

# 4.619

## Historiography of Islamic Architecture

F A L L 2 0 1 0

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 limits. 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 course aims to include 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

**DAY:** Wednesday  
**TIME:** 2:00 - 5:00  
**ROOM:** 5-216  
**INSTRUCTOR:** Nasser Rabbat  
**UNITS:** 3-0-9

### PERMISSION OF INSTRUCTOR



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. During the second half of the term, we will have a number of visiting scholars presenting their research and engaging in discussions with the class. 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 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 a Stellar Site.

**Required Texts:** Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973, 1987 2d ed.); Yasser Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival* (Seattle: University of Washington Press: 2001); George Michell, ed. *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1978 [reprint 1984].

**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) Robert Irwin, *Islamic Art in Context: Art, Architecture and the Literary World*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ; New York: Prentice-Hall; H.N. Abrams, 1997).

### Reference Tools in Islamic

**Architecture:** <http://hcl.harvard.edu/research/guides/iaa/>