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A Documentary Study of Patterns and Styles of the MAIA Mosques in Kuwait

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Abstract: What makes a mosque a mosque? The answer is forbiddingly simple: a wall correctly oriented towards the Qibla. [1]

The mosque, by definition, is the prominent and perhaps only religious building in Islam. It is a building type, which often reflected the impact of the manifestation of local architectural traditions, which later on formed the core of Islamic architecture. Indeed the mosque is sometimes considered the prime symbol of a country's religious stance, or national identity.

The of new Muslim states, particularly after the progressive dissolution of the Western colonial empires, and Since c. 1950 these states, whatever their political ideology, have increasingly engaged in mosque-building projects at all levels and on several scales. These ever more capital-intensive building programmes can be seen as attempts to create new expressions not only of political power, social control and piety, but also of sovereignty, national identity and modernity. [2]

The State of Kuwait is no exception from this prevailing pattern. In addition to the few ancient mosques that were inherited from the ancestors, the Kuwaiti government have constructed numerous mosques over the past few decades. Through the various ministerial agencies, fund was raised for mosque-building schemes. This paper attempts to provide a visual and architectural survey of the mosques built by the Ministry of Awqaf & Islamic Affairs (MAIA) in Kuwait. It investigates the similarities and the differences in the design patterns, and searches for underlying endeavours to create distinctive styles that reflect traditional values of Kuwaiti mosque architecture.

Introduction

Although all mosques of Kuwait are under the administration of (MAIA), they can be classified, according to construction financing, to two main categories; the mosques built through directly by MAIA, and the private mosques. This is in addition to temporary prayer sheds (shabra). The first category is subdivided into large gathering principal mosques (Masjid for Friday prayers) and relatively smaller district mosques for everyday congregational prayers (Jama') In 1996 the ratio between government funded mosques and those built by individuals was 42% to 58% respectively. [3]

This is a preliminary reconnaissance study dealing with the documentation and visual analysis of the architectural design of the mosques commissioned and built by MAIA during the time period of 1973 to 1990, which represent nearly all the MAIA mosques (Figs. 1&2). During this period 107 mosques were completed featuring 15 design types in addition to 7 other mosques, which have not followed the set-forward design types, totaling 114 completed mosques. Mosque types were put forward as a set of basic requirements for variable mosque sizes. They represented the design brief for individual MPW design staff.

Each design type states the components that must be found in a particular size mosque, in addition to determining the areas of and the relationships between these components. The design type also specified the architectural treatments that should be followed and the finishing materials that should be used. In short, design types give almost complete description of the mosques to be designed leaving little room for individual designers' innovations.

The reason for the choice of this particular time period is due to availability of recorded data on the subject at the Ministry of Public Works' (MPW) archives, in addition to the fact that after 1990, MAIA and MPW have slowed down, and virtually halted, the construction of new mosques, and concentrated efforts, instead, on finishing-up the commissioned and uncompleted mosque projects, as well as on restoring other mosques damaged and destroyed as a result of aggression during the Gulf war.

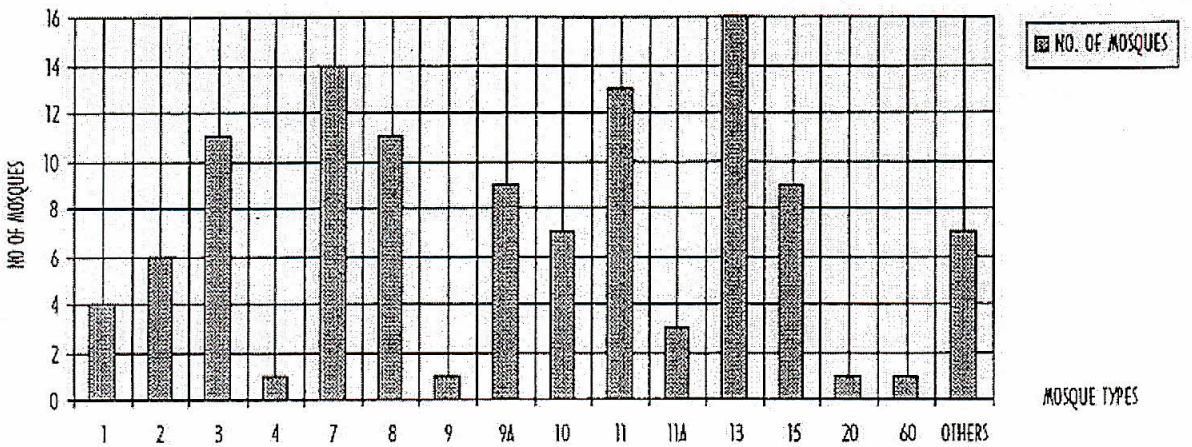


Fig. 1: Number of mosques completed by MAIA during 1973 to 1990 according to mosque-types.

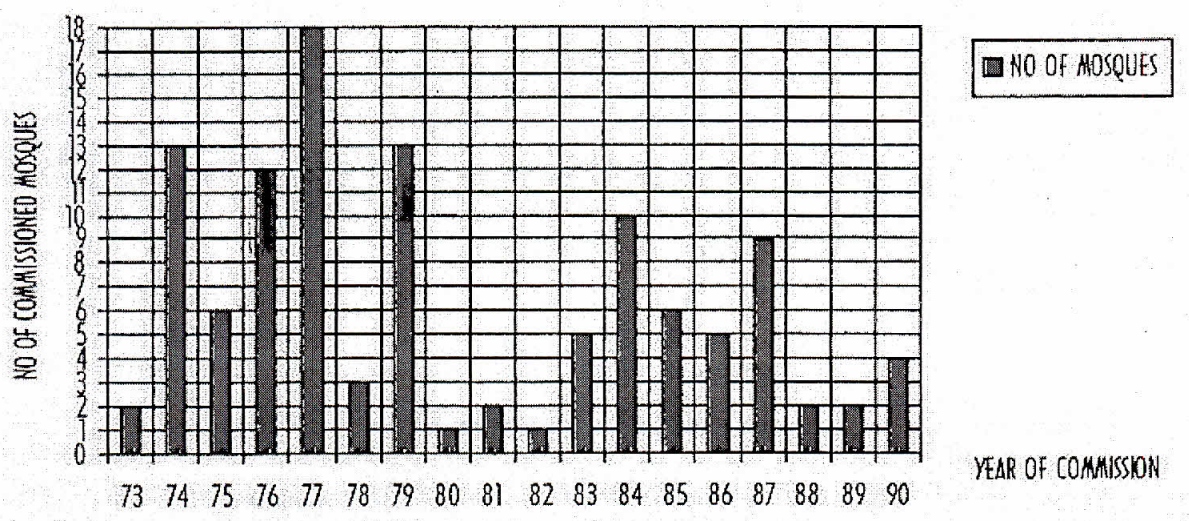


Fig. 2: Total number of MAIA mosques completed yearly from 1973 to 1990.

An Historical Background

Benevolent people of Kuwait have built mosques over the years all around the country, as an act of charity and means of approaching Allah and to encourage Muslims to pray in congregation in each vicinity. Most of them, in their will, allocated a third of their inheritance as waqf for mosque construction. They did not only finance the construction of mosques, but have also furnished and equipped them with all essentials and allotted money to pay for maintenance and running costs. The first mosque to be built in Kuwait is Al-Baher (Al-Ibrahim) mosque, completed at 1696. [3, p.27] Mosque building and maintenance activities continued in the same individual benevolent manner over the years from 1696 up to 1949. Most of the old mosques built around Kuwait, were renovated by MAIA during the period from 1949 to 1960. After independence, most mosque construction activities were given to the Design Section (DS) at MPW. In the newly founded residential areas, the National Agency for Housing Welfare (NAHW) was given the task of mosque construction since it is responsible for the establishment of these areas. After completion of construction, MAIA takes over the responsibility of supervision of these mosques, maintenance and operation in terms of the appointment of Imam and Muezzin for each of them.

Methodology

The total number of existing mosques in Kuwait of all categories (i.e. Masjid, Jama', and temporary sheds) has reached 862 mosques[1] according to latest statistics by Mosques Department (MD) at MAIA dated 1998. These mosques are distributed along the 5 governrates of Kuwait based on proportion to existing population of each of them (Fig. 3).

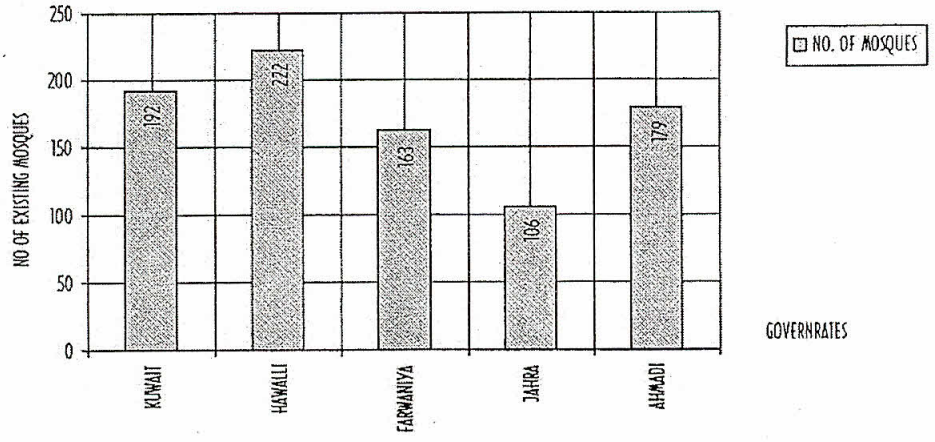


Fig. 3: Distribution of total number of existing mosques in Kuwait by governrates.

The population of MAIA mosques covered and analyzed in this paper represents about 33% of all government funded mosques and about 14% of all the mosques built to date in Kuwait. This population feature fifteen various design types developed by DS' staff at MPW. Due to limitations of available data and study time, a sample of eight out of these types were covered in the visual and architectural survey in addition to three other mosques

[1] Source: Latest statistics obtained personally by the Author from MD staff at MAIA.

that do not follow the design-type system, which are Musallam, Mulla Saleh and Jahra mosques. As stated earlier, each design type has prescribed a set of areas and proximity relationships of all the functional components that need to be designed. In the few specific cases of MAIA mosques that did not follow the type system, more freedom was given to DS staff to formulate the design brief according to site conditions, basic requirements, context, and personal innovations. The available architectural drawings of the eleven sample mosques were obtained and their external facades were photographed.

Attention is given in this paper to the documentation and analysis of the main component parts of the mosques surveyed, i.e. the haram (prayer hall), sahn (courtyard), riwaq (colonnade), Qibla wall, minbar (pulpit), mihrab (niche), minaret, and maida' (ablution place).

Focusing, however, on plan forms, elevations and external components, e.g. minarets, and portals. Although it is not the aim or scope of this paper to hold a comparison of the design of old and new mosques of Kuwait, two outstanding examples, Al-Khalifa and Al-Saeed mosques, are referred to in order to draw reference of the typical component parts of a traditional Kuwaiti mosque. While the first example is regarded as the most beautiful among old Kuwaiti mosques, [4, p. 148] the second example is said to be the only remaining mosque in old Kuwait town which preserves many of its original architectural features. [5, p 203]

Design Process

As a common practice in Kuwait after the commission to build a mosque is given to MPW by the MAIA, the DS at MPW takes over the job and embarks on completing the design documents of the new mosque. MPW in conjunction with MAIA have developed a set of design guidelines for mosques, dealing with all aspects of mosque construction. While MAIA have developed a set of general design requirements for all mosques, MPW have developed the design types for various mosque sizes and outlined the specific design guidelines for each type. These include a list of all component parts, the preferred square meter area for each of them as well as the governing relationships among all these components, in addition to the prescribed architectural treatment and finishing materials selection.

However, some freedom is given to individual DS' staff in the choice of architectural treatment of each project providing they abide by the guidelines. Since MPW employ foreign expatriates as DS' staff, the final design output depends to some extent on each designer's professional background. This has resulted in the variety of architectural treatments of the mosque types and in the different interpretation of the MAIA design guidelines. In order to study the design of MAIA mosques it is essential to first understand the nature of these guidelines. Therefore, it is important to summarize the MAIA design guidelines for mosques as a threshold for the analysis of the output design patterns.

Maia & Mpw Guidelines for Mosque Design

The guidelines are divided into general comments on the design as whole and specific requirements for various mosque components[2]. While the first apply to all mosque sizes and types, the later vary from type to type depending on their size.

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[2] Source: Extracts from MAIA & MPW archives obtained and translated by the Author.

General Requirements

These come in the form of a set of general design suggestions as follows:

- Simplicity must be sought in internal and external design, without contradictions to worship requirements.
- Circular shapes must be excluded and plans should be configurations of rectangular and square shapes to ensure regularity of prayers lines.
- Friday mosques should be provided with fully equipped libraries.
- Harmony must be sought in selection of indoor furnishings and outdoor colours, and a marble plinth of at least 1m high should be made all around internal walls.

Specific Requirements

This part deals with detailed requirements for each mosque component. They are meant to help designers form evaluation criteria for the design of new mosques. They include specific guidelines on area, height, shape, and proportions of all mosque components, such as the haram, sahn, riwaq, minaret, and maida'. A summary of the specific requirements for each of these components can be referred to in Appendix A.

Visual and Architectural Analysis

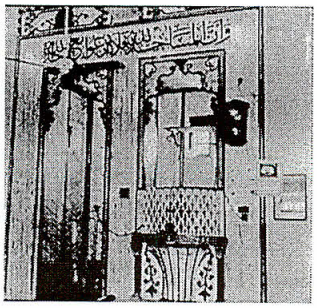
Frishman has summarised mosque components in nine parts; the demarcated space, the Qibla wall, the minbar, the dikka, the kursi, the maqsura, the pool, the minaret, and the portal. [6, pp. 32-41] The visual analysis in this paper focuses on six out of these components leaving out the three other components, namely the dikka, the kursi, and the maqsura, for irrelevance to the MAIA mosque-sample surveyed, since they are not so customary to Kuwaiti mosques.

Each component is analysed across the sample and then singled-out in a separate descriptive sketch Figure containing a collection of examples from the surveyed sample. Prior to analysing the MAIA mosque sample, the author traced the historical precedent of mosque components, drawing on some examples of traditional Kuwaiti mosques with a focus on the two cases of Al-Khalifa and Al-Saeed mosques. This is done with the aid of old photographic records of some traditional mosques shown in (Figs. 4-6) and more recent images, plans, elevations, and minaret details of Al-Khalifa and Al-Saeed mosques, indicating the existence of all the six main components traditional Kuwaiti mosques. As Lukoke [4] states about the design of these mosques: "Old mosques of Kuwait were built following the open-mosques type prevailing in Arabian Peninsula. The roofs of prayer halls in these mosques were supported by wooden columns. Each mosque contained one prayer hall preceded by a riwaq on entry side which is connected to an open courtyard on the opposite side of the Qibla wall." [4, p. 148]

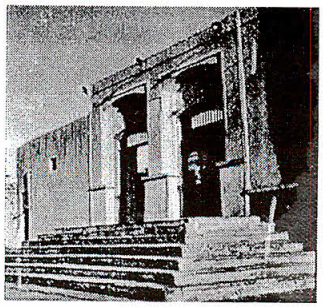
The plans of Al-Khalifa and Al-Saeed mosques demonstrate the presence of the haram, riwaq, and sahn in a similar procession in both mosques. The rest of the other components, i.e. Qibla wall, minbar, maida', minaret, and portal, are also visible in the visual analysis of both mosques shown in (Figs. 4-6). These two examples are, to a great extent, typical to the formation of traditional Kuwaiti mosques.



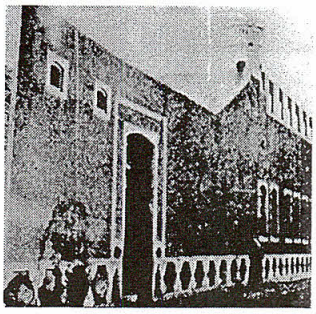
The Haram
Al-Awadi Mosque



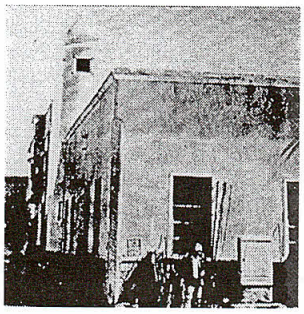
The Mihrab & Minbar,
Al-Mataba Mosque



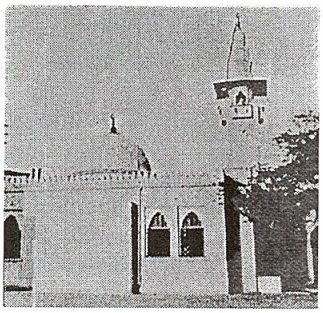
The Portal
Al-Khalifa Mosque



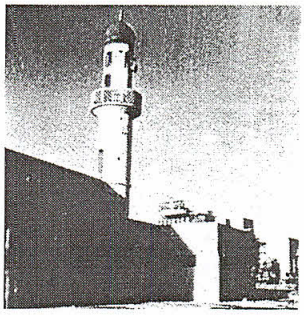
The Portal
Said Al-Atibi Mosque



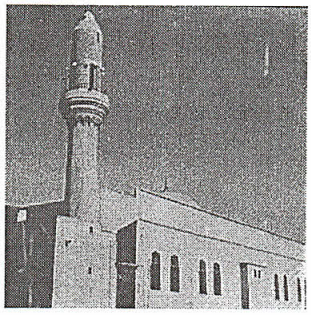
The Qibla Wall
Al-Mutawa Mosque



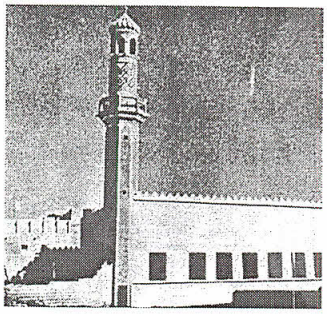
The Qibla Wall
Al-Mataba



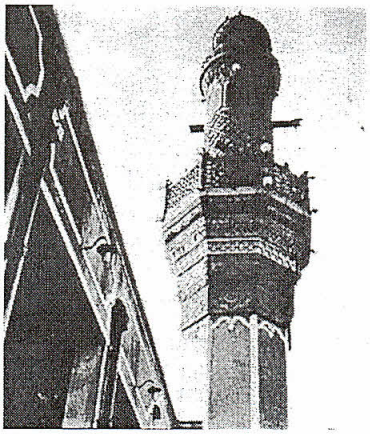
The Minaret
Al-Flaij Mosque



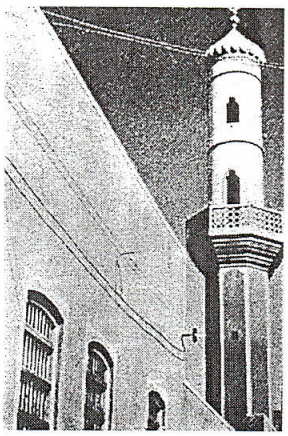
The Minaret
Nasir Al-Badir Mosque



The Minaret
Al-Nisf Mosque

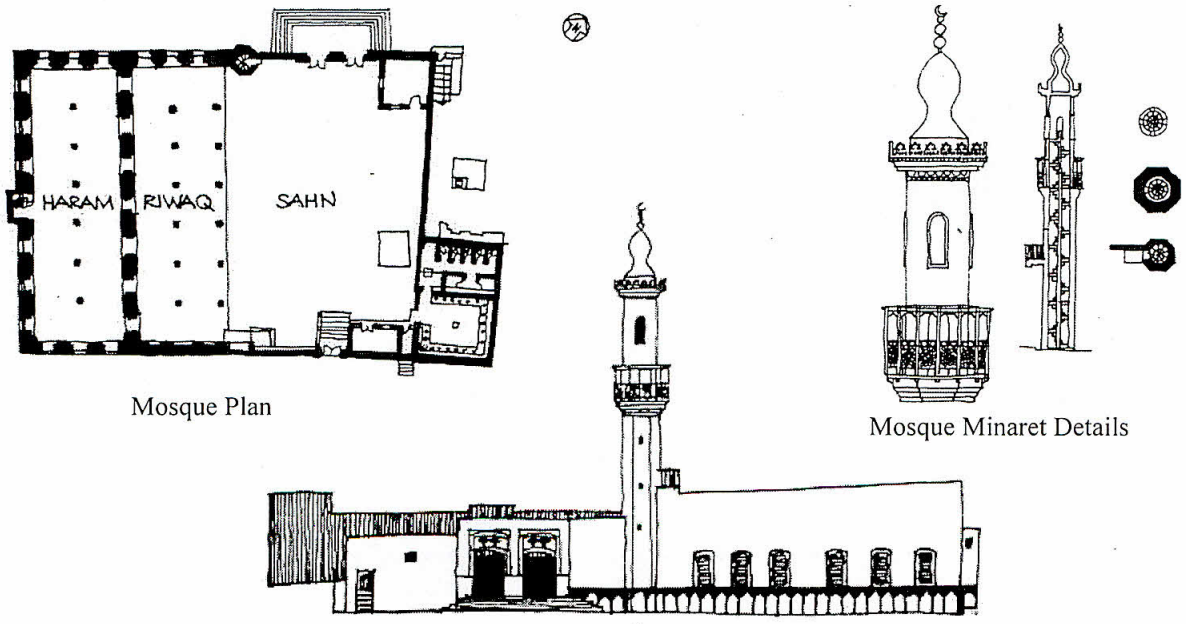


The Minaret
Al-Mediras Mosque



The Minaret
Al-Mediras Mosque

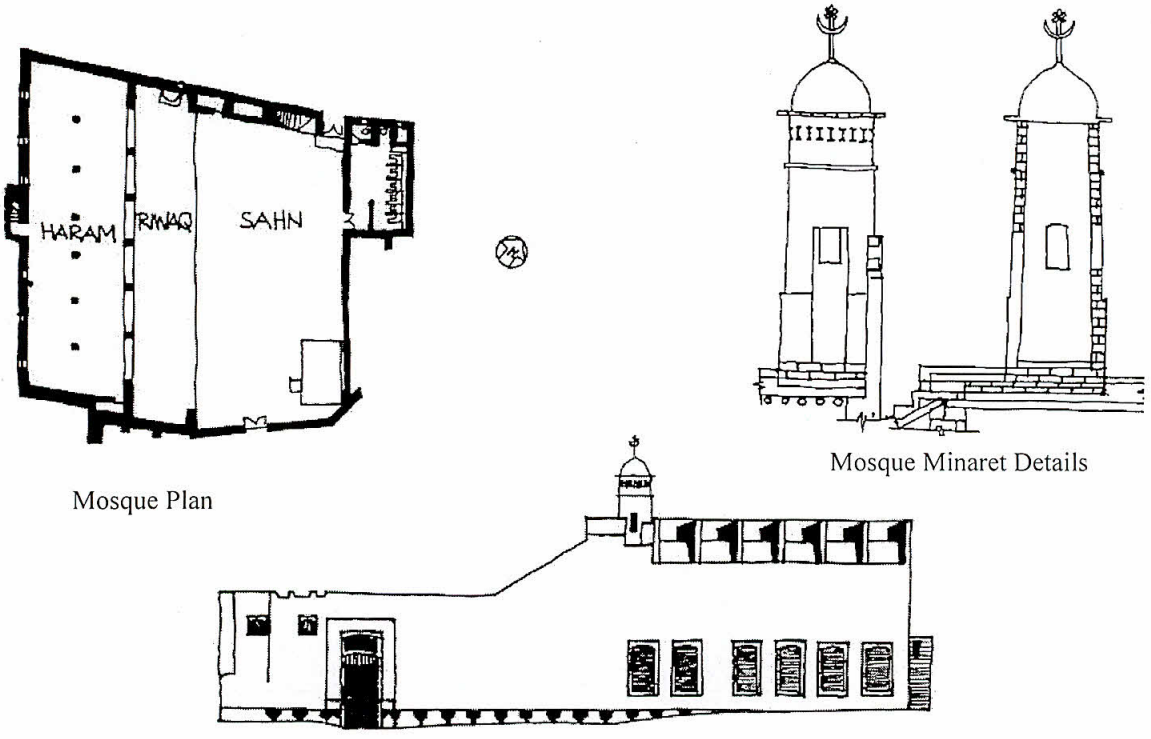
Fig. 4: Example of early mosques built in Kuwait over past 3 centuries.
Source: Ibn Al-Roumi. *History of Mosques of Kuwait.*



Mosque Plan

Mosque Minaret Details

Entry Facade, Al-Khalifa Mosque

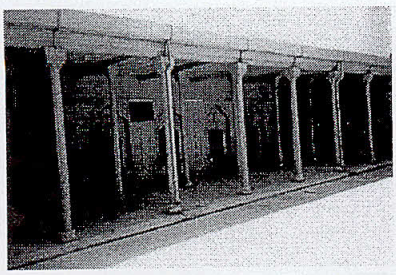


Mosque Plan

Mosque Minaret Details

Entry Facade, Al-Saeed Mosque

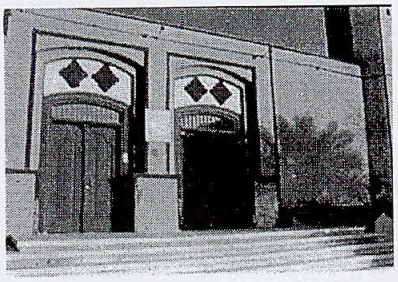
Fig. 5: Main components of Al-Khalifa and Al-Saeed Mosques.
Source: Courtesy of Architectural & Engineering Affairs Department,
The National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, Kuwait.



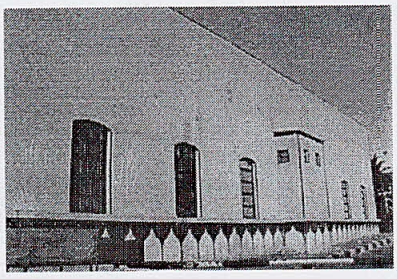
Riwaq



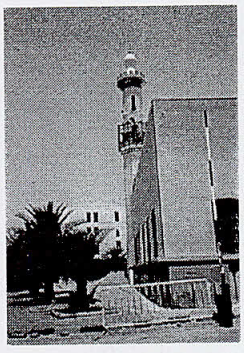
Haram



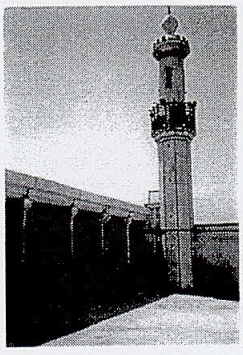
Portal



Qibla Wall



Minaret
Al-Khalifa Mosque

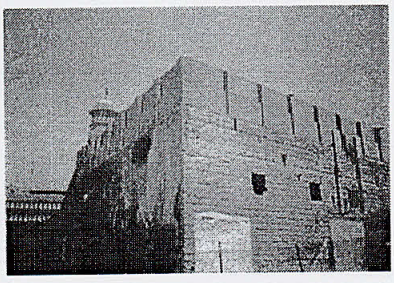


Sahn



Mihrab & Minbar

Historical Precedent



Qibla Wall & Minaret
Al-Saeed Mosque

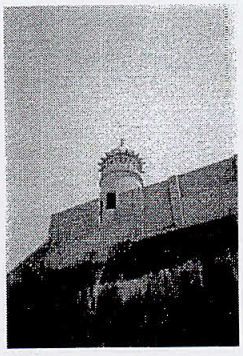


Fig. 6: Some examples of early mosques built in Kuwait over the past 3 centuries.
Source: Author's Transparencies

The Demarcated Space

Contains the haram, the sahn, and the riwaq. Originally is partly roofed and partly opened to sky, but due to harsh weather in Kuwait, the majority of MAIA mosque-types have adopted a modified version with all 3 sub-components covered and mechanically air-conditioned.

From architectural survey carried out on the MAIA mosque sample, it is clear that riwaq always separates sahn and haram as a transitional space in most cases. Upon entry, one first comes to sahn which is a large space with a high ceiling usually naturally-lit by sky lights, passes through riwaq which is narrower and lower, to arrive finally to haram which is the main focal element.

Proportion between these 3 parts varies according to mosque capacity and design. Sahn, in half of the cases surveyed, is being surrounded by riwaq from 4 sides, while in the other half has only a single riwaq from haram side. Mosque's main entrance is often found perpendicular to Qibla wall. Haram often has a partly high level ceiling in its centre, sometimes covered by a dome and often covered by a clear storey. (Fig. 7) demonstrates the arrangement of the components of the demarcated space, i.e. haram, riwaq, and sahn, in the MAIA mosque sample.

Mosques are identified in all the analysis Figures in this paper by either a name or a type number depending on whether they are following the type design or not, in addition to this some of the types have been modified from the original type design throughout the period of their implementation, and therefore referred to in the Figures as modified types.

The Qibla Wall

Contains the focal point of any mosque, namely the mihrab that is a recess or niche in the wall for Imam to lead the congregation in prayer. Prayers have to observe the location of mihrab to enable them to face the right direction during their prayers. With mihrab in its mid-point, Qibla wall has become an important element in mosque architecture.

Almost all MAIA sample mosques have adopted a Qibla wall model that has no openings, at least at worshippers' level, and has a mihrab alcove exposed outside the wall. This important element, externally visible, has led this component to become a reference point to Qibla direction for residents in the mosque's vicinity. The reason for the windowless Qibla wall is to avoid distraction and diversion of prayers attention during khutba (Friday sermon) or during prayers. (Fig. 8) shows a few rear views and sections of Qibla wall from surveyed cases.

The Minbar

This is a pulpit or raised platform for Imam to be comfortably seen by worshippers during his delivery of Friday sermon. Together with the mihrab, minbar is assumed to be the most decorated feature of the mosque, in order to draw worshippers' attention to it as they enter the haram. MAIA mosques have adopted a built-in type minbar integrated with the mihrab, and always positioned to its right, in a single unit that may have been inspired by influences from nearby Indian sub-continent. Majority of MAIA mosque-types surveyed showed a three-compartment unit for a minbar and a mihrab and a space for amplifying sound system to the left of the mihrab, which is always in the middle of this unit. This three-compartment unit has an axes of symmetry passing through the centre of the mihrab with some special articulation to highlight the minbar.

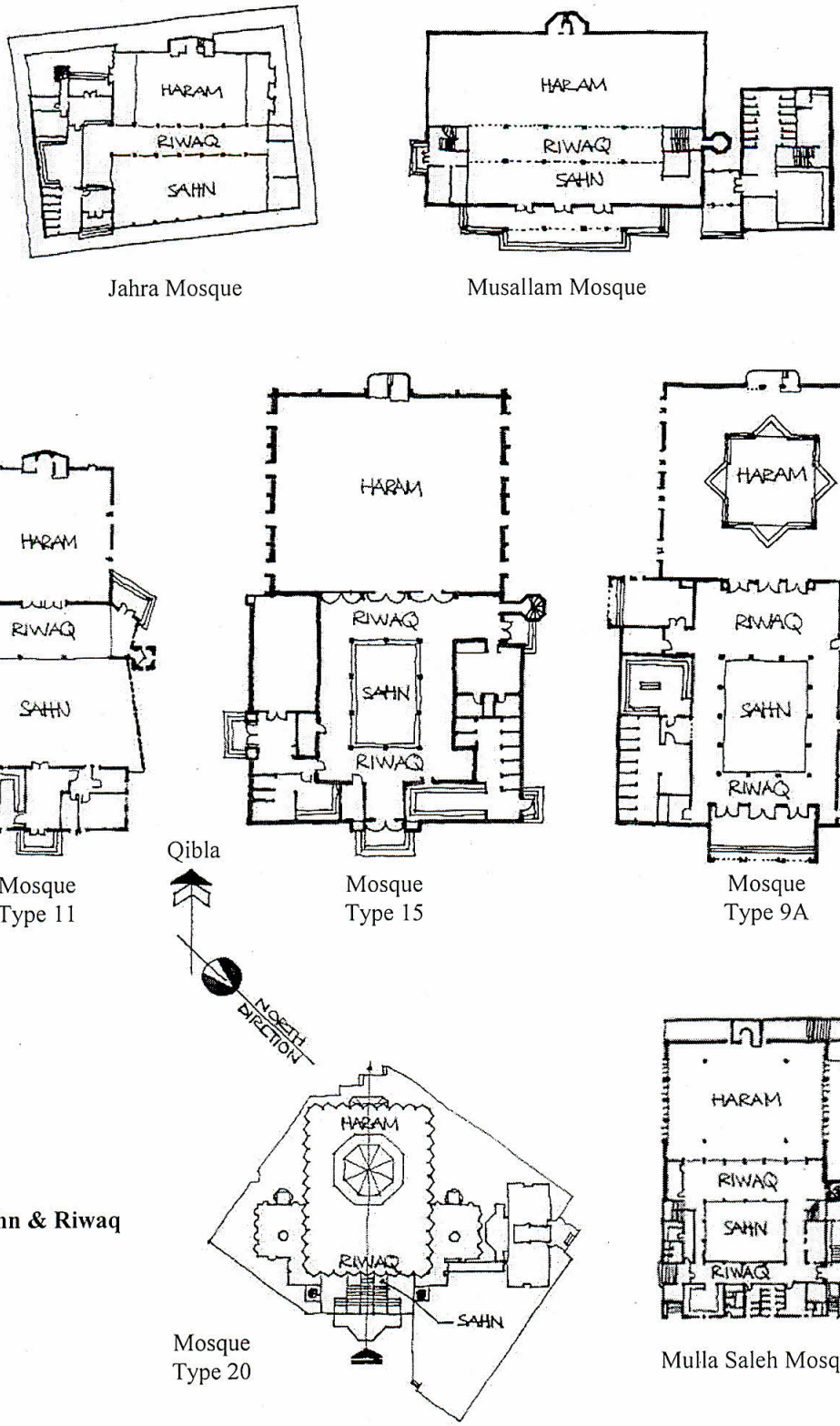


Fig. 7: Haram, Sahn and Riwaq as surveyed in the MAIA mosque types.
Source: Author's sketches after original drawings obtained from M.P.W., Kuwait.

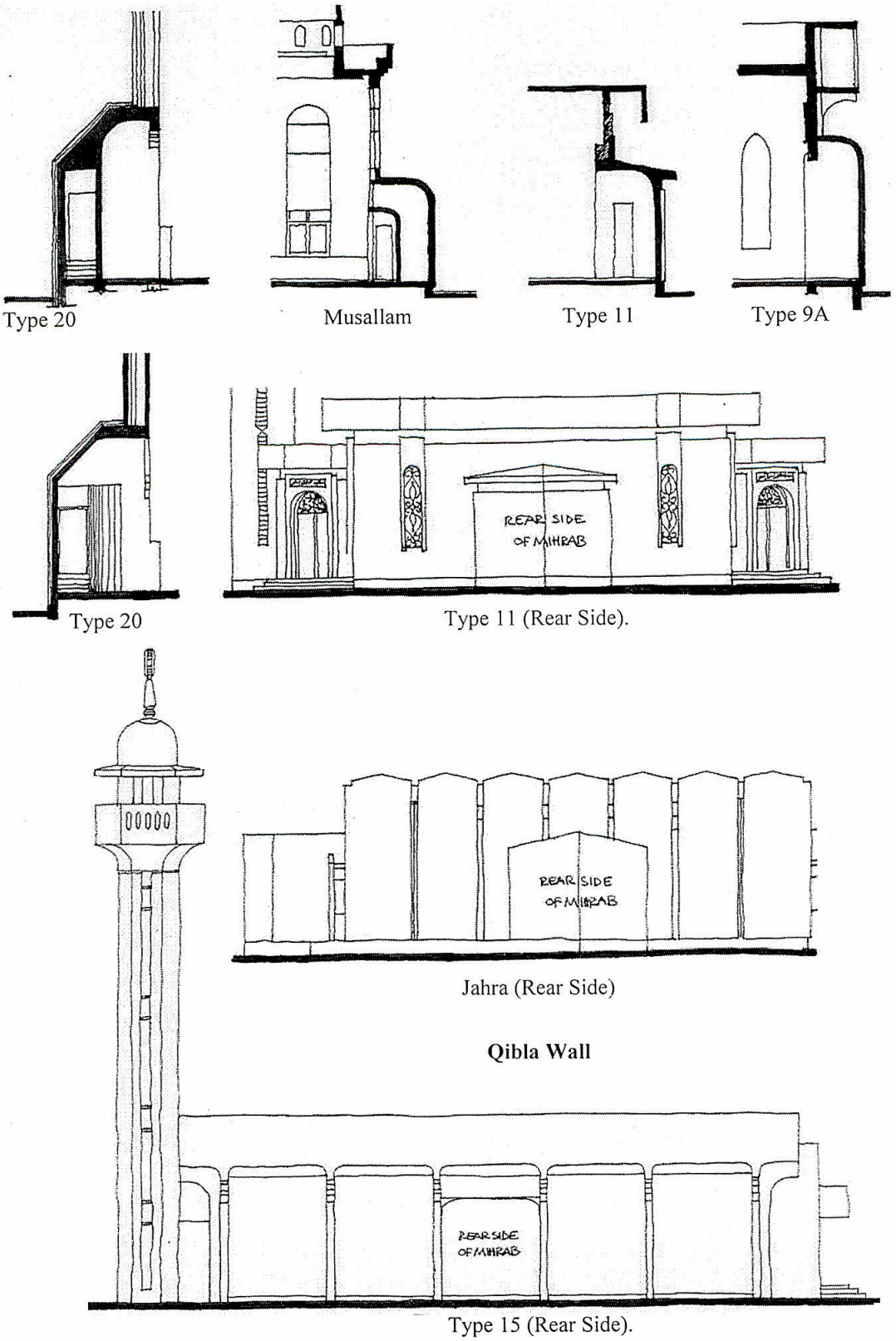


Fig. 8: Qibla wall examples as surveyed in the MAIA mosque types.
Source: Author's sketch's after original drawings obtained from M.P.W., Kuwait.

This articulation for both minbar and mihrab mainly uses Islamic geometric and floral patterns and motifs, such as mukarnas, integrated with Arabic calligraphy of verses of the Qura'n as the main source of decoration. Frequently used materials for decoration of minbar and mihrab in MAIA mosque sample are marble, ceramic tiles, and stucco. (Fig. 9) shows some surveyed examples of minbar and mihrab types.

The Pool, or Ablution Place

Traditionally this element is introduced as an outstanding feature, with or without a fountain, in the open-to-sky sahn. In addition to fulfilling the prescribed ritual of ablution before prayer, it also serves as an aesthetic element. Since MAIA mosque-types have a roofed and air-conditioned sahn, the pool took the form of an enclosed unit containing ablution space and restroom at the edge of the mosque.

The location of the pool is decided based on the Islamic rule that a man using a W. C. should not be in the direction of Qibla, which is clear from the orientation of all W. C. cubicles shown on (Fig. 10). It is also apparent from surveyed examples that the pool has a direct access from outside, in addition to an access to riwaq or sahn, in order to maintain the separation between the impure domain of the W. C. area and the pure domain of the haram.

The Minaret

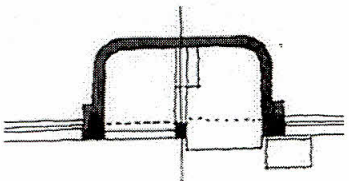
Although this component part has lost to a great extent its original intent as a high place to broadcast the adhan (call for prayer) as far as possible, it has acquired a greater role in mosque, and perhaps Islamic, architecture. The minaret has not only become the identifying feature of a mosque but it has also become the symbol of Islam. The tradition was to build one minaret for each mosque until the Ottoman era when twin minarets came to existence. Currently there are mosques with more than two minarets, for example Al-Haram Al-Sharif Mosque in Makkah has seven minarets. "Minarets in the mosques of Kuwait were building of low height and almost at roof level or slightly higher." [4, p. 148]

Lukoke [4] observed that in 1912 there was a few minarets in Kuwait that could hardly be seen above the roof-tops of the houses due to their low height. Gardiner [7] around the 1920s indicated that:

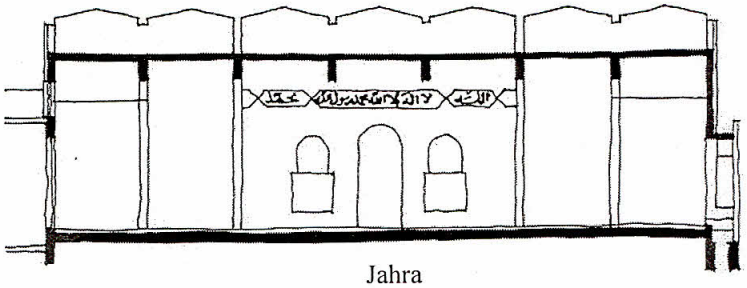
"There were no great buildings in Kuwait, no mosques with gleaming sea-blue domes, no unique pieces of special historical significance." [7, p. 39]

This emphasises the fact that traditional mosques of Kuwait were simple and humble in their architectural features. MAIA mosque-types have adopted the single and simple minaret model, apart from the large capacity model type 20 (more than 2000 worshipper capacity) where there are two minarets. It is also observed that minarets are always located on the right of haram. The dominant plan forms of minaret shafts in the surveyed sample are the square and the octagon shapes and seldom we find a shaft with a circular plan.

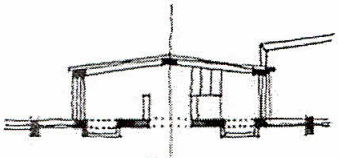
All minarets have a spiral staircase in the centre leading to mosque's roof and balcony level. All surveyed minarets are relatively low, apart from type 20, with only one balcony level ending with a bronze crescent fixed over their dome-like top part. Again this brings to mind the traditional Kuwaiti forms of low rise, one-balcony level minarets shown in the examples of old mosques in (Figs. 11 – 14).



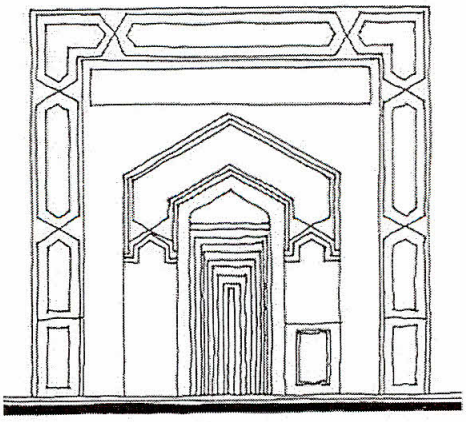
Type 15



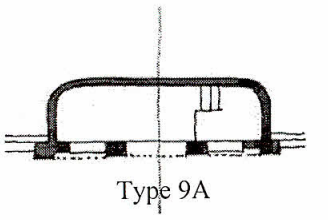
Jahra



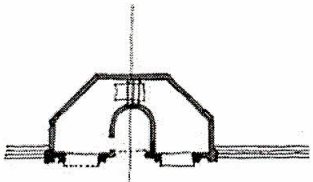
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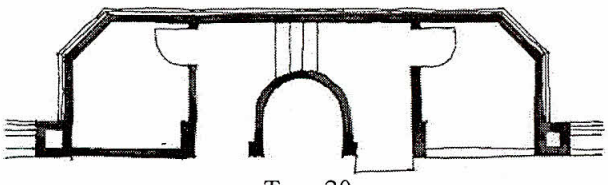
Type 20



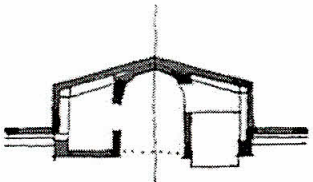
Type 9A



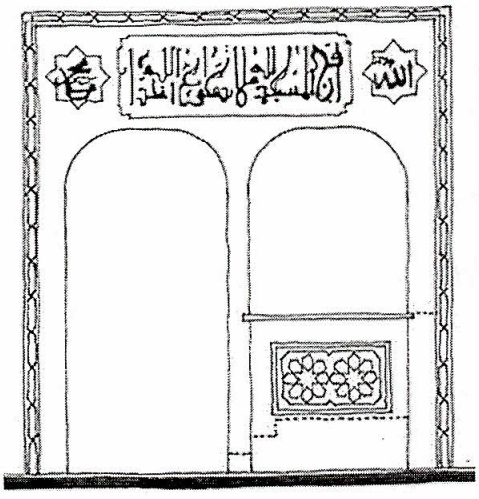
Musallam



Type 20

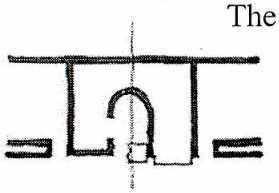


Type 11



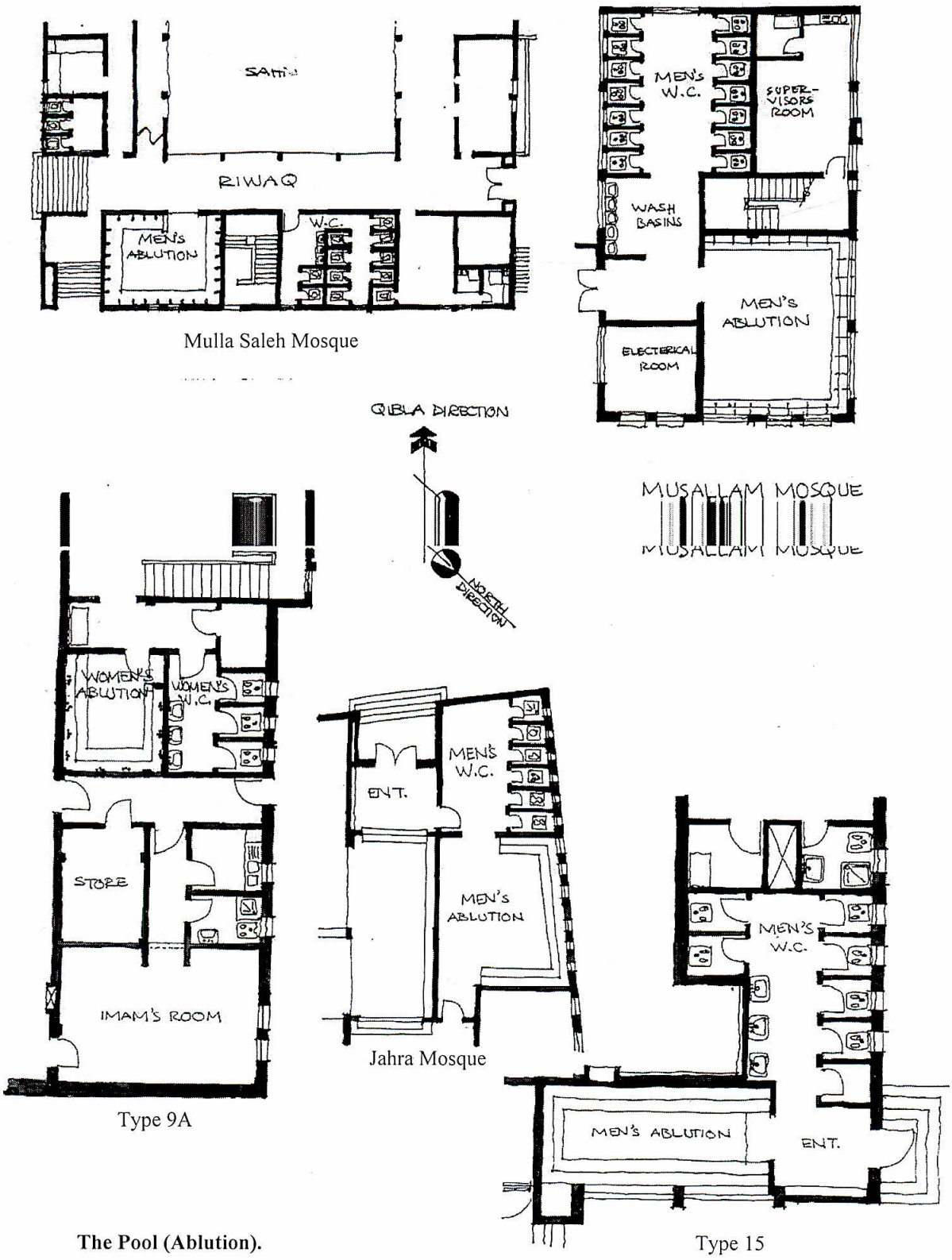
Type 15

The Minbar and the Mihrab



Mulla Saleh

Fig. 9: Minbar and mihrab as surveyed in the MAIA mosque types.
Source: Author's sketch's after original drawings obtained from M.P.W., Kuwait.



The Pool (Ablution).

Fig. 10: The pool or ablution as surveyed in MAIA mosque types.

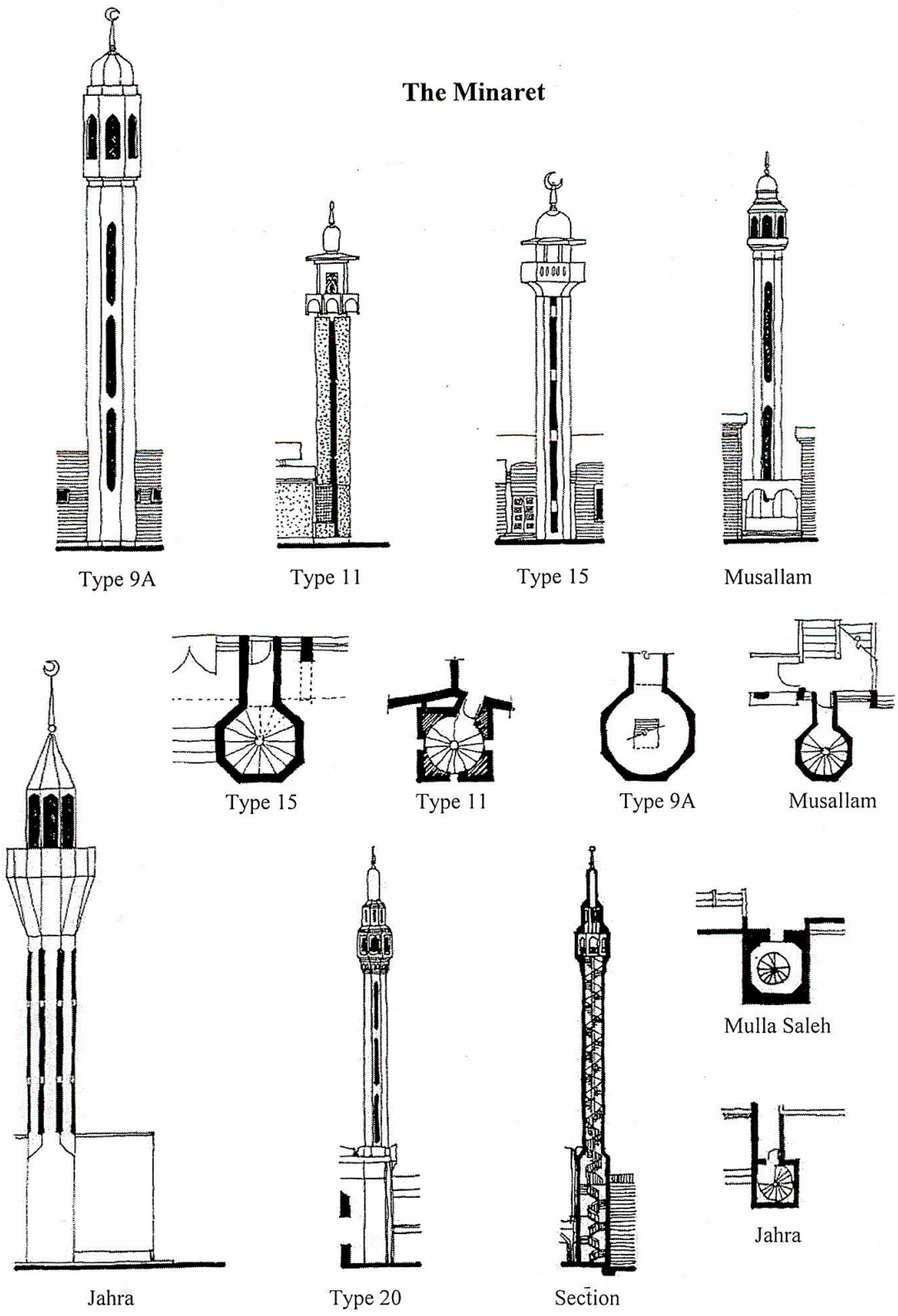


Fig. 11: Minarets as surveyed in MAIA mosque types.
Source: Author's sketch's after original drawings obtained from M.P.W., Kuwait.
Note: Minarets are not drawn to the same scale.

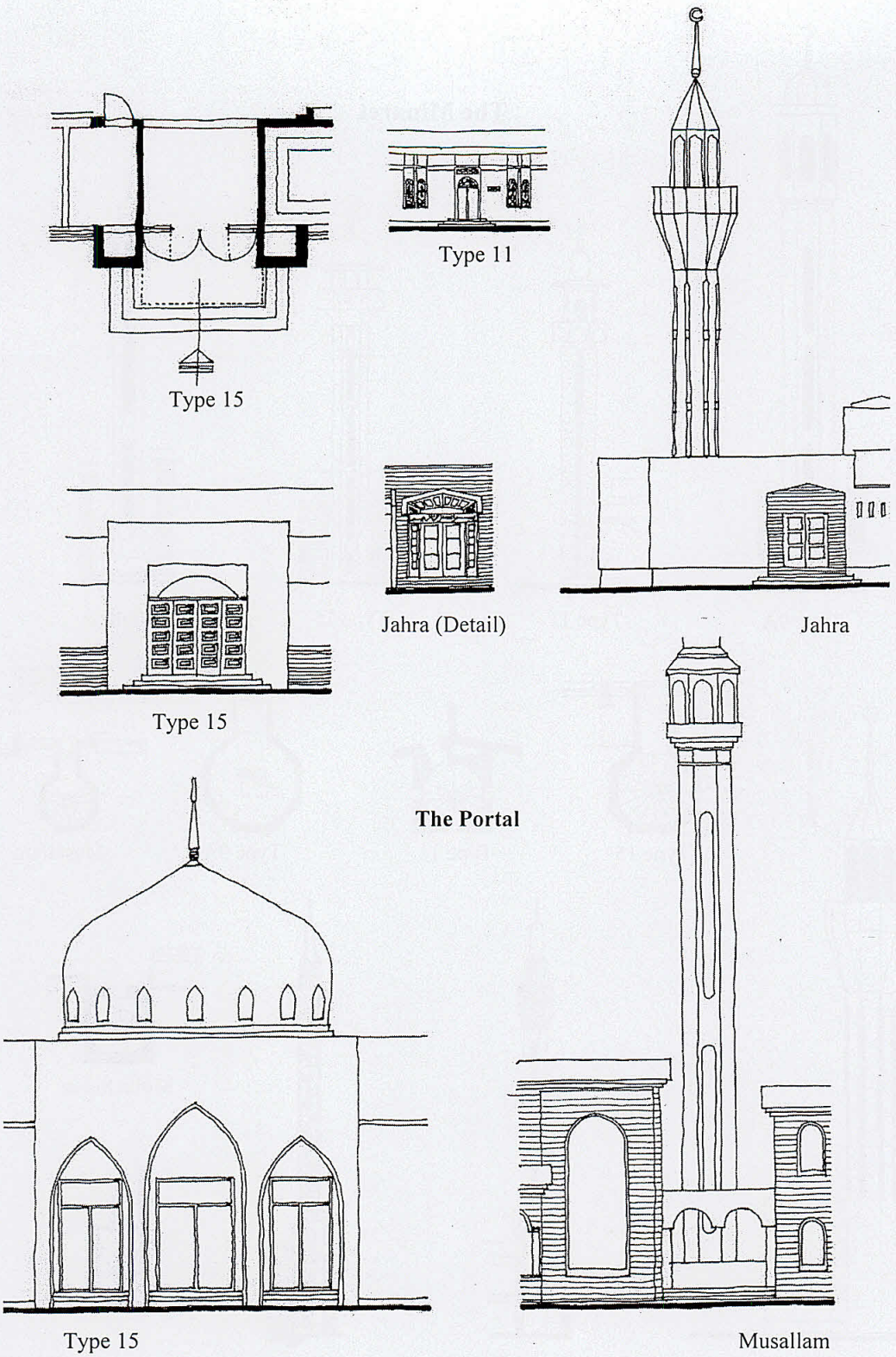


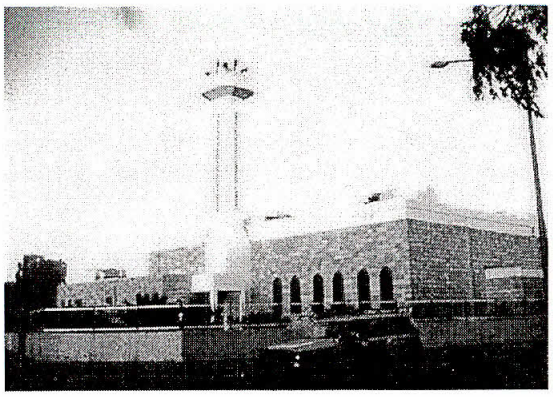
Fig. 12: The portal as surveyed in MAIA mosque-types.
Source: Author's sketch's after original drawings obtained from M.P.W., Kuwait.



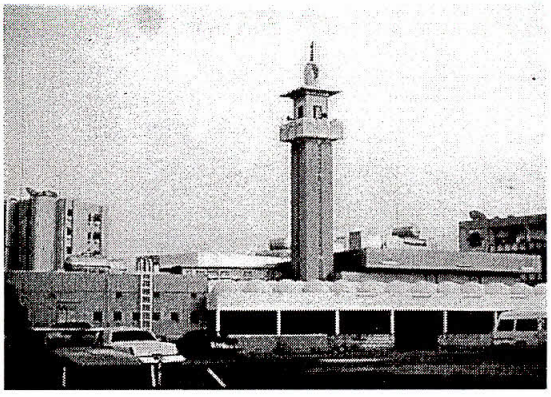
Type 60



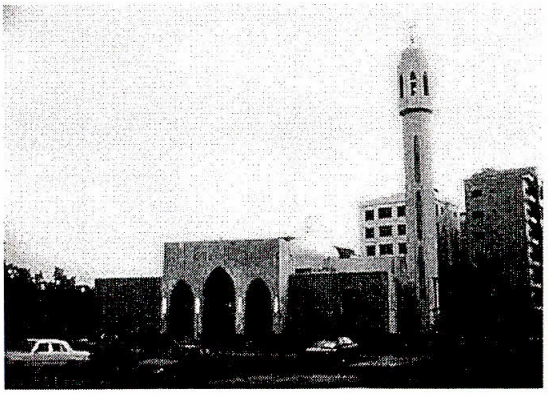
Type 20



Type 15



Type 11 (modified)

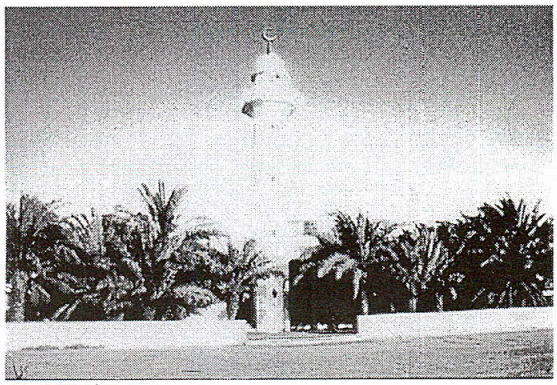


Type 9A

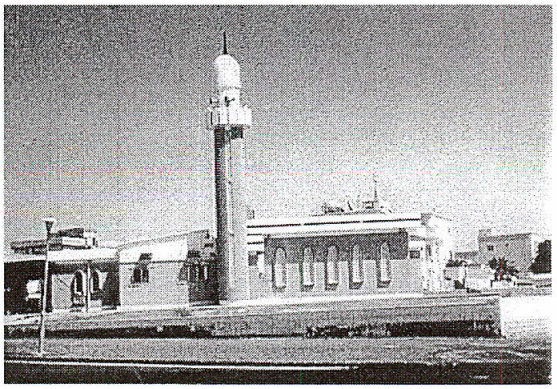


Type 13 (modified)

Fig. 13: Examples of surveyed MAIA mosque-types.
Source: Author's Transparents



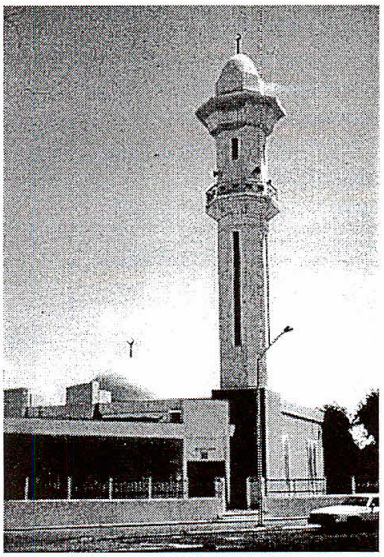
Type 10



Type 11



Mulla Saleh Mosque



Type15 (modified)



Musallam Mosque

Fig. 14: Examples of surveyed MAIA mosque-types.
Source: Author's Transparents

Conclusion

There are very few documented studies on the mosques of Kuwait in general[3]. But certainly there is no study, whatsoever, on the MAIA built-mosques which represent a large quantity of the country's mosque population[4]. This makes this preliminary study, which documents quantitatively all MAIA mosques built between 1973 and 1990, and which analyses visually the architecture of these mosques, the first in its field and an initial contribution to the study of this important field.

Although the study does not claim that it has deeply exhausted the issue by any means, since this requires a more extensive, deep and wide study using a larger sample size of MAIA mosques and covering it in more depth and detail, it regards itself as the threshold to a further elaborate research on the matter. Parallel to this, a similar study has to be conducted on the traditional mosques of Kuwait to explore the historical precedent and to draw a set of reference guidelines for the design of new mosques which reflect the country's national identity.

Comparative analysis across these two MAIA commissioned these mosques. The MAIA mosque types are a product of two processes; the first is the application of MPW and MAIA guidelines for mosque design and the second is the limited individual innovations of DS staff at MPW. As indicated earlier, the application of the first process has produced some similarities among MAIA surveyed mosques, while the application of the second process has led to some architectural differences among them.

"Like the homes and buildings the mosques of old Kuwait were simple, with low minarets and little decoration. Today there is an exquisite mosque in every street, some in traditional, many in ultra modern, Islamic styles." [9, p. 19]

While the latter part of this statement politely confirms the fact that most of new mosque architecture in Kuwait has little attachment to its past, its first part, probably summarises the design criteria that MAIA mosque-types are following. The criteria that is, by and large, simple and to some extent derived from old Kuwaiti mosque forms as has been primarily presented throughout the visual and architectural survey. So far, these criteria has succeeded in creating an easily recognisable *image* of most MAIA mosques, what is yet to be achieved is a contemporary image that reflects the long tradition of mosque architecture in Kuwait. This only becomes possible when more insightful architectural guidelines, derived from the careful analysis of the traditional mosques of Kuwait, are available to designers for reference and application.

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[3] Among these is the valuable study by Ibn Al-Roumy [8]: *Tariekh Masajed Al-Dierah Al-Qadima.*

[4] As confirmed to the Author by MAIA and MPW staff during data collection stage.

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[2] Khan, Hasan-Uddin. "An Overview of Contemporary Mosques." In: *The Mosque*, edited by: Khan, Hasan-Uddin & Frishman, Martin. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1994.

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[4] Lukoke, Ronald. *Al-Emara Al-Taklidiya fi Al-Kuwait wa Shamal Al-Khalij* or 'The Traditional Architecture of Kuwait and the North of the Gulf'. London: 1978, (In Arabic).

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[9] *Kuwait State Directory*. Kuwait: Multimedia publishing, 1998.

دراسة توثيقيّة للنماذج والطرز لمساجد وزارة الأوقاف والشؤون الإسلامية في الكويت

عمر خطّاب

قسم العمارة، كلية الهندسة والبترول

دولة الكويت

ملخص البحث: ما الذيّ يجعل الجامع جامعاً ؟ الجواب بسيط حقا: إنه جدار صحيح التوجه على القبلة [١] والمسجد، حسب تعريفه، فهو الأهم والبناء الأول في الإسلام. وإثر تطور العمارة الإسلامية، أصبح نوعاً من أنواعها الذي حفظ فنونها وعبّر عن قيم عمارتها وتقاليدها؛ وفيما بعد كوّن المسجد قلب العمارة الإسلاميّة . كما أُعتبر ممثلاً لاندفاع بلدانها الديني ورمزاً لأمتّها.

وإنّ الدول الإسلامية الحديثة، وبشكل خاص بعد اندحار القوى الغربيّة التي استعمرتها خلال عقود طويلة وبدءاً من عام ١٩٥٠م وبغضّ النظر عن انتمائها المذهبي، اشتغلت هذه الدول ببناء المساجد على كافة المستويات وبمقاييس متعددة. وإن برامج البناء التي تتطلب رصد الموارد الماليّة المرتفعة، يمكن النظر إليها كمحاولات لإيجاد تعبيرات جديدة ليس فقط نحو السيادة السياسيّة والضبط الإجتماعي والتقوى، ولكن تفعيلاً لمظاهر الاستقلالية والهويّة القومية والحداثة. [٢]

وإن دولة الكويت ليست استثناء من النماذج المطروحة. فبالإضافة إلى بعض المساجد القديمة والقليلة التي ورثوها من الأجداد، فإن الحكومة قامت بإنشاء عدد كبير من المساجد خلال العقود القريبة من السنوات. وقد تعاضدت وزارات الدولة لتخصيص ورصد الميزانيات الماليّة لخطط إعمار المساجد. وهذا البحث ما هو إلاّ محاولةً لتقديم مسح بصري معماريّ للمساجد التي بنتها وزارة الأوقاف والشؤون الإسلامية في الكويت. كما وأن هذا البحث أيضاً يتحرى مظاهر التشابه والاختلافات في النماذج المصممة ويهدف إلى اكتشاف ما تحت الخطط الموضوعة لإيجاد طرز متميّزة يمكنها التعبير عن القيم التقليديّة في عمارة المساجد الكويتية.