Introduction:

Early Modern Islamic Cities

Conceptions of the city, and of the complex socio-cultural practices embodied in cities, have been at the forefront of historical inquiry. The debate has been marked by diverse claims about the nature of cities, including the notion that "the city" is an incoherent concept that has been universalized based on urban patterns in the global North.[1] The concept of the "Western city" can be traced back to Max Weber's nineteenth-century notion of the medieval European city as a self-governing ideal type, with an independent collective identity. Early modern studies have traditionally emphasized the significance of cities during the heyday of European dynastic states and empires. Cities played significant roles in the midst of the new commercial and political networks that spanned the globe, and within the socio-spatial complexes that emerged across the Atlantic and beyond.[2] The city thus occupies a central place in studies of how western European societies produced new and unique urban experiences in connection with complex regional and global processes. Pioneering works such as Jan de Vries's *European Urbanization, 1500–1800* and Paul M. Hohenberg and Lynn Hollen Lees's *The Making of Urban Europe, 1000–1950,* place early modern cities within broader economic networks and demographic transformations. Others, such as Calabi and Turk Christiansen or Christopher R. Friedrichs, focus on the cultural and religious aspects of city life against the backdrop of the increasing power of centralized states. These scholars argue that European cities produced cultural practices that reflected growing changes in the social experience of urban life. As Nina Levine maintains in her study of late sixteenth-century London, cultural practices such as theater performance opened up new social spaces of self-understanding and belonging, spaces wherein denizens engaged in new

forms of sociability on a plural level within the growing metropolis.[3] Likewise, the changing media landscape in major European cities, such as Cologne and Hamburg, led to the incorporation of print technology in everyday life, and to what Daniel Bellingradt calls the "multifaceted modes of communication."[4]

Perhaps the most significant result of these intertwined processes was the emergence of distinct publics and public spaces in the midst of early modern European urban life. These publics and public spaces were the result of complex interactions between political authorities and communities in the context of the emergent market economies and empire- and state-building projects. They were enhanced through expanding networks of knowledge, as well as the increasingly global movement of ideas, people, and goods. They fostered new emotive practices, and helped create civic and cultural identities.[5] Cities played a critical role as prominent loci for the new forms of political and social interaction. However, these findings about European cities have been utilized typically to promote the uniqueness of the European experience, and the specific characteristics of European cities have been deployed as normative criteria while evaluating urban cultures in other parts of the world.

This approach continues to dominate views of non-European cities, as in, for example, publications as recent as *The Oxford Handbook of Cities in World History* (2013). European cities are described, *pace* Weber, with reference to self-governance and civic and communal institutions, while Islamic and Asian cities are presented as having very little, if any, autonomy vis-à-vis the central administration of state or empire. Indeed, early modern urban expansion in the Middle East and Asia is connected to the rise of major empires, which is in turn contrasted with the self-driven expansion of many European cities. Similarly, commercial activity is said to have been fostered in Europe through the initiative of urban communities, while it was controlled by the central states in Asia and the Middle East, in the absence of separate fiscal administrative structures at the city level. This approach extends into the characterization of cities established by the Spanish in the New World, whereby these colonial centers are described as instruments of political and economic coercion serving the interests of the Spanish crown. Moreover, non-European cities are singled out with reference to a limited number of public spaces; the mosque is often portrayed as the sole, or main, meeting space in any predominantly Muslim city. These views partially stem from Orientalist and Eurocentric clichés that endure in European studies; at the same time, they are also inspired by older

generations of scholars of Islam who were instrumental in developing and fostering notions of a specifically "Islamic" city.

The particular case of the "Islamic city" can be traced back to the early twentieth century, when works by Orientalists such as William Marçais and Gustav von Grunebaum described a fairly generic "medina" with its centrally situated mosque as the spiritual heart of the city, which also included a market, public baths, and residential neighborhoods divided by religious affiliation. Compared to medieval European cities, these Muslim cities purportedly did not have civic institutions; in the absence of these institutions, communal leaders in residential neighborhoods were said to fall short of fulfilling the role of a municipal organization. According to this picture, Islamic law, with its plethora of rules on subjects ranging from commercial transactions to matters of privacy, was seen as the main force shaping the patterns and structures of urban life. The "Islamic" adjective served as an essential cultural unifier that supposedly brought together the urban experiences of all Muslim-majority cities in Africa, Asia, and parts of Europe, both in the medieval and early modern eras. Islamic law, the Sharia, was interpreted as a monolithic body of rules and regulations that was mostly closed to transformation and negotiation.

By the 1960s and 1970s, a shift in the study of the Islamic city took place. This new debate, which became increasingly diversified, reexamined the structure of the Islamic city through architectural, anthropological, geographical, and sociological approaches. For instance, Ira Lapidus and Gamal Hamadan argued that, under Arab Muslim rule, cities became extensions of older urban settlements and, as such, inherited preexisting structures.[6] In his study of the Ottoman-Arab city, Albert Hourani demonstrated the important role the administrative and legal apparatuses of the city played in urban governance. These various studies also underlined the trans-regional interconnectivity of Islamic cities in the early modern era, when commercial and political contexts dramatically changed as a result of European expansion.[7] In the 1970s, anthropologists like Dale Eickelman proposed alternative urban models distinct from the earlier Orientalist theories (such as those advanced by Massignon and Marçais) by arguing that the morphological core of a North African city such as Boujad in Morocco was based on an intimate sense of community and solidarity, rather than a physical structure.[8] Since the 1980s, the debate on the Islamic city, advanced by Besim Selim

Hakim, Janet Abu-Lughod and André Raymond, has been primarily about the intractable applications of general and unified models of urbanity, thus underscoring unique, yet changing, structures and cultural experiences in specific socio-historical contexts.[9] While the Orientalist legacy relied on generalized schemes, recent studies on morphological dynamics, urban topography, and historical sources have challenged earlier generalizations, and claimed that urban processes are subject to change as a result of shifting social contexts.[10]

This critique of earlier approaches culminated in a comprehensive two-volume compilation, *The City in the Islamic World*,[11] in which broad thematic articles and case studies focusing on a single city intertwine across the *longue durée* of Islamic history, from the seventh century to the present. While summing up the state of the field through its coverage of different centuries, regions, and themes, this colossal work also exposes some of the challenges that persist in the study of Islamic cities. Some of the persistent challenges are the overrepresentation of Arabo-Islamic cities with regard to the rest of the Islamic world, and the privileging of the experiences of Muslim urbanites at the expense of the non-Muslims who inhabited the same cities. Another challenge relates to comparative perspectives: while resuscitating the originality of urban life in various Islamic cities, we sometimes create the risk of isolating the Islamic city once more, by over-emphasizing its specificity and glossing over the links that tied it to regional and global networks. Finally, if we are to stay away from essentialist assumptions of a core Islamic culture that would have endured in urban life from the seventh century to the present, we have to be mindful of historical transformation and period shifts.

These challenges motivated us, as co-editors, to focus on the early modern period as a time of global imperial, commercial, and urban expansion and connectivity. The extensive debates on the definition of early modernity, and on the applicability of the term "early modern" to non-European societies, are beyond the limits of the present discussion. At the same time, we feel the need to clarify what we, as editors, understand from the term. Here, we use it, first of all, as a chronological marker that refers to the period between 1400 and 1800; this chronology takes us from the late Middle Ages in Europe and the beginning of the post-Mongol era in Eurasia to the threshold of Western industrial capitalism and the birth of a new imperialism. In this period, developments such as empire- and state-formation, urbanization, the rise of new publics (urban publics, reading publics, etc.), large-scale population

movements, and the increased exploitation of natural resources were observed not only in European societies, but in the rest of the globe as well. These transformations did not lead to the emergence of a single form of early modernity that could be imposed upon all by one hegemonic power; rather, one of the characteristics of the early modern period is its multi-centered nature, which allowed for the flourishing of several simultaneous, parallel, competing "early modernities" in different parts of the world, centered on Istanbul, Isfahan, Beijing, Mexico City, or Delhi. The hemispheric interconnectivities that shaped the early modern world, and the co-existence of various early modernities, allow us to tell a story that is both local/regional and global; in other words, the term early modern is useful in order to restore the relevance of non-European societies and cultures in global history while eschewing essentialist understandings of those same non-European societies and cultures.

While comparative perspectives on early modern Islamic cities, both within and across regions and empires, have generally been absent, several scholars have shown the importance of urban cultures within their respective fields. Within Ottoman studies, recent works by Peirce, Zeitlian-Watenpaugh, Özkoçak, Hamadeh, Semerdjian, Kafescioğlu, Zarinebaf, and Çalış-Kural not only emphasize the constructed nature of cities and urban cultures but also push issues like law/legality, property relations, urban cultural and religious identities, and gender to the forefront. Kafescioğlu offers a thorough analysis of the creation of Ottoman Istanbul on the basis of the Byzantine city, and under the influence of a process of Ottoman empire building; Peirce, Zeitlian-Watenpaugh, and Semerdjian, on the other hand, successfully re-orient the Istanbul-centric focus of Ottoman urban studies to Aintab and Aleppo. Istanbul returns to center stage in works by Özkoçak, Hamadeh, and Zarinebaf, in which the authors focus on the city as an ever-changing site of experiences that range from pleasure and civility to political activity and crime; in their works, the city emerges as the sum total of the lives and struggles of its inhabitants from all walks of life. The works mentioned above and, in general, the recent body of scholarship on Ottoman cities also introduce new approaches to primary sources. Next to discussions of architectural evidence as part of lived, interactive cityscapes, scholars have expanded and deepened their analyses of court records for the study of urban interactions among a diverse body of urban dwellers (diverse in terms of class and gender as well as religion); they have also integrated literary evidence, such as poetry as well as city-specific genres and practices of writing, into their investigations.

In the field of Safavid studies, Stephen Blake and Sussan Babaie have provided detailed studies on the cultural life of Isfahan.[12] According to Babaie, for instance, the construction of new Isfahan under Shah Abbas I (r. 1588–1629) was historically motivated by a crucial socio-political transition whereby Safavid urbanization, tied to state formation, fostered public and royal designs that enunciated a distinct imperial Perso-Shi'ism. With the construction of new urban sites such as bazaars, parks, streets, pavilions, and a large square at the core of the city, the spatial clusters of the new Isfahan were marked by a visual regime of performative spaces, where everyday life could be experienced in distinct staging practices for collective integration.[13] The seventeenth-century Safavid urbanization also reflected Timurid patterns of suburbanization, which included the design of gardens around the city as a testimony to the Turko-Mongol nomadic idealization of the countryside.[14]

Studies of Southeast Asian cities by Gupta, Blake, and Singh have brought to the fore the cultural and historical intricacies of Mughal cities, while Gagan Sood drew attention to the myriad connections between cities and communities in India and the Islamic heartlands in the Middle East. Similar to the Safavids, the Mughal cityscapes included the conglomeration of Turko-Mongol nomadic and Perso-Islamic urban patterns, best articulated in the architectural designs of public spaces and royal buildings.[15] The amalgamation of motifs and styles was observed in non-Mughal examples as well. The Sher Shah Suri Masjid (1540), built in Patna as an educational, missionary and political center by Sher Shah Suri (1486–1545), the founder of the Sur Empire (1540–1556), reflected Afghani architectural designs. In general, cities such as Ahmadabad, Burhanpur, Kabul, Patna, and Lahore exemplified the Islamicate concept of "*shahristan*." As sites of cultural, military, and political significance with a complex set of urban quarters, these cities brought together the administrative, civic and religious domains under Mughal imperial rule.[16] The Mughal urban experience was not limited to Islamicate zones of contact, however. As Southeast Asia was increasingly incorporated into an expanding global economy led by European colonialism, Mughal cities such as Shahjahanabad and, more importantly, the Gujarati city of Surat, became participants in emerging networks of consumption linked to ocean-borne commerce.[17] These consumption networks produced new metropolitan tastes and forms of urban sociability; as a result, the Southeast Asian urban experiences are particularly conducive to the discussion of the early modern as a global phenomenon.

In this special issue, our aim is to build on previous studies while offering a group of essays that focus, in a variety of ways, on early modern Islamic cities in diverse localities. Because the bulk of the literature on urbanity outside Europe tends to focus on the impact of the West in the form of colonialism, the industrial-capitalist mode of production, nation-building, and cultural transformation and adaptation, we particularly wanted to emphasize the open-endedness and multi-centeredness of the early modern era. With the aim to further advance the dialogue between scholars of the early modern period and urban studies, we sought essays that would underscore the everyday publics, civilities, sociabilities, feelings, rituals, and other life-experiences. By presenting a group of examples from different geographical localities, we hope to emphasize once again that the "Islamic city" defied the conventional meanings attributed to that concept. Through their multi-religious demographies, the tensions between imperial control and urban governance, and their active roles in regional and global economies, these cities helped define an early modern urbanity that does not need to be constricted by references to Western European models. At the same time, while the essays included in this special issue are not comparative studies of early modern cities, they are mindful of the overall developments in the early modern world, such as demographic and climactic changes, imperial expansion, urban growth, and the emergence of new political and cultural subjectivities. They are also mindful of the debates that are encountered in other early modern contexts, such as the emergence of public spheres/spaces, the encounters between Europeans and others, and, in general, the existence and transformation of cities within wider political and economic networks, and the meaning and significance of urban cultural and political experiences.

The panorama we offer here is inescapably incomplete: the African continent is not represented, while Southeast Asia is underrepresented; non-Muslim communities, fundamental components of the majority of Islamic cities, are barely visible between the lines. These lacunae are not the outcome of conscious choices. Rather, they partly stem from the difficulty of successfully soliciting a comprehensive group of articles from busy academics committed to specific projects; they are also related to the historiographical problems within the study of the early modern Islamic cities, to which we hope to draw attention once more. Finally, we are aware that urban history almost always creates elitist implications, by implicitly or explicitly privileging town over country. One remedy is to abstain from seeking "models," and

instead see the city as a complex political, economic and cultural unit that defies easy categorizations. We are comforted by the fact that the group of essays presented here reflects the richness of urban dynamics and structures within specific geographies and time periods, while leaving enough space for further discussion and comparative analysis.

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This special issue includes six articles, along with reviews of three scholarly works. In "Mapping Ottoman Cities: Socio-Spatial Definitions and Groupings (1450–1700)," on the basis of Ottoman cadastral surveys and extraordinary tax registers, Yunus Uğur offers a survey of Ottoman urban units through their development and transformation over two and a half centuries. Here, the city is defined as a structure that is based on demography (population, as well as the relative weight of Muslims and non-Muslims), economy (taxation, land ownership, types of resources and revenues), and spatial organization (clusters of neighborhoods as well as multi-functional building complexes). Uğur divides this period into half-century blocs, which allows him to follow the impact of Ottoman imperial expansion on urban growth and development; moreover, it makes it possible to gauge the effect of regional and global developments, such as the rise of the Muslim population in the Balkans, the Anatolian rebellions of the seventeenth century, increasingly intense and diverse economic flows, and environmental change, on the size and wealth of Ottoman cities. Uğur's thorough survey is a meticulous example of the application of the latest research methods to Ottoman urban history; moreover, his study opens the overall dynamics of Ottoman urbanization to comparative analyses with different areas of the early modern world, and particularly early modern Europe, for which similar studies are available. Several striking points emerge from this panoramic study: large-scale cities are more resilient in front of rapid economic and social change, while smaller units fluctuate more radically; non-Muslim communities constitute a significant part of Ottoman urban populations; more importantly, an early modern Ottoman city is almost never a frozen unit that is the outcome of deep-seated structures, but a constantly changing demographic, spatial, and economic entity.

In "Citizens of Piety: Networks of Piety and the Public Sphere in Early Modern Ottoman Cities," Aslıhan Gürbüzel deftly shifts the emphasis from

macro-analysis to micro-analysis, and from demographic and economic structures to the lived experiences of urbanites. Gürbüzel's sources are seventeenth-century biographical dictionaries that were produced outside the upper echelons of the Ottoman scholarly establishment; these reflect the crucial role of "networks of piety" in the creation of cultural and social authority in Ottoman provincial cities. Focusing on a period of critical transformation in Ottoman bureaucratic governance, whereby the central administration managed the provinces via attempts at integrating local society through cooperation, this article makes a number of critical interventions, while offering a nuanced portrayal of urban life. Developing a solid critique of Habermasian notions of public sphere on the basis of evidence from Ottoman society, Gürbüzel offers the model of a civil society that was neither bourgeois nor secular; initially established in response to the central administration's efforts at maintaining control over local society, this public sphere promoted the pious of the community as negotiators with the central apparatus. Her second critical intervention is a creative reading of the function of religion (in this case, Sunni Islam) in early modern societies. Reminding the readers that doctrinal conformity (Sunnism) has been often misinterpreted as being synonymous with political conformity, Gürbüzel emphasizes the ways in which discourses of piety became a "cornerstone of public political discourse" and allowed "the scrutiny of the political authority of the ruling elite by forming an alternative locus of judgment." As such, her article invites critical considerations of the role of piety and religiosity in early modern political life beyond the Ottoman Empire.

Just as the articles above highlight the importance of particular primary sources for the study of early modern urbanity, Sherry Velasco's "From Spain to Algiers: Morisco/Muslim Sounds in the Western Mediterranean" develops an innovative reading of notions of religious and cultural difference in urban settings in the case of Iberian captivity narratives. In this article, we see the development of the category of "Islamic" by non-Muslim actors, from Reconquista Spain to the seventeenth-century Western Mediterranean, with reference to the sounds of cultural practices of Muslims and Moriscos in Spain as well as the voices and noises of everyday life in Algiers. Inspired by the recent development of sound studies, Velasco skillfully criticizes the predominance of the visual, including the written word, and excavates the rich sonic dimension of early modern texts. Here, we begin to see the ways in which a multilingual and multicultural urban environment created sonic

experiences ("the music, sounds, noises, and vocal practices perceptible through social and commercial interactions, religious rituals, political events, as well as architecture and urban design produced by a vastly divergent group of inhabitants"), and how these sonic experiences "provided aural evidence of the uniquely transcultural essence of the early modern Islamic city." Next to its crucial intervention on behalf of sound as one of the founding blocs of urban experience, Velasco reminds the readers of the importance of texts and documents produced in European languages for the study of early modern Islamic cities as spaces of encounter.

While Velasco explores sonic experiences of Islamic urbanity in transcultural processes, Sussan Babaie, in "Cookery and Urbanity in Early Modern Isfahan," focuses on Safavid Isfahan and its shared spaces of sociability in terms of gastronomic practices that range from cooking to feasting, from drinking to visual evocations of culinary practices. From a phenomenological perspective, Babaie understands "culinarity" as a collection of embodied practices. The reflexive experiences with food and its cultures of consumption (i.e., taste) and production (i.e., cooking) are visualized and felt in the material urban culture of Safavid Isfahan: these experiences are at the core of the Persianate city as lived cosmopolitan space. Such cultural experiences do not merely emanate from, nor are they limited to, the court society. Rather, they spread across the broader public, as seen in other cosmopolitan cities in the early modern period. Babaie is keen to show how the pictorial representation of communal practices of food consumption or commensality, such as the mural paintings at the Chihil Sutun Palace in Isfahan (1647–1650s), are suggestive of festive cultures that, together with the propagation of the Perso-Shi'i royalty, evoke experiences of conviviality on an urban level. This interrelation between taste and visual culture is evident throughout the new Isfahan, built by the Safavids under Shah Abbas I (r. 1588–1629). Interwoven in the pictorial repertoire of public spaces of new Isfahan are erotic scenes, dandified figures, royal receptions, and leisurely consumptive practices that heighten the body as an integral feature of the city landscape. The media culture of cookbooks, along with figures of chefs in pictorial depictions, and the material cultures of wine bottles and drinking cups, also serves as a record of sensory experiences that shaped the early modern Isfahani culture as a distinct cosmopolitan subjectivity.

In Farshid Emami's article, "Discursive Images and Urban Itineraries: Literary Form and City Experience in Safavid Isfahan," the theme of sensory experiences becomes manifest within literary cultures connected to the new

urban landscapes. Such connections were marked by new ways of seeing and experiencing the city, as manifested in literary tropes and styles; these tropes and styles revolved around the non-courtly thematic features of the literary practices that represented the built urban environment. The emergence of leisurely sites, in particular coffeehouses where many literary works were performed, underscored a social milieu embedded and expressive to the Isfahani phase of Safavid rule. Related to commercial spaces, gardens, and ritual events, such as Muharram rituals,[18] topographical literary themes, particularly found in the *shahrashub* ("city-disturber"), depicted urban denizens and their engagement with varied city spaces. In Perso-Islamic letters, by the twelfth century, a new literary trope had arisen to portray the city as a metaphoric site of geographical and emotive space. Moving away from architectural patronage to architectural places, the late Abbasid and especially post-Timurid literary-poetic works represent a watershed in the reinterpretation of lived spaces in expressive practices, of which the *shahrashub* is the best example. In its early modern form, the *shahrashub* (Ott. *şehrengiz*) flourished across Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal domains as a "new style" of urbanite cultural practice. The new literary narratives interwove city experiences and the "self-fashioning" strategies of diverse urban groups with an expanding public sphere in Isfahan as a major imperial site with universal-cosmopolitan significance.

In his "Literary Decadence and Imagining the Late Mughal City," Arthur Dudney expands the Persianate genre of *shahrashub* into the Mughal context. Dudney argues that, in its Urdu manifestation, the *shahrashub* represents the tradition of depicting the city as an idealized site of socio-political importance—even though it is not always a reflection of changing political order. Challenging the Orientalist account of *shahrashub* as a decadent literary genre tied to a declining Persian literary culture and a weakening Mughal Empire, Dudney shows that Urdu literary production partook in a long Persianate literary tradition that explicitly articulated new ways of depicting city life. Rather than solely reflecting "decline," the literary and aesthetic practices that developed under the Mughals, especially in the eighteenth century, were complex textual and topographical instruments that conveyed social reality through poetry. A central aim of Dudney's work is to show how the modern literary study of Mughal literature, particularly in the colonial period, imposed onto a dynamic urban poetic tradition a moral prerogative that would identify political decline with cultural decay. Dudney instead argues that the Mughal *shahrashub* developed a poetic tradition based on a kind of

urban description, which partly saw aesthetic intervention through bodily and erotic presence. In the early modern case of the *shahrashub* in Urdu, the city was depicted within its entire social ambience, through various styles and forms that reflected different historical periods of Mughal rule.

Three book reviews follow the articles presented in this special issue. In the first review, Subah Dayal critically engages with the notion of *qasbah* or "middling towns" as enduring rural and urban sites in early modern Southeast Asia as discussed by M. Raisur Rahman in *Locale, Everyday Islam, and Modernity: Qasbah Towns and Muslim Life in Colonial India* (2015). In his reviews of *Sky Blue Stone: The Turquoise Trade in World History* (2014) and *Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* (2009), Babak Rahimi investigates the notion of early modern Islamic cities. Particularly, in his favorable review of Arash Khazeni's historical work on turquoises, Rahimi suggests rethinking the notion of the early modern Islamic city—indeed, the broader concept of the "city"—as a set of transcultural experiential processes. Dayal and Rahimi invite readers to understand the "city" both from a local and a world historical perspective, and to merge Islamicate urbanities with broader histories of materiality, consumer cultures, and sensory experiences. The city was, and is, a process made of experiences, spatial or otherwise.

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NOTES

1. See Robinson; Roy.
2. See Mann.
3. See Levine.
4. See Bellingradt; also see Costas.
5. See Wilson and Yachnin.
6. See Hamdan and Lapidus
7. See Hourani and Stern.
8. See Eickelman, "Is There an Islamic City?"
9. See Hakim; Abu-Lughod; Raymond, "Islamic City."
10. For example, Raymond, *City in the Islamic World* .
11. Jayyusi.
12. Blake, *Half the World*.
13. See Babayan 2002; Rahimi, *Theater State* and "*Maydān-i Naqsh-i Jahān*."
14. See Haneda.

15. See Blake, *Shahjahanabad*; Dale.
16. See Chaudhuri.
17. See Palat, et al.
18. See Calmard; Rahimi, *Theater State*.

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