

Sacred Architecture of the Rock : An Innovative Design Concept and Iconography in Al-Aqsa Mosque

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Abstract: The religious sanctity and symbolisms of the Sacred Rock in Islam has been a frame of reference for inspiration of the architect who established a building over it in the early Islamic period. His challenging task was to generate an architectural archetype based on idea and concept in architecture vivid with sacredness and reflecting the religious symbolism of the place. Nowhere can this be true as *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* (the Dome of the Rock); an Islamic masterpiece which is considered to be the utmost achievement of the Umayyad Islamic religious art and architecture in the late seventh century C.E. It is evident that the architect of the Sacred Rock was very successful in dealing with the site when establishing an attractive mature building that is dominating the skyline of the al-Aqsa mosque and the city of Islamic Jerusalem alike. In addition to the Umayyad religious objective in establishing this sacred building, another important goal was achieved which reinforced their political power and Islamic sovereignty over the city. Indeed, *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* is a memorable building that commemorates the Sacred Rock and is full of religious feelings. It has, visually, strong impact on observers as its form and function recalls both of the archetype of Makkah and Islamic Jerusalem and their religious experience.

Key Words: Islamic sacred art and architecture, the sanctity of the rock, Islamic religious symbolism, Islamic Iconography, Islamic memorial archetype.



Introduction

The city of Islamic Jerusalem fell under Muslims' rule in 637 C.E. Their interest in the place was very earlier due to the significance of the Sacred Rock in Islam on which al-Aqsa mosque was established. The site is basically believed to be the very location of the Second mosque on earth after the Sacred Mosque. It was also Muslims' prophet Mohammad's destination during his Night Journey (*Isra'*), and it was the place where he led the prayer of the prophets. This prestigious status of the place made the Muslims' caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Kattâb attend the city and to proceed to this Sacred site in order to verify Islamic identity of the place by delineating *mihrab* (a niche) for Muslims' prayers [al-Wâqidî, no date, pp.314-318; Abu 'Ubaid, 1986, p168; al-Balâdhurî, 1983, p144; al-Tabarî, 1960, 1: pp2399, 2405-2406].

With the rise of Umayyad rule over Historical Syria, the religious status of the Sacred Rock and al-Aqsa mosque became much greater. Umayyads extremely interested in this sacred place as they view it as a center of religious and political power. The Muslims' caliph Mu'awiyah and his successors took Muslims' allegiance in al-Aqsa mosque enclave. As the city of Islamic Jerusalem is located in the geographical proximity of Damascus; the political capital of Umayyads, they attempted to make the city of Islamic Jerusalem rival religiously Makkah and Madinah. In doing so, the Umayyad caliph, 'Abd el-malik Ibn Marwân, established sacred buildings in al-Aqsa mosque enclave, such as *al-Jame' al-Aqsa* (al-Aqsa congregational mosque), *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh* (the Dome of the Rock) and *Qubbet al-Silsilah* (the Dome of the Chain). These buildings were among other religious and symbolic buildings included in the Umayyad building scheme on this site. Indeed, such architectural building activities over the Sacred Rock of al-Aqsa mosque and those outside imply that Umayyads were aiming at sanctifying the Sacred Rock and al-Aqsa mosque and verifying its Islamic identity [al-Ratrou, 2004, p.511].

The Sanctity of the Rock to Muslims

The sanctity of the Rock in Islam is derived from the fact that it was the very place on which al-Aqsa mosque was established after the Sacred mosque in Makkah ['Abd al-Baqî, 1994, 1:p.133]. It is the

Muslims' first *qiblah* (direction of the prayer) [Ibn Kathîr, 1994, 1: p259] and it is the destination of Muhammad's *Isrâ'* (the translocation from Makkah to IslamicJerusalem). Furthermore, some Qurânîc verses relate the Sacred Rock with eschatological Islamic beliefs such as: "And listen the Day when the Caller will call out from a place quite near" [Qurân, 50:41]. Some Muslim commentators such as Ibn Kathîr say that the nearby place, from which the Israfil will blow his trumpet, is the Sacred Rock in the city of IslamicJerusalem. In this land the people will be gathered on the Day of Judgment [Ibn Kathîr, 1994, 4: p294; el-Awaisi, 1997, p20].

In fact, the religious significance of the Sacred Rock was among other main reasons which encouraged the Muslim Umayyad caliph, 'Abd el-Malik Ibn Marwân, to commemorate the Sacred Rock of al-Aqsa mosque by establishing *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* (the Dome of the Rock). This can be identified from the given name of the building itself; *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* which emphasizes the significance of the place.

Reason for the Construction of Qubbet al-Sakhrah

The actual reason behind building this monument has always been debated among students of al-Aqsa mosque such as Creswel, Grabar, Rozen-Ayalon, Elad, al-Ratrout and others. They were basically led by two Arabic accounts which give different reasons for the construction. The first one presented by the 9th century *Shi'i* historian, al-Ya'qubî, who argued from a political point of view that Umayyad Caliph 'Abd el-Malik Ibn Marwan intended to divert Muslim pilgrimage (*Hajj*) From the Sacred mosque to the al-Aqsa mosque during his political struggle with 'Abdullah Ibn al-Zubair [al-Ya'qubî, 1999, 2:p182]. This reason is, indeed, difficult to be accepted due to the fact that 'Abdel Malik will not dare to destroy one of main five theological pillars of Islamic belief. Furthermore, Muslims' pilgrimage will not, of course, wait until the building *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* (the Dome of the Rock) would be finished. The second statement was introduced by al-Muqdisî's account, a 10th century Arab geographer, which indicate that the actual reason for building *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* is to challenge the Christian architecture by raising the Islamic architectural visual image of the city and its sacred site when he states:

"... ألا ترى أن عبد الملك لما رأى عظم قبة القمامة وهيأتها خشي أن تعظم في قلوب المسلمين، فنصب على الصخرة قبة على ما ترى."

"when 'Abd al-Malik saw the splendid Christian architecture in historical Syria and Jerusalem, he feared that this would dazzle the minds of the Muslims, hence he erected the Dome above the Rock which can now be seen there." [al-Muqdisî, 1987, p139].

This historical reference implies that there was a general assumption that art and architecture are capable of doing something to the observer [Alami, 2011, p166]. This understanding of the architectural visual experience was possibly understood by Umayyads as 'Abd el-Malik who intended to proclaim Umayyad religious and political power in historical Syria. This is hardly achieved in their administrative capital; Damascus, but surely in the center of holiness of the Historical Syria; Islamicjerusalem.

Accordingly, al-Ratrout argues in his study "the architectural development of the al-Aqsa mosque in the early Islamic period: Sacred architecture and the shape of the 'holy'" that establishing the religious Islamic architecture over the Sacred Rock of al-Aqsa mosque was aiming at developing the three dimensional image of Umayyad Islamicjerusalem [al-Ratrout, 2004, p462].

Architecture of Qubbet al-Sakhrah

Qubbet al-Sakhrah (the Dome of the Rock) forms a regular octagon with three concentric annular enclosures; the inner-most one is circular while the others are octagons (see Fig. 1).

The outer octagon forms the boundary wall of *Qubbet al-Sakhrah*. It has eight sides; four sides of this boundary wall face almost the four cardinal points; each has a central door and seven windows (including the doors), supporting round-headed arches (see Fig. 1). According to Clermont-Ganneau, five of these windows are real. They are filled with slabs of plaster pierced with holes containing stained glass of various colours. However, the windows at each end are blind arches, and have always been so [Clermont-Ganneau, 1899, 1:p181]. Such architectural treatment at the corners of the building is presumably employed for the structural stability of *Qubbet al-Sakhrah*. A small arched parapet crowns the boundary wall; each side has 13 openings. It is described by al-'Umarî in

748AH/ 1347AD as having niches [al-'Umarî, 1924, 1:140]. These small openings support round-headed arches [Clermont-Ganneau, 1899, 1: pp.184-185]. All of the upper faces of the walls were decorated by a mosaic coating which was described by al-'Umarî [al-'Umarî, 1924, 1: p140], and its existence is confirmed by Clermont-Ganneau [Clermont-Ganneau, 1899, 1: p190]. Unfortunately the exterior mosaic no longer exists, as it was replaced by ceramic tiles in the 16th century AD [Richmond, 1924, p36]; the lower parts, however, are covered by marble slabs, of which some are still preserved since the erection of the building. Indeed, the covering of the series of the arcades which crown the eight sides of the wall of the octagon and its mosaic must originally have given the building a very different general aspect from that which it offers at the present day, and must have been even more beautiful then.

The intermediate enclosure also forms an octagon. It divides the interior space into two ambulatories. It is constructed on 8 piers and 16 marble columns supporting round-headed arches. Each of the eight sides is divided into three archways standing on two columns and the corner piers (see Fig. 2). All the piers and columns are tied together by decorated wooden tie-beams running around the entire intermediate enclosure. Both the inner and the outer faces of this enclosure are decorated by mosaic of different colours, predominantly gold.

The inner enclosure surrounds the Sacred Rock which rises above the building's floor level. The enclosure has a circular delineation with a little dent. This enclosure forms a cylinder, consisting of four piers and 12 columns supporting semi-circular arches. Part of this enclosure represents the drum; it is pierced by sixteen windows supporting round-headed arches. Both the inner and the outer faces of this enclosure were originally decorated by mosaics, which were of glass tesserae and mother-of-pearl [Richmond, 1924, p15].

The roofing system in the *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh* consists of two different types. A large wooden cupola was used to cover all the space surrounding the rock in the inner enclosure. It was first described by Ibn al-Faqîh [Ibn al-Faqîh, 1996, p151], Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (301 AH/ 913 AD) and al-Muqdisî who presents a detailed technical historical description [al-Muqdisî, 1987, p146]. Unfortunately, the original dome was destroyed by an earthquake in the 5th century AH/ 11th

century AD [Ibn al-Athîr, 1966, 9: p294], and built with the help of some construction material reused from the earlier dome [Richmond, 1924, p13]. For the covering of the other space around the inner enclosure of *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh*, a monopitch wooden roof is used which extends from the drum to the boundary wall (see Fig. 3).

Having discussed the architectural vocabulary used by the architect of the Sacred Rock to configure the form of the building, it is of great importance of the paper's investigations to elaborate on the architectural archetype of the building.

Architectural Archetype of Qubbet al-Sakhrâh

Not only the name of *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh* (The Dome of the Rock) commemorates the Sacred Rock but the design concept of the building also indicates an attempt to highlight its significance. The designer of the building dealt with the Sacred Rock as an extremely important feature. Although the building surrounded the protrusive top of the Sacred Rock, it is located on an artificial platform, itself part of a huge area in al-Aqsa enclave. There was no attempt to cover the Sacred Rock or to raise the level of this artificial base that accommodates the building. The level of the inner floor of *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh* is located 1.50 metres below the top of the Sacred Rock, which makes it distinguishable from the inside. This treatment in the design of the building must indicate that the Sacred Rock plays an important role in generating the idea of the design of the building (see Fig. 3).

The architect of the Sacred Rock developed a unique building archetype; according to Creswell, no example of three annular concentric enclosures –two are octagons and the inner is circular–exists among the Christian buildings. A circle surrounded by octagon surrounded by another octagon was, indeed, early Muslim architecture invention [Creswell, 1969, 1: p108]. The originality of the archetype of *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh* and other comparative precedents can also be seen in the size of the dome and the relation between its rotunda and the surrounding octagons are quite different from precedent octagonal buildings. It is the way of which the dome of the building itself projects out of the octagons. The effect is quite different from

that of the Church at Capernaum, St. Vitale in Ravenna and St. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople (with which *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh* is frequently compared). The architect of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh* made the dome more significant from the outside and its circular rotunda are also clearly distinguished from the other annular octagonal enclosure [Ettinghausen & Grabar, 1994, pp.28-34].

This archetype of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh*, is represented in two ways: spiritual and architectural (see Fig. 4).

The centralized arrangement and rotational movement in the archetype of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh* recalls the archetype of the Ka'bah. They are also reminiscent of *Isrâ'* (the mystical flight of Muhammad) from the Sacred Mosque in Makkah to al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem –that was established over the Sacred Rock. In other words, the prime sanctity of Makkah was translocated to al-Aqsa Mosque. This translocation fuses the two places in Muslims' imagination. For example, on the Last Day, as it reads in Ibn al-Faqîh, the Ka'bah with its pilgrims will come to Islamic Jerusalem [Ibn al-Faqîh, 1996 (902), p.145]. Furthermore, the decorative aspects of the interior of the buildings integrate with its architectural concept. This is evidently expressed in the way of portraying the mosaic and marble artistic harmonious compositions on inner walls. These, in fact stimulate the mind of observers by enjoying the sacred art. Consequently, they make them move in a rotational way. In other words, they perform *tawâf* and enjoy also the similar sacred experience of the Ka'bah (see Fig. 4).

The content of the mosaic artistic compositions of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh* may well correspond with that content of the existing Umayyad mosaics in the Sacred mosque in Makkah and the mosque of the Prophet in Madinah. All of which inspired by the Qurânic verses. According to al-Samhudî (1440-1506 C.E.), a famous Muslim historian, who quoted from Ibn Sabala (who died at the end of the 2nd century of the Hijra) that the workers of the mosaics of the principal Muslims' mosques, at the time of the Umayyad caliph al-Walîd Ibn 'Abd al-Malik (706-715 C.E.) were inspired by the picture of Paradise and its palaces as mentioned in the Qurân [al-Samhudî, 1908, I: p.368]; he quotes:

... وقال بعض العمال الذين عملوا الفسيفساء: انا عملناه على ما وجدنا من صورة شجر الجنة وقصورها.

One of the workmen who did the mosaic said: "we made it according to the picture of the Tree of Paradise and its Palaces." [al-Samhudî, 1908 , I: p.368]

The exterior mosaic covering of the building may well shape the exterior cover of the Ka'bah too, regardless of the difference in techniques. These suggest that the archetype of the Ka'bah may well inspire *Qubbet al-Sakhrah*, and especially for the following similarities between the two places:

— Architecturally, the centralized location of the Sacred Rock inside the al-Aqsa Mosque corresponds with the central location of the Ka'bah inside the Sacred Mosque. Visits to both of these Mosques were intensely encouraged by Muhammad [Hanbal, 1955, 6/299; Al-al-Bânî, no date, 2/999]. The circular movement around the Sacred Rock corresponds well with Muslims' circumambulation around the Ka'bah. Moreover, the Umayyad exterior mosaic decoration of *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* symbolizes the colored embroidered cover of the Ka'bah at that time.

— Spiritually, the Rock was the Muslims' *Qiblah* (direction of prayers) as the Ka'bah is then and now. The Sacred Rock is part of the sanctity of al-Aqsa Mosque as the Ka'bah is part of the Sacred Mosque in Makkah, both places are historically linked together in their establishment in Islam.

Such religious connections between the Ka'bah and the Sacred Rock made the British historian, Karen Armstrong, argue that the architecture of Makkah is reflected symbolically through the building of *Qubbet al-Sakhrah*. The Sacred Rock surrounded by the octagon of the shrine is representing Muslims the first step away from the fixity of the square. It thus marks the beginning of the ascent towards wholeness, perfection and eternity [Armstrong, 1997, p.16]. Such an architectural shape which translates Muslims religious experience of *tawâf* (circumambulation) and its basic symbolism was also coordinated by the geometric proportions and the system of numbers employed in the plan, section and elevation of the building.

The Sacred Proportions of Qubbet al-Sakhrah

The proportional system employed in *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* (The Dome of the Rock) displays a harmonic relationship among the different

parts of the building. Both Chen and Jacobson suggested that the system's ratios are based on the Golden Section. Their analysis shows that this ratio is close to that of the plan and section and elevation [Chen, 1980, pp.41-50; Jacobson, 1987, pp.145-147]. But a later research of al-Ratrouf confirms that the proportion of the building is generated from the octagonal series developed with the help of an octagon that is based on the square [al-Ratrouf, 2002, pp.212-220]. A certain proportion of 1:1.613 is repeated between length and height of different parts in the building. This value exists in plan, section and elevation of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh* which indicates the great attention paid to the unity in the planning of this building. As the proportion is based on the octagon, the different dimensions in the building may well have been determined with the help of the diagonals of the square (see Fig. 5).

Ikhwan al-Safah, Othman and al-Ratrouf believe that the octagonal shape and its generated proportion have sacred qualities and is reflecting a symbolic correspondence with the number eight of angels carrying the throne of God [*Ikhwan al-Safah*, 1957, 1: p.95; Othman, 1988, pp.337-364; al-Ratrouf, 2002, p181]. These, as Muslims believe, stand on the Sacred Rock [*Ibn Qazawighlī*, 1995 p.169].

No comparative octagonal forms existed in the enclave at that time to examine the relationship between their proportions. But dimensions in the Umayyad *Bāb al-Rahmah* (Golden Gate) in al-Aqsa Mosque correspond well with the dimension of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh*. For example, the inner length of the Golden Gate (20.37 metres) is identical to the inner diameter of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh*. Comparative examples of the precision and harmony in the proportional system which exist everywhere in *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh* have yet to be discovered in precedent octagonal buildings. The proportion in the plan of the Church of St. Mary in Nablus and St. Vitale in Ravenna may generally correspond to the plan of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh*, but regarding the section and elevation, the similarities are hardly noticeable.

In short, the proportional system of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh* reflects a high quality of design practice in coordinating the plan, section and elevation of the building that responds to the symbolic meaning of the place.

The Meaning of Qubbet al-Sakhrah

Two principal arguments on the meaning of *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* (The Dome of the Rock) have been put forward; both are based on the iconographic interpretation of the mosaics. Grabar developed the first interpretation in 1950 when investigating the mosaic of the inner face of the intermediate octagon of *Qubbet al-Sakhrah*. His analysis led him to claim that the representation of jewellery on the mosaic decoration of the intermediate enclosure can be identified as the imperial and royal attributes of Byzantine culture, which thus symbolizes the Muslims' victory over the Christians. Creswell and Van Berchem have both rejected this interpretation but have not offered an alternative. According to them, there are no examples in early Christian art where Christ, the Virgin, or the Saints have been adorned with such rich and glittering jewels as can be seen in *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* [Creswell, 1969, 1: p280]. Hence, according to Creswell and Van Berchem, Grabar's attempt to connect the ornament inside *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* with Christian motifs is far from convincing [Creswell, 1969, 1: p281].

The second interpretation has been introduced by Rosen-Ayalon in 1989 AD. She argues that the decorative concept in *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* was intended to convey a specific symbolic message of Paradise [Rosen-Ayalon, 1989, p66]. Although Rosen-Ayalon's study is somewhat more convincing, it is not clear yet whether it represents the entire story of the meaning of the building. Her interpretation had indeed been proposed earlier for the mosaic of the Great Mosque of Damascus which was contemporary to that of *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* [Grabar, 1996, p.59]. The central problem with the mosaic decoration is the abundance of sophisticated symbolic systems and abstraction that afforded different interpretations. For example, Rosen-Ayalon argues that *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* illustrates the theme of Paradise while in another part of her study she claims to detect the depiction of the Resurrection. For her, therefore, *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* represents Paradise. However, the Arabic scripts inside *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* do not refer to paradise but to Resurrection and Judgment. Yet, similar decorative motifs of this building have repeated in other monuments inside al-Aqsa enclave, such as *al-Jâmi'* al-Aqsa (al-Aqsa Congregation Mosque), *Qubbet al-Silsilah* (the Dome of the Chain), *Bâb al-Rahmah* (or the Golden Gate). They can also be found

in other buildings in relatively close geographical proximity such as the Umayyad Great Mosque at Damascus. All of these Muslim monuments, in fact, differ in their form from *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh*.

Rosen-Ayalon's conclusion corresponded to some extent with Tāmāri's research on the symbolic meaning of the early names of the gateways of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh*. Based on a historio-architectural approach, he argues that the names of the gateways of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh* reflect an eschatological symbolic message. However, his argument is only elaborated with regards to one aspect of the building, i.e. the early names of the gateways of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh* in connection with Muslims' belief and culture regarding the Sacred Rock. Tāmāri's argument which refers to the eschatological 'symbology' of the early names of the gateways of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh*, indicated that "the octagonal outline itself, as it is known, represents more than one symbol" [Tāmāri, 1996, p.5].

To understand the full meaning of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh*, there is a need to approach it thoroughly from both an architectural and artistic point of view rather than exclude one or the other. The starting point will be to examine briefly the historical, artistic and urban context of the building. Islamic Jerusalem at that time was an important religious place of the Umayyad caliphs in historical Syria. It was, also, given a political significance as a city in which the Umayyads used to take Muslims' allegiance. Jerusalem is, of course, important for Christians too; among their beliefs is one that the Resurrection of Christ took place in Jerusalem at the place where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was constructed, which accordingly became a place of Christian pilgrimage. Muslims, too, believe in the Resurrection which is in their minds also associated with Islamic Jerusalem. Muhammad, indeed, instructed Muslims that the city is the land where the dead will be raised and gathered [El-Awaisi, 1997, p20]. It is also believed that the Sacred Rock in al-Aqsa enclave would be the place from which the caller will call out on the last day [Ibn Kathîr, 1994, 4:p294].

Architecturally, the selection of the octagonal form strongly recalls the idea of Resurrection. The form has its precedents in Christian octagonal churches and particularly in the tomb of Jesus in the Holy Sepulchre itself, all of which symbolize the Resurrection. What is significant in this discussion is the Byzantine Church on mount

Jerzîm in Nablus, dated to the 2nd half of the 5th century AD and destroyed before the Muslim conquest of Palestine. While it contains an octagon in its planning, it too has a rock at its centre (or a rock-cut tomb). No such octagonal form contemporary to *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh* has been revealed in Islamic Jerusalem so far. The fact is that both Christians and Muslims share the idea of the Resurrection; they differ, however, in their interpretations. Christians relate the octagon to the Resurrection of the dead, and this may be the reason why octagons were constructed over graves. The Tomb of the Virgin in Jerusalem and the Mausoleum of Diocletian's palace in the middle of the east Adriatic coast (Croatia) are two Christian examples of octagons over graves [Creswell, 1969, 1:p.109; Marasovic, 1970, p17]. As for Muslims, on the day of Resurrection, as it reads in the Qurân, "eight will, that day, bear the Throne" [Qurân, 69:17]. Ibn Kathîr comments that on the Resurrection Day a throne will be placed on earth from which the people will be judged. The eight sides of the octagon correspond to the number eight of the angels that will carry God's Throne [Ibn Kathîr, 1994, 4: p532]. Originally the carriers of the throne are four and only become eight at the time of Resurrection. This idea corresponds to the geometry of the octagon, which has its origin in the square. Indeed, in Muslim shrines the octagon is associated with the divine source. No such octagons, constructed over the Muslims' dead, have been found that are dated to the Umayyad period or before. Umayyads do, however, build octagons, for example, to house the treasury in their Mosques. This link with the treasury recalls the large amount of jewellery depicted on the intermediate octagon of *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh*. Such observations lead to the belief that, in the early Islamic period, the meaning of the octagon form has some association with the Resurrection context rather than representing it.

Another issue of special significance to this discussion, supporting the divinity theme of the octagon form, is the large numbers of *mîhrâbs* (niches) in the decoration of the building. While these *mîhrâbs* are represented architecturally as a parapet crowning the building from the outside, they also crown the mosaic decoration and marble carvings inside the building. According to Walî, in all cases where such an element is mentioned in the Qurân it represents the most significant position related to God or a royal place where the King resides [Walî, 1993, p282]. This leads back to the Arabic

script, particularly inside the building at the inner face of the intermediate enclosure which stresses basically the oneness of God and rejects the idea that Jesus was his son. It reads from the southern side in counter clockwise direction:

"بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له له الملك وله الحمد يحيي ويميت وهو على كل شيء قدير محمد عبد الله ورسوله ان الله وملائكته يصلون على النبي يا ايها الذين امنوا صلوا عليه وسلموا تسليما صلى الله عليه وسلم عليه ورحمة الله يا اهل الكتاب لا تغلوا في دينكم ولا تقولوا على الله الا الحق انما المسيح عيسى ابن مريم رسول الله وكلمته التي القاها الى مريم وروح منه فامنوا بالله ورسوله ولا تقولوا ثلاثة انتهوا واخذ سبحانه ان يكون له ولد له ما في السموات وما في الارض خيرا لكم انما الله اله وكفى بالله وكيلاً لمن يستنكف المسجد ان يكون عبد الله ولا الملائكة المقربون ومن يستنكف عن عبادته ويستكبر فسيحشرهم اليه جميعا اللهم صلي على رسولك وعبدك عيسى ابن مريم والسلام عليه يوم ولد ويوم يموت ويوم يبعث حيا ذلك عيسى ابن مريم قول الحق الذي فيه يمتنون ما كان الله ان يتخذ من ولد سبحانه اذا قضى امرا فانما يقول له كن فيكون ان الله ربي وربكم فاعبدوه هذا صراط مستقيم شهد الله انه لا اله الا هو والملائكة واولوا العلم قيما بالقسط لا اله الا هو العزيز الحكيم ان الدين عند الله الاسلام وما اختلف الذين اتوا الكتاب بالامر بعد ما جاءهم العلم بغيا بينهم ومن يكفر بايات الله فان الله سريع الحساب"

...It is He who gives Life and Death, and He has Power over all things...Allah and His Angels, send blessing on the Prophet: O ye that believe! Send ye blessing on him, and salute him with all respect [Qurân. 33: 56]. O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah, and his Word, which he bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His Messengers. Say not "three": desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is One God: glory be to him: (far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs. Christ disdaineth not to serve and worship Allah, nor do the angels, those nearest (to Allah): those who disdain His worship and are arrogant, He will gather them all [Qurân. 4: 171-172]... So peace on him the day he was born, the day that he dies, and the day that he will be raised up to life (again)! [Qurân. 19: 15] Such (was) Jesus the son of Mary: (it is) a statement of truth, about which they (vainly) dispute. It is not befitting to (the majesty of) Allah that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him! When He determines a matter, He only says to it, "Be", and it is. Verily Allah is my Lord and your Lord: Him therefore serve ye: this is a Way that is straight [Qurân. 19: 34-36] There is no god but He: that is the witness of Allah, His angels, and those endued with knowledge, standing firm on justice. There is no god but He the Exalted in Power, the Wise. The Religion before Allah is

Islam (submission to His Will) nor did the People of the Book dissent therefrom except through envy of each other, after knowledge had come to them. But if any deny the Signs of Allah, Allah is swift in calling to account [Qurân. 3: 18-19].

According to Grabar, the contents of the script were meant to define the building's shape [Grabar, 1996, p.66]. In fact, those texts referring to Christians are taken from the Qurân as well as other Qurânic texts referring to Judaism and Islam which are written inside the inner face of the drum of the dome of the building. The central point in this calligraphy reveres and celebrates holiness based on the religious idea of monotheism, which is common to Muslims, Christians and Jews. It is glorifying God that he is omnipotent and celebrating the sanctity of the place as Muslims understood it.

What is interesting in the Kufic script of *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh* is in some of its content, that it is also related to the Resurrection as the last statement in the calligraphy is: "And Allah is swift in calling to account" which suggests *Yawm al-Hisâb*, (Day of Judgement). This reflects the Resurrection context, which corresponds to the symbolic message of the octagon as derived from Muslim culture. But, it is irrelevant to the Paradise representation argument of Rosen-Ayalon [Rosen-Ayalon, 1989, pp.66-67] where Paradise was portrayed in Christian art as a circle (see Fig. 6).

It is often said by later Muslim sources such as al-'Ulaimî and al-Nabulsî (1143 AH/ 1730 AD) that the Sacred Rock is the very place from which Muhammad ascended to heaven. However, the early mention of *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh* as stated by Ibn al-Faqîh and al-Muqdisî establishes no such link between *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh* and Muhammad's ascension to heaven. However, Al-Muqdisî points out that the *Qubbet al-Mi'râj* (the Dome of the Ascension) [al-Muqdisî, 1987, p145], is located some metres to the north-west of *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh*, indicating that Muhammad's ascension has nothing to do with *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh* [Armstrong, 1997, p.16]. This in turn encourages the rejection of any idea linking the ascension of Muhammad and Jesus with the octagon of *Qubbet al-Sakhrâh* and with the octagon of the Ascension Church on the Mount of Olives, the octagon of which is confirmed by Bagatti to be of Crusader origin while the earlier pre-Crusader Church was not octagonal in plan [Bugatti, 1971, Fig. 88].

The notion of eschatology was evidently still fervent in the 10th century AD and a clear reference for it can be found in al-Muqdisî's manuscript [al-Muqdisî, 1987, p144]. Moreover, additional evidence reinforcing this argument exists in the building itself and has been noticed since early times. The early names of two of the doors of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh* [al-Muqdisî, 1987, p146] are an indication of the Resurrection Day: the Gate of *Israfil* and the Gate of *al-sûr* "trumpet of the Resurrection". If the name of the door *al-sûr* existed since the construction of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh*, then the motif of cornucopiae on the interior mosaic of the intermediate octagon is surely to be identified as a trumpet (see Fig. 7) [Rosen-Ayalon, 1989, p68]. Such evidence relates to the Muslim eschatology belief regarding the Sacred Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque in Islamic Jerusalem as the place of the end of al-Dunyâ (the world).

Also very helpful in understanding the meaning of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh* is the urban form of the site, especially the platform of the building which rises some metres above the surroundings. The number of arcades at the edge of the platform of *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh* also holds a similar, if not the same, symbolic meaning. They acquired the name of *al-Mayazîn* (scales) which connects them with the Last Day. This also corresponds with other names given to parts of al-Aqsa enclave, for instance, *Bâb al-Rahmah* (Mercy) (or the Golden Gate) and the valley of *Jahannam* (Hell) which were established at that time.

The octagon is a geometrical expression of number eight. The concept of numbers in Islam is similar to the Pythagorean system where numbers are qualitative as well as quantitative entities. They are not identified simply by addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division [Ardalan & Bakhtiar, no date, p31]. In Christianity, eight symbolises Resurrection [Harastanî, 1991, p215] in contrast to Islam where eight is related to the Divine source, particularly to the throne of God [Ardalan & Bakhtiar, no date, p.31; Tâmarî, 1996, p.11]. Ardalan & Bakhtiar study the general concept of the octagon and the dome in Islamic perspective that, indeed, fitted *Qubbet al-Sakhrāh*. They argue that the dome rested upon a square surrounded by an octagon which symbolized the eight angels, the bearers of the throne [Ardalan & Bakhtiar, no date, p31].

Conclusion

'Abd el-malik Ibn Marwân chose a talent architect to develop the architecture of the Sacred Rock of the al-Aqsa mosque. He was very sensitive to the religious associations of the site; hence he generated a centralized building type that expresses a religious power of the Sacred Rock and magnifying it to dominate the skyline of the city of Islamicjerusalem. Therefore, it has a very strong visual impact on the observers and their sacred experience.

Everything in *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* (The Dome of the Rock) leads to the belief that this monument symbolises the throne of God. This is imbued with eschatological emotions, such as the Last Day, the Resurrection, Judgment Day for which, according to Muslim belief, the Sacred Rock would be the place of eschatological activity, particularly, blowing the trumpet of the Last Day. The religious meaning of the octagon in Muslims' culture also fits well with the context of the Resurrection associated with the place; it is an emblem of transition from death to life and, of course, a symbol of return to the divine creator [Armstrong, 1997, p.16]. This idea of transition corresponds to the structural solution in Muslim architecture in transforming forms from square to sphere. In symbolic terms, Muslims can understand such a solution as a relationship linking earth to Heaven.

Qubbet al-Sakhrah may well have been inspired by the Ka'bah in its remote impact. The archetype of the building with its eschatological emotions must have facilitated creating a link with the Ka'bah or the Church of the Resurrection by the early scholars al-Ya'qûbî and al-Muqdisî. They saw the reason for the building it as being an intention to divert Muslim pilgrimage or as a challenge to the architecture of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. But these do not seem acceptable, especially when considering the impact of the contemporary political environment on these early writers.

Examples of comparable earlier octagonal buildings are known in antecedent non-Muslim buildings such as St. Vitale in Ravenna, the octagon of the palace church in Aachen in Germany and the Church of St. Mary in Nablus in Palestine. Much of the building materials of *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* such as bases, columns and capital are relicts of Byzantine or Roman buildings. The original feature in

building is the architectural coordination of the annular enclosures in the plan of *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* — a circle surrounded by octagon surrounded by another octagon —. This architectural organization does not exist in the Christian buildings [Creswell, 1969, 1: p108]. Another significant feature in the building is the way in which the dome itself projects out of the octagons. It is evident that the architect made the dome more significant from the outside than from the inside due to the height and location of the Sacred Rock. In geometric terms: it proclaims repose and stresses the significance of the central object [Ettinghausen & Grabar, 1994, pp.28-34].

Qubbet al-Sakhrah is indeed a Sacred Islamic monument displaying the Muslim belief in the sanctity of the place of al-Aqsa mosque and its symbolic meaning associated with the Last Judgment Day. The reasons for its construction are a mixture of religion and politics. 'Abd al-Malik considered the city's great wealth of religious association to strengthen the bond of Muslims to other monotheistic religions. He also saw the city of Islamic Jerusalem as place of second Mosque established on earth as believed by Muslims and their former Qiblah. It is a part of the urban syntax in the overall early Muslim scheme of al-Aqsa enclave that exerts a powerful and deliberately contrived impact in developing a full three-dimensional Islamic image for the city of Islamic Jerusalem.

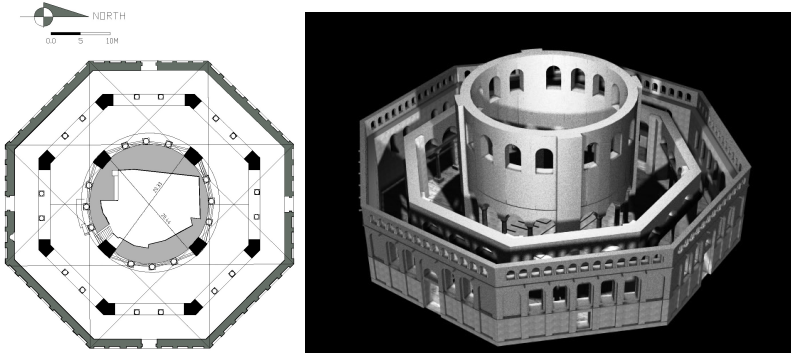


Fig. 1: The Dome of the Rock: Left: plan of *Qubbet al-Sakhrah* in Jerusalem. Right: three-dimensional model of the annular enclosures of the building without a roof as they looked at the time of construction. **Source:** The researcher.



Fig. 2: The Dome of the Rock in al-Aqsa Mosque: Left and right pictures represent the outer and inner ambulatory of Qubbet al-Sakhrah as it looks today. **Source:** Grabar, 1996, pp.58, 69.

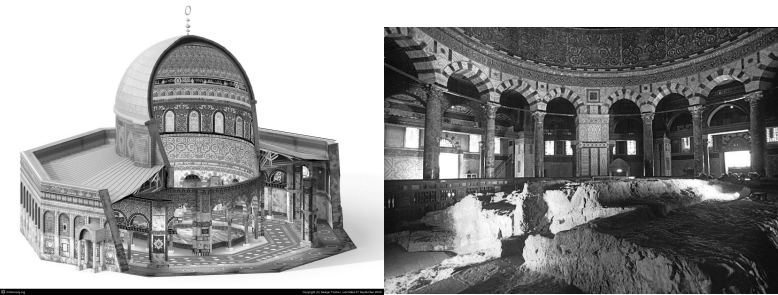


Fig. 3: The Sacred Rock of al-Aqsa Mosque: Left and right pictures represent the architectural archetype of Qubbet al-Sakhrah and its relation with the protrusive Rock.

Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/166422148706747976/?lp=true>, <http://biblicalisraelstours.com/2016/10/the-mountain-of-god/>

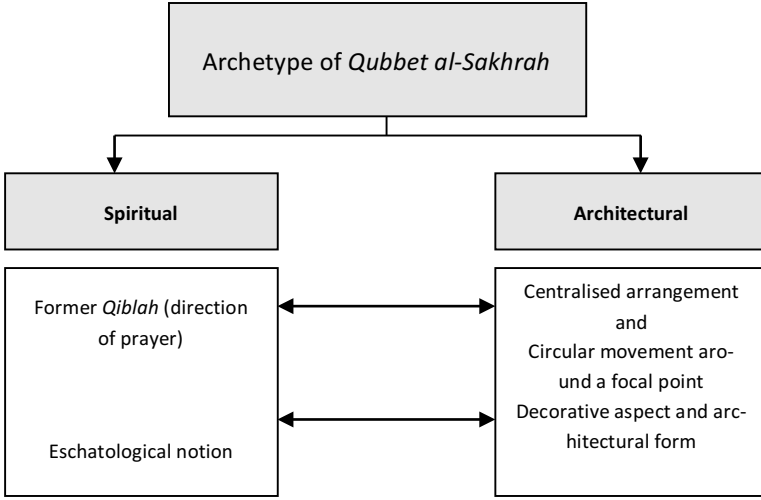


Fig. 4: The Dome of the Rock in al-Aqsa Mosque: The archetype of Qubbet al-Sakhrah in Jerusalem. **Source:** The researcher.

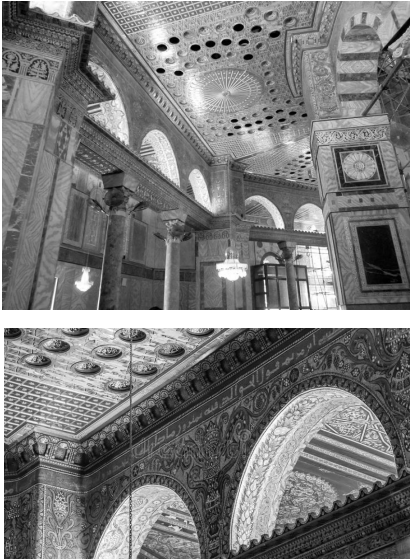


Fig. 3. The Sacred Rock of al-Aqsa Mosque: Left and right pictures represent the decorative compositions in the inner wall mosaic covering of Qubbet al-Sakhrah which attracts the viewers to follow up in unconscious rotational movement.

Source: <https://thumbs.dreamstime.com/b/interior-dome-rock-jerusalem-israel-temple-mount-65087726.jpg>,

<https://i.pnimg.com/736x/70/43/ae/7043ae594091aac639e5a76061ac4c73--dome-of-the-rock-mosques.jpg>

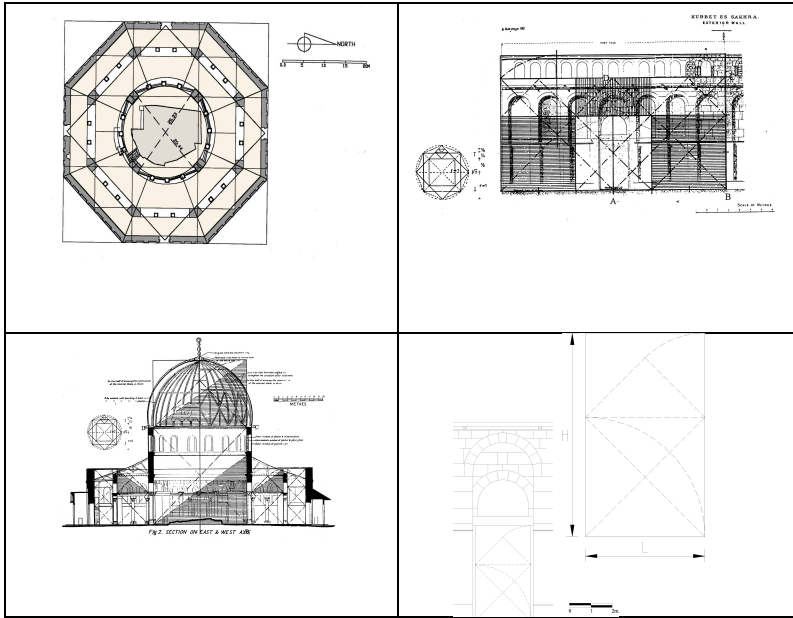


Fig 5: The Dome of the Rock: Top and bottom pictures are representing the similar proportional system employed in the plan, elevation, cross-section and an entrance detail of Qubbet al-Sakhrah in Jerusalem. **Source:** Al-Ratrou, 2002, pp. 355-367.

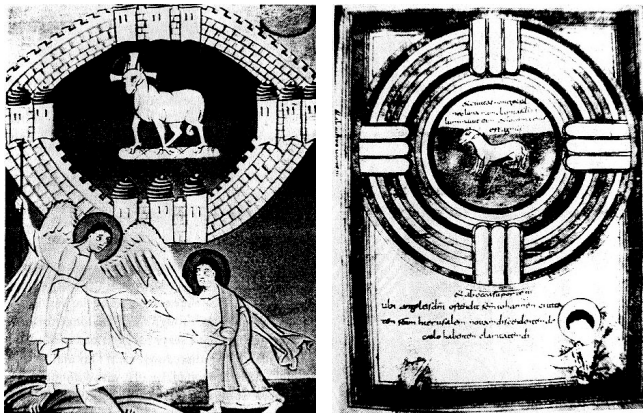


Fig 6: Two Christian miniatures which show an interpretation of the Heavenly Jerusalem in an apocalyptic vision. Both of them portray paradise as a circle. On the right the manuscript dates to the 9th century AD (in the Municipal Library, Valenciennes), on the left the manuscript dates to the 1st quarter of the 11th century AD (in the Stadtbibliothek, Bamberg). **Source:** Rosen-Ayalon, 1989, pp. 66-67



Fig 7: The Dome of the Rock, Cornucopiae, detail of mosaics; the left picture is at the circular arcade of Qubbat al-Sakhrah, and the right one is at its northern intrados. **Source:** Creswell, 1969, 1: pp. 270-272.

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Muallak Taşı'nın Kutsal Mimarisi: Mescid-i Aksa'da Yenilikçi Tasarım Konsepti ve İkonografi

Atf/©: Al-Ratrouf, Haithem, (2017). Muallak Taşı'nın Kutsal Mimarisi: Mescid-i Aksa'da Yenilikçi Tasarım Konsepti ve İkonografi, Milet ve Nihal, 14 (2), 49-73.

Öz: Kudüs şehri M.S 637'de Müslümanların yönetimine geçti. Müslümanların şehre ilgisi, üzerine Mescid-i Aksa'nın inşa edildiği Muallak Taşı'na verilen önemden ötürü daha erken dönemlere dayanmaktadır. Beytülmakdis bölgesinin, temelde, ilk kutsal mescidin sonrasında inşa edilen ikinci mescidin bulunduğu yer olduğuna inanılmaktadır. Ayrıca, Hz. Muhammed'in miraca yükseldiği (İsra) ve diğer peygamberlere namaz kıldırıldığı yer olarak da alan önem kazanır. Müslümanlar nezdindeki bu saygı konumu, Halife Hz. Ömer'i şehri almaya ve bu kutsal bölgenin İslami kimliğini görünür kılmak için bir mihrap (niş) yapmaya sevk etmiştir.

Emevilerin Suriye'deki yükselişi ile beraber, Muallak Taşı'nın ve Aksa Mescidi'nin dini konumu daha da arttı. Emeviler bu kutsal alan ile çok ilgili idiler zira onu dini ve siyasi gücün merkezi olarak görüyorlardı. Müslümanların halifesi olan Muaviye ve halefleri sınırlarını Aksa Mescidini çevreleyecek biçimde genişlettiler. Beytülmakdisin, Emevilerin siyasi başkenti olan Şam'a coğrafi yakınlığından ötürü Emeviler Beytülmakdisi Mekke ve Medine'nin dini bir rakibi haline getirmeye çabaladılar. Böylelikle, Emevi halifesi Abdülmelik İbn Mervan, Aksa alanını çevreleyen, Aksa Camisi, Kubbetü's-Sahra ve Kubbetü's-Silsile gibi kutsal yapılar inşa etti. Emeviler bu inşalar yoluyla, Aksa Mescidi'nin ve Hacer-i Muallakanın kutsanmasını ve İslami kimliğin sabit kılınmasını amaçladılar.

Abdülmelik İbn Mervan, Aksa Mescidindeki Muallak Taşı'nının geliştirilmesi için yetenekli bir mimarı görevlendirdi. Alanın dinsel çağrışımlarına karşı çok hassas olduğundan, Muallak taşının dini gücünü ifade eden merkezileşmiş bir inşa modeli oluşturdu ve onu Beytülmakdisin silüetine hâkim bir biçimde genişletti. Bu sebeple Muallak Taşı, kendisini temaşa edenlerin kutsala ilişkin deneyimlerine çok güçlü bir görsel etkide bulunmaktadır.

Kubbetü's-Sahranın her bir kısmı, eserin Tanrı'nın ilmini, otoritesini ve arşını sembolize ettiği görüşüne imkân tanır. Bu görüş, Kıyamet Gününü, Din Gününü, Mahşer gününü içeren eskatolojik duygularla doludur. İslam inancına göre, Muallak Taşı, Kıyamet Gününde Sur borusuna üflenmesiyle, bu eskatolojik eylemlerin gerçekleşme mekanı olacaktır. İslam kültüründe sekizgenin dinsel anlamı, yeniden dirilme gününün mekanla ilişkisi bağlamında anlamlıdır; Sekizgen bu anlamda ölümden yaşama geçişin remzi, ve elbette Yaratıcı'ya dönüşün sembolüdür. Bu geçiş ve intikal fikri, İslam mimarisinde kareden küreye dönüşen yapısal değişime tekabül eder. Sembol ifadelerle, Müslümanlar, bu değişimi, dünyanın ve cennetin ilişkililiğinin kurulduğu bir açıklama biçimi olarak anlamaktadırlar.

Kubbetüs-Sahra, dolaylı olarak Kabe'den ilham almış olabilir. Yapının eskatolojik çağrışımlarıyla beraber ilk hali, erken dönem bilginlerinden Yakubi ve Makdisinin, yapının Kabe ve Diriliş Kilisesi ile arasında bir ilgi kurmasına imkan tanımış olmalıdır. Bu bilginler, yapının inşa edilmesinin sebebinin Müslümanların hac yolunu değiştirmek ya da Kutsal Kabir Kilisesine mimari açıdan meydan okumak olarak açıkladılar. Ancak bu açıklamaları kabul etmek, özellikle de dönemin siyasi ortamının bu yazarlar üzerindeki etkisi göz önüne alındığında, pek mümkün gözükmemektedir.

Erken dönem karşılaştırmalı sekizgen yapının bilinen örnekleri, öncül gayrimüslim eserleri olan Ravennadaki Aziz Vitale Kilisesi, Almanya'daki Aachen Katedrali ve Filistin Nablustaki Azize Meryem Kilisesi'dir. Kubbetü's-Sahra'nın temeli, sütunları ve başlıkları gibi çoğu yapı materyali Bizans ve Roma yapılarının bakiyesidir. Eserin orijinal özelliği, Kubbetü's-Sahra'nın planındaki dairesel mahfazaların-sekizgenle çevrili bir diğer sekizgenin çevrelediği daire- mimari insicam ve düzenidir. Bu mimari düzen Hristiyan yapılarda mevcut değildir. Yapının bir diğer önemli özelliği ise kubbenin sekizgenlerle dışa açıldığı şeklidir. Mimarın, Muallak Taşı'nın yükseklik ve konumundan ötürü, kubbenin içeriden daha ziyade dışarıdan önemine odaklandığı açıktır. Geometrik terimlerle söylersek, yapı sükûnu imler ve merkezi nesnenin önemini vurgular.

Kubbetü's-Sahra şüphesiz Mescidi Aksa'nın İslam inancındaki mukaddes yerini ve onun Kıyamet Günü ile ilişkili temsiliyetini gösteren kutsal bir İslami eserdir. İnşasının sebepleri din ve siyaset ile ilişkilidir. AbdülMalik, şehrin çok zengin dinsel çağrışımını, Müslümanların diğer tek tanrılı dinlerle olan bağını güçlendirici bir etki olarak yorumlar. Beytülmakdisi, Müslümanlarca inanıldığı haliyle, yeryüzünde inşa edilmiş ikinci mescid ve ilk kible olarak görür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kutsal sanat, İslami sembolizm, arketip, kutsal mimari.