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# **Quba' Mosque in the Works of Early Muslim Visitors and Scholars**

## **Masjid Quba' dalam Karya Pelawat dan Cendekiawan Muslim Awal**

Spahic Omer\*

### **Abstract**

This article discusses the religiosity, historicity and architecturality of the Quba' mosque in the holy city of Madinah. It does so through the literary works of the early Muslim visitors and scholars. The discussion covers the timespan from the earliest periods of the Islamic presence in the Prophet's city till the age al-Samahudi whose scholarly contributions stand for the embodiment of the Islamic classicism in Madinah, and also the age and contributions of Abu Salim al-Ayyashi whose case signified a transition from the Islamic classical times to the premodern ones. The primary sources consulted for the article were of two kinds: the classical history writings about Madinah, and an array of travel and exploration literature. The research method adopted is a combination of descriptive and historical interpretation as well as analysis.

**Keywords:** Quba' Mosque, Madinah, Architecture, Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta, Abu Salim Al-Ayyashi.

### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini membincangkan aspek keagamaan, sejarah, dan seni bina Masjid Quba' di kota suci Madinah dengan mengkaji karya-karya sastera pelawat dan cendekiawan Muslim awal. Perbincangan ini

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merangkumi tempoh zaman awal kehadiran Islam di kota Nabi sehingga zaman al-Samahudi yang mana sumbangan beliau melambangkan klasisme Islam di Madinah, dan juga zaman serta sumbangan Abu Salim al-Ayyashi yang kesnya menandakan peralihan dari zaman klasik Islam ke zaman pramoden. Sumber utama yang dirujuk bagi kajian ini merangkumi dua jenis sumber: penulisan sejarah klasik mengenai Madinah, dan pelbagai kesusasteraan perjalanan dan penerokaan. Kaedah penyelidikan yang digunakan adalah gabungan kaedah deskriptif dan tafsiran sejarah serta analisis.

**Kata Kunci:** Masjid Quba', Madinah, Seni Bina, Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta, Abu Salim Al-Ayyashi.

## **Introduction**

The Quba' mosque is very important. Its importance lies in relation to both history and religious ordinances. As to the former, the Quba' mosque was the first mosque built by the Prophet. It was built in the village of Quba' on the outskirts of Madinah. It was located to the south or south-west of the city, on the way of the Prophet's hijrah trajectory. As a migrant on his way from Makkah to the city of Madinah, the Prophet stopped in Quba' for two weeks, ten days, or just "a few days". During the stay he managed to build the mosque, that is, he laid its foundations and started the building process. Although there might have existed other simple mosques established earlier by certain companions of the Prophet, the Quba' mosque was the first one where the Prophet with his companions prayed publicly in congregation, and in whose establishment and construction he personally participated. The mosque, it goes without saying, was incomparable.<sup>1</sup>

The mosque symbolized freedom, maturation and victory. It furthermore symbolized the actual advent of the Prophet, Islam and Muslims in Madinah, on the one hand, and the advent of a new direction

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<sup>1</sup> Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1997), vol. 1 pp. 250-252. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Zad al-Ma'ad*, (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 1998), vol. 3 p. 52.

and a new purpose, on the other. In short, the mosque symbolized an existential transformation and the arrival of the future. Accordingly, the building of the Quba' mosque marked not just a new and certainly most decisive phase, but also a turning point, in the history of the prophethood of the final messenger of Almighty Allah to people: Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The mosque personified the migration or hijrah as a whole, and also a migration from one epoch, yet one dimension, of Islam and its message to another, and from one paradigm of the Prophet's preaching and of the people's behavioural standard to another. The Quba' mosque was a segment of a process that culminated in the creation of the Prophet's mosque in Madinah proper.

Conceiving and erecting the Quba' mosque indicated a new birth and a new beginning. If there was the biological birth of the Prophet, which happened as per the majority of Muslim scholars on the twelfth of Rabi' al-Awwal, the third month of the lunar year, in 570 CE, there was, likewise, a new religious birth and a new civilizational beginning associated with the hijrah and the arrival of the Prophet and his creation of the mosque in Quba'. Hence, perhaps partly as a coincidence and partly as a design, the Prophet is said to have arrived in Quba' also on the twelfth of the month of Rabi' al-Awwal on the back of thirteen years of preaching in Makkah.<sup>2</sup> When the Prophet died ten years later, that was as well on the twelfth of Rabi' al-Awwal, thus perfectly completing as much the ontological as the prophetic cycle.<sup>3</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that the year of the migration of the Prophet to Madinah via Quba' was used as the starting point for the Islamic hijri calendar. The hijrah and with it the Quba' episode was thus forever immortalized both in the history books and in the Muslim consciousness.

With reference to the religious importance of the Quba' mosque, there are several Qur'anic verses and traditions of the Prophet that attest to it. For example, the Qur'an says that the Quba' mosque was a mosque founded on righteousness and Allah's good pleasure from the first day, that it was worthy for the Prophet to stand or worship Allah in it, and that in it were persons who loved to purify themselves (al-Tawbah, 108-109). The mosque, it follows, was a sign and an exemplar. It stood as an

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<sup>2</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Zad al-Ma'ad*, vol. 3 p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002), pp. 111, 528.

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epitome of virtue and, at the same time, as an antithesis of the wickedness - at once individual and institutionalized - of the forces of falsehood which the Prophet had to encounter in Madinah, on top of which, positively, stood the hypocrites and their internal and external allies.

The hypocrites built their own mosque in the vicinity of the Quba' mosque. The aim was to rival the intrinsic greatness of the latter. As a result, the Qur'an describes the "mosque" of the hypocrites as a mosque created for causing harm, disbelief and division among the believers and as a station for whoever had warred against Allah and the Prophet before. Notwithstanding the deceitful excuses of the hypocrites to the effect that they had intended only what was the best for Muslims, the Qur'an unmasked their intentions and declared that Allah testifies that, surely, the hypocrites were nothing but liars (al-Tawbah, 107).

As such, the context of the Quba' mosque triggered a heavenly intervention due to which one could sense a guarantee of the bright future of Islam - in Madinah and beyond - together with the universal sustainability of its message, people and civilization. There can be no doubt that the Qur'anic reference to the Quba' mosque contained a prophecy that materialized during the Prophet's time first, and then kept materializing throughout history and throughout the world.

Indeed, the testimonial of the Qur'an is a gift that never stops giving. So much so that it became a historical and civilization-building law that any edifice, organization, enterprise, institution, system, "house", etc. - simply put, anything that can be categorized as a type of establishment or a foundation either actually or metaphorically - that is founded upon duty to Allah and His good pleasure is righteous and so, sustainable. Its vitality and permanence are ensured thereby, commensurately with the vitality and permanence of the fundamentals it rests upon.

Conversely, any type of establishment, foundation, or system that is founded on principles other than piety to Almighty Allah and His pleasure is aberrant and so, doomed, sooner or later. Its foundations are laid on the edge of a bank about to collapse. There is neither constancy nor benediction enclosed in such an endeavour. Hence, Allah does not endorse it, nor does He endorse and guide its wrongdoing people. Ultimately, the whole setup fails and crumbles to pieces "into the fire of



Hell” (al-Tawbah, 109). All this is as a consequence of another categorical truth enshrined in the Qur’anic text according to which while the truth and its believers are destined to prevail in the end, falsehood and its patrons are destined to fall short.

The Prophet never stopped drawing attention to this significance of the Quba’ mosque. He did so as much through words as through actions. Thus, he is reported to have said: “Whoever purifies himself in his house, then comes to the Quba’ mosque and offers one prayer therein, will have a reward like that for umrah (the lesser pilgrimage).”<sup>4</sup> The Prophet himself used to go to the Quba’ mosque every Saturday, sometimes walking and sometimes riding. Emulating the Prophet, a companion Abdullah b. Umar used to do the same.<sup>5</sup> The Prophet is said to have frequently ridden a donkey while travelling to Quba’. He would unsurprisingly be surrounded by his companions many of whom travelled on foot with him.<sup>6</sup>

This article aims to examine how the early Muslim visitors and scholars through their literary works initiated a culture of popularizing and preserving the extraordinary legacy of the Quba’ mosque. In the process, a concise history of the architectural evolution of the mosque will also be presented. This is because of the tenet that speaking about the Quba’ mosque means not only speaking about its religiosity, but also its historicity and architecturality, with the latter manifesting, corroborating and aiding the former. The article is divided into the following sections: the roles of al-Ya’qubi and al-Muqaddisi; a brief architectural history of the Quba’ mosque; the description of the Quba’ mosque by Ibn Jubayr; the description of the Quba’ mosque by Ibn Battuta; the Quba’ mosque under the Mamluks; the case of Abu Salim al-Ayyashi.

### **The Roles of al-Ya’qubi and al-Muqaddisi**

As one would expect, from the very beginning the Quba’ mosque was the focus of attention in Islamic scholarship. By virtue of being safeguarded by the scope of the revelation – which is the Qur’an and the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Book 5, Hadith 610.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 20, Hadith 5.

<sup>6</sup> Majduddin Muhammad al-Fayruzabadi, *al-Maghamim al-Mutabah fi Ma’alim Tabah*, (Riyadh: Dar al-Yamamah, 1969), p. 328.

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Prophet's Sunnah - the case of the Quba' mosque featured conspicuously in virtually every book or study of almost all Islamic sciences, but especially the sciences of tafsir (exegesis), hadith (the Prophet's tradition) and sirah (biography) of the Prophet. The object of those books and studies was to uphold the authenticity of the Quba' mosque reports, and to explore further, preserve, disseminate and teach them to posterity. For the legacy of the Quba' mosque encompassed as much the heavenly as the earthly components, and so, was as much constant as inconstant.

When it comes to the books and studies of the science of Islamic geography and Islamic exploration and travel, things become a bit different. They become exciting in their own unique way. Owing to the exceptional status of the Quba' mosque, most books still refer to it in respect of its religious character, drawing on the contents of the pure religious sciences. At the same time, however, the geography, exploration and travel references add an aura of current-ness and contemporaneity. They speak of the Quba' mosque as an actual, contemporary, enduring and vivid entity, projecting it as an idea and a physical-cum-architectural reality where the past and present, and where the earth and heaven, perennially converge and usher a visitor into a new dimension of meaning and experience.

The first two such books that mention the Quba' mosque are "Kitab al-Buldan" composed by a geographer and historian al-Ya'qubi (d. 897) and "Ahsan al-Taqasim fi Ma'rifah al-Aqalim" by a geographer al-Muqaddisi or al-Muqaddisi (d. 991). Consistent with the fact that their works were among the first of their kind and that they stood for a kind of a breakthrough, plus in proportion to the overall scales of the two works, the two authors provided very succinct, albeit insightful and revealing, accounts of the Quba' mosque.

Al-Ya'qubi was less accommodating of the two. He only said that the Quba' district was at a distance of six miles from Madinah, which nevertheless is inaccurate. Most scholars after al-Ya'qubi, including al-Muqaddisi, were of the opinion that the distance was between two and three miles. Some of those scholars might have had in mind the outer walls - or the common borders before the erection of the walls - of the city of Madinah, and others might have meant the core of the city with the Prophet's mosque in it, hence their negligible disagreements. But to

say that there were six miles between Madinah and Quba' was too much. Such was either a miscalculation or a slip up on al-Ya'qubi's side, or he simply had a different set of criteria unknown to others. He for one might have considered the entire parameters of the Quba' district's expanse, in which case the "distance" from Madinah to Quba' had to be bigger. That possibly was the reason why al-Ya'qubi bracketed the Quba' lands with the sprawling housing areas of the indigenous tribes of al-Aws and al-Khazraj. As if Quba' was made larger than it seemed, yet larger than it in actual fact was.<sup>7</sup>

In the same vein, it is customarily said that Quba' was to the south or south-west of Madinah. People differed in their judgments predicated on whether by Madinah they thought of the Prophet's mosque and the city's core only, or the city's total urban volume, and whether by Quba' they thought of the Quba' mosque only, or the total Quba' settlement, yet area. If people had in mind the whole city of Madinah and the whole Quba' settlement-cum-area, they would normally have said that the latter lay to the south-west of the former. A bit of generality and approximation in such a case could do no harm. However, if they had in mind the mosque of the Prophet and the core of the Madinah city, on the one hand, and the Quba' mosque only, on the other, people tended to be more precise and so, ended up saying that Quba' was to the south of Madinah. Interestingly, it was usually the early scholars and visitors<sup>8</sup> who said that the Quba' was to the south of Madinah, and the later ones<sup>9</sup> who said that it was to the south-west, the reason being the foreseeable developments whereby, historically, the topographical as well as built-up parameters of both the city of Madinah and the Quba' settlement kept expanding. The subsequent scholars and visitors had greater leeway to come to their conclusions.

Al-Ya'qubi furthermore wrote that following his arrival in Quba', on the way from Makkah to Madinah, the Prophet stayed in the house of a companion Kulthum b. al-Hadm. However, the host soon passed away and the Prophet briefly moved to the house of another companion called Sa'd b. Khaythama al-Ansari. At the time of al-Ya'qubi's visit, the house of the latter – or some residues thereof – was still standing, obviously

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<sup>7</sup> Al-Ya'qubi, *Kitab al-Buldan*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), p. 152.

<sup>8</sup> Like, for example, Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta.

<sup>9</sup> Like, for example, Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha and Eldon Rutter.

looked-after in its capacity as a historical vestige, and was located adjacent to the Quba' mosque near the qiblah side. The mosque and the house were part of a large Quba' complex some portions of which al-Ya'qubi refrained from mentioning.<sup>10</sup>

However, al-Ya'qubi's statement that Kulthum b. al-Hadm died during the Prophet's stay in Quba', after which the Prophet moved to the house of Sa'd b. Khaythama al-Ansari, is puzzling, for it is known that although Kulthum b. al-Hadm was the first Madinah native to die after the hijrah, that happened after the Prophet's departure from Quba' and before the battle of Badr. Consequently, the Prophet appears to have been lodged only in the house of Kulthum b. al-Hadm. His relationship with the house of Sa'd b. Khaythama al-Ansari was in a different capacity, such as visiting it, resting and praying in it (in its private "mosque"). Besides, it was only al-Ya'qubi that reported this inconsistency.

As regards al-Muqaddisi, he somewhat provided more information than al-Ya'qubi. He said that Quba' was a village two miles away from Madinah, on the left side of the road to Makkah. It had many buildings of stone and its water was fresh. While referring to the Quba' mosque, al-Muqaddisi called it the mosque of piety (*masjid al-taqwa*), after the Qur'anic framework and terminology. He said that the mosque was well-built and in front of it there were a paved court and an open area. The mosque had many places associated with the Prophet, which were the target of pilgrims' visits. Completing the milieu, al-Muqaddisi, while still following the Qur'anic perspective and terminology, mentioned that once in Quba' there was also the mosque of mischief or harm (*masjid al-dirar*). It was the outcome of hypocrites' endless intrigues, because of which it was destroyed. In the pulling down of that unholy structure "the people performed a pious deed."<sup>11</sup>

### **A Brief Architectural History of the Quba' Mosque**

Prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, which were the centuries in which al-Ya'qubi and al-Muqaddisi respectively lived, the Quba' mosque underwent one exercise of upgrading and one of rebuilding, along with expansion. When the Prophet built the Quba' mosque it was a simple

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<sup>10</sup> Al-Ya'qubi, *Kitab al-Buldan*, p. 152.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Muqaddisi, *Ahsan al-Ta'asim fi Ma'rifah al-Aqalim*, translated into English by Basil Collins, (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2001), p. 74.

structure in the mould of his mosque in Madinah and the rest of the mosques built at the time. It should have been a roofless and unpaved enclosure. In harmony with the domestic architecture of the Quba' district, the mosque's main building material was stone quarried from a nearby basaltic stony ground (whereas, parenthetically, the Prophet's mosque was a mudbrick building). The Prophet himself participated in the construction, as did most of the leading companions and local residents, including Abu Bakr and Umar.<sup>12</sup>

Some reports suggest that even Uthman b. Affan took part, but al-Samahudi (d. 1505) was quick to dismiss the idea, reminding that Uthman b. Affan was yet to return from Abyssinia where he earlier had gone as a migrant. Al-Samahudi then went a step further and suggested that, while Uthman b. Affan was definitely absent at the time of the Prophet's arrival in Quba' and during his instantaneous establishment of the Quba' mosque, however, the Prophet might have only founded the Quba' mosque upon his arrival from Makkah and might have embarked on some basic construction activities only. It is plausible that the major construction work might have been undertaken considerably later when Uthman b. Affan was around as well, enabling him to participate. This way, al-Samahudi attempted to reconcile some apparently conflicting reports and also to enrich the Quba' mosque debates.<sup>13</sup>

The Quba' mosque was built on a piece of land that belonged to the mentioned Kulthum b. al-Hadm from the tribe of Banu Amr b. Awf in whose house the Prophet had been lodged. That piece of land was hitherto known as a *marbad*, which means "a place for drying dates", and was donated to the Prophet and the community.<sup>14</sup> The angel Jibril or Gabriel was in charge of fixing the mosque's qiblah direction, making it a mosque with the most precise qiblah. However, inasmuch as the first qiblah from Madinah was towards Jerusalem and its al-Aqsa mosque for about a year and a half, the Quba' mosque's qiblah – like the qiblah of the Prophet's mosque, too, which was built shortly after the Quba' mosque – faced Jerusalem to the north. Later when the Prophet was instructed to

<sup>12</sup> Majduddin Muhammad al-Fayruzabadi, *al-Maghanim al-Mutabah fi Ma'alim Tabah*, pp. 323-340.

<sup>13</sup> Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 1 p. 252.

<sup>14</sup> Abu Abdullah b. al-Najjar, *al-Durrah al-Thaminah fi Akhbar al-Madinah*, (Madinah: Dar al-Madinah al-Munawwarah, 1996), p. 176. Muhammad b. Zabal, *Akhbar al-Madinah*, (Madinah: Markaz Buhuth wa Dirasat al-Madinah al-Munawwarah, 2003), p. 71.

alter the qiblah towards Makkah and its holy mosque (al-masjid al-haram) in the south, the qiblah direction in all mosques in Madinah was changed accordingly. This suggests that, at last, there might have been two “official” founding and “launching” of the Quba’ mosque, during both of which the angel Jibril should have been responsible for determining the qiblah.<sup>15</sup>

In conjunction with the qiblah change, which had several implications for the architectural morphology of the Quba’ mosque, the mosque, it would seem, was subjected to some additional building activities following which it was deemed complete. It is not clear whether the mosque remained roofless till the end of the Prophet’s era, but despite the lack of concrete evidences it can be safely presumed that at one point afterwards the mosque should have been provided with a roofed section especially towards the qiblah side. That sector is likely to have been in the form of riwaqs or porticos that featured date palm trunks as pillars and date palm planks and leaves as covering. This is believed to have been the case on account of the fact that the Prophet’s mosque underwent the same architectural evolution, and since the Prophet’s mosque was a standard-setter the rest of Madinah mosques were expected to follow it in all aspects including the development of an architectural vocabulary.

When Uthman b. Affan was the third caliph of Muslims he rebuilt and expanded the Prophet’s mosque in such a way that his exploits are regarded as historic and ground-breaking. He set some new architectural standards in the nascent Muslim society, which were used as a benchmark for future built environment trends and comparisons. Of the prominent things were building materials and techniques, resulting in the walls of the Prophet’s mosque being built with engraved stones and lime, its pillars also of engraved stones and its roof built of teak wood.<sup>16</sup> It has been reported that, similarly, Uthman b. Affan enlarged the Quba’ mosque, which inevitably leads to a conclusion that the same building standards had been employed in the case of the latter as well.<sup>17</sup>

According to a narration reported by al-Samahudi, the Quba’ mosque was a hypostyle mosque whose flat roof rested on seven

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<sup>15</sup> Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 1 pp. 251-253.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 8, Hadith 95.

<sup>17</sup> Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 3 p. 809.

columns directly without the intermediary of arches. It had a flight of stairs topped by a dome and used for calls to prayers, which was a structural device that functioned as a precursor to minarets. The device was called *al-nu'amah*. The narration ends by saying that the mosque remained in such a state until the rebuilding and expansion feat by the sixth Umayyad caliph al-Walid b. Abd al-Malik (d. 715). The task was executed by the Caliph's governor in Madinah Umar b. Abd al-Aziz (d. 720).

This narration is an unmistakable indication of the architectural intervention in the Quba' mosque by Uthman b. Affan, for, although the mosque might have had columns as part of a roofing system during the epoch of the Prophet, as seen earlier, it was unconceivable to have domes and elaborate antecedents of minarets during the same time. Thus, the only explanation is that between the Prophet's building of the Quba' mosque and the notable expansion of the same by Umar b. Abd al-Aziz there was an expansion and rebuilding program by Uthman b. Affan.

The reconstruction of the Quba' mosque by Umar b. Abd al-Aziz was historic. It was part of the caliph al-Walid b. Abd al-Malik's architectural accomplishments that made him one of the greatest builders in Islamic civilization and during whose tenure the evolution of the identity of Islamic art and architecture came of age. The Quba' mosque was rebuilt and enlarged using finely carved stone and lime. Its columns were also made of carved stone and were connected with beams made of iron and lead for additional strength. The mosque was decorated with mosaics and was roofed with teak wood. It retained a hypostyle form, featuring riwaqs on all sides that in turn surrounded a courtyard in the centre. The crown of the mosque's originality and innovation was a minaret, which by then was becoming a norm within the lexis of the mosque architecture.<sup>18</sup> In passing, the earliest minarets were built by the first Umayyad caliph Mu'awiyah b. Abi Sufyan (d. 680).

The site of the minaret of the Quba' mosque, according to Majduddin Muhammad al-Fayruzabadi, was the site of an *utum* (a high construction functioning as a fort or a battlement) that belonged to the tribe of Bani Amr bin Auf and which was called 'izzah (power or

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<sup>18</sup> Abu Abdullah b. al-Najjar, *al-Durrah al-Thaminah fi Akhbar al-Madinah*, p. 176.

supremacy). The utum was destroyed and a minaret was built instead.<sup>19</sup> This was the case perhaps because both the minarets and utums (atam) were relatively high-rise structures that demanded a different foundation in terms of strength, building engineering and building materials. Building a minaret over the foundation of an utum, partly or entirely, meant that the building process for the minaret would be faster and effective without compromising quality. Such was important bearing in mind that the notion of the minaret was comparatively new in the Muslim architectural consciousness and cultural outlook. A bit of creativeness and improvisation was not a bad idea at the time.

By the way, most tribes in Madinah had their utums (atam) meant for defence purposes. Some traditions of the Prophet explicitly referred to the utums of Madinah, like the one narrated by al-Bukhari wherein the Prophet is said to have stood on the top of one of the many utums of Madinah and announced: "Do you see what I see? No doubt I am seeing the spots of afflictions amongst your houses as numerous as the spots where raindrops fall (during a heavy rain)."<sup>20</sup> Pursuant to a weak or da'if hadith, the Prophet yet prohibited, or strongly discouraged, destroying the utums of Madinah, saying that they were part of the beautification (charm) of the city.

The Quba' mosque was so solidly built that it withstood the passage of time for more than four centuries. The next benefactor to rebuild it was a person called Jamaluddin (Abu Mansur Muhammad b. Ali al-Asfahani, (d. 1164), who was vizier to the ruler of Mosul in Iraq. The mosque deteriorated structurally to such an extent that a reconstruction was unavoidable. The job was done in the year 1160.<sup>21</sup>

Abu Abdullah b. al-Najjar who died in 1245 and who composed one of the earliest and most reliable references on the history of Madinah called "al-Durrah al-Thaminah fi Akhbar al-Madinah" said that he had seen and measured the mosque following its latest rebuilding. His description of it is as follows.

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<sup>19</sup> Majduddin Muhammad al-Fayruzabadi, *al-Maghanim al-Mutabah fi Ma'alim Tabah*, p. 328.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 46, Hadith 28.

<sup>21</sup> Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 3 p. 810.



The building was almost perfectly square and was about 34 meters both long and wide (68 cubits or dhira', one cubit being about half a meter). It was 10 meters high. The height of the minaret from the ceiling of the mosque to its summit topped by a dome was 11 meters. The dome itself was 5 meters high. The width of the minaret from the qiblah side was 5 meters and from the western side 4 meters. This means that the overall height of the minaret was about 26 meters: 10 meters the height of the mosque, 11 meters the height of the cuboid or square shaft, and 5 additional meters as the height of the dome at the top.<sup>22</sup>

There were 39 columns supporting the mosque's flat roof, the distance between each pair of which was about 4 meters. The mosque had 8 riwaqs running parallel to the qiblah: three riwaqs on the southern qiblah side with three rows of columns and each row featuring 7 columns (21 columns in total); two riwaqs on the opposite northern side with two rows of columns each row also featuring 7 columns (14 columns in total); and three "broken riwaqs" in the middle with two "rows" of columns.<sup>23</sup> These were interrupted by the presence of the central courtyard due to which both the right (eastern) and left (western) ends of the middle riwaqs and their two rows of columns flanking the courtyard had only one column each (4 columns in total).

Based on this, the courtyard was sizeable. It was about 24 meters wide and 12 meters long. Because the mosque was a perfect square, there were likewise 8 riwaqs that run perpendicular to the qiblah: one riwaq with one row of 7 columns on the eastern and western sides each (14 columns altogether), and 6 "broken riwaqs" with 5 rows of columns. However, these were interrupted by the central courtyard, as a result of which each row on the southern qiblah side had three columns (15 columns overall) and each row on the northern side of the courtyard had two columns (10 columns overall).

The walls of the mosque were pierced with windows opening onto the outside. Each wall of the mosque had 8 windows except the wall facing the Sham area (Syria and Palestine) in the north which had one window less. The wall's eighth window was prevented by the presence

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<sup>22</sup> Abu Abdullah b. al-Najjar, *al-Durrah al-Thaminah fi Akhbar al-Madinah*, p. 176.

<sup>23</sup> Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 3 p. 812.

of the attached minaret. The minaret was square and was to the right of the prayer hall (musalla).<sup>24</sup>

### **The Description of the Quba' Mosque by Ibn Jubayr**

When Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217), an Andalusian scholar and traveller, visited Madinah in 1184 – which was two years after Abu Abdullah b. al-Najjar was born - he also witnessed the same form of the Quba' mosque. The account of Ibn Jubayr is truly remarkable and at the same time additionally edifying, in that the focus of his exposition was more than the building's architectural form. He regarded the mosque as a multidimensional complex and a phenomenon whose dimensions were numerous and "beyond computation." Given that he saw the mosque much before Abu Abdullah b. al-Najjar, Ibn Jubayr's description of it ranks among the most authoritative, most authentic and so, most reliable. It is little wonder that Ibn Jubayr and his rihlah or "Travels of Ibn Jubayr" are right on top when it comes to the sources of the classical history of Madinah.

According to Ibn Jubayr: "Quba' lies about two miles to the south of Medina. It was once a large city contiguous with Medina, the venerated. The road to it goes through continuous palm-groves. Medina itself is surrounded by palms, which are most plentiful on the south and east sides, and less so on the west. The mosque founded in Quba' from sentiments of piety has been restored. It is square shaped with straight sides and has a tall white minaret that can be seen from afar. In its midst is the 'Place of Kneeling of the She-Dromedary', that of the Prophet - may God bless and preserve him - which is surrounded by a low enclosure forming a kind of small rawdah in which men pray to acquire blessings. In the south part of the court, on a stone bench, is a species of mihrab that is the place where the Prophet - may God bless and preserve him - performed his first rak'ah. To the south of this are other mihrabs. The mosque has one door only, at the west, and has seven rows of porticoes (rows of columns) through its length and the same number breadthways. South of the mosque is a hut belonging to the Banu al-Najjar that was the dwelling of Abu Ayyub the Ansarite. In an open space west of the mosque is a well beside whose brink stands a broad stone in the form of a trough

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<sup>24</sup> Abu Abdullah b. al-Najjar, *al-Durrah al-Thaminah fi Akhbar al-Madinah*, p. 176.

at which men do their ritual ablutions. Adjacent to the hut of the Banu al-Najjar is that of A'ishah - may God hold her in His favour - and contiguous with that is those of Umar, Fatimah, and Abu Bakr - may God hold them in His favour. Beside them is the well of Aris into which the Prophet - may God bless and preserve him - spat, so that from being brackish its waters became sweet. It was into this well that the Prophet's ring - may God bless and preserve him - fell from the hand of Uthman, and the tradition concerning it is well known."<sup>25</sup>

Several observations can be made concerning the above quotation. First, Ibn Jubayr referred to the notion of multiple mihrabs or praying niches inside the Quba' mosque, just as he did in the context of the holy mosque in Makkah (al-masjid al-haram) and elsewhere. The multiplicity of mihrabs meant the multiplicity - and divergence - not only of congregations, but also systems and methods. The sight stood for the antithesis of unity and accord. This indicates that people were divided according to the provisos of the madhhabs or juristic schools of thought, and even sects, and were expected to perform their prayers and other religious rituals accordingly. People were expected to think in line with the rigidly precast moulds only. There was neither freedom nor broad-mindedness. The mentioned mihrabs or praying niches, surely, were intended to aid the procedure. In this way, religious-cum-sociopolitical disunity and disagreements, which tore into the heart of the Muslim religious and civilizational presence, were cemented rather than healed, and were perpetuated rather than put an end to. However, one would expect that at least the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah with their holy mosques and sites were spared the scourge of disagreements and divisions. What is more, one would expect that they were promoted to function as sources of reconciliation, harmony and perennial hope instead.

Second, it is amazing how the plan of the Quba' mosque managed to integrate and exhibit several notable historical events and places connected with them, both inside and outside. They were so preserved that the mosque served yet as an exhibition hall or a museum, so to speak. The mosque was able to illuminate the minds and gratify the souls of visitors. No person, regardless of the level of his intellectual acumen

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<sup>25</sup> Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, translated by Ronald Broadhurst, (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2001), p. 205.

and spiritual capacity, was able to stay indifferent or uninspired. The mosque furthermore was like a primary historical source which a pilgrim could personally read, awaken and live through. This nevertheless is said in rather general, and even a bit romantic, terms, because several particularized and nuanced disparities, along with many people's misconstruing of and misbehaving vis-à-vis the events in question and their loci within and without the mosque, are not taken into consideration at this particular juncture.

Third, it is rather unclear what Ibn Jubayr meant when he said that Quba' was once a large city attached to Madinah proper.<sup>26</sup> It is normally stated that Quba' was a village consisting of some loosely interrelated settlements. It was only after the hijrah that the suburb started to grow and gradually assume the role of a township. Its growth was steady nevertheless, expanding towards each direction, in particular towards the core of Madinah. The two cities grew towards each other to such an extent that, ultimately, they became merged into one unified urban zone. But this did not come to pass until many centuries after Ibn Jubayr. As if the author suggested that the act of geographical and functional merging once indeed had happened, but the situation somehow reverted to its old self, something that no historian or historical report of any kind has ever suggested.

By the way, in his "Mu'jam al-Buldan" Yaqut al-Hamawi (d. 1229) called Quba' a village;<sup>27</sup> Ibn Battuta (d. 1369) spoke in his travelogue about Quba' and Madinah as two different urban entities separated by continuous palm-estates;<sup>28</sup> J.L. Burckhardt (d. 1817) still described Quba' as a neighbouring village and its mosque as a humble building positioned in the midst of groves and surrounded by about thirty or forty houses only;<sup>29</sup> Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha talked in 1901 about how considerable and at the same time fear-provoking the distance between Madinah and Quba' was, on account of the presence of countless date-palm plantations that resulted in the dearth of settled and "civilized" population, which in turn gave rise to the occurrences of banditry and

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<sup>26</sup> This was repeated by several subsequent historians and travellers including Majduddin Muhammad al-Fayruzabadi (d. 1415) in his "al-Maghanim al-Mutabah fi Ma'alim Tabah", p. 323.

<sup>27</sup> Yaqut al-Hamawi, *Mu'jam al-Buldan*, (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1995), vol. 4 p. 302.

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Battuta, *Rihlah Ibn Battutah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), p. 144.

<sup>29</sup> John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, (London: Henry Colburn, 1829), p. 367.

highway robberies;<sup>30</sup> in 1925, Eldon Rutter still called the Quba' settlement a village; John Philby (d. 1960), having dubbed Quba' a district as late as in 1931, emphasized the conspicuous topography of the place and how distant and separated from Madinah nevertheless it was;<sup>31</sup> two years later in 1933, following the formation of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Lady Evelyn Cobbold (d. 1963), regardless, wrote that between Quba' and the city of Madinah there were "innumerable palm groves."<sup>32</sup>

Fourth, Ibn Jubayr's words that next to the huts or houses (dar) of the Banu al-Najjar were the huts or houses of A'ishah, Umar, Fatimah and Abu Bakr, should not be taken literally. As informed by al-Samahudi, what was called (the locations of) the huts or houses of the latter most probably was indicative of their disembarkation places and the places of their brief stay in the wake of their migration, before proceeding to the city of Madinah.<sup>33</sup>

Fifth, Ibn Jubayr mentioned that to the south of the Quba' mosque there was a hut (i.e., dar, which is also translated as a house) belonging to the Banu al-Najjar, which in fact was the house or dwelling (dar) of a companion Abu Ayyub al-Ansari.<sup>34</sup> However, this is an obvious factual error, for the house of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, who was a member of the Banu al-Najjar tribe, was in the city of Madinah, rather than in Quba'. It was in the courtyard of the said house in Madinah that the Prophet's camel had stopped and the Prophet dismounted, as a result of which – based on what the Prophet had earlier intimated to the people – the Prophet stayed in the house of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari until the Prophet's mosque and his houses as part of the mosque complex in Madinah were completed. The Prophet stayed in the house of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari between seven and twelve months. Other houses of the Banu al-Najjar

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<sup>30</sup> Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha, *Mir'ah al-Haramayn*, (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d), vol. 1 p. 399.

<sup>31</sup> John Philby, *A Pilgrim in Arabia*, (Berkshire: Golden Cockerel Press, 1943), p.69.

<sup>32</sup> Lady Evelyn Cobbold, *Pilgrimage to Mecca*, (London: J. Murray, 1934), p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 3 p. 813.

<sup>34</sup> Majduddin Muhammad al-Fayruzabadi, *al-Maghanim al-Mutabah fi Ma'alim Tabah*, pp. 323-340.

tribe were in the vicinity too. The Prophet's mosque was built on a piece of land that belonged to some members of the tribe.<sup>35</sup>

All in all, it seems that Ibn Jubayr, inexplicably, mistook the Prophet's arrival in Quba' and his building of the Quba' mosque for his subsequent arrival in Madinah and his building of the city's principal mosque (the Prophet's mosque). Since Ibn Jubayr mentioned neither the house of Kulthum b. al-Hadm nor the one of Sa'd b. Khaythama al-Ansari – with which, according to the majority of Muslim scholars and historians, the Prophet's arrival and stay in Quba' had been associated the most, and which the plan of the Quba' mosque had considerably honoured – it could be that, more specifically, Ibn Jubayr mistook these two houses for the houses of the Banu al-Najjar tribe, one of which he supposed belonged to Abu Ayyub al-Ansari. This is all the more astounding considering that all the major books of Islamic history and of the Prophet's biography and his Sunnah in an explicit and comprehensive manner deal with the Prophet's arrival especially from Quba' to Madinah and how the house of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari and the building of the Prophet's mosque complex near it occupied a central position.

#### **The Description of the Quba' Mosque by Ibn Battuta**

The Quba' mosque was next rebuilt in 1273.<sup>36</sup> When Ibn Battuta visited Madinah 53 years later in 1326 what he saw in Quba' was the outcome of this latest rebuilding undertaking. He described the place and its mosque like so: "Another of the holy sanctuaries (in Madinah) is Quba', about two miles to the south of Madinah, and the road between them lies through groves of palms. At Quba' is the mosque which was founded on piety and the desire to please God, a square-built mosque with a tall white minaret visible from a great distance. In the centre of it is the place where the she-camel of the Prophet (God bless and give him peace) knelt down at the end of his journey, and where now people seek to obtain a blessing by performing the prayer. On the southern side of its court there is a mihrab on a platform, which marks the first place in which the Prophet (God bless and give him peace) bowed himself in prayer. South of the mosque is a house, which belonged to Abu Ayyub al-

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<sup>35</sup> Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 8, Hadith 78. Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Book 5, Hadith 13.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3 p. 810.

Ansari (God be pleased with him), and next to it are houses said to have belonged to Abu Bakr, Omar, Fatimah, and A'ishah (God be pleased with them). Facing the mosque is the well of Aris, the one whose water from being brackish became sweet when the Prophet (God bless and give him peace) spat into it. It was into this same well that the holy ring dropped from (the hand of) Uthman (God be pleased with him)."<sup>37</sup>

Almost everything Ibn Battuta said about the Quba' mosque is found in the exposition of Ibn Jubayr. The flow of ideas and the ways they have been exhibited are often exactly like those of Ibn Jubayr, albeit with all the necessary and rather clever abridgements and omissions. Generally speaking, a great deal of what Ibn Battuta wrote in his travels is about partial and complete repetitions of what Ibn Jubayr had reported almost one century and a half before. The repetitions are so recurring and so detailed that one starts deliberating if they bordered on a form of plagiarism. Even Ibn Jubayr's mistaken mention of the house of a companion Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, and his omission of the houses of Kulthum b. al-Hadm and Sa'd b. Khaythama al-Ansari, Ibn Battuta "copied".

This tendency of Ibn Battuta did not remain unnoticed. There are research studies that were dedicated to the matter. According to J.N. Mattock, about 250 pages of Ibn Battuta's "Rihlah (Travels)" have been borrowed more or less directly from Ibn Jubayr's work. This represents about 160 pages of the latter. A certain amount of Ibn Jubayr has been borrowed almost word-perfect.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the translation of Ibn Battuta's travels into English by H.A.R. Gibb with all the notes and comments is executed in such a way that one wonders if the same, in some way, is a comparison of the substance of Ibn Battuta's work and that of Ibn Jubayr.

Moreover, in order to underpin this perplexing style of Ibn Battuta, which extended beyond the case of Ibn Jubayr though, Amikam Elad wrote an academic paper titled "The Description of the Travels of Ibn Battuta in Palestine: Is It Original?" wherein he wanted to demonstrate that large parts of Ibn Battuta's description of his travels in

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<sup>37</sup> Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, translated into English by H.A.R. Gibb, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), vol. 1 p. 180.

<sup>38</sup> J.N. Mattock, *Ibn Battuta's Use of Ibn Jubayr's Rihlah*, Inside: Proceedings of the Ninth Congress of the Union Europeenne Des Arabisants Et Islamisants, Amsterdam, 1-7.9.1978, Edited by: Rudolph Peters, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), pp. 209-218.

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Palestine were in fact copied, with certain abbreviations and deletions, from the records of another Muslim traveller, Muhammad b. Muhammad al-'Abdari.<sup>39</sup>

Hence, the translator of Ibn Battuta's book into English, H.A.R. Gibb, at one point even concluded that "we have consequently to bear in mind that the book is not entirely Ibn Battuta's work."<sup>40</sup> Only twice did Ibn Battuta acknowledge Ibn Jubayr in his book, which was in connection with the description of the city of Damascus.<sup>41</sup> Without doubt, he should have done so more often and more conclusively.

Returning to the subject of the Quba' mosque, it is noteworthy that Ibn Battuta did not say anything about the architectural character of the structure except that it was square-built with a tall white minaret visible from a great distance. Why he did not say more remains a secret. However, in the light of the above, it might be asked if Ibn Battuta really intended to depend exclusively on the accounts of Ibn Jubayr - notwithstanding the fact that he himself indeed visited Quba' - in which case he had to be an opportunist. He had no choice but to bring up only such matters as were permanent and were bound to persist in spite of the challenges of the vagaries of time. Needless to say, then, that the transient and fluctuating aspects of the Quba' mosque - architecture being one of them - had to be passed over. As if the principles of taking no chances and being on the safe side were the main determinant of Ibn Battuta's approach. He did not want to say something with which he could contradict himself or his time, and thus risk the legitimacy of his work. He needed to rise above the variants of the mosque's rebuilding and restoration chapters.

### **The Quba' Mosque under the Mamluks**

Afterwards, the Quba' mosque was partially renovated in 1333 by the Mamluk sultan al-Nasir b. Qalawun (d. 1341). Al-Samahudi reported that there was an inscription in the mosque bearing witness to the subject. He then added that most of the mosque's roof as found in his time was constructed in 1437 by another Mamluk sultan al-Ashraf

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<sup>39</sup> Amikam Elad, *The Description of the Travels of Ibn Battuta in Palestine: Is It Original?*, Inside: Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. 119, No. 2, April 1987, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 256 – 272.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, see "Introduction" p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 118-119.



Barsbay (d. 1438). And finally, when al-Samahudi was 33 years old, in 1473, the minaret of the Quba' mosque collapsed. Three years later, in 1476, it was rebuilt by a person called al-Jinab al-Khawajki who was a construction representative of the Mamluk sultan Qaitbay (d. 1496).<sup>42</sup> The job was integral to sultan Qaitbay's extensive architectural programs in Madinah, including the numerous repair and improvement works at the Prophet's mosque.

As part of the latest activity – whose contemporary al-Samahudi was - the minaret of the Quba' mosque was completely demolished first. It was levelled to its foundation. A segment of the external wall where the minaret had formerly stood was also destroyed and rebuilt; as were some adjacent columns. The affected columns were initially made of stone and lead, but after the latest rebuilding exercise, lead was not used. A window in the northern wall and three windows in the western wall were closed up. Sections of the roof were also improved, while the rebuilt parts of the wall were made much sturdier than before. Since the mosque was a multifunctional complex, some of its external facilities and services were likewise enhanced. When completed over its original foundation, the new minaret was about 31 meters tall and about 5 meters wide. Al-Samahudi admitted that although the new minaret was 5 meters taller than the previous one, the latter was nicer.<sup>43</sup>

Al-Samahudi measured the dimensions of the Quba' mosque as existed during his time, the results of which were as follows. The mosque still had 7 rows of columns forming 8 riwaqs. Its length from the eastern to the western side near the section of the Sham (Syria and Palestine) direction was about 35 meters. Its width from the qiblah to the Sham direction was about 40 meters. Its length from the eastern to the western side near the qiblah section was about 36 meters. From inside, the mosque's height from the ground to the roof was about 10 meters, but from outside, from the pavement on the western side to the highest crenelations, the height was about 12 meters. The length of the courtyard from the eastern to the western side was about 26 meters, and from the southern qiblah side to the northern Sham side it was about 13.5 meters.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 3 p. 810.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., vol. 3 p. 810.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., vol. 3 p. 811.

Apart from the mosque itself, al-Samahudi recommended the following places to be visited too, in order for the benefits of the Quba' visit to be completed. The first was the house of Sa'd b. Khaythama al-Ansari which the Prophet had visited, stayed for a while in it and prayed in its private "mosque". The closed western door of the Quba' mosque – as per the mosque's configuration in al-Samahudi's time - indicated the location of the front yard of the house. The house itself was near the mosque's qiblah. People used to visit the area adjoining the said closed door of the Quba' mosque, calling it for some reason the mosque of Ali b. Abi Talib. There almost certainly was a structure there or thereabouts. It was erected for the purpose of a mosque which some people called the mosque of Ali b. Abi Talib and others the mosque of the (house of) Sa'd b. Khaythama al-Ansari. People as well used to visit the site of the house proper next to the Quba' mosque's qiblah wall.

The second was (the location of) the house of Kulthum b. al-Hadm where the Prophet and his family, and Abu Bakr and his own family, had stayed as they were arriving in stages from Makkah. This house, too, was located near the qiblah of the Quba' mosque. People used to enter the place for visit and to seek divine blessings as well as grace.

And the third place al-Samahudi recommended to be visited was the well of Aris, which faced the mosque on the western side.<sup>45</sup> The water of this well was brackish, but after the Prophet had spat into it, it became sweet. It was into this same well that the Prophet's ring fell from the hand of Uthman b. Affan.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Case of Abu Salim al-Ayyashi**

The last person to be considered under the category of early or classical Muslim visitors and scholars is Abu Salim al-Ayyashi (d. 1679), a Moroccan scholar, Sufi master and traveller. His celebrated book on travels is "al-Rihlah al-'Ayyashiyyah". However, since he died 174 years after al-Samahudi, whom he regarded as his main reference on Madinah, and since his time signified an epoch when the Hijaz territories were under the absolute Ottoman control, Abu Salim al-Ayyashi's epoch could

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<sup>45</sup> To some scholars and visitors, like Ibrahim Rif'at Pasha in 1901, the distance between the Aris well and the Quba' mosque was about two hundred meters, and the location of the well was to the north-west of the mosque.

<sup>46</sup> Ali b. Ahmad al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 3 pp. 812-813, 875.

also be seen as the final stage of a transition from the Islamic classical times to the premodern ones. Al-Samahudi was the personification of the Islamic classicism in Madinah.

Abu Salim al-Ayyashi arrived in Madinah in 1662. He spent seven months and a half in the city, after which he proceeded to Makkah for his second hajj. He left Madinah about two weeks before the holy month of Ramadan.<sup>47</sup>

Abu Salim al-Ayyashi's account of the Quba' mosque is rather detailed. He cites only the true information, backing them up with reliable sources. His main point of reference is al-Samahudi, whose intellectual presence, not only during the former's visit, but also ever afterwards, towered over the scholarly horizons of the holy city of Madinah. The exposition of the story of the Quba' mosque is placed under the title "Referencing the mosques that are visited in Madinah owing to their association with the Prophet." The Quba' mosque is the first mosque explained.

Abu Salim al-Ayyashi deliberated the history and religious significance of the mosque first, reiterating the views of the mainstream Muslim scholars. He then disclosed that he went to the place after the fajr or dawn prayer. Upon arriving and entering the mosque, he performed a voluntary prayer at the supposed location of the Prophet's prayer, admitting at the same time that there were other places deemed to be the sites of the Prophet's prayer(s). He mentioned two such sites: one in the mosque's courtyard and the other in the eastern corner or end of the first row (of columns), adding that al-Samahudi "referred to all of them (the potential sites) and explained them in the most comprehensive way."<sup>48</sup>

Abu Salim al-Ayyashi wrote that outside the Quba' mosque, near its qiblah or southern side, there was the mosque of Ali b. Abi Talib, about which he said – again on the strength of the authority of al-Samahudi – that it was confused or mixed up with the location of the mosque of the house of Sa'd b. Khaythama al-Ansari, which the Prophet had visited and in which he had lain down and had taken ablution. The location of the

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<sup>47</sup> Abu Salim al-Ayyashi, *al-Rihlah al-Ayyashiyyah*, (Abu Dhabi: Dar al-Swidi, 2006), vol. 1 p. 423.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1 pp. 387-388.

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house of Kulthum b. al-Hadm, also near the Quba' mosque's qiblah side, wherein the Prophet had resided, is further mentioned. At its site there was a small mosque whose identity was unknown. Apparently, Abu Salim al-Ayyashi enquired about the mosque but admitted: "We did not find anyone who could name the mosque to us."

Near the Quba' mosque, on the eastern side, there was a huge dumping ground. It marked the place of the mosque of mischief (*masjid al-dirar*) which the hypocrites of Madinah had built with the intention of rivalling the Quba' mosque, as a result of which the Prophet was instructed to demolish it. As the last element of the Quba' mosque complex, Abu Salim al-Ayyashi mentioned the well of Aris from whose blessed water he had drunk. At the end of his account, the author put emphasis on the fact that he was so happy to have visited the Quba' mosque in which he repeatedly performed voluntary prayers, possibly as many as ten prayers. He was aware of the heavenly rewards thus procured.

Abu Salim al-Ayyashi next mentioned something exceptional and revealing. He said that outside the Quba' mosque, on its western side, there was a huge *ribat* (hospice or hostel) elegantly built of hewed stone. It contained many residences which were occupied by strangers and wayfarers (*ghuraba'*). The *ribat* was sustained by means of *awqaf* or endowments.<sup>49</sup>

In the context of the history of Islamic civilization the concept of *ribat* implies several things. It could mean a fortification, a hostel, an educational institution, and a Sufi hospice or retreat. All things considered, what was in the vicinity of the Quba' mosque in the 16<sup>th</sup> century should have been a combination of the last two, i.e., a blend of an educational institution and a Sufi hospice. Nobody mentioned this institution before because most of the historians and scholars that wrote about Madinah before the instance of Abu Salim al-Ayyashi lived ahead of the establishment of the Ottoman rule in the Hijaz. In passing, the arrival of the Ottoman administration in the Hijaz occurred in 1517 after the sultan Selim I had defeated the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt. The Hijaz was under the Mamluk suzerainty, which means that the Ottoman authority over the Hijaz instantaneously became inevitable.

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1 pp. 387-388.

One of the doctrines of the Ottoman Empire, which at times was an official one and at other times a widely tolerated one, was Sufism. Thus, the Ottoman ruling classes supported a variety of Sufi paths or schools of thought, both conceptually and institutionally. The cities of Makkah and Madinah were no exceptions. However, it cannot be overlooked that before the Ottomans, especially during the reign of the Mamluks, what could be dubbed the phenomena of institutionalization and even politicization of Sufism, existed, but the same under the Ottoman patronage came to a crescendo.

It seems as though the Ottoman proselytization efforts with regard to Sufism were well under way and were yielding results in Madinah at the time of the visit of Abu Salim al-Ayyashi. That was exactly 145 years following the establishment of the Ottoman control in the Hijaz. The existence of the ribat in question, and the existence of other full-fledged or partial Sufi institutions, were some of those results. Even if the Ottomans did not openly stimulate the proliferation of Sufism and Sufi fraternities in the Hijaz, there must have been an upsurge in the trend on account of several undercurrents taking advantage of the Ottoman liberal outlook.

Abu Salim al-Ayyashi was a Sufi scholar. To the caretaker of the mentioned ribat near the Quba' mosque he referred as "our associate or colleague (*sahibuna*)", whose name was Salih b. Ahmad al-Yamani. The man was a Shaikh (evidently a Sufi guru himself). His repute was fairly illustrious, to the point that Abu Salim al-Ayyashi appended the pronunciation of his name with the words "may Allah be pleased with him",<sup>50</sup> which is normally reserved for the Prophet's companions and for such succeeding scholarly and religious luminaries as commanded extraordinary standings.

The additional evidence that the stated ribat adjacent to the Quba' mosque was a Sufi institution - which Abu Salim al-Ayyashi in his capacity as a Sufi master and scholar was very happy to introduce to his audience and to be associated with, one way or another - was the compelling reality that much of Abu Salim al-Ayyashi's stay in Madinah was related to ribats, tombs and funerary complexes of saints, and meetings with the likeminded people spirituality-wise. In short, the man

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., vol. 1 p. 388.

was a Sufi and almost everything he did was relatable to the world of Sufism. To give some examples, while in Madinah Abu Salim al-Ayyashi first stayed in a ribat and funerary complex of a saint Ismail b. Ja'far al-Sadiq, then in another ribat attributed to Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166), a famous jurist, theologian and the founder of the Qadiriyyah Sufi tariqah or order. While the first ribat was rather far from the Prophet's mosque, lying next to Madinah's graveyard called al-Baqi', in view of which going to the Prophet's mosque for daily prayers posed a challenge, the latter ribat was merely three steps away.

Abu Salim al-Ayyashi admitted that, while staying in the second ribat, he felt extremely blessed by the proximity of the Prophet's mosque. However, the blessings were further increased by the presence in the same ribat of a Sufi master from the Naqshbandi Sufi order whose name was Jamaluddin al-Hindi al-Naqshbandi. Abu Salim al-Ayyashi revealed that he capitalized on this privileged proximity to the Shaikh, regularly having an audience with him and performing muraqabah or meditation. In this second ribat Abu Salim al-Ayyashi resided for about a month.<sup>51</sup>

All of Abu Salim al-Ayyashi's discussions in his two-volume book "al-Rihlah al-Ayyashiyyah" centre either on Islamic scholarship or on elements of Sufism. He even referred to Shaikh Muhyuddin Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240), the greatest Sufi Shaikh and the father of what could be called the speculative Sufism, adding an exclamation "may Allah be pleased with him".<sup>52</sup>

Having thus established that the ribat institution near the Quba' mosque was a Sufi institution and that it was one of many qualified or out-and-out Sufi institutions in Madinah, it behoves us to point out that the institution, most probably, was the same as the one mentioned by John Lewis Burckhardt in 1814-1815, who wrote that "near to the mosque of Quba' stands a building erected by Sultan Morad for dervishes (Sufis)."<sup>53</sup> The referred to sultan Morad should be either Murad III who died in 1595 or Murad IV who died in 1640. He could not be Murad V because the latter died in 1904, long after Burckhardt's visit to Makkah and Madinah; nor could he be either Murad I or Murad II because these two died in 1389 and 1451 respectively, long before the Hijaz came

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., vol. 1 pp. 372-380, 425.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., vol. 1 p. 505.

<sup>53</sup> John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, p. 369.

under the Ottoman rule. At any rate, the Quba' ribat should have been relatively new at the time of Abu Salim al-Ayyashi's visit, operating at full capacity, but not so, and was possibly even worn-down – unless renovated of late – at the time of Burckhardt's visit.

This is what Burckhardt had to say about the qualitative and quantitative presence of Sufis (called dervishes consistent with the ubiquitous Turkish lexis and culture) during the hajj season he himself attended. The report is loaded. It reveals that Sufis were numerous and were representing different tariqahs or orders and geographical regions. Some were sincere and pious, while others were phony and irreverent. They must have found the holy cities convenient and homelike insofar as their calling was involved. Inasmuch as many pilgrims were inclined to prolong their stay in the holy cities – as Abu Salim al-Ayyashi and his company had in fact done – and if possible yet to settle permanently there, a great many Sufis felt the same urge. They believed that Makkah and Madinah were their spiritual and potentially biological home too.

Burckhardt wrote: "Dervishes of every sect and order in the Turkish Empire are found among the pilgrims; many of them madmen, or at least assuming the appearance of insanity, which causes them to be much respected by the hadjis, and fills their pockets with money. The behaviour of some of them is so violent, and at the same time so cunning, that even the least charitably disposed hadjis give willingly something to escape from them. They mostly come from other countries; for among the Arabians themselves there are fewer crazy of these people than in other parts of the east. Egypt chiefly abounds with them; and almost every village in the valley of the Nile furnishes some Masloub, or reputed madman, whom the inhabitants regard as an inspired being, and a blessing sent to them from heaven."<sup>54</sup>

Burckhardt also said that there were "numerous dervishes from Persia, Tartary and the realms watered by the Indus."<sup>55</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The remarkable importance of the Quba' mosque is undisputed. It lies in the truths that it is the fourth mosque in Islam to which a

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

religious excursion can be undertaken, that it was built by the Prophet himself, and that it resided at the core of the first and certainly most pivotal chapters of the history of Islam and its civilization. As such, the Quba' mosque featured prominently on the list of the legitimate places of visitation in the holy city of Madinah. Such a sacrosanct legacy translated itself into the creation of a unique Muslim consciousness vis-à-vis the mosque, with the early Muslim scholars and visitors adopting different ways and means to appreciate and document the outlook. This chapter was an effort towards capturing that sentiment and analysing some of its foremost manifestations. The discussion extended from the dawn of the Islamic presence in Madinah till the age and contributions of al-Samahudi who was the personification of the Islamic classicism in the Prophet's city, and also the age and contributions of Abu Salim al-Ayyashi whose case signified a transition from the Islamic classical times to the premodern ones.

All things considered, the Quba' region and its mosque - where the Prophet had arrived first, had organized the community, and had founded the first multipurpose institution of Islam (the mosque) - functioned as the gateway to everything the holy city of Madinah subsequently represented. It was the latter's microcosm. As a community development centre, the Quba' mosque signified a watershed in the history of Islam and its civilization. It was a threshold between the old Makkan sphere and a new revolutionary one in Madinah. It was a portal to the future, and by extension, to infinity. This could be one of the reasons why the Prophet used to frequent the Quba' mosque, advising his followers to follow suit, and reminding that a visit to and a prayer in the mosque is equivalent to umrah or the lesser pilgrimage. Which connotes that travelling to the Quba' mosque, in point of fact, means revisiting an essential aspect of the origins and beginnings of everything Islamic. It connotes not going, but returning and also journeying back in time. It connotes a pilgrimage - a private spiritual odyssey - par excellence.

After the Prophet and his companions (sahabah), in their capacity as the makers and eyewitnesses of the history and legacy of the Quba' mosque, people worked painstakingly to preserve the incredible status of the mosque. They did so by honouring and, whenever possible, uplifting its religiosity, historicity and architecturality. They did so, furthermore, by replenishing the milieu and by renewing the "clothing"



whose aim was to frame and aid the mosque's ever-vibrant spirit and purpose. Unquestionably, the Quba' mosque's historical legacy was always the result of a subtle interplay between the permanency of quintessence and canons and the impermanency of the exigencies of time and space factors. It was a marvel that consisted of the abiding soul and transient body. It was a locus where heaven and earth convened, with the human agency subsisting at the convergence point and striving to attend to the enticement of the infinite potentials of the former and the sobriety of the practical necessities of the latter.

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