

International Journal of Islamic Architecture

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CALL FOR PAPERS

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Special Issue on the Conception and Use of Expertise in the Architecture of the Islamic World since 1800

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As traditional narratives go, the internal religiously-driven architectural production of the medieval and early modern Islamic world ended around 1800, when Europe's impact on the Islamic world became characterized more by force than by affinity. These long-standing, yet dynamic internal forms of expertise, ranging from mathematics and geometry to the mastery of certain crafts like metalwork, tile production, and masonry, faced enormous external pressure that rid the arts of Islam of their (supposed) purity. As several have argued, this transmutation of European "modernity," as it is known, subjected most of the Islamic world to both political and psychological pressures that stymied intrinsic expertise and the monolithic notions of autonomous, universal, and divine creativity. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, such transformations are more widely described under the rubric of "globalization," a system where access to expertise is open to so many and so readily that its structure merely mimics capitalist culture writ large with its tendencies towards designification, mimesis, kitsch, and ubiquity.

The binaries of periodization ("apex" vs. "decline") and characterization ("autonomy" vs. "dependency") traditionally used to characterize these transformations have been duly challenged by recent scholars, but rarely with an eye toward the immensely important and mutable notion of what expertise means to those it impacts on a day-to-day basis. Although "expert" and "expertise" are commonly deployed terms for describing both historical and contemporary production processes in architecture, the meanings of the terms are markedly devoid of a critical perspective. Defined as comprehensive and authoritative knowledge of or skill in a particular area, the notion of expertise is clearly tethered to the entanglement of power and knowledge at the core of post-colonial studies; yet its inherent function in applied "real world" and collateral design matters has exempted it from the scrutiny directed toward other economies of knowledge in the last three decades. This special issue joins the newer synthetic frameworks that opt out of dualizing narratives of the Islamic world and its other, but in the specific context of understanding the conception and use of expertise in the period post 1800 and its vital role in the reconfiguration of artisa-

nal production, the circulation of knowledge and skills, and the transformation of style.

Some contemporary thinkers from other humanistic fields have suggested a new sociological paradigm of “interactional” expertise that generates knowledge production through transactional and multilateral engagement, while others have theorized expertise as a system of knowledge management and contend that “expert” knowledge has no single source (such as a monolithic “West”). The resulting questions are wide-ranging. How, for example, were the dynamics of competition between associations of craftsmen in medieval and early modern Islamic cities reconfigured after 1800, and how were the key urban spaces where information was exchanged—the storehouse, the market, and the university—reshaped or muted in the process? With rapidly increasing contact with Europe, but also Africa, East Asia, and later North America, how did conceptions of expertise shift in light of the crafts and skills of formerly unknown populations? To what extent has technology (perceived as originating outside the Islamic world) from the nineteenth century to the present reinforced the stereotype of an expert “West,” and to what extent has such technology facilitated new forms of autonomous creative production in the Islamic world? What are the promises and the pitfalls of the contemporary free market economy’s ability to import foreign expertise to develop local built environments, as in China’s intense engagement in developing much of the housing sector in Nigeria or the rapid development of oil-rich landscapes in the Islamic world designed by European and North American “experts” and executed with South Asian labor?

This special issue invites papers that explore the notion of expertise in the architecture of the Islamic world since 1800 in a new light, focusing on the history and practice of architecture and its allied design fields, including geography, anthropology, and civil engineering. Themes that might be addressed include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Who and/or what (e.g., guilds, masters, systems of formal training) has defined expertise in the production of architecture in Islamic lands from the late eighteenth century to the present day, and how has the definition been socially, religiously, or culturally informed—for example by the European university system?
2. How have “outsider” forms of expertise in the production of architecture—such as the German apprenticeship system for Ottoman engineers in the construction of the Hejaz Railway to Mecca or the introduction of brick production in Dutch colonial Indonesia—been legitimated, imposed, or appropriated in the modern Islamic world?
3. What are the contours between different forms of expertise, from the highly technical to the theoretical, in the modern Islamic world, and in what ways have these divisions had greater or lesser cultural or economic importance? For example, which forms of design expertise have been sought from abroad in major projects since decolonization, which have not, and are there patterns that divide along the lines of particular forms of technical, artistic, or theoretical expertise?
4. To what extent is expertise an integral part of the power/knowledge genre? How can we understand—through examples such as the importation of French architects to Egypt in the 19th century, which had a defined relationship to a French civilizing mission, or the strong connection forged between the early Turkish Republic and German and French architects and planners, which was elective—the ways in which expertise is both an extension of and separate from the established

power/knowledge genre and its geopolitical landscape? Is this contingent on the status of the state (colony vs. republic), the historical period, or something altogether different?

5. What are the relationships between author and expert, authorship and expertise, in the architecture of the Islamic world—for example, in massive collaborations such as Masdar—and how are hierarchies for giving credit established and culturally constructed by the host cultures and the cultures of those providing the expertise?

6. How can scholars, practitioners, professionals, and artists address, define, and critically theorize expertise, and what particular relevance does this have for the study of Islamic architecture?

Essays that focus on historical and theoretical analysis (DiT papers) should be a minimum of 5,000 words but no more than 8,000 words, and essays on design (DiP papers) can range from 2,000 to 3,000 words. Contributions from practitioners are welcome and should bear in mind the critical framework of the journal. Contributions from scholars of craft history and preservation as well as scholars and critics of sustainability in the broadest sense are also particularly welcome.

Please send a 400-word abstract with essay title to the guest editor, Peter Christensen, Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter, Technische Universität München, (peter.christensen@tum.de), by 1 March 2014. Those whose proposals are accepted will be contacted soon thereafter and requested to submit full papers to the journal by 25 July 2014. All papers will undergo full peer review.

For author instructions regarding paper guidelines, please consult: www.intellectbooks.com/ijia

Reference:

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