

MIT, Department of Architecture

Fall 2008

4.619 Historiography of Islamic Architecture

Time: Tuesdays 2-5, 5-216

Instructor: Nasser Rabbat <nasser@mit.edu>

TA: Christian Andrew Hedrick chedrick@MIT.EDU

Units: 3-0-9, H-Level Grad Credit

Prerequisite: Consent of instructor, open to advanced undergraduates

Required Text: Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973, 1987 2d ed.).

Background Text: Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* 3 vols. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

Stellar Site: <http://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/4/fa08/4.619/>

References in Islamic Architecture: <http://hcl.harvard.edu/research/guides/iaa/>

This seminar presents a critical review of literature on Islamic architecture in the last two centuries and analyzes its historical and theoretical frameworks. It challenges the tacit assumptions and biases of standard studies of Islamic architecture and addresses historiographic and critical questions concerning how knowledge of a field is defined, produced, and reproduced.

The seminar focuses on two critical issues that have emerged recently both in academe and in the architectural profession. First is the relationship between architecture and culture, a crucial query that has become one of the most debated issues in architectural and art historical circles. Second is the definition of Islamic architecture, a discursive category embraced by a devout audience but skeptically accepted by academics, which has never had a forum where it can be scholarly and critically examined without proscribed historical or ideological confines. This is especially true in the case of its presumed temporal boundaries: the polemical discontinuity from late antique to Islamic architecture, and the forced rupture between modern architecture in the Islamic world and its historical genealogy. The seminar will attentively examine both moments. But it definitely does not aim to essentialize Islamic architecture. Instead it emphasizes the cultural diversity within the Islamic context, which produced the various architectural traditions that dot the historical and geographic map of the Islamic world.

The course includes weekly reading and writing assignments and requires active participation in discussions. A research paper is to be first presented in class and then submitted at the end of the term. Topics are limited to in-depth studies of texts, representations, and scholarly traditions. They can either be chosen from the enclosed list or should be decided in consultation with the instructor by

4.619 Historiography of Islamic Architecture

Fall 2008

Instructor: Nasser Rabbat

the end of the third week of the semester. A short abstract and preliminary bibliography should be submitted by the fourth week. Required texts are available at the Coop and area bookshops. All articles and book sections required will be available on the Stellar Site.

Syllabus

1-Sep 9: Islamic Architecture as a Field of Historical Inquiry: Overview and Class Structure

2-Sep 16: Historical and Methodological Frameworks of the Field Where Does the Field Stand: Recent Reviews:

Required Reading:

Oleg Grabar, "What Should One Know about Islamic Art?" *RES*43 (Spring 2003): 5-11.

Robert Hillenbrand, "Studying Islamic Architecture: Challenges and Perspectives." *Architectural History* 46 (2003): 1-18

Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field," *The Art Bulletin* 85, 1 (March 2003): 152-84.

Sibel Bozdogan (unpublished) Thoughts on S. Blair and J. Bloom's "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field."

3-Sep 23: First Encounters and Academic Developments: A Pioneering Text: Pascal Coste

Required Reading:

Pascal Coste, "Préface," *Architecture Arabe ou Monuments du Kaire Mesurés et dessinés de 1818 à 1826* (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1837), 2-29.

Stephen Vernoit, "Islamic Art and Architecture: An Overview of Scholarship and Collecting, c. 1850-c. 1950," in Vernoit, ed., *Discovering Islamic art: scholars, collectors and collections 1850-1950* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 1-61.

J.M. Rogers, *From Antiquarianism to Islamic Archaeology*. Cairo: Quaderni Dell' Istituto Italiano di Cultura per la R.A.E., 1974.

4- Sep 30: Early Scholars/Interpreters: Three case studies Ernest Diez, K.A.C. Creswell, and Mehmet Agaoglu.

Required Reading:

K.A.C. Creswell, "The Origin of the Cruciform Plan of Cairene Madrasas," in *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt* 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 2: 104-34.

4.619 Historiography of Islamic Architecture

Fall 2008

Instructor: Nasser Rabbat

J.M. Rogers, "Architectural History as Literature: Creswell's Reading and Methods," *Muqarnas* 8 (1991): 45-54.

Ernest Diez, "A Stylistic Analysis of Islamic Art," *Ars Islamica* (1936-37-38), 3/2: 201-12; 4/1:185-89; 5/1: 36-45.

Mehmet Agaoglu, "Remarks on the Character of Islamic Art." *The Art Bulletin* 36, 3 (September 1954): 175-202.

Gulru Necipoglu, *The Topkapi scroll : geometry and ornament in Islamic architecture* (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995), 61-71.

5-Oct 7: The Historical Method and the Study of Islamic Architecture (1): Historical Framework and the Question of Boundaries

Required Reading:

Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, 1-131, 195-213.

6-Oct 14: The Historical Method and the Study of Islamic Architecture (2): Beginnings and Transition from Late Antiquity

Required Reading:

Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), 1-14, 184-236.

Terry Allen. *Five Essays in Islamic Architecture* (Sebastopol, California: Solipsist Press, 1988), 1-15, "Arabesque and the Bevelled Style."

Finbarr Barry Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture* (Leiden, Brill, 2001), 1-14, 237-46. (suggested, Chapter 6: 184-236)

Nasser Rabbat, "The Dialogic Dimension in Umayyad Art," *RES* 43 (Spring 2003): 78-94.

7-Oct 21: Islamic Architecture and Cosmology: The Sufi Tradition and the Symbolist Approach

Required Reading:

Robert Irwin, "Louis Massignon and the esoteric interpretation of Islamic art," in S.Vernoit, ed. *Discovering Islamic art: scholars, collectors and collections, 1850-1950*, 163-170

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The principle of Unity and the Sacred Architecture of Islam" *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 37-63.

4.619 Historiography of Islamic Architecture

Fall 2008

Instructor: Nasser Rabbat

Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 149-209.

8- Oct 28: Islamic Architecture and Cultural Interpretation: When Culture Becomes Classification

Required Reading:

Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 193-229.

Samer Akkach, "The Burden of Difference: Rethinking the Role of Culture in Architectural Education," *Architectural Theory Review* 5:1 (April 2000), 61-64.

Ernest J. Grube, "What is Islamic Architecture," in: ed. G. Michell, *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning* (London, 1978), 10-14.

Oleg Grabar, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art," *Muqarnas* 1(1983): 1-14.

Oliver Leaman, *Islamic Aesthetics: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 4-44, Eleven Common Mistakes About Islamic Art.

(suggested) Jean-Charles Depaule, "Improbables detachements: l'architecture et les arts dans la culture islamique," *Cahiers du Musee National d'Art Moderne* 39 (Spring 1992): 26-41.

9- Nov 4: Locating Islamic Architecture Today Postcolonialism, Multiculturalism, and The Role of the Aga Khan Enterprise

Required Reading:

Spiro Kostof, Christian Norberg-Schulz, Mohammed Arkoun, "Approaches to Education," in Ahmet Evin, ed. *Architecture Education in the Islamic World* (Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1986), 1-21.

Annie Coombes, "Inventing the 'Postcolonial': Hybridity and Constituency in Contemporary Curating," in Donald Preziosi, ed. *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 486-97.

Gülsüm Baydar, "Toward Postcolonial Openings: Rereading Sir Banister Fletcher's "History of Architecture." *Assemblage* 35 (April, 1998): 6-17.

Nasser Rabbat, "Islamic Architecture as a Field of Historical Inquiry," *AD Architectural Design*, Special Issue *Islam+Architecture* 74, 6 (Nov-Dec 2004): 18-23.

Finbarr Barry Flood, "From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the end of Islamic Art," in Elizabeth Mansfield, ed. *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions* (London: Routledge, 2007), 31-53.

Homi Bhabha, "Architecture and Thought," in *Intervention Architecture: Building for Change* (Aga Khan Award for Architecture/I.B. Tauris, 2007), 6-11.

4.619 Historiography of Islamic Architecture

Fall 2008

Instructor: Nasser Rabbat

Nov 11 Holiday: Veteran Day

10- Nov 18: Current Research: Steven Wolf

Required Reading:

Steven Wolf, Conceptualizing Cultural Autonomy "After Essentialism": The Case of Ottoman Aleppo.

11- Nov 25: MESA/ Student Presentations to be rescheduled:

12- Dec 2: Student Presentations

13- Dec 9: Student Presentations

Suggested Research Topics:

1. Islamic architecture in the writing of Richard Ettinghausen, Robert Hillenbrand, K. A. C. Creswell, or any other major scholar in any language.
2. The French, German, Spanish, Italian or Russian school of scholarship on Islamic architecture.
3. Colonial architecture and scholarship in French North Africa, Egypt, the Indian subcontinent, Sub-Saharan Islamic Africa, etc.
4. Western scholars and the nationalist question: K.A.C. Creswell in Egypt, Arthur Upham Pope in Iran, and G. Goodwin in Turkey, ect.
5. Nationalism and Islamism in Turkish, Arabic, Iranian, or Pakistani/Bangladeshi art historical scholarship and/or contemporary architecture.
6. The writing of members of the Traditionalist school: Henri Corbin, Titus Burkhardt, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Nader Ardalan, etc.
7. European travelers and illustrators in India, Egypt, Turkey, Spain, Iran, or Central Asia.
8. Chinoiserie, Turkerie, and the fascination with Oriental fashion in Europe.
9. The fascination with the Alhambra, the Taj Mahal, and other major monuments.
10. Status of Islamic/Oriental architecture in the nineteenth-century study of architecture.
11. Analysis of the scholarly oeuvre of major national scholars of Islamic architecture anywhere in the Islamic world.
12. The relationship between the study of Islamic architecture and the study of Islamic history, cultures, and societies
13. The role of the Aga Khan cultural enterprise in defining Islamic architecture.
14. Analysis and critique of how contemporary major architects interpret Islamic architecture in their design.

4.619 Historiography of Islamic Architecture

Fall 2008

Instructor: Nasser Rabbat

15. The pros and cons of teaching Islamic architecture as a separate topic in Western and/or Islamic universities.