

# THE EVOLUTION OF THE IDENTITY OF ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE AFTER PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PBUH): SOME OBSERVATIONS

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## *Introduction*

In this paper, I shall deal with some of the themes relating to the gradual evolution of the conspicuous identity of Islamic architecture from the time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) till approximately the end of the first period of the Abbasid state (861 AC/247 H). It was during this period that Islamic architecture really matured. It reached its pinnacle in both technical and conceptual terms. It finally attained such qualities as artistic comprehensive excellence, universality, internationalism and profundity of styles and meanings that reflected unparalleled genius, innovation and creativity. The end of the first period of the Abbasid state has been pinpointed as the final phase in the evolution of the total identity of Islamic architecture as we know it today for several reasons. The following two reasons perhaps are most significant.

Firstly, the leadership of the development of the Islamic state and Islamic civilization while swinging towards the Abbasids and Iraq and Iran appeared to have completed a full natural cycle, having hitherto been under the custody firstly of the rightly-guided caliphs (*al-Khulafa' al-Rashidun*) principally in Madinah and then under the custody of the Umayyads in Syria. It was not by chance that the cycle occurred right in the lands which were destined to serve as the nucleus of Islam from its inception and during nearly each subsequent Islamic generation and period with all major parties, political and religious, playing their roles and making contributions. By and large, the end of the first period of the Abbasid state is also considered the end of the most prosperous period of the long Abbasid rule, as well as the end of one of the most glorious eras of Islam's cosmopolitan civilization. It stands to reason that the development of Islamic architecture towards the end of the same period was at its zenith

together with the rest of its cultural and civilizational constituents.

The second reason why the end of the first period of the Abbasid state is regarded as the final phase in the evolution of the total identity of Islamic architecture is that by the end of that particular period all the major ethnic groups: the Arabs, the Romans, the Persians and, to a lesser extent, the Turks, were actively exerting their influences over the expansion of Islamic civilization leaving their respective marks on the latter's extensive makeup. That means that the rich talent and prolonged cultural and civilizational exposures of these groups—and in fact many others but whose roles and contributions were not as significant at that point of time—were readily and happily employed to carry the culture and civilization of Islam to some new and hitherto unknown heights. Once the members of these groups and communities entered the fold of Islam, it was no longer a case of foreigners contributing to an alien religion and its alien culture or people who came from distant lands. Rather, it was the case of new Muslim members joining the ranks of the fast growing Islamic fraternity in the lands newly liberated by Islam with which they all closely and proudly associated themselves. The whole thing, furthermore, was a case of Islamic universal association and Islamic comprehensive worldview fully at work.

The evolution and growth of Islamic architecture was not an exception to this rule. Islamic architecture was immensely enriched and spurred by the presence and contributions of new geographic, cultural and socio-economic factors, making it a genuinely universal, eclectic and authoritative phenomenon that mirrored the universality and authority of the Islamic message that inspired it. Islam as a universal religion saw nothing wrong in enriching and multiplying the legitimate means for fulfilling its divine mission. The existing resources of the communities which were newly exposed to Islam were seen as a source of such novel and legitimate means. Naturally, the more the members of those new communities embraced Islam, the faster and wider the adoption and application of such means became.

The following issues are discussed in this paper: 1) What is Islamic architecture?; 2) The early Arabs and the enterprise of building; 3) The Muslims and the enterprise of building after Prophet