

# Islam Architecture

The Prophet Muhammad (570-632) and Islam

## The formation of Muslim

- In the early 7th century, the Arab peoples were not united in any way.
- They all worshipped different gods.
- Then, in about 610, an Arab merchant named Muhammad (570?-632) preached a new religion.
- This new religion was called Islam.
- The religion he preached changed the course of history, by uniting the peoples of Arabia.
- Islam means “submission to the will of God or devoting oneself to God.”
- According to Muslim belief, Muhammad was sent by God as a messenger
- He started his preaching in his native town of Mecca (map next slide).
- Mecca had little water and stony soil.
- But it derived a certain prominence from the regional commerce that it controlled.
- Mecca also had the sanctuary complex centered on the famous shrine of the Ka’ba, the object of an annual pilgrimage among the tribes of West Arabia.

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Circumambulation of the Ka-ba, Mecca

What is Ka-ba?

-originally a pagan shrine which could have accommodated deities of many Arabian nomadic groups of people

-a simple black box made with granite and it stands on a marble base of 25 cm

-Arabian people made a pilgrimage to worship the idols in the black shrine

## Muhammad's Teaching

- Muhammad's teachings were well respected in his home town of Mecca and his influence grew.
- But many Meccans gradually became to resent his new teaching and began to persecute him and his followers.
- In 622 he was driven out of Mecca and was invited to move to Yathrib (now Medina). (map next slide)
- His journey there is commemorated as the Hegira, which begins the Muslim calendar.

Hegira (hijra: migration to a place of refuge)

## Muhammad's Teaching

-Muhammad had several religious revelations and his teachings were written down in the Koran, the holy book of Islam.

-The fundamental principle of Muhammad's legacy was simple but demanding: that the sole legitimate object of politics was to build a society committed to the fulfillment of God's commandments, as given in his revealed word (the Koran) and in the Prophet's own teaching and example

-He set out religious laws that included five daily prayers and a month of fasting

-This Islamic style of life based on the prophet and his teachings is called the Sunna or sunnah.

-Any other style of life was mere worldly ambition.

## Spread of Islam

- From 624 Muhammad and his followers had to fight their enemies.
- In 630 they captured Mecca, and smashed the pagan idles in the Kabba, the holiest shrine in the city.

Appropriation of the Kabba pilgrimage

-Kabba was now empty, containing void only.

-Three pillars were added sometime later

-But, other than these pillars, there is no perceivable object inside

-The Kabba pilgrimage was originally a pagan religious rite, but Muhammed embraced it as one of the most essential observances of Islam

-The Kaba is believed by the Muslims God's House on earth.

-The empty box is now transformed into an object of worship

-the eye looks for something to worship, some visible proof

## Problem of successor

-When Muhammad died in 632, he left a daughter, Fatima, but no son and he did not name anyone to succeed him.

-His friend and father-in-law, Abu Bakr (632-4), was chosen as first caliph (successor), but an argument soon broke out between Muhammad's followers

-Some known as Shiites, thought only the descendants of Fatima and her husband, Ali, should succeed Muhammad.

-Others, who came to be known as Sunnis, believed that any follower of Islam could succeed Muhammad.

-The argument soon became political as well as religious and has not yet been settled to this day.

## Expansion of Territory

-Abu Bakr's campaigns led to an enormous territorial expansion.

-Muslim forces subjugated all Arabia and penetrated into Palestine and lower Iraq.

-Under the second caliph, Umar (reg 634-44), these later initiatives rapidly became a conquest of the Fertile Crescent, then Egypt and the highlands of Western Iran

-The Byzantine and Persian empires were much too weak to withstand the Muslim attacks. (They first conquered Syria and Palestine, then Egypt and Persia.)

-By 715, Spain, North Africa, Transoxiana and Sind were under Islamic domination.

## Islamic Architecture

- House of the Prophet, Medina, Saudi Arabia

- the form of the Mosque was largely determined by the character of the house of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina.

- Muhammad built this in 622 as a residence for himself, his family and his followers after their hijra (emigration) from Mecca to Medina.

- It was a large and almost empty square enclosed by plain walls 100 cubits (56 meters) to a side.

- The three entrances were little more than openings in the wall.

- The remaining wall faced Jerusalem.

Why was the remaining wall facing Jerusalem? (map next slide)

-Jerusalem was a sacred city for the Islam, too

-Approximately three thousand years ago, King David conquered the city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites, and claimed it his capital.

-Here, Solomon, David's successor built the First Temple, making Jerusalem the spiritual center of the Jewish people.

-the destruction of the Second Temple by the Roman, Titus in 70 CE

-Islam also accepts this history as theirs.

-This wall, the indicator of the sacred direction, was called ***qibla***

-Because some of the Prophet's companions complained of the sun during prayer, a shelter (zulla) was constructed along the inside of the qibla wall of the enclosure.

-Zulla consisted of a roof of palm leaves plastered with mud and resting on palm trunks.

-The domestic accommodation of the Prophet and his family was limited first to the two rooms along the outer side of the building's east wall

-A year later, when a divine revelation caused Muhammad to change the qibla from Jerusalem to the Kaba in Mecca

-The zulla was demolished and reerected along the new qibla wall.

-Some of the characteristic aspects that are found in this house in terms of the later development of the mosque:

1. the empty courtyard, which was far bigger than the household of the Prophet required
2. the qibla, the indicator of the sacred direction

-Eventually, five primary elements of the mosque were formed:

1. Qibla (Kiblah) Wall

2. Mihrab and Minbar

-Mihrab: A niche in a Muslim prayer practice that points toward Mecca (next slide)

-Minbar: A wooden pulpit

-These elements could have been influenced from the apse of a Christian church

3. Covered area adjacent to the qibla wall

4. Open Courtyard (next slide)

5. Minaret

Kairawan, Great Mosque,  
mihrab niche and, to its right,  
minbar, or the wooden pulpit

# Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem (688-692)

Map of Jerusalem

Jerusalem, seen from the west

Jerusalem, from the mount of olives

## Jerusalem the Sacred City

-sacred for Judaism, Christianity and Islam

-To the Jewish people it is *Ir Ha-Kodesh* (the Holy City), the Biblical Zion, the City of David, the site of Solomon's Temple, and the eternal capital of the Israelite nation.

-To Christians it is where the young Jesus impressed the sages at the Jewish Temple, where he spent the last days of his ministry, and where the Last Supper, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection took place.

## Jerusalem the Sacred City

-Jerusalem was also sacred for muslims

-For Muslims, Jerusalem is known as the land of many prophets

-Muslims revere all of the Biblical prophets such as Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon and Jesus

-The Prophet Muhammad set the direction of prayer to Jerusalem, the first qibla for Muslims

-Muhammad changed the direction from Jerusalem to Mecca

-But, he said this,

"There are only three mosques to which you should embark on a journey: the sacred mosque (Mecca, Saudi Arabia), this mosque of mine (Madinah, Saudi Arabia), and the mosque of Al-Aqsa (Jerusalem)."

-Lastly, Jerusalem is where Abraham the prophet Muhammad was believed to ascend to heaven during his prayer.

Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem

# Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem

1. Dome of the Rock (688-92, restored in 1956-64)

-By Caliph al Walid (son of Ibn el Malik) (or by the caliph 'Abd al-Malik')  
belonging to the Umayyads

-An exceptional building type in Islam because of its memorial function  
-it was intended as a victory monument or as a place of pilgrimage to  
supplement Mecca itself

## 1. Dome of the Rock (688-92, restored in 1956-64)

-the nature of the site, a vast high platform with rich religious history, gives rise to a political complexity

-The dome marks a rocky outcrop traditionally associated by Christians and Jews with the Creation and with Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac.

-And, this was also a land where Solomo's Temple stood (next slide: wailing wall)

- the choice of form probably stems from a desire to upstage the nearby domed church of the Holy Sepulcher, also built over a rock
- The diameters of the domes are only centimeters apart, but the church is physically confined by the dense urban fabric of Jerusalem, while the Dome of the Rock enjoys an uncluttered and highly visible site

- consists of a domed octagon about 20 m in diameter and 25 m high over the rock
- The rock in the center of the dome is believed by Muslims to be the spot from which Muhammad was brought by night and from which he ascended to heaven
- has a double ambulatory (plan next slide)
- the building is a centralized structure of a type long familiar in Roman mausolea and Christian martyria

Santa Costanza, Rome, ca. 350

-Mosaic was used to decorate the interior and exterior of the Dome of the Rock on a scale unparalleled in any surviving earlier Byzantine church

-the inner and outer arcades are decorated with the earliest epigraphic program in Islamic architecture.

-the epigraphic program includes lengthy Koranic quotations exhorting believers and attacking such Christian doctrines as the Trinity and the Incarnation

Great Mosque, damascus, Syria

(706-15)

- classical motifs and the Byzantine dome
- shows a Muslim response to the splendors of Classical and Christian architecture around it
- the facade is a free variation on the standard west front of Syrian churches

-it occupied the most prominent and hallowed site in the city, and its topographical dominance had a clear political overtones

-The Caliph al-Walid I purchased the entire site, comprising the 100 m by 157 m walled enclosure of the Temple of Jupiter Damascenus and the Church of St. John the Baptists within it.

-And then, he had all the structures within the walls demolished

-The resulting oblong was divided along its length into an open courtyard and a prayer hall along its southern side  
-the prayer hall is a bold recasting of the standard components of a typical early Christian basilica to secure a new lateral emphasis in keeping with the needs of Islamic worship

# Cordoba, Spain, 786 (A representative Islamic City in Western Europe)

Map of the western Islamic lands

## **Cordoba, Spain, 786**

- By the time 'Abd al-Rahman reached Spain, the Arabs from North Africa were already entrenched on the Iberian Peninsula and had begun to write one of the most glorious chapters in Islamic history.
- After their forays into France were blunted by Charles Martel (next slide), the Muslims in Spain had begun to focus their whole attention on what they called al-Andalus, southern Spain (Andalusia), and to build there a civilization far superior to anything Spain had ever known.
- Reigning with wisdom and justice, they treated Christians and Jews with tolerance, with the result that many embraced Islam.
- They also improved trade and agriculture, patronized the arts, made valuable contributions to science, and established Cordoba as the most sophisticated city in Europe.
- Cordoba, as the capital of Islamic Spain, it became perhaps the most civilized city in medieval Europe

Battle of Tours (732) (Charles Martel blocking the Islamic expansion to Europe)

# Great Mosque (Mezquita), Cordoba, Spain, 786

Court of the Oranges with entrance to prayer hall

Aerial view, mosque prayer hall with 16th century cathedral inserted in center

## The Great Mosque (Mezquita)

- The first phase of the mosque was built in 785 by Abd al-Rahman I (a)
- it consisted of 11 aisles of 12 bays that ran perpendicular to a walled court. (similar to the Great Mosque at Damascus),
- later in 836, BY Abd al-Rahman II, the mosque was extended by elongating eight bays to the south (b), maintaining an identical elevation, arch type and decorative texture.
- In 951, Abd al-Rahman III added a new, larger minaret to the mosque and rebuilt its courtyard (d)

-In 961-6, al-Hakam II (extended the prayer hall by 12 bays), created an elaborately domed Maqsura (e, f)

Maqsurah (Arabic)

-literally “closed-off space”, an enclosure, a box or wooden screen near the Mihrab or the center of the qiblah wall, which was originally designed to shield a worshiping ruler from assassins. (next slide image)

-The Maqsura, or the domed bay, is supported on an extravagant screen of interlaced arches

Maqsura dome and interlaced  
horseshoe arches

-At the same time, the qibla was also adorned with three doorways covered, like the domes, with mosaic inscriptions and decorations.

Qibla wall and  
Mihrab

-In 987, the Regent al-Mansur added eight aisles to the East (g)

Al-Mansur's addition

# Multi-layered Horseshoe Arches

## Multi-layered Horseshoe Arches

- the lower arch sits on a relatively thin and short column.
- The column supports the stone pier which supports the upper arch.
- This juxtaposition of the circular column and the stone pier was an ingenious way of securing a proper ceiling height in response to the horizontal extension of the mosque.
- The alternating voussoirs also enriches the beauty of the arch (mosaic of materials)  
(maybe an imitation in available materials of Syrian Umayyad marble revetment work)
- These arches create a beautiful space evoking infinite expansion

## Multi-layered Horseshoe Arches

- there is a special room called Capilla de villaviciosa.
- It is a room roofed with vaults.
- Here, the juxtaposition of the two arches in the other parts of the mosque becomes more complex and sophisticated.
- Three arches are superimposed on top of another, creating what is called the lobed arch system

The Mihrab Aisle