

Free research proposal about history of islamic art architecture - al- masjid al-n...

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The Prophet's Mosque

Two categories describe the distinctive visual elements of Islamic art/architecture as decorated surface and structural shape. Understanding these characteristics of Islamic art/architecture proves a historical journey of the second holy mosque built next to the Prophet Muhammad's home in Medinah in the 5th century 622 C. E. (Araffin 2005). The evolution of mosques from the humble rendering of the first erected with the Prophet's own hands to the geometric patterned, repetitive designed, and calligraphy domed places of prayer and worship found in the Islamic world today is a testament to the faith in God of all Muslims globally. The ensuing academic investigation of the history of Islamic art/architecture begins with " Al-masjid al-nabawi" – the Prophet's mosque explaining the remarkable architectural and artistic changes through the centuries into contemporary times that makes it the second holiest and one of the largest mosques in the world. The history of the construction and following structural changes to " Al-masjid al-nabawi" begin when Medinah's eight Arab tribes invite Muhammad leave Mecca and live with them (Durant 1959; Weston 2008). Once moved in, with the help of his companion, the Prophet Muhammad erected the second holiest mosque in the Islamic world after the first built in Mecca, next to his house. Originally, an open-aired structure with a palm frond covered flat roof, reading the Quran took place on a raised rectangular platform. The mosque's rectangular shape was 98 feet by 115 feet with a six foot seven inch high wall of mud walls. Worshippers entered through either the southern located Door of Mercy (Bab Rahmah), the Door of Gabriel (Bab Jibril to the west, or the eastern Door of Women (Bab al-Nisa'). Most mosques

throughout the world reflect this architectural plan today (Petersen 2002).

The ensuing centuries reveal according to the cultural influences and personal tastes Muslim leaders in the eras put their own style to the new additions of the " Al-masjid al-nabawi" (Fortuna 2006).

Under the first Muslim dynasty after the death Muhammad, the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750) brought a more secular influence to " Al-masjid al-nabawi" structure replacing the original erected by Muhammad and his attendants, building a larger building 276 by 328 feet joining it to the tomb of Muhammad. Constructed on stone foundations and columns supporting the teak roof, this new mosque's walls glowed with mosaics. Single minarets stood at the four corners of the building where galleries surrounded the courtyard. Built on the qibla (the direction of Muslim prayers facing to Mecca) wall, a small dome adorned the roof. During the Mamluk reign (1260 – 1290) the ruler added another dome to the Prophet's Mosque above Muhammad's tomb and an ablution fountain by the Door of Peace. Another ruler (1295-1303) replaced the fourth minaret destroyed before his reign. The ruling sultan of (1468-1496) rebuilt the 1481 lightning destroyed east, west, as well as qibla walls. During 1520-1566 the rulers rebuilding of both the eastern and western walls took place and erection of the al-Suleymaniyya north eastern minaret. A new wall niche (mihrab) was built next to the Prophet's as well as a new lead sheeted dome covered Muhammad's tomb as well. In 1817, rulers built the dome covered Rawdah in the south east corner of the mosque and it was painted green in 1839. Other additions in the years following included doubling the width of the south prayer hall then covered with small equal sized domes decorated with Quranic verses and

line from the Poem of the Mantle. More additions of glazed tiles and calligraphy further adorned the mosque and marble now covered the prayer hall floors and the courtyard as well including red stones and a fifth minaret. During the reign of the Saudis the most modern application to the Prophet's mosque is the thousands of electric lights after enlarging the mosque five times its original size during from the 1970s-1980s (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2013). Thus, Prophet's Mosque went through structural changes according to the Muslim in power over the region during the next centuries into the 21st century with the Saudi rulers installing electricity and consequently, the " Prophet's Mosque in Medina have witnessed large-scale construction works." (Shehedah 1994)

Important Features of Islamic Art/Architecture

Architecturally, three models of mosques form Islamic architectural features. From the beginnings of Islam in the 600s C. E. through to 1000 C. E. they remained erected as large and enclosed areas combining flat-roofed room of worship with an open courtyard mostly built in the western Islamic world including Spain and Central Asia. From the 1000s C. E. a new architectural type of mosque emerged with two or more balconies positioned looking down on the unroofed open centralized court yard found in Egypt, Turkey and east into India and Pakistan. The third architectural mosque type developed during the Ottoman Empire, from the 1400s found in Saudi Arabia to the Balks are dome covered central prayer spaced buildings with a courtyard. " Today, as in the past, domes and minarets characteristically adorn all mosques". (Esposito 43)

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The distinctive visual elements of Islamic art can be classified into two categories: surface decoration and structural form.

Surface decoration includes geometric patterning, repetitive design, and calligraphy. Domes, minarets, arches, and mihrab constitute the main structural elements of Islamic architecture”. (Esposito 48) Minarets “ differ in shape, building materials, and other features depending on when and where they were built” (Esposito 49) as already previously advised about the changes made to the Prophet’s Mosque.

Domes are part of Islamic architectural features as part of the roof constructed in a circular vaulted manner. (Petersen 2002) Either painted in bright turquoise or bright blue representing heaven domes may also have the same color of tiles. Tall spire formed minarets towers serve where the faithful hear the call to prayer typically reside next to the dome where together they symbolize the presence of peace, purity, submission, and obedience (Islam). Arches provide the ambience of the sense of unity of the community. (Esposito 2004)

As already described the qibla niche cut into walls elaborately decorated reveal the Muslim artistry of mosaics, moldings and reliefs, stucco, brick, terra cotta, marble, and tiles worked with colorful patterns of floral or scripture details. Islamic art/architecture prohibits making animal or human forms resulting in Muslim artistry of abundant and overflowing non-representational forms of geometrical shapes including line, sphere, circle, spiral, ellipse, cone, square, angle, cube, and polygon figures. With combinations of these, the Muslim artisan develops them into guilloches,

swirls, entrelacs, reticulations, and stars. These move into floral formations such as vines, wreaths, lotus rosettes, palm tendrils, or leaves. These arabesque forms include Arabic script becoming works of art in the use of Kufic characters lifted vertically. Some expanded laterally, while others show points and flourishes making the Arabic alphabet a work of art. Later with religious restrictions, lifted artists added new decorative motifs including birds a flight, beasts of the field as well as unusual best composites of whimsical fantasies. The abstract nature of Muslim artistry inspired poetry and adorned other mediums including wood, metal, stone, tile, and glass articles. (Durant 1955)

Conclusion

This academic investigation provided the historical architectural changes to "Al-masjid al-nabawi" – the Prophet's mosque aligned to Islamic rulers' tastes during their reign. The Islamic art and architectural elements historical evolution to modern day show remarkable aesthetic abstract application like no other found in the world marking the profound devotion Muslims have to Allah and all their efforts to glorify his mosques as sacred places of worship both artistically and architecturally.

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