



Islamic Architecture Today and Tomorrow (Re)defining the Field

Edited by
Mohammad Gharipour
and Daniel E. Coslett

Critical Studies in Architecture of the Middle East

Islamic Architecture Today and Tomorrow (Re)defining the Field

Edited by Mohammad Gharipour and Daniel E. Coslett



Bristol, UK / Chicago, USA

Contents

List of Figures	xi
Acknowledgements	xvii
Introduction. The Changed and Changing Field of 'Islamic Architecture' <i>Mohammad Gharipour and Daniel E. Coslett</i>	1
Part 1. Research and Scholarship	9
Chapter 1. The Study of Islamic Architecture: Reflections on an Expanding Field <i>Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom</i>	11
Chapter 2. Widening the Horizons for the Study of Islamic Architecture <i>Bernard O'Kane</i>	29
Chapter 3. Modern Architecture and Colonialism in the Islamic World <i>Brian L. McLaren</i>	43
Part 2. Scope and Scale	55
Chapter 4. From Garden to Landscape: Lessons from the Taj and the Alhambra <i>D. Fairchild Ruggles</i>	57
Chapter 5. Invisible Geographies in the Study of Islamic Architecture <i>Abidin Kusno</i>	69
Chapter 6. Silencing Palestinian Architectural History in Israel: Reflections on Scholarship and Activism <i>Alona Nitzan-Shiftan</i>	79

Chapter 7.	Islamic Architecture in the Americas: Advancing a Transregional and Hemispheric Approach <i>Caroline 'Olivia' M. Wolf</i>	93
Part 3. Historiography and Context		113
Chapter 8.	Cultural Encounters, Local Practice, and Historical Process in the Ancient Middle East <i>Dell Upton</i>	115
Chapter 9.	Neo-Eurocentrism and Science: Implications for the Historiography of Islamic Art and Architecture <i>Samer Akkach</i>	125
Chapter 10.	Carving an Epistemological Space for Southeast Asia: Historiographical and Critical Engagements <i>Imran bin Tajudeen</i>	141
Part 4. Fieldwork and Documentation		159
Chapter 11.	A Field without Fieldwork: Sustaining the Study of Islamic Architecture in the Twenty-First Century <i>Nancy Um</i>	161
Chapter 12.	Architectural History in Turkey: Between Fieldwork and Archival Research <i>Patricia Blessing</i>	175
Chapter 13.	Documenting Islamic Architecture: Objectives and Outcomes in a Time of War <i>Sharon C. Smith</i>	189
Part 5. Education and Pedagogy		203
Chapter 14.	Reorienting Perspectives: Why I Do Not Teach a Course Titled 'Islamic Architecture' <i>Jelena Bogdanović</i>	205
Chapter 15.	Decolonizing Architectural Knowledge: Situating Middle Eastern Pedagogies in a Globalizing World <i>Ashraf M. Salama</i>	221

Chapter 16.	Educating the Public about Islamic Art and Architecture through Museums <i>Sheila R. Canby</i>	233
Part 6. Curation and Publication		245
Chapter 17.	Displaying Islamic Arts in Global Cities <i>Jorge Correia</i>	247
Chapter 18.	Curating the 'Islamic': The Personal and the Political <i>Leslee Katrina Michelsen</i>	259
Chapter 19.	Islamic Architecture on the Move: Publishing Architectural History in the Digital Age <i>Nancy Micklewright</i>	271
Chapter 20.	Illustrating Islamic Architecture: On Visual Presentation and Scholarship <i>Lorenz Korn</i>	285
Part 7. Globalization and Change		309
Chapter 21.	Uneven Geographies and Neoliberal Urban Transformation in Arab Cities <i>Rami F. Daher</i>	311
Chapter 22.	Affection for <i>Nouvel</i> Architecture: On Contemporary (Islamic) Architecture and Affect <i>Şebnem Yücel</i>	325
Chapter 23.	The 'Islamic-Modern' Project in this Age of Uncertainty <i>Vikramaditya Prakash</i>	339
Part 8. Experience and Use		353
Chapter 24.	The Tourist Gaze, Visiting Mosques, and the Folds of Architecture <i>Elif Kalaycıoğlu and Waleed Hazbun</i>	355
Chapter 25.	Decolonizing the Conservation of Islamic Built Heritage in Egypt <i>Hossam Mahdy</i>	371

Chapter 26.	(Dis)placement and Placemaking: Reconsidering Islamic Architecture through Refugee Agency <i>Kıvanç Kılınç and Bülent Batuman</i>	387
Part 9. Practice and Profession		399
Chapter 27.	'Islamic Architecture' and the Profession <i>Nasser Rabbat</i>	401
Chapter 28.	A Trinity of Values in Architecture for Muslim Societies <i>Rasem Badran</i>	409
Chapter 29.	Relevance, Tradition, and Practice in Islamic Architecture <i>Kamil Khan Mumtaz</i>	421
Chapter 30.	Architectural Competitions: Creating Dialogues and Promoting Excellence <i>Hasan-Uddin Khan</i>	435
Contributor Biographies		453
Index		461

Introduction

The Changed and Changing Field of 'Islamic Architecture'

Mohammad Gharipour and Daniel E. Coslett

The architecture – historic and contemporary – of the Islamic world has attracted increasingly significant attention in non-specialist circles during recent decades. Indeed, as the eyes of the world have focused on the Middle East and North Africa – whether in the aftermath of 9/11, lured by stunning Persian Gulf ‘starchitecture’, or amidst the excitement of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ – questions regarding what constitutes Islamic identity and architecture have surfaced again and again. Many minds immediately turn to mosques in Mecca and medieval Egypt, and perhaps to Ottoman Turkey, but there is of course so much more. ‘Islamic architecture’ appears in the United States, Brazil, France, Australia, and elsewhere far from the traditional epicentres of historic Islam. Depending on one’s definition, it includes both sacred and secular built environments, as well as those with long histories and those that may be brand new. Skyscrapers, hotels, schools, cultural centres, boulevards, and even whole cities might be considered ‘Islamic’ by today’s scholars and practitioners of design.

Since its establishment as a specialist field by art historians in nineteenth-century Europe, Islamic art (and architecture) has captured the attention of visual and cultural historians, urbanists, designers, preservationists, tourism professionals, and others. Initially deeply saturated with dominant orientalist and colonialist perspectives, the field has changed quite a bit as it has become more inclusive, diverse, and geographically diffused.¹ Indeed, many scholars have wrestled with the meaning of ‘Islamic architecture’, acknowledging the inadequacy of traditional conceptions that – despite significant changes – remain tied to orientalist notions of ‘the other’ and fail to capture the diversity of Islamic contexts in our increasingly interconnected world.² When considering the critical areas of authenticity, identity, symbolism, style, agency, and function, one is struck by the field’s breadth, potential flexibility, complexity, and relevance, both in assessing its past and plotting its future as a living, changing arena. Adding to the dynamism of architecture and the global Islamic context today is the movement toward historiographic critique on the part of scholars who define the field and educate future researchers, teachers, and designers. Calls for revisions to global histories, along with increased awareness of the entangled nature of the postcolonial world, further complicate assumptions about a field that was once envisioned quite narrowly as exclusively medieval, sacred, and Middle Eastern.³

Defining 'Islamic Architecture'

While some readers may be expertly acquainted with Islamic art and architecture, many will be unsure of the field's nature, likely recognizing some imprecision in the meaning of 'Islamic architecture'. What constitutes 'Islamic' built environments? From where and what time do they come? Are they exclusively sacred? These remain in many ways open questions and most attempts to define the terminology related to the field still end up retaining some degree of ambiguity or flexibility. Indeed, as Nasser Rabbat has noted, the idea that 'Islamic architecture' is the 'formal expression of Islam' – despite the absence of a consensus on what that really means and a durable denial of Islam's heterogeneity – remains 'the background of every major debate within the field, or in the larger discipline of art history as it tries to accommodate its structure and epistemological contours to the age of postcolonial criticism and globalization'.⁴ While traditional interpretations of the field have been seriously challenged since the publication of Edward Said's seminal *Orientalism* in 1978, the legacies of orientalism, periodization based on ruling dynasties, and longstanding emphases on religion have remained inexorable and some regions are still often overlooked.⁵ In the words of Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, 'Islamic architecture' persists as an 'unwieldy field' encompassing 'much, if not most, of the art produced over fourteen centuries in the "Islamic lands"'.⁶ Hasan-Uddin Khan, mindful of geographic and temporal limitations and assumptions carried by the 'Islamic' label when referring to the culture and religion of Muslims, considers 'Islam as a civilization, encompassing the secular and the religious', and thus prefers the term 'arts of Islam' in an effort to be as inclusive as possible.⁷ In search of a fully decolonized art history, Wendy Shaw urges scholars to think beyond the enduring Hegelian structure of art history that views objects through the lenses of construction and content, and to consider sensorial experience in what she calls 'perceptual culture' while prioritizing 'reception over production'.⁸

As we have done in our capacities as editorial team members at the *International Journal of Islamic Architecture (IJIA)*, in this volume we aim to expand readers' ideas about built environments in the Islamic world by inviting them to go beyond the conventional boundaries of 'Islamic' architecture and by exploring architecture through an interdisciplinary lens in relation to a wide range of factors (e.g., social and cultural histories, geography, politics, aesthetics, technology, and conservation). Using this transdisciplinary framework reveals new perspectives within the field and acknowledges and engages experts from disciplines outside of architecture, thereby expanding understandings of Islamic architecture today. It also encourages new ways of thinking about lived and experienced spaces rather than museumified objects in isolation. As noted above, this work has been going on for some time. The volume thus reflects and extends some of the 'new approaches, greater crossdisciplinarity, and an increasingly sophisticated engagement with theory and criticism [that] are repositioning Islamic architecture in a more reflective place', described by Rabbat, despite growing political and social hostility to Islam in some parts of the world.⁹

This emphasis on transdisciplinary collaborations has led to some interesting outcomes, as can be seen in the pages of *IJIA*, where we have worked with contributors from diverse

academic disciplines, including art history, urban planning, landscape design, sociology, anthropology, and archaeology. These partnerships can be challenging, since disciplinary barriers can make us sensitive to criticism and resistant to alternative viewpoints on the subjects we study, but they have produced some refreshingly original essays. We admire and appreciate the bravery of scholars who welcome such opportunities, sharing their expertise and knowledge while tearing down disciplinary barriers. Many of the authors here have undertaken this type of inspiring work in *IJIA* and elsewhere. Indeed, this collection, in its totality, may be read as an endorsement for even more collaborative transdisciplinary research, teaching, publication, and design work.

Ultimately, we therefore advance a comprehensive definition of 'Islamic architecture' that embraces different historical and contemporary contexts, geographies, scales, functions, and meanings. It recognizes the inseparable nature of the secular and sacred and the significance of experience and perception in studying, understanding, and designing built environments within the Islamic world and beyond. Like the world it describes, the term's definition is changing.

Re-envisioning the Field

Reconceptualizing terminology is of course but one step. In order to change – to expand, diversify, globalize, decolonize – one must first know (what one can) of the existing field. The future of Islamic architecture should be transdisciplinary, inclusive, responsive to contemporary events, historically cognizant, and future-oriented. Significant progress has been made, but there is ample room to expand and diversify the field.

Any paradigm shift would require bold collaborations and stepping outside academic and intellectual comfort zones. We need to redefine the notion of research and scholarship, to go beyond our conventions, admit and appreciate diversity in scholarship, and to encourage critical thinking by engaging new platforms and venues. This may be quite challenging in a strained academic world dealing with budgetary restrictions and driven by tenure criteria that afford insufficient value to publishing in newspapers, magazines, and encyclopaedias, and for documenting endangered sites, conducting creative pedagogical projects, and promoting innovative study-abroad programs. It is obvious that we need to become more entrepreneurial and inclusive in order to maintain our position as contributors to important scholarship and critical thinking. While expertise remains vitally important, there is so much to learn from scholars in other fields and with different backgrounds and experiences. Our biggest achievement – the research framework within which we operate – has been shaped throughout decades and even centuries; however, longstanding practices and systems of inquiry become substantial liabilities when they impose limitations on creative thinking and the productive use of holistic and global approaches.

The relegation of Islamic architecture to the past – the denial of its contemporaneity – is merely one such limitation. Related to this historicizing tendency is the separation of architectural history/theory and the practice/experience of architecture in the Islamic world today.¹⁰

How can architectural research inform and educate the professional audience across the Islamic world while raising consciousness about creativity, good design, global vision, and meaningful preservation in the Islamic world and beyond? How might the consideration of contemporary design processes help historians better understand the past, and vice versa? Much of the architecture in the Islamic world is indeed a living, changing practice that is deeply rooted in history. Whether architects today embrace or reject that past (or some understanding thereof), it remains relevant. 'Local versus learned' knowledge matters.¹¹ An emphasis on the importance of transhistorical connections – architectural, material, spiritual, experiential, or otherwise – might open new avenues for creativity and deeper understandings of today's built environments, both historic and new.

This Volume

Here we present a selection of short critical reflections on the field of Islamic architecture by scholars and practitioners, many of whom have helped define its contours over the past several decades. Many of the essays contained in this volume first appeared in *IJIA*'s tenth anniversary issue, the theme of which was "Islamic Architecture": Reflections on the Field.¹² Several others included here are revised versions of thematic commentaries previously published in *IJIA*. The remainder have been commissioned specifically for this volume, drafted to fill gaps and further explore certain critical areas. This collected set of commentaries ultimately explores issues of pressing scholarly and professional concern for the wider field of Islamic architectural studies, including the related arenas of art, architectural history, design, urbanism, preservation or conservation, historiography, and education. The volume reviews past efforts and responds to new trends and innovations in both scholarship and practice. It explores changing methodologies, identifies new challenges, introduces creative approaches to old questions, asks new questions, and addresses contemporary issues and on-going controversies relevant to the field and, arguably, to the broader public as well.

The volume's 30 essays are grouped into nine sections that cover the realm of architecture in the Islamic world, from its study and publication to its preservation, creation, and use. These are not mutually exclusive categories and inevitably some degree of overlap exists between them. While some essays are more specifically place- or context-focused, their insights offer avenues for the exploration of other related areas and issues, leaving the reader to explore connections through comparison and extension. Authors have written their chapters in a manner intended to be accessible to both specialist and student alike.

Contributors address research and scholarship in the first section, exploring the nature of Islamic architecture as a changing intellectual field of inquiry. The next section, on scope and scale, includes essays that advocate for the expansion of that field through the consideration of both overlooked spaces and geographies. The writing of architectural histories on this material is considered in the following section on historiography and context. Authors then consider the state of fieldwork, archives, and documentation in today's complicated world

wherein conflict and technology can bring challenging instability. Education and pedagogy are the themes for the next section. There authors consider both classrooms and museum galleries as spaces of learning for students and members of the public, for whom some of the scholarly developments in recent decades may be less known. Museums and written works are considered next in a section on curation and publication that explores how visitors and readers interact with information and visuals. Authors then explore neo-liberalism and preservation in a section on globalization and change in Islamic cities and at tourism sites. Demonstrating that architecture provides a setting for activity and is a vector of agency rather than just an object to be studied, authors in the subsequent section on experience and use address heritage management and displacement. Finally, chapters on professional practice consider the wider field of design today, and close attention is paid to the personal experiences and identity of architects.

No single volume can capture the full complexity of the field, nor can one answer all the existing questions regarding its past and future. However, this one does consider much of the current state of affairs in terms of research, publication, teaching, and design across the wider Islamic world. The assembled collection thus indexes the field of Islamic architecture and offers suggestions from scholars – established and emerging – on where it might be headed, highlighting the messiness and widening inclusivity of a once-narrow field. Rather than a definitive conclusion, it is therefore both a snapshot and an invitation for continued dialogue and expansive thinking.

Notes

- 1 Orientalism remains influential in the field of architectural history. See, for example, Nasser Rabbat, 'The Hidden Hand: Edward Said's Orientalism and Architectural History', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 77.4 (2018): 388–96.
- 2 Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, 'The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field', *Art Bulletin* 85.1 (2003): 152–84; Nasser Rabbat, 'Islamic Architecture as a Field of Historical Inquiry', *Architectural Design* 74.6 (2004): 18–23; Finbarr Barry Flood, 'From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art', in *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions*, ed. Elizabeth C. Mansfield (London: Routledge, 2007), 31–53; Nasser Rabbat, 'What Is Islamic Architecture Anyway?', *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (2012): 1–15, <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/rabbat1.pdf>; Heghnar Z. Watenpaugh, 'Resonance and Circulation: The Category 'Islamic Art and Architecture'', in *A Companion to Islamic Art & Architecture*, ed. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (New York: Wiley, 2017), 1123–44; Wendy M. K. Shaw, *What is 'Islamic' Art?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1–29. For an earlier discussion of 'Islamic' cities from western and 'non-western' perspectives, see Anthony King, 'Terminologies and Types: Making Sense of Some Types of Dwellings and Cities', in *Ordering Space, Types in Architecture and Design*, ed. Karen A. Franck and Lynda H. Schneekloth (New York: Van

Nostrand Reinhold, 1994), 127–46. Several chapters in the present volume include more substantial literature reviews that detail the wider development of scholarship on Islamic art and architecture.

- 3 Vikramaditya Prakash, ‘The “Islamic” from a Global Historiographical Perspective’, *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 6.1 (2017): 17–24.
- 4 Rabbat, ‘What Is Islamic Architecture Anyway?’, 2.
- 5 Ibid., 12; Rabbat, ‘Islamic Architecture as a Field’, 19–21; Shaw, *What Is ‘Islamic’ Art?*, 3–20. The latest edition of Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2021) is illustrative; though it includes a welcomed new chapter on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are absent.
- 6 Blair and Bloom, ‘The Mirage’, 152.
- 7 Hasan-Uddin Khan, ‘Editorial: Towards a New Paradigm for the Architecture and Arts of Islam’, *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 1.1 (2012): 6.
- 8 Shaw, *What Is ‘Islamic’ Art?*, 27.
- 9 Nasser Rabbat, ‘Continuity and Rupture in Islamic Architecture’, *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 10.1 (2021): 47.
- 10 This assumption rests on the notions that ‘Islamic architecture’ is exclusively religious in nature and therefore incompatible with today’s allegedly secular society. Both premises are faulty.
- 11 Rabbat, ‘Continuity and Rupture’, 49.
- 12 Mohammad Gharipour and Daniel E. Coslett, eds, “‘Islamic Architecture’: Reflections on the Field’, special issue, *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 10.1 (2021).