



Foreword

What Is Islamic Architecture?

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It is a truism that the study of the architecture of the Islamic world was a post-Enlightenment European project. It started with architects, artists, and draftsmen who travelled to the 'Orient' in the wake of the first European interventions there in search of adventure, employment, and the thrill of fantasy associated with that mysterious land. They visited cities and sites – primarily in Spain, Turkey, the Holy Land, Egypt, and India – where they measured and illustrated buildings and ruins and published impressive catalogues that began to introduce to Europe that rich architectural heritage which was hitherto almost totally unknown (fig. 1).¹ But having no model to understand and situate the architecture they were studying, they toyed with various Eurocentric, open-ended, and casually prejudiced terms such as 'Saracenic', 'Mohammedan', 'Moorish', and, of course, 'Oriental', before settling on 'Islamic architecture' as the most appropriate term sometime around the end of the nineteenth century. Thus was the stage set for the development of an architectural historical discipline that cast Islamic architecture essentially as a direct, formal expression of Islam, which was itself not so homogeneously defined. This was to become the first contentious issue in the self-definition of the field of Islamic architecture.² It still forms 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 post-colonial criticism and globalisation.³

The second contentious issue in defining Islamic architecture is its time frame.⁴ Until a generation ago, scholars viewed Islamic architecture as a tradition of the past that had ceased to be a creative force with the onset of colonialism and its two concomitant phenomena, Westernisation and modernisation, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They all somehow accepted a degree of incongruity between Islamic architecture and modernism so that when modern architecture (and by this I mean the architecture of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) arrived it immediately eclipsed Islamic architecture and took its place. Consequently, the architecture built under colonialism and after independence was not considered 'Islamic'; it was seen as either modern or culturally hybrid. Studying it was the domain



Figure 1. The Minaret of Qawsun, illustration from Pascal-Xavier Coste, *Architecture Arabe ou Monuments du Kaire mesurés et dessinés de 1818 à 1826* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1839).

of the modernist or the area specialist.⁵ The modernist and the area specialist concurred. But neither one of them was particularly interested in the contemporary or near contemporary architecture built in the various countries of the Islamic World: the modernist because he, and very rarely she, considered that architecture to be too derivative to warrant scholarly attention; the area specialist because the built environment was only the static background upon which the more important events that were worthy of study were played out.

So it was that Islamic architecture became the architecture of a vast territory encompassing about forty countries today where a majority of Muslims live or lived in the past, and spanning the periods of Islamic ascendance and dominance – roughly the late seventh to the early eighteenth centuries. But these were only the geographic and historical contours of Islamic architecture. Scholars still needed to develop a set of intrinsic architectural criteria that distinguished Islamic architecture and made it recognisable as such. Those scholars, by and large, looked for common formal qualities. Some, like Georges Marçais, stayed at the impressionistic level, arguing that Islamic art and architecture ought to be readily identifiable by visual means alone.⁶ To prove his point he suggested that an educated person sifting through a large number of photos of buildings from around the world could easily identify the Islamic examples among them. Others, like Ernst Grube in a short but influential essay, aimed at defining Islamic architecture as that which displays a set of architectural and spatial features, such as introspection, that are ‘inherent in Islam as a cultural phenomenon.’⁷ Still others, trying to navigate the contentious terrain of definitions and counter-definitions within the very small field of specialists, opted for a definition that can only be termed operational, or, more precisely, statistical. Although he experimented with a culturalist definition of Islamic architecture all his life, Oleg Grabar was perhaps the most eloquent of these pragmatists, for he argued in more than one place that Islamic architecture is the architecture built by Muslims, for Muslims, or in an Islamic country, or in places where Muslims have an opportunity to express their cultural independence in architecture.⁸ This of course allowed the study of Islamic architecture to claim vast terrains, artistic traditions, styles, and periods, including the modern and contemporary, and sometimes to transcend religious and cultural divisions to acquire an ecumenical patina.

But this all-inclusive definition was decidedly not religious, despite its acceptance of the designation ‘Islamic architecture.’ It actually shunned religion as an ontological category or a classificatory measure and instead sought unity in culturally shared approaches to aesthetics and spatial sensitivities (which may or may not have their origins in religious injunctions) that crossed all denominational, ethnic, and national boundaries within the greater Islamic world and resulted in similar architectural expressions. This became the dominant understanding of Islamic architecture in Western academia, underscoring the rationalist, secular humanist roots of the two disciplines of Orientalism and art history, from whose margins sprang the field of Islamic art and architecture.⁹ It worked well for the students of the history of Islamic architecture whose attraction to the field was fundamentally intellectual or based on connoisseurship, i.e. those for whom Islamic architecture was an object to think with or one to aesthetically appreciate or contemplate. But it could not satisfy those for whom Islamic architecture is an object to identify with or to build upon, i.e. a living tradition with culturally distinct roots. This inability of the definition to really address the ‘Islamic’ in Islamic architecture did not become an urgent issue until

the 1970s, when two interrelated quests arose almost simultaneously in two separate domains. The first was that of the increasing number of students from the Islamic world studying the history of Islamic architecture in Western institutions, who saw Islamic architecture as their living heritage, uninterrupted and still operative to this day.¹⁰ The second was that of architects practising in the Islamic world, many but not all of whom were Muslims, who rediscovered historical and vernacular Islamic architecture and sought to reinsert it into their design repertoire as a foundational body of knowledge, rather than as an occasional formal or decorative reference.¹¹

Of course, there were students of Islamic architecture in the Islamic world before 1970. In fact a sizeable number of them flourished in Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, the Soviet Islamic Republics, and, to a lesser degree, India, from as early as the 1940s. Many studied in Western institutions, mostly in the European colonial capitals London and Paris but also in Berlin, Vienna, and Moscow and Leningrad. Others studied with Western scholars who were living and working in an Islamic country, such as the cases of K.A.C. Creswell in Cairo, Jean Sauvaget in Damascus, and Ernst Diez in Istanbul, each of whom had local students and collaborators (and many of these did not receive the credit they deserved).¹² Unlike their Western teachers, the local scholars saw Islamic architecture, or regional variations thereof, as their heritage, and felt proud of it. But they tended to concur with the dominant opinion that it was no longer a living heritage. Thus their work did not differ much from the work of their Western teachers and colleagues in the conceptualisation of its domain as strictly historical. Their main contribution was a closer examination of the primary sources in a search for local flavours in the Islamic architecture of their own country or of their ethnic group, which paved the way for paradoxical definitions of regional and national Islamic architecture. The examples are numerous, but the most glaringly and unmistakably nationalistic histories can be seen in the studies of Persian or Turkish architecture produced mostly in Iran and Turkey by local historians or by Westerners sponsored by national authorities.¹³ The regionalist trend was weak, though, in the overall output of the field. It was still obscured by the preponderance of studies that treated Islamic architecture as a unified domain stretching across the Islamic world irrespective of political or national boundaries.

Different worldviews motivated a group of mystically inclined Western and Western-educated Muslim scholars in the 1960s and 1970s who were searching for an understanding of Islamic art and architecture from within the Islamic Sufi tradition. They adopted an all-encompassing, universalistic, and pan-Islamic stance, which was very fashionable in the 1970s. Foremost among them were the Iranian philosopher Sayyed Hussein Nasr and the Swiss Muslim scholar Titus Burckhardt, who published an assortment of books that introduced Islamic art and architecture as a symbolic manifestation of a transcendental and rather monolithic and suprahistorical Islam.¹⁴ Their ideas were applied to the history of Islamic architecture by several scholars/architects, most notable among them being Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, whose book, *The Sense of Unity: the Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*, was very influential among the generation of Muslim architects studying in the West in the 1980s.¹⁵ These universalists, however, did not eschew the particularistic framework that conventional Islamic architectural history inherited from its Western progenitors. On the contrary, they actually reinforced it by essentialising and ‘transcendentalising’ it in a way that made it impervious to historical contextualisation or criticism.

Islamic Architecture in Modern Practice

The scene was slightly different in the world of practice. The second half of the nineteenth century brought the first Western architects to various imperial Islamic capitals such as Istanbul, Cairo, Delhi, and Tehran, and a little later to smaller capitals such as Rabat, Damascus, and Bukhara.¹⁶ These architects worked mostly for local rulers or for the rising international mercantile class, which operated under the aegis of colonial powers. Some of them introduced the new styles prevalent in Europe such as the Neoclassical, Neo-Baroque, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, and even Modernist styles into their designs, probably to assert their own and – more importantly – their patrons’ modernity and up-to-dateness (fig. 2). Others tried to reference historical architecture in their designs as a way to relate to the culture and history of the place. To that end, they borrowed architectural and decorative elements from a number of historic architectural traditions, some pre-Islamic and some Islamic, and incorporated them in a host of neo-styles: neo-Mamluk, neo-Moorish, and neo-Saracenic (or Indo-Saracenic), but also neo-Pharaonic, neo-Assyrian, and neo-Sasanian. But those architects, like the



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Figure 2. Raimondo Tommaso D'Aronco, tomb of Sheikh Zafir, Istanbul, 1905–1906. Photograph by the author.

Figure 3. ‘Abd al-Razzaq Malas, headquarters of the Fijeh water company, Damascus, 1937–1942. Photograph by the author.

scholars with whom they had some contact, saw these architectural traditions, including Islamic architecture, as traditions of the past, which somehow did not make the leap to modern times. They thus needed to be documented, dissected, and categorised before any of their formal or spatial elements could be incorporated into new stylistic repertoires. This process of architectural analysis followed established Western norms, primarily those of the *Beaux-Arts envois* from Rome and Greece. The resulting ‘revivalist’ styles were practically indistinguishable from the work of revivalist Western architects except in their ‘Islamic’ references. This observation applies both to the work of the revivalist Western architects working in the Islamic world and to that of the first generation of local architects who were trained in European schools of architecture and laboured along the same lines established by their teachers and predecessors (fig. 3).¹⁷

Some local architects were dissatisfied with borrowing and imitation. They sought to develop an architecture all their own, an architecture that represented their culture, reinvigorated after decades, and in

some cases centuries, of exclusion under colonial rule. Their search came at the height of, and was linked to, their countries' struggles to gain independence from European colonisers and to claim their places among modern nations. The emerging discourse on a living and breathing Islamic architecture, along with the discourses on vernacular and regional architecture, offered these architects both an affirmation of an active, pre-colonial traditional architecture that never really withered away, and a foundation for a postcolonial national architecture that would spring out of its fertile soil.¹⁸ Especially valuable were architectural elements commonly attributed to Islamic architecture, such as the courtyard, the wind-catcher, and the pointed dome, which could embody cultural and social specificity and formal continuity. They were recovered from their historical or vernacular retreat in order to be inducted into the service of new architectural expressions of cultural identity and national unity after decolonisation and independence.

Perhaps the first to consciously and thoughtfully 'go native' was the Egyptian visionary architect Hassan Fathy (1900–1989).¹⁹ His adoption of the vernacular had its ideological roots in the struggle against British colonial rule in the 1920s and 1930s and the rise of an Egyptian national identity. He presented his first experiments in the 1940s in a few resort houses for members of the Egyptian intelligentsia, and then in his project for the village of New Gourna as the embodiment of an authentic Egyptian architecture, albeit of an unlikely mix of Mamluk Cairene style and Nubian construction techniques that he admired (fig. 4). The design principles he proposed were interpreted as novel expressions of indigenously developed architecture with clear environmental underpinnings and rootedness in place. But the cultural and historical references in Fathy's architecture expanded, and even shifted over time. They went from nationalist to pan-Arabist and finally to Islamic supra-nationalist following the changing cultural identity of Egypt itself after its independence and espousal of pan-Arabism under Gamal Abdel Nasser and then the rise of populist Islamism under Anwar al-Sadat and later.²⁰

Fathy himself modified the interpretation of his architecture in his writing from a manifestation of a primeval Egyptian model to an essentially Arabic and later an Arab-Islamic one with vague universal applicability. He identified the 'ubiquitous' Arab courtyard house with its architectural adaptation to the harsh desert environment as the model for his own architecture. A few years later, the model became the Arab-Islamic house, and ultimately an all-encompassing Islamic concept of domestic space. References to notions of the serene and protected family life as gleaned from the analogy between the terms *sakina* ('serenity') and the triconsonantal root *sakan* ('abode'), and *harim* (womenfolk, or segregated section of the house) and the root



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Figure 4. Hassan Fathy, New Gourna village, Egypt, 1945–1948. Photograph: Chant Avedissian/Aga Khan Trust for Culture.



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Figure 5. Hassan Fathy, Dar al-Islam Community Centre, Abiquiu, New Mexico, USA, 1981–1986. Photograph: Saïd Zulficar/Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

the Chairman's Award of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1980, and the first Arab architect to build in the U.S. with his Dar al-Islam Community Centre, Abiquiu, New Mexico (1981–1986), a utopian project that mixed new-age Islamic philosophy with Fathy's familiar domical forms in the desert of New Mexico for a community of American converts to Islam (fig. 5). Fathy's numerous disciples continued to use the formal language he devised, but did not build on its socioeconomic and environmental underpinnings. Instead they focused on its cultural and pan-Islamic appeal and brandished it as a kind of native response to both the blandness of modernism and the eurocentrism of the nascent postmodernism, and in some cases exported it as an expressive and historicising Islamic style.

Islamic Architecture and Postmodernism

The next significant historical shift was the articulation of an ideology that saw 'Islam' as identity. This badly understood and still-evolving process has been promoted by at least two economically, historically, and politically dissimilar, though ultimately mutually reinforcing, phenomena. First was the re-emergence in the 1970s of various Islamic political movements in most Islamic countries after an apparent dormancy of some thirty years. Coming on the heels of the victorious Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 and perceived as a response to the failure of the nation states to face up to foreign interference and moral decadence, Islamic political movements sought a return to more authentic foundations to govern the Islamic nation. Yet despite their relentless and violent attacks on what they saw as the depravity of all Western cultural imports, these political movements showed surprisingly little interest in the conceptual contours of architecture, including the religious structures being built in the name of Islamic architecture.²²

By contrast, the second group to wield a vision of Islam as a framer of identity, the ruling and religious elite of the many recently formed states of the Gulf region, has had a tremendous impact on the trajectory of architecture in the Islamic World in recent decades. Having lain impoverished on the edge of the desert for so long, and, with the exception of Saudi Arabia and Oman, not having achieved independence

haram (protected or forbidden), in addition to a more symbolic index dealing with the perception of the unique God and the images of His promised paradise, were subsequently added to the normative paradigms of Fathy's architectural model.

Fathy's romantic, neo-traditionalist model, which incorporated Islamic and vernacular elements, received ample praise in international architectural circles as an ingenious adaptation of indigenously developed architecture. In fact, Fathy became one of the most famous architects hailing from the Islamic world, especially after the publication of his *Architecture for the Poor* by Chicago University Press in 1973.²¹ He was the first recipient of

until the 1960s and even 1970s, these countries had no role in the early developments of modern architecture in the Islamic world. But things slowly began to change in the wake of oil discovery in the 1940s and, more spectacularly, after the 1970s oil price surge. With this massive cash flow and its concomitant socioeconomic empowerment came the desire to expand and modernise cities and upgrade their infrastructures to serve the growing population of natives and expatriates, and to satisfy their socio-cultural needs and newly acquired tastes. The wealth of the Gulf patrons, their deeply religious and conservative outlook, and their fervent quest for a distinct political and cultural identity in the sea of competing ideologies around them, combined to create a demand for a contemporary yet visually recognisable Islamic architecture. Sincerely at times, but opportunistically at many others, architects responded by incorporating within their designs various historical elements dubbed ‘traditional’, ‘Arabic’ or ‘Islamic’, which they often used as basic diagrams for their plans or splashed on surfaces as ornament.²³

Thus, the 1980s became the decade of readily identifiable Islamicised postmodern architecture everywhere in the Islamic world. There were the post-traditionalists who, like Hassan Fathy before them, looked for inspiration in the vernacular architecture of the region. The Egyptian Kamal al-Kafrawi for instance deployed the *badgir*, or wind-catcher, both as a visual referent and an environmental device in his University of Qatar complex (1985). Similarly, in the Great Mosque of Riyadh (1984–1992), the Palestinian-Jordanian Rasem Badran used a rationalising approach to reference the local Najdi architecture (fig. 6). There were also the free, and often arbitrary, *mélanges* of diverse historical forms and patterns from a wide range of Islamic styles. This is seen for instance in the high-quality sculptural work of the Egyptian ‘Abd al-Wahid al-Wakil, particularly in the series of mosques he built in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia in the late 1980s. A bit more colourful is the work of the Iraqi Basil al-Bayati, who dips into the exuberance of postmodernism to produce loud formalist compositions, such as his al-Nakheel Mosque in Riyadh (1985) and his castle-like Great Mosque in Edinburgh (1988–1998). This trend culminated with grand structures by large international firms working in the Gulf. They re-interpreted visual symbols and historical motifs and used them in otherwise ultra-sleek designs, such as the gigantic Hajj Terminal in Jeddah by SOM (1982), inspired by the Bedouin tent (fig. 7); or



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Figure 6. Rasem Badran, the Great Mosque of Riyadh and Old City Centre Redevelopment, Saudi Arabia, 1984–1992. Photograph: Mehmet Karakurt/ Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

Figure 7. Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM), the Hajj Terminal, Jeddah, 1982. Photograph: Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

Figure 8. I.M. Pei, the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar, 2009. Photograph ©Anne de Henning/Aga Khan Award for Architecture.



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the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh by Henning Larsen (1982–1984), which employs both the notions of covered *suq* and courtyard; or the Kuwait National Assembly Complex by Jørn Utzon (1982), which evokes the sail of the traditional *dhow* in a gesture not too different from Utzon's earlier iconic project in Sydney, Australia. More recently, the Qatar Islamic Museum by I.M. Pei (2009) claims an inspiration from the bold and simple domed fountain of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo as the basis of its cubic design (fig. 8).

Islamic Architecture and Academia

The two quests, the scholarly and the design-oriented, though aware of each other, did not come together in an academically articulated way until the founding of the Aga Khan Award for Islamic Architecture (AKAA) in 1977, which was shortly followed by the establishment of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture (AKPIA) at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1978. AKAA had a straightforward mission: to identify, evaluate, and award outstanding architecture in the Islamic world. But since identifying contemporary 'Islamic' architecture, let alone judging it, was a controversial issue at best, AKAA had to set up and continuously revise and modify the criteria for definition and evaluation in a conciliatory way that accommodated the various trends of thought about Islamic architecture. This meant that, for the last thirty years, AKAA has been a key promoter of a syncretic and expansive 'Islamic architecture' that was not limited only to traditionally recognised Islamic building types, but included urban and landscape design, environmentally and socioeconomically sensitive projects, and conservation and rehabilitation interventions.²⁴

AKPIA, on the other hand, is an academic and research endeavour. Designed to promote, sustain, and increase the teaching of Islamic architecture, it has become an experiment in architectural education that seeks to move from the particular to the general while maintaining its disciplinary identity. Not only was AKPIA the first academic programme exclusively devoted to the study of Islamic architecture, it was also housed

in two of the most prestigious institutions of architectural education in the world, with established cultures and pedagogical methods.²⁵ The location of AKPIA at MIT's Department of Architecture in particular was a novel and intellectually challenging decision. The siting itself was implicitly intended to negate the polarising dichotomy and to normalise the continuity between the discipline of architecture (derived from Western architectural history and praxis) and Islamic architecture, which is routinely relegated to area/cultural studies within art history departments.²⁶

The foremost academic to lead the effort to historicise, theorise, and ultimately legitimise Islamic architecture both as a field of historical inquiry and of contemporary creativity, was Oleg Grabar (1929–2011), the first Aga Khan Professor at Harvard University and the last recipient of the Chairman's Award of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2010. His influential book, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (1973, 2nd ed. 1987) was a conceptual study *par excellence*.²⁷ It investigated the ways in which an Islamic artistic and architectural tradition acquired and disseminated distinct forms and meanings primarily in conjunction with its cultural, social, and ideological contexts. This strongly historicising framework underscores the book's originality and palpable sense of purpose. It also endows it with a remarkable coherence despite the otherwise selective character of its content, which focuses on the problems of the emergence of Islamic art and architecture in the first three centuries Hegira and their relationship to the art of Byzantium and Persia. But the book's importance does not, ultimately, lie in answering concrete questions about the circumstances surrounding the formation of Islamic art, which it actually avoids doing. It lies rather in its setting the tone for a whole generation of historians of Islamic art and architecture to begin to reassess the geographic, historical, religious, and cultural boundaries of their discipline and to develop its methods and theoretical contours. As such, *The Formation of Islamic Art* became the foundation upon which most historical interpretations in the field have depended until now.

But the limitations imposed by the burdensome and politically biased scholarly lineage of Islamic architecture were not seriously challenged until the 1980s. Empowered by developments in critical and post-colonial studies, especially after the publication of Edward Saïd's seminal book *Orientalism* in 1978, students of Islamic architecture began to question their received methods and conceptual structures and to extend their domain of inquiry back in time to points of convergence between Islamic architecture and the architecture of other cultures, and forward to the modern and contemporary scenes of revivalist efforts and inventive continuities. The notions of uniformity, introversion, and cultural and religious particularism that had long dominated the study of Islamic architecture began to be truly challenged as more and more scholars turned to cultural theories in their inquiry.²⁸ Some began to pry open the intracultural spaces – that is, zones within a given society at a given time that are shared by its diverse constituent cultural groups – to critical inquiry. Thus, the contributions of the various Islamic fringe sects and esoteric religious orders, Christian and Jewish denominations, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Hindus, and others have started to be analysed as both instrumental components of a shared architectural language and as distinct expressions that link Islamic architecture to other traditions. Others focused on the intercultural development of Islamic architecture with its substantial

connections to the Late Antique, South Arabian, Mediterranean, Iranian, and Hindu-Buddhist cultures in the early periods, and European, Asian, and African cultures in recent times, although the bulk of studies is of course concentrated on the links to Western architecture.²⁹

The relationship with Western architecture is indeed the main problem that Islamic architecture has still to resolve in order to acquire its rightful place as an active and contributive component of world architecture.³⁰ Until at least the 1980s, the chronology of Western architecture from its presumed Classical origins to its triumphant culmination in modern times constituted the living core of architectural discourse and relegated the architecture of other cultures to marginal places in its prescribed hierarchy.³¹

Furthermore, because of its venerable legacy and institutional power, the authoritative historiography of Western architecture (usually called Architecture *tout court*) promoted, and even required, the study of other architectural traditions to be confined within clearly proscribed and exclusive times, spaces, and cultures. Islamic architecture, like many other non-Western architectural traditions (and the term itself amply illustrates the classificatory predicament of these traditions)³² was thus cast as the opposite of Western architecture: conservative where Western architecture is progressive; its formal categories static, as compared to the self-evolving ones of Western architecture; and reflecting cultural imperatives rather than the creative individual subjectivity ascribed to Western architecture. But, first and foremost, Islamic architecture was seen as a tradition whose agency was collective and creativity in design rarely assigned, except for the few celebrated cases such as the great Ottoman master architect Sinan (d. 1588).³³ It was therefore an architecture that was difficult to study along the conceptual lines of Western architecture, yet no other methodological perspective was developed enough to accommodate its particular trajectory or internal cohesiveness while accounting for its regional, ethnic, or national diversity.

Where Are We Now?

So where do we stand today? And is there an agreement on what Islamic architecture is? Of course the answer is no. In fact, although the number of students of Islamic architecture has multiplied many times over, and many more universities in the West and the Islamic world have added chairs for the study of Islamic architecture, and although the majority of new major projects in various countries of the Islamic world require their designers to respect or adapt the principles of Islamic architecture, questions still abound in academe and in the world of practice about whether there is an Islamic architecture or not in the first place. Some of those who doubt the validity of the term Islamic architecture raise the following rhetorical challenge: what is Christian about European architecture? And the ready – and correct – answer is usually, ‘very little, except for the architecture of churches’. The parallel conclusion for Islamic architecture thus becomes, ‘Islamic architecture is mosque architecture’.

But if we change the tense in the first question and ask, ‘what was Christian about European architecture?’ the answer is bound to be, ‘a lot’. Medieval Christianity indeed shaped not only faith and rituals but

also various patterns of life in Europe: gender relations and family hierarchy, private and public behaviour of individuals and groups, and relationships between religious and profane authorities in the rule of country and city. These, and other cultural, social, and political attributes, were predicated on religion, just like the Islamic world. They also found architectural manifestation in the form and function of church, convent, house, palace, and city, again like the Islamic world. Things began to change first with the Renaissance but especially with the rise of Enlightenment values, not because European architecture rejected the burdensome influence of religion, but because European polity and European mores and even European epistemology broke away from Christianity.³⁴ Architecture predictably absorbed these cultural transformations and began to reflect the new secularism, first by consciously returning to Classical, pre-Christian forms, and later by responding to the aesthetic and civic values of the Enlightenment and then the Industrial Revolution, with its standardisation and accelerated technological progress.

The Islamic world, on the other hand, never experienced a total break with religion, nor did it undergo an Industrial Revolution. Its experience of the secular modernism it imported from Europe in the late nineteenth century was resisted by, then moderated by and even filtered through the prism of religion. Islam remains a major force not only in dictating the ethics and beliefs of Muslims today, but also in shaping their social relations, their individual behaviour, and their collective polity and imaginary. Religious motives and inhibitions transpire in many aspects of their modern life that have gone totally secular in the West, to the point where their enactment often causes puzzlement and misunderstanding among Western observers and commentators.³⁵ This is not a value judgment; it is simply a historical fact. To understand and explain the mixed, and perhaps paradoxical, but definitely dynamic character of the cultures of the Islamic world today, it is thus necessary to take into account how religion interacts with and modifies the effect of Western, secular modernism on those cultures. This is also how we can understand the role of the modifier 'Islamic' in framing the term Islamic architecture.³⁶ It is not necessarily the formal or stylistic attributes that it produces; it is rather the persistence of religion in playing a role in defining many aspects of life in the Islamic world, either in competition or harmony with modernity and other major socio-cultural contemporary forces.

To me then, Islamic architecture is the architecture of those cultures, regions, or societies that have directly or via some intermediary processes accepted Islam as an integral and formative component of their socio-cultural makeup.³⁷ It is still a valid designation for architecture being built today simply because Islam has never ceased being that constitutive component even though the ways in which it expresses itself have changed over time and space. The actual architectural forms which that expression takes are tangential. It is the presence – spiritual, symbolic, social, political, functional, behavioural, and yes formal – of Islam in the architecture as seen and practised by the people that gives that architecture its Islamic designation, even though it always had to contend with other powerful universal phenomena, such as competing world religions and more advanced cultures in its formative stages, and modern secularism and globally networked tastes and techniques of representation today.

- 1 The most remarkable among these early studies are Pascal-Xavier Coste, *Architecture Arabe ou Monuments du Kaire mesurés et dessinés de 1818 à 1826* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1839); Girault de Prangey, *Souvenirs de Grenade et de l'Alhambra: monuments arabes et moresques de Cordoue, Séville et Grenade, dessinés et mesurés en 1832 et 1833* (Paris: Veith et Hauser, 1837); *idem*, *Essai sur l'architecture des Arabes et des Mores, en Espagne, en Sicile, et en Barbarie* (Paris: A. Hauser, 1841); Owen Jones and Jules Goury, *Plans, Elevations, Sections and Details of the Alhambra from Drawings taken on the Spot in 1834 & 1837* (London: published by Owen Jones, 1852); Prisse d'Avennes, *L'art arabe d'après les monuments du Kaire depuis le VIIe siècle jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIe* (Paris: A. Morel, 1877).
- 2 A pioneering study to articulate the contours of this thesis is Louis Massignon, 'Les méthodes de réalisation artistique des peuples de l'Islam', *Syria*, 2 (1921), pp. 47–53, 149–160. See also Jean-Charles Depaule, 'Improbables detachements: l'architecture et les arts dans la culture islamique', *Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne*, 39 (1992), pp. 26–41; and Robert Hillenbrand, 'Studying Islamic Architecture: Challenges and Perspectives', *Architectural History*, 46 (2003), pp. 1–18.
- 3 See Zeynep Çelik, 'Colonialism, Orientalism, and the Canon', *The Art Bulletin*, 78/2 (1996), pp. 202–205.
- 4 Nasser Rabbat, 'Islamic Architecture as a Field of Historical Inquiry', *AD Architectural Design* (special issue *Islam+Architecture*), 74/6 (2004), pp. 18–23.
- 5 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), pp. 31–53.
- 6 Georges Marçais, *L'art de l'Islam* (Paris: Larousse, 1946), p. 5.
- 7 Ernest J. Grube, 'What is Islamic Architecture?' in George Michell (ed.), *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), pp. 10–14.
- 8 Grabar refined both culturalist and statistical definitions of Islamic art and architecture for over four decades. See for instance, Oleg Grabar, 'Teaching of Islamic Architecture', *The Yale Architectural Magazine*, 1 (1963), pp. 14–18; *idem*, 'What Makes Islamic Art Islamic?' *AARP*, 9 (1976), pp. 1–3; *idem*, 'Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art', *Muqarnas*, 1 (1983), pp. 1–14; *idem*, 'What Should One Know about Islamic Art?' *RES*, 43 (2003), pp. 5–11.
- 9 Two recent surveys of the field make this clear: see Stephen Vernoit, 'Islamic Art and Architecture: An Overview of Scholarship and Collecting, c. 1850–c. 1950', in *idem* (ed.), *Discovering Islamic art: scholars, collectors and collections 1850–1950* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 1–61; 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 (2003), pp. 152–184.
- 10 The cleansing of national culture of all possible Western, and therefore colonial, contamination, and its paradoxical psychological and epistemological consequences, have been insightfully analysed by Franz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 'On National Culture', pp. 167–199. For a discussion of the relationship between culture and ideology see Clifford Geertz, 'Ideology as a Cultural System', *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 193–229. For a brief analysis of the role of culture in architectural education see Samer Akkash, 'The Burden of Difference: Rethinking the Role of Culture in Architectural Education', *Architectural Theory Review*, 5/1 (2000), pp. 61–64.
- 11 Gwendolyn Wright, 'Tradition in the Service of Modernity: Architecture and Urbanism in French Colonial Policy, 1900–1930', *Journal of Modern History*, 59/2 (1987), pp. 291–316; Jane M. Jacobs, 'Tradition is (not) Modern: Deterritorializing Globalization', in Nezar AlSayyad (ed.), *The End of Tradition?* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 29–44.
- 12 Oktay Aslanapa worked with Ernst Diez and translated his book on Turkish architecture before going his own way to become one of the foremost historians of architecture in Turkey: see Oya Pancaroglu, 'Formalism and the Academic Foundation of Turkish Art in the Early Twentieth Century', *Muqarnas*, 24 (2007), pp. 67–78, esp. p. 75. Farid Shafi'i worked with Creswell on his *Muslim Architecture of Egypt* and went on to publish several books on the Islamic architecture in Egypt, in some of which he challenged the interpretations of his erstwhile teacher: see Farid Shafi'i, 'The Mashhad al-Juyushi (Archeological Notes and Studies)', in C.L. Geddes *et al.* (eds), *Studies in Islamic Art and Architecture in Honour of Professor K.A.C. Creswell* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1965), pp. 237–252. Khaled Moaz, who was one of the most accomplished students of the Syrian built environment, worked with Jean Sauvaget, but, in the words of André Raymond, remained 'in his shadow': see André Raymond, 'The Traditional Arab City', in Youssef M. Choueiri (ed.), *A Companion to the History of the Middle East* (Oxford/Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 207–225, esp. p. 211.
- 13 In Iran, the trend started with the ultra-exclusive series by Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman (eds), *A survey of Persian art, from pre-historic times to the present* (5 vols) (first ed. London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1938–1939). Other examples include Mohssen Foroughi, *Masterpieces of Iranian Architecture* (Tehran: Society of Iranian Architects, 1980); Abbas Daneshvari, *Medieval Tomb Towers of Iran, an Iconographic Study* (Lexington, KY: Mazda, 1986); Donald N. Wilber, *The Architecture of Islamic Iran: The Ilkhanid Period* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969). Turkish examples include Celâl Esad Arseven, *L'art Turc: Depuis Son Origine Jusqu'à Nos Jours* (Istanbul: Devlet basimevi, 1939); Behçet Ünsal, *Turkish Islamic Architecture in Seljuk and Ottoman Times, 1071–1923* (London: A. Tiranti, 1959); Oktay Aslanapa, *Turkish Art and Architecture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971); Ekrem Akurgal (ed.), *The Art and Architecture of Turkey* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980).
- 14 Cf. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987) and Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: language and meaning* (London: World of Islam Festival, 1976).
- 15 Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).
- 16 The best studied case is that of Turkey: see Gülsüm Baydar Nalbantoglu, 'The Birth of an Aesthetic Discourse in Ottoman Architecture', *METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture*, 8/2 (1988), pp. 115–122; Ali Uzay Peker, 'Western Influences on the Ottoman Empire and Occidentalism in the Architecture of Istanbul', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 26/3 (2002), pp. 139–163; Sibel Bozdoğan, 'Turkish Architecture between Ottomanism and Modernism, 1873–1931', in Anna Frangoudaki and Çağlar Keyder (eds), *Ways to Modernity in Greece and Turkey: Encounters with Europe, 1850–1950* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 113–132.
- 17 Mercedes Volait, *Architectes et Architectures de l'Égypte Moderne (1830–1950): Genèse et essor d'une expertise locale* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2005), pp. 21–79, for a review of the transformation of architecture in modern Egypt.
- 18 Anthony D. King, 'Internationalism, Imperialism, Postcolonialism, Globalization: Frameworks for Vernacular Architecture', *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, 13/2 (2006/2007), pp. 64–75; Dennis Alan Mann, 'Between Traditionalism and Modernism: Approaches to a Vernacular Architecture', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 39/2 (1985), pp. 10–16; Panayiota Pyla, 'Hassan Fathy Revisited: Postwar Discourses on Science, Development, and Vernacular Architecture', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 60/3 (2007), pp. 28–39.
- 19 For the development of Fathy's ideas, see: Hassan Fathy, *Gourna; a tale of two villages* (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, 1969); *idem*, *Architec-*

- ture for the Poor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); *idem*, *Qisat mashrabiyyah: masrahiyyah dhat arb'at fusul* (Beirut: Sharikat al-Matbu'at lil-Tawzi wa-al-Nashir, 1991); *idem*, *Yutubia* (Beirut: Sharikat al-Matbu'at lil-Tawzi wa-al-Nashir, 1991); Hassan Fathy, Walter Shearer and 'Abd al-Rahman Sultan, *Natural energy and vernacular architecture: principles and examples with reference to hot arid climates* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Hasan-Uddin Khan (ed.), *Hassan Fathy* (Singapore: Concept Media, 1985); James Steele, *The Hassan Fathy Collection: A Catalogue of Visual Documents at The Aga Khan Award for Architecture* (Geneva: Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 1989); *idem*, *An Architecture for the People: The Complete Works of Hassan Fathy* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1997).
- 20 See Nasser Rabbat, 'Hassan Fathy and the Identity Debate', in Gilane Tawadros and Sarah Campbell (eds), *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes* (London: Institute of International Visual Art, 2003), pp. 196–203. For a more critical analysis of Fathy's classist politics see Timothy Mitchell, 'Making the Nation: The Politics of Heritage in Egypt', in Nezar AlSayyad (ed.), *Consuming Tradition, Manufacturing Heritage: Global Norms and Urban Forms in the Age of Tourism* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 212–239, esp. 213–222.
 - 21 Hassan Fathy first published the report on vernacular architecture and his work at Gourna in Arabic as *Gourna: Qisat Qaryatayn* (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, 1969). It was then translated and published in French as *Construire avec le peuple, histoire d'un village d'Egypte: Gourna. Texte définitif revu par l'auteur* (Paris: J. Martineau, 1970), and then in English as *Architecture for the Poor*. Fathy also published a more general book on vernacular Arabic architecture, *Al-'Imara al-'Arabiyya al-hadariyya bi-al-Sharq al-Aswat* (Beirut: Arab University of Beirut, 1971).
 - 22 Only a few 'Islamicist' historians of Islamic architecture can be identified: Taha al-Wali, *Al-Masajid fi al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al- 'Ilm lil-Malayin, 1988); 'Abd al-Baqi Ibrahim, *Al-Manzur al-Islami lil-Nazariyya al-Mimariyya* (Cairo: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Takhtitiyya wa-al-Mimariyya, 1986); 'Abd al-Baqi Ibrahim and Hazim Muhammad Ibrahim, *Al-Manzur al-Tarikhii lil-Imara fi-al Mashriq al- 'Arabi* (Cairo: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Takhtitiyya wa-al-Mimariyya, 1993); Hayyan Sidawi, *Al-Islam wa-Fiawiyat tatawwur al-'Imara al-'Arabiyya* (Paris/Beirut: Dar al-Mutanabbi, 1992).
 - 23 Sharon Nagy, 'Dressing Up Downtown: urban development and government public image in Qatar', *City & Society*, 12/1 (2000), pp. 125–147; Khaled Adham, 'Cairo's Urban *déjà-vu*: Globalization and Colonial Fantasies', in Yasser Elsheshtawy (ed.), *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 134–168; *idem*, 'Rediscovering the Island: Doha's Urbanity from Pearls to Spectacle', in Yasser Elsheshtawy (ed.), *The evolving Arab city: tradition, modernity, and urban development* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 218–257; Hassan-Uddin Khan, 'Identity, Globalization, and the Contemporary Islamic City', in Renata Holod, Attilio Petruccioli and André Raymond (eds), *The City in the Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 1035–1062; Yasser Elsheshtawy, 'Redrawing Boundaries: Dubai, the Emergence of a Global City', in *idem* (ed.), *Planning Middle Eastern Cities*, pp. 169–199.
 - 24 Sibel Bozdoğan, 'The Aga Khan Award for Architecture: A Philosophy of Reconciliation', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 45/3 (1992), pp. 182–188.
 - 25 Spiro Kostof, Christian Norberg-Schulz and Mohammed Arkoun, 'Approaches to Education', in Ahmet Evin (ed.), *Architecture Education in the Islamic World* (Singapore: Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1986), pp. 1–21.
 - 26 Garth Fowden, in *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: University Press, 1993), picked up on the same point by asserting that "There are roads out of antiquity that do not lead to the Renaissance" (p. 9). His book offers a historical recon-
- ceptualisation of the Antiquity to Islam continuum that challenges previous frameworks.
 - 27 Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973, second ed. 1987).
 - 28 Cf. the special issue of the journal *RES*, vol. 43 (2003), subtitled *Islamic Arts* (in the plural).
 - 29 The list is becoming quite long. For a selection of the variety of approaches and areas, see: R.A. Jairazbhoy, 'The Taj Mahal in the Context of East and West: Study in the Comparative Method', *Journal of the Warburg Courtauld Institute*, 24 (1961), pp. 59–88; Patrick Connor, *Oriental Architecture in the West* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979); Gülru Necipoğlu, 'Suleyman and the representation of power in the context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-papal rivalry', *Art Bulletin*, 71/3 (1989), pp. 401–427; Sibel Bozdoğan, 'Journey to the East: Ways of Looking at the Orient and the Question of Representation', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 41/4 (1988), pp. 38–45.
 - 30 This was the conceptual framework advocated by Marshall Hodgson, the author of the magisterial *The Venture of Islam*, when he wrote "We must leave behind the Westward pattern of history and the "East and West" dichotomy in studying the development of the oikoumenic configuration; and we must free our theorizing of the turns of thought which arise from assuming the Westward pattern'. See *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, ed. Edmund Burke III (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), p. 292.
 - 31 Gülsüm Baydar, 'Toward Postcolonial Openings: Rereading Sir Banister Fletcher's "History of Architecture"', *Assemblage*, 35 (1998), pp. 6–17; Erika Naginski, 'Riegl, Archaeology, and the Periodization of Culture', *RES*, 40 (2001), pp. 115–132. For a specific example of how Islamic architecture was confined to a premodern status in Dutch scholarship, see the discussion in Eric Roose, *The Architectural Representation of Islam: Muslim-Commissioned Mosque Design in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: University Press, 2009), pp. 9–11 and notes.
 - 32 A recent challenge to this division is Dana Arnold, 'Beyond a Boundary: Towards an Architectural History of the Non-East', in Dana Arnold, Elvan Altan Ergut and Belgin Turan Özkaya (eds), *Rethinking Architectural Historiography* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 229–245.
 - 33 See Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: University Press, 2005), pp. 127–152.
 - 34 This epistemological shift affected even the way we study history so that religion role is conceptually diminished even when it was still palpable and effective, see Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 'Making History: Problems of Method and Meaning', pp. 19–55.
 - 35 I am reminded here of the confusion caused by the common phrase, *tawakkaltu 'ala Allah* ('I put my trust in God') repeated on the recorder that was recovered from the wreckage of EgyptAir's fatal Flight 990. See Christopher S. Wren, 'The Crash of Egyptair: The Statement; Arabic Speakers Dispute Inquiry's Interpretation of Pilot's Words', *The New York Times* (18 November 1999).
 - 36 Mohammed Arkoun, 'Muslim Character: The Essential and the Changeable', in *A Rising Edifice: Contributions Towards a Better Understanding of Architectural Excellence in the Muslim World* (Geneva: Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1989), pp. 208–212.
 - 37 This is what a historian of religion such as Juan Eduardo Campo, *The Other Sides of Paradise: Explorations into the Religious Meanings of Domestic Space in Islam* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), tried to do, even though he focused on the religious and did not pay much attention to the syncretic product of the religion's interaction with other cultural forces.