

Unit 4: Post Classical Europe and Islamic Art



Unit Reading Packet #2

56. Great Mosque.

Córdoba, Spain. Umayyad. c.

785–786 C.E. Stone masonry.

G15, 284-284, 292-295

G14, 282-283, 290-291

S5, 272-273, 275

A3, 322-323

GW, 148

SH



[Pins](#) [Aerial vw from list](#) [Aerial vw, diff angle](#) [Detail from list](#) [Ext view from list](#) [Ext view alternate](#)

[Arches 1](#) [Arches 2](#) [Arches 3](#) [Plan](#) [Mihrab](#) [Dome](#) [Dome](#)

[Video](#) [Video](#) [Video](#) [Article](#)

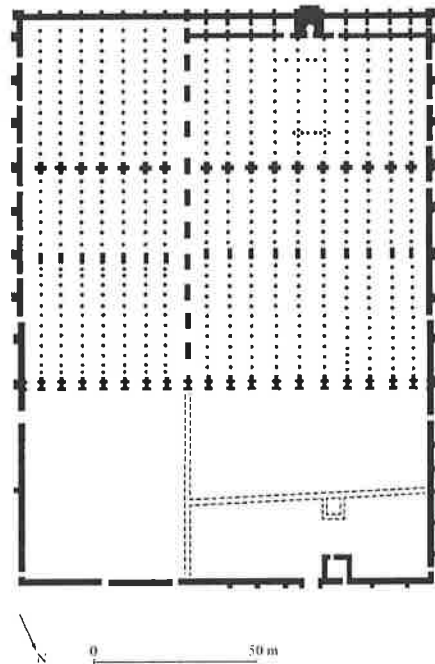
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-islam/islamic-art-early/a/the-great-mosque-of-cordoba>

The Great Mosque of Córdoba. Text by Shadiéh Mirmobiny

Known locally as Mezquita-Catedral, the Great Mosque of Córdoba is one of the oldest structures still standing from the time Muslims ruled Al-Andalus (Muslim Iberia including most of Spain, Portugal, and a small section of Southern France) in the late 8th century. Córdoba is a two hour train ride south of Madrid, and draws visitors from all over the world.

Temple/Church/Mosque/Church

The buildings on this site are as complex as the extraordinarily rich history they illustrate. Historians believe that there had first been a temple to the Roman god, Janus, on this site. The temple was converted into a church by invading Visigoths who seized Córdoba in 572. Next, the church was converted into a mosque and then completely rebuilt by the descendants of the exiled Umayyads—the first Islamic dynasty who had originally ruled from their capital Damascus (in present-day Syria) from 661 until 750.



A New Capital

Following the overthrow of his family (the Umayyads) in Damascus by the incoming Abbasids, Prince Abd al-Rahman I escaped to southern Spain. Once there, he established control over almost all of the Iberian Peninsula and attempted to recreate the grandeur of Damascus in his new capital, Córdoba. He sponsored elaborate building programs, promoted agriculture, and even imported fruit trees and other plants from his former home. Orange trees still stand in the courtyard of the Mosque of Córdoba, a beautiful, if bittersweet reminder of the Umayyad exile.

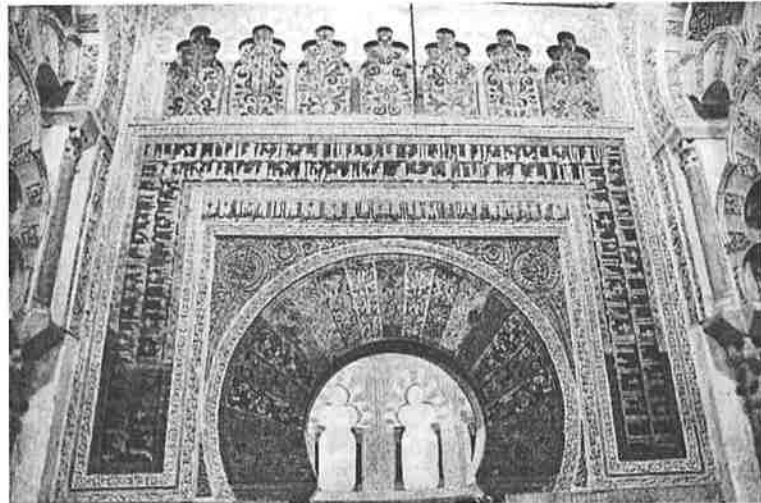
The Hypostyle Hall

The building itself was expanded over two hundred years. It is comprised of a large hypostyle prayer hall (hypostyle means, filled with columns), a courtyard with a fountain in the middle, an orange grove, a covered walkway circling the courtyard, and a minaret (a tower used to call the faithful to prayer) that is now encased in a squared, tapered bell tower. The expansive prayer hall seems magnified by its

repeated geometry. It is built with recycled ancient Roman columns from which sprout a striking combination of two-tiered, symmetrical arches, formed of stone and red brick.

The Mihrab

The focal point in the prayer hall is the famous horseshoe arched mihrab or prayer niche. A mihrab is used in a mosque to identify the wall that faces Mecca—the birth place of Islam in what is now Saudi Arabia. This is practical as Muslims face toward Mecca during their daily prayers. The mihrab in the Great Mosque of Cordoba is framed by an exquisitely decorated arch behind which is an unusually large space,



the size of a small room. Gold tesserae (small pieces of glass with gold and color backing) create a dazzling combination of dark blues, reddish browns, yellows and golds that form intricate calligraphic bands and vegetal motifs that adorn the arch.

The Horseshoe Arch

The horseshoe-style arch was common in the architecture of the Visigoths, the people that ruled this area after the Roman empire collapsed and before the Umayyads arrived. The horseshoe arch eventually spread across North Africa from Morocco to Egypt and is an easily identified characteristic of Western Islamic architecture (though there are some early examples in the East as well).

The Dome

Above the mihrab, is an equally dazzling dome. It is built of crisscrossing ribs that create pointed arches all lavishly covered with gold mosaic in a radial pattern. This astonishing building technique anticipates later Gothic rib vaulting, though on a more modest scale.

The Great Mosque of Cordoba is a prime example of the Muslim world's ability to brilliantly develop architectural styles based on pre-existing regional traditions. Here is an extraordinary combination of the familiar and the innovative, a formal stylistic vocabulary that can be recognized as "Islamic" even today.

Stokstad, Marilyn. *Art History*. 4th edition, 2011. p. 268-269.

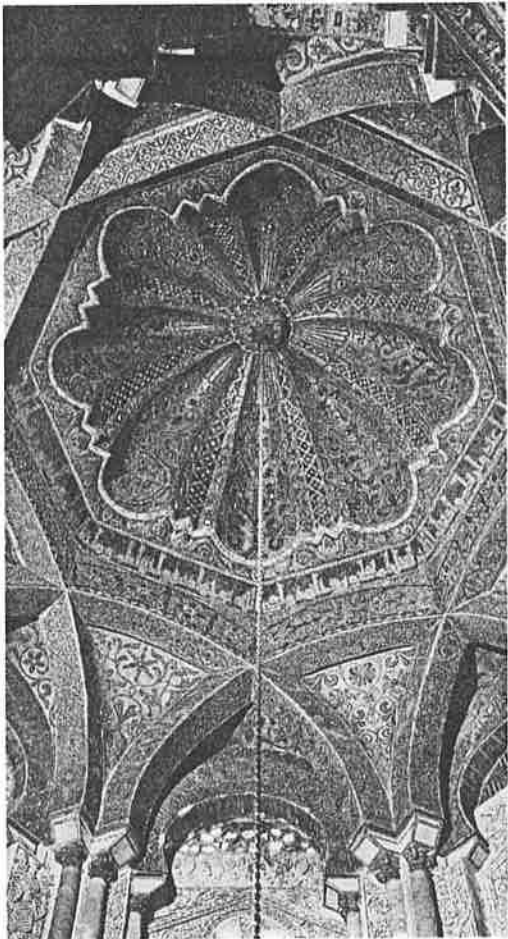
The Great Mosque of Cordoba

When the Umayyads were toppled in 750, a survivor of the dynasty, Abd al-Rahman I (r. 756–88), fled across north Africa into southern Spain (al-Andalus) where, with the support of Muslim settlers, he established himself as the provincial ruler, or emir. This newly transplanted Umayyad dynasty ruled in Spain from their capital in Cordoba (756–1031). The Hispano-Umayyads were noted patrons of the arts, and one of the finest surviving examples of Umayyad architecture is the Great Mosque of Cordoba.

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In 785, the Umayyad conquerors began building the Cordoba mosque on the site of a Christian church built by the Visigoths, the pre-Islamic rulers of Spain. The choice of site was both practical—for the Muslims had already been renting space within the church—and symbolic, an appropriation of place (similar to the Dome of the Rock) that affirmed their presence. Later rulers expanded the building three times, and today the walls enclose an area of about 620 by 460 feet, about a third of which is the courtyard. This patio was planted with fruit trees, beginning in the early ninth century; today orange trees seasonally fill the space with color and sweet scent.

Inside, the proliferation of pattern in the repeated columns and double flying arches is colorful and dramatic. The marble columns and capitals in the hypostyle prayer hall were recycled from the Christian church that had formerly occupied the site, as well as from classical buildings in the region, which had been a



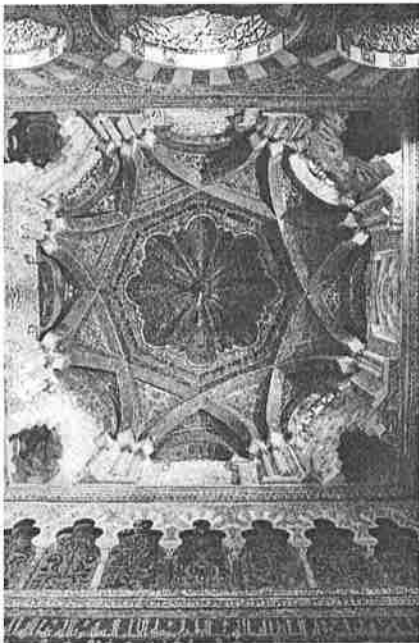
wealthy Roman province. The mosque's interior incorporates *spolia* (reused) columns of slightly varying heights. Two tiers of arches, one over the other, surmount these columns; the upper tier springs from rectangular posts that rise from the columns. This double-tiered design dramatically increases the height of the interior space, inspiring a sense of monumentality and awe. The distinctively shaped **horseshoe arches**—a form known from Roman times and favored by the Visigoths—came to be closely associated with Islamic architecture in the West. Another distinctive feature of these arches, adopted from Roman and Byzantine precedents, is the alternation of white stone and red brick voussoirs forming the curved arch. This mixture of materials may have helped the building withstand earthquakes.

In the final century of Umayyad rule, Cordoba emerged as a major commercial and intellectual hub and a flourishing center for the arts, surpassing Christian European cities in science, literature, and philosophy. As a sign of this new wealth, prestige, and power, Abd al-Rahman III (r. 912–61) boldly reclaimed the title of caliph in 929. He and his son al-Hakam II (r. 961–76) made the Great Mosque a focus of patronage, commissioning costly and luxurious renovations such as a new *mihrab* with three bays in front

of it. These capped the *maq̄sura*, an enclosure in front of the *mih̄rab* reserved for the ruler and other dignitaries, which became a feature of congregational mosques after an assassination attempt on one of the Umayyad rulers. A *min̄bar* formerly stood by the *mih̄rab* as the place for the prayer leader and as a symbol of authority. The melon-shaped, ribbed dome over the central bay may be a metaphor for the celestial canopy. It seems to float upon a web of crisscrossing arches, the complexity of the design reflecting the Islamic interest in mathematics and geometry, not purely as abstract concepts but as sources for artistic inspiration. Lushly patterned mosaics with inscriptions, geometric motifs, and stylized vegetation clothe both this dome and the *mih̄rab* below in brilliant color and gold. These were installed by a Byzantine master who was sent by the emperor in Constantinople, bearing boxes of small glazed ceramic and glass pieces (*tesserae*). Such artistic exchange is emblematic of the interconnectedness of the medieval Mediterranean—through trade, diplomacy, and competition.

Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art Through the Ages*, 13th Enhanced ed. 2011, p. 349-350.

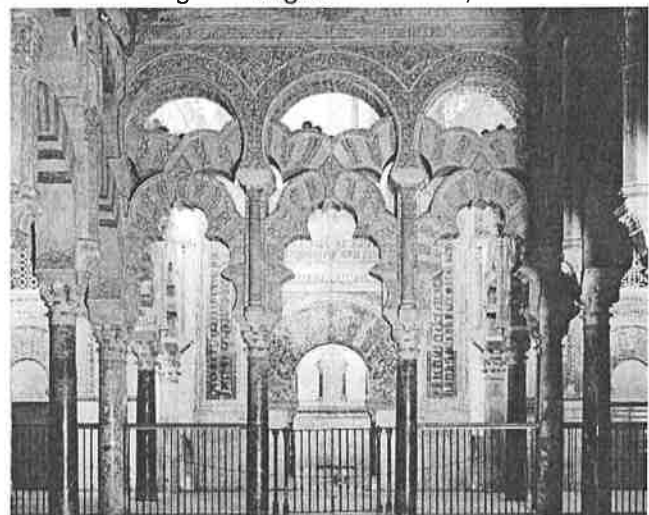
GREAT MOSQUE, CÓRDOBA At the opposite end of the Muslim world, Abd al-Rahman I, the only eminent Umayyad to escape the Abbasid massacre of his clan in Syria, fled to Spain in 750. There, the Arabs had overthrown the Christian kingdom of the Visigoths in 711. The Arab military governors of the peninsula accepted the fugitive as their overlord, and he founded the Spanish Umayyad dynasty, which lasted almost three centuries. The capital of the Spanish Umayyads was Córdoba, which became the center of a brilliant culture rivaling that of the Abbasids at Baghdad and exerting major influence on the civilization of the Christian West.



The jewel of the capital at Córdoba was its Great Mosque, begun in 784 and enlarged several times during the 9th and 10th centuries. It eventually became one of the largest mosques in the Islamic West. The hypostyle prayer hall (FIG. 13-11) has 36 piers and 514 columns topped by a unique system of double-tiered arches that carried a wooden roof (later replaced by vaults). The two-story system was the builders' response to the need to raise the roof to an acceptable height using short columns that had been employed earlier in other structures. The lower arches are horseshoe shaped, a form perhaps adapted from earlier Near Eastern architecture or of Visigothic origin. In the West, the horseshoe arch quickly became closely associated with Muslim

architecture. Visually, these arches seem to billow out like windblown sails, and they contribute greatly to the light and airy effect of the Córdoba mosque's interior.

The caliph al-Hakam II (r. 961–976) undertook major renovations to the mosque. His builders



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expanded the prayer hall and added a series of domes. They also erected the elaborate maqsura (FIG. 13-12), the area reserved for the caliph and connected to his palace by a corridor in the qibla wall. The Córdoba maqsura is a prime example of Islamic experimentation with highly decorative, multilobed arches. The builders created rich and varied abstract patterns and further enhanced the magnificent effect of the complex arches by sheathing the walls with marbles and mosaics. The mosaicists and even the tesserae were brought to Spain from Constantinople by al-Hakam II, who wished to emulate the great mosaic-clad monuments his Umayyad predecessors had erected in Jerusalem and Damascus.

The same desire for decorative effect also inspired the design of the dome that covers the area in front of the mihrab. One of the four domes built during the 10th century to emphasize the axis leading to the mihrab, the dome rests on an octagonal base of arcuated squinches. Crisscrossing ribs form an intricate pattern centered on two squares set at 45-degree angles to each other. The mosaics are the work of the same Byzantine artists responsible for the maqsura's decoration.

Jean Brodahl, http://www.ypah.net/?page_id=784

Even today, the Great Mosque of Córdoba is one of the largest mosques ever built. The city was lost to the Christians in 1236 and the mosque was converted into a church at that time, however, the city's inhabitants held the mosque's architecture in great esteem. It was against their wishes, and much later, that the Gothic cathedral of Santa María was built in its center.



Many medieval churches in Spain inhabit former mosques. Both types of building are generally rectangular, but the Friday mosques (the main congregational mosque in each city, historically but rather erroneously also known as the Great mosque) can become very large rectangles since are laid out with the main wall facing Mecca, the direction of prayer for all Muslims, and the congregation attend

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mosque in rows facing this wall. Christian churches, by contrast, use a longitudinal layout, to accommodate processions down a central aisle. The Great Mosque of Córdoba was a symbol of Muslim rule to the Christians, so its conversion into a church (and its minaret into a belltower) had an especially strong symbolic importance.

The mosque was originally built under the first Umayyad ruler in the Iberian peninsula, Abd al-Rahman I, who arrived there in 755 after fleeing for his life following the Abbasid takeover of his former homeland in Syria (he didn't start building the Great Mosque until 30 years later, on the site of an earlier Christian church that had long been converted to a mosque). Because of his history and because of the significant architectural and cultural achievement of his ancestral land, Abd al-Rahman I and his successors emulated aspects of Umayyad building in the East, including reuse of Roman marble columns, the double arches, and the alternating colors of the voussoirs.^[9] In the same fashion as the buildings in the eastern Umayyad lands, those in the west incorporated aspects of local building styles.

The signature variation on the horseshoe arch used in the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the palace of Madinat al-Zahra is an indigenous form, used in earlier churches of the Visigoths who had ruled Iberia prior to the Muslim arrival. This attractive and distinctive horseshoe was consciously incorporated into the mosque architecture, creating a building style that was both new to the area and entirely at home there.

The central mosque of cities is not static, but is added on to over time in order to accommodate all the believers in the city as it grows (hence the more accurate term Friday Mosque, for the day of weekly communal worship). The Great Mosque of Córdoba experienced three major additions over the next 200 years, making it much longer and wider while preserving the essential aspect of marble columns topped with double arches of alternating colors. The addition of al-Hakam II of 962, however, was unusual for the addition of a mihrab that was a domed room with three doors, one of which led to the caliphal palace. The mihrab was decorated with Byzantine mosaics in a style directly referring to the famed mosaics on the Great Mosque of Damascus and the Dome of the Rock.

Al-Hakam's addition to the Great Mosque was ruinously expensive. The Byzantine mosaics, the size of the addition, and the carving of marble screens, including the remarkable, eye-catching polylobed screens which mark the location of the new mihrab, culminating in an exquisitely realized dome (visible in the image above), were a source of unhappiness to the religious foundations that had to pay for them, as they clearly served the ruler rather than the believers of the city.^[10] The reason given for al-Hakam's sumptuous addition was that the old mosque was so small, it caused the tightly crowded believers to faint and even perish (a reason nearly identical to that given by Abbot Suger 150 years later when he made his case for building a new abbey church of Saint Denis, a caution to the perennial difficulties of raising money for expensive building projects).

The mosque today has much altered by the addition of the full-size late Gothic cathedral planted in its very center. The only surviving Islamic and Jewish monuments built before 1492 in Spain and Portugal were those deemed valuable enough to convert into Christian use. Though the presence of religious conflict is inescapable in the buildings' fabric, ultimately, it need not diminish our appreciation of the time in which they were built, although these alterations necessarily serve as a reminder of how much has been lost.

[9] Jerrilynn D. Dodds, "The Great Mosque of Córdoba", in Dodds, ed. *Al-Andalus; the Art of Islamic Spain*, pp.14-15.

[10] Dodds, p.19.

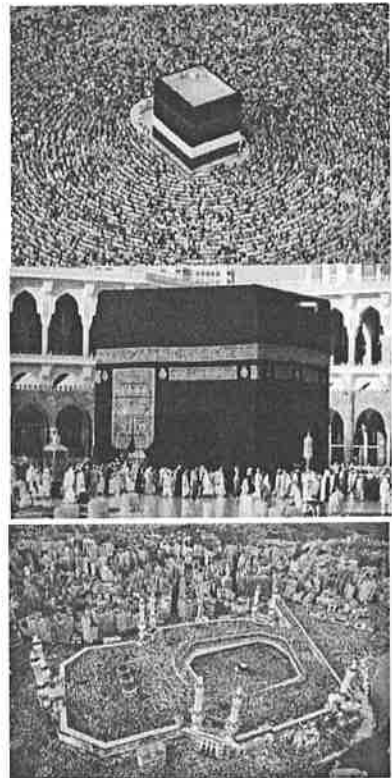
183. The Kaaba. Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Islamic. Pre-Islamic monument; rededicated by Muhammad in 631–632 C.E.; multiple renovations. Granite masonry, covered with silk curtain and calligraphy in gold and silver-wrapped thread.

G14, 285
S5, 266, 271
GW, 324
SH

Pins [Close-up\(tiny file\)](#) [Kaaba aerial](#) [Larger view aerial](#) [Video](#) [Article](#) [Article](#)

<http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/kaaba>

The Kaaba, a cube-shaped stone monument in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is the holiest site in Islam. The exterior is covered by a curtain of black silk and gold called the *kiswah*. Access to the interior of the Kaaba, which contains Qur'anic inscriptions, is extremely rare. The Kaaba's eastern cornerstone is known as the Black Stone, a relic traditionally dated to the life of Adam and Eve. Islamic tradition holds that Adam built the first structure on earth in the spot the Kaaba now occupies. The prophet Ibrahim (the biblical Abraham) and his son Ishmael rebuilt the Kaaba on the foundations left by Adam. The Kaaba served as the site of a major pilgrimage for pagan Arab tribes until 631 CE, when the prophet Muhammad rededicated it to Islam and made it a central component of the obligatory hajj pilgrimage. The Kaaba is now housed within the Masjid al-Haram, also known as the Sacred Mosque, the largest and holiest mosque in the world.



The Kaaba serves as the *qibla*, the direction that all Muslims across the world face during prayer. It is the holiness of the Kaaba that makes the Sacred Mosque the holiest of all mosques and Mecca the holiest of cities in Islam. Its strong association with the prophets Ibrahim and Muhammad inspires great reverence among Muslims. As part of the hajj, pilgrims are required to perform the *Tawaf*, a ritual in which they circumambulate the Kaaba seven times. The circumambulation of millions of Muslims around the Kaaba during the hajj represents the unity of believers in worshipping God, and has become an iconic symbol of Islamic piety. During the *Tawaf*, Muslims kiss the Black Stone (or simply point at it if it is too crowded) each time they pass it in accordance with an Islamic tradition holding that Muhammad kissed the Black Stone during his hajj.

Stokstad, Marilyn. *Art History*. 4th edition, 2011. p. 263-265.

ISLAM AND EARLY ISLAMIC SOCIETY

Islam arose in seventh-century Arabia, a land of desert oases with no cities of great size, sparsely inhabited by tribal nomads. Yet, under the leadership of its founder, the Prophet Muhammad (c. 570–632 CE), and his successors, Islam spread rapidly throughout northern Africa, southern and eastern Europe, and much of Asia, gaining territory and converts with astonishing speed. Because Islam encompassed geographical areas with a variety of long-established cultural traditions, and because it admitted diverse peoples among its converts, it absorbed and combined many different techniques and ideas about art and architecture. The result was a remarkable eclecticism and artistic sophistication.

In the desert outside of Mecca in 610, Muhammad received revelations that led him to found the religion called Islam ("submission to God's will"), whose adherents are Muslims ("those who have submitted to God"). Many

powerful Meccans were hostile to the message of the young visionary, and in 622 he and his companions were forced to flee to Medina. There Muhammad built a house that became a gathering place for the converted and thus the first Islamic mosque. Muslims date their history as beginning with this *hijira* ("emigration").

In 630, Muhammad returned to Mecca with an army of 10,000, routed his enemies, and established the city as the spiritual capital of Islam. After his triumph, he went to the Kaaba, a cubical, textile-draped shrine said to have been built for God by Ibrahim (Abraham) and Isma'il (Ishmael) and long the focus of pilgrimage and polytheistic worship. He emptied the shrine, repudiating its accumulated pagan idols, while preserving the enigmatic cubical structure itself and dedicating it to God.

The Kaaba is the symbolic center of the Islamic world, the place to which all Muslim prayer is directed and the ultimate destination of Islam's obligatory pilgrimage, the *hajj*. Each year, huge numbers of Muslims from all over the world travel to Mecca to circumambulate the Kaaba during the month of pilgrimage. The exchange of ideas that occurs during the intermingling of these diverse groups of pilgrims has contributed to Islam's cultural eclecticism.

Muhammad's act of emptying the Kaaba of its pagan idols instituted the fundamental concept of **aniconism** (avoidance of figural imagery) in Islamic art. Following his example, the Muslim faith discourages the representation of figures in religious contexts (although such images abound in palaces and illustrated manuscripts). Instead, Islamic artists elaborated a rich vocabulary of nonfigural ornament, including complex geometric designs and scrolling vines sometimes known as **arabesques**. Islamic art revels in surface decoration, in manipulating line, color, and especially pattern, often highlighting the interplay of pure abstraction, organic form, and script.

According to tradition, the Qur'an assumed its final form during the time of the third caliph (successor to the Prophet), Uthman (r. 644–56). As the language of the Qur'an, the Arabic language and script have been a powerful unifying force within Islam. From the eighth through the eleventh centuries, it was the universal language among scholars in the Islamic world and in some Christian lands as well. Inscriptions frequently ornament works of art, sometimes written clearly to provide a readable message, but in other cases written as complex patterns simply to delight the eye.

The Prophet was succeeded by a series of caliphs. The accession of Ali as the fourth caliph (r. 656–61) provoked a power struggle that led to his assassination and resulted in enduring divisions within Islam. Followers of Ali, known as Shi'ites (referring to the party or *shi'a* of Ali), regard him alone as the Prophet's rightful successor. Sunni Muslims, in contrast, recognize all of the first four caliphs as "rightly guided." Ali was succeeded by his rival Muawiya (r. 661–80), a close relative of Uthman and the founder of the first Muslim dynasty, the Umayyad dynasty (661–750).

Islam expanded dramatically. In just two decades, seemingly unstoppable Muslim armies conquered the Sasanian Persian Empire, Egypt, and the Byzantine provinces of Syria and Palestine. By the early eighth century, under the Umayyads, they had reached India, conquered northern Africa and Spain, and penetrated France before being turned back. In these newly conquered lands, the treatment of Christians and Jews who did not convert to Islam was not consistent, but in general, as "People of the Book"—followers of a monotheistic religion based on a revealed scripture—they enjoyed a protected status. However, they were also subject to a special tax and restrictions on dress and employment.

Muslims participate in congregational worship at a mosque (*masjid*, "place of prostration"). The Prophet Muhammad himself lived simply and instructed his followers in prayer at his house, now known as the Mosque

of the Prophet, where he resided in Medina. This was a square enclosure that framed a large courtyard with rooms along the east wall where he and his family lived. Along the south wall, a thatched portico supported by palm-tree trunks sheltered both the faithful as they prayed and Muhammad as he spoke from a low platform. This simple arrangement inspired the design of later mosques. Lacking an architectural focus such as an altar, nave, or dome, the space of this prototypical hypostyle (multicolumned) mosque reflected the founding spirit of Islam in which the faithful pray as equals directly to God, led by an imam, but without the intermediary of a priesthood.

<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/saudi-arabia/mecca-kaba>

The **Ka'ba** (Arabic **الكعبة**; also spelled **al-Ka'bah** or **Kaaba**) is a small building located within the courtyard of **al-Haram Mosque** in **Mecca**, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'ba is the holiest site in Islam; the Haram Mosque was built around it and because of it. The *qibla*, the direction Muslims face during prayer, is the direction facing the Ka'ba.

The Ka'ba houses the mysterious **Black Stone**, which was revered in Mecca in pre-Islamic times as well. It became a Muslim relic in the time of the Prophet Muhammad and pilgrims to Mecca try to stop and kiss it while circumambulating the Ka'ba during the hajj.

Pilgrims touch the gilded entrance to the Ka'ba, which is raised 2 meters above the ground. © Omar Chatriwala



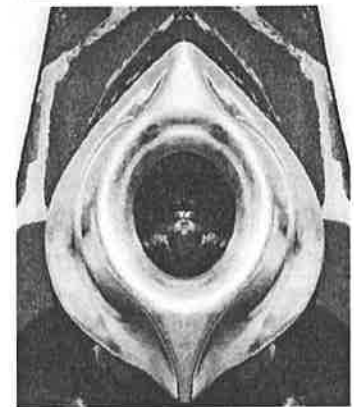
History of the Kaaba

According to Islamic belief, God ordained a place of worship on Earth to reflect a house in heaven. Muslims believe that **Adam**, the first man, was the first to build such a place of worship. According to the Qur'an, the Ka'ba that stands today was built by the prophet Ibrahim (**Abraham**) and his son Ismail (Ishmael). According to archaeologists, the Ka'ba certainly **predates Islam**. It was rebuilt several times by the tribes ruling Mecca, who used it to house sacred objects, including the **Black Stone**, and as a shrine to Arabian tribal gods.

At the time of Muhammad, his tribe, the **Quraysh**, was in charge of the Ka'ba. Desert tribesmen, the Bedouin, and inhabitants of other cities would join the annual pilgrimage to the Ka'ba to worship and to trade. Caravan-raiding, common during the rest of the year, was suspended during the pilgrimage, making it a good time for travel and trade.

The prophet Muhammad, preaching monotheism and the Day of Judgment, faced mounting opposition in Mecca. The Quraysh persecuted and harassed him and he and his followers eventually migrated to Medina in 622 CE. In 630 CE, Muhammad and his followers returned to Mecca as conquerors and **rededicated the Ka'ba** as an Islamic house of worship. Henceforth, the traditional annual pilgrimage was to be a Muslim rite, the **Hajj**.

After Muhammad's victory, the Quraysh tribe **rebuilt the Ka'ba** with alternating courses of stone and wood. The inner space was divided into two rooms, one of which housed the Black Stone. The exterior was covered with the *habrat* cloth from Yemen.



Early Islamic chroniclers say that the Ka'ba was rebuilt during Muhammad's youth, and that there was some contention among the Quraysh, Mecca's ruling clan, as to who should have the honor of raising the Black Stone to its place in the new structure. Muhammad is said to have suggested that the Stone be placed on a cloak and that the various clan heads jointly lift the cloak and put the Stone into place.

Crowds strain to touch the Black Stone. © Omar Chatriwala

During the conflict between Ibn Zubayr of Mecca and the Umayyad Caliph Mu'awiyah, the Ka'ba was set on fire and the **Black Stone broke** into three pieces. Its parts were reassembled with silver by Ibn Zubayr, who also ordered the rebuilding of the Ka'ba in stone and in accordance with the original dimensions believed to be set by Abraham, and paved the open space around it. The shrine at this time had two doors and a wooden staircase for roof access.



In **692**, after taking over Mecca, Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik bin demolished the Ka'ba and **rebuilt** it based on the Qurayshi version. The Abbasid Caliphs contributed the *kiswa* cover, a black cloth brought from Tanis in Egypt. The *kiswa* comprised of eight curtains (a pair on each side of the cube) embroidered with gold calligraphy expressing the Muslim shahada, or oath, "There is no God but Allah and Muhammed is the Prophet of Allah."

Following Mamluk rule of the Hijaz, which lasted from 1269 to 1517, Mecca came under the control of the Ottoman Sultans. In 1553, Sultan **Süleyman I** (1520-1566) renovated the roof of the Ka'ba and ordered the wooden ceiling painted with golden calligraphy and floral patterns.

Damaged in a flood in 1611, the Ka'ba was rebuilt once again by Sultan Murad IV (1623-1640) in 1629. The new foundation was laid according to Abraham's plan, while the upper structure was built with large granite blocks resting on a 25 cm-high marble base.

Three columns were built to support the roof on the inside; they were covered with golden decorations. Silver and golden lamps were suspended from the ceiling. The silver door offered by Sultan Süleyman was placed off-center on the northeast wall, two meters above ground level. The Ka'ba was then covered with two *kiswas*, a red cloth covered with a black one, that were annually replaced.

During the first Saudi extension to Masjid al-Haram in 1976, the interior of the Ka'ba was decorated with gold geometric motifs and inscribed with Quranic verses.

What to See at the Kaaba

The **Ka'ba** is roughly the shape of a **cube** (Ka'ba comes from the Arabic word meaning "cube") and is made of granite from the hills near Mecca. It stands 15 meters (49 feet) high, with sides measuring 10.5 m (34') by 12 m (39'). It is covered by a black silk cloth decorated with gold-embroidered calligraphy. This cloth is known as the *kiswah* and is replaced yearly.

On the southwest side of the Ka'ba is a **semi-circular wall** about one and a quarter meters tall, which represents its border (*al-hatim*) as built by Abraham.

Entrance to the inside of the Ka'ba is gained through a **door** 2.13 meters above the ground on the northeastern wall. Inside is a marble floor and **walls** clad with marble half-way to the roof. Tablets with Quranic inscriptions

are inset in the marble. The upper part of the interior walls is covered with a green cloth decorated with gold embroidered Quranic verses.

Lamps hang from a cross beam; there is also a small table for incense burners. Caretakers perfume the marble cladding with scented oil, the same oil used to anoint the Black Stone outside. The Black Stone, an ancient sacred stone, is embedded in the eastern corner of the Ka'ba, one and a half meters above the ground.

According to Muslim belief, the **Black Stone** was found by Abraham (Ibrahim) and his son Ishmael (Ismail) when they were searching for stones with which to build the Kaaba. They recognized its worth and made it one of the building's cornerstones.

Secular historians point to the history of stone worship, and especially meteorite worship, in pre-Islamic Arabia, and say that it is likely that the Stone is a meteorite. But of course this hypothesis cannot be tested without removing and examining the Stone, which would not be permitted by its guardians.

Within Islam, there are various opinions as to the status and meaning of the Black Stone. Many regard the Stone as "**just a stone.**" When Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph, came to kiss the stone, he said, in front of all assembled: "No doubt, I know that you are a stone and can neither harm anyone nor benefit anyone. Had I not seen Allah's Messenger kissing you, I would not have kissed you."

Many Muslims follow Umar: they pay their respects to the Black Stone in a spirit of trust in Muhammad, not with any belief in the Black Stone itself. Some say that the stone is best considered as a **marker**, useful in keeping count of the ritual circumambulations one has performed (tawaf).

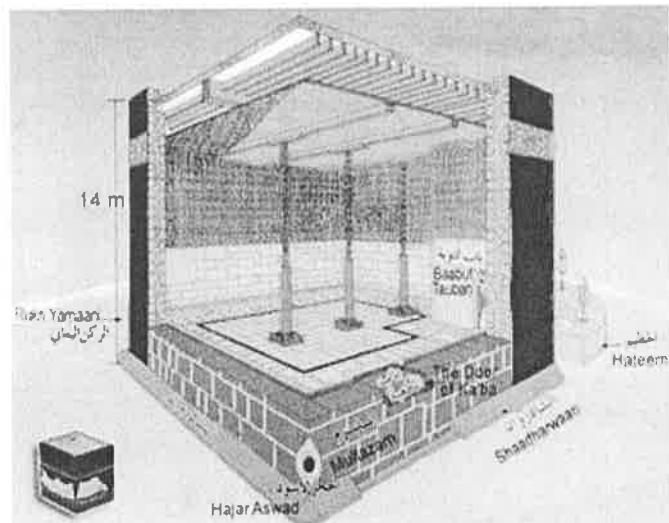
But other Muslims are more inclined to believe that the Stone itself has **supernatural powers**. Some hold that it fell from the sky during the time of Adam and Eve, and that it has the power to cleanse worshippers of their sins by absorbing them into itself. They say that the Black Stone was once a pure and dazzling white and it has turned black because of the sins it has absorbed over the years. Still others believe that the stone can only erase the believer's minor sins. On the Day of Judgement, the Stone will testify before God (Allah) in favor of those who kissed it. Such folk beliefs are not shared by all Muslims.

Festivals and Events

The Ka'ba is opened twice a year for the ceremony of "**the cleaning of the Ka'ba.**" This ceremony takes place roughly fifteen days before the start of the month of Ramadan and the same period of time before the start of the annual pilgrimage.

The keys to the Kaaba are held by the Banī Shaybat (بني شيبان) tribe. Members of the tribe greet visitors to the inside of the Kaaba on the occasion of the cleaning ceremony. A small number of dignitaries and foreign diplomats are invited to participate in the ceremony. The governor of Mecca leads the honored guests who ritually clean the structure, using simple brooms.

<http://archnet.org/sites/3790>



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The Ka'ba is a cubical structure located at the center of Masjid al-Haram in Mecca. The Baqara verse, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, established the Ka'ba as the direction (qibla) towards which Muslims must address their five daily prayers, and as the destination of annual pilgrimage, or *hajj*, required once in the lifetime of every Muslim. Each year, worshippers gather in the courtyard of Masjid al-Haram and encircle the Ka'ba seven times (*tawaf*), during which they kiss and touch the Black Stone (*al-Hajar al-Aswad*), a Muslim object of veneration embedded in the eastern corner of the Ka'ba. As it stands today, the cubical structure is fifteen meters tall and measures ten and a half meters by twelve meters on the exterior. It is oriented such that its four corners align roughly with north, south, east and west.

The structure predates Islam and is believed to have been first built by the Prophet Abraham and his son Ismail, although there are no archaeological findings to support this argument. It is known, however, that the pre-Islamic Ka'ba was rebuilt several times by the tribes ruling Mecca, who used it to house sacred objects, including the Black Stone. During the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, the Quraysh tribe rebuilt the Ka'ba with alternating courses of stone and wood. The inner space was divided into two rooms, one of which housed the Black Stone. The interior walls were decorated with paintings of Abraham, Mary, Jesus, angels, prophets and trees; and the exterior was covered with the *habrat* cloth from Yemen.

During the conflict between Ibn Zubayr, ruler of Mecca, and Umayyad Caliph Mu'awiyah, the Ka'ba was set to fire. The Black Stone broke into three pieces and its parts were reassembled with silver by Ibn Zubayr. Ibn Zubayr also ordered the rebuilding of the Ka'ba in stone, in accordance with its original dimensions believed to be set by Abraham, and paved the open space around it. The shrine at this time had two doors and a wooden staircase for roof access. In 692, after taking over Mecca, Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik bin demolished the Ka'ba and rebuilt it based on the Qurayshi version.

The Abbasid Caliphs contributed to the design of the Ka'ba by covering it with the *kiswa*, a black cloth brought from Tanis in Egypt. The *kiswa* comprised of eight curtains (a pair on each side of the cube) embroidered with gold calligraphy expressing the Muslim *shahada*, or oath, "There is no God but Allah and Muhammed is the Prophet of Allah."

Following Mamluk rule of the Hijaz, which lasted from 1269 to 1517, Mecca came under the control of the Ottoman Sultans. In 1553, Sultan Süleyman I (1520-1566) renovated the roof of the Ka'ba and ordered the wooden ceiling painted with golden calligraphy and floral patterns. Damaged in a flood in 1611, the Ka'ba was rebuilt once again by Sultan Murad IV (1623-1640) in 1629. The new foundation was laid according to Abraham's plan, while the upper structure was built with large granite blocks resting on a twenty-five centimeters high marble base. Three columns were built to support the roof on the inside; they were covered with golden decorations. Silver and golden lamps were suspended from the ceiling. At this time, the silver door offered by Sultan Süleyman I was placed off-center on the northeast wall, two meters above ground level. The Ka'ba was then covered with two *kiswas*, a red cloth covered with a black one, that were annually replaced.

On the southwest side of the Ka'ba is a semi-circular wall about one and a quarter meters tall, which represents its border (*al-hatim*) as built by Abraham. The Black Stone is embedded in the eastern corner, one and a half meters above the ground. During the first Saudi extension to Masjid al-Haram in 1976, the interior of the Ka'ba was decorated with gold geometric motifs and inscribed with Quranic verses.

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185. Dome of the Rock. Jerusalem, Palestine. Islamic, Umayyad. 691–692 C.E., with multiple renovations. Stone masonry and wooden roof decorated with glazed ceramic tile, mosaics, and gilt aluminum and bronze dome.

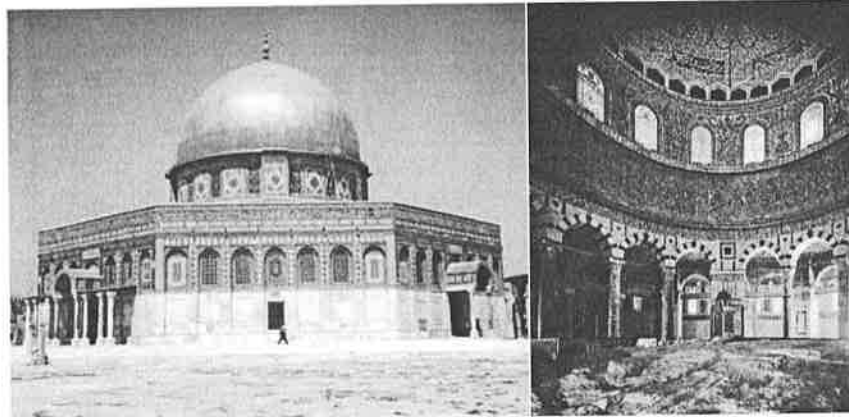
G14, 285-287, 294, 299, 300, 346

S5, 269-271

A3, 319, 370

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Art

Kleiner, Fred S. Gardner's

Through the Ages, 13th Enhanced ed. 2011, p. 342-344.

The first great Islamic building is the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The Muslims had taken the city from the Byzantines in 638, and the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) erected monumental shrine between 687 and 692 as an architectural tribute to the triumph of Islam. The Dome of the Rock marked coming of the new religion to the city that was—and still is—sacred to both Jews and Christians. The structure rises from a huge platform known as the Noble Enclosure, where in ancient times the Hebrews built the Temple of Solomon that the Roman emperor Titus destroyed in 70. In time, the site took on additional significance as the reputed place where Adam was buried and where Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac. The rock that gives the building its name also later came to be identified with the spot from which Muhammad miraculously journeyed to Heaven and then, in the same night, returned to his home in Mecca.



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As Islam took much of its teaching from Judaism and Christianity, so, too, its architects and artists borrowed and transformed design, construction, and ornamentation principles long applied in Byzantium and the Middle East. The Dome of the Rock is a domed octagon resembling San Vitale in Ravenna in its basic design. In all likelihood, a neighboring Christian monument, Constantine's Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a domed rotunda, inspired the Dome of the Rock's designers. That fourth-century rotunda bore a family resemblance to the roughly contemporary Constantinian mausoleum later dedicated as Santa Costanza in Rome. The Dome of the Rock is a member of the same extended family. Its double-shelled wooden dome, however, some 60 feet across and 75 feet high, so dominates the elevation as to reduce the octagon to function merely as its base. This soaring, majestic unit creates a decidedly more commanding effect than that produced by Late Roman and Byzantine domical structures. The silhouettes of those domes are comparatively insignificant when seen from the outside.

The building's exterior has been much restored. Tiling from the 16th century and later has replaced the original mosaic. Yet the vivid, colorful patterning that wraps the walls like a textile is typical of Islamic ornamentation. It contrasts markedly with Byzantine brickwork and Greco-Roman sculptured decoration. The interior's rich mosaic ornament has been preserved and suggests the original appearance of the exterior walls. Islamic practice does not significantly distinguish interior and exterior decor.

Stokstad, Marilyn. *Art History*. 4th edition, 2011. p. 265-66.

The Dome of the Rock is the first great monument of Islamic art. Built in Jerusalem, it is the third most holy site in Islam. In the center of the city rises the Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary), a rocky outcrop from which Muslims believe Muhammad ascended to the presence of God on the Night Journey described in the Qur'an. It is the site of the First and Second Jewish Temples, and Jews and Christians variously associate it with Solomon, the site of the creation of Adam, and the place where the patriarch Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac at the command of God. In 691-92, a shrine was built over the rock using artisans trained in the Byzantine tradition. By appropriating a site holy to the Jewish and Christian faiths, the Dome of the Rock is the first architectural manifestation of Islam's view of itself as completing the prophecies of those faiths and superseding them.

Structurally, the Dome of the Rock imitates the centrally planned form of Early Christian and Byzantine martyria. However, unlike its models, with their plain exteriors, it is crowned by a golden dome that dominates the Jerusalem skyline. The ceramic tiles on the lower portion of the exterior were added later, but the opulent marble veneer and mosaics of the interior are original. The dome, surmounting a circular drum pierced with windows and supported by arcades of alternating **piers** and **columns**, covers the central space containing the rock. These arcades create concentric **aisles (ambulatories)** that permit devout visitors to circumambulate the rock.

Inscriptions from the Qur'an interspersed with passages from other texts, including information about the building itself, form a frieze around the inner and outer arcades. As the pilgrim walks around the central space to read the inscriptions in brilliant gold mosaic on turquoise green ground, the building communicates both as a text and as a dazzling visual display. These passages of text are especially notable because they are the oldest surviving written Qur'an verses and the first use of monumental Qur'anic inscriptions in architecture. Below are walls covered with pale marble, the veining of which creates abstract symmetrical patterns, and columns with shafts of gray marble and gilded capitals. Above the calligraphic frieze is another mosaic frieze depicting thick, symmetrical vine scrolls and trees in turquoise, blue, and green, embellished with imitation jewels, over a gold ground. The mosaics are variously thought to represent the gardens of Paradise and trophies of Muslim victories offered to God. The decorative program is extraordinarily rich but, remarkably enough, the focus of the building is neither art nor architecture but the plain rock within it.

<http://archnet.org/sites/2814>

When approaching the Old City of Jerusalem from the south, as used to be the main approach in the Middle Ages, the first impression of the city is the glittering golden color of the Dome of the Rock viewed from a great distance. Entering the Old City one wanders through dense meandering alleys and alternating plays of dark deep shadows and bright light shining on the buff-beige Jerusalemite stone. The 7th century Dome of the Rock with its colorful exterior wall decoration and Golden Dome reappear in full glory only when entering the precinct of al-Haram al-Sharif ("The Noble Sacred Enclosure").

Al-Haram al-Sharif is an enormous open-air platform of artificial construction that houses the congregational mosque of al-Aqsa, numerous memorial buildings and fountains and is surrounded by many madrasas. The platform was built during Herodian times (1st century AD) to accommodate the new Jewish Temple (that was burned shortly after its completion). The Dome of the Rock is built approximately in the center of the Haram on an additional platform; it is the most prominent building in al-Haram al-Sharif both in terms of height and colors.

The Dome of the Rock was built by the Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik and completed in 691 AD. While it is the earliest Islamic monument that has survived and one of the most admired ones, the original purpose for its

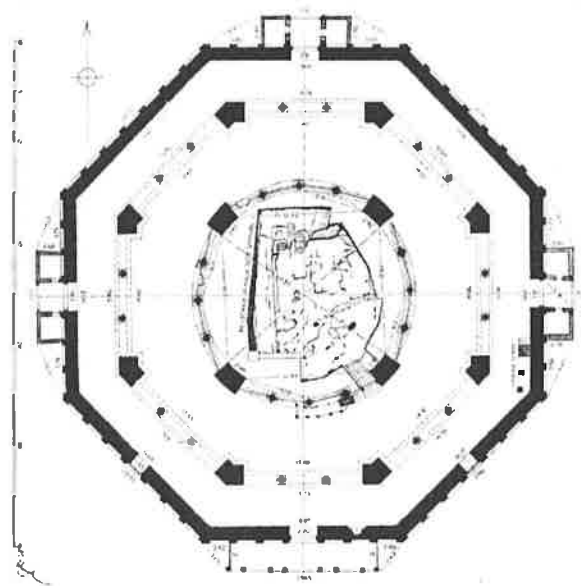
creation has been the subject of much debate from the late Middle Ages to this day. Its location, on the top of Mount Moriah, which is also known as Temple Mount, associates the building with a rich tradition of Jewish and Christian narratives.

The location of the Dome of the Rock connects it with a long tradition of the two other monotheistic religions in Jerusalem, Judaism and Christianity. The place is not only the place where the second Jewish Temple was built, but is also associated with the first Jewish Temple of Solomon. In addition, the Rock was considered to be the place where Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. It is in the same location where numerous important events in the life of Christ are assumed to have happened, and the area to which he predicted: "There will not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down" (Mark 13:2).

Today the Dome is mainly perceived in the Islamic world as the commemoration of the marvelous story of the night journey of the Prophet Muhammad (al-Isra') and his ascension to the sky (al-mi'raj). It is believed that one night, while Muhammad was sleeping near the Ka'ba in Mecca, he was taken by the Angel Gabriel on a legendary steed named al-Burak to al-Masjid al-Aqsa (the farthest mosque) in Jerusalem. From the rock Muhammad ascended to the sky where he met all the prophets who had preceded him (such as Moses, Josef and Christ), witnessed paradise and hell and finally saw God sitting on his throne circumambulated by angels.

Since the association of the Dome with the story of the night journey appeared in texts only several decades later, some theories suggest that the main purpose of the building was to express the victory of Islam in the recently conquered dominantly Christian city. The pictorial and textual decoration and the visual dominance of the building in the cityscape might support this theory. Another theory goes as far as to suggest that in response to the political tensions that endangered the pilgrims performing the Hajj to Mecca in those unstable times, Abd al-Malik wanted Jerusalem to supersede Mecca as the main focus of Islamic pilgrimage, thus constructing a building that would allow the ceremony of the circumambulation (al-tawaf).

The building of the Dome of the Rock surrounds the somber rock by two sets of colonnades and an octagonal exterior wall. The central colonnade made of four piers and twelve columns support a rounded drum that transitions into the two-layered dome, which is more than 20m in diameter. Light that enters from grilled windows pierced in the drum and exterior wall glitters on golden mosaics and depictions of jewels, and Byzantine and Sassanian crowns in the midst of vegetal motifs. Those decorations have been interpreted as trophies that show the victory of Islam or as depictions of paradise. Quotations from the Koran are inscribed on the arcades and attest the role of Muhammad and of Islam and clarify the perception of Jesus Christ ('Isa) in Islam as an important prophet but not the son of God or God himself. The exterior walls were richly decorated with marble and mosaics similar to the interior. In the 16th century though, at the time of the Ottoman ruler Suleyman the Magnificent the exterior decoration was replaced by Turkish faience tiles, which in turn were widely replaced by a faithful copy made in Italy in the 1960s.



One can conclude the attempt to describe the Dome of the Rock with the memory of the 14th century traveler Ibn Batuta who wrote "This is one of the most fantastic of all buildings. Its queerness and perfection lie in its shape... It is so amazing it captivates the eye... Both the inside and the outside are covered with many kinds of tiles of such beautiful make that the whole defies description. Any viewer's tongue will grow shorter trying to describe it."

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<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/israel/jerusalem-dome-of-the-rock>

The most famous Islamic site in Jerusalem is the **Dome of the Rock**(*Qubbat as-Sakhrah*). An impressive and beautiful edifice, the Dome of the Rock can be seen from all over Jerusalem. It is the crowning glory of the Haram es-Sharif ("Noble Sanctuary"), or Temple Mount.

The Dome of the Rock is not a mosque, but a Muslim shrine. Like the Ka'ba in Mecca, it is built over a **sacred stone**. This stone is believed to be the place from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended into heaven during his Night Journey to heaven.

The Dome of the Rock is the **oldest Islamic monument** that stands today and certainly one of the most beautiful. It also boasts the oldest surviving mihrab (niche indicating the direction of Mecca) in the world.

History of the Dome of the Rock

The **sacred rock** over which the Dome of the Rock is built was considered holy before the arrival of Islam. Jews believed, and still believe, the rock to be the very place where **Abraham** prepared to sacrifice Isaac (an event which Muslims place in Mecca). In addition, the Dome of the Rock (or the adjacent Dome of the Chain) is believed by many to stand directly over the site of the Holy of Holies of both Solomon's Temple and Herod's Temple.

The Dome of the Rock was built by the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik from **688 to 691 AD**. It was not intended to be a mosque, but a shrine for pilgrims. According to tradition, the Dome of the Rock was built to commemorate Muhammad's ascension into heaven after his night journey to Jerusalem (Qur'an 17). But there seems to have been more to it than this, since the Dome of the Ascension was later built nearby.

Actually, according to the *Oxford Archaeological Guide to the Holy Land*, "Abd al-Malik's purpose was more complex and subtle." He wished to erect a beautiful Muslim building that could compete with the majestic churches of Christendom and would be a **symbolic statement** to both Jews and Christians of the superiority of the new faith of Islam. "His building spoke to Jews by its location, to Christians by its interior decoration." [1]

In the Middle Ages, Christians and Muslims both believed the dome to be the biblical **Temple of Solomon**. The Knights Templar made their headquarters there during the Crusades and later patterned their churches after its design. [4]

The exterior mosaics that once adorned the Dome of the Rock suffered from exposure to Jerusalem winters. They were repaired in the Mamluk period, and then completely replaced with tiles by Sulieman the Magnificent in 1545. At the same time, he created the parapet wall with its intricate inscription by filling up the thirteen

small arches that originally topped each facade. The windows of the Dome of the Rock date from this period as well. The tiling was completely replaced in the last major restoration in 1956-62.

What to See at the Dome of the Rock

The extraordinary visual impact of the Dome of the Rock is in part due to the **mathematical rhythm** of its proportions. All the critical dimensions are related to the center circle that surrounds the sacred stone. For example, each outer wall is 67 feet long, which is exactly the dome's diameter and exactly its height from the base of the drum.

The same principles were used in Byzantine churches of Italy, Syria, and Palestine, but none compare to the integration of plan and elevation seen in the Dome of the Rock.

The great **golden dome** that crowns the Dome of the Rock was originally made of gold, but was replaced with copper and then aluminum. The aluminum is now covered with gold leaf, a donation from the late King Hussein of Jordan. [6]

The dome is topped by a **full moon** decoration which evokes the familiar crescent moon symbol of Islam. It is aligned so that if you could look through it, you would be looking straight towards Mecca.

The beautiful multicolored Turkish **tiles** that adorn the shrine's exterior are faithful copies of the Persian tiles that Suleiman the Magnificent added in 1545 to replace the damaged originals. The lower half of the exterior is white marble.

The Arabic **inscriptions** around the octagonal part of the Dome of the Rock are verses from the Qur'an. The inscription dates from the renovation under Suleiman. The tiled area just below the golden dome is the **drum**. Its glazed tiles were made in Turkey, and its Arabic inscription tells of the Night Journey of Muhammad as described in the Qur'an (surah 17).

Inside the shrine, an arched wall called the octagonal arcade or **inner octagon** follows the exterior shape. An open space between this and the central circle forms the inner ambulatory around the Rock, carpeted in lush red. The area between the inner octagon and outer octagon (exterior wall) forms a smaller, outer ambulatory, carpeted in green. The two ambulatories recall the ritual circular movement of pilgrims around the Ka'ba in Mecca.

The **cupola**, the interior of the great golden dome, features elaborate floral decorations in red and gold, as well as various inscriptions. The main inscription in the cupola commemorates Saladin, who sponsored extensive restoration work on the building.

The **mosaics** of the interior feature both realistic and stylized representations of vegetation and related themes (Muslim law forbids the representation of living beings in art). The mosaics evoke an exotic garden, perhaps the gardens of Paradise. Rich jewelry is also depicted in abundance, including breastplates, necklaces, and a Persian crown with features gathered at the base. The caliph Omar had conquered Persia in 637, and the mosaics symbolize the Persian crowns he sent to hang in Mecca.

The **founding inscription** is a monumental 240-meter long line of Kufic script running along the top of both sides of the octagonal arcade inside the Dome of the Rock. On the outer side of the arcade, the inscription quotes Quranic verses glorifying God.

On the eastern side, an inscription gives credit for the building's construction to the Abbasid caliph al-Mamun in the year 72 AH (691 AD). However, al-Mamun reigned from 813-33 AD, so the inscription clearly represents an Abbasid effort to claim credit for the achievement of the previous dynasty.

Much of the **inscription** on the inner side of the octagonal arcade exhorts Christians to depart from error of the Trinity and recognize the truth of Islam:

The **columns** supporting the inner octagon and the center circle are of different sizes; they were recycled from previous structures. The crosses on some show them to have been taken from churches. The **carved ceilings** on either side of the inner octagon were not part of the original design; they first appeared in the 14th century and have been restored since then. The Mamluk star is the dominant motif.

The small, flat **mihrab** (niche showing the direction of Mecca) belongs to the original building, and is the oldest mihrab preserved in the Islamic world. The **wooden screen** around the sacred rock was donated by the Ayyubid sultan al-Aziz in 1198. The Crusaders protected the rock from relic-snatching pilgrims by erecting a **wrought-iron screen** between the columns of the circle; it remained in place until 1960 and is now on display in the Islamic Museum.

The **sacred rock** that is the central focus of the shrine is a large, ancient rock that may have once stood in the center of Solomon's Temple. For Jews, it is the rock on which Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac. For Muslims, it is the rock from which Muhammad's winged horse leapt into the sky, accompanied by the Archangel Gabriel, on the "Night Journey" into heaven (Qur'an 17). The rock is said to bear the horse's imprint. Muslim tradition holds that an angel will come to the rock to sound the trumpet call of the Last Judgment at the end of the world. [7]

The **reliquary** next to the rock dates from the Ottoman period and contains a hair of Muhammad's beard.

The cavity beneath the rock, accessible by a staircase near the south entrance, is known as Bir el-Arwah, the "**Well of Souls.**" It is said that here the voices of the dead mingle with the falling waters of the lower rivers of paradise as they drop into eternity. Another legend says that the dead meet here twice a month to pray. In earlier days, those who prayed here after having walked around the rock were given a certificate entitling them admission to paradise; it was to be buried with them.

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2. Mukaddesi, *Description of Syria*, 46 (trans. G. Le Strange).
3. Nasir-i Khusraw, *Diary of Journey through Syria and Palestine*, 49-50 (trans. G. Le Strange).
4. [Dome of the Rock](#) - Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service, 2005.
5. [The Arabic Islamic Inscriptions On The Dome Of The Rock In Jerusalem, 72 AH](#) - Islamic Awareness
6. *Eyewitness Travel Guide to Jerusalem and the Holy Land*, 2nd ed. (DK Publishing, 2002), 70-71.
7. Norbert Brockman, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Places* (Oxford, 1997), 129.

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-islam/islamic-art-early/a/the-dome-of-the-rock-qubbat-al-sakhra>

The Dome of the Rock is a building of extraordinary beauty, solidity, elegance, and singularity of shape... Both outside and inside, the decoration is so magnificent and the workmanship so surpassing as to defy description.

The greater part is covered with gold so that the eyes of one who gazes on its beauties are dazzled by its brilliance, now glowing like a mass of light, now flashing like lightning. — Ibn Battuta (14th century travel writer)

A glorious mystery

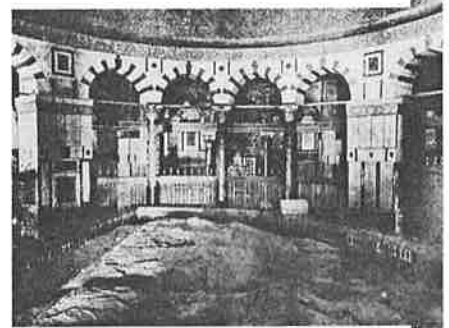
One of the most iconic images of the Middle East is undoubtedly the Dome of the Rock shimmering in the setting



sun of Jerusalem. Sitting atop the Haram al-Sharif, the highest point in old Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock's golden-color Dome and Turkish Faience tiles dominates the cityscape of Old Jerusalem and in the 7th century served as a testament to the power of the new faith of Islam. The Dome of the Rock is one of the earliest surviving buildings from the Islamic world. This remarkable building is not a mosque, as is commonly assumed and scholars still debate its original function and meaning.

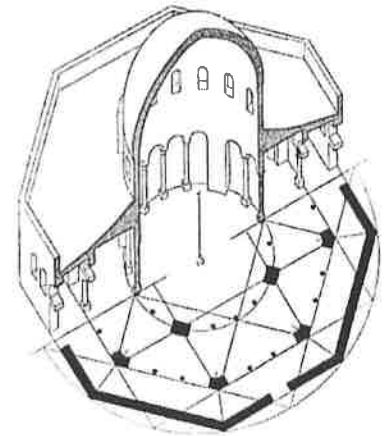
Between the death of the prophet Muhammad in 632 and 691/2, when the Dome of the Rock was completed, there was intermittent warfare in Arabia and Holy Land around Jerusalem. The first Arab armies who emerged from the Arabian peninsula were focused on conquering and establishing an empire—not building.

Thus, the Dome of the Rock was one of the first Islamic buildings ever constructed. It was built between 685 and 691/2 by Abd al-Malik, probably the most important Umayyad caliph, as a religious focal point for his supporters, while he was fighting a civil war against Ibn Zubayr. When Abd al-Malik began construction on the Dome of the Rock, he did not have control of the Kaaba, the holiest shrine in Islam, which is located in Mecca.



The Dome is located on the Haram al-Sharif, an enormous open-air platform that now houses Al-Aqsa mosque, madrasas and several other religious buildings. Few places are as holy for Christians, Jews and Muslims as the Haram al-Sharif. It is the Temple Mount, the site of the Jewish second temple, which the Roman Emperor Titus destroyed in 70 C.E. while subduing the Jewish revolt; a Roman temple was later built on the site. The Temple Mount was abandoned in Late Antiquity.

The Rock in the Dome of the Rock: At the center of the Dome of the Rock sits a large rock, which is believed to be the location where Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son Ismail (Isaac in the Judeo/Christian tradition). Today, Muslims believe that the Rock commemorates the night journey of Muhammad. One night the Angel Gabriel came to Muhammad while he slept near the Kaaba in Mecca and took him to al-Masjid al-Aqsa (the farthest mosque) in Jerusalem. From the Rock, Muhammad journeyed to heaven, where he met other prophets, such as Moses and Christ, witnessed paradise and hell and finally saw God enthroned and circumambulated by angels. The Rock is enclosed by two ambulatories (in this case the aisles that circle the rock) and an octagonal exterior wall. The central colonnade (row of columns) was composed of four piers and twelve columns supporting a rounded drum that transitions into the two-layered dome more than 20 meters in diameter.



The colonnades are clad in marble on their lower registers, and their upper registers are adorned with exceptional mosaics. The ethereal interior atmosphere is a result of light that pours in from gridded windows located in the drum and exterior walls. Golden mosaics depicting jewels shimmer in this glittering light. Byzantine and Sassanian crowns in the midst of vegetal motifs are also visible.

The Byzantine Empire stood to the North and to the West of the new Islamic Empire until 1453, when its capital, Constantinople, fell to the Ottoman Turks. To the East, the old Sasanian Empire of Persia imploded under pressure from the Arabs, but nevertheless provided winged crown motifs that can be found in the Dome of the Rock.

Mosaics: Wall and ceiling mosaics became very popular in Late Antiquity and adorn many Byzantine churches, including San Vitale in Ravenna and Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Thus, the use of mosaics reflects an artistic tie to the world of Late Antiquity. Late Antiquity is a period from about 300-800, when the Classical world dissolves and the Medieval period emerges.

The mosaics in the Dome of the Rock contain no human figures or animals. While Islam does not prohibit the use of figurative art per se, it seems that in religious buildings, this proscription was upheld. Instead, we see vegetative scrolls and motifs, as well as vessels and winged crowns, which were worn by Sasanian kings. Thus, the iconography of the Dome of the Rock also includes the other major pre-Islamic civilization of the region, the Sasanian Empire, which the Arab armies had defeated.



A reference to Burial Places

The building enclosing the Rock also seems to take its form from the imperial mausolea (the burial places) of Roman emperors, such as Augustus or Hadrian. Its circular form and Dome also reference the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The circular Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem was built to enclose the tomb of Christ. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Dome of the Rock have domes that are almost identical in size; this suggests that the elevated position of the Dome of the Rock and the comparable size of its dome was a way that Muslims in the late 8th century proclaimed the superiority of their newly formed faith over Christians.

The Inscription

The Dome of the Rock also contains an inscription, 240 meters long, that includes some of the earliest surviving examples of verses from the Qur'an – in an architectural context or otherwise. The bismillah (in the name of God, the merciful and compassionate), the phrase that starts each verse of the Qur'an, and the shahada, the Islamic confession of faith, which states that there is only one God and Muhammad is his prophet, are also included in the inscription. The inscription also refers to Mary and Christ and proclaim that Christ was not divine but a prophet. Thus the inscription also proclaims some of the core values of the newly formed religion of Islam.

Below the Rock is a small chamber, whose purpose is not fully understood even to this day. For those are fortunate enough to be able to enter the Dome of the Rock, the experience is moving, regardless of one's faith.

Essay by Dr. Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis

The following excerpts were compiled by Douglas Darracott, Plano West Senior High School, Plano, TX.

1. "The earliest extant Islamic sanctuary is the **Dome of the Rock** in Jerusalem. The structure encloses a rock outcropping that is sacred to Judaism and Christianity as well as to Islam. Its exterior is faced with mosaics and marble. The building, which was inspired by round Christian martyria, is a centrally planned octagon. Stylistically, the architectural ornamentation of the Dome of the Rock is a synthesis of Byzantine, Persian, and other Middle Eastern forms' (Adams, *Art Across Time* 321). "This was precisely the effect desired by Caliph Abd al-Malik, who commissioned it. According to a tenth-century source, he wanted a building that would 'dazzle the minds' of Muslims and thereby distract them from the Christian buildings in Jerusalem. This sentiment is a variant of the impulse to compete artistically, using height and size to express achievement and power. In the caliph's view, the splendor of his sanctuary would symbolically 'blind' Muslims, preventing them from 'seeing' beauty in monuments built by other faiths" (321).

2. Popular tradition claims that in Mecca the angel Gabriel presented "Muhammad with a strange celestial winged creature called **al-Buraq** ('Lightning'), which had the face of a woman and a peacock's tail, and was

186. Great Mosque (Masjid-e Jameh). Isfahan, Iran. Islamic, Persian: Seljuk, Il-Khanid, Timurid and Safavid Dynasties. c. 700 C.E.; additions and restorations in the 14th, 18th, and 20th centuries C.E. Stone, brick, wood, plaster, and glazed ceramic tile.

G14, 291-292, 299

(Masjid- i Shah, also at Isfahan: S5, 290)

SH

Pins [Model Isfahan 1](#) [Isfahan 2](#) [Isfahan 3 - Courtyard](#) [Courtyard again](#) [Isfahan 4 - Mihrab](#) [Mihrab](#) [Video](#) [Video](#)

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-islam/islamic-art-medieval/a/the-great-mosque-or-masjid-e-jameh-of-isfahan>

The Great Mosque (or Masjid-e Jameh) of Isfahan

Courtyard, The Great Mosque or Masjid-e Jameh of Isfahan, photo:reibai (CC BY 2.0)



Most cities with sizable Muslim populations possess a primary congregational mosque. Diverse in design and dimensions, they can illustrate the style of the period or geographic region, the choices of the patron, and the expertise of the architect.

Congregational mosques are often expanded in conjunction with the growth and needs of the *umma*, or Muslim community; however, it is

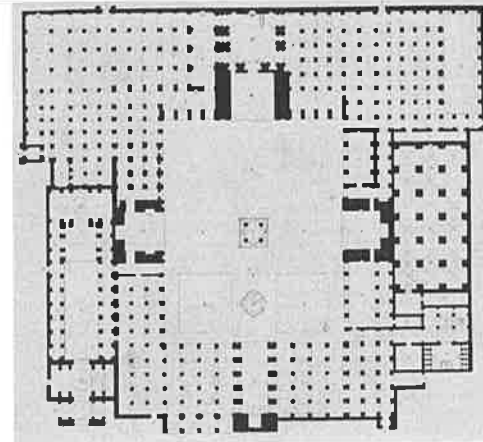
uncommon for such expansion and modification to continue over a span of a thousand years. The Great Mosque of Isfahan in Iran is unique in this regard and thus enjoys a special place in the history of Islamic architecture. Its present configuration is the sum of building and decorating activities carried out from the 8th through the 20th centuries. It is an architectural documentary, visually embodying the political exigencies and aesthetic tastes of the great Islamic empires of Persia.

Street view of the Grand Bazaar of Isfahan with the Great Mosque dome in the distance, photo: Saif Alnuweiri (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)



Another distinctive aspect of the mosque is its urban integration. Positioned at the center of the old city, the mosque shares walls with other buildings abutting its perimeter. Due to its immense size and its numerous entrances (all except one inaccessible now), it formed a pedestrian hub, connecting the arterial network of paths crisscrossing the city. Far from being an insular sacred monument, the mosque facilitated public mobility and commercial activity thus transcending its principal function as a place for prayer alone.

Plan of the mosque from *Monuments modernes de la Perse mesurés, dessinés et décrits*, éd. Morel, 1867



The mosque's core structure dates primarily from the 11th century when the Seljuk Turks established Isfahan as their capital. Additions and alterations were made during Il-Khanid, Timurid, Safavid, and

Qajar rule. An earlier mosque with a single inner courtyard already existed on the current location. Under the reign of Malik Shah I (ruled 1072-1092) and his immediate successors, the mosque grew to its current four-ivan design. Indeed, the Great Mosque of Isfahan is considered the prototype for future four-ivan mosques (an iwan is a vaulted space that opens on one side to a courtyard).

Linking the four iwans at the center is a large courtyard open to the air, which provides a tranquil space from the hustle and bustle of the city. Brick piers and columns support the roofing system and allow prayer halls to extend away from this central courtyard on each side. Aerial photographs of the building provide an interesting view; the mosque's roof has the appearance of "bubble wrap" formed through the panoply of unusual but charming domes crowning its hypostyle interior.

Great Mosque, Isfahan, imagery ©2014 DigitalGlobe. Map data ©2014 Google

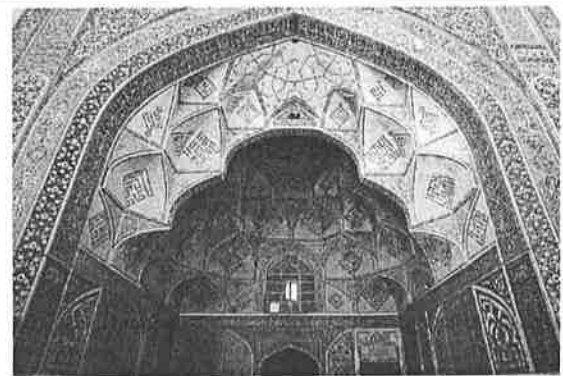
This simplicity of the earth-colored exterior belies the complexity of its internal decor. Dome soffits (undersides) are crafted in varied geometric designs and often include an oculus, a circular opening to the sky. Vaults, sometimes ribbed, offer lighting and ventilation to an otherwise dark space. Creative arrangement of bricks, intricate motifs in stucco, and sumptuous tile-work (later additions) harmonize the interior while simultaneously delighting the viewer at every turn. In this manner, movement within the mosque becomes a journey of discovery and a stroll across time.

View of the south iwan from the prayer hall, photo: [Alan Cordova](#) (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Given its sprawling expanse, one can imagine how difficult it would be to locate the correct direction for prayer. The qibla iwan on the southern side of the courtyard solves this conundrum. It is the only one flanked by two cylindrical minarets and also serves as the entrance to one of two large, domed chambers within the mosque. Similar to its three counterparts, this iwan sports colorful tile decoration and muqarnas or traditional Islamic cusped niches. The domed interior was reserved for the use of the ruler and gives access to the main mihrab of the mosque.

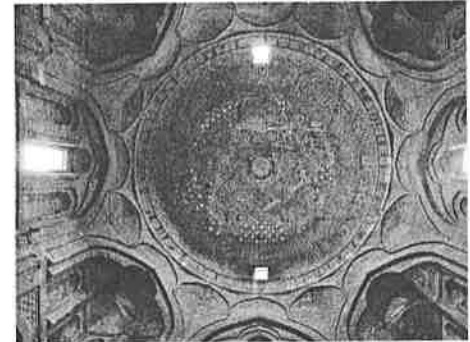
Muqarnas, South Iwan, Photo: [Fulvio Spada](#) (CC BY-SA 2.0)

The second domed room lies on a longitudinal axis right across the double-arcaded courtyard. This opposite placement and varied decoration underscores the political enmity between the respective patrons; each dome vies for primacy through its position and architectural articulation. Nizam al-Mulk, vizier to



Malik Shah I, commissioned the qibla dome in 1086. But a year later, he fell out of favor with the ruler and Taj al-Mulk, his nemesis, with support from female members of the court, quickly replaced him. The new vizier's dome (below), built in 1088, is smaller but considered a masterpiece of proportions.

Interior decoration of Taj-al-Mulk (north) dome, photo: [Matt Werner](#) (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



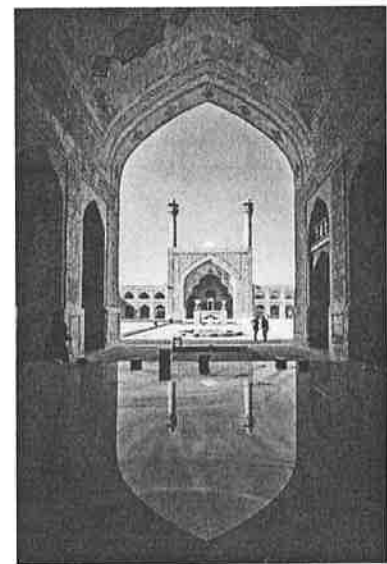
When Shah Abbas I, a Safavid dynasty ruler, decided to move the capital of his empire from Qazvin to Isfahan in the late 16th century, he crafted a completely new imperial and mercantile center away from the old Seljuk city. While the new square and its adjoining buildings, renowned for their exquisite decorations, renewed Isfahan's prestige among the early modern cities of the world, the significance of the Seljuk mosque and its influence on the population was not forgotten. This link amongst the political, commercial, social, and religious activities is nowhere more emphasized than in the architectural layout of Isfahan's covered bazaar. Its massive brick vaulting and lengthy, sinuous route connects the Safavid center to the city's ancient heart, the Great Mosque of Isfahan.

Essay by Dr. Radha Dalal

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1397/>

Masjed-e Jāme' of Isfahan

Located in the historic centre of Isfahan, the Masjed-e Jāme' ('Friday mosque') can be seen as a stunning illustration of the evolution of mosque architecture over twelve centuries, starting in ad 841. It is the oldest preserved edifice of its type in Iran and a prototype for later mosque designs throughout Central Asia. The complex, covering more than 20,000 m², is also the first Islamic building that adapted the four-courtyard layout of Sassanid palaces to Islamic religious architecture. Its double-shelled ribbed domes represent an architectural innovation that inspired builders throughout the region. The site also features remarkable decorative details representative of stylistic developments over more than a thousand years of Islamic art.



Brief synthesis

Masjed-e Jāme' is the oldest Friday (congregational) mosque in Iran, located in the historical centre of Isfahan. The monument illustrates a sequence of architectural construction and decorative styles of different periods in Iranian Islamic architecture, covering 12 centuries, most predominantly the Abbasid, Buyid, Seljuq, Ilkhanid, Muzaffarid, Timurid and Safavid eras. Following its Seljuq expansion and the characteristic introduction of the four iwans (Chahar Ayyān) around the courtyard as well as two extraordinary domes, the mosque became the prototype of a distinctive Islamic architectural style.

The prototype character is well illustrated in the earliest double-shell ribbed Nezam al-Molk dome, the first use of the four iwān (Chahar Ayyān) typology in Islamic architecture, as well as the textbook character of the Masjed-e Jāme' as a compilation of Islamic architectural styles. The Masjed-e Jāme' of Isfahan is an outstanding example of innovation in architectural adaptation and technology applied during the restoration and expansion

of an earlier mosque complex during the Seljuq era, which has been further enlarged during later Islamic periods by addition of high quality extensions and decoration.

Criterion (ii): Masjed-e Jāme is the first Islamic building that adapted the four iwan (Chahar Ayyān) courtyard layout of Sassanid palaces to Islamic religious architecture and thereby became the prototype construction for a new layout and aesthetic in mosque design. The Nezam al-Molk Dome is the first double-shell ribbed dome structure in the Islamic empire, which introduced new engineering skills, allowing for more elaborate dome constructions in later mosque and burial complexes. On the basis of these two elements, the Masjed-e Jāme is a recognized prototype for mosque design, layout and dome construction, which was referenced in several later eras and regions of the Islamic world.

Integrity: The Masjed-e Jāme' contains a continuous sequence of Islamic architectural styles, the most prominent of which date from the Seljuq period. The remains from the Seljuq era, especially the key elements of the ground plan, the four iwans, and the two domes are sufficient to illustrate the advances in mosque and dome architecture made at the time. The boundaries of the property are adequate to encompass the entire mosque complex with all its extensions and significant functions over time. However, the integrity of the property is highly vulnerable to development projects in its vicinity. For this reason, any project proposed should be carefully assessed on the basis of comprehensive Heritage Impact Assessments and respect the historic setting and urban proportions around the Masjed-e Jāme'.

Authenticity: Most elements of the mosque, in particular the four iwans and the Malek al-Molk and Taj al-Molk domes, are authentic in material, design and location. Restorations and a reconstruction, which became necessary following an air raid in 1984, were carried out to an adequate standard, using traditional craftsmanship and materials. One of the most important aspects of authenticity is the function of the Masjed-e Jāme' of Isfahan, both as a mosque, which continues to be used for prayers, and as a component of the Isfahan historic bazaar fabric. Attached to and accessed from the street network of the bazaar area, the mosque has a significant setting, the authenticity of which is highly vulnerable to changes in urban character. To respect the authenticity of spirit and feeling, the museum function of Masjed-e Jāme' has to remain sensitive to its religious use, both in terms of information panel design and visitor numbers.

<http://islamic-arts.org/2012/jameh-mosque-of-isfahan/>

Jameh Mosque of Isfahan By ArchNet on May 14, 2012 in Architecture, Mosques

The **Jāmeḥ Mosque of Isfahān** (Persian: مسجد جامع اصفهان – *Masjid-e-Jāmeḥ Isfahān*) is the grand, congregational mosque (Jāmeḥ) of Isfahān city, within Isfahān Province, Iran. The mosque is the result of continual construction, reconstruction, additions and renovations on the site from around 771 to the end of the 20th century.

Located in Isfahan, 340 km south of Tehran, the Friday mosque of Isfahan is a prominent architectural expression of the Seljuk rule in Persia (1038-1118). In 1051, Isfahan became the capital of the Seljuks, who arrived in Khwarazm and Transoxiana from central Asia in the eleventh century. Defenders of Sunnism, they aimed at the restoration of the Abbasid Caliphate. The conquest of Isfahan by Tughril Beg elevated the city's status, which was manifested in the rich architectural projects representing the Seljuk's powerful empire – the first of which was the Friday mosque.

The Seljuks planned their city center and square near the existing Friday mosque, so that their square was bordered by its northern elevation. Later, Safavid ruler Shah Abbas would supersede the Seljuk center with his new maydan, built in 1602, effectively moving the focal point of the city further south. Therefore, many

contemporary architectural historians consider the Friday Mosque to epitomize the Seljuk to early Safavid period and the core of what we might call the "pre-Abbas" city. Historical accounts differ on the condition of the mosque under Seljuk rule. The renowned historian and geographer, Yaqut al-Hamawi, tells us that the people of Isfahan were forced to demolish the mosque "for the lack of wood" in 1051, when Isfahan was captured by Tughril Beg. Another account by Nasir-i-Khusrau recounts that the mosque was "great and magnificent" around 1052.

What is certain, however, is that prior to the Seljuk conquest of Isfahan, a Friday mosque of a hypostyle plan that dates back to the tenth-century Buyid period existed on the site. The capture of the city and consequent riots, religious disputes (between Hanafite and Shafi'ite sects) under Malik Shah, and fire caused damage to the mosque and prompted the rebuilding of some of its old architectural elements and introducing new ones. Consequently, the mosque's plan evolved from a hypostyle plan with a rectangular inner court (65 by 55 meters) surrounded by prayer halls comprised of round columns carrying a wooden roof (7 bays on the southwest; 3 bays on the southeast and northwest; 5 bays on the northeast), to a four-iwan plan established/augmented in the twelfth century after the additions of the four iwans, the southern (southwest) domed chamber, the two minarets flanking it, and the northern domed chamber. Especially noticeable of all the later reconstructions and additions to the mosque is the double-story arcade surrounding the court (added around 1447), supplanting the original one-story arcade and unifying the elements of the court leading to the various spaces of the mosque.

What distinguishes the mosque is its integration into the urban fabric through the many gates and entrances that weave it with the city's activities and blur the boundaries between city space and mosque space. This is also a result of a cumulative history of construction and reconstruction resulting in a mosque that comprises an assemblage of structures built in different periods of time.

Access to the mosque:

The mosque is woven organically into the urban fabric, with the two towers flanking the southern iwan and the large domes on the north and south rising above the horizon of Isfahan's silhouette and serving as visual landmarks. This integration into the city fabric allows for multiple points of access to the mosque along on the shared walls demarcating the boundary between the mosque's area and the adjacent buildings. It is impossible to circumnavigate the building, both because of this blurring of boundaries and due to the absence of defining outer walls in the ever-expanding mosque. The current entrance gate to the mosque is located on the southeastern area. The exact date of the gate, which was restored in 1804 as part of the restoration projects ("Ta'amir") is obscure; however, an inscription on the adjacent space leading to the madrasa on the southeast part of the complex, mentions the Muzaffarid sultan Mahmud (ruled in Isfahan between 1358 and 1374). Most historians assume that this was the main gate during the fourteenth century, perhaps replacing another which is no longer extant. This gate leads to the upper part of the eastern wall closer to the southeast corner.

On the opposite side, on the southwest part, another gate, still in use, dates from 1590-1, the period of Shah Abbas's rule. It connects the corner of the southwest and northwest arcade walls with the adjacent areas of the city, facilitating movement between the city's parts which were disconnected as a result of the insertion of the mosque. A large monumental gate, no longer in use today, is located on the north, adjoining the northeast wall of the northern dome. It dates from 1366 and bears inscriptions from the Quranic Surah 76 describing eternal life. This gate is aligned on the east-west axis, unlike any other elements in the mosque. The fourth gate in the northeast segment, also no longer in use, is decorated with brick instead of the colored, glazed tiles found on the other three gates. A Quranic inscription on the gate addressing forms of mosque desecration mentions that the mosque was restored after a fire in 1121-2.

The winding covered bazaar with its intensive mercantile activity connects the new Safavid center in the maydan to the Friday mosque. The pedestrian flow leads to the northern portal.

The court:

As aforementioned, the (recently restored) court comprises a two-story arcade acting as a two-dimensional screen decorated with glazed bricks forming floral and geometric patterns in dark and light blue, white, and yellow. The arches of the two-story arcade are symmetrically arranged around the four iwans situated in the center of each one of the four walls, and are uniformly equal in height, except the two bays flanking the eastern iwan, which rise higher than the other arches. In addition, the northern half of the western arcade is given a different treatment through a monumental gate that extends as high as two stories, defining an area of a winter mosque. Although constantly modified over the different historical periods, the mosque retains unity by its architectural forms and decorative elements of different materials, patterns, and colors. The four elevations of the court are flat screens, but they also embody passageways that lead to the different sacred spaces of the mosque and the profane, living spaces of the city.

The earlier southern dome (maqsura):

As part of the reconstruction of the damaged mosque, in 1086 Nizam al-Mulk, Abu al-Fath Malik Shah's vizier, ordered the building of a domed chamber (15 meters per side, approximately 30 meters high) on the southwest. This chamber was designed by the architect Abul Fath, who is sometimes credited with the construction of both domes. Two preserved inscriptions on the dome's drum mention the names of Abu Malik Shah and Nizam al-Mulk. The ribbed dome rests on a muqarnas transitional zone. These in turn are carried by a bearing wall and eight massive piers which belonged the old mosque. Historians contend, based on archaeological investigations, that this chamber was erected on top of an earlier hypostyle area and was a freestanding structure. This maqsura became a prototype for later mosques, among them those in Ardestan, Qasvin, and Zavareh.

The northeast dome:

Commissioned by Taj al-Mulk (the successor of Nizam and main advisor of Malik Shah's mother), the northeast dome was built in 1088-9 for Terkan Khatun (Malik Shah's wife and Sultan Tamghach Khan's daughter). Because of the dome's initial freestanding position, many historians have speculated that it served as a private prayer space, a women's mosque, or even a library. Smaller in size and placed on the same lateral longitudinal axis as the southwest dome, the northeast dome rests on a square base of square, massive piers (with three slim round engaged columns), with an octagonal transitional zone formed by four squinches, on top of which rests another zone of sixteen arches with a drum comprising an inscription band with religious inscription. Ten double-ribs emerge from the dome's drum and ascend to inscribe a pentagon. Most scholars consider this architectural act of Taj al-Mulk to be an attempt to surpass the dome built by his rival, Nizam al-Mulk, in the south. This dome could be accessed from the south and west. On the inside of the dome are Quranic verses inscribed in letters formed by bricks.

Architectural historians often draw comparisons, regarding structure and ornament, between the earlier southwest dome, built by Nizam al-Mulk, and the later, smaller northeast dome, also referred to as Gunbad-e Khaki (the earthly dome) built by Taj al-Mulk. They view the northern dome an epitome of mathematical perfection, evident in the harmony of its horizontal and vertical divisions, and achieved by a hierarchy of the fitting of its parts, adhering to the Golden Section. For this reason, many historians find that it evokes later French High Gothic architecture.

The two domes are also distinct in their system of ornament. In the southwest dome, remnants of stucco ornament are still found in situ, while in the northeast dome, bricks constitute a structurally integrated ornamentation. With different degrees of projection, they create a multitude of patterns through their varied alignments. This consistency in the architectural language (i.e., brick as ornament) is lacking in the southern dome because it was built on an existing structure and had to adapt existing structural and decorative elements without a leading unifying principle in an overall design as in the case of the northern. As parts of the structure were destroyed by riots and later fire, there is an incongruity between the new and the old: the massive original infrastructure of the double piers and arches differently curved vs. the lighter new design of the dome and its transitional zone. This "rivalry" between the two domes is best illustrated in the description of the British travel writer, Robert Byron (1905-1941), who mentioned the two in his 1937 classic The Road to Oxiana.

The iwans:

The four iwans are not of equal importance and this fact is reflected in their different dimensions, structure, and decorative motifs. The southwest iwan, preceding the domed chamber with the mihrab, is the most prominent among the other iwans. Visually, it is flanked by two towers and referred to in the vernacular as *sofe-e saheb* or "the high [dignified] space of the master." The iwan, which is an element of early Islamic palace architecture (e.g., Sassanian), is used here for the first time to precede the maqsura and to emphasize the space of the sanctuary. The three other iwans in the middle of each court elevation repeat this motif.

Inscription bands decorate the mihrab date mainly from the time of Shah Tahmasp (reg. 1531-32) and Shah Abbas II (reg. 1642-67). There is reference to the rule of Uzun Hassan, the ruler of Aq Qoyunlu dynasty, dated from 1475-76 and mentioning the magnificence of the mosque and later restoration of the iwan's ceiling. Two words are dominant in these inscriptions: *ta'mir* (to restore) and *taz'yin* (to decorate). These inscriptions show the building's mutability through time. The inscriptions come from Quranic passages praising the power of God, or venerating the names of Shi'ite imams, and therefore mostly date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The iwan's ceiling dates from the 15th century; most of its walls are covered with Safavid statements. Under the iwan's pavement, columns and bases of an earlier mosque were found.

Built roughly at the same time and with similar methods, the southeast and northwest iwans both have later Safavid architectural elements. However, these Safavid structural modifications are different in both, since the intervention took into consideration the kind of structure found in the adjacent area of each iwan (walls were added to the southeast iwan; piers to the northwest). The names of both iwans indicate their pedagogical roles/associations. Called the *sofe* of the master (*Ustadh*), the northwest iwan was restored fully between 1940s and the 1950s. It comprises a multitude of small brick muqarnas units, whose edges are delineated by glazed dark blue lines. Each muqarnas cluster, as it ascends, ends with a star-shaped form in which is inscribed geometric arabesques in dark blue. An inscription band of glazed tiles in yellow and white on a dark blue background runs horizontally on the three walls of the iwan, which are all made of brick.

The southeast iwan, called the *sofe* of the student (*shagird*), displays Safavid motifs of tilework. In comparison with the east iwan, it is composed of larger muqarnas units. Each face of the muqarnas units is decorated with very small square pieces of glazed tiles in dark blue points and lines forming a larger geometric arabesque inscribing an epigraphic element in lighter blue.

The prayer areas:

The covered areas extending between the four iwans are hypostyle halls comprising a series of small domes, mostly built in the twelfth century. The piers of these halls differ in shape and thickness as structural supports

were added to them over time. There is variety of open and closed vaults of different forms and arrangements. The open vaults create lit spaces, in contrast to dark ones; closed brick vaults present a structural innovation, and in many instances include rib vaults similar to those in the Great Mosque of Cordoba. The different arrangement of the brick patterns, some hexagonal, others octagonal or decagonal, indicate not only structural variation but also embodied meaning: but to some historians (i.e., Sayed Husein Nasr), these patterns are associated with Sufi mysticism through their mathematical shapes.

There were three additions to the original rectangular perimeter of the mosque that are incorporated into its space: the Muzaffarid madrasa on the southeast (22 by 26 meters); the Timurid prayer hall (masjid) to the southwest (32 by 32 meters); and the large Safavid hall to the west (32 by 48 meters), distinctive for their vaulting system of wide pointed barrel vaults that almost rise from the ground with a pedestal-like low base.

Of particular interest is the mihrab of Oljaytu, which was installed in 1310 for the Il Khanid ruler Oljaytu. It is found in the northwestern part of the mosque, on the exterior of the northeastern wall of the northwest iwan. Exhibiting a mastery of stuccowork of complex compositions of three-dimensional inscriptions merging with floral and geometric carvings, the whole mihrab stands as a unique element extruded from the original wall of the mosque. The mihrab is composed of an external framed arch within which is inscribed a smaller recessed framed arch, almost half in height and width. These two arches, including their frames and their "columns," which do not have a structural function, are all ornamented with carvings of inscriptions and patterns. The most external frame takes this delicate treatment to an extreme. The inscription band, as it recessed in the wall, spatially curves as if written on a convex surface; its florally-decorated and perforated background make the inscription appear to be floating in air.

The Muzaffarid madrasa, locally known as the iwan of Umar (Suffeh-i Umar), was erected on the southeast side of the Friday mosque in the fourteenth century and is particularly remarkable for its superb mosaic faience decoration in floral and geometric designs, compared by art historians to the works of the architects of the Timurid court. An inscription on the soffit of the iwan of the madrasa gives the name of the Muzaffarid Sultan Mahmud (reg. 1358-1374) as the patron of the addition to the Friday Mosque. The original extant section of the building consists of an iwan leading to a rectangular hall with transverse vaulting. The central bay of the qibla hall is covered with a lantern and encompasses a tile mosaic mihrab with muqarnas hood. While *hazarbaft* tiles in geometric patterns enliven the soffit of the iwan, the muqarnas above the mihrab is revetted with light blue, dark blue, black and white tiles as well as unglazed tiles.

Historians of architecture consider the Friday Mosque of Isfahan to be a masterpiece of brick architecture. While similar in magnitude to mosques found in Syria and Cordoba, it also presents new elements, highly esteemed for their structural ingenuity and complexity. The amalgam of decoration compositions produced by the variety of brick patterns, the meticulous work in carved stucco, colored panels of floral, geometric and epigraphic motifs, all render the Friday mosque of Isfahan a highlight of Seljuk architecture.

Sources:

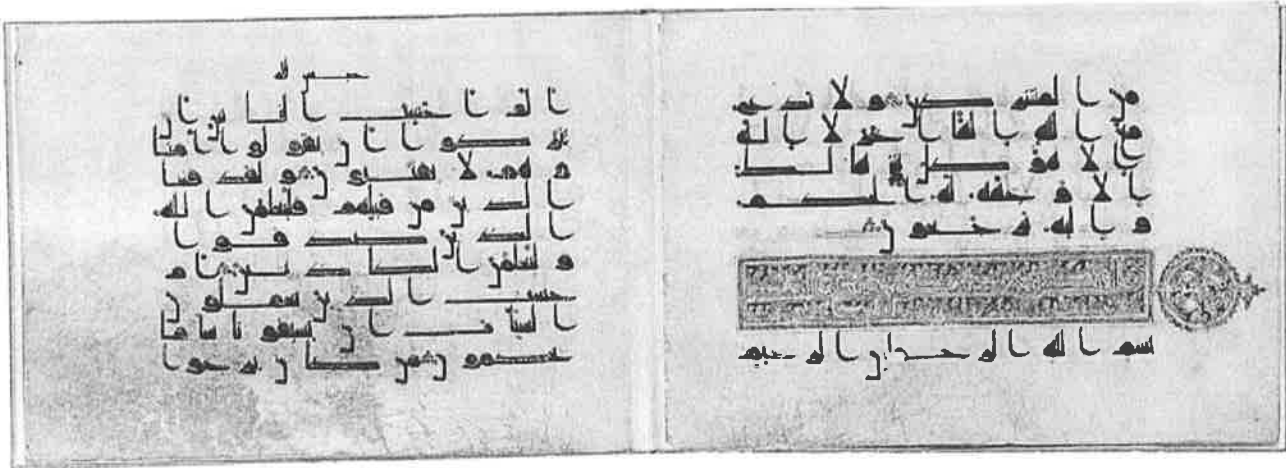
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187. Folio from a Qur'an. Arab, North Africa, or Near East. Abbasid. c. eighth to ninth century C.E. Ink, color, and gold on parchment.

(similar SS, 275-276)

SH

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<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-islam/islamic-art-medieval/a/folio-from-a-quran>

Qur'an fragment, in Arabic, before 911, vellum, MS M. 712, fols 19v-20r, 23 x 32 cm, possibly Iraq (The Morgan Library and Museum, New York)

The Qur'an: from recitation to book

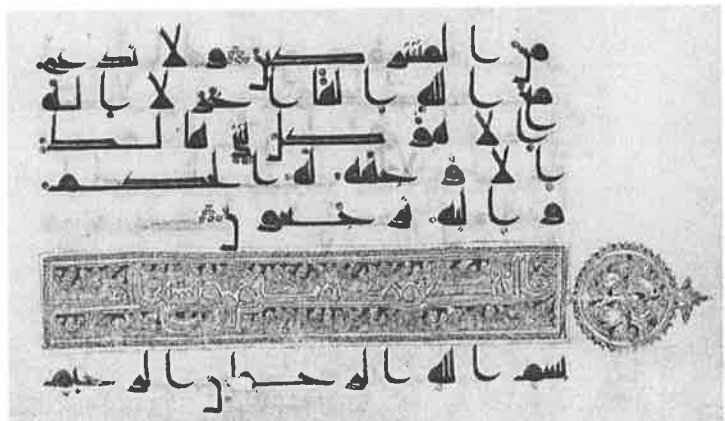
The Qur'an is the sacred text of Islam, consisting of the divine revelation to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic. Over the course of the first century and a half of Islam, the form of the manuscript was adapted to suit the dignity and splendor of this divine revelation. However, the word Qur'an, which means "recitation," suggests that manuscripts were of secondary importance to oral tradition. In fact, the 114 *suras* (or chapters) of the Qur'an were compiled into a textual format, organized from longest to shortest, only after the death of Muhammad, although scholars still debate exactly when this might have occurred.

This two-page spread (or bifolium) of a Qur'an manuscript, which contains the beginning of *Surat Al-Ankabut* (The Spider), is now in the collection of The Morgan Library and Museum in New York. Other folios that appear to be from the same Qur'an survive in the Chester Beatty Library (Dublin), the Topkapı Palace Museum and the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art (Istanbul), and the National Museum of Syria (Damascus). One page includes an inscription, which states that 'Abd al-Mun'im Ibn Ahmad donated the Qur'an to the Great Mosque of Damascus in 298 A.H. (July, 911 C.E.), although we do not know where or how long before this donation the manuscript was produced.

Qur'an fragment (detail), in Arabic, before 911, vellum, MS M.712, fols. 19v-20r, 23 x 32 cm, possibly Iraq (The Morgan Library and Museum, New York)

A roadmap for readers

The main text of the *mushaf* (pronounced muss-hoff), as manuscripts of the Qur'an are known, is written in brown ink. Arabic, the language of

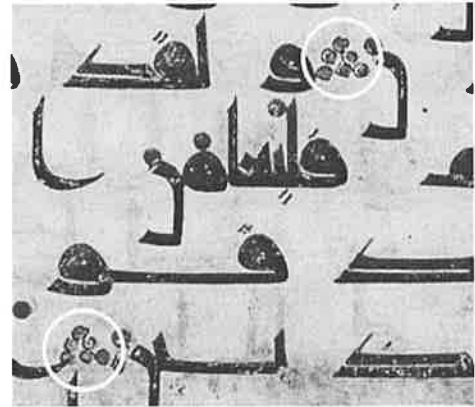


the divine word of Islam, is read from right to left. Several consonants share the same basic letterform, and these are usually distinguished from each other by lines or dots placed above or below the letter. Short vowels such as a, u, and i, are not normally written in Arabic, but in order to avoid misreadings of such an important text it quickly became standard to include vowels in the Qur'an. In this manuscript, these short vowels are marked with red circles positioned above, next to, or below the consonants, depending on the vowel.

The text of each sura is further divided into verses by triangles made up of 5 gold circles located at the end of each verse (left).

The title of each sura is written in gold ink, and surrounded by a rectangle, filled here with an undulating golden vine (below). Combined with a rounded palmette extending into the margin of the folio, it allows readers to quickly locate the beginning of each sura.

Because figural imagery such as human or animal forms was considered inappropriate for the ornamentation of sacred monuments and objects, artists relied on vegetal and geometric motifs when they decorated mosques and sacred manuscripts. Vines and palmettes like the ones that surround the sura heading here appear alone in sacred contexts, but they also accompanied animal and human forms in the secular decoration of palaces and textiles.



Sura, Qur'an fragment (detail), in Arabic, before 911, vellum, MS M.712, fols. 19v-20r, 23 x 32 cm, possibly Iraq (The Morgan Library and Museum, New York)



Sura title, Qur'an fragment (detail), in Arabic, before 911, vellum, MS M.712, fols. 19v-20r, 23 x 32 cm, possibly Iraq (The Morgan Library and Museum, New York)

Planning the proportions of the page

The art of producing a *mushaf* began well before a pen was ever dipped into ink. The dimensions of each page were calculated before the parchment was cut, and the text was carefully situated relative to the edges of the pages. Each page of costly parchment (or vellum) in this Qur'an is larger than a standard sheet of printer paper, and contains only nine lines of calligraphy. These materials suggest both the dignity of the sacred text and the wealth of its patron, who was probably a member of the aristocratic elite.

In addition to the high quality and large quantity of materials used, the deliberate geometric planning of the page conveys the

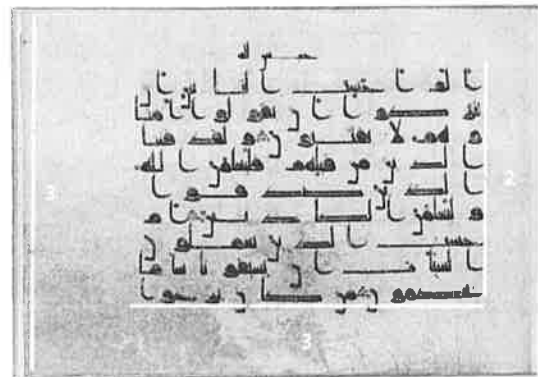
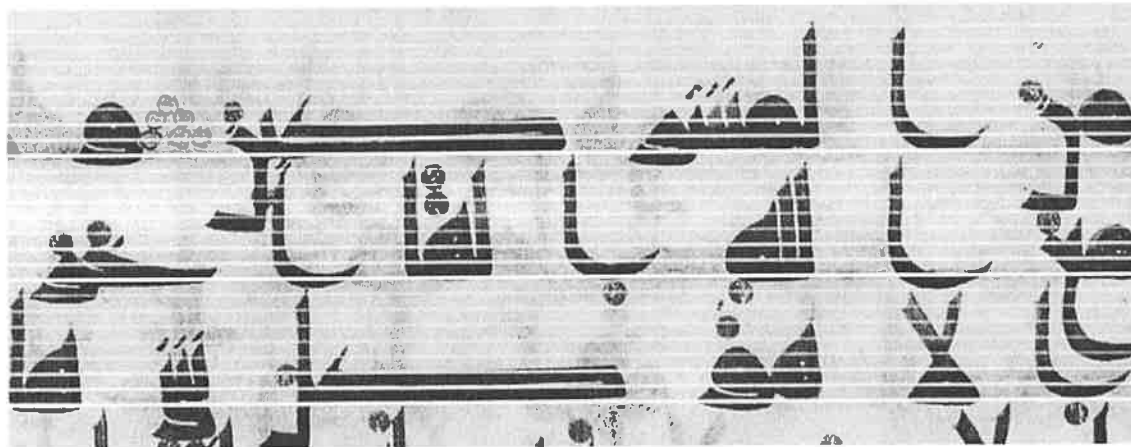


Diagram of proportions, Single folio, Qur'an fragment, in Arabic, before 911, possibly Iraq (The Morgan Library and Museum, New York)

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importance of the text that it contains. As in many of the *mushafs* produced between 750 and 1000 C.E., the pages of this manuscript are wider than they are tall.

The text-block of this manuscript has a height-to-width ratio of 2:3, and the width of the text-block is approximately equal to the height of the page. The height of each line of text was derived from the first letter of the alphabet, *alif*, which was in turn derived from the width of the nib of the reed pen used by the calligraphers to write the text.



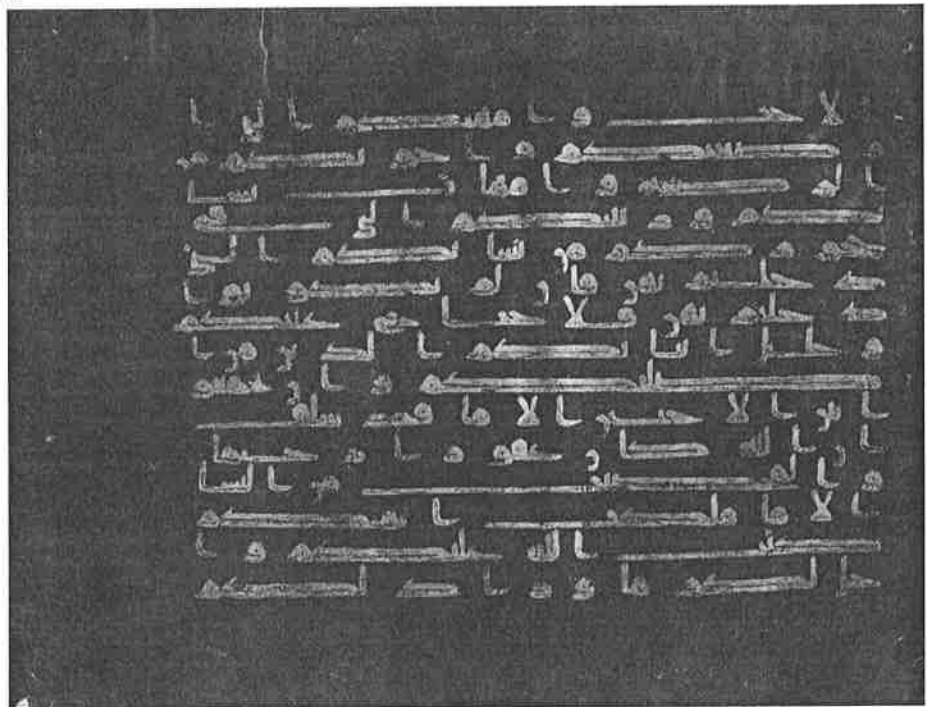
Interlines, Single folio, Qur'an fragment (detail), in Arabic, before 911, vellum, 23 x 32 cm, possibly Iraq (The Morgan Library and Museum, New York)

Each line was further divided into a set number of "interlines," which were used to determine the heights of various parts of individual letters. There is no ruling on the parchment, however, so scribes probably placed each sheet of the semi-transparent parchment on a board marked with horizontal guidelines as they wrote.

Memorizing and producing the proportions of each pen stroke, however, must have been part of the training of every scribe.

Kufic script in folio from a Qur'an, c. 900-950 C.E., gold leaf, silver and ink on parchment with indigo, 28.5 x 37.5 cm, probably made in Tunisia, Qairawan (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

Kufic Script and the Specialization of Scribes
Writing in the tenth century C.E., the Abbasid court secretary Ibn Durustuyah noted that letters of the alphabet were written differently by Qur'anic scribes, professional

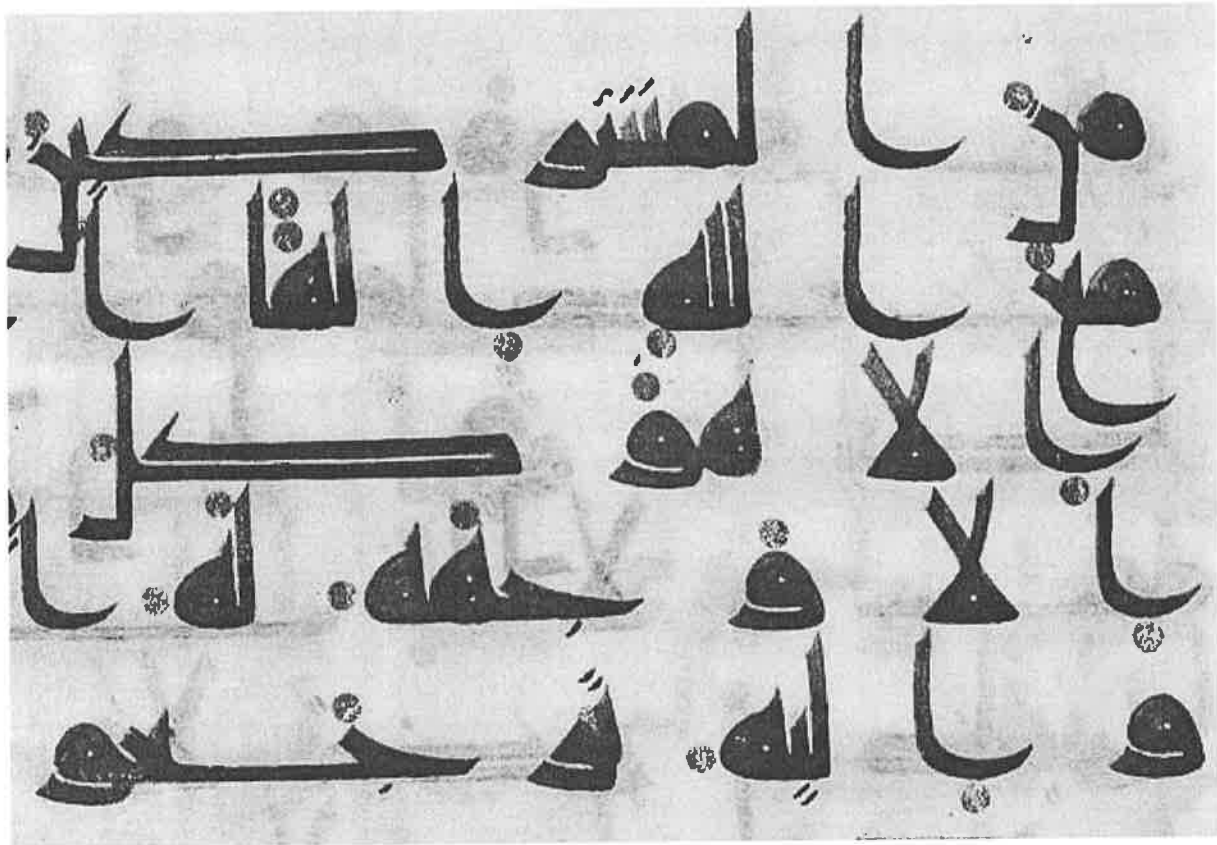


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secretaries, and other copyists. The calligraphic style used by these early scribes of the Qur'an is known today as Kufic. Only two or three of the more than 1300 fragments and manuscripts written in Kufic that survive contain non-Qur'anic content.

Kufic is not so much a single type of handwriting as it is a family of 17 related styles based on common principles, including a preference for strokes of relatively uniform thickness, short straight vertical lines and long horizontal lines, and a straight, horizontal baseline.

Various types of kufic were popular from the seventh century C.E. until the late tenth century C.E. Scribes used a wide reed pen dipped in ink to write. In some letters the angle of the pen was adjusted as the scribe wrote in order to maintain an even thickness throughout the entire letterform, but in others the angle could be held constant in order to produce both very thick and very thin lines. Although letters and even entire words at first appear to consist of a single stroke of the pen, in fact individual letters were often formed using multiple strokes.



Qur'an fragment (detail), in Arabic, before 911, vellum, 23 x 32 cm, possibly Iraq (The Morgan Library and Museum, New York)

The regularity and precision of the penmanship in the fragment from The Morgan Library reveals the skill of the scribes who produced it. Each of them deliberately imitated a single style in order to produce a unified finished product.

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Scribes also had some freedom in composing a page. They could emphasize individual words and balance the widths of lines of different length by elongating certain letters horizontally (a technique known as *mashq*). They could also adjust spacing between words and letters, and even split words between two lines, in order to balance positive and negative space across the page.

Graphic showing negative space, Qu'ran fragment (detail), in Arabic, before 911, vellum, 23 x 32 cm, possible Iraq (The Morgan Library and Museum, New York)

NEGATIVE SPACE WITHIN WORDS:



NEGATIVE SPACE BETWEEN WORDS:



In this *mushaf*, the spaces between non-connecting characters within a word are as wide as the spaces that separate different words (sometimes even wider!). For readers unfamiliar with the text, it is therefore difficult to figure out which letters should be grouped together to form words. This deliberate obfuscation would have slowed down readers, and it suggests that anyone who read aloud from these manuscripts had probably already memorized the text of the Qur'an and used the lavish manuscript only as a kind of mnemonic device.

Essay by Alex Brey

Suggested readings:

Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

Alain George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy* (London: Saqi, 2010).

Alain George, "The Geometry of Early Qur'anic Manuscripts." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* volume 9, no. 1 (2007), pp. 78-110.

Alain George, "Calligraphy, Colour and Light in the Blue Qur'an." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* volume 11, no. 1 (2009), pp. 75-125.

Estelle Whelan, "Writing the Word of God: Some Early Qur'an Manuscripts and Their Milieux, Part I," *Ars Orientalis* volume 20 (1990), pp. 113-147.

Additional Resources

[This manuscript at the Morgan Library and Museum](#)

[Glossary from the British Museum's Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts](#)

[The development and spread of calligraphic scripts from The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

[Scripts in development from The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

[Islamic Manuscripts from the Cambridge Digital Library](#)

[Alain George, A Little-Known Collection of Early Qur'anic Fragments at The Metropolitan Museum of Art \(video\)](#)

168. Great Mosque of Djenné. Mali.

Founded c. 1200 C.E.; rebuilt 1906–1907. Adobe.

G14, 288, 529

S5, 422-423

GW, 368-369

Pins [Image](#) AND [Image](#) AND [Image](#) [Video](#) [Video 2](#) [Video 3](#)

[Video 4](#) [Interior](#) [Interior 2](#) [Article](#) [Article](#)

[Article](#)

[KA](#)

<http://www.learner.org/courses/globalart/work/114/index.html>

Great Mosque

Unknown artist(s), Niger Inland Delta, Mopti Region, Mali

Located in present-day Mali on the floodlands between two rivers, the Niger and the Bani, Djenné is the oldest known city in sub-Saharan Africa. In the ninth century, merchants founded Djenné near an older settlement that had been established as early as 250 BCE.

Under the rule of the powerful Mali Empire, between 1300 and 1500 CE, Djenné reached the height of its prosperity, flourishing as a center of trade, Islamic faith, and learning.

According to tradition, the first mosque in Djenné was built in the thirteenth century by the king Koi Konboro after his conversion to Islam. When a second mosque was erected in the nineteenth century, the first was abandoned and left to deteriorate. As a result, very little is known about its appearance. In 1906–07, a third mosque, funded by the French and said to be modeled after the thirteenth-century building, was raised on the site where the original once stood; it is this building that is known as the Great Mosque.

Although it follows a typically Middle Eastern plan with a roofed prayer hall adjacent to a large courtyard, Djenné's Great Mosque is constructed with distinctly African materials—mud brick and palm wood. One of the largest mud brick, or adobe, buildings in the world, the mosque's thick walls both support the structure and act as insulation from the heat. At night, ceramic caps on the roof of the mosque are opened to ventilate the interior space. Drawing on the "Sudan style" of mud brick architecture, the Djenné mosque is topped by crenellation and attached pillars on the façade are used to emphasize the building's verticality.

The Great Mosque of Djenné is situated in a large market square, making it a constant presence in the everyday lives of residents. For one day each year, however, the structure becomes the focus of the city's ritual life as



well. Mud architecture thrives in parts of the world where there is enough water to mix plaster and form bricks, but not so much rain to put the dried walls in constant danger of dissolving.

Despite the prevailing aridity of the Djenné region, its mud buildings require constant upkeep.

During the annual festival known as *Crepissage*, thousands of people gather to replaster the walls of the Great Mosque. Although the wood poles that jut out from the building embellish the surface of its walls in a decorative manner, their primary function is practical; these rungs serve as scaffolding for those participating in the repairs. Today, the future of the festival and the mosque itself are threatened by a waning population and a lack of participation from the city's youth.



Expert Perspective: Susan Vogel,

Filmmaker/Professor of African Art and Architecture, Columbia University

Africa has had cities from very early times. And one of the earliest, perhaps the earliest, is Djenné, which is founded around 900 AD. Djenné is founded before Islam, but once Islam reaches the region, which is around 1100, Djenné became a center of Islamic learning, which it remains today with many Koranic schools.

Djenné is on a branch of the Niger River, the Bani River, in present day Mali. The mud of Djenné includes a very unique chemical mixture that includes both manure and fish remains and it makes it exceptionally hard, and that's why the people of Djenné were able to build the largest mud brick building in the world, which is the great mosque.

The Great Mosque of Djenné is the principal place of worship in the city where everyone is Muslim. And it's the largest mud-brick building in the world. And it really is an architectural masterpiece. The mosque is in a style we know as the Sudanese style and it developed in this region about 1,000 years ago.

The mud is very hard and totally waterproof as long as it's sealed. But at the end of every rainy season, cracks and fissures develop. If those are not repaired, a building will fall apart quickly and actually can collapse. So every year, every building needs to be re-plastered with a thin coat to keep the seal tight. And actually on that top layer they put oil—when you do an oil change, they put the oil in the mud for that top coat, if you're rich, because it gives you a very well-sealed surface. But the mosque has to be repaired every year and that has been a major celebration for a long time. The amazing thing about it is that the whole thing is done in a few hours.

Masonry is a hereditary craft and very prestigious. The architecture can't continue without the masons and without their knowledge. So what's happening is that the masons' children don't always want to take up their fathers' trade and so there's been a kind of tapering off of the hereditary masons, while young men from poor farming families north of Djenné are coming into the city and apprenticing and they will probably become masons. So it will become a less hereditary trade.

The entire city of Djenné has been declared a World Heritage Monument by UNESCO. So, at least in principle, the buildings should remain unchanged.

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-africa/west-africa/mali1/a/great-mosque-of-djenn>

As one of the wonders of Africa, and one of the most unique religious buildings in the world, the Great Mosque of Djenné, in present-day Mali, is also the greatest achievement of Sudano-Sahelian architecture (Sudano-Sahelian refers to the Sudanian and Sahel grassland of West Africa). It is also the largest mud-built structure in the world. We experience its monumentality from afar as it dwarfs the city of Djenné. Imagine arriving at the towering mosque from the neighborhoods of low-rise adobe houses that comprise the city.

Djenné was founded between 800 and 1250 C.E., and it flourished as a great center of commerce, learning, and Islam, which had been practiced from the beginning of the 13th century. Soon thereafter, the Great Mosque became one of the most important buildings in town primarily because it became a political symbol for local residents and for colonial powers like the French who took control of Mali in 1892. Over the centuries, the Great Mosque has become the epicenter of the religious



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and cultural life of Mali, and the community of Djenné. It is also the site of a unique annual festival called the *Crepissage de la Grand Mosquée* (Plastering of the Great Mosque).

The Great Mosque that we see today is its third reconstruction, completed in 1907. According to legend, the original Great Mosque was probably erected in the 13th century, when King Koi Konboro—Djenné's twenty-sixth ruler and its first Muslim sultan (king)—decided to use local materials and traditional design techniques to build a place of Muslim worship in town. King Konboro's successors and the town's rulers added two towers to the mosque and surrounded the main building with a wall. The mosque compound continued to expand over the centuries, and by the 16th century, popular accounts claimed half of Djenné's population could fit in the mosque's galleries.

The first Great Mosque and its reconstructions

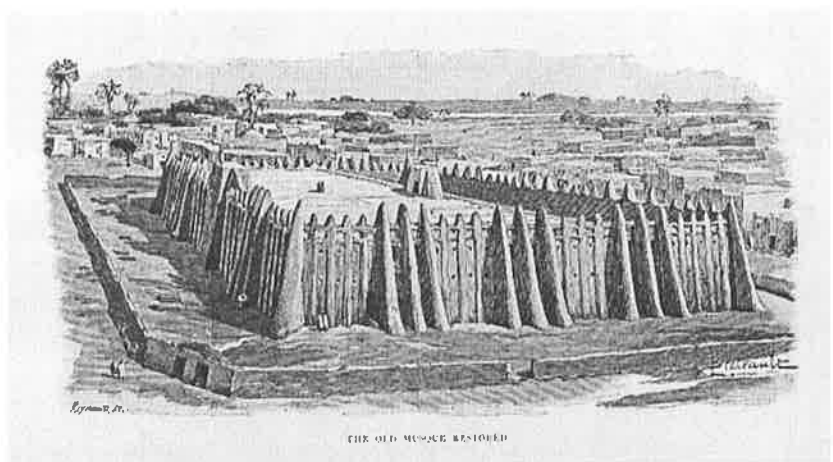
Some of the earliest European writings on the first Great Mosque came from the French explorer René Caillié who wrote in detail about the structure in his travelogue *Journal d'un voyage a Temboctou et à Jenné (Journal of a Voyage to Timbuktu and Djenné)*. Caillié traveled to Djenné in 1827, and he was the only European to see the monument before it fell into ruin. In his travelogue, he wrote that the building was already in bad repair from the lack of upkeep. In the Sahel—the transitional zone between the Sahara and the humid savannas to the south—adobe and mud buildings such as the Great Mosque require periodic and often annual re-plastering. If re-plastering does not occur, the exteriors of the structures melt in the rainy season. Based on Caillié's description, his visit likely coincided with a period when the mosque had not been re-plastered for several years, and multiple rainy seasons had probably washed away all the plaster and worn the mud-brick.

A second mosque built between 1834 and 1836 replaced the original and damaged building described by Caillié. We can see evidence of this construction in drawings by the French journalist Felix Dubois. In 1896, three years after the French conquest of the city, Dubois published a plan of the mosque based on his survey of the ruins.

"The Old Mosque Restored," from Félix Dubois, *Timbuktoo the Mysterious* (London: William Heinemann, 1897), pp. 157.

The structure drawn by Dubois (left) was more compact than the one that is seen today. Based on the drawings, the second construction of the Great Mosque was more massive than the first and defined by its weightiness. It also featured a series of low minaret towers and equidistant pillar supports.

The present and third iteration of the Great Mosque was completed in 1907, and some scholars argue that the French constructed it during their period of occupation of the city starting in 1892. However, no colonial documents support this theory. New scholarship supports the idea that the mason's guild of Djenné built the current mosque with the help of forced laborers from villages of adjacent regions, brought in by French colonial authorities. To accompany and motivate workers, musicians were provided who played drums and flutes.

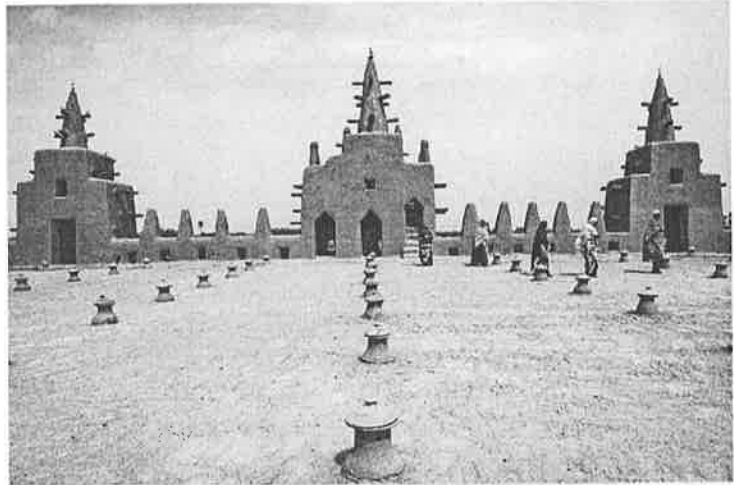


Workers included masons who mixed tons of mud, sand, rice-husks, and water and formed the bricks that shape the current structure.

Roof (detail), Great Mosque of Djenné, Mali, 1907
(photo: [un photo](#), CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The Great Mosque today:

The Great Mosque that we see today is rectilinear in plan and is partly enclosed by an exterior wall. An earthen roof covers the building, which is supported by monumental pillars. The roof has several holes covered by terra-cotta lids (above), which provide its interior spaces with fresh air even during the hottest days. The façade of the Great Mosque



includes three minarets and a series of engaged columns that together create a rhythmic effect (below).

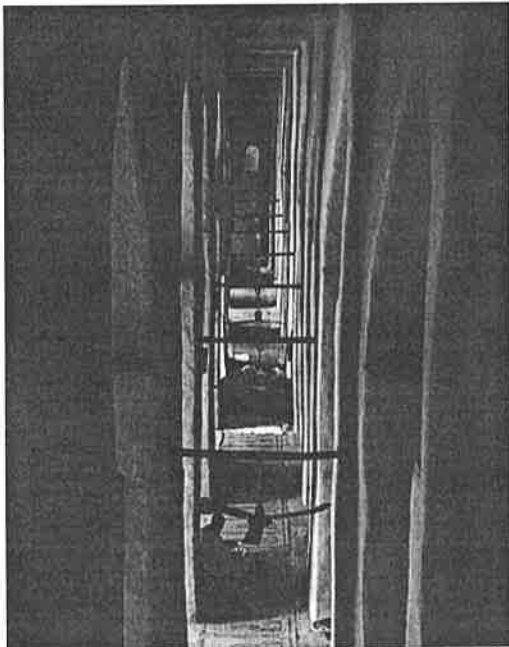
At the top of the pillars are conical extensions with ostrich eggs placed at the very top—symbol of fertility and purity in the Malian region. Timber beams throughout the exterior are both decorative and structural. These elements also function as scaffolding for the re-plastering of the mosque during the annual festival of the *Crepissage*. Compared to images and descriptions of the previous buildings, the present Great Mosque includes several innovations such as a special court reserved for women and a principal entrance with earthen pillars that signal the graves of two local religious leaders.



Re-plastering the Mosque: During the annual festival

of the *Crepissage de la Grand Mosquée*, the entire city contributes to the re-plastering of the mosque's exterior by kneading into it a mud plaster made from a mixture of butter and fine clay from the alluvial soil of the nearby Niger and Bani Rivers. The men of the community usually take up the task of mixing the construction material. As in the past, musicians entertain them during their labors, while women provide water for the mixture. Elders also contribute through their presence on site, by sitting on terrace walls and giving advice. Mixing work and play, young boys sing, run, and dash everywhere.

Interior view, Great Mosque of Djenné, Mali, 1907 (photo: [UN Mission in Mali](#), CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)



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Over the years Djenné's inhabitants have withstood repeated attempts to change the character of their exceptional mosque and the nature of the annual festival. For instance, some have tried to suppress the playing of music during the *Crepissage*, and foreign Muslim investors have also offered to rebuild the mosque in concrete and tile its current sand floor. Djenné's community has unrelentingly striven to maintain its cultural heritage and the unique character of the Great Mosque. In 1988, the tenacious effort led to the designation of the site and the entire town of Djenné as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Essay by Dr. Elisa Dainese

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/19/arts/design/the-great-mosque-in-dienne-mali.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1

A Tribute to Islam, Earthen but Transcendent By HOLLAND COTTER APRIL 18, 2012

DJENNÉ, Mali — As in so much of the Islamic world, "insha'Allah" — "if God wills it" — is how people punctuate conversations in this predominantly Muslim West African country. If you speak of starting a project, or taking a trip, or trying to pay a debt, the outcome is always understood to be conditional.

Recently Malians have had to trust heaven more than usual. The year's millet crop arrived too early and much too thin. In late fall and winter there were attacks on Europeans by a Qaeda affiliate. The military overthrow of the government in Bamako, the nation's capital, left one of Africa's poorest nations shut off from the world. Meanwhile Tuareg rebels and Islamist forces have seized the northern half of the country, including Timbuktu.

Tourism, so vital to the economy, has been reduced to a trickle, though West Africa has never attracted the kind of monument-hungry crowds that flood into Egypt. Most travelers who come here are in search of "black" Africa — the Africa of so-called tribal art — and many are only dimly aware of the extraordinary vitality of Islamic culture, old and new, below the Sahara.

In modern cities like Bamako, Mali's capital, and Dakar in Senegal, this culture often assumes a pop voice, with religious phrases spray-painted across walls and devotional music pounding and keening over the airwaves. In the ancient pilgrimage city of Djenné, set between two rivers in the country's center and accessible only by ferry, the voice is quieter, tempered by tradition, but also shaped and, some would say, distorted, by modern intervention.

Djenné, along with Timbuktu, was long a central point for the diffusion of Islam deep into the continent. Although Islam took firm hold in the city only in the 13th century, when a local ruler converted, it had been filtering in on trade routes from the Mediterranean coast and the Middle East for centuries. Along with salt, gold and slaves, merchant caravans brought scholars and scribes, many of whom stopped along the road to set up Koranic schools and manuscript ateliers.

Their path can still be imagined today in the countless small village mosques that dot Mali's landscape like way stations, some squat and foursquare and painted candy-box turquoise and white, others molded from earth like ceramic pots. And it's easy to experience the age-old thrill of arriving at Djenné itself, with its majestic Great Mosque seen from afar against the horizon, dwarfing the city around it.

The mosque is one of Africa's most revered religious monuments. Constructed almost entirely from sun-dried mud bricks coated with clay, it is the largest surviving example of a distinctive style of African architecture. In tribute to its status, it has been designated, together with its immediate neighborhood of low-rise adobe houses, as a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Yet for a Western viewer the Unesco seal of approval may raise expectations that the building doesn't quite meet. Heritage implies great age, and the mosque, as it now exists, is not ancient. The original mosque, dating

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Meanwhile, politics have also threatened to stall an important project at the Djenné Manuscript Library, directly adjacent to the Great Mosque, where work is under way — sponsored by the British Library Endangered Archives program in London — to preserve physically and digitize the many thousands of Arabic manuscripts that survive in the city. These include many handwritten copies of the Koran, but also medical, scientific and legal treatises; books of magic; and transcriptions of oral history as handed down by the griots, or minstrels, of West Africa. Some of the material dates to the 11th century.

A small number of the manuscripts belong to the library; most are still owned by local families and are in precarious condition. Some manuscripts recently on view in the office of the mosque's imam were kept locked behind screened cabinet doors, which protected them from insects, though the room itself, with its crumbling, water-damaged ceiling, gave clear evidence of other environmental liabilities.

A campaign to persuade local owners to entrust their manuscripts to the Djenné library has met with some success, and digitizing goes forward: some 40,000 images are now online. But serious conflicts around the project have arisen.

Certain members of the Djenné religious establishment want to preserve primarily Koranic manuscripts, but not those of magic and oral history, which they consider heretical. The British Library team, by contrast, wants to digitize everything possible, giving priority to items rare in age, exceptional in execution and unusual in content, whatever that may be.

In play, of course, are differing attitudes toward the handling of potent information, including information in the form of art. The West believes in instant access, full and neutral disclosure; material first, spiritual second. Orthodox Islam believes in ideas discriminately revealed, then slowly absorbed; in mystery over matter, or at least equal to matter.

What's at stake is what beliefs and biases will shape the way history is told, in this case the history of Djenné, which is a crucial part of the history of Islam in Africa. (The United Nations has expressed concern over the safety of similar manuscripts in Timbuktu, since the occupying forces have looted the Ahmad Baba Institute of Higher Islamic Studies and Research.)

The big question is whether any work can go forward, given the drastic uncertainty of Mali's present political situation. Half of the country, including Djenné's spiritual twin city, Timbuktu, some 300 miles to the north, has effectively passed into new hands. And the intentions of the military junta in Bamako are unclear. For outsiders much of the country is still a no-go zone. For Malians catastrophe looms.

At least Djenné has had some positive news lately. In mid-March, after a three-year halt, the Crepissage de la Mosquée resumed. Few outsiders were present to see it, but the lift in local morale was huge. At around the same time a potential standoff in the archiving project was averted, with the opposing parties at least temporarily reconciled.

And there is the hope, even now, that with time new travelers, frightened off by current events, will come to this old, pious African city, with its deep history, contemporary questions and transcendent earth-made art, insha'Allah.

http://www.kamit.ip/27_mali/mal_eng.htm

ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE in MALI: THE GREAT MOSQUE in DJENNÉ by Takeo Kamiya

The largest mosque in Mali is the Great Mosque of Djenné. Its majestic external view is worthy of surprise for architects from industrialized societies, stimulating with its 'expressionist' like appearance, that is, a formation

similar to a handwrought clay figure completely different from modern buildings made by assemblage of industrial products.

When looking at its plan, the surprise grows all the more. Everything is distorted; moreover the interior space is crammed with pillars.

Plan of the Great Mosque, Djenné
(from R. Bedaux, B. Diaby & P. Maas,
"L'Architecture de Djenné" 2003 □j

The mosque was constructed around 1280 in the time of the Mali Empire (the 13 ~ 16th centuries) by the 26th King of Djenné, Koy Konboro who had just converted to Islam. It is said that he tore down his old palace and built the mosque at that site. That earthen building seemed to have functioned for a long time until its demolition in the 19th century. In 1893 when the French army occupied Djenné, the mosque had already been ruined.

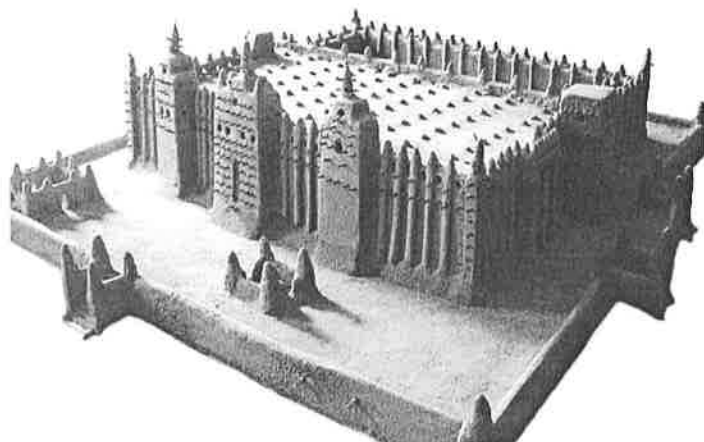
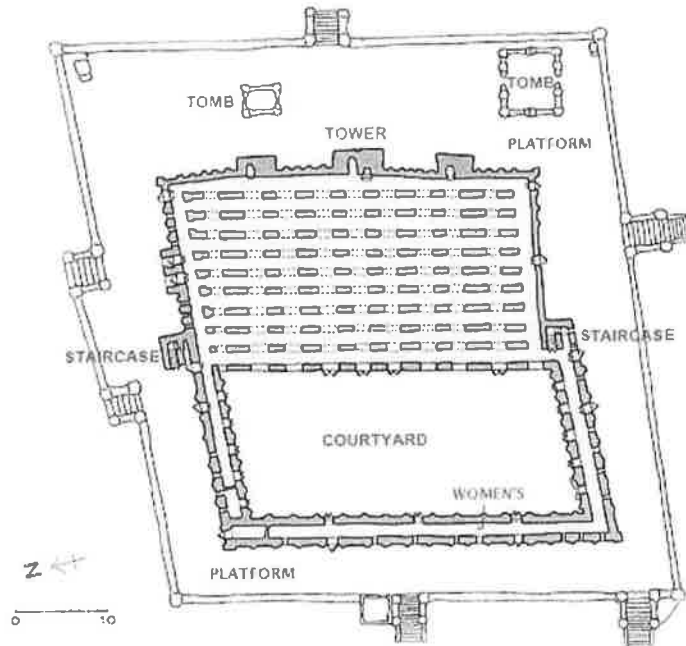
The present mosque was reconstructed in 1907 with French assistance on the same site. Since they must have utilized the existing platform and basal part of the ruined mosque, its original plan is considered to have

succeeded almost intact, while the reconstructed form of the upper part probably reflected the aesthetic sense of that age. The commander of the construction was the chief of the mason guild, Ismaila Traoré.

The mosque stands on a more than two-meter high platform in order to avoid damage on occasion of a flood of the surrounding river. This platform covering about 75m x 75m does not take a shape of a square but is distorted like a parallelogram. In response to that the plan of the mosque is also distorted and the shape of the courtyard is completely parallelogram. As there should not have been a difficulty of narrowness of the site such as in Cairo's mosques since it faced an extensive square, this distortion seems to derive from immaturity of measurement skills. It is easy to draw parallel lines, while it might be difficult to make right angles on a large scale.

□ Model of Djenné's Great Mosque,
National Museum in Bamako

Though its composition < worship room + courtyard > is the same as that in village mosques, the gap between their scales has brought various differences. First of all the enclosure of the courtyard at the Great Mosque is not simple walls but cloisters, the west part of which is applied to women's worship space. As the direction of Macca



(Mecca) is east of Mali, three Mihrabs are settled on Qibla wall (nevertheless they are not large enough to form independent rooms as in Spain).

The erection of a tower over each Mihrab by a successor of Koy Konboro thus engendered 'Three-tower type' mosque, quintessential in Malian mosques, like 'Three-dome type' in India. The east side of the Great Mosque is an extensive square, where a huge renowned market is traditionally held every Monday. That location gave a front character to the mosque's east side that is originally a backside. The mosque flaunts its decorative 'Three-tower type' appearance to the crowd in the market.

The decorations are horn like protrusions that are set not only on each corner but also on top of the outer walls continuously, three towers divided in three tiers having a horn protruding on each corner as well, and palm wood sticks (Toron) half embedded and rhythmically arranged on the wall surfaces.

These sticks are needed on higher positions for the function of scaffolding on occasion of replastering the whole surface of the Great Mosque once a year. Therefore it was not necessarily required at lower positions, but gradually these sticks have come to be used as decorative elements even for low-rise mosques. Apart from them strangely there is no calligraphy, Muqarnas, floral or vegetal ornaments, nor geometric embellishments, which are standard decorations for Islamic architecture in the world.



Towers, Collapse, and Interior of the Great Mosque in Djenné

Djenné's oblong worship room of 50m x 26m approximately in area is the exact opposite of Turkish type mosque, a worship room of which looks like a cosmic space covered by an enormous dome. Djenné's mosque is just an extreme sample of Arabic type hypostyle mosque in contrast, making as many as ninety thick pillars of earth stand densely, causing impossibility to get even a penetrating view of the interior space.

Standing up many columns together is a fate for the erection of a grand hall with a flat roof without using a dome structure. Since Djenné's mosque is made of earth, the pillars had to be much bulkier than stone columns.

Even if this worship hall sounds quite strange for people who are used to seeing spacious worship halls, from a practical standpoint it is possible to function as a mosque. As Muslims worship God standing side by side in lines parallel to the Qibla wall even at congregational prayers on Friday, there is no hindrance as far as the arcades stand parallel to the Qibla wall at regular intervals affording the followers space to prostrate themselves in lines (never in columns), although it is a defect that attendants cannot look at the Imam (worship leader) and it is a little hard to hear his preach.

When it comes to the origin of this plan, it is likely that it was the oldest existing mosque in Egypt, Ibn Tulun Mosque (876-879). When the Abbasid general Ahmad Ibn Tulun dispatched from Baghdad conquered Egypt, he inaugurated his own Tulun Dynasty (868-905) and erected the Great Mosque in Cairo, introducing brick construction technology from his homeland (although there existed a tradition of stone structures in Egypt).

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The mosque's plan was the Arabic type that would become a model for later Egyptian mosques. It was presumably brought to Mali through the pilgrimage route to Macca, or an architect might have been invited from Cairo.

Plan and Interior of Ibn Tulun Mosque, Cairo

In spite of baked brick construction instead of sun-dried bricks, still thick columns stand densely in Ibn Tulun Mosque

compared to stone mosques because of the early stage of Islamic architecture. In addition to that, surrounded with an outer enclosed yard (Ziyada) that could correspond to Djenné's platform, arranging arcades of pointed arches in parallel to the Qibla wall, and surrounding courtyard with galleries, it is apparent that the principles of Ibn Tulun's plan have been passed on to Djenné's Great Mosque. Since the arcades are basically disposed in a right angle to Qibla wall in Maghreb and Spain since Cordoba's Mezquita, it cannot be said that this plan was brought from Morocco.

Built of earth, the pointed arches of Djenné's arcades are narrowed more than Cairo's to avoid collapse, causing strong vertical impression on its interior space with a high ceiling. One cannot see, apart from the sphere of earth culture, such sort of mosques consisting of rows of longitudinal passage-like space only. Unlike Ibn Tulun Mosque, Malians have not erected independent minarets but utilized the towers above mihrabs for the roll, as before mentioned.

