

Great Mosque of Kairouan



○ Introduction:-

The Mosque of Uqba also known as the Great Mosque of Kairouan, is an early example of a hypostyle mosque that also reflects how pre-Islamic and eastern Islamic art and motifs were incorporated into the religious architecture of Islamic North Africa.

○ Founder:-

Kairouan flourished under the Aghlabid dynasty in the 9th century. The mosque, as it stands today, was built by Ziyadat Allah, between 817 and 838 AD.

○ Location:-

Located in the centre of Tunisia in a plain at an almost equal distance from the sea and the mountain, Kairouan is the most ancient Arabo-Muslim base of the Maghreb, located in the historic walled district of the Medina.

Kairouan bears unique witness to the first centuries of this civilisation and its architectural and urban development.

Aghlabid dynasty

The Aghlabids were an Arab dynasty of emirs from Banu Tamim, who ruled Ifriqiya, nominally on behalf of the Abbasid Caliph, for about a century, until overthrown by the new power of the Fatimids. The decline of the dynasty began after the attack by the Tulunids of Egypt.



History:-

- The Great Mosque at Kairouan inherited the site of the first Muslim oratory in the Maghreb, which was built by 'Uqba ibn Nafi in 50 (670).
- Renovations was conducted by Hasan ibn Nu'man in 84 (703).
- Enlargements of the mosque done under the governor Bichr ibn Safwan (103–9 / 722–8).
- Another renovation done under Yazid ibn Hatim in 155 (772).
- Finally, the mosque was totally rebuilt by the Aghlabid prince Ziyadat Allah I in 221 (836), when it assumed its current dimensions.

For centuries, the Great Mosque of Kairouan has served as a pilgrimage destination for North Africans not able to make the long trip to Mecca. According to popular belief, seven trips to Kairouan was worth one hajj to Mecca.

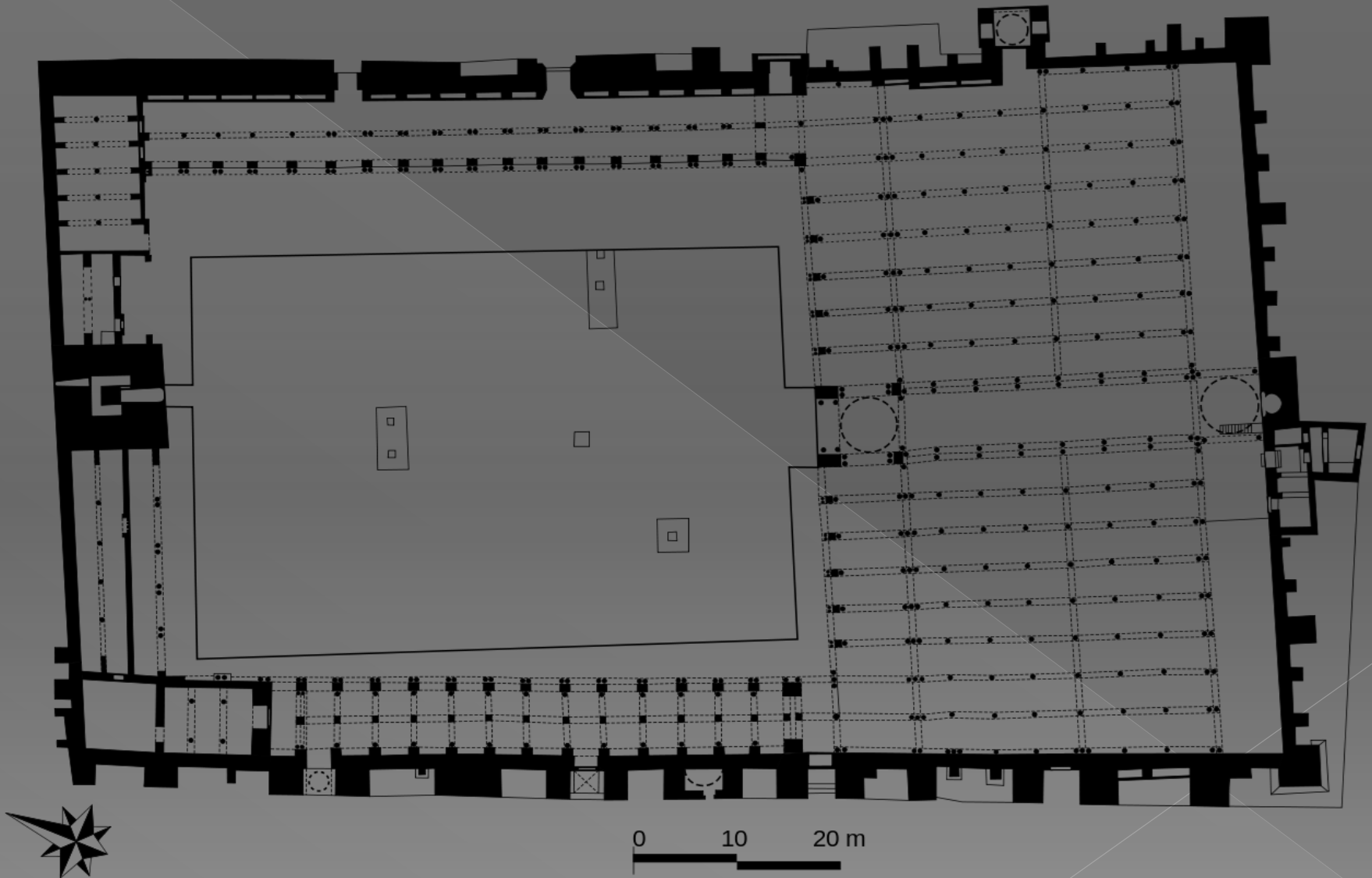


● Planing of the mosque:-

- The exterior of the Great Mosque of Kairouan, with buttressed walls, is in the typically austere Aghlabid design.
- There are several gates with porches.
- The grand minaret indicates the buildings significance and the mosque becomes far more impressive upon entering.
- Muslims can enter the mosque through nine different gates.
- non-Muslim visitors use the main gate on rue Oqba ibn Nafaa .
- The enclosure of the Great Mosque of Kairouan is pierced by nine gates (six opening on the courtyard, two opening on the prayer hall and a ninth allows access to the maqsura).
- The mosque is slightly irregular in shape, the complex measures about 70 by 125 meters and is aligned northwest-southeast.
- It consists of an arcaded rectangular courtyard with the prayer hall to its southeast, preceded by a seventeen-bay portico.



Plan of the mosque



○ Architectural elements of the mosque:-

○ Courtyard:-

○ The courtyard is a vast trapezoidal area whose interior dimensions are approximately 67 by 52 meters.[40][41] It is surrounded on all its four sides by a portico with double rows of arches, opened by slightly horseshoe arches supported by columns in various marbles, in granite or in porphyry.

○ Ribbed dome:-

The portico on the south side of the courtyard, near the prayer hall, includes in its middle a large dressed stone pointed horseshoe arch which rests on ancient columns of white veined marble with Corinthian capitals. This porch of seven meters high is topped with a square base upon which rests a semi-spherical ribbed dome .

The intermediary area, the dodecagonal drum of the dome, is pierced by sixteen small rectangular windows set into rounded niches.

○ Minaret :-

The minaret perhaps inspired by Roman lighthouses, is the massive square minaret is about which is 32 meters tall. It is located inside the enclosure and does not have direct access from the outside .it was placed just off the mihrab axis. The interior includes a staircase of 129 steps, which gives access to the terraces and the first tier of the minaret. The door giving access to the minaret is framed by a lintel and jambs made of recycled carved friezes of antique origin.



Mihraab:-

The central aisle leads to the 9th-century tiled mihrab (niche indicating the direction of Mecca) on the south side of the mosque. The lower portion of the mihrab is decorated with openwork marble panels in floral and geometric vine designs. It is covered by a painted wooden half-dome with foliate scrolls and five-lobed leaves. The niche has 28 panels of pierced or chased marble.

Minbar:-

The minbar, also from the 3rd century AH (9th AD), is the oldest Muslim preacher's chair that we possess. It is made of more than 300 pieces of Indian teak. The wood-carving combines Byzantine and Mesopotamian influences. The minbar, situated on the right of the mihrab, is used by the imam during the Friday or Eids sermons, is a staircase-shaped pulpit with an upper seat, reached by eleven steps, and measuring 3.93 meters length to 3.31 meters in height.



○ Maqsura:-

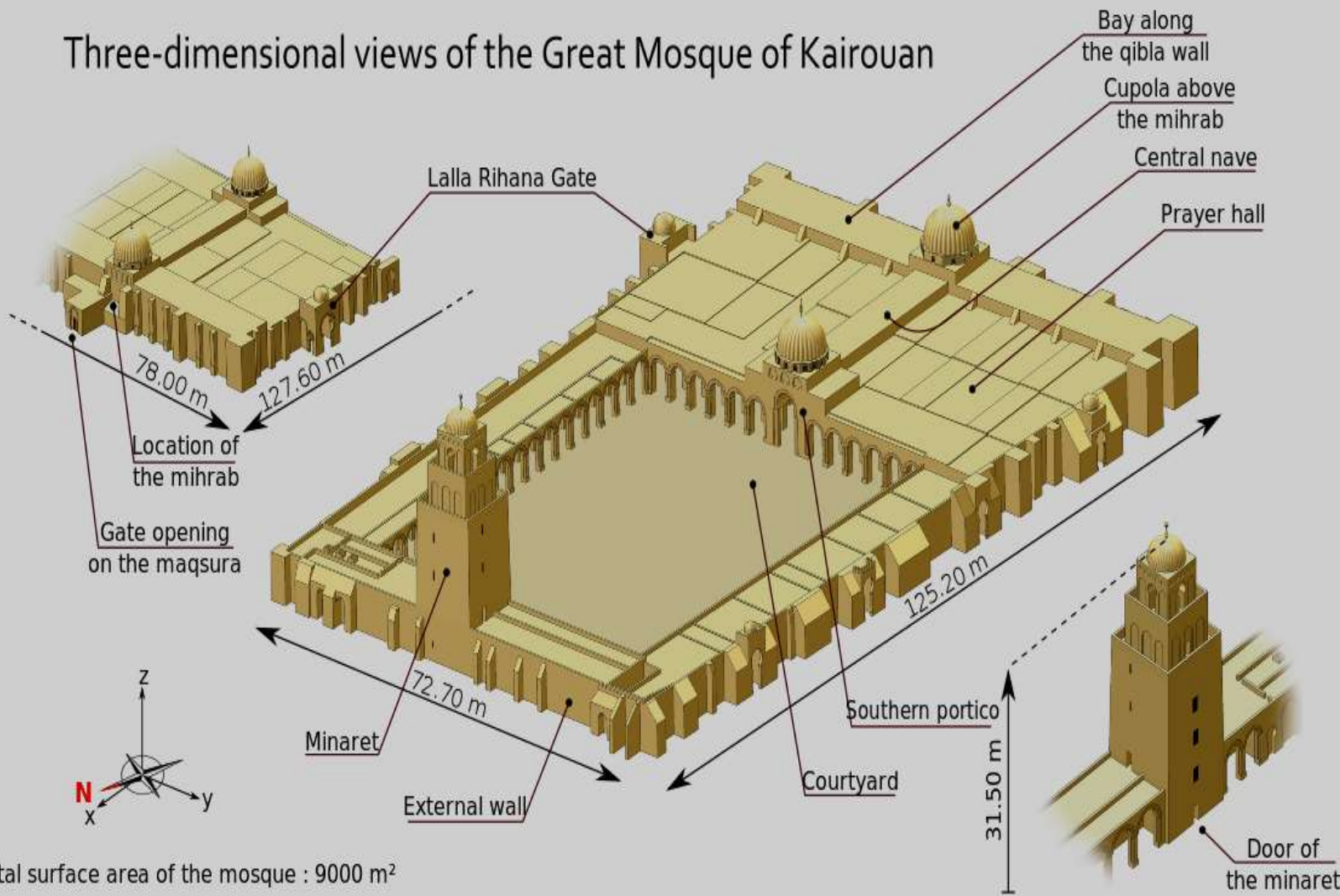
The maqsura, another precious wooden piece, has rich calligraphy in flowery kufic. The maqsura, located near the minbar, consists of a fence bounding a private enclosure that allows the sovereign and his senior officials to follow the solemn prayer of Friday without mingling with the faithful.

Inside the prayer hall:-

The prayer hall is located on the southern side of the courtyard . A portico with double row of arches precede the spacious prayer hall, which takes the shape of a rectangle of 70.6 meters in width and 37.5 meters depth. The hypostyle hall is divided into 17 aisles of eight bays, the central nave is wider, as well as the bay along the wall of the qibla. In the prayer hall, the 414 columns of marble, granite or porphyry that supports the horseshoe arches. In the wooden roof of the prayer hall some fine beams have been preserved, in spite of successive restorations in the AH 8th and 9th centuries .The capitals resting on the column shafts offer a wide variety of shapes and styles (Corinthian, Ionic, Composite, etc)



Three-dimensional views of the Great Mosque of Kairouan



total surface area of the mosque : 9000 m²

○ Special feature of the mosque:-

The impluvium square basin is the sunken part provided that focuses rain water collection .It is an ingenious system that ensures the capture (with the slightly sloping surface of the courtyard) then filtering storm water at a central basin furnished with horseshoe arches sculpted in white marble.

This is one of the most important mosques in Tunisia, situated in the UNESCO World Heritage town of Kairouan.

The Great Mosque represents one of the most prestigious places of worship in Islam.



