

Mediterraneanism: how to incorporate Islamic art into an emerging field

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Towards the end of their historiographical article, 'The Mirage of Islamic Art', Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom pondered some possible solutions to the central problem of how exactly to define and encompass the 'field' of 'Islamic art'.¹ One option, proffered somewhat reluctantly, was 'to dismantle the field of Islamic art entirely and give over its bits and pieces to the adjacent historical and geographic fields, such as medieval Mediterranean art or the arts of the Indian subcontinent'.² This was not an option the authors decided to accept, as it 'would mean that all medievalists would have to be responsible not only for the Gothic in France and Germany but also for the mosque of Córdoba and Mamluk architecture in Egypt and Syria'. While perhaps the medievalists of northern European art might balk at taking on this responsibility (though some would not and have not – Chris Wickham and Sarah Guérin, for example, whose work is discussed in part IV of this essay), what about the Mediterraneanists? In the last decade, even in the last five years, the 'medieval Mediterranean' has expanded dramatically as a field of academic study in its own right, with an enormous number of conferences, publications, scholarly journals and even academic positions emerging to reflect burgeoning interest in this field of enquiry. While Blair and Bloom were concerned that the Islamic would get lost in 'the larger story' of the Mediterranean, other scholars have expressed the view that a fragmentation of the 'former monolith' of the field of Islamic art is only beneficial, allowing a 'specialized study of historical contexts ... that permit[s] works of art to be analyzed ... in more sophisticated ways'.³ A place is undoubtedly emerging for Islamic material culture within the medieval Mediterranean framework: there is even a sub-discipline that has been styled the 'Islamic Mediterranean'.

This essay will not attempt a detailed historiographical review of all the recent academic output on this region, which is – suddenly – vast, but will offer

¹ I am grateful to the editors, Moya Carey and Margaret Graves, as well as other friends and colleagues who have discussed these ideas with me or sent helpful and thought-provoking comments on the first draft of this paper, especially Glair Anderson, Corisande Fenwick, Tehmina Goskar, Sarah Guérin, Eva Hoffman, Alex Metcalfe and Rose Walker.

² Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, 'The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field', *The Art Bulletin*, 85, 2003, 174-5.

³ David J. Roxburgh, 'After Munich: Reflections on Recent Exhibitions', in Andrea Lerner and Avinoam Shalem, eds, *After One Hundred Years: the 1910 Exhibition 'Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst' Reconsidered*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, 368.

some reflections on the ‘nascent field’⁴ of what is becoming known as ‘Mediterraneanism’; next, it will examine some of the problems that still remain for the study of Islamic material culture in the Mediterranean, and suggest some ways forward. As a historian of Islamic Iberia, my concentration will be the western Mediterranean basin, where a ‘pan-Straits approach’ is increasingly being adopted in order to study Iberia in meaningful conjunction with the traditionally-excluded region of North Africa.⁵ Chronologically, I err towards the medieval rather than the early modern. In focusing on the western – and, to some extent, the central – Mediterranean, I do not implicitly exclude the eastern basin from a pan-Mediterranean framework, but leave it to colleagues who know that region better than I to see whether the suggestions offered here might be helpfully applied to a similar expansion of their field of enquiry. Indeed I would urge those colleagues not to forget Byzantium in so doing.

I. Defining the Mediterranean

A friend was recently asked in a job interview, ‘What is your theory of the Mediterranean?’ Just a few years ago, this question would have been inconceivable (as it was, it was unexpected). Scholarly discussions of what the Mediterranean is and what it means for historians of the ancient and medieval past have been excited by the publication of Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell’s great study of Mediterranean history, *The Corrupting Sea* (2000),⁶ as they never were by Fernand Braudel’s groundbreaking magnum opus, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II* (1949),⁷ for all that the latter work gave birth to the French Annales School and changed the way that many people study history.⁸ In the decade since Horden and Purcell’s polemical book was published – and particularly in the last five to six years, as historians from a variety of disciplines have digested their arguments and begun to respond to them – the debate has become increasingly exercised, and through the burgeoning of publications and, above all, academic conferences, a new field of Mediterranean studies is emerging.

⁴ A phrase used by Amity Law of Harvard University’s Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture in her recent Call for Papers for the second part of the panel ‘Rethinking Cultures and Identities in the Medieval Mediterranean’, proposed for the 47th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, May 2012.

⁵ This is the term adopted by the Spain-North Africa Project (SNAP), discussed below, to guide the roundtable discussion on integrating Iberia and North Africa in scholarship, teaching, and the Academy, organized at the first SNAP symposium, held at the Catholic University of America, Washington DC, in November 2011.

⁶ Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000. See (among others) the review by David Abulafia in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 14 April 2000, 9-10, and the authors’ eventual rebuttal: ‘Four years of corruption: a response to critics’, in William V. Harris, ed., *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 348-75.

⁷ Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*, Paris: Colin, 1949.

⁸ For an interesting discussion of why Braudel’s work ‘[brought] about an end rather than a beginning to Mediterranean studies’, see Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, 39-43.

A focus on the Mediterranean as a field of research did exist before Horden and Purcell, though there was a tendency for scholars to study in depth isolated pockets around the Mediterranean coastlands, rather than the interaction between them. This is largely because of a traditionally national (though not necessarily *nationalist*) approach to the different geographical entities which share the Mediterranean space. In the past, Spanish scholars have exclusively studied Iberia, Italian scholars Italy – though both these peninsulas are comparatively recent federations of historically distinct regions, a circumstance which has in turn contributed to a region-specific approach within these countries. Granada-based academics in Spain, for example, have to date almost exclusively conducted research on Granada (though thanks to the increasingly international outlook of the Escuela de Estudios Árabes and its Laboratorio de Arqueología y Arquitectura de la Ciudad, this is beginning to change). At the recent conference ‘Romanesque and the Mediterranean’ (organized by the British Archaeological Association, Palermo, 16-18 April 2012), Caroline Bruzelius commented on the historic tendency of Italian scholarship not just to concentrate myopically on a particular region, such as Lazio or Apulia, but even to focus exclusively on a particular city.

Medieval historians and art historians are now actively investigating whether the Mediterranean as a ‘geographical expression’⁹ provides a useful framework within which to redefine and refine the traditional academic disciplines. With the recent welcome trend for interdisciplinarity in academic study, the Mediterranean, as ‘the meeting point of three continents and of three religions’,¹⁰ becomes an obvious and appealing subject. However, this rather rose-tinted figuring of the Mediterranean as a place solely of cross-cultural exchange has come to dominate in the studies which have emerged from this first flush of Mediterraneanism. In fields where a comparative consideration of other cultures has not been part of the traditional method – the art history of medieval northern Europe, for example – but which nonetheless must respond to the current general academic call for interdisciplinarity, the medieval Mediterranean with its many contiguous cultures has offered an easy hit for exploring a bit of ‘cross-cultural exchange’,¹¹ asking ‘what it means for scholars to speak of... one region with several religious cultures’.¹² As this quote from a recent Call for Papers shows, these discussions have tended to be preoccupied with religion, an issue which I will return to. Such perspectives have more to do with responses to modern geo-political concerns than with the realities of living in the medieval Mediterranean; indeed, as such they reflect a general tendency in the last decade to seek a ‘bridge to cultural understanding’ within Islamic art and history.¹³

⁹ Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, chapter 1.

¹⁰ David Abulafia, ed., *The Mediterranean in History*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2003, 23.

¹¹ Call for Papers for the Newberry Library Symposium, Chicago, February 2011.

¹² Call for Papers for a one day conference at the University of Texas at Arlington, March 2012.

¹³ Roxburgh, ‘After Munich’, especially 377-82. He notes (359) the tendency that has ‘increased in cultural politics since 9/11 and 7/7’, that ‘artworks from the historical Islamic lands are often expected to carry an overtly didactic weight, the burden of representing Islamic societies and cultures (and sometimes in a particular light)’.

Considering the Mediterranean as a point of religious intersection can also be seen as reaction against the assertion of Henri Pirenne (1862-1935) that the Mediterranean was a site of rupture and fragmentation.¹⁴ This passage summarizes his point of view:

With Islam a new world was established on those Mediterranean shores which had formerly known the syncretism of the Roman civilization. A complete break was made, which was to continue even to our own day. Henceforth two different and hostile civilizations existed on the shores of *Mare Nostrum* ... The sea which had hitherto been the centre of Christianity became its frontier. The Mediterranean unity was shattered;¹⁵ ... once the great means of communication, [the sea] was now an insuperable barrier.¹⁶

In what came to be known as ‘the Pirenne thesis’, the Mediterranean was totally closed by the Islamic invasions of the seventh century, north was cut off from south by an invisible border falling somewhere across the sea, and the region was only ‘reopened to commerce’ in the twelfth century.¹⁷ Since this thesis was proposed, scholars of the Mediterranean have moved away from these simple binaries and are now trying to open up the study of the sea as a system, seeking to adopt ‘a broader geographic view’,¹⁸ and to think about ‘connectivity’ in the parlance of Horden and Purcell, or ‘interactions, rather than an infinite number of localities’.¹⁹ But these interactions do also include conflict, in the forms of war and power politics, and not necessarily between states whose rulers professed different faiths – the long conflict between the Andalusi Umayyads and the Fatimids in Tunisia comes to mind, for example. Mediterranean studies should not be afraid to encompass notions of clash and studies of conflict, but these should obviously be considered in a more nuanced way than is exemplified by the Pirenne extreme.

A singular vision of the Mediterranean sea as a facilitator for cross-cultural exchange risks becoming a sop to political correctness, a bias-inflected subject that too closely reflects the contemporary world’s yearning for peaceful multiculturalism. In some respects, the Mediterranean has been adopted as a new al-Andalus, a medieval beacon of *convivencia*, the mythical paradigm of harmonious coexistence between the three Abrahamic faiths. The organizers of two recent conferences, ‘The Mediterranean: Criss-crossed and Constructed’²⁰ and

¹⁴ Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, tr. Bernard Miall, London: Unwin, 1939.

¹⁵ Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, 152-3.

¹⁶ Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, 164.

¹⁷ Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, 172.

¹⁸ Call for Papers, ‘Sea-Crossings: Rethinking Mediterranean Architecture and History’, University of Virginia School of Architecture, 19-20 November 2010.

¹⁹ Abulafia, *Mediterranean in History*, 18.

²⁰ Held at Harvard University, 28-30 April 2011, organized by the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Program in Moroccan Studies, Kokkalis Program and Humanities Center.

'Mediterranean Cities. Myth and/or Reality?','²¹ specifically noted in their Calls for Papers how European politicians have employed this very myth of 'Mediterranean harmony' in their development of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, through the Barcelona Process of 1995, and more recently the Union for the Mediterranean (2008), fronted by Nicolas Sarkozy, former President of France.²²

In the discussion that follows, I will leave to one side the ongoing debate about whether the Mediterranean is distinct from other geographical areas, or whether it possesses a 'cultural unity'; I will not engage in the discussion of whether historic Mediterranean peoples 'self-identified' as being from that region.²³ I will also set aside preoccupations with how to define the Mediterranean: whether we mean the sea itself and as a consequence restrict study to the history of the people who crossed it; whether we cling to the coastlands of its littoral, which then raises questions of how far inland to extend the Mediterranean hinterland; whether 'the Mediterranean' should include Portugal and the Black Sea... These questions have been addressed in other recent publications.²⁴ For the sake of argument, I am happy to concur with the organizers of the conference 'Southern Horrors: the Dark Side of the Mediterranean World seen from Northern Europe and America (1453-1939)', and adopt the Braudelian climatic criteria for the northern and southern limits of this world: 'from Donzère to Timgad, from the first olive trees encountered when coming from the north to the clusters of palm trees growing on the edge of the desert'.²⁵ Furthermore, I concur with Brian Catlos's view of the Mediterranean as:

[a] 'historical region' in the same sense that 'Europe', 'the Islamic World' and 'the Jewish World' are invoked ... as categories of analysis. This is to say it should not be reified or essentialized, nor endowed with a historical protagonism that it did not possess, nor imagined to be universally valid. It is, just as those other categories, one of many appropriate intellectual models to employ in historical analyses of the Middle Ages, but it is one which has been traditionally neglected because of the biases of nation-state oriented

²¹ Conference held at Monte Verità, Ascona in April 2012, organized by the Istituto Studi Mediterranei and the Masters in Intercultural Communication (Università della Svizzera Italiana, Lugano) in association with Università di Bergamo, University of Colorado at Boulder (The Mediterranean Seminar), and the Centro Stefano Franscini.

²² On the Barcelona Process, see the EU website European Union External Action: Euromed [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/barcelona_en.htm accessed 19.05.2012]; on Sarkozy's Mediterranean Union, see Union pour la Méditerranée [<http://www.ufmsecretariat.org/en/> accessed 19.05.2012]. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was conceived as 'an innovative alliance based on the principles of joint ownership, dialogue and co-operation, seeking to create a Mediterranean region of peace, security and shared prosperity' (quote from the website European Union External Action: Euromed).

²³ See, for example, Michael Herzfeld, 'Practical Mediterraneanism: Excuses for Everything, from Epistemology to Eating', in Harris, *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, 45-63; or Tehmina Goskar, 'Material Worlds: The Shared Cultures of Southern Italy and its Mediterranean Neighbours in the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries', *Al-Masaq* 23(3), 2011, 189-204.

²⁴ Especially Abulafia, *Mediterranean in History*, and now *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*, London: Allen Lane, 2011; Harris, *Rethinking the Mediterranean*; Herzfeld, 'Practical Mediterraneanism'; Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*.

²⁵ Conference held at Université de Nice-Sophia Antipolis, Nice, in April 2012.

historiography and assumptions regarding the absolute incompatibility of rival confessional cultures.²⁶

As I shall elaborate further, especially in part IV of this essay, considering the Mediterranean as a geographic region is useful as a means of bringing together disciplines and areas that do not currently talk to each other, but it is not an end in itself: we should be careful not to ignore the connections between this region and other important zones of the medieval world.

Lastly, by 'Mediterraneanism', I do not mean the quasi-Orientalist sense in which Horden and Purcell define it,²⁷ whereby a 'Mediterranean character' typified by idleness and a *mañana/insha Allah* attitude is attributed by northern Europeans to their southern neighbours. Rather, I use the term as it is increasingly being used by other scholars, to define an emerging field characterized by a growing comparative method in the approaches taken to the study of different aspects of the 'Mediterranean space' in the medieval period. As William V. Harris suggests, the most sensible way forward for historical study of any kind is 'to pursue broader comparisons and a less restricted ethnography',²⁸ though he does not limit himself to the Mediterranean, and neither should we.

II. Building a Mediterranean framework

The recent frenzy of conferences convened on Mediterranean themes is only one – if perhaps the most visible – aspect of the ways in which Mediterranean studies have become firmly embedded in international academia over the last ten years. This section will survey the various facets of this new discipline, which include societies and initiatives, research centres and jobs, an expanding number of periodicals and email lists. There can be no doubt that this academic discipline has arrived, and it remains for Islamicists and Islamic art historians to decide how they want to integrate or respond to this Mediterranean framework. The starting point of this section will be an overview of the conferences being organized – many of them by the indefatigable Brian Catlos under the auspices of The Mediterranean Seminar – and the common themes which emerge from their often eloquent Calls for Papers. These conference rationales provide the most up-to-the-minute bellwether for the directions that research in the field is taking; so far, Islamic art has played a very minor role.

So many Mediterranean-themed conferences have been organized in the last few years that conferences are now being organized to comment on the organization

²⁶ Brian Catlos, 'Was there a Medieval Mediterranean?' Quote from the abstract of his paper developed during the Residential Research Group on 'Alternative Teleologies: The Mediterranean and the Modern World(s)', convened at the University of California Humanities Research Institute, Fall 2007.

²⁷ See Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, 28-9, 'The Romantic Mediterranean'.

²⁸ Harris, *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, 39.

of all these conferences!²⁹ Common themes that emerge from the Calls for Papers highlight networks (building on Horden and Purcell's concept of 'connectivity'),³⁰ the sea itself,³¹ cross-cultural exchange,³² multiculturalism and, in particular, 'ethno-religious diversity'.³³ The next few paragraphs will examine some of these themes in more detail, looking in turn at the question of religion, the notion of hybridity, and the way that Mediterranean studies have been utilized as a means of embracing the foremost academic desideratum of the last decade – interdisciplinarity.

Conferences and methodologies

Much emphasis is placed on the religions of the Mediterranean and this region as the meeting point of different confessional cultures. This has certainly been David Abulafia's consistent approach to the study of the Mediterranean.³⁴ Scholars of medieval Europe who have attempted to engage in a dialogue across a perceived cultural divide have engendered a fixation on religion as the sole axis around which contact or conflict can be predicated. This perspective is entrenched by the Webb-Smith Essay Competition offered by the Department of History at the University of Texas at Arlington, for the 'best research essay on "Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Medieval Mediterranean"'. Submitted articles should 'explore relations between the three major cultures in the medieval Mediterranean', and may concern

cultural or technological transfers, trade and its social or political implications, warfare, conquest, migration, and theories of Mediterranean unity/disunity or inter-cultural relations ... Papers that engage with current scholarship debating the connections within the Mediterranean or the utility of discussing multiculturalism in the Middle Ages are especially welcome.

The prizes, awarded in 2012 jointly to Brian Catlos and Thomas Glick, were presented at the forty-seventh Annual Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lecture Series in Arlington in March 2012, a day-long conference which set out to 'critically

²⁹ See the Call for Papers for 'Interdisciplinarity in the Medieval Mediterranean', Knoxville, TN: Medieval Academy Annual Meeting, April 2013: 'Especially welcome are papers that include some specific reflection on the nature, promise, and/or limitations of ... interdisciplinarity'.

³⁰ For example, 'Sea-Crossings: Rethinking Mediterranean Architecture and History', University of Virginia School of Architecture, November 2010.

³¹ For example, 'The Mediterranean: a Liquid Space of Architectures, Images and Things', Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence, December 2010.

³² 'The Mediterranean, Criss-Crossed and Constructed', Harvard, April 2011.

³³ A category that would include most of the output of The Mediterranean Seminar, including the 'Workshop on Ethno-Religious Diversity and Cultural Innovation', organized to coincide with the thirteenth Mediterranean Research Meeting held by the Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute at Montecatini, Italy, March 2012.

³⁴ Abulafia (in his review of Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, cited in footnote 6) accuses the authors of 'little understanding how the coming of the three great monotheistic religions transformed the religious life of the Mediterranean'.

examine aspects of the multi-cultural Mediterranean and what it means for scholars to speak of the sea as one region with several religious cultures'.³⁵

Islamic art historians are perhaps particularly sceptical of a focus on religion, born out of a constant compulsion to clarify that 'Islamic' in the title of our field relates to the faith professed by the patrons who commissioned the buildings and objects under study, not the objects themselves, nor many of the buildings, unless they happen to be mosques. Indeed, a concern with religion has perhaps led to a disproportionate abundance of studies of religious architecture in Islamic art history, largely because mosques tend to survive, albeit in states that have been altered many times from their original medieval forms. Fewer studies have focused on secular or domestic structures (apart from the few surviving Islamic palaces). Categories such as 'Mudéjar' – the Spanish term conventionally used to refer to art or architecture in an Islamic style commissioned by non-Muslim patrons – have been invented to accommodate the confessional overlap into which whole classes of objects and buildings inevitably fall. Although many scholars feel the term is not wholly satisfactory, recent attempts to move away from thinking of particular types of objects as neither 'Islamic' nor 'Christian', indeed just as objects that arise from the particular social conditions of specific locales, have not been overwhelmingly warmly received.³⁶ Categorizing objects according to faith groups raises questions of the identity and religion of their makers that do not necessarily help us to understand the objects as works of art. Portable objects circulated widely, spreading styles across great distances, and appealing to consumers of all faiths.³⁷ Issues of faith do not necessarily help us to understand how trade goods were exchanged or patronage systems worked, and this preoccupation detracts from a consideration of art objects within their specific socio-economic contexts.

'Hybridity' is another concept that has reared its head in the themes of several recent conferences. It was the theme of the second NEH-sponsored Summer Institute organized by The Mediterranean Seminar;³⁸ and the fourth International Conference of Mediterranean Worlds, to be held in Istanbul in September 2012 (again, in collaboration with The Mediterranean Seminar), takes the title 'Domino

³⁵ Webb Lectures, on the website for University of Texas Arlington: College of Liberal Arts [<http://www.uta.edu/history/webb.html> accessed 19.05.2012]. The lectures presented, including the two essay competition winners, will be published in a volume edited by Sarah Davis-Secord and Elisabeth A. Cawthon. The title of Brian Catlos' essay is 'Accursed, Superior Men: Ethno-religious Minorities and Politics in the Medieval Mediterranean'. I have been unable to discover any further details of Thomas Glick's essay.

³⁶ I am thinking here of the objections raised during the Historians of Islamic Art Association Symposium in Washington DC in October 2010 to Anna McSweeney's proposal that scholars should consider the tin-glazed ceramics made at Paterna in southeastern Spain in the fourteenth century simply as 'Paterna ware' rather than as a sub-category of Mudéjar art.

³⁷ Eva Hoffman, 'Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century', *Art History*, 24, 2001, 17–50.

³⁸ 'Cultural Hybridities: Christians, Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Mediterranean', see [<http://humweb.ucsc.edu/mediterraneanseminar/projects/neh2010/neh2010.php> accessed 04.03.2012]. This was hosted by the Archives of the Crown of Aragón, Barcelona, in July 2010. See below for more on these Summer Institutes.

Effects and Hybridization of the Mediterranean'. While this facet of postcolonial theory is being abandoned in other sectors of scholarship,³⁹ it is just emerging as a theoretical buzzword for art and cultural history, though many scholars feel uncomfortable with its connotations of eugenics under the Nazis,⁴⁰ or its negative implications of instability/liminality *vis-à-vis* some perceived canon.⁴¹ Hybridity also remains frustratingly ill-defined: the definition offered in the Call for Papers for the Istanbul conference rests on the notion that the Mediterranean is 'a place of constant flux', but it might reasonably be asked, what place isn't? Indeed, Horden convincingly questioned the validity of applying this notion to the Mediterranean at a seminar presented to the London Society for Medieval Studies by asking – is cultural mixing just what happens in societies, and do we just notice it more in the Mediterranean because the Muslim and Jewish cultural aspects are more visible? Is what seems to be a special Mediterranean phenomenon actually what passes for history in other parts of Europe and the Middle East?⁴²

Along similar lines, William Tronzo recently offered two 'general propositions' that he takes 'to be foundational to any discussion of hybridity':⁴³ firstly, 'everything is hybrid. Everything is composed on some level ... and every composition, in some sense, is made up of disparate parts'. Secondly, 'everything is hybrid but not everything is called hybrid'. He elaborates, '[t]o call something hybrid is really an act of selection. It is to pull something out of our vast field of experience and label it in a way that draws attention to its disparate nature ... We use the label hybrid to designate something we see as a departure from a norm'. But how do we define the norm? The theory of 'hybridity' – at least in the way it has been applied to the study of the medieval Mediterranean – implies the marriage of disparate elements to form a new and different whole, but one that is imbued with a positive ideal of cross-culturalism. Tronzo notes his discomfort with discussions of 'shared cultures', where the 'hypothesis ... is essentially that similarities were more important than differences in the medieval Mediterranean world'. By selecting only those elements which a particular researcher considers to be 'shared', we build a picture of the medieval past based entirely on modern biases – this act of selection is 'profoundly political in nature'.

An afternoon workshop at the University of York in July 2011 discussed whether 'syncretism' (rather than 'hybridity') should be adopted as a possible

³⁹ Personal communication from Corisande Fenwick, 14 April 2012, who also raises the important question of how much influence postcolonial approaches have had on the emergence of Mediterraneanism: 'certainly a lot of the terminology and emphasis on fluidity, change etc. in a non-confrontational, almost positive, way is the same'. This is an aspect of the historiography of this field which deserves further scrutiny.

⁴⁰ Personal communication from Eva Hoffman, 1 April 2012.

⁴¹ See Michael Camille, 'Prophets, Canons and Promising Monsters', in 'Rethinking the Canon', *The Art Bulletin*, 78(2), June 1996, 199.

⁴² Seminar held at the Institute of Historical Research, London, 15 February 2011.

⁴³ William Tronzo, 'Restoring Agency to the Discourse on Hybridity: the Cappella Palatina from a Different Point of View', in Thomas Dittelbach, ed., *Die Cappella Palatina in Palermo: Geschichte, Kunst, Funktionen*, Künzelsau: Swiridoff Verlag, 2011, 579-80.

alternative model for studying the cultures of medieval Iberia. While the notion of syncretism has the merit of permitting the recognition of disparity without imposing a need to study only those elements which are perceived to be held in common, such discussions of whether to adopt this or that theory ultimately make the field of Mediterranean studies sound like a subject in search of a framework. In both cases, the exploration of themes of 'ethno-religious diversity' and 'hybridity' in Mediterranean societies is a self-conscious reaction against the traditional nationalist discourses that have dominated studies of many states in the region during the twentieth century, as discussed further in part III. It is also a reaction against the Pirenian view of civilizational clash, and another means by which Mediterranean studies are being employed to respond to contemporary politics. It can be argued that these emphases in recent scholarship have accomplished the conceptual redirection that they set out to achieve, and that it is now time to refocus.

The main message perceptible from all these Calls for Papers is interdisciplinarity, reflecting the most important development in art historical scholarship in the last decade. As with so many methodological shifts that have taken hold in academia in recent years, this takes its lead from a self-conscious redirection in the social sciences.⁴⁴ Defined as 'transcending disciplinary barriers and boundaries', the ostensible goal of interdisciplinarity has been not simply to juxtapose different disciplines but to create a dialogue between them.⁴⁵ This approach has been institutionalized, as it were, through the parameters laid down by funding bodies: quite simply, a research project which expresses an interdisciplinary approach is more likely to get funding than one that remains obstinately mono-disciplinary. However, in achieving a true 'integration of knowledge', it has been argued that interdisciplinarity does not go far enough:

In an academic world characterized by a plethora of segmented disciplines, 'integration' is the cardinal keyword to increase understanding. Neither multi-disciplinarity nor inter-disciplinarity meets this criterion. Multi-disciplinarity, often relying on the simple juxtaposition of mono-disciplinary approaches, frequently fails to provide unified outlooks. Inter-disciplinarity, mostly based on assembling distinct viewpoints, keeps its roots in fragmented disciplines, and consequently misses the coherence it is aiming at.⁴⁶

A third 'modality', that of 'trans-disciplinarity', has been proposed, representing 'a qualitative, not just quantitative, shift' to an "'intellectual space" where the nature of

⁴⁴ See, for example, the interesting report by Aaron Benavot, Sabine Erbes-Seguin and Sky Gross, 'Interdisciplinarity in EU-funded Social Science Projects', in Michael Kuhn and Svend Remøe, eds, *Building the European Research Area: Socio-Economic Research in Practice*, New York: Peter Lang, 2005, 115-76.

⁴⁵ Benavot *et al.*, 'Interdisciplinarity', 121-2.

⁴⁶ Yersu Kim in Massimiliano Lattanzi, ed., *Transdisciplinarity: Stimulating Synergies, Integrating Knowledge*, UNESCO Documents and Publications, Geneva: UNESCO, Division of Philosophy and Ethics, 1998, iii.

the manifold links among isolated issues can be explored and unveiled, the space where issues are rethought, alternatives reconsidered, and interrelations revealed'.⁴⁷ Scholarship in the Humanities still has a long way to go before it achieves this aspiration, though these shifts are beginning to have a positive effect. Eventually, it will hopefully mean that historians – who have traditionally been sceptical of the need for or advantages of incorporating material evidence into their armoury of primary sources – will no longer consider art history to be a frivolous category of analysis. One recent frustrating example of this was the 'First Colloquium on Christian and Islamic Iberia', held at the University of Exeter in 2006. This purported to 'promote interdisciplinary approaches', but it turned out that the disciplines referred to were history and literature and manifestly *not* material culture, whose presence on several panels in the conference the organizer was overheard to deplore. (For other reasons, this series of colloquia seems not to have survived beyond the Second, held in 2007.)

The Calls for Papers circulated in recent years and the subsequent conference programmes these have generated reveal the diversity of subjects which the 'Mediterranean' as a field of enquiry encompasses. This was also evident at the second biennial meeting of the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean (SMM) held at the University of Southampton in July 2011.⁴⁸ Formed in 1997, this Society (which publishes the peer-reviewed journal, *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean*, on which see below) 'aims to promote ... the study of the intercultural relationships and interfaces in the eastern, central and western Mediterranean during the Middle Ages'; an 'interdisciplinary approach' lies 'at the heart' of this effort.⁴⁹ Yet the result was a three-day conference with multiple panels, some of them in parallel session, on topics ranging from medicine in medieval Salerno, judicial sources in Spain, Norman military strategies, women in business, to mapping Jewish merchant communities in Byzantium, alchemy, archaeology, Visigothic conversion, relic theft – and all of this across a thousand-year period. Few of the individual presentations could be said to have adopted a truly interdisciplinary methodology, and questions from the audience disappointingly manifested the time-honoured suspicion of historians towards material as opposed to textual evidence. Time restrictions and logistical considerations at large conferences of this nature mean that little or no real discussion can be generated where interaction might be highlighted, and papers and panels are simply juxtaposed to show what a large remit we medieval Mediterraneanists have. Bearing in mind the definitions of multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinarity given above, such a conference might be said to be interdisciplinary in that it 'assembl[es] distinct viewpoints [which] keep [their] roots in fragmented disciplines' – but so far we are talking *at*, not really *to*, each other, and we are a long

⁴⁷ Kim, *Transdisciplinarity*, iv.

⁴⁸ Its assonant title was 'Cultures, Communities and Conflicts in the Medieval Mediterranean'. The first SMM conference, held at the University of Exeter in 2009, was 'Merchants, Mercenaries and Missionaries: the Society and Culture of the Medieval Mediterranean, c. 500-1500'.

⁴⁹ The Society for the Medieval Mediterranean [<http://projects.exeter.ac.uk/smm/> accessed 04.03.2012].

way from generating a new 'intellectual space'. This suggests a need for collaborative projects, as will be discussed further in part III of this essay.

No coherent understanding of 'Mediterraneanism' emerges from the promising programmes of recent conferences. The term 'medieval Mediterranean' does not provide enough focus, and conferences like 'Liquid Space' at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence (December 2010), which attempt to encompass every aspect of Mediterranean connectivity, do not help bring sharper definition to the field.⁵⁰ Perhaps one way forward is to be more focused chronologically, geographically and thematically, in order to really delve in detail into questions of interaction in a specific time and place. This approach is beginning to emerge: the organizers of 'Criss-crossed and Constructed' (Harvard, April 2011) stressed the need to focus discussion on 'individual and comparable concrete cases, periods and places' in order to provide 'the most rigorous and debate-facilitating' forum, allowing its speakers to develop a genuinely interdisciplinary discussion. A few recent thematic conferences have taken the medieval Mediterranean as the broad framework of enquiry while focusing on specific facets of human activity: ships and shipping,⁵¹ labour,⁵² cities,⁵³ and biography⁵⁴ have been explored, though these themes are still very general.

Another recent thematic meeting was that organized by the Spain-North Africa Project (SNAP), an initiative founded in 2010 by a group of scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, who met in Barcelona at the second NEH-sponsored Summer Institute organized by The Mediterranean Seminar. SNAP aims to actively promote research within a framework that considers Iberia and North Africa as a single geographical region.⁵⁵ The first SNAP symposium, held at the Catholic University of America, Washington DC, in November 2011, was entitled 'Spanning the Straits: Unity/Disunity in the Western Mediterranean', providing an interesting alternative to the classic binary of unity/diversity often adopted in Islamic art history (as discussed in Shalem's article in this volume), and one which acknowledges and encompasses notions of conflict (see the discussion in part I, above). The SNAP symposium featured a number of sessions of different formats with presentations from the wide span of disciplines represented by the project's ever-expanding membership, including a historiographical roundtable discussion. All the speakers attempted to show how their research fitted within or would

⁵⁰ See the programme at [<http://www.khi.fi.it/en/aktuelles/veranstaltungen/veranstaltungen/veranstaltung251/index.html> accessed 19.05.2012].

⁵¹ Several panels at the SMM meeting in 2009, for example.

⁵² 'The Laboring Mediterranean', session organized by Gina Brandolino at the 47th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, May 2012.

⁵³ 'Mediterranean Cities. Myth and/or Reality?', Ascona, April 2012.

⁵⁴ 'Mediterranean Lives, Mediterranean Stories', 127th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, New Orleans, January 2013 – organized by Catlos and, once again, The Mediterranean Seminar.

⁵⁵ See their mission statement at: [http://datacenter2.aucegypt.edu/cgomezrivas/Spain_North_Africa_Project/About.html accessed 04.03.2012].

benefit from a 'pan-Straits approach': this is the phrase adopted to define SNAP's call to integrate the study of Iberia and North Africa. It is, perhaps, a little too restrictive, indicating a focus on Morocco, whereas the whole of the North African region is intended. This symposium stands out because so few other Mediterranean Studies conferences have focused on or incorporated art or material culture – the disciplines so far responding to the recent debate on Mediterraneanism have been primarily historical and anthropological. In contrast, SNAP has been insistent on involving and engaging Islamicists of all disciplines, including that of art history, into their overarching discussion about the Western Mediterranean as a more integrated region.

Research clusters and jobs

SNAP is just one of the groups that are actively contributing to the developing field of Mediterranean Studies. Others have already been mentioned, chief among them the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean in Britain, and The Mediterranean Seminar in the USA. Based at the University of California and supported by the Center for Mediterranean Studies at UC Santa Cruz, The Mediterranean Seminar is 'dedicated to the development of Mediterranean Studies as a field of research and teaching', and provides an international scholarly forum with over 400 members world-wide.⁵⁶ As well as the many conferences and meetings that the Seminar organizes or supports others in organizing, their dissemination projects include the biennial Summer Institutes on Mediterranean Studies, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).⁵⁷ Targeted at college and university professors researching and teaching aspects of Mediterranean Studies, colleagues come together in an intensive month-long programme of lectures, seminars and collaborative research, in which they are encouraged to reconsider their work in the light of current debates on the Mediterranean. The fruits of these discussions are to be published as edited volumes, and in March 2012 The Mediterranean Seminar announced a new book series, *Mediterranean Studies*, to be published in conjunction with Palgrave Macmillan (discussed further below). The Mediterranean Seminar website also serves as a hub for news and updates on the group's own activities and others related to the Mediterranean. The Seminar's hyperactivity in the area of Mediterranean studies means that they are now largely generating the critical debates on Mediterraneanism, with the result that their fixation on certain themes – in particular religion – has brought those themes to dominate the discourse in other centres.

Other initiatives exist, and the creation of academic research centres and posts at a number of international universities sees 'Mediterraneanism' firmly

⁵⁶ Information from The Mediterranean Seminar's website [<http://www.mediterraneanseminar.org> accessed 04.03.2012].

⁵⁷ Their third School will be held in Barcelona in July 2012, on the theme 'Networks and Knowledge: Synthesis and Innovation in the Muslim-Christian-Jewish Medieval Mediterranean'. Previous schools were held in 2010 ('Cultural Hybridities: Christians, Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Mediterranean', see above) and 2008 ('The Medieval Mediterranean and the Emergence of the West', [<http://humweb.ucsc.edu/mediterraneanseminar/projects/neh2008.php> accessed 04.03.2012]).

embedding itself as an academic discipline. One of the earliest to be established was the Center for the Ancient Mediterranean at Columbia (CAM), devised in 1999 and formalized in 2000, 'with the intention of fostering exchange between the exponents and students of a number of different disciplines which our university ... tends to separate'.⁵⁸ A conference held at CAM in September 2001 was the basis for the volume edited by its director, William V. Harris, *Rethinking the Mediterranean* (2005). Stanford University hosts a Mediterranean Studies Forum, active since at least 2006. This centre

provides a forum for scholars to explore the interplay between societies, cultures, and communities around the Mediterranean Basin from the Middle Ages to the present. Its focus is on all aspects of co-existence and conflict that have marked these encounters in the empires, port cities, nation-states, and transregional and transnational social, religious, cultural, economic contexts of the Levant, Anatolia, the Balkans, Southern Europe and North Africa. It is also interested in the multiple relations of the Mediterranean with other regions and areas of the world.⁵⁹

This definition encompasses an extremely broad remit, both geographically and chronologically.

Most recently, the University of Michigan has launched a major new initiative in the interdisciplinary study of the Mediterranean, whose rationale incorporates responses to the discourse of *The Corrupting Sea* as well as contemporary geo-political concerns.⁶⁰ Its research cluster, 'The Mediterranean Perspective on Global History and Culture', brings together faculty members from the departments of the History of Art, Romance Languages, Judaic Studies, and Architecture and Urban Planning to

study the ways in which the sea has served over time as a medium of contact, exchange, and interaction. Taking a networked approach to historical and cultural inquiry, this group will work collaboratively to articulate and implement new ways of thinking about the transnational and transcultural dynamics of historical processes in the region. This approach will bring essential research to bear upon the Mediterranean as a region whose interconnected histories and cultures are especially relevant for understanding global relations in the world today.

Importantly, this cluster offered four tenure-track Assistant Professorships in September 2011, specifically including a post for a 'Historian of the Art and Visual

⁵⁸ Harris, *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, vi.

⁵⁹ The Mediterranean Studies Forum: Stanford University
[<http://www.stanford.edu/group/mediterranean/cgi-bin/web/> accessed 04.03.2012].

⁶⁰ The Mediterranean: Perspectives on Global History and Culture
[<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/rl/mediterranean/index.html> accessed 04.03.2012].

Culture of the Mediterranean Region'.⁶¹ Candidates were sought 'with a demonstrated commitment to studying the Mediterranean as a region of transnational and transcultural histories relevant for understanding global relations today', and the successful postholders will 'participate in comparative and interdisciplinary dialogue', sharing an approach to the 'Mediterranean as a dynamic arena of cultural, religious, social, and political exchange'.

While the currently poor funding situation for the Humanities in Europe allows American academia to lead the way in establishing Mediterranean Studies within universities, European initiatives do also exist. The Department of the History of Art at Bern University, Switzerland, hosts the Research Centre TransMediterraneanStudies,⁶² while the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence hosts the Getty-funded project 'Art Space and Mobility in Early Ages of Globalization: the Mediterranean, Central Asia and the Indian Subcontinent 400-1650' (MeCAIS).⁶³ The KHI project supports a wealth of pre- and post-doctoral fellowships, as well as conferences, workshops and study visits, while promoting a far-flung network of international scholars 'interested in ... adopting an interdisciplinary perspective in their study of artistic objects, images and/or texts'. In history and religion, John Tolan at the Université de Nantes now leads the European Research Council-funded project RELMIN ('The Legal Status of Religious Minorities in the Euro-Mediterranean World 5th-15th centuries', 2010-15).⁶⁴ Even in Britain, Mediterraneanism is now embedded in academia through two important Professorships: David Abulafia has been Professor of Mediterranean History at the University of Cambridge since 2000, and Jeremy Johns was made Professor of the Art and Archaeology of the Islamic Mediterranean at the University of Oxford in 2006.

The funding model for research clusters recently promoted by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) has seen the rise of different faculties within a single university banding together to advance that institution's research priorities more efficiently. Since 2010, Oxford University hosts the NearEastMed Archaeology group, which brings together researchers from the Department of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum, the University's Classics and Oriental

⁶¹ The job advertisement left open the historical and geographical focus, from antiquity to early modernity. It identified as possible research interests 'conquest, empires, and frontiers; the trans-regional movement of artists, crafted objects, and artistic technologies; diplomatic exchanges; collecting; urbanization and the production of visual art in port cities and centers of trade; visualizing the Mediterranean; visual modes and cultural hybridity...'. The successfully appointed candidate is Paroma Chatterjee, currently of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a specialist in Byzantine icons.

⁶² Institut für Kunstgeschichte: Interkulturelle Mittelmeerstudien – TransMediterraneanStudies [http://www.ikg.unibe.ch/content/forschung/forschungsprojekte/transmediterraneanstudies/index_ger.html accessed 04.03.2012].

⁶³ Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence: Art, Space and Mobility in the Early Ages of Globalization: The Mediterranean, Central Asia and the Indian Subcontinent (MeCAIS) 400-1600 [<http://www.khi.fi.it/forschung/projekte/projekte/projekt35/index.html> accessed 04.03.2012].

⁶⁴ The Legal Status of Religious Minorities in the Euro-Mediterranean World (5th-15th Centuries) [<http://www.relmin.eu/> accessed 04.03.2012].

Studies Faculties and its School of Archaeology, to organize seminars and events on 'aspects of Ancient Near East and East Mediterranean archaeology and material culture, in particular focusing on interconnections in antiquity and cross-regional themes'.⁶⁵ The Group's Eastern Mediterranean focus is also manifested in the new gallery of 'The Mediterranean World from AD 300' at the Ashmolean Museum (opened in 2009), essentially a gallery dedicated to Byzantium and its immediate neighbours: a huge tabletop map at the centre of the gallery, intended to orientate the visitor, includes Italy and Sicily, but indicates no point further west than Carthage, as if the Western Mediterranean was not also a region with significant connections to Byzantium and the rest of the world.

The University of Durham hosts the Centre for the Study of the Ancient Mediterranean and Near East (CAMNE), likewise founded in 2010, which draws its membership from the University's Departments of Classics and Ancient History, Archaeology, Theology and Religion, and Physics.⁶⁶ CAMNE 'aims to promote the study of cultural encounters and exchanges in the ancient world, from India in the East to the Iberian Peninsula in the West; and to foster diverse approaches to, and perspectives on, this area. It particularly encourages projects that straddle disciplinary and/or cultural, temporal and geographical boundaries'. Its motivations are explicitly drawn from a perceived need to respond to the current geo-political climate: 'At a time of alarming cultural and political polarisation along ancient fault lines, [CAMNE] aims to strengthen the dialogue between neighbouring academic disciplines, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of multiculturalism and cultural contact in the ancient Mediterranean'. However, its focus is 'the ancient world', defined as 'ca. 3000BCE-650CE'. There seems to be a reluctance on the part of both the Oxford and Durham projects to engage with the Islamic world,⁶⁷ the study of which by implication remains a discipline unto itself. But, one might ask, ultimately what use is a Mediterraneanist approach if it only considers part of the region, whether temporally or geographically?

Publications and communications

The research activity outlined in the previous two sections has resulted in a plethora of publications. Two important peer-reviewed journals, *Mediterranean Historical*

⁶⁵ NearEastMed (NEM) Archaeology Group

[<http://www.ashmolean.org/departments/antiquities/research/nem/?s=mediterranean> accessed 19.05.2012].

⁶⁶ Centre for the Study of the Ancient Mediterranean and the Near East

[<http://www.dur.ac.uk/mediterranean.centre> accessed 19.05.2012].

⁶⁷ However, members of the Durham group include: Chris Gerrard, who has worked extensively on medieval Spanish ceramics excavated in the British Isles; Derek Kennet, a specialist in the archaeology of Islam; Anna Leone, a specialist in the Roman archaeology of North Africa; Tony Wilkinson and Penny Wilson, both archaeologists who have worked extensively in the Middle East; and Mark Woolmer, a historian working on ancient Carthage. Such a group of experts could make an important contribution to research on the transition from the Late Antique to early Islamic period.

Review and Mediterranean Archaeology,⁶⁸ were founded as early as the 1980s, and since 1993 Brill has published a book series entitled *The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1500*, under the guidance of managing editor Hugh Kennedy; the series now numbers ninety-five titles, though few are on subjects of material culture.⁶⁹ Periodicals are better able to keep up with quickly changing academic debates, and the main outlet for the medieval Mediterranean is of course the peer-reviewed journal *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean*, published since 1988.⁷⁰ A reflection of the burgeoning scholarship in this area in recent years is the fact that this originally biannual journal expanded to three issues a year in 2009, and in 2012 will go up again to four. Somewhat like the conferences arranged by its aegis organization, the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean, these issues juxtapose essays on a wide variety of subjects, but through its guest-edited special thematic issues present more coherent syntheses, including on material culture; for example, issue 21(1) (April 2009) edited by Rebecca Bridgman focused on 'Islamic Ceramics in Western Europe: Fresh Perspectives through Recent Research'; and issue 25(1) (April 2013), edited by Alex Metcalfe and Mariam Rosser-Owen, will bring together essays on the theme of connections in material culture between Italy, Iberia and North Africa.

Other journals from the Taylor & Francis stable are attempting to be self-consciously interdisciplinary, though geographically they remain focused on distinct areas. These include the recently established *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* (first printed in 2009),⁷¹ and the *Journal of North African Studies*,⁷² the publication of the American Institute for Maghrib Studies and the Centre of North African Studies, which is also increasing its output from four to five issues a year in 2012 – again, telling of the growth of academic interest in North Africa. In 2013, *JNAS* will publish an interdisciplinary special issue sponsored by the Spain-North Africa Project, edited by Adam Gaiser and Miriam Alí-de-Unzaga; entitled *Facets of Exchange between North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula*, it will be one of the first publications promoted by that energetic group, and will hopefully stimulate scholars to think about working on this region in a more integrated way. The current interest in Mediterranean Studies is also stimulating the creation of new periodicals, and *The Mediterranean Chronicle* appeared for the first time in 2011.⁷³ While it focuses on Greece and Rome, classics and archaeology, *MC* subscribes to

⁶⁸ *Mediterranean Historical Review* [<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=0951-8967&linktype=1> accessed 19.05.2012]; *Mediterranean Archaeology* [<http://sydney.edu.au/arts/publications/meditarch> accessed 19.05.2012].

⁶⁹ *The Medieval Mediterranean* [<http://www.brill.nl/publications/medieval-mediterranean> accessed 04.03.2012].

⁷⁰ *Al-Masaq* [<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/09503110.asp> accessed 04.03.2012]. This journal came under the auspices of the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean when that organization was formed in 1997.

⁷¹ *Journal of Iberian Studies* [<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=1754-6559&linktype=1> accessed 04.03.2012].

⁷² *The Journal of North African Studies* [<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/fnas> accessed 04.03.2012].

⁷³ *Mediterranean Chronicle* [<http://www.mediterraneanchronicle.org/> accessed 04.03.2012].

the current Mediterraneanist discourse by aiming to promote 'a discussion on culture/s in the Mediterranean world' including 'Medieval-Byzantine culture'.

As mentioned above, in March 2012 The Mediterranean Seminar launched a new book series, entitled *Mediterranean Studies*, described as 'a new series of monographs and volumes of collected essays – the series for the latest and most exciting scholarship in the new inter-disciplinary field of Mediterranean Studies'.⁷⁴ The series description defines its scope as follows: 'In shifting focus away from histories of the origins and development of phenomena predefined by national or religious borders, *Mediterranean Studies* opens vistas onto histories of contact, circulation, and exchange in all their complexity while encouraging the reconceptualization of inter- and intra-disciplinary scholarship'. The two series editors are also the two co-directors of The Mediterranean Seminar (Brian Catlos and Sharon Kinoshita), while members of its editorial board come from a variety of disciplines, though perhaps with an over-representation of research specialism on medieval Iberia, obviously reflecting the bias of the Seminar's own directors. The appointment of members of other Mediterranean-focused research groups to the editorial board – John Tolan of RELMIN, Karla Mallette of the University of Michigan research cluster – integrates those projects into the remit of The Mediterranean Seminar, and the series description mentions several times that authors whose work is accepted for publication by *Mediterranean Studies* will be integrated into the 'projects and programs of The Mediterranean Seminar'. It could be argued that this book series institutionalizes an already-existing monopoly of The Mediterranean Seminar over this new field, perhaps even a control over the way it will develop in the future.

Finally, the indispensable resource for academics today is the email listserv, especially those hosted by H-Net in the United States. The establishment of new email lists reflects the growth of interest in particular academic disciplines. H-Mediterranean was established in 2001 to 'promote a trans-Mediterranean circulation of information' as well as 'academic discussion between scholars of various parts of the region as a scientific method'.⁷⁵ Instead of focusing on a particular country within the region 'or only discussing the concept of Mediterranean history, the aim is to facilitate circulation and confrontation of ideas, methods, and theories'. H-Maghrib was (finally) established in December 2011 by a group of American academics associated with the American Institute for Maghrib Studies, 'to facilitate scholarly discussion and research about North Africa, a region that today comprises the countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Mauretania'.⁷⁶ Again, this forum aims at interdisciplinarity: 'H-Maghrib welcomes queries, calls, and announcements about all historical periods and thematic issues

⁷⁴ "'Mediterranean Studies' – a new monograph series from Palgrave Macmillan and the Mediterranean Seminar' [<http://humweb.ucsc.edu/mediterraneanseminar/news/index.php?id=165> accessed 19.05.2012].

⁷⁵ H-Mediterranean: Mediterranean History Discussion [<http://www.h-net.org/~mediter/> accessed 04.03.2012]

⁷⁶ H-Maghrib [<http://www.h-net.org/~maghrib/> accessed 04.03.2012]. On AIMS, see American Institute for Maghrib Studies [<http://aimsnorthafrica.org> accessed 04.03.2012].

related to the Maghrib and its diverse populations from all disciplines'. While the network is still establishing itself, and is to date mainly a forum for announcements and information sharing rather than academic discussion, the posts reveal a more-or-less equal representation from Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco; Libya, so far, is largely represented through events connected with the Arab Spring. The subjects are for the most part modern and contemporary rather than medieval, and focus on history and society rather than art and material culture, but the list represents a welcome increase in the visibility of this region within academia and, importantly, begins to put scholars from around the world in contact with each other, especially local scholars from North Africa itself.

While these many networks greatly improve communication across international academia, they also reinforce disciplinary silos. An individual scholar could subscribe to many lists and call themselves an interdisciplinarian, but while there is plenty of overlap between them, there is rarely a meeting of minds. All Islamic art historians live and swear by H-Islamart, for example, and most of those who specialize in the medieval period also subscribe to H-MEM (Mid-East Medieval) – but few historians do the reverse and subscribe to H-Islamart.

Where does all this tremendous recent activity leave us? There can be no doubt that the discipline of Mediterranean studies has emerged and is here to stay. The emphasis on 'cross-cultural exchange' has grown out of a response among academics of a variety of disciplines to problems in contemporary geo-politics. This approach offers historians of medieval European art a strategy for interdisciplinarity, but what do Islamic art historians get out of it? To date, no Islamicist has yet published a response to the arguments made by Horden and Purcell in *The Corrupting Sea*,⁷⁷ considering how Islamic studies might fit within a broader Mediterranean discourse, though such discussions are clearly taking place, as several studies are planned.⁷⁸ Other Mediterraneanists have commented on the need for the region to open up more to the Islamic world, which forms an equal part of the Mediterranean littoral – Harris, for example, comments on the 'downright superficial attitude of most Mediterraneanists to the Arab World'.⁷⁹ This neglect is not limited to the Islamic period: he notes that the same problems have prevailed in the study of the ancient history of the Mediterranean as in the study of its medieval

⁷⁷ Of the reviews which Horden and Purcell list in note 1 of their self-reviewing article, 'Four years of corruption', not one was written by an Islamicist. They also comment that they have not had as much response as they had hoped from medievalists in general – and are happy to assume this constitutes an endorsement of their approach (364).

⁷⁸ For example, the publication in the SNAP special issue of *JNAS* of Glair Anderson's remarks delivered at the SNAP Symposium historiographical roundtable, discussed further below. Eagerly anticipated is the joint piece by Eva Hoffman and Scott Redford entitled 'Transculturation in the Eastern Mediterranean', a contribution to Gülru Necipoğlu and Finbarr B. Flood, eds, *The Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming 2013. This essay will 'take up the question of trade with both Islamic and Italian states, and undertake a review of scholarship dealing with "connectivities" within the Mediterranean realm (Abulafia, Horden and Purcell, Goitein, among others)' (quote from article abstract).

⁷⁹ Harris, *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, 39.

history,⁸⁰ a trend that seems to be continuing in the ‘ancient world’ focus of some of the research groups discussed above. In *The Corrupting Sea*, Horden and Purcell specifically advocate that ‘Mediterranean studies’ should ‘impartially embrace North Africa and the rest of the Middle East’.⁸¹ The challenge to Mediterraneanists now, therefore, is to engage with the Islamic World – but Islamic historians who focus on the juncture of the Islamic world with the Mediterranean also need to consider how these new debates about Mediterraneanism relate to their own areas of research, and the extent to which they engage with Byzantine and medieval European art and history. A brief discussion of the problems that remain in the study of the Islamic West from a material culture perspective might suggest some advantages to integrating this field into a more ‘trans-Mediterranean’ approach.

III. The Problems of Studying the Islamic West

The material culture of the Islamic communities in the Iberian Peninsula, southern Italy and Sicily, and the North African littoral (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya) – the countries which form the western Mediterranean region – remains firmly on the margins of study within the field of Islamic art history. Writing in 1996, Olivia Remie Constable noted:

For most of the medieval period, the Iberian Peninsula experienced the paradox of an existence between two worlds. Situated at the western edge of the Muslim Mediterranean and the southern edge of Christian Europe, it was part of both – yet not fully part of either. Distance continually accentuated the peninsula’s liminality, while at the same time the region remained an accepted element within both Muslim and Christian views of the world.⁸²

The same statement could be made of Iberia’s position within modern scholarship, while North Africa scarcely *has* a position within modern scholarship. Even in Mediterranean studies to date, far more work has been done on the Eastern than the Western Mediterranean, and the Islamic West (including North Africa) remains the most neglected area of the field. As recently as January 2012, when Andrew Devereux circulated the report of the SNAP Symposium, it was noted that ‘of particular interest during [the general] discussion was the tendency in traditional scholarship to treat the Maghrib and the Iberian Peninsula as peripheral or exceptional’. This reflects the continued allure of a now outdated centre:periphery

⁸⁰ A case in point relates to Harris’ own research on ancient literacy. He notes that the papyrological evidence for literacy in ancient Egypt was largely ignored until the 1960s, because ‘ancient historians were too inclined to treat Egyptian evidence as being irrelevant to the main questions of Greek and Roman history’. See Harris, *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, 41-2.

⁸¹ Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, 17.

⁸² Olivia Remie Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain: the Commercial Realignment of the Iberian Peninsula, 900–1500*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Fourth Series, no. 24, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 1.

model: from Baghdad, the 'Maghrib al-Aqsa', for example – the far, far west – is a long way out of sight and out of mind. The peripheral position of the 'Islamic West' is reinforced by the persistence in Islamic art history of such terminology as the 'Central Islamic lands', whereby the western Asian countries of Egypt, Syria, Anatolia, Iraq and Iran are conceptualized hierarchically as the cradle of Islamic art. At the same time, Islamic cultures on the margins of Europe are viewed askance by historians of medieval Europe, as an exotic and unknowable 'other', because of their ethnic or religious difference, or the linguistic barriers to their study. This is not helped by the persistence of an East/West binary, even among such prominent Mediterraneanists as David Abulafia and as recently as 2011: in his new book, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*, for example, he mentions Spain and Portugal followed in the next breath by 'the West', as if these countries were not in 'the West'.⁸³

Islamic scholars more familiar with the Islamic East have disproportionately privileged 'Abbasid cultural influence on the Islamic West. In fact, from the early tenth century internal tensions within the Mediterranean due to the rise of the Fatimids had at least as great an impact on the means by which Islamic dynasties in the region expressed their identity through art and culture. In her presentation at the SNAP Symposium roundtable discussion, Claire Anderson noted the incongruity of studying the ninth-century extensions to the Great Mosques of Córdoba (in 833) and Kairouan (in 836) in separate chapters of most Islamic art survey texts.⁸⁴ While Kairouan is traditionally considered as an outpost of 'Abbasid imperial power (centre:periphery again), Córdoba is normally ghettoed in a separate, often diachronic chapter on 'the Islamic West'. Yet adopting a comparative approach which considers these two key monuments in their regional context allows us to make better sense of this particular moment in their architectural history. Focusing on the regional context allows scholars to focus on the specific political conditions in a particular locale that is ultimately more illuminating than insisting on perceiving artistic change as a passive reflection of movements in the imperial centre. However, it is not unknown for scholars who attempt to take a micro-regional approach to the study of Iberia, for example, to be accused of isolationism by their Islamicist colleagues for not sufficiently engaging with the 'centre' or the 'Islamic East'. But it is not always the case that a comparison with the Islamic world further east would be the most fruitful; a more immediate Mediterranean or European context is sometimes more enlightening.

The failure to engage with the Islamic West on its own cultural terms has led to misinterpretations of the material evidence, or to skewed connections to other aspects of Islamic art that have been more fully studied, rather than uncovering new connections that might make more sense in the local context. Some aspects of the material culture of the region – for example the economic power and cultural importance of the Berber dynasties, the Almoravids and Almohads – have simply

⁸³ Abulafia *The Great Sea*, 241.

⁸⁴ These remarks will be developed into an article to be published as part of the SNAP special issue of the *Journal of North African Studies*.

been ignored. The almost complete absence of North Africa from Islamic art surveys reflects the sad continuity of colonial and postcolonial biases of the early twentieth century, which held that African cultural production was unsophisticated and had nothing to teach Europe. While thankfully such attitudes finally seem to be changing – through the recent archaeological activity in Morocco and Tunisia, promoted by mixed teams of French, Spanish, American and North African archaeologists⁸⁵ – nevertheless, there remain very real difficulties of access for the researcher: the dangers of travelling around Algeria, for example, have meant that for two generations sites that have important light to shed on the transmission of styles and technology across North Africa into Italy and Iberia, such as the Qal‘a of the Banu Hammad, have effectively been dropped from the canon.

The political stability of the modern North African states remains unpredictable – a case in point is Libya since the Arab Spring – meaning that new graduate students who might otherwise choose to study this emerging region may be dissuaded from doing so, or may try to do so without actually visiting the region itself. But compared to other problematic regions where Islamic art historians conduct research – think of all the archaeologists currently cut off from their excavation sites in Syria; Iraq and Iran remain difficult countries to visit, while even Egypt has been unstable recently – the fact remains that North African countries, even Algeria, are now becoming much safer and easier to travel in than they have been in the last fifty years. Their proximity to Europe and the recent instigation of collaborative excavation projects will hopefully encourage upcoming graduate students to focus their research interests on this region, and contribute to the proper emergence of studies focusing on North Africa.

However, instability is not the only obstacle to studying this region. Non-Muslims cannot visit mosques in Morocco and Tunisia, and photography is prohibited in many museums, especially in Morocco, so that the basic art historical tools of seeing and recording are denied to most researchers. These difficulties of access mean that the art and architecture of the region is little known and worse published, and few of the national museums in this region can afford the investment in websites that present their collections online. This situation has paved the way for recent ‘Euro-Med’ initiatives like the Museum With No Frontiers (MWNF) and its web interface, Discover Islamic Art,⁸⁶ or the Qantara: Mediterranean Heritage project, part of the Euromed Heritage programme, which is mainly focused on the Arab nations of the Mediterranean.⁸⁷ Both projects take their motivation from

⁸⁵ For example, Patrice Cressier (Université de Lyon) who directed the recent excavations at Sabra-Mansuriyya (Tunisia) and is now working on Sedrata (Algeria); or Jean-Pierre van Staevel (Sorbonne) who also worked at Sabra-Mansuriyya, and now collaborates with Moroccan Abdallah Fili and American Ronald Messier on the excavation and restoration of Aghmat (Morocco). Members of the Laboratorio de Arqueología y Arquitectura de la Ciudad (LAAC), based at CSIC in Granada, are involved in new excavations at the Agdal in Marrakesh, directed by Julio Navarro, while another member, Antonio Almagro, is advising on the restoration of monuments in Tlemcen, Algeria: see Laboratorio de Arqueología y Arquitectura de la Ciudad [<http://www.laac.es/> accessed 19.05.2012].

⁸⁶ Museum With No Frontiers [<http://www.museumwnf.org/> accessed 04.03.2012].

⁸⁷ Qantara: Mediterranean Heritage [<http://www.qantara-med.org> accessed 19.05.2012].

overtly political aims born out of the Barcelona Process, to ‘contribute to mutual understanding and dialogue among Mediterranean cultures by highlighting their cultural heritage’ in the case of Qantara, while MWNF strives at nothing less than to ‘use cultural heritage and local perceptions of history to promote the Alliance of Civilizations’. The ‘collections’ displayed on their websites have done much to correct the hitherto limited understanding of the region’s cultural treasures, though there is a considerable degree of overlap between them, which has the predictable result of creating a canon confined to the same few widely reproduced objects and buildings.

A further problem in studying the art of the medieval Islamic West is the often fragmentary and disparate nature of the material evidence, which requires any student who wants to gain a fully rounded picture to engage with a variety of methodologies. Recent trends towards interdisciplinarity are opening up the subject in new ways, but this type of approach requires commitment and vision on the part of the researcher. It is comparatively easy to stick to one’s discipline, but this disciplinary exclusivism – and the persistence, to a degree, of nationalist biases – means that the region continues to be studied in hermetically sealed compartments. Scholars who work on medieval Italy, for example, rarely also work on medieval Tunisia, despite the fact that the two countries are only 150 miles apart and maintained close relations during the Roman and medieval periods. As a result of being on the margins of two academic disciplines – the Islamic world on the one hand, medieval Europe on the other – fascinating subjects such as the ninth-century amirate of Bari, to give but one example, have gone almost completely unstudied.

Perhaps more questionable is the fact that historians of medieval Italy and those of medieval Iberia have traditionally failed to engage in comparative study of these two peninsulas, despite the fact that there are obvious historical parallels in the presence of the three Abrahamic religions and the deployment of these cultural traditions in art and architecture. There are even historical connections between Spain and Italy, when in the thirteenth century Sicily became part of the Crown of Aragón. For example, when we talk about Mudéjar, why do we do so only in reference to Spain and thus fail to address this same phenomenon in the arts of Italy or Sicily? Apart from a few scholars who have investigated the transfer of ‘Mudejarismo’ from Spain to the New World,⁸⁸ this subject is not yet studied as a broader phenomenon. Yet there are clear artistic parallels between ‘Mudéjar’ in Italy and Iberia which include the use of brick, blind arcading or the incrustation of ceramic tiles or bowls (known in Italian art history as *bacini*) on church exteriors: the churches at Terracina are almost identical to those at Teruel.⁸⁹

There is much scope in studying the material culture of Iberia and Sicily/Italy in parallel or in concert: a forthcoming workshop on multi-lingual inscriptions at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas in Madrid,

⁸⁸ The doctoral theses of María Judit Feliciano (University of Pennsylvania, 2005), and Farzaneh Pirouz-Moussavi (University of Oxford, 2010), for example.

⁸⁹ See Francesco Gabrieli and Umberto Scerrato, eds, *Gli Arabi in Italia: Cultura, Contatti e Tradizioni*, Milan: Libri Scheiwiller, 1979, figs 471 and 472.

organized by Giuseppe Mandalà, Inmaculada Pérez Martín and Alex Metcalfe, will be an important first step in this direction.⁹⁰ Another avenue relates to imports from the Islamic East, especially textiles and metalwork, which have been more carefully studied in the Italian case than the Spanish.⁹¹ A comparative approach to the types of imports which bear similarities to objects found in Spain would help us to shut down the thinking that all objects found in a locale are *a priori* local productions, and would better elucidate patterns of trade and consumer taste. It would also suggest whether certain wares – bronze mortars, for example, which have been found in abundance in Spain – were specifically made for export at production centres in Iran, Egypt or Syria. Mediterranean metalwork forms are notoriously difficult to attribute to particular centres, as evidenced by the ongoing discussion about the Pisa Griffin; but shared forms such as copper-gilt mounts on ivories, animal-shaped aquamanilia and architectonic candelabra remain largely unstudied due to a general sense of confusion about their places of production. The publication of metalwork hoards at various sites around the Mediterranean is essential for advancing our understanding of where objects in this medium were made and how they circulated. The book by Elias Khamis on the hoard found at Tiberias, which includes evidence of a workshop, is eagerly anticipated;⁹² however, just as crucial is the parallel publication of metalwork found at the opposite end of the Mediterranean – the Denia hoard, for example, whose promised publication by Rafael Azuar Ruiz has not yet materialized.

Naturally, much of the historical work on the countries that form the western Mediterranean has been undertaken by local scholars interested in the history of their own cultures. But this research has at times an over-simplifying tendency towards nationalism, whereby objects or architectural traditions which come to light in a particular country must be autochthonous. There is in some quarters too great a tendency to ignore or even dismiss the possibility of external influences or the degree of interconnectivity between Mediterranean centres. Chris Wickham calls this phenomenon ‘cultural solipsism’⁹³ – whereby a Spanish historian, for example, studies only aspects of Spanish history (though thankfully this is now beginning to change). He describes the condition in a way that will be familiar to many scholars who have worked on Mediterranean themes:

The sizeable and increasing contingent of scholars who study another country ... by and large ... have the choice between being absorbed into the

⁹⁰ ‘Multilingual and Multigraphic Manuscripts from East and West’, 27-28 September 2012, Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales, CSIC, Madrid.

⁹¹ See, for example, the many works by Marco Spallanzani, especially *Metalli islamici: a Firenze nel Rinascimento*, Florence: The Bruschetti Foundation for Islamic and Asian Art/SPES, 2010. Also see Stefano Carboni, ed., *Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007; Giovanni Curatola, ed., *Eredità dell’Islam: Arte Islamica in Italia*, Milan: Silvano, 1993.

⁹² *The Metalwork Hoard from Tiberias*, forthcoming in the series *Qedem Reports*, Publications of the Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012.

⁹³ Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800*, Oxford University Press, 2005, 2-3.

national debates of the country they study, or else keeping a distance from them, but only because they have remained attached to the debates of their country of origin. In the latter situation they can add a critical element, and sometimes do, but in that case they have often been ignored by the historians in the country they study.

Adopting a broader Mediterranean framework for the study of the art of Iberia or Italy, for example, has the advantage of making connections which have not hitherto been made, and which would shed mutual light on the material culture of both peninsulas.

A problem that remains in breaking down the tendency towards 'cultural solipsism' is language. It has not been usual until very recently for Spaniards, for example, to learn English at school, and since English has become the *lingua franca* of international academia – for good or ill – this means that Spanish scholars have often not engaged with studies in their field written by anglophone scholars. This is now changing in Spain. Many Spanish doctoral students are taking advantage of the option to solicit a 'Título Europeo': this title means that one section of their thesis is written in another European language (often English); they may also have to conduct part of their thesis defence in that language, and they have to spend at least three months conducting research abroad. This has opened young scholars up to the more critical and analytical approaches usually taken in anglophone research, with positive consequences for the approaches they later take in writing their theses. The more outward-looking among their professors are also now actively learning English, and therefore engaging with and participating in English-language publications which have an international distribution. Academics in the Arabic-speaking countries of the Mediterranean learn the languages of their former colonizers, and publish in French, Spanish and Italian, as well as Arabic. While this perpetuates an uneasy postcolonial relationship with Europe, it at least has the advantage that their work is read and considered by some European scholars, and vice versa.

By contrast, the same is not always true of anglophone scholars. It is a sad fact that many researchers in the UK and North America frequently do not read anything unless it is written in English. Anglophone scholars who are serious about engaging with a particular field of research often learn the languages in which much of the secondary literature is written (many of the British and American art historians of medieval Iberia communicate well in Spanish, for example); but it is difficult for an academic who normally works in another field to assimilate up-to-date research in a subject because of their unfamiliarity with the languages in which it is written. Instead, these researchers sometimes rely on out-of-date material, purely because it is written in English. This does nothing to promote a deeper or more nuanced understanding of the Mediterranean, nor to promote interdisciplinary studies.

Language remains perhaps the most significant and daunting hurdle to overcome in developing a properly trans-Mediterranean approach. The student who

wants to study and understand this region in its entirety must become familiar with Spanish (including regional languages like Catalan and Aragonese, which are increasingly being employed in academic publishing), Portuguese, Italian, French and German (the latter a legacy of the German scholars who laid the groundwork for Mediterranean studies, especially in archaeology), even Latin or Hebrew if they are studying the medieval period, and Greek if they want to study connections with Byzantium (not to mention Russian – which is also one reason why formerly Soviet Central Asia has generally been left on the margins of Islamic art history). Of course the most important language for reading the history of the Islamic Mediterranean is Arabic, a language that takes a real investment of time and ability to learn well enough to read medieval sources. Most Islamic art historians today do not come to the subject from a background in Middle Eastern languages, and intensive linguistic training is not part of the British system of graduate study, unlike in the American PhD programme – it should be. The average doctoral student – who at a British university has a maximum of four years to complete their degree – just does not have the time to learn and engage with the main secondary literature in all these languages, certainly not if they also want to study their primary sources in the original languages. In order for Islamic art to retain some academic rigour as a discipline, a solid grounding in Islamic history, civilization and languages is fundamental, but it certainly discourages many potential students from the subject.

Online translation tools such as Google Translate are becoming increasingly sophisticated, but another issue is that publications in the various languages under discussion can be very difficult to obtain in the first place. Many Spanish scholars, for example, publish in local archaeological reports or university journals or in books published by private foundations, which often have no distribution outside the town or region in which they are published. Modern digital technology and the near-universal accessibility granted by the internet is starting to come to our aid with sites such as Google Books, and many scholars are now posting their publications on academia.edu. Yet this requires a desire to engage with the wider international community, and for anglophone researchers to realize that not everything they should read will be written in English.

One solution to some of these linguistic issues would be a great academic translation enterprise. Some initiatives for this already exist, such as *Art In Translation*, the online journal of the Visual Arts Research Institute, Edinburgh (VARIE).⁹⁴ Launched in March 2009, *AIT* ‘publishes the best writing from around the world on the visual arts, architecture, and design in English translation’. Described in an endorsement on their website as ‘a long awaited and much-needed instrument for international transmission of knowledge and cross-pollination of ideas’, *AIT* has already published occasional texts on Islamic art,⁹⁵ and plans special

⁹⁴ *Art in Translation* [<http://www.artintranslation.org/> accessed 19.05.2012].

⁹⁵ Including articles on the Alhambra by Claudia Heide, one of *AIT*'s editors, and the translation in volume 2(3), November 2010, of Volkmar Enderlein and Michael Meinecke's article 'Graben, Forschen, Präsentieren. Probleme der Darstellung vergangener Kulturen am Beispiel der Mschatta-Fassade', from the *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 34, 1992, as 'Excavation, Investigation, Presentation. Problems of

issues on Chinese and Japanese art – perhaps it is time to propose a special issue on key non-English texts for the study of Islamic art. There is also scope for more books like that recently edited by Dede Fairchild Ruggles, *Islamic Art and Visual Culture: An Anthology of Sources* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), perhaps focusing on specific subjects or geographical regions. Translations of key texts, both primary and secondary, are needed, and would require academic publishers not to insist on ‘previously unpublished research’, in order to facilitate the re-publication in translation of material already published in other languages. This may have the long-term effect of solidifying English as the international language of academia, though that is the status quo.

The development of collaborative research projects would provide another solution to some of these problems: this would require the teaming up of specialists with different skills to tackle a specific problem. The research clusters discussed above provide a framework for such projects, but to be truly beneficial they need to be highly focused. This could take the form of research projects elaborated over several years, or perhaps just a carefully-structured symposium which asks clear and particular questions to speakers who then actually engage with those questions in their presentations. A collaborative and comparative method is evident in another current trend in medieval history – that of the ‘Global Middle Ages’. The Oxford Centre for Global History was established by Oxford University in June 2011, and incorporates a network of medievalists working on the ‘Global Middle Ages’.⁹⁶ While this does not, seemingly, include art historians, a parallel group, also called the ‘Global Middle Ages’, was established at the University of Edinburgh at about the same time, to study ‘European, Islamic and Chinese visual culture in the period known in Europe as the “Middle Ages”, which coincided with classical phases of civilization in both East and West Asia’.⁹⁷ The Edinburgh group has already held a conference, ‘From Influence to Translation: Art of the Global Middle Ages’ (16-18 May 2012), and while the coverage of the programme is certainly expansive,⁹⁸ it is to be hoped that they tackle more specific subjects with a global perspective in future. This group has also launched an MSc programme on The Art of the Global Middle Ages, ‘designed for students seeking a distinctive perspective on the arts of the Middle Ages’.⁹⁹ Another new MSc at Edinburgh is that in Late Antique, Islamic and Byzantine Studies,¹⁰⁰ which will ‘provide specialist

Representing Past Cultures in the Example of the Mshatta Façade’, translated from German by Jonathan Blower.

⁹⁶ University of Oxford Centre for Global History: The Global Middle Ages [http://www.history.ox.ac.uk/global/?page_id=663 accessed 19.05.2012].

⁹⁷ The Global Middle Ages [<https://sites.ace.ed.ac.uk/globalmiddleages/> accessed 19.05.2012].

⁹⁸ ‘From Influence to Translation: Art of the Global Middle Ages’ [<http://influencetotranslation.wordpress.com/programme/> accessed 19.05.2012].

⁹⁹ The Global Middle Ages: About the MSc [<https://sites.ace.ed.ac.uk/globalmiddleages/about/> accessed 19.05.2012].

¹⁰⁰ The University of Edinburgh Graduate School: Taught MSc in Late Antique, Islamic and Byzantine Studies [<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/history-classics-archaeology/graduate-school/programmes/classics/msc-antiquities> accessed 19.05.2012].

methodological, theoretical, and cross-disciplinary training', with a compulsory language option. These new clusters and courses see Edinburgh University embedding a comparative method into medieval historical and art historical study, in a way that promises to lead to truly trans-disciplinary results, in the UNESCO sense outlined above.

Returning to the Mediterranean, Chris Wickham argues for 'more systematic regional comparison' in the study of this region, and he puts this to the test in his recent volume, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*.¹⁰¹ A comparative approach is certainly already being profitably employed by medievalists such as Sarah Guérin, who for the first time in the history of scholarship on Gothic ivories has investigated where the raw material was actually coming from, and questioned how relationships with the Islamic world influenced not only ivory's availability but also the initiation and development of ivory carving as an industry.¹⁰² For Italy, Tehmina Goskar has positioned her research into medieval dress firmly within 'the Mediterranean framework', examining 'shared dress cultures' between Southern Italy (especially Apulia), Egypt and Byzantium.¹⁰³ Radical among Italianists is her standpoint that 'Mediterraneanizing southern Italy' provides a more useful framework than the previously insular approaches, 'to understand better its material culture, as well as to provide an alternative paradigm for comparison'.

Similarly, it is noticeable among the work of recently-graduated Spanish doctoral students that they are adopting a self-consciously comparative approach to both the Christian and Islamic artistic traditions of the Iberian Peninsula, deliberately examining in parallel building types (for example Torres de Homenaje, in the thesis on the Reales Alcázares de Sevilla by Concepción Rodríguez Moreno, University of Granada, 2012) or artistic production (such as the relationship of the Leonese ivory carving industry with Islamic production on the Peninsula, which is the subject of Noemi Álvarez da Silva's research at the University of León).¹⁰⁴ The next meeting of the Salerno Ivories Project at the KHI in Florence specifically seeks to place these very Christian objects into their 'Mediterranean context',¹⁰⁵ while the work of Arianna d'Ottone, of La Sapienza University in Rome, on the *Hadith Bayad wa Riyad* (Vat. MS Ar. 368) has already demonstrated the advantages of being an Arabist and Italianist at the same time, through the discovery of labels in *mercantesca* handwriting on some of the figures, which would indicate that this thirteenth-

¹⁰¹ Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 5.

¹⁰² See her excellent article, Sarah M. Guérin, 'Avorio d'ogni ragione: the supply of elephant ivory to northern Europe in the Gothic era', *Journal of Medieval History*, 36, 2010, 156–74.

¹⁰³ See Goskar, 'Material Worlds'.

¹⁰⁴ An interesting parallel case, which does not relate to Islamic art but which is already having successful results, is that currently being taken in the study of twelfth-century Catalan panel painting: investigations have been made into its stylistic and technical comparisons with contemporary Byzantine paintings, particularly from Cyprus. This fruitful broadening out of a subject that hitherto has had a rather closed northern European focus to embrace the Mediterranean context was evident in the papers presented by Manuel Castañeiras and Dulce Ocón at the recent British Archaeological Association conference 'Romanesque and the Mediterranean', Palermo, 16–18 April 2012.

¹⁰⁵ 'The Tusk and the Book: The Salerno/Amalfi Ivories in their Mediterranean Contexts,' 29 June–1 July 2012.

century manuscript was already in the possession of a Tuscan (possibly a merchant) by the second half of the fourteenth century.¹⁰⁶

This is only a short selection of some recent but obvious successes which seem to point to the direction in which Mediterraneanism should continue to develop, and so far the Islamic element has not drowned in the Mediterranean, as Bloom and Blair speculated. Perhaps these studies finally witness the proper integration of Islamic art and European medieval art as two subfields within the broader discipline of art history. The next and final section will discuss some of the clear advantages for studying the material culture of the Islamic West within a broader Mediterraneanist framework.

IV. The Attractions of Mediterraneanism for the Islamic art historian

The major advantage of adopting a properly ‘impartial’ pan-regionalist approach to the Mediterranean – as advocated by Horden and Purcell – is that it forces scholars to give due prominence to North Africa in the post-Roman period. This is not wholly unproblematic: one should be careful not to think of North Africa solely as a Mediterranean-facing region, when it is just as important to consider its relationships with the Sahara, or the rest of the African continent, or the Atlantic in the case of Morocco. Of course, the archaeology, art and architecture of North Africa in the Islamic period should ultimately also be considered on its own terms – but until a body of material and a critical mass of scholars working in this area has emerged, it seems to me no bad thing that a ‘positive discrimination’ approach towards North Africa within a pan-Mediterranean framework, such as that advocated by SNAP, should be applied to the region, to at least begin to give it due consideration in the broader discourse of Islamic art history.

Thus might be averted the uncritical treatment of the Islamic art of Morocco, for example, as ‘Hispano-Moresque’ – as if the Qarawiyyin Mosque in Fez were actually in Córdoba. Recent studies on the Cappella Palatina in Palermo – particularly of its pavement¹⁰⁷ and its ceiling¹⁰⁸ – have been especially welcome because they begin to present an alternative to the monolithic tendency that had framed Islamic artistic influences in Norman Sicily (and other regions of southern Italy) as the exclusive result of contacts with Fatimid Egypt, by opening up the question of artistic contacts with the Almoravids and Almohads of North Africa. But an article on the possible Almoravid sources of the ceiling, published as recently as 2011, talks of the development of new styles and techniques as if they were

¹⁰⁶ Arianna d’Ottone, ‘Il manoscritto Vaticano arabo 368, *Hadith Bayad wa Riyad*. Il codice, il testo, le immagini’, *Rivista di Storia della Miniatura*, 14, 2010, 55-70. Her most recent findings were presented at the Research Seminar in Islamic Art, SOAS, London, on 8 December 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Jonathan Bloom, ‘Almoravid geometric designs in the pavement of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo’, in Bernard O’Kane, ed., *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005, 61-80.

¹⁰⁸ David Knipp, ‘Almoravid Sources for the Wooden Ceiling in the Nave of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo’, in Thomas Dittelbach, ed., *Die Cappella Palatina in Palermo: Geschichte, Kunst, Funktionen*, Künzelsau: Swiridoff Verlag, 2011, 571-8.

emanating from al-Andalus rather than the Almoravid imperial capital of Morocco.¹⁰⁹ The use of *muqarnas* for the construction of the Cappella Palatina ceiling is described as the ‘latest Hispano-Moresque fashion’ – but there is no evidence of *muqarnas* being used in al-Andalus before the date of the Qubbat Ba’ diyyin in Marrakesh (c. 1125) or the Qarawiyyin vaults (1136-43). The earliest examples from the Peninsula itself are the fragmentary paintings from a *muqarnas* vault associated with the Dar al-Saghir (later convent of Santa Clara la Real) in Murcia, which are datable to the transition period between the Almoravid and Almohad regimes.¹¹⁰ So why presuppose a model of Andalusian influence on North Africa rather than the other way around? The answer is, of course, the same as always: the persistence of colonial and postcolonial biases towards the Islamic material culture of North Africa, which perceive that nothing of quality was produced there. It is time for that prejudice to go.

The North African chapter in Jonathan Bloom’s recent book on the Fatimids, *Arts of the City Victorious*, is particularly welcome, but much more remains to be done.¹¹¹ A proper study of the Aghlabids – another important and expansive Mediterranean dynasty with a taste for luxury goods and artistic patronage – is needed, for example. A trans-Mediterranean approach to the early Islamic period (say, 650-1000) could reap dividends in better understanding the interesting phenomenon of the swift emergence of Islamic splinter states in North Africa and Iberia, who then busied themselves with constructing their own power locally but remained plugged in to wider networks. Studying the Mediterranean as an economic system, as advocated by Horden and Purcell, also offers many advantages for contextualizing the material culture. The western Mediterranean basin becomes fundamental rather than peripheral when one starts thinking about shipping currents, and access to ports beyond the Straits. An increasing number of studies are dedicated to opening up the Mediterranean through trade, focusing in particular on the role of Italian, especially Genoese, merchants in the circulation of goods and raw materials around the western basin, which were then on-traded to northern Europe. Investigations such as those by David Jacoby on ‘silk economics’, and Sarah Guérin on ivory and other raw materials which piggy-backed on the alum trade, have laid important recent groundwork in English,¹¹² while in Spanish Alberto García Porrás and Ádela Fábregas García have been gradually publishing a series of important studies of Genoese relations with the Nasrids in Granada and the impact that this

¹⁰⁹ Knipp, ‘Almoravid Sources’, 573.

¹¹⁰ In fact they may be associated with Ibn Mardanish (r. 1147-72), an Almoravid *taifa* ruler who held out against the Almohad takeover. On the paintings, see Fatma Dahmani, ‘Remarques sur quelques fragments de peinture murale trouvés à Murcie’, *Tudmir* 1, 2008, 1-12.

¹¹¹ Jonathan M. Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2007, 15-49.

¹¹² David Jacoby, ‘Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 58, 2004, 197-240; Guérin, ‘Aorio d’ogni ragione’.

connection had on the ceramics and silk industries.¹¹³ This provides a fascinating parallel case to the research of Scott Redford and others into Italian trading colonies in the eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea regions, which have drawn very significant conclusions concerning the role of Italian traders in exploiting local ceramic industries to improve their own profits, as well as how these imported ceramics stimulated imitative industries back home.¹¹⁴ Hitherto such obviously parallel research projects probably had very little to do with each other, but placing both within a trans-Mediterranean framework would lead to more fruitful comparative analysis.

It is obvious that North Africa was plugged into an international trade network in every direction, and had both the wealth to bring luxury commodities from far afield and a sophisticated market willing to buy them. In Tunisia, for example, we find teak and Iraqi lustre tiles in the Great Mosque of Kairouan, and what is probably a Central Asian luxury silk textile which was embroidered in Ifriqiyya's *tiraz* with the name of the caliph Marwan II (r. 744-50).¹¹⁵ But North Africa was not just a recipient of luxury goods from elsewhere – the region also generated luxuries that other people wanted. North Africa provided an important transit point for raw materials like gold, ivory, salt and slaves, but its artisans and patrons also *made* sophisticated artefacts that had a widely dispersed market. One example of the latter would be Almoravid and Almohad gold coinage, which was so prized in northern Europe that it was imitated, melted down to make new coin, and even collected in England to be given out as donatives on Christian feast days.¹¹⁶ The high quality of Almohad pottery and brocaded silk textiles led to them being traded as far as Prague.¹¹⁷ The North African origin of many of the Italian *bacini* has long been identified, but still more work is needed on technological developments

¹¹³ Alberto García Porras, 'La cerámica española importada en Italia durante el siglo XIV. El efecto de la demanda sobre una producción cerámica en los inicios de su despliegue comercial', *Archeologia Medievale*, 27, 2000, 131-44; García Porras and Adela Fábregas García, 'La cerámica española en el comercio mediterráneo bajomedieval. Algunas notas documentales', *Miscelánea Medieval Murciana* 27-28, 2003-4, 5-32; Fábregas García, 'Aprovisionamiento de la seda en el reino nazarí de Granada. Vías de intervención directa practicadas por la comunidad mercantil genovesa', *En la España Medieval* 27, 2004, 53-75; Fábregas García, 'Actividad comercial de los reyes nazaríes y su implicación con los representantes del gran comercio occidental a finales de la Edad Media', *Studia Historica: Historia Medieval*, 25, 2007, 171-90; García Porras and Fábregas García, 'Genoese trade networks in the southern Iberian Peninsula: trade, transmission of technical knowledge and economic interactions', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 25(1), June 2010, 35-51. All these articles, and others, are available on the authors' academia.edu pages.

¹¹⁴ M. James Blackman and Scott Redford, 'Neutron activation analysis of medieval ceramics from Kinet, Turkey, especially Port Saint Symeon ware', *Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, 42, 2005, 83-186.

¹¹⁵ Mariam Rosser-Owen, with Mina Moraitou and Ana Cabrera, 'Fragments of the So-Called Marwan Tiraz', in Helen C. Evans with Brandie Ratliff, eds, *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012, 238-41, cat. no. 173.

¹¹⁶ Philip Grierson, 'Oboli de Musc'', *The English Historical Review*, 66(258), January 1951, 75-81.

¹¹⁷ Petr Charvát, *Slyšte volání muezzinovo: české země a arabský svět ve starším středověku (do roku 1300)*. Centrum blízkovýchodních studií, Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita, 2010, 74, 138-9; Petr Charvát, Ladislav Hrdlička and Claire Déléry, 'Andalusi sherds from Prague', *Archeologické rozhledy*, 64, forthcoming 2012.

in western Mediterranean ceramics, especially the origins and ‘shared culture’ of tin-glaze and lustre. Hopefully looking at these wares with an ‘impartial’ eye will move the subject on from the current unsatisfactory account by which these technologies hopped from Fatimid Egypt to al-Andalus without touching ground in North Africa itself. García Porras has been groundbreaking among Spanish academics for suggesting that cobalt blue was first introduced to Tunisian ceramics in the thirteenth century, and that North African ceramic imports into al-Andalus (as well as the trade in cobalt blue presumably, something that still needs further research) prompted the Nasrids to start using blue in their own ceramic production.¹¹⁸ These are just a few of many North African influences *on* the art of other centres – not just in Spain or Italy – that future studies will elaborate.

A move to a trade approach rather than one obsessed with the Mediterranean as a meeting point of religions and a site of ‘cross-cultural interaction’ also seems ultimately more profitable and revealing of actual human interaction in the medieval period. Trade and exchange was conducted not just across the ‘three faiths’ but within them. But while trade conducted between the different Jewish communities of the Mediterranean has received extended treatment – beginning with Goitein’s magisterial, multi-volume *A Mediterranean Society*¹¹⁹ – intra-Muslim trade or other forms of contact, such as diplomacy and gift exchange, has not interested so many scholars. While much has been written about the export and consumption of Andalusí and North African ceramics in Italy – by Hugo Blake, Marco Spallanzani and others¹²⁰ – few researchers have looked at the export of these same wares to Egypt or the Levant.¹²¹ While the Italian context admittedly provides better documentation and more accurately stratified archaeological information (at least compared with the early excavations at Fustat), it also offers an attractive example of Muslim-Christian interaction in the Mediterranean. But Muslim-Muslim interaction – including trade as well as diplomatic contacts, such as that between the Nasrids and the Mamluks – is just as interesting. And if there must be a ‘cross-cultural’/cross-religious dimension, these wares were probably shipped by Christian merchants, whether Italian or Catalan. It is surely time to move beyond thinking of the Mediterranean – or about medieval material culture in general – confessionally.

Problems remain by considering Islamic material culture within a Mediterranean framework, and we must keep in mind that we cannot focus

¹¹⁸ García Porras, ‘La cerámica española importada en Italia’.

¹¹⁹ Shelomo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: the Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967-93.

¹²⁰ See the many publications of Hugo Blake (all available on his academia.edu page), especially ‘The ceramic hoard from Pula (Prov. Cagliari) and the Pula type of Spanish lustreware’, *Segundo Coloquio Internacional de Cerámica Medieval del Mediterráneo Occidental*, Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1986, 365-407. See also Marco Spallanzani, *Maioliche ispano-moresche a Firenze nel Rinascimento*, Florence: SPES, 2006; García Porras, ‘La cerámica española importada en Italia’; García Porras and Fábregas García, ‘La cerámica española en el comercio mediterráneo bajomedieval’; ‘Genoese trade networks’.

¹²¹ Though see my forthcoming article, ‘“From the Mounds of Old Cairo”: Spanish ceramics from Fustat in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum’, *Actas del I Congreso Internacional Red Europea de Museos de Arte Islámico*, Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, 2012.

exclusively on the Mediterranean or we certainly will be accused of isolationism, and deservedly so. As the Center for Mediterranean Studies at UC Santa Cruz points out in their justification, we need to 'remain attentive to [the] place [of the Mediterranean] in the history of adjacent regions and in both historical and methodological connections to research currently underway on other maritime spaces such as the Atlantic and Indian Oceans', to which we might reasonably add the Sahara.¹²² In other words, in treating the Mediterranean as a region – as a 'geographical expression', in Horden and Purcell's phrase – we should be wary of treating it in isolation, or letting Mediterranean studies become its own exclusive category. In considering the region's Islamic states, we should continue to bear in mind their relationships with the rest of the Islamic lands, though in terms that are more nuanced than the tired model of centre:periphery. It is likewise important for historians of the Islamic East to understand that other factors pertaining to local regional conditions might be more important for understanding issues at play in the Islamic West than a reliance on the hierarchical 'centre' which has been conceived as the cradle of Islamic art. Studying economic, political and artistic processes in Iberia, Italy and North Africa in parallel and in connection with each other ultimately has more to offer than considering how, say, Córdoba or Marrakesh related or responded to Baghdad or points east at a particular moment in the medieval period.

This is not to say that we should dismantle the discipline of 'Islamic art' just yet, but that it is time for it to become less monolithic, and that Mediterraneanism offers one way of breaking down old boundaries. There are political and economic conditions, issues of artistic influence and regional style, among many other subjects, that would benefit from a more impartial, trans-Mediterranean consideration of material culture, of which the Islamic forms one element. Acknowledging a category of the 'Islamic Mediterranean' within a larger Mediterranean framework – or within a larger Islamic art framework, if the Islamic Mediterranean is allowed to stand on its own terms – and studying the region with a genuinely interdisciplinary comparative method, which moves beyond an exclusive focus on religion and ethnicity, has much to offer for the future of the field of Islamic art history.

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¹²² The Mediterranean Seminar: UCSC Center for Mediterranean Studies [<http://humweb.ucsc.edu/mediterraneanseminar/projects/UCSCCMS.php> accessed 04.03.2012].