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## **Author Guidelines**

Manuscript article can be either in English, Malay or Arabic using software Microsoft office (Word, and Excel), Font 12 Times New Roman. Only tables, figures and appendix can be written using Font 10, Times New Roman.

If there is a usage of Quranic verses or Hadith from Prophet P.B.U.H., it only needs to be done by translation only.

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## **Important Notes**

The first six articles of this Special Issue were contributed by the Group of Researchers of professional bodies such as architects, planners, surveyors and others. Therefore, their writings differed from the normal social sciences literature. The rest of the articles were contributed by those who are specialized in Islamic Social Sciences area.

## Is Islamic Architecture Synonymous with Mosque Architecture?

Spahic Omer\*

### Abstract

This article discusses the meaning and significance of Islamic architecture. It adds a new dimension to the subject by addressing it from the perspective of the genesis and evolution of the mosque institution and its architecture. The article concludes that mosque architecture functioned as the quintessence and also driving power of Islamic architecture. However, it is not to be fully identifiable with it. Despite a great many similarities, there were many aspects of Islamic architecture that evolved on their own and functioned independently from the vocabulary of mosque architecture. There were yet others which, even though originating within the orb of mosque architecture, assumed supplementary imports and functions elsewhere. The topic in question is viewed through the prism of the mosque institution as the basis of all other institutions, and of the institutional ideological harmony in Islamic civilization through which the mosque institution served as an incubator of general architectural creativity.

**Keywords:** Islamic architecture; mosque; institutions; civilization; creativity

### Introduction

Islamic architecture is a widely misunderstood subject. It also divides opinion like no other theme in the fields of Islamic culture and civilization. Both scholars and ordinary people question if Islamic architecture as an idea and demonstrable reality exists, and if yes what its most appropriate definition and its underlying characteristics are. They likewise wonder if the recognizable built environment styles of Muslims worldwide and in history should be called “Islamic”, “Muslim”, “Islamicate”, or even something else, and whether there is any relationship between architecture, which is popularly regarded as a pure secular realm, and Islam as a total spiritual orientation and a religious consciousness as well as a style of living.

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Debates are set to continue *ad infinitum*, given the inherent profundity of the world of Islamic architecture and the complexity of challenges - and outright problems – a proper conception and application of Islamic architecture in modern milieus face. No intellectual discourse concerning a holistic civilizational enterprise can sidestep the subject of built environment, in that the latter signifies a physical locus of people's lives and a receptacle – together with an index - of their recurring civilizational ups and downs. Without a doubt, civilization and built environment are so intricately connected that irrespective of which one exactly denotes the cause and which one the effect, they are destined to rise, prosper, decline and eventually fall together.

Some of the works that dwell extensively on the subject of the ontology (the nature of being) and axiology (the nature of values) of Islamic architecture are “The Formation of Islamic Art” (1973) by Oleg Grabar, “Early Muslim Architecture” (1969) by K.A.C. Creswell, “Islamic Art and Architecture” (1999) by Robert Hillenbrand, “Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning” (1995) edited by George Michell, “Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture” (2001) by Valerie Gonzalez, “Islam: Art and Architecture” (2000) edited by Markus Hattstein and Peter Delius, “Art and Architecture in Islamic Tradition” (2011) by Mohammed Hamdouni Alami, “Islamic Art and Spirituality” (1987) by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Islam and Art” (1985) by Lois Lamya' al-Faruqi, “Crisis in the Built Environment” (1988) by Jamel Akbar.<sup>1</sup>

In quest of its veiled, ambiguous and often distorted meaning and significance, some scholars yet tried to expand the scope of Islamic architecture, relating it to the discernible religious and socio-cultural identity of the premodern Islam and Muslims. Even though the idiom “Islamic architecture” is “a category forged by nineteenth-century European orientalist”,<sup>2</sup> accepting it somehow and grappling with many of its entailed implications – and inconveniences – still stood at the core of most Muslims' postcolonial search for identity and their attempts to outline similarities and differences with others. Islamic architecture

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<sup>1</sup> The author of this study tried to answer some of the sensitive questions that underpin the existence of Islamic architecture in an article of his titled “What exactly is Islamic architecture, and is architecture a problematic concept?” (<https://news.iium.edu.my/?p=140679>). About Islamic architecture in general, he composed three books: “Islamic Architecture: its Philosophy, Spiritual Significance and Some Early Developments” (2009), “History and Theory of Islamic Architecture” (2019) and “The Qur'an and Built Environment” (2021).

<sup>2</sup> Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. xxii.

became at once a catalyst and goal. It became the face of Islamic revivalist tendencies and agendas, and so, a microcosm of Islamic cultural and civilizational awareness in addition to performance.

Samer Akkach, for one, wrote about “Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: an Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas” (2005) wherein he draws ontological and cosmological parallels between architecture and Sufism. In his study the author offers an alternative perspective to view the architecture of premodern Islam, one that complements existing approaches in a meaningful way. He thereby shifts the academic focus “away from style and history to ontology and cosmology.”<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Yasser Tabbaa discusses in his “The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival” (2001) the transformation undergone by Islamic architecture during the medieval period, ascribing the cumulative process whereby “meaning was produced within the resulting new forms” to the supremacy of the factors of theology, politics, technology and patronage. The intrinsic dynamism, practicality and fluidity not only of the form, but also function of Islamic architecture in any given circumstances are readily implied all through the intellectual vibes of the book.

Moreover, in 1990, an international seminar was organized in Indonesia on the theme of “Contemporary Expressions of Islam in Buildings”. The seminar resulted in a book (the seminar’s proceedings) titled “Expressions of Islam in Buildings”. Both the seminar and book were sponsored by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and the Indonesian Institute of Architects as part of a series called “Exploring Architecture in Islamic Cultures”.

The key theme of the seminar was the exploration of the interaction between Islam, as a social and cultural phenomenon, and the built environment of Muslims – before and in modern times. Apart from the expected topics, such as tradition versus modernity, mosque architecture, practicing architecture, and the Indonesian Islamic architecture experiences, there were also less known and less predictable topics, such as women and architecture, the religious versus secular in architecture, Muslims in the West, and faith, tradition, innovation and Islamic architecture.

A similar seminar initiative was conducted seven years earlier, in 1983, in Malaysia as well, which produced a similar result: an academic book in the form of the seminar’s proceedings titled “Architecture and Identity”.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. xxiii.

One of the latest projects concerning the intricate and demanding character of Islamic architecture is an encyclopaedia titled “A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture” (2017) with two volumes and 1386 pages. The “Companion” provides “a new level of access and interpretation to Islamic art. The more than 50 newly commissioned essays revisit canonical topics, and include original approaches and scholarship on neglected aspects of the field.” The essays survey Islamic art and architecture in all its traditional grandeur. They, in addition, “chart the influence of key ideas, discourses and theories on (Islamic) art, and the way that it is taught, thought of, and talked about throughout the English-speaking world.” The editors of the “Companion” are Finbarr Barry Flood and Gulru Necipoglu.

This article is intended to add a new dimension to the existing discourses on Islamic architecture. It traces and relates most of the genesis and evolution of Islamic architecture to the genesis and evolution of mosque institution and its own architectural vocabulary. Indeed, almost all aspects of Islamic architecture are viewed through the prism of mosque architecture, originating from it – directly or indirectly - and basing its legitimacy on the legitimacy and acceptance of the latter. A series of sensible questions, it follows, can be asked: is Islamic architecture synonymous with mosque architecture? Can there be Islamic architecture unrelated to mosque architecture? What exactly is the architectural relationship between the mosque as an institution and the rest of religious and secular private as well as institutional buildings? The following discussion sheds some light on those concerns and their many conceptual and practical ramifications.

### **The Mosque Institution as the Basis of all other Institutions**

Since its inception in the Prophet’s city-state of Madinah, Islamic civilization was dominated by the idea and phenomenon of the mosque. The mosque was the only institution. It functioned as a community development centre with essentially all aspects of the vibrant community- and civilization-building processes taking place within its ambits, partly or completely. The mosque thus was an epitome of Islam’s and Muslims’ simple but fast-fading past and its exciting and imminently thriving future.

The mosque institution resided at the heart of the new developments. It exemplified everything Muslims were and were aspiring to be in the future. No wonder that in terms of location, the mosque occupied communities’ central and most strategic positions; in

terms of form, it was the strongest, sturdiest and most open to creative ideas and solutions; and in terms of function and serviceability, it was most energetic, most wide-ranging and most productive.

In short, the mosque stood at the centre of people's lives. It was inseparable from their entire being, as much at the personal as the collective level. The mosque was synonymous with people's religious and civilizational identity. With regard to cultivated consciousness, mission and vision, people and the mosque institution were one, so to speak. Scrutinizing either one was sufficient for understanding the other one as well.

Hence, the mosque is dubbed "the house of God" (*baytullah*), suggesting its remarkable meaning, significance and primacy which transcend the confines of the vicissitudes of the physical world. As "the house of God", the mosque ought to dominate and determine the characters of all other "houses". It is the "mother" of, and the source of legitimacy for, other "houses", sanctuaries, establishments and institutions. The mosque is also called "the place of prostration and worship" (*masjid*), whereby the most honourable undertakings of man in his capacity as God's vicegerent on earth are accentuated, and without which neither success nor happiness in this world and in the hereafter – as the only genuine objects of people's struggles – is possible.

The Prophet (pbuh) said that the mosques are "the most beloved of places to God".<sup>1</sup> Therefore, there can be no doubt that people are safe and on the right track as long as they stayed intimately associated with their mosques.

The Prophet's mosque was an exemplar. Pertaining to its function, it was the seat of the Prophet's government, a learning centre, a place for some medical treatments and nursing, a detention and rehabilitation centre, a welfare and charity centre, and a place for some legitimate leisure and recreational activities.<sup>2</sup> It was such an exhilarating place to be. It was never devoid of activities and exuding optimism. The events most revolutionary on earth and, at the same time, most valued in Heaven, unfolded right there. The future was in the making.

The form of the Prophet's mosque responded accordingly, keeping to the principles that the form of architecture follows function, that architecture should be compatible and should fit with the ways people live their lives, and that architecture is both an expression and embodiment of

<sup>1</sup> Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 671.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Kattani, Abd al-Hayy, *al-Taratib al-Idariyyah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-‘Arabi, 1980), vol. 1 p. 84. Al-Samahudi, ‘Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa’ al-Wafa*, (Beirut: Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-‘Arabi, 1997), vol. 2 pp. 388-398.

people's beliefs and values. Hence, having initially been built as a simple roofless and bare enclosure – because the initial functions of the mosque were limited and correspondingly simple - the mosque in the end emerged as a significantly enlarged and fairly complex structure that featured, among other things, a roofed section in the form of three arcades, a pavement outside one of its entrances, a *minbar* (pulpit) and a *dakkah* or *dukkan* (seat, bench) for communication purposes, lamps as a means for lighting up the mosque, several compartments and facilities that facilitated the various functions of the mosque, and a person, or persons, whose job was to keep the mosque clean.<sup>1</sup>

Though in its infancy, the Prophet's was the most centralized form of Islamic government. It was likewise the most homogenous kind, reflecting the homogeneity of its people's cultural and civilizational proclivities. The society seamlessly integrated itself into the mosque's orb, while the mosque amiably welcomed all the people and effortlessly entertained and absorbed all the basic needs of theirs. That is why the houses of the Prophet (pbuh) - as a prophet and the leader of the community - adjoined the mosque (the house of Allah), sharing literally its wall and opening into its realm. The houses of people further clustered around the mosque with a belief that the closer to the mosque – and the Prophet (pbuh) – a house was located, the better it was.

This way, the houses of people and the house of God were one and the same in relation to import and purpose. They complemented each other in facilitating the demanding terrestrial journey of man in his capacity as God's trustee. This means that for man to attain and inhabit the Abode of (ultimate) Peace (*dar al-salam*) in the hereafter, he must transform the earthly context into an abode (house) of worship and inner peace. One positively cannot be achieved without the other. That is to say, the only way forward is via optimizing the potentials of the houses of God (mosques) (*buyut Allah*) and the potentials of the houses of people (*buyut al-nas*) as an auxiliary to the former.

However, having failed to grasp the substance of the matter with regard to the relationship between the mosque institution and the house institution in general, and between the Prophet's mosque and his houses in particular, a number of scholars erroneously inferred that the whole complex of the Prophet's mosque – including his abutting houses - initially functioned as the Prophet's residential complex only with the mosque's courtyard serving

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<sup>1</sup> 'Alī b. Aḥmad Al-Samahudī, , *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 pp. 388-398.

as the Prophet's domestic courtyard.<sup>1</sup> Volkmar, for instance, writes: "This was where Muhammad received guests, who left their camels in the courtyard. It was only gradually that the courtyard became a special place where the faithful assembled for prayer."<sup>2</sup>

While dealing with the subject in question, Creswell does not even call the Prophet's mosque as such. Rather, he talks only about "Muhammad's house" which encompassed the whole area with all its sections. To him, even after the Prophet's death, the place was yet to be transformed into a mosque, in spite of the collective worship activities that had been carried out in it for years.<sup>3</sup>

Creswell furthermore opines: "No further change had taken place in Muhammad's house at the time of his death on 8 June 632 CE. He was buried in the room which he had occupied in his lifetime. His house had not yet become a mosque and its transformation to such was by no means a rapid process. It apparently remained a house long after his death, for Abu Bakr, on being elected *khalif*, or successor, made use of it in the same way as Muhammad himself. It was still a house in 655 CE, when the Khalif 'Uthman was murdered there, in the room next to that in which the Prophet lay buried."<sup>4</sup> The full transformation of the house to a mosque was completed only in 55 AH/ 674 CE, forty two years after the Prophet's death.<sup>5</sup>

For a similar reason do some scholars disagree as to the exact meaning of the word *buyut* in the Qur'anic chapter (*surah*) *al-Nur* (the Light), verse (*ayah*) 36. To some, the word connotes "mosques", and to others, "houses". The verse reads as follows: "In *buyut* (mosques or houses) which Allah has permitted to be raised and exalted and that His name may be remembered in them; there glorify Him therein in the mornings and the evenings" (*al-Nur*, 36).

Al-Maududi reconciles the contrasting views by asserting that both "mosques" and "houses" are implied by the word *buyut*. That is because in Islam, the idea of worship is not confined to mosques alone, or to any other institution or place designated solely for that particular purpose. In

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Hillenbrand, Robert, *Islamic Art and Architecture*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), p. 15. Volkmar, Enderlein, *Syria and Palestine: The Umayyad Caliphate*, inside: Islam, Art and Architecture, edited by: Markus Hattstein & Peter Delius, (Cologne: Konemann, 2000), p. 67. Creswell, K.A.C., *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1989), pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Volkmar, Enderlein, *Syria and Palestine: The Umayyad Caliphate*, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Creswell, K.A.C., *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Islam, worship is a way of life. A house is also a place of worship like the mosque and every man is his own priest. Therefore, al-Maududi concludes, there will be no harm if both the mosques and the houses of the believers are implied in the mentioned verse.<sup>1</sup>

This universality and inclusivity of the Islamic worship are clearly indicated in the subsequent verse of *surah al-Nur*. In it, God outlines the chief traits of the believers, connecting the most cardinal religious rituals and services with the pursuits of everyday life. One of such traits is the fact that neither commerce nor sale distracts the believers from the remembrance of Allah and from performance of prayer and giving of *zakah* (al-Nur, 37).

The words “the remembrance of Allah, performance of prayer and giving of *zakah*” are evocative of mosques (the houses of Allah), whereas the words “commerce and sale” are suggestive of the houses – as well as other institutions and establishments – of people. The two realms are expected to be unified and to cooperate in propelling people’s destinies to a higher level of meaning and realization, a level the same verse describes as the believers’ fear of “a Day when hearts and eyes will be fearfully transformed (in a world wholly new)” (al-Nur, 37).

Herein, additionally, lies the essence of Islamic urbanism and urban planning. There is no aspect in the grand scheme of the Islamic built environment that can be neglected or unduly favoured at the expense of the others. For example, both rural and urban areas are equally important in the Islamic architectural, planning and development outlook, just as there are no purely religious and purely secular spheres within the authentic Islamic civilizational mind-set. All predispositions and intents are to be directed, and all human capital channelled, towards the same objectives.

Following the death of the Prophet (pbuh) and the subsequent dramatic spread of Islam throughout the world, which resulted in the unprecedented growth of the Islamic society and its governmental administrative systems, the form and function of the mosque institution was set to undergo spectacular changes. Its internal evolution and the evolution of its relationships with the fast-changing society and with the novel socio-cultural and administrative trends, needed to remain timely and pertinent. It had to be up-to-date. The mosque and everything affiliated with it - from ideas and knowledge to the people who typified them (especially scholars

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Mawdūdī, *The Meaning of the Qur’an*,  
[www.english tafsir.com/Quran/24/index.html](http://www.english tafsir.com/Quran/24/index.html), accessed on January 15, 2021.

and the pious ones) - needed to stay faithful to its heavenly mission and to persist as an out-and-out standard-setter.

That was critical, for the mosque was always meant to enlighten, inspire and lead, rather than to be regulated, inhibited and overseen. In other words, the mosque institution was intended to serve to Muslims as a perpetual source of guidance, motivation and creativity, including the fields of art, architecture and general planning and development. Everything else was supposed to be subservient to this doctrine. If truth be told, whenever the golden rule of the pre-eminence of the mosque and its heavenly purpose was observed, the Muslim civilizational trajectory was in an upward mode. However, no sooner had the same been compromised, than the Muslim civilizational fortunes were put in jeopardy.

The first phase in the evolution of the multidimensionality of the mosque institution after the Prophet's death was the institutionalization of its functions. The mere functions and services of the mosque now became institutions, in the sense of being well-established and well-structured patterns of behaviour dedicated to the promotion of particular causes, interests, or programs, as enjoyed public, educational, social and charitable characters. They were strongly identifiable with prevalent religious and social norms and purposes, rising above and dominating individuals and individual intentions, and eventually morphing into mechanisms for directing and governing human behaviour. Consequently, a social institution, according to Jonathan Turner, is defined as "a complex of positions, roles, norms and values lodged in particular types of social structures and organising relatively stable patterns of human activity with respect to fundamental problems in producing life-sustaining resources, in reproducing individuals, and in sustaining viable societal structures within a given environment."<sup>1</sup>

The caliphate of the second rightly-guided caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khattab (d. 24 AH / 644 CE), was a time when the process of the institutionalization of the mosque's functions was most intensive and most productive. Such was a corollary of the extraordinary - virtually miraculous - expansion of the Islamic state and of its fast becoming a main protagonist on world stage. Hence, 'Umar's reign is regarded as one of institutions and institutional innovations and growth. By way of illustration, 'Umar established *bayt al-mal* as the public treasury; he established courts and appointed judges; he established a war department

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<sup>1</sup> Seumas Miller, *Social Institutions*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-institutions>, accessed on January 15, 2021.

and improved the army administration; he established a land revenue department; he organized jails and police department; he built guest-houses; he established “schools” (institutions for the teaching of children) and provided salaries for teachers. ‘Umar’s leadership and management styles were second to none as regards proficiency, dedication and intelligence.<sup>1</sup>

It is requisite to note that most of the new institutions and institutional initiatives remained integral to the “mother” mosque institution, both with respect to form and function. They but further diversified and enriched the roles and performances of the mosque. There were hardly any advanced independent structures within or without the mosque’s domain that were meant for accommodating those novel institutions, unless staying and operating in the mosque proved inappropriate and impractical in which case institutions were moved away from the mosque and were given their own, albeit rudimentary, physical configurations.

An embodiment of these changes and developments was ‘Umar’s prohibition of reciting poetry inside the Prophet’s mosque. ‘Umar by no means was against wholesome poetry as such, nor against reciting it inside the mosque’s central praying areas. He simply reasoned that as sentimental and agreeable as it was, the practice – initially permitted by the Prophet (pbuh) himself – outlived its usefulness and just like everything else, should have undergone a change and be part of other much bigger and more consequential transformations.

As a result, ‘Umar allocated an area that adjoined the mosque on its eastern side called *al-Butayha*’ for the purpose. Not only for reciting poetry, but also for all other worldly, often idle, yet vain, discussions and arguments accompanied by noise, shouting, quarrelling and laughing, was the area designated. It appears as though the area, or the quarter, contained some basic architectural elements so as to facilitate the intended purposes, for in some accounts the following words have been used “... ‘Umar b. al-Khattab bana fi nahiyah al-masjid rahbah tudda’ a *al-Butayha*’...” which means “...‘Umar b. al-Khattab built at a side of the mosque a place called al-Butayha’”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Haykal, Muhammad, *al-Faruq ‘Umar*, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahdah al-Misriyyah, 1964), vol. 2 pp. 200-299. Shurrab, Muhammad Hasan, *al-Madinah al-Munawwarah Fajr al-Islam wa al-‘Asr al-Rashidi*, (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1994), v. 1 p. 100. Masud-ul-Hasan, *Hadrat ‘Umar Farooq*, (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd, 1982), p. 513.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Samahudi, ‘Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa’ al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 498.

The next critical phase in the evolution of the mosque institution was the complete independence of institutions from the mosque. This phase was at once a gradual and inevitable process, in view of the rapid socio-economic and military developments and the corresponding augmentation of the governmental apparatus, which portended the rapid maturation of Islamic culture and civilization. Those independent institutions were of two types: such as remained physically attached or stayed in close proximity to the mosque, and such as went away from the mosque and operated in completely different contexts.

The approximate commencement of this phase was the second half of the Umayyad caliphate and the first period of the Abbasid caliphate, after which the processes of the institutional evolution were set to intensify by the day. For example, it was around that period that the first mints, hospitals, observatories and independent educational institutions in Islamic civilization were reported.

It must be emphasized that also at this stage of the gradual institutional decentralization, all institutions remained faithful to the “mother” mosque institution. Even if many of them were no longer physically connected to the mosque, they nevertheless remained unified along the lines of their shared mission, worth and purpose. They still formed a unified and cohesive institutional universe, functioning as one. They enjoyed the highest level of what could be called the institutional ideological harmony, as opposed to the institutional ideological dichotomy, which was not to plague the Islamic religious and civilizational presence until a number of centuries later. They together took care of the cultural and civilizational journeys of Muslims.

It was incontestable that all institutions originated from the mosque institution. They owed their sheer existence and legitimacy to the existence of the mosque and its somewhat divine disposition. As it was incontestable that the future of institutions rested in the “hands of the mosque” (i.e., in the “hands” of the message and spirit the mosque epitomized). For that matter, the visions, programs and functionality of institutions had to recurrently be referred to the same of the mosque for their authentication and approval. The institutional harmony meant the harmony and peace of the mind, soul and entire being, whereas the institutional dichotomy meant their tension and angst.

As if to say that everything started in the mosque, could not subsist in isolation from it, and in due course must return to it - one way or another. Indeed, the mosque is Islam’s and Islamic civilization’s centre of gravity. It

is likewise their centroid where all the spiritual, intellectual and physical axes intersect and draw on each other's rectitude and strength.

### **The Mosque Institution as an Incubator of General Architectural Creativity**

The earliest mosques were extremely simple. However, as their functions and roles were increasing, so did their form keep improving and the overall appearance was getting more conspicuous. In the world of austerity and minimalism – as the character of the Islamic world at first was – building, acquiring and maintaining mosques as the community's pivots and development centres was a big challenge. The strength of the customary simplicity and unpretentiousness was often tested. For that reason did the concept and sensory reality of the mosque feature in the Qur'an, the Prophet's Sunnah and the legacies of the Prophet's companions more prominently than any other aspect of the built environment. The trend continued like so in subsequent eras as well.

The architectural form of people's houses, for instance, is rarely brought up, let alone being mentioned as a knotty issue people had to contend with. Which in no way suggests that residential architecture was not important and was not preoccupying the dedication and focus of people. The stark difference was that unlike mosque architecture, residential architecture was more straightforward, more adaptable and more predictable. It was about a relatively small-scale enterprise with fewer needs and was anchored completely in personal preferences and capacities. There is a huge difference in satisfying the particular and private needs of a family to satisfying the collective and civilizational needs of a community.

Thus the mosque stood not just at the forefront of the civilizational development of Muslims, but also at the forefront of their artistic and architectural evolution. It was probing, experimenting, adopting, borrowing, conceiving and inventing. It had to strike a delicate balance between the demands of the Islamic worldview and shari'ah and the demands of diverse cultural and socio-economic norms. It also had to be mindful of the cosmopolitan and multi-religious makeup of most Islamic societies. In short, the mosque needed to observe the ideology of steadfastly following religion and as tenaciously inventing the world (civilization). Even the Prophet's experiences demonstrated that the mosque institution should always exemplify a harmonious integration of the permanence of spirit and values (metaphysics) and the transience of matter and gloss (physics), of form and function, and of this world and the hereafter.

Consequently, the vocabulary of mosque architecture was expanding at a remarkably fast rate. Its abounding sources of ideas and solutions were the newly-stirred Islamic creative genius and the architectural legacies of the newly opened-to-Islam (*fath*) territories and their both Muslim and non-Muslim peoples. Enriching the architectural lexis of the mosque was part as much of the unrelenting developments as of the meditative islamization needs and efforts.

Architecture was seen as a province where much innocent knowledge and even wisdom reside. While it is an Islamic dictum that wisdom is the lost property of the believer, wherever he finds it, he is most deserving of it (and let him claim it) - as declared by the Prophet (pbuh).<sup>1</sup> The Prophet (pbuh) also said that people are like gold and silver; those who were the best of people in *Jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic time of ignorance) were still the best ones in Islam (after embracing Islam), provided that they attained religious understanding (*idha faqihu*).<sup>2</sup> And the Qur'an confirms all that by saying: "He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding" (al-Baqarah, 269).

As said earlier, the language of mosque architecture was significantly expanded and enriched as early as during the Prophet's ten-year stay in Madinah. He himself yet considerably expanded and enhanced his mosque (*al-masjid al-nabawi*). Despite the fact that most of the things in Madinah were perceived in minimalist and modest terms, the Prophet's mosque was an exception. It was steadily growing as much in stature as in physical complexity. Its approximate size after the Prophet's expansion of it in the seventh year following the *hijrah* (migration from Makkah to Madinah when the mosque was originally constructed) was 2,500 square meters, having been 50 meters both wide and long.

The Prophet (pbuh) pondered the prospect of enlarging the mosque even further, but was unable to do anything to that effect as he was overtaken by death. That was the main reason for caliph 'Umar b. al-Khattab's expansion of the mosque. 'Umar was of the view that he was only fulfilling the wish of the Prophet (pbuh); he was an executor of the Prophet's will. He used to say that if he had not heard the Prophet (pbuh) saying that the mosque needed to be enlarged further, so as to

<sup>1</sup> Al-Tirmidhī, *Jamī' al-Tirmidhī*, Ḥadīth No. 2687.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Bukharī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Ḥadīth No. 3374.

accommodate the growing needs of the community, he would not have done anything to it.<sup>1</sup>

The following is the description of the Prophet's mosque after caliph 'Umar's expansion. This is important because the expansion and its architectural penchant, in a way, still reflected the pure spirit of the Prophet's age. By and large, 'Umar expanded the area of the mosque in the directions of the south, the west, as well as the north, with foundations of stone about 1.8 meters in depth. The total area measured about 70 meters from south to north and about 60 meters from east to west, that is, more or less 4,200 square meters. The new walls were of mud brick and about 5.3 meters in height. Palm trunks, which in height were equivalent to the walls, were used for pillars, and palm fronds were used to cover the ceiling. On the *qiblah* direction, there were now four colonnades or porticoes, each portico had around ten or eleven pillars (palm trunks). The mosque in this fashion had two major parts: a hypostyle, or roofed, southern praying section supported by columns, and a vast open courtyard that comprised the rest of the mosque. 'Umar also added three new doors to bring their number to six. Each side - except the *qiblah* wall - had two doors. The floor was covered with matting of inter-woven palm fronds after it had been graded and covered with soft pebbles where necessary.<sup>2</sup>

Following the phases of the institutionalization of the mosque's diverse functions and the institutional decentralization, the language of mosque architecture peaked. It did so in order to facilitate the functionality of the latest civilizational evolutionary episodes and experiences. It also aimed to stimulate those to further heights, towards their eventual fruition, improving thereby the overall conditions of living and allowing the processes of manifesting the religion of Islam and Muslim social programs into the physical world, to get into full swing. That way, the world of the mosque's functional and structural possibilities kept growing. There was virtually no end to possibilities and prospects. If truth be told, the processes of institutionalization and decentralization were parts of the said enrichment and growth. The mosque never stopped inventing and, at the same time, borrowing. It was

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<sup>1</sup> 'Alī b. Aḥmad Al-Samahudī, , *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 482.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Qu'aiti, Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2007), p. 56. Al-Barzanji, Ja'far, *Nuzhah al-Nazirin fi Masjid Sayyid al-Awwalin wa al-Akhirin*, (Cairo: Maṭba'ah al-Jamaliyyah, 1914), p. 11. Al-Samahudī, 'Alī b. Aḥmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 481.

always giving, but also taking, and was affecting and was also affected. It came to be an image of openness, fluidity and reciprocity.

It was on account of this that the mosque architecture vocabulary soon featured, among other things, the notions of adopting and converting churches, temples and other sanctified places, the *minbar* or pulpit (which was invented, or adopted, as early as during the Prophet's time), the *mihrab* or praying niche for the imam (prayer leader), decorative niches, minarets, arches, domes, vaulting, landscaped courtyards, porticos, the *maqsurah* and other forms of screens, iwans, preferably running water for ablution and aesthetic purposes, marble for construction and decoration, most excellent and durable types of wood, elaborate decorative styles featuring geometry, calligraphy and floral patterns, mosaics, squinches, muqarnas and iconoclasm.

At first, hypostyle mosques dominated, deriving their originality and authenticity from the Prophet's mosque as the first hypostyle mosque. That was followed by the four-iwan mosque type. And later with the advent of the Ottoman Turks, the centrally-planned mosque type, which was dominated by monumental central domes, was introduced. All other mosque types – including the modern ones - were combinations of these three fundamental types, comprising, in addition, a series of indigenous and regional variables.

In any case, the objectives of mosque architecture aimed to ensure durability, functionality, resourcefulness, adaptability, effectiveness, beauty, and spiritual as well as physical connectivity with society. Different eras with all of their permutations, different geographical regions and protagonists all played different roles in line with the prevalent circumstances of theirs. The mosque had to live up to its reputation and the expectations of people. It had to endure as a haven and a sanctuary to a worshipper, as a fascination to a learner, as a source of concern and anxiety to a ruler (owing to the pressure of adequately building, enlivening and maintaining mosques), as a sign to a spectator, and as a beacon and guide to a traveller. All roads led to the mosque and all directions pointed to it. The mosque stood for the Muslim society's image. Yet it was its microcosm. Their respective aspirations and fates originated and coalesced firstly in the transcendent world of ideas and values and were then set to prove themselves in the midst of the trials of everyday life.

Thus, when other institutions started to experience their self-governing operational and architectural existence, they could not do so except in terms of the mosque's operation and architecture. They were the latter's clones and descendants, so to speak. They were its extended

arms. If initially the mosque was a religious-cum-social centre, independent institutions subsequently became social-cum-religious centres. Essentially, the object of the mosque and institutions remained the same, namely, worshipping God and serving society; what changed, though, was their applied prioritization, focus and *modi operandi*.

The architecture of the mosque, by extension, was most befitting to the architecture of novel institutions. Needless to say that what is identical in purpose, substance and orientation ought to be, to a large extent, identical in overall function and look as well, certainly after duly observing the dictates of practical focuses, priorities and operational strategies and means. Such was a perfect way to demonstrate the worth and implications of the central Islamic tenets of unity and concord, whose spirit originated from nowhere else but the religious notion of God's Oneness (*tawhīd*). The tenets entailed the unity of truth, vision, purpose and existential mission, and the diversity of means, tactics, expressions and hands-on solutions. This philosophy moreover furnished Islamic settlements, both urban and rural, with an extraordinary built environment identity that oozed the spirit of coherence and inclusiveness.

Hence, architecturally speaking, it was often hard to immediately distinguish between a mosque and a school (*madrasah*), a governmental complex, an observatory or some other learning/scientific institutions, a hospital, a caravanserai, a funerary complex, and a Sufi institution – regardless of how much problematic the latter two have been in terms of religious validity and acceptability. Their specialised operations aside, all those institutions partly functioned as mosques too. Some institutions had sizable inner spaces that functioned as places for worship, others enclosed semi-independent structures that were integrated and designated for the same purpose, and yet others were built and operated in such a way that whenever needed – including the needs of the five daily prayers – they, for the most part, could easily be converted into provisional mosques.

By way of example, it was – and still is – testing to recognize all the architectural and artistic peculiarities that separated any Tulunid, Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mamluk or Ottoman mosque in Cairo from the schools (*madrasahs*), caravanserais, funerary complexes, Sufi centres, charitable institutions and palaces, from the same historical periods. The same applies to the traditional built environments of Damascus, Aleppo, Baghdād, Tunis, Qayrawān, Fez, Marrakesh, Ṣanaʿā, Isfahan, Istanbul, and the other Islamic cultural and civilizational hubs.

Just as it was hard to identify where a mosque's being mosque (a house of pure worship) stopped and its being a community centre started, it was

hard, in equal measure, to identify where an institution's being a worldly establishment stopped and its being a place of worship (an intermittent mosque) started. The same worldview and values presided over all of them. While the people that patronized both the mosques and other institutions - in accordance with their worldly and otherworldly requirements and preferences - were the adherents of the same worldview and values. There existed neither separation nor inconsistency in people's ideals. Those ideals were immortalized firstly in the ways people lived their lives, and secondly in the ways their built environment was conceived, planned and built, and in the ways it functioned - with the latter subsisting solely in order to serve as a framework of the former. The spiritual constancy spelled the worldly constancy, and the inner individual spelled the outer institutional and collective equilibrium.

It could yet be said that this way of doing things was an implementation of the Islamic doctrine that the whole earth has been rendered a form of mosque. The Prophet (pbuh) once said that "the earth has been made sacred and pure and mosque for me, so whenever the time of prayer comes for any one of you he should pray wherever he is."<sup>1</sup> With the exception of a few places, such as the locations where camels lie down, graveyards and impure places, the whole earth Islam regards as a mosque. The Prophet (pbuh) led by example, praying wherever the times of prayers overtook him. He even prayed in the sheepfolds.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, not only the earth, but also the entire universe behaves as though an inestimable mosque, so to speak, for the Qur'an often reminds that everything in the heavens and on the earth incessantly glorifies, prostrates and sings praises to Almighty God the Creator and Sustainer of life. This renders the earth and the seven heavens as nothing but the places of worship and veneration of God, i.e., "mosques".

People, by the same token, are expected to do the same as the rest of creation through their words, thoughts and deeds. They are to subscribe to the universal and all-pervading paradigm of God's Oneness and His lordship, joining the rest of the existential congregation and living accordingly. It is owing to this, surely, that man's most honourable title is "the servant of God" and, as per the letter of the Qur'an, he has not been created except to worship his Creator and Master (al-Dhariyat, 56). Positively, life and worship are to be indivisible and indistinguishable.

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<sup>1</sup> Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1056.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3932.

The Qur'an says, for example: "Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures and many of the people?" (al-Hajj, 18).

"Whatever is in the heavens and the earth declares the glory of Allah, and He is the Mighty, the Wise" (al-Hadid, 1).

"Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to (Allah) Most Gracious as a servant" (Maryam, 93).

To further corroborate the point, the University of al-Qarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco, is the oldest existing, continually operating higher educational institution in the world according to UNESCO and Guinness World Records. It was founded by Fatima al-Fihri in 244 AH / 859 CE. For well over twelve hundred years it has been one of the leading spiritual and educational centres of the Muslim world.<sup>1</sup>

However, the university was founded firstly as a mosque. The foundation of the mosque was to provide, in addition to a space for worship, a learning centre for the local community as well. Like any mosque, al-Qarawiyyin soon developed into a place for religious instruction and political discussion, gradually extending its education to all subjects, particularly the natural sciences.

The mosque of al-Azhar in Cairo, the second oldest continuously run university in the world, after al-Qarawiyyin, was also initially a mosque-school, subsequently becoming one of the most influential universities in the world. The same goes to the al-Zaytuna University in Tunis.

These three outstanding examples were no different from the majority of principal mosques across the Muslim world. However, they were better taken care of than the others, were better managed and functioned better, and were yet more fortunate than many others insofar as the prevalent local and international social, political and economic circumstances were concerned. That ensured their continuity, longevity, overall operation and appeal.

Besides, the three universities never stopped functioning as mosques. Before the modern times when they became incorporated into their countries' modern state university systems, their being

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<sup>1</sup> Said Temsamani, *Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema: Leading Institution to Disseminate True Values of Islam in Africa*, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/17062016-mohammed-vi-foundation-for-african-ulema-leading-institution-to-disseminate-true-values-of-islam-in-africa-oped>, accessed on January 18, 2021.

educational institutions rarely eclipsed their being mosques – and *vice versa*. For instance, it is still said about al-Zaytuna mosque (University) that it is the oldest mosque in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia. “The mosque is known to host one of the first and greatest universities in the history of Islam. Many Muslim scholars were graduated from the al-Zaytuna for over a thousand years”.<sup>1</sup>

Architecturally, likewise, the three institutions never substantially changed. What at the outset was adequate for them to be mosques was adequate to be schools too. And later, what became appropriate for satisfying the needs of their new educational roles, by and large, did not prevent them from continuing to function as mosques too. Hence, the histories, purposes and architectural looks of the three mosques-cum-schools and then schools-cum-mosques are often misunderstood and misinterpreted, especially by those who fail to come to accept the nature of the evolution of Islamic institutions and of Islamic art and architecture and how the two were interconnected. They always appeared as though the same-yet-different and different-yet-the-same, exactly like the rest of the cases in the Islamic institutional art and architecture. To some, the phenomenon was fascinating and engaging, and to others, bewildering and confusing.

Finally, one cannot stop feeling that the impact and lure of the splendid mosque architecture together with its virtual institutional twin was so ubiquitous and overwhelming that it also affected the evolution of Islamic residential architecture. This was particularly apparent in big houses whose functions were more diversified and more complex than in smaller houses. Apart from functioning as family development centres, those houses, in addition, were increasingly becoming environment-, culture- and society-conscious units. In other words, they were turning into a form of institutions themselves, feeling as a result ever more inclined to embracing the institutional architecture.

And it came as no surprise that such institutional architectural components as landscaped courtyards, intricate decorative styles, emblematic ornaments, arches, pillars, miniature domes, vaulting, porticos, mosaics, iconoclasm and first-rate building materials, were increasingly finding their ways into residential architecture. Yet certain spaces – in some cases entire rooms – were assigned to perform as the places of worship, i.e., domestic mosques, whose milieus tried as much

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<sup>1</sup> *Al-Zaytuna Mosque*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Zaytuna\\_Mosque](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Zaytuna_Mosque), accessed on January 18, 2021.

as possible to imitate those of real mosques. In connection with the last point, it should be emphasized that the notion of designating some domestic spaces for worship purposes - primarily for daily prayers - dates back to the time of the Prophet (pbuh) himself.

the idea and definite artistic and architectural reality of domestic window screens, which later developed into full-fledged *mashrabiyyahs* or *rawashin* (projecting latticed windows adorned with intricate woodworks), as the most recognizable component of Islamic domestic architecture, might have been influenced, somehow or other, by the evolution of the vocabulary of mosque architecture.

Long before the emergence of elaborate window screens, the third rightly-guided caliph, ‘Uthman b. ‘Affan (36 AH / 656 CE), invented a *maqsurah* in the Prophet’s mosque. He did so for security reasons. Literally, the *maqsurah* means a cabinet or a compartment, and technically, it signifies a raised platform with protective screens adjacent to the *qiblah* wall with a direct private access to, or right in front of, the *mihrab* or praying niche area. The *maqsurah* was a small structural element and was built of mud brick. It had small openings through which the people could see the *imam* or the prayer leader. The *maqsurah* was later transformed at the hands of the Umayyad caliphs into an elaborate institution. It was enlarged and rebuilt firstly from carved stones then from teak wood.<sup>1</sup>

It certainly stands to reason that some elaborate wooden designs and decorative features of the *maqsurah* might have been borrowed by the evolving concepts of domestic window screens and *mashrabiyyahs*. They were now needed for different types and degrees of safety and security. They were needed to preserve the privacy and dignity of domestic life, further enriching and ennobling it.

What is more, some of the oldest known – and surviving - examples of *mashrabiyyahs* especially in Egypt were institutional rather than residential, in which case residential architecture, most probably, drew upon the wealth of institutional (mosque) architecture. Some old instances were two *mashrabiyyahs* made for the portico and *minbar* (pulpit) of al-Salih Tala’i’s mosque in Cairo. The mosque was built

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Khaldun, Abd al-Rahman, *The Muqaddimah*, translated from Arabic by Franz Rosenthal, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 222. Al-Samahudī, ‘Alī b. Aḥmad, *Wafa’ al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 502-505.

towards the end of the Fatimid rule in Egypt in 555 AH / 1160 CE by the Fatimid vizier Tala'i b. Ruzzik (d. 556 AH / 1161 CE).<sup>1</sup>

Other early examples were *mashrabiyyahs* found in the Ayyubid cenotaphs in the mosque and funerary complex of Imam al-Shafi'i in Cairo (early 7<sup>th</sup> AH / early 13<sup>th</sup> CE century), and those found in the railings surrounding the tomb of the Mamluk Sultan Qalawun (end of 7<sup>th</sup> AH / end of 13<sup>th</sup> CE century).<sup>2</sup>

### **The Current Dilemma**

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Islamic architecture was standing at a crossroads, while the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century spelled its virtual death. The culprits came as much from within as without the rapidly declining Islamic civilizational reality. In the final analysis, however, Muslims and nobody else were responsible for the tragedy. All other, specifically external, factors were supplementary. Muslims were subjugated and exploited by others only because they wanted to be subjugated and displayed readiness to be exploited. Malik Bennabi calls this disorder *qabiliyyah li al-isti'mar* (predisposition to, and readiness for, colonization).

Muslims stopped generating uniquely Islamic civilizational outputs - comprising art and architecture - only when they stopped being creative and when they ceased to generate ideas and solutions; that is to say, when they discontinued being civilizational producers and became mere observers and consumers. Put another way, Muslims and their civilizational legacy went into a tailspin because they bartered their Islam as a heavenly source of total goodness, vitality, perseverance, and spiritual, ethical and material productivity, for an Islam of general ineptitude, indifference, externalism and academicism.

As far as architecture is concerned, it was among the last segments to be affected. That was the case, firstly, on account of architecture being an effect whose causes resided in the realms of ideas and values, and, secondly, on account of it being an external manifestation of the intellectual and spiritual states of people. As a maxim goes to the effect that what is outside is merely a reflection of that which is inside.

Hence, for the outside conditions to change, the inner ones must change first. Similarly, for performances and deeds to change, beliefs and values must change first. The latter is most crucial and human individual

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<sup>1</sup> Jehan Mohamed, *The Traditional Arts and Crafts of Turnery or Mashrabiya*, Master's thesis, (Camden, New Jersey: Rutgers University, 2015), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

and collective destinies depend on it. Even the divine justice necessitated that man be in charge of his inner self and thus be exclusively accountable for it. All other things are accidents contingent upon the existence of something else. They are relative and as such can be circumnavigated.

Given that the outside world is rather beyond the limited capacities and control of man, God promised to intervene and help – as a sign of His infinite love and care - provided man did what he could with regard to “what is in himself”. As if man was advised to take care of himself and what is absolutely his, following which the rest will be taken care of with or without him being employed as an agent of improvement and change.

The Qur’an says: “Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves” (al-Ra’d, 11).

“That is because Allah would not change a favour which He had bestowed upon a people until they change what is within themselves. And indeed, Allah is Hearing and Knowing” (al-An’am, 53).

After the faith and thought patterns of people changed, quite some time was needed for corresponding changes in Islamic architecture as a consequence to take place. The laws that regulate the orb of faith and thought are subtle and cerebral, which is why they are contravened and neglected first. There is nothing easier, nor quicker, than to become myopic, yet completely blind, in the world of ideas and wisdom. People may suffer without even realizing it.

However, when it comes to the physical world of manifestations, things are different as they are easily perceived and distinguished. Even the weakest, most helpless, most unenlightened and most misguided ones can have a say in the goings-on. Possessing the least functioning senses is sufficient to do so. It is not for nothing that visionary and wise men are concerned about generating and sustaining causes, while thoughtless and heedless ones can see and appreciate nothing beyond sheer effects. Whereas one side wants to produce and move forward, the other one fancies but to consume, become stagnant and move backward. The former live and feel architecture, hence easily comprehend it; the latter, on the other hand, is able only to see and use it, and hence is prone to misunderstanding it. The former furthermore identify their lives with architecture, while to the latter architecture and their lives connote two dissimilar, often conflicting, strands. Theirs is a marriage of convenience.

So, therefore, when architecture deteriorates, unqualified persons see in the process a deterioration of something that is their mere possession, not that it is themselves; something that is their mere symbol, not quintessence; something that is their past, not present and

future; and something that is their mere tradition, not civilizational identity and strength. Still, such people will not easily give up the architectural legacy of theirs, in that doing so would imply giving up most of their social and cultural constructs. They relegate their architecture to the spheres of sheer symbolism, cultural heritage and customs. And in so doing, novel – often unfamiliar - architectural styles and schools of thought are readily espoused, albeit without completely renouncing the home-grown ones. Those are needed for the inferior purposes of ceremonialism, scholasticism and nostalgia. With this architectural dualism, the doors that one day may lead to a sense and degree of guilty conscience are permanently sealed.

The fate of Islamic architecture was akin to that. Its true spirit was long gone, but its externalism and symbolism abided. So much so that any attempts afterwards to revive its authentic nature, either at a conceptual or a real-life plane, were significantly hindered thereby.

Looking at the declining curve of Islamic architecture, it becomes apparent that the first thing that declined were Islamic teachings and values. That was followed by a decline in people's progressive thought and its looked-for impact in everyday life. In its capacity as a personification of Islam's most noble standards, the mosque - principally - was pushed to the forefront of the new struggles. Every faction wanted to utilize its potentials for its own vision and programs, some trying to use it and others to misuse it. To some, the mosque was an opportunity, to others, an impediment.

As might be expected, the universality and comprehensiveness of Islam as a complete code of life suffered most in the process. With it, the institutional character of the mosque, and its prolific relationship with other institutions, was likewise wrecked. The case of Islamic architecture, as a servant of the Islamic institutionalism, was next. The Islamic ontological triangle, as it were, whose non-collinear points of Islam and Muslims, Islamic civilization and Islamic architecture, which coexisted peacefully for ages and which mutually supported and greatly benefited from each other, was debilitated. Harmony was replaced with incongruity, cooperation with tension, and unity with disagreement and uncertainty.

All of a sudden, the mosque and other institutions – including the house institution - stood worlds apart. They were different universes altogether. Disagreements and conflicts gradually deepened to the point that hitherto national assets and strengths in the end developed into wholesale liabilities and weaknesses. The mosque was still the fortress of the Islamic message and spirituality, but was increasingly isolated by the

institutionalized and now differently-configured outside world. It is by no means an exaggeration to posit that the mosque was forced into a form of religious passivism and even reductionism. It had to fight its way through the mounting challenges to stay socially relevant and useful.

Conversely, socio-political, economic and educational institutions in the Muslim world, all the time more, were flirting with other and alien-to-Islam worldviews and systems of life, especially such as were coming from the fast-changing and rapidly-developing West. To many people, led by certain disoriented and desperate rulers, the temptation of the Western enormous military and material progress was too much to resist. The way of the West might just have been the quick fix those rules and their followers were keenly looking for.

It all changed when the Muslim mind changed and was recalibrated. And when systems of education as a prime mover of societal and cultural change were revised, so as to go hand in hand with and to mirror the other sweeping changes, there was no stopping, nor going back. The Muslim world reached the point of no return on the road to westernized reform and acculturation. The Muslim persistent disintegration and decline and the Western steady “progress” were sealing people’s and communities’ fates.

On the face of it, the Muslim rulers wanted to “modernize” their countries; first it was armies and modern weapons of war, then railways, then the amenities of domestic life such as electricity and running water, then automobiles and factory equipment, and finally all the new inventions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the Western-educated class grew in numbers and wealth, it also wanted to share in Western comforts and luxuries. As time went on, more and more ordinary people too wanted to partake in the new standards of living being developed in the West.<sup>1</sup> Western-type education, both in the West and back home, was also ultimately coveted and pursued, in that it was the most warranted path to a modernity status.

As William Montgomery Watt puts it, most of the Muslim modernity-associated problems originated from the exposure of their traditional worldview to the contemporary Western outlook. “They might also have come to see that they could not share in Western science and technology without also sharing in those aspects of Western thought on which science and technology are based, and that these could not be

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<sup>1</sup> William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*, (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 46.

wholly separated from the historical and literary criticism which threw doubts on parts of their traditional worldview.”<sup>1</sup>

The dichotomy between the mosque and other institutions was one based on conflicting ideologies. It was Islam against the emerging nonreligious ideologies of the West, such as secularism, materialism, humanism, liberalism, modernism and scientific agnosticism. It is no wonder that since Islam as an ideology and way of life was no longer welcome in those institutions’ domains, neither was anything else that originated therefrom and was related to it. Pure Islamic architecture was one of those things that was dispensed with. What was favoured instead were the Western architectural styles as were associated with the adopted Western systems of thought and behaviour, such as the renaissance, baroque, neoclassical, modern, international and postmodern architectural styles. As underlined before, a civilizational aspect cannot be adopted alone and in isolation from its philosophy and tenets. Acts of civilizational advocacy and support must come as package deals.

Admittedly, the architecture of some institutions – including residential architecture – was a dishonest hybrid between the dominant Western styles and the formalism (literalism) of the deceasing Islamic architecture. In this manner, the architecture was neither Western nor Islamic. It was a symbol of ugliness and mendaciousness. Every so often, it produced architectural freaks that were repelling, rather than attracting. It was a delusional architecture, so to say, and was a perfect symptom of people’s existential disorientation and uncertainty.

The mosque could not fare much better with respect to the safeguarding of genuine Islamic architecture. It was growing weaker each day and was forced to scale down its roles and ambitions. Its enduring pure religious functions suffered too, for Islam as a religious system can be ideally practiced only with its social and civilizational dimensions on-board. If the latter are suppressed, the former is proportionally dented and rendered incapacitated as well.

The artistic and architectural appearance of the mosque was regressive, reflecting the regressive nature of its status and function. It hesitantly oscillated between Islamic architectural symbolism, externalism and imitation, and the meticulous selection of unavoidable, highly technical and utterly neutral methods and solutions provided by the architectural styles of the dominated-by-the-West modern times. The

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

mosque generated its own architectural hybrid styles that were all out to be dictated by Islamic heritage and traditions.

Thus the mosque continued as the only spiritual, emotional and even intellectual safe haven. It persisted as a sanctuary for a true believer's being with all of its facets and tiers. Its architecture, in turn, became the repository, as well as the place, of safety and protection for Islamic architecture. The stage therefore was set for permanently traditionalizing the mosque and with it Islamic architecture. It follows that Islamic tradition, not as a part and outcome of a dynamic process, but as the aim and design of a deliberate strategy, was born. The same holds true in relation to the birth of Islamic traditional architecture and the mosque as a traditional institution. Together they stood for a citadel and symbol of Islamic tradition.

Since Islam for many people was not a desirable entity outside the parameters of the mosque – in the domains where other ideologies and value systems ruled – the mosque eventually grew to be synonymous with the whole of Islam, and mosque architecture with the whole of Islamic architecture. Such were the novel conditions of the mosque and its architecture that there was extremely little room for visionary enthusiasm and creativity. It all boiled down to the tasks of the safeguarding and continuation of tradition. Apart from the established mere religious aspects, the mosque featured nothing but few other run-of-the-mill “non-religious” interests. It was becoming a kind of museum or memorial. It was morphing into an anachronism of the modern world.

However, it is fair to say that the mosque was somewhat forced to be what it in due course has become. The terms of its existence and operation were generally imposed on it, as a consequence of which its responses were as much reactionary as apologetic and protective. The main problems lay with modern social institutions. They initiated rifts with the mosque institution, keeping it at bay and trying to neutralize it as much as possible. Their positions could yet be described as antagonistic and missionary. They therefore were the main source of the escalation of the institutional ideological – and architectural - dichotomy in Islamic civilization. They were also the main campaigner for the tradition-versus-modernity – and traditional-versus-modern-architecture – mistrust.

Inasmuch as modern social institutions shunned the mosque institution and everything it represented, the mosque did not retaliate in like manner. The mosque institution (its mission and patrons) was but against the un-Islamic dimensions those institutions imbibed. In principle, the mosque was not against anything or anybody. It was

regularly making overtures to all sides. It never ceased being ready and willing to function as a reformer and pacifier.

There can be no doubt that the mosque and its message represent the only hope for the bright future of Muslims and their civilizational enterprise. Integration of the exigencies of the material world and those of the spiritual realm, manifested then in the institutional ideological harmony, is the only way forward. Restoring the intrinsic mission and rights of the mosque institution as a community development centre – while ingeniously coming to grips with the demands and opportunities of modern times - is the key.

For example, in today's large and multifaceted societies, the mosque institution can resort to the systems of prioritization, selectivity and devolution. It can be decided that the mosque should handle completely and alone certain activities, while some others can be handled in cooperation with additional institutions, and yet taking care of further activities and pursuits can be fully delegated to alternative appropriate establishments. Nor is it necessary that everything should come to the mosque and operate under its patronage. Nowadays the mosque can partially move to the provinces of other institutions and operate under their own patronages, in particular if those institutions are complex and dominant. As for instance, the mosque can be planned and smoothly integrated into the overall functions of schools, shopping and business centres, governmental complexes, factories, recreational centres, etc. This, inevitably, would trigger a whole lot of dynamic mosque and general Islamic architectural discourses, which in turn would significantly enrich the architectural education and practice of Muslims.

At any rate, the mosque ought to be visionary, resourceful, uninhibited, democratic, and steadfast in its ideals, but flexible in its methods and strategies. It must be what it always was meant to be, namely a microcosm of Islam, Islamic society and Islamic civilization. Its relationships with the rest are to be organic, reciprocal and truthful. Only then, certainly, can we talk about the prospect of reviving Islamic architecture in general and mosque architecture in particular, in that there can be no revival of Islamic architecture without a revival in Islamic at once religious and civilizational consciousness. There should be no place for literal symbolism, blind dogmatism and excessive formalism. They are as damaging as the absence of Islam itself.

## **Conclusion**

It was asked at the beginning of the article if Islamic architecture is synonymous with mosque architecture. Now it can be asserted that it isn't, despite a great many evolutionary and operational similarities. The most that can be said is that mosque architecture served as the quintessence and also driving power of Islamic architecture. There are more points where the two met than where they separated.

Despite the fact that the mosque institution and its architecture generally inspired, guided and watched over most of the other aspects of Islamic architecture, it must be recognized that there were other aspects that evolved on their own and functioned independently from the vocabulary of mosque architecture. There were yet others which, even though originating within the orb of mosque architecture, assumed supplementary imports and functions elsewhere.

This ensured the perennial expansion, together with enrichment, of the outward show and inward meaning of Islamic architecture. Such a unique identity of Islamic architecture and the subtle relationship between mosque architecture and the whole body of Islamic architecture ought to be studied through the lens of the mosque institution as the basis (“mother”) of all other institutions, and of the institutional ideological harmony in Islamic civilization through which the mosque institution served as an incubator of general architectural creativity. If not, the studies of Islamic architecture are bound to be inconsistent, deficient and so, unreliable.

Those who might claim that Islamic architecture is utterly synonymous with mosque architecture are the people who favour, deliberately or otherwise, the institutional ideological dichotomy in Islamic societies. Accordingly, the mosque is to be isolated and placed into its own pure religious orbit, while the rest of social institutions are to subsist in their own secular realms cut off from the influences of the heavenly purpose of the mosque. Anything pertaining to religion and spirituality is expected to be affiliated with the mosque phenomenon alone, including Islamic architecture. Elsewhere, nonreligious systems of thought and values were more applicable, including the systems of architecture inspired by the former.

Needless to say that these beliefs are as dangerous as denying the total existence of Islamic architecture. They may yet be more damaging, for distortion is worse than outright rejection. They originate from the Western secular and liberal philosophies, according to which religion is a private matter without public interference and social influence whatsoever. But

promoting those philosophies in the Islamic midst was never easy. The main stumbling block was always the notion and multidimensionality of the mosque. Hence, contriving elaborate plans and schemes, which aimed to undermine the authority of the mosque and its mission, never fizzled out. Misapprehending mosque architecture in connection with the total of Islamic architecture, it stands to reason, might have been part – or an upshot – of some of such plans and schemes.

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