



The Mosque El Aksa, Jerusalem

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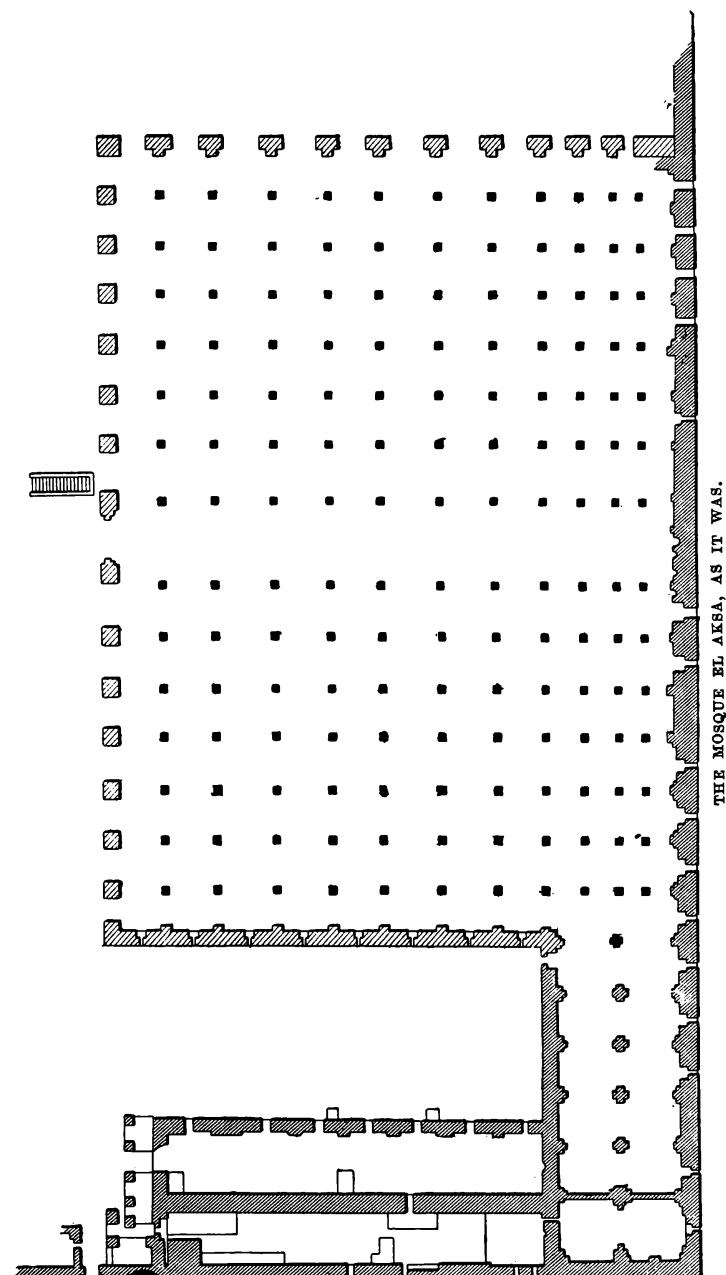
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THE MOSQUE EL AKSA, JERUSALEM.

THE volume lately issued by the Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, viz. "The Travels of Mukaddasi," translated from the Arabic by Mr. Guy le Strange, gives a most interesting account of various sites and buildings in Palestine at the time of his journey, viz., c. 985 A.D., the details of which are increased in value to the archæologist by careful notes added by Mr. Le Strange.

Mukaddasi's description of the Aksa is the most detailed account of that Mosque which is known to me; and by comparing it with the statements given by Nassiri Khasrou, who visited and described it, c. 1040, and by Edrisi, c. 1150, we obtain an idea of the grandeur of the Mosque after its restoration, or rather rebuilding, in the eighth or beginning of the ninth century, which seems to show that it surpassed even that of Damascus.

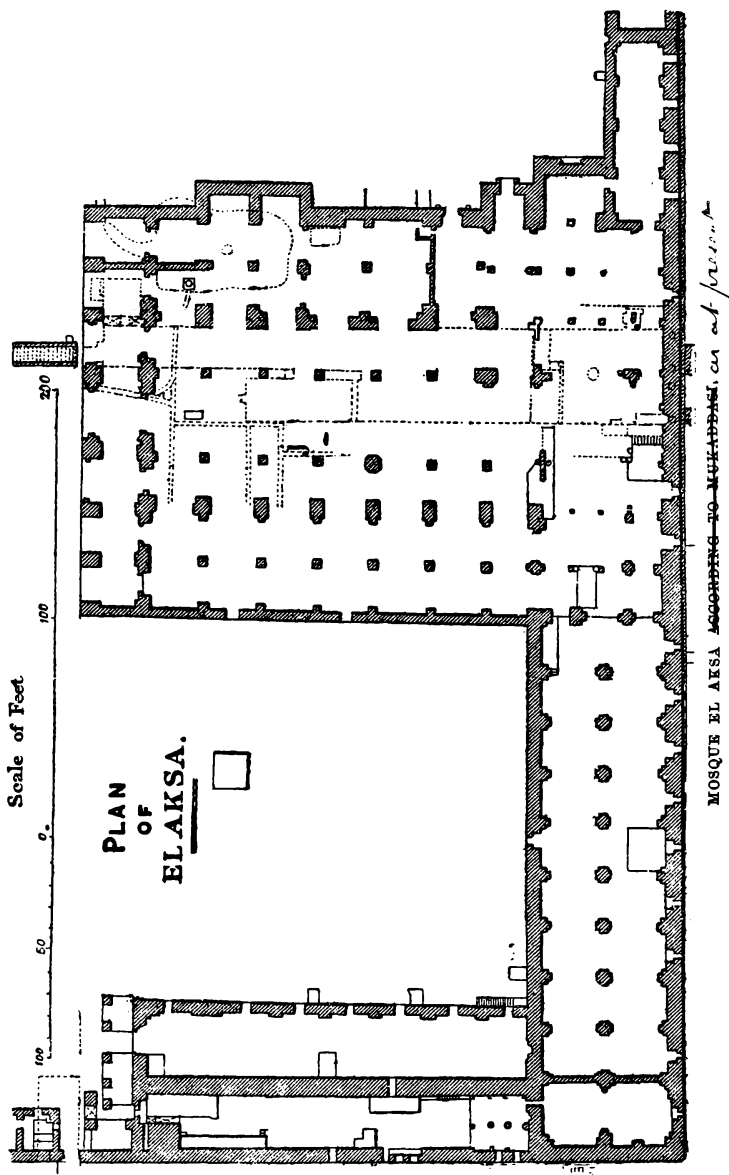
The plan of the Aksa, in its present state, is given accurately, to a large scale, on the map of the Haram Area, &c., made from the survey by Sir Charles Wilson, and this, allowing for alterations known to have been made in the eighth century, was considered by Count de Vogüé to represent the great Church of St. Mary, built by command of Justinian, and of which Procopius gives a detailed account in his book, "De Ædificiis," recently translated for the Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society by Mr. Aubrey Stuart.

But the present remains show very slight traces of so magnificent a building as that described by Procopius, and it is now clear, from the above Arabic authors, that the Mosque, as restored after the great earthquake in the eighth century, is very feebly represented by the present structure, which has seven aisles running north and south, with seven doors opening, on the north side, towards the Dome of the Rock, whereas it appears, from the descriptions given by the above-named Arabic authors, that the original Mosque had fifteen aisles, with fifteen doors opening northward, and eleven doors to the east.

Courts are described surrounded by colonnades of marble columns, halls vaulted with stone, and whose ceilings are decorated with mosaics, the main building itself having "a mighty roof and dome."

The idea altogether conveyed is that of a Mosque resembling more what we can see realized in that of Damascus, than the comparatively poor remains of the Aksa, which, picturesque as they undoubtedly are, occupy but one-half of the space of the old Mosque, and are built up of the poorest materials, the only exception being the great columns of the central aisle. And it would appear, from Mukaddasi's account, that these are the sole remains of the original Mosque.

T. HAYTER LEWIS.



MOSQUE EL AKSA ACCORDING TO MUHAMMAD, an at present