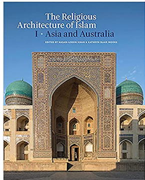
Book review



The Religious Architecture of Islam, Volume I: Asia and Australia
K. Moore and H.-U. Khan (Eds.)
Brepols Publishers
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2021
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What is the relationship between Islam as a religion and "Islamic" architecture? This question has been raised in a number of previous studies with no definitive answer (Allahham, 2020). In the midst of the ongoing discussion on Islamic architecture, the book "*The Religious Architecture of Islam*" seeks to re-address this question. The book attempts, implicitly in some essays and explicitly in others, to broaden the notion of religious architecture of Islam. Many previous studies have used the term Islamic religious architecture to refer to the sacred architecture of Islam, i.e., serves ritual purposes such as mosques, however, Khan and Moore (book editors), adopt a broader definition to include all architecture related to the religion of Islam, such as madrassas, shrines and funerary architecture.

The book presents an overview of the religious architecture of Islam across the globe and over the course of time. The significance of the book lies in its inclusion of diverse Muslim cultures, including periphery regions such as West China, its coverage of past and present religious architecture so as to bridge the link between the past and the present, and in its broad scope of religious Islamic architecture that includes various building types like schools, shrines and saints' tombs. This, according to the editors, lead to having a "diverse and expansive conception of Islamic architecture, that is suggestive of potential pathways for new and ongoing research" (p. 8). Nevertheless, there was no specific definition of Islamic religious architecture. For a book of such size and scope, it would have been ideal to provide such a definition so that the reader could understand where each essay fits within that definition.

Based on the book's title *The Religious Architecture of Islam*, one would assume that the book will only focus on buildings that are consistent with Islam as a religion, such as mosques and possibly madrasas. In early Islamic periods, mosques served both religious and secular purposes, however, starting in the Umayyad era, a split between the mosque and the government house took place, turning the mosque to solely a place of prayer, or a religious building. As such, the majority of the book's essays are about mosque architecture. Nonetheless, the book contains five essays on funerary and shrine architecture with other essays partially discuss their architecture. This indicates the importance scholars attach to this particular building type. Despite a few claims that refer the emergence of shrine architecture to early Islamic periods, shrine architecture flourished in the late ninth to the 13th century; it was therefore an invention with added sacred, religious value. To be included in this book, however, the question of whether or not shrine and funerary architecture fulfills religious purposes and qualifies as religious architecture *of* Islam must be addressed.

The Religious Architecture of Islam is a multi-author book that acts as an introduction to architecture related to the religion of Islam throughout history. The book is divided into two volumes, with volume I covering Asia and Australia and volume II covering Africa, Europe and the Americas. This review is for volume I, which was released in 2021. The book has 488 pages with high quality colorful photos and illustrations.

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The book contains 33 essays by 29 authors. In addition to the introduction by the editors, the book is divided into four parts. Part 1 is dedicated to background themes, whereas the other three parts are classified according to the geographical regions: West and Central Asia, South and East Asia and Australia. Subjects are approached diachronically, however, some groups of buildings are approached roughly according to their own chronologies, others are approached in a more flexible chronological and geographical scheme.

The five essays in the first part, Background Themes, covered a wide range of topics, from basic conceptual themes like Heba Mostafa's essay on locating the sacred in early Islamic architecture, to focusing on specific building types, places and elements like the mosque in AlSayyad's essay, gardens in Ruggles' essay and the Islamic patterns and geometry in As's essay. Saba and Toler's final piece in this part focused on the role of the archives in studying Islamic religious architecture.

Placing early Islam on a historical continuum with late-antiquity, Mostafa, in her essay "Locating the sacred in early Islamic architecture", portrays sacrality in Islam as elusive and ambiguous. The mosque's absence of a definite spatial sacral hierarchy or restrictive internal boundaries, as was the case in late antiquity, and housing sacred and secular activities blurred the boundary between sanctities at the mosque and palace (although the palace has first emerged in the Umayyad era) and challenges the concept of sacred space in Islam. Mostafa problematizes our conventional understanding of sacrality as spatially prescribed, and seeks to re-conceptualize the notion of the sacred in early Islam.

The sacred is a key concept in sociology, yet its definition is ambiguous and its relationship to religion is quite problematic. Sometimes, the sacred is simply presented as a synonym to the religious. In Mostafa's essay, the sacred moves into a different conceptual terrain. For her, Islamic sacrality is removed from physical representation. It exists along a continuum rather than a dichotomy and is situated within notions of divine covenant and encounter. Sacrality in early Islam, she asserts, "eludes definition if we seek to understand it as formally or spatially prescribed. Rather it can be understood as a manifestation of the divine covenant, problematized by the specificity of context, responsive to the Muslim lifeworld in close dialogue with it" (p. 18). The sacred space is not necessarily the religious. The sacred is ritually embodied within the space; that is, it is the rituals that take place within the space that bear sanctity, not the space itself. Sacred space, for Mostafa, is the arena for the enactment of the divine covenant, it is a container, or a product of belief, represented as sites of memory such as shrines and funerary architecture, as well as mosques and other spaces of worship, such as *mihrabs* (the locus of divine communication) and the *Haram* enclosure in Mecca.

Mostafa identifies three categories of sacred architecture in early Islam along what she refers to as "spectrum of sacrality" due to their association with the divine covenant. First, the prime *loca sancta* of Islam which includes the three holy mosques in Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. Second, the congregational mosques in early Islam like the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, and the third is commemorative and funerary shrines including those dedicated to holy men and women. The first category is sacred due to its sacred virtues as naturally blessed by God, the second represents the elusive connotation of the scared. Decorated with mosaic motifs symbolizing nature and afterlife, these mosques, in addition to hosting ritual prayers, offer opportunities for personal experience; they act as spaces of meditation and reminders to uphold the divine covenant and the afterlife reward. As such Mostafa deprived such spaces of their sacrality, and attached it to the ritual prayer and to the believer's experience within them. The third category is funerary shrines. This category, as presented by Mostafa, is perplexing to the reader. Funerary spaces are viewed as spaces where the terms of the covenant are negotiated after death. Mostafa here mixes between the novel concept of death in Islam associated with the belief in afterlife, death as the final phase of the divine covenant for the deceased and funerary architecture. Mostafa brought the concept of

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sacrality to an extremely skeptical level. If sacrality, as Mostafa contends, is "framed as forming distinct functions and phases of the divine contract" (p. 15), funerary architecture should not be deemed sacred as it is not associated with any Islamic religious or ritual practices; it doesn't embody sacrality. Funerary architecture and shrines of holy men or women are forbidden in Islam; thus, it didn't occur in early Islam, the timeframe of Mostafa's essay.

Throughout her essay, Mostafa makes a very clear effort to place the early Islamic conception of the sacred in conversation with other cultures, particularly late antiquity. This, she contends, offers historical context and "contributes to the ongoing debates around cultural transmission and translation that transcend geographic and confessional boundaries and inform narratives of continuity, discontinuity, and rupture" (p. 21). However, is it really fair to approach the Islamic sacred space from a comparative perspective? Is it not limiting how the concept of the Islamic sacrality in space is viewed and acknowledged?

While Mostafa focused on a conceptual theme, the three essays that followed in the first part of the book were more concerned with the physical aspects of Islamic religious architecture. Al-Sayyad, in his essay "The mosque in the urban context", concentrated on the growth of the mosque's physical urbanity. He traced the evolving functions and roles of the mosque and how they fit within the urban context, starting from the first mosques built in the early garrison towns to the converted mosques in the pre-exiting cities like Damascus through to the modern mosques, with a focus on the State mosques. He contends that throughout Islamic history, mosques preserved a common language and visual expressions, such as the dome and the minaret. Such expressions "achieved certain symbolic meanings upon which there are general societal agreement within the Muslim world" (p. 32).

In her essay "Gardens as places of piety and faith", Ruggles discussed the religious dimension of Islamic gardens. She argues that, contrary to Padori's contention in her essay in the third part of the book, gardens in Islam embody a semiotic facet; they are both an idea or a concept and an actual built form. They are called "earthly paradises" in reference to the idea of the heavenly paradise. However, putting the concept into practice might be subjective, depending on the viewers' values, i.e., the conceptual is deliberately superimposed upon the built.

Apart from serving pleasure and relaxation earthly functions, Ruggles explored the religious functions and symbolism of such gardens in two religious building typologies: the mosque and the tomb. As opposed to actual gardens surrounding mosques, which were extremely uncommon, sultans or rulers' tomb gardens, in addition to their commemorative functions, embodied additional layer of symbolism that celebrated an enduring, powerful dynastic authority. Given that gardens were not typically associated with mosque architecture, Ruggles' essay brings us to reconsider the religious symbolism of these tomb gardens. Here, we must ask: Do rulers' tomb gardens genuinely represent heavenly religious symbolism, or are they worldly political expressions with a heavenly disguise?

In a very well-structured and persuasively argued essay, supported by fascinating illustrations, Imdat As discusses the "Complex patterns and three-dimensional geometry in Islamic religious architecture". As maintained by Imdat As, the complex system of production of the two-dimensional geometric patterns, known as *girih*, has largely been identified with the aid of historical records, however, the method of transforming those two-dimensional projections into three-dimensional architecture is still elusive. Due to the vast range of monuments in the Islamic world, As proclaims that "it is hard to derive a set of standard geometrical principles for architectural projects" (p. 54). He explores various propositions on three different levels of Islamic religious architecture, ranging from the 3D physical elements of the *muqarnas* vaults, to the common proportional systems as a guiding deign method, like in the architecture of Mimar Sinan mosques, to the modular building units employed in mosque designs as in the Great mosque of Cordoba and the classical Ottoman

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mosques. Raising a question on the original meanings and intentions of the *girih* patterns, As states that there is no agreed upon understanding of their meaning but conflicting opinions. Furthermore, As discusses the status of Islamic patterns and 3D geometries in the Modern and contemporary architecture. He voices his concern that, due to the usage of the CAD tools along with the decline in architectural discourse, Islamic *girih* patterns, when arbitrary utilized, "can often appear as a pastiche of their historic past" (p. 59). It must be mentioned toward the end that the essay is definitely highly thought-provoking and illuminating for the reader.

The first part of the book ends with an essay on the "Archives and archival documents in the study of Islamic religious architecture". The essay is organized chronologically into three main sections: early Islamic archives 700–1500c., later Islamic periods 1500–1900c., and the modern and contemporary era. The first two sections of the essay often provide an overview of the Islamic archives in general, including where they are and what they are, with little information specifically pertaining to Islamic religious architecture. The essay's latter section, however, examined a variety of relevant archives according to their sources.

The second part of the book on West and Central Asia includes 19 essays. The first six essays concentrate on early Islamic religious architecture, whereas the subsequent essays are organized diachronically. For reviewing this part, I will look into a few essays and some of the key ideas included.

Due to their sacred significance, the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina, in addition to the Dome of the Rock and the Umayyad mosque in Damascus are indispensable when studying Islamic religious architecture. Unlike the essays on the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina and the Great Mosque of Damascus, which functioned as a record of their architectural development that took place throughout Islamic history, the essay on the Dome of the Rock featured an argument by tracing the building's evolution through the centuries.

Relying on secondary sources to build her argument, Moore, echoing Grabar and a few other scholars, argues that rather than just being purely a symbol of Islam, the Dome of the Rock may be viewed as a unique religious building negotiating the interrelations between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. She contends that the Dome of the Rock had physical and theological ties to ancient Judaism, conversely, it articulates Islam's divergence from then-contemporary Christianity.

While Necipoglu (2008) contends that historical records attribute the building's holiness to its hallowed site rather than to the building itself, Moore sees the building's architecture as fulfilling this purpose. In one of her attempts to prove the building's holiness, Moore endorses a widely disproved assumption that the Dome of the Rock resembles the Kaaba in Mecca, despite this being strongly refuted by many scholars. As regards the connection with Judaism, in addition to the site's eschatological association, Moore claims that the Dome of the Rock has a physical connection to the Jewish Temple because of its mosaic themes that were particular to the idea of Solomon's Temple and related legends. Likewise, in proving its connection to Christianity, Moore interprets the building's physical resemblance to the nearby early churches of Jesus and Mary, yet its visual primacy combined with its Quranic inscriptions and figural abstention, as a sign of Islam's denial of the divinity of Jesus and Mary. Moore's conclusion in this regard is not particularly compelling. If the Dome of the Rock rejects Christianity's sacred symbols, how can it be said to indicate a relationship with Christianity? According to Guidetti's in his essay on Early Islam and Byzantine churches, the Islamic religious complex in Jerusalem was built on Temple Mount and avoided having a close physical contact with the holy Christian sanctuaries while still maintaining a dialogue with them. This seems to go against Moore's claim that the Dome of the Rock represents a connection between Christianity and Islam.

The Dome of the Rock has always piqued the interest of scholars, particularly in relation to its meaning and inspiration for construction. Moore's argument is one of many hypotheses

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that have been advanced. Due to lack of authentic texts that address this issue, scholars utilize logical reasoning to reach the truth, therefore, it is difficult to identify one plausible reason and meaning.

Due to its successive historical layers, Boomer and Ousterhout refer to the Haram al-Sharif in their essay as a palimpsest, citing Necipoglu (2008). Their essay, thus, traces with remarkable details the architectural history of al-Haram al-Sharif from the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE to the mediaeval changes that occurred in the aftermath of the Crusades and Salah al-Dins' recapture of the city.

The essay by Guidetti is particularly interesting. Guidetti, in light of the Islamic jurisprudence's norms toward the minorities and their places of worship, examines the different attitudes of early Islamic rulers toward late antique Byzantine churches, with a special focus on the Syrian-Palestinian region. Guidetti refers to the respectful attitude of Muslim rulers toward the existence of Byzantine churches as pragmatic. Examples of this attitude can be found in the Great Mosque of Aleppo, which was built in the late-antique monastery's garden while the cathedral of the monastic complex was kept in use, and al-Rusfa's Friday mosque which stood adjacent to the main church of the monastic complex. Other attitudes ranged from acquiring the building and transforming its function from church to mosque, as the case of Hama, to firmer cases as in the Great Mosque of Damascus. Al-Walid I destroyed the Christian church and built the mosque in its place. To the extreme of these cases, the Kathisma church near Jerusalem is believed to have accommodated both Muslims and Christians worship.

In the final section of the essay, Guidetti veered into a slightly different topic regarding the role of late-antique churches in shaping early Islamic aesthetic attitude and visual culture. He delved into the subject without much elaboration or supporting evidence. The quality of this section of the essay falls short of that of the first.

Mulder's short essay on Mosques under the Ayyubids touches on a very intriguing subject. She questioned the simple categorization and readings of historical mediaeval texts regarding Ayyubid mosques. She highlighted several semantic challenges about the nature of mosque or *masjid*, as well as issues of interpretation, using the historian and topographer Ibn Asakir as an example. She concludes by calling for "the expansion of simplistic categorizations and challenge our assumptions about the nature of the mosque in the middle Islamic period." (p. 195). Reading this essay is really appealing.

Moving from mosque architecture in the Islamic Central Lands (covered in the above essays) to the peripheries, several essays in this part explored Islamic religious architecture during particular dynasties or in specific regions, following some sort of chronological order. The four following essays cover the religious architecture in Iran and Central Asia under different reigns.

Michailidis, in her essay, focused on early mosques in the region of Iran and Central Asia. She outlined the evolution of a uniquely Iranian mosque type, beginning with the converted pre-Islamic religious buildings which, against Grabar's claims, occurred frequently in Iran and central Asia. She continues by describing the later purpose-built mosques that adopted the hypostyle plan of the Prophet Mosque in Medina, and finally the distinctively Iranian mosque type, with the freestanding domed chamber being one of the most prevalent mosque types in Iran. Michailidis also looked at the development of mosque architecture in Central Asia. The emphasis of the essay's later sections was on the indigenous building materials and decoration patterns utilized in mosque architecture. The essay is praised for bringing to light the cross-cultural influences on mosque architecture and decoration between the eastern and western Islamic worlds.

On the other hand, Blair, O'Kane and Emami, in their essays, covered Islamic religious architecture during particular successive dynasties. Blair focused on the Ilkhanids (13th c.) and their successors, O'Knae on the Timurids and their successors, whereas Emami focused

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on the Safavids in Iran. The four essays reveal the flow of architectural styles and elements between subsequent dynasties and regions.

In her very engaging essay, Blair explored four different types of religious architecture under the Ilkhanids and their successors; mosques, *madrasas*, *khanqahs* (for Sufis) and tombs. The essay is noteworthy for exploring how architectural typologies, styles, construction elements and decorations have evolved. Likewise, O'Kane shed light on the religious architecture of the Timurids and their successors in Central Asia (late 14th to 15th c.). The essay is intriguing for highlighting the connection between power and wealth and architecture. Timur, the founder of the Timurid dynasty (r. 1370–1405), was renowned for his autocratic power and wealth, thus his architecture tended toward monumentality as a reflection of his ego. The Uzbek dynasties that followed were not as powerful, thus their architecture, although demonstrated a continuity with the Timurids prototypes, was not as grandiose. The essay also touched on the different Timurid and Uzbek attitudes to funerary structures. Moreover, in addition to the common Islamic religious architecture, the essay discussed another building type, that is the *namazgah* or the *Eid musalla*.

Unlike earlier essays, Emami examined the spiritual experiences embedded in the Safavid religious edifices. As a dynasty with dual religious identity, Emami argues that the novelty in the Safavid religious architecture does not arise from its stylistic or structural traits, inherited from their predecessors, but rather from "the manner in which deep-seated spatial forms and decorative patterns were harmonized with the Shi'i and Sufi elements to engender unique spiritual experiences" (p. 257). However, the essay's objective was not satisfactorily met. It was not clear how the spatial configuration of religious architecture stimulated certain spiritual experiences and pious sentiments. Despite this, the essay's thorough descriptions of Iran's Safavid religious architecture make it highly instructive.

The last four essays to be discussed in this part of the book are about the Anatolian region pre- and under the Ottomans. In her essay on Islamic architecture in medieval Anatolia, Pancaroglu focuses on the social networks (Sufis, madrasa scholars and students, *futuwwa*) developed in the society (much of which are new immigrants) to provide a sense of cohesion. She argues that Islamic religious architecture in medieval Anatolia (1150–1450) developed largely in connection with these social network affiliations and the changing sources of political authority. Ira Lapidus (1967) actually pioneered this method of studying Islamic cities and architecture using the social networks. As such, Islamic religious architecture of medieval Anatolia, according to Pancaroglu, is highly receptive to accommodate the diverse polities and shifting political landscape. This is evident in the multiplicity and variety of imported styles and techniques exhibited in mosque and tomb architecture. The essay significantly contributes to illuminating the origins of the formulations and styles of medieval Anatolian religious architecture, imported from other regions and times.

Similarly, Peker, in his essay, focuses on the migration of architectural ideas along with culture by illustrating the many types of mosque architecture in Anatolia under the Seljuks and Ottomans. Peker's essay traces the evolution of the distinctive Ottoman mosque type. Consecutively, Imdat As in his essay presents a new design vision to modernize the 16th century Ottoman mosque type put forward by Dalokay, a Turkish architect. In 1957, Dalokay won the competition to design Kocatepe state mosque in Ankara. Even though the project was never realized, Dalokay's ideas had an impact on the architecture of a few modern Ottoman mosques in Turkey, the Gulf region and Pakistan. Despite Imdat As's efforts to demonstrate how Kocatepe mosque design maintained a connection to earlier Seljuk and Ottoman mosques in terms of path, form, narratives and religious symbolism, yet, with its own inherent logic, the paradox for me is that whereas the Ottoman mosque type evolved naturally and intricately, the attempt to establish the modern Ottoman style is the product of a single intellect.

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The last essay in this part to be discussed takes us to another region and time, that is the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East in the contemporary time, by James Steele. The essay examines the works and design approach of a few pioneering architects, including Hasan Fathy, Abdel Wahid El-Wakeel, Rasem Badran and Muhammed Makiya, whose designs contributed to the preservation of cultural heritage and regional identity.

To conclude this part, we will now proceed to the essays related to another building type of religious architecture, that is tombs. Four essays in this part and one in the following part are centered on funerary and shrine architecture in Iraq, Central lands, Central Asia and Iran and Sufi shrines. Essays varied as to when funerary architecture first emerged. While Saba places its origin in the late ninth century, Michailildis dates its beginning to the early periods of Islam, however, it flourished in late ninth to thirteen centuries. Though, the authors share their reliance on subjective interpretations, arrived at through logical reasoning without any convincing evidence. Saba, in his essay on funerary architecture in Iraq under the Abbasids and their successors (750–1250 AD), traces the history of funerary architecture in Iraq using literary and archaeological evidence. He attributes the emergence of funerary architecture to the Shi'a. In his search for Iraqi Sunni tombs, he misinterpreted historical texts which mentioned tombs but did not explicitly specify the existence of monumental structures (shrines) over them. He added that "visitation of tombs had become a widespread practice across sectarian lines." (p. 163). Islam has traditionally encouraged tomb visits; this practice, mentioned in the *Hadith*, predates the construction of the monumental shrines in the ninth century. Saba, based on archaeological evidence, provided a clear description of the most common architectural features of the shrines that existed in Iraq between the late ninth and 13th century. This contrasts Mulder's essay which hardly discussed shrine architecture but rather their existence as a sign of saints' veneration in Islam.

In an attempt to highlight the relevance of shrines in Islam, Mulder, in her essay on shrines in the Central Islamic lands, delved into a contentious topic in Islamic culture, that is the difference among Sunnis and Shi'ites on graves visitation and saints' veneration coupled with ritualistic practices. Mulder frequently draws her conclusions by referring to secondary sources in conjunction with her personal interpretation. Despite citing the prophet's *Hadith* which considers building structures over graves as discouraged (*makruh*), and forbids performing ritual practices on the graves of righteous figures (saints) (p. 199), Mulder insists on normalizing the existence of such structures and practices. She claims that their widespread and the actual practices mentioned in some historical manuscripts provide good evidence against the opinions of some "restricted groups of legal scholars". Moreover, although she differentiated between visitation *"ziyara"* which is accepted in Islam, and the ritual practices performed on graves, which are prohibited in Islam (p. 199), she continues to mix the two. She implicitly turned the issue of graves visitation and saints' veneration into a disputed issue or a tension between a small group of Sunni scholars and the public. Throughout the essay, she frequently plays with generalization to support her claims. For example, she mentioned that "... in *all* periods, ordinary Muslims and members of religious and ruling elite alike embraces these activities, apparently without regard for scholarly sanction" (p. 199, italic added). Lessening the division between Sunni and Shi'i on shrines visitation, she describes that division as discussed in the academic literature as artificial and exaggerated. She concludes that "the difference between the two sects with respect to such practices are probably differences of emphasis, not of kind." (p. 200). Such shrines, she claims, act "as flexible sites of communal cohesion and identity, and of their place in the hearts of the people." (p. 210).

In a more persuasive essay than Mulder's, Michailidis argues, following Yusuf Raghib, for the widespread existence of mausoleums since the early Islamic period despite the often-noted disapproval of it in the *Hadith*. She supports her claim by referring to the Islamic legal position in that respect. She asserts, citing Leisten, that the Islamic legal schools

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consider the construction of mausolea as *makruh* (discouraged), not *haram* (forbidden). She concludes that "the legal position of mausolea in the early centuries can best be described as ambivalent and contested, rather than universally condemned." (p. 217). Michailidis continues her essay by describing the evolution of funerary architecture, from domed square in their early emergence in Central Asia, through the Samanid period to the tomb tower topped by a dome under the Ziyarid and Bavandid dynasties.

The three essays looked into funerary and shrine structures from different perspectives, but none of them addressed the question of what is Islamic about funerary structures for them to be considered as part of the religious architecture of Islam.

As to the other two essays on Sufi shrines, the first one by Yurekli discussed three Sufi shrines during the Ottomans; Ibn al-ʿArabi in Damascus, al-Rumi in Konya, and al-Khurasani near Kiesehir, Turkey. The essay shed light on the history and architecture of these Sufi shrines, yet, in a descriptive manner. The other essay on Sufi shrines in Pakistan (from the third part of the book), by Mumtaz, is written in a very sentimental and unscientific style. It discusses the "Islamic spirituality" embodied in shrines' art and architecture as a connection with the metaphysical and idealist world-view.

The third part of the book concerns Islamic religious architecture in South and East Asia. This part includes seven essays, one of which on Sufi shrines discussed with the previous part, and two on mosques in China. The first three essays, along with Tajudeen's essay, trace the development of Islamic religious architecture in the region; however, due to the regions' significant cultural diversity and shifting political power, all views concur that the final architecture is a fusion of conventional architecture or techniques and imported ones.

In her essay, Patel asserts that the new architectural forms that emerged in South Asia under the sultanates (700–1690) are merely a synthesis of indigenous and imported conventions, transcending the scholarly constructs of "Hindu" or "Islamic". These new forms cut across the various categories of religious and secular building types throughout South Asia's history. Similarly, Parodi in her essay examines the origins of Mughal Islamic architecture, referring it mostly to the Timurid architecture with local influences. Giving the argument a profound perspective, the essay, interestingly, reveals the impact of the Mughal central power on architecture, particularly the grand scale and the exclusive use of marble in the royal monuments, and the founding of the Mughal imperial mosque type. The essay also explores the impact of the shifting political landscape on the development of religious architecture under the Mughals. Persuasively, Parodi, in the final section of her essay critiques the alleged symbolic interpretations of the imperial Mughal mausoleum and the gardens' quadripartite design. As an example of the late Mughal congregational mosques, Mumtaz, in his essay, explores in detail the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore. In the same vein, the essay by Tajudeen considers Southeast Asia or Nusantara region inhabited by the Jawi Muslim communities. He emphasizes the continuation of pre-Islamic and vernacular craftsmanship and art in the Islamic art and architecture of Nusantara.

China is the subject of the final two essays in this part of the book. Steinhardt's essay discusses the mosque in China, while Hasan-Uddin Khan addresses one mosque in China, the Great Mosque of Xi'an. In contrast to the adaptable traditional architecture of South and Southeast Asia discussed in the previous essays, Chinese building system, as Steinhardt argues, is very strict. It is immune to innovation and change. However, as the necessities of mosque construction are very few, they were easily incorporated into Chinese architecture. Steinhardt uses mosques from consecutive dynasties and various provinces in China as examples of how the mosque was incorporated into the vocabulary of Chinese religious architecture. The following essay by Khan can be considered as a continuation of the former one. Khan elaborates on one of China's most famous mosques that Steinhardt highlighted, the Great Mosque of Xi'an.

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The last part of the book takes us to another region, Australia, however, it travels to a different time period than the former essays, the contemporary era. The essay by Gaber explores the new Australian mosques, influenced by the contemporary architectural style. Highlighting the multifunction of contemporary mosques in the diaspora, Gaber looks at two recent mosques as a representation of a building type that vacillates between aesthetic objectification and vital community requirements including the sense of identity and inclusivity.

This marks the conclusion of the book. However, when reviewing the examples and edifices brought up in the book, it becomes clear that they mostly allude to monumental or authority-related structures. This is congruent with the Orientalist' approach of perceiving Islamic architecture through its iconic structures (Allahham, 2020). The popular religious architecture of Islam, produced by the people themselves, is hardly ever mentioned in the book.

Overall, the book makes a substantial contribution to the body of knowledge in the area. It is a really enlightening and interesting book to read. However, what makes the book so fascinating is how the information is woven throughout. The four parts, the book's one part and the essays all flow into one another. Something you read in one essay is then brought up in another essay in a way that deepens your grasp of the subject. In conclusion, I must remark that, even though one could disagree with some of the arguments presented in the essays, most of them are worthy of being part of this valuable collection.

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