

intrinsic proportions and relations between each other in a way that the monument continues to have a familiar character.

The repetitive and unhieratic architectural expression of the prayer hall allows the faithful to feel connected with the interior space without feeling overwhelmed by the size of the building.

The large dome is situated not over the sanctuary, as in many mosques, but rather over an interior patio (or sahn), and provides shadow and protection. This dome has been drawn as a "large tree, but light and lightweight". Domes have always been associated with mosques, especially in contemporary mosques. Moving the shadow providing dome over an open patio liberates the hall from its presence, avoids favoring a determined zone, and privileges the egalitarian character of the hipostilic hall.

What from afar appears to be a monumental dome, is, actually, made of two superimposed domes, one inside the other, and formed from mocarabes (honey-combed designs), which, due to their different sizes, let in a filtered light that is both diffused and vibrant. The choice of honey combed work (one of the most original elements of Islamic architecture) is very important in a city such as Baghdad where theoretical and applied research of the nature of geometrical figures and their rotation has made notable developments, especially during the Abbasidic period.

A large patio in front of the mosque offers sufficient exterior space for more than 40,000 to pray. The premises and the houses are grouped so as to form a traditional village next to one of the corners of the mosque. Circulation and the underground parking lot are placed in such a way as to control the masses in the most efficient way on determined occasions. All the entryways, including those for the parking lot, for the guest houses, and for the pedestrian walkways are distributed so as to provide beautiful vistas, preparing the spectator to enter in the great mosque. A series of exterior walls contain the kiosks for footwear and the fountains for ablution.

(Text composed from quotation from VENTURI, R., RAUCH, J. & SCOTT-BROWN, D.: *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 228 (1983), pgs. 30-31; from SCHMERTZ, M.F.: *Architectural Record*, June, 1984, pgs. 144-145; and from the memoirs of the project sent by the studio).

Notes

The dome is an earthly construction that symbolizes the vault of heaven. The revolution of the bodies that compose the dome evoke the cycle of the sun and the moon, and the complexity of the mocarabes represent the invisible presence of God.

The façade has an inscription from the Koran, "The Surah of the Cow (Surah Al-Baqarah)", 2, 144:

"We have seen you look at the heavens insistently, and we are going to give you a direction to satisfy you: turn your face towards the Incorruptible Mosque, and you all, wherever you may be, turn in that direction. The people of the Book know that this is the truth of your Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what you do".

Notes

- 1 The names of Sert and Utzon could be found on an initial list from Chadirji (HOLLOD, Renata, KHAN, Hasan-Uddin: "State Mosque (Competition), Baghdad, Iraq", *The Mosque and the Modern World*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1997, p. 260, n. 56).
- 2 The first mosque was not built, but rather installed in a house (of Roman type or origin, with a large terraced patio in the entrance) which Mohammed possessed in Medina.
- 3 This is the expression with which Saddam Hussein designated the war with a coalition of thirty four countries, headed by the United States, began in 1989 to liberate Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion a few months earlier, in homage to the 15,000 Iraqi soldiers entombed in the desert by the president himself (a war which the coalition denominated Operation Desert Storm)

PROJECT FOR A COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL BLOCK ON KHULAFÁ STREET (1981-1982)

Robert Venturi, John Rauch, Denise Scott-Brown
Studio: Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

Between 1979 (with Saddam Hussein's arrival in power) and 1983 (when the war between Iran and Iraq reached its highest point) the office of urban projects of Baghdad, the Amanat Al Assima (AAA), under the leadership of Samir Abdul Wahab Al Shaikhly, but in which the president of the country, Saddam Hussein, played an active role, decided to create new residential and financial centers on the right bank of Baghdad, until then less developed. The urban planning projects of new roadways, and new buildings and functions, which were inserted in a dense jungle of narrow streets and low houses, were divided into sectors. Thanks to the municipal advisers, the architects Rifat Chadirji and Hisham Madfai, head of the Department of Construction of the AAA, these projects were granted to international architects and builders. Among these great urban planning operations, two stand out: Bab Al Sheikh, whose sixth sector was given to Ricardo Bofill, and Khulafa Street, part of which was designed by Venturi, although the

ever deteriorating political situation of wars (Iran-Iraq, Iraq-Kuwait), and the international embargo detained the works, or impeded that the authors of the projects (who at times renounced their positions) supervised the construction. In the case of this project, carried out with the help of Rifat Chadirji, it was never built, or even developed to the point of an executive project. However, two firms, one Iraqi and one Yugoslavian, built a version of the building designed by Venturi on the designated plot. Unfortunately, now it is in ruins from the war, and the Iraqi builder was ruined in the Gulf War of 1991.

"This is a project of nine floors for multiple uses, in the center of Baghdad, which forms part of a large renovation plan to convert Khulafa Street into a central avenue and an important urban center. More than 200 meters long, the building occupies a block and a half. The main and first floors, behind a deep portico, are dedicated to commercial activities and have a main subway entrance. Above are four open floors for offices, and three more traditionally organized floors for housing, meeting rooms, and an assistance center for the residents. A bomb shelter is located in the basement.

Although there is air conditioning, the building is protected from the intense radiation and heat by means of continuous curtained walls separated by a meter and a half from the two

principle facades. Openings that allow light and outside viewing punctuate these walls. The openings below the portico and the apartments are in part decorative and evoke, through their shape and form, civic and residential Iraqi architecture. This evocation of traditional Muslim architecture is prolonged in certain details, such as the decorative wood screens of the terraces of the apartments, and in the geometric Islamic motifs of the metallic panels inside the arcades.

The design adapts the now universally accepted block height, developed by Le Corbusier, so that the faade faces the street in a traditional urban fashion, and the "brise-soleils" are explicitly decorative elements as well as functional at the same time. The openings in these are decorative; the forms are based on traditional compositions and symbols in a general and abstract way, combining historical symbolism with a more modern and technological one. The ornaments also spread out over panels of enamel and porcelain colored with representations of traditional Muslim motifs glimpsed within the arcades, over masses of wood, common in traditional houses, spread over the parapet of the upper floor."

(Biographical memoir of the project)

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