

THE FOUNDATION INSCRIPTION OF THE Umayyad MOSQUE AS THE SOURCE OF HISTORY OF DESTRUCTION OF THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN IN DAMASCUS BY MUSLIMS

Summary

At the time of the Muslim conquest of Damascus, the main holy place in this city was a monumental basilica dedicated to St. John the Baptist. The church which had formerly stood on the site of Roman Jupiter's Temple incorporated materials from the previous monument including part of the temenos wall. In a crypt-chapel was placed the most precious holy relic of Damascus: the head of the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist.

The church of St. John, over which Christians of Damascus had dispute with Abd al-Malik, had been demolished on the orders this Walid I. In the basilica's place this caliph ordered to built new mosque.

One of the sources for the Historical researches of destruction of the church of St. John was the foundation inscription of the Umayyad Mosque. This article analyses the foundation inscription in the context of the another sources relating the destruction of the church of St. John.

According to the conditions established in the treaty of Damascus from 635 churches that remained in Christian hands could not later be commandeered for Muslim use. It is a disputable matte if from the early Islamic period in Damascus Muslims with Christian worshipped within the temenos wall. Ibn 'Asākir narrated many traditions concerning the way Walid confiscated the Christian Basilica of St. John the Baptist and the Christian actions to preserve this church before was demolished. This compiled information with the foundation inscription of the Umayyad Mosque is useful to understand the reason for such a severe Walid's decision. It seems that the main reason for this action was to overshadow Christian culture by the Muslim mosque. One of the consequences of taking over the Christian holy place, the basilica St. John, was the Islamization of its history. The Islamic commentators on the Damascus mosque from the eighth to the twelfth centuries demonstrated Islam's superiority to Christianity so as to reduce the influence of the sanctuary's earlier owners having given this holy place the exclusively Muslim meaning.