Early Terminology of Mosque Architecture

By Essam Ayyad

WORD COUNT 9644
TIME SUBMITTED 21-OCT-2024 08:14PM
PAPER ID 112467030

Early Terminology of Mosque Architecture: The Prophet's Mosque as the Archetypal Model

Introduction

Available literary and archaeological evidence suggests that, at the inception of Islam, the Arabs in the heartland regions of Arabia, such as Najd and the Ḥijāz, did not possess a significant architectural heritage, which noticeably influenced the early architectural forms of mosques and the vocabulary used to describe them. The terminology employed by early Arabic sources to describe the features of the first Islamic structures was as basic as the structures themselves. As mosque architecture evolved into its distinctive classical forms, the associated lexicon progressed through stages of refinement and specialization. For example, the shaded front section of the mosque was known by various terms in historical sources, including *ʿarīsh*, *ẓullat al-qibla*, *muqaddam al-masjid*, *ṣadr al-masjid*, *bayt al-ṣalāh*, and *riwāq al-qibla*, among others. The use of these appellations can be interpreted from both a chronological and geographical standpoint, each closely tied to specific cultural factors and the evolution of the architectural element as such. The choice of terms was often shaped by the vernacular language of early authors, their exposure to existing architectural traditions, or even a retrospective interpretation of earlier structures. In some instances, contemporary but less precise terminology was employed to describe older features, reflecting how the descriptions were often influenced by the evolving architectural context of the time. Generally, the glossary of early mosque architecture offers rich insights into the adaptation and transformation of Islamic architectural traditions, shaped by regional variations, linguistic influences, and the gradual development of mosque forms. This evolving vocabulary not only mirrors the associated architectural progression in forms, but also underscores the interplay between language, cultural influences, and architectural evolution *per se*.

This research seeks to illuminate the etymology and philological evolution of mosque architectural terminology as found in early Arabic sources. In this context, the Prophet's mosque in Madīna, which served as the archetypal model for subsequent mosque architectural types worldwide, will be used as a referential case study. Special attention will be given to the various architectural phases the Prophet's mosque underwent in the first century AH, as described in narratives from the first four centuries. For a more comprehensive understanding, however, later phases and sources will also be considered, though not as extensively. This time frame is highlighted because the earliest surviving source was not written until the second half of the second/eighth century. The paper begins with an analysis of the Arabic terms

used for 'mosque' and explores the reasons for, as well as the implications of, their variations. It then transitions to examining the descriptive discourses employed by the earliest historical reports on the Prophet's mosque during his lifetime, scrutinizing the terminology used to describe its architectural elements, which later became normative in mosque architecture. The discussion subsequently addresses the terminology associated with the mosque's reconstructions by the caliphs ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, and al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik. The study concludes with an exploration of the visual depictions and phraseology applied by two contemporary accounts following al-Walīd's reconstruction and the subsequent enhancements by a number of ʿAbbāsid caliphs.

Masjid, Jāmiʿ, Muṣallā, Mirbad, and *Bayt Allāh*

In Arabic, the mosque is commonly called '*masjid*'. This term, also historically pronounced as *masjad* and *masyid*,[1] is believed by modern philologists to have its roots in the Aramaic term '*msgd'*', which signified a worship site, stele, or sacred column, and is documented as early as the fifth century BC in the Elephantine Papyri. Meanwhile, the Syriac form '*msgd'*' and the Amharic '*masged*' are regarded as later adaptations borrowed from Arabic. The term '*ms¹gd*', meaning 'a prayer hall or oratory', is also present in Epigraphic South Arabian.[2] Arabic lexica, however, identify '*masjid*' as a locative noun that denotes the place where a worshipper prostrates (*yasjud*) in prayer.[3] During the pre-Hijra time, '*masjid*' primarily referred to significant religious sites like al-Bayt al-Ḥarām, 'the Meccan Sacred Mosque', and al-Masdjid al-Aqṣā, 'the Furthest Mosque' in Jerusalem. Additionally, it was used for more 'private' places of worship, such as the mosque which Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq reportedly built in the court of his domicile (*dār*) in Makka.[4] However, the immigration to Yathrib marked

---

[1] See al-Jurāʿī, *Tuḥfat al-rākiʿ wa-l-sājid bi-aḥkām al-masājid*, eds. Ṣāliḥ Sālim al-Nahām, Muḥammad Bānī al-Maṭayrī, Ṣabāḥ ʿAbd al-Karīm al-ʿAnzī and others (Farawāniyya: Wazārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyya, 2004), p. 47.

[2] A. F. L. Beeston and others, *Sabaic Dictionary* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban; Louvain: Peeters, 1982), p. 125; A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān* (Cairo: Oriental Institute Baroda, 1938), pp. 263-4; J. Pedersen and others, art., 'Masdjid', *EI²* (1991), vi, 644-707 (p. 644); Jeremy Johns (ed.), 'The ''House of the Prophet'' and the Concept of the Mosque', *Bayt al-Maqdis: Jerusalem and Early Islam* (1999), ii. 59–112 (p. 89); Jonathan M. Bloom, 'Mosque', in *Encyclopædia of the Qurʾān*, (2003), iii, pp. 426-37 (pp. 426-7).

[3] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, eds. ʿA. al-Kabīr, M. A. Ḥasab Allāh and H. M. al-Shādhilī, rev. edn, 6 vols (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981), iii, 1941. See also Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Zarkashī, *Iʿlām al-sājid bi-aḥkām al-masājid*, ed. M. Marāghī, 5th edn (Cairo: Ministry of Waqfs, 1999), pp. 26-8.

[4] Al-Bukhārī, no. 476; In this article, all the *ḥadīths* from the six canonical collections will be referenced, along with their respective numbers, from *Mawsūʿat al-ḥadīth al-sharīf: al-kutub al-sitta, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Sunan Abī Dāwūd, Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī, Sunan al-Nasāʾī wa-Sunan Ibn Māja*, rev. Shaykh Ṣāliḥ b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl al-Shaykh (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1999). See also Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī bī-sharḥ 'Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī'*, 14 vols (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Ḥalabī, 1959), ii, 110.

the institution of the earliest Islamic state, with the Prophet's mosque serving as the mainstay of the nascent Islamic society.

After the early conquests, a number of garrison towns (*amṣār*) were established, each featuring a congregational mosque at its centre. These mosques, where the Friday sermon was held and prayers were usually led by the caliph's agent, were referred to by the local chroniclers as *al-masjid al-jāmiʿ* or simply *al-jāmiʿ* (i.e. the civic place in which communal prayers are performed), to distinguish them from smaller tribal mosques.[5] Early informants, such as Ibn Khordadbeh (d. 300/913), in order to state the existence of a congregational mosque in a given district, referred to it as having *jāmiʿ* and *minbar*. Sometimes, simply referring to a *minbar* in it, i.e. where *khuṭba*s were delivered, was sufficient: '*fīhā minbar*',[6] '*lahā minbar*'.[7] Additionally, because the mosque served as the nucleus of state and community, it was occasionally referred to as *balāṭ al-khalīfa*, i.e. caliphal court or headquarters.[8]

Another term that was used to denote prayer spaces was *muṣallā*, 'literally referring to a place in which prayer is performed'. In the early textual records, the designation '*muṣallā*' is primarily attributed to Muṣallā al-ʿĪd, an expansive outdoor area situated roughly 1000 cubits west of the Prophet's mosque, reserved for Eid prayers.[9] This term not only delineated this specific prayer venue but also highlighted its spaciousness, distinguishing it from the more confined spaces of the Prophet's mosque and other community mosques and physical structures. It was particularly favoured for large congregational gatherings, such as the prayers for feast days and for praying in supplication for rain (*ṣalāt al-istisqāʾ*). Additionally, the term '*muṣallā*' was employed to specify a particular spot within a mosque where a (prominent) worshipper consistently engaged in prayer. The Prophet is reported to have said: 'The angels keep on praying for one of you as long as he remains in his own *muṣallā*, saying: "O Allāh, forgive him. O Allāh, have mercy upon him", as long as he does not

---

[5] See Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-akhbāruhā (The History of the Conquests of Egypt, North Africa and Spain)*, ed. Charles C. Torrey (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1922), pp. 91-2; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Maʿārif*, ed. Tharwat ʿUkāsha, 2nd edn, (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1969), p. 563; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, eds. A. Anīs al-Ṭabbāʿ and U. Anīs al-Ṭabbāʿ (Beirut: Dār al-Nashr li-l-Jāmiʿiyyīn, 1957), p. 402), Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-nafisa wa-yalīhi Kitāb al-Buldān li-l-Yaʿqūbī* (ed. M. J. De Goeje: *Kitâb al-aʿlâḳ al-nafîsa. . . et Kitâb al-boldân*; Leiden: Brill, 1891), p. 116.

[6] Ibn Khordadbeh, *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1889), p. 189.

[7] Ibn Abd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, eds. Mufīd Qumayḥa and ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Tarḥīnī, 3rd edn, 9 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1983), vii, 282.

[8] Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh M. al-Darwīsh, 2 vols (Damascus: Dār Yaʿrub, 2004), ii, 25. See also K. A. C. Creswell (ed.), *Early Muslim Architecture: with a Contribution on the Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Great Mosque in Damascus by Marguerite Gautier-van Berchem* (New York: Hacker Art Books, [1940, 1969], 2 vols. in 3, 1979), i. 1, 44-5.

[9] Oleg Grabar (ed.), *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 103. See also Pedersen, 'Masdjid', p. 653.

invalidate his ablution'.[10] The old references to the so-called 'Muṣallā Rasūli-l-llāh' denote the exact location within the Prophet's mosque where he customarily prayed.[11] Similarly, when describing the mosque of Damascus in his time, Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217) referred to a spot known as Muṣallā Abū al-Dardāʾ, indicating the place where the Companion Abū al-Dardāʾ used to perform his prayers.[12] Some medieval commentators, however, broadened the term '*muṣallā*' to encompass the entire mosque proper, indicating a shift in the semantic scope of the term over time.

Contrary to popular perception, the Prophet's mosque in Madīna (known as Yathrib in pre-Islamic times) was not the first congregational mosque in Islam.[13] It was preceded by the one which he established for the Banū ʿAmr b. ʿAwf at Qubāʾ during the course of his migration from Makka to Yathrib. Both mosques, however, were preceded by the one founded in the latter town by Asʿad b. Zurāra, a prominent member of the Khazraj tribe, who embraced Islam in 620 AD—before the First ʿAqaba Pledge—thus becoming the first among Yathrib leaders to embrace Islam. The earliest textual evidence concerning this rudimentary mosque comes from Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), who described it as *jidār mujaddar*. While '*jidār*' denotes a structural wall, the modifier '*mujaddar*' is derived from the root '*ja-da-ra*', 'to enclose'.[14] Hence, it was a roofless constructed enclosure, that was oriented towards Bayt al-Maqdis in Jerusalem.[15] Upon migrating to Madīna, the Prophet sought to construct a larger mosque to accommodate the now larger Muslim community. Consequently, he requested Asʿad to integrate his mosque into the new structure and to sell him the contiguous *mirbad*, 'a threshing floor for dates' for the expansion. The location where the Prophet set up his mosque was called *mirbad* by many sources and *baydar* by others.[16] Both expressions denote a threshing floor (for dates). As explained by the early philologist Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim (d. 224/838), the terms *mirbad* and *jarīn* are the Ḥijāzī counterparts to the Syrian *andar* and the Iraqi *baydar*.[17] Derived from the root *ra-ba-da*, meaning to confine or restrict movement, *mirbad* is an old Arabic word used to

---

[10] See al-Bukhārī, nos. 445, 659.

[11] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, 20 vols (Jiza: Dār Hajr, 1997), iv, 540.

[12] Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥlat Ibn Jubayr* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 1964), p. 238.

[13] See Essam S. Ayyad, 'Revisiting K.A.C. Creswell's Theory on the First Mosque in Islam', *Journal of Islamic Architecture*, 7 (2017), 188-95.

[14] See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, i, 566; al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās al-balāgha*, ed. Muḥammad B. ʿUyūn al-Sūd, 2 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1998), i, 125.

[15] Ibn Saʿd, *K. al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, ed. ʿAlī M. ʿUmar, 11 vols (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), i, 205.

[16] Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, p. 12; Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *ʿUyūn al-athar fī funūn al-maghāzī wa-l-shamāʾil wa-l-siyar*, ed. M. al-Khaṭrāwī and Muḥyī al-Dīn Mistū, 2 vols (Medina: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1992), i, 316; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafā bi-akhbār dār al-muṣṭafā*, ed. M. Muḥyī ad-Dīn, 4 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, [Cairo, 1955] 1984), i, 322-4.

[17] See Ibn Manẓūr (*Lisān*, iii, 1556), quoting Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim.

refer to a place where camels or livestock are kept or confined, often used as a gathering place for camels and their trade. Later, it came to designate any 'enclosed' spot where livestock, crops or fruit are kept or stored.

Beside the Prophet's mosque, the mosque at Qubāʾ was also established on a *mirbad*. The transformation of such sites into mosques involved, in addition to preparing the land, merely erecting a quadrangular enclosure with the front wall aligned towards the *qibla*, which partly explained the selection. The nearly complete hypaethral configuration of the two mosques accounts for an incident involving a defiant hypocrite, Abū ʿĀmir al-Rāhib, who referred to the mosque of Qubāʾ disparagingly as the '*mirbad*' of the Banū ʿAmr b. ʿAwf.[18] This observation might also elucidate the diverse array of episodes reported to have occurred within the Prophet's mosque that some deem inappropriate for a place of worship.[19]

The Prophet referred to mosques as the places most beloved to God on Earth,[20] and they are often called '*buyūt* Allāh' (meaning 'houses of God').[21] Ibn ʿAbbās narrated that the Prophet said: "Mosques are the houses of God on Earth […]".[22] Naturally, given Islamic theology's absolute rejection of any notion of divine incarnation in the material world, this designation was never taken literally; the mosque was always understood to be simply a space dedicated to the remembrance and worship of God. Thus, the attribution of mosques to God is meant as an expression of reverence, not to suggest any physical manifestation of the Divine. The Qurʾān describes mosques as "[…] houses [of worship], which God has permitted to be raised to honour; for the celebration, in them, of His name: in them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings (again and again)".[23] In subsequent periods, Muslim civilization introduced a range of religious architectural forms, including madrasas, *khanqā*s, *zāwiya*s, and *ribāṭ*s. These buildings, among others, were considered sacred to varying extents due to their use as spaces for prayer, while also fulfilling educational and social roles, thus enhancing their sanctity.[24]

---

[18] This was reported by al-Wāqidī on the authority of ʿĀṣim b. ʿAdiyy (d. 45/665).

[19] Essam S. Ayyad, 'The 'House of the Prophet' or the 'Mosque of the Prophet'?', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 24 (2013), 273-334.

[20] Ibn Khuzayma, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. M. Muṣṭafā al-Aʿẓamī, 4 vols (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1980), no. 1293.

[21] Abū Dāwūd, no. 1455; Muslim, nos. 666, 2699.

[22] This *ḥadīth* is generally regarded as weak (*ḍaʿīf*). Nevertheless, in the Qurʾān, God refers to the Kaʿba as belonging to Him, using the term '*baytī*', 'My House'. Qurʾān 2:125; 22:26. Additionally, in *ḥadīth* literature, the term 'Bayt Allāh' specifically and exclusively refers to the Kaʿba.

[23] Qurʾān 24:36.

[24] See Essam Ayyad, 'What Made a Place Holy in Early Islam? An Inquiry into Meaning and Doctrinal Modalities', *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 19 (2024), 25-46.

The mosque of the Prophet in his time

Although it was not the *first* mosque from a chronological viewpoint, as described above, the mosque of the Prophet was always understood to represent the pre-eminent mosque in terms of institutional and architectural precedence. It established the architectural prototype for subsequent mosques, typically featuring an open courtyard encircled by four porticoes. Therefore, it is crucial for our examination of early mosque architectural terminology to explore the terms employed by the earliest sources in describing its architectural components. The terms under review are largely taken from Madīna's earliest local chronicler, Ibn Zabāla, who died shortly after the year 199/814. His monograph, *Akhbār al-Madīna*,[25] follows only *al-Hujja ʿalā ahl al-Madīna* by Muḥammad b. al-Hasan al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805) in chronology. Nonetheless, Ibn Zabāla's treatise stands as the oldest detailed exploration of the city's topography and landmarks, while the earlier chronicle by al-Shaybānī predominantly offers a comparative study of Madīnian jurisprudence *vis-à-vis* other venerable *fiqh* schools, especially those based in Iraq.

Another significant, even if missing, early work was *Akhbār al-Madīna* by Yaḥyā al-ʿAqīqī (277/890). However, Ibn Zabāla's book is certainly more comprehensive than Yaḥyā's, who, in fact, sourced much of his material from the former. This makes Ibn Zabāla our earliest and foremost source on the Prophet's mosque. The methodologies and insights presented in Ibn Zabāla's text exerted a profound influence on later historians of the city. Among the surviving works inspired by his approach are *al-Manāsik* by Abū Isḥāq al-Ḥarbī (d. 285/898),[26] *al-Durra al-thamīna* by Ibn al-Najjār (d. 643/1245),[27] *al-Taʿrīf bi-mā ansat al-hijra* by al-Maṭarī (d. 741/1340),[28] and *Taḥqīq al-nuṣra* by Zayn al-Dīn al-Marāghī (d. 816/1413).[29] However, the most significant of these subsequent chronicles was *Wafāʾ al-wafā* by al-Samhūdī (d. 911/1505), which is distinguished by its extensive and valuable content that encompasses Madīna's historical narrative, topographical layout, urban development, key landmarks, along with the complex agrarian and irrigation schemes during its historical peak.[30]

---

[25] Ibn Zabāla, *Akhbār al-Madīna*, ed. Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Salāma (Medina: Markaz Buḥūth al-Madīna, 2014).

[26] Ibn Isḥāq al-Ḥarbī, *Kitāb al-Manāsik wa-amākin ṭuruq al-ḥajj wa-maʿālim al-Jazīra*, ed. Ḥamad al-Jāsir, (Riyadh: Dār al-Yamāma, 1969).

[27] Ibn al-Najjār, *al-Durra al-thamīna fī tārīkh al-Madīna*, ed. M. Z. ʿAzab (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa, 1995).

[28] Al-Maṭarī, *al-Taʿrīf bi-mā ansat al-hijra min maʿālim dār al-Hijra*, ed. Sulaymān al-Raḥīlī (Riyadh: Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, 2005).

[29] Al-Marāghī, *Taḥqīq al-nuṣra bi-talkhīṣ maʿālim dār al-Hijra*, ed. M. al-Aṣmaʿī (Medina: al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmiy, 1955).

[30] See Essam S. Ayyad, 'An Historiographical Analysis of the Arabic Accounts of Early Mosques: With Special Reference to Those at Madina, Baṣra and Kūfa', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 30 (2019), 1-33.

Numerous reports by Ibn Zabāla draw authority from various Companions (*ṣaḥābīs*) and Followers (*tābiʿīs*) of the Prophet, and hence appear across several *ḥadīth* collections, particularly those by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/875). Key early narrators regarding the Prophet's mosque include renowned figures such as Anas b. Mālik, Bilāl b. Rabāḥ, Umm Salama, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh, Ṭalq b. ʿAlī, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741–2), and Ṣāliḥ b. Kaysān (d. post- 140/758). As we will observe, the language employed by these and other informants to portray the Prophet's mosque during his time was as straightforward as the structure itself. The terminology was palpably primitive, shaped by pre-Islamic Arabic culture and indigenous building traditions. Moreover, the majority of scholars chronicling Madīna's past were natives of the city, which may elucidate the occasional convergence, and at times exact overlap, of the terminologies reported by different sources. This recurring linguistic consistency can also be explained by later historians' tendency to replicate the specific terms used by the individuals they referenced.

In its early form, the Prophet's mosque was a simple rectangular structure, primarily constructed from adobe or mudbrick, locally referred to as *labin*.[31] This term specifically described a type of building material made from water, earth and organic materials like straw, which is shaped into bricks and dried in the sun rather than fired in kilns. For thousands of years, this construction method was widely used in ancient societies to build houses and structures, particularly in hot, arid regions like Arabia where wood was scarce and clay and water were more readily available. Situated in the eastern part of the Ḥijāz region, Madīna lies between central Arabia, where *labin* was the typical building material, and the volcanic plateaus of the western Ḥijāz, where rock was more commonly used. Consequently, the city's residents developed a local style that incorporated both *labin* and stone. The former was plentiful in the surrounding defiles, while stones had to be brought from the nearby lava beds. For the construction of the Prophet's mosque, stones were sourced from the nearby hillsides, and *labin* was prepared in an area on the outskirts of Madīna, called Baqīʿ al-Khabkhaba.[32]

In the initial stages of the mosque's construction, a local building method known as *samīṭ* was employed. This involved a rudimentary layering of adobe bricks. Progressing to the second phase, the construction methodology evolved to *saʿīda*, where the walls were fortified to a thickness of one and a half bricks, using bricks of

---

[31] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, i, 206; Ibn al-Najjār, *Durra*, p. 146; Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, i, 336.

[32] Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, i, 334. See also al-Fayrūzabādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba fī maʿālim ṭāba*, ed. Ḥamad al-Jāsir (Riyadh: Manshūrāt Dār al-Yamāma, 1969), pp. 63-4; Essam Ayyad, *The Making of the Mosque: A Survey of Religious Imperatives* (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, 2019).

varying dimensions. In the final phase, an even more refined technique, referred to in the sources as *dhakar wa-unthā*, was applied.[33] This method featured a crosswise placement of two pairs of bricks, substantially augmenting the wall thickness to adequately support the newly introduced roof structure. This architectural enhancement required raising the wall height to accommodate the newly introduced roof for the front section (see below). In later periods, the term '*ṭūb*' is commonly paired with '*labin*' to refer to units of unbaked bricks as '*ṭūb labin*', but such usage is absent in the early records of mosque architecture. Whenever a unit of unbaked brick is meant, the word '*labina*' is used instead. In early sources, '*ṭūb*' primarily denotes kiln-baked brick, more typically referred to as *ājurr*. A more generic sense of the word came at a later stage due to more influential cultural exchange. This could relate well to the fact that the Arabic term *ṭūb* was derived from the Coptic ⲧⲱⲃ (*tōb*), which in turn traces its origin to the ancient Egyptian word ḏbt (*dēbt*), used to refer to sun-dried bricks.[34] Interestingly, the English 'adobe' originates from the Spanish term *adobe*, which, in turn, is derived from the Arabic *al-ṭūba* or *at-tūba*.

The Prophet's structure(s) rested on a foundational base of stone (*asās min ḥijāra*) and featured entries on three sides, excluding the *qibla* wall (*jidār al-qibla*).[35] While this is how the majority of early sources refer to the *qibla* wall, some, such as Anas b. Mālik, used the term '*qibla*' alone, which more basically denotes the prayer direction or the front area of the mosque, to signify the front wall of the Prophet's mosque. A similar usage is reported by Ibn Rusta, citing Khawla al-Sulamiyya, the wife of the Companion ʿUthmān b. Mazʿūn, who was said to be the first to wash the *qibla*—here referring to the *qibla* wall quite obviously—and anoint it with *khalūq*, 'a paste of aromatic spices, particularly saffron'.[36] Indeed, all *ḥadīths* that describe the Prophet delineating the *qibla*, whether for his own mosque or others, suggest that the term '*qibla*' refers to the front wall of such mosques. The importance of getting that ruling architectural element laid precisely cannot be overemphasized, given that this wall, or more precisely, the straight line it delineates, indicates the direction toward which worshippers are required to orient themselves. Even in subsequent periods, the significance of the *miḥrāb* was not inherent; rather, worshippers were directed not towards the centre of the *miḥrāb*, but along the line on which it is aligned.

The entrances consisted merely of basic apertures in the wall devoid of any shutters (*furaj lā aghlāq ʿalayhā*).[37] *Furaj* is the plural of *furja*, which basically refers to a

---

[33] Ibn al-Najjār, *Durra*, p. 147; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, i, 335-6, 346.
[34] See Ṭāriq Abū Hashīma, *Uṣūl al-Kalimāt* (Giza: Dār Halā, 2007), p. 66.
[35] Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, i, 206; Ibn al-Najjār, *Durra*, p. 146; al-Maṭarī, *Taʿrīf*, p. 103; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, i, 336.
[36] Ibn Rusta, *Aʿlāq*, p. 66.
[37] Ibn al-Maḥjūb, *Qurrat al-ʿayn fī awṣāf al-ḥaramayn*, leaf 65.

gap or an opening between two things, often indicating a small space through which one can look or pass an object. It is derived from the root *fa-ra-ja*, which means to open or create a gap. *Aghlāq*, on the other hand, is the plural of *ghalaq*, which means locking or closing something, e.g. a door or window. This root is also found in several other Semitic languages with similar meanings. The total height of the enclosure, initially oriented towards Bayt al-Maqdis, slightly exceeded that of a *qāma*—defined as a fathom or the 'height' of an average man—or a *basṭa*,[38] which describes the stature of a standing man with his arms fully extended (*mabsūṭa*) upwards.

The rapid increase in the number of congregants necessitated successive expansions of the mosque. Another expansion was imperative yet again before the *qibla* side was eventually covered with a rudimentary shelter (*ẓulla*), following complaints from the congregants about the intense heat of the sun. Derived from the Arabic root *ẓa-la-la*, 'to provide shade',[39] the term *ẓulla* refers to anything that offers shade from the sun's rays, whether natural such as trees or man-made like arcades or canopies. The pillars (*ʿumud*) of the mosque[40] were constructed from palm trunks (*judhūʿ al-nakhl*), which some described as 'splits' of palm trunks (*shiqqᵃⁿ shiqqa*),[41] and they supported transverse wooden beams (*ʿawāriḍ*), which were overlaid with plaited palm fronds (*khaṣaf*) and brushwood, notably camel grass (*idhkhar*).[42]

Despite receiving suggestions to reconstruct the mosque in a more elaborate style, akin to Christian places of worship familiar to Arabs who had travelled to the Levant, the Prophet firmly declined, insisting on maintaining the mosque's original simplicity. This incident is of particular significance to our discussion as it represents the sole occasion on which the Prophet articulated his vision for the mosque's design in his own words: "I want it in the form of a few pieces of wood and twigs, and a booth like that of Moses (*thumām wa-khushaybāt wa-ẓulla ka-ẓullat Mūsā*)". In different narrations, when queried about the nature of Moses' booth, he explained, "When he stood up, his head touched the ceiling".[43] In another account, he described it as, "an arbour like that of Moses (*ʿarīsh ka-ʿarīsh Mūsā*)".[44] *ʿArīsh* literarily means a roof of brushwood and shrubs.[45]

---

[38] Ibn al-Najjār, *Durra*, p. 147; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, i, 335.
[39] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, iv, 2753; al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, i, 625; Ibn Abī Bakr al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-ṣiḥāḥ*, ed. Dāʾirat al-Maʿājim fī Maktabat Lubnān, rev. edn (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1989), p. 356.
[40] The plural forms of *ʿamūd* include: *ʿumud*, *ʿamad*, and *aʿmida*, see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, iv, 3097.
[41] Al-Marāghī, *Taḥqīq*, p. 44.
[42] Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, i, 335-6.
[43] al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, i, 339; Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, i, 206; Essam S. Ayyad, 'A Prophetic Perspective of Mosque Architecture', *The Islamic Quarterly*, 59 (2015), 117-72.
[44] Ibn Rusta, *Aʿlāq*, p. 66; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, i, 339.
[45] See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, iv, 2881; al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, i, 643; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār*, p. 373.

Following the redirection of the *qibla* from Bayt al-Maqdis in Jerusalem to the Kaʿba in Makka in the second year AH, an additional shelter was erected at the southern part of the mosque. The original one, now more frequently called *ṣuffa*, due to its composition of parallel rows of palm trunks (*ṣufūf al-nakhal*), was maintained to provide refuge for the most indigent among the Prophet's associates, who were subsequently known as the *ahl al-ṣuffa*, or 'the people of the portico' (considered to be one potential origin for the term 'Sufi').[46] It is worth noting here that the English word 'sofa' originates from the Arabic '*ṣuffa*'. The term passed into European languages through Turkish, where it was adapted as *sofa*.[47]

The above two shelters are widely considered the precursors to the later *riwāq* or *ruwāq*, typically translated as arcade, colonnade, or cloister in English. The surrounding open area (*raḥba*), which they bordered, is thought to be the origin of the later *ṣaḥn*, 'courtyard'. The term *raḥba* derives from the root *ra-ḥu-ba*, meaning 'to be wide enough to accommodate'.[48] The *raḥba* was an integral part of the pre-Islamic Arabian *dār*, 'house', taking its name from the fact that it was a wide space accommodating various household activities. Generally, three terms were used in early sources to describe the open areas attached to or included in mosques: *raḥba*, *fināʾ*, and *ṣaḥn*. The latter was most commonly applied when the courtyard was centrally located, typically surrounded by four porticoes, while the *fināʾ* referred to a more peripheral open space. For example, the first mosque of the Companion ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ in Fusṭāṭ was described by al-Maqrīzī as having "no *ṣaḥn*, but rather a surrounding *fināʾ*".[49]

Following his return from the battle of Khaybar in 7/628, the Prophet expanded the mosque significantly to accommodate the increasing number of worshippers, especially as many tribes were increasingly converting to Islam. After this final stage, the mosque of the Prophet was surrounded by numerous residences belonging to his Companions. We understand from one *ḥadīth* that some of these dwellings featured *khawkhas*, small doors or wickets embedded within the walls that faced the mosque and opened onto it.[50] Historically, these openings were customary in the walls

---

[46] See al-Barzinjī, *al-Tārīkh al-musammā nuzhat al-nāẓirīn fī masjid Sayyid al-awwalīn wa-l-ākhirīn* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Jamāliyya, 1914), p. 10.

[47] French also played a role in the transmission of the word into English. By the early 17th century, 'sofa' in English began to refer to a cushioned seat or long upholstered furniture for reclining, similar to how it is understood today.

[48] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, iii, 1605-6; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār*, p. 208.

[49] Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-l-iʿtibār bi dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l āthār: al-Maʿrūf bi-l khiṭaṭ al-maqrīziyya*, ed. M. Zaynuhum and M. Al-Sharqāwī, 3 vols (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1998), iii, 148.

[50] Al-Bukhārī, no. 467; Ibn al-Najjār, *Durra*, p. 161.

separating adjacent homes (of the same household) in pre-Islamic Arabian society,[51] primarily serving the functional purposes of providing light and air circulation. It is noteworthy that there is no direct linguistic connection between the word '*khawkha*', meaning a small opening between two houses, and its more familiar modern usage referring to a 'peach', known in classical Arabic as '*durrāq*'. The name of this well-known fruit may have originated in Persian or Turkish before making its way into Arabic. Therefore, the similarity in pronunciation between the two words is due to linguistic evolution, but they refer to different meanings and are not related in terms of linguistic origin or context.

The later introduction of the typical minaret was most likely instigated by the practices of Bilāl, the Prophet's muezzin, who traditionally called to prayer from the roof of a house near the mosque. Notably, the mosque constructed by the Prophet did at some stage include a structure referred to by later historical sources such as Ibn al-Najjār as a '*manār*', that was specifically for the *adhān*. Ibn Saʿd records that upon the construction of his mosque, the Prophet facilitated Bilāl's call to prayer from its rooftop by erecting an elevated platform for him. Known as al-Miṭmār,[52] this platform is mentioned in other accounts as an *usṭuwān murabbaʿa*, 'rectangular column' (occasionally also termed a *manāra*).[53] Ibn Zabāla continued to use the term *murabbaʿa* to designate any quadrangular column, or structure, in the mosque during his time. In order to ascend that structure, Bilāl reportedly used *aqtāb* (sing. *qitb*), which refers to a pile of small saddles, each typically about the size of a camel's hump.[54]

Historical accounts indicate that in 8/629, the Prophet adopted the use of a *minbar*, albeit a rudimentary one: a three-step seat constructed from lumber and sticks. Made of tamarisk wood (*ṭarfāʾ*) from a nearby grove, this simple device was to replace the palm stem (*jidhʿ*) against which he previously leaned during speeches. The Prophet himself referred to this pulpit as '*aʿwād*' (sing. *ʿūd*), and in another narration, '*aʿwād al-minbar*'.[55] It is interesting to note that Ibn Zabāla identified the piers of the *maqṣūra*, which was later added to the mosque by al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik and seen by him, as '*ʿīdān*' (another plural form of *ʿūd*),[56] indicating that this term—usually used to denote the Prophet's *minbar*—referred to planks and logs in general, not just sticks or rods as in today's usage. The term '*minbar*', said by some to be of an Abyssinian

[51] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, ii, 1284; al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, i, 269.
[52] In its simplest sense, a *miṭmār* refers to the string that a builder uses to outline the structure.
[53] Ibn al-Najjār, *Durra*, p. 164; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, ii, 530.
[54] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, v, 3523–4; al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, ii, 50.
[55] Al-Bukhārī, nos. 917, 2094, 2569.
[56] Ibn Zabāla, *Akhbār*, p. 114.

origin,[57] is also used by the Prophet in various other *ḥadīths* to describe this preaching platform,[58] which is said by Ibn Saʿd, on the authority of the Companion Tamīm al-Dārī, to have been inspired by Christian practices (i.e. ambos) observed in the Levant.[59] The term '*minbar*' is a place noun that originated from the verb *na-ba-ra*, 'to elevate', particularly in the context of amplifying one's voice. In mosque architecture, the *minbar* serves as the designated platform from which the *khaṭīb* delivers a religious discourse during the Friday sermon, typically projected at full volume. The lexicographer Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311-12) argues that the *minbar* is so named due to its 'elevated' form.[60]

Expansion by ʿUmar (r. 13-23/634-644)

The caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb undertook the reconstruction of the mosque in Madīna in 17/638 primarily due to the deterioration of the original palm trunks used in its construction. Additionally, the expansion was necessitated by the rapidly increasing congregation size that the original mosque could no longer accommodate. According to ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar (d. 74/693–4), his father meticulously replicated the architectural design of the Prophet's original structure. The materials used in this reconstruction also remained the same: unbaked bricks (*labin*) and date-palm leaves (*jarīd*), and he replaced the old palm trunks with new ones (*ʿumuduh khashab al-nakhl*).[61] It is of interest to note that the new trunks began to be called *asāṭīn* (sing. *usṭuwān* or *usṭuwāna*) by some narrators, such as Anas b. Mālik.[62] For the sake of differentiation, the term *sawārī* was more commonly used when referring to the palm trunks from the time of the Prophet,[63] possibly because that is how the Prophet referred to them himself. Alternatively, this differentiation between the two terms can be ascribed to the fact that during the Prophet's time, the pillars were made from splits (*shiqqa*) of palm stems, as mentioned earlier, while in ʿUmar's time, intact palm trunks were used. Therefore, they were called *usṭuwānat* due to their cylindrical shape, as *usṭuwāna*, originally derived from the Persian *usṭūn*, denotes cylindrical pillars.[64]

Planted in the same positions as the older trunks, these columns were later given names commemorating certain episodes from the Prophet's biography that they

---

[57] ʿĀṣim M. Rizq, *Muʿjam muṣṭalaḥat al-ʿimāra wa-l-funūn al-islāmiyya* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 2000), p. 30.

[58] al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-aḥadīth al-ṣaḥīḥa*, 7 vols (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1992-2002), no. 2363. See also ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, iv, 544.

[59] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, i, 215; Ibn al-Najjār, *Durra*, pp. 157-8.

[60] See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, vi, 4323.

[61] Al-Bukhārī, no. 446.

[62] See Ibn Zabāla, *Akhbār*, pp. 113-14.

[63] On the meaning of *sawārī* (sing. *sāriya*), see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, iii, 2004; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār*, p. 261.

[64] See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, iii, 2010, fn. 1.

witnessed: *usṭuwānat al-wufūd*, 'the column of delegates', *usṭuwānat al-tawba*, 'the column of repentance', and so on. This naming convention continued even after they were later replaced with stone pillars, and careful observers can still spot Ottoman-era descriptions of some of them in the current structure. In his descriptions of the Baṣra mosque, Yāqūt employed both terms '*asāṭīn*' and '*sawārī*', using the latter specifically to refer to columns appropriated as spolia. In his contemporary accounts of the Damascus mosque, Ibn Jubayr made distinctions among '*ʿamūd*', '*sāriya*', and '*rijl*', 'lit. leg', thereby differentiating various architectural elements: "It rested upon sixty-eight columns (*ʿamūd*), including fifty-four pillars (*sāriya*), eight plaster legs (*arjul*) interspersed among them, and two marble columns embedded into the wall".[65]

Expansion by ʿUthmān (r. 23–35/644–56)

In 29/649-50, the caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, who inherited a more affluent economy, reconstructed the mosque, enhancing its structure with better materials. However, this reconstruction of ʿUthmān faced open reservations from puritan voices of the time for allegedly deviating from the Prophet's more austere model.[66] However, ʿUthmān aimed to incorporate more durable materials to make the mosque more cost-efficient, while also honouring the space and facilitating its use. His motivation stemmed from the fact that the mosque had been repeatedly rebuilt in the past, partly due to the use of ephemeral materials. At his direction, the walls were constructed from uniformly carved stones (*ḥijāra manqūsha muṭābiqa*), finished with a stucco coating (*qaṣṣa*). This terminology was used by Ibn ʿUmar, as recorded by the majority of early sources.[67] In contrast, Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī (d. 630/1233), who came from Cizre in modern Turkey), employed the term '*jiṣṣ*' rather than '*qaṣṣa*', the latter being a term from the Ḥijāzī dialect predominantly used by informants from the Ḥijāz region.[68] *Jiṣṣ* (also *jaṣṣ*), on the other hand, may be derived from a common Semitic root associated with whiteness or whitewashing. Ibn Manẓūr had already noted its non-Arabic (possibly Persian) origin.[69] The architectural innovations during ʿUthmān's era included the inaugural use of the *maqṣūra*, which featured a roof constructed from teak wood (*sājj*) said to be brought from India.[70] The term itself originates from the verb *qa-ṣa-ra*, meaning 'to confine', as the *maqṣūra* was exclusively reserved for the ruler's use. This

[65] Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, p. 237.
[66] Muslim, no. 1190; al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-sunna*, eds. Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh and Shuʿayb al-Arnāʾūṭ, 2nd edn, 16 vols (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983), ii, 349; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ*, ii, 86-7.
[67] Al-Bukhārī, no. 446; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, iv, 533-4; Ibn al-Najjār, *Durra*, 174; al-Ḥarbī, *Manāsik*, p. 364; al-Maṭarī, *Taʿrīf*, pp. 231-2; al-Marjānī, *Bahja*, 128; al-Marāghī, *Taḥqīq*, p. 47; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, ii, 501-2.
[68] See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, v, 3652; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār*, p. 473. See also al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, ii, 83.
[69] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, i, 630.
[70] Ibn al-Najjār, *Durra*, p. 174; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, ii, 510.

chapel-like structure was consistently referred to as the *maqṣūra*, with no alternative designations recorded.

The columns, which were constructed from ashlar blocks, underwent precise drilling and were reinforced with iron dowels (*aʿmidat al-ḥadīd*) that were embedded within lead bedding.[71] The same technique is reported to have been used later for the Kūfa mosque when rebuilt by Ziyād b. Abīh in 50/670. According to al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Ziyād expressed his desired architectural vision for the mosque at Kūfa, particularly in terms of size and height, albeit struggling to articulate its specifics effectively: "I yearn for something which I cannot describe adequately (*ashtahī min dhālik shayʾ lā aqaʿ ʿalā ṣifatih*)". After some discussion, a builder who was previously employed by Khusrau advised the ruler that the only method to realize and construct the envisioned structure to perfection would involve utilizing stone columns sourced from al-Ahwāz mountains. These columns needed to be hollowed out, drilled, and assembled using lead and iron rods (*safāfīd*).[72]

Enlargement by al-Walīd I (r. 86–96/705–15)

The Umayyad caliph al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik was an aesthete who ruled a more settled and established *pan-Islamica* than his predecessors. Besides rebuilding the Prophet's mosque at Madīna as well as the mosques in Fusṭāṭ and Ṣanʿāʾ, his construction projects included the erection of the mosques of Damascus, ʿAnjar, Khirbat al-Minyā, and Jabal Says. He also decorated the Aqṣā mosque in 87/706 and collaborated with his brother, Sulaymān, to construct the mosque in Aleppo. The era of al-Walīd marked a significant advancement in Islamic art and architecture, which was, of course, part of the Umayyad propagandistic agenda. This architectural renaissance was driven by active caliphal patronage, abundant state resources, and the incorporation of foreign artistic traditions and skilled craftsmen. These factors collectively contributed to notable innovations in mosque architectural features and, in turn, the development of specialized terminologies to describe them.

The mosque of the Prophet reportedly retained its afore-mentioned form from the time of ʿUthmān until the reign of al-Walīd. Under the supervision of his governor in Madīna, ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 101/720), the mosque underwent substantial expansion and renovation, transforming it into a grand and impressive structure. The work, which took three years (88–91/707–710), included expanding the mosque's area to accommodate the swelling crowds of resident worshippers and pilgrims. This involved incorporating the surrounding houses, including those of the Prophet's

[71] Ibn al-Najjār, *Durra*, p. 174; al-Barzinjī, *Nuzha*, p. 12.

[72] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. M. Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 2nd edn, 10 vols (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1967), iv, 46; Creswell, *EMA*, i. 1, 46.

wives, into the mosque's area, nearly doubling its size to approximately 100x90 metres. The new design featured an expanded courtyard (*ṣaḥn*) and a larger prayer hall with five horizontal rows of columns (*ṣufūf muqaddama*). The columns themselves (*sawārī* or *usṭwānāt*) were connected by arches that supported a wooden roof (*saqf*) made of teakwood (*sājj*), which was gilded and adorned with intricate carvings.[73]

It is said that the reconstruction project employed not only local workers but also Greek and Coptic craftsmen, as well as materials (particularly for mosaics).[74] Before the reconstruction, al-Walīd reportedly sent a letter to the Byzantine Emperor (referred to by the Muslim sources as *malik al-Rūm*): "We wish to [re-]construct the mosque of our Grand Prophet. Therefore, help us with workers and mosaics (*fusayfisāʾ*)".[75] The reported incorporation of Greek input into mosque architecture and decoration aimed to provide the structure with a transformative and innovative aesthetic. It also had a clear influence on the associated terminology. For example, the above Arabic word used for mosaics, namely *fusayfisāʾ*, has its origins in the Greek language, derived from the word 'ψηφιδωτόν' (*psēphidōtón*), which literally means 'made of small pebbles' or 'a composition of small pieces'. This term was transferred into Arabic through Syriac or Greek, and was used to describe mosaic art forms, which involve assembling small pieces of glass, stone, or other materials to create images or designs.[76] It is said that the Byzantine king also sent lanterns (*qanādīl*, sing. *qindīl*) along with their chains. Here as well, the Arabic term traces its origin to the Greek language; '*qindīl*' comes from the Greek *kandíla* (κανδήλα), meaning 'candle' or 'lamp'.[77] This incident, however, does not mark the first large-scale use of lanterns for night-time lighting in Arabia—a feat attributed to the caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, who reportedly used simpler devices to illuminate the mosques during the nights of the holy month of Ramaḍān.[78] Later, the *qanādīl* were used in the Muslim societies to light homes, streets, and public spaces, typically consisting of a container holding oil and a wick that was lit to provide light. Afterwards, the term was used to refer to any type of hanging lighting device.

---

[73] On al-Walid's reconstruction, see Ibn al-Najjār, *Durra*, pp. 174-8; Ibn Isḥāq al-Ḥarbī, *Manāsik*, pp. 364-70; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, ii, 513-35.

[74] See Ayyad, *Making of the Mosque*, pp. 353-4.

[75] Ibn al-Najjār, *Durra*, p. 175; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, ii, 518–9. Before that, mosaics were used, presumably for the first time in Islamic religious architecture, by ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr when he rebuilt the Kaʿba in 64–65/684.

[76] See Nizār al-Ṭarshān, 'al-Madāris al-asāsiyya li-l-fusayfisāʾ al-umawiyya fī Bilād al-Shām', (unpublished MA dissertation, University of Jordan, 1989), pp. 3-10; Abū Hashīma, *Uṣūl*, p. 72; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, v, 3413; Rizq, *Mosaic*, p. 214.

[77] See M. al-Tunjī, *al-Muʿarrab wa-l-dakhīl fī al-lugha al-ʿarabiyya wa-ādābuhā* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 2005), p. 251; Abū Hashīma, *Uṣūl*, p. 80.

[78] Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, ii, 670.

The mosque was constructed using finely cut ashlar stones (*ḥijāra manqūsha muṭābiqa*), coated with lime mortar (*qaṣṣa/nūra*), and embellished with friezes (*ṭunuf*). It also featured a fountain (*fawwāra*) and was equipped with lead spouts (*mayāzīb min al-raṣāṣ*). For the first time, a new decorative element—crenellations (*shurufāt* or *shuraf*)—was introduced, which subsequently became a signature motif in mosque architecture.[79] The columns were clad in stone and marble (*marmar*), giving the mosque a more monumental appearance. The Arabic word *marmar*, used by all relevant sources, originates also from a Greek word, *mármaros* (μάρμαρος), meaning 'shining stone'.[80] It was used to denote marble or alabaster, which was a valuable material in ancient Greek and Roman arts and architecture. The term was introduced into Arabic through intermediary languages such as Persian or Syriac, where it came to refer specifically to marble.[81] During al-Walīd's reconstruction, the workers and artisans of marble, said to be among the Greek labour force, are referred to in the Arabic sources as '*murakhkhimūn*' (from *rukhām*, another Arabic term for marble).

The new construction of al-Walīd included the addition of four minarets (*manārāt*) at the mosque corners, which many consider to be the earliest example of this architectural element in Islamic architecture.[82] In early Islamic sources, three terms are commonly used to refer to the minaret: '*ṣawmaʿa*', '*miʾdhana*', and '*manāra*'. The first of these initially referred to towers typically used as granaries as well as those inhabited by hermits. It was later applied to the earliest minarets, which were typically cubic structures. This term was predominantly found in North Africa and Syria, regions where minarets constructed prior to the thirteenth century AD generally featured a square design akin to traditional grain silos. The second term, '*miʾdhana*', with variations in pronunciation such as '*maʾdhana*' and '*mīdhana*', stems from its key function as a platform for *adhān*, 'call to prayer'.[83] This term itself could have originated from the triliteral root '*a-dhi-na*', meaning 'to give permission',[84] in the context of commencing a prayer when its time is due. More likely, it may have been derived directly from another form of the verb, '*adh-dha-na*', which means to inform (worshippers about the time of prayer), literally making them hear it with their ears (*udhun*). From the late Middle Ages onwards, '*miʾdhana*' has become the most commonly used term for a minaret. The third term, *manāra*—which is obviously the

[79] The above Arabic terms are mainly reported by from Ibn Zabāla, as well as al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Rusta, al-Muqaddasī, al-Qazwīnī, and Ibn Kathīr.
[80] See Abū Hashīma, *Uṣūl*, p. 94.
[81] From Greek, it passed into other languages, such as Latin '*marmor*', which later evolved into the English word 'marble'.
[82] Ibn Isḥāq al-Ḥarbī, *Manāsik*, p. 368.
[83] See Rizq, *Muʿjam*, p. 307.
[84] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, i, 51-4; al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, i, 23; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār*, pp. 10-11.

origin of the English 'minaret' (especially when used in a genitive construction, such as *manārat* [*al-masjid*], or in the plural form *manārāt*)—is derived from *manār*, which refers to a lighthouse: a place that emits light (*nūr*), typically associated with fire (*nār*). Given their towering stature and visibility from great distances, minarets were aptly termed '*manāra*'.[85] Additionally, '*manār*' connotes a banner or beacon that serves as a guiding landmark during large assemblage, such as in wars or parades, further emphasizing the minaret's role as a prominent and guiding physical structure.[86]

Of all the above three terms, '*manāra*' is reported to have been used by the Prophet, particularly to denote the White Minaret in Damascus where Jesus Christ is prophesied to descend to earth in the End Times: "Then, he [i.e., Jesus] descends near the white minaret to the east of Damascus".[87] The term *manāra* was also used by al-Balādhurī to refer to what some specialists consider the first true minaret, namely the one introduced to the mosque of Baṣra when it was rebuilt by Ziyād b. Abīh in 45/665. Sometimes, historians used different terms to refer to the same minaret(s), often influenced by their own dialects. For instance, both Ibn Zabāla and Ibn Rusta used '*manārāt*' to describe the minarets added by al-Walīd to the Prophet's mosque, while the Maghribī traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 779/1377) referred to them as *ṣawāmiʿ*.[88] Similarly, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/870) and al-Kindī (d. 350/961) called the early minarets introduced to the mosque of Fusṭāṭ by Maslama b. Mukhallad in 53/673, and which are also considered by some to be the first of their kind in Islam, *manār* (another, albeit rare, plural of *manāra*),[89] whereas al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) referred to them as *ṣawāmiʿ*.[90]

The mosque is also believed to have been the site of the first introduction of a concave prayer niche (*miḥrāb mujawwaf*), which was intricately decorated. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was reportedly eager for people to witness the replacement of the old *miḥrāb* with the new one. From al-Muqaddasī (d. 380/990), we understand that the term *miḥrāb* was already used to refer to the mark of the *qibla* prior to al-Walīd's renovation, though it was not allegedly a concave recess. While references to *miḥrāb*s are present in the Qurʾān, substantial evidence suggests that in the nascent stages of Islam, the term may have denoted a structure distinct from the concave prayer niche. The prevailing scholarly consensus posits that the mosque of the Prophet lacked a *miḥrāb*, despite narratives—such as that recounted by Wāʾil b. Ḥajar—which describe

---

[85] Al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār*, pp. 602-3; al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, ii, 307-8.
[86] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, vi, 4572; al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, ii, 307-8.
[87] Muslim, no. 2937; Abū Dāwūd, no. 4321; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, xii, p. 579.
[88] See Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭa al-musammāh tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār fī gharāʾib al-amṣār wa-ʿajāʾib al-asfār*, 2 vols (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Khayriyya, 1904), i, 85-6
[89] Other plural forms are *manāʾir* and *manāwir*.
[90] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, iii, 149-50.

the Prophet praying in a location referred to as a '*miḥrāb*'.[91] This was presumably merely a designated area at the front of the mosque where he regularly led prayers. Supporting this interpretation is the continued use of '*miḥrāb*' in historical texts to describe an elevated platform at the front of the mosque.

In early Islamic texts, notably Ḥadīth, the concave prayer niche was commonly referred to as *al-ṭāq*, a term of Persian origin meaning 'recess', and applicable to any arched structure, such as an aqueduct or a window. Notable Ḥadīth collections, including the *Muṣannaf* of Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/850) and the *Sunan* of al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), contain chapters discussing the legality of praying in the *ṭāq*.[92] These discussions primarily reflect the views of the *ṣaḥābī*s and the *tābiʿī*s, rather than those of the Prophet. It is noteworthy that in these *ḥadīths*, due to the absence of such an architectural feature in pre-Islamic Arabian culture, both the first and succeeding early generations of Muslims (*ṣaḥābī*s and *tābiʿī*s) tended to borrow non-Islamic terms to describe this new architectural element. However, while the latter used the Persian term *ṭāq*, the former referred to it as *madhbaḥ*. In Arabic, '*madhbaḥ*' is derived from the root *dha-ba-ḥa*, which refers to slaughter or sacrifice. In most religious systems, including Pagan, Hindu, and Buddhist cultures, the *madhbaḥ*, or 'altar', is a place located in the pre-eminent position within sanctuaries, where sacrifices are offered or religious rituals related to sacrifice are performed.[93] This term was used with the same meaning in ancient Semitic cultures, including Canaanite and Hebrew civilizations. In Hebrew, the corresponding word is '**מִזְבֵּחַ**' (*mizbéaḥ*). The *madhbaḥ* was known to pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabs through the Jewish and Christian communities in the Arabian Peninsula. The Companions subsequently adopted the term to denote the concave prayer niche in the mosque, as both architectural features occupied a frontal position, both literally and metaphorically.

The etymology of the term '*miḥrāb*' is believed by scholars of Semitic languages to trace back to the Himyarite language, which adopted the term from Abyssinian influences during the introduction of Christianity to Yemen.[94] The original Abyssinian form, '*mekurab*', referred to a church, temple, or an apse.[95] Notably, the Christians of Najrān used the term specifically to denote the apse (*ḥanya*) in a church wall. Serjeant

[91] Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, ed. M. ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, 3rd edn, 11 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003), no. 2335.

[92] Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. M. ʿAwāma, 26 vols (Jeddah: Dār al-Qibla; Beirut: Muʾassasat ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān, 2006), nos. 4727-44; al-Bayhaqī, no. 4304.

[93] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, iii, 1487; al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, i, 309; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār*, p. 193.

[94] It may be important to note here that prior to Abyssinia's involvement, Christianity was already present in Yemen, likely due to trade routes and the interactions between the Roman Empire, Byzantium, and the Arabian Peninsula.

[95] See J. Sauvaget, 'The Mosque and the Palace', in Jonathan M. Bloom (ed.), *Early Islamic Art and Architecture* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 109-47 (p. 134).

maintains that the term '*miḥrāb*' primarily refers to architectural elements, specifically a row of columns and their intervening spaces, suggesting its derived meanings, such as a niche or part of a monk's cell, are ancillary.[96] In the pre-Islamic Arabic lexicon, the term '*miḥrāb*' encompassed a variety of significations, including the front part of a house, a royal palace, and a communal gathering spot. The word specifically denoted the foremost section of a residence, regarded as the most esteemed area therein. Early Arabic poets employed '*miḥrāb*' to reference royal palaces. Further, the term extended metaphorically to signify a lion's den and the collective meeting place. Among the Israelites, '*maḥārīb*' referred to their sanctuaries or places of worship.[97]

In the formative years of Islam, as elucidated by al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 170/786) and Abū Manṣūr al-Azharī (d. 370/980), the term '*miḥrāb*' predominantly (though not exclusively) came to signify the location from which the *imām* leads the congregational prayers. Nonetheless, it retained broader meanings, including the garret of a house, as noted by Abū Isḥāq al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923). One illustrative *ḥadīth* recounts the Prophet sending ʿUrawa b. Masʿūd to his relatives in Yemen, where, upon entering his *miḥrāb*, he emerged at dawn to lead the Fajr prayer. Al-Zajjāj interprets this usage to suggest that a *miḥrāb* is an elevated chamber or loft (*ghurfa*), further indicating the term's varied applications, even in religious contexts, during this period. Al-Azharī, drawing on the authority of Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/940), posits that the term '*miḥrāb*' was coined to denote the area where the imām stands, distinguished and isolated from the rest of the congregants.[98] This interpretation aligns with the various definitions previously discussed. Notably, early lexicographers like al-Azharī and Ibn Manẓūr have interpreted '*miḥrāb*' as indicating the front part of a gathering place. This interpretation explains Anas b. Malik's hesitance to pray within it, stemming from a reluctance to conspicuously set himself apart from other congregants. Occasionally, a raised platform (*dukkān*) was constructed within the *miḥrāb* for the imām to lead prayers.[99] Subsequently, the term '*miḥrāb*' came to be more exclusively associated with the concave prayer niche.

The mosque after al-Walīd

After al-Walīd, the next monarch to undertake architectural modifications at the Prophet's mosque, albeit on a smaller scale, was the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Mahdī (r. 158–169/775–785), who expanded it northward by 50 meters (160 feet). He had also

---

[96] R. B. Serjeant, 'Miḥrāb', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 22 (1959), 439-53 (p. 450).

[97] See al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lugha*, ed. M. ʿAwaḍ Murʿib, 15 vols (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2001), v, 17; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, ii, 817-18; al-Fayrūzabādī, *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, 4 vols (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1978-80), i, 53; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār*, p. 128.

[98] Al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb*, v, 24.

[99] Mālik b. Anas, *al-Mudawwana al-kubrā*, 4 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1994), i, 175.

planned to remove six steps from the *minbar*, but abandoned the idea due to concerns about damaging the wooden platforms supporting them.[100] According to Ibn Qutayba, who gave no details, the caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 198–218/813–833) also expanded the mosque.[101] Al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–247/847–861), for his part, covered the enclosure of the Prophet's tomb with marble veneer. The following ʿAbbāsid caliphs continued to take care of the Prophet's mosque, but there was no need for its expansion or reconstruction until the mosque accidentally caught fire in the year 654/1256. The following year, the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Mustaʿṣim bi-llāh (r. 640-56/1242-58) ordered the reconstruction of the mosque, but he was later preoccupied with the Mongol invasion of Baghdad, leaving the workers to abandon the rubble as it was. However, they did manage to build a roof over it, supported by the columns surrounding the Prophet's sacred chamber.[102]

Now, our textual sources on the forms of the Prophet's mosque prior to al-Walīd describe structures that the authors themselves did not see; at best, they managed to convey the accounts and exact terms used by those who had witnessed such structures. Otherwise, they used the terminology of their own time to describe the knowledge they had of these vanished structures. Al-Walīd' structure, however, stood for long. As we have just seen, the monarchs who followed him either carried out only secondary works at the mosque, or none at all, reflecting an increasing reluctance to tamper with the venerable structure due to this being perceived as sacrilegious or vainglorious (notwithstanding that it had been extensively rebuilt and renovated numerous times in the first century AH, as discussed above).

Besides Ibn Zabāla and those informed by him, there are two informative accounts of the mosque from the third-fourth centuries AH, i.e. those by Ibn Rusta al-Iṣfahānī (d. *ca.* 300/912) and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih al-Andalusī (d. 328/940), who described the mosque in their time. From an architectural point of view, however, and for the reasons discussed earlier, these descriptions primarily pertain to the structure built by al-Walīd. Ibn Rusta, a renowned Persian geographer and traveller, mentioned that he saw the mosque of the Prophet in 290/903 (during his pilgrimage to the Muslim holy lands), after the construction work of al-Mahdī and the restorations carried out by al-Muʿtaḍid bi-llāh in 282/895. He even read to us the inscriptions on the commemorative plaque related to al-Mahdī's works. The mosque structure he described, however, largely belongs to al-Walīd (see above). Ibn Rusta used well-chosen Arabic inflections to refer to the mosque's rear portico (*muʾakhkhar*) and front portico (*muqaddam*). He was unique in highlighting the presence of a chandelier (*thurayyā*) hanging from the

[100] See Ibn Isḥāq al-Ḥarbī, *Manāsik*, pp. 370-3; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, ii, 535-40.
[101] Ibn Qutayba, *Maʿārif*, p. 562.
[102] See al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, ii, 598-601.

ceiling. This term initially referred to a cluster of bright stars in the sky (literally, the Pleiades 'seven sisters' star cluster), but over time, it came to refer specifically to chandeliers.

Ibn Rusta also refers to the use of *shuraf* (sing. *shuraf*), 'cresting' or 'battlements' for decoration, which are originally notched, defensive parapets often seen on the tops of fortifications. The term '*shuraf*' is derived from the root *sha-ra-fa*, meaning 'to overlook' or 'to have a commanding view', reflecting the protective function of battlements.[103] Ibn Rusta saw the original *minbar* of the Prophet (with the additions made by the Umayyad ruler Marwān b. al-Ḥakam). He referred to two of the original three rods at the back that once supported the Prophet's back when seated as '*aʿwād badad*', 'detached wooden sticks'. He explained that Marwān added more sticks (*aʿwād*) to the sides, adding that the *minbar* also had round *kwuā* (openings). Ibn Rusta also referred to a pomegranate-shaped wooden finial (*rummāna*) that topped the baluster of the *minbar*'s staircase.[104]

Coming from Cordoba, a city with a resplendent architectural heritage, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih al-Andalusī provided a most comprehensive account of this architectural phase of the Prophet's mosque. Although he himself is believed to have never left al-Andalus, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih learned about the mosque from his shaykhs, particularly Baqiyy b. Makhlad (d. 276/889), Ibn Waḍḍāḥ al-Qurṭubī (d. 287/899), and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Khushanī (d. 286/899), who had visited the eastern Islamic territories in pursuit of knowledge and for pilgrimage. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih's account is particularly significant to our discussion, not only for its rich details but also because he employed a more sophisticated descriptive discourse and terminology, introducing some of the mosque's architectural features for the first time. As such, it deserves to be quoted here in full:

> Description of the Prophet's Mosque (Peace Be Upon Him): The aisles in its *qibla* [i.e. front area] are laid horizontally from east to west, with each row consisting of seventeen columns. Between every two columns, there is a large, wide gap. The columns in the southern prayer area (*qibliyya*) are coated with white plaster and very tall (*shāṭṭatⁱᵃⁿ jiddⁱᵃⁿ*), while the rest of the mosque's columns are made of marble. The plastered columns rest on large, square bases, and their capitals are gilded, adorned with golden, engraved friezes (*nijaf munnaqasha mudhahhaba*).[105] The ceilings (*samāwāt*) above the friezes are also

[103] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, iv, 2241-2.
[104] Ibn Rusta, *Aʿlāq*, pp. 73-7.
[105] *Nijāf* denotes the protruding part that overhangs something; *nijāf al-bayt* refers to what is built above a house, extending over it.

decorated and gilded. Facing the *miḥrāb* is the central [vertical] aisle (*mūsaṭat al-balāṭāt*[106]) taking the form of an entirely gilded bay that cuts across the [horizonal] bays from the courtyard to the bay of the *miḥrāb*, though it does not cut through it. The bay next to the *miḥrāb* is richly gilded, and at its centre is topped with a roundel-like ceiling (*samāʾ ka-l-tirs al-muqaddar*) whose concavity is like that of a shell (*mujawwaf ka-l-maḥār*), gilded as well. The inner face of the southern wall of the mosque is lined with a marble band (*izār rukhām*) from the foundation up to about a fathom, with a marble strip the thickness of a finger running along it. Above this is another narrower band, treated with incense paste (*mukhallaq bi-l-khalūq*), and above it a similar band pierced with fourteen door-like motifs in a row from east to west, resembling the niches of the Great Mosque of Cordoba. These are engraved and gilded. Above that is yet another marble band with a celestial design (*ṣunayfa samāwiyya*),[107] inscribed with five lines of gilded calligraphy, as thick as a finger, from the shorter chapters of the Qurʾān (*al-Mufaṣṣal*). Above this is a marble band similar to the first (i.e. the lowest), adorned with a gilded shield-like motif (*tersa min dhahab*), and between each shield is a green colonette with golden rods at its edges. Above this is another marble band with an engraved design (*ṣunayfa munaqqasha*), the width of about a forearm, featuring golden rods and leaves. Above this is a wide mosaic band, and the ceilings rest upon it. The *miḥrāb* is situated in the centre of the southern wall (*mūsaṭat al-sūr al-qiblī*). Above its arch is a protruding, thick gilded crest (*qaṣṣa min dhahab*), in the middle of which is a square mirror, said to have belonged to ʿĀʾisha (may Allāh be pleased with her). The dome of the *miḥrāb* is beautifully adorned, featuring circles, some gilded and others in red and black. Beneath the dome is a gilded, engraved design (*ṣunayfa*), followed by octagonal golden plates, with a variegated agate (*juzʿa*) about the size of a little child's skull set and fastened within them. Below that, down to the floor, is a band of marble smeared with saffron paste, in which lies the palm stem (*watad*) the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to lean on when rising from prostration in the original *miḥrāb*, as in tradition. And Allāh knows best. To the right of the *miḥrāb* is a door through which the imam enters and exits, and to the left is a small, chessboard-like door (*bāb mushaṭraj*)[108] that has been sealed with iron bars. Between these two doors and the *miḥrāb* is a smooth, gentle walkway. The *maqṣūra* is attached to the western wall, extending from the door to the small partition (*faṣīl*) connected to the eastern wall. From this partition, there is a flight of steps leading to the roof of the mosque. The enclosure is old and simple in design, with battlements and four doors. Outside the enclosure, near the left side of the *miḥrāb*, is an underground passage (*sarab*) accessed by steps, which leads to the house of ʿUmar b. al-Khattab (may Allāh be pleased with him). The *minbar* is located to the right of the *miḥrāb*, in the beginning of the third bay from the latter, situated in the *Rawḍa* and paved with

---

[106] The *mūsaṭ* of any structure is its central place. *Balāṭ* derives from the Greek *platea*. see Harry Munt, *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 103.

[107] The word '*ṣunayfa*' is the diminutive form of '*ṣinfa*'. According to al-Jawhari, the *ṣinfa* of one's *izār*, 'sarong or waist-wrapper', is its border, specifically the side that has no fringe. It is also said to mean the edge of a garment, regardless of which side.

[108] In other versions of the MS, '*shaṭranjī*'.

marble and surrounded by it. It has steps, and at the top, a plank has been nailed to prevent anyone from sitting on the step where the Messenger of Allāh (peace be upon him) used to sit. The pulpit is simple, without the intricate carvings and fine craftsmanship seen in those of our time. The [old palm] trunk stands in front of the pulpit, and to its east is a wooden chest (*tābūt*) that covers the sitting place of the Messenger of Allāh (peace be upon him) [i.e. the upper step where he used to sit]. The grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is located in the eastern part of the mosque, at the end of the southern portico (*musaqqafa*) near the courtyard (*ṣaḥn*). There is a distance of about ten cubits between it and the eastern wall. The grave is enclosed by a wall, with about three cubits separating it from the ceiling. It has six corners and is covered with a marble veneer higher than a fathom (*qāma*), with the area above the marble treated with saffron paste. The Messenger of Allāh (peace be upon him) said: "The space between my grave and my pulpit is a garden (*rawḍa*) from the gardens of Paradise, and my pulpit is on one of the gates (*turʿa*) of Paradise".[109] On the roof of the mosque, directly above the grave, is a fenced-off area (*ḥijr maḥjūr*) to prevent people from walking over it. The southern bays are five, while the western ones are four, all aligned with each other in length. From the *qibla* [i.e. southern] side to the interior, there are eighteen columns. All the arches (*ḥanāyā*) of the mosque from the courtyard are reinforced on all four sides with engraved wooden beams (*khashab munaqqash*) connected to the columns' shoulders (*manākib al-ʿumud*). The mosque has three minarets: two in the south and one in the east. The walls of the mosque, from the interior, are adorned with marble, gold, and mosaics (*fusayfisāʾ*), from beginning to end. The mosque has eighteen doors, all with gilded lintels (*ʿatabuhā mudhahhaba*). These are large doors with no locks (*ghilaq*)—four in the south, seven in the east, and seven in the west. The entire floor (*qāʿ*) of the mosque is covered with pebbeles (*ḥaṣā*), and it has no matting (*ḥuṣur*). The outer walls of the mosque are decorated with weathered stone (*kadhdhān*), as are the battlements.[110]

Conclusion

In its formative stage, under the Prophet and the Rāshidūn caliphs, the architectural features and terminologies of the Prophet's mosque were characterized by a marked simplicity, deeply embedded in practicality and expediency. The mosque's elements, along with the language employed by early local sources, were utilitarian and rustic, reflecting the environmental conditions and domestic construction practices prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia, as seen in terms such as *ẓulla*, *raḥba*, *ṣuffa*, and *qāma*. These terminologies were not merely descriptive, but indicative of how early Islamic architecture maintained continuity with its pre-Islamic roots, adapting familiar concepts to new religious and social functions. Given the status of the Prophet's mosque as a foundational prototype for later Islamic architectural forms, some of the terms associated with it endured, evolving to denote more sophisticated and

[109] *Turʿa* also means an elevated garden.
[110] Ibn Abd Rabbih, *ʿIqd*, vii, 288-90.

developed features in subsequent mosque constructions. This enduring influence underscores the mosque's pivotal role in establishing a lexicon that became integral to the architectural discourse and vocabulary of Islamic structures, both religious and secular, serving as a testament to the adaptability of early Islamic architectural practices. While some terms naturally faded into obscurity as architectural practices evolved, others persisted, even influencing the lexicon of other languages, with certain Arabic terms serving as the etymological roots for Latin counterparts. Although the original Prophet's mosque lacked elements such as the *miḥrāb*, *manāra*, or *minbar*, which later became definitive features of mosque architecture, it incorporated rudimentary versions of these components, either during the Prophet's era, or shortly thereafter. Some contemporary sources even anachronistically applied later-established terms to describe these early elements, underscoring the evolving nature of architectural terminology, as the transmission of architectural knowledge was occasionally filtered through later terminological frameworks.

The transformation under Umayyad patronage, particularly during the reconstruction by al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik, marked a critical juncture in mosque architecture, introducing a synthesis of indigenous and foreign elements that became the hallmark of Islamic architecture. It introduced what is now called the 'Arab plan', i.e. the hypostyle mosque design that has dominated Islamic architecture across various regions ever since. The inclusion of features such as the concave prayer niche, dedicated minarets, an elevated pulpit, and crenellations—many of which were thought to be unprecedented in early Islamic architecture—marked a shift toward a more elaborate and symbolically rich architectural expression. The integration of non-Arab craftsmen, particularly Greek and Coptic artisans, and the use of foreign materials, enhanced the mosque's grandeur and also introduced a cross-cultural exchange that is evident in the architectural lexicon, as seen in Arabic derivatives of Greek terms like *fusayfisāʾ*, *marmar*, and *qanadīl*, which continue to be used in modern Arabic. This period demonstrated a conscious effort to transcend local architectural norms by incorporating non-Arab craftsmanship, materials, and design concepts, reflecting the cosmopolitan nature of the Islamic empire and its engagement with the broader Mediterranean and West Asian worlds.

As mosque architecture continued to evolve, the terminologies used by contemporary informants—whether based on personal observation or learned through transmission—reflected a blend of foreign influences and indigenous innovations. The reliance on terminologies that evolved over time underscores the complexities of recording and transmitting architectural knowledge in the early Islamic period. This linguistic evolution, wherein Arabic expressions were adapted or replaced by foreign terms, mirrored the broader socio-cultural transitions within the

Islamic empire, reflecting shifts in knowledge, technology, and material culture. It also signified the fluidity with which Islamic architecture absorbed and redefined external influences. In this context, the nuanced role of language not only served as a vehicle for describing architectural innovations but also functioned as a medium for preserving cultural memory and identity within an evolving Islamic context. The difficulty faced (and admitted) by some early Arab patrons and chroniclers in accurately articulating the innovative architectural elements they encountered in some mosques highlights the challenges of capturing the rapidly evolving and increasingly complex nature of Islamic architecture. The recorded inability of some early observers to fully encapsulate the elaborate features of some particular mosques reflects not only the unprecedented level of architectural sophistication achieved, but also the limitations of the contemporary architectural vocabulary to adequately convey such innovations.

Early Terminology of Mosque Architecture

ORIGINALITY REPORT

11%
SIMILARITY INDEX

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	www.aaciaegypt.com Internet	100 words — 1%
2	pt.scribd.com Internet	68 words — 1%
3	dokumen.pub Internet	48 words — < 1%
4	pishine.ir Internet	47 words — < 1%
5	Adam Bursi. "5 Places Where the Prophet Prayed: Ritualising the Prophet's Traces", Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2024 Crossref	36 words — < 1%
6	ESSAM AYYAD. " How were young Muslim minds shaped? A critical study of the in Medieval Islam ", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 2021 Crossref	36 words — < 1%
7	www.cawtarclearinghouse.org Internet	36 words — < 1%
8	sohailhanif.co.uk Internet	31 words — < 1%

9	iicss.iq Internet	29 words — < 1%
10	archive.org Internet	27 words — < 1%
11	Heba Mostafa. "Architecture of Anxiety, Body Politics and the Formation of Islamic Architecture", Brill, 2024 Crossref	26 words — < 1%
12	journals.uco.es Internet	26 words — < 1%
13	Hussain Mohammed Alqarni. "Naqāʾiḍ Poetry in the Post-Umayyad Era", Journal of Abbasid Studies, 2017 Crossref	25 words — < 1%
14	Abdullah Muhammad AlSaif. "Agriculture in al-Yamāma during the Abbasid Period*", Darah Journal of Arabian Peninsula Studies, 2023 Crossref	24 words — < 1%
15	ora.ox.ac.uk Internet	24 words — < 1%
16	www.researchgate.net Internet	24 words — < 1%
17	Harry Munt. "Writing the History of an Arabian Holy City: Ibn Zabāla and the First Local History of Medina", Arabica, 2012 Crossref	23 words — < 1%
18	Adam Bursi. "1 Grave Markers: Rhetoric and Materiality of Relic and Tomb Veneration in Early	20 words — < 1%

Islam", Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2024
Crossref

19	Ahmad Snober. "7. Hadith Criticism in the Levant in the Twentieth Century: From ẓāhir al-isnād to ʿilal al-ḥadīth", Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2020 Crossref	20 words — < 1%
20	Etan Kohlberg. "In Praise of the Few. Studies in Shiʿi Thought and History", Brill, 2020 Crossref	19 words — < 1%
21	www.pure.ed.ac.uk Internet	19 words — < 1%
22	Oliver Leaman. "Routledge Handbook of Islamic Ritual and Practice", Routledge, 2022 Publications	17 words — < 1%
23	Essam S Ayyad. "AN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ARABIC ACCOUNTS OF EARLY MOSQUES: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THOSE AT MADINA, BAṢRA and KŪFA", Journal of Islamic Studies, 2018 Crossref	16 words — < 1%
24	fr.scribd.com Internet	16 words — < 1%
25	ia601409.us.archive.org Internet	16 words — < 1%
26	Amikam Elad. "The Rebellion of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya in 145/762", Brill, 2016 Crossref	15 words — < 1%
27	cdn.yaqeeninstitute.org Internet	15 words — < 1%

28	dergipark.org.tr Internet	15 words — < 1%
29	ejournal.uin-malang.ac.id Internet	15 words — < 1%
30	eprints.whiterose.ac.uk Internet	15 words — < 1%
31	E. S. Ayyad. "The 'House of the Prophet' or the 'Mosque of the Prophet'?", Journal of Islamic Studies, 2013 Crossref	14 words — < 1%
32	Nāṣir ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥārithī. "King Abdulaziz's Sabīl (Drinking Fountain) at al-Muʿābada in Makkah al-Mukarramah", Darah Journal of Arabian Peninsula Studies, 2023 Crossref	14 words — < 1%
33	s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com Internet	14 words — < 1%
34	www.worldcat.org Internet	14 words — < 1%
35	Richard van Leeuwen. "Hajj Travelogues", Brill, 2024 Crossref	13 words — < 1%
36	edoc.pub Internet	13 words — < 1%
37	etheses.dur.ac.uk Internet	13 words — < 1%

38	Claude Gilliot. "Education and Learning in the Early Islamic World", Routledge, 2017 Publications	12 words — < 1%
39	Ramzi Baalbaki. "The Arabic Lexicographical Tradition", Brill, 2014 Crossref	12 words — < 1%
40	pdfcookie.com Internet	12 words — < 1%
41	Andrew Rippin. "The Islamic World", Routledge, 2013 Publications	11 words — < 1%
42	Bernard O'Kane. "CHAPTER FOURTEEN. The Mosque", Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2021 Crossref	11 words — < 1%
43	Christopher Melchert. "Kitāb al-Ḥujjah ʿAlā Ahl al-Madīnah and the Transition from Regional Schools to Personal", Studia Islamica, 2022 Crossref	11 words — < 1%
44	escholarship.org Internet	11 words — < 1%
45	mapomerantz.org Internet	11 words — < 1%
46	"The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Islamic Spirituality", Wiley, 2022 Crossref	10 words — < 1%
47	"Umayyad Legacies", Brill, 2010 Crossref	10 words — < 1%

48	Harry Munt. "Caliphal Imperialism and Ḥijāzī elites in the second/eighth Century", Al-Masāq, 2016 Crossref	10 words — < 1%
49	Hussein Abdul-Raof. "Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis - Genesis and development", Routledge, 2013 Publications	10 words — < 1%
50	oi.uchicago.edu Internet	10 words — < 1%
51	referenceworks.brillonline.com Internet	10 words — < 1%
52	yayin.diyanet.gov.tr Internet	10 words — < 1%
53	Andreas Görke. " The relationship between and in early Islamic scholarship ", Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 2011 Crossref	9 words — < 1%
54	Encyclopaedia of the History of Science Technology and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures, 1997. Crossref	9 words — < 1%
55	biblio.ugent.be Internet	9 words — < 1%
56	ia600706.us.archive.org Internet	9 words — < 1%
57	www.lockwoodonlinejournals.com Internet	9 words — < 1%

58	"Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy", Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2016 Crossref	8 words — < 1%
59	"Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba", Brill, 2013 Crossref	8 words — < 1%
60	Aydogan Kars. " The Early Transmission of al-Suhrawardī's ", The Journal of Religion, 2022 Crossref	8 words — < 1%
61	Khaled Abou El Fadl, Ahmad Atif Ahmad, Said Fares Hassan. "Routledge Handbook of Islamic Law", Routledge, 2019 Publications	8 words — < 1%
62	Lee-Hood, Elizabeth Rowe. "Divine Daily Prayers and the Quest for Nearness to God: A Journey Into Ṣalāt in Islamic Spiritual Literature From the Qur'ān to Rūmī Bringing Traditional Light to Contemporary Understandings of Religion and Ritual", Harvard University, 2024 ProQuest	8 words — < 1%
63	Mohammad Gharaibeh. "Beyond Authenticity, Alternative Approaches to Hadith Narrations and Collections", Brill, 2023 Crossref	8 words — < 1%
64	Tobias Andersson. "Early Sunnī Historiography", Brill, 2019 Crossref	8 words — < 1%
65	Yossef Rapoport, Lahcen Daaïf. "The Book of Clear Arabic Expression regarding the Arab Tribes of Egypt", Brill, 2024 Crossref	8 words — < 1%
66	dn790005.ca.archive.org	

	Internet	8 words — < 1%
67	faculty.ksu.edu.sa Internet	8 words — < 1%
68	icraa.org Internet	8 words — < 1%
69	irep.ntu.ac.uk Internet	8 words — < 1%
70	link.springer.com Internet	8 words — < 1%
71	muslimheritage.com Internet	8 words — < 1%
72	pastebin.com Internet	8 words — < 1%
73	www.degruyter.com Internet	8 words — < 1%
74	www.mdpi.com Internet	8 words — < 1%
75	www.mizanproject.org Internet	8 words — < 1%
76	Ben Farmer, Dr Hentie J Louw, Hentie Louw, Adrian Napper. "Companion to Contemporary Architectural Thought", Routledge, 2019 Publications	7 words — < 1%
77	Feryal Salem. "The Emergence of Early Sufi Piety and Sunnī Scholasticism", Brill, 2016 Crossref	7 words — < 1%

78	Ibrahim Mohamed Zein, Ahmed El-Wakil. "The Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad - From Shared Historical Memory to Peaceful Co-existence", Routledge, 2022 Publications	7 words — < 1%
79	Maribel Fierro. "The Routledge Handbook of Muslim Iberia", Routledge, 2020 Publications	7 words — < 1%
80	Michael Lecker, Yaara Perlman. "Al-Maqrīzī's al-Ḫabar ʿan al-bašar: Volume IV, Section 2: The Idols of the Arabs", Brill, 2022 Crossref	7 words — < 1%
81	Ramzi Baalbaki. "The Early Islamic Grammatical Tradition", Routledge, 2017 Publications	7 words — < 1%
82	ejournal.um.edu.my Internet	7 words — < 1%
83	library.oapen.org Internet	7 words — < 1%
84	Bea Leal. "The Abbasid Mosaic Tradition and the Great Mosque of Damascus", Muqarnas Online, 2020 Crossref	6 words — < 1%
85	Christian Lange, Adam Bursi. "Islamic Sensory History", Brill, 2024 Crossref	6 words — < 1%
86	Farid Suleiman, Carl Sharif El-Tobgui. "Ibn Taymiyya and the Attributes of God", Brill, 2024 Crossref	6 words — < 1%

87	Hiroyuki Yanagihashi. "Studies in Legal Hadith", Brill, 2019 Crossref	6 words — < 1%
88	Jens Scheiner, Isabel Toral. "Baghdād", Brill, 2022 Crossref	6 words — < 1%
89	José Miguel Puerta-Vilchez, Consuelo López-Morillas. "Aesthetics in Arabic Thought", Brill, 2017 Crossref	6 words — < 1%
90	Letizia Osti, Maaike van Berkel. "The Historian of Islam at Work", Brill, 2022 Crossref	6 words — < 1%
91	Maya Yazigi. "A Claim of Tajdīd for the Sixth/Twelfth Century? al-Samānī, his Kitāb al-Ansāb and a Legacy Contested", Oriens, 2011 Crossref	6 words — < 1%
92	cronfa.swan.ac.uk Internet	5 words — < 1%
93	iris.uniroma1.it Internet	5 words — < 1%

EXCLUDE QUOTES	ON	EXCLUDE SOURCES	OFF
EXCLUDE BIBLIOGRAPHY	ON	EXCLUDE MATCHES	OFF