

ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING ACCORDING TO THE QURAN

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Before plunging into the verses, first it must be stated that all what we may find in the Quran on architecture and building are no more than deductions from various verses. O. Grabar stated correctly that the Quran "provides no direct or implied definition or even a requirement for a particular locale for the accomplishment" of the ritual practices of the Muslims and for this, the deduced views leads only to "a series of disjointed observations."¹ Yet, this voids not the role of the Quranic verses and their exegesis in the development of Islamic art and architecture.

In general, there are many direct and indirect references to different forms of buildings in the Quran. The verb *bana* and its derivations recur in many verses and refer to God as the perfect builder of heaven and other constructions in Paradise, while in many other verses it applies to what is built by people or to metaphoric uses.²

Bunyan marsus in Q61:4 means a building that its walls are strongly constructed and

cemented with well-cut, but it describes metaphorically the array and tenacity of Muslim fighters in holy war.³ Two kinds of buildings, *aya* and *masani*, are mentioned in Q26:128-129 in context with the ancient people of 'Ad "What, do you build on every prominence a sign –*aya*-, sporting, and do you take to you castles –*masani*'-, haply to dwell forever?" *Aya* means a sign in the form of whatsoever high construction, probably a tower. While *masani* are explained as high palaces

and fortresses built well.⁴ The exegetes found no indications in these verses for how and what to

1 Grabar, *Early Islamic Art, 650-1100*, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing 2005, p. 87.

2 Quran: Q5:91; 6:50; 66:11; 12:78; 39:20; 47:51; 27:79 and Q9:110; 26:128; 40:36; 18:21; 37:97; 38:37; 61:4; 9:109; 16:26.

3 Óabari, *Jami' al-Bayan* (Cairo 1422/2001), 22: 611; Qurtubi, *al-Jami'*, (Beirut 1427/2006), 20: 438; Nasafi, *Tafsir*,

4:251-252; Zamakhsharī, *Kashsháf*, 6: 102.

4 According to *Lisan al-Árab*, art. *a-y-Á*, was borrowed to the verses of the *Qur'Án* because a verse is a sign separated from others or because it is a sign for the Devine miracles. See also *al-IÖfahÁnÐ*, *MufradÁt*, p. 41-42.

Jeffery, the *Foreign Vocabulary*, pp. 72-73 believed that it is a borrowing from the Syraic or Aramic speaking.

For *masani* see Óabarī, *JÁmi' al-BayÁn* (Cairo 1422/2001), 17: 610-612; QÛrÔÛbÐ, *al-JÁmi'*, (Beirut 1427/2006),

16: 55-57; Ibn Juzzġ, al-Tashġl, 2:120; al-Baghawġ, MaŸĀlim al-Tanzġl, 6: 123; al-ĀaġġĀk, Tafsġr, 2:636.

build. However, Tabarsi considered both verses as indicating repugnance at every unnecessary building, and he supported this view with the Prophetic tradition "Every unnecessary building will harm his owner in the last day."⁵ Ibn Kathir expressed the same view by relying on the reprimand that Abu al-Dardaġ, a companion of the Prophet, directed to the people of Damascus for their plenty of buildings and gardens.⁶ For some, in these verses there is a disallowance of

building for pleasure usually done by profligates.⁷ The same sense is repeated in other passages

addressing another old people, Thamud. Q26:149 "Hewing your dwellings in the mountains and leading a wanton life?" probably, they built large palaces. Q7:74 says "And remember when He

... lodged you in the land, taking to yourselves castles of its plains, and hewing its mountains into houses." The keyword in the last verses is *tanhitun*, literally means to hew or to cut in solid substances.⁸ The exegetes explained *naht* (hewing) as the act of building winter houses of stone in hilly regions, while summerhouses were built of mud and bricks and are of shorter age than

those of stone.⁹ More interesting, Qurtubi related that those who legalized the magnificent

building such as palaces based their attitude, among others on Q7:74". They supported this view with a tradition from the Prophet saying "If God bestowed someone He likes to see the effect of his grace on him."¹⁰ Therefore, nice building is one of the effects of God's grace. Others, Qurġubġ

continued, rejected this view relying on the traditions like "If God wants to harm someone He

5 Ōabarsġ, *MajmaŸ al-BayĀn*, 7: 310.

6 Ibn Kathġr, *Tafsġr*, 3: 330. Similar reprimand was directed to MuŸĀwiya as governor of Syria and later to ŸUthamĀn, the third caliph, by the Prophet's companion AbŸ Dharr al-GhafĀrġ when he noticed the plethora of buildings in al- Madġna and, consequently, decided to leave the city and moved to nearby Rabadha. See on this al- Ōabarġ, *TĀrġkh*,

4: 283-285. According to YaŸqŸbġ, *TĀrġkh*, 2: 232-233, the caliph MuŸĀwiya asked one day the Muġaddith ŸAbdullĀh bin ŸUmar: "How do you see our buildings in Damascus? ŸAbdullĀh bin ŸUmar answered: "If you

made this from the money of God then you are traitor and if it from your personal money you are from the profligates.”

7 Ibn ÁyyÁn, al-BaÁr al-MuÁÐÓ, 7: 31.

8 LisÁn al-ÝArab, art. n-Á-t. See also al-IÓfahÁnÐ, MufradÁt, p. 487.

9 See the interpretations of the verses in: MuqÁtil, TafsÐr, 2:46, 435; NasafÐ, TafsÐr, 2: 60-61; ÓabarÐ, JÁmiÝ al-BayÁn (Cairo 1422/2001), 10: 299, 17: 621-624; ÓabarsÐ, MajmaÝ al-BayÁn, 4: 679; ZamakhsharÐ, KashshÁf, 4: 408; QÛrÓÛbÐ, al-JÁmiÝ, (Beirut 1427/2006), 9: 267, 16: 64-65; Ibn al-JawzÐ, ZÁd al-MasÐr, 3: 224-225.

10 They also relied on Q7:32 “Say who has forbidden the ornament of God which He brought forth for his servants, and the good things of His providing?” See also Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 13:468, no. 8107.

will make him waste his money on clay and bricks” i.e. on building, “One who builds more than his need will have to carry it on his neck, “every disbursement of the believers will be rewarded by God except what he disburses on building and sin,” and “The Children of Adam has no right except in house to dwell, a dress to cover his pudina, bread and water.”¹¹

It is clear that the above verses present luxurious and large building on earth will not protect

people from the Almighty God and will not be better than what God designated to His believers in Paradise. Q39:20 declare “but those who fear their Lord – for them await lofty chambers, underneath which rivers flow”. It is spoken with magnificent buildings and multi-story palaces and houses, built and decorated with gold, silver, pearls and corundum, all will be in the service of the believers in Paradise.¹² In spite of the negative attitude in the verses cannot deduce from them any strict judgment, nor Ibn al-ÝArabÐ considered them as of legal implications (ayÁt al-aÁkÁm).¹³ In any rate, the importance of the verses is double: on one hand, they somehow present some general ideas and forms of architecture that existed in the far past: building of winter houses and summerhouses, the technique of cutting of stones and the need to do things perfectly and magnificently. The interpretations reflect also something of the forms and construction materials used in Islamic world in the time of the exegetes. On the other hand, some aristocratic Muslims like the Umayyads, used the verses, especially Q7:74, to impart legitimacy to their magnificent palaces. Their claim was: If God permitted glorious houses to the ancient people, it should be also permitted to Muslims, a pretense that the majority of the theologians rejected. In contrast with them, most of the Muslim rulers accepted this claim in order to justify the splendid

religious and secular architectural and artistic projects that they initiated in their lands.

11 Qur'ân, al-Jâmi', (Beirut 1427/2006), 9: 267-268; Abû Ya'îd, Musnad, 4: 36, no. 2040. See the *îadth* in

Tirmidh, al-Sunan, 4: 300, Kitâb al-Zuhd 33, no. 2341

12 Óabars, Majma' al-Bayân, 8: 770; Nasaf, Tafsir, 3: 54; Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, 4: 50.

13 Ibn al-Árab, AÎkâm al-Qur'ân, 4: 1656-1658.

More reference to magnificent building and art works rises in the verses describing the unusual merits that God granted the king-Prophet Solomon. In Q38:37 the jinn are described as builders and divers working for Prophet Solomon. The verse corresponds with Q34:12-13, telling about the Jinn doing, with the permission of God, different works for Prophet Solomon (this verse will be discussed below). It also corresponds with the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba related in Q27:17- 44 and telling about what God made submissive to Solomon. In the verses about Solomon and in the stories of the Prophets usually used to explain them, there are many implications of imagined art and architecture. The Queen of Sheba had a splendid throne and Solomon, in order to test her and to prove his superiority to her, ordered the jinn to bring it to him (Q27:38) and to construct a *Òarî mumarrad min qawár*, a pavilion smoothed of crystal (Q27:44). The lexicographers gave the word different meanings: a single huge, decorated and

high house, a palace, every high building, and the yard of the house and glass tiles.¹⁴ In Q28:38

and Q40:36 *sarh* indicates a high building or tower that Pharaoh ordered to construct in order to reach God! Grabar explained the term thus: "Since all these passages deal with mythical buildings and because the root of the word implies purity and clarity the term may reflect the attribute of transparency in a building rather than its form. It would then be a pavilion comparable to the elaborate construction alleged to have existed on top of pre-Islamic Yemeni

palaces."¹⁵ Of some interest is verse Q28:38 in which Pharaoh said to his vezir "Kindle me,

Haman, a fire upon the clay -*Òdn* -, and make me a tower -*Òarî*." The point in this verse is the

fact that it tells about the technique of making building material: it is $\hat{O}Dn$ backed by fire and out of it they, certainly, made bricks. For the exegetes it is spoken with baked bricks ($\acute{A}jur$) with

14 Lis $\acute{A}n$ al- \acute{Y} Arab, art. \hat{O} -r- \hat{I} ; Ibn F \acute{A} ris, Mujmal al-Lugha, p. 556; Ibn F \acute{A} ris, Mu \acute{Y} jam, 3: 347-348; I \hat{O} fah $\acute{A}nD$, Mufrad $\acute{A}t$, p. 282.. Jeffery, the Foreign Vocabulary, pp. 196-197 believed that this word was borrowed from Ethiopian and means a room, templum and sometimes palatium. See also Muq $\acute{A}til$, Taf \acute{s} Dr, 3: 308-309; Zamakhshar \acute{D} , Kashsh $\acute{A}f$,

4:458; al-Na \acute{I} \acute{I} \acute{A} s, Ma \acute{Y} $\acute{A}nD$ al-Qur \acute{P} $\acute{A}n$, 1:878; Qur \hat{O} ub \acute{D} , al-J \acute{A} mi \acute{Y} , (Beirut 1427/2006), 16: 174.

15 Grabar, Early Islamic Art, p. 88.

which one builds. Further, they described the building operation saying that they used baked bricks, stucco (jass), wood and tacks and that Pharaoh was the first to build with baked bricks.¹⁶

The importance of the last verses on Solomon and Belq \acute{D} s is their possible implications on architecture and arts. It is clearly understood that God Sanctioned Solomon to build great and splendid constructions. The wanted question arising in this context is: If all this was permitted to Prophet-King Solomon, does it mean that it was also permitted to the rest of people. The answer may be supposed to be affirmative since the deeds of the Prophets were considered as behavior that should be copied. Nevertheless, the exegetes explained that what the jinn built for Prophet- King Solomon was not at his will, but at God's or miracles sent down by God as a proof of the faith. Another question that is worth questioning is: Is it not reasonable to think that the Quran spoke to the Arabs with the language, terms and ideas that they understood? al-Qurtubi expressed it nice, saying that the Arabs were addressed with what they understood, thus what is

similar in the use to what God said is of the same meaning.¹⁷ Therefore, if the early Arabs had

nothing comparable with what the Quran described the Muslims in general should have been affected positively or negatively from the references to architecture and the rest of arts.

This conjecture receives further support from another two verses in which we have more detailed description of luxurious buildings. In Q43:33-35 it is said "... We would have given those who denied the Lord of Mercy dwelling with silver roofs, and gates and stairs of silver; silver couches to recline upon and ornaments of gold; for all these are but the fleeting comforts

of this life". The exegetes explained the verses as meaning that God can provide all people with

16 Ibn Jurayj, Tafsīr, p. 272; ÓabarĎ, JÁmiÝ al-BayÁn (Cairo 1422/2001), 18: 254-255; al-NaĦĦÁs, MaÝÁnĎ al-QurĎÁn,

2: 896; BaghawĎ, Tafsīr, 6: 208; al-ZamakhsharĎ, KashshÁf, 4: 504-505; QurÓubĎ, al-JÁmiÝ, (Beirut 1427/2006), 16:

283. It should be noted that the word ÓĎn recurs in many verses: in eight verses (Q6:2, 7:12, 23:12, 32:7, 37:11, 38:71, 76, 17:61) in the meaning of the clay from which God created the humankind and in two verses (Q3:49,

5:110) as the clay of which Jesus made the shape of a bird and in verse 51:33 it came in the meaning of stones made of clay that God threatened to send down upon the unbelievers in the time of Abraham.

17 QurÓubĎ, al-JÁmiÝ, (Beirut 1427/2006), 12: 3494-395.

houses with silver and gold walls, roofs, stairs, doors and furniture. However, He refrains from this; lets people choose the mean life on earth instead of Paradise.¹⁸ In the verses, there are eight terms of art and architecture implications: houses, roofs, silver, stairs, doors, couches, ornaments and joyance. It is needless to point that the verses belong to the sūra called al-Zukhruf and the same term occurs in Q6:112, 10:24 and 17:93. In all cases, it means anything highly embellished ornamentation. The bayt min zukhruf in Q17:93 is a house of gold that Quraysh asked the Prophet to have for himself as a proof for his Prophecy.¹⁹ Another important term in the verses is maÝÁrij, pl. of miÝrÁj, derived from the verb Ýaraja, to mount or to ascend by using a ladder or stairs.²⁰ Thus, the intended houses are one-floor building with stairs reaching its floor, roofs, doors and couches inside it; all are made or decorated with gold and silver. In matter of fact, what we have here is a principal aesthetic conception in the fields of architecture, architectural decoration, gilding, silvering and furnishing that is supposed to exist in the imagination of those who do not believe in the next world. Reading the whole sūra (Q43) shows that it spoke to the people of Meccan Quraysh who resisted Muhammad's mission and it is supposed that they have some understanding of that conception; else, it could have been useless.

In the same context of luxurious building there is another important expression which is repeated in the Quran four times (Q7:74, 22:45, 25:10, 77:32); it is the word qasr. It is a walled

masonry building with maqsura where man's wives (hurum) and the like are confined or a big

18 MuqÁtil, TafsÐr, 3: 794; ÓabarÐ, JÁmiÝ al-BayÁn (Cairo 1422/2001), 20: 586-591; Ibn al-ÝArabÐ, AÁkÁm al-QurÐÁn,

4: 1682; QurÔÛbÐ, al-JÁmiÝ, (Beirut 1427/2006), 19: 37-38; ÓabarsÐ, MajmaÝ al-BayÁn, 9: 72.

19 See Ibn Qutayba, TafsÐr GharÐb al-QurÐÁn, p. 397; Zayd bi ÝAlÐ, GharÐb, p. 227; al-IÒfahÁnÐ, MufradÁt, p. 217; Abū ÍayyÁn, TuÍfat al-ArÐb, 48; ÓabarsÐ, MajmaÝ al-BayÁn, 4: 545, 5: 155, 678-679; LisÁn al-ÝArab, art. z-kh-r-f. See also: MuqÁtil, TafsÐr, 2: 234, 550; ÓabarÐ, JÁmiÝ al-BayÁn (Cairo 1422/2001), 20: 592-593; al-ThaÝÁlibÐ, al-JawÁhir al-ÍisÁn, 5:180; QurÔubÐ, al-JÁmiÝ, (Beirut 1427/2006), 19: 42-43.

20 The term and its derivations occurs in other several verses (Q70:3-4, 32:5, 34:2, 57:4, 15:14), always with the same meaning: ascension. It should be noted that the ascension of the Prophet MuÁammad to Heaven after his night journey to Jerusalem was called miÝrÁj. Ibn Qutayba, TafsÐr GharÐb al-QurÐÁn, p. 397; al-IÒfahÁnÐ, MufradÁt, p. 332; ÓabarÐ, JÁmiÝ al-BayÁn (Cairo 1422/2001), 20: 590-591; QurÔubÐ, al-JÁmiÝ, (Beirut 1427/2006), 19: 39.

and fortified house or castle.²¹ In Q25:10 it means the well-constructed houses/palaces that God may make for the Prophet in this world but instead He will have them in Paradise.²² In Q22:45 qaÒr mushayyad is a tall and large building built for kings and civic dignitaries decorated with

plaster and stucco (jaÒÒ). The word mushayyad had different, but close, meanings: plastered, decorated or whitened with stucco, high, fine, and fortified.²³ In all cases, the verse is telling about a splendid building in its size, height, and technique of building or decoration.

Until now, our discussion was about the Quranic references to secular architecture and its attitudes towards this kind of architecture. The conclusive point of these attitudes is that only unnecessary building with its decorations and amenities undesirable. However, the overall attitude towards architecture cannot be gauged separately from the attitude towards religious architecture.

Religious building

One finds in the Quran several terms with the meaning of religious architecture such as masjid,

bayt and miḥrab.

Masġid, pl. of masjid, as a place for prostration, occurs in the Qurʾān 28 times; of them, fifteen times it appears in conjunction within the term al-masjid al-ġarġm, referring to the sanctuary of the Kaʿba in Mecca. Twice it refers to the sanctuary in Jerusalem (Q17:1, 7). In six cases (Q2:114, 187, 9:17, 18, 22:40 72:18), it came in the plural form of masġid al-Lġh (the mosques of God) or the mosques were the name of God is praised, an expression used frequently

in the inscriptions of the mosque. In addition, the act of prostrating (sujūd and rukūʿ) is referred

21 Ibn Fġris, Muġmal, p. 756; Lisġn al-ʿArab, art. q-Ō-r; Ibn Sġda, al-Muġkam, 6:121; Ōabarsġ, Majmaʿ al-Bayġn, 4:

677. Jeffrey, Foreign Vocabulary, p. 240, considered it as borrowing that resulted from the Roman occupation to Syria and Palestine.

22 See Ōabarġ, Jġmiʿ al-Bayġn (Cairo 1422/2001), 17: 407-408; al-Rġzġ, Mafġtġġ, 24: 53-54; Ibn ʿġdil, al-Lubġb, 14:

486-487; Ibn ʿġiyya, al-Muġarrar, 4: 201; QurŌubġ, al-Jġmiʿ, (Beirut 1427/2006), 15: 371-372.

23 Muqġtil, Tafsġr, 3: 131; Ōabarġ, Jġmiʿ al-Bayġn (Cairo 1422/2001), 16: 592-595; al-Naġġġs, Maʿġnġ al-Qurġġn, 2:

764-765; Ibn Qutayba, Tafsġr Gharġb al-Qurġġn, p. 274; al-Rġzġ, Mafġtġġ, 23: 45; QurŌubġ, al-Jġmiʿ, (Beirut

1427/2006), 14: 415-416; Ōabarsġ, Majmaʿ al-Bayġn, 7: 140; Ibn Kathġr, Tafsġr, 3: 220.

in many verses as an act of worship that occurs in the mosque or anywhere, individually or collectively. According to the Arabic lexicons it is of Arabic origin, derived from the root s-j-d and means the place where the act of prostration (sujūd) is taking place. It also meant any place used for worship .²⁴

One verse (Q18:21), tells about the mosque to be built over the seven sleepers of Ephesus.

Interestingly, in the context of this verse Qur'ān raised the debate around issues concerning the building of mosques or tombs over graves and having figures or inscriptions on them. On the one hand, he, assisted with different traditions, deduced that it is forbidden to build a mosque over the grave and to pray in it. On the other hand, he claimed that it is permitted to build a tomb as long as it comes only to signify the grave.²⁵ In another verse (Q22:40), God told that if He Had not defended some people by the means of others, Òaw'āmi' (cloisters), biya' (churches), Òalaw'āt (synagogues) and mas'ajid (mosques) wherein God's Name is much mentioned, could have been destroyed. Undoubtedly, in the last two verses the acts of building and destroying are indicating whatever buildings used as sacred spaces. The verse referred to different places of worship that,

according to the interpretations, belong to those who owned holy books and originally believed in one God and are considered as ahl al-shar'ā'ī, Christians, Jews and Muslims. The following notes are brief of the different commentaries of the other building terms mentioned in the verse:²⁶

Òaw'āmi', pl, of Òawma'ya: the verb Òawma'ya bin'ābahu means made the building tall and its head

pointed and slender. Therefore, Òawma'ya is the high building with pointed and slender

²⁴ Ibn S'ad, al-Mu'kam, 7: 187; Lis'ān al-'Arab, art. s-j-d.

²⁵ Qur'ān, al-Jāmi' (Beirut 1427/2006), 13: 242-246. The same debate was raised by Ibn Rajab, Tafsīr, 1: 642-651. There, he discussed the legal attitudes concerning mosques, tombs, paying in the cemetery and having all kinds of figures on the tomb.

²⁶ al-Na'ās, Ma'ān al-Qur'ān, 2: 763-764; 'Āl'āk, Tafsīr, 2: 591-592; Ibn Qutayba, Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān, p.

293; al-Baghawī, Tafsīr, 5: 389; Tha'ālibī, al-Jawāhir al-'īsān, 4: 127; Ibn Juzayr, al-Tashīl, 2: 59; Óabar, Jāmi' al-Bayān (Cairo 1422/2001), 16: 580-585; Zamakhsharī, Kashshāf, 4:199; Ibn 'A'īyya, al-Mu'arrar, 4: 125; Qur'ān, al-Jāmi' (Beirut 1427/2006), 14: 410-412; Ibn 'Adīl, al-Lub'āb, 14: 102-106.

extremity.²⁷ The exegetes explained it as the pre-Islamic monk's chamber and/or the place of worship of the Nabians.

biyaŸ, pl. of bŸŸa: JawÁlŸqŸ recognized it as foreign word borrowed from Persian while Jeffry confirmed it as of Syriac origin that means "an egg and then was used metaphorically for the top of a rounded arch and so for the domed buildings used for worship."²⁸ Most of the exegetes explained it as a Jewish Synagogue or Christian church, apparently.

ŸalawÁt, pl. of ŸalÁt: Generally used for the Muslim ritual prayer. In the context of this verse, the sources referred it to two possible origins: Hebrew and Syriac, and in both cases it means places for prayer.²⁹ In an isolated interpretation, it is claimed that ŸalawÁt was derived from the

Nabataean word ŸalwÁta and meant mihrab for the Nabian monks.³⁰ In the exegesis one finds that

also, these 'places of worship' were recognized as of the Sabians and even of Muslims and others and are situated on the roads.³¹

Thus, in spite of the wide mention of the word masjid in the QurŸán, nothing is stated in the verses about the shape, design, decoration, size or building techniques of mosques. From theological point of view, mosque may be anywhere, an open place or a building in which the devotional act of prostration and praying takes place. The only condition is that it must be clean. The basis for this deduction is the tradition ascribed to the Prophet saying, "God made for me the

whole earth as a mosque" or "the whole earth is a mosque except cemeteries and bath houses".³²

27 Ibn Durayd, Jamhara, Hyderabad 1345, 3: 77; Lisán al-ŸArab, art. Ÿ-m-Ÿ, al-IŸfahÁnŸ, MufradÁt, p. 289. Jeffry, Foreign Vocabulary, p. 200, considered it as of South Arabian origin and meant a high tapering building. See also Dozy, Takmilat, 6: 467-468. In a verse ascribed to ŸAlŸ bin MuŸammad al-ŸAlawŸ it meant the minaret of the mosque. See al-JÁliŸ, al-MaŸÁsin wal-AŸŸÁd, FawzŸ ŸAŸawŸ (ed.), p. 90.

28 JawÁlŸqŸ, MuŸarrab, p. 129; Jeffry, Foreign Vocabulary, pp. 86-87. Lisán al-ŸArab, art. b-Ÿ-Ÿ, recognized it as a worship place for the Christians or the Jews and said nothing about the origin of the word.

29 Ibn JinnŸ, al-MuŸtasab, 2: 83-85; Lisán al-ŸArab, art. Ÿ-l-Á; al-JawharŸ, al-ŸiŸÁŸ, 3: 2404; JawÁlŸqŸ, MuŸarrab, p.

259; KhafÁjŸ, ShifÁŸ, p. 191; SuyŸŸŸ, al-ItqÁn, no. 58, p. 322. See also Jeffry, Foreign Vocabulary, pp. 197-198.

30 Zayd bin ŸAlŸ, GharŸb al-QurŸán, p. 165-166.

31 ŸabarŸ, JÁmiŸ al-BayÁn (Cairo 1422/2001), 16: 584-586; Ibn ŸAŸiyya, al-MuŸarrar, 4: 125.

32 Zarakshġ, IŶlĀm al-SĀjid, pp. 26-28; Ibn MĀjja, Sunan, 1: 264.

Undoubtedly, from the above references to the mosque and the other places for worship one learns nothing about their architectural characteristics except the fact that all were destroyable buildings. Nevertheless, according to most of exegetes, verse 22:40 presents the mosque as the Muslim house of worship parallel to the Christian church and the Jewish synagogue.

More references to places of worship exist in other verses. Verses Q9:17-19, referred to those who will inhabit (yaŶmur) the mosques of God and that of Mecca, al-masjid al-ġarĀm. The verb yaŶmur carries the senses of building or renewing the building, visiting a place and renewing the life in it by inhabiting it. Therefore, ŶamĀrat or taŶmġr masĀjid means to preserve the building, to

keep it clean, to keep it ready for prayers and to keep visiting them permanently.³³ This was the

main trend among the exegetes. In Modern, Arabic Ŷammara and its derivations are of the most common terms to indicate constructing (taŶmġr) and construction (ŶamĀra). In any event, some commentators, though few, emphasized the architectural aspect in the meaning of ŶamĀrat al-masĀjid. BayĀĀwġ, for instance, said that it meant decorating the mosques with carpets (farsh) and lighting it up in addition to maintaining and perpetuating the worship in it.³⁴ Suyŭġġ went far in explaining this term. He, relying only on Prophetic ġadġths in his commentary, used many of them in interpreting the verse and by this; actually, he raised the issue of prompting or discouraging and decorating the building of mosques in Islam. For instance, one of them says, "one who build a mosque for God, He will build for him in Paradise a larger house" or, in another version, "a house of coral and rubies." In another tradition, the Prophet said, "build the

mosques – juman - without acroterial ornaments, shurfa."³⁵

33 Ōabarġ, JĀmiŶ al-BayĀn (Cairo 1422/2001), 11: 374; Zamakhsharġ, KashshĀf, 3:20-24; Nasafġ, Tafsġr, 2: 119-120;

Ōabarsġ, MajmaŶ al-BayĀn, 5: 23-24; Ibn Kathġr, Tafsġr, 2: 326-327.

34 BayĀĀwĒ, TafsĒr, (within Āshiyat MuĪyĒ al-DĒn Shaykh ZĀda), 4: 441.

35 SuyĪĒ, TafsĒr, 7: 263-268.

Another word in the QurĀn that deserves attention is bayt. It occurs at least 66 times in tow usages: secular and religious. Surveying the different commentaries show that the bayt carried no less than thirteen meanings: house, mosque, ship, the KaĪba, house in Paradise, room, prison, nest, tent, property and khan (inn).³⁶ In the secular usage, bayt indicated commonly the private house that one own for his dwellings such as the houses of the wives of the Prophet (Q33:33-34), the houses as grace from God (Q16:80), the house as place of privacy (Q24:27, 29, 61, 33:53,

65:1) and houses in common. This meaning, among others, still being in use in the Arabic of our time. In the religious usage, bayt indicates mostly the sanctuary of the KaĪba and therefore, it occurs separately in the form of al-bayt or in conjunction with other words such as al-bayt al- ĀrĀm (Q5:2, 97), al-bayt al-ĪtĒq, the Ancient House, (Q22:29, 33) and al-bayt al-māĪmūr, the inhabited House (52:3). In Q2:127 "and when Abraham, and Ishmael with him, raised up the foundations of the House" (wa-idh yarfaĪ IbrĀhĒm al-qawĪid mina al-bayt wa-ismĪĒl). The commentators agreed that Abraham built the House on four foundations that God discovered for him. Thus, the verb yarfaĪ means to raise up by building and qawĪid, pl. of qĪida are the

foundations of a building.³⁷ Further, the exegetes attached to the interpretation of this verse

different traditions and stories that, so to speak, telling how and of what material did, the KaĪba was built in the first time and how Abraham did rebuild it. For instance, they repeated a tradition according to which Adam, with Devine direction, built it in foursquare plan with four corners and Abraham, directed by the angle, rebuilt it according to the same plan.³⁸

The word buyūt occurs again in conjunction with the term turfaĪ in Q24:36 that say "fĒ buyūtin

adhina al-lĀhu an turfaĪ (His light is found in temples which God has sanctioned to be built). As

36 al-DĀmighĀnĒ, al-Wujūh, 1: 153-155.

37 According to some, qĪida is also the columns (asĀĒn) of the building or the judur, pl. of jidĀr, the walls.

38 See for example ÓabarĒ, JĀmiĪ al-BayĀn (Cairo 1422/2001), 2: 548-556; ZamakhsharĒ, KashshĀf, 1:321-322; al- BaghawĒ, TafsĒr, 1: 150; QurtubĒ, al-JĀmiĪ, (Beirut 1427/2006), 2: 386-395; Abu ĪayyĀn, al-BaĪr al-MuĪĒ, 1:

558;

to buyūt, most of the exegetes said that these are the mosques of God, though some gave the word more specified indications such as, the houses of the Prophet, the worship places in Jerusalem, houses and mosques in general or the four mosques or places of worship built by Prophets: the Ka'aba (built by Abraham), the sanctuary of Bayt al-Maqdis, certainly al-Aqṣā mosque built by David and Solomon, the mosque of the Prophet and the mosque of Qibla both in Medina and built by the Prophet. The verb turfa has at least three meanings: to build (an tubnā), to purify from dirt (tuḥahhar) and to magnify (an tu'ā'ūam), but most of the exegetes, relying on the interpretation of the previous verse (Q2:127), accepted the meaning of 'to build', i.e. the mosques that God ordered or permitted to build for praying. However, some of them combined between the three meanings by saying that God ordered the Muslims to build mosques, to purify and to preserve them; by this they will be magnified. 39 Qur'ub broadened the

implication of the verse. He deduced that God in this verse is encouraging the construction of

mosques and that several traditions from the Prophet are leading to this conclusion. Further, in the same context he evoked the debate around the legitimacy or illegitimacy of decorating the mosques by mentioning the supporting and the objecting views, as if to say, every side derived his view from the implications of that verse. For instance, he pointed out the renewing of the mosque of the Prophet by 'Uthmān, the great expansion and decoration of the same mosque by the Umayyad caliph 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz, the magnificent building of the great mosque of

Damascus by the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd bin 'Abd al-Malik and the lighting of the mosques

39 See al-Nā'īs, Ma'ān al-Qur'ān, 2:809-810; Óabar, Jāmi' al-Bay'ān (Cairo 1422/2001), 17: 315-318; Tha'ālib, al-Jawāhir al-Īsā, 4: 189; al-Baghaw, Tafsīr, 6: 49-50; Óabars, Majma' al-Bay'ān, 7: 227; Ibn al-'Arabī, Alkām al-Qur'ān, 3:1389-1390; Qur'ub, al-Jāmi', (Beirut 1427/2006), 15: 270; Ibn Abī

ÍÁtim, TafsĐr, 8: 2604-5; Abu ÍayyÁn, al-BaÍr al-MuÍĐÔ, 6: 421; Ibn KathĐr, TafsĐr, 3: 282. It should be noted that Grabar, Early Islamic Art, for unknown reason, ignored this verse completely.

beginning with that of the Prophet. These works, he added, were achieved without any objection of the religious circles.⁴⁰

Summing up the above-mentioned references of the QurĐÁn to worship places and mosques, several points are to be noted.

First, nothing is said about the planning, design, size, shape and the decoration of religious buildings of Muslims or others. As we observed, mosque in the QurĐÁn occurred in different indications of which we learn that it is a common name for worship spaces, not only a construction, which existed in Islam and before. The QurĐÁn referred to sacred spaces not as specific constructions of any religion but only as whatever places where the name of God is being praised or where prayer to God is being made. In other words, the QurĐÁn does not supply any specific characteristics of the mosque as a Muslim worship construction but, as in other religions, it does express strongly the need for appropriate place for prayer and, depending on the the exegesis of Q24:36, it encourage the building, maintaining and purifying of mosques. Thus, it was the natural result of the complicated and permanent system of the Muslim prayer and of its

great superiority in the QurĐÁn in particular and in the Islamic belief at all.⁴¹

Second, the QurĐÁn does inform us of at least two principal elements that became the first and most important conditions for the planning of any building of the mosque: an area that can contain a maximum number of worshipers in order to perform the five daily prayers, especially the Friday prayer, and the qibla direction to which the worshiper directs his prayer (Q2:144,

149). In fact, these conditions might be found in any building and even in the open space, so that

they are inadequate to attribute to the mosque its architectural and decorative characteristics.

40 QŪrŪbĀn, al-JĀmiĀ, (Beirut 1427/2006), 15: 272-273, 284.

41 In the QurĀn, there are many references to the obligation of prayer. See for instance, Q2:43, 238, 4:103, 62:8.

Nevertheless, the fact is that soon with the expansion of Islam in and outside Arabia, the Muslim prayer was institutionalized and the mosque as a construction became one of the first needs, of every Muslim community and the first space that the planners of the first Muslim cities delimited and built.⁴² Undoubtedly, the majority of the architectural elements of the mosque in Islam developed gradually through the first Islamic century according to the growing needs of the new society and under the rich architectural legacy of the world that the Muslims ruled.

Third, one should ask: does the way in which the Muslim collective prayer performed has any influence on the inner design of the mosque? To answer this question we first must look for the QurĀnic references to this point. In Q37:164-166 the angles declared *wa-mĀ minnĀ illĀ lahu maqĀmun maĀlŭm, wa-innĀ la-naġnu al-ŌŌĀffŭn wa-innĀ la-naġnu al-musabbiġŭn* (We each have our appointed place. We range ourselves in adoration and give glory to him). According to the exegetes these verses came, among others, to teach the Muslims how to perform their collective prayer. The Muslims through their prayer adopted the way the angles ranked in rows worshipping God. It is believed that before the revelation of this verse, the Muslim worshipers used to pray singly and without separation between men and women. When these verses were revealed, the Prophet ordered the women to pray in the back rows and all the worshipers to align in straight and full rows just like the ranking of the angles in their prayer. It is also related that Ūmar, the second caliph, used, as *imĀm* (leader of the prayers), to order the prayers back to him to straighten the ranks. Further, it is constantly pointed by the commentators that praying in straight

and full ranks like the angles was a unique characteristic of the Muslim prayer that does not exist

42 al-Baladhurġ, *Futŭġ al-BuldĀn*, (Muġssasat al-MaĀĀrif, Beirut 1407/1987), p. 388-389, 483, related that the planners of Kŭfa and Baġra first delimited the area of the mosque and of *dĀr al-imĀra* (the governor house) and then allocated the plots for the settlers.

in the other religions.⁴³ Certainly, for this Muslim prayers still crowding in the first rows believing that they will get more reward. In other words, the collective prayer executed as follows: the prayers stand in straight and crowded ranks and the imam stands lonely in the middle, but in front of the first rank, all tending with their faces to the qibla direction, the side of the Ka'aba. If thus how the Muslims understood these verses, one may wonder what implications do this interpretation, has upon the planning of the mosque in Islam. First, it is very sensible that the most important ritual in Islam, the prayer, became a permanent institution that from the beginning deserved whatever architectural expression. Certainly, there were other motives for the very early appearance of the mosque as a construction, but the most decisive one is the ritual

of the prayer. Such being the case, it can be assumed that the Muslims from the beginning looked for concrete form in which they can perform the prayer in accordance with their understanding of the prayer-related verses. In order to determine the general orientation of such form they needed first to determine the qibla direction as deduced from the Qur'anic references. After that, they needed to apply what they deduced from the expression *wa-inna la-na'nu al-ÔÔaffûn*, meaning the idea of praying in ranks like the angles. Undoubtedly, the achievement of these needs committed the invention of whatever architectural form in which the qibla direction is determined and that can contain a maximum number of ranks of worshipers. Obviously, the best form for this is to have enough space in front of the qibla sign, i.e. the wall, in which the prayers can align in long ranks as possible. Thus, the needed space should by large, open and appropriate to contain maximum number of ranks, meaning the optimal form for this is the rectangular

square and if not possible the square one. This internal space is noticeable in most of the

43 Óabarð, *JÁmiÝ al-BayÁN* (Cairo 1422/2001), 19: 652-655; ThaÝÁlibð, *al-JawÁhir al-ÍisÁN*, 5: 51; MaÍmūd bin Íamza *al-KaramÁNð*, *GharÁpib al-Tafsðr*, ShamrÁN S. al-ÝIjlð (ed.), Jadda and Beirut 1403/1987, 2: 986-987; *Zamakhsharð*, *KashshÁf*, 5:335; Ibn Juzzð, *al-Tashðl*, 2: 244; Ibn al-Jawzð, *ZÁd al-Masðr*, 7: 93; *QÛrÔÛbð*, *al-JÁmiÝ*, (Beirut 1427/2006), 18: 114-116; Abu ÍayyÁN, *al-BaÍr al-MuÍðÔ*, 7: 363; *al-SuyūÔð*, *Tafsðr*, 12: 487-497.

mosques built in the Muslim lands called *bayt al-ÒalÁt*, the prayer hall. Therefore, the Qur'án laid down the obligation to perform prayers and the forms in which all kinds of prayers are performed. By this, in fact, it determined the internal division of the space of whatever building used for prayer, the mosque.

Fourth, the evaluation of the modern scholars to the Qur'anic views on art and architecture based more on their understanding of the literal meaning of the verses and less on how the Muslims conceived them in the course of time. In other words, the Muslim conception of art and architecture, among others, resulted of the different commentaries that they gave to the related verses. Therefore, the impact of the verses on Islamic art and architecture, I believe, should be measured more according to how the Muslims conceived them, i. e. interpreted them. O. Grabar, for example, reached right conclusions such as "in the Qur'án itself there is no indication for the existence of a new kind of Muslim religious building," or in the Qur'án "there is no opposition to art or to representation, just as there is no call for the creation of works of art or of material culture that would be distinctly Muslim."⁴⁴ However, reading his analysis will show that he ignored completely the commentaries of the verses and thus, he, in fact, gave no consideration

to the background upon which the Muslim conception of art and architecture evolved.

44 Grabar, the Formation of Islamic art, p. 105, idem., Early Islamic Art, p. 92.

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