THE FIRST MASTERPIECE OF THE ISLAMIC ART
KUBBAT AL-SAKHRA AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

İslam Sanatının İlk Şaheseri Kubbetü’s-Sahra Ve Tarihi Arka Planı

Muammer GÜL
Harran Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Bölümü
Muammergul@mynet.com

ÖZET


Anahtar Kelimeler: Kudüs Mabed Kubbetü’s-Sahra Abdulmelik Kur’an

ABSTRACT

Temples, played a central role in transition from ancient cities to modern cities. For instance some cities identified themself with temples. Jerusalem played a leading role among other cities. Jerusalem holds the most attractive temples because of being the holy center for the tree heavenly religion. These temples are Solomon Temple of the Jews, The Church of The Holy Sepulchre of the Christians, The Kubbat al-Sakhra of the Muslims.

This study discusses the location of the Kubbat al-Sakhra, the reasons for which It was built, Whether it has any functions related to a mosque. In addition this study discusses in a general perspective on Kubbat al-Sakhra and during the construction of Kubbet al-Sahkra, within the interior policy of Emavids period, a Calipper strugle existed between Abdullah b. Zubeyr and Emavies is also discussed.

Key Words: Jerusalem Temple Kubbat al-Sakhra Abdulmalik Koran
THE FIRST MASTERPIECE OF THE ISLAMIC ART KUBBAT AL-SAKHRA AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Temples have been one of the most important elements of the cities set up by human beings since the first eras. So, in the first and middle ages, temples had a central role in the cities of every culture and every country, in both physical and moral sense.

In the same manner, Islamic civilization put the temple in the centre of the city in the directions of either islamic path or geographic heritage (About arguments on Islamic city see; Fischet, 1956; Hourani, 1981; Serjeant, 1992; Weber, 2000). Koran encouraged urbanization in principal (Kur’an : Tevbe, 90, 97, 99, 101, 120.). But the Kaba of Mecca city had a central role in religious meaning since the beginning. After the emergence in Arabian peninsula, Islam met magnificent temples in Syria, Egypt and Palestine when while spreading to these countries which had a deep urbanization tradition (Diez, 1934, s. 235.). As we will mention below; the excerpt from Mukaddasi is very important from this point of view (Mukaddasi, 1906, s. 159). Temples that have a central role in ordinary cities, gain much more importance in bigger cities which flourished with religions. Among them, Jerusalem, which is accepted as holy by three monotheist religions namely Islam, Jewish and Christianity, is the first to mention.

After the migration from Egypt to Palestine, Jewish people built Solomon Temple against the monuments of Pharaoh. Christians built the Holy Sepulchre Church in the place where Jesus was crucified after the Roman Empire had declared christianity as the official religion. And lastly Muslims built Kubbat al-Sakhra and Mascid al-Aksa during Emevid period soon after caliph Omar conquered Jerusalem, who constructed Kubbat al-Sakhra in what conditions and for which reasons are our matters in this study.

Muslims used some parts of churchs in conquered lands for praying or they made simple mosques during the caliphates period and the early years of Emevids. Within this comprehension, caliph Omar cleared Haram al-Şarif and built a simple mosque there when he had conquered Jerusalem. The first generations of muslims were accustomed to simplicity of the prophet’s mosque in Medina and this mosque built simply with wood was still open to pray as mentioned by a Frenc traveller Arculf in 670 (Muaviya’s reign) (Goitein, 1950, s. 106.). But later, the magnificiant churcher of Syria and Palestine may have effected muslims. Thus, in late VII. Century and early VIII. Century striking buildings started to appear. Kubbat al-Sakhra built by caliph Abdulmalik (685-705) between 687-691 comes first among them (İsfahanî, 1888, s. 65; Briggs, 1924, s. 37; Grabar, 1978, s. 298; Walker, 1988, s. 944-5; Le Strange, 1965, s. 144; Yetkin, 1959, s. 26; Hitti, 1995, s. 411; Goitein, 1978, s. 340; Hitti, 1951, s. 511.)
Kubbat al-Sakhra was designed to cover the Holy Rock on the place surrounded by the platform on Haram al-Šarif in Jerusalem. Although there have been many various explanations and descriptions about Kubbat al-Sakhra by firstly Ibn Fakih (Le Strange, 1965, s. 120), Mukaddasi (Mukaddasi, 1906, s. 169-170.), Nasır-ı Husrev (Nasır-ı Hüsrev, 1950, s. 46-48.), Ali al-Haravi (Haravi, 1957, s. 12-13.) and lastly by Ibn Batuta ( Ibn Batuta, 1966, s.42-43.) the arguments about who built have continued. There have been many arguments about who really built it. Because orientalists thought this monument such a wonderful art work that the Araps were not able to do it. Even some orientalist claimed it to be the work of Byzantium architectsin Constantin period (Buhl, 1986, s. 958; Walker, 1988, s. 945.). However nowadays it is a common statement that Abdulmalik b. Marvan started to build the Haram al-Šarif (forbidden zone) surrounding Kubbat al-Sakhra in 687 and finished in 691 (Turani, 1995, s. 256; Goitein, 1978, s. 340-341.). It is also possible to learn the chronology of construction from the inscriptions of the monument. Kubbat al-Sakhra built on the place where Hz.Muhammed ascended to Heaven and on the rock he stepped on was named as Sakhrat al-Muazzama and Sakhrat al-Muṣrifā. But the western sources, especially the Franch ones, named it falsely as “Hz. Omar Mosque” (Isfahani, 1888, s. 65; Hiyari 1987, s. 336; Grabar, 1978, s. 298; Goitein, 1978, s. 325; Le Strange, 1965, s. 96.). Probably the reason is the simple mosque built by Hz. Omar in the same place after the conquest of Jerusalem. This mosque was called Hz. Omar mosque.

There are several views on the reasons of the construction of Kubbat al-Sakhra about which our main sources made widely descriptions the early times as we mentioned before. The architectural characteristics of Kubbat al-Sakhra that means whether it has the functions of a mosque; the construction of Māṣcīd al-Aksa with the functions of a mosque in addition to it in Haram al-Šarif; its meaning for the interior struggles of muslim countries; and amazing conspiracy applications of the period of Emevid Caliphates make it difficult for us to understand the reason and to evaluate them. So taking into account those aspects, we’ll try to analyze its construction story.

Mukaddasi, a native of Jerusalem, explains the construction reasons with this speech. “One day I asked my uncle O! My uncle, It is not right that Caliph al-Valid spend so much the wealht of muslims for the mosque in Damascus. It would be better if he spent it on construction of a caravansary and the restoration of border forts. “ My uncle replied me”My little son, you can’t understand. In fact, Valid is right. He does his work quickly.He looked at the long term the Christian invasion of Syria and saw famous and wonderful churches of Jerusalem, Lydda and Edessa. Therefore he thought such a
mosque that will prevent Muslims from venerating to those churches and be unique in the world. The dome of Kumamã is nothing and their grandeur would dazzle the eyes of Muslims that’s why this dome on Sahra was built” (Mukaddasi, 1906, s. 156.). These expressions support the idea that Kubbat al-Sakhra, like other Emevid mosques, was built to overshadow the churches and the synagogues in Palestine, Syria and Egypt. Probably these explanations led the researchers be of the opinion that the construction of this famous dome indicates the competition between Muslims and Christians (Goitein, 1950, s. 106; Le Strange, 1965, s. 117; Walker, 1988, s. 945; Hitti, 1951, s. 512).

According to Grabar, the Emevids needed, as a dynasty, a preying center to realize their best effort in Syria, Palestina and Jerusalem (Ayalon, 1989, s. 14-15; Grabar, 1978, s. 229). This interpretation suits to the psychology of a society of conquest. Nevertheless this idea alone is not enough. Because during an interior struggle, started with the Emevid in power, it is not possible for Emevids to find an opportunity to make such luxuries.

In explaining the construction of Kubbat al-Sakhra, Grabar quoted from Yakubi and orthodox priest Eutychius and said “carries a supremacy of being appropriate to the historical data of 685-692 period” (Grabar, 1988, s. 38-51). Their common view depend on the struggle for caliphate between Abdullah ibn Zubayr from Mecca, having the advantage of Islamic pilgrimage direction to Mecca, and Emevid Abdulmalik who wanted to overcome the advantage of Makka and wished a Palestine city’s sanctity take the precedence over others. In this matter Yakubi cited that “Abdulmalik forbade Syrian people to go to Mecca on pilgrimage. Therefore during the pilgrimage period, people were interfered. But people muttered: “How can you prevent us from visiting the House of God. As you see, it is an order of God on us”. Then the caliphate answered: You couldn’t comprehend what Ibn $hab ez-Zuhri, a servant of God, said “People can only travel to those mosques, Al-Mascid al-Haram (Makka), my mosque in Madina and the Holy Mosque in Jerusalem” (Le Strange, 1965, s. 116). Therefore, from now on, you are to go to the place where our prophet stepped on while ascending to heaven, instead of Mascid al-Haram”. Even though there is no source to support this idea, it must be taken into account as a possible reason of the construction of Kubbat al-Sakhra. According to Grabar this idea is not valid because Yakubi’s were orthodox Muslims and fanatic opponent to Emevids, and it was impossibility to find anything about this in early Islamic sources. But he didn’t say anything about “the supremacy of being in conformity with the historical data.” On the other hand, it may not be easy to understand this era without studying the confrontation between Emevids and Abdullah b. Zubayr on the center.

The people of Mecca and Medina revolted against Emevids and Abdullah b.
Zubayr was their holy leader. Muawiya and Yazid tried to repress the uprising but they failed. After coming to power by force, Emevians started action to weaken the authority of Abdullah b. Zubayr in all cities of Arabia and Africa. Abdullah b. Zubayr influenced all pilgrims going to Kaba. That’s why Abdulmalik took action to prevent them from going to Kaba and tried to canalize them to Jerusalem (Besant-Palmer, 1871, s. 78; Hitti, 1951, s. 512; Goitein, 1978, s. 340; Hitti, 1995, s. 349; Walker, 1988, s. 945). Goldziher explained, in detail, the construction of Kubbat al-Sahra by Abdulmalik to take advantage over Abdullah b. Zubayr who abused the sanctity of Mecca, his capitalcity (Goitein, 1950, s. 104). Goitein, in his article on this problem, cited: “The sources we examined up to now do not approve the thesis that Kubbat al-Sakhra replaced Kaba. The plainness of Kur’an prevents such an action. Raca b. Hayva, an inspector during the construction period, didn’t accept it as a religious trick, and said that Abdulmalik was an obedient muslim.” (Goitein, 1950, s. 104-105). Moreover, he found it meaningful that there was four different pilgrim groups in Mecca in H. 68 (Goitein, 1950, s. 104). But for us, this is an ordinary event without any value. It is almost certain that Haricies and Shiite (two muslim sect) had the same attitude against both sides and Ibn Zubayr got an important public support. Even Ibn Zubayr’s special treatment for the people from Damascus is politically normal and that was disturbing Abdulmalik, the reason for preventing the Syrian people from going to Mecca during the besiege of Haccac must be a tactic of Ibn Zubayr to exercise a public pressure over Emevians. As for the words of Raca b. Hayva; He was one of two inspectors charged with the construction of Kubbat al-Sakhra and thus his sayings in favour of Abdulmalik is normal. Goitein’s words that he couldn’t find any source to support the idea that Kubbat al-Sakha replaced Makka are true. Whether Abdulmalik had succeeded or not Kubbat al-Sakha was not going to replace Kaba because the Koran is quite obvious on this matter. But this doesn’t mean that Abdulmalik couldn’t think such a replacement, at least temporarily, within the atmosphere of that time. Because we understand clearly Abdulmalik’s intention to balance the sanctity of Mecca and Madina. Ibn al Asir proved it by saying “Muaviya, later Abdulmalik b. Marwan and lastly Valid b. Abdulmalik were all in desire of bringing the sceptre and the pulpit of the prophet from Madina to Damascus” (Ibn al-Athir, 1985, s. 470-471). Goitein found this transportation dangerous and cited “the circular base of the building was designed for pilgrimage, walking round the holy building.” (Goitein, 1950, s. 105 footnote 14). Kubbat al-Sakha differs from classic mosque regarding its circular structure, and its mihrab lost importance. It is very interesting that Mascid al-Aksa, with normal mosque functions, was started to be built next to it in south at the
same period (Yetkin, 1959, s. 27; Hitti, 1995, s. 411). Kubbat al-Sakhra’s construction was completed by spending seven years of income of Egypt (over 100,000 dinar) during interior struggles. So we must take into account the interior problems of the period. The idea that Abdulmalik planned to construct a dome to protect muslims from hot and cold (Le Strange, 1965, s. 144) at the same time let them pray under it is not acceptable.

According to Grabar, the attempt of Abdulmalik to change such a fundamental principle of Islam must be a political suicide (Grabar, 1988, s. 40 vd.). Whereas his aim in the construction of Kubbat al-Sakhra and other activities was not just the replacement of Kaba. However it was thought to be an element of balance and a center of interest against Kaba. Grabar emphasized the idea that competition with christians and their influences. But the main problem for the caliph was the interior revolt of Abdullah b. Zubayr. Consequently this construction activity must be related to the struggle for power about being caliphate. Especially during such an internal disorder the statement of competition with christians is very weak at least it must be a matter of secondary importance. In addition, during such a political crisis era, spending seven years of income of Egypt for competition with christians would not be suitable.

In fact, this problem must not be thought just by focusing the construction of Kubbat al-Sakhra (For further information that is about restoration in period Abbasid, Fatimid, Eyyubid and especiaaly Ottoman see: Ibn Şeddad, 2000, s. 166 vd.; Laurent, 1991, s. 257-265; Creswel, 1969; Grabar, 1959; Burgoyne, 1976) as the struggle for caliphate turned to be a struggle between the regions of Syria, Iraq, Hijaz (Gül, 1992, s. 48). This geographical competition has some parallelism and connections with the emergence of new political and religious cliquer and also with regulation of Hadith (words of the prophet) (Hızı, 1265, s. 2-102). Emevians, after gaining the power, started to generalize such hadiths and legends that attach importance to holiness of Syria against Hijaz. Hence, they tried to put the holy place of Miraj forward as mentioned in Kor’an. And morever this place is very important for the tradition of Islam on Prophets. It was the center for christians and Jewish as well. Thus Emevids hoped to get support of muslims.

In short, when we consider Emevid competition with Hijaz, the conclusion can be that Emevids tried to make use of exalting the holiness of Jerusalem at least for their sovereignty areas namely Syria, Egypt and Palestine. Grabar, secondly, describes Kubbat al-Sakhra as a memorial to the event of Miraj with the support of majority opinion. Nevertheless, he didn’t find this view enough and wanted the elements of Kubbat al-
Sakhrā itself be taken into account. His main idea depends on the affects of Jewish and Christian (Grabar, 1988, s. 39-40). He tries to explain the influences with the christians and jewish from outside. But the principals of prophet Abraham and King Solomon with his monument can be found in their original form in the Islamic tradition. The holiness of Jerusalem depends on the same basis for muslims, as well. But this was natural and Grabar interpreted as if it was an effect from outside. Of course, as being one of the first era Islamic works, It can be accepted normal that there are some technical and architectural influences from outside.

In conclusion, Kubbat al-Sakhrā, the symbol of Jerusalem, is very important with respect to its place in the interior politics of Emevian period, its architectural charcteristics and its construction region that is the geography of the most rooted belief tradition. it can be understand that Kubbat al-Sakhrā was related to the power struggle for being caliphate, whichever opinion you take; the explanation of Jerusalem in Koran, the piety necessitate the reconstruction of a holy city, or the desire for prevailing the christian churches.

REFERENCE


F. Ü. Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi 2005 15 (1)


Hourani, A., “The Islamic City”, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East*, 1981.


*Kur'an*: Tevbe, 90, 97, 99, 101, 120.


Plan I: Kubbetü’s Sahra’nın Planı