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Editorial Correspondence:

Editor, IIUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies (IJRCS)

Research Management Centre, RMC

International Islamic University Malaysia

53100 Gombak Campus

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Tel: (+603) 6421 5002/5010

Fax: (+603) 6421 4862

Website: http://journals.iium.edu.my/irkh/index.php/ijrcs

Comments and suggestions to: alwialatas@iium.edu.my

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CONTENTS

Editorial 96

Fauziah Fathil

Articles

A Response to Feminist Theology on Women's Access to Knowledge in Islam: 98

A Qur'anic Reappraisal of the *Amānah*

Waresa Azizi and Fatimah Binti Karim

The Karađoz Beg Mosque: A Gem of Islamic Architecture in Mostar Attributed to Mimar Sinan 114

Spahic Omer

Patani Sultanate: Struggle for Independence in the Triangle of Siam, Britain, and France 132

Metin Zengin and Mefail Hızlı

Editorial

This December 2025 issue of the IIUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies (IJRCS) comprises several topics related to Islamic history and civilisation, namely Islamic art and architecture, the role of women in Islam in the realm of religious knowledge, and political history.

The first article, titled **“A Response to Feminist Theology on Women’s Access to Knowledge in Islam: A Qur’anic Reappraisal of the Amanah”** by Waresa Azizi and Fatimah binti Karim tackles an interesting issue on women and the production and transmission of religious knowledge against the backdrop of some claims that have been influenced by feminist ideology, on how the role of women has been downplayed vis-à-vis that of men. Using the Qur’anic concept of *amānah* (trust), the authors conclude that, instead of opting for gender-based narratives, the Qur’an should be interpreted in its true spirit, which, if followed through, shows that the Qur’an assigns equal roles to both men and women in seeking and disseminating Islamic knowledge, thereby highlighting the concept of fairness in Islam.

The next article, **“The Karađoz Beg Mosque: A Gem of Islamic Architecture in Mostar Attributed to Mimar Sinan”** by Spahic Omer, dwells on one significant Ottoman legacy at Mostar in the present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina in the form of an architectural monument, a mosque. Not only was the Karađoz Beg Mosque built by one of the most renowned Muslim architects, Mimar Sinan, but it is also the most iconic mosque in Mostar, which inspired the establishment of other similar structures in the city. Shedding light on the mosque's special features, the article establishes its uniqueness, which is in line with the Islamic worldview. Not only does the mosque perform various communal functions, but it also exudes the significance of worshipping the Creator and preparing oneself for the afterlife. It is due to its physical and spiritual features and functions that the mosque needs to be appreciated and preserved.

Choosing political history as their topic of discussion, Metin Zengin and Mefail Hizli examine the effects of British and French presence and influence on the relations between Siam and the Malay Sultanate of Patani in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In their work, **“Patani Sultanate: Struggle for Independence in the Triangle of Siam, Britain and France”**, the author highlights the Siamese efforts for state-building and preservation of independence amidst the Western imperialist threats, which ended with the signing of the Anglo-French Treaty of 1896 and the Anglo-Siamese Accord of 1897. For readers of history, not only does the article explain the events leading to the fall of the Patani Sultanate, but also how they shaped the Malay-Muslims’ political identity in Patani, the impacts of which linger until today.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to all contributors and reviewers who were involved in this June issue. It is hoped that the valuable ideas and engaging works of the contributors or authors will enrich the existing knowledge and benefit readers and students of history and civilisation worldwide.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to all members of the Editorial Board, our Editor, Dr. Mohd Helmi Mohd Sobri, and Associate Editors, namely Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alwi Alatas, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rabi'ah Aminudin and Dr. Mohamad Firdaus Mansor Majdin, without whose efforts and dedication, the publication of this issue would not have become a reality. Thank you.

Fauziah Fathil
Editor-in-Chief
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A Response to Feminist Theology on Women's Access to Knowledge in Islam: A Qur'anic Reappraisal of the *Amānah*

Waresa Azizi[1] and Fatimah Binti Karim[2]

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Abstract: This paper foregrounds the Qur'anic concept of *amānah* (trust) as the central theological lens for re-examining women's access to religious knowledge in Islam. It examines contemporary feminist theological critiques of Islamic epistemology that highlight the historical marginalisation of women in religious knowledge and authority. They argue that patriarchal interpretations have overshadowed the Qur'an's egalitarian message, excluding women from epistemic participation. While these critiques offer valuable insights, they often assume that Islamic epistemology is inherently patriarchal or irreversibly shaped by male-dominated traditions. This study challenges that assumption by analysing the Qur'anic concept of *amānah* (trust), which frames both men and women as rational agents equally responsible for seeking and upholding divine knowledge. The paper unfolds in three parts. First, it analyses Sa'diyya Shaikh's feminist approach to hadith and Qur'anic interpretation, identifying methodological limitations and selective readings that risk undermining the coherence of the Islamic epistemic tradition. Second, it reconstructs a Qur'anic epistemology centred on *amānah*, emphasising knowledge-seeking as a divine mandate shared by both genders. Finally, the study synthesises these insights to propose a constructive theological vision rooted in the Qur'an's ethical and metaphysical framework. Rather than merely responding to feminist critiques, this paper reclaims Islamic theology as an inclusive and universal space that mandates women's active role in the production and transmission of knowledge.

Keywords: *Amānah* and women, Muslim feminist, women's education, Hadith criticism, Islam and modernity, women and Islam

Introduction

The Qur'anic concept of *amānah* (trust) provides the central theological foundation for this study, framing both men and women as rational agents equally responsible for seeking and upholding divine knowledge. This paper situates *amānah* at the heart of debates on women's access to religious authority, arguing that the trust is a universal covenant that cannot be restricted by gender.

The contemporary discourse on women in Islam is deeply influenced by feminist theology, which critiques traditional Islamic frameworks for what it perceives as gender-based exclusion, particularly in the realms of knowledge and authority. Feminist theologians such as Amina Wadud (1999), Fatima Mernissi (1992), Ahmed & Ali (2021), Ahmed (1992), and Barlas (2019) argue that Islamic interpretive traditions have historically marginalised women, especially in matters concerning religious knowledge, authority, and public agency. These scholars contend that patriarchal exegeses have been instrumental in maintaining male

[1] Waresa Azizi is a Master student in the department of Fiqh and Usul Al-Fiqh at the International Islamic University Malaysia. She can be reached at waresa62@gmail.com.
[2] Dr. Fatimah Binti Karim is an Assistant Professor at the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She can be reached at fatimahkarim@iium.edu.my.

dominance in the production and dissemination of Islamic knowledge, thus depriving women of their rightful epistemological agency.

For instance, Amina Wadud's *Qur'an and Woman* (Wadud, 1999) offers a gender-inclusive hermeneutic of the Qur'an, asserting that the text itself is not patriarchal but has been read through a male-centric lens that systematically excludes women's voices. Similarly, Fatima Mernissi (1992) in *The Veil and the Male Elite* critiques the use of certain Hadith traditions to undermine women's public participation, including their access to religious and intellectual spaces. Mernissi argues that the exclusion of women from the public sphere was not a divine injunction but a human construct. Barlas (2019) furthers this argument in *Believing Women in Islam*, suggesting that patriarchal readings of the Qur'an have obscured its inherently egalitarian ethos: The Qur'an's teachings are fundamentally anti-patriarchal, yet its exegesis has been shaped by patriarchal contexts. These critiques form a core part of Islamic feminist theology, which posits that Islam, in its classical interpretive heritage, has failed to provide equitable epistemic space for women.

Furthermore, feminist theology in Islam has been instrumental in questioning the male-dominated interpretive traditions that have shaped Islamic scholarship. Amina Wadud's work, for instance, emphasises a hermeneutic that prioritises the Qur'an's ethical vision over later interpretations. She argues that the Qur'an's universal principles of justice and equality have been overshadowed by patriarchal readings that privilege male authority (Wadud, 1999). Similarly, Women and Gender in Islam traces the historical development of gender norms in Muslim societies, suggesting that pre-Islamic patriarchal structures were absorbed into Islamic exegesis, thus limiting women's roles in religious scholarship. It notes that the Qur'an's egalitarian potential was curtailed by the cultural norms of the societies in which it was interpreted (Ahmed & Ali, 2021).

Fatima Mernissi's critique focuses on the selective use of Hadith to restrict women's public roles. She examines traditions that depict women as intellectually inferior or unfit for leadership, arguing that such narrations reflect the biases of their narrators rather than divine intent (Mernissi, 1992; Pastner & Mernissi, 1978). Asma Barlas (2019) extends this critique by challenging the interpretive methodologies that prioritise male perspectives. She asserts that to read the Qur'an as a patriarchal text is to misread its intent, which is to liberate all human beings from oppression.

Despite the valuable contributions of feminist theology in highlighting historical exclusions of women from religious authority, much of this discourse remains framed by external paradigms that measure Islamic epistemology against secular or Western ethical benchmarks. This creates a methodological gap: while feminist critiques rightly expose patriarchal biases, they often risk overlooking the Qur'an's own epistemic framework, which emphasises universality and inclusivity through concepts such as *amānah*. Addressing this gap requires a constructive theological approach that re-engages Islamic sources on their own terms, rather than primarily through external lenses. It is within this context that the present study situates its analysis, moving beyond critique to reconstruct a Qur'anic epistemology that affirms women's equal responsibility in the pursuit and transmission of knowledge.

The paper is organised into three sections. The first section provides a critical analysis of Sa'diyya Shaikh's article, which serves as a representative example of feminist theology's interpretive approach to Islamic texts. Shaikh's work offers a valuable insight into the feminist re-articulation of knowledge and authority within Islam, particularly through her engagement with Hadith literature. However, this section will demonstrate methodological and epistemological inconsistencies in her approach, including selective readings and an overreliance on gendered hermeneutics that may overlook the internal coherence and epistemic universality of the Qur'anic worldview.

In the second section, the paper reconstructs a Qur'anic epistemology rooted in the concept of *amānah*, highlighting how the Qur'an presents knowledge-seeking as a universal moral obligation crucial for fulfilling human responsibility. This section builds a rational and theological framework that affirms the inclusion of women in the pursuit of knowledge as a necessary condition for their role as stewards of divine trust. The final section offers a synthesis of these findings, reaffirming that the Qur'an not only permits but actively requires the epistemological participation of women. In doing so, the paper seeks to move beyond reactionary readings of feminist theology and instead provide a constructive theological vision grounded in the Qur'an's own ethical and metaphysical logic.

Feministic Hermeneutics in Understanding Knowledge

Islamic epistemology is fundamentally rooted in revelation (*waḥy*) and its interpretive traditions, which prioritise coherence, continuity, and fidelity to the Qur'an and Sunnah. Classical methodologies such as *tafsīr* (exegesis), Hadith criticism, and *ijtihād* (juridical reasoning) are designed to safeguard the integrity of divine knowledge by situating interpretation within a disciplined framework of textual, linguistic, and ethical principles. This epistemology is not merely descriptive but normative, aiming to preserve the universality of divine guidance across generations. By contrast, feminist epistemology often begins from external paradigms—particularly Western theories of gender, power, and social justice—which, while valuable in exposing historical exclusions, risk imposing categories foreign to the Qur'anic worldview. The divergence lies in the source of authority: Islamic epistemology derives legitimacy from revelation and its scholarly tradition, whereas feminist epistemology privileges contextual critique and experiential perspectives (Akbar, 2020; Zacky & Moniruzzaman, 2024).

This methodological distinction is crucial for understanding why feminist interpretations may be problematic when measured against Islamic interpretive practices. Feminist hermeneutics often emphasise selective readings that foreground gendered concerns, sometimes at the expense of the Qur'an's internal coherence and epistemic universality. Islamic epistemology, however, insists that knowledge must be pursued through holistic engagement with revelation, guided by principles of justice, rationality, and continuity with the scholarly tradition. While feminist critiques rightly highlight patriarchal biases in historical exegesis, their reliance on external frameworks can obscure the Qur'an's own mechanisms for inclusivity, such as the concept of *amānah*. By clarifying this distinction, the paper demonstrates that a Qur'anically grounded epistemology not only addresses concerns of justice and equality but also provides a more robust theological foundation for affirming women's rightful participation in the pursuit and transmission of knowledge (Nasr, 2004; Rahman, 2009).

An important question that must be addressed is: What occurred throughout history that led to the marginalisation of women's access to knowledge within Muslim societies? Historically, disrupting the intellectual participation of half the Muslim population would not have been possible without invoking evidence from the Qur'an and Hadith. However, it is also evident that these foundational sources can be, and have been, interpreted in both constructive and reductive ways depending on the prevailing needs and motivations of the interpreter. As the Qur'an states, *"Thereby He misleads many and thereby He guides many. And He misleads none except the defiantly disobedient"* (Qur'an 2:26). This verse highlights the dual potential of divine guidance—to lead or mislead—depending on the ethical orientation of the interpreter.

In this light, it becomes necessary to critically evaluate the arguments of contemporary feminist thinkers who approach Islamic texts through frameworks primarily shaped by Western ethical and moral paradigms. We analyse such readings not to dismiss the genuine concerns raised by feminist scholars, but to scrutinise the methodological inconsistencies that arise when

Islamic epistemology is measured against external, often secular, benchmarks. Here "methodological inconsistencies" mean that certain feminist theological readings of the Qur'an and Hadith employ selective hermeneutics that do not consistently align with the internal logic of the Islamic interpretive tradition. For instance, some interpretations highlight narrations that appear to marginalise women while overlooking other textual and exegetical evidence that affirms women's active role in transmitting and preserving knowledge. In addition, these readings often apply categories derived from modern secular feminist theory—such as gender hierarchy and power analysis—without fully engaging with the Qur'an's own epistemic categories like *amānah* (trust), *taqwā* (God-consciousness), and *'ilm* (knowledge). This reliance on external frameworks, coupled with decontextualised readings of individual hadith, risks fragmenting the coherence of the tradition. By contrast, Islamic epistemology is characterised by its grounding in revelation (*waḥy*) and its integration of rational inquiry with moral accountability. Unlike secular epistemology, which derives knowledge primarily from human reason, empirical observation, or social constructs, Islamic epistemology treats revelation as a primary source and views knowledge as a divine trust inseparable from ethical responsibility. Its purpose is not merely utilitarian but to fulfill the covenant of justice and guidance, with validity measured by alignment with revelation and its capacity to lead to moral rectitude. In this framework, both men and women are equally addressed as rational agents responsible for seeking and applying knowledge, making epistemic participation a divine obligation rather than a matter of social equity alone. We seek to offer a thorough and respectful engagement with feminist theological claims, while reaffirming a Qur'anically rooted framework for understanding knowledge and its obligations—particularly as they pertain to women.

In her 2004 article, Sa'diyyah Shaikh (2004) analyses the "Book of Knowledge" (*Kitāb al-'Ilm*) in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*[3] through a feminist hermeneutical lens, aiming to uncover underlying gendered assumptions within classical Islamic texts. One of the central Hadiths she focuses on reads:

> Abd Allah ibn Anas narrated: Among the portents [or signs] of the final hour are [the following]: 1) the taking away of religious knowledge [*the notion that this happens through the death of religiously learned men is mentioned elsewhere in the chapter*]; 2) the prevalence of ignorance 3) the prevalence of illegal sexual intercourse and, 4) women will increase in number and men will decrease in number, so that fifty women will be looked after by one man. (Al-Bukhārī, Ch 22, 81)

Shaikh interprets this narration as constructing a deeply gendered discourse that links the loss of knowledge and the spread of ignorance with an increase in female presence. She writes:

> The four signs of the 'end' which are presented as discrete conditions collectively constitute a profoundly gendered subtext. This narrative presents us with interlocking associations of knowledge, sexuality, ignorance and women. The predicted future where women dominate in terms of number is at the same time a society in which ignorance prevails. Underpinning this view is the self-evident premise that knowledge is a male prerogative. That men monopolized the knowledge discourse in the medieval period is no startling revelation. However, this Hadith also assumes that such a gender or knowledge configuration is given and unchangeable. The vision of the future is one in which women will never advance to be the purveyors of knowledge: women are ignorant and remain definitive of ignorance. A society that has an excess of women is one that de facto lacks religious knowledge and enlightenment. The envisioned dislodging of male religious authority implies the destruction of all religious authority. Implicit is the notion that maleness is exclusively and ontologically linked to the realm of religious authority. This Hadith not only reinforces the given gender hierarchy in the

[3] All the Hadith quoted are taken from the Sunnah.com for ease of search and referencing.

> sphere of knowledge but also entrenches it until the kingdom comes or, to use a qur'anic phrase, until 'the trumpet is sounded. (Shaikh, 2004, p.101)

On the basis of this interpretation, she asserts that the hadith embeds an immutable gender hierarchy in relation to knowledge—that male authority is the assumed and exclusive bearer of religious insight, while the increasing number of women is implicitly tied to moral and intellectual decline. However, a closer examination of both the hadith and its interpretative tradition reveals serious flaws in Shaikh's conclusions. Her reading rests on questionable assumptions and decontextualised premises that neither align with the broader prophetic teachings nor the classical exegetical discourse surrounding such narrations. The classical exegetical tradition traces its roots to the foundational sources of interpreting the words of Allah—beginning with the Prophet's sīrah and teachings, followed by the understandings of the companions, the *tābiʿīn*, and the *tābiʿ al-tābiʿīn*. Similarly, the same applies to the interpretation of the Hadith, which is understood in the context of the Qur'an, opinions of companions, and broader socio-political development of the time. As will be demonstrated, her interpretation is not only methodologically selective but also imposes an external epistemological framework—namely, Western feminist theory—onto a genre of Hadith literature that demands an internal and holistic hermeneutical approach. Western feminist theory has been influential in critiquing patriarchal structures within its own historical and cultural context, but when applied to Islamic theological discourse, it faces several methodological obstacles. Its underlying epistemology differs sharply from the principles that ground Islamic knowledge, and it often employs selective readings that isolate gender from the broader theological and ethical framework. Additionally, Western feminist ideas emerge from social conditions distinct from those that shaped Islamic intellectual traditions. These approaches also tend to overlook the depth of Muslim scholarly heritage—including significant contributions by women—and frequently frame authority in terms of a male–female binary that does not reflect the Qur'anic emphasis on *taqwā* and moral responsibility. Together, these challenges underscore the importance of engaging with issues of gender in Islam through interpretive methods rooted in its own epistemological, ethical, and spiritual foundations (Barlas, 2019).

In the first part of the Hadith, the phrase "*the taking away of religious knowledge [the notion that this happens through the death of religiously learned men is mentioned elsewhere in the chapter]*" includes a bracketed note by the author asserting that this refers to the loss of learned men, a concept allegedly found elsewhere in the same chapter of the Book of Knowledge. However, the original Arabic text of the Hadith reads:

> The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say: 'Among the signs of the Hour are: knowledge will decrease, ignorance will become widespread, adultery will become rampant, women will increase in number, and men will decrease—until there will be one man to look after fifty women.' (Al-Bukhārī 81, Book 3, Hadith 23)

As is evident, the phrase "*learned men*" is not part of the hadith itself. Even if we momentarily accept the author's interpretation that "men" are referenced elsewhere, it is important to consider other hadiths in the same chapter that provide further clarification. For instance, another hadith from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, also within the *Book of Knowledge*, reads:

> I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say: 'Indeed, Allah does not take away knowledge by snatching it away from the people, but He takes away knowledge by taking away the scholars (in death). Until when no scholar remains, the people will take ignorant ones as their leaders. They will be asked (about religious matters), and they will give fatwas (legal opinions) without knowledge. They will go astray and will lead others astray.' (Al-Bukhārī 100, Book 3, Hadith 42)

This Hadith clearly states that taking away of knowledge means "*But He takes away knowledge by taking away the scholars*," which means the scholars of Islam. It does not isolate women from being one of them. The same gender neutrality is found in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Knowledge:

> Verily, Allah does not take away knowledge by snatching it from the people but He takes away knowledge by taking away the *scholars*, so that when He leaves no learned person, people turn to the ignorant as their leaders; then they are asked to deliver religious verdicts and they deliver them without knowledge, they go astray, and lead others astray. (Muslim 2673a, Book 47, Hadith 22).

This hadith, too, emphasises the role of scholars in preserving knowledge and does so in a gender-neutral way. It does not exclude women from being among those scholars. Therefore, the feminist interpretation that draws a gender-specific conclusion from the earlier hadith is not supported by the larger textual context. Even if one were to interpret the first hadith as implying male scholars specifically, such an interpretation would still be limited and cannot be generalised across the broader Islamic epistemological tradition. The cumulative evidence clearly refutes the assertion that the prophetic tradition equates the loss of knowledge exclusively with the absence of male scholarship.

The second assertion under scrutiny claims that "*the predicted future where women dominate in terms of number is simultaneously a society in which ignorance prevails*." This interpretation derives from a particular sequencing of a Hadith, wherein the prevalence of ignorance is associated with the concluding statement that the number of women will surpass that of men. The methodological approach taken by some interpreters—prioritising the numerical reference to women and retroactively linking it to the other signs of the Hadith (namely ignorance, conflict, and widespread loss of knowledge)—raises critical questions. It is because Hadith scholars have understood this narration differently, such as in *Fatḥ al-Bārī* (Vol. 1, p. 236), Ibn Hajar al- 'Asqalani interprets the phrase "fifty women to one man" as a sign of social imbalance, potentially caused by war, disease, or economic shifts that disproportionately diminish the male population. He explains that the term "*qayyim*"—commonly translated as "caretaker" or "guardian"—signifies responsibility and provision, not polygamy, which is explicitly limited to four wives under Surah al-Nisā' (4:3). Ibn Hajar links this gender imbalance to the spread of ignorance, arguing that the decline in male scholars accelerates the erosion of knowledge. Significantly, he emphasises the role of women's education in countering this decline, citing notable female scholars such as Hafsa bint Sireen.

The third major issue with the feminist interpretation of the Hadith lies in their conclusion that "*the envisioned dislodging of male religious authority implies the destruction of all religious authority. Implicit is the notion that maleness is exclusively and ontologically linked to the realm of religious authority*." As demonstrated in the preceding discussion, this interpretation fundamentally contradicts the spirit and content of the Hadith. The assertion goes too far by implying an exclusive and essential association between maleness and religious authority. This claim can be refuted from multiple angles, particularly through well-known Hadiths that emphasise the importance of women's education and access to knowledge—Hadiths that directly undermine the notion of male exclusivity in religious leadership. Notably, even the scholar (Shaikh, 2004) who supports the feminist reading elsewhere cites these very Hadiths in a different context, inadvertently highlighting the inconsistency of such a conclusion. The Hadith says:

> Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī narrated: Some women requested the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to fix a day for them, as the men were taking all his time. Accordingly, he promised them one day for religious lessons and commandments. Once, during such a lesson, the Prophet (pbuh) said: 'A woman whose three children die, will be shielded by them from the hell fire.' On that a

> woman asked, 'If only two die?' He replied: 'Even two will shield her from hellfire." (Shaikh, 2004, p.105)

This Hadith clearly illustrates that the Prophet ﷺ dedicated a specific day from his demanding schedule to teach and educate women. As affirmed in another narration, the Prophet ﷺ stated, "*Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim*" (Ibn Majah, Hadith 224). The narration reported by Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī thus offers profound insights into both the social structure of early Islamic society and the spiritual status afforded to women within it.

This incident is significant for several reasons. First, it highlights the proactive role women played in pursuing religious knowledge, challenging contemporary assumptions that early Muslim women were passive or excluded from spiritual authority. Their request for a dedicated time to learn from the Prophet ﷺ reflects a strong sense of religious agency and a deep desire for direct engagement with prophetic teachings. Second, the Prophet's immediate and affirmative response—allocating a specific day for women's instruction—exemplifies the inclusive and egalitarian ethos of Islamic pedagogy. It affirms that access to religious knowledge and spiritual growth is a shared obligation and right for both men and women. His tailored approach to the spiritual and personal concerns of women exemplifies a prophetic pedagogy rooted in compassion, responsiveness, and inclusion.

The latter part of the narration, in which the Prophet ﷺ addresses a question posed during the session, adds another layer of depth. When he spoke of the immense spiritual reward for a mother who loses her children—stating that a woman whose three children die will be shielded from Hellfire and later extending that mercy to those who lose even two—he underscored both divine compassion and the sanctity of maternal suffering. This teaching offers not only comfort but also spiritual elevation to women enduring profound personal loss, emphasising the sacred value of their trials. Furthermore, this Hadith should be understood within the broader Islamic framework that recognises and honours the diverse roles of women—not only as mothers but also as seekers of knowledge and active contributors to religious life. This Hadith stands as an early and powerful precedent affirming women's rightful place in the pursuit of religious knowledge and spiritual leadership.

Now that we have briefly examined the methodological issues in the feminist reinterpretation of the Hadith under discussion, it is important to clarify that the intent behind such critiques—to pursue justice and rectify gender-based injustices—is not inherently objectionable. Indeed, Islam itself upholds the pursuit of justice as a fundamental value. However, such efforts must not come at the cost of undermining or reinterpreting Qur'anic and Prophetic texts in ways that are incongruent with established interpretive methodologies simply to suit a particular ideological framework. Reinterpretation must emerge from within the bounds of the Islamic epistemological tradition, not be imposed upon it from external paradigms.

The lack of widespread documentation of women scholars in Islamic history is frequently cited as evidence of their marginalisation or exclusion. However, this is a flawed assumption. The absence of documentation does not equate to the absence of contribution. As the late Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi has shown in his seminal work *Al-Muhaddithat: The Women Scholars in Islam*, there exists a rich and underexplored legacy of female scholarship in the Islamic tradition. Through meticulous research, Nadwi catalogued over 9,000 women scholars who were active participants in the transmission of Hadith, jurisprudence, and other Islamic sciences. These women were not anomalies; they were part of a continuous and integrated scholarly tradition. Nadwi eloquently addresses the core of the modern dilemma in the introduction to his work:

> The aim of undoing injustices suffered by women (wherever they are suffered) is acceptable to Muslims. But it is entangled in the theoretical underpinning of feminist critique, which is

> not acceptable, but which nevertheless invades Muslim minds. I hear it in the form and content of the questions put to me. The form is: if men can do X, why can't women do X? The X could be 'pray in a mosque,' 'interpret the law,' 'issue fatwas,' 'lead prayer,' 'travel unaccompanied,' 'behave chastely without scarfing the head,' etc. This approach succeeds in embarrassing Muslims by framing each issue as one of equity: if men can X and women can't, or if women must X but men needn't, it does appear to be unfair. Now, it is not possible here to deal properly with such questioning of Islam - as I have said plainly, I am not qualified to take on 'women's studies' discourse - but I do owe it to the women whose scholarly authority this book celebrates to say briefly what is necessary to distinguish their perspective. These were not feminists, neither consciously nor unconsciously. They were above all else, like the men scholars, believers, and they got and exercised the same authority by virtue of reasoning with the same methods from the same sources as the men, and by having at the same time, just as the men did, a reputation for taqwa (wariness of God), righteousness and strong intellect. (Nadwī, 2007, p.XIV)

This observation underscores a fundamental point: the epistemic authority of female scholars in Islam was not contingent upon gender but on adherence to intellectual rigor, ethical integrity, and methodological consistency. They earned recognition not through rebellion against the tradition, but through mastery within it. Their legacy challenges the modern framing that religious authority has always been exclusively male. If we are to correct historical injustices—such as the neglect in recording women's contributions—we must do so by restoring and strengthening the Islamic intellectual tradition, not by displacing it with frameworks that rest on epistemological assumptions alien to the Qur'an and Sunnah. True reform arises not from negating the sources of knowledge, but from re-engaging with them in their full depth and scope. This entails a revival of classical methodologies of *ijtihād*, critical reasoning, and ethical scholarship—fields in which both men and women have historically excelled. Thus, our approach to gender and knowledge in Islam must be principled, rooted in the recognition that justice and truth are divine imperatives. They are not defined by the shifting metrics of modern ideologies but by the timeless guidance of revelation and the lived example of generations of sincere and pious scholars—men and women alike.

After briefly, analysing the feministic reinterpretation approach, we now move towards the theological construction that would establish that seeking knowledge is undeniably gender-neutral based on the Qur'anic verses. So that there remains no reinterpretation to refute women's knowledge using either the Qur'anic verses or Hadith.

The Theology of Knowledge in the Qur'an

The truth of Islam, as it stands today, is often obscured by the passage of time and the layers of cultural influence that have accumulated over centuries. It is, therefore, one of the most pressing challenges for the Muslim *ummah* to devise methods that can help peel away these historical and cultural accretions to rediscover the original intellectual and spiritual clarity that Islam brought to humanity. This task requires identifying specific points in history where cultural wear and civilisational decline began to overshadow the dynamic intellectual rigor and ethical vision of Islam.

If Islam is indeed the truth—as Muslims believe—then it must not merely be proclaimed in words but also be demonstrated through the actions and intellectual integrity of its followers. Islam is not a passive or meditative tradition; rather, it is an intensely action-oriented *dīn*—a comprehensive way of life. This intensity of divine responsibility is powerfully reflected in the following Qur'anic verse:

> *Indeed, We offered the trust (al-amānah) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and feared it; yet man undertook to bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.* (Qur'an 33:72)

It is *al-insān*—the human being—who dared to take on the weight of this divine trust. But what is this trust (*amānah*)? It is the Qur'an and all that it entails: divine guidance, moral accountability, and the responsibility to establish justice. As the Qur'an affirms:

> *And We have explained everything in it in clear detail. (Qur'an 17:12)*

If everything has been explained in the Qur'an with clarity, then the methodology by which Muslims must seek truth—especially on questions of moral and social importance—must begin with the Qur'an itself. The very subject of this discussion, namely the role and status of women in Islamic epistemology and leadership, is tied to this foundational trust. It leads us to ask: Is the responsibility of this *amānah* exclusive to men, or are women equal participants in bearing it?

This question cannot be answered by cultural assumptions or inherited social structures. It must be answered by returning to the original source—the Qur'an—and by applying rational inquiry rooted in the Islamic intellectual tradition.

To begin this inquiry, I propose a simple, yet powerful logical argument based on the Qur'anic verse of *amānah* (33:72):

Premise 1: The *amānah* (trust) is a divine responsibility offered to various creations—heavens, earth, mountains, and humans.

Premise 2: Non-human creations lacked the free will and rational capacity to bear the trust, and their refusal stemmed from fear of failure (as explained in *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* and other classical commentaries).

Premise 3: *Insān* (human beings), endowed with free will and intellect, accepted the trust. However, their unjust and ignorant nature suggests a tendency toward failure unless guided by knowledge.

Conclusion: Since fulfilling the trust requires rational and moral capacity, and since ignorance undermines this capacity, the acquisition of knowledge is essential for all human beings—including women—who share equally in bearing the divine Trust.

This argument highlights that the moral and epistemic burden of the *amānah* is not gendered. If the acceptance of the trust is rooted in human rationality and volition, and if knowledge is the key to avoiding injustice and ignorance, then women, by virtue of their humanity, are equal stakeholders in this divine responsibility. Thus, seeking knowledge is not merely a right but a necessary condition for fulfilling the purpose of life itself. It is the foundational force that sustains the moral and intellectual order of the world.

In the following sections, I will elaborate on each premise and support the conclusion with Qur'anic, historical, and logical evidence—demonstrating that knowledge is not only a shared obligation but an intrinsic aspect of womanhood in Islam. Women are not passive recipients of divine grace; they are active participants in upholding the covenant of the trust. Their pursuit of knowledge is, therefore, not optional—it is essential to the fulfilment of Islam's vision for human society.

On the first premise: Trust is divine responsibility to creation

Al-amānah derives from the Arabic root (*alīf-mīm-nūn*), which conveys notions of trust, safety, security, and faithfulness. This root also forms words like *īmān* (faith), *amīn* (trustworthy), and *amn* (peace). In classical Arabic dictionaries, such as *Lisan al-Arab* by Ibn Manḍūr, *amānah* is defined as trustworthiness—the quality of being reliable and faithful in fulfilling obligations, something entrusted-an object, duty, or responsibility given to someone with the expectation of safeguarding or fulfilling it, moral responsibility—a covenant or pledge requiring integrity. The term implies a reciprocal relationship—the one who entrusts (*mu'tamin*) expects the trustee (*amīn*) to uphold the obligation with honesty.

In Surah al-Ahzab (33:72), *al-amānah* is a singular feminine noun with the definite article "*al-*" indicating a specific, significant trust. Its placement in the verse suggests a divine, universal responsibility distinct from ordinary trusts. The verb *ḥamalat* (bore it) used with *insān* implies an active, voluntary acceptance, contrasting with the refusal (*abā* and *ashfaq*) of non-human creations, highlighting the weight and moral agency required. *Amānah* carries connotations of duty, covenant, and accountability. It is not merely a physical object but a spiritual and ethical commitment. The root's association with *īmān* (faith) suggests that *al-amānah* is intrinsically linked to belief in Allah, as fulfilling the trust requires faith and obedience.

Furthermore, Islamic scholars, through *tafsīr*, provide diverse yet complementary interpretations of *al-amānah*, reflecting its multifaceted nature. For example, key interpretations from classical and modern *tafsīrs*, focusing on Surah al-Ahzab (33:72), are as follows. According to *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Vol.6, p.431), *al-amānah* is the comprehensive responsibility of divine guidance, including obedience to Allah's commands, adherence to the Qur'an, and fulfilment of moral and legal obligations (e.g., prayer, zakat, and justice). Hence, it encompasses religious duties: The five pillars of Islam and other obligations. Moral integrity: Honesty, justice, and trustworthiness in dealings, as per Surah al-Baqarah (2:283): "*If one of you entrusts another, then let him who is entrusted discharge his trust*." Free will: The ability to choose obedience or disobedience, which non-human creations (heavens, earth, mountains) lacked. Therefore, the refusal of other creations reflects their fear of failing to uphold the trust's demands, given the risk of divine punishment. *Insān*'s acceptance, led by the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), shows human potential, though tempered by "unjust and ignorant" tendencies without guidance. Here, the gender-neutral insan includes women in upholding the trust through knowledge.

Under the verse 32:72, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* (Vol. 19, pp. 196–205) states that, scholars differ on its meaning, but a common interpretation is that Allah offered His obligations and commands—referred to as the "trust"—to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains. If they had fulfilled them, they would have been rewarded; if neglected, they would have faced punishment. These entities, however, refused out of reverence for the greatness of Allah's law and fear of failing in duty. Adam accepted the trust, thereby taking on responsibility, and in doing so, became "unjust and ignorant" in the sense of committing error. So according to this interpretation, the trust is a universal responsibility, encompassing all religious obligations and duties toward others. These interpretations highlight that both men and women are equally accountable before Allah in fulfilling their religious duties, regardless of gender or physical differences. Similarly, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* (Vol.9, p. 288) states that *al-amānah* is the covenant of *tawḥīd* (oneness of Allah) and the responsibility to follow divine law, as established in the pre-eternal covenant (Surah al-A'rāf 7:172): "Am I not your Lord? They said, 'Yes, we testify'. It includes intellectual responsibility: Understanding and applying divine guidance. Moral accountability: Acting justly, as injustice (*ẓalūman*) stems from neglecting the trust. Prophetic mission: The Prophet's heart, purified per *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (1:314), was uniquely equipped to bear the Qur'an's revelation. Hence, non-human creations, lacking free will, feared failing the trust's moral demands, as their role is fixed submission (Surah al-Ra'd 13:15). Women, as insan, share this covenant, as seen in Surah al-Tawbah (9:71), where they enjoin good, requiring knowledge.

In al-Qurtubī's *tafsīr*, volume 14, pages 253–258, regarding the meaning of "*al-amānah*" in Surah al-Ahzab (33:72), it is stated that "According to the majority of scholars (the opinion of *al-jumhūr*), the term '*amānah*' includes all religious duties—that is, everything God has entrusted to His servants, such as acts of worship, obligatory deeds, and legal responsibilities. Al-Tirmidhī al-Hakīm Abū Abdillah narrated from Ismā'īl ibn Naṣr, from Ṣālih ibn Abdullah, from Muḥammad ibn Yazīd ibn Jawhar, from al-Dahhak, from Ibn 'Abbās, who reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'God Almighty said to Adam, "O Adam! I offered the trust (*amānah*) to the heavens and the earth, but they were unable to bear it. Will you take it upon yourself with all that it entails?' Adam asked, 'O Lord, what does it contain?' God said, 'If you fulfill it, you will be rewarded; but if you neglect it, you will be punished.' Adam said, 'I accept it with all that it entails.' Yet he did not remain in Paradise for long—only for the time between the noon and afternoon prayers—until Satan caused him to be expelled from it. Thus, the *amānah* is the religious obligations and duties that God has made mankind responsible for." In this explanation, there is no gender distinction—Eve (Hawwa) is not mentioned by name—and therefore it cannot be claimed that the interpretation is patriarchal. According to the consensus of the majority of scholars (*jumhūr al-'ulamā'*), these duties and obligations apply equally to all human beings, men and women alike. And this is the true meaning of *amānah* in this verse.

On the other hand, *Tafsīr* al-Qurtubī (Vol.13, p. 162) states that *al-amānah* is the trust of rational agency, including the Qur'an, shariah, and ethical conduct. It is a test of human free will, distinguishing *insān* from other creations. The trust requires knowledge to overcome "ignorant" (*jahūlan*), as per Surah al-Zumar (39:9). Justice to avoid "unjust" (*ẓalūman*), aligning with Surah al-Nisā (4:58): "*Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due.*" The Prophet's acceptance, supported by *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (60:441) (revelation's weight), exemplifies perfect stewardship, while women like Umm al-Dardā' fulfilled it through fiqh scholarship. The verse's universal call mandates women's education to uphold shariah, countering cultural restrictions.

The core part of the verse is that *insān* was 'unjust and ignorant.' That they have taken the trust of Allah without knowledge, which made them both unjust and ignorant. Since Allah already mentioned that "*And Allah brought you out of the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He gave you hearing, sight, and hearts that you might give thanks*" (16:78). To shatter the quality of unjust and ignorant from *insān* who knew nothing, Allah has given them methods to acquire knowledge. From knowing nothing to something is a departure from ignorance to knowledge, so whatever you hear, see and hearts contemplates brings you towards the knowledge because "*wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah. Indeed, Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing*" (2:115). Using these methods Allah says, "*We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that this is the truth*" (41:53).

Now, the question one should ask is, where did our Lord mention the gender? Or isolated women from seeking knowledge using the methods He himself bestowed? If Allah, the lord of *al-amānah* did not discriminate between man and women when it comes to preserving the trust and allowed running the affairs of the world through joint efforts based on justice for each, who has created the mess that seeking knowledge for women is not a requirement or even not permissible? Not that our lord says, "*The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong*" (9:71). The Qur'an categorically reminds Muslims of a joint venture between men and women to lead the caravan of Islam towards the future, yet the masculinity of man keeps dragging that collaboration into a mess by denying rights to women. How are women going to stop society from doing wrong and help them doing right if they themselves have no knowledge? Is not the rule of Allah—"*This is my way; I invite to Allah with insight* (*baṣīrah*)" (12:108). Without insight that comes with deep knowledge, it is impossible to invite people towards Allah or find Allah wherever you see.

The above discussion clearly demonstrates that in terms of sharing the responsibility of *amānah* Allah has not made any distinction between men and women. Ergo, the Lord has allowed this responsibility to be shared by both, an emphasis that only the collaboration with the guidance of Allah can give them success in the endeavour. Hence, the curtain of ignorance and culture must be removed to see the clear caravan of men and women leading towards the future.

On the second premise: Non-human creations lacked rational capacity to bear the trust, as their refusal stemmed from fear of failure

The refusal of the heavens, earth, and mountains to bear *al-amānah* is rooted in their lack of free will, rational agency, and the capacity to handle the moral and intellectual demands of the Trust. Islamic sources elucidate this through Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and *tafsīr*, emphasising that knowledge is essential for insan to succeed where other creations could not.

The verse in Surah al-Ra'd (13:15), "*Whatever is in the heavens and earth prostrates to Allah, willingly or unwillingly...*," establishes that non-human creations operate under fixed divine laws, submitting to Allah without choice. Their refusal of *al-amānah* in Surah al-Ahzab (33:72) reflects this lack of free will, as the trust requires voluntary acceptance and moral accountability. Knowledge enables *insān* to exercise free will rationally, distinguishing humans from the heavens and earth. Surah al-Zumar (39:9)— "*Are those who know equal to those who do not know?*"—underscores that knowledge is critical for fulfilling the trust's demands, which non-human creations could not undertake. Surah al-Zalzalah (99:4-5) says, "*That Day, it [the earth] will report its news, because your Lord has inspired it.*" The earth's role is to bear witness to human actions under divine command, not to act autonomously. The "fear" (*ashfaq*) in Surah al-Ahzab (33:72) indicates non-human creations' recognition of their inability to bear the trust's accountability, which includes upholding divine guidance like the Qur'an. Knowledge equips *insān* to navigate accountability, as Surah al-Nahl (16:89) describes the Qur'an as a "*clarification for all things*." Without knowledge, *insān* risks being "unjust and ignorant" (*ẓalūman jahūlan*), failing where non-human creations prudently declined. Surah al-Anbiya (21:19) says, "*To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth, and those near Him are not too proud to worship Him, nor do they tire*." Non-human creations are designed for specific roles (e.g., the heavens as a canopy, mountains as stabilisers), lacking the versatility to bear a dynamic responsibility like *al-amānah*. Their refusal reflects their fixed nature, as opposed to *insān*'s adaptability. *Insān*'s intellect, cultivated through knowledge, enables adaptation to the trust's demands, as Surah al-Alaq (96:1-5)— "*Read... who taught by the pen*"—encourages learning to overcome limitations.

Furthermore, in *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Vol.6, p.431), Abū al-Fida Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī states the reason for refusal. The heavens, earth, and mountains declined *al-amānah* due to their fear of failing to uphold its demands—obedience, justice, and adherence to the Qur'an. Their fixed roles (Surah al-Ra'd 13:15) preclude moral agency, unlike *insān*'s free will. *Insān*'s acceptance, led by the Prophet, requires knowledge to avoid "unjust and ignorant" failures. Surah al-Mujādila (58:11) elevates the knowledgeable, including women like 'Ā'ishah, who taught Hadith to fulfil the trust. *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* says that non-human creations recognised their inability to bear the intellectual and moral burden of *al-amānah*, which includes the covenant of *tawḥīd* (Surah al-A'raf 7:172). Their fear stemmed from the risk of divine punishment for non-compliance. *Insān*'s rational capacity, cultivated through knowledge, enables them to uphold *tawḥīd* and shariah. Women, as *insān*, share this duty, as Surah al-Tawbah (9:71) mandates their role in enjoining good, requiring education. This is also supported by *Tafsīr al-Qurtubī*, the trust's moral and legal demands (e.g., Surah al-Nisā' 4:58) require rational engagement, which non-human creations lack. Their refusal reflects their limited, deterministic roles. Knowledge counters *insān*'s "ignorant" nature, as Surah al-Isrā' (17:12) provides "clear explanation."

Therefore, the refusal of the heavens, earth, and mountains to bear *al-amānah* underscores their lack of free will, rational agency, and moral accountability—essential attributes that define the human condition. While these non-human creations fulfil their roles in fixed submission to divine command, they prudently declined a responsibility that demands conscious choice, moral reasoning, and the capacity for error and reform. In contrast, *insān*, endowed with intellect and free will, accepted this trust, making knowledge not only a distinguishing trait but a divine imperative for fulfilling the demands of *al-amānah*. The Qur'anic verses and classical *tafsīr* demonstrate that only through the acquisition and application of knowledge—spiritual, moral, and rational—can humans rise to the challenge of this sacred responsibility. The trust involves upholding *tawḥīd*, administering justice, and embodying divine guidance, all of which require a dynamic, learning, and reflective being. Thus, *insān*'s success in bearing *al-amānah* lies in embracing knowledge as the means to transcend ignorance and injustice, fulfilling a role that even the grandest creations of the cosmos chose to forgo.

On the third premise: Insān (human), endowed with free will and intellect, accepted the trust, but their "unjust and ignorant" nature risks failure unless guided by knowledge

In the Qur'anic worldview, *insān* (human being) is a unique creation, endowed with *'aql* (reason), *ikhtiyār* (free will), and the capacity to learn. These faculties elevate humans above other creations in potential but also expose them to the risk of moral failure. Without proper guidance and knowledge, this potential can easily turn into injustice and ignorance.

The Qur'an affirms this dual nature of humanity in several verses. For instance, it says, "*And He taught Adam the names—all of them...*" (2:31). This verse is foundational in establishing that knowledge was the first divine gift to *insān*. According to classical commentators like Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and al-Ṭabarī, this knowledge not only included the names of physical things but also the capacity for abstract understanding, classification, and moral discernment. It is this divine instruction that made Adam superior to the angels in function, though not in essence. Yet, the Qur'an also acknowledges that humans are inherently inclined to forget, transgress, and err. In Surah Ṭaha (20:115), Allah says, "*And We had already taken a covenant from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination.*" This highlights the vulnerability of the human condition— *insān* may possess the tools of intellect, but without discipline, memory, and moral clarity, these tools falter. The Prophet Adam's forgetfulness is a symbol of human fallibility, even when endowed with divine knowledge. This tension between potential and peril is also reflected in Surah al-Isrā' (17:11), "*Man prays for evil as he prays for good, and man is ever hasty*." Hastiness (*'ajalah*) is here depicted as a defining trait. Ibn Kathīr explains that humans, due to their impulsive nature, often pursue what they think is good without true understanding—unless guided by revelation. This impulsivity demonstrates that intellect alone is insufficient; it must be regulated by knowledge, patience, and divine guidance. The Qur'an continuously links moral success with the possession and application of knowledge. Surah al-Zumar (39:9) asks rhetorically, "*Are those who know equal to those who do not know?"* This verse implicitly answers in the negative and emphasises the Qur'anic epistemology, that those with knowledge are not only superior in rank but also more capable of fulfilling divine responsibilities. Classical *tafsīr*, such as that of al-Qurtubī, emphasises that this knowledge must include awareness of divine commands and moral discernment, not merely technical expertise. Moreover, knowledge is the basis upon which *taqwā* (God-consciousness) is built. In Surah Fāṭir (35:28), the Qur'an says, "... *Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge....*" This verse directly links moral accountability with intellectual awareness. Without *'ilm*, fear of God (*taqwā*) is shallow, and ethical decision-making becomes arbitrary. As a result, the Qur'an presents *'ilm* not as a luxury but as a prerequisite for fulfilling the responsibilities uniquely assigned to humans. Lastly, the human need for divine guidance is made explicit in Surah al-Insān (76:3), "*Indeed, we guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful*." This verse reaffirms that, although humans are guided and equipped with faculties, the choice remains theirs. But it also implies that without divine guidance (*hidāyah*), the correct path cannot be sustained solely through rational intuition.

Hence, the Qur'an affirms that humans, while uniquely privileged with intellect and volition, are morally and existentially at risk when knowledge and divine guidance are absent. Their capacity for learning and ethical discernment distinguishes them from other creations, but this very distinction demands responsibility. Without *'ilm*, humans remain vulnerable to injustice (*ẓulm*) and ignorance (*jahl*), making the acquisition and application of knowledge not only a virtue but a divine necessity.

Humans, including women, must cultivate knowledge to fulfill the trust, as ignorance undermines their capacity to uphold divine guidance

The acceptance of the divine trust (*al-amānah*) by humans is a profound metaphysical and moral commitment, demanding intellectual, ethical, and spiritual readiness. As established in earlier premises, the Qur'an and Islamic tradition consistently present knowledge as the defining criterion that enables humans to bear this burden. Without knowledge, the moral capacity to uphold divine guidance collapses, resulting in the unjust and ignorant failure that the Qur'an warns against.

The Qur'an repeatedly establishes knowledge (*'ilm*) as the foundation for fulfilling divine responsibilities. Surah al-Zumar (39:9) states, "*Say: Are those who know equal to those who do not know?*"—emphasising the moral and epistemic superiority of the knowledgeable. Similarly, Surah al-Nahl (16:89) describes the Qur'an as a "*clarification for all things, and a guidance and mercy and good tidings for the Muslims*," indicating that guidance cannot be separated from understanding. Surah al-Isrā' (17:36) warns, "*And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart—about all those [one] will be questioned*." These verses establish a foundational Qur'anic principle, that the trust cannot be fulfilled blindly. It demands intellectual engagement and awareness. The human capacity for knowledge distinguishes them from other creations and is essential to their divine mandate.

The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ emphasised knowledge as a religious obligation upon all Muslims. In Sunan Ibn Mājah (Hadith 224), he says, "*Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim*." Scholars agree that this includes both men and women and covers religious knowledge as well as worldly knowledge necessary to fulfill one's duties. The Prophet's ﷺ relationship with 'Ā'ishah (RA), who transmitted over 2,000 Hadith and was considered a legal scholar in her own right, demonstrates that women are equally tasked with upholding the trust through knowledge. The Prophet ﷺ also prioritised education in Madinah, freeing prisoners of war in exchange for teaching literacy (Al-Bukhārī, Book 59, Hadith 139). These examples show that the Prophet ﷺ laid a civilisational foundation where moral agency and accountability were inseparable from knowledge.

In Islamic jurisprudence, *farḍu ʿayn* (individual obligation) includes the knowledge necessary to perform obligatory acts, such as prayer, fasting, and justice. The *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence) posit that actions are only valid with knowledge of their conditions. Imam al-Ghazalī in *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* asserts that ignorance is a disease, and knowledge is the only cure for ensuring sincerity and correctness in action. Ibn Rushd (Averroes), in *Fasl al-Maqāl* defends the compatibility of reason and revelation, arguing that rational inquiry is essential to understanding divine law. Theologically, scholars like Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī stressed that the intellect (*ʿaql*) is the first faculty through which divine accountability is realised. Hence, without knowledge, the human being fails to fulfill the trust and risks becoming *ẓalūman jahūlan* (unjust and ignorant).

From the premises presented, it becomes evident that the divine trust is not merely a spiritual metaphor, but a real moral responsibility that requires intellectual, ethical, and volitional capacity. Humans were entrusted with this responsibility because they possess free will and rationality—qualities that make them accountable for their choices. But this same potential for greatness is also what makes humans vulnerable to failure if not guided by knowledge and understanding.

Now, if knowledge is what empowers humans to fulfil this trust responsibly, it follows that both men and women—equally human—must be equipped with it. There is no logical basis for assuming that only men are meant to uphold divine responsibility while women remain passive or uninformed. The trust was not given to men alone; it was given to humanity. To deny women access to knowledge, or to discourage their development, is to weaken humanity's collective ability to uphold the trust.

Furthermore, the complexities of the world—its ethical challenges, its demands for justice, mercy, leadership, compassion, and truth—require the participation of all capable minds. Women, being equally endowed with intellect and moral sense, are not only capable of sharing this burden but are essential to its full realisation. A society that suppresses half its moral capacity is a society that undermines its own foundations. The divine trust is too immense, too sacred, and too consequential to be shouldered by only a part of humanity.

Therefore, the logical conclusion is this: Women, empowered with knowledge, are not optional participants in fulfilling the divine trust. They are necessary, equal, and indispensable. The affairs of this world, the pursuit of justice, and the establishment of moral order cannot endure if women remain ignorant or excluded. Only through the shared, informed, and intentional participation of both men and women can humanity hope to fulfil the responsibility it willingly accepted.

Conclusion

This article has re-examined the feminist theological claims regarding women's access to knowledge in Islam through the Qur'anic concept of *al-amānah* (the trust). By analysing Surah al-Ahzab (33:72) and related verses, we demonstrated that the trust is a divine responsibility requiring rationality, free will, and moral accountability—qualities shared equally by both men and women. The argument that women are excluded from religious knowledge or leadership lacks Qur'anic basis and often stems from cultural biases rather than authentic Islamic sources. On the contrary, the Qur'an affirms that knowledge is essential for fulfilling the human duty of carrying the *amānah*. Thus, seeking and upholding knowledge is not a male-specific duty but a universal obligation in Islam. Women are not only rightful seekers of knowledge but are also entrusted with its ethical application and dissemination. Any attempt to limit women's intellectual and religious contributions contradicts the very spirit of the Qur'anic message. It is time to shift the narrative from exclusion to empowerment, grounded in the Qur'an itself to interpret the Qur'an and Hadith in its real spirit and messages, which are really words of the divine books or revealed knowledge. Rather than critiquing blindly and rejudging or looking for unreliable sources in Islamic books to impose personal understanding of the divined book's contexts.

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The Karađoz Beg Mosque: A Gem of Islamic Architecture in Mostar Attributed to Mimar Sinan

Spahic Omer[1]

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Abstract: This article explores the architectural luminosity of the Karađoz Beg Mosque in Mostar, a masterpiece attributed to Mimar Sinan. As a gem of Islamic architecture that harmonizes the physical and divine orders, the mosque stands as both an artistic and conceptual benchmark, not only for other mosques in the city but also for the entire corpus of Islamic architecture in Mostar. Despite experiencing functional fluctuations due to regime changes following the Ottoman departure from Bosnia and Hercegovina, the mosque has consistently stood "tall," radiating the supremacy, persistence, and resilience of truth, and defiantly confronting its antitheses. The article analyses the mosque's major architectural components: the dome, minaret, windows, *miḥrāb*, *minbar*, *maḥfil* (gallery), entrance, portico, and decorative strategies, relating each to the principles that govern both terrestrial and otherworldly dimensions of life. Through the Karađoz Beg Mosque as an archetype, the study affirms that Islamic architecture is not merely a dialogue between form and function; it is a metaphysical expression of the earth–heaven axis, affirming man's existential purpose and his noble mission as vicegerent (*khalīfah*) upon the earth. The methodology employed combines descriptive and analytical approaches, treating the mosque as both a conceptual and perceptible reality.

Keywords: The Karađoz Beg Mosque; Mostar; Islamic architecture; Mimar Sinan, the Ottoman

Introduction

Like other Ottoman-Islamic cities, Mostar's skyline and overall landscape were dominated by mosques and their soaring minarets. These were the largest, tallest, most architecturally substantial, and most impressive buildings. As the cores of the city's basic urban units, the *mahallahs* (residential quarters), mosques shaped not only the physical fabric but also the everyday lives of people. Accordingly, they were not merely places of worship but community development centers where diverse activities aimed at spiritual, educational, and socio-cultural refinement took place. Indeed, as both idea and built form, the mosque distils Islam's worldview and moral order, effectively serving as a microcosm of the faith.

In other words, mosques functioned as the fulcrums of both urban and human development: they stood at the heart of individual and collective life and acted as reference points from which virtually everything beneficial to the city and its inhabitants originated and to which subsequent outcomes returned for validation. Mosques were the catalysts of the city's existence and growth; they gave the city its vigor, identity, and charm. The city of Mostar was what its mosques were and how they functioned, and simultaneously the city and its mosques reflected the people's aspirations, character, and religious-cum-civilisational orientation. The axis linking city, mosques, and community was clearly defined and robust, with the three components finely intertwined and continually drawing strength from one another.

[1] Dr. Spahic Omer is an Associate Professor at the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). His research interests cover early Islamic history and civilisation, as well as the history and theory of Islamic built environment. He can be reached at ospahic@iium.edu.my.

This article explores the architecture of the Karađoz Beg Mosque (Karađoz-begova džamija), the most monumental and iconic mosque in Mostar. It was most likely designed and constructed by Mimar Sinan, the universally acclaimed master builder, who thereby bestowed upon Mostar—and indeed the entirety of Bosnia and Hercegovina—a gem of Islamic architecture that continues to inspire admiration and awe among both Muslims and non-Muslims. The mosque set a high benchmark for mosque architecture in particular and Islamic architectural expression in general within the city. The article seeks to connect architecture with the realms of spirituality, intellectual refinement, and emotional wellbeing, using this case study as evidence of how Islamic architecture must be preserved not only in its physical form but also in its functional and spiritual essence, and how it is to be genuinely appreciated and lived.

Who was Karađoz Beg?

Karađoz Beg's full name was Haji Zaim Muhamed (Mehmed) Beg ibn Abu al-Saʿadat. His sobriquet Karađoz, "dark-eyed," signaled his marked prominence and notability. A native of the Mostar hinterland, he was born in a village roughly twelve kilometers north of the city. A chronostich carved on a white-marble panel above the mosque's entrance indicates he had a brother who attained the office of the most illustrious or most noble (*al-afkham*)—interpreted by some as grand—vizier (Mujezinović, 1962). Most scholars identify that vizier with Rustem Pasha, himself of Bosnian origin, whose marriage into the sultanic family markedly increased his influence at the imperial court in Istanbul.

It is plausible that Karađoz Beg, as a close kinsman of such a powerful figure, availed himself of courtly channels to advance Mostar's interests, which helps explain the exceptional patronage and state attention given to key urban projects there. The analogy extends to Gazi Husrev Beg and his commitment to Sarajevo's providential destiny. Some accounts attribute the latter's meteoric rise and the city's striking transformation in part to kinship with Sultan Suleyman and to his status as the grandson of Sultan Bayezid II, which rendered him a figure of immense political and financial influence. In both cases prominence bred further prominence, as familial ties and courtly favor amplified access to resources and enabled successive acts of endowment that consolidated status and accelerated urban development, producing a self-perpetuating cycle in which initial distinction opened the way to ever greater opportunities for public benefaction and civic advancement (Zlatar, 2010; Muvekkit-Hadžihuseinović, 1998).

There is, however, a small irregularity. Rustem Pasha's only recorded brother is the grand admiral Sinan Pasha, which suggests that Rustem may have had another, less-documented brother or that the most illustrious vizier named in the chronostich is not Rustem. There is still something else that may even complicate the identification of the patron of the Karađoz Beg Mosque. The issue pertains to Mimar Sinan's autobiographical notes, in which the founder of the Karađoz Beg Mosque—designed by Mimar Sinan—is referred to as a pasha, a title denoting a considerably higher rank than bey (beg). So, was it a Karađoz Pasha or a Karađoz Beg, and were they two different persons?

Gulru Necipoglu (2005) seeks to resolve this by arguing that Sinan's autobiographical records, which list Mostar's principal mosque among his works, likely mis-recorded the patron's title, calling him a pasha rather than a bey (beg). But to dismiss the incongruity as mere confusion is too simplistic, for there had to exist a very close professional and even personal relationship between Sinan as the architect and Karađoz Beg as the client of the mosque. It is implausible that there was an unintended mix-up in recording titles that would warrant corresponding mutual treatment.

The fact remains that the prevailing view treats the mosque's patron as a beg, while Sinan's autobiographies unmistakably present him as a pasha. For example, based on the latter, one of the master builder's commissions was "the noble Friday (*Jumuʿah*) mosque of Sofu Mehmed Pasha in Hercegovina" (Sinan, 2006). The epithet "sofu" is an Ottoman-Turkish term meaning "pious," "devout," or "ascetic." As a prefix before a personal name, it functions as an honorific describing the person's public reputation for religiosity. In addition to being a formal rank and insignia, "pasha" can also function as a fluid honorific, signaling social prestige and economic clout. Because Mehmed's name is thus preceded by an epithet, the subsequent title "pasha" likewise appears intended to perform the same function, flanking the name with two unconfined honorifics. The objective appears to be to underscore popular rather than official status, purposes, and roles. Mehmed Karađoz Beg might have been a bey, but in the eyes of many, including Mimar Sinan, he was a pasha. He was larger than life, as it were.

Karađoz Beg thus remains the undisputed patron of the mosque, with Sinan the probable architect; yet the identity of the eminent vizier and his relationship to the benefactor remain unresolved. It is possible that the term "most illustrious vizier" in the inscription above the mosque's entrance should not be interpreted strictly as the empire's highest-ranking minister and effective head of government, but rather practically or reputationally to denote a lower-ranked yet highly prominent and influential vizier whose name was omitted. Thus, the "most illustrious vizier" refers to an "exceptionally famous and powerful vizier." Otherwise, the word *al-afkham* (the most illustrious or most noble), as in the chronostich, would have been substituted with the word *al-aʿẓam* (grand), which was unambiguously employed for the apex of the Ottoman political hierarchy directly under the sultan (Mujezinović, 1962). Nevertheless, for rhetorical effect and to augment the subject's prestige, many sources continue to affirm that Rustem was Karađoz Beg's brother, making this claim a widely accepted narrative.

Karađoz Beg was a remarkable benefactor. He served as administrator of Hercegovinian tax farms (mukataas) and supervised the construction of Mostar's Old Bridge. His title of Hercegovinian *zaim* indicates he held a large feudal fief with an annual income of 20,000–100,000 akce (the Ottoman silver coin, weighing roughly 1.15–1.18 grams of silver) (Zvonić, 2018). Besides the mosque already mentioned, he endowed a madrasah, a library, a *maktab* (elementary school), an *imaret* (public kitchen or similar charitable institution), a *musafirhana* (guesthouse for travelers), and a *han* (caravanserai), all in Mostar. These were located next to or in the vicinity of the mosque. Moreover, in other parts of Hercegovina—in both towns and villages—he endowed a range of institutions and structures, including *maktabs*, *hans*, bridges, a masjid, and a *hammām* (public bathhouse). To finance these endowments and ensure their self-sufficiency, Karađoz Beg also bequeathed 42 commercial shops in Mostar's market district, 16 craft shops and businesses (*taphana*), six watermills, two fulling mills for processing cloth, parcels of arable land in and around Mostar, and 300,000 Ottoman dirhams in cash (Hasandedić, 2005).

The Karađoz Beg Mosque: a testament to the classical Ottoman style

The Karađoz Beg Mosque was built of local cream-colored limestone known regionally as Mostar stone or tenelija, a fine-grained, workable limestone quarried nearby. Skilled masons from Dubrovnik (the independent maritime Republic of Ragusa) supplied labor, specialist techniques, and additional building materials, a pattern that influenced a number of Ottoman-era architectural masterworks in Mostar and Sarajevo (Hasandedić, 2005). This exchange shows that architectural refinement accompanying Ottoman rule often depended on cross-Adriatic cooperation rather than being produced solely by local craftsmen. It is likely that the latter did not possess the necessary skills or know-how for advanced building work.

Working with Dubrovnik was both practical and strategic, since Ragusa pursued a policy of neutrality and diplomacy towards the Porte to protect its trade and secure privileged access to Ottoman markets and safe passage for its shipping. The relationship yielded mutual benefits: The Ottomans gained revenue, market access, Adriatic stability, and diplomatic intelligence, while Ragusan merchants expanded their commercial reach. Dubrovnik documents record that as early as 1549 the Ragusan government sent five masonry experts to Mostar at Karađoz Beg's request, with additional specialists arriving in later years for work on the patron's mosque as well as the Old Bridge. Another Ragusan record notes that Karađoz Beg's chief tailor (terzibaša) travelled to Dubrovnik to purchase textiles, indicating cordial ties that extended beyond construction assistance (Zvonić, 2018). There is no doubt that Mostar's geographic importance positioned it at the heart of the Dubrovnik-Ottoman commercial and diplomatic network. The fast-growing urban marvel of Mostar effectively formed the pivot of the dynamic south-north and south-northeast axis.

The Karađoz Beg Mosque was built with such strength that it required few major repairs over time. Only at the end of the nineteenth century was the minaret rebuilt above the fifty-seventh step. The lead cladding of the domes was replaced intermittently as needed. In 1909, the mosque's interior was redecorated and repainted, denoting the first comprehensive refurbishment in the building's documented history. The mosque has remained in uninterrupted use as the city's principal congregational mosque and was officially designated a protected cultural monument in 1950, during the period of the People's Republic of Bosnia and Hercegovina, the designation describing it as the most monumental structure in Mostar. It suffered extensive damage during the Serbo-Croat aggression from 1992 to 1995 but was fully repaired and restored for use in 1996 and again after further work in 2004 (Hasandedić, 2005; Medžlis Islamske Zajednice Mostar, 2018). The mosque's sustained material integrity and uninterrupted function render it a notably authentic example of its original architecture. It constitutes an invaluable exhibit of Mostar's open-air museum.

The mosque was built in a *mahallah*, or neighborhood, named after Karađoz Beg. The mosque itself was constructed first and subsequently served as a stimulus for the formation and growth of the *mahallah*. Typically, *mahallahs* were named after the mosques that functioned as their nuclei, which in turn were named after their benefactors. The Karađoz Beg *mahallah*, though not the largest, was reportedly the most elitist. In 1585, it housed 50 families. Among its residents were the son of Karađoz Beg, the *dizdar* (commander) of Mostar's fortress and his two deputies (*kethuda*), as well as several scholars, teachers, merchants, Sufis, and five individuals who had performed the *hajj* in Makkah (Čar-Drnda, 2014).

The Karađoz Beg Mosque exemplifies the classical Ottoman paradigm: a single-domed, virtually symmetrical square structure anchored by a porticoed main entrance. This architectural blueprint—at once simple and profound—was gradually perfected, expanded, and diversified through the addition or substitution of myriad structural and ornamental elements. Yet all such innovations remained derivatives or variations of the original modules, testifying to the enduring integrity of the foundational design. The apex of this perfection is commonly associated with Mimar Sinan, whose architectural genius shaped the very soul of Ottoman aesthetics. It is thus no surprise that the Karađoz Beg Mosque stands out as a mesmerizing jewel, and that Mostar and its people are, in a sense, blessed to host the artistic footprints of Sinan in their midst. The mosque has earned a distinguished reputation as the finest exemplar of Ottoman-Islamic architecture in the Balkans (Čar-Drnda, 2014).

Those even partially acquainted with Sinan's masterpieces—scattered across lands once integral to the Ottoman devlet—can discern the spirit of his architectural school: unprecedented in style, yet deeply rooted in the Islamic worldview. Sinan himself declared, "Architecture is the most difficult profession, and he who wishes to practice it correctly and justly must, above all, be pious" (Freely & Burelli, 1996). To him, the domes of mosques in particular were not mere architectural features—they were celestial metaphors: revolving heavens suspended above the earth, bubbles rising from the sea of elegance. The pervasive harmony and symmetry in his buildings echoed the divine order that permeates the cosmos. He refused to deviate from, or even slightly disturb, the universal configurations that governed creation. He sought not merely to integrate his buildings into the divine order, but to subdue them to its laws—both physical and metaphysical—just as he yearned to align his own being with the will and workings of his Creator.

Architecture, for Sinan, was a form of worship: a means of drawing nearer to God through the disciplined harmonisation of matter and meaning. His edifices were not autonomous creations, but humble articulations of cosmic obedience—structures that bowed, as he did, before the majesty of divine ordinance. His architecture was not simply an expression of material beauty; it was a testament to his conviction in the existence of sacred correspondences, metaphysical bonds, and divine ordainments. Every line, curve, and proportion bore witness to a worldview in which form mirrored faith, and structure became a vessel of cosmic truth. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that, being in all likelihood a devout Sufi, Sinan imbued his buildings with the same inner orientation and outward discipline that shaped his own spiritual path (Sinan, 2006).

It follows that in every edifice Sinan embedded not only technical mastery but also spiritual intentionality. Those who live by the same worldview and its attendant values are best positioned to appreciate the master's work. The two realms—the architecture and spirituality of Sinan and the spirituality as well as inquisitiveness of an architecture user—gravitationally draw towards one another until they converge. Put differently, Sinan built not only an idea but also himself into his magnum opuses. His mosques are living representations of a man, an ideology, and an otherworldly dimension. The more one observes, uses, and interacts with the foremost mosque of Mostar, the more it unveils itself—and the more Sinan unveils himself too. In such moments, both the mosque and its celebrated architect become vessels of architectural wisdom, capable of communicating with the committed seeker, the murid of beauty and truth.

To some observers, the Karađoz Beg Mosque shares its architectural concept and typology with the Aladža Mosque in Foča—a valid observation insofar as both exemplify the prototypical Ottoman architectural foundation, whose core elements recur across numerous regional iterations (Čar-Drnda, 2014). Yet when one considers architectural performance in its deeper and more profound dimensions, the Karađoz Beg Mosque may also be placed in the same league as the Rustem Pasha Mosque in Istanbul, likewise designed and built by Sinan.

Although the Rustem Pasha Mosque—completed roughly five years after the Karađoz Beg Mosque—is markedly larger, more intricate, and adorned with unprecedented tilework, a conceptual reduction of its form to the classical Ottoman single-domed paradigm reveals striking parallels with the Mostar gem. Stripped of its subtle monumentality and decorative excess, the Rustem Pasha Mosque tends to mirror the Karađoz Beg Mosque in several key structural and stylistic components: the double portico—one with domes and another with a steeply pitched roof—the elegant transition from the central dome to the square base below, the luminous embellishment of the dome's inner core, and the generous use of windows as masonry screens or perforated stone panels filled with glass insets. The latter features not only provide natural illumination but also evoke emotional resonance, facilitating a spiritual ascent—a signature motif in Sinan's architectural vocabulary.

It is therefore reasonable to interpret the Karađoz Beg Mosque as a small-scale counterpart to the Rustem Pasha Mosque, a distilled expression of Sinan's genius that, despite the omnipresent architectural grandeur of Istanbul, still commands distinction. Perhaps this architectural kinship lends credence to the popular notion that the mosques' patrons were brothers—a sentiment that extends architectural affinity into the realm of familial association.

Whether literal or symbolic, the perceived fraternal bond reflects the shared aesthetic and spiritual lineage embedded in their respective edifices. At least within the realm of architecture, such an affiliation is both authentic and unbreakable. It acts as an enduring testament for which Sinan is to be duly commended. Through his genius, the bonds between Mostar—and Bosnia and Hercegovina more broadly—and Istanbul were not merely imagined but architecturally enacted. They were etched into the pages of history and quite literally set in stone.

Figure 1. The Karađoz Beg Mosque is the finest-looking mosque in Mostar.

The dome as a vessel of spiritual meaning

The Karađoz Beg Mosque, whose interior forms an almost perfect square—measuring 13 meters in both length and width—is crowned by a semispherical dome with a diameter of nearly 11 meters and an internal height of 16.5 meters, measured from the floor to the apex of the dome. Clad in lead and topped with a modest alem or finial, the dome's silhouette is gracefully completed, its vertical emphasis and visual refinement subtly asserting presence. Besides working as ornamental and refining flourishes, such finials often function as capstones that seal and structurally stabilise the dome's apex.

Though the mosque is neither structurally massive nor colossally imposing, its setting, surrounded by open spaces and a low-rise built environment, allows it to command an admirable visual charisma. It draws the gaze towards itself and, through that visual invitation, towards the beliefs and values it embodies, radiating its noble message and, by extension, the universal message of Islam. The dome, architecturally distinct and immediately perceptible, plays a pivotal role in this spiritual dynamic. It evokes the vault of heaven overarching creation, enclosing beneath it a sanctified space where acts of devotion and remembrance are regularly performed and which connote the acts that aim at that very heaven.

Structurally, the dome facilitates balanced weight distribution, acoustic resonance, and a masterful manipulation of light and color, all in service of the mosque's mission. It is not merely a roof, but a metaphysical canopy, an architectural expression of the Islamic worldview, where form and function converge to elevate the soul. As a spiritual beacon, the dome additionally guides hearts and minds upward towards transcendence. In its form and appreciable aura, it encapsulates the mosque's purpose: to harmonise the earthly with the heavenly, the visible with the invisible (Sinan, 2006).

All this is further corroborated by the dome's inner core, which is adorned with a sizable ceiling medallion. The medallion is a work of art that is both symmetrical and spiritually evocative. Its outermost layer features teardrop-shaped arabesque motifs radiating outward like sunbursts, suggesting a dynamic descent from higher spheres to the earthly realm. This visual rhythm conjures the all-encompassing harmony, stability, and equilibrium that characterise both the cosmos and the worship spaces below. At the heart of the medallion lies an inner circle of Arabic calligraphy, seamlessly interwoven into the geometry of the design. The inscription features the following verse from the Qur'an: "In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease. And if they should cease, no one could hold them (in place) after Him. Indeed, He is Forbearing and Forgiving" (Fatir 41).

Undoubtedly, the above verse was deliberately chosen. For a dome that, in various philosophical reflections, symbolises heaven, a Qur'anic verse encapsulating the fundamental nature of the heavens and the earth—the entire universe—was deemed most fitting. Its selection aimed to convey a profound truth: no matter how talented or accomplished a person may be, he can never replicate the magnificent creations of Almighty Allah. Human abilities and achievements are granted solely through the grace and providence of the Creator. There can be no comparison, let alone challenge, to Allah's supremacy.

Ultimately, man must come to recognise at once the power of the Creator and the limitations of his own being. This acknowledgment is often most evident in architecture, where human design adheres strictly to the natural laws ordained by Allah. All human thought, action, and creation remain subject to divine provision and decree, leading to the realisation that their conclusive fate rests in Allah's hands alone. Never will anything pertaining to creation amount to anything comparable to the Creator. In all actual and aspirational circumstances, creation will remain forever just that—creation—and the Creator will remain the transcendent and ultimate Originator, Lord, and Master. There will never be an exchange of titles, jurisdictions, or prerogatives.

This architectural philosophy manifested in the decoration of the central dome's inner core of the Karađoz Beg Mosque appears to have been a defining obsession for Sinan, residing at the heart of his broader philosophy of architecture and life. So potent was this approach that it evolved into a lasting architectural-cum-artistic culture. Numerous edifices designed by Sinan feature the same Qur'anic verse prominently inscribed within the dome's medallion, a tradition that continued in the works of those who followed in his footsteps.

Where the original verse was omitted, alternative selections were made with equal deliberation, chosen to reflect the identical spiritual and intellectual ethos. Among these, the Qur'anic chapter al-Ikhlas and the Ayat al-Kursī (the Throne Verse) (al-Baqarah 255) stand out. The former affirms the essence of Allah's transcendence and oneness (*tawḥīd*), while the latter asserts His absolute sovereignty, omniscience, and guardianship over creation. Together, they form a theological axis drawing attention to who Allah is and how He governs.

Even when some other verses were sporadically selected, they rarely deviated from this metaphysical orientation. A notable example is Surah al-Fatihah, likely due to its status as the opening chapter of the Qur'an and its unparalleled role in compressing the essence of Islamic belief, worship, and the divine-human relationship. Its inclusion signals a comprehensive invocation of divine mercy, guidance, and lordship. Another example is the *Ayat al-Nūr* (the Light Verse) (al-Nūr 35) as one of the profound verses in the Qur'an, symbolising divine guidance, transcendence, and the metaphysical illumination that sustains creation. In every case, the chosen inscription functioned as both a visual and spiritual anchor, reinforcing the mosque's role not merely as a place of ritual worship, but as a sanctified space where divine truths were architecturally embodied and eternally proclaimed.

Of the mosques designed by Sinan that feature the above-cited Qur'anic verse number 41 from Surah Fatir in the main dome's core—apart from the Karađoz Beg Mosque—are the Suleymaniye Mosque, completed in 1557, slightly before the Karađoz Beg Mosque; the Rustem Pasha Mosque (1563); the first Sokollu Mehmed Pasha Mosque (1571), located in the Kadirga neighborhood of the Fatih District; the second Sokollu Mehmed Pasha Mosque (1577), located in Beyoglu on the opposite shore of the Golden Horn; and the Shemsi Pasha Mosque (1581), located in the Uskudar district on the Anatolian (Asian) shore of the Bosphorus.

There is also the Yeni Valide Mosque in the Uskudar district, which highlights the same verse in the dome's center. It was built in 1710, 122 years after Sinan's death, but it is often said that the mosque generally follows Sinan's architectural style, hence the use of the same verse for decoration. The same can be said about the New, or Yeni, Mosque, which, although built in 1665, was heavily influenced by Sinan's school. One of its initial architects was an apprentice to Sinan.

To draw this contemplation to a close, it should be noted that three masterpieces of Sinan—the Mihrimah Sultan Mosque (1570) in Istanbul, the Shehzade Mosque (1548) in Istanbul, and the Selimiye Mosque (1574) in Edirne—include the Ayat al-Nūr, Surah al-Fatihah, and Surah al-Ikhlas, respectively, in their dome core decorations. In this way, the Qur'anic ethos brings full coherence to Sinan's architectural and existential vision.

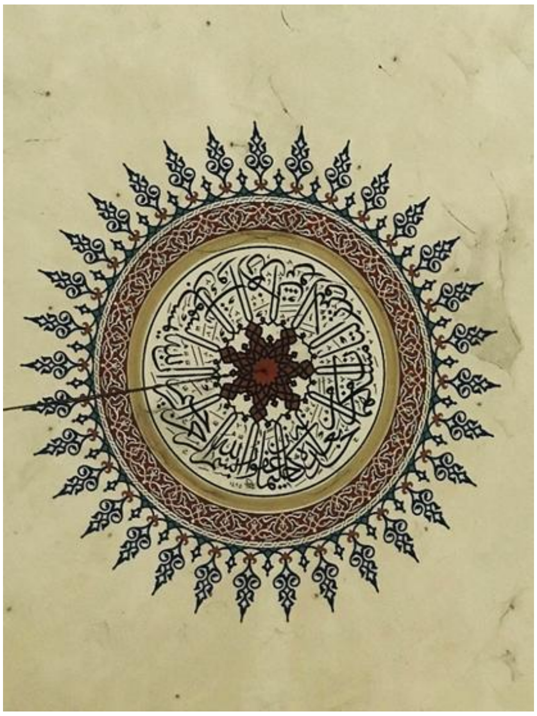

Figure 2. The decorated core of the mosque's dome.

Windows

The dome of the Karađoz Beg Mosque transitions gracefully into the square prayer hall below via a structural base known as the drum which is octagonal in its external geometry, yet circular within. This intermediary form not only mediates between the dome and the hall but also contributes to the mosque's visual harmony and spatial coherence. The drum is punctuated by eight arched window panels, each perforated and inset with glass. These panels evoke the jali screens of Indo-Islamic architecture, themselves part of the broader family of *mashrabiyyahs*—oriel windows enclosed with intricately carved wooden latticework and often adorned with stained glass. Such elements serve both aesthetic and climatic functions.

The transition from the circular dome to the square base is achieved through pendentives—smooth, curved triangular sections that span the corners between the arches. These rest upon arches springing from the tops of piers or pillars, which in turn channel the dome's weight downward into the structural core. Pendentives allow the dome to appear as if it floats effortlessly above the square hall, a visual metaphor for the descent of the celestial into the terrestrial. At the bottom tip of the pendentives there is muqarnas, a form of three-dimensional geometric ornamentation often described as "stalactite" or "honeycomb" decoration. The muqarnas are plaster or stucco niches arranged in tiers, forming a visually rich transition element at the junction between the vertical wall and the curved pendentives.

Repetitive windows in the drum and upper walls of the mosque further lighten the structure—both visually and physically—while inviting natural light into the interior. This interplay of geometry, illumination, and materiality reflects a sophisticated architectural language, one that harmonises structural necessity with spiritual symbolism. The mosque's interior is generally well lit by natural light, a vital quality that allows naturality and spontaneity to prevail over artificiality and constraint. This luminous atmosphere is achieved not only through the eight arched windows in the dome's drum but also through the numerous openings strategically positioned throughout the walls. These perforations are not merely functional; they are also expressive of ideas, emotions, and aesthetic splendor.

Figure 3. An abundance of natural light permeates the mosque's interior through 25 sizable windows. Eight of them pierce the drum of the dome.

The mosque features exactly seventeen additional windows, sizable and well distributed across its four walls: five each on the *qiblah* (front), right, and left walls, and two on the rear wall containing the main entrance. The windows are articulated in three distinct levels, each enhancing the mosque's light and spatial experience. The first level has two tiers: a standard wooden-framed window below and an upper semi-circular arch filled with small circular glass insets set within a lattice-like screen. This upper tier is framed by a painted arch adorned with floral motifs and is fixed (non-opening), serving mainly aesthetic and illumination purposes. These dual-tiered windows are present on all four sides of the prayer hall, totaling eight. Directly above them is the second level, featuring arched lattice-like screens identical in size and appearance to the windows in the dome's drum. There are two such windows on each wall except the rear, amounting to six in total. The third and highest level contains a single window on each wall except the rear, bringing the total to three. These also mirror the design of the drum and second-level windows, maintaining visual continuity and reinforcing the mosque's layered lighting strategy. Evliya Celebi (1967) described the mosque in 1664 as having a generous spatial layout, refined artistic detailing, and an abundance of natural light.

The *miḥrāb* niche

The *miḥrāb* niche of the mosque is rather extravagant. It is vertically elongated and shallow, set into the *qiblah* wall to indicate the direction of Makkah. It is topped with tiered *muqarnas* that form a decorative half-dome effect above the niche. The muqarnas is arranged in a conical, pyramidal formation, tapering upward in diminishing tiers. Each tier is geometrically precise, creating a dynamic interplay of shadow and depth. The *miḥrāb* is bordered by an ornate band of interlacing geometric patterns in painted plaster and is crowned by a richly decorated painted lunette, also known as a tympanum. Flanked by turrets, this lunette echoes the shape of a half-dome or shell with a crown-like top element, signaling the *miḥrāb*'s supreme importance within the mosque's spatial and functional hierarchy. Facing the *qiblah* and following the leadership of the imam—whose positional and operative epicenter is the *miḥrāb*—are indispensable elements of congregational worship.

The *minbar* or pulpit

The *minbar*, or pulpit from which the imam delivers the khutbah sermon, is likewise relatively extravagant, echoing the opulence of the *miḥrāb*. This correspondence underscores its foundational significance within the mosque's spatial and operational hierarchy. Constructed of stone, the *minbar* exemplifies the refined craftsmanship of Ottoman mosque architecture, replicated across virtually all monumental mosques with variations in scale and ornamentation proportionate to each mosque's dimensions, scope, and civic stature (Sinan, 2006). Its elevated position ensures the diffusion of the imam's voice throughout the mosque's interior and, symbolically, its exterior realm—facilitating clarity of speech while evoking authority, consequence, and spiritual leadership.

The *minbar* consists of a staircase ascending to a small platform enclosed by a pointed canopy or spire, suggestive of a minaret. The conical highpoint, though perhaps not intentionally symbolic, unmistakably reverberates the formal language of Ottoman minarets. Its vertical thrust puts the accent on notions of rise and transcendence, while contributing to the compositional balance and geometric alignment of the mosque's interior and its harmonious, transitional relationship with the exterior. The staircase's side panel is adorned with geometric and floral motifs characteristic of Ottoman stone carving. Repetitive arabesque medallions, interlinked with rosette and knot motifs, generate a vine-like visual rhythm, rendered in green, red, and beige tones. This decorative scheme of the *minbar* resonates with the iconic medallion at the dome's core, establishing thereby not only a visual axis but also a psychological and spiritual resonance. Furthermore, the arch and niche patterns beneath the stairs of the *minbar* emulate the window and *miḥrāb* forms, introducing an additional layer of cadence and aesthetic cohesion to the interior.

All this, surely—both consciously and unconsciously—awakens in the mosque's visitors a profound sense of inner peace, tranquility, and contentment. Within the mosque—and in other sanctuaries where the foundational principles of Islamic aesthetics are honored—a person may be effortlessly transported to otherworldly realms of meaning, beauty, and experience. There, one may encounter and actively embody ontological truth. One may encounter a portal to the unseen, where the veils of the mundane lift, and the soul glimpses the fulfillment of its deepest aspirations and long-held dreams. One may discover the meaning and purpose of life. One may, ultimately, find oneself.

That is why, unlike other architectural theories and systems—where individuals seek to construct a purposeful trajectory for life and then generate architectural and artistic expressions accordingly—Islam offers a fundamentally different operational paradigm. As a comprehensive philosophy, worldview, and way of life, Islam first forms and refines the human being, who then shapes his aesthetics and built environment in accordance with how his thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions have themselves been shaped. In this process, the human being is both shaped by and becomes a shaper of reality, guided by existential and heavenly standards. Whereas other architectural systems often remain confined within the narrow frameworks of humanism and materialism, Islamic architecture treats man and his earthly context merely as a point of departure—a launching pad—for honoring and elevating him beyond the stifling limitations of both. It continually propels him towards his ultimate fulfillment: towards the realm of spirit, towards transcendence, towards heaven. Islamic architecture is thus a conduit, not a culmination. It liberates rather than confines, evokes rather than imposes, and "leads further and away" rather than "captures and controls." It is shaped by truth, not allowed to shape it.

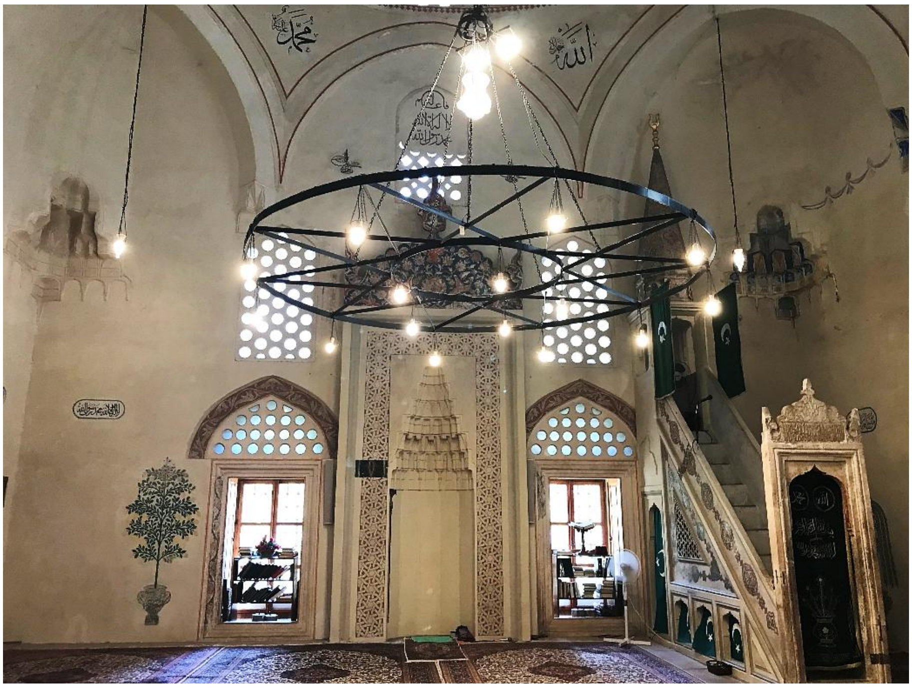

Figure 4. The *qiblah* wall of the mosque, featuring a clear view of the *minbar* and the *miḥrāb* niche.

The *maḫfil* or gallery

Upon entering the mosque, one encounters to the right a *maḫfil* or gallery, measuring approximately 3.5 meters in height, 2.5 meters in width, and extending along roughly 40 percent of the mosque's longitudinal axis. Beneath it, a narrow doorway pierces the right wall, providing access to the upper level of the gallery. Functionally, the gallery serves as a women's prayer section, though it may also accommodate men during peak congregational times—particularly the Friday (*Jumuʿah*) and the biannual ʿId prayers. Originally, it was established as a platform for the *muʾadhdhin* during these occasions, when the mosque reaches full capacity and its acoustics perform at their prime. It may also have fulfilled additional roles related to privacy and social status, possibly serving as a secluded space for members of the nobility.

Architecturally, the gallery is supported by three slender columns and two arches, forming a shallow arcade. The columns are slim and graceful, transitioning into the arches through muqarnas-like corbels that soften the junction and introduce ornamental refinement. The upper section of the balcony includes a lattice-style balustrade with geometric perforations. Beneath it, the frieze—marking the beam or gallery edge—is adorned with a sequence of floral motifs arranged in a vine-like rhythm, seamlessly integrated into the mosque's broader artistic and aesthetic composition.

The entrance and its alignment with the *miḥrāb* niche

The entrance of the mosque is framed by a pointed arch set within a rectangular portal, establishing a clear and dignified threshold. Above the doorway rises a triangular composition bordered by muqarnas, forming a niche or canopy that mediates the transition from the flat wall to the ornate apex. This architectural gesture marks the entrance as a liminal zone—significant and symbolic—signaling passage from one realm to another, the latter being of greater spiritual consequence. At the center of this niche is a stone inscription panel, carved in intricate and stylised Arabic calligraphy, recording the identity of the patron and incumbent Sultan in Istanbul, the date of construction, and the purpose behind the founding of the Karađoz Beg Mosque. The wooden double doors are composed of solid panels, articulated into geometric rectangular forms and likely hand-carved. Iron studs and hinges not only enhance structural durability but also call up the mosque's historical depth and reflect the craftsmanship of traditional Ottoman joinery.

Flanking the portal are two vertical bands of geometric ornamentation, composed of infinitely interlaced symmetrical motifs. These patterns replicate those framing the *miḥrāb* niche within. Such is no mere aesthetic coincidence. The entrance and the *miḥrāb* are conceptually and spatially aligned. Positioned directly opposite one another, they constitute a symbolic axis—thresholds of entry and orientation—that embody movement, dynamism, and spiritual progression. The entrance invites the worshipper into the worship space, while the *miḥrāb*, as the focal point, draws the gaze and the heart towards a higher order of involvement, experience, and appreciation, with the imam leading the charge. Before one can encounter the *miḥrāb* and partake in what it represents, one must first pass through the main doorway. Indeed, the law of gradation applies equally in the physical and metaphysical domains. Spiritual elevation within the mosque presupposes entry; one must first be received by its space to be transformed by its spirit. For that reason, it goes without saying, do the two components—entrance and *miḥrāb*—exhibit a comparable architectural design and a perfectly matched decorative scheme.

Figure 5. The *maḥfil* and the entrance at the rear side of the mosque.

The minaret

The mosque is crowned by an exquisite minaret, soaring to 34.50 meters in height and executed in the classical Ottoman style. Fashioned from the same finely hewn stone as the rest of the structure, the minaret asserts a graceful vertical emphasis, tapering elegantly towards its apex as if gesturing towards a destination, a purpose, a realm beyond. It does not merely rise; it points, symbolically and architecturally, towards the sky, towards the Divine (Nasr, 1987). A single balcony encircles the shaft, supported by a band of muqarnas that serve both ornamental and structural functions. These elements transition fluidly from the shaft to the balcony's base, forming what appears to be a continuous bracket, a seamless architectural flourish. From this elevated perch, the *adhān* (call to prayer) is sounded. Its proclamation, issuing from a point that rises well above the mosque's dome and once towered over the surrounding cityscape, becomes a summons from above, a celestial invitation from the Creator. The minaret is capped with a pointed conical finial (*alem*), completing its upward thrust with a symbolic spearhead piercing the heavens. Though often described as cylindrical, the shaft is in fact a tetradecagon (14-gon)—its fourteen facets subtly articulated to create the illusion of roundness. At its base, the minaret widens slightly, anchoring itself firmly to the mosque's body and ensuring structural stability.

The dual-section portico

The mosque presents a frontal portico composed of two distinct sections: a domed portico adjoining the prayer hall and an outer portico covered by a steeply pitched wooden roof. The inner portico comprises a series of pointed arches borne on columns, forming a semi-open, transitional zone between the exterior and the interior prayer hall. This semi-enclosed area accommodates worshippers for gathering, social interaction, and preparation for prayer, and functions as overflow space during peak services; it also provides a place of prayer for latecomers or for those seeking seclusion and contemplation.

The domed portico is divided into two raised platforms flanking a central passage that leads to the main entrance. Each platform is elevated approximately half a meter, a subtle device that marks the area as part of the mosque's precinct and as an extension of the prayer space despite its external position. Four columns, via a system of arches, support three small domes: one over each lateral platform and one above the central passage. These domes are miniaturised analogues of the main dome, their drums lacking the perforations of the principal dome. The outer edge of the portico is carried by the columns and pointed arches, while the inner edge is tied directly to the mosque's exterior masonry wall, which measures approximately 90 centimeters in thickness. This substantial load-bearing wall moderates light and temperature and provides structural resilience. The arch springing points are embedded into solid masonry with no openings beneath, a deliberate arrangement to preserve robustness. Column capitals are ornamented with muqarnas motifs. Both the upper and lower ends of the columns are encased in metal collars, employed primarily for structural reinforcement. Horizontal beams connect the capitals, restraining lateral movement and maintaining the integrity of the architectural grid.

Figure 6. The mosque comprises a two-part frontal portico: an inner domed section adjoining the prayer hall and an outer section sheltered by a steeply pitched wooden roof.

Extending from the domed portico is the outer portico, roofed with a sloping wooden structure and covered in lead sheeting analogous to the domes. This outer portico shelters a stone-paved courtyard that is not designated for formal prayer and therefore lacks elaborate architectural embellishment. Shoes are not removed in this area; it functions as an intermediate, covered exterior space that facilitates informal gathering, relaxation, and social activity before and after worship. As such, it constitutes the first stage in the transition from the mundane exterior to the sanctified interior and the beginning of the physical and spiritual preparations associated with the vivacity of the mosque. Hence, nearby to the left when entering the mosque's compound, there is a beautiful *shadrwan*, or fountain, for ritual ablution. The fountain has two segments: an octagonal open pavilion with a pitched roof covered in stone slabs, supported by eight columns connected by pointed arches; and the fountain base, an octagonal stone basin fitted with water taps around its perimeter. According to Hivzija Hasandedić (n.d.), another key underlying function of the second portico is environmental: it shields both the structure and its users from the elements, particularly from summer heat and cold winter winds.

The outer edge of the second portico is supported by a series of slender stone columns, noticeably smaller than those of the domed portico; their capitals bear simplified muqarnas ornament appropriate to their scale. The extended sloped portico has antecedents in several Istanbul mosques attributed to Mimar Sinan—among them the Rustem Pasha, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha in Beyoglu, Mihrimah Sultan, and Mesih Ali Pasha (1586)—a parallel that reinforces the assessment of the Karađoz Beg Mosque as reflecting Sinanian architectural principles and the broader splendor of Istanbul.

Visual splendor and spiritual expression in the decoration

The decoration of the Karađoz Beg Mosque is both opulent and extraordinary—yet, in its present state, it neither fully replaces the original ornamentation nor constitutes a completed replica. Rather, it remains a work in progress, in a manner of speaking, adding a fascinating and layered dimension to the mosque's architectural expression. Not only is the structural framework lavishly adorned, but the spiritual atmosphere it fosters is likewise profoundly enriched. So exceptional is this precedent that even tourists—many of whom are non-Muslims—find themselves drawn to and deeply impressed by its aesthetic and symbolic resonance. Beyond the previously noted calligraphy and geometric arabesque patterning, the mosque's decorative scheme includes stylised wall paintings of local and regional flora: pomegranate, fig, olive, orange/lemon, pear, weeping willow, cypress, and palm trees. These are accompanied by vegetal garlands and festoons that form a continuous, chain-like sequence encircling much of the mosque's interior. Vine-scrolls and foliate bends frame prominent architectural elements such as pendentives and arches, further enhancing the visual rhythm. Each tree emerges from an ornate vase and stands between one and one and a half meters tall, blending botanical realism with the symbolic and ornamental sensibilities intrinsic to Islamic non-figurative art.

These vegetal motifs are not naturalistic but rather denaturalised and idealised, evoking a sense of otherworldliness. They invite the observer to seek that same transcendent quality within the self. As such, the representations offer both visual serenity and spiritual elevation. They embody a sophisticated interplay of symmetry, rhythm, balance, harmony, and verticality, while simultaneously spiritualising and abstracting nature and man's role within it (al-Faruqi, 1986). Moreover, these depictions subtly teach the principles of sustainability and harmonious coexistence with the natural world, for the mutual flourishing of both man and nature. Nature is portrayed as the source and symbol of life's abundance, fertility, divine order, and as a mirror of man's vulnerability and dependence. Without nature, man cannot survive, let alone build civilisations or fulfill his existential purpose. Nature is also a compendium of divine signs, revealing truth and constantly pointing to the presence and majesty of the Creator.

Given this, man's engagement with nature should not be limited to physical exploitation for selfish ends. Rather, he must learn from it and treat it as a partner in his journey towards truth and spiritual realisation. The painted trees and plants are often interpreted as representations of Paradise. Yet, an additional, complementary message emerges: man's entry into Paradise on the Day of Judgment will depend significantly on how he treated himself, others, and the natural world—and how he utilised nature as an indispensable context for salvation, both in this world and the Hereafter. This implies that unless one renders this world a form of spiritual paradise, the journey towards the Paradise of the Hereafter is unlikely to be smooth. The "paradise" of this world must be cultivated first; it is the precondition for the next. Man, as the divinely appointed vicegerent on earth, is tasked with creating, sustaining, and enjoying, not deforming, destroying, and suffering. This ethos is further affirmed by the mosque's calligraphic inscriptions, which visually accompany and conceptually reinforce the natural motifs. Together, they recall the foundational spiritual truths of Islam enshrined in the Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunnah.

It is worth noting that three other mosques in Mostar follow in the decorative footsteps of the Karađoz Beg Mosque, attesting to the widespread presence of this refined artistic consciousness in the region. These are the Koski Mehmed Pasha Mosque, the Tabačica (or Hadži-Kurt) Mosque, and the Ćejvan Ćehaja Mosque. In Sarajevo, the Muslihudin Čekrekčija Mosque exhibits a similarly adorned interior, further confirming that this aesthetic approach was not isolated but rather a shared cultural expression across Bosnia and Hercegovina. According to Nihad Čengić (2008), comparable artistic outputs were also found in the mosques of Stolac and Travnik.

The same author, however, contends that the current decorative scheme and its constituent elements in the Karađoz Beg Mosque are merely replicas or surrogates of the original. During the mosque's recent restoration and repair, the lavish ornamentation was reintroduced—yet, in the author's view, the process could have been executed with greater artistic integrity and professional dedication. As it stands today, the mosque remains laden with untapped potential—architecturally, artistically, and spiritually—that could elevate it to far greater heights of sophistication and splendor (Čengić, 2008).

Figure 7. In addition to calligraphy and geometric arabesque patterning, the mosque's decorative scheme includes stylised wall paintings of local and regional flora, including pomegranate, fig, olive, citrus (orange and lemon), pear, weeping willow, cypress, and palm trees.

At any rate, to be fair to the mosque and to those entrusted with its function and upkeep, it must be acknowledged that the decorative scheme—being part of a broader structural actuality—has not yet been fully replicated or completed. In light of this, passing definitive judgments at this stage would be premature. Only once the restoration processes are concluded and the mosque is fully adorned can such evaluations be responsibly made.

Conclusion

The Karađoz Beg Mosque is the finest-looking mosque in Mostar. Commissioned and endowed by one of the city's greatest sons and leading patrons, Karađoz Beg, it was designed and executed by the Ottoman imperial architect Mimar Sinan and intended to serve as Mostar's principal religious landmark. Together with the monumental Old Bridge, the mosque was conceived to place Mostar on the global cultural-urban map and to accelerate, as well as mark, the city's transformation from a *kasabah*, a fortified town quarter, into a *shahar*, a fully constituted city and advanced urban ecosystem.

For this reason, both monuments were realised under the same imperial government of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent: the Karađoz Beg Mosque was erected in 1557–58 and the Old Bridge in 1557–66. The employment of Sinan for the mosque and his pupil Mimar Hayruddin for the bridge signals the state's investment of its foremost architectural talent in Mostar's urban and symbolic reconfiguration. It should be mentioned that Karađoz Beg was also in charge of overseeing the construction of the Old Bridge, thereby reinforcing his status both at home and at the seat of power and highlighting the importance of the flourishing Mostar-Istanbul axis. In this way, the golden age of Istanbul shone brightly over the creation and subsequent growth of Mostar, acting almost like a big brother city.

Based on the foregoing, just as Gazi Husrev Beg and his mosque—one among numerous endowments—anchored Sarajevo's swift transition from a kasabah to a shahar, so Karađoz Beg and his mosque fulfilled an analogous role in Mostar's urban development. This parallel is strengthened by the chronological concurrence of both processes under Sultan Suleyman's reign. Furthermore, attribution of Gazi Husrev Beg's Mosque to a single architect remains disputed: some sources name the Persian Adžem Esir Ali, while others attribute the work to a practitioner of Mimar Hayruddin's school, a student of Mimar Sinan. Together these facts indicate a coherent pattern of imperial patronage and the deployment of elite Ottoman architectural expertise in Bosnian urbanisation, making the region's growing socio-economic and political significance to the empire readily apparent.

Finally, each and every mosque in Mostar—with the Karađoz Beg Mosque leading the way—bears a story told through its visible scars and through repeated acts of reconstruction. Beneath their finely executed architectural and artistic details lie stratified layers of history that testify to a once-glorious, later turbulent, and at times urbicidal past. The reverberations of these dramatic vicissitudes are readily perceptible to any observer who engages the buildings with an attentive and inquisitive mind.

For illustrative purposes, during the post-World War II period from 1947 to 1969—when Socialist Yugoslavia's atheist founding charter and its early policies were enforced most emphatically—nine mosques and three masjids in Mostar were completely destroyed. Whereas during the subsequent Serbo-Croat aggression—as documented in the archival records of Muftijstvo Mostarsko and Medžlis Islamske Zajednice Mostar (the Muftiate of Mostar and the Council of the Islamic Community of Mostar)—all available mosques and masjids were either demolished or severely damaged, leaving the city without a single functional Muslim place of worship.

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Patani Sultanate: Struggle for Independence in the Triangle of Siam, Britain, and France

Metin Zengin[1] and Mefail Hızlı[2]

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Abstract: This article examines the Patani Sultanate's struggle for independence within the complex geopolitical triangle formed by Siam, Britain, and France in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While existing scholarship has largely focused on bilateral colonial relations in Southeast Asia, this study addresses a gap in understanding how competing Western imperial pressures simultaneously shaped local autonomy and indigenous resistance. The research demonstrates that Siam's annexation of Patani in 1902 was not solely a product of Siamese expansionism, but rather a direct consequence of Anglo-French competition for regional influence. Through the analysis of archival materials from Singapore, British colonial accounts, and contemporary sources, this article reveals how the Anglo-French Declaration of 1896 and the Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of 1897 fundamentally altered the power dynamics that had granted Patani significant internal autonomy despite Siamese rule since 1785. This article contributes to Southeast Asian historiography by illuminating how local Malay resistance under Tengku Abdul Kadir intersected with great power diplomacy to reshape the Malay-Muslim political identity in Southern Thailand. This multilayered analysis offers new insights into how colonial rivalries, rather than outright colonisation, determined the fate of semi-autonomous sultanates in the region.

Keywords: Patani Sultanate, Malay History, Southern Thailand, Anglo-Siam and French conflict, Tengku Abdul Kadir

Introduction

The Patani Sultanate's historical trajectory during the colonial era shows a complex entanglement within Southeast Asia's broader geopolitics. Due to its advantageous location in the northern Malay Peninsula, Patani played a significant role in the power triangle that Siam, Britain, and France established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The gradual arrival of Western colonial powers—beginning with the Portuguese, then the Dutch, and lastly the British and French—changed the political and economic climate of the area. The British were more interested in tin-rich areas such as Patani after gaining control of Penang, Malacca, and Singapore. In the meantime, Siam's fears of encirclement were heightened by the French expansion into Indochina, which led to attempts to impose control over its southern regions. Following the catastrophic invasion in 1785, Patani, a previously semi-autonomous Malay-Muslim sultanate, came under growing Siamese control. Despite appearing to be loyal to Siam, the Patani Sultanate maintained significant independence until Siam was compelled to exercise more direct control due to pressure from rival Western imperial powers. Siam was forced to defend its borders and carry out internal reforms as a result of British and French interference in regional affairs, which ultimately resulted in the annexation of Patani in 1902.

[1] Dr. Metin Zengin is a part time lecturer at the Department of History and Civilisation at International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: metin_34@yahoo.com.
[2] Prof. Dr. Mefail Hızlı is a lecturer at the Department of Theology at Bursa Uludağ Unıversity Türkiye. Email: mefailhizli@hotmail.com.

The aim of this study is to analyse how Siam's reform policies interacted with Western imperial pressures. It concentrates on Siam's reformist attempts to preserve its independence, the diplomatic tactics used by Britain and France, and the local opposition led by Malay leaders such as Tengku Abdul Kadir. The Anglo-French Declaration of 1896 and the Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of 1897 were crucial in changing the political landscape of the area. This study advances knowledge of how local reactions and colonial forces impacted the Patani Sultanate's downfall and changed the trajectory of the Malay-Muslim political identity in Southern Thailand.

Methodology

This study adopted a historical-analytical methodology that utilises both primary and secondary sources. Archival materials, such as diplomatic letters, colonial treaties, and articles from current media, provide the main empirical foundation for recreating the political developments that affected Patani. The Anglo-French Declaration of 1896, the Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of 1897, the British East India Company's reports, and correspondence from British officials such as Frank Swettenham are among the significant documents referred to in this study.

The analysis is supported by secondary literature, including academic monographs and peer-reviewed journal articles on British, French, and Siamese colonial strategies. The commentary places a strong emphasis on comprehending how Patani's destiny was influenced by commercial interests, foreign diplomacy, and Malay resistance. The involvement of regional leaders and the political and cultural elements that influenced their interactions with colonial powers are also taken into account in this study.

The gathered sources were interpreted through a diplomatic-historical lens by examining how treaty negotiations, official correspondence, and colonial policies shaped the political fate of Patani. The analysis employed a comparative approach to understand how the influences of British and French imperial strategies converged on Siamese decision making, while applying a centre-periphery framework to investigate the power dynamics between colonial metropoles (London and Paris), regional powers (Bangkok), and the local sultanate (Patani). Archival documents—particularly the Anglo-French Declaration of 1896, the Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of 1897, and diplomatic correspondence—are interpreted not as mere legal documents, but as tools for geopolitical manoeuvring. Indigenous perspectives through Tengku Abdul Kadir's petitions were also explored to provide a nuanced understanding of Malay agency and resistance within the constraints of imperial rivalry.

The British and French in Malaya

Western colonial powers began settling around the Malay Peninsula in the early 16th century, and they created extensive trade networks thereafter. After the fall of Malacca in 1511, the activities of Western powers in Southeast Asia, particularly around the Malay Peninsula, increased significantly. The British's first contact with the Malay Peninsula occurred in the early 17th century, and this initial contact was directly with the Patani Sultanate. In 1611, under the leadership of Captain Anthony Hippon and the guidance of Dutch sailors, the British ship Globe reached Patani and established a trading office to develop silk trade with China and Japan, but they were unable to sustain it due to fierce competition in the region. The trading office, established in 1611 with great hope, was burned down in 1623, disrupting British trade expectations in Southeast Asia (Winstedt, 1935). After the Portuguese lost their maritime dominance, the Dutch became the most active player in regional trade for a long period. In particular, with the support of the Johor Sultanate, in 1641, the Dutch captured Malacca from the Portuguese, engaged in extensive trade activities with the Malay sultanates, and gained great success in tin exports (Basset, 1961).

The British, on the other hand, became an important player in regional trade for many years with its East India Company, though they were not very successful in competing with the Portuguese and the Dutch. In fact, the Dutch East India Company worked intensively to prevent the British from successfully trading in the region. For this reason, the British were unable to establish a strong network in and around the Malay Peninsula for a long period. However, in the late 18th century, the British, having guaranteed control of Calcutta, deemed it necessary to establish a port around the Malay Peninsula to ensure trade between India and China as well as to break the Dutch dominance in the region (Hall, 2011).

After the Siamese attack on Patani from 1785 to 1786, the assassination of the sultan and his family, and the capture of thousands of slaves, the Malay sultanates in the north of the Malay Peninsula were greatly alarmed. The sultanates of Kedah, Terengganu, and Kelantan were especially worried that Siam would launch a sudden attack and the disaster that had befallen Patani would befall them. After settling in Penang Island, the British only attempted to establish commercial relations and did not intervene in the internal affairs of the Malay sultanates to avoid a possible war with other powers in the region. This strategy was to avoid confrontation with Siam, especially in the struggle against Burma. During this period, several Malay sultanates requested assistance from the British against Siam, but were ignored (Yamada, 2007).

The British East India Company began to play an active role in trade around the Malay Peninsula, while the Dutch, having lost their former influence during the same period, were no longer able to compete with the British. In addition, the Napoleonic Wars in Europe in the first quarter of the 19th century, and the beginning of French settlement in the regions of Vietnam and Cambodia, forced the British and the Dutch to cooperate. For this reason, the British and the Dutch signed the Treaty of London on March 17, 1824, demarcating the borders of their colonial territories in Southeast Asia. Following this treaty, the Dutch left Malacca to the British and withdrew to present-day Indonesian territory, while the British closed their trade centres in the south of Sumatra Island (Mills 1961). The British went on to take control of Penang Island on one side and Malacca and Singapore on the other, thus having a monopoly not only on trade around the Malay Peninsula, but also on securing the trade route between India and China (Hall, 1955)

Following the Dutch and British, the French made their home in the Indochina region. King Louis XIV made an unsuccessful attempt to impose French authority over Siam in 1680 by sending a delegation to Bangkok. The French attempted to establish control over the Kingdom of Annam (Vietnam) for a long time, but these efforts produced no results. One of their most unsuccessful endeavours was when their naval forces moored off the coast of Thieu-Tri in 1848 and requested privileges from the King of Annam. During the one-month period granted to the king to think over the request, he instead raised a sizable army and attacked the French, severely defeating them (*Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1863).

Napoleon III attacked the Kingdom of Annam in 1857 with the assistance of Spanish troops based in the Philippines. The French forces were able to seize several areas from the Kingdom of Annam as a result of this attack (Prendergast, 1896). Following this event, Christian missionaries were granted authority to work in the area, and trade increased when the French and the King of Annam signed a treaty in 1862 (Hall, 1955). The French gained more power in the area as a result of the advantages they were granted. Cambodia, which had previously paid homage to Siam, was ruled by France by 1864 (Bunnag, 1977). Since then, the French steadily increased their sphere of influence in the area, and by 1885, the Kingdom of Annam was fully under French jurisdiction. The French conquered Annam's lands and advanced to the Mekong River, which shared a border with Siam (Ferry, 2008).

Beginning in the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution in Europe significantly increased the demand for raw materials. Industrialisation, led by the British, created an increase in the need for minerals such as iron, steel, and tin. Moreover, the profit accrued from these minerals was more significant compared to other products. The Malay Peninsula was rich in tin mines, among many other resources. For many years, the Dutch had been exporting raw tin from the Malay sultanates and developed a strong trade network. Later in power, the British started to make profound efforts to take over the tin mining industry.

After the British established their first settlements in the Malay Peninsula, they made extensive efforts to control all the mines around the region. Patani's tin mines were already known to the British, though no attempt to take control was made due to the agreement signed with Siam in 1824. However, when the French advanced into the Kingdom of Annam and began to put pressure on Siam from the northern borders, the British took advantage of the situation to extend their colonial ambitions into the southern region, which included Patani.

Establishment of the British Administration in the Malay Peninsula and Patani Mines

During the 19th century in the north of the Malay Peninsula, the Malay sultanates under Siam's control (Patani, Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu) were relatively safer compared to the southern Malay sultanates, despite occasionally rebelling due to their dissatisfaction with Siam's presence. Siam's influence prevented both internal conflicts among these sultanates and external interventions by foreign powers. In the southern sultanates (Perak, Selangor, Pahang, and Johor), there were ongoing conflicts for power between the sultanates, throne disputes, pirates, uprisings by Chinese workers in the mines, and external interventions. Additionally, due to their inefficiency, these sultanates were unable to collect taxes regularly. All these factors facilitated the British settlement in the Malay Peninsula.

The British benefitted greatly from this internal turmoil in the Malay sultanates and made the first agreement with the Perak Sultanate (Noor, 2011). In the 1870s, a struggle for the throne had the Perak Sultanate on the verge of civil war. The three heirs to the throne, Raja Abdullah, Raja Ismail, and Raja Yusof, declared their sultanates in various regions of Perak following the death of Sultan Ali in 1871. Furthermore, they wanted the assistance of the Malay kings on the one hand, and the assistance of the Siamese and British on the other. While Raja Abdullah sought the British for assistance, Raja Yusuf wrote to the Siamese for support (Cheah, 1998).

Taking advantage of Raja Abdullah's plea for assistance, the British established their first colonial presence in Perak in 1874 when they signed the Pangkor Treaty. The Selangor Sultanate was placed under British protection in the same year as the Sultanate of Perak. Internal discontent within the Selangor Sultanate served as the foundation for its acceptance of the British protectorate. Following the rise in profits from raw tin, new mines were established in Selangor, and thousands of Chinese migrants were hired to work in these mines. These migrants occasionally rebelled and provoked disturbances. Furthermore, several Malay administrators refused to pay taxes because they did not recognise the Sultan's legitimacy. The Sultan of Selangor sought the British for assistance in both tax collection and migrant management. By signing a protectorate compact, the British exploited this request (Hall, 1955).

The Malay sultanates frequently experienced succession disputes, which made it easier for the British to settle in the Malay Peninsula. Similar circumstances arose in Pahang, where

Wan Mansur rebelled against his brother, Sultan Wan Ahmad, with British assistance. In an effort to get Sultan Ahmad to accept their protectorate, the British exploited this uprising as leverage. They were unsure of Wan Mansur's support from other Malay chiefs, though, so they refused to acknowledge him as sultan. Initially, Sultan Wan Ahmad resisted British protection for an extended period. However, in 1888, the growing political pressure from the British through Wan Mansur caused him to concede British suzerainty (Noor, 2011).

The growing demand for raw tin, particularly from the Dutch and the British, sparked new competition among the Malay sultanates. Tin was largely extracted in the Kroh mines of the Raman region under the Patani Sultanate (Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register, 1836). It is known that in the 1770s, the Patani Sultanate brought Chinese migrants to work in these mines (Philip, 2013). Boats carried the tin that was taken out of the Kroh mines down the Muda River to Kedah, where it was sold to either the British or the Dutch. In order to acquire the authority to run tin mines, the British started negotiating bilaterally with Malay sultanates in the early 1800s. The British also discovered the tin mines in Raman at this time and began a number of attempts to access them.

The British East India Company and Patani came to an agreement in the 1820s over the operation of tin mines. According to a London report on the subject, the Sultan of Patani made a deal with the East India Company, whereby the tin would be shipped to Kedah via the Muda River (Bradley, 2010). The British commerce in tin from Patani was hampered in 1820 when Siam attacked Kedah. The Burney Treaty, which established Siam's permanent rule over Kedah, finally prevented the British from accessing the Patani mines despite their repeated attempts during this time.

Patani: The Anglo-French and Siamese Dilemma

Following their conquest of Indochina, the French asserted that parts of the Siamese territory, especially Laos, had traditionally belonged to the Kingdom of Annam and hence to them. By using this strategy, the French sought to annex Siam and gain control over its land. Siam and the French were engaged in a protracted fight for control of Laos. Similar to the British, the French attempted to exert pressure on Siam at this time in an effort to acquire further land and rights (Mishra, 2010). A similar tactic employed by the British to take control of the Kroh mines was also attempted by the French along their northern frontiers.

Siam was continuously subjected to commercial and political pressure by the British and French in an attempt to gain additional privileges. It aimed to protect its sovereignty and strike a balance between the two superpowers, realising that both had colonised many nations (Marzuqi, 2010). The British were greatly alarmed when Siam was unable to repel the French forces' attacks on its territory in 1893. On January 15, 1896, British and French representatives met in London and signed The Anglo-French Declaration which put an end to the wars and defined their respective areas of influence. The conflict over the Kingdom of Siam's lands was essentially resolved by this agreement (Jeshurun, 1970). The borders of the Kingdom of Siam were acknowledged as the border between the two colonial powers, and both parties agreed not to attack Siamese territory. The Anglo-French Declaration settled the border disputes between France and Siam and committed both countries to protecting Siam's territorial integrity (*The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1896b). This treaty not only alleviated Siam's fear of being occupied by both the British and French, but also made the Malay sultanates under Siamese control more resistant to external intervention (*The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1896a).

The Anglo-French Declaration was once again brought to the attention of the Malay sultanates ruled by the Siamese. Siam sent thousands of troops to areas close to the southern

Malay sultanates shortly after the Declaration because the British and French continued to vie for control of Siam. According to a letter (Suchekomnaty Mionczynski, 1902) and certain documents delivered to Swettenham in 1902 by Australian Compte C. de Suchekomnaty Mionczynski, the French were planning an invasion of Siam. The British also placed constant pressure on Siam to bolster its authority over the Malay sultanates as well as to thwart any possible foreign intrusion ever since the Declaration was signed.

The French were not the only nation attempting to gain control of the Patani and other still-partially independent Malay sultanates at the end of the 19th century—the Germans and Russians were also trying to influence these sultanates and build relationships (Mahmud, 2008). To forestall any prospective foreign interference, the British negotiated a secret pact with the Kingdom of Siam on April 6, 1897, exactly one year after the Anglo-French Declaration (Denudom & Hoadley, 2015).

This pact benefitted both parties. On the one hand, the British stopped Siam from making deals with third parties and consolidated its position as the dominant force in the area (Suwannathat-Pian, 1984). Siam, on the other hand, regained its rights over the sultanates of Patani, Terengganu, and Kelantan, strengthening its power over them. Notwithstanding these advantages, the British were nevertheless unable to allay their fears of European nations, especially the French, gaining sway over the Malay sultanates (Koch, 1977).

Following the Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of 1897, the Singapore office received a telegram from British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain alerting them to the dangers of not carrying out projects pertaining to the Malay sultanates under Siamese protection. Additionally, he cautioned against any action that would raise Siam's suspicions. The hunger for the Malay Peninsula's mineral riches at the start of the 20th century nearly put Western nations in direct rivalry with one another. The United States attempted to enter this race as well in 1901, presenting the Sultan of Terengganu with a number of ideas for commerce and cooperation (Malek, 2000).

Tengku Abdul Kadir and a Rebellion Plan

Tengku Abdul Kadir Kamaruddin was the son of Sultan Sulaiman Sharifuddin Syah of Patani (d. 1899). Following the custom of his forebears, Tengku Abdul Kadir wrote to Bangkok to seek recognition as the new Sultan of Patani after assuming the throne. However, due to an unforeseen circumstance, Bangkok took a long time to recognise Tengku Abdul Kadir's takeover of Patani. Following a year of waiting, the King of Siam travelled to Patani as part of a state visit to the Malay sultanates. There, he met Tengku Abdul Kadir and gave his approval for the latter's accession to the Patani throne.

Tengku Abdul Kadir was a youthful, enthusiastic, and intelligent man who ascended the throne as Sultan of Patani at the age of 26. Furthermore, he developed close ties with the British authorities and spoke fluent English. These attributes guaranteed his recognition as the legitimate heir to the Patani Sultanate and won him the respect of other regional leaders outside of Patani. On June 26, 1901 (*The Straits Times*, 1901a), Tengku Abdul Kadir, his family, and 40 companions travelled to Singapore to meet the King of Siam, who was coming from Java Island shortly after assuming the throne. The Siamese inspectors in Patani used force to collect taxes from the local populace while Tengku Abdul Kadir was in Singapore. Upon returning from Singapore, Tengku Abdul Kadir became aware of the issue and directed that taxes be provided to him at the appropriate time rather than to the inspectors. However, the inspectors were not pleased with this order, so a squad of 600 troops began to police the area near Tengku Abdul Kadir's residence.

Tengku Abdul Kadir wrote to Prince Damrong, Siam's Interior Minister, in 1901, asking that the inspectors sent by Siam be removed and that the Malays be ruled by Malay rulers, as had previously been the case. However, he did not receive a favourable answer (Marzuqi, 2010). Tengku Abdul Kadir further held talks with authorities in Bangkok and Singapore in an attempt to find a peaceful solution to the Patani problem. However, when these negotiations failed, he and other Patani-based Malay rulers made the decision to overthrow Bangkok. Tengku Abdul Kadir ordered guns in anticipation of the insurrection and intended its commencement by the end of 1901. Support from the French was also to be sought as part of the planned uprising against Siam. The Siamese army would be sent to the area when the southern Malay cities revolted. It was anticipated that the French army would use the opportunity and move northward into Siamese territory during this period (Mahmud, 2008).

While preparations for the uprising were in progress, British colonial officer R. W. Duff, who was in Patani at the time, learned the details of the uprising. He was concerned that the British presence in the Malay Peninsula may be in danger if such a revolt spread across all the Malay sultanates. Before the uprising, Duff advised Tengku Abdul Kadir to write a petition to Swettenham in Singapore for a possible amicable settlement of this dispute, and the latter agreed. In his petition to Swettenham, Tengku Abdul Kadir described the circumstances in Patani and stated that if the issue was not resolved, a rebellion would undoubtedly break out (Mahmud, 2008).

Siam also started to carry out its ambitions to seize total authority over Patani's lands during this time. To restructure Patani's provinces under two administrative divisions, a Bangkok committee travelled to the area in 1901. Sai, Rangae, and Phra Anachak were to be placed under one administrative zone, while Patani, Nong Chik, Yaring, Yala, and Raman were to be united under another. The Bangkok government planned to designate a chief inspector to each of the two newly established regions and remove the inspectors who had previously been assigned. They also intended to pay these chief inspectors more than what they were given by their predecessors (*The Straits Times*, 1901b).

Siamese Interior Minister Phraya Sri Sahathep arrived in Patani on October 23, 1901, bearing a paper that Tengku Abdul Kadir needed to sign. According to the document, the Sultan of Patani was to cede all of his powers to the Kingdom of Siam. Tengku Abdul Kadir declined to sign the document since it was written in Thai. However, Phraya Sri Sahathep had Tengku Abdul Kadir sign the incorrectly translated version after hiring a translator to translate it into Malay. Thereafter, Phraya Sri Sahathep went to Singapore and showed Swettenham the signed document as evidence that the Sultan of Patani had given up his rights. Upon learning that he had been duped, Tengku Abdul Kadir wrote to Bangkok to protest, but Siam disregarded him (Bunnag, 1977).

Swettenham was concerned about the letter that Tengku Abdul Kadir had dispatched to Singapore. In a letter to Bangkok dated November 20, 1901, Swettenham stated that the 1897 pact benefitted both Siam and the British Empire. He also noted that the treaty, which benefitted both parties, was now in jeopardy since Siam was unable to rule the Malay sultanates. Swettenham added that the inspectors dispatched to the area had only exacerbated the Malays' discontent and that Siam had failed to establish effective authority over the Malay sultanates. He claimed that Siam was not abiding by the conditions of the treaty and that, as a result, Malay rulers had begun looking for European assistance outside of the British (Koch, 1977).

Swettenham's letter to Bangkok prompted action from Siamese officials. Not long after Tengku Abdul Kadir sent his letter to Singapore, Phraya Sri Sahathep from the Siamese Interior Ministry arrived in Patani. In his meeting with Tengku Abdul Kadir, Phraya Sri Sahathep informed him that any complaints should be addressed directly to Bangkok. Tengku Abdul Kadir responded that he would be happy to provide copies of all his sent letters. As a result, all the letters previously sent to Singapore were seized by Phraya Sri Sahathep and transported by boat to Bangkok (Davies, 1902).

Patani's Quest for British Mandate

The Malay sultanates under Siamese rule kept a careful eye on the region's economic advancements and the British Empire's growing power over several sultanates in the Malay Peninsula in the 1880s. Notably, a major economic shift was brought about by the British government's construction of railways throughout the peninsula (Anuar, 2018). Furthermore, from the 1870s onwards, the British began to recruit Tamil migrants from India to work in the mines as an alternative to the Chinese workforce. The Malay Peninsula's Indian population grew by 188% between 1870 and 1880. This development offered a less expensive source of labour, in addition to providing the Chinese with an alternative labour force (López, 2001). All of these elements contributed to events that brought in large sums of money for the British-occupied sultanates. Furthermore, the British were especially careful not to meddle with the Malays' beliefs and customs following the murder of James W. W. Birch, the first British Resident in Perak.

Inspectors dispatched by the Kingdom of Siam had taken over tax collection in Patani during this time and even started to interfere with the customs and religion of the Malay Muslims. Malay rulers were forced to seek British protection as a result of this circumstance. The British were asked to open an office in Patani by the Sultan of Patani in a joint meeting in August 1889 (*The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1889). An article published on October 15, 1889, in London asserted that the Patani Sultanate wanted to become a British colony; this article was later discussed in newspapers in Penang and Singapore. The article stated the following about the issue:

> This week's Pinang newspaper is talking about a London-based article that details the Patani people's wishes to be protected by the British .... Since Kedah only recently came under Siamese rule, it continues to be an independent sultanate in our eyes. However, Patani's situation is different. We are uncertain how long it has been under Siamese control. Therefore, the only course of action we can take for Patani is to adhere to the borders drawn several years ago through the efforts of Singapore, London, and Bangkok. We see the likelihood of Siam voluntarily allowing Patani to come under British control as extremely low. (*Straits Times Weekly Issue*, 1889)

The Bangkok administration replied fiercely to these charges made by the British publications. On October 28, 1889, *The Bangkok Times* (*The Straits Times*, 1889) expressed great surprise at the news published by the Penang newspapers that the Patani Sultanate under Siamese domination desired to come under British rule. According to the article, people who opposed Siam's supremacy over the Malay sultanates were probably the same ones pushing this absurd notion. The publication went on to state that the Sultan of Patani had just visited Bangkok with a number of his troops to pay bunga mas (tribute in the form of gold and silver trees). Consequently, it considered such a claim to be unjustified and irrational.

Siam's power over the Malay sultanates grew stronger with the signing of the secret treaty in 1897. The Malay monarchs, however, were troubled by this circumstance and regularly turned to British authorities for support. Swettenham wrote to London on January 10, 1899, to inform them that the Sultan of Patani had asked for British rule over Patani's territories (Suwannathat-Pian, 1984). However, these requests frequently had unfavourable outcomes and even increased tension with Siam. The events in Patani were mostly disregarded by the British government. British newspapers started disseminating erroneous information about the situation in Patani, especially following the covert deal with Siam, which propagated the idea that Siam had ceased its tyranny and atrocities in the area (*The Straits Times*, 1900).

As Siamese pressure mounted in the early 20th century, the Patani sultans persisted in their pursuit of British support. Tengku Abdul Kadir repeatedly asked the British to take the Patani Sultanate under their protection in a letter to Swettenham dated August 31, 1901, but to no avail (Denudom & Hoadley, 2015). In addition to this failure, the Patani monarchs' attempt to gain British favour only served to inflame Siamese resentment. Siam was forced by this circumstance to look for a long-term solution in Patani.

The Siamese-Kelantan Treaty of 1902 and the Administrative Restructuring in Patani

After the Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of 1897, the British, following a long hiatus, entirely left the administration of the Kelantan and Terengganu sultanates under the sovereignty of Siam. Siam, in turn, dispatched inspectors to these sultanates to enhance its control in governance. Nonetheless, this circumstance threatened British interests in the Malay Peninsula and infuriated the Malay rulers. As a result, the British started working to regain control of these Malay sultanates. Among these initiatives, arguably the most noteworthy was the endeavour of R.W. Duff.

R.W. Duff had worked for many years in the Malay sultanates under the British East India Company and, after retiring in 1900, established a company in his own name (*The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (weekly)*, 1902). Following his retirement, Duff returned to Kelantan and held discussions with the Sultan of Kelantan. Observing that the Sultan wished to completely free himself from Siamese rule, Duff entered into an agreement with him. According to this agreement, in exchange for liberating Kelantan from total Siamese control, Kelantan's mines would be operated by Duff's company for a period of 40 years (Wannamethee, 2014). Following discussions in Kelantan, Duff travelled to England to seek political support for his efforts. His meetings proved successful, and the British decided to officially recognise his agreement with the Sultan of Kelantan since this would create a new opportunity for them to have Siam accept this agreement as a trade arrangement (Suwannathat-Pian, 1984).

King Chulalongkorn of Siam visited Singapore on March 8, 1902, and met with Swettenham to discuss the Malay sultanates' predicament. However, the meeting did not proceed smoothly. The Siamese king was threatened by Swettenham, who insisted that Siam accept the deal reached with Duff or the Malays would be enraged and rebel against Siam. Consequently, the Malay sultanates' destiny was completely in the hands of the British. Due to Duff's efforts, the long-standing British-Siamese border dispute, which had previously gained attention due to the Kroh mines, resurfaced. Beginning in March 1902, British-Siamese negotiations lasted for nearly the entire year. In the context of British-Siamese ties, the extent of negotiations over the Malay sultanates was unparalleled. Following protracted discussions, both the Siamese and British authorities agreed on the status of the sultanates of Kelantan and Terengganu in October 1902. Siam, however, declined to sign the deal with Patani, though it agreed to give Kelantan and Terengganu autonomy in their domestic issues while maintaining authority over their international affairs (Suwannathat-Pian, 1984).

Siam initially tried to convince the Malay rulers through pressure and discussions since it knew that the choice to establish complete control over Patani would cause a severe reaction from the Malays. The discussions with the British in 1902 concerning the Kelantan and Terengganu sultanates marked the beginning of these initiatives. Siam began by meeting with the seven Malay rulers and pressuring them to sign papers giving it full control over their rights. Under duress, a few rulers, such as the Legeh region's administrator, agreed to hand over their rights to Siam by signing the documents. Meanwhile, Tengku Abdul Kadir was among the numerous Malay rulers who resisted such pressures (Koch, 1977).

The 1902 treaty fundamentally sealed the fate of Patani by creating a sharp divide in Siam's attitude towards the Malay sultanates. Kelantan and Terengganu gained internal autonomy to meet British demands, while Siam tightened its grip on Patani as compensation for these concessions. British connivance with Siam's refusal to include Patani in the treaty effectively sacrificed the sultanate in the broader Anglo-Siamese diplomatic bargain. The arrest and imprisonment of Tengku Abdul Kadir during these treaty negotiations in 1902 was part of Siam's calculated strategy to eliminate Malay resistance in Patani and appease British interests elsewhere. This disparate treatment shattered Patani's traditional governing structure, paving the way for its formal annexation and culminating in the 1909 treaty that finalised the territorial arrangements between Britain and Siam.

Pressures and Detentions against Malay Rulers

The Sai region's ruler, Tengku Mutaleb, was coerced by Bangkok to sign a document on February 8, 1902, handing over all rights to Siam. Two weeks later, on February 22, 1902, Tengku Abdul Kadir's home was visited in the evening by Phraya Sri Sahathep from Siam's Interior Ministry, who was accompanied by one hundred individuals. They insisted that Tengku Abdul Kadir give Bangkok the same privileges he had in Patani (Davies, 1902).

Phraya Sri Sahathep said he barely had five minutes to spare and declined Tengku Abdul Kadir's plea for a few days to consider the situation. Tengku Abdul Kadir thereupon declined to sign the document that was presented to him. Both he and Imam Haji Abdûllatif of the Tiga Mosque were subsequently taken to Singora by Phraya Sri Sahathep (Teeuw & Wyat, 1970). Tengku Abdul Kadir was detained for a while in Singora before being sent to Bangkok's Phitsanulok Prison.

The other Malay sultanates were extremely alarmed by the arrest of Tengku Abdul Kadir. In particular, the Sultan of Kelantan was worried that Siam may force him to sign a similar document (*The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1902). King Chulalongkorn of Siam travelled to Singapore in March 1902 to discuss the state of affairs in the Malay sultanates. Although Swettenham sought for Tengku Abdul Kadir's release during this visit, according to King Chulalongkorn, Tengku Abdul Kadir was a Siamese Kingdom official and would be punished as well as not be allowed to leave since he had disobeyed the law and caused disorder (Suwannathat-Pian, 1984). Patani came under Siam's direct rule on March 6, 1902, when Tengku Abdul Kadir was imprisoned in Bangkok. After being held in Phitsanulok Prison for approximately 27 months, he accepted Siam's conditions and was released on March 5, 1904. Shortly after his release, he moved to Kelantan, marking the end of Malay rule in Patani.

In 1907, French pressure on Siam to cede some of its eastern territories prompted action from the British in the south. Long engaged in border disputes with Siam, the British expressed their intention to return to the negotiating table to seize territory from Siam. Siam, eager to resolve its longstanding issues with the British and relieve itself from pressure, engaged in negotiations with the British, beginning in 1907. After two years of negotiations, both parties reached an agreement on March 10, 1909. As per the terms of this treaty, the Patani territories were annexed by Siam, while Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu came under British sovereignty (Marzuqi, 2010).

Conclusion

The most significant factor shaping Patani-Siam relations from the late 19th century onwards was the establishment of colonies in the region by Western colonial powers, specifically the British and French. Through the lease of Penang Island and its straits, the establishment of Singapore, and the purchase of Malacca from the Dutch, the British began to establish themselves as a significant player in the area in the late 18th century. They then proceeded to start colonising the Malay Peninsula in the late 1800s. Internal strife in the Sultanates of Perak and Selangor was exploited by the British in 1874, and both were placed under their protection. During this period, they also gained access to tin mines in Patani, making their relations with the Patani Sultanate increasingly significant.

From the 1880s onward, the British accelerated their colonial activities, with the primary reason being to counter the beginning of French presence in the region through Vietnam and Cambodia. The British made considerable efforts to prevent the French from expanding their sphere of influence in the region and settling in the Malay Peninsula. Their attempts to colonise the Malay Peninsula were further pushed by the prospect of French protection for Siam. In the meantime, Patani was under constant pressure from Siam, which aimed to offset the territorial demands and pressures from both the British and the French. As a result of this pressure, Siam first forcibly stripped Malay rulers of their rights and then annexed the territory of Patani.

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