



REVISITING K.A.C. CRESWELL'S THEORY ON THE FIRST MOSQUE IN ISLAM

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ABSTRACT

Professor Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell (1879–1974), better known as K.A.C. Creswell or simply Creswell, was definitely one of the most prominent and prolific scholars in the field of Islamic art and architecture. His gigantic two-volume *Early Muslim Architecture*, of which Volume I was first published in Oxford in 1932, remains widely acknowledged as the most important reference for early Islamic architecture so far. Nevertheless, Creswell's hypothesis on the genesis of the mosque type and his perception of the first mosque in Islam betray a considerable amount of dubiety and suffer a myriad of critical deficiencies. As he maintains, the making of the mosque, as defined in the modern sense, was launched not by the Prophet, as commonly believed, but by Ziyād b. Abīh when he reconstructed the mosque of Baṣra in 45/665. Astonishingly, these views of Creswell were adopted and further enhanced by quite a number of notable specialists over eighty-five years. This article will subject such views to scrutiny with the aim of identifying the first mosque in Islam and the religious as well as historical contexts in which it emerged. This discussion becomes more persistent, however, given the dominant misconceptions about the topic in Western as well as Muslim scholarships.

KEYWORDS:

First mosque; Medina; the Prophet; Creswell; Hijra; Mecca; As'ad b. Zurāra

INTRODUCTION

CRESWELL'S LEGACY AND IMPACT

Amongst all of those, Western and Arab, who wrote on the art and architecture of the Muslim world, the name of K.A.C. Creswell stands out as the most recognized in the relevant academic circles. Born in London in 1879, the British art historian is best known for his seminal works on the architecture of early Islam. His gigantic two-volume *Early Muslim Architecture*, of which Volume I was first published in Oxford in 1932, remains widely referred to as the most acknowledged reference for early Islamic architecture [1]. Creswell's work represented a substantially decisive watershed for the study of the material culture of the central Arab lands. It is true that Western scholarship à propos Islamic architecture started at a quite earlier date, i.e. since the late nineteenth century, but the works of Creswell have well stretched the boundaries of the discipline, geographically, chronologically and technically.

The fortes of Creswell studies lie in the fact that they almost digested all of the previous Western relevant works and considered more sources than those used by former scholars [2]. Further, Creswell

provided quite a big number of reconstructed plans for most of the missing early mosques, based on his reading of the literary sources as well as on the archaeological findings of the then recent excavations. He also prompted a number of new methods and innovative perspectives [3]. His eleven-thousand-photograph collection is of no less importance. Creswell left a remarkable library of more than three thousand books plus his own photographs [4] [5]. It is now held—at his own discretion—by the American University in Cairo [6]. In addition, Creswell wrote another colossal two-volume work on the *Muslim Architecture of Egypt* [7] [8] that has been relatively recently translated into Arabic [9]. He also amassed, over a period of forty-nine years, a *Bibliography of the Architecture, Arts and Crafts of Islam* [10]. Its Supplement was published in 1973. This is in addition to more than sixty articles and treatises [11].

Creswell has usually been credited as one of the most notable forefathers of Islamic architecture in Western scholarship. In addition to Volume VIII of the renowned *Muqarnas* [12], a festschrift was dedicated to him [13]. His impact on relevant Arabic scholarship is equally compelling. His arguments and views are always quoted and discussed by the Muslim scholars.

In spite of their disputed accuracy, Creswell's reconstructed plans of the first/seventh-century mosques, are what we should usually expect to see if we ask a student of Islamic art and architecture in most parts of the world to draw the (isometric) plan for any of them.

Nevertheless, Creswell's knowledge of pre-Islamic Arabia and of the origins of the mosque type suffers a number of critical inconsistencies. While his perception of the former has been convincingly reassessed by quite a number of later scholars [14] [15] [16] [17], his views on the genesis of the mosque type was revised by only few. More critically, Creswell argues that what the Prophet built in Medina was not a mosque, as believed by a majority of Muslim scholars, but a 'house' [1]. Astonishingly, these views of Creswell were well-received and further adopted by quite a number of notable Muslim specialists, such as Kamāl al-Din Sāmih and Farīd Shāfi'ī, who tend to posit that the mosque type derived from the 'house' of the Prophet in Medina [18] [19] [20]. One of those who reacted to Creswell's theory on the origins of the mosque is Ahmad Fikrī. In his *al-Masjid al-jāmi' bi-l-Qayrawān*, Fikrī contested the theory of Creswell on the Prophet's mosque and drew attention to a number of relevant issues which, as he maintained, should be compelling enough to make Creswell reconsider his views on this notably significant question [21][22]. The latter, however, ignored Fikrī's argument and reproduced the ideas on the Prophet's mosque in the abridged version of his renowned work. Such was enough for Fikrī to tag Creswell as obstinate [22]. In principle, Fikrī's reconstruction of the Prophet's mosque represents a more convincing reading of the sources than that already suggested by Creswell. Nonetheless, the former overall thesis, in spite of its apparent very similitude, is not properly methodical. For instance, Fikrī, while pointing out that Creswell considered unreliable hadiths; did not identify or discuss any of which.

Creswell's belief that mosque design as well as architectural features had derived from non-Islamic types is well represented, in addition to an elucidated preamble on the topic, in his regular discussion of the non-Islamic origins of most of the Islamic monuments" with which he dealt in his book. The subheadings Creswell chose for this are quite sufficient to tell us how he thought in this regard: "The Migration to Madīna—Construction of Muḥammad's house—Details of this primitive structure—This house was not a mosque, nor was it intended to be a mosque, although it ultimately became one—Architecture non-existent in Arabia at this time".

Given his far-reaching academic impact and remarkable scholarly imprint on relevant scholarship, Creswell's views should be discussed and reassessed. This paper seeks to scrutinize Creswell's perception of the first mosque in Islam, and which is later adopted by a majority of Western academics. The importance of such an imminent discussion is further underscored by the importance of the building itself, the mosque,

which is widely looked upon, on both the institutional and architectural levels, as the most significant building type in Islam. This is attributed, not only to its influence on other types of Islamic architecture—religious and domestic—but also to its devotional, societal and pedagogical functions.

DISCUSSION

CRESWELL AND THE FIRST MOSQUE IN ISLAM

Contrary to Islamic traditions, Creswell argues that what the Prophet built upon his immigration to Madīna in AD 622 was not a mosque but a private residence for him and his household. He also maintains that it was not until the following decades [1]. That this communal building claimed the character of a place for regular prayer, i.e. a mosque. Mainly inspired by Leone Caetani's *Annali dell'Islam* [23] [24] [25] [26] [27], Creswell's prime grounds for such assumption is the allegedly 'profane' nature of the activities which are reported to take place in the Prophet's building and the so-called Qur'ānic non-specific use of the term 'masjid' [28] [29] [30]. Creswell not only adopted such views but also further enhanced them, through a protracted discussion of the mosque in hadith collections, particularly from al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), as well as early sources [1]. Against this background, Creswell, as did many of his predecessors, looked elsewhere in search for the origins of the mosque, particularly in pre-Islamic architectural types.

Creswell's contention is that the early Muslim informants and hadith compilers failed to identify the aperçu of the big corpus of traditions on the Prophet's structure [1]. Rather, he argues that the foundation of the mosque type was less the result of one man's feat than of a gradual and long process that affected every facet of 'formative Islam'. In Creswell's view, the Prophet's building was just a duplication of the people's houses in pre and early Islamic Arabia. Creswell's epilogue is that pre-Islamic artistic traditions of Arabia was not capable of delivering the adequate scope for any architectural accomplishment in earliest Islamic decades [1] or him, this is ideally represented in the simple configuration of the Prophet's domicile, and the unpretentiousness of his environs and possessions. This may well explain Creswell's overdue assignment of primitiveness to the Prophet's building, almost each time he refers to it [1].

In keeping with this assumption regarding the 'mosque' of the Prophet, Creswell assigns the introduction of congregational mosques to political modalities. As he maintains, this is due to Ziyād b. Abīh, Mu'āwiya's ambitious client, when he expanded the mosque of Basra in 44/665. According to Creswell, Ziyād wanted the mosque to act as a platform for his political orations in the face of the growing impact of the mosques of tribes, castes and kinships [1]. He then asserts that it was not until 54/674 that the Prophet's 'abode' officially claimed the guise of a mosque, specifically when it superseded—for the first time—the musallā as the venue of the prayer of 'Īd al-Adhā

[1]. Creswell's argument that congregational mosques had not been known to Muslim people until after four decades of the Hijra forced him to commit a number of fatal mistakes and inaccuracies.

For example, he confusingly admits the dates given by the classical Arabic sources for the institution of the mosques at Basra as 14/635 and at Kūfa as 17/638 [1]. He also, following the sources, gives the date for the reconstruction of the Prophet's mosque in Medina by the Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khattāb as 17/638 [1]. In this connection, Creswell incomprehensibly said: 'In this year [namely, 17/638] 'Umar also enlarged the mosque at Medina' [1]. If so, this would mean that Creswell thought of the Prophet's building to have been a 'mosque' prior to 'Umar's caliphate. He further states, confusingly still, that some features at the 'mosque' of 'Amr b. al-'Ās at Fustāt, the first capital of Islamic Egypt and which was founded as early as 21/640-1, was inspired by the model that had been set by the caliph 'Umar b. al-Khattāb in 17/638 in Madīna [1].

Creswell's neglect, or at the mildest undervaluation, of the religious prompts for the institution of the mosque has led him to attribute its foundation even to what he called 'trivial facts'. These included the delineation of the mosque periphery by asking an archer to cast arrow-shots in four perpendicular directions, as in the case of the first Kūfa mosque. Another trivial fact is also an episode related to the history of the Kūfa mosque, namely when the Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khattāb advised his client Sa'd b. Abī Waqqās to change the position of the State Treasury (bayt al-māl) to be located just in front of the qiblain order to be guarded by congregants [31]. Indeed, the mosque design as well as the majority of its architectural components were already prompted by devotional prerequisites that are due to the time of the Prophet himself. For example, the positioning of the mosque to face the qibla direction, i.e. the Ka'ba in Mecca is not a coincidence, but dictated by quite a number of Qur'ānic verses and hadīth instructions [32]. Similarly, the minaret is not simply a loan from pre-Islamic architectural types [33] [34]. Rather, it could have been inspired by an early Islamic practice to call to prayer from the most elevated point in the mosque vicinity. When the Prophet erected an arbour at the front area of his mosque, his muezzin Bilāl is said to have mounted its roof to call to prayer. Before that, he is said to have done so from the highest roof in town [35] [36][37]. It is also reported of Bilāl to have used for the same purpose a pillar called al-mitmār [38][37] [39]. The religious framework for the foundation of the mosque, as well as its outline, was impelled by other ceremonial imperatives such as the congregants' need to be arranged in even parallel rows, to hear the preacher (khatīb) and see the prayer leader (imām).

Creswell further argued that the first instance when pebble superseded sand for the mosque floor is due to either the caliph 'Umar b. al-Khattāb or to Ziyād b. Abīh. In this, Creswell relied on historical episodes from al-Tabaqāt by Ibn Sa'd and Futūh al-Buldān by al-Balādhurī [40][41]. Both sources indicate that 'Umar

and Ziyād used pebbles to cover the floors of the mosques at Medina and Basra respectively when they saw the worshippers clapping their hands after prayer to get rid of the sand attached to them after prostration. It is reported of both patrons to have taken such a procedure, i.e. the introduction of pebble, because they were concerned that in the course of time later people would think of this clapping as an authentic finale of Muslim prayer [1]. Also here, we have a more compelling historical evidence that the use of pebble goes back to time of the Prophet [42]. Just by the same token, the first use of saffron paste to scent the wall of the qibla is attributed to the Prophet himself.

PRE-HIJRA MOSQUES IN MECCA

It is argued by Creswell that the Prophet did not wish to ordain a compulsory Friday midday prayer because he was unsure of the compliance of his 'Bedouin' adherents to any ceremonial commitments [1]. According to Creswell, only two prayers were practiced by the Prophet and the earliest Muslim community—one at the beginning of the day and another at its end [1] [43][44][45]. As Creswell suggests, this viewpoint is enhanced by the fact that the Qur'ān only speaks of two prayers, al-Fajr and al-'Ishā'(Qur'an XXIV. 58) [46]. In fact, the Qur'ān mentions four times of prayer in one verse: 'So glory be to Allāh, when ye reach eventide ('ishā'), and when ye rise in the morning (fajr). Yea, to Him be praise, in the heavens and on earth; and in the late afternoon (zuhr) and when the day begins to decline (maghrib)'(Qur'an XXX. 17-18) [46]. The fifth time of prayer, i.e. 'asr, is referred to by another verse: 'Guard strictly your (habit of) prayers, especially the Middle Prayer; and stand before Allāh in a devout (frame of mind)'(Qur'an II. 238) [46].

It is well known, nonetheless, that salāh was proscribed while the Prophet and the first Muslim community were still in Mecca, i.e. before they immigrated to Medina in AD 622. This particularly happened at some point in the celebrated Night Journey (Rihlat al-Isrā' wa-l Mi'rāj). While in Mecca, the Prophet and the first believers were not allowed to observe their rituals freely and publicly. It was not until the Hijra when they had the chance to establish their place of prayer, but how and where did they perform salāh (individually and collectively) before the Hijra? It is told by Ibn Hishām that the Prophet occasionally conducted prayer along with his earliest followers, most notably his cousin 'Alī b. AbīTālib, in the adjacent ravines in Mecca's neighbourhood [44][47]. The Prophet is also reported to have conducted prayer individually in his house—sometimes also in the vicinity of the Holy Sanctuary, namely the Ka'ba, but this latter was quite a rare department. We are told, in this connection, that it was not until the conversion of 'Umar b. al-Khattāb to Islam that the believers had the courage to perform prayer, albeit cautiously still, beside the Ka'ba [44][47]. We do not possess any historical evidence to say this was done on any regular basis. Rather, the first devotees gathered for prayer in

a house on the Mt. al-Safā that was owned by al-Arqam b. Abī al-Arqam [40]. This was too a secret undertaking.

That being said, some Muslim individuals, particularly those belonging to notable clans, had what the sources called 'a mosque'. Abū Bakr al-Siddīq, for instance, is reported via al-Bukhārī and others to have had a mosque at the front yard of his house [48][49][50][30]. Such, however, were no more than individual places of prayer, i.e. mosques for private, rather than public, prayer. Such a conduct was of course censured by Quraysh, who were concerned that their folks might be tempted by what they saw and thus consider conversion to Islam [48].

These forbidding restrictions, imposed on the earliest Muslims by the Qurayshī disbelievers, were manipulated by the fact that in Islam prayer can be performed on any given piece of land. The Prophet is reported to have accentuated that one of five gifts given to him exclusively is that the whole land is made a mosque to him and his adherents [51][52][53][54][55].

PRE-HIJRA MOSQUES IN MEDINA

According to Islamic common belief, the first mosque in Islam was that put up by the Prophet and the first Muslim community just after he migrated to Yathrib (a pre-Hijra name of Medina) in AD 622. As far as Muslim scholarship is concerned, such precedence should be credited to the mosque of Qubā', a place in the outskirts of Medina that was populated by a clan called the Banū'Amr b. 'Awf. Before arriving to Medina, the Prophet liked to call upon this Muslim clan to pay tribute and have some rest. During his stay there, which lasted for a period between 3 and 22 days, the Prophet founded for them a mosque [38][56][44][41]. According to some accounts, an earlier mosque had already existed in situ. This is said to have been put up by Kalthūm b. al-Hidm, an early Madinian Muslim who hosted the Prophet during his stay at Qubā' [57][37]. Al-Samhūdī expressly states that this, namely the mosque of Qubā', was the one referred to in the Qur'ān as being founded on 'faithfulness'. He also remarks that it was the first mosque to be built for the Prophet and the believers. This mosque is said to have been visited by the Prophet each Saturday [37].

Another mosque connected to the Prophet's emigrational itinerary was the masjid al-jum'a, 'the Friday Mosque'. This, however, was not a mosque when the Prophet used it for prayer. Rather, the time of Friday midday prayer came when the Prophet was approaching Yathrib. He prayed the Friday sermon, reportedly for the first time ever in congregation, with the Banū Sālim b. 'Awf at a place in Wādī Rānuna' [41][58][44][56]. After he left their kinship for Yathrib, they built a mosque right in the same location to celebrate this episode of the Prophet's biography [59]. For some, such reports on pre-Hijra mosques were concocted after the time of the Prophet in the context of a clear tendency to attribute to his biography later events and structures [28]. Meanwhile, the presence of mosques in the time of the Prophet is clearly

established in the Qur'ān, and could not be simply taken as references to Jewish or Christian shrines.

THE FIRST TRUE MOSQUE IN ISLAM

In response to the Quraysh stubborn resistance to the Prophet's call to the new religion, he began to proselytise members of the other clans of Arabia and who used to come to Mecca for pilgrimage on annual basis. His call did not fall on deaf ears, as he managed to make his first converts from Yathrib. In 620 AD, six men of the Khazraj tribe embraced Islam and acknowledged him as Prophet. In the following year, his efforts came to fruition and the number was doubled, representing converts from both of the two prime tribes in Yathrib, i.e. the Aws and the Khazraj. In 622 AD, a deputation of seventy-five converts vowed to facilitate his moving to the city. This was known as the pledge of al-'Aqaba [58][44][44]. Later in the same year, the Prophet and his earliest adherents from Mecca made the journey to Yathrib, that was henceforth better known as al-Madina al-Munawwara, 'the illuminated city', namely the city that is enlightened by the Prophet taking it as his new hometown.

Just before the advent of the Prophet, and thanks to the scrupulous preaching efforts of the first Ansārī converts and of Mus'ab b. 'Umayr [58][60][40] the nascent Yathribī Muslim community began to meet for collective prayer [43]. The sources, nevertheless, give conflict accounts with regard to the place which accommodated the first collective prayer. They also disagree regarding the one who led such a formal assembly for the first time. According to Anas b. Mālik (d. ca. 93/712), Mus'ab b. 'Umayr, the Prophet's envoy to Yathrib, led in prayer a congregation consisting of the earliest Medinian converts (Ansār) and the first Muslim emigrants (Muhājirūn). As Anas states, this happened a year before the Hijra in the site that was later taken by the Prophet to build his mosque [40]. Anas expressly states that Mus'ab was, thus, the first man to perform the Friday midday prayer in congregation [57][61][40]. More information can be found in Ibn Sa'd, who explains that Mus'ab asked the Prophet to allow him to perform the Friday midday prayer (salāt al-jumu'a) along with the Muslims of Medina. The Prophet gave him leave to do so, and commanded that they should gather for congregational prayer a day before the Sabbath, i.e. Friday (yawmu-l-jumu'a) [40][47][62]. The Prophet was particularly delighted that he was guided to the inception of such a sacred gathering even before he received the pertinent revelation, i.e. sūrat al-jumu'a, 'the Friday chapter' [47][63][64][65].

Other narratives assign the antecedence of leading the earliest Ansār in congregational prayer to As'ad b. Zurāra, the first Medinian chief to embrace Islam and whose epithet was Abū Umāma. As'ad is reported to have led a group of forty Muslims in prayer at a site known as Hazm al-Nabī [44][47]. The paradoxes presented by these seemingly disagreeing accounts on the venue and the imām of the first collective prayer in Medina are clarified through an

account by al-Samhūdī and 'Umar b. Shabba (d. 262/876). According to which, Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh (d. 78/697) states that for two years before the Prophet came to Medina, they used to erect mosques and perform collective prayer [37]. This implies that they used to meet for congregational prayer even before the coming of Mus'ab b. 'Umayr in 621 AD. Such an idea is further explained by a statement of 'Ubāda b. al-Sāmīt who reveals that As'ad used to gather the people for collective prayer before Mus'ab was dispatched to Madīna, and that when Mus'ab arrived, As'ad hosted him and ceded the task of prayer leadership to him [40][44]. When the former returned to Mecca, As'ad again took charge of leading the people in prayer [57]. As such, As'ad continued to be acknowledged as the first one to commence the Friday congregational prayer [44][47].

Upon his migration to Medina, the Prophet performed prayer for some time at the mosque of As'ad. Later on, he offered to buy the contiguous threshing floor (mirbad) to erect a more spacious mosque that would be capable to accommodate the nascent Muslim community. As reported by al-Nawwārbt. Mālik: 'in the beginning, the Prophet prayed at this mosque [of As'ad]. Then, he built it to become his today's mosque' [37]. Creswell, nonetheless, inaccurately argues: 'Yet, throughout all this period [i.e. before the Prophet built his mosque], which lasted at least seven months, he namely the Prophet] never once used the open space which became the courtyard of his house, and ultimately a mosque' [1].

What did this first mosque of As'ad look like? According to Ibrāhīm Rif'at and Ahmad Fikrī, it must have been no more than a plot of land delineated by dry-stone walls (i.e. drystack) to identify and protect its inviolable sanctum [66] [22]. More detail is given by Ibn Sa'd, who describes the structure as 'jīdāranmujaddāran', an enclosure wall, not just an arbour of timber and shrubs. It is natural that this hypaethral primitive mosque of As'ad was set towards Bayt al-Maqdis in Jerusalem [40].

OTHER MEDINIAN MOSQUES

In addition to Medina congregational mosque and the mosque of Qubā', the Prophet is said to have founded a number of other mosques. For example, he marked out a mosque for a group of Ansārīs from the Juhayna clan [67]. It is also reported of the Prophet to have himself built a small mosque in the course of the battle of Khaybar in 7/628-9. Just in the same manner, the Prophet is said to have founded a mosque in Liyya during his several-day siege of the two tribes of Tha'qif and Hawāzin at al-Tā'if in 8/630. Apart from those founded or supervised by the Prophet, other mosques were founded by Muslim tribes and yet others were founded by individuals.

First: Tribal mosques

In Medina, other mosques existed beside that of the Prophet. These were mainly tribal mosques. In addition to the already mentioned ones of Banū'Amr b.

'Awf and their kin Banū Sālim b. 'Awf, al-Tabarī tells us that a mosque was built, albeit out of jealousy, by their competing cousins the BanūGhanm b. 'Awf. This is the notorious Masjid al-Dirār (Qur'an IX, 107-108) [46]. Another example for tribal mosques is that erected in the outskirts of Medina by the Banū Salīma and which was later better known as masjid al-qiblatayn, 'the mosque of the two qiblas', on account of it witnessing the revelation about changing the qibla direction from Bayt al-Maqdis in Jerusalem to the Ka'ba in Mecca. We also know from al-Bukhārī that a mosque was attributed the Banū Zurayq that it was visited by the Prophet [68][69][40][28]. It was, per se, expected for tribes converting to Islam to establish their own mosques. Examples included the Ansārī clan of Sa'd b. Bakr who erected mosques in 5/626-7. Similar mosques are reported to have been built by the clan of the Banū al-Mustaliq upon their embracing of Islam. According to another episode, representatives of the newly converted tribe of the Banū Hanīfa asked the Prophet for the water remaining after his ablution, as they wanted to sprinkle it on the floor of a church (bī'a) of theirs so that they can take it as a mosque. Such tribal mosques were usually built around, not in the heart of Medina, because in Medina there stood the chief mosque of the Prophet. Other tribal mosques included those attributed to the Banū Zafār, Banū Qurayza, Banū Hāritha, Banū Wā'il and Banū Harām.

Second: Private mosques

Private mosques also existed along side those attributed to tribes. Such private masjids also occasionally accommodated collective prayer. A good example is the one founded by 'Utbān b. Mālik, an Ansārī Companion who suffered delicate sightedness and who was usually in charge of leading his kin in prayer at their mosque. Usual torrents prevented 'Utbān from attending the mosque, so he asked the Prophet to allow him to perform prayer at his 'private mosque'. For that reason, 'Utbān's mosque, which was located in his house, needed to be canonized by the Prophet as a place for prayer. Other private mosques were attributed to al-Barā' b. 'Āzib and 'AbdAllāh b. 'Abbās. That of the former is also said to have located in his house [70]. After the Prophet's departure, countless mosques were built to commemorate episodes of his biography. This, however, cannot be simply argued to be a later tendency. That mosques were erected to celebrate the memory of the Prophet is evidenced by the fact that quite a number of mosques were already built for the very purpose in his lifetime.

CONCLUSION

The impact of K.A.C. Creswell and his reputation as a key pundit in the field of Islamic art and architecture have given his views a considerable weight. A number of such views on early Islamic architecture, nonetheless, fail to withstand the scrutiny of succeeding scholarship, especially given the findings of later excavations and research. Of these

views, some are palpably very critical for our perception of the genesis of the mosque type. Against this background, Creswell's theory on the first congregational mosque in Islam is evidently marred by clear inconsistencies. For him, the Prophet did not like to ordain congregational prayer in his time because he was not confident of the Bedouin converts' compliance to formal commitments. In keeping with this line of thinking, Creswell misinterpreted the big number of historical reports on the mosque of the Prophet and those on other mosques in his lifetime. Preferring to attribute the institution of the mosque to later political and sectarian prompts, he chose 45/665 when Ziyād b. Abih reconstructed the mosque of Basra as the year to witness the debut of a real congregational mosque. For Creswell, Ziyād did so because he wanted to use the mosque as a political platform to resist the mounting influence of the gatherings of Arabia's clans and kinships.

That being said, the mosque type is as old as Islam itself. It is well known according to Muslim tradition, and denied by Creswell et al, that the Prophet and the first Muhājirūn and Ansār embarked on the erection of a congregational mosque just after the Hijra. This is, nonetheless, not the first mosque in Islam as believed by many Muslims. Nor is it the one which the Prophet built for the Banū 'Amr b. 'Awf at Qubā'. There is indeed historical evidence that mosques began to be founded even prior to the Prophet's emigration to Medina. In Mecca these were very rare and did not have the guise of true mosques, since they served as places for individual, rather than, collective prayer. Rather, the first mosque to be set for congregational prayer was founded by As'ad b. Zurāra who is reported to have led the earliest Ansār in prayer over two years before the Prophet's emigration to Medina. When the Prophet arrived, he merged the mosque of As'ad to the area of his mosque so as to give enough room for the growing Muslim community. Just in the lifetime of the Prophet other mosques were erected of which few were supervised by him, some were tribal mosques and others were attributed to Muslim individuals.

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