Stop the Murdoch (Flt 93) Memorial Blogburst: Professor who white-washed the Crescent of Embrace was Paul MurdochÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s classmate at UCLA

Description



Professor who white-washed the Crescent of Embrace was Paul MurdochÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s classmate at UCLA An excerpt from the Park Service investigation into the Flight 93 memorial identifies one of their consultants as a scholar from MIT who Ã¢â‚¬Å“wishes to remain anonymous.Ã¢â‚¬Â• Another document identifies this person as a religious scholar or a professor of Islamic architecture. MIT does not have a religion department, and they only have one professor of Islamic architecture: Professor Nassar Rabbat, who has confirmed that he is the Park Service consultant.

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A check of RabbatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s background shows that he was a classmate of Paul Murdoch, both getting masters degrees in architecture from UCLA in 1984 and both doing their masters work on Middle Eastern subjects. Murdoch wrote a Ã¢â‚¬Å“masters projectÃ¢â‚¬Â• titled: Ã¢â‚¬Å“A museum for Haifa, Israel.Ã¢â‚¬Â• Rabbat did a masters thesis titled: Ã¢â‚¬Å“House-form, climactic response and lifestyle: a study of the 17-19th century courthouse houses in Cairo and Damascus.Ã¢â‚¬Â•

This connection between Murdoch and Rabbat raises the possibility that Murdoch himself orchestrated the Park Service investigation into warnings about his own design. Rabbat denies knowing Murdoch, but given the blatant dishonesty of what he told the Park Service, that denial cannot be trusted.

Rabbat lied about something that every practicing Muslim knows

RabbatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s first Ã¢â‚¬Å“major talking pointÃ¢â‚¬Â• (from the Memorial ProjectÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s White Paper, towards the bottom) is a blatantly dishonest excuse for why the Park Service should not be concerned about the almost exact Mecca orientation of the Crescent of Embrace. A crescent that Muslims face into to face Mecca is called a *mihrab* and is the central feature around which every mosque is built. Rabbat assures the Park Service that because the Mecca orientation of the Crescent of Embrace is inexact, it canÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t be seen as a mihrab:

> Mihrab orientation is either correct or not. It cannot be off by some degrees.

Absolutely false, and Rabbat certainly knows it. This goes to the most basic principle of mosque design: that all mosques are expressions of MuhammadÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s prototype.

MuhammadÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s original mosque in Medina was *not* oriented precisely on Mecca. It was built to face Jerusalem. Later in his career Muhammad changed the direction that Muslims were to face for prayer (their qibla direction). Instead of facing north from Medina to Jerusalem they were to face south, towards Mecca (Koran 2.142-145). To effect this change, Muhammad just started using the southerly

wall of his mosque as his Ã¢â‚¬Å“qibla wallÃ¢â‚¬Â• instead of the northerly wall, even though this wall had not been built to face Mecca.

In the abstract, Muhammad held the qibla direction from Medina to be Ã¢â‚¬Å“south.Ã¢â‚¬Â• But Mecca is not quite due south from Medina either. Thus both in practice and in the abstract, Muhammad was not particular about an exact orientation on Mecca, and in Islam, what is good enough for Muhammad has to be good enough for everyone. He is the model.

This leeway to face only roughly towards Mecca for prayer is not some obscure bit of doctrine. Every practicing Muslim knows that qibla orientation does not have to be exact because they all have to avail themselves of this allowance pretty much every day as they seek walls that are oriented not too far off of Mecca which they can face into for their frequent prayers.

Rabbat just flat out lied about something that every practicing Muslim knows, and this is an expert in Mosque design. He knows better than anyone the historic leeway afforded in Mecca orientation.

Is Rabbat the source of Patrick WhiteÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s foolishness?

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RabbatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s dishonest report to the Park Service may explain an amazing argument made by Patrick White, Vice President of Families of Flight 93. At the July 2007 public meeting of the Memorial Project, White argued in a private conversation that the almost exact Mecca-orientation of the giant crescent cannot be intended as a tribute to Islam because the inexactness of it would be Ã¢â‚¬Å“disrespectful to Islam.Ã¢â‚¬Â•

At the same time as White was privately making excuses for the almost exact Mecca orientation of the crescent, he was telling the newspapers that the Mecca orientation claim was false and preposterous, so he certainly cannot be absolved. But it *is* possible that he himself was misled about how Muslims would regard an inexactly oriented mihrab.

The Memorial Project received RabbatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s comments about a year earlier, and Patrick White certainly had access to them. It seems likely that when White said that an inexact orientation on Mecca would be Ã¢â‚¬Å“disrespectful to Islam,Ã¢â‚¬Â• he was following RabbatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s Ã¢â‚¬Å“canÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t be offÃ¢â‚¬Â• lead.

The crescent design also includes an exact Mecca orientation

If Nassar Rabbat actually read the information that Alec Rawls sent to the Memorial Project, he would know that in addition to the physical crescent, the Crescent of Embrace design also includes a thematic crescent, defined by architect Paul Murdoch himself. The upper tip of this thematic crescent is the point where, in MurdochÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s explanation, the flight path breaks the circle. If this thematic or Ã¢â‚¬Å“trueÃ¢â‚¬Â• upper crescent tip is used to define the orientation of the crescent, then the crescent points exactly to Mecca.

If Rabbat really thinks that exactness is what matters, he would have been alarmed to see that this thematic crescent is oriented exactly on Mecca. Instead, he ignored it.

The Park Service already knew about the Mecca orientation of the crescent

The Park ServiceÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s other Islamic scholar, Kevin Jaques, did the same thing as Rabbat. He admitted the similarity between the giant Mecca oriented crescent and a traditional Islamic mihrab, then concocted a blatantly dishonest excuse for why the Park Service shouldnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t be concerned about it. Jaques assured the Park Service that there was no reason to worry because no one had ever seen a mihrab this *big* before:

> Thirdly, most mihrabs are small, rarely larger than the figure of a man, although some of the more ornamental ones can be larger, but nothing as large at the crescent found in the site design. It is unlikely that most Muslims would walk into the area of the circle/crescent and see a mihrab because it is well beyond their limit of experience. Again, just because it is similar does not make it the same.

If Jaques and Rabbat were willing to engage in such blatantly dishonest excuse-making, why did they start out by admitting that the giant crescent was geometrically close to a perfect mihrab? Because the Park Service *already knew* that the giant crescent was oriented almost exactly on Mecca, and that a crescent that Muslims face into to face Mecca is the central feature around which every mosque is built.

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Advisory Commission member Tim Baird would admit this explicitly in 2007, but it was obvious much earlier. What the Park Service wanted when it conducted its internal investigation in the spring and summer of 2006 was excuses not to be concerned about these damning facts, and that is what Jaques and Rabbat provided. Similarly for the egregious Daniel Griffith, the Ã¢â‚¬Å“professor of geospatial information,Ã¢â‚¬Â• who told the newspapers that Ã¢â‚¬Å“anything can point to Mecca, because the earth is round.Ã¢â‚¬Â•

The Park Service knew this was all fraudulent. GriffithÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s Ã¢â‚¬Å“anything can point to MeccaÃ¢â‚¬Â• and RabbatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s Ã¢â‚¬Å“it has to be exactÃ¢â‚¬Â• were complete contradictions of each other, but the Park Service gladly embraced both as excuses to pretend that there was nothing to worry about.

If these government functionaries were this desperate for a cover up, it is certainly plausible that they would accept any help they could get from Paul Murdoch. Not that it is hard to find radically dishonest, America-hating academics, but these three frauds are outliers even by worst standards.

More dishonest excuse-making from Rabbat

RabbatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s next talking point is more of the same dishonest excuse-making:

> Besides, in the US, a debate has been going on as to which is the right Mecca orientation: the one going through the North Pole or the one that follows a flat representation of the globe.

The orientation Ã¢â‚¬Å“through the North PoleÃ¢â‚¬Â• (55.2Ã‚Â° clockwise from north, to be precise) is the great-circle direction to Mecca. This great circle direction to Mecca is the orientation of the Crescent of Embrace (almost exactly), and it is the direction in which almost all Muslims pray.

A few dissenters pray in the rhumb-line direction to Mecca (the direction of constant compass heading, which spirals down the globe in an east-southeasterly direction from North America). Rabbat pretends

that the existence of these few dissenters somehow makes the whole matter of the Mecca oriented crescent a non-issue.

If anything, the debate over qibla direction shows the flexibility of the qibla direction, giving the lie to RabbatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s earlier assertion that mihrab orientation Ã¢â‚¬Å“canÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t be off.Ã¢â‚¬Â•

Rabbat certainly knows that the great-circle direction to Mecca is the dominant qibla direction. (It won out over the rhumb line direction for the very good reason that a person facing in the rhumb-line direction to Mecca is not actually facing Mecca, since the rhumb-line follows a curved path.) But donÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t worry about a little thing like the crescent facing in the dominant qibla direction. Rabbat has plenty of lame excuses why you donÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t need to care.

Tom BurnettÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s call for a Congressional investigation

The Park Service wonÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t say how they came up with Griffith, Jaques and Rabbat so we have to force them. A lot of People must be forced to answer these and a lot of other hard questions, and the only way to do it is to heed Tom BurnettÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s call for a Congressional Investigation.

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Stop the Memorial Blogburst

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