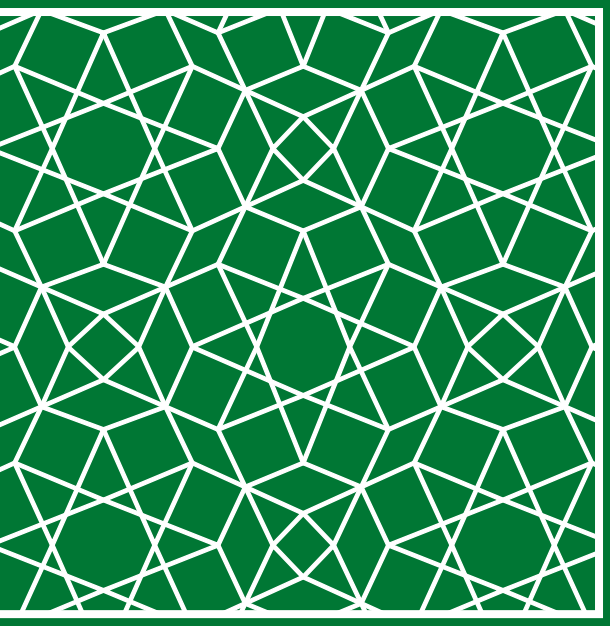
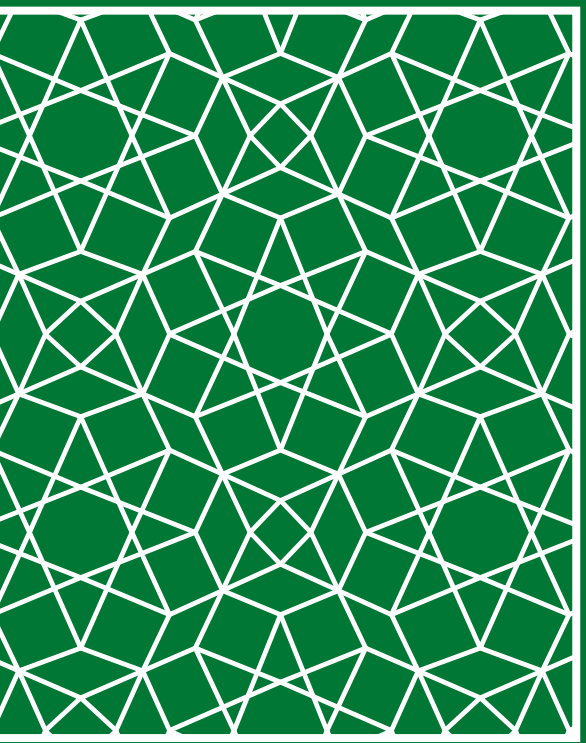


ISLAMIC WORLD OF ART

Cover Story

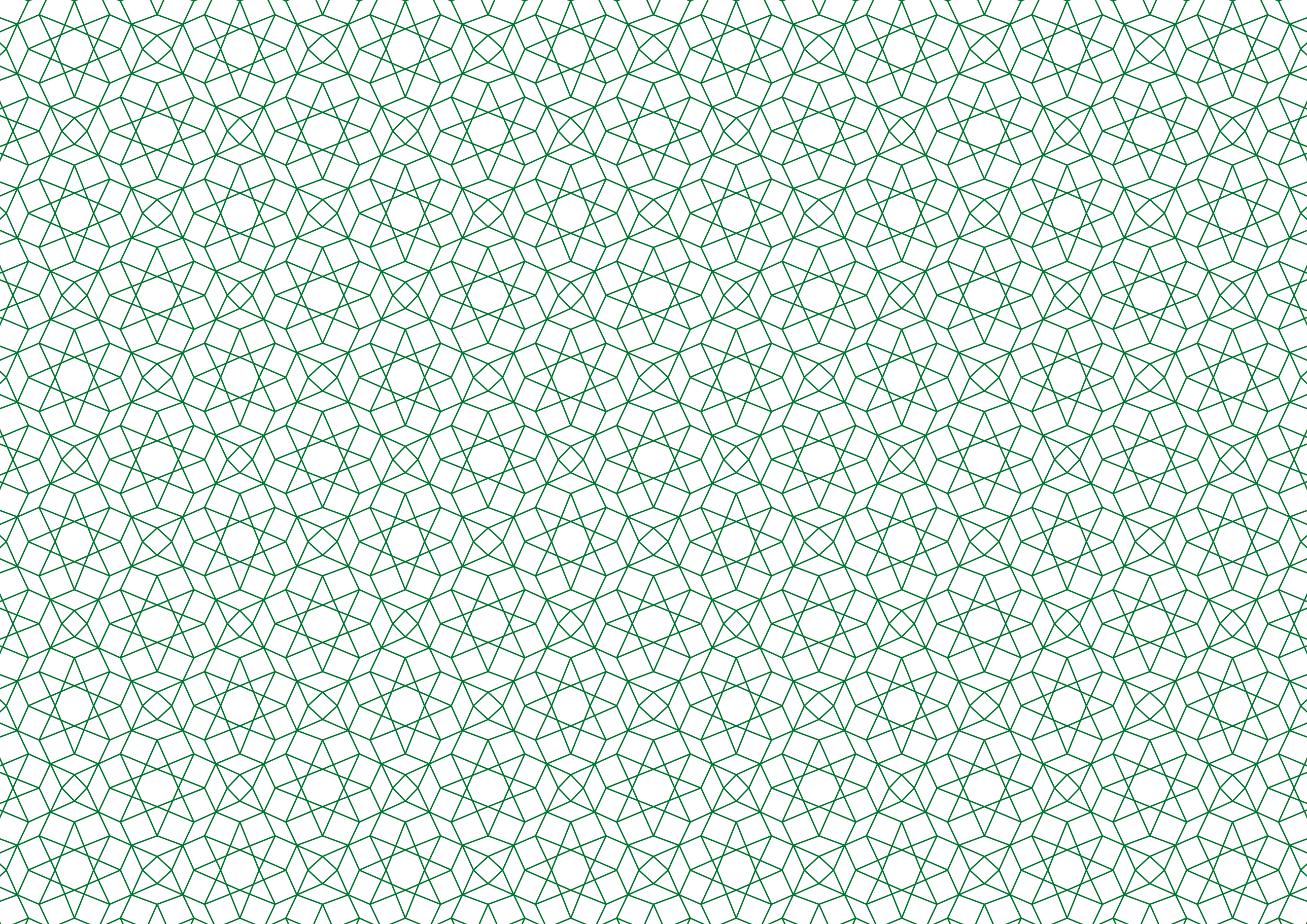
SYRIA AND POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION



When a war is over, those who remain are bound to face the excruciating problem of reconstruction. But what is it, and how should it be carried out? In this article, we discuss some of the issues faced by Syrian reconstruction at the end of a never-ending conflict.

A Magazine on Islamic art

Winter 2019 Vol. 5



The monument
is not destroyed for itself,
but for something
that is not itself.

Manar Hammad

Editorial by Sara Ibrahim, Editor-in-Chief

The Silent Cry of the Arab World

Recently I watched a movie – or better, a documentary – that took me back to Spring 2010. It was the sweetest and at the same time the most bitter Spring seen in a long while in the Arab world: the Arab Spring. It was the taste of freedom, the taste of courage and justice, equality, brotherhood, community. The Pan-Arabism had never been so strong from East to West. The brotherhood was founded upon the powerful ideal of freedom that crossed the major Arabic countries, from Tunisia and Morocco to Libya, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Jordan and the Gulf States.

Crowds of young people, men, and women from all generations and social status, gathered peacefully to call for human rights and democracy and put an end to monarchies, regimes, and false republics dominated by censorship and autocracy.

What happened to all that? Where has this dream been confined to? Let's take Syria, a country whose integrity, after eight years of conflicts, doesn't exist anymore as we knew it. Idlib, the last rebel stronghold, is collapsing under Syrian Armed Forces and Russian artillery fire. The country is split in at least seven different military zones, controlled by opposing powers. With the departure of the US and the arrival of Turkey, things are not getting any better in the areas outside Assad's zones of influence.

What will be the destiny of Rojava? Will the Islamic State make up ground again? Are the requests for freedom and democracy of the Syrian population lost forever in a suffocated cry? For the moment, there's no place for hope, not in Syria nor in other Arab countries, with some rare exceptions (see the potential Algerian case, for instance).

The documentary I watched is *For Sama*, the true account of a brave Syrian journalist and filmmaker, Waad al-Kateab, who filmed her daily life in the rebel-held city of Aleppo – from her years at the university and the uprising of protests to the war, to her marriage and the birth of her daughter, for whom the film is named. All happens in the tragic scenography of a bloody civil war, but the strength of the movie is that is doesn't leave humanity and a wide range of human feelings aside, even during the most tragic moments of the war: love, laugh, faith, hope, solidarity, resilience.

When a country is destroyed, architecture can come to the rescue, giving back dignity, humanity, and hope. To honor Syria and reflect on its future, we decided to dedicate the cover story of this issue to the topic of Syria's post-war reconstruction and how to deal with it, taking into account the social fabric and the true nature of cities whose vibrant soul has been annihilated, in an era where conflicts are held more and more in urban spaces, with harder consequences for civilians.

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In the Mist of the Aftermath

Illigal excavations, antiquity trade, and Islamic art: trade practices of pre-modern Syrian art.

by **Isabelle Imbert** | PhD, Islamic Art specialist

by Isabelle Imbert

It is now a certified fact that the terrorist organisation ISIS took advantage of the lucrative trade of antiquities to fund their activities, by stealing from archaeological sites and museums objects to resell in Europe and the US. Syria is a particularly rich and dense archaeological field, with more than 15,000 major sites in the country of which no more than a third have been published, and the Western art market demand has not decreased since the beginning of the war.
Since the first report published by the *Washington Post* in June 2015, the estimated revenue ISIS has earned from the illegal art trade has never stopped increasing. It is still impossible to give a precise number, because no one knows what is missing, but the generally accepted amount approaches $100 million per year of net revenues. This estimate holds despite the reinforced legislation of the European Commission and the United States on cultural good imports. However, governments were too late to react and failed to come to a common agreement, which resulted in the emergence of illegal routes within the European Union, through which illegally acquired objects have been able to circulate.

One could ask how it has been possible for ISIS to earn this much money from stolen artefacts, but here lies the core of the issue. The years of continuous war in Syria and Iraq have made antiquity trade a necessity for the local population, and many middle-men have emerged with the authorities' blessing.

The years of continuous war in Syria and Iraq have made antiquity trade a necessity for the local population, and many middle-men have emerged with the authorities' blessing

Documents captured during a raid against ISIS leader Abu Sayyaf in 2015 revealed the complex structure of illegal excavations and the antiquity trade, considered as a "natural resource" like gas or oil. A full department was dedicated to it, which included such sections as marketing and research. An important and very organised network was put in place, going from Syrian archaeological sites in Turkey and Lebanon, to Western middle-men who forged paperwork and created false provenance to give a legal status to the artefact and avoid raising suspicion.
In the end, no one knows how many looted objects were sold in private and public auctions, but one could guess a lot. Though U.S. imports from Syria have declined from $429.3 million in 2010 to $12.4 million in 2014, work-of-art importation has increased from $4,553,364 in 2011 to $11,148,782 in 2013.

by Isabelle Imbert

Since 2014, scholars and cultural heritage organisations have mainly focused on pre-Islamic antiquities, especially Roman and Greek, that seem to constitute the most important part of exported artefacts and those fetching the highest prices. The recent study on Dura Europos and Tell Bi'a, two of the most important archaeological sites in Syria, have revealed an estimated value of $22 million in looted goods.

However, Islamic sites have suffered the same fate, as demonstrated by the less publicized destruction of Muhammad ibn 'Ali and Nizar Abu Bahaeddine mausoleums in Palmyra in June 2015. More than 50 other tombs and shrines were reported destroyed since the beginning of the war, not only in Syria but also in Iraq where the 14th century mausoleum of the prophet Yunus (Jonas) was, for instance, bombed in July 2014.

The destruction of Muslim shrines falls under the Salafist interpretation of Quranic laws and the self-imposed severity regarding devotion to past prophets, saints, and rulers. However, there is no reason to think that the above-mentioned mausoleums were not pillaged before being reduced to gravel. We just have no idea what was taken and sold in the Western art market with false provenance.

To my knowledge, no study has been conducted on this topic, and there is currently no available list of disputed Islamic Syrian artefacts. This absence of documentation raises an ethical issue for art dealers and auction houses who need to proceed with caution when facilitating the trade of previously unpublished artefacts.

As long as the Western market demand for previously unseen items dictates its conditions to sellers, vulnerable local populations in Syria and Iraq will continue to dig holes in the desert, hoping for a better future

The International Council of Museums published in 2013 a red list of cultural goods legally protected and most vulnerable to illicit trafficking. The Syrian list shows a majority of pre-Islamic objects but also Mamluk (13th-16th centuries) copper vessels, glazed ceramics and unglazed cast flasks, as well as ceramic tiles (15th-18th centuries) and metal astrolabes (16th-18th centuries). Small objects could easily have been stolen from local museums such as Raqqa, pillaged during the Civil War in 2013, and then again in 2014 by ISIS. Ceramic tiles have been abundantly used since the 16th century to ornament Syrian building, and they are today a particularly sensitive topic that raises ethical questions beyond the Syrian war.

White hexagonal tiles decorated with blue and black geometric or vegetal designs have been sold in public auctions since Islamic art first sparked interest in Western collectors. Lots comprised of these small tiles are presented in most auctions dedicated to Islamic arts—before 2012 without a systematic mention of a provenance. The origin of the tiles is rarely discussed, but they are usually linked to Damascus in reference to the mausoleum of Ghars al-Din al-Khalil al-Tawziri, built before 1430 and decorated with more than 1,300 blue and white tiles. However, similar decoration is visible in other Mamluk cities such as Jerusalem and Cairo. Valuations of such tiles vary depending on the quality of the decoration, the state of conservation, the presence of a signature on the piece, and its provenance. In the most important auctions dedicated to Islamic art, one tile can easily reach £5,000. In April 2017 for instance, Christie's London presented part of the collection of Lockwood De Forest, comprised of approximately 50 hexagonal and square Damascus tiles. Though the catalogue referred to older scientific publications in order to trace the origin of the items, it insisted particularly on the fact that Lockwood De Forest visited Damascus in the 1880's and was ready to pay "five dollars apiece and more for complete sets", prices quite high for that time. This predatory behavior was not justified by an urgent need to preserve these pieces from an incoming destruction but by the wish of the collector to decorate his New York house. The high prices offered for such small pieces does not discourage illegal looting and the deterioration of historical monuments by detaching the tile from the wall with a knife.

Between 2012 and 2017, the number of hexagonal white and blue tiles offered in public auctions dedicated to Islamic art heavily decreased. This diminution could be due to more severe control by the authorities or to an overall caution from the merchants.

Either way, this decline didn't last, and more Syrian tiles appeared on the market again. The main houses dealing in Islamic art have protected themselves by working mostly in a closed loop, pushing collectors to resell parts of their collections that were recently acquired. This is, of course, a lucrative trade, as resold lots usually get a higher estimation than the initial buying price. Similarly, experts source unexplored collections and convince the owners to sell, for instance Lockwood De Forest's tiles collections, which were sold by his descendants. This task is particularly common when it comes to pre-contemporary art, but it has found a new justification with the current dread of reselling looted artefacts.

However, while big auction houses proceed with extreme caution, it is not necessarily the case for smaller, more generalist ones operating through online auctions. On these platforms, prices are usually lower, the costs being reduced by dematerialisation, but the anonymity of the experts and the absence of detailed analysis don't fail to raise questions. While local initiatives are taken by governments to prevent such illegal trade, there is no effective authority on a global level and provenance control is left to art-market professionals, some of whom are not as scrupulous as they should be. Social media constitute a last resort for reselling stolen goods, as demonstrated recently by an investigation on several Facebook groups dedicated to illegal sales. Here again, the resistance is organised by local governments. In France and Italy, for example, Ebay has started to collaborate with national organisations to identify looted items and sellers.

Here lies a real danger for the players in the art market. Auction house departments dedicated to ancient art are required by the field to work in a more or less closed loop; new creation being impossible, the only items that can enter the market are newly discovered remains. However, reselling items sold less than 10 to 20 years ago results in a price inflation and potential disinterest among collectors, especially for artefacts considered common, such as Damascus hexagonal tiles or Mamluk copper vessels. The temptation for sourcing new objects with suspect provenances is strong for experts working for commission on sales, while the avidity of collectors for exceptional pieces never fades. Only through a systematic analysis of origins and a strong work ethic of all parties involved can the war against illegal looting be won, but as long as the Western market demand for previously unseen items dictates its conditions to sellers, vulnerable local populations in Syria and Iraq will continue to dig holes in the desert, hoping for a better future.

For further reading:

European Commission, "Questions et réponses sur les importations illégales de biens culturels utilisées pour financer le terrorisme", 13 July 2017

F. Greeland *et alii*, "We're just beginning to grasp the toll of the Islamic State's archaeological looting in Syria", *The Conservation*, May 2015

A. Curry, "Ancient Sites Damaged and Destroyed by ISIS", *National Geographic*, Nov. 2017

A. Hammou, "'A Treasure of Syria Past': Archaeologists, NGOs reckon with scale of cultural looting in post-IS Raqqa", *Syria Direct*, 16 August 2018

S. Swann, "Antiquities looted in Syria and Iraq are sold on Facebook", *BBC News*, 2 May 2019

Mamluk hexagonal pottery tile.
Damascus, Syria. Dated to circa 1420-1450.
Part of Christie's sale *Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds*, London, April 26th 2018, lot 27.

Birth of an Archetype: the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus

The Umayyad mosque of Damascus marked a turning point in Islamic architecture, setting a precedent for a new mosque typology drawn from several sources and traditions. Its architectural analysis reveals the development of a new archetype.

by **Atef Alshehri** | Architect, consultant, and university lecturer based in Saudi Arabia

The creation of the Umayyad mosque of Damascus marked a turning point in the development of early Islamic architecture in general and mosque typology in particular. Several of its architectural features became standard templates for later mosques across Islamic lands. The proprietors of this cultural shift, the Umayyads, reinvented the mosque not only as an architectural edifice but also as a political statement. As the new caliphal dynasty, the Umayyads moved quickly to formulate their own distinct visual identity based on their Arab-Islamic tradition and the multi-cultural artistic heritage of the Levant. They were ideally positioned to undertake this task in Bilad al-Sham (today's Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon), which was a meeting point of the Byzantine world from the west and the Sassanian from the east.
For about a century or so, Damascus was the arena for accelerating developments in art and architecture that took place simultaneously or in quick succession. Cultural influences were drawn from many sources and were sometimes too mixed and varied to be easily discerned. The political vigor of the Umayyads found fertile ground in such an environment to assert their authority and legitimacy through artistic production.

THE ORIGINAL HYPOSTYLE MOSQUE TYPOLOGY

The earliest place of prayer in Islam was not a building *per se* but an open space. The meaning of the word *mosque* (*masjid* in Arabic) signifies essentially a 'place of prayer.' The word came to mean the mosque building once the first mosque was built in Medina, the Prophet's mosque, circa 622 CE. This first mosque reflected its open-space origins with a diptych-like arrangement of a large open courtyard coupled with a covered prayer hall. The covered area of the mosque was simply a semi-open enclosure constructed of adobe with a roof made out of palm reeds raised on palm tree trunks. The Prophet's mosque in Medina established the hypostyle typology as an open Cartesian space that could be expanded freely in all directions according to social needs. Before the Umayyad period, the first congregational mosques of the newly established cities of the Islamic conquests in Iraq, Syria and Egypt strictly followed this open plan typology.

by Atef Alshehri

TRANSITION FROM PURE HYPOSTYLE TO BASILICAL PLAN

The scale of the Umayyad mosque exceeded that of previous houses of worship that stood on the same site. A Byzantine basilica dedicated to John the Baptist occupied only part of the site, although its exact location has not been confirmed. Prior to that, the same site was an Aramaean and then a Roman temple. After the Arab conquest of Damascus in 634 CE, it became a shared worship space for Muslims and Christians before it was finally appropriated as a mosque in 706 CE by the Umayyad caliph al-Walid I.

This point marked a significant transition from the Arabian open hypostyle mosque to the basilical type. The hypostyle plan, which directly represented the essential liturgical practices, was superimposed onto the basilical plan, which, for the Umayyads, represented the elaborate artistic expression of their new dominion. The result was a combined spatial plan that retained the hypostyle dual arrangement of a covered prayer hall adjoined by an open courtyard but with innovative new architectural elements and spatial organization.

Culturally, Byzantine visual iconography had an overriding presence in Bilad al-Sham at that time. This challenged the Umayyads, as a burgeoning political power, to produce a distinct visual identity that spoke their language yet was firmly grounded in the land and its history. On the Umayyad mosque site in particular, an abundance of Roman and Byzantine spolia might have triggered the Umayyads' curiosity and encouraged them to reuse existing resources extensively in building their mosque. This curiosity, however, went further—as the outcome demonstrates—resulting in reworking the basilical spatial concept to fit Islamic liturgical requirements.

The Umayyads apparently wanted to create a landmark of a scale that could surpass any previous monument on the same site

The Umayyads apparently wanted to create a landmark of a scale that could surpass any previous monument on the same site. This had already happened in Jerusalem when al-Walid's father, Caliph Abd al-Malik (d. 705), built the Dome of the Rock as an attestation to the supremacy of the new faith, Islam, and as an architectural rival to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Similarly in Damascus, the planned Umayyad mosque could be no less monumental than the Roman *temenos* (temple enclosure) occupying the whole site. Thus, the mosque footprint took the length of the Roman *temenos* perimeter wall, while the *temenos* width was split almost equally between the mosque courtyard and the prayer hall. This created an elongated plan with a shallow depth of only three aisles that is strikingly similar to a typical Latin-cross basilica plan, which is composed of a long nave that stretches on an east-west axis and a shorter transept that cuts across the nave. However, a mosque in Damascus must face south, towards Mecca, not east. So the plan configuration maintained its elongated east-west stretch, but the internal movement of worshippers was rotated at a 90-degree angle to face south.

This rotation automatically reversed the usual nave and transept functions found in a typical Latin-cross basilica. The shorter of the two, the transept, took the ceremonial role, which previously belonged to the nave: to lead worshipers from the entrance to the apex of the mosque, which is the prayer niche (*mihrab*). The elongated three-aisled nave lent itself well to the liturgical requirement of accommodating long rows of worshipers lined up shoulder to shoulder facing Mecca.

Along the ceremonial transept, the most striking architectural features of the Umayyad mosque were condensed. The triple-arched entrance façade was very similar to that of Theodoric's palace at Ravenna (6th century CE), with richly ornamented mosaics inspired by Qur'anic images. Also, the roof of the transept was raised above the rest of the prayer hall roof level. It became even more articulated at its middle, where it intersected with the elongated east-west middle aisle at a prominent dome marking the geometric center of the prayer hall. The transept ends at another innovative feature by the Umayyads, the *mihrab mujawwaf*, or the hollowed *mihrab*. This new spatially defined type was born during the reign of al-Walid in Medina and Damascus, possibly concurrently. It is characterized by a hollowed semi-circular niche defined by an arch standing on two columns on both sides of the *mihrab*.

The Umayyad mosque of Damascus established a lasting architectural expression for liturgical practices which were not previously embodied in distinct architectural forms

Courtyard and the Bride Minaret, Umayyad Mosque of Damascus. Photo by Dan.

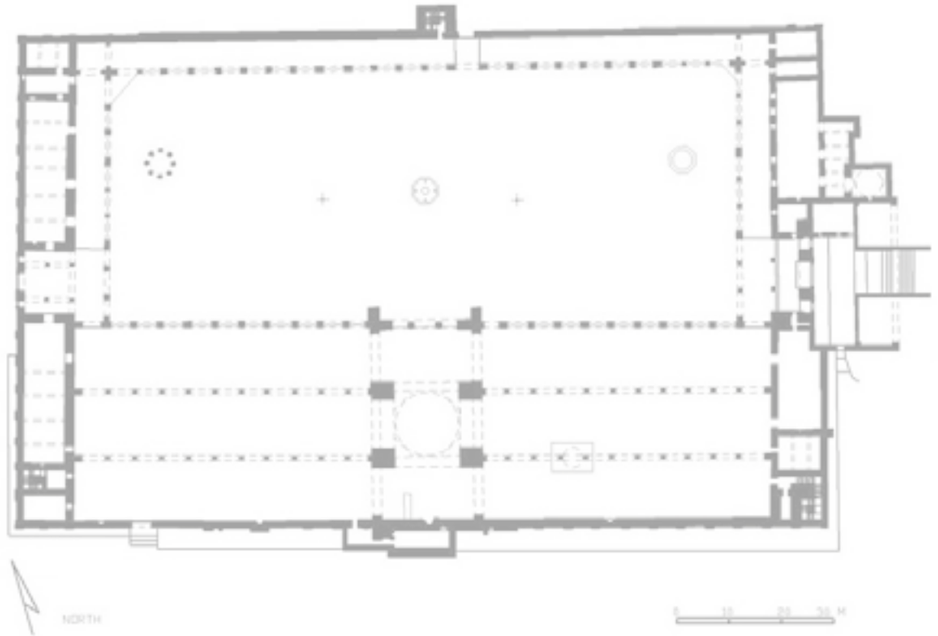
by Atef Alshehri

These developments represented a remarkable departure from the open-grid plan to a more demarcated space with architecturally pronounced features. The height of the entire interior space was further amplified by the use of double-tiered arches, reminiscent of Roman aqueduct structures. Today, the mausoleum of John the Baptist (*Yahya* in Arabic), which is still accessible inside the prayer hall, is not only a reminder of the Christian heritage of the site but also of the Umayyad belief of themselves as a legitimate heir to the tradition of the three Abrahamic faiths.

Outside of the prayer hall, the open courtyard became more spatially defined with an enclosing portico on three sides. To the north side of the courtyard stands the 'Bride Minaret', which is the oldest in Syria and the earliest example of a square-base minaret in the Islamic world. It has been rebuilt several times, but its oldest version, which probably dates back to the 9th century CE, was originally built on the remains of the Byzantine church tower. There is no evidence, however, that the church tower was part of the Umayyad program when the mosque was completed in 715 CE.

Earlier mosques did not have minarets at all, as the call to prayer was made from the mosque rooftop or solid corner towers that did not project much higher than the roof itself.

The Umayyad Mosque of Damascus.
Photo by Jerzy Strzelecki.



The Umayyad Mosque of Damascus, floor plan.
After K. A. C. Creswell. Image courtesy of Fine Arts Library, Harvard College Library.

Theoderic's Palace
as depicted in the mosaic of the Church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna (6th century).
Photo from The Yorck Project.

Historical accounts attest to the fact that call to prayer at the Umayyad mosque of Damascus, in the early period, was made from the corner towers, which were part of the previous Roman temple enclosure and are still visible today.

The Umayyad mosque became the new standard when the caliph al-Walid I (reigned 705-716 CE) spread this typology through his extensive re-building program of the congregational mosques in all major cities of the Islamic conquest, including the Prophet's mosque in Medina. Over subsequent periods during and after the Umayyad reign, the hallmarks of the new typology, such as the basilical T-shape plan, the minaret, and the hollowed *mihrab*, were adopted in Arabia, the Levant, Iraq, and North Africa. For example, the Great Mosque of Kairouan (670 CE), the oldest in North Africa, when it was renovated during the Umayyad reign followed essentially the same basilical plan developed in Damascus. Its prominent square-base minaret, which became the standard minaret form in North Africa, is a calque of the one developed in Damascus. Even outside of the central Muslim lands, specifically in Al-Andalus, transfer of this architectural pattern can be seen in the mosque and minaret of Cordoba (784-786 CE), which mirrored its Umayyad roots in the Levant.

The Umayyad mosque of Damascus established a lasting architectural expression for liturgical practices which were not previously embodied in distinct architectural forms. Medieval Arab geographers, such as al-Maqdisi (d. circa 991 CE), used the expression, "in the manner of Damascus mosque" when describing mosques that followed its example. Its skillful fusion of Islamic and pre-Islamic architectural vocabulary created a rich lexicon, foundational for the development of a prolific Islamic architectural tradition. After many centuries, renditions of the Umayyad mosque can still be seen across the Middle East, North Africa and Spain, while the source archetype still stands in Damascus as a bridge connecting the present with its profound past and hopefully will continue to do so in the future.

SYRIA AND POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION

When a war is over, those who remain are bound to face the excruciating problem of reconstruction. But what is it, and how should it be carried out? In this article, we discuss some of the issues faced by Syrian reconstruction at the end of a never-ending conflict.

with the support of **Omar Abdelaziz Hallaj**

Architect and development consultant

by Giulia Gallini with the support of Omar Abdelaziz Hallaj

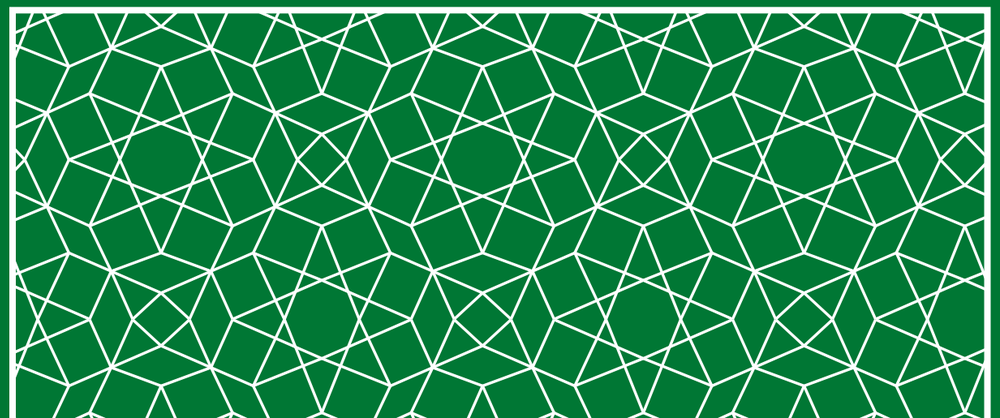
Wars are fought more and more in the urban space: in the last decades, cities have come to be the battlefields, their destruction representing a strategic goal. In this context, post-war reconstruction becomes a delicate process that needs to be well thought out.

The key issue is how the concept of reconstruction itself is understood. Reconstruction means rebuilding what has been destroyed: roads, infrastructures, buildings, houses, public areas. Naively, we tend to think it suffices to rebuild everything as it used to be to restore a war-torn country; it is commonly assumed that repairing this building, repaving that road, restore that square, will eventually lead to the recovery of a country and, consequently, of an entire society. This approach is based on the assumption that the conflict can be deleted, the country reset to the pre-war situation.
With the war being fought in the urban space, cities are affected on a deeper level than only the material one: cities *live* through conflicts and undergo profound and rapid changes. In the case of civil wars, internal boundaries are created, neighborhoods and whole cities change their functions, and a new narrative is created around areas: the population starts to give new and different meanings to the spaces they live in and, in some cases, fight for. The new meanings outlive the conflict. As Omar Abdelaziz Hallaj puts it, "Cities have a strange way of living after a conflict, and of remembering where the conflict took place".

The dimension of the conflict

Co-founder and senior coordinator of the Syria Initiative at the Common Space Initiative in Beirut, Omar Abdelaziz Hallaj is engaged in facilitating dialogues and projects for peacebuilding and recovery planning in Syria.
Mr. Hallaj's research interests focus on the history, economics, and development policies of the Muslim world and the Arab region. In Syria, he has been CEO of the Syria Trust for Development, a foundation that provides a framework for community-based developmental initiatives in the country. He was also a partner in Suradec, a consortium for urban development and urban heritage planning in Aleppo.

THE POOR UNDERSTANDING OF THE SITUATION STEMS FROM HOW THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA HAVE COVERED THE SYRIAN WAR, SIMPLIFYING IT INTO A SIMPLE, BINARY CONFLICT



His approach to the matter of post-war reconstruction in Syria is down-to-earth and infused with knowledge and experience.
Hallaj stresses the importance of understanding the territory that needs to be redeveloped, which is particularly important in Syria, a place that everybody thinks they know but that is frequently misinterpreted. The poor understanding of the situation stems from how the international media have covered the Syrian war, simplifying it into a simple, binary conflict: President al-Assad's loyalists versus the rebels. Correspondingly, international support has been divided similarly: among others, Russia and Iran have backed Bashar al-Assad's government, while the US, France, and the UK have supported the rebels, for instance.

Hallaj points out how the international narration contrasts with the actual dimension of the conflict and how Western media prevent international actors from seeing and understanding the peculiarities of the local reality. The Syrian conflict is in fact multi-sided and layered. In each faction of the conflict many fighting groups are involved - the Syrian Armed Forces, the Syrian National Coalition, the Kurdish YPG, the Free Syrian Army, Shi'a militias, Christian militias, the Islamic State, to name just a few, each of them having different interests and aims. Even if the components of a faction may agree in general terms, each of them fight for power and follow their own agenda and interests. In addition, within the single group attitudes and ideas can vary dramatically among peaceful factions, violent ones, criminals, idealists. Each new situation that arises during the war can be exploited differently by the various fighting agents, thus generating conflicts at all levels.

If the Syrian Civil War is layered and intricate, the reality of Syrian cities and population is even more complex: "Do not assume that, since you know something about Syria, you are able to understand it" warns Hallaj. To talk about reconstruction, it is vital to understand what the situation is in Syria now, as well as what it used to be.

IF THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR IS LAYERED AND INTRICATE, THE REALITY OF SYRIAN CITIES AND POPULATION IS EVEN MORE COMPLEX

Urban development before and during the conflict

Before the outbreak of the conflict, Syria had a strong central government and a weak local administration. This centralization of power was also mirrored in urban development: all the resources and the power, both economic and political, were controlled by the two dominant cities, Damascus and Aleppo, with Damascus being the center of government and administration, and Aleppo the main city for trade and industry. It is then no surprise that the two cities combined produced roughly half of the Syrian GDP. The government invested primarily in these two centers, neglecting the smaller ones: the spending per-capita in Damascus was about five or six times the spending per-capita in a small town somewhere else. "And in rural areas, government spending was even less", points out Hallaj.

by Giulia Gallini with the support of Omar Abdelaziz Hallaj

As a result, while in the 1990s Aleppo and Damascus were growing with an annual rate of 3.6-3.9%, smaller cities were left with insufficient resources, personnel, and support from the government.
Together with Aleppo and Damascus, other medium-sized cities started to gain more and more prominence. When the two main cities became more and more saturated, the government started to invest resources in smaller cities that began to grow in both size and importance. This, in turn, caused internal migration from the rural areas to these developing cities. Government investments and urban planning could not cope with the drastic growth these urban centers were experiencing. By 2011, the year of the outbreak of the war, 54% of Syrians lived in 120 cities that had a population of more than 20,000 people. Here, though, due to the lack of a coherent and effective urban planning, 30% of the residents lived in informal settlements. This percentage rises to 45-50% in the case of Aleppo and Damascus. "This was because the bureaucracy was very difficult to move, and the government was not able to formalize this enormous development quickly enough, which also brought to corruption", explains Hallaj.
Nonetheless, urban realities have drastically changed during the conflict: bigger cities, densely populated have lost broad swathes of their population, while smaller, rural, previously insignificant cities have acquired more and more importance. In many cases this is due to the location of the cities; settlements that are at the crossing points between opposition areas are in many cases thriving. As a matter of fact, regardless of how the conflict is depicted in the media, boundaries in Syria are not as hard as we think: the war economy and the resilience of the population have created ideal bridges between opposition areas. A good example is the city of Sarmada, on the Turkish border, which was a very small town before the conflict and has now become a major market for goods coming from Turkey and the government-controlled zone. Sarmada's market revolves around basic goods such as food but also arms and arm repair. Sarmada shares its fate with other cities similarly located in strategic zones.
In other cases, settlements have undergone drastic demographic shifts. The entire Syrian population has changed radically. According to UNHCR 5.6 million people have fled Syria since 2011, the majority of them aged between 18 and 59 years old. "The population from 15 to 30 years of age have all disappeared, particularly the male population," adds Hallaj. The number of IDPs (internally displaced persons) is even bigger. According to UNHCR, they are 6.6 million. Some cities, particularly those located in safer areas, have witnessed a dramatic demographic change due to internal displacement. A good example is Jaramana, an urban suburb of Damascus: since 2012 a large wave of displacement from neighboring areas took place, mainly for security issues. In 2014 Jaramana increased its habitants to nearly 190,000, and in 2017 the population soared to around 300,000 inhabitants.

The idea of reconstruction

When talking about reconstruction it is vital to consider the new social fabric of the country. Cities and urban communities have changed during the war, but the end of the war is bound to cause other deep changes in Syrian society. If on the one hand the majority of people have left their homes with the intent to come back as soon as the conflict is over, on the other hand, a lot of them might decide to stay where they have finally managed to build a new life for themselves and their family. This will be true for both refugees and IDPs. In this light, the problem of informality worsens. Who is entitled to live in a squatted house - the original inhabitants or the occupants who have lived there over the last 5 years? Who is going to be the beneficiary of a reconstruction project? But also, how can someone show that a particular house belonged to them when the settlement was informal? It is hardly true that those that before the war had lived in the informal settlement will not have any paper to show. They might have court orders, or they may be the righteous owner of certain agricultural plots that have been illegally constructed over the years. Are these papers going to be accepted? Who is to decide?

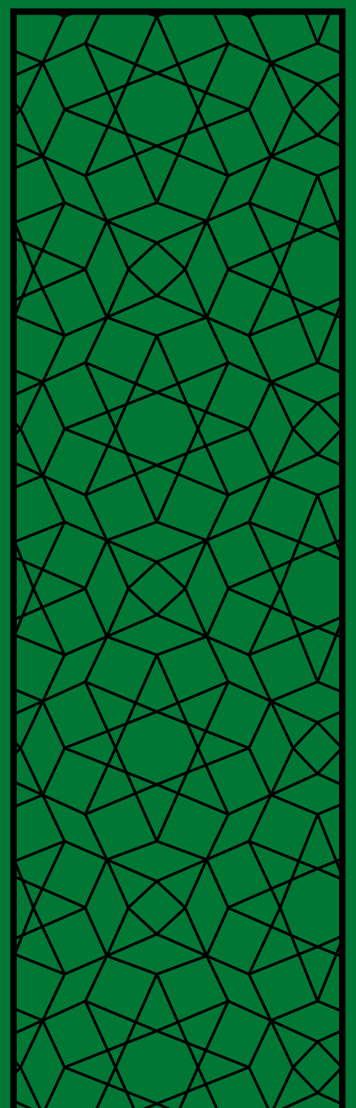
As Hallaj sees it, the key issue when tackling reconstruction in Syria, and post-war reconstruction in general, is to create political as well as economic agency among the people: "As always, the best way to create peace is to create the opportunity for peace to grow". Hallaj is skeptical of the role of big international donors, as he sees them posing a number of limitations to the reconstruction process. First, the amount of money they will invest in reconstruction will be limited in time and scope. Then, the administration, technical standards, and the requirements to access the funding are different for any and each donor. Last but not least, international donors tend to fund specific reconstruction projects involving only certain contractors and beneficiaries. In the long run, this will produce results in fairly limited geographical areas and will not build sufficient momentum to boost a recovery to the whole country. If we sum these limitations to the problem of informality and IDPs previously discussed, it is clear how a reconstruction carried out under these terms would not be sufficient to encourage a real recovery of the country.

by Giulia Gallini with the support of Omar Abdelaziz Hallaj

The solution Hallaj proposes is then to rely heavily on the population for the reconstruction: resilience becomes the engine for the redevelopment of

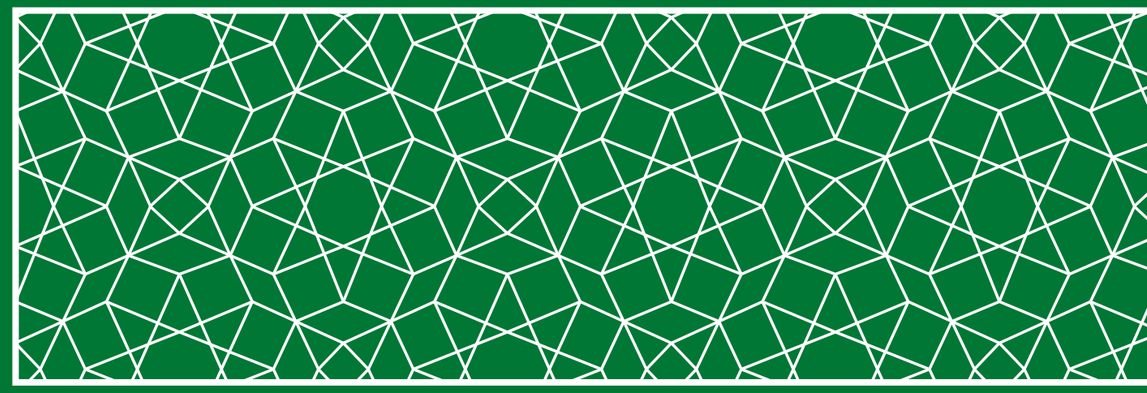
RESILIENCE BECOMES THE ENGINE FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY BOTTOM-UP

the country bottom-up. In order to achieve it, it is vital to provide tools to the population so that society can be actively engaged in the recovery process. Hallaj talks about small loans and microfinancing: "a small loan of $2,000 for instance, that people can use to rebuild their house, as well as their life". If this on one hand will mean that the reconstruction will not result in the short term in an "aesthetically beautiful" architectural reconstruction, in the long run it will yield a redevelopment of the cities as well as of the whole society. When Hallaj talks about reconstruction, his focus is on the community. Keeping Syrian people apart is not in any way useful for the reconstruction process. Conversely, focusing on reforms and policies that encourage self-entrepreneurship and self-making, instead of seeking the favor of international donors, will help the creation of a self-sufficient community that can re-establish the value chain and create multipliers.



Hallaj urges architects who will take part in redeveloping post-war Syria not to focus on master plans, material reconstruction, and the act of building in itself. Rather, he recommends putting the people at the center of the process, creating on the situation as it is, without seeking an aesthetic reconstruction that disregards the need to redevelop the sense of community and mutual trust. Leaving aside the reconstruction of houses and homes, thinking about public and shared spaces will be an even trickier challenge. He uses as an example the Green Line that divided West and East Beirut during the Lebanese Civil War: as Hallaj says, it has never been erased from public memory. It still remains in the city as an ideal border: "I did a survey on the city of Beirut with some students of mine," he explains, "and we discovered that still today, it presents a low percentage of traffic moving from East Beirut to West Beirut".
After the conflict, public spaces will need to be reinvented and redeveloped in order to prevent the creation of new geographies and new boundaries that will keep communities apart and prevent a deep reconciliation: to do that, it is paramount to rely on the bridges that society has been creating also during the war.

"Reconciliation is also a question of architecture and planning", but, to Hallaj, this does not mean that architects and urban planners can act as they please: the reconstruction needs to involve the population and needs to be carried out bottom-up. The creation of a community is vital for the social, economic, and political recovery of the country, and this can be achieved only when the people become active agents and are not inert beneficiaries of decisions made somewhere else, without taking into consideration the local realities of the country.



The Venice Charter on Reconstruction and Syria: Going beyond Architecture

In 1964, the Venice Charter marked an important step in the architectural conservation of monuments. More than 50 years later, a new Venice Charter has been presented, that reconsiders the role of the monument and links the architecture to the community.

with the support of **Jacopo Galli** | Architect, graduate assistant at the IUAV

In 1964, Venice witnessed an important step in the architectural conservation of sites considered to be part of the shared heritage of humanity: the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, also known as The Venice Charter 1964. The Charter, written and signed during the International Congress of Architecture, came to represent a milestone in safeguarding historical monuments. With that document, the international community stated the importance of preserving ancient buildings, which are seen as representing an important heritage not only for specific groups in specific regions but for all of humanity, everywhere in the world.

With this illustrious precedent, in the summer 2017, an international group of architects and professionals gathered once again in Venice to participate in a workshop about Syria organized by the Venice University of Architecture, IUAV. During the workshop, the architects were confronted with a theme as crucial as the one discussed in 1964 and probably more urgent given contemporary warfare tactics: post-war reconstruction.
The participants analyzed and tried to respond to the deliberate destruction of urban spaces; historical monuments, and also entire Syrian cities, are threatened and targeted, as their destruction is seen as militarily and psychologically relevant for the outcome of the conflict.
The Venice Charter on Reconstruction was also presented at the end of the workshop. Written jointly by the two architects Jacopo Galli and Wesam Asali, it lays out the general guidelines and ideas pertaining to re-building after wartime. The document, even if it emerged as a response to the specific situation of Syria, wants to have a larger scope and to adapt to different, but similar, scenarios.

with the support of Jacopo Galli

The Venice Charter of 1964 understood monuments as common heritage to the people; the charter of 2017 also recognizes the value of the population that define the monument.

> **The destruction of the city, the so-called urbicide, is therefore not only the demolition of buildings, old or new, but it is also, and probably most importantly, the annihilation of the community that lived in the spaces and gave meaning to those same buildings**

If the 1964 Charter's goal was to preserve historical monuments, the Charter on Reconstruction aims at something that includes, but also goes beyond, that honorable intent: the reconstruction of the urban space.

"Urban space" has different meanings. The urban space is the city, with its historic stratifications and its evolutionary processes; it comprises historical monuments, new neighborhoods, city centers, and old neighborhoods that have changed and evolved through time to meet the needs of the local population and that actively defined the space. The "Urban space", then, is also the community tissue: the inhabitants of the city, the common heritage that they share, their needs, and their future aspirations.
The destruction of the city, the so-called urbicide, is therefore not only the demolition of buildings, old or new, but it is also, and probably most importantly, the annihilation of the community that lived in the spaces and gave meaning to those same buildings.
This may be the most distinctive aspect of the Venice Charter on Reconstruction: it sees the building and the population as strictly related to each other. The monument acquires meaning as long as it is used and understood by the population that, *vice versa*, is defined by the building, recognizing the building as representing part of the population's own shared heritage. This idea emerges clearly from the document: "City centres, monuments and physical heritage must be preserved during the reconstruction process, together with the intangible heritage related to the value of human environment" (*Venice Charter on Reconstruction*, Art. 17).

For this same reason, the 2017 Charter includes articles focused specifically on the population and related questions: displacement, refugee camps, diaspora, education, and law of return.
The idea is that reconstruction cannot be understood only as the physical re-building of the city. It also means recovering and repairing the societal tissue that used to inhabit the space. This, in turn, means considering the displacement of people that fled to other areas or who are living in refugee camps and also the future intentions of the people: do they want to return? Do they want to keep living in their new 'home', where they are struggling to rebuild their lives? Nothing can be taken for granted, and architectural solutions need to adapt to the new situation.
The role of the architect that emerges from the Charter, then, extends beyond the traditional understanding of the profession: the architects "should become managers of natural and social resources assuming the burdensome task to both understand and improve the relationship between people and their environment", whatever it may be. That is to say, a plan that only considers the material reconstruction, without caring about the population that will live, use, and eventually give meaning to the space, cannot be sustainable in the long run. Reconstructing a destroyed country in a post-war scenario, such as Syria, means not only architectural interventions, but also, primarily, transformation of the society.
It would be naive to assume that rebuilding monuments and houses wipes out the effects of war.
Commonly, we tend to depict war as a hiatus, a (hopefully) brief interruption of normal life, a life that can be regained exactly as it used to be after the conflict is over. In fact, war is a meaningful phase in the creation of identity, both of a person and of a city: a city gets redefined by the war. In Syria, people will remember which neighborhoods belonged to the rebels or to the regime, and rebuilding does not erase the memory. Displacement means that the demographic situations may have changed: new inhabitants have arrived, and old inhabitants have gone away. A once culturally homogeneous neighborhood might be populated by different groups now, and a once over-populated city might be empty, and *vice versa*. The end of the conflict does not mean that the situation will be restored to what it used to be.
The new Charter takes into consideration, or at least emerges from, all these and other issues that carefully describe a situation that is difficult and complex. The Charter does not provide solutions; that is not its aim. It provides a set of guidelines that wants to push those who will take care of the reconstruction to think beyond the architecture and the material aspects of rebuilding.

The Venice Charter on Reconstruction is, then, an important milestone in this new understanding of conflict and reconstruction. Cities and historical monuments need to be rebuilt, certainly, but not for their own sake. There can be no real reconstruction if society is not at the core of the intervention.

Interview | by James Blake Wiener

The Islamic Museum of Australia

An interview with the General Manager of the museum, to understand the vision and the impact of the first Islamic museum in Australia.

The Islamic Museum of Australia (IMA) in Melbourne, established in 2010 and opened in 2014, provides educational and cross-cultural experiences by showcasing the artistic and cultural heritage of Muslims in Australia and abroad. Through five permanent thematic galleries, the museum aims to foster a more nuanced and realistic understanding of what it means to be an Australian Muslim.
James Blake Wiener, the co-founder of the Ancient History Encyclopaedia, interviewed for IWA Maryum Chaudhry, General Manager of the museum.

What is the story behind the genesis of your museum, and why did Australia need a museum dedicated to Islamic arts and cultures in the first place?
Building a museum started as a humble idea by our Founder and now Chairman, Moustafa Fahour. Back in 2010, and in a post 9/11 era, Mr. Fahour wanted to simply share the beauty of Islam and contribute to creating a better understanding of Islam and the contributions of Muslims in Australia with the wider community. Together with his wife, they determined that education would be fundamental to have any lasting impact in countering the negative narrative of Islam and Muslims portrayed in the media.
After months of research and deliberation, they concluded that a Museum would provide the perfect vehicle for educating the community and sharing the beauty of Islam.
Mr. Fahour gathered a team to work on the Museum's development. This, of course, took time, from sourcing funds, developing plans, construction, content and collections development until we opened our doors on 28 February 2014.
Celebrating our five-year anniversary this year has enabled us all to reflect on Moustafa's original vision, the journey and our achievements in relation to his vision. Over 50,000 guests have experienced the Islamic Museum of Australia, approximately 70 percent of our guests are school students, joining us as part of a curriculum-linked school tour.

Tell us about the IMA's architecture, which blends traditional Islamic architecture with distinctly Australian elements. How does it reflect the story of Muslim history in Australia, from Aboriginal contact with the Makassans through to the present day? Which facets make it especially unique? `
One of the things we highlight when touring guests around the Museum, is that the architecture of Islamic structures, including mosques, are often a reflection of the place where they are built. For example, in China, one will see examples of mosques that architecturally are not dissimilar to Buddhist temples - red-bricked, green-roofed pagodas. Similarly, the Great Mosque of Djenne in Mali, known for its Sudano-Sahelian architectural style, is made in part, from earth brick with sand and earth-based mortar.
With a sense of 'place' at the forefront of the architect Issam Nabulsi's mind (Desypher Architects), the Museum's architecture has strong references to the traditional owners of the land on which it sits. The striking, rusted weathering steel veil which wraps the building's front façade, is a nod to the earthen tones of inland Australia, a landscape familiar to the Afghan cameleers who arrived in the 1800s to assist the building of Australia's inland railway. The steel is perforated with modernized Aboriginal art that tells the story of Muslim history in Australia, including the first contact with the Makassans, the Cameleers, pre-war and post-war migration.
Another architectural element is the way in which the Museum invites a visitor to enter, to discover and unravel. The Qur'anic verse in Arabic calligraphy adorns the front, external wall translates as, *'so narrate to them the stories so that upon them they may reflect.'* Thus

Entrance passageway of the Museum.
Photo courtesy of the
Islamic Museum of Australia.

by James Blake Wiener

inviting guests to explore the marriage that has existed between Islamic civilization and the rest of the world for centuries, and to look past the veils and stereotypes. Behind the steel veil is a subtle entrance and narrow passageway before guests are enveloped by the beautiful space that greets them. On a sunny day, the perforations allow the speckled sunlight to filter through the veil, and beyond that, in the center of the foyer, guests are greeted by a leafy *billabong* - an indigenous term meaning 'a pond or isolated body of water'.

The IMA contains five permanent galleries and oversees a rotating schedule of organized exhibitions that are rather eclectic in their offerings. Topics explored in the museum's exhibition space range from artistic and historical issues to community and solo works. Why does the IMA choose such a broad scope when it comes to organizing its shows?

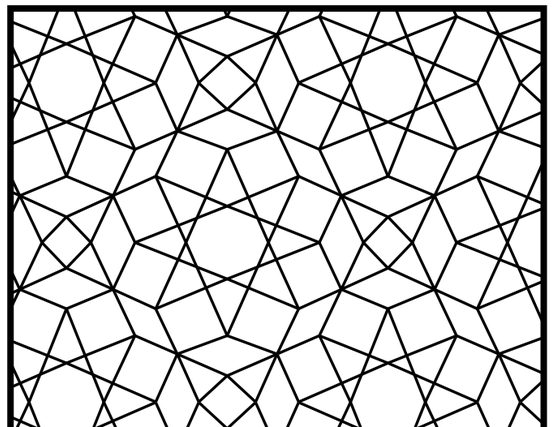
Australia's Muslim community is a microcosm of the global Muslim community. There are over 600,000 Australian Muslims originating from over 80 countries. The curatorial team ensures our schedule of temporary exhibitions reflects the diversity of Muslim cultures and interests.

In which ways does the IMA showcase the artistic heritage and historical contributions of Muslims in Australia?

Our five permanent galleries are themed as Faith, Islamic Contributions to Civilisation, Islamic Art, Islamic Architecture, and Australian Muslim History.
Guests will learn a myriad of things relating to Islamic contribution to civilization – from maths, medicine, and science to quirky facts around the origins of coffee and the story of Abass Ibn Firnass an Andalusian polymath, who in 875 CE, was the first person to attempt flying with a heavier-than-air machine.
Our art gallery showcases the works of some of Australia's foremost Muslim Artists, along with the works of emerging artists.
The Australian Muslim History gallery is one space that truly fascinates many guests. Here, our guests journey through the centuries and discover more about our past. We start with the Makassans (from nearby Makassar, Indonesia) who are believed to be the first Muslims to have interfaced with indigenous Australians in the 16th and 17th centuries and prior to colonization in 1788. During this time, Makassan fishermen would visit the northern coastal areas of Australia including Arnhem Land, where they would collect trepang (sea cucumber) to trade with the Chinese. While on their visits to Australian shores, they would negotiate with local Aboriginal communities to fish in their waters. In exchange for Aboriginal labor – cutting firewood, fishing, processing trepang - the Makassans would trade cloth, hooks, rice, tobacco and more. In remote Arnhem Land, there still exists indigenous rock art depicting Makassan fishing boats and other vessels, offering a fascinating insight into what the local indigenous community witnessed over time.

In which ways does the IMA facilitate space for critical reflection and personal interpretation? Can museums be spaces in which myths and prejudices are dispelled, and mutual understanding is established in the 21st century?

Museums are learning spaces.
They offer opportunities for both young and lifelong learners to gain knowledge, to explore, to examine, in an environment that is comfortable and compelling.
We feel that our space reflects this philosophy. Our Museum is warm and welcoming and an easy environment where to absorb knowledge and interpret new information.
Our Faith Gallery is dedicated to sharing with our guests, knowledge about Islam. We highlight the five pillars of the faith and we address common misconceptions around the status of women in Islam, we break down the meaning of *halal* certification and *jihad*, we discuss the importance of marriage in Islam and give definition to Sharia law. These are all matters that have been the subject of western scrutiny, subjects that negative narrative are often based upon.
Educating and sharing this knowledge enables our guests to reflect on what they previously understood, and newfound awareness.



What have been the greatest rewards of working for the IMA?

Alhamdulillah – *Praise be to God* - We are grateful for Moustafa's vision and the whole team instrumental in the genesis of this Museum.
The greatest reward is the acknowledgement from our guests when they bid farewell, that they take with them a greater understanding of Islam, Islamic contributions, art, and Muslim history. Because this confirms that we are fulfilling Moustafa's vision and the goal he set out to achieve – sharing the beauty of Islam.

What can visitors to the IMA expect within the next few years? What plans or ventures might you share with us?

Every year we present and curate an exhibition, *Australian Muslim Artists*, showcasing the work of contemporary Muslim artists. There is no binding theme beyond being an artist who identifies as both Muslim and Australian. This results in a rare perspective on the creative field of emerging and established artists across the nation entering original works. Contributing artists — new migrants, second, and third-generation Australians from diverse communities — display the diversity of the Australian Muslim experience.
This year, we have partnered with La Trobe University, one of Australia's foremost universities to enhance the *Australian Muslim Artists* exhibition by introducing the Australian Muslim Artists Art Prize. As we look to the future and growing this important exhibition, we hope to tour the *Australian Muslim Artists* exhibition nationally.

Australian Muslim Artists Exhibition

The Islamic Museum of Australia recently held an exhibition devoted to artists with an Australian Muslim identity. The exhibition showcased 13 original works of art created within the last 12 months by talents coming from different communities. The objective was to demonstrate the diversity of the Australian Muslim experience.

in collaboration with the **Islamic Museum of Australia** | the Editorial Staff

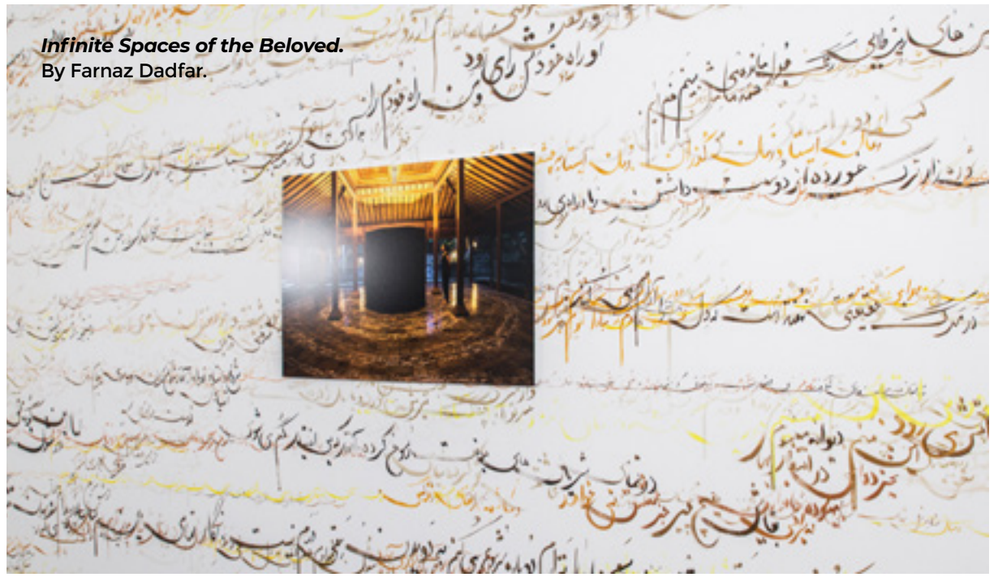
Australia, with a population approaching 26 million, is home to 600,000 Muslims who trace their cultural roots back to many countries around the world.
Indeed, its Muslim community is a microcosm of the cultural melting pot that is this southern land.
And it is this diversity of the Muslim community that is reflected in *Australian Muslim Artists*, an annual exhibition presented by the Islamic Museum of Australia, which showcased the talent of local creatives.
This year, the exhibition highlighted the work of artists whose cultural backgrounds include Malay, Turkish, Iranian, Pakistani and Ethiopian.
The subjects of the 13 exhibited works were as diverse as their artists and with no binding theme, other than being Australian and Muslim, the exhibition encompassed works inspired by lived experiences, homelands, and faith, along with works that depict the human cost of war.

ABDUL ABDULLAH

Thirty-three-year-old multidisciplinary artist Abdul Abdullah took home a prize of $15,000 this year as the recipient of the new Australian Muslim Artist Art Prize, supported by museum partner La Trobe University.
Born in Australia's western city of Perth, Abdullah is himself of mixed descent. While he is seventh generation Australian on his father's side, he is also proudly of Malay heritage, thanks to his mother who hails from Johor on the Malay peninsula.
A self-described 'outsider amongst outsiders,' Abdullah's mixed cultural heritage has been the subject of his work.

THE EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTED THE WORK OF ARTISTS WHOSE CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS INCLUDE MALAY, TURKISH, IRANIAN, PAKISTANI AND ETHIOPIAN

You can call me troublesome from the series 'Call me by my name' (2018) is a manual embroidery that features a pensive young woman behind a scrawled smiley-face emoji.
Abdullah says, "In making the work I was concerned about the accusations directed at younger generations that they are not living up to the former generation's expectations. In this embroidery, a young person looks out at the viewer from behind the superficially qualifying symbol of a smiley-face. The contrasting smiley-face icon and the figure lurking behind suggest a facade of joy, shielding the viewer from a deeper, more ominous truth concealed within the stoic sitter."



Infinite Spaces of the Beloved.
By Farnaz Dadfar.

At 150 cm x 120 cm, the work is certainly striking from a distance. The embroidered piece is so meticulously detailed that upon first sight, many museum visitors immediately assume it's a painting. But a closer view brings an even greater appreciation for the work. Though the edging was embroidered with digital techniques, the bulk of the piece was created with manual embroidery.
Abdullah, who splits his time between Sydney and Yogyjakarta, Indonesia where he also has a studio, engaged DGTMB studios there to work with him on the 'Call me by my name' series, using a technique that was developed and honed by Eko Nugroho, one of Indonesia's most accomplished contemporary artists.

AMBER HAMMAD

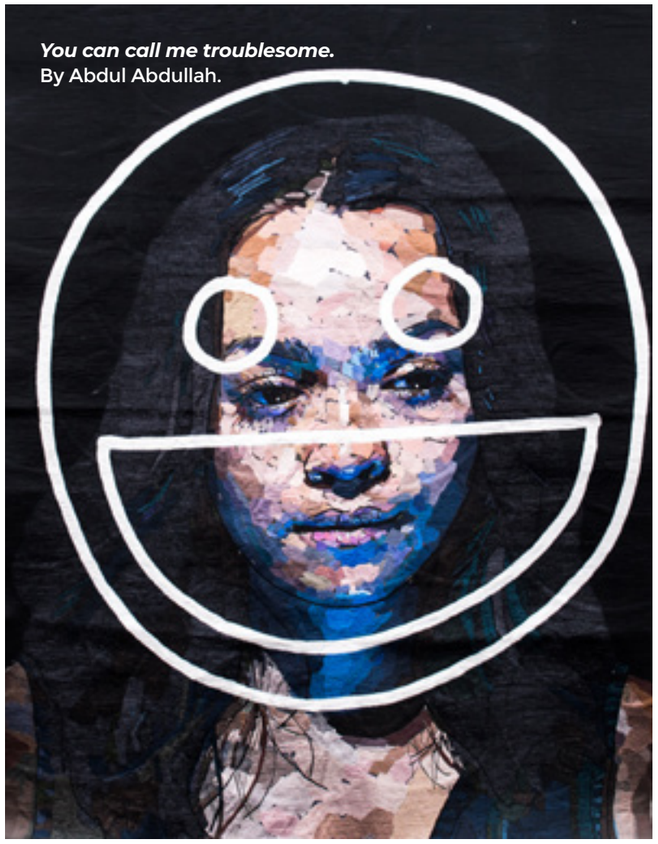
Finalist Amber Hammad was born and raised in Pakistan, where she studied and taught art for many years before moving to Australia. Her art investigates her identity as a Muslim woman of colour from South Asia in relation to art history, popular culture, attire, and gender.
Her work *Veiling Unveiling* in pencil on paper is adapted from Mughal miniature painting. Hammad advances the tradition of learning by practicing the art of miniature painting through copying old masters' works and comments on the veiling and unveiling of the female body and space, as well as the veiling and unveiling of the archive and history. This work aims to evoke a sense that there is an omnipotent presence of history in our present and lessons to be learnt from the past, as we live in this highly digitalized world.

It's important for the museum to embolden the creative community and provide a platform for artists to showcase their work with the wider community

FARNAZ DADFAR

Iranian born Farnaz Dadfar, who hails from Tehran, moved to Australia nine years ago. She lists Islamic art and architecture and Persian Sufi poetry as sources of inspiration for her artistic practice.
For this exhibition, she created an adaptation of her work *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, which, with a diameter of around 8 m, was too large to install.

Dadfar spent two days at the museum emblazoning a wall with Persian calligraphy, and of the work she said, "*Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* offers creative possibilities concerning spirituality and Islamic mysticism in contemporary art. Through the lens of Rumi's poetry, the piece suggests existential exile and nomadic experiences of being located in hybrid cultural forms and languages. By activating meanings and nonsenses in linguistic diasporas using fragmented text and sound as a means of incarnating otherness, deterritorialisation, and displacement, the project imagines utopic alternatives to the dystopic realities of twenty-first century existence".
It is a piece the team at the museum have enjoyed immensely, not least because of the opportunity presented to engage with the artist and watch her bring her vision to life.



You can call me troublesome.
By Abdul Abdullah.

NEXT EXHIBITIONS

Motivated by the success of the exhibition, the team at the museum are already looking to 2020 and beyond. This exhibition attracted artists from all over the country, and it seems natural that their next goal is to tour *Australian Muslim Artists*, a move which again would prove fruitful for exhibiting artists by widening their reach and audience. The museum also looks to further develop *Future Australian Muslim Artists*, another layer of the exhibition highlighting the work of high school art students. The museum views the younger generations as the future custodians of the museum itself, and *Future Australian Muslim Artists* is not only a way to harness the collective creative talent of young Muslims but is also a vehicle to encourage young Muslims to reflect on their identity and feel proud to have a space that celebrates their Islamic faith in a secular country.
Founder and Chair of the Museum Moustafa Fahour OAM says it's important for the museum to embolden the creative community and provide a platform for artists to showcase their work with the wider community. In doing so, they also contribute to the museum's mission of sharing the beauty of Australian Muslim artists and their contributions to Australia.

The Reception of the Ambassadors in Damascus

A painting dated to 1511 sheds light on the reality of the economic, diplomatic, and cultural relationship between the Mamluk sultans and the city of Venice.

by **Sami Benkherfallah** | PhD student on the Medieval Islamic World

VENICE, ART, AND ORIENT: A COMMON LANGUAGE

The Mamluks were the protectors of the Sunni orthodoxy for two and a half centuries after the Caliphate capital moved from Baghdad to Cairo in the 13th century. Consequently, they inherited the Ayyubid's domain, along with a long political and diplomatic tradition from previous powerful Egyptian dynasties that had existed since the advent of Islam.

The Mamluk sultans were able to develop privileged relationships with the Venetians in order to face Portuguese competition on the Spice Route. Herein, Venice was a maritime power deployed throughout the Mediterranean, in North Africa, the Levant, Cyprus, and even in the Black Sea. Admittedly, the City-State already had close economic and commercial relationships with many Islamic countries.

Hence, Venice was the only European power to maintain regular diplomatic and commercial relationships with the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria. At the end of the 15th century exchanges with the Mamluks represented 45% of the Venetian maritime trade on a market value basis: Venice supplied metals to the Mamluks, such as gold, silver, copper, tin, lead, and mercury, that had been lacking in Egypt and Syria.

This trade with the Mamluks substantially fostered the artistic and cultural exchanges between the two parties. For this reason, you only have to cross Venice to realize the huge influence of Islamic art on the architectural practices in the town.

A CONTROVERSIAL PIECE OF ART

The Reception of the Ambassadors in Damascus is a painting that reveals the relationship between Venice and the Mamluk Empire. It represents the reception of a Venetian embassy in Damascus that may have taken place between 1488 and 1511.

It is an oil painting on canvas (201 cm long and 175 cm tall) and was repatriated from Istanbul in the 17th century, expanding Louis XIV's collections. It is now kept in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

For a long time, this painting was very controversial in regards to the place (Istanbul? Cairo? Damascus?) as well as the protagonists represented (Vizier? Sultan? Regional Governor?). Marco Boschini, an eighteenth-century Italian art theorist and painter, saw Mehmet II

by Sami Benkherfallah

Venice has always been a mercantile city, as trading center for goods and merchandise from the east through the maritime routes of the Adriatic and the Eastern Mediterranean

receiving a Venetian dignitary at the Ottoman court in Istanbul. For him, the building in the background could be nothing other than Hagia Sophia. This hypothesis was accepted until the opinion of Charles Shefer, a nineteenth-century French orientalist, became the majority view. He saw Egypt and the Cairo Citadel instead, where a meeting in 1512 between the Mamluk Sultan Qansuh al-Ghawri and a Venetian dignitary by the name of Domenico Trevisano took place.
The origin of the painting also remains uncertain: was it painted by Gentile Bellini or by one of his students? Gentile Bellini was an Italian painter, sculptor, and a medal carver. He was born in 1429 and died in 1507 in Venice and was from a well-known family of painters: his father was Jacopo Bellini and his brother was Giovanni Bellini. He was selected to paint a portrait of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II in 1480, which was probably his first direct contact with the East, and maybe the only one.

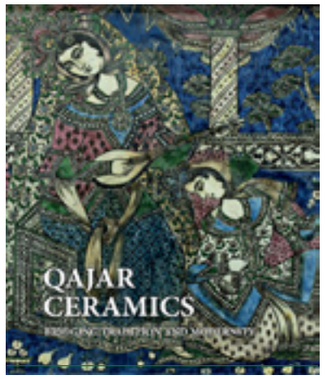
POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS

According to the interpretation widely accepted today, the painting represents the Mamluk governor of Damascus, who is granting an audience to Venetian merchants around the year 1500.
Numerous elements make it possible to identify the place where the scene took place. On one side, architectural elements give us some information about a still-existing monument: the Umayyad's mosque, recognizable by the minaret of Qaitbay, built in 1488, in the third plan, at the left side of the painting. It has five exterior windows adorned with Mamluk architectural elements. Additionally, there are other elements such as clothes that are typical of the Great Syria region. Thus, the women in the background wearing the *tantur* (conical hat) and the clothes worn by the farmers from the Nablus area in the left foreground indicate that the scene took place in Bilad al-Sham and more precisely in Damascus. The numerous animals and the verdant landscape bring an exotic touch to the painting. Syria, a fascinating region well integrated into the collective imagination of the period thanks to travellers' and greographers' accounts, was well known by its numerous fruit trees, loved by the Mamluk Sultan. He imported a lot of varieties to plant in the gardens of the Citadel, which was the residence of the Court.
The highly accurate description of Damascus in the background suggests that the painter had access to major documents or testimonies about the city. The eight coats of arms represented on the walls are those of the Mamluk sultan Qaytbay (reign 1468-1496), which means that the depicted scene took place at the end of the 15th century. However, after a recent restoration, a new completion date of 1511 on the painting corresponds to the reign of the Sultan al-Ghuri (1501–1516).

The painter has represented a real court scene. The person wearing a strange head covering is the main character, probably an Emir, governor of Damascus (*na'ib*). The hat is called a *nuria* (water wheel) and has its origins in the Sasanid dynasty; the Mamluks liked to present themselves as the heirs of powerful dynasties from the past – Sasanids, Abbasids, Umayyads, Byzantines, for instance – and this connection was represented in the ceremonies of the court. The *nuria* is one of many symbols that were used for this aim. The Emir is sitting cross-legged in the traditional Turkish posture on a red velvet platform (*mastaba*). At his side, there are four religious men (certainly cadies) recognizable by their white turbans; two of them are standing up, and the others are sitting. They may be the lawyers of the four Islamic legal schools (Hanafi, Malikite, Hanbalite and Shafi'ite). In front of him, near the Venetian delegation is a man seen from the back who is talking to the Emir. He is the interpreter (*drogman*), a key figure in diplomatic negotiations. The two groups wearing red *taqyas* are Mamluk soldiers. On the other side, the Venetian delegation is composed of five people who are dressed the same and one whose scarlet red robe stands out. Usually made from wool, this gown, coming from Ancient Rome, is reserved for the Doges of Venice.
The simplified and modest protocol in this painting indicates that the protagonists knew each other. This is the same protocol which was used by the Sultan when he held hearings in Cairo.

Italian painting from the end of the Middle Ages left us with an important artistic legacy, depicting as it did the Muslim East and revealing the artistic and cultural relations that existed between the Muslim and the Christian world in a context that was both rich and tumultuous.
Other pieces from the Bellini family have survived, such as the portrait of Mehmet II (1480 - Gentille Bellini) and the painting *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria* (1503-1507 - The Bellini Brothers), the latter being remarkably precise, a true masterpiece of the Venetian school.

The Reception of the Venetian Ambassadors in Damascus, probably painted in the workshop of Gentile Bellini (d. 1507), 1511. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Qajar Ceramics: Bridging Tradition and Modernity

Of all Islamic cultures, it is Persia that has received the most attention. Nonetheless, ceramics of the Qajar era have been somewhat neglected by scholarship. The period from the late 18th to the early 20th century was a time of change everywhere — nowhere more so than in this empire. The Qajars tried to open their empire up to the world while retaining traditions that go back millennia. The ceramics of the time are ideal representatives of the experimentation that typified the Qajars. New technologies, new subject matter, and new markets meant a dynamism that has rarely been matched.

The exhibition *Qajar Ceramics: Bridging Tradition and Modernity* is about an artistic transition, featuring a diversity of ceramic objects from the collection of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. For the first time, this subject has been tackled with vigour and enthusiasm. The exhibition catalog offers a magnification of the distinctive characteristics of Qajar ceramics, highlighting their forms, functions, aesthetics, and themes. The output of Persian kilns ranges from timeless elegance to products that might be classified as kitsch.
The writers of this catalog have taken a comprehensive approach, selecting objects that have often been overlooked and explaining their place in the cultural revolution that the Qajar era represents. From kiln technology to details of every known ceramic artist of the time, this is a definitive work, delving into a highly original and comparatively unknown field.

Qajar Ceramics: Bridging Tradition and Modernity Exhibition opened to the public as part of the year-long celebration of IAMM's 20th anniversary at the Special Gallery 2 from March 21 in conjunction with Nurowz (Persian New Year), and it will be on view until December 31, 2019.

Qajar Ceramics: Bridging Tradition and Modernity

Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia
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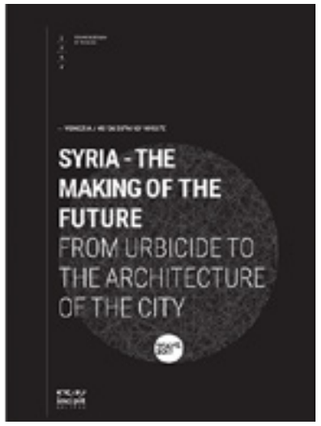
RM 120



Syria – The Making of the Future

Every year, the Venice University of Architecture, IUAV, organizes a summer workshop: the W.A.Ve. (Workshop di Architettura Venezia). In June and July 2017, the W.A.Ve. focused on some of the most important problems Syria is facing now and will face in the future: urban disruption and the social and architectural reconstruction of the country. From the workshop emerged the publication: *Syria - The Making of the Future. From Urbicide to the Architecture of the City*.

The book follows the natural path of the workshop, starting with a series of essays based on talks given by international guests, including Nasser Rabbat, Abdulaziz Hallaj, Kilian Kleinschmidt, and Manar Hammad. It proceeds by illustrating the case studies, and it ends with the "Venice charter on reconstruction", a series of guidelines that emerged and developed from the discussion triggered in the workshop.

The path that the book follows allows readers to gain an overall understanding of the subject, first framing the context, then applying the theory to the practical reality, and finally proposing guidelines that go beyond the case studies themselves. Going from the general to the particular and back to the general allows the reader, even if not an expert in architecture, to attain a full grasp of the problems related to reconstruction and acquire a frame of thought that can be applied to different post-war scenarios.

Throughout the book, the keyword is 'Urbicide'. The term was coined by the sci-fi author Michael Moorcock and is described as a condition of modernity. Urbicide is "the experience of seeing your city in ruins" and "one of the dreadful primal scenes". Urbicide is deliberate violence against cities, where the civil population is targeted and civilian welfare itself becomes a weapon. In this post-modern war, "the monument is not destroyed for itself, but for something that is not itself", as Manar Hammad puts it. The destruction of the city, of its monuments, and urban spaces, acquires a new meaning: the disruption of the population that has lived and keeps living there. Cities, villages, and suburbs undergo deep mutation during the war: population displacement and redistribution, buffer zones, safe zones, urban battlefields, and new frontiers within the same settlement. These are just a few of the new functions and meanings that the urban space acquires; changes are rapid and unavoidable.

The book, especially the part devoted to the case studies, underlines how the war cannot be conceived of as a hiatus in Syrian history. Urban planning and urban development cannot take Syria back to what it was before the war. Also, it is impossible to plan any reconstruction without taking into account the new dynamics and meanings that the war has brought; those working in the reconstruction of post-war Syria need "to dare to see the war as part of history and destruction as a morphological fact that bears meaning".

The collection of essays opens up a number of questions that need to be addressed when talking about reconstruction: how was the space perceived before the war, and how is it used and understood now? Who inhabits the land? What are the social dynamics that take place there? What is the history of the place and what will be its future? What is the future for the refugees and the internally displaced persons? Will they go back to their original towns? Or will they decide to settle permanently in their new home?

The role of the architect has been challenged by Urbicide and needs to be re-thought: the architect needs to rebuild the city not only in its material form but in its immaterial reality. Rebuilding a city means to rebuild primarily the social structures, something that needs to be achieved by careful urban planning and consideration of the new dynamics produced by the war.

After reading *Syria - The Making of the Future*, the reader will be able to recognize the challenges that post-war Syria will face and the tools that can be put in place in order to overcome them. The analysis sheds light on the problems pre-war Syria faced on an urban level and combines them with future issues that those who will be working on the reconstruction will encounter. This book is thus a valuable tool for everyone who wants a better understanding of the social dimension of the conflict and the challenges of the reconstruction.

Syria - The Making of the Future. From Urbicide to the Architecture of the City

By Jacopo Galli (ed.)
Incipit Editore and Università Iuav di Venezia
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€ 22.00

Make the Desert Bloom: Israeli Propaganda and Orientalism

Gallery

by Sofia Bacchini, independent researcher on Middle Eastern contemporary history

The Jewish presence in Palestine is rooted in a historical and mythological past. It was written about in sacred texts and orally transmitted by the elders of the Jewish communities that emerged after the Diaspora, which started symbolically in 71 CE, after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Roman emperor Titus.

After centuries of segregation, persecution, and assimilation, in the late 19th century some intellectuals started to spread the idea of a return to *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel), the promised land. The return represented a spiritual need to go back to the origin, and it was a form of protection against the antisemitism that was building up in Europe. The return was also an actual political project aiming at the creation of a Jewish country.

From 1881 to 1931 five *aliyot* (from the singular *aliyah*, "act of going up") were organized. These were expeditions of Jewish migrants who were charged with materially laying the foundations for the organization of the community and of the future Jewish country through the exploitation of resources, the creation of parastatal institutions, defense, and basic services.
The men and women who took part in these early migration waves were called *biluim*, pioneers, who built the *Yishuv,* the semi-official body in Palestine that organized the Jewish population before the State of Israel was declared in 1948. The *Yishuv* was based on three pillars: independence of thought and the absence of ideological biases, the supremacy of the nation and the subordination of everything else to it, and personal fulfillment and redemption through manual work.

The early Jewish pioneers were born in Europe in the period of nationalism and colonialism; their cultural background included the idea of uncontested supremacy of the "white man" towards local populations and of Asia and Africa as lands of conquest or resources needed to feed that progress.

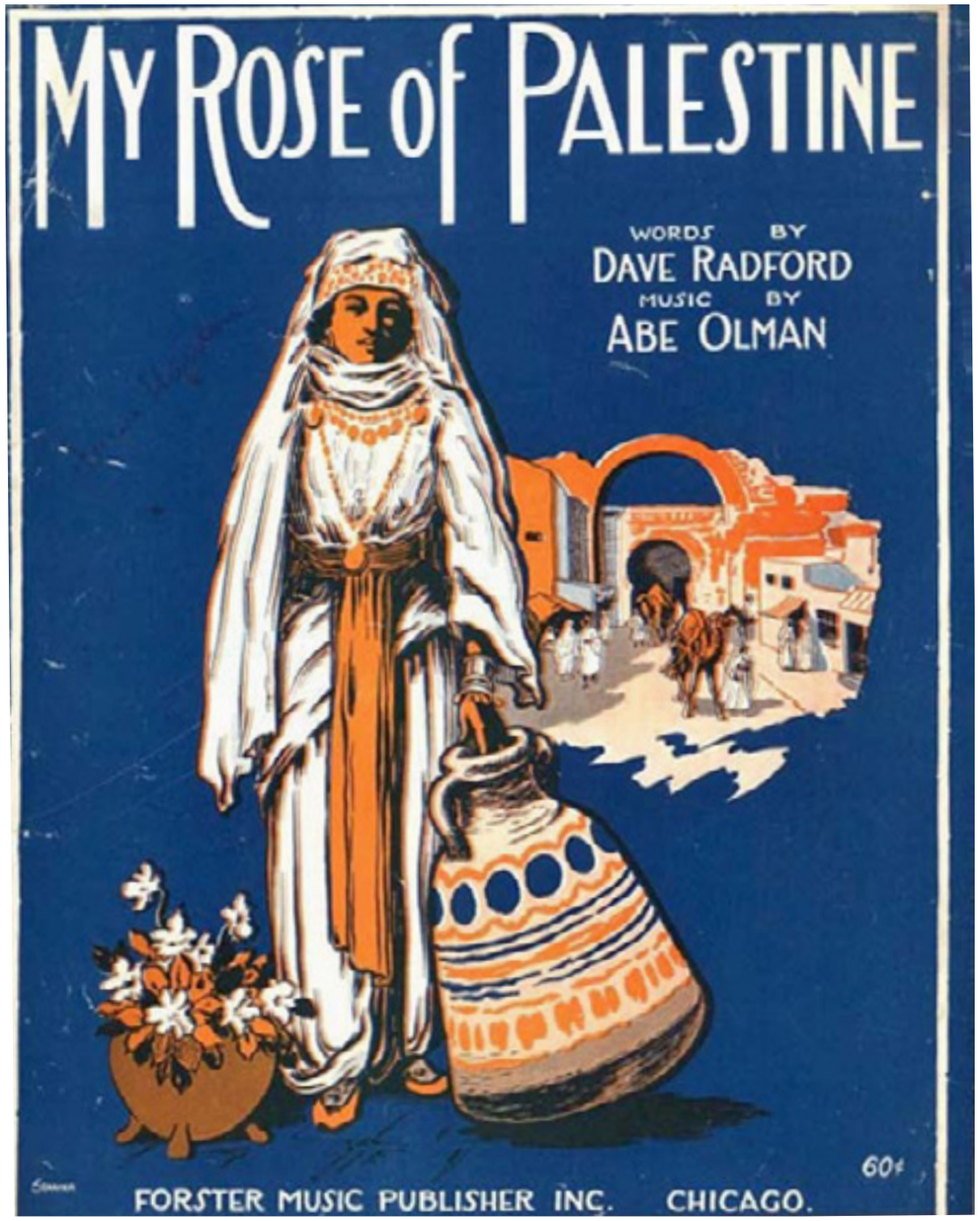
To promote this ideology of conquest, military and economic hegemony was not enough. Political, artistic, and cultural productions needed to shape the collective imagination of the colonies that would enhance the idea of conquest. This literary production is beautifully analyzed by the Palestinian professor Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, published in 1978.
One dogma of Orientalism as understood by Said is the absolute and systematic difference between the West and the East: the former characterized by progress, wealth, culture, and development; the second by ignorance, backwardness, and inferiority. Together with this, Said recognized the tendency to understand the Orient solely as an abstract concept, based on stereotypes or on the particular desires of the Western agent.

Zionist cultural production and propaganda include aspects similar to those of other nationalistic movements of the period (for instance the themes of homeland, people, and progress) but also propose peculiar themes that fit the unique mission of the Jewish community: to build in Palestine "a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism" (Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State,* 1896).

Many elements of this Jewish "new epic" are connected to nature for two reasons: on the one hand, the land and redemption through the land are central themes for a people that has always felt deprived of a homeland; on the other hand, the exoticism that is typical of Orientalism (palms, deserts, caricatures of the Indigenous people) legitimizes the civilizing mission.
Said talks about "imagined geographies", when in propaganda materials the object is defined before having acquired knowledge of it so the conquest can start. Zionist propaganda has used a number of themes, always recognizable by the Jewish community of the Diaspora, to pursue this narrative.

The Rebirth of Our Land Through Hebrew Labor
Designed by Pivovarski for the Zionist List (Russia), Russia 1917

This propaganda poster of the Jewish Congress of 1917 is a visual representation of the Zionist concept of "redemption through labor". The manual, agricultural labor is personified by a young woman, barefoot, harvesting wheat. The working woman, a symbol of progress and development, contrasts with the two Arabs in the background, dressed in traditional robes and *kufiya* scarfs, who stare at her attentively, as people who want to learn.
The poster is directed, as the text reads, to "Jewish workers, [...] all who suffer from exile and misery". The redemption of the (Jewish) man mingles with the redemption of the land (Palestine), thus producing a common destiny of regeneration as the Zionist future, where even a woman would be able to win back fertile land from the desert.
In this image, the Arabs stay in the background, watching: they are passive objects in the process of redemption and settlement.
They have no place in Israel: they are in the background, waiting, or at least reminding the Jews about what they are not.
According to the Zionist idea, the Jews deserve that land because of their pain and exile, and the land belongs to those who cultivate it.

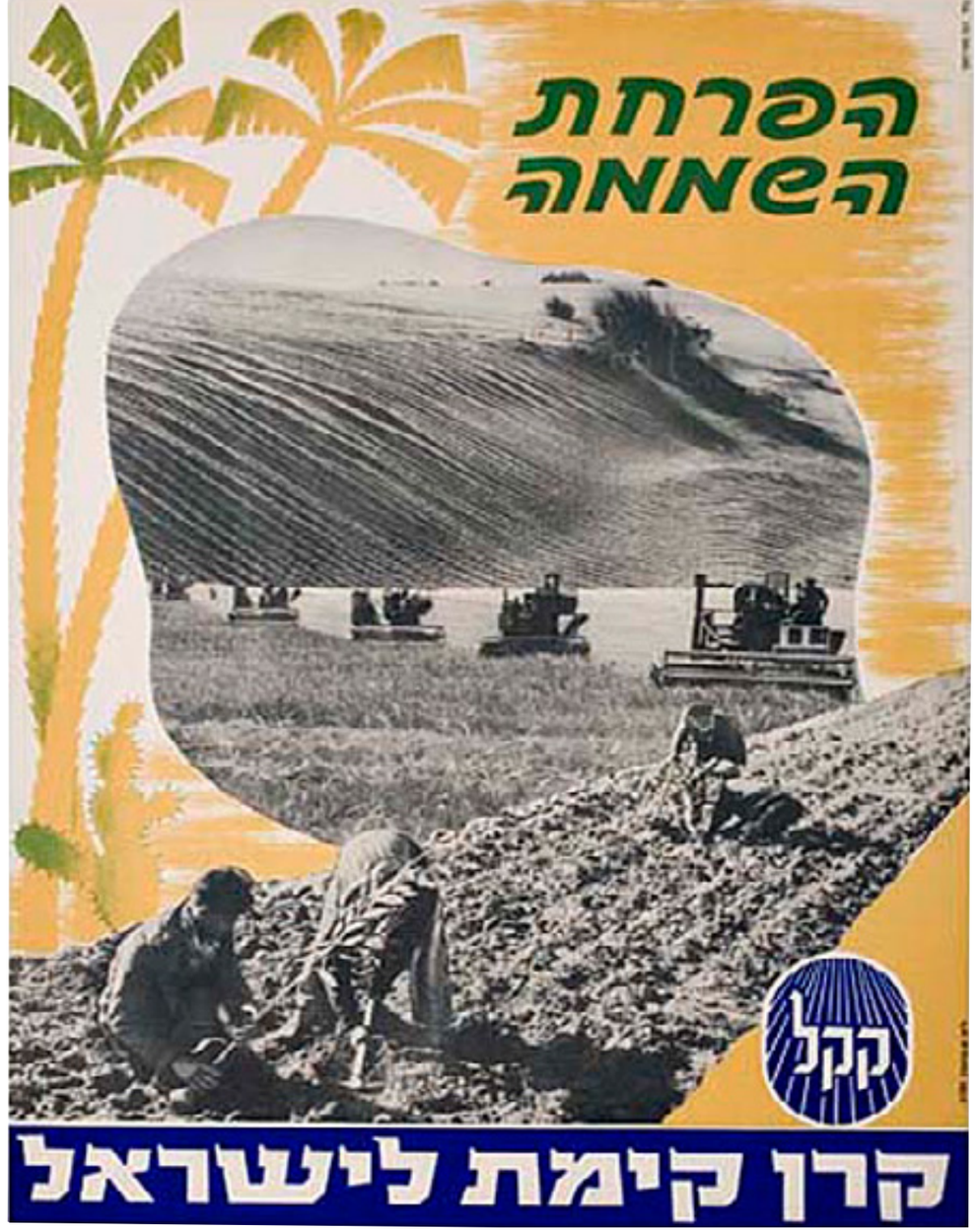


My Rose of Palestine
Designed by Starmer for Forster Music Publisher, Chicago (USA) 1917.

The poster advertises a 1917 song *My Rose of Palestine*, composed by two Jewish composers, Radford and Olman, and produced in Chicago, USA.
The Orientalist *leitmotif* is visible, and even if re-interpreted, is always present in the Western attitude towards Palestine. In the lyrics of the song, all the cliches of the land of Palestine are used: the exotic charm of the woman, the olive trees, the sandy roads, etc.
The song lyrics mention the pilgrims throughout – a theme also analyzed by Said in *Orientalism* – who, from the 18th century on, contributed through their travelogues to the construction of the Orient as it is represented in the West, inspiring the images that are present in the lyrics of *My Rose of Palestine*.

Help Him _Build_ Palestine
Designed by Modest Stein for Palestine Foundation Fund, Mandate Palestine, circa 1930.

The toil of a farmer-pioneer, who looks to the horizon at the new Israeli settlements springing up from the desert thanks to his labor, is the subject of this poster. The title is self-explanatory: "_help_ him _build_ Palestine".
This message has a two-fold aim.
On the one hand, it aims at launching and sustaining the campaign for "Hebrew labor" in a historical moment, when the tension with the Arab population was peaking due to the struggle to control the scarce resources of the land. On the other hand, the poster implies that Palestine needs to be built, completely ignoring the Arab history and their presence. In this way, the presence of the Jewish community is the only one that is legitimate and the only one able to redeem the land and build the nation.



Making The Desert Bloom
Designed by Wind-Strosky for the Jewish National Fund, circa 1950.

"Making the desert bloom" is a highly symbolic phrase that is commonly paired with the role of the Jew in Palestine.
In this poster of the Jewish National Fund of 1950, the rebirth of the desert is achieved through another element worth analyzing: mechanised agriculture.

Mechanised agriculture is a symbol of technical and scientific progress; positivist theories of the time deeply influenced the formation of Zionist ideology in the late 19th century.
In this specific case it is noteworthy that 50 years afterward, and after the birth of the State of Israel, Zionism has reworked the idea of "progress" and inserted it into the process of nation-building, showing – thanks to a new technique, photography – Jewish farmers who cultivate the land using agricultural machinery.
Once again the viewer is in front of a dichotomy, if slightly different, with the desert (with its Palestinian inhabitants), synonym of barbarism, versus progress (with its Jewish initiators), synonym of civilization.

Towards a New Life
Designed by Miskovits,
Mandate Palestine, 1935.

This Hungarian propaganda poster has a two-fold function: (visually) defining the "new Jew" and luring new migrants to Palestine.
Regarding the first function, the pioneering features of the Jewish endeavor are reaffirmed: two young farmers, a man and a woman, work side by side, thus trying to establish a new relation between sexes based on equality and parity (a feature that would be endorsed by the *kibbutz*).
Immigration is another aspect of Zionist propaganda. The goal of the Jewish Agency for Israel was to bring as large a population as possible to be settled in Palestine, so they could assert, primarily on an international level, the legitimacy of the Jewish settlement and the need of an official acknowledgment from the international community. This acknowledgment was given as early as 1917, with the Balfour Declaration; nonetheless, the issue of the "demographic scale" would become (and still is) a real obsession for the Jewish community in Palestine.
The struggle for "Hebrew labor" must be seen with this in mind. The organization of migrations (aliyot), hindered by the Arab population and more mildly by British mandatory rule, aimed at building an autonomous sector within Palestine that could become the driving force in the creation of the nation. The aliyot also aimed at creating, through the "genuine" Jewish element, a new concept of nationality and a new origin myth.

British Fertilizers Are the Best
ICI (Levant) Ltd., circa 1935.

This poster, that dates back to 1935, cannot be described as "propaganda"; nevertheless, it shows a meaningful image, deeply-rooted not only in the Zionist understanding but also in the contemporary European collective imagination. An Englishman (represented with the traditional features of the English middle-class, with tails, top hat, and boots) stands on England (again an example of "imagined geography") and pours on Israel the "best fertilizer", making the land bloom.
Noteworthy is the symbolic meaning of this representation: England, at the time the Mandatory power of Palestine, becomes the protector of the Jewish community (the Arabic script is purely commercial), bestowing technical and scientific novelties on Palestine in order to redeem the land. From the start, trade with international powers, and particularly with the British Empire, represented for the Jewish community a strong legitimization factor, since the European state frequently regarded the *Yishuv* as a commercial partner and an independent political entity de facto, well before the official declaration of the birth of the State of Israel.

Blessed Land of Israel Awaits Redemption
Designed by Franz Krausz for the Jewish National Fund, Mandate Palestine, circa 1935.

Once again, the theme of the redemption of the people is deeply connected with the image of a luxuriant land emerging from the dryness of the desert.
In this poster the people of Israel are personified by the colorful and juicy fruits in the foreground, in front of the barren sand dunes.
Fig, grapes, pomegranate, olives – these fruits represent the Jewish worker fighting against the desert and thus against decadence, barbarism, and all those obstacles that hinder their redemption, which becomes possible only through the action of the Jewish people.
The representation of the fruits (products of redemption) comes from an Orientalist cliché in which the desert is the opposite of civilization and fertility, which is justified by religious belief: in this case, in the white box, there's a quote from Deuteronomy).

Conquest of the Desert
Designed by Abram Games for the Palestine Foundaton Fund, 1953.

The poster advertises an international exhibition held in Jerusalem in 1953, five years after the declaration of independence of the State of Israel.
The graphic design itself is effective: the color of the background recalls the desert, the hands that hold the flower are blue, like water, that becomes the symbol of life.
It is interesting to note, apart from the graphic effectiveness, how even after the watershed of 1948, the fundamental elements of Zionist propaganda and perception remain the same: the dichotomy of sterility/fertility and barrenness/progress, together with the biblical reference on the right, from Isaiah: "and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1).

ISLAMIC WORLD OF ART