

The Architecture of the Mosque, an Overview and Design Directions

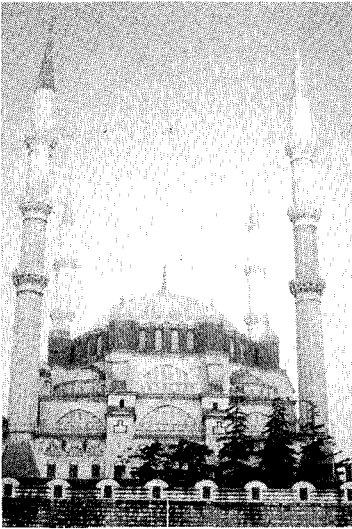
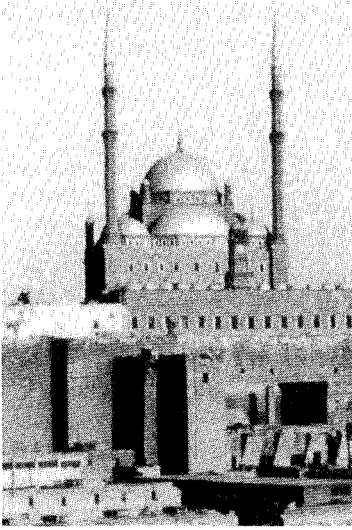
Hasan-Uddin Khan

A very large number of mosques have been built during the past twenty-five years throughout the world, commissioned by a variety of clients ranging from governments to private individuals. What follows is a synopsis and a preliminary overview of these buildings, which examined the type in its functional and formal aspects. This work was done in conjunction with Renata Holod of the University of Pennsylvania.¹ The core of the material gathered is based on first-hand studies and questionnaires sent to architects and clients, and work brought to our attention by colleagues. The questionnaires, which are based on the documentation process set up by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, requested and obtained detailed information on the constructional history and economics of each project, the evolution of the design concepts and the architect's statement.

Some eighty buildings were identified and documented in this manner. Others were studied in a more cursory fashion during a number of trips, while still others were brought to our attention by the architects themselves as projects yet unbuilt. The buildings chosen for this study come from a wide range of countries and regions, from Senegal to Indonesia. To the careful student of cultural phenomena, they may seem too diffuse and too diverse a group of artifacts to study in a coherent fashion. Yet, the type of building under scrutiny, the mosque, is by definition one that transcends regional boundaries in its symbolic and functional sense, if not in its formal realizations. It has been historically, and still is at least on a community scale, the central public ritual space for the men (and to a lesser extent, women) of a particular neighbourhood or group. In recent years it has become the organizing nucleus for the planning and layout of new neighbourhoods in the rapidly growing cities of the Islamic world, often in an idealized re-creation of a traditional neighbourhood. The formal interconnections are more self-aware and apparent than may have been suspected, as the details of the professional education and culture of individual architects are traced and the impact of these ties is assessed against often proclaimed regionalist ambitions. Here I look at mosques, not in terms of symbols, but as signs of Muslim presence.

I approach the subject from both the client's and the architect's viewpoints. The subjects of intention (of what was asked for) and of response (the design solution) are the primary areas of concern. Also I emphasize here the product which makes real in actual examples the concepts and abstract ideas about design.

This presentation is in three parts. The first deals with some of the general issues raised by the design of mosques as defined by the client's programme or brief. In the second section examples illustrate the design response to the client's instructions, presenting an overlay in terms of style and design response as the main point of reference. The two overlays give rise to the third part, which draws together underlying issues and discernible directions as a basis



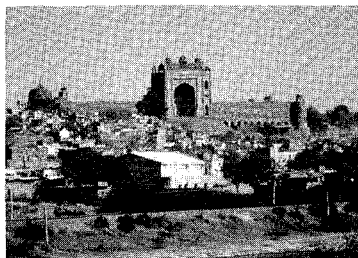
*The Mosque of Muhammad Ali in Cairo (top) built in the 1840s displays classical Ottoman references based on the model of the great mosques developed by Sinan in the 16th century as for example in the Selimiye Mosque at Edirne (above).
Architects: Yusuf Bushnaq and Sinan respectively
Photographs: N. Rabbat and Ü. Bates*

for further discussion. This is not a historical presentation and it does not discuss directly the elements important in establishing the image of the mosque such as the *mihrab*, the minaret, the dome, and so on, as these have been addressed extensively in most of the literature on mosques.

In the act of ritual prayer, the Muslim affirms individual belief in God. In the act of group prayer, the Muslim affirms his membership in the community of believers and recalls the first community (*ummah*) of the Prophet Muhammad. The focus of that community prayer is the mosque, and it is in this sense that it serves as a bridge between the present and that time. Here follows a discussion of the temporal and regional variations of the mosque, its characteristics and forms. The progressive “sacralization” of its space seems to have taken place, with the transfer of governance and political functions to citadels, palaces, or government houses, and of educational functions to specially constituted buildings such as madrasahs and other schools. Yet the memory and the potential for these functions in the space have remained to the present day. It is interesting to note that in recent years mosques have moved towards a single function, as places of prayer, whereas churches, in general, have tended towards multiple functions, as social centres in order to attract younger people back.

Any study of contemporary architecture in the different regions of the world must pause to take note of the physical and visual surroundings of a building and the ideological selection of forms it was given. The built environment, and its model artifacts, have been selectively valued, even more radically than had been the case prior to the nineteenth century. Ruptures in the continuity of borrowing and uses of the past, the symbolic language of architecture, can be detected in all regions. The Islamic world has been transformed physically and culturally by outright colonialist rule, if not by cultural, economic, and political European hegemony. The effects on the physical environments and on the symbolic systems which created them cannot be underestimated. One need only inspect any city to ascertain the introduction of new urban forms (most often in new settlements) and of new building types.

Representative of the rupture of a symbolic language are two buildings in Egypt: the Mosque of Muhammad Ali built in the 1840s, and the Mausoleum of Zaghul Pasha built in the 1920s. While Muhammad Ali was independent of central Ottoman control, he chose to display this independence by building what appears, at first glance at least, as a classical Ottoman mosque. The Mausoleum of Zaghul Pasha, built with neophaonic references, illustrates the extent of a cultural rupture and dissonance present in Egypt at the time when the commemorative architecture of the Islamic past was hidden behind an ideological curtain. This was an attempt to define identity in terms of the specificity of the land, in nationalist terms, and is the first time that pharaonic models were even considered.



The Great Mosque of Fatehpur Sikri in Agra, India, is an example of a mosque built under individual patronage yet seen as a symbol of power and state.

Photograph: M. Brand/Aga Khan Program Archives

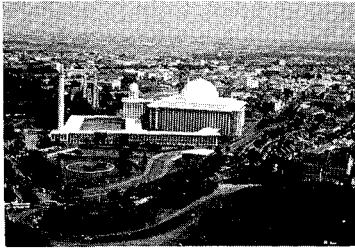
These two examples are used here in an emblematic fashion only to discuss the processes of the formation of these attitudes. Nevertheless, it is necessary to signal the distancing and the rupture which did take place in the intervening decades not only in Egypt but in all regional Islamic cultures.

The rupture with the symbolic and visual past was first achieved by the Turkish Republic as it moved to define itself in purely secular terms and to treat the great past, evident in its monuments, not as a continuous line, but as a far distant, ideological, and inaccessible past to which neither architect nor client could have recourse.

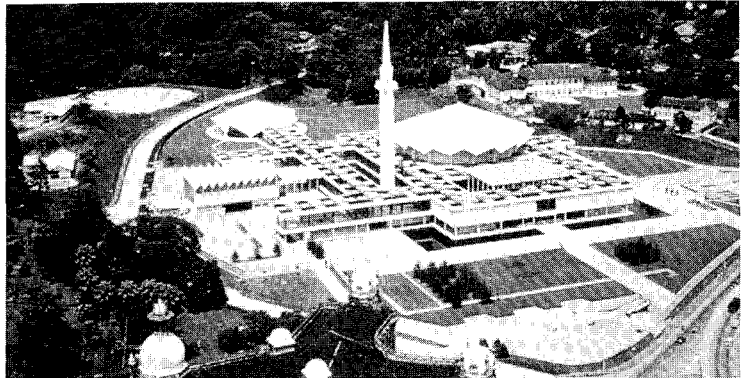
Turkey achieved this refashioning of itself into a nation state in secular terms and became a powerful model for its neighbour, Iran, where Reza Shah moved to build at least the trappings, if not the replication, of the “modern” state, down to the town square. It is my contention that the modernization project of Turkey has been a powerful model throughout the Islamic world, both in the success of its secular forms and symbols, and in ways we have yet to understand, even in terms of its presecular monumental architecture.

While individual clients can be seen to continue the type of patronage responsible for many older mosques, the appearance of newly formed states, particularly after the progressive dissolution of the colonialist empires, has brought a new type of client into the history of mosque patronage, somewhat different from earlier dynastic and private patronage. In the last twenty-five years, these states, whatever their ideology, have increasingly been engaged in mosque-building projects on all levels and on several scales. In these increasingly intensive building programmes can be seen the attempts to create new expressions not only for power, social control, and piety but also for sovereignty, nationality, and modernity. These processes may be viewed against the background of popular architecture, mosques built by artisans and contractors, for a variety of individual or community clients where choices between traditional and nontraditional mosque forms were apparently not as consciously articulated.

The **State as client** presents us with a recent set of buildings. The history of the mosque as building type does record examples of individual mosques which would have served as symbols of the power of a dynasty, and therefore of State, e.g., the Umayyad mosque of Damascus, the Fatih Mosque of Mehmet the Conqueror, or even the Great Mosque of Fatehpur Sikri. Yet these were built under the individual patronage of the current ruler and not that of a corporate structure or a government. The attempt to define one’s state in modern and Islamic terms is a thoroughly modern phenomenon, often driven by the special necessity to ascertain and develop an identity in the face of a different, even hostile, majority or neighbour. Such was the case with the new Islamic republics of Pakistan and Malaysia. As political entities, both are post-colonial creations. In other states, such as Indonesia, the mosque also plays



Kuala Lumpur's Masjid Negara (National Mosque, right), built by the Malaysian government as a state mosque, was the largest mosque in Southeast Asia at the time of its construction (1965). Architect: Dato Baharuddin Abu Kassim. The Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta (above), built by the government of Indonesia following the country's independence, expresses national identity and monumental scale. Architect: F. Silaban. Photographs: M.N. Khan; H.-U. Khan

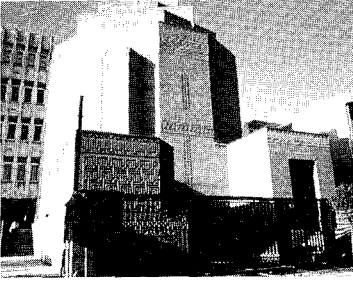


a central and symbolic role. There, the idea of a state mosque is introduced as separate from the mosque of the ruler. It is a building funded and visualized by a committee with an insistence on a clearly recognizable identity. This identity has to be explicit in its regional, modern, and Islamic references. The largest such mosque was proposed for Iraq through an international design competition in 1982. As the building complex was generally seen as a projection of national identity to an international world, the Jakarta State Mosque was planned to be quite large, with a capacity of between five to twenty thousand people under covered space and up to one hundred thousand in the courtyard during major Muslim festivals such as Eid. Interestingly, such a place of prayer traditionally extended its functions to include a madrasah and sometimes an Islamic university, a library, and spaces for social gathering. In this way it reflected a multi-use of space.

The State as patron, seems to have taken over the role of the king or ruler in building mosques that express nationhood. If state mosques are an expression of political will and national identity, as symbols for the country and the outside world, then mosques built by local authorities can be seen as signs of the concern that the government has for local communities.

With the development of local governments in the nineteenth century, there came a shift of responsibility from individuals and village or town organizations to a more centralized authority. With this centralization came the concept of physical development plans and master plans for urban and rural settlements. In assuming this responsibility, local governments have been obliged to provide religious facilities, just as they provide schools, hospitals, and other facilities to serve the public.

With the advent of the master plan and zoning as organizational devices, the multi-use of the mosque complex was broken down, leading to separate buildings with more limited functions. Twentieth century planning brought with it what one might call the secularization of space. Hence, although the function of the mosque has remained the same, in most instances its context has changed.



Commissioned by a group of local benefactors, the Al-Ghadir Mosque (above and right) in Teheran is an interesting example of a small urban mosque built within the existing fabric of the city. Its design was to a large extent shaped by the restricted dimensions of the site. Architect: Jahanguir Mazlum. The Island Mosque (below) on the Jeddah Corniche in Saudi Arabia, commissioned by the Ministry of Awqaf, illustrates the pattern of local authorities marking a place along the periphery of a settlement. Architect: Abdel-Wahed El-Wakil Photographs: K. Adle/AKAA; C. Abel/AKAA

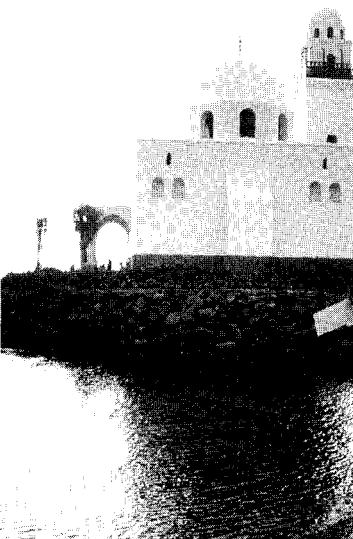


Local authorities in the Islamic world have probably been over the past forty years or so more responsible than individuals or even neighbourhood communities for building urban mosques. They are essentially confronted with building mosques in three contexts: within the existing fabric of a town to define the nucleus of a settlement; to mark a place along a periphery of settlements such as along a corniche or at the entrance of a village; or, as part of a new urban community, usually in new towns or suburbs.

Local government interventions appear to take two forms: either they create a mosque which is individual and special or they create a mosque which may be repeated in similar contexts and situations. In the latter form, the mosque is usually related to a new settlement as is the case in Islamabad in Pakistan, and in Singapore. It should also be noted that local authority interventions are primarily related to urban situations. In considering the design of mosques, it appears that buildings are erected either because of pressure from local inhabitants or because they fit into the local authority's plan which calls for one mosque per so many hundred people — a figure determined by the planning authority itself.

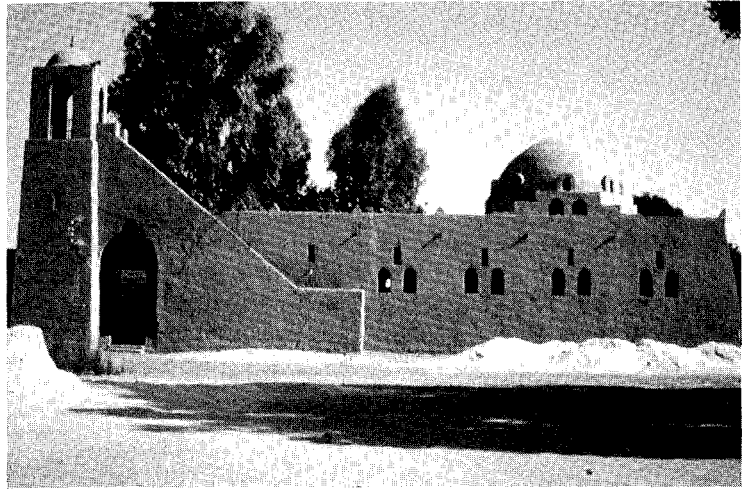
The mosque is, of course, divided both by function and by scale. In considering congregational prayer, governments have essentially turned their attention to the jami which basically serves communal worship every Friday, creating a need for a building conceived on a larger scale than that of a masjid.² In addition, the jami has a public role with symbolic and propagandistic undertones which are perforce denied to the masjid. It is in some sense a showpiece to exhibit the benevolent nature of a government concerned with the spiritual well-being of its people. Not surprisingly then, experiments in the architectural evolution of the mosque have concentrated on this mosque type.

Institutions form the third major client for mosques. Institutions such as universities, hospitals, airport authorities, etc., also integrate



The Mosque of New Gourná was conceived as part of a new urban community. Commissioned by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities, the design of New Gourná is one of the earliest modern-day experiments in local vernacular rural town-planning in the Muslim world.

*Architect: Hassan Fathy
Photograph: H.-U. Khan*

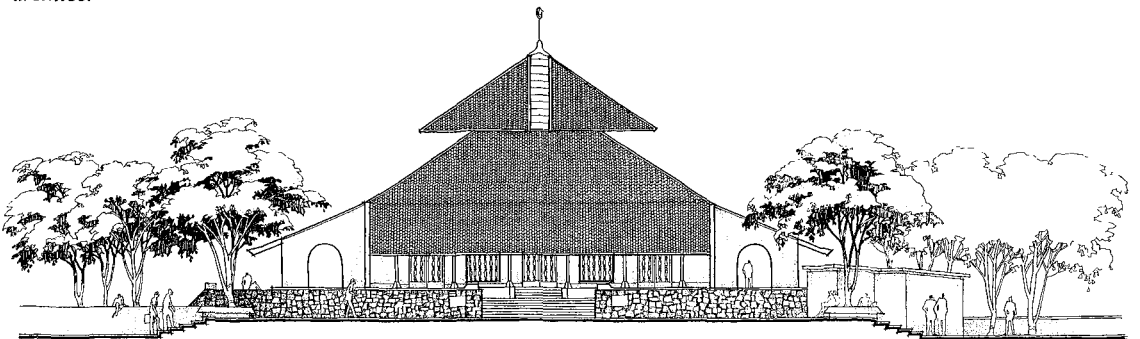


mosques into the design of their complexes. The mosque has become a standard facility in the planning of institutions as a result of broader educational concerns and a recognition of the need for places of collective prayer as part of a modern facility. The historical connections to the traditional mosque-hospital or mosque-school are apparent. The essential legacy of Western modernization with its separation of buildings into functional typologies is currently being questioned in the context of contemporary life in Muslim societies.³ The size of the mosque is dependent on the number of people in the institution, but the design is usually seen in terms of “maximums” in order to emphasize the importance and size of the institution.

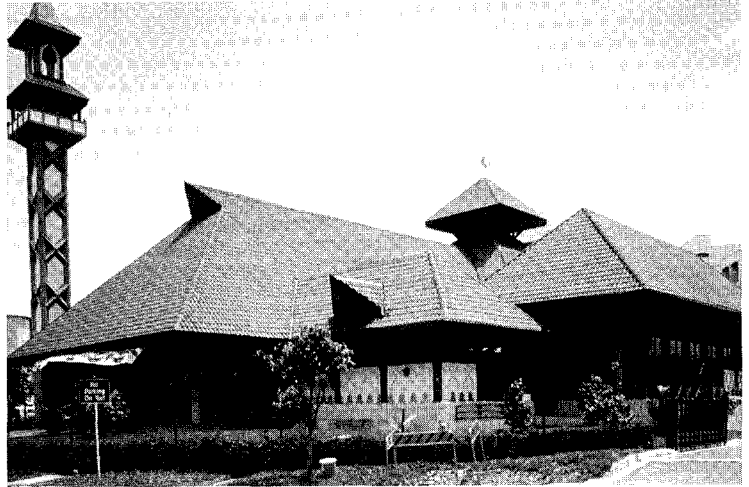
Within these new planning situations the mosque plays an increasingly more central role not only in terms of its function but also in terms of its site. For example, at Jondishapur University in Iran and at the Riyadh International Airport in Saudi Arabia the mosque is centrally located and conceived as a special connector. The place of prayer assumes symbolic importance in signalling the

The Said Naum Mosque, commissioned by the Municipal Government of Jakarta and Yayasan, is an example of local government intervention where the individual unique mosque design is favoured.

*Architect: Atelier Enam-Adhi Moersid
Photograph: Courtesy of the architect*



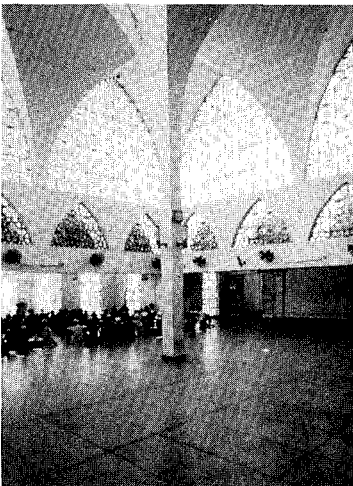
One of a number of community mosques built by the Housing Development Board of Singapore, the Darul Aman Mosque illustrates a preference of the vernacular historicist approach.
Architect: Asaduz Zaman
Photograph: M.N. Khan



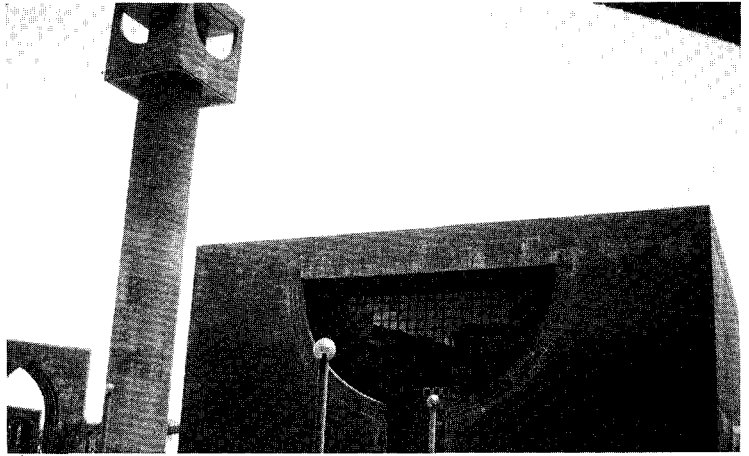
centrality of Islam in the institution. Mosques marking the edge of a city are often visible, as in the case of the corniche in Jeddah where mosques have been built in various styles at about two-mile intervals.

In rural or village **communities**, where traditional beliefs and practices tend to have the upper hand, the function and place of the mosque in relationship to the community have remained much the same as always. In the past such communities were traditionally made up of different groups organized by guilds, casts, or tribes, with each group having a landlord or sheikh as its chief. In some cases a patron, usually a sultan or wealthy landlord, would finance the building of a mosque, but the decision-making process remained collective, thus allowing the community a role in shaping its own environment. Participation in such decisions inevitably provoked

The Ahle Hadith Mosque in Islamabad, built by the Capital Development Authority, illustrates the phenomenon of repeatable mosques designed to be implanted in planned neighbourhoods throughout Pakistan.
Architect: Anwar Saeed/CDA
Photographs: I.C. Stewart



*The mosque of the Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research in Dhaka, Bangladesh, was conceived as the central focus of the campus.
Architect: Doruk Pamir
Photograph: D. Pamir/AKAA*

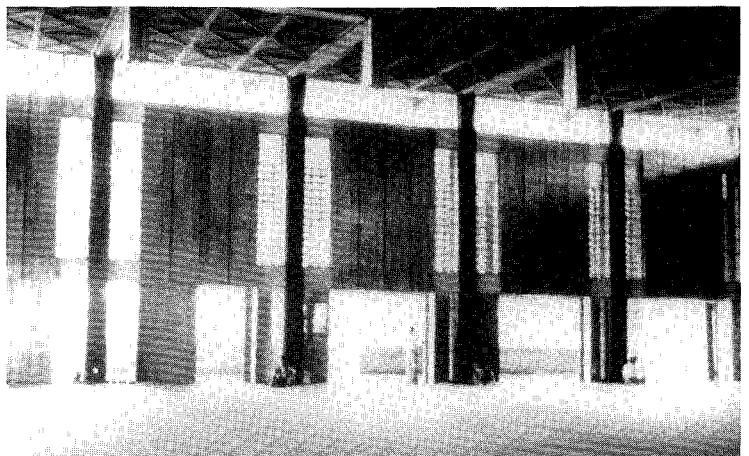


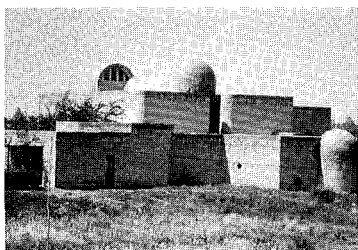
a sense of responsibility and commitment in the community towards its environment because it was actively involved in forming as well as maintaining it.

Each group built its own mosque using whatever resources it had as a collectivity, according to local traditions passed down through generations. Such was the case of Yaama Mosque in Niger and Niono Mosque in Mali. No architect, in the modern sense of the word, was necessary and the construction was usually undertaken by a local mason aided by the members of the community. Since the mosque was essentially there to cater to the basic religious needs of the group, it was usually a functional structure and seldom were there any external signs distinguishing it as a mosque because everyone knew what and where it was.

However, the situation today is considerably different, in that the decision-making process has become the affair of centralized government authorities, both on a local and national scale.

*This campus mosque, built by the Foundation for the Development of Salman ITB Campus Mosque, on an existing university campus in Bandung, Java, was designed with the intent of creating a spiritual space of great simplicity.
Architect: Achmad Noe'man
Photograph: H.-U. Khan*

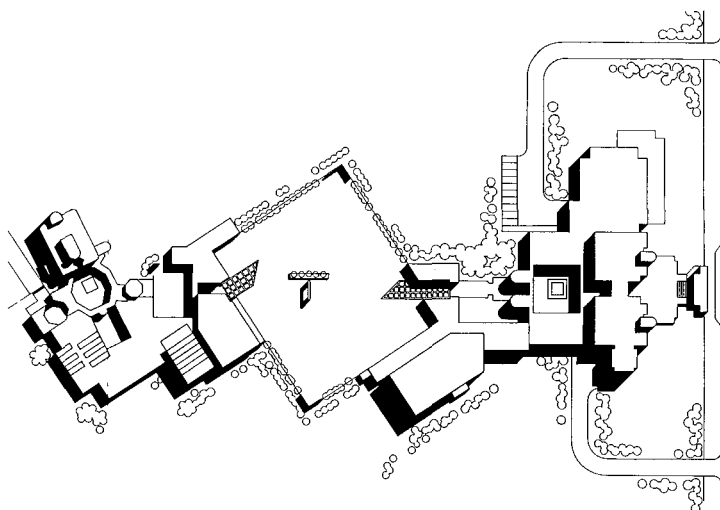




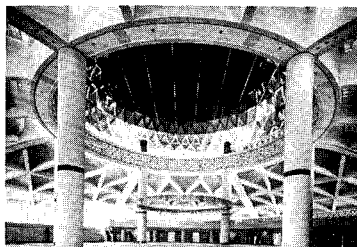
The Jondishapur University Mosque in Iran is located along the principal walkway connecting the university buildings and as such plays the role of a spatial connector. By its refusal of traditional architectural elements, this is a determinedly modern mosque.

Architect: Kamran Diba

Photograph: K. Adle/AKAA



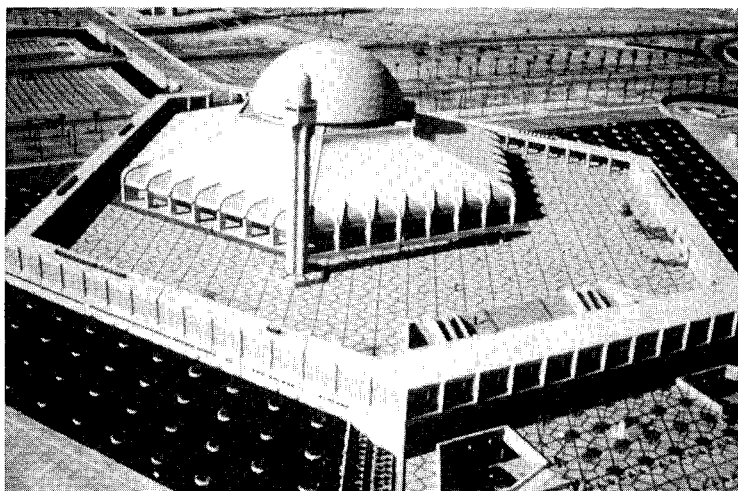
The consequences of this shift of power are particularly evident in the modern-day urban setting. In the past, the mosque was almost without exception an integrated element in the urban fabric, central to the community it served. This is still true of older urban settings where the relationship has already been established and of new urban settlements where traditional models are sometimes repeated. However, in many Islamic cities, the problem of the growing city which has led to the creation of new urban settlements has incited governments to make site decisions based exclusively on zoning considerations, that is, to create a number of “strategically located” Friday mosques which are not usually integrated into the community that they serve. The result is that these mosques become separated from the neighbourhood, thus leading to a breakdown in the inhabitants’ physical relationship with their mosque.



The King Khaled International Airport Mosque in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, is a perfect example of a centrally conceived mosque commissioned by an institutional body, in this case the Airport Development Authority.

Architects: Helmut, Obata and Kasselbaum

Photograph: Courtesy of the architects



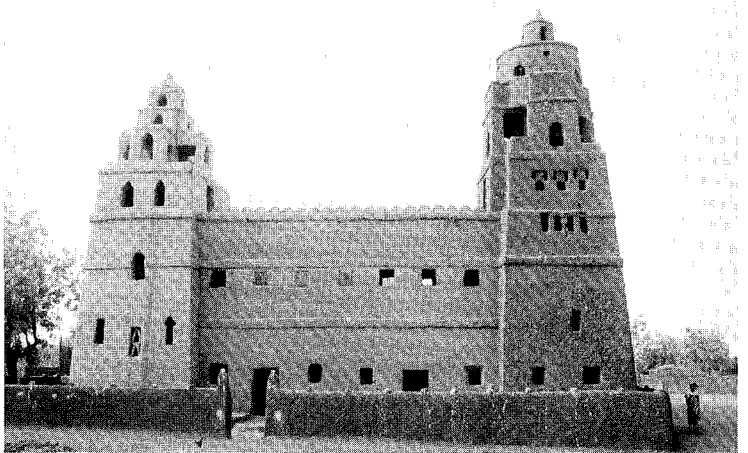
*The Central Mosque of Porto Novo, Benin, begun in 1912 by African repatriates from South America, uses an imported vernacular style reminiscent of Brazilian baroque church architecture known as the Afro-Brazilian style.
Photograph: C. Benedetti*

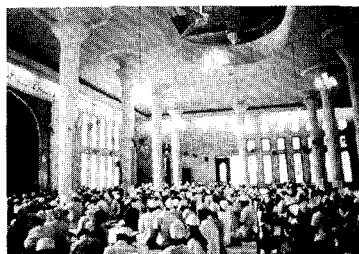


Another development which has been expressed in a shift from particularism in the built environment towards universalism is the appearance of a pan-Islamic style. As a result of pressures to become more “normative”, as well as a conscious desire on the part of Muslim communities to be seen as being Muslim, the use of clearly identifiable, universally “Islamic” elements such as the minaret and dome is becoming ever more frequent in modern-day mosque architecture. The pan-Islamic style has had a significant impact on the entire Islamic world, but especially in regions such as Southeast Asia where it has almost completely supplanted traditional architectural styles in both urban and rural societies. An illustration of this tendency can be found in Indonesia where take-home prefabricated tin domes, which can be bought at roadside stands, have had an overwhelming success.

Individual patrons have always played an important part in the building of mosques. Individuals usually build mosques as a sign

*Winner of an Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1986, the Yaama Mosque in Niger was constructed in several stages by the community led by the master mason. It displays the vernacular building tradition of Africa using local mud brick techniques.
Master Mason: Falké Barmou
Photograph: K. Adle/AKAA*





*Baitul Mukarram was conceived as a central mosque for the city of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Built by the local community, it takes the historical model of the Kaaba in Mecca as its formal reference. Architect: A.H. Thariani
Photograph: S. Noorani*



of their piety or as a gesture towards their own community. Such mosques usually reflect the taste of their patrons, such as the eclectic Indian mosque complex built by the landowner Sardar Rais in Bhong, Pakistan. Often a ruler would erect a mosque in a foreign land as a reminder of his presence and his own faith. This can be seen in countless examples in India and Indonesia. In recent times the international nature of the elite has led to the individual making a gesture not only to his own community but to others as well — for example, several Saudi Arabian princes have built mosques in Pakistan, Morocco, and Spain. The patron is of necessity economically well-off but the range is enormous: from the King of Morocco to a businessman in Bangladesh. Here, I do not plan to elaborate on the question of individual as client but raise it as a continually important force in mosque-building.

Communities “abroad” constitute the other new client type (other than the State). They consist of people who live in societies that

*The Sherefudin White Mosque in Visoko, Yugoslavia, winner of an Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1983, was built by the Muslim community of Visoko. The building illustrates the modernist approach to mosque building. Architect: Zlatko Ugljen
Photograph: J. Bétant/AKAA*



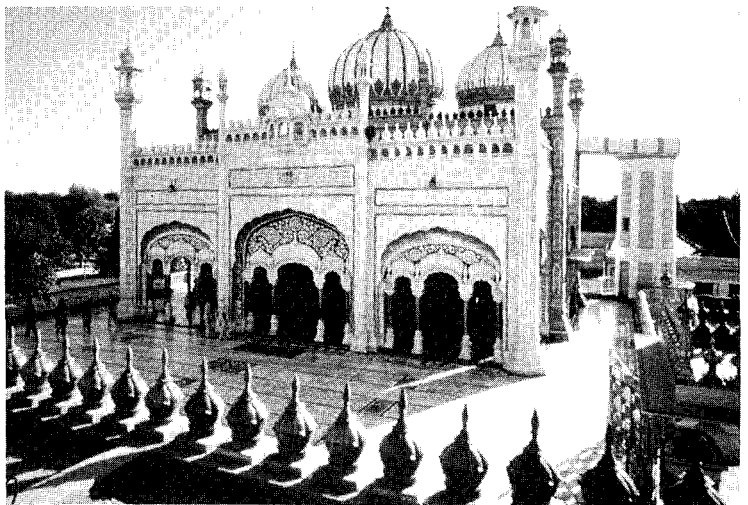
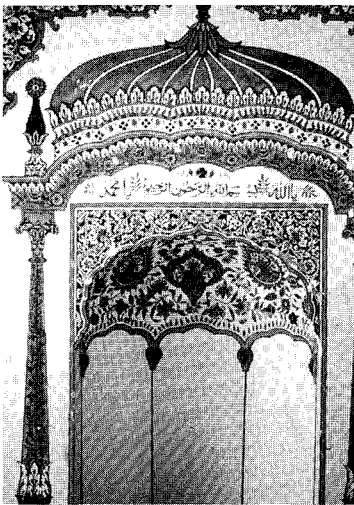
In Indonesia, prefabricated tin domes which can be bought at road stands have enjoyed enormous popularity. Such domes replace the traditional roof as a signal of a mosque's presence and are perceived as relating to the Middle Eastern Arab architecture of Islam's origins.

Photograph: S. Özkan



Entirely conceived, financed and built by its patron, Rais Ghazi Mohammad, the Bhong Village Mosque represents a popular eclectic vernacular style common in the north of the Indo-Pakistani sub-continent. This recipient of an Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1986 uses profuse decoration and a liberal juxtaposition of materials (below and right). As such, it represents perhaps a true ars vulgaris.

*Architect: Rais Ghazi Mohammad
Photographs: J. Bétant/AKAA*



are predominantly non-Muslim and belong to cultures other than their own. With the globalization of culture and movement of people, this category of client has become an important one. This is true of the Dar al-Islam Mosque in New Mexico, designed by Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy in a traditional Nubian architectural idiom, which serves as a landmark for a Muslim minority in the United States, and of the mosque in Plainfield, Indiana, designed by Gulzar Haider.

This discussion, however, of mosques built by immigrant communities abroad focuses on mosques built or perceived as statements of Muslim presence in the West, which can be distinguished from mosques that are built by communities for their own everyday use. In new urban and rural settings, particularly in the case of a Muslim community in a non-Muslim country or surrounded by other religious groups, the mosque is a very important

The Dar al-Islam Mosque near Abiquiu, New Mexico, is part of the planned village designed for a Muslim arts and crafts community in the United States as a continuation of the New Gorna experiment.

Architect: Hassan Fathy

Photograph: Cradoc Bagshaw/Dar al-Islam



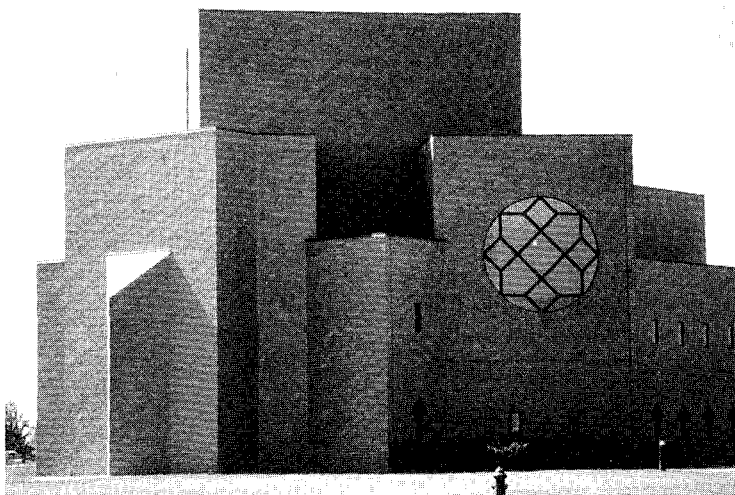
collective sign of the community's presence, and usually the first public building to be erected. This is true in most large cities in the West such as London, Washington, or Paris where the mosque or Islamic centre functions as a point of reference for Muslims in the city and as a symbol of Islam. These buildings are usually financed by groups of Muslims of different origins and backgrounds. They also serve as indicators of the role in which immigrant groups see themselves within a foreign cultural context.

Projects for mosques expressing Muslim presence in non-Muslim countries basically started to take shape in the 1950s, which coincided with the end of colonialist rule and the rise of the independent states of the Islamic world. The colonial connections between countries like England, India, France, and North Africa remained noticeable. Early mosques included one in Woking, Surrey — a version of the Taj Mahal — founded in 1889 by Shah Jehan Begum, the wife of

The mosque designed for the headquarters of the Islamic Society of North America in Plainfield, Indiana, is a modern image of an Islamic spirit.

Architect: Gulzar Haider

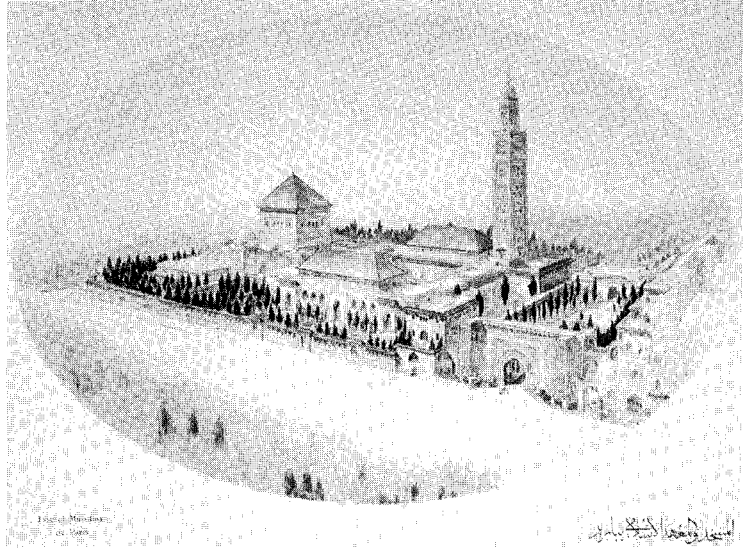
Photograph: Courtesy of the architect



The Paris Mosque is part of an Islamic multipurpose institute built by the French government in the 1920s as a gesture to the North African Muslims for their services during World War I. The complex with its courtyards, minaret and green-tiled roofs was inspired by North African Moroccan architecture.

Architect: Maurice Montour

Photograph: Architect's drawing

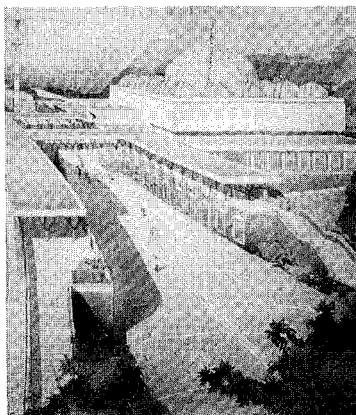


the then Nawab of Bhopal. It displays its Indian connections just as the Paris Mosque built in the 1930s was inspired by North African Moroccan architecture.

During the 1950s and 1960s significant numbers of Muslims began emigrating to England, France, and other parts of Europe as well as North America. By the 1960s the burgeoning immigrant communities began to feel the desire to express their presence by articulating new mosques. Projects that had been initiated in the 1950s like the Islamic Centre in Hamburg, built between 1960 and 1973 and funded jointly by the Iranian community in Germany and religious institutions in Iran, were finally seeing the light of day. With the rise of nationalism came also a growing sense of Muslim identity, which began to be expressed at that time in a large number of mosques being built by governments as symbols of Islamic nationhood — King Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, Masjid Negara in Kuala Lumpur, and Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, to name a few.

Like their counterparts in Muslim countries, mosques in the West built as statements of Muslim identity are usually financed either entirely or in part by Muslim governments, particularly those in the Arab world, which have been responsible for financing more mosques outside of their boundaries than any other Muslim group. Very often, the prime movers in such projects are members of Muslim diplomatic missions who use their position and influence to get the necessary funds to build a mosque from their own and other Islamic governments.

Mosques built in foreign cultural settings are characterized by two tendencies: firstly, the design is tempered by the local context, modified by pressures from the local community or by local regulations and laws; and secondly, the design makes references to



The Mosque of the Islamic Centre in Rome expresses monumentality and a sense of tranquillity. Its contemporary classic design was inspired by an eclectic set of references to mirror the diversity of origins of the Muslim population it serves.

Architects: Portoghesi, Moussawi and Gigliotti

Photographs: Courtesy of P. Portoghesi



regional traditions. In the latter case, the external architectural form is usually influenced by one dominant style from one country or region, depending on who is financing, designing, or leading the project. In this sense, the design reflects the self-identity and aspirations of the group that takes the initiative in the project. The internal layout or plan generally follows the external architecture. However, the interior ornamentation is quite frequently inspired by a potpourri of styles that often have no direct connection with the formal expression. While the outside must fit into a non-Muslim cultural context, the inside is exuberantly decorated with Islamic ornamentation as if to emphasize that space as Muslim. Good examples of such buildings are the Islamic Centre in Washington, D.C.; the Regent's Park Mosque in London; and the recently built mosque in Rome by Paolo Portoghesi, Sami Moussawi, and V. Gigliotti.

In this century, the convergence of tradition and modernity in the Islamic world has provoked a wide-ranging debate on the essence of Islamic design. This, in turn, has led to a global reassessment of the Islamic heritage and culture, and the question: what constitutes Islamic design? The mosque, as the most important architectural representation of Muslim identity, has come to centre stage.

By taking concrete examples of various mosques from different parts of the world to illustrate the directions which mosque design has taken in the last forty years or so, I hope to indicate the different currents present in mosque design today. They range from government-sponsored and institutional mosques to those individually and community funded. Examples representing the mosque in the West give us insight into Muslim perceptions of their role in the international community.

Architecturally, mosques built in the past forty years may be divided into basically four categories as follows:⁴

- Vernacular — in which the buildings are defined by a traditional architectural language that is still used today.
- Historicist — models which refer back to specific historical styles as the source on which designs are based. Some of the mosques refer to more than one such style and are presented as a mixture of styles.
- Contemporary Classic — which in a Western interpretation would have been called post-modern classicism by writers such as William Curtis. This approach makes reference to the historical styles that are generally regarded as “classical” in Islam but presents a self-conscious search for original reinterpretations of these models. In some cases this leads to an eclecticism and in some, an interesting synthesis.
- Modern — in which originality and dealing with the twentieth century become the overriding concerns. Design, image, and technology point to a break with the past to portray the modern Muslim. Often this is the domain of the formally trained architect (in the Western sense) and the educated client. Progress is the key word.

The design vocabulary raises a number of issues when considered under the four categories of style — the difficulties of this kind of classification are apparent but still serve a useful function as an analytic tool.

Ismail Serageldin in a recent essay outlined some major issues that in regard to buildings in Islam need reflection.⁵ I draw upon these in order to understand better both process and product. The first two deal with the stewardship of the earth and the relationship to nature. Both address attitudes towards the environment and in this instance towards the built environment of settlements and cities. This raises questions of how Muslims relate to society in general, what value systems are implicit in the relationships, and what image they want to project. In building terms one can discern two major trends — within a country that has a predominantly Muslim population the references are very often Ottoman, taking their cue from the modern state that came into being with Ataturk. This is tempered by considerations of nationalism and modern technology. For Muslims in non-Islamic countries, the images of recurring historical and regional references are usually Egyptian, Moroccan, Turkish, Iranian, and Indian.

Serageldin’s third issue considers the relationship among people, and the expression of community — reflected in the relationship to buildings. The mosque in this instance is seen as an integral expression of communal gathering and prayer. The issues raised here address the question of how Muslims see their role within the society in which they live. The aspirations of different groups are expressed in various ways. For instance, the idea of the Arab-Islamic homeland often equates Muslim with Arab, especially outside the Arab nation states. In recent times this has, as we know, manifested

itself well beyond the question of identity to that of politics — the Arab-American dichotomy being one such manifestation. Interestingly, this alternative system of values was equally dramatically illustrated in Iran some ten years ago. Currently, Muslims in Southeast Asia also seem to be confronting these issues, although not in such dramatic ways. In the U.S.A. itself the minority Afro-American Muslims are struggling with the same problem.

In the architecture of Islam, this confrontation within communities begins to take the form of the home base or of the predominant cultural group. Immigrant groups seem to follow the same process. However, the situation becomes less clear when a number of groups collectively try to establish their identity through a single building complex. The often eclectic solutions are only occasionally innovative.

The last issue that Serageldin raises is that of individual behaviour, which I would translate as the way in which a particular building is used. In the case of the mosque, the question of how Muslims relate to each other is essentially not addressed. The act of collective prayer assumes a character of its own where the self is “left outside” and sublimated to the act of community.

To these issues I should like to add some historical considerations. The question of mosque as “sacred” space is open to discussion. Unlike Buddhism or Christianity, the notion of sacred space did not exist in Islam. The individual can pray anywhere, as can a group. What is prescribed is the ritual: the need for a clean surface and the acknowledgement of a physical direction. As collective prayer existed from the time of the Prophet, which was performed in the courtyard of his house, the space for congregation became more formalized. In some *tariqas*, or ways of Islamic belief, such as Sufism and other traditions that leaned towards mysticism and meditation, the space appears to have also become defined in terms of atmosphere and used as the symbolic heart of community. This has led to what one might perceive as the “sacralization” of space.

It may be extrapolated that owing to the secular/sacred integration in Islam, the place of prayer never stood alone but was complemented by other spaces that dealt with general societal interactions. Hence the mosque was usually integrated into the built fabric and was part of the social milieu. As part of the community, it provided spaces for functional facilities around it, such as hospitals, madrasahs, and even bazaars. The emergence of the mosque as a statement of power divorced from its physical context was limited to special cases until the emergence of the modern Islamic state where it has become a statement of identity isolated as a distinct building type — an identity that carries over to its presence in other cultures today.

In the modern world the mosque, more than any other building type of Islam, signals the values of both client groups and society, and the manifestations of change are more apparent in the mosque than in most other building types.

Lastly, the mosque has always been the structure in which both patrons and architects have made the strongest design and technological statement — a trend which today has become even more pronounced. Mosque design takes on the persona and aspirations of the dominant group, which can in practice be quite small. In following the case studies of a wide range of buildings, Renata Holod and I were fascinated by how just a few decision-makers and designers have influenced so much. For example, the committees that decided on most of the state mosques, or the juries that judged design competitions, consisted of five to fifteen people. The mosques subsequently produced became models which were often copied (with variations) many times over. The diffusion of their ideas and their impact even on remote rural situations are acutely felt.

The central role of the contemporary mosque as a clue to understanding the aspirations and needs of Muslim societies cannot be denied. In its mutation and adaptation to change, it has reflected the inherently inclusive nature of Islam rather than what is often portrayed, especially in Western media, as the exclusive nature of the faith. It may not be much of an exaggeration to say that to recognize the dynamics of design in the mosque is to begin to understand changes that are occurring in Muslim societies today.

Finally, let me offer a model of the mosque which is both contemporary and timeless: whether the mosque lies within a complex of buildings, whether it is an isolated monument or just a space in the home, the place of prayer does not stand alone — it is an integrated whole in which the act of ritual prayer is complemented by other activities that relate to the community. It is a sense of public space which is a reflector to all Muslims and the world at large that reconfirms the humanistic and holistic values of Islam.

Notes

1. This paper quotes freely from a forthcoming book on contemporary mosques by Renata Holod and Hasan-Uddin Khan. However, some of the views expressed herein are my own and cannot be attributed to the joint monograph.
2. The masjid being seen as a mosque for daily prayer or built especially for members of a tribe, sect, profession, or other exclusively defined communities, whereas the jami is essentially seen as the mosque for congregational Friday prayer.
3. Although town planning legislation, which divided the city into functional zones and hierarchies, was essentially a Western colonial legacy, local governments still use it in spite of the fact that it is often inapplicable either culturally or climatically in much of the Islamic world.
4. A simpler classification of the mosque has been suggested by Oleg Grabar into “traditional and modern”, and by Mohammad al-Asad in Chapter 1 of this volume. But I feel that my wider classification permits greater nuances and understanding of design from an architectural critic’s point of view.
5. Ismail Serageldin, “Faith and Environment”, in *Space for Freedom* (London: Butterworth Architecture, 1989).