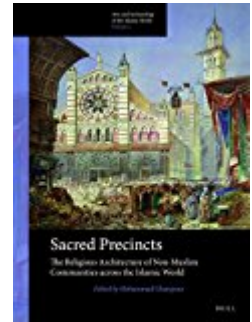


**Mohammed Gharipour, ed..** *Sacred Precincts: The Religious Architecture of Non-Muslim Communities across the Islamic World*. Leiden: Brill, 2015. xxxviii + 542 pp. \$254.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-27906-3.



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When I was growing up, I often heard my father lament the mass exodus of ethnic and religious minorities who fled Egypt in the wake of President Gamal Abdel Nasser's exclusionary brand of Arab nationalism. Reflecting on the religiously diverse, cross-cultural dimensions of the urban Cairo of his youth in the 1940s, he would bemoan the loss of my grandmother's talented Armenian seamstress, Madame Marie, or the disappearance of the city's prominent Jewish mercantile community, whose contributions to the country's burgeoning economy were tremendous, especially through the downtown department stores of Benzion, Orico, or Gattegno (stores that my family admired and frequented) that fashioned their window displays in the refined mold of Galleries Lafayette or Printemps in Paris. Out of these intergenerational memories of a cosmopolitan and heterogeneous Cairo emerged a looming, seemingly inescapable sense of nostalgia not simply for a bygone era, but perhaps more poignantly, for a period that was more tolerant, accepting of social difference, and progressive. And yet, by

contrast, there were stories of obstinance, insularity, and segregationist attitudes dividing religious communities as well. One vivid and intimate account detailed the clash and subsequent prevention of a marriage between a Coptic woman and my uncle, who lived in adjacent villas in Mohandiseen and who were in love; however, even in spite of the Qur'anic allowance for Muslim men to marry women of *ahl al-Kitāb*, or "People of the Book" (Jews and Christians), their would-be interfaith union was deemed improper and unsuitable, partially on the grounds that the clans lived in such close spatial proximity to each other. Yet my family's experience of this culturally heterogeneous and dynamic Cairo was far from exceptional, as countless stories such as these live on across the diasporas of the Middle East.

With these inherited memories of coexistence and tension at the forefront of my own writing about the spatial (re)configurations of communities in the Middle East and North Africa, I found Mohammad Gharipour's edited volume *Sacred Precincts: The Religious Architecture of Non-Muslim*

*lim Communities across the Islamic World* to be a timely and sorely needed compilation of essays that accounts for the long-standing history and complexity of pluralism within many Muslim-majority cities and contexts throughout the world. Today, the status of many ethnic and religious minority communities within the Islamic world remains precarious, with some more recent cases receiving much media coverage (e.g., the iconoclastic destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, the brutal treatment of Yazidis in ISIS-claimed territories, acts of terrorism aimed at Christian communities in Pakistan, or the recent bombing in the Boutrousiyya Coptic complex in Cairo, and, sadly, more). But one of the main motivators behind Gharipour's text was precisely to combat the stigmatization resulting from this destruction at the hands of Islamist radicalization. As a whole, the essays analyze the complex historical sociocultural interactions and negotiations of communities across the Islamic world, evidenced not only in the web of relationships across congregations and constituencies, but in the urban imprints that these interrelations left behind.

This prodigious compilation is truly comprehensive in scope, offering a spectrum of religious representation and vast geographical and cultural diversity throughout the Islamic world. Essays from contributors, for example, range from Alevis in Anatolia, to Christian communities in the Levant and Catholics in Tunisia, to Jewish peoples who resided across the Maghreb to Isfahan, to syncretic practices and spaces of West African peoples in Mali and Gambia, and beyond. Rather than partitioning the book along religious lines (which would only act to further ghettoize minorities), these chapters are integrated along four principle thematic sections which follow a chronological order: identity (religious, ethnic, national), design (formal and spatial elements), construction (materials and construction processes), and re-use (the repurposing of former sacred sites for alternative functions). A very minor shortcoming of the book is the omission of accounts of

Zoroastrian fire temples (*atashkadeh* or *dar-e mehr*), or the *dönme* and Jewish communities in Ottoman Thessaloniki, or Catholic outposts in Southeast Asia, but as Gharipour notes in his preface, coverage of all minority groups within the so-called *dār al-Islam*, or territories of Islam, in one volume would be impossible.

One salient feature that is of special interest to neophytes of Islamic history is the editor's deft but succinct distillation of the important early interactions of the Prophet Muhammad with the many peoples of seventh-century Arabia, including the numerous and powerful Jewish tribes in Medina, as well as existing Christians and practitioners of pagan rituals. This not only provides the readership with a full synopsis of some key events that contributed to the sociopolitical and legal position of non-Muslims within those formative moments of Islam's establishment, but as a result of that dialectical contextualization, the preface serves to deepen the audience's understanding of how Islam in turn adapted to an already religiously plural environment, through the implementation of systems of poll and land taxation (*jizya* and *kharaj*, respectively).

Particularly welcome contributions devote attention to indigenous religious practices and the sacred architecture of West African Islam, a subject and region that is ignored by (often) Mashreq-centric Islamic historians, and therefore relegated to African studies and anthropology. This is an important feature of this publication as it is a testament to very recent scholarly efforts to comprehend the African expanse of Islam through a system of Saharan and trans-Saharan cultural exchange and trade networks. Steven Thomson's work illustrates that religious and ethnic identities in the Gambia—whether pagan, Christian, or Muslim—are intricately tied through a collective sense of belonging, contributing to an ethos of tolerance. A. A. Muhammad-Oumar's writing on Hausa cosmology, human-spirit interactions, and the mutually constructive roles of the intangible

spiritual realm and natural environment underscores the place of trees, groves, inselbergs, boulders, and bushes in Hausa Traditional Religion; even in spite of clashes with Islam over the centuries, these sites have remained sacred for the Hausa peoples.

A thread that weaves across the essays is the authors' demonstration of how sociocultural processes of acculturation and enculturation contributed to the exchange of knowledge and architectural practices amongst Muslim and non-Muslim groups. Essays offer refreshingly plastic and adaptive perspectives on Alevi, Armenian, Jewish, and even urban identities more generally. Angela Andersen's study of Alevi vernacular architecture and culture provides a unique account of a group that was often labeled as heretical by the Sunni Muslim majority, and an analysis of their reinvention of a sacred space for worship that served as an alternative to the congregational mosque. Alyson Wharton examines Armenian church architecture of the late Ottoman Empire, arguing that patrons often deliberately chose to emphasize decorative elements so as to build a stronger self-image for the Armenian community. Susan Gilson Miller focuses on the relationships between Jews and Muslims in late nineteenth-century Tangier, in the way that these communities took on spatial practices that enabled cooperation and separation in the face of rapidly implemented modernization schemes. She argues that Jews still maintained loyalty to synagogues in the heart of the medina. Elvan Cobb provides a nuanced analysis of the politics of heritage in the holy sites of Jerusalem, discussing the role of the World Heritage Organization (WHO) as the primary post-colonial institution governing the sacred spaces of the three Abrahamic faiths.

Non-Muslim minorities created modes of expression and self-assertion through formal and spatial elements of design. Erin Maglaque discusses the decorative scheme of the Coptic Christian church of Al-Mu'allaqah in medieval Cairo

and the ways in which its iconographic program's emphasis on redemption outwardly marks its identity amidst a strong Muslim majority. Geometric motifs, according to Ann Shafer, are one of the key elements that are shared across sectarian lines, whether at the Church of Santa Barbara in Old Cairo or the nearby Ben Ezra Synagogue. Mohammad Gharipour and Rafael Sedighpour make the case that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century synagogues of the Jewish neighborhood of Jubareh in Isfahan were very much assimilated in the urban fabric of the city, while the austere ornamentation (except for illustrious skylights) and discreet façade demonstrated an adoption or reverence for local traditions. Ayla Lepine explores the colonial inscription of a Gothic Revival style in the Crimea Memorial Church of Istanbul as evidence of a British claim to the region. Europeanization, colonization, and modernization went hand-in-hand in modern Istanbul, where the Gothic Revival style pervaded other sacred structures, namely the St. Antoine Church, according to Ebru Özeke Tökmeci. Writing on the implementation of ornamental forms of Islamic architecture in the Cathedral of Oran, designed by French architect Auguste Perret, Karla Cavarra Britton sheds light on the truly multidirectional flows of influence and cross-fertilizations in the global iterations of modernism.

With regard to construction methods, the third part of the volume elaborates on how non-Muslim religious sites were built as part of broader processes of negotiation in predominantly Muslim cities. Challenging the oft-invoked but erroneous claim that Islam, in the wake of the Arab conquests, was spread by the sword, Karen C. Britt demonstrates the symbiotic coexistence of a robust Christian community at Umm al-Rasas (in present-day Jordan) with Umayyad and Abbasid rule through an archaeological examination of mosaic inscriptions. In Fatimid-era Old Cairo, Jennifer Pruitt explores the unique Coptic-Fatimid alliance and how "architecture served as a fulcrum of interfaith interaction, tolerance, religious

ranking, and urban tension” (p. 288), indicative of a much larger power struggle for dominance. Clara Ilham Álvarez Dopico analyzes the conditions of the construction of the Trinitarian-commissioned St. John de Matha Hospital in the medina of Tunis, which was built in 1720-23 as a refuge for sick prisoners held captive for ransom; the hospital stands as proof of the complex diplomatic relations between the beylical court of Ottoman Tunisia and the Trinitarian Province of Castile. Patterns of economic and political interdependency can be seen between non-Muslim and Muslim elites in other reaches of the Islamic world; under Shah ‘Abbas I, New Julfa, an appendage of the Safavid imperial palace, was established to accommodate long-distance Armenian traders who invested their mercantile gains in constructing churches and sacred sites that blended with the aesthetic and material built environment of seventeenth-century Isfahan, as Amy Landau and Theo Maarten van Lint describe. Meltem Özkan Altinöz reflects on the modernization-driven plural architectural heritage of the late Ottoman Empire, particularly as it concerns the accommodation of Ashkenazi Jewry and the construction of synagogue of Tofre Begadim. The Catholic presence in late nineteenth-century Tunisia was central to the French colonial enterprise, according to Daniel E. Coslett, but the decorative programs of the cathedrals of St. Louis de Carthage and St. Vincent de Paul attest to the ambiguous nature of these schemes, as neither assimilationist nor associationist in style.

Aspects of architectural use and re-use of sacred sites are surveyed in the fourth and final section of the compilation. Changing relations among religious communities posed real transformations not only for the identities of the congregations themselves, but also for the holy complexes that these constituencies frequented. The thirteenth-century Syrian Orthodox monastery of saint Mar Behnam (or the monastery of Dayr al-Khidr, as it is also known, in present-day Iraq) testifies to a unique brand of medieval syncretism, as the site

was visited by and deemed sacred to Christian and Muslim worshippers alike, as Ethel Sara Wolper explains; Wolper records a solemn afterword, lamenting not only the monastery’s capture by militants in July 2014, but the decimation of a Christian community that had, for centuries until now, thrived in the region of Mosul. Sites with dual Christian and Muslim architectural heritages are examined in two subsequent studies. Archaeological excavations at the Hal Millieri church in Malta reveal that the apse of the structure may have also functioned as the *qibla* of a former mosque, as David Mallia investigates. The Church of St. Sophia in Nicosia, Cyprus, transformed from a Lusignan cathedral into the Ottoman mosque of Ayasofya in the sixteenth century, and so, Suna Güven elaborates, stands as a living marker of this multicultural and hybrid legacy. Turning to Mali, Esther Kühn discusses the Selofara women of the country, who, dependent as they are on mercantile success of local gold mining at Musodugu, offer libations to appease bush spirits (*jineu*) that reside in the Maribayasa tree. The tree’s place as a Muslim or non-Muslim site remains contested, but for the women of Selofara, the contentment of these *jineu* guarantees the women’s ability to feed their children, and therefore please Allah. Jorge Corriea makes the case, based on urban analysis, that the Portuguese forcefully attempted to eradicate the spatial presence of Muslim communities in several Moroccan cities (e.g., Asilah, Azemmour, and Mazagão) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with sacred mosques converted to basilicas. The final study, by Heghnar Z. Watenpugh, complicates any facile solution to the preservation of the city of Ani, a former node on the Silk Road and today a non-Muslim site on the edge of a Muslim-majority nation, neither fully Armenian nor Turkish, Christian nor Muslim—a place that is as politically fraught as its history is palimpsestically dense.

Without question, texts from this vitally important volume should not only be read by specialists, but assigned in every introductory art his-

torical, theological, historical, or anthropological course that even touches on Islam, for these essays are the interlocutors that can simultaneously dismantle the logic of both Islamophobia and radicalism through innumerable historical exemplars of coexistence. Within the existing body of scholarship in architectural history and urban studies, this volume expands our knowledge of the vibrant pluralism and religious and ethnic diversity of cities throughout the Islamic world, while productively obliterating the Orientalist, monolithic conception of the "Islamic city." This volume also underscores the growing need for more studies in global art and architectural histories, ones which investigate how aspects of trade, exchange, circulation, reception, transmission, as well as processes of transculturation and transmission of knowledge, impacted visual cultures and the built environment. We need—perhaps now more than ever—interfaith dialogue and empathic mechanisms for cross-cultural understanding, in our classrooms, in our places of worship, and perhaps most importantly, in the precincts of our communities and spaces of our everyday lives.

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