



Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas (SUNY series in Islam)

Samer Akkach

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A fascinating exploration of how the transcendent is expressed in the spatial sensibility of premodern Islam.

This fascinating interdisciplinary study reveals connections between architecture, cosmology, and mysticism. Samer Akkach demonstrates how space ordering in premodern Islamic architecture reflects the transcendental and the sublime. The book features many new translations, a number from unpublished sources, and several illustrations.

Referencing a wide range of mystical texts, and with a special focus on the works of the great Sufi master Ibn Arabi, Akkach introduces a notion of spatial sensibility that is shaped by religious conceptions of time and space. Religious beliefs about the cosmos, geography, the human body, and constructed forms are all underpinned by a consistent spatial sensibility anchored in medieval geocentrism. Within this geometrically defined and ordered universe, nothing stands in isolation or ambiguity; everything is interrelated and carefully positioned in an intricate hierarchy. Through detailed mapping of this intricate order, the book shows the significance of this mode of seeing the world for those who lived in the premodern Islamic era and how cosmological ideas became manifest in the buildings and spaces of their everyday lives. This is a highly original work that provides important insights on Islamic aesthetics and culture, on the history of architecture, and on the relationship of art and religion, creativity and spirituality.

Samer Akkach is Associate Professor in History and Theory of Architecture at the University of Adelaide, Australia, and the Founding Director of the Center for Asian and Middle Eastern Architecture (CAMEA).

Illustrations

Note to the Reader

Preface

Introduction

Abbreviations

1. Discursive Order

Cosmology: An Overview

Symbolism: A Critical Review

History and Symbolism

Sufism

Symbolism: A Sufi Perspective

2. Metaphysical Order

Being and Presence
The Primordial Presence
The Divine Presence
The Human Presence
The Epitome of Creation
The Presence of the Word

3. Cosmic Order

The Original Idea
Creative Breathing
The “Cloud” and Cosmic Forms
The World of Command
The World of Creation

4. Architectural Order

Gazing at the Sky
Ordering Spaces
Architecture and the Sacred
The Ka’ba: The First House
The Mosque and the Spatiality of Prayer

Afterword: Architecture and Cosmic Habitat

Notes

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