

In Search of the ‘Time-less’ in Architecture

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Abstract

While the use of geometry as surface decoration in Islamic architecture is evident and well documented, an aspect about which not enough is known and understood is the use of geometry in the design of the buildings themselves. This paper will, therefore, endeavour to focus on the use of geometry in the ordering and design of the architecture – plan, elevation and section. In addition it does so from the point of view of a practising architect attempting to develop ways of employing these methods in contemporary practice, based not only on a knowledge of their traditional use but also their artistic function – which is to create an architecture which reflects something of the ‘time-less’ quality of all great art.

This paper consists of an Introduction, briefly outlining the relevance of the study of traditional architecture and what we can learn from it. Part I gives the theoretical and philosophical background to the design principles of Islamic architecture. Part II offers a theoretical model for looking at traditional architecture in terms of a *language* with a *grammar* and a *vocabulary* in the context of which the *principles* of design and practical *methods* of geometry are employed. Part III gives a Historical Overview of the connection between Architecture and Geometry. Part IV consists of a presentation of geometric methods used in Islamic Architecture taking Timurid architecture of Iran and Turan as a case-study. In Part V, a Mughal building and a Master-mason’s plan drawing of a mosque are analysed in the light of the methods discussed in the preceding section. In conclusion, in Part VI a contemporary project of a community mosque in Lahore is presented, where some of the methods studied are applied.

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