Beyond ORIENTALISM
How the West was Won over by Islamic Art

ISLAMIC ARTS MUSEUM MALAYSIA

Wall tile
17th century
Damascus, Syria

Set of wall tiles
17th century
Delft, Holland
Beyond ORIENTALISM  
How the West was Won over by Islamic Art

Global interest in the Islamic world has reached a high point in recent years. At the same time, the influence of Islamic art on the world has declined. In the past, both Europe and America were inspired by what was then called the ‘Orient’ and its artistic output. Western painters travelled extensively in the Middle East and India, recording their views of a region that was irresistible to Victorians with a sense of romance.

The exhibition ‘Beyond Orientalism: How the West was Won over by Islamic Art’ looks further than Orientalist art. Instead of being about how European and American artists depicted the Islamic world, it shows how the Islamic world changed aesthetics in the West.

The aim of the exhibition is to put artefacts from the collection of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia alongside the works they inspired. Beyond Orientalism explores a world in which creative inspiration flowed in all directions and the eyes of the West were open to the beauty of Islamic culture.
Beyond ORIENTALISM
How the West was Won over by Islamic Art

Lucien de Guise

The radiant stars with beauty strike our eyes
Because amid gloom opaque we see them rise

(Abu Taib al-Mutanabi, 915-965)
Chairman’s Foreword

The Almighty expects excellence in all works performed
(Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, narrated by al-Tibrâni)

The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia continues its quest for beauty and understanding with the exhibition Beyond Orientalism: How the West was Won over by Islamic Art. The theme of the influence that art can have is worthwhile at many levels. It not only ensures that we view Islamic culture in isolation, which it has never been, but it also encourages Muslims to look more closely at their own achievements.

These cultural achievements span fourteen hundred years, which is about the same length of time that they have been appreciated by outsiders. They cover every medium, from the vellum on which the holy words of the Qur'an were written, to the coins which served a more commercial use.

To see this heritage being admired by others makes it easier for oneself to appreciate it. Art can tell many different stories, and we are gratified to find what a versatile resource the IAMM collection is. Every artefact, regardless of its function, had a role to play in traditional Islamic society. This pride in purpose is one of the many aspects of Islamic art which has ensured its popularity far beyond the borders of the Islamic world.

At home, some of this excellence has occasionally been either unrecognised or taken for granted. A reminder of the creative genius of the Islamic world is valuable at a time when technology increasingly monopolises the popular imagination. Beyond Orientalism should encourage every viewer to take time to reflect on the importance of works that were able to inspire people from vastly different cultures. The innate quality of this art often lies beneath the surface, not immediately apparent but working its quiet charm on those who take the trouble to dwell on it.

The launch of Beyond Orientalism is officiated by the Minister of Unity, Culture, Arts and Heritage, YB Dato' Haji Mohd Shafie Apdal. We are honoured that he has agreed to join us in this celebration of works that have found a wide audience in the past and continue to do so in the present.

As with previous exhibitions at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, it is appropriate that the venue should be in Malaysia, a country that has been as open to the discovery of new ideas as it has been committed to honouring and perpetuating the best of the Islamic past.

Syed Mokhtar Albukhary
The work of art reflects the greatness of an artist in the same way that the beauty of the universe reflects that of the Creator  
(Al-Ghazali, 1058-1111)

The exhibition Beyond Orientalism: How the West was Won over by Islamic Art is about cultures coming together in sometimes surprising ways. There have been links between the Islamic world and Europe since the time of the Caliphate. At that time, trade was the motivation, and with it came more than just the necessities of life. The appreciation of beauty is universal, and there can be no doubt that Islamic artefacts were admired as much in Europe as in the Far East.

Elements of Islamic art were copied in every corner of the world. The emphasis of our exhibition, however, has been narrowed to the Western world. This is mostly because the West has a long and continuous history of being influenced by Islamic art. It is also because this area is especially well represented at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.

In addition to having the original Islamic artefacts, we also have a large number of the European works that were inspired by them. This is a long-established connection, and one that Western artists did not usually try to hide. The link with the Middle East was a mark of prestige, just as the finest wares had names that pinned down their origins: there was damascening from Damascus, and muslin from Mosul.

The impression of the Islamic world as a place of beauty and luxury was preserved even when colonial conquest was at its most acquisitive. Although the Islamic world was looked down in many ways at that time, there was still respect for its artistic heritage. As a result, European artists often worked with Islamic media and motifs. This was mostly a phenomenon of the 19th century, and in the IAMM collection there are many Western reinterpretations from that era. We have earlier examples too. A recent acquisition, which has not been displayed before, is a stunning gilded-metal ewer from five hundred years ago. This was made in Italy but follows Middle Eastern forms exquisitely; it is part of a metalwork tradition so intertwined between Venice and the Islamic world that it became known as ‘Veneto-Saracenic’.

Venice and Spain were the entry points for most of the Islamic influence that is covered in this exhibition, but the geographic focus is much wider than this. We have also expanded the time frame. Instead of confining the exhibition to a narrow range of dates, we have included the full spectrum represented in our collection. For assistance in providing images of Western artefacts that are not in the IAMM collection, we have communicated with a number of institutions that are not our usual associates. These were all highly receptive to the theme of the exhibition. It might even be said that they were excited by it. For art lovers in Europe and America, the connection with Islamic art is sometimes as welcome as for those of us who are working full-time with these artefacts.

There is still a sense of wonder at the objects themselves as well as the routes they took to arrive in such different destinations. As much as in Venice a thousand years ago, art is helping to create understanding and respect between the Islamic world and its neighbours.

Syed Mohamad Albukhary
INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF PERSIAN ART
ROYAL ACADEMY - LONDON - JANUARY 7 - FEBRUARY 28, 1931

PATRONS
HIS MAJESTY THE KING
HIS MAJESTY RIZÀ SHAH PÂHLAVI

HON. PRESIDENT
The Persian Chargé d'Affaires

VICE-PATRONS

H.E. the Spanish Ambassador
H.E. the French Ambassador
H.E. the Italian Ambassador
H.E. the Turkish Ambassador
H.E. the American Ambassador
H.E. the Soviet Ambassador
H.E. the Polish Ambassador
H.E. the German Ambassador
H.E. the Norwegian Minister
H.E. the Danish Minister
H.E. the Czechoslovak Minister
H.E. the Swedish Minister
H.E. the Hungarian Minister
H.E. the Hungarian Minister
H.E. the Austrian Minister
H.E. the Russian Minister
H.E. the Japanese Minister
H.E. the Greek Minister

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The exhibition of Persian art at Burlington House in 1931 created a level of interest and participation that has rarely been equalled in the world of art.
The meaning of the word 'Orientalism' changed in 1978 with the publication of Edward Said's classic work of that name. Although he had little to say on the subject of art, the entire creative genre has been treated with suspicion ever since. As with all revolutionary theories, there has been the inevitable retort of revisionism. This has been stepped up in the past decade, with the most crushing indictment coming from the historian Robert Irwin. Orientalist paintings themselves are now hugely popular in the Middle East.

Beyond Orientalism: How the West was Won over by Islamic Art looks further than impressions of the 'East' recorded – or imagined – by Western artists. It provides an overview of works inspired by Islamic art rather than by Islamic-world backdrops. The artists' motivation can never be determined, but there was clearly admiration or at least curiosity on the part of many in Europe and America. Most of these individuals worked in the 'decorative' media that were increasingly acknowledged during the 19th century as valid participants in the great arena of art.

There had always been collectors of Islamic art in Europe, but it was during the 19th century that scholarship began to replace romanticism. Collectors were a valuable repository of knowledge at a time when museums were only beginning to conduct serious research. The collecting community included artists steeped in high classicism, such as Frederick Lord Leighton, along with amateur enthusiast C.D.E. Fortnum, whose financial resources were provided by the world's oldest and grandest grocery emporium, Fortnum & Mason of Piccadilly.

Major exhibitions of Islamic art happened in the early 20th century. Artists and celebrities were increasingly impressed and influenced by what they saw. Understanding of the field grew and attitudes changed. Even an entertainer like the opera-singer Enrico Caruso became a collector of Iznik ceramics.

By the 1930s, the exhibition of Persian art at Burlington House in London showed how seriously works of Middle Eastern origin were being taken. By that time, 'Persian' meant Persian and was no longer a generic word for anything Islamic, as it had been in the 19th century. The lineup of participants at the exhibition was unprecedented and could not be matched today. It included everyone from the British prime minister to the leading collectors of the day, which was as international an assembly as could be contemplated. It is conspicuous how many were individuals; nowadays it would mainly be institutions. The Pahlavi dynasty, which ruled Iran for two generations, was prominent at the event. This is another occurrence that is unlikely to be repeated.
In recent years the debt owed to the Islamic world has been acknowledged to a growing extent, at least in art-historical circles. For much of the 20th century this was ignored. There have been few global initiatives dedicated to the Islamic arts as a whole since the 1976 'Festival of Islam' in London.

It is Islam's relations with Venice, rather than with the Western world as a whole, that has been covered in the most detail. There have been at least three major surveys of this relationship in recent years. The most comprehensive of these is Venice and the Islamic World 828-1797 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and L'Institut du Monde Arabe. Organised by Stefano Carboni, the curator himself is living testimony to the enduring links between the Islamic world and the maritime republic.

As the director of the Metropolitan Museum, Philippe de Montebello, wrote in his foreword to the sumptuous catalogue: "Born near the Rialto Bridge in the heart of Venice, he [Dr Stefano Carboni] has studied Islamic art in his native city and abroad and has been a member of Museum staff for many years."

There have also been some innovative shows exploring the opposite of Orientalism – the 'Occidentalis'm that took root mainly in Iran and the Ottoman empire during the 19th century. It is still rare for the big picture to be examined. The collection of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is large enough to make a wide range of comparisons between its own holdings and those of institutions dedicated to Western art.

These comparisons began to be made in the early 20th century. Specialists such as A.H. Christie expounded their views with Islamic Minor Arts and Their Influence upon European Work. In Christie's case the modern reader feels a sense of dread as the author launches into a tirade about the sterility of Arabia. There are concessions, though. As the title of his ground-breaking article hinted at, the Islamic world did make a contribution:

"If, however, with the single exception of architecture, the Muslims failed to equal Western achievement in the fine arts, their success in the arts in which their genius had free play was unparalleled in medieval times. Islam was the direct heir to many ancient craft traditions unknown in the West. In much the same way that Muslim scholars transmitted to posterity a large fund of ancient learning, Muslim artisans preserved, developed, and spread abroad the traditional 'workshop practice' of arts current in the Orient, which had either never penetrated into Europe, or if known there in former times, had decayed during the period of storm and stress that ushered in the Middle Ages."

The 'minor arts' that he alluded to have not become any more significant now than they were in his day. In fact, the zeal of Art Nouveau apologists convinced more observers about the Islamic contribution a century ago than it does today. Who knows the names of the world's leading potters or book binders in the early 21st century. Throughout the first half of the last century there were artists of consequence. It was in the decorative milieu that Islamic art had more influence on contemporary artists than it has now.

Fortunately, some of that inspiration from the 20th century is still available, often in the most unexpected places. The only comic books that have acquired an enduring status from that time, apart from Asterix, are the Tintin series. These are available in every country of the world,
although Tintin in Tibet is less popular than ever among the authorities in China during the Olympic year of 2008.

The author-illustrator of the Tintin books, Hergé, was indebted to Persian miniatures for the ligne claire style that he used, a technique that became standard among Western cartoonists for decades. In King Ottokar's Sceptre, there is even a prominent re-creation of an Islamic miniature painting.

Although the Western debt to Islamic art is substantial, there is one corner of the Islamic world that has received less attention. No survey of these influences has included the role of the Malay world. Certainly this was less extensive than regions that were closer to Europe, such as the Ottoman empire and the Mamluks, but Malay artefacts were part of this process, just as words from the Malay language became part of the European lexicon. One of the few references comes from the romantic novelist Walter Scott, who mentioned that John Leyden 'sent a poisoned creeze the hilt as brilliant as that of Excabbar'. This is an area that deserves further research.

Right: Jeanne Toussaint was one of the most influential jewellery designers of the 20th century. Known mainly for the bejewelled pendants she created for Cartier, her interest in Oriental style is apparent in this photograph from the 1920s.

1. Sir Walter Scott (Latter II, 474)
CHAPTER ONE
East and West: Estrangement and a Wary Welcome
At the same time that Islam was emerging from the 'Age of Ignorance', Europe was well entrenched in its Dark Ages. A century later, Islam had become an empire of wealth, sophistication and luxury. Europe remained as dark as it had been since the fall of the Roman empire. If ever there was an opportunity for Western artists to look for inspiration elsewhere, the 8th century would have been the time. This did not happen.

During Roman times there had been an extensive trade network linking every part of Europe with the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Roman emperors had come from different parts of the empire and some had been Arab. Between the fall of Rome and the rise of Venice in the 9th century, Christian Europe survived in comparative isolation. Political contact was limited and cultural interchange almost non-existent.

Before the Crusades, it was a privileged European who had ever seen an Islamic artefact. Apart from diplomatic missions and the accounts of traders, there was little to illuminate the gloom of the Dark Ages. In Western Europe, contact existed between Islamic Spain and Christian France, but the northward expansion of Arab and Berber armies had been stopped in the middle of the 8th century. Relations between the two neighbours on either side of the Pyrenees were at various stages cordial and there were power-brokering marriages between Muslims and Christians.

There were also some spectacularly bloody encounters, such as the legendary Battle of Tours or Poitiers, a seminal rout which some despairing Arab historians believed to have left as many as 300,000 Muslim dead and wounded. At the Battle of Bordeaux, the situation was reversed with the defeat of the city's Christian inhabitants: "only God knows how many died and vanished."

In Western Europe the contact was mostly military, and this is what historians have concentrated on ever since. There has also been superficial awareness of the cultural implications, usually expressed with alarm. England's formative historian of the modern era wrote these often-repeated words in 1776: "A victorious line of march had been prolonged above a thousand miles from the rock of Gibraltar to the bank of the Loire; the repetition of an equal space would have carried the Saracens to the confines of Poland and the Highlands of Scotland; the Rhine is not more impassable than the Nile or Euphrates, and the Arabian fleet might have sailed without a naval combat into the mouth of the Thames. Perhaps the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pupils might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Muhammad."

Gibbon was, in general, quite encouraging about Islam: "The creed of Mahomet is free from suspicion or ambiguity; and the Koran is a glorious testimony to the unity of God."

Neither Latin nor Arabic sources go into much detail about the cultural artefacts that might have been sought out by both sides as they fought each other in what is seen as an early clash of civilisations. 'Booty' in the old sense was the usual priority. There are more references to what the Christian princes had that was worth plundering than to their opponents' possessions. After capturing the city of Bordeaux, the

2. Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (New York, 1974), Volume 6, p.16
3. Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (London, 1862, Volume 6, p.223
Andalusian leader Abdul Rahman took "gem-and-pearl-encrusted golden objects", according to an Arab chronicler.

References to plunder tend to specify its origins as items taken from churches. On many occasions these are taken back by Christian warriors, but there is frustratingly little information on the possessions of their Muslim enemies. Countless Andalusian weapons must have ended up in Frankish hands, but they seem not to have merited a mention. Arms and armour of the Islamic world aroused more comment in later centuries, perhaps because there were more literate observers to chronicle them.

One of the greatest accounts of the 13th century is the Song of Roland, a poem that takes a free approach to history by making the Emperor Charlemagne a scourge of Islam. The incident around which the poem is based has been turned into a battle against Saracens, when the enemy were actually Christian Basques. The writer did at least draw attention to the quality of the Saracens' weaponry:

"And Sarrazins, so many gathered,
Their helmets gleam, with gold are jewelled,
Also their shields, their haubersks orfreyed,
Also their swords, ensigns on spears fixed,
Rank beyond rank could not be numbered,
So many there, no measure could he set."

Charlemagne's skirmishes with Muslim armies were based on political expedience rather than religious conviction. He had fought against the Umayyads of Andalusia and was interested in exploring an alliance with their Abbasid enemies in Baghdad. One of the earliest, peaceful encounters between Islam and Europe was the delegation from Caliph Harun al-Rashid to the Frankish emperor in 802. An earlier exchange between Charlemagne's father Pepin and the Caliph al-Mansur has been written about less but also included an exchange of gifts. Charlemagne's rendezvous with Harun al-Rashid's delegation has been mentioned in numerous histories, with few details given about the gifts that were exchanged. European historians were more excited about the elephant that was given by the caliph. It is believed that Charlemagne allowed an iron Frankish broadsword to be sent to Harun, although the death penalty was imposed on Christians who sold this weapon to the Franks' most reviled foes, the Vikings.

The low level of art appreciation shown by medieval European historians did not apply only to artefacts from the Islamic world. Their concern, in general, was how precious the contents might be. Eastern gifts that included gold or silk were the most highly valued. Among the earliest influences on Europe were coins. One of the most discussed is a gold 'mancus' of King Offa of Mercia, which is shown in the following section of this catalogue (page 38).

The coinage of Offa's realm in the centre of England included a copy of an Abbasid dinar. It has always been common to copy other types of currency, especially when the original issuer is an economic superpower, as the Abbasid empire was. However, Islamic coins of this time would have placed the Mercian king - unknowingly - at the very heart of Islamic aesthetics. In addition to Offa's name, the Shahadah features prominently on his imitation dinar: "There is no God but Allah,

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Muhammad is His Messenger." The coin also emphasises the importance of calligraphy in Islam; at that stage it was still Kufic script, successfully copied in other parts of Christian Europe.

Coins were among the first exponents of a new aesthetic approach that came with Islam. The importance of the written word is clear. It is also possible to see the aniconic message beginning to spread. The earliest Islamic coins were conspicuous for reusing the figural imagery of the Byzantine and Sassanian empires that they had taken over. In the case of the Christian Byzantine solidus, the cross was soon transformed into an upright stick with no cross bar: This symbolised the unitary nature of Islam. An aniconic rivalry seems to have then sprung up between the Islamic empire and its Byzantine neighbour which during the 8th century competed with Islam in iconoclastic fervour.

The earliest Islamic influence on the art of Europe was filtered through Spain, at the opposite end of the Mediterranean from Byzantium. Much of this occurred during the Christian re-conquest, which began in a small way during the 8th century. As the extent of the Andalusian achievement became more apparent, so did the urge to copy it. Muslim artisans taken captive at this time created the 'Mudejar' art that reached its greatest expression during the 14th and 15th centuries. Their involvement is most visible in Christian sacred settings. This approach was exported from Spain to its colonies in the Americas, where Islamic aesthetics have been intermittently popular. A revival that was enjoyed in Hollywood during the 20th century is visible in many films noir.

During the 16th century the presence of Moors who had only recently converted to Christianity was thought threatening enough for the Spanish authorities to expel them from their American colonies. Even after the expulsion, churches and cathedrals were built with Moorish features such as ceilings filled with stars and stalactites. In Spain, the influence of Mudejar art continued in a quiet and unobtrusive manner up to the 19th century, as can be seen in numerous items in the IAMM. During the 1850s there was an important revival, known as Neo-Mudejar, which affected most areas of the arts and spread far beyond its home in the Iberian peninsula.

Islamic Spain's artistic legacy was felt as much in southern Europe as in the later Spanish colonies. One of the most significant contributions was ceramics. Hispano-Moresque glazed lustreware is the best-known of these exports, most of which were shipped to Italy. In this other European outpost of one-time Muslim occupation, lustre ceramics became the
model for a new, Italian approach. This was initially based on the floral motifs of Islamic Spain, later acquiring a Renaissance look with classical imagery. The albarallo was the preferred shape for tin-glazed ceramics in both countries, although the potters' inventories included dishes, tiles and drinking vessels.

Disputes continue about the origins of the word ‘maiolica’, used to describe these Hispano-Moresque wares and their offspring in Italy. Whether it is derived from the island of Majorca or the town of Malaga (Maliqa), there can be no doubting its popularity. The Venetian authorities tried to restrict the import of maiolica during the 15th century, although this did not prevent it from being greatly admired among the secular and religious nobility of Italy, according to the definitive scholar of the subject, C.D.E. Fortnum.

In other parts of Europe, different Islamic wares were sought after. In southern France, which had been exposed to so much Andalusian culture, metalwork was coveted. Candelsticks of Muslim workmanship were recorded in Limoges, which later became the European capital of enamelling. It is possible that these items took a much longer route than from nearby Spain. Their origins might lie at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, where Byzantium was the leading enameller. However, Islamic Spain had also perfected this art and the forms adopted by Limoges’ enamellers were common in many parts of the Islamic world. It is likely that the same techniques were transferred to China, where they developed into cloisonné wares.

As James Allan has so effectively shown, Islamic metalwork was the model for a wide variety of artefacts in Christendom. The religious message contained in many of the original works was no deterrent to its European admirers. At the same time, the figurative shapes and decoration on these items provided another type of inspiration. “The greatest legacy of Islam to Christian Europe in metalworking terms was that very form of art most distrusted by Muslim piety, human and animal sculptures in the round.”

The city that provided the most regular conduit between Islam and Christendom was Venice. The relationship goes back a long way. In the early 9th century Venice initiated its reputation as the ‘Alexandria of the West’ by removing the relics of St Mark from the Egyptian port city to their new resting place in the Adriatic. Unlike many other parts of Italy, Venice had not been overrun by Muslim forces. In common with other northern Italian cities, hostilities between Christian and Muslim states did little to damage the merchant mindset. Pisa, however, was the home town of the man who popularised Arabic numerals in Europe.

Despite the general assumption that traders were not the main importers of Islamic influence into Europe, Venice was different. This was a city that imported ideas as well as artefacts. Instead of condemning the Islamic world, as most of Europe did, Venice sought to understand its main trading partners: the Mamluks and the Ottomans. Working on a balance between its interests in East and West was a challenge for Venice that was severely tested when it became a port of embarkation for crusaders on their way to the Holy Land.

When Pope Urban preached the First Crusade in 1096, he

Detail of a map of Venice from 1572. When the map was made there were fears that it might fall into the hands of the Turks.
obviously had more than spiritual gain in mind when he promised: "The possessions of the enemy too, will be yours, since you will make spoil of their treasures and return victorious to your own." It is less clear exactly what goods they were expecting to find in the Holy Land. In typically medieval fashion the emphasis would probably have been on bullion.

After playing its part in the sacking of the Christian city of Constantinople in 1204, Venice also acquired some worthwhile spoils from the Islamic world. It may have been at this time that interest in the aesthetic qualities of Islam was reawakened among the citizens of the republic. They were already avid collectors and there are numerous accounts of the possessions of its leading families. Evidently, some admired the collectibles they acquired from the Middle East for more than their commercial value. One of the earliest examples was the 9th century Doge Giustiniano Partezipazio, whose will specified a number of "ornaments" that may have had Islamic origins.

Venice was described by the Italian historian Giuseppe Fiocco as "a massive sucq". Its contact with the Islamic world gave Venice many similarities to its eastern trading partners. The Milanese cleric Pietro Casola described its women in the 15th century as, "being so completely covered up, I do not know how they can see to go along the streets." Just as the ambience and architecture were felt by outsiders to be unnaturally 'Oriental', the tastes of its inhabitants were also inclined in an unexpected direction. Being exposed to influences quite different from the rest of Europe, its elite had the opportunity to acquire the truly exotic and appreciate the culture that created the objects.

The 16th century Venetian nobleman Gasparo Contarini was showing no false modesty when he called his city, "the emporium of the whole world!" The volume of trade flowing through Venice was enormous, and much of it had a formative effect on the luxury arts of Europe. In everything from enamelled glass to lacquered book bindings, Venice took a leading role. The fine art of painting was also affected by the merchandise that arrived from the Islamic world.

Although Islamic art cannot be said to have influenced his style, the 16th century painter Carpaccio was more open than most to the decorative possibilities of using Islamic artefacts in his work. Some were included to make a political statement against the Ottomans, who were disrupting Venetian interests at the time. Others were included because they were among the most desirable items in the home environment - or more often in an ecclesiastical setting. Inlaid bronze buckets were much sought after, becoming part of the liturgical accessories in Christian churches. These can still be found in Italian Catholic institutions, along with the Islamic textiles that were so highly prized throughout Europe. Contemporary inventories make it clear that the owners were aware of the origins of their treasures. The 1557 inventory of a religious school on the Dalmatian coast uses terminology to describe various items of metalwork as being in Islamic style.

Carpaccio's paintings show a detailed acquaintance with a wide variety of Islamic artefacts. Living in Venice gave him an advantage in the business of creating an impression with spectacular objects. He painted

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10. Quoted in "Venice and the East" by Deborah Howard, Yale, 1999, p.12
Timurid jugs, Persian rosewater sprinklers, Iznik jars and Mamluk candlesticks. In some cases it is hard to tell whether he is showing the original Islamic works or the imitations that Venice started to produce.

In other parts of Europe there was considerably less Islamic material available. Iznik pottery that was commonplace in Venice was treated as regally as Chinese porcelain in northern Europe. Hispano-Moresque lustreware made its way to England, but seems to have been of inferior quality to the examples that were exported to Italy. While China was celebrated for its ceramics, the Islamic world was admired for its carpets. During the 16th century, demand for ‘Lotto’ carpets from Anatolia grew at an astonishing rate. They are shown in paintings of the time, often occupying a place of honour on a table rather than being put on the floor.

Some of these carpets were copied in Europe, although there seems to have been an acceptance that this was an activity better left to Muslim craftsmen. Instead of copying the labour-intensive carpets of Asia, European artisans adopted their designs, along with other types of ornament from the Islamic world, to create the arabesques that became a central part of European culture.

For others, inspiration was to be found in the Islamic world itself instead of its artistic output. Travellers returned from the Middle East and more distant lands with a clearer idea of how artefacts were created and used, as well as with a wider selection of objects than was available in Europe. Persian manuscripts were seen for the first time but not necessarily understood. The study of Arabic and Persian languages was stepped up during the 17th century. At the same time, Rembrandt had seen enough Mughal miniatures to copy images of Shah Jehan and Jahangir, as well as to use Oriental imagery in his other paintings.

By the 18th century, Islamic designs had to compete with those from China for the attention of collectors. Desirable though Chinese ceramics and lacquerware had become in Europe, they did not offer the same long-term opportunities for artists. Apart from the European ceramics that have been imitating Chinese porcelain ever since, there was not a wide range of material from China that could be transferred to Western media. This did not prove an obstacle to the imagination of European craftsmen, who adopted implausible figures wearing ‘coolie’ hats as part of the chinoiserie craze that overcame the West, insinuating itself onto wallpaper, carpets and every type of furniture.

Knowledge of that distant land was so incomplete that it acquired an extra level of exoticism, which easily turned to whimsy rather than the more solid virtues of Islamic design. European visitors to China were rare and it was more common for them to influence Chinese art than the other way round. The Middle Kingdom was to remain elusive for much longer. In contrast, Asia’s second-largest empire was receiving a growing number of visitors. Indian cloths were to become a vital part of textiles and fashion in Britain. This was a complex trade in which British agents commissioned work in India, changing tastes there at the same time.

Chintz was the most popular import for a long time. It acquired a new desirability in England at the end of the 17th century after the accession of Prince William of Orange to the English throne, bringing with him a Dutch taste for this Indian cloth. In 1694 the East India Company reported: “the greatest ladies in the land will wear chintz—you can never make or send us too many of them.” Business in India was different from China, where the division between Chinese taste and that of Western

customers was strictly observed.

During the 17th century the artistic influence of the Ottoman empire was showing signs of the decisive role it would play two hundred years later. Iznik ceramics inspired a new approach in Europe, partly through the attachment to tulips that was felt in both parts of the world. This became an obsession in mid-century Holland, where 'tulip mania' became one of the earliest speculative bubbles. The economic effect might have been less devastating than was previously thought, but it is certain that Dutch collectors were spending colossal sums on tulip bulbs. More than two hundred years later, the English were also susceptible to tulip infatuation. A pioneer economist of the 19th century, Charles MacKay, provided fascinating and mostly accurate anecdotes about speculation, ignoring the artistic consequences of the tulip's popularity: "The example of the Dutch was followed to some extent in England. In the year 1636 tulips were publicly sold in the Exchange in London, and the jobbers exerted themselves to the utmost to raise them to the fictitious value they had acquired in Amsterdam."

Art fads came and went in Europe, along with clothing fashions. Ottoman designs made frequent comebacks, but their most visible time in the limelight—before the 19th century obsession with Iznik wares—was during the early 18th century. French arbiters of taste became so attached to Ottoman culture that 'tuleries' featured in every aspect of court life. Two years before the French Revolution of 1789, the ruling class of France made elaborate preparations to welcome a delegation from the Indian Muslim ruler Tipu Sultan. Despite the geographic distance from the Ottoman empire, this event was still called a tulerie. Before the arrival of the guests, the Sévres workshops prepared commemorative porcelain coffee cups, huqqas and spitoons. The ceramicists understood enough about Islamic priorities to avoid figural imagery, although Tipu was known for his attachment to representations of tigers.

While India was still unimaginably exotic for most Europeans, 'going native' in Turkey was a chic activity; even for those who had known the Turks as battlefield adversaries. Back home, the accounts of travellers were an inspiration to the creatively minded who longed for the exuberance of the East as much as the Ottoman emperors savoured the pleasures of European rococo style.

Armchair travellers could also enjoy the first edition of The Thousand and One Nights, which was published in French at the beginning of the 18th century and then translated into English. The luxury and civility of these tales must have been appealing to Western European readers whose acquaintance with hygiene was, at the best, basic. Even in the desert, the following encounter was possible: "...the young man arose, and entered the tent, and brought forth a clean basin, with a handsome ewer, and a napkin of silk, the ends of which were embroidered with red gold, and a sprinkling bottle full of rose-water infused with musk."

There were also more reliable, first-hand accounts of life in the East. One of the most detailed of these was written by Lady Mary Wortley Montague, who lived in Constantinople around 1718. Her observations were usually less concerned with art than with fashion and

13. Charles Mackay, Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds, London, 1841, p.114. The author did make an oblique reference to art on the same page: "As the rich Englishman bores of his fine race-horses or his old pictures, so does the wealthy Dutchman want him of his tulips."

the beauty of the women she met in Turkish harems: “To say all in a word, our celebrated English beauties would vanish near her. She was dressed in a caftan of gold brocade, flowered with silver, very well fitted to her shape... her lovely arms adorned with bracelets of diamonds.” When Lady Mary turned her attention to interior design, the details are more open to doubt: “the rooms are all spread with Persian carpets.”

Just as chinoiserie gazebos were built in European gardens during the 18th century, there was the same demand for Ottoman structures. These usually took the form of tents, or sometimes mosques on a very small scale. At Kew Gardens, to the southwest of London, William Chambers built a decorative mosque in the Turkish style during the 1760s. His project in Kew seems to have aroused surprisingly little contemporary comment. Although the mosque no longer exists, it formed a favourable impression on The Gentleman’s Magazine in 1896: “The buildings in Kew Gardens are deservedly the admiration of all foreigners; and, among them, none deserves greater applause than the beautiful mosque.”

As contact with the Islamic world grew, a different type of appreciation arose, along with the word ‘Orientalism’. Artists became more concerned with depicting the Orient than learning aesthetic lessons from it. Apart from the elements of Ottoman and Persian fashion and furnishings that were adopted, the greatest gift to the West was architecture. Buildings acquired Oriental features, and the longstanding debate about links between Gothic and Islamic style continued. In the fine and decorative arts there was little sign of Islamic influence at this point.

England was a trading backwater in the 8th century, when the famous gold 'mancus' (left) of King Offa was minted. His kingdom of Mercia, in the centre of England, had close links with the Frankish kingdom that occupied much of Western Europe. It was probably from there that the prototype of this coin made its way across the English Channel. Finds of Islamic gold coins are extremely rare in England. Offa’s coin is more likely to have been a copy of a prestige gift than an attempt to rival the dinar; which seems to have been the intention of his Frankish counterpart, the Emperor Charlemagne.

The original on which Offa’s coin was based is a gold dinar of the Abbasid Caliph al-Manur, dated 157 AH (774 AD). The almost identical dinar (left) in the collection of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is from the reign of Caliph al-Saffah (749-754). In 802, the diplomatic gifts presented by emissaries of Caliph Harun al-Rashid to Charlemagne were so lavish that the monk who recorded the exchange later exclaimed, “It seemed as if the East had been left bare that the West might be filled.” Monkeys and precious ungents were mentioned; gold coins were not. However, there can be no doubt that they circulated in Charlemagne’s realm and that his mints produced imitations of them.

King Offa’s coin leaves the Islamic exhortations intact. Four hundred years later, King Alfonso VIII of Castile (1158-1214) was obviously more aware of the content. Instead of making simple mistakes with the Arabic, as the Mercians had done, his copies of Almoravid dinars deliberately made certain phrases unreadable. No such caution was exercised by the later Bishop of Maguelonne, who was reprimanded by Pope Clement IV in 1266 for: “having his coinage struck with the title of Mahomet...which is displeasing to God and is contrary to the profession of bishops.”

Other Islamic coins were copied by Christian rulers, especially those who settled in the Middle East after the First Crusade. Pope Innocent IV banned the Crusader kingdoms from using Islamic inscriptions. The rulers responded by copying Fatimid and Ayyubid coins but changing the inscriptions in Arabic.
The ogee and the cusped arch were fundamental to Islamic architecture, just as they were in Europe during the Middle Ages. The modification of the classical semi-circular arch in both cultures was noticed by Sir Christopher Wren. England’s most prolific architect believed that Gothic was the offspring of ‘Saracenic’ architecture. For other observers in the 17th century, both labels were used as terms of abuse. The diarist John Evelyn wrote unfavourably of Saracen “ponderous arched roofs… and gaudy sculpture.”

Pointed arches, as seen in the drawing of Notre Dame de Paris above, were essential to Gothic style. They affected more than just architecture. In the Islamic world, the shape was adopted in different areas of the arts, most notably to form a mihrab shape on Iranian tiles. In Europe, furniture and the frames of paintings were equally susceptible. This was considered a model of elegance until the classicism of the 17th century relegated the earlier style to the category of barbarous deviation from the path of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

By the 19th century, the Gothic was back in fashion. France’s pre-eminent architect, Viollet-Le-Duc, did not spare his praise when discussing the Islamic contribution: “The square and the compass became supreme, and yet with these means, apparently so restricted and with so dry a theme, the artists whom we call ‘Arabs’ succeeded in producing marvels.”

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2. E.J. Viollet-Le-Duc, Lectures on Architecture (18), New York, 1987, Dover, p. 388. Viollet-Le-Duc went on to say: “Geometry afforded to them an intellectual pastime and it engaged the eye through wonderful combinations.”
Hunging lamp, enamelled glass. 16th century Venice. Gift of Mrs. Glamour Hanfich

Detail of pseudo-Arabic enamelled inscription
The appeal of Islamic enameled glass in Europe began much earlier than the 19th century, when countless Mamluk vessels were imitated. Crusaders from the 12th century onwards were famed for their attachment to this decorative technique, especially when it was in beaker form (left). In addition to the enamelling and gilding, which had no parallel in Europe, touches of the Orient were introduced in the form of motifs such as camels. Arabic inscriptions were also imitated in a less convincing manner.

In Venice, especially, Mamluk glass was the inspiration for numerous enameled wares. In addition to evidence such as the Islamic-derived lamp from Venice (previous pages), the importance of Mamluk glass is attested to in contemporary Venetian accounts. Some scholars have, however, suggested that Byzantine influence might have been more significant.1 Despite this, there can be no doubt about the almost talismanic properties that were associated with Islamic glass in medieval Europe.

Among the most revered examples to have made its way to England, and remained intact for 700 years, is the 'Luck of Edenhall'. This flask, with a leather case that helped protect it, is of a very similar size and shape to the one illustrated here from the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. A poem commemorates the flask, written, not as is so often stated, by America’s would-be poet laureate Henry Wadsworth Longfellow but by the English Quaker J.H. Wilten in 1812.

"Joy to thy banner, bold Sir Knight! But if your goblet break or fall, Farewell thy vantage in the fight! Farewell the luck of Eden-Hall!"

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