

The Crusader Period

1099–1187

The Dome of the Ascension is situated on the Temple Mount platform, northwest of the Dome of the Rock (the baptistry in the opening map of this chapter). In Crusader times, it apparently served as a baptistry when the Dome of the Rock functioned as a church (Templum Domini). Originally, the structure was open and overlaid with marble, and only later, in the Ayyubid period, was it blocked up on all sides.

In Muslim tradition this structure marked the spot where Muhammad prayed before his ascent to heaven, and hence its name. A structure was erected here in the Early Muslim period to denote the event. This structure was demolished and the present dome erected during the Crusader period, and renovated during the Ayyubid period.

An inscription dating to 1200/01 has been placed inside the structure stating: "This is the dome of the Prophet described by historians in their records. . . ." According to the inscription, its purpose was to record for posterity the dome built in honor of the prophet and which "disappeared" in the Crusader period. The decorations and the style of

architecture prove beyond doubt that this is a Crusader structure.

A further inscription reveals that the structure was renovated again in 1781.



The Crusaders conquered Jerusalem on July 15, 1099, at the end of a five-week siege. The status of Jerusalem now changed from a city in an outlying province to the capital of an independent kingdom and an important center of the Christian world. It was granted this special status for it constituted the religious and emotional center of the Crusader-Christian world, despite the fact that it lacked strategic advantages and despite its remoteness from the main commercial routes and the sea, which were the main supply lines of the Crusader kingdom. The sanctity of the city attracted numerous pilgrims who brought in large amounts of money, and some pilgrims even settled there permanently. Jerusalem now enjoyed a period of prosperity, expressed in intensive construction and which brought about a change in the city's image. Many Crusader buildings have remained until today, and some even serve the very function for which they were built. The Old City of Jerusalem is in many ways a reflection of the Crusader city.

During the course of the time Jerusalem served as the capital city of the Crusader kingdom, a strong link was developed with the countries of Europe, and consequently a wealth of documentation describing the city in that period has remained. These include accounts by the numerous pilgrims who visited the city, collections of documents of some of the leading churches such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Church of St. Mary in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and documentation of the Knights Hospitallers and the Order of the Teutonic Knights. There are also the written accounts by Jewish travelers who visited the city during this period. Among the most well-known were Benjamin of Tudela (1167) and Pethahiah of Regensburg (1180). As a consequence of the abundance of maps and written sources, as well as the numerous Crusader buildings still standing in Jerusalem, the Crusader period in Jerusalem is probably the best known of all the periods throughout its entire history.

Once they had succeeded in taking the city, the Crusaders massacred the majority of non-Christian inhabitants and evicted the remainder. Since most of the soldiers had returned to Europe on the completion of their mission, Jerusalem was almost uninhabited, and the conquerors sought ways of attracting Christians to the city. They waived levies on goods brought into the city and introduced concessions on commercial transactions (especially among the Italian residents to encourage them to increase commercial ventures in Jerusalem). New laws were enacted regarding the ownership of abandoned property seized by the Crusader forces during the conquest of the city. Furthermore, persons who held property for one year, left it and then returned within the course of one year, were granted title to those holdings. In addition, Christian Arabs from the border areas of Transjordan and Palestine were resettled in the abandoned quarters of the city. As a consequence of the massacres and the Crusader government's settlement policy, the ethnic composition of the city was radically altered, becoming predominantly Christian. Religious institutions, such as the Dome of the Rock and el-Aqsa Mosque, were appropriated and handed over to the Latin church.

