

The Dimensions and Significance of the Symbolism of Umayyad Architecture in the Mashriq

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¹ Aesthetic Symbolism as a Manifestation of Political Authority in Umayyad Caliphal Palaces

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ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

The aesthetic elements in Umayyad palaces were not merely decorative; rather, they reflected the Caliph's status and the state's prestige and economic power. Consequently, architectural beauty served a political and symbolic function alongside its artistic one. The political symbolism and the authority of the nascent state are manifested in dimensions rooted in the concepts of "geographical legitimacy" and the "succession of power" (expressed through "architectural supersession"). Historical accounts indicate that the *Qasr al-Khadra* (Green Palace) was initially a modest structure built upon the ruins of an old palace belonging to a Byzantine governor. This choice carried profound political symbolism, signaling the end of Byzantine sovereignty and the advent of Islamic rule in the heart of Damascus; the transition represented a "visual displacement" of the old symbols of power, replacing them with the new center of Umayyad decision-making. This concept is complemented by the relationship between religion and authority: the palace's location and its connection to the mosque embody the early political philosophy of the Caliphate, wherein the seat of governance and the center of worship merge. This layout served a dual purpose: ensuring the Caliph could move directly from the seat of government (*Dar al-Imara*) to the *mihrab* (prayer niche) to prevent assassination, and reinforcing the Caliph's symbolic role as *Imam* of the nation—simultaneously a political and religious leader.

Political symbolism extended beyond mere location to encompass "imperial parity and emulation" (manifested in the evolution of building materials)—specifically, the transition from constructing... The transition from mud-brick and clay to massive stone—following Mu'awiya's dialogue with the Byzantine delegation—marks a symbolic shift from the simple idiom of the desert to the language of established empires. Since the Byzantines recognized only solid, monumental architecture, stone construction was adopted to reflect the state's strength, endurance, and ability to rival Byzantium and Sassanid Persia in architectural grandeur. This political prestige was further solidified by establishing the foundations of a structured state apparatus and centralized sovereign administration. Furthermore, the palace's transformation into an administrative complex—housing the mint, military barracks, prison, and postal bureau—symbolizes the move from spontaneous tribalism to an organized, institutional state managing vast territories from a unified sovereign center. This institutional evolution paralleled the emergence of displays of pomp and the institution of the *hijaba* (chamberlainship); these served as political symbols—inspired by Persian and Byzantine systems—designed to reshape the ruler's image in the eyes of subjects and foreign visitors, thereby instilling a sense of awe and authority. Beyond its political and administrative functions, the architectural value of the *Qasr al-Khadra* (Green Palace) is expressed through an artistic form that highlights the aesthetic symbolism of color and visual elements; the dome, painted green, became a distinctive visual landmark on the Damascus skyline. This choice of color carries a dual significance: an aesthetic and environmental meaning symbolizing fertility and life amidst the natural landscape of the Ghouta of Damascus, and a politico-religious significance that imbues the palace with an Islamic character. ...at an early stage, given that green was a sacred color associated with the bliss of Paradise; thus, the dome became a visual symbol of the Caliphate's identity. This aligns with features of "cultural integration in ornamentation (mosaic, marble, and gold)," symbolizing a "Late Imperial aesthetic." Adorning architectural spaces with mosaics represented an adoption of the prevailing global aesthetic language of the time, adapted to serve the non-figurative nature of Islamic art during this early period. This artistic environment is inseparable from the "concept of the earthly paradise (gardens and fountains)," which carries aesthetic and philosophical symbolism mirroring the "Promised Paradise" or an earthly Eden; it reflects the Umayyads' fascination with water and its architectural integration as a symbol of luxury and engineering prowess. This vision is further realized through the brilliant choice of location: the palace overlooked a fertile plain extending southwest toward the snow-capped Mount Hermon. This highlights a sophisticated awareness of site selection—leveraging the surrounding landscape to achieve harmony between architecture and the vast geographical setting—thereby reinforcing the occupant's sense of dominion and

expansive scale Collectively, these features contribute to the palace's economic symbolism—specifically the dimension of "financial capacity and immense funding." Historical references to the vast sums spent on the palace symbolically reflect the financial stability of the nascent state; revenues from conquests and land taxes flowed into the central treasury in Damascus in amounts framed to signify opulence and supreme economic solvency. This value is further underscored by "economic centralization and monetary sovereignty," as evidenced by the palace's functional layout: the inclusion of a mint as an integral part of its structure represents the pinnacle of this economic symbolism. Currency serves as the state's vital artery; its issuance from within the palace's administrative complex proclaims the Caliph's absolute sovereignty over the economy and paves the way for the comprehensive Arabization of coinage—a process that fully crystallized later during the reign of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. Similarly, Qasr Burqu in Jordan embodies a functional and symbolic transition reflecting the ambitions of the nascent Umayyad state. Its construction as a military fortress alongside a Roman watchtower—coupled with a Kufic inscription dated 81 AH—carries political significance, signaling the displacement of Byzantine influence and the consolidation of Marwanid sovereignty. Its aesthetic symbolism is highlighted through an architecture attuned to the environment, utilizing local black basalt stone and adopting a layout featuring a central courtyard and vaulted chambers. These aspects are complemented by vital economic symbolism evident in the engineering of a dam to secure water facilities, transforming the palace into a strategic hub for resource management and the protection of trade caravan routes deep within the desert. At Qasr al-Minya, political symbolism is manifested through inscriptions affirming the Imamate in Arabic script—documenting allegiance to the Commander of the Faithful and proclaiming triumph—reinforced by the fortress-like appearance of towers that attest to the ruler's might and the projection of authority across the frontier zones. Aesthetic dimensions are revealed in the pairing of stones of contrasting colors and the lavish use of marble flooring and gilded, multicolored mosaics—elements symbolizing the exalted status of the noble court and the creation of a magnificent Arab architectural style. This system is complemented by economic symbolism evident in the strategic placement of springs and water channels; such features demonstrate the treasury's solvency, the abundant minting of dinars, and the capacity to develop the land and harness water resources to settle the populace and secure their livelihoods. The political symbolism of Qasr al-Harrana is embodied in the repurposing of ancient Byzantine military strongholds to proclaim a succession of power and to document—via Kufic Arabic script—obedience and loyalty to the Marwanid dynasty. Furthermore, the spacious rooms and the structural symmetry between the two floors signify the centralization of administrative functions and the reception of delegations and the Caliphate's entourage, thereby projecting the prestige and authority of the ruling power at the fringes of the Syrian Desert.

Aesthetic symbolism is also highlighted through the adaptation of Sassanid and Byzantine structural systems to the Arab style—seen, for instance, in transverse arches resting on clustered triple columns and in oval domes that signify superior craftsmanship. The incorporation of a two-course decorative band into the stone facades of a palace in the Syrian Desert symbolizes a fusion of civilizations and an openness to the knowledge of the conquered nations. Umayyad builders successfully adapted this imported element, employing it as an aesthetic feature to adorn the architecture of the new Islamic Caliphate and distinguish it from the purely Roman style prevalent in the region. This is evident in the construction of **khans** (caravanserais) along international trade routes extending toward the Arabian Peninsula—structures characterized by durable stone masonry and a ground floor designated for pack animals and servants. Such features highlight the economic symbolism of the **Bayt al-Mal** (State Treasury) in financing these utilitarian facilities, which secured the economic lifeblood of the state and fostered agricultural and pastoral stability in the Syrian steppe. At Qasr Usays, the architecture asserts the sovereignty of the Islamic Caliphate amidst rugged highlands, projecting an aura of authority. Aesthetic symbolism is manifested in the octagonal stone pool at the center of the courtyard, representing the engineering ingenuity capable of overcoming water scarcity and crafting a space that evokes the architecture of paradise. The artistic composition is crowned by an ornate, wreath-like cornice atop the dome, symbolizing the dignity and grandeur befitting the court of the Caliph's sons residing in the desert. The murals of Qusayr 'Amra serve as a testament to the diversity and fluid transitions between colors and themes, embodying authentic archaeological and civilizational symbols—such as the emulation of imperial grandeur and the assertion of universal sovereignty. This symbolism is clearly evident in the "official panels," where the depiction of the Caliph—flanked by two figures and shaded by a parasol topped with a halo—reflects the adoption of traditions from great imperial courts (Sassanid and Byzantine) to proclaim the exalted status of the Caliphate. Furthermore, the documentation of thirty-two panels depicting various trades carries political significance; it signifies the Caliphate's absolute dominion over human resources—mobilizing them to develop the land and harnessing diverse professions to serve the central authority. The "Six Kings" mural (depicting the enemies of Islam) at Qusayr 'Amra embodies profound political and civilizational significance for the Umayyad dynasty. It serves as a political statement proclaiming the supremacy of the Umayyad Caliphate and its succession to the mantle of global leadership; Al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malik sought to demonstrate the submission of the world's monarchs to the awe-inspiring authority of the nascent Islamic state. Placing this mural in the heart of the desert—where it would be viewed by official delegations and visitors—

symbolized the breaking of psychological barriers vis-à-vis established powers. Caliphs who had emerged from the austere simplicity of the Arabian Peninsula now possessed the visual authority to depict powerful world leaders in postures of submission or parity within their own royal courts. This bestowed upon the emerging state an absolute imperial legitimacy rivaling the prestige of Byzantium and Sassanid Persia. Meanwhile, scenes of hunting, the driving of onagers, wrestling, dancing, and depictions of women and human figures symbolize a celebration of life, cultural openness, and the Caliphs' desire to transform these palaces and retreats into venues for leisure and lavish recreation, far removed from the rigid formality of Damascus and the seat of government. These mythological and pagan panels embody a cultural symbolism demonstrating how local artists—Arameans and Arabs—integrated dominant Classical and Roman cultures, fusing them into an early Arab-Umayyad mold that formed the nucleus of Islamic decorative principles. The economic symbolism is equally evident, linked to structural investment and the practical utility of the state treasury; the construction of these strongholds along ancient trade routes signifies the state's financial capacity to secure travelers and protect overland paths. Furthermore, these architectural oases served as centers of sovereign hospitality and functional rest stops, contributing to resource revitalization, economic stability, and the projection of the state's wealth and splendor across its territories. At Qasr al-Muwaqqar, political symbolism is manifested in the site's functional evolution from a remote facility in the Balqa region into a seat of the Caliphate—a center for proclaiming victory and cementing the imperial legitimacy of the Marwanid dynasty. The court's hosting of major poetry festivals and gatherings of eminent poets carried profound political significance, symbolizing the use of the architectural monument as a platform to broadcast power and triumph, while reinforcing allegiance to the Imam of the Muslims. This complements the imposing appearance of the wall, reinforced by four towers and domes of varying geometries—alternating between square and circular forms. This design symbolizes the ruler's desire to project strength and establish royal prestige, blending the formal authority of the sultanate court with an Arab yearning for Bedouin life and solitary contemplation—far from the clamor of urban centers and the burdens of governance. Meanwhile, the "Tree of Life" mosaic—which paves the floor of the main reception hall at the Khirbat palace—depicts a scene where a lion ferociously and powerfully pounces on a frail gazelle; this is not merely an imitation of nature but carries profound political symbolism, proclaiming the might of the Umayyad Caliphate and its ruthlessness toward the state's lurking enemies. In contrast, two gazelles frolic in peace and safety on the left side beneath the shade of the fruit-bearing tree, symbolizing the prosperity, justice, and security enjoyed by the subjects under the rule of the Commander of the Faithful, Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik. The architectural and decorative elements of Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi reveal that beauty was not an end in itself but was linked to projecting the prestige of the Umayyad Caliphate and embodying its political stature. The palace's urban layout—conceived as a self-contained royal city comprising two palaces, orchards, waterworks, a mosque, and quarters for the retinue and servants—reflects an architectural vision that embodies centralized authority. It demonstrates the Umayyad state's capacity to create integrated urban complexes that underscore the stability of the regime and its abundant resources, while highlighting aesthetic symbolism through stucco ornamentation and wall paintings featuring intricate floral motifs. Motifs such as vine leaves, palm fronds, and lilies symbolize the sophistication and prosperity of the Umayyad court, as well as the state's political power and its capacity to patronize the arts and architecture. Furthermore, depictions of men and women bearing cornucopias and vessels filled with flowers—alongside images of birds and animals—carry symbolic connotations of prosperity, abundance, and stability. In the political thought of the era, these concepts were linked to strong, successful governance; thus, ornamentation became a means to embody the image of the Caliph as a patron of bounty and civilization.

The combination of decorative elements also reflects a cultural and political symbolism that underscores the Umayyad state's ability to assimilate the architectural heritage of earlier civilizations and recast it within an Islamic framework that bears its own distinct identity. This contributed to reinforcing the image of the Caliphate as the heir to great civilizations and a power capable of producing distinctive architecture. Consequently, the aesthetic beauty of Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi was not merely decorative; it served as a symbolic vehicle for projecting the Caliph's prestige and the state's power, wealth, and cultural superiority—factors that shaped the architecture. It served as an instrument for expressing political authority just as much as it was a space for residence and administration. Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi reveals a clear presence of political symbolism in Umayyad architecture; it was not merely a residence for the Caliph but a tangible embodiment of the Umayyad state's power and prestige. The Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik's establishment of a fully integrated royal city symbolized the Caliphate's capacity to organize a comprehensive administrative and residential hub, as well as the stability of its rule and the strength of its administration. This political symbolism is further evident in the defensive fortifications surrounding the palace—elements that served not only a military function but also embodied the prestige of authority and the commitment to protecting the Caliph's seat, reflecting the ruler's status and the necessity of securing the center of governance against threats. Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi stands as a clear example of the adaptation and reformulation of ancient craftsmanship to articulate the voice and political dominance of the Marwanid Caliphate, a quality evident in its layout, which is based on the "house system." The palace was divided into six independent residential units; this rigorous spatial layout carried political and

administrative significance, reflecting the organization of the Caliph's retinue and the accommodation of official delegations according to their social rank—thereby realizing the concepts of **hijaba** (screening/access control) and **mana'a** (inviolability/security) essential to the seat of power in the Syrian steppe. Aesthetic dimensions served as a visual manifestation of sovereignty, exemplified by the statue of Caliph Hisham positioned on the façade. Furthermore, the "Musicians and Horseman-Archer" panel—discovered on the floors and walls of Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi—embodies authentic historical and archaeological symbolism, specifically the fusion of court life and Bedouin life. The panel's division into upper and lower registers reflects the Umayyad Caliphs' philosophy of living: the upper section, featuring **nay** (flute) and **oud** (lute) players, symbolizes the atmosphere of luxury, leisure, and refinement within courtly gatherings; conversely, the lower section—depicting a mounted horseman—symbolizes the life of hunting, chivalry, and a passion for the nature of the Syrian steppe. This arrangement also demonstrates the adaptation of artistic traditions to proclaim dominance and sovereign authority; the placement of musicians within architectural arches and the depiction of hunting expeditions echo Sassanid artistic conventions and the imagery of ancient non-Arab kings. The decorative façade of Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi epitomizes the art of visual splendor, as well as the grandeur, sophistication, and refined taste of its creators. Exquisite limestone carvings are concentrated at the palace's sole entrance, forming a main façade with political symbolism aimed at visitors; its purpose is to project the authority's wealth and power before one even steps inside. Aesthetically, the fusion of intricate floral and geometric patterns clearly symbolizes the architectural style's openness to—and synthesis of—artistic influences from neighboring regions. This dense ornamentation imbues the façade with a dynamic aesthetic quality, relying on the interplay of light and shadow across raised and recessed surfaces, while demonstrating artistic mastery and the ability to harness and adapt diverse building materials into a unified structure. Although political circumstances prevented its completion, Qasr Tuba embodies political symbolism reflecting the authority's ambition to extend its sphere of influence and assert its physical presence across open landscapes and vital corridors. Aesthetically, the site highlights the concept of an "architectural challenge" by placing a highly organized structure within an exposed, wild environment; this creates a visual balance between the harshness of the natural surroundings and the opulence of the architecture, transforming the valley's geography into a focal point that proclaims the authority's might. The palace's geometric layout carries clear symbolic meaning, signifying decisiveness, discipline, and the projection of political prestige. The political and aesthetic dimensions are evident in the division of the structure into two square masses that are symmetrical in layout and planning; this precise symmetry embodies the administration's desire to organize space, divide tasks, and equitably distribute architectural functions. Collectively, the decorative carvings symbolize artistic cross-pollination with neighboring civilizations and the adoption of motifs representing opulence and cosmic fertility, thereby documenting the grandeur of the authority and its visual reach. The stagnation of urban development in subsequent periods reflected a symbolism of austerity—marked by a halt in construction and the disappearance of new palaces—as well as a political symbolism evident in the shifting of state priorities toward suppressing internal unrest and waging war. The focus turned to the treasury and the public good rather than lavish spending on opulent structures. This strategic shift, combined with the practice of relocating administrative centers without leaving behind lasting physical traces, symbolizes the migration of power centers and a transformation in the ruling authority's philosophy regarding architecture and monumental edifices.....

Secondly: Economic Symbolism as a Manifestation of Political Authority in Key Umayyad Cities

1- Wasit

The timing of Wasit's construction is linked to profound political symbolism regarding the breaking of the opposition's power and the restoration of the Umayyad state's prestige—both auditory and visual. The construction of Wasit at that specific juncture was not merely an act of urban expansion; it was a tangible, spatial declaration of the Marwanids' victory. It established a permanent stronghold overlooking the sources of unrest, enabling the management of internal frontiers and the suppression of separatist tendencies in the **Sawad** (fertile lowlands) of Iraq by concentrating military power at a single, strategic fulcrum. Siting Wasit at an intermediary point between the two rebellious garrison cities (**amsar**) symbolized the authorities' desire to shatter the geographical axis of sedition—the Kufa-Basra line—and to drive a permanent wedge between them, preventing their military coalition. Thus, Wasit became a physical symbol of the state's dominance—a power that had quelled insurrectionist impulses, particularly following the defeat of Ibn al-Ash'ath's revolt. Here, the political symbolism lies in the dismantling of the opposition front. Furthermore, Al-Hajjaj's creation of the city—particularly the residential arrangements in its western sector—carried profound political and authoritative implications. It reflected the state's aim to cultivate a society of unalloyed loyalty; this spatial segregation symbolized the Umayyad administration's desire to preserve the ruling **asabiyya** (group solidarity)—specifically the Syrian Arab troops—within a pristine geographical enclave that secured the Governor's Palace (**Dar al-Imara**) and forestalled social mixing. The city was established to isolate the Arab forces from the local non-Arab population—thereby preventing the infiltration of anti-regime sentiments or the influence of local loyalties held by indigenous groups (such as the **Mawali** and **Ahl al-Dhimma** of Persian Kaskar). This made the western sector a tangible

symbol of the state's "authority of conquest" and its tribal purity (*asabiyya*). The choice of this geographic location was not merely a matter of local significance; rather, Wasit served as a "base for the eastern frontiers" and a hub for military mobilization. Functionally, it acted as a sovereign link between the Caliphate's center in the Levant and the regions of Khorasan, Sistan, and Transoxiana. It was the bridge through which state decrees and military reinforcements flowed to drive forward conquests and assert the East's allegiance to the House of Marwan. Furthermore, constructing the city on an elevated, virgin site reflected strategic foresight aimed at capturing the region's revenues and establishing a distinct financial administration. The economic symbolism here arises from the contrast between the Arab city of Wasit and the Persian city of Kaskar—the long-standing financial and cultural center of the region's *Dehqans* (landed gentry). By building an Arab *misr* (garrison city) on the bank opposite old Kaskar and north of the *al-Batiha* (marshlands), the state sought to shatter the economic hegemony and financial influence of the old Persian noble houses, shifting the center of commercial and fiscal gravity entirely to the new Islamic administration, thereby ensuring the governor's headquarters (*Dar al-Imara*) maintained control over the region's treasury (*Bayt al-Mal*). The circular-to-oval geometric structure of Wasit carries pioneering symbolic significance in the history of Umayyad architecture, encapsulating the city's political symbolism as a purely "functional tool" serving the state rather than a site for tribal settlement. Its sophisticated circular-oval layout, situated on an elevated mound, grants the Governor's Palace (*Dar al-Imara*) the advantages of visual oversight and all-round defense. This geometric evolution symbolizes the maturation of the centralized state concept—building cities as precise geometric forms designed for "surveillance, regulation, and control"—a model later emulated by the Abbasids in their "Round City." Furthermore, Umayyad urban planning in Wasit was driven by a philosophy of asserting total political control through direct fiscal oversight, symbolized by the architectural centrality of financial institutions as instruments of state authority. This economic symbolism is manifested in the spatial and geometric integration of the center of worship, the seat of governance, and state administrative institutions; Al-Hajjaj established his palace against the *qibla* wall of the congregational mosque, placing it at the very heart of the city. The architectural contiguity of the mosque and the Governor's Palace at the city center embodies the union of "religious leadership" and "political leadership"—an Umayyad urban philosophy that positioned the mosque's *minbar* (pulpit) and the palace's seat of authority as the twin poles of direct control over the populace, where political affairs were managed and caliphal decrees and pledges were proclaimed from the heart of the religious sanctuary. Administrative offices and institutions were established alongside the Great Mosque and the Governor's Palace (*Dar al-Imara*). This close proximity—linking the mosque's pulpit, the seat of governance, the treasury (*Dar al-Rizq*), and the administrative bureaus—represented more than a mere spatial arrangement of facilities; it carried profound political symbolism. It signified that wealth was the lifeblood of obedience and the pillar of state stability, with the governor exercising direct oversight over financial flows, the collection of *khums* (religious levies), and the distribution of stipends. Furthermore, placing the treasury under the governor's direct supervision and control symbolized the subordination of the state's economic function to the needs of the military apparatus. In Marwanid statecraft, wealth was the primary tool for securing the loyalty of the "obedient troops" (the Syrians) and curbing the ambitions of dissenters, making resource management a clear manifestation of the Sultan's prestige and executive authority. As for the symbolism of professional-based urban settlement and the dismantling of tribal solidarity (*asabiyya*) within the garrison towns, the internal layout and residential zoning of Wasit's districts revolutionized the old tribal model that had prevailed in Basra and Kufa. Economic organization emerged as a tool to fragment social blocs opposed to the regime by making trade and craft—rather than lineage—the basis for spatial distribution. Planners deliberately isolated potential agitators; the political symbolism of this professional settlement lay in the Umayyad administration's desire to dissolve the tribal identities that had fueled Kharijite uprisings and political opposition ...replacing them with economic ties based on mutual interest that revolved around the state. Dividing the city into "four quarters with straight streets opening onto the seat of the governorate" ensured visual and security control, as well as ease in collecting levies from these districts. Furthermore, designating specific quarters for productive trades reflected the transformation of the *misr* (garrison city)—shifting from a tribal military settlement driven by kinship loyalties to a fully controlled hub of artisanal production. This deprived opposition movements of a tribal power base and established political authority as the sole arbiter for land grants and the development of infrastructure. Central markets and standardized weights and measures served as instruments of both hegemony and legitimacy; in Al-Hajjaj's vision, markets acted as arteries for concentrating material resources under the state's watchful eye. Placing the governor's residence and the congregational mosque near the market demonstrated the expansion and rigorous organization of commercial space, followed by sovereign measures to regulate financial transactions. The resulting productive abundance enhanced the symbolic significance of the markets established at the city's heart, reflecting the state's stability and its capacity to secure the food supply. The organization of these markets—stocked with staples and provisions—within the city centers signaled state oversight and a commitment to converting agricultural wealth into monetary and commercial activity. Here, markets were not merely sites of exchange but manifestations of a "successful state policy" that ensured prosperity and price stability through the *Hisba* institution and market overseers.

Moreover, the extension of the market... The route extending from the seat of governance to the riverbank holds profound economic significance, as it links the center of authority with the point of waterborne distribution, thereby enabling complete control over the movement of provisions and goods. The aspect of sovereign authority is powerfully manifested in the "standardization of weights and measures and the regulation of prices." In Islamic jurisprudence, the regulation of measures is both a religious and a state function—carried out by the **Hisba** institution—that reflects the ruler's justice and his ability to maintain order. Here, economic symbolism emerges: controlling markets and money changers prevents monopolies and the social unrest that could lead to sedition (**fitna**), while simultaneously ensuring the accurate collection of tithes and levies for the Wasit treasury. Thus, the markets serve as a visual showcase of economic prosperity rooted in the stability derived from obedience to the Caliphate. The city's engineering plans reveal an advanced military awareness that integrates natural and man-made barriers to quell insurrection. The symbolism here transcends mere defensive measures, aiming instead to demonstrate the ruler's deterrent power; encircling the city with two walls and a moat—while leveraging the naturally fortified island location between the Tigris and Euphrates—sends a visual and psychological message to the rebellious cities of Kufa and Basra that the seat of authority is impregnable. It also grants the governor the ability to maneuver rapidly, dispatching forces to suppress unrest and secure the Umayyad presence in Iraq. Furthermore, the defensive system—specifically the restrictions on migration and the prohibition regarding the **Sawad** (the fertile alluvial lands)—served not only to protect Wasit from external enemies but also acted as an economic tool for managing the movement of the population and labor force within the **Sawad**. This economic symbolism is evident in the strict isolation of the **Sawad** inhabitants and the ban on them spending the night within the city... The political authority sought to anchor farmers and producers to their lands and villages to ensure the continuity of agriculture and land cultivation—and, crucially, to avoid disrupting the collection of the **kharaj** (land tax). After all, the migration of the rural population of the **Sawad** to the urban center would transform them into idle consumer masses potentially susceptible to sedition. In this context, the city wall—with its massive iron gates that were "closed at sunset"—functioned as both an economic and security filter: daytime entry was permitted for market trade, while rural inhabitants were expelled at night to preserve the **misr's** (garrison city's) distinctively Levantine military character. This physical control over human movement symbolizes that the city's layout served the administration of governance and finance, rather than functioning merely as an open population settlement..

The immense financial strength and superior fiscal capacity of the Umayyad state are evident in the staggering scale of expenditure on the new **misr** (garrison city). Directing the budget of the Caliphate's wealthiest provinces for five years toward the construction of a single city reflects the symbolism of total economic mobilization; the state was not merely building housing but leveraging financial surpluses to project the Sultan's opulence and the state's grandeur to its subjects, while transforming collected wealth into permanent real estate and defensive assets that bolstered the stability of rule. This is manifested in infrastructure and major edifices that stand as tangible testaments to the state's financial might and coercive power. Economic symbolism is further highlighted by the juxtaposition of the "port terminal" against the "state prison"; the convergence of the "Elephant Landing" (**Mashra'at al-Fil**) near the "al-Dimas" prison represents the pinnacle of this dual economic-political symbolism. The landing symbolizes abundance and the monopolization of the riverine arteries connecting to the far reaches of the East, while **al-Dimas** symbolizes the material power capable of safeguarding this wealth and punishing those who rebel against the community or refuse to pay land taxes (**kharaj**). Ultimately, the expenditure of "forty-three million dirhams" stands as the supreme manifestation of the state's financial symbolism. It reflects the Marwanid Caliphate's capacity to channel the financial surplus of an entire region into monumental architecture—colossal structures designed to awe subjects and compel their obedience. This signaled the supremacy of Wasit, establishing it as the hub of Iraq and the seat of governors who administered Umayyad territories in the East. Furthermore, the pinnacle of Wasit's economic and sovereign symbolism is evident in its transformation into the sole financial center for minting silver coinage in the eastern Caliphate. Restricting the minting of **dirhams** to Wasit for a quarter-century (104–128 AH)—while closing mints in other provinces—symbolized the Marwanid state's iron-fisted economic control. The **dirhams** of Wasit, circulating far and wide, were not merely instruments of financial exchange; they were "mobile political documents" bearing the name of the province and Islamic slogans. They affirmed the central treasury's direct control over monetary policy and prevented provincial governors or officials from unilaterally minting coins or tampering with their purity, thereby making Wasit the heart of the Umayyad financial system.

2- Ramla

Examining the structural development and urbanization of Ramla during the Umayyad era requires moving beyond reductive, anecdotal, or moralizing explanations—such as the desire for "comfort and leisure" or attributing the city's founding solely to the narrative regarding the inability to purchase the orchard of the Church of Lydda. Instead, one must adopt a broader perspective that analyzes the economic and political symbolism leveraged by the Caliphate. The initial contours of this political symbolism emerge in the alignment of urban

development with the "Caliphal pledge of allegiance" (bay'a) to Sulayman ibn Abd al-Malik, marking a new destiny. The transition from a provincial military administration (*jund*) to a centralized decision-making authority created an imperative to establish a capital that embodied Umayyad autonomy vis-à-vis ancient Byzantine urban centers like Lydda and Jerusalem. Politically, this transformation is manifested in the architectural "triad of sovereignty"—comprising the treasury (*Bayt al-Mal*), the governor's palace (*Dar al-Imara*), and the congregational mosque. The symbolism of this architectural ensemble lies in linking military power to its financial and religious legitimacy under the ruler's authority, reinforced by military fortifications—specifically walls featuring twelve gates. At its core, this defensive system served as a safeguard, protecting tax revenues and market activity from political instability. This political framework was paralleled by a highly nuanced economic symbolism reflected in artisanal activities and service facilities; the "Dyers' Quarter" (*Dar al-Sabbaghin*), for instance, was not merely an isolated workshop but represented a Caliphal strategy to monopolize—and direct—vital, high-revenue industries. The *Bayt al-Mal* (public treasury) service supported this infrastructure through the development of public utility projects—such as caravanserais (*khans*), bathhouses, restaurants, and inns—distributed around the Great Mosque according to craft specializations. This geometric arrangement of markets reflected not only professional evolution but also symbolized the firm authority of the *Hisba* (market oversight) and direct state supervision of production. Furthermore, these services played a role in attracting labor from diverse origins and tribes, thereby integrating tribal components—such as Lakhm, Kinana, the *Ajam* (non-Arabs), and the Samaritans—into the melting pot of the new *Misr* (garrison city) and subjecting them to Umayyad centralization. Water engineering—manifested in the excavation of the Barada Canal, wells, and cisterns—was not merely a utilitarian measure; it embodied a dual political and economic symbolism. Controlling the vital arteries of water in a sandy environment served to proclaim the ruler's legitimacy through the exercise of the right to "revive dead land" (*ihya' al-mawat*) and provide water (*al-suqya*). This rendered the livelihoods and industries of the common people existentially dependent on the Sultan's patronage and the city's economic appeal—a quality Al-Muqaddasi described by noting that it was the "metropolis of Palestine" and that "trade there was profitable."

As for religious and aesthetic symbolism, this was clearly expressed in the construction of the "White Mosque" and its massive minaret, which rivaled the Giralda in scale. In Umayyad thought, the mosque stood as the supreme visual symbol of the triumph of faith and the consolidation of the new state's foundations. Meanwhile, the engagement of the scribe "al-Batriq ibn al-Nakka" carried civilizational symbolism linked to aesthetic cross-cultural exchange and the leveraging of local artistic expertise to create a dazzling Islamic style. However, this architectural and aesthetic ascent was soon subject to regulatory restraint following the death of Sulayman; the austere stance of Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz—who scaled back the original plan on the grounds that the existing scale sufficed—embodied a new religious symbolism. This marked a shift in state ideology from the architectural ostentation inherited from the Khosraus and Caesars toward jurisprudential discipline and asceticism, redefining the *misr* (garrison city) as a space for worship and justice rather than a stage for displaying regal opulence.

3- Al-Rusafa

Islamic urban centers during the Umayyad era were not merely residential hubs or military outposts; rather, they emerged as geographical arenas where the majesty of the Caliphate—along with its material and authoritative power—was manifested, as previously discussed. In this context, the experience of the Umayyad Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik (105–125 AH / 742–743 CE)—who established the city of Rusafa as his seat of government and residence—serves as a unique model of how resources, as well as urban and economic infrastructure, were utilized to reshape the symbolic concept of sovereignty and authority. Prior to the Islamic era, Rusafa was a city of significant Byzantine religious symbolism; however, the shift of the political center of gravity to the city under Caliph Hisham transformed the nature of this symbolism. It evolved from its traditional Byzantine religious dimension into an Islamic political and economic one, reflecting the grandeur of the Caliphate and the vastness of its authority. The redirection of trade routes and axes served as a tool for projecting influence; indeed, the Umayyad authority's economic hegemony was first manifested in its ability to control vital trade arteries and redraw the geographical map for caravans and merchants. This political decision was not merely an administrative measure; rather, it was an explicit declaration of the Caliphate center's capacity to divert the flows of wealth and trade toward its new headquarters. In historical literature, control over overland routes carries symbolic significance ...highly intent on securing the sources of power and safeguarding the state's economic activity; this endowed Al-Rusafa with the status of a vibrant hub toward which economic routes and activities between the Levant and Mesopotamia converged. Furthermore, magnificent architecture and the restoration of walls served as a visual manifestation of the Caliphate's wealth; in ancient political thought, expenditure on construction was a primary indicator of a state's stability and financial might. When Caliph Hisham relocated to the open countryside, the move was not merely a temporary flight to escape an epidemic; rather, his presence there evolved into a massive architectural and economic project aimed at consolidation. Investing funds in the construction of palaces and royal residences—and adorning gates and walls with intricate ornamentation and carvings—served as a visual

embodiment of prosperity and the abundance of the public treasury. These edifices became tangible symbols, conveying to the general populace and visitors alike the majesty of the sovereign and the Umayyad Caliphate's capacity to restore ruins and revitalize urban centers—creating an architectural aesthetic that surpassed the Byzantine legacy. Moreover, the control and management of water resources in semi-arid regions stood as a true test of political authority's competence and a symbol of the "beneficent Caliph." Rusafa faced a significant environmental challenge; the economic symbolism here lies in the state's capacity to engineer the environment and tame the harshness of nature through massive, vital investments. Excavating enormous cisterns and lining them with marble columns was not merely an architectural feat but a political statement: the Caliphate possessed the financial means and prudent management to secure the very essence of life—water—for its subjects and entourage in the heart of the desert. This act cemented the legitimacy of its rule, positioning the state as the guardian and guarantor of human settlement. The association of the sovereign self with the location—"Rusafa of Hisham"—and the merging of the Caliph's name with the city represented the pinnacle of economic and political proprietorship. The shift in the city's name—from one linked to Byzantine religious symbolism and saints to "Rusafa of Hisham"—reflected a radical transformation in the site's ownership and its economic and political identity. The entire city became a personal and material embodiment of the Caliph; its growth, architecture, markets, and cisterns were all attributed to his largesse and authority, causing both the people and the structures to merge into the name "Hisham" as the prime mover of the city's economic and political life. Third: The Political and Religious Symbolism of Umayyad Mosques

The symbolism inherent in both the political and religious dimensions of Umayyad architecture in the East manifests as an integrated conceptual framework that fuses the sacred with the sovereign. The "mosque"—both in its fundamental nature as a site of ritual purity and in its etymological link to *sujud* (prostration), the noblest act of prayer—embodies a profound religious symbolism. It reinforces absolute proximity to the Creator and total submission to Him alone, transforming architectural space from a realm associated with pre-Islamic idolatry—such as prostration before the sun or the veneration of tombs—into a sanctuary of exclusive servitude to God. This concept extends to signify the expansive nature of sacred space; the sacred is not confined within enclosed walls but permeates the entire earth, organized according to a jurisprudential and architectural hierarchy that categorizes spaces based on scale and extent—ranging from the *musalla* (prayer hall) and *zawiya* (small prayer space) to the *Jami'* (Congregational Mosque). The latter term serves as a political and religious symbol of the state's centrality and the authority of the Umayyad Caliphate, as it designates These are the large mosques—distinct from smaller ones—that house the *minbar* (pulpit) and serve as venues for congregational prayers and the two Eid prayers. From this function arises the direct political symbolism of the mosque's construction—often the first act undertaken by conquerors upon seizing a territory—as an imprint of Islam's civilizational and political identity upon the geography of the East. It serves as an explicit declaration of the decline of preceding empires and the advent of an architectural style that forms the cornerstone of Islamic civilization, representing its most significant religious and civic structures. Reflecting how architectural art stems from religious doctrine, the twenty-eight mentions of the word "mosque" (*masjid*) in the Holy Quran confer absolute historical and doctrinal legitimacy upon the Umayyad state's geographic and architectural expansion; this is grounded in Quranic texts calling for the establishment and preparation of mosques as an act of devotion to God. The Umayyad state's extraordinary geographic expanse—stretching from the borders of China to Al-Andalus and the Indian Ocean—was anchored by administrative centralization in Damascus and provinces across the East and West, embodying a fused political and religious symbolism that proclaimed the universal nature of Islam and the absolute legitimacy of the ruling Caliphate. The architectural renaissance—and the state's ability to assimilate and adapt Roman artistic styles in the Levant and Persian styles in Iraq—symbolically represents the subordination of the visual heritage of waning empires to the new monotheistic identity. This achieved a qualitative architectural leap that demonstrated the state's stature on the global stage. This empowerment was manifested through a dual-axis architectural strategy that complemented the prevailing philosophy regarding mosques: the renovation of great mosques symbolized the establishment of the Umayyads' political legitimacy as protectors and authentic continuators of the nation's foundational heritage, while the construction of monumental new mosques asserted the state's visual supremacy within its capital and holy sites. Thus, these structures became a tangible declaration of the centrality of authority and the autonomy of religion and state across the geography of ancient civilizations.

1. The Political and Religious Symbolism of Renovating the Sacred Mosque (Al-Haram) and Rebuilding the Kaaba During the Umayyad Era

Umayyad efforts to develop and expand great mosques carried a combined political and religious symbolism that reflected the state's organizational prowess and its conception of the mosque as a space uniting religious and worldly affairs through the introduction of innovative elements. The transformation of the Sacred Mosque—moving from the architectural simplicity inherited from the Quraysh and the Rashidun Caliphate to the lavish Umayyad patronage characterized by draping the Kaaba in brocade, illuminating the site, and appointing dedicated

attendants—symbolized, in religious terms, the veneration of sacred sites, and in political terms, the assertion of direct Umayyad sovereignty over the Hijaz. This symbolic blending is evident in the adoption of Dar al-Nadwa as the seat of authority and in Mu'awiya's importation of the three-tiered pulpit from Syria—from which he delivered sermons while seated, in a clear departure from his predecessors. This move symbolized the transfer of the ruler's prestige and administrative style from Damascus to the very heart of early Islamic symbolism. Meanwhile, the burning of the Kaaba during the siege of Ibn al-Zubayr in 64 AH underscores the symbolic nature of the conflict over the legitimacy of the sacred site, the reconstruction of the Haram later became a pressing political necessity to reaffirm the absolute religious authority of the Umayyad Caliphate and its role as the guardian of the Ummah against its adversaries. The structural layout and architectural transformations of the Meccan Haram embodied a highly complex political and religious symbolism, wherein the walls of the Kaaba were transformed into a visual arena for asserting religious legitimacy and the right to the Caliphate. Leaving the Kaaba in its fire-damaged state—or altering its architectural structure based on older foundations—symbolized the adversaries' exploitation of sacred space to undermine Umayyad prestige and strip Damascus of its spiritual legitimacy. Conversely, Abd al-Malik's counter-architectural policy—which sought to erase those changes and restore the Kaaba to its pre-Islamic form—symbolized the re-imposition of "Umayyad stability and order" and the removal of the visual traces of the **Fitna** (civil strife). This process was imbued with both devotional and political symbolism through the dispatch of a luxurious silk **kiswa** (covering), the roofing of the Sacred Mosque with teak, the importation of marble columns, and the gilding of capitals—all intended to assert the majesty of the victorious Caliphate.

This supreme imperial symbolism later crystallized during the reign of al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malik with the introduction—for the first time—of marble columns brought from the Levant and Egypt. This move symbolized the "civilizational inclusivity of Islam" under the Umayyad banner and the harnessing of the conquered provinces' wealth to serve the spiritual capital. He crowned these efforts by gilding the Kaaba's door and channeling fresh water for pilgrims—acts symbolizing the Caliphate's abundant bounty and its stewardship of the faith.

In contrast, the era of Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz represented a symbolic shift back toward asceticism; Limiting architectural activity to essential restoration—while eschewing gold and ornamentation—symbolized a commitment to social justice and a return to the architectural style of the Rashidun era, prioritizing the purity of religious function over lavish imperial displays. The patronage extended by caliphs like Yazid ibn Abd al-Malik and their governors to pilgrimage routes—through the digging of wells, construction of hostels, and improvement of the path from Kufa to Mecca—carried both religious and political significance: religiously, it embodied the duties of **siqaya** (providing water) and **rifada** (hosting pilgrims); politically, it established territorial oversight and asserted sovereignty over the state's major corridors and arteries. This service-oriented approach complemented the continued provision of the Kaaba's covering and the expansion of the Sacred Mosque's precincts, allowing the caliphs to project themselves as legitimate leaders and guardians of the holy sites. These actions served as a crucial political tool to defuse public discontent, secure loyalty, and alleviate tensions in the Hijaz—a trajectory demonstrating the state's predominantly religious orientation up to the caliphate of Yazid ibn al-Walid. Conversely, the complete absence of construction during the reign of Marwan ibn Muhammad—due to his preoccupation with internal conflicts—symbolized a waning of prestige; Umayyad architecture was a mirror of state power, and its absence signaled a suspension of the symbolism of sovereignty that persisted until the regime's ultimate collapse.

2. The Political and Religious Symbolism of the Development of the Mosque of Amr ibn al-Aas During the Umayyad Era

The political and religious symbolism inherent in the architectural transformations of the Mosque of Amr ibn al-Aas in Fustat demonstrates how simple spaces were adapted into visual instruments proclaiming the authority and stability of the Caliphate. As the first mosque established in Egypt—and the fourth in the Islamic state—this mosque (known by honorifics such as the "Crown of Mosques," the "Ancient Mosque," and the "Mosque of Victory") was linked from its inception to the **Dar al-Imara** (Governor's Palace). This connection primarily symbolized the structural interdependence and close integration between religious authority and the prestige of governance. However, the mosque's evolution—transitioning from the structural simplicity of its initial form during the Prophetic era and the Rashidun Caliphate to the first phase of Umayyad renovation under Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan (carried out by the governor of Egypt, Maslama ibn Mukhallad al-Ansari)—embodies a combined political and religious symbolism. When Maslama demolished the structure in 53 AH and rebuilt it, he expanded the area to the north—along with the addition of the open courtyard and the four corner minarets commissioned by the Caliph—served as a political symbol of the Islamic state asserting visual dominance and absolute sovereignty over the open city's public space. Architecturally, this acted as a counter-statement to Byzantine church towers and bells, signaling the wane of Roman influence and the rise of the new Umayyad imprint as a dominant force. Religiously, it symbolized the institutionalization of the **adhan** (call to prayer),

transforming it from a mere vocal signal into a towering architectural element that anchored the concept of monotheism and geographically defined the boundaries of the Islamic space by projecting the "Voice of Truth" to the farthest reaches of the metropolis. It also established the Umayyad Caliphate's new civilizational identity and exalted the beacon of monotheism—manifested in replacing the gravel floor with reed mats, the governor inscribing his name on the minaret, and the first-time decoration of the ceiling and walls. This reflected the distinctiveness of the Umayyad empire and a shift toward an aesthetic character expressing the state's stability and strength. This sense of sovereignty deepened during the new construction phase under the governorship of Abd al-Aziz ibn Marwan—commissioned by his brother, Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. The demolition of the mosque in 79 AH and the doubling of its total area symbolized the reinforcement of the Marwanid dynasty's political legitimacy through intensified architectural efforts that transformed and elevated the mosque's form. This process culminated in a unique symbolic gesture: the importation of a wooden **minbar** (pulpit) from Nubia. It was installed at the forefront of the mosque, where the **minbar** (pulpit) symbolized the subjugation of neighboring regions and the utilization of their wealth to bolster the Umayyad platform of governance and leadership. Conversely, the subsequent expansion undertaken during the reign of Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz—adding an outer courtyard (**rahba**) on the western side—served as a jurisprudential complement; it symbolized the accommodation of the growing Muslim community and affirmed the state's role in providing just stewardship, thereby bridging the dimensions of political hegemony with the site's religious sanctity.

This political and religious symbolism reached its zenith during the comprehensive reconstruction of the Fustat Mosque. Raising the mosque's roof under Abdallah ibn Abd al-Malik, followed by its complete demolition and total rebuilding, symbolized the imposition of Umayyad political will and showcased an architectural boom as a means to cement the authority's prestige and visually anchor the Caliphate's legitimacy within the conquered territories. Features such as the addition of corner towers—mimicking the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus—the correction of the **qibla** orientation, the introduction of a concave **mihrab** (prayer niche) modeled after the Prophet's **mihrab** in Medina, the construction of the **maqsura** (enclosure), the gilding of column capitals, and the incorporation of Amr ibn al-As's house to expand the entrances to eleven, held deep significance. Religiously, these elements symbolized the regulation of worship rituals and affirmed the ancient mosque's connection to major Prophetic and Umayyad precedents and sacred symbols. Politically and architecturally, they symbolized the transplantation of the "grandeur of the unified Umayyad style," creating an enduring, tangible testament to the state's centrality and power. This expression of sovereignty continues through... This is evident in the renovations and the construction of the "Bayt al-Mal Dome" (Treasury Dome) undertaken by Sulayman ibn Abd al-Malik. This unique architectural element symbolizes the integrity of the Caliphate and its social justice by integrating a religious space with the function of safeguarding the subjects' wealth under the protection of the sacred. This regional prominence was further consolidated during the tenures of subsequent governors through the incorporation of the **Rahba** (courtyard), the addition of a wooden **minbar** (pulpit) during the governorship of Safwan ibn Hanzala, and the restoration of the minarets during the governorship of al-Hurr ibn Yusuf Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik's directive to repair and maintain water conduits, tunnels, and underground channels demonstrated the state's capacity to manage major infrastructure and public utilities. This effort was further elevated by Governor Hafs ibn al-Walid, who introduced structural elements characterized by grandeur and durability; these features explicitly symbolized architectural majesty and impregnability, reflecting the edifice's strategic importance and transforming it into a visual and political stronghold that underscored the firm establishment of Umayyad rule in the Islamic East.

3. The Political and Religious Symbolism of Founding and Expanding the Great Mosque of Kufa During the Umayyad Era

The construction of mosque porticoes resting on marble columns—originally belonging to the Sassanid kings—symbolized the physical and visual subjugation and appropriation of the legacy of fallen empires for the benefit of the nascent state. This transition marked a shift from reed structures to mud-brick and clay—adopted for greater stability following a fire. This dominance was further cemented by walls reinforced with towering, twenty-meter-high turrets and deep foundations, symbolizing military might and material strength; these features transformed the religious space into a visible fortress, embodying the steadfastness of Muslim authority in Iraq. This complex is completed by the shrines of Muslim ibn Aqil and Hani ibn Urwa—featuring pointed domes adorned with inscriptions and colorful **kashi** (glazed tilework)—which embody the symbolism of martyrdom and a historical link to the struggle for legitimacy, connecting dimensions of political allegiance with the sanctity of the mosque's courtyard and architecture. This political and religious symbolism manifests during the phase of Kufa Mosque's civilizational consolidation, as architectural elements are transformed into visual markers proclaiming the state's authority. The cylindrical minaret, with its geometric brickwork, symbolizes the exaltation of the beacon of monotheism and projects the visual authority of the Caliphate. Meanwhile, the open courtyard, its **mihrabs** (prayer niches), and the area known as the "Safina" (the Ship) serve to religiously anchor the spiritual memory of

the site. This parallels the significance of the original layout—designed to accommodate forty thousand fighters—which stood as a base for administering the affairs of both the *Ummah* (community) and the military. The rigorous Umayyad symbolism became particularly evident during the governorship of Ziyad ibn Abihi in Iraq (50 AH, under the reign of Mu'awiyah); the mosque's reconstruction using brick and plaster—following the four-portico style—signified the state's stability and an era of consolidation. This was further reinforced by expanding the area to accommodate sixty thousand worshippers, thereby addressing the community's rapid population growth.

Furthermore, the transport of massive stone columns from the Ahwaz mountains symbolized the harnessing of geography and regional resources to serve the edifices of the Caliphate. This transformed the sanctuary—with its hall of carved columns and gravel-strewn floor—into a symbol of imperial grandeur. A symbolic fusion is also evident in Ziyad's introduction of the *maqsurah* (an enclosed area for the ruler); this symbolized the security and political separation of the ruler, while simultaneously acknowledging his religious standing as *Imam*. Thus, the Kufa Mosque—having fully realized its structural elements and emulated the architectural style Before its demolition and reconstruction, the Prophet's Mosque stood as a unique edifice in which the state's sovereign symbolism converged with the allure of religious sanctity. 4. The Political and Religious Symbolism of the Founding and Expansion of the Great Mosque of Sana'a During the Umayyad Era

The political and religious symbolism of the Great Mosque of Sana'a—one of the oldest mosques in Yemen and the third in Islam—is evident in its very inception. Its establishment by the direct command of the Prophet (PBUH) to the Companion Wabar bin Yuhannis al-Ansari—along with the precise designation of its site within the Badhan orchard, utilizing the bedrock of the ancient Ghumdan Palace and aligning with Mount Dhin—imbues the architectural space with profound, miraculous religious symbolism. This grants the mosque absolute sanctity, placing its *qibla* (direction of prayer) on par with the Holy Kaaba. This sanctity is further reinforced by a historical link to the tomb of one of the sons of the Prophet Hud (peace be upon him) on the western side, symbolizing the continuity of monotheism and the roots of the prophets in Yemen. Furthermore, the Yemenis' adherence to the boundaries of the original small, square structure (12 meters) and its twelve columns—specifically the "Manqura" and "Masmura" columns, which were designated by the Prophet as outer markers—symbolizes a religious desire to seek blessings from these primordial Prophetic relics and to cement the architectural connection to the era of the mosque's initial founding.

Stemming from this deeply rooted sanctity, the first Umayyad expansion—undertaken during the reign of Caliph al-Walid bin Abd al-Malik and the governorship of Ayyub bin Yahya al-Thaqafi—acquired a dual political and religious significance. The Caliph's directive to enlarge and solidly reconstruct the mosque, and to relocate the *qibla* and *mihrab* northward toward Mount Dhin—in compliance with Prophetic specifications and the testimony of Wahb bin... It serves as a reminder of the assertion of the Marwanid political legitimacy—positioning the dynasty as the faithful guardian and executor of Prophetic injunctions across the conquered territories. Furthermore, the ornamentation of the new *mihrab*—featuring exquisite stucco leaf patterns and its annual anointing with *khaluq* (a saffron-based perfume), musk, and fine fragrances during Ramadan—symbolizes, both politically and architecturally, the infusion of Yemeni urban centers with Umayyad grandeur and distinctive style. It proclaims the state's visual supremacy by marrying aesthetic value with religious solemnity—an opulent imperial style that later triggered a symbolic and jurisprudential backlash when Judge Yahya bin Abdullah demolished these decorations, reverting the *mihrab* to plain stucco to prevent the embellishment of mosques from distracting worshippers. Thus, the edifice as a whole embodies the symbolic balance and ongoing tension between the political authority's desire to project might and the need to preserve the purity of the faith's devotional function. Similarly, the literary testimony found in the words of Abu Nuwas—"We are the lords of Na'it; Sana'a is ours, and musk fills its *mihrab*"—conveys a combined doctrinal and architectural significance, cementing the Umayyads' lavish policy of scenting mosque *mihrabs* with *khaluq* and fine perfumes. This practice was not merely a devotional act intended to lend religious gravity to the *qibla* space; it evolved into a political symbol proclaiming the harmony between Marwanid prosperity and empowerment and the veneration of the Houses of God ...and the crafting of a visual and sensory identity that embodied Umayyad grandeur within the urban centers of the East. Conversely, the discontinuation of this practice upon the arrival of the governor Umar ibn Abd al-Hamid—the first Abbasid governor of Sana'a—signified a clear ideological shift orchestrated by the new administration to erase the tangible traces of Umayyad sovereignty; the cessation of the practice of scenting the mosque thus served as a symbolic dismantling of the former opulence, demonstrating that the architectural amenities of the mosque mirrored the shifting political authority and the struggle to shape the sacred space. 5. The Political and Religious Symbolism of the Founding and Architecture of the Dome of the Rock Mosque in the Umayyad Era

Within the context of the extraordinary architectural transformation of Jerusalem, the political and religious symbolism associated with the Dome of the Rock—the oldest surviving Islamic monument and an architectural marvel—reflects several key themes: it was designed to adorn major urban centers, unify the Muslim community, and project strength against outsiders. Historically, the context of the conquest of Palestine—specifically the

surrender of "Aelia" (Jerusalem) conditional upon the personal presence of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab—signifies the Islamic recognition of the site's exceptional sanctity. Politically, it symbolizes the transfer of administrative and spiritual sovereignty over the Levant to the banner of the Caliphate. Umar's foundational act—marking out the **mihrab** (prayer niche) on the eastern side and building the first mosque in Jerusalem—involved positioning the prayer area toward the **Qibla** while leaving the Noble Rock in the background; this spatial arrangement carried a clear monotheistic symbolism that distinguished the independent Islamic **Qibla** (the Kaaba) from earlier religious legacies. This structural layout, however, gave rise to a historical conflation that merged the structures of the Haram complex (the Mosque of Umar, the Dome of the Rock, and the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque) into a unified symbolic space. This political and religious symbolism was further amplified when Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan affirmed the city's sanctity, secured the pledge of allegiance (**bay'a**) for his own Caliphate in Jerusalem, and performed prayers in its mosque; such political utilization of the holy site symbolized Mu'awiya's effort to consolidate the legitimacy of the nascent Umayyad rule through a doctrinal and historical bond with the Blessed Land. ...and the cradle of prophets; this political foundation served as a direct, symbolic prelude to the radical urban transformation and the city's golden age—which later crystallized under the reign of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan—when architecture evolved from a realm of simple functionality into a universal visual language proclaiming the eminence of the Islamic nation and its complete independence from contemporary empires. The architecture of the Dome of the Rock embodies a profound intersection of political and religious symbolism. Umayyad architecture in Jerusalem transcends mere structural dimensions, serving instead as an instrument to assert international sovereignty and rival Byzantium. Here, the concept of political and religious symbolism manifests as the transformation of geometric and material forms into intellectual and authoritative signifiers that articulate the identity of the nascent state. This symbolism is evident in the construction of the Dome of the Rock, whose height and monumental scale surpass those of surrounding churches—a declaration of Islam's civilizational supremacy and its role as the successor to ancient empires. From a political perspective... This international ambition coincided with a domestic objective: "establishing legitimacy and confronting the opposition." The Umayyads imbued the architectural void with alternative symbolism by shifting the symbolic center of gravity to the Levant—a direct political response to the revolt of Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr in the Hejaz and his efforts to win over the people of the Levant. This prompted the Caliphate to divert people from the Hajj in Mecca toward the Dome of the Rock, positioning it as a substitute for the Kaaba. In crafting this sacred symbolism, they relied on religious and jurisprudential dimensions articulated by eminent scholars who enjoyed the endorsement of the Companions. This strategic use of architecture was not limited to internal conflict; it also served to "display power and wealth and assert continuity and dynastic succession." Gold and blue mosaics were employed to project imperial majesty, while Sassanid and Byzantine artistic styles were assimilated and subordinated to the new sovereign authority. This aesthetic and political grandeur remains a living testament to that era; indeed, this political symbolism persisted into the Abbasid period, manifesting as a struggle over the legacy of legitimacy and an attempt to erase the achievements of the preceding Caliphate. This was clearly demonstrated when Caliph al-Ma'mun removed the original mosaic inscription commissioned by Abd al-Malik and replaced it with his own name, attempting to falsify the historical lineage of the architectural monument and attribute it to the Abbasids. Modern approaches to discussing Umayyad architecture move beyond monolithic interpretations, focusing instead on deconstructing the political and religious symbolism articulated by al-Ya'qubi; A close examination reveals that his claims lack historical and logical accuracy—particularly his hypothesis that the Dome of the Rock was built to serve as a spatial and doctrinal alternative to Mecca for the Hajj pilgrimage. This is an implausible proposition that would effectively invalidate a definitively established religious obligation; indeed, the political legitimacy of the Umayyad Caliphate rested upon the unity of the **Ummah** rather than its fragmentation. Furthermore, the biography of Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan—who was a jurist raised in Medina—imbues his political leadership with religious symbolism, rendering it inconceivable that he would alter a pillar of the Hajj or act out of ignorance regarding religious rulings. This symbolic legitimacy is corroborated by irrefutable historical evidence demonstrating that the rituals of the pilgrimage were kept distinct from political conflicts. Al-Baladhuri notes the adherence of the Levantine army to Mecca's religious centrality—a point reinforced by Al-Tabari's documentation of the Hajj pilgrimage undertaken by four warring factions in the year 68 AH. Beyond the mere symbolism of internal schism, competitive religious symbolism and civilizational hegemony emerge as primary drivers for the construction. The architectural significance of the Dome of the Rock reveals deeper layers of political and religious symbolism; Al-Muqaddasi presents a reasoned argument establishing a "philosophy of defensive architecture and the protection of doctrinal identity." He demonstrates that the lavish expenditure on Umayyad structures—such as the Dome of the Rock—was not an act of extravagance but a necessity dictated by competitive symbolism: the need to eclipse the visual and religious impact of Byzantine churches (like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre) on the hearts of Muslims and to transform the Islamic landmark into a symbol of sovereignty that would dazzle outsiders and safeguard doctrinal loyalty. Thus, a dome of comparable majesty and grandeur was erected to assert the supremacy of Islam. Furthermore, countering the image of autocracy propagated by certain narratives, Al-Ulaymi reframes the institutional and administrative symbolism of the Caliphate by

highlighting the "principle of *Shura* (consultation) and the gauging of public opinion." Abd al-Malik did not embark on construction until he had corresponded with provincial governors and officials, thereby imbuing the project—and its function of shielding the structure from the elements—with symbolic legitimacy and a broad political consensus endorsed by the *Ummah*. This is complemented by a fourth narrative reflecting the spiritual and popular symbolism associated with commemorating the Isra and Mi'raj (the Night Journey and Ascension). Although early exegetes did not explicitly reference this aspect, it imbues the edifice with a profound sacred symbolism—bridging earth and heaven—and transforms the architecture into a tangible embodiment of a metaphysical event central to Islamic doctrine. Furthermore, the project's execution and financial arrangements reveal sophisticated structural dimensions of political and religious symbolism; entrusting the technical oversight to an elite group of jurists and administrators creates a symbolic synergy that fuses religious legitimacy with institutional competence, thereby lending absolute credibility to this royal undertaking.

The creation of a scale model for engineering validation—followed by lavish financial expenditure at the geographical heart of the holy sites—reflects symbolism rooted in merit and empowerment. The Caliphate utilized the imperial financial surplus, derived from the land taxes of major provinces, as a vehicle to symbolize economic hegemony and demonstrate material superiority to contemporary international powers. This strategic use of resources also embodies the symbolism of social inclusion and overarching sovereignty by integrating local religious communities (Jews and Christians); exempting them from standard levies in exchange for their contribution to the maintenance of this Islamic facility reinforces the concept of the state as an inclusive patron. This scene is completed by the design's sovereign and visual symbolism, which absorbed prevailing architectural styles—such as that of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre—and fused them into a new identity. Perched atop a raised platform known in geographical sources as the *Dakka*, the edifice serves as a dominant visual axis, proclaiming the State's supremacy and its doctrinal and political presence within the space of Jerusalem. The structure's geometric and architectural characteristics embody profound layers of political and religious symbolism; the octagonal plan and the circular space surrounding the center signify sanctity and spiritual transcendence by directing the entire visual field toward the focal point of the religious event. The repurposing of ancient architectural elements reflects the symbolism of sovereignty and a successor civilization, signaling the subordination of previous empires to the emerging Islamic authority.

Furthermore, the towering golden dome—crowned with a crescent and adorned with the copper of Caliphate dinars—imposes a symbolism of dominance and regal loftiness, acting as a sovereign visual marker that proclaims the triumph of monotheism within the city's landscape. The mosaics, *mihrab*, and abundant windows evoke the symbolism of divine manifestation and light, consecrating the sacred majesty, while the design of the two concentric circular arcades symbolizes inclusivity and the fluid, ritualistic movement of the community of believers. The system is made complete by the symbolism of universality and doctrinal inclusiveness, expressed through early vegetal ornamentation and the placement of four doorways facing the cardinal directions—a declaration of the sovereign edifice's openness to the world and its historical permanence. This doctrinal and political presence is deeply rooted in the landscape of Jerusalem, transcending mere political or religious symbolism; the architectural plan itself reveals this, as the Umayyads' deliberate choice of an octagonal design—rooted in the classical Levantine tradition—signifies a rootedness in the land and a rightful claim to its urban geography. The Caliphate did not import a foreign style; rather, it intentionally fused local architectural heritage through the work of skilled Arab artisans, thereby asserting the new faith's sovereignty over the region's history and embodying the symbolism of civilizational independence and sovereign parity. This symbolic system reached its culmination during the reign of al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malik; the repair of structural fissures and the completion of the wall enclosure came to symbolize the political succession and familial continuity of the Marwanid dynasty. Thus, the architectural achievement transcends the individual legacy of the founding Caliph, evolving into a sustained state strategy that reflects the collaborative efforts of successive generations—fathers and sons alike—to magnify the site's sanctity and cement the prestige of the sovereign authority as the guardian of the holy places⁶. The Political and Religious Symbolism of the Founding and Architecture of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem during the Umayyad Era

The development of Jerusalem during the Umayyad era transcended purely architectural objectives, embodying profound connotations of authority and faith. The structures commissioned by Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan symbolized the might of the Caliphate and served to rival the Christian churches of the Levant. Architecture became a tool to consolidate the pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*) and refute claims of dissent, symbolizing the unity of the *Ummah* regarding the sanctity of the Mosque and its traditions, while highlighting the Caliph's jurisprudential standing. This material expression extended to the octagonal plan and local architectural styles, symbolizing the independence and heritage of Arab craftsmanship—a legacy further cemented under al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malik, who completed the construction and walls, thereby symbolizing a dynastic achievement and the continuity of the Marwanid family. This significance is rooted in the status attributed to the edifice by Al-Umari—as the sanctuary of the prophets, the "Second House" (after the Kaaba), and the threshold of the Gathering (*Mahshar*). These virtues, referenced in the Quranic account of the Night Journey (*Isra*), symbolize the site's

divinely ordained sanctity and the doctrinal link between the two Holy Sanctuaries established even prior to their physical construction. Meanwhile, the incorporation of white marble, gilded plating, green and blue mosaics, and motifs of grape clusters and leaves conveys a luxurious aesthetic symbolism, harnessing artistic splendor to assert civilizational and sovereign supremacy. The significance of the grape clusters and vegetal motifs lies in their symbolism of the promises of paradise and divine blessing, while simultaneously proclaiming the vast reach and universality of the Caliphate. Meanwhile, the interplay of colors and gold leaf reflects the majesty of authority and the grandeur of the faith; this served to divert the subjects' attention from the ornamentation of other structures and to highlight the preeminence of the Levant. Under the reign of Sulayman ibn Abd al-Malik, the Dome became a venue for state administration, the taking of the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*), and the safekeeping of official records and the treasury—thereby imbuing it with a symbolism that united politics and religious law, and establishing an official governing character that earned the ruler the title "The Reformer." He was succeeded by Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, whose decision to remove Jews from guard duties symbolized absolute sovereignty over the stewardship of the Sanctuary and the preservation of its doctrinal identity. The picture of this transformation is completed by the edifice remaining a focal point of dynastic rivalry following the earthquake of 130 AH and the fall of the Marwanids; the Abbasids' requirement that provincial governors fund the site—coupled with Abu Ja'far al-Mansur's actions in stripping away gold and silver plating and removing the precious coverings—symbolized the erasure of Marwanid dominance, the dismantling of the lavish aesthetic legacy of the structure's original builder, and the reshaping of the architectural space to proclaim Abbasid supremacy and bring Jerusalem under the banner of the rising Abbasid state.⁷ The Architectural Symbolism of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus and Its Civilizational Significance in the Umayyad Era

In its physical and spatial structure, the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus constitutes an archaeological and civilizational document of immense importance, revealing the philosophy of the Umayyad Caliphate and the era of the Islamic state's historical consolidation. Its architecture incorporates multi-layered symbolic dimensions, the first of which manifests as a political symbolism designed to proclaim the prestige of the nascent state—a state that had reached the zenith of its expansion and civilizational development. Caliph al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malik's decision to construct the edifice was driven by a desire for it to be "commensurate with the city's grandeur and befitting the prestige of his state." He was intent on ensuring the Damascus mosque would stand as an enduring symbol of architectural magnificence and splendor, immortalizing his own name, the city of Damascus, and the Umayyad era through an unprecedented achievement. This move cemented the legitimacy of the new capital, establishing Damascus as a central hub of the Islamic world—a source of pride the Caliph could boast of to the world, telling the people of Damascus: "I wished to add a fifth element for you: this mosque." The structure also embodied the symbolism of political dominance and the definition of sovereign boundaries; the transition from a phase of "sharing the sanctuary" to one of "total site appropriation" served as an explicit political declaration that the era of subservience to old administrative or visual legacies had ended. The moment the Caliph himself wielded an axe to demolish the church—amidst the people's cries of *Allahu Akbar*—marked a symbolic political watershed, affirming the Islamic state's absolute sovereignty over the strongholds of ancient Byzantine urban centers. Furthermore, it demonstrated civilizational distinctiveness, challenged the architectural supremacy of neighboring empires (Byzantine and Sassanid), and sought to rival the monuments of Constantinople, echoing al-Walid's declaration: "I wish to build a mosque the likes of which neither my predecessors nor my successors shall ever build." This visual and political grandeur is corroborated by historical accounts regarding the Byzantine delegation that visited the mosque during the Caliphate... Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz—where their leader collapsed, overcome by the grandeur of the structure; upon regaining consciousness, he expressed his astonishment, realizing that the notion of the Arabs' fleeting presence was dispelled by this edifice, which reflected strategic depth and an enduring civilizational reach that stunned their Byzantine adversaries and shook their political convictions. This political symbolism is further underscored by the centrality of the seat of power (the Caliph's palace); incorporating the seat of authority and its ancillary structures—such as the *Dar al-Khadra* (Green Palace) and *Dar al-Khayl* (Stables)—into the mosque complex carried profound political symbolism. It signified the integration of the nation's leadership with its center of worship, establishing a direct nucleus for state administration and the *bay'a* (oath of allegiance), while simultaneously bolstering the Caliph's security through the *maqsurah* (enclosure) and the *sirdab* (underground chamber) adjacent to the *Dar al-Khadra*. These political dimensions paralleled a religious symbolism rooted in the reconfiguration and purification of the architectural space, dedicating it exclusively to the doctrine of *Tawhid* (Divine Oneness). This commitment was documented through inscriptions in gold and lapis lazuli adorning the mosque walls—an explicit doctrinal statement rejecting polytheism and repudiating the site's pagan and Trinitarian past (the Temple of Hadad, the Temple of Jupiter, and the Church of John the Baptist). The structure's immense scale accommodated the steadily growing Muslim population, transforming the building itself into a symbol of the faith's expansion and its jurisprudential and social stability. Furthermore, the design eschewed figurative representation—eliminating human and animal forms and replacing icons with vegetal and geometric motifs—to create a visual environment that exalted the Creator and fostered a sense of detachment and reverence in the worshiper, in accordance with

Islamic prohibitions against figurative imagery. This doctrinal approach endowed the edifice with an aesthetic symbolism born of a genius for synthesis; Umayyad art embraced local skills and leveraged the expertise of artisans, planners, and builders, ultimately embodying a structure described as "a compendium of virtues, a repository of marvels, and a wonder of the world," while achieving a harmonious visual integration. Masterfully executed with a distinctive character and rich ornamentation, employing techniques such as polychrome and gilded mosaics (gold and lapis lazuli), polished brick, and alabaster. The polished aesthetic—rooted in Syrian and local artistic traditions—was imbued with an Islamic philosophical character that symbolized the richness of doctrinal belief without resorting to the depiction of living forms. Meanwhile, economic symbolism was manifested by highlighting the material solvency and productive capacity of the Muslim treasury; this was evident in the deployment of immense material resources and lavish expenditure—equivalent to seven years' worth of tax revenue from the Levant—as well as a massive workforce of ten thousand men engaged daily in cutting marble to create the building's intricate ornamentation. Financial surpluses were channeled into constructing colossal infrastructure that served the populace and consolidated the state's foundations. Furthermore, the project demonstrated ingenuity by repurposing precious materials and curbing recurring costs; the walls, towers, and massive limestone blocks of the ancient Roman temple were reused—an effective economic strategy balancing demolition with structural recycling to reduce the time and expense required to erect the primary walls. These profound symbolic dimensions directly shaped the philosophy behind the architectural elements employed and the mosque's overall layout. The mosque was constructed according to an innovative plan that aligns with Islamic religious rites—specifically its orientation toward the Kaaba. Its transverse rectangular layout—which echoes the basilica style but inverts it to create a wide profile—symbolizes the nature of Islamic prayer rows; these favor horizontal expansion (extending right and left) to secure the spiritual merit associated with the front rows, contrasting with churches that stretch longitudinally toward the altar. Furthermore, the structural framework—comprising arches and columns—reveals an advanced engineering sensibility. This is evident in the shift from the Caliph's initial preference for columns extending "toward the cosmos" to a system of interconnected arches that distribute weight away from the columns, resulting in a more robust and masterfully crafted structure. This architectural form symbolizes strength and cohesion, fostering visual continuity within the prayer hall without obstacles obstructing the view between worshippers. Meanwhile, the open courtyard serves as the mosque's beating heart and spatial "breathing space," philosophically symbolizing a hub for gathering, consultation (*shura*), equality, and social and educational interaction among Muslims—a visual and spatial continuity rooted in the early Islamic style of the "Mosque of the Companions" and the earliest Prophetic mosques. The four surrounding arcades symbolize an environment for learning and social interaction—evoking the "shade of knowledge" and traditional schools—and act as a sanctuary linking open and enclosed spaces, thereby ensuring fluid movement and climatic comfort for visitors. Among these, the Qibla arcade on the southern side stands out as the largest space, dedicated to worship and housing the *Maqsura* (enclosed prayer area) and the *Minbar* (pulpit). The sermon and the prayer niche (*mihrab*)—defined by texts as the focal point of the *qibla*—embodied, through their concave form, the "point of orientation toward Mecca." Acting as an acoustic and visual recess, this feature focused the attention of worshippers behind the Imam and anchored the geography of Islamic worship. Complementing the prayer hall were architectural domes; in Umayyad philosophy, these symbolized the heavens, spiritual transcendence, and the Creator's majesty, while serving to distribute natural light, open up the ceiling, and draw the eye toward the central axis of the *mihrab*. The complex was further integrated with minarets—specifically three towers—marking a functional and symbolic transformation: the Umayyads adapted existing ancient Roman square towers located at the wall's corners, converting them into soaring, mosaic-adorned beacons. Thus, the minaret's symbolism shifted from a mere platform for the *muezzin* to announce prayer times—counterbalancing and displacing the space once occupied by Christian bells—into a "guiding visual marker" symbolizing Islam's sovereignty over the city. Its four sides boldly signaled the unification of the call to prayer and broke the previous monopoly on sound; the towers also housed spacious quarters for travelers, reflecting the symbiotic and social symbolism inherent in mosque architecture. Furthermore, mosaics, gold, and lapis lazuli were employed to clad the walls of the sanctuary and the courtyard arcades—both inside and out—creating a lavish display of ornamentation and intricate gilded mosaic artistry. Motifs of plants, trees, cities, and natural elements were selected to serve a doctrinal purpose that eschewed figurative statuary. ...transcending earlier Roman pagan traditions to serve a philosophical purpose: symbolizing the promised Paradise—with its rivers and secure dwellings—awaiting the righteous. The walls thus became a perpetual reminder of the believers' ultimate destiny, reinforcing themes of security, peace, and prosperity under the new state. This was coupled with the symbolism of Kufic and gold-inlaid inscriptions—such as "Our Lord is Allah; we worship none but Allah"—which employed the Divine Word as both a decorative and communicative element. Replacing the traditional icon, these inscriptions proclaimed the site's official, political, and religious identity while documenting the builder's name and the date of construction as an enduring testament to the nation's civilizational legacy. Furthermore, the Caliph's mobilization of a vast workforce symbolized the state's immense organizational and sovereign power. The structure's function extended beyond mere architecture to fulfill a significant social and

scholarly role—a fact chronicled by Muslim travelers like Ibn Battuta. The mosque evolved into a vibrant community hub, teeming with people daily following the dawn and afternoon prayers; it thus became firmly established in the history of Islamic thought as a comprehensive spiritual, educational, and political center—an authentic masterpiece reflecting the genius of Islamic architectural identity and its civilizational leadership throughout the ages

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