



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY  
(International) in the United Kingdom  
Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

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# The Islamic City, Spirit and Identity, Past and Present

**5 March-2 April**

In four two-hour-long sessions plus a film evening (hence five sessions in all every Tuesday), this short course will introduce a general audience of non-specialists to the Islamic City, both historic and contemporary. Using the development, rise and present-day trajectories of a range of cities in the Islamic world as examples, the course will explore the following themes:

- What are Islamic cities, and how have contemporary local architects been inspired by them in their work?
- What are the intangible aspects of their identities and how do their communities see themselves with respect to their cities and places?
- What are the civic institutions of Islamic cities, and ideas of patronage past and present?
- How has pluralism played a part in historic Islamic cities, and how have Muslim communities found a place in the West today?
- What opportunities and challenges face the preservation of Islamic built heritage?

Each of the four main sessions will be divided into 2 hour-long segments. The first segment will be dedicated to one key theme historically connected to the Islamic city, while the second hour will take up a contemporary issue related to that theme. Typically, the main instructor will speak during the first hour, and a guest specialist will speak during the second.

The film evening will follow a slightly different structure: it will consist of a film screening followed by a discussion.

### **Pedagogy:**

This course has been specially developed for those who are not specialists in urbanism of the Islamic world, but who have an interest in the subject, and seek to learn by exposure to a wide range of examples, historic and contemporary. Each of the four sessions will be divided up into two segments – the primary instructor would teach the first hour (giving a visual presentation for 45 minutes followed by 15 minutes of questions and answers, and then following a 15 minute break the guest lecturer would give a presentation for 45 minutes followed by a question and answer period of the same length. In general, the first hour would focus more on history, while the second hour would focus more on the contemporary.

Extra activities to be included as part of the course:

- If possible, the third session will take place in a London Mosque, so that the audience has the chance to experience an Islamic building other than the Aga Khan Centre.
- A tour of the Aga Khan Centre
- A film screening – this will either be a documentary or series of documentaries about the heritage of the Islamic World, or a film which captures the spirit of an Islamic city in its broadest sense, without necessary being a documentary. Possible examples include: West Beirut, (Lebanon). The Last Days of the City (Cairo, Egypt), Istanbul Tales (Istanbul/Turkey), Timbuktu (Mali).

### **Instructor(s):**

**Seif El Rashidi** will be the principal instructor, speaking in the first hour of each main session. Seif El Rashidi's expertise is in urban conservation, heritage management, interpretation and engagement around history of art and architecture, especially of the Islamic world. He is currently the project manager for the 'Layers of London' ([www.layersoflondon.org](http://www.layersoflondon.org)), which enables public engagement with London's heritage through knowledge-sharing, and is also the director of The Barakat Trust. ([www.barakat.org](http://www.barakat.org)) Seif previously managed the Magna Carta Programme at Salisbury Cathedral (2014-2016) and Durham World Heritage Site (2008-2014). Prior to that, he worked for the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's Historic Cities Programme (1997-2008) and for Ahmad Hamid Architects (1995-1997), both in Cairo. Seif has lectured and written about the

preservation of historic cities in a wide range of contexts and has been a guest lecturer on Durham University's International Heritage Management Master's Degree since 2012.

In addition, there will be a number of guest lecturers. These include **Ahmad Hamid**, architect, and **Shahed Saleem**, author of *The British Mosque*.

# Outline

## **1. (5 March 2019) An Exploration of the Islamic City**

What makes an Islamic city Islamic? What are its distinctive features and those that it shares with cities in other civilisational regions? How do contemporary architects respond to their history?

### **First Hour**

#### **Introductory Session**

What makes an Islamic city Islamic? How are cities across the Islamic world similar or different from each other? How did Islamic cities change across time? In what ways have they stayed the same?

### **Second Hour**

#### **Ahmad Hamid Architect – Spirit Not Letter: My work inspired by the principles of Islamic architecture**

Ahmad Hamid is a practising architect based in Egypt.

## **2. (12 March 2019) Film Evening – More than Just Physical: People and Identities, Capturing the Intangible**

### **First Hour**

#### **Film and Discussion**

Oliver Wilkins (<http://www.oliverwilkins.com/>) will discuss documentaries as a tool for communities to reflect on their cultural heritage.

#### **Tour of the Aga Khan Centre**

## **3. (19 March 2019 ) Sacred and Secular**

The second main session will explore the sacred as well as secular dimensions of cities across the Muslim world and of how patronage has shaped them historically and continues to do so today. The session will aim to broaden the understanding of what an Islamic City is beyond a general idea of just a city with mosques and minarets.

### **First Hour**

#### **Patrons and Patronage, the Construction of Civic Buildings across the Muslim World**

### **Second Hour**

#### **Patrons and Patronage Today**

## **4. (26 March 2019) Pluralism and the Islamic City**

The third main session will consider pluralism in Islamic cities and within contemporary Muslim communities in the West.

### **First Hour**

#### **The Multi-Religious Tapestry of the Traditional Islamic City**

### **Second Hour**

#### **Building for and by Muslims in the West Today**

**Shahed Saleem** will talk about his experience of building mosques in the UK, in the context of contemporary Mosque building in the UK.

## **5. (2 April 2019 ) The Preservation of Islamic Cities**

The fourth and final main session will explore how historic Islamic cities are being preserved, rehabilitated and revitalised.

### **First Hour**

#### **Challenges and Opportunities: Recent Projects and Experiences; Historic Attitudes towards Preservation, the Work of the AKTC**

### **Second Hour**

#### **The Preservation and Renewal of Heritage Building Skills**

# Session Details (First Hour)

## **Session 1: What Are Islamic Cities and How Have They Changed?**

What makes historic Islamic cities Islamic? How are they different or similar to historic cities elsewhere and how do they differ from new urban environments in the Muslim world? Four types of examples will be explored: i) an example of an Islamic city in North Africa (Fez/Marrakesh); ii) an example of an Islamic City today in a non-Islamic context that still retains a strong Islamic identity, iii) an example of an Islamic city that wasn't originally Islamic (Istanbul) and iv) an example of a planned Islamic city (Isfahan).

How cities in the Muslim world have changed over recent decades and the socio-economic and political factors driving these changes.

## **Session 2: Reflecting on People and Identities in the Islamic City**

Cities are not places, but networks of people. This session captures 'life' in places in the Islamic World seen through the medium of film, focusing on the contemporary.

## **Session 3: Sacred and Secular Patronage in the Islamic City**

*Sacred:* How does the same feature differ from one place to another?: A Mosque in Mali, in Iran, and in Turkey. Building community institutions out of piety: schools, water fountains, hospitals, water-troughs.

*Secular:* How non-religious buildings are representative of Islamic culture (Houses in the Islamic world – Samarkand, Aleppo. Baths: Turkey, Egypt, Morocco). The bath and its function.

Patronage and patrons: The Fatimids and the idea of a ceremonial city; Aleppo as an example of urban continuity, Sultan Hassan (outdoing legendary buildings elsewhere); 19<sup>th</sup> century Istanbul; the great buildings of Isfahan; Sultan Qaboos, Oman (building anew); The custodianship of Mecca and Medina and the relationship between preserving buildings and preserving traditions.

The work of His Highness the Aga Khan across the world (nurturing the process of building upon the past, to be picked up again in Session 4).

## **Session 4: The Pluralistic Islamic City**

The cities of the Muslim world as crucibles of cultural pluralism. Jerusalem— looking at the link between Islamic cities and the urbanism of the other Abrahamic faiths. Jewish and Christian quarters, and Jewish and Christian architects. In India, the Hindu influence on Islamic urbanism.

## **Session 5: Revitalising the Islamic City**

This final session will explore the challenges of conserving and revitalising Islamic Cities, evoking both successes and failures and highlighting the distinct yet converging contributions of different organisations and stakeholders, notably the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme, the needs and aspirations of local communities and the effects both positive and negative of tourism as a driving force. The session will also link these impacts to issues of urban sustainability in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.