Abstract

This article examines how the study of medieval Islamic architecture is currently being practiced. It explores the multiple implications of the much greater volume of scholarship devoted to Western architecture, which extend from library provision to job opportunities, from richer resources to a greater theoretical sophistication. It discusses the specific problems encountered by those who study Islamic architecture, for example the paucity of documents, the range of languages required, the near-monopoly of this subject (until recently) by Western scholars operating outside their cultural comfort zone, or the unfamiliar privileging of epigraphy and vegetal or geometric ornament rather than sculpture or painting. It highlights the glut of unpublished material available. Finally, it outlines the types of research that most urgently need doing in a context of mass tourism and rampant urban development; and the pleasures and rewards, notably the scope for original work, which the study of Islamic architecture brings in its train.

Bio

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Studying Islamic Architecture: Challenges and Perspectives

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Opportunities to attempt a bird’s-eye view of a field are rare,¹ and my thanks go to the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain for providing the forum for just such an exercise.² Most scholars, after all, spend the research part of their academic careers doing what seems best suited to their tastes and abilities and hoping to make a good job of it. There is little time for navel-gazing; and besides, most people have little time for it. Certainly scholars will consider the kind of methods to follow in order to bring their research to a successful conclusion: the ‘how’ in both practical and intellectual terms. But unless they are naturally of a theoretical turn of mind, they are more likely to spend their time with the what than with the why, let alone the whence and the whither. It is those issues that will form much of the substance of this paper. There is no intention here to peddle some theory; instead, the focus will be on how work on Islamic architecture and its history has been, is being and should be done. The approach will thus be more practical than theoretical.

At the very heart of the enquiry is the question of how, in practical terms, the study of Islamic architecture differs from that of Western architecture. It seems sensible to set up this dichotomy in the clearest binary terms from the outset, simply because the vast majority of the world’s architectural historians concern themselves with Western architecture. It is worth stopping to ponder that fact. Is Western architecture really so much more intrinsically interesting or otherwise more worthy of study than the architecture of ‘the non-Western world’? Incidentally, that latter phrase, which is in common use — not, of course, by people from that world — is itself a somewhat offensive rubric, for (in the present context of buildings) it subsumes into one vague portmanteau term the architecture of, for example, ancient Egypt, pre-Columbian America, Japan, Hindu India and the Islamic world. And the phrase defines all those cultures not in their own terms but by using the West quite blithely and unapologetically as the obvious benchmark. It is surely worth asking oneself how the study of Western architecture has achieved such dominance, and what is implied by that. It is hard not to recognize here, in all their distorting power, the long shadows of colonialism and Eurocentricity.

In particular, what message is being transmitted to students learning about the history of architecture if they can reach the end of their degree without ever having had to grapple with any ‘non-Western’ tradition? Yet nowadays young people in particular, but also tourists of all ages, travel far more widely than did any previous generation. It is surely a pity that, precisely at a time when the world, with all its manifold architectural treasures, has indeed become smaller, people should view the architecture that they encounter in their global travels with an uneducated eye.
That unacceptable level of ignorance must be laid at the door of educational curricula, and equally of the people who design them or who perpetuate the prejudices of the past. The problem is that Westerners are apt to be sublimely, arrogantly confident that their culture — or, in this case, their architecture — is the only one that really counts, and the books that Western scholars write about Western art and architecture usually do nothing to question this confidence. Take the most famous handbook of all, Ernst Gombrich’s *The Story of Art*, first published in 1950 and since then reprinted in sixteen editions, with over 6,000,000 copies sold. Translated into twenty-three languages and dubbed ‘The World’s Best Selling Art Book’, *The Story of Art* has, perhaps more than any other book, left its mark on the minds of generations of students of art and architecture in the Western world.

Yet its very title performs an impudent sleight of hand, purporting as it does to cover in global fashion the history of art, whereas in reality it deals almost exclusively with the art of Western Europe. Architecture is consistently correlated in this book with the other major media of art, namely (for Gombrich at least) sculpture and painting. One may note in parentheses that to privilege such a hierarchy of media is silently to discriminate against the very different hierarchies which operate in other cultures, for example, privileging ceramics in China or textiles in the Islamic world. In the case of Islamic art, a subject to which Gombrich allots 472 words — one seventh of the space which he devotes to Michelangelo — the architectural monument selected to epitomize that culture for much of the time that *The Story of Art* has been in print has been a crassly inaccurate nineteenth-century rebuilding, long since demolished, of a pavilion in the Alhambra. China and Japan are represented by no building at all. A permissible implication of this omission is that architecture did not matter in these cultures.

How is one to decode all this? The original preface contains the ingenuous comment, ‘I may as well confess that I have found no room for Hindu or Etruscan art (a somewhat baffling juxtaposition), nor — as Gombrich says in the selfsame sentence — for a host of tertiary luminaries in the pantheon of European painting, such as della Quercia, Signorelli, Brouwer and Terborch. That he should be capable of bracketing such minor painters with the art of hundreds of millions of people over a period of five millennia sheds a flood of light on the author’s system of values. It will not do to regard the quite remarkable downgrading of ‘non-Western’ art here as an accidental oversight, especially not in the context of a bestseller which has been reprinted on average every couple of years for half a century. In the course of those successive editions, the preface as well as the text proper was constantly being revised, and there was ample opportunity to modulate this aspect of the book. Yet that was never done.

The message of European dominance which permeates *The Story of Art* is transmitted as much by what is omitted as by the beguilingly written text itself, and by the gross errors which disfigure the insultingly brief surveys of ‘non-Western’ artistic traditions. These are, as it were, tacked on to the main body of the book. Nor is that all. It is also a matter of how the material is presented. The art of Islam, China and Japan is lumped together in a single brief chapter whose title is again revealing: ‘Looking Eastwards’, that is, from the bastion of the West. The chapter opens with the words, ‘Before we return to the Western world and take up the story of art in Europe, we must take at least a glance at what happened in other parts of the world during these centuries of
turmoil’, and closes with a solitary reference to Japan, but in the context of how Japanese art influenced the West. Thus the dismissively brief account of, to quote the chapter sub-title, ‘Islam, China, Second to Thirteenth Century A.D.’, is itself, even within the very chapter, interpreted within the context of that West to which he cannot wait to return. One cannot help wondering how today’s readers of the Turkish, Chinese, Japanese and Korean translations of The Story of Art respond to this chapter.

The unmistakable relegation of ‘non-Western’ art to the periphery has disturbing implications at several levels — political, social and religious as well as cultural. And yet the study of art and architecture is an especially fruitful way of learning about a culture. Artefacts are a primary text which can be read at least to some extent even by those unfamiliar with their cultural and linguistic context. This is what makes The Story of Art a failed opportunity of a particularly sad kind. Its unexpressed message is sheer propaganda, namely that no art and architecture other than that of the Western world need be taken seriously. It is against that discouraging kind of backdrop that the study of Islamic art and architecture, for example, has developed.

It might well be argued that, in theory at least, architectural history ought to be capable of being practised in more or less the same way no matter what particular culture was being investigated. Much of this paper will be devoted to explaining why it does not work out that way, and specifically how the two fields of Western and of Islamic architectural history differ in practice. That in turn will involve some discussion of the specific problems encountered by those who study Islamic architecture; the types of research that most urgently need doing; and last, but certainly not least, the pleasures and rewards which this kind of work brings in its train. Clearly there will be areas of overlap within these sub-themes, especially between the discussion of current practice and the problems encountered in the course of it.

To put what follows into context, it is important to note that this survey of Islamic architecture and its scholarly study will focus exclusively on the medieval period. This is not merely a quirk of personal preference. The overwhelming mass of scholarship on the history of Islamic architecture, from its beginnings in the seventh century to the present day, has been devoted to the medieval period. That said, the border between medieval and post-medieval is somewhat porous in the Islamic world, and occurs at different times in different areas. But scholars would generally agree that in most Muslim territories, with the possible exception of the Ottoman domains, architecture of medieval type continued to be built into the eighteenth century. Thus ‘medieval’ in the Islamic context is by no means as exclusive a term as it is in the Western one. It is also only fair to add that the volume of modern scholarship on the Islamic architecture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is steadily increasing. The activities of The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture (of which more anon) over the last two decades have played a significant part in redressing this imbalance.

To provide a positive context for the unavoidably negative tone of some of what follows, one core fact needs to occupy the foreground of the reader’s attention: the superlative quality of the great masterpieces of Islamic architecture. Above all, the sheer quality of so much of the material makes it a pleasure and privilege to study it. It is their relative physical remoteness from the European scene that in large measure explains why so many masterpieces of Islamic architecture are so little known in the West. If
monuments like the Great Mosques of Damascus, Qairawan and Isfahan, mausolea like the Gunbad-i Qabus and the Taj Mahal, or military architecture like the Aleppo citadel, the castle of Masyaf or the walls of Diyarbakr, had been located in Europe they would have been the focus of intense scholarly interest generations ago. It is precisely because that has not been the case that the field of Islamic architectural history is such fun to pursue. Moreover, the plethora of decorative techniques — whether in mosaic, fresco, patterned brick, carved marble, stone, or stucco, or glazed tilework — expressing vegetal, geometric and epigraphic themes give this architecture a unique and instantly recognizable cachet. The still under-developed state of the field as a whole means that, faced with this mass of material awaiting detailed study, historians of Islamic architecture have virtually unlimited choice of where to specialise.

Now to the question of how the experience of historians of Islamic architecture differs from that of their counterparts studying the architecture of the West. Some of these differences are extrinsic to the field of study; others are intrinsic. Obviously both have their effect.

Among the extrinsic differences the first and perhaps the most fundamental is the sheer volume of scholarship, some of it dating back centuries, available on most aspects of Western architecture. The history of Islamic architecture, by contrast, has been seriously studied for little more than a hundred years. In the field of Western architectural history, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century antiquarians — not to mention earlier observers from Villard de Honnecourt to Serlio — steadily assembled relevant texts, drawings and other source material. To take the case of Britain alone, muscular Victorian vicars dashed around their parishes measuring and describing not only churches but also other buildings of interest. They published their findings in an impressive variety of journals, often of nineteenth-century foundation and also of remarkably specialized local focus, dedicated to the recording of the historical, architectural and archaeological information in a given area. Much the same can be said, for example, of France. Thus our great-grandfathers did a huge amount of spadework. And that laid the foundations for more ambitious general undertakings like Pevsner’s The Buildings of England. Nothing remotely like this constellation of earlier basic scholarship exists for the historian of Islamic architecture.

The second extrinsic difference builds on the first and might be termed the greater complexity and sophistication of scholarship on Western as opposed to Islamic architecture. This greater depth is reflected in a flood of specialized studies. With so much preliminary work already done, with the monuments safely measured, described and photographed, with lots of documents worked through, general architectural histories written and with clear, well-established definitions of local schools, plus numerous studies of architectural types and elements, structural problems, and decoration, the newcomer to the field of Western architectural history can safely move on to the next stage. That involves still more specialized studies, attractive new theories (often purloined from other disciplines), close-focus archival work, the study of a key phase in the career of a famous architect or the resurrection of a minor one from obscurity. Perhaps the field has not yet reached mid-Victorian tram shelters in Steeple Bumstead, but it is assuredly moving in that direction. Historians of Islamic architecture, on the other hand, are still stuck, if not in the Jurassic, then still at an early
stage in the evolution of their subject. Some of the obvious desiderata will be mentioned later in this paper.

A third extrinsic difference is a corollary of the other two already mentioned. In the matter of library resources (which includes photographic collections) scholars of Western architecture are spoilt for choice. They are, after all, citizens of the first world studying the architecture of what has become the first world; and they have access to many libraries of corresponding status, which have an obvious vested interest in building up collections of such material. The information locked up in those libraries is power to the arm in productive scholarship. The contrast for historians of Islamic architecture is stark. For those of them who live in Western countries, library resources of the standard needed to pursue serious research are available in only very few centres. In Britain, those are London, Oxford, and Cambridge in that order. It needs little imagination to visualize the practical obstacles confronting those scholars who live outside that so-called ‘Golden Triangle’. Libraries elsewhere in Britain are reluctant to invest heavily in this field of scholarship. With the exception of Edinburgh, there are not the student numbers to warrant it. But the uncertain, spasmodic mercies of the Inter-Library Loan system, and rushed trips to libraries far from home in order to check missing references, quite quickly add up to a cumulative information deficit that cannot easily be made up.

As for scholars in the Islamic world, their plight in this respect is parlous indeed. In most Islamic countries, libraries simply cannot afford most books on Islamic architectural history published in the West, unless — like my own book on Islamic architecture — they are pirated and sold at literally one-twentieth of the price. By a singular irony, the richest Islamic countries — those who could buy these books from the West — are those with the poorest architectural heritage. Iran used to be the only major exception, but post-Revolutionary Iran can scarcely be called rich. To put it in plain terms, the public libraries of nearly every Islamic country are too under-resourced to sustain serious research in this field.

The fourth extrinsic difference — there are still more, but there is no room to deal with them here — arises from the fact that the study of Islamic architecture has been, until recent times, effectively a Western monopoly. To the financial reasons for this just outlined above might be added the high cost of foreign travel relative to salary levels in much of the Islamic world. But even if those scholars who travelled on the passports of Islamic countries could afford to travel where they wished, they would often find — another paradox — that for political reasons it is easier for Westerners to travel widely in the Islamic world than for many citizens of that world, because of the strained political relationships within it.

But there is more. Islamic architectural history is a field invented by Westerners and cast in Western terms. Those Westerners have come from many countries and have written in many languages. A single example will illustrate this point, namely the architecture of the Iranian world, an area that in the past has stretched from Turkey and Iraq to Central Asia, Pakistan and India. Much of the scholarship in this field, true enough, is in English, but that in German, French and Russian runs it close, and there is also a good deal in Italian. The inscriptions of these buildings are mainly in Arabic and most of the local gazetteers in which buildings are briefly described are in Persian,
with some in Turkish. This is not the kind of situation in which many historians of Western architecture are liable to find themselves. Many of them, especially those who deal with the modern world, can be happily monoglot and still deserve an international reputation. Do they ever reflect as to how lucky they are?

This linguistic farrago, incidentally, works to exclude scholars from the Middle East. Paradoxically, their native languages are still not, professionally speaking, as useful — though this is very slowly beginning to change — as European ones. While many of them can handle scholarship in English, that is already one foreign language that they have had to acquire, and one can only sympathize with them when they come to contemplate the further and daunting linguistic challenges that lie ahead. These problems are exacerbated by the very poor library provision already discussed. So from their point of view, either the books are unavailable in the first place; or, if they are, they cannot read half of them.

I have perhaps laboured these extrinsic differences; but scholarship, no less than politics, is the art of the possible. So no matter how many excellent books on Islamic architecture have been published in the West, many of them might just as well have been published on Mars as far as those historians of the subject who live in the Muslim world are concerned. Such scholars can work only with the materials available to them; and those materials do not get them very far.

These problems of libraries, travel and languages are, so to speak, extrinsic. The intrinsic differences are tougher still. First and foremost, historians of Islamic architecture are forced, if they are Westerners (and most of them still are) to leave their own cultural comfort zone. In a sense, that says it all. They have to grapple with the faith, culture and history of Islam, to say nothing of one or more of its languages. That is a very tall order indeed. Of course, this is not to deny that historians of Western architecture also have to master huge quantities of data, nor that such material becomes ever more unfamiliar and difficult as one travels further back in time. But there is an inestimable intrinsic advantage in staying within one’s own cultural frame of reference. Religion, history, geography, myth, language, literature: all feel intrinsically more familiar. Goodbye to all that for Westerners who embark on the serious study of Islamic architectural history. Not only do they have to absorb a mountain of background information before they can begin to contextualize the buildings satisfactorily, but they also have to unlearn some assumptions.

Thus, for example, there is very little mileage in embarking on the study of the work of individual architects in this tradition before the nineteenth century. The sole major exception is Sinan, the master who dominates Ottoman architecture in that empire’s golden age. True, snippets of information can be garnered about some of his immediate successors, and indeed precursors, such as the Persian fifteenth-century master Qavam al-Din. But such exceptions do not invalidate the general picture. Even though hundreds and hundreds of Islamic architects left their signatures on their buildings, those buildings might just as well have been signed by Joe Bloggs; for the indispensable biographical information, the kind of thing that Vasari gives us so prodigally, is simply unavailable. These are effectively anonymous buildings.

Another assumption that has to be unlearned is that religious buildings will be designed to present figural sculpture to advantage. There is effectively none of that in
STUDYING ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

Islamic religious architecture; the exceptions are trivial. Instead, religious messages were proclaimed through epigraphy, to the extent that some buildings become holy books. This tendency can be detected at the very beginning of Islamic architecture, in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (dated 691–92), whose interior is encircled by some 240 metres of inscription bands of largely Qur’anic content.\(^{20}\) Thus the word, not the image, becomes the icon. Yet, just as figural sculpture in the West was integrated into the design, so too do Islamic inscriptions perform an articulating function, for example, defining the superposed tiers of an elevation, or hugging the undulating rhythms of an arcade.\(^{21}\)

A third assumption — and here again there are others, which shortage of space must exclude from the discussion — is the expectation that there will be written sources to shed light on a building’s history: chronicles, charters, contracts, records of legal proceedings and so on. Mosques do not have muniment rooms. Only from the sixteenth century onwards do archival documents survive in sufficient quantity to shed light on these areas, and then mainly in the field of Ottoman architecture.\(^{22}\) The formulaic nature of Islamic historical inscriptions makes them of very limited value in uncovering the finer detail of the history of a building.

Among other documents of which there is simply no trace in the surviving record are working drawings, or sketches, by Islamic architects — although there is a unique depiction of two mosques in a perhaps eighth-century Qur’anic manuscript.\(^{23}\) Yet the few deliberately simplified or reduced plans of vaults, among them muqarnas vaults of various kinds, show that Islamic architects did make use of a coded notation, if only as an aide mémoire which could be used solely by someone already trained in the profession. Vaults are traced at one-sixteenth or one-thirty-second of their size, as are decorative panels and even ground plans. While these plans might be incised on plaster, others were executed on paper and glued together into a long roll called a tumar, of which the earliest and most magnificent survival, with scores of drawings, is the so-called Topkapi scroll in Istanbul, probably of the fifteenth century onwards, recently published by Necipoğlu.\(^{24}\) But such devices continued to be used in later times, as a later eighteenth-century example from Iraq shows.\(^{25}\) Easy familiarity with complex geometrical principles is required to make sense of such notations. This reduction ensures that a great deal of information can be crammed onto a single roll. Here, then, is an Islamic equivalent to the secretive craft practices of medieval Western architects.

To harp on the extrinsic and intrinsic problems of studying Islamic as distinct from Western architectural history is perhaps to give the discussion an unduly negative tone. This, then, is the moment to emphasize, as a counter-balance to all these differences, that there are vast areas of common ground between these two traditions. They share a similar aesthetic, grounded perhaps in their shared use of an architectural vocabulary derived from the classical, especially the Roman, world of the Mediterranean: arches, domes, columns, capitals, vaults, arcades. Most of the Islamic building types can be paralleled, if not indeed duplicated, in the West.\(^{26}\) Many mosques can be interpreted as rearrangements of standard Early Christian and Byzantine church types.\(^{27}\) Minarets have an obvious source in church towers.\(^{28}\) The mausoleum genre is common to both traditions, as is the educational establishment with cloisters and their adjoining rooms disposed around a central courtyard, whether in an Oxbridge quadrangle or a
Many Islamic palaces derive from Roman models. None of this is to deny that Islamic architects found their own ways of reinterpreting this inherited tradition; but the key point is that in many ways Islamic and Western architecture had the same grandparents, as it were; they are first cousins. This is of a piece with the fact that the medieval Arabs saw themselves as the heirs to classical knowledge, philosophy and science. The Mediterranean was at times more of an Arab than a Western sea. The few distinctively Islamic forms — the bazaar, the fountain, the muqarnas or honeycomb vault — do nothing to dislodge that connexion. It is for this reason that Western scholars can bring somewhat more intuitive understanding to the study of Islamic architecture than to that of Indian, Chinese or pre-Columbian buildings.

So much for the wider context of the field of Islamic architectural history and how it differs in practical as distinct from theoretical terms from the architectural history of West. It is now time to confront the other major theme of this paper. It will be convenient to begin by posing a simple question: how is the study of Islamic architecture being practised these days? There is a one-word answer: badly. But the reasons which lead to that verdict are complex and not nearly so susceptible to simplistic one-word answers. Moreover, they have to do with unavoidable limitations rather than poor scholarship.

For a start, the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few. The recording of this architecture is typically done monument by monument and by single scholars. Teamwork is rare. The result is a certain narrowness of vision depending on the approach of the scholar concerned. It has to be admitted that this kind of solo investigation, especially when it tackles large and complex buildings, cannot easily avoid being superficial. If a whole team of people is involved, on the other hand, with different skills, the result is apt to be much more satisfactory. In such cases the study is likely to be much longer than single-author studies, as shown by the examination of the fourteenth-century Mamlok Mithqaliyya madrasa in Cairo carried out by a German team under Michael Meinecke. That team comprised a historian, an architect, two art historians, and an urban historian. Yet Hansjörg Schmid’s book on the Mustansiriyya madrasa in Baghdad of 1228, and its sister building, shows that prolonged and devoted study by a single scholar can also yield very satisfactory results, such as the discovery that plan and elevation alike were designed on a system of proportional ratios based on the Byzantine foot. Not surprisingly, this building was the subject of his doctoral thesis.

Next, much of the work currently being done is by nationals of the country in question. Algerians work on Algerian monuments, Iraqis on Iraqi ones. It is not difficult to work out the disadvantages of this situation, even though local people are likely to have the widest experience of the monuments in their own country. Such studies tend to miss out on the wider context of the buildings and to degenerate into little more than masses of undigested data. Furthermore, modern political boundaries distort medieval realities, erecting artificial barriers between territories that were culturally and often linguistically united, such as Iran and Central Asia, Morocco and Tunisia. Moreover, the political or financial restrictions already mentioned, and sometimes both, as well as the almost inbuilt unduly local focus just referred to, conspire to discourage nationals of Muslim countries from acquiring extensive first-hand knowledge of Islamic architecture as a whole. The resultant intellectual isolation
is exacerbated by the lack of meaningful exchange between scholars of these many countries within the framework of Islamic states. There is absolutely no lack of conferences on Islamic architecture in the Muslim world itself, but all too often their very raison d’être is obstinately local. Paradoxically enough, in the present state of the field it is in a Western setting and through the medium of Western languages that interchange between scholars from Islamic countries working in cognate fields but in different countries can most fruitfully take place. Since the language of that interchange will usually be English, the number of local scholars who can benefit from it to the full is thereby substantially reduced — and not only for reasons of language, but also of educational background and of facilities to travel abroad for scholarly encounters. Thus the cards are stacked against precisely those scholars who can justly claim Islamic architecture as their national and cultural heritage. By the same token, those cards are stacked in favour of outsiders, Westerners who cannot make that claim. Hence the danger that this entire field of academic study has become distorted by inappropriate Western preconceptions and intellectual baggage of one kind or another: Orientalism in the dirty sense of that word.36

There is no denying that, were the pendulum to swing the other way, a rabid nationalism might disfigure some aspects of the field. To take a single, but also representative, example, conferences on Islamic art held in Turkey overwhelmingly privilege Turkish art in their content. There is no intention here to single out Turkey for negative criticism. On the contrary, Turkey currently has by far the most active and best-trained cohort of Islamic art historians in the Muslim world, and might thus serve as a portent of things to come. Nevertheless, the implications of this unrelenting focus on the native hearth cannot help but cause some concern about the future development of the field in other Islamic states. On the credit side, however, it must be acknowledged that Turkey has made by far the most serious commitment of all the Islamic states to the study of Islamic art and especially Islamic architecture. The last thirty years has seen the establishment of scores of posts — more than in any other country in the world — in these two fields at Turkish universities, museums and academic institutes, with a publishing industry to match in the form of numerous specialist presses and journals, plus major commercial support from Turkish banks and companies for expensive art books.37 All this means that Turkish Islamic architecture has been explored in impressive detail, although this mass of information is accessible only to those who can read Turkish.38

Turkey is, however, an isolated case. In the rest of the Islamic world, progress is much more spasmodic. This is because of changing political circumstances: for example, at any given moment, some parts of the Muslim world may effectively be out of bounds for Western researchers, or at any rate difficult to work in freely. Currently Algeria, Libya, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan fall into that category. This situation, however, is liable to change suddenly; thus Iran is clearly opening up again at present.

A further reason for slow progress — Turkey always excepted — is still more chronic, namely the small number of scholars active in this field. Much follows from this fact: in comparison with the field of Western architecture there are fewer students to teach, fewer focused scholarly gatherings at national or international level, fewer opportunities for obtaining grants, fewer journals in which to publish one’s research. It
would not be surprising if in 2003 more people will publish on American architecture from 1800 to 1950 than on the entire world of Islamic architecture from Spain to Indonesia and from the seventh to the twenty-first century. This is not to decry nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American architecture; but is that an appropriate allocation of intellectual and financial resources? How many more studies are needed of establishments for processing maple syrup in nineteenth-century Vermont?

As one can deduce from that, the biggest single obstacle to exploring Islamic architecture in depth is a settled Eurocentrism (in this context, understood to include the West generally) which is all the more pernicious for being largely unacknowledged. If the world of the twenty-first century is indeed a global village, is it not high time to sally forth from Fortress Europe and get to know the history and culture of the rest of the world? That applies to architectural history no less than to the study of religion, history, literature, art and language — to stick for the time being to the humanities. The readiness to engage seriously with other cultures is a measure of whether a commitment to globalism is sincere or just a nod in the direction of political correctness.

One further aspect of current work on Islamic architecture is worth some notice at this point. Many Islamic buildings nowadays are being explored as it were by accident, or certainly as a secondary activity, in the context of several quite different concerns: those of tourism, restoration and archaeology. Each has significant drawbacks for the future not only of scholarship but also of the buildings themselves.

The advent of mass tourism has certainly brought an exponential increase of interest in the material culture of Islam. That is in itself a very positive development for the study of Islamic architecture, because buildings are the central feature of most of these group tours. But, as elsewhere in the world, the buildings thus targeted pay a heavy price. They may sustain actual damage from the physical effects of hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions, of people visiting them annually. Their floors and staircases wear away, graffiti are scribbled or cut into their walls, and fragments of decoration are removed as souvenirs. The authorities in charge of such buildings sometimes have to close them, or parts of them, to visitors (including scholars) for long periods at a time in order to install protective measures. Thus, whereas thirty years ago it was possible to wander at will through the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, one now has to follow a prescribed path cordoned off by ropes from the rest of the building, to the detriment of any serious understanding of the interior as a whole. Likewise, climbing the Great Pyramid at Gizeh is an activity now forbidden. Visitors are now denied access to the roof of the Friday Mosque of Isfahan and cannot climb its minarets. And the list of such exclusions is growing all the time.

The issue of mass tourism shades over into the next one, that of restoration. Those same authorities who see medieval buildings as a source of income often develop an itch to tidy them up. That might mean levelling their surroundings, as in the case of the shrine of Imam Rida at Mashhad in Iran, which in the space of a few traumatic weeks near the end of the Shah’s régime was stripped of a physical context of attendant buildings which had as it were slowly grown up around the sacred precinct over several centuries. Or it might involve the kind of enthusiastic but misguided gentrification which has transformed the ribat of Monastir in Tunisia from an austere stronghold of
early medieval warriors for the faith into a drop-dead cool setting for rangy pouting
models to display the latest fashions. This approach, however, can get right out of hand.
Post-Soviet Central Asia offers a depressing wealth of examples. In some fifteenth-
century monuments whose glazed bricks have partially dropped off, spanning new
replacements are run up; yet, while the originals spelled out sacred names, the new ones
are meaninglessly jumbled together, for the restorer did not realize that this apparently
geometrical ornament was actually Arabic writing. In other cases, missing passages in
cursive twelfth-century inscriptions are filled in with decorative curlicues so as to avoid
an embarrassing gap.\textsuperscript{42} Or take the Bibi Khanum mosque in Samarqand. In the past ten
years its outer walls have been rebuilt to significantly more than their original height,
thus completely disrupting the harmony of the whole ensemble. For good measure they
have now been dolled up with a lamentable and inaccurate modern Uzbek pastiche of
medieval Islamic brickwork designs. This is not a carbuncle on the face of a well-loved
friend; it is plastic surgery carried out by a butcher. The local authorities in several
Central Asian republics, in their frantic and fiscal desire to bring the tourists piling in,
and not disappoint them with what those same local authorities perceive as shabby,
down-at-heel medieval buildings, remove the ancient thousand-year-old patina of
decorative brickwork by high-speed sanding machines, making these monuments look
as if the builders had departed only the day before. Elsewhere, people are removed \textit{en}
masse from picturesque old towns like Khiva in Uzbekistan, which become ghost towns
visited only by tourists.\textsuperscript{43} Worst of all, buildings which are in part decayed are liable to
be pulled down in their entirety and then — believe it or not — re-erected in something
tolerably like their original form but wholly executed in modern materials.\textsuperscript{44} So they no
longer have any evidential value at all. In the decade since the disintegration of the
Soviet Union, and with it the departure from Central Asia of the Russian historians of
Islamic architecture who had made their careers there, the monuments they had cared
for so lovingly have in many cases suffered grievously from the ignorant, intrusive and
frequently quite redundant restorations of inept local contractors. This, moreover, in
spite of UNESCO awarding some of these groups of monuments the status of World
Heritage Sites. That is an eagerly coveted distinction because it means that more tourists
will come; but UNESCO has no way of ensuring that the buildings thus singled out will
be properly looked after. Indeed, it refuses to intervene in such matters even when the
buildings are obviously being ruined.

Finally, what of archaeology? The key point here is that most archaeological
excavations in the Islamic world are undertaken in search not of Islamic but of pre-
Islamic material culture. What the excavators seek therefore lies below the Islamic
layers, which will need to be removed to make way for it. Thus, unless the Islamic
material is of exceptional interest, it is doomed to destruction. That destruction,
moreover, given the factors of the high cost of excavation seasons and the short time
available for them, will be rapid. Often enough there is not even an expert in Islamic
architecture at hand from the moment that this material comes to light to the moment
that it is destroyed.

Moreover, by a curious quirk, in the Islamic countries the dominance of archaeology
over architectural or art history is most marked. It is well symbolized by the way that
university departments of archaeology, and governmental bodies active in that field,
enjoy a far higher status than do institutions which teach art or architectural history. Indeed, at university level it is not rare to find art history taught within a department of archaeology. The relative balance between these disciplines is further reflected in the proliferation of archaeological journals at the expense of journals of comparable quality dedicated to the history of Islamic art and architecture.45

It is time to turn to happier themes: the rewards of studying Islamic architecture, and the research waiting to be done. Truly there is unlimited room to do new work both in the field and in the study; the prospect is exhilarating. Moreover, original observations do not have to be pried loose from the accumulated incrustation of commentary left by generations of earlier scholars. It is still possible in the current state of the field for scholars to operate on a wider canvas than do most historians of Western architecture. In many Islamic countries, serious and sustained fieldwork will, as likely as not, turn up buildings hitherto unknown to scholarship: not just one or two, either.46 And the tally of monuments that are technically known but effectively not studied in detail is very large indeed. Anyone with the instincts of an explorer cannot go far wrong in this field.

Moreover, in comparison with the study of Western medieval architecture, the history of Islamic architecture is, intellectually speaking, still a field in flux. It is possible to apply all kinds of approaches and methodologies to it. Western historians of Islamic architecture have astonishingly diverse backgrounds. Some have trained as architects or art historians, sure enough, but others as lawyers, historians, philosophers, literary critics, social scientists, archaeologists ... and the list goes on. This fruitful diversity permits many angles of approach; the weight of conventional wisdom sits lightly on the profession. The father figure of the whole field, Archibald Creswell, who died as late as 1973, never got a degree at all but spent his formative years learning the finer points of technical drawing in the London office of an electrical engineering firm;47 it was scarcely the ideal preparation for his future career.

If people from such very disparate backgrounds can make significant contributions to the study of Islamic architecture, it should occasion no surprise that the range of research that remains to be done should be equally varied. And there are astonishing gaps. To begin at the beginning, there is only one book written in the last fifty years that purports to be a chronological history of medieval Islamic architecture from Spain to India, and that book (John Hoag’s *Islamic Architecture*) is little more than a survey of the obvious highlights, with few pretensions to depth.48 So there is very little in the way of general guides. And that is only the beginning. There is a need to survey literally thousands of buildings, to read thousands of hitherto undeciphered inscriptions, to study structural problems by the dozen, to explore in detail the themes and techniques of architectural decoration in a score of countries, to define regional schools, to construct the chronology of specific styles, to write detailed histories of such building types as bazaars, dams, bridges, fountains, caravansarais and the many sub-types of domestic, industrial and other types of vernacular architecture. There are only a few books devoted to the architecture of specific Islamic dynasties, let alone patrons. Most key monuments have had no monograph devoted to them. We still await a full-length study of Islamic domes, or of the miqarnas, that distinctively Islamic contribution to the history of vaulting. And so on and so forth. Clearly, then, there is much too little work
available above the level of the detailed survey of individual buildings, and thus the field as a whole lacks the detailed body of knowledge required to modulate grand generalizations of pan-Islamic scope.

This defect is the direct result of the very uneven rate at which Islamic architecture has been explored. Thanks to the pioneering work of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe,\textsuperscript{49} and to the wonderful work of Creswell, who for more than forty-five years devoted himself single-mindedly to the medieval Islamic architecture of Egypt,\textsuperscript{50} many, although not most, of these buildings are well known and well published. The same may be said for the architecture of Iran in the fourteenth\textsuperscript{51} and fifteenth centuries,\textsuperscript{52} or that of medieval Spain.\textsuperscript{53} But this relatively promising picture must be set against the extremely patchy current knowledge about, say, the buildings of most of North Africa, Pakistan and Islamic India, let alone the whole of South-East Asia, China, sub-Saharan Africa and a host of other areas at various periods. This is a necessary corollary of a field established only in the last century or so and covering vast tracts of space and time.

The underdeveloped nature of the field is reflected clearly enough by the fact that there is, to my knowledge, only one centre in the world dedicated specifically to the study of Islamic architecture as a whole, properly resourced to carry out that task and with no built-in national bias. It is thus distinct from the many institutes of architecture throughout the Muslim world whose function is principally to train practising architects rather than architectural historians, and where such Islamic architectural history as is taught will focus mainly on the buildings of the country in question. This lone centre, The Aga Khan Program for Architecture, was founded in 1979 with an $11,000,000 endowment from the Aga Khan and supports posts at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Part of the brief of this endowment was to encourage the creation of new buildings faithful to the spirit of Islamic architecture. Elsewhere in the Western world Islamic architecture is usually taught in the context of courses on Islamic art, although the subject is occasionally taught in departments of architecture. Thus, institutionally speaking, the subject has not yet arrived and must for the present fit into a wider menu of art-historical options.

There is a clear danger here of presenting the study of Islamic architecture in a negative light. That is by no means the intention. Most of the disadvantages mentioned so far could more helpfully be regarded as challenges, as opportunities to do things better and to push the field in new directions. Indeed, it is precisely the kind of disadvantages discussed in this paper, and still other problems which there is no room here to discuss in detail, that have conspired to slow down progress in this field.

Perhaps the best way of short-circuiting the practical and logistical difficulties which can beset Westerners in Muslim countries is to plan an extended stay in the relevant country. This is liable to have many far-reaching consequences, such as a sustained opportunity to get to grips with the language concerned and to experience a Muslim society at first hand. But it also facilitates multiple visits to key monuments, so that there is no need to load a brief visit to such buildings with more demands than can readily be met in a short time.

The study of Islamic architecture is liable to involve its practitioners in longer journeys than those undertaken by many of their peers studying Western architecture,
and much more testing conditions for the fieldwork itself. Issues like the granting of permits and the accessibility of buildings for study by non-Muslims may loom large. It is not easy to plan a research trip which does not suffer from too little time on site. But this problem too is more easily overcome in the context of a long rather than a short stay.

Finally, a few words about the future. During the last two or three generations it has become increasingly clear that the architectural heritage of some parts of the Islamic world is under severe threat as a result of galloping modernization. Paradoxically but not surprisingly, the recognition of this danger by municipal authorities is no guarantee that they will do anything about it. Bukhara in Central Asia was a completely walled city until the 1920s, when that wall was demolished on the specious pretext of letting more air in. With the wall went a sense of identity well over a thousand years in the making. Many cities in the eastern Islamic world had encircling walls of mud brick or even stamped earth, such as Merv in Turkmenistan, Herat among other cities in Afghanistan, Multan in Pakistan or Yazd in Iran. Such walls are all too easily destroyed. The more durable stone walls of Cairo, Aleppo, Jerusalem or Diyarbakr in eastern Turkey have fared better, but even stone walls are not necessarily a match for rapid urban expansion, as the cases of Damascus or Konya (whose walls were in excellent condition 160 years ago) show.

City walls, then, are disappearing fast; but intramural destruction is still more widespread. A recent unpublished survey suggests that Jeddah in Saudi Arabia has lost 92 per cent of its traditional high-rise domestic housing within the last century, and a good deal of that destruction has taken place in the teeth of municipal regulations aimed at preserving the urban fabric. Suakin on the Sudanese coast, with its unique buildings made out of coral, and even Zanzibar, despite the declaration of its Stone Town as a conservation area, have both suffered grievous losses. Nowadays only bits and pieces of the old city of Jeddah survive, marooned in the midst of a sea of concrete like islands in an archipelago. Towns like Shibam in the Hadramaut area of Yemen are a reminder of what has been lost. So the need for survey and conservation work is urgent. If the current generation does not bestir itself, there will be precious little left of this spectacular visual heritage for our grandchildren to admire.

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I would like to thank Peter Draper for his help and encouragement in writing this paper. Few Western medievalists have such an informed interest in Islamic architecture, and it has been a rare pleasure to discuss the subject with him.

NOTES

1 For the most recent ambitious attempt of this kind see Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, 'The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field', The Art Bulletin, lxxxv, no. 1 (March 2003), 152ff.
2 That forum was their invitation that I should deliver the Society’s annual lecture in 2001. The present paper deliberately tries to preserve something of the lecture format, and to that end references have been kept to a minimum. The intention of those references is principally to enable readers to investigate in more detail how Islamic architecture has been studied.
3 This figure is taken from the cover of the latest reprinting (already the sixth) of the sixteenth edition, published in 1995. The quotations from the text itself used in this paper are taken from the first edition.

4 By the US News & World Report (again quoted from the cover of the latest reprint).

5 Some 3,318 words.

6 It has recently been replaced by another image from the Alhambra, this time reproduced in colour, which depicts — rather than a complete building as is the norm for the other chapters of the book — an architectural detail of massed columns. Is it perhaps significant, too, that the one monument chosen to represent Islam happens to be in Europe, even though only very few pre-modern Islamic buildings survive in that continent?

7 If it be argued that the system which the author had chosen to adopt for the book limited him to one example of architecture per chapter, the idea that the image of the Alhambra could in any sense ‘represent’ China and Japan is not worth considering. Yet his own words on the purpose of the architectural illustrations in the book are worth recalling here: ‘... the story of art as here conceived could not be told without a reference to the architectural background. While I had to confine myself to discussing the style of only one or two buildings in each period, I tried to restore the balance in favour of architecture by giving these examples pride of place in each chapter’ (The Story of Art, p. 3). The ‘Oriental’ chapter was an obvious place to include two illustrations of architecture.

8 The Story of Art, p. 2.


10 ‘It was only after a new contact with the achievements of Western art in the eighteenth century that Japanese artists dared to apply the Eastern methods to new subjects. We shall see how fruitful these new experiments also became for the West when it first got to know them’ (The Story of Art, p. 108).

11 These criticisms would be irrelevant (if not entirely unfounded) had Gombrich entitled the book The Story of Western Art. But perhaps such a title would have sold much less well than The Story of Art has done.

12 Note in particular the series entitled Architectural Transformations in the Islamic World published by The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture (Cambridge, Mass., 1978 onwards). These studies deal principally with modern architecture — for example, the first volume is entitled Toward an Architecture in the Spirit of Islam — but they often bring into the discussion the buildings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

13 Hence the remark made by the President of the Royal Asiatic Society, Sir Gerard Clauson (himself a lonely pioneer in the obscure field of Altaic linguistics) when in 1950 he presented the Society’s Triennial Gold Medal to Archibald Creswell, the founding father of the study of Islamic architecture: ‘Professor Creswell has not only got to the head of his profession; he has created it’ (R. W. Hamilton, ‘Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell’, Muqarnas, viii [1991], p. 128).

14 This can be illustrated by the fact that no serious general history of Islamic architecture organized on chronological or geographical principles, as distinct from popular books on the subject, or histories of Islamic art which extend their remit to architecture, is in print. Some treatments of Islamic architecture are conceived thematically, such as Architecture of the Islamic World, ed. G. Mitchell (London, 1978), or my Islamic Architecture. Form, Function and Meaning, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 2000). But the only chronological survey of any length is that of J. D. Hoag, Islamic architecture (New York, 1977), while the only detailed geographical survey is that by R. A. Jairazbhoy, An Outline of Islamic Architecture (Bombay, 1972). Many other books boast titles that promise a treatment of Islamic architecture as a whole, but they fail to deliver.

15 In striking contrast to this situation, there are very few photographic collections of Islamic architecture available in the public domain to interested scholars. The best of these is the photographic collection built up under the auspices of The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard; in Britain, pride of place goes to the collection at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, whose core is the Creswell archive.

16 The reading of architectural inscriptions is the obvious exception here. A good example of what has been achieved by local scholars in this field are the series Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica (from 1907), and its successor, Epigraphia Indica, Arabic and Persian Supplement, in which the Muslim inscriptions of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent are systematically recorded.

17 Since Ernst Egli’s monograph Sinan, der Baumeister osmanischer Glanzzeit (Stuttgart, 1954), biographies have proliferated. A study of the master by Professor Gülru Necipoğlu, which promises to be definitive, is in preparation. Yet despite the vigour of the Sinan industry, the field still awaits detailed biographies of other great Ottoman architects. Meanwhile, see two important translations by Howard Crane: Risale-i Mi’marîye. An Early-


19 See L. A. Mayer, Islamic Architects and their Works (Geneva, 1956). His list of 318 architects could easily be doubled as a result of subsequent research — for example, an unpublished list of Persian craftsmen drawn up by the late Douglas Pickett and extending to well over a hundred closely typed pages.


21 For typical examples, see S. S. Blair, Islamic Inscriptions (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 50, pl. 4.19 and p. 211, pl. 15.86.


24 G. Necipoğlu, The Topkapi Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture (Santa Monica, Cal., 1995).


26 Examples not specifically mentioned below include the bath or hammam, the wayside inn or caravanserai, and even, on occasion, city plans.

27 An early example is the Great Mosque of Damascus (c. 705–15), where a simple re-alignment of the atrium, west front and focus of worship of a standard early Christian basilica — with no alteration of the actual form involved — is enough to transform the model almost beyond recognition. Given the overwhelmingly Christian local environment at that time and place, and the long-established authority of the basilica as a building type, this is an impressive example of (literally) lateral thinking.

28 For the most up-to-date and focused discussion of the origins of the form of the minaret or mosque tower, see J. M. Bloom, Minaret. Symbol of Islam (Oxford Studies in Islamic Art, vi) (Oxford, 1988), pp. 9–20.

29 For the intellectual background to this connection, see G. Makdisi, The Rise of Colleges (Edinburgh, 1980), and idem, The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West (Edinburgh, 1990).

30 For a brief treatment of this connection, see R. Hillenbrand, Studies in Medieval Islamic Architecture, 1 (London, 2001), pp. 154–55 (‘Islamic Art at the Crossroads’).


32 M. Meinecke et al., Die Restaurierung der Madrasa des Amirs Sabiq al-Din Mitqal al-Anuki und die Sanierung des Darb Qirmiz (Mainz, 1980).


35 T. J. al-Janabi, Studies in Medieval Iraqi Architecture (Baghdad, 1982).

36 E. Said, Orientalism (New York, 1978) remains the classic statement of the subject; see also his Culture and Imperialism (London, 1993). For a recent overview of the problem, see A. L. Macfie, Orientalism. A Reader (Edinburgh, 2000).

37 See, for example, J. Freely and R. Burelli, Sinan. Architect of Süleyman the Magnificent and the Ottoman Golden Age (n.p., 1996); G. Öney, Türk Çini Sanati (Istanbul, 1976), and E. Atil, Leoni and the Surname. The Story of an
STUDYING ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Festival (Istanbul, 1999). The latter two books were published by Yapı ve Kredi Bankası and Koç Bank, respectively.

The extent of the information explosion in Turkish art in recent decades may be gauged from the fact that the number of listings in the First Supplement of K. A. C. Creswell’s A Bibliography of the Architecture, Arts and Crafts of Islam (Cairo, 1973) — 69 columns in total — far exceeds that listed in the parent volume (A Bibliography of the Architecture, Arts and Crafts of Islam to 1st Jan., 1960 [Cairo, 1961]) for the entire period to 1960 (39 columns), even though for the most part it covers only thirteen years.

Qusair ‘Amra in Jordan, an Umayyad hunting lodge-cum-bath-house of the early eighth century with a cycle of fresco paintings of the utmost rarity — the major cycle of fresco painting in the Mediterranean world between Pompeii and twelfth-century France and Italy — has been comprehensively wrecked by hundreds of graffiti, almost all of them post-dating the ‘discovery’ of the building by a Czech scholar in 1898. For the extent of the damage, see M. Almagro, L. Caballero, J. Zozoya, and A. Almagro, Qusayr ‘Amra: Residencia y baños omeyas en el desierto de Jordania (Madrid, 1975).

The damage sustained by the almost equally rare body of early Islamic carved stucco at the Friday Mosque of Na’īn, in central Iran, datable to the tenth century, where thieves have removed much of the stucco in the mihrab, has forced the authorities to cordon off this area, thus rendering it inaccessible to study at close quarters. Yet this stucco is the principal draw of the mosque to visitors.

The scale of the damage inflicted on the environment of the shrine in the course of two campaigns of destruction in 1975 and 1977 can best be appreciated in an aerial photograph. See A General Study On Urbanization & Urban Planning in Iran, 1, ed. M. Y. Kiani (Tehran, 1986), colour pl. on 479. A less dramatic case is the celebrated ‘Tomb of the Samanids’ at Bukhara, datable to the tenth century, which when first studied in detail by Western scholars was set in an ancient graveyard, surrounded by deeply sunken tombstones. The whole area has now been levelled and transmogrified into a concrete plaza. The loss of context makes the building harder to understand and emphasizes that it is now primarily a tourist attraction.

As in the portal inscription of the tomb of Jalal al-Din Husain, dated 1187, at Uzgend in Kirghizistan. For an earlier view of this inscription, see E. Cohn-Wiener, Turan. Islamische Baukunst in Mittelasien (Berlin, 1930), pl. XV (top).


As in the early eleventh-century Samanid mausoleum of al-Mustansir, known as the Alamberdar tomb, at Kerki in eastern Turkmenistan (V. Pilyavskii, Pamyatniki arkhitekturny Turkmenistana, 1974, pp. 235–40).

Those which publish in Western as well as Islamic languages and whose prime emphasis is archaeological include Atal (Saudi Arabia), Bastan Chenassi va Honar-e Iran (Iran; defunct after the Islamic Revolution); Sumer (Iraq), Annales Archéologiques de la Syrie, Libya Antiqua, Afghanistan (defunct after the Soviet invasion), and the Journal of the Department of Antiquities, Jordan.

The case of the Yemen is perhaps the best known; scores of medieval buildings still in use within their local communities, but hitherto totally unknown to the scholarly world, have been ‘discovered’ in the last quarter-century. It will take decades before this material has been studied in the requisite detail and incorporated into the mainstream of scholarship. Its preliminary presentation is largely the work of Barbara Finster; by way of introduction, see her article ‘An Outline of the History of Islamic Religious Architecture in Yemen’, Muqarnas, ix (1992), pp. 124–47.

Hamilton, op. cit., p. 129.

For the context, see n. 14 above.


See in particular The Muslim Architecture of Egypt, i (Oxford, 1952), and ii (Oxford, 1959).


Although here the material is still very scattered, with a quite disproportionate emphasis on a few buildings: the Alhambra, the Aljaferia in Zaragoza and the Great Mosque of Cordova.

56 For the city walls of Konya as they appeared in the early nineteenth century, see N. Baspelen, Bir Zamanlar Konya (Istanbul, 1998), frontispiece and pp. 4–5.
57 See J.-P. Greenlaw, The Coral Buildings of Suakin. Islamic Architecture, Planning, Design and Domestic Arrangements in a Red Sea Port (London and New York, 1995). It is ironic that the most evocative record of how Suakin used to look is to be found in the film The Four Feathers, an adventure story based on the novel by A. E. W. Mason and shot in technicolour in 1939.
58 Happily the Courtauld Institute holds an excellent archive of photographs of the city taken by T. E. Lawrence before the First World War.