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On Pedagogy: Islamic Art and Architecture in the Classroom

Abstract

IJIA*'s Dialogues series brings together scholars and practitioners from across varied disciplines for discussions of critical contemporary issues that interrogate the boundaries between architecture, art, anthropology, archaeology, and history. Its second instalment, held as a webinar in January 2022, was hosted by Associate Editor Emily Neumeier and featured Christiane Gruber, Stephennie Mulder, and Fernando Luis Martínez Nespral. Their conversation addressed a number of pressing issues related to the teaching of Islamic art in a wide range of classroom settings. The speakers touched upon the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-racism and decolonizing initiatives within the field, and the future of several new and ongoing pedagogical endeavours. The following is an edited excerpt from the original discussion.*[1]

Keywords

pedagogy
higher education
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    architecture
learning resources
decolonial studies

Christiane Gruber is a professor of Islamic art at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her research interests span from medieval Islamic book arts to contemporary visual culture. She has written three books, including *The Praiseworthy One: The Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Texts and Images* (Indiana University Press, 2019), and edited a dozen volumes. Gruber is the founding director of Khamseen: Islamic Art History Online, an open-access platform of digital resources for the study of Islamic art, architecture, and visual culture.

Stephennie Mulder is an associate professor of Islamic art and architecture at the University of Texas at Austin and president of Middle East Medievalists. She is a specialist in Islamic art, architectural history, and archaeology. She worked for over ten years as the head ceramicist at Balis, Syria, and has also conducted archaeological and art historical fieldwork in Syria, Egypt, Turkey,

and elsewhere in the region. Mulder's *The Shrines of the 'Alids in Medieval Syria: Sunnis, Shi'is and the Architecture of Coexistence* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), received numerous awards. She has also published on medieval and contemporary art history, Islamic archaeology, and cultural heritage, including in the *Journal of Islamic Archaeology*, the *International Journal of Islamic Architecture*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Archaeology*.

Fernando Luis Martínez Nespral trained as an architect at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and holds a Ph.D. in history from the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella in Argentina. He is Head Professor of architectural history, and affiliated as a researcher with the American Art and Aesthetics Studies Institute, based in the School of Architecture, Design and Urbanism at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. His work focuses on Islamic architecture and its connections with the Ibero-American world. He is currently a member of several international associations, including the Global Architectural History Teaching Collaborative, the College Art Association, the Society of Architectural Historians, and Our North is the South (Nuestro Norte es el Sur).

Emily Neumeier (EN):
Let's begin with overarching trends in the field. What would you say are some of the most important recent developments in the instruction of Islamic art and architecture?

Christiane Gruber (CG):
There have been a few points that have been revealing to me in terms of where the field stands. For example, while reviewing the presentations that have been submitted to the Khamseen online platform, I have noticed that, despite the fact that we have been teaching more or less the canon in our surveys of Islamic art, many of us have been working to diversify our approaches, such as through thematic clusters. Yet, when looking at the current list of presentations on the Khamseen website, you will notice that, as of now, we have some big gaps.[2] For example, there is no representation of the Abbasid dynasty, a five-hundred-year period that is central to the canon. There is also not much for the Seljuks, Nasrids, or Ilkhanids. This current list of presentations is in contra-distinction to the typical parameters of the field of Islamic art, which tended to be sandwiched between Late Antique/early Christian and Byzantine art. For a long time, Islamic art was structurally presented as if it was a perennially medieval corpus of material. Yet, in these new digital spaces, many scholars are producing scholarship on modern and contemporary materials – a switch of the pendulum that is yielding what I call the 'plentiful modern' as opposed to the now 'blank medieval'. So, there is an interesting 'wafting' that I am noticing nowadays. We are going to have to find a way to move forward by not throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. This issue was recently raised by Gülru Necipoğlu in her interview for the Historians of Islamic Art Association newsletter, and I think we should continue a collective discussion going forward.[3]

The other issue that I have noticed is that, beyond efforts toward diversity, inclusion, and equity [DEI] and anti-racism, which we will broach subsequently, we still face problems with accessibility. How do we make this material accessible, not just intellectually by foregoing jargon, but also via offering a foundational set of tools that include adequate closed captioning? Through our experience at Khamseen, we noticed that about ten per cent of whatever we are saying is lost on our hearers, if AI (artificial intelligence) is any indication.

We thus should not underestimate the fact that all our students – and not just the hearing-impaired, neuro-diverse, or students for whom English is not a first language – are hearing words that you are simply not uttering in your classroom. What we have learned from the digital pivot is that we should not take for granted the orally delivered lecture as an autonomously understood product of pedagogy, because it is not. Within the in-person classroom, we must find a way to crisscross between our lecturing from the podium and the PowerPoint slides on the screen, because there are no closed captions floating in the air.

Stephennie Mulder (SM):

Like Christiane, I also teach at a large public university in the United States. The University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) is among the largest universities in the country, with about 50,000 students. These factors mean that at the undergraduate level and even at the graduate level, it's rare that I have a small, seminar-style class. This semester, for example, I have almost 80 students in my course, which is a relatively large size for an Islamic art survey. I think this dynamic presents certain types of opportunities and certain types of challenges. The plus side is that you can impact many more students all at once, but the downside is that we are unable to go as deep as we might be able to in a smaller class. Texas has a certain advantage in the sense that it's such a large state – by area it is the size of France! – and the university is a Hispanic- and Asian-American-serving institution.[4] It also has a very strong Middle Eastern Studies programme and a great collection of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish materials in our library. UT Austin also maintains a significant Muslim student population: Texas has the fifth largest Muslim population per capita in the United States, and I frequently have students with Muslim backgrounds in my classes. In that sense, I would circle back to your initial question, Emily, and to some of the issues that Christiane raised. I certainly see my work as contributing to broader anti-racism struggles in the humanities, and the United States, and I think that is one of the broader trends that I see right now in the instruction of Islamic art and architecture among my colleagues.

There are two things that have changed about my teaching in the last couple of years. One started before the pandemic and the other has been, let's say, augmented or even improved by the pandemic. Two years ago, I was asked to design and teach a course that had its home directly in Middle Eastern Studies. I have a joint appointment in Middle Eastern Studies and Art and Art History, but my classes had previously always originated in Art History. That course ended up being a nice opportunity to rethink the way that I was teaching Islamic art. I came up with the model derived from the BBC series *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, and I decided to do a class titled 'History of the Middle East in 100 Objects'.[5] I created a history of the medieval period in the fall and then a history from the early modern to the contemporary in spring, so it was effectively a year-long, two-semester survey class. What happened when I shifted from the idea of an Islamic art survey to a history of objects surprised even myself, because I ended up bringing in a whole host of things, oftentimes very mundane, everyday objects. For example, when I talk about Nasserism in the modern section of the class, I bring in the transistor radio as an object that enables us to think about the voice of Nasser and the way that it went out to the people and the way that he was able to bring people into his political sphere. So, this class is more a history of

objects, as opposed to the history of art. And although it also includes a lot of art, we think about art through the paradigm of the object.

I'm an archaeologist, so I had always thought of myself as not being someone who was stuck in elite paradigms about what art was, but this approach enabled me to step outside of the canon in ways that are really liberating. And I think that students have connected to it in a way that surprised me as well, so it's enabled me to bring in a whole host of ordinary objects that had previously somehow not been within my way of thinking about Islamic art, and to thus step outside of the prism – or the prison, perhaps – of the canon, and to bring in objects and communities that have traditionally been marginalized within our field. I see this course as part of a broader trend within the humanities, moving toward more object-based ontologies and different ways of working with objects and material culture as expressive of history, so a history-from-below model also influences my approach.[6]

EN:
Fernando, you are operating within a different context than our two other speakers, who teach in the United States. Could you talk about that?

Fernando Luis Martínez Nespral (FN):
I come from Latin America and the university system is very different here, because almost all universities are free for students. At least all the state universities are free. My university, the Universidad de Buenos Aires, which is the principal university in the country of Argentina, has 300,000 students; the School of Architecture and Design alone has 25,000; and specifically in the Architecture Department there are 12,000 students. The building [for the school] is a huge, brutalist block and is like a small city with four elevators, so we have not been able to enter the building in 2020 and 2021 because of the [COVID-19] pandemic. But, during a normal day in my school, there is a huge concentration of people. Last academic year, my team and I had 1200 students. This group was spread out among ten different courses, with the median of a single course around 200 [students], so these are very large courses. To be sure, it is a challenge to figure out how to teach 1000 people! I offer both general surveys of architectural history and a specialized course on Islamic architecture, which I participated in developing and have been teaching for almost thirty years.

The other dynamic specific to our context here in Buenos Aires is that we are far from the Islamic world, not only geographically but also culturally. At least, that is the prevailing assumption. Of all the students I have taught over the years, I have only had one or two who are confessionally Muslim. So, the main challenge is to explain to my students that Islamic art and architecture is not as distant as they might imagine. It is just impossible to be disconnected from a culture when one of its predominant languages (Arabic) is the second source for Spanish.

Every day, in every moment here in Argentina, we are saying Arabic words that have been adopted into our language. On the first day of class, I like to show images of architectural spaces that at first appear to be from the Islamic world, but in fact are from Latin America. For example, this balcony with *mashrabiya* woodwork is actually from Lima, not Cairo [Figure 1]. Meanwhile, this elaborate ceiling with geometric patterning is from Quito, Ecuador, and these epigraphic tiles are from Buenos Aires [Figures 2 and 3]. I say to my students: 'Do you think these photographs were taken in Syria, or Morocco?
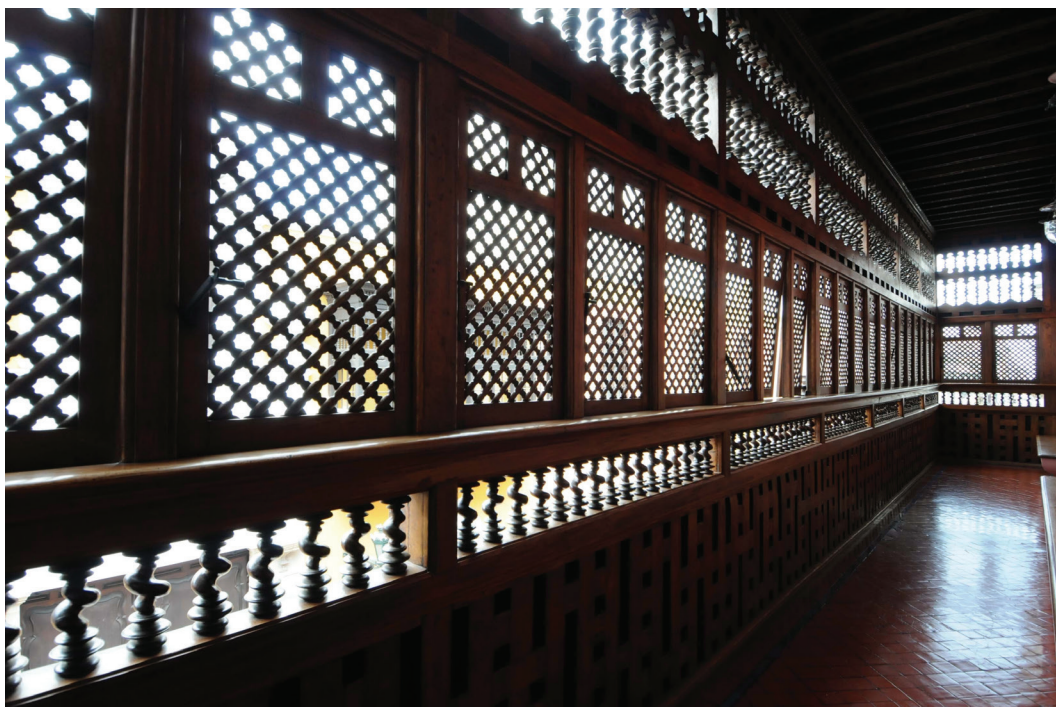
Wikimedia Commons/Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Peru.

*Figure 1: Balcony at the Torre Tagle Palace in Lima, Peru.*

No! These images are from your city, near your house. These tiles are from the Buenos Aires metro, so 2 million people see them every day'. For students who think that Islamic art is a 'foreign' topic unrelated to their daily reality, my aim is to unsettle these notions and demonstrate that in fact they can find many connections with this material in their everyday lives. The work is to deconstruct ideas that have been instilled through orientalism and exoticism. Because we are educated to think that we are part of the western world, we do not see ourselves connected with Islamic art, or – more broadly –'non-western categories'. This is not my specialization, but a similar process is happening with Indigenous people and their cultures: we think they are far, not related, and yet these are the native cultures of *our* country, *our* land.

EN:

All three of you have touched on some broader issues in terms of expanding the field and connections with postcolonial studies. To get more into the specifics, I want to ask each of you about some projects with which each of you have been involved. How have they been incorporated into classroom instruction and how are these projects connecting with these larger issues that we've already been talking about?

CG:

Thinking about decoloniality, to borrow Mignolo's term, I appreciate what Stephennie has to say about teaching through objects rather than through the
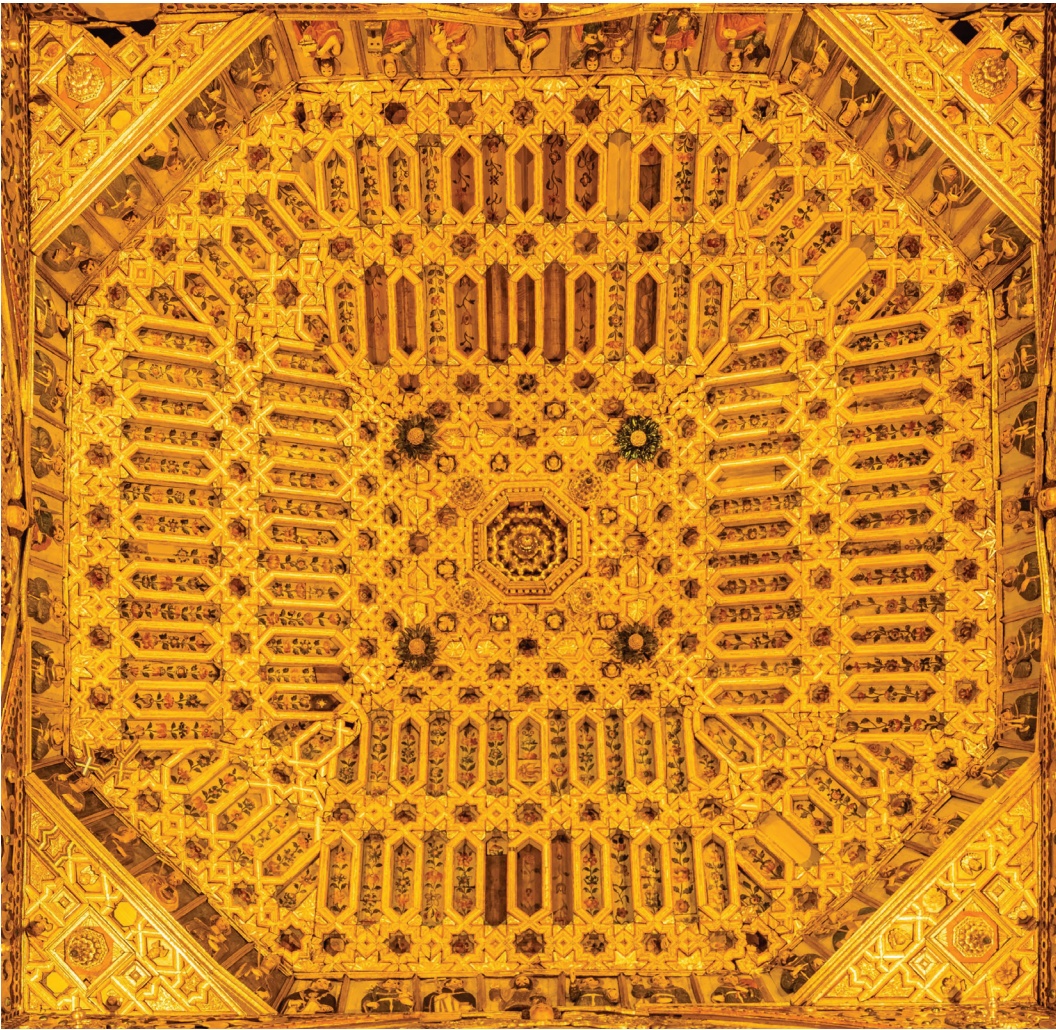
Wikimedia Commons/Diego Delso.

Figure 2: Ceiling of the Church of San Francisco in Quito, Ecuador.

stemma of a canon. After all, stretching beyond received paradigms is a form of 'disenclosure' (per Mbembe).[7] I believe this is what we want to be aiming for: namely, not to enclose material in any sort of given format, cluster, voice, or even language. That is diversity writ large, disenclosed from the strictures of structuring systems of thought (i.e., ideology).

Our experiences with Khamseen have been illuminating. When COVID-19 broke out, colleagues banded together and decided to help each other, and this initiative resulted in the Khamseen platform. We named it after strong seasonal winds, as we all decided to ride the winds of change into the e-pivot. Through these efforts, I have been learning about how to use multimedia materials both online *and* inside the classroom, because instead of being mutually exclusive, they are co-constituent. In our classrooms, whether they're

Wikimedia Commons/JonySniuk.

Figure 3: Tiles from the subway in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

online or in-person, we can use the multimedia presentations and the glossary term definitions found on the website. Education specialists are quick to point out that pedagogues must break up their teaching into 15-minute modules to maintain their students' attention. The presentations found on Khamseen are all about or under fifteen minutes. If you show one of the Khamseen videos inside the classroom, you can ask students to respond to it or under-take a visual analysis by typing in chat. I have noticed that many students who otherwise are not keen to speak up are quite active in chat, so that is an inter-esting type of empowerment. To me, it is phenomenal that a close and collec-tive visual exercise – or paradigmatic Panofskian iconographical analysis – can unfold live in chat. And then, when you pull it all together and propose an interpretation as a class, then, as a teacher, you will have been able to model a historical method, expanding and enriching it through an experiential activity.

I enjoy it when the classroom is no longer mine, when I have to give up the 'sage on the stage' as well as claims to mono-vocal authority. I person-ally relish hearing the voices of my colleagues beaming into my classroom and watching their own ways of speaking about art. I think it is important for students to see that knowledge is co-created and it can be distributed among interlocutors. This point is also key to DEI and decoloniality in the sense that we are, once again, 'disenclosing' the single, central authoritative voice in

favour of the pluri-vocal and the pluri-local. This process also allows us to push back on certain arguments that I see articulated as of late, including in the recently published book by James Elkins entitled *The End of Diversity in Art Historical Writing*.[8] In this work, Elkins argues that, at the same time as we face calls for diversity, the language, structures, and theories in North Atlantic art historical scholarship are spreading worldwide, and ergo we are all producing scholarship more or less in the same mode. For my part, I prefer to retain all the slight prose, delivery, and methodological varieties in the Khamseen presentations as I do not want those differences to be elided or flattened. I think it is important to allow those patinas of difference to emerge and give intellectual colouration to the field.

SM:
One initiative that I have been involved with over the past couple of years is the #StudentsofIslamicArt Wikipedia edit-a-thon. The project began in the fall of 2018, when a group of Islamic art historians embarked on this effort to collectively edit Wikipedia articles about art and architecture topics related to the Islamic world. Wikipedia is often derided for having poorly-researched content and uneven quality, but, after its twenty years of existence, it is now, on the aggregate, more accurate than the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.[9] Of course, individual articles are indeed still very problematic, which is the purpose of this initiative. However you may feel about Wikipedia, it is now the world's most frequently consulted source of information, and its ubiquity is moulding how people think about our field as a discipline. What pushed me into the project is the idea that, as academics, we can either ignore this reality or we can jump in and try to engage it and shape it. One issue that we confronted when we started the edit-a-thon in 2018 is the fact that over 90 per cent of Wikipedia's editors are men from Euro-American backgrounds, and 84 per cent of the entries are about either Europe or North America. These numbers were a real impetus for us and are also related to issues around diversity, inclusion, and representation. Wikipedia remains very strongly Eurocentric, and its coverage of the Middle East is rather spotty and uneven, as anyone who works in the field knows. This initiative began as a small effort to address that problem.

In my own teaching, the Wikipedia assignment is structured as a semester-long research project, so students must begin researching within the first few weeks of the semester. They're required to find about half of their sources from the university library, so it also has the virtue of bringing sources that are normally locked up behind the walls of the university library out into the public sphere. And then the other half of the bibliography must derive from high-quality online sources that are easily accessible, and students must work on this over the course of the semester as a group project with the end goal of ultimately editing an article. Along the way, I help with their drafts and make suggestions. Then, at the end of the semester we have one day when we participate in an international edit-a-thon that typically includes between two to three – and we've had as many as four – different universities participating from Australia to the UK and across the United States [Figure 4]. We also collaborate with the Shangri La Museum of Islamic Art in Honolulu, Hawaii, and they serve as our social media backup and help us catalogue the results.

The whole project is supported by a dashboard created by Wikipedia to train students in how to edit articles.[10] This dashboard is unfortunately only available to instructors located within the United States, although they're

Lauren Macknight.

Figure 4: Students editing Wikipedia at the University of Texas at Austin in 2018.

supposed to be working on this. It's very simple to learn to edit Wikipedia, but the dashboard is helpful for students to learn a few basic editing skills and walks them through a set of modules in which they must learn about issues like plagiarism and critical approaches to different sources. These are all the same skills that you want students to learn when they're doing a traditional research paper or research project. In the past few years, Wikipedia also has produced a number of handbooks that are useful for students; one specific to art history was created about three years ago.[11] Those are available to download on the site, or Wikipedia will mail you hard copies of these flyers or pamphlets to hand out to your students in the classroom.

The impact of this project really took even me by surprise. Obviously, one clear effect is that particular articles are going to have improved quality and sources. For example, one article that we decided to edit this semester is about the Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i in Cairo, one that's very dear to my heart because my first published article was about this building, so in a way it was a little bit of a self-serving project. But I happened to notice that the article was really bad. So, I had the students go in and rewrite the article, and they improved it significantly, especially in terms of adding references. As I mentioned earlier, students not only end up developing traditional research methods, but they also learn a whole host of digital literacy skills as they learn to look critically at what they find on the Internet. We also see really powerful responses from students in this project. At the end of the semester, I always have them write a short reflection; they can write whatever they want. I'm always touched by the number of students who say things that speak about the way that the assignment opened their eyes to the power of the humanities, and especially public-facing humanities, in changing people's impressions and knowledge about the Middle East or the Islamic world. There is also the personal empowerment that students feel. They often begin the semester very nervous about this assignment, and by the end, they are Wikipedia editors, and they realize that they have a role to play in actually improving the public's knowledge on the Internet. They also often speak about things that are related to representation, equity, and inclusion. Especially for my Muslim students, this ends up being a very important exercise for them in that regard. The quantifiable impact of the project is also quite extraordinary; just last fall, my class alone added over 1000 edits with almost 30,000 words. There have also been 145,000 article views already for the articles that the students edited, and that will just continue to grow over time. As for promotion, we Tweet about it and post on Instagram using the hashtag #StudentsofIslamicArt, and include photos and videos of students speaking about their experiences. We would love to have people join us and to grow this project, especially in terms of having more participation from universities outside of the United States.

EN:
Let's now shift over to Fernando to ask about his involvement with GAHTC, the Global Architectural History Teaching Collaborative. We already have had the audience submit several questions about access and sharing syllabi, and I understand that is something GAHTC is very interested in doing.

FN:
Yes, I am part of GAHTC. We are more than 300 professionals from all over the world. And, on our website, we have more than 300 lectures about specific topics on architectural history from a global view.[12] This network was begun by Mark Jarzombek from MIT and Vikram Prakash from the University of Washington. It is a very useful resource for teaching a wide diversity of sites. On the GAHTC website, one can find quite a number of presentations and lesson plans about, or themes related to, Islamic architecture. It is all available online, so you can download the lectures, and each one has slides and notes for the teacher as they prepare their own lesson for their students. An initiative that has emerged from these broader efforts is a specialized group about Latin American architectural history called Our North is the South, which I formed along with Ana María León from the University of Michigan.[13] We have our own group of lectures on the GAHTC website. Some of the presentations

I have produced are about the relationship between Islamic architecture and Latin America, obviously. We have three modules about Islamic architecture and several other presentations that explore the impact of Islamic architecture in countries beyond the Islamic world.

As for syllabi, all the courses on the GAHTC website have accompanying curriculum outlines, as they connect the different parts of each module. These outlines are useful when, for example, you find a course with fourteen lectures about Southeast Asian architecture, but perhaps you decide to focus on just one or two of these topics, perhaps even just a few slides, when constructing your own syllabus. You could even adapt parts from several different modules to build an outline for your own course.

EN:
I have personally found the GAHTC website beneficial for my own teaching. I use it in just the way you describe, to fill in the gaps of my own syllabus for a course. It is also great to browse through the website, especially at the beginning of the semester when you're trying to get some inspiration and fresh ideas about what to add or subtract from your own material.

FN:
I want to address some questions submitted by our audience about terminology and how we define Islamic art and architecture in the classroom. I know this is a very difficult topic. From my position, Islamic architecture is a cultural phenomenon. It is not necessarily related exclusively to 'Muslim' architecture. In our part of the world, it is necessary to understand the topic in that way. In Latin America, we have a relatively small Muslim population, and all of the examples of architecture that I showed you earlier were made for Christians and by Christians, generally, but using the forms, shapes, and ideas of Islamic architecture. And this is not only the case here. In Spain, for instance, we can find buildings that use various elements from Islamic architecture, but these spaces may have been created for Christian or Jewish communities. Of course, we can talk about Muslim architecture constructed by Muslims, and in that case, we could use the term 'Muslim' architecture. But from where I stand, Islamic art is a cultural norm that is not automatically related to a specific faith tradition.

EN:
Fernando has guided us to the big picture question – the million-dollar question – which is how we as instructors define Islamic art and architecture, or the art and architecture of the Islamic world, to students in the classroom. In my own teaching, and here I am picking up on something that Christiane has already said in terms of trying not to enclose the field, I usually begin my courses with a proposed definition of any art and architecture that was produced in geographic regions under Muslim rule. We have to start somewhere, but then I invite my students all semester long to join me in testing that definition, to see to what extent it holds up and to what extent it is not entirely satisfactory in covering the material that we are seeing in the course. For example, early on in my survey I present a fourteenth-century iconostasis from a Coptic church in Cairo that is made from wood and has mother-of-pearl inlay, compared with a *minbar* that is also from fourteenth-century Cairo. Thus, these two artworks were produced around the exact same time and use virtually the same decorative elements. This pairing encourages the students

to consider why these objects from different faith traditions look so similar, and whether or not we can categorize both examples as Islamic art.

SM:

I approach this question of definitions and terminology in a very similar way – this is our perennial conversation that will probably never end in our field. But, again, you have to begin with something, and so framing it deliberately at the beginning of the semester as a historiographical construct and thinking about why it was constructed that way, and who it serves, over the course of the semester is really the best way to deal with that question. Similar to Emily, I take the same approach whereby the definition of the Islamic world that I offer to students is: parts of the globe that came under the political power or sovereignty of Muslim rulers. Yet, in the very first lecture, I always pointedly elicit a conversation about how this world also contains large communities of Christians, Jews, Hindus, and a variety of other different religious and ethnic and racial groups. The idea of having this inclusive, expansive definition of the Islamic world is built into the way that I begin that conversation, and as part of that, we talk about synagogues and churches in places like Cairo or Iran and elsewhere. These works of architecture tell that story of their own accord.

CG:

I also have a similar approach: I start with a premise, with the understanding that some of it may hold and some of it may not, and then I and students bombard it with questions to see what emerges as a productive nexus of contestation, historiographically speaking. For example, on Khamseen we include a presentation on Yezidi amulets (*nîshan*s) [Figure 5].[14] One may posit Yezidism in opposition to Islam, but amulets reveal intriguing overlaps in apotropaic materiality. I like to take things that we tend to place on a spectrum of binaries and muddy the waters a little bit, to avoid dichotomous thinking within the classroom (and in other arenas of life). In other words, I try to carve out a tertiary space, which is a space of interstices, constellations, and complexities.

Stephennie's and her students' impact via Wikipedia is just phenomenal. At Khamseen, we also have been interested in our statistics, not just in terms of viewer numbers but also geographical footprint. In about a year and a half, we have had about 100,000 views from all over the world; we are thus reaching well beyond our classrooms. These statistics have laid bare the fact that public audiences have a thirst for reliable scholarly information about the Islamic world, so it's important for us – one might even say incumbent upon us – that we translate our work into a publicly-oriented form of knowledge. Regarding scholarly resources, I am struck by Stephennie's and her students' expanded critical apparatus for Wikipedia – I love those meaty bibliographies! We have a similar goal with our presentations at Khamseen, where presentations include hyperlinked bibliographies that enable shortcuts for further research. So online platforms can serve as blueprints for the pooling and retrieval of scholarly information as well.

Finally, the border between the classroom and the public seems to be thinning. Here, I am thinking of the ways many of us are crossing between these spaces, and how they reinforce one another in interesting ways. How we practice our craft has bigger implications for the humanities, including the newer trans-humanities, e.g., the public humanities, digital humanities, environmental humanities, medical humanities, and so forth. To my mind, as a

The Nîshans of the Yezidis of Northern Iraq

Khamseen: Islamic Art History Online.

Figure 5: Page on the Khamseen website for Eszter Spät's presentation on Yezidi amulets.

public or digital humanities endeavour, Khamseen is essentially an interdiscipline put to practice. It is also a structure through which scholars can stretch their 'tentacles' to produce public scholarship, an emerging criterion for tenure and promotion cases.

EN:
To conclude, let's turn now to the question of textbooks and whether or not you even use a textbook. This of course directly relates to the issue of how instructors approach a definition or representation of what the material within the field of Islamic art comprises.

SM:
Textbooks are a challenge. I do use a textbook, but it's really like a secondary or even tertiary source of information in my classes. I have a simple basic textbook reading that I give students, and then supplement that with a ton of other materials, like online resources. Khamseen is one of them, and by

now there are also some very high-quality videos and films and other types of more interactive content online as well. Then, I will typically have a discussion section in all my classes structured around an academic article written by one of my illustrious colleagues. I usually ask students to write a brief analytical summary that is structured in a very specific way in which they must find the thesis and the supporting evidence. That exercise helps them to work through a more challenging academic article and initiates them into learning how to read critically. I would therefore say that I haven't entirely abandoned the textbook – it does provide a basic grounding of information – but I supplement very heavily with a lot of other additional resources in all my classes.

I think that oftentimes it matters less what course materials you assign than what actually happens in the classroom around those course materials. I haven't fully abandoned the textbook, because I think that for the students, having this little nugget of basic data right to begin with is helpful. And then, we take that all apart oftentimes in the lectures, through readings that come in and challenge or undo things that are in the textbook or build out beyond what's in the textbook. It's not so much you have to have the textbook or not, but it's really how you think with the course materials that you've given the students that really makes the difference.

CG:
I will just come clean and say that I abandoned the textbook long ago. Textbooks freeze content in structure, just like an exhibition limits an object to a vitrine. I wrestled with this issue for a long time and realized that I am weary of structural, interpretative, and other rigidities. We do need some basic lingua franca, and we can convey that in the classroom and point students to some major textbooks and let them pick what suits their needs and interests best. Yet, more and more I prefer the 'living survey' model on Khamseen, in which we cluster presentations within a chronological spine. We include cloud tags for more open-ended adventures, untethered from a master narrative or format. Again, here I am inspired by 'disenclosure' practices at the practical and intellectual levels. Stephennie and I had once discussed writing a textbook together, but time has flown and here we are, no longer fans of this particular production formula. I myself do not like such stiffness because it disallows multiple narratives, curtails pedagogical objectives, and reduces learning outcomes.

FN:
We focus on Western Islamic architecture in Spain and North Africa because it is the most relevant to us in Latin America. We have a lot of textbooks on these topics in Spanish. As for Islamic architecture in Latin America, we have to construct our own textbooks because it is a new field that is fractional and under construction. Yet, for other parts of the Islamic world, we have very few textbooks in Spanish, so this is one of the great benefits of GAHTC. I began to work translating several lectures on the GAHTC website that were originally in English into Spanish.

EN:
This issue of languages is a theme that has come up across all the different projects that we have discussed today. So, perhaps we can conclude our conversation here, underlining that there is evidently a real need for a greater number of translations and a more general expansion of materials in all

different languages for use in the classroom. I think that this point also reflects the incredible diversity that the Islamic world represents.

Contributor Details

Emily Neumeier is an assistant professor of Islamic art and architecture at Temple University in the United States. In her own research, she specializes in the visual and spatial cultures of the eastern Mediterranean, with a focus on the Ottoman Empire. Neumeier works with her students to explore emerging technologies and engage in public scholarship through digital initiatives, such as the recent podcast series *Monument Biography*.

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Endnotes

1. A video recording of the discussion is available for viewing on the journal's YouTube channel. See *International Journal of Islamic Architecture,* 'IJIA Dialogues #2 "On Pedagogy" (21 Jan. 2022)', YouTube, accessed May 2, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgRR1FK7DeI.

2. Khamseen: Islamic Art History Online, accessed February 15, 2022: https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/khamseen/presentations/.

3. Simon Rettig, 'Interview: A Conversation with Gülru Necipoğlu', *Historians of Islamic Art Association Newsletter* (Fall 2021): 3–5.

4. The US Department of Education designates universities with large minority student populations as Asian American- and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (ten per cent) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (25 per cent). These designations facilitate specific government support programmes and investments in such schools.

5. Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, BBC Radio 4, 2010.

6. See Alfred Gell, 'The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology', in *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 40–66; Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); Dylan Kerr, 'What Is Object-Oriented Ontology? A Quick-and-Dirty Guide to the Philosophical Movement Sweeping the Art World', *Artspace*, April 8, 2016, https://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/the_big_idea/a-guide-to-object-oriented-ontology-art-53690.

7. See Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Achille

Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

8. James Elkins, *The End of Diversity in Art Historical Writing; North Atlantic Art History and its Alternatives* (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020).

9. Jim Giles, 'Internet Encyclopaedias Go Head to Head', *Nature*, December 14, 2005, https://www.nature.com/articles/438900a.

10. Wiki Education Dashboard, accessed February 25, 2022, https://dashboard. wikiedu.org/.

11. 'Editing Wikipedia Articles on Art History', Wiki Education, 2018, accessed February 25, 2022, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Editing_ Wikipedia_articles_on_art_history.pdf.

12. Global Architectural History Teaching Collaborative, accessed February 25, 2022, https://gahtc.org/.

13. 'Our North is the South', Global Architectural History Teaching Collaborative, accessed February 25, 2022, https://gahtc.org/pages/our-north-south.

14. Eszter Spät, 'The Nîshans of the Yezidis of Northern Iraq', Khamseen: Islamic Art History Online, accessed May 2, 2022, https://sites.lsa. umich.edu/khamseen/short-form-videos/2021/the-nishans-of-the-yezidis-of-northern-iraq/.