Islamic Architecture

Historical and Analytical Studies

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“As far as architecture is concerned, it is the haven where man’s spirit, soul and body find refuge and shelter.”

Ibn Abdun, an Andalusian judge from the 12th century
Is an architecture whose functions and, to a lesser extent, form, are inspired primarily by Islam. Islamic architecture is a framework for the implementation of Islam. It facilitates, fosters and stimulates the Muslims’ ‘ibadah (worship) activities, which, in turn, account for every moment of their earthly lives. Islamic architecture only can come into existence under the aegis of the Islamic perceptions of God, man, nature, life, death and the Hereafter. Thus, Islamic architecture would be the facilities and, at the same time, a physical locus of the actualization of the Islamic message. Practically, Islamic architecture represents the religion of Islam that has been translated onto reality at the hands of the Muslims. It also represents the identity of Islamic culture and civilization.[1]
1- Unity (التوحيد):
"Asserting the unity or oneness of Allah”
Unity is certainly one of the most outstanding characteristics of Islamic architecture. This unity reveals itself in religious buildings, in dwellings, and in all kinds of private and public edifices, whatever the place or the era.

Islam is said to embody a cohesive way of life amongst ethnically and culturally diverse peoples, this is also a form of unity of mankind. In fact, this led Le Corbusier to say “The orientation of the axis of every mosque on Muslim soil towards the black stone of the Ka’abah is an awe-inspiring symbol of unity of faith.”
Unity in Islamic patterns

The principle of unity in Islamic architecture is applicable on horizontal projections as well as on radial star-shaped decorations and walls which surround the high gateway whose doors can be rectangular, pointed or circular.
Unity in Islamic city planning

Many of the old Islamic cities like Baghdad, Basra and Cairo are radially planned, the center is either the mosque or the palace.
2- Respect (الاحترام):
- The respect is clear in the use of decorative Islamic calligraphy instead of pictures which were haram (forbidden) in mosque architecture. Note that in secular architecture, human and animal representation was indeed present. Islamic calligraphy shows also respect to the Quran verses.

- Another example of respect is clear in the Islamic architecture law set by (Omar Ibn El Khattab) namely the right of the neighbor and also the right of the road.
The street in old Islamic Cairo show the respect of right of neighbor with the 2 stories height & the windows.
3- **Sincerity** (الإخلاص):

-Sincerity is another characteristic that is clear in the building of Ribats & Fortresses. These buildings show the sincerity of the followers to defend their land and religion.

- The sincerity not only shown in the times of war, but it is shown in every aspect & every day. Building like mosques are another kind of architecture that shows this sincerity. This is clear in the Quran verse

  “إنما يعمر مساجد الله من أمن بالله و اليوم الآخر”
Minaret is an architectural element that is based on a function. (Call for prayer)
4- Moderation & Humility (الاقتصاد و التواضع):

One example is the Great Mosque of Djenne in Mali, West Africa, made of sun-baked mud bricks which insulate the building from the extreme sub-Saharan semi-desert heat in the day and radiate warmth in the cold night. This provision of natural cooling and heating (without energy-guzzling air conditioners) does indeed symbolize ecological moderation and balance. It was built after a 13th century ruler of Mali destroyed his ostentatious palace, replacing it with this symbol of spiritual humility before God.
5- Modesty (الحياء):
- Another characteristic of Islamic architectural is showing the importance of the Islamic principle of haya (modesty). Few cultures have been as successful at making modesty look good. The division of traditional houses and the use of window screens are practical and aesthetically appealing contributions, as well as being spiritually appropriate.
5- Modesty (الحياء):
- Eventually, what became to be known as the language of Islamic residential architecture, such as the courtyard, partly or fully screened windows, raising windows above the eye level, bent entrances, double circulations inside houses, inward looking designs, guest rooms near main entrances and away from houses’ core, certain decorative systems, etc.
6- Pursuit of knowledge (العلم):
-Pursuit of knowledge is shown in the many building that Muslim architect built for their communities to learn and spread Islam teachings.
6- Pursuit of knowledge (العلم):

Sultan Hassan madrasah
7- Rememberance (الذكر):
- We see splendid flowery arabesques on a wooden door of Cairo, Egypt, and magnificent muqarnas (geometric ceiling patterns) at the majestic Alhambra palace of Granada, Spain. All these intricate, almost hypnotic, patterns are said to resemble rhythmic chanting, a perfect architectural example of the principle of Dhikr, the remembrance of God.
-“Gardens beneath which rivers flow”
Another form of remembrance is the remembrance of heaven
While living on earth this is very clear when you see gardens & water channels that muslim architects have done
Contemporary Islamic Architecture:

Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi is the exact contrary of principal no.4, its totally immoderate.
Contemporary Islamic Architecture:

The Glass mosque in Germany is a little bit not following the principal of sincerity as the nature of the worshiping of muslim is affected by glass transparency.

Other principal like Remembrance on the minaret and pursuit of knowledge as this is a community center.
Contemporary Islamic Architecture:

Institute du monde arabe, Jean Novel tried to mimic the Islamic arabesque but with modern technology.

The mimic is about controlling the quantity of light to enter the space, but it didn’t do the old job of arabesque to serve principle no.5 Modesty. Its is kind of fake.
References:

[1] Conceptualizing islamic architecture

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