



‘ILM: Science, Religion, and Art in Islam

An international conference organised by
the Centre for Asian and Middle Eastern Architecture (CAMEA),
The University of Adelaide, Australia

Adelaide, 21-23 July, 2016

‘Ilm is a complex, multifaceted Arabic term used in various derivations to denote the many aspects of knowing and knowledge acquisition, production, and dissemination, including teaching and learning, education, and science, as well as comprehension, perception, feeling, experience, and familiarity. From *‘ilm* also comes the term *‘ālam*, “world,” signifying that the divine creative act is fundamentally an act of knowing and an expression of knowledge. Through the Quran and prophetic traditions, Islam has placed a strong emphasis on *‘ilm*, considering the seeking of knowledge to be obligatory on all Muslims. Accordingly, the enterprise of knowing has been central to all aspects of cultural production in Islam, particularly in the fields of science, religion, and the arts. On the one hand, *‘ilm* fuses science and religion together into an indissoluble whole, and on the other, it makes art as an act of knowledge before being an expression of feeling. Historically, there has been no specific word for “science” in Arabic, and early-modern and modern Arab intellectuals, linguists, reformers, and “scientists” did not coin a new term for it to help delineate the territories of modern science from that of traditional *‘ilm* in Arabic thought. The Arabic word *‘ilm* (pl. *‘ulūm*) has continued to be used to describe both religious and non-religious pursuits of knowledge, that is, the devotional and intellectual engagements with the divine revelation as well as the rational and empirical study of nature. It has also continued to be associated with art (*fann*), imagination (*khayāl*), and artistic creativity (*ibdā’*). As both science and religion have formed the common foundation of artistic production in the Islamic tradition, *‘ilm* has acted as a unifying cultural force throughout Islamic history.

‘Ilm conference presents an opportunity, at the national and international levels, to examine the concept of “knowledge” in the Islamic culture in order to explore and generate innovative perspectives on its role in science, religion, and the arts. It invites reflections on and discussions of the idea of *‘ilm* and its role in pre-, early-, and post-modern Islamic culture, and, more importantly, how it is engaged and experienced by Muslim communities today. What are its practices, territories, and histories? How does it continue to shape Islam’s past, present, and future within the Muslims’ lands and beyond?

‘Ilm conference will bring together a broad group of scholars, artists, designers, curators, practitioners, and higher degree researchers across the fields of Islamic intellectual history, history and theory of Islamic art and architecture, history of Islamic science, and Islamic studies to address key issues of concern and to highlight points of intersection between science, religion, and the arts.

Main Themes

The conference will focus on three broad topics: *‘ilm* as science, *‘ilm* as religion, and *‘ilm* as art. These broad topics are articulated through the following proposed sets of sub-topics, which should be seen as guides rather than exclusive lists. Proposals expanding the proposed thematic scope are encouraged.

***‘Ilm* as Science**

Islam and the study of nature
Islam and the rise of early modern science
Scientific thinking: a universal mode of knowing
Science and Islam: conflicts and harmony
Islamic science and the concept of *i‘jāz*
Islamic history of the “scientific revolution”
Islam and the ethos of science in the post-Copernican period
Islam and virtual reality

***‘Ilm* as Religion**

Revelation and reason
Revelation, history, and modernity
Religion, philosophy, and the mystical quest
Religion, culture, and society
Islam in Australia: ideals and realities
Religion, identity, and globalization
The sacred and the secular
Religion and technology: utility vs ideology

***‘Ilm* as Art**

What is “Islamic” Art?
Islamic art: knowledge, aesthetics, and utility
Islamic art, music, and architecture: Australia and beyond
Australian Muslim artists: creative crossings
Contemporary Islamic art: theory and practice
Art, gender, and the law in Islam
Space and spatial thinking in Islam
The mediation of ornament: iconography, calligraphy, and geometry

Proposals

Researchers, artists, designers, and architects are invited to submit proposals for two types of contributions:

1. **Paper:** 300-word summary, outlining clearly the topic, main argument, and sources to be used. Please include email address and 50-word biography.
2. **Poster:** A4 mock-up (portrait) presenting visual commentary on a selected theme. The final poster size is A1 (portrait) with 500-800-word exposition. A 200-word summary of the exposition should be submitted with the mock-up.

Key Dates

Announcement: 15 October, 2015
Proposals: 15 December 2015 – 300 words / A4 posters
Selection: 15 January 2016
Papers/posters: 15 June 2016 – 2500 words / A1 posters
Conference 21-23 July 2016

Organisers & Contacts

Professor Samer Akkach, Founding Director, Centre for Asian and Middle Eastern Architecture (CAMEA), the University of Adelaide, Australia (samer.akkach@adelaide.edu.au)

Professor Sahar Amer, Chair, Department of Arabic Language and Cultures, The University of Sydney, Australia (sahar.amer@sydney.edu.au)

Dr Samuel Bowker, School of Communication and Creative Industries, Charles Sturt University, Australia (sbowker@csu.edu.au)

All inquiries should be directed to Perri Sparnon: perri.sparnon@adelaide.edu.au