The Masjid al-Aqsa, the deeply revered architectural masterwork of early Islam, has lost much of its original form from extensive repairs and renovations over its long and tumultuous history. The first serious attempt to restore the highly altered building scientifically was made during the early years of this century when, in 1922, the Supreme Muslim Council of the Islamic State of Palestine under the British Mandate invited the renowned, Turkish architect Ahmet Kemalettin to carry out the difficult task of restoring the monuments in the Haram area.

Ahmet Kemalettin Bey, the most prominent theoretician of the national style in Turkish architecture which prevailed during the final years of the Ottoman Empire and the early days of the Turkish Republic, was born in Istanbul in 1870. After graduating from the School of Engineering in 1891, he was sent to Berlin by the government in 1895 to study architecture at the Charlottenburg Technisches Hochschule. Upon his return in 1900, he was asked to teach architectural design at the School of Engineering, while at the same time working as the chief architect in the Ministry of War.

He was assigned to the post of chief architect at the Ministry of Awqaf in 1909, where he had both the opportunity and the authority to develop and execute his novel ideas on national style. The Turkish nationalism advocated by the well-known philosopher Ziya Gökalp as a bulwark against the perils of minority nationalism in the empire was an important incentive for developing this style. The office Kemalettin established was to become an organization of exemplary teamwork which in a short time produced an amazing number of new national-style buildings all over the empire. In addition to being a well organized office that carried out the first scientifically correct restoration of monuments in the Middle East, it also served as a school, teaching and disseminating the fundamentals of Turkish national architecture. In broad terms this architecture depended heavily on an Ottoman revivalism based in its turn on the principles of nineteenth-century eclecticism.

The invitation to restore the Haram monuments in Jerusalem, which Kemalettin accepted, came during a temporary break in his official duties after the fall of the empire and the War of Independence. Though it cannot be documented exactly, he most probably had already visited Jerusalem, since in 1912 he had written and published the detailed description of the Haram monuments for a probable restoration project initiated by the Ottoman government, but interrupted by the First World War. He began the restoration of the Masjid al-Aqsa in 1922 at the invitation of the Supreme Muslim Council of Palestine and personally supervised most of the work until July of 1925. Then, unable to resist the incessant invitations from the Turkish government to work at home, he entrusted its completion to his experienced staff and returned to Ankara to take part in the frenzy of building that was going on in the new capital. There he found the ideal place to apply his patriotism to architecture. He designed some of the most important buildings in the city, but saw none to completion; he died suddenly of a brain hemorrhage on 13 July 1927.

Today, almost seventy years after his death, Kemalettin Bey is still venerated in Turkey, not only as an able architect and professor who, together with the young architects he trained, built some of the finest buildings of the late empire and early republic, but also as a writer on architectural theory, problems of the built environment, and the history of architecture in the Middle East. At a time when most of the writers on this subject were European Orientalists who simply viewed the architecture of all Islamic countries as an undifferentiated, monolithic whole, his publications stand out as refreshing documents revealing the nuanced spatial, structural, and decorative differences in the Arab, Ottoman, and Byzantine traditions of building. These works today are untapped sources of valuable reflections on the subtleties of Middle Eastern architecture, still awaiting interpretation by a historian.

When Kemalettin Bey was invited to Jerusalem for the Aqsa restoration, a commission was established to oversee the legal, technical, and financial aspects of the job. It included British architects, Egyptian experts, and local
Fig. 1. Masjid al-Aqsa. Transverse section drawing prepared for the rejected third restoration proposal. (Photo: courtesy Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Geneva.)

Fig. 2. Masjid al-Aqsa. Drawing of the western façade prepared for the rejected third restoration proposal. (Photo: courtesy Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Geneva.)
officials, as well as Mimar Kemalettin himself. Of the three projects he prepared for the restoration of the masjid in general and its dome in particular, the commission chose the second one, which would consolidate and conserve the building and its dome as they were. Official approval was given in a report dated 24 February 1924. The consolidation project included erecting scaffolding, reinforcing the foundations, rectifying the columns, replacing the tie beams, and conserving the various elements of the dome, such as the arches, the pendentives, and the drum, insofar as possible (sec appendix).

The third project proposing the replacement of the timber roof over the central aisle and the two aisles on either side by steel trusses and the addition of a minaret next to the redesigned western wall was found unfit for approval; and it is not even mentioned in the commission report. This was most probably because the configuration of the steel trusses would have created a rather steep pitched roof over the aisles, destroying the traditional, flat-roofed image of the masjid and eliminating the stained-glass clerestory windows of the central aisle, which would have reduced the natural illumination in the interior (figs. 1–2).

The first project was apparently preferred by Kemalettin, who insisted on its execution and continued its design even after its rejection by the commission. It was diplomatically explained in the report that its realization would have been strong and aesthetically satisfying, but the second project was unanimously approved because it exactly fitted the social, religious, and archaeological suggestions made by the Egyptian delegates to the commission (see appendix). What these suggestions were is not known, since they were not recorded in the report, but the results of Kemalettin’s restoration work provide clues to the extent of the intervention in the building that was demanded.

A guidebook prepared by the Supreme Awqaf Council of Jerusalem states that, at the end of the restoration project, three of the supporting pillars in the subterranean vaults, which are also called al-Aqsa al-Qadima (the ancient Aqsa), were strengthened by reinforced concrete so as to secure the foundations. The eight marble columns and the four bearing arches of the dome had to be replaced by new ones. The mosaic decoration and the inscriptions on the spandrels of these arches which date back to the Fatimid period were revealed from behind plasterwork of a later date that covered them. The dilapidated western section of the southern wall was pulled down and rebuilt in reinforced concrete, and the timber roof of the central nave was replaced by a concrete slab. All the arches were decorated with green-tinted gypsum and gold, and their timber tie beams replaced by gilded brass ones. Approximately 30 of the original 121 stained-glass windows, most of them in the eastern part of the building, were skillfully renewed. During this work, extreme care was taken to carry out the reconstruction according to the original designs made during the Abbasid and Fatimid periods. According to the Awqaf’s guidebook, the restoration was closely controlled so as not to lose the original Abbasid and Fatimid identity of the historical structure. This effort to protect the identity only of those two periods, and not of the earlier or later—particularly the Umayyad and the Ottoman—ones may be an indication of Arab nationalism on the part of the Palestinian and Egyptian delegates to the commission.

Finally, an inscription in Arabic was placed over and around one of the prayer niches to commemorate the restoration work. It reads as follows: “The dome of the mosque of al-Aqsa was renovated by the Supreme Muslim Council in Dhul-Hijja 1346 H–1927 A.D.” This wording suggests that the focus of the 1922–26 restoration had been the dome, which was in great need of repair at the beginning of the restoration process. While the dome was being strengthened, however, other necessary interventions were carried out in the subterranean vaults, on the southern wall, and in the superstructure of the nave as well.

The first proposal of Kemalettin Bey, had it been implemented, would have wrought much more radical changes in the structure and general design of the masjid. It deserves attention because it yields important clues about the architectural, spatial, and structural ideas of Kemalettin Bey, who was the most prominent architect in the Islamic world during the first quarter of this century. Before proceeding with an analysis of some of the documents related to this project, it would be useful to review the earlier interventions that had altered the building and brought it to its present state.

The holy precinct lying in the eastern part of old Jerusalem, where temples of various religions have succeeded one another, is today known as al-Haram al-Sha’rif by the Muslims. At its southern edge stands the Masjid al-Aqsa, “the farthest masjid,” first mentioned in the Qur’an in relation to the Prophet’s Night Journey. Since the masjid was not yet built when the Qur’an was revealed, the whole Haram area where Solomon’s Temple once stood must have been called by this name. It is known that the Jewish temple was destroyed by the order of the Roman emperor Titus in 70 A.D. and that Emperor Hadrian ordered the building of another temple in
Fig. 3. Haram, Jerusalem. Plan. (From: Arthur Katcher, *New Jerusalem: Planning and Politics* (London, 1973).)

Fig. 4. Haram, Jerusalem. General view from the southwest. (From: Arthur Katcher, *New Jerusalem: Planning and Politics* (London, 1973).)
its place, this time for Jupiter. It is reported that Caliph 5Umar, when he captured the city in 638, had a simple masjid built over the holy rock at the center, which had been covered by debris from the already ruined temple of Jupiter.4

It was over the site of this masjid that the Umayyad caliph 5Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan had the Dome of the Rock built between 688 and 692. He was also responsible for building the original Masjid al-Aqsa on its present site, as claimed by various Arab sources and verified by recent research (figs. 3 4). This first building, found to be rather small, was enlarged in 715 by his son al-Walid, who increased its depth from 50 to almost 70 meters.6 The new masjid was a rectangle 114.60 m. by 69.2 m. with 15 aisles formed by arcades built perpendicular to the qibla wall. The central aisle was twice the width of the other aisles and covered by a gabled roof with a clerestory. Over the second bay, in front of the mihrab, was placed a wooden dome from which transverse arcades were extended to the side walls to withstand its side thrust (fig. 5).

The masjid, which was greatly damaged during an earthquake in 748, was rebuilt by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur in 758 and reputedly once again by al-Mahdi in 780, after new damage was inflicted on it, possibly by another earthquake that might have shaken the city in 774. More recently, however, some scholars have claimed that
there was no later earthquake and only a single rebuilding of the masjid during the Abbasid period.8

The Masjid al-Aqsa owes a large part of its present form to the Fatimid Caliph al-Zahir who rebuilt it in 1035, after it was destroyed by the great earthquake of 1033.9 During this reconstruction, the masjid was reduced to its present width of seven aisles, all of them covered by individual gable roofs as in the earlier building.10 The arcades of the wider central aisle, the main entrance, the southern wall, the transverse arcades, and the dome apparently date from this or earlier periods, as can be observed from the Creswell plan (fig. 6).

After the arrival of the Crusaders in 1099, the Haram area was occupied by the Order of the Templars, who restored and used the masjid, first as a residence for the Latin kings under the name of "Palatium Solomonis,"11 and then as a religious center which they renamed "Templum Solomonis."12 During this restoration, the two outer aisles of the building to the east and west were covered by stone vaults, two of which on the western side have remained unchanged to the present day.

The consecutive minor repairs by the Ayyubids and the Mamluks were not intended to make radical changes in the general form of the masjid, but only to keep its weak structure from crumbling. One major addition during the Ayyubid period was the arched entrance porch to the north, which was built by Salah al-Din's nephew al-Mu'azzam in 1217-18.13 After the 1922-26 restoration by Kemalettin Bey, the masjid underwent further restorations in 1940 and 1945, and since the earthquake of 1946, it has been subject to continuous repair.14

Probably because the procedure used for the work and its results were not published by the architect, the 1922-26 restoration of the building did not stir up a great deal of interest among Western scholars of Islamic architecture at the time, even though Kemalettin Bey was awarded honorary membership in the Royal Institute of British Architects for his restoration.15 His scholarly and methodological approach to the restoration was supported by careful research and measured drawings, based on his research as well as his experience in restor-
ing a considerable number of Ottoman monuments for the Ministry of Awqaf.

Numerous drawings prepared by Mimar Kemalettin and his staff for the restoration of the masjid and the Dome of the Rock are kept in the archives of the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem. Among these, one measured survey dating from early 1924, which shows the plans of both the masjid and the rock-cut vaults underneath it, is of particular interest because it seems to have been the first survey drawing of the building (fig. 7). It also is possible that this drawing was the basis for Creswell's 1932 plan, which shows the history of its construction (fig. 6). The differences between the two drawings are minimal. While Kemalettin Bey has superimposed the configuration of the subterranean vaults over his plan, Creswell has reflected the superstructure instead (figs. 6–7). Both plans document the building as it was at the turn of the century, long before the restitution of the eastern aisles to their original state in the early fifties.

Among the drawings for the rejected first project is a longitudinal section, dated 18 June 1925, which proposes the installation of a large brick dome, buttressed by two half-domes, over the central part of the building (fig. 8). The proposed central dome, approximately 22 meters in diameter, is slightly pointed in section. Supported by four large, pointed arches, it rises approximately 42 meters inside and 47 meters outside, including the height of the finial. A continuous inscription band encircles it in the interior, and a similar band runs around the springing line of the supporting arches. The tympani of these arches are perforated by three tiers of windows on the east and the west. The intrados of the dome, the half-domes, and the pendentives are decorated with classical Ottoman designs.

An earlier drawing of the western façade, dated 19 November 1924, offers a slightly different variation (fig. 9). Here the central dome has a pointed horseshoe profile, recalling the somewhat bulbous outline of the original timber dome, and it rises to a height of almost 54 meters at the top of the finial. Considering its rather bulky and unproportional form, we may assume that it was an outer dome placed over an inner one, like the original double dome of the masjid. In this drawing, the supporting arches are also seen to be stilted, with five windows in the upper tier in the tympanum, instead of three as in the section. Since the dome with the horseshoe profile is not seen in the section drawing, we can suppose that the architect was either dissatisfied with his earlier design and modified it as a single dome with a simpler, pointed profile, or chose not to draw the outer dome in the section. Whatever the reason, the stilted arches were also modified to produce more harmonious proportions in the later drawing (figs. 8–9). The organization of the eastern façade, with a square minaret to the east of the porch, repetitive single windows at the ground level, double arched windows on the upper level, and pointed blind arches above them is a completely new proposal also found in the rejected third project (fig. 2).

The most revealing document of the first project is the plan drawing. Here the original structural members which were to be kept are rendered in black outlines while the proposed ones are filled in with a light tone (fig. 10). A comparison of this plan with the measured survey plan of 1924 shows the surprising extent of alterations which were to have been carried out. The plan shows that the architect had envisioned the insertion of a huge new structure in the classical Ottoman style at the center of the building, replacing the three central aisles and twelve original columns aligning them (compare figs 6, 7, 10). The large (approximately 22 m. x 48.5 m.) rectangular space thus obtained is defined by four colossal cross-shaped piers and eight irregular ones that are designed to bear the weight of the dome and the half-domes above. These piers, delineating the outline of the proposed superstructure, further replace two rows of older piers that carry the cross vaults of the two outer pairs of aisles built by the Crusaders.

Similar interventions to the existing structure were made at various other parts of the building as well. The original columns of the transverse arcades were slightly moved to be backed with rectangular piers. The same was proposed for the L-shaped corner supports of the timber dome, each of which was originally composed of three detached columns. The entry into the women's masjid which adjoins the Aqsa on the west is diverted into the main masjid through the small, domed entrance chamber at the junction of the two buildings. Thus a new entrance was opened from the west, symmetrical to the one on the eastern wall built by the Crusaders (figs. 10–11). The irregular eastern wall was left untouched; on the western wall windows were placed at the center of each bay. The proposed minaret was also attached to it as an extension of the first bay behind the entrance porch, contrary to the façade drawings where the minaret is shown as attached to the porch itself (compare figs. 2, 6, 7, 9, and 10).

As these drawings show, had it been approved by the technical commission, Kemalettin Bey's daring first project would have created drastic changes in the historic
Fig. 8. Masjid al-Aqsa. North-south section drawn for the rejected first restoration proposal, 1925. (Photo: courtesy Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Geneva.)

Fig. 9. Masjid al-Aqsa. Drawing of western façade prepared for the rejected first restoration proposal, 1925. (Photo: courtesy Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Geneva.)
Fig. 10. Masjid al-Aqsa. Altered plan prepared for the rejected first proposal of the restoration. (Photo: courtesy Isam Aswad, Jerusalem.)

Fig. 11. Masjid al-Aqsa. Eastern view. (Photo: courtesy Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Geneva.)
building. The proposed domed structure which schematically recalls the Sûleymaniye mosque in Istanbul, would have created a strange contrast with the multi-columnar interior of the masjid, as in the case of the Great Mosque of Cordoba which was impaired by the construction of the Gothic cathedral in its center. Such an alteration would have created problems of harmony both inside and outside the building. The Dome of the Rock, rising to a height of approximately 35 meters, would have been dwarfed by the new structure, which would have surpassed it by at least 20 meters. The masjid would have assumed a new monumental scale, in contrast to the modest disposition it had displayed for centuries, with its smaller dome and simpler structure sitting at a slightly lower level, next to its highly praised neighbor (fig. 4). Such an alien style and scale would have seriously damaged the image of the city, as the Muhammed 'Ali mosque had already done in Cairo.

Why Kemalettin Bey, who was renowned for his sensitive and careful approach to building design, his immense knowledge of architectural history, and his valuable pioneering work in the restoration of historical Ottoman monuments should have proposed and defended such drastic and questionable changes in the general setup of the Masjid al-Aqsa is a baffling question. However, a report he prepared for the restoration of the Haram monuments and a couple of articles he wrote on the history of Islamic architecture may help us to understand why he chose this approach to that particular project.

In an undated, handwritten report entitled "Haram al-Sharif," signed "Kemal, architect-professor" and officially stamped by the Technical Committee of the Haram al-Sharif—Jerusalem, Kemalettin Bey gives a detailed description of the Holy City and the Haram area in general and the Dome of the Rock in particular. Obviously addressed to the aforementioned commission, the report must have been written toward the end of 1922, and it seems to have formed the basis for the restoration of the buildings in the Haram area. Speaking of the urban, structural, and aesthetic problems facing the holy premises, the architect wrote as follows:
I have long been aware of the strong impact the architectural grandeur of these holy buildings has. This time, however, the long hours I have spent in and around these sacred places for a serious attempt at intervention has allowed me to observe, discover, and understand the secrets behind their extremely high artistic quality.

Thank God, the Islamic sanctity of the Haram has been protected from the multi-religious superstitions of Jerusalem by its surrounding walls. Here, and only here, man’s soul comprehends the concept of God and religion, and by prostrating himself in the “mihrabs” of those monuments of divine inspiration, reaches for peace in His realm.

Compared with the magnitude and sanctity of the vast and pure view we see through the gates of that high enclosure, where the glorious monuments of Islam rise to the heavens, what can be said of those absurd old and new buildings of Jerusalem: Built for the propagation of various competing beliefs, these buildings disturb the pleasant panorama of the city with their large, ugly forms, disgracing art and talent as well.

History will never forgive the desecration of these holy places with such alien architecture. Hence, tired from this jumble of diverse styles spoiling the civilized urban ambiance of Jerusalem, my eyes gladly turn back to the Haram, to rest and attain perfect peace and pleasure in its heavenly, eternal aesthetics.

Oh God, how incredible is the beauty with which You have endowed these holy premises and how great is the power of creativity You have inspired in the masterbuilders of Islam. Though I have to confess my inability to comprehend it totally, I do not believe that there will be anybody in this wide world who is able to see and think and who would not be impressed by the powerful impact of this great skill and beauty.

... and I, more than any other being, am under the spell of this impact. I pray, Great God, also to inspire me, Your poor disciple, in the expert skills which have created these products of great beauty and increase the force of their influence on me so as to ensure the success of our efforts to restore and reinforce the monuments of the Haram as Sharif properly.

From these rather emotional introductory comments, we can acquire a fairly good idea of Kemalettin Bey’s first impressions of Jerusalem and its monuments. His fervent praise of the buildings of Islamic origin in the Haram area and his dislike of the non-Islamic monuments around it reflect both his reverence for Islam and his sensitivity in matters pertaining to architecture. His criticism of the diverse architectural styles and the overpowering size of the non-Islamic monuments may be accepted as a reaction to unbalanced, unadjusted, unproportional urban and architectural solutions, which even today have damaged the face of most Middle Eastern cities, in addition to Jerusalem itself, where pressing socioeconomic and political problems are usually given priority over aesthetic ones. On the other hand, Kemalettin Bey’s criticism of the architectural aspects of the city makes his first proposal even more puzzling, since it too would have radically changed the well-adjusted skyline of Jerusalem.

Elaborating on his description of the Haram area and its specific monuments, the architect continues:

... A careful study of the principles of design behind the pleasant visual effects that have been created by the forms and colors of the buildings on the holy precinct of the Haram is of vital importance for understanding and protecting the quality and integrity of these perfect masterpieces, which may easily be destroyed through unskilled interventions.

First of all, the Haram al-Sharif, as defined by its exterior walls, is a large, holy area for religious activity, illuminated by the celestial light streaming down from the immense dome of heaven covering it. Inside this vast, peaceful space, on a higher, sacred platform, the Ma‘ṣūd al-Muqaddas [lit. Holy Temple, i.e., Dome of the Rock], composed of well-adjusted octogonal, round, and spherical forms, reaches for the sky in ascending steps. Its finely balanced proportions and the spiritual quality of its embellishments are important aspects of its design.

The inner side of the surrounding Haram wall has been built up as a simple, continuous niqab (arcade) of modest size. This niqab, occasionally punctuated by high, ornate portals, respects the holiness of the Haram and does not interfere with the glorious architectural aesthetics of the Bayt al-Muqaddas [lit. Holy House, i.e., the Dome of the Rock]. The Masjid al-Aqsā, situated on the southern side of the Haram, displays a similar modesty with its restrained form and size, thus contributing to the principles of design and harmony in this sacred environment.

Obviously impressed by the magnificence of the Dome of the Rock and the modesty of the buildings surrounding it, Kemalettin Bey goes on to give a detailed description of this unique monument in his report, emphasizing its historical and spiritual significance. On its architectural and decorative vocabulary, he makes the following remarks:

As has been pointed out previously, the architectural embellishments attain the highest quality and richness in their design and color schemes on the exterior as well as the interior of the Bayt al-Muqaddas. Here, the upper half of the exterior façades are covered with exquisite tiles of rich colors and floral designs produced by the great ceramic masters during the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent. Unfortunately, very few of these tiles, which are among the finest examples of the Turkish ceramic arts of the classical period, have come down to us intact, due to wrong interventions in the past, which have brutally destroyed this magnificent Islamic attire of the Holy Temple.

... It is reputed that these exterior surfaces were once clad with glass mosaics, a decorative medium of non-
Islamic origin. The general form and construction of the building is also alien to Islamic architecture which reached its maturity at a later date.

When this building was built as a house of worship over the sacred Rock only 72 years had elapsed since the emergence of Islam. Many a fine master and artisan of the civilized world was destined to contribute his skills to build a great monument befitting the House of Islam. Since they all happened to be practitioners of Byzantine architecture, they built it in that style but in accordance with the particular laws and spiritual demands of Islam.

... When the art of Islamic architecture and decoration reached its peak during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent, the care and restoration of the worn-out building were entrusted to Turkish artisans who, with great faith and skill, reestablished its decorative vocabulary along lines more suitable to the spirit of Islam. Thus, all the tilework, a major part of the plaster windows, marble revetments of the interior arches, and the iron tie beams which replaced the older timber ones were the work of the Turkish masters of this period. The semicircular arches crossing the exterior windows and the openings of the inner arcade were also replaced with extraordinary skill by pointed arches of Islamic design. This process alone deserves particular attention since it proves how faithfully these old masters were attached to their national ideals in architecture.18

Because he had been responsible for the emergence of a national style in Turkish architecture at the turn of the century, Kemalettin Bey's praise of the Ottoman masters and artisans who had implemented the stylistic and decorative transformation of the building during Suleiman's reign is understandable. It was mainly the architectures of this period — the apex of Ottoman classicism — that the architect sought to revive through the national style he had created.

Continuing with his report, the architect discusses the physical and the aesthetic problems in the Haram area and proposes the following solutions:

... The original architectural form of the surrounding Haram wall, which plays such a great role in the general harmony and proportioning of the premises, has been almost totally obliterated by ugly buildings that have been built above it. Most of these were built as dwellings under the pretext that they were mosques or madrasas. Nothing could be more sacrilegious than utilizing that vast, sacred platform of the Holy Haram as a simple backyard to private houses. The pillars, the arches, and the vaults of the surrounding riaq, designed to bear the weight of only a single story, are about to collapse under the weight of these crude additions. As if that were not enough, the form and the inner façade of the wall are further damaged by additional buttresses and arches which were built to resist the structural deformations. ... The wall and the riaq should be restored to their original form by removing these dreadful additions which also reduce the architectural and decorative values of the carefully placed gates ....

... Everything which would disturb the spiritual calm of the sacred platform of the Haram should be avoided. Everyone who comes here should be aware of the divine nature of this holy place and pay due respect accordingly. Those who are not involved in worship have no place on these grounds. Hence, recreational visits and activities should be prohibited there, and those attempting them should be invited to show proper religious respect.

Instead of creating the effect of a pleasure garden by dividing the area into exotic flower parterres, calm and dignified cypresses should be planted here and there at suitable places, to enhance the spiritual majesty of the view with their dark, reviving shadows ...

... As was mentioned earlier in the technical report which I presented to the president of the Supreme Council of the Islamic State of Palestine on 12 August 1338-1922, the general structural integrity of both the Bayt al-Muqaddas and the Masjid al-Aqsa is extremely weakened because of the insect-infested and decayed timber structural members, whose reinforcement and cure cannot be neglected any longer. Hence, the structural reinforcements to be decided upon after thorough technical investigation and to be applied with extreme skill, should start as soon as possible ...

... The derelict condition of the monuments in the Haram al-Sharif caused by long years of neglect and ignorance and the technical measures to be taken for their revitalization, have been explained above. Alongside the most advanced scientific and technical methods of restoration which are required for reviving the artistic and architectural excellence of these world-famous masterpieces, the establishment of an effective and competent technical committee is also of vital importance for the protection and continuation of their maintenance. From my professional and official duties, I have long been convinced of the necessity for such a committee. Its organization finally became possible when the High Council of the Islamic State of Palestine entrusted me, their humble servant, with the technical supervision of the restoration and improvement of the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem. Hence, with the invaluable support of my assistants, who for a very long time now have not refused their help in my professional duties, and with the efforts of those who will spend the execution of this sacred duty, [I will take the following steps]: (1) The preparation of detailed technical drawings based on thorough research and investigation, which will secure the use of advanced scientific methods in the restoration process, for retrieving the exquisite artistic value of the monuments, and (2) the establishment of a permanent technical committee which will conduct and administer the restoration of the buildings according to the requirements of the prepared drawings and secure their continuous maintenance afterwards. These will be needed for a healthy repair operation which may require years of hard work. The technical principles to be implemented during this long operation will be decided at once but, with an able and permanent technical committee, further deterioration of the monuments will be prevented and the desired excellence will be secured through annually allo-
olated expense budgets. Since, as a rule, the formation of such a committee and the appointment of a competent director who will devote all his life's efforts to this important duty is the most suitable and economic way of preserving historical monuments, their approval by the commission should be seriously considered. Unfortunately, many an important building in the Islamic world has lost its original artistic and historical value because of the lack of such technical maintenance. To secure the safeguarding of the remaining monuments, which are numerous enough to prove the size and the grandeur of Islamic civilization is a cultural necessity and should be adopted as an obligation by every faithful Muslim.

Therefore, I pray that the new technical committee, established through God's grace, will be favored with success in its efforts to improve the Holy Haram, and will eventually evolve and prosper as a school of restoration which will serve the resurrection of the glorious Islamic monuments in these holy premises. With the guidance and support of God Almighty. 29

Although religious and romantic in tone, the report shows that its author had observed the Haram and its buildings with care against the multicultural backdrop of Jerusalem, and it gives a factual account of its problems and makes sound proposals for their solution. The architect's respect for the historical context is obvious, and this again makes his proposal for the alteration of the Masjid al-Aqsa baffling. His approach to the restoration and revitalization of the area seems to be both dignified and modest, emphasizing the procurement of a noble grandeur through silence, simplicity, and restraint. His proposal for a subdued, almost natural landscaping for the holy platform is a particularly striking display of his aesthetic sensitivity. Then what could have been the motive behind his daring project of alteration, which would have produced a result totally different from the one he sought? Though we may find clues in the report, we will have to look elsewhere for a more complete understanding.

In an article he published in 1910, almost twelve years before the start of his work in Jerusalem, Kemalettin Bey wrote of Islamic architecture as follows:

Though Arab architecture in general is not really extraordinary in its spatial and structural solutions, the dexterity of the Arabs in carving, ornamentation, and in surface adornment is amazing. This shows that they are more inclined to decoration than construction and therefore are renowned as a people who delightfully embellish their interiors. Every nation has certain characteristics which are reflected in their architecture. The Byzantines, for example, were fine engineers. In structural theory, in the distribution of building loads, in the proper use and distribution of building materials, and in the strength of their structural systems they arrived at a point which is almost impossible to surpass. 30

The architect's high esteem for the structural aspects of Byzantine architecture, in comparison to the decorative emphasis of the Arabs echoes the typical judgments made in European Orientalist publications on the "character" of Islamic architecture at the time. It is followed by comments on Turkish architecture that have a strong nationalistic flavor:

Although the Turks, like the Arabs, have been blessed with the honor and distinction of Islam, they have had a totally different approach to architecture due to the differences in their nature. Considering strength and majesty in buildings, and taking Byzantine monuments as a model, they have developed and changed this style to create a strong and prominent architecture of their own. Hence, in spite of their common religious beliefs and customs, there is a great deal of difference between the Arabs and the Turks in terms of character, as well as architecture. Even though the Arabs have created exquisite architectural monuments, they have never attempted to build large-scale buildings. Even the Great Mosque in Cordoba consists of thousands of columns, spaced at four- or five-meter intervals. This explains why its spatial quality is not so extraordinary, in spite of its enormous size. Unlike the Turks, the Arabs have had no desire to imitate the church of St. Sophia. The Turks appreciated its advanced structural techniques and have further developed them in their own architecture. 31

Having gone through an engineer's education before being trained as an architect, Kemalettin Bey was well aware of general theories of structure. This technical training coupled with an interest in history, had induced in him an admiration for Byzantine building technology, particularly as manifested in the church of St. Sophia, which was developed further under the Ottomans and perfected by Mimar Sinan in the sixteenth century. His criticism of the Great Mosque of Cordoba seems to reveal a preference for large, uninterrupted architectural spaces with a powerful, monumental effect. This particular sensitivity to spatial aesthetics in architecture is further confirmed by the following passage:

... The Great Mosque in Bursa is one of the earliest and largest masonry structures of the Ottomans. A mosque of such size is seldom encountered in the Anatolian Seljuk period. Because they were not in need of large spans, the biggest arches built by the Seljuqs were usually between 12m. and 15m. in width, rarely attaining a breadth of 18 meters in some of the large caravanserais. In the Great Mosque of Bursa, the distance between the supporting pillars, and hence the width of the arches and the radius of the domes, does not exceed 12 meters. Therefore, the Great Mosque of Bursa does not show a...
building supported by multiple prismatic pillars, one encounters an elongated, corridor-like space, which makes it difficult to realize the size of the building at first sight. The general view of the pillars is not even pleasant. Because the expanse of the interior is restricted by the distances between the supports, and because the heights of these supports have to be proportional to the spans, attaining the proper height in relation to the total width of the building so as to achieve a harmonious proportion in its entirety would be quite impossible. Therefore, the architect who was looking for a pleasant spatial harmony for the interior of his building had to search for a different structural solution to replace this monotonous and confused system of repeating supports. . . . After the completion of the Great Mosque of Bursa, particularly the architects of the day must have been dissatisfied with the insufficient evolution of its spatial organization, since in subsequent mosques they were able to take the initial steps towards eliminating these repetitive supports over large clearances.

. . . Hence, in those mosques which were built after the Great Mosque of Bursa, the elegance of the entire building and the general proportioning and organization of the interior space were considered to be of great importance and as a first step the distances between the supporting members were maximized . . . .

Through these passages translated from the article and the previous report, we can gain a fairly good idea of what Mimar Kemalettin thought about Islamic architecture in general. His interest in architectural history is reflected in his comments explaining the basic differences between Arab, Byzantine, and Turkish architecture, and his conception of space as observed through his thoughts on how an interior space, particularly in a religious environment, should be fashioned.

In 1912, only two years after the publication of his article on Islamic architecture, he published another one, describing the glories of the Haram and the Dome of the Rock in detail, showing that he was already familiar with Jerusalem's buildings long before he was invited there by the Supreme Muslim Council of Palestine to restore the monuments. Therefore, his first proposal for the drastic alteration of the masjid cannot have been inspired by the idea of building a new monument that would compete with the glories of the Dome of the Rock.

When he arrived in Jerusalem in 1922, with the task of restoring the masjid, Kemalettin Bey was already a well-known architect in his own country, with a career of more than thirty years behind him. He had lived through a turbulent period of history which had brought drastic changes not only to the Ottoman Empire but also to the world in general. In 1876, as a small child, not yet in school, he had witnessed a series of overwhelming political incidents, including the revolt of the young Ottoman intellectuals who dethroned Abdülaziz and proclaimed the first constitutional regime in the empire. In 1878 Istanbul was almost occupied by the advancing Russian armies at the end of the Russo-Turkish War, and Abdülhamid II took this as an excuse to abolish the first Ottoman parliament; he ruled with absolute power for another thirty years. Towards the end of the eventful nineteenth century, as an enlightened young university student Kemalettin must have supported the underground activities of the Young Turks who were rebelling against the despotic rule of the sultan. Even though he was appointed to important positions in the School of Engineering and in several ministries by the sultan's government after he completed his graduate studies in Berlin, he was sympathetic to the secret political Party of Union and Progress, which reestablished the constitutional monarchy in 1908 and deposed Abdülhamid II in 1909 in favor of Mehmet Reşat V.

Though the revolution in 1908 had brought great expectations for a bright future, nationalist wars in the Balkans, and later the disastrous First World War which crumbled the empire, must have greatly affected the architect, who witnessed the disintegration of the provinces, the division of the mainland by victorious European powers, and finally the occupation of his beloved city by foreign armies in 1919.

On top of it all, after the failure of the Party of Union and Progress, with which he was associated, he was stripped of all of his official duties by the orders of the new government of Sultan Mehmet Vahdettin VI, who allied himself with the occupying forces to save the Ottoman throne. The War of Independence in Anatolia was only a distant flicker of hope when observed through the depressing atmosphere of the occupied capital.

Hence, during those final hours of the empire when the architect, like every contemporary Turkish nationalist, had lost faith in the future, the invitation from Jerusalem must have seemed a token of God's blessing. He must have felt great honor and gratitude for having been entrusted with the sacred task of restoring one of the most important monuments of the Islamic world. The exalted piety he displayed during this period is well represented in the flamboyant Ottoman vernacular style in which his Jerusalem reports are written.

Another important development which must have encouraged his hopes was the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, after the War of Independence, when the invading European armies were all expelled from the Anatolian heartland and a modern Turkish state was established with a democratic parliament. Turk-
ish nationalism, which he had supported so fervently, had at last triumphed and achieved its ultimate goal, in spite of many obstacles and difficulties. The enthusiasm with which he launched into his work in Ankara, the new capital of Turkey, when he was invited there in 1925, almost a whole year before the restoration of the Aqṣa was completed, is a sure sign of the intense nationalistic feelings he bore for the new republic. Respect for religion and nation apparently had an impact on the formation of his first proposal for the transformation of the masjid in Jerusalem which he defended so insistently.

The prevailing nationalist ideals that affected every level of Ottoman culture and politics during the turbulent years between 1909 and 1922 must also have had a very decisive influence on the formation of the Turkish national style in architecture which, as theorized and professed by Mimar Kemalettin himself, became extremely popular throughout the empire during its final years and continued to be popular in the early days of the republic. The new style implemented a revival of classical Ottoman architecture and glorified the works of Sinan and other Turkish masters of the sixteenth century. That architecture, particularly during the classical period, was greatly involved with finding structural solutions to covering large interior spaces in religious buildings in order to accommodate the maximum number of believers under a single dome. The tectonic character of Sinan’s works is well documented, tracing their remarkable evolution from the Sehzade and the Süleymaniye mosques to the unsurpassable Selimiye in Edirne. Although the interiors of these masterpieces are richly embellished with chromatic tiles, intricately designed and painted wall patterns, exquisite calligraphic bands, panels, and delicately carved marble mihrabs and minbars, the exteriors are strikingly stark, reflecting the powerful structural aspects of the building, with decorative touches only allowed at certain places to highlight architectonic elements. This unadorned, powerful display of structural resolution on the exterior of the classical Ottoman mosque is sometimes also explained as an effort to reflect on the outside the configuration of the interior spaces.

In contrast, Umayyad Arab architecture formulated after the early period of the first four caliphs was influenced by the decorative aspects of the Byzantino-Roman architectural tradition of Syria and Palestine with its mosaic-covered surfaces and delicate marble carvings. Intricately carved domes, multifoiled arches, highly decorated exterior surfaces, and alternating courses of multi-colored stones on walls were also standard characteristics of Mamluk architecture in Egypt. In North Africa and Spain, profusely carved plaster work accompanied by elaborate tilework conceal the structural members of monuments in such a way that it is almost impossible to read the construction system clearly.

Aware of such distinctive stylistic characteristics in the variegated architecture of the Islamic countries in the Middle East, Kemalettin Bey, the great master of the Turkish national style, under the influence of conflicting feelings of religion and patriotism, must have thought that his first proposal for the structural alteration of the masjid according to the principles of the prevailing Ottoman revivalism would have been a proper and contemporary approach to the restoration of this historically important but structurally insignificant and dilapidated building. He must also have thought that the centrally planned mosque type so perfected by the Ottomans would be the best solution for enhancing the importance of the Aqṣa. Therefore, he must have prepared his design, not to intervene, but to glorify and improve the building. The neighboring Dome of the Rock, which had gone through similar alterations under Ottoman rule, when notions of restoration were far from our own, may also have been a source of inspiration for such a proposal. Whatever the case, Kemalettin’s pride in national and religious values, coupled with his great admiration for the Haram monuments, must have led the architect to provide and defend such a controversial proposal involving major changes in the spatial quality of the Aqṣa.

Faculty of Architecture
Middle East Technical University
Ankara, Turkey

APPENDIX

CONCLUSIONS ARRÊTÉES À LA SÉANCE DE
LA COMMISSION TECHNIQUE SPECIALE
POUR L'EXAMEN DU MESJED EL AKSA,
EN DATE DU 23 FÉVRIER 192421

Après examen minutieux de l'état de la coupole du MESJED EL AKSA et de sa substructure, at des trois projets soumis par M. le Professeur Kemaeddin Bey, ainsi que le rapport présenté par les délégués Egyptiens signés M.M. Hamdy El Kattan Bey et Mahmoud Ahmed Eff. et après mûre délibération, la Commission réunie décide à l'unanimité de conclure en faveur du deuxième projet, dont le principe repose sur une formule envisa-
geant une consolidation avec la conservation de ce qui existe autant que possible. Ce projet peut se résumer ainsi: étayage de l’ensemble; renforcement des fondations; rectification des colonnes, renouvellement des tirants; conservation des arcs, des pendentifs, du tambour et autant que possible, de la coupole; et, en dehors de cela, toute réparation et réfection que M. Kemaleddin Bey jugerait nécessaire et praticable. La Commission ajoute que quoique le ler projet de reconstruction préférée et présenté par Kemaleddin Bey, donne un résultat plus fort et plus esthétique, l’unanimité approbation a été en faveur de la 2ème susdite proposition qui correspond exactement aux suggestions mentionnées dans le rapport des délégués Egyptiens par suite des considerations Archéologiques, religieuses et sociales.

A cet effet, la Commission est d’avoir qu’il faudrait donner a Kemaleddin Bey pleine liberté de choisir à discrétion les moyens à employer et de décider des mesures à prendre afin de mener tous les travaux envisagés par le projet énoncé ci-dessus à bonne fin. La Commission reconnaît que le travail à entreprendre est à la fois nécessaire et délicat, et estime qu’il est essentiel de mettre M. Kemaleddin Bey en mesure, pour l’exécuter, de se procurer à sa choix tout personnel technique dont il pourrait avoir besoin, et de se munir à sa discrétion de toutes les précautions spéciales que comporte une entreprise d’une telle délicatesse.

La Commission désire faire acte de sa haute approbation de la façon consciencieuse et habile avec laquelle M. le Professeur Kemaleddin Bey et son équipe technique ont étudié le problème et préparé les projets, et exprime sa conviction unanime que c’est grâce à cette préparation minutieuse et indispensable qu’il a été donné à la Commission de saisir toute la portée de ce problème extrêmement complexe et de prendre une décision en toute conscience, et en pleine conscience de cause.

Jerusalem, le 23 Février 1924
Prof. A. Kemaleddin
M. Nihad
PLO GuyAusland
B. Hamson A.R.I.B.A.
M. Djemal Mahmoud Ahmady

G.P. Richmond F.R.I.D.A.
Imam al-Aclami
Rouchdy El-Imam
H. Hussni

NOTES
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7. D. Bahat, Carta's Historical Atlas of Jerusalem (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 46; see also Creswell-Allan, Short Account, pp. 75-82.
8. Creswell-Allan, Short Account, pp. 79-82.
9. Ibid., pp. 76-77.
10. Ibid., pp. 77.
17. Ibid., pp. 1-2.
18. Ibid., pp. 3-5.
19. Ibid., pp. 5-8.
24. The original document was provided to me by Isam Awad, resident architect for the Restoration Committee of the Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.