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 confines. 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 seminar will attentively examine 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 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. 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 the Stellar Site.

**Syllabus**

**1-Sep 9: Islamic Architecture as a Field of Historical Inquiry:**
Overview and Class Structure

**2-Sep 16: Historical and Methodological Frameworks of the Field**
Where Does the Field Stand: Recent Reviews:

Required Reading:
Oleg Grabar, "What Should One Know about Islamic Art?" *RES* 43 (Spring 2003): 5-11.


**3-Sep 23: First Encounters and Academic Developments:**
A Pioneering Text: Pascal Coste

Required Reading:


**4-Sep 30: Early Scholars/Interpreters:**
Three case studies Ernest Diez, K.A.C. Creswell, and Mehmet Agaoglu.

Required Reading:
4.619 Historiography of Islamic Architecture
Fall 2008
Instructor: Nasser Rabbat


5-Oct 7: The Historical Method and the Study of Islamic Architecture (1):
Historical Framework and the Question of Boundaries

Required Reading:

6-Oct 14: The Historical Method and the Study of Islamic Architecture (2):
Beginnings and Transition from Late Antiquity

Required Reading:
Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), 1-14, 184-236.


7-Oct 21: Islamic Architecture and Cosmology:
The Sufi Tradition and the Symbolist Approach

Required Reading:


**8- Oct 28: Islamic Architecture and Cultural Interpretation: When Culture Becomes Classification**

**Required Reading:**


**9- Nov 4: Locating Islamic Architecture Today Postcolonialism, Multiculturalism, and The Role of the Aga Khan Enterprise**

**Required Reading:**


Nov 11 Holiday: Veteran Day

10- Nov 18: Current Research: Steven Wolf

Required Reading:

Steven Wolf, Conceptualizing Cultural Autonomy "After Essentialism": The Case of Ottoman Aleppo.

11- Nov 25: MESA/ Student Presentations to be rescheduled:

12- Dec 2: Student Presentations

13- Dec 9: Student Presentations

Suggested Research Topics:

1. Islamic architecture in the writing of Richard Ettinghausen, Robert Hillenbrand, K. A. C. Creswell, or any other major scholar in any language.

2. The French, German, Spanish, Italian or Russian school of scholarship on Islamic architecture.

3. Colonial architecture and scholarship in French North Africa, Egypt, the Indian subcontinent, Sub-Saharan Islamic Africa, etc.

4. Western scholars and the nationalist question: K.A.C. Creswell in Egypt, Arthur Upham Pope in Iran, and G. Goodwin in Turkey, etc.

5. Nationalism and Islamism in Turkish, Arabic, Iranian, or Pakistani/Bangladeshi art historical scholarship and/or contemporary architecture.

6. The writing of members of the Traditionalist school: Henri Corbin, Titus Burkhardt, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Nader Ardalan, etc.

7. European travelers and illustrators in India, Egypt, Turkey, Spain, Iran, or Central Asia.


9. The fascination with the Alhambra, the Taj Mahal, and other major monuments.

10. Status of Islamic/Oriental architecture in the nineteenth-century study of architecture.

11. Analysis of the scholarly oeuvre of major national scholars of Islamic architecture anywhere in the Islamic world.

12. The relationship between the study of Islamic architecture and the study of Islamic history, cultures, and societies.

13. The role of the Aga Khan cultural enterprise in defining Islamic architecture.

14. Analysis and critique of how contemporary major architects interpret Islamic architecture in their design.
15. The pros and cons of teaching Islamic architecture as a separate topic in Western and/or Islamic universities.