

## Evaluating the Dominant Theories on the Genesis of the Mosque Type

Dr Essam S. Ayyad

Lecturer of Islamic History and Archaeology, Faculty of Tourism, Suez Canal University

### Abstract

The Western interest in studying the artistic patrimony of the Muslim world began as early as the late-nineteenth century. Since then, huge efforts have been made to document, analyse and conserve the gems of Islamic architecture. Nonetheless, mainly drawing on Arabia's slender architectural heritage in pre- and early Islamic times, a majority of Western scholars have tended to credit the mosque type to non-Islamic origins. Although most of these theories were put forward about a century ago, they still largely shape the dominant wisdom in Western scholarship. This article tries to look closely into the earliest mosques, particularly those built in the first/seventh century, with the aim of investigating whether and how these mosques were influenced by the local pre-Islamic types. To do so, we will consider the early Arabic sources as well as the findings of the relevant excavation works. It is of interest to note that all hypotheses on the non-Islamic origins of the mosque were too weak to withstand the scrutiny of subsequent research. A typical case in the literature is that a group of scholars adopt a theory which is soon demolished by another group who themselves propose their own that is disproved by a third group and so on. All these views failed to provide convincing answers for such central questions as when, where and how a certain architectural type, or types, inspired the mosque. The stark simplicity of the earliest mosques, and which derived from the simplicity of the Islamic rituals themselves, does not seem to have required, particularly in the earliest phase, the borrowing of any foreign architectural type. Later, the mosque layout, while greatly retaining its distinctive Islamic character, was influenced by some architectural types in the conquered territories. A noted example is the use of transept in the Umayyad mosque in Damascus. The presence of such influences is natural and could well have been dictated by variant climatic conditions, but should not be taken to attribute the mosque type to non-Islamic origins—especially that it was only at a later date when such influences found their way to mosque architecture.

**Keywords:** mosque, pre-Islamic types, origins, *apadāna*, Roman basilica, church, synagogue, theories

### Introduction

The Western interest in studying the artistic patrimony of the Muslim world began as early as the late-nineteenth century. Since then, huge efforts have been made to document, analyse and conserve the gems of Islamic architecture: excavations have been funded; studies and surveys done; photographs taken, methodologies proposed and sketches as well as plans put forth. Nonetheless, mainly drawing on Arabia's slender architectural heritage in pre- and

**DOI:10.12816/0038057**

early Islamic times, a majority of Western scholars have tended to credit the mosque architecture to non-Islamic origins. Although most of these theories were put forward about a century ago, they still largely shape the dominant wisdom in Western scholarship. The genesis of the mosque in particular has been assigned to a myriad of pre-Islamic types. However, all hypotheses on the non-Islamic origins of the mosque have proved too weak to weather the scrutiny of subsequent research. A typical case in the literature is that a group of scholars adopt a theory which is soon demolished by another group who themselves propose their own that is disproved by a third group and so on. All these views failed to provide convincing answers for such central questions as when, where and how a certain type, or types, inspired the mosque.

Seeing such difficulties, some academics turned to match up the architectural elements of the mosque to those of older non-Islamic sanctuaries.<sup>1</sup> This proved a more fruitful effort, but the central solecism here is overstatement. The fact that some of the mosque components, such as the minaret, *mihrāb* and *minbar* have parallels in pre-Islamic religious types does not necessarily mean that the origins of the mosque is due to such types; especially that most of such features were yet to materialize in the formative period, i.e. the first fifty years on Islam. Against this background, it is the first-half century mosques AH that should be heeded for if the origin of the mosque is sought. Another critical misstep was the tendency to attribute the origins of a certain mosque to building types of remote geographical areas. It is *per se* the local architectural types, where a given mosque existed, that should be considered. In this article, we will try to look closely into the earliest mosques, particularly those built in the first/seventh century, with the aim of investigating whether and how these mosques were influenced by the local pre-Islamic types in the different Muslim territories. It is worth mentioning, as such, that in this discussion it is the architectural designs and layouts rather than elements, such as minarets, columns, roofing systems, entrances, furnishing, etc. that will be considered.

### **Sources for the study of the early mosques**

Our knowledge of the first/seventh century mosques is mainly based on literary sources. Meanwhile, some of this knowledge is supported by archaeological evidence which, thanks to successive excavations, is now available to us. At Kūfa, for example, attempts to take advantage of the existing material evidence began in 1765 when a rudimentary plan for

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, see K.A.C. Creswell, 'The Evolution of the Minaret with Special Reference to Egypt', *Burlington Magazine*, 1 (1926), 127-83; George C. Miles, 'Mihrāb and Anaza: A Study in Islamic Iconography', in *Early Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. by Jonathan M. Bloom (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 149-65; G. Fehérvári, G., 'Mihrāb', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, 7 (1993), pp. 7-15; R.B. Serjeant, 'Mihrāb', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 22, (1959), pp. 439-53; Estelle Whelan, 'The Origins of the Mihrāb Mujawwaf: a Reinterpretation', in *Early Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. by Jonathan M. Bloom, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 373-91; J. Pedersen, and others, 'Minbar', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, VII (1993), 73-80.

Ziyād's mosque (50/670) was made by Niebuhr who saw it in a ruined condition.<sup>2</sup> Later, excavations at the site of the *dār al-imāra* and the mosque have been made by the Iraqi Department of Antiquities over three seasons, i.e. in 1938, 1953 and 1956.<sup>3</sup> Then, Creswell made use of the findings of these excavations, as well as of primary sources, to reconstruct the Umayyad mosque of Kūfa (50/670).<sup>4</sup>

The Great Umayyad mosque of Damascus (87/706), on the other hand, endured five conflagrations. The first of which took place in 461/1068 and the last was in 1893 in the time of sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II, to whose reign the actual building (with its columns and general appearance) dates.<sup>5</sup> According to a majority of scholars, the mosque continued to retain its original form in spite of the considerable damage and consecutive restorations which it underwent over time.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, most of the Umayyad Aqṣā mosque unluckily collapsed in the aftermath of an earthquake in 130/747-8. The only surviving remnants are the arches, which are supported on marble columns situated to either sides of the copula near the entrance.<sup>7</sup> According to Briggs, 'there seems to be little doubt that the lower part of the present walls of the main aisle of the mosque is due to 'Abd al-Malik, and that the squat marble columns with their stiff Byzantine foliage were taken from Justinian's church.'<sup>8</sup> According to Johns, however, archaeological evidence may be existent for an earlier construction of the Aqṣā mosque (early 40s/660s).<sup>9</sup> In addition to these major mosques, recent excavations have presented valuable information on quite a number of smaller mosques which, in many cases, were built in the late Umayyad period.

## The mosque in Iraq

### *The mosque of Baṣra*

Scholars before K.A.C. Creswell (1879-1974) had argued that there are two types of

<sup>2</sup> K. A. C. Creswell (ed.), *Early Muslim Architecture: with a Contribution on the Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Great Mosque in Damascus by Marguerite Gautier-van Berchem* (New York: Hacker Art Books, [1940, 1969], 2 vols. in 3, 1979), I. I, 48 (hereafter cited as *E.M.A.*). Carsten Niebur, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und Anderen Umliegenden Landern*, 2 vols (Copenhagen: 1774-78), II, 261-4. See also the English trans. by R. Heron as: *Travels Through Arabia and other Countries in the East*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1792)

<sup>3</sup> Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I. I, 48; Jeremy Johns (ed.), 'The "House of the Prophet" and the Concept of the Mosque', *Bayt al-Maqdis: Jerusalem and Early Islam* (1999), ii. 59-112 (pp. 62-3).

<sup>4</sup> Creswell, *E.M.A.* I. I, 48.

<sup>5</sup> Ḥusayn Mu'nis, *Al-Masājid*, (Kuwait: al-Majlis al-Waṭanī lil-Thaqāfah wa-al-Funūn wal Adāb, 1981), pp. 159-60.

<sup>6</sup> Fikrī, Aḥmad Fikrī, *Masājid al-Qāhira wa-madārisuhā: al-Madkhal* (Cairo and Alexandria: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1963), p. 218; Mu'nis, *Masājid*, p. 160.

<sup>7</sup> Mu'nis, *Masājid*, p. 161; Fikrī, *Madkhal*, p. 210.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Briggs, *Muhammadan Architecture in Egypt and Palestine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 38. Having been destroyed by an earthquake in 130/747-8, the mosque was rebuilt twice in the 'Abbāsīd period by the caliphs Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī in 140/780 and 163/780 respectively. See al-Muqaddasī, *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions: a Translation of Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm*, trans. by Basil Anthony Collins, reviewed by Muhammad Hamid al-Tai (Doha: Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilization; Reading: Garnet, 1994), p. 153; Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I. II, 374-5; Mu'nis, *Masājid*, p. 161.

<sup>9</sup> Johns, 'House of the Prophet', p. 62.

mosques: the Christian (Syrian) and the Persian (Iraqian), and that the latter derived from the type of the Persian *apadānas*, namely audience or reception halls in Achaemenid imperial architecture (figs. 1, 2 & 3).<sup>10</sup> This argument was resurrected and yet elaborated by Creswell, who argues that similarity between the Iraqian mosques and the Persian *apadānas* are represented, alongside the quadrangular layout, in the use of *labin*, 'mud brick', as well as *ājurr*, 'kiln-baked brick', stone piers and wooden flat ceilings.<sup>11</sup> In order to assess this theory, we need: (first) to keep into account that the similarity of some architectural elements of one building type to those of another should not be safely taken to mean that the former is derived from the latter; (second) to investigate how the first mosques in Iraq looked like in the first/seventh century.

Let us start with the earliest congregational mosque in Iraq, namely the mosque of Baṣra. We know from al-Balādhurī that the houses and mosque of Baṣra were first built of *qaṣab*, 'reed' in 14/635.<sup>12</sup> The mosque was laid out by the general of the conquering army and then governor of Baṣra, 'Utba b. Ghazwān, who also built a *dār imāra*, 'ruler's residence' in the vicinity.<sup>13</sup> Before the Muslim troops went on a military expedition, they usually took off the reed, bundling them and putting them aside until they came back.<sup>14</sup> Based on such accounts, the first Baṣra mosque was too simple and distinctive to be compared to any of the Persian *apadānas* (fig. 1). It was not until the time of Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, 'Umar's governor in Baṣra (r. 17-27/638-648), that the mosque and the *dār al-imāra* were rebuilt of *labin* instead of reed.<sup>15</sup> For the roof, '*ushb*, 'grass' was used.<sup>16</sup> The *minbar* was set in the middle of the mosque.<sup>17</sup> In 45/665, under Ziyād b. Abīh, the mosque of Baṣra was greatly enlarged. Two side *riwāqs* were added.<sup>18</sup> Kiln-baked bricks and gypsum plaster (*jīṣṣ*) were used. Teak was used for the roof, which was supported on five rows of stone columns.<sup>19</sup> Later on, Ziyād is said to have repositioned the *dār al-imāra* so that the *minbar* was moved to the mosque front.<sup>20</sup> The mosque layout, nevertheless, remained greatly distinct from any influences of Persian architecture.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, E. Diez, *Die Kunst der Islamischen Völker* (Berlin: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion m.b.h, 1915), 8 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I, I, 21-22.

<sup>12</sup> See al-Balādhurī, *Futūh al-buldān*, (eds.) A. Anīs al-Ṭabbā' and U. Anīs al-Ṭabbā' (Beirut: Dār al-Nashr li-l-Jāmi' iyyīn, 1957), p. 483; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, (ed.) Tharwat 'Ukāsha, 2nd edn, (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1969), p. 563;

<sup>13</sup> Al-Balādhurī, *Futūh*, pp. 483-4; Ibn al-Faqīh, *Ma'ārif*, 188. See also C. Saarda, 'Origins of the Mosque: 622-650', *Moslem World*, Volume 28 (4) (1938), pp. 336-44.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Balādhurī, *Futūh*, p. 484; Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, 5 vols (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977), IV, 432.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Balādhurī, *Futūh*, p. 484; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, p. 433. According to Ibn Qutayba, it was built with *labin* by Ibn 'Āmir in the caliphate of 'Uthmān: *Al-Ma'ārif*, p. 563.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Balādhurī, *Futūh*, p. 484; J. Pedersen and others, 'Masjdīd', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, VI (1991), pp. 644-707 (647). Later on, stone was used to build the columns of the mosque. See Al-Balādhurī, *Futūh*, p. 390.

<sup>17</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, I, 433.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif*, p. 563.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Balādhurī, *Futūh*, p. 485; Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I, I, 45.

<sup>20</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, I, 433.

The two cases suggested by Creswell to support his theory on the influence of the *apadāna* style on mosque architecture were from Qazwīn and Iṣṭakhr. His theory on the latter is largely based on a report from a-Muqaddasī that the congregational mosque at Iṣṭakhr had round columns topped with bovine-headed capitals, and that the building was said to have formerly been a fire temple.<sup>21</sup> This assumption of Creswell is profoundly weakened by the fact that al-Muqaddasī himself did not speak of any conversion of an *apadāna* into mosque, but denoted the reuse of a bull-headed capital that could well be no more than *spolia* taken from an earlier building. The theory on the *apadāna* origin of the mosque type is further contested by Ettinghausen and Grabar, who convincingly argued why the mere adoption of the hypostyle outline for the early mosques cannot stand by itself as evidence for such a theory. In this regard, they conclude: 'This was no conscious mutation of the old models of Persian *apadānas*, Roman *fora*, or Egyptian temples: it arose rather from the combination of the need for large space in the newly created cities and the availability of disused units of construction like columns'.<sup>22</sup>

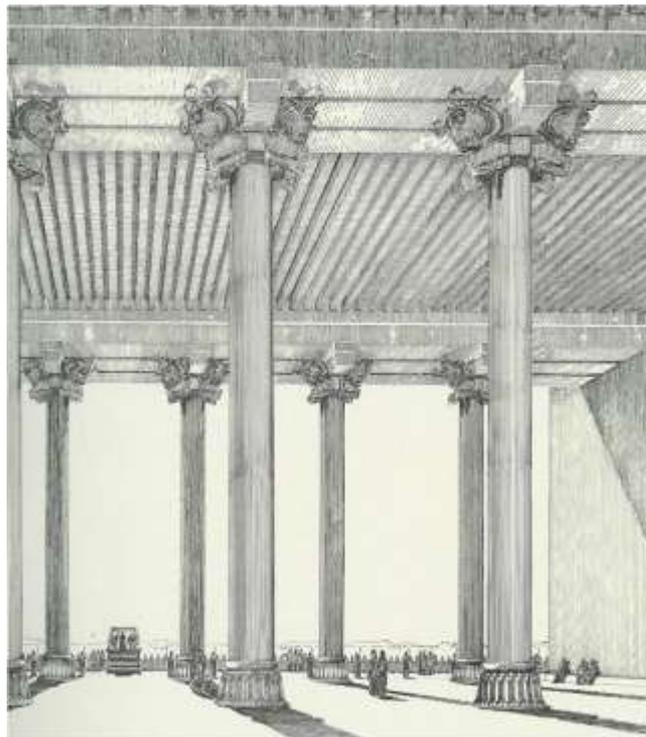


Figure 1: A reconstruction of the façade of the Persepolis Apadāna in Fars, Iran (Kaveh Farroukh, 2017)

<sup>21</sup> Al-Muqaddasī, M.J. De Goeje (ed.), *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm*, in *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum* vol.III (Leiden: Brill, 1877), p.436

<sup>22</sup> Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 650-1250* (New Haven, 1987), p. 36.



Figure 2: Bull-headed capital from Persepolis Apadāna (Courtesy of the National Museum of Iran)

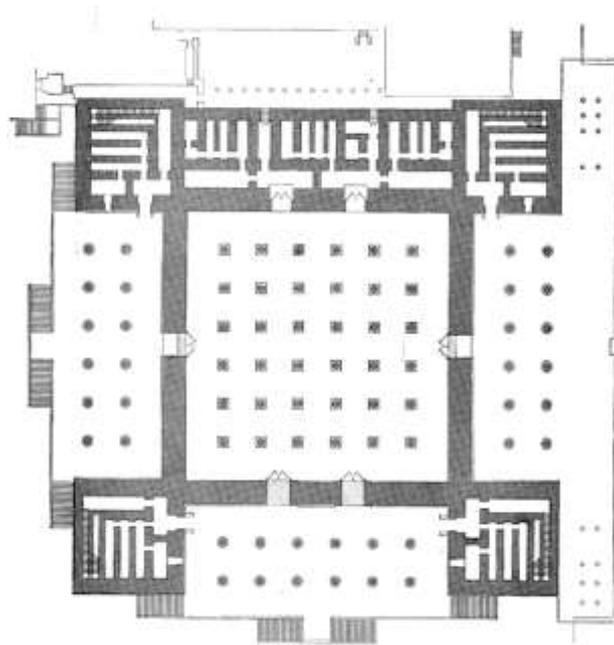


Figure 3: Plan of Persepolis *Apadāna* (E. F. Schmidt, 1953)

### *The mosque of Kūfa*

Elie Lambert compared the mosque of Kūfa to the synagogue layout and concluded that the mosque type could have derived from the Jewish Temple. However, it is the very plan which he proposed for the latter that betrays the impracticality of his argument (fig. 4).<sup>23</sup> As relayed by the sources, the first mosque of Kūfa could not be compared to any existent synagogue. According to al-Ṭabarī, the mosque's quadrangular layout was marked out, at Sa'd's command, by four arrow-shots at four right angles.<sup>24</sup> According to traditions, the dimensions of the mosque were gigantic; the caliph 'Umar asked Sa'd to plan the mosque so that it

<sup>23</sup> Elie Lambert, 'Les Origines de la Mosquée et l'Architecture Religieuse des Omeiyades', *Studia Islamica*, 6 (1956), 5-18. See also Elie Lambert, 'La synagogue de Doura-Europos et les Origines de la Mosquée', *Semitica*, 3 (1950), pp. 67-72.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, (ed.) M. Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 2nd edn, 10 vols (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1967), IV, 44; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, p. 388; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, IV, 491. This story of the arrow-shots has been doubted by Farīd Shāfi'ī who argued that such accounts were fabricated so as to depict the Arabs as ignorant of the proper ways of planning such a simple structures. Farīd Shāfi'ī, *al-Imāra al-'arabiyya fī Miṣr al-Islāmiyya: 'aṣr al-wulā'* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li-l-Ta'līf wa-l-Nashr, 1970), p. 239.

should accommodate all the Muslim conquerors and new settlers. It was thus built to accommodate 40.000 congregants.<sup>25</sup> According to al-Ṭabarī, a *zulla*, 'portico', was built in the front of the mosque and an area of an arrow-cast (400 cubits or 184.8 m) in width was left free at the mosque's four sides.<sup>26</sup> This *zulla*, 200 cubits long, was supported upon marble columns in the form of those of the Roman churches.<sup>27</sup> These columns were taken from churches without side arcades owned by Kisra, 'the Persian King'.<sup>28</sup> It should be noted, however, that the reported use of such antique columns did not make the mosque of Kūfa a Persian building, even if the architect too was reportedly a Persian.

Based on al-Ṭabarī's account, Creswell assumed that the *zulla* was open on all sides.<sup>29</sup> Unlike synagogues, it had no side or rear arcades. The mosque first had no enclosure walls; rather a trench was dug around its proper so that it would not be encroached by further building (fig. 5).<sup>30</sup> The square courtyard (*murabba'a*) was dedicated for the people's assemblies so that congestions would be avoided.<sup>31</sup> The house of Sa'd, which was still standing in the time of Ibn al-Athīr and known as the Qaṣr al-Kūfa, 'the Palace of Kūfa', was connected to the mosque forming a united *ensemble*.<sup>32</sup> This complex was made of *ajurr*, 'fired bricks' taken from the ruins of a palace attributed to the Persian kings and located in the outskirts of Ḥīra.<sup>33</sup> Later in 50/670, the mosque was built by Ziyād b. Abīh, <sup>34</sup> who provided it with two side arcades and a back.<sup>35</sup> The *bayt al-ṣalāt*, 'sanctuary' was composed of five aisles each, while the other *riwāqs* were made of two aisles each.<sup>36</sup>

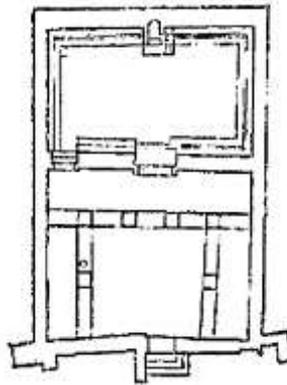


Figure 4: A plan of the synagogue of Doura-Europos (Lambert, 1950)

<sup>25</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, IV, 491.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, IV, 44.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, IV, 45.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 46. According to Ibn al-Athīr, these marble columns were brought from Ḥīra and were made by the Caesarean kings. Creswell stated that they were taken from some buildings of the Lakhmīd princes at Ḥīra, about 4 miles away.

<sup>29</sup> Creswell, *E.M.A.* I, I, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, IV, 45; Pedersen, 'Masjdīd', 647-8.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, IV, 44.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, p. 529.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 46; Pedersen, 'Masjdīd', 660.

<sup>34</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif*, p. 565; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, p. 389.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, IV, 46.

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Jubayr, *al-Riḥla* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir li-l Ṭibā'a wa-l Nashr, [1964 (?)]), pp. 187-8; Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I, I, 46.

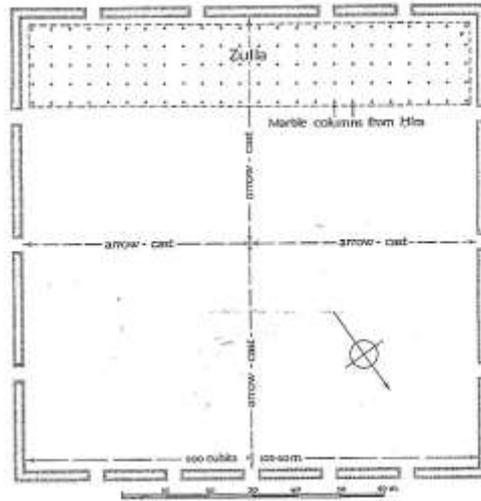


Figure 5: Kūfa, plan of the first mosque (Creswell, 1969)

### *The mosque of Wāsiṭ*

Elsewhere in Iraq, the mosque continued to be clearly independent from Persian architectural influences, and more definitely from synagogues. Wāsiṭ was the fifth town to be established in Islam. The city and its congregational mosques were founded by al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqaḫī in the middle of Iraq in 83 or 84/703-4.<sup>37</sup> According to Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī,<sup>38</sup> the mosque was a square-shaped building.<sup>39</sup> The *qibla* wall was 200 cubits long. The *bayt al-ṣalāh* was composed of five aisles of equal widths except for the one next to the *miḥrāb*. There were 19 vertical aisles of different widths. The widest is the one facing the *miḥrāb*.<sup>40</sup> The back and side *riwāqs* were one aisle each.<sup>41</sup>

This puts the mosque of Wāsiṭ in clear association with the other mosques of the early Muslim world. Most of these followed what was later known as the Arab plan, mainly composed of an open courtyard surrounded by four porticoes. In Iraq, as well as in other newly captured territories, the earliest Muslims had, indeed, no time to imitate foreign architectural types, even had they had the willingness to do so. So too in the case of the primitive mosque which was soon put up in the newly conquered Sassanian capital. According to Ibn al-Faqīh, the first mosque to have been built of *sawād*, 'twigs and shrubs' was the mosque of al-Madā'in, or Ctesiphon, which was built by Sa'd and his comrades. Later, it was expanded and built in a better way by Hudhyfa b. al-Yamān (d. 36/656). It was followed by the mosque of Kūfa and that of Anbār.<sup>42</sup> However, Hillenbrand states, 'the architectural vocabulary of these early mosques brought further scope for diversity. In the

<sup>37</sup> Al-Mas'ūdī, *Al-Tanbīh wa-l Ishrāf*, p. 360; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, IV, 222. According to Baḥshal (d. 292/905), the chronicler of Wāsiṭ, the process of building of the mosque began in 75/694 and lasted for three years. Baḥshal, *Tārīkh Wāsiṭ*, ed. by Kurkī Awwad (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1986), p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, V, 35.

<sup>39</sup> The same thing is confirmed by excavation, Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I, 134.

<sup>40</sup> Fikrī, *Madkhal*, p. 216.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, p. 263.

first half-century of Islamic architecture, the system of roofing was still primitive, and even when columns and roof-beams had replaced palm-trunks and thatching, the basic scheme remained trabeate (Baṣrah; Kūfah; and Wāsiṭ, 83/702) whether the roof was flat or pitched'.<sup>43</sup>

### The mosque in Bilād al-Shām

#### *The Aqṣā mosque*

The architectural type of the mosque, in its mature form, has been also considered by some as a descent from that of the church.<sup>44</sup> Building on the multilateral arrangement of most mosques, E. Lambert, for example, argued that the Aqṣā mosque was a descent from the church design.<sup>45</sup> This judgment of Lambert is based on a comparison between the church layout and the Umayyad Aqṣā mosque. It is, thus, significant for this discussion to cast light on the Aqṣā mosque when it was first built. The first mosque here is attributed to the Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb when Jerusalem capitulated to him in 16/637. On authority of al-Ṭabarī, after 'Umar identified the location of the Holy Rock, he cleaned it and then consulted Ka'b al-Aḥbār, a knowledgeable Companion, about the right place to lay his mosque out.<sup>46</sup> While this represents evidence from Arabic sources that 'Umar built a mosque in Bayt al Maqdis, our information on the mosque is mainly taken from a non-Muslim contemporary eyewitness. According to Arculf,<sup>47</sup> a Frankish bishop who came from Britain to visit Jerusalem in around 670, 'In that famous place where the Temple once stood, near the [city] was on the east, the Saracens [an appellation of the Muslims in the West] now frequent an oblong house of prayer which they pieced together with upright planks and large beams over some ruined remains. It is said that the building can hold up to three thousand people.'<sup>48</sup> Caetani's argument that the mosque of 'Umar rested on the ruins of the church of the Virgin Mary and that it was raised on the platform of Herod's Temple is not supported by any evidence, whether textual or material.<sup>49</sup> This account of Arculf, who visited Jerusalem only thirty-three years after its conquest by the Muslims, stands as a compelling evidence for the existence of early custom-built mosques. This means that the Muslims did not generally capture the churches of Jerusalem to use as places for Muslim prayer, as believed by some. Rather,

<sup>43</sup> R. Hillenbrand, 'Masjid', in *the Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, VI (1991), pp. 677-88 (p. 679).

<sup>44</sup> A good example is G. T. Rivoira: *Moslem Architecture: Its Origins and Development*, (transl.) Gordon McNeil Rushforth (New York: Hacker Art Books, [1918] 1975).

<sup>45</sup> Elie Lambert, 'Les Mosquées du Type Andalou en Espagne et en Afrique du Nord', *Al-Andalus*, 14 (1949), 273-89.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III, 610-11. On the mosque of 'Umar, see also al-Suyūfī, *Ithāf al-akhiṣṣā bi faḍā'il al-masjid al-aqṣā*, (ed.) A. R. Aḥmad, 2 vols (Cairo, 1982-4), i, 235-41; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya* (ed.) 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, 20 vols (Jiza: Dār Hajr, 1997), ix, 656, 662.

<sup>47</sup> Tobler, *Itinera et descriptiones Terrae Sanctae*, I, 145; Arculfī *Relatio de Locis Sanctis, scripta ab Adamnano*.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Irwin, *Islamic Art* (London: Laurence King, 1997), p. 58-9; Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, *Islamic Arts* (London: Phaidon, 1997), p. 25.

<sup>49</sup> Rivoira, *Moslem Architecture*, p. 14 (quoting Caetani, *Annali*, III, 2, pp. 950, 951; vol. IV, 507-509).

they preferred to erect mosque for this purpose.<sup>50</sup>

After the works of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, the Aqṣā mosque was rebuilt in the Umayyad period.<sup>51</sup> The mosque itself, combined with other memorials and structures, is part of a grander complex called al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf, which—as maintained by Briggs—still ‘represents very nearly the same aspect as when it was laid out by ‘Abd al-Malik’.<sup>52</sup> There are two theories regarding to whom the Umayyad reconstruction of the Aqṣā mosque should be attributed. According to a majority of early historians and geographers, it was rebuilt by ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān in 65/685. Others believe that it is due to al-Walīd (87/706).<sup>53</sup> More recently, Julian Raby, shared later by Hamilton, has attributed the first building of the Umayyad Aqṣā mosque to caliph Mu‘āwīya in the early 40s/660s.<sup>54</sup> Whoever the builders of the Umayyad mosque was, it was later struck by an earthquake, which destroyed the *mughatṭā*, ‘roofed part’. The mosque was, therefore, rebuilt in the Abbasid period.<sup>55</sup>

In the Umayyad period, the Aqṣā mosque was a rectangular structure composed of an axial nave surmounted by a high wooden dome sheathed with lead. It was flanked with six bays, three on each side.<sup>56</sup> Based on a short statement of al-Muqaddasī,<sup>57</sup> Rivoira assumed that the mosque had a T-shaped plan formed by a central nave upheld upon arches resting on isolated piers, and that it had a dome over the *miḥrāb*.<sup>58</sup> Rivoira attempted to use this interpretation to support his theory that the origins of the mosque are to be sought in the Christian architecture in Armenia and the Iberian Peninsula. Nevertheless, a more recent study by Hamilton revealed that in the Umayyad period such a central nave never existed and thus demolished Rivoira’s theory (fig. 6).<sup>59</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Creswell did not agree that this was built by Muslims and argued that Arculf meant by that an ancient palace that had been set to ruins by Titus in 70 AD. However, this palace, which was destroyed about 600 years before the Arabs built their mosque, was not mentioned by any of the Arab early informants.

<sup>51</sup> For more information about the results of recent excavations, see: ‘Al-Masjid al-Aqṣā’, first published in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, VI, (1988), pp. 707-8.

<sup>52</sup> Briggs, *Muhammadan architecture*, p. 33.

<sup>53</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, IV, 292.

<sup>54</sup> Johns, ‘The House of the Prophet’, p. 62.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Muqaddasī, *The Best Divisions*, p. 153.

<sup>56</sup> Oleg Grabar, ‘The Haram al-Sharif: An Essay in Interpretation’, *Jerusalem*, 4 (2005). First published in *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies*, 2 (2000), pp. 1-13, (pp. 207-8).

<sup>57</sup> Al-Muqaddasī, *The Best Divisions*, p. 153.

<sup>58</sup> Rivoira, *Moslem Architecture*, p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> R. W. Hamilton, *The Structural History of the Aqṣā Mosque: A Record of Archaeological Gleanings from the Repairs of 1938-1942* (Jerusalem: Published for the Government of Palestine by Oxford University Press, London, 1949); Hamilton, *The Structural History of the Aqṣā Mosque*; idem, ‘Once again the Aqṣā’, in *Bayt al-Maqdis: ‘Abd al-Malik’s Jerusalem*, J. Raby and J. Johns (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Islamic Art vol. IX part 1*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I. II, 379-80.

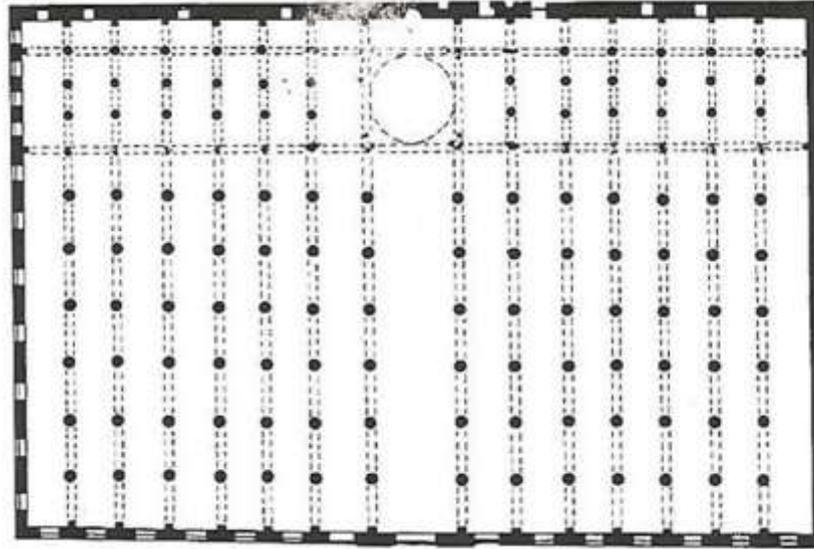


Figure 6: Jerusalem, Hamilton's (1949) plan of the Marwānīd Aqṣā mosque (Johns 1999)

#### *The Dome of the Rock (72/691-2)*

Given its peculiar configuration, many scholars tend to perceive the Dome of the Rock as inspired from non-Islamic types, particularly, the Christian sanctuaries in Bilād al-Shām, such as the Cathedral of Boṣra (AD 513), the Church of Su'ūd at Jabal al-Zaytūn and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.<sup>60</sup> Creswell's study of this supreme Islamic monument digested almost all previous relevant work.<sup>61</sup> He described the structure as 'an annular building and consists in its ultimate analysis of a wooden dome 20.44 m' (fig. 7).<sup>62</sup>

In fact, many aspects coalesced to portray the building—at the time of its foundation—a part of a theological as well as political confrontation between Islam on one side and Judaism and Christianity on another. These aspects are, in addition to the layout of Dome of the Rock itself, the inscriptions on its walls and the mosaics and coins from the time of 'Abd al-Malik and some historical accounts on the Byzantine emperor Heraclius contemplating upon converting to Islam. F. Shāfi'ī, however, argues that we should not try to generate from the unique case of the Dome of the Rock indiscriminate judgments.<sup>63</sup> Shāfi'ī also mentions that the people who lived in Syria at the time of building the Umayyad mosque were mainly of Arabic descent and that when the Dome of the Rock was being built in 72/691, the Syrian population had mainly consisted of Muslims who were either converts or migrants.<sup>64</sup> Shāfi'ī added that it is clear from the plan of the Dome of the Rock that it is

<sup>60</sup> 'Afif Bahnasī, *Al-Fann al-'Arabī al-Islāmī fī bidāyat takawwunih* (Damascus, Dār al-Fikr, 1983), p. 55.

<sup>61</sup> Creswell's study about the Dome of the Rock was preceded by that of Mauss, *Revue Archéologique*, 3rd series, XII, p. 18; Richmond's *The Dome of the Rock*; Walker; 'Kubbat al-Ṣakhra', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, II, p. 1089. This is in addition to the works of van Berchem, Lammens, Fergusson and others.

<sup>62</sup> Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I, I, pp 68.

<sup>63</sup> Shāfi'ī, *Imāra*, p. 75.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

different from the Byzantine architecture in Syria and elsewhere. The architectural style of the Dome of the Rock could, accordingly, have been derived from the Byzantine type, but then modified to suit the purpose for which it was erected, namely to commemorate the Holy Rock.<sup>65</sup>

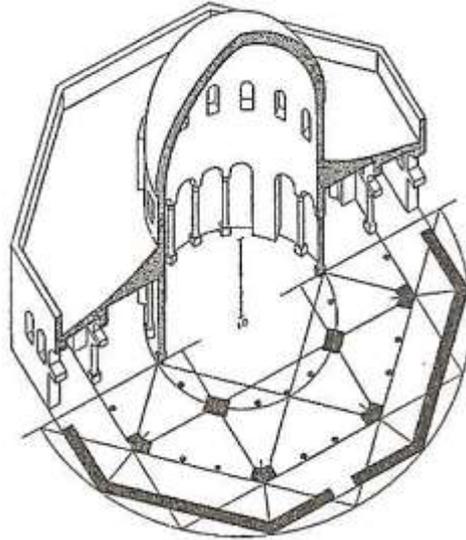


Figure 7: Jerusalem, plan of the Dome of the Rock (Choisy, 1899)

*The Great Umayyad mosque in Damascus (87/706)*

Mainly arguing from some medieval accounts stating that the mosque of Damascus was built on the ruins of the church of St. John the Baptist, quite a number of academics argued that the type of the mosque derived from the Syrian churches. Creswell, while contesting the idea that the Umayyad mosque was built on the foundations of an older church, maintained that the Umayyad mosque and other mosques in Syria at the time derived from the Syrian churches, drawing mainly from the style of the three-way arrangement of the *bayt al-ṣalāh*.<sup>66</sup> This is, however, backed by neither textual nor archaeological evidence. Creswell himself admitted that the type of the Umayyad mosque is not comparable to that of any of the Syrian churches. Sauvaget states that the type of the Umayyad mosque is at total odds with the church that once existed in the very location. Nor could it be argued that the church type provided the origins of mosque in general for quite a number of mosques had already been built before the Umayyad mosque.

Even if we accept that the Umayyad mosque was built after the fashion of the church, there is no evidence that other Syrian mosques too followed the church type. Nor could it be argued that such a Christian architectural type, which is said to have exerted influence on the Umayyad mosque, represented the origins of mosque in general, for quite a number of mosques had already been built before the Umayyad mosque. The Umayyad mosque, in particular, was not a straight continuation of the mosques built before it. Nor did it

<sup>65</sup> Shāfi'ī, *Imāra*, p. 78.

<sup>66</sup> Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I. 1. 187–96.

have any influence on the following mosques.

With the exception of the southern wall, which is believed to have been existent even before the Arab conquest of Syria, the whole mosque was built in the time of al-Walīd.<sup>67</sup> It is said that al-Walīd wanted to build the mosque with columns without arcades (*iṣṭiwānāt ilā-l-ṭaqāt*), just as he did to the mosque of the Prophet. Yet, one of the architects advised him that the roof should rest on arches so that no much pressure would be exerted on the columns.<sup>68</sup> According to J. M. Bloom and S. Blair, ‘the building does retain much of its original appearance, though it has been damaged, especially in the great fire in 1893.’<sup>69</sup> There is belief amongst a majority of scholars that the actual mosque presents the plan of al-Walīd,<sup>70</sup> and that many parts of the masonry date to his time.<sup>71</sup>

In the time of al-Walīd, the mosque was a rectangle 160 x 100 m. The *bayt al-ṣalāh*, whose roof was 11 m. high, consisted of three aisles. The *ṣaḥn* was surrounded from the other three directions by single-aisled *riwāq*. The sanctuary had four *miḥrābs*, the central one of which, and that was not set in the middle of the *qibla* wall, was connected to the *ṣaḥn* by means of a wide central nave (22 m. wide).<sup>72</sup> Above the bay of the *miḥrāb* rose three cupolas: one connected to the wall, which surrounded the *ṣaḥn*, another connected to the *miḥrāb* to emphasize its significance,<sup>73</sup> and a third one located in between (fig. 8).<sup>74</sup> Al-Walīd’s architects retained the four observation towers at the corner of the older Roman Temenos and used them as minarets.<sup>75</sup> According to al-‘Umarī, the columns were surmounted by arches pierced with small *ṭaqāt* (recesses or windows). Between each two of them, was a marble pillar or a column.<sup>76</sup> Al-Walīd made the roof of the Umayyad mosque in the form of gables whose interiors were adorned with gold.<sup>77</sup> To the present, geometric patterns of interlaced circles and other ribbed and lobed patterns can be seen in the Roman part of the Umayyad mosque.<sup>78</sup>

While there seems to be consensus that the mosque was built at the Ancient Temenos of Jupiter, there is a large controversy about whether it was erected on the ruins of

<sup>67</sup> Fikrī, *Madkhal*, p. 217.

<sup>68</sup> Al-‘Umarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār*, I, 181.

<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, *Islamic Arts*, p. 31.

<sup>70</sup> Briggs, *Muhammadan Architecture*, p. 40.

<sup>71</sup> For more details on the Umayyad mosque, see: Richmond, *Moslem Architecture* (London: 1926), pp 25-30; Briggs, *Muhammadan Architecture*, pp. 39-44; Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Art and Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), pp. 25-8; Ettinghausen and Grabar, pp. 37-45; Bahnasī, *Fann*, pp. 35-54.

<sup>72</sup> Al-Muqaddasī, *The Best Divisions*, pp. 144-7; Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla*, pp. 236-46; Fikrī, *Madkhal*, p. 218-9. For detailed information about the Umayyad mosque, see: Rivoira, *Moslem Architecture*, pp. 72-137; Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I. I, 151-205; Briggs, *Muhammadan Architecture*, p. 40-6.

<sup>73</sup> Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla*, pp. 240; *Islam: Art and Architecture*, p. 71

<sup>74</sup> Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla*, p. 237.

<sup>75</sup> *Islam: Art and Architecture*, p. 68.

<sup>76</sup> Al-‘Umarī, *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*, ed. by Aḥmad Zakī Pāsha, (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1924) I, 195.

<sup>77</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XII, 573.

<sup>78</sup> Shāfi‘ī, *‘Imāra*, pp. 218-9.

the church of St. John the Baptist. It is expressly stated by renowned historians, such as Ibn 'Asākir and Ibn Jubayr, that the church, or a part of it, was appropriated by Walīd to build his mosque.<sup>79</sup> This theory, however, has been systematically demolished by Rivoira and Creswell both from historical as well as archaeological perspectives.<sup>80</sup> It is further argued by H. Mu'nis that the area of the Jupiter Temple was not entirely occupied by the footprint of the later Church of St. John the Baptist (fig. 9). Mu'nis assumes that the Muslims, having seen the vastness of the ancient Temple (which by then was dilapidated) wished to take advantage of the debris which included readily-cut stones, marble and a spacious paved floor. Later on, the masons of 'Abd al-Malik thought that they could turn the whole edifice into a mosque and so they made a deal with the Christians according to which the latter were compensated with a new bigger church.<sup>81</sup>

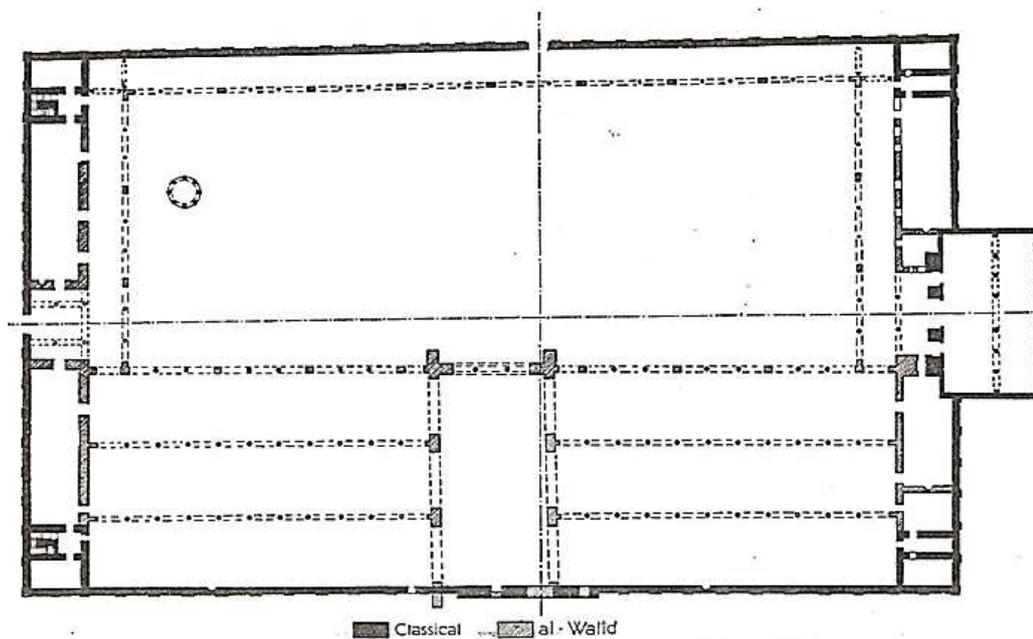


Figure 8: Damascus, plan of the Umayyad mosque (Creswell, 1969)

<sup>79</sup> See Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla*, p. 236; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XII, 566; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh*, II, 254-5; al-'Umarī, *Masālik*, I, 179-80.

171.

<sup>80</sup> Rivoira, *Moslem Architecture*, pp. 72-137; Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I, I, 187-96. The theory about the seizure of the church and converting it into the Umayyad mosque was also doubted by other scholars such as Fergusson.

<sup>81</sup> Mu'nis, *Masājid*, p. 159.

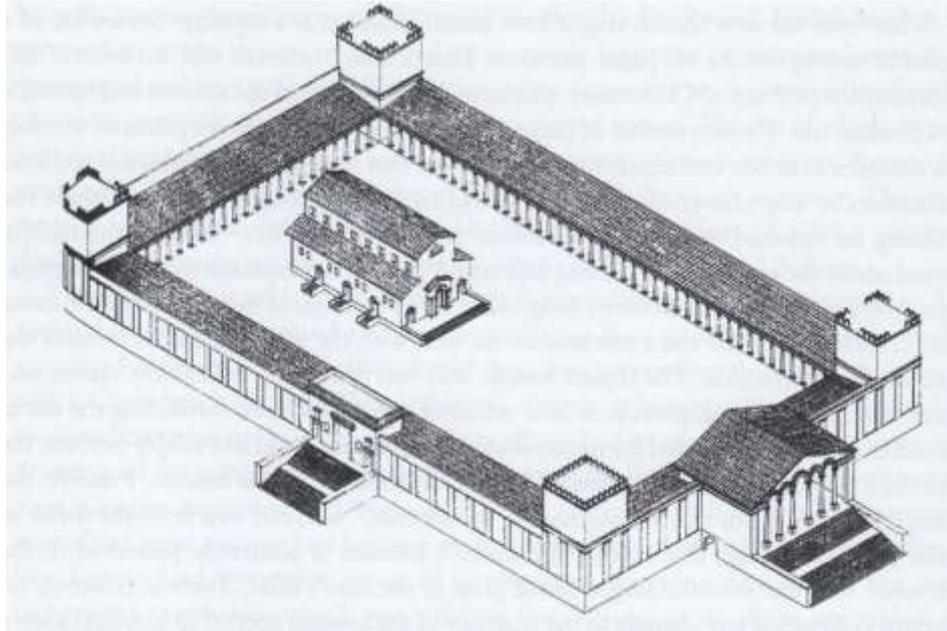


Figure 9: Drawing of the Temenos at the time of conquest (F. Shafi'ī, 1970)

### The mosque in Arabia

#### *The mosque of the Prophet in Medina*

Both Lane-Poole and Ernst Diez believed that the Muslim Arabs took the system of the mosque from the Qurayshī temple. This is replaced by J. Johns with the so-called *bayt al-'arab*.<sup>82</sup> Also, Henri Lammens argued that the mosque is a development of the Arab pre-Islamic tribal *majlis* (i.e. chieftain tent or council).<sup>83</sup> However, the theory that the origin of the mosque is to be found in pre-Islamic types of Arabia is challenged by the fact that only inadequate information is available on these types thus far. This assumption is further weakened by the fact that the mosque which the Prophet built upon his emigration to Madina was mainly a hypaethral structure. The mosque retained this configuration after the works of 'Umar and 'Uthmān in 17 and 29 respectively. In the Umayyad period, the mosque was rebuilt by al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik in 88-90/707-9. The work was consigned to his governor at Madīna at that time, 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz.<sup>84</sup>

According to tradition, al-Walīd sent a letter to *malik al-Rūm* telling him: 'We want to re-build the mosque of our great Prophet [at Madīna]. Thus, help me by [sending] craftsmen and mosaics.' Therefore, he [namely the Byzantine king] sent to him loads [of mosaics] and more than twenty masons. Some said ten. The emperor wrote to al-Walīd saying: 'I have sent you ten workers, equalling one hundred workers. [I also sent you] 80.000 *dinārs* to help you, and some chains to carry the lanterns.' According to Qudāma b. Mūsa, the *malik al-Rūm* sent to al-Walīd 40 Roman workers, 40 Copt workers and 40.000 *mithqāl* of gold and

<sup>82</sup> Johns, 'The House of the Prophet', pp. 93-103.

<sup>83</sup> Henri Lammens, 'Ziād ibn Abīhi', in *Rivista delgi Studi Orientali*, IV, pp. 240-250.

<sup>84</sup> Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā' bi-akhbār dār al-Muṣṭafā* (ed.) M. Muḥyī al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 4 vols, [Cairo, 1955] 1984), II, 513.

mosaics.<sup>85</sup>

This account on the employment of non-Muslim workers in the Umayyad reconstruction of the Prophet's mosque is usually taken by many as evidence for foreign influences on mosque architecture. Nonetheless, the reported design of the Umayyad structure of the Madina (fig. 10) mosque proves a direct evolution of the Arab plan that had been already adopted for the mosque by 'Umar and 'Uthmān and before them by the Prophet himself. There is also historical evidence that the majority of workers, masons and craftsmen who were involved in the Umayyad reconstruction of the mosque were local Arabs, who were also supervised by an Arab architect, Ṣāliḥ b. Kaysān.<sup>86</sup>

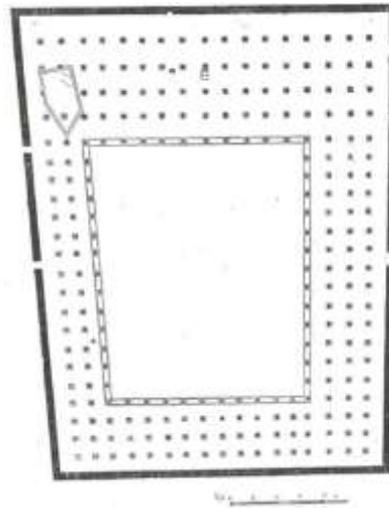


Figure 10: Plan of the Prophet's mosque in the time of al-Walīd (Fikrī, 1963)

### The mosque in North Africa

*The mosque of Kairouan (50/670, rebuilt in 84/703 and in 105/723)*

Some scholars maintained that the type of the mosque, particularly in the Western part of the Muslim world, derived from the Roman basilicas, or reception halls. In his *Moslem Architecture*, Richmond posited that the mosque evolved from Roman and Byzantine architecture.<sup>87</sup> Sauvaget, who already contested the argument that mosque design was based on the church type, accepted and further elaborated on the above theory that the origins of the mosque is to be found in the Roman Basilicas. His contention is that the mosque was used for many purposes, particularly as a formal and public meeting-place,

<sup>85</sup> Ibn al-Najjār, *al-Durra al-thamīna fī tārikh al-Madīna*, (ed.) M. Z. 'Azab (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa, 1981), p. 175; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'*, II, 518-9. An abridged version of the story was also mentioned by al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: Volume XXIII the Zenith of the Marwānīd House*, trans. by Martin Hinds, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 142. On the same story, see also Ibn Rusta, *al-A'lāq al-naḥḥīya wa-yalīhi Kitāb al-Buldān li-l-Ya'qūbī* (ed. M. J. de Goeje: *Kitāb al-a'laq al-naḥḥīya. . . et Kitāb al-buldān* (Leiden: Brill, 1891), p. 69; Abū Ḥanīfah al-Dīnawarī, *Al-Akḥbār al-Ṭiwāl*, ed. by Vladimir Guirgass (Leiden: Brill, 1888), p. 329; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XII, 570.

<sup>86</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, XXIII (Hinds's transl.), pp. 141-2; al-Samhūdī, II, *Wafā'*, 522.

<sup>87</sup> E.T. Richmond, *Moslem Architecture: Some Causes and Consequences* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1926), p. 3.

rather than an exclusive place of worship.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, Georges Marçais *et alii* suggested that the design of the Kairouan mosque, in particular, derived from some churches of the Byzantine part of Africa, such as Damous el-Karita in Cartagena.<sup>89</sup>

Before looking into the mosque of Kairouan in the first/seventh century and whether it was similar to Roman and/Christian basilicas, we should note that early Christian basilicas, particularly in Italy and Syria, was mainly a rectangle with a wide central nave running the middle, terminating with an altar and flanked with equally-sized aisles. In most cases, the basilica was preceded by an atrium—sometimes a narthex (fig. 12). It is noteworthy that this type, having materialized only two centuries before the rise of Islam, had no influence on the mosque type over the first ten centuries. It was not until the Ottoman period that some influence existed.<sup>90</sup> The difficulty for the church with atrium, notwithstanding its perceived eligibility, to have inspired the mosque in its early phase has already been noted by J. Johns.<sup>91</sup> It is noteworthy here that the Christian (or genus) basilica was formerly suggested by van Berchem to have inspired the mosques at Jerusalem and Damascus.<sup>92</sup>

The mosque of Kairouan was first put up by ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’ when he marked out (*ikhtaṭṭa*) the city in 50-5/670-670. In the beginning, the mosque was no more than a space enclosed by a thick wall of *labin*. We do not have adequate description of the *bayt ṣalāh* or any other component. In 80/694, the mosque was renewed by Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān,<sup>93</sup> who was ‘Abd al-Malik’s ruler of the Maghreb. According to al-Bakrī, the whole mosque but the *miḥrāb* was pulled down and rebuilt by Ḥassān who provided it with two red columns, spotted with yellow, from an ancient church.<sup>94</sup> The anonymous author of *Kitāb al-Istibṣār* added that these two columns on which the dome is supported faced the *miḥrāb*.<sup>95</sup>

This is the only aspect that links the Kairouan mosque to church architecture, and it has palpably nothing to do with plan or layout. In view of our slight information on what the mosque looked like during the first/seventh century, scholars’ attempts to propose reconstructed plans of the mosque are only assumptions that are based on neither archaeological nor historical evidence.<sup>96</sup> Adequate information is, however, available about the mosque when it was rebuilt in 105/723 by Bishr b. Ṣafwān, at command of the caliph

<sup>88</sup> Jean Sauvaget, *La Mosquée Omeyyade de Médine: Études sur les Origines Architecturales de la Mosquée et de la Basilique* (Paris: Vanoest, 1947), pp. 123; 134–5, 137, 143, 157.

<sup>89</sup> Henri Saladin: *La Mosquée de Sidi Okba à Kairouan* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1899), p. 40; Georges Marçais, *Manuel d’Art musulman: L’Architecture, Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc, Espagne, Sicile*, 2 vols (Paris: Auguste Picard, 1926-7), I, 17. See also Dieulafoy’s reconstruction of the Cordoba mosque. Dieulafoy, *Espagne et Portugal* (Paris: Hachette, 1921), p. 41, fig. 94.

<sup>90</sup> See F. Shafi‘ī, *Imāra*, pp. 125-7.

<sup>91</sup> Johns, ‘House of the Prophet’, p. 102.

<sup>92</sup> Max van Berchem ‘Architecture’, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 1st edn, vol.I, 1913, pp.422-425.

<sup>93</sup> Creswell states that the date of this reconstruction is only given by al-Mālikī: I. I, 139.

<sup>94</sup> Al-Bakrī, *Al-Masālik wal Mamālik*, 2 vols (Tunisia: Bayt al-Ḥikma, 1992), II, 673.

<sup>95</sup> Unknown Author, *Kitāb al-Istibṣār fī ‘Ajā’b al-Amṣār* (Casablanca: Dār al-Nashr al-Maghribiyya, 1985), p. 114.

<sup>96</sup> Fikrī, *Al-Masjid al-Jāmi‘ bil Qayrawān* (Cairo: Al-Ma‘ārif, 1936), p. 23; Mu’nis, *Masājid*, p. 56.

Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik (fig. 11).<sup>97</sup> After such a review, it becomes quite clear that Roman/Hellenistic architecture did not exert any direct impact upon Islam architecture, taken together. This, however, happened through loans from the Byzantine style, but was more mainly restricted to the use of architectural elements. It never surpassed that to have any substantial effect on design or layout.

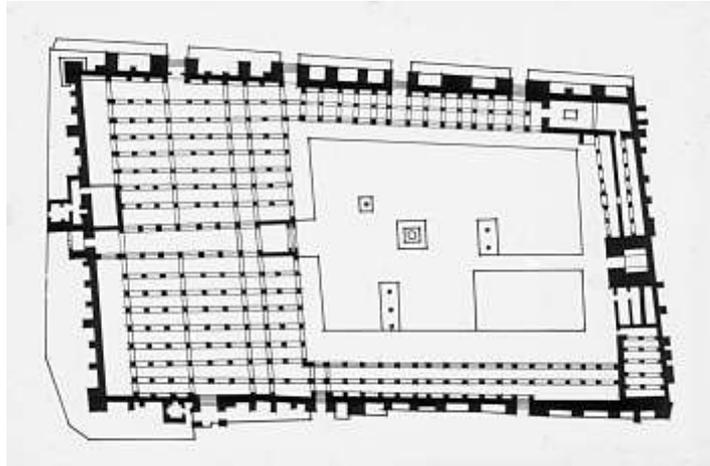


Figure 11: Plan of the great mosque in the time of Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik in 105/723 (Keith Turner after George Michell, 1995)

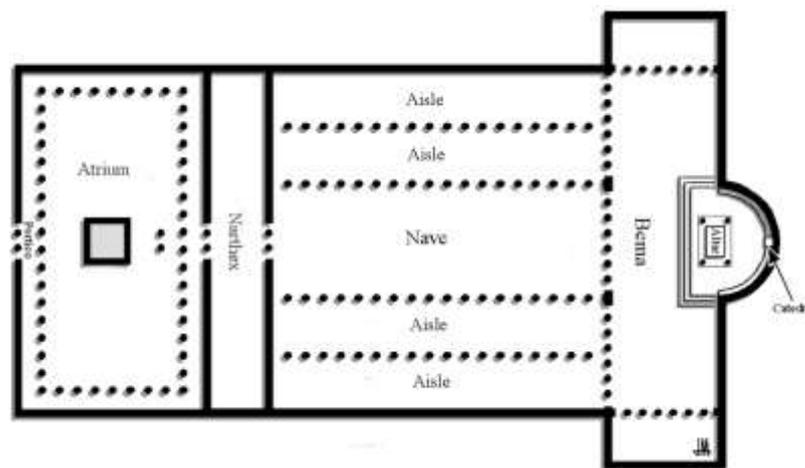


Figure 12: Plan of a typical early Christian basilica

### The mosque in Egypt

Also in connection with the above discussion, Henri Saladin, arguing from the similarity between the orientation of the Kairouan mosque and that of the Egyptian and Chaldean temples, assumed that mosque design derived from the ancient Egyptian temples.<sup>98</sup> Forty

<sup>97</sup> For details on the form of mosque in the time of Hishām, see: Fikrī, *Madkhal*, p. 207; Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I, II, 521.

<sup>98</sup> Saladin: *La Mosquée de Sidi Okba*, p. 37. Saladin's theory was later contested by Briggs, *Muhammadan Architecture*, p. 15.

years afterwards, this hypothesis of Saladin was supported by Louis Hauteceœur and Gaston Wiet.<sup>99</sup> For a number of particulars, Saladin's theory does not seem to be well argued. First, and for considerations related to geographical convenience, it is the earliest mosques of Egypt, not Tunisia, that should rather be considered if a link between the mosque and the Pharaonic temple is to be theorized. Second, and for temporal aspects, it is the first/seventh century mosques that needs to be discussed. This is further challenged by the rarity of our information on the Egyptian mosques in that early period, i.e. the first century AH.

The only salient exception is the mosque of 'Amr at Fuṣṭāṭ. Nevertheless, our information of the mosque in the first/seventh century is based on historical rather than archaeological evidence. Due to numeral successive enlargements and additions, the mosque in its actual form represents a problem as far as dating is concerned. The oldest parts of today's mosque are attributed to 'Abd Allāh b. Ṭāhir, the 'Abbāsīd emir who pulled down an earlier structure of the mosque and rebuilt it in 212/827 by command of the caliph al-Ma'mūn.<sup>100</sup> When first built in 21/641-2, however, the mosque was no more than a simple cubic structure, putting it in no link whatsoever with either the Ancient Egyptian or Chaldean temples. Its dimensions (50 x 30 cubits) would have housed a maximum of 700 worshippers. It is true that the mosque underwent a series of improvements and expansions under the Umayyads and later under the Abbasids, but its layout has always retained the Arab plan (fig. 13). The mosque of 'Amr, just like other early mosques in Egypt such as Ibn Ṭulūn and al-Azhar, are mainly composed an open courtyard surrounded by four porticoes.<sup>101</sup> The dominant constituent elements of a typical Ancient Egyptian temple, on the other hand, are forecourts, massive pylons peristyle halls, and quite a large covered section usually occupied by sanctuaries and shrines for the exclusive use of royalties and priests (fig. 14).

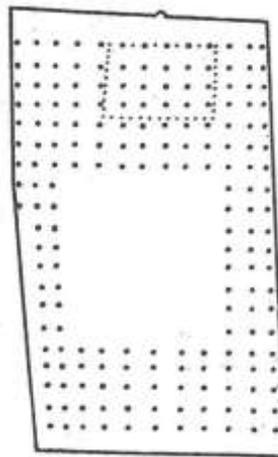


Figure 13: The mosque of Fuṣṭāṭ in the time of Qurra b. Sharīk (92-3/710-12) (Fikrī

<sup>99</sup> Louis Hauteceœur and Gaston Wiet, *Les mosquées du Caire* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1932).

<sup>100</sup> See Richard Yeomans, *The Art and Architecture of Islamic Cairo* (Reading: Garnet, 2006), p. 21.

<sup>101</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Mawā'iz wa al-I'tibār bi Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa al-Āthār: al-Ma'rūf bil Khīṭaṭ al-Maqrīziyya*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 1987) II, 247-56; Kamāl al-Dīn Sāmīh, *Al-Imāra al-Islamiyya fī Miṣr*, Kitābuk Series, 30 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1977 [?]), p. 4.

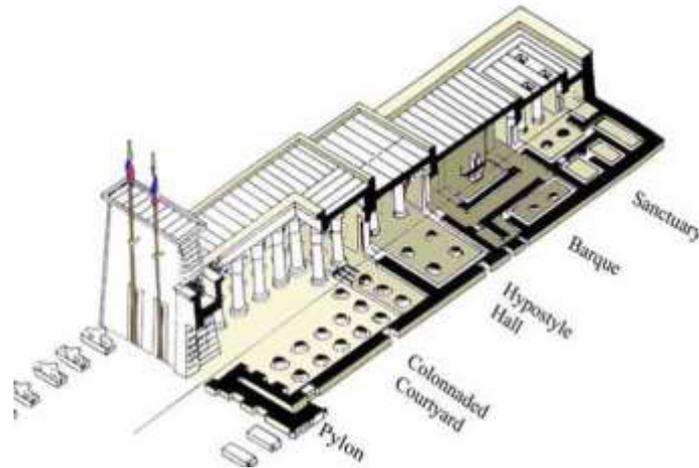


Figure 14: Plan of the temple of Amon at the Karnak complex in Luxor (Baines and Malek, 2002)

### Conclusion

All the theories put forward so far on the foreign origins of the mosque type are marred by clear inconsistency. They are disqualified by either geographical or chronological barriers. Incompatible statements do not only flow from scholars who embrace the same theory, but also from the same scholar. A clear example is Elie Lambert who first argued in favour of the church being the origin of the mosque type.<sup>102</sup> Later on, however, Lambert abandoned the above theory and posited that there were two types of mosque design. The first derived from the Prophet's 'house' at Madīna, where architectural emphasis was centred on three main features: (i) the *bayt al-ṣalāh* extending from east to west; (ii) the *qibla* wall; (iii) and the spaciousness of the *ṣaḥn*, 'courtyard'. The second type, as he maintains, was inspired from the Aqṣā mosque, which—in turn—was a descent from the church design, where the use of multi-aisles was the ruling architectural element.<sup>103</sup> Lambert produced a modified plan for a section of the Cordoba mosque to prove his theory. Five years later, he contested the theories about the church origin of the mosque type and indicated, based on the well-defined discrepancy between the Muslim and Christian rituals, the difference between the mosque components and their counterparts in church architecture. Instead, Lambert tentatively argued a similarity between the mosque and the synagogue and maintained that the *minbar* in the mosque is comparable to the *bimah* (or *bema*), which is a platform from which the Torah is read out in the synagogue.

There is, in fact, neither textual nor archaeological evidence that the early Arabs used to build their mosques after the style of churches. That being said, the case of the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, more than others, received much attention from scholars, given the historical accounts that it was built on ruins of the church of St. John the Baptist.

<sup>102</sup> Fikrī, *Madkhal*, pp. 288-9.

<sup>103</sup> Elie Lambert, 'Les Mosquées du Type Andalou', pp. 273-89.

Creswell himself admitted that the type of the Umayyad mosque could not be compared to any of the Syrian churches. A noted difference between the mosque and the church is that, while the plan of the former usually lays architectural emphasis on width, the latter does so with depth. In the mosque, the *qibla* wall usually attains more than 100 m. long. There is no archaeological evidence for a church whose court is 136 m. long (and which is the length of the *qibla* wall in the Umayyad mosque).<sup>104</sup> The front wall of any pre-Islamic church, on the other hand, was definitely less than the shortest *qibla* wall in any of the above mosques. Further, the length of the front wall of any of these churches is 'by far' less than that of the side walls of the same church.<sup>105</sup>

It is from the very start that the earliest Muslims wanted their places of prayer to be different from foreign architectural types. They continued to observe such a scheme even after the Islamic state took the guise of an empire. The reported conversion, whether partial or complete, of some churches into mosque upon the earliest conquests was a short-term practise to meet the importunate need for a place of worship and a headquarters. The earliest Muslims, it seems, were not interested to copy the architectural styles they found in the conquered lands. They only used them as a matter of expedience and impermanency. This seems to have been done on purpose. According Eutychius: 'Umar visited the Basilica of Constantine and prayed at the top of the flight of steps leading up to the entrance, after which he went to Bethlehem and prayed in the southern apse of the Church of Nativity'.<sup>106</sup> 'Umar is said to have refused to pray in the church itself as he was concerned that such a practice of him, albeit intrinsically spontaneous, would be taken by later people as a legal foundation to convert churches into mosques.<sup>107</sup>

In the course of time, and particularly under the Umayyads, it was natural for some elements of the mosque to be influenced by the architectural types of the conquered lands. This, nonetheless, did not give the mosque the character of an Islamised church, synagogue, fire temple, etc. We should here differentiate between two meanings for architecture: one as how space is to be designed; the other as how space to be occupied. In this article, the discussion has been focused on the former meaning. The borrowing of some architectural elements from non-Muslim types, on the other hand, and that is supported by material evidence, is natural and not decisive for architectural personality. Let us take the parallelism between the *mihṛāb* in the mosque and the ark in the church or the synagogue as a telling example. Praying towards a certain direction has had its unique impact on the mosque institutional and architectural features. Some scholars, such as Abraham Geiger, Edward Hirschfield and Horowitz, argue that the *qibla* sign in the mosque is inspired by the ark in the

<sup>104</sup> At Kūfa, Fuṣṭāṭ, Wāsiṭ and Baghdad it ranges from 100 to 110 m. long, and in Kairouan, 72 m. Fikrī, *Madkhal*, p. 275.

<sup>105</sup> Fikrī, *Madkhal*, p. 275.

<sup>106</sup> Creswell, *Short Account*, p. 10.

<sup>107</sup> Creswell, *E.M.A.*, I. I, 34. This story is also referred to by al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭat*, II, 492.

synagogue. Yet, unlike the *qibla* which exquisitely governs the outline of mosques, and towards which each Muslim must orientate himself during prayers, the ark is no more than a niche where important records, sacred writings and other precious relics are saved.<sup>108</sup>

Finally, the stark simplicity of the earliest mosques, particularly those built in the first-half century, was inspired by simplicity of the rituals which they served. Such simplicity does not seem to have required the borrowing of any foreign architectural type. It follows that the largely hypaethral configuration of such mosques demolishes all of the theories on the foreign origins of mosque architecture, in its earliest phase. Later, the mosque layout, while greatly retaining its distinctive Islamic character, was influenced by some architectural types in the conquered territories. A noted example is the use of transept in the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, and also possibly in the Umayyad construction of the Aqṣā mosque in Jerusalem. The presence of such influences is natural and could well have been dictated by variant climatic conditions, but should not be taken to attribute the mosque type to non-Islamic origins—especially that it was only at a later date when such influences found their way to mosque architecture.

#### تقييم النظريات السائدة عن نشأة الطراز المعماري للمسجد

لقد بدأ الاهتمام الغربي بدراسة التراث الفني والعماري للعالم الإسلامي منذ أواخر القرن التاسع عشر. ومنذ ذلك الحين، فقد بُدلت جهود لاقتة لتوثيق ودراسة روائع العمارة الإسلامية وكذلك الحفاظ عليها. إلا أن غالبية العلماء الغربيين، انطلاقاً مما هو معروف عن التراث العمراني الضئيل لشبه الجزيرة العربية قبيل ظهور الإسلام، قد دأبوا على إرجاع طراز المساجد في الإسلام إلى أصول غير إسلامية. وعلى الرغم من أن معظم هذه النظريات قد وُضعت منذ ما يقارب قرناً من الزمان، فإنها ما تزال تشكل وجهة النظر السائدة في المدرسة الغربية حتى الآن. هذه الدراسة تحاول أن تنتظر عن كتب في تاريخ المساجد الأولى، خاصة تلك التي شُيدت في القرن الأول للإسلام، وذلك بهدف الوقوف على معرفة ما إذا كانت تلك المساجد قد تأثرت بالفعل بالطرز المعمارية المحلية التي كانت موجودة قبل الإسلام. لهذا، فإننا سوف نعتمد في هذه الدراسة على المصادر العربية الأصيلة إلى جانب نتائج أعمال الحفائر ذات الصلة. لعل من اللافت أن كل تلك النظريات التي وضعت عن الأصول غير الإسلامية للمسجد لم تتمكن من الصمود في وجه ما تلا من دراسات وأبحاث. فكثيراً ما نجد في الأدبيات نموذجاً لجماعة من الباحثين وقد تبنا نظرية ما، لكن سرعان ما يتم هدمها على يد فريق آخر، والذي يقوم بدوره بوضع نظريته الخاصة عن الأصول الغير إسلامية للمسجد. إلا أن هذه الأخيرة لا تلبث أن يهدمها فريق ثالث، وهكذا. إن جميع هذه النظريات لم تنجح في تقديم إجابات عملية لجملة من الأسئلة المحورية، فيما يتصل بمتى وأين وكيف ألهم طراز معماري يعينه نموذج المسجد في الإسلام. إن البساطة الواضحة التي ميزت المساجد الأولى، والتي اشتقت من بساطة الشعائر الإسلامية نفسها، لا يبدو أنها قد تطلبت استعارة أي طراز أجنبي ليكون مكاناً لصلاة المسلمين. أما فيما تلا من عقود، فقد تأثر المسجد ببعض الطرز المعمارية التي كانت موجودة في البلاد المفتوحة، لكنه ظل محتفظاً بشخصيته الإسلامية. ولعل استخدام المجاز القاطع في المسجد الأموي بدمشق، على سبيل المثال، يعد نموذجاً واضحاً لهذا التأثير. إن وجود مثل هذه التأثيرات لهُو أمر طبيعي وربما يكون قد دفع إليه الظروف المناخية المتنوعة، لكن لا يجب أن يتم الاستناد عليه لنسبة الطراز المساجدي لأصول غير إسلامية. خاصة وأن هذه التأثيرات لم تجد طريقها إلى عمارة المسجد إلا في مرحلة لاحقة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المسجد، أصول، نظريات، الإسلام المبكر، قاعات الاستقبال الفارسية، البازيليكا الرومانية، الكنائس، معابد اليهود.

<sup>108</sup> Mu'nis, *Masājid*, p. 63-6.