



Supreme spiritual structures of Islam: Mecca, medina and Jerusalem (A Brief account of history & development)

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Abstract

After founding Islam by Prophet Mohammad, mosque became an important architecture for prayer, preaching and rituals. There are three supreme mosques in the world which equally devoted by every follower of Islam. These are in Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. In pre Islamic era, the Kaaba at Mecca was an important site for the worship of dwelling tribes in Arabian Peninsula and was equally devoted by everyone. In Islamic beliefs, this site is associated with Abraham and his son Ismail. Prophet Mohammad would have chosen this site as it was recognized by all surrounding tribes and local people, and also accredited with pre existing religious activities. Prophet cleaned this site with his followers and broken all the idols surrounding here. This famous mosque is called Masjid-al-Haram. The mosque at Medina is directly belonged to Prophet Mohammad where he lived many years and there were a large number of followers who believed in him and his preaching. The mosque of Medina is second sacred mosque of Islam known as Masjid-al-Nabi. The third holiest mosque of Islam Masjid-al-Aqsa is located in the old city of Jerusalem which equally valuable for Jews, Christian and Islam. The site where mosque and famous Dome of rock built is associated with night journey of Prophet. This article deals with history and developments of all three supreme mosques of the world which are mentioned above and also discusses important facts about creation of these mosques. It describes architecture and expansion of all three supreme mosques in different periods briefly so that we get the idea as to how the architecture was developed with different style of its elements.

Keywords: mosque, mecca, medina, Jerusalem, Kaaba, masjid-al-haram, masjid-al-Nabi, masjid-al-Aqsa

Introduction

The mosque is the sacred and earliest architecture of Islam. Mosque doesn't require any special demanding of the size, enclosing walls or liturgical accessories. Prophet Mohammad himself messaged to the people, "wherever you pray that place is the mosque" but the direction of the performer's face has to be towards the Kaaba. Actually, The Kaaba was most famous and pre Islamic site and it is believed to have been built by Abraham (Ibrahim to Muslims) and his son Ismail. It was home to many temples and worship sites where the devoted prayed to the idols of these gods as well as being the site of an annual pilgrimage. It is situated in the city of Mecca and that time Mecca was an important financial center in Arabian Peninsula where many tribes were lived. During the lifetime of Prophet, the Quresh was ruling tribe of that region. Since the founding of Islam, Quresh began to oppress Prophet and his followers. So, Prophet left Mecca with his number of followers for Yathrab. During his migration to Yathrab, he stayed more than ten days at the town Quba where he laid the foundation stone of first mosque. The actual journey of mosque is begun here. But Masjid-al-Haram at Mecca is recognized as first Islamic mosque. When Prophet reached city of Yathrab the city became famous as Medinanat Nabi where he constructed house for himself and also performed prayer within this house made of mud and palm trunk. In early of Islam the direction of prayer within this hypostyle mosque was towards Jerusalem but after receiving a divine message, the direction was changed towards Kaaba at Mecca known as *qibla*. Later on after the death of Prophet Mohammad, this entire area including his house was

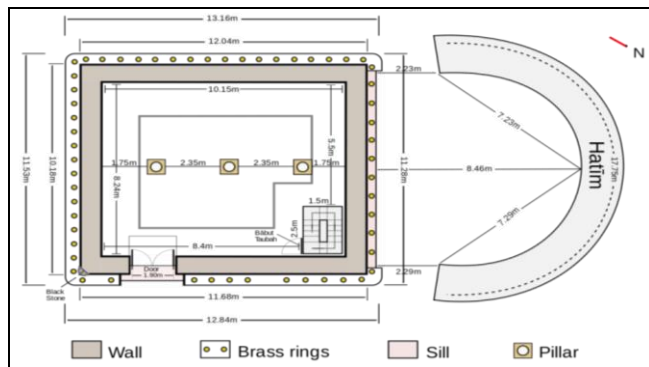
converted to mosque known as Masjid-al-Nabi. The site of Jerusalem where famous the Dome of rock established was also direct associated with Prophet Mohammad.

Masjid-al-Haram

There are five pillars of Islam in which pilgrimage to Mecca or "*hajj*" is one of them. Every Muslim has to come here for *hajj* once in his life. The Kaaba was used as a mosque before the Prophet Mohammad or before the Islam. It was a place of worship for Arab pagans who would come from all over the peninsula to pay dues to their many deities. After the migration of Prophet Mohammad, his victorious returned to Mecca, he removed all the idols around the Kaaba with the help of his followers and the Kaaba was cleaned. This began the Islamic rule over the Kaaba and Prophet got the structure of a mosque built around it. This Grand Mosque of Mecca is called "God's sacred house" and the Kaaba called "the first house created for people". The Hadith records that the Kaaba is a replica on the earth of "the frequented house" in heaven, which is visited by thousands of angels each day. It is the first Islamic mosque which established in Mecca and founded by Prophet Mohammad. Islamic tradition holds that the site of the Masjid-al-Haram is associated with Abraham (Ibrahim) and his son Ismail. It is believed to be the place built by Prophet Adam or Prophet Ibrahim with the help of his son Prophet Ismail. Islamic followers believe that they were ordered by *Allah* to build the Kaaba where later on the mosque was constructed surrounding the Kaaba. The Black Stone (Hujr-al-Aswad) is kept near the eastern corner of the Kaaba, and according to another Islamic

believe this stone came from heaven and turned black due to man's misdeeds, by touching it by the passage of the time. Others believe, it is only a mark to start the circumambulation around the Kaaba which was in bad condition and was demolished and reconstructed by the Quresh in 608 CE. The Kaaba is the direction for all the Muslims wherever they are; this is the center of all mosques having *qibla* wall towards Mecca.

The Kaaba is built of granite stones brought from the hills around the city of Mecca and measured approximately 13.1 meters high with sides measuring 11.03 X 12.86 meters (Fig. 1). The interior walls are covered with tiles measuring about 13 m X 9 meters and the floor of the interior raised about 2.2 meters above the ground level where *tawaf* is performed. The floor inside the Kaaba is built up with marble and limestone. The door of the Kaaba is provided on the North-Eastern wall. There are three wooden pillars inside the structure holding the roof. The structure covered by the *kiswa*, a black curtain produced in Egypt, and changed annually at the time of *hajj*. The Islamic teaching specifically mentions that there is a miraculous oasis, *zamzam*, which never dry ever since it was revealed.



(Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/ba/Kaaba-plan.svg>)

Fig 1: Plan of Kaaba

Beginning of the structure of the Masjid-al-Haram was established under Khalifa Umar Ibn al-Khattab (634-644 CE). The Khalifa ordered the demolition of houses surrounding the Kaaba and built 1.5 meters high wall to form an outdoor prayer area around the shrine. During the reign of Khalifa Usman Ibn Affan (644-656 CE), the area of mosque was enlarged and covered with a simple roof supported by wooden columns and arches. In 692 CE, Abdul Maliq bin Marwan conquered Mecca from Ibn Zubayr and the building was enlarged and embellished, the outer walls were raised and the ceiling was covered with teak. The Khalifa's son Al-Walid (705-715 CE) replaced the wooden columns with marble and decorated it with mosaics arches. Abbasid Khalifa Abu Jafar al-Mansur (754-775 CE) added mosaics to the columns and made double the size of the northern and western wings of the prayer hall and erected the minaret of Bab-al-Umra on the northwest corner. In 777 CE, a major rebuild took place under Abbasid Khalifa al-Mahdi (775-785 CE) to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims.

The mosque was renovated by Ottoman Sultan Selim II in 1570, he replaced flat roof with domes decorated with calligraphy internally, and created new supporting columns. After suffering and damaged due to rain and heavy floods, it was renovated in 1629 by Sultan Murad IV. New

stone arcade was created and three more minarets (bringing the total to seven) were built, and the marble flooring was retiled. The major renovation under the Saudi kings was done between 1955 and 1973 when he added four more minarets. The ceiling was refurbished, and the floor was replaced with artificial stone and marble. King Fahd added a new wing and an outdoor prayer area to the mosque. After that it extended with 18 more gates, three domes corresponding in position to each gate and the installation of nearly 500 marble columns. King Abdullah Ibn Abdul aziz commenced a fourth extension project in 2007, which is estimated to last until 2020 and planned to increase the mosque's capacity to 2 million; although he died in 2015. The mosque is likely to continue by his successor, King Salman. The area of the mosque will be expanded from the current 356,000 m² to 400,000 m². A new gate named after King Abdullah will be built together with two new minarets, bringing their total to eleven and after completion the mosque will house over 2.5 million worshippers.

Masjid-al-Nabi

Masjid-al-Nabi is the second sacred Islamic architecture after Masjid-al-Haram. Prophet Mohammad in the year 622 CE migrated from Mecca to Medina. He built a house for himself. There is an interesting story behind the architecture of his house in Medina. After receiving the divine direction, Prophet Muhammad departed from Mecca and did not proceed directly to Yathrab later on known as Medina but veered a little to the right and arrived at Quba, a suburb near Medina where he laid the foundation of first Islamic mosque and after staying for more than ten days; he started his journey towards Yathrab on Friday. He was accompanied by a large number of followers. He was riding on his she-camel with Abu Bakr behind him. After Prophet's arrival in Yathrab, the city was known as Medinatun Nabi ('City of the Prophet'), which was soon abbreviated to Medina. The tribal of the city were standing armed in rows and the girls were singing welcome songs from the roofs of their houses. Some of them, in their eagerness, took hold of the halter of his she-camel but the Holy Prophet said, leave my camel free as she is under divine direction and where ever she would stop that will be my dwelling place. The Prophet's she camel stood near the house of Abu Ayub Ansari, who came forward and submitted himself before 'The Messenger of Allah'. Abu Ayub Ansari offered his house. Prophet responded, well, then go and prepare some place for my stay. Abu Ayub made arrangements within a few minutes. Holy Prophet preferred the ground floor of the two storeys building so as people could reach easily.

Now the Holy Prophet's attention was to construct his own house. He left his camel free again which sat down at a place. It was a vacant site having few Date trees and the ruins of an old building. The owners of the land were two Muslim brothers, Sahal and Suhail. Both brothers offered the land to Prophet free of cost but the Prophet refused their proposal as he did not want the land free rather he purchased the plot for the house for ten dinars (approximately six pounds sterling). The site was made clear, leveled and the Holy Prophet laid the foundation stone with Prayers. Later on this entire area including his house was converted into a mosque known as Masjid-al-Nabi.

The size of this structure was very substantial. It was built of bricks and slabs of stone, which were placed between wooden stakes and the roof was made by trunks and

branches of date trees. It was an open square with each side approximately 56 meters (Fig. II).

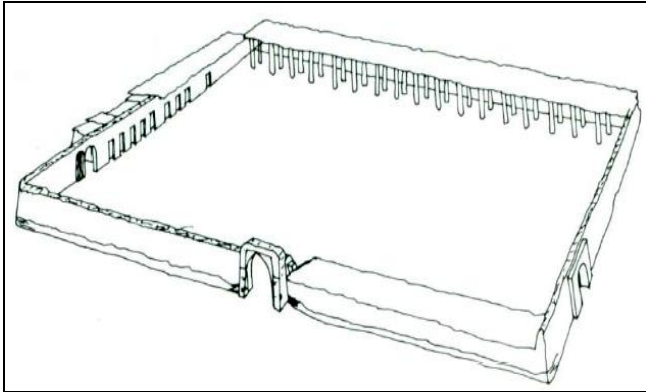


Fig 2: Earlier Plan of Prophet's Mosque (Source- Hillenbrand)

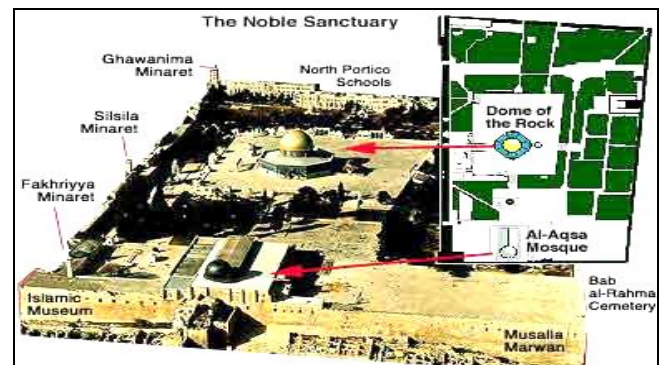
Nine small rooms were built at the eastern side of the square which used by Prophet Mohammad and his family for accommodation. This house was the first focal point of new Islamic community. The whole space of the structure except the nine rooms was used for prayer as a 'mosque' and other religious purposes. The walls of the structure were plain and at one side there was a shaded place of double row of palm trunk facing towards Jerusalem, which was the direction of the prayer or *qibla* known as "zulla". Many complaints were made by his followers regarding discomfort cause of Sun rays during prayer then Prophet Mohammad changed the direction of prayer by the divine revelation. Thus, new direction of the prayer towards Mecca was erected which known as *qibla*. The Prophet delivered his sermon on Fridays leaning against one of these pillars made of palm trunk at his house. Earlier, the mosque had no *mihrab* and *mimber*. Some years later a wooden *mimber* of three steps was erected for Prophet to preach gathering. In 629 CE, the mosque was extended to the North, South and West sides to form a square enclosure. After the death of Prophet Muhammad, he was buried in his room with of one of his wives. Subsequently, the Khalifa Abu Bakr and Umar were buried in the same place. During the reign of Umar, the palm trunks were replaced with stone columns and a new roof of teak was added.

The first major rebuilt and renovation of the mosque was done during the period of the Umayyad Khalifa al-Walid. Walid extended the size of the mosque and incorporated the room having the graves into the mosque. He made an irregular shape of enclosure around the graves. Walid decorated the interior of the mosque with mosaic and marble. He also added a *mihrab* and four minarets to the structure of the mosque. The mosque was enlarged again by the Abbasid Khalifa al-Mahdi in 781 CE and by al-Muawakkil in 862 CE. Presently, the two tiered mosque has a rectangular plan. Several major modifications were made in the mosque by Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In 1951, King Ibn Saud ordered the demolitions around the mosque so that he could make the path to new wings in the east and west of the prayer hall, which comprises concrete columns with pointed arches. Older columns were reinforced with concrete and braced with copper rings at the top. After many renovations and modifications, the mosque covers an area of 1.7 million sq. feet having 27 courtyards and escalators are amongst the additions to the mosque.

Masjid-al-Aqsa

The site where the "Al-Aqsa mosque" and the famous "the Dome of Rock" are established, was an ancient site of temple mount Moriah. The whole complex having Al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of Rock is known as "Haram-al-Sharif" (Fig. III). It is believed that Prophet was transported from sacred mosque in Mecca to al-Aqsa during his night journey. Khalifa Umar conquered Jerusalem in 637 CE as he wanted a place for prayer so probably he ordered to demolish the group of ancient site which was the site of Herod's great Stoa and developed there a mosque to the South of the Rock. After sometimes Khalifa Abd-al-Malik built a shrine over the Sacred Rock, and it was named "The Dome of the Rock". Later on, Abd-al-Malik, the successor Umayyad Khalifa Al-Walid renovated and expanded the mosque south of the Dome and at this time, the mosque was called Masjid al-Aqsa. Al-Walid (705-15 CE.) the successor of Abd-al-Malik sent craftsmen from Egypt to Jerusalem to build and renovate the mosque. Al-walid's most of the work and used mosaic inside the mosque was interpreted. According to the recent research by Robert W. Hamilton indicates that at least one of the arcades just east of the present dome is the work of al-Walid still remain.

Present dome was built by az-Zahir and consists of wood plated with lead enamelwork. The prayer hall (*al-Musalla al-Qibli*) under the dome is also known as al-Jami al-Qibli, located in the southern part of the mosque. It was built by the Khalifa Umar ibn Al-Khattab in 637 CE. Al-Aqsa's dome is one of the few domes to be built in front of the *mihrab* during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods; the facade of the mosque was built in 1065 CE during Fatimid Khalifa al-Mustansir Billah. It was crowned with a balustrade consisting of arcades and small columns. The facade of the mosque was damaged by Crusaders, but it was restored and renovated by the Ayyubids. The al-Aqsa Mosque consists of seven aisles of hypostyle naves with several additional small halls to the west and east of the southern section of the building. The interior of the mosque is supported by 45 columns, 33 of which are white marble and 12 of stone. It comprises a main ablution pond known as *al-Kas* (the Cup) which is located north of the mosque between it and the Dome of the Rock.



Source: <http://www.noblesanctuary.com>

Fig 3: Noble Sanctuary at Jerusalem

Many rulers of different dynasties made several renovations and enlargements that fully changed present structure. The rectangular Mosque covers an area of 144,000 square meters with its premises, although the mosque itself is about 4,600 square meters having four minarets on the southern,

northern and western sides. It allows approx 5,000 people at one time for prayer.

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