

◆ **Al-Haram Ash-Sharif Area**

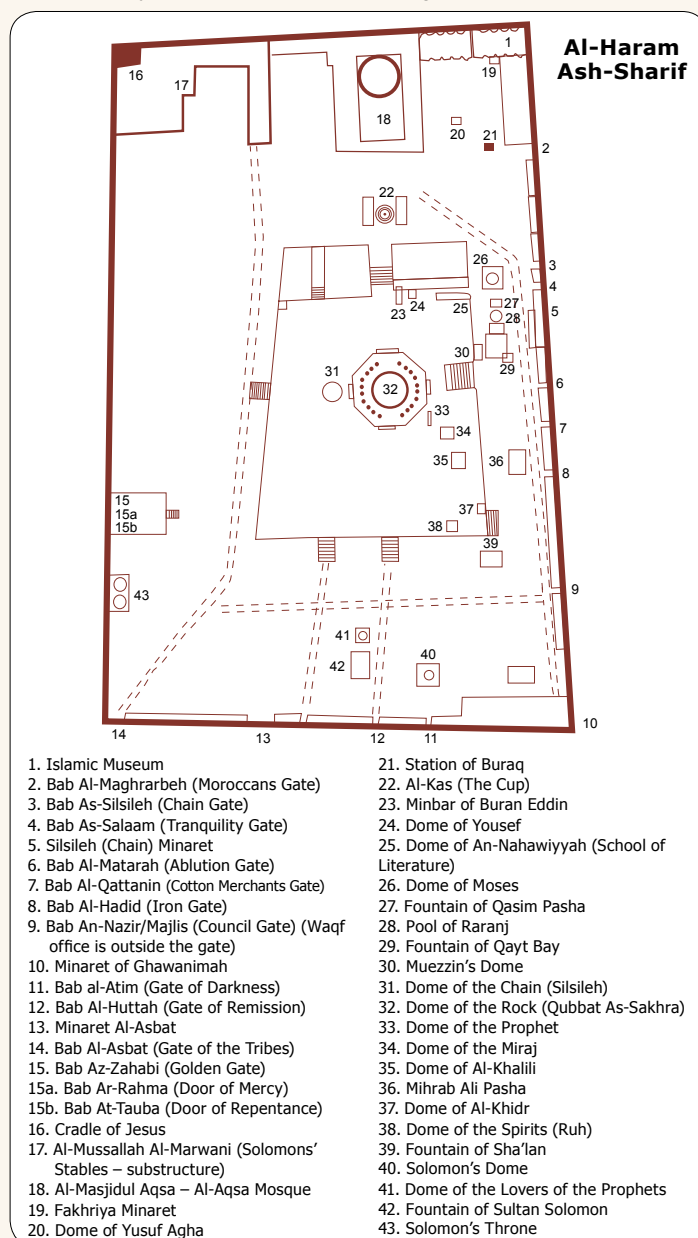
Al-Haram Ash-Sharif, the sacred place that Jews refer to as the 'Temple Mount,' has aroused great religious passion throughout the history of Jerusalem. Jewish and Muslim confrontations focusing on the site, beginning in the 19th Century and continuing until the present, have escalated throughout the past decades and resulted in numerous political crises and violent clashes. These included, *inter alia*, the aforementioned riots of 1929, caused by a dispute over prayer arrangements at Al-Buraq Wall, the destruction of the entire Moroccan (Mughrabi) Quarter to create the 'Wailing Wall' plaza in the aftermath of the War of 1967, the unrest of 1969 that followed the attempt by an Australian tourist to burn down Al-Aqsa Mosque, the 1990 Al-Aqsa Massacre resulting from attempts by Jewish extremists to lay the cornerstone for the Temple, the unrest that followed the opening of the Hasmonean Tunnel by the Israeli Government in 1996, and the eruption of the second (Al-Aqsa) *Intifada* in September 2000, sparked by the provocative visit of Ariel Sharon to Al-Haram Ash-Sharif on the 28th of that month.



Most recently, the excavation work that Israel began on 5 Feb. 2007 near Al-Buraq Wall, adjacent to Al-Haram Ash-Sharif, has come to represent, as far as the Palestinians and the Arab and Muslim worlds are concerned, yet another ominous move on the part of Israel to 'Judaize' Jerusalem. The work, which involves the destruction of a historic pedestrian bridge connecting the Mughrabi Quarter to the **Mughrabi Gate**, an Al-Haram Ash-Sharif gate facing westward, and its subsequent reconstruction, was suspended temporarily on 11 Feb. due to its controversial nature and the outrage it sparked among Muslims around the world, not least of all because the gate has been used in the past by Israeli forces and various Jewish groups as their main point of entry into the Al-Aqsa compound. Interestingly, the excavation work that has taken place to date, though carried out by the Jerusalem Municipality, was not authorized by the Ministry of Antiquities and was funded by the extremist El 'Ad settler group.



Recent excavation near Mughrabi Gate



The 36-acre **HARAM ASH-SHARIF** ('Noble Sanctuary') is the third holiest site in Islam. The compound, which for 16 months acted as the first *qiblah* (prayer direction), comprises the walls and minarets that mark the parameters of Al-Aqsa Mosque, the aesthetically magnificent Dome of the Rock (As-Sakhra Mosque), historical Islamic schools, the western corridors, subterranean prayer halls, fountains, gardens, the southern most building (erroneously referred to as Al-Aqsa Mosque), and numerous other domes and structures, such as the Dome of the Grammarians, which today hosts the offices of the Chief Qadi.

For Jews, the area is the "**Temple Mount**," i.e., the site of the first (destroyed around 587 BCE) and second (destroyed in 70 CE) temples in Jerusalem as well as the site of the third and final temple, to be rebuilt with the coming of the Messiah.