Rethinking Conservation in Islam: Lessons from the Prophet's Mosque

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Abstract:
The search for ideas and approaches in the conservation of man-made environment is becoming increasingly exciting. Conservation thinking of the middle- and far-eastern culture seems unheard of. As one of the most vibrant civilization, Islam surely has something to offer on conservation. This paper uncovers the spirit of conservation in Islam as practiced in the Prophet's Mosque (*Al-Masajid an-Nabawi*) in Medina, Saudi Arabia. The intervention throughout the development of this sacred mosque offers valuable ideas of architectural conservation in Islam.

The attitude of the Muslims in their effort to care and protect the Prophet's mosque throughout its architectural development cannot be sidelined, as many lessons can be drawn from it and be put to greater benefits for the Muslim society worldwide. Conservation as we perceive it today mainly deals with monuments and buildings that have already suffered from the consequence of time and change. Necessary actions are usually taken only when consistent wave of neglect threatens to wipe out a cultural property. From the case study, conservation can be understood as a means of ensuring an organic metamorphosis of a place, by continually respecting the past, while accepting the potential of the present and the future, through which meaning is preserved in a significant and purposeful way. Preservation of meanings of a place is certainly more important than anything else. Whilst, the conservation of the fabric should certainly take into consideration the meaning of meanings; in other words, to remain pristine may not be beneficial to the preservation of meaning.
Keywords: mosque – architecture – conservation – heritage.

1.0 Introduction

This paper mainly rooted in a postgraduate research carried out by the author way back in 1999, but was unable to share with wider audience particularly within the context of the Muslim society. The research was later adapted for publication in 2007 but unfortunately its circulation is confined within Malaysia. In an abridge form and purposefully amended to suit to the conference theme it is thought that this conference is the best platform for sharing the outcome of this study.

Conservation is mainly shaped to its present state of awareness from values and understanding initiated by Western culture. Although the Venice Charter is formed under the banner of UNESCO, there is difficulty in accepting it as a truly global idea on conservation.[1] Some scholars have pointed out the problems of the Charter from cultural contexts.[2] However, the Venice Charter's contribution especially in the initiation of contemporary awareness and modern thinking in conservation is widely approved. It plays an important role in generating a concerted international concern on the subject of cultural heritage.

The search for ideas and approaches in the conservation of man-made environment is becoming more active than ever before. However, the least known conservation thinking of the middle-eastern and far-eastern culture is yet to be explored and made known to the international community.[3]

1.1 Background

As one of the most vibrant civilization in the course of humanity, Islam surely has something to offer to the world on the subject of conservation. This paper explores and observes the spirit of conservation in Islam as practiced and implemented in the holy mosque of the Prophet Mohammad[4] in Medina (*Al-Masajid an-Nabawi*), Saudi Arabia. The physical development of this historic and sacred mosque, within the aspects of intervention and innovation, offers some intriguing ideas on the approach of architectural conservation in Islam.

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1 Committee of the Venice Charter consisted of mostly European and American representatives, only one from North Africa.

2 The idea for the Asian Charter was voiced out by A. G. K Menon at International Conference titled *The Future of Asia's Past*, Chiangmai, 1996.

3 For example the research activities by: Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties, Japan; Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture (AKPIA), Cambridge, MIT. See the work of M. Hodjat (1995) *Cultural Heritage in Iran: Policies for an Islamic Country*, and also several AKAA seminars proceedings, especially R. Holod (ed.) (1978), *Conservation as Cultural Survival* and Y. Lari (ed.) (1985), *Challenges of Transformation - Built Environment in Islamic Countries*.

4 The customary blessings on the Prophet Muhammad, i.e. may Allah bless and grant peace upon him, each time his name is mentioned will not be repeated in the text, but Muslim readers are kindly requested to observe this tradition.

The population growth of Medina and the consistent increase of visitors during the pilgrimage season (*hajj*) necessitate the enlargement of the Prophet's Mosque. As one of the three holiest places in Islam, the construction works that have taken place at the mosque in the span of more than one hundred decades, from the days of the Prophet until the end of Ottoman rule, must have brought arguments about conservation as these activities involved demolition and renovation as well as addition of new structure to a historic fabric.

1.2 Objective

The prime objective of this paper is to study the attitudes and approaches of the Muslims throughout the architectural development of the Prophet's Mosque, and to identify the reasons for the decisions taken. It is hoped that the attitude and care found in the process of building as well as in the design and planning of the Prophet's Mosque will furnish the basis for an understanding of conservation in Islam.

Preceding the discussion on the Prophet's Mosque this paper presents an idea of conservation based on two-dimensional work - the attitude and approach in conservation amongst Muslims can be observed in the preservation of the Qur'an.

It is hoped that this study will add to the theoretical knowledge in conservation, especially within the Islamic culture, as an alternative approach to the development and conservation of fast decadent traditional and vernacular Muslims architecture and built environment.

2.0 Overview of Definitions and Meanings of Conservation and Related Terminology

Although many practical examples which give clues to conservation attitudes can be drawn from numerous historic monuments that had gone through the process of protection and care (or conservation), yet, at present, less effort have been made by contemporary scholars to evaluate the historical development of conservation in Islam, thus making the understanding of its terminology difficult.[5] According to urban historian sociologist, Janet L. Abu-Lughod (1980), the terms *preserve* and *restore* are quite imprecise for they contain several potential meanings; each term has both a passive and an active sense,

> "*preserve* can mean to keep undisturbed, safe from harm or destruction, a rather passive goal, but it can also mean to keep alive.

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[5] See R. Lewcock (1986) 'Preservation versus Modernization - Realities in Islamic Architecture', in *Why Preserve the Past - The Challenge to Our Cultural Heritage*, in Y. Raj Isar, Paris, UNESCO. Also see, J. L. Abu-Lughod (1980), 'Preserving the Living Heritage if Islamic Cities', in Holod, R. (ed.), *Towards an Architecture in the Spirit of Islam*, The Aga Khan Awards, p. 63-66.

> The term *restore* is even more ambiguous, since it can imply to repair so as to bring back (something) as nearly as possible to its original state, but can also mean to bring back (something) to a healthy and vigorous state, to a previously normal condition. "[6]

Divergence in conservation philosophies has resulted in polarization of meanings in conservation. Within the span of the last 30 years, Robert Maguire (1997) concluded that the understanding of architectural conservation could be divided into two contrasting meanings.[7] The first,

> "*Conservation* means retaining and, where necessary, adapting or adding to old environments, in such a way that a fresh entity is created to serve modern life, in which the old is respected and valued for its contribution."[8]

Meanwhile, the opposing understanding of conservation as he observed is,

> "...retaining old environments and creating conditions in which they may survive into the future (but essentially unchanged) and users must accept the limitations on their way of life such restriction of change imposes."[9]

A building is usually designed with some measures of preparedness in facing possible consequences due to the organic process of growth and decay. In its totality, a building is continuously put to the test of time immediately after it is built, to both its function and fabric. In this regards, this author is keen in looking at historical development of a building in a more positive insight in light of what has been expressed by Ada Louis Huxtable (1976);

> "a good old building should develop layers of aesthetic meaning like the rings of a tree, continually enriched, rather than isolated, by contemporary functions."[10]

3.0 Lessons from the Preservation of the Qur'an

Muslims believe that he Qur'an was revealed by God unto the Prophet Muhammad through the Archangel Gabriel using the medium of sound (voice) upon which the hearing faculty was the first sensory feature to encounter the Divine messages, of what then was inspired to the mind and the soul of the Prophet. The fact is that it was sent down in the form of recitation. The Qur'an was only written, i.e. obtained its visual textualization compiled in a book form,

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6 J. L. Abu-Lughod, op. cit., p. 64.

7 'Conservation and Diverging Philosophies' in D. Watt (ed.), *Journal of Architectural Conservation*, Vol. 3, No. 1, March 1997, p. 7-18.

8 ibid., p. 17.

9 ibid.

10 A. L. Huxtable (1976), *Kicked a Building Lately?*, New York: Quadrangle, p. 234.

during the time of Caliph Abu Bakr; although he was against the idea of 'writing' the Qur'an at the beginning. The Qur'an was sent down in Arabic and thus was first written in the form of writing familiar to the Qurasyh-Arab at that period of early Islam.

The expansion of Islam to other continents, beyond the cultural and language boundary of the Arabian Peninsula, has raised new thinking amongst the *mutakallimun* (a person knowledgeable in the science of the Qur'an) pertaining to the need to protect the Qur'an. The words of Hudhayfa bin al-Yamin uttered to Caliph Uthman after his return from battles in Azerbaijan (645 AD) is worth looking at;

> "Quick! Help the Muslims before they differ about the text of the Qur'an as the Christians and Jews differed about their scriptures".[11]

Caliph Uthman obtained the one and only authoritative copy left in Hafsa's possession, produced during Caliph Abu Bakr administration, so that a number of copies could be made from it. It was publicized and followed as the only authorized textualization of Qur'an. The copies were sent to various parts of the Muslim world, and were meant to be authoritative.[12]

The learning and reading of the Qur'an in the Islamic tradition relied on oral transmission. Writing remained a secondary aid. The situation encountered by Caliph Uthman urged him to take step to improve Arabic orthography. Muslims after the first generation took steps to distinguish between letters of the alphabet of similar shape. To the Arab-Quraysh vowel marks are unnecessary since they were of course master of their own language. A system of dots was added to indicate different consonants of similar shape (*a'jam*)[13] and diacritical marks were introduced to different vowels and nunation (*tashkil*).[14] These two aspects were the main visual representation that was added to improve the Qur'anic orthography. The development of Qur'anic orthography continues to improve, despite the addition of some elements to the text. It was in fact doing no more than ensuring an exact recitation of the Qur'an without affecting any of its original content and meanings. The *Al-rasm al-Uthmani* manuscript has been the authoritative version of the written representation of the recited text of the Qur'an ever since the issue of Qur'anic preservation was introduced.

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[11] Narrated Anas bin Malik: Hudhaifa bin Al-Yaman came to Uthman at the time when the people of Sha'm and the people of Iraq were waging war to conquer Arminya [Armenia] and Adharbijan [Arzebaijan].

[12] It was reported by Ibn Hazm that there was about 100,000 copies produced in the beginning of the reign of Caliph Uthman, about 25 years after the death of Muhammad. See M. Abu Layla, 'The Qur'an: Nature, Authenticity, Authority and Influence on the Muslim Mind', p. 233.

[13] Pointing was added to distinguish between those letters that were rendered by a single shape.

[14] Short-vowels markings above and below the letters (the *fathah* for short "a" sound, *kasrah* for short "i", *dammah* for short "u") were developed to complement the consonants and long vowels.

Alongside the development of the science of Qur'anic orthography, another subject that is equally important is the development of *'ilm tajwid al-Qur'an* (the science of the proper articulation and reading of the Qur'an).

The recorded Qur'an from the *Al-rasm al-Uthmani* and *'Ilm tajwid al-Qur'an* ensure the preservation of the Qur'an in its totality and firmly protects it from any corrupt innovation. Thus, the hearing and reading of the Qur'an is exactly the same as it was first revealed to Muhammad. They provide a clear path for the branch of knowledge called *'Ulum al-Qur'an* (the Sciences of the Qur'an) to function and flourish, so that they are used as a means of understanding the message of the Qur'an by reflecting upon it and studying its meanings. As a result of this effort, for the past 1,400 years the Qur'an stood resolutely as the authentic scripture of the Divine revelation.

It is interesting to note that although several innovations were made to the visual form of the text as a means of preserving the correct recitation, the authenticity of the Qur'an was never in doubt. This has no effect on the form, substance or meaning of the Qur'an. In fact, it solidifies the preservation of Qur'anic recitation, thus maintaining the correct meanings of the texts. The effort by early Muslims to prevent the Qur'an from any corruption and tampering reflects the attitudes of the Muslims towards 'conservation' and the approach that was formulated in the preservation of the written document.

The degree of care and protection shown by the Muslim scholars in their effort to preserve the Qur'an and to guard the *Sunnah* is of the highest commitment that could not be possible, if it was solely driven by worldly interest. The development of the Sciences of the Qur'an is undeniably a reflection of the greatest conservation works of a two-dimensional level.

Caliph Uthman instructed that the written Qur'an other than the authoritative copies that he had published to be burnt. This is the case where originality was not an important issue. The authenticity of the meanings of the Qur'an as manifested in its recitation was considered the ultimate importance. One of the original Uthman's copies is still in existence today. It may contain important historical evidence that may interest many historians and calligraphy enthusiast. As to Muslims at large, the nostalgic feeling, be it to the Abu Bakr's or Uthman's copy is considered non-existence because they already had at least one in their possession (of the contemporary copy) that is equally authentic.

4.0 Lessons from the Conservation of the Prophet's Mosque

The degree of care and consciousness from conservation viewpoints can be seen applied in several significant changes to physical and spatial features of the Prophet's Mosque. The fact that a mosque is designed to accommodate a dynamic nature of usage, and usually to cope with a growing community, it is the element of flexibility that is most important in the design and planning of a mosque. A mosque is a place for gathering of people. Its prosperity relies

greatly on the devotion and submission of the Muslims. The preference for communal gathering as observed in congregational prayers reflects Islam's firm emphasis on the necessity to elevate the sense of solidarity and collective cooperation among Muslims.

4.1 Progress with Great Care

Despite all the physical changes to the Prophet's Mosque, it is important to note that all the prophetically significant elements, namely the position of columns, the *mihrab*, the *mimbar* (pulpit), and the Burial Chamber were authentically preserved. Although it was understandably not possible to preserve the mosque layout as it was originally constructed, the subsequent enlargement truly respected the original spatial organization by strictly following its space-planning principles; thus, extending the vibrant religious and spiritual feel of the *rawdah* to reverberate to the entire corners of the newly added mosque space.

It would be impractical to elaborate historical account of the changes in this paper. However, this author has encounter sufficient number of incidents clearly showing the degree of care of adding something new to the existing fabrics, some of which were highly sensitive. A 'leaving it alone' approach was adopted while allowing time to consider before anything could be done to it. Historical evidence has shown that many 'new' works were recorded in the form of inscription. As a whole, this paper would like to assert that the care and conservation of the Prophet's Mosque were based on several fundamental factors:

- It should not contain any religious contradiction;
- It was usually based on the precedents that had been created before so that continuity of tradition can be observed;
- It should appropriately fulfill the needs and be beneficial to the Muslim community.

5.0 Consciousness in the Development and Protection the Prophet's Mosque

In the context of the Prophet's Mosque and apart from the points raised in Section 4.0, there are several incidents relating to building that could demonstrate the care and awareness of the Muslim community and their leaders in fulfilling the entrusted responsibility at that particular time.

5.1 Opposition to Sumptuous Design

There were contradictory views pertaining to the idea of decorating the Prophet's Mosque. When the Prophet built his mosque, the building was

constructed using an ordinary vernacular method known for centuries to the people of that region. It was a simple and modest design fitting in well with the economic situation and highly appropriate for a newly formed Muslim community. The opposing view targeted the idea of 'alienating' the simple appearance of the mosque and for not following the precedent set by the Prophet. Several traditions were quoted by pious conservative individuals in relation to this subject;

> "Protect the people from rain, but be sure not to make it red or yellow — i.e. do not ornament the mosque."[15]

> "O Umm Salma! Verily, the most unprofitable thing that eaten up the wealth of the believer is building."[16]

Opinions in favor of the new design of the Prophet's Mosque were raised since the renovation and enlargement by Uthman. It was counter-argued that the decoration and furnishing of the mosque was regarded as appropriate and not in contradiction to the Qur'an;

> "Say: 'Who has forbidden the ornament of God which he brought forth for His servants, and the good things of His providing?' Say: 'These, on the Day of Resurrection, shall be exclusively for those who were believers during his life of this world. So We distinguish the signs for a people who know'." (A. J. Arberry, Qur'an 7:32)

At the time of Uthman's caliphate the economic stature and regional influences in Medina were distinctly different. Bisheh (1979), in his deliberation of the condition in Medina, highlighted that:

> "The Prophet's Mosque, which had so far preserved its unprepossessing simplicity, was no longer compatible with the new conditions. It was virtually inevitable that a new mosque, corresponding in luxury and sumptuousness to the private residences, should be erected."[17]

On a conciliatory mode, traditions such as the following were also referred to;

> "No person with an atom of arrogance in his heart will enter Paradise." A man said: 'A person likes to wear good clothes and shoes.' The Prophet answered: 'God is beautiful and He loves beauty."[18]

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[15] Bisheh, p. 157.
[16] Hughes, p. 390
[17] Bisheh, p. 161.
[18] *Sahih Muslim* (ref. 7), p. 97.

"God does not look at your appearance or wealth but looks at your hearts and deeds."[19]

It is not the intent of this paper to view elaboration presented in this case from a legalistic or jurisprudence standpoints. It purely highlights the degree of sensitivity amongst the Muslims and the level of arguments raised by them, which occurred simultaneously with the building activities relating to the Prophet's Mosque.

5.2 The Demolition of the Newly Built Minaret

Although four minarets were built during Al-Walid's renovation, only one is left standing. The first one to be taken down was the southwest minaret, next to *Bab as-Salam*. Sulayman Abd Al-Malik, brother to the caliph, ordered the minaret to be demolished, ironically, only about four years after its completion.

On his visit to Medina, Sulayman ordered the minaret to be taken down because it cast a shadow over the house of Marwan al-Hakam where he lodged.[20] It is amazing to see that such a decision was made four years after the minaret was built. Moreover the minaret belonged to the most important religious building at that time, i.e. the Prophet's Mosque. The reason for its demolition could be considered as highly insignificant to a modern planning approach. But, it seems that Islam did not give any distinction between the two, i.e. the house of Marwan and the mosque. The right of the individual prevailed in the judgment. In his description on Islamic law and neighborhood building guidelines[21], Hakim (1986) mentioned the two rights that can be related to this incident: (i) rights of building higher within one's air space, even if it excludes air and sun from others[22], and, (ii) respect for the property of others.[23] It could also be affected by guidelines stipulated in the right for privacy.[24]

Thus it can be said that consciousness on conservation cannot in any way override the behavioral principles of living in a community as prescribed in the *Shari'ah*.

5.3 Opposition to Al-Walid's Expansion Programme

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19 *Sahih Muslim*, (ref. 7), p. 304.
20 Bisheh, pp. 211-2.
21 Hakim, p. 20.
22 Hakim, p. 24; Qur'an (26:183); *Sahih Muslim* (ref. 7, p. 304).
23 Qur'an 26:183; *Sahih al-Bukhari* (ref. 5, p. 307)
24 Hakim, p. 20.
Qur'an 16:80), 24:27, 24:28, 24:30; *Sahih al-Bukhari* (ref. 7, p. 307)

When the dispatch from Caliph Al-Walid was read aloud, commanding the houses (among them were houses belonged to the Prophet's wives) at the eastern side of the mosque be demolished or brought down within the area of the mosque, a citizen of Medina who was present on this occasion, told how he had never witnessed sorer weeping amongst the people at that time. One exclaimed;

> "I wish, by the Lord that they would leave *these houses alone thus as they are*; then would those that spring up hereafter in Medina, and strangers from the ends of the earth, *come and see* what kind of building sufficed for the Prophet's own abode, and the sight thereof, would deter men from extravagance and pride."[25] [italic added]

The concern was also raised by Saed ibn al-Musaib;

> "I wished these rooms had not been demolished so that later generations would follow the simple life of the Prophet and realize his monasticism in the material pleasure of life."[26]

From the above description it is possible to trace or identify some thoughts and ideas of the people of Medina that could be linked to the idea of conservation as conceived by modern society. Their words contained direct suggestion that can be interpreted as follows:

- *Authenticity*

The concept of leaving historic artifacts 'alone' as they are found, i.e. to preserve building as is so that its original condition could be seen (as in "...leave these houses alone thus as they are");

- *Educational Value*

The idea of historic buildings being used as a means of educating future generations by witnessing the moderate life of the Prophet where lessons could be learned from it (as in; "...come and see...would deter men from extravagance and pride");

and indirect interpretation of the above incident are:

- *Emotional Value*

The resistance was indeed due to emotional dissatisfaction raised by the community closely associated with the place. The Prophet's wives apartment had became part of the feature in the compound of the mosque. Alongside the mosque the apartment formed an important landmark in the

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[25] W. Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, London, 1861, Vol. IV, p. 325; from al-Waqidi and was narrated by Abdullah ibn Yazid.

[26] Quoted by A. Hafiz (1987), *Chapter from the History of Madina*, p. 48.

urban environment of Medina that was firmly embedded in the collective memory of the Medinese; and

- *Historical Value*

The buildings were closely linked to the life of the Prophet in the last ten years of his prophecy when many *hadith* relating to him were in fact connected, directly or indirectly, to this place.

5.4 What is Conservable?

Relying on the precedents mentioned earlier, several points could be highlighted here on what may be considered as ideas or the basis for conservation of buildings in Islamic culture:

5.4.1 Changes of Materials

Prophet Muhammad used two brick sizes in the extension of his mosque, although only one size of brick was used when it was first built. Abu Bakr did not enlarge or renovate simply because there was no urgency for doing so. He merely made good some of the palm pillars that had worn out. Umar was reported to use brick columns instead of palm trunks. Uthman introduced stones, and Al-Walid enhanced what was left by Uthman. The main material for walls and columns was constructed of mud bricks, and later stones, quarried locally. But most materials used for decoration and ornamentation such as marble, gold, and mosaic were imported from neighboring regions. The use of lead and iron were also mentioned. We are informed that the teakwood used for the ceiling during Caliph Uthman and Al-Walid came from India. We have also seen throughout the architectural development of the Prophet's Mosque the use of foreign building craftsmen of all sorts of skills from Byzantine, Abyssinian, Syria, and Persia. The changes in materials and the use of foreign skills were never an issue in the awareness of conservation amongst the Muslim community.

5.4.2 Is Conservation an Act of Worship?

In their daily lives, the early Muslims were well known for their religious enthusiasm. In every aspect they will attempt the best possible behavior. Everything was done with the belief that the entire life is placed under the embracement of *ibadah* (worship). Ironically, in the case of building the Prophet's Mosque, we could say that the precedents set by Prophet Muhammad were not accepted in total. The

reason for this may be related to the Prophet's statement he gave after the Khandaq battle.

The Muslims were taught and continuously inspired by the Prophet. Immediately before the Battle of Khandaq (Battle of the Trench) Muhammad called the community for consultation. In the discussion, Salman al-Farsi asked if the Prophet was inspired by the Divine revelation and was then reported saying;

> "I am no more than a man, but when I enjoin anything respecting religion receive it, and when I order anything about the affairs of the world, then I am nothing more than a man"[27]

Salman, who was a Persian, suggested digging a trench so that the attack by horsemen could be countered. Everybody agreed and so did the Prophet.

The 'container', i.e. the physical form is considered temporary and subjected to change, and what is 'contained' is permanent and to be observed and followed. The essence of spatial organization was followed and never changed[28], and in fact is being practiced to this day. As far as the physical appearance of a mosque was concerned, the Muslims were exercising their own intellect and rationale influenced by circumstances at each given time. So, the question of building or renovating in the same style as previously known was an issue of lesser importance.

5.4.3 Conservation as Cultural Continuity

i) Continuity of Tradition

Conservation, as it is conceived today, is mostly raised and discussed after decay or deterioration to a historic monument has taken place. Conservation has become a solution to revive the lost of past values in environment. Ruskin (1988) was probably the first person who highlighted the necessity for the upkeep of the buildings. He had an early idea of conservation as a process rather than a means. In the case of the Prophet's Mosque, conservation seems to be understood as

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[27] Quoted by T. P. Hughes, p. 639; from *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Book I Ch. VI.
"Verily the best word is the Word of God, and the best rule of life is that delivered by Muhammad."
"I have left you two things, and you will not stray as long as you hold them fast. The one is the Book of God, and the other the law (*sunnah*) of His Prophet."

[28] For mosque design and typology see:
D. Kuban (1974), *Early Muslim Architecture - Its Origin and Development,* Lieden: E. J. Brill; A. B. Prochazka (1986), *Mosques*, Zurich: Muslim Architecture Research Program (MARP); I. Serageldin (1996), *Architecture of the Contemporary Mosques,* London: Academy Edition.

a 'process'. The architectural development of the Prophet's Mosque had occurred in an organic manner. Consciousness of the importance of the past existed firmly in the minds of the Muslims and this was implemented wherever it was found necessary. Whenever it was possible and necessary a new interpretation was brought in. The Prophet's Mosque was a testimony to the dynamic environmental and social changes that had taken place in the city of Medina. The rising needs for a bigger praying area were a manifestation of the prosperity in the faith of the Muslim community in their submission to God.

ii) Affirmation of Regionalism

The creation of men of different colors and languages is a testimony to the existence of people of different races with a diversified cultural identity. The spherical nature of planet earth and its topographical formation gave rise to a varying form of climatic conditions and landscapes. This is the basic rational justification for the necessity of regionalism in built environment. Anything that defies regionalism is regarded as against the *fitrah* (primordial nature) and would not be able to satisfy the natural instinct of man at large. For this reason, built environment should be preserved in the shape that conforms with, or is at least compatible and complementary to its regional potential and constraints. The subject of regionalism is mentioned in the Qur'an as the nature of community of man on earth;

> "And among His Signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the *difference of your languages and colors*. Verily, in that are indeed signs for men of sound knowledge." (Al-Hilali, Qur'an 30:22) [italics added]

> "O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and *made you into nation and tribe, that you may know one another*, the most honorable of you in the Sight of Allah is that (believer) who has at-Taqwa..." (Al-Hilali, Qur'an 49:13) [italics added]

Conservation should therefore become the mechanism for the affirmation of regional variety in built environment. In this instance, conservation could also become religiously and spiritually motivated if any evil act were found in its way to destroy the natural phenomenon of regionalism.

5.5 Restoration of the Ka'ba by the Ottoman

In the land of Hijaz, matters concerning care and protection of the two Holy Mosques have gradually developed and matured. In 1572-1577 AD, about 880 years after the reconstruction by al-Hajjaj, and 84 years after the repair works by Sultan Ashraf al-Qatabai, the Ottoman decided to restore the Ka'ba. At this time, the violation of the old form of the Ka'ba (of Abd al-Malik or al-Hajjaj) is not a matter that would be approved. The restoration dealt mainly with technical matters using the approach of what we today call *consolidation* or *retention* which means 'doing as little as possible' and 'protecting the building from further decay', and if necessary, 'replacing with new and similar if not identical material'. The Ottoman was highly philosophical in the effort to repair the fabrics. Their philosophy on fabric restoration of the Ka'ba can be observed in the following sentences written in early 16th century[29];

> "...and in accordance with this beautiful truth, that *Beyt Allah* must be among the objects of God's love. Now when one reflects on the state of being a lover, no matter how weak and absent the lover, he endures with the strength of love ['ask]. It is inconceivable that they [lover] are mortal and that they are near destruction..."[30]

The text of the manuscript is then followed with poetical verses containing some ideas and approaches in conservation of that period;

> "Although there is a world in the face of *the beloved*,
> There is *another world* in the *garment* of the desired one.
> Beauties are glorified by sumptuous and ornamented garments.
> *They* wish *to reveal* themselves in *a different mode*."[31] (italics added)

The phrase *the beloved* here referred to the Golden Gutter through which rainwater from the flat roof of the Ka'ba flowed. It could also refer to other elements that needed repair apart from the Golden Gutter. The words *another world* means the condition of the materials as they changed through time and in this context, *garment* means the intended appearance as they were first installed. In the fourth line, *they* is a reference to the Golden Gutter and other elements which should sincerely display their potential, i.e. *to reveal*, in a newly acquired appearance that is capable of expressing and achieving its potential, as indicated in the phrase *a different mode*.

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[29] H. Crane (trans.) (1987), *Risale-i Miᶜmariyye - An Early Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Treatise on Architecture*, Leiden: E. J. Brill.

[30] Crane, p. 54.

[31] ibid., p. 55.

The understanding of conservation as portrayed in this 16th century Ottomanic treatise for architects displayed the degree of sophistication in the thinking of the Muslims in their effort to repair 'historic monuments'. The amalgamation of a philosophical and theological approach, as well as the inclination to esotericism, was clearly evident in the restoration of the Ka'ba.[32]

5.6 The Presence of Conservation

The points as presented and discussed in this section 5.0 can be concluded as follows:

- In a straightforward religious instruction, some elements of conservation are noticeable. These have been presented in the form of principles and guidelines for the community to live in a neighborhood.
- The condition of the Muslim society in Medina and Mecca as portrayed in their socio-economic development nurtured by the teachings of *Shari'ah*, has shown considerable sophistication in the thought process of the Muslims.
- There is no doubt in our judgment that the idea of conservation has already existed from the first century of Islamic culture. The element of care and awareness on conservation can be observed alongside the architectural development of the Prophet's Mosque. As the Prophet's Mosque proceeded through the influence of time, the building had allowed itself to become a testimony of growth, change and continuity. Perhaps, the words of Huxtable quoted earlier could be used partly to describe this point.
- Conservation in the early Islamic civilization had appeared in several forms. In a lower state of consciousness, there was evident showing attitude towards conservation in the form of a sentiment or emotional outcry at the loss of a historic building. On a more complex level, conservation was evidently developed later on into philosophical and theoretical argument.

6.0 Conclusion

In our attempt to find a basis for understanding architectural conservation in Islam we have looked into the attitude and approach of the early Muslims from several levels of credence and perception.

First, this study investigates conservation as it is portrayed in the preservation of the Qur'an. Preservation of the Qur'anic recitation was achieved

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[32] ibid., Ch. 5, pp. 47-64.

through the refinement of its textualization. The meaning of the Qur'an is based upon its correct recitation. Correct recitation ensures the delivery of its exact meanings. Muslim scholars were faithfully involved in these two disciplines. The attitude of the Muslims as presented in the preservation of the Qur'an proves that conservation had been part of the cultural entity since the beginning of Islamic civilization.

Second, this paper traces the use of conservation-related definitions during the implementation of Al-Walid's enlargement program in the 18th century. In Islam, the concept of *preservation*, as expressed in Europe in the 'leave it alone' approach, has been stated since 708 AD. Suggestion on the idea of using historic artifacts for educational purposes was also being spelled out at the same time.

Third, the study looks at the attitude of the Muslims in their effort to love, care, and protect the Prophet's Mosque throughout its architectural development. Conservation as we perceive it today mainly deals with monuments and buildings that have already suffered from the consequence of time and change. Necessary actions are usually taken only when a consistent wave of neglect threatens to wipe out a cultural property. In the case of the Prophet's Mosque, conservation can be understood as a means of ensuring an organic metamorphosis of a place, by continually being aware and respecting the relevance of the past, while accepting the potential of the present and the future, through which meaning is preserved in a significant and purposeful way. Changing perception would not allow the conservation of meaning to come into being in a simplistic manner. Preservation of meanings is certainly more important than anything else. Whilst, the conservation of the fabric should certainly take into consideration the meaning of meanings; in other words, to remain pristine may not be helpful to the preservation of meaning. It requires ingenuity and wisdom that is in conformity with the continuity of tradition.

There are indications showing that conservation had already been approached as an art during the Ottoman period (probably earlier than this). Evidence had shown that the Ottomans had argued conservation from philosophical, theological, and esoteric points of view.[33] In Ibn al-Zubayr's effort to reconstruct the Ka'ba, he purposefully wanted to use the right stones and mortar so that they were similar to the original ones (this case is not presented above). The concern on the subject of originality and authenticity in conservation was evident in his work. Perhaps this incident, which occurred in 683 AD, provides an early indication of concern in technical matters in conservation.

Finally, this study has demonstrated that architectural conservation as practiced by the early Muslim community had embarked in a similar thinking and approach as perceived in contemporary society (see Appendix for

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[33] Crane (1987), pp. 47-64.

comparison of principles of conservation in Islam and Western-originated charters). We could not find distinct contradiction to the ethics and principles of modern conservation. However Islamic culture is more persistent in the provision of the path for harmonious development. The Prophet's Mosque has exemplified that conservation should not become a deterrent to development (even for a holy monument such as the Prophet's Mosque). Perhaps the expression by Huxtable could emphasize this point;

> "a good old building should develop layers of aesthetic meaning like the rings of a tree, continually enriched, rather than isolated, by contemporary functions."[34]

Moreover, conservation should complement growth and ensure it develops in a biological and organic way. Nothing in this created world can escape the cycle of growth and decay. What is most important is that the process is being observed within its potentiality. Apparently, in this instance, conservation should be understood as a process, and never as a means to an end, or the end itself. Rigid architectural conservation thinking is unfavorable, whilst a living and dynamic approach, with careful observance of the continuity of tradition, is more likely to be in conformity with the spirit of Islam.

Anything that is good and beautiful in our built environment can be likened to the *a'tam* in the early period of the Prophet's migration to Medina. Thus, we end this paper by reiterating the words of the Prophet that was uttered between 622 and 632 AD;

> "Do not demolish the A'tam [the old fortress] because they are the decorations [*zinah*] of Medina."[35]

The word 'medina' or *al-Madinah* means the city of Medina, however, it could also mean city in general (in Arabic, *madinah* means city). Although the Prophet mentioned this in the context of the city of Medina, this does not mean that the *hadith* is inapplicable in other cities. Similarly, the *a'tam* may represent the kind of decoration that the Prophet wanted to highlight. We take the view that other buildings or structure that have similar significance and contribution in decorating the townscape of a place may also be included, so that they could be protected and conserved.

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[34] Huxtable, p. 234.
[35] Mullakhatir, p. 37.

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Appendix: Conservation Approach in Islam and the Current Thoughts

This table summarizes the points mentioned in this study pertaining to the differences and similarities between conservation approach within Islam and the current thoughts. The contemporary approach on the subject as reflected in the Venice Charter (VC) and the Burra Charter (BC) are placed immediately below each section so that a quick cross-reference can be made (some of which may overlap between sections).

Conservation Approach in Islam	Venice Charter	Burra Charter
1. Qur'anic Concept of the Past ▪ The necessity to *observe* and *preserve* past relics as originally found for *lessons* can be learned from the *subject* or *message* that is concealed in them; ▪ Art and architecture as means of *communication* and is equally important to ensure the correct delivery of messages of the past. ▪ The idea of *leaving* historic artefacts as they are found as a means of educating future generations.		▪ A building or work should remain in its historical condition. The moving of all or part of a building or work is unacceptable unless this is the sole means of ensuring its survival (Art. 9) A building or work should remain in its historical condition. The moving of all or part of a building or work is unacceptable unless this is the sole means of ensuring its survival (Art. 9). ▪ The aim of conservation is to retain the cultural significance of a place and must include provision for its security, its maintenance and its future (Art. 2)
2. Continuity of Meanings ▪ Conservation should ascertain continuity of meanings, that conservation is in continuity with the essences and meanings as embedded in the purpose and spatial quality; ▪ The existence of earlier elements of religious and cultural significance must be respected; ▪ Careful in the effort to meet the demands for change while maintaining the respect to the religious significance of a building; ▪ All prophetically significant elements must be preserved, in their original meanings		▪ Conservation is based on a respect for the existing fabric...(Art. 3)

Conservation Approach in Islam	Venice Charter	Burra Charter
3. Historical Significance ▪ Conservation as a means of protecting historically significant buildings	▪ The intention in conserving and restoring monuments is to safeguard them no less as works of art than as historical evidence (Art.1)	
4. Authenticity ▪ To repair or restore using identical or similar materials ▪ The judgment between authenticity and creativity ▪ The idea of using substitute materials only when they provide a significant advantage	▪ Where traditional technique prove inadequate, the consolidation of a monument can be achieved by the use of any modern technique…the efficacy of which has been shown by scientific data and proved by experience (Art.10)	
5. Preservation and Restoration ▪ The idea of preservation and restoration by accepting aging not as decay but as process of change, that is, to preserve and restore an object in view of its material's potentiality by accepting decay as a form of natural beauty or extending the life and purpose of a created object	▪ Restoration: …its aim is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents… (Art.6)	▪ Restoration means returning the existing fabric of a place to a known earlier state by removing accretions or by reassembling existing components without the introduction of new material (Art.17) ▪ Preservation means maintaining the fabric and place in its existing state and retarding deterioration (Art.1.6)
6. Maintenance ▪ The idea of *conservation* as a repair or an improvement of the state of dilapidation ▪ The institution of *waqfs* is responsible in up keeping of the buildings and is obliged to preserve them as they are, if that is the wished of the contributor (owner) No changes can be made to it. ▪ Under the concept of *waqfs*, where rewards endure forever, it is important for the authority to ensure a building to survive as long as the life of the building permits	▪ Conservation: …it is essential to the conservation of monuments that they be maintained on a permanent basis (Art. 4)	

Conservation Approach in Islam	Venice Charter	Burra Charter
7. The Relationship between Old and New ▪ Introduction of new element is permissible only if it is truly necessary and should be implemented in the most appropriate way; ▪ Must be in harmony and complementary to the aesthetic quality of the earlier building; ▪ New works should enhance the old; ▪ A 'leave it alone' approach may be applied to allow time to consider before anything could be done to a historic object or place; ▪ Innovation can be accepted when it is based on the continuity of meanings; ▪ Changes are permissible as long as they do not imperil the religious significance of a building or a place		▪ Adaptation is acceptable where the conservation of the place cannot otherwise be achieved, and where the adaptation does not substantially detract from its cultural significance (Art. 20)
8. Layers of Historical Contribution ▪ It is necessary to acknowledge the archaeological and documentary values of a building or place. This has to be done by not jeopardizing the right of a newly enhanced building (thus enhancing its cultural significance) to exist		▪ The contribution of all periods to the place must be respected. If a place includes the fabric of different periods, revealing the fabric of one period at the expense of another can only be justified when what removed is of slight cultural significance and the fabric which is to be revealed is of much greater cultural significance (Art. 16)
9. Townscape ▪ Any significant objects or building that gives character to a place should be preserved	▪ The concept of an historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban and rural setting (Art. 1)	

Note: Some of the principles or approaches in conservation listed on the left column are not selected for deliberation in the paper.