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Solomon's Stables, The Temple Mount, Jerusalem: The Events Concerning the Destruction of Antiquities 1999–2001[1]

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The Temple Mount (Ḥaram esh-Sharif) has been significant to the cults and rituals of the country since Canaanite times. The enclosure bears within its physical remains the potential of providing answers to key questions concerning the development of rituals in Jerusalem and the foundations of the three great monotheistic faiths. However, issues of management, control and politics have always had a crucial influence on the possibility to conduct scientific archaeological and historical research at the site (Avni and Seligman 2006).

The Temple Mount came under Israeli control during the Six-Day War in June 1967. Following the decision of the then Defense Minister, Moshe Dayan, on June 17, 1967, control over the day-to-day running of the Temple Mount by the Islamic religious authorities (henceforth, the Waqf) was restored in the area that had been taken by the Israel Defense Forces (henceforth, IDF) only ten days earlier (Ramon 2001:114–115). With this single decision Dayan created the basis for the status quo which exists till the present day. In his account of the events of that day, Uzi Narkiss (1991:341), at the time the IDF Chief of Central Command, describes this new state of affairs succinctly: "The IDF will clear the Temple Mount platform and will redeploy outside it. The Israeli administration will be responsible for general security, but will not interfere with the internal guarding and the internal inspection of the running of the Mount."

The Temple Mount, both an active religious site and a registered antiquities site,[2] has since then been the crux of contention over the level of control that could be exercised by Israeli government and administrative authorities (Shragai 1995; Berkovitz 2001a; 2001b; Reiter 2001a; 2001b). This question has been especially conspicuous with regard to the actions of the Muslim authorities concerning the important antiquities at the site (Avni and Seligman 2001:24, 27–29). The issue peaked on November 25, 1999 with the commencement by the Waqf authorities of major development works just north of the vaulted complex known as Solomon's Stables. These works, which were conducted without archaeological supervision, resulted in serious damage to the archaeological layers of the site, sparking controversy over the management of the archaeological patrimony of the Temple Mount.

Historical References

The complex of Solomon's Stables is a huge vaulted structure under the platform of the Temple Mount. It is located at the southeastern corner of the Mount and connects with the Triple Gate, also known as the eastern Ḥulda Gate, one of the entrances into the enclosure from the Second Temple period.

This subterranean structure has been noted by visitors to Jerusalem since the fourth century CE, the earliest description being that of the Bordeaux Pilgrim in 333 CE (The Pilgrim of Bordeaux:156, §590). Gibson and Jacobson (1996:268–281) exhaustively list the observations of the site through its history, showing Solomon's Stables to be clearly known to Jewish, Christian and Muslim commentators. Tsafrir (1986:133, n. 11) suggests that the area contained a monastery of virgins, described by a sixth-century-CE visitor named Theodosius as being located "Down below the Pinnacle of the

Temple" (Theodosius:66, §11). Early Muslim writers often treated the vaulted structure as inseparable from the Cradle of Jesus (Masjid Mahd 'Isa), a small canopied shrine in a room just under the southeastern corner of the Temple Mount platform (Wilson 1865:37; Myres 2000:525). The earliest mention of the shrine dates to the tenth century CE, and the tradition continues through the Crusader period.

The vaults received their current name in the Crusader period, when the Templars—the Order of the Knights of the Temple—associated the Temple Mount with the Solomonic construction and used the vaults as stables. The earliest source noting this name was Theoderich in 1172 CE: "They (the Templars) have below them stables for horses built by King Solomon … a wondrous building, resting on piers and containing an endless complication of arches and vaults…" (Theodorich:31; Gibson and Jacobson 1996:269). Later on, both Jewish and Muslim writers used the same appellation for the site, all accepting the erroneous historical connection to Solomon. According to Wilson (1865:37–38), the vaults were alternatively known by the Arabs as El-Masjid el-Qadim, the Ancient Mosque, this being the first hint of a prior Muslim ritual use of the space. However, the standard designation used in Islamic sources for this monument was Istablat Suleiman, literally Solomon's Stables (Jarrar 1998:86).

The earliest modern descriptions of the vaults were presented by Catherwood (Bartlett after 1842:156–158) and then by many of the pioneers of Jerusalem archaeology: Barclay (1858:503–505), Pierotti (1864:77–78), de Vogüé (1864:13–14), Wilson (1865:37–38), Wilson and Warren (1871:226–228), Conder (Warren and Conder 1884:163–164) and Schick (1887:90–92).

THE STRUCTURE (Plans 1, 2; Fig. 1)

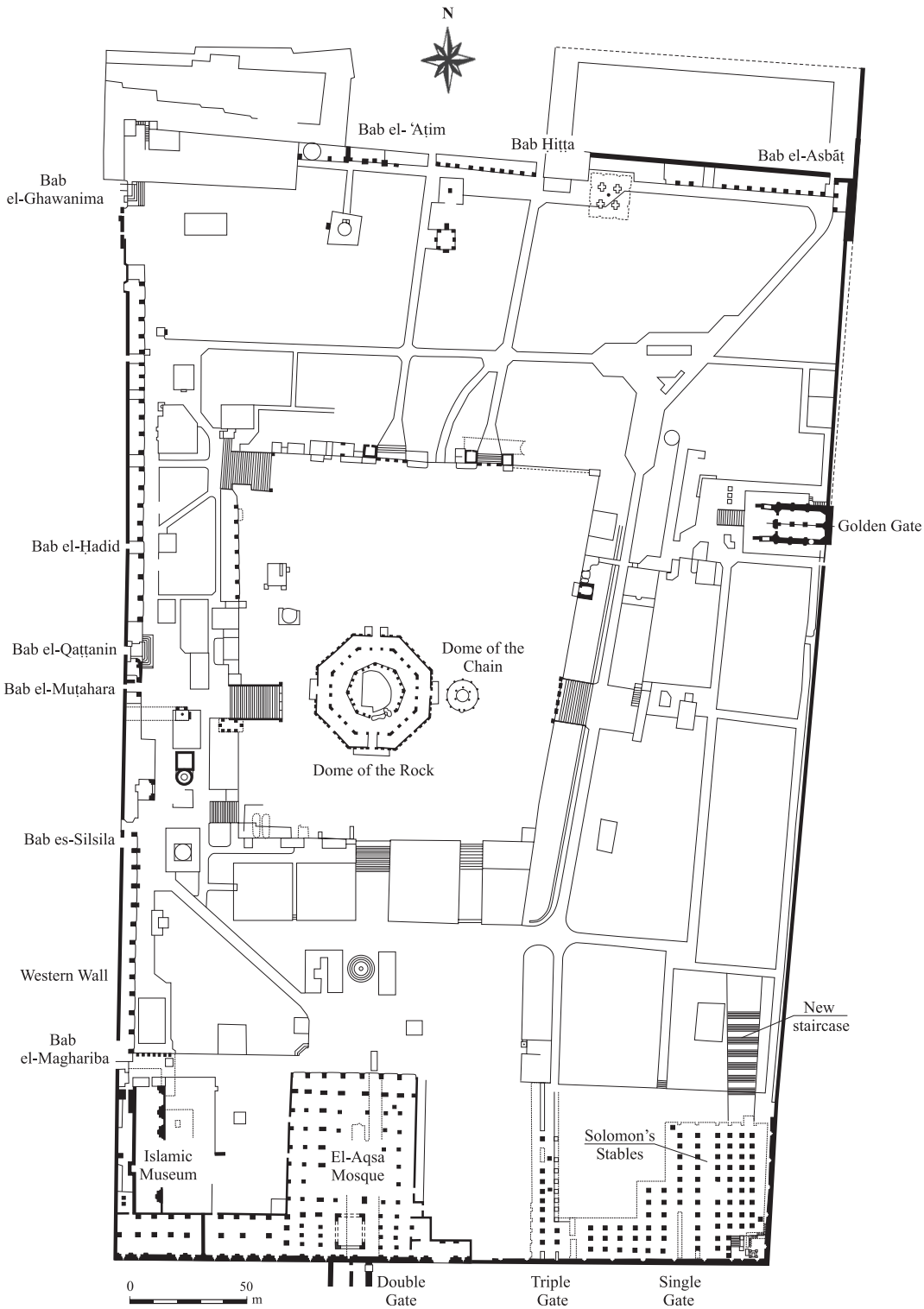
The area of Solomon's Stables excluding the passage of the Triple Gate (900 sq m) is 3390 sq m. The north–south length of the space is 62 m at the eastern end, reduced to about 20 m at the western end; from east to west it measures 83 m at the southern end, reduced to some 46 m at the northern end. The floor level prior to the 1996 works (see below) was 12.5 m below the Temple Mount platform, at a level erroneously claimed by Warren to be that of the master course of the Temple Mount.

The hall comprises 12 arches running north–south, rising to the present height of 9 m. The arches are supported by 88 known piers, though Bahat (2001:126) notes the presence of 94 by including the engaged piers. Above the arcades spring 13 barrel-shaped vaults, ranging in span from 3.5 to 7.4 m. These vaults support the platform of the southeastern part of the Temple Mount. Along each arcade, above the level of the arches and at regular intervals, are square holes intended to support the wooden frames used during the construction of the vaults.

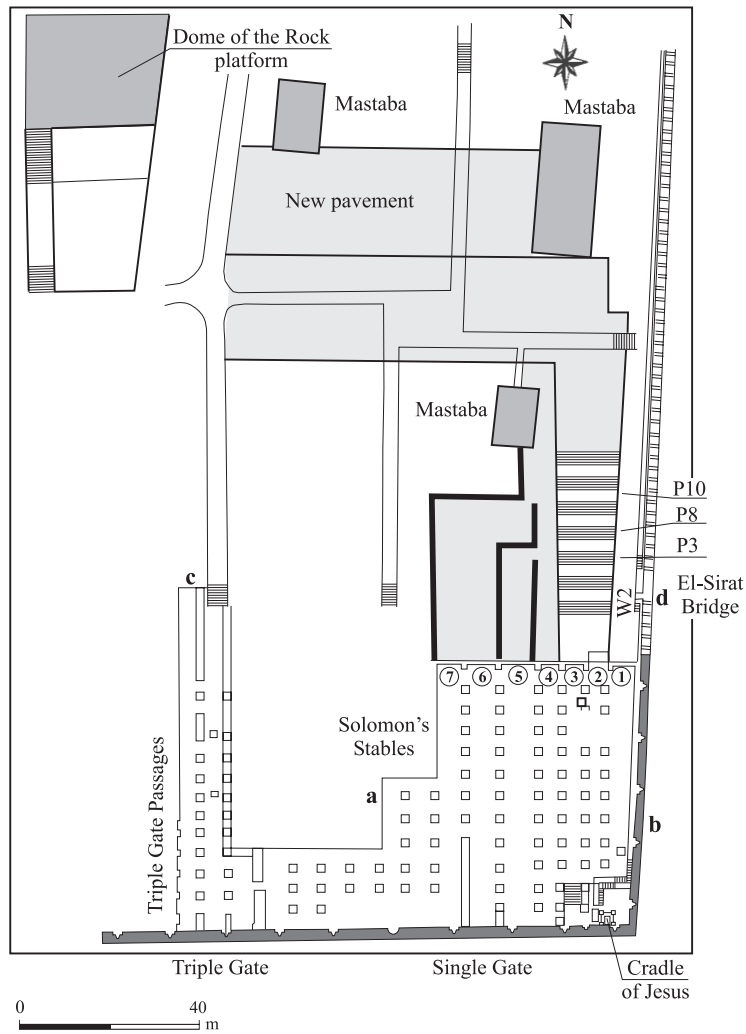
The inter-pier spacing varies from 3 to 3.7 m. The piers, 1.1–1.2 m thick, are built of large rectangular blocks set on their short side. Many of the piers have holes pierced through their corners, which led early visitors to suggest that horses had been tethered and stabled here.

The piers are clearly in secondary use, as indicated by the mixed masonry: all four sides of the stones are fashioned in Herodian style, but the variable quality of the dressing shows that not all the chipping was conducted at the same time or in the same workshop. This is

Fig. 1. The interior of Masallah el-Marwani (the new name for Solomon's Stables) after the renovations begun in 1996.



Plan 1. The Temple Mount (Ḥaram esh-Sharif) with the new construction at its southeastern corner.



Plan 2. Schematic plan of the southeastern part of the Temple Mount (Ḥaram esh-Sharif), including Solomon's Stables and the new staircase to the north.

clearly stated by de Vogüé (1864:13–14): "The pillars were constructed from ashlars decorated with crude bosses that had been purloined from some ancient structure and stacked above one another. Some of them derived from the external foundations of the first (Herodian) phase of the construction, as indicated by the characteristic margins that surround one of their faces. By contrast, the three other exposed faces were rendered with crude bosses, which were added at a later date".

The vaults and arches are semicircular in shape. The north–south arcades are perpendicular to the southern wall, yet not absolutely parallel to one another or to the eastern Temple Mount wall.

At the northernmost end, the vaults rest on a row of wide arches that either were blocked as part of the original construction or were left open and later blocked (as suggested by Bahat 2001:128). This blockage allowed a massive fill to be set behind it (to the north) in order to

level the platform of the Temple Mount to the present height.

In the southeastern corner, at a level higher than the present floor of Solomon's Stables, is a small room (5.5 × 10.3 m) enclosing a shrine known as the Cradle of Jesus (Masjid Mahd 'Isa). The canopied shrine is in fact a Roman or Byzantine niche, carved from a single stone block and set on its back below a dome (Myres 2000). In this room are three *miḥrab*s, dedicated to Mary, the Disciples (of Christ) and to John and Zakariah (Wilson 1865:37–38). This room is constructed from large stone blocks, their internal faces not dressed, that are probably datable to the original Herodian construction of the Temple Mount walls. Wilson (1865:37–38) suggested the room is all that remained of a massively built tower from the construction of the southern extension of the Temple Mount during Herod's reign. Two original windows open from the eastern wall into this room. These windows were later partially blocked.

An interesting proposal relating to the construction of the vaults was attributed to Wilson and Warren (1871:134). Commenting on the fact that the bedrock at the southeastern corner of the Temple Mount is some 32 m below the surface of the Ḥaram esh-Sharif (it is in fact around 43 m; see Kenyon 1974:213, Fig. 32), they suggested that there may be another system of vaults under those visible. Whether this vast space under the floors of Solomon's Stables is made up of vaults, as suggested by Wilson and Warren and later supported by Vincent and Stève (1954: Pl. CXXVIII), or simply filled with earth, is unknown to this day.

The east–west vaults are adjacent to the Triple Gate passages on the western side of the complex and access to them is possible through a doorway in the dividing wall. This passage is considered by most scholars to be a fully preserved remnant of Herodian construction (see review of this view in Gibson and Jacobson 1996:259–268). However, in light of recent research, which proposes an Umayyad date for the parallel Double Gate and its passages, this conclusion may require reconsideration (Shani and Chen 2001).

The Triple Gate, originally part of the Herodian construction of the southern extension of the Temple Mount, was heavily damaged during the destruction of the Temple by Titus in 70 CE. In fact, only the thresholds and part of the lowest course of the doorjambs survived. The existing triple semicircular arched portals with chamfered voussoirs almost certainly belong to the Umayyad reconstruction of the walls of the Ḥaram esh-Sharif (Wightman 1993:230; Burgoyne 1992:110–111, 124). The gate was referred to in Al-Muqaddasi's list of Jerusalem gates as Bawab Miḥrab Maryam, meaning Gate of Mary's Prayer Niche (Al-Muqaddasi:46; Burgoyne 1992:122), associating it with the nearby shrine of the Cradle of Jesus (Masjid Mahd 'Isa). The Triple Gate was blocked most probably during the Fatimid refortification of Jerusalem (Ben-Dov 1982:346; Burgoyne 1992:110).

Another gateway, the Single Gate, is visible both from within and without. It is located 32 m from the southeastern corner of the Temple Mount and has a pointed arch, typical of the early medieval period. This opening may well have been breached by the Templars as an access to Solomon's Stables, as the Triple Gate had been blocked prior to this time (see above). However, in a recent study, Bahat (2001:129) proposed that the Single Gate was built by the Fatimids as part of their reconstruction of the walls after the 1033 CE earthquake. Ben-Dov (1983:81) suggested that this gate was originally faced with an external gate-tower, similar to others found attached to gates along the walls. If so, this tower was removed when the Single Gate was blocked in the Ayyubid or Mamluk periods. Certainly no remains of such a gate-tower were found during the excavations conducted by B. Mazar in the 1970s, nor are any remnants visible on the masonry of the wall.

A tunnel discovered by Wilson (1880:55–57) under the Single Gate runs northward for 30 m until it is blocked by debris (Mazar 1975:127–128; Ben-Dov 1982:347). It should be dated

to the Crusader remodeling of the space. The sides of the tunnel utilize Herodian masonry in clear secondary use. It has been suggested by Ben-Dov (1982:346–347) that the tunnel served as a postern escape route, constructed by the Crusaders together with the Single Gate. The use of this tunnel to exit the city could only have been possible after the eleventh century CE, as prior to this date this section of the Temple Mount walls was encompassed within the city fortifications.

In a letter to the Palestine Exploration Fund, Schick notes that in the early months of 1891 the Waqf authorities cleared earth from Solomon's Stables to the level of the floor (Gibson and Jacobson 1996:277). In the process, the internal face of the Single Gate was buried up to the top of the arch, together with mangers that were still visible at that time. Windows were also opened at this time along the upper part of the southern wall of the Temple Mount, between the Triple Gate and the southeastern corner, allowing light to enter Solomon's Stables. As a result of the leveling of the floor, two courses of an arch spring (Plan 2:a) were exposed at the northern end of the western side of the fifth vault from the west (Wrightson 1891). This portion of the arch may well be part of the original Herodian vaults (Gibson and Jacobson 1996:277), though it has been associated with the Umayyad period due to its constructional similarity to Umayyad buildings at the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount (Bahat 2001:126).

Also thought to be of Herodian construction is an arch spring and a pair of blocked gates (Plan 2:b) visible on the exterior of the eastern wall of the Temple Mount, about 25 m north of the southeastern corner. As this arch spring is below the level of the floor of Solomon's Stables, it may represent the remains of a bridge or a staircase similar to Robinson's Arch on the opposite, southwestern corner. This arch would have allowed access into the underground chambers of Solomon's Stables during the Herodian period (Warren and Conder 1884:147; Burgoyne 2000:489). Interestingly, this arch was built on the same axis as that noted by Wrightson (1891:222–224) and it may have been part of the same vaulting system.

Chronological Analysis

An understanding of the external walls of the Temple Mount surrounding Solomon's Stables is important for the interpretation of the monument, both structurally and chronologically. Though the walls of the Temple Mount have been the subject of inconclusive study since the nineteenth century (summarized in Wightman 1993), a detailed analysis including a chronological investigation has yet to be carried out. Burgoyne (2000) has proposed the guidelines for such a research through inspection of the vertical 'stratigraphy' of the walls' building stages.

The outer walls of Solomon's Stables, which also constitute the southeastern corner of the Temple Mount, display masonry from various periods throughout the history of the wall: the heavy protruding boss ashlars on the eastern wall north of the seam,[3] usually dated to the Hasmonean period; the magnificent large paneled ashlars of the Herodian extension; the smaller smooth ashlars of the Umayyad reconstruction; the diagonally comb-chiseled Crusader stones; the small stones with a heavy boss of the Middle Ages (Ayyubid to Mamluk periods); the stones with pecked surface and rough margins of Sultan Suleiman's rebuilding of the city walls; and various repairs of the wall including the extensive renovations using small stones, following the collapse of part of the eastern wall in the winter of 1881 (Schick 1882).

The dating of Solomon's Stables has long been debated. Since no systematic archaeological work has been conducted, dating is still based on architectural analysis and historical sources, rather than upon direct archaeological evidence. Even the name of the structure is based on an interpretation of the chronology of the site, and Barclay (1858:503–505) actually ascribed the building to the time of King Solomon. A Herodian date for the site was first proposed

by Catherwood in the mid-nineteenth century (Bartlett after 1842:157) and later reaffirmed by Willis and Williams (Williams 1849:312). This date still receives occasional support. Fergusson (1847:120–123) suggested that the round arcades and vaults were of a Byzantine date, associating them with Justinian's building of the Nea Church, which was thought to have stood on the southern part of the Temple Mount. A Byzantine date was also supported by Pierotti (1864:77–78), though he 'hedged his bets' by assigning the original construction to King Solomon, with later reconstruction in the Herodian period.

De Vogüé (1864:13–14) designated the rendering of the stonework and the vaults as seen in the nineteenth century simply as 'Arab' and thus post seventh century CE, and the original construction to Herod's expansion of the Temple Mount platform. Wilson (1871:14–15) later agreed with this dating. Shortly afterwards, Warren returned to a mixture of previous ideas, assigning the lower part of the outer wall to 'Solomon's Palace', the major construction to the Herodian period, the destruction to the time of Titus, and the vaults visible today to Justinian's age (Wilson and Warren 1871:126; Wilson 1865:325). Conder (1879:47) suggested that the vaults had been destroyed by an earthquake in the eleventh century CE and were then rebuilt by the Crusaders. He also noted that the floor was well above the master course and that the present external walls, except those of the southeastern corner, all post-date the Herodian drafted masonry found on the lower courses of the wall (Warren and Conder 1884:163–164).

Even in the late twentieth century, opinion was still divided to a certain extent. Most scholars associated the original construction with the time of the Second Temple, when Herod expanded the platform in order to accommodate the huge numbers of people that entered the Temple Mount during the three annual pilgrimage festivals. With the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 CE, most of the southern enclosure wall and the internal walls were removed. This destruction can easily be seen by analyzing the external courses of the southern wall, which clearly show that the wall was destroyed down to the level of a single course above the threshold of the Triple Gate.

The only record of the vaults being utilized between 70 CE and the Umayyad period was possibly as the home of a monastery of virgins during the sixth century CE, which was documented as being "Down below the Pinnacle of the Temple" (Tsafrir 1986:133, n. 11; Theodosius:66, §11). However, it is not clear from this description whether the convent was located within the precincts of the Temple Mount or just outside its walls (Mazar 1998:15).

In a view summarized by Busink (1980:961, n. 127) and accepted by Ben-Dov (1978), Bahat (1987:58) and Gibson and Jacobson (1996:279), it is suggested that the vaults were rebuilt by the Umayyad rulers in the seventh century CE, as part of the extensive works to re-establish the esplanade of the Temple Mount. The level of the new platform may have been lower than that of the Herodian period (Ben-Dov 1982:346). The Umayyad works included the repair of the external walls of the Temple Mount, known from then on as Ḥaram esh-Sharif—the Noble Sanctuary, and the building of the Dome of the Rock, the El-Aqsa Mosque and the four palaces to the south and west of the Mount.

The vaults were damaged by the earthquake of 1033 CE and then repaired, probably by the Fatimids, before the Crusader attack on Jerusalem. The vaults were later renovated again by the Crusaders themselves (Ben-Dov 1982:346). In this context, Bahat (2001:128–129) suggests that Solomon's Stables were constructed as part of the repair of the southern wall of the Temple Mount, but not as an underground edifice; rather, the hall was accessed through the open arches in the northern wall, following the drop in the platform level as a result of the collapse of the eastern wall during the 1033 CE earthquake. (Evidence of this activity is strengthened by the building remains found beneath the surface during the

works of 1999; see below.) Only later, sometime after the Crusader period, was this area refilled to restore the space to the previous level with the blocking of the northern openings into Solomon's Stables. Bahat's proposal is backed by an inscription dated to 1034 CE, which was discovered in secondary use in the eastern wall of the Temple Mount:

... (1) [أيّام] الإمام الظاهر لأ ع [ـزا]ز دين (ا) لله أمير المؤ [منين]...
... (2) والأقباء والمرَّة (?) لهنّ (?) و [الـ]ـحائط القبلى والحائط ...
... (3) [ا] لآخر سنة خمس وعشرين و [أر] بع مائة [word] الله (?)

French translation:[4] *"...l'imam al-Zahir li-a'zaz din Allah, l'émir des croyants ...et les voutes et le passage qui y conduit (?), et le mur sud et le mur est (?) ...(au mois de rabi'ou djumada) de l'année 425 (février à nai 1034)"* (van Berchem 1925:15, Inscription 147).

The vaults noted in the inscription must be those of Solomon's Stables and the passage—perhaps that leading from the Triple Gate to the vaults, implying that these structures were built contemporaneously with the rebuilding of the southern and eastern walls of the Temple Mount by the Fatimid Caliph El-Dhaher (Bahat 2001:129).

Solomon's Stables finally lost all importance with Saladin's taking of Jerusalem in 1187 CE, when the vaults seem to have been abandoned and entrance through the Single Gate was probably blocked. Above the Cradle of Jesus (Masjid Mahd 'Isa) the Ayyubid governor El-Mu'azzam 'Isa gave permission to the followers of the Hanbalite rite to construct a prayer site. This double-domed shrine, named Suq el-Ma'rifa (Market of Knowledge) is clearly visible, precisely in the southeastern corner, on illustrations of the Ḥaram esh-Sharif drawn until the end of the nineteenth century (Jarrar 1998).

Commentators since the Middle Ages through the Ottoman period note the accumulation of rubbish and building debris within Solomon's Stables. For example, in the fifteenth century CE the German pilgrim Felix Faber (Fabri) described how the Muslims swept dirt into the vaults through a hole in the roof (Felix Fabri:129–130). Evidently, the vaults had been abandoned, certainly since the Crusader period, and it was in this state that the complex reached the modern era, remaining as it has been for eight centuries up to the work of the Waqf in the year 1996.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING ACTIVITIES 1996–2001

Proposals to utilize the vast space of Solomon's Stables have come in the past few years from both Jews and Muslims.

A small number of Jewish groups have suggested using the vaults for prayer. In this context it must be emphasized that the *Halakha* (Jewish traditional law) forbids Jews from entering the Temple Mount due to its sanctity. This ban was reinforced by the Chief Rabbinate following the Six-Day War and by other *Halakhic* authorities on numerous occasions thereafter (Shragai 1995:28, 61; Cohen 1999:101–126; Ramon 2001:119–121). Furthermore, the ban received political clout through the decision of the then Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, to reassert the administrative control of the Waqf on the Temple Mount (Benvenisti 1976:101; Ramon 2001:114–117). However, a group of rabbis, led by Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, ruled that Jews may visit the Temple Mount, as long as they stayed outside the original 500 × 500 cubits space believed to have been occupied by Solomon's Temple (Mishna, Middot 2:1; Shragai 1995:62). The Herodian expansion of the Temple platform, including the area of Solomon's Stables, was outside this original compound and thus access was to be permitted for religious Jews, provided they immersed in a ritual bath (*miqwe*) prior to their visit (Medad 2000:11).

During the late 1990s pressure mounted to sanction Jewish prayer at the site (Ramon 2001:121–135). Furthermore, suggestions have been made to construct a synagogue

above Solomon's Stables (Shragai 1995:65; Ramon 2001:122), or to allow prayer within their confines (Reiter 2001a:168; 2001b:309). Nevertheless, the Israeli government never sanctioned or agreed to those initiatives, nor were they ever adopted by any official institution. In fact, any attempt to modify the existing policy has been strongly repulsed by all Israeli governments.

On the Muslim side, engineers of the Waqf approached the Israel Antiquities Authority (henceforth IAA) in June 1995 with a proposal to renovate Solomon's Stables, known at the time in Arabic as Istablat Sulieman (Avni and Seligman 2001:32). At that point, no mention was made of using the structure as a new mosque. Other Israeli authorities were also approached, and during Ramadan of 1996 permission was granted to use the vaults as a sheltered space for prayer. It is still unclear whether or not this agreement was reached as a *quid-pro-quo* arrangement to allow the opening of the Hasmonean Tunnel (in September 1996; Reiter 2001b:315–316). Whatever the answer to this matter, the events that followed the opening of the tunnel provided the Waqf the pretext to exclude the IAA inspectors from the subsequent works in Solomon's Stables and later in El-Aqsa el-Qadima.

Renovation of the vaults started on August 24, 1996 and it quickly became apparent that the intention of the Waqf, together with financial and logistical assistance from the Islamic Movement based in northern Israel, was to convert Istablat Suleiman into a huge underground prayer hall, i.e., a new mosque (Reiter 2001a:168–169; 2001b:309–312; Avni and Seligman 2001:32–34). Accordingly, the vaults were renamed Masallah (and later Masjid) el-Marwani—the Prayer Place/Mosque of Marwan—after the first Umayyad Caliph enthroned in Jerusalem. This designation is missing from all sources familiar to the author, yet Muslims have previously referred to the area as El-Masjid el-Qadim, the Ancient Mosque (see above).

At this stage, the work did not include major changes to the structure. The archaeological fill was leveled by mechanical machinery and a stone floor was laid by hundreds of volunteers of the Islamic Movement. Electrical cables for lighting fixtures were attached to the ancient columns, causing limited damage to the stonework. Carpets, donated by the King of Morocco, were strewn over the floor (Fig.1).

Access to Solomon's Stables at this point was via a narrow doorway at the southeastern corner of the Temple Mount, through the room known as the Cradle of Jesus. This entrance was clearly inadequate for some 15,000 believers who would now fill the new prayer hall. To alleviate this situation, the Waqf opened up a previously blocked entrance (Plan 2:c) at the northern end of the two corridors leading from the blocked Triple Gate and rising up to the pavement northeast of the El-Aqsa Mosque. These corridors, their southern end reaching Solomon's Stables, provided limited access to the vaults. (This passage has generally been considered to be among the few remains which may be definitely identified with the Herodian construction within the confines of the Temple Mount; however, a recent study raises doubts regarding this conclusion, see Shani and Chen 2001.)

Nevertheless, even this entrance was not sufficient to serve the growing number of people who would be visiting the Ḥaram esh-Sharif during the month of Ramadan. Consequently, for safety reasons, the Israeli government granted a permit to open up an additional emergency opening into Solomon's Stable. Unfortunately, the government did not seem to appreciate the physical consequences of this action, nor did it convey its decision to the IAA, whose inspectors had been all but excluded from proper access to the closed areas of the Temple Mount since October 1996 (Berkovitz 2001b:62; Reiter 2001b:311). The subsequent works executed by the Waqf, once more with the active participation of the Islamic Movement, were the cause of severe and irrevocable damage to the ancient layers of the Temple Mount.

During the days of November 25–28, 1999, bulldozers were sent in by the Waqf. A vast hole was cut into the platform of the Temple Mount to the north of Solomon's Stables, sloping down from north to south to a depth of 10–12 m. It soon became apparent that the actual intention of the Waqf was not merely to install a limited emergency exit, but rather to exploit the permit and open the arches on the northern wall of the vaults, next to the eastern wall of the Temple Mount.

By the time the Israeli authorities had grasped the extent of the work and the damage, the Waqf had succeeded in digging out a huge gash, measuring 36 m from north to south and 43 m from east to west (Figs. 2–5). Of the six arches uncovered during the work on the northern wall of the hall, three were completely exposed: two of them were entirely penetrated, the third was partly breached (Plan 3). On the eastern side of the pit an ancient wall (W2; Plan 4) had been uncovered, and after being partially damaged by the bulldozers, was left in place. (The importance of this wall is discussed below.)

At this point, the Israeli government put a halt to the work, although 'the proverbial horse had bolted' (from the 'stables') and most of the damage had already been done (Berkovitz 2001b:62). Following instruction from the Israel Police, the partly breached arch was resealed.

The archaeological layers extracted out of the immense cavity were loaded onto trucks and were initially dumped into the municipal dump at Abu Dis. Following the intervention of the IAA and the Israel Police, dumping was transferred to various locations outside the Temple Mount. There, the now out-of-context debris could be examined for archaeological finds. Over several terms in 2000, the IAA examined the deposited material for any surviving remnants (see Baruch, this volume).

Fig. 2. The pit dug north of Solomon's Stables, November 1999, looking southeast.

Fig. 3. A truck in front of the newly exposed vaults of Solomon's Stables, November 1999, looking south.

Fig. 4. The exposed northern exterior face of Solomon's Stables, looking south.

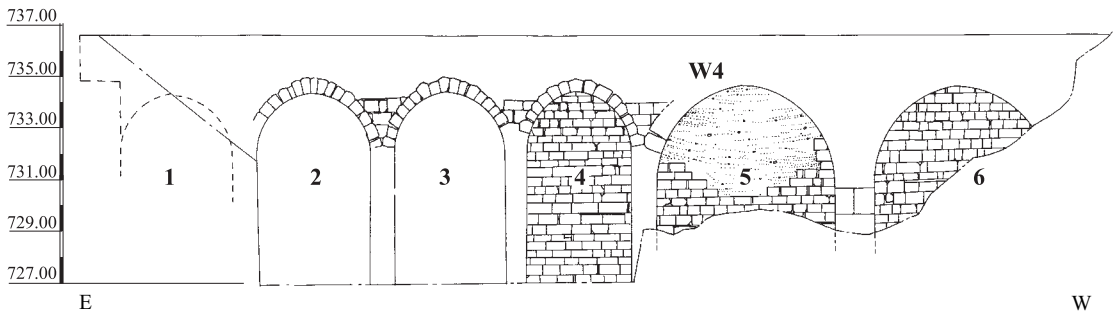
Further activities went on after 2001, causing additional damage to W2 on the eastern side of the pit. Works to secure the exposed remains continued up to the time of publication of this report. The development project carried out over a year and a half included the following activities:

Fig. 5. Aerial view of the construction area north of Solomon's Stables during summer 2000, looking south.

1) The opening of two arches of the eastern vaults of Solomon's Stables (Plan 3: Arches 2 and 3).
2) The erecting of stairs in six flights and landings from the north down to the openings noted above (Plan 2).
3) The construction of three terraces bordered by huge boulders to the west of the steps.
4) The digging of a drainage pit at the base of the stairs and the laying of piping to drain the pit into a cistern to the west.
5) The laying of electrical cables and water pipes under the steps and the paving.
6) The erecting of another set of stairs from the entrance to the arches down to the floor of Solomon's Stables.
7) The laying of paving, measuring about 6000 sq m, between the steps and the courtyard of El-Aqsa Mosque (Fig. 5).
8) The partial reconstruction of the remains uncovered on the eastern side of the stairs.

Before assessing the damage caused to the antiquities of the Temple Mount by the work carried out by the Waqf, it must be reiterated that although the Temple Mount has been researched in detail over the past 150 years, excavation at the site has been extremely limited.[5] It is essential to stress that because of the historical and religious importance of the Temple Mount, any work conducted at the site requires the utmost sensitivity.[6]

Unfortunately this is not what has transpired. The brutal use of mechanical machinery



Plan 3. Section across the newly exposed northern exterior face of Solomon's Stables, looking south, including six of seven arches. The seventh, westernmost arch is completely covered by earth and therefore absent from this section, yet it is visible from inside the vaults.

caused the irrevocable loss of archaeological information and the following damage:

a) The removal of at least 9000 cu m of archaeological material that rested on the northern outer face of Solomon's Stables and the inner face of the eastern wall of the Temple Mount. The extraction of the ancient layers without supervision, recording and systematic archaeological excavation, resulted in the loss of archaeological data of supreme value. Although the fill was later investigated after being dumped in the Kidron Valley (see Baruch, this volume, and further references therein), the after-the-fact collection of a few finds from the heaps is of limited value, as a find has no archaeological significance when out of context.

b) The northern wall of Solomon's Stables was not examined nor documented prior to being broken through.

c) The partial destruction of a medieval covered passageway and an ancient wall (W2), connecting a series of piers on the eastern side of the steps. The date and function of these finds is not clear, as the necessary archaeological corroboratory evidence was removed (see below, Building Stage III). Limited documentation of these remains was conducted by the Waqf after the removal of the archaeological layers.

d) The removal of a rubble and mortar building opposite Arch 4 (Plan 3).

e) The damage to a cistern and a water channel, both probably ancient installations.

INTERPRETATION OF THE ANTIQUITIES EXPOSED DURING THE BUILDING ACTIVITIES

This section attempts to describe and interpret the remains uncovered by the construction works. As it was impossible to excavate, measure or graphically document the remains, the following description was based solely on visual observations and photographs, and must be considered in that context.

Major finds were exposed on the inner face of the eastern wall of the Temple Mount, to the east of the new staircase north of Solomon's Stables (Plan 4; Figs. 6–9). The lower externally exposed sections of this part of the wall are clearly dated to the Second Temple period, either from Hasmonean or Herodian times (Burgoyne 2000:482–483).

Fig. 6. Southern section of the eastern side of the new staircase, looking east.

Fig. 7. Northern section of the eastern side of the new staircase, looking east.

Fig. 8. View of the new staircase into Solomon's Stables and the various walls on the eastern side, looking southeast.

The upper portion of the wall stretches from the present inner ground surface, at around 736 m above sea level, down to the level at the base of the newly built staircase (a depth of approximately 10 m, with another 2 m exposed in the drainage pit cut at the base of the steps). This portion would be expected to display large sections of the Umayyad reconstruction of the Ḥaram esh-Sharif walls. Burgoyne's recent analysis of the masonry of the external eastern face of the wall, however, indicates that much of the upper construction should be dated to the twelfth–fourteenth centuries CE and the Ottoman period (Burgoyne 2000:482–483). The top section of the wall is clearly part of the Ottoman additions of Suleiman the Magnificent, directed by Muhammad Çelebi al-Naqqash, the 'Superintendent of the Wall' (Cohen 1989:467–477; Burgoyne 2000:479). Other portions pertain to the 1882 repairs of the eastern wall (Schick 1882:171; Burgoyne 2000:483, Fig. 31.1).

Analysis of the material removed from the site showed it to be mixed and to contain dated finds from the Iron Age up to the Ottoman period (see Baruch, this volume). Regrettably, the multi-period nature of the material and the lack of a proper archaeological context render these finds of little value to the understanding of the various archaeological layers. Nevertheless, several clear and distinct building stages were discerned on the inner face of the eastern wall (Plans 3, 4; Figs. 4, 6–9).

Building Stage I

The earliest remains, dating to the Umayyad period, are three built piers set in line north of the northern wall (W4) of Solomon's Stables, 5.5 m west of the eastern Temple Mount wall (Plans 2 and 4: P3, P8 and P10; Fig.7). Pier 3 is located 19.5 m north of the northern wall (W4). The other two (P8 and P10) are placed at intervals of 3.5 m farther north, respectively. The piers are built of typical Herodian stones laid on their short sides in secondary use, the other sides crudely cut to imitate the original fine margin and boss dressing. These piers are identical in construction to those found inside Solomon's Stables. This may well indicate that Solomon's Stables had originally extended farther north than at present, since the Umayyad rebuilding of the edifice.

Fig. 9. Wall 2 with columns in secondary use laid within, before removal.

This supposition is supported by the broken arch spring on the northern side of the easternmost pier of Solomon's Stables (Plans 3, 4:a; Fig. 6). This pier was built on the same line as Piers 3, 8 and 10, noted above. The northern extent of Solomon's Stables is difficult to assess, yet the traces preserved in the section imply that the vaults stretched at least 27 m north of the present-day standing structure. Alternatively, it is quite possible that these piers stood free and open at the time of their use, in which case the area may be reconstructed as an arcade along the eastern wall of the Ḥaram esh-Sharif, leading to Solomon's Stables. The vaults were entered from the north through seven arches, of which only six are presently visible from the outside (Plan 3; Fig. 4). The easternmost arch would have led directly into the arcade noted above.

Building Stage II

A section of a wall, 13.25 m long (W5; Plan 4), was integrated with the eastern wall of the Ḥaram esh-Sharif. It can be traced up to a height

of 5 m from below the Ottoman wall (W1) down to the top level of the connecting wall (W2, see below). Wall 5 is built of well-dressed ashlars bound by mortar. Two semicircular arched openings, each spanning 3 m, are connected by a small arched passage within the thickness (c. 1.5 m) of the wall. Above the northern of the two arches is a course of stones forming a spring for a vault, and a series of six putlog holes. As the contextual information is lacking, it is difficult to date these arches and W5 itself. They may have been a part of the Umayyad building; certainly the constructional features, be it the dressing of the stones or the shape of the arches, do not exclude this possibility. However, if so, they are, at least technically, later than the standing portion of Solomon's Stables, as W5 abuts the northeastern corner of the vaults.

Another possibility is that W5 is part of the Fatimid repair of the arcade along the eastern Ḥaram esh-Sharif wall by Caliph El-Dhaher following the earthquakes of 1016 and 1033 CE. Clearly at this stage this part of the eastern Ḥaram esh-Sharif wall and the northern arches of Solomon's Stables were exposed, allowing access into the vaults at this lower level. Bahat (2001:128) suggests that this area was open due to an earthquake (probably in 1033 CE), which had caused the collapse of the eastern Ḥaram esh-Sharif wall and the fill behind it. This explanation is highly feasible, though it is also likely, as described above (Building Stage I), that the area was open prior to the Fatimid period.

Building Stage III

The third stage of building includes a roughly built wall (W2; Plan 4), set between the easternmost pier of W4 and P3 of Stage I, abutting the latter. The upper courses of W2 were severely damaged by the construction work in November 1999 and additional sections were lost in January 2001. It is 19.5 m long and is parallel to the eastern wall of the Temple Mount, at a distance of 5.5 m to the west. Wall 2 is built of ashlar blocks, mostly similar to those used in Stage II but in secondary use, and is not bound with mortar. The upper courses of the surviving wall were inset from the lower. A part of the southern section of the wall was built of columns laid one above the other (Fig. 9). These columns, carved from limestone, marble, and green and red granite, clearly came from various sites within the Temple Mount compound.

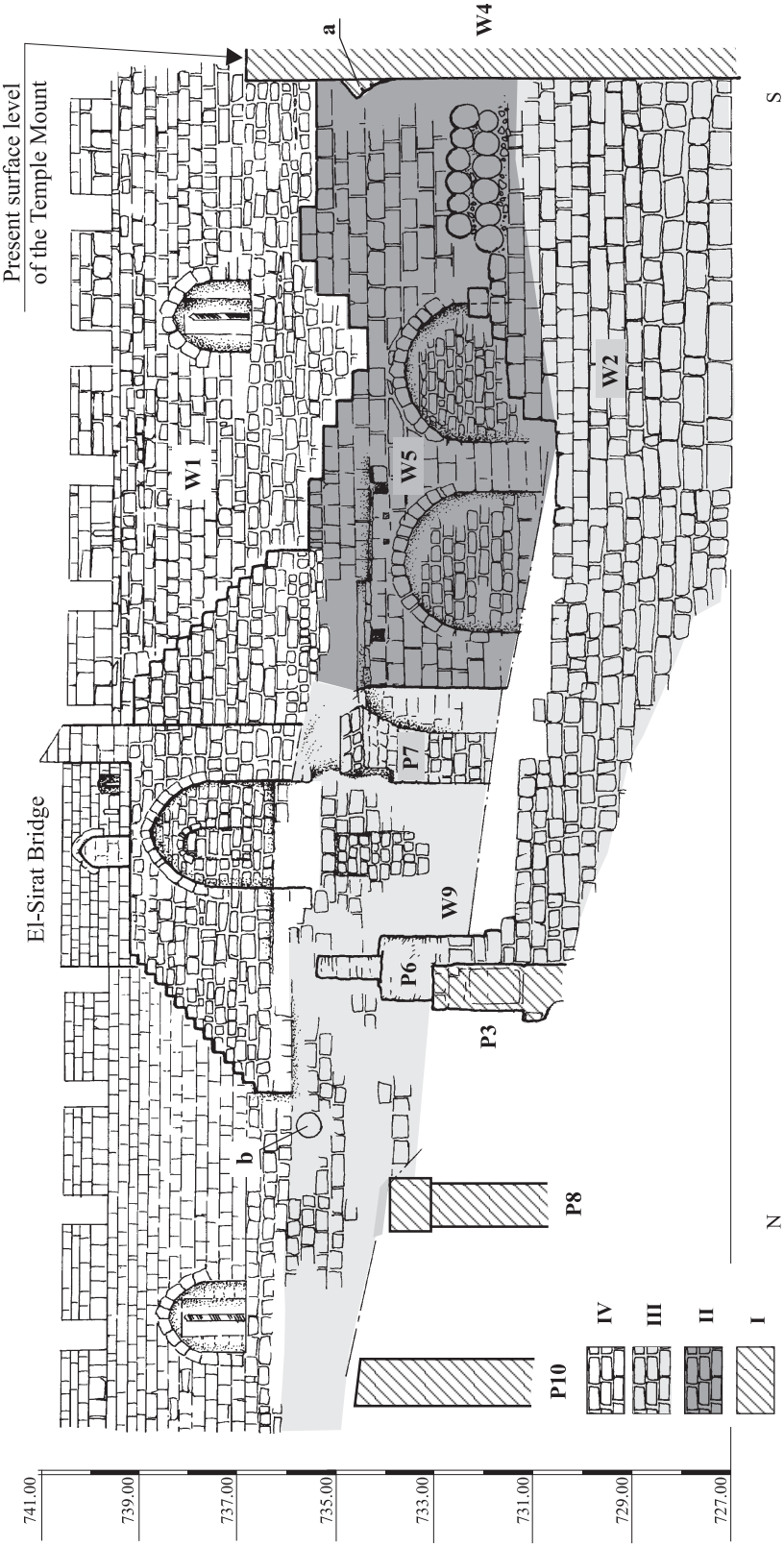
The blocking of the seven open arches leading into Solomon's Stables most likely belonged to this phase as well.

Building Stage III also included the construction of a supporting pier (P6; Plan 4; Figs. 7, 8), enveloping the earlier P3 on its southern and eastern sides. Pier 6 supported an arch (visible today; Fig. 8), reaching over to a parallel engaged pilaster (P11; hidden behind P6) that is attached to the eastern wall of the Ḥaram esh-Sharif. This arch is pointed at its apex and is most probably of medieval construction.

Two engaged pilasters (P7, P11; Plan 4) were also part of this building stage and would have supported now-missing arches or vaults. Wall 9 (Plan 4) was built between these pilasters, and abuts W5 of Stage II. Set into W9, between P7 and P11, is a currently blocked rectangular window, located below a tower of the Ottoman El-Sirat Bridge (Plan 4; see below Building Stage IV). Farther north and of the same building stage is one of the 56 columns (Plan 4:b) that transverse the eastern wall of the Ḥaram esh-Sharif, providing a solid bond and structural strength. This column can be seen from both inside and outside the Temple Mount wall.

The dating and function of Building Stage III is very difficult to assess. The style of the pointed arch and the use of columns to bond the wall would seem to point to a Crusader or Ayyubid date. This is strengthened by the circumstantial evidence, as this building stage is later than the suggested Umayyad or Fatimid datings of Stages I and II, and earlier than the Ottoman construction above.

The function of Wall 2 is a matter for speculation. It may have been constructed as a



Plan 4. Section exposed along the inner face of the eastrern wall of the Temple Mount, indicating Building Stages I–IV, looking east.

support wall prior to the depositing of the back fill, in order to raise this area up to the present level of the Temple Mount platform following its collapse after the earthquakes of 1016 and 1033 CE. Bahat (2001:130) alternatively suggests that W2 was built during the Crusader period, as part of a vaulted room or corridor leading north from Solomon's Stables along the line of the eastern wall of the Ḥaram esh-Sharif. However, the roughness and poor quality of the masonry do not support this suggestion; exposed masonry of the Crusader period within the Temple Mount complex is well dressed (as for example at the southern wall of the Mount or the El-Zawiya el-Ḥantuniya), and there is no reason to suppose that the walls here would have been of any lesser quality.

Building Stage IV

The Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent (1496–1566 CE), built the upper part of the wall (W1) with its crenellations, which can be seen today surrounding the Temple Mount (Plan 4; Fig. 7). Directly over the walls of Stages II and III a tower was built with a staircase leading down to the modern surface. This tower, known as the Bridge of El-Sirat el-Mustaqim (the Bridge of the Straight Path), is traditionally considered by Muslims as the place where, on the Day of Judgement, the souls of the righteous will cross the Kidron Valley up to the Mount of Olives (Stephan 1942:102–103; Burgoyne 2000:491). Within the tower is an east–west vaulted niche, topped with a pointed arch, measuring 2.5 m wide and 3.25 m deep. In the southern wall of the niche is a *miḥrab*, and at its eastern end is a blocked semicircular arched opening.

A smaller opening is situated above it, on the upper wall walkway. At the walkway level and set between the two openings (the niche and the *miḥrab*) is a column known as 'Muhammad's Pillar' (Plan 2:d), which protrudes externally, joining the El-Sirat Bridge in a symbolic crossing of the Kidron Valley (Burgoyne 2000:491). As the structure is not noted in descriptions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries CE, nor in Reuwich's illustration of Jerusalem from 1483 CE, Burgoyne (2000:491) rightly concludes that this tower should be dated to the Ottoman construction. Clearly by this time and in accordance with the elevation of the base of the steps leading up to El-Sirat Bridge, the surface level of this part of the Temple Mount was the same as the present surface level.

EPILOGUE

While thousands of books and articles have been written over the last century and a half about the Temple Mount, scientifically controlled archaeological excavations have so far eluded the site. Due to the basically conservative approach to the maintenance of the enclosure adopted by the Waqf authorities since Ottoman times, little has actually changed at the compound until recent times. The only exception occurred during the reconstruction of the El-Aqsa Mosque, damaged in the 1927 earthquake,[7] when a series of Crusader vaults to the east of the mosque was removed (Avni and Seligman 2001:15, 17–19). Since no excavation was permitted at the time, the archaeological heritage below the surface of the Temple Mount was protected.

The recent radicalization of the Waqf, catalyzed by the Islamic Movement, caused a dramatic change in this policy, the disastrous results of which have been described in this paper. The massive excavation of the ancient levels of the site by mechanical machinery, without archaeological supervision, undoubtedly brought about a major loss of a single opportunity to professionally investigate and better understand the history of the site and thus illuminate a dark corner of Jerusalem's history. This should not be tolerated and must not be allowed to recur.

The necessity for an emergency exit to the new mosque is clear, but surely there were means to achieve this goal within the boundaries of the professional ethics governing the management of sites of this nature. Beyond the responsibility the Waqf has of operating the site for the Muslim community, it also has a responsibility to preserve the site for all

humanity and in this aspect of its duty the Waqf failed miserably. "An archaeological crime" is how the late Amir Drori, then director of the IAA, succinctly described this episode.

An attempt has been made here to archaeologically analyze the observations made at the site during the works in the years 1999–2001, with the hope that future work at the Temple Mount is conducted in a proper manner, allowing the scientific community to validate or reinterpret these partially documented findings.

NOTES

[1] I take this opportunity to thank the people who assisted in the work and the writing of this article: Nisso Shaham and Yoram Ohayon of the Israel Police; Viatcheslav Pirsky and Natalia Zak (drafting); Gideon Avni and Yuval Baruch of the IAA and Boaz Zissu who read the article and provided useful comments. The sections (Plans 3, 4) were rendered using computerized adaptations of photographs from the site; hence, measurements are close estimations and should not be considered as absolute.

[2] The Temple Mount was declared a registered archaeological site and is part of the registering of the Old City of Jerusalem in the Official Gazetteer of the State of Israel, published on 31.8.1967, No. 1390, p. 2159.

[3] A clear masonry seam is visible 32 m north of the current southeastern corner of the Temple Mount. This seam probably indicates the location of the Temple Mount corner before the expansion of the enclosure in the Herodian period.

[4] As no English translation is available, quoted here is the reliable French translation of this medieval Arabic inscription.

[5] A single exception is the archaeological documentation conducted by R.W. Hamilton of the Department of Antiquities of the British Mandatory Government within the confines of the El-Aqsa Mosque, following the collapse of much of the building in the disastrous earthquake of 1927 (Hamilton 1949).

[6] The execution of these works and the damage they caused must be taken very gravely. The work carried out by the Waqf, beyond being a breach of the Law of Antiquities, contravenes international charters and conventions, as well as professional ethics governing the management of antiquities sites of supreme universal cultural value. These include contravention of the 'UNESCO Recommendation on International Principles Applicable to Archaeological Excavation (1956)', the 'Venice Charter (1964)' and the 'Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)'. Violation of the latter is especially poignant as it concerns the cultural management of Jerusalem as a site registered on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1981 and the subsequent inscription in 1982 on the World Heritage List in Danger. In view of these blatant transgressions of universal cultural values, the silence of the international cultural community in the face of these events is most intriguing. Particularly alarming is UNESCO's indifference, in view of its previous involvement in matters concerning Jerusalem, especially Israel's actions, since 1967.

[7] See n. 5.

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