



**FROM STONE TO THE SPIRIT OF THE BEING: KAABA, THE LARGEST NATURAL
MANDALA**

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ABSTRACT

In this article the main question is the semantic anatomy of Kaaba and its different aspects, especially the relationships between its symbolic structure and its meaningful significations; moreover the spiritual and symbolical functions of Kaaba is studied here. In this research this question has been answered that how Kaaba is a natural Mandala? And which qualities it has? and what are the hidden significations of this central structure? In this article, symbology, comparative studies and especially interpretive hermeneutics and hermeneutic analysis has been used as method to reach results; and also deductive reasoning and analogies has been used to reach the hidden meanings and significations of this key construction in the world; it has been tried to show some esoteric meanings; the meanings of it's form and qualities have been discovered here and for this goal Islamic interpretations and the concepts in celestial Book of Muslims and also Islamic philosophy and Sophia has been used. Some main results reached in this article is that Kaaba is the largest natural and alive Mandala in the world which has been formed in a human-architectural construction and hajjis or circumambaltors are elements of this huge alive Mandala; with their presence in it, they experience "Integral Unity" with the world and cosmos and other beings; also Kaaba is Axix Mundi and center of the world according to

Islamic cosmology; Kaaba is a symbol of central position of Godhood that all the world and being is turning around it.

Keywords: Symbology, Kaaba, Natural Mandala, Islamic Sophia/Philosophy, Sacred Architecture

INTRODUCTION

In this writing we have studied different aspects of Kaaba from the symbological point of view and its significations. Kaaba is the central and the most important temple and sacred structure in the world of Islam and also is Muslim's Kiblah and the center of other temples and mosques in Islamic perspective. Here we encounter the important concept of the "Center" and "Axis" and through it, it would be more described that why this central construction has this high important position in Islamic worldview and cosmology; and also it is described that how is defined its central position in Islamic worldview. Moreover through opening and discovering its meanings and its significant layers, we know this sacred structure more and more and we become familiar to its functions and especially implicative functions. So here through analyzing and also opening its symbolical meanings and its symbolical functions, we reach this aim.

We should have in mind that Kaaba as a key construction in Islamic architecture and even the key sacred architecture in Monotheistic religions has been considered in a special way and with having a true and vast

knowledge about it and studying it in a true way, we can reach the knowledge of the models and key-models and rules in the sacred architecture; because we can call Kaaba, the "temple of temples" or the "Mosque of Mosques". So as a key-structures, or an archetypal construction, understanding its symbolical meanings hidden in it, and its symbolical functions could be very effective for reaching a more vast knowledge about sacred world and sacred architecture which is made of symbols, hidden meanings and secrets.

In fact Kaaba is the archetypal model structure for all the mosques and temples in Islamic worldview and it is the center of all other temples in Islamic universe.

As method we have used the knowledge of symbology and especially we have used comparative studying because in this we would be able to reach the essence of the subject which has been the question in different cultures and traditions; here we find similarities that shows the main problem and far from different names and labels we can observe the main problem.

Here also we have used hermeneutical interpretations which are confirmed with reasoning and analogies; deductions have been made from after comparing and reasoning. So here we have both philosophy and hermeneutics and also we have knowledge and symbology which are joined together and we reach similar results through both approaches.

Background

Here we consider the most important or distinguished works on our subject although it is necessary to say that there are many other books and articles which could be mentioned; but we have chosen the most key-works to review here.

Henry Corbin in the field of symbology of Kaaba and studying it as a sacred construction and also its meanings and symbolical meanings in Islamic Sophia and philosophy has distinguished writings in which he has used especially the writings of Shiite philosopher, Ghaazi Sa'id-e Ghomi,ⁱ and he has published his work in French by the title *Temple et Contemplation* in 1980 which is translated to English in 1986 with this title: *Temple and Contemplation*. Corbin has written a very deep book on esoteric aspects of structure in Kaaba and generally about sacred temple and especially he has

written according to Shiite philosophy, cosmology and epistemology.

Another important work that has been especially written on this subject, is a book by Titus Burckhardt; although it is more about Islamic mosque. Burckhardt has studied the meanings in temple and Islamic mosque in his books *Sacred Art in East and West*ⁱⁱ and *Art of Islam*.ⁱⁱⁱ

René Guénon with a very deep and vast look and also with comparative approach has been studied the hidden meanings of Islam and Kaaba and generally sacred temple, in his different works. We can say that this subject has been studied in the traditionalist context and traditionalists' works; for instance a work by Martin Lings has also approached this subject^{iv}.

Also from the point of view of symbology and exact psychological approaches, Carl Gustav Jung has very vast writings that could be considered in this research. He has especially studied and analyzed Mandalas in his writings and has used it as a method for knowing and especially as a way to discover the knowledge of the "Self" which is considered in our article as the Spirit. Also in some works of his pupils, like Anila Jaffé in his book: *Word and Image*.^v

Mandala and its Functions

Mandala or Mandalah is a Sanskrit word which means "circle"^{vi}. Mandala is a pure symbolic figure which is constructed from a central square and circles around it; it has usually four gates corresponding four main directions which show the gates of Heaven or the gates of cosmos or Skies. Mandalas have different and various colors are ornamented in different shapes and with various colors but the main structure is the central square and circles around it which is common in all Mandalas. It is used for spiritual aims and especially for meditation, by monks and spiritual schools especially in Buddhism and in Tibet and India, and some other places in East and it is found in many other places all around the world, for example we can find some types of Mandalas by Celts.

What is really important here is the function of Mandala as a very fundamental symbol of the "Self".^{vii} Mandala is a fundamental symbol which shows all the cosmos^{viii}; because all the cosmos is an expansion and an emanation and the manifestation of the Self in traditional cosmology, especially in Vedanta. And a symbol of absolute Truth is placed at the center of Mandala^{ix}; which is in correspondence with Kaaba at the center of the world and cosmos in Islamic cosmology.

In East some people use Mandalas to reach inner unity through meditating on it and by gazing at it for a relatively long time. By this way they reach deeper states of consciousness and they can touch the inner parts of their existence. Mandala is also used for cure and remedy in East, and C. G. Jung has considered this aspect in his works and in his psychological school and he has studied Mandalas and their functions vastly.

Ontological states and layers in Kaaba

One of the most important points here is that Kaaba as the Axis Mundi and the central point in Islamic cosmology is connected with the concept of the "world Egg" or the "world Seed" which is known as Brahmanda (Brahma's anda) in Vedanta: The Egg of Brahma. This approach opens layers and states around Kabaa; In fact this is considered as a very basic rule that according to many Creation Narrations in sacred texts, all the world or cosmos has been formed from a unique Egg^x or Seed, which is called Bindu in Sanskrit and Vedanta which means "seed". This first and unique Egg or Seed has all the world in itself potentially, and in some texts it is said that the upper half of this Egg is transformed to skies and the lower part transforms to the Earth and its yolk, is transformed to the Sun, which has a central and light-full role in the symbolical

cosmology. And it should be considered that cosmology is symbolic in itself and in different traditions and religions and even the cosmology of our age; so there are many secrets and mysteries to be discovered here.

What is important here, is the different layers which are surround the symbol of center and it is quite like the description which exists now in modern cosmology that for example describes the cosmos as a model of "Nutshell"^{xi}, in which all the layers of the cosmos are placed on each other like a structure of a walnut; and this is what we see symbolically in the circles of circumambulators in Kaaba.

In other words, emanating from a unique center is a fundamental model in nature and galaxies and in fact in cosmos. For instance we see this model in huge structures in galaxies, solar system or in the form of a sunflower. This is the same model which is observed in Kaaba and the orbits or circles of circumambulators around it. This is a complete representation of this symbol: Mandala.

Kaaba is a huge Mandala and Mandala is an equivalent to the Self itself. And this is the point that we can observe in the philosophy of sacred architecture and especially temples, because they are a design and a reconstruction or a representation of cosmos

or the world; for example in some Hindu or Buddhist temples, the plan of the temple is exactly a Mandala; a plan which is a representation of different states or layers of the cosmos or Being.

This is a symbol of the center, which is a divine symbol in itself,^{xii} and we can see the worshipers circumambulating around the Divine center; and this is the key-model of the cosmos which is symbolically manifested in different dimensions as atom, Solar system, galaxy systems and many others instances all around the world.

A very delicate point here is that, human itself corresponding to traditional knowledge, is a microcosm in which all the universe or cosmos or macrocosm is reflected and manifested; so all the universe is also an expansion of this microcosm of in fact its essence or seed or Bindu which is the essential part of his/her existence: the Self; and so human is a symbol of the world itself.

As in Islamic philosophy is asserted: "Human is microcosm and universe is macrocosm" and what is so important is that these two are equivalent and even unique; in other words, two manifestation of a unique essence.

In addition in sacred architecture, the temple is a representation of the cosmos itself; so human, temple (sacred structure)

and universe are similar and they are three images of three manifestations of a unique essence. So here the details become very important and as we find in ancient philosophies, the different parts of the universe are equivalents to different organs or parts of human body; as it is especially insisted in knowledge and science of renaissance period.

So in Kaaba, all these microcosms (circumambulators or Hajjis) are turning around the Divine center; and it means in all universe, all the beings and stars and galaxies (worlds/macrocosms) are turning around the central infinite Divine Existence of central Divine Light; and this is the essential meaning of Mandala and because of this implicit meaning and symbolical function, someone who meditates on a Mandala, reaches inner, mental and spiritual unity and integration; and Koran, the Holy Book of Muslims has pointed to this fact.

In fact in Kaaba we observe a very great temple which itself is a manifestation of the cosmos and the cosmos is also an enormous temple in ancient wisdom; Indeed the circles around Kaaba are the spheres and skies around the Divine center, which is in heart of every being and the secret of turning is also this praising; so all the cosmos is functioning as a rosary and is praising all the time, as is

mentioned in Koran. Stars and beings are all, different parts of the "universal rosary", as we see in Kaaba in which circumambulators are the same as these parts; and we observe this rosary in micro dimensions as in atom, and also in macro dimensions, as in Solar system; and they are all turning and turning like whirling dervishes in Konya or Rumi's school. So all the universe is a symbolical enormous rosary that is whirling and praising permanently; and this fact is mentioned in Koran.^{xiii}

So the universal or cosmic rosary or the cosmic temple, is manifested in the archetypical temple and in Kaaba which is the central and the first temple in Islamic and Abrahamic traditions' cosmology; here is a point that Kaaba is not a typical mosque, so it belongs to all monotheistic traditions, and not only Muslims.

There are sayings (hadith) and traditions in Islam which show that Kaaba is situated on the axis of the world which is known as Axis Mundi (axis of the world); For example it is said that in the fourth sky above the Earth, there is the main construction of Kaaba, which existed before the Flood and because of the Flood it was transferred to the sky and after that, this Holy house was again reconstructed on Earth. The house which is situated in the fourth (or another high) sky -

as in Islamic cosmology skies has been described in seven stated - is the main house which is called "Beyt-e ma'moor" which means the "cultivated/thriving house". So at this central axis, these two Houses are joined; one in the sky and one on the Earth; and we will see that the one which is on Earth is an image (representation) and a symbol of the one in the sky; and it is said that the main one was transferred to the sky, and it means that the original house is in the sky and the one that was rebuilt by prophet Abraham was in accordance to the first one and it is its equivalent on Earth. So it means that they are situated on the spiritual geography or position or axis which is the central axis of the world or the Axis mundi, that as we saw, all the world and beings are turning around this Divine center.

The fix and permanent stone and circles of moving circumambulators

There is an opposition here that reveals hidden meanings. We have the black fix stable stone of Kaaba (the main cubic building), and moving white circles of circumambulators and in this opposition we find many deep significations. One of them is that in this collection – and in this natural Mandala – we find from stone, which is solid and the first type of beings to human which is the most developed creature according to

Islamic worldview. So here we have all of the beings in one great alive Mandala; it is another reason that shows Mandala is an equivalent to all the cosmos; and this is a very important meaning for Mandala.

In addition among qualities which are attributed to Godhood, being Permanent and eternity is one of the most familiar ones. And generally, eternity that goes beyond the relative time is a divine characteristic in itself. It has also a very clear relationship with the term "Arsh" (the Epyrean/ Throne) which is a key concept in sacred Islamic and monotheistic texts and points to the highest place in this cosmology. After "Arsh" we have "Korsi" (Kursi/chair) which is the place of acting and moving and is the world of change; According to *Koran*, Kursi is as vast as skies and the Earth^{xiv}.

In Islamic philosophy and cosmology it is said that spheres of the skies is a part of Kursi as in works written by Avicenna (Ibn-e Sina)^{xv}.

So the fix and permanent central stone and moving white circles are also a symbolic representation of Arsh and Kursi which are amongst the most important terms in Islamic cosmology; especially when we consider that all Haram's area – including Kaaba and circumambulators - is a sacred place. But we should pay attention that in Kaaba everything

is sacred, so it means all the being – which is represented in the Mandala of Kaaba – and all the cosmos is sacred and it is a meaning that exists in etymology of Holly and Whole that points to this fact that "All" or the Whole is Holly.

Here we have also the opposition of the light-full worlds in sky and Malakut (kingdom of Heaven) and angels and the solid, terrestrial world of earth and soil. In ancient cosmologies the more we get close to the Divine center, the light becomes more and more and the spiritual qualities grow, as for instance in Zoroastrianism (Mazdyasna), the highest sky is the world of "infinite Light" or "Anghra raochang'h" in Avestan language.^{xvi} And it is so close and similar to the descriptions of the universe and the states of lights which is described by Sohrevardi in his book, *Hikmat-ol- Eshragh*.^{xvii}

So the inner part of the Haram is a symbol of the most pure and light-full states of the being which is pointed to, by the name of Ten great Intellects or the Ten Intellects in Islamic philosophy^{xviii}. Each sky is the product of the thinking of its higher Intellect to itself^{xix}; because of this thinking two things are born; one is a sphere or sky and the other one is the next Intellect, which is like a descendant to the former Intellect. Step by step the amount of the first Light is

reduced and in the tenth step, which is the sphere/sky of the Moon, there is no potential left to form or create another great Intellect; so the process of making skies is stopped here and after the sphere of Moon – which is called the world beneath moon – there is Earth and terrestrial domain that does not have a celestial quality and there is soil and solidity; But the main substance of skies or upper spheres is Ether, the fifth essence or substance (Quintessence).

So skies have a light-full and delicate, Etheric quality; Earth has a solid, fix and stable quality and here we have a clear opposition. As it was pointed, each sphere is an image or reflection of the higher Intellect; So in lower parts and beings or states, we can see the images/reflections of the higher states and this is exactly what is asserted by ancient wisdom that "as above, so bellow" which is a really important principle rule in symbology and ancient cosmology and for analyzing symbols and specially sacred symbols it is really useful.

As a result we can see, the patterns and the archetypes or key-models in skies and in higher states of Being, on Earth in the form of different beings and specially in nature and in "Sacred Art" which is formed according to universal and higher rules and patterns. And so Kaaba is an image of the

main House or the main pattern which exists in higher skies.

In another word, what exists in higher states of Being (which is symbolized as Skies) is reflected and formed on Earth; so Earth which is the lowest state after skies, is a true collection of reflections and images of all higher worlds; and we can say that Earth is an abstraction or a very abstract image or reflection of all of cosmos. So in Mandala of Kaaba we find all, which is represented in the central cube/square (Earth or soil world) and circles (Skies/spheres) and this is the meaning of a sacred symbol which shows all the cosmos.

CONCLUSION

We pointed to some dimensions of the hidden meanings and significations in the philosophy of sacred architecture, in the keystone temple in Islam and other monotheistic religions. As it is mentioned, Kaaba shows the different states of being and the structure of the cosmos, with symbolic forms and structures and even through colors and the positions of its elements; Kaaba is itself a true image and symbol of Axis Mundi of the cosmic axis. Moreover Kaaba makes man understand and perceive the structure of the universe and the world and also the sense of unity unconsciously.

when someone participates in the atmosphere of circumambulation around Kaaba, can touch the sense of being united with all the world and all other beings and with the unique Being; this is what many of the distinguished people that have participated circumambulating have felt; This is one of the most important functions of this key temple in which human can feel the integrity and unity and holiness; and this function as we described is found also in the symbolic pattern of Mandala; And we observed that Kaaba is an alive natural Mandala that people are its parts and elements, and in its integrity they become united and they can experience the integral unity which exists in the cosmos and even in ecosystems on Earth. This function is also available only by looking with attention and thinking to its image, as it is occurs during meditation among Tibetan monks or other spiritual schools.

As it is mentioned the main pattern and structure of a Mandala is the same as Kaaba's and in addition to theoretical significations, there are practical functions for this dynamic alive Mandala that one of them is dissolving individuality of the person in the integrity and unity of the whole cosmos. This function is justified and proved also by psychological

facts and approaches, and also by philosophical and other disciplines.

Kaaba and participating in it is a manifestation of cosmic unity and is a practical symbol of surrender. As we saw we can consider Kaaba as the most enormous alive Mandala on Earth, in which being constructed from humans is a really unique quality all around the world; because other known Mandalas are painted by colors, soils, natural materials or with architectural materials and generally with solid materials which are fix. But in Kaaba the material includes stone and soil, as well as human and soul. So it is an alive construction or an alive and dynamic Mandala in which we observe all states of being, from stone to Divine Spirit.

Mandala which exists lively in Kaaba is also a symbol of integrity and wholeness (holiness) of the Self/Spirit, so participating in an alive Mandala could have a great effect on participants' consciousness and unconsciously, the experience the Unity with Beint; and in Kaaba instead of looking to the Mandala, people become a part of this enormous Mandala and they are dissolved in its whole and holly pattern and become a part of the Universal Rosary or cosmic Mandala; in this way they are dissolved, in the one unique Universe that every part and element

in it is correlated to other parts, far from egoistic thoughts; and this is the secret of true surrender which is the basis of Islam and other spiritual schools, as the word Islam means: surrender, health and peace, and a true Muslim is someone who is integrated with the cosmos and holy life and lives in peace and harmony with other beings and his/her selfishness is dissolved in the sacred integral unity of Being.

NOTES

ⁱ Corbin, Henry. 2009. *Temple and Contemplation*, Translated by Philip Sherrard, Routledge, New York.

ⁱⁱ Burckhardt, Titus. 2001. *Sacred Art in East and West*, translated by Lord Northbourne, Fons Vitae.

ⁱⁱⁱ Burckhardt, Titus. 2009. *Art of Islam, Language and Meaning*, World Wisdom, Indiana.

^{iv} Lings, Martin. 2006. *Symbol and Archetype: A Study in the Meaning of Existence*, Quinta Essentia

^v Jung, C. G; Jaffé, Anila. 1983. *Word and Image*, Princeton University Press.

^{vi} Tucci, Giuseppe, 2013. *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala: With Special Reference to the Modern Psychology of the Unconscious*, New Age Books.

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^{ix}Ibid.

^x Eliade, Mircea, 1991. *Essential Sacred Writings From Around the World*, HarperOne (Reprint edition Edition).

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^{xiii} Chevalier, Jean and Gheerbrant, Alan, 2008. *The Pinguin Dictionary of Symbols, (Farhang-e Namaadha)* translated by Sudabeh Fazayeli, 5th vol. , Jeyhoon publications, Tehran. pp. 215-217.

^{xiii} Koran

^{xiv}Koran, Baghareh: 255

^{xv} Corbin, Henry, 2008. *Ibn-e Sinaa va Tamsil-e Erfaani*, translated by Ensha'ALLAH Rahmati, Jaami publications, Tehran.

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^{xvii} Yasrebi, Yahya, 2007. *Hekmat-e Eshraagh-e Sohrevardi*, Boostan-e Ketaab, Qum.

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^{xix}Ibid.

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