City as a Mosque
Makkah
Studio Bound

Founded in 2015, Studio Bound operates as both design studio and research lab. A collaboration between Hussam Dakkak, Hessa Al Bader, and Basmah Kaki, the studio works with designers and professionals across the design spectrum. The research lab studies complex and unique urban contexts which shape the spaces they eventually design.

Witness a place within a place, controlled, imagined. A free space, a non-space that expands one’s perception by transcending reality and broadening the horizon between the imagined and the perceptible.

This photo essay is a case study for dissolving boundaries, a reverse engineering into the modus operandi of the sacred spaces of ‘Umm Al Qura,’ the mother of all settlements: Makkah. We strive to explore and challenge the landmarks that have come to define our understanding and experiences of Makkah.

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A rise in activity within the mosque or a new expansion of its structure can serve as a precursor or extension of civic development within the larger sphere of the city.
Considering this inherent link, the vision to expand the boundaries of the mosque and extend it into the city, commanding a larger footprint and circumference, results in the need for increased infrastructural support, namely an extensive road network and new accommodations.
Challenging the notion of what constitutes a boundary, we document the accidental topographies that emerge through the perceived landscapes of the city. An empirical, formal establishment of sacred boundaries triggers further dimensions of 'sacredness,' emanating through the arteries and capillaries of the city.

A declared sacred and holy site, the conditions that delineate its boundaries and such demarcation of space can extend from the territorial to the individual scale. The sacred landscapes of Makkah adapt to an organic proliferation embedded within the DNA of the city through nuanced manifestations.
While explicitly delineated physically, with several gates that have grown grander and larger over time, the interface between city and mosque is becoming increasingly blurred as the city grows. The boundary becomes secondary.

Makkah: a city as a mosque, where functional morphology yields to its essence as holy and sacred space. A unique urban quarrrel of contrasts and contradictions, one that prompts debate on the classification of space: between public and private, holy and unsanctified.

Makkah as a city is sacred ground, a mosque. In Islam, the whole city of Makkah is considered sacred ground, and as such the urban domain of its metropolis is a spiritual one, and consequently urban evolution and practice are intrinsically tied to the mosque.
What follows are a series of Nolli map traces of Makkah. The Nolli maps chart the relationship between sacred places of worship (the mosques) and their urban domain. In their bold composition, the maps invite an analysis of the unfolding of spaces within Makkah and the morphologies of the different neighborhoods. They reveal the extent of continuity of space between the sacred and open sectors, depicting the mosques as an extension of the urban fabric, giving a sense of how the public understands and uses the prayer spaces of the city.
Al Hujun – North East of Al Haram
Al Sharashif – South West of Al Haram

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Launched in 2015 in partnership between Studio Bound and The Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, AA Jeddah is a research platform studying and archiving Makkah. In the spirit of the explorer, the overall ambition of AA Jeddah is to compile a body of research about the city of Makkah that extends beyond the Holy Mosque. Its mission is to record and represent both the visible and invisible landscapes of the city. Managed by Studio Bound, AA Jeddah continues to expand its rich archive into Makkah, uncovering uncharted territories of exploration.