

Islamic Mosque and Christian Cathedrals: A Comprehensive Examination of the

Historical Similarities

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Abstract

In Islamic and Christian architecture one can find similar attributes despite the contrast that resides within the religions. Architecture is one of the best ways to compare religions, culture, and art throughout the Islamic and Christian communities. The vast representation that architecture gives the engineer, chartered most likely the emperor or king, allows for cultural and religious influences that are transferable throughout each culture.

Keywords: Architecture, Christian Architecture, Islamic Architecture, Culture, Religion

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Islamic mosque architecture was influenced on the design and building of Christian Cathedrals can be seen in centuries of historical architecture around the middle east.

Architectural elements such as domes with squinches/pendentives are synonymous throughout Islamic and Christian architecture. Noticing and learning these historical similarities are imperative to the next generation of continued restoration of these magnificent buildings.

Compare the Two Religions Before Architecture

Due to current events it is hard to find any comparisons between the Islamic culture and Christian culture. First before looking at architecture one must find the similarities in each religion. When narrowing down both religions the conclusion is this, both have the same fears and ask the same questions: Why are we here, where are we headed, what will happen to us after we die? (Grupico, 2011)

This strong feeling of afterlife in both religions present a culture similarity that is echoed in their architectural elements. Iconoclastic type elements are used to describe each other's faith throughout the mosque and churches to echo the answers to the questions of afterlife.

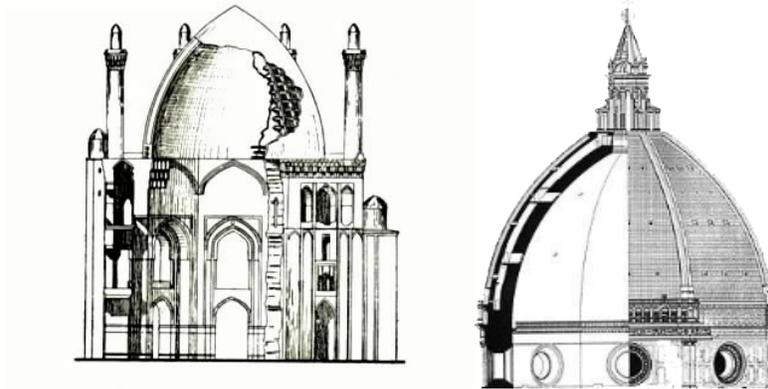
Afterlife may look different to Islamic believers as it does to Christian believers but the use of their buildings is synonymous. A place of communion with the divine and it is a place where divine power manifest itself (Seasoltz, 2007, pp. 69-70).

As High as The Heavens

Early Christian styles and Islamic styles both surfaced during the renaissance. Both of those eras are distinguished by beauty achieved through the exercise of logic and exalting human accomplishment (Abercrombie & Whiton, 2007, p. 123).

Architectural engineers achieved aesthetically pleasing atmospheres, in Christian and Islamic cultures, to come and worship while displaying human accomplishment in the height and wealth. Dome were created in Islamic culture to,” represent the vault of heaven in the same way as the garden prefigures Paradise” (Gamm, 2014) . In the same way, Christian cathedrals such as the Hagia Sophia, built by Justinian, took the dome and added it to cathedrals to add height to reach heaven. Domes are a cohesive design element that can be seen throughout both Islamic and Christian architecture.

Byzantine architecture was influenced greatly by the Islamic dome that carried over to the early Christian cathedrals as well, such as the Hagia Sophia compared to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Later, we can see the dome used in Christian architecture such as Florence Cathedral in the Gothic Revival period. It has been said that Brunelleschi used extensive influence in his blueprint for the dome from Islamic architecture. Brunelleschi's use of the double dome to support the vast drum of the structure and herringbone pattern of brickwork within is the first such instance in Europe -- but can be found throughout great mosques of the Muslim world. (MOHAMMADI, 2009)

*Figure 1**Figure 2*

Melding Two Cultures Together

In both Islamic and Christian architecture arches were a key element to separate spaces while still adding height and depth to the buildings. Islamic architectural engineers took on the arch to and modified its appearance. The character of the shape of Islamic arch compared to Christian one is less pointed. An obtuse angle is more used in Islamic arch than in Christian one (Ibragimov, 2011, p. 2). Even with their differences the similarities are apparent throughout history. The pointed arch was carried on throughout gothic Christian architecture influenced by Islamic architecture. Arches pointed to the heavens was an architectural design element, for exterior and interior use, used in such cathedrals as Reims Cathedral in France.

In the interiors of the cathedrals arches were used in the aisles to frame the nave. Architecturally the arch also functions like an aqueduct joining two sides of a river valley together (Davies, 1982, p. 96). In Islamic architecture continued that pattern like element to create a unified whole look throughout the mosque. The Córdoba Mosque is a perfect example of aisle-like repetitive architecture. In the Córdoba Mosque, there were 1293 columns and 856 remain today each holding double arches emulated by red and white stripes. The Córdoba Mosque was originally a catholic church dedicated to the Saint Vincent the third (Mosque–

Cathedral of Córdoba,2017). The mosque was divided into a cathedral and mosque when Muslims took over Spain in 711.

Horseshoe arches, which are the unmistakable sign of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, were themselves adopted by the early Muslims rulers of Córdoba from Visigothic Christian churches. It was, in other words, a culture that rejected religious or political correctness as the basis for a sort of aesthetic or intellectual value. (Menocal, 2002, p. 202)

The influence of such churches as the Great Mosque of Córdoba, originally named Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, and the Hagia Sophia of which both displace the works of fascinating cross-cultural arches. As they architecturally bring two columns together, they seemingly bring the two cultures together with ease.



Figure 3

Capitals: Presence of the Divine

After the Islamic conquest of 635 the construction of many mosques such as, Great Mosque of Damascus, started. Islamic architects started to become influenced by the Roman

architects and their Corinthian capitals. When the architects decided to produce their own capital, the majority went with a stylized double row of acanthus leaves that was reduced to one V above another. The design became known as a stalactite capital or makarunas (Davies, 1982, p. 138) (*see figure 4*).

At the same time, shortly after the Islamic conquest early Christian and byzantine architects were re-designing their style of capitals throughout their damaged churches. The Church of Saint Demetrius, was damaged by fire and reconstructed from 629-635. The capitals of the building are an example of the unique Ionic stylized detailed capitals that were used throughout byzantine architecture. Christian architects started using heavy detail in the stone designs unlike previous periods, just as Islamic architects had in their mosque.

It is the ornament that provides the clue to the appreciation of these capitals which were designed either Islamic or Christian (Davies, 1982, p. 107). No matter the religion the building is constructed for the reasoning for the ornamentation of the capitals is the same, to represent the presence of the divine (Seasoltz, 2007, p. 69)



Figure 4

Conclusion

Domes, arches, and capitals are only a brief comparison of the works of architects in Islamic and Christian cultures. Islamic influence on Christian architecture has been vast throughout history. The interchangeable elements during the early Christian and byzantine period even going into the Romanesque period were evident.

Whether it is a Christian cathedral turned into a mosque or capitals that influence the restyling of Islamic mosque pillars. Christian cathedrals had a substantial impact on the Islamic architecture as well. Christian architecture such as the Hagia Sophia and the Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción make permanent stance of how Islamic culture was, and still is, influenced by a religion that otherwise looks at their differences.

Architecture could possibly be the bind that brings these two religions together to find common ground within the structures that each one built. Bringing people together is the fundamental part of why churches and mosque or any sacred place is built. Worship each individual's god in their own religions manner is a key similarity of every religion's "why".

In spite of, the differences in the interior choices such as the icons and stained glass windows in Christian cathedrals and Muslim mosque: that bring them closer to the Word. The exterior and architectural similarities remind one of the similarities of the faith. With domes and arches reaching as high as the heavens reminding one of afterlife. Christian and Islamic domes remind us that we do not have to wait until after we die to reconnect with our creator. The beautiful arches and angles represent eternity which is a belief synonymous with both religions.

The Christian and Islamic architectural realm drew close to each other whether they knew and still a mystery. However, it is obvious that both mosque and cathedrals have heavily influenced each other in ways that have impact history forever.

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Figures

Figure 1. Soltanieh Dome cut out to show double dome construction

Figure 2. Florence Cathedral cut out to show Brunelleschi's double dome construction

Figure 3. Còrdoba, La Mezquita

Figure 4 Perso-Turkish Stalactite Capital