

Course Syllabus

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Columbia University, GSAPP – Fall 2017 Seminar A6806

BUILDING ISLAM, a brief history of the Mosque architecture.

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Building Islam is not about Islamic buildings, nor is it an attempt at forming a comprehensive history of the built environment of the Islamic world. Instead the class aims to critically re-formulate (re-build) the field of historical inquiry into the architecture of the mosque - the most religious 'Islamic' architectural type.

We will pursue this objective through two parallel and simultaneous methods:

1) The class will start by studying the historiography of 'Islamic Architecture'*—the production of knowledge and the formation of the discipline through established (academic and cultural) theoretical narratives. We will critically unpack the 'Orientalist' roots of this field of thought, which provide an all-encompassing meta-narrative. This deterministic framework, pioneered by early Orientalist travelers and experts, understood the architecture of the mosque typologically or stylistically, through dynastic periodization (abruptly ending in the 18th century) or through a medieval historical lens— denying the discipline from the project of 'modernity'.

2) In parallel, the class will study and analyze, through an illustrated paper, a series of 'modern' and contemporary mosques from the 20th and 21st centuries.

Each case study will produce its own constellation of relevant historical knowledge - layered into the drawings - which will include: the Social (stakeholders, users, gender issues, etc.), the Urban (physical evolution, property ownership, etc.), the Political (questions of representation and symbolism, etc.), the Economic (funding, Waqf and other economic support for the institution, etc.), the Environmental (consumption of resources, building performance, etc.) as well as the spatial agendas mobilized by architects during specific architectural historical periods.

The seminar seeks to contextualize these buildings and (re)learn them in light of this uncovered knowledge. The research conducted during the seminar will build upon contemporary academic discourses in the field of 'Islamic architecture' that aim to break free from the previous fixed and singular understanding of the mosque typology in favor of a dynamic theoretical framework.

Building is an opposite and complementary act to destroying. Because dynasties are frequently built on the destruction of their predecessors, we will seek to learn about the monuments that have been altered, transformed or erased in the name of God. Here, the mosque typologies alterations, transformations and destructions, are equally integrated as the act of building into the larger history of the evolution of the mosque.

* See Nasser Rabbat, *'Islamic Architecture as a field of Historical Enquiry'*

Schedule:

I – Historiography of Islamic Architecture

Week 1 – 9/11: Lecture: Overview / seminar structure

Week 2 – 9/18: Lecture: a brief survey of ‘Islamic Architecture’

Week 3 – 9/25: The Orientalism Debate

Week 4 – 10/02: What is Islamic Art and Architecture? (1) Who and Where: ‘At the Exhibit’

Week 5 – 10/09: What is Islamic Art and Architecture? (2) How: Theories and Alternative Narratives

II - Historical Revisions:

Week 6 – 10/16: The Islamic City and Landscape

Week 7 – 10/23: The Destruction of Cultural Heritage

Week 8 – 10/30: The Mosque Today

Week 9 – 11/06: NO CLASS (Election Day)

III – (re)Building The Modern Mosque

Week 10 – 11/13: Regionalism, Case Studies

Week 11 – 11/20: Nationalism, Case Studies

Week 12 – 11/27: Trans-nationalism, Case studies

CASE STUDIES (TBD):

Mosque in University of Baghdad. Baghdad. 1957

National Assembly Building of Bangladesh. Dhaka. 1963

National Mosque of Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur. 1965

Tooba Mosque. Karachi. 1969

Namaz–Khaneh Mosque. Tehrān. 1978

Sherefudin’s White Mosque. Visoko. 1980

Assem Salam Khashokgi Mosque. Beirut. 1981

King Khalid International Airport Mosque. Riyadh. 1983

Faisal Mosque. Islamabad. 1987

Grand National Assembly Mosque. Ankara. 1989