

THE KOBE MUSLIM MOSQUE: Experience of “Miracles” - 1945 Air Raid & 1995 Earthquake

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1. Introduction - Kobe Muslim Mosque

The Kobe Muslim Mosque is the oldest in extant and most prominent architecture which represents the faith of local Muslim community as well as legacy of architectural modern development in international port city Kobe and Japan. Tenacious fund rising among Muslim traders, uncountable tense negotiations with authorities, unique design led by Czech born architect *Jan Josef Švagr*, and drawn and built by early day's construction giant *Takenaka Corporation*; the place, community and architecture has been witnessed as they are living proof of an important Kobe's urban cultural legacy. Interestingly enough, this structure has been recognized a landmark and evidence of “International Port City Kobe”, however, it has not architecturally examined previously. Especially, complexity of construction process has still indicate uncertain portion as such as real figure of commitment and contribution of architectural professions, and “miracle” of survivals from uncountable tragedies upon the mosque – fires of Kobe Air raid during WW2 reach to the wall of the mosque, and subsequent postwar social disorder, Kobe Flood in 1938, and Great Earthquake in 1995. Previously, author presented these outlines as a primarily account which entitled; *Kobe Mosque: A Preliminary account of the Place, Community and Architecture*¹, and summarized on earlier sections of this article. In this paper which will be presented as a sequel to re-examine facts behind, particularly survivals from war and disasters which sometimes accepted as “miracles” by public in general in Kobe.

2. The Mosque and Kobe City

The location of the mosque is on a boundary district which neighbored between Foreign Settlement in coastal harbor and residential hill side area. This area accommodates and lined up religious institutions which inevitably functions Kobe's urban legacy as an international maritime trade city then. The mosque has been noted as historic symbols which revealed following respective accounts; historic back ground of local Muslim community (Y. Fukuda, 2011)², governmental built heritages inventory (Educational Board of Hyogo Prefectural Government, 2006)³, and architectural records edited by Goichi Takeda and prominent architects (Modern Architectures Pictorial, 1936)⁴.

3. Architecture of the Kobe Muslim Mosque

- **Location:** 2 Nakayamate Douri, Chuo-Ku, Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture.
- **Construction:** 1935 (Official occupational certificate issued)
- **Structure:** Reinforced Concrete
- **Floor level:** 3 levels + 1 Underground level
- **Roofing:** Flat Roof with partially Dome (Wooden Structure and Copper Roofing)
- **Walls:** “Exposed-aggregate finish by washing”
- **Total Floor Size:** 250 sqm
- **Architectural Design:** Jan Josef Švagr
- **Construction works:** Takenaka Corporation

Dome has particular design with copper roofing (300×400mm) and curved surfaces. Internal structure is wooden structure and places on reinforced concrete roof top slab. **Minaret** has 3 levels with different design. Floor and wall shapes are differed on each level and details with oriental influences. Exterior has different attire, but interior has same and simple finishing, except steel stair. **Exterior Walls** has finished “exposed-aggregate finish by washing” which provides unified images as a part of street scape, even though the building design has composed diverse architectural design elements. **Ground Floor** has main prayer hall and corridor space. There are traces of doors between main hall and corridor which provide more spaces for prayers. Prayer hall is square plan, faces to West with Mihrab (Arch height: 3487mm AFL) and Minbar (1090mm AFL) which decorated white marbles. **First Floor** has smaller prayer hall where mainly occupied by female prayers. Rest of the space is void space above of main prayer hall on ground floor. Void space and female prayer hall is separated and decorated parapet. **Second Floor** has large prayer hall and pitched roof with small void space connecting main prayer hall. This function makes all mosque 3 levels are connected and deliver imam and prayer’s voice on G/F. Interior is same as main prayer hall and rest of the area.

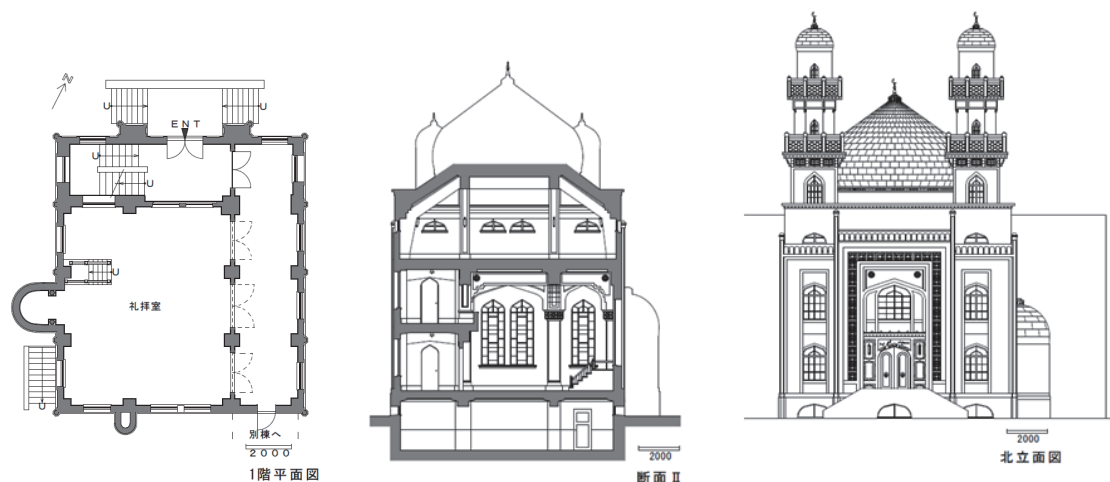


Fig 1. Plan (G/F), Cross Section and Front Elevation (2012)

4. Architect Jan Josef Švagr and Takenaka Corporation

Jan Josef Švagr was born in Bohemia, Czech in 1885. He educated in Czech Institute of Engineering. Later, he fled to Russia due to military service and religious reason. Unfortunately, his life in Russia is interrupted by Russian October Revolution; again he fled to China, then Japan. He met with architect Antonin Raymond in Shanghai, and worked under him from 1923 to 1930. Švagr opened his own office near Yokohama Catholic Church which he designed. Immediate before the WW2 in 1940, he offers his office for his Japanese collaborator and left to Argentina, and passed away in 1969. According to Takeyoshi Hori, Švagr was hired as a “*structural expert*” by Raymond. At that time of Yokohama, architects received high demand of *Kanto Great Earthquake* recovery. Švagr is the part of leading architects among them. Takeyoshi Hori described Švagr’s recognition as “*one of the three prominent foreign architects in Yokohama*”. Interestingly enough, there are no significant architectural design sequences on Švagr’s works in Japan. All his works have different design, somehow designed different architects. In fact, some of research indicated that Švagr is a structural engineer rather than architectural designer. Švagr had architectural work from 1923 to 1940 in Japan. During his carrier in Japan, he carried out his projects mainly in Yokohama and Tokyo during early 1930s. Late 1930s, he extended his project in Hokkaido and Kyushu, includes mosque in Kobe. **Takenaka Corporation** then, new branch office were established in Kobe to pursue their further company’s growth as a part of modern architectural field, especially to establish reinforced concrete engineering method. Their office and Kobe Mosque is located almost same quarters, and Takenaka committed mosque construction from the beginnings to prepare particulars of building certification application. Their design team was led by Kuro Washio, a renowned architect who was the division head of design office of Takenaka. Takenaka’s plan has not touched architectural details of the mosque as well as structure. After they submit these drafts, Jan Josef Švagr invited to the project to brush up both architectural design detail and structural reinvention which could be an unforeseen factor of “miracles” later years. According to the aerial picture taken in 1936, urban built up areas were already extended and elevated railway lines are appeared as current Kobe City area, and clearly indicate two minaret and dome of the mosque.

5. The Mosque and Disasters

The mosque experienced “miracle” of survivals from uncountable tragedies to them - Kobe Flood in 1938, Kobe Air raid during WW2, subsequent postwar social disorder, tourism development as “*Izinkan gai*”, and Great Earthquake in 1995. In this paper, author analyze background of major disasters - 1945 Air Raid and 1995 Earthquake - and pointed out possible reason generated the “miracle”; (1) the surroundings of the mosque had slightly wider buffer space with adjoining properties, (2) consisted stronger ground and stable soil condition, (2) structure has enough strength to resist, and (4) sophisticated management and continuous maintenance by mosque committee members.

WW2 Air raid 1944: Kobe air-raid during the WW2, the fires and destruction reached to the mosque area, Kobe air raid in March, 1945, 21% built up area is burned and destructed. According to the picture taken in 1946, a few structures were remained, mainly reinforced concrete structure. Other remains are chimney of burned residential buildings. The picture (Fig.3) indicates completely burned Kobe city area, until the line of elevated railway lines and *Sannomiya Station*. Immediate after the war, aerial picture taken by US Army indicated completely destroyed nature of city, and fires are reached to another two blocks up to the hill

side. However, the picture shows us clearly, shadow of two minarets and dome of the mosque surrounded burned field, and only windows were broken.

Kobe Earthquake 1995: January 17 earthquake destroy wide area of the Kobe City. The mosque had slightly damaged, despite of the surrounding buildings were seriously destroyed and ruined. According to the map which recorded and analyze the damage happened individual building, mosque has been recorded “no damage”. Surrounding areas were experienced more serious damage, especially area has survived WW2 Air raid 1944. It could be understood that mosque stands above stable land, and stronger structural design by architects Jan Josef Švagr who trained as engineer and witnessed aftermath of *Great Kanto Earthquake* in Yokohama. Immediate after the earthquake, the mosque functioned as a shelter for Muslims staying in Kobe, and accommodate them as long as a month until basic needs were recovered. These evacuee required specific diet – halal foods, fresh waters, and daily necessities for infants. Remarkably, Muslim community both from international and locals send these necessities to the mosque immediate after the disaster, and evacuees were helped each other beyond their origins and nationalities.



Fig 2. The Mosque and Kobe: Immediate after the war

Picture sources: Kobe City, edited, 1989, Kobe Pictorial: 100 Years, Kobe City, pp.110-111. Caption: USAF's B29 bombers were left late afternoon, fires remained till evening in down town. Muslim temple was survived. Air Raid on 5 June. (Picture's original is provided by The Mainichi Newspapers)

Notes

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