



Dynamics of Contested Sanctity in Mosques: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

Mosques are symbols of peace and pluralism. However, some mosques are built over pre-Islamic places of worship or are considered sacred by non-Muslims. This has the potential to trigger interfaith tensions and conflicts. This article argues that mosques should be spaces and symbols of peace, religious tolerance, and multiculturalism. The study uses direct observation and compares textual and material evidence related to several large mosques in different countries. It concludes that mosque construction should consider historical and interfaith sensitivities, uphold the sanctity of places of worship, and avoid all forms of heresy. Mosque architecture and buildings can be a mirror of harmony and pluralism. Mosques are aesthetically adaptive and accommodate local wisdom, culture, and religious traditions. Historically controversial mosques cannot be justified and imitated as Islamic mosques in general. Mosque construction must prioritise peaceful views and rational spiritual understanding to maintain harmony and pluralism.

Keywords: Mosque, Place of Worship, Islamic Culture, Multiculturalism, Interreligious Relation.

Introduction

According to the Qur'ān (22: 40), each religion has its term of place of worship. Jews have synagogues (*sawāmi'*), Christians have churches (*biya'*), Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians have temples or monasteries (*ṣalawāt*), while Muslims have mosques (*masājid*) which means a place of prostration in Arabic. These places of worship are considered sacred sites (De Wildt et al., 2019). They are bestowed with holiness or sanctity that shapes how people perceive them, not as ordinary things (Coleman & Bowman, 2019). The two statuses as sites belong exclusively to specific religious traditions and as sacred places often trigger interreligious tensions and problems when there are claims to the same area of worship by two or more religious communities. For example, the legitimacy of several mosques as Islamic sites has been questioned and demanded to bring them back for being a temple, church, or Synagogue. It means that the mosques claimed to have stood in the area sanctified by other religions or were non-Islamic places of worship seized and changed by Muslims. It inevitably has created a stumbling block to fostering a more inclusive society (Bueno Sánchez, 2022). Instead of



being a haven for religious plurality, places of worship could become symbols of exclusion and separation (Öcal, 2022).

The mosque building, on the other hand, shows encounters and even a harmonious blend of various cultures and different religious traditions. (Akel Ismail Kahera, 2002) It can be found in the architectural aspects of mosque construction, additional parts attached, and artistic decorations that beautify the mosque's look, such as the domes, minarets, *minbar*, and *mihrāb*. Here, the mosque represents a symbol of tolerance and peace. These two opposing realities regarding mosques will be studied and discussed further in this paper. It aims to uncover the rationality behind the two asymmetrical appearances. One side becomes a site that displays Islam as the face of cordiality and a willingness to embrace differences (Ismail & Aziz, 2022). The other side becomes a locus that can cause interfaith disputes and enmity (Colaner et al., 2023; Körs & Nagel, 2018). The synthesis of the discussion is expected to lead to a bridging understanding of these two spectrums about mosques.

The study begins with the history and development of two major Islamic mosques: al-Masjid al-Ḥarām in Mecca and al-Masjid al-Aqṣā in Jerusalem. Mosque-related interreligious issues are documented here. Several magnificent mosques from various countries are then recounted to demonstrate that inter-religious tensions and conflicts over places of worship are contextual. The Umayyad Mosque in Syria, the Cordoba Mosque in Spain, the Hagia Sophia in Turkey, the Babri Mosque in India, and certain Indonesian mosques were included. Next, we will examine the construction of al-Masjid al-Nabawī in Medina and 'Uqbah ibn Nāfi' Mosque in Tunisia to gain insights into how Muslims might build mosques without disrupting other religions or adherents' honour. A peaceful worldview and reasonable religious understanding make sense and are needed to maintain harmony in diversity.

Inheriting the Disputes

The holy sites of Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām and al-Masjid al-Aqṣā hold significant influence and command great respect among Muslims. The prestige of these two magnificent mosques is founded on a historical and theological basis. (Ayyad, 2013) Before the advent of Islam, the designation al-Masjid al-Ḥarām for the Kaaba was not acknowledged. The Kaaba is commonly called *al-Bayt al-'Atīq*, *al-Bayt*, and *Bayt*. According to Ibn' Ashur, the use of al-Masjid al-Ḥarām to refer to the Kaaba and al-Masjid al-Aqṣā to refer to Har ha Bayīt is a creation found in the Qur'an (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1969).

Historically, Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām is a religious site that has been associated with the Ḥanīfiyyah faith. Abraham introduced this faith later, followed by Ishmael, the Jurhum, the 'Amāliqah, the Khuzā'ah, and the Quraysh (Galadari, 2021). The second group subsequently diverged significantly from the doctrines of the Ḥanīfiyyah religion during a period commonly referred to as *al-Jāhiliyyah*, which translates to the Era of Ignorance (Goudarzi, 2023). The purpose of sending Prophet Muḥammad of Quraysh was to reinstate the principles and doctrines of the Ḥanīfiyyah religion within the framework of Islam (Pishvaei, 2003). Similarly, al-Masjid al-Aqṣā is considered to be a continuation of the Ḥanīfiyyah religion, which was given down by Isaac, Jacob, and Josef, and later by Moses, who was closely affiliated with the Jewish faith (Feldman, 1988; al-Maghlūth, 2011). During the reigns of King David and his son Solomon, the Jews successfully established a renowned place of worship known as Har ha Bayīt in Hebrew, referred to as the Temple Mount in English, or Bayt al-Maqdis in Arabic, which translates to "holy house." The Qur'ān refers to this place as al-Masjid al-Aqṣā. Al-Suyūṭī discovered a total of 17 names that are used to refer to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā (Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, 1982).

Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām

The area of al-Masjid al-Ḥarām was expanded to include the Kaaba and all the Haram territories that Abraham had specified after Muhammad's victory in Mecca in 630CE.



Located the centre of al-Masjid al-Ḥarām in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the Kaaba is a qibla that Muslims consider the holiest place on earth. Muslims always face this qibla when performing the five daily prayers, burying their dead facing its direction, and cherish the ambition to make the pilgrimage to the Kaaba as commanded in the Qur'ān. Thus, the acquisition of the Kaaba as a Muslim sacred site rendered the pagan Quraysh and other Arabian Peninsula tribes' control over the holy place null and void (al-Qasim & Allāh, n.d.). The liberation was carried out in stages. Initially, Muḥammad and his followers carefully removed the statues and other symbols of polytheistic beliefs from the interior of the Kaaba and its surroundings, although the statues of Isāf at Ṣafā' and Nā'ilah at Marwā were not removed at that time (Bukhārī, 2020; Said & Sharif, 2020). Furthermore, between 630CE and early 632CE, polytheists and non-Muslims were permitted to continue their religious practices in Ḥarām and the Kaaba. Muḥammad's assertion through 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was recognised in a speech at Minā in 631, which took place during the Hajj season. He stated:

Oh, folks! It is forbidden for a nude person to do ṭawāf in the Bayt Allāh, and those who do not believe will not be admitted to paradise. Additionally, polytheists will not be permitted to make pilgrimages after this year. Moreover, whoever has a pledge with the Prophet that is still binding will be bound by it until adulthood. So that every tribe and country may return to their nations, starting with this announcement, there will be a four-month transition period (Ibn Hishām, 1998).

Therefore, in 632CE, when Muḥammad performed the Farewell Pilgrimage (*Hajj al-wadā'*), only Muslims were allowed to visit the Grand Mosque. From then on, only Muslims were allowed to enter and stay in the region of Ḥarām.

During that era, the Kaaba was not refurbished despite its deviation from the architectural design and construction techniques initially implemented by Abraham. The status of the Kaaba was established through remodelling in 606CE, before the Prophet's appointment, and remained unchanged until the first revelation in 611CE. Muḥammad diligently attended to the emotional needs of the newly converted Arabs and held a deep reverence for the Kaaba. Modifications to the Kaaba structure were made to prevent the creation of any perception of disrespect among the people. Consequently, he preserved the preexisting structure to uphold the coherence and uninterrupted sanctity from the pagan epoch to the Islamic age. The suboptimal state of the Kaaba persisted till his demise. Subsequently, his associates refrained from making any modifications. The remodelling occurred under the reign of 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr (624CE-692CE) in Mecca. He reconstructed the Kaaba, adhering to its ancient architectural base. However, in 686, al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī restored the tower to its original state during the pre-Islamic period (Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Kurdī al-Makkī, 2008; Yehia et al., 2022).

The argument above demonstrates that the Kaaba remains a worship site previously consecrated by the pre-Islamic Pagans. Since the Prophet declared this location sacred only for Muslims in 631CE, no evidence suggests that other religious communities would challenge or attempt to regain it. Muslims are aware that the Kaaba faced the danger of being destroyed by the Himyar governor Abrahah in 570CE, but his attempt was unsuccessful (Peters, 1994). According to the Prophet's prophecy, Dhū al-Suwayqatayn, from Ethiopia, would destroy the Kaaba before the Last Days (Bukhārī, 2020).

Al-Masjid al-Aqṣā

Abraham chose Mount Moriah as a place of worship, and it became known as the Synagogue. After the kingdom of Israel was divided, the Synagogue was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar II (605 BCE to his own death in 562BCE) and later by . Titus Caesar Vespasianus who was Roman emperor from 79CE to 81CE. Emperor Hadrian (76CE-138CE) then attacked Jerusalem, murdering the Jews and forcing them to flee. The Christians later demolished the temple built by Hadrian during the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine the Great (272CE – 337CE).



The Persian Sasanid Empire conquered Jerusalem in 614CE after defeating the Romans (Rezakhani, 2013). The Jews started to construct Har haBayit after being granted the power to form a vassal state. It was said that the Jews destroyed the churches in Jerusalem during their brief reign (Armstrong, 2011). According to Abrahamson and Katz (2014), the Romans retook Jerusalem in 622CE. The incomplete Har haBayit was levelled and converted into a landfill. The story goes that Christians in Jerusalem would not build a church on the Temple Mount as they believed the Big Rock had disappeared. The Byzantine government's daring decision under Heraclitus to transform the area into a landfill manifested its ideology (Johnson & Lewis, 2007). Upon completing the Isrā' and Mi'rāj in 621CE, Muḥammad found al-Masjid al-Aqṣā to be a barren plot of ground that contained the remains of the Har haBayit structure.

Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem was conquered by Muslims led by Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattāb in 636CE. The 'Umar Pact, which 'Umar issued, allowed all residents of Jerusalem, regardless of their religion, to practice their faith freely (Suwaydān, 2009). At the historic Har haBayit and the Wailing Wall, the few Jews still living in Jerusalem were granted the right to display their faith. 'Umar obtained help locating the Great Stone from a Jew named Ka'b' al-Aḥbār, who had converted to Islam. This stone is believed to be the place where Abraham intended to slaughter his son Isaac in Judaism and the beginning of Muhammad's ascent to heaven in Islam. For Muslims to face the Hajar Aswad and the Kaaba simultaneously, Ka'b suggested that Umar pray on the northern side of the stone. By doing so, Muslims would gain the two virtues of Moses and Muhammad at once. However, "Umar refused and instead chose to lead the prayer on the southern side of the rock (Ṭabarī & Donner, 1993).

The First Crusade led to the Christian conquest of Jerusalem in 1099CE. Upon its transformation, al-Masjid al-Aqṣā appeared as a palace similar to Solomon's Temple (Sarah, 2023). As an analogy, the Templum Domini, often known as the Church of the Lord, was established in the Dome of the Rock. The mosque complex and surrounding area were restored to their original purpose and use in 1187CE when Muslims led by Ṣalah al-Dīn al-Ayyubī recaptured Jerusalem. The Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman dynasties all had a hand in transferring the sovereignty of Al-Masjid al-Aqṣā. Following the Ottoman Empire's collapse and the end of World War I, the British mandate administration took control of Jerusalem.

The Jewish population in Jerusalem grew substantially after the Balfour Agreement of 1917, encouraging a massive influx of Jewish immigration. After Britain withdrew from Jerusalem in 1922, a potentially civil war-like fight broke out between the Jewish community and Palestine. David Ben-Gurion formally proclaimed that Israel was created on May 14, 1948. The Israeli government seized control of Jerusalem, including Al-Masjid al-Aqṣā, during the Six-Day War in 1967 (Sarah, 2023). As a result, tensions rose between the two groups, and Muslims continued to see this as a matter of religion.

Despite the low likelihood of demolition, the site is considered the most contentious sacred spot among the three Abrahamic religions. Tensions and incidents of violence have persisted since President Trump's 2017 announcement recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital and plans to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv. According to Ghada Karmi, Palestine's predicament stems from its ability to evoke various illusions and satisfy diverse emotional yearnings. If the location had lacked any historical, geographical, religious, or scriptural connections, it is possible that residents, including ourselves, could have lived without disruptions (Karmi, 2015; Makdisi, 2004).

Quarrelling over the Sanctified

After conquering the Arabian Peninsula, Greater Syria, and Jerusalem, Muslim rulers often converted sacred places into mosques as propaganda of Islam's supremacy over the captive populations' religions. The relocation of the Kaaba and Har haBayit to al-Masjid al-Ḥarām and al-Masjid al-Aqṣā may have contributed to this The Umayyad



dynasty's Great Mosque, Jāmi' Banī' Umayyah al-Kabīr, was built by al-Walīd ibn' Abd al-Malik between 706CE and 715CE on the site of a Roman Jupiter worship place. Since Constantine I, Christians have built the Basilica Church, dedicated to John the Baptist or Prophet Yaḥyā. It has a tomb said to have John the Baptist's head. Mattia Guidetti (2013) noticed Muslims building mosques near churches as a flanking without altering them, a strategy typical of early Islam. In urban areas of this region, political governance changed the development, persistence, and demise of the physical connection between religious sites from the late antique and early mediaeval periods.

Abd al-Rahmān al-Dakhīl, an Umayyad dynasty official in Andalusia, converted places of worship into mosques while building and maintaining the Cordoba Mosque. The mosque was formerly a Visigoth Catholic cathedral. Under al-Dakhīl's control, the site was partitioned into Muslim and Christian sections. He made the entire structure a mosque in 787CE. After the Catholics overcame the Muslims in 1236CE, part of the Cordoba Mosque became a church. UNESCO declared the mosque a World Heritage Site in 1984. UNESCO calls the Great Mosque of Cordoba a church. According to academic arguments, Andalusia's Islamic legacy has shaped Spanish history and identity (Ecker, 2003; Harris, 1997).

Muslim conquerors turned Hagia Sophia, a pre-Islamic temple, into a mosque. This happened three days after the invasion in 1453CE. After a millennium of pagan use, the church became Christian in the 4th century. On May 29, 1453CE, the Ottoman Sultan Muḥammad al-Fātiḥ seized control of the city. All ornaments, including paintings, were clothed and intact. Istanbul, originally Constantinople, has Hagia Sophia north of the Kaaba. A *miḥrāb* and *minbar* were added at the southern end of the church to make it a mosque.

Pre-Islamic sites of worship were often converted into mosques in Palestine. In Hebron, West Bank, the Ibrāhīmī Mosque (Jami' Ibrāhīmī) is under Palestinian Authority jurisdiction (Carabelli, 2019). Muslims refer to the mosque as the sacred land of Abraham (al-Ḥarām al-Ibrāhīmī). Since the nineteenth century BCE, Jews have worshipped in the Cave of Machpelah or Cave of the Patriarchs. Muslims and Jews considered this mosque to be the fourth most sacred spot, whereas Jews consider Har haBayit the second most hallowed site. Christians believe this a holy pilgrimage place. The site was hallowed because Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Rebecca, and Leah were buried there. Some historians believe Sam, Josef, Adam, and Noah were buried in this cave (Khalīl Yaḥyā Nāmī, 1943). As a synagogue, the Ibrāhīmī Mosque practised Catholicism. After the Muslims lost the crusade, this holy place became a church. After Jerusalem was liberated, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-'Ayyūbī transformed it into a mosque. The 1997 Protocol on Redeployment in Hebron, adopted under Israel's occupation, divided Hebron into Hebron 1 and Hebron 2 (Hammami, 2023). This edifice was a synagogue and mosque. It is currently the Ibrāhīmī Mosque. Mount Zion, considered King David's palace and grave, has caused much dispute in Palestine. After the Six-Day War, David's mosque was demolished and transformed into a synagogue, Jewish school, Torah Institute, and ceremonial grounds (Kaplony, 2002).

The conversion of non-Muslim houses of worship into mosques was also standard in the Indian subcontinent. After India gained independence in 1947, there was an increase in incidents involving the destruction or loss of life at places of worship due to disputes between the country's Muslim minority and Hindu majority. The First Moghul King invaded India in 1526 and constructed the Babri mosque on the hill of Ramkot, which Hindus believed to be the birthplace of Rama. However, no historical proof supports the claim that the Ramjanambhoomi temple existed and was situated in Ayodhya. The Indian Supreme Court ruled in a dispute involving Muslims seeking to protect the Babri Mosque and Hindus insisting on its takeover, allowing Hindu authorities to construct a temple on the plot of land where the 460-year-old mosque had been destroyed in 1992. Muslims in Ayodhya were required to relinquish two hectares of land to construct a new mosque (Sinha, 2022).



Pre-Islamic temples have been converted into mosques in Indonesia. Menara Kudus Mosque in Central Java is an example. Ambari (1998) ambiguously claimed that the mosque was built atop Hindu temple ruins. He regarded it primarily as Hindu iconography in its architecture and space. The mosque was founded in 1549, as evidenced by a stone inscription in the *mihṛāb*. The mosque was built in Bayt al-Maqdis, Palestine, stone. After that, the mosque was renamed al-Masjid al-Aqṣā. Despite its Arabic name, the mosque retains its local identity (Buljubasic, 2023). Similar incidents occurred at the Sunan Giri Mosque in Gresik and the Nūr Raḥmat Sendang Duwur Mosque in Lamongan. Both are in East Java Province. Like a Hindu temple, the mosque has three giant steps, indicating the Sunan Giri Mosque case change. The Nūr Raḥmat Mosque has a previous cremation pole near the entryway, once used for body burning. The panorama and murals before Sunan Nūr Raḥmat's tomb feature sun and eagle symbols. Thus, this mosque may have been a Hindu-Buddhist temple before the Islamic era (Handoni et al., 2018; Kasdi, 2008).

Changing pre-Islamic houses of worship into mosques is not well documented. The takeover story was a make-believe tale. The conqueror's religious teaching could impact the conquered community's faith or improve the reputation of military leaders who conquered new territory. Additionally, it can boost a mosque's status. Religious communities may overstate their perceived weakness after a political power transfer (Miller, 2002).

Embracing the Diversity

Tension and strife between religious communities should not be cherished and preserved since they desecrate places of worship. The mosque is historical proof that Islam values religious diversity. The architecture of the two great mosques supports this. Diversity and multiculturalism create mosques (Ahmed, 2019).

Al-Masjid al-Nabawī

Al-Maghlūth (2006) states that Prophet Muhammad and his companions erected the Al-Masjid al-Nabawī in Medina's centre. Two months after the Prophet arrived from Mecca in 622CE, the second mosque was built, following the Qubā mosque. The mosque was built on the location of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī's date palm orchards and polytheist burial place (Samārī, 2019).

Upon his arrival, the Prophet relocated graves and built the second-largest mosque in the world, Al-Masjid al-Nabawī, the second-most important mosque in terms of religion after Al-Ḥarām. Unlike Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām and Al-Aqṣā, it was erected by Muslims and served as a communal centre, assembly hall, and "religious school" for the Prophet and his followers. The mosque started with palm frond roofs and clay brick walls. It had three entrances and exits: Bāb al-Raḥmah, Bāb 'Ātikah, Bāb al-Jibrīl, and Bāb al-Nisā'. Mosques worldwide serve as social and political centres and places of worship. Al-Masjid al-Nabawī is unique as it was created and built by the Prophet and his disciples, whom churches and synagogues inspired they saw while travelling but did not choose to copy.

The historical ten-fold mosque development is a testament to the influence of Islamic kings. Initially, al-Masjid al-Nabawī lacked a tower or minaret. In 706, Walīd ibn' Abd al-Malik rebuilt it. His four towers can be prayer shawls. A dome over Prophet Muhammad's grave appeared in the 1300s. The original constructor was Egyptian Sultan Qalāwūn (1222-1290) in 1279CE. Under Sultan Maḥmūd II's administration (1808-1839), the Dome was painted green, giving it the name Green Dome (Akboy-Ilk & Akboy-Ilk, 2023). Muslim saints' tombs were covered with domes imitating the Prophet in mosques in Palestine, Syria, Egypt, India, and Iran (Necipoğlu, 2008). As expected, the minaret recalls Damascus' Umayyad Mosque. In addition to its functional use, the minaret's remote beauty increased its aesthetic worth and rank. Despite using loudspeakers for the call to prayer, most mosques still feature minarets.



Minarets were used in temples in Rome, Egypt, and Persia. Mosque minarets showed how different cultures combined building structures and architectural approaches. This produced minarets of various sizes, shapes, numbers, and materials. Spirals, guides, ma'zaneh, façades, and dome minarets are available. Roman palaces, churches, and tombs had domes. Mosque domes boost sound and air circulation, improving exterior and interior attractiveness. The mosque's beauty is often enhanced with calligraphy. The Masjid-e Jomeh and Friday Mosque of Isfahan, Iran, use domes and cupolas to decorate mosques. Innovations and ingenuity at Masjid al-Nabawī date back to al-Walīd ibn' Abd al-Malik and were further refined by Ottoman sultans and Saudi Arabia (Bier, 2012).

Masjid al-Nabawī, besides the minaret and Dome, features the *mihrāb* and *minbar*, integral to each mosque. The *mihrāb* is where the imam leads congregational prayer. The term *mihrāb*, derived from *ḥ-r-b*, can imply "site of conflict." According to Mahmutćehajić (2010), those entering the mosque or prostration area want to pass through the battlefield or *mihrāb* to reach the 'Place of Peace'. Preaching takes place in the pulpit. Initially, the Prophet's *mihrāb* was a rod inserted into the ground to mark the front of the prayer area. Initially, north of the mosque, it was transferred south when the Qibla orientation changed from Masjid al-Aqṣā to Masjid al-Haram. Al-Walīd ibn' Abd al-Malik, through his governor 'Umar ibn' Abd al-'Azīz, created the semicircular *mihrāb* construction visible from the front. Several *mihrāb* were built after the Masjid al-Nabawī enlargement.

The Prophet's *minbar* was a favourite portion of al-Masjid al-Nabawī. The *minbar* was located two metres west of his *mihrāb*. Before the permanent construction, the Prophet stood on a clay mound supported by three steps, high enough for the assembly to view him. The Prophet stood to deliver messages and rested his hands on a date palm by the *minbar*. He and a friend decided to create a seat-and-foothold structure. He was told to make it by the Prophet, who consented.

Thus, the date palm tree became unnecessary as a grasp. Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām and al-Masjid al-Nabawī received Mu'āwiyah's *minbar* following his rise to power. The top of his *minbar*'s nine ladders was always his. According to Ḥusayn Mu'nis (1981), Carl Heinrich Becker argued that the *minbar* primarily symbolised the Umayyad caliphs' authority. Twelve ladders now adorn the *minbar*. The door has three steps outside and nine inside (Abweini et al., 2013).

This mosque's construction is the most innovative. This mosque is structurally, architecturally, and artistically comparable to the other two holy mosques and many modern mosques. It shows how Islamic sacred architecture may accommodate other religions. Islamic sites follow outside events. Mosques show how Islam's interaction with Roman, Persian, and Chinese traditions has affected its civilisation and culture (Qing, 2018). Architecturally, the creative cultural amalgamation of towers, domes, mihrab, and *minbar* to look like mosques; imaginative ornaments and decorations, including stylish calligraphies; and various building materials is striking.

'Uqbah ibn Nāfi' Mosque

For instance, the 'Uqbah ibn Nāfi' Mosque in Tunisia resembles al-Masjid al-Nabawī in Medina. It was built in 670CE by 'Uqbah ibn Nāfi' (622–683CE) of the Umayyad dynasty and expanded by his descendants without any connection to pre-Islamic worship houses. The Great Mosque of Kairouan, also known as Jāmi' al-Kairouan al-Akbar, is a frequent visitor. It is about 150 miles south of Tūnis City. The mosque was at risk of destruction when Berber chief Kusaylah took possession of Kairouan in reaction to Muslim resistance to Berber rule across Africa. Al-Kāhinah, a warrior-queen and priestess, eventually succeeded (Fenwick, 2023).

From 693CE to 697CE, Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān renovated the mosque. In response to Kairouan's growing population, Umayyad Caliph Hishām ibn' Abd al-Malik authorised



Governor Bishr ibn Şafwān to expand the mosque in 724CE. The reconstruction had also been conducted by succeeding rulers. Adding ornaments and decorations by Khalaf Allāh ibn Ghāzī al-Ushayrī in 1012CE and al-Mu'iz ibn Bādīs in 1049CE enhanced its beauty. Ḥafsid dynasty also contributed to building two fancy gates in its period (Albarrán, 2023).

Kairouan flourished under the Aghlabids, according to history. This wonderful mosque embodies that glorious era architecturally. The amazing *mihrāb* of this 9,997 m² mosque extends eastward. It has semicircular top and bottom motifs and Tsulusi Arabic calligraphy of African flora. In winter, the *mihrāb*'s back serves as a prayer room. During the summer, the imam moves to an open area under the door, parallel to the first *mihrāb*. In summer, a dome is constructed at the second entrance to the *mihrāb* to designate its use as the underground space. The back gate has a 31.5-meter tower. The roofless area spans from the gate to the Dome, with the *mihrāb* in front of it. The mosque is beautiful, with a tall minaret and two domes. Local North African culture merges with influences from Masjid al-Ḥarām, Masjid al-Aqṣā, and Masjid al-Nabawī in the formation of this culture.

The two great mosques, al-Masjid al-Aqṣā and al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, also symbolise tolerance for diversity. Apart from the interreligious struggle for claiming the site, al-Masjid al-Aqṣā maintains architectural material evidence and creative imprints that adapt and accept cultural diversities, particularly from the major civilisations that once established their authority over this hallowed territory.

In contemporary times, 'al-Masjid al-Aqṣā' refers to any designated space exclusively for religious purposes. Its width is approximately 140,900 m², making it the second-largest mosque after Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome. Jerusalem was an important Christian spiritual centre, with 43.7% Muslims and 45.3% Christians (Bosworth, 2007). The Qiblī mosque, where 'Umar used to pray, was built by 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān in 646-705 and is today the main mosque in al-Aqṣā. The Qubbat al-Şakhrāh mosque, carried out by Mu'āwiyah and continued by al-Walīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik, was built to cover the Big Stone revered by Jews with a golden dome. The construction of the Dome of the Rock began in 687CE and was completed in 690CE (McMillan, 2012). The Kufic calligraphy inside the Dome confessed the oneness of God. Christians viewed the Dome's Qur'ānic inscriptions as a test of their understanding, not just an architectural marvel.

The edifice took design cues from Roman imperial palaces and churches, particularly its mosaic detailing. About 20 metres circle the octagonal building. Raja' ibn Haywah, a Beit She'an cleric, and Yazīd ibn Salām, a Jerusalem non-Arab Muslim, led the project as technicians (Feniger & Kallus, 2017). Sultan Sulaymān I ordered the city wall construction in East Jerusalem during his reign. The location of al-Ḥarām al-Sharīf was marked. The wall took four years to build, from 1537CE to 1541CE (Burak, 2017). The walls averaged 12 meters in height and 2.5 meters in thickness, for a total of 4,018 meters in length. These walls had 34 watchtowers, seven transportation gates, and two archaeological study gates.

The construction of al-Masjid al-Ḥarām reflects Muslims' contacts with Persian and Roman cultures. Use domes and minarets to show it. The Ottoman dynasty, led by Sultans Sulaymān al-Qānūnī and Murād IV, adopted the practice of al-Walīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik. Saudi Arabia adopted the Ottoman dynasty's al-Masjid al-Ḥarām design, which includes seven minarets and fifty-one domes—still going on.

Conclusion

The conversion of religious places of worship among different traditions has been a noteworthy phenomenon, often accompanied by theological and ideological implications.



This has been seen in cases where Muslim rulers conquered areas inhabited by other religious groups and transformed sacred places into mosques. If Muslims continue to hold political power, the fear of retaliation to reclaim these mosques from them could be alleviated. However, if Muslims are socially or politically defeated, it could lead to reprisals and conflict between those defending and reclaiming the mosque. This could result in loss of lives and property.

Muslims must comprehend the history and implications of mosques. A place of worship can spark discord if not treated with sensitivity. Muslim rulers must foster intercultural, social, and political connections with other religions. Mismanagement of interreligious relations can lead to damage or alter the status of mosques as places of worship, cause unnecessary loss of life, and disrupt peace. Thus, Islam and Muslims must adapt and contribute to resolving everyday issues. Mosques, like other places of worship, should promote peace and harmony, not incite hatred and conflict. Identifying a site as a mosque may signify Muslim ownership, but the Islamic mosque, as an extension of preceding religions, is not exclusively for Muslims. All divine religions can utilise it. Mosques, with their architectural creativity, serve as instructive examples. They reflect the ability to maintain and promote local wisdom while accommodating cultural inspirations from diverse religious traditions.

A place of worship is a place that is sanctified or sacred regardless of what its religious affiliation is, and therefore, it is sensitive to acts of desecration. So, when establishing a place of worship, one should pay close attention to the sensitivity of interreligious relations. Selecting a mosque does not always have to take over a pre-Islamic holy site. Mosques can be erected on the side of, without disturbing, the sacred buildings of other religions or entirely in new locations. Al-Masjid al-Nabawī, the Qiblī Mosque, the 'Uqbah ibn Nāfi' Mosque, the Blue Mosque, and countless other mosques in the Islamic world are examples of that friendly religious attitude. Thus, some cases of disputed mosques in history must not be used as an excuse and exaggerated as identical and typical Islamic mosques.

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