

Introduction: the historiography of Islamic art and architecture, 2012

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The present volume of studies has evolved from what was originally a fairly modest panel proposal for the 2010 Association of Art Historians annual conference held in Glasgow, seeking to survey the state of the field by inviting papers that dealt with the historiography of scholarship on the art of the pre-modern Islamic world but also accepting presentations of current research that were not primarily concerned with historiography. The very open-ended nature of the original Call for Papers reflects the fact that one of our main aims at that point was simply to address the absence of any dedicated Islamic art history panel at an AAH annual conference since Robert Hillenbrand's panel at the 2000 conference held in Edinburgh,¹ an omission that we saw as unhappily reflecting both the Eurocentrism and modern/contemporary biases of the AAH, and the apparent disinterest of some of the practitioners in our field (particularly, perhaps, in the United Kingdom) towards the critical dialogues taking place in the larger field of art history. We remain grateful for the generous support of Iran Heritage Foundation and the University of Edinburgh, which allowed us to assemble a full AAH panel of Islamic art historians once again. Even after the rather dramatic intervention of the Icelandic volcano lost us two of our speakers to the giant ash-cloud which grounded all flights in the western hemisphere, we did in the end have a panel that included excellent papers on a wide variety of subjects, some of which have gone on to appear in print elsewhere. However, the majority of the papers presented did not deal with historiography *per se*.

It was at this panel that we were first approached by the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Art Historiography*, Richard Woodfield, who invited us to act as guest editors for a special edition of the journal on the historiography of Islamic art. Stimulated by the possibilities offered by Richard's egalitarian scholarly enterprise of an open-access peer-reviewed e-journal, we circulated a new Call for Papers articulating what we perceived to be the urgent need for a critical interrogation of the field that would build on the landmark studies in historiography published since the 1990s, as well as indicating future directions for the discipline. The results of this exercise are now before you, and this introduction will seek not only to outline briefly the articles themselves, but also to pull together some of the major thematic strands to have emerged from this collection and provide some reflection on the state of the discipline thus framed. The volume has been divided into four

¹ There may have been occasional lone papers that broke this rule: Moya Carey contributed one intervening representation, a paper on Mu' in Musavvir, delivered at a wider Asian art panel convened by Shane McCausland, 'Painting workshops of the (17th century) world: Grounds for contestation', at the AAH conference held in the University of Ulster, Belfast, in April 2007.

thematic sections and this introductory discussion will loosely follow the themes by which the articles have been grouped, expanding particularly on the issues of canon formation and perpetuation that have formed something of a leitmotif throughout the assembled works.

The growing reflexivity of the rapidly expanding field of Islamic art history can be seen in a host of recent publications, notably the volume edited by Stephen Vernoit, *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections, 1850-1950* (2000), and the 2000 issue of *Ars Orientalis* guest-edited by Linda Komaroff and titled *Exhibiting the Middle East: Collections and Perceptions of Islamic Art*, as well as a number of landmark articles.² For this reason we have chosen to reproduce in the Documents section at the end of the present volume some of the most frequently cited discussions of the historiography of the field to have appeared in print in the last decade. The four texts in question are reproduced here without any editorial intervention beyond the inclusion of an erratum statement in one and a brief introductory paragraph provided by the authors in another, and are intended to act as a comprehensive sourcebook for those who wish to study the field's historiography. We are deeply grateful to the authors and publishers of these pieces for making them available for inclusion in this context. They are, in chronological order: Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, 'The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field', *The Art Bulletin*, 85(1), 2003; Robert Hillenbrand, 'Studying Islamic Architecture: Challenges and Perspectives', *Architectural History*, 46, 2003; Finbarr Barry Flood, 'From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art', in Elizabeth Mansfield, ed., *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and its Institutions*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007; and Gülru Necipoğlu, 'The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches', in Benoît Junod, Georges Khalil, Stefan Weber and Gerhard Wolf, eds, *Islamic Art and the Museum*, London: Saqi, 2012.³

From the start, it was also planned to have a small section of the journal issue dedicated to translated material. While also counselling the absolute requirement to extend one's research reading well beyond anglophone publications, Mariam Rosser-Owen has made a strong case for a 'great academic translation enterprise', to mitigate the historical outcome of this field of study that both primary and secondary research materials have been published in many different European as well as Asian languages. In support of such a mutually beneficial international project, our Translations section features a detailed account of the architecture of Delhi, composed in Urdu by Sayyid Ahmad Khan in the mid-nineteenth century, and translated here into English by Fatima Quraishi. Quraishi's preface outlines the translation history of this influential text.

² For a full bibliography of the historiography of Islamic art history one would do well to start with the considerable list of titles assembled in footnote 8 of the article by Hussein Keshani in the present volume.

³ We had hoped to include a fifth piece – Nasser Rabbat, 'Islamic Architecture as a Field of Historical Enquiry', *AD Architectural Design*, 74(6), 2004 – but unfortunately were unable to obtain publisher permission for reproduction without paying a considerable fee, in spite of the author's support.

The location of Islamic art history

The disciplinary idiosyncrasies of Islamic art history are many. An academic specialization that is now generally treated and taught as a subfield of the history of art, but which first found its feet in the nineteenth century as the outcome of largely philological and ethnographic concerns during the throes of the colonial enterprise, and with one hand (then as now) in the pocket of private collecting and connoisseurship, can perhaps be forgiven for occasionally exhibiting some of the anxieties of the misbegotten. Most prominently, the very term 'Islamic art' has been the subject of a long-running and high-profile debate that recently reached apotheosis in the renaming of what are now officially titled the 'Galleries of the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and Later South Asia' in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.⁴

The title of the article by Avinoam Shalem which stands as prologue to present volume, 'What do we mean when we say "Islamic art"? A plea for a critical rewriting of the history of the arts of Islam', could not make these terminological anxieties plainer. But Shalem is not, in fact, primarily concerned with wrangling over the implications of an intellectually questionable if widely recognized label (and the term 'Islamic art history' will be used throughout this essay, in full awareness of its problems) that equates cultural production and identity with religious practice and projects a monolithic Islam. Rather, he presents the exposure and acknowledgement of the subject's unique historiographic background as an undertaking of the utmost critical urgency and the responsibility of all of its practitioners. To this end, he examines several problematic scholarly paradigms in turn, some of them largely abandoned in academia but still circulating merrily in public discourse (such as universalism), others very much alive within the academy (one example being centre-to-periphery models of 'artistic influence'). Shalem concludes with some considerations for the establishment of a visual theory of 'Islamic art' that is rooted in the frameworks of Islamic literary, historical, scientific and theological traditions rather than the secular humanist constructs of an art history that was devised first and foremost for the study of European art. While Shalem's article was not commissioned as a prologue we have opted to position it as one because the concerns he outlines are echoed so consistently throughout the volume, finding their fullest reflection in the last article, by Wendy Shaw, of which more below.

For the purposes of this introductory essay, however, it may help to approach the discipline sideways. Rather than starting with the question 'what is Islamic art history?', let us consider a different one: where is Islamic art history? That is, where has it been institutionalized in university teaching positions and in curatorial posts in public collections?

The census data gathered in 2010 by the field's membership and advocacy organization, the Historians of Islamic Art Association (HIAA), makes the

⁴ See the reviews of the new galleries by Nasser Rabbat and Michael J. Lewis: Nasser Rabbat, 'What's in a Name', *Artforum*, January 2012 [<http://artforum.com/inprint/id=29813> accessed 22.05.2012]. Michael J. Lewis, 'Islam by Any Other Name', *New Criterion*, December 2011 [<http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Islam-by-any-other-name-7225> accessed 22.05.2012]

geographic location of academic Islamic art history partially visible, and the results are illuminating.⁵ In the collated data from a membership-wide attempt at gathering global information on past and present holders of university positions teaching some aspect of Islamic art and architectural history, relatively few positions are listed in the Islamic world itself with the major exception of Turkey, where thirty-two institutions are cited as having (or having had in the past) at least one Islamic art historian. Elsewhere, eleven institutions in Egypt are included (omitting the American University in Cairo, which is listed with the other three American universities abroad that teach this subject), and five in the rest of North Africa although only one current post-holder is listed there (the data appear to be very incomplete for this region). There are no results for the rest of the Islamic world, including for example Iran, which certainly has significant numbers of positions dedicated to the study of Islamic art and architecture. International tensions have presumably made it undesirable for practitioners there to appear in data generated by what is essentially an American organization, and much of the scholarship being produced in Iran does not reach an international audience (although sites like academia.edu are rapidly changing that situation).

Even when allowances are made for the more fully rounded picture of North America that is made available through HIAA's makeup, the number of practitioners housed in institutions in that geographic region is telling. Somewhere in the region of sixty universities in the United States and Canada currently have one or more Islamic art historians or have had a position in the subject at some point in the past. Compare this with the HIAA data for Europe: with the exception of Spain, where six institutions have nineteen post-holders listed between them – many of whom are predominantly active in the archaeology of Islamic Spain, naturally enough – Islamic art historians are relatively thin on the ground. Three post-holders in France, only one listed in Switzerland, a somewhat healthier nine spread across five institutions in the United Kingdom, but rather shockingly only two in Germany, the birthplace of academic Islamic art history. With the merry-go-round of academic jobs being what it is there have of course been changes to this picture since 2010, and the data are far from complete, to say nothing of the fact that the holders of postdoctoral positions – who make up a greater share of the academic throng in continental Europe than they do in North America – are excluded. But the overall impression derived from this 2010 snapshot is that Islamic art history is, at present, most widely practised and most internationally visible in the United States.

Scholars and showmen

The rise of the United States universities in the story of Islamic art history can be traced back to the second quarter of the twentieth century. Émigré scholars, many of whom were, like Richard Ettinghausen (1906-79), displaced under the shadow of National Socialism in the 1930s, have long been recognized as a catalyst in the shift in Islamic art studies from a centre of gravity located in continental Europe to one located in North America. The ensuing professionalization of the field in the United

⁵ Historians of Islamic Art Association: Resources [<http://www.historiansofislamicart.org/Resources.aspx> accessed 22.05.2012]

States came to define the academic discipline of Islamic art history as one that is generally understood to be as closely engaged with art history as it is with area studies, with individual posts in the subject normally housed in history of art departments. However, this model is not followed everywhere outside of North America: notably, at the University of Oxford, where Arabic has been taught since the seventeenth century, the Khalili Research Centre for the Art and Material Culture of the Middle East (founded in 2005) operates under the auspices of the Faculty of Oriental Studies and has much less direct engagement with the department of History of Art.

Following the prologue, the first section of the journal, 'Scholars and showmen', begins with two redoubtable scholars. The career of Mehmet Ağa-Oğlu (1896-1949), addressed in an article by Zeynep Simavi, stands as the bridge between the old and new worlds in this story. An extraordinary early trajectory meant that by his mid-thirties Ağa-Oğlu had studied in Moscow, Istanbul, Berlin, Jena and Vienna, training in Oriental languages and philosophy, Middle Eastern art and archaeology, and European art and aesthetics with the greatest scholars of the day (most of them German-speaking), and, significantly, honing his skills as an art historian as well as an Oriental philologist. His move to Detroit in 1929 placed him at the vanguard of Islamic art history in the United States, and his was a career of firsts – most notably, he was holder of the first chair of Islamic art history in the United States (at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) – that was cut short by his untimely death in 1949. His planned monumental work, the *Corpus of Islamic Metalwork*, was left unfinished at the time of his death, and the research materials for this are now housed in the Freer-Sackler archives in Washington DC. Simavi's discussion of the contents of this archive provides a glimpse onto a project of almost unthinkable dimensions.

The same University of Michigan chair that was created for Ağa-Oğlu was later to be held by Oleg Grabar (1929-2011), indisputably the major figure in the field of Islamic art history for most of the second half of the twentieth century. The key works that have (thus far) come to define the long and remarkably productive career of this much-mourned figure are discussed by Robert Hillenbrand in his affectionate but insightful study of Grabar's oeuvre. Between them these two scholars, Ağa-Oğlu and Grabar, delineate the 'American century' of Islamic art history. The period between Ağa-Oğlu's arrival in 1929 and Grabar's death in 2011 saw the field evolve through the efforts of pioneering scholars into a subdiscipline of art history that has received increasing recognition over the last twenty years in particular. Well over half of the North American positions listed by HIAA are post-1989 creations, and many of them have been filled by scholars from Grabar's family tree, his students and his students' students.

But Islamic art history does not only exist in universities. The most widely visible manifestations of the scholarly project of Islamic art history lie not in the grove of academe, but in museums and other public art collections. The enquiry into the location of Islamic art history is now joined by a second query: 'where is Islamic art?' The material we study in Islamic art history – classically, the historical material culture of the Islamic world, with a longstanding disciplinary focus on the Middle East – rests in two types of site. These are the originary locations of architecture or archaeology, and the current (and not necessarily permanent) locations of

subsequent repository: nationalized museums and libraries, imperial or spiritual treasuries, and private collections. This truism is worth closer scrutiny, for it is this precise diversity of preservation that has long determined how Islamic art history has been divided, directed, studied and published, and that renders us a significant political legacy to consider and/or tackle.

The geographic location of the major public collections of Islamic art is again illuminated by the data gathered by HIAA in 2010. In addition to the many national museums in Islamic countries that contain major collections of Islamic art, there are also important holdings in most European countries and approximately thirty institutions in North America are listed in HIAA's survey as having (or having once had) a curator dedicated to the arts of part or all of the Islamic world. Although designed objects from the Islamic world were globally traded and exchanged long before the nineteenth century, the current levels of westward dispersal derive principally from mid-nineteenth to early twentieth-century activity. In the European museums the geographical foci of Islamic art holdings often reflect very directly the country's colonial agenda in the nineteenth century. Hence the massive volume of Indian art in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, or the concentration of Egyptian art in the Musée du Louvre in Paris.

While curatorial positions in public collections in Europe and North America are nowadays occupied almost exclusively by scholars with PhDs in Islamic art history and prominent research profiles, this arena also underwent a process of professionalization in the twentieth century. The third individual discussed in this first section of the journal, Arthur Upham Pope (1881-1969), did not have a PhD and, what is more to the point, enjoyed a remarkably maverick career from the 1910s onwards – from lecturer in aesthetics at Berkeley to broker of Iranian art sales and consultant to American public collections and the Shah of Iran alike – leading Stuart Cary Welch to describe him as the 'P.T. Barnum figure' of Islamic art history.⁶ His reputation as a connoisseur and scholar of Iranian art enabled him to act as agent or broker for a number of high-profile collections in a largely unregulated art market. Yuka Kadoi's closely focused article addresses Pope's scholarship on West Asian carpets from a precise historiographic perspective, examining a particular article published by Pope in 1925 in *International Studio* in the context of his larger body of work on carpets and its role in the formation of 'Oriental carpet' studies in the United States. As Kadoi has noted, the arrival of the émigré scholars in the 1930s and the subsequent changes this wrought upon the Islamic art landscape in the United States contributed to pushing carpet studies back out of the scholarly field of Islamic art just as they were apparently beginning to enter it, and leaving them largely in the domain of commercial collecting where they have more or less remained ever since.

Connoisseurs, collectors and consumers

Taking its cue from Kadoi's discussion of Pope, the second grouping of papers opens out the theme of 'Collectors, connoisseurs and consumers'; with this, one of

⁶ Jay Gluck and Noël Siver, eds, *Surveyors of Persian Art: A Documentary Biography of Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman*, Ashiya, Japan: SoPA, 1996, 170.

major themes to emerge from the journal begins to take shape. That is, the circumstances surrounding the formation of a canon of Islamic art, its legacies, and its perpetuation through collecting, display and teaching practices. Like all branches of art history, the study of Islamic art rests upon a material canon, subsists by direct access or through reproduced images and data, and then flourishes by applying knowledge of cultural context in order to interpret the material more deeply. However, for complex inherited reasons of global collecting history and modern institutional logistics, these apparently straightforward elements seem disarmingly compromised when it comes to Islamic art. This situation is worth examining. It is not the intention here simply to bemoan an unconventional status quo, but to understand our field better by querying the emergence, circumscription and circulation of its canon, and by acknowledging that this has always been deeply politicized.

Exploration of the canon should perhaps begin in the most common source of European and American museum holdings: private Western ownership. The three essays contained in this section address different facets of the role of the collector and the connoisseur in the canonization of Islamic art, beginning with the figure of Edwin Binney, 3rd, who provides a direct link to the world of the art market and the private collector that lies in the background of Kadoi's article on Pope. In Keelan Overton's 'A history of Ottoman art history through the private database of Edwin Binney, 3rd', the unique character of this noted American collector of Islamic art is laid bare through his own records of his collection. Overton's article illuminates with remarkable clarity collecting practices that, while they may be idiosyncratic, are surely not unique to Binney alone amongst collectors and connoisseurs: the pursuit of quarry on the art market at the expense of rivals and an overwhelming preoccupation with pedigree (whose collection has it come from? Who else has got one?), as well as an abiding interest in his own legacy as a collector, appear to have constituted a greater focus for Binney than the intrinsic qualities of the art itself much of the time. As Overton observes, '[f]or Binney, a work of art's 'life' on the art market, as well as its position within broader histories of art and patterns of collecting, were often more important than its quality or style. As such, he is perhaps better described as a connoisseur of the market, rather than a connoisseur of the object'. One might suggest that it is his transparency in this respect that is unusual, rather than his criteria for judging the desirability of artworks. In such contexts, the canon is everything.

The material delivered to museum collections through the private collecting of figures like Binney is no indifferent survey of Islamic art but a highly-coloured selection made within a contemporary cultural ecology. Aside from the collector's personal taste (also culturally determined), the contents of any private collection are predicated on the actuality of the owner's direct experience: locations visited, dealers known, personal purchasing power, leverage of the desired objects in question, timing and focus of collecting activity, and ultimately the hazard of available opportunity. This is all worth outlining if we look principally to worldwide museum collections in order to form a canon of Islamic art history. The corpus therein has been largely filtered through the lens of late nineteenth-century collecting practices and preferences.

Less often acknowledged is that for good or ill, so much art historical material is still circulating as collectable art, serving an elite prestige economy with age-old motivations of aesthetic appeal and cultural and financial investment, and that the material subjects of Islamic art history continue to settle in contexts of private ownership with variable levels of academic accessibility and even basic disclosure.

Western private collectors of Islamic art commonly have, as Binney had, a strong bias towards objects which are portable, exchangeable and capable of being displayed in a decorative domestic context. This has engendered in some areas a primary leaning towards soft furnishings, such as the Iranian carpets so beloved of Arthur Upham Pope and the privileged social milieu of collectors which he courted, or the seventeenth-century Ottoman velvets transformed into Rothschild salon upholstery, as observed by Amanda Phillips in her article 'The historiography of Ottoman velvets, 2011-1572: scholars, craftsmen, consumers'. Both examples have the noteworthy trait of echoing the textile function intended by the objects' makers.

In both public and private collections, the originary context of certain types of object, most obviously those that have been revealed through archaeological excavation and then transported directly into a major museum (such as the Metropolitan Museum's Nishapur materials), is often considered to be somehow preferable to an uncertain and often unknowable object-life spent in various kinds of private or public repository. It seems that our preferred narrative for pre-modern materials is that they have risen to us directly from the past, having been patiently passive and unadulterated throughout the intervening centuries, which have ideally been spent underground in a virgin archaeological site, or similarly unmolested on a dusty palace library shelf. This is rarely the above-ground reality of Islamic art objects, which tend to have long and eventful biographies and trajectories only sometimes discernible through eloquent internal evidence, such as new mount settings, inserted stamps and inscriptions or a replacement binding, or by the simple evidence of their current locations, preposterously far away from their time and place of manufacture – in such remote islands indeed as Manhattan, Hawaii, Ireland and Great Britain.

It could in fact be proposed that both sites of preservation – the context of discovery, and the subsequent locations of repository – in fact represent archaeological contexts, equally subject to time and turbation and also both subject to some insecurity of provenance. In this critical framework the originary context can be styled 'below-ground archaeology', while the subsequent repository contexts (private domestic environments, palace treasuries, and museum display-cases) represent 'above-ground archaeology'. For both, the objects lie among strata of contextual evidence, with other pieces of material culture discarded in the same underground situation, or buried beneath later documentation and physical trappings pertaining to later ownership, interpretation and use, one day to be excavated and read.

One example of this framework is explored by Phillips in the stratigraphic excavation of historical context indicated in the reverse date-range in her title, as she seeks to work backwards through the historiographic context surrounding the Ottoman velvets of her study to expose issues of reception and consumption that were alive in earlier centuries of the objects' life-histories but which have become

obscured by more recent scholarship. In so doing she has presented an utterly convincing argument for the development of a model of Ottoman material culture production that moves beyond the dominant paradigm of an elite style that trickled down to the rest of society and outwards from the metropolitan centre to the provinces, demonstrating that by returning to the objects themselves and permitting their makers and various consumers a voice, a far more nuanced picture of the use-lives of these Ottoman velvets emerges.

While Phillips' study powerfully demonstrates the utility of examining an object's life and uses in the world such material testimonies are rarely discussed in museum labelling, which seeks only the briefest account of an object's original instant of production – not the longer life-story, with all its complexity, unknowable hiatus and perhaps even institutional incrimination. Doubly removed in time and space, the isolation of the historic *and* foreign object of Islamic art is thus doubly celebrated. Museum visitors thrill to see ancient objects that have travelled centuries through time and many hundreds if not thousands of miles through space and the suspect aesthetics of decontextualized display focuses solely upon the 'purity' of the solo framed object.

The overt preference in museum display for whole objects, as opposed to fragmentation, later material addition or visible repair, is further evidence of the desire to behold the frozen moment of first creation and to invalidate all subsequent actions and purposes. This is particularly evident in the case of Islamic ceramics, which are of course rarely excavated as whole objects, and connoisseurial disinterest in incomplete pieces has created space for a great number of semi-fakes and forgeries to circulate, kept afloat by a collective desire to see a whole object rather than a fractured one. The single, whole item is spotlighted alone in a simulacrum of the day it was produced and revealed to the view of a delighted patron – which privileged roleplay is happily performed by the current viewer, whether museum visitor or private collector. Perhaps for this reason, re-purposed objects are often omitted from or undiscussed in academic surveys and museum displays alike, revealing a measure of self-censorship in traditional Islamic art history. Placed upon a pedestal, the unbroken object is almost openly characterized as a desirable commodity that is tempting the acquisitive beholder, not as an object with a history to relate to the inquisitive. This model prefers to ignore the object's existence after its creation by a 'master's hand', and before its ascension to the aspic of the museum environment as a star object. For most historical objects, this intermediate existence naturally involved a very long period as an owned and traded object and yet the intervening time, experience, transformations and transference are (when not the conferrers of an obvious pedigree, such as time spent in an imperial library) often treated as something only negative – an obstruction, to be cleaned away like soil from a (below-ground) archaeological find to reveal the glossy and original artwork.

The notion of the 'star object', and the accompanying acquisitive subtext that underpins much connoisseurship, are especially present in the study of illustrated Persian manuscripts, exalted as one of the great achievements of Islamic art. Through its designation as a canonical medium, Persian manuscript painting has long been subject to models of understanding that stem directly from connoisseurial practice. The identification of individual hands and the tracing and classification of styles and their evolution has often been accompanied by – once more – an

overriding interest in pedigree. The sadly dismembered state of many major manuscripts, the result of dealers' actions following the establishment of single-page Persian manuscript painting as a premier medium for collecting from the late nineteenth century, makes searching for and identifying pages from the same manuscript or same atelier something of a headache barely a century later. In this context a taxonomical model which traces an organicist narrative of 'rise and decline' throughout Persian manuscript painting has valorized the work of certain eras, notably the Timurid period in Iran and Central Asia (c. 1370-1507). The article by Christiane Gruber, 'Questioning the 'classical' in Persian painting: problems and models of definition', addresses precisely this connoisseurial construct. Through analysis of the role of copying and self-conscious historicization in paintings of the Prophet Muhammad, she has illustrated an evident interest in and high regard amongst later painters for the works of the earlier Ilkhanid period (1256-1353), suggesting an alternative 'canon' of Persian manuscript painting that exposes the failure of the connoisseurship model of Islamic art history to enter into any judgement of the paintings on their own terms.

The recorded object: collating the canon

In the third section of the journal are three articles which broach, in very different ways, the implications not only of canon formation but also of canon dissemination for our field. It is worth underlining the significance of Europe and America in this regard, from approximately 1851 (the year of the Great Exhibition in London) to 1931 and Arthur Upham Pope's blockbuster *International Exhibition of Persian Art* (also held in London). That eighty-year period witnessed systematic activity in several interrelated domains: the survey exhibition open to the general public, the consequent publication and dissemination of densely-illustrated art catalogues, and the ever-deepening marketability in the West of Islamic material culture facilitated by increasing political and financial instability in many Middle Eastern countries. Eva-Maria Troelenberg's article 'Regarding the exhibition: the Munich exhibition of *Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art* in 1910 and its scholarly position' addresses the most seminal of these monumental survey exhibitions, and identifies a powerful relationship between private lenders, exhibition curators and the illustrated survey publication, which was to deliver a canon of Islamic art 'masterpieces' that would arguably remain largely uncontested for the following century, and which was, significantly, documented, refined and circulated through the publication of a luxurious catalogue using very high-quality reproductions.

Arguably, it has been the development of photographic reproduction, more than anything else, which has allowed the field of art history to exist. The recorded image allows accessible study to extend beyond the elite privilege of direct personal ownership, the temporal serendipity of viewing an all-too temporary exhibition, or the geographical privilege of visiting a major museum or an architectural site. Given the great mutual remove of Islamic art objects, archaeological sites and architectural monuments, the remote study of material culture is vital to the development of Islamic art history as a globally-spread academic discipline. With the academic community of Islamic art historians likewise distributed worldwide, personal

geographical remoteness from intended objects of study is a regular and unremarkable outcome. Scholars expect to travel but as research time and bursaries are never infinite objects must also be available for study and teaching from afar.

In spite of the indispensable role of remote study, it has unavoidable limitations. Firstly, once physical objects are studied as flat visual images, their coherence undergoes all manner of risk. As a powerpoint slide or a photograph printed on the page of a book, the three-dimensional object is now encountered in two dimensions only. Physical information is reduced to one visual intake, isolated from any more material engagement with physical scale, weight, surface texture and volume. Everyone has had the experience of confusion when they see a well-known (i.e. much-reproduced) art object for the first time and discover that it is much smaller or much larger than they had imagined it to be from reproductions. This disconnection applies to all reproductions but is especially deceptive with illustrated manuscripts, where there lies an illusive similarity between the paginated structure of the textbook and that of the manuscript.

Possibly the earliest case of this isolating focus on surface was that of the British designer Owen Jones when he studied, interpreted, published and recreated the Nasrid architecture of the Alhambra, in his landmark publication *Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Details of the Alhambra* (2 vols, 1842 and 1845) and his scale recreation of the Court of the Lions at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham, London in 1854. Lara Eggleton, in her article 'History in the making: the ornament of the Alhambra and the past-facing present', describes the process of excising, repackaging and praising Nasrid architecture as transferable surface design. As Eggleton argues, the visual fragmentation of the Alhambra that was performed by some of these acts of reproduction contributed to popular, and to some extent also scholarly, imagining of this monument as a nostalgic repository of ornament that looks backwards in time.

The second limitation of remote study lies in the cost structures of print media, and the stranglehold wielded by commercial image libraries. For reasons of cost, even into the twenty-first century, Islamic art objects may still be reproduced in black and white – which makes for hard choices when a journal editor condemns most of one's beautiful illustrations to monochrome.⁷ In any survey text, objects are illustrated once only for space economy and therefore shown as seen from only one side, thus excluding at least fifty percent of the visual information about a deeper three-dimensional piece. Depressingly, the same photograph can be reused in any number of publications, as the relevant museum's imaging department issues the same convenient library photo to paying customers. Paying for the museum to take a new photograph tends to be considerably more expensive and even specialist art history publishers do not usually regard this as a price worth paying for object integrity. This straightforward economic effect allows key documentary objects, such as the silver and copper inlaid Herati brass bath-pail dated 1163 and known as the Bobrinsky Bucket (held in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg), to subsist in Islamic art history as a two-dimensional version of itself, consistently reproduced

⁷ Here private collectors' published catalogues feel a financial advantage, and their photographs tend to be large, full colour and from multiple views – the Khalili volumes are elephantine examples of this luxury.

from one side only and almost never reproduced, discussed or treated in the round. It is up to individual museums to improve on this, and there has indeed been a growing commitment to free-access online images with multiple views available but only from those institutions who can afford to forego their image-fees. The apparent legitimacy of single-view image-publication suggests that the undeniable convenience of remote study is increasingly decoupling art history from object-based research.

Against this backdrop, Hussein Keshani's article, 'Towards digital Islamic art history', stands as a formidable reminder of the directional impact that image and archive availability has had on our field, and invites us to consider afresh how online data could and must serve our purposes better. It is, he argues, the responsibility of the field's practitioners to think seriously about what it is they actually need from digital archives. Digitization is happening right now: if we fail to consider how the archives we will use could best meet the particular needs of Islamic art history we will be left working with tools that have been designed for other purposes, to the potential detriment of our research. His article also encompasses discussion of the assumptions of neutrality that are often (erroneously) attributed to archives, pointing out that in fact every archive represents a series of decisions taken with regard to what is worth preserving and how information ought to be presented, with considerable political implications. In a field which is so conscious of, and sometimes conflicted by, its roots in the colonial enterprise, this is also an important aspect of the formation and dissemination of the canon of both objects and information that should not be forgotten.

The limits of Islamic art history, and new angles of approach

Moving away from the theories of the object outlined above, the final four articles of this issue each issue an explicit challenge to the typical circumscriptions of this academic field. Hence, these four articles have been grouped together under the title 'The limits of Islamic art history' and they explore, respectively, the outer edges of formal categorization, geographical space, historical time and secular models of art history. In spite of its notoriously imprecise title, the chronology and the geography of Islamic art history have apparently centred the field on the Middle East in the middle ages, thus rendering important cultural regions such as Islamic Spain and North Africa as peripheral, and temporal periods such as the nineteenth century as similarly remote and irrelevant. The disciplinary location of an acceptably 'authentic' Islamic artistic production within these restricted parameters has had enormous implications not only for the development of the discipline but also in the wider public sphere. The public role that has been foisted upon Islamic art, requiring it to perform as the benign and beautiful face of Islamic culture in a world of complex and frequently hostile relations between Islamic countries and the West, has circulated the canonical structure of Islamic art history far and wide, with sometimes disquieting results.

The first article in this grouping, by Nasser Rabbat, poses a confrontational question in its title: 'What is Islamic architecture anyway?' In critiquing what he classifies as the homogenizing strands of aesthetes and partisans, Rabbat emerges

with a definition of Islamic architecture that is, he posits, directly related to 'the impact – legal, spiritual, symbolic, social, political, functional, behavioural, and yes formal – of Islam on architecture as seen and used by the people'. In a discipline that has sought for many years to establish a largely secular framework for understanding the art and architecture of the Islamic world, this is more revolutionary than one might think. In many respects Rabbat's argument connects directly to Shalem's proposal that we must seek to establish a disciplinary framework for the treatment of art (and architecture) that is actually constructed within parameters drawn from the contexts of Islam, rather than grafted over from models derived from the study of European art.

Mariam Rosser-Owen's essay on 'Mediterraneanism: how to incorporate Islamic art into an emerging field' tracks the dynamic emergence of Mediterranean Studies, within which both Islam and art history have a potentially bright future but may yet struggle to achieve adequately complex integration. Observing that the coherent acknowledgement of Islamic Spain and North Africa is long overdue in Islamic art history, Rosser-Owen identifies similar problems in the centre-to-periphery model to those elucidated by Shalem and Phillips. As Rosser-Owen shows, the assumed model of a weakening relay of artistic styles from the metropolitan centre – traditionally conceived to be 'Abbasid Baghdad for much of Islamic Spain's history – to the posited margins of the Islamic world, has contributed to the unjustified disciplinary sidelining of Iberia and the Maghrib. In her very up-to-the-minute tracking of the emergent field of Mediterraneanism, Rosser-Owen identifies opportunities for the historians of the art of Islamic Spain and North Africa to regroup and redraw their disciplinary framework in ways that could, if done with sincerity, conviction and co-operation, produce a more plausible model for an integrated study of the arts of the region.

An idiosyncrasy of the treatment of time in Islamic art history forms the focus of the essay by Margaret Graves, 'Feeling uncomfortable in the nineteenth century'. Examining a period long elided or derided in survey literature, Graves surveys the current status of nineteenth-century materials within the overarching narratives of Islamic art history as revealed in, principally, the survey text and the saleroom, seeking answers to the question 'what is so wrong with the nineteenth century?' In the event, some of the nineteenth-century materials under discussion are shown to be of increasing interest for their utility as perfect teaching material for discussing complex global phenomena. But beyond the didactic value of nineteenth-century arts, the disciplinary treatment of the nineteenth century as a whole exposes the field's continuing predilection for taxonomic structures rooted in the ethnological practices and collecting milieu of the colonial enterprise, contributing to a number of paradoxes. The absent nineteenth century in Islamic art history has also, inadvertantly, provided support for popular imaginings of the contemporary Islamic world as a retrograde zone. In this context Graves' study can also be connected with questions raised elsewhere about the role of Islamic art history as public mediator of Islamic culture and civilization, a theme that emerges most fully in the last article in the volume, that of Shaw.

In 'The Islam in Islamic art history: secularism and public discourse', Wendy Shaw makes what must be the fullest and most considered argument to date for abandoning the secular art-historical framework that has dominated studies of

Islamic art history for decades. As has already been mentioned, this is something of a leitmotif throughout the volume as a whole, explicitly called for by Shalem and also argued to a certain extent by Rabbat, and it is implicitly present in other places. A very telling observation made by Robert Hillenbrand in his essay on Oleg Grabar notes the surprisingly slight impact made by religion within that great scholar's body of work:

He did not fail to acknowledge the religious impulse behind so much Islamic art; and he was capable of sensitive analyses of the thinking behind the use of specific Qur'anic verses in specific locations within a building, as is repeatedly evident in his book on the Isfahan *jami*'. But such insights, revealing as they are, do not invalidate one's basic impression that he did not make it a high priority to probe in depth the religious impulse in Islamic art. ... one senses that his particular configuration of interests led him to downplay the overwhelmingly religious motivation of so much Islamic art, especially Qur'anic manuscripts, sacred architecture and the impact of *waqf*.

Grabar was, without doubt, a towering scholar, and there is of course no rule that says an Islamic art historian must be all things to all men. But this observation is interesting because it speaks of a much broader and just-tangible disciplinary aversion to religious models for understanding the art of the Islamic world. While many practitioners in the field have perhaps reacted strongly against the possibility of a religious model for Islamic art history in part because they are seeking to avoid the universalist mystical interpretation of Islamic art propounded in certain quarters in the 1970s, it is time, Shaw suggests, for us to stop attempting to fit the discipline of Islamic art history into a secular humanist framework borrowed from other areas of art history. Rather than continuing to elide Islam as a cultural phenomenon through the designation of 'denatured aestheticized tropes', Shaw argues for a new and more complicated academic discourse of Islam - which could potentially strengthen Islamic art's capability to bespeak intellectual processes of religion as expressed in material culture. A more variegated exposition of Islam and Islamic art, she argues, could and should stand 'against the essentialization of Islam at the core of both Orientalist and fundamentalist practice'.

Our initial Call for Papers, launched in mid 2010, proposed that the time was right for fresh interrogation of the field of Islamic art history, given the ongoing rise of published research on this broad and complex material culture. Papers were duly sought which might analyze the field's rather specific intellectual legacies, compare parallel contextual developments, and imagine future directions if not obstacles. We very much hope that this collection of papers will provoke and stimulate new ideas about and appraisals of significant and even controversial figures, materials, events, approaches, moments and concepts, as they have certainly done for us as editors. Editing this collection of works has been a genuinely illuminating experience, constantly leading us into new territory. Most humbling, but most rewarding also, has been the experience of having some of our own prejudices about Islamic art history revealed to us.

With this in mind, we would like to offer our sincerest thanks to all of the contributors to this volume, the authors of the essays and those who contributed

works previously published elsewhere for the documents section. We would also like to extend our thanks to those of our colleagues who kindly agreed to serve as anonymous peer-reviewers for this project. Finally, we are enormously grateful to Richard Woodfield, the *JAH* editor-in-chief, for offering us the opportunity to undertake this valuable and eventually completely engrossing project (and for his tremendous patience throughout), and to his assistant Emily Cottrill.

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