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Some Lessons from Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in Architecture: The Prophet's Mosque in Madīnah

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Abstract: This paper discusses some lessons in architecture that can be gleaned using the Prophet's Mosque in Madīnah as a case study. The paper deals with the following main themes: the meaning and significance of Islamic architecture; function–form relationship; respect for the environment; cleanliness; comprehensive excellence; promoting just social interactions; safety; and the relationship between the indigenous and foreign influences in the spheres of Islamic architecture. Every theme discussed signifies a permanent feature of Islamic architecture which derives its strength and merit from the Prophet's experiences. Hence, a close analogy is drawn in the paper between those architectural features and the Prophet.

Keywords: Prophet Muhammad (SAW), Madīnah, the Prophet's mosque, Islamic architecture, comprehensive excellence

What is Islamic architecture?

Islamic architecture is architecture whose functions and, to a lesser extent, form, are inspired primarily by Islam. Islamic architecture is a framework for the implementation of Islam. It facilitates, foster and stimulates the *'ibādah* (worship) activities of Muslims, which, in turn, account for every moment of their earthly lives. Islamic architecture can only come into existence under the aegis of the Islamic perceptions of God, man, nature, life, death and the Hereafter. Thus, Islamic architecture would include not only the

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facilities but at the same time would be a physical locus of the actualisation of the Islamic message. Practically, Islamic architecture represents the religion of Islam that has been translated into reality in the hands of Muslims. It also represents the identity of Islamic culture and civilisation.

Ibn Abdun, an Andalusian judge from the 12th century, is reported to have said, as quoted by Bianca (2000): "As far as architecture is concerned, it is the haven where man's spirit, soul and body find refuge and shelter" (p.22). In other words, architecture is a container of people's lives.

Also, Ibn Qutaybah, a Muslim scholar of the 9th century, compared the house, as quoted by Bahnassi (2003), to a shirt, saying that just as the shirt should fit its owner, the house, too, should suit its dwellers. That is to say, the aesthetic and utilitarian ends of the house must correspond to the needs and capabilities of its users. The two must perfectly suit each other.

Central to Islamic architecture is function with all of its dimensions: corporeal, cerebral and spiritual. The form, divorced from function, is inconsequential. This, however, by no means implies that the form plays no role in Islamic architecture. It does play a prominent role, but its relevance is a supportive one supplementing and enhancing function. The form is important but in terms of value and substance it always comes second to function with its wide scope. There must exist the closest relationship between the ideals that underpin the form of buildings and the ideals that underpin their function, with which the users of buildings must be at ease. A rift or conflict between the two is bound to lead to a conflict of some far-reaching psychological proportions in the users of the building. Therefore, the roles of form are equivalent to the roles of function.

Islamic architecture promotes unity in diversity, that is, the unity of message and purpose, and the diversity of styles, methods and solutions. Certainly, this is what renders Islamic architecture so relevant and dynamic, and so consistent and adaptable. It is such a fascinating subject to study, for doing so is not about sheer art and architecture. It is more than that; it is about beholding the Islamic ideology and creed at work. It is about witnessing a microcosm of

Islamic society, civilisation and culture. Islamic architecture is about Islam in a manifest form.

The identity and vocabulary of Islamic architecture evolved as a means for the fulfilment of concerns of Muslim societies. Islamic architecture was never an end in itself. It was the vessel of Islamic culture and civilisation, reflecting the cultural identity and the level of creative and aesthetic consciousness of Muslims. Architecture, in general, should always be of service to people. It is never to be the other way round, that is to say that architecture should not evolve into a hobby or an adventure, and in the process impose itself on society while forsaking, or taking lightly, people's identities, cultures and the demands of their daily struggles. Architecture, first and foremost, should remain associated with functionality. It should not deviate from its authentic character and stray into the world of excessive invention and abstraction (Bianca, 2000).

Frazer, as reported by Beg (1981), said about the fundamental nature of Islamic architecture: "The architecture of Islam is the expression of a religion and its view of the world rather than that of a particular people or political or economic system" (p.16).

Burckhardt (1976) wrote that it is not surprising, nor strange, that the most outward manifestation of Islam as a religion and civilisation reflects in its own fashion what is most inward in it. The same author further remarked, "If one were to reply to the question 'what is Islam?' by simply pointing to one of the masterpieces of Islamic art, such as, the Mosque of Cordova, or that of Ibn Tulūn in Cairo, or one of the *madrasahs* in Samarqand...that reply, summary as it is, would be nonetheless valid, for the art of Islam expresses what its name indicates, and it does so without ambiguity" (p.1).

The significance of the Prophet's Mosque in Madīnah

When Prophet Muhammad (SAW) arrived in Madīnah from Makkah (*hijrah*), the first task relating to the built environment that he embarked on fulfilling was building the city's central mosque (also called the Prophet's Mosque). When completed, the form of the mosque was extremely simple. It consisted of an enclosure with walls made of mud bricks and an arcade on the *qiblah* side (towards Makkah) made of palm-trunks used as columns to support a roof of

palm-leaves and mud. There were initially three entrances which pierced the eastern, western and southern walls. The northern wall was the *qiblah* side facing the al-Masjid al-Aqṣā–which was the first *qiblah* for about one year and a few months. However, as the *qiblah* was changed to face south towards Makkah, the southern entrance was subsequently bricked up and a wall on the northern side was pierced. Before the *qiblah* change there was, in all likelihood, no roofed area in the mosque, but after the change an arcade on the southern side facing Makkah was created. There was no decoration of any kind within or without the mosque.

The following is a standard description of the Prophet's Mosque as given by most scholars: "In the construction method a stone foundation was laid to a depth of three cubits (about 1.50 meters). On top of that adobe, walls 75 cm. wide were built. The mosque was shaded by erecting palm trunks and wooden cross beams covered with palm leaves and stalks. On the *qiblah* direction, there were three porticoes, each portico had six pillars. On the rear part of the mosque, there was a shade, where the homeless *Muhājirīn* took refuge. The height of the roof of the mosque was equal to the height of a man, i.e., about 3.5 cubits (about 1.75 meters)" (Hamid, 1996, p.226).

It must be mentioned, however, that the notion of the mosque (*masjid*) was not instituted, nor were the mosques built, until the envisaged roles and position of the mosque institution in the forthcoming broad-spectrum development of the Muslim community were implanted into the hearts and minds of its custodians and users. The whole of the Prophet's mission in Makkah, prior to the migration to Madînah where the first self-governing Muslim community was established, is to be seen in this light. That is to say, the Makkah period is to be seen as the laying of a foundation, as well as the setting up of a conceptual framework, for the Madînah period where the first physical manifestations of Islamic culture and civilisation came to pass. Hence, Allah (SWT) describes the Qubā' Mosque (the mosque which the Prophet [SAW] had built in a suburb of Madīnah on the way from Makkah) and its patrons in the following words: "…There is a mosque whose foundation was laid from the first day on piety; it is more worthy of thy standing forth (for prayer) therein.

In it are men who love to be purified; and Allah loveth those who make themselves pure" (9:108).

Notwithstanding its unpretentious and rudimentary structure, the Prophet's Mosque from the very first day served as a real community centre quickly evolving into a multifunctional complex. It was meant not only for performing prayers at formally appointed times but also for many other religious, social, political and administrative functions. The main roles performed by the mosque were as a centre for congregational worship practices, a learning centre, the seat of the Prophet's government, a welfare and charity centre, a detention and rehabilitation centre, a place for medical treatment and nursing, and a place for some leisure activities (Omer, 2005).

The Prophet's Mosque was the nerve-centre of the wide spectrum of the activities and aspirations of the fast-emerging Muslim Ummah. The impact of the mosque complex on the development of Madīnah was such that the core of the city eventually grew to be almost ring-shaped, centreing around the complex. Thus, the standard was set for every future Muslim city in terms of the role of its principal mosque(s), as well as its position in relation to the rest of the city's spatial components.

So eventful and bustling with life was the Prophet's Mosque that after several years of existence, it started to show signs that it could no longer comfortably accommodate the ever-growing number of worshippers, especially on Fridays. It, therefore, had to be enlarged, which the Prophet (SAW) did following the conquest of Khaybar in the 7th year after the Hijrah. At first the mosque measured about 35 m by 35 m. After the enlargement, it measured about 50 m by 50 m.

At the outset, the Prophet's Mosque was very simple because its initial roles were simple, and the mosque's roles were simple because the Muslim community in Madīnah was in its infancy. In architecture, the three elements – the people's needs, the function and form – are inseparable, and in the same order they call for each other. However, as the people's engagements and so their requirements increased, the functions of the mosque multiplied in turn, calling for some noteworthy improvements in the mosque's original austere form. Thus, during the Prophet's time, his mosque evolved from a simple

roofless and plain enclosure to a complex institution that featured, among other factors, a roofed section, a pavement outside one of its entrances, a *minbar* (pulpit) and a *dakkah* or *dukkān* (seat, bench) for communication purposes, lamps as a means for lighting up the mosque, several compartments that facilitated the various social functions of the mosque, and a person or persons whose job was to keep the mosque clean.

As the Prophet's Mosque was the centre of gravity in the wide-ranging affairs of the ever expanding Muslim community in Madînah, its strength and stature epitomised the strength and stature of Islam and the Muslims. The mosque seemed to be accommodative of every beneficial activity concerning worship (*'ibādah*), education, politics, economy, security and social relations, which enabled the nascent and ambitious society to make some civilisational headway. The Prophet's Mosque was the microcosm of the Muslim society in Madînah and its struggle. Thus, it would be appropriate to say that talking about the Prophet's Mosque during the time of the Prophet (SAW) is to talk about the people who instituted and then made the most of it. In the same vein, to talk about the stages which the mosque institution went through during the Madînah period of the Prophet's mission is to talk about the stages which the Muslim community, and with it the Muslim mentality and spirituality, went through.

While exemplifying the strength and eminence of Islam and Muslims, the evolution of the Prophet's Mosque also exemplified in no less remarkable terms the Prophet's contributions to the evolution of the identity of Islamic architecture. In fact, the origins of all the major principles of Islamic architecture can be traced back to the Prophet (SAW) and his experiences while advancing the position of his mosque in Madînah from a simple unroofed enclosure to a multifunctional community development centre. Such principles, which are generally the principles of Islamic architecture, can be summarized as being: 1) Function–form relationship, 2) Respect for the environment, 3) Cleanliness, 4) Comprehensive excellence, 5) Promoting just social interactions, 6) *"lā ḍarar wa-lā ḍirār*" (There is no inflicting or returning of harm), and 7) Indigenous versus foreign influences.

Function–form relationship

In Islam, the functions of buildings are to be optimised. Buildings are created to be at the complete service of their users. As a result of this principle, the Prophet's Mosque eventually evolved into a multifunctional community centre catering to the spiritual, social, educational and political needs of the nascent but dynamic Muslim community.

Function is more important than form. The role of the form is a supportive and complementing one to the functions of buildings. Thus, it is inappropriate for people to become obsessed with the mere forms of buildings and treat them in isolation from the requisites of the functions and purposes of buildings. It was reported that some of the Prophet's companions from the ranks of the Helpers one day brought a considerable amount of money to the Prophet (SAW), telling him, "How long shall we pray under these palm-leaves (referring to the simple conditions in the Prophet's Mosque)? Take this, build and adorn the mosque (*zayyinhu*) (that is to say, improve its physical condition)." The Prophet (SAW) did not reprimand them and their proposal but retorted, "I have no intention to differ from my brother Musa (Moses); an arbour like the arbour of Musa." The arbour of the prophet Musa is said to have been so low that he could touch the roof if he raised his hand, or when he stood up, his head could touch it, as reported in another account (Al-Samhūdī, 1997).

There is nothing inherently wrong with the form in buildings, especially if the form is justifiable on the strength of the functions and purposes of buildings. If such is not the case, however, then the form becomes inappropriate. Whenever a genuine need called for improving the physical appearance of his mosque, such as in the cases of roofing the mosque, paving a section outside one of the mosque's entrances, creating a *minbar* (pulpit) and a *dakkah* or *dukkān* (seat, bench), providing lamps, enlarging the mosque, and so on, the Prophet (SAW) was very supportive. He never hesitated for a moment to sanction such initiatives which, in fact, were meant to facilitate the functions of the mosque and to help it realise its objectives. The mosque's performance depended on such initiatives.

Let us now refer to the circumstances in which the introduction of the *minbar*, the *dakkah* or *dukkān*, the roof and the lamps to the

mosque's fabric took place, and how the Prophet (SAW) had reacted to them (Omer, 2005).

The Prophet (SAW) is said to have been delivering his addresses in his mosque leaning against a palm-tree, or a palm-trunk fixed in the ground. However, after the number of Muslims had grown, it became difficult for everyone to see and hear properly the Prophet (SAW). The matter was compounded by the wish of the Prophet (SAW) to have something to sit on in case he got tired of standing while speaking. It was, thus, suggested to him to allow a pulpit to be made and then placed in the mosque to which he, after consulting his nearest companions, consented. The *minbar* was like a chair consisting of three steps. On the third and the last the Prophet (SAW) used to sit, keeping his feet on the second (al-Bukhārī, 43:3560).

In view of the Prophet's Mosque having been the seat of the Prophet's government, messengers representing external tribes and communities would normally go straight away to the mosque, most of the time finding the Prophet (SAW) therein with his companions, engrossed in a beneficial pursuit. However, the Prophet (SAW) was so similar to others in both apparel and demeanour that strangers would, as a rule, find it quite difficult to recognize him. Thus, they had to ask some of the Prophet's companions who the Prophet (SAW) actually was. In order to avoid this inconvenience, some companions suggested that a *dukkah* or *dukkān* be made in the mosque on which the Prophet (SAW) would sit in public assemblies flanked by his companions. The proposal was consented to, and a seat of clay slightly raised off the ground was built (al-Nasā'ī, 47:4905). The pillar which later stood there is called the Pillar of Delegations.

As said earlier, at the very beginning, no section of the Prophet's Mosque was roofed. However, after sometime, when the people complained about hot weather and to what extent it troubled them in prayers, a roof of palm-leaves supported by palm-trunks as columns on the *qiblah* side was built. Mud was later added so as to prevent rain dripping onto the ground of the mosque (Al-Samhūdī, 1997). Certainly, rain too, especially during the cold season, contributed to the introduction of a solid roof so that its negative effects could be reduced. A companion, Abū Sa'īd al-Khurī, once described the initial conditions of the mosque – most probably when it had only a simple

roof of the branches of date palms before mud was added to it, and before the mosque ground was strewn with pebbles: "A cloud came and it rained till the roof started leaking, and in those days the roof used to be of the branches of date palms. *Iqāmah* (signaling the beginning of prayer) was pronounced and I saw the Prophet (SAW) prostrating in water and mud and even I saw the mark of mud on his forehead" (al-Bukhārī, 10:638).

Originally, the people used to light up the mosque by burning up palm fronds. Only sometime later were lamps introduced. Abû Sa'īd al-Khurī reported that a companion called Tamīm al-Dārī was the first who lit up the mosque with lamps (Ibn Mājah, 5:752). The Prophet (SAW) was delighted and his comment was, "You have lit up Islam, may Allah light up both this world and Hereafter for you" (Al-Kattānī, 1980, p.84).

Respect for the environment

In architecture, utmost respect for the environment must be displayed. The way architecture is conceived, created and used must confirm that there is a peaceful co-existence between people and the environment, and between the realms of natural and built environments. Architecture must be an environment-conscious enterprise, realizing and then inviting and accommodating nature's advantages, and also realising and then repelling its disadvantages. In other words, architecture must be sustainable.

At the very outset of the mosque-building process, the Prophet (SAW) taught his companions a lesson in sustainable use of the environment. In a place earmarked for building the Prophet's Mosque were the graves of some pagans, and there were some date palms on it. The Prophet (SAW) ordered that the graves of the pagans be dug up, the unlevelled land be levelled, and the trees be cut down. The cut date palms were not wasted. Rather, they were later reused as an alignment towards the *qiblah* of the mosque forming a wall (al-Bukhārī, 8:420).

We have already said that at first, the Prophet (SAW) used to lean against a tree absorbed by building or just a palm-trunk fixed in the ground when delivering his addresses (*khutbah*) in the mosque. However, some time later, a pulpit was made for him. On the first

occasion when the Prophet (SAW) used the pulpit and abandoned the palm-trunk, the latter yearned and even cried like an infant because it was sad and it missed the Prophet (SAW) knowing that the Prophet (SAW) did not need it anymore. The Prophet (SAW) then descended from the pulpit, came to the trunk and rubbed it with his hands till the tree stopped crying. The trunk (tree) stayed where it was until the mosque was rebuilt and enlarged by the third caliph Uthman ibn 'Affan when it was either buried somewhere in the mosque proper or was taken away by the Prophet's companion Ubayy ibn Ka'b. The latter kept the trunk (tree) with him until it was eaten by woodworms (Al-Samhūdī, 1997).

Also, the ground of the mosque was bare at first. However, one night it rained profusely and the ground became too wet to be prostrated on. As a result, some people brought along some pebbles to overcome the problem. After prayer, having seen what some of his companions had done, the Prophet (SAW) said, "This is a very good idea" (Al-Samhūdī, 1997, p.655). Afterwards, the whole area of the mosque was strewn with pebbles (Al-Samhūdī, 1997).

Strewing the mosque ground with pebbles proved very advantageous as pebbles allowed rainwater to go through to the ground and once absorbed by it no muddy areas could thus be created inside the mosque. During dry spells, on the other hand, the ground without pebbles would have been dusty and the mosque ambiance occasionally unpleasant, as dust could be easily stirred up and fill the air. Since the mosque ground was covered with pebbles, it took a longer time to dry out after rain, or after any ground watering exercise, thus allowing for longer evaporation and cooling of the surface. In the winter, no matter how uncomfortably cold pebbles might have been, yet the condition was by far better than one generated by bare and frequently wet ground. Also, the presence of pebbles was very helpful because generally some of the thermal qualities of many stone types are that they have a high level of resistance and a low level of thermal conductivity.

Cleanliness

Since cleanliness – be it the cleanliness of the body, dwelling places, courtyards, streets, markets, rivers and the whole surroundings–

constitutes a branch of faith (*īmān*) in Islam, as declared by the Prophet (SAW, see Muslim, 3:328). Islamic architecture must be known for typifying and promoting it. The Prophet (SAW) was very much concerned about the cleanliness of the whole of the city-state of Madînah in general, and about the cleanliness of his mosque in particular. He also said that Allah is clean and loves cleanliness (al-Tirmidhī, 43:2723). When the Prophet's Mosque was first put in use in the beginning, some people were not totally cleanliness-conscious; they were most likely those who had freshly entered the fold of the new religion. Among other things, they had the habit of spitting and expectorating phlegm inside the mosque without doing away with it afterwards or covering it up. The Prophet (SAW) disliked the habit very much but the matter needed to be cured gradually and with a great deal of wisdom and goodly counsel. Thus, he advised those who did this that phlegm be scraped off and the place be overlaid with saffron or crocus (*za'farān*) or anything else which is pleasant and fragrant. The Prophet (SAW) himself on a couple of occasions scraped off some people's spit after having seen that it had been left behind. He would likewise shower with praises those who did the same. Towards this end there is a ḥadīth (tradition) wherein the Prophet (SAW) said that whoever does away with a disturbance from a mosque, God will build a house for him in Paradise (Ibn Mājah, 5:749). In the mosque, there always was plenty of water meant for the cleanliness of the mosque as well as its users (Muslim, 34:4682).

An Abyssinian (Ethiopian) woman (or man, according to some sources) later took up the chore of looking after the cleanliness of the mosque. So high a regard did the Prophet (SAW) have for her that he told her one day that a double portion of reward would await her. When she died, however, some people treated her as of little consequence and buried her without informing the Prophet (SAW). However, on discovering that she was missing, he asked concerning her. When told what had happened, he replied that they should have informed him. Then, he asked to be shown her grave where he prayed for her (al-Bukhārī, 8:438).

Comprehensive excellence

Islamic architecture with all its aspects must embody the notion of comprehensive excellence because this is what is prescribed for

Muslims in all situations and in all of their undertakings. The spirit of excellence and the striving for it must be felt at every stage and in every aspect of the process of creating buildings, from choosing a site and conceptualising and making a design, over a selection of building materials and quality of work, to the final execution of buildings and the activation of their function as environment-friendly, energy-efficient, and catering to the exact needs of their users. Excellence is to be a culture; it is not to be reduced to a mere slogan. Excellence is to be seen, not just heard.

Striving for excellence is what Allah loves and what Islamic cultures and civilization ought to be famous for. Conversely, deliberate mediocrity, or that which stems from routine negligence or indolence, is what Allah loathes and what ought to be alien to genuine Islamic cultures and civilization. Due to both its conceptual and practical connotations, the significance of the concept of comprehensive excellence had to be advocated during the earliest stages of building the Madīnah community. That was exactly what happened. Building his mosque as the first urban element in the course of urbanizing the city of Madīnah, the Prophet (SAW) used that opportunity to educate the Muslims on many issues including that of comprehensive excellence.

It is reported that in course of building the mosque a man from *Ḥaramawt* in the southern Arabian Peninsula was expertly treading clay for the making of the bricks with which the mosque was built. On seeing him, the Prophet (SAW) said, "May Allah have mercy upon him who excels in his profession." To the man he said, "Keep doing this job for I see that you excel in it" (Al-Samhūdī, 1997, p.333).

Another man from *al-Yamāmah* in the east of the Arabian Peninsula reported that he came to the Prophet (SAW) when the latter was building his mosque with his companions. However, he realised that the Prophet (SAW) did not really like how the people worked. The man said that he then took a shovel to work the clay and the Prophet (SAW) seemed to have liked how he was doing the job. The Prophet (SAW) then said: "Leave *al-Ḥanafī* (the man's name) and the clay alone, for I see that he is the most competent among you to handle the clay." (Al-Samhūdī, 1997, p.333). In

another account, the Prophet (SAW) said, "Bring *al-Yamāmī* (another name for the man) closer to the clay because he is the most excellent among you in handling it" (Al-Samhūdī, 1997, p.334). The Prophet (SAW) is also said to have called the man "the proprietor or lord of the clay, *ṣāḥib al-tīn*" (Al-Samhūdī, 1997, p.334).

Promoting just social interactions

Islamic architecture must promote and at the same time be a field of equitable social interactions. In this way, realising some of the most prominent Islamic values and principles will be greatly aided. In this regard, too, the Prophet (SAW) is the best example to get inspiration from. Strengthening fraternity among the Migrants (*Muhājirs*) from Makkah and Helpers (*Anṣār*, the natives of Madīnah) was at all times one of the major aims of the Prophet's actions, fully knowing that the future of Islam and the Muslim society in Madīnah depended on the strength of the relationship between the two sides. His planning and development pursuits in Madīnah, with the erection of his mosque more than anything else, therefore, aimed to foster constructive and fair social interactions. While building the mosque following the migration from Makkah, building houses for the Migrants, including for the Prophet (SAW) himself, was for a time deferred. During that period – approximately six or seven months – the Migrants stayed together with the Helpers, sharing everything with them. While staying together, the two sides developed a stronger and warmer relationship, which later proved its value time and again while surmounting the challenges posed by the community. The Prophet (SAW) himself stayed in the house of a companion Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī till the mosque was completed.

While building the mosque, the Prophet (SAW) and the people used to chant, "O God, no good except the good of the Hereafter, so have mercy upon the Migrants and Helpers!" (Al-Samhūdī, 1997, p.329).

Some of the underlying societal qualities and features of Islam, such as commitment to the established cause, justice, equality and mutual understanding, and cooperation, have been underlined as early as during the exercise of determining the site of the Prophet's Mosque and marking out its boundaries. At the earmarked location, there was a walled piece of land that belonged to some people from

the Banû al-Najjār clan. The Prophet (SAW) sent for them and asked them to suggest to him the price of the land. They replied, "No! By Allah! We do not demand its price except from Allah." The Prophet (SAW) accepted the offer and the occurrence typified as well as inaugurated, so to speak, a new phase of the unreserved keenness of the first Muslims to sacrifice whatever they possessed for the cause of strengthening Islam and Muslims (al-Bukhārī, 8:420). Additionally, when the mosque proper was about to expand into an area used for drying dates which belonged to two youths, both orphans, named Sahl and Suhayl, the Prophet (SAW) asked them, too, to suggest to him the price of the place. However, when they said that they demanded no price for it, the Prophet (SAW) insisted that they name the price, since they were orphans and possessed little. Eventually, he paid them ten golden *dinar*. The money was Abû Bakr's (Ibn Hishām, 1936).

It also should be noted that the mosque and with it the midpoint of the new urban marvel, Madînah, was positioned in an area between the old settlements – virtually in the middle of them – rather than either too far away from them or within the ambit of any of them. Thus, the message was that Islam favours no person and no group, be it based on history, culture or socio-political and economic status and affiliation. Everyone would have a place in the forthcoming Madînah urbanisation scheme, and everyone would be given an opportunity to make a contribution. Credit would be given to people only on the basis of their merit, god-consciousness and righteous contributions to society.

Since the mosque was established on a relatively uninhabited piece of land, the majority of the Migrants were honoured to be able to settle near it. This way, justice was done to them for all the services they had rendered earlier to the Islamic cause while in Makkah. This also meant that the Migrants at the same time were encouraged to work hard and become self-reliant and start a life on their own as soon as they could, thus becoming an asset to the modest and nascent community rather than a liability. Had the mosque been constructed somewhere within the ambit of any of the existing settlements and the Migrants had to settle elsewhere, there would have existed a real possibility of marginalizing some of them in certain aspects, making thereby their plight all the more difficult, and with it the solicited

integration and adaptation an intricate task. In this case, their initial stay with the Helpers would have been undeniably prolonged as well and both their self-sufficiency and contribution to satisfying the socio-political and economic needs of the city would have been forestalled for sometime.

Nor were the Helpers held in contempt for not selecting the location of the mosque in any of their established settlements. The arrival of Islam and the Prophet (SAW) in Madīnah meant that each and every avenue to reviving the centuries-old and all-encompassing antagonism between the two major Arab tribes in Madīnah: the *Aws* and *Khazraj* was forever obstructed. Doing a favour to either the *Aws* or *Khazraj,* by positioning the mosque in the settlement of either side, could have triggered fresh antagonism, given the fact that faith was yet to conquer the hearts of many individuals from each of the two tribes. Certainly, not positioning the Prophet's Mosque in the ambit of either the *Aws* or *Khazraj* was one of the most constructive moves that could have been made under the circumstances.

Once the mosque was built and the people started using it, the Prophet (SAW) asserted that his mosque, and every other mosque, is blind to socio-economic rank and status. Mosques belong to everybody. Everybody is equally entitled to them and their services. Favouring a category of people in a mosque on the basis of their socio-economic position at the expense of another category of people is unacceptable. Being societal institutions that embody the profundity and strength of Islam, mosques are there to inspire, monitor and oversee the rest of societal institutions insofar as realising equitable social interactions is concerned.

"La ḍarar wa-lā ḍirār" (There is no inflicting or returning of harm)

One of the most important Islamic principles in architecture and in built environment in general is the one highlighted in a ḥadīth of the Prophet (SAW): "There is no inflicting or returning of harm" (Ibn Mâjah, 14:2331). The message of the ḥadīth is that everyone should exercise his full rights in what is rightfully his, provided that the decisions/actions that one makes do not generate harm to others (Besim, 1988). Likewise, none shall return injury in case it has been inflicted on him, intentionally or otherwise. People are instead

encouraged to share both their happiness and problems, care for each other, respect the rule of law and settle their disputes peacefully. This way, they will secure sound and friendly relations, as well as a healthy environment conducive to all kinds of constructive human engagements.

Being a field of human interactions and undertakings, it is paramount for architecture to embody in all of its segments the notions of safety and security. Surely, people's physical, psychological and even spiritual wellbeing depends on how much of a conducive and constructive environments their architecture generates. If it is said that a healthy mind resides in a healthy body, it likewise could be freely asserted that both a healthy body and mind reside in a healthy and safe built environment.

It is because of this that the objectives of the Islamic Sharī'ah, whose task is to regulate and guide people's actions, are preserving and sustaining 1) religion, 2) the self, 3) the intellect, 4) descendants, and 5) wealth and resources. Hence, every religious injunction has been tailored in such a way as to enhance the wellbeing of man and his surroundings. In the same vein, nothing did Islam forbid except those things which are capable of harming man – directly or indirectly – or can impede his spiritual, cultural and civilisational headway.

In many of his initiatives, while building and then enlivening his mosque, the Prophet (SAW) promoted the significance of safety and security in the arena of building as a whole. The safety and security initiatives were: the Prophet's lessons on peaceful coexistence with the environment, ensuring the highest standards of hygiene not only in the realm of the mosque but generally in all areas of life, the Prophet's concern about the needs and welfare of his companions to which the mosque significantly catered, the Prophet's insistence that no unaccompanied children and madmen patronise the mosque, that the mosque be free from disputes and clashes, that swords are not to be brandished in it, and that even legitimate punishments are not to be carried out in it (Al-Samhūdī, 1997). The Prophet (SAW) went so far as to announce that those who have eaten beforehand of either garlic or onion will not be

allowed admittance into the mosque, so that their strong smell does not disturb those who could not stand it.

Also, people were advised not to talk and recite their prayers loudly when inside the mosque and thus disturb the others. Furthermore, people were asked to cooperate with each other when it came to maximum utilisation of the mosque's inner spaces. That some special attention has been given to public gatherings and the ways people should behave in them may be corroborated by the following Qur'ānic verse: "O you who believe! When you are told to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and) make room: (ample) room will Allah provide for you. And when you are told to rise up, rise up: Allah will raise up, to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted knowledge. And Allah is well-acquainted with all you do" (58:11).

The Prophet (SAW) insisted that the mosques belong to everybody and that reserving certain places for certain people – like a camel which fixes its place – is not acceptable (Abū Dāwūd, 2: 861). The mosque was not allowed to be made a thoroughfare. When coming to and entering the mosque, the people were bidden to wear a sober, calm and dignified deportment. No running or scrambling was permitted. One was not allowed to enter the mosque unconsciously, talking and laughing loosely, as if one was not aware of the place where one actually was. When coming to or leaving the mosque, men and women were not to mingle freely in the road. They were asked to keep to different sides (Abū Dāwūd, 35:5252).

In other words, virtually everything that could generate any amount and any type of harm – physical, mental and even spiritual – was strictly forbidden in the mosque and elsewhere. Similarly, the initiatives that were able to bolster people's overall wellbeing were encouraged and implemented. Hence, the ways buildings are designed and built must take utmost heed of safety and security requirements such as these. Once created and occupied, buildings are to serve as a place of maximum safety and protection from both nature and man-made hazards. Buildings are to serve as the safe haven on earth for their occupants.

Indigenous versus foreign influences

The Prophet's Mosque very much epitomised the nature of the Islamic message and the nature of Islamic civilisation that was bound to stem from the former. The mosque promoted the notions of Islam's finality and universality, as well as the notions of universality and the unity-in-diversity of Islamic civilisation. The mosque was built not only as a communal place of worship but also in order to satisfy the growing needs of the Muslim community which the mosque was endorsing, facilitating their progress and further promoting their authenticity and worth. In other words, the mosque symbolised the message and struggle of Islam. Moreover, it symbolised both the absolute and constant dimensions of Islamic civilisation, as well as the relative and transient ones.

Through its perception, philosophy, purpose and function, the mosque characterised the substance of Islam which is permanent and not subject to change, because it is based on permanent, essential human nature and its needs, as well as on the permanent nature of the whole of existence and its needs. However, when it comes to inventing systems, regulations, views and attitudes so that people's worldly life is duly comprehended and regulated in accordance with both the absolute substance of Islam and people's different eras, regions and needs, it is there that the solutions and perceptions become transitory and fluctuate as they signify what people deduced from the fundamental principles and permanent values of life as their best practical solutions and answers.

As a result, the function of the mosque institution always remains the same, whereas its form changes, varies and evolves in response to the various cultures, geographies and climates, and to the changes and developments in people's socio-economic conditions. The form of the mosque institution is the physical locus of its functions. Hence, changes in the form are inevitable for mosques to function properly. Certainly, this principle applies not only to the mosque but also to all other aspects of the Islamic built environment. Since the changes in the Islamic built environment are unavoidable and necessary, innovations in the same field, it stands to reason, must be regarded as highly recommended and even obligatory in that the functions of

buildings depend on the appropriateness and effectiveness of their forms.

Having said this, the Prophet (SAW) did not hesitate to add anything to the form of his mosque which could enhance its projected roles and stature. At the same time, however, he turned down those suggestions and prospects that could possibly get in the way of maximising the performance of the mosque as the community development centre, in both the spiritual and worldly sense of the term. While doing the former, that is, amplifying the mosque's facilities so that its performance is enhanced, the Prophet (SAW) was open not only to the indigenous resources, expertise and influences but also to the foreign ones, including those from non-Islamic locales. We have already referred to the prominent roles played by two persons in the course of building the mosque: one from *Ḥaḍramawt* in the southern Arabian Peninsula, and the other from *al-Yamāmah* in the eastern Arabian Peninsula, and how much the Prophet (SAW) was delighted by their expertise.

When oil lamps were introduced to the mosque for the sake of illuminating it at night, it should be pointed out that the lamps were brought by a companion called Tamīm al-Darī from Syria, which was a Christian land. The Prophet (SAW) was so happy that he made a prayer for the man, and he named his servant who had set up the lamps in the mosque "*Sirāj,*" which means "Light" (Al-Kattānī, 1980).

Also, when the *minbar* or pulpit was introduced to the mosque's fabric for communication purposes, it should be mentioned that the person responsible for making the *minbar* was, in all likelihood, again Tamim al-Dari. While conversing with the Prophet (SAW) about the issue, the companion clearly told the Prophet (SAW) that he would make the *minbar* as he had seen people in Syria making it. What inspired Tamīm al-Darī to come up with the idea of the *minbar* and its design could well have been the pulpit of a Syrian church. Yet, such was not a problem due to the universal appeal of Islam and its civilisation, as well as due to Islam's open-minded outlook on other people's cultures and civilisations, with the sole condition that the foreign elements and influences should not collide with the worldview and law of Islam, both outwardly and inwardly.

To this end, certainly, is the declaration of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that the people of stature and influence, or simply, the best ones (*khiyārukum*), during the time of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*), i.e., prior to the advent of Islam and prior to people's acceptance of it, will remain the best with the best stature and influence after accepting Islam, provided they understood and adhered to it (Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, 6:9905). In other words, people's achievements, engagements, positions and ranks prior to Islam will not undergo dramatic changes afterwards, as long as they do not entail elements that are at odds with the spirit and message of Islam, and as long as they make the objectives of Islam their own objectives and the objectives of their aspirations. Moreover, such people's accomplishments, authority and social standings will be very much needed for the sake of championing and advancing the cause of Islam against its many challenges.

Without doubt, because of this nature of Islam and its attitude towards the cultural and civilisational bequests of the world, custom (*'ādāt*) and customary usage (*'urf*) are regarded as a source of the rulings of the Islamic law (*Sharī'ah*) where there are no explicit texts from either the Qur'ān or the Prophet's *sunnah* (tradition) specifying the rulings. It is also a requirement in making custom (*'ādāt*) and customary usage (*'urf*) a source of *Sharī'ah* rulings that there are no contradictions between them and the contents of the Qur'ān and *sunnah*. About the meaning of custom and customary usage, Abū Zahrah (1970) said, "Custom is a matter on which a community of people agree in the course of their daily life, and common usage is an action which is repeatedly performed by individuals and communities. When a community makes a habit of doing something, it becomes its common usage. So the custom and common usage of a community share the same underlying idea even if what is understood by them differs slightly."

And about the reasons why *'ādāt* and *'urf* are deemed the appropriate sources of *Sharī'ah* , in absence of explicit texts from the Qur'ān and *sunnah* and when there are no conflicts between the*'ādāt* and *'urf* and the latter, Abū Zahrah (1970) said, "Many judgments are based on *'urf* because in many cases it coincides with public interest... Another reason is that custom necessarily entails

people's familiarity with a matter, and so any judgment based on it will receive general acceptance whereas divergence from it will be liable to cause distress, which is disliked in the judgment of Islam because Allah Almighty has not imposed any hardship on people in His *dīn*. Allah Almighty prescribes what normal people deem proper and are accustomed to, not what they dislike and hate. So when a custom is not a vice and is respected by people, honouring it will strengthen the bond which draws people together because it is connected to their traditions and social transactions whereas opposition to it will destroy that cohesion and bring about disunity."

So strong is this source of Islamic *Sharī'ah* that according to many Muslim jurists, most notably the Mālikites, it makes the general specific and qualifies the unqualified. As for the extent to which the three leading schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*): the Mālikī, Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī schools, accept '*ādāt* and '*urf* as a source of Islamic Sharī'ah, Abū Zahrah (1970) said, "Mlikī *fiqh*, like Ḥanafī *fiqh*, makes use of custom and considers it a legal principle in respect of matters about which there is no definitive text. In fact it has an even deeper respect for custom than the Ḥanafī school since, as we have seen, public interest and general benefit are the foundation of Mālikī *fiqh* in coming to decisions and there is no doubt that respect for a custom which contains no harm is one of the types of benefit. It is not valid for any *faqīh* to leave it: indeed, it is obligatory to adopt it. We find that the Mālikīs abandon analogy when custom opposes it. Custom makes the general specific and qualifies the unqualified, as far as the Mālikīs are concerned. It appears that the Shāfi'ites also takes custom into consideration when there is no text. If text dominates in its judgment because people are subject to and do it by way of familiarity and habit. Nothing can prevent them from adopting it except a prohibiting text. Where there is no prohibiting text, then it must be adopted. We find that Ibn Ḥajar stated that custom is acted on it when there is nothing in the custom contrary to a text."

As a conclusion to this section on the validity, yet inevitability, of integration between indigenous and foreign influences in Islamic architecture, we shall quote Umar Faruq (2006) who in his paper on Islam and cultural imperative elaborated on the Prophet's attitude

and the attitude of his companions towards the multifaceted cultural and civilisational legacies of the world which they were set to inherit and whose threads they would weave into a newly-emerging all-inclusive and total Islamic culture and civilisation, "The Prophet Muhammad and his Companions were not at war with the world's cultures and ethnicities but entertained an honest, accommodating, and generally positive view of the broad social endowments of other peoples and places. The Prophet and his Companions did not look upon human culture in terms of black and white, nor did they drastically divide human societies into spheres of absolute good and absolute evil. Islam did not impose itself – neither among Arabs or non-Arabs – as an alien, culturally predatory worldview. Rather, the Prophetic message was, from the outset, based on the distinction between what was good, beneficial, and authentically human in other cultures, while seeking to alter only what was clearly detrimental. Prophetic law did not burn and obliterate what was distinctive about other peoples but sought instead to prune, nurture, and nourish, creating a positive Islamic synthesis."

Much of what became the Prophet's *sunnah* (Prophetic model) was made up of acceptable pre-Islamic Arab cultural norms, and the principle of tolerating and accommodating such practices among Arabs and non-Arabs alike may be termed a supreme, overriding Prophetic *sunnah*. In this vein, the noted early jurist, Abû Yûsuf, understood the recognition of good, local cultural norms as falling under the rubric of the *sunnah*. The 15th century Granadan jurisprudent Ibn al-Mawaq articulated a similar outlook and stressed, for example, that it was not the purpose of Prophetic dress codes to impinge upon the cultural integrity of non-Arab Muslims, who were at liberty to develop or maintain their own distinctive dress within the broad parameters of the sacred law.

The Qur'ān enjoined the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to adhere to people's sound customs and usages and take them as a fundamental reference in legislation: "Accept (from people) what comes naturally [for them]. Command what is customarily [good]. And turn away from the ignorant (without responding in kind)" (7:199). Ibn 'Ammiyyah, a renowned early Andalusian jurist and Qur'ānic commentator, asserted that the verse not only upheld the sanctity of indigenous culture but granted sweeping validity to

everything the human heart regards as sound and beneficial, as long as it is not clearly repudiated in the revealed law. For classical Islamic jurists in general, the verse was often cited as proof for the affirmation of sound cultural usage, and it was noted that what people generally deem as proper tends to be compatible with their nature and environment, serving essential needs and valid aspirations.

At any rate, as a final remark, whatever can enrich culture, enhance civilisation and bolster the wellbeing of people, barring any conflict with any of the Islamic principles and values as the precondition, Islam with its cultures and civilisation warmly welcomes to its fold. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his companions were the best models to follow in this regard. In virtually all fields of their daily existence they did not hesitate to apply this Islamic principle, such as the fields of architecture, medicine, clothing, foodstuff, business, entertainment and art of war.

Conclusion

Based on Prophet Muhammad's building experiences, we can conclude that Islamic architecture is not to be concerned about the form of buildings only. Islamic architecture signifies a process where all the phases and aspects are equally important. It is almost impossible to identify a phase or an aspect in that process and consider it more important than the others. The process of Islamic architecture starts with having a proper understanding and vision which leads to making a right intention. It continues with the planning, designing and building stages, and ends with attaining the net results and how people make use of and benefit from them. Islamic architecture is a fine blend of all these factors which are interwoven with the treads of the belief system, principles, teachings and values of Islam.

Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) taught that at the core of Islamic architecture lies function with all of its dimensions: corporeal, cerebral and spiritual. The role of form is an important one, too, but only inasmuch as it supplements and enhances function. Islamic architecture must embody the teachings, values and principles of Islam as a way of life, because it functions as the physical locus for human activities, facilitating and promoting them. It must be man-oriented, upholding his dignity and facilitating his spiritual

progression while in this world. Architecture is a means, not an end. Moreover, one of the most recognizable features of Islamic architecture must always be sustainability. This is so because Islam, as a total worldview, ethics and jurisprudence, aims to preserve man and his total wellbeing, i.e., his religion, self, mental strength, progeny (future generations) and wealth (personal, societal and natural). The views of Islam and Prophet Muhammad (SAW) concerning the natural environment and man's relation thereto are unprecedented.

It goes without saying, therefore, that without Islam there can be no Islamic architecture. Likewise, without true Muslims, who in their thoughts, actions and words epitomise the total message of Islam, there can be no Islamic architecture either. Islamic architecture is a framework for the implementation of Islam, a framework which exists in order to facilitate, encourage and promote such an implementation. Hence, properly perceiving, creating, comprehending, studying and even using Islamic architecture, cannot be achieved in isolation from the total framework of Islam with its comprehensive worldview, ethos, doctrines, laws, practices, genesis and history. Any attempt or method that defies this very logical principle is bound to end up in failure, generating in the process sets of errors and misconceptions. Indeed, the existing studies on Islamic architecture, by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike, and the ways in which Islamic architecture is taught and "practiced" today, is the best testimony to the confusion that surrounds Islamic architecture as both a concept and sensory reality.

Prophet Muhammad's time represents the first and certainly most decisive phase in the evolution of the identity of Islamic architecture, as it is known today. What the Prophet did with regard to architecture, by and large, amounts to sowing the seeds whose yield was harvested later during the Umayyad and Abbasid epochs and beyond. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) laid the foundation of Islamic architecture by introducing its invisible conceptual and ideological aspects that were later given their different outward appearances as dictated by different contexts. The aspects contributed by the Prophet to Islamic architecture signify both the quintessence of Islamic architecture and the vitality that is permeates its every facet and feature. Thus, the permanent and most consequential side of Islamic architecture

is as old as the Islamic message and the Islamic community but at the time of the Prophet, it could take no more than an austere and unsophisticated physical form. The evolution of the Prophet's Mosque in Madînah was the epitome of the Prophet's contributions to the evolution of the phenomenon of Islamic architecture.

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