

Bofill did visit our office. He arrived in a long black limousine, a small man, dressed in black, with a large black hat. He spoke only French and Italian and, as I remember, the conversation was conducted in French. He had eyes for Bob alone, and said to him, "You throw away your scheme. I'll throw away my scheme. And we can start work together." To which we replied, "No," thereby losing our chance to build the biggest building we would ever build in our lives. "Our reasons for rejecting were numerous. We had previously cleared with the US State Department that it would be in order to work in Iraq. (This was during the famous "tilt" of our government toward Iraq) but we had found the atmosphere in the country strange and scary and noted how white some Iraqi architects had turned on hearing veiled threats from officials at the meeting. And our chief client there had been imprisoned by the regime. And, being Jewish, I couldn't go there at all. Also a Philadelphia scholar began telling us some of the more lurid aspects of Saddam's rule, saying he was "worse than Hitler." And at that time, hostilities between Iraq and Jordan meant that Bob's plane had to fly over Jordan with its lights out. Added to these highly convincing reasons was the fact that we could see no good outcome for our collaboration with Bofill. "So we asked ourselves why Bob should risk life and limb in an evil, scary place and on behalf of a project that we could not love. And the answer was clear. Nevertheless, we agreed, for the sake of our friend Rifat Chadirji, to go one step further and attend a conference on the project in Paris. However Iraq's war with Iran intervened and the conference never took place."

(Denise Scott Brown)

To complicate the facts even more, a recent article maintains that the winner of the contest was the team of...Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown! (VAUGHAN, Richard: "Saddam's Architect. How Rifat Chadirji masterplanned Baghdad in exchange of his freedom", *The Architects' Journal*, 17.04.08, p. 34).

PROJECT FOR THE COMPETITION OF THE NATIONAL MOSQUE OF BAGHDAD (1982)

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

Besides being the capital of the caliphate between the IX and XIII centuries, the multiple invasions of Baghdad kept it from possessing, like Damascus, Aleppo, and Jerusalem, a grand mosque which could cater to all the Muslim sensibilities.

The contest for a state mosque, which was to be added to the group of mosques built in all the country, reflects Saddam Hussein's desire to favor the most conservative sectors. The municipality of Baghdad (Amanat Al Assima AAA), advised by the architect Rifat Chadirji, and the presidential department of architecture, organized a restricted competition, by invitation only, in July of 1982. They established an initial list of twenty two

international architecture studios, which was finally reduced to seven: Maath Alousi (Iraq), Rasem Badran (Jordan), Ricardo Bofill and the *Taller de Arquitectura* (Spain) in collaboration with an Iraqi consulting team, Qahtan Al Madfai (United Kingdom), Mohamed Makiya (United Kingdom), Minoru Takeyama (Japan) and Venturi, Rauch, and Scott-Brown (United States).

The guidelines were drawn up by the ministry of Awqaf (religious buildings), with the mediation of Rifat Chadirji. Can non-Muslim architects build a mosque? The argument began with the contest (the selection of land, considered profane, had already raised protest on the part of fundamentalist religious journalists). The Christians were tolerated, because, like the Muslims, they believe in only one god and in the final day of judgment; it was the etymology that saved the selection of the Japanese architect (Takeyama): the verb (*amara*) with which Allah ordered the faithful to build a mosque, the first common house (Koran, 2, 144) (a verse recited when the foundation of any mosque is begun, and which Venturi reproduced on the principal façade of the sanctuary he designed), really means "to use, to live". Thus, the job of physically building does not only include the faithful?

They tried to design a grand Friday mosque (the day on which the faithful should go to temple), the biggest in the world, capable of holding 15,000, and later 30,000 (with a hall for 3000 women), and to widen the space to include 4000 more people, together with rooms and annexed buildings: a school, a library, guest houses, an administrative center, meeting rooms and a large cafeteria. The guidelines were posted at the end of September, and the projects were turned in on January 10th, 1983.

After the private deliberations of the jury, presided over by Rifat Chadirji, who declared Rasem Badran to be the winner, Ricardo Bofill second, and Maath Alousi third, but recommended that the last two help Badran, Saddam Hussein decided to organize a large meeting of three hundred specialists (architects, historians, philosophers, etc.) in Baghdad, to which the architects were invited. The objective was to discuss the suitability of the final projects. During a break in the symposium, upon hearing a private conversation in which an Iraqi architect mentioned the necessity of changing the location to be more urban, less peripheral (a Friday mosque ideally must be in the heart of the urban center), Saddam Hussein forced this topic to be the object of the debate, deciding upon a new location, close to the old airport, nowadays known as the Green Zone (the previous site was not far from the neighborhood designed by Doxiadis).

Saddam Hussein's interventions were not out of the ordinary, considering that he already felt an affinity for architecture, and tended to actively intervene in discussion in the heart of the Amanat Al Assima (AAA), the municipal organism created by mayor Samir Abdul Wahab Al Shaikhly, who, between 1979 and 1983, coordinated the infrastructures and the large urban projects commissioned to foreign firms and architects. He had created a presidential office of architecture and engineering in which forty five architects and seven hundred engineers designed and constructed based on designs and sketches from Saddam Hussein himself, especially after the Western embargo of 1990 (the workers were required to follow the plans to the letter of the law, and if not, could be executed). They primarily constructed dozens of presidential palaces and family residences (to the detriment of projects carried out by the dismantled *Development Board*).

Upon concluding the symposium the decisions of the jury were made public. The project was to have aspects of the winning project, as well as of the other finalists.

However, the smaller size of the new plot of land impeded the monumental designs that were started. Additionally, the lack of agreement upon the fees to be paid led to Badran abandoning the project. The invasion of Kuwait, the withdrawal of large companies from the country, and the international sanctions stalled the project.

Saddam Hussein began the initiative again in 1989, and summoned a second contest in 1990, this time open only to Iraqi architects, for what was to be known as Saddam's Mosque. The invasion of Kuwait put a temporary end to this new project.

Teams formed by architects from the presidential department and from the University were invited in 1993 to revise the project. Laith Al-Nuaimai, from the Department of Architecture of Saddam Hussein, won this third contest. The Iraqi president ordered that, before beginning construction on the great mosque (begun in 1998, and unfinished), they constructed a temple as a model (1/5 scale) of the great sanctuary. In 2000, unhappy with the proportions of the vaulted space and by the shape of the minarets, he ordered a new university team to completely revise the project (organizing a fourth competition), completed in April of 2001 (date of Saddam Hussein's anniversary). Known as the Umm al Qura Mosque (the mosque of the Mother of All Battles³), it has eight minarets (four of which are reminiscent of the form of Scud missiles and four of the barrel of AK-47 assault rifles, whose number and height were interpreted as symbolic references to the Gulf War) and a marble

hexagonal shrine which contains a Koran calligraphied in red with the president's blood. The shape of the minarets, however, did not use any arms (guns or missiles) as a model as one might think (those shapes upset the Iraqi president, who, most angry (in fact, the architects feared for their lives), ordered them to be changed, which resulted in the placement of cylindrical towers, much like the Asian minarets, with geometrical shapes common in North Africa, thus symbolizing the union of all Muslims.

The fall, detention, and execution of Saddam Hussein in 2006 definitively finished with the dream of a great national mosque, still being built, (following a less ambitious project, due to the lack of resources, with one two cylindrical minarets inspired by the tower of the great mosque of Samarra in the IX century, as well as lacking the other buildings, schools, museums, and hotels, which would have been on the edge of the lake surrounding the mosque) which would have been (and may still be) the largest of the Muslim world.

A national mosque for Iraq (...) should at the same time welcome the masses of followers, and be a national symbol whose contemporary architecture integrates the formal and ornamental characteristics of the Islamic and Iraqi cultures. This building should also be placed in the urban context of a city that is in full-out expansion, respecting, through its shape and size, the requirements of a recently urbanized location. A state mosque should also be sufficiently monumental to be imposing, and sufficiently popular so that the Iraqi people accept it.

Our first idea consisted of designing a mosque based on the idea of common prayer, an approximation which would be testimony to the egalitarian ideals of contemporary Iraq, but collective prayers only take place one day a week, Friday, and the rest of the time the mosque is only visited by restricted groups or individuals. Thus, since the beginning, we have had to use two scales in this project, one large, to be monumental, and one smaller, to be quotidian (...)

For technical reasons we have adopted and adapted a hipostilic plan that, appearing for the first time in Iraq, has now appeared in all of the Muslim world. Its spatial qualities, which combine the monumental with the smaller scale (...), help the faithful to find their way (...)

The interpretation of the hipostilic design implied an interpretation of the traditional ornamentations and decorations. In the exterior we have used decoration and symbolism in an eclectic manner, adapting the dimensions to a grand scale and to the monumental aspect of the building. This change in dimension of the formal elements requires a respect for the

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 KHULAFAS 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