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Correspondence
Managing Editor, *Al-Itqān*
Research Management Centre, RMC
International Islamic University Malaysia
P.O Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tel: +603 6196 5558
Website: http://journals.iium.edu.my/al-itqan/index.php/alitqan/index
Email: al-itqan@iium.edu.my

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Three Mosques Associated with the Battle of Uhud: Their Importance, History and Architecture

Spahic Omer*

Abstract

This article discusses the importance, history and architecture of three mosques associated with the Uhud battle. The mosques are: masjid al-Fash, masjid al-Dir' and masjid al-Mustarah. These mosques are of a number of thronged landmarks found at or near the Uhud battlefield. The article concludes that the three mosques, though historically and to some extent architecturally remarkable, do not contain any corresponding religious significance. They are mere historical buildings commemorating certain, however critical, historical events and their sites. Thus, the mosques are not to be promoted from the level of historicity to that of religiosity, and are to be neither spiritualized nor ritualized. The mosques convey a number of lessons in the history of the nascent Madinah society, as well as in the nature of the development of Islamic culture and civilization. The research method adopted is interdisciplinary in character; it is a blend of descriptive, analytical and historical methods. A variety of sources, both primary and secondary, have been used. A field visit to the three mosques has also been performed.

Keywords: Uhud battle, masjid al-Fash, masjid al-Dir', masjid al-Mustarah; Madinah, Prophet

Introduction

The event of the Uhud battle was as worldlier as otherworldly. It was more than a mere moment in history. The confines of time, as well as space, failed to impound what the Uhud spectacle was destined to be, not only for the history and present, but also the entire future. Thus, as soon as the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) started his and his combatants' preparations for the battle – eternalized and at the same time publicized by the words of the Qur'an: "And (remember) when you, (O Muhammad), left your family in the morning to post the believers at their stations for the battle (of Uhud)" (Āli ʿImrān, 122) – the affair commenced to assume both its supra-historical and trans-historical

* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Department of History and Civilization, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: ospahic@iium.edu.my

character. The implied imperative "Remember!" in the cited verse-which was meant first for the Prophet, then for the rest of the Muslim ummah (community)-is redolent of these extraordinary dimensions entailed in the battle and its infinite ramifications.

In sum, the Uhud battle was not just an instant of history, but also history's personification and microcosm; nor was it just a defining moment of truth, but also a leading factor in charting the course of the truth and of the whole of existence, serving as the context and coordinate system of that truth. Uhud was a sphere by itself. The eternal spirit of Uhud is featured and its ever-burning flame kept alive within the realms of the Qur'an and the commentaries of the Qur'an, the Prophet's Sunnah, the Prophet's biographies, the genre of *maghazi* or accounts of especially the Prophet's military expeditions, and in the annals of Muslim historiography with generic contents. The well-known battlefield of Uhud and its surrounding areas, containing a number of thronged landmarks, contributed towards the realization of the same objectives. Three mosques: masjid al-Fash, masjid al-Dir' and masjid al-Mustarah, are of the landmarks from the battlefield's surrounding areas. Their importance, history and architecture will be analysed in this article.

Masjid al-Fash (the mosque of al-Fash)

Masjid al-Fash (the mosque of al-Fash) is a mosque closely affiliated with the battle of Uhud. It is located at the foot of the Uhud Mountain behind, or north of, the Uhud battlefield, about 700-800 meters away. It is a well-known fact that as a strategic manoeuvre, the Prophet stationed the Muslim fighters in such a way that they faced Madinah while their backs were to the hills of the Uhud Mountain. Hence, the army of the enemy stood between the Muslims and Madinah.

The earliest reference to this mosque was by Umar b. Shibbah al-Basri (d. 262 AH/876 AC) in his seminal book on the history of Madinah "Tarikh al-Madinah al-Munawwarah." The author wrote that the Prophet prayed in a small mosque which was affixed to the Uhud Mountain (it laid at its foot). The mosque was on the right side of the visitors coming from the Uhud battlefield. The mosque seemed important to Umar b. Shibbah, thus, without naming it, he mentioned the mosque as the first of the Madinah mosques and sites where the Prophet had performed his prayers, after the

Prophet's mosque and the Quba' mosque.[1] The subsequent historians agreed that the mosque under consideration was masjid al-Fash.

The mosque might have been built first by Madinah's Umayyad governor ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. Following the completion of the historic expansion of the Prophet's mosque by order of the Umayyad caliph in Damascus al-Walid b. ʿAbd al-Malik, ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz asked the people of Madinah to show him the ancient mosques and places where the Prophet had prayed.[2] He then at each such location built a mosque with incised and identical stones; that is to say, he both institutionalized and immortalized those places and their mosques with the intention of facilitating their visitation.

"With incised and identical stones" additionally suggests that the mosques were part of a systematic undertaking and were given an architectural individuality hitherto unknown. Not unexpectedly was such the case, given that the caliphate of al-Walid b. ʻAbd al-Malik was the time when the distinguishable vocabulary of Islamic architecture, along with its identity, were in the final phase of evolution.

One of those places thence attended to architecturally was masjid al-Fash. During the time of Umar b. Shibbah, the mosque appears to have been still standing and in a usable condition. That was in the third Hijrah century, less than two centuries after the mosque's first construction.

In his influential work on the history of Madinah titled "Al-Taʿrīf bima Anasat al-Hijrah min Maʿalim Dar al-Hijrah", Jamaluddin al-Matari (d. 1341) also alluded to the same mosque. However, just like Umar b. Shibbah, neither did he name it. To the two authors, the mosque in question was only "a small mosque." Jamaluddin al-Matari further added that subsequent to the Uhud battle, the Prophet had performed the *zuhr* (midday) and *ʿasr* (afternoon) prayers in the said mosque (at its site), which is the solitary truth closely linked with the structure and its location. By the time of al-Matari's writing of his book, though, the mosque was as good as destroyed.[3]

Adjoining the mosque, towards the *qiblah* (south) side facing Makkah, there was in the mountain a carved, or hollowed out, place of the size of a human head. People believed that the Prophet had sat on a rock beneath that place, resting his head where the mentioned carved

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[1] Umar b. Shibbah al-Basri, *Tarikh al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), vol. 1, p. 57.

[2] Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1997), vol. 3, p. 850.

[3] Jamaluddin Muhammad al-Matari, *al-Ta'rif bima Anasat al-Hijrah min Ma'alim Dar al-Hijrah*, (Riyadh: Darah al-Malik ʻAbd al-'Aziz, 2006), pp. 126-127.

spot was. There his wounds were ostensibly washed. To the north of the mosque – which was the opposite of the former spot – there was a cave about 150 meters up the mountain. It was suspected that the Prophet had entered it following his and the Muslims' withdrawal from the Uhud battlefield.

However, Jamaluddin al-Matari concluded that neither of the two beliefs was true. They were mere folktales.[1] Certainly, there was a cave nearby and a supposedly carved point abutting the mosque, but they were there by chance. The general public started to relate those to the Prophet as a result of their ignorance and weak faith. The viewpoints were the product of their imagination. Self-interested and greedy schemers were to be blamed as well, as emphasized by Ibrahim Rifʿat Pasha at the outset of the 20th century.[2]

That was one of the reasons why in his book "Wafa' al-Wafa" - which is by far the greatest and most reliable reference on the history of Madinah - al-Samahudi did not mention any of the two fallacies when he spoke about masjid al-Fash.[3] However, he did briefly mention – and repudiated - them when he reported about the Uhud Mountain, relying mainly on the views of Umar b. Shibbah, Jamaluddin al-Matari and Abu Abdullah b. al-Najjar and his work "*al-Durrah al-Thāminah fī Akhbār al-Madīnah*" as three of his mentors. Al-Samahudi's account is such that he seems to have just accepted and duly implemented the findings of his predecessors.[4]

Today, the mosque lies in ruins. There are only traces of its ground plan. The south *qiblah* wall is in a better shape than the rest of the walls, standing at the height of about one meter. Its relatively small and shallow *miḥrab* or praying niche, as a result, is also discernible. The *qiblah* wall was so thick that recessing the *miḥrab* into it did not require a protrusion on the outside, as is always the case with thin qiblah walls. The thickness of the wall amplified its sturdiness, which, without doubt, contributed to its longevity as opposed to the other walls.

The mosque's architectural remnants most probably date back to a period of the Osmanli or Ottoman history in Madinah. This could be supported by the fact that the medieval pre-Osmanli historians generally draw attention to the ruinous state of the mosque. Whereas the historians

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[1] Jamaluddin Muhammad al-Matari, *al-Ta'rif bima Anasat al-Hijrah min Ma'alim Dar al-Hijrah*, p. 127.
[2] Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha, *Mir'ah al-Haramayn*, (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), vol. 1 p. 394.
[3] Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 3 p. 848.
[4] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 930.

of the Osmanli period do not follow suit. Rather, they speak of the mosque as a subsisting entity, sometimes even implying a tenable architectural condition. For example, while Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha[1] and Muhammad Kibrit al-Husayni[2] in the 20th and 17th centuries respectively simply affirmed that there was a mosque: the mosque of al-Fash, Ali b. Musa al-Afandi in 1885 referred to the mosque as a complete, albeit not a roofed structure.[3] This denotes that prior to the arrival of the Osmanlis, the mosque lay derelict and in a state of ruin; afterwards it was rebuilt by the Osmanlis, and again in modern times, the mosque has been allowed to slip back to its old conditions of devastation and neglect.

However, there are official efforts aimed at restoring the mosque and reviving its fortunes once again. In charge of the initiative is Al Madinah Region Development Authority. The plan is part of an enormous enterprise that seeks to redevelop and rehabilitate the Islamic historical sites of Madinah.

The mosque is called al-Fash, which means "giving place to", "opening the way for" and "spaciousness." Why the mosque is thus called is unknown. Still, many people believe that the mosque's name had something to do with the revelation of the following Qur'anic verse: "O you who have believed, when you are told: 'Space yourselves' in assemblies, then make space; Allah will make space for you. And when you are told: 'Arise,' then arise; Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees. And Allah is Acquainted with what you do" (al-Mujadilah, 11).

It has been purported that the reason for revealing this verse was an event that took place at the mosque's location, in all probability in conjunction with the events of the battle of Uhud, which nevertheless is not correct. No commentator of the Qur'an, nor trustworthy historian, subscribed to that opinion. On the contrary, a great many scholars took great pains to address the issue and establish its falseness.[4]

The mosque is sometimes called the mosque of Uhud as well, which is for obvious reasons. It was built at the base of the Uhud Mountain, virtually integrating itself with the latter. Its main building material was the famous dark stone of Madinah, some of which should have been cut from quarries

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[1] Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha, *Mir'ah al-Haramayn*, vol. 1, p. 393.

[2] Muhammad Kibrit al-Husayni, *Kitab al-Jawahir al-Thaminah fi Mahasin al-Madinah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), p. 256.

[3] Ali b. Musa al-Afandi, *Wasf al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*, (Cairo: Matba'ah Nahdah Misr, 1885), p. 15.

[4] Muhammad Ilyas 'Abd al-Ghani, *al-Masajid al-Athariyyah fi al-Madinah al-Nabawiyyah*, (Madinah: Matabi' al-Rashid, 2003), pp. 151-152.

at or near the Uhud Mountain. Thus, in terms of environmental guidance and support, the mosque and the landscape of Uhud were at peace with each other. They were organically amalgamated. They were just as one; which surely serves as a lesson in sustainability and sustainable development.

Finally, it is remarkable that in the modern-day editions of al-Samahudi's magnum opus "Wafa' al-Wafa" the mosque is (mis)spelled as "masjid al-qabih" instead of "masjid al-fash." To make things worse, the wording of "masjid al-qabih" is grossly repulsive and so, utterly inappropriate for any mosque, let alone a mosque associated with the Prophet, which tend as much to confuse as astonish researchers.

However, the truth is that the said wording is a typographical error. The original manuscript of the book, plus the manuscript, as well as the printed version, of the abridgment of the same book, contain the correct name of the mosque. Muhammad Ilyas ʿAbd al-Ghani properly clarified the matter in his scholarly analysis of the traditional mosques in Madinah titled "Al-Masājid al-Athariyyah fī al-Madīnah al-Nabawiyyah."[1] Thus, al-Samahudi must be absolved of any charge of wrongdoing.

Figure 1: Masjid al-Fash is located at the foot of the Uhud Mountain behind, or north of, the Uhud battlefield, about 700-800 meters away. Today, the small mosque lies in ruins.

[1] Muhammad Ilyas ʿAbd al-Ghani, *al-Masajid al-Athariyyah fi al-Madinah al-Nabawiyyah*, pp. 152-154.

Figure 2: Of late, there are official efforts aimed at restoring the mosque and reviving its fortunes once again. In charge of the initiative is Al Madinah Region Development Authority. This is an aerial view of the mosque's current ruins taken from an advertising material of Al Madinah Region Development Authority.

Masjid al-Dir' (the mosque of al-Dir')

Masjid al-Dir' is another small mosque linked to the battle of Uhud. It lies between the Prophet's mosque and the Uhud battlefield, though slightly tilting towards northwest of the city of Madinah. The mosque is thus called (*al-dir'* means "armour or coat of mail") because, as part of his preparations for the battle, the Prophet is said to have worn his armour (*dir'*) right there.

However, some historians, such as Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha in his book "*Mir'ah al-Ḥaramayn*" and Ibrahim al-'Ayyashi in his book "*al-Madīnah bayn al-Madi wa al-Hadir*", objected to this claim, reminding that it is well-established that the Prophet had worn his armour at home in the house of his wife ʿĀ'ishah before setting out for the battle.[1] Faced by this quandary, Muhammad Ilyas ʿAbd al-Ghani tried to patch things by drawing attention to the verity that the Prophet, as a matter of fact, had put on two coats of mail during the battle of Uhud as a double protection.[2] Thus, it could be that the Prophet had donned one armour at

[1] Ibrahim al-'Ayyashi, *al-Madinah bayn al-Madi wa al-Hadir*, (Madinah: al-Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah, 1972), p. 527.
[2] Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Book 15, Hadith No. 114.

home and another one in the mentioned mosque, due to which the mosque got its name: masjid al-Dir'.[1]

Even so, the reasoning of Muhammad Ilyas 'Abd al-Ghani does not hold true. It is sensible to assume that the Prophet had both armours worn while at home. However, historians looked at the subject differently. For example, whereas Ibn Hisham in his biography of the Prophet stated that the Prophet had put on his armour at home, Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri was explicit in his own biography "the Sealed Nectar" that at that initial juncture the Prophet had put on not just "his armour", but "both of his armours".

Nevertheless, the two authors, it seems, meant the same thing. For Ibn Hisham the implication of "his armour" was a set of two armours. What Ibn Hisham wanted to say was that the Prophet was under full military readiness and was prepared for the battle, which included his wearing of his two armours as a set. Ibn Hisham mentioned one armour, but the object was a general description that entailed only the type of the Prophet's protective covering, not the details of the readiness including the quantity of armour. It stands to reason that the Prophet's two armours were not specifically stated, but were implied.

Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, on the other hand, spoke of the two armours because his account was more comprehensive and more details-oriented. Since one of his main references was Ibn Hisham and his biography of the Prophet (al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah), as if the narrative of Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri stood for a commentary of that of his mentor. Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri reported that the eve of the Uhud battle was Friday. The Prophet led the *Jumūʿah* prayer in his mosque with crowds of people. "Then he entered his house accompanied by his two friends Abu Bakr and ʿUmar. They helped him dress and wear his head-cloth. He armed himself and wore two armours one over the other. He wore his sword and went out to meet people. People were waiting for him impatiently." It was then that the people felt inclined to change their minds and to revert to the Prophet's original suggestion that the enemy should be confronted within the city of Madinah, rather than outside in the open. To that, the Prophet replied: "It is not fit for a Prophet, when he puts on his armour, to take it off until he fights."[2]

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[1] Muhammad Ilyas 'Abd al-Ghani, *al-Masajid al-Athariyyah fi al-Madinah al-Nabawiyyah*, p. 112.

[2] Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar*, (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 1996), p. 248. Ibn Hisham, *The Prophetic Biography*, translated into English by Muhammad Mahdi al-Sharif, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2013), p. 394.

When exactly and under what circumstances the mosque started to be called masjid al-Dir' is difficult to say, but it is feasible that the designation pertained to the Prophet's armours. The Prophet arrived at the place on Friday after the Jumu'ah prayer. He spent the night there and the following day he departed to the site of the Uhud battle. That means that the Prophet had performed the *ʿasr* (afternoon), *maghrib* (sunset), *ʿishā'* (night) and *fajr* (dawn) prayers in the mosque.

The mosque and its surrounding areas corresponded to the Prophet's temporary military camp in which he for the duration of his stay performed a number of activities, some of which were military and others social and religious in character. One of the key activities conducted at the place was parading the army. Those who were considered to be unsuitable, disabled and too young to stand the fight, were asked to return.

Obviously, the location of the mosque and the time spent there was a kind of a recess for a changeover. It was a point where a transition from Madinah proper to a conflict zone, and from a civil to a warlike aura, came to pass. The range of the mosque signified a temporary military base of the Muslims. It was moreover a scene of some of the most critical decision-making, and an incubator of some of the most extraordinary at once individual and collective sentiments. Heroes were made and cowards exposed. In their own right, they all inscribed indelible pages of history.

For that reason did the Prophet just there ask the persons younger than fourteen years to return to Madinah. What was to follow thenceforward was beyond their physical and mental capacities.[1] It was likewise there or thereabouts that the Prophet refused to admit a well-armed battalion of Madinah Jews-who had wished to contribute to the fight against the Makkan idolaters-telling them "that he would not seek the assistance of disbelievers against the idolaters."

Furthermore, at the same place and at the end of the night just before it was daybreak – that is, shortly before leaving the "transit" and heading for the combat-a sizable group of hypocrites rebelled against the Prophet and withdrew to Madinah. Initially, those people made up about one-third of the Muslim army, so the mutiny was every bit of a disappointment.[2] Finally, partly shaken by the actions of the hypocrites, more Muslims were about to follow their example, were it not for a divine intervention: "When two parties among you were about to lose

[1] Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Book 20, Hadith No. 11.
[2] Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 65, Hadith No. 111.

courage, but Allah was their ally; and upon Allah the believers should rely" (Āli ʿImrān, 122).[1]

Owing to all this, it is a fair guess that during the transit that lasted more than half a day, the Prophet had taken off his two armours he had originally worn at home. Then, when he was about to lead the Muslim army directly to the arena of the Uhud fight, he should have worn those armours again. The Prophet putting (again) on his armours, galvanizing his soldiers and implanting the spirit of bravery into their hearts, must have been a sight to behold and an experience to savour, as a result of which the mosque which was the epicentre of these historic events, was later called masjid al-Dir' (the mosque of al-Dir', or the mosque of the Prophet's armour or coat of mail).

That there were two instances of the Prophet putting on his two armours, one at home and the other just ahead of the battle, testify the reports of Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri who, having already referred to the first instance, also said in connection with the final preparations for the battle: "The Messenger of Allah forbade the Muslims to start the fight without having an order from him. He, then, wore two armours - a front armour and a back one. He urged his companions to fight and spurred them to show stamina and steadfastness at fight."[2]

At any rate, masjid al-Dir' or the mosque of al-Dir' is only one of several names of the mosque in question. There are at least three other names: masjid al-Shaykhayn, masjid al-Badai' and masjid al-'Udwah.[3] The first name-masjid al-Shaykhayn–appears to be most common overall. Conversely, the name masjid al-Dir' appears to be most common at the present time, whereas the same was not the case especially in the early and medieval history. That being the case, most contemporary works speak about the mosque as masjid al-Dir' first and foremost. Examples of such works are "Irshad al-Qasid lima Buniya 'ala 'Ahd al-Nubuwwah min al-Masajid" by al-Sayyid Dhiya' bin Muhammad 'Attar and "Ma'alim Makkah wa al-Madinah bayn al-Madi wa al-Hadir" by Yusuf Ragda al-'Amili.

Ali b. Musa al-Afandi hinted at the crux of the mosque's semantics when he said in 1885 that about halfway between Uhud and the city of Madinah there was a mosque on a slope (hence one of its names: masjid al-'Udwah or the mosque of a slope or a hillock) which was customarily

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[1] Muhammad Ilyas 'Abd al-Ghani, *al-Masajid al-Athariyyah fi al-Madinah al-Nabawiyyah*, p. 116.
[2] Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar*, p. 254.
[3] Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 3, p. 865.

known as "masjid al-Shaykhayn, but which is now (in 1885) called masjid al-Dir'."[1] Yet, to further compound the matter, Muhammad Ilyas 'Abd al-Ghani said that in 1997 he came across a noticeboard affixed on the door of the mosque which stated that the mosque's name was masjid al-Khayr. That name, nonetheless, is unfounded and could be a fabrication. No historical source refers to the mosque with that name.[2]

The mosque's principal name al-Shaykhayn, which means "two elders or chieftains", was so termed because at that particular location there were two forts, or lofty buildings (*utum*), that belonged to some Jews and which were called "al-Shaykhayn". Near them, within their yard, there was a mosque which assumed the name of the two forts.

Al-Samahudi said that the al-Shaykhayn name was given based on a tradition according to which a shaykh (an elderly man) and shaykhah (an elderly woman) used to converse at the place. He also said that the original name of the entire locality was "*thaniyyah shaykhan*" (the valley, or mountain path, of the two elders),[3] owing to which the two Jewish forts (*utum*), as the locality's landmarks, and consequently the mosque situated in the vicinity of the latter, were called thus by dint of the original designation of the locality.

Parenthetically, the city of Madinah abounded with utum structures. They were characteristic of the uniqueness of the city's built environment, so much so that the Prophet-as per a weak *ḥadīth* (tradition) - once said that the atam (plural of utum) added up to the adornment of Madinah and so should be maintained as much as a legacy as an essential.

Moreover, it should be highlighted that the mosques of Madinah during the Prophet's time were extremely simple structures. Patterning themselves after the Prophet's mosque, they were either unpaved and roofless enclosures, or simply earmarked open spaces with some unpretentious indicators that suggested the places' function. The sites were mosques more with respect to function than form. Without doubt, the mosque of al-Shaykhayn, or al-Dir', conformed to the same standard, as the words "(the mosque being) within the yard of the two *utum*" clearly imply.

The earliest reference to this mosque is made by Muhammad bin Zabalah (d. 199 AH/814 AC), who was the first historian of Madinah. In his seminal history of Madinah "Akhbar al-Madinah" the author merely said that on the way to Uhud the Prophet prayed in the mosque that was located

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[1] Ali b. Musa al-Afandi, *Wasf al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*, p. 15.
[2] Muhammad Ilyas 'Abd al-Ghani, *al-Masajid al-Athariyyah fi al-Madinah al-Nabawiyyah*, p. 112.
[3] Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 4 p. 1249.

in the yard of the two utum named al-Shaykhayn.[1] At first, people used to refer to the mosque as "a mosque near or at al-Shaykhayn", which shortly afterwards adopted the name of the place and its two *utum*.

Less than a century later, in his book "Tarikh al-Madinah al-Munawwarah" Umar b. Shibbah al-Basri (d. 262 AH/876 AC) reported that the mosque was near al-Shaykhayn, and also near al-Bada'i (wonders or marvels) which in turn were at al-Shaykhayn. He also narrated that during the night which the Prophet had spent in the area and in its mosque on the eve of the Uhud battle, Ummu Salamah came with some grilled food from which the Prophet ate. According to the narration, this happened in masjid al-Bada'i (the mosque of al-Bada'i), rather than masjid al-Shaykhayn.[2]

This denotes that the mosque was first called masjid al-Shaykhayn, then masjid al-Bada'i, then masjid al-'Udwah, and finally in latter times masjid al-Dir'. The first three names are featured in al-Samahudi's "Wafa' al-Wafa."[3] The absence of the last name (masjid al-Dir') points towards the possibility that the name was given – or became widespread – after al-Samahudi, who lived and died during the final years of the Mamluk dynasty in 1505.

By the way, the Prophet might have chosen this particular place and its mosque to spend the night and to finalize preparations for the battle of Uhud the following day, on account of the location's security advantages. The location was slightly elevated and in part protected by the inherent defence qualities of the two Jewish forts (utum). That was crucial, indeed, for the Uhud battlefield was not far away. Though still far apart, the two armies were effectively in sight of each other. The night was long and nobody could tell what the unholy plots and designs of the Makkan polytheists had been.

Therefore, the Prophet was vigilant. His tactical genius never departed him. He appointed fifty soldiers, headed by a companion Muhammad bin Maslamah, to patrol and guard the Muslim camp throughout the night. The chosen site afforded the Prophet a vantage point wherefrom the neighbouring areas could be kept an eye on. Hence, anything untoward from the Makkan side - individually or jointly - could be perceived and on time pre-empted.

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[1] Muhammad bin Zabalah, *Akhbar al-Madinah*, (Madinah: Markaz Buhuth wa Dirasat al-Madinah al-Munawwarah, 2003), p. 236.

[2] Umar b. Shibbah al-Basri, *Tarikh al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*, vol. 1, p. 72.

[3] Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 3 pp. 865-866.

The place and its mosque were thus turned into an interim fortress. They yet became comparable to armour (*dir'*). Like so, the mosque could possibly be called masjid al-Dir' allegorically, because of the highest security standards that had been adopted in advance of the Uhud fight.

Just like in the case of masjid al-Fash and the majority of Madinah mosques, masjid al-Dir', too, should have been (re)built as a permanent and architecturally sound structure by Madinah's Umayyad governor 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz prior to his appointment as Caliph. Bearing comparison to other mosques, this mosque also had its own structural, as well as functional, historical highs and lows.

Ali b. Musa al-Afandi wrote in 1885 that the mosque during his time was a roofless configuration. Shortly after that it was either renovated or reconstructed completely. This can be corroborated by the fact that Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha merely sixteen years later, in 1901, stated that the mosque had two domes.[1]

Generally speaking, the mosque had two sections: the south and north ones. The former was covered with two identical domes and the latter was converted into an open courtyard. This is validated by a report of Ibrahim al-'Ayyashi in 1972, who as well added that the mosque was plastered superbly - i.e. was well-built – from the beginning.[2]

Today the mosque retained the above-reported shape, except that it has been slightly modified and polished up. When it comes to roofing, the mosque still has two parts. The first south one is with two domes, surmounting two bays parallel to the qiblah wall. The other north part is not uncovered and so, does not constitute a courtyard, anymore. Instead, it has been ceiled with a flat timber roof.

The latter part of the roof is executed in such a way that a series of wooden planks have been arranged parallel to the qiblah wall, resting on wooden beams or joists placed at intervals perpendicular to the qiblah. This roof system is as much beautiful as meaningful, for the reason that it is reminiscent of a core principle of the traditional architecture of Madinah. Inasmuch as that principle, as well as the city's vernacular building style in general, are virtually gone, taking a step such as the one relating to masjid al-Dir' is truly a breath of fresh air to the surrounding built environment. Muhammad Ilyas 'Abd al-Ghani disclosed that a person named Ali Babtin was responsible for the complete latest restoration of the mosque.[3]

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[1] Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha, *Mir'ah al-Haramayn*, vol. 1, p. 389.
[2] Ibrahim al-'Ayyashi, *al-Madinah bayn al-Madi wa al-Hadir*, p. 527.
[3] Muhammad Ilyas 'Abd al-Ghani, *al-Masajid al-Athariyyah fi al-Madinah al-Nabawiyyah*, p. 114.

The two domes rest directly on the walls and on three arches that spring from a massive column placed in the middle of the mosque. Two arches extend right and left towards the west and east walls respectively, and one arch towards the *qiblah* wall. The arches, which are semi-circular, thus bridge the spaces in three directions between the central column and the walls. The lower end of each arch is additionally spanned by a metal beam. There are three beams corresponding to the number of arches. The beams are thrust into the arches' springers so as to create a grid and therewith enhance firmness and stability.

Naturally, the circular bases of the domes do not match the plan of the supporting walls beneath them, hence pendentives as triangular segments of a sphere were employed, tapering or thinning down to points at the bottom and spreading at the top to establish the continuous circular or elliptical base needed for a dome.

Since the domes do not have drums as bases, there was no space for piercing windows for ventilation and lighting purposes. This was offset by the presence of the courtyard, which was more than sufficient because the mosque was small and the courtyard comprised half the mosque's volume. Later when the courtyard was also roofed, those issues must have posed a challenge. However, the problem was overcome by perforating a number of good-sized windows along the upper parts of the east, west and north walls (the courtyard's range). As a result, the mosque is well lit and looks very fresh and soothing. In addition, it is kept well maintained, tidy and clean. It is fully operational; hence, paying a visit to it with the aim of performing a voluntary prayer, meditating, or simply having a rest while going to or from Uhud, is a worthwhile experience.

In addition, considering that the mosque was meant to be primarily a commemorative mosque and a home of daily prayers locally, it has no *minbar* (pulpit), which is a sign, as well as facility, of huge congregational or Friday mosques. The mosque likewise features a small and shallow mihrab or prayer niche, appearing as though symbolic rather than functional. It is placed under the springer or the bottom-most element of the arch, which represents the lowest point where, via the intermediary of pendentives, the ends of the two domes converge.

The mosque has two water-spouts (*mizabs*) projecting from the roof on the south *qiblah* side, enabling rainwater to pour to the ground below. There are also two additional inner spaces on the west side of the mosque's prayer hall. They are next to each other. The first one serves as a large vestibule and the second one as restrooms and a place for ablution. However, the vestibule is so large that it extends along the entire west wall

of the mosque, partly functioning, in consequence, as an auxiliary prayer hall. The two extra inner spaces have been constructed recently, as part of the latest Saudi restoration programs, and are intended to augment facilities and improve functionality.

It should be admitted that the new additions were painstakingly conceived and carried out, honouring in the process the mosque's original architectural character, yet further enriching it within the context of the exigencies of modern times. The mosque's main entrance is from the south side. One enters the vestibule first, whence through the west wall one moves into the main prayer hall.

For obvious reasons the mosque never had a minaret. However, today above the south-west corner there is a metal shaft that is about two meters and a half tall and half a meter in diameter. With two loudspeakers fastened to its highpoint, the shaft functions as an improvised minaret. Quite honestly, the "minaret" is the only element of the mosque that is incongruous and out of place. It was literally superimposed on the harmonious contour of the structure, upsetting its visual rhythm and its silhouette against the permanently blue sky of Madinah and the permanently ethereal, as well as imposing, presence of the Uhud Mountain in the distance.

Perhaps the only other downside of the mosque is its surrounding area, which is neither landscaped nor kept orderly and clean continuously. It would be a great advantage if the neighbouring milieus are duly attended to, so that a visitor's transition from the outside to the inside of the mosque, and from one emotional-cum-spiritual realm to another, is not only made smoother and more hassle-free, but also more profoundly impactful.

The mosque is built of the city's famed dark lava stone. The stone units, which are of different sizes and shapes, are joined with mortar. The mortar is of a bone or desert sand colour, and as such, complements well with the greyish hue of the structure's overall framework. The domes are plastered and whitewashed, both internally and externally. However, the rest of the interior and exterior is neither plastered nor whitewashed, revealing the naturalness of the building materials and the structural authenticity of the mosque.

However, then again, as per a photograph inside the book "*Irshād al-Qāṣid limā Buniya ʿalā ʿAhd al-Nubuwwah min al-Masājid*" composed by al-Sayyid Dhiya' bin Muhammad 'Attar, not long ago the mosque's interior was immaculately both plastered and whitewashed. It looked

current somewhat and hence, different.[1] Which means that just a few years ago for certain reasons the mosque was occasioned archetypical, plain and "organic." Doing so is believed to have been part of the most up-to-date refurbishment and conservation undertakings coming about across the city of Madinah, which is to be commended.

The lava rock as the mosque's main building material strikes a chord with Madinah's geological disposition dominated by vast lava fields. Even the Prophet, when he declared that Madinah was a sacred territory, called to mind this environmental feature of the city. He said: "(Prophet) Ibrahim declared Makkah as sacred and I declare sacred the area between its (Madinah's) two stony grounds (lava lands)."[2] By saying that Madinah is a haram (sanctuary) between the two stony grounds (lava lands), the Prophet meant the city's eastern and western boundaries known as *al-harrah al-gharbiyyah* (the western lava land) and *al-harrah al-sharqiyyah* (the eastern lava land).

Besides the darkish colour of the lava stone units, the mortar's and the domes' desert sand and white colours respectively round off the full range of the geographical tones of Madinah and its immediate surroundings. Thus, the three major colours, coalesced with the effects of the abundant natural, coupled with artificial, light and the rest of shades and tinges generated through a variety of other functional and decorative components of the mosque – such as the timber roof, mud bricks used for the filling or intrados of the mihrab, carpets, wooden shelves, etc. – render the ambiance of the mosque nothing short of spectacular. The ambiance stands for the quintessence of Madinah's attractions and boons. It corresponds to a time capsule, so to speak.

The mosque, on the whole, is as much a traditional and historical as architectural gem. It stands proudly, defending a legacy it represents and, at the same time, defying the onslaughts of modernism and postmodernism that keep pressing forward ubiquitously and remorselessly, destroying everything in their wake. The mosque is one of a few left in Madinah that successfully combine the classical time-honoured form and contemporary function. It is refreshingly different, and an asset capable of transporting a person to different epochs and higher emotional states. The mosque is an endangered type. Its conservation and function offer hope for a better future.

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[1] Al-Sayyid Dhiya' bin Muhammad 'Attar, *Irshad al-Qasid lima Buniya 'ala 'Ahd al-Nubuwwah min al-Masajid*, (Makkah: Dar al-Multazim, 2019), p. 214.
[2] Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Book 15, Hadith No. 519.

Figure 3: Masjid al-Dir' is another mosque linked to the battle of Uhud. It lies halfway between the Prophet's mosque and the Uhud battlefield.

Figure 4: Masjid al-Dir' is one of a few mosques left in Madinah that successfully combine the classical time-honoured form and contemporary function.

Masjid al-Mustarah (the mosque of al-Mustarah)

Masjid al-Mustarah is yet another mosque associated with the episode of the Uhud battle. Just like masjid al-Dir' (or masjid al-Shaykhayn), this mosque too is located virtually halfway between the Prophet's mosque and the battlefield of Uhud. However, since it is a few hundred meters further north from masjid al-Dir', masjid al-Mustarah is somewhat closer to Uhud than the Prophet's mosque.

The mosque's relationship with the battle of Uhud is two-fold. First, the mosque belonged to the Banu Harithah tribe, which lived in the area. While on the eve of the battle the Prophet stayed in masjid al-Dir' and its neighbourhood for about half a day, in order to parade his army and finalize the preparations for the battle, the tribe of Banu Harithah, living nearby, featured prominently in the proceedings.

Their getting in on the act was so consequential that even the Qur'an and its narrative of the Uhud affairs highlighted it. Banu Harithah were one of the two parties on the verge of losing courage and falling away – following in the footsteps of the mutinous hypocrites and thus leaving the Prophet and Muslims in dire straits - but they backtracked, adopting obedience and valour in lieu of disobedience and cowardice. Their exemplary triumph over negative thoughts and the persistent insinuations of Satan prompted Almighty Allah to reveal that He, in fact, was Banu Harithah's protecting Friend and Helper. The Qur'an declares about this: "When two parties among you were about to lose courage, but Allah was their ally; and upon Allah the believers should rely" (Āli ʿImrān, 122).

In this manner, Banu Harithah went from zero to hero. Their behavioural pattern served as a lesson to posterity. Ahead of the battle of Uhud, there were three parties on the Muslim side: steadfast believers, faithless and irresolute hypocrites, and those in-between. Banu Harithah belonged to the last category. Despite everything, though, they in the end demonstrated the power of an amalgamation of unyielding faith and positive attitude in the face of adversity.

Banu Harithah taught the world that if they could change and prevail during those critical moments when the odds were stacked against them, everyone, come rain or shine, can aspire to change and prevail. All roads lead to righteousness and goodness, and Allah is open to being each deserving person's Friend and Ally.

Indeed, since by its very definition the mosque institution in Islam is a community centre, where the religious and worldly affairs of a community are discussed and settled upon, the mosque of Banu Harithah must have played a significant role in the people's turning from losers to winners. The

mosque with its intrinsic heavenly message and its dynamic earthly function should furthermore have loomed large over the developments.

If the first aspect of the Banu Harithah mosque's connection with the Uhud battle was in relation to the plans and last preparations, the second aspect pertained to the battle's aftermath. Defeated and devastated, in the company of his battered army the Prophet was returning from Uhud in the north to Madinah proper in the south, which was a distance of about five kilometres. The Prophet was using the same route as the one he used for arrival. That route is called today the Sayyid al-Shuhada' Street and is a major street in the city loaded with the meaning and profundity of history.

Historians disclose the reason why this route had been chosen, submitting that the pick was rather a military expediency. As stated by Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, "the camp of idolaters was situated in such a place that the many roads leading to Uhud were almost blocked by them. So the Messenger of Allah said to his men: 'Which man of you can lead us to where the people (i.e. the idolaters) are, along a short track that does not pass by them?' Abu Khaithama said: 'O Messenger of Allah, I am the man you need.' Then he chose a short track that led to Uhud passing by Harrah (the settlement of) Banu Harithah and their farms, leaving the idolaters' army westwards."[1]

Having arrived at the Banu Harithah quarters and their mosque in such a dejected state, the Prophet decided to rest. He did so briefly, as a result of which the mosque, apart from being known as the mosque of Banu Harithah, soon came to be known as the mosque of al-Mustarah (masjid al-Mustarah) as well. The word al-Mustarah means "a place of rest", "a rest house" and "a rest stop."

It has been reported that whilst the Prophet was on his way back from Uhud, matchless examples of love and devotion were publicized by the truthful believing women and all those believers who could not join the battle. The targets were the Prophet himself and his prophetic mission, the Muslim army, and generally the cause of the Islamic enterprise and that of the nascent Islamic society in the city-state of Madinah. In view of the fact that the Prophet had taken a break in the settlement of Banu Harithah, it is reasonable to presuppose that a similar emotional outpouring also issued from the settlement's residents and that their mosque was a locus of the happenings. This way, not only physically did the Prophet have a rest, but also psychologically and emotionally. He needed both in equal measures.

[1] Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar*, p. 251.

Masjid al-Mustarah was one of the earliest mosques in Madinah. Certainly, it was reputed to be a mosque before the Uhud battle and was commonly referred to as the mosque of Banu Harithah. The historic battle of Uhud only put the extra spotlight on it. Apart from its affiliation with the events of Uhud and the Prophet's brief repose in it, the mosque enjoyed three additional benefits.

First, the Prophet is reported to have prayed in masjid al-Mustarah. This however has nothing to do with the occasion of the Uhud fight. The Prophet's prayer in the mosque might have taken place either before or afterwards. That such is the case testify the accounts of early Madinah historians, such as Umar b. Shibbah al-Basri,[1] Muhammad bin Zabalah and al-Samahudi.[2] In the context of the mosque, the three historians just pointed out that the establishment was a place of the Prophet's prayer, without saying anything whatsoever regarding the battle of Uhud.

The best case in point is al-Samahudi, who merely quoted his predecessors: Umar b. Shibbah al-Basri and Muhammad bin Zabalah, agreeing with them. Strangely enough, neither did he draw any parallels between the mosque and Uhud, rendering his account of the mosque surprisingly succinct. As if a person wishing to be enlightened on masjid al-Mustarah by al-Samahudi and his opus "Wafa' al-Wafa" is bound to be left disappointed a bit. Hence, if this proves something, it would be that the two: the Uhud battle and the Prophet's prayer in masjid al-Mustarah, are not concurrent events.

Second, the quarters of Banu Harithah with their mosque as a nucleus represented the first line of defence for Madinah against the invading enemy forces during the battle of Khandaq (the Trench). There was in the area the starting point of the trench as a Muslim defensive system.[3]

Third, masjid al-Mustarah is one of the three mosques in Madinah in which the worshipers performed a prayer facing two qiblahs, or two directions of prayer: masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem and the Holy Mosque or the Ka'bah in Makkah. The other two mosques are: the mosque of Banu Salimah (called today the mosque of the two *qiblahs*, masjid al-Qiblatayn) and the Quba' mosque.

According to authentic accounts, one day the Prophet prayed the ẓuhr (midday) prayer in the mosque of Banu Salimah. During the prayer he received a revelation instructing him to stop facing the *qiblah* of

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[1] Umar b. Shibbah al-Basri, *Tarikh al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*, vol. 1 p. 66.
[2] Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 3, p. 865.
[3] Muhammad Ilyas 'Abd al-Ghani, *al-Masajid al-Athariyyah fi al-Madinah al-Nabawiyyah*, p. 205.

Jerusalem and turn his face towards the *qiblah* of Makkah instead. He then performed the first half of the prayer facing Jerusalem and the second half facing Makkah.

After the prayer, a person went to the mosque of Banu Harithah. He arrived when the people were in the middle of performing the *ʿasr* (afternoon) prayer. Without hesitation, the person informed them about the change of the qiblah, whereupon the congregation, having completed one half of the prayer facing Jerusalem, instantaneously turned towards Makkah, thus completing the other half of the prayer.

The news reached the people of Quba' the following morning while they were still performing the *fajr* (dawn) prayer. They too had the distinction of accomplishing the *qiblah* alteration while still in the state of prayer.

Of the three mosques, the mosque of Banu Salimah (the mosque of the two qiblahs, masjid al-Qiblatayn today) is most creditable because in it, it was the Prophet who had led the congregation in the qiblah shift. In the other two mosques, the process unfolded without the Prophet. Yet, when told concerning the dutiful reaction of the congregation in masjid al-Mustarah, following the arrival of the news of the qiblah alteration, the Prophet complimented the Banu Harithah tribe by saying: "They are the people who believed in the unseen."[1]

Al-Bukhari reported the following ḥadīth (tradition) on the subject: "Allah's Messenger prayed facing Baitul-Maqdis (Jerusalem) for sixteen or seventeen months but he loved to face the Ka'bah (at Makkah) so Allah revealed: 'Verily, We have seen the turning of your face to the heaven!' (2:144) So the Prophet faced the Ka`bah and the fools amongst the people namely 'the Jews' said: 'What has turned them from their qiblah (Baitul-Maqdis) which they formerly observed?' (Allah revealed): 'Say: 'To Allah belongs the East and the West. He guides whom he will to a straight path.' (2:142) A man prayed with the Prophet (facing the Ka`bah) and went out. He saw some of the Ansar praying the 'Asr prayer with their faces towards Baitul-Maqdis, he said: 'I bear witness that I prayed with Allah's Messenger facing the Ka`bah.' So all the people turned their faces towards the Ka`bah."[2]

According to Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani and his commentary of al-Bukhari, "some of the Ansar" in the above ḥadīth, who had been informed

[1] Al-Sayyid Dhiya' bin Muhammad 'Attar, *Irshad al-Qasid lima Buniya 'ala 'Ahd al-Nubuwwah min al-Masajid*, p. 135.
[2] Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 8, Hadith No. 50.

about the *qiblah* change and who had embraced the novelty right away, were Banu Harithah.[1]

Throughout the ages masjid al-Mustarah was a simple structure and was not always in the best physical shape. It might yet sometimes have been in ruins, which was often the fate of many Madinah "secondary" mosques if the city had to put up with prolonged upheavals and crises resulting in the deterioration of built environment. An evidence of this is the fact that the early historians merely mentioned the mosque's existence, without venturing to say anything about its physical form or serviceability. It is safe to assume that they did so for the reason that neither the mosque's day-to-day functionality, nor its form, was worthy of attention.

By way of illustration, as late as in 1885 Ali b. Musa al-Afandi observed that the mosque was on a piece of a lava field and was unroofed.[2] The mosque must have been very small, for its description entails that it was built on a fragment of a volcanic and stony area. The word used is "*qiṭʿah*" (piece or fragment) and is an indication of smallness and inconsequentiality.

Sixteen years later, in 1901, Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha likewise reported that there was "just another mosque" where people believed the Prophet had rested while returning from the Uhud battle. Next to the mosque, there was a sign alleging that its spot designated the location of the Prophet's back (where he leaned) while taking a break.[3] Parenthetically, the latter place was what John Lewis Burckhardt, a Swiss geographer, explorer and orientalist, had referred to in 1814-15 as a large stone. He then mistakenly said that upon the stone "it is said that Mohammed leaned for a few minutes on his way to Ohod",[4] rather than on his way from Uhud. "The visitor is enjoined to press his back against this stone, and to recite the Fateha", added Burckhardt. The author did not mention the mosque at all. It is noteworthy to observe that, in addition, neither Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217) nor Ibn Battuta (d. 1369) brought up the case of masjid al-Mustarah in their respective books of travels.

Moreover, about half a century after Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha's visit, al-Sayyid Ahmad Yasin al-Khayyari still recorded in his book "Tarikh Ma'alim al-Madinah al-Munawwarah Qadiman wa Hadithan" that the mosque was small, unroofed and only about half a meter high, and that it

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[1] Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari bi Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 506.
[2] Ali b. Musa al-Afandi, *Wasf al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*, p. 16.
[3] Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha, *Mir'ah al-Haramayn*, vol. 1, p. 389.
[4] John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, (London: Henry Colburn, 1829), p. 365.

was an old and plastered structure.[1] Sometime later, in 1972, a similar description was given by Ibrahim al-'Ayyashi as well, who nevertheless said that the mosque was one meter – instead of half a meter - high. The mosque in addition was subjected to some minor restoration programs undertaken by a Saudi department of awqaf (endowments).[2]

According to al-Sayyid Ahmad Yasin al-Khayyari, that simple form of the mosque dated back to the Osmanli administrative presence. It was the outcome of an intervention by the Osmanli department of antiquities, after it had been ascertained that the mosque's site was associable with the Prophet's brief rest while on the way from Uhud to Madinah.

Richard Francis Burton, a British explorer, orientalist, geographer and spy, described the mosque in 1853, after it had been rebuilt following the Osmanli recapturing of the region from the Wahhabis in 1818 (in passing, the first Saudi state lasted from 1727 to 1818): "It is a newly-built square enclosure of dwarf whitewashed walls, within which devotees pray. On the outside fronting al-Madinah is a seat like a chair of rough stones. Here I was placed by my muzawwir, who recited an insignificant supplication to be repeated after him." Though Burton did not mention it, but the seat of rough stones was the place where the Prophet was believed to have had rested and had leaned against. Burton called the mosque "Mustarah" (resting-place).[3]

This establishes that before the Osmanli interference subsequent to 1818, the mosque should have been yet a simpler structure not institutionally maintained, and should have been renowned more for other relatable historical occurrences than for the Prophet's brief rest. The latter certainly enjoyed a wide currency, but it seems that it was shrouded in some misunderstandings and figments. However, following the Osmanli (re)construction and concurrent popularization of the mosque, the place became distinguished more due to the Prophet's stopover and rest, than the other remarkable events. The mosque's record, likewise, was set straight, so to speak.

After Ibrahim al-'Ayyashi's composition of his book "al-Madinah bayn al-Madi wa al-Hadir" in 1972 and before the extraordinary development undertakings by the Saudi king Fahd b. Abdulaziz (d. 2005) - whose reign commenced in 1982 - affecting masjid al-Mustarah

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[1] Al-Sayyid Ahmad Yasin al-Khayyari, *Tarikh Ma'alim al-Madinah al-Munawwarah Qadiman wa Hadithan*, (n.p.: Muntada iqra' al-thaqafi, 1993), p. 133.
[2] Ibrahim al-'Ayyashi, *al-Madinah bayn al-Madi wa al-Hadir*, p. 373.
[3] Richard Francis Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*, (London: Tylston and Edwards, 1893), vol. 2, p. 418.

as well, the mosque was reconstructed once more. Based on some old pictures provided by Muhammad Ilyas ‘Abd al-Ghani in his book “al-Masajid al-Athariyyah fi al-Madinah al-Nabawiyyah” and Yusuf Ragda al-‘Amili in his book “Ma’alim Makkah wa al-Madinah bayn al-Madi wa al-Hadir”, the mosque was a simple structure about ten meters wide and a few meters long. It was either roofless or had a partial flat roof. Its mihrab was considerable because its semi-circular shape protruded from the qiblah wall. It also had a short and heavy minaret, whose shaft was square up to the balcony, but afterwards it turned octagonal. The mosque stood next to an Osmanli fort.

Today, if people, including the locals, are asked about the mosque’s identity, most will reminisce about Uhud and the Prophet’s layover, rather than, for example, about the fact that the Prophet had prayed in the mosque, and that the mosque was a scene of the qiblah-change in the course of a congregational prayer. Similarly, most people will refer to the mosque as masjid al-Mustarah, rather than the masjid of Banu Harithah.

The new sentiment persisted until the rule of king Fahd b. Abdulaziz, who completely rebuilt and significantly enlarged the mosque. The mosque was thus immortalized as masjid al-Mustarah. The construction task was remarkable, proportional to the king’s other development programs in Makkah and Madinah. Thus rebuilt and enlarged, the mosque endures and is in full use both by visitors and the locals. Obviously, it was meant to function as much as a universal monument as a fully operational local mosque.

The status, together with the corporeal existence, of the mosque were intended to be preserved once and for all and to be placed on an equal footing with the rest of Madinah historical mosques - of course after the Prophet’s mosque and the mosque of Quba’ whose grades are unmatched. The man tasked with the aim of architecturally and aesthetically matching the new outlook was Abd al-Wahid al-Wakil,[1] an Egyptian architect who in the latter part of the last century was commissioned to design more than a dozen mosques in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, mostly in Madinah and

[1] Having studied some of the mosque architecture of Abd al-Wahid al-Wakil in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia before, I was able to deduce that this mosque, too, was designed by him. Each and every mosque he designed exhibits his distinctive signature style. However, just to be completely sure – as there is no inscription, nor validation, of any kind verifying so – I contacted Prof. Dr. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Ka’ki, a foremost authority on the architectural and urban development of Madinah, who assured me of the correctness of my conclusion. For that, I feel very much grateful to the esteemed Professor.

Jeddah. The move had the hallmarks of the Kingdom's newly-found penchant for renewal and modernization.

In passing, Abd al-Wahid al-Wakil is regarded by many as a leading authority in contemporary Islamic architecture. His philosophy revolves around the principles of reviving and readopting Islamic traditional styles, values and practices in architecture. For him, the beauty of architecture is not in total originality, innovation and style - in the modernist meanings of the terms - but in emulating, reviving and handling traditional solutions and forms for uses in new socio-economic, cultural and ecological contexts. Beauty is in that which is indigenous, ecological, proven, friendly, unpretentious and expedient, as opposed to that which is foreign, unsustainable, unfriendly, unknown, artificial and ostentatious. This philosophy puts a great emphasis on sustainability and friendly coexistence with the natural world as well, as a result of which its application nowadays is increasingly sanctioned and even looked-for. Abd al-Wahid al-Wakil, thus, could be perceived as a foremost proponent of a neo-traditional or new classical Islamic architecture.

In Madinah, Abd al-Wahid al-Wakil also designed the Quba' mosque, masjid al-Qiblatayn (the mosque of the two qiblahs), the Jumu'ah mosque and the Miqat mosque. With these uniquely designed buildings, pervading the heart of Madinah's overall regeneration and in particular architectural reinvention, the city was given its refreshingly new spark. It is definitely a sign of a new approach towards recognizing the value of and dealing with the wealth of history. More and more history is not only preserved, but also brought to life, for which the constantly growing number of pilgrims and visitors feel ever-grateful.

On account of the present architectural celebration of a historical moment and its physical locus, masjid al-Mustarah confidently stands at the crossroads of the past, present and future. It likewise manoeuvres the challenges of the intersection of tradition and modernity, inspiring novel ways to navigate the complexities of the newest national development paradigm. The mosque does not just appreciate and cherish history, but as well looks ahead. Furthermore, it does not just teach history, but as well stimulates visions for the future.

With regard to its latest architectural make-up, the mosque is a medium-sized structure. It employs a hybrid style, combining elements from diverse Islamic traditional architectural schools. The architect tried his best to make the mosque present itself as an architectural composition accentuated by an aesthetic unity and the strength of traditions and values, rather than by sheer structural and engineering performances. It was aspired that each part contributes to beauty, unity and strength in its own

way, and that the whole be held together not like a meaningless mass, but like a living architectural neo-traditional organism.

The mosque has three main sections: the prayer hall, a place for ablution and restrooms. The restrooms and ablution area are located on the opposite (north) side of the *qiblah*. Because the mosque is a modern structure, its facilities are up-to-date, adequate and commodious. There are three entrances: on the east, west and north sides. At the rear of the prayer hall (its north side), there is also an upper level functioning as women's prayer space.

The roof of the prayer hall is supported by six columns arranged in three pairs' perpendicular to the qiblah side. The columns support a roof that has been divided into three categories. At the centre, there is a dome that surmounts the prayer hall's central bay. Around it are eight identical bays surmounted by groined and barrel vaults, the latter vaults outnumbering the former by three to one. To be exact, there is one dome, two groined vaults, and six barrel vaults perpendicular to the qiblah. It seems as though in roofing, the barrel vaults were principal and the groined ones auxiliary.

Why that is the case is because of the needed mechanisms for absorbing the lateral thrust generated by barrel vaults against the walls. If there were only barrel vaults, the generated lateral thrust would have been greater and additional structural solutions would have been needed. In masjid al-Mustarah, the lateral or sideways progression of the thrusts generated by the barrel vaults have been attended to by means of the following three "emblematic" mechanisms: first, having two or more barrel vaults parallel to each other whereby the forces of their outward thrusts negate each other; second, the creation of intermittent groined vaults – essentially an intersection of two barrel vaults at right angles - whose thrusts, instead of pressurising entire walls, are concentrated only at four points with four groins formed by the intersection of barrel vaults (hence six barrel and two groined vaults); and third, the presence of buttressing agents, which in the case of masjid al-Mustarah are double-tiered, or flying, arches, which in some measure even perform the task of (internal) buttressing arches, as will be seen later.

The base of the dome has only four windows, which are too few and too small to perform any environmental function, such as lighting and ventilation. They are there principally to meet some aesthetic requirements and, considering the depth of the windows' frames, to also enhance the

structural integrity of the dome. The dome is reminiscent of the domes of several historical mosques in Madinah, such as the Prophet's mosque, the mosque of al-Ghamamah, the mosque of Abu Bakr and the mosque of Umar, except that the dome of masjid al-Mustarah is smaller and shallower, and is not ribbed. Needless to say that employing a different variety of this particular dome, and vaulting with red clay bricks, are Abd al-Wahid al-Wakil's favourite roofing techniques. It is right there that his remarkable architectural flair – and imagination – step to the fore the most.

From the middle of four out of six columns upon which the mosque's roof rests – in the south section of the prayer hall - originate arches that connect either to the neighbouring columns or the walls. Bearing in mind the roofing techniques of masjid al-Mustarah, this way the arches are partly of the double-tiered, or flying, arches type, and are partly intermediate arches above which lie horizontal supports for the vaults. As said earlier, this was one of the three "emblematic" mechanisms for managing the lateral thrusts generated by the two groined and six barrel vaults. There are ten such arches in masjid al-Mustarah.

However, this method is rarely used nowadays, and when it is resorted to, it is mainly as a bit of a specific artistic manoeuvre, or in order to augment the traditional appearance quality of a building and so, its charm. The last and least important role performed by the double-tiered and flying arches - and by extension vaults - is a structural one. Without a doubt, the latest building materials and techniques rendered buildings lighter and more resourceful, minimizing weight and thrust problems.[1] Perhaps the most illustrious example of double-tiered arches in Muslim history is the arches used in the great mosque of Cordoba from which masjid al-Mustarah might have drawn inspiration.

At the north-east corner of the part of the mosque that contains the prayer hall stands an elegant square minaret. The minaret is topped by a chhatri or a semi-open and dome-shaped pavilion the likes of which are found most commonly in Mughal architecture. At the point where the shaft of the minaret and the chhatri meet protrudes a balcony with a simple wooden fence to which several loudspeakers have been affixed. The balcony is supported by two-tiered horizontal ridges that extend gradually, one above the other, from the main body of the shaft. Aesthetically, as well as symmetrically, the borders of the balcony keep

[1] Gloria Lotha, *Vault,* https://www.britannica.com/technology/vault-architecture, accessed on July 31, 2023.

to the form and movement of the two ridges beneath, in which case the borders correspond to a third and furthermost ridge and hence, add to the regularity of the spatial connectivity of the minaret.

The minbar (pulpit) of the mosque is a simple device. It is merely an indentation, or recess, in the qiblah wall to which one climbs via two stairs. There is a small wooden railing, which walls off one half of the indentation, behind which the preacher (*khatib*, he who delivers sermons) stands. The similarity between this railing and the fence of the minaret's balcony contributes to the structural, together with visual, equilibrium of the mosque. The simplicity of the minbar indicates that the mosque is medium-sized in terms of dimensions, and that it is local in terms of everyday function.

The *miḥrāb* (praying niche), standing next to the minbar on its left side, is of the same size as the indentation of the minbar, thus additionally contributing to the mosque's symmetry. Both are recesses slightly less than one meter deep, with the difference that the recess of the minbar is plain and rectangular, and the one of the mihrab semi-circular and slightly ornamented. The mihrab is flanked by two engaged ribbed columns. Above it is a panel featuring the following excerpt from the Qur'an pertaining to the concept and institution of the mihrab: "Every time that (Prophet) Zakariyya entered (Maryam's) *miḥrāb* or chamber to see her, He found her supplied with sustenance" (Āli ʿImrān, 37).

Like most of the courtyard-less mosques of Abd al-Wahid al-Wakil, this mosque, too, is rather dark inside. Consequently, at no point of the day can the mosque be comfortably used without having recourse to artificial light, which, in spite of everything, is a disadvantage. As it is now, the mosque, to a certain degree, is redolent of the nuances of the secluded and inward-looking Sufi institutions, contrasted with the multidimensionality and the inward as well as outward-oriented disposition of mosques as community development hubs.

Masjid al-Mustarah has ten relatively small windows, five on the east and five on the west sides of the mosque's prayer hall. The glass panels of the windows are yellowish. On the outside, those windows are screened by dense wooden lattice panels, which, though beautiful and suggestive of the traditional Hijazi mashrabiyyahs and rawashin, reduce daylight admission. On the inside, the window frames are flanked by two engaged ribbed columns and are capped by decorative boards that contain the Qur'anic declaration that "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth" (al-Nur,

35). The boards, in turn, are contained within the larger decorative frames that include intertwined floral motifs as well. Like so, the frames constitute a form of arabesque, and even can be said to symbolize an entablature, in its capacity as a superstructure of mouldings and bands which lies horizontally above columns or above proportioned alcoves.

At the points where the ends of the vaults conjoin with the external walls, semi-circular segments of the walls, resembling the filled up spans and rises of arches, are created. There are eight such segments: three on the south qiblah wall and three on the opposite northern wall. These (six in total) are due to the presence of the six barrel vaults. There are also two segments, one on each of the east and west walls. These are due to the presence of the two groined vaults, which are expectedly smaller than the segments of the barrel vaults owing to their different intersecting profiles.

These semi-circular segments are utilized for further illuminating the mosque, enhancing the limited performance of the ten windows. The segments are turned into perforated frameworks that give the impression of concrete or cement *jaalis* (literally, nets) featuring an array of geometric shapes. The shapes are fitted with coloured (yellowish) glass, which is the same as the colour of the window panels.

Moreover, above the east and west entrances there are as sizeable rectangular perforated segments of the wall. There are also six miniature perforated units, two on each of the *qiblah*, east and west walls. These small units are created at the strategic locations of the walls and feature but a few geometric patterns. For example, the two units on the qiblah wall flank the *miḥrāb*. Following the style of the windows and the perforated segments associated with the vaults, these additional segments and units are likewise fitted with the same yellowish glass.

In this fashion, the interior of the mosque, though poorly lit from the outside by natural light, enjoys a unique atmosphere. The limited natural light admitted through the coloured windows and its latticework, and through the strategically placed patterned apertures, generates an exciting environment inside. The environment contributes to the enlivening of the place, the creation of positive moods, and to the enhancement of decorative manoeuvres and the performance of materials.

This is further boosted and enriched by interplays of colours, ornamental themes, and of natural as well as artificial lights, making the mosque an exceptionally tranquil and soothing place. Surrounded by the

hustle and bustle of modern life, masjid al-Mustarah- its few weaknesses notwithstanding- is a place to be. It lives up to its name, i.e. "*al-Mustarah*" refers to "a place of rest", "a rest house" and "a rest stop."

Since there are only ten windows piercing the east and west walls at regular intervals, the rest of those two walls, plus the south qiblah wall, are concaved with recesses that look like the windows with regard to position and form. The purpose of those recesses is to supplement at once the beauty and symmetry of the interior, in addition to making the mosque appear like a more elegant and lighter structure. A subtle blend of windows and recesses provides a sense of continuity and architectural rhythmical flow.

Given that the recesses are not windows, they have been inlaid with complex decorative designs made of ceramic tiles. The tiles are dominated by blue and white colours, in the vein of the legendary handmade Iznik ceramic tiles that for centuries occupied a prominent place in Osmanli art and architecture. If the windows are capped by decorative boards that contain the Qur'anic declaration that "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth" (al-Nūr, 35), the recesses are capped by similar boards that nevertheless contain the quintessence of the Islamic faith: "There is no true God except Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."

Lastly, in the manner of masjid al-Dir' close by, the roof of masjid al-Mustarah also has two water-spouts (*mizabs*) projecting from the roof on the *qiblah* side, enabling rainwater to pour to the ground below. The mosque is really clean and well-maintained. It is fully operational. It is whitewashed, and in terms of its colour, inward-looking appearance, and overall intriguing yet vibrant configuration, it fits in nicely with its fast-changing surroundings. It belongs there.

Figure 5: Masjid al-Mustarah is another mosque associated with the episode of the Uhud battle. It is located virtually halfway between the Prophet's mosque and the battlefield of Uhud.

Figure 6: With regard to its latest architectural make-up, Masjid al-Mustarah is a medium-sized structure. It employs a hybrid style, combining elements from diverse Islamic traditional architectural schools.

Conclusion

In the end, it ought to be emphasized that the above-discussed three mosques are the places that do not contain any specific religious significance. They are merely historical sites and buildings, albeit more eminent than many other sites and buildings on account of them being associated with the Prophet himself and with one of the most critical episodes in the history of Islam. Still, however, not in the slightest does that qualify them to be promoted from the level of historicity to that of religiosity.

The three mosques thus are not supposed to be converted into the objects of any particular religious intents, designs, or procedures. Which is to say that, essentially, the mosques and their backgrounds are just like any other aspects of history and should be treated as such. They are to be neither spiritualized nor ritualized. Even emotionalizing them can be tricky and can lead a person to the edge of a thinking or behavioural slip. Certainly, every visitor should get his intellectual and spiritual bearings right. Neither mass cultures nor local ethnologies are the best ways to go.

The Prophet's mosque is the only component of Madinah a person can undertake a journey to visit. Once in Madinah, though, the following places are also strongly recommended to be visited – but without embarking on a journey from outside Madinah to visit them exclusively: the Prophet's grave and the graves of his two companions, Abu Bakr and ʿUmar; the graves of the city's al-Baqiʿ cemetery; the graves of the martyrs of Uhud; and the Quba' mosque. Apart from these, everything else belongs to the realm of pure history - however exciting and consequential things and their narratives may be - and whatever applies to the matters of conceptualizing and dealing with history, applies to those "subordinate" Madinah places and buildings too.

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