

THE ART
OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD
AND THE ARTISTIC RELATIONSHIPS
BETWEEN POLAND
AND ISLAMIC COUNTRIES



manggha

Polish Institute
of World Art Studies



Al-Faisaliah Tower: The first skyscraper in Saudi Arabia

Ihsan Otahbachi
King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia



Introduction

The architecture of the Islamic world—its spectacle of domes and minarets, arches and the mind-boggling geometric decoration of the interiors—has fascinated and perplexed many Western observers who have had few ways of really understanding the buildings or the beliefs and ways of life of the Muslims for whom these buildings were designed and erected. Islam, extending from Africa to Asia, creates a unique scope of artistic concepts with different tastes and traditions.¹ Islamic architecture is more than a history of form and style: it is a product of cultural and environmental factors and an expression of the way of life of people and their buildings which play a vital role in that way of life.² Domes and courtyards are therefore points of orientation within a comprehensive totality, rather than formal, symbolic goals.³ Certain architectural features have become fixed and eternal. The meaning of so-called “introverted architecture” becomes manifest primarily in enclosed gardens, courtyards and interiors, what is given as an eternal fact.⁴

In this modern world, they help us find our architectural roots and remain true to our identity in any part of the Islamic world. Its rich heritage offers a framework to bridge the gap between alien Western culture on one side, and prevailing lack of continuity and cultural relevance in the local architectural world on the other.⁵ Hassan Fathi says: “The migration of an architectural style from one area to another foreign area is something that should be rejected because it will cut its relations to its heritage, traditions and culture. It leads to double personality and the loss of one’s identity, thus to be a stranger in your own house is the worst type of stranger.”⁶

In the last decade the Islamic world—and the Middle East in particular—has been undergoing a transformation unprecedented in its history. The major construction projects in the

¹ Archer 1990.
² Koolhaas 1994.
³ Soehn 1996.
⁴ Abd al-Qader 1989.
⁵ Azizi 2001.
⁶ Said Atwan 2001.

