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The Architectural History of the Early 'Uyunid Madrasah Abu Zaidan or Suq al-Khamis Mosque on Bahrain

Danial.T. Potts

The University of Sydney
Sydney, Australia

Abstract: The Madrasah Abu Zaidan or Suq al-Khamis mosque is traditionally regarded as the oldest standing monument of the Islamic era on the island of Bahrain [e.g. 1, p.22]. Along its southern and southeastern sides, the mosque adjoins the settlement known as Al-Bilâd al-Qadima which, prior to the Portuguese period, is though to have been the island's capital. Thus the mosque of the Thursday market was once integrated into the urban fabric of Bahrain's principal city. The Bahrain National Museum guidebook [2, p. 77] suggests that the mosque's history has been as follows:

1. Foundation during the reign of 'Umar (717-720 AD).
2. Restoration c. 1058 at the request of two Bahrainis, Abdullah b. Bahlul and Abdulwalid Muslim
3. Construction of first minaret and enlargement in 12th century by 'Uyunid *emir* Abu Sinan Muhammad b. Al-Fadl b. 'Abd Allah
4. Establishing several *waqfs* for maintenance of mosque, construction of second minaret, between 14th and 16th century.

The autopsy of the Suq al-Khamis mosque includes a review of the history of scholarship on this topic as well as evaluation the evidence adduced in support of each of the building phases suggested above. This will judge how confident one can be in this reconstruction, and what is the basis for the chronology.

Introduction

Early Western references to the Suq al-Khamis mosque can be summarised quickly. While he was involved with the initial British survey of the Gulf between 1826 and 1829, Lt. G.B. Brucks learned of several fine reservoirs and aqueducts built by the Portuguese, as well as the Portuguese fort on the island. Apart from these, he wrote, "The only other ruins of any interest are those of a mosque built by the Alassar people" [3, p.27]. For reasons which will become clear below, 'Alassar' can only be a corruption of al-Hasa [4, p.564]. In his 1826 'Memoir on Bahreyn', Lt. R.W. Whish of the Indian Navy referred twice to 'the Minarets', obviously meaning the twin minarets of our mosque. Leaving Manama for Jabal Dhukan, Whish crossed rich date plantations and gardens in the direction of the Minarets [5, p.42]. He recorded a local folktale explaining the origins of Bahrain's famous underground springs which began, 'Once upon a time there was only one spring on the Island, which was situated not far from the present site of the Minarets' [5, p.45].

The first brief description of the Suq al-Khamis mosque seems to be that of Captain E.L. Durand, dating to 1879. Durand noted the ruined mosque of the Meshed-i-Abu-Zeidán, near the Bilád-i-Kadim, said to have been built with the material of a still older structure, a ring of stones round one, if not two, of its room walls are scored with large Kufic letters, perhaps from some earlier building. These were not copied. [6, p.5] A decade later, in 1889, Theodore

and Mabel Bent noted that the old mosque (Madresseh-i-abu-Zeidan), with its two slender and elegant minarets, forms a conspicuous landmark for ships approaching the low-lying coasts of these islands. Around the body of the mosque runs a fine inscription in Kufic letters.

In fact, whatever else the Bents may have gotten wrong in their historical deductions on the mosque's history, they were quite right about it serving as a landmark for mariners. In Lorimer's 1905, gazetteer of the Gulf, the entry 'Bilad-al-Qadim' contains information about the ruins of the Madrasah Abu Zaidan mosque. With two slender and not inelegant minarets 70 feet high and still standing in combination with Jabal-ad-Dukhan, these minarets form the leading marker for vessels entering Manamah harbour. This is located about ½ a mile west of the existing habitations. [7, p.299] The 1944 edition of sailing directions in the Gulf issued by the Secretary of the United States Navy, confirms that the minarets of the mosque were used as navigational markers by ships entering Manamah as the Inner Harbor is approached. [8, p.218] Travelling through Bahrain in 1906, however, the German visitor Alfred Stürken observed the old ruins of the mosque at Suq al-Khamis with its engraved inscriptions but was only able to find out that it was 'very old'. [9, p.84]

Ernst Diez's Visit of 1914

This situation of uninformed observation changed in February 1914, when the German Islamicist Ernst Diez visited Bahrain on his way from Bandar Bushire to Bombay. In an article not published until 1925, Diez gave what remains to this day the most detailed account of the Suq al-Khamis mosque. In view of subsequent attempts to restore the mosque, Diez's description is considered to be very important. The mosque, as described by Diez, is of the courtyard type, originally bounded by a nearly square enclosure wall measuring 25x28 m (east and west sides 28m long, north and south 25m). In 1914, only the western side, i.e. the *Qibla* wall, and small portions of the northern and southern walls of the enclosure were still standing, while the remainder of the perimeter wall had by then collapsed. The interior of the enclosure consisted of a central, rectangular courtyard flanked on either side by three naves of approximately eight bays each separated by columns joined by plastered arches (Figs. 1-2).

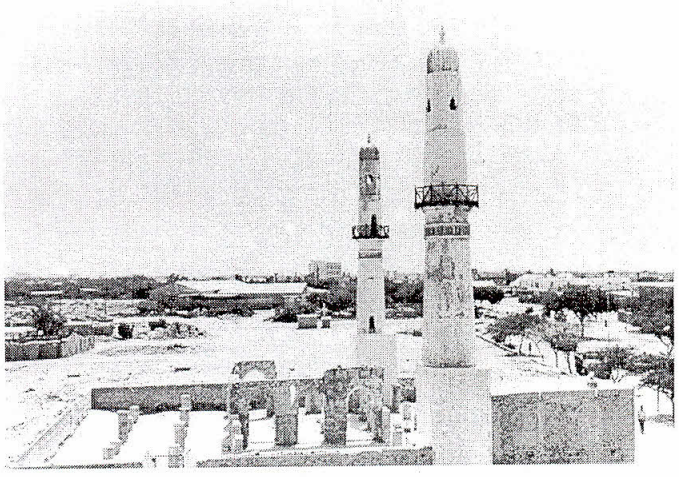


Fig. 1: View of the Suq al-Khamis mosque in the early 1980's. [2, p. 110]

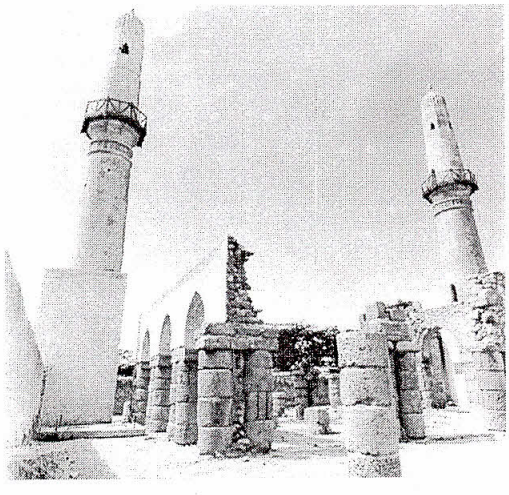


Fig. 2: View of the Suq al-Kahmis mosque in the early 1990's. [2, p. 77]

The columns were constructed of stone drum c. 30 cm. thick and 60 cm. in diameter. The roof of the praying area was supported by a pair of 4 m. high teak columns measuring 15 x 24 cm in diameter, the upper parts of which were decorated with carved designs. Although nothing remained of the *mihrab* in 1914, two *Qibla* stones with Kufic inscriptions had been built into the stone columns of the *Qibla* wall. Two tall minarets were still standing. The eastern of which, was perhaps original, for it was built into the eastern perimeter wall, while the western one, directly opposite to it, was built abutting the associated wall. [11, p.102-103]

Two stone blocks with Kufic inscriptions were clearly in a state of secondary re-use. These were built into the fabric of the *Qibla* wall on its interior and exterior faces, one of them even upside down. A further block with Kufic inscription was also observed in the lowest courses of the western minaret. The *Qibla* tablets with a Kufic inscription were also considered secondary. The use of inscribed *Qibla* stones, rather than a *Qibla* niche or a *mihrab*, to direct worshippers towards Makkah, Diez observed, was also known in the mosque of Ibn Tulum in Cairo and the mosque of Muhammad in Al-Madinah [10, p.103]. In Diez's opinion, three construction phases could be discerned in the life of the mosque. The first was represented by the wooden carved and inscribed teak columns. These recalled for him the account of the Friday mosque at Nishapur where the wooden elements were built during the time of the Abbasid propagandist Abu Muslim, c. 750 AD [cf. 11, p.257] which speaks of 'eine Moscheeruine mit Holzpfeilern and Sattelholzern in abbasidischem Schnitzstil'. The second was represented by the period of the inscribed Qibla stones, which he placed in the 12th century Ad on paleographic ground. The third and final phase, to which the two minarets must be assigned, was represented by the stone work and the inscription of 1339/40 AD (740 AH). [10, p.105]

Restoration in 1950: The implications of the new discoveries

The continuing decay of the Suq al-Khamis mosque was not addressed until 1950 when the Government of Bahrain undertook restoration work. As described by James Belgrave, [13, p.87] the blocks and columns which for many years had lain in the sand were restored to their original position, the floor was cleared of the scrub growing there and the teak columns were removed from the mosque. In 1973, these were in the possession of the Bahrain Government. [12, p. 88] Unfortunately, these precious artifacts, on display in the old Bahrain Museum until 1965 [13, p. 191], have since disappeared. Generally speaking, Belgrave's account, originally written in 1953, does little more than give an English summary of Diez's main points.

The Antiquities of Bahrain

In 1970, the Bahrain Historical & Archaeological Society published the first edition of their handbook *Antiquities of Bahrain* revealed that the notion that the Suq al-Khamis mosque was built by Abu Sinan. The authors of *Antiquities of Bahrain,* attributed the foundation of the building to Abu Sinan on the basis of one of the inscriptions described by Belgrave which, at the time of writing, had recently been built into the doorway of the western minaret. [1, p.22]

As a point of history, Abdullah b. Ali of was known to be a man of authority in al-Hasa, the east Arabian mainland. In the later part of the ninth century, he helped appoint his son Al-Fadl as paramount ruler in Qatif and the second son, Ali b. Abdullah al 'Uyuni, as a ruler on Uwal. [14, p. 20] In about 1090 AD/483 AH, Al Fadl was murdered by his servants on Tarut island, whereupon, Abdullah b. Ali appointed Al Fadl's son, Abu Sinan Mohammad b. Al Fadl, as governor of Qatif and Uwal. It is noteworthy to point out that James Belgrave had already signaled the existence of two texts containing the name Fadl in *Welcome to Bahrain.*

[12, p. 89] He was not, however, able to offer transliterations and translations. In 1990, however, the French epigrapher Ludvik Kalus published complete text editions of these and nine other building inscriptions (not counting inscribed tombstones) from the mosque and it is these, which form the basis for any discussion of the subject today.

The poet Ali ibn Al Muqarrib, whose Diwan is the main source available for the history of the 'Uyunids, [15, p. 70, n. 23; 16, p. 91] noted Abu Sinan's great generosity. According to one story, all of the wealth in pearls, gold and silver brought to al-Hasa from Uwal was turned over to the poet Tha'labi by Abu Sinan. [14, p.24] Be that as it may, the inscriptions now built into the fabric of the Suq al-Khamis mosque confirm that some of his wealth was used to build a mosque and a minaret on Bahrain. The important points, however, are as follows. Text 1, (Fig. 3) tells us (my trans. after Kalus' French version). This is the construction which was ordered by Ma'ali b. Al-Hasan b. Ali b. Hammad.

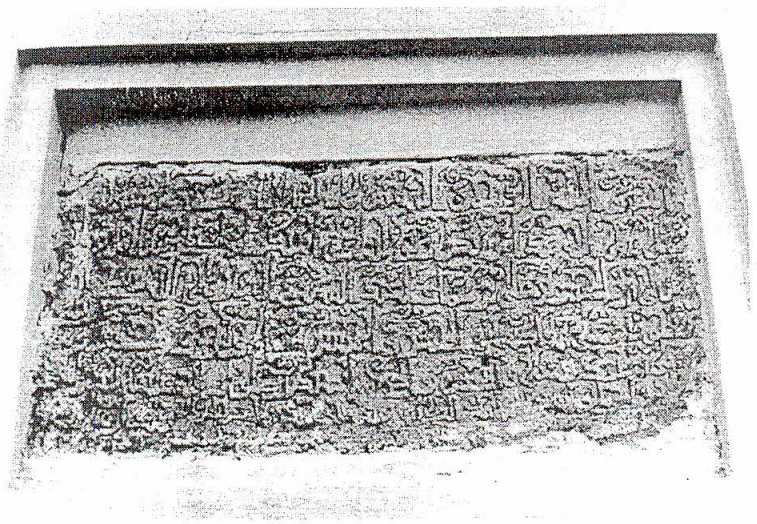


Fig. 3: Text 1, a Kufic building inscription in limestone (90 x 42-43 cm) situated above the doorway of the eastern minaret.

Text 2 (Fig. 4), although undated, is likely to be later, dating to the period c. 1131/2-1148/9 AD/526-543 AH, for its author is called *al-Malik al-'Adil Zayn al-dunya wa l-din,* (Lord of the Worlds, Seigneur des Mondes) Abu Sinan Muhammad b. al-Fadl b. 'Abd Allah, and the title *al-dunya wa l-din* was, as Kalus has stressed, given by the Caliph himself.

Text 2, moreover, concerns a minaret, in the time of Abu Sinan, although the verb whether 'was built', or 'was prepared', or 'was fitted out', as suggested by Kalus, is nearly illegible, though traces of *'ammara* seem to be visible. [17, p. 20] This text thus disproves the suggestion, found in *Welcome to Bahrain*, that the twin minarets of the Suq al-Khamis mosque date to the period 1339/40. [1, p. 22] Likewise, it disproves the statement in Clarke's Islands of Bahrain that the two minarets were not constructed until the 15th century AD. [13, p. 191] King also repeats the same view when he says 'The mosque of *Suq al-Khamis* has been ascribed a tenth to twelfth century A.D. date, although the minarets are considerably later.' [18, p. 261]

As Kalus has noted, Abu Sinan is the only Uyunid who bore the name Muhammad b. al-Fadl. It seems certain that Abu Sinan's *kunya* changed at some point in his life from Abu 'Abd Allah to the better known Abu Sinan. The presence of the Caliphal title in the second text and its absence in the first one would also suggest that the first, was written before Abu Sinan had risen to the position of ruler, i.e., that it was composed during his father's lifetime.



Fig. 4: Text 2, a Kufic building inscription in limestone (65 x 56 cm) situated above the doorway of the western minaret.

These considerations are of more than biographical interest, however, for the formula *bi-bina'i-hi* used in Text 1 is significant in two respects. On the one hand, it implies a 'new' construction, something consistent with the original erection of the mosque building itself. On the other hand, the masculine personal pronoun here excludes the possibility that the text could refer to the construction of a minaret. Thus, the two texts clearly imply the building of a mosque with a single minaret. This raises the question, which minaret in the Suq al-Khamis is the older, original one. This is difficult to determine without excavation, but it seems *prima facie* more likely that the minaret built into the east wall and colum end aisle is the older of the two, rather than the western minaret, which is offset from the western enclosure wall. We should, however, also consider the less likely but not altogether impossible likelihood that the two texts have nothing to do at all with the Suq al-Khamis mosque, but were brought at some later date from another, now ruined structure. Although this cannot be excluded, it seems, in light of the available evidence, unlikely.

The Qibla inscriptions

Returning to the *Qibla* on which Diez originally based much of his interpretation of the early history of the Suq al-Khamis mosque. As Belgrave noted, [12, p. 89] 'Were we to depend upon the present state of the Qibla, it would be impossible to decipher it, but Diez has left us photographs showing the Qibla in an original form.

A building inscription (Fig. 5) in the house of the guard (Text 8) records the fitting out or construction of a minaret by a patron, whose name is unfortunately missing, in the year 724 /1323-24. [17, p. 27, no. 8] While this might relate to the refurbishment of the original minaret mentioned in Text 1, it is equally possible that it records the construction of the second minaret of the mosque.

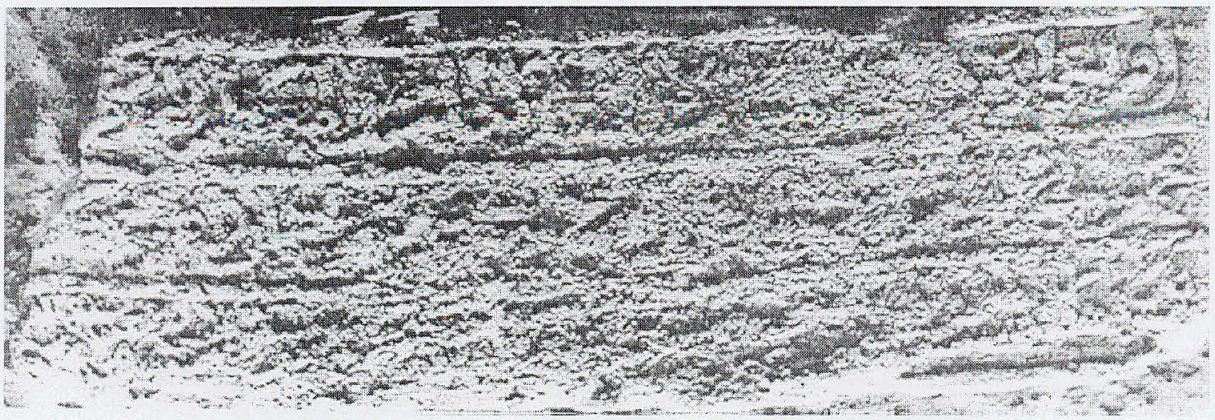


Fig. 5: Text 8, cursive inscription in stone (61 x 20 x 11 cm), currently in the house of the mosque's guard.

A combination of building inscription and *waqf* from 776/1374 (Text 9, Fig. 6) ordered by the minister *(sahib)* Gamal al-din 'Ali b.Mansur b.Mahmud Kurd speaks of the refurbishment of the mosque and the palm garden of Fuliyan in Bilad al-Qadim. [17, p. 28, no. 9] Although this inscription was found at the village of Musallam to the west of the mosque itself, Kalus presumes it identical to the one seen by Diez in the *Qibla* wall of the Suq al-Khamis mosque which he described but did not illustrate.

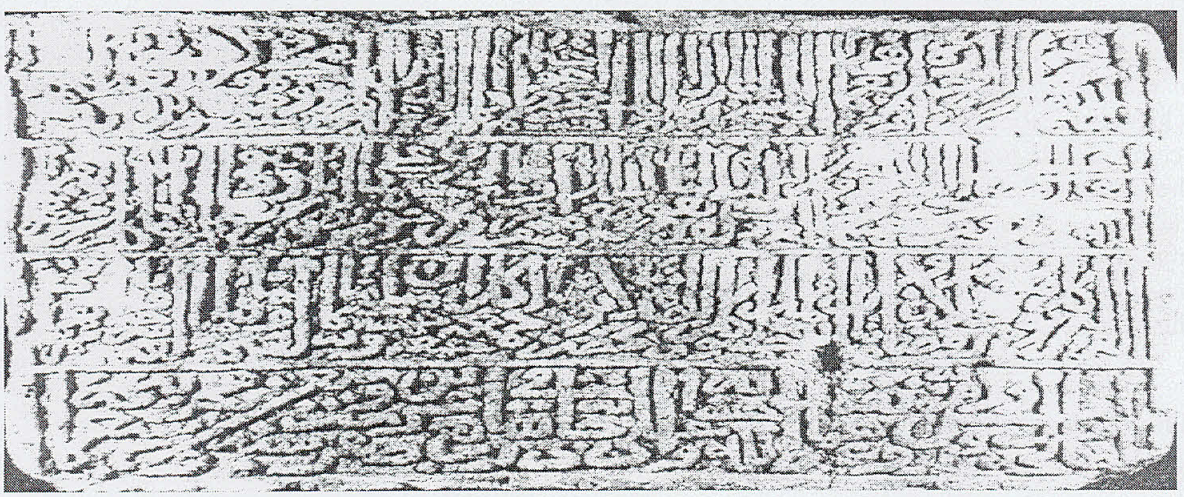


Fig. 6: Text 9, Cursive inscription in stone (73 x 52 x 8 cm), currently in the Bahrain National Museum.

While it may seem strange that Diez would have neglected to illustrate such an important text, it is explicable given the fact that, between his visit of 1914 and his eventual publication of 1925, World War I had intervened. He refers on at least one occasion to the loss of a crucial negative and his consequent inability to illustrate a text of significance. Another *waqf* inscription (Text 10, Fig. 7), probably later than that of 1374 and relating to the same palm garden at Fuliyan, was also found at Musallam. [17, p. 31, no. 10]

Finally, a decree (Text 11, Figs. 8-10) dated 990/1582 [17, p. 33, no. 11] dating to the late Portuguese period, calls the Suq al-Khamis mosque 'the noble martyrium with two minarets in the land of Uwal', recalling the epithet used in the text of 740/1339-40 seen by Diez. An

individual whose identity is uncertain issued the decree of 1582. Kalus considered the possibility that this was Galal al-din Murad Mahmud Shah, governor *(re'is)* of Bahrain from 1530 to 1577 and, from 1554 onwards, graced with the title *Sanjak beg* as result of his submission to the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman. [19, p. 23-24] Although Kalus has noted an unnamed son, according to an Ottoman letter, at least raising the possibility that there may have been another individual succeeded Murad. Yet another individual of the time was in charge of the Ottoman fleet at Basra.

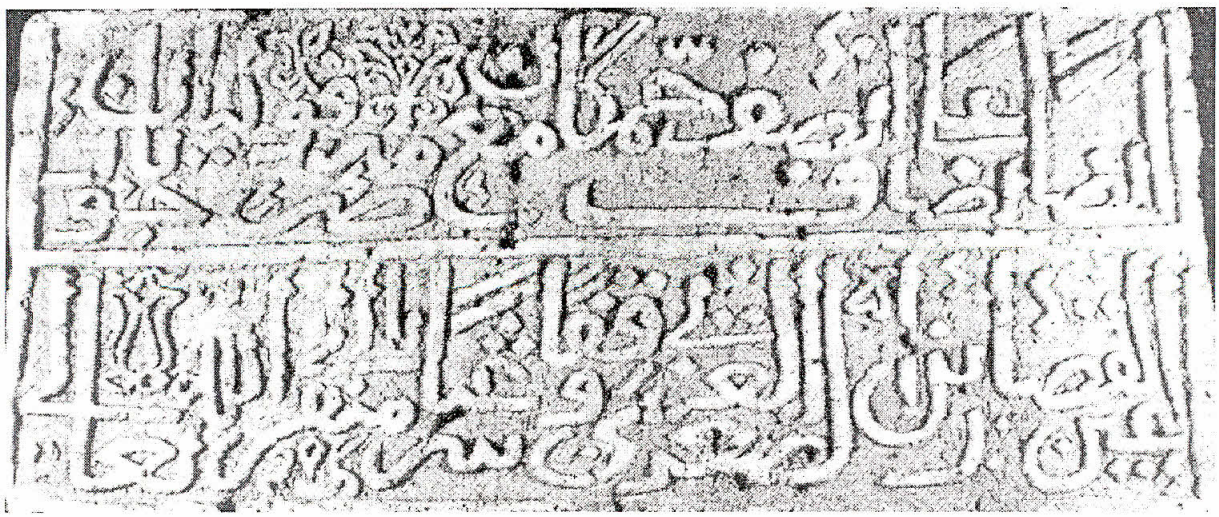


Figure 7: Text 10, cursive inscription in stone (71-73 x 32 x 10 cm), currently in the Bahrain National Museum.

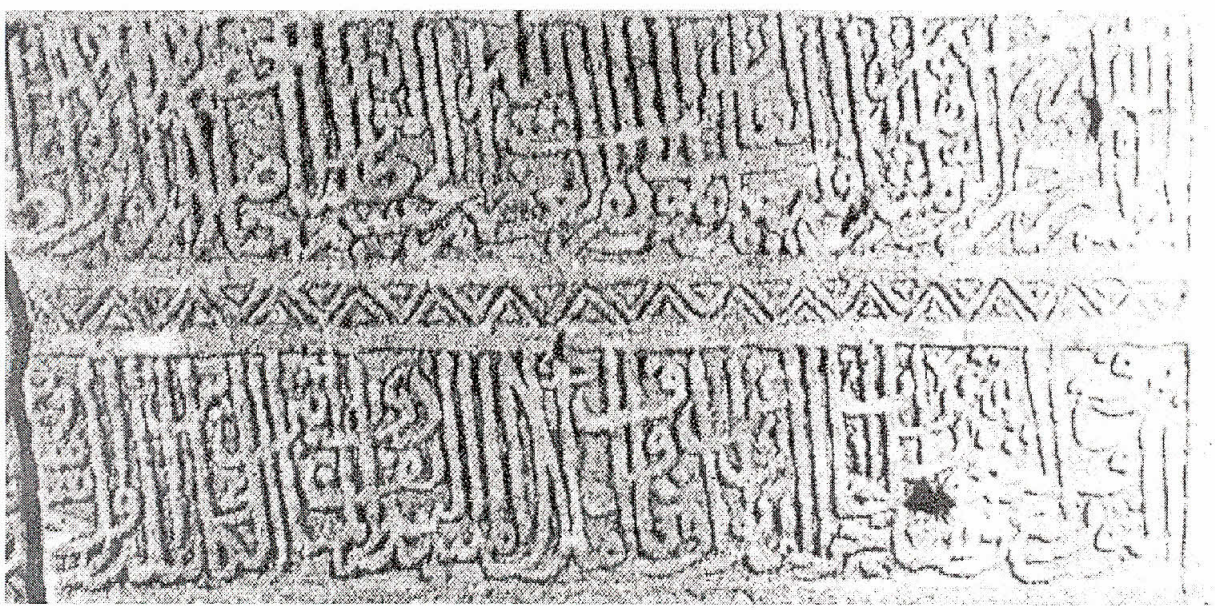


Figure 8: Text 11, part 1, cursive inscription in stone (154 x 32-34 x 9 cm), currently in three pieces, in the Bahrain National Museum.



Fig. 9: Text 11, part 2.

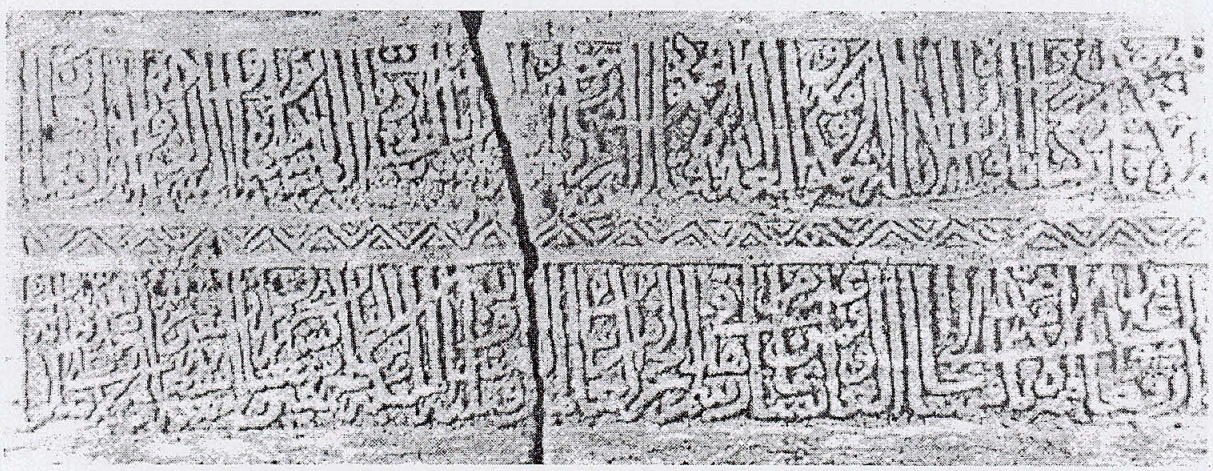


Fig. 10: Text 11, part 3.

Conclusions

In contrast to earlier treatments of the Suq al-Khamis mosque, this review of the epigraphic and historical evidence strongly suggests the following construction sequence:

1. Construction of the first minaret by Abu Sinan after his accession to the 'Uyunid leadership c. 526/1131-2 (which lasted until 543/1148-9) following the death of his grandfather Ali b.'Abd Allah Al 'Uyuni, according to Text 2.
2. Construction of the second minaret or restoration of the original one in 724/1323-4 by an unnamed patron, according to Text 3.
3. Existence of the two minarets by 990/1582 according to Text 4, a decree issued by one Mahmud who calls the mosque 'the noble martyrium with two minarets in the land of Uwal'.

In setting out this chronology, no attempt was made to comment upon, let alone integrate, the remarks of Diez and others on the stylistic affinities of the mosque's plan its arches, its

wooden members, or its inscriptions. Clearly there are points which might be of some interest, but the example of the carved wooden elements, now lost, suffices to reveal why it seems pointless to dwell too much on stylistic attributes. Diez, for example, commented at some length on the ornamentation of the carved wooden column supports particularly on the five-leafed palmette and three-petalled lotus blossom, suggesting that they believed to the 'First Style' of Samarra, arguing for a date in the 9th or 10th century. [10, p. 104] Monique Kervran, on the other hand, in a personal communication to Kalus, compared them to 14th century carved wood from Zafar in Oman. [17, p. 26, no. 1] Clearly, with such divergent views on the affinities of material like this, it is impossible to arrive at a close dating which is free of bias and of any real utility. For this reason, it seems wisest to utilize the extant epigraphic data and put aside preconceptions about the dates implied by the architectural or decorative characteristics of the mosque.

A UNESCO conservation report written in 1974 [2, p.3] alleges that the corners of the surrounding wall had imitation circular bastions of a type which is known only from very early mosques of the 7th to 9th centuries. [13, p. 191]

As for the idea that the mosque was re-founded or restored c. 1058 by Abdullah b.Bahlul and Abdulwalid Muslim, this inference derives from the fact that, according to 'Ali ibn Al Muqarrib's diwan, the two brothers, offered to build a mosque on Bahrain-'Uwal because, in their view, the place was being avoided by merchants since there was nowhere to properly perform the Friday prayers. [20, p. 6] The brothers are said to have offered no less than 3000 dinars for the mosque's construction, permission for which was granted.

This story clearly suggests that there was no significant mosque on Bahrain prior to the middle of the 11th century, even if the population had long since embraced Islam. It does not follow, however, that the mosque constructed by Abdullah b. Bahlul and his brother is the Suq al-Khamis mosque. The catalogue of the Bahrain National Museum suggests that 'the simple rectangular stone building which they built is still visible below the present mosque.' [2, p. 77] The author, however, have found nothing which corroborates this statement.

In concluding this examination of the Suq al-Khamis mosque, it is worth returning to the 19th century observations of Brucks, Whish, Durand and the Bents. The tradition related by Brucks, that the mosque was built by the Alassar people, has in fact been confirmed, for it is surely the case that this reflects a dim knowledge of its having been built by the Uyunid Abu Sinan whose family controlled al-Hasa. Whish's reference to the mosque as 'the Minarets' is intriguing given the fact that the decree of 1582 gives the mosque no name but remarks on the minarets. It is also probable the single minaret shown in a Portuguese manuscript painting of 1635 depicting Bahrain is meant to represent the Minarets (Fig. 11). Durand's account of 1879 identifies the mosque by the same word as the decree of 1582, where here the author encountered, seemingly for the first time, the epithet Abu Zaydan. Who was this Abu Zaydan? The author could find no reference to such an individual, and is inclined rather to interpret this as a corruption of *Abu Sinan,* the name of the founder of our mosque.

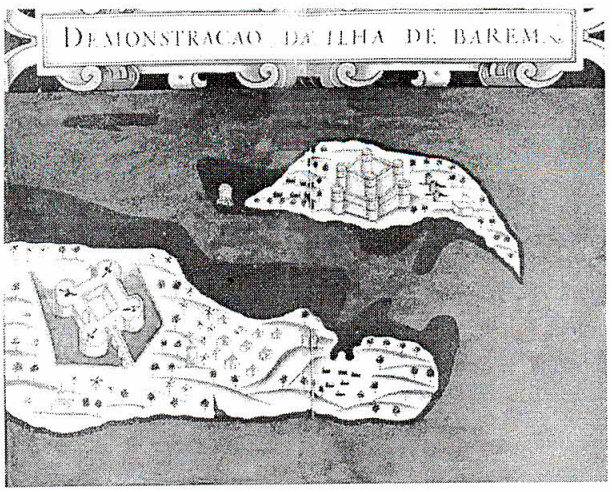


Fig. 11: 'Demonstracao Da Ilha de Barem' from the 'Livro do Estado da India Oriental' Manuscript. (Pedro Barreto de Resende, 1635, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, as reproduced in Dilmun: Journal of the Bahrain Historical and Archaeological Society, Vol. 11(1983), centre page).

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تاريخ عمارة مدرسة أبو زيدان العيوني المبكرة (مسجد سوق الخميس) في البحرين

دانيال تي بوتس

جامعة سيدني

سدني, أستراليا

ملخص البحث: تعتبر مدرسة أبو زيدان أو ما يعرف بسوق الخميس أقدم صرح في العصر الإسلامي في البحرين. و يحد المسجد من الجنوب و الجنوب الشرقي مستوطنة تعرف بالبلاد القديمة و تعود إلى زمن البرتغاليين حيث كان يعتقد بأنها عاصمة الجزيرة البحرينية. و لذا فقد كان مسجد سوق الخميس ملتحما بالنسيج العمراني البحريني. و يذكر كتاب إرشاد المتحف الوطني البحريني بأن المسجد كان تاريخيا كما يلي:

١- تأسس في عهد حكم الخليفة عمر (٧١٧-٧٢٠ م)

٢- ترميم بناء على طلب البحرينيين عبد الله بن بهلول و عبد الوليد مسلم.

٣- تشييد أول منارة في القرن الثاني عشر بواسطة العيوني أمير أبو سنان محمد بن الفضل بن عبد الله.

٤- تأسيس عدة أوقاف لصيانة المسجد و تشييد منارة ثانية بين القرن الرابع عشر و السادس عشر.