



Islamic Art in A Challenging Predicament

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Islamic art is a comparatively new and very significantly small academic field with different at times contradictory, areas, and an uncommonly complicated ancestry. Its true forefathers all existed in the 20th century, and several of them are nevertheless effective and prominent in the present day. The scholarly persons dedicated to its research are much too limited within obviously substantial number in the United States and to a smaller scope in the old European colonist centers in particular London and Paris, and a disturbingly limited existence in the Islamic world. Its professionals across the world figure in the smaller numbers likes hundreds, and several of them extend to additional areas for unavailability of prospect in their own. Its academic productivity has consequently far been unavoidably limited and inadequate in it extend and implication. Usually in research of Islamic art up to very lately embraced whichever a biological, typological, or artistic context on the one hand or are faith based or ethnically relativists, essentialist, or traditionally fatalists one or the other. These methodologies manifested the lasting impact of the two main and patently mutuality intellectual institutions and governed the expansion of this art as its foundation. The initial slowed from the strange record of the analysis of Islam in the West that we happened to know as Orientalism and its numerous passages in the 19th and 20th century. The next was the influential record of art and architectural description which up until at slightest the 1980s outlined the possibility and approaches of all the other disciplines and allocated them their spaces in a geologically, chronologically, and even conceptually arranged ancient and creative grading. This paper investigates the historical disparities in the study of Islamic art and architecture and determines deeper relationships with other parts of artistry such as Chinese, Indian, African and in Western art. It underlines the significance of regional histories in their theoretical and scholarly establishment.

Key word: Islam, Fatalists, Essentialist, Epistemology, Art History



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Europeans travelled to the Islamic centers which were identified in the 17th century as the Orient. The invasion of the Europeans in these lands were military in search of exploration, escapades, and engagement. These interventions were associated with curiosity about the illusions and ambiguities of the Oriental world. Similarly like the other fields of Orientalists the Europeans became obsessed to collect, observe and decode data on different attributes of art, music, literature, and culture in the Orient. They explored the lands, settlements, and constructions mainly in South Asia, Egypt, Turkey, and Spain. They sized and documented architectural and archaeological sites and collected traditional artifacts and pieces of art while studying and classifying them. Their research laid down the foundation of Oriental historical written details about the formations, objects, time, origin, investor, price and similar information. This information led to the production of the notable catalogues that initiated the introduction of the Orientalists to the Europe and to the leading elites of the Oriental lands itself about the Islamic arts, archeology, and architectural history that was previously hidden and undocumented.

These pioneers of the 19th century were followed by many diversified groups of devotees, researchers, inventors, archaeologists, and specialists. Whom broadened the area of research survey, collection, and specification of space and time. They worked the area of Anatolia, Morocco, India, and Arabia, Iran and finally found its way to the remote Islamic world like Central Asia. These faraway areas by gradually welcoming the Western power and control. Towards the mid-20th century, the area of research was very much defined. Along with the exemption of Southeast Asia most main constructions and art ventures in the Islamic sphere had been documented and categorized into two categories and types ensuing somewhat rigid sovereign grouping which is even now with us in the present day.

The first archaeological experts at the Islamic excavation sites were trained in the previous civilizations like ancient Persian, Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Classical. They analyzed the areas and collected the valuable artifacts for the Museum and private collections based on the well-known Islamic archeological sites. As untouched Islamic findings were a surprise for the researchers and experts rather than a discovery. They stumbled upon them rather than seeking those valuable findings of the Islamic ideological research. There were some exceptions found in Iraq and Syria which were the two main centers of Islamic dynasties, the Abbasids and the Umayyads. In Iraq, the Abbasid Caliphate towards the end of the 18th century and into 19th century were the torchbearers and trendsetters off the Islamic world. Its most famous sites are renowned as Samarra (836-883 AD) and Baghdad (762-767 AD) in Iraq had vanished because of the idiosyncrasies of time, neglect, and the use of unbaked brick, which was the main structuring raw material. (Creswell, 1932) Syria was different, it had Ummayad desert palaces (16th/17th century AD) though destroyed and ruined, it had melancholic beauty with slightly Western features that intrigued the archeologists. For example,



two sites like the *Mshatta* in Jordan (c. 743 AD) and the *Anjar* in Lebanon (c. 715 AD) were considered Byzantine or Roman in history for quite a long time. (Herzfeld, 2002) And were acclaimed to be Islamic in the 20th century.

The most prominent, though progressively debatable archeologist of the early period, was Ernst Herzfeld (1878- 1948 AD) he labored on excavations at both facades, Umayyad desert palaces and Samarra, while his major concentration was later, ancient Iran and pre-Islamic Mesopotamia. (Herzfeld, 2002) Still neither a professional on Islamic art or archaeology, Herzfeld had an enormous influence on together both areas, so as to be believed one of their originators. His fundamental theory, that is Islamic art and architecture have its place directly in the practice of architecture in the Orient. (Sarre, Herzfeld, & Berchem, 1920)

This was engrained in the current academic discussion about the technical and physical difference and similarity among the Medieval Western, ancient Oriental, and late antique art and architecture. Nearly disregarded but important discussion for the expansion of art history opposed the notorious and belligerent Austrian art historian Joseph Strzygowski and Herzfeld activated many European academic discussions at the start of the 20th century. (Murquand, 1910) Strzygowski believed that the medieval European architecture was contrarily to the Semitic and was closer to Roman. According to Strzygowski and Herzfeld the origin of the medieval art came from pan-Aryan connection that joined Iran, Armenia via Anatolia to the Germanic. (Strzygowski, 1901) This a little bit racist, acrimonious theory developing a low perspective of Islamic art or the orient itself. This gave rise to a lot of future studies on the Islamic architecture and art which led to a continuous investigation about the connections pertaining to the Western art and architecture mainly medieval European and sub-Saharan Africa.

A British researcher K.A.C. Creswell was one of the few technically sound architects and photographers. He studied Islamic architecture till the 19th century and Islamic buildings of Egypt to the 1311 AD while residing there. Creswell was very meticulous about the method of researching as he photographed, measured, and drawn the Islamic buildings that he came across. He spent hours and hours in observing and studying the art and architecture while formulating systematic investigation of perfect formal evaluation of building. His techniques were adopted by several scholars for their research, investigation, and observation. Creswell's tedious methodical and quantitative precision while total disregard of the traditional culture he was studying, led him to miss a lot of contextual details of the ideology of Islamic Art. His studies were an asset to the architecture repository though he just studied the descriptions of Egyptian or Islamic architecture in Egypt. Having said that many of the early 20th century researchers had similar views about Islamic architecture and art as Creswell. Like many other studying the various art in different cultures they supported to unobjectionably to the canonical or established view of art as an ethnically graded action with Europe at the center of the art and architecture. Regardless of their scholarly and impressive productivity, their interest was not to transfer the interchange of culture and the



continuity that persisted in the Islamic art and architecture. They totally overlooked the intercultural partnership in Islamic architecture and art between previous and current. As a substitute they established the confined dissertation, projecting the narration of Islamic art and architecture as growing and originating from within. And apparently limited the practice that had initiated with the construction of the Prophet's *Masjid* in Medina in 620 AD, and mysteriously disappeared in the late 18th century with the advent of the Colonial period. (Creswell, 1932)

This path was validated as Islamic art and architecture ultimately developed as a topic of research of art history. This occurred gradually and progressively in the initial portion of the 20th century with the formation of the primary educational chairpersons for the learning of Islamic art in art history section in Western academes and curator seats in main Western museums. Through this progress the learning of Islamic art came to be one of the primaries in a group of culture particular non-Western societies like Indian, meso-American art, and Chinese, to find their place into Western academia. But they required theoretic seats of their own, these beginners initiated themselves included by the intangible context of Western art history this was procedurally helpful and scholastically significant to be certain for Western art records had a distinguished academic practice in its credit. It had its origin in the late 18th century French and German philosophies of archeology and art and extensively seasoned completely its knowledgeable meets with the numerous anthropological and historiographical new conservatories of thought in the early 20th century.

Moreover, the Western art history also generated a dominating composition, that is, it evasively operated the complicated system of knowledge and traditions that created and applied art historical understanding. Due to its defenseless inheritance and formal authority the sequence of events of the Western art from it believed Classical foundation to its glorious climax in contemporary periods created the historical underlying of the subject and downgraded other fields to peripheral areas in its methodical grading. Personified by the legendary "Tree of Architecture" by Banister Fletcher, which surfaced on his prominent book, "A history of Architecture on the Comparative Method for the Student, Craftsman and Amateur", 1905, 5th ed pp, III (Fig.no.1-2). This impartially racist illustration reticent the shaft and the top healthy sections of the hierarchy to a continuous sequence of Western characters from Greece to modern America and consigned the architecture of all additional civilizations to deceased ending limbs on the tree. (Fletcher, 1905)

This stringent program had an unforgettable impact on the perception of Islamic Art and Architecture. It lowered it to a setting of dominant classification like ornamental, decorative, erotic, and stagnant being the favored among them that stayed in sheer distinction to the historically changing characteristics regularly depicted as particular to Western art. Cases that did not match with the classification, such as be collective Classical tradition in medieval Europe and the Islamic Central Asia, the productive communication among them during the invasions and their alike historicizing attitudes in the 18th century were clarified as peculiarities or anomalies motivated by specific historical situations.



The primary intellectual symbol of the cultural instinct raised in nations that faced fundamental rhapsody with their Islamic history for example the Islamic khanates of the Caucasus and Central Asia after their invasion by Russia and Turkey afterward the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. These nations saw the upsurge of a state art history that adopted chosen parts of Islamic art as its own and associated them to the chronology of indigenous history. Following was those contemporary countries that pursued to resuscitate a pre Islamic history as resources to build a supposed historical permanency of an ideal countrywide character. Iran is the main example of this propensity which climaxed in the 1971 pictorial and architectural festival rejoicing 2500 years of Persian Empire. (Nasr, 1987) Therefore, whole exploration initiatives had to transform their programs possibilities and terminologies to house these resilient and fervent repetitious necessities. The royal Islamic periods like the Abbasids, Ottoman and Umayyads, were the supreme stubborn blocks alongside the path of building a continuous national architectural and art progression. (Grabar, 1988)

In universalistic world the Muslim scholars who are Western educated and some of the veteran scholars in 1960s and 70s did start a search for understanding the Islamic art from within its heritage. One of the forerunners was an Iranian theorist Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and a scholar Titus Bruckhardt, who was a Muslim from Switzerland. They developed their philosophies from the Sufi institution and tradition. (Nasr, 1987) Their exploration included a collection of books that presented art and symbolic representation of mystical and somewhat monumental and ancient Islam. (Burckhardt & Michaud, 1976) Throughout the late 20th century the focus of magnitude of Islamic art and architecture was moving to USA from Europe. (Nasr, 1987) The relocation was initially factual as some of European historians particularly Richard Ettinghausen and Ernest Herzfeld, had been involuntarily enforced to escape the increasing Nazi command in Germany alike innumerable other academics and researchers. As they got to the USA nevertheless their academic identities had previously been shaped and nearly few of their finest research were already done. Among the leading model of fresh Islamic European academics is Oleg Grabar, from Princeton. His book “The Formation of Islamic Art” in 1973. established the attitude for an entire group of researchers of Islamic art and architecture to commence and reconsider the terrestrial antique, spiritual, and traditional frontiers of their art. (Grabar, 1988) It developed the basis on which greatest past understandings in the art arena have been determined by till today.

Understanding the Islamic art was extremely defied up until the 1980s enabled by serious expansions in national and postcolonial research after Edward Said’s influential book “Orientalism” in 1978, scholars of Islamic art started lately to ease cautiously yet energetically into the redeeming area of concept and to spread their field of review into previously abandoned or omitted eras, zones and facts of communication with other philosophies. (Said, 1978) The ideas of consistency introspection and national and spiritual approach that long controlled the scholarship of Islamic art and architecture started to drop their grasp as new researchers selected to embrace a multiethnic technique in their investigation. These deliberately located inquiries promise to link the historical



cracks in the learning of Islamic art and architecture and to create sturdier relations with other spaces of art history learning such non- canonical Western art, Chinese, Indian, and African, that has similarly understood the reputation of seeing the significance of indigenous histories in their epistemological constructions and theory. They are likewise destined to established Islamic art thriving on its approach to finally develop its personal operational and academic delineations. But possibly the utmost achieved result of these innovative investigations is to create the situation for dogmatic reassessment of leading standard of the complete field of art history which has allowed for a long time an insecure and factually developing personality of the art of the West while molding the arts of other nations in historical and anthropological classifications.

Figures

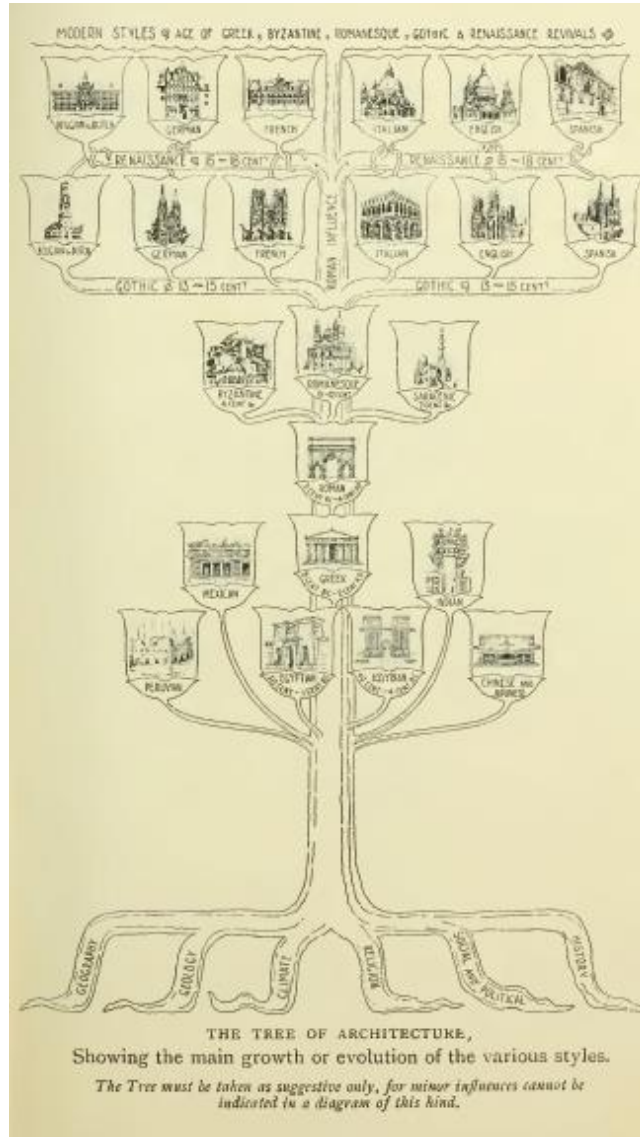


Figure 1 The Trees of Architecture. Banister Fletcher. A history of architecture on the comparative method for students, craftsman and amateur, 1905. London

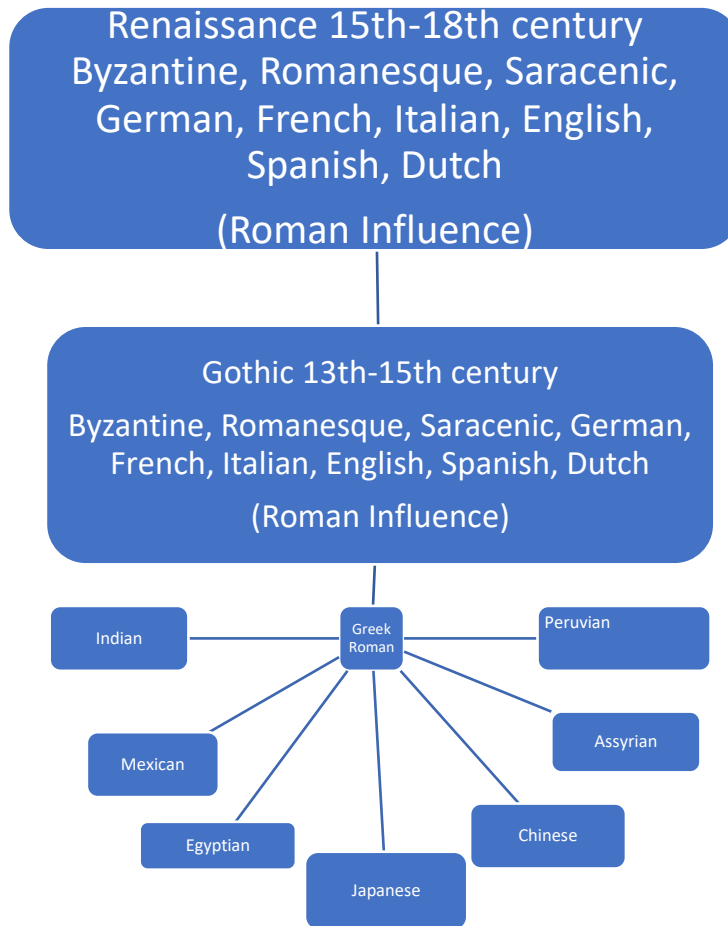


Figure 2 Details of The Trees of Architecture. Banister Fletcher. A history of architecture on the comparative method for students, craftsman and amateur, 1905. London



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