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ORITA

XL/1 June 2008

ISSN 0030 5596

XL/1 June 2008

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ORITA

Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies

XL/1

June 2008

Published by

The Department of Religious Studies
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Produced by *JOHN ARCHERS* (Publishers) Ltd
GPO Box 339, Dugbe, Ibadan

Orita is indexed in the following Index Services:

- Ulrich's Int. Periodicals Directory (Index Services) www.bowker.org.uk
R.R. Bowker, Box 727, New Providence NJ 07974-0727 USA
- Zeller Verlag www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal (Social Science Citation Index)
Postfach 1949, D-49009 OSNABRUCK.
- Periodica Islamica, journalseek.net/cgi-bin/journalseek/journalsearch
22 Jalan Liku, 5900 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

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The aim of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan is to promote the study and understanding of "the phenomenon and the social implications of religion in general and religion in African in particular". This involves more specifically "the field of history and phenomenology of religion, theology and philosophy, aiming at an interpretation and understanding of African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam, separately and in so far as there has been cross-fertilisation between them". *Orita: The Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* contributes to the fulfilment of this purpose.

Every effort will be made to give an equal amount of space to articles and reviews dealing with each of the three Faiths and to encourage articles which treat their interaction. The phenomenon of secularisation which represents a common problem for them all will also not be neglected.

ORITA is a Yoruba word meaning, "Where the Roads Meet".

The cover design is by Charles Umezude. It seeks to represent the coming together of Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion in the Journal.

Orita appears in June and December each year.

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Two hard copies of the manuscripts (with an abstract) accompanied with an electronic copy of the text by mail or on a diskette should be sent to the Editor: dejigboyin@yahoo.com, or orita67@yahoo.co.uk

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Within Nigeria: ₦500 per copy
Outside Nigeria: \$20; £16 per copy

c/o The Business Manager: kunbial@yahoo.com
Department of Religious Studies,
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Oyo State
Nigeria.

The Origin and Importance of Mosque in Islam

L.O. Abbas

Abstract

Muslims believe that the basis of human existence in life is worship of the Creator, Allah, and Mosque as the ordained place of worship is strategic in actualising that objective. While the Ka'bah is mentioned in Islamic scriptures as the first house ordained for worship, yet, the use made of mosque in contemporary Muslim society transcends the functions identified with it. Since the sanctification of the Ka'bah as a place of worship by Patriarch Ibrahim, the use made of mosque as a place of worship by Prophet Muhammad has transformed it to a place not only for ecumenical functions but also for social concern. While mosque has undergone stages of transformation in its usage and design, all mosques must be made to face the direction of the Ka'bah in Mecca.

Introduction

Mosque (*Masjid*) literally means a place for self-prostration, a place formally designated for the saying of prayers (*salawat*). In effect, it is a place for the inculcation of reverence for God, the object of worship. Practically, mosque can be described as the spiritual, political, social and educational centre for Muslims. This is so because worship (*salat*) and other Islamic activities are held in it. It also serves as an assembly where matters affecting Muslims and the welfare of the public are discussed. It also serves as educational and social gathering.

Every mosque should ordinarily have workers headed by the Imam who is appointed by the community. It is the responsibility of the Imam to lead the *salat*, deliver sermon (*Khutbah*) on Fridays and conduct other

religious activities (such as open air service (*Wa'z*) and symposium) of the mosque.

There are different opinions on the use of mosque for other purposes beside the observance of *salawat*. One school of thought supports using mosque for prayers only in order to preserve its sacredness. To them, mosque is primarily meant for *salat* performance and should be used exclusively for the purpose. They reject the conduct of social activities like marriage and *Walimatul Qur'an eidul Mawlid*, etc. in mosque which can permit entrance of non-Muslims or menstruating women into mosque and thereby desecrate the house of God.²

The other school believes that other activities can be done in mosque insofar as they are of Islamic importance. According to it, since Prophet Muhammad has declared that the whole of the earth has been made a mosque for him (Bu 7:1), the sacredness of mosque can, therefore, not be tampered with through any other programme.³

Origin and Purpose

The origin of mosque is traced to the Ka'bah in Mecca. The Qur'an describes it as the first house of worship that was ever built on the surface of the earth (Q. 3:95). The Ka'bah contains a cubic-like structure standing in an oblong square of 250 paces long and 200 broad. It has about 152 domes from the outside and its pillars are 20 feet high and $1\frac{3}{4}$ in diameter. The exterior of the mosque is adorned with 7 minarets, which are irregularly distributed. The aim is simply for the worship of Allah through *salat* and circumambulation (*Tawaf*).

There are different accounts about the founding of the Ka'bah. One of the accounts relates that the original Ka'bah was situated in heaven. After the expulsion of Adam from paradise because of his and his wife's disobedience to Allah's directive, he wandered around and finally found himself in Mecca. He later realised that he had been cut off with the

1. I.A.A. Seriki (1986). "Islam Among the Egba and Ijebu Peoples (1841-1932)". Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, p. 395.

2. The idea is promoted by a group known as *Ahlu-Sunnah*. They are easily identifiable by shortness of their trousers and they always wear the turban.
3. This is the view of the Islamic scholars, among whom are University lecturers who are knowledgeable about Islam.

angels who circumambulate the original Ka'bah in heaven with the praises of God on their lips. He was said to have prayed to Allah to allow him erect a building, the like of which he had seen in heaven called *Baytul-ma'mur*⁴ (the Frequented house). God accepted his request and let down a replica of that house in curtains of light and set it in Mecca, perpendicularly under the original. He then ordered the patriarch to turn towards it while praying and to encompass it by way of devotion. After his (Adam's) death, his son Shith built a house in the same form of stone and clay which was later destroyed by a deluge. It was consequently rebuilt by Prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismail, following the command of Allah.

Another legend tells that when after the Fall, Adam was sent out of paradise, he wandered down to Mecca. A foundation which had already been laid in the Seventh Heaven, was uncovered in Mecca by the Angel Jibril, using his wings. This was as a result of Adam's request when the higher spheres were closed to him and he could not communicate again with the other hosts around Allah's throne,⁵ as a result of his fall. The angels threw blocks down from the surrounding areas like Lebanon which filled the hole to the level of the surface of the earth. God then sent a tent from paradise in which Adam lived.

Ka'bah thus became the first principal mosque in Islam. Other principal mosques are the prophetic mosque in Madinah and the Al-Aqsa mosque in Palestine. Ka'bah is different from all the others in that towards it, all of the mosques on earth must face for the purpose of *salat* (Q2:149). Also, *Tawaf* (circumambulation) and *sa'y* (brisk running between *safa* and *marwa*), two principal duties of hajj, are done within it.

The Quba and the Prophet's Mosques

The migration (*hijrah*) of muslims from Mecca to Madinah in 622 A.D. caused the need for and subsequent construction of both Quba and the

prophet's Mosques.⁶ Meccans (*Muhajirin*) and the people of Madinah (*Ansar*) left the city of Madinah to welcome the prophet into the city. When they were all returning to Madinah, the prophet stopped at the residence of the tribe of 'Amr b. 'Awf in Quba'⁷ (a suburb of Madinah). There, he lived with Kulthum b. Hadam and there he built the famous Quba' Mosque, the first to be built during Prophet Muhammad's mission.

On the fourteenth day of his stay in Quba', he set out to Madinah. On arrival, he built a Mosque where the camel he rode stopped on the Divine's instruction. The mosque also served as his family's residence as well as the meeting place for all matters including the court of law. The mosque is important in that a visit to it is a part of hajj rites and any *salat* performed there is 1,000 times more meritorious than one any performed in any other mosques except in the Ka'bah.⁸

Al-Aqsa Mosque

Al-Aqsa Mosque, situated in Quds, Palestine, was the second mosque built on the surface of earth after the *Ka'bah* in Mecca, it was so named because it was the farthest mosque⁹ to which people pay visit in worship. The interval between the construction of the Ka'bah and al-Aqsa is said to be forty years.¹⁰ The building of the mosque commenced with Prophet Dawud (David) during his reign. He engaged some Israelites to build the mosque which was completed by Prophet Sulayman ((Solomon). Al-Aqsa Mosque is unique in some ways: it served as the first direction (*qiblah*) for prayers before Prophet Muhammad was divinely ordered to change his direction to Ka'bah in Mecca. Also, it was reported that whoever dies in it, dies in heaven and that all his sins shall be forgiven.

4. T.P. Hughes (1985). *A Dictionary of Islam*. Lahore. The Book House, p. 386.
5. Z. Rahman (1985). *Encyclopaedia of Seerah*. London, The Muslim Schools Trust, Vol. 1, p. 10.

6. Abbas, L.O. (2004). "Imamship in Islam: Its Concept and Practice Among the Yoruba of Oyo and Osun States", an unpublished Ph.D thesis, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, p.38.
7. M. AbdulWahhab (nd). *Mukhtasar Siratu-Rasul* (SAW) Beirut, Darul-Arabiyyah, p. 157.
8. M.M. Khan (nd). *Summarized Sahih Al-Bukhari*. Saudi Arabia, Maktaba Dar-us-salam, p. 312.
9. A.I. An-Nisaburi (nd). *Qisasul-Ambiya'*, Cairo, Mashhudul-Husayn, p. 411.
10. *Ibid* p.110.

Again, a *salat* performed in Al-Aqsa Mosque is 500¹¹ times more meritorious than any one performed in other mosques except in the Ka'bah and the prophetic mosque in Madinah.

Other Mosques

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the rapid growth of members of the Muslim community under the Islamic state necessitated the establishment of many mosques using different names. They are:

Tribal and Sectarian Mosque

Mosques established on tribal and sectarian basis are allowed in Islam. Such was not only approved by the prophet, but he visited and offered *salat* in some of them. For instance, it was during a *salat* session in the mosque of the Salimah tribe that the revelation to change the *qiblah* from Quds to Ka'bah in Mecca was received by the prophet. Among prominent tribal mosques at the time were those situated around the city of Madinah. They were built by tribes like Qurayzah, Haritha, Dhayyar, Wail, etc. Usually, one is chosen as the central mosque where Friday (*jum'ah*) services are held by the congregation of all Muslims in the community.

Just as there were tribal mosques in the community, there were also mosques belonging to different sects. The Hambalites (named after imam Hambal) in Baghdad built mosques for its congregation. The Hanafi and Shafi'i also had their own separate mosques. In Nigeria society, a similar situation happens as the case is elsewhere in the Muslim world. There are mosques belonging to different groups and associations such as Ahmadiyyah, Ansar-ud-Deen, Ansar ul-Islam, Isabatud-Deen, etc.

Individuals too joined in the building of mosques. While some did it as a general pious act in accordance with the tradition of Prophet Muhammad, others engage in it for personal reasons.

Sanctuaries Becoming Mosques

The spread of Islam particularly during the wars, made some Jewish

sanctuaries and churches in the conquered cities fall into the hands of Muslims and these were converted to mosques. In some places, some churches were willingly surrendered to the Muslims and about fifteen of such were affected in Damascus because members had all converted to Islam. However, there were some towns which made treaty with the Muslims to retain their churches and their faith, and such were permitted.¹² Many of these churches and synagogues taken over were used as official residences and government offices.

Memorial Mosques

Building of mosques in memory of pious leaders for their good deeds happened early in Islam. The practice started with the memory of Prophet Muhammad himself. There were several mosques built in places where the prophet observed *salawat*, and of particular mention is the Mecca-Madinah road. Abubakr As-siddiq was reported to have built a mosque on the road to Badr because the prophet once offered *salat* there.

Some mosques were built in Mecca because the places in which they were situated had one association or the other with the prophet. The house of the first wife of the prophet Khadijah was converted to a mosque. The house where the prophet was born was bought over by the mother of Harun ar-Rashid and converted to a mosque in memory of the prophet.

Some mosques were built and named either after the companions of the prophet or his wives. Some were even named after some earlier prophets. There were, for instance, *Masjid Abubakr* (Abubakr's Mosque) and *Masjid Bilal* (Bilal's Mosque) in Jeddah. There were mosques in memory of Khadijah and Aishah. Some mosques were built in memory of the birthplaces of Hamzah, Umar and Ali.¹³ In Nigeria, some Muslims build mosques in memory of their departed parents and spiritual leaders. Some even build mosques in their names while still alive.

Mosques are built in public institutions like government secretariats, universities, secondary schools, etc. for religious obligations of workers and students, as the case may be.

12. *Ibid* p. 321.

13. W. Sha'rani (1963). *Kashful-Ghamma 'anjami'l Ummah* (np), p. 141.

11. Brill *op. cit.* p. 318.

Types of Mosque

Mosque is basically meant for congregational prayers by all Muslims, particularly those living in the locality where it is situated. There are local (*Raihi*) and central (*Jami'*) mosques. The local mosque is one built either by an individual or by joint efforts of the Muslims in a compound or a quarter. It serves as a meeting place for the observance of the five daily prayers. There could be as many mosques in an area as possible depending on the need of the Muslim community there.

The other one is Central Mosque (*Jami'*). This is purposely built for Friday worship (*Jum'ah*). It is larger than the local since it is meant to serve congregations of many local mosques in the area. But this does not preclude the observance of five daily *salat* there.

In some countries like Nigeria, mosques are named "National". This happens when such a mosque is financed by the government. Such is basically meant for Friday prayers and is in no way different from the other central mosques in function and importance. It is important to note that *salat* can be done in any place (such as one's room, office or house, etc.), but ideally, it is performed in an organised manner, in congregation within the mosque.

Functions of the Mosque

Mosque (*Masjid*) is primarily built for the purpose of observing *salat* both congregationally and individually. Though *salat* observed at any place other than the mosque is acceptable, the one observed in the mosque is more meritorious. Also, it is in the mosque where God's name is mostly remembered. And as all religious houses are generally resorted to once a week, the mosque is visited at least five times a day for the worship of God and the remembrance of His name. The call to prayers (*salat*) at these hours which rends the air with cries of greatness and unity of God further gears the adherents up to their responsibility. Mosque is used for other purposes than *salat*. The following are some of them.

Mosque as a Centre of Equality

The mosque being a meeting place of all Muslims, serves as a training

ground where the doctrine of equality and fraternity of mankind is put into practical use. This is demonstrated when the faithfuls stand shoulder to shoulder in a row before their Creator, with no distinction on the basis of difference of colour or rank, and all following the lead of a fellow man, Imam. All differences and distinctions are obliterated during prayers.

Mosque as Social Centre

Since man is a social animal, he certainly must engage in social activities. Though as a Muslim the level of his activities should be within the approved limits of *Shar'ah*, it is another opportunity to meet with one another which further promotes unity among the Muslims. Marriage (*Zawajj*) performed in the mosque serves as occasion that reunite and re-establish joy and love not only between the couple or their families, but between friends, relations and well wishers.

Funeral prayer (*salatul-janazah*) is also performed in the mosque. Aishah, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, once reported that the body of one Suhayl b. Baida' was brought to the mosque and the prophet led the prayers on it. Umar b. al-Khattab (the second caliph) is also reported to have performed funeral *salat* on Abubakr in the prophetic mosque in Madinah. So also Umar's funeral prayer was performed there.¹⁴ The share of the congregation of joy and sad moments as reflected in the above two examples go a long way in cementing human fraternity and solidarity.

Mosque as Counselling Centre

The fact that mosque is open to the Muslims for greater parts of the day, serves as advantage for counselling purposes. Many members of the Muslim community who cannot determine the next line of action in life are brought together and guided. There is need for proper counselling to ensure right choice of course or occupation, right choice of spouse, right friends and even right place to live. Mosque serves as a venue for this important aspect of human life. This was practised during the lifetime of

14. A. Sarbasi (nd). *Yas' ahunaka fid-Din Wal-Hayat*, Bairut, Darul Jayl, p. 877.

Prophet Muhammad. At the University of Ibadan Central Mosque, for example, couples who register for marriage are made to undergo counselling sessions in the mosque office before wedding. This is to prepare them for future challenges as well as their duties as a Muslim couple.

Mosque as a Place of Accommodation

Residential apartments like guest house or hostel are attached to mosques for guests and wayfarers. The prophet was quoted to have lodged his Thakifi delegates in the mosque. Instead of looking for the assistance of philanthropists or a hotel for such guests of the community, an apartment is reserved in the mosque for them.

Mosque as Pilgrimage Centre

In Islam, visit to mosques particularly the three principal ones — *Ka'bah*, *Almasjidun-Nabawi* and *Almasjidul-Aqsa* — is made an act of worship (*'ihadah*). Prophet Muhammad once said:

One should only mount into the saddle to visit three mosques: *Al-Masjidul-Haram*, *Almasjidun-Nabawi* and *Almasjidul-Aqsa*.¹⁵

Besides, the Qur'an has prescribed pilgrimage to Mecca as an important duty with a visit to the prophet's mosque in Madinah. A visit to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem is equally rewarding. In the year 140 A.H., it was reported that Abu Ja'far Mansur on his hajj visited the three mosques.

Another very important mosque in Islam is Quba. A *salat* performed in this mosque is said to be as meritorious as that of a lesser pilgrimage (*Umrah*) or two visits to Aqsa mosque. The Mosque of Kufa is, according to the fourth Caliph Ali, rated high behind that of Jerusalem. He was quoted to have said that a *salat* performed in the Mosque of Kufa is equal to ten in other mosques.¹⁶ Whenever Prophet Muhammad visited

or arrived any town, his first point of call was mosque, where he would perform *salat*.

Mosque as a Court of Justice

Mosque is used as courts where cases are adjudicated. Early in Islam when the prophet and the caliphs combined the position of head of state with that of chief justice, there were no separate places for courts, and cases were judged in the mosque. Similar courts have been established in the central mosques of some state capitals. Such can be found at the Oja'ba Central Mosque, Ibadan, the Oyo State and in Osun State, at the Osogbo Central Mosque. They are not called *Shari'ah* courts since they were not established by the government. They are named *Shari'ah* Arbitration Panels. There, civil cases relating to religious practices are judged.

Mosque as Education Centre

In the early days of Islam, mosque was used for the observance of *salat*, so also was it used to teach the Muslims about their religion and the knowledge of the *Qur'an*. Apart from the study of the *Qur'an*, when *Hadiith* was collected and codified in later centuries, its scientific study also began in mosque.¹⁷

In 3rd century of Islam, Imam Shafi' taught various subjects in the Mosque of 'Amr b. Al-As. In 326 A.H. there were about fifteen groups belonging to both Shafi's and Maliki's learning *Fiqh* in the Mosque of 'Amr b. Al-As, while Hanafi had three groups at the same time. Apart from the study of *Fiqh* and the Qur'an, Arabic philological studies were carried out in the mosques. For instance, Sa'id b. Musayyib (d. 95 A.H.) discussed Arabic poetry in the mosque at Madinah. In Canada, a *nahwi* (grammarian) delivered various lectures on grammar to people in the mosque. The famous Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt started from mosque. Thus, Mosques were, from the very beginning, centres of learning. In Nigeria, many Qur'anic schools are located in mosques from

15. Brill *op. cit.* p. 330.

16. M.M. Khan (nd). *Summarized Sahih Bukhari*, Riyadh (Darul-Salam Publications), p. 461.

17. M.M. Ali (1986). *The Religion of Islam*, New Delhi (Taj Company) p. 385.

where many distinguished Nigerians began their primary education.

That mosque may be used for purposes other than the observance of prayers does not in any way detract from its sacred form. Its primary role of divine worship must be kept. Programmes other than those that relate to the welfare of the Muslim community are not allowed in mosque. Transaction of any business or trade in mosque is forbidden as due respect must be given to the house of God. One must neither raise his voice in mosque unnecessarily nor spit in it. All forms of dirt must be kept away from mosque.

Structure and Organisation

In building a mosque there is need for proper planning and implementation to make its use easy for the faithfuls. In planning for the main building of a mosque, the following should be put into consideration. Area allocated should be according to the needs of the community and population growth, so that there would not be need for expansion in no distant future. Available building materials should be used and there should be simplicity in its internal and external designs. There should be no decoration of any sort or drawings in the mosque, which could draw attention of the people away from prayers. It is necessary that the internal and external appearances of a mosque be Islamic and should include a minaret.

Mosque should be provided with enough sanitary facilities like toilets, bathrooms, adequate ventilation and bright lighting. Doors installed should always be made to face the direction (*qiblah*) of the Ka'bah so as to avoid inconvenience for people sitting in the mosque.¹⁸ Provision should be made for a door for the exclusive use of the Imam. Mosque should be situated away from dirty places and amusement centres in order to preserve its sanctity. It should comprise front and rear for men and women respectively to prevent mingling of both sexes while communing with the Creator.¹⁹

Ablution area should be separated from mosque hall (*Jami'*) to prevent flooding and provision should be made for seclusion (*i'tikaf*) and night

vigil (*tahajjud*). Water must be available for the use of worshippers at every hour of prayers and for cleaning purposes. It is important to ensure vehicular access and parking space to mosque.

A well-equipped library should be attached to mosque, which should be stocked with current relevant texts, religious journals and even newspapers. Provision of a clinic is essential with medical personnel. Prophet Muhammad, once ordered a tent to be laid in the prophetic mosque in Madinah for the treatment of the sick. A nurse was then appointed to look after the patients.

In building a mosque, the intention should be made clear either for private (family) or for general (public). If one builds a mosque in his compound, it remains part of his property until he separates both the area occupied by the mosque and also the road and the entrance into the mosque from his own property. If a person appropriates grounds for the purpose of building mosque, he cannot later sell it²⁰ neither can it be claimed by his heirs or be inherited. This is so because the land has been alienated altogether from the right of individual and appertained to God.

Conclusion

Mosque plays important roles in the life of Muslims. It serves as the meeting place for various activities of Islamic importance, be it religious, social, economic or political. The importance of mosque cannot be over-emphasised. In Islam, more preference is given to building mosque than houses used for other purposes.

In building a mosque, care must be taken to ensure that proper planning is made for enough space, good facilities and provision of basic needs that will make activities of the mosque easy and convenient.

18. K. Niazi (1979). *Role of the Mosque* (Ashraf Press) Lahore, p. 20.

19. S.M. Darsh (1996). *The Role of the Mosque in Islam* Riyadh (Darus-Salaam), p. 12.

20. Uches *op. cit.* p. 30.