The seventeenth-century traveler Evliya Çelebi describes the Ottoman takeover of the city of Jerusalem by Sultan Selim I in the following passage: "When Jerusalem was in the possession of the Circassian Mamlukes all the `ulema and pious men went out to meet Selim Shah in 922 [1516]. They handed him the keys to the Mosque al-Aqṣa and the Dome of the Rock of Allah. Selim prostrated himself and exclaimed: ‘Thanks be to Allah! I am now the possessor of the first gībḥah.’"

Selim’s claim that he possessed the “first gībḥah” signals that he was mindful of Jerusalem’s significance, of its place in early Islam, and of the importance of its legacy to Ottoman claims of hegemony over the Holy Land and the Hijaz. Like the Abbasid, Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk rulers before him, Selim embellished the city in small ways by restoring and adding to its edifices. His son and successor Sultan Süleyman Kanuni, however, renovated the Holy City on a much grander scale. Süleyman symbolically appropriated Jerusalem by redecorating its most famous Islamic shrines in the Ottoman manner and enclosing it within massive rebuilt city walls. These renovations are the best known — and, according to some, the only — Ottoman contributions to the built form of the third of Islam’s sacred cities. The latter view reflects a line of historiography that presents the last three centuries of Islamic rule in Jerusalem as an unbroken slide into neglect and decline until the benign intervention of the Europeans in the nineteenth century.

The aim of this paper is to put forward an alternative to that view, and to show that the Ottomans were in fact active keepers of Jerusalem and its monuments throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that later Ottoman restorations of the Dome of the Rock, the Haram al-Sharif, and the city of Jerusalem should be seen as part of a continuum that began with Ottoman claims over the territory of early Islam. Two major reasons emerge for these restorations. First, they were initiated as part of a larger program by the Ottoman government to assert or reassert central administrative control over the region. Second, they resulted from competition with other religious groups and foreign powers to gain primacy within Jerusalem itself. Three of these restorations — one from the early eighteenth century, one from the end of the nineteenth, and one from the beginning of the Mandate period — will be used to demonstrate this point.

The earlier phases of the Dome of the Rock’s history have been extensively studied and published by a number of scholars — among them K. A. G. Creswell, Max van Berchem, and Oleg Grabar — who deal with individual monuments and their meaning. Myriam Rosen-Ayalon and Michael Burgoyne have dealt with the significance of the Haram’s plan and early decoration and carry the architectural history of Jerusalem forward into the Mamluk period, and Priscilla Soucek and Nasser Rabbat have discussed the pre-Islamic significance of, and references to, the site.

The Dome of the Rock competes with another domed building which covers a rock, the fourth-century Church of the Holy Sepulchre or the Church of the Resurrection (Kanisat al-Qiyama), located just outside the Haram enclosure (fig. 1). The domed anastasis covered the acicule of the tomb of Christ, and the rock of Calvary was contained in a porticoed courtyard. For this building the Haram site was rejected by the Christian community in favor of a site outside the enclosure, and the site of Solomon’s temple on the Haram was desecrated and left abandoned until the first Islamic constructions on it in the seventh century. A major difference between the two buildings is that the dome that covers the Dome of the Rock is closed; that of the Holy Sepulchre was left open to the sky at the top until the nineteenth century. In 1009 the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim destroyed the Holy Sepulchre and its contents in retaliation for Byzantine attacks from the north. Though he later granted permission for its rebuilding, construction did not begin until 1046, under the reign of his successor and twenty years after the restoration of the Dome of the Rock.

Grabar writes that the Dome of the Rock has “a specific Muslim meaning (the Ascension of the Prophet), an old and particularly Jerusalemite association with the Resurrection, the Judgment, and the end of time; and an intim-
ate relationship to the monotheistic prophetic succession as seen through the Muslim faith — these three themes combined to create around the Dome of the Rock, on the platform of the Haram, that extraordinary Mamluk Jerusalem which Süleyman the Magnificent, the new Solomon, enclosed in a stunningly powerful curtain wall.  

According to Evliya’s account, when Selim entered the city, he “passed the documents of Umar, which were in the possession of the Greek and Frankish monks, over his face and eyes and gave them the Royal Writ (hatte-i şerif) confirming to the monks the contents of the documents, to wit, that they were exempted from paying taxes and that the Anastasis was their praying place as heretofore.”  

Selim saw his role as continuing that of earlier Islamic rulers of the city by maintaining the policies established by Umar, the first Umayyad caliph.

Between 1537 and 1541 Sultan Süleyman had the walls of the city completely rebuilt (fig. 2). For the Dome of the Rock, between 1545 and 1566 he had the mosaics on the drum of the dome replaced with glazed tiles and later extended this decoration to the lower walls of the octagon and installed stained-glass windows. Gülrü Necipoğlu has suggested that the skin of tiles on the exterior of the Dome of the Rock and on other monuments in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina were a stamp of Ottoman identity at a time when the Sunni Ottomans sought to establish hegemony over their heterodox Safavid neighbors. The Ottomans granted permission for the Christian restoration of the Holy Sepulchre in 1555, shortly after Süleyman established relations with Francis I, the French king.

Evlıya mentions no major restoration program during the seventeenth century, though he does say that Ahmed I “had a richly gilt canopy made, the cover of which was a curtain studded with gold and jewels. The corners were fastened with silk cords, thus covering the Holy Rock.”

For the eighteenth century, we know of at least four periods of restoration for the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque. The first, ordered by Ahmed III (1703-30), was between 1720–21; it is documented in a register now in the Prime Ministry Archives in Istanbul. This register (defter) includes orders, accounts, and inventories dated between 1133 and 1148 (1720–1736). It shows that most of the materials for the project were procured from different parts of Anatolia and the Black Sea region and shipped from either Istanbul or Izmir to Jaffa for transfer.
overland by oxcart (hanlı) to Jerusalem. Since no wheeled vehicles were to be found in the province, parts had to be prefabricated, shipped from Istanbul, and assembled on site. Fifty pairs of oxcart wheels, 120 wooden axles, and various other parts were requisitioned for the project from the Istanbul arsenal at Tophane.

First, Osman Efendi, the former provincial treasurer (defterdar) of Damascus and later Mustafa Efendi, former first deputy imperial treasurer (sikke-i evvel defterdarı) was put in charge of the project, with the title of superintendent of construction (bina emini). The high status of the positions they had previously held indicates the importance given to the Jerusalem project. Local workers were hired to do the work, which began on 28 May 1721 and lasted until 3 February 1722, a total of 252 days. Two-thirds of the entire cost of the project came from the revenues of the tax farms of Jaffa and Tripoli. Pay for the foremen and skilled laborers sent from Istanbul and the cost of transport wagons constituted nearly a third of the whole project’s cost.

The list of materials purchased for the project includes numerous pigments and clay body ingredients, items that are normally used in painting and in the production of tiles. The fact that these raw materials were shipped to the site indicates that the tiles for the restoration were produced somewhere in Jerusalem, though no tilemakers appear on the lists of craftsmen. Boxes of newly made tiles are listed in an inventory of leftover material dated 1734, suggesting that at least some tiles were replaced in the restoration.

Lumber ordered for the project — oak (meşe), pine (gum) and linden (ihtlamur) — in various sizes was probably used to construct scaffolding and to replace beams in the outer ambulatory. A large amount of lead was also
purchased for use in repairing the exterior of the dome. European ("Frankish") marbles appear on the list in sufficient quantity (23.73 m²) to suggest the repair of dadoes, either inside or outside.

The stained-glass windows in the drum of the dome were all replaced. Plain and colored glass is listed according to the number of panels needed for each window. Two kinds of window are specified: twelve ordinary windows using little glass, and fancier windows for the qibla wall using a large number of small pieces of the "Persian" type, with more color. One of the supplies listed for window replacement is brass wire, rather surprising in that traditional Ottoman stained-glass windows employed only a plaster armature. The reference to lead and brass suggests that at the beginning of the eighteenth century the Ottomans introduced European techniques of glass production for the replacement of the building's windows. The document is also the first record of any changes in the windows first placed there by Suleyman in the sixteenth century.

Repairs and embellishments were also ordered for nearly a dozen other shrines and mosques in and around Jerusalem. Among these was the tomb of the Prophet David on Mount Zion, a site also venerated by Jews and Christians, which had been taken over from the Franciscan friars and rebuilt as a Muslim shrine in Sultan Suleyman's time. Another dome that was refurbished was that of the Mosque of the Ascension (al-Mas'ad) on the Mount of Olives, built on the foundations of a Crusader chapel, which marks the traditional site of the ascent of Jesus into heaven. This shows that maintenance was also extended to sacred sites of Judaic and Christian origin, providing they could be fitted into the framework of Islamic belief.

The document provides a view into the nature of eighteenth-century restoration techniques and their cost. European methods and materials are combined with traditional Ottoman ones in the Haram project. The scale and expense of the project indicate the importance of the Haram and of Jerusalem to the Ottoman government. The restoration was a major organizational feat, with important administrators put in charge of the project, and special craftsmen and materials sent from the capital and abroad to work on it. If one compares the cost of this project to that of rebuilding the essential frontier fortresses at Niš and Vidin in the Balkans, it is clear that the Jerusalem project was considered as important as the security of the empire's borders.

The question arises, then, why the government undertook such a grand project just at this particular moment.

The possible answers are several. First, the restoration coincides with a general tightening of central-government authority over the province of Damascus. It was also a time of increasing contacts with Europe; several official Ottoman embassies had sent back reports to Istanbul concerning artistic tastes and techniques. Although the European methods and materials in the Haram restoration were introduced too soon to be attributed to the reports and picture books brought back by the Turkish ambassador from his visit to the French court, they certainly suggest that a climate of receptiveness to new ideas and methods was already present. Major restoration projects were also underway in the capital: the sources mention that Hagia Sophia and a large number of other major monuments were restored at that time.

The restoration also coincides with requests by the Eu-
Fig. 4. Dome of the Rock. From the north. Drawing by Elzear Horn, from his *Iconographiae Monumentorum Terrae Sanctae, 1724–1744* (Jerusalem, 1962).

Fig. 5. Dome of the Rock. From the northwest corner. Photograph by J. McDonald from *Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem* (London, 1863). (Photo: Fine Arts Library, Harvard University)

Restoration projects continued through the reigns of succeeding Ottoman sultans. In 1817, Sultan Mahmud II restored the marble of the exterior of the Dome of the Rock and constructed a portico over the south qibla entrance. This repair came not long after the Russians constructed a new closed dome for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In 1853, Sultan Abdülmecid began a major restoration project at the Dome of the Rock, completed by Abdülaçiz in 1874–75 (figs. 4–6). It

Fig. 6. Dome of the Rock. Exterior of west and southwest façades under restoration between 1875 and 1875. (Photo: Collection of the Palestine Exploration Fund, London)
included stripping the southwest and west sides of the Dome of the Rock’s exterior and replacing the tiles. In 1876 Abdülhamid II began buying carpets for the Dome of the Rock. Successive Hamidian projects included ornamentation of the arcades on the stairs of the Dome’s slightly elevated platform and of the façade of the Aqsa Mosque.

These restorations all occurred as part of the Ottoman government’s centralization of military and administrative control over the provinces of the empire during the Tanzimat and the reign of Abdülhamid II. The government tried to reassert its authority in the provinces through institutional modernization, Ottomanation, and Islamization. The imposition of new institutions visibly altered the character of Jerusalem during this period and the politically motivated restorations of the Haram al-Sharif monuments, like the Hijaz railroad project, can be seen as concrete expressions of Abdülhamid’s policy of Islamization. Increased tourist and pilgrim access to the holy sites of Jerusalem and its environs also prompted a renewed focus on the early Islamic monuments of the city.

Under Abdülhamid, Jerusalem’s port at Jaffa grew to accommodate a flood of tourists to the Holy Land and included a new customs house and the Jaffa-Jerusalem rail line, opened in 1892. Among the institutions added to the city at this time were European-style new schools; one inside the walls of the old city by Herod’s Gate and another just to the north of Herod’s Gate, effectively linking the old and new city. In 1901, a new Museum of Antiquities opened in a room off the courtyard of the former (fig. 7). Beginning in 1890, the project was planned by three people — Ismail Bey, the Director of Public Instruction in Jerusalem, and Frederick J. Bliss, a Palestinian Exploration Fund archaeologist and son of the founder of the American University of Beirut, in consultation with Osman Hamdi Bey, director of the Istanbul Museum of Antiquities. The Jerusalem Museum was later moved to the Tower of David under the British in 1920, and to a new building nearby, the Rockefeller Museum.

The number of new foreign residents in the empire encouraged foreign rulers to visit, which in turn generated improvements. The new German settlements in Haifa, Jaffa, and Jerusalem prompted the visit of the German Kaiser to the region in 1898. Roads were repaired to facilitate his journey. In Jerusalem, a new road was built along the old walls of the city from the Jaffa Gate to Mt. Zion, which allowed him to visit the German colony along the way. Jaffa Street was repaired and street lamps added along it and other streets on the path he was to take to visit Christian sites in the area north of the old city, clearly visible on a map modified by Konrad Schick. To accommodate the Kaiser’s desire to enter the old city through the gate mounted on a horse — heretofore permissible only to a conqueror of the city —
more critically. Frederick J. Bliss’s correspondence with the Palestine Exploration Fund suggests that his relations with the Ottomans between 1890 and 1900 were congenial,39 but his successor, the Irish archaeologist R.A. Stewart Macalister, was not as conciliatory. He complained that the Jaffa Gate “has been utterly spoilt by the erection above of an ultra-hideous clocktower, which in itself is a perfect eyesore” (fig. 8).40 Concerning the museum, he wrote, “You will remember that I have complained before of the waste of time involved in the handling over of the antiquities to the ignorant effendis who run this museum.”41 There were management problems with the museum, but similar problems had been dealt with differently during Bliss’s time. Macalister’s tone was peremptory, and he clearly felt that the British could do better.

As the British foothold in the region strengthened, they became increasingly impatient with an Ottoman officialdom they regarded as bungling and inferior. The ultimate result was Allenby’s entry into Jerusalem in 1917, not triumphantly on horseback through a breach in the wall, as the German Kaiser had done, but on foot through the Jaffa Gate itself. In the following year, in conjunction with the Supreme Muslim Council of Jerusalem, the British embarked on a major restoration of the Haram al-Sharif,42 which included the demolition of the fountain and moving the clocktower, but, according to the Palestine Annual, “so constant was the stream of criticism directed against this excrecence [the tower] that the [Pro-Jerusalem] Society proceeded to its removal. As however the inhabitants of Jerusalem were naturally averse from the loss of their clock, the tower will be re-erected in a simple more suitable form in front of the Post Office in Allenby Square.”43 (Since the residents were made so unhappy by its removal, one wonders who besides the British were upset by its presence). The National Museum of Art, Archaeology, and Natural History was established in the old Ottoman barracks of the Tower of David in the Citadel in the western part of the old city; the objects in the old Government Museum were moved to the new museum.44

The British architect C. R. Ashbee was put in charge of restoring the Dome of the Rock, the Aqṣa Mosque, and other sites on the Haram.45 Among his major undertakings was the restoration of the Dome’s tiles. In 1918, Sir Ronald Storrs invited David Ohannessian, an Armenian ceramist from Kütahya, to come from Aleppo where he lived at the time.46 Ohannessian sent for help from others in the Kütahya industry, who brought with them the materials and supplies, including clay, needed to produce

---

Fig. 8. Letter about the Ottoman clocktower from R. A. S. Macalister, dated 10 June 1908. Palestine Exploration Fund, London.
tiles. They made tiles for other buildings — including the American Colony Hotel and St. Andrew's Scottish Church — street signs, and decorative objects, but for some unknown reason, none for the Dome of the Rock.

The restoration project was completed in 1928; by then it was under the supervision of the Supreme Muslim Council, with the Turkish architect Kemalettin directing the project from Istanbul. The lapse of time suggests that it was necessary to raise funds as the work went along or that the Council may not have approved the British plans. Kemalettin appointed Rushdi Bey Ahmad to be the architect in charge.38 The Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock were structurally stabilized, the mosaics and stained-glass windows restored. Other buildings on the Haram were also stabilized. In 1926, in a letter to the Supreme Muslim Council, Kemalettin remarks that he is sending a tile specialist to Jerusalem to propose restoration plans for the tiles,39 suggesting that he did not approve of the Amenian tilemakers' work. The tiles, however, were not restored; an earthquake in 1927 that affected many sites in Jerusalem drained off the funds allotted to the project.40

The major restoration periods discussed here — one from the reign of Ahmed III, one under Abdüllahim II, and the last under the British Mandate and the Supreme Muslim Council — demonstrate that restorations of the early Islamic monuments in Jerusalem were in part the result of competition with other religious groups and foreign powers for primacy in the city. They were also part of a larger program by the Ottomans to control the region. From the time of Süleyman through the reign of Abdüllahim II, the restorations coincided with the granting of concessions to foreign rulers and religious groups both abroad and in Jerusalem. Finally the embellishment and repair of the Dome of the Rock, the Haram, and other places in the city usually just preceded or immediately followed a restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

These projects of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth century, sponsored by the Ottomans, the British, and the Supreme Muslim Council, are part of the continuum of repair and reconstruction of the Umayyad monuments in the Haram al-Sharif that had begun not long after the buildings' construction.

Wellesley College
Wellesley, Massachusetts

Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

NOTES
gaphy on the topic.

13. Nejat Gökçen summarizes the contents of this document in “The Procurement of Labor and Materials in the Ottoman Empire (16th and 17th Centuries),” in Jean-Louis Bacquemont and Paul Dumont, eds., Économie et sociétés dans l’Empire ottoman (Paris, 1983), pp. 327–33. The document is in the Turkish Prime Ministry Archives (Malieyken Müdever Deftterleri, no. 7829). We are preparing an analysis and translation of this document for publication.


17. Ibid., p. 122–23, notes that the military and fiscal administration of the province of Damascus was reorganized in 1721. For more on the history of this period, see Karl Barbir, Ottoman Rule in Damascüs, 1708–1758 (Princeton, N.J., 1980).


20. A geographical pun on K Cumal Kiyam, the Arabic name of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a pun that no Muslim writer from the Middle Ages on has been able to resist (Peters, Jerusalem, p. 600, n.9 and passim). There may also be a link with earlier Umayyad descriptions of the site of the Dome of the Rock. When ‘Umar entered the Haram, it was noted that the rock had been heaped with dung by the Christians who had desecrated the site because it was holy to the Jews (ibid., pp. 186–89).


22. As Carwell has documented in his study of the Kilatba industry, see John Carwell, Kilatba Tiles and Pottery from the Armenian Cathedral of St. James, Jerusalem, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1972), 1:12–13.


27. The papers of Conrado Schick, German architect and resident of Jerusalem during the period, document this period; they are in the archives of the Palestine Exploration Fund in London. See also “Letters from Herr Baurath C. Schick,” letter dated October 1892, Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement, 1893, pp. 20–23.

28. For Bliss’s role in the formation of this collection, see Palestine Exploration Fund: Bliss 93/151A, 132A; and ibid., 42–90/85A.


30. Bliss’s correspondence is at the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) in London, PEF/Bliss, in 8 vols.

31. For R. A. Stewart Macalister’s comments on the clocktower, see Palestine Exploration Fund: MAC 250, letter dated 14 July 1907.

32. PEF/MAC 295a, letter dated 1 January 1909.

33. The Pro-Jerusalem Society published two volumes in conjunction with this restoration, Jerusalem 1918–20 (London, 1921), and Jerusalem 1920–22 (London, 1924).


36. See Jerusalem, 1918–20 for further information.


39. Ibid., p.11; the letter is dated 24 May 1926.