

Review Essay

A Question of Presence and Agency: Mosques in the West, North and South

Al Rashid Mosque:
Building Canadian Muslim Communities
Earle H. Waugh
Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2018. 258 pages.

Rebuilding Islam in Contemporary Spain:
The Politics of Mosque Establishment, 1976-2013
Avi Astor
Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2017. 204 pages.

The British Mosque: An Architectural and Social History
Shahed Saleem
Swindon: Historic England, 2018. 293 pages.

Angelo Candalepas Architecture in Detail No1:
Australian Islamic Mission
*Angelo Candalepas, Adrian Curtin, Maryam Gusheh,
Zachariah Matthews*
Melbourne: Uro Publications, 2018. 74 pages.

Beyond aesthetics or style, the mosque, as a building type, is latent with meaning for its users and perception by others. Today the mosque, more

than at any other time in recent history, is in question. The mosque is subjected to questions of legitimacy of presence, of potential political meaning, of imagined threat, and is sometimes undermined by local bylaws created to legislate some level of xenophobia through bureaucratic hurdles. Creating a mosque in predominantly non-Muslim societies is an act of proclaiming presence.

The vast majority of scholarship on mosque architecture is focused on historical documentation in the Middle East and the extents of historical Islam. Scholarship on contemporary mosque architecture mostly covers mosques in predominantly Muslim countries; however, in the past few decades, publications—such as *Mosque Manifesto: Propositions for Spaces of Coexistence* by Azra Akšamija; *Islamic Architecture on the Move: Motion and Modernity*, edited by Christiane Gruber (see review essay *AJISS* 34, no. 3:113-124); *The Mosque: Political, Architectural, and Social Transformations*, by Ergun Erkocu and Cihan Bugdaci (reviewed in *AJISS* 27, no. 4 [Fall 2010]) and *Design Criteria for Mosques and Islamic Centres: Art, Architecture and Worship*, by Akel Kahera (reviewed in *AJISS* 27, no. 3 [Summer 2010]), and others—have evaluated the place and role of mosques in geographies where Muslims are in the minority, namely in European countries and in the United States.

New scholarship, covered by the books in this review essay, includes studies of mosques in the UK, Canada, Spain, and Australia and demonstrate that the proclamation of presence of the architecture of the mosque works on a number of levels. The exterior façade, of course, functions to symbolize some sort of landmark and identity in a variety of possible architectural languages. However, the interior is where the differences truly lie between the mosque as constructed in the Muslim world and those constructed outside of the Muslim world. For minority communities, the mosque program frequently includes facilities for education, recreation, festive gathering and dining, in addition to other specific programs such as funeral preparation, food bank collection, and so forth. The contemporary mosque in the non-Muslim world, regardless of how west, north, or south it is located, is loaded with more programmatic demand in addition to the politics of creating presence and identity in a perceived foreign landscape.

Within the earliest centuries of Islam, Muslims lived as far west as Spain and as far East as China. In the past century, Muslims have migrated and converted as far north as Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, and Canada and as far south as Australia. The histories of Muslims forming community

in these countries followed similar patterns of gathering in borrowed spaces, homes, converting space, and eventually the creation of purpose-built mosques. These architectural configurations represent the iterative aspirations to create presence and have a safe space of gathering and community.

The four books in this review essay have each approached the specificity of this subject in different ways. Although there is no universal method to understand the architecture of mosque usage and impact of design, it is important to recognize that this building type is informed by the community that uses it, and in turn, the architecture affects how it is used.

Al Rashid Mosque: Building Canadian Muslim Communities by Earle H. Waugh tells the story of the first Muslims in Canada (who arrived in the late nineteenth century), the founding of the first mosque in the country, and the iterative growth of the specific Muslim community in Edmonton to expand to other, newer facilities. The book is predominantly text with some black and white photographs. *Rebuilding Islam in Contemporary Spain: The Politics of Mosque Establishment, 1976-2013* by Avi Astor traces forty years of contemporary mosques in Spain with a focus on the social and local processes. The book is largely text with some black and white images, maps and graphs, and some statistics. There are eight central pages with color photographs of mosques and users. *The British Mosque: An Architectural and Social History* by Shahed Saleem is slightly larger in format and focusses much more on an architectural survey of 130 years of mosque construction in the UK. The text is interspersed regularly with architectural drawings and photographs, the majority of which are in full color. *Angelo Candalepas Architecture in Detail No1: Australian Islamic Mission* with essays by Angelo Candalepas, Adrian Curtin, Maryam Gusheh, and Zachariah Matthews documents the development, design, and completion of one mosque in Australia. This is a larger format book, much slimmer than the rest and with much more emphasis on the visual power of architectural drawings, sketches, and photographs of the completed mosque.

In *Al Rashid Mosque* and *Rebuilding Islam in Contemporary Spain* the author's backgrounds are in history and social sciences, and thus both books (although about buildings) are largely text-based and the analysis is socio-cultural rather than architectural, with only a few photographs of the buildings in questions. In *The British Mosque* and *Australian Islamic Mission* the authors' backgrounds are architectural and thus the focus of analysis in both of these books is on building elements; both of these books

are larger in format and include architectural drawings in addition to ample photographs of the interior and exterior of the mosques.

Waugh's long history with the Edmonton Muslim community is evident in the extensive detailing of the history of the first Muslims in Canada, focussing on Edmonton, Alberta, and the construction of mosque spaces in that prairie city. The book is organized into five chapters with an epilogue. Chapter One ("Leaving for Rihla") outlines the first Muslims of the city, from two Scottish converts in the nineteenth century to the founding of the Muslim community in Edmonton as it grew through immigrants migrating in the 1850s-1930s. Chapter Two ("The Foundations of Al Rashid") recounts the creation of the first purpose-built mosque in Canada, which was completed in 1938, as well as its patronage by a mix of local Muslims, local government, and members of other faiths. This mosque became a place of social and cultural as much as religious gathering, and the chapter outlines the important role it played until 1970. Chapter Three ("The Evolution of a Canadian Mosque Tradition") chronologically (1975-2005) follows the expansion of the Muslim community beyond the capacity of the first mosque, its physical relocation, and ultimately the creation of a new Al Rashid mosque on a new, much larger property, now with facilities to accommodate teaching, recreation, and so forth. Chapter Four ("Conserving a Canadian Islamic Community During Adversity") recounts the difficulties of the community after 9/11, from 2001-2010. The utopian ideal of the first Al Rashid, supported and used by a broad spectrum from the Edmonton community, became a distant memory, as the presence of the mosque became a target where Muslims needed to renegotiate and re-establish (sometimes daily) the legitimacy of their presence. Chapter 5 ("Transition into the Future") looks at 2010 and beyond and outlines the proactive and expansive activities of the Al Rashid mosque, which reach many mosques throughout the province and participate in activities and groups with far reaching impact. The book concludes with an Epilogue summarizing the iconic quality of Al Rashid, its community, and its journey.

The text of *Al Rashid Mosque* reads clearly, with attention to the nuances of the narratives recollected by past and current users and available documentation. Waugh uses clear language accessible to the novice; the depth of information and comprehensive collection sheds new light for those who have studied the material before. Although it is about architectural spaces, the text is not written with a focus on architectural elements beyond those that consequentially arise in the narrative, nor is its analysis primarily with respect to spaces. Focussed on the story of one mosque in two building

iterations, the book encapsulates in many ways the foundational story for mosque building in Canada; it hints at the effect of this pioneering effort but does not go further to indicate the expansion or numbers of mosques across the country for further context.

Rebuilding Islam in Contemporary Spain by Avi Astor, like Waugh's book, is predominantly textual history about architecture. The focus is on the social, community, and political *perceptions* of mosque building in Spain. The seven chapters of the book delve into the detailed nuances of the contentious issue. The framework of the book takes up perceptions from the outside, looking in to understand why building mosques in Spain is so problematic. In the center of the book there are eight pages with exterior photographs of some of the mosques discussed in the book, images of Muslims praying outside, reproductions of anti-Muslim and anti-mosque rhetoric in the media, and images of protests against mosques. The author relies heavily on interviews of residents who live around mosques; only a small portion of the interviews are with mosque members, and the framework for those interviews revolves around defensive justification of the mosque. In a country with over 1.9 million Muslims and 1400 mosques, the patterns identified and focus of the book is on the perception of the mosque and mosque building as a problematic insertion in the fabric of six areas in Madrid and Catalonia. The ample statistics throughout trace the negative-to-positive perception of residents regarding the mosque presence in their neighbourhood; maps locate the mosques and economic densities of residents.

Chapter One ("Reviving al-Andalus") includes the process of reincorporation of Muslims into Spain since their 1502 expulsion, through the "prism of conflict and construction of mosques". The focus, from the beginning of the book, is from this vantage of perceived conflict. The chosen time period to study the reincorporation of Muslims is the 1980s–1990s and focuses on the Spanish government's welcoming of Arab financing of five mosques (in Madrid, Valencia, Marbella, and Malaga). The only notation regarding the architecture of these mosques is that the ample financing supported the construction of edifices that expressed historical references. Chapter Two ("From Celebration to Stigmatization") picks up the chronological study of mosque building in the country in the 1990s and the growing numbers of immigrants from North Africa. The author notes that at this time Islam is framed as a social problem to be managed and controlled, coinciding with the growth of anti-mosque campaigns in various parts of the country and a rise in general anti-immigration sentiment. A

few store-front mosques are briefly mentioned but the focus of the chapter lies in the quantity and location of anti-mosque campaigns from 1990-2013 (map on page 41). Chapter Three (“Migration, Urbanization and Social Stratification in Catalonia”) discusses the recent controversies over proposed mosque construction in Catalonia. The author argues that existing marginalization of working-class neighbourhoods greatly contributed to the anti-Muslim sentiment and the increased tensions with ghettoized Muslim enclaves. The disillusionment of the marginalized working class (mostly Spanish migrants from other parts of the country) and the enduring effects of inequality and foreign immigration have exacerbated the situation and have amplified xenophobic public protest against proposed mosque establishment.

Chapter Four (“Urban Marginality and Anti-Mosque Mobilization”) delves into further details covered in the previous chapters and argues that the preconceptions and campaigns against mosques were expressive of marginalized communities contesting neglect by public institutions and social injustices. The tension is thus exploited by politicians. There is a brief discussion of three specific mosques: the problems of attempted expansion beyond apartment conversion, the abrupt shutdown of one of the mosques by the government, and the need for a space and the resultant prayer sessions in the street. There is much effort devoted to interviewing people about how they feel about mosques but little effort interviewing Muslim users of the mosques. Chapter Five (“Urban Privilege and Neighbourhood Defense”) focuses, again, on the contestation of mosques in two neighbourhoods of Barcelona in order to preserve boundaries and shield them from social stigma and the perceived urban problems associated with immigration and diversification. The focus of the narrative and statistics is on the protests regarding the establishment and expansion of a mosque in a converted space. Chapter Six (“A Point of Comparison: The Case of Madrid”) comparatively considers why there is a low incidence of anti-mosque campaigns in Madrid. The author argues that there are fewer social and spatial divisions and that the growth of other foreign groups in Madrid reduced the North African “iconic otherness” prevalent in Catalonia. The chapter starts with a summary of the 2004 train attacks and interviews Muslims expressing fear of reprisals and discrimination after the attacks. Chapter Seven, “From the Social to the Legislative Realm,” explores the processes that led the Catalonia’s Republic Left Party to draw a law regulating all centres of worship in 2009. This was intended to reduce conflicts over mosques and applies to all places of worship. In response to this, the Spanish central government

developed other regulations on places of worship in 2013 (“the Law of Local Administration Rationalization and Sustainability,” 135) which intended to preempt other Spanish regions from passing laws similar to Catalonia’s that create bureaucratic hurdles to the establishment of places of worship. The concluding chapter summarizes the findings of the book and reiterates the debates of accommodating Muslims and others. Written in the first person, the author reflects on meso-level factors and briefly mentions new mosque projects underway. The book ends with a table of the location and year of anti-mosque protests throughout the country (149).

Rebuilding Islam in Contemporary Spain is written in clear but very academic language, with a strong social scientific analysis utilizing statistics and figures to trace patterns of the *perception* of mosques by non-Muslims. It does not include much anecdotal or narrative material other than quotes from those interviewed. For a book about mosques and Muslims, very little is directly investigated about either. The internal voices of the Muslim communities in Spain are not clear beyond apologetic justifications, nor are their community initiatives, aspirations, or outreach discussed. Once again, this is a book about the perception of Muslims, rather than Muslims themselves. Likewise, this is a book about the perception of mosques; what scant reference there is to architecture is reserved for brief mention of external elements of a few sites. In a book about a building type, the agency and nuances of design decisions—the types of materials, the size, the programming, the location, the approach, the architectural language—need to be at least acknowledged if not analyzed. Links between architectural design and spaces and usage by patrons and, yes, perception of the building are very real. Although this book tackles the difficult subject of cultural and systemic xenophobia regarding mosque construction in an entire country, it only tells a small part of the story.

The following two books are architectural in their framework and intended audience with a focus on the spatial and tectonic qualities of mosques. *The British Mosque* in eight chapters surveys 130 years of mosques in the country. The nearly full-color, glossy publication is larger in size, allowing for ample photographic and drawing documentation. Each chapter refers to a number of case study mosques that exemplify the theme focused on in the chapter. Chapter One (“Introduction: Mosques and Muslims in Britain”) outlines the various terms and requirements of the faith, architecture elements typically found in mosques, and the typology of ‘house mosque’, ‘conversion’, and ‘purpose-built’. The author utilized databases such as English Heritage/Historic England and Muslims in Britain to identify over

1300 mosques in the country, using aerial images to determine the type of the mosque, and concluded that 45% of mosques in Britain were 'house mosques', 39% were in converted spaces, and that 16% (approximately 200 mosques) were purpose-built.

Chapter Two ("The First Mosques") discusses the first house mosque in Liverpool (est. 1889), the purpose-built Woking mosque (est. 1926), and two other mosques (est. 1943 and 1969, respectively). The emphasis of the analysis is on the architectural idiom utilized, from orientalist expressionism to post-war modernist styles. Chapter Three ("Adaptation and Transformation: A New Era of Mosque-making") centres on the period of influx of immigrants from the Indian Subcontinent as a result of decolonization and partition of India. It explores eight case studies built in 1958-1990. Like in the rest of the book, analysis of the mosque spaces always includes direct reference to architectural elements seen in the accompanying photographs and reference to spatial sequences seen in the architectural drawings. The text summary for each mosque notes historical facts and information about the community that established and uses the mosque. This is both informative and useful throughout the book, allowing for clear comparison by the reader, and renders the author's analysis clearly.

Chapter Four ("Adaptation and Transformation: A New Era of Mosque-making") looks at seven case studies from 1970-2001 that demonstrated grassroots founding and establishment, and delves into the community efforts and effects of this type of mosque foundation. Chapter Five ("Making Muslim Landmarks and Institutions") spotlights three purpose-built examples of large mosques considered landmarks of national and international significance, as built from 1977-2004: the London Central mosque in Regent's Park, the Ismaili Centre, and the East London Mosque. Chapter Six ("New Century, New Historicism") reviews seven case studies of mosques established from the 1990s to 2010 that exemplify the historicist approach of "Islamic architectural tropes". Chapter Seven ("New Narratives") looks at five case studies that exemplify a distinct shift in mosque design utilizing contemporary architectural language and reinterpreting patterned ornamentation on a large scale. The mosques covered in this chapter range from 2000-2017 and certainly present an interesting direction of mosque conversions and purpose-built approaches. The conclusive summary, Chapter Eight ("Surveying the Landscape: 130 Years of the Mosque in Britain"), reviews social and architectural debates underscoring the role of mosques in immigration and settlement as well as the discontent of design approaches regarding aesthetics and identity. The

book concludes with two appendixes; the first covers 25 additional case studies exemplifying different types of mosques and the second contains seven maps with locations of the mosques and density of the Muslim population in each area.

This book goes a long way toward documenting patterns and types of mosques in Britain, covering 34 mosques in some depth and summarizing an additional 25. With over 1300 mosques in the country, this book is more of a framework than a comprehensive study and certainly opens the door for further research and exploration. The architectural drawings, when provided, are reproduced clearly. Further synthesized study could begin to analyze the qualities and proportions of these mosque spaces and impact of community engagement.

Angelo Candalepas Architecture in Detail No1: Australian Islamic Mission by Angelo Candalepas, Adrian Curtin, Maryam Gusheh, Zachariah Matthews is a focussed study of one mosque project in Australia. The large format, slim volume is divided into seven sections, each written by a different author. The first section, just two pages long (“The History of the Australian Islamic Mission and Design Brief”), is written by former mosque president and current mosque vice-president, Dr. Zachariah Matthews, and outlines the growth of the community from borrowed and rented spaces to conversion to the purpose-built mosque. The second section (“Architect’s Statement”) is authored by the architect of the project, Angelo Candalepas, who outlines his interest in the design of spiritual spaces and in this particular project. Candalepas expressed his keen desire to reinterpret Islamic geometries and to sculpt a space animated by light. The chapter is filled with idea and design sketches and with photographs of the complete project emphasizing approach, entry, and craftsmanship of the wood and concrete materials utilized. The third section (“From Prayer Hall to a Contemporary Mosque”), by Maryam Gusheh, six pages long, briefly analyzes the unique qualities of this mosque; it includes the architect’s sketches and photographs focussed on the sculptural qualities of the 102 concrete partial domes and the large stepped concrete dome. The fourth section (“Mosque Concrete”), by Adrian Curtin, eight pages long, documents the process of constructing the concrete domes onsite, including formwork and reinforcements. It is rare that a construction process is so well documented or shared, and is exemplary of the craftsmanship pursued by the architect and client. The fifth section is a photographic essay by Rory Gardiner, sixteen pages of extraordinary architectural photography of moments in the mosque, from approach and entry to sculpted details. The final two sections

of the book include the full set of architectural drawings and the detailed construction drawings for the concrete elements.

This is a comprehensive reflection on the history and creation of one mosque by community members, experts in the field, and the architect. The efforts made through the design process to focus on quality and craftsmanship is evident in the creation of this monograph. Uniquely expressing both the architectural qualities and the community's history and aspirations, this book is an exemplary documentation of the newly constructed Australian Islamic Mission in Punchbowl (2017), and will be of interest to both the specialist, the general interest reader, and the novice.

The latest in research in contemporary mosques across the world, these four books are all valuable contributions to scholarship in this subject matter. In *Al Rashid Mosque* the founding purpose-built mosque in Canada is discussed in great detail, as are the iterations of the spaces created by this community and the far-reaching impact of this mosque for the community and for the country. The author's close connection with the community for decades and familiarity with generations of Muslims who have used this mosque greatly added to this work to nuance the impact of creating a mosque space in the diaspora. It includes some discussions of the spatial qualities of the mosque and of the design process for the following iteration of the building. In *Rebuilding Islam in Contemporary Spain* the relentless focus on the anti-mosque campaigns reads clearly as a description of the perceptions of the mosque in two major regions in the country. Although about a building type, very little attention is paid to the specific qualities and agencies inherent in the architecture of the mosque and the connections of spatial design to usage and perception. In *The British Mosque* a sample of 34 mosques (from the 1300 in the country) is analyzed with some depth with respect to typology (house or other conversion, or purpose-built); architectural elements and drawings are included. A further 25 mosques are noted in the appendix. The book serves to establish a framework and initial study of the mosques in the country, an effort that ideally will be continued by other scholars. The comprehensive nature of the study of each mosque starts to identify certain patterns of settlement and identity creation, from the reliance on historical tropes to creating new contemporary language. In *Australian Islamic Mission* the detailed focus on a single mosque—including mosque community members, history of its formation and iterations, architectural design conception, and craftsmanship in construction—offers a holistic study of a particular diaspora Muslim community, their

aspirations and struggles translated carefully into an architecture that in turn influences the quality and quantity of community engagement.

Both *Al Rashid* and *Australian Islamic Mission* read easily because of their clear recognition and inclusion of users' voices in the narrative. Both would be of interest to the expert and the novice interested in the diaspora of Muslims in Canada and Australia. *The Mosques of Britain* is clearly written, with a disciplined systematic focus to analyze and catalogue particular mosques, and would be of interest to academics in the field of Islam in the UK and of mosque architecture. *Rebuilding Islam in Contemporary Spain* would be of interest to advanced researchers or experts interested in the fields of anti-Muslim rhetoric in Europe.

Stories of Muslim communities—of their associated identities, contentions, and their manifestation in the built form of mosques—are multi-faceted and ultimately intertwined. The creation of mosques in the Muslim diaspora in the West, North, or South indeed proclaim identity but serve much more than landmark edifices; they have the agency of the communities that depend on them. The presence of Muslims and mosques reflect community needs and aspirations, socio-political contexts and cultures, all of which impact and are impacted by the specific qualities of the architecture of the converted or purpose-built mosque.

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