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The domestication of light from manifestation to performance as a crisis of intentionality in mosque design

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Abstract

In architectural discourse, light is regarded as an indisputable constituent of the mosque space. However, this assumption obscures how light becomes an authoritarian object of intention in contemporary design. This article critically examines light in the mosque, moving beyond conventional dichotomies between tradition and modernity. The study argues that in contemporary mosque design, light has lost its quality as a temporal existential event blended with shadow and ambiguity. Instead, light has become a pre-scripted, simulated scenario whose outcomes are guaranteed by the architect. Four cases are interpreted comparatively: the resistant texture of Divriği Grand Mosque that delays light, the layered indirectness of Bait Ur Rouf Mosque, the digital choreography of Gargash Mosque, and the linear light regime of Sancaklar Mosque that generates orientation. The concept of knowledge by presence (*ilm al-huduri*) in Suhrawardi's illuminationist philosophy and phenomenological approaches, particularly Heidegger's notion of *Lichtung*, constitute the theoretical framework. The study discusses how reducing light's transcendent power to a sterile outcome narrows the worshipper's perceptual threshold and closes the ancient openness in the mosque. This analysis reveals that homogenizing light under absolute control creates an illusion of mental closure, suspending spatial experience. The article proposes abandoning managed brilliance and returning light to its own nature, suggesting architectural success should be measured not by how perfectly light is controlled, but by how much space is opened for light to occur as an event itself.

Keywords: Design intent; Light; Spatial behavior; Spatial theory and criticism; Phenomenology; Mosque architecture

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1. Introduction

Unlike literary or art criticism, architectural criticism is often confined to a discourse of eulogy focused on the building's physical presence. While literary criticism has a deep-rooted tradition of structurally dissecting a text and opening it up for public debate, with the exception of critics like Frampton,[1] in some academic circles within the architectural world, popular discourses on buildings frequently cannot transcend a comfortable

practice of affirmation. This situation risks freezing architecture into a mere object of visual appreciation. This risk relegates the real world to the background, as the complex and sometimes conflictual relationship that space establishes with everyday life. In the architectural world, substantive critiques of buildings often find life not in publications but in unofficial narratives whispered from ear to ear. However, when it comes to structures that promise an existential depth, such as spaces of faith, this comfort of praise is not merely a stylistic issue; it also becomes a veil that conceals spatial truth. In this context, we pursue a critical path regarding the presence of light in the mosque, moving beyond conventional dichotomies between tradition and modernity or superficial glorifications, deciphering the authoritarian nature of constructed scenarios and designed space.

In academic and professional discourse on Islamic architecture, light is positioned as a fundamental actor that constitutes space and attributes sanctity to it. In the literature, the relationship between the mosque and light is often narrated with concepts such as *nūr* (divine light) and spirituality, typically with a consensus that leaves little room for questioning. However, this established acceptance can render invisible how light transforms into an object of intention and, increasingly, a constructed scenario in modern design practices. Contemporary mosque design tends to transform light from a spontaneous event occurring in space and unfolding over time, into a simulated performance—its outcome largely predetermined and packaged as a design input. Such a shift brings forth a crisis of intentionality, especially as light becomes not only an illuminating element but also a tool for image production.

To understand the roots of this crisis, one must return to an ancient perspective on the existential nature of light. In his work *Hikmat al Ishrāq* (the philosophy of illumination), Shihāb al Dīn al Suhrawardī defines light beyond being a physical wave, as existence itself (*al wujūd*). Suhrawardī's conceptualization of knowledge by presence (*ilm al ḥuḍūrī*) argues that knowledge of a space can only be attained by being directly present with it for a certain duration.[2] Ibn al ʿArabī, on the other hand, does not define light as the opposite of darkness but sees it as the manifestation (*tajallī*) of existence in different intensities. According to ʿArabī, manifestation is an event that is renewed every moment and never repeated.[3] The horizon of these two thinkers points to light being a process of becoming rather than a result. At this point, the presence of light in space appears to depend on its spontaneous disclosure within a spatial openness, rather than being confined to a script dictated by the designer.

In modern mosque architecture, this openness gradually shifts towards a ground where design intention becomes pronounced. Modern designers can use light as an instrument to shape a specific perception, rather than leaving it as a field of manifestation. In this context, the research traces this shift in the light regime through four structures: The Divriği Great Mosque in Sivas represents an ancient delay where light encounters the resistance of stone, intertwines with shadow, and compels the body to slow down. Here, light does not rush to enter space; on the contrary, it enters space through a formal withdrawal, through the resistance between itself and the solid structure of space. This entry through resistance is what the present study terms formal withdrawal. Rather than delivering the space in a single, total act of illumination that renders everything simultaneously visible and therefore exhausted, light here yields itself gradually, negotiating with matter, withholding as much as it reveals. What remains withheld is precisely what keeps the worshipper's perceptual engagement alive. The Bait Ur Rouf Mosque in Dhaka demonstrates, with a modern language, that light can still produce a breathing openness by filtering through layers. The Mohamed Abdulkhaliq Gargash Mosque in Dubai renders visible the translation of light into a choreography with digital precision and how intention tightens the visual outcome. The Sancaklar Mosque in Istanbul, with its claim of purification from form, opens up for discussion the transformation of light into a sign regime that generates orientation.

Existing literature often reads mosque lighting through the lens of technical efficiency or superficial symbolism.[4] However, these readings can neglect light's connection with bodily experience and temporality. From a phenomenological perspective, the function of light in the mosque is not merely to enable vision. Beyond this, it creates an opening that allows the gaze to transcend the space's own boundaries. This situation, as Martin Heidegger expressed it through the concept of *Lichtung* (clearing), indicates that light can only build a world through its relationship with shadow and ambiguity.[5] If light is made too clear and too comprehensible by design, there remains no mystery to be manifested there, nor an interval for the worshipper to devote to their own inner journey. This domestication of light, while weakening the mosque's existential depth, can render it an object of architectural imagery. In this context, the article argues that constructing light as a design scenario narrows the worshipper's perceptual threshold and closes the ancient openness in the mosque. Thus, light's loss of its event quality also means the weakening of the immediate and temporal bond that space establishes with people. Therefore, our research proposes analyzing the crisis of intentionality hidden behind the visual perfection in contemporary projects and reconsidering light as a spatial opening.

2. Theoretical framework: Between manifestation and script

To understand the transformation of light into an object of intention, one must first consider what light makes possible as an event. In his illuminationist metaphysics, Suhrawardī elevates light beyond the physical to a degree of existence. According to Suhrawardī, everything is related to the intensity or scarcity of light (*nūr*); however, this is not merely a matter of visual brightness. With his concept of "knowledge by presence" (*ilm al ḥuḍūrī*), he argues that knowledge of a truth can only be attained by being present in the same space with that truth.[6] From an architectural perspective, this means that light ceases to be a mere decor standing still in space and becomes a presence that occurs together with the user and accompanies the body's slowing down in space. If light is confined to a pre-calculated brightness in every corner, the state of presence that Suhrawardī describes gives way to passive spectatorship.

On the other hand, Heidegger's concept of *Lichtung* grounds this presence on a deeper foundation. *Lichtung* is not merely a void or a clearing in the forest; it is a scene of truth where phenomena emerge from their self-concealment and reveal themselves.[7] For Heidegger, for something to exist means for it to "appear" in this openness. However, this appearance always goes hand in hand with concealment (mystery). Rather than being a tool that exposes everything to the naked eye, light becomes a possibility that sustains existence by revealing in a balanced way, allowing beings to preserve their own character. The task of light in the mosque is not to make every place equally visible. On the contrary, it is to keep that openness in a continuous state of event by both illuminating and keeping in shadow. This balanced revelation transforms the worshipper's relationship with space from mere visual perception into a continuous experience of being.

In contemporary design practice, however, light loses this quality of openness and becomes part of a script. Rather than leaving light as a field of manifestation, the architect calibrates it to produce a specific emotional response. Here, intentionality deprives light of its right to be an event in itself. If we think with ʿArabī's idea of perpetual creation (*khalq jadīd*), manifestation is an occurrence renewed every moment, never identical to the previous one. ʿArabī names this *tajallī*; Heidegger reaches toward the same ground with his notion of appearing.[8] Yet, in a digitally simulated light regime where every moment and angle is pre-controlled, this renewal ceases. Light is no longer an event; it has become a finished, completed design object awaiting consumption. This objective dominance, as a design intention, creates a kind of veiling that prevents space from transcending its own boundaries: when light is used to explain and illustrate space, the gaps in which the worshipper might construct their own meaning in that space are erased. In a mosque where everything is overly clear (designed, permeating every corner), the threshold of dimness and ambiguity required for Suhrawardī's manifestation of lights is exceeded. This reduces space to merely a visual object. In fact, the issue here is not to romanticize darkness. The matter is that, for openness to be experienced as an intellectual activity, a margin of partial invisibility is sometimes needed. Ultimately, from a phenomenological perspective, light needs a delay to penetrate the body. This delay, the process of the eye adapting from darkness to light, is not merely biological. It can also be understood as a spiritual threshold, a formal withdrawal. The speed of modern design, seeking an instantaneous effect, destroys this threshold. Consequently, the mosque space ceases to be open and transforms into a perfect copy of the idea in the architect's mind—that is, a script. Perhaps a question arises here: Could it be that the success of design silently diminishes the possibility of light being an event in itself?

3. Cases

The four cases analyzed in this section represent the process by which light's transformation from a conflict with matter as an element of resistance into a digitalized and domesticated script element. Selected structures encompass a sequence ranging from the perceptual delay created by the traditional stone mass, through the indirect openness offered by modern layering, and finally to scenarios designed with digital precision. Each structure is considered a critical juncture for understanding the authority of design intention over light and the position this authority creates in the user, whether presence (being there) or spectatorship.

3.1. Divriği Great Mosque

Divriği Great Mosque reveals the behavior of light within space as a process of physical conflict between mass and void, beyond a mere design intention. The light regime in the structure is founded on a strategy of delay that restricts light's entry into the space and defines it through the resistance it encounters with matter (stone), in contrast to the homogeneous lighting prevalent in modern mosques. This delay is not a matter of aesthetic preference. It is the construction, through architectural means, of the temporal threshold necessary for Suhrawardī's knowledge by presence. The distance light travels through the thickness of stone diminishes its intensity while transforming its perceptual pressure on the user.[9]

The light shadow interactions observed in the crown gates on the western and northern facades of the mosque

are concrete indicators of how architectural plasticity transforms light into a spatial event (Figure 1). The stonework on the mosque's outer shell is highly detailed. The high-relief ornaments here create a constantly changing shadow map throughout the day, depending on the sun's angle: the aim is not to present a specific image with the same clarity at every moment, as often seen in contemporary projects. Rather, the exchange between light and shadow occurs at certain intervals, then withdraws. This dynamic exchange between light and shadow carries the quality of an appearance (Heideggerian Ereignis) that emerges and then disappears at specific times.[10] Here, light ceases to be an external factor tasked with illuminating a surface; it becomes an actor that momentarily constitutes space together with the geometry of stone and then withdraws. Here, design does not control light. It creates the conditions for light to occur as an event in its own right.

Interior surfaces, unlike the exterior, are not detailed. In the quite plain interior surfaces, tension is achieved through a dynamic of light shadows. Here, the control and balanced scarcity of light necessitate a bodily slowing down. The narrow and deep openings of the windows allow light to seep in not directly, but through multiple reflections on the stone's texture. This technical solution keeps the lumen level low in space while rendering the available light as directional. The user's process of acclimation to this low light level is one of the factors determining the pace of movement in the mosque. While in modern mosque designs, light makes the entire volume of space consumable at a single glance, in Divriği, it presents space as fragmented, gradual, and discoverable only over time. This delayed presentation of light ensures that the user is not merely an observer in space but exists as a participant in that presence.

In this spatial configuration, shadow should not be read as an absence of light. As shown in Figure 2, shadow is a structural component that defines light's presence and its contact with matter. This balance—determining where light



Figure 1. The high relief ornaments on the crown gates create a constantly changing shadow map throughout the day, depending on the sun's angle.[11] Reproduced under open access terms from arkeolojisanat.com.



Figure 2. Interior view of the Divriği Great Mosque, showcasing its natural lighting regime.[12] Reproduced under open access terms from kulturportali.gov.tr (Turkish Ministry of Culture public portal).

will stop and where stone will be immersed in darkness—establishes a field of being that aligns with Heidegger's concept of openness (*Lichtung*). In this environment where light does not illuminate every surface with equal clarity, objects preserve their boundaries and involve the user in an active process of perception. If light were to invade the space to make everything transparent, as in today's mosques, the existential weight and temporal depth of the stone would be lost. Therefore, since light here is not a tool for explaining or illustrating design, it becomes an opening that allows space to transcend its own boundaries.

A lesson that Divriği offers us is that design intention, rather than freezing light as a script, creates physical obstacles (the thickness of stone, the scarcity of openings) that preserve its quality as an event. Suhrawardī's hierarchical conception of the universe, which views matter as a kind of condensed and veiled form of light, comes to life in Divriği through the tension between the solidity of stone and light's effort to permeate.[13] Here, light is a process renewed every moment with the movement of the sun.[14] Contemporary mosque design has largely lost this resistant character of light. It is precisely this quality that constitutes the existential depth of space. Consequently, this slowed-down and restricted use of light raises the user's perceptual threshold, creating a spatial experience that physicalizes the depth and continuity demanded by the place of worship.

3.2. Bait Ur Rouf Mosque

Rising as a spiritual sanctuary within the dense and irregular urban fabric of Dhaka's Faidabad area, the Bait Ur Rouf Mosque positions light not as a lighting input but as an agent that constitutes space. The story of the structure's existence begins with its patron, Sufia Khatun, who, after suffering losses, commissioned her granddaughter Marina Tabassum to build a place of worship. In this respect, the design germinated as a process of healing for both the architect and the user.[15;p(26)] In this project, Tabassum aims to return to the early Islamic mosque typology—that moment of purification, free of symbols and ritualistic excess. As Arrigoni notes in his analysis, this approach seeks to liberate the mosque from the cultural baggage of historical symbols such as the dome and minaret, focusing on a pure spirituality where light and void take the lead.[15;p(33)] Here, architectural intention, which is not about producing an image, is to reach the essence of the sacred through light.[16]

From this perspective, the structural configuration forms a complex dispositif comprising three interlocking geometric layers (square–circle–square). While the outermost brick cladding serves as a threshold filtering the noise and chaos of the street, the inner cylindrical volume rotates the main prayer hall towards the qibla direction at a 13-degree angle (Figure 3).[17] Arrigoni argues that this geometric rotation is not merely an orientation towards the qibla but also creates a perceptual delay between the outer world and the place of worship.[15;p(30)] In fact, we trace this perceptual delay from Divriği. We interpret the delay here as, in a sense, a formal withdrawal. Consequently, the triangular light courtyards formed between the outer periphery and the inner space, resulting from this geometric shift, prevent light from entering the prayer hall directly. As light passes through these layered voids, it loses its directness, refracts, and seeps in as it negotiates with matter. This indirectness opens a realm of being where the user, free from visual stimuli, can focus on Suhrawardī's knowledge by presence.

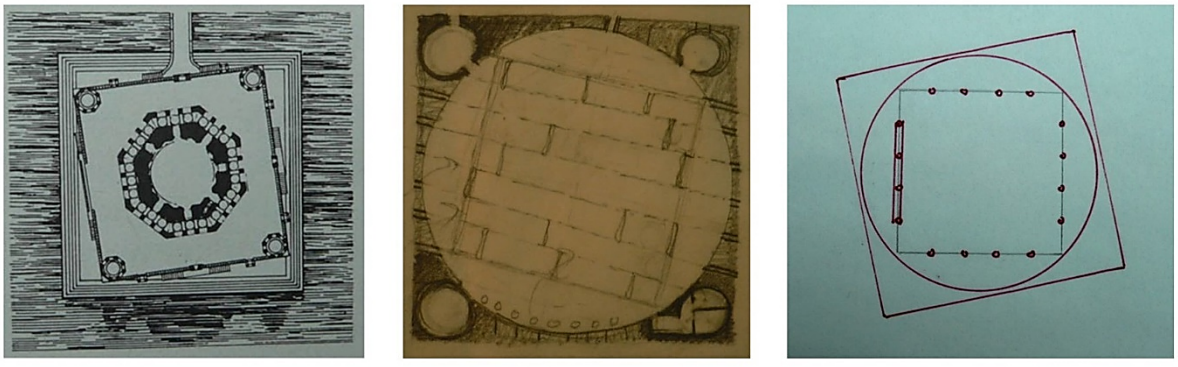


Figure 3. Conceptual massing sketch of the Bait Ur Rouf Mosque, showing the rotated inner prayer hall volume within the outer square mass.[18] Reproduced under open access terms from the official website of Marina Tabassum Architects.

When we read the light regime of Bait Ur Rouf as a tectonic honesty, it is shaped by the resistance of local materials, in contrast to the smooth, homogeneous control seen in contemporary mosques. The handmade rustic bricks used in the structure, with their textured surfaces that absorb and reflect light, provide a ground where light materializes. In Vacchini's observation, this is a gesture of thought, but always a situated, spatialized thought, subject to time and the elements: the passage of seasons, the interaction of clouds with water, air with heat, earth with dust. With its modest and simple material use, Bait Ur Rouf renounces all ornamentation. Its sole magnificence is entrusted to light and its various syntaxes. Light is refracted by the rotated bricks; it nearly solidifies as it filters through more than two hundred holes in the roof and finally reflects on the shiny floor of the prayer hall as a mobile *decus* (dignity).[19]

In Figure 4, over 200 circular perforations (skylights) in the ceiling of the prayer hall project the sun's movement throughout the day onto the floor, creating a carpet of light. At this point, light is not merely a tool that makes space visible; combined with the brick's porous texture, it becomes a building material that reconstructs space at every moment. The porous structure of the brick walls, left mortarless in places, allows light and air to circulate freely within the space, transforming the building into a breathing organism.



Figure 4. Photograph showing the cosmic movement of daylight within the mosque during prayer times.[20] Reproduced under open access terms from mosqpedia.org.

What this mosque demonstrates is that light operating as an event, rather than a script, keeps the worshipper's perceptual threshold open and alive. Unlike the linear light foci we will observe in the Sancaklar Mosque, which generate orientation and underline intention, here light is fragmented, discontinuous, and ambiguous. This ambiguity prevents the occurrence of mental closure mentioned in the Zeigarnik Effect. Zeigarnik's research showed that incomplete tasks are retained in memory more persistently than completed ones. The same logic finds a quiet parallel in spatial experience. A space that withholds something of itself holds the body's attention in ways that a fully legible space cannot. The worshipper cannot consume, archive, or forget the knowledge of the space all at once.[21] Light seeping through the pores of the material in this uncontrolled way produces an openness that escapes the architect's authority and surrenders itself to the movement of the natural world. Tabassum's search for "essence" is sealed by the fact that light, beyond being an ornament or a performance output, is an event that reveals space's own existence. Thus, rather than promising visual perfection, Bait Ur Rouf, through the dialectic of light and darkness, rescues the user from the position of spectator and makes them a part of or a dweller in space.

3.3. Gargash Mosque

Mohamed Abdulkhaliq Gargash Mosque in Dubai, also known as the "Light Mosque," [22] is one of the refined examples of light's transformation from an ontological event into a completely controlled design scenario. Where Divriği admits light through resistance and Bait Ur Rouf through layered indirection, Dabbagh's design operates through digital precision and absolute intentionality. Here, light ceases to be an element that allows space to reveal itself (*Lichtung*). Instead, it becomes a choreographic element that ensures the design's visual impact, losing its quality as an event and becoming a tool serving a predetermined perceptual outcome (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Calibrated light establishes absolute visual authority, eliminating spatial uncertainty. Photograph by Gerry O'Leary.[23] Reproduced under open access terms from theplan.it.

In this mosque, lighting is managed through triangular openings in the walls, dome, and ceiling. These openings are calibrated to cast a specific light pattern into the interior at every hour of the day, leaving no room for chance illumination. While in Divriği the movement of light on stone leaves a margin of uncertainty and concealment, here it is used to perfectly illustrate the geometric idea in the architect's mind. This disrupts the slow, exploratory nature of Suhrawardī's knowledge through its presence. Light functions as a script that dictates how the user should perceive the space. Instead of finding their own place within the light, the user becomes a spectator of a visual hierarchy determined by light.

The material selection and surface smoothness in the structure also bring the reflective character of light under absolute control. White surfaces soften light while simultaneously sterilizing it. This degree of purified and homogenized light weakens the quality of manifestation (*tajallī*) that Ibn al ʿArabī emphasizes as perpetually renewed (*khalq jadīd*) and unpredictable.[24] This light regime, with every angle calculated through digital simulations, eliminates the ontological distance created by ambiguity. When space becomes equally comprehensible and transparent from every point, Heidegger's openness is reduced to merely a bright room. This brightness, stripped of mystery and concealment, severs the worshipper's presence in space from temporal depth and confines it to an instantaneous visual consumption.

At this point, intentionality packages light as a component of image and identity. In the Gargash Mosque, light does not merely enable us to see; it also invites us to appreciate the design's success and elegance. This performative character of light narrows the perceptual threshold. The need for bodily slowing down and acclimation in Divriği is here replaced by an instantaneous visual saturation. This domestication of light deprives the mosque of its ability to transcend its own boundaries and build a world, fixing it as a design object. In this context, the mosque reveals how technical possibilities can transform light into an absolute script. This light regime, under the architect's absolute control, although offering aesthetic pleasure, reduces the variable and unsettling presence of existence to a simulated comfort zone. This loss of light's quality as an "event" is one of the quietest yet most profound crises facing contemporary mosque architecture.

3.4. Sancaklar Mosque

The Sancaklar Mosque in Istanbul claims purification from form and ontological simplicity in contemporary mosque architecture. The designer's office defines this claim as a primordial inner world, purified of cultural burdens, where physical and emotional pleasure are foregrounded, and directly associates the structure with a phenomenological effort of world-making. This fiction of a pure inner world begins to unravel, however, when light is examined on its own terms. In Sancaklar, light does not arrive as a free event. It arrives as a spatial instruction, calibrated in advance by architectural intention. In Sancaklar, rather than being an agent struggling with matter as in Divriği, light occupies the space frictionlessly as a sharp graphic element pre-calibrated onto surfaces of exposed concrete and natural stone. Light here no longer constitutes space as *nūr*. It concludes it as a lighting strategy and as a form of closure.

At first glance, as shown in Figure 6, the space appears quite compressed. Despite this, the interior, dominated by a light gray tone, creates a silent and tranquil effect. The



Figure 6. Interior views of the Sancaklar Mosque.[25] Reproduced under open access terms from the official website of Emre Arolat Architecture.

only light in this semi-illuminated mosque comes from a slit at the top of the qibla wall opposite. This light, even when the sky is overcast outside, suffices to illuminate the entire qibla wall and allows the mosque to be perceived as a whole. On one side, the tall, narrow mihrab, illuminated by concealed natural light, is one of the few traditional elements encountered inside the mosque. Another is the glass-enclosed prayer lectern, placed as a small projection on the left side wall (relative to the entrance), which is clad in black glass. The "Waw" (و) panel on the same wall is the only Arabic inscription within the mosque.

At this point, the structure establishes a direct affinity with Le Corbusier's use of light in the Ronchamp Chapel. In Ronchamp, light seeping through irrational openings in the thick walls creates a graphic smoothness and intense effect of patches in space; there, light is a clear element that pierces through matter and illustrates it.[26] In Sancaklar, similarly, rather than laboring within the mass of stone, light flows smoothly through a predetermined slit, forming a sharp line on the wall. This situation, which Pallasmaa terms ultimate visual hegemony, results in light being reduced to an intentional object that fixes the gaze in a single direction instead of nourishing bodily and temporal experience. In Ronchamp, Corbusier aimed for a meditative, expressionist spiritual atmosphere, with light filtering through white walls and colored glass. The windows scattered on the chapel's wall, widening inward, enhance the power of light as it enters. However, these speckled patterns, creating an impression of a starry night, transform light into a dramatic patch that emphasizes space rather than an element that constitutes it. In Ronchamp, the user sits in an ordered arrangement as required by the church typology, their face turned directly towards these powerful light patches. This spatial configuration reduces the user to a guest or, more sharply, to a directed passive consumer. The user, becoming a compulsory spectator in the face of light and the architectural script, consumes spiritual experience as a pre-scripted visual spectacle.

A similar situation emerges in the Sancaklar Mosque through paradoxical interventions concerning the collective and egalitarian nature of Islamic architecture. The designer's stated intention is essence and humility. The spatial result tells a different story. The stepped level differences in the prayer area work against the principle of believers standing as equals before God, which Islamic terminology names *taswiya*, and introduce a spatial hierarchy that the design's own rhetoric cannot accommodate. Just as in the seating arrangement at Ronchamp, in Sancaklar, the worshipper's gaze and body are fixed upon an intense and linear patch of light extending along the qibla wall. This leads light to

become not an element that opens up space, but a graphic dispositive that imprisons the gaze. In Sancaklar, light meets no resistance. It negotiates with nothing. This frictionless self-revelation transforms the spatial experience from an event into a performance that exists to validate the design. The passive spectator forced to look at light in Ronchamp becomes, in Sancaklar, a spectator forced to focus on the linear light line. In both structures, light leads to the loss of temporal depth, severing the sacred space from its quality as a continuous event and bringing it closer to a completed, instantaneously consumable architectural image.

Behind the dim and mysterious atmosphere constructed by the Sancaklar Mosque lies a regime of declaration through which architectural intention legitimizes itself via text. In his critique of the structure, Doğan Tekeli notes that Emre Arolat aims to address some fundamental issues of contemporary mosque design and to reflect deeply on the essence of a religious space. According to Tekeli's observation, the designer proceeds from the principle that, in terms of tradition and practice, a mosque does not contain predetermined immutable forms and that prayer can be performed in any clean space. The primary goal of the architect and his colleagues at this point is to approach the design primarily as a construct of an inner world, purifying light and material from all cultural baggage by representing them in their purest form. Accordingly, the interior of the mosque is conceived as a cave-like experiential field, inspired by Qur'anic texts and isolated from all external influences.[27]

The text titled *Öz* (The Essence), mounted on the library building's lower platform at the mosque entrance and penned by Emre Arolat himself, is of key importance for understanding the design's ideological framework. The inscription presents a manifesto beginning with the 37th verse of Surah Al Isra, which advises humility:

> Walk not on the earth with insolence: for thou canst not rend the earth asunder, nor reach the mountains in height.[28]
>
> This is any place, a place of prostration. It is pure. It was built with the motto of humility. It neither boasts with its form nor swells with its figure. It does not come between the Creator and man with its grandeur. It refrains. Rather, it seeks the essence hidden behind forms. It touches the earth lightly... Its interior is as plain as its exterior; it does not dress up; it does not shout out. As I said, it is humble. The only ornament is the light that washes the qibla wall... (Emre Arolat, Architect)[29]

This text, woven in a poetic style and reinforcing its credibility with a verse from the Qur'an, opens a minimal field of legitimacy by emphasizing that the structure is a pure place of prostration. At this point, a new theoretical reading is necessary for Sancaklar: The Spatialization of Time and Static Awe. A genuine cave experience or the ancient darkness in Divriği presents light as an ever-changing, ambiguous, and unpredictable openness. In Sancaklar, however, natural light is confined within a linear slit, serving to spatialize time. Light is no longer an element that recreates space every moment with the movement of the sun; it becomes a decor expected to fall from a specific angle, completing the space at that moment. The state of incompleteness (closure) identified by Zeigarnik here emerges as an architectural style: light leaves no realm of mystery to be discovered in space; instead, it constructs the feeling of awe as a ready-made, finished package of experience presented to the user.

Another issue in Sancaklar can be read through phenomenological reductionism. The project's use of textured surfaces, such as exposed concrete and natural stone, promises a haptic depth. However, the sterile and clear beam of light descending from above, while illuminating these textures, ironically flattens them. Light's encounter with no resistance eliminates the shadows' *umbra/penumbra* in the stone's texture, reducing it to merely a visual pattern. This is the matter Tanizaki addresses in his text *In Praise of Shadows*, how the intensity of light kills the depth of the object.[30] Light's sudden self-revelation without encountering any resistance, without negotiating with the mass of stone, transforms spatial experience from an event into a performance that validates the design. Resistance is the sole element that ensures the sustainability of light as an existential event; in Sancaklar, however, this resistance has been sacrificed for pure form.

There is one further dimension to this critique that the cave metaphor itself invites. A genuine cave is above all a temporally alive space. Dawn reads differently from noon, and dusk carries its own register entirely. Light in a cave is the very mechanism through which the body keeps time. In Sancaklar, artificial lighting completely severes this bond. This matters beyond phenomenology. The timing of prayer is among the fundamental obligations of Islamic worship. The daily cycle of light is not incidental to the act of prayer but constitutive of it. A mosque that renders the hour imperceptible departs, by its own logic, from the very metaphor it claims as its foundation. An even more critical issue is the position of the light regime in Sancaklar, which ostensibly frees the user but constrains them perceptually. Here, light is not a subject but an architectural dispositif (mechanism) that imprisons the user's perception on the qibla wall and its linear continuity. Instead of constructing their own presence within the chaotic, uncanny

darkness of a cave, the user experiences the role of a passive spectator assigned to them within the controlled atmospheric scenario designed by the architect.[31] Light remaining as a clean, clear, and smooth patch leads to the loss of temporal depth, severing the mosque space from its quality as a continuous event and bringing it closer to a completed, consumable architectural image. Ultimately, the Sancaklar Mosque is an example of how modern architectural intention, in its effort to represent the sacred, domesticates light and transforms it into a design output (script). Reducing light to a subheading of design in this way weakens its power to construct presence, while fixing the space merely as an object of visual appreciation.

4. Conclusion

This study has exposed a shift in mentality within the light regime by examining the position of light in contemporary mosque architecture along the tension line between an existential event and a design scenario. The strategy of delay in the Divriği Great Mosque and the layered, indirectness of Bait Ur Rouf represent an ancient resistance in which light negotiates with matter. In contrast, the digital choreography of the Gargash Mosque and the ideologically constructed modest intentionality of Sancaklar tell the story of light's reduction from an agent that opens space to an instrument that explains it. As emphasized throughout the research, the loss of light's ambiguous quality, which transcends design, is not merely an aesthetic preference. It is a crisis of intentionality that shallows the ontological depth of the sacred space.

This study remains mindful of the interpretive risks inherent in its own methodology. A phenomenological reading inevitably moves in a hermeneutic circle, where the analyst brings a pre-formed theoretical optic to the material, and that optic quietly shapes what surfaces. The four cases gathered here were chosen to open a critical conversation spanning different geographies, periods, and formal ambitions, a conversation that, to our knowledge, has not been conducted through the lens of Islamic illuminationist philosophy before. Even so, drawing sweeping conclusions about contemporary mosque architecture from just four cases would go well beyond what this study can responsibly claim. The intention has always been to show that light and space can be approached through a fundamentally different epistemological register, not to deliver a final verdict. Future researchers are warmly invited to extend, challenge, or reframe this framework across other sacred typologies and cultural contexts. One further limitation deserves honest acknowledgment here. The claim that a space is devoid of knowledge by presence, as argued in the Gargash analysis, rests on philosophical interpretation rather than empirically measurable ground. In phenomenological inquiry, this is the discipline's accepted and indeed necessary mode of argumentation. What can be stated with greater confidence is that the spatial conditions making such presence possible, namely resistance, temporal variability, and perceptual delay, are structurally absent from that design. The Sancaklar case ultimately shows how a design that declares humility can still exercise a quiet but total authority over the worshipper's perceptual world.

Our interpretive analyses demonstrate that the homogenization of light under absolute control creates an illusion of mental completion and suspends spatial experience. In atmospheres where light exposes every corner with the same clarity, the clearing in which the worshipper might construct their own meaning is closed. While constructing light as a script imprisons space within a photograph frame, rapidly aging it, spaces where light is freed as an event preserve their quality as ever-renewing fields of manifestation (*tajallī*). The perceptual delay and bodily slowing down that Suhrawardī posits as necessary for knowledge by presence (*ilm al ḥuḍūrī*) can only come to life in this resistant and shadow-laden relationship that light enters with matter. In contemporary mosque design, this study proposes abandoning the comfort of managed brilliance and returning light to its natural state. The success of a designer should be measured by how much space they open for light to occur as an event in itself. Future architectural practice must develop an ethics of light that, instead of using light as a brush to illustrate space, acknowledges the right of shadow and views ideological incompleteness as a possibility. An architecture willing to relinquish control over light is an architecture willing to return the worshipper to presence, to that ancient openness Heidegger named *Lichtung*. An architecture oriented toward the presence of light rather than its management may yet restore to the mosque what scripted brilliance has quietly taken away, the capacity to remain, for those who enter it, an open field of world-making.

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