

**Spring 2026 Arts of Asia Lecture Series**  
**Asia Reimagined: Mapping Cultures Beyond Borders**  
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## The Transcultural Evolution of Islamic Architecture

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### 1. Periodization

Period	Dynasties / Dates	Architectural significance
Foundations	Prophetic and Rashidun, c. 622-661	The mosque emerges as a combined space of prayer, governance, and community, with Medina as the prototype.
Early imperial phase	Umayyads, 661-750	The first major imperial monuments appear, especially in Syria and Jerusalem, drawing on Byzantine and Late Antique models.
Eastern consolidation	Abbasids, 750-c. 900	Baghdad and Samarra shift the center eastward and establish new models in brick construction, urban planning, and stucco ornament.
Medieval regionalization	Samanids, Seljuqs, Fatimids, Nasrids, Mamluks, c. 900-1500	Regional schools mature: the four-iwan plan, the madrasa, the mausoleum, palace-garden traditions, and highly developed brick, stone, and tile vocabularies.
Gunpowder empires	Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals, c. 1400s-1700s	Early modern Islamic architecture reaches new imperial syntheses in Istanbul, Isfahan, and Mughal India.
Modern and contemporary	18th century-present	Islamic architecture continues through revivalism, nationalist modernism, regional reinterpretation, and global contemporary practice.

### 2. Key Terms

Term	Short definition
Qibla	Direction of prayer toward Mecca; it determines the orientation of the mosque.
Hypostyle	A hall carried by many columns or piers; the basic form of the early congregational mosque.
Mihrab	Prayer niche in the qibla wall indicating the direction of prayer.

Term	Short definition
Iwan	A vaulted hall open on one side, usually facing a courtyard.
Four-iwan plan	A courtyard layout with one monumental iwan on each side, especially important in Iranian architecture.
Madrasa	An institution of higher learning, often with a distinct architectural form.
Mausoleum	A monumental tomb building.
Squinch	A structural device used to help place a dome over a square chamber.
Muqarnas	Cellular, three-dimensional ornament used in vaults, portals, domes, and transitional zones.
Chahar bagh	A quadripartite garden organized by intersecting water channels or paths.
Hasht bihist	An "eight paradises" plan: a central domed hall surrounded by subsidiary spaces.

### 3. Major Monuments in Chronological Order

Date	Monument	Dynasty / Place	Why it matters
622 onward	Mosque of the Prophet	Medina	Foundational mosque type: courtyard, portico, and political-religious center.
692	Dome of the Rock	Umayyad, Jerusalem	First great imperial Islamic monument; central-plan shrine with mosaic and inscription.
715	Umayyad Mosque	Damascus	Major congregational mosque combining Islamic liturgical planning with Byzantine inheritance.
836 onward	Samarra	Abbasid, Iraq	Imperial capital whose mosques, palaces, and stucco became highly influential.
c. 914	Samanid Mausoleum	Bukhara	Early masterpiece of brick architecture and domed funerary form.
11th-12th c.	Great Mosque of Isfahan	Seljuq, Iran	Canonical development of the four-iwan mosque.
784-10th c.	Great Mosque of Córdoba	Umayyad, al-Andalus	Western hypostyle masterpiece known for double arches and rich maqsura/mihrab zone.

Date	Monument	Dynasty / Place	Why it matters
13th-15th c.	Alhambra	Nasrid, Granada	Courtly palace-city that refines the relation of ornament, water, and garden.
1472-74	Funerary complex of Qaytbay	Mamluk, Cairo	Culmination of the carved-stone Mamluk dome tradition.
1568-75	Selimiye Mosque	Ottoman, Edirne	Sinan's masterpiece and the peak of the classical Ottoman dome-centered mosque.
1603-29	Royal square and monuments of Isfahan	Safavid, Isfahan	Urban ensemble of maydan, mosque, palace, and commerce under Shah Abbas.
1570	Humayun's Tomb	Mughal, Delhi	Early Mughal garden tomb and major introduction of Persianate planning into India.
1632-53	Taj Mahal	Mughal, Agra	The most celebrated Mughal mausoleum; culmination of symmetry, garden planning, and marble inlay.
1981-82	Hajj Terminal	Jeddah	Modern reinterpretation of regional forms through large-scale tensile structure.
2008	Museum of Islamic Art	Doha	Contemporary museum translating historical Islamic forms into a modern monumental idiom.

#### 4. Recommended Texts

Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoglu, eds., *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, 2 vols. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017.

Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina. *The Art and Architecture of Islam: 650-1250*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001.

Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250-1800*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic architecture: form, function and meaning*. Edinburgh, 1994.

J. W. Allan & K.A.C. Creswell. *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*. Cairo, 1989.

Martin Frishman and Hasan-Uddin Khan (eds), *The Mosque: History, Architectural Development & Regional Diversity*. New York, 1994.

Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi, eds. *Modernism and the Middle East: Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century*. Seattle, 2008.