



Call for Papers

Historicisms in Islamic Art: Narratives, Materials and Perspectives

20th Colloquium of the Ernst Herzfeld Society
for Studies in Islamic Art and Archaeology

Cairo (Egypt), American University in Cairo – Tahrir Campus
July 3–6, 2025

Deadline for submissions: January 31, 2025.

Notification of acceptance: February 28, 2025

Historicism is generally understood in a sense of historical periodisation, and more specifically in art and architecture as a term and a period that refer to the use and revival of historical forms and ‘styles’ in nineteenth-century Europe and the West. It is, however, in the broader sense of a conscious and intentional recourse to artistic forms and visualities of earlier times that we would like to address this issue in the 20th Colloquium of the Ernst Herzfeld Society, jointly organised by the German Archaeological Institute, Cairo Department, and the American University in Cairo. Under the heading “Historicisms in Islamic Art: Narratives, Materials and Perspectives”, we invite to look at instances of such recourses to historical forms and styles in the wide geographical and temporal context of Islamic Art from early Islam to the present, and across all media.

The city of Cairo, as a product of several foundations, relocations and refortifications, and the site of architectural and artistic activities of a long chain of successive rulers, dynasties, and social groups, belongs to the most important historical urban ensembles in the Eastern Mediterranean. The city therefore lends itself perfectly as a vantage point for a critical reflection about how architecture and visual arts serve as markers for the continuity and change over time and as clues about how various historical societies lived with, viewed, and took recourse to, their history.

The 20th Colloquium of the Ernst Herzfeld Society invites recent research on historicism in Islamic art that examines how historical awareness has shaped artistic production in different periods and regions. The conference aims to explore the different categories of historicism in Islamic Art and the role of historiography and Islamic material cultural production in shaping narratives. Besides papers and panels that discuss theoretical approaches and case studies within different regional socio-political contexts, the conference also welcomes presentations on revivalist art movements in the 19th and 20th centuries as well as discussions on contemporary cultural production engaging with historical themes in different media and techniques.

This conference hopes to explore the different ways historicism has shaped narratives, mediums, and discourses surrounding Islamic art, while also exploring its contemporary production. The concept of historicism in Islamic art, which involves the conscious use and sometimes revival and reinterpretation of historical forms and visualities, offers an interesting way to explore the evolution and continuity of Islamic artistic traditions. The organisers aim to bring together and encourage the dialogue between art historians, archaeologists, cultural historians, and practitioners, and to highlight the need for the preservation and promotion of the Islamic artistic heritage in contemporary times.

Key Questions:

1. How do architectural monuments, artefacts, calligraphy, textiles, and other material remains embody the historical contexts of their creation? What are the tangible expressions of historicism in Islamic art?
2. What are the varied manifestations of historicism in Islamic art? Revivalism, eclecticism, archaism, and other stylistic and conceptual approaches can be explored.
3. Where do we encounter narratives influenced by, or giving evidence of, historicism within Islamic art and material culture? Mosque inscriptions, chroniclers' accounts, travelogues, patronage records, and other historical sources as options.
4. Who are the agents and institutions that have shaped historicist practices and narratives in Islamic art? The roles of rulers, religious authorities, scholars, museums, collectors, curators, academics, publishers, and modern nation-states in constructing and disseminating these narratives.
5. What are the diverse media through which historicist narratives of Islamic art have been transmitted? Manuscripts, exhibitions, scholarly texts, digital platforms, artworks, and educational curricula.
6. How has the past been selectively invoked, appropriated, or distorted within historicist discourses surrounding Islamic art? The potential uses and abuses of historicism.
7. How has historicism shaped the interpretation and representation of Islamic material culture, such as ceramics, metalwork, and numismatics, etc?
8. What are the different methodologies and perspectives of historicism in the study and appreciation of Islamic art? What have been the major shifts and evolutions in contemporary history?
9. How is historicism in Islamic art perceived and read by diverse audiences, including scholars, artists, and the general public? Reception and impact of historicist narratives.

The Colloquium will also host a panel for other themes of current research in Islamic art and archaeology, for which we also invite applications.

The four-day conference will be held at AUC's Tahrir Campus in Downtown Cairo and will include a keynote lecture, panel sessions and round table discussions, poster presentations, a graduate meeting, and field trips in Cairo.

Application

Please submit your proposal for a paper or a panel **by January 31, 2025** to Heba Afifi: heba.afifi@dainst.de

Individual papers: Please submit a title and an abstract of 250 and no more than 300 words, together with a short CV (max. 1 page).

Pre-arranged panels: will preferably include three to four presentations. Please submit a title and an abstract of no more than 500 words presenting the topic and aim of the panel, and a provisional list of speakers with abstracts and CVs (see above).

The preferred colloquium language is English. Each presentation is limited to 20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes of discussion (or 30 minutes of discussion per panel).

All proposals will undergo a peer review selection process. Acceptance will be notified by the end of February 2025.

If you want to submit a paper proposal for the graduate meeting (separate call), please send your title and abstract to Salma Azzam: salma.azzam@univie.ac.at

Registration for and participation in the Colloquium are free for members of the Ernst Herzfeld Society. Other speakers and participants are asked to join the Society by paying the annual membership fee. Please see: <https://ernst-herzfeld-gesellschaft.com/en/beitrittsformular/>

We kindly request that speakers and participants make their own travel and accommodation arrangements. A list of hotels located in the vicinity of the Colloquium venue, some of them offering AUC special rates, will be made available in due course. For a limited number of student participants of the graduate meeting, accommodation can be provided at the premises of the German Archaeological Institute depending on availability.

