of copper in Iran, see Luke Treadwell, 'The Copper Coinage of Umayyad Iran', *Numismatic Chronicle* 168 (2008): 331–81.

58. Goodwin in Album and Goodwin, *Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period*, pp. 106–7. See also Goodwin, *Arab–Byzantine Coinage*, pp. 91–3.

59. *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church*, pp. 50–1.

60. On the antagonism between Monophysite and Chalcedonian Christians in this period, and the ways in which anti-Chalcedonian views were expressed in written form in Late Antiquity, see Peers, 'Vision and Community among Christians and Muslims', pp. 37–40.

61. On the iconoclastic edict, see Alexander Vasiliev, 'The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9/10 (1956): 23–47; Crone, 'Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm'.

62. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine*, p. 223 (his survey on iconoclastic damage appears on pp. 180–224).

63. Treadwell, 'The "Orans" Drachms of Bishr ibn Marwān'.

64. Miles, 'Mihrab and ʿAnazah'; Treadwell, '"Mihrab and ʿAnaza" or "Sacrum and Spear"?', pp. 15–16. The latter argues persuasively against Miles' view that the arch is a representation of a *miḥrāb*.

65. Treadwell, '"Mihrab and ʿAnaza" or "Sacrum and Spear"?', p. 21; 'Raby, '*In vitro veritas*', pp. 139–45, figs 27–30.

66. On the woodwork, see Hamilton, *The Structural History of the Aqsa Mosque*, pp. 95–104, pls L–LXXV; Robert Hillenbrand, 'Umayyad Woodwork in the Aqṣā Mosque', in Jeremy Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 2: Jerusalem and Early Islam*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.2 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 271–310.

67. On the history and significance of this title, see also W. Montgomery Watt, 'God's Caliph: Qurʾānic Interpretations and Umayyad Claims', in Clifford Bosworth (ed.), *Iran and Islam, in Memory of the late Vladimir Minorsky* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), pp. 565–74; Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, pp. 65–6; Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 37 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 4–23. Crone and Hinds argue on the basis of textual sources that the term, *khalīfat allāh*, was used in the titulature of caliphs prior to ʿAbd al-Malik. See, however, Norman Calder's criticisms of their choice of sources and the conclusions drawn from those sources in his

review of *God's Caliph* published in the *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32(2) (1987): 375–78.

68. Bacharach, 'Signs of Sovereignty', pp. 12–15; Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire', pp. 176–7, 186–8.

69. J. Walker, *A Catalogue of Muhammadan Coins*, vol. 1, p. 112; Luke Treadwell, 'Qurʾanic Inscriptions on the Coins of the *ahl al-bayt* from the Second to the Fourth Century AH', *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 14(2) (2012): 47–71 (see p. 49); Adam Gaiser, 'What Do We Learn about the Early Khārijites and Ibāḍiyya from their Coins?', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130(2) (2010): 174–80. Reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Coins/drachm8.html, last accessed 5 January 2015. Gaiser cautions that the messages *lā ḥukm illā lill(ā)h* and *amīr al-muʾminīn* (the latter in Pahlavi) on the coins minted by Qatari b. al-Fujaʾa might not have carried the potency in the 690s often attributed to them by modern scholars (see his arguments on pp. 175–6).

70. Fred Donner sees this adoption of the caliphal title as part of a 'Qurʾanicization' of political culture in this period. See his 'Qurʾânicization of Religio-political Discourse in the Umayyad Period', *Revue des Mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 129 (2011): 79–92.

71. Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, pp. 81–6. Patricia Crone sees much of this poetry as being 'messianic' in character. See her, *God's Rule*, p. 41. On messianic views in the early period, see also pp. 75–80.

72. Al-Akhtal, 'The Tribe has Departed' (*Khaffa al-qaṭīnu*), translated in Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, pp. 90–1. Also discussed in Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, pp. 81–7. On the uses of poetry among the Umayyad elite, see Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 102–6, 122–4.

73. Nadia Jamil, 'Caliph and *Quṭb*: Poetry as a Source for Interpreting the Transformation of the Byzantine Cross on Steps on Umayyad Coinage', in Jeremy Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis, Part 2: Jerusalem and early Islam*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.2 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 11–57. For a different interpretation of the pole-on-steps, see Stefan Heidemann, 'The Standing Caliph Type – The Object on the Reverse', in Andrew Oddy (ed.), *Coinage and the History of the Seventh Century Near East 2* (London: Archetype, 2010), pp. 23–34; Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire', pp. 178–82.

74. The Solomonic imagery employed in Umayyad art and architecture has been discussed by many scholars. For example, see Richard Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), *passim*; Soucek, 'The Temple of Solomon in Islamic Legend and Art'; Priscilla Soucek, 'Solomon's Throne/ Solomon's Bath: Model or Metaphor?', *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 109–34; Fowden, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, *passim*; Shani, 'The Iconography of the Dome of the Rock', pp. 166–76.

75. See nn. 15–17 above. On Byzantine copper coinage, see Philip Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1999), pp. 17–20. In addition to words and single letters, the reverse might also carry crosses and six- or eight-pointed stars.

76. Grierson, 'The Monetary Reforms of ʿAbd al-Malik'.

77. The historical context and chronology of the coin issues of Justinian II are dealt with in more details in James Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II (685–695, 705–711 A.D.)*, The American Numismatic Society Numismatic Notes and Monographs 144 (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1959), pp. 70–90 (for the suggested dates, see p. 90).

78. On the archaeological evidence, see Allan Walmsley, 'Coin Frequencies in Sixth- and Seventh-century Palestine and Arabia: Social and Economic Implications', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42 (1999): 324–50 (for the situation of the late seventh century, see pp. 346–7); Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*, pp. 60–2.

79. Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire', p. 188. Also Bacharach, 'Signs of Sovereignty', pp. 12–15.

80. Treadwell, 'Qur'anic Inscriptions on the Coins of the *ahl al-bayt*', p. 49. The coin is reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Coins/fals3.html, last accessed 6 January 2015.

81. On these inscriptions, see the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/makkah6.html, and http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/makkah2.html, last accessed 8 January 2015.

82. See 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/makkah5.html, last accessed 8 January 2015.

83. Brisch, 'Observations on the Iconography of the Mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus'; Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus*, pp. 15–56, 223–4.

84. On the themes developed in early graffiti, see Hoyland, 'New Documentary Texts', pp. 406–9. The examples are all illustrated on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions, last accessed 5 January 2015.

85. These ideas are brought together powerfully in 1959 in Grabar, 'The Umayyad Dome of the Rock'. His presentation of the themes in the inscriptions has influenced most later scholarly studies.

86. The verb *ekporeuesthai* (to proceed) indicates the ultimate origin (God the Father) and precludes the idea that the Spirit passes through both the Father and the Son. This latter concept, known as the Filioque Clause, relies upon the slightly broader semantic range of the Latin verb, *procedere*, and is found in the creed adopted by the Roman Catholic Church from the sixth century. On the background and history of the Filioque controversy, see John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), pp. 91–4.

87. Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II*, pp. 78–88; Michael Bates, 'History, Geography and Numismatics in the First Century of Islamic Coinage', *Revue Suisse de Numismatique* 65 (1986): 253; Blair, 'What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?', pp. 81–2, fig. 20.

88. Cf. Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, pp. 64–5.

89. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, pp. 81–104.

90. Miles, 'Early Islamic Inscriptions', pp. 241–2, fig. 18B. Also reproduced on the 'Islamic Awareness' website, available at: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/seal2.html, last accessed 5 January 2015.

91. Apocalypses of the seventh and eighth centuries that mention Islam are collected in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 257–335. Also David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Studies in Late Antiquity and early Islam (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2002), pp. 54–66.

92. Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Muqaddasi, *Ahsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm*; translated in Busse, 'The Sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam', pp. 467–8. See also Rosen-Ayalon, *Early Islamic Monuments*, p. 69. (The translation is given in Chapter 1, n. 48 in the present study.)

93. Quoted sections in Rosen-Ayalon, *Early Islamic Monuments*, p. 61.

Conclusion

> Arabic writing has a great drawback. It contains letters identical in their forms. They are easily confused, and there results the need for diacritical marks to distinguish those letters from each other, as well as needs for ways and means to express the grammatical terminations at the ends of words. Where these marks are omitted, the meaning becomes obscured. In addition, it is the widespread custom among scribes to neglect the collation and checking of the correctness of the text of a manuscript. In view of this situation, it often makes no difference whether a book on a certain subject does exist or does not, and reading such a book makes nobody the wiser with respect to the subject matter it deals with.[1]

THIS LAMENT ON the difficulties of writing and understanding Arabic appears in the foreword to the *Kitāb al-ṣaydana* ('Book of Pharmacy') by the polymath, al-Biruni (d. 1048). Al-Biruni had in mind the scripts employed by copyists producing secular and religious manuscripts, but his comments are equally pertinent to the interpretation of monumental inscriptions from the earliest phase of Islam. Here, too, one is confronted by the problem of missing diacritical marks that serve to obscure the intended meaning. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that conventions employed in written Arabic were still evolving in the seventh and eighth centuries.

This book has dealt with one set of early monumental inscriptions: those found on the outer and inner faces of the octagonal arcade within the Dome of the Rock. The two bands of inscriptions are important for many reasons, not the least of which is that they represent the longest and most ambitious monumental Arabic text of the seventh century. Written in variants of Kufic script, the mosaic inscription forms part of a larger programme of interior decoration. In contrast to the majority of previous studies of this building in its Umayyad phase, I have not chosen to deal with all aspects of the architecture and ornamentation. Indeed, it could be argued that the approach taken in this study is unduly restrictive.

The principal reason for maintaining a narrow focus on the

epigraphic evidence – also including the inscribed copper plaques from the same building, and the other manifestations of formal Arabic script during the seventh and early eighth centuries – was that it allowed for a close examination of the relationship between the apparent meaning (the information conveyed by the words), the visual qualities of the scripts themselves, the technical problems involved in the formation of scripts (especially in mosaic), and the precise temporal and spatial contexts of the inscriptions themselves. It is, of course, the case that the apparent meaning of the outer and inner band inscriptions is far from straightforward; even the record of the date of construction (72/691–2) is open to interpretation, and the meanings originally conveyed by the Qur'anic quotations and other broadly religious content offer a challenge of an even greater magnitude. Nevertheless, I argue that this assemblage of Arabic texts still offers some relatively stable qualities that allow one to formulate meaningful comparisons with other inscribed objects and buildings. For example, one can compare the ways in which specific letters, or combinations of letters, have been handled in the Dome of the Rock and in other broadly contemporary graffiti, Qur'anic manuscripts, coins and seals. More elaborate analyses can be offered for the treatment of longer phrases – the *basmala*, the profession of faith (in its different forms), and quotations from scripture – across the visual culture of the Umayyad period.

Clearly, one can attempt similar comparative studies of representational motifs in the Dome of the Rock, though there exist greater challenges in establishing that visual similarities are evidence of actual iconographic compatibility. Can we be sure, for example, that the elaborate vases and stylised plant forms depicted in Sasanian architectural decoration and *repoussé* silver carry broadly similar meanings to those found in the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock?[2] In fact, it is very likely that the Umayyad patrons of this building were attempting to adapt these striking motifs for new purposes (and this process of adaptation has generated much interesting scholarship). Where we naturally struggle, however, is in establishing precisely what were these new goals and how they relate to the meanings conveyed by the rest of the building. There are grounds for asserting that the same processes are also to be found in the mosaic inscriptions, and evidence for these processes has been collected in previous chapters of the present study. Where the texts differ from the images is in the relatively stable presence of an explicit message. For example, from its first appearance in the 640s through to the 690s the *basmala* is understood, first and foremost, as a pious invocation. The *shahāda* is encountered rather later, and in more varied forms, but it too has a primary meaning – stating the oneness of God – often with the additional assertion of the status of Muhammad as His messenger. The same point can be made about some of the more familiar Qur'anic quotations such as Q 112. Lastly, the notion of using

monumental text to record the foundation details of the structure can already be seen during the caliphate of Muʿawiya, and had been a standard feature of inscriptions in the Middle East and around the Mediterranean for centuries.

This is not to assert that the apparent or explicit meanings of the inscription bands represent the only way in which they can be understood. The purpose of this book is to demonstrate that the search for meaning requires both a close attention to the form and content of the inscription itself, as well as a broad-ranging survey of the context in which the text was planned and executed. The present study was motivated by the belief that previous examinations of the inscriptions had accepted too easily the primary meanings conveyed by the inscription without due consideration of factors such as the chronology (absolute and relative) of their placement on the walls; the evolution of Arabic scripts in the late seventh century; the formation of earlier monumental scripts, particularly in Greek; the general characteristics of foundation inscriptions in Late Antiquity; and the types of craft expertise available in the Umayyad period. The uncertainties concerning the timing of the codification of the Qurʾan present another problematic dimension to this recovery of meaning, though it remains unclear quite how the scriptural quotations (including those usually considered to be paraphrased or conflated) in the Dome of the Rock fit within this process.

The Dome of the Rock is a building about which we still know too little in its initial phase of construction. A critical study of the mosaic inscriptions demonstrates that it is a structure about which we know rather less than we think we do. The first part of the book presented evidence for changes of mind about the content and character of the outer and inner face inscriptions during the period in which they were being planned and executed. In other words, the meaning of the building as a whole was subject to some degree of adjustment prior to its completion in the mid-690s. I suggested in Chapter 8 some of the historical circumstances that might have contributed to the differences in content between the outer and inner face (particularly the section occupied by George's script C). These changes of emphasis probably occurred over a brief period in the years after 72/691–2, and it seems probable that some parts of the iconography of ʿAbd al-Malik's building were soon forgotten. In the early part of the eighth century, during the caliphates of al-Walid I and his successors, new ideas were generated around the Dome of the Rock and the Temple Mount in general.[3] These factors had the effect of obscuring the original meanings conveyed by this seminal monument.

Having made these claims, I will use the remainder of this chapter to establish what can be considered as relatively 'solid ground' for the interpretation of the Dome of the Rock when it was being constructed and at the moment of its completion.[4] This does not

constitute a conclusive reading of the monument, but is intended to provide a foundation for future study. For example, it would be possible to approach the representational mosaics and other ornamental components using the methodological principles outlined in the present study. The other aim is to evaluate which of the dominant scholarly interpretations of 'Abd al-Malik's buildings can be maintained, wholly or partially, on the basis of this study of the inscriptions.

To start with the most obvious point: the Dome of the Rock is a centralised, domed structure built over an exposed section of rock near the centre of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Nees argues in a forthcoming study that the Dome of the Chain, immediately to the east, should be dated to the reign of Mu'awiya; if this reading is accepted, then one can conclude that all, or part, of the platform on which the Dome of the Rock sits was constructed prior to 680.[5] There is, however, no conclusive evidence to suggest that any part of the current structure of the Dome of the Rock dates from earlier than the caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik. Furthermore, there is nothing to indicate that there were any plans to construct a monument on this site prior to end of the late 680s (although this remains a possibility). While there are no exact antecedents for the plan and elevation of the Dome of the Rock, Late Antique audiences in Greater Syria and elsewhere around the Mediterranean would presumably have understood it to be some form of martyrium. Recent research has identified several earlier octagonal martyria in the general vicinity. Analysis of the proportional systems employed in the planning of the Dome of the Rock suggests links to the rotunda of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.[6] We can also characterise 'Abd al-Malik's commission as a centralised structure with (in its initial conception) a single encircling foundation inscription running around the interior. In this respect it can be connected, on the basis of surviving evidence, with other types of Late Antique building, notably baptisteries and churches associated with imperial patrons. The colour scheme of the mosaic inscription in the Dome of the Rock (gold lettering on a blue ground) also possesses imperial resonances (Chapter 7).

The outer face inscription conforms in many respects to the type of foundation inscription (particularly those made for royal patrons) created in Late Antiquity: the final part of the text identifies the patron, the date of construction and the function of the building (*qubba*), while the preceding space is taken up with texts of a pious nature. Certainly, there are elements that are very specific to Umayyad concerns of the late 680s and early 690s, and there are also curious aspects that can be attributed in part to the difficulties of planning and executing such a long mosaic inscription in Arabic (see Chapters 4 and 5). Even allowing for these qualifications, however, it is reasonable to assert that 'Abd al-Malik was still conceiving of his building as a martyrium, and of the outer face inscription in ways

that would have been familiar to the political elites of the eastern Mediterranean prior to the rise of Islam. The decision to place this foundation inscription on the outer face of the octagonal arcade rather than the inner face perhaps reflects some inexperience on the part of the patrons (if one assumes that it was initially planned as the sole inscription). The uninterrupted sides of the outer face would have been easier to work with than those of the inner face (which run around the contours of the eight impost blocks), but there is the distinct disadvantage that they have to be viewed from the narrower of the two ambulatories (Figure 2.21, above). Furthermore, the placement of an inscription on the outer face of the arcade contrasts with what we know about continuous encircling inscriptions in monumental architecture of Late Antiquity (see below and Chapter 7).

The decision to continue the inscription band onto the inner face of the octagonal arcade represents a radical shift. This effectively continued the inscription beyond the foundation information (something that is seldom, if ever done in Late Antiquity), but it also introduced a contrary orientation for those choosing to read the text as a whole. To this should be added the fact that the tone and content of the inner face inscription changes significantly with the introduction of script C. Not only does this appear to represent the adoption of book script for the purposes of monumental epigraphy, but there is also the concentration upon extended Qur'anic quotation at the expense of the invocation and profession of faith. There are examples of the incorporation of scripture into earlier encircling inscriptions, although these generally took the form of short passages that often related closely to credal formulae. Close parallels for the extended employment of scriptural quotation seen in the inner face inscription of the Dome of the Rock cannot be found in surviving Late Antique architecture of the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East.

If we move to the interpretation of the content of the outer and inner face inscriptions, it is perhaps easiest to focus first on what they do not contain, and the implications that these omissions have for our understanding of the entirety of the iconographic programme of the Dome of the Rock. Particularly striking, given its location on the Temple Mount, is the fact that the Umayyad inscriptions (including the two copper plaques from the north and east gates) of the Dome of the Rock make no mention of Solomon or David. These omissions sit uncomfortably with the links that are often made – both in medieval writing and modern scholarship – between the Jewish Temple and the Dome of the Rock.[7] While it was probably the case that some early Muslims were aware that the platform was previously the site of the Temple,[8] it does not necessarily follow that this represented a primary element in the symbolism of 'Abd al-Malik's building. It is also conceivable that the Jewish practice (documented once in the fourth century by the Bordeaux Pilgrim) of anointing a perforated rock on the platform was still known in the seventh century, but

would the Umayyad elite have understood the underlying meaning of this action?[9] Despite the claims made in later writing that the Rock was the site of Abraham's sacrifice, no mention of the patriarch appears in the building.

The other interesting omission is Q 17:1, the description of the *isrāʾ* ('night journey') of the Prophet Muhammad to *al-masjid al-aqṣā* ('the Furthest Mosque'). The association between *al-masjid al-aqṣā* can be traced to the early part of the eighth century.[10] Although there is no definitive evidence, it is conceivable that the link was also made by Muslims in the latter part of the seventh century. The earliest monumental inscription (located in the Aqsa Mosque) to carry Q 17:1 dates to the Fatimid period, however.[11] The term *masjid* is translated as 'mosque', though this could refer to a built structure or simply to an open area such as the platform of the Temple Mount. Nees presents compelling reasons to doubt the validity of Adomnán's description (drawing upon the authority of one Arculf) of a mosque on the Temple Mount in the late 670s. He argues that there is no solid evidence to support the existence of a constructed mosque (as opposed to a *muṣalla*) on the platform prior to the rule of ʿAbd al-Malik. He goes further to suggest that there was no mosque on the site of the current Aqsa until after the completion of the Dome of the Rock.[12] This last point is debatable, but he provides powerful arguments against the dating of Robert Hamilton's 'Aqsa I' to the time of Muʿawiya.[13] To summarise, there is little to suggest that the association between the Temple Mount and the *isrāʾ* contributed in any meaningful way to the decision to erect the Dome of the Rock. Neither did it gain any additional importance through the years in which the building was brought to completion. Lastly, given the status of Jerusalem as the first *qibla*, one could imagine the inclusion of one of the Qurʾanic verses (Q 2:142–5) dealing with this issue.[14]

The concluding section of Chapter 8 offered some interpretations of the surviving textual content of the outer and inner faces. These came out of a consideration of the historical context as well as survey of the other dated objects from the period up to *c.* 700. The principal themes can be briefly summarised as: the expression of the central tenets of Islam (the oneness and transcendence of God and the prophethood of Muhammad); the status of Jesus as a messenger and not the son of God; the explicit denial of the Trinity; the importance of following the true path of Islam; and the preparation for the end of days (at which time Muhammad will act as an intercessor for the faithful). These themes are unevenly distributed on the outer and inner faces. The repeated use of the profession of faith and the selection of shorter Qurʾanic passages on the outer face dwell upon the characteristics of God and His messenger, while the inner face (script C) is more assertive about the contrasts between Islam and Christianity. I argue, however, that the two are linked by

the necessity to establish the truth of Islam and the preparation for the end of days. In other words, these ideas are already part of the meaning of the Dome of the Rock in the first phase of decoration, but are further elaborated when the inscription on the inner face was planned and executed. The message of the inner face is aimed at a broader audience, encompassing the followers of all the Abrahamic faiths, and not simply Muslims. Some aspects of this inscription appear to be aimed at the Kharijite denial of caliphal authority.

It is difficult to find in the inscriptions of the octagonal arcade even an implied reference to the concept of victory. Neither is this apparent in the texts contained on the copper plaques from the north and east gates. Those who designed the inscriptions show a clear wish to engage in a theological discourse with Christian groups, most notably followers of Orthodoxy, but this does not seem to be framed in the context of conquest. Oleg Grabar put forward the idea that the Dome of the Rock could be considered as a monument to the victory of Islam, and there is support for this interpretation in the incorporation of images of Byzantine imperial regalia and elements of Sasanian winged crowns in the mosaics of the inner face of the octagonal arcade and the drum of the dome.[15] Furthermore, there are references in later sources, including al-Wasiti, to the placement of Shah Khusraw's hanging crown in the building in the Umayyad period.[16] It is, therefore, quite possible that victory formed one element of the iconography of the building at the time of its construction, though if this were the case then the idea must have crystallised at a relatively late stage in this process (i.e., when the decorative programme was already partly completed). Notably, there is no explicit employment of Byzantine or Sasanian royal emblems among the mosaic panels of the outer face of the octagonal arcade.

The same general points can be made about the claims for the Dome of the Rock as a seventh-century evocation of Solomon's Temple. One can certainly identify potentially Solomonic themes (and there is also evidence for this thread of iconography in later religious and secular monuments of the Umayyad period) in the location of the building and aspects of the ornamentation. There is also some support in later textual sources for the practice of anointing the Rock in a manner that might echo earlier Jewish practices.[17] What is lacking, however, is any explicit reference in the inscriptional programme, or in early textual sources that might encourage the view that ʿAbd al-Malik was deeply interested in either Solomon or the Jewish Temple, and that this spurred him to commission the Dome of the Rock.[18] Aside from the Dome of the Rock itself, the only other possible Solomonic visual reference directly associated with his rule is the lead seal made for the province of Filastin (Figure 4.10, above). Contrast this to the explicit reference to the Old Testament king in the inscriptional programme of Juliana Anicia's Church of St Polyeuktos in Constantinople. The proportions of the building

itself are modelled after descriptions of the First Temple in I Kings 6:1–38. Emperor Justinian too seems to have evoked Solomon following the construction of the Hagia Sophia.[19]

We remain poorly informed about precisely what was meant to happen in, or indeed around, the Dome of the Rock during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik. The suggestion that the building was connected with investiture ceremonies is attractive, but is unfortunately not confirmed by any contemporary textual source (though it is notable that the Maronite Chronicle asserts that Muʿawiya was invested in Jerusalem).[20] The act of anointing the rock has been mentioned above, though the descriptions do not provide much indication concerning the underlying meanings behind this ritual (Julian Raby has drawn attention to the fact that Ibn al-Zubayr may have initiated a rite of anointing the Kaʿba[21]). The most contentious assertion made in modern scholarship about the function of the Dome of the Rock is, however, that it was designed by ʿAbd al-Malik as an alternative locus of Muslim pilgrimage to that of the Kaʿba in Mecca. There is no reason to rehearse here the arguments made for and against the primary sources (see Chapter 1) that make this claim. What is more important in the present context is that this scenario makes most sense if one places the design and construction of the Dome of the Rock prior to 72/691–2 (i.e., during the second *fitna*).

If one locates the building of the Dome of the Rock in the period after 72/691–2, then one must look for other interpretations of ʿAbd al-Malik's decision to erect a structure on the Temple Mount. It might well be that another centralised, domed building (the Dome of the Chain) was already standing near the centre point of the platform, and it is intriguing that ʿAbd al-Malik should have chosen a centralised plan for this own monument. The Dome of the Rock fits within an established genre of commemorative structures in Greater Syria. This Syrian tradition of martyria includes several octagonal buildings, most notably the Kathisma church. These are clearly distinguishable from the architectural form of the Kaʿba, and it is difficult to imagine that a seventh-century observer would have equated the Dome of the Rock with the Meccan sanctuary (at least, in visual terms).[22] Rosen-Ayalon also notes that there are several Late Antique structures in Greater Syria that are focused around rocks, meaning that ʿAbd al-Malik's building could have been drawing upon a localised symbolic vocabulary.[23] Furthermore, there is evidence for acts of circumambulation within the Holy Sepulchre around the tomb of Christ. According to a Georgian lectionary, dated from the fifth to the eighth century, the structure would be circled three times by the priests after sunset on Holy Saturday.[24]

If one abandons the idea that the Dome of the Rock was set up as a direct competitor to the Kaʿba, what can be made of the fact that its plan evidently facilitates the movement of visitors around the exposed Rock at its centre? In this respect, the inscriptions play an

important role in that they are deliberately designed to encircle the space. If one were to read the inscriptions (or, at least, follow their general direction), then it would be necessary to make one clockwise circuit of the outer ambulatory and another anticlockwise circuit of the inner ambulatory. The adoption of a centralised plan and the decision to arrange the inscriptions in continuous bands looks too deliberate to ignore, but their precise functions remain obscure. If there had been no initial plan to run a second band of text around the inner face of the octagonal arcade, then one is left with the possibility that the inscription was originally only meant to facilitate a clockwise movement around the Rock. Alternatively, one is left with the highly unusual use of two inscription bands, each of which apparently encourages circumambulation in different directions. As far as I am aware, this arrangement is only survives in one earlier structure, the fifth-century arcade surrounding the tomb of St Felix in Cimitile. I have already demonstrated (Chapter 7) that the outer face inscription accords in several significant respects to the type of extended foundation inscriptions encountered in Late Antique architecture around the Mediterranean (no parallels exist in Sasanian lands). The decision to make this foundation inscription encircle the interior space suggests connections with imperial Byzantine patronage, though other more remote links can be found with baptisteries, such as the octagonal structure in Milan, and with Armenian churches.

The Armenian churches run the bands of inscription around the exterior, but it appears to have been more common practice to arrange encircling inscriptions in the interior space. In the cases of Sts Sergius and Bacchus and St Polyeuktos in Constantinople, the text is arranged such that it can be seen by a viewer looking outward from the central space. The contrast to the outer face inscription of the Dome of the Rock is clear in this respect; not only must it be viewed from the outer arcade, but also it requires the viewer to walk around the entire circuit of the building. The clockwise orientation indicated by the text (assuming, as logic would suggest, that the viewer was meant to move in accordance with the inscription band[25]) also contrasts to the counter-clockwise circumambulation (ṭawāf) of the Kaʿba. While fact alone would appear to be sufficient to discount the idea that in its earliest phases the Dome of the Rock was intended to suggest some equivalence with the Kaʿba, it is worth noting that there appears to have been some fluidity in Meccan ritual practice during the first century of Islam. For example, according to the account of al-Tabari (d. 923), Caliph Hisham felt the need to correspond with the scholar Abu al-Zinad ʿAbd Allah ibn Khakwan (d. c. 747–8) before reaching the city of Medina. The caliph was concerned to establish the proper customs associated with the hajj. More tellingly, Sulayman b. ʿAbd al-Malik (Caliph Sulayman, r. 715–17) is reputed to have quizzed the religious authorities of Mecca about how

to perform the pilgrimage in 716. Failing to receive an unambiguous response, Sulayman asked about the hajj rituals of ʿAbd al-Malik, pronouncing that these would be the ones he would follow.[26] One gets the sense of a state of flux as well as of the status of ʿAbd al-Malik as the exemplar for the Muslim community (or, at least, those who accepted the authority of the Marwanids).

ʿAbd al-Malik's imprint can be seen in many other aspects of Islamic culture and governance in the first half of the eighth century. With regard to the rituals of pilgrimage, however, it should be admitted that it is unclear what practices associated with his father Sulayman was proposing to imitate. Both Julius Wellhausen and Gerald Hawting have pointed to the fact that through the seventh century the hajj might have focused solely upon ʿArafa, with Mecca being connected only with the 'lesser pilgrimage' (ʿumra).[27] There is no evidence that the orientation of the ṭawāf of the Kaʿba has ever been different, and one can probably discount the idea that the clockwise movement around the outer ambulatory of the Dome of the Rock was meant to evoke the passage of pilgrims around the Kaʿba. It might be that clockwise orientation has indirect connections to the practices of other religious communities in the Late Antique Middle East. For example, Wensinck has drawn attention to the employment of circumambulation during mourning rituals among Syrian Christians, while Goldziher discusses a reference to similar practices in the commemoration of the dead in pre-Islamic Arabia.[28] The circling of the altar is described in Psalm 26:6, and there are further references to this action in relation to the discussion of the autumnal festival, Sukkoth, in the Mishna and the Talmud.[29] One is justified, therefore, in claiming that circumambulation was relatively widespread among the Abrahamic communities of the Middle East, though it cannot yet be demonstrated how these rituals (or those performed within the Holy Sepulchre; see above) might have contributed to the design of the Dome of the Rock as a structure facilitating movement around the central space.

One intriguing piece of evidence for other types of Muslim circumambulation comes from a late source, Ibn Abi al-Hadid (d. 1257). He reports al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf's claim that those circumambulating the tomb of the Prophet in Medina would be better advised to do the same around the palace of ʿAbd al-Malik.[30] The challenges involved in the interpretation of later representations of the Umayyads have been discussed earlier in the book, and this anecdote can be regarded as equally problematic. However, Chase Robinson argues that the curious reference to the circling of the tomb of the Prophet might lend this account greater credibility in that it appears to preserve a ritual practice that would have been deeply unacceptable to Muslim writers in later centuries.[31] Had the intention been simply to heap opprobrium upon the Umayyads, one can imagine Ibn Abi al-Hadid using the ṭawāf of the Kaʿba as the point of comparison given that

this ritual would have been readily understood by his readers. Further support for the idea that some Muslims were circling the Prophet's tomb is also provided by the decision apparently made by the governor of Medina, ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAziz (Caliph ʿUmar II, r. 717–20), to erect a five-sided (and not four-sided) screen around the resting place. According to the collector of Medinan history, al-Samhudi (d. 1505), the reasoning for this unusual arrangement was that worshippers would be less likely to treat it as an additional *kaʿba* and to employ it as a *qibla* for prayer.[32] Ironically, the elegy for ʿUmar II penned by al-Farazdaq contains the following words:

> They kiss the earth that is over his bones the way that the [black] stone of the house to which pilgrimage is made is kissed. How perfect is the ground in which a grave conceals him. Yet, how is it possible for the moon to be buried in a tomb?[33]

As Nadia Jamil has pointed out, this equates a Marwanid caliph to the House of God (*bayt allāh*) in the precise sense of the ritual of kissing the black stone. He does not go so far as to include the role of the Kaʿba as *qibla* nor does he explicitly mention the *ṭawāf* (both of which would have elicited the accusation of *shirk* in the context of the veneration of the tomb of ʿUmar). Al-Farazdaq does, however, claim that Caliph Marwan I might have been the subject of worship had not such practices been forbidden by the Prophet.[34] The idea that one might circumambulate a member of the ruling elite continues into later periods. For example, Bashshar ibn Burd (d. 784) says of a cousin of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur: 'Greatly loved has Sulayman become; around him we revolve as do the Arabs around the *qibla*-house.'[35]

Whether or not one regards the sentiments allegedly expressed by al-Hajjaj as historically accurate, they do contribute to a general notion that the Umayyad elite of the late seventh century were seeking ways by which to elevate the position of the caliph. The crucial term, *khalīfat allāh* ('representative of God') is notably absent from the outer face inscription, with only the uncontroversial honorific 'Commander of the Faithful' employed. As noted in Chapter 8, this might indicate that the term was not in circulation at the time the outer face inscription was laid within the building (i.e., prior to the minting of the *ʿanaza* drachm in *c.* 75/695–6). It would, however, have been understood by the Umayyad elite at the time the building was completed, and perhaps even when the inner face inscription was being executed. Other concepts were being developed in the 690s, such as the caliph providing guidance (*hudā*) to the Muslim community. Poetry also evokes the image of the leader as the axis or pole (*quṭb*) of the millstone around which his followers revolve, and even the figure to whom the faithful pray for rain.

One can only speculate upon the significance of these themes in

relation to the planning and execution of the Dome of the Rock. Likewise, we are left to guess at the precise nature of the rituals performed within or in the vicinity of the building in the years after its completion. Without wishing to push the available evidence too far, there are reasons to see the building, its decoration and the inscriptional programme in its final form as relating in important ways to ʿAbd al-Malik and his status as the *imām al-hudā* for the Muslim community and *khalīfat allāh*. Nees has suggested that the Dome of the Chain should be connected with Muʿawiya and his leadership of the Muslim community.[36] In this context, one can imagine ʿAbd al-Malik wishing to communicate through his monument the most important qualities of caliphal authority. The outer inscription has relatively limited aims in this respect, with ʿAbd al-Malik projecting himself as patron and as the Commander of the Faithful. Notably, it is the Prophet who is cited repeatedly through the *shahāda*, references to the divine blessings conferred upon him, and his role as intercessor for the Muslim community. The mosaic decoration of the outer face of the octagonal arcade is also striking for the absence of royal regalia, Byzantine and Sasanian, among the vegetal motifs. The plant forms suggest instead a paradisiac reading, which can perhaps be linked to the textual references to angels (southwest and north sides) and to Muhammad's role as an intercessor for the faithful on the 'day or resurrection'.[37]

ʿAbd al-Malik's name is, of course, absent from the inner face inscription, but his presence remains strong through the precise choice of texts, particularly in the area written in George's script C (i.e., last part of the southwest side through to the end of the southeast side). One encounters in these Qurʾanic verses an engagement with Christian views on the nature of Christ, but also what appears to be a response to Kharijite beliefs. This latter battle was also played out in Umayyad coinage, most notably through the *ʿanaza* and sacral arch drachm and the first epigraphic dinar of 77/696–7.[38] The emphasis upon the adhering to the true message of God is set within the context of an apocalyptic mentality[39] – one which is also found on graffiti from a few years later and is also apparent in broadly contemporary writing within all the Abrahamic faiths – in which the necessity of 'guidance' is emphasised (a concept also highlighted in the use of Q 9:33 (or 61:9) on both the undated copper plaque from the north entrance and the epigraphic dinar). Muslims of the 690s who accepted the authority of the Umayyads were being informed through coins and monumental inscriptions that it was the caliph who could provide this pathway to the proper practise of Islam, following the model of the Prophet.

Notably the mosaic decoration of the inner face also introduces royal themes though the inclusion of jewellery, often ornamented with hanging pearls, derived from Byzantine imperial prototypes. This might be seen as a symbolic appropriation of this Christian

empire by the Umayyad caliph, and is made additionally pertinent because of the way in which the inscriptions of script C seem to take issue with the Eastern Orthodox Church. By the time one reaches the mosaics of the drum of the dome, the imperial crowns of the Sasanian kings are also present, providing a powerful indication of the caliph as inheritor of Persian royal authority.[40] This 'universal' appropriation of attributes of Late Antique kingship seems appropriate given the role that the caliph had to play in establishing the true faith in preparation for the end of days. (Rosen-Ayalon has emphasised the importance of this apocalyptic dimension in the building, and some additional evidence in support of this position appears in slightly later graffiti: see Chapter 8.) Could it be that the circumambulation (a practice that is inferred both by the plan of the Dome of the Rock and the placement of encircling inscriptions around its interior) relates to the claims made by Umayyad poets, and perhaps also by al-Hajjaj, that Muslims should move around the person of the ruler or of buildings associated with him?

I suggest that there is an evolving set of themes in the decorative programme of the Dome of the Rock, many of which focus upon the caliph. Scholars have argued that the Umayyads were engaged in a process of establishing a symbolic language able to communicate religio-political concepts; much of this was done without recourse to representations of animate life. The increasing reliance upon script as a carrier of meaning is probably the most enduring example, but others can be suggested. The spear (*'anaza*) can be viewed as a metonym for the Prophet, and the same could be said of the *miḥrāb* (the first documented example coming from al-Walid's reconstruction of the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina).[41] In some senses, therefore, one might be justified in thinking of the Dome of the Rock in its finished form as representing qualities located in the person of 'Abd al-Malik, the *khalīfat allāh* and *imām al-hudā*. The analysis of the form and content of the outer face inscription (Chapters 2, 4–6) suggests that these ideas were only in embryonic form at the time the monument was initially planned.

Historical circumstance and the increasing ambition (and ability) of the Umayyads as architectural patrons allowed for a Late Antique commemorative building incorporating an extended foundation text largely concerned with the credal formulae to be transformed midway through the process of ornamentation into something capable of communicating a more complex set of ideas through both text and image. Defining the nature and scope of the meanings attached to the first and second phase of activity will remain the subject of ongoing scholarly inquiry, though I argue that future interpretations of the building and its ornamental programme must attend carefully to the physical evidence provided by the building itself, to the constraints formed by the craft traditions of Late Antiquity, and the primary texts and archaeological evidence that can be dated with reasonable certainty

to the late seventh century. It would also be worthwhile to give further consideration to the reasons why the ideas expressed by 'Abd al-Malik's Dome of the Rock should so quickly have been lost, only to be replaced by new and more enduring readings.[42]

In conclusion, I offer some observations about the importance of the two mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock in evolution of Islamic art and architecture. They stand at the beginning of the long and illustrious tradition of monumental epigraphy, and for this reason it is worthwhile to assess the extent to which they can be considered as the point of origin for later developments. These ambitious bands of text seem both familiar and unfamiliar when seen from the perspective of the next millennium of visual and material culture in the Islamic world. They are familiar in that they make extensive use of scripture, the choice of specific *āya*s and *sūra*s intended to direct the viewer to concepts that are connected to, but often move beyond, their precise Qur'anic context.[43] Thus, we see an early attempt to employ divine revelation as a means by which to comment upon contemporary concerns. The decision to make the two texts form complete circuits of the interior space is also highly significant. One only has to look at the architecture of the Islamic world, particularly from the eleventh century onwards, to see the popularity of encircling inscriptions. These appear running in bands that enclose interior spaces and also wrapping around the exterior surfaces of features such as minarets and domes. Encircling inscriptions also become ubiquitous in portable arts.[44]

One can question the extent to which later Muslim patrons and those who worked for them would necessarily have understood there to be a connection between the Umayyad mosaic inscriptions of the Jerusalem building and the encircling texts placed on their own monuments. The employment of Qur'anic quotation on Islamic architecture also evolves in many ways that are not anticipated in the Dome of the Rock. There are other ways in which the encircling inscriptions in 'Abd al-Malik's buildings are disconnected from those produced in the following centuries. The unstable proportional systems of the script and the haphazard appearance of diacritical marks are seldom encountered in major state-sponsored commissions. Neither does one again see the repetitive character of the outer face inscription with its concentration upon the (variant) credal statements. These curious elements can be explained in part by the profoundly experimental quality of this inscription; it was the first time Arabic had been rendered in the medium of mosaic during the Islamic era. Indeed, in purely visual terms one can argue that they were relatively unsuccessful as a result of their high placement and inadequate lighting. We must understand the outer face inscription (and, by extension, the Dome of the Rock as it was initially conceived by the Umayyad elite in the late 680s and the early years of the 690s) as being rooted in the visual language and craft traditions

of the Late Antique Eastern Mediterranean. It is with the inclusion of the second, and more innovative, inscription band on the inner face that one sees the opening move in what would become the rich and intensely varied tradition of monumental epigraphy so familiar to every student of Islamic architecture.

Notes

1. Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-ṣaydana*; translated in Franz Rosenthal, 'Significant Uses of Arabic Writing', in *Four Essays on Art and Literature in Islam*, L. A. Mayer Memorial Studies in Islamic Art and Archaeology 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), p. 60.
2. For examples of stylised plant forms on Sasanian and 'post-Sasanian' metalwork, see Oleg Grabar, *Sasanian Silver: Late Antique and Early Mediaeval Arts of Luxury from Iran* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1967), Cat. Nos 24, 41, 51; Vladimir Loukonine and Anatoli Ivanov, *Persian Art, Lost Treasures* (London: Mage Publishers, 2003), p. 100, Cat. No. 89; Mikhail Pietrovsky and J. Vrieze, *Heavenly Art, Earthly Beauty* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2000), p. 156, Cat. No. 110. Also Marcus Milwright, 'Raqqa before "Raqqa Wares": Toward a Typology of Ornament in the Ceramic Workshops of Early Abbasid Tal Aswad', *al-Rafidan* 32 (2011): 241–3, fig. 6.A).
3. On this issue, see Busse, 'Jerusalem in the Story of Muḥammad's Night Journey and Ascension'; Rabbat, 'The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock' (on p. 18 he makes the significant observation relating to the rebuilding of the Aqsa Mosque, completed by al-Walid, that: 'The Dome of the Rock was then subjected to a shift in significance when the mihrab of the rebuilt Aqsa mosque was aligned with its north–south axis, thus incorporating it into a larger complex whose focus it became'); Rabbat, 'The Dome of the Rock Revisited'; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, *passim*; Angelika Neuwirth, 'The Spiritual Meaning of Jerusalem in Islam', in Nitza Rosovsky (ed.), *City of the Great King: Jerusalem from David to the Present* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 93–116; Robert Hillenbrand, 'The Dome of the Rock: From Medieval Symbol to Modern Propaganda', in Jill Franklin, T. A. Heslop and Christine Stevenson (eds), *Architecture and Interpretation: Essays for Eric Fernie* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 344–56.
4. An interesting critical survey of the significant secondary literature (up to 2004) appears in Oleg Grabar, 'Notes on the Dome of the Rock', in Grabar, *Constructing the Study of Islamic Art, vol. IV: Jerusalem* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 213–29. More recent publications (up to 2008) are considered in Necıpoğlu's penetrating analysis of the building. See her 'The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest'.
5. Nees, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Art in Jerusalem*. On the earliest phases of Umayyad activity on the site, see also the speculations in Peters, 'Who Built the Dome of the Rock?'
6. Avner, 'The Dome of the Rock in the Light of the Development of Concentric Martyria in Jerusalem'; Avner, 'The Account of Caesarea by

the Piacenza Pilgrim'; Chen, 'The Façades of the Dome of the Rock and the Rotunda of the Anastasis Compared'.

7. Soucek, 'The Temple of Solomon in Islamic Legend and Art'. On the associations made by medieval authors and artists between the Dome of the Rock and Solomon's Temple, see Berger, *The Crescent on the Temple*, *passim*; Moore, 'Textual Transmission and Pictorial Transformations', pp. 64–7.

8. On the role of Jewish and Christian converts to Islam in this period, see Rabbat, 'The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock', pp. 14–15; Rabbat, 'The Dome of the Rock Revisited', pp. 68–9; Necıpoğlu, 'The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest', pp. 38, 43. Also comments in Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire*, Ancient Warfare and Civilization (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 158–69.

9. On the role of Ka'b al-Ahbar as a transmitter of Jewish traditions about the Temple Mount, see Busse, ''Omar's Image as Conqueror of Jerusalem', pp. 149–68; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, pp. 105–6, 157–8, 162–3.

10. Busse, 'Jerusalem in the Story of Muḥammad's Night Journey and Ascension', pp. 37–8.

11. van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicum*, pp. 452–3 (the reading is by Gaston Wiet); Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, pp. 149–51.

12. Nees, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Art in Jerusalem*. On the understanding of Jerusalem in Adomnán, see also Hoyland and Waidler, 'Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis*', pp. 795–9.

13. Hamilton, 'An Alternative History of the Aqsā Mosque', pp. 79–82; Johns, 'The "House of the Prophet" and the Concept of the Mosque', pp. 62–4.

14. On the significance of Jerusalem as the first *qibla*, see Neuwirth, 'The Spiritual Meaning of Jerusalem in Islam', pp. 95–102.

15. Grabar, 'The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem', pp. 47–8.

16. Rabbat, 'The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock', pp. 71–3. Other objects mentioned in al-Wasiti's account are the Yatima pearl and the horns of the ram sacrificed by Abraham.

17. Raby, '*In vitro veritas*', pp. 176–7. It should be noted that the account describes activities later in the Umayyad period, and not during the rule of 'Abd al-Malik.

18. Grabar goes as far as suggesting that 'Solomonic associations within the Muslim community at the time of the building's construction are almost impossible to imagine.' See his *The Dome of the Rock* (2006), p. 115. Also quoted and discussed in Nees, 'Blue behind Gold', p. 172.

19. Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium*, pp. 8–9, 34, 137–9; Ousterhout, 'New Temples and New Solomons', pp. 239–49. The Solomon dimensions of the decoration in al-Walid's architecture are a theme throughout Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus*.

20. Caskel, *Der Felsendom und die Wallfahrt nach Jerusalem*, pp. 28–30. Also comments in van Ess, ''Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock', pp. 89–104. On Mu'awiya's accession, probably in Jerusalem, see Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*, pp. 86–9.

21. Raby, '*In vitro veritas*', p. 183. For more on the anointing rituals in Jerusalem and elsewhere, see pp. 174–9.

22. On the shared iconography of these buildings, see Nuha Khoury, 'The

Dome of the Rock, the Ka'ba, and Ghumdan: Arab Myths and Umayyad Monuments', *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 57–65.

23. Rosen-Ayalon, *Early Islamic Monuments*, pp. 66–7. See also Avner, 'The Dome of the Rock in the Light of the Development of Concentric Martyria in Jerusalem'.

24. John Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of the Stational Liturgy*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 228 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), p. 73. He describes it as 'a three-fold perambulation and censing of the church, a blessing of the new candle, of the candles held by all the faithful, the opening of the doors and procession to the Martyrium'. On the earliest phases of the aedicule over the tomb of Christ, see also Martin Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), pp. 21–8. On the representations in Arabic poetry of Christians apparently circumambulating the cross, see Jamil, 'Caliph and *Quṭb*', pp. 55–6.

25. See, however, Bacharach's suggestion about how the two inscription bands were 'read' in his 'Signs of Sovereignty', p. 7.

26. On these episodes, see Harry Munt, 'The Official Announcement of an Umayyad Caliph's Successful Pilgrimage to Mecca', in Venetia Porter and Liana Saif (eds), *The Hajj: Collected Essays*, Research Publications 193 (London: British Museum, 2013), pp. 15–20 (especially pp. 15–16).

27. Gerald Hawting, 'The Hajj in the Second Civil War', in Ian Netton (ed.), *Golden Roads: Migration, Pilgrimage, and Travel in Mediaeval and Modern Islam* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1993), pp. 31–42 (see pp. 37–9); Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Religious Dialectics of the Ḥadjdj', in Gerald Hawting (ed.), *The Development of Islamic Ritual*, Formation of the Classical Islamic World 26 (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), p. 267; Munt, 'The Official Announcement', pp. 18–19. For further discussion of ritual, particularly in relation to the Ḥijr, see Uri Rubin, 'The Ka'ba: Aspects of its Ritual Functions and Position in pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): 104–7.

28. A. J. Wensinck, *Some Semitic Rites of Mourning and Religion: Studies on their Origin and Mutual Relation* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1917), pp. 42–9; Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, I, p. 246; Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, I, p. 223.

29. Wensinck, *Some Semitic Rites of Mourning and Religion*, p. 45–6. See also Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Religious Dialectics of the Ḥadjdj', pp. 267–8.

30. Discussed in Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, pp. 28–9; Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, pp. 90–1.

31. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, p. 91.

32. Jamil, 'Caliph and *Quṭb*', p. 44.

33. Al-Farazdaq, translated in *ibid.*, p. 44.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

35. Translated in *ibid.*, pp. 44–5.

36. Nees, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Art in Jerusalem*. On this issues, see also Andrew Marsham, 'The Architecture of Allegiance in Early Islamic Late Antiquity: The Accession of Mu'awiya in Jerusalem, ca. 661 CE', in Alexander Beihammer, Stavroula Constantinou and Maria Parani (eds), *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean*, The Medieval Mediterranean 98 (Leiden and

Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), pp. 87–112; Marsham, *Rituals of Monarchy*, pp. 86–9.

37. Rosen-Ayalon, *Early Islamic Monuments*, pp. 67–8.

38. Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire', pp. 176–7, 184–8.

39. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 257–335 (for Muslim Arabic apocalypes, see pp. 330–5); Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton, NJ and London: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 23–44. For a thematic examination of the genre, see Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*.

40. Fowden, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, pp. 227–40 and *passim*; Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran*, *passim*. Also Guitty Azarpay, 'Sasanian Art beyond the Persian World', in John Curtis (ed.), *Mesopotamian and Iran in the Parthian and Sasanian Periods: Rejection and Revival, c. 238 BC–AD 642* (London: British Museum Press, 2000), pp. 67–75.

41. Estelle Whelan, 'The Origins of the *Miḥrāb Mujawwaf*: A Reinterpretation', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18 (1996): 205–23; Treadwell, '"Mihrab and ʿAnaza" or "Sacrum and Spear"?', pp. 15–21.

42. On this process of reimagining the symbolic language of the building, see references collected in n. 3.

43. Dodd and Khairallah, *Image of the Word*, I, *passim*; Hillenbrand, 'Qurʾanic Epigraphy in Medieval Islamic Architecture'; Elias, *Aisha's Cushion*, pp. 236–83.

44. The early history of Islamic encircling inscriptions will be dealt with in a forthcoming article by the author.

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Illustration Acknowledgements

Inscription on the Inner Face
of the Octagonal Arcade

Areas shaded grey mark the point where the inscription passes around an angle or re-entrant corner. Areas marked in black indicate where part of a word continues onto the next side of the octagonal arcade.

South

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له له الملك وله الحمد يحيى ويميت وهو على كل شيء قدر محمد عبد الله ورسوله

Southest

ان الله وملئكته يصلون على النبي يا ايها الذين امنوا صلوا عليه وسلموا تسليما صلى الله عليه والسلم عليه ورحمة الله يا اهل الكتب لا تغلوا في دينكم

East

ولا تقولوا على الله الا الحق انما المسيح عيسى ابن مريم رسول الله وكلمته القيها الى مريم و روح منه فامنوا بالله ورسله ولا تقولوا ثلثة انتهوا

Northeast

انتهوا خيرا لكم انما الله اله واحد سبحنه ان يكون له ولد له ما في السموت وما في الارض وكفى بالله وكيلا لن يستنكف المسيح ان يكون عبدا

North

عبدا لله ولا الملئكة المقربون ومن يستنكف عن عبدته ويستكبر فسيحشرهم اليه جميعا اللهم صل على رسولك وعبدك عيسى

Northwest

عيسى ابن مريم و السلم عليه يوم ولد ويوم يموت ويوم يبعث حيا ذلك عيسى ابن مريم قول الحق الذي فيه تمترون ما كان لله ان يتخذ من ولد سبحنه اذا

West

اذا قضى امرا فانما يقول له كن فيكون ان الله ربي وربكم فاعبدوه هذا صرط مستقيم شهد الله انه لا اله الا هو والملئكة واولوا العلم قائما بالقسط لا اله الا هو

Southwest

هو العزيز الحكيم ان الدين عند الله الاسلم وما اختلف الذين اوتوا الكتب الا من بعد ما جاءهم العلم بغيا بينهم ومن يكفر بايت الله فان الله سريع الحساب

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3.10 Drawing: Genevieve Neelin.

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