

Chapter III

Upon Reading al-Azraqi*

It is altogether curious that so little scholarship has been devoted to the physical features of Mecca in early Islamic times. Except for the informative and detailed entries in the two editions of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*,¹ most writing on Mecca has been concerned either with its socioeconomic and religious-cultural setting at the time of the Revelation to Muhammad or, even more often, with the pilgrimage, its complex liturgical practices, its concomitant economic and other practical problems, and, especially in more recent times, the powerfully moving emotional and spiritual experiences of the faithful on this holiest of journeys.²

Yet, however fascinating and emotionally charged the practices and symbolic associations of the pilgrimage might be, they are only one part of the impact the holy city has on the pilgrim. The Ka'ba, the Masjid al-Haram, or Sacred Mosque, surrounding it, and the whole city of Mecca are today, as they were in the past, part of a common visual memory of the Muslim community, even if colored by the emotional make-up and sensitivities of each particular individual. Every Muslim has in common an awareness of its forms and spatial compositions.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, photographs and films have been available to serve as reminders of the holy city and of the events taking place in it. In earlier centuries people relied on printed, stenciled, drawn and painted pictures rendered on paper, cloth, tile, stone, or any other available material for the images of Mecca that became the souvenirs or mementos that were the permanent signs of a believer's association with the city of the qibla.³

* First published in *Muqarnas*, 3 (1986), pp. 1–7.

¹ In the second edition the key article is “Ka’ba” by J. Jomier and A. Wensinck, but the article “Mekka” in the first edition contains considerable additional information.

² The fundamental study is still that of M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Le Pèlerinage à la Mekke* (Paris, 1923); classic accounts of pre-contemporary times are C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Het Mekkaansche Fest* (Leiden, 1880), Muhammad L. al-Batanuni, *al-Rihla al-Hijaziya* (Cairo, 1329H), and Rif'at Pasha, *Mir'at al-Haramayn* (Cairo, 1925). A particularly striking contemporary Muslim account is Abdel Magid Turki and Hadj Rabah Souami, *Récits de pèlerinage à la Mekke* (Paris, 1979); Malcolm X's experience of brotherhood during the pilgrimage is one of the most moving passages of his autobiography. It would be most desirable to have a good historical anthology of pilgrimage accounts.

These representations are, however, for the most part very conventional and stereotyped and, pending detailed investigation, contribute very little to an understanding of the holy city's physical character and evolution. They are pious images, not historical documents, and reflect a standard, toponymically accurate but visually simplified vision of a rectangle with the places of commemorative or liturgical importance clearly marked. The contrast between them and the complicated and frequently difficult to interpret sixth-century Byzantine pials from Jerusalem is striking.⁴ Furthermore, the Muslim images all belong to a time when the sanctuary had acquired more or less the shape it would keep until the momentous and irreversible transformations of recent decades, a shape fixed in its major features by the end of the ninth century. Even the principal monuments punctuating the holy place had been built by the fifteenth century, and such stylistic variations as occurred during reconstructions were rarely, if ever, recorded on images. They were not meant to be descriptions of places, but evocations of holiness, and they do not provide any sense of the range of emotion or reaction the faithful experienced as they reached the sanctuary, nor do they express the complex memories carried away by pilgrims afterward. There is nothing in these depictions that is comparable in range to Ibn Jubayr's rapturous but very precise description studded with Qur'anic quotations,⁵ Ibn Battuta's chatty but equally concrete account full of stories and minor human events,⁶ Ibn Khaldun's perfunctory statement with a long reference to the letters he received and the important people he met in Mecca,⁷ or Ibn al-Arabi's transformation of the holy place and of the pilgrimage into a stunning cosmological vision.⁸ But even these literary examples are relatively late (the earliest author, Ibn Jubayr, was born in 1145); they belong to essentially post-Fatimid centuries, when the Muslim world had fully developed a material culture of piety around Mecca and probably other religious sanctuaries as well.⁹

³ There has never been, to my knowledge, any attempt to gather together a corpus of representations of Mecca in Islamic art. The most common examples are on Ottoman tiles, K. Erdmann, "Ka'bah-Fliesen," *Ars Orientalis*, 3 (1959), pp. 192–7, with bibliography to that year. The earliest example known to me, dated 498 (1098), is a small basalt plaque in the Baghdad museum, which had the accession number 'ayn 1149 when I saw it in 1956. To my knowledge it is not published, and my notes of over a quarter of a century ago indicate that the dating inscription may not be contemporary with the object. Vincenza Strita, "A Ka'bah Picture in the Iraq Museum," *Sumer Journal*, 32 (1976), pp. 195–201.

⁴ André Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre-Sainte* (Paris, 1958); D. Barag and J. Wilkinson, "The Monza-Bobbio Flasks and the Holy Sepulchre," *Levant*, 6 (1974).

⁵ Ibn Jobair, *Voyages*, trans. M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes (Paris, 1949), pp. 93 ff.

⁶ Ibn Battuta, *Voyages*, ed. C. Defremery and B. R. Sanguinetti (Paris, 1969), I, pp. 303 ff.

⁷ Ibn Khaldun, *Le Voyage d'Occident et d'Orient*, trans. A. Cheddadi (Paris, 1980), pp. 159 ff.

⁸ See the lengthy commentary on the appropriate passages in the *Futuhāt* by C. A. Gilis, *La Doctrine initiatique du pèlerinage* (Paris, 1982).

⁹ Needless to say, this material culture of piety has not been investigated in any systematic way. See Janine Sourdél-Thomine, "Clefs et serrures de la Ka'ba," *Revue des Etudes*

What happened to the Meccan sanctuary between the Prophet's glorious and official return to it in 631 and the, properly speaking, medieval restructuring of the Muslim world from the eleventh century onward? Is it possible to imagine the attitudes of people during the formative centuries of Islam toward the shape, the physical form, of their holiest sanctuary? The investigation I am proposing, of which this essay is only a very preliminary step, has as its long-range objective an understanding of the interplay between specific building activities – the erection of a colonnade or of a [2] portico, the repaving of a court, the addition of some decoration – which can easily be documented through an inscription or a chronicle's reference, and the practical, ideological, pietistic and symbolic motivations and explanations attached to these activities. This type of investigation may allow us little by little to develop a profile of the synchronic and diachronic mental attitudes of Muslims and of the relationship between those attitudes and architecture. Because of its overwhelming importance to Muslims, the Haram in Mecca can serve as an exemplar for this sort of investigation, and whatever hypotheses or conclusions can be reached for Mecca should apply to other holy buildings and places as well.

There is no available archaeological record for the Haram, and none is likely to be forthcoming. We are therefore restricted to incidental references in chronicles, to the factual but, with a partial exception in the case of Maqdisi, remarkably sober descriptions in tenth-century geographies,¹⁰ and to the lengthy volume *Kitab Akhbar Makka* ("Book of Information on Mecca") by Abu al-Walid Muhammad b. 'Abdallah b. 'Ali al-Azraqi.¹¹ The book was put together before 865 by a native of Mecca claiming descent

Islamiques, 39 (1971), pp. 29 ff.; D. Sourdel and J. Sourdel-Thomine, "Nouveaux documents sur l'histoire religieuse et sociale de Damas," *ibid.*, 32 (1962), pp. 1–25. For other sanctuaries, also late, there is the extraordinary luster plaque in the Musée de la Céramique at Sèvres published by Chahriyar Adle, "Un diptyque de fondation en céramique lustrée," *Art et société dans le monde iranien*, C. Adle, ed. (Paris, 1982), pp. 199–218. I am sure that a reexamination of ceramics, metal objects and possibly textiles will yield interesting results for a corpus of pious objects.

¹⁰ On these remarkable writers in general, see André Miquel, *La Géographie humaine du monde musulman*, 3 vols (Paris, 1967–80). Specific passages are: Ibn Rusteh, *Les Atours précieux* (Cairo, 1955), pp. 21–62, with historical, topographical and pietistic notations, the latter taken from *adab* literature; Maqdisi, *Absan al-Taqasim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim (Descriptio Imperii Moslemici)*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1906), pp. 71 ff.; Ibn Hauqal, *Configuration de la terre*, trans. J. H. Kramers and G. Wiet (Paris, 1964), 1, pp. 26 ff. I am leaving aside the issue of the relationship between geographers and litterateurs like al Jahiz, Ibn Qutayba, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, and others, who do occasionally mention the Arabian sanctuary, because they set it within a frame of reference which is less immediately involved with the specifics of the sanctuary's form, but much more with its meaning in the consciousness of a man of culture. For the long-range objective of understanding the ethos of a period, however, these authors will also need investigation.

¹¹ Edited by F. Wüstenfeld as vol. 1 of the *Geschichte der Stadt Mekka* (Leipzig, 1858; photo reprints, Beirut, n.d.).

from a Byzantine soldier who was taken prisoner during the Persian wars of the seventh century. It is primarily a text completed by a member of his family before 837, but, as preserved and edited, also includes references from as late as 922–3. It was probably revised by a pupil of al-Azraqi called al-Khuza‘i.¹² Although there is some evidence that works on Mecca and on the Ka‘ba were written earlier, including one by Wahb ibn Munabbih in the early eighth century,¹³ none has survived. Azraqi’s mid-ninth-century work is therefore not only the earliest extant book on Mecca, but the earliest preserved example of a book devoted to a single city. An added peculiarity is that it does not deal at all with the city’s notables, as most Arabic literature on cities does, but with its buildings and their history. By its very nature, therefore, it establishes that Mecca’s physical character and evolution had primacy over the people who lived in it.

Several recent studies on early Muslim writers have begun to formulate methods for investigating written sources that will define the attitudes of their authors and explain the experiences and thoughts that lie behind a book’s content and structure.¹⁴ Such investigations can be of great value to the historian and interpreter of visual forms, but they also require complex and painstaking philological, linguistic, critical and historical inquiries that are far removed from the art historian’s or archaeologist’s concerns and competence.

A brief description of al-Azraqi’s work will suggest the type of information that could be extracted from a literary and structural analysis of this kind. Structurally the book can be divided into four unequal parts: the first covers the Ka‘ba from the Creation to the Yemenis’ attempt to destroy the Ka‘ba late in the sixth century (pp. 1–84); the second, the “historical” Ka‘ba and the immediately surrounding holy spots (Maqam Ibrahim, Zemzem well) from the time of their reconstruction by the Quraysh before the Revelation to al-Azraqi’s time, with sections on the chronology, characteristics and liturgical or daily uses of the holy places (pp. 84–301); the third, the Masjid al-Haram, i.e., the open space which surrounds the Ka‘ba and which is entirely a Muslim creation (pp. 301–445); and the fourth, the living quarters of the city and a few miscellaneous items (pp. 445–505).

Except for the last section, which is fairly straightforward and enumerative, each part consists of a large number of chapters, some as long as ten or fifteen pages, some as short as a paragraph or a few lines. Some are purely descriptive, either of a building or of a fragment of a building (e.g., the nails and the gutter

¹² See Wüstenfeld’s introduction and Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, 1 (Leiden, 1967), pp. 339 ff.

¹³ Azraqi, *Akbbār*, p. 9.

¹⁴ Mas‘udi has been studied by Ahmad M. H. Shboul, *Al-Mas‘udi and His World* (London, 1979), and by T. Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography* (Binghampton, 1975). For Bayhaqi, see Marilyn R. Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative* (Columbus, 1980). For al-Jurjani, see Kemal Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjani’s Theory of Poetic Imagery* (Warminster, 1979).

of the Ka'ba); some deal with an event (e.g., the Yemeni invasion) or with a sequence of events (e.g., the various pieces of cloth put on the Ka'ba and the scents sprayed on it over several centuries), or with good or bad practices and obligations (e.g., on p. 316, the virtue of circumambulating the Ka'ba in the rain). In other words, the book is neither an account in chronological sequence nor is it an orderly description of space. There is a constant interplay between specific moments, usually established quite precisely with names and dates when known, and equally specific places in the sanctuary. It is as though the understanding of something seen requires its connection with a historical or a mythical event, often drawn from the lives of Abraham or Hagar, which were connected with so many places in Mecca.

The same events are repeated several times, and while a coherent chronology can be derived from al-Azraqi's account, establishing a sequence of events does not seem to be its main point. Only a careful structural analysis of many passages¹⁵ in al-Azraqi's book and their collation with other historical or religious sources would reveal whether he was using events to explain anomalous as well as regular features and practices, or whether he was seeking to connect sacred and, later, [3] human and dynastic history with the physical features of the sanctuary.

Each of his chapters seems to answer a question: why are the nails of the Ka'ba gilt? What is, or was, inside the Ka'ba? Why is there a small dome over the Maqam Ibrahim? Can one catch one of the pigeons nestled in the courtyard? If this colonnade was built by order of the caliph al-Ma'mun, what was there earlier? Who is asking the questions, why he is doing so, and especially whether al-Azraqi was reflecting one, two, or more systematic interpretations of the holiest place in Islam are the questions we should ask, however. Once answers, even hypothetical ones, to them can be given, we will be closer than we now are to understanding early medieval Mecca through the eyes of those who lived there. Perhaps we can then better understand the architectural decisions made for its sanctuary.

Because its subject is so closely tied to a particular architectural ensemble, al-Azraqi's text is replete with architectural terms pertaining to a building's construction as well as its appearance. It is, therefore, a prime source for the architectural vocabulary of the ninth century, at least the one prevalent in the Arabian peninsula. It probably reflects the high Arabic of the central lands of the Fertile Crescent, but not necessarily the technical language being developed, also in Arabic, in eastern Iran.¹⁶ Three passages can be used

¹⁵ I have in mind the type of analysis carried out by Kemal Abu Deeb, "Toward a Structural Analysis," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 6 (1975), pp. 148–84, and sketched recently by A. Hamori, "The Comic Romance from the Thousand and One Nights," *Arabica*, 30 (1983), pp. 38–56.

¹⁶ Oleg Grabar and Renata Holod, "A Tenth-Century Source for Architecture," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* (Eucharisterion, Essays Presented to Omeljan Pritsak), 3–4 (1979–80), pp. 310–19.

to illustrate both the quality and the limitations of the information on vocabulary that al-Azraqi can provide.

The first passage is an account of the church allegedly built in San'a by Abraha, a more or less legendary Christian, probably Ethiopian, king who in the second half of the sixth century sought to conquer Mecca.¹⁷ The account is fictional, as are the main accounts of the castle of Ghumdan, also in San'a.¹⁸ Neither al-Azraqi nor his immediate sources had ever seen the church, or even its ruins – assuming it ever existed. Nevertheless, for reasons which are not entirely clear but which may well have involved the then prevalent mythology about pre-Islamic architecture in Yemen, al-Azraqi's description is so precise that R. B. Serjeant was able to sketch out a reconstruction from it.¹⁹

The building consisted of a large columnar hall (*bayt*), followed by a more formal hall (*iwan*)²⁰ and then by a domed one (*qubba*). The sequence suggests a long church of a sort that would not have been impossible within the typology of early churches removed from the main urban centers of the Mediterranean. But a more interesting point lies in the three terms – *bayt*, *iwan*, and *qubba* – used to define the parts of the elaborate building. One of them refers to a form, the other two to functions, but all three are in standard use in early Arabic texts for defining (usually secular) built and covered spaces, and must correspond to some way of perceiving and organizing one's perception of architectural ensembles.

On a more technical level, this same passage provides a vocabulary for elements of construction – *kibs* (platform?), *sur* and *ha'it* (two types of walls, probably to be differentiated as outer wall and partition), and *daraj* (steps), and for materials and ways of building, including a very precise description of a closely fitted stone masonry (*mutabaqah*). It also makes several references to decoration – either in general, as with the word *manqush*, or more specifically, as in the description of crosses decorated with mosaics and in a technique known as *balaq*, which channels the light of the sun and of the moon inside the dome.

Although such descriptions of long-gone monuments must have been couched in terms that were understandable to a ninth-century reader, the same terms are used in literary accounts of ancient masterpieces, and only a comparative study of several such texts will permit the clear separation between literary clichés and contemporary facts. No such problem exists

¹⁷ Azraqi, *Akhbar*, pp. 88–91. Barbara Finster and Jürgen Schmidt, "Die Kirche des Abraha im San'a," Norbert Nebes, ed. *Arabia Felix* (Wiesbaden, 1994), pp. 67–85.

¹⁸ Al-Hamdani, *Iklil*, trans. N. A. Faris, *The Antiquities of South Arabia* (Princeton, 1938).

¹⁹ R. B. Serjeant and R. Lewcock, *San'a* (London, 1983), pp. 45–47.

²⁰ I am less sure than Serjeant is that *iwan* should be translated as "arched space" and maintain my earlier position (s.v. "Iwan" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn) that in classical times the word referred to a function rather than to a form. Serjeant's emendations of al-Azraqi's text are all eminently reasonable, even if at times hypothetical.

with those passages in al-Azraqi which deal with roughly contemporary constructions.²¹ There we can cull a wonderful example of a process of construction. When the caliph al-Mahdi decides to enlarge the mosque, he calls surveyors (*muhandisun*) for advice; spears (*rimah*) are used as markers; private properties are expropriated; a budget is fixed; materials such as columns are brought by boat from Syria; a flood during construction compels a modification of levels, for which surveyors are brought in again; some supports (*asatin*) are built with marble, and arcades are roofed with gilded and decorated wood; other supports are of stone.²² Al-Azraqi's description of the gates of the Haram is so precise as to have made it possible for Jonathan Bloom to propose a reconstruction for them,²³ but such reconstructions are equally possible for colonnades, minarets, ceilings, cornices, inscriptions, ornaments and even light fixtures. The whole sanctuary is broken down into its constituent elements, and these elements are then enumerated, measured and described. But in order to make these reconstructions plausible in all details, the Meccan information must be related to monuments and descriptions from other places of contemporary [4] building activities, and its vocabulary compared with whatever is known to have been in use elsewhere.

In addition to legendary accounts of the past and descriptions of contemporary practices and activities, al-Azraqi's account also contributes to our knowledge of architectural terminology and architectural and religious history when it deals with particularly complex features of the sanctuary in which old pre-Islamic practices had not been entirely transformed into a set Muslim liturgy. Such is the case of the Zemzem well and of the area around it, which so puzzled Gaudefroy-Demombynes²⁴ and in which the following curious sequence of constructions took place.²⁵ Adjoining the well with its two basins was the *majlis* (usually meaning at this time a reception hall) of Ibn 'Abbas, whose family had some sort of control over the well. During the rule of the first 'Abbasid caliph, al-Saffah (749–54), the governor of Mecca put a dome (*qubba*) over the *majlis*. In the reign of al-Mansur (754–75), two *shubbak* (literally openings or windows, but usually interpreted to mean wooden screens) were built around the well, and under al-Mahdi (775–81), a *kanisa* (literally "church," interpreted as "*petite loge*" by Gaudefroy-Demombynes) was built in the domed room. As a curiosity, al-Azraqi adds that it was built by a carpenter (whose name he gives) brought from Iraq by the 'Abbasid governor, and that this carpenter also made a roof and a door for the governor's house.

²¹ Azraqi, *Akhbar*, pp. 312 ff., among several places.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 317–19; for another example of process, see p. 344.

²³ Jonathan Bloom, "The Mosque of al-Hakim in Cairo," *Muqarnas*, 1 (1983), pp. 25–6.

²⁴ Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, pp. 71 ff.

²⁵ Azraqi, *Akhbar*, pp. 299–300.

This passage has four terms with architectural connotations, of which only one – *qubba* – can be understood in its obvious and common meaning of dome. For two others, some alternative or secondary meaning must be found, and for the fourth, *kanisa*, a meaning has to be invented. It is likely that in this account of structures that had been built a hundred years before al-Azraqi's time, our chronicler was quoting or repeating a terminology which no longer made sense, for, as we shall see, the whole setting of the sanctuary was changing rapidly in the second half of the eighth century. His expressions, the functions which would have been associated with them, and the forms they imply must therefore be replaced, if at all possible, in a very precise context of early 'Abbasid history.

The full elucidation of the issues raised by all the examples I have so far given would require considerable linguistic, philological and historical investigation in many different sources. Alongside the broad structural problems raised earlier, whose solution would situate the perspective from which al-Azraqi wrote, such investigations would do more than identify a technical vocabulary of forms and functions; they would also provide what might be called the "analytical process" of a ninth-century observer, a unique process no doubt, but one whose perception and understanding can only be formulated within the verbal and conceptual competence of a time.

A final series of remarks derived from reading a section of al-Azraqi's text will clarify a further methodological point I am trying to make. There is a fascinating interplay in the *Akhbar* between events recalled by the chronicler and the visual perception of the sanctuary in his time, and it is this interplay which becomes the recorded history of the sanctuary. The section deals with the development of the mosque proper, that is, the area that eventually became the large open space around the initial and mostly pre-Islamic core of holy places.²⁶ For it the following sequence can be reconstructed:

1. Under the righteous caliphs 'Umar (634–44) and 'Uthman (644–56), a few houses adjoining the Ka'ba and the few holy spaces in its immediate vicinity were bought and razed, and a low wall or fence (*jidar qasir*) was marked out (*ahatta*); there was no covered (*musaqqaḥ*) area anywhere.
2. When Ibn Zubayr ruled over Mecca (680–92), he acquired a few more houses and even parts of houses (including one belonging to an ancestor of al-Azraqi) and enlarged the sacred space, but without altering its simple character. Most of the account actually deals with the location of the old houses in the mosque of al-Azraqi's time; it also includes an obscure explanation of how to walk backwards from the corner with the Black Stone.
3. The Umayyads did not modify the size of the mosque, but they did transform its character. Both 'Abd al-Malik (685–705) and al-Walid

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 306 ff.

(705–15) are credited with beautification (*husna*), and it is probable that we are dealing with a single activity which lasted many years. The outer walls were raised and a covered area was built, consisting probably of a portico with a wooden ceiling; the capitals or upper parts (*ru'us*) of the supports (*asatin*, piers or columns) were gilt. Al-Walid is remembered for having covered supports with marble, and soffits or spandrels (*wajh al-tayqan*) with mosaics; he also built its crenellations and moldings, if this is the correct way of interpreting the word *shurrafat*.²⁷ It is interesting to note that the verb used to mean “cover,” as with marble, is *azzara*, which means to “veil” or to “cover with a piece of clothing.” Elsewhere in the text, [5] the most common verb for “decorating a surface” is *albasa*, “to clothe.”

4. Between 754 and 758, a major program of construction was ordered by the caliph al-Ma'mun. It was commemorated by a triumphal inscription on a newly built gate in black mosaic cubes on a gold background, and one of its two qur'anic quotations (3:96) proclaims that “the first house appointed to Me was the one at Bakka” (i.e., the Ka'ba).²⁸ It consisted of increases in area in whatever directions were available through the acquisition of houses; in extensive decoration; and in the building of formal gates and of a *manara* (minaret), whatever was meant by that term at the time.
5. The caliph al-Mahdi (775–85) went on a pilgrimage in 776–7 and immediately undertook a major program of repairs and modifications of the usual sort. It is described in such detail by al-Azraqi that it should be possible to sketch out a full reconstruction, if not of the whole building, at least of the main units (gates, vaulted arcades, open spaces) which were its constituent parts. Four years later, in 780–81, al-Mahdi returned to Mecca and, having inspected the work done, saw that “the Ka'ba was on one side (*fi shiqq*) of the mosque; he did not like that and wished that it be in the middle (*mutawassata*) of the mosque.”²⁹ He called in surveyors and architects, bought houses, fixed the wadi going through the mosque so that it would not flood as often as it was wont to do, had columns brought from Egypt and Syria, and altogether created a complete monument with the Ka'ba in the center, arcades around an open space, a minaret, and gates leading into various parts of the city.³⁰ Al-Azraqi then proceeds to detailed descriptions of the architectural elements of the *masjid*, eventually providing a list of such changes or repairs as occurred between 781 and his own time, and

²⁷ Cornice is also possible.

²⁸ E. Combe et al., *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe* (henceforth *RCEA*), 1 (Cairo, 1931), no. 40; Azraqi, *Akhbar*, pp. 311–12.

²⁹ Azraqi, *Akhbar*, p. 317.

³⁰ Some of these building activities have been recorded in inscriptions listed by Ibn Jubayr, *RCEA*, nos 49 ff.

discusses the rules, practices and regulations affecting behavior in what is both the congregational mosque of a city and the sacred space around that unique holy place.

This sequence of five changes is of considerable interest for many reasons. One is that nearly every other feature of Mecca, as remembered by al-Azraqi, was affected by roughly the same set of interventions: those made by the Prophet and his immediate successors; by Ibn Zubayr, the Meccan aristocrat who sought to establish his city as the center of Islam; by the Umayyads, primarily al-Walid; and by al-Mansur, and al-Mahdi, the second and third 'Abbasid caliphs (one of whom was also the founder of Baghdad). But this raises a question: why were so many major modifications made to the mosque over a period of not more than five generations? One explanation may simply be that the growth of Islam and the presumed increase in the number of pilgrims required an ever-larger space. That this was so can hardly be questioned. But, in addition to that, each of these interventions in the mosque and elsewhere also seems to have had a different motive behind it. The first caliphs merely wanted to maintain the status quo established by the Prophet and to accommodate the still barely elaborated rites of the pilgrimage.³¹ Ibn Zubayr had more complex ambitions, and he alone rebuilt the Ka'ba as it allegedly had been before the Quraysh rule over the city.³² A full investigation of his ideological and other motives is sorely needed. The Umayyads were remarkably inactive in Mecca. They did, of course, rebuild the Ka'ba as it had been in the Prophet's time, but the remainder of their work either involved ornamentation and is known only through statements smacking of literary clichés, which occur in many accounts of their buildings, or else it was downright blasphemous, as when one of their governors downgraded the Zemzem well in order to dig a well with sweeter water.³³ It was the early 'Abbasids who first, under al-Mansur, officially proclaimed the unique holiness of the Ka'ba and built a full-fledged mosque around it, and then, under al-Mahdi, reached the aesthetic decision to make of it a true monument.

At this stage of scholarship, we can only speculate as to why it was al-Mansur and al-Mahdi who so deliberately formalized the sacred mosque and gave it a visual and compositional definition. Yet it is not an accident that

³¹ Azraqi, *Akhbar*, p. 234, for a curiously skeptical statement by Caliph 'Umar about the real holiness of the Black Stone. Had he not seen the Prophet's veneration for it, says 'Umar, he would not have believed in it. For a model analysis of the formation of Muslim practices, see Klaus Lech, *Geschichte des islamischen Kultus: I. Das Ramadan Fasten* (Wiesbaden, 1979).

³² M. Ibrahim, "Social and Economic Conditions in Pre-Islamic Mecca," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 24 (1982), p. 343, for an interesting approach.

³³ Azraqi, *Akhbar*, pp. 339–40; Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, pp. 74–5 and p. 98, n. 3; for an interesting commentary of another Umayyad attempt at innovation based on Azraqi, p. 461.

the patron of Baghdad, with its palace complex in the center of an urban ring, also transformed the sanctuary of Mecca into a large space around a holy place. But it is curious that both al-Mansur and al-Mahdi had traveled to Jerusalem, had seen there a vast and only partially rebuilt esplanade with a stunning Umayyad monument in its psychological, if not actual, center, and made major contributions to its monuments. The building up of Mecca's sacred mosque into the shape it finally acquired can perhaps best be seen as the result of a new taste for centralized planning developed by the early 'Abbasids and of the very precise memory of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. This suggestion introduces yet another element in the visual as well as ideological contest or parallelism between the two holy cities in the seventh and eighth centuries.³⁴

Beyond this admittedly speculative possibility, the 'Abbasid formulation of Mecca as a shrine, almost a dynastic one in part, explains the official use of the Ka'ba by Harun al-Rashid when he put his political [6] testament there and by al-Ma'mun when he filled it with treasures from conquered Eastern potentates. It also explains the succession of repairs and additions made to the mosque throughout the ninth century, and, on a more practically pious level, the development of the Darb Zubayda, the great road for pilgrims from Iraq to Mecca. While describing what he saw, al-Azraqi reflected the formal ideology of 'Abbasid power and the incorporation of Mecca within it.

Thus from practical issues of architectural practice and vocabulary to speculation about the relationship between holy places and the growth of an 'Abbasid aesthetic, al-Azraqi's text offers a mine of information which has hardly been tapped and whose full exploitation requires a variety of investigations barely sketched out in these remarks. The uniqueness of Mecca led to a unique source about it, but, perhaps more important, an analysis of al-Azraqi's text requires a modification of Gaudefroy-Demombynes's early judgment that the Meccan sanctuary was a "monument built without any method."³⁵ Its "method" can be understood once the several discrete moments of its history can be both visually and ideologically isolated.

³⁴ I expect soon to return to the topic in a far more systematic way, but I have discussed some of the religious associations common to both places in "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Ars Orientalis*, 3 (1957); there are many more.

³⁵ Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, p. 116.

