Spolia – A Conscious Display of History in Seventh-Century Jerusalem
Beatrice St. Laurent

Abstract
This article focuses on the use of spolia as historic objects on display in the seventh-century monuments of Bayt al-Maqdis or Jerusalem. This is not the incorporation of ruins in adaptive reuse such as columns built into walls. Rather, select historic objects figure prominently in the monumental construction of Mu‘awiya I (638–80 CE), the first Umayyad Commander of the Faithful (Amir al-Mu‘minin), including in the Mosque of Mu‘awiya (638–60), the Dome of the Rock (640–92), the Dome of the Chain, Double Gate, Golden Gate, and the eastern arcade or mizan leading to the Dome of the Rock. The spolia include Herodian stones, marble columns, carved wooden beams, and decorative stones from the Persian, Hellenistic, Hasmonian, and Roman periods and Christian churches. The patron, planners, and builders of the earliest Islamic monuments consciously incorporated spolia for prominent display as historic objects from earlier regional cultures and religions worthy of respect and preservation. This concept of displaying the ancient past has been linked with imperial power as early as the Greek Mouseion. Thus, the concept of a “Museum of Antiquities” was voiced by Muslim authority in mid-seventh century Jerusalem, invoking an egalitarian relationship with earlier Jewish and Christian monuments and proclaiming that message to a multicultural multireligious population.

Keywords
Spolia; Bayt al-Maqdis; Jerusalem; Dome of the Rock; Dome of the Chain; Mosque of Mu‘awiya; Golden Gate; Double Gate; Museum of Antiquities.
The use of *spolia* (Latin, *spolium*, sing.; spoils) as historic objects on display in the seventh-century monuments of Bayt al-Maqdis (the Sacred or Holy House, a name for Jerusalem) during the governing period and reign of Mu‘awiya I (638–80 CE) is significant for continuity with the past practice of other cultures present in the Eastern Mediterranean region. This is not simply the incorporation of ruins, sometimes helter-skelter, sometimes more purposefully utilized in reuse, such as a column built into a wall or a foundation as a supporting element, which certainly became a feature in the rebuilding of city walls in later periods.¹ The seventh-century early Umayyad period is a fertile domain for scholarly exploration of spolia utilization.

Significantly, select historical objects figure prominently in the construction of the new monuments of Mu‘awiya, the first Umayyad Commander of the Faithful (*Amir al-Mu’minin*). The monuments of the early Umayyad era include the modified Golden Gate, the rebuilt Double Gate, the first mosque of Jerusalem – the Mosque of Mu‘awiya (638–60), and the eastern and central western arcades or *mawazin* (pl., *mizan*, sing., scales or balances; architecturally, free-standing gates) leading up to the Dome of the Chain and the Dome of the Rock (640–91). The spolia include marble columns, some from churches, carved wooden beams, decorative stones from a church chancel screen, decorative stones from the Persian, Hellenic, Hasmonian, and Roman periods, large Herodian stones, and very practical reuse of stones found on-site or from nearby sites (figure 1).²

---

¹ Figure 1. The Dome of the Rock southwestern facade, photo by Père Raphaël Savignac, 1907–9. Courtesy of École Biblique, no. 06838-657.

² I propose here that the patron, planners, and builders of the earliest Islamic monumental architecture in Bayt al-Maqdis, later the Haram al-Sharif, consciously incorporated locally sourced historical *spolia* and intended them for prominent display
in these new monuments as historical objects from earlier periods worthy of respect and preservation. In fact,

in the oldest surviving Islamic monuments of Jerusalem from the seventh-century Umayyad Period, we find the earliest examples of the inclusion of physical documents of the past indicating that there was an awareness of the significance of history, its preservation and its obvious display in the early years of Islam.³

Also, there are clear intended messages in spolia usage on specific monuments. Thus begins the physical embodiment of the “open-air museum” for the preservation and display of historic artifacts, no doubt a continuation of past practice in the region.⁴

For the monuments of Mu'awiya, the message communicated was less of conquest and dominance but rather of a more egalitarian relationship with earlier Christian and Jewish monuments, and quite loudly proclaiming that message to the multicultural, multireligious population of the city. This message would change to new interpretations of dominance contextually with legal codification and superiority of Islam during the reign of the Marwanid Umayyad successors, beginning with ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705) ruling from Damascus, along with the imposition of more restrictive access to the site for all except Muslims. The latter message was supported by the later writers of hadith and narrative histories of the Abbasid era in their eradication of the history and legacy of the Umayyads.⁵

History

This concept of displaying the ancient past has been linked with imperial power and conquest as early as the Greek Mouseion, which was a place, temple, or seat of the Muses in Alexandria circa third century BCE, presiding over the arts and sciences though not including works of art except for manuscripts as defined today. This was more of a space for contemplation of the sciences than a museum in the modern context. The other early comparative is the Greek pinacotheca (Latin from Greek, for picture gallery) forming the wing of the Propylaea on the Acropolis in Athens.⁶ A notion of collections of works of art that can be applied here in the Muslim context is works considered as reverent, given as part of a waqf (charitable endowment) established during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, such as Qur’ans or objects for use in a mosque. They can be found now in museum collections such as the collections in the Islamic Museum in the southwest corner of today’s Haram al-Sharif founded in 1922.⁷

The collection and use of spolia for the purposes of display of the historic past, I argue here, is comparable to the concept of a “museum of antiquities” displayed in the early Umayyad context and clearly and physically defined in the works of Mu'awiyah in Jerusalem. Once established, the tradition of including spolia from the past continued in the monumental construction of imperial Islamic dynastic architecture on the site and elsewhere in the Islamic world, accompanied frequently in later periods by a new message being assigned to the same objects in reuse.⁸
Definition

The definition of spolia is repurposed building stone from the past incorporated in new construction, often taken from ruined monuments in nearby sites and incorporated in adaptive reuse in new construction in the Mediterranean region. The reuse of period specific architectural features, be they sculptural or purely functional elements, have in the Islamic periods been attributed much more to utilitarian purposes rather than to a more purposeful intent. Additionally, up until now, there has been little discussion between scholars of the Classical and Byzantine periods with those scholars examining the Islamic context.

With reference to the Early Islamic and Medieval periods in the Islamic world, where there has been the adaptive reuse of architectural components from earlier periods “the phenomenon has (with few exceptions) been ascribed either to utilitarian opportunism or to a triumphalist impulse posited (implicitly or explicitly) on the basis of an essentialized notion of Islam, and often colored by the assumption of a cultural predisposition towards iconoclasm.” This ultimately results in ahistorical interpretations ignoring differing temporal and regional contexts. The lack of research and publication in the Islamic realm has been changing recently with published research on the uses of spolia in Saljuq, Beylik, and Ottoman architecture. The uses explored are pragmatic, ideological, symbolic, and varying regionally and time wise; in the Anatolian Saljuq region, one scholar explores a talismanic association in the reuse of spolia as an indicator of power.

There is a danger in later analyses of spolia of assigning an inappropriate message not tied to the original intended message at the time of its incorporation. This is a particularly significant observation for the period under consideration, since there are few surviving texts to provide evidence of the original message and when history has been intentionally eradicated or modified to suit new political dictates. Thus, it is important to “let the monument speak for itself, plainly and directly” in any attempts to interpret the visual language of individual monuments, in order to assure that the argument focuses on the message appropriate for the time.

While there are some practical or pragmatic uses of older ruins as a “quarry” for new construction, other reasons for the use of spolia are obviously aesthetic and ideological and, I suggest, not solely with a message of conquest. All such practices are used in the seventh century (and later) monuments of Muslim rule in Jerusalem and specifically those monuments of the new Islamic sanctuary, al-Haram al-Sharif. The obvious message appears visually in both the architecture itself and in contemporary religious texts, notably the Qur’an and the traditional teachings of the qussas, popular preachers and early interpreters of the Qur’an prior to the revisionist texts of the later authors of hadith and histories.

Monumental Construction under Mu‘awiya (638–680 CE)

Prior to discussing the use of spolia, a brief discussion is warranted on the monuments
previously attributed to the Marwanid Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705), which are now being backdated to the Sufyanid Umayyad Mu‘awiya who was first governor in 638–60 and Amir al-Mu‘minin or Commander of the Faithful (and not caliph) in 661–80. More recent scholarship proposed that the first mosque of Jerusalem said to have been destroyed survives today in the structure called the Marwani Musalla, traditionally called al-masjid al-qadim (the old mosque), and later erroneously referred to as Solomon’s Stables. The survival of the mosque built of ruins on ruins establishes it as the oldest surviving Islamic monument in the city. At the same time, the city walls, Triple and Double gates were rebuilt, the Golden Gate added to and a new Single Gate built by Mu‘awiya.  

A forthcoming book attributes to Mu‘awiya the resanctification of the sacred precinct, establishing the footprint on the Herodian sanctuary by rebuilding the walls; renewing or establishing new entrances; and building the eastern, central western and south arcades or mawazin, the Dome of the Chain (640–60?), and the Dome of the Rock (640–91). The book also proposes that at the time of construction of these monuments there was no upper platform. Evidence is mostly in the monuments themselves, based on texts, and in expansion of the arguments of previous scholarship.  

Previously both S. D. Goitein and Oleg Grabar proposed both an earlier date and attributed at least the initiation of the Dome of the Rock’s construction to Mu‘awiya. There are multiple reasons for Mu‘awiya versus ‘Abd al-Malik as the patron who built the Dome; many previously cited by Grabar in 1988 and mostly abandoned by him in later scholarship. The first reason is time to plan and build the monument. Most scholarship supports the construction of the building sometime between 685 and 691 with the building’s completion date 691/692 supported by the Kufic inscription on the interior arcade of the structure. This is a very short period to complete such a large-scale project, particularly that it includes the exterior and interior mosaic decoration. After arriving in Damascus in 683 and becoming caliph in 685, ‘Abd al-Malik would have had to build the Dome between 685 and 691 (six years), which would have been difficult, probably physically impossible, especially as he was primarily engaged in a long period of continuous military activity fraught with political challenges. There was simply not sufficient time to build a monument as decoratively complex as the Dome of the Rock.  

A second reason is the fact that Mu‘awiya’s family had long tenure in the region with landholdings in Balqa’, south of Amman, in Jordan prior to Islam and before he came in 634 to Bilad al-Sham with the army of conquest. Additionally, he had a long history as a builder of monuments in the Arabia of his origins prior to coming to Greater Syria. ‘Abd al-Malik on the other hand was a Medinan who arrived in Damascus in 683, two years prior to becoming caliph, spending no time in Jerusalem. Thus, prior to becoming caliph in 685, he had not spent time in, nor did he know the region.  

A third reason for Mu‘awiya versus ‘Abd al-Malik is ideological disposition. Mu‘awiya was not only long in the region but throughout his career prior to Jerusalem was a restorer of earlier monuments and the builder of new ones. He also chose to
build his mosque in Jerusalem and not in Damascus where he was invested as Amir al-Mu’minin. It is also clear that ‘Abd al-Malik followed Mu‘awiya throughout his early career in either utilizing or embellishing sites already established by Mu‘awiya, and now including the Dome of the Rock, and establishing Jerusalem as one of the capitals of the early Umayyads. ‘Abd al-Malik was a political strategist ruling from his capital of Damascus. His was the period of administrative reform and the molding of a specifically defined Islamic Umayyad state, adopting the title of caliph, and minimizing the role of the other ahl al-kitab (People of the Book) including Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians, both in the state and on the site, and not much focused on monument building.

A fourth reason for Mu‘awiya versus ‘Abd al-Malik is that the period of the former was a relatively peaceful period during the establishment of the Umayyad rule in Greater Syria allowing time to focus on monument building. In fact, the entire period from Mu‘awiya’s death in 680 through the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik is “dominated by unceasing internecine strife between various factional groups” with peace finally restored in 692, at the end of ‘Abd al-Malik reign.

This article examines and analyzes the incorporation of spolia in multiple early Islamic seventh-century monuments within this revisionist framework of contemporary scholarship. Mu‘awiya had a vision of Jerusalem as his new royal Umayyad capital that included historical consciousness and the value both of using the detritus of the relevant previous cultures of the People of the Book and of consciously displaying them in the open for all to witness.

**Spolia in Early Islamic Jerusalem (638–80 CE)**

While there are exceptions in the Medieval Islamic context, the use of spolia in early seventh-century Islamic Jerusalem (Bayt al-Maqdis) has been attributed mainly to the convenience of material ruins from nearby sites or to historic triumphalism. Offered here are some preliminary comments on the common usages of spolia for clear utilitarian purposes; this is followed by select situations of spolia usage beyond the utilitarian in seventh-century Umayyad monuments of Bayt al-Maqdis (known as al-Haram al-Sharif during and after the Mamluk period). Some reflect choices based on aesthetic value of the selected spolia, displaying a historic consciousness of their value specific to a particular culture or religion and their purposeful display, often reflecting cultural equivalency rather than the triumphalism of imperial conquest. The selection here of spolia usage is limited to those examples that can be reasonably attributed to the seventh century.

**Utilitarian Usage**

Indeed, there are many instances of specific utilitarian usage and the archaeological evidence for this requires examination. What the early Umayyad builders found when they arrived in the city in 636 CE was a site that had been attacked and previously utilized as a stone quarry for later monumental construction. This first occurred
after the Roman destruction of the Herodian temple. The city witnessed further
destruction by the Persians in 614 CE but the degree of destruction has recently been
archaeologically proven not as great as previously recorded in Christian texts. The
city was reconquered for Byzantium in 630 CE, seven years prior to the Umayyad
conquest.24 In fact, evidence from a Roman period structure indicates that the building
featured spolia from the Hasmonean period (140–37 BCE) – so a long-established
practice in Jerusalem. That same archaeological evidence also points to how the
seventh-century Umayyad builders utilized the materials from destroyed buildings of
previous cultures.25

Up until recently there has been no evidence of methodological specificity employed
by the early Umayyad builders of Jerusalem in their usage of spolia. The Givati Parking
Lot excavation (in Silwan) provides abundant elucidating evidence of spolia and
usage during the Byzantine–early-Islamic transition in one area of Jerusalem south of
the Haram sanctuary near the “City of David” excavations. Notable are the remains of
the paved Roman, later Byzantine, street – a main thoroughfare and pilgrimage route
of the Byzantine city that led from the Byzantine church at the Pool of Siloam in the
south, northward toward the major churches and Christian religious center of the city,
and nearby the abandoned temple sanctuary and a Byzantine administrative structure
to its east.26

The administrative building experienced two periods of destruction – one in 614
CE and one later above the street level in the second half of the seventh century. In this
area, there were large amounts of fragments of marble (2,400 to be exact) and other
materials but not larger intact pieces.27 That area was converted into an industrial zone
in the early Islamic period after 636 CE and abandoned by the Umayyads before the
beginning of the Abbasid period in 750 CE. The larger more intact pieces of marble
and decorative pieces that were already spolia in reuse from the second Byzantine
period structure were no doubt employed in the monuments of the new Muslim
sanctuary just to the north. There was a limestone kiln to produce lime for plaster and
there were marble finds of small pieces of wall veneers and mainly pieces of opus
sectile (small pieces of cut colored stone) flooring. The selective reuse of the small
Byzantine marble fragments found in the Islamic layers was for the plaster needed
in building the new Islamic monuments of the sanctuary and the “palace” complex
south of the Haram.28 Thus, the practice to reuse marble from older sites rather than
the importation of new was a well-established practice both in the local region and the
Mediterranean in general.29

The Muslim prohibition against public display of Christian crosses and other icons
came only in the Abbasid period; in the Umayyad period there was no such dictate
against Christian symbolism on monuments of the city. The archaeological evidence
then points to “pragmatic recycling” with no ideological motivation. In fact, there was
no definite break between the Byzantine to early Islamic period but rather a slow and
gradual process of transition and a period characterized by great diversity.30

This area of the city south of the sanctuary went from being a principal street,
pilgrimage, and public area of the city in the Byzantine period to an industrial area in
the early Islamic Umayyad period. Also, parts of the colonnaded city streets in the city were narrowed accommodating a new lifestyle characterized by increased industrial activity for the massive, monumental construction nearby and characteristic of the newly developing Islamic city.\(^3\)

The Umayyad palace complex and administrative buildings south of the sanctuary initiated by Mu‘awiya and continued but left unfinished by his Umayyad successors includes reused columns from earlier buildings to strengthen foundations.\(^3\) Ben-Dov documented the use of columns as fortifying elements in his discovery of “no less than five different methods of construction” in the palace foundations.\(^3\) This technique has more recently been found in the lower palace structure Building II, the southwestern part of the building complex south of the Haram.\(^4\) Since the structures begun in the seventh century were left incomplete in the eighth century, there is no additional incorporation of spolia for display.\(^5\)

Another exemplifying utilitarian usage of spolia exists whose original context is completely lost, and whose decorative motifs are not displayed. This is a flat piece of marble used as a step in the stairs leading down to the cave under the rock in the Dome of the Rock. This is a reused piece of marble of convenient size from the Byzantine period installed upside down, the decorative portion face-down and thus unseen.\(^6\) This is a clear case of use of material as an available quarry source from a nearby site; there may be many more similarly used fragments not yet discovered, documented, and recorded.

Additionally, there are many decorative Byzantine and later marble fragments stored in the Islamic Museum courtyard and several additional fragments outside of al-Aqsa Library located in the unfinished Crusader structure between the mosque and the museum. Additionally, scattered throughout the platform are columns of indeterminate origin and period that today appear organized for display. There is no clear period of usage of these columns on the site, or perhaps they were never used in later construction and just stored for future consumption – a common practice at the site up to today.\(^7\)

**Spolia on Display in Bayt al-Maqdis (al-Haram al-Sharif)**

Multiple secondary seventh-century monuments of Jerusalem’s early Umayyad sanctuary display spolia with a specific message for public consumption. One is the renovated or rebuilt Byzantine Golden Gate (first built for Heraclius in 630 CE), in the eastern city wall, which was the main formal entrance to the city in the seventh century. It was also the ceremonial entrance to the courtyard of the seventh-century mosque of the city and was one of the ceremonial entrances to the Dome of the Rock. A second is the rebuilt southern sanctuary entrance or the Double Gate in the city wall that was one of three southern entrances to the sanctuary and the Dome of the Rock.\(^8\) A third example are the eastern and central western triumphal mawazin or arcades leading up from the Triple Gate and Golden Gate, first to the Qubbat al-Silsila, then to the Dome of the Rock on the east and, from the western sanctuary entrances, to the Dome of the Rock.
Three major monuments also incorporate substantial quantities of message-laden spolia. The first is the initial mosque of the city or the Mosque of Mu'awiyah (638–60 CE) in the southeastern corner of the sanctuary. The second is the Qubbat al-Silsila or the Dome of the Chain (seventh century). The third – the crowning glory of the sanctuary – is the Qubbat al-Sakhra or the Dome of the Rock (640–691/92 CE).

Golden Gate

Golden Gate was the main ceremonial entrance to the city of Bayt al-Maqdis. The gate is a rebuilt Byzantine gate, built for Heraclius’s triumphal reentry to Jerusalem with the relic of the Holy Cross in 630 CE, recaptured from the Sasanians at their capital of Ctesiphon, on the Tigris river. In fact, Mu'awiyah’s father witnessed the cross’s return by Heraclius while he was at his farm south of Amman prior to the conquest of 634. There are also Christian biblical associations of Golden Gate with the temple and Mary’s residence there.

The gate is decorated with a gloss of Umayyad veneer on both the exterior eastern and western facades. The western exterior facade was capped by the veneer of Umayyad decor with a Byzantine column topped by a Corinthian capital in between the two arched openings. In other words, architecturally the Byzantine substructure was intended to be viewed as supporting the new Umayyad function of the gate. Additionally, the rebuilt interior flat domes or sail vaults from the Umayyad period (the latest rebuilding during the Ottoman period) of the Golden Gate are supported by Byzantine columns and the interior walls are decorated with pilasters capped by Corinthian capitals. The latter were possibly part of the original Byzantine construction but the columns with their varying capitals supporting the domes date from the period of rebuilding. The complete visual message was not to broadcast conquest but rather to suggest cultural equivalency and integration with Umayyad rule with clearly stated respect for the previous culture.

Thus, the purpose here is both aesthetic and ideological, combining the new Umayyad decorative veneer with the Byzantine royal structure, and is the quiet expression of new rule but also inclusion of and respect for the previous culture. The choice was made by the Umayyad builders to emphasize equally both the Byzantine Christian original construction and the new Umayyad decorative vocabulary of decor. Thus, there is a strong Christian association with this main entrance into the city as well as the new Umayyad sovereign message of welcome to important visitors to the city at the time. Though there are numerous ties of this eastern gate with the Jewish temple, they are not reflected clearly in what currently remains of the building but rather are embedded in Marian Christian associations.

The gate also was the royal ceremonial entrance to the courtyard of the seventh-century Umayyad mosque of Mu‘awiyah in the southeastern corner of the sanctuary – the first mosque in the city. An arcade or riwaq connects the southern entrance of the Golden Gate with the undecorated northern entrance of the mosque. This entrance to the mosque was probably reserved for ceremonial visits, notably first for the investiture of Mu‘awiyah as the first Amir al-Mu’minin in 661 CE. The message
in this instance is the linkage of Byzantine rule to the new sovereign Umayyad rule under Islam.

The Double Gate

The Double Gate was originally a Herodian gate located in the south wall of the archaeological precinct of the temple and is a gate rebuilt in the Umayyad seventh century under Mu‘awiya as an entrance from the southern Muslim, Christian, and Jewish residential districts leading to the central part of the sanctuary and the Dome of the Rock. That it is an Umayyad rebuilding is made clear by the gloss of Umayyad decoration on the double arches of the exterior facade – the same decor that appears on both facades of the Golden Gate. A Roman inscription from the period of Antoninus Pius (when Jerusalem was Aelia Capitolina) is also included, placed upside down above the original Herodian lintel – left intact – of the entrance signifying a rejection or a negative response to the Roman destruction of the temple. That the remains of the earlier Herodian gate are built into the new Umayyad gate communicates to Jewish visitors to the sanctuary a respect for Judaism and the temple previously on the site.

On the interior just as one enters the gate, Byzantine columns of undetermined origin and clearly in reuse support the newly rebuilt gate leading up to the archaeological precinct in the direction of the Dome of the Rock. While they serve a completely practical function of support, their meaning goes far beyond their function. Though often interpreted as historic triumphalism, the fact that they were inside the gate suggests not a message of conquest but rather of quiet welcome to all who entered, and to suggest cultural equivalency with Umayyad rule and respect for the previous government and culture. Just beyond the columns are the series of pendentives, triangular corners supporting flat domes or sail vaults rebuilt using Herodian precedents.

Mosque of Mu‘awiya (al-Masjid al-Qadim – the Old Mosque)

As previously mentioned, the Golden Gate afforded ceremonial entrance to the multi-arched north entrance to the first mosque of the city, the Mosque of Mu‘awiya (638–60 CE). There is no use of spolia on the exterior north entrance of the mosque, only in the interior of the building. The use of monumental Herodian stones in a secondary context creates the pier support structure for the Mosque of Mu‘awiya – later known erroneously in European/American scholarship as Solomon’s Stables and used as a stable in the Crusader period. Additionally, the underground passageway originating in the sixth aisle of the mosque leading to the ruler’s palace just outside the sanctuary walls is also of the same large Herodian stones in reuse. They are used to construct an overly large, monumental passageway for the ruler, clearly created with Herodian temple period stones, perhaps from the stoa previously on the site. That there is no decoration is dictated by governing principles dominant in the period of Muhammad, the early followers, and the period of the Rashidun caliphs. The only other use of spolia in the mosque is in the mihrab in the center of the qibla southern wall. The mihrab is formed by a large decorated spolium as the left formative
base of the rudimentary flat arch and with additional pieces of white marble. The decorated element is a remnant of the Herodian period decor of the nearby Triple Gate/Hulda Gate, which provided a south mosque entrance linking it with the Judaic ruling past. The rest of the arch is composed of a series of white marble pieces clearly in reuse, salvaged from a destroyed local building to create the earliest surviving mihrab.

The mihrab is said to have been invented by Mu‘awiya to indicate the direction of Mecca and the usage here in Jerusalem is the first surviving example of such a marker. Flood defines the use of pieces of colored stone as commemorative markers of the places of prayer of the Prophet, pointing to that as the origin of the mihrab. Thus, this early and perhaps first official mihrab turns to the time of the Prophet as a source. One can further suggest that the creation of the mihrab also draws on the pre-Islamic religious past based on the use of standing stones in an iconic context. Thus, this use of spolia is purely in an Islamic context, its first usage with an entirely Islamic and new interpretation in Jerusalem.

The reuse of Herodian materials in the mosque and private royal passageway addresses the textual reference to the temple, and the Herodian enclosure as placed on the southeastern wall of the sanctuary can be yet another referent to the temple. It is notable that there are no uses of specifically recognizable Byzantine period spolia in the mosque building. Thus, usage can be viewed both as practical, serving a supporting construction function for the large space, and ideological in that the use of these materials in this particular space connects the physical early Islamic monument only to the Jewish temple. With no exterior reminders of earlier cultures on the northern formal entrance, the message was communicated internally to Muslim practitioners who frequented the mosque that the building was tied to the temple. Since Mu‘awiya was installed as Commander of the Faithful in this mosque, one can postulate that the destroyed temple, which was in the southeastern wall of the sanctuary, was integrated into the Umayyad royal context coming under the sovereignty of Islam and the Umayyads.

**Triple Gate**

Access to the mosque from the south was through the undecorated Triple Gate, a rebuilt Herodian gate placed in the south wall just west of, and attached to, the mosque; by turning right it led directly to the entrance to the mosque for Muslims. At the time, the “faithful” were the *ahl al-kitab* – Muslims, Jews, and Christians. The passageways of the Triple Gate additionally led straight to the north for Jews and Christians to access the sanctuary from their residential quarters south of the enclosure.

**Eastern and Central Western Mawazin or Scales (Two of the Current Eight Arcades)**

As indicated by the previous examples, the choice of spolia based on historic time period could also communicate a specific message by that usage. Another good example is the mizan or scale/balance on the eastern side of the upper platform. One can safely propose here that only the base piers supporting the upper present arcade date to the Early Umayyad seventh century during the reign of Mu‘awiya. The upper
arches date from a much later period, the original construction of which is unknown and is not considered in this examination.\textsuperscript{58}

The supporting piers are of very large Herodian stones in reuse and are crowned by a cornice. Since Herodian stones were used only in the early Umayyad period in the sanctuary, this confirms an early date for this mizan. Since the supporting Herodian stones are independent of the platform and begin at ground level not at upper platform level, the structure was probably originally free standing and later integrated into the platform. This indicates that the platform in that area dates from a later time and the mizan afforded access to the uneven, gradually sloping terrain defined by the original exposed topography. Additionally, there was no need for a staircase at the time of initial construction.\textsuperscript{59} This also demonstrates that columns in reuse were added later after the platform was built.

The central western mizan leading directly from the western sanctuary entrances leads directly to the west entrance of the Dome of the Rock. The pier structure also is comprised of Herodian period stones in reuse. The north column of the central arcade contains a dated inscription documenting an Abbasid period restoration dated 950–52 CE by Ahmad ibn Abu Karasa, indicating that it existed in an earlier period in a different form.\textsuperscript{60} It is also located at the top of the current stairs and was the limit of the upper platform in the Abbasid period.

The east and west central mawazin are often collectively discussed with the other six mawazin leading up to the platform, and in scholarship have been considered as constructed later. The southeastern mizan dated to the Fatimid period with a later Ayyubid restoration shares one similarity with the eastern one. The Fatimid period piers were also independent of the platform, which confirms a later date for this part of the platform to the Ayyubid period, with the addition of the arcade between the piers at that time.

Another issue requiring discussion is that if only the piers are part of the original construction of the eastern and west central mawazin, what was between the piers at the time of initial construction? This raises the issue of the use of the word mizan or collectively mawazin for the eight structures today located around the upper platform. The word means scale or balance and it is between the piers “because on the day of Judgment the scales for the weighing of character will be suspended here!”\textsuperscript{61} The Qur’an is the initial source of this definition and two of relevance follow: “We shall set up the scales of justice for the Day of Judgment, so that not a soul will be dealt with unjustly” (Sura 21: \textit{Anbiya’}– The Prophets) and “Then, he whose Balance (of good deeds) will be (found) heavy, will be in a life of good pleasure and satisfaction” (Sura 101: \textit{al-Qari’a} – The Day of Noise and Clamor). From the above analysis, it is possible to posit that there may not have been anything at all between the piers, awaiting the scale to appear on the Day of Judgment. Short of any further definitive evidence, the most that we can say is that we have no idea what was originally between the piers, so the question remains open.\textsuperscript{62}

The exclusive use of Herodian stones in the eastern and west central pier construction parallels their usage in the mosque piers, a message of respect and
inclusion of the Judaic past as part of the newly acquired sacred precinct. These piers were strategically located on the path directly from the east and west entrance to the sanctuary and directly on the path of one of the main approaches to the Dome of the Rock from the Triple Gate for those Christians and Jews residing south of the sanctuary. It thus could also represent Islamic sovereignty and reacquisition and resanctification of the site from the Romans and their destruction of the temple as well as the later Byzantine Empire.\(^6^3\)

**Dome of the Chain (Qubbat al-Silsila)**

Proceeding directly west from the eastern mizan or piers, one encounters the Dome of the Chain also dated by most to the seventh century but by this author to the period of Mu‘awiya rather than ‘Abd al-Malik (figure 2).\(^6^4\) The small domed building displays prominent usage of spolia dating from its period of construction and intended for viewing by visitors to the site.

The two rows of columns – eleven on the outside and six on the inside – and their capitals in reuse are spolia of multiple types of stone and marble and similarly lack clarity of their geographic origins from Byzantine to Coptic Christian. The columns are not the same thickness of marble, nor are the capitals of uniform style. The columns clearly serve a practical purpose in their reuse but also are on display for their beauty. One column, however, definitely came from a Christian structure as evidenced in the vertical remnants of a cross – the horizontal part of the cross has been removed, perhaps dating to the Abbasid period restorations at the site when all crosses were removed from Christian buildings in the city (figure 3).\(^6^5\)

The early structure had no mihrab, at least not a niche defined as an indicator of the direction of prayer to Mecca, but probably had an arched niche or space implied by a structure having the unusual number of eleven sides. Also, an eleven-sided building prompts questions as to the role and original function of the structure; many have speculated in the past as to the function of the building placed in the exact middle of the sanctuary.\(^6^6\) Given the building’s prominent placement, it must have had a ritual function, possibly related to the Dome of the Rock just to the east.

It is possible that this space would have been used by the earliest Umayyad ruler

---

\(^{6^3}\) The contribution of the Judaic past as part of the newly acquired sacred precinct.

\(^{6^4}\) The exact period dating from the construction of the Dome of the Chain.

\(^{6^5}\) The one column which clearly came from a Christian structure.

\(^{6^6}\) The role and original function of the eleven-sided building.
to dispense alms or funds – a function recorded in histories attributed to the later caliph Sulayman ibn ʿAbd al-Malik. This would also explain the lack of need for a separate building serving as a treasury comparable to the one in the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Damascus. It is also proposed as the site where the oath to accession was taken by early Umayyad rulers.

This small eleven-sided building with no structural closing of the lower walls sits extremely and almost uncomfortably close to the eastern entrance of the Dome of the Rock. There exists some contemporary textual evidence that there were two other buildings on the site at the time of its creation and that they were located at the edge of the rock. This may also be an indicator that there was no upper platform at the time of the two earliest buildings and that all would have proceeded up over the unlevveled natural topography of the site from the eastern mizan up to the Dome of the Chain. Also, it is clear that one should pass through the Dome of the Chain prior to entry to the Dome of the Rock from the east. Since all entrances from the east seem to have a formal ceremonial purpose, perhaps this structure was restricted for usage by the royal figure coming from either his palace or mosque located just to the southeast prior to entry into the Dome of the Rock.\(^{67}\)

Since we are positing a new function for the Dome of the Chain, it is essential to present validation for our thesis. A plausible royal Umayyad function is proposed that includes its Muslim relationship to the dispensing of Davidian justice as the Mihrab Dawud of the Qurʾan and as one of the maharib of Solomon and its ties to justice dispensation. A more eschatological theory related to the End of Days from its period of construction up through the Ottoman period is a well-developed thesis in past scholarship. Also proposed is its possible role later as the site for taking the oath of caliphal authority or bayʿa, as a prayer space, and as a space for the dispensation of funds (treasury).\(^{68}\) For the latter two proposed functions, there is not sufficient supporting evidence for any Umayyad ruler except possibly Sulayman, son of ʿAbd

[ 42 ] Spolia – A Conscious Display of History | Beatrice St. Laurent

---

Figure 3. Dome of the Chain, southeastern column of the interior arcade. The vertical remnant of a cross is visible in the middle of the photograph, 2016. Photo by author.
al-Malik. In fact there is evidence that ‘Abd al-Malik took the oath in the Mosque of Mu‘awiya.\(^{69}\)

The thesis presented here is that Mu‘awiya is responsible for the construction of the Dome of the Chain, probably under construction prior to his 660 CE investiture as Amir al-Mu‘minin in the mosque in the southeastern corner. Not yet explored in previous scholarship is its possible connection to the then recently conquered Sasanians, beginning with the Rashidun caliphate’s first battle of expansion into Sasanian territory at the 633 CE Battle of the Chains or Salasil in Kazima (Kuwait today).

By 637 CE, the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon had fallen. From the roof or ceiling of the throne room or \emph{iwan} of the Palace of Ctesiphon hung a royal chain holding the king’s crown which was so heavy that it was suspended with a chain and hung over the head of the royal figure enthroned below. That kingship but not the king was divinely ordained is also relevant to this argument. That crown was captured in the sack of Ctesiphon and was sent to Jerusalem. According to one tradition, it hung in the Dome of the Rock during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik.\(^{70}\) If it arrived in Jerusalem after the sack of Ctesiphon, where was it during the intervening years? And did this chain with the crown hang elsewhere prior to the period of ‘Abd al-Malik?

There are documented stories told by the descendants of the Persians who came to Yemen c. 570 CE, possibly semi-legendary tales, that were of interest to Mu‘awiya who consulted with the storytellers or relaters of traditions, \emph{qussas}. Among them were tales concerned with the Throne of Solomon whose powers included harnessing the \emph{jinn} (powerful spirits) to construct buildings. The throne was decorated with vegetation made of gold and was encrusted with rubies and emeralds. Mu‘awiya’s meetings with several of these relaters of tradition linked one of Solomon’s attributes to the pursuit of justice. Solomon in Sura 34:12–13 is known to have had more than one mihhrab in the temple in Jerusalem. A mihhrab in this context is defined in early Islamic history as a sanctuary space for the ruler to pray and also defined as the palace Ghumdan in San‘a’ of the pre-Arabian kings of south Arabia (Yemen).\(^{71}\) Solomon was also linked to the Persian king Jamshid who had a jewel-encrusted throne that was flown by jinn.\(^{72}\)

Thus, Mu‘awiya’s construction in the area cleared by the jinn (mentioned by Christian sources in this time) of a small eleven-sided structure on the edge of the bedrock was a jewel-encrusted structure decorated with mosaics and embellished by the spolia of the past. It could be interpreted as a mihhrab or sanctuary space reserved for the ruler. It would have included a throne in the niche of the south side of the Dome of the Chain reflecting Solomon’s throne. A chain \emph{sil}sila would have been suspended over his head in a niche that represented both Davidian and Solomonic justice but also was tied to the divine kingship of the Sasanian kings and the Rashidun first conquest of the Sasanian Empire at the Battle of Salasil. Was the Sasanian crown attached to that chain and suspended above Mu‘awiya’s head as the unifier of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires under Umayyad sovereignty?\(^{73}\)

Mu‘awiya’s role at the time would have been to serve as the Umayyad arbiter of justice in a place outside of his mosque, where people of all denominations – those “of
the Book and beyond” – would have met with him. Since this structure would have been built first or contemporaneously with the Dome of the Rock, he was also able to supervise and control the construction of the Dome of the Rock, which no doubt was left incomplete at his death in 680 CE.

Such a chain with a seemingly emblematic crown is found in the later 735–44 CE royal audience hall of Umayyad Khirbat al-Mafjar in Jericho: a stone chain with a pendant standing in for the crown hung in a centrally placed wall niche where the royal figure was said to have been “enthroned.” This was a symbolic representation of the gold crown suspended from the roof of the Sasanian royal palace. The chain carved from a single stone today is in the Rockefeller Museum (Palestine Archaeological Museum) in Jerusalem. In fact, much of the royal imagery at the later Umayyad Palace in Jericho clearly reflects Sasanian royal dress and paraphernalia. It is proposed here that the later representation in Jericho began with the earliest Umayyad ruler Mu'awiya in the rituals associated with the Dome of the Chain.

_The Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al-Sakhra) and Its Precinct Entrance Gates_

The Dome of the Rock appears just beside the Dome of the Chain (figure 2), so close as to inhibit entrance, confirming that the latter’s placement was at the edge of the bedrock at a time when there was no upper platform. Approaching from the east, from either the official and ceremonial Golden Gate or Triple Gate, and passing through the eastern mizan, all but necessitated passing through the Dome of the Chain, restricting access to enter the Dome of the Rock from the east. One could posit that during the early Umayyad period this entrance was reserved for the ruler.

Another entrance to the site from the south located west of the Triple Gate is the Double Gate, one of the main entrances aligning with the Dome of the Rock and was probably the formal entrance for the southern residential districts – Muslim, Christian, and Jewish – leading directly to the Dome. At the time, there was no al-Aqsa Mosque and probably only rough terrain of the exposed topography led up to the Dome. It is known that, at the time, there were at least two multi-arched entrances (parallel to the Triple Gate in the south) to the sanctuary from the north leading directly to the now platformed area north of the Dome. The western multiple entrances, mostly rebuilt earlier ones, are the least emphasized entrances to the sanctuary for the primarily Christian population residing in the western area outside of the sanctuary. This plethora of entrances all leading to the Dome suggests that the Dome of the Rock was the primary focus of attention for visitors to the sanctuary in the seventh century and not the mosque located in the southeast corner.

_The Building_

As mentioned earlier, this article emphasizes subjects not explored before, or challenges previous scholarship, on the Dome of the Rock regarding this early Umayyad period begun well before 660 CE by Mu'awiya, as opposed to 'Abd al-Malik, and continuing up through his death in 680 CE (figure 1). Focus will be specifically on areas of
the building that utilized spolia: the building’s foundation, exterior and interior walls of the octagon, the interior columns, the drum of the dome and its wooden support structure – areas that are most assuredly dated to the initial construction of the building. Although it is apparent that there were probably no porches sheltering the four entrances, they will be briefly mentioned. The dome itself will not be considered as it was initially built by ‘Abd al-Malik as per the 691 CE Kufic inscription and was replaced after a collapse in 1017 CE, also dated by inscription. Thus, discussion will be limited to the lower areas of the building up to the top of the dome drum.

The walls of the octagonal arcade sit on a combination of bedrock and large stones that can be considered spolia of found materials on the site (figure 4). These large stones are placed somewhat randomly to create the original foundational stabilization for the building, with filler material of smaller stones. In the 1960’s renovation, these foundations were exposed in efforts to strengthen structural support with new and inappropriate materials. The interior structure of columns and piers sit on a similar base of smaller stones. In other words, there is no evidence of a systematic method of foundational construction but rather a random use of available materials. Similar construction methods exist in earlier buildings of Mu’awiya in Tiberias, in a mosque there and in his palace and mosque of Sinnabra, confirming an earlier attribution of the Dome of the Rock to Mu’awiya.78

The lower walls of the octagon up to the windows are of large roughly hewn stones of varying sizes characteristic of the Umayyad seventh-century construction elsewhere on the site including in the rebuilt walls in the sanctuary (figure 5).79 Much of this stone was no doubt readily available for reuse from the nearby area either directly within the sanctuary or just to

Figure 4. Dome of the Rock; view of the trench dug along the northeast in 1961 showing large stones in reuse. Courtesy of Awqaf Archives no. 1869.

Figure 5. Dome of the Rock interior southwestern lower facade. Typical Umayyad period stone construction was revealed when marble was removed before being mortared again in place in 2007. Photo by author.
the south beyond the walls. There is no mortar between the stones suggesting that there was initially an intention to cover those walls with a revetment or facing. Exposure of part of the southwestern facade in an early twentieth century photograph revealed that the wall was clearly composed of stones in reuse (figure 6). Thus, some of the stones used in the lower wall construction should be considered as spolia in reuse, utilized for purely practical reasons and not meant for exposure. The main part of the building does use newly hewn stones easily identifiable as of typical Umayyad character.⁸⁰

Figure 6. Dome of the Rock (detail of figure 1; photo by Père Raphaël Savignac, 1907–9. Courtesy of École Biblique, no. 06838-657). Note particularly the lower part of the easternmost panel of southwest facade (at right) where the marble revetment has been removed to reveal spolia in reuse. The two adjacent panels also contain spolia in reuse but lack visual clarity in the image.

Large marble panels, spolia from earlier buildings in the city, were used to cover the lower section of all exterior octagonal facades of the Dome of the Rock (figure 1).⁸¹ The upper levels of the exterior at the window level of the octagon and on the drum were known to have been covered with mosaics requiring the use of smaller stones for wall construction but not necessarily identifiable as spolia (figure 7). One can speculate that the larger panels of marble discussed earlier from the site of the main Byzantine street and other ruins elsewhere from the Persian invasion of 614 CE
were the bountiful source of the necessary marble panels for the building’s exterior and interior revetment.

Figure 7. Exterior of the Dome of the Rock northwest facade, in A. H. S. Peter Megaw, “Qubbat As Sakhra (The Dome of the Rock),” unpublished report, 1946, Plate IV.

The purpose of using marble is both practical, aesthetic, and ideological. The practical motivation would have been twofold: first, that mosaics would have been easily destroyed at that lower level and marble was more durable, and, second, that the marble was readily available. The use of marble can be ideologically related to connections of the Dome of the Rock to the exterior of the Jewish Temple which was said to have been bejeweled and covered with marble as well as referencing the Yemeni or south Arabian pre-Islamic palace of the Sabian kings said to be of multicolored marble with four entrances from the cardinal points.  

Additionally, an ideological rationale is proposed for a specific and important marble spolium incorporated in the northeast facade of the Dome of the Rock (figure 8). Prominently and centrally placed at the base of the marble revetment in the facade’s central panel is a rather large remnant from a Byzantine church chancel screen. Earlier photographs indicate that it is the entire chancel screen, including its bottom-framing border, with later level/s of the platform encasing the panel. Prior interpretations implied that such usage was disrespectful to the previous culture. In fact, the spolium was selected based on aesthetic, religious and ideological considerations, showing
a respect for Byzantine Christian culture with further intentionality of purposeful display of an historic object in a new context. One can go even further in suggesting the inclusion of a Christian work was intended to clearly display to a visiting Christian public an implicit respect for and inclusion of Christianity in the function of the Dome of the Rock. Later ideological codification of Islamic law under ‘Abd al-Malik would no doubt have dictated a very different interpretation of triumphalism with such a display.83

It is very questionable that the Dome’s eastern and western porches existed in their current state. It has been suggested by many including Creswell, Grabar, and Rosen-Ayalon that all four entrances were contemporary to the period of construction, but there is sufficient evidence to question their existence in the seventh century. Photographs from the 1960s restoration of the Dome demonstrate that the porches were inserted in earlier construction. There will be brief commentary considering the porches after the removal of the late Ottoman additions. Each of the entrances include columns of a single style and may or may not be spolia in reuse from other buildings. They could be new columns that were crafted as part of a complete colonnade intended to connect all of the porches.84 Until there is more conclusive archaeological evidence, the dating of the porches remains unresolved.

The Dome of the Rock also utilizes wooden beams, at least some of which are in reuse, that support the dome, though it is difficult to ascertain whether they are used in a purely utilitarian sense or if they were intended to be visible (figure 9). These beams are all decorated and probably at least some originally came from the ruins of local churches destroyed in the earlier seventh-century Persian invasion. Since there would have been continuity of crafts people in Jerusalem during this period, some may have been produced specifically for the Dome. They were exposed, photographed, and removed in the 1961 renovation of the Dome of the Rock under Egyptian technical supervision and do not survive.85

These beams were used as the main supports of the dome itself and sit with stones in between them on the circular stone drum. From the multitude of images that survive in the Awqaf Archives in Jerusalem, one can speculate that all beams had carved decoration and that the carved part was systematically facing downward. Not only that, but great care was also given to the inclusion of entire design units, not cutting them off in the middle or concealing them by embedding them in the stonework. From

Figure 8. Dome of the Rock northeastern facade, 2016. Photo by author.
this, one can propose that they were intended to be seen from below and were thus exposed to public view (figure 10), and that their function was possibly to be the integration of recognizable elements of Christian churches that would have been placed for optimum visibility to co-religionist visitors and worshippers at the site.86

The same purpose in spolia usage is reflected on the interior of the building (figure 11) as well as a revetment of marble at the lower level of the octagon. Since there have been many restorations throughout the history of the structure, it is difficult to tell if any of the original marble usage remains.87 In addition to the interior wall revetment of marble, there are columns in reuse filling the interior space of the two ambulatories, the interior row surrounding the rock. The twenty-eight columns – sixteen in the outer and twelve in the inner arcades in the Dome of the Rock – all with Byzantine capitals, are not of uniform size in either width or height and so obviously are from different buildings, possibly Christian churches damaged or destroyed in the Persian invasion of Jerusalem.88 These columns, supported on different-sized bases, surround the object of Muslim reverence at the site – the Rock – a position of greatest importance.

That the Rock has a specific relationship to Mount Moriah suggests an association with Judaism and the Temple. That columns from Christian monuments surround the

Figure 9. Dome of the Rock, showing supporting dome beams before removal and replacement in 1964. Courtesy of Awqaf Archives 1674, al-Haram al-Sharif.

Figure 10. Dome of the Rock in 1964. Supporting beam of the dome. Courtesy of Awqaf Archives 1687, al-Haram al-Sharif.
Rock incorporates a message of Christian inclusivity. If the beams are solely from Christian churches, then the message was also a message of inclusivity of Christianity in a new Muslim context. This also implies that the entire community of believers, the *ahl al-kitab* governed by the Amir al-Mu’minin, Mu’awiya, were intended to have visitation privileges to the Dome in this period. Thus, we see practical, aesthetic, and ideological usage of spolia to communicate this message to a Muslim, Jewish, and Christian public allowed access to the site in the seventh century.  

Figure 11. Dome of the Rock interior. Photo by Père Raphaël Savignac, 1905. Courtesy of École Biblique, no. 04715-1629.

A further issue in this discussion of the use of spolia is what dictated the choices of utilizing exterior decoration of the building to define the symbology of this new structure. First, why does this building not parallel the origins of its form and decoration as derived from the Byzantine church tradition and so defined in most previous scholarship. First, no Byzantine building of similar form had exterior decoration intentionally employed for visibility. Nor did the typical octagonal church have more than one entrance. Those issues were never addressed in previous scholarship. However, two other building types besides the Byzantine octagonal church have been proposed as inspirational and derivative for the Dome of the Rock. It is the choice of these influences that drives a new formal definition of the Dome of the Rock as a truly innovative monument.
Multiple symbolic reasons could have been the motivating factors for the use of exterior decoration on the Dome. This includes that the building’s lower area was tied to the symbology of the Jewish Temple, whose exterior was said to be colorful and whose lower area was also said to be of marble. That decor included marble resembling waves at its lower level and the facade colorfully “bejeweled” at the upper level. Another marble and colorfully decorated building type came with the Muslims from south Arabia. Living only in historical memory with its ruins attached to the Great Mosque of the city – supposedly by command of the Prophet – was the pre-Islamic Sabian (the kingdom of Saba’) palace of the kings in San’a’– Ghumdan. Ghumdan had a multicolored stone or marble exterior with four entrances from the cardinal points. This palace type was called a mihrab or sanctuary space in Sabian, and significantly defines a space between the original stones of pre-Islamic worship on the interior of the Great Mosque as reserved for the ruler.

Supporting this architectural past as the source for the Dome of the Rock is the fact that the Qur’an includes multiple references to mihrabs – those of David, of the multiple maharib of Solomon, and of Mary who lived in a mihrab in the temple for twelve years and was visited there by Zakariyya. The parallels are clear. Thus, the building stands as the physical embodiment of a palatial mihrab or sanctuary displaying the inclusion of the three religions of the Book as well as linking pre-Islamic rule to the recent establishment of the sovereignty of Islam.

It also is inclusive of another people, the Sabians, as the Qur’an states: “Those who believe (in the Qur’an), and those who follow the Jewish (Scriptures) and the Christians and the Sabians – any who believe in God and the Last Day, and do righteous deeds, shall have their reward and is surely secure with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve” (Sura 2: al-Baqara, 62). At the time, the People of the Book would also have included the monotheistic Persian Zoroastrians. The Qur’an discusses the people of Saba’ or Saba whose capital was at San’a’ in the third century CE; the empire failed with the collapse of the major dam at Ma’rib in the sixth century. “There was, for Saba aforetime, a sign in their homeland – two gardens . . . a territory fair and happy . . . . But they turned away, and we sent against them the flood from the dams” (Surah 34: Saba [Mecca], 15–16). Are these then the Sabians that moved to Greater Syria and converted to Christianity? Is the subject to be explored that the Sabaeans and Sabians were originally the same people, but that their name was transformed in the early decades of the empire? The Himyarites succeeded the Sabians maintaining their capital in San‘a’. The ties to Mu‘awiya are in the mythologized mihrab palace of the Sabians’ Ghumdan and is recorded in a seventh century book on the history of the pre-Islamic Arab kings. A book by ‘Ubayd ibn Sharyah al-Jurhumi – a scholar and storyteller in Mu‘awiya’s court – on the history of the pre-Islamic Arab kings is presented as a dialogue between Mu‘awiya and ‘Ubayd.

Thus, the Dome of the Rock can be seen as combining the religious maharib or sanctuaries of David, Solomon, and Mary with the royal mihrab palace of the Sabians enshrined in the Dome of the Rock.
Conclusion

The multipurpose uses of spolia in the seventh-century monuments of Bayt al-Maqdis (later al-Haram al-Sharif) created between 638 CE and 680 CE include: the first instance of pragmatic use of locally available stone from ruins; the aesthetic selection of spolia for beauty and meaning in previous cultures; the use of spolia for ideological purposes to convey a variety of coded messages; and, finally, chosen with the intent to be prominently displayed as the legacy of a previous culture or cultures. Examples selected for discussion in this article are only those that can be reasonably and securely dated to the period of initial construction at the site during the period of Mu‘awiya.

Three of the major seventh-century monuments of the Bayt al-Maqdis sanctuary that clearly have exploited the use of ruins as a quarry are the Mosque of Mu‘awiya, the Dome of the Chain, and the Dome of the Rock. Their inclusion of spolia is evident in both exterior and interior usage for both practical and symbolic purposes. The secondary monuments using spolia are the major entry gates into the city during this period, the Golden Gate and the Double Gate, remainders from both the Byzantine and Herodian periods and rebuilt to continue to reflect those earlier periods. In their use of spolia referencing the religions of Judaism and Christianity, as well as Islam, I argue that these highly important monuments of the seventh century as a unit reflect the intentional ideological inclusion of Jews, Christians, and Muslims – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and the Sabians/Saebeans – on this most holy site of Islam. The referential inclusion of Sasanian, Byzantine, and Sabian royal references links the site to the Umayyad sovereignty of the sanctuary.

The spolia that consciously reference specific prior cultures and religions contain messages addressed to those who continue to be part of those social groups and are allowed to frequent the site. Displayed in this manner, spolia intentionally reflect the political and religious views acceptable and included under Islam and the earliest period of Sufyanid Umayyad rule, prior to its more restrictive sociopolitical transformation under later Marwanid Umayyad, and notably Abbasid rule.

The patron, planners, and builders of the earliest Islamic monumental architecture of Bayt al-Maqdis consciously incorporated historic spolia intended for prominent display in these new monuments as recognizable historic objects from earlier regional cultures and religions worthy of respect, inclusion, and preservation. Thus, the concept of a “Museum of Antiquities” was clearly voiced by Umayyad authority established in mid-seventh century Jerusalem, invoking an egalitarian relationship with earlier Jewish and Christian, Byzantine, Sasanian and Sabian monuments and proclaiming that message to a multicultural multireligious population of the city. Thus, the early Umayyad sanctuary of Jerusalem was a venue for the display of objects from past cultures, which truly conforms to the definition of an open-air museum.

Beatrice St. Laurent received her PhD in Islamic Art from Harvard University and is currently professor of art history at Bridgewater State University, MA, and fellow at the W.F. Albright Institute for Archaeological Research in Jerusalem. Her latest book

Endnotes
3 St. Laurent and Taşkömür, “Imperial Museum,” 18.
4 St. Laurent and Taşkömür, “Imperial Museum,” discuss the initial argument for the concept of open-air museum, 16.
8 Later examples from the Haram al-Sharif include the Crusader period spolia employed on the facade of the Nahawiyya, some of which was added in the late nineteenth-century Ottoman period; the same was included in the eastern mihrab of al-Aqsa Mosque. More distantly and later, the entrance to fifteenth-century Ottoman Yeşil Cami in the capital in Bursa includes two Byzantine columns; St. Laurent, “Yeşil Külliye,” unpublished paper, Harvard University, 1981.
12 Flood, “Medieval Trophy,” discusses the absence and begins a redefinition. Among others recently publishing is Hilal Aktur,

13 Particularly relevant for the approach taken in this article, see Paolo Liverani, “Reading Spolia in Late Antiquity and Contemporary Perception,” in Reuse Value: ‘Spolia’ and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherry Levine, ed. Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 33–51, quote at 35.
14 St. Laurent and Awwad, “Marwani Musalla.”
15 St. Laurent and Awwad, Capitalizing Jerusalem.
17 St. Laurent, “From Arabia to Bilad al-Sham.”
18 St. Laurent, “From Arabia to Bilad al-Sham.”
19 St. Laurent, “From Arabia to Bilad al-Sham.”
20 See St. Laurent and Awwad, Capitalizing Jerusalem for discussion of the expanded role played by Zoroastrianism in the founding monuments of the precinct.
26 Moran Hagbi and Joe Uziel have exposed another section of the street, which extended northward along the Western Wall. The church was destroyed in the Persian siege of the city in 614; Tchekanovets, “Recycling the Glory,” 218 fn. 5, 221.
27 Tchekhanovets, “Spoils and Spolia.” Earlier bibliography and views on the site are included in Tchekhanovets’s articles and Stoyanov’s more historical analysis of the Persian invasion and subsequent destruction. Tchekhanovets documents the reuse of Byzantine marble fragmentary larger panels in the later Byzantine administrative structure under discussion above street level.
32 The history of the “palace complex” is revisited in St. Laurent and Awwad, Capitalizing Jerusalem. See also Tchekhanovets, “Recycling the Glory.”
33 Ben-Dov, In the Shadow of the Temple; the illustration of this method can be seen in the
This excavation of the IAA (Israel Antiquities Authority), directed by Joe Uziel and Moran Hagbi, is published in a paper in Hebrew; Helena Roth, Moran Hagbe and Joanna Regev, “Construction Techniques of the Monumental Buildings in the Davidson Center in Light of the Renewed Excavations in the Foundations of Building II,” City of David: Studies of Ancient Jerusalem 12 (2017): 106–18. It discusses the dating of the foundations as Late Byzantine/Early Islamic with C14 dating of mortar and wood installations. The chapter on the “palaces” discusses the initiation of the palace district by Mu’awiyah; St. Laurent and Awwad, Capitalizing Jerusalem.

35 The use of columns to reinforce foundations or walls has been more frequently documented in Jerusalem during the later periods. See Mazar, The Walls of the Temple Mount; Burgoyne, “The East Wall.”

36 Isam Awwad indicated that this was discovered during a restoration of the steps.

37 The column capitals of Byzantine Umayyad (Abbasid and Fatimid) period that were removed from al-Aqsa Mosque in the 1938–42 mosque “restoration” are displayed to the east and west outside of the mosque in what can be termed an open-air museum context. See John Wilkinson, Column Capitals of the Haram al-Sharif (from 138 AD to 1118 AD) (Jerusalem: Administration of Waqfs and Islamic Affairs, 1987); Robert W. Hamilton, Structural History of the Aqsa Mosque: A Record of Archaeological Gleanings from the Repairs of 1938–1942 (Jerusalem: Oxford University Press for the Government of Palestine, 1949).

38 Though two additional entrances are built into the southern city wall atop the Herodian foundation, the Single Gate and the Triple Gate, neither display consciously placed spolia with an intended public message; St. Laurent and Awwad, Capitalizing Jerusalem.

39 St. Laurent and Awwad, “Marwani Musalla” and Capitalizing Jerusalem.

40 St. Laurent and Awwad, Capitalizing Jerusalem.


42 St. Laurent, “From Arabia to Bilad al-Sham.”

43 These associations are discussed in St. Laurent and Awwad, “Marwani Musalla,” and Capitalizing Jerusalem.

44 St. Laurent and Awwad, “Marwani Musalla.”


47 This phenomenon continues to later dynastic periods in the Islamic world. The entrance to fifteenth century Yeşil Cami or the Green Mosque in Bursa also shares the inclusion with their placement in a somewhat sheltered location (Beatrice St. Laurent, “Yeşil Külliye,” 9, unpublished paper, Harvard University, 1981), 9.


49 St. Laurent and Awwad, “Marwani Musalla” and Capitalizing Jerusalem.


51 Ben-Dov, In the Shadow, 137, 139.

52 This usage parallels the similar usage in the second Byzantine period administrative building in the Givati excavation; see Tchekhanovets, “Recycling the Glory,” 221–26.

There is a detailed section in the mosque chapter of our forthcoming book documenting the history of the mihrab, St. Laurent and Awwad, *Capitalizing Jerusalem.*

In “Marwani Musallāh,” and *Capitalizing Jerusalem,* St. Laurent and Awwad discuss more completely the belief that the Temple stood in the southeastern corner.

St. Laurent, “From Arabia to Bilad al-Sham,” 153–86, discusses in greater detail the role of Mu‘awiyah as Amir al-Mu‘minin and never referred to as caliph. The gate does not incorporate earlier spolia so it is not discussed further in this article.

The word mawazin is often translated as arcades but the word for arcade in a mosque is a *riwaq* and is continuous and covered, providing shelter. For a brief description of the arcades, see Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, *The Early Islamic Monuments of the Haram al-Sharif: An Iconographic Study* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1989), 30–32. See also St. Laurent and Awwad, “Marwani Musalla” for a discussion of the *riwaq.*

Other mawazin are safely dated later and built atop the platform. There were no other arcades on the south side at the time; there are two other Umayyad period arcades, the central western and southern ones. There is also evidence that there was perhaps no platform at that time in the southern area; St. Laurent and Awwad, *Capitalizing Jerusalem.*

The entire eastern area of the platform is constructed over buildings of unknown date and function.


This subject is more completely explored in St. Laurent and Awwad, *Capitalizing Jerusalem.*

St. Laurent and Awwad, *Capitalizing Jerusalem.*

Heba Mostafà, “From the Dome of the Chain to the Mihrab Da‘ud: The Transformation of an Umayyad Commemorative site at the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem,” *Muqarnas* 34, no. 1 (2017): 1–22. This article provides a good summary of the history of the Dome of the Chain as well as the available scholarship on the subject. The exterior of the building was covered with external mosaics dating from the seventh century, so it was no doubt built in this period. See also St. Laurent and Awwad, *Capitalizing Jerusalem,* for a differing and expanded view of the original function and dating of this building.

Tchekhanovets, “Recycling the Glory,” 236, also deals with the sources of marble found on sites in Jerusalem. She also indicates that Byzantine and Early Islamic usage was limited to already imported marble from previous periods.


St. Laurent and Awwad, *Capitalizing Jerusalem.* A text cited in *Capitalizing Jerusalem* indicates that the treasury sat at the edge of the bedrock suggesting that there was no platform at that time and that the rock was visible. The topography of the site illustrates that the rock was fairly level under the Dome of the Chain but drops off afterward toward the east.

Mostafà, “From the Dome of the Chain.”


For the purposes of this article, the explication of the newly proposed function of the Dome of the Chain is extremely limited here. The entire analysis and explication is fully developed in St. Laurent and Awwad, *Capitalizing Jerusalem.*

Bernard O’Kane, *The Civilization of the Islamic World* (New York: Rosen Publishing, 2013), 32. See also St. Laurent and Awwad,


77 The discussion of Mu’awiyah versus ‘Abd al-Malik is pursued in detail in St. Laurent and Awwad, Capitalizing Jerusalem. It is proposed that ‘Abd al-Malik continued the project, building the dome and completing the mosaic decoration.

78 The renovations of the 1961–66 by the Egyptian team working for the Jordanian government revealed the bases of the support structure. The renovations are well documented in the four volumes and surviving photographs in the Awqaf Archives. All have been reinforced using concrete, not a desirable method of architectural restoration. For earlier buildings of Mu’awiyah, see St. Laurent, “From Arabia to Bilad al-Sham.”

79 For the sanctuary wall rebuilding from the Umayyad period, see Mazar, Walls of the Temple Mount, and St. Laurent and Awwad, Capitalizing Jerusalem.

80 St. Laurent and Awwad, Capitalizing Jerusalem, discusses this issue more completely. The interior lower walls were exposed in 2007 and St. Laurent had the opportunity to photograph one area of the wall construction. Beatrice St. Laurent, “The Dome of the Rock: Restorations and Significance 1540–1918,” in Ottoman Jerusalem, ed. Sylvia Auld and Robert Hillembrand (Edinburgh: Altajir World of Islam Festival Trust, 2000), 415–24; A. H. S. Peter Megaw, “Qubbat As Sakhra (The Dome of the Rock): An Account of the Building and Its Condition with Recommendations for Its Conservation, Submitted to the Supreme Moslem Council,” unpublished report, 1946. St. Laurent will publish Megaw’s complete report as a separate volume in the future. Since the stones are roughly hewn, the walls would have required a revetment. Megaw prepared the report for the British Mandate government and the Supreme Muslim Council, wherein he discusses the condition of the building at that time before the 1960s renovation and major transformation of the building.

81 Tchechanovets, “Spoils and Spolia,” demonstrates that only marble spolia were available at the time with no new imports from abroad.


83 St. Laurent and Awwad, Capitalizing Jerusalem, fully explores this concept.

84 Megaw, “Qubbat as Sakhra,” 59, no. 174. Megaw and others believe that the mosaics date from the time of construction. However, the mosaics of the arched porches might date from later than the initial construction period between 660 and 680 CE, possibly from the Mamluk period when there were documented major mosaic restorations, notable in the window areas of the Dome and the arch soffits of the Dome of the Chain.

85 In 2009, there was a collection of “trash” deposited by the Golden Gate, which included a number of rafters from the Dome removed in 1961. There were several large beams, which St. Laurent identified as removed from al-Aqsa Mosque during the 1938 restoration of that building. Some of the shorter ones with only one decorative panel could have come from the Dome. At the time of St. Laurent’s last visit to Jerusalem in January of 2019, the beams remained outside to the left of the Golden Gate.

86 There existed six beams with Abbasid period inscriptions indicating that the beams were replaced or restored during that later period. One still exists in the Islamic Museum in the Haram.

87 St. Laurent, “Dome of the Rock,
Restorations”; Megaw, “Qubbat as Sakhra” discusses the multiple restoration periods of the marble.

The bases of the columns do not sit on solid foundational material but rather rest on a combination of small stones and dirt, rubble sitting directly on bedrock. Thus, there is no obvious use of spolia in this context.

St. Laurent and Awwad, Capitalizing Jerusalem.


Khoury, “Dome of the Rock.”

St. Laurent and Awwad, Capitalizing Jerusalem, analyzes these sources in far greater detail.

There are questions about the references to the Sabians in the Qur’an as to whether they refer to a group of Christians living in Greater Syria or the Saebeans of south Arabia. These issues remain unresolved. It is also not clear what the specific references and word usage were at the time of the writing of the Qur’an.

A part of the book entitled Akhbar 'Ubayd bin Shariya al-Jurhami fi akhbar al-Yaman wa ash'ariha wa ansabiha [The account of 'Ubayd bin Shariya al-Jurhami of the events of Yemen and its poets and lineages] was published in Hyderabad, 10 and fn. 16, as noted by M. ul-Hasan in Ibn al-Athir: An Arab Historian – A Critical Analysis of His ‘Tarikh-al-kamil and Tarikh-al-atabeca’ (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2005), 10 and fn. 16.