

## The myth of the 'Islamic City': rethinking the notion of sacred space

The first aim of this paper is to explore the contention that the traditional notion of the 'Islamic city' is a myth - a fiction that is fueled by a reductive and essentialist approach to Islam in general and Muslim cultures in particular. The second aim follows on from the first, and involves a rethinking of the notion of 'sacred space', particularly insofar as it pertains to Muslim perceptions. My central argument is that the same misconceptions which divide cities into 'the Islamic' and the 'other-than-Islamic' are the same misconceptions which lead faith communities to confer a greater sacrality on some places than they do on others. Furthermore, I shall contend that it is these self-same misconceptions about the 'tiered sacrality' of the physical world which are also responsible for the erroneous compartmentalisation of culture into the 'religious' and the 'worldly', leading to a secularisation not only of space and place, but also of approach and behaviour.

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