A WOODEN MODEL OF THE DOME OF THE ROCK, BY DR CONRAD SCHICK, JERUSALEM, 1872-3

constructed of wood and plaster, on a rectangular base with handles and sliding
mechanism to reveal the interior representing the innermost part of the Haram al-Sharif,
with the Dome of the Rock and surrounding buildings including the Dome of the Chain,
Dome of the Prophet, Dome of the Mi’raj, Dome of the Hebronite and Minbar of Burhan al-
Din, polychrome decoration throughout, featuring a number of small figurines each
individually modelled.
base: 190 by 195cm.

ESTIMATE £250,000-300,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 242,500 GBP

CATALOGUE NOTE

The Dome of the Rock

The Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is one of the most sacred sites in Islam, ranking third in
importance after the Two Holy Mosques of Mecca and Medina. The symbolic significance of this building to Muslims
around the world should not be underestimated. Its special status and historical pre-eminence resonates with the
entire global Muslim community. Not only does it stand on the spot where Abraham (or Ibrahim, as he is referred to in
the Qur’an) purportedly attempted the sacrifice of his son Isaac, but it also marks the site where The Prophet
Muhammad ascended into Heaven. Some maintain that the Rock itself is the very seat upon which God the Father will
sit in judgement on the final Day of Reckoning.
The elegant domed octagon, which has its origins in late Roman and Byzantine structures, is of great interest to
scholars and historians of Islamic art. It represents both continuity with the ancient Classical world, and yet is an
emphatic statement of a new world order. It is also one of the earliest buildings that can be directly attributed to a
Muslim royal patron, ‘Abd al-Malik, the Umayyad Caliph who inaugurated the monument in 691 CE and whose name is emblazoned in gold Kufic letters around the interior. This inscription is the earliest surviving use of Qur’anic text recorded in a monumental context. When the building was first erected in the late seventh century it was intended as a bold proclamation of the triumph of Islam, raised at the symbolic centre of the ancient capital of Judaism and Christianity. Even today it has lost none of its spiritual and political potency. The building still functions as a place of daily worship and yet it has always been much more than that, standing prominently above the city skyline, proclaiming the pride and ambition of Dar al-Islam (the “House of Islam”).

Dr Conrad Schick (1822–1901)

Architect, town-planner and archaeologist, Dr Conrad Schick is remembered today principally for his remarkable architectural models. The present model is at once monumental, yet intricate in its design and craftsmanship, as revealed by glimpses into its richly painted and carved interiors. Whereas this attention to detail can be credited to the rigorous precision of his training as an architect-engineer in the Swiss-German tradition, Schick’s ability to capture the essence of this landmark can be ascribed to his deep knowledge of the city of Jerusalem and its archaeological landscape. Born in Baden-Württemberg in 1822 and schooled in Kornthal and Basel, Schick’s association with Palestine began in October 1846 when, at the age of twenty-four, he travelled to the Holy Land to work as a missionary on behalf of the Reformed St. Chrischona Pilgrim Mission of Bettingen. He settled in Jerusalem and lived with his family on the Street of the Prophets, in a house which he himself constructed, and which still stands today, named Beit Tabor, or Tabor House. Schick was to spend the rest of his life in Jerusalem, acquiring an unrivalled knowledge of the city. He died on 24 December 1901 at the age of eighty and is buried in the Protestant cemetery on Mount Zion. Schick worked on a number of buildings and architectural schemes in Jerusalem as well as being at the forefront of many of the city’s archaeological projects. In Jerusalem he is perhaps best known as the architect of the new Mea Shearim neighbourhood, one of the first to be built outside of the Old City walls. He also participated in a research project on the subterranean structures within the Haram al-Sharif, or “Noble Sanctuary” on the Temple Mount, which provided him with exact information for his architectural models.

In 1872, at the behest of the Ottoman authorities, Conrad Schick was given the rare opportunity to survey the entire site of the Haram al-Sharif, which had hitherto been off-limits to European archaeologists. Schick went on to construct a large wooden model of the Haram as well as the present model of the Dome of the Rock, both of which were exhibited at the World Fair in Vienna in 1873. The present model is accompanied by two copies of the original pamphlet which was published at the time of the Vienna exhibition, entitled Erklärung der Modelle des Haram Es Scherif und der Sachra Moschee in Jerusalem (“An explanation of the models of the Haram al-Sharif and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem”, Vienna 1873, Diuck von M. Bettelheim & J. Pick. Verlag von J. H. Brühl). Conrad Schick’s commitment to education is demonstrated in a letter addressed to a colleague, Charles Wilson, dated 7 June 1872, in which he emphasises the fact that he wanted his models to be used didactically, as learning tools for “students of history and topography” (Gibson, S., and Jacobson, M., “The Oldest Datable Chambers on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem”, The American Schools of Oriental Research, 8 November 2008). Schick went on to create further models of other religious buildings in Jerusalem, notably, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the historic Jewish Temple. The latter was listed in Baedeker’s 1876 guide to Jerusalem, and was praised by Barnaby Meistermann, a Franciscan priest, who in 1923 wrote that the city “should not be left without seeing the exact model of the Temple made from painted wood by Mr Schick” (E.W.G. Masterman, “Obituary: The Important Work of Dr. Conrad Schick”, The Biblical World, Vol.20, No.2, 1902, pp.146-148).

The Conrad Schick Model

The monumental wooden model, commissioned by the Ottoman sultan ‘Abd al-Aziz and displayed at the 1873 World
Fair in Vienna, is a unique historical document recording the Dome and surrounding buildings as Conrad Schick found them in 1872. Schick’s eye for detail and unwavering pursuit of archaeological veracity has bequeathed to us a three-dimensional record of astonishing fidelity. Many elements in the building, including the lead grey covering of the dome and the polychrome interior have been altered in more recent times. The model thus represents an invaluable record of the building as it stood in former times, before modern renovations and “improvements”. Ingenious, inspired, and pedagogical, The Conrad Schick Model embodies the spirit of the Age of the Great Exhibitions. The only other models produced by Schick and known to have survived, those of the Temple Mount and the Jewish Temple, are held by private institutions in Jerusalem and are unlikely ever to come to the market. The sale of The Conrad Schick Model of the Dome of the Rock is thus a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to acquire an outstanding museum piece of great historical interest and educational importance.

For more information on Conrad Schick, see: August Strobel, Conrad Schick ein leben für Jerusalem, Zeugnisse über einen erkannten Auftrag, Germany, 1988.


- For a full list of Conrad Schick’s early works, see: Reinhold Röhrich, Bibliotheca Geographica Palaestinae, Berlin, 1890.