

The Great Nea Church - Church of Mary

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By Joseph F. Dumond

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The Medieval Historical and Geographical “Key” Unlocking the Location of the Temples

There is a major “key” that (if applied) can be of prime significance in identifying the true Temple site of God. This “key” is a historical truism vouched for by several eyewitness accounts of competent scholars from the time of Omar the Second Caliph (638 C.E.) to the historical evaluations of the first class Jewish historian Azariah De’ Rossi who wrote as late as 1577 C.E. If modern historians and theologians will pay attention to this initial factor and subsequent ones that I will present (and let them serve as “deal points” in showing historical and geographical truths – which they all demonstrate), these facts will aid us in wading through the murky and sometime contradictory writers of Jewish literature beginning in the seventh century and thriving for the next thousand years that have confused Jewish scholars. The prime “key” is very clear. The first illustration of the “key” is not of Jewish origin. It is the observations a Christian archbishop who wrote a history about a main Jewish return to Jerusalem took place at the time of Omar the Second Caliph in 638 C.E. This historical account reveals a “deal

point” of factual geographical knowledge that is recorded by the first Christian Arabic author and church leader by the name of Eutychius (Arabic name: Said Ibn Bitriq) who wrote his historical work in 876 C.E. He stated how Omar and Sophronius (the Christian archbishop of Jerusalem) originally came to a final recognition of the true site of the Jewish Temples in Jerusalem. In my new book mentioned above, I present the details about the conversations recorded by Eutychius that took place between Omar and Sophronius. If you have read my book, you will recall that there were three sites shown Omar by Sophronius as contenders for the place where the former Jewish Temples stood. Yet, it was the final place (the third site) that was eventually selected by Omar as the real area of the Jewish Temple. The first two places that Sophronius showed Omar (when Sophronius gave false identifications that the Caliph did not accept) were rightly aborted.

This third place suggested by Sophronius that Omar finally accepted was an area over the Gihon Spring. This former Temple site had a particular (and even a unique) architectural history associated with it that none of the other areas in Jerusalem possessed. Eutychius gave us a primary identifying “key” (that later Jews also recognized) that singled out this true site of the Temples. The “key” point of knowledge was the fact that the Romans from the year 70 C.E. to the time of Constantine (for 260 years) **HAD NEVER CONSTRUCTED ANY BUILDINGS** of their own on the site of the Jewish Temples. Eutychius made this statement as a standard sign of identification that all people in Jerusalem recognized. He went even further. Eutychius said it was also realized that the later Byzantine Christians from the fourth to the seventh centuries **HAD AS WELL NEVER CONSTRUCTED ANY BUILDINGS** of their own upon the site. These two evaluations eliminate the area of the Haram esh-Sharif from being considered as a proper Temple site because in 876 C.E. (even when Eutychius wrote) there was an Al Aqsa Mosque within the Haram and the structure called the Dome of the Rock was also there.

This means that Sophronius was informing Omar in 638 C.E. (that for over 300 years since the time of Constantine) there had been no buildings of any kind constructed by the former Gentiles who controlled Jerusalem on the site of the Temples in Jerusalem. Consequently, there were no ruins in the area that could have come from the Romans or Byzantines. What we discover is the simple fact that the Romans and the Byzantines left the whole region of the former Temples to be a unique “Jewish area” in Jerusalem between the year 70 C.E. and 638 C.E. (for 568 years). They had a specific reason for not building within the region. Early Christians said it was to sustain the reliability of the prophecy of Christ that the Temple area would remain in ruins with no stone on another. Note the words written by Eutychius (translation is by F.E.Peters). 2

“Then Omar [Umar in Arabic] said to him [to Sophronius]: ‘You owe me a rightful debt. Give me a place in which I might build a sanctuary [masjid] a prayer shrine’].’ The patriarch said to him: ‘I will give to the Commander of the Faithful a place to build a sanctuary where the kings of Rum [the Romans] **WERE UNABLE TO BUILD**. It is a rock where God spoke to Jacob and which Jacob called the Gate of Heaven and the Israelites the Holy of Holies. It is the center of the world and was a Temple for the Israelites.... [And], the Byzantines neglected it [that is, the Byzantines left the site empty] and did not hold it in veneration, **NOR DID THEY BUILD A CHURCH OVER IT**” (capitalization and bracketed words mine). These were well-known facts being told Omar by Sophronius.

The Gentile Romans and Byzantines deliberately shied away from building on the spot in order for the prophecy of Christ to remain in fulfillment. So, they left the southeast section of Jerusalem empty of any major buildings (where the former City of David had been at the original Mount Zion). Oh yes, we do have a few Christian records that the desolation of the area had been graced on occasion by a ramshackle hut or a temporary covering for some Roman farmers who once watched over some crops that once grew in the region. Other than these few temporary and isolated agricultural shelters (none of them ever lasted more than a few seasons of farming), there were **NO PERMANENT BUILDINGS** constructed by the Romans or Byzantines within the area of the Temple Mount (there were no churches, no holy shrines and no government buildings). This was the clear teaching of Eutychius. This fact becomes a “key” sign (a “deal point”) because there are two later writers (one in 1235, another in 1577) testifying the same.

Once it is recognized that **NO ROMAN** or **BYZANTINE** buildings had ever been built in the region of the former Jewish Temples up to the time of Omar the Second Caliph, then the actions that Omar and his successors undertook

at Jerusalem begin to make sense in their dealings with the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the early Arabic period. This fact recorded by Eutychius becomes a prime “key” or “deal point.” And though the records show that Omar and Sophronius witnessed ruins of buildings in the area where the former Jewish Temples were once located (and even the fourth century Archbishop of Jerusalem named Cyril said there were Jewish ruins in his time), 3 those remains were reckoned by those in the seventh century to be ruins of Jewish buildings that were part of a previous Temple rebuilt in the time of Constantine and Julian.

Jews Wanted to Live in the Southern Part of Jerusalem

In Omar’s time there were still some ruins from a few Jewish buildings and ruins of an abortive Temple that was attempted to be built in the time of Constantine and Julian. To be near those ruined buildings and Temple on the southeast ridge, the Jews in the time of Omar asked the Second Caliph for permission to move from Tiberias in Galilee to this part of Jerusalem. We have absolute documentary evidence that 70 Jewish families in the seventh century were allowed by Omar to settle in Jerusalem. They specifically informed Omar that they wanted to reside in the SOUTHERN part of Jerusalem so they could be near the Siloam water system and to be in proximity to the site of their former Temple. Omar, who was then beginning to build his Al Aqsa Mosque in the southern extremity of the Haram esh-Sharif, allowed them their request. This historical fact is found in a fragment of a letter discovered in the Geniza library of Egypt now in Cambridge University in England. Notice what it states:

“Omar agreed that seventy households should come [to Jerusalem from Tiberias]. They agreed to that. After that, he asked: ‘Where do you wish to live within the city?’ They replied: ‘In the southern section of the city, which is the market of the Jews.’ Their request was to enable them to be near the site of the Temple and its gates, as well as to the waters of Shiloah, which could be used for immersion. This was granted them [the 70 Jewish families] by the Emir of the Believers. So seventy households including women and children moved from Tiberias, and established settlements in buildings [then in ruins] whose foundations had stood for many generations.” (emphasis and bracketed words mine) 4

This southern area was quite to the south of the southern wall of the Haram (where Omar was building his Al Aqsa Mosque) because Professor Benjamin Mazar (when I was working with him at the archaeological excavations along the southern wall of the Haram) discovered two palatial Umayyad buildings close to the southern wall of the Haram that occupied a great deal of space south of the southern Haram wall. Those 70 families certainly had their settlement further south than these ruins of the two palatial Muslim government buildings. And note carefully, that these seventy Jewish families wanted to establish themselves “in buildings whose foundations had stood for many generations.” This is a most important observation. It shows that there were indeed “foundations” of the former Temples that were built in the fourth century still in place in the region. There were no walls remaining on the foundations. In short, there were still Jewish RUINS just as Eutychius stated. It was from those ruined areas that Omar took his stone and placed it in his new Mosque that he was building at the southern end of the Haram esh-Sharif.

Interestingly, in this early document from the Geniza library in Egypt (and in all pre-Crusade records), Jews showed no interest in the “Rock” now under the Dome of the Rock. Their sole attention was to the area SOUTH of the Haram esh-Sharif and even further south from the Muslim government buildings that were built in the Umayyad period. Also, when the Karaite Jews a century after the time of Omar settled in Jerusalem, they also went to this same southern area which was the former site of the City of David on the southeast ridge as well as adjacently across the Kidron into the Silwan area. 5 These first Jewish settlers certainly knew that the former Temple site was well SOUTH of the Haram esh-Sharif. Indeed, their area of interest was even further SOUTH than the palatial Umayyad buildings that Professor Mazar and our Ambassador students (under my direction) discovered SOUTH of the Haram. The Temple was actually near the “waters of Shiloah” (waters that flowed from the Gihon Spring). All the Jews within the early Arabic period knew that the Temples were located over the Gihon. Anyone who would have suggested any other area would have been laughed at by the Rabbis and by the generality of the Jewish people. The Jewish authorities were then aware the Temples were over the Gihon Spring.

The Two Jewish Attempts to Rebuild the Temple in the Fourth Century

There had been two Jewish attempts to rebuild the Temple after the destruction of the Herodian Temple in 70 C.E.: one in the time of Constantine (which was 12 years in building — from the Edict of Milan in 312 C.E. to Licinius's defeat in 324 C.E.) and the other attempt to rebuild was about 37 years later in the time of Julian the Apostate. 6 These two occasions at reconstructing the Jewish Temples by Jewish people were frustrated by Constantine and then by natural (seismic) disturbances and the buildings were never completed. Their ruins continued at the site (including the “Western Wall” of the Holy of Holies from the Constantine/Julian Temple built over the Gihon Spring and that portion of the wall remained for several centuries. This was especially true of some of the foundations (as the Geniza records show). 7 This early “Western Wall” has nothing to do with the present “Wailing Wall” of Herod's Fort Antonia that the Jews have adorned for the past 430 years. These were all Jewish ruins from those two fourth century Temples because Eutychius stated there were no Gentile buildings erected in or on that Jewish “Temple Mount” for just over the previous 568 years — from 70 C.E. to 638 C.E.

Omar Selected a Portable Stone from the Constantine/Julian Temple Ruins for his Qiblah

It was from among these Jewish ruins that Omar was shown the special stone that he took out of the ground and had it carried into the Al Aqsa Mosque that he was beginning to construct. This stone was a portable one. He set it up at the southern end of his mosque to serve as the pointing device (the Qiblah) that directed Muslims to face Mecca. This portable stone certainly WAS NOT that rock under the Dome of the Rock within the Haram eshSharif because that stationary “rock outcropping” is a part of the bedrock formation on the northeastern ridge. The Dome of the Rock was also the former area of the majestic Church of the Holy Wisdom. That Church had specifically been built over that particular “oblong rock.” This was because Christians from the sixth century onward reckoned that this “Rock” had been the site of the Praetorium where Jesus was judged by Pilate. The footprint of Jesus was embossed into the surface of that “oblong stone.” 8

Indeed, Sophronius as an eyewitness even wrote a poem while he was a young man about that Church of the Holy Wisdom and its accompanying Stone (the special “oblong” Rock) that later became the center piece of the Dome of the Rock. But, the Persians and Jews (about 24 years before the discussion between Sophronius and Omar) destroyed that Church of the Holy Wisdom. This obliteration was in 614 C.E. Still, everyone in Jerusalem knew at the time that that particular area of rock outcropping within the Haram esh-Sharif WAS ONCE the site of the former Praetorium and also the famous Church of the Holy Wisdom. This fact alone disqualifies the Dome of the Rock area from being the place that Sophronius was showing Omar. The stone that Omar selected was from a “Jewish area” where the Temples had been. The later historical records show that the place where the portable stone of Omar was found was at the Temple area over the Gihon Spring. That area was NEVER BUILT UPON by the Romans or Byzantines. What Omar did was to take a portable stone (a single stone) from the area of the Gihon Spring and re-positioned it within his new mosque that he started to construct at the southern end of the Haram esh-Sharif. That stone became the Qibla [the pillar stone that pointed the faithful Muslims to pray toward Mecca]. The reason Omar selected the southern part of the Haram esh-Sharif is because it fit all of the parameters that he had witnessed in his vision that Muhammad had supposedly given to him about his “Night Journey” from the “Farthest Mosque” into heaven. That is the location in Jerusalem that Omar selected to build his Mosque. It is highly significant and of utmost importance to recognize that Omar gave no spiritual accolades whatever to the “Rock” under the Dome of the Rock at the time, and no other Caliph did until the time of Abn alMalik near the end of the seventh century. Indeed, Omar rejected the “Rock” under the Dome of the Rock as not having any holiness to those in Islam. Only later (after 750 C.E.) did Muslims begin to think that “Rock” had the prophet's footprint and handprint that were placed there during the “Night Journey.” This teaching, however, was later derived, and only after the “Rock” started to become famous after the building of the Dome of the Rock in 692 C.E.

Omar, however, in this early period concentrated only on building what became the Al Aqsa Mosque in the extreme south of the Haram. And he went even further. Omar began to retrieve many ruined stones from the same area that Sophronius said was the site of the Jewish Temple (in the southeast quadrant of Jerusalem – over the Gihon Spring) in order to build the Al Aqsa Mosque itself. Remember, the Geniza document said that there were “foundation

stones” still in the area where the Jews considered to be the place of their Temples. Thus, Omar imagined he was using stones from the original “Solomon’s Temple” to construct his Muslim shrine. This is one reason why it became common for those in Jerusalem to call the new Mosque as the remains of “Solomon’s Temple” (there was also another reason that I will provide a little later in this article). In fact, the procedure of moving stones from a holy place to make another place holy was a well-known and significant ritual called in Arabic “Barakah.” In Muslim theological thought, the use of the ritual called Barakah signified the transference of all the holiness and sanctification once associated with Solomon’s Temple to the new area of the Al Aqsa Mosque that was built about 600 feet to the north (in the south part of the Haram). The Encyclopedia of Religion 9 describes the Muslim theological principle called “Barakah.” The use of this procedure allowed the holiness of one site (in Arabic eyes) to be transferred to another place and the new place could be called after the former designation even though it was in a different site. “What is Barakah among the Arabs and in Islam? In the Arab world, the Semitic root brk seems originally to have meant both ‘blessing’ and ‘crouching.’ In the Arab mind, the idea seems to have developed of transferring this quality; barakah (noun; pl., barakat) [the quality or influence could be transferred] to such acts as kissing a hand or touching a holy object. See [the article] Touching. In popular Islam, traces of this nomadic notion of barakah [that is, a transference of holiness or title, or the influence of persons] remain in attitudes toward localities, historical personalities, and sacred objects.” (words in brackets and underlining mine).

Look at this Muslim principle closely. It is important in regard to our subject we are now discussing. This use of barakah is a major error adopted by the people of Jerusalem that helped even the local people to lose sight of the former spot of the Temple (or other sites). By practicing this ritualistic procedure, the Islamic people of Jerusalem began calling the Al Aqsa Mosque by the name “Solomon’s Temple.” Christians in time also adopted the same tactic. When the Europeans during the Crusades spoke of the Al Aqsa Mosque, they stated that it was indeed the remains of “Solomon’s Temple.” Christians in Crusader times used the same principle of barakah to transfer the influence and significance of a site (or a person) in the Holy Land to an area (or areas) in Europe that was found to be in proximity to the same holy person or persons.

In all likelihood, the early Arabs learned the practice from previous Christians (and perhaps Jews) who regularly used the ritual of “holy transference” (or, barakah) for many relics and holy sites [I will later give some examples of this transference.]. So, it was no surprise that Omar reckoned that the influence and holiness of Solomon’s Temple could in his day be transferred to his new Mosque at the southern end of the Haram esh-Sharif. In no way was this principle a proper one from a biblical point of view. Note that when the Tabernacle went from place to place in the Wilderness with the Shekinah (Spirit) of God leading it, the places where the Tabernacle had been formerly pitched retained no holiness with them. To further illustrate this, Jeremiah called the attention of the Jews of his day to the ruined state of Shiloh (where the Ark had remained for scores of years) and yet in Jeremiah’s time the area of Shiloh was ruined, desolate and bereft of all holiness. Jeremiah meant that Shiloh was deprived of all sanctification.

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In spite of this biblical proscription, later people began to use this erroneous principle called barakah, and Christians from the fourth century, Muslims from the seventh, and Jews from the eleventh century adopted the procedure almost wholesale as a proper means of transferring the so-called “holiness” of one site to another – even to places hundreds of miles away. This allowed the influence and holiness of Solomon’s Temple to be transferred to another the place (using the well-known and well-used barakah principle). But there was also another reason why the Al Aqsa Mosque became known as “Solomon’s Temple” in early Arabic times (and even during the Crusade period the Christians themselves also referred to the Al Aqsa Mosque as “Solomon’s Temple”). Also within the Crusades, Christians reckoned the Dome of the Rock as being likened to King Herod’s northern extension of the Temple and it was called by Christians “The Temple of God.” Still, the whole of the area within the Haram esh-Sharif before the Persians and Jews destroyed the area in 614 C.E. was a major Christian region with two large and sumptuous churches built in the area. One of those churches that was built over the “oblong rock” now under the Dome of the Rock and it was called the Church of the Holy

Wisdom. This was the “Rock” that Josephus stated was a prominent feature around which Fort Antonia [the Roman Praetorium] was built in Jerusalem.

There was another church built just to the south. This was the Church of Mary built on the southern flank of the Church having the “oblong Rock.” It was constructed by the Emperor Justinian. It was a very large church called “The Church of Mary” which the historical records show was so huge that one of its associated buildings occupying about a third of the overall size of the Church was large enough to have a hospital of 3000 beds. Procopius the Greek historian of the sixth century said this Church was so prominent in Jerusalem that there was no Church in the world that could compare to it regarding its various features. The people of Jerusalem began to call this Church the “Nea Church” (the New Church). Procopius describes the construction of this Church. It was a basilica that was extremely large in all its dimensions. This gigantic church edifice was constructed over the area now covered by the Al Aqsa Mosque. Let us see.

The Importance of Locating “Mary’s Church” (the Nea Church).

There is a third point that shows the former Jewish Temples were NOT built in any region of the Haram eshSharif. Why? Because Omar took a portable stone from the former Temple region over the Gihon Spring and brought it through the southern gate of the Haram esh-Sharif into the place he finally selected to be the Al Aqsa Mosque. That site at the time was a ruined area of the Nea Church (called the Church of Mary) that formerly existed at that exact spot before its destruction by the Persians and Jews in 614 C.E. Procopius the Byzantine historian who lived at the time of the Emperor Justinian described the Nea Church in great detail. I remember reading Procopius about 30 years ago when I taught a class at Ambassador College in England called “Classical Literature.” I then concluded that he could only be speaking about the southern part of the Haram esh-Sharif. The geography fits perfectly with what Procopius said about Justinian building the Church of Mary. The account of Procopius is appended below. 11

Many prominent scholars and archaeologists up to the year 1977 C.E. noticed that Arabic historical sources had identified the Church of Mary with the spot where Omar built the Al Aqsa Mosque (that is, at the southern end of the Haram esh-Sharif). Before 1977 C.E., it was generally accepted that this identification was correct. But in that year, Prof. Avigad while digging in the valley area southwest of the Haram esh-Sharif found the remains of a foundational area near the top of an associated cistern. The inscription stated that the building was constructed by the orders of Justinian. Prof. Avigad almost immediately began to think that he had found the Church of Mary (the Nea Church). 12 The inscription (which is certainly from Justinian’s builders) was enough to convince the majority of the scholarly world that he had discovered the Nea Church. He was so wrong! Caution was thrown to the wind. Exuberance over the discovery of a Justinian monastery (and Procopius said the emperor Justinian built several structures in Jerusalem), led the scholars to misidentify the building. They at once began to call it the Nea Church. But in NO WAY is this identification proper. Their judgement was too hasty. There are historical facts that disprove Prof. Avigad and his colleagues. They are fatal to his assumption that this site was the Nea Church. Look at the facts that I will present below. What the historical records show (and even the archaeology demands) is that the Nea Church (the Church of Mary) was located at the southern quarter of the Haram esh-Sharif and covering the same site as Omar’s Al Aqsa Mosque.

1). When one reads all of the account of Procopius (I only record in the footnote above the central part about the Church of Mary itself), it will be found that Justinian renovated or built at least seven other major buildings in Jerusalem within his long life and rule (born 483 and ruled from 527 to 565 C.E.). 13 Prof. Avigad should not have been so hasty in his enthusiasm to identify his building with the Nea Church, since Justinian built seven other like buildings in Jerusalem.

2). The inscription found by Prof. Avigad was (as he admitted with his own words) located in “almost total darkness some 8 meters [25 feet] within a subterranean cistern, indicates that it was not intended to be a display inscription [for the general public].” 14 It was situated at a place where only building inspectors would have been able to read it. Thus, it was not at ground level where inscriptions for church edifices were normally displayed. This location of the inscription shows the site to be one of the seven Monasteries that Justinian built in Jerusalem.

3). Even more devastating to Prof. Avigad's theory, the inscription (besides saying the building was sponsored by Justinian's generosity) stated that the religious leader in charge of construction was: "the Most Holy Constantinus, Priest and Hegumen," 15 whereas for the special construction of the Church of Mary (the Nea Church) we have the precise statement of Procopius that "the Emperor sent an architect named Theodore who was supervised by the Bishop of Bacatha named Barachos." 16 The supervisors were two different persons who lived at different periods. And though Prof. Avigad showed a historical account that this Constantinus was once (at a later time) in charge of the Nea Church, the supervisor that Justinian had selected specifically as the first supervisor and builder of the Nea Church was Barachos, the Bishop of Bacatha. Prof. Avigad's building was not the Nea Church. It does have credentials for being one of the seven Monasteries built by Justinian that were later associated with the Nea Church in administrative ways.

3). But there is more. Look at underline # 1 in the account of Procopius found in footnote 9. The precise location of the Nea Church is well described. Procopius said: (1) "But this church alone stands in a different position; for the Emperor Justinian ordered it to be built upon the highest of the hills." Procopius had just said that "buildings in the city [Jerusalem] stand in one place, being either built upon the hills, or upon flat and open ground." Now, the side building in which Prof. Avigad found the Justinian inscription was just west of the Tyropoeon Valley and slightly upslope. It was NOT on "the highest hill." Indeed, Avigad's structure was practically on "flat and open ground" with only its eastern part requiring some minor vaulting for support. However, the actual Nea Church was built "upon the highest of the hills." It was at the very top! The "highest of the hills" in Jerusalem at that time was the Haram esh-Sharif. And, without doubt, the Nea Church was constructed on the southern part of this "highest hill" with the pavement of the Nea Church elevated to be even with the top of the rocky ridge itself. Procopius continues:

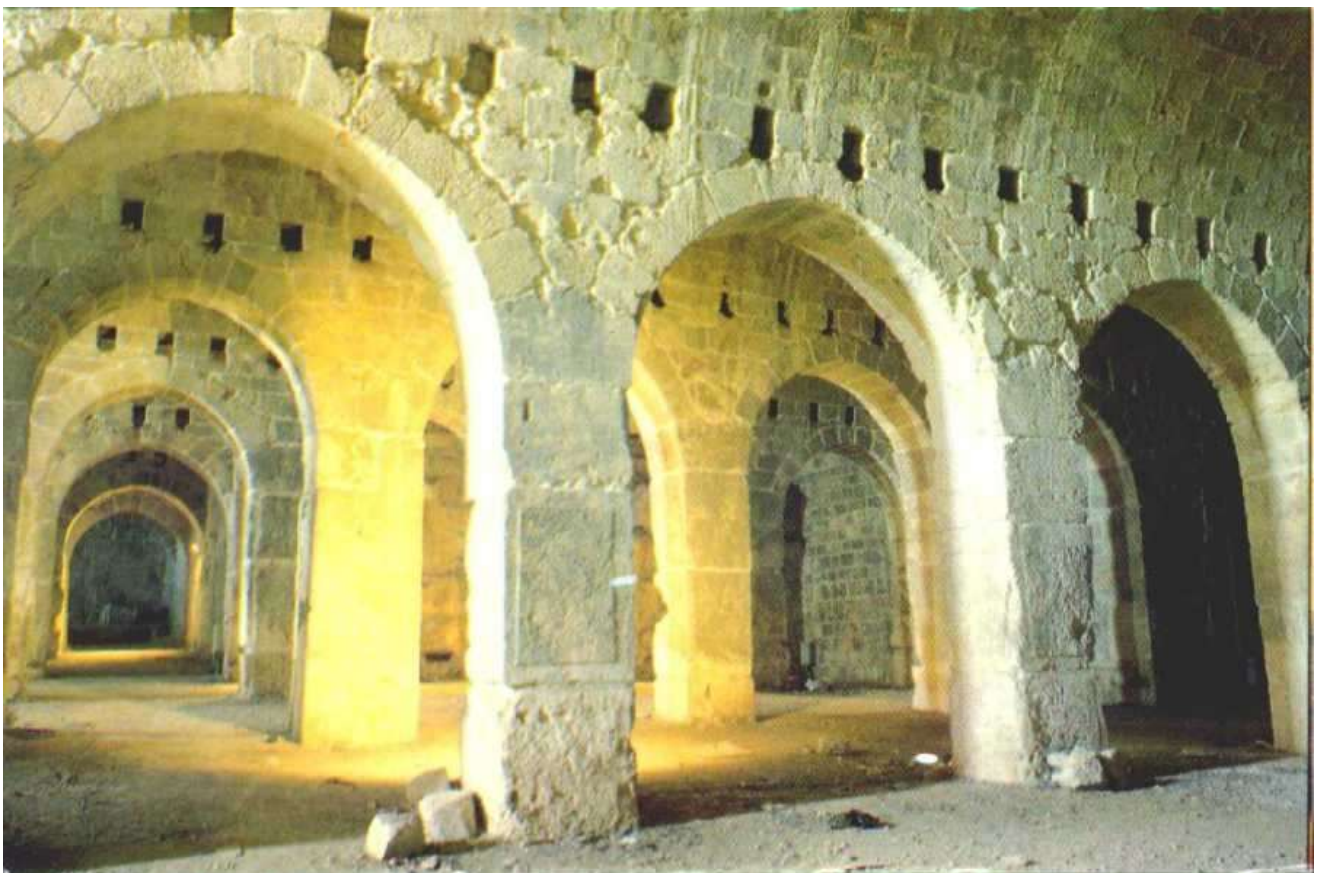
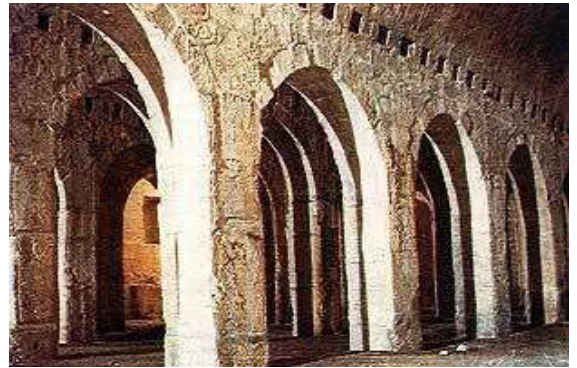
4) Justinian had given his architects some enormous proportions for the length and breath of the church and its accompanying buildings. It was to be so grand and large that it was to be "a church in honour of the Virgin, to which no other can be compared" (first line of Procopius' description). So large was the church to be that (2) "the hill was not of sufficient size to enable the work to be carried out." While this "highest hill" in Jerusalem had its eastern and southern sides inclined rather sharply from its top down to its base, the narrow level space at the top of the hill could not contain the massive dimensions of the Nea Church. This geographical fact alone prohibits one from considering Prof. Avigad's monastery from being the Nea Church. 17 This is because there was NO SINGLE HILL with a top being the highest in Jerusalem in the area of his ruins. But the southern region of the Haram esh-Sharif fits the description of Procopius exactly.

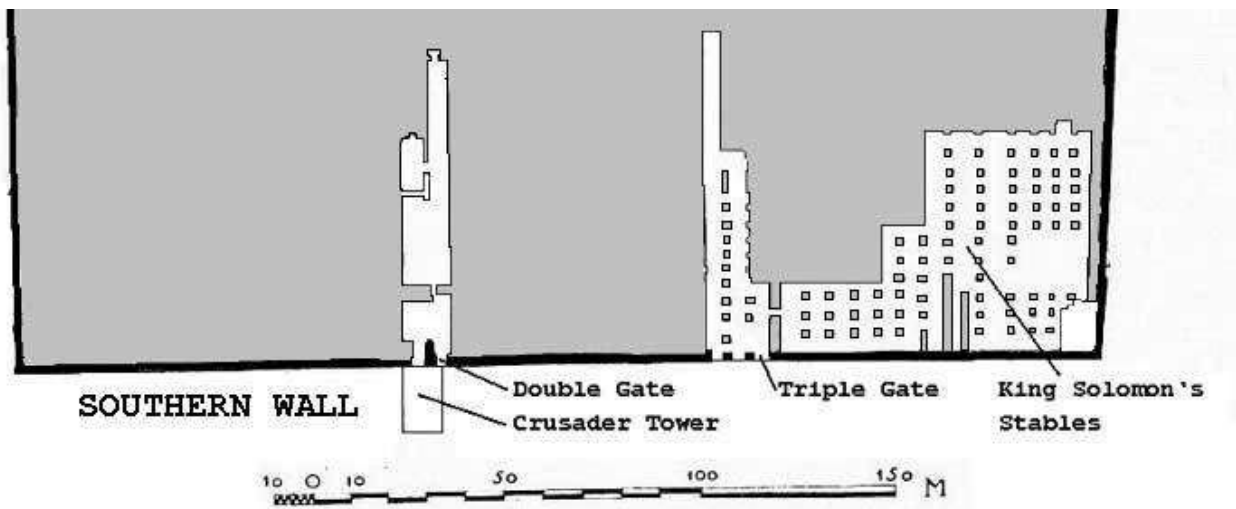
5) Procopius continues: (3) "But a fourth part of the church, that toward the south wind and the rising sun, in which the priests perform the sacred mysteries, was left with no ground upon which to rest." From the top of the hill the slope was inclined so steeply that it became necessary to build huge columns (higher as one got further south and east) in order to build a level platform on which the foundations of the church pavement could be placed. Interestingly, this is precisely what one observes at the extreme south of the Haram esh-Sharif and in its southeastern portion where the vaulted area called "Solomon's Stables" are found. Procopius then continues: (4) "They laid foundations at the extremity of the flat ground [in the east and south, especially], and constructed a building rising to the same height as the [top] of the hill." From the flat ground around this "highest hill in

Jerusalem” they build up vaulted foundations to reach the height of the top of the hill, and then they build a platform or a pavement of flat stones to make the whole of the eastern and southern area to the walls as an elevated enclosure. This is exactly how the Haram esh-Sharif is built today. Procopius continues: (5) “When they reached the [height of the] summit, they placed vaults [columned supports] upon the walls and joined this building to the other foundations of the church [to those other foundations located in the west and north].” Procopius continues: (6) “This church is one place is built upon a firm rock [the northern half], and in another place is suspended in the air [the foundations and pavement in the south and east were supported by vaulted columns with air in between].”

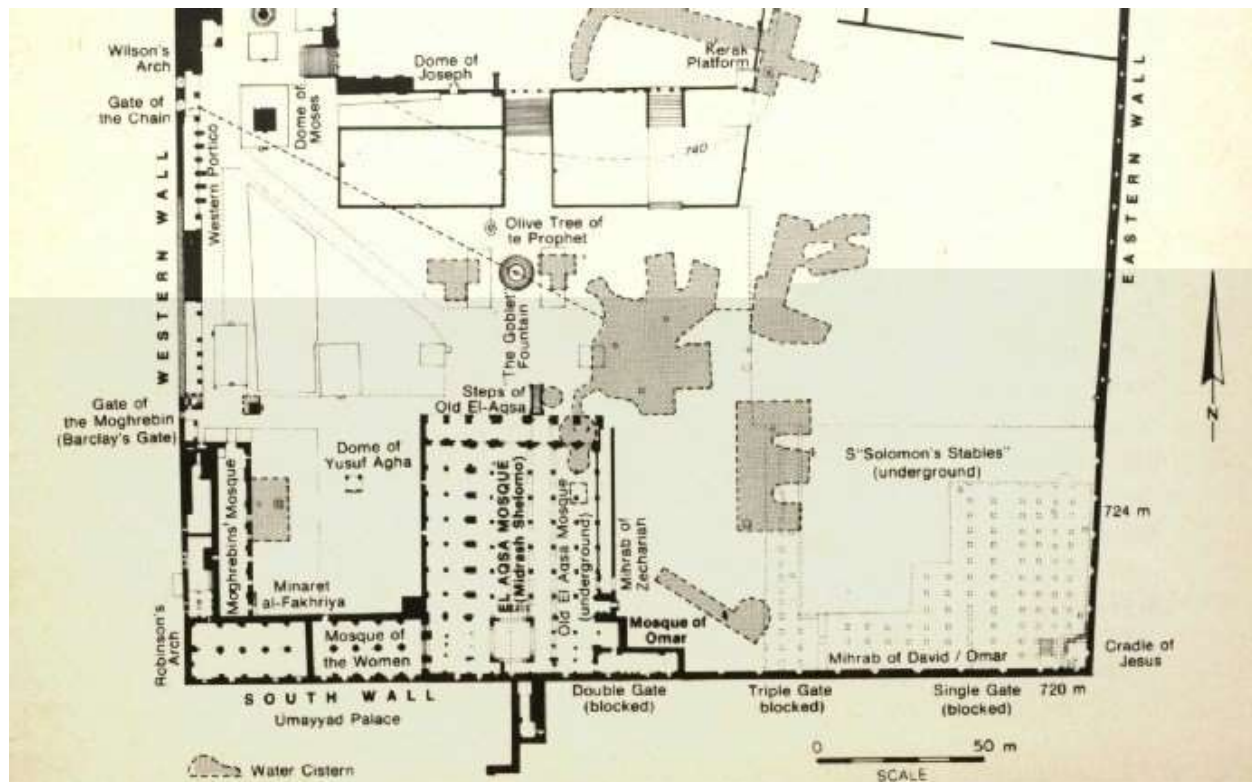


This picture of the columns being spoken of is from historic lecture booklet: “When the Temple was built, the summit of Mount Moriah was found not large enough for the building and its courts. The architects adopted the plan of building out the platform and resting it upon great walls reared up from the side of the mountain. we can descend by a series of steps into theses vast substructures which are underneath the open court south of the Dome of the Rock. There are thirteen of these great vaults, including an area of 273 feet from east to west, and nearly 300 feet from north to south. They are called “Solomon’s Stables” from a tradition of their use in ancient times. On the lower courses of the pillars a smooth band or drafting may be noticed. This is characteristic of very ancient work, and may indicate that the foundations of these structures were laid by the Tyrian builders of Solomon’s Temple. As we look upward to these arched roofs. let us remember that above them is the platform of the Temple area.”

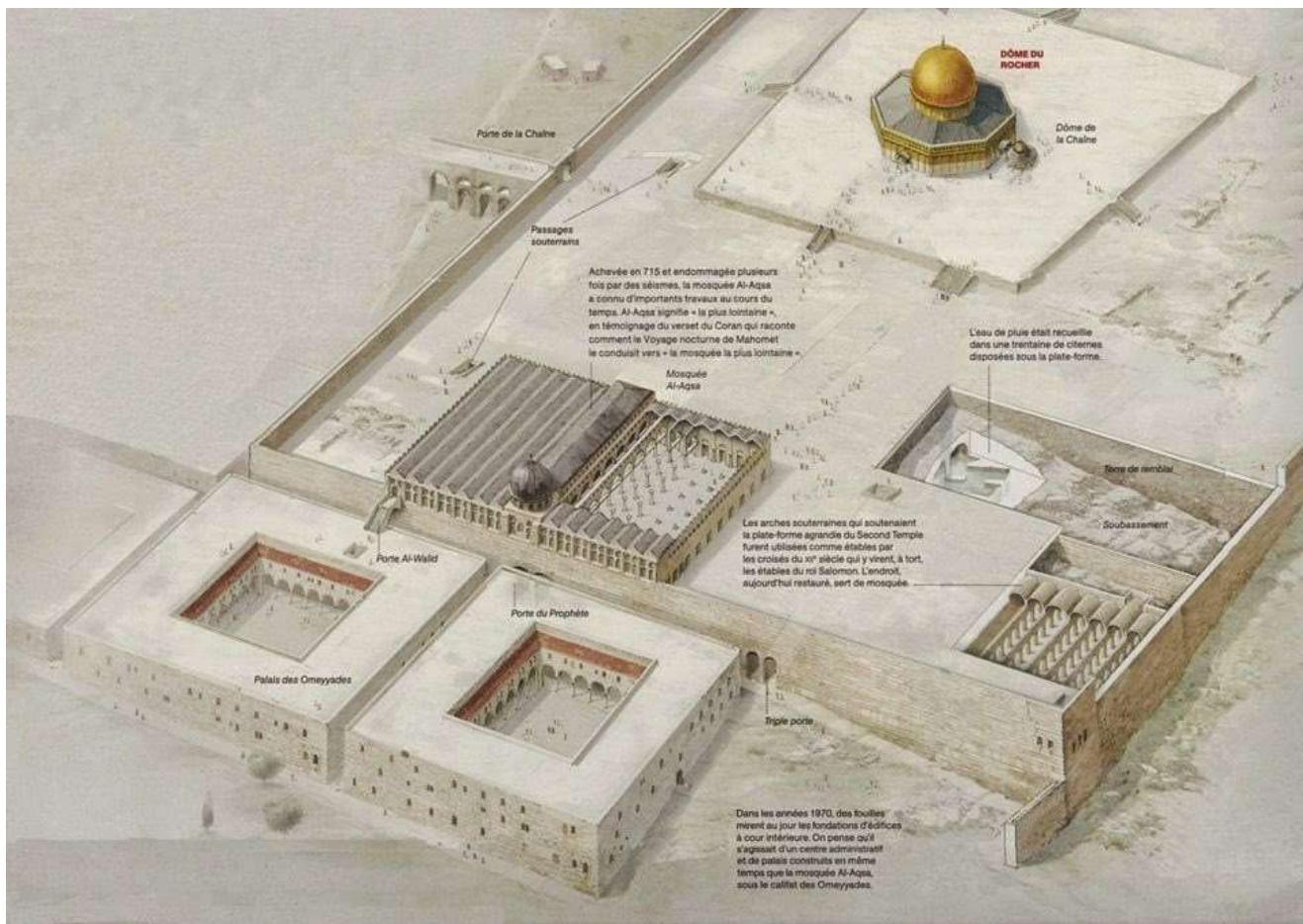




This map above shows the area where Solomon's Stables area along the southern wall. The Map below shows their relationship to the Al Aqsa Mosque. They got the name Solomon's Stables from the time of the Crusades. But not before this time.



From the Crusader period, this area beneath the southeastern platform of the Temple Mount [see map] has been named Solomon's stables. The name has a mythical connection to Solomon which shows the great intensity and lasting impression that this place had upon the Crusaders. Solomon's stables were connected to this king just as were the Golden Dome (associated by the Crusaders with Solomon's Temple), and El-Aksa (associated with Solomon's palace). However, the Arabs did not preserve the names "Solomon's palace" and "Solomon's temple" because they wanted to destroy any remnant of the Crusaders occupation of the site.



The Knights Templar and “Solomon’s Stables”

The Knights Templar are said to have been using Solomon's Stables, vaults below the Temple Mount at Jerusalem. These "Stables" were in fact vaulted cellars built by Justinian, meant to support the huge platform of the Nea Church or the church of Mary. This huge scaffolding reached 45 metres above ground level at the southeast corner of the Temple Mount. It is estimated that there are four levels of vaults. However, only the highest level is accessible, although for the moment it is not open to tourists.

The Umayyads reused the Herodian masonry to restore this last level between the end of the 7th century and the early 8th century.

And the Templars rebuilt later arcs. Apart from the structural support offered first for the Nea Church platform and then to the Al Aqsa mosque built at this location, these caves are still unexplored due to the current situation on the Temple Mount. The Templars were probably the first to make them stables.

A short tunnel runs from the south retaining wall of the Temple Mount under “Solomon’s Stables.” After 30 meters, the tunnel is blocked by rocks and debris and archaeologists have not been able to conduct investigations beyond because of the refusal of Muslim authorities. However, given the tunnel construction method, often with large blocks dating from the time of Herod’s Temple, archaeologists have concluded that it was built as a postern (a secret gateway) by the Templars. The entrance would have been located somewhere on the surface and the exit at the south wall, allowing the Templars to launch surprise attacks against their enemies.

Today this place being restored has been transformed into a place of prayer called the Al Marwani mosque

In the winter of 1996, the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf acquired a permit to use Solomon's Stables as an alternative place of worship for occasional rainy days of the holy month of Ramadan. Rivka Gonen, however, suggested that the real reason was that Palestinians feared that once a final arrangement with Israel is reached, Israel would create there a place of

prayer. Later the waqf declared that it aimed to create a mosque for 10,000 worshippers, making it the largest mosque in the country. This move was designed to strengthen the Muslim claim over the Temple Mount.[1]

In gross violation of the status quo, the Waqf began digging a huge hole in the southeastern area of the Temple Mount, without a permit from the Jerusalem municipality or archeological supervision using tractors and heavy vehicles.[1] This action drew criticism from archaeologists, who said that archaeological finds were being damaged in the process and the excavations weakened the stability of the Southern Wall. The excavations are thought to have been responsible for creating a large, visible bulge in the Southern Wall that threatened the structural integrity of the Temple Mount, necessitating major repairs.[6] The repairs have been called “unsightly” because they appear as a large, bright, white patch of smooth stones in a golden tan wall of rusticated ashlar.[6] In December 1996 the new mosque was officially inaugurated as El-Marwani Mosque.



Today, Solomon’s Stables are now called the Marwani Mosque and look like these next pictures.





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Let's carry on the teaching from Ernest Martin. 6) We now come to an important phase of Procopius' description because he states the Emperor had to make a major addition to the hill as it then existed. The Emperor did something that was not in the original hill. Note this important addition: (7) "The Emperor has added another portion to the original hill." Since the original Haram area was surrounded by four walls that were almost in the shape of a rectangle, the Emperor "added another portion to the original hill." To do this he would have had to enlarge the walled area. And this is apparently what he did in the south (and a portion in the east and

a small part in the west). Let us look at this “addition.” The Haram was not large enough in its southern portions to satisfy the gigantic measurements of the Church of Mary

(the Nea Church) as Justinian intended. So, the builders began to construct a brand new mountain within the Haram enclosure (south and east) alongside the former high area to the north. In elevating this new area, the builders were (8) “being forced to raise a building equal in size to a mountain.” Indeed, they elevated the whole of the southern area of the Haram to become level with the highest elevation in the north. To do this (9) “they cut blocks of stone of enormous size out of the mountains.” This was to make this new “elevated mountain” in the south. This new mountain extended beyond the former southern wall of the Haram. This, as Procopius states, allowed them the (10) “form the church of the great length [it extended all the way to the east wall]” and then “After [the eastern extension] they had built it of a proportional width [this extended it south to where it was extending beyond the former southern wall]. This extension was no impediment to Justinian’s engineers. He simply had them to create a new southern wall for the Haram esh-Sharif. The evidence of this can be seen today in the southern part of the walls. Note this:

From what is called the “Seam” in the east wall (Kenyon said the “Seam” was a little over 107 feet north of the southeast angle 18), Justinian appears to have built a southern extension and made a new southeastern angle. He then repositioned the whole of the southern wall that paralleled the former wall (some 107+ feet south) with refurbished and new stones (which were made to resemble all Herodian type of masonry). This reconstruction formed a new southwestern corner about 107+ feet south of the former angle. From there his architects built a new part of the western wall about 107+ feet north to intersect with the former southwestern angle. If this is true, and it appears as though this is what Procopius is stating, then Robinson’s Arch and its stairways were a creation of Justinian and not a part of the original wall build by Herod. It will be noticed that the whole of the southern wall even today appears in a much newer condition than any of the stones in other parts of the Haram walls. It could well be that it was Justinian who re-positioned the south wall. Only extensive archaeological investigations can determine if this is true or not.



The two lines are what is being spoken of here by Ernest Martin. The picture above that I am using is claiming the Herod is the one to extend the Southern wall after the Hasmoneans did it before that. We are in agreement with Ernest Martin that this was all done by Justinian completed in the year 543 C.E. One other point to keep in mind. If Herod is the one to have built the Temple Mount and we all know this. How is that this person claims these Herodian walls were moved by the Hasmoneans. Know your history before you fall for someone else misunderstanding.

The Hasmonean dynasty was a ruling dynasty of Judea and surrounding regions during classical antiquity. Between c. 140 and c. 116 BCE the dynasty ruled Judea semi-autonomously from the Seleucids. From 110 BCE, with the Seleucid Empire disintegrating, the dynasty became fully independent, expanded into the neighbouring regions of Samaria, Galilee, Iturea, Perea, and Idumea, and took the title “basileus”. Some modern scholars refer to this period as an independent kingdom of Israel.

The dynasty was established under the leadership of Simon Thassi, two decades after his brother Judas Maccabeus defeated the Seleucid army during the Maccabean Revolt. According to 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, and the first book of The Jewish War by Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (37 CE–c. 100), Antiochus IV moved to assert strict control over the Seleucid satrapy of Coele Syria and Phoenicia after his successful invasion of Ptolemaic Egypt was turned back by the intervention of the Roman Republic. He sacked Jerusalem and its Temple, suppressing Jewish and Samaritan religious and cultural observances, and imposed Hellenistic practices. The ensuing revolt by the Jews (167 BCE) began a period of Jewish independence potentiated by the steady collapse of the Seleucid Empire under attacks from the rising powers of the Roman Republic and the Parthian Empire.

In 63 BCE, the kingdom was invaded by the Roman Republic, broken up and set up as a Roman client state. However, the same power vacuum that enabled the Jewish state to be recognized by the Roman Senate c. 139 BCE was later exploited by the Romans themselves. Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, Simon’s great-grandsons, became pawns in a proxy war between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great. The deaths of Pompey (48 BCE) and Caesar (44 BCE), and the related Roman civil wars temporarily relaxed Rome’s grip on the Hasmonean kingdom, allowing a brief reassertion of autonomy backed by the Parthian Empire. This short independence was rapidly crushed by the Romans under Mark Antony and Octavian.

The dynasty had survived for 103 years before yielding to the Herodian dynasty in 37 BCE. The installation of Herod the Great (an Idumean) as king in 37 BCE made Judea a Roman client state and marked the end of the Hasmonean dynasty.

Herod built the Temple Mount, not the Hasmoneans. But if you presume to believe that this is the actual Temple...well, we have much more to say on this in the upcoming News Letter.



By extending the whole of the southern wall 107+ feet further south, this allowed the largeness of the Nea Church to be accorded the proper dimensions that were vouched for by an eyewitness who saw and described it while soon after it was constructed. This was the Piacenza Pilgrim who said (just after its construction) that there was in Jerusalem the Church of Mary “with its great congregation of monks, and its guest houses for men and women. In catering for travelers they have a vast number of tables, and more than 3000 beds for the sick.” 19 Procopius also mentioned these complex of buildings that were part of the Nea Church. He said: (13) “While on either side of the other road [next to the Nea Church] are two hospices — the work of the Emperor Justinian — one of which is destined for the reception of strangers [travelers], while the other is an infirmary for the sick poor.” An acre of land is 43,560 square feet, and that would be a minimum size of a building that could reasonably house 3000 beds for the sick (and there was also side-by-side to the infirmary the hospice for travelers and this was of similar size). These two structures besides the Nea Church itself that is described as gigantic. All of this is in contrast to the guessing of Prof. Avigad as to the dimensions of his rival church across the Tyropoeon Valley. He guesses it to be about one acre in size (and this included the two hospices). Even his guessing about the size (he found no

archaeological evidence for the shape or size of his rival church), the real Nea Church was much larger in size. It truly occupied the southern fourth of the Haram esh-Sharif, and certainly all of the area now covered by the Al Aqsa Mosque within the Haram.

Justinian I (left, Hagia Sophia) and (right, holding a Constantinople) Virgin Mary and Christ 10th century; in Hagia Dumbarton Harvard University,

In the picture above model of the Hagia below is the Istanbul today. The later date after the



holding a model of Constantine the Great model of the city of presenting gifts to the Child (centre), mosaic, Sophia, Istanbul. Oaks/Trustees for Washington, D.C.

Justinian is holding the Sophia in his hands and completed building in Minarets were added a area was conquered by

Islam.



7) As a closing point on the importance of the Nea Church being located at the southern end of the Haram esh - Sharif, it should be mentioned that Procopius has an interesting evaluation of the Emperor Justinian that can help us to understand the Emperor's great interest in architectural endeavors during his reign. Not only did Justinian build the grand Nea Church (the Church of Mary) in Jerusalem and other fine buildings, but he also constructed in different parts of the Empire. Notable among his achievements was the Church of the Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia), one of the truly great buildings of the classical world (which is still standing majestically in Istanbul). According to Prof. Hagi Amitzur of Bar Ilan University in Israel, Justinian had a specific wish not only to equal Solomon as one noted for his architectural accomplishments, but Justinian had an intense desire to surpass Solomon. He loved being compared to King Solomon.

Prof. Amizur points out that when Justinian first looked to Jerusalem to build a structure, the thing that came to his mind was to erect a "shrine" (that is, "temple") — a word normally connected with the meaning of "Temple." Amizur translates Procopius as: "And in Jerusalem he dedicated...a shrine [that is, a Temple, emphasis mine] to which no other can be compared.) 20 In short (and Amitzur argues his case convincingly), Justinian wanted his Nea

Church to be called “a shrine” or “a Temple.”²¹ No wonder he wanted it to be the most grand building in the world, and in the capital city of his religion. At the dedication of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul in 537 C.E., his dedicatory words show something in the character of Justinian that pleased him beyond compare. He stated in conclusion (as Prof. Amitzur relates): “Solomon, I vanquished thee.” Justinian wanted people to look on him as the new “Solomon,” and even superior to Solomon. So, as Amitzur argues effectively, the Nea Church became known as Justinian’s “shrine” or “Temple” and the people looked on its construction as the rebuilding of “Solomon’s Temple.” Indeed, Amitzur makes the wise observation that Procopius’ description of two important columns on the east side of the “shrine” were depicting the Jachin and Boaz (I Kings 7:21) that were prominent in Solomon’s Temple. Procopius wrote: (12) “Of these columns, the two which stand before the door of the church are of very unusual size, and probably second to no columns in the whole world.” The suggestions made by Prof. Amitzur make perfectly good sense to me. So, Christians began to call the site of the Church of Mary the “Shrine of Solomon” in the sixth century. But that “Solomon” was “Justinian,” not the Solomon of history. It was easy for Christians to continue this identification to the time of the Crusades when it was dogmatically believed that the building in the Haram taken over by the Knights’ Templar was indeed in their view, “Solomon’s Temple.” It was truly “Solomon’s Temple,” but the “Solomon” was Justinian.

There is more to suggest this conclusion. When the Piacenza Pilgrim in Justinian’s time described the Church of the Holy Wisdom as being the Praetorium where Christ’s footprints were found in the “oblong rock” (now under the Dome of the Rock), he then made the further comment that the Church stood “in front of the Temple of Solomon.” In going southward from the Church of the Holy Wisdom, the first edifice that would be encountered was the “Church of Mary” (the Nea Church) but it was also reckoned to be a “Shrine” (“Temple”) and that “Solomon” (that is, the new “Solomon” otherwise known as the Emperor Justinian) had built it. This Nea Church was so grand in design and in dimensions that there was nothing else in Jerusalem to compare to it (so said Procopius). This “Church of Mary” was the same as the new “Solomon’s Temple” and this outstandingly large church with its two enormous hospices alongside were all located at the southern part of and within the Haram esh-Sharif. So, “Solomon’s New Temple” came into existence at the Haram. Even the southern wall of the Haram was moved southward for about 107+ feet to accommodate this complex of buildings.

The Church of Mary Once Occupied the Southern Fourth of the Haram — Its Importance

The real Church of Mary (the Nea Church) described clearly in Procopius was indeed the structure that preceded the Al Aqsa Mosque that was begun by Omar the Second Caliph. It is NOT the new one suggested by Prof. Avigad. Look at what Arabic historians of later times believed and many of our own modern scholars of early Arabic times. For example, the outstanding scholar of Arabic history, Prof. Guy Le Strange in his “Palestine Under the Moslems” gives an exact quote from the Arabic historian Shams ad Din Suyuti (1470 C.E. who was himself referring to earlier Arabic histories) stated that the spot where Omar selected for his Al Aqsa Mosque was certainly the precise area where the Church of Saint Mary (the Nea Church) stood, and it was Justinian (that is, “Solomon”) who built it. Notice what Suyuti wrote: “Now, when Omar made the capitulation with the people of the Holy City [Jerusalem], and entered among them, he was wearing at that time two long tunics of the kind called Sumbulant. Then he prayed IN THE CHURCH OF MARY, and when he had done so, he spat on one of his tunics. And it was said to him: ‘Dost thou spit here because that this is a place in which the sin of polytheism has been committed?’ And Omar answered: ‘Yes, verily the sin of polytheism hath been committed herein; but now, in truth, the name of Allah hath been pronounced here.’”²²

Professor Le Strange accepted this Arabic identification of the Al Aqsa Mosque with the site of the former Church of Mary (and the editors of The Palestinian Pilgrims’ Text Society seconded this belief²³). In my view (which I will soon give an abundance of evidence), there can really be no doubt that this is a correct evaluation.²⁴ The geographical area for the site of Mary’s Church (the Nea Church) built by Justinian fits the Al Aqsa Mosque region perfectly.²⁵ Conder consistently referred to Al Aqsa Mosque as built on the ruins of the Nea Church without any doubt in its identity. Clearly, before 614 C.E., all the Haram esh-Sharif was Christian. This means that in the sixth century there were two major Christian churches standing within the walls of the Haram esh-Sharif. One

was in the central and north part called the Church of the Holy Wisdom over the area of the later Dome of the Rock, and the other dominated the southern part (and even with the southern wall extended 107+ feet south to accommodate it) called the Church of Mary (Nea Church) situated over the southern fourth of the enclosure. Look at what the location of these two Christian churches means to our present inquiry. With the Church of Mary built by Justinian (the new “Solomon”) being at the exact site of the present Al Aqsa Mosque, this then means that within the Haram esh-Sharif (when Omar told Sophronius that the southern end of the Haram was where he wanted to build his Mosque) that it was possible to see the ruins of two major Byzantine Churches within that Haram area that had recently been destroyed by the Persians and Jews in 614 C.E. Omar was looking over the ruins of those two Christian churches. And, as the early Arabic historians knew, it was within the ruins of the latter church (the Church of Mary, the Nea Church), that Omar started to construct his Al Aqsa Mosque. This region is really a Christian site, but Sophronius gave it to Omar.

These facts present an impossible historical scenario according to the early records of the Arabs (and as we will soon see) as well as the Jews. As clear as Eutychius could write it, he stated that the place where Omar first selected his portable stone to be the Qiblah of his Al Aqsa Mosque within the Haram esh-Sharif, was a ruined Jewish area in which there had NEVER been any Roman, Byzantine or Arabic construction prior to the time of Omar. The site that Sophronius showed Omar was over the Gihon Spring and much to the south of the Haram esh-Sharif. Now note this. Further, we have the same testimony given to us by the Jewish Rabbi David Kimchi who lived just after the main period of the Crusades in 1235 C.E. (about 600 years after the time of Omar and Sophronius). The description he provides to us is very similar to what the earlier historical authorities had to tell us. It seems that the early Jewish sector of Jerusalem was always reckoned to be over the southeast ridge and across the Kedron Valley an up the slope of Olivet in the south. We should note carefully what this Jewish authority had to say about the site of the former Temple in his day. This Rabbi was still testifying that NO GENTILE BUILDINGS were ever built within the former precincts of the Temple of God at Jerusalem.

The Witness of Rabbi David Kimchi on the Ruins of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Concerning the former Temple site in Jerusalem, we also have the express testimony of Rabbi David Kimchi, one of the great biblical commentators of the Jews (otherwise known as the RADAQ) who lived from about 1160 to 1235 C.E. Rabbi Kimchi said that as late as his time the region of the former Temples still remained in ruins and that it continued to be a fact that NO GENTILES (whether Roman, Byzantine or Muslim) HAD YET BUILT ANY OF THEIR BUILDINGS OVER THE SITE OF THE TEMPLE. He said (and I am quoting him verbatim): “And [the Temple] is still in ruins, [in] that the Temple site WAS NEVER BUILT ON BY THE NATIONS” (Commentary on Isaiah 64:10 and quoted by Prof. Kaufman in Biblical Archaeology Review, March/April, 2000, p.61 – the letters in capitals are my emphasis). The comments of Rabbi David Kimchi are first-class Jewish testimony in about 1235 C.E. He carried on the same theme as the former Archbishop Eutychius did back in 876 C.E. The tradition among the inhabitants of Jerusalem that no Gentile construction was permitted on the former site of the Jewish Temples was still in effect 360 years after Eutychius. So, in the year 1225 C.E., Rabbi Kimchi still continues the theme by dogmatically stating that NO GENTILE BUILDINGS had ever been built on the Temple site – and this included the period of 600 years before him when the Muslims (and during the Crusader period, also the Christians) had control over all areas of Jerusalem! In fact, Rabbi Kimchi said that the actual state of the former Temple EVEN IN HIS DAY was that it was “still in ruins.”

There can be no doubt that Rabbi Kimchi was stating absolute fact and that he was not speaking allegorically that the so-called “ruin” including the Christian and Muslim buildings that were within the Haram esh-Sharif. Indeed, the buildings within the Haram esh-Sharif through the early Arabic period and through the first stages of the Crusades (when Christians controlled the Haram), the buildings were reckoned as holy and sanctified and they were in absolute beauty and well kept up in order for the masses to worship within their sumptuous surroundings. Those buildings within the Haram were anything but being in ruins. But, the testimony of Rabbi Kimchi states clearly that “the Temple is still in ruins, in that the Temple site was never built on by the Gentiles. “This latter observation of Rabbi David Kimchi is the second “key” (or “deal point”) that the areas of the Al Aqsa Mosque or the Dome of the

Rock COULD NOT be considered as possible contenders for the original sites of the Temples because those areas had long been built upon first by Christians (for the Dome of the Rock area) and then by Muslims for both the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. In fact, we have the testimony of the Jewish poet Solomon Ibn Gabirol of Spain (born about 1021 and died about 1070 C.E.) who included among his collection of poems an important observation concerning the state of the Temple in Jerusalem. He wrote (and he was followed by many others who stated virtually the same thing):

“Remember me when You [God] rebuild Thy Temple, that I may behold the bliss of Thy chosen ones. And purify me to seek diligently Thy Sanctuary [the Temple now] devastated and ruined. And to cherish its[the Temple’s] stones and its dust, and the clods of its desolation, and rebuild Thou its wastes.” 26

Gabirol cannot be describing the site of the Haram esh-Sharif which was everything but desolate. It was totally a built-up area and NOT in a ruined state. Then there are the comments of the eminent poet of the Jews by the name of Judah Halevi who lived a short time after Gabirol (Judah Halevi lived from about 1085 to 1140 C.E. – during the Crusades). He confirms the state of the Jewish Temple as then consisting of desolate ruins. He wrote several works about the condition of Jerusalem and the site of the Temple in his time. Note the lament of Rabbi Judah Halevi over the ruined and desolate state of the Temple Mount during this early period of the Crusades. The Temple site was certainly not then a built-up area like the Haram esh-Sharif was at the time! This area from the Crusades until 1900 C.E. was an empty area, with no houses.

“My heart is in the east, and I in the uttermost west. How can I find savor in food? How shall it be sweet to me? How shall I render my vows and my bonds, while yet Zion lieth beneath the fetters of Edom [Rome, Christians by inference], and I in Arab chains? A light thing would it seem to me to leave all the good things of Spain [where he lived], seeing how precious in mine eyes to behold the dust of the desolate sanctuary [in Jerusalem].” 27

“Sweet would it be unto my soul to walk naked and barefoot upon the desolate ruins where thy holiest dwellings were; in the place of thine Ark where it is hidden [Halevi believed the tradition that the Ark was hidden in the tunnels and caves underneath the Holy of Holies] and in the place of thy Cherubim which abode in thine innermost recesses.” 28

Thy captives “pant toward thee, worshipping everyone from his own place toward thy gates [in Zion]. They are in pain over thy [Zion’s]desolation, and that weep over thy ruin.” 29 “The tumult of my tenderness is stirred when I remember thy glory of old that is departed thine habitation [the Temple] which is desolate.” 30

“They [our Jewish people] mourn the wasteness of thine [the Temple’s] overthrow and weep at thy destruction bitterly.” 31

“Sweet to my soul it would be to wander bare feet, to go unshod in places waxen waste – desolate since the oracles were there: Where thine Ark rested, hidden in thine heart, and were, within [the Temple] thy Cherubim were placed.” 32

A short time later, the famous Maimonides (who modernized Judaism with rationalistic doctrines in the twelfth century) was also non-allegorical in his descriptions of the Temple Mount when he came to relate the condition of the Temple site in his day. We should pay attention to what Maimonides stated during the time when the Crusading Christians were in charge of Jerusalem. Indeed, he and his father and brother even visited Jerusalem for three days on their way from North Africa to Egypt and they all witnessed the ruins and desolation of the Temple site while the area of the Haram esh-Sharif and the Dome of the Rock were then built over with beautiful religious structures and plazas that were kept in the finest conditions (there were no ruins within the region of the Haram whatever). Note what Maimonides stated in his “Book of Temple Services,” the eighth section of the Misneh Torah written in the year 1180 C.E.

“As far as the Sanctuary and Jerusalem were concerned, the first sanctification [by Solomon] hallowed them for all time to come.... Wherefrom the Sages have averred, even though they are desolate [at the time of

Maimonides], the sanctuaries retain their pristine holiness.... Now just as we are obliged to keep the Sabbath for all time to come, so must we reverence the Sanctuary [the Temple] for all time to come; for even though it is in ruins, its sanctity endures.”

There is even more testimony to the site of the Temple in Crusader times being in ruins. In 1210 C.E. there is a brief account by Rabbi Samuel Ben Samson that in Jerusalem was a place where “only the foundations [of the Temple] remain now in existence.” It was near the “fount [spring] of Etham, the bathing place of the priests.” This is a reference to the Gihon Spring which had been closed up by Saladin in 1187 C.E. Rabbi Samson said that opposite the fount was a Gate in the Western Wall. “At the base of this wall there is to be observed a kind of arch placed at the base of the Temple. It is by a subterranean passage that the priests reach the fount of Etham, the spot where the baths [of the priests] were.” 33 The spring was then being named after a site called Etham. This spring was also reckoned as the miraculous “Well of Miriam” that appeared in various places and was once located in the time of Moses at the Tabernacle entrance.

Why did some Jews in the Crusade period call the Gihon Spring “the Fount of Etham”? This is easy to answer. Etham was an area south of Bethlehem that was once a water source for Jerusalem when conduits brought water to Jerusalem from the higher area of Etham. Many people thought that the water that came from the Gihon had its origin in the Etham area and thus the Gihon Spring in Jerusalem was sometimes called by that name. In the time of Rabbi Samson, there was no outside entrance to the Gihon or the Etham fount (it was “blocked up” by Saladin). The spring had to be reached by subterranean tunnels and shafts that led downwards from the Ophel mount [the site of the Temple] to the waters that finally emerged at the Siloam pool area southeast of the city. In no way could Rabbi Samson have been describing the Dome of the Rock area within the Haram esh-Sharif in his account of the Temple site. He concluded his remarks with: “Only the foundations [of the Temple] remain now in existence, but the place where the Ark stood is still to be seen” (ibid.). He then said that from that spot he and his party then journeyed to the adjacent Pool of Siloam.

And now we once again come to the comments of Rabbi David Kimchi. He reported about the condition of the Temple and the Temple Mount about twenty years after Rabbi Samson (about 1235 C.E.). He stated without ambiguity that the site of the former Temples in Jerusalem “were still in ruins” in his day and he qualified his statement with the further observation that NO GENTILE BUILDINGS WERE THEN ERECTED OVER THE TEMPLE SITE (this account disqualifies the whole region of the Haram esh-Sharif with its Dome of the Rock from being considered because there were then many Christian and former Muslim buildings in evidence in those areas). For the grandeur of the Haram esh-Sharif in Arab times, we have the eyewitness reports of Muslim travelers (principally Nasir-i Khusraw and Al Ghazali), and the Christian Daniel the Abbot 34 who report the beautiful buildings and pavements of the plaza areas that were in various parts of the Haram esh-Sharif and that the earlier Muslims and the later Christians viewed the precincts as a holy and sanctified place. The Haram esh-Sharif was especially taken care of with utmost attention and that no ruins of any kind were found within its confines. Even with frequent earthquakes the sites were quickly restored.

So, these wonderful descriptions of the beauty of the Haram esh-Sharif during the period of the Crusades show conclusively that Rabbi Kimchi was not allegorizing about the ruins and desolation of the Temple site at that same time. It also backs up the truthfulness of his statement that none of the previous nations (the Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Egyptians, Turks, Crusading Christians, etc.) had ever built any buildings whatever over the former site of the Jewish Temple located over the Gihon Spring area in Jerusalem.

There is a Third Jewish Witness in 1577 C.E. Who Virtually Repeated Rabbi David Kimchi.

The fact is, Rabbi David Kimchi in 1235 C.E. was NOT the last Jewish authority who unambiguously stated that the beautiful Christian/Muslim buildings of the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque COULD NOT BE the site of the Temple. These Christian/Muslim areas were not in ruins. Just the opposite was the case. Our next proof is yet a third “key” (or “deal point”) on this same theme given by a first class Jewish historian some 335 years after Rabbi David Kimchi. This is the testimony of a Jewish historian who was also aware in the year 1577 C.E. that the site of the former Temples WAS STILL NOT BUILT UPON by the Romans, Byzantines, Muslims, Crusaders, Egyptians

or Ottoman Turks. Other than the Jews themselves in the brief period in the fourth century in the time of Constantine and again in that of Julian (when two Temples were started by the Jews, but aborted), there had never been any buildings of consequence ever constructed on that southeast ridge over the Gihon Spring. And now we come to the sixteenth century. Jewish authorities as late as 1577 C.E. knew the Haram was not the Temple site. They knew that the City of Jerusalem had been moved north and westward! We have written record from one of the finest Jewish historians of the sixteenth century (one who had access to scores of early Jewish records, as well as many Islamic historical accounts and he was a master of early Greek and Roman historical sources that he acknowledged as extremely valuable and with whom in most cases he agreed). His name was Azariah de' Rossi. He wrote a first class historical work published in Hebrew by 1577 C.E. in which he garnered the writings and records of former Jewish historians and complemented them with the major Gentile works of the past that most Christian authorities in the sixteenth century relied on for their accuracy.

The book of Azariah de' Rossi was: "The Light of the Eyes." And true to the title, the book does illumine the eyes of the reader with some excellent (and true) observations on the historical accounts of the past that particularly interested Jews, but it incorporated many of the Gentile historians of the past that many Jews in the sixteenth century had jettisoned from their historical studies. From a historical point of view, this Jewish historian (Azariah de' Rossi) must be reckoned the finest Jewish historian from the time of Maimonides until the period of the enlightenment in our modern period. And, among other things, De' Rossi provided the same "key" (or "deal point") on locating the proper site of the former Temples of the Jews in the City of Jerusalem as did Eutychius in 876 C.E. and Rabbi David Kimchi in 1235 C.E. Let us see. De' Rossi in his book "Light of the Eyes," 35 relates a belief that was widespread in the sixteenth century among scholarly Jews. It was commonly accepted among the Jews that the present City of Jerusalem was NOT the actual City of David (or even the City of Herod in the first century). They believed it was a new city built by the Emperor Hadrian a few miles north of the former city that the emperor named Aelia. In this belief the Jews were correct about Hadrian constructing his new city, but De' Rossi wrote authoritatively to assure the Jews of his time that they were wrong to think that Hadrian had built Aelia several miles north from the original site of the Jerusalem of David and Herod. Even the famous Jewish statesman and scholar Don Isaac Abarbanel (who wrote some 70 years before De' Rossi's time) had stated that Zechariah 12:6 proved that modern Jerusalem was NOT in its original place, but that it was a few miles north of its former location. To many Jews living at the time, it was thought that the "Jerusalem" of their day (in the sixteenth century) was in a different location than that of David or Herod. But it was also believed that this repositioning of Jerusalem would be righted in the Messianic period, and that Jerusalem would once again be built in its original areas. Don Isaac Abarbanel specifically taught that the Jerusalem of his day would be moved back to its pristine site (as Zechariah 12:6 stated) once the Messiah would arrive.

While De' Rossi had no problem with Abarbanel's evaluation that Jerusalem and the Temple at Moriah would be restored to their former places, De' Rossi felt compelled to inform his readers that Don Isaac Abarbanel [who wrote about 1495 C.E.] was wrong in believing that Hadrian had moved Jerusalem a few miles north of the original site (some thought as much as 5 miles). True, it was a fact that the Jerusalem and Moriah of the sixteenth century was located further north than David's and Herod's sites, but not as far as 5 miles. Indeed, the move was just less than a mile. Note what De' Rossi said in correcting Don Isaac. "[Abarbanel believed that] Hadrian completely rebuilt the City of Jerusalem some miles away from its original site, and for this reason the promise [in Zechariah 12:6] that she would in the future be restored to the real site of Jerusalem" (pp.249,250). De' Rossi gave more information. Other Jews were saying that "the present site of Mount Moriah [where the Temple was once built] was about five miles away from Jerusalem [north of the original Jerusalem of David and Herod]" (p.250). Though De' Rossi admitted that Abarbanel was correct about Zechariah 12:6 and that the Jerusalem of David and Herod was located in a different area than the present Jerusalem built by Hadrian, De' Rossi insisted that the records that the Gentiles maintained (he meant Josephus written in Greek and other Greek writings) that Hadrian only enlarged the city to embrace within his new city the northern cemeteries of Herod's Jerusalem. According to De' Rossi, Hadrian made those northern cemeteries of the earlier Jerusalem, to be inside the later walls of Aelia by at least a bow's shot. De' Rossi's exact statement was: "The Gentile historians, whose evidence he [Abarbanel] cites for the life of Hadrian and [the] restoration of Jerusalem [under the name Aelia], simply state that he [Hadrian] destroyed it [completely

destroyed Herod's Jerusalem] and then enlarged it ... enlarged it to the north so that the cemeteries which had been an arrow's shot outside the city came within the walls [came within the north and west walls]." Since those cemeteries in Herod's time had to be "outside the camp" [at least 2000 cubits or 3000 feet] from the original Temple area, this means that Hadrian's Jerusalem was located north of the earlier city of Herod. This was De' Rossi's reasoning, and he was correct.

But within this context concerning the geographical differences between Hadrian's and Herod's Jerusalem, De' Rossi then made two major observations about the original site of the Jerusalem — the Jerusalem of David and Herod and also the site of the Temple [Moriah] in the time of Herod. He said that in spite of the fact that the location of Jerusalem and the Temple had been moved northward since the time of Hadrian, there was still a reason for all Jews to take comfort and show their satisfaction that the original site of the Temples had not been disturbed at all by Hadrian's actions. Hadrian left that southeastern region where the Temples once stood alone and did not build on it. As a result of this maneuver, De' Rossi stated: "OUR HOLY SITE [Moriah] HAS NOT BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ANY OTHER PEOPLE" (p.250). De' Rossi is acclaiming that NO HOUSE OF PRAYER for any other people had been built on the site of the former Temples. Indeed, De' Rossi went even further in his observation which he gave at his own time (1577 C.E.). De' Rossi went on say (in the same context) that though the Jewish Rabbi Nachmanides 300 years before was willing to tear his garments when he first saw the modern Jerusalem of Hadrian and the Al Aqsa Mosque as being the location of Solomon's Temple and that the Dome of the Rock was acknowledged as the area for the new Holy of Holies (and this is where the Christians and Muslims were then placing them), De' Rossi insisted that Abarbanel in 1495 C.E. knew this was not the true site. The original Jerusalem and Temple were not associated with the Haram esh-Sharif (which was further north). Now note what De' Rossi concluded in his observation for his own generation. He said that "the original Jerusalem" was located in an area "in which, even in his own time [the time of Abarbanel], and nowadays [also in the time of De' Rossi] NO ARAB WOULD PITCH HIS TENT" (p.250). 36

De' Rossi stated categorically that all Arabs were afraid to approach the original site of the Jewish Temples in 1577 C.E. and that they would not so much as pitch a tent in the region. De' Rossi was certainly NOT TALKING ABOUT the Haram esh-Sharif in this context because that area was the central shrine and their religious site of gathering for the Muslims of which most of the Arabs belonged. Indeed, Arabs from 638 C.E. and throughout their history had been pitching their tents (and building monumental shrine type buildings and mosques) within the Haram esh-Sharif (and Christians had built equally monumental churches within the Haram esh-Sharif before the time of the Arabic occupation of Jerusalem). Yet, De' Rossi said that Jews of his time could take some consolation in one particular point. That Jewish consolation rested in the fact that the true site of the Temple over the Gihon Spring area because "OUR HOLY SITE [Moriah] HAS NOT BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ANY OTHER PEOPLE" (p.250), and that "NO ARAB WOULD PITCH HIS TENT [there]" (p.250). This observation by a contemporary Jewish historian (with outstanding scholarly credentials) who favorably referred to those who were eyewitnesses about the true site of the Temples is of utmost importance in showing our modern Jewish scholars that they are wrong in their acceptance of the Haram esh-Sharif as the place of the former Temples. Let's face it. De' Rossi was trying to instruct his Jewish brethren in 1577 C.E. about the real site of the Jewish Temples. He was making the clear and certain statements that the actual site of Moriah had never been transformed into a house of prayer for any other people...and that nowadays [in 1577 C.E.] and that in his day "NO ARAB WOULD PITCH HIS TENT" in the true region. This shows that De' Rossi knew exactly where the former Temples had stood because he made the statement (backed up by eyewitnesses) that NO ARAB would in his day PITCH HIS TENT at the ruined site. In fact, in the period just after the Crusades when the Gihon Spring was once again discovered, its water was then bitter and unsanitary. Christians were beginning to call it, however, the Spring of the Virgin. 37 This was an region of Jerusalem (and the only one) that "HAD NEVER BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ANY OTHER PEOPLE." And even today, there is in the region only a smattering of secular and ramshackle dwellings that are of poor construction and it is the most undesirable place in modern Jerusalem for people to set up house.

This eyewitness testimony of De' Rossi as late as 1577 C.E. that no Gentile buildings of any kind (religious or non-religious) had ever been built on the true Moriah (the original Temple site) and that Arabs were shunning it is simply a continuation of the statements of Rabbi David Kimchi (and earlier those of Eutychius) that the Gentiles would never construct their holy buildings on the site of the former Jewish Temples. It was different for Christians and Muslims. They had long before transferred their new Temples up to the Haram esh-Sharif and they built holy structures within the Haram esh-Sharif as a re-dedicated Temple of Solomon (the Al Aqsa Mosque) and what they thought to be the northern extension of Herod's Temple which became known in Crusader times as the Temple of the Lord (the Dome of the Rock). Yes, there is evidence that some Jews in the time of the Crusades began to believe the Haram had some credentials for being the original Temples that the Christians and Muslims were demanding. Others thought it was actually over the Gihon Spring in the south. We now need to devote some attention to the fact that some Jews in the latter part of the Crusade period were willing to abandon the former spot of their holy Temples and retreat (along with the Christians and Muslims) to believe that the Haram esh-Sharif (and especially the area of the Dome of the Rock) may have had some credentials as being the former "Temple Mount." Let us look at the historical records to see what was happening in the Crusader period that brought some Jews to accept the Gentile location of the former Temple (rather than their previous beliefs that it was over the Gihon Spring). It is an interesting story and one that all should understand. It is simply amazing that the generality of the Jewish people would forget the whereabouts of their former Temples that they held in such esteem and adoration. It is almost as if God hid the site from them. If any wants my judgment, this is precisely what has happened. We should read Isaiah 29.

The Start of Jewish Attention that the Dome of the Rock was the Actual Temple Site

But things began to change about the site of the Temple at Jerusalem. Even in the time of Maimonides, Rabbi Samson and David Kimchi who showed the actual Temple site to be in desolate ruins, there were some Jews who were beginning to think that the Dome of the Rock was indeed the location of the Temple. And within another hundred years, all Jews accepted the changeover with the full sanction of the Jewish authorities. The change in Jewish attitude came quickly and without ambiguity. It first developed with the observations of a Jewish traveler who happened to pass through Jerusalem on his round-trip journey from the city of Tudela in northern Spain into Babylon, then to Egypt and finally back to Tudela. This traveler made his trip in the middle of the twelfth century. He was known as Benjamin of Tudela. He visited Jerusalem for a short visit about 1169 C.E. He was the first Jew who unambiguously stated that the area of the Dome of the Rock was the Temple site.

Benjamin of Tudela arrived on the scene in Jerusalem when the Christians in the Crusade period were in control of Jerusalem and they had been masters of the city for the previous 70 years. When Benjamin got there he found four Jewish people who lived near the Tower of David (as it was being called) near the present day Jaffa Gate. Some texts of Benjamin state that he found "200 Jews," but this is contradicted by another Jewish traveler of the same period by the name of Petahyah of Regensburg who stated that there was only one Jew (a dyer) in the city when he visited it. 38 Just a handful of Jews were in Jerusalem when Benjamin of Tudela hurriedly visited the Holy City.

This has to be the case because when the Christian Crusaders conquered Jerusalem in 1099 C.E., they forbade any Jew from entering the city (this also included Muslims) and this prohibition was strictly adhered to for at least 52 years. But after that period of 52 years of complete Jewish abandonment of the Holy City, a few Jews then began to live in or on the edge of Jerusalem. So, there were from one to four Jews in the area in the time of Benjamin of Tudela. It was at this time that some Jews (but not all) first began to think that the Dome of the Rock was the site of the Holy of Holies of their former Temples. Benjamin testified to this fact. These Jews simply began to acknowledge that the Christians and Muslims were right in identifying the spot as that of their former Sanctuary. And though this was a major departure from Jewish tradition of the previous centuries, there was an archaeological discovery (so the story goes) that prompted many Jews to turn their attention to the southwest hill as being the real Zion and that the southeast ridge could no longer be considered as the former "City of David."

Why Benjamin of Tudela Readily Accepted the Dome of the Rock as the Temple Site

Let us now look at an important observation made by Benjamin of Tudela when he got to Jerusalem. He reports an event that occurred 15 years before he visited the city during which some workers on the southwestern hill called by Christians “Mound Zion” (while working on rebuilding a wall of a Christian church) accidentally came upon a cavern which was filled with tombs and other finery that was interpreted by a Jewish resident of Jerusalem as being the tombs of David, Solomon and the other Kings of Judah. The Jewish person who made the interpretation was named Abraham al-Constantini. So, this means (if the story is factual – and later Jews took it to be) that this Abraham al-Constantini must have been in Jerusalem in the year 1074 C.E. (some 15 years before Benjamin of Tudela talked with him about the discovery of the so-called tombs of David, Solomon and the Kings of Judah when he visited the city). Before that period of Abraham al-Constantini (and for a period of at least 52 years) there had not been a single Jew who could enter into Jerusalem. The city had been empty of Jews for over five decades. Indeed, in 1129 C.E., the Spanish Rabbi Abraham Hiyya said: “Not even one Jew is to be found in Jerusalem in our own days.” 39 The early Crusade period saw NO JEWS whatever in Jerusalem.

Those 52 or so years when there were no Jews able to visit Jerusalem (from 1099 to 1151 C.E. or thereabouts) is an important period of time in our quest to explain why Jews finally began to accept the Dome of the Rock in the Haram esh-Sharif as the real site of the Temple (even though the Jews who began to think so were mistaken in their beliefs). The fact is, during that period of 52 years Jerusalem underwent a great change geographically. The Christians came into the region and began to tear down former buildings and to construct new ones. And when Jews (almost two generations later – and having been ejected from Jerusalem for over five decades) came back to the city, the memories of how it once appeared were different from what was then being displayed. That span of 52 years is a long time for Jews to be prohibited from entering Jerusalem. That is like stating that no Jew of modern times ever visited Jerusalem from Israel’s Independence Day as a State in 1948 until the Spring of 2000 when the Pope visited the city. Of course, in our time Jerusalem has grown and grown so that over a half million Jews live in the surrounding area, but back in the period of the first five decades of the Crusader period, NOT A SINGLE JEW had visited or entered the city of Jerusalem (the Jews were banned from doing so by the Christian masters of the city). In that time, the Jewish people lost knowledge of Jerusalem.

In 1152 C.E., however, one or two Jews were permitted to live near the Tower of David at the Jaffe Gate. One of them must have been Abraham al-Constantini because it was about 1154 C.E. that Benjamin of Tudela stated that Abraham al-Constantini told him of the discovery of the Tombs of David, Solomon and the other Kings of Judah underneath a church on the southwest hill of Jerusalem then being called by the Christians “Mount Sion” (Christians use the spelling “Sion” rather than “Zion”). Indeed, Benjamin states that it was this Abraham alConstantini that informed the Christian bishop that the newly discovered tombs were those of David and the other kings. Though the bishop had the entrance to the tomb/cavern soon closed up and no one has since seen the resplendence of the Tombs as they were described by Benjamin, still the knowledge of that archaeological discovery spread like wild-fire throughout the whole of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish worlds. This new “Tomb area” was considered an archaeological discovery of great significance and the interpretations based upon it began to change the very way Christians, Muslims and especially Jews viewed the early geography of Jerusalem. It is a fact that one story (no matter how well intentioned) can reap devastating results. Let us see why.

If there really was a Tomb area found on the Christian “Mount Sion” just before the time of Benjamin of Tudela, it was because Simon the Hasmonean in the second century before Christ moved David’s “Tomb” (which he built as a cenotaph, and not an actual Tomb) to the southwest hill. I have explained this as a definite possibility in my book. But whatever was discovered, the matter became a very controversial subject even with the Jews when they came to interpret that “archaeological” discovery. If those tombs were reckoned to be genuine (and not simply a later cenotaph), then it meant that the southwest hill was indeed the real and proper “Mount Zion” and it was NOT the southeast ridge that the Jews from the time of Omar had thought (recall that the SEVENTY FAMILIES mentioned in the Geniza documents wanted to be near the Temple in the SOUTHERN part of Jerusalem and Jewish presence continued in the southeast quadrant – and only there — until 1077 C.E.). The Jews in the early Arabic period knew these facts!

This discovery of the so-called “Tomb of David,” however, prompted some Jews to question the validity of the southeast hill. This was especially so because this “Tomb of David” was now located at a church that was believed to be built over the ruins of a Jewish synagogue whose walls showed that the building was orientated with its niche directed northward. Though our modern scholars have now surmised that the ruined structure within the church area is actually that of a fourth or fifth century Christian church (NOT a synagogue) that was destroyed by the Persians in 614 C.E. or by later Muslims in 965 C.E. (a good summary of these archaeological details is found in the excellent book: *Blue Guide Jerusalem*, p.237), in the Middle Ages it was thought the remains were those of a Jewish synagogue built at the so-called “Tomb of David.”

What was striking about the holy niche in the building was its northward orientation that seemed to focus attention toward the Haram esh-Sharif and the Dome of the Rock. Since Jewish tradition stated that early synagogues in Palestine were normally oriented toward the Temple, this particular configuration of this church (that was erroneously thought to be a synagogue) was precisely in the direction of the Dome of the Rock. This appeared to be proof that the region of the Haram esh-Sharif must have been the true site of the Temple (and that it was NOT situated on the southeast ridge as all history and biblical teaching demanded that it be). Because of this assumption, within a century of this so-called “archaeological” discovery, Jews were now speaking dogmatically about “the Royal Tombs on Mount Zion.”⁴⁰ This is further confirmed by what is called *The Forged Itinerary of Rabbi Menahem of Hebron* in 1215 C.E. who spoke of “the Tombs of the Kings on Mount Zion.”⁴¹

This does not end it. In 1270 to 1291 there is *The Itinerary of the Anonymous Pupil of Nachmanides* who not only visited the site of the “Tomb of David” (and the other kings) but he described a building at the place which was then being called (hold on to your hats, folks), “the Temple of David” with the Hebrew name *Heikhal* describing it. This same Hebrew word was that which sometimes was used for the Holy of Holies in the actual Temples. And note this. This later Jewish traveler gave a further interpretation about this new site on the Christian “Mount Sion.” He stated: “Some [Jews] say that the Ark of the Covenant which was brought by David [to Jerusalem] rested here [on the southwest hill] until he built the Temple.” The author then added the further interpretation: “Not far away [from this “Temple”] is the Tower of David, built of huge stones.” This was the Christian “Tower of David” located at the Jaffe Gate to the north and west. The author then stated that anyone can see that this Tower of David “is an ancient building.”⁴² This new location for the “Tower of David” was near half a mile from the true site.

So, by the end of the thirteenth century, even the Jewish authorities throughout the world had mistakenly gone over to believing that the southwest hill was indeed the original “Mount Zion” of David’s time. And with the so-called “synagogue” under the church where the “Tomb” was supposed to have been pointing its niche toward the Dome of the Rock, it was easy for the whole community of the Jews (along with the Christians and Muslims) to identify the area of the Haram esh-Sharif as the former Temple site of the Jews. They also began to believe that the so-called “Tower of David” at the Jaffe Gate was the real “Tower” of David. The truth is, that false “Tower” was built no earlier than the sixth century and it was situated about three quarters of a mile northwest of where the former and accurate “Citadel [Tower] of David” was positioned in biblical times. From this time onward, the confusion (it should be called “the deception”) was now complete and within two generations after the time of the Crusades, all people (including the Jews) now accepted the Dome of the Rock as the place near where the Holy of Holies once existed. They forgot all about the proper place on the southeast ridge.

This was the period when all peoples finally accepted the southwest hill of Jerusalem as the actual “Zion,” and they forgot the real biblical “Zion” on the southeast hill. So certain did this false identification become in the eyes of all scholars, historians and theologians that even Robinson (one of the great explorers of Palestine in the early 19th century and after whom “Robinson’s Arch” in the western wall of the Haram esh-Sharif is named) said the truth of the southwest hill as being the real “Mount Zion” was thoroughly unassailable. To him and his colleagues there was not the slightest doubt that the southwest hill was the correct biblical site. Indeed, virtually everyone throughout the world (and at all official levels of academic and theological authorities of all religious persuasions) dogmatically accepted that the southwest hill was the true “Mount Zion.” The error brought chaos to the actual biblical geography of Jerusalem. Among other mistakes because of this wrong identification, Robinson went so far as to believe that

the Gihon Spring (which the Bible shows was at the foot of “Mount Zion” at the southeast ridge) was actually a place west of the southwest hill and down in the upper valley (wadi) Er-Rababi where water would drip from crevices in the wet season. Robinson’s location was at least a mile west of where it actually was. 43 These false locations were almost a mile off.

Still however, the Jewish authorities had been swayed by this archaeological discovery and the orientation of the so-called “synagogue” at what was considered the “Tomb of David.” They shifted the real “Mount Zion” of biblical Jerusalem erroneously to the southwest hill. So entrenched did this new concept become regarding the geography of the city that both Christians, Muslim and Jews began to accept the southwestern “Zion” as certain. As a matter of fact, as I explain in my book, all scholars in England and America until the year 1875 C.E. strongly believed that the southwest hill was the “Mount Zion” that David conquered from the Jebusites. Thankfully, however, common sense finally returned to the thinking of scholars about 1875 C.E. It was the indefatigable efforts of W.F. Birch in England who wrote his passionate pleas (he held out almost single-handedly against the opinions of all the scholars in his day) that the southwest hill WAS WRONG and that the southeast hill was the correct “Mount Zion.” 44 He was right!

Birch’s persistence on behalf of the truth paid off and all the scholars in the universities finally had to give in and accept that the southeast hill was proper and that the southwest hill WAS NOT the original “Mount Zion.” Yes, W.F. Birch won the match against all the top scholars of his day including the most respected and prestigious in the business. It is interesting that this procedure is now being repeated in my endeavor to get the Temple site back to its original position over the Gihon Spring. The truth is, everyone now knows that the original “Mount Zion” was truly on the southeast hill and this shows that the Jewish authorities who wanted to settle “near the former Temple” in the time of Omar and Sophronius went to that southeast region and settled. No Jew before the twelfth century showed any interest in the erroneous southwest hill until that “archaeological discovery” was made 15 years before Benjamin of Tudela went to Jerusalem. The main culprit who introduced the error was the reference to this “discovery” in the account of Benjamin of Tudela in 1169 C.E. This man is an enigma to many Jewish scholars. Just who was he?

What Did Benjamin of Tudela Report and What are his Qualifications?

The events that were told Benjamin of Tudela about Jerusalem when he got to the Holy City made him instantly arrive at some profound conclusions on the early geography of Jerusalem that no Jewish authority before his time had unambiguously accepted. But Benjamin presented his views with vigor and certainty. Without the slightest doubt, and with full dogmatism, Benjamin arrived at the conclusion that the Christians were right and that the Dome of the Rock was the actual site of the former Temples of the Jews. He stated: “Jerusalem is furnished with four gates, called the Gate of Abraham, of David, of Zion, and of Jehoshaphat. The latter stands opposite the Holy Temple, which is occupied at present by a building, called Templo Domino [the Dome of the Rock]. In front of it [to the west, because Christian entrance to the building was on the west] you see the western wall, one of the walls which formed the Holy of Holies of the ancient Temple, it is called the Gate of Mercy [on the east where one could view it] and all Jews resort thither to say their prayers near the wall of the court yard [the east wall of the Haram].” 45 His dogmatism as to these identifications were no doubt prompted by what he learned from Rabbi Abraham al-Constantini about the Tombs of David found on the Christian “Mount Zion” and the orientation of the early church (which they interpreted as being a “synagogue”) being directed toward the Haram esh-Sharif. It was the discovery of these so-called “Tombs” (and the “synagogue”) that prompted all later Jews to adopt the Dome of the Rock as the actual site of the Temple (as Christians demanded and even the Muslim were now accepting).

Though some Rabbis in the first hundred years after the archaeological discovery knew better (notably Maimonides and Rabbi David Kimchi who said the Temple site was still in ruins and was desolate – and Rabbi Kimchi even stated that no Christian or Muslim building had ever been constructed on the true Temple Mount), by the end of the thirteenth century, most Jews in the world (of which we have record) accepted the Dome of the Rock as the real site of the Temple. Still, a few educated Jews held out against this error until the sixteenth century when the historical studies of Azariah De Rossi proved again that Maimonides and Rabbi Kimchi were right and that the

true Temple site had still remained vacant of any Gentile buildings of consequence. The majority of Jews, however, persisted in believing the Dome of the Rock was the former Temple site. Even the “western wall” was identified as being in front of the entrance to the Crusader Templo Domino (there was a short and low balustrade that once stood in that area that the Jews mistakenly thought was the “Western Wall” of the Holy of Holies that the Jews wrote about in the period of the Talmud and a short time afterward). This was a short stretch of wall that the Italian Rabbi Obadiah Da Bertinoro just before 1516 C.E. referred to as “the western wall, part of which is still standing.”⁴⁶ It was only after the time of Rabbi Isaac Luria (died in 1572 C.E.) that the present “Wailing Wall” was finally selected for Jews to venerate.

The Jews of the earlier Talmudic period were speaking about the part of a “Western Wall” that was located near a cave over and near the Gihon Spring. Some Jews during the Crusades changed the site to the western side of the Dome of the Rock. Benjamin of Tudela boldly asserts (and without the slightest compunction) that the so-called “Western Wall” was then found at the entrance to the Dome of the Rock. [Note: even this so-called “Western Wall” of the Holy of Holies as described by Benjamin of Tudela, is NOT TO BE CONFUSED with the later “Western Wall” of the Haram esh-Sharif (which only became the “Wailing Wall” of the Jews in the sixteenth century). I will soon explain how the later “Wailing Wall” became the so-called “Western Wall” of Jewish tradition. There is NOT THE SLIGHTEST DOUBT, the present “Wailing Wall” of the Jewish authorities (accepted by most religious Jews) is an invention of the sixteenth century and it has no relevance whatever to any architecture of the first century. Interestingly, Jewish scholars today admit this fact.

However, it was this Benjamin of Tudela who was the first Jewish person who unambiguously stated that the Dome of the Rock was the site of the Holy of Holies and that the balustrade then in front of its west entrance was the “Western Wall” of Jewish tradition. Just who was this Benjamin of Tudela who pontificated on these matters? No one knows anything about him besides what he wrote in his treatise that has come down to us. He writes of the Jewish people who were in the towns and cities he visited (even giving the names of eminent scholars and politicians), but his accounting is strange because when he gets to Cairo in Egypt he fails to mention the presence of Maimonides (the leader of all Egyptian Jews, and one of the most outstanding Jews in all history and one who had influence throughout all Jewry). That would be like someone traveling to Mount Vernon in Virginia two hundred years ago and mentioning all about several activities of the area (and Benjamin always mentioned the top leaders of Jewry and even of the Gentiles in the other lands he visited), yet the man visiting Mount Vernon failed to say a word about the activities or presence of George Washington the first President of the United States. There is much to be desired in the geographical reporting of this Benjamin. He was sloppy in his accounting. This is easily shown.

The Glaring Geographical Mistakes of Benjamin of Tudela

The geographical knowledge of Benjamin of Tudela was one of great ignorance and his judgments are often absurd. For one thing, when the archaeological discovery was made of “David’s Tomb,” Benjamin boldly placed Mount Zion in Jerusalem half a mile west of where it actually was. He also placed the early Citadel of David (called in his day the Tower of David) almost a mile northwest of where it once was. He placed the Temple a third of mile north of its actual location. Not only that, when he entered the Holy Land at Tyre, he journeyed south and when he came to Haifa he called it the ancient Gath-Hepher where Jonah was born (although the actual city of Gath-Hepher was located about 25 miles northeast of Haifa). He also said Capernaum was located south of Haifa on the Mediterranean coast, though it was actually located on the Sea of Galilee about 40 miles northeast of where he placed it. He also said that the famous Maon of Judah (located about 8 miles southwest of Hebron in Judah) was also the same place as Capernaum and located just south of Haifa. He said that Caesarea was the city of Gath where David hid out for a while, though the city of Gath was 30 miles south and east of Caesarea. He stated dogmatically that one of the streams that came from Mount Hermon (the eastern one) was in fact the River Arnon that anciently separated Moab from Edom (but the Arnon River was actually located about 100 miles south of where Benjamin placed it). And he also located the city of Keilah of Judah at least 60 miles away from its actual location.

Most of these anomalies of Benjamin are recorded by Col. Claude R. Conder of the Royal Engineers (and one of last centuries’ top scholars regarding Holy Land geography) in a report to The Palestinian Exploration Fund Journal

dated 27th of October, 1876. Indeed, when this Benjamin was traveling through southern Italy in the province of Apulia, he said the capital city of that province is where the Assyrian king named “Pul” came from (mentioned in II Kings 15:19 and I Chronicles 5:26). Let’s face it, the land of Assyria in Asia and the area of Southern Italy in Europe are two very different locations on earth. And even if there were a slight bit of historical truth that Benjamin recorded from the Jewish tradition that he accepts without criticism, his opinion is jaundiced because he gives so many ridiculous and outrageous erroneous statements concerning geographical matters in his work that a child would know are not correct. Without the slightest tinge of criticism, Benjamin reported that he saw in Rome “two copper pillars constructed by King Solomon, of blessed memory, whose name ‘Sh’lomo ben David’ is engraved on each.” He continues: “The Jews of Rome say that every year, about the time of the Ninth of Ab, these pillars sweat so much that the water runs down from them.” 47 One wonders how the Romans (and for what reason) received the two pillars of Solomon from the first Temple that was destroyed in the time of Nebuchadnezzar (King of Babylon in Mesopotamia) in the sixth century B.C.E.? Though Benjamin expressed no doubt in the veracity of the story, I have to apologize to my friends who are believers in such folklore that I cannot accept such unreasonable nonsense. The fact is, Benjamin was not only a sloppy and ignorant geographer, he also became a most dangerous authority for later Jews because many accepted his opinions without criticism. It is amazing how people at the time swallowed hook, line and sinker such nonsense.

But wait a moment. The Jews who lived after the Crusades are not entirely to blame for accepting these outlandish geographical anomalies of Benjamin of Tudela and other Christian and Muslim accounts of the time that are equally absurd and false. Do you know why Benjamin of Tudela placed Capernaum and Maon (two different cities and miles apart from each other) at the same location near the Mediterranean coast south of Haifa? That’s because the Christian authorities told him that is where those cities were then reckoned to be, and he gullibly believed the Christians. Col. Claude R. Conder of the Royal Engineers in his report to The Palestinian Exploration Fund Journal dated 27th of October, 1876 related that Benjamin of Tudela placed Capernaum and Maon on the main highway from Haifa to Jerusalem because Christian authorities wanted to grant pilgrims their full religious indulgences that the Roman Church were then awarding if they went to such places. But because at the time, the Muslims controlled both Capernaum and Maon, so the ecclesiastical authorities wanted to satisfy Christian pilgrims that they had indeed been to those holy places so they officially moved those cities from their original sites to the main road to Jerusalem so that Christians could conveniently stop off and gain their sought after indulgences that the Church guaranteed. That’s right. It was our misguided Christian church authorities who moved those two cities to the same convenient location on the main highway (at least 40 and 60 miles from their sites) and Benjamin of Tudela simply accepted these geographical errors without the slightest criticism.

Such things were common practice at the time. In the year 1291 C.E., the so-called “House of Mary” in Nazareth was, according to top ecclesiastical authorities, transported physically through the air to a place in Croatia in Europe. But that was not on the most favored route for pilgrimage, so three years later it was also carted (lock, stock and barrel) by the angelic hosts to a laurel grove near Loreto in Italy where it became a very famous place of pilgrimage. Now, the faithful did not have to go to Palestine to get their indulgences from the Vatican. They could now accomplish all they needed to do in regard to worshipping at the very “House of Mary” that the angels had transported to Loreto. Note what the Encyclopedia Britannica has to say about this famous site of pilgrimage. “Papal bulls were issued in favour of the shrine. Pope Innocent VII established a special mass for the feast of the Transportation of the Holy House (December 10)” (article: Loreto). Indeed, so sure and certain is the Vatican of the holiness of the site and that the angels did in fact transport Mary’s House to Loreto in Italy that “Benedict XV declared the Madonna di Loreto to be the patron of modern aviators (1920).” 48 Some of us might laugh at such nonsense (and I believe the story deserves such laughter), but Roman Catholic Church officials to this very day DO NOT laugh at these accounts. Some take them seriously and even papal authority vindicates their veracity by awarding the patronage of those angels to our modern airplane pilots. Many of my Catholic priest friends know these things are false, but simply smile at them. What they ought to do is to blast such nonsensical beliefs out of the saddle of orthodoxy.

Of course, this transporting through the air by the angels of the “House of Mary” from Nazareth to Loreto is a Christian story that requires a miraculous element of outstanding merit to vouch for its veracity. We should think that no Jewish person would be so daft as to believe such nonsense. Oh? Again (hold on to your hats, folks) because the Jewish religious authorities have a similar account that happened about the same time to the stones of the Temple once it was destroyed by Titus in 70 C.E. Note the following quote from the excellent work by Zev Vilnay. 49 It states:

“In the city of Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia, there is a synagogue which dates back to the most ancient days of the exile. According to tradition, its foundation contains stones taken from the Great Temple in Jerusalem. After the destruction of the Temple, angels carried on their wings a number of stones, and said to the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘Lord of the Universe, we take these holy stones on the condition that when the Temple is rebuilt, we are to return them to their place.’ Then the angels took the stones to Prague and left them in the Jewish quarter; over them a synagogue was built. Therefore the Jews name the synagogue ‘On Condition’ – in Hebrew *Al Tenai*.

With the passing of generations, the name *Al Tenai* was corrupted into *Altneu-Shul*, which in Yiddish means OldNew Synagogue.”

That is not all. Following up on the belief that angels deposited some stones of the Temple in Prague, Vilnay continues:

“It is reported by Rabbi Yitzak of Moskovera: ‘The old synagogue in the city of Prague was built from stones of the Temple, because as the children of Israel went forth in the abundance of their love for its holiness, to fulfill the words of the psalmist: ‘because Your servants desired her stones.’ And when they came to the city of Prague, they built there a synagogue, and they placed there these stones.” When the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One, blessed be He, scattered its stones over all the world. And on every place where a stone fell, a synagogue was erected. Therefore, each synagogue is called “a little Temple” because it contains within it a little of the Great Temple of Jerusalem.” 50

There you have it! No wonder archaeologists cannot find stones of the Temple in Jerusalem! We have this Jewish account that the angels have carried them to all areas of the world and then the angels directed that synagogues be raised up in the sites in which those stone chips have been deposited. Believe it if you will. People in the Middle Ages certainly did. We can call all of this mere folklore if we wish (but, as I said before), the papacy of Christendom does not consider the transportation of the “House of Mary” to Loreto as folklore, nor do many Jewish religious leaders believe their “little Temples” (with stones from the literal Temple in Jerusalem at their sites) to be mere folklore. But folks, this is the very type of teaching that finally got the Christians to switch the place of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ Jesus from the Mount of Olives (where the Holy Scriptures demand that the events took place) to their Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the western part of Jerusalem, and it was the same type of teaching that got the Jewish authorities in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to transfer the site of their former Temples from the southeast ridge up the northeast quadrant of early Jerusalem where the Dome of the Rock is now situated. And these erroneous sites are being taught by official church and synagogue leaders within this modern period. Oh God, help us! Folks, this is modern Judaism!

But the Muslims are no better off. Vilnay gives another tradition (this time a Muslim one). He relates that the Muslim geographer Makadissi, who was born in Jerusalem, wrote in 955 C.E. that “on the night of Arafat [when Muslim pilgrims gather on the Mount of Arafat near Mecca], the water in the holy well of Zamzam [which was shown to Hagar and her son Ishmael, and is near the mosque of Mecca] flows underground to the water of the Spring of Siloam [in Jerusalem]. And the people hold a festival here [in Jerusalem] on that evening.” 51 This Muslim belief reckons that underground stream at travelling about 800 miles from Mecca to Jerusalem. Indeed, nearby the Haram esh-Sharif is the famous Muslim bath called “the Bath of Healing.”

Vilnay again comments with a modern example of transference: “They [the Muslims] believe that its waters come from the Well of Zamzam in Mecca, the holy city of Arabia. Should you appear unconvinced,” said Vilnay, “they will tell you the following story, which you must admit,” said Vilnay with tongue in cheek, “is conclusive proof.” Vilnay then relates the story: “A few years ago a Muslim from India went on his pilgrimage to Mecca. As he was

bathing in the holy waters of the Well of Zamzam, a unique and valuable bowl which he had brought with him was carried away by the stream. This bowl was made of copper, and engraved thereon were many artistic and distinctive pictures and designs. The pilgrim was much grieved over his loss and consoled himself by visiting sacred sites. From Arabia he traveled to Jerusalem, and there he went to the Bath of Healing. When he was bathing, he suddenly saw in the flowing waters the very bowl he had lost. Only the water which flows underground from the Well of Zamzam in Mecca to Jerusalem could have carried it thither.” 52 Many of the religious Muslims in Jerusalem believe this story. Should we believe it? I must confess that I think the story is an outright lie.

What I am trying to show is the fact that even modern religious authorities (Christian, Jewish, Muslim) continue to relate or sustain such stories about the transference of sacred spots and items to other areas of holiness. Since this is the case, why should we blame Benjamin of Tudela for reporting that Capernaum and Maon (brought to a single location) was where the Christian authorities had falsely placed them just south of Haifa? It is difficult to blame Benjamin (who merely reported what he was told), when we have the Vatican in our modern period also stating with firm belief that “Mary’s House” in Nazareth can no longer be seen in that city because the angels took it to Loreto in Italy. And we have religious Jews convinced that the oldest synagogue in Prague was made from stones from the ruined Temple that the angels carried through the air to the spot. And many religious Jews confidently believe that each site for a synagogue is where an angel dropped a part of a stone from the Temple. My plea is: Oh God, save us from nonsense!

Indeed, even Vilnay tells us that the originator of modern Zionism (Herzl, who was NOT a practicing religious Jew) was prompted by his nostalgia to name his book proposing a modern Jewish state by the name of the Prague synagogue, Altneu-land. The Hebrew translation of this very work was titled Tel Aviv (Hill of spring) the name later given to the first city established by Zionist efforts in the land of Israel. The naming of the modern city of Tel Aviv from accounts generated from Jewish folklore may be for nostalgic reasons alone, but such innocent procedures often have a strange way of becoming very literal as time passes and people want to rescue traditional beliefs from being traditional nonsense. We need to jettison all such false beliefs!

It is the use of such erroneous teachings that people are led far away from simple and common sense biblical truths. All historians are aware that particularly in the period of the Crusades and up to the time of the Reformation, it was common for people to believe religious myths (of the above kind) at the expense of real historical truths. The fact is, however, we in this modern age are still saddled with many of those mythic accounts that have arisen since the close of the Holy Scriptures, the Talmud and even the Koran. Countless stories of such mythic and absurd themes have developed over the centuries and we moderns need to jettison them from our beliefs. They, however, are still plaguing us, particularly in matters concerning Jerusalem and its history and geography. The modern church, synagogue and Islamic authorities need to change their ways and admit that the majority of these early accounts are pure fiction and they perpetuate profound errors. We Christians are equally wrong in what we have accepted from our ignorant past.

Stories of Myths Given by Mystics or Teachings of Facts Given by Historians

But both Rabbi David Kimchi in 1235 C.E. and De’ Rossi in 1577 C.E. assured their Jewish readers that those Christian and Muslim buildings located within the Haram esh-Sharif were NOT those on the site of the true Temples of God that were built over and around the Gihon Spring. But, as interesting as De’ Rossi’s plea was to his scholarly colleagues, the historical truths he was advocating fell into immediate disuse and abandonment even in De’ Rossi’s own generation. Indeed, at this very time in history, a man came on the stage of history that had such power and authority among the Jewish authorities and the lay people at large that he completely changed their minds on the issue. The whole of the Jewish nation had their minds blinded to rationality, and they went over to the opinions of a profound mystic and religious eccentric by the name of Isaac Luria. Most psychologists today would describe him as truly “mentally ill.”

When this man, called “The Ari” (Rabbi Isaac Luria) came in the midst of the Jews in Safed in Galilee and in

Jerusalem (he lived from 1534 to August 5, 1572 C.E.), every bit of advice given by De' Rossi (as well as that of Maimonides and Rabbi David Kimchi in the earlier period) was pushed aside and the Jews embraced the teachings of Isaac Luria almost totally (and this is no exaggeration). Almost to a man, woman and child the Jewish people went into a belief in utter mysticism as the true teaching of Judaism. It was a time of lapse into religious beliefs that can only be described in modern terms as tantamount to mass hysteria and thorough delusion. Jewish scholars admit this. The whole nation went into a type of "Pentecostal" experience with paranormal outbursts among the Jewish leaders on such a wide scale that the influence permeated the whole of Jewish society for just over a century. And what emerged from this mass hysteria? This is the very time that the Jewish authorities decided to accept the "Wailing Wall" as the holiest site in all Judaism. They did so by paying attention to the mystical teachings and visionary experiences of Rabbi Luria. It was Luria who directed the Jews in his time to the "Wailing Wall" and to the Haram esh-Sharif as the place where the Shekinah (Spirit) of God had returned to the Holy Land from exile. Luria came up with beliefs that were "proof positive" that the Shekinah had returned to Jerusalem and that the divine wedding of the Shekinah with God was just on the doorstep. And where had the Shekinah returned? It was to the "Wailing Wall" and NOT to the area of the former Temples over the Gihon Spring. This return of the Shekinah to the "Wailing Wall" was absolute proof (as the Jewish religious people then viewed it) that the area of the Haram esh-Sharif was indeed the site of their former Temples. And even if there were any lingering doubts about the area of the Gihon Spring, they vanished from Jewish consciousness because the Shekinah had chosen the "Wailing Wall" area and none other. From then on, the true spot of the Temples that was over and near the Gihon Spring was completely and thoroughly substituted (wrongly) for the buildings within the Haram esh-Sharif that the Christians and Muslims had long accepted as the place of the Temples. The fact is, Isaac Luria was wrong in so many ways concerning the things he taught, and he was absolutely in error in telling the Jewish people in his day to look to the Western Wall as the spot marking the former Temple wall of Herod, but the Jewish population accepted him and his teachings almost to a man, woman and child.

For the next hundred years and more, the teachings of Lurianic Kabbalah reigned supreme in the beliefs of Judaism. It led to their final acceptance of a false messianic pretender known as Sabbatai Sevi (1660 C.E.) who duped the whole of the Jewish nation (much to the embarrassment of later Jewish intellectuals) into believing the most absurd form of Messianic belief imaginable. It was a time when practically the whole of Jewish society went into a "Dark Age Mentality" in which rational thought and beliefs were substituted with some of the most absurd and ridiculous religious beliefs imaginable. This time has to be reckoned in a modern sense as the period when the lowest form of religious madness that any people could experience became predominant in Judaism. It still remains in some Jewish sects. (By the way, we Christians and Muslims have had similar times when rational and true spiritual beliefs were also substituted for such utter mystical nonsense.) True to their tradition, some religious Jews today are still smarting over the doctrinal catastrophe that took place from the time of Luria to Sabbatai Sevi. Even later Jewish scholars (most of them) have admitted to the complete absurdity of Jewish belief derived from many of these men in the period from 1550 to 1670 C.E. It is a period that most Jewish intellectuals and rational scholars would hope that people would forget. But the fact is, they should NOT FORGET that period. It was the acceptance of such false beliefs (many of them still entrenched in modern Judaistic sects to this day) that caused the Jews to lose the site of their own Temples. Religious Jews ought to rid themselves of such nonsense (of course, I am not Jewish, but I hope they will heed what I say). Indeed, it is essentially from the teachings accepted by the Jewish people in that time of religious madness that is causing them to wail at the wrong "Wailing Wall." They have simply accepted the teachings of religious fanatics (whom most psychiatrists today would label as mad-men and very mentally disturbed). Forgive me for being plain, but someone ought to speak out on this issue, and most Jewish intellectuals would agree with my conclusions. Still, we Christians and Muslims are no better off in many of the utter nonsensical teachings we now hold sacrosanct that we inherited from the same religious fervor of our own "Dark Ages." The truth is, there needs to be a thorough housecleaning of all Jewish, Christian and Muslim absurdities that we moderns have embraced from our historical experiences in the "Dark Ages."

Let us be plain. The Jewish people almost to a man, woman and child from the time of Luria to Sevi did what many of our Christian people have done in following false teachers and also what some Muslims have done who have followed false Imams and prophets over the centuries. In my view, it is time to get rid of all such beliefs from

Christianity, and I hope my Jewish and Islamic scholar friends would say the same thing in regard to the equally absurd religious teachings that plague us all today. I am NOT talking about giving up pristine Christianity that got its teaching from the New Testament (which I feel is a divine work from God), nor am I speaking about giving up Jewish teachings from wise Rabbis of the past, nor am I asking for Muslims to give up pristine Islamic teachings from the original Koran. I am speaking about something that is far more sinister. I am referring to the nonsensical absurdities inherited from later times that have been promoted by religious fanatics and by psychologically disturbed individuals that have saddled false teachings onto the original religious writings that make the religions we see today to be about as far from the original versions as it is possible to get.

How the False Wailing Wall Was Selected as a Jewish Holy Site

The ordinary Jewish people in the sixteenth century had their minds turned toward the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria called “Ha Ari” or “the Lion” — a visionary man who was to lead all in Judaism into the most profound errors that any society has ever encountered. This evaluation is no exaggeration as any rational Jewish scholar today (and there are thousands out there) will testify. At the very time of De’ Rossi (who was a sensible and intelligent man with wisdom and knowledge), we find that the Jewish scholars and people in the area of Safed in Galilee and in Jerusalem was “religiously conquered” by Rabbi Luria. He almost single-handedly secured a significant change in the way the Jewish people began to look on their former religious beliefs. A dramatic change took place in Judaism when they adopted almost wholesale, Lurianic Kabbalah. Luria alone (with the insistence of his some of his contemporaries and especially later admirers) changed the whole of Judaism into a Kabbalistic type of mystical religious belief that was as different from the basic teachings of the Tanak and even of the Talmuds as daylight and dark. The “Ari” was responsible for altering the essential basic teachings of Moses into what some Jewish people today consider to be a Gentile Gnostic type of religious belief. And in the wake of his unique and wild interpretations of the Bible, he also got the whole of the Jewish people to turn the eyes from the former Temple spot over the Gihon Spring (that De’ Rossi spoke about) to accept in an official manner the area of the Gentile “Temples” that were then believed to be within the confines of the Haram esh-Sharif. It was Luria’s teaching concerning the Shekinah and its Exile (along with the prophetic Exile of Israel) that turned the trick. It was this Isaac Luria who falsely led the Jewish people to accept the “Wailing Wall” as the western wall of the Temple of Herod because he provided proof that the Shekinah glory of God was (according to him) already within the Haram esh-Sharif (directly behind the “Wailing Wall”) and the Shekinah would not leave that wall and that the time of the Jewish Exile was soon to be over.

The ordinary Jewish population had no idea how anti-biblical Luria’s teachings were or how wrong his geographical identifications were. They accepted his teachings altogether because he was to them a visionary holy man of the first rank. With his spiritual attributes (that others did not have as he did), he was able to select and identify for places to worship former unmarked graves of early Rabbis of the past, and also to show holy places long forgotten by the Jews. He gave the principal determination that the “Wailing Wall” (that was at first a Christian/Muslim holy site) was (or had become) a holy place for the Jews. Indeed, in my research it appears that Luria was the first person in Jewish history (450 years ago) to point out the present “Western Wall” (the “Wailing Wall”) as the site to assemble for the Jewish people and where they ought to worship God. No Jewish person had ever gone to the “Wailing Wall” (as we call it today) until Luria told one Rabbi Abraham Halevy that he was worthy to see the Shekinah (the Divine Presence). Vilnay spoke about Luria (Ha-Ari) and what he said to Rabbi Abraham Halevy. Notice the comment by Vilnay. The account below shows why later Jews flocked to the Wall. “Once the holy Ha-Ari said to Rabbi Abraham: ‘Know that your days are numbered and that you will soon die if you will not do as I tell you: but if you do, you will yet live another twenty-two years. This is what I bid you do: Go to Jerusalem and pour out your prayers before the Wailing Wall and you will prove yourself worthy by seeing the divine Presence there.’ Rabbi Abraham went home, shut himself in his house for three days and three nights, clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes, and fasted the whole time. Then he went forth to Jerusalem; he stood before the Wailing Wall in prayer, deep meditation, and weeping. The image of a woman, clad in black, appeared to him on the face of the wall. Immediately he fell upon the ground in great fear. Tearing his hair, he cried in a loud voice: ‘Woe is me, what have I seen?’ Finally he fell in a deep slumber and in a dream the divine Presence appeared to

him, clad in fine raiment, and said to him: 'Console thyself, My son Abraham; there is yet hope for thee, and the children of Israel will return to their inheritance, and I will have mercy on them.' He arose and returned to Safed, and when Ha-Ari the Holy saw him, he said to him at once: 'Now I know that you have seen the Divine Presence and you can rest assured that you will live another twenty-two years.'" 53

As a result, Rabbi Abraham Halevy who witnessed these things at the "Wailing Wall" lived exactly 22 more years. This was the "key." His longevity was exactly as Luria had told him, and the Jewish authorities considered that only God could provide such precise powers for life extension. The people thus considered this an astonishing confirmation of Rabbi Luria's divine powers and the truthfulness of his revelations for identifying geographical sites of former holy regions. This included the site of the "Wailing Wall." From that time forward, Jews in Jerusalem began to flock to that former Christian holy spot (which the Muslims had cleaned up after they inherited it from the Christians), and the Jewish authorities soon turned it into what is now called the "Wailing Wall." The fact is, the Jewish people at the time should have tested Rabbi Luria a little more. From the records that have come down to us about him, it is easily seen that he was one of the biggest liars (or false prophets) that could be imagined. Let us look at some of his big mistakes in geography and history — the very things in which he was supposed to have divine knowledge. When one surveys what Rabbi Luria taught, he was one of the greatest of liars!

Notice Some False Geographical Identifications Made by Rabbi Isaac Luria

This Rabbi should not be looked on as a simple deceived "religious man." This is because of the supreme influence that the man and his teachings have had (and still have) on modern day Judaism. Let us look at a few points. There was also a side to Rabbi Luria that many people have decided to ignore. But we need to be aware of it. The fact is, Luria also made some outstanding mistakes in his selection of former sites mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. We are told in Vilnay's *The Legends of Jerusalem* that Rabbi Luria supposedly knew in his day in a supernatural way where Jeremiah was placed in the Court of the Guard mentioned in Jeremiah 32:2. Notice what Vilnay records:

"It is told of Ha-Ari the holy, head of the Safed Kabbalists in the sixteenth century, that he discovered the Court of the Guard and its pit into which Jeremiah was cast. [Ha-Ari then envisioned:] 'And the mouth of the pit is narrow and its bottom large and round, about two ells in diameter. And there are places cut out of the mountain rock which were used as jails by the kings of Judah. And it is told that Jeremiah the prophet is buried in the Court of the Guard.'" 54

The only trouble was, Rabbi Luria (that is, Ha-Ari) picked the spot now called "Jeremiah's Grotto" in back of the East Jerusalem bus station. Luria selected the wrong place — a place that the Holy Scriptures would in no way allow. Luria was about 3000 feet north of the true site that was near the Gihon Spring. It is clear in the biblical text that the prison in the House of the King of Judah was located just south of the Temple. The poor guy had no knowledge of the truth.

Another geographical and historical error attributed to Rabbi Luria (Ha-Ari) was his selection of the person who supposedly "blocked up" the Gihon Spring in earlier days (which had in the previous century been re-discovered in Jerusalem). According to Jewish historical sources, the Gihon Spring was again revealed and restored to the knowledge of the Jewish people by the disciple of Isaac Luria named Rabbi Haim Vital. This great mystical leader of the Jews brought all Judaism within the embrace of the Lurianic Kabbalistic teachings in the sixteenth century. I shall give the Jewish rendition of how the Gihon Spring was again restored to the knowledge of the Jews, as shown by Zev Vilnay. 55 Remember that Jews of this time were prone to accept the teachings of some of the mystics as divine revelations direct from God.

"In the sixteenth century, Jerusalem was ruled by a tyrannical Turkish governor called Abu-Seifen — Father of Two Swords. Knowing that a king of Judah had sealed up the Fountain of Gihon, he asked whether there was one who could open it. His friends advised him: 'There is a wise Jew in this city, a man of God, and his name is Rabbi Haim Vital. He will surely know how to open it.' The governor sent for him on Friday, the Muslim day of rest, and said: 'I command you to open the fountain, which was sealed by your king, during the time that I am at prayer in the mosque. If you obey not, your blood be on your head.' Then a miracle occurred, and there appeared to Rabbi Vital

in a vision his teacher, Ha-Ari the holy [that is, Rabbi Luria], head of the mystics [who had been dead several years]. He said: ‘The soul of King Sennacherib, the enemy of King Hezekiah, has been transmitted into the body of this governor, and in your body there is a spark of the soul of King Hezekiah, peace be upon him! [The Lurianic Kabbalistic teaching of the Ha-Ari (Isaac Luria) believed in the Transmigration of Souls — an Indian or Gentile doctrine never believed by mainline Jews before the revelation of the Kabbalah in the thirteenth century. This vision of Isaac Luria to Haim Vital continued by saying:] ‘And now is the time to open the Fountain of Gihon, for it was without the consent of the sages that Hezekiah sealed its waters.’ ‘And now,’ continued the vision of Rabbi Luria, ‘if you are able to open the sealed Gihon, you will bring great blessing upon the people!’ Rabbi Vital answered: ‘I shall open the fountain.’”

This account vindicates the belief that Rabbi Vital accepted the instruction of “Rabbi Luria” that it was indeed King Hezekiah who “blocked up” the waters of the Gihon Spring [this belief, however, was the first historical falsehood]. As it has been shown in my book “The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot,” we have records from the Crusade period that it was actually Saladin, the Kurdish Muslim ruler about 400 years before who “blocked up” the Gihon. 56 But the Jewish people in the sixteenth century believed that Rabbi Luria was (through the teaching of the Transmigration of Souls) a re-manifestation on earth of Adam, Abraham, Moses, Elijah and the Messiah all combined in the person of Luria. This man was one of biggest frauds in history.

With such credentials that the Jews accepted, the Jews thought Luria must have known the true sites in Jerusalem and the long-lost unmarked graves of many early Rabbis who lived in Galilee. They also believed he must have known it was Hezekiah who “blocked up” the Gihon, rather than Saladin as the historical records revealed. Saladin was the right person, NOT Hezekiah as Luria stated in his visionary explanation. Some of Luria’s identifications were gigantic errors.

But why blame the Jewish people for believing such “miraculous” identifications when we Christians equally have a similar amount of erroneous sites promulgated by our early Christian and Muslim authorities and still maintained by their modern representatives. I have made my plea to modern religious leaders. There needs to be a thorough housecleaning of all of these nonsensical and paganized forms of idolatry that now permeate the religious beliefs, customs and traditions of the Jews, of the Christians and of the Muslims. God help us and save us from our utter stupidities. My quarrel over these so-called “holy sites” is not only with the Muslims and the Jews, but our Christian scholars and theologians are equally guilty in perpetuating such absurd teachings about them.

The “Wailing Wall” Was Also One of Rabbi Isaac Luria’s Bequests to Modern Judaism

The fact is, the geography of the “Wailing Wall” was equally a fallacious identification of Rabbi Luria. He was no more right on that selection than he was in his other visionary discoveries. But the Jewish people at the time were not equipped to test him out properly. They were wanting miracles and visions in their lives, and Rabbi Luria gave them what they craved. So, Luria gave them the “Wailing Wall.” The symbolic teaching in its architecture and geography fit the erroneous theological teachings of Luria to a tee. Beyond that wall (eastward) was “nothing” (no buildings or shrines) but once it was the holiest of areas. This belief provided support to his Kabbalistic teaching that the Shekinah was in Exile (the Shekinah was reckoned to be the lowest form of the Godhead of ten spheres — like the Christian Trinity has three) but the top manifestation of the deity was known as the Ein Sof.. Both were in Exile and in a state of “Nothingness,” but on the verge of a return from Exile. The final manifestation of God’s presence in the Lurianic concept was that God’s “end” would terminate in “nothing.” In other words, Luria’s God for the Jewish people was a “Nothingness” (a truly exiled and unknowable “God”). It is no wonder that Luria’s “God” could not be seen. But the lowest manifestation known as the Shekinah could on occasion be witnessed either in mourning and non-glory or in a bridal attire in glory awaiting the Messianic Age. The Shekinah was a key to Luria’s theology.

To Luria and those who followed him within Judaism for the next 200 years, there was “NO discernable God” in the final degree of his non-theistic understanding of the divine epiphany. Plainly, if a person reasoned the Lurianic philosophical beliefs to a proper conclusion, the person finally encounters “NO God.” He finds only “empty space.”

There was good symbol at the “Wailing Wall” because the “empty space” east of the Western Wall was ideal in Luria’s mind to emphasize the “Ein Sof” (Nothingness) of the Deity. And the Deity was not in His Temple, but in Exile (like the Children of Israel). But the Shekinah had made its first appearance come back from Exile when it showed itself as an old woman in ragged clothes. To demonstrate this, the account shows the Shekinah was first decorated as an old woman in black mourning clothes as a sign of its Exile from its “home,” but then Rabbi Halevy a short time later dreamed he saw the Shekinah in glory and that he was blessed with a period of 22 more years of life because of it. To Luria, it was this Wailing Wall that best represented the spot to show the exilic condition of the Shekinah (and even Luria’s ten displays of his divine epiphany called the Sefirot — the Ein Sof as also being in Exile). With this revelatory experience of Rabbi Luria and Halevy and the site of the “Wailing Wall” as the proper spot of the Shekinah caused Jews to begin their serious assembling at this part of the Haram esh-Sharif. In a very short time, it became their most holy place in Jerusalem. It had nothing to do with the Western Wall of the Holy of Holies that earlier Jewish authorities had spoken about that was once a part of the aborted attempts to build the Temple in the time of Constantine and Julian. This was a different “Western Wall” altogether, but its location satisfied Rabbi Luria that he had found the home (or the “Wall”) of the Shekinah.

As far as I can find, before the time of Luria no Jewish person ever went to the present “Wailing Wall” to pray. But Luria directed the Jewish people to the Western Wall. In doing so, he sent them to the wrong place and they have been flocking there ever since. Jewish people at the time were so impressed with Luria, that they gave him a status that equaled that of Moses (or even greater). Luria himself believed he was a re-born Elijah and that he was the Messiah in several attributes. The Jewish authorities at his time absorbed his beliefs almost hook, line and sinker. These beliefs are Kabbalistic in origin. They do not come from the Scriptures nor even from the Talmuds. They come from the mind of Luria and some of his misguided contemporaries.

The Perpetuation of the False (and Anti-biblical) Teachings of the Kabbalah

Luria also established his own unique version of the Kabbalah. The teachings of this form of worship are almost thoroughly in the mystical vein. Through his teaching of Transmigration of Souls, he stated to his disciples that he had inherited the “soul” of Adam, along with some other “souls” (who came into Luria’s body to inhabit it by reincarnation). Several “souls” entered Luria’s body: those of Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah and he even had the “soul” of the Messiah. His visionary experiences and his extraordinary feats as a religious holy man, won over the whole of those in Judaism. His desire was to begin a new type of Judaism, and he did. Luria won over most of the influential Rabbis at the time with his teachings, and for the next 200 years (until the Jewish enlightenment of the 1700’s). Lurianic Kabbalah reigned supreme in most Jewish circles. ⁵⁷ Of course, most Jews do not believe in many of the weird teachings of Rabbi Luria today. Many Jewish scholars and intellectuals have now learned to place such beliefs into a category of “dark age mentality” that most religious groups have gone through at one time or another. We Christians and also the Muslims have inherited equally absurd teachings that many denominations of Christendom and sects of Islam practice today. They all come from this “dark age mentality.” It should not surprise any sane person today that many of these outlandish teachings of eccentric religious personalities are in no way authentic forms of early Christian, Islamic or Jewish beliefs. This is true enough, but it is the philosophy behind the concepts of Rabbi Luria that we still see continuing in mainline Christianity, mainline Islam and mainline Judaism. It is the retention of what must be called “Dark Age doctrines of a Middle Age mentality” that promote some of the most absurd teachings known to mankind.

At any rate, I have shown with an abundance of historical and biblical evidences that the original Temples of God were positioned over and around the Gihon Spring in the southeastern part of Jerusalem. The evidence is so strong that one wonders how such an obvious fact could be so hidden from the attention of the world for so long? Perhaps we all ought to read the whole of Isaiah 29 once again. The answer why the site of the Temples has been hidden is shown in Isaiah 29. If one will read that section closely, it will explain our present dilemma perfectly. In conclusion, the acceptance of the present “Wailing Wall” by the Jewish authorities as a wall of Herod’s Temple was inspired by false visions and dreams and so-called miraculous events that turned a former Christian holy site into the prime Jewish spot for divine veneration. That spot was NOT discovered by using historical and biblical facts. The present

“Wailing Wall” is a modern invention (devised about 430 years ago) and Jewish scholars know this to be a certain fact. That “Wailing Wall” is actually the Western Wall of Fort Antonia. It is time for people to wake up from this “Dark Age Mentality” and get back to the pristine truths of the Holy Scriptures and also to a belief in the true facts of history and geography that are abundantly available to correct us in our present ignorance. Let us realize the truth. The real Temples of God were located over the Gihon Spring on the southeast ridge of Jerusalem. There can be no doubt of this fact. It is time for all people to abandon their false religious sites derived from the religious beliefs of fanatics who can be proved to be liars.

Thankfully, we are informed in the Holy Scriptures that Israel will soon begin to mourn for the One who was pierced when He secured the salvation for the world (Zechariah 12:10-15). And though it was Israel by their prophets who introduced the teaching of the Messiah to the world, they are the very ones who still remain without Him (and they even adamantly rebuke Him). They have a messianic religion, without a Messiah! Yet this will change. They will soon be wise enough to accept their true “Messiah,” but NOT the longhaired “Christ” that is now displayed in our churches who was invented by Constantine and his successors to mimic the pagan gods. Israel will be different. They will opt for the real Messiah with credentials obtained from the Holy Scriptures. When they do, “ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, we will go with you” (Zechariah 8:23). When Israel begins to show that grace, good will and love to other people as did Solomon, and when they also accept the One greater than Solomon, they will “conquer with good works” not only the Middle East, but they will also have the admiration of all on earth. They need to start their CHANGE now.

Truly, the time for Israel to change its ways and to get into conformity to their role as shown by the Holy Scriptures is NOW. Every year in the Autumn, the people of Israel fast for a 24 hour period. It is known as Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). That is a day when the whole nation of Israel fasts (refrains from food or drink) in order to ask God for the forgiveness of their sins. There is some specific teaching in the book of Isaiah about the kind of fast day that God really desires for the people of Israel. It could equally apply to us Gentiles if we wish to share in the quests of the Jews to obtain righteousness from our God. Yes, even we Gentiles (who are likewise sinners in the eyes of God and can also ask for forgiveness) along with Israel can reflect on the sublime teachings that Isaiah the Prophet gave to the early Israelites. That commonsense teaching of Isaiah is as pertinent today as it was for those almost 800 years before Christ. Here is what Isaiah taught ancient Israel. I hope that all the people of Israel will adopt these statements of Isaiah with a united purpose and a diligence to perform them (and that we Gentiles will join them in doing the same things). Note Isaiah 58:1-12.

“Cry aloud [God said to Isaiah], spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people [Israel] their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

3 Wherefore have we fasted [on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement], say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast [says the God of Israel] ye find pleasure, and exact all your labors.

4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.

5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen [a mere physical “day”]? a day for a man [merely] to afflict his soul? is it [merely] to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a [proper] fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? [NO, it is NOT!]

6 Is not this the fast [the proper kind of “fast”] that I have chosen?:

· to lose the bands of wickedness,

· to undo the heavy burdens, ·
 and to let the oppressed go free, ·
 and that ye break every yoke?
 · Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry,
 · and that thou bring the poor that are cast out [in Exile] to thy house?
 · when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him;
 · and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward.

9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger [of blame], and speaking vanity;

10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday:

11 And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

12 And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.” That section of Isaiah is a very appropriate one for Israelites throughout the world at this time. It is most instructive and needful to be heard on their Yom Kippur. Israel seriously needs to consider this command and promise from their God (from our God the Father of us all). Indeed, it is such a beautiful and necessary obligation that even we Gentiles around the globe can learn and benefit from its teaching. What is described above is the simple (yet profound) display of the democratic principles of life that people of all nations and creeds can know to be proper. It is time to jettison the teachings that we Christians, Muslims and Jews have inherited from the false theologies of our forefathers who were applying “Dark Age Mentalities” as their basic foundational themes for the religious beliefs that they have handed down to us. We all need to get rid of such absurd teachings and return to the original documents of our faiths that have a far purer concept of religious teaching than what we have all inherited from the medieval period of our religious decline. We need to revitalize our respect and devotions to the original sources that generated our faiths. If we do, we will all be better off. And as for Israel (both the government and the people) and also for those adhering to Judaism as a whole, if they obey the teachings of Isaiah given above, and if we Gentiles follow them, terrorism will cease on earth among all peoples, and Israel will become (with all in the world applauding) the nation that all nations will call “the People of God.” May God speed that day. ELM

1 See my “The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot,” p.417 where I show what words Josephus actually wrote in Greek that most translators leave out in their modern translations. Josephus said there was a stade of space between the southern wall of Fort Antonia and the northern wall of Herod’s Temple.

Footnotes are listed in this section. Use your browser BACK button to return to your place in this article after reading the footnote.

2 “Jerusalem,” pp.189,190.

3 See my “The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot,” p.210 where I quote the reference given by Cyril.

4 See Hammer, Reuven, The Jerusalem Anthology, p.148.

5 Bahat, Dan, The Illustrated Atlas of Jerusalem, pp.81,87.

6 See my chapter 12, pp.199-212 in my book “The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot” for adequate proof. Indeed, the Bordeaux Pilgrim described a “Temple” as being at the site (and he gave no hint that it was in ruins). So many Jews were inhabitants of Jerusalem from the Edict of Milan in 312 C.E. unto the defeat of Licinius in 324 C.E. — 12 years — that seven synagogues were built on the southwestern hill called “Zion” to provide them places to worship (and one of those synagogues still remained when the Bordeaux Pilgrim viewed the area in 333 C.E.). At this same time there was also a standing building on the site called “Hezekiah’s House” which was a Jewish title for the prophesied palace that the Jewish authorities had just built to house their soon-coming Messiah that they then expected to appear. Parts of these buildings from the time of Constantine were reconstructed a few years later in the reign of Julian the Apostate, and after that there were ruins to be seen of these buildings over the Gihon Spring for the next 600 years including a part of the “Western Wall” of the Holy of Holies from the Temple that the Bordeaux Pilgrim viewed. But this region over the Gihon Spring was never built on (either churches, shrines, government buildings, etc.) by the Romans, Byzantines nor the Christians. As we will see, the spot remained vacant until 1577 C.E.

7 It is significant that the Geniza document points out that there were foundational ruins at the Temple site.

8 See chapters Six and Seven of my book “The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot.”

9 See under the article “Blessing” (Vol.2, pp.251,252).

10 Jeremiah 7:12-14; 26:6-9.

11 “These were the works of the Emperor Justinian in Cilicia. At Jerusalem he built a church [Prof. Amitzur says: “shrine”] in honour of the Virgin, to which no other can be compared. The inhabitants call it the ‘new church.’ I shall describe what it is like, prefacing my account by the remark that this city stands for the most part upon hilly ground, which hills are not formed of earth, but are rough and precipitous, so as to make the paths up and down them as steep as ladders. All the rest of the buildings in the city stand in one place, being either built upon the hills, or upon flat and open ground; (1) but this church alone stands in a different position; for the Emperor Justinian ordered it to be built upon the highest of the hills, explaining of what size he wished it to be, both in width and in length. (2) The hill was not of sufficient size to enable the work to be carried out according to the Emperor’s orders, (3) but a fourth part of the church, that towards the south wind and the rising sun, in which the priests perform the sacred mysteries, was left with no ground upon which to rest. Accordingly those in charge of this work devised the following expedient: (4) they laid foundations at the extremity of the flat ground, and constructed a building rising to the same height as the hill. (5) When it reached the summit, they placed vaults upon the walls and joined this building to the other foundations of the church; so that (6) this church in one place is built upon a firm rock, and in another place is suspended in the air—for the power of (7) the Emperor has added another portion to the (original) hill. The stones of this substruction are not of the size of those which we are accustomed to see: for the builders of this work, having to contend with the nature of the ground, and (8) being forced to raise a building equal in size to a mountain, scorned the ordinary practices of building, and betook themselves to strange and altogether unknown methods. (9) They cut blocks of stone of enormous size out of the mountains which rise to vast heights in the neighborhood of the city, cunningly squared them, and brought them thither in the following manner: they built wagons of the same size as these stones, and placed one stone upon each wagon. These wagons were dragged by picked oxen, chosen by the Emperor, forty of them dragging each wagon with its stone. Since it was impossible for the roads leading into the city to take these wagons upon them, they made a passage for them by cutting deeply into the mountains, and thus (10) formed the church of the great length which it was the Emperor’s pleasure that it should have. (11) After they had built it of a proportional width they were not able to put a roof upon it. While they were inspecting every grove and place which they heard was planted with tall trees, they discovered a thick wood, producing cedars of enormous height, with which they made the roof of the church, of a height proportional to its length and width. These were the works which the Emperor Justinian constructed by human power and art, though assisted by his pious confidence, which in its turn reflected honour upon himself, and helped him to carry out his design. This church required to be surrounded on every side with columns, such as in beauty would be worthy of the main building,

and of a size capable of supporting the weight which would be laid upon them. However, the place, from its inland situation at a distance from the sea, and it's being entirely surrounded by the precipitous mountains which I have mentioned, rendered it impossible for the builders of the foundation to bring columns thither from elsewhere. While, however, the Emperor was grieving at this difficulty, God pointed out in the nearest mountains a bed of stone of a kind suitable for this purpose, which either had existed there in former times and been concealed, or was then created. Either story is credible to those who regard God as the cause of it: for we, measuring everything by our human strength, think that many things belong to the region of the impossible, while for God nothing whatever is difficult or impossible. The church, then, is supported by a great number of columns brought from this place, of very great size, and of a color which resembles flame, which stand, some above, some below, and some round the porticos which encircle the entire church, except on the side turned towards the east. (12) Of these columns, the two which stand before the door of the church are of very unusual size, and probably second to no columns in the whole world. Beyond them is another portico, named the Narthex (reed), I suppose because it is narrow; after this is a court of square shape supported by columns of equal size; from this lead interior doors of such grandeur as to show those passing them what a spectacle they are about to meet with. Beyond this is a wonderful porch, and an arch supported on two columns at a great height. Proceeding further, there stand two semicircles, opposite to one another, on each side of the way to the church; (13) while on either side of the other road are two hospices—the work of the Emperor Justinian—one of which is destined for the reception of strangers, while the other is an infirmary for the sick poor. The Emperor Justinian also endowed this Church of the Virgin with large revenues. Such were the works of the Emperor Justinian in Jerusalem” (Procopius of Caesarea, translation in The Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society, “Buildings of Justinian,” Book IV, Sect. VI, in Vol. 2, pp.136-143, London, 1890).

12 Avigad, Nahman, *Discovering Jerusalem*, Israel Exploration Society, 1980.

13 Procopius stated later in the text at section 356 (XI.1-11): “In Jerusalem he [Justinian] restored The Monastery of St. Thaleleus; The Monastery of St. Gregory;...The Monastery of the Iberians in Jerusalem; The Monastery of the ‘Lazi in the Desert’ of Jerusalem;...The Monastery of the Spring of Elisha in Jerusalem; the Monastery of Siletheus; The Monastery of Abba Romanus.” 14 Avigad, *Ibid.*, p.245. 15 Avigad, *Ibid.*, p.245.

16 Wilkinson, John, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*, see *Gazetteer* under “New Saint Mary,” p.166.

17 Professor Oleg Grabar expressed surprise that the spot of Avigad’s suggestion for the Nea Church was built “on such an inhospitable and inconvenient space” (*The Shape of the Holy*, Princeton University Press, 1996, p.35).

18 Kathleen Kenyon in her work on Jerusalem said that the “Seam” was 32.72 meters north of the southeast angle, or in English feet that answers to 107 feet 4.5 inches.

19 Wilkinson, John, *Ibid.*, p.84.

20 Amitzur, H., *The Centrality of Jerusalem*, editors: Pourthuis and Safrai, Pharos, Kampen, Netherlands, p.164.

21 The southeast section of the Haram esh-Sharif was long afterward associated with Mary and the presentation of Jesus in the Temple at the time of his circumcision. Throughout Islamic times the Muslim historians have often mentioned “Mary’s niche” for prayer as being in the southeastern part of the Haram. The area called the “Stables of Solomon” was where the “Shrine of Mary” (also the Cradle of Jesus) was located and the spot was always connected with the early life of Jesus with Mary. Even as late as the sixteenth century the region of Solomon’s Stables were known as the “Shrine of Mary” (see F.E. Peters, *Jerusalem*, p.480). Procopius said Justinian called it a “Temple” area. And, as I will reveal in a moment, it was recognized by Arabic historians that the whole area of the Al Aqsa Mosque in the southern part of the Haram was accounted the original “Church of Mary” (or, the Nea Church).

22 Le Strange, pp.143,144, capital letters mine for emphasis.

- 23 The Editors of the PPTS state: “Church of the Virgin [Mary], Jerusalem: The description by Procopius of this church [the NEA CHURCH] is very detailed; but the great alterations and destruction of buildings throughout the Haram [the Haram esh-Sharif] area since his time make it extremely difficult to arrive at a correct understanding of his account, or to identify any portion of the church with existing buildings. It is usually supposed to have occupied the site of the present Mosque El Aqsa, the entrances to which the Duc de Vogue believes to be remains of Justinian’s church” (Vol.2, Appendix II, p.171). I have no doubt that these observations are correct.
- 24 This area at the southern (and most particularly, the southeastern) part of the Haram had long been associated with Mary and her giving birth to Jesus. Christian tradition that persisted unto the time of the Crusades associated the area as the place where the priest blessed Jesus as an infant, and later Muslim tradition even thought it was the region where Jesus was born (and not, as the Gospels truly attest, in Bethlehem). This is where the Muslims selected as the “Cradle of Jesus” that commemorated the birth of Jesus “on the Temple mount.” It is no wonder that Justinian selected this southern area to build a church to the “Mother of God” because of these early traditions about Mary. The Nea Church was certainly built in the southern part of the Haram esh-Sharif. See the following footnote.
- 25 Throughout the histories written by Islamic scholars, they have made mention of Mary having her niche for prayer in the southeastern part of the Haram esh-Sharif. It was no surprise to them that the “Church of Mary” should have been in that region of the Haram.
- 26 Poem 39, trans. Israel Zangwill, Jewish Publication Society, 1923, p.121.
- 27 Section One, Judah Halevi, edited by Heinrich Brody, Jewish Publication Society, 1924, 1952). NOTE: the Dome of the Rock and the Haram esh-Sharif were not then in a desolate state.
- 28 Section 5, *ibid*.
- 29 *Ibid*.
- 30 Section 8.
- 31 *Ibid*.
- 32 Section 19.
- 33 Jewish Travelers in the Middle Ages, p.104.
- 34 See F.E.Peters, “Jerusalem,” pp.246-250, 280, 314-316, 358, 374,5.
- 35 In the division “Words of Understanding,” Section One found on pages 249-251 in the English translation by Joanna Weinberg (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
- 36 The clause was found in Isaiah 13:20 and became proverbial for any desolate area judged by God for its evil and now inhabited by evil spirits and wicked or unclean demons. Arabs in De’Rossi’s time shunned the Gihon Spring and they had even renamed it “the Dragon’s Well.”
- 37 In the time of the Crusades it became common to call the Gihon Spring by the name “Miriam’s Well.” The early Jews attached the name “Miriam” to the location of the spring when they believed it to be the proverbial “Miriam’s Well” that was once situated inside the entrance to the Tabernacle in the wilderness. But because this site where the former Temples stood on the southeast ridge of Jerusalem had become like the original Zion that Isaiah the prophet described in Isaiah 29 (where the Bible stated that ghost-like appearances would be made at the former site), the Gihon Spring (“Miriam’s Well”) became known to post-Crusader Arabs in Jerusalem as the Dragon’s Well (a place of evil spirits). Just like no Arab was prophesied to enter Babylon once it would become a haunt of evil spirits and demons (Isaiah 13:20), it became proverbial among Jews that no Arab wanted to go

near any place that was designated a site of evil spirit for fear of being demon possessed. So, in the time of De' Rossi (1577 C.E.) we find the historian resorting to the proverbial fact that "NO ARAB WOULD PITCH HIS TENT" in an area where evil spirits were known to haunt. Thus, the Arabs of De' Rossi's day would not enter the area of the Gihon Spring.

38 See Prawer, *The History of the Jews in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, p.48.

39 See Prawer, *ibid.*, p.48.

40 See the work *Sefer Qabbalath Sadiqei Eretz Israel* as cited by Prawer, *ibid.*, pp.176-180.

41 Prawer, *ibid.*, p.223.

42 See Prawer, *ibid.*, p.48.

43 See George Adam Smith, *Jerusalem*, vol.I, p.83.

44 W.F. Birch (he wrote in the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly* from 1875 to 1885)

45 Sandra Benjamin, *The World of Benjamin Tudela*, p.171, emphasis and words in brackets are mine.

46 Hammer, Reuvin, *The Jerusalem Anthology*, p.166. This could not be a reference to the present Wailing Wall because its length is complete and is 1596 feet long. Note that Rabbi Da Bertinoro's "Western Wall" was only partially standing. This was the short ruin of a wall just to the west and north of the Dome of the Rock.

47 Sandra Benjamin, *The World of Benjamin of Tudela*, p. 88.

48 *Ibid.*

49 *Legends of Jerusalem* that is published by the Jewish Publication Society of America, p.204.

50 *Legends of Jerusalem*, pp.204,205, the punctuation is Vilnay's.

51 *Ibid.*, p.280.

52 *Ibid.*, p.212.

53 *Legends of Jerusalem*, pp.165,166.

54 *Legends of Jerusalem*, pp.242,3.

55 *Legends of Jerusalem*, pp.276,277.

56 Gabrieli, Francesco, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, p.93.

57 See the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* article "Judaism."