
TRAITS OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH IN ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURAL STUDIES: ISLAMIC ART AND ARCHITECTURE (650-1250)

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the traits of historical research in the context of Islamic architectural studies. For this purpose, it focuses on the distinguished book "Islamic Art and Architecture (650-1250)" and argues that these traits receive significant attention in the book. The paper begins by examining the book authors' statements to draw insights from their work plan. Underscoring the necessity of evidence-based reporting, it highlights chief facts related to the traits within the context of Islamic architecture. By analyzing their reporting and the facts, the paper unveils the principles devised for studying Islamic architectural history. It demonstrates that historians of Islamic art and architecture can employ various means to unearth evidence from the past. It delineates how the objectives of studying Islamic architecture can align with the interpretation of historical facts. It also discusses the criteria of periodization offered for dealing with the history of Islamic art and architecture, explaining the aspects of chronological categories in the book. Based on the principles, the paper finally presents suggestions for augmenting the traits in researching Islamic architecture.

KEYWORDS: art, chronological categories, islamic architecture, historical research, objectives

Artikel ini menyelidiki sifat-sifat penelitian historis dalam konteks studi arsitektur Islam. Untuk tujuan ini, makalah ini berfokus pada buku "Seni dan Arsitektur Islam (650-1250)" yang terkenal dan berargumen bahwa sifat-sifat ini mendapat perhatian yang signifikan dalam buku tersebut. Makalah ini dimulai dengan memeriksa pernyataan penulis buku untuk menarik wawasan dari rencana kerja mereka. Menggarisbawahi perlunya pelaporan berbasis bukti, makalah ini menyoroti fakta-fakta utama yang berkaitan dengan ciri-ciri tersebut dalam konteks arsitektur Islam. Dengan menganalisis laporan dan fakta-fakta yang ada, makalah ini menyingkap prinsip-prinsip yang dirancang untuk mempelajari sejarah arsitektur Islam. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa sejarawan seni dan arsitektur Islam dapat menggunakan berbagai cara untuk menggali bukti-bukti dari masa lalu. Hal ini menggambarkan bagaimana tujuan mempelajari arsitektur Islam dapat selaras dengan interpretasi fakta-fakta sejarah. Makalah ini juga membahas kriteria periodisasi yang ditawarkan untuk membahas sejarah seni dan arsitektur Islam, menjelaskan aspek-aspek kategori kronologis dalam buku ini. Berdasarkan prinsip-prinsip tersebut, makalah ini akhirnya menyajikan saran-saran untuk menambah ciri-ciri dalam meneliti arsitektur Islam.

KATA KUNCI: seni, kategori kronologis, arsitektur islam, penelitian sejarah, tujuan

INTRODUCTION

So far, various researches have dealt with the aspects of art and architecture in the Islamic world (Nasr, 1987; Necipoğlu & Al-Asad, 1995; Hillenbrand, 2015). In this situation, the past recent decades have been among the most dynamic in the history of the field of Islamic art and architecture, a field that emerged in close dialogue with the nascent discipline of art history itself (Flood & Necipoğlu, 2017). Academics and practitioners at the beginning of the twenty-first century remain at a loss to define with any clarity, let alone unity, what may be the best strategies for understanding the multiple phenomena that may be

gathered under the aegis of an Islamic art and its history (Rizvi, 2010). Yet, various art history books have embraced the history of Islamic art and architecture (Honour & Fleming, 2016; Stokstad et al, 1995; Gardner et al, 2005). In this case, Shaw (2019) says that along with other art histories, Islamic art history can enable engagements with ideas interacting across space and time. To analyze appropriate strategies for studying Islamic art and architecture, Hence, researchers should take into account the ideas interacting in the history.

As some researchers believe that the question of "what is Islamic architecture" remains unanswerable (Akkach, 2005), there have been complexities

associated with studying the architecture (Ahmed, 2015). According to Omer (2010), studying Islamic architecture by no means can be separated from the total framework of Islam as to its genesis, history, ethos, worldview, doctrines, laws, and practices. Moreover, the architecture benefits from vast traditions across Islamic lands. For instance, rich ornaments in the architecture of mosques spring from diverse traditions of arts (Figure 1). That implies the necessity of considering many aspects or resources for Islamic architecture studies. For example, the surviving documents reflecting the early development of polyhedral isometric geometry demonstrate the sophistication with which craftsmen learned to execute designs that would become commonplace on the surfaces of objects and architecture (Shaw, 2019). In terms of considering the resources, this statement tacitly shows that many of the studies depend on researchers' attentions to historical resources. Indeed, they are very important to concern with studies of Islamic architecture.



Figure 1. Rich ornaments in the architecture of mosques spring from diverse traditions of arts.
(source: Author, 2024)

Besides, Wang argues the traits of historical research in the context of architectural research methods (Wang & Groat, 2013). In the case of architectural research, Hillenbrand (2003) mentions the benefits of dealing with the history of Islamic architecture for western architectural historians. In practice, some historians examine aspects of studying Islamic architecture and introduce their methodological frameworks for audiences. For this matter, it is very useful to ponder the frameworks in correspondence with the traits of historical research

for the history of Islamic architecture. Regarding the mentioned complexities in Islamic architecture studies, concerning with the traits of historical research aids to examine the frameworks considered for Islamic architecture studies.

In this context, Grabar and Ettinghausen have done distinguished researches on the history of Islamic architecture (Hillenbrand, 2012). Particularly, a significant study of Islamic architecture is one of their works entitled *Islamic art and architecture (650-1250)*. Regarding their descriptions for the work, the aim of that study was to present a book as one of the most reliable and useful resources for understanding the architecture. Afterward, Blair and Bloom (1995) published a book entitled *The Art and Architecture of Islam (1250-1800)*, as the second volume of that study. Hence, it is beneficial for pursuing the traits of historical research in the work by Ettinghausen et al.

Therefore, this research seeks to pursue the traits of historical research in a study of Islamic architecture. It tries to illustrate how the traits receive attention in the work by Ettinghausen et al., *Islamic Art and Architecture (650-1250)*. In this way, analyzing the framework of that work is useful for architectural historian's studies.

METHODOLOGY

How can the traits of historical research be detectable in the work by Ettinghausen et al., *Islamic Art and Architecture (650-1250)*? To achieve this, by following the method outlined by Gunn and Faire (2016), the study explores the authors' plan for the data representation in the work. On this issue, this paper examines their statements denoting their work plan. Hence, this study explores chief aspects in the statements related to the traits, namely bringing into view the architecture from the past, interpretations, narratives, and spatial/cultural turns.

To delineate the historical research traits pertinently, this study begins by examining the book authors' statements. Through Wang's framework, this study briefly illustrates each of the mentioned traits and highlights their applications within the context of Islamic architectural studies. Additionally, it draws upon relevant resources in the field of historical research to enrich our understanding of these traits. Thereby, this study refers to the resources of both historical and architectural research, especially Islamic architecture, to elucidate the traits in Islamic architectural studies.

As Carroll (2001) emphasizes, reports in art studies must rest on solid evidence. For this reason, this study meticulously scrutinizes the statements made by Ettinghausen et al. within the text of their work. It aims to validate the traits of historical research

that they embody in their work by tracing the evidence of their statement.

Meanwhile, to enhance clarity, this study employs visual aids. In this issue, Illustrations and photographs play a crucial role in depicting chief facts related to the traits in the context of Islamic architecture. These visual representations allow readers to grasp the nuances and intricacies associated with historical research. By aligning evidence with the traits, together with employing visual representations, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of their historical research approach.

Finally, this study extracts overarching principles from the work *Islamic Art and Architecture (650-1250)*. These principles serve as valuable guidelines for future research endeavors for Islamic architectural studies. They also provide some suggestions concerning the studies.

Bringing into View Architectural History of the Islamic World

Generally, a history researcher must use various tactics for unearthing evidence from a time and a world not his or her own because the “something from the past” is not empirically accessible (Wang & Groat, 2013). This fact is pursuable in the past studies of Islamic art and architecture (Figure 2). In Islamic architecture studies, several books discuss architecture from the rise of Islam to the later centuries through a chronological framework. On this issue, some studies introduce the structures of books at the beginning. Ettinghausen et al. inform audiences about the total events mentioned in the book, based on a chronological order. In this context, Grabar says:

“The present work illustrates an approach to Islamic art which focuses on the cultural and artistic evolution of numerous regional centers from the great hubs in the central Islamic lands in the seminal early Islamic period and on the wealth of ways of creating a beautiful environment rather than on the assumption of a single visual ideal which would have found different local expressions” (Ettinghausen et al, 2001).

In other words, the authors propose the method of delineating the beautiful environments of regional centers to bring into view the art and architectural history of the Islamic world. In doing so, based on the extent of geographical regions, they establish a coherent framework in sections of the book and make a clear continuity of content. Notably, Ettinghausen et al. use maps of Islamic lands that show the locations of regional centers affecting the formation of Islamic art and architecture in each chapter of the book. This use

is very profitable for audiences to grasp the content of the book in its chapters pertinently. Regarding the chronological framework of the book, the maps prevent audiences from confusing the architecture of each period mentioned in the book.

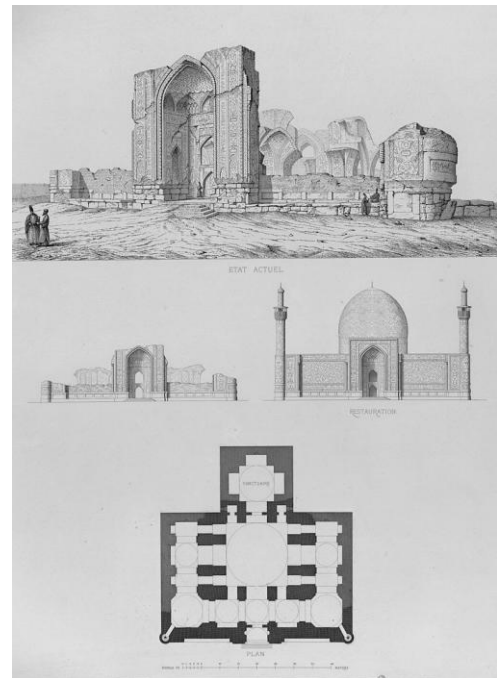


Figure 2. Pascal Coste (1851) aimed to bring into view the architecture of Blue Mosque by technical drawings in the 19th century
(source: Wikimedia, 2024)

In addition to maps of Islamic lands, the authors use a chart to show the chronology of principal dynasties in the centuries covered by the book. Naturally, the chart is very beneficial for pursuing events in the main geographical regions of Islam in the centuries. Additionally, they employ photographs and drawings for illustrating notable buildings. In the book, the use of photographs and drawings extends to depict the ornaments and decorations of the buildings. All these illuminate the ways of providing appropriate tactics for dealing with the built environments of regional centers in the history of Islamic art and architecture (Table 1).

Table 1. Various means contribute to bringing into view the architecture of Islamic world from the past.

Using Various Tactics with			
Building Photographs	Technical Drawings	Maps	Chronological Chart

(source: Author, 2024)

Therefore, authors can make use of reliable references, means, and sources to bring into view the architecture of the Islamic world from the past. This use is evident and traceable throughout the text of that book mostly. In fact, these means help audiences to grasp the content of each section pertinently.

INTERPRETATIONS

Aside from evidence from the past, the historian's point of view is a key part of history research and narration (Wang & Groat, 2013). Generally, a historical investigation includes interpreting the meaning of events, which are analyzed based on the available of surviving data (Lundy, 2008). However, the book principally aims to offer information about Islamic art and architecture. In this regard, the authors have not considered a broad venue for cultural interpretations. In practice, their study points to the traditional discussion of the arts of Islamic world.

In the first edition of the book, Ettinghausen et al. regard the book as unfinished and as a manuscript for future studies. This matter is generally traceable in the book, but interpretations are evident in some parts of the book. In essence, interpretations are a significant factor for studying Islamic art and architecture (Figure 3). As the authors mention in the book, the schools of interpretations of Islamic sources were little by little created in the history of the Islamic world. To illustrate, they refer to some narratives to describe and interpret the formation of Islamic art and architecture in the early Islamic era. Notably, their elaborative interpretations are more at the beginning of the book than at other parts. That matter denotes that the authors try to illuminate the relationship between Islamic texts and the art and architecture in the era. In the case of interpreting architectural ornaments, they say:

"In short, the task of interpreting architectural ornament is still fraught with uncertainty and I shall limit ourselves to a traditional discussion of techniques and themes" (Ettinghausen et al, 2001).



Figure 3. Ornaments in Islamic architecture are subjects for interpretations (source: Author, 2024).

That is to say, interpretation of architectural ornaments accompanies the discussion of techniques and themes in the book by Ettinghausen et al. As they put it, the variation of architectural decoration and ornament make interpretations of Islamic architecture difficult. Likewise, the authors argue that the interpretation of independent objects and books is difficult mostly. With this respect, the authors illustrate the major historical events of periods

covered in the chapters of the book, based on a chronological order. On this issue, the authors discuss how those events took place at the beginning of each chapter and mention their aspects relevant to Islamic art and architecture. This way, the authors make audiences familiar with the atmosphere of their study and ultimately offer a deep hint at the themes of Islamic culture. Then, illustrating the events can facilitate understanding the themes embodied by Islamic art and architecture in each era. In this context, Grabar mentions:

"..., but in most instances each variation within a theme represents an individual interpretation of some general principle of design. The social or psychological reasons for these variations remain unexplained" (Ettinghausen et al, 2001).

In this way, the authors point to the relationships between the themes of Islamic culture and some general principles of design. With this regard, after introducing each of the mentioned periods, the authors consider a logical approach toward dealing with Islamic architecture in each period. That is to say, the book usually begins with describing the concrete circumstances of each period, and then it deals with prominent buildings to show their integrities in the circumstances. In explaining the buildings, the authors first discuss their whole structures and their ornaments and decorations secondly (Figure 4). In the case of ruined historical buildings or the ones buried underground, they point to surveys with very preliminary interpretations. They illustrate that the decorations of Islamic architecture can be interpreted to a wide range, such as to a symbol of power, heavenly representations, reflecting the needs of a social class or courtly life, or paradisiacal meanings. However, they all appear in the themes of Islamic traditions. Hence, this study reasonably analyzes each of the significant buildings by discussing the particular principles of notable buildings and their designs for each period.

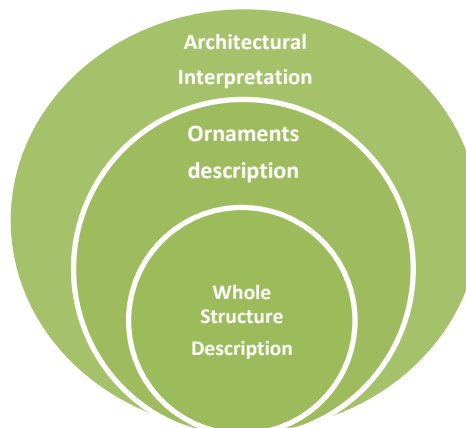


Figure 4. The study shows a logical approach toward interpreting Islamic architecture (source: Author, 2024)

Accordingly, historians can logically approach toward interpreting Islamic architecture. In *Islamic Art and Architecture (650-1250)* book, interpretations hint at the relevant events of each period. With this regard, historian can discuss particular techniques and themes for notable buildings after illustrating the general circumstances of each period within a cultural history.

Narrative

In general, the output of history research is not verse, or essay, or some other literary form; the output is narrative. This may seem obvious, but “narrative” in historiography requires its own discipline (Wang & Groat, 2013). Many scholars treat narratives as discrete units, with clear beginnings and endings, as detachable from the surrounding discourse rather than as situated events (Riessman, 1993). To study the aspects of narrative in the book, hence, it is needed to deal with clear beginnings and endings.



Figure 5. Religious texts accompany the architecture of mosques, such as in Isfahan Jāmi' mosque (source: Author, 2024)

In the beginning, the book deals with early Islamic art and architecture, which results in delineating its differences from the others, such as Christian art. In this regard, the authors begin a discussion on early Islamic art and explain the evolution of Islamic art from its beginning in the Arabian Peninsula to its effects on other lands (Figure 5). For this matter, the authors point to pre-Islamic art in the Arabian Peninsula. In this context, Kaaba was the most significant building before Islam in the

peninsula, regardless of Yemen. They discuss the influence of the Lakhmid cultures and Yemeni civilization on shaping the circumstances of early Islamic art and architecture. Some concepts have roots in pre-Islamic history, such as the concept of mosque. Thus, the authors narrate some aspects of pre-Islamic art and architecture, needed to discuss early Islamic art and architecture.

In the chapters of the book, the authors consider Islamic art and architecture in two general chapters, namely the early Islamic era and the medieval Islamic era. Likewise, the audiences can observe the chronological order in each chapter from its beginning to its end. In this case, the Grabar say:

“Without altering the principle of a history, i.e. a chronological development, of the arts in lands dominated by Islam and by Muslim power, we have divided these six centuries into two broad chronological categories: Early Islamic (roughly 650 to 1000) and Medieval Islamic (roughly 1000 to 1250). The justifications for the divisions and some elaboration of their historical and cultural characteristics are provided in the prologue to each section” (Ettinghausen et al, 2001).

For each chronological category, mentioned by the authors, the book separately discusses architecture, the art of objects, and the art of books in each section. Through considering Islamic architecture and its decoration, the art of objects, and the art of books, the authors’ discussion extends to the ornaments of notable buildings. This matter has particular importance to illustrate details. Yet, audiences can find an inextricable relationship between Islamic art and architecture in the book. It is worth noting that pages of the book overall deal with architecture more than the art of books or the art of objects. That corresponds to the importance of Islamic architecture for the expansion of Islamic culture in the early and medieval centuries. Thus, the fact that authors have considered the relationship between Islamic art and architecture in each chapter is already evident and is one of the salient points of their work.

Particularly, the relationship between Islamic art and architecture is easily graspable through referring to the text of the book in each section. Although characterizing the art of objects or books is distinct from Islamic architecture in each of the sections, audiences can understand the role of art as well as art professions in the architecture of each period through observing its decorations and ornaments. To put it simply, illustrating the relationship receives special attention in the book. On this issue, Grabar mention:

"At the end of each chapter we have provided a summary of such art historical, stylistic, or expressive categories as seemed applicable to a given area at a given time; occasionally, we have suggested avenues for further research" (Ettinghausen et al, 2001).

As illustrated earlier, each narrative has a clear beginning and ending part. In this regard, the authors consider the ending part of the narrative in their work through summarizing. That is, the ending part of the narrative includes a summary of whatever is mentioned and categorized in each chapter. The summary points to historical, stylistic, and expressive domains, considered for narrating Islamic art and architecture. In this way, they emphasize the role of their narrative units in each section (Figure 6).



Figure 6. The study shows an emphasis on narrative unites (source: Author, 2024)

Accordingly, researchers can delineate the fundamental aspects of narrative in studying Islamic art and architecture. In Islamic art and architecture (650-1250), The authors notably specify the beginning and ending part of their narrative in each chapter. These units are considered in each period covered by the book, following the atmosphere of chronological development.

Cultural/ Spatial Turns

Generally, Artifacts cannot be front and center without consideration of space (Wang & Groat, 2013). In cultural and spatial turns, as some pieces of evidence show, physical objects along with subjective constructions of the space that they are found in (or that produced them) are the key issues in historical analysis. Moreover, the resources of historical research can depict the shifts and changes in the social, cultural, and political context of history (Lundy, 2008). The role of political issues in the mentioned periods is widely observable in the content of the book chapters. As mentioned earlier, the book provides historians with a form of a manuscript for further research and does not deal with elaborative interpretations highly. However, due to some geographical overlapping of governments as well as the similarity and continuity of architectural

atmosphere in the periods, the authors consider the cultural zone to be the primary criterion of periodization of the centuries covered in the book. Owing to the role of major historical events in the formation of cultural space (Figure 7), and of architecture consequently, the authors base the main structure of the book on the formation of cultural zones. In the case of titles, likewise, the chapters and sections of the book do not refer to political regions. For this reason, the authors divide the Muslim world into western (from the Atlantic to Libya), central (Egypt through the Mesopotamian valley), and eastern (from the Zagros and eastern Anatolian mountains to the Indus and the Tarim basin in Central Asia) areas. In this case, Grabar say:

"We recognize that, like all divisions of cultural zones, this one is in part arbitrary, but it seemed to us better suited than political ones and more manageable than if we had sliced time periods across the entire Muslim world" (Ettinghausen et al, 2001).



Figure 7. Eugène Flandin (1851) showed cultural contexts in illustrating Islamic architecture in the 19th century (source: Wikimedia, 2024).

Throughout the book, the authors describe the political and social conditions of the two eras mainly at the beginning of each chapter. In this context, each particular social or cultural movement in the mentioned periods is mostly elaborated at the beginning of the chapter. In the next step, there is a descriptive approach to the art and architecture of each period in each chapter. Thereby, it is beneficial for audiences to observe the coincidence of these movements with the architecture of the periods of Islamic centuries.

Notably, with the spread of Islam and Muslims' conquests, Islamic art benefited from dynamic traditions through accessing Greco-Roman and Sassanid art and books. In this way, dynamic traditions in Islamic lands offer the co-existence of new experiments with ancient styles. This fact corresponds to the development of Islamic art and architecture. Admittedly, in addition to the mentioned regions, the Islamic conquests of non-Arab lands influenced the art of other ethnic groups such as Syrians. The subsequent Muslim conquests of India and Central Asia led to the use of their cultures in Islamic art and architecture. These facts imply the formation of diverse styles in Islamic architecture. Hence, the authors deal with traditions for explaining the socio-cultural conditions in the periods.

Therefore, that study engages with the change of limited traditions to diverse traditions with the Muslim conquests. The change accompanied the emergence of great cultural-artistic movements in the Islamic world. This fact is accordingly very significant for studying the history of Islamic architecture.

CONCLUSION

This study shows the aspects of addressing the traits of historical research in an Islamic architecture study, through focusing on a work by Ettinghausen et al. In this regard, it significantly points to the architecture of mosques for focusing on the traits in Islamic Architectural history. Regarding the traits, the study provides historians with a significant factor for comparing studies of Islamic art history with studies of other arts and architectural histories, which is tacitly mentioned by Shaw and Hillenbrand. Instead of political changes, the structure of the work mainly relies on cultural zones. This matter shows the significance of dealing with cultural zones in Islamic architecture studies, as it is one of the principal objectives of the work. For this matter, further research on the traditional arts of the zones can be done to investigate their characteristics and positions in each period of Islamic history. In this regard, the historical texts of Muslim scholars are beneficial in Islamic art and architecture studies. Comparably, further research can pursue the studies of the physical

expansion of Muslim settlements for delineating the changes in their characteristics in the periods.

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