

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE EXPANSION OF THE
MOSQUE OF THE PROPHET (ﷺ) BY
CALIPH ‘UMAR B. AL-KHAṬṬĀB (A.S.)
(d. 24 A.H./744 C.E.)**

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This paper discusses the expansion of the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) in Madinah by Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (A.S.). The paper concludes that the undertaking was in full consonance both with the spiritual benchmarks of the Islamic message and the emerging socio-cultural *Traditions* and norms of the nascent Muslim community. So significant was the expansion and at such a critical juncture in the Muslim history, that it set some high standards for the future development and nurturing of the spiritual as well as human dimensions in the sphere of Muslim architecture. The main discussion of the paper focuses on three vital dimensions of the Mosque expansion which proved significant for the early development of the authentic identity of Muslim architecture: the role of consultation and mutual agreements, which is tantamount to what is today called public participation in architecture; the significance and impact of the dynamic process of institutionalization of the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) myriad religious, educational, social, cultural and political activities; and the austere, yet judicious, views of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (A.S.) on architecture which, by and large, reverberated the core of the Islamic attitude towards the prospect of erecting buildings. The three dimensions are dealt with after the main physical features of the Mosque’s expansion have been expounded. The paper also shows that so interwoven were the evolution of Muslim architectural identity and the community development processes in Islam, that successfully investigating the former without systematically referring to the latter can never be complete. Thus, the orb of Muslim architecture, both as a concept and sensory reality, should always be seen as a multidimensional, universal, fluid, vibrant, expressive and as much scientific, technological and applied, as spiritual, educational and ethical, phenomenon.

Keywords: ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (A.S.), The mosque of the Prophet’s (ﷺ); Expansion, Madinah.

Introduction

The Mosque of the Prophet Muḥammad's (ﷺ) in Madinah is the second most important mosque on earth. It comes second only to al-Masjid al-Ḥarām in Makkah. As per a *Tradition (ḥadīth)* of the Prophet (ﷺ), performing a prayer in it is more valuable than doing so a thousand times elsewhere in ordinary mosques (al-Bukhārī, 1981, *Ḥadīth* No. 282).

The Mosque was planned and built under the supervision and participation of the Prophet (ﷺ) himself as soon as he and his *Companions (ṣaḥābah [رضي الله عنهم])* performed the *hijrah* (migration) from Makkah to Madinah in 622 C.E.* At first, the Mosque was just an enclosure. Its walls, made of mud brick and raised over stone foundations, enclosed a roofless and unpaved area of approximately 1,200 square meters. There was no roofed section. Three entrances pierced the southern, eastern and western walls. The northern side was the *qiblah* (prayer direction) wall facing al-Masjid al-Aqṣā in Jerusalem (al-Quds). After 16 or 17 months following the *hijrah*, the *qiblah* was redirected from al-Masjid al-Aqṣā to al-Masjid al-Ḥarām and so, the simple form of the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) responded accordingly: the entrance in the southern wall was bricked up since it started to function at once as a new *qiblah* side, while a new entrance was perforated in the northern wall which, heretofore had functioned as the *qiblah* side (Creswell, 1989, p. 4; Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 39).

The mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) was extremely simple because its initial functions were correspondingly simple. However, as the functions of the Mosque – which since its inception were meant to operate as a community development centre, setting a precedent for all future mosques – were multiplying as well as intensifying, so did the form of the Mosque respond in the like manner. In the end, at the time of the Prophet's passing away, the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) had become a

*A basic and very important aspect of building mosques was that for its construction the earmarked land was purchased, although it was offered on voluntary basis. Purchase of land for the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) decided for all times to come that all the mosques have to be built on grounds legally earmarked by a sale deed. It means that a mosque cannot be built on illegally acquired land. The same principles were applied to the building of graves – *Ed.*

dynamic multifunctional community centre with its relatively complex form, a far cry from what it was ten years earlier. Such was expected, though, on account of a fundamental architectural rule that the form of a building follows and corresponds to its function, enfolding, facilitating and promoting it.

The mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) performed numerous religious and social roles and functions. The Mosque, thus was a centre for religious activities, a learning centre, the seat of the Prophet's government, a welfare and charity centre, a detention and rehabilitation centre, a place for medical treatment and nursing, a place for some leisure activities (Omer, 2013, p. 68).

The following is a standard description of the form of the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) at the time of the Prophet's demise as given by most scholars: "In the construction method a stone foundation was laid to a depth of three cubits (about 1.50 meters). On top of that adobe, walls 75 cm. wide were built. The Mosque was shaded by erecting palm trunks and wooden cross beams covered with palm leaves and stalks. On the *qiblah* direction, there were three porticoes, each portico had six pillars (palm trunks). On the rear part of the Mosque, there was a shade (*Suffah*), where the homeless *muhājirīn* (migrants) took shelter. The height of the roof of the Mosque was equal to the height of a man (with his hands raised)" (Hamid, 1996, p. 226; al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, p. 481; *al-Bukhārī*, 1981, *Ḥadīth* No. 436; *Abū Dāwūd*, 1997, *Ḥadīth* No. 451). About three years before his death, i.e., in the 7th year of the *hijrah* (629 C.E.), the Prophet (ﷺ), while duly answering the needs created by the rapid increase of worshippers as well as the rapid expansion of Madinah as a prototype Muslim city-state, significantly enlarged the Mosque, making its measure approximately 2,500 square meters (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. 1, p. 338).

When the Prophet (ﷺ) passed away in 10 A.H./631 C.E., the first Muslim Caliph, Abū Bakr (A.S.) (d. 13 A.H./634 C.E.), neither altered nor enlarged the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ). However, when Abū Bakr (A.S.) was succeeded by 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (A.S.) as the second Caliph, the first expansion of the Mosque came to pass. This paper critically analyses the undertaking of the first expansion, placing it within the context of the evolution of the identity of both Muslim architecture and Muslim civilization. After a presentation of the main physical features

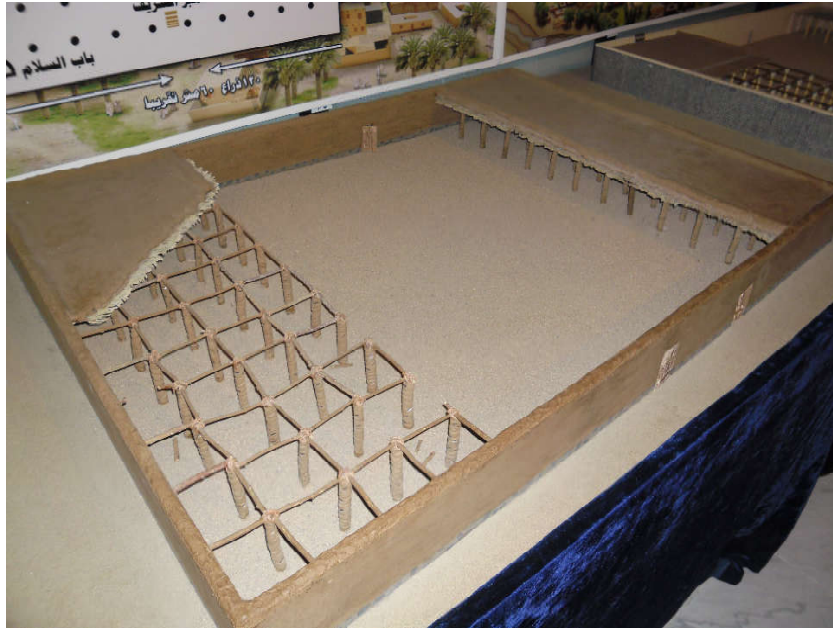
of the Mosque expansion, the discussion of the salient points will proceed as three-pronged concentrating on (1) the role of consultation and mutual agreements in the expansion; (2) the expansion as a precursor of the institutionalization of the Prophet's mosque's (ﷺ) various activities; and (3) the expansion as an epitome of 'Umar's (A.S.) austere views of architecture.



(An imaginary initial simple form of the mosque of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ). Courtesy of the Hadarah Tayyibah Exhibition held in Madinah in 2010-2012).

The Main Physical Features of the Expansion

The expansion of the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) by Caliph 'Umar (A.S.) took place in 17 AH/638 CE. It was regarded as an outstandingly consequential event in the history of Muslim architecture and civilization. It was a continuation of the Prophet's high community building standards. Thus, some of the most authoritative anthologies of the Prophet's *Traditions* (*ḥadīth* or *Sunnah*), such as *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, recorded it. That the details of 'Umar's (A.S.) expansion were presented in the same accounts as featured the way the



(An imaginary form of the mosque of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) after Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb’s expansion. Courtesy of the Hadarah Tayyibah Exhibition held in Madinah in 2010-2012)

Prophet (ﷺ) built and maintained the Mosque – as well as with the details of the expansion of ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (A.S.) (d. 36 A.H./656 C.E.), the third Muslim Caliph, who succeeded ‘Umar (A.S.) – testifies that what ‘Umar (A.S.) did was utterly in accordance with the Divinely established civilization development paradigms. Moreover, that the account in question was recorded in the section, or book (*kitāb*), of Prayer (*ṣalāh*) by *al-Bukhārī* (d. 256 A.H./870 C.E.), and in the section, or book, of Prayer (*ṣalāh*) by Abū Dāwūd (d. 276 A.H./889 C.E.) as well, but in a chapter of “The Reward of Building Mosques” demonstrates how important the subject matter was, especially in the beginning when a recognizable Muslim architectural identity was yet to be established, and how much spiritual as well as civilizational meaning and substance it contained.

By and large, ‘Umar (A.S.) expanded the area of the Mosque in the directions of the south, the west, as well as the north, with foundations of stone about 1.8 meters in depth. The total area measured about 70 meters from south to north and about 60 meters from east to west, that is, more or less 4,200 square meters (*al-Qu’aiti*, 2007, p. 56).

‘Umar (A.S.) could not expand the Mosque in the direction of the east because most of the Prophet’s houses, including the house of ‘Ā’ishah (رضي الله عنها) (d. 59 A.H./678 C.E.), the Prophet’s wife, that contained the graves of the Prophet (ﷺ) and the first Caliph, Abū Bakr (A.S.) also and adjoined the Mosque. Expanding the area of the Mosque towards the east would have entailed demolishing those houses and integrating the two graves into the Mosque proper, which was then – and remained so for quite some time – an inconceivable proposition. Such a sensitive mission was embarked on during a revolutionary and fairly justifiable Mosque expansion by the Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 97 A.H./715 C.E.) in 88-91 A.H./707-710 C.E. Even then, however, when the Prophet’s houses deteriorated significantly in terms of their ephemeral forms, and when they lost somewhat their original significance and appeal, the matter proved exceedingly difficult to rationalize and defend.

The new walls were of mud brick and about 5.3 meters in height. Again, palm trunks, which in height were equivalent to the walls, were used for pillars, and palm fronds were used to cover the ceiling (*al-Bukhārī*, 1981, *Ḥadīth* No. 436; *Abū Dāwūd*, 1997, *Ḥadīth* No. 451). As seen earlier, during the Prophet’s era, the height of the Mosque’s walls and ceiling was equal to the height of a man with his hands raised. ‘Umar’s (A.S.) alteration of the height, it goes without saying, was a remarkable environmental feature that facilitated the lighting, air circulation and aeration of the space. Human individual and collective scale in the architecture of the Mosque was also enhanced thereby, in view of the verity that people interact with their environments based on their physical dimensions, potentials and limitations. Considering the new size of the Mosque, as well as the enormous quantity of its visitors and worshippers, and the ever-increasing intensity of its roles and functions, the Mosque was thus properly scaled to the community’s individual and collective capacities, exigencies and needs.

According to some bizarre reports, the pillars of the Mosque used to support the ceiling were made of mud bricks rather than palm trunks. However, such reports, as emphasized by al-Samahudi (1997, vol. II, p. 481), are unreliable and weak, and given that they contradict the authentic and mainstream sources, they are to be repudiated. The authors of such reports must have mistaken the building material of the walls for

that of the pillars. Furthermore, it was never reported that the pillars – or even a single pillar – of the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) were ever built of mud brick. They consistently were either of palm trunks, as was the case in relation to the construction activities of the Prophet (ﷺ) and those of the first two Caliphs (although it is said that Abū Bakr (A.S.), the first Caliph, did not enlarge the Mosque, he nevertheless is said to have replaced its old and decaying palm trunk pillars with new ones or by stone ones, as was the case commencing with the expansion of ‘Uthmān (A.S.), the third Caliph.

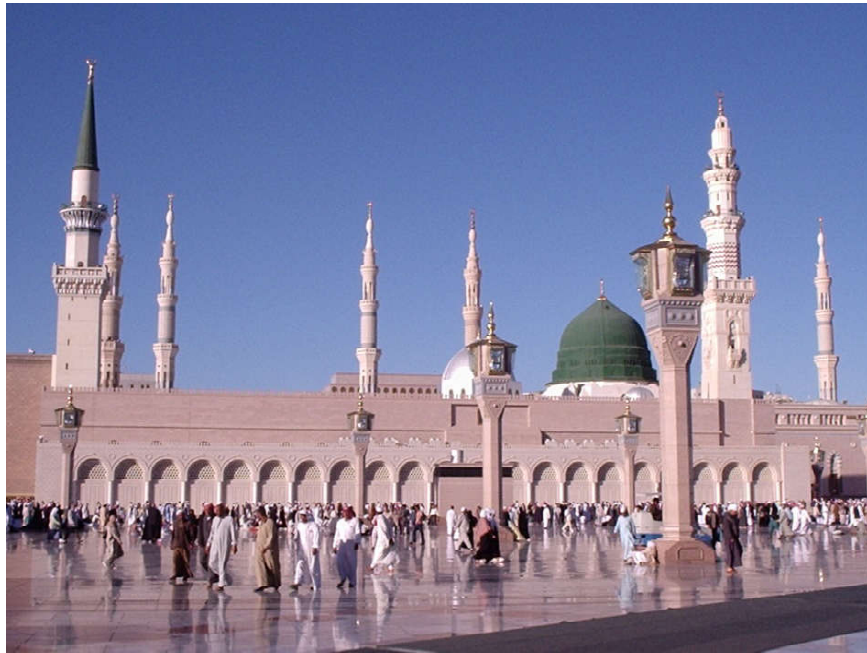
‘Umar (A.S.) also added three new doors to bring their number to six. Each side – except the *qiblah* wall – had two doors. The floor was covered with matting of inter-woven palm fronds after it had been graded and covered with soft pebbles where necessary. At the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), the ground, at first, was both unpaved and uncovered. Later, some parts were strewn with pebbles, and some mats of palm fronds were introduced as well. In addition, although its introduction dates back to the Prophet’s era, the use of incense to perfume the atmosphere in the Mosque on Fridays and during the holy month of *Ramaḍān*, was sustained, yet institutionalized (al-Qu’aiti, 2007, p. 56). ‘Umar (A.S.) was the first to provide lights for the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) (Mas‘ūd-ul-Ḥasan, 1982, p. 128).

The Expansion Based on Consultation and Mutual Agreements

The way Islam looks at the enterprise of building is very delicate. While it regards it as indispensable for living and so, permissible – yet, at times, even highly praiseworthy – erecting buildings for whatever vain and harmful purposes, at the same time, is sternly rejected and condemned. Like in most worldly matters, a middle moderate path is to be always pursued.

Indeed, how the Prophet (ﷺ) approached and treated the phenomenon of building while developing the city of Madinah, including his Mosque in particular, is the best illustration of the Islamic attitude concerning the notion of erecting buildings. Such accounted for a significant segment of his life pattern (*Sunnah*). That’s why when ‘Umar (A.S.) decided to embark on the assignment of enlarging the mosque of the

Prophet (ﷺ) and altering its existing configuration, he knew all too well that the task needed to be in full conformity both with the spiritual benchmarks of the Islamic message and the emerging socio-cultural Traditions and norms of the nascent Muslim community.



(The mosque of the Prophet [ﷺ] seen today from the *qiblah* side)

Hence, from the outset, ‘Umar (A.S.) maintained that his scheme in fact was neither of his, nor of people’s own accord, so to speak. Rather, it was an extension of the Prophet’s planning and development policies and undertakings. He used to say that if he had not heard the Prophet (ﷺ) saying that the Mosque needed to be enlarged further, so as to accommodate the growing needs of the community, he would not have done anything to it (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, p. 482). The Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have uttered those words before his passing away, so any further Mosque extension activities by him were overtaken by his demise. Thus, ‘Umar (A.S.) felt obliged to do what he did, ensuring legitimacy for his actions in the process.

Accordingly, in his capacity as the Caliph, ‘Umar (A.S.) saw himself as an executor of the Prophet’s will. His job was a trust from God and was for the good of Islam and the community. Hence, making sure that people’s overall interests were preserved, and their proper life engagements encouraged and facilitated, had to be prioritized at all times. One of the most excellent strategies for successfully dealing with the pressing challenges was to engage the community in the projects of common interests, consulting them, seeking their feedback and arriving at mutual agreements and, if necessary, compromises.

One of such projects was the expansion of the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) (Badr, 1993, vol. I, p. 274; Masudul-Hasan, 1982, p. 128). According to some reports, it was a group of the people of Madinah who, having been fully conscious of their participative rights and responsibilities which had been nurtured in them since the commencement of the Islamic civilization agenda in Madinah, approached ‘Umar (A.S.) and suggested the obvious, namely, that the Mosque be expanded (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, p. 489) because its existing size and facilities were inadequate for the swelling needs and requirements of the rapidly increasing population of Madinah, plus the needs of the incessant visitors to it as a place of pilgrimage. Those who approached ‘Umar (A.S.) for the purpose and thus expedited his historic decision might have been either individuals or groups as per different narrations. But it seems that the proposal which helped ‘Umar (A.S.) make up his mind represented a pervasive Madinah sentiment shared by many, which, nevertheless, was expressed candidly and most emphatically to ‘Umar (A.S.) only by a few.

At any rate, ‘Umar (A.S.) proceeded with the expansion, having established a necessary legitimacy for it. One of the most challenging concerns was how to do away with the houses that stood in the way of the projected expansion, and, more acutely, how to compensate their owners in just and agreeable manners for the incurred losses. ‘Umar (A.S.) is reported to have come up with four options, asking the house owners to choose any of them: to sell their houses for agreed-upon prices which were to be paid from state treasury (*bayt al-māl*); to allot agreed-upon empty lands for them anywhere in the city of Madinah where new houses could be built from state treasury; to donate (the demolition of) their houses as charity (*sadaqah*) to Muslims and their expansion project;

to gift (the demolition of) their houses to Muslims (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, p. 483, 488).

All the house owners ultimately consented, availing themselves of the four offered alternatives, except the Prophet's uncle, al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (A.S.) (d. 33 A.H./653 C.E.), who adamantly refused to give up his house (Masud-ul-Hasan, 1982, p. 128; al-Ya'qūbi, 2002, vol. II, p. 102). He refused to accept any of the presented options mainly because of some sentimental value that the house had for him. While arguing with 'Umar (A.S.) about the matter, al-'Abbās (A.S.) related that the house location was apportioned to him by nobody else but the Prophet (ﷺ) himself. The Prophet (ﷺ) even participated in constructing some sections of the house. "The house water-spout that pours inside the Mosque had been installed by the Prophet's hand", was one of the revelations of al-'Abbās (A.S.) (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, pp. 483, 489).

'Umar (A.S.) was fully aware that there was not much place for sentimental values and personal feelings when it comes to such collective civilizational undertakings of gigantic proportions as the Mosque expansion in question, but he could not do much about the persistence of al-'Abbās (A.S.). He could neither force him to give up his house, nor was he in a position to seize it from him by force, in that mosques cannot be established on the premises of usurpation, unfairness and injury. Hence, 'Umar (A.S.) had to elevate his consultation and reconciliatory exploits to another level. He thus appointed a renowned *Companion* of the Prophet (ﷺ), Ubayy b. Ka'b (A.S.) (d. 29 A.H./649 C.E.), to mediate between him (the government) and al-'Abbās (A.S.).

Ubayy b. Ka'b's (A.S.) reasoning was that the act of expanding and rebuilding the Mosque cannot even in the slightest be associated with any form of malevolence and wrong. And since al-'Abbās (A.S.) declined to relinquish the house, 'Umar (A.S.) had no right to take it from him by force. In view of that, Ubayy b. Ka'b (A.S.) decided the case in favour of al-'Abbās (A.S.). In other words, he decided in favour of individual rights at the expense of the rights of the government.

If truth be told, however, the incident was never a matter of individual versus governmental rights. It was only an opportunity to demonstrate the fundamental truth that governments exist because of, and for, people. They exist only in order to serve people's best interests. The rights of people are essentially the responsibilities of governments, whereas the

rights of governments are not necessarily the responsibilities of people. People signify governments' strength, quintessence and the only source of legitimacy and power. Thus, the quality and strength of governments depend on the quality and strength of the relationship between them and their people, and their longevity is conditioned by the longevity of such relationship.

On hearing the judgment, 'Umar (A.S.) was unhappy, but was prepared to live and cope with it. On the other hand, however, al-'Abbās (A.S.) was so struck by the readiness of 'Umar (A.S.) to go to great lengths to implement the expansion project, as well as by his penchant for serving the interests of Islamic egalitarianism and justice, that he forsook his accorded right as soon as it was pronounced. He remarked to Ubayy b. Ka'b (A.S.), the appointed mediator by the government: "Because you decided in my favour, I dedicate it (the house) as charity (*ṣadaqah*) to Muslims" (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, pp. 483, 490; Badr, 1993, vol. I, p. 276). It was only then that 'Umar (A.S.) and his government were able to proceed with the expansion, making a subtly struck balance between personal and communal interests and aims its strongest foundation.

A Precursor of the Institutionalization of the Mosque's Diverse Activities

Having rebuilt and enlarged the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ), 'Umar (A.S.) went on to enhance the code of ethics for its usage. One of the most arresting – to some even contentious – issues was his prohibition of reciting poetry inside the Mosque. Instead, he allocated an area that adjoined the Mosque on its eastern side called al-Buṭayḥa' for the purpose. Not only for reciting poetry, but also for all other worldly, often idle, yet vain, discussions and arguments accompanied by noise, shouting, quarrelling and laughing, was the area designated. It seems that the area, or the quarter, contained some basic architectural elements so as to facilitate the intended purposes, for in some accounts the following words have been used "... 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb banā fi nahiyah al-masjid rahbah tudda'a al-Buṭayḥa'..." which means "...that 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (A.S.) built at a side of the Mosque a place called al-Butayha' ..." (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, p. 498).

On that score, ‘Umar (A.S.) was the first who inspected the Mosque after the nightfall (*‘ishā’*) prayer, making sure that no one unnecessarily stayed behind overnight and used the Mosque for potentially unfitting goals. Children were not spared either (al-Ṣābūnī, 1981, vol. II, p. 608). He used to admonish the offenders of the code of ethics using terms like, for example, “Do you know where you are?”, or “Why are you raising your voice(s) in the Mosque of Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ)?”, or “In this Mosque of ours, voices are not to be raised.”, or “Mosques are built for remembering God, so, if you want to discuss your trade and some sheer matters of this world, then get out from them.” (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, p. 498-499; al-Ṣābūnī, 1981, vol. II, p. 608).

On one occasion, ‘Umar (A.S.) passed by a *Companion* of the Prophet (ﷺ), Ḥassān b. Thābit (A.S.) (d. 55 A.H./674 C.E.), while he was reciting poetry in the Mosque, giving him a disapproving look. At that, Ḥassān (A.S.) said to ‘Umar (A.S.) that he was reciting poetry in the Mosque when there was someone better than him, i.e., the Prophet (ﷺ), in charge. Then, he turned to another *Companion* of the Prophet (ﷺ), Abū Hurayrah (A.S.) (d. 62 A.H./681 C.E.), and said: “Did you not hear the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) when he said: ‘Answer back on my behalf. O Allah, help him with the Holy Spirit!’” Abū Hurayrah replied: “Yes, by Allah” (*al-Nasā’i*, 2007, *Ḥadīth* No. 716).

Not only that. The Prophet (ﷺ) once even set up a pulpit (*minbar*) for Ḥassān b. Thābit (A.S.) in the Mosque to defend him and his mission, and to lampoon or compose satirical poetry defaming the infidels and their agendas against the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Islamic message (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, p. 500). According to a report, once a man started abusing Ḥassān b. Thābit (A.S.) in front of ‘Ā’ishah (رضي الله عنها), the wife of the Prophet (ﷺ), whereupon she said: “Do not abuse him, for he used to defend the Prophet (ﷺ) (with his poetry)” (*al-Bukhārī*, 1981, *Ḥadīth* No. 3531).

Some people take this to mean that ‘Umar (A.S.) was excessively harsh and was against poetry in particular. However, such was not the case in any way. ‘Umar (A.S.) was neither exceedingly harsh, nor was he against poetry. He just lived ahead of his time, so his debatable, yet to some extent controversial, decisions need be properly contextualized.

During the era of the Prophet (ﷺ), the Mosque was a multipurpose and multidimensional community development center with a myriad of

religious, educational, social, political and cultural activities being conducted under its roof. However, as time went by and the evolution of Islamic society and culture intensified, those diversified activities started to institutionalize, both spontaneously and by design, in order to cater better for the growing needs of the Muslim civilizational progress. As independent institutions, they were then sought to clearly define and mark out for themselves their conceptual, methodological and operational parameters and scopes. Soon, that also necessitated their gradual physical, but never ideological, separation from the Mosque as the “mother” institution, as well as from each other.

The whole process could be dubbed as a process of ideologically harmonious institutionalization of the mosque’s activities, which hit unprecedented heights during the caliphate of ‘Umar (A.S.) after the Persian and Byzantine Empires had been brought to their knees and the Islamic state expanded dramatically. When ‘Umar (A.S.) expanded considerably the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) in Madinah as the capital and nerve center of the Islamic state, and when he established al-Buṭayḥa’ for reciting poetry, conducting other worldly discussions and for settling minor disputes in it, as part of his boosting of the code of conduct for using the Mosque, ‘Umar (A.S.) was consciously laying down a precursor to the impending full-fledged institutionalization whereby the Mosque’s multiple activities were given the character of distinct institutions.

The institutionalization process in question applied to various segments of the dynamic spiritual, socio-political, administrative and human development. Hence, it is often asserted that the reign of the Caliph ‘Umar (A.S.) was a reign of institutions and institutional innovations and growth. Indeed, ensuring the adequate status and function of mosques in relation to the newly emerging institutions featured most prominently in the hierarchy of ‘Umar’s leadership and administrative priorities. While each and every new institution was to be accorded its due status and jurisdiction, the status and authority of the “mother” of all institutions, the mosque, where every other institution originated and to which they all eventually “returned” for the validation and endorsement of their programmes and achievements, could by no means be compromised, or undermined, even in the slightest. That is why, in addition, under the umbrella of mosques – rather than physically away from them –

‘Umar (A.S.) established hundreds of schools throughout the country. Highly qualified persons were appointed to teach and liberal salaries were allocated to them. As further examples, ‘Umar also established and organized *bayt al-māl* or state treasury, courts of justice, war department, land revenue department, jails, police department, *dīwāns* and other buildings for administrative purposes (Mas‘ud-ul-Ḥasan, 1982, p. 513).

At the same time, however, ‘Umar (A.S.) paid special attention to the planning, building and functioning of mosques, on top of which was the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ). That was so because the vitality and authenticity of the rising independent and specialized institutions hinged largely on the vitality and authenticity of mosques with collective vision and purpose. Accordingly, he is said to have built about four thousand mosques. They were generally simple and unassuming buildings made of bricks and mud mortar. ‘Umar’s (A.S.) main governors: Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī (A.S.) (d. 42 or 52 A.H./662 or 672 C.E.) in Basrah, Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqās (A.S.) (d. 55 A.H./674 C.E.) in Kufah, and ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (A.S.) (d. 44 A.H./664 C.E.) in Egypt, played major roles in building most mosques as they lived in newly conquered territories and in newly built Muslim cities. Many of those mosques are still named after ‘Umar (A.S.). ‘Umar (A.S.), furthermore, was the first to provide salaries to *imāms* (prayer and other religious ceremonies leaders) and *mu’adhdhins* (those who call for prayers and together with *imāms* often look after mosques) due to the growing complexities and responsibilities entailed in their tasks (Mas‘ud-ul-Ḥasan, 1982, p. 127, 514; Husain, 1977, p. 228).

The Expansion as an Epitome of ‘Umar’s Austere Views on Architecture

In terms of architecture, as a style and method of designing and erecting buildings, the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ), following ‘Umar’s expansion, was at once simple and impressive. It was simple insofar as its outward appearance was concerned, but with regard to its metaphysical meaning, significance and purpose, there was more to it than meets the eye. Although the Mosque was slightly modified from its original look and was considerably enlarged, it in essence did not depart from any of the

fundamental notions, perceptions, strategies and methods of the Prophet (ﷺ) relating to the realm of architecture.

However, such is the orb of architecture that perceiving, planning and designing its forms, spaces and ambiances in order that they reflect the functional, technical, social, environmental and aesthetic considerations of a people, are greatly governed by the exigencies of the time and space factors. Thus, since it denotes a physical representation of a worldview, a belief system and life principles and values into the ever-changing parameters of space and time, there is very little especially in the corporeal manifestations of architecture that could be characterized by rigidity, permanence and constancy. That said, if the extensive developments, yet some radical changes, that were sweeping across the vast Muslim state during the caliphate of ‘Umar, (A.S.) are taken into consideration, it becomes clear that he and his government were in a legitimate position to deviate somewhat from the original form of the Mosque, improving it and making it to some extent commensurate with the rest of the happenings in the state. However, he did not do so, firstly because he wanted to follow the Prophet’s example to the letter – although he did not have to – and secondly, because of his own austere views on architecture which he was not ready to give up, or amend, notwithstanding the mounting pressure of the changing times and conditions.

To ‘Umar (A.S.), therefore, architecture was just a means; not an end. That in a sense signified a minimalist tendency where the subjects are reduced to their basic and necessary elements. Hence, the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) in terms of its outward appearance created an impression of extreme simplicity, and its basic building ideas and materials seem to have served multiple visual and functional purposes. If there was no place in it for advanced building styles or materials, there was no place for any decoration blueprint either. ‘Umar (A.S.) was explicit about the matter when he said in the course of expanding the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) that he was intending only to protect the people from the rain and the sun. He then ordered that the Mosque be rendered neither red nor yellow (that is, not to be decorated) lest the people should be unnecessarily tried or exposed to temptation thereby (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, p. 496).

‘Umar’s (A.S.) general architectural goals revolved around making sure that the form followed and facilitated function, and that he

never built more than what was genuinely needed. He did not want to get involved, wittingly or unwittingly, in some devastating architectural deviations and malpractices, such as extravagance, excessiveness, insincerity, competition and pride, setting thus some bad behavioral patterns to be followed by others. His motto for himself and others was to adhere to the Prophet's life patterns (*Sunnah*) as the only criterion if the people wanted to succeed and thrive (al-Ṭabarī, 1989, vol. XIII, p. 68).

Herein, perhaps, lies one of the reasons why 'Umar (A.S.) did not expand the Mosque towards the eastern side where most of the houses of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his wives stood. The houses exuded the architectural spirit of the original Mosque as well, because they were both built and utilized by the Prophet (ﷺ). In actual fact, the Mosque and the houses made up an enormous complex of the Prophet (ﷺ) whose main constituents, in terms of service, function and architectural propensity, finely supported and complemented each other. Thus, if 'Umar (A.S.) extended the Mosque towards the eastern side and demolished the Prophet's houses in the process, that would have meant an obliteration of one of the richest and most meaningful legacies that the Muslim community possessed. The community would also have become bereft of an incredible source of spiritual as well as civilizational inspiration and guidance. 'Umar (A.S.) thus wanted the simple houses, where the best of mankind had lived and duly performed their life missions, to serve as a reminder and benchmark against which other future architectural undertakings could be measured.

This could be further corroborated by the fact that some of the Prophet's houses adjoined the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) from the northern side as well. However, even though 'Umar's (A.S.) expansion took place in that direction, he still kept them intact. He integrated them into the Mosque proper, and the Mosque's endless activities and functions unfolded around them (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, p. 494). In this way, just as intended, the people interacted with the houses and the messages they embodied more than ever before. Little wonder, then, that in due course they became an adornment and treasure of Madinah dearly cherished not only by its citizens, but also by all Muslims who thronged into the city from far and wide. Thus, when they were demolished as a result of the Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd's massive expansion of the

mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) some 71 years later, the city of Madinah experienced one of its saddest days in history (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, p. 517).

Those austere views concerning the enterprise of erecting buildings ‘Umar (A.S.) consistently displayed throughout the tenure of his caliphate. For example, when Muslims established Basra and Kufah as garrison cities in 16 A.H./637 C.E., they built houses using reeds as building material. Then fire occurred and eighty roof structures were destroyed, not a single stem of reed being spared. Consequently, the people sought ‘Umar’s permission to use bricks for building as they were better and safer. ‘Umar (A.S.) agreed but cautioned: “Go ahead, but let nobody build more than three rooms for himself and do not let one build higher houses than the other. If you adhere to what is generally recognized as proper (*Sunnah*), you will thrive” (al-Ṭabarī, 1989, vol. 13 p. 68).

‘Umar (A.S.) is also reported to have prohibited the people from the two affected cities from constructing buildings that were higher than the “norm”. When the people inquired about the meaning of the “norm”, he said: “The ‘norm’ is that which keeps you well away from wastefulness but, at the same time, won’t make you lose sight of what you are aiming at” (al-Ṭabarī, 1989, vol. XIII, p. 68).

Also, the first to use a pulpit (*minbar*) during the Friday (*Jumu‘ah*) sermon – which later became one of the most recognizable elements of the language of mosque architecture – was ‘Umar’s governor in Egypt, ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (A.S.), when he built his mosque in Egypt. When the news reached ‘Umar (A.S.), he wrote to ‘Amr (A.S.): “I have heard that you use a pulpit and thus raise yourself above the necks of the Muslims. Is it not sufficient for you that you are standing while the Muslims are at your heels? Therefore, I urge you to smash it to bits” (Ibn Khaldūn, 1987, p. 222).

Indeed, the views of ‘Umar (A.S.) concerning the subject of erecting buildings echoed more than anybody else’s the views and practices of the Prophet (ﷺ) who, for example, said: “Every building is a misfortune for its owner, except what cannot, except what cannot, meaning except that which is essential” (*Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, 1997, *Hadīth* No. 5218).

“... The Day of Judgment will not come to pass till the people start competing in erecting high buildings ...” (*al-Bukhārī*, 1981, *Hadīth* No. 6588).

The Prophet (ﷺ) also said that he was not directed to erect monumental mosques. The narrator of this *ḥadīth* (Tradition), ‘Abdullah b. ‘Abbās (A.S.) (d. 68 AH/687 CE), commented: “You shall certainly end up adorning your mosques as both the Jews and Christians did” (Abū Dāwūd, 1997, *Hadīth* No. 378). Surely, ‘Abdullah b. ‘Abbās (A.S.) did not say this of his own accord; rather, he just paraphrased a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have uttered the same.

As a result, ‘Umar’s (A.S.) conduct became a normative reference whenever people wanted to refer to the evolution of the Muslim ways of planning and building not only individual buildings, but also entire cities. People appreciated that ‘Umar (A.S.) had left to posterity a comprehensive conceptual framework, which is deeply rooted in the quintessence of the Islamic message as enshrined in the Holy Qur’ān and the Prophet’s *Sunnah*, as well as an array of practical and applied solutions with respect to the development of the identity of Muslim architecture. The first reference to this outstanding architectural legacy of ‘Umar (A.S.) was made as early as in 29 A.H./649 C.E. when ‘Umar’s (A.S.) successor, Caliph ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (A.S.), also embarked on expanding the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ). He regarded his initiative as an imitation of, or a follow-up to, ‘Umar’s (A.S.), albeit within the context of the conditions and needs of his own epoch (al-Samahudi, 1997, vol. II, p. 502). The Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd, too, did the same when he on an unprecedented scale also rebuilt and enlarged the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) (al-Ṭabarī, 1990, vol. XXIII, p. 141).

Conclusion

Since its inception, the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) was meant to be a catalyst for fostering and at the same time refining a Muslim civilizational consciousness and output. It was not by chance, therefore, that it was positioned most strategically and right in the middle of the city of Madinah, the prototype Islamic city, which from the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) served both as a personification and microcosm of Islam’s and Muslims’ civilizational undeniable presence and aspirations of global proportions. That is why the name of the city is derived from the Arabic words *maddana* and *tamaddun* which mean to civilize and civilization respectively. From the same root, the concepts *madaniyy* and *mutamaddin*, both of which denote civilized, civil and cultured, are derived, too.

Certainly, Caliph ‘Umar’s (A.S.) rebuilding and enlarging of the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) exemplified the avant-garde status of the Madinah city and its principal Mosque. The project not only called attention to the authentic viewpoints of Islam as regards some of the most critical aspects of social and human development, but also set some high standards as to the future development and nurturing of the spiritual as well as human dimensions in Muslim architecture in particular. It was on account of this that ‘Umar (A.S.) is generally regarded as one of the most influential and upright leaders in history, which earned him the epithet *al-Fārūq* which means “the one who due to a special insight distinguishes between right and wrong”. He is also regarded as one of the great contributors to the rapid growth and maturation of Islamic civilization.

In view of its consequential religious and social nature, ‘Umar’s expansion of the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) was recorded apart from the books of Muslim history, in the leading anthologies of the Prophet’s *Tradition (ḥadīth or Sunnah)* as well. That shows that the main aspects of the expansion, such as maintaining the simple and unpretentious physical configuration of the Mosque devoid of those transgressions and vices as are most commonly associated with planning and erecting buildings, honouring the principles of consultation and mutual agreements, as well as striking a delicate balance between the interests of individuals, society and the government in the midst of the relentless processes of community building and institutionalization of the mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) diverse functions – all these aspects carried as much general spiritual and ethical undertones as specialized architectural tendencies and predisposition.

So, therefore, ‘Umar’s experiences affirmed in emphatic terms that authentic Muslim architecture is one that typifies some of the most fundamental Islamic teachings and values in an architectural process rather than in an architectural product. An architectural process starts with having a proper understanding and vision, which leads to making a right intention. It continues with the planning, designing and building stages, and ends with attaining the net results and how people make use of and benefit from them. Authentic Muslim architecture is a fine blend of all those phases and elements that are interwoven with the threads of the belief system, tenets, teachings and values of Islam. What makes an architecture truly great from an Islamic perspective are its metaphysical, spiritual and ethical dimensions, rather than the sheer physical and

observable aspects, in relation to all the parties involved in the process: patrons, architects, engineers and ordinary users, and the implications of their dissimilar conceptual and practical relationships with architecture.

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