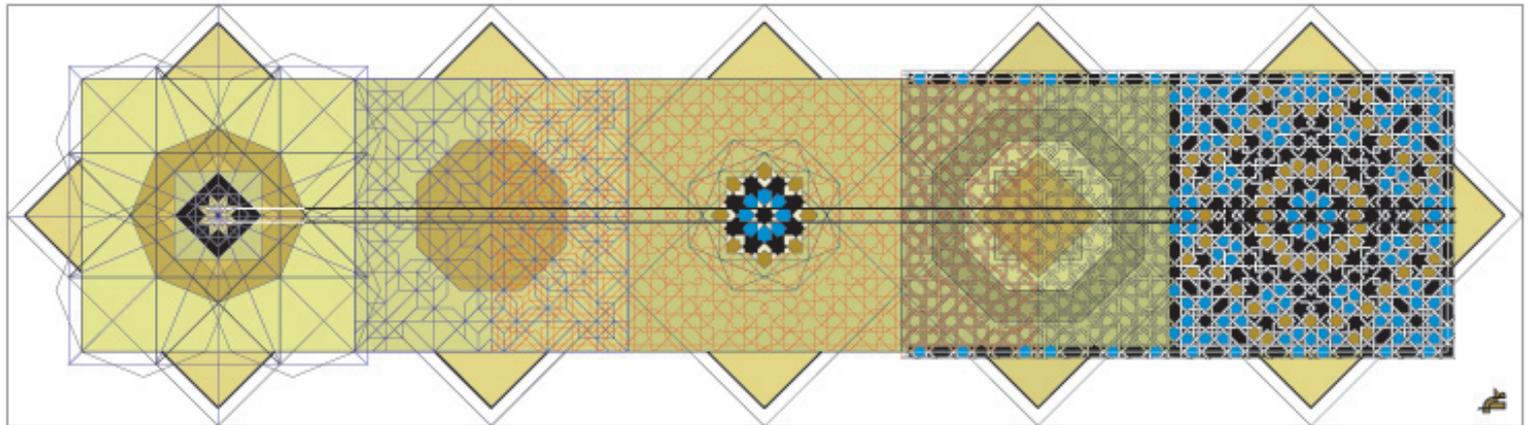


BEYOND THE MINARET

A SPACE FOR THE SPIRIT - A PLACE FOR THE CITY DWELLER



YUSUF ADAMS

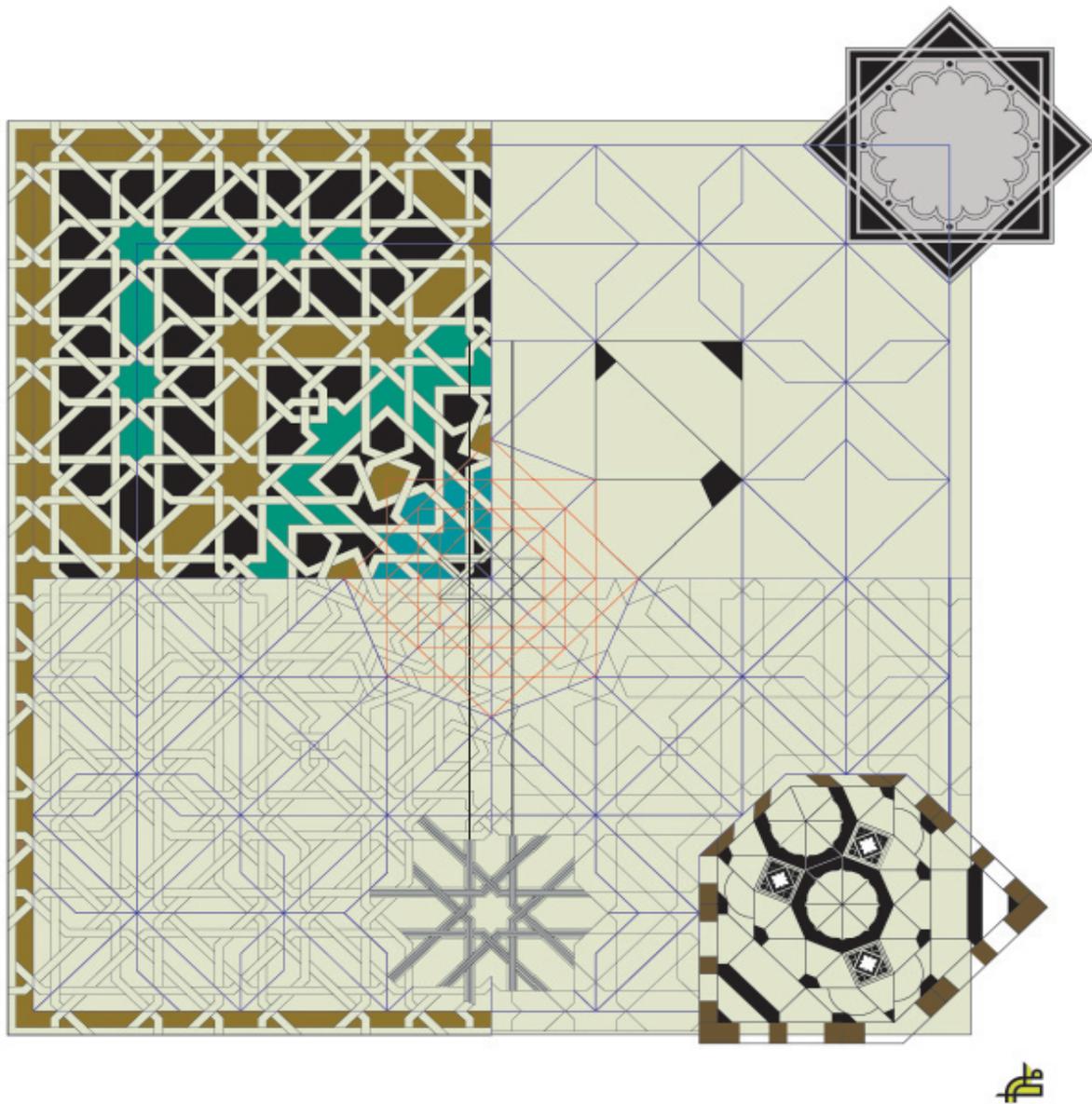


At first, the arabic calligraphy existed in books, and from here - and from the bare elemental desert - it unfolded across all available mediums: ceramics, stone, glass, weaving, wood and stucco. The origin, the source we must remember, being the revelation of the Quran, ‘Recall the first words revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ‘Read, recite.’ Does not the word Qur’an also mean the act of reading and recitation? Read the world and the heavens as a table of signs. You are first and foremost a reader, then a believer.’⁹³ Calligraphy is the supreme Islamic art, joining the delight of the sensory realms with the realities of the realms of meaning:

Islamic calligraphy is the visual embodiment of the crystallization of the spiritual realities (*al-haqiq*) contained in the Islamic revelation. This calligraphy provides the external dress for the Word of God in the visible world but this art remains wedded to the world of the spirit, for according to the traditional Islamic saying, ‘Calligraphy is the geometry of the Spirit.’⁹⁴

The Meaning of Number Mohamed Talhaoui - Algerian artist, and academic - has been studying the geometric patterns of the Muslim world for many years. Recently this has led to creating beautiful analytical computer models of the complex geometries within the Alhambra Palace, including the kaleidoscopic *muqarnas*. The study has enabled him to propose that all Islamic geometry comes from only three sets of D.N.A. the triangle, the square and the pentagon. All of these are unified by the centre and circumference of a circle, all possible multiple rotations returning the many to the one. In Talhaoui’s words, ‘It is indeed a journey of endless lines, interlaced... Thus the eye is invited to travel the path of this line without beginning and without end. Given the expressions of the geometry, not only is the complexity amazing, but also the harmony of the arrangement, movements that offer beauty in which the unity of form is always complete.’ Talhaoui has been studying and teaching the art of geometry, ‘deciphering its covert activities... trying to understand the mechanisms and laws that govern’ it. From this interrogation of the line he has been able to ‘develop a generic method for designing geometry with a careful analysis of the various stages of design.’⁹⁵

Once understood, the line without beginning or end becomes a device to stimulate the senses, to ‘engender a dynamic sort of contemplation by keeping the eye constantly moving over the geometric infinitude of patterns without ever being caught.’⁹⁶ In the poetic reading of the arabesque Burckhardt observes - with the ‘eye of the heart’ it seems - that ‘all suggestion of an individual form is eliminated by the indefiniteness of a continuous wave... Thus at the sight of glittering waves or leafage trembling in the breeze, the soul detaches itself from internal objects, from the “idols” of passion, and plunges, vibrant within itself, into a pure state of being.’⁹⁷



The Connections between science, geography and astrology and harmonic geometry continue to be made; it has taken until the 20th century for Western Physicists to recognise that five fold geometry can cover a two dimensional surface without leaving any odd surfaces.⁹⁸ Students of sacred geometry continue to find connections between Islamic patterns, the Fibonacci sequence, the golden mean and - particularly in Critchlow's case - the proportion of the orbiting planets in our solar system. The golden mean (1.618) has recently been stated to be the ratio of the exact distance between the Kaaba and the North and South Poles,⁹⁹ adding to the idea that the proportions widely acknowledged in nature correlate with what the Muslim acknowledges as Divine. If this could be verified satisfactorily it would of course have vast implications, validating connections between nature, divinity and the siting of the House of Abraham. The present study however must be more concerned with the simple delight in pattern which emerges from a circle and a centre point, from which highly skilled artisans equipped with only a stick and a length of rope have created mesmerising works for over a Millennium, as many manifestations of one underlying reality:

'So the Universe is its own veil of itself, and it cannot perceive the Reality since it perceives itself. It is continuously a veil which is not removed since it knows that it is distinct from its Creator by its need for Him. It has no part in the essential necessity which belong to the existence of Allah, so it can never perceive Him. In this respect Allah is always unknown by the knowledge of tasting and direct seeing, because the in-time has no access to that.'¹⁰⁰