

Highlights of Jerusalem



Introduction

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Travel guidebooks for the ultra curious, Approach Guides reveal a destination's essence by exploring a compelling aspect of its cultural heritage: art, architecture, history, food or wine.

A wonderfully complex and multi-layered city, Jerusalem is the crossroads of the world's three great Abrahamic faiths: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The ancient monuments erected to celebrate these religions still pulse with their original sacred energy. They are yours to discover.

What's in this guidebook

- **Tour of the city's highlights.** Following our tradition of being the most valuable resource for culture-focused travelers, we offer a tour of Jerusalem's most iconic structures: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Temple Mount's Dome of the Rock and the Western Wall (details below). For each, we reveal its most important architectural and decorative features and provide a discussion that ties it all together. To make things come alive, we have packed our review with high-resolution images.
- **Advice for getting the best cultural experience.** To help you plan your visit, this guidebook supplies logistical advice, maps and links to online resources. Plus, we give our personal tips for getting the most from your experience while on location.
- **Information the way you like it.** As with all of our guides, this book is optimized for intuitive, quick navigation; information is organized into bullet points to make absorption easy; and images are marked up with text that explains important features.

Tour itinerary

- **Church of the Holy Sepulchre.** For the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which encloses the sites of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, we explore the changes that the structure has undergone through the ages in response to adversity and changing requirements. Specifically, we examine the how the present church's architectural layout relates to those of the three earlier edifices that occupied the site: the enormous 4th century Constantinian church; the modest rebuilt 11th century Byzantine church; and the expanded 12th century Crusader church.
- **Temple Mount.** Crowning the Temple Mount, the iconic 7th century Dome of the Rock is one of the earliest surviving Islamic structures. We explore its history, architecture, decoration and political significance. Further, we profile the Temple Mount's other highlights: Al-Aqsa mosque, Dome of the Chain, Golden Gate and two Mamluk monuments.
- **Western Wall.** The Temple Mount's history far pre-dates Islam's presence on the scene. The Mount was the site of the three Jewish Temples, the first of which was built in 950 BCE. This guide discusses these temples — their histories and what they looked like — and profiles the only vestige of their existence, the Western Wall, the most sacred of Jewish religious sites.

Contact us anytime

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We hope this cultural guidebook offers you fresh insights into Jerusalem's foremost religious monuments and sets you on a path to making your own discoveries.

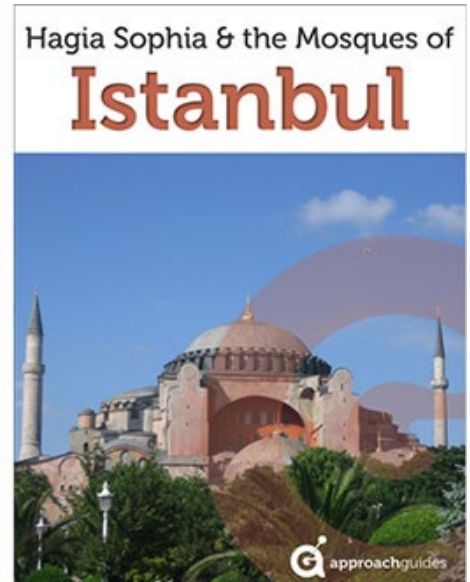
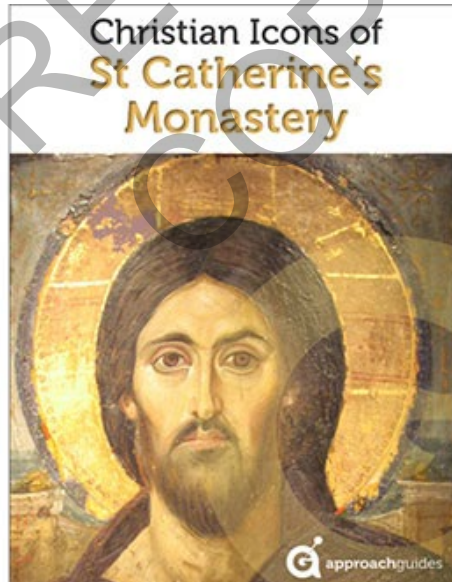
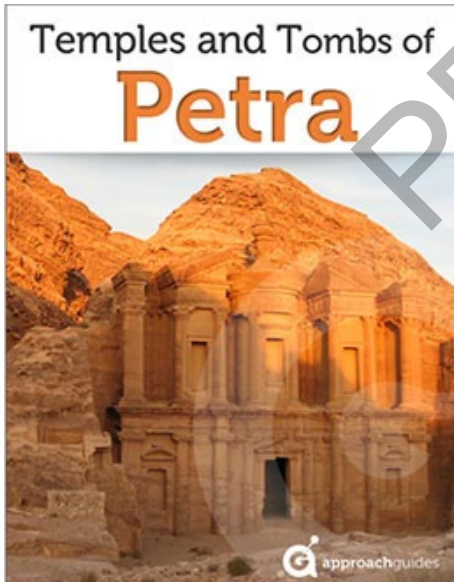
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David and Jennifer Raezer
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Highlights of Jerusalem: Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Dome of the Rock and Western Wall

Version 1.3

by [David Raezer](#) and [Jennifer Raezer](#)

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For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness,
and the salvation thereof as a lamp [that] burneth.
... I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem,
[which] shall never hold their peace day nor night:
ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence,
And give him no rest, till he establish,
and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.
... Go through, go through the gates;
prepare ye the way of the people;
cast up, cast up the highway;
gather out the stones;
lift up a standard for the people.

—

Book of Isaiah, [Chapter 62](#)

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The City's Layout

Author tip: Look for the grid. Enclosed by massive walls erected by the Ottoman sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in the 16th century, the Old City occupies a rather small area: 220 acres (approximately 0.35 square miles or 0.9 square kilometers). Nevertheless, it can be challenging to navigate: the narrow medieval streets often appear as an unnavigable maze. But there is an underlying logic! By associating key thoroughfares with the ancient Roman grid, you will be able to seamlessly navigate the twists and turns.

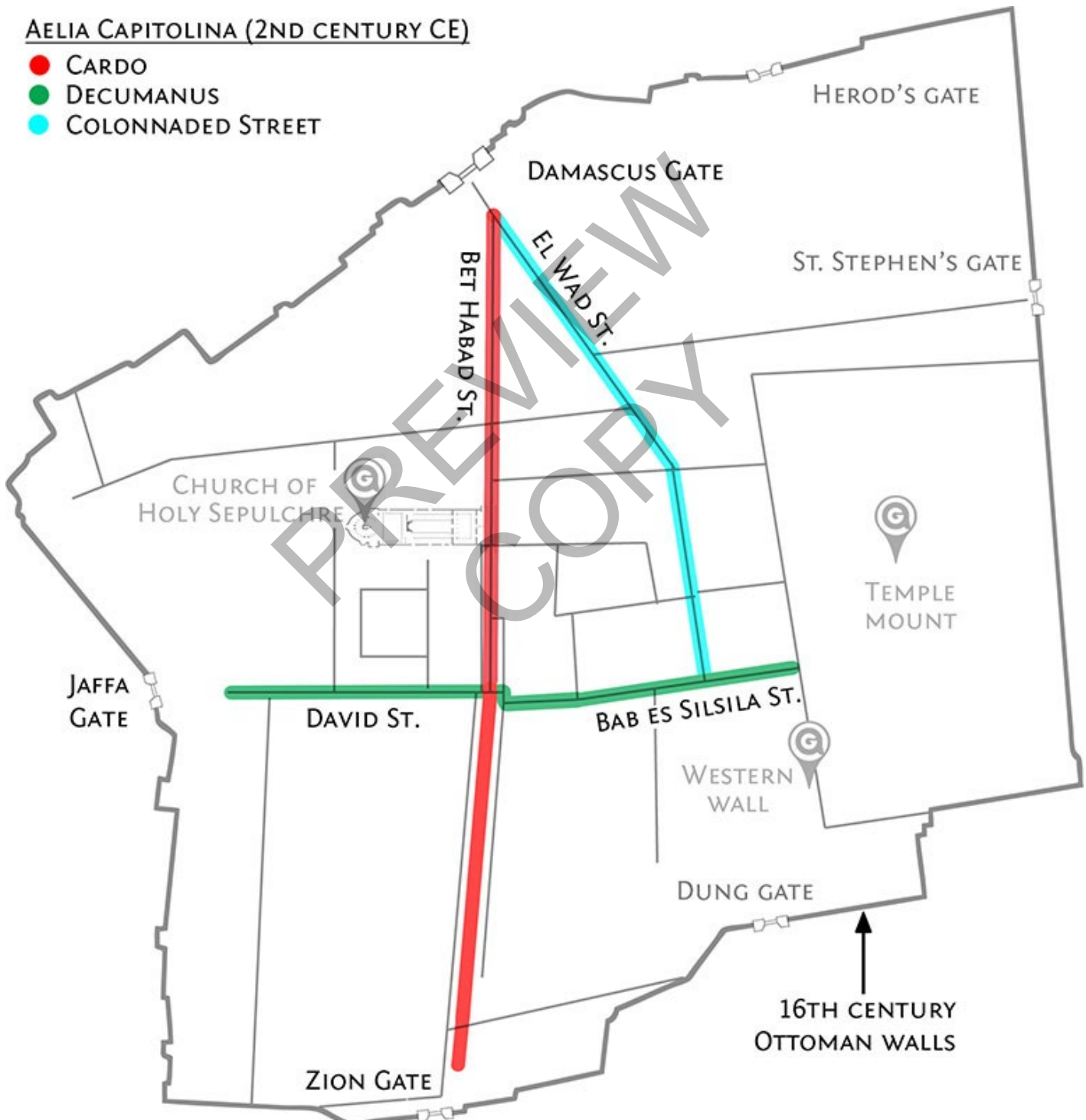


Fig. 1. Aelia Capitolina's primary streets overlaid on the current Old City layout.

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Touring Itinerary

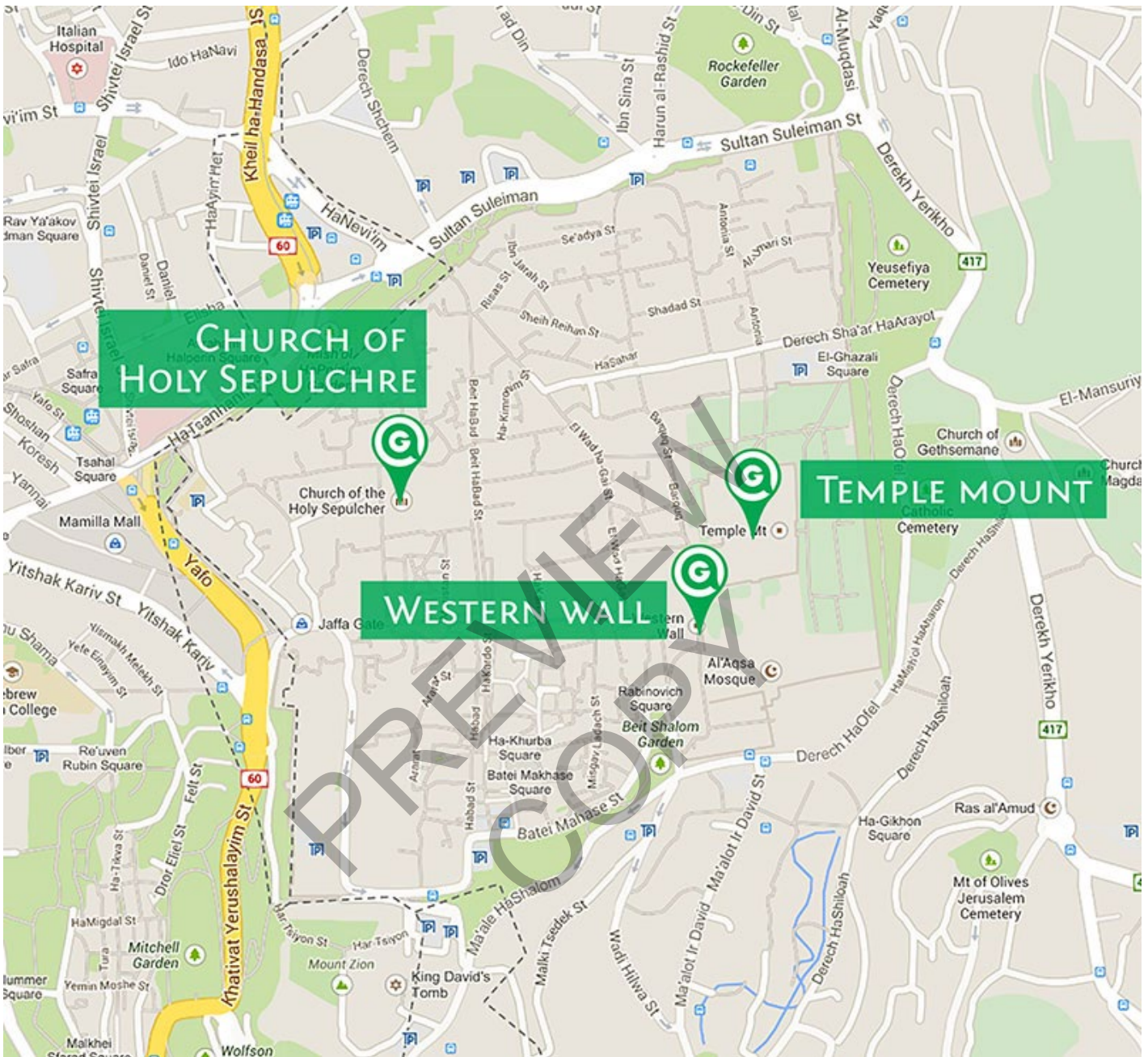


Fig. 3. Touring itinerary. See in [Google Maps](#).

Our tour focuses on Jerusalem's three most iconic structures (Fig. 3).

- Church of the Holy Sepulchre
- The Temple Mount's Dome of the Rock
- Western Wall

Author tip: Remember to use the table of contents. To facilitate quick navigation, each site has been broken down into a number of easily-referenced chapters. So, even if you don't

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CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE



An Evolving Layout

Background

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is the most sacred church among Christians. Under one roof, it encloses the sites of Jesus' crucifixion (Golgotha) and burial. Highly religiously charged, it is thronged with pilgrims at all hours.

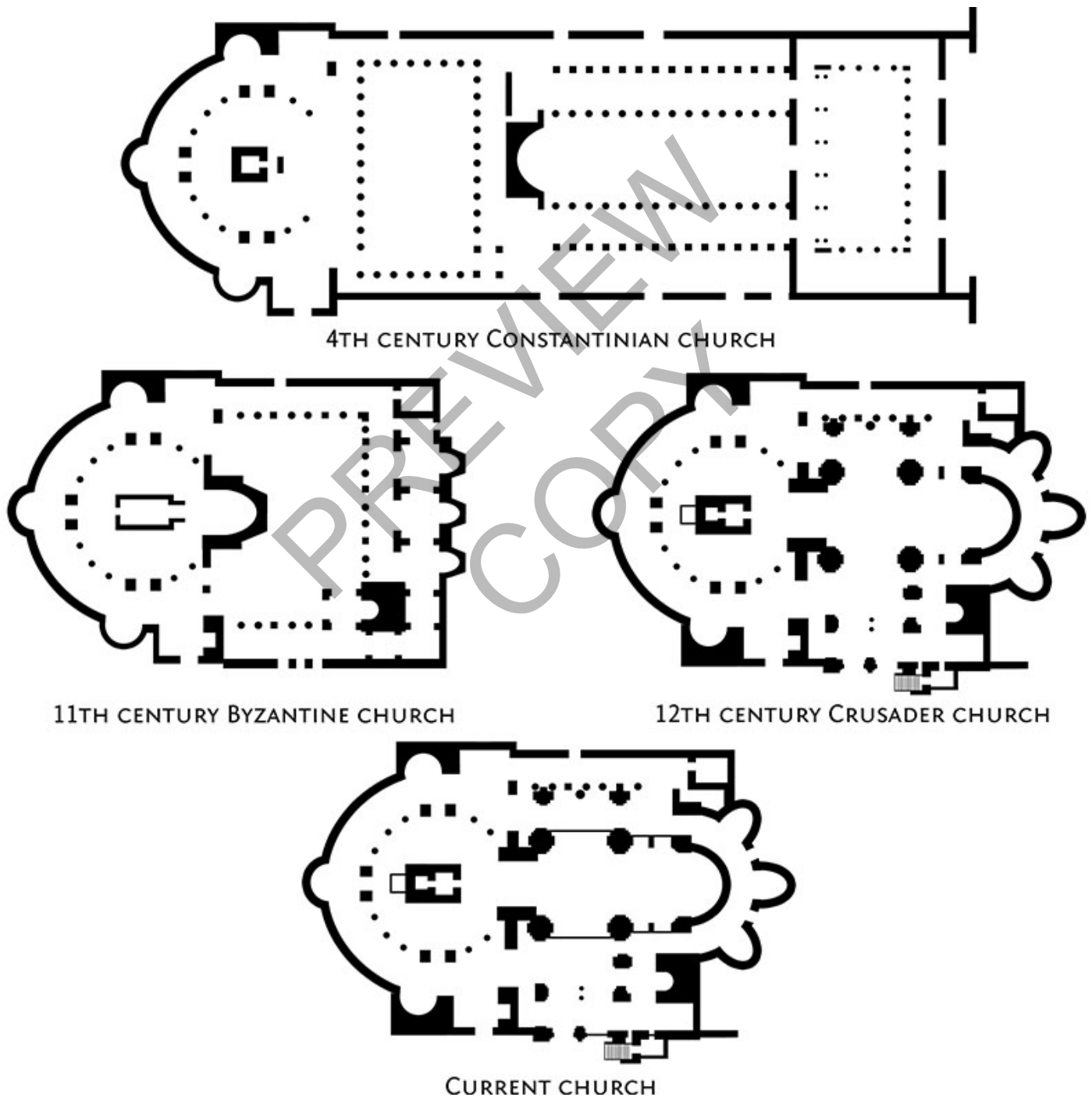


Fig. 4. Evolution, Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

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Version 2: 11th Century Byzantine Church

History

Although the Fatimids still controlled Jerusalem, the Byzantine emperor Michael IV the Paphlagonian was quick to rebuild the church in the wake of its destruction, completing the project around 1040.

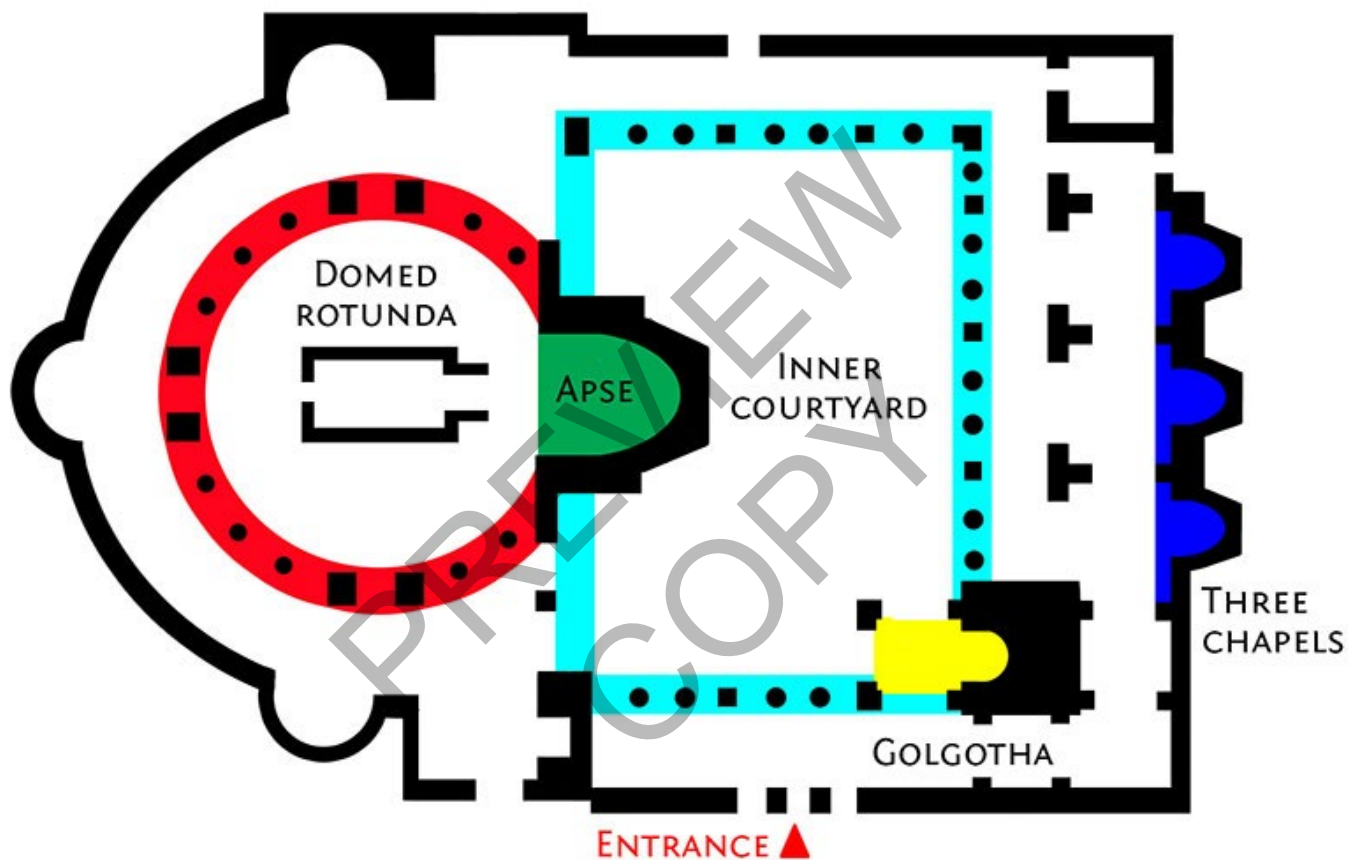


Fig. 8. Layout, 11th century Byzantine church.

Byzantine Modifications

While the sites of Golgotha (yellow highlights in Fig. 8) and the domed burial rotunda (red highlights in Fig. 8) remained consistent, the Byzantine version of the church was quite different:

- **Dramatically reduced scale.** Following the church's destruction, all future churches built on this site would occupy only a fraction of the 4th century edifice's footprint. More specifically, future churches would confine themselves to the western end of the 4th century church,

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Tour Itinerary

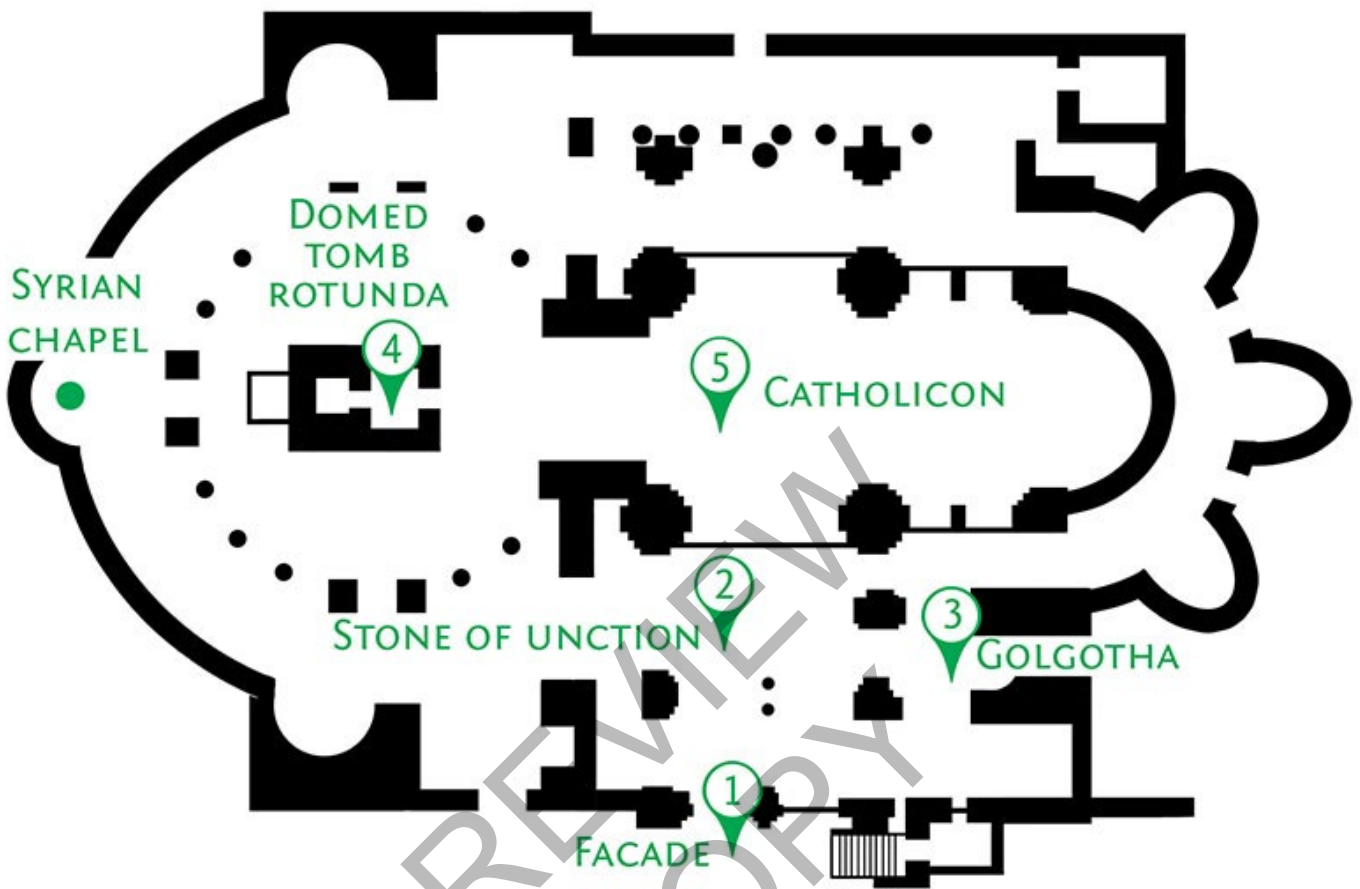


Fig. 19. Layout, current Church.

Itinerary

Our tour profiles the most important sites in the church (Fig. 19).

1. Entrance facade
2. Stone of unction
3. Golgotha
4. Domed tomb rotunda
5. Catholicon

Visiting Hours

- **April-September:** Sundays 5:00am - 8:00pm; Monday-Saturday 5:00am - 9:00pm.

- **October-March:** Sundays 4:00am - 7:00pm; Monday-Saturday 4:00am - 7:00pm.

For more information, including the times for church services, see the [Holy Sepulchre's website](#).

***Author tip:** The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is an intriguing site, one that will likely draw you back a number of times during your visit to Jerusalem. We have found that the late night and early morning liturgies (times listed on the Holy Sepulchre's website) offer the best opportunities to experience the church in serene conditions. Also, lines to visit the interior of Jesus' tomb are typically long. If you wish to do so, we advise visiting in the early morning.*

Some Things to Keep in Mind

A number of factors make the present-day church challenging to understand and appreciate from an architectural perspective:

- **Poor exterior vantage.** The view of the church from the entrance courtyard is limited, preventing visitors from appreciating its interior arrangement (Fig. 20). Specifically, the buildings lining the sides of the entrance courtyard obstruct views of the church's overall layout. Further, the courtyard is too small (relative to the height of the facade) to allow views of the great dome over the tomb rotunda.
- **Disorienting south entrance.** The entrance's position on the church's south side is disorienting, as most church entrances are from the west end.
- **Obstructed interior views.** The Catholicon's modern walls block expansive views of the church interior, making it difficult to gauge its internal scale and arrangement.
- **Lack of design unity.** As we laid out in the prior section, elements remain from prior periods, which serves to interrupt the architectural unity of the church.

Keep these unique features in mind as we move along this tour.

1. Entrance Facade

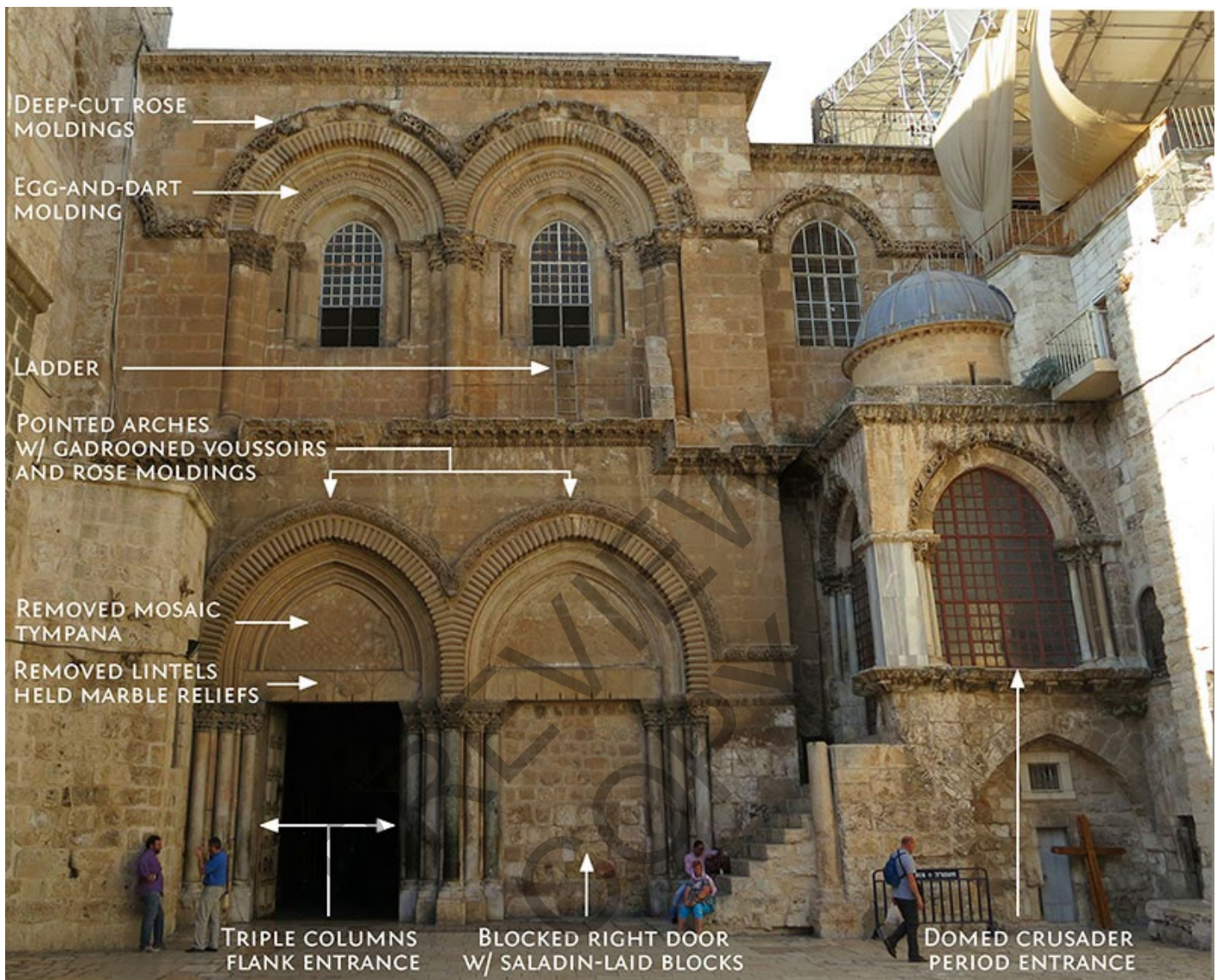


Fig. 20. Facade, current church, view from entrance courtyard.

Decoration across the two-level entrance facade dates entirely from the 12th century Crusader period.

Status Quo Symbol

The three Patriarchates that control the church — Roman (Latin) Catholics, Eastern (Greek) Orthodox and Armenian Apostolics — signed a status quo agreement under the Ottomans in 1852, effectively stating that no changes could be made to the church without the consent of all parties. Given the endemic lack of consensus, this agreement has effectively frozen the church in time.

- **Ladder on facade.** This ladder (center of **Fig. 20**), which was on the facade at the signing of the contract, symbolizes the absence of change. Even a ladder has not moved for over 150

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Tour Itinerary

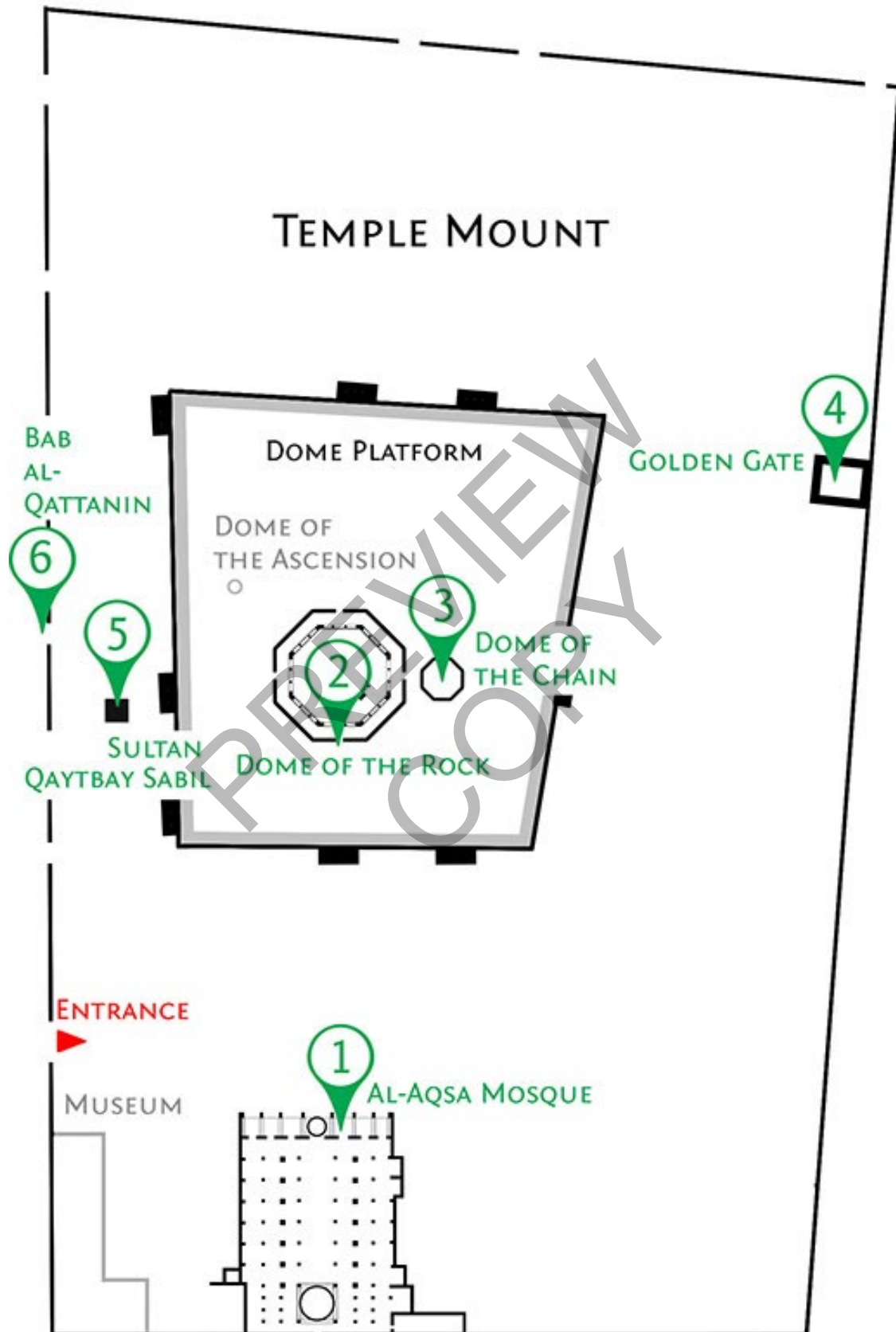


Fig. 29. Temple Mount itinerary.

Temple Mount Tour

Our tour profiles six of the most impressive structures on the Temple Mount (Fig. 29 and Fig. 30).

1. Al-Aqsa mosque
2. Dome of the Rock
3. Dome of the Chain
4. Golden Gate
5. Sultan Qaytbay sabil
6. Bab al-Qattanin



Fig. 30. Temple Mount itinerary. See satellite view in [Google Maps](#).

Visiting

- **Access.** The Temple Mount is accessed by non-Muslims exclusively by way of a long elevated ramp located just south of the Western Wall. You will have to pass through a security check in order to be admitted.
- **Hours.** The Temple Mount is open Sunday-Thursday from 7:30am - 11:00am and from

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Architecture Review

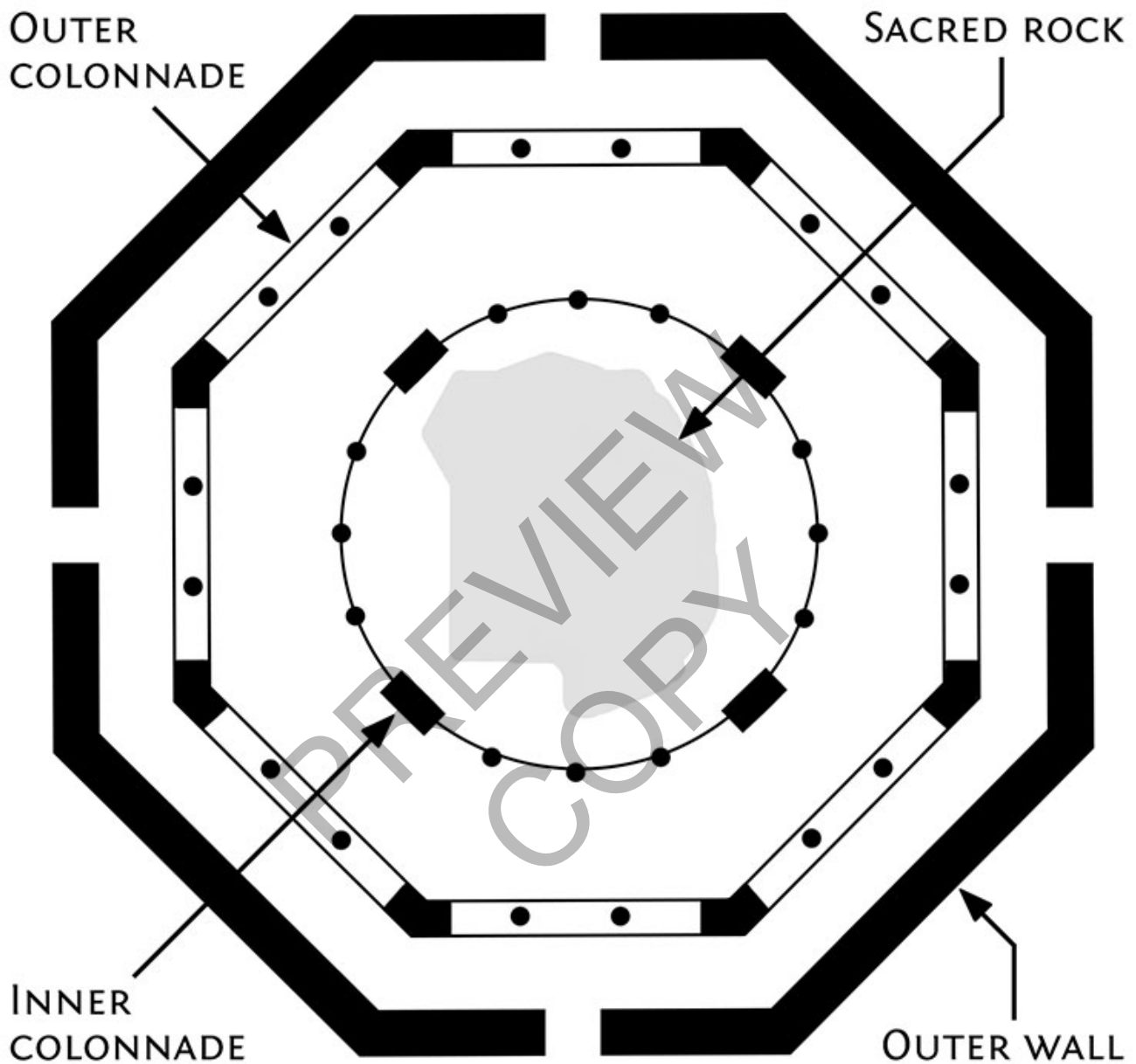


Fig. 35. Layout, Dome of the Rock.

As one of the earliest Islamic structures, the Dome of the Rock played a critical role in shaping the Islamic architectural aesthetic and served as a prototype for subsequent structures.

Layout

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as that of figurative depictions in Christian decoration. Interestingly, the inscriptions necessitated by Islam's aniconic orientation make explicit those messages that are implicit in Christian iconography.

- **The builder's original intentions.** Since inscriptions were purposefully chosen to communicate a specific message at a particular location, they often provide keen insight into the religious and political motivations of the builder.

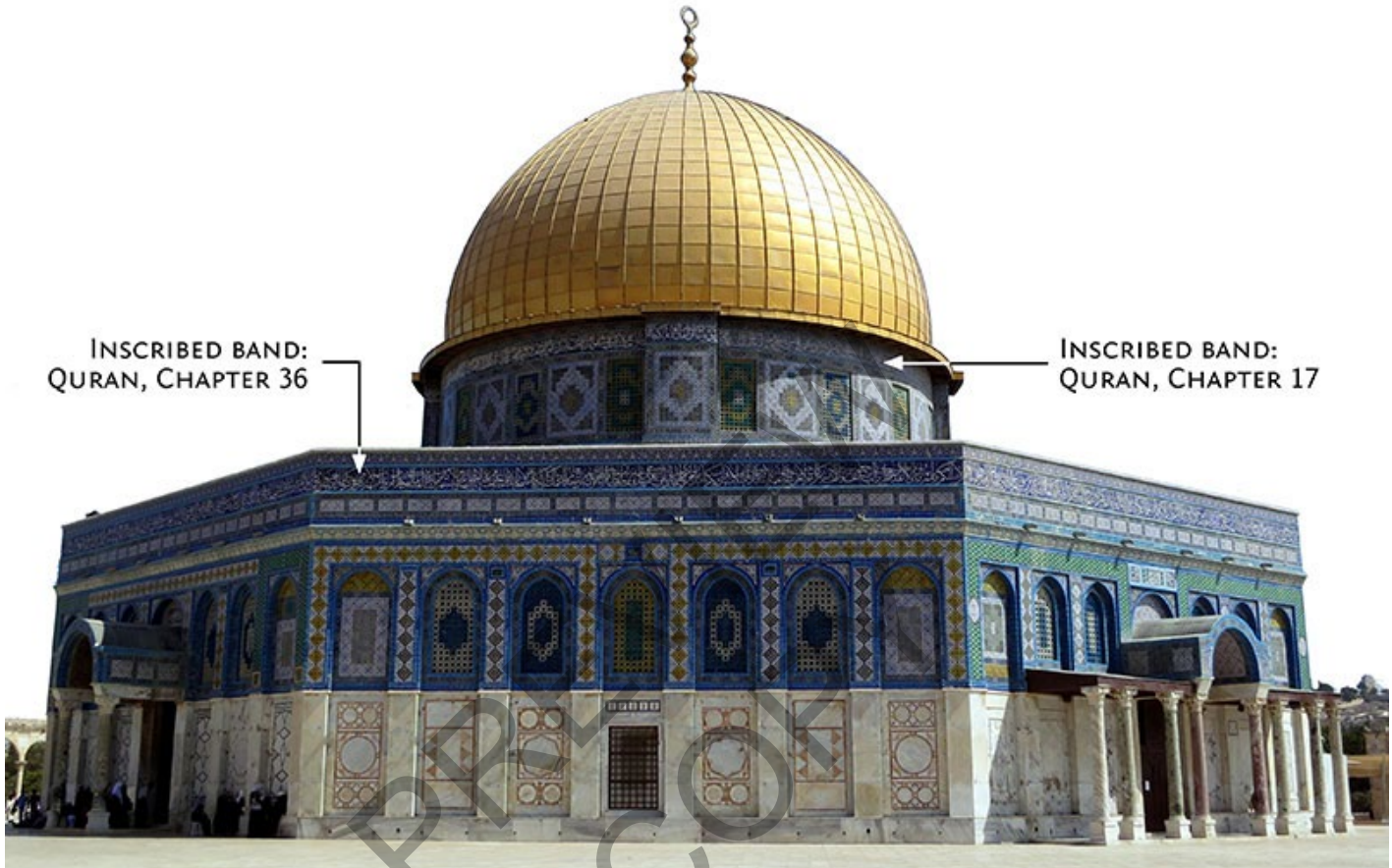


Fig. 45. Inscription locations, Dome of the Rock.

Two Primary Exterior Inscriptions

There are two prominent inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock's exterior (**Fig. 45**).

First inscription: along the upper edge of the octagon

It contains excerpts, in Kufic script, from Chapter 36 of the Quran, Ya Sin. Visit this [link](#) for a complete translation. Here is an excerpt (Book 36 chapters 81-83):

Is not He who created the heavens and the earth
able to create the likes of them?
Yes, it is so; and He is the Knowing Creator.

His command is only when He intends a thing that
He says to it, "Be," and it is.
So exalted is He in whose hand is the realm of all things,
and to Him you will be returned.

Second inscription: Along the upper edge of the drum

It contains excerpts, again in Kufic, from Chapter 17 of the Quran, Muhammad's Night Journey. Visit [this link](#) for a complete translation. Here is an excerpt (Book 17 chapter 1):

Glory to Allah who did take His servant for a journey by night
from the Sacred Mosque [in Mecca]
to the farthest Mosque [Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem],
whose precincts we did bless,
in order that we might show Him some of our signs:
for He is the one who heareth and seeth all things.

Interior Inscription

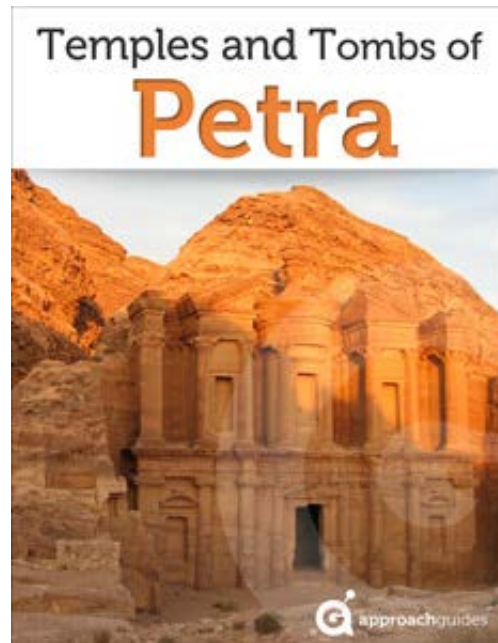
On the interior of the Dome of the Rock, there is a **extensive founding inscription** located in the upper part of the octagonal (outer) ambulatory's arcade. It contains passages from the Quran laying out the mission of the Prophet Muhammad: complete the divine revelation given to Jews and Christians and bring them to the true faith. An excerpt from this founding inscription is provided in the next section entitled "Political Significance."

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Temples & Tombs of Petra
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Jerusalem Reading List

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Here are just a few of our Jerusalem recommendations ([see the complete list](#)):

- **History of God** Important book on the history of the montheistic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. *By Karen Armstrong.*
- **"Chef's Guide to Eating in Jerusalem"** London-based chef and restaurateur Yotem Ottolenghi, who grew up in the Jewish west side of Jerusalem, gives his tips. *By Emily Brennan.*
- **King David** Just for kids! Children's history of the life of King David. *By Nancy I. Sanders.*

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Los Angeles Times

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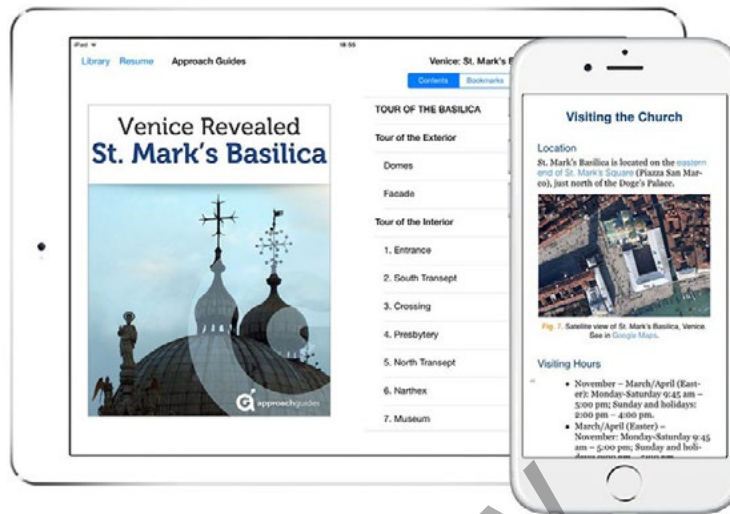
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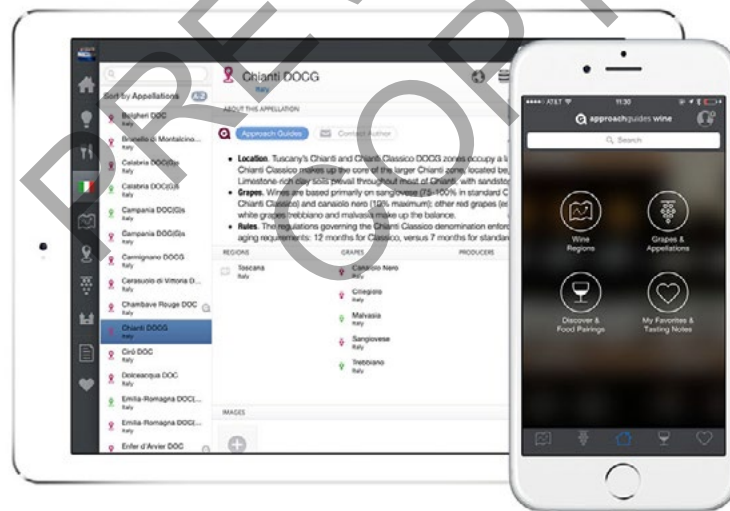
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