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ROLE OF ARTISTIC AND PHILOSOPHIC IDEAS IN PERCEPTION OF ARCHITECTURAL ENVIRONMENTAL UNITY OF ISLAMIC ARAB CITIES

Abstract. The work deals with the investigation of imagery essence within Arab architecture. The problem of preserving artistic unity of architectural environment is the principal one in intensively developing Arab cities. Understanding of architectural environmental unity is possible due to awaking important metaphors and, thus, images come to the fore in the consciousness of a person with the help of dominating architectural form. Images modeling outer-space order in architectural sphere are based upon archetypical oppositions. In Islamic architecture they are most vivid in architecture of traditional and modern mosques and form the images of the world, Universe creation, they form mega-images.

Keywords: unity, architectural environment, image, mosque, archetypical oppositions

Urban realm is a mirror of philosophy and cultural stereotypes of the society. Architectural form traditionally brings clear information understandable for everyone who belongs to this social system. That is why special importance while perception of an architectural environment is within the comprehension of space and form images unity, which are the markers of the main philosophic idea, of attitude to the world, city, to some certain part of the city, etc.

Imaginative perception and imaginative presentation are the basics of the communicative function of an architecture piece that performs some kind of human's attitude programming to the surrounding world. In general one can come to an assumption that the image is a channel that performs the dialog between an architect and a consumer, between architectural environment and society. It is an integral part to feel architectural environmental unity.

The image is one of the chief notions in gnoseology. Different theories come to define the image as a reflection of reality in the consciousness of a person. The image is always individual and quite complicated. The factor of an aesthetic affection brings the image into the sphere of an artistic one. A new emotional and sense essence that is due to the aesthetic affection forms higher level of the image. It brings from some specific and multi-valued reality (still partial and singular) to the global emotionally notional generalization. Thus, the essence of the image is its synthesizing character.

A. P. Marder, investigating the architectural aspect of the image says: “The architectural environment is presented within time and informative sequence of architecture form perception – the image of an architectural form (the prime one) – the architectonic image of the world (secondary, tertiary, etc); as a result the image of a certain form turns into the sphere of images adding, developing, enriching the image of the world” [1, p. 114–117].

The images modeling outer-space order in the architectural sphere are reflected through archetypical associations. The value of archetypical codes is stressed upon by A. V. Ikonnikov. He mentions the following archetypical images in architectural environment: world axis which is performed through the central dominating vertical of an architectural form; crossing of the horizontal axes that is to underline the order given by the universe; circle, regular tetragon, rectangle as the order given by the space; city as a model of the Universe; borders defining city and country-side. [2].

Y. M. Lotman mentions iconic essence of the architecture language based upon archetypical oppositions [3]. S. A. Shubovich in her works deals with the detailed research of the archetypical binary oppositions and their architectural interpretations. Among them there are such oppositions: Chaos-Universe, Heaven-Earth, “top-bottom”, “light-darkness”, “middle-outskirts”, “broad-narrow”, east-west [4]. The universe aspect of these archetypical oppositions is reflected through their realization on the one hand at all levels of the architectural environmental system, on the other hand in different cultural contexts.

Meanwhile their iconic background varies and is fixed within certain architectural embodiment by different ethnic groups. So it attracts special interest to see architectural iconic background of active in modern culture traditional Islamic architecture together with the organization of city environment in Arab cities.

The acutest for the human-being according to C. Levi-Strauss is the universal opposition “Life” – “Death” [5]. It is modeled by symbolic image of Outer-Space and Chaos. It is brightly presented in architectural environment. City environment of a traditional Arab city preserves both of these images in harmony. The Chaos, the main feature of which is shapelessness, is given through unstructured, entrapped and dark

space. Vision of the Outer-Space is modeled by the set of coordinate axes, which are molded through structure-framing elements – streets. In traditional cities of the Arab world streets join busy areas with the city gates, which were usually built in accordance with the cardinal points. All together they create definite frame for the planning structure. The image of the Outer-Space in city environment is performed by natural or architectonic centerpieces. In Islamic cities with their traditional structure such a centerpiece is a mosque.

Archetypical images are most vivid in centerpiece architectural forms. The evaluation of unity of architectural environment is possible only when the architectural form that is centerpiece brings the human being to important metaphors revealing some images at the associative level. Metaphor, image creation is the basics of Muslim fine arts.

In Islamic architecture and first of all in the architecture of the mosques one can purely see the range of archetypical forms which all together form the images of the world, Universe creation – mega-images.

Impressive images are created due to the tower tops (minarets and mihrabs). They keep the image of “the universal axis”, the vertical that joins absolute top and absolute bottom, the Heaven and the Earth. Crossing of the horizontal axes determining important directions at different structural levels is vertically fixed. It is accomplished by the architectural image of a stair-case. Stretching of the stair-case in three-dimensional spiral awakes pre-Islamic image of the Tower of Babel – ziggurat Etemenanki.

One of the variants to realize the vertical that joins worldly and the real is an immant geometric pyramid image that is often sophisticated by a spiral turning. The pyramid in the history of humankind preserves sacral features that include temple origin. It symbolizes the unity of worldly order and Divine Unity. Its chief characteristic is a regular tetragon at the bottom as a symbol of geometric order. This mathematic order of pyramid forms in Egypt and Mesopotamia was modified by image thinking of a later Islamic world. The mathematic nature of the Islamic art and architecture was inherited together with the Greek culture. Spiritual value of mathematics given by Pythagor was easily assimilated within Islamic culture. It is all because in Islamic philosophy long before its contact with the Greek science there was the aspect named “Abrahamic Pythagoriness” [6].

That is why it is not by accident that for the Moslem people the cube form keeps its sacred value. “What is it a cube? It is just about a mystique object. The object that all of a sudden and instantly serves as a source of images. The cube is a perfect image of protuberance, which still always includes emptiness because it usually serves as a box. Still gathering of empty spaces creates some substance, some ordered quantity of blocks, partition walls, constructions, buildings” [7].

The cube form is observed within the chief sanctity of Islam – the Caaba that is surrounded by Al-Haram Mosque in Mecca. The Caaba is 15 meters high, 12 meters long and 10 meters wide. Its corners are directed in accordance with the cardinal points. In the eastern angle of the Caaba at 1,5 meters height one can find “the black stone” framed in silver – the stone of mercy which according to the belief was sent by Allah to Adam and Eve. The very sanctity hidden within the cube form is the guideline attracting eyes of all Muslim people while praying.



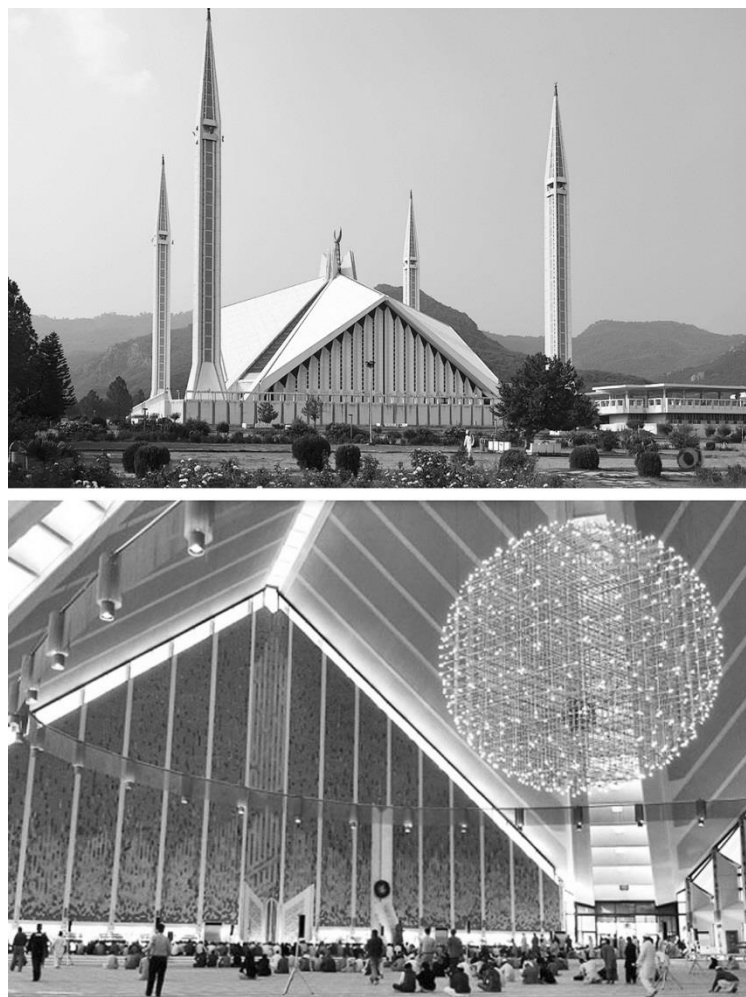
Pic.1. Al-Haram Mosque, Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

The Caaba cube sets geometric modes of thinking preserving vivid metaphoric essence. The Caaba is the centre of the world creation and attracts the space. Thus, the Caaba in the mosque holds the whole world, the whole past, present and future temple traditions and forms comprehended unity [8]. So one can consider the cube as an invariant form for the Islamic culture.

Not only forms but the very space in Islamic architecture emits images. Perception of the space in Islamic architecture by an average Muslim person reveals its qualitative characteristics which go together with sacred geometry and opposition “middle-outskirts”. The space keeps the characteristics which give an opportunity to integrate all the nodes of outskirts into the Center creating the feeling of “omnipresent

Divine essence that shows the Center, no matter where the human being can be within the wheel of this life” [6].

At the very same time the space includes the quality of emptiness. The emptiness of the mosque marks absence and symbolizes presence of Spirit and the image of the Divine Unity that is mentioned in Islamic revelation. It gives the emptiness within the space of Islamic architecture spiritual sense of a great value. “Entering a mosque or any traditional building the very emptiness of the space attracts to dues absconditus in the same way as the feeling of the floor which can be stepped on only having taken off the footwear” [6].



Pic. 2. Shah Faisal Mosque, Islamabad. Pakistan. 1986

In modern mosques great attention is paid to the space.

In Islamabad Shah Faisal Mosque the space for praying that was previously secluded is now introduced openly. Interior space is focused upon mihrab that is not deep in the wall but presents sculpture form standing open depicting an unclosed book – the Koran. That is why the image of the Book and giving sacred writing openly, that is

traditionally presented in a calligraphic ornament on the walls, is also shown within sculpture in the mosque. It underlines special meaning of the interior space.

Not only the space of the mosque brings symbolic essence, but the very floor where religious people knee down pronouncing their prayer requests. The carpet, no matter whether it is white or ornamented with geometric patterns and arabesques, “reflects the Heaven and lets the Muslim person, who mostly spends his time on the carpet at home, percept the floor where he sits as a particle of a genuine and sacred floor of the mosque where he pronounces his prayer request. Touching the ground with his forehead Prophet gave special sense to the floor of his house, thus to the floor of the first mosque, then through the mosque in Medina – to the floor of the whole Islamic architecture, and so it brings the sense of the space through the floor” [6]. Moreover, touching the ground means returning of the human being, nature to the initial genuine state.



Pic. 3. Al-Masjid al-Nabawī in Medina, Saudi Arabia.

The form of the dome belongs to those which serve the mega-image creation. The dome, that gives the shelter while heat or cold, at the very same time symbolizes the broad expanse of the heaven. This symbol is connected with our understanding of world creation tectonics. The dome is the center, world’s axis that joins all the levels of the Universe into one unity.



Pic. 4. Mosque the Dome of the Rock, Al-Quds.

The Koran says: “God is the Light of the Heaven and the Earth”. The greatest masterpieces of the Islamic architecture as historical (the mausoleum-mosque Taj Mahal), so modern (the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque) look like crystallized light: pure, clear, shining. Minaret, al-manara in Arabic literally mean “the place of light”. The light determines the boundaries of the Islamic architecture space and underlines its geometric precise form and intellectual clarity. Mystique role of the light as a proof of the Divine presence, ecstatic interflow and dissolving in light-god can be viewed together with reconsidered thoughts of Neo-Platonists about god-light. Arab Neo-Platonism with its exalted mystique form takes prime role in the art and especially in the architecture of the Arab countries. The images of the light and darkness are predominating. The light was used to explain the relation between Life and Death, Good and Evil, God and human being.



Pic. 5. A, B - Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, architect Jean Nouvel, 2003, C- Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque, architect C. R. Nolli, 1958, D-mausoleum-mosque Taj Mahal, 1653.

So we can see that the prime images (archetypical images) of the Islamic architecture are within the architecture of the mosques as one of the most symbolic component of the Arab architecture reflecting the collective identity.

Archetypical images come from religious architecture to the architecture of absolutely another direction. So, S. M. Shukurov investigating the transformation of the mosques forms stresses retaining of the full-sense prime-images not only in the modern mosque, but also while its patterning in secular buildings. He analyses iconographic project of the opera-house for Baghdad by F. L. Wright. The variety of imaginative structure is presented by the interpretation of archetypical codes range. First of all it is the geometric circle form turning into spiral – the image of “a stair-case stretching directly into the sky”. There is also dome form of the theatre underlined by a simple spire. Spiral vertical is adjacent to the whole volume of the building reminding minaret form.

Inner space of the opera-house is described by the very author: “The space within the building is the prime treasure of the building”.

Thus, the backbone of the opera-house project is Islamic artistic power and the mosque.



Pic. Opera-house project in Baghdad, architect F.L.Wright, 1957.

That is why understanding “the image” as a way and form to grasp the reality and the way to realize the idea, which is characterized by sense and practical unity, we can name its characteristics which correspond the Islamic Arab architecture.

- The image always coincides with the prototype that exists in the consciousness of a person within the conceptualization of this object;

- The image reflects the essence of the perceived object that gives the attitude of the object to the person or to his / her activity without reference to “unimportant” details;

- The image is a result of an artistic generalization, of arising singular aspect to typical, ideal one;

- The image according to its social meaning is divided into mega-image (the image of the world creation, the image of a certain ideology of the epoch, religious image), macro-image (social point of view forming generally accepted traditional images of objects) and mini-image (individual for every person, own image of the world, environment, object).

For the Arab architecture the prime mega-images forming national identity are the images of “the world axis”, “the stair-case stretching directly into the sky”, the broad expanse of heaven, mathematic order, the center of the Universe creation, the image of the Divine Unity, etc.

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Аннотация. В работе исследована проблема образности в арабской архитектуре. Проблема сохранения художественно-образной целостности архитектурной среды является одной из наиболее актуальных проблем интенсивно развивающихся городов арабского мира. Осознание целостности архитектурной среды человеком происходит, когда доминирующая архитектурная форма ассоциируется с важными для человека метафорами и в сознании человека возникает образ. Образы в архитектурной среде, моделирующие космическую упорядоченность, основываются на архетипических оппозициях. В исламской архитектуре они наиболее четко прочитываются в архитектуре традиционных и современных мечетей и формируют образы сотворения мира, Вселенной - мега-образы.

Ключевые слова: целостность, архитектурная среда, образ, мечеть, архетипические оппозиции

Анотація. У роботі досліджена проблема образності в арабській архітектурі. Проблема збереження художньо-образної цілісності архітектурного середовища є однією з найбільш актуальних проблем міст арабського світу, які інтенсивно розвиваються. Усвідомлення цілісності архітектурного середовища людиною виникає, коли домінуюча архітектурна форма асоціюється з важливими для людини метафорами та в свідомості людини з'являється образ. Образи в архітектурному середовищі, які моделюють космічну упорядкованість, базуються на архетипічних опозиціях. В ісламській архітектурі вони особливо чітко прочитуються в архітектурі традиційних та сучасних мечетей та формують образи створення світу, Всесвіту - мега-образи.

Ключові слова: цілісність, архітектурне середовище, образ, мечеть, архетипічні опозиції