International Journal of Islamic Architecture

International Journal of Islamic Architecture

AIMS AND SCOPE

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While the main focus is on architecture, papers that explore architecture from other disciplinary perspectives, such as art, history, archeology, anthropology, culture, spirituality, religion and economics are also welcome. The journal is specifically interested in contemporary architecture and urban design in relation to social and cultural history, geography, politics, aesthetics, technology and conservation. Spanning across cultures and disciplines, IJIA seeks to analyze and explain issues related to the built environment throughout the regions covered. The audience of this journal includes both practitioners and scholars.

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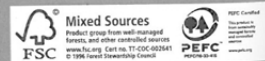*Associate Editor*
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IJIA publishes *Design in Practice* articles that focus on the contemporary practice of architecture, urban planning and landscape design in the Islamic world, which includes the Middle East, parts of Africa and Asia, and also more recent migratory geographies. In these articles, the issues and complexities of the day-to-day practice of architecture are studied from contextual, conceptual and critical perspectives.

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Cultivating Convergence: The First Islamic Cemetery in Vorarlberg, Austria

Abstract

The Altach Islamic cemetery, winner of the 2013 Aga Khan Award, exemplifies how Islamic funerary architecture can contribute to nurturing pluralism in Western Europe. This newly opened cemetery is part of a wider trend in European funerary architecture; the increasing number of Islamic cemeteries reveals the contemporary dynamics of Europe's cultural and religious diversification. While this new trend provides an opportunity to broaden the scope of representation for Islam in the West, most of the new Islamic cemeteries have been designed mainly to fulfil functional necessities, neglecting an opportunity to shape an intercultural dialogue from an architectural standpoint. In this context, the Altach Islamic cemetery demonstrates a new approach to creating Islamic architecture in non-Islamic environments that fosters cultural convergence. By emphasizing the dialogic dimensions of architecture through design, implementation and public mediation, this approach allows for an understanding of architecture as a medium for community-making and as a bridge between cultures.

Keywords

Islamic architecture
cemetery
integration
identity
pluralism
Islam in the West
Aga Khan Award

## Cultivating Convergence: The Islamic Cemetery in Altach, Austria

'Homeland is the place where we would like to find the final resting.'
Dr Fuat Sanaç, June 3, 2012

With these words, Fuat Sanaç, the president of the Islamic Religious Community of Austria, addressed several hundred people at the inauguration of the newly built Islamic cemetery in Altach, Vorarlberg.[1] Describing what

this project means for Muslim immigrants in Austria, Sanaç's opening remarks point to the shifting conceptions of homeland for Muslim diasporic communities in their adopted country, and more notably, the remarks show that architecture can facilitate that shift.

For many, the cemetery's openness and design, which is grounded in both Islamic and local building traditions, bear witness to a constructive dialogue between cultures [Figure 1].[2] This essay probes the architectural parameters that shape such a dialogue, examining how Islamic funerary architecture can contribute to cultivating pluralism in Europe. Islamic cemeteries represent an opportunity to widen the scope of representation for Islam in the West beyond the mosque. This opportunity necessitates new approaches to creating Islamic architecture in non-Islamic environments that would be sensitive to the local context and the needs of Muslim immigrants who have found a new homeland.[3] While most of the new Islamic cemeteries in Western Europe are focused on fulfilling the functional requirements of Islamic burial, the Altach cemetery, I argue, reveals a new route by creating a bridge between cultures and fostering intercultural exchange.
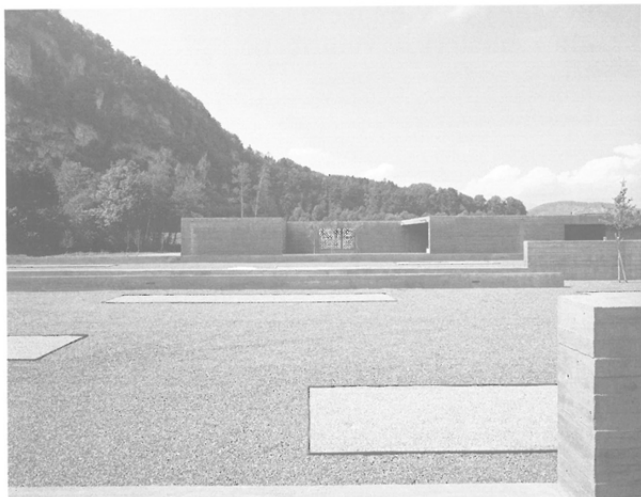
Adolf Bereuter.

Figure 1: The Islamic cemetery in Altach, Austria, 2012. Located along the federal road L190 between the municipalities of Hohenems and Götzis, the facility can accommodate approximately 700 graves; on its grounds there is also a structure for the ritual washing of the dead, as well as a small prayer space.

The cemetery was designed by the architect Bernardo Bader from the Bregenz Forest region of Vorarlberg, and the interior prayer space was conceived by the Sarajevo-born Austrian Muslim artist and architectural historian Azra Aksamija, the present author.[4] The cemetery was completed in late 2011, nine years after the initial idea was born. The large amount of interest in the project has persisted even a year after the inauguration – the mayor of Altach, Gottfried Brändle, has given more than sixty guided tours.

It is even more astonishing that, throughout the entire implementation process, there have been no protests or media campaigns against the construction of this cemetery. This is very unusual, given that the visibility of Islam in the context of the immigration and integration politics in Austria represents a sensitive issue and that conflicts in response to construction of new mosques and Islamic cemeteries in Western Europe are very probable.[5] The Islamic cemetery in Altach was not only spared from conflicts, but it also found major international recognition in both Islamic and non-Islamic contexts, receiving the International Piranesi Award in 2012, the Austrian Client Award 2013 and the highly prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2013.[6]

The reasons for the success of this project are manifold and, as I intend to explain in this essay, have to do with the ways in which the project has been communicated to the public and the ways in which it functions as a form of intercultural communication.

Root-taking in a New Homeland

State law has recognized the existence of Muslim religious communities in Austria for over a hundred years, but only recently have burials according to Islamic rituals become possible. An Islamic burial rite helps the mourning community to overcome its loss by placing emphasis on the spiritual journey of the deceased to the afterlife, rather than mourning the physical loss of the beloved person. Inhumation burials are the only form of burial in Islam, which, according to belief, allows for a possible resurrection on Judgment Day.[7] The deceased is prepared for the burial through a ritual washing conducted by specialized personnel, and then wrapped in simple white cotton sheets. To facilitate quick decay, the grave is constructed in such a way that the soil can touch the corpse. No coffins are used – the corpse is laid directly on wooden planks placed in the grave hole. This is very different from burials in Europe and the United States, where the use of coffins is at times obligatory. Finally, the family and friends of the deceased accompany the deceased person's 'journey' to the hereafter with collective prayers. The corpses and graves are oriented towards Mecca. Burial within a community of Muslims is also important; this practice of burial within one's own religious community is common to other cultures, as evident, for example, from the developments in European funerary architecture. Since the end of the nineteenth century, communal cemeteries in European cities with a religiously mixed population have witnessed a proliferation of cemeteries with distinct grave fields for their Catholic, Protestant and Jewish communities.[8]

The Islamic cemetery in Altach is the first of its kind constructed in the western Austrian province of Vorarlberg.[9] It is the second Islamic cemetery ever constructed in the whole of Austria; the first was built in Vienna in 2008. The two cemeteries differ in their administrative status: the Islamic cemetery in Vienna is a confessional cemetery, run by the Islamic Religious Community of Austria, whereas the Islamic cemetery at Altach is a municipal cemetery

managed by the city of Altach for the different communities of the Vorarlberg region. Before these cemeteries, Austrian municipal cemeteries were not built to accommodate Islamic funerals, making it necessary to transport the dead (after a long, expensive and bureaucratically complex process) to their countries of origin.

The Altach cemetery serves the 39,000 Muslims who live in the 96 communities of Vorarlberg (10 per cent of the local population).[10] The Muslim community in Vorarlberg is predominantly comprised of Turkish immigrants who came to Vorarlberg in the 1960s as 'migrant workers', Bosnian Muslims who sought refuge in Austria during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s and immigrants from Chechnya and North African countries who came to the region in the last two decades.[11] The assumption held in 1960s Austria that these migrant workers would one day return to their countries of origin has long been proven wrong. Austria has now become home to many Muslim immigrants; their third- and fourth-generation descendants have become part of the culturally heterogeneous Austrian population. The immigrants' decision to bury their dead in Austria, rather than in the country of their origin, points towards the process of 'root-taking' in the adopted country.

The Altach cemetery is part of the ongoing processes of Europe's social and cultural diversification, which is manifested in the increasing number of Islamic cemeteries. The oldest Islamic cemeteries in Germany and the United Kingdom date back to the nineteenth century, and some cemeteries in Western Europe have facilitated special burial grounds for Muslims.[12] The building of separate Islamic cemeteries, however, represents a novel phenomenon in Western European funerary architecture. Most of them opened in the past ten years, such as the one that opened in London in 2002; in Zurich in 2004; in Brøndby, near Copenhagen, in 2006; and in Paris in 2012. These new developments in European funerary architecture provide an opportunity for representation and mediation of Islam in the West. Most of these new Islamic cemeteries, however, have been built to fulfil primarily functional necessities, missing the opportunity to reflect Europe's diversity from an architectural standpoint.[13]

In order to understand how the Altach cemetery takes a lead in addressing the changing notion of Muslims' homeland, we can consider related debates over identity and representation in other realms of Islamic religious architecture. Over the course of the past century, the mosque has been the primary architectural repository of identity and authenticity for those Muslims displaced from their countries of origin.[14] The sociocultural transformation processes in a postcolonial and globalized society and the related fear of loss of identity are architecturally reflected in the attempts to preserve identities by insisting on Islamic signifiers such as domes and minarets. Consider, for example, the mosque in Vienna, Austria (1979), or the more recent Essalam al-Maktoum Mosque in Rotterdam, Netherlands (2006); both are inspired by their monumental Ottoman and Mamluk predecessors.[15]

This traditionalist (and predominant) approach to designing contemporary Islamic architecture has been criticized for its reliance on historic forms that project an image of Islamic cultures as static and 'stuck' in time.[16] The insistence on domes and minarets as the defining elements of the mosque contradicts its fluid architectural definition and historical richness of forms and types.[17] The traditional designs have also been interpreted as an expression of 'homeland nostalgia', lacking an architectural relationship to the local

context.[18] They are often perceived as 'alien' to their surroundings and are interpreted as an indication of the immigrant community's lack of integration in the dominant society.[19] What connects all these criticisms, regardless of the validity of the claims, is the concern for the references chosen to represent contemporary Muslims in the West. Central to this concern is an architecture that can express both the identity of their users and engage the specific cultural context in which it is located.

More and more, architects are taking on this challenging task and investigating different methods to address Muslim immigrants' quest for more visibility under a less negative spotlight. Examples such as the newly built Islamic Centre in Penzberg, Germany (2005) and the design for the mosque and Islamic Centre in Aarhus, Denmark (2007) signal both an Islamic and European identity through a marriage of Islamic ornaments with modernist forms. However, when they are more generic or too abstract, designs such as these often fail to facilitate a sense of identification for their Muslim users.

None of the issues discussed above have affected the funerary architecture in Europe so far, except for the Islamic cemetery in Altach. The cemetery is pioneering in the way it addresses both functional and representational needs, thereby fostering coexistence, a culturally sensitive design, and an inclusive building process that reveals the dialogic dimension of architecture. This last dimension fosters cultural convergence and mutual understanding.

Architecture as a Community-Making Process

The Altach cemetery creates a community through the process of building and public mediation. Before the Altach cemetery was built, there was no other possibility for Muslims of Vorarlberg to be buried there according to their traditions. Hence, a new solution had to be found. One option was to create separate Islamic burial grounds within different municipal cemeteries, which would then be open to burials of Muslims from different Islamic sects. The other option was to create a single Islamic cemetery for all Muslims of Vorarlberg. The solution that was found is new and unique: a separate Islamic cemetery that is managed by a single municipality, as a cooperation of all municipalities in Vorarlberg, and that can be used by Muslims of different confessional affiliations.

This unique solution evolved during an inclusive and participatory process bringing together all Muslims of Vorarlberg who live in 93 of the 96 municipalities of the province, the municipal and regional governments, institutions of the Catholic Church, and minority-culture organizations, such as 'okay. zusammen leben', an informational and advising centre on immigration and integration issues in Vorarlberg.[20] The cemetery project was carried out through an intense mediation led by Eva Grabherr, an academic expert in history and Jewish studies and founding director of okay. zusammen leben, Attila Dinçer, the spokesperson for the Islamic community in Vorarlberg, and the mayor of Altach, Gottfried Brändle, who is an enthusiastic advocate for the cemetery.

In 2004, different Muslim communities and associations of immigrants in Vorarlberg founded 'The Initiative Islamic Cemetery', hoping to create a common burial ground in their adopted homeland. The subsequent process was guided and mediated by Eva Grabherr who, in her role as the director of okay. zusammen leben, commissioned an expert report to demonstrate the need for an Islamic cemetery in the area. This report was created by Elisabeth

Dörler, the envoy to the Islamic community for the Vorarlberg Catholic Church, in 2004.[21]

That same year, the Islamic community of Bregenz, the Islamic Religious Community of Austria and 'The Initiative Islamic Cemetery' filed an application with the Vorarlberg Provincial Government for the construction of the cemetery. The Association of Local Authorities in Vorarlberg issued a recommendation document for the cemetery in 2005. The next step was to find an adequate site – not an easy task given the politically sensitive debate about the presence of Islam in Austria. The Municipality of Altach voluntarily approached the project initiators to offer them a plot, which the Association of Local Authorities in Vorarlberg purchased in 2006.

Subsequently, an invitation-only architectural idea competition was launched, and the winning project was designed by Bernardo Bader.[22] Between 2007 and 2010, Bader's office carried out the planning phase and preparatory work on the site.[23] A group of imams from Vorarlberg and a 'construction working group' (Arbeitsgruppe Bau) composed of representatives and experts from the local Islamic communities, selected by communities themselves and invited by Eva Grabherr, assisted in the development of the project and advised planners about the particular ritual requirements for an Islamic cemetery.[24] Azra Akšamija was commissioned to create the interior design of the masjid (mosque).[25] Her concept for a space that bridges different cultures through the qibla (indicating the direction of Mecca) wall and the prayer rugs was implemented in close collaboration with Bader.

Throughout the planning and construction process of the cemetery, there was very little public critique.[26] The few points of critique that were publicly discussed in response to diverse informational events and media reports regarded the following three issues: 1) the fact that a separate Islamic cemetery was to be built was seen by some as a sign that Muslims wanted to separate themselves from their Christian neighbours, while others understood this as a diametrically opposite tendency; 2) the remote location of the cemetery was understood as something that would underscore social exclusion of Muslims from the dominant society; and 3) the original need and reasons articulated for such a large plot of land was seen as unjustified (regardless of the required inhumation burials).[27]

A major constraint on the development of the design was the lack of organizational structures in the local Islamic communities and associations, which made the decision-making process difficult. Executive bodies first needed to be formed and their representatives chosen. The fact that Islamic groups and associations living across 96 communities in the region wanted to jointly realize this project added to the communicational and organizational challenges. The project would have taken far less time had the establishment of these organizational networks and communication channels not been necessary.

The process of mediation and building the cemetery put a spotlight on the organizational structures of the local Muslim groups because the activities of planning, administration and construction required the presence of representative decision-making bodies. On a social level, this project brought together very diverse Islamic groups for a common purpose. The will to share the burial ground necessitated networking and collaboration between people with ideologically diverging positions (i.e. orthodox Sunnis and the Alevis), demonstrating that a building process can stimulate community-making and encourage conciliation.

Converging in Design

From the design perspective, the Islamic cemetery in Altach demonstrates how architecture can inspire a process of finding common ground between different cultures without having to become the same. The subtle simplicity of the cemetery's architecture and its integration with the surrounding nature provide a calm and dignified place for spiritual contemplation and mourning. Bader and his consultants worked with the idea of 'the cemetery as a primordial garden' – a recurring theme across different religious traditions. To create a garden means to demarcate a plot of land from its surroundings for cultivation. This idea was architecturally translated into a lattice-like system of light-red exposed concrete walls of varying heights, embedded in the marshy terrain and enclosing distinct burial areas. The 'finger-shaped' grave fields allow for the ritually correct orientation towards Mecca, as well as for phased occupancy [Figure 2].

The delicate mesh of red concrete walls patterned by formwork surrounds the burial fields and the structural facilities. The cemetery's main entrance is perpendicular to a long outer wall; the visitor is welcomed by an ornamental opening in a wall that bears a wooden lattice featuring Islamic geometric patterns in an octagonal motif. Crossing the threshold, the visitor enters a partially roofed space large enough to accommodate a congregation and a crowd of mourners. This space opens onto the courtyard and is characterized by a lively play of light and shadow [Figure 3]. The position of the openings guides the visitors' gazes towards the burial garden and the hills of the Bregenz Forest that can be seen in the background.

1 Grabanlage
2 Verabschiedungshalle
3 Raum für rituelle Waschung
4 Gebetsraum
5 Parkplätze
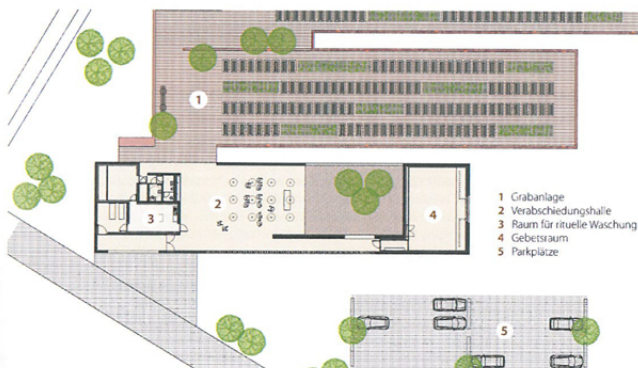
Bernardo Bader.

Figure 2: Plan of the Islamic cemetery in Altach, 2012. The requirements of an Islamic cemetery, such as the ritual washing of the dead and the simple burial, are addressed with an adequate provision of spaces arranged in an open plan. Legend: 1) Burial site, 2) Leave-taking hall, 3) Facility for ritual washing, 4) Prayer space, 5) Parking.
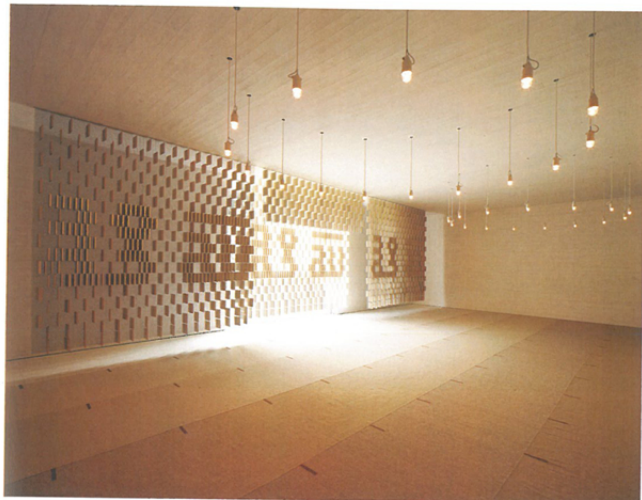
Adolf Bereuter.

Figure 3: The built-in ceiling lights positioned in ring-shaped recesses provide an additional source of light, 2012.

Adolf Bereuter.

Figure 4: The small prayer space within the Islamic cemetery in Altach, Austria, 2012. The qibla wall-curtain and the prayer rugs were designed by the artist Azra Akšamija.

Akšamija's design of the *masjid*'s interior was intended to symbolically and visually connect the different cultures in Vorarlberg though formal and material references to local and Islamic traditions. The *qibla* wall was executed in the form of three stainless steel mesh curtains covered with an array of wooden shingles [Figure 4]. These curtains are positioned parallel to the wall and the *mihrab* (niche indicating Mecca) window at different distances, an arrangement that emulates a prayer niche with the *muqarnas* (three-dimensional ornamental motif). Since the shingle curtains also function as blinds they break the light, making it more dramatic, and underscoring not only the architectural significance of light in mosques, but also the analogy between light and spirit, light (*An-Nūr*) being one of the 99 names of God.

The *qibla* wall was designed to be seen differently by different observers, depending on their position in the space and their angle of vision. Upon entering, the *qibla* wall appears to be a wooden shingle wall, which resonates with Vorarlberg's local architectural tradition. To a moving observer, the pattern of the shingle curtains appears animated. Arranged in the direction of Mecca, the shingles are parallel to the visitor's direction of prayer. Because the shingles are positioned orthogonally to the window, the visitor has a clear view of the park surrounding the cemetery outside, which symbolically reiterates the notion of the *mihrab* as a gateway to the afterlife [Figure 5].

Six prayer rugs with long, alternating beige and brown coloured stripes indicate prayer rows. Their pattern reiterates the rhythm of the shingles from the *qibla* wall. The colour gradient of the carpets increases the perception of spatial depth, brightening in the direction of Mecca and continuing the theme of directionality of prayer and purity of the prayer space.

The prayer carpets (*kilims*) were hand-woven in a specialized *kilim* workshop, the 'Association for the Preservation of the Bosnian Kilim', based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.[28] The choice of the workshop was significant not only because it addressed the cultural origins of the Bosnian Muslim communities in Vorarlberg, but also because it served as a contribution to preserving the craft in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where war in the 1990s inflicted a massive destruction of cultural heritage. The workshop employs women who were victims of the war, and working in the craft serves as a form of trauma recovery for them. The Islamic cemetery in Altach also recognized the importance of such humanitarian efforts.
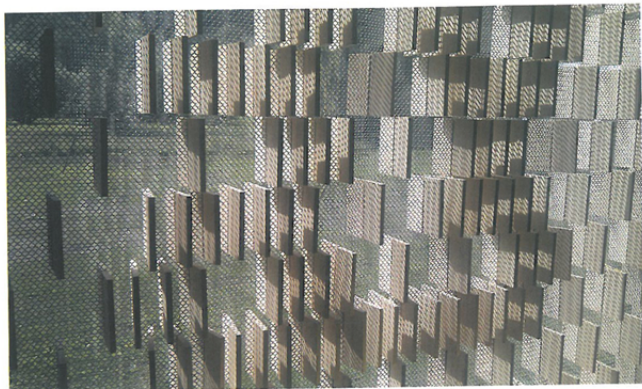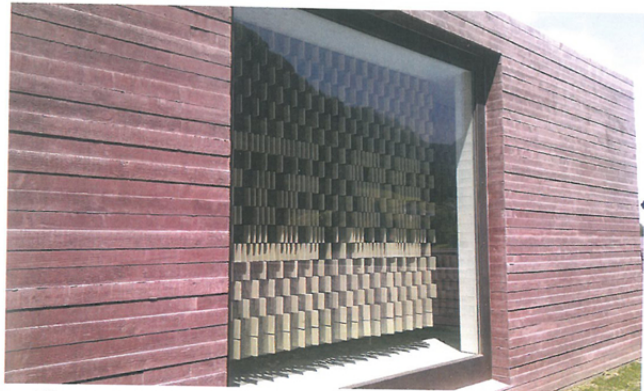
Azra Akšamija.

Figure 5: Detail of the qibla wall-curtain, 2012. At eye level, an array of gold-coated shingles is arranged more densely to spell out the words 'Allah' and 'Muhammad' in Kufic script. The individual shingles are invisibly jointed to one another with small bolts.

Azra Akšamija.

Figure 6: Detail of the concrete walls, 2012.

Bernardo Bader.

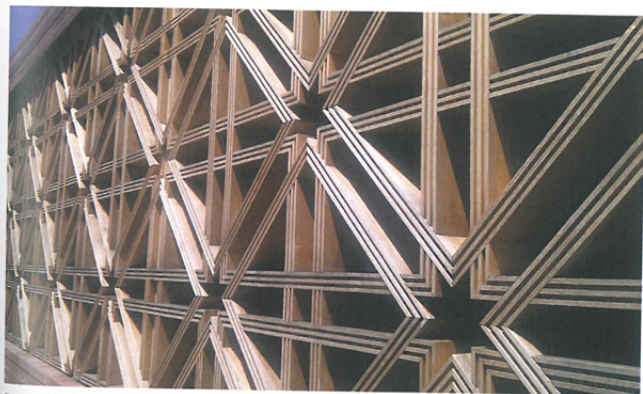*Figure 7: Detail of the carpentry work in the entrance hall of the cemetery, 2012.*

The principal materials used in constructing the cemetery's buildings include exposed reinforced concrete for the walls as well as oak wood for the ornamentation of the entrance facade and the interior of the prayer space. Special attention was paid to the appearance of the exposed concrete, the design of which evolved from advances in structural and material technology involving colouring and the design of formwork patterns. To achieve the desired colour tone, ten wall samples were tinted by mixing black and red pigments in different ratios. The final tone was chosen based on the wall's appearance at the site. The aim was to create a contrast between the colours of the surrounding cliffs, the fields and the architecture. The texture of the exposed concrete walls was created though a particular arrangement of formwork planks of varying thicknesses and widths [Figure 6]. The surfaces of the exterior walls reflect the texture of the rough-sawn boards used for the formwork (in three different thicknesses), while the inner surfaces remained smooth and plain. This created a subtle distinction between the interior and exterior walls.

The use of wood was important in evoking the local building traditions of Vorarlberg, a region known for its woodcraft. For the wooden lattice ornament in the entrance wall, oak was crafted using traditional carpentry and mechanical techniques. The individual wooden boards were first milled with CNC machines and then linked without glue or screws [Figure 7]. Wood played an important role in the design of the prayer space interior, which is entirely clad in white-stained wood. For the *qibla* wall, fir wood shingles with a natural finish
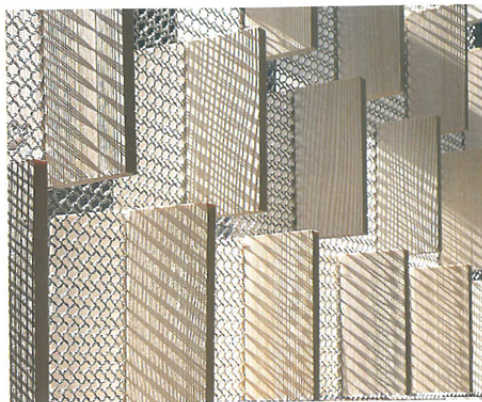
Azra Akšamija.

Figure 8: Detail of the qibla wall-curtain, 2012. The individual shingles are invisibly jointed to one another with small bolts.

were used.[29] Invisible bolt connections pierce tightly through the mesh of the stainless steel curtains at two points and provide a rigid and stabile positioning of the shingles perpendicular to the mesh [Figure 8]. This was important to achieve the animated appearance of the overall pattern while simultaneously maintaining the textile look of the curtains.

Conclusion

The Islamic cemetery in Altach is a product of a fruitful dialogue between Muslim immigrants and the dominant society in Austria, underscoring the importance of Islamic religious architecture for more expansive integration politics in Europe. In light of the project's religious requirements, the political sensitivities of the programme, and the lack of organizational links between local Islamic communities and associations, the building of the cemetery necessitated intense collaboration among many diverse groups. The remarkable achievement of this project is that the participatory process contributed to the forming of continuing organizational structures for Muslims in Vorarlberg.

With the construction of the first Islamic cemetery in Vorarlberg, local Muslim immigrants and the local community signalled that Austria is welcoming to Islam and that architecture can be a bridge between cultures. The project symbolically acknowledges the coexistence of different religions and ethnicities in Austria. For Muslim immigrants in Vorarlberg, the cemetery is a symbol that Austria has become their new homeland, in which

the remains of their ancestors can lie buried according to Islamic rituals. For many of them, as Fuat Sanaç put it, the cemetery symbolizes the fact that a homeland is no longer where one came from, but where one chooses to bury one's dead.[30]

This meaningful dimension of the project is most poignant in regard to the connections that were forged between Muslims and non-Muslims, as evident from the very large local interest in this project. The cemetery's pedagogical potential continues to nourish a sense of pride and ownership within Islamic communities. The architectural significance of the project has come to the fore. By moving beyond the 'dome vs. cube' and the 'traditionalist vs. modernist' design dichotomies that dominate the architectural discourse concerning the choice of symbolic markers of Islamic identity, the cemetery in Altach renders visible a new culturally sensitive aesthetic that is simultaneously local, Islamic and European.[31]

Suggested Citation

Contributor Details

Azra Akšamija is an artist and architectural historian, currently Assistant Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Program in Art, Culture and Technology. She holds a M.Arch. degree from Princeton University (2004) and a Ph.D. in Architecture from MIT (2011). In her interdisciplinary practice, Aksamija investigates the potency of art and architecture to facilitate transformative mediation of conflicts over identity though cultural pedagogy. Her artwork takes shape through different types of media, including clothing, video, performance, sculpture and/or new media. Recent exhibitions include the Royal Academy of Arts in London (2010), the Jewish Museum in Berlin (2011) and the 54th Art Biennale in Venice.

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Endnotes

1. Fuat Sanaç, the president of the Islamic Religious Community of Austria [Die Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich], stated: 'Heimat ist dort, wo man gerne die letzte Ruhe finden möchte.' Brigitte Hellrigl, 'Ein Stück Heimat Für Muslime', *VOL.AT*, June 4, 2012, accessed October 30, 2013, http://www.vol.at/ein-stueck-heimat-fuer-muslime/3270716 (my translation).

2. With 'many', I am referring to the local community members and the local media reports.

3. It should be noted that not all Muslims in Europe are immigrants; there are converts and also people who were born in Western European countries as Muslims. In this essay, I am referring mainly to first and second generation immigrant communities.

4. Bader originates from the Bregenz Forest [*Bregenzer Wald*] region and his office is based in Dornbirn, Austria. For more information about the architect Bernardo Bader and his work see: http://www.bernardobader.com.

5. Stefano Allievi and Ethnobarometer, eds., *Mosques in Europe: Why a Solution Has Become a Problem – NEF Initiative on Religion and Democracy in Europe* (London: Alliance Publishing Trust, 2010).

6. The project was also nominated for other renowned international awards, such as the DETAIL Prize in 2012 and the 2013 European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture Mies van der Rohe Award.

7. Elisabeth Dörler, 'Eine Begräbnisstätte für Muslime und MuslimInnen in Vorarlberg', okay. zusammen leben. Projektstelle für Zuwanderung und Integration, October 2, 2004, accessed October 30, 2013, http://www.okay-line.at/file/656/empfehlungspapierislamischerfriedhof.pdf.

8. In 2012, Austria celebrated the hundredth jubilee of its 'Islamic law', issued in 1912 following the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This law recognized Sunni (Hanafi) Muslims as a religious community and guaranteed them the same religious rights as those of the empire's other recognized religions.

9. For the chronology of the project realization see 'Eine Begräbnisstätte für MuslimInnen in Vorarlberg', *Okay-line Für Zuwanderung Und Integration in Vorarlberg*, accessed December 10, 2012, accessed October 30, 2013, http://www.okay-line.at/deutsch/okay.zusammen-leben/doku-prozessbegleitung/.

10. 'Islamischer Friedhof Altach', Information brochure by the Municipality of Altach, accessed December 10, 2012, http://altach.at/buergerservice/bestattung/islamischer-friedhof-altach.

11. Dörler, 'Eine Begräbnisstätte'.

12. Germany's oldest Islamic cemetery is the Turkish cemetery of Berlin-Şehitlik, dating back to 1863. In the United Kingdom, there are a number of historic Islamic burial sites, such as the Brookwood cemetery near Woking in Surrey.

13. I am using the problematic phrase 'Islam in the West' for the sake of the word limit, but I would like to point out that neither of the two can be understood as homogenous entities. In my understanding of these terms,

both Islam as a religion and the West as a geographical region standing primarily for Western European countries and the United States are ideologically, culturally, historically and politically heterogeneous.

14. For developments of mosque architecture over the course of the twentieth century, as they evolved in response to the nationalist movements in the Islamic world and the identity formation of the Islamic diasporic communities in the West, see: Renata Holod, Hasan-Uddin Khan and Kimberly Mims, *The Mosque and the Modern World: Architects, Patrons and Designs Since the 1950s* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997); Omar Khalidi, 'Import, Adapt, Innovate: Mosque Design in the United States', *Saudi Aramco World* 52.6 (December 2001): 24–33; Nebahat Avcıoğlu, 'Identity-as-Form: The Mosque in the West', *Cultural Analysis* 6 (2007): 91–112.

15. While the broadcasting of the *adhan* is often not permitted, the function of minarets remains primarily symbolic. They act as architectural anchors for the identity of immigrant communities.

16. Khalidi, 'Import, Adapt, Innovate'.

17. Azra Akšamija, 'Generative Design Principles for the Contemporary Mosque', in *The Mosque: Political, Architectural and Social Transformations*, eds. Ergün Erkoçu and Cihan Buğdacı (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2009), 129–39.

18. Christian Welzbacher, *Euro Islam Architecture: New Mosques in the West* (Amsterdam: SUN, 2008).

19. We could, of course, argue that domes and minarets can indeed be understood as contemporary forms, and that having them a matter both of personal taste and freedom of religious expression. We should also keep in mind that architectural arguments often conceal xenophobic politics and Islamophobic populism. As a whole, however, the ongoing debates over mosque appearances demonstrate the vital role of architecture in mediating the challenges of European society to come to terms with its own cultural diversification and social integration. For more information on mosque conflicts, see Stefano Allievi and Ethnobarometer, eds., *Mosques in Europe*.

20. The 'okay. zusammen leben' describes itself as 'an information and advice centre for immigration and integration issues in the Austrian province of Vorarlberg. The Aktion Mitarbeit society is responsible for the centre. It was founded in the autumn of 2001. The majority of the funding is provided by the Vorarlberg State Government.' For more information, see 'Okay-line für Zuwanderung und Integration in Vorarlberg', accessed December 10, 2012, http://www.okay-line.at/deutsch/okay.zusammen-leben/english-portrait/.

21. Dörler, 'Eine Begräbnisstätte'.

22. The competition brief specified the parameters concerning the burial grounds and their supporting structures, including a space for the ritual

washing, a mortuary facility for a maximum of two deceased, ablution facilities for the mourners (four to eight people), sanitary facilities, a small *masjid* (for individual prayer for five to ten people), a weather-protected area for about fifty people for the congregational prayer (not an enclosed space), a well and off-road parking. The competition aimed for a design that would address the following issues: programming at the site (access, facilities, parking lots, grave sites and footpaths), fencing, choice of materials and planting.

23. Unsuitable soil properties posed a major concern at the very start of the project. The existing clay soil at the site was too soft for the construction and inappropriate for burials. Consequently, this soil had to be removed and replaced with soil containing more sand and gravel, which was then allowed to settle for a year before construction work on the site could begin.

24. The constant members of the construction working group, who accompanied the entire planning and construction process of the cemetery, included Attila Dinçer, Eva Grabherr, Baki Kaya, Jusuf Mesic and Nuri Sarıgül.

25. The commission of Azra Akšamija for the interior design of the prayer space was part of the 'Percent for the Arts' programme to foster contemporary arts within public constructions.

26. 'Islamischer Friedhof Altach', Information brochure by the Municipality of Altach, accessed December 10, 2012, http://altach.at/buergerservice/bestattung/islamischer-friedhof-altach.

27. Ibid.

28. Founded by the artist and rug specialist Amila Smajović, this workshop is committed to fostering research and to preserving and reproducing traditional Bosnian *kilims*, which are a historical product of diverse Islamic and local weaving traditions.

29. Following unsatisfactory tests with traditional planed shingles, it was decided to use machine-cut shingles, which allowed for better precision and legibility of the curtain-wall pattern and its calligraphy.

30. Hellrigl, 'Ein Stück Heimat Für Muslime'.

31. Parts of this article, such as this sentence, were used for the description of the project for the Aga Khan Award submission.

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From Japanese to Cairene Houses: A Contribution to the Design of Socially Responsible Housing in Egypt

Abstract

This article represents a contribution to social and spatial problems of low-income housing units in Egypt. It is an illustrated product of work previously accomplished in several separate studies. In this article, I attempt to offer more tangible solutions and architectural drawings inspired by ideas from traditional Cairene homes and traditional small-scale urban Japanese residences (to which I was exposed during my research in Japan) in light of surveys conducted among housing-unit residents in Egypt. The article first takes a brief look at the history of the emergence of apartments and housing units in Egypt. Second, it explores examples of small-scale apartments and housing units attempting to incorporate traditional patterns and elements into their design. Third, it proposes a 70m² unit plan showing architectural and structural modules, a suggested combination of four units, and proposed spatial organizations and architectural solutions for unit interiors: entrance zone, guestroom, living and sleeping zones, prayer area, washing and ablution area, kitchen, bathroom and guest toilet, and doors and partitions, while incorporating a suggested latticework device that has been proposed and discussed in detail in my previous studies.

Keywords

Cairene houses
Egypt
socially responsible
Japanese residences
low-income housing
mashrabiyya

History and Background

The spatial organization and openings of the traditional Cairene houses of the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries were consistent with the socio-religious beliefs and customs of the time. During the late Ottoman period,[1] house design was largely influenced by prevalent norms (veiling, gender segregation and home seclusion), requiring the separation of female quarters from the public areas and the use of wooden screens known as *mashrabiyyas*.[2] Even the smaller and more