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The Contributions of the Mamluks to the Architecture of the Prophet's Mosque

Sumbangan Dinasti Mamluk kepada Senibina Masjid Nabawi

Spahic Omer *

Abstract

This paper discusses the contributions of the Mamluks to the architecture and development of the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah. The main discussion lays emphasis on two major issues: Making the Mosque in the Mamluk architectural image, and the maturation of architectural deviations. In order to make them more comprehensible, the two thrusts are preceded by a brief account of a religio-political context that existed prior to and at the time when the Mamluks started to assert their authority, both locally and internationally. In the sheer context of the architectural development of the Mosque, the Mamluks unmistakably showed why they are regarded as some of the greatest patrons of art and architecture in the history of Islamic civilization. But in terms of how they dealt with the prevalent architectural deviations, the Mamluks could be recognized both as victims of the established nonconformist architectural tendencies and trends, and as active protagonists in their further nurturing and spreading.

Keywords: The Mamluks, the Prophet's Mosque, Madinah, architectural deviations.

Abstrak

Kertas kajian ini membincangkan sumbangan 'Mamluk' kepada seni bina dan pembangunan Masjid Nabi di Madinah. Perbincangan utama kajian ini menekankan kepada dua isu utama: pembinaan Masjid dalam imej seni bina 'Mamluk', dan penyelewengan seni bina. Untuk menjadikannya lebih mudah difahami, terdapat dua teras yang perlu didahului, iaitu satu ringkasan tentang konteks agama-politik yang wujud sebelum zaman penguasaan 'Mamluk' dan pada masa 'Mamluk' meluaskan kuasa mereka, samada di dalam dan di luar negara. Dalam konteks pembangunan seni bina Masjid, 'Mamluk' membuktikan mereka adalah salah satu pelukis seni bina terkemuka dalam sejarah tamadun Islam. Tetapi dari segi menangani penyelewengan seni bina, 'Mamluk' juga dikenali sebagai mangsa kepada seni bina yang tidak konvensional, dan sebagai protagonis aktif dalam memupuk dan menyebarkan.

Kata Kunci: Mamluk, Masjid Nabi, Madinah, penyelewengan seni bina.

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Introduction

Prior to the Mamluks, the Prophet's Mosque was significantly expanded four times, by Caliphs 'Umar b. al-Khattab (d. 24 AH/644 CE), 'Uthman b. 'Affan (d. 36 AH/656 CE), al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik (d. 97 AH/ 715 CE) and al-Mahdi Muhammad b. 'Abdullah al-Mansur (d. 169 AH/785 CE). When the Mamluks embarked on doing the same, they continued a well-established tradition. This paper intends to dwell on the contributions of the Mamluks to the architectural development of the Prophet's Mosque. The paper shows that those contributions rendered the Mosque in a Mamluk architectural image, underlining, on the one hand, the distinction of the Mamluk architectural predilection, passion, genius and flair, as well as their penchant for certain architectural deviations which around those times were displaying signs of their conceptual and palpable maturation, on the other.

Hence, the main discussion in the paper revolves around two chief thrusts: 1) making the Mosque in a Mamluk architectural image; and 2) the maturation of architectural deviations. Those two thrusts are preceded by a brief narrative of a religio-political context prior to and at the time when the Mamluks, as a regional Muslim political elite that acted as the proxies or procurators of the degraded Abbasid establishment, began making waves, both locally and internationally. This is so because the former is better understood when studied against the backdrop of the latter, in that the two are joined in an unfastened causal relationship wherein the religio-political context denotes one of the causes, and the Mamluk architectural legacy, with regard to the Mosque, denotes to a certain extent an effect.

A Religio-Political Context

The Mamluk dynasty officially commenced in 648 AH/1250 CE. It was regarded as a direct continuation of the Ayyubid dynasty of Kurdish origin that ruled much of the Middle East during the 6th and 7th AH/12th and 13th CE centuries. The Ayyubids, too, were centered in Egypt. The Mamluks were able to present themselves to the rest of the Muslim world as the successors of Saladin (Salahuddin al-Ayyubi, d. 589 AH/1193 CE), the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty and a hero of the Muslim struggle against the Crusaders. The Mamluks were also seen as the upholders of Islamic orthodoxy. Their remarkable legacy was based on the verity that they maintained a steady and successful defense for more than half a century against repeated Mongol incursions in Syria and

the Hijaz. At the same time they flushed out the Crusaders and the Armenians of Cilicia from their remaining strongholds and thereby established a grip on the Levant which was not to be broken until the Ottoman conquest in 923 AH/1517 CE. In addition, they picked up the campaign of rescinding the religious and political influences of the Shi'ah Fatimids where the Ayyubids had left off. And finally, The Mamluks inherited not only the prestige of Baghdad, but also – because it housed the Abbasid caliph, even though he was no more than a puppet – the religio-political authority that was inseparably linked to the institution of the caliphate.¹

In the field of art and architecture, the Mamluks were generous patrons. Their generosity was matchless to the point that their architecture is generally regarded as a flowering of Muslim art. Apart from their inherent refined talent and taste, their case was boosted also by the fact that when the Mongol invasions created a widespread refuge crisis in the Eastern parts of the Islamic empire, Cairo was the obvious haven for the displaced craftsmen from Iraq and Iran which hitherto comprised a number of flourishing centers of Muslim art and culture.² Moreover, trade and agriculture flourished under the Mamluks. Consequently, Cairo, as their capital, became one of the wealthiest cities in the Middle East and the center of artistic and intellectual activity. It was dotted with majestic and imposing domes, buildings' splendid façades, front entrances or porticos, courtyards and soaring minarets. Thus, Ibn Khaldun praised the city highly as a cultural center, describing it as “the capital of the world, the garden of the universe, the meeting place of mankind”.³

The difficult circumstances in which the Mamluks' first official contacts with and engagements in the architecture of the Prophet's Mosque came to pass were somewhat an indication and reminder of the depressing state of affairs of the whole Muslim community (*ummah*). The whole thing was a lesson and thus, should have served as an eye-opener to all. The situation also presented the Mamluks with an opportunity to rise to the occasion and further assert their authority as the *de facto* leaders of the Muslim world in the Middle East. Being true to themselves and their gigantic political ambitions and plans, the Mamluks

¹ Hillenbrand Robert, *Islamic Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), pp. 139-140. Hitti Philip K., *History of the Arabs* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 671. Muir Sir William, *The Mameluke or Slave Dynasty of Egypt* (London: Smith, Elder & CO, 1896), pp. 7-32.

² Hillenbrand Robert, *Islamic Art and Architecture*, p. 140.

³ Fischel Walter J., *Ibn Khaldun and Tamerlane* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952), p. 74.

hardly hesitated to get the most out of what they had been confronted with insofar as the necessary architectural evolution and development of the Mosque was concerned, boosting thereby their religious and political prospects.

Hence, it was almost at the same time as the Mamluks had burst onto the Muslim political scene that the Mongol scourge was most intense, reaching its peak, and that a first devastating fire caught the Mosque and burned down much of the Prophet's tomb -- or the honorable burial chamber that contained the Prophet's grave and the graves of his two companions and successors: Abu Bakr and 'Umar b. al-Khattab -- significant portions of the Mosque's double roof, and much of its rich and exquisite decoration that dated back to the earlier expansion and restoration exercises, especially the most historic one undertaken by the Umayyad caliph al-Walid and his governor in Madinah 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz.⁴ When the fire engulfed and burned the Mosque in the holy month of Ramadan in 654 AH/1256 CE, many people regarded the incident as an act as well as portent of God aimed to remind the people of their most authentic and pressing duties as the servants of God and followers of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The fire was also meant to purify one of the holiest Muslim sites of its relative physical and metaphysical impurities associated with the architectural form and overall function of the Mosque, which were accumulated over ages by diverse socio-political players and their often somewhat different spiritual proclivities and alignments.⁵ Metaphorically speaking, just as the holy month of Ramadan and the noble act of fasting in it "scorch" and "whittle away" people's sins, as well as purify their bodies, minds and souls, so did the fire accomplish the same, so to speak, to the Mosque, and indirectly, by means of serving as a spiritual sign and caveat, to the people.

From the very beginning, the Mosque was meant to serve to Muslims as a catalyst for a total bona fide civilizational awareness and progress. It was to function through an orb of its meanings and services as a unifying, not dividing, factor. Indeed, anything short of that was deemed inappropriate and so, unacceptable. For example, according to al-Samahudi⁶ -- a historian and a contemporary of the latter Mamluks who

⁴ Badr 'Abd al-Basit, *Al-Tarikh al-Shamil li al-Madinah al-Munawwarah* (Madinah: npp, 1993), vol. 2 p. 233.

⁵ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1997), vol. 2 p. 600.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 2 p. 600.

died in 911 AH/1505 CE and who in principle agreed that the fire was a purification act -- Madinah and its Mosque at the time of the fire were under the firm control of the extremist Shi'ah, with the city's magistrate or judge (*qadi*) and *khatib* (the person who delivered sermons in the Mosque) being from them. The situation was such that nobody from the Sunni ranks was able to openly study the Sunni books.

On the word of another historian and the Mamluks' contemporary, Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH/1372 CE)⁷, the burning down of the Mosque was a harbinger and precursor of catastrophic things to come. What Ibn Kathir had meant were the forthcoming and deeper divisions among Muslims, the destruction of the capital city of Baghdad at the hands of the Mongols, followed by the slaying of the incumbent Abbasid caliph, a subsequent period of three years and a half when the leadership of the Muslim state was in limbo and without an actual caliph, a period of total ignominy when the institution of the Abbasid caliphate was reinstalled in Egypt under the patronage of the Mamluks, but the caliphs were mere puppets in the latter's hands and were every so often inaugurated and removed on a whim, etc.⁸

The Mosque got burned approximately six years after the official political investiture of the Mamluks. Such was a time of transition and the gradual consolidation of power. Following the Mosque's inferno, the people of Madinah with their local *Amir* (ruler) contacted the Abbasid caliph, al-Musta'sim (d. 656 AH/1258 CE), who was the last reigning Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, for help. They did so because renovating the Mosque in an appropriate and quality manner was beyond the building technology and engineering capacities of the city.⁹ However, having been engrossed in desperate battles for personal survival and the survival of the regime against the Mongols, the Caliph responded in a rather lukewarm fashion. He did not act on the plea of Madinah as swiftly as must have been expected and necessary. He is reported to have sent some workers and the necessary tools and provisions some time later with the Iraqi pilgrimage (*hajj*) mission. However, the full-fledged refurbishment job could not start until the end of the pilgrimage season, after multitudes of pilgrims had returned home, that is, in the early 655 AH/1257 CE.¹⁰ But before that, only some areas of the Mosque were cleared of the ash-

⁷ Ibn Kathir Abu al-Fida', *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1985), vol. 13 p. 206.

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 13 pp. 206-245.

⁹ Badr 'Abd al-Basit, *Al-Tarikh al-Shamil li al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*, vol. 2 p. 233.

¹⁰ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 601.

es, trash and fallen shards and charred wreckages in order to be provisionally used for prayers and other Mosque-related activities.

The predicament became all the more conspicuous when the work commenced. As a consequence of the Mosque's inferno, the Mosque's roof above the Prophet's honorable burial chamber collapsed on the roof of the chamber. The latter then with the debris from the Mosque's roof caved in, bringing down some rubble onto the Prophet's grave and the graves of his two companions. When the work on the Mosque restoration started and the people realized that some debris had fallen inside the chamber above the graves, they panicked without knowing what to do. They were unsure if removing the debris and cleaning the chamber and its graves would be an act of submissiveness and reverence, or otherwise. Thus, some members of the political and religious leadership in the city, who were most closely associated with the Mosque, hastened to contact again the Caliph in Baghdad and seek his counsel as to what course of action to be undertaken. They agreed that whatever the Caliph decided would be their decision, too, implying thereby the extent of both the worldly and religious authority which the office of the caliphate had still enjoyed.¹¹ As a small digression, the Caliph was head of state and had overall authority for religious and organizational matters. He was also a reference in religious law, expressing all the more the size and convolution of a peril the Muslim state was confronted with once, caliph-less, it was plunged into a political chaos. Correspondingly, it expressed the extent of an urgency to find a feasible and pragmatic solution for the calamity, at both conceptual and operational planes.

However, the plea from Madinah fell on deaf ears in Baghdad because the Caliph, members of his government and the whole affected population were fighting for their lives against the Mongols' seemingly unstoppable advances. Finally, the Mongol (Tatar) ruler, Hulagu Khan, sacked Baghdad on February 10, 1258 CE (656 AH), causing great loss of life. Al-Musta'sim, the last Abbasid caliph in Baghdad was then executed on February 20, 1258 CE.¹²

Having received no response whatsoever from Baghdad, the people of Madinah proceeded on their own with the mammoth task of cleaning up and repairing the Mosque. Though the history books do not mention it, they seem to have been helped, yet led, by the Iraqi workers earli-

¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2 p. 601.

¹² Ibn Iyas Muhammad b. Ahmad, *Bada'i' al-Zuhur fi Waqa'i' al-Duhur* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Masriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitab, 1975), vol. 1 p. 297.

er sent by the Caliph. However, as soon as the work got underway, some of the glaring deficiencies caused by the perennial problems that were besetting Madinah as a microcosm of the Muslim *ummah*, started manifesting themselves.

Firstly, on the spiritual and somewhat psychological planes, the Prophet's burial chamber was enclosed and roofed without doing away with the debris that had fallen into it and above its graves, something that had left the historian of Madinah, al-Samahudi, greatly puzzled.¹³ They did so under the pretext of piety, respect and Islamic decorum. Even some technical difficulties were used as an excuse, as suggested by al-Qu'aiti.¹⁴ At best, however, such was an outright flawed and untimely judgement, even though caused by pure and good intentions. At worst, the action might have amounted to a collective act of negligence and disregard for the chamber and its graves.

Secondly, with regard to the building technology and engineering flair and capacities, the restoration job was rather too slow, stretched and even somewhat incompetent. That might have been the case owing to the lack of appropriate building materials and tools. Limited expertise might have been the cause as well. Hence, throughout the year 655 AH/1257 CE, the refurbishment work yielded only the roofing of the honorable burial chamber and some of its adjacent areas towards east, west and south. To be precise, the partial repair work embraced mostly the ceiling, extending from the burial chamber to the eastern wall up to the gate or *Bab Jibril*, southward as far as the *qiblah* wall and from the west, right up to the *minbar* (pulpit). All this took place only in the southeastern sector of the Mosque.¹⁵ By all accounts, that was too little and too modest a construction output if compared with the swiftness and efficiency of the two previous major expansions of the Mosque, by the Umayyad caliph al-Walid and the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi, the first one lasting from the beginning till the end only about three years, and the second one about three years and a half.

Hence, for subsequent refurbishment works, significant help, especially in terms of providing building materials, such as timber, and construction tools, was needed and received especially from Egypt. Some assistance and support arrived from Yemen as well. At any rate, it was

¹³ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 601.

¹⁴ Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2007), p. 125.

¹⁵ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 603. Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 125.

then that the Mamluks and their architectural penchant began rising in Madinah, having already risen to the occasion when called upon in Egypt and Syria in the domains of military and political affairs. Certainly, it was not a chance that such developments coincided with each other. If the latter, that is, military and political dominance in Egypt and Syria, was a phenomenon, as well as a course of action, that were as much premeditated and planned as dictated and shaped by a range of external factors, the former, that is, making political overtures in Madinah under the guise of architecture and the prospect of repairing the Mosque, was an occurrence instigated and sustained entirely by the Mamluks themselves and their inclusive political strategies. It was a product of an amalgam of a Mamluk sense of responsibility towards the people and their well-being, as a direct implication of their rise to power, and the increasing Mamluk opportunistic tendencies boosted by their relentless political, military and even cultural expansionist ambitions.

Making the Mosque in a Mamluk Architectural Image

The first Mamluk ruler who made the first tangible architectural contribution to the restoration program of the Mosque was al-Mansur 'Ali (d. 657 AH/1259 CE). He was the second -- or the third -- Mamluk Sultan, which depended on whether the lady Shajar al-Durr (d. 655 AH/1257 CE) was the first Mamluk Sultan, or not, who was the wife firstly of al-Salih Ayyub (d. 647 AH/1249 CE), one of the last Ayyubid Sultans in Egypt, then of 'Izz al-Din Aybak (d. 655 AH/1257 CE) the first -- or second, in case Shajar al-Durr is recognized as the first -- Mamluk Sultan. Sultan al-Mansur 'Ali is said to have contributed building tools and implements. His contributions are mentioned in the context of the events of the year 656 AH/1258, the same year in which the city of Baghdad had been conquered and devastated by the Mongols. In the same year, additional tools and building materials also arrived from Yemen.¹⁶

However, it is unlikely that Sultan al-Mansur 'Ali did earlier anything noteworthy in relation to the subject of the Mosque restoration. He was appointed the Sultan in 655 AH/1257 CE, approximately one year before his first recorded contribution to the Mosque. He was then only twenty one years old. During the first year of his reign, he must have been quite busy cleaning up the political mess he had inherited from his

¹⁶ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 604.

father, ‘Izz al-Din Aybak, and aligning as well as firming up the Mamluk pretensions to power.¹⁷ Since it was the beginning of a new political era for the whole of the Middle East, as well as the city of Madinah, work on the renovation of the Mosque was still slow-moving. During the entire year 656 AH/1258 CE, and perhaps the beginning of 657 AH/1259 CE, only the roof near the gate called the *Bab al-Salam*, which was formerly known as the *Bab Marwan*, was restored.¹⁸

After Sultan al-Mansur ‘Ali, the mantle of the Mamluk leadership passed to Qutuz (d. 658 AH/1260 CE). It was under his headship that the Mamluks crashed the Mongols in the key battle of ‘*Ayn Jalut* in Palestine in 658 AH/1260 CE.¹⁹ One of the most significant outcomes of the battle was the fact that such was the first time that a Mongol advance had been irreversibly halted, smashing forever the myth of Mongol invincibility. Consequently, although his reign was short, lasting less than a year, Sultan Qutuz remained one of the most popular Mamluk sultans with a reputation bordering on legend. However, despite the brevity of his reign, during which he took on and impeded the menace of the Mongols, the Sultan also managed to complete the roofing work on the Prophet’s Mosque required between the *Bab al-Salam* and the *Bab Jibril* and also eastwards, up to the *Bab al-Nisa’* in the *qiblah* zone.²⁰

Sultan Qutuz was succeeded by Sultan Baybars (d. 676 AH/1277 CE). The latter’s reign marked the true beginning of a Mamluk political, military and cultural dominance. He managed to “pave the way for the end of the Crusader presence in the Levant and reinforced the union of Egypt and Syria as the region’s pre-eminent Muslim state, able to fend off threats from both Crusaders and Mongols”.²¹ In addition, he fostered public works, built and beautified mosques, established religious endowments, built learning institutions, improved canals, harbors and fortifications, and added to the security of the state by a swift post between Damascus and the capital Cairo. In the year following his enthronement, Baybars conceived the design of reestablishing the Abbasid caliphate in Cairo which, two or three years before, had been swept away. He re-

¹⁷ Ibn Iyas Muhammad b. Ahmad, *Bada’i’ al-Zuhur fi Waqa’i’ al-Duhur*, vol. 1 p. 296.

¹⁸ Al-Samahudi ‘Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa’ al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 604.

¹⁹ Taghribirdi Jamaluddin, *Al-Nujum al-Zahirah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1992), vol. 7 p. 73. Al-Maqrizi Abu al-‘Abbas, *Al-Khitat* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1998), vol. 3 p. 414.

²⁰ Al-Qu’aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 126.

²¹ *Baibars*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baibars> (accessed on October 22, 2013).

quired his throne to be thus strengthened against the jealousies of former comrades, as well as against the efforts of the Shi'ah to restore the Fatiimid dynasty. "A Caliph of the orthodox faith would put an end to such intrigue, and confer legitimacy upon the (Mamluk) crown." By and large, Baybars was a wise and competent administrator, succeeding in establishing his popularity and power both at home and abroad.²²

Baybars' stately prowess and ambitions extended to and greatly impacted on the holy places of Makkah and Madinah as well. His architectural benefaction and patronage, in the same way, affected the fate of the on-going, albeit agonizingly sluggish, restoration -- as well as further artistic and architectural enhancement -- of the Prophet's Mosque. Thus, it was not by coincidence that it was Sultan Baybars who finished off the remaining work on the roof and provided the Mosque with a double or false ceiling also, just as it used to have before the fire, except in the northern sector, which had only a single roof. In the same sector, the Mosque had four colonnades instead of the former five.²³

As an illustration of how the restoration work before Baybars was erratic and inept, the Prophet's honorable burial chamber, so severely affected by the fire, was merely sheltered by a humble temporary, wooden roofing and five layers of waxed cloth.²⁴ Admittedly, neither the first few Mamluk Sultans, nor anybody else who had a hand in controlling and administering the city of Madinah from within or without, could do significantly more both in terms of quality and quantity of the restoration work. All plans for comprehensive efforts had fallen into abeyance due to the consuming conflicts with the Mongols that culminated in the fall of Baghdad and the destruction of the Caliphate, and due to the shock-waves that the two events had sent through the Muslim world at each and every tier of its existence.

However, with the investiture of Sultan Baybars, the renovation and development of the Mosque ushered in a whole new phase that echoed the Mamluk outstanding architectural disposition and spirit. Historians are full of praise for such a turn of the Mosque's fortune and, of course, for its main originator. Al-Sakhawi²⁵, for example, wrote that

²² Muir Sir William, *The Mameluke or Slave Dynasty of Egypt*, p. 14.

²³ Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 126.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁵ Al-Sakhawi Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman, *Al-Tuhfah al-Latifah fi Tarikh al-Madinah al-Sharifah* (Damascus: Dar Kinan, 2010), vol. 1 p. 322.

Baybars was very concerned about the fate of the Mosque following the inferno, and the prospect of its restoration and further architectural development. He thus at the outset of his reign prepared and dispatched from Egypt the most crucial building materials, such as wooden planks and beams, iron and lead. He also sent fifty three architects and structural engineers, providing them with everything they needed and remunerating them fairly before they set off for the holy cities. The Sultan also appointed and sent with them *Amir* Jamaluddin Muhsin al-Salihi to supervise the work on behalf of the Sultan. His main task was to ensure the quality of work and that there was no shortage of building materials and funds. All this happened in 658 AH/1260 CE, the first year of Baybars' rule.²⁶

Indeed, Sultan Baybars was the first Mamluk ruler who *de facto* established Mamluk suzerainty over the whole Hijaz region, including the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. His case was helped by the perennial quarrels and conflicts between the members of the local essentially non-sovereign governments (*amirates*), and between some of them and the Rasulid dynasty in Yemen. On a couple of occasions, the rising power and authority of the Mamluks, in general, and Baybars, in particular, were called in for mediation and outright intervention.²⁷

When the roofing of the Mosque was completed, in terms of its framework and the outward appearance of its fundamental structural components, the Mosque resembled very much the one earlier built or expanded by the Umayyad and Abbasid rulers. That was understandable and anticipated, though, because, in the wake of the fire, the Mosque first and foremost needed to undergo exigent restoration works. In doing so, it could not alter its customary and time-honored style as a hypostyle mosque – one of the most recognizable mosque styles in the vocabulary of Muslim architecture – whereby colonnades or cloisters of stone columns on all four sides, reinforced with lead and iron to add to their strength and durability, enclosed a vast inner courtyard. In the aftermath of the fire, most reinforced stone columns were left intact and standing. The roof made of timber suffered most. Thus, the initial refurbishing efforts concentrated mainly on the reprocessing and reconditioning of the Mosque's overall plan and design, as well as on the recycling of its still

²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 1 p. 322.

²⁷ Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 126. Badr 'Abd al-Basit, *Al-Tarikh al-Shamil li al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*, vol. 2 p. 238.

useful structural components and building materials. In other words, as regards the plan, design and execution of the Mosque's basic framework, total creativity and ingenuity had somewhat to take a back seat. They had to play second fiddle to the notions of replicating and following.

However, following the completion – albeit largely reproduction – of the Mosque's physical framework, the Mamluk artistic sumptuousness and architectural resourcefulness and vision were able to be set in motion. Accordingly, in 666 AH/ 1267 CE Baybars is said to have presented the Mosque with a pulpit (*minbar*), which must have featured intricately knitted geometric elements, as well as floral patterns, as part of delicately carved arabesque designs – just as almost all Mamluk *minbars*, the upper sections of the *mihrabs* (praying niches), decorative wall, window and door panels, etc., do. He did so even though the ruler of the Yemen, al-Muzaffar Shamsuddin Yusuf, too had gifted one just about ten years earlier. The latter, as a result, was done away with from the Mosque. Undoubtedly, Baybars wanted to show thereby such as had the suzerainty over the holy cities in their sight who the person in charge really was, alluding to them furthermore to rethink their schemes and recoil. The *minbar* stayed in the Mosque, evoking the personality and legacy of Baybars, until 797 AH/1394 CE when, due to its prolonged existence and wear, it was replaced by a new one donated by the incumbent Sultan al-Zahir Barquq (d. 801 AH/1399 CE).²⁸ In 820 AH/1417 CE, another *minbar*, which replaced the latter, was gifted by Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (d. 824 AH/1421 CE).²⁹

Then in 667 AH/1268 CE, Baybars installed a high wooden enclosure (*maqsurah*) with three doors around the tomb, or the burial chamber, of the Prophet (pbuh), and the abutting little chamber known as *Bayt Fatimah* (the House of Fatimah). The height of the enclosure was 3.5 meters.³⁰ In 729 AH/ 1328 CE, a fourth door facing north was added to the enclosure.³¹ According to Taghribirdi³², the ceiling of the enclosure was gilded.

²⁸ Al-Sakhawi Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman, *Al-Tuhfah al-Latifah fi Tarikh al-Madinah al-Sharifah*, vol. 1 p. 322.

²⁹ Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 143.

³⁰ Isma'il Muhammad, *The Architecture of the Prophet's Holy Mosque* (London: Hazar, 1998), p. 48.

³¹ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 611.

³² Taghribirdi Jamaluddin, *Al-Nujum al-Zahirah*, vol. 7 p. 170.

However, the enclosure had two flaws: one was design-oriented and the other one was related to the structure's operation. First, the enclosure extended somewhat into the honorable *Rawdah* (a holy place located between the Prophet's, that is, his wife 'A'ishah's, house, and between the Prophet's *minbar* (pulpit)), enclosing some of its sanctified limited space as well. Thus, taking into consideration that people, in particular pilgrims, always throng in droves to visit, supplicate and offer prayers in the *Rawdah*, a number of them was always bound to be left out because of the enclosure's encroachment on the *Rawdah*'s space.

Second, the doors of the enclosure were initially left opened at all times for the people to get closer to the three graves that it contained. The people could also supplicate and pray inside the narrow space between the enclosure and the second octagonal wall of the chamber facing west, which was erected by Caliph al-Walid, because that space was part of the *Rawdah*. There were other numerous benefits linked with the enclosed spaces and some of their tangible constituents which the people wanted to make the most of. However, keeping the doors always opened, especially during the *hajj* (pilgrimage) season when the Mosque was congested most, proved challenging as many people, both men and women with children, were prone to clogging and cluttering up the limited spaces available inside the enclosure. Cleanliness, orderliness and overall Islamic propriety and decorum were often at stake. Yet, some people were even susceptible to committing various religious offences under the pretexts of getting closer to the Prophet (pbuh) and his grave, seeking blessings (*tabarruk*), seeking intercession or resorting to intermediary (*tawasul*), etc.³³

When the matter became too serious and excessive, it was decided that the doors be shut at all times. There was no access to the inside of the enclosure except for the servants of the *hujrah*, cleaners, workers, and occasionally for some dignitaries, or the people of high political, scholarly and religious standing. However, the downside of the novel custom was that the people were denied scores of benefits associated with the spaces as well as physical components that existed between the second octagonal wall around the burial chamber and the wooden enclosure (*maqsurah*). It was thus proposed that, if keeping the doors opened during the pilgrimage seasons was most double-edged and problematic, they should have been kept closed then, but opened, and the enclosure made accessible, after the pilgrimage seasons. However, the persons responsi-

³³ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 616.

ble, including the Mamluk sovereigns themselves, were adamant in maintaining the enclosure inaccessible at all times. Even the historian al-Samahudi, who enjoyed a solid reputation with the Mamluks, tried to convince them to make concessions and render the enclosure opened after the pilgrimage seasons, but they could not be budged.³⁴

It was not until about eleven years later in 678 AH/1279 CE, during the reign of Sultan Qalawun (d. 689 AH/1290 CE), that a wooden dome was built above the honorable burial chamber. It was the first dome ever to be raised over it.³⁵ The dome was square at the bottom and octagonal at the top, made of wood, and built on top of the pillars that surrounded the chamber. Planks of wood were nailed to it, over which plates of lead were placed. The dome was refurbished at the time of Sultan al-Nasir Hasan b. Muhammad Qalawun (d. 741 AH/1341 CE). Then the leaden plates slipped, but they were fixed and refurbished at the time of Sultan al-Ashraf Sha'ban b. Husayn b. Muhammad in 765 AH/1363 CE.³⁶

In addition, Sultan Qalawun also built in 686 AH/1287 CE a place for ablutions, or a fountain, just outside the Mosque next to the gate or *Bab al-Salam*. Al-Sakhawi³⁷ described the fountain as enormous and impressive (*ha'ilah*). Qalawun likewise rebuilt the south-western minaret, and his son, Sultan al-Nasir Hasan b. Muhammad Qalawun, built the fourth minaret which was destroyed during the period of the Umayyad caliph Sulayman b. 'Abd al-Malik (d. 99 AH/717 CE) because it overlooked the house of Marwan b. al-Hakam (d. 66 AH/685 CE) which was also the residence of the Umayyad caliphs when they came to Madinah.³⁸

Some subsequent restoration work to the Mosque's ceiling in the *Rawdah* area was carried out in 701 AH/1301 CE during the second reign of Sultan al-Nasir Hasan b. Muhammad Qalawun. That was followed in 705 AH/1305 CE by the renovation of the ceiling covering the colonnades to the east and the west of the central courtyards, which took two years to complete. Two additional colonnades were also to be added in 729 AH/1328 CE to the *qiblah* or southern part of the Mosque, raising

³⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 2 p. 617.

³⁵ Al-Sakhawi Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman, *Al-Tuhfah al-Latifah fi Tarikh al-Madinah al-Sharifah*, vol. 2 p. 400.

³⁶ *The Green Dome in Madinah*, <https://islamqa.info/en/110061> (accessed on September 21, 2016).

³⁷ Al-Sakhawi Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman, *Al-Tuhfah al-Latifah fi Tarikh al-Madinah al-Sharifah*, vol. 2 p. 400.

³⁸ Isma'il Muhammad, *The Architecture of the Prophet's Holy Mosque*, pp. 48-49.

their number to seven. That was executed during the third reign of Sultan al-Nasir Hasan b. Muhammad Qalawun.

Furthermore, in 831 AH/1428 CE, Sultan al-Ashraf Sayfuddin Barsbay (d. 841 AH/1437 CE) is reported to have restored the two southern colonnades overlooking the courtyard, which were first built by Sultan al-Nasir Hasan b. Muhammad Qalawun about 102 years earlier, as mentioned above. This restoration work was carried out along with the repairs to the ceiling in the Mosque's northern section.³⁹

Additional repairs and improvements were made to the ceiling near the *Rawdah* by Sultan al-Zahir Jaqmaq (d. 857 AH/1453 CE). He had also tiled the floor in that area up to the courtyard in marble, using colored tiles for the space between the wooden enclosure (*maqsurah*), enclosing the Prophet's burial chamber, and the latter's protective octagonal wall. The *mihrab* (praying niche), along with the *qiblah* wall, were likewise tiled in marble. During the reign of Sultan Inal or Aynal (d. 865 AH/1461 CE), another *mihrab* was added for a Hanafi *imam* (prayer leader), because the Mamluks belonged to the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence. In passing, the Hanafi *madhhab* was introduced in Madinah approximately in 723 AH/1323 CE. Before that, there were only the Maliki and Shafi'i *madhhabs* in the city.⁴⁰

When Sultan Qayit Bey (d. 902 AH/1496 CE) -- arguably the greatest Mamluk patron of art and architecture -- came to power, the Mosque underwent numerous repairs and improvements. To begin with, according to al-Qu'aiti⁴¹, who draws exclusively on al-Samahudi, construction in the eastern sector overlooking the courtyard was pulled down along with the colonnade's ceiling and a whole section of the eastern wall, starting from the location of the south-eastern minaret. All of these were then rebuilt. The columns in particular were injected with lead for purposes of durability, and the foundations of that minaret were strengthened. Further work was undertaken in the areas of the *Rawdah* and around the burial chamber and its vicinity and temporary or wooden structures were removed from the upper and the lower ceilings and replaced with baked bricks as feasible. "In 881 AH/1476 CE, repairs or ra-

³⁹ Al-Sakhawi Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman, *Al-Tuhfah al-Latifah fi Tarikh al-Madinah al-Sharifah*, vol. 1 p. 308. Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 143.

⁴⁰ Al-Barzanji Ja'far, *Nuzhah al-Nazirin fi Masjid Sayyid al-Awwalin wa al-'Akhirin* (Cairo: Matba'ah al-Jamaliyyah, 1914), p. 50.

⁴¹ Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 144.

ther construction was also started on the double walls of the Prophet's chamber (*al-hujrah al-sharifah*), which had developed cracks following the fire. The walls were rebuilt in stone and the ceiling of the inner chamber raised. An inner dome of basalt rock with its top in limestone was also built in replacement of the earlier wooden structure. This work over, the phase of beautification was undertaken next here. The floor of the Prophet's chamber was covered in white and red marble, as were parts of the *qiblah* sector also".⁴²

This way, the Prophet's Mosque, a large and richly decorated hypostyle mosque type with tall and striking minarets and an imposing dome over the Prophet's tomb, protruding from the roof of one of the Mosque's colonnades, looked indeed like one of a great many Mamluk religious complexes that dotted especially the city of Cairo. Parenthetically, Mamluk buildings are generally characterized by their large size, soaring and often slim minarets, majestic domes regularly topping immense mausoleums that had been integrated into mosques, *madrasahs* or Sufi *khanqahs* (*zawiyahs* or *ribats*), etc., courtyards, exquisite fountains, carefully composed facades with keel-shaped niches and portals with ornate *muqarnas* (stalactite vault), and rich decoration employing multi-coloured stones, marble, mosaics and carved wood, while featuring subtle calligraphy and endless ranges of geometric and floral intricate patterns.⁴³

However, in the holy month of Ramadan of 886 AH/1481 CE, a second major fire broke out in the Mosque, burning much of it and its contents. The fire started as lightning struck the south-eastern minaret and demolished it, spreading quickly to the rest of the Mosque and undoing most of the earlier architectural works done to it. More than a few persons died and many more were injured in the process due to fire burns, smoke inhalation and falling debris. When Sultan Qayit Bey was informed by his confederates in Madinah of the tragedy, stunned and shaken, he and all those who were with him are said to have cried profusely. Nonetheless, no sooner had the initial shock been overcome and

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴³ Hillenbrand Robert, *Islamic Art and Architecture*, pp. 143-151. Rabbat Nasser, *Mamluk History through Architecture* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), pp. 104-137. Henri Stierlin & Anne Stierlin, *Splendors of an Islamic World* (London: Tauris Parke Books, 1997), pp. 71-112. Behrens-Abouseif Doris, "Qaytbay's Madrasahs in the Holy Cities and the Evolution of Haram Architecture", *Mamluk Studies Review*, 3, 1999. pp. 130-131.

the damage to the Mosque assessed, than a royal decree for the immediate commencement of a comprehensive rebuilding process was issued.

The Sultan felt both acutely tried by the latest development concerning the Mosque, and even more greatly honored by the repairing and rebuilding tasks placed on his shoulders in his capacity as a powerful sovereign entrusted with the preservation of the wellbeing of the two holy cities and their holy places. Thus, al-Samahudi could not run out of superlatives describing the Sultan's sincerity and dedication to the Mosque reconstruction undertaking, as well as its final outcomes. The rebuilding was on an unprecedented scale and the funding aspect was largely disregarded. The Sultan's unparalleled quality standards were well-known and little short of extraordinary. They at times were even hard to meet, as found out by one of his construction managers or chief architects, who was replaced on account of some decisions of his whereby some of those quality standards were compromised.⁴⁴

For the latest rebuilding mission, two large groups of skilled artisans, craftsmen and workers specializing in all the required fields were immediately assembled. One, a hundred strong, arrived from Makkah where it had been engaged in implementing various projects relating to the development and upkeep of al-Masjid al-Haram and the city of Makkah as a whole. The other larger group of more than three hundred came from Cairo, bringing with it all types of supplies, building materials and funds for initial expenditure. With the latter group, more than two hundred camels and a hundred donkeys, were also dispatched.⁴⁵

Reconstruction began with the demolition of what was left of the damaged minaret, the *qiblah* wall, the eastern wall to the gate or *Bab Jibril* and the western wall to the *Bab al-Rahmah*. These were then rebuilt, increasing the depth of the walls and making them thicker. The lower sections of the walls were made of basalt rock and the upper sections in brick of baked clay. The new minaret had a strong base of basalt rock and was in the inimitable and easily recognizable post-Ayyubid/Mamluk style with four segments or tiers. It was about sixty meters high. Al-Samahudi remarked that no minaret like it was ever before witnessed in Madinah.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 646.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2 p. 617. Badr 'Abd al-Basit, *Al-Tarikh al-Shamil li al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*, vol. 2 p. 315. Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 145.

⁴⁶ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 646.

Based on al-Qu'aiti's understanding and interpretation of al-Samahudi's comprehensive reports, the *mihrab* was expanded and then dressed in marble tiles of different colors. A wooden ceiling supported by new columns was also provided. Vaults of baked brick were built on top of those columns. The open space "facing the *mihrab* was to be covered by a dome and the Prophet's tomb sheltered from above by a large vaulted dome on supports of stone, with baked clay bricks at the top." Another similar dome, surrounded by three smaller ones, now shaded the area from the impressive dome on the Prophet's tomb up to the southern or *qiblah* wall. A suitable opening provided near those domes and the potential of the main south-eastern minaret were used for lighting and ventilation.⁴⁷

Another two domes were raised above the Mosque's interior by the entrance of the *Bab al-Salam* in the south-west, which had been covered with white and black marble. According to al-Samahudi, this entrance and the domes were decorated magnificently or superbly (*zakhrafah 'azimah*), definitely with designs and themes evocative of those on the massive domes, portals, minarets, *minbars* and entire *qiblah* walls of numerous Mamluk architectural masterpieces in Egypt and Syria. An additional *mihrab* was also built, which was embellished with marble mosaic in beautiful geometric patterns, so much a feature of renowned Mamluk decorative art of that period. So were the walls of the Prophet's tomb or burial chamber and the entire area in its vicinity covered in marble.⁴⁸

There should have been by then at least three *mihrabs* inside the Mosque proper: one that marked the location of the Prophet's prayers inside the *Rawdah*, standing a short distance east of the *minbar*, or pulpit, which was generally used outside the pilgrimage season (the present structure dates back to Sultan Qayit Bey and his rebuilding of the Mosque); one called *al-mihrab al-'Uthmani* which marked the location of the prayers as well as the *maqsurah* of Caliph 'Uthman b. 'Affan as part of the southern *qiblah* wall (this was the main *mihrab* especially during the pilgrimage season which was restored, expanded and handsomely decorated by Sultan Qayit Bey); and one for the *imam* of the Hanafi *madhhab* which stood a short distance west of the *minbar* (pulpit) (this *mihrab* was first created in 861 AH/1456 CE during the reign of Sultan

⁴⁷ Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 146-148.

⁴⁸ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 641.

Inal or Aynal (d. 865 AH/1461 CE). It is known today as *al-mihrab al-sulaymani* in connection with the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman Qanuni (d. 974 AH/1566 CE) who is reported to have notably embellished it in 938 AH/1531 CE using white and black marble.⁴⁹

A marble *dikkah* (platform) for *mu'adhdhins* (*mu'adhdhin* is a person appointed to recite the call for prayers and to announce the official beginning of prayers) was installed in the eastern and western parts of the Mosque. As said earlier, the last Sultan to endow the Mosque with a *minbar* was Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh in 820 AH/1417 CE. The *minbar*, however, was destroyed in the latest fire, as a result of which Sultan Qayit Bey delivered a new one made of, and embellished with, marble. This, nevertheless, might have transpired a bit later, as there are reports that a provisional *minbar* made of baked brick was immediately installed. The former might have replaced the latter.

In the end, the eastern section of the Mosque overlooking the central courtyard had three colonnades, while its western counterpart had four. The northern sector also had four and the southern one, seven. In 888 AH/1483 CE, exactly two years after the second inferno, the main restoration and rebuilding activities in the Mosque were officially deemed to have been completed, with other largely secondary works continuing for the next two to three. Soon thereafter, in 889 AH/1484 CE, a company of painters with a scaffolding were sent from Egypt by the Sultan himself to paint the Mosque's ceiling in turquoise or azure blue (*lazward*). Before that, the ceiling was painted in the traditional blue (indigo). Having been vastly experienced craftsmen plying their trade in the capital of Mamluk Muslim art and architecture, their performances and results were brilliant.⁵⁰

Sultan Qayit Bey made a single ceiling for the Mosque, while it was double or two-tier before. The height of the Mosque was about eleven meters.⁵¹ During the time of al-Samahudi, the contemporary of the

⁴⁹ Al-Barzanji Ja'far, *Nuzhah al-Nazirin fi Masjid Sayyid al-Awwalin wa al-'Akhirin*, pp. 46-50. Mustafa Salih Lam'i, *Al-Madinah al-Munawwarah: Tatawwuruha al-'Umrani wa Turathuha al-Mi'mari* (Beirut: Dar al-Nahdah, 1981), pp. 69-72.

⁵⁰ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa'*, vol. 2 p. 682. Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 147. Isma'il Muhammad, *The Architecture of the Prophet's Holy Mosque*, p. 49. Mustafa Salih Lam'i, *Al-Madinah al-Munawwarah: Tatawwuruha al-'Umrani wa Turathuha al-Mi'mari*, pp. 67-72.

⁵¹ Mubarakpuri Safiur Rahman, *History of al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*, Translated into English by Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2002), p. 74.

latter Mamluks, there were 256 lamps in the Mosque lit every night. An additional 100 were lit on special occasions. In order to introduce more natural light, vaulted circular openings or perforations at regular intervals were made in the upper parts of the southern and the eastern walls. These were then provided with windows covered with glass, which was protected by a copper grill or mesh. It was no coincidence then that next to the eastern wall, one of the better lit sections of the Mosque, a depository of books was set up.⁵²

A *sabil* or public drinking fountain by the *Bab al-Rahmah*, with an opening into the Mosque, was also provided, swelling the number of drinking fountains there, great and small, to around twenty. There was a fountain in the central courtyard of the Mosque, too. There, there was a large pond as well, built of baked bricks, lime and wood, into which one could descend via four steps placed at the sides of the pond, with water flowing from a central fountain. There was a number of date palm trees in the central courtyard.⁵³

Besides, a *madrasah* (school), a *ribat* (hospice for the poor and Sufis), a public bath-house, a flour mill, an oven and a public kitchen were also endowed to the city of Madinah, its population, visitors and pilgrims.⁵⁴ Finally, "an amount well in excess of 120,000 gold Dinars was spent on these activities and the revenues of vast tracts of some of the most fertile land in Egypt were affixed to cover the annual expenditure of these institutions, as well as to ensure the provision of the supplies sent annually in charity from Egypt for the people of the two holy cities".⁵⁵ According to Doris Behrens-Abouseif, one of the overriding reasons why Qayit Bey made significant endowments to the City of Madinah was the poverty and deprivation he saw there while performing pilgrimage, which moved him deeply.⁵⁶

⁵² Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 147. Dawah Hamad, *Al-Madinah al-Munawwarah fi al-Fikr al-Islami* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2006), p. 197.

⁵³ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 682. Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 147. Isma'il Muhammad, *The Architecture of the Prophet's Holy Mosque*, p. 50.

⁵⁴ Behrens-Abouseif Doris, *Qaytbay's Madrasahs in the Holy Cities and the Evolution of Haram Architecture*, pp. 130-131.

⁵⁵ Al-Qu'aiti Sultan Ghalib, *The Holy Cities, the Pilgrimage and the World of Islam*, p. 148.

⁵⁶ Behrens-Abouseif Doris, "Sultan Qaytbay's Foundation in Medina: the Madrasah, the Ribat and the Dashishah", *Mamluk Studies Review*, 2, 1998, p. 62.

The Maturation of Architectural Deviations

Muslim architecture is an architecture that is relatively based on, inspired and governed by a set of general, immutable and fairly fluid values, teachings and principles anchored in the Islamic revealed message. This quintessential character of Muslim architecture rendered it always conformist, easily distinguishable to an astute observer and at once traditional and modern. In other words, it made it entail and subtly integrate the spheres of both innovation and following. That said, an architectural deviation in the orb of authentic Muslim architecture would be an architectural concept or action that clearly departs from an established Muslim architectural course or accepted standard, violating, somehow or other, one or more of those Islamic values, teachings and principles that instigated and gradually gave rise to the ubiquitous phenomenon of Muslim architecture.

The first outright architectural deviations could be traced back roughly to the first period of the Umayyad caliphate when some of the popular religious and civilizational aberrations were invented and perpetrated rather overtly and audaciously. The matter was evolving gradually ever since, proportionately to the evolution of the causes that initiated and sustained the predicament. Arguably, the most fertile period were the latter phases of the Abbasid rule to which the Mamluk Sultanate belonged.

While architecturally maintaining, enriching and reconstructing the Prophet's Mosque, throughout a period of slightly more than two and a half centuries, the Mamluk sovereigns demonstrated the meaning and impact of more than a few established architectural deviations. In doing so, they acted as both victims of a centuries-old syndrome and active protagonists in its furthering. Most of such deviations, by and large, revolved around these three issues: politicization of architecture, funerary architecture or the architecture of dead, and institutionalization of factors that could contribute to religious unorthodoxy.

As for politicization of architecture, it is a perennial truth that architecture has always been used as a symbol of power and an expression of political ideology, defining relationships between individuals, diverse groups and even cities and nations. Thus, apart from attending to the constant repairs and development of the Prophet's Mosque as part of their responsibilities towards Islam and Muslims, the Mamluks also did so in order to assert their control and superiority over the Hijaz region with its two holy cities, and beyond. Additionally, there was a matter of affirming

the overall legitimacy of their rule, and ensuring acceptance as the upholders of Islamic orthodoxy, which was as important as the former.

The notion of the *minbar* (pulpit) could be mentioned as an example. As seen above, four Mamluk sovereigns contributed four *minbars*, which were built and decorated in the Mamluk splendid artistic and architectural image. The first *minbar* was contributed by Sultan Baybars in 666 AH/ 1267 CE, even though the second Rasulid ruler of the Yemen, al-Muzaffar Shamsuddin Yusuf, too had gifted one just about ten years earlier in the wake of the first major fire in the Mosque. Having been the former's rival over suzerainty over the Hijaz territories, the latter's *minbar* was removed from the Mosque, and a clear message as to who was in command over the holy cities, had thus been relayed both to the emerging Rasulid ruling family in Yemen and to the ordinary people.

The *minbar* was a symbol of authority and legitimacy as well. A ruler whose name is mentioned, and for whom is supplicated, in the *khutbahs* or sermons delivered from a *minbar* -- especially in the sermon associated with the Friday or *Jumu'ah* prayer -- is generally regarded as the true and accepted ruler in a territory where his name is extolled. Such was an unmistakable evidence of his and his government's validity and legitimacy. When a ruler is around, moreover, his mere presence, or appearance, on the *minbar*, and his address to the congregation, denote a further sign of his authority. This way, the *minbar* functioned to a degree as though a throne.

This was so because the first *minbar* was installed by the Prophet (pbuh) himself in his Mosque. It was meant to facilitate better visual and audio communication between the Prophet (pbuh) and the people in the Mosque. Hence, it is called *minbar*, which means a platform from where something is being communicated, or said, in an emphatic and convincing manner. The history of misusing the status and political potential of the *minbar* is as old as the initial political conflicts between Muslims -- the latter being the cause of the former -- as a result of which the rightly-guided caliphate (*al-khilafah al-rashidah*) came to an end and the Umayyad reign was launched instead.

In the same vein, when following the first inferno in the Mosque, the second or third Mamluk Sultan al-Mansur 'Ali (d. 657 AH/1259 CE) made the first Mamluk architectural contribution to the Mosque by sending building tools and implements from Egypt, additional tools and building materials, likewise, arrived from Yemen under the patronage of

the second Rasulid ruler al-Muzaffar Shamsuddin Yusuf.⁵⁷ It was a time when both dynasties and their respective political realms were in embryonic stages, striving to secure their strong footing. However, in the wake of the subsequent Mamluk assertion of full control over the Hijaz region, there is no reference whatsoever to any continuous contributions or help from Yemen. Indeed, it was not the question of whether the Rasulid ruling family was willing, or capable, of doing so. Rather, it was a question of whether they were invited and authorized, or not, by the actual rulers in the region: the Mamluks. By means of architecture, among other methods and measures, the Rasulids – and indeed any other potential pretender to the honor of administering the Hijaz province and its holy cities of Makkah and Madinah – were disqualified from the contention.

It was owing to this architectural propensity -- whereby architecture is deemed primarily a signature of power and authority, resulting in the creation of countless, often breathtaking, monumental, iconic and commemorative structures in the name of individuals, groups, ruling families and empires – which is shared by many historical Muslim royal houses and dynasties, including the Mamluks, that today many people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, possess a flawed perception of Muslim/Islamic architecture. To them, it is all about gargantuan and institutional alleged masterpieces – frequently white elephants, though -- carrying the names of certain individuals and evoking the vivid memories of states, or empires, and their eras as well as socio-political ethos. Rarely does anyone talk at length about medium or small -- yet extremely significant for the wellbeing of the people -- public and private buildings such as common housing, places of worship, education, work, recreation, etc.

However, due to the Prophet's Mosque's distance from the epicenter of the Mamluk power in Egypt, its status as the second most important mosque on earth which lives forever in the heart of each and every Muslim, and due to the two major fires that on two separate occasions devastated the Mosque's form and configuration, the Mamluk intrinsic penchant for politicization of architecture in the Prophet's Mosque was rather curtailed. This could be further corroborated by comparing the overall character of the narrated decorative art and architecture of the Prophet's Mosque under the Mamluks with the same of numerous and extant Mamluk spectacular master-works in Egypt. That they hardly inscribed their names as benefactors on the Prophet's Mosque, whereas vir-

⁵⁷ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 604.

tually all of their buildings in Egypt and Syria feature the names of patrons, is also a case in point.

Second, with reference to the subject of funerary architecture or the architecture of dead, it was perhaps the Mamluks, more than anybody else in the history of Islamic civilization, who contributed most to its flourishing. So much so that the areas which were under their control -- above all their capital city of Cairo -- are still dotted with a great many funerary and religious complexes marked by grandiose domes, towering minarets, magnificent courtyards and half-domed entry portals dressed in subtle and lovely decoration, which have been dedicated to the Sultans and the members of the ruling elite and their families, as well as to the prominent scholars and Sufi gurus. Expectedly, they transported their obsession to the realm of the Prophet's Mosque and the Prophet's burial chamber as well. Thus, it was them, specifically Sultan Qalawun, who built a dome over the honorable burial chamber, or the tomb, of the Prophet (pbuh) which contained three graves: the Prophet's grave and the graves of his two companions and successors: Abu Bakr and 'Umar b. al-Khattab.

The dome was refurbished a couple of times thereafter. However, it fell into disrepair and was renovated at the time of Sultan Qayit Bey in 881 AH/1476 CE. Following the latest renovation, the chamber and its dome were soon burned in the second fire that swept through the Prophet's Mosque in 886 AH/1481 CE. Qayit Bey again rebuilt the dome, in 887 AH/1482 CE, and strong pillars to support it were built in the floor of the Mosque, and they were built of bricks to the correct height. After the dome had been built in the manner described above, cracks appeared in its upper part. When it proved impossible to refurbish it, Qayit Bey ordered that the upper part be demolished and rebuilt strongly using white plaster. So it was built solidly in 892 AH/1486 CE.⁵⁸

This way, the Prophet's burial chamber was transformed into a structure resembling an imposing mausoleum or a funerary complex. It bore a resemblance to all those massive mausoleums in Cairo associated with multifunctional religious complexes at the heart of which stood mosques, *madrasahs* (schools), or Sufi *khanqahs* (*zawiyahs* or *ribats*). Certainly, it was not coincidence that the funerary complexes of two Mamluk Sultans: Qalawun and Qayit Bey -- who in their own respective ways were most responsible for rendering the Prophet's burial chamber

⁵⁸ *The Green Dome in Madinah*, <https://islamqa.info/en/110061> (accessed on September 21, 2016). Isma'il Muhammad, *The Architecture of the Prophet's Holy Mosque*, p. 49.

resemble a mausoleum – were arguably the grandest and most ostentatious of all similar structures in Cairo. In other words, they built the Prophet's burial chamber in their own Mamluk funerary architectural image. Not only that. The mausoleum of Qayit Bey even contains an alleged footprint of the Prophet (pbuh) brought from either Makkah or Madinah. The footprint permanently marked in stone was intended to add to the projected distinctiveness of his funerary complex and, more importantly, generate a bit of an aura of its purity and inviolability.

It stands to reason that as part of the Mamluk obsession with funerary architecture and everything that such a tradition entailed, Sultan Baybars failed to understand and come to terms with the demerit of the width of the wooden *maqsurah* (enclosure) he built around the Prophet's burial chamber. As seen above, with the extra size of his *maqsurah*, he enclosed and cordoned off some sanctified space of the honorable *Rawdah*, the space of the little chamber called *Bayt Fatimah*, as well as some other minor physical components associated with those spaces. The Sultan thus inadvertently denied countless visitors the myriad spiritual and intellectual gains and rewards exclusively connected with such spaces and elements. The subsequent Mamluk rulers were no different, following faithfully the exemplar set by Baybars.

Unquestionably, Islam explicitly and in most emphatic terms forbids veneration of any graves and building activities over them. Erecting such structures as mausoleums, tomb-mosques and shrines over graves is prohibited, more so if the people intend to carry out some acts of worship in the same structures, or do anything else -- big or small, on a collective or individual basis -- that contradicts the teachings of Islam and the spirit of its *tawhidic* (God's Oneness) worldview.

Thus, when everything is taken into consideration, the dome built over the honorable burial chamber of the Prophet's grave might have generated more harm and sin than benefit and goodness both to the soul and psyche of an ordinary Muslim. Owing to that, to a vast majority of mainstream scholars the dome was always an obnoxious thing, and whatever the Prophet (pbuh) said against venerating graves and erecting structures over them, applied reasonably to the domed sacred chamber as well. The domed sacred burial chamber, which in the end looked like a huge mausoleum, was a result, as well as a sign, of the thriving abominable culture of funerary architecture, or the practice of spiritually and architecturally glorifying the graves, in which the Mamluks excelled and led the way for a couple of centuries.

Even al-Samahudi⁵⁹, who did not hesitate to commend the Mamluk sovereigns for their contributions to the development of the Mosque - especially Sultan Qayit Bey, his contemporary -- seemed not to be in agreement with the introduction of the dome. To him, that was a case of intending a good thing, but ending up doing a bad one; or a case of using a blameworthy means for accomplishing a praiseworthy goal.

Third, concerning the matter of institutionalization of factors that could contribute to religious unorthodoxy, the issues that stood out were: adding another *mihrab* in the Mosque for a Hanafi *imam* (prayer leader), because the Mamluks belonged to the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, and building a *ribat* (hospice for the poor and Sufis) in the immediate vicinity of the Mosque. These were contentious because no segment especially of the Prophet's Mosque should have ever been designed and planned, and have functioned along the lines of a particular jurisprudential or doctrinal *madhhab*, group or faction. The Mosque by all means should have curbed differences, divisions and eccentricities – regardless of the levels of their acuteness and fields of operation – promoting and facilitating, instead, mutual understanding, harmony, unity and strict Islamic orthodoxy.

The subject was of utmost significance because during the Mamluks, daily prayers inside al-Masjid al-Haram in Makkah were conducted at different times according to the four most widely accepted Sunni Schools of jurisprudence (*madhhab*), and at four different locations of the Mosque. Because they were most numerous in the city, the followers of the Shafi'i School of law would pray first, and would do so behind *maqam Ibrahim* (Ibrahim's station). Their prayers would be followed by the prayers of the followers of the Maliki and Hanbali Schools of law. They were conducted behind the Yamani corner and at a place between the Yamani corner and the corner with the Black Stone respectively, and were performed concomitantly. Lastly, the followers of the Hanafi School would pray facing the Ka'bah's northwestern side where *Hijr Isma'il*, or *Hatim*, as well as the spout or downpipe (*mizab*) are. This was the situation with all daily prayers except the *Maghrib* or after-sunset Prayer. Since the time between the *Maghrib* and the subsequent 'Isha' or night-time Prayer is short, the former would be performed simultaneously by all four Schools. This, however, was often a cause of widespread confusion and chaos as voices of prayer leaders and *mu'adhdhins* (prayer

⁵⁹ Al-Samahudi 'Ali b. Ahmad, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 609.

announcers) were overlapping and fusing. At times, there was yet a fifth congregation that belonged to *Zaydiyyah* or Zaidism, a Shi'ah branch that followed the Zaydi Islamic jurisprudence.

Admittedly, this was one of the most perplexing innovations associated with al-Masjid al-Haram. It remains something of a mystery how the people could resort to such a repulsive tradition right inside al-Masjid al-Haram when harmony, unity, tolerance, mutual compassion and respect occupy the highest positions in the hierarchy of Islamic foremost values and virtues. According to Basalamah⁶⁰, the tradition originated most probably between the 4th and 5th AH/ 10th and 11th CE centuries and lasted well into the 14th AH/ 20th CE century. No wonder, then, that the air inside al-Masjid al-Haram, and in the holy city of Makkah at large, especially during the annual *hajj* or pilgrimage season when multitudes of people from all corners of the Muslim world would converge on the holy cities, was often during most trying times filled with trepidation, mistrust and insecurity.

There are no explicit reports that such a culture in its entirety was transported to the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah as well. However, building *mihrabs* inside it, associated with different *madhhabs* or schools of thought, certainly, was a step towards a wrong direction. Thus, according to al-Barzanji⁶¹, prayer congregations inside the Prophet's Mosque were time and again segregated both in terms of schedule and location into two most dominant groups: the Hanafi and Shafi'i *madhhabs*. Which congregation prayed first, and where exactly, depended much on whether it was a pilgrimage season and how much influence over certain religious matters the Mamluks – and later the Ottomans – were able to exert in the holy cities.

Furthermore, the time during which the Mamluks ruled some of the most important religious and socio-political centers of the Muslim world was a time of the ultimate fruition and institutionalization of pseudo-Sufism in consequence of which such Sufi institutions as *zawiyahs*, *ribats* and *khanqahs* were flourishing across the Muslim lands in order to accommodate the rising phenomenon. The first seeds of a marriage between the rulers and Sufis – every so often from the ranks of pseudo-Sufism -- were sown during the reigns of the Saljuqs and Ayyubids, the

⁶⁰ Basalamah Husayn, *Tarikh 'Imarah al-Masjid al-Haram* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Thaqafah al-Diniyyah, 2001), p. 68.

⁶¹ Al-Barzanji Ja'far, *Nuzhah al-Nazirin fi Masjid Sayyid al-Awwalin wa al-'Akhirin*, p. 49.

latter preceding the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria. By the advent of the Mamluks and then the Ottoman Turks at the scene, the matter was becoming somewhat of a permanent feature of the Muslim polity.

Hence, Doris Behrens-Abousief wrote, for instance, on the relationship between the Mamluks and Sufis: "The Mamluks, particularly the Circassians, promoted Sufism to the point of making it a sort of state doctrine...The Sultans venerated Sufi sheikhs and always sought to please them, perhaps to impress the general public. In a discussion between 'ulama' (scholars) and extremist Sufis, Sultan Qayit Bey favored the extreme Sufi line. Sufi sheikh Abu al-Sa'ud wielded such power under Sultan Tumanbay that he could afford to beat the *qadi* and *muhtasib* al-Zayni Barakat on his head with a shoe, and gain the Sultan's approval for doing so. Sheikh Abu al-Sa'ud was so powerful that Sultan Tumanbay took the oath of allegiance of the *amirs* at his *zawiyah* (hospice), promising not to act like his predecessor Sultan al-Ghuri".⁶²

No wonder that the Sufi influences featured prominently under the Mamluks in the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah as well, right adjacent to both al-Masjid al-Haram and the Prophet's Mosque. Nor is it surprising that Sultan Qayit Bey, based on his generally favorable treatment of the Sufis, even if such occasionally was to the detriment of 'ulama' (scholars) and their reputation, built two *ribats*, one in Makkah and the other in Madinah. The *ribats*, in effect, were regarded as part of the two holy Mosque complexes. Generally, during the rule of the Mamluks, tens of *ribats* were operational in the two holy cities.

Conclusion

The Mamluks came to power at the height of the internal as well as external challenges that for quite some time were rocking the Muslim world to its core. As a result, the city of Baghdad and with it the last notch of the integrity of the Abbasid caliphate – among others – fell victim to the mounting trials and tribulations. The Mamluks' dominant military and political presence mainly in Egypt and Syria was in many ways a blessing. It was due to them that the Mongols were decisively crashed in the key battle of *'Ayn Jalut* in Palestine in 658 AH/1260 CE. One of the most significant outcomes of the battle was the fact that such was the first time that a Mongol advance had been irreversibly halted, shattering

⁶² Behrens-Abouseif Doris, *Egypt's Adjustment to Ottoman Rule* (Leiden: E.J. BRILL, 1994), p. 95.

forever the myth of Mongol invincibility. Because they tamed the Mongols, flushed out the Crusaders from their remaining strongholds, continued the campaign of annulling the religious and political influences of the Shi'ah Fatimids, and because they rescued the Abbasid caliphate institution by transferring it and its personnel to Egypt, the Mamluks were able to present themselves to the rest of the Muslim world as the successors of Saladin, a hero of the Muslim struggle primarily against the Crusaders. They were also seen as the upholders of Islamic orthodoxy.

It was during the Mamluk rule that the Prophet's Mosque -- as the second most consequential mosque on earth after al-Masjid al-Haram in Makkah to which pilgrimage has been strongly recommended -- was afflicted by two major fires which devastated its architectural morphology. Thus, the challenges to the Mamluks, who enjoyed suzerainty over the Hijaz region, were greatly hardened. Nevertheless, the misfortunes were accepted in good faith and responsibly. As great patrons of art and architecture, there was no shortage of political will with the Mamluks. However, since Madinah was a relatively small and poor city, far away from the centers of the Mamluk power in Egypt and Syria, a great deal of building materials, tools, professionals and funds had to be brought in from the latter. In other words, the building technology and engineering, which were required for overhauling and rebuilding the Prophet's Mosque -- the microcosm of the Muslim *ummah's* religious and civilizational awareness and existence -- were beyond the limited capacities of the city of Madinah and its population. Such definitely was a hindrance to the rapidity, punctuality and close supervision of works, as well as total quality control; nonetheless -- when all is said and done -- the Mamluks rose to the occasion and did what was generally expected from them to do. Their continuous renovations, rebuilding and maintenance of the Mosque, and the manners in which they had done so, boosted, rather than diminished, their overall reputation and legacy.

The Mamluks built and sustained the Prophet's Mosque in their own architectural image. The Mosque, a large and richly decorated hypostyle mosque type with tall and striking minarets and an imposing dome over the Prophet's tomb, protruding from the roof of one of the Mosque's colonnades, looked indeed like one of a great many Mamluk religious complexes that dotted the urban landscape of the city of Cairo. That was particularly the case with the Prophet's tomb, or burial chamber. It in the end was transformed into a structure resembling a striking mausoleum, or a funerary complex. It bore a resemblance to all those massive mausoleums in Cairo associated with multifunctional religious complexes at the

heart of which stood mosques, *madrasahs* (schools), or Sufi *khanqahs* (*zawiyahs* or *ribats*). The idea of the Prophet's Mosque as a multi-tiered religious complex was further enhanced by the immediate presence of a *madrasah* and *ribat* built by Sultan Qayit Bey.

The Mamluks were also in some measure guilty of augmenting and intensifying some of the upsetting disorders which were increasingly besetting the realm of Muslim architecture. Such disorders, apart from endorsing and additionally promoting funerary architecture or the architecture of dead, were also related to politicization of architecture, and a culture of institutionalization of factors that directly or indirectly contributed to the rise of religious unorthodoxy. While doing so, the Mamluks acted both as victims of established architectural tendencies and trends, and active protagonists in their further nurturing and spreading. So deep-rooted and powerful did such architectural syndromes become during the Mamluk sultanate and beyond – with the Prophet's Mosque as a field of implementation -- that each of the conceptual, epistemological and technical tiers of the orb of Muslim architecture still suffers from their ill effects.

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Figure 1: The Mamluk Sultan Qalawun was the first to build a dome over the Prophet's tomb, or sacred chamber. He did that in 678 AH/1279 CE. The dome was wooden. (Courtesy of the Museum of Dar al-Madinah)



Figure 2: The approximate form of the Prophet's Mosque after Sultan Qayit Bey's expansion, after the Mosque and the honorable burial chamber of the Prophet (pbuh) had been badly damaged in the fire. (Courtesy of the Museum of Dar al-Madinah)