

A BRIEF GUIDE

TO

AL-HARAM AL-SHARIF

JERUSALEM

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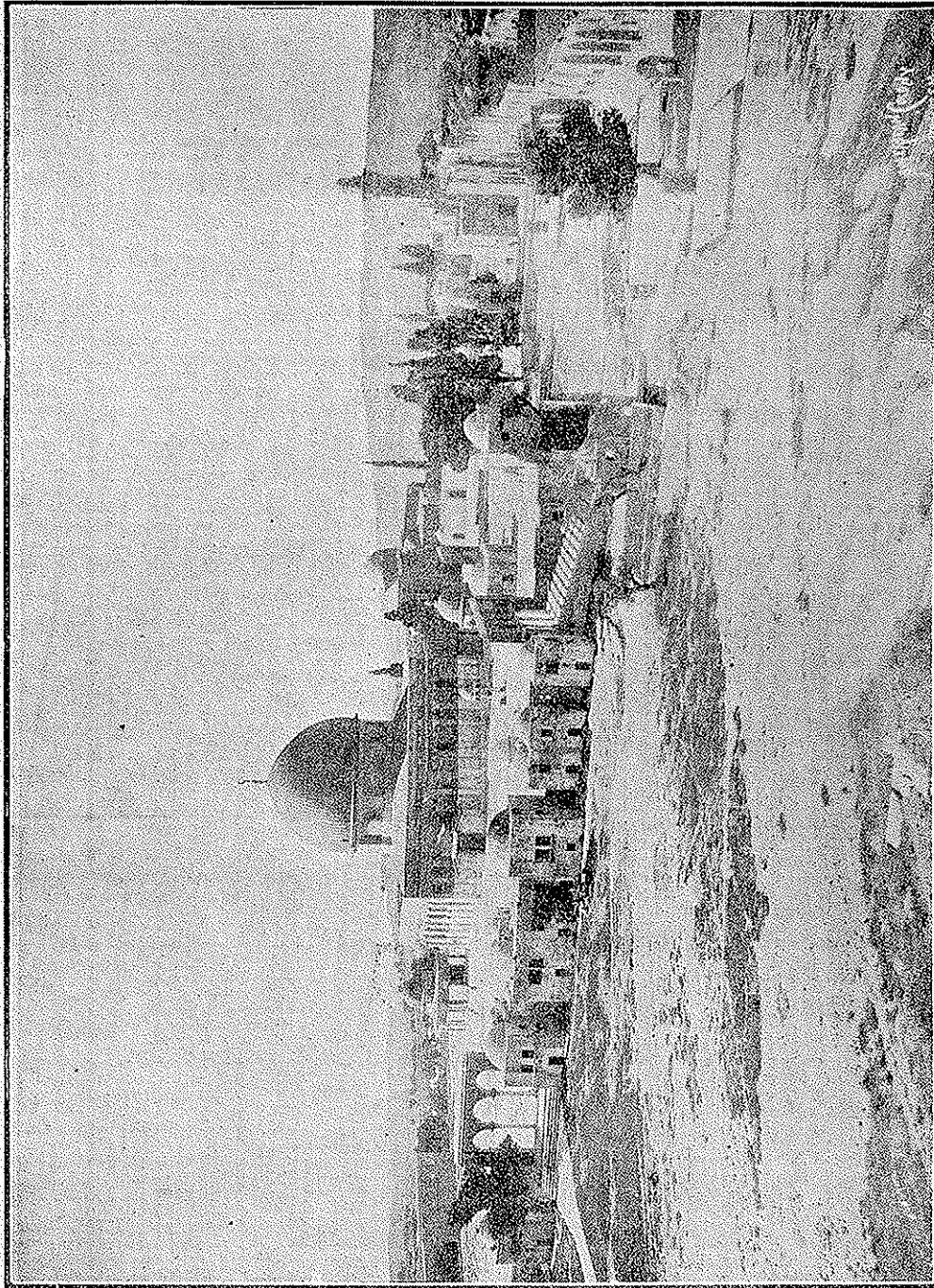
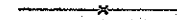


Fig. 1 — View of the Haram Area (from L. North-West)

IMPORTANT NOTICE.



Visitors should bear in mind that the whole of the Haram Area, and not only its edifices, is sacred to Moslems; and that they will be expected to pay due regard to its sanctity. In particular, they must abstain from smoking anywhere in the Area, and from bringing dogs with them.

The visiting-hours are from 7.30 a. m. to 11.30 a. m. daily, (Fridays excepted)-and visitors are particularly requested to leave punctually at 11.30 so as not to hinder the observance of the midday-prayer.

Admission may best be gained by the gate known as Bab al-Silsileh. It would save trouble and delay if visitors were to make it a point of entering the Haram by that gate.



THE HARAM.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The words al-Haram al-Sharif, which can perhaps best be rendered by "The August Sanctuary", denote the whole of the sacred enclosure which it is the object of this Guide to describe. Its plan is roughly that of a rectangle whose major axis runs from north to south; its area is approximately 145,000 square metres. If you wish to have some idea of its extent and to see it whole before proceeding to examine it in detail, you would be well-advised to begin your visit by walking to the north-west corner, and there, ascending the flight of steps which lead up to the disused building on the right, you will see the whole area spread before you. The view shown on the frontispiece (Fig. 1) was taken, although at a considerable altitude, from the very spot where you are standing.

The two principal edifices are the Dome of the Rock, on a raised platform in the middle, and the mosque of al-Aqsa against the south wall. Other buildings which we shall consider later lie dotted about here and there. On the left, along the east wall, the double portals of the Golden Gate appear. On every side, trees break the prospect, which lend a peculiar charm to the scene. The site is one of the oldest in the world. Its sanctity dates from the earliest (perhaps from pre-historic) times. Its identity with the site of Solomon's Temple is beyond dispute. This, too, is the spot, according to the universal belief, on which "David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings". (1)

But, for the purposes of this Guide, which confines itself to the Moslem period, the starting-point is the year 637 A. D. In that year, the Caliph Omar occupied Jerusalem and one of his first acts was to repair to this site, which had already become sacred in the eyes of Moslems as the place to which the Prophet was one night miraculously translated. The site had long since been neglected. The Caliph and his four thousand followers found little more than desolation and rubbish. There were the ruined walls of the Herodian and Roman periods, the remains of an early basilica (probably on the present site of al-Aqsa), and the bare Rock. Yet from this rock had the Prophet, according to the tradition, ascended to heaven on his steed. So the Caliph ordered a mosque to be erected by its side. His orders were executed, and the building was seen and described by Bishop Arculf who visited Jerusalem about 670 A. D. But no vestige of it remains to-day, save for the name "Mosque of Omar" which is still, but quite wrongly, sometimes used for the Dome of the Rock.

With the reign of 'Abdul-Malek ibn Marwan, the Umayyad, 685-705 A. D.), the history of the present buildings begins. Jeru-

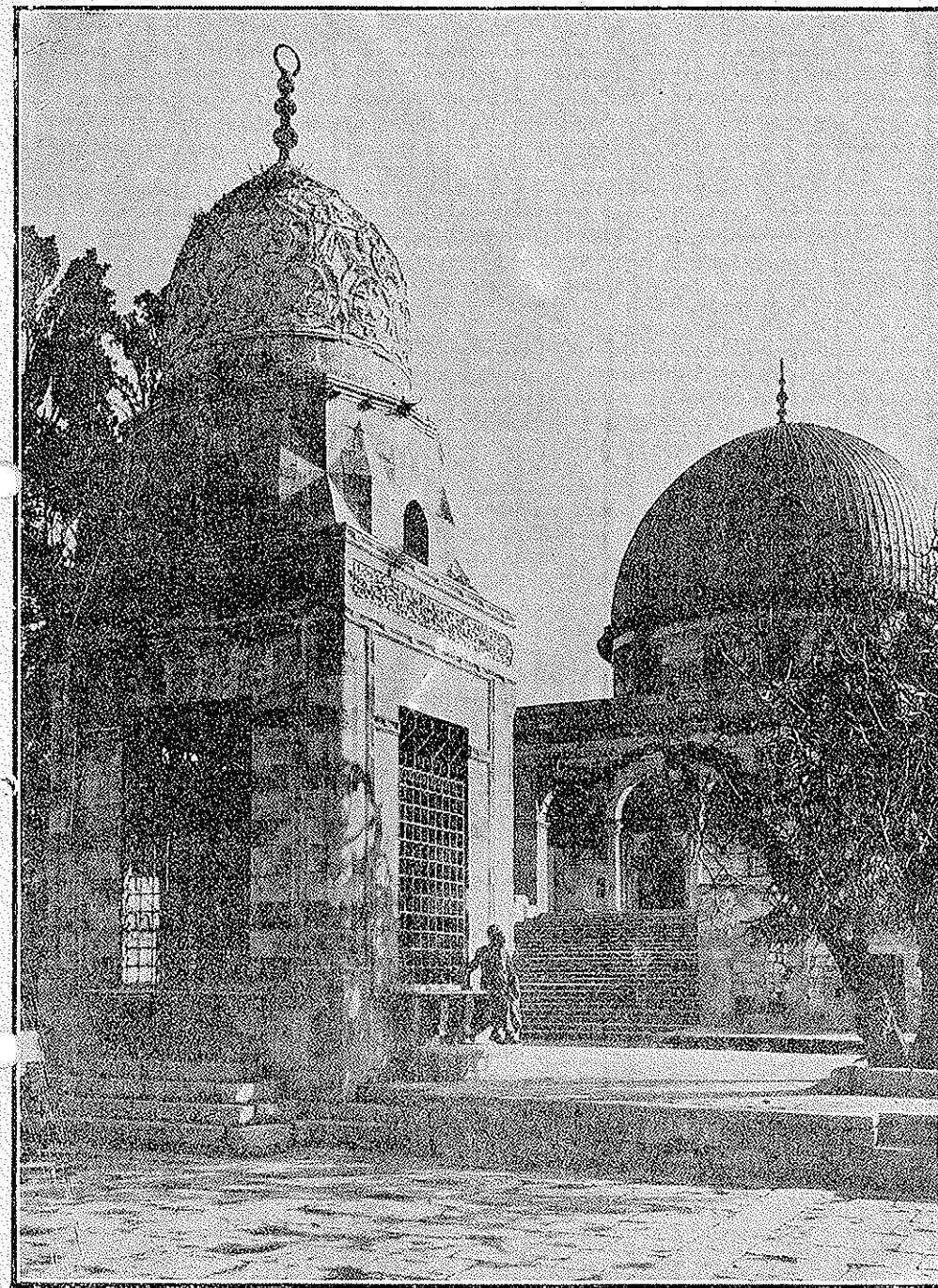


Fig. 2 — The Fountain (*Sabil*) of Qait Bay

(1) 2 Samuel XXIV, 25.

salem was a holy city, to Moslems as well as to others, and to the energetic and pious caliph its glorification seemed an obvious duty. He collected large sums of money, amounting (say the Arab historians) to "seven times the revenue of Egypt"; and with that he built the Dome (691 A. D.), and the mosque of al-Aqsa (693 A. D.), both of which, according to medieval Arab travellers and chroniclers, were of unsurpassed magnificence. But in subsequent years, the buildings suffered much from earthquake shocks and underwent various restorations. In the year 407 A.H. (1016 A.D.), an earthquake shock caused the Dome to collapse, and it was re-erected six years later by the Caliph Hakem.

A new chapter begins with the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders in 1099. They occupied the Haram Area and turned its monuments to different uses. The Dome of the Rock was turned into a church and an altar erected on the Rock itself. The edifice was regarded by them as the veritable Temple of the Lord (*Templum Domini*) from which the Knights Templar whose Order was formed there take their name. It is interesting to note also that, as Temple of the Lord and symbol of the Order, it served as a model for churches which were later erected at various places in Europe, such as Aix-la-Chapelle, Metz, Laon, and the Temple Church in London; and that it figures in Raphael's famous picture of the "Sposalizio" (*Brera, Milan*) and, still more recognisably, in the picture of "The Maries at the Sepulchre", attributed to Hubert van Eyck. The mosque of al-Aqsa, on the other hand, was transformed into a royal residence known as the Palace of Solomon; while the vast substructures below the south-east corner of the Area were used by the Knights as stables.

The end of this chapter came in 1187, when Saladin captured Jerusalem and drove the Crusaders out. One of his first acts was to put back the buildings to their former use as places of Moslem worship, and he caused every vestige of the Templars' occupation to be removed. At the same time he carried out important embellishments. In the Dome of the Rock, he caused the walls to be covered with marble, and set up the beautiful inscription which may still be seen above the open gallery of the cupola. He also restored the stucco incrustation of the inner dome, which remains to this day. In the mosque of al-Aqsa, he carried out restoration and embellishments, of which the chief were the fine mosaics on the drum of the dome and the beautiful pulpit adjoining the prayer-niche.

The Haram Area has remained in Moslem hands ever since. For although Jerusalem was again occupied by the Crusaders (1229-1244), yet their occupation did not extend to the sacred enclosure which it had been agreed should remain in Moslem possession. During the three centuries which followed, various repairs and additions were made; but the most important restoration was that which was carried out, after the Turkish conquest. In the reign of Sulaiman the Magnificent (1520-1566). This sultan, whose works are still to be found all over the Holy City, carried out a wholesale renovation of the Dome of the Rock. A large part of the decoration in glazed tiles upon the exterior of the shrine and most of the windows were added during his reign. Since then,

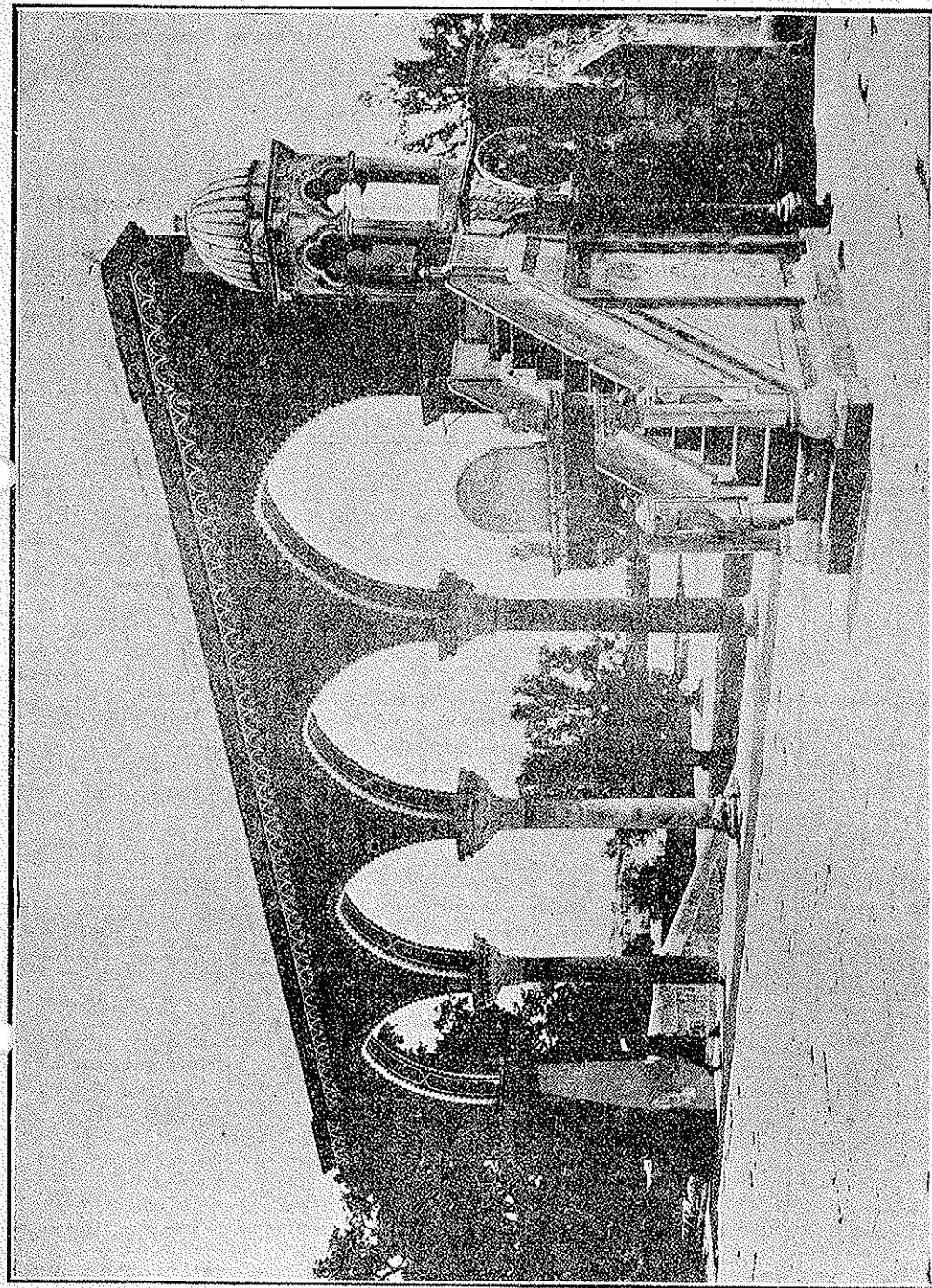


Fig. 3 — The Southern Arcades (Mawazin) and Pulpit of Burhaneddin

both buildings have undergone different restorations which have for the most part marred rather than enhanced their beauty. This is more particularly the case with the tiles on the exterior of the Dome of the Rock, which the hand of the restorer has here and there sifted or replaced most unhappily; and it is the present concern of the authorities of the Haram to try and undo the damage and restore to these decorative features something of their former harmony.

THE DOME OF THE ROCK.

The Dome of the Rock stands on an irregular platform whose level is some 12 feet above that of the Area. It is approached from every side by flights of broad steps surmounted at the landing by graceful arcades (Fig. 3) known as *Mawazin*, that is to say 'scales', because of the traditional belief that on the Day of Judgment the scales of good and evil will be suspended there. Having ascended the steps on the raised platform, you should, before entering the edifice, walk around it and examine it from the outside first. Its plan is that of a regular octagon inscribed in a circle of 177 ft. diameter. It has four entrances, each of which faces one of the points of the compass: on the West, the *Bab al-Gharb*, or west gate; on the north, the *Bab al-Janna*, or gate of Paradise; on the east, the *Bab Daud*, or gate of David; and on the south, the *Bab al-Qibla* or south gate. This last gate fixes the direction in which prayers are to be said, namely the direction of Mecca. The walls of the building are decorated with marble facings on the lower courses and with coloured glazed tiles above. The tiles which form this decoration date for the most part from the end of the reign of Sulaiman the Magnificent (v. page 6) when the art of Oriental ceramic decoration was perhaps at its height. Unfortunately, a great many of the original tiles have fallen off, and others have at various times been set in their stead without apparent regard for the harmony either of colour or pattern. Still, the effect is striking and, especially in certain lights, beautiful. The frieze is inscribed with verses from the Koran. Above rests the Dome, as rebuilt by the Caliph Hakem in 1022, slightly flattened on one side, and surmounted by the Crescent. The edifice itself is substantially that which was erected by 'Abdul-Malek ibn Marwan; but the outer decorations that we have just seen are mostly due to Sulaiman the Magnificent, and to later restorers.

On the east side of the Dome of the Rock, facing the *Bab Daud*, or gate of David, stands an elegant little edifice, also surmounted by a dome, which looks at first sight like a miniature representation of its larger brother. The roof which supports the Dome and its drum rests on two concentric rows of columns neither of which is encased by walls. On the south side is a *mihrab*, that is to say the prayer-recess. The edifice is variously known as *Mahkamah Daud*, (i. e. Tribunal of David) and *Qubbat al-Silsileh* (i. e. Dome of the Chain), from the legendary belief that on its site was a place of Judgment where verdicts were given by a miraculous chain. For as the legend has it, a chain was once suspen-

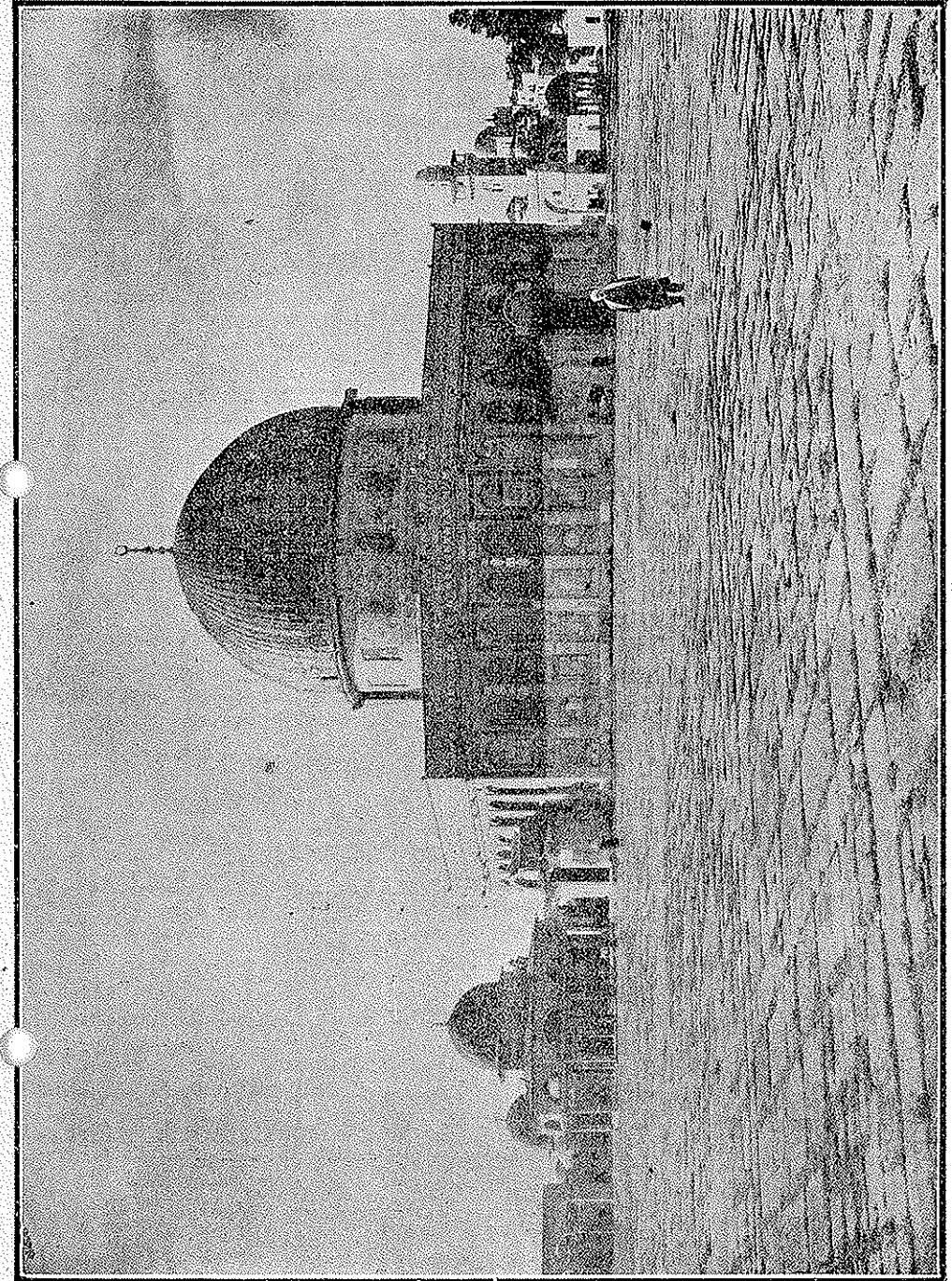


Fig. 4 — The Dome of the Rock (from the North-East)

ded from heaven over this spot, to which it was the practice in Solomon's time to appeal in cases of conflicting evidence. Each witness was made to grasp the chain in turn: if he succeeded in holding it, his truthfulness was thereby vindicated, but if it eluded his grasp, then he was a manifest liar. The edifice is said by some historians to be contemporaneous with the Dome of the Rock; but it is an established fact that it has been rebuilt more than once, albeit with the original columns, which are in the Byzantine style and were undoubtedly taken from older buildings. Their number has varied: at the present time there are eleven in the outer, and six in the inner, rows. (Fig. 4)

We will now enter the Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat al-Sakhra*) by the west gate. The metal doors on either side of the entrance are worthy of notice; an inscription which was only recently discovered proves them to have been made and set up during the reign of the Mameluke Sultan Qaitbay, towards the end of the XVth. century. A few steps further, we find ourselves in the interior of the building. At first sight it is almost too dark to see; but as the eye gets used to the subdued light, the beauty of the structure and the splendour of the ornamentation reveal themselves. In the centre, vertically below the dome, is the Sacred Rock, an irregular mass of yellowish stone. This is where the Crusaders had set up an altar and traces can still be seen of the steps which once led up to it. The dome rests on an inner system of piers and columns forming a circle and connected with each other by a wrought-iron grille, dating from the XIIth. century — a unique remnant of the Crusaders' decorations. This inner row is formed of four rectangular piers, beautifully adorned with marble facings dating from the XVth. century, and twelve monolithic columns with Byzantine capitals carrying semicircular arches. Above is the drum with its rich mosaics, its delicate inscription on bands and medallions; and 16 windows; while, resting on the drum above the clerestory windows, is the inner (wooden) cupola, with its remarkable stucco ornamentation, ordered by Saladin in 1189.

Concentric with the inner system which we have just described is the outer octagonal row of piers and columns supporting the roof. The piers in this row are eight in number and are of massive size, covered with XVth. century marble facings; while the columns, of which there are sixteen, are marble monoliths taken from some older building, probably Hadrian's Temple of Jupiter. The capitals, which are of varying design, belong to the late Græco-Roman or the early Byzantine period. Above each capital is an abacus on which rests the decorated beam which runs round the octagon and serves as an "anchor" beam from pier to pier—an interesting architectural feature, probably of Arab origin, which is characteristic of the earliest mosques. Between each pair of piers are three arches richly adorned with old mosaic dating, except for certain later restorations, from the VIIth. century. Above is a narrow band of blue tiles on which runs an inscription in gold Cufic letters, which is of great historical importance, for it records the date of the construction of the edifice and the name of the builder, with a chronological inconsequence which tells its own tale. The date is given as A. H. 72 and the

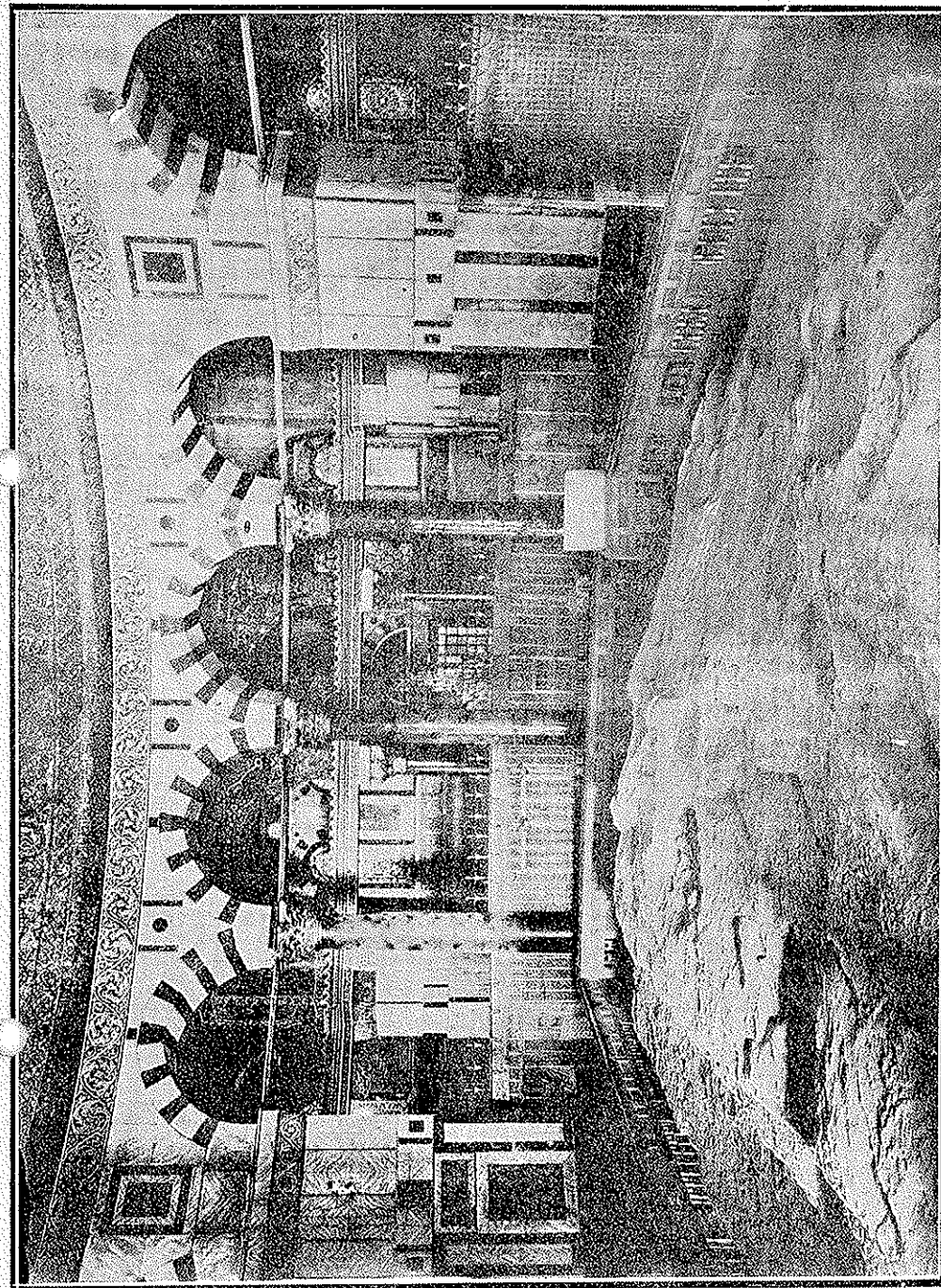


Fig. 5 — The Rock.

name as that of the Caliph al-Mamun who reigned in A.H.197-218: an obvious anachronism, of which the explanation is that the name of the later Caliph was substituted for that of his predecessor, 'Abdul-Malek ibn Marwan, the real builder of the Dome of the Rock, while the original date remained unchanged.

The walls of the edifice, which as we have seen form a regular octagon, are covered with marble slabs and pierced with windows dating, for the most part, from Sulaiman's restorations. The slabs are of beautiful marble specially chosen for its smoothness and remarkable veining. The windows are made of plaster, and their pattern consists of an intricate openwork tracery in which are inserted bits of coloured glass. The effect is one of great softness and richness of colour, and this is partly due to the skill with which the tracery is hollowed out of the plaster and cut away towards the inside in such a way that the openings become provided with a kind of cone for the softer diffusion of the rays of light.

A detailed description of the Dome of the Rock would be beyond the scope of this Guide. Its principal features have been mentioned and described in sufficient detail, it is believed, to give the visitor an adequate summary of its history and some help towards the appreciation of its magnificence.

THE MOSQUE OF AL-AQSA

Leaving the Dome of the Rock by the west gate, the visitor will notice, some 50 yards away on the right, a small octagonal domed edifice of semi-oriental and semi-Gothic appearance. This is the *Qubbat al-Mi'raj* or Dome of the Ascension. It was originally built in commemoration of the Prophet's miraculous ascension, and rebuilt in its present form about the year 1200 A. D., that is to say some thirteen years after the capture of the Holy City by Saladin and at a time when Gothic influence in building, which had been imported by the Crusaders, was still at its height. The monument is not open to visitors.

Turning towards the south, we cross the platform to the arcades on its southern side, passing on the way the marble pulpit of Burhaneddin (Fig. 3.) which was built by the judge of that name in the middle of the XVth. century. The pulpit is crowned by a dome supported by trefoil arches resting on columns, and is an interesting as well as a beautiful example of the work of that period. Beyond the pulpit are the steps leading down to the court of the mosque of al-Aqsa. Immediately in front is the fountain of ablutions, and beyond that is the mosque itself.

The porch, which is the most recent part of the building, was added by the Sultan al-Mu'azzam, a nephew of Saladin, in the XIIIth. century. An inscription above the middle archway records the date as 634 A. H. (1236 A. D.). The porch consists of a façade of seven pointed arches, corresponding to the seven front doors of the mosque, and affords yet another example of the Crusaders' influence, although not a very happy one.

The interior of the mosque is unfortunately only partly ac-

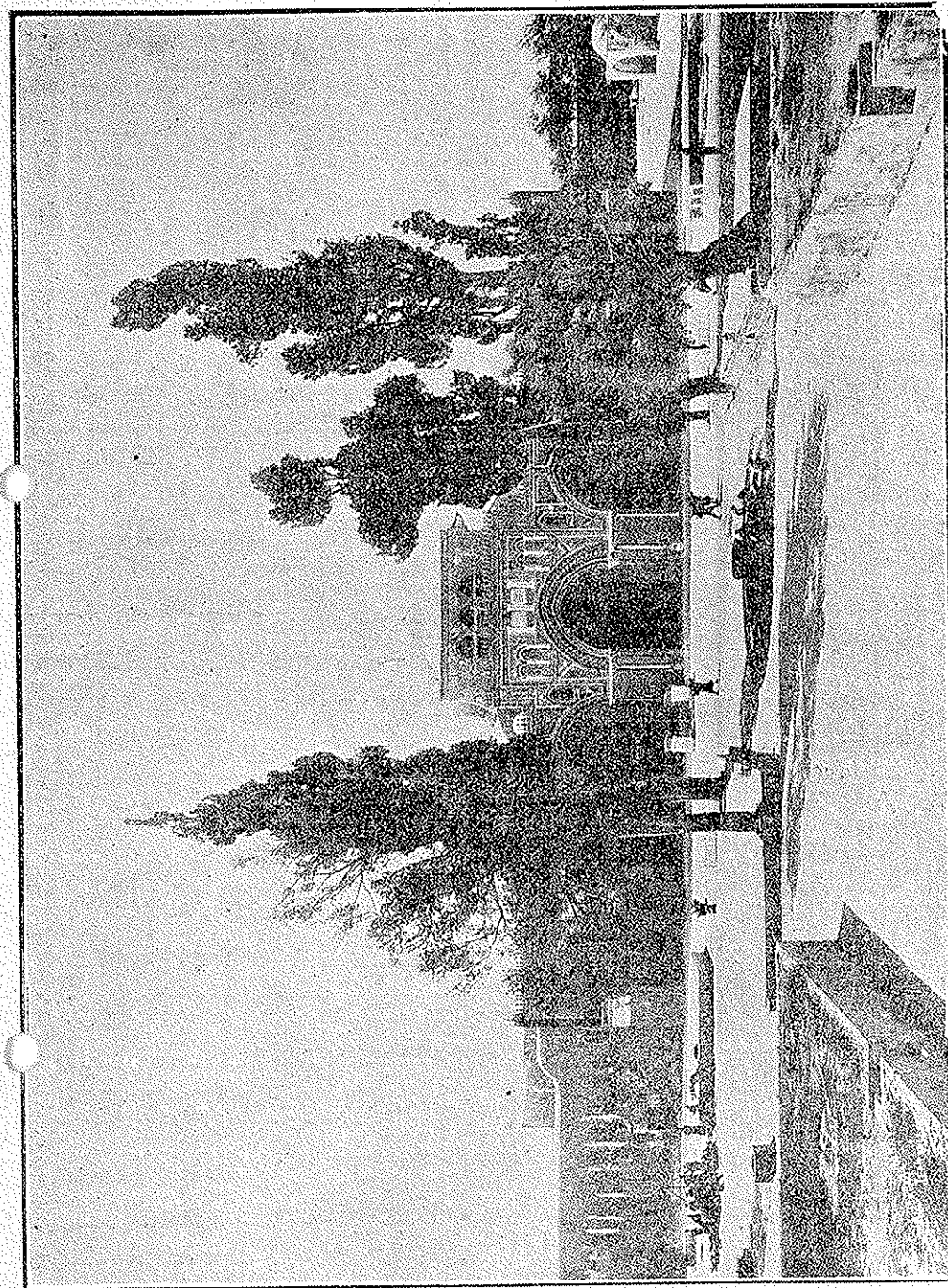


Fig. 6 The Al-Aqsa Mosque (front)

cessible to visitors at the present time, on account of the considerable repairs which have to be carried out to that part of the building which supports the dome. But visitors are admitted to the nave and aisles and can gain some idea of the whole. The nave, formed by two rows of massive columns with capitals, is the oldest part of the mosque. On either side of it, is an aisle, both of which date also from the earliest period; the outside aisles are of more recent construction. The columns of the nave were probably taken from Justinian's basilica; while the capitals, which are mostly of the acanthus-leaf and wicker-work patterns, date from Byzantine times and are probably contemporaneous with the construction of the mosque itself. The columns support a system of pointed arches of which the exact date is not known for certain. Their pointed form, however, shows plainly that they belong to a later period than the VIIIth. century, for in that period the pointed form had not yet been evolved and the horse-shoe arch, as we have seen in the interior of the Dome of the Rock, was still prevalent. The columns are connected by wooden tie-beams, which as we have seen (page 10) is a device characteristic of early Arab monuments. Above the arches are two rows of windows; the lower open on to the inner aisles, the upper are clerestory windows admitting air and light from the outside. (Fig. 7).

Above the crossing stands the dome resting on a circular drum supported by a system of arches and pendentives, which are themselves borne at the four corners by groups of pillars and capitals. The dome, which is of wood protected on the outside by a covering of lead sheeting, is ornamented with a handsome stucco incrustation of the same style as that of the dome of the Qubbat al-Sakhra. This decoration may, like its counterpart in the Sakhra, date from the time of Saladin; but be this as it may, it was completely renovated, if not actually made in the first instance, by the Sultan Muhammad ibn Qalaun in the year 728 A. H. (1327 A.D.), as the beautiful inscription on the blue band around the cupola testifies. The drum and the four arches with their pendentives are covered with a beautiful mosaic on a gold ground dating from the end of the XIIth. century, that is to say from the restoration carried out by Saladin (v. page 6).

To the west of the crossing runs the broad transept with its colonnade of pillars taken from older buildings. A few interesting Byzantine capitals of wicker-work design are worth noticing. The transept is continued into a vaulted gallery which dates from the occupation of the Crusaders, and was used as quarters by the Knights Templar.

The *mihrab* (or prayer recess) in the south wall, facing the nave, is ornamented with mosaics and flanked with slender and elegant marble columns. According to an inscription in mosaic above the niche, the work is due to Saladin. To the right of the *mihrab* stands a handsome pulpit made of wood and beautifully ornamented with inlaid ivory and mother-of-pearl. It was made in Aleppo, as the inscription on it testifies, by the Sultan Nureddin in the year 1168 A.D., and was brought to Jerusalem by order of Saladin towards the end of the century. Above the prayer-niche are windows dating from the XVIth. century.

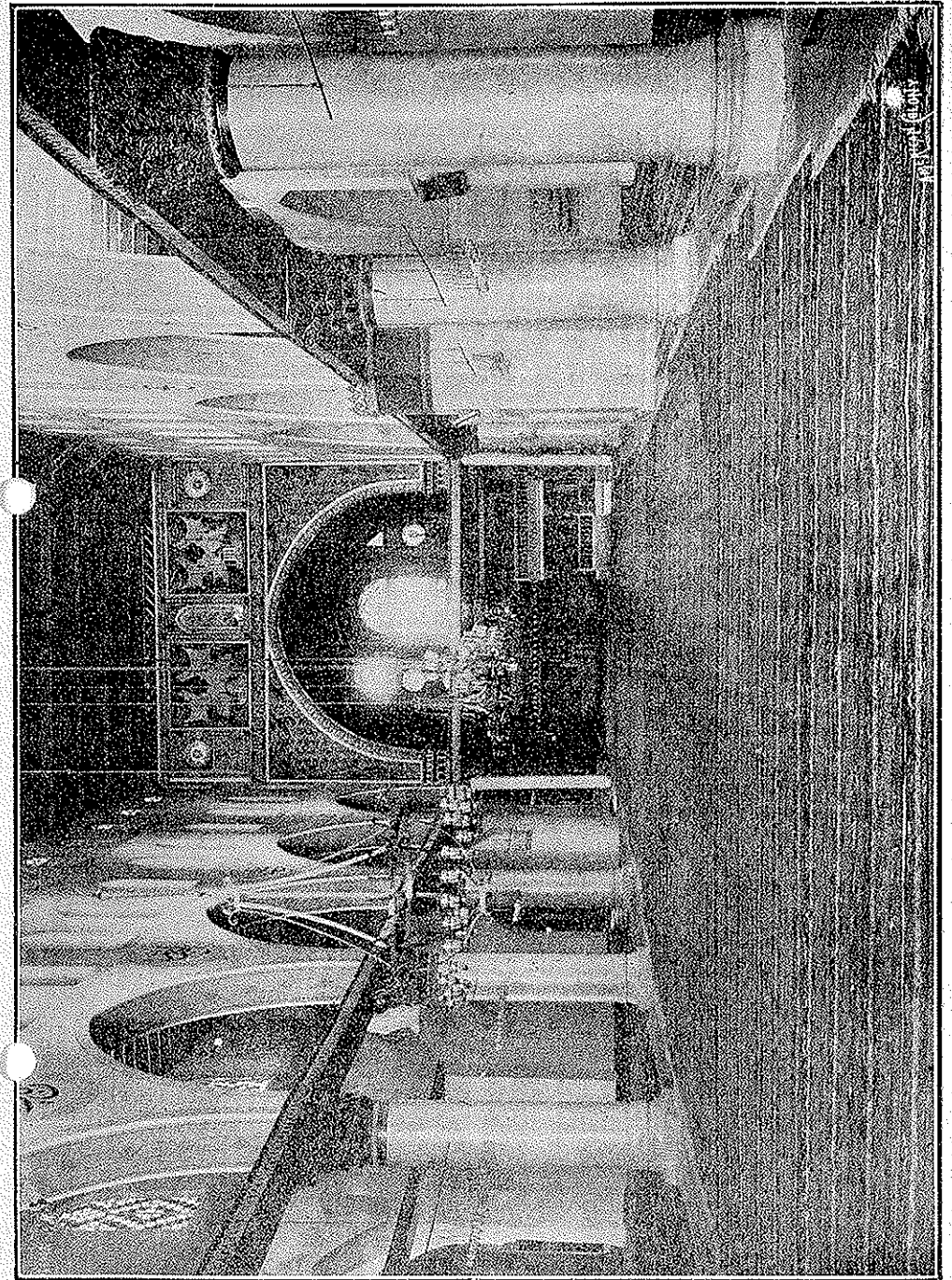


Fig. 7.— The Al-Aqsa Mosque (interior).

THE SUBSTRUCTURES

Leaving the mosque of al-Aqsa by the front entrance, we turn to the left and proceed to the south-east corner of the Haram Area where a staircase leads down in to the vast subterranean substructures known as *Solomon's Stables*. The first flight of steps takes us down to the small chamber, now used as a place of Moslem worship, which was believed in medieval times to have been associated with Jesus Christ's infancy. This belief was prevalent long before the advent of the Crusaders and was subsequently accepted by them. In the angle between the west and the south walls of the chamber is a little dome borne upon four marble columns; and underneath the dome is a small niche lying horizontally, which was believed in early times to have been the *Cradle of Christ* and referred to under that name by several Arab historians.

In the west wall of the chamber, a door opens into a staircase descending to *Solomon's Stables*. This is a vast subterranean chamber, of roughly rectangular shape, of which the chief feature is the imposing size of the piers. Of these, there are fifteen rows of varying size and height supporting the vaults on which rests the roof. Little is known for certain of the early history of the chamber itself. It dates probably as far back as the construction of Solomon's Temple. According to Josephus, it was in existence and was used as a place of refuge by the Jews at the time of the conquest of Jerusalem by Titus in the year 70 A. D. We also know that this space was used by the Knights Templar as stables, and the holes to which they tethered their horses can still be seen in the masonry of the piers. Such evidence as is afforded by the masonry itself, and more particularly by the contrast between the lower and the upper courses of the larger piers, would tend to show that they belong to two distinct periods, and that the upper parts and the vaults were of Arab construction superimposed upon ancient foundations.

The substructures supporting the nave of the mosque of al-Aqsa are not accessible.

The best way out is across the esplanade, past the porch of the mosque of al-Aqsa, and back to the Bab al-Silsileh. An alternative would be to continue northwards past the Bab al-Silsileh to the gate known as *Bab al-Qattanin*, a handsome gate dating from the reign of Sultan Muhammad ibn Qalaun (1336 A. D.) and typical of XIVth century Arab work. To the south-east of this gate is the *Sabil* (or drinking fountain) built about the year 1460 A. D. by the Mameluke Sultan Qaitbay — an attractive building, perfect of its kind. (Fig. 2).