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A RARE WOODEN MIHRAB INSIDE AL-HALLAWIYA MADRASA IN ALEPPO: AN ATTEMPT FOR DATING BASED ON HISTORICAL SOURCES

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to study a rare wooden mihrab located inside al-Hallawiya madrasa in Aleppo city. The mihrab is generally considered a rare masterpiece in Islamic art, and particularly in Aleppo city, that it is the only archaeological wooden mihrab remained in the city. It includes a historical review and a descriptive study of its decorations and inscriptions. The aim is an attempt for dating the mihrab based on the archaeological evidences and the historical texts that no previous studies gave an accurate date for it.

KEYWORDS: Mihrab, al-Hallawiya, Aleppo, Islamic art, wooden works, inscriptions, decorations, dating, historical, archaeological.

1. INTRODUCTION

A huge number of the monumental buildings that were filled by many fixed and movable antiques characterized Aleppo city (Sauvaget, 1941). These antiques were true examples of the historical periods that alternated on the city that it represents the features of Islamic art, which spread in these periods (Talas, 1956).

Among the fixed and movable antiques that fill the monumental buildings in the city of Aleppo, a rare wooden prayer niche *mihrab* in al-Hallawiya madrasa. The mihrab has a great archaeological importance because it is striking in its richness by the decorations and the inscriptions that were carved on it.

What increases the archaeological importance of this mihrab, its rarity that it is the only wooden one, which is still surviving in Aleppo city. The religious buildings in the city of Aleppo had only two wooden mihrabs, the first one was in the small mosque of the citadel, and it was attributed to Nūr al-din Mahmūd who constructed the small mosque inside the citadel (Othman, 2009). The mihrab is no longer in its location inside the mosque in current time because it disappeared during the French occupation of Aleppo (Sauwaf, 1967). The second one still exists in its location inside al-Hallawiya madrasa, it has the same feature, and the same characterizes of the first one (Herzfeld, 1955) as the paper will prove that

both of them belong to the same period and the same person.

This article aims to study this mihrab for its artistic and historical importance in the field of the development of the Islamic wooden works industry. The article aims also to date the mihrab and attributed it to the person who ordered to make it that the previous studies did not determine the accurate date or the accurate period, which the mihrab was made on it, and there is a great disagreement among these studies about the date of the mihrab. The study of this mihrab has a great importance because it considered a documental study for the mihrab as its decorations and inscriptions may have been damaged or destroyed during the current events of the Syrian revolution.

2. THE MIHRAB'S LOCATION

The mihrab is located in the middle of the southern wall of the iwan, which added to al-Hallawiya madrasa in Aleppo city (fig. 1),(pl. 1). Al-Hallawiya madrasa, which includes the mihrab is located in front of the western gate of the great Omayyad mosque (al-Jaser, 2000), the school is considered to be one of the oldest survived schools in the city of Aleppo (Ibn Shaddad, 1953). In the past, the school was a temple for fire worshipers then it changed to be a Synagogue, in the 5th century the empress Helana, the mother of the emperor Constantine ordered to change it to be the great cathedral of Aleppo city (al-Jermani, 1992).



Plate 1: general view to al-Hallawiya madrasa from inside, in the right side, the façade of the iwan which includes the mihrab. Photographed by author, July 2010.

The great church survived until the Crusaders attacked Aleppo city in 518 A.H/ 1124 A.D (Ibn al-Šohna, 1984; al-Tabbakh, 1997; ibn al-'dim, 1997), and they destroyed many monuments in the city (Talas, 1956). At that time, the ruler of the city was al-Kadi Abu al-Hassan Mohammed ibn Yahya al-

Khashab who belonged to al-Khashab family, which played a great role in the history of Aleppo city (al-Asady, 1990; Nasrallah, 1983; al-Ghozzi, 1999).

Al-Kadi al-Khashab wanted to reply to the attacks of the Crusaders that he ordered to change four churches in the city to be mosques (Ibn al-Šohna,

1984), among the churches that were changed, the great cathedral of the city which became a mosque known by al-Sarrageen (al-Tabbakh, 1997).

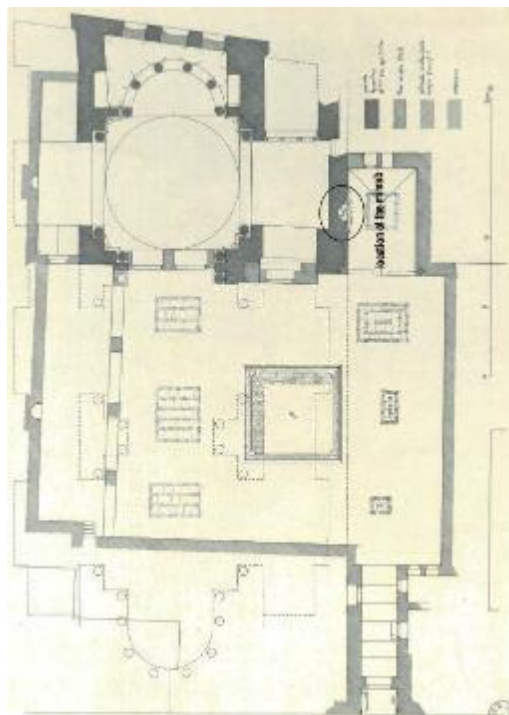


Figure 1: Plan of al-Hallawiya madrasa shows the location of the mihrab.

Herzfeld, E. (1955) *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*, tome II, planches, pl. LXXXII. Developed by authors.

When Nūr al-din Mahmoud ruled Aleppo in 541 A.H / 1146 A.D, (Abu Shamah, 1997; Elisséeff, 1967; Sauvaget, 1941) he ordered to change the mosque of al-Sarrageen to be a school for Hanafi doctrine, since that date, this school has been known by al-Hallawiya (Ibn Shaddad, 1953). Nūr al-din ordered to add living rooms and an iwan, which is the current one that includes the mihrab. These works achieved in 544 A.H/ 1149 A.D according to Ibn Shaddad (Ibn Shaddad, 1953), but the inscription in the main entrance mentions the date 543 A.H/ 1148 A.D (Herzfeld, 1955), which may be mean that the date of the inscription is the date of the beginning of these works, and the date of Ibn Shaddad refers to ending it.

2. THE MIHRAB AND THE HISTORICAL SOURCES

Many historians dealt with the history of Aleppo and its monuments, some of them were contemporary with the period in which the mihrab is dated, and the other lived in a later periods. These historians informed us by the state of al-Hallawiya madrasa, which includes the mihrab, but many of

them described the school without mentioning the fantastic mihrab inside it.

Among these historians, *Ibn al-'dim* who died in 660 A.H/ 1262 A.D. He mentioned al-Hallawiya madrasa in his book *zobdat al-halap* that he mentioned the works of Nūr al-din, and dating it in 543 A.H, then he continued in mentioning the teachers who were brought by Nūr al-din to the school but he completely ignored the mihrab (Ibn al-'dim, 1997).

Nevertheless, the ignoring of *Ibn al-'dim* for the mihrab is a strange subject because the mihrab was in its location in that time, and he was a witness to renewing it as mentioned in its inscriptions. In accordance with *Ibn al-'dim*, the school was described by *Ibn Shaddad* who died in 684 A.H/ 1285 A.D. He mentioned al-Hallawiya madrasa in his book *al-a'laq al-khtira* that he recorded detailed information about the school's architecture, in addition to a narration for its teachers since it began until the end of his reign, but he didn't mention anything about the mihrab although he was contemporary with the Ayyubid period (Ibn Shaddad, 1953).

The first historian who included the mihrab in the school's description was *Ibn al-Agami* who died in 884 A.H/ 1479 A.D in his book *konoz al-zahab* that he mentioned a brief description to the mihrab including the date of the renewing in the reign of al-sultan al-Naser Yousef II in 643 A.H/ 1246 A.D. (Ibn al-Agami, 1997).

"The mihrab which is located inside its iwan had an inscription engraved on its door read as: it was renewed in the reign of al-Sultan Salah al-din Yousef Ibn Mohammed in 643"

In the same period, another historian known by *Ibn al-Šohna* who died in 890 A.H/ 1485 A.D, he described al-Hallawiya madrasa in his book *al-dorr al-montakhab*, but he didn't mention the mihrab inside it (Ibn al-Šohna, 1984), as he transmitted his description from *Ibn Shaddad* who presented a brief description of the school without its mihrab.

In a later period, a detailed description of al-Hallawiya madrasa was presented by *al-Ghozzi*, who died in 1352 A.H/ 1933 A.D in his book *nahr al-zahab*. He transmitted his description from the previous historians and described its status in his time including the mihrab. It seems through his description that he was fascinated by the mihrab that he described its decorations and mentioned the fully text that carved on it (al-Ghozzi, 1999).

"The western side of the courtyard occupied by an iwan, the iwan includes a fantastic mihrab, it is made of wood and is decorated by accurate wooden carved panels which the eye did not see more beautiful decorations like

this, the outer border is decorated with a carved inscription, and it is read as (The full text)".

4. MATERIAL AND TECHNIQUE

The mihrab is made from good wood and inlaid with ebony, ivory, and shell. Herzfeld referred that it was covered by a multi-color oily layer made it difficult to distinguish between its panels. Fortunately, he was a witness to the mihrab before it covered by this oily layer that he photographed it in 1908 A.D (Herzfeld, 1955) (pl. 2). Herzfeld's photo is considered to be a rare one that shows the mihrab and its decorated panels.

As for the technique, it is made with gathering and dovetailing the panels *al-tagmee' wa al-ta'shiqe*, the panels decorations are geometrical, plant, and calligraphy achieved with prominent and deep carving. The decorations cover the whole surface of the mihrab; the principle motifs among them are the stars, hexagonal, and star polygons patterns. These patterns were spread in applied arts in the Fatimid period, but they are more developed and complex in this mihrab (Ettinghausen, 2001). In addition to the geometrical motifs, the mihrab includes the plant decoration which follows *al-Arabesque* style that the mihrab is decorated with many ribbons that achieved by prominent and deep carving. Also, it includes many inscriptions wrapped around it.



Plate 2: Archive photo to the mihrab dated by 1908.
Herzfeld, E. (1955) *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*, tome II, planches, pl. LXXXIII.

5. DESCRIPTION STUDY

The mihrab is composed of a rectangular shape; its high is 4.54m, and its width is 3.55m. In the middle of its façade, there is the niche, its width is 1.35m, and its depth is 1.13m (fig. 2), (pl. 3).

The outer frame is composed of an inscription wrapped around the mihrab from the top, the right, and the left sides. The width of this inscription is 20 cm, and it is written by *al-thuluth* line with prominent carving. The inscription begins from the right side, extends to the upper side, and ends in the left side (pl. 4:8). It is read as following:

" *Al-Basmala, this mihrab was renewed in the reign of al-Sultan al-Malik al-'adel al-Mogahed al-Morabit al-Mu'yyad al-Mansour al-Malik al-Naser Salah al-donia wa addin Sultan / al-Islam wa al-Muslmeen monsef al-Mazloumeen min al-Zalimeen rafi' al-'adl fi al-'lameen game' al-Kafara wal Molhdeen Abi al-Mozaffer Yousef ibn Mohammed Naser / Ameer al-Mo'mneen Allah immortalized his reign, strengthen his supporters, raised his flag, and lit his way under the patronage of the poor to his god mercy Omar Ibn Ahmed Ibn Hebat Allah Ibn Mohammed Ibn Abi Jarada Allah forgiven him, his parents, and all Muslims in the year 643"*

Among the words of this inscription, there are plant decorations made by prominent carving, and the same decoration repeated in the right and the left corner of this frame.

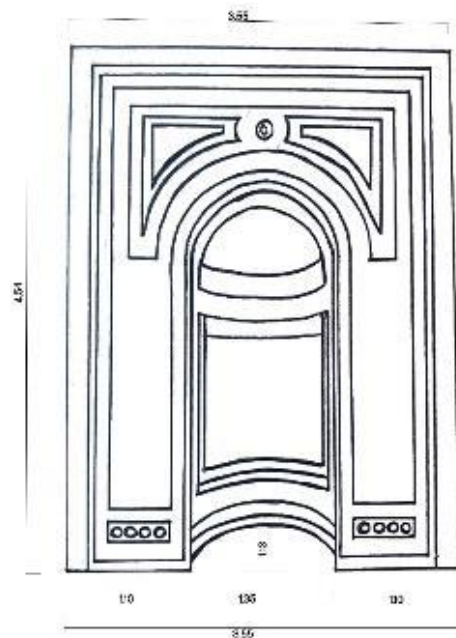


Figure 2: Facsimile of the general shape of the mihrab. By authors.



Plate 3: General view to the mihrab in its location inside the iwan. Photographed by authors, July 2010.



Plate 4: Details of the inscription in the outer frame.



Plate 5: Details of the inscription in the outer frame.

It is clear that the inscription is a monumental one for renewing that the date which is included in it, is a renewal date and it is not the date of the mihrab's made. What asserts that the inscription was added to the mihrab in a later period, comparing it with the mihrab of Nūr al-din in the small mosque *al-maqam al-asfal* inside the citadel, it belonged to the same period that the mosque was constructed by Nūr al-din (Ibn Shaddad, 1953), (pl. 9). The comparing

between the two examples shows that there is a matching between them both in the general shape and the decorations except the outer frame which includes the inscription, it exists only in al-Hallawiya mihrab which proves that this frame was added to it in a later period.

There are decorated frames follow the outer one to inside. They twist around the mihrab and its niche, the first one is located beside the outer frame, it is narrow and prominent from the mihrab's façade. The second is wider than the first one, and both of them were decorated by plant decorations from palm leaves and their halves that performed by deep and prominent carving (pl. 10). The second frame includes a rectangular area at the top of the mihrab, it is occupied by an inscription composed of the signature of the artist who made the mihrab (pl. 11), the inscription was written by *Naskhi* line and it is read as following:

"It was made by *Abi al-Hussein Ibn Mohammed al-Harrany Allah forgiven him*"

It is clear from the signature and its position that it belonged to the original mihrab before it was renewed at the end of the Ayyubid period that there is a color homogeneity between the signature and the original parts of the mihrab. In addition to the preceding, there is a chromatic difference between the signature and the outer frame, which we supposed that it was added to the mihrab at the end of the Ayyubid period.

The areas between the previous frames and the niche were decorated by geometrical motifs performed by gathering and dovetailing *al-tagmee' wa al-ta'shiqe*. In both sides of the niche, there are three star-patterns around them hexagonal and pentagonal shapes their units intertwined with each other to form a shape like a star-polygon (fig. 3). The panels decorated from its inside by accurate plant decorations made by prominent and deep carving. The decorations of the panels conformed to the decorations of the outer frames.



Plate 6: Details of the inscription in the outer frame.



Plate 7: Details of the inscription in the outer frame.



Plate 8: Details of the inscription in the outer frame.



Plate 9: The mihrab of the small mosque *al-maqam al-asfal* inside the citadel.

Herzfeld, E. (1955) *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*, tome II, planches, pl. XLVI

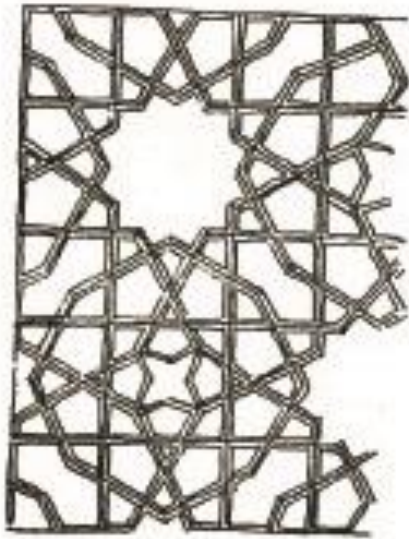


Figure 3: The geometrical panels in both sides of the niche. Herzfeld, E. (1955) *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*, vol. 1, p.218, fig.



Plate 10: Decoration frames and geometrical panels in both sides of the niche.



Plate 11: Details of the signature of the artist *Abi al-Hossien Mohammed ibn al-Harrani*.

At the bottom of that decorative composition, on both the right and left sides of the niche, there is horizontal rectangular panel decorated from its inside by four adjacent octagons occupied by accurate plant decorations made by prominent and deep carving. All the panels around the mihrab were inlaid by ivory and shell (pl. 12), but they were covered by a layer paint added to it in a later period.

As for the niche, it is situated in the middle of the mihrab's façade, its depth is 1.13m, and a half dome decorated with a number of decorative frames surmounts it. Inside the niche was decorated by geometrical panels in addition to a number of star-polygons and their parts made by gathering and dovetailing *al-tagmee' wa al-ta'shiqe* (fig. 4, 5), (pl. 13).

The niche includes two inscriptions, the first one composed of two *Naskhi* lines, it includes the signature of the carpenter, and it is read as "*carpentry of the poor slave to his god mercy/ Abdallah ibn Ahmed al-naggar*"

The second inscription written by *Kufic* leafy line, it is composed of one line wrapped around the niche's arch, and its content is *al-Basmalah* and *sourat al-fatihah* (pl. 14).

In both sides of the niche's arch, there are two triangle areas inside a decorative frame (pl. 14). Each one of them is surrounded by an inscription written by *Thuluth* line, the inscription of the right area includes *al-Basmalah* and a part of the verse 36 *sourat al-Nour*, the same verse completes in the inscription of the left area, and it is followed by the verse 18 *sourat al-Tawbah*.

The right inscription:

"*Al-Basmalah, in mosques which Allah has ordered to be raised and that his name be mentioned therein; exalting him within them in the morning and evenings, men whom neither commerce nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allah and performance of prayer and giving of zakah. They fear a day in which ...*"

The left inscription:

"*The hearts and eyes will (fearfully) turn about that Allah reward them the best of what they did increase them from his bounty. And Allah gives provision to whom he*

will without account. The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the last day and establish prayer and give zakah and do not fear except Allah"

Inside the two triangle areas is decorated by star-polygons surrounded by geometrical panels which different in their shapes and sizes (fig. 6), (pl. 14).



Plate 12: The decorations in both sides of the niche and its inside.

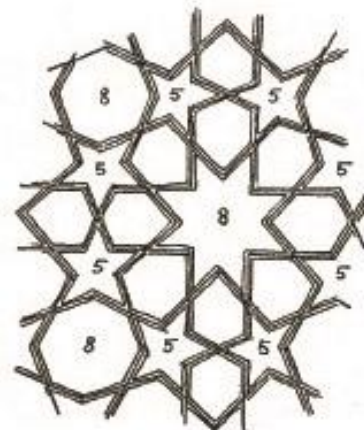


Figure 4: The geometrical panels inside the niche. Herzfeld, E. (1955) *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*, vol. 1, p.218, fig. 72



Plate 13: Details of the decorations inside the niche.

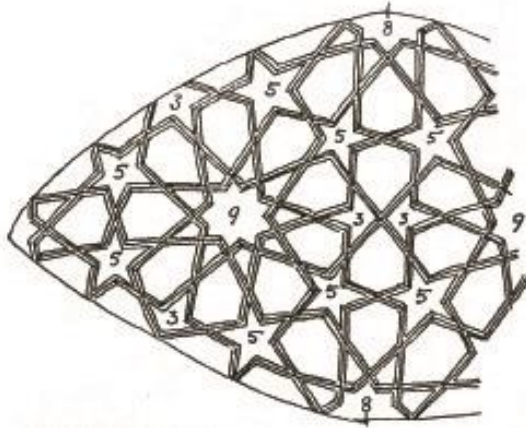


Figure 5: The geometrical panels at the top of the niche.
Herzfeld, E. (1955) *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*, vol. 1, p.218, fig. 72.

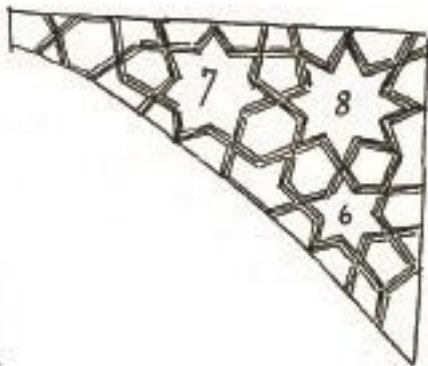


Figure 6: The geometrical panels in both sides of the upper section of the niche.
Herzfeld, E. (1955) *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*, vol. 1, p.218, fig.



Plate 14: Details of the geometrical, plant, and calligraphic decorations in upper section of the mihrab.

6. DATING THE MIHRAB

There are many studies and historical sources about the history and the monuments of the city of Aleppo which have many references about the mihrab, but no one of them determined an accurate date or attributed it to a specific person. Also, there is a clear conflict among these studies about the mihrab's dating, this is because, it does not include any inscriptions about the dating, in addition to the historical sources did not mention an accurate date for it. The only historian who mentioned a reference about the date of the mihrab is *Ibn al-Agamy* in his book *Konoz al-zahab* that he said "it was renewed in the reign of al-sultan Salah al-din Yousef ibn Mohammed in the year 643..." (Ibn al-Agamy, 1997), the date that was mentioned, is the same one that was recorded in the inscription, and it is clear that it is a renewal date not a date for the mihrab's made that both the inscription and the phrase of *Ibn al-Agamy* begin by the term "renewed".

Because of the mihrab does not include any inscriptions about the date, and the historical sources did not mention an accurate date for it, many researchers supposed an approximate date for the mihrab. At the same time, no one of them supported his supposition by evidences through studying the history of the monument that includes the mihrab or analysis the historical texts that related to this case.

Some researchers attributed the mihrab to the reign of Nūr al-din Mahmoud without any evidences for this dating (Haggar, 1990). Some researchers also attributed it to the same period 6th / 12th century, without mentioning to Nūr al-din (Ettinghausen, 2001). There is a team of researchers agreed to dating it by Ayyubid period depending on the date which was included in the inscription, as they considered that this date is a date of the mihrab's made that they ignored the term "renewed" at the beginning of the same inscription (Talas,

1956)(al-Asady, 1990)(al-Hemsey, 1983)(al-Jaser, 2000). The other researchers mentioned it by other names without any references for dating such as al-Hallawiya mihrab (Hadjar, 2002), and the mihrab of Ibn al-'deem, depending on that the name of ibn al-'deem was included in its inscriptions (al-Bahnasy, 1983).

Among the researchers who supposed that the mihrab is belonged to the Ayyubid period, a researcher tried to support this supposition by the description of *ibn Jobier* who visited the city of Aleppo between 578 A.H/ 1182 A.D and 581 A.H/ 1185 A.D. During his survey to the monuments of the city, he described al-Hallawiya madrasa but his description did not include any references about the mihrab. Therefore, the researcher considered that the mihrab was added to the al-Hallawiya after the visit of *ibn Jobeir* (al-Jaser, 2000).

Regarding the description of *ibn Jobeir*, it is very brief, and it does not exceed one paragraph that he presented a general description which has no details (Ibn Jobeir, 1959). Therefore, it is not likely that he ignored the mihrab inside the school as many important elements, which were not recorded in his book, so we can assert that ignoring the mihrab in his records does not a clear evidence for dating it after that period.

For dating the mihrab, we must benefit from all the related historical texts and the archaeological evidences for reaching a scientific supposition. The first archaeological evidence in this case, is the inscription of the mihrab which includes the date 643 A.D. This date which is considered by many researchers as a date for the mihrab's made that they ignored - as previously mentioned - the term "renewed" at the beginning of the inscription, this means that it is a renewal date, and it has been confirmed by *ibn al-Agamy* (Ibn al-Agamy, 1997).

From the preceding, we can assert that there is no relation between the inscription and the date of the mihrab's made but this note putting us at the beginning of the right way for dating it as following:

Following up the history of al-Hallawiya, leading us for dating the mihrab through determining its date between 518 A.H/ 1124 A.D, and 643 A.H/ 1245 A.D that the first refers to changing the great church of Aleppo to be a mosque as replying to the violations of the Crusaders in the city (Ibn al-'deem, 1997) (Ibn Shaddad, 1953). This mosque was known at that time by al-Sarrageen, and it became later al-Hallawiya (Ibn al-Agamy, 1997). Therefore, it is unacceptable that the mihrab might be added before this date. So, the date 518 A.H/ 1124 A.D is the year which the probability of adding the mihrab begins with it until the year 643 A.H/ 1245 A.D in which

the mihrab was renewed as mentioned in its inscriptions.

By following up the architecture of al-Hallawiya in that period, we can find that it has two principal stages of architecture and renewing; the first one, achieved by al-Kadi Ibn al-Khashab who changed the great church of Aleppo to be the mosque of al-Sarrageen in 518 A.H/ 1124 A.D. The second achieved by Nūr al-din Mahmoud in 543 A.H/ 1148 A.D as recorded in the inscriptions which still remaining at the entrance, in this stage, Nūr al-din changed the mentioned mosque to be a Hanafi school, and it was known since that date by al-Hallawiya.

If we supposed that the mihrab was added to al-Hallawiya during the works of al-Kadi Ibn al-Khashab in 518 A.H/ 1124 A.D, especially that the historical sources asserted that he added mihrabs to the four churches that were changed to be mosques (Ibn Shaddad, 1953)(Ibn al-Šohna, 1984). Although the historical sources did not determine the shape or the style of the mihrabs that were added to these mosques, it puts us in the possibility of adding the mihrab in that date.

However, if we examine the historical event that carried Ibn al-Khashab to change the four churches to be mosques including the mosque which later became al-Hallawiya madrasa, we found that it is unreasonable for the mihrab to fall in his works. This because that what carried him to achieve these works, was an unexpected and supervising event to reply to the violations of the Crusaders in the city. Also, he did not have the time to make a masterpiece of this great value at this time, because it is clear that the work of this mihrab requires a lot of time, effort, and money, which was not available to him under these events.

Even if we concede that Ibn al-Khashab had what qualifies him for making this mihrab, why he did not repeat it in the other three churches that were changed to mosques during the same events? Moreover, if we concede that the mihrabs of the other mosques were disappeared or destroyed because of their wooden material or because of they had not been renewed as happened with the mentioned one, why the historical sources did not refer to them as referring to al-Hallawiya's mihrab? Therefore, it is unlikely that adding the mihrab to the school was in the date 518 A.H/ 1124 A.D.

While it is unlikely that the mihrab was not added to al-Hallawiya during the works of Ibn al-Khashab in 518 A.H/ 1124 A.D, at the same time it includes a clear renewal date in 643 A.H/ 1245 A.D in the reign of al-Naser Yousef II. Therefore, only the period between the two dates has the possibility of the mihrab's manufacture. During this period between

the two mentioned dates, there were no renewal or addition works to the school except those attributed to Nūr al-din Mahmūd in 543 A.H/ 1148 A.D, this which the historical sources agreed on it, and supported by the inscriptions that still remain at the top of the main entrance of the school (Herzfeld, 1955) (al-Jermany, 1992).

In addition to the preceding, the mihrab is located in an extension iwan inside the school. The mentioned iwan was added to the school during the works of Nūr al-din in 543 A.H/ 1148 A.D, and this is what the historical sources confirmed it that Ibn Shaddad said that "... when Nur al-din ruled Aleppo, endowed it as a school, added a housing for the scholars, and iwan ..." (Ibn Shaddad, 1953). It is likely that there is a relation between the date of the iwan and the date of the mihrab inside it that although the mihrab entirely made of wood and although it can be moved, it seems to be fixed and not movable, so it seems to be made specifically to occupy its current location. Therefore, the connection between the iwan and the mihrab supports that it belonged to the renewal works of Nūr al-din.

Also, this mihrab is considered to be the only wooden one which still remains in Aleppo in the current time, but there was another one in the small mosque *al-maqam al-asfal* inside the citadel achieved by the same technique that the two mihrabs were matched in general shape, decorative elements, geometrical panels, and inscriptions style. The mihrab of the small mosque disappeared during the French occupation to the city (Sauwaf, 1967) that the commander of the French garrison observed the artistic value of that mihrab and transferred it to France. It was attributed to Nūr al-din Mahmūd ibn Zanki who built the small mosque inside the citadel in 563 A.H/ 1167 A.D (Othman, 2009). Herzfeld left a photographic plate dated by 1908 to it before being smuggled to France (Herzfeld, 1955) (pl. 9). By comparison between the two mihrabs, the similarity between them is evident, which supports including the mihrab of al-Hallawiya in the works of Nūr al-din.

Also, we can compare the mihrab with the minbar of al-Aqsa mosque which is considered to be one of the most famous wooden masterpieces that attributed to Nūr al-din Mahmūd in 563 A.H/ 1168 A.D (Singer, 2008)(al-Shar', 2012). By the comparing, we find a clear similarity between them, and the similarity extends to the technique which depends on the style of gathering and dovetailing *al-tagmee' wa al-ta'shiqe*, prominent, and deep carving to the decorations. The minbar of al-Aqsa mosque was burned in 1969 but we have many photographic plates to it before this event (al-Abweeny, 2007) (pl.

15), the plates assert to the clear similarity between it and the mihrab.



Plate 15: The original minbar of Nūr al-din inside al-Aqsa mosque before it was burned.
Al-Abweeny, W. (2007) *E'adet ehya minbar Salah al-din*, fig. 7.

As for the domicile of the minbar of al-Aqsa mosque, the historical sources referred to that it was made in Aleppo, which is the same place that the mihrab was made. Ibn al-Atheer asserted that the minbar was made in Aleppo when he talked about the recovery of al-Aqsa mosque by Salah al-din (Ibn al-Atheer, 1966) that he said "...in Friday, 4 Sha'ban, the Muslim prayed the Friday with Salah al-din who ordered them to make a minbar to al-Aqsa, he was told that Nūr al-din made a nice one in Aleppo and he intended to put it in the mosque, Salah al-din ordered to bring the minbar from Aleppo and fixed it in the holy mosque".

From the preceding, we can assert that the city of Aleppo was a domicile for the mihrab and the minbar, which is surely attributed to Nūr al-din, and this supports that the mihrab is attributed to the same person.

Some researchers mentioned what supports the preceding that the minbar of al-Aqsa was made inside al-Hallawiya madrasa in Aleppo (al-Shar', 2012), this means that the iwan which was added to al-Hallawiya by Nūr al-din was aimed to be a place for making the minbar of al-Aqsa and this place is the same one that including the mihrab. The preceding leads us to a new possibility: that the mihrab that still exists inside the iwan of Al-Hallawiya may have been made in the same time that the minbar was made to be transported together to al-Aqsa mosque after its recovery. The new possibility is supported by some texts in the historical sources that prove that Nūr al-din did not order to make the minbar only to al-Aqsa mosque

but his order was associated with making a mihrab alongside the minbar which was actually transferred in the reign of al-sultan Salah al-din.

Among these historical texts, what mentioned by al-Imam al-Zahabi (al-Zahabi, 2003) who said: "...Nūr al-din ordered to make a minbar to al-Aqsa mosque before he recovered it, the minbar was made by a clever carpenter in Aleppo city, and it was transported to the great mosque of Aleppo after it was burned, the same carpenter who was called al-Akhtareeny made a mihrab in the same technique of the minbar...".

Also, Abo Shamah transmitted the same case from al-'emad al-asfhany (Abo Shamah, 1997) that he said " ...there was a clever carpenter in Aleppo city called by al-Akhtareeny from Akhtareen district, Nur al-din ordered him to make a minbar to the holy mosque, the minbar was finished in many years, and then, the great mosque of Aleppo was burned, so the minbar was transmitted to the mosque instead of the burned one. After that, the same carpenter made a mihrab similar to the minbar in its decorations.....".

From the preceding texts which were mentioned in the historical sources, we can understand that the carpenter who made the minbar of al-Aqsa mosque, made another mihrab after he finished the minbar, and the mihrab was similar to the minbar in its technique and decorations. Thus, it is likely that this mihrab is the same one that still survives inside al-Hallawiya madrasa in Aleppo city, in this case, the date of the mihrab will be the same date of the minbar in 563 A.H/ 1168 A.D.

As for the transporting of the minbar without the mihrab, Salah al-din may have satisfied only by moving the minbar because of the lack of validity of the mihrab for transporting at that time, especially that it has been fixed in its place since it has been finished and the process of extracting may cause damage to it. Alternatively, it may have been inappropriate for al-Aqsa mosque, which included a stone prayer niche at that time and there was no need for the wooden mihrab. On the other hand, the mihrab may have been damaged at that time due to the different conditions of the place where they were kept that the minbar was moved after the completion of its manufacture to the great mosque of Aleppo, while the mihrab remained in its place inside the iwan of the school.

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After the preceding, we have another question, why did not the name of the carpenter who known by al-Aktareeny mention in the inscriptions of the minbar and the mihrab although the historical sources agreed that he was the chief manufacturer for them? The answer for this question abstracted that this name may have been a nickname for him that he was from Akhtareen district, which was following Aleppo city, and it is supposed that he has another name that was mentioned among the four signatures which were recorded in the minbar, especially that three of them were ended by "al-Halaby". If we had a co-maker between the two pieces, it would be certain that the mihrab was made specifically for the same purpose for which the minbar was made, and on the same date. It is supposed also that renewing the mihrab in a later period may have hidden some of the original signatures especially that the name of Nūr al-din does not include in its current inscriptions.

Depending on the preceding, this study asserts that the mihrab of al-Hallawiya was added to the school during the renewal works of al-sultan Nūr al-din Mahmoud which began in 543 A.H/ 1148 A.D, or after twenty years from this date when he ordered to make the minbar of al Aqsa in 563 A.H/ 1168 A.D and it still remained in its location until it was renewed again in the reign of al-sultan al-Naser Yousef II in 643 A.H/ 1245 A.D.

7. CONCLUSION

Our work asserts that the mihrab of al-Hallawiya madrasa is attributed to al-Sultan Nūr al-din Mahmoud Zanki who ordered to make it inside the iwan of the madrasa. It is found also that the mihrab was made between 543 A.H/ 1148 A.D, and 563 A.H/ 1168 A.D, this period which extends from the date of the renewal works of Nūr al-din in Al-Hallawiya madrasa to date of the minbar of al-Aqsa mosque. Thus, the mihrab's dating can be limited to a period that estimated by twenty years from the reign of Nūr al-din in Aleppo. It is concluded that the mihrab was specifically made by Nūr al-din to move with the minbar to al-Aqsa mosque, but only the minbar was moved to the mosque in a later period by al-Sultan Salah al-din in 583 A.H/ 1187 A.D.

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