

The influence of pre-Islamic Near & Middle East Art and Architecture on Islamic Art & Architecture /History and Theory

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Abstract: This article presents a Chronological /Historical review of a worldwide and history-wide architectural phenomena named “Islamic Architecture” with special emphasis on appearance of that in first nations that accept Islam either by believing or by force. Defining the phenomenon named “Islamic Architecture” may be led via a series of methods. This paper is considering the historical dimensions, elements and the function of the social and cultural system in sort of the presence of religious elements in various architectural forms or the usage of particular colors or motifs.

Key Words: Architecture, History, Islamic, Middle East, Religion

Introduction

The question in this research is: Could architecture be defined within a specific religion or religious culture? Although almost all Islamic states entered the construction of spaces with different functions and forms, yet they have all been considered as Islamic Architecture in academic writings even in nonreligious buildings and urban areas. The dramatic early expansion of Islam in the 7th and 8th centuries AD brought the adherents of the new religion into contact with new, external architectural traditions. In 100 years, the Arabs were able to expand their territory from India to Spain and to North Africa. The main characteristics of the architectural pattern in different parts of the Islamic territory are calligraphy, domed rooftops, specific exterior ornamentation and the use of arches and grand spaces. These specifications were adopted according to vernacular architecture as inspired by the local methods, materials and climate.

It is assumed that, these common characteristics naming Islamic Architecture are considerably similar to the Persian Sassanian Empire's /224 AD-651 AD architectural elements originating from Parthian Dynasty/247 BC-224 AD. The Iranian architects were invited to build monumental buildings during the Abbasid Era/alongside with the Seljuq Dynasty of Iran and regarding this fact that generally religious and governmental monuments in Syria, Iraq and Central Asia followed the Abbasid architectural traditions, they are very similar to their counterparts in IRAN, all primarily constructed of brick or stone according to the climate respectively mainly consisting of a large central courtyard surrounded by arcades.

The newly Moslem Arabs living pattern at its early time was nomad type of living in hot arid climate of Arab peninsula, mainly tents or mud made cottages. The motives and arts of Moslem Arab invaders to Byzantine and Persian Empire were not in architecture, painting and sculpture but what they were promised in the Qur'an: "PARADISE in the Earth or after the death". They had nothing to lose but promised to gain. So after invading the developed Empires and living in homes, thanks to genius architects of the defeated Empires, they were able to reach to large monumental buildings, mosques, palaces and tombs.

Defining Islamic architecture may be led via two main methods. First is considering the history, dimensions, elements and the function of the social and cultural system; e.g. the presence of religious elements in various architectural forms or the usage of particular colors or motifs. The search for significations, God, angels, resurrection and many other religious meanings in Islamic Art and Architecture is left to be discovered by the audience whereas representing them in art and architectural context is the architect's task. The second way is

comparison, comparison between Islamic art and architecture with modern or non Islamic art and architecture; comparing their historical aspects, functionality, designers and producers. Hence in studying Islamic architecture we must define the most focal element. For instance what is the interpretation of creation and the world and how is it described.

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The Outset of the Islamic Art

The story of Islamic art starts with the clamour of Allah Akbar which had united Islam and Muhammad, the messenger's words. With such a belief Muslims attacked the Byzantium and Syria. They were able to defeat many troops and descend in the wealthy cities of Syria. The Arabs outrided the entrance of Iran and moved towards Central Asia, Samarkand and Bukhara. In less than 100 years after the death of Muhammad, the Arabs were able to expand their territory from India to Spain and North Africa. The motives and arts of Moslem Arab invaders did not belong to their architecture, painting or sculpture. Therefore their dominance on the world created an opportunity for their acquaintance with arts and crafts of the developed Empires. The dramatic early expansion of Islam in the 7th and 8th centuries AD brought the adherents of the new religion into contact with new, external architectural traditions. The earliest mosque and the main center for prayer in the city of Medina, appears to have been the Prophet Muhammad's own house¹ /641 AD, where nine rooms were arranged along the east wall. Another important, early example of a Muslim architecture, the mosque at the newly founded Muslim town of Kufa², was a simple square with supports along all 4 sides and a deep portico with the Qibla³ wall functioning as a prayer hall. Thus, the form and structure of early Islamic architecture in western territory (Eastern Mediterranean) was conditioned by the availability of good local stone and wood. The buildings would often be decorated with mosaics, carved stone, ornamental brick-work or wall paintings what could be considered similar to the Byzantium architecture.

Early Islamic People Find Umayyad Architecture 661 AD/41 AH.

The Umayyads⁴ main power base was Syria, and Damascus was its capital. During a time of great political expansion, The Great Mosque of Damascus⁵ was built under the orders of the caliph al-Wahid I as a clear expression of the power and prestige of the Umayyad. Another Umayyad mosque, the Qusayr Amra, contrasts the illustrious decorations of religious architecture in major centers such as Damascus but still contains some remarkable figural wall paintings again somewhat identical to Byzantium architecture.

The Abbasids

During the Abbasids period 750 AD- 1258 AD, Islamic architecture continued to develop the patterns established under the Umayyad dynasty. The Abbasid caliphate initially centered their government on the city of Kufa, but once the city of Baghdad was formed in 762 AD, it was chosen as the Abbasid capital due to its proximity to Persia. Today, nothing of 8th century Baghdad remains; its site has also been buried beneath later developments. The great mosque of Samarra built during the rule of the caliph al-Mutawakkil, was once the largest mosque of the Islamic world. It is rectangular in plan and measures about 2.40 Square miles. The mosque is located north west of Baghdad, and features an early use of the iwan which opens onto the central court an absolute characteristic of Persian architectural element. The mosque of the Ibn Tulun at Fustat or old Cairo was strongly influenced by the architecture of Samarra, where its founder, Ahmad Ibn Tulun had spent numbers of years to build the monument.

It is built of brick and features rectangular piers. It is one of the earliest examples of the extensive use of arches. At the center of its rectangular court there is a large fountain. The structure dates back to the late 13th – 14th century. Similarly the mosque of Al-Hakim in Cair successfully blends elements from North Africa (such as the high central nave) with features from Samarra (such as the large brick piers already seen in the mosque of Ibn Tulun). Most of the mosques built during the Fatimid Islamic dynasty included decorative wall paintings similar to that of Seljuq Empire Architecture of Iran/1037 AD–1194AD.

Spain and North Africa

As in the decorative arts, the architecture of Islamic Spain and North Africa developed along their own lines, and were at once deeply rooted in the style of Umayyad. Arguably the most important building to have survived from Umayyad Spain is the Great Mosque of Cordoba rooted in the Western Mediterranean architecture of Roman Empire. Another example of Spanish Islamic architecture is the Alhambra in Granada, perhaps one of the best medieval Muslim palaces. Its most significant features include the Court of the Myrtles¹⁸ and the Court of the Lions which date back to the 14th century, during the reigns of the Nasrid rulers Yusuf-I and Muhammad-V. The

decoration of the numerous court yards, colonnades, pools and fountains, included intricate stucco, and mosaic tile work what could be seen as rooted in the Byzantium Architecture.

Iran and Iran Peninsula

Due to inviting Iranian Architects to build monumental buildings during the Abbasid era, the mosques in Iran and Central Asia generally followed the Abbasid architectural traditions, and like their counterparts in Iraq, were primarily constructed of brick; a good example of this are the mosques in Damghan and Negin, which feature round columns. As a master piece finalized during the Seljuq dynasty era in Iran, almost the same time period of Abbasids in Syria and Iraq, is the plan of Masjid-e Jameh/ grand mosque of Isfahan. The basic plan of the Masjid Jāmeḥ of Isfahan consists of a large central courtyard surrounded by arcades. The Masjid was built during the 9th century and enlarged by the Buyids in the 10th century. It underwent a major transformation during the 11th and early 12th centuries, when Isfahan was the Seljuq capital. The largest dome bears an inscription with the name of the great Nezam-al-Mulk, vizier of the Seljuq ruler Malik Shah; the dome was a private area for prayers. Another of the mosque's domes is named Taj al-Mulk, under the name of Malik Shah's wife. The mosque comprised of four iwans opened to the courtyard, the most significant one being the Qibla iwan. Persian Islamic architecture arose following the rise of the Safavid dynasty in 1501; however, archaeological evidence suggests that the Sassanid dynasty architecture, which fell in 633 AD by the Muslim Arabs, had an impressive impact on the Islamic world. Religious buildings in Iran began to include artwork in the form of stucco, calligraphy, mosaics, or mirror work. This style was often accompanied by domed rooftops, a prominent Sassanian architectural element originating from the Parthian dynasty which began in 247 BC. Other Sassanian architectural influences to Safavid Islamic architecture include the exterior ornamentations, use of arches and grand spaces. Thus, a new vernacular method for Muslim architecture arose, as inspired by the existing methods, materials, and climate.

An example is the Naqshe Jahan Square in Isfahan, which is considered by some, to be the greatest example of 16th century Iranian architecture. It is the sixth largest square in the world, and is situated at the center of Isfahan city. Its construction spanned from 1598 to 1629. The square is bordered by notable Safavid era buildings, including the Shah Mosque to the South, the Ali Qapu Palace to the west, and the Sheikh Lotf Allah Mosque to the east. The Shah Mosque, completed in 1629 in the four iwan format, is also regarded as a masterpiece of Persian architecture. Its beauty can be partly attributed to its seven coloured mosaic tiles and calligraphic inscriptions. The mosque features domes and iwans, which were both architectural elements that were introduced to Islamic Architecture by the Persians. The four iwan format of the mosque was inherited by the Safavids from the Seljuq's, and places an imposing emphasis on the courtyard it faces. Although Persians had constructed domes for centuries, the Safavids began a renaissance in Persian dome design, by covering both the interior and exterior of the dome with colourful tiles. The use of squinches was also adopted from the Persians, in order to construct an octagonal or circular dome above a square room.

Seljuq Anatolia until the late 12th Century

In contrast to the architecture of Iran, the Seljuqs' in Anatolia was primarily of stone as a usual item in the typical Mediterranean architecture, reflecting a long local tradition. In many Seljuq mosques, either the central court would be considerably reduced in size or the building would be entirely roofed. A distinctive element of Seljuq architecture in Anatolia, are the numerous mausoleums, known in Turkish as Kumbed or Turbe. These continued the tradition of the Iranian and Central Asian tomb towers, and occurred both independently and within the context of Mudrasas/schools and other buildings. The great majority were cylindrical or octagonal structures on raised plinths with conical or pyramidal roofs. As in Anatolia, the architecture of Mamluk Egypt and Syria was primarily built of stone. Mamluk architecture was strongly conditioned by its urban setting. In Iran Ilkhanid architecture generally followed the four iwan plan for mosques and MUDRASAS established under the Seljuqs. For instance, the Masjid-al Jami at Varamin consists of a monumental portal leading to an open court with four iwan and Seljuq- style domes behind a Qibla iwan

Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire, also historically referred to as the Turkish Empire, was an empire founded by Oghuz Turks under Osman Bey in north-western Anatolia in 1299. Architecture of the Ottoman Empire emerged in Bursa and Edirne in the 14th and 15th centuries. The Empire Architecture had emerged from Seljuq Anatolia Architecture and was under deep influences of the after the invasion of Constantinople by the Ottomans For almost 400 years Byzantine architectural artifacts such as the church of Hagia Sophia served as models for many of the Ottoman

mosques. Generally speaking Ottoman architecture has been synthesized with architectural traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean Roman and the Islamic Iran.^[6]

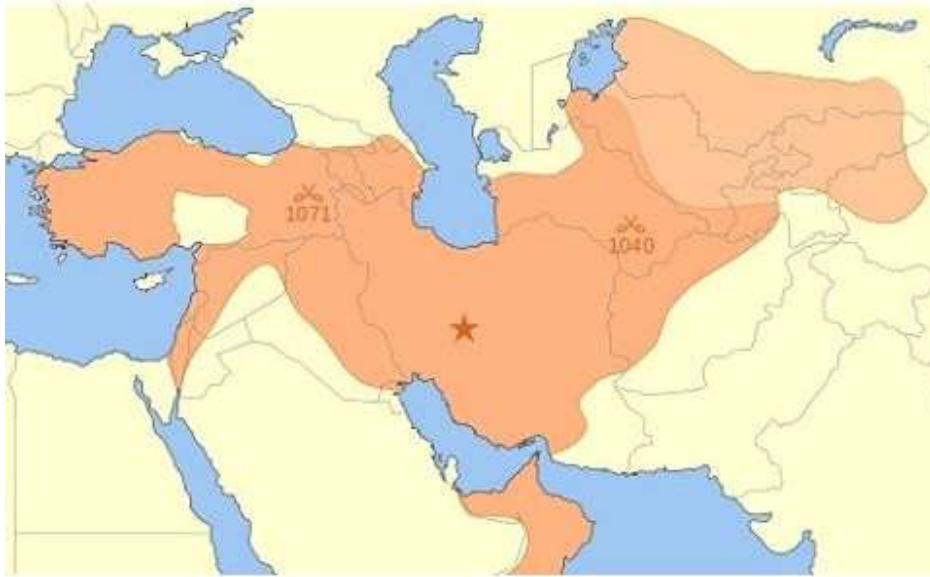


Figure: 1 Great Seljuq Empire in its zenith in 1092, upon the death of Malik Shah I



Figure 2: the Ottoman Empire 1599

With the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, the years 1300–1453 constitute the early or first Ottoman period, when Ottoman art was in search of new ideas. This period witnessed three types of mosques: tiered, single-domed and multi-angled mosques. The Hacı Özbek Mosque (1333) in İznik, the first important center of Ottoman art, is the first example of an Ottoman single-domed mosque.

Mosque of Iznik

The domed architectural style evolved from Bursa and Edirne. The holy Mosque in Bursa was the first Seljuk mosque to be converted into a domed one. Edirne was the last Ottoman capital before Istanbul. The great palace of Istanbul the Topkap Palace was constructed in Istanbul during the Sultan Suleiman period after the capture of the capital city of Eastern Roman Empire Byzantine.

Holy Mosque in Bursa

The next period of Ottoman architecture starting after selecting Istanbul as the capital of the Empire is to a large degree a development of the prior approaches as they evolved over the 15th and early 16th centuries and strongly known with the works of Mimar Sinan. In this period, Ottoman architecture, especially with the works, and under the influence of Sinan, saw a new unification and harmonization of the various architectural parts, elements and influences that Ottoman architecture had previously absorbed but which had not yet been harmonized into a collective whole. Taking heavily from the Byzantine tradition and in particular the influence of the Hagia Sophia, the former Greek Orthodox Cathedral is now a museum (Ayasofya Müzesi) in Istanbul.

Hagia Sophia, Istanbul

In what may be the most emblematic of the structures of this period, the mosques designed by Sinan and those after him used a dome-based structure, similar to that of Hagia Sophia, but among other things changed the proportions, opened the interior of the structure and freed it from the colonnades and other structural elements that broke up the inside of Hagia Sophia and other Byzantine churches, and added more light, with greater emphasis on the use of lighting and shadow with a huge volume of windows. These developments were both a mixture of influence from Hagia Sophia and similar Byzantine structures, as well as the result of the developments of Ottoman architecture under the influence of the eastern empire of Iran from 1400 on.

Findings and Conclusion

This research has been done on the influence of Pre-Islamic Middle Eastern (Persian/Iranian Empires) and Eastern Mediterranean (Eastern Roman and Ottoman Empires) Civilizations/Art& Architecture on the phenomenon used to be known as Islamic Art & Architecture/ Civilization in Islamic countries, is based on the historical facts and analysis.

According to the study carried out on the subject, there is no known style of any type of Art and Architecture contributions of Arab invaders to the phenomenon known as Islamic Art & Architecture/ Civilization. Although, there are some artistic works and monumental buildings provided and constructed during the Arab Caliphates era, however no known Arab artist and architect from Arabian Peninsula could be found from the early time of Islam till the end of Ottoman Empire in the twentieth century.

It should be noted that Muslims in Islamic countries either in public or academic views, strongly maintain that almost every land, over which the Islamic rules became dominant, gained their culture- including Arts and Architecture- after the invasion of Arab Moslems and previously there had been no notable or historically considerable cultural values and civilizations in those areas.

Meanwhile, according to the study, there was an inverse process of interactions between two eras (Pre-Islamic and Islamic). It appeared that Arab Moslems in Arabian Peninsula had no attributed or documented Arts and Architecture before their invasion to the neighboring civilized nations. It seems that the cultural value of the Moslem world had been gained in parallel to their invasion of other lands as what was customary at the time, the more they occupied lands, the more so called Islamic Arts, Architecture and Civilization had been obtained and developed.

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