Architecture of Islamic Inspiration in the United States: A Bibliographic Essay
By Omar Khalidi

Introduction

Walking through Chicago's North Side, I was struck by the sight of a building that looked every inch a mosque, complete with dome and tower. The building's exterior surface, decorated with Islamic ornamentation and Arabic calligraphy further stated the building's Islamic style. I assumed that it was a mosque until the caretaker told me that the building was in fact a Masonic meeting hall called Medinah temple!

http://www.ci.chi.il.us/Landmarks/M/MedinahTemple.html

Similar examples of "Islamic," "Oriental," "Moorish," and "Mudejar," styled architecture in North America are found in many parts of the country. Islamic or Islamic-influenced architecture in the United States can be divided into at least three distinct types: Orientalist buildings designed by non-Muslims to evoke the spirit of the "mysterious East," buildings in the Spanish-American style which recall the Mudejar architecture of Spain; and emerging mosque architecture designed for American Muslims. This bibliographic essay is a survey of published and unpublished works on the subject whether written by academic scholars, architects, journalists and others. Several years ago Anraes Reidelmeyer, Aya Khan Bibliographer at Harvard University's Fine Arts Library wrote a "Bibliography: Islamic Revival and Orientalist Architecture in America and Europe." This essay draws on Reidelmeyer's work that conveys published works about Islamic architecture in the United States, and categorizes Islamicate buildings according to style and typology.

Orientalist Style: General Statements


The world fairs contributed a great deal to the dissemination of Islamic styles in the West in general. See Zeynep Celik, Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth Century World's Fairs, (Berkeley: University of California, 1992). Particular social and religious groups have held a particular fascination for the Islamic style, to which we turn.

Orientalist Style: Masonic Lodges

Tripoli Temple Shrine Mosque, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, C. J. Wilson

Of all social groups, the fraternal group known as the Masons or the Ancient Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine draws most heavily on Middle Eastern sources for the design of meeting halls and regalia, often mixing the Islamic and pre-Islamic associations of that region in an undifferentiated manner. An introduction is found in James S. Culp's The Art and Architecture of the Freemasonry (London: Batsford, 1991). There is some academic work on this subject by William D. Moore, "Structures of Masculinity: Masonic Temples, Material Culture, and Ritual Gender Archetypes in New York State, 1870-1930," PhD dissertation, Boston University, 1999. For a fascinating account of a Pakistani student's experience of a Masonic temple see Gulzar Haider, "Muslim Space and the Practice of Architecture: A Personal Odyssey," pp. 31-45, in Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe, edited by Barbara D. Metcalf, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

An interesting subject for research is the design history and philosophy of particular temples. See for example, J.E. Murphy's article, "Eastern Architecture in the West," Medinah Temple in Chicago," The Architectural Record 33 (April 1913): 339-349. Richard Gustave Schmidt, the architect of this temple, is listed in Henry P. and Elsie R. Withey's Biographical Dictionary of American Architects,
IslamicStyledSynagogues

Why would synagogues be built incorporating decorative elements of Islamic architecture? In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Gothic revival style was the predominant idiom for church architecture in America. Many Jews associated Gothic architecture with anti-semitism, making it therefore inappropriate for emulation in Jewish sacred architecture. So the choice of Hispanic Islamic architecture was seen as fittingly identified with a period of Muslim-Jewish harmony in medieval Spain. There are several examples of Islamic styled synagogues, see Gerald S. Bernstein, *Two Hundred Years of American Synagogue Architecture*, (Waltham, MA: American Jewish Historical Society, 1976); this exhibition catalog includes synagogues built in Moorish revival style. Since Bernstein’s work, there is a new book in German by Hannslo Kunzl, *Islamische Stilelemente im Synagogenbau des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984). Individual Islamic-styled synagogue histories shed light on the motives behind the design preference; see The George Street Synagogue of Congregation B’nai Jacob, edited by Harvey N. Ladin, (New Haven, CT: Congregation B’nai Jacob, 1961). The Ahavai Shalom in Portland, Oregon is another example; see Lambert Florin, *Victorian West*, (Seattle, WA: Superior Publishing, 1978). Other examples are the Isaac Wise Temple in Cincinnati, Ohio, and New York’s.

Islamic-Styled Civic or Secular Architecture


Spanish Mission, Moorish Revival, and Mudejar Style

The “discovery” of America and the expulsion of Muslims from Spain happened in the same year 1492. It resulted in the forced
conversion of Muslims to Christianity. Many such Muslims emigrated to the New World, where their skills were used in the development of New Spain. Mudejar (forced Muslim converts to Catholicism) style architecture in America is found mostly in Mexico and Central America. It can also be seen in the American southwest, Texas, and California, besides many other states such as Florida. There is an overview of this by Thomas E. Irving, Mudejar Crafts in Americas with Illustrations and Maps, (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Mother Mosque Foundation, 1991). The most prominent example of Moorish revival architecture is in Opa-Locka, in suburban Miami, see Larry Luxner, "Opa-Locka Rising," Aramco World 40, 5 (September-October 1989): 2-7. Longwood in Natchez, Mississippi, now a National Historic Landmark, best represents Moorish-revival mansions. It was built by architect Samuel Sloan, 1815-84, see Harold N. Coolege, Samuel Sloan, PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1963; and the same writer's "A Sloan Checklist," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 19 (March 1960): 34-38. City-specific accounts such as Sam H. Kaplan's L.A. Lost and Found: An Architectural History of Los Angeles, (New York: Crown Hall, 1987) surveys the Spanish Mission and Moorish revival style. Many American artists influenced Moorish-styled design, see for example, Anne S. Lewis, Lockwood de Forest: Painter, Importer, Decorator, (Huntington, NY: Heckscher Museum, 1975). There is persistent interest in the Moorish style, see "The Alhambra Down South: A Show Case of Islamic Civilization Arises in Mississippi," Islamic Horizons (November-December 2001): 68-71.

**Iranian Style**

![Image of Iranian Style Building]

Iranian, Bridgeport, Connecticut

Although not as wide spread as the "Islamic" or "Islamic revival" styles, there are examples of Iranian style in the United States, such as that of the mansion "Iranistan," built in 1855 in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Evidently the mansion has been demolished since. The Bahai temple in Wilmette, Illinois, designed by the French-Canadian architect Louis Bourgeois in 1917-21, 1930-53, is a nine-sided building clearly inspired by Iranian prototypes. See Marshall K. McClelland, "Castle of Light," The Architect 2 (Mary 1972): 45-46.

**Architectural Decoration**


**Mosque Architecture in the United States**

![Image of Mosque Architecture]

Islamic Cultural Center, New York City, bloom.mit.edu/aga/chan/ismosques
Since the mid 1960s, as result of the changes in American immigration laws and due to the conversion of Afro-Americans and others to Islam, there is a large increase of Muslims in the United States. In 2002, it is estimated that there are some 2,500 mosques in the United States, of which there might be about 125 that are purpose-built. An introduction to the American mosque is found in the present writer's entry "Mosque" in Contemporary American Religion, vol. 2, edited by Wade C. Roof, (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2000). An extended discussion of the subject is found in my "Approaches to Mosque Design in North America," pp. 399-424, in Muslims on the Americanization Path, edited by Yvonne Haddad and John Esposito, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

The present writer's website "Mosques in the United States can be accessed at http://bloom.mit.edu/agakhan/usmosques/index.html.


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