

ject No. 2 (Badran) as the First Place, with Project No. 4 (Bofill) and Project No. 7 (Alousi) named to be invited to give support to the winner. This result was subsequently made public at the end of the Symposium held in Baghdad October 29-30, 1983. Action was not taken on the recommendation of the Jury pending the Symposium, after which new recommendations were made based on consideration of the first Jury's recommendation, plus the further considerations developed in the Symposium and the final decision of the Sponsor.

An International Symposium to assess the submissions of the work of the Competitors, under the patronage of His Excellency, President Saddam Hussein, was conducted by the Amanat-Al-Assima in association with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. In addition to all those previously involved in the Competition, there were invited Islamic architectural historians, religious officials and philosophers, architects, poets and others appropriate to this assessment, making an attendance of over 300 participants. The two-day open discussion (with continuing inspection of the submissions) took place in the National Assembly and was attended through much of the deliberation by His Excellency the President, who heard all the seven competitors make half-hour presentations and spoke at length as to his own considerations of the importance and purposes of the State Mosque, and its relation to the Islamic Nation as a whole. A summary of the Symposium follows this Brief History.

Summary of Proceedings

During this critical and exciting period of Iraq, the participants to this International Symposium were all conscious of taking part in an important historical event. This event was the search for values and greatness in perhaps the most important symbol in this era of aspiration with deep beliefs in Islam.

As his Excellency President Saddam Hussein stated so eloquently: "We are in a part of the process that responds to and is an outcome of the past; is deeply in the middle of the present; and is an advanced part of the future."

It was felt that all participated fully, reflecting on a complex problems and on the opportunities. For the first time a competition and symposium drew strength from the gathering of interna-

tional architects and many other experts.

His Excellency the President said that the contribution of the designers and others who took part in this process will be recognised. At the start of the Symposium, His Excellency Samir Abdul-Wahab, advised the participants to study the project of the State Mosque as a symbol in history. The main purpose of this Symposium was to study and to benefit from the observations of all those invited.

In the same spirit of study, it was proposed that a *framework* should be set up for continuous monitoring and that *categories* for further work should be suggested for the most important topics. It was also felt that by this means, the conclusions reached by all participants could be developed further for the decision makers' consideration.

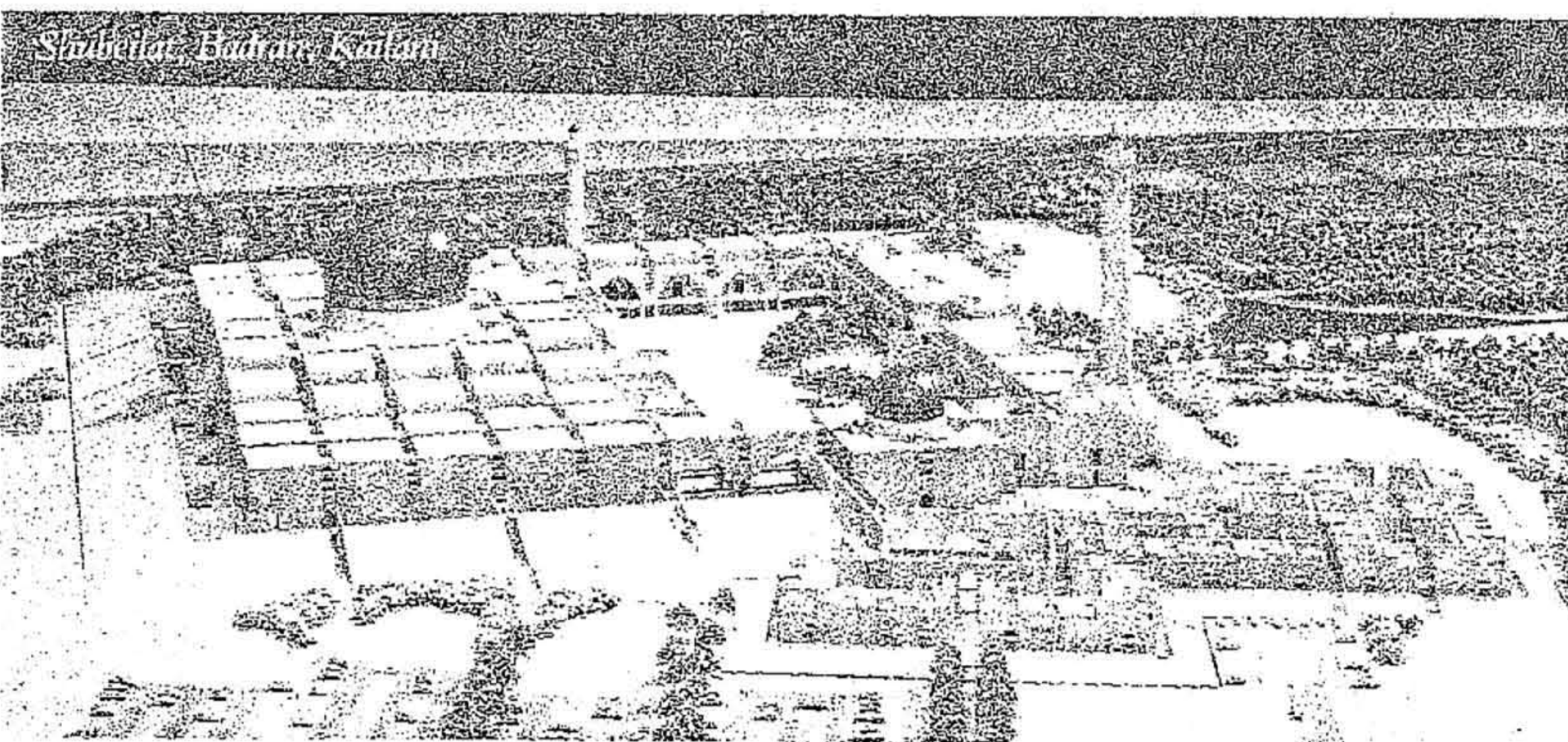
A list of categories of consideration, based on the Symposium discussions, was proposed for further development of this important study. The list was not in

and the World as a whole. In this way, all who pray there, will find the house of God they seek.

It was stated that prayer was the basic function of the Mosque. This was reinforced by many statements, but also stressed was the balance between social and cultural functions, as well as the teaching and community functions. An even more important balance was to be found and planned between the religious and spiritual and with the political or government aspects.

In his analogy with the strength of a tree, the President related the Present or Modern and the Traditional as a tree. The roots were the Past but without the branches and the leaves of the Future the tree would be without life. As Architect Venturi said: "precedent must be combined with invention."

It was envisaged that the mosque would be a work of *Distinguished Architecture*. This would be expressed by



any order of priority but recommended a sequence for developing the philosophical and design criteria from the general to the particular; from the physical to the spiritual.

It was proposed that the Mosque should be a "Great Symbol of development, shining all over the world, so every visitor will be excited to see it." It should have symbolic significance for the State, representing Life & Hope, acting as the link between Religion and Life and as a centre of knowledge and culture. Chairman Madfai suggested it should be a symbol of the tradition and originality of the Arab World.

Another important contribution was the *Scale*, the very size of the Mosque, which was established by studies undertaken by the Ministry of Awqaf for a capacity of 30,000 people. His Excellency the President said that scale would be representative of Iraq, the Arab nations

the impression, the mood and the impact, it would convey, to be remembered and to uplift the spirits of all.

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Reflections on the Projects ...

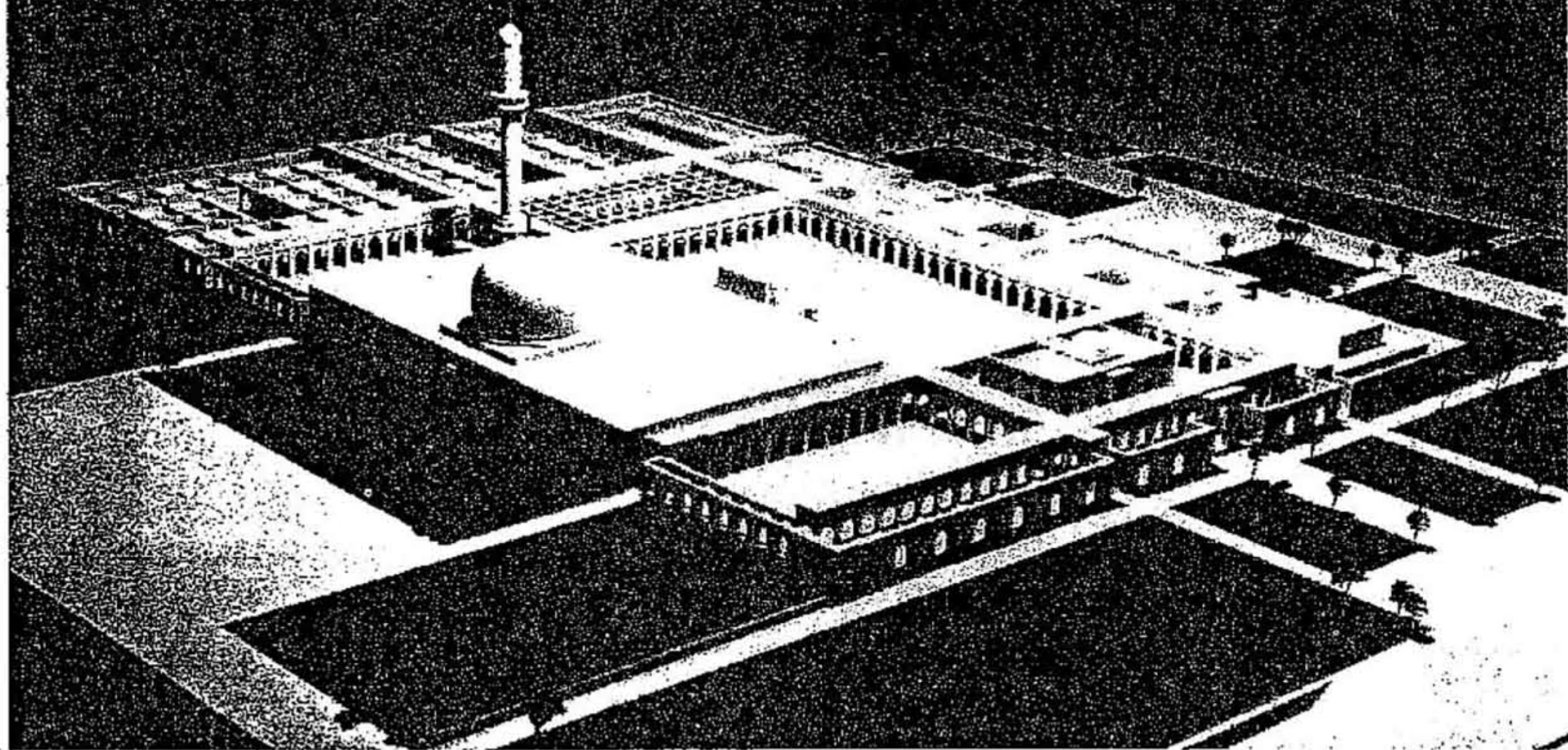
The essential question is that of constructing in 1983 a State mosque in Baghdad. This question entails three major problems, concerning: 1) The symbolic nature of the monument; 2) The typology of the religious edifice; 3) The formal language that is most appropriate.

1) The problem of the symbolic nature of the State mosque can be formulated immediately in a most obvious way. It is an exceptional monument that must take its roots in a tradition, and must symbolise the yearning of the Iraqi people towards a future of spiritual, mor-

al, and material progress. Such a monument ought to be located at the centre of the nation, and offer itself as a sign of gathering together, of social consensus and national unity.

However, the monumental expression of such a programme presents several alternatives, or possibilities of choice, the results of which might conceivably be contradictory. The monumentality could be obtained first of all by the situation of the mosque in the city, and the relationships which it may have with the other monuments of that city. The singularity of the site, its isolation and its centrality are factors which lend monumentality to an architectural object. In the Arabo-Islamic tradition, the founders of capital cities used to place the Great Mosque at the geometric centre of the city and to have the urban design depend upon this centre. Thus, the Baghdad of al-Mansour might obviously be consi-

Tesi/Maath Alousi



the starting point of a radical restructuring of the urban periphery. The actual site might certainly offer the opportunity for a great, monumental display, but the symbolic nature of the building, and even its functioning, might run the risk of being handicapped by distance and isolation from the most active areas of the city.

With regard to the intrinsically monumental quality of the building, it depends upon several objectives, which could be attained separately or as a group in order to obtain the maximum rhetorical effect. This latter feature, of saturation of effects, always involves a great risk — which might even go against the idea of a mosque in traditional Islamic thinking. One can attain monumentality simply through gigantic scale, i.e., height, covered surfaces, volume of the edifice. This is the only quality of the project by Mr. Makiya, and to a lesser extent, in the projects by Mr. Venturi and Mr. Bofill.

One can also attempt rhetorical pomposity by creating a system of axial composition, play a symmetry, and perspective effects to reinforce a strong visual hierarchy of volumes and their submission to a predominant centre. This is perceptible in the projects by Mr. Bofill and Mr. Al-Madfai. But this baroque configuration of space is used very rarely in Arab tradition. Some of the competitors here are misled in making references to the Taj Mahal — which is a mausoleum, not a mosque, and was erected by a king in order to glorify his own dynasty. This has nothing to do with Islam as a faith.

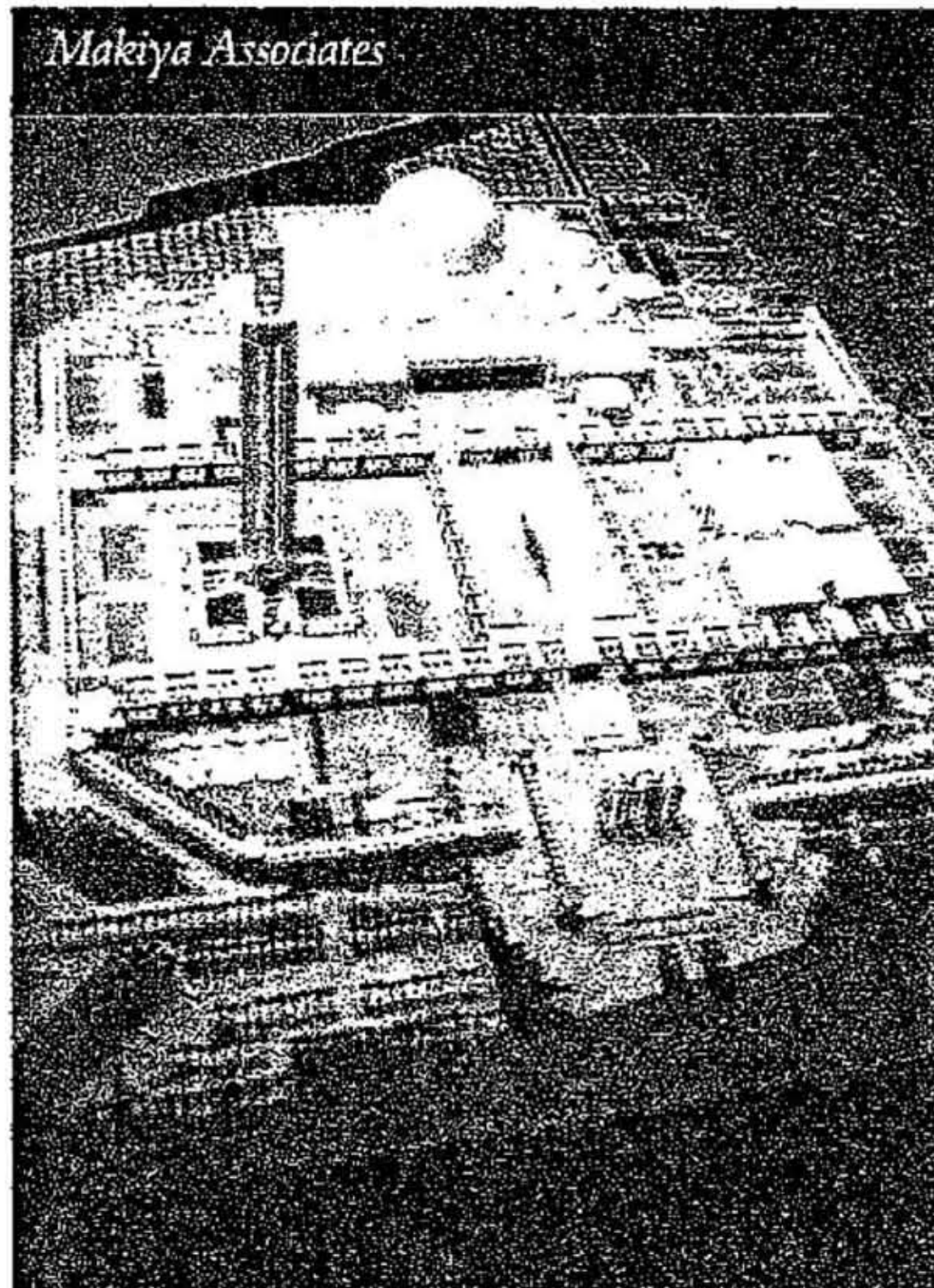
However, monumental singularity can also result from decorative accumulation, ornamental richness, and a sumptuous use of materials which tend towards a total semantic saturation of space. We find the use of these effects frequently in a particular tradition of Ara-

bo-Islamic architecture in Iraq itself (at Kerbala, Kufa, or Baghdad). The projects by Mr. Makiya, by Mr. Venturi and by Mr. Al-Madfai refer explicitly to that tradition but they tend to forget that Arab architecture keeps this colourful ornamental sumptuousness for enclosed spaces, only glimpsed from doorways, and for volumes which dominate the enclosure, such as minarets and cupolas.

Finally, there is one last means to attain monumentality without having recourse either to gigantic scale, axial rhetoric, or external decorative richness, and which is quite frequent in the grand tradition of Arab architecture. It is obtained by way of a juxtaposed richness of simple spaces, the multiplicity and the diversity of sequences, of discoveries, by the grandeur and geometric perfection of various volumes, the careful balance of materials for decoration and of colour. The *anti-rhetorical* character of the project by Mr. Badran, above all by Mr. Alousi, belong to this category.

2) The second problem raised by the construction of the State Mosque is that of either staying within the bounds of a typology which has been the same for centuries, or of possibly going beyond that typology. The typology for the mosque was established very early in the history of Islam. The conditions for individual and collective prayer, having been rigorously formulated by sacred texts, were probably determinant in creating a certain number of essential characteristics of a primitive type of mosque: the call to prayer, the purification rituals, the definition of the sacred enclosure, the orientation towards the *Ka'ba*, the egalitarian alignment of all the faithful parallel to the *qibla* and behind the Imam are so many elements containing the necessary geometric attributes for explaining the plan of the first mosques. But, they are

Makiya Associates



dered the archetype for this kind of strategy; and, the isolation introduced by the Abbasid Califs around the State Mosque reinforced its monumentality, but we should not be misled about the significance of this isolation. It is not a separation of the Mosque from the city itself; on the contrary, it signifies the equidistant positioning of the faithful around their most important symbol.

The site selected for this competition is vast, isolated, but separated from the city. Without wishing to place the State Mosque at the heart of Baghdad, it might have been possible to imagine that its location could reinforce one of the major existing poles of development in Greater Baghdad; or, that this mosque become

inadequate for revealing not only certain necessary spaces, their form and their sequence (like the court, for example), but also the presence of certain symbolic elements like the cupola, the niche, or the arch. It is therefore around these spaces and these architectural elements that variations on the primitive type were developed, that can be observed in diverse Islamic cultures throughout history. Nevertheless, one might ask if it is possible to go even further, to do as modern architecture has so often done and force oneself to go beyond the traditional type, in order to invent another. Certainly not, because the essential function of a religious edifice is permanence, it cannot be "modernised" since it is outside of time and of history. The mosque typology is much more than a spatial disposition because certain symbolic qualities of its spaces are implied by the very practices of the faithful.

Most of the competing projects have glorified the cupola as a symbol of the heavens and of God himself, whereas in the mosque-type (which is different from certain types of Christian churches) the cupola is never the dominant theme, given that one of the geometric properties of the cupola — its centralising force — contradicts the linear and parallel geometry of the faithful united in collective prayer facing the *qibla*. One of the projects, that by Mr. Makiya, goes so far in exploiting the dome that the *qibla* wall becomes transformed into a vast apse, which in fact runs contrary to the spirit of the Mosque typology.

In my opinion, modernity therefore consists in a return to the essential aspects of a primitive typology for the prayer hall.

With regard to the courtyard which precedes the hall and which serves, as everyone knows, for prayer as well, it should retain a closed, autonomous, mineral quality, protected from the exterior; its geometry ought to be a reflection of that of the prayer hall.

Several of the present projects, either out of a desire to be modern or out of a misunderstanding of the problem, radically transform the idea of the court. Mr. Makiya make it into a vast, monumental square open to the winds. Mr. Venturi treats it like a public hall by covering it with a cupola, while Mr Al-Madfai gives it the aspect of a garden that serves as a transition between the prayer hall and surrounding buildings. Finally, and certainly more subtly, Mr. Badran preserves

the closed, geometric character of the court but weakens its autonomy, its isolation as a space unto itself, by giving it the function of a distribution area for annexes to the Mosque. Only Mr. Bofill and Mr. Alousi give back to the court its true character of a room open to the sky, a space conducive to prayer for the believer, but also designed for prayer. The places for ablutions which accompany and/or precede the court have vanished, or been assimilated into "modern sanitary facilities", in all of the projects except one (by Mr. Alousi) which is to say they have simply been relegated to the level of hygiene, or total insignificance. Paradoxically, however, many of the competitors have included ornamental pools, a symbolic incorporation of water, without realising that it is precisely in the cleansing act that the symbol retains its maximum effect. To be convinced of this, it should suffice to take a look at several superb examples of ablution places in mosques throughout the Islamic world, whether in Turkey, India, Yemen, Egypt or Morocco.

In addition, I would like to raise a problem which was widely debated, that of the minaret. Of course, the minaret



serves for the call to prayer and it is, by its high elevation, a symbol. In the ancient cities of Islam the minarets dominated all the other buildings around them, manifesting the hierarchy of values upon which Islamic society was founded. Today Western modernism, with its materialistic values based on money and consumerism, has endowed these cities with high-rise buildings intended for bureaucracy and for business, thereby destroying the visual imagery of spiritual values that predominated in the city. A question, then, comes to the fore: is it possible for *two* forms, symbolising totally opposed values, to coexist in a modern city? Should we make minarets higher than the office towers? Or rather, should not political powers define codes for

limiting the heights of buildings, which would clearly impose a sense of monumental hierarchy upon the city? This was always the case in the ancient cities of the Arabo-Islamic world. It is this latter solution, in our opinion, which is the most global, the most difficult, but also the most courageous that the urban planning authorities in Iraq could adopt.

3) In conclusion, I should like to address the issue of references to tradition through the choice of an architectural language. Here, the question is not exclusively one of religion, since it implies the whole cultural domain of Arabo-Islamic societies asserting their existence in the face of cultural imperialism by industrialised countries. In this respect both Eastern socialism and Western capitalism have certain things in common: references to a cultural tradition in order to make it live again does not just mean undertaking a superficial game of stylistic references, Abbasid or other, to which many of the competitors have succumbed. Stylistic games which are not morally reprehensible in themselves, and perhaps can be an indispensable step in emphasising visible differences with the modernity of developed countries; and, national traditions may even have value again in the eyes of certain Arab peoples. But such an endeavour may become useless and even negative if it leads only to camouflaging surfaces that marks a space, whose very concept, for example is foreign to Arabo-Islamic culture. The primary effort by architects should rather modestly consist therefore in learning the essential elements of a tradition, particularly the Arabo-Islamic concept of space, a concept which denotes a specific kind of space that ought to be understood as much by its visual manifestations, by its geometrical or compositional order, proportions or ornamentation, as by its mode of production and its social and cultural effects. From this point of view, most of the projects presented have little relationship with an Arab concept of space.

Only the project by Mr. Alousi reflects this, by a multiplicity and juxtaposition of spaces. Above all Mr. Alousi indicates an approach which easily does without the heavy stylistic allusions in order to attain an essential, and regenerated expression that is compatible with our time.

Bernard Huet
Symposium participant