

Theory and Characteristics

Islamic Architecture

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Introduction

- The spread of Islam was very wide, and the geographical spots it ruled were various and different.
- The term Islamic architecture is used to describe the architecture of the regions that were under the rule of Islam, partially or wholly.
- What makes the Islamic architecture unique and different than the other historical styles is that it was the result of a religion.
- Because of the wide spread and the nature of the religion, diversity became a very important issue in the Islamic architecture.
- Islamic architecture contains different treatments and details systems, which gives it richness but also threatens, according to some, the terminology of this style.

Theory

- The term Islamic architecture is a modern one.
- The architecture was described by several names, Muslim architecture, Mohammedin architecture, Arabian architecture and Saracenic architecture.
- Each one of these terms has its own objections against it.
- This is why a wider term was chosen, which is Islamic architecture.
- The term suggests that religion, not other factors, is the primary formulator of this architecture.

Theory

- Islamic architecture is different than other historical styles that its value is not only in its physical appearance but in its spiritual and symbolic values.
- This shows very clearly in the architecture produced. The importance is not in the physical appearance of the building but the ideas it holds; it is not about the constructional elements but the functions and services it gives.
- Of course any historical architecture cannot deny the human technology available or the climatic/environmental factors, but in Islamic architecture the emphasis is on the translations of religious doctrines to buildings.

Theory

- The theory lies between two extreme views, one considering the religion the ultimate creator of the product, while the other claims there is no specialty of this style and it is just a copy of other pre-Islamic styles.
- The holy Quran and prophet Mohammad's preaching (Sunna) are the basic source of Islamic laws.
- According to the Islamic theories, these are the primary reason of giving the Islamic architecture the form it has.
- In terms of architecture, the Quran and Sunna have very little regulations about building tradition, but they had a huge effect on building the society and the personalities of Muslims. These regulations put the general laws for the culture which will then affect the architecture.
- The series of rights (Huquq) are an example. These rights had their effect on shaping the Islamic city, like right of water, right of height, right of privacy ...

Characteristics

- Looking at the physical appearance of the Islamic architecture, it is almost impossible to give a general character to the Islamic buildings.
- To understand the theory of Islamic architecture, one must go beyond the physical appearance.
- We can count 4 special characteristics that can be summarized from the mosques' architecture and probably generalized to all the Islamic architecture. Moreover we can also find a few general ones.

Characteristics

- 1- Flexibility and multi functionality:
- Mosques, were flexible buildings due to lack of formal rituals and ceremonies in Muslim worship. This is why many buildings served as mosques along with many forms.
- We can also see the complexity of Islamic buildings in terms of the functions they serve, since most of them had multi functions.
- This is why simple shapes and layouts were chosen for the Islamic buildings, to house the different functions and stay flexible.
- As a whole, Islamic architecture doesn't have a specific form for a specific function.

Characteristics

- 2- Indifference to exterior:
- Most of the Islamic buildings had very simple and non articulated facades.
- The reason might be religious, since Islamic instructions despises pride, showing off and boasting about opulence.
- This idea moved to architecture, which led to a strong equality in exterior facades of different buildings.
- Mosques were usually hiding within thick blocks and behind alleys of bazaars, and the general planning of city was not spacious.
- Islamic cities became continuous narrow simple walls.

Characteristics

- 2- Indifference to exterior:



Characteristics

- 3- Emphasis on interior:
- Islamic architecture is oriented towards the inside.
- The courtyard was very essential element, and most of the decoration, iwans, articulation, water surfaces and green areas were inside. This means that the outside literally moved inside.
- Not only the masses were inward oriented, but the life was inward oriented. The Islamic cities lacked outside open spaces and the only open spaces in the city were inside the buildings.
- The reason again is religious and cultural, because of the privacy in Islamic culture and environmental reasons too.

Characteristics

- 3- Emphasis on interior:

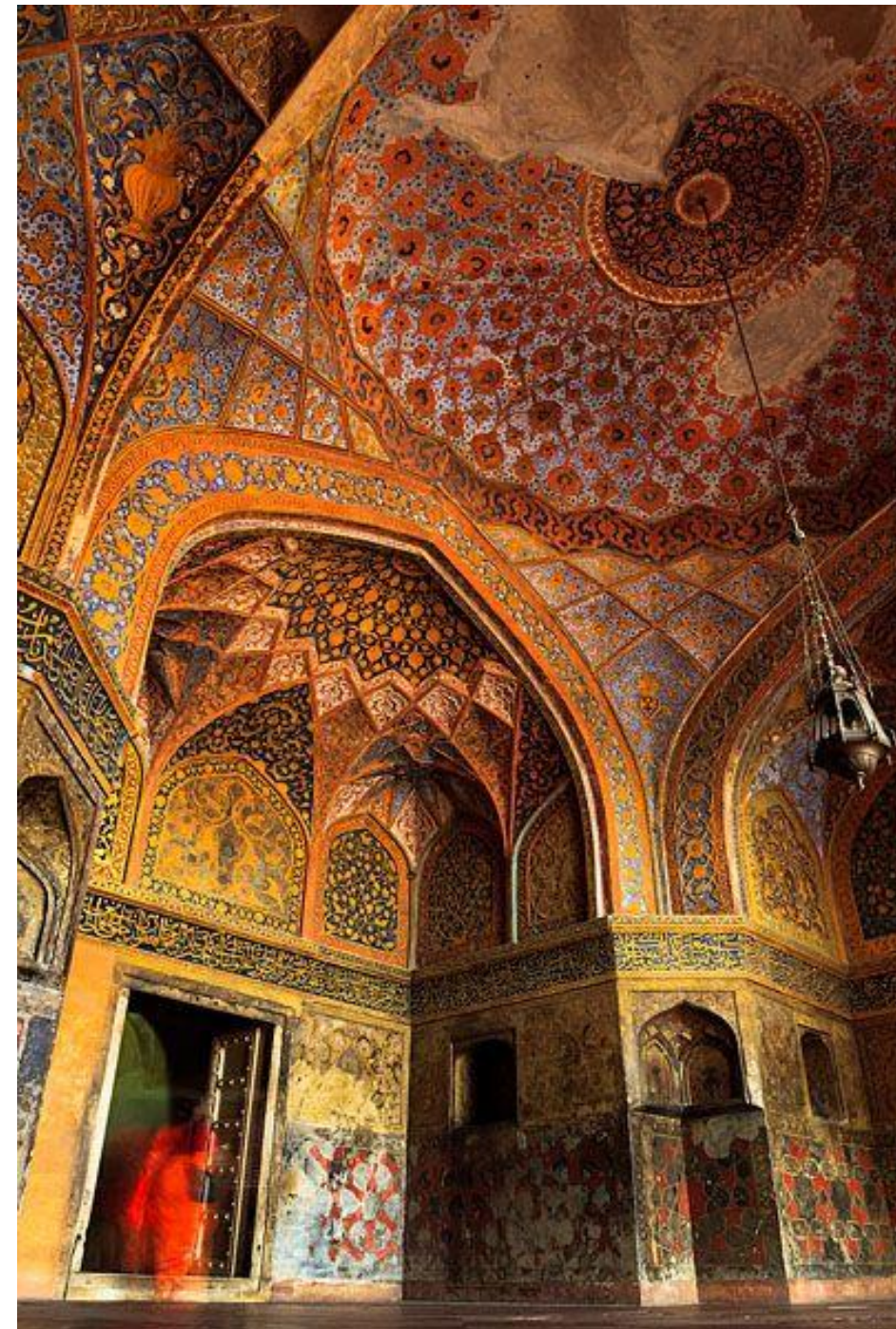


Characteristics

- 4- Geometric Decoration and craftsmanship:
- Again the Islamic instructions show their impact on the art and architecture. Islam forbade using human or animal drawings and sculpture, which urged the Muslim architects to shift attention towards other sources.
- Islamic decoration is geometric and mathematical. They also used floral decorations. The Islamic decoration was three dimensional and not only covering for masses. This can be seen in the Muqarnas.
- The calligraphy is another Islamic decoration system, where religious texts were used in a very complex system of typography, as an aesthetic element.
- Muslim architects develop a complex craftsmanship for the different elements of architecture and promoted local solutions.

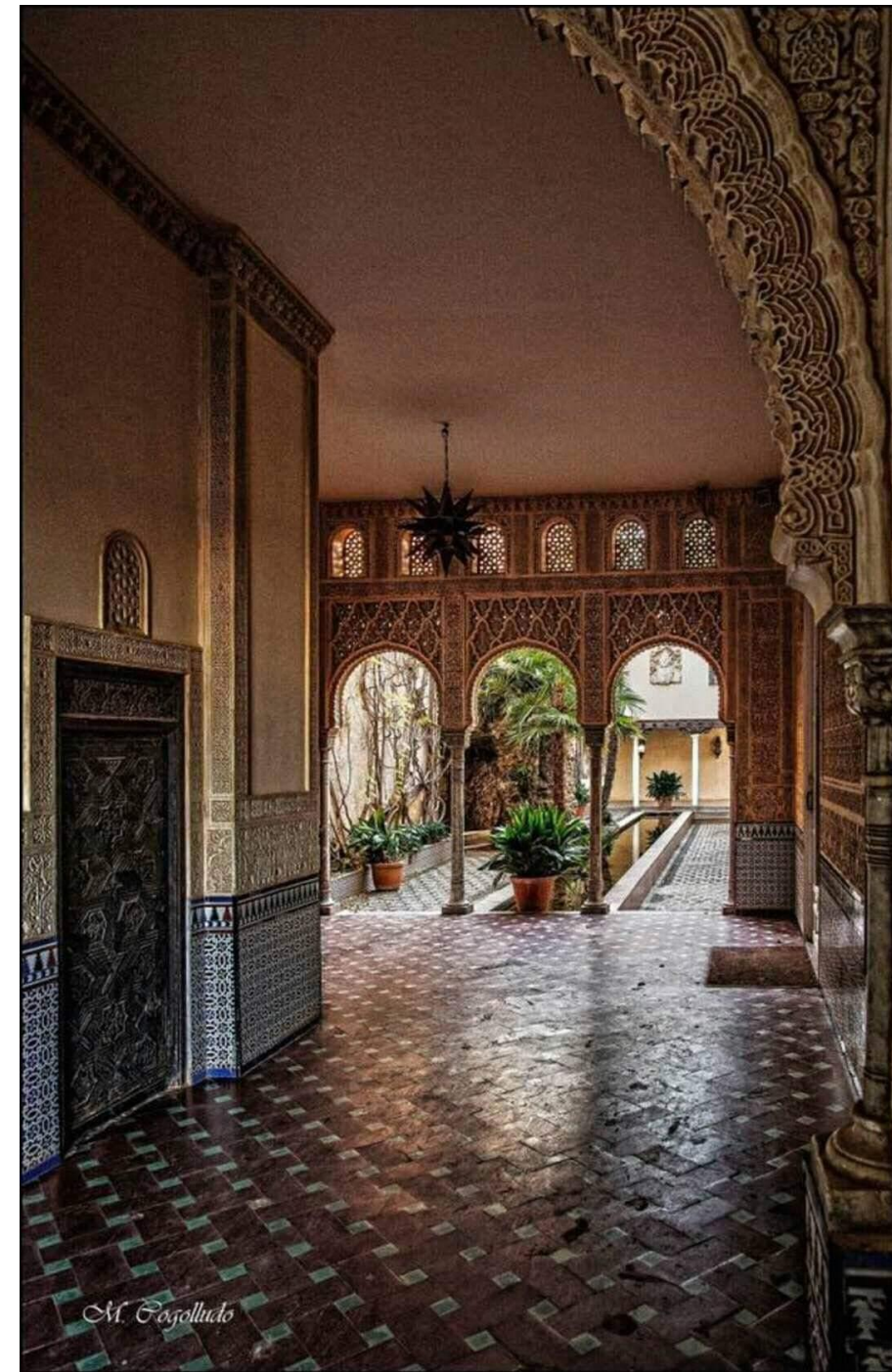
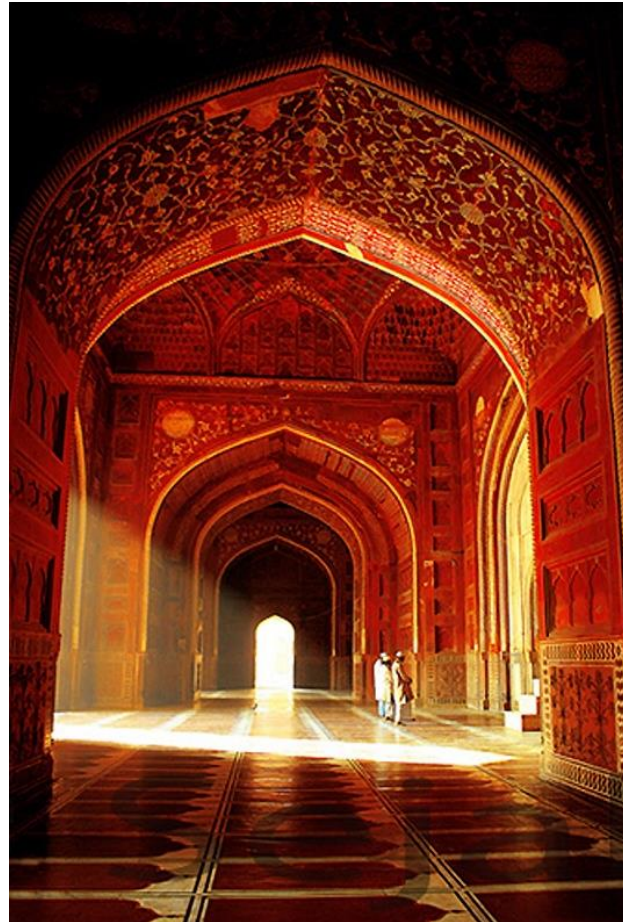
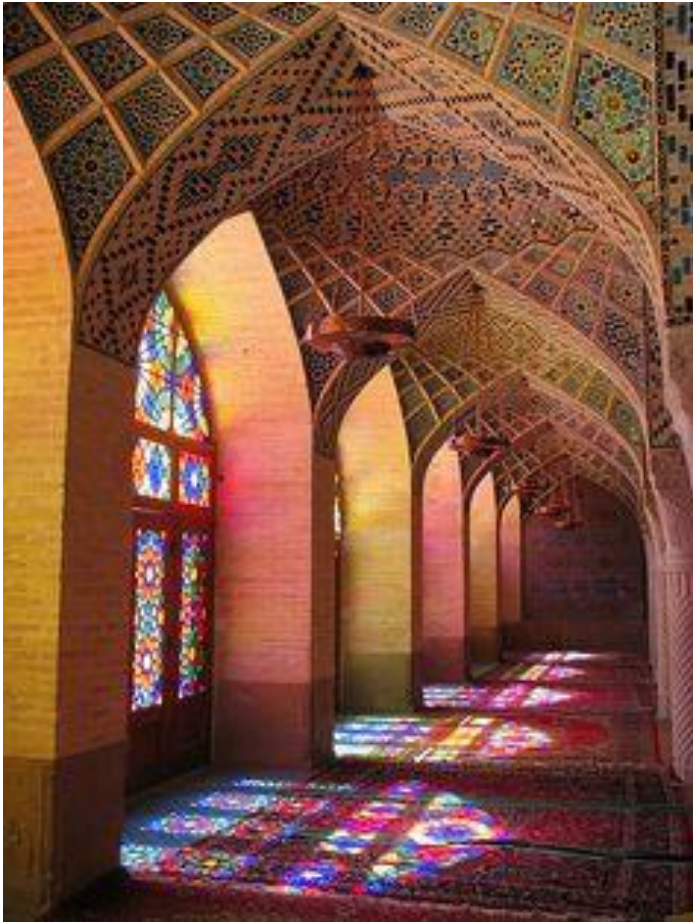
Characteristics

- 4- Geometric Decoration and craftsmanship:



Characteristics

- 4- Geometric Decoration and craftsmanship:



Characteristics

- There are other general characteristics for the Islamic architecture:
- Simple and Abstract
- The nature of the religion is very simple and abstract.
- Islam and Islamic culture had very little restrictions, and in terms of architecture almost none.
- The functions were housed in very primitive shapes.
- This character will lead to another one, adaptability.

Characteristics

- Adaptive
- Because of the previous character, Islamic architecture came to become a very adaptive idea.
- Because of its simplicity, it was able to merge itself into almost any environment.
- The lack of a clear architectural tradition in the Arab world meant that the Early Muslims were open to all new traditions.

Characteristics

- Unity and Variety
- Unity is probably the strongest of all characters in this architecture.
- The geographical locations which Islam entered were very diverse.
- Because of the adaptability of this idea with different cultures it led to many different versions of Islamic architecture.
- The huge differences between different countries and styles, and hidden similarities in innate structures, ideas and repetition of spatial structures at the same time, gives a strong sense of variety and unity in this architecture.

The End