

Plan of the Rock.

of photographs taken from the ambulatory below the dome (see plan, above). I had first visited the Dome of the Rock in 1967 and many times since, but the relevant observations made during 1992 and 1994 made sense only after having first established the location of the 500-cubit-square Temple Mount.

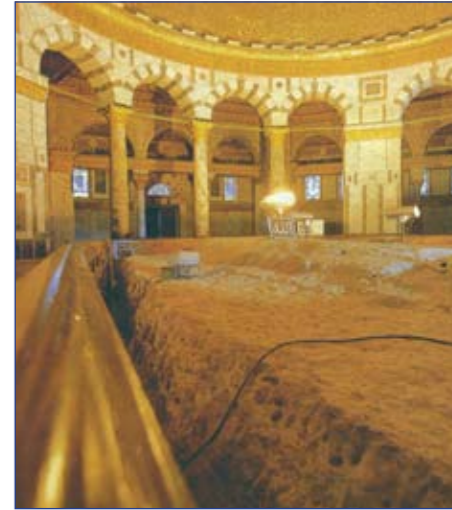
Six major features characterize the Rock: (1) the western steps; (2) the cut on the south; (3) the northern shelf and the mysterious drain; (4) the eastern slope; (5) the cave below the Rock; and (6) the upper level with the rectangular depression we have identified as the former location of the Ark of the Covenant.

We will now examine these features of the Rock in that order:

### 1) The Western Steps

Vision is partly obstructed by the wooden fence that surrounds the Rock on all sides, yet we see immediately that the western face of the Rock, which stands 3 feet 7 inches (1.09 m) above the pavement, is a natural rockscarp with many deep grooves running down from the top. The bottom of the scarp, being close to the fence, is more difficult to see. There are some twenty-seven grooves in the western face of the Rock. In its southern part there are eight grooves that Muslims hold to be the fingers of the angel Gabriel, who they believe held down the rock when it wanted to follow Mohammed during his ascent to heaven. Although the line of the rockscarp is slightly broken, the major direction is approximately 3.5 degrees east, which is virtually identical to the direction of the *step* and the eastern wall of the Temple Mount.

Above the western scarp is a flat area, some 38 feet (11.55 m) long by 5 feet (1.52 m) wide in the south and narrower in the north. It has the appearance of a broad landing, somewhat similar to the landings of the monumental staircase which leads up to the Double Gate in the Southern Wall of the Herodian Temple Mount. There are two more parallel but much narrower steps to the east. If allowed to climb them, one would reach the flat upper level of the Rock.



Above: View of the natural western scarp inside the Dome of the Rock. (photo: Garo Nalbandian)

Below: Isometric view of the Rock with part of the floor of the Dome of the Rock removed to show the full height of the western and northern scarps.

