

Chapter Title: INTRODUCTION: Connecting Historiographies, Challenging Assumptions

Book Title: *Antique Dealing and Creative Reuse in Cairo and Damascus 1850-1890*

Book Subtitle: *Intercultural Engagements with Architecture and Craft in the Age of Travel and Reform*

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Published by: Brill. (2021)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv1v7zbh3.5>

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## Connecting Historiographies, Challenging Assumptions

It was by sheer accident that I came across the topic at the origin and core of the present book. As an architectural historian interested in the working of modernity in pre-Nasserist Egypt, in the early 1990s I was fortuitously given access to an unprecedented resource on the making of Khedivial Cairo: the private papers of French architect Ambroise Baudry (1838–1906), who had been active in the city from 1871 to 1886. For the first time ever, the architectural fashioning of modern Cairo could be viewed and experienced through primary sources, instead of secondary, and mostly indirect, ones. Baudry's carefully kept archive, then in his descendants' hands, consisted of an extensive collection of correspondence (about 800 letters to family, friends, mentors and clients); an accounts' ledger detailing commissions, costs, collaborators and contractors on an almost year-by-year basis; and sets of photographs and architectural drawings, a number of which were acquired in 2000 by the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.<sup>1</sup> The archive also contained documentation on his art collections: Baudry was an early enthusiast and proud owner of valuable Islamic objects from Egypt and Syria, among other high "curiosities," the then current shorthand term for non-Western artworks. A selection of his Iznik tiles and Mamluk woodwork is now housed in the Musée du Louvre in Paris; while the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York holds carved and inlaid woodwork from his collection too. Most remaining pieces were dispersed in 1999 and 2000.<sup>2</sup>

The papers revealed a fine artist who gave birth to one of the most original and alluring form of Mamluk-inspired architecture conceived during

Egypt's modern era.<sup>3</sup> Many other architects, such as the Slovenian Anton Lasciac (1856–1946), did also explore the possibilities of Mamluk tangible heritage for modern design and came up with appealing formulas at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> But Baudry's work not only came at an early stage, it indeed uncovered an aspect of modern design practice on Egyptian soil that came as complete novelty: the large-scale reuse of historic architectural salvage in new suburban domestic architecture. The notion of salvage in modern Europe is typically embedded in post-revolutionary France, when eccentric *amateurs* [art lovers] endeavoured to transport to safety any fragment rescued from confiscated church property at risk of destruction or dilapidation;<sup>5</sup> it infused museum display with the idea of the period room, and inspired historicist architecture for decades afterwards, particularly in France.<sup>6</sup> In other words, salvage designates elements retrieved from damaged buildings or structures in the course of demolition, in order to ensure their survival. Repurposing them in modern residences in France and elsewhere

3 Marie-Laure Crosnier Leconte and Mercedes Volait, *L'Égypte d'un architecte, Ambroise Baudry (1838–1906)* (Paris: Somogy, 1998).

4 Mercedes Volait, "Un architecte face à l'Orient: Antoine Lasciac (1856–1946)," in *La Fuite en Égypte: supplément aux voyages européens*, ed. Jean-Claude Vatin (Cairo: Cedej, 1989), 265–73.

5 Geneviève Bresc-Bautier and Béatrice de Chancel-Bardelot, *Un Musée révolutionnaire: le musée des Monuments français d'Alexandre Lenoir* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2016) and for a broader view, just released, Tom Stammers, *The Purchase of the Past, Collecting Culture in Post-Revolutionary Paris c. 1790–1890* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

6 On nineteenth-century historicism, also termed Revivalism, in architecture, Martin Bressani, "Revivalism," in *The Companions to the History of Architecture*, III: *Nineteenth-Century Architecture*, eds. Martin Bressani and Christina Contandriopoulos (New York: Wiley, 2017), 3–18.

1 The drawings are numbered ARO 2000 378–389, supplemented by ARO 2010 013–016.

2 *Arts d'Orient*, Paris-Drouot Montaigne, 7 June 1999, lots no. 76 to 147; *Arts d'Orient*, Drouot-Richelieu, Paris, 11 December 2000, lots no. 98 to 120; no. 172 to 195.

became a worldwide line of decorative work during the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth one.<sup>7</sup>

The patrons for which Baudry designed houses which incorporated salvage were themselves Islamic art collectors. The purpose was to reconstruct immersive environments for their artworks. The spoils repurposed consisted of entire ceilings, marble floors and dados, fountains, tiles and mashrabiyyas – in short anything that could be detached from historic buildings for future recycling. To be sure, *spolia* in itself is hardly *terra incognita* for historians;<sup>8</sup> it is basic material to any archaeologist and medievalist around the world. But its modern instantiation in nineteenth-century Cairo had never been addressed, let alone mentioned in the literature. Studying Baudry's architectural achievements in Cairo thus opened unsuspected horizons. It pointed to an economy of collecting and repurposing that had never been heard of until then.

On further inspection, the recycling of salvage proved to be far from exceptional but rather an integral part of a broader ecosystem in Egypt. Good evidence of its prevalence is offered by the recurrence of briefs and reports on rubble (*kharāb*, also *inqāṣ* in Arabic) in the pages of the official journal of the Egyptian government since the 1830s.<sup>9</sup> The availability and prominence of ruined buildings in late Ottoman Cairo raise in turn questions about the commodification of the city's tangible heritage

and portable assets associated with its architecture. It subsequently appeared that the circulation of salvage and artefacts trespassed across the frontiers of Egypt, for provenances could be traced to adjoining Syria and, farther afield, to the Hijaz and Persia. How did such things turn into collectibles? How did their circulation function? What was the relationship with the system of endowments, since endowed buildings and their furnishings formed the largest part of historic architecture and craft in Cairo and Damascus and had theoretically been made in perpetuity? What agencies were involved? What were the economic dynamics behind the movement of salvage and objects? What subjectivities (cultural, aesthetic and otherwise) sustained it? How was it dealt with, socially and politically, at a time of increased worldwide awareness about heritage preservation?

## 1 Things, People and Places

The five chapters of this book attempt to provide answers to these questions. They do so by exploring the commodification process from varied viewpoints, within a time frame covering its early phase during the nineteenth century. Evidence shows that the birth of the trade in Islamic antiques, to use contemporary parlance,<sup>10</sup> can be dated to the 1850s, while legal control over it became quite effective from the 1890s onwards. Those four decades represent a transitional period in the commercial and consumption cycle of tangible heritage in the region, and constitute the focus of this book. The period in question is characterised politically by late Ottoman imperial governance besieged by increasing European interference, but before direct European rule intervened (the British army occupied the Ottoman province of Egypt in 1882). Within the Ottoman Empire, it

7 Bruno Pons, *Grands décors français 1650–1800, reconstitués en Angleterre, aux États-Unis, en Amérique du Sud et en France* (Dijon: Faton, 1995); Wayne Craven, *Stanford White: Decorator in Opulence and Dealer in Antiquities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

8 Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney, eds., *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012) and further bibliography in Chapter 4.

9 A systematic mining of the official journal *Al-Waqā'ir al-misriyya*, irregularly issued since 1828, for news related to architectural and urban affairs in Cairo is currently underway within the project “La fabrique du Caire moderne,” based at the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology in Cairo, under the supervision of Adam Mestyan (Duke University) and the present author.

10 On the category of “antiques,” its meaning and history, see Mark Westgarth, *The Emergence of the Antique and Curiosity Dealer in Britain 1815–1850. The Commodification of Historical Objects* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2020), 102–06.

corresponded to an age of reform inaugurated by the Tanzimat Edict of 1839 in order to adjust to the new world order. These times were conflicted ones, and yet they cannot be subsumed in the colonial paradigm. They had an Ottoman, Syrian and Egyptian life of their own, and one that should be captured in its own terms.<sup>11</sup> On the global stage, industry was in full swing. Manufactured objects reigned; gigantic international fairs promoted and celebrated their worldwide outreach. Trains and steamships did the rest: European goods travelled faster and further away, dominating consumption everywhere.

A first angle under which the evidence collected for this book is looked at is the social life of the Middle Eastern pieces on the move, which in turn encompasses many aspects. To name but a few, the availability and supply of artefacts, their varied provenances, the multiple means of their motion, their incorporation into private and public spheres, the functions they performed, and last but not least, the reactions their appropriation elicited (from indifference and complacency to reluctance and dissension), all shaped the biography of artefacts in circulation for reuse and display. The material things considered here are of diverse nature, ranging from small curios to large fixtures, and all varieties of collectibles in between: from helmets, architectural tiles and tabouret-tables up to a mosque pulpit, painted ceilings and full rooms. These commodities were joined by non-architectural objects, namely apparel. Because of their corporeal dimension, garments offer a way to further approach the realm of the subjectivities associated with cross-collecting and cross-decorating.<sup>12</sup>

The second prism is that of people. The book considers trade and consumption through the

lens of individual stakeholders and end-users, be they officials, overseers, collectors, connoisseurs, brokers, providers, manufacturers, designers, purchasers, painters, photographers, sitters, and the like. Following Howard S. Becker's *Art Worlds*,<sup>13</sup> the approach assumes that the transformation of things into collectibles was not the doing of isolated individuals, but the undertaking of a web of interrelated people who intersected one way or another with the physical settings and material objects – historic architecture and related artefacts – discussed here. Whether protagonists were engaged with selling, purchasing, dismantling, repurposing the tangible culture referred to, or facilitated, negotiated, opposed and punished its appropriation, their actions and attitudes did impact the commodification process and have something to say about it in return.

Capturing both Western and non-Western voices in the microhistories that make the weft of the book has been a relentless concern. The literature on collecting has shown that the desire to acquire and display the rare and the remarkable had reached around the world since at least the sixteenth century and that it often involved cross-cultural contact. It was the case in the Early Modern Atlantic world,<sup>14</sup> and it holds true for the coeval Islamicate one.<sup>15</sup> There are comparatively fewer studies for the nineteenth-century Mediterranean realm. And within these, subaltern voices are frequently left offstage, for that age, the acme of Western imperial Orientalism, has been primarily sought through the eyes of

11 As proposed in Adam Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism: The Ideology and Culture of Power in Late Ottoman Egypt* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017).

12 For apparel as a shortcut to core social issues, Daniel Roche, *La Culture des apparences, une histoire du vêtement (XVII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

13 Howard Saul Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

14 Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall, eds., *Collecting across Cultures, Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

15 Sussan Babaie and Melanie Gibson, eds., *The Mercantile Effect: Art and Exchange in the Islamicate World during the 17th and 18th centuries* (London: The Gingko Library, 2017); Catarina Schmidt Arcangeli and Gerhard Wolf, eds., *Islamic Artefacts in the Mediterranean World: Trade, Gift Exchange and Artistic Transfer* (Venice: Marsilio, 2010).

the conquerors. French and British collecting in the Middle East have attracted so far most existing research,<sup>16</sup> besides the Western art markets where their pieces circulated.<sup>17</sup> Some peripheries such as Central Europe and Russia have been recently brought into the picture.<sup>18</sup> But local agency is still remarkably absent from the narrative, with the exception of a handful of successful dealers who had moved to Europe and America in the late nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Truly enough, the asymmetry of sources is overwhelming, as has been frequently acknowledged; documents on the activities of Europeans and Americans largely outpace records addressing local figures and dynamics. Redressing the balance may seem farfetched, but alternative historiographies do exist.<sup>20</sup> The present book holds central the points

of view, interests and actions of insiders, in addition to that of outside agency. Besides adhering to the concerns of “decentered history,”<sup>21</sup> it aims to further explore the path of entangled and connected history by examining the interplay of both agencies.<sup>22</sup> It is willing, in other words, to devote attention to intercultural “contact zones.”<sup>23</sup>

Place constitutes a third entry into the subject matter of the book. It is understood here in its architectural sense. The consideration of place commands close attention to the physical settings where consumers’ actions could be observed and interpreted, whether the agency consisted of fashioning domestic décors or conceiving the lifestyle to be enjoyed within their precincts. All places studied are interiors, and most belong to homes, with the exception of a few art galleries and showrooms. New collecting cultures always developed in the private sphere before conquering the public realm. To word it otherwise, most museum collections grew out of private ones, starting with the aristocratic *Wunderkammer*, the cabinet of curiosities of the early modern period. What happened in the private interiors considered here is thus of broader social significance, as most of their valuables went public at one point or another. Geographically speaking, the book covers local, transnational and global ground. Cairo, and to a lesser extent Damascus, are the cities at

16 Stephen Vernoit, ed., *Discovering Islamic Art. Scholars, Collecting and Collections, 1850–1950* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000); Christine Peltre, *Les Arts de l’Islam: itinéraire d’une redécouverte* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006); Rémi Labrusse, *Purs décors, Arts de l’Islam, Regards du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Arts Décoratifs, 2007) and *Islamophilies: l’Europe moderne et les arts de l’Islam* (Paris: Somogy, 2011); Moya Carey, *Persian Art. Collecting the Arts of Iran for the V&A* (London: V&A Publishing, 2017).

17 Bénédicte Savoy et al., eds., *Acquiring Cultures: Histories of World Art on Western Markets* (Boston, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018).

18 Francine Giese et al., eds., *À l’orientale: Collecting, Displaying and Appropriating Islamic Art and Architecture in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

19 The typical example is the famous New York-based Armenian dealer Dikran Kelekian; for a thorough study of an Ottoman collector-dealer in *fin de siècle* Paris, Deniz Türker, “Hakky-Bey and his Journal *Le Miroir de l’art musulman*, or, *Mir’āt-I Şanāyī-Ī İslāmiye* (1898),” *Muqarnas* 31 (2014): 277–306.

20 A case in point is André Raymond, *Égyptiens et Français au Caire, 1798–1801* (Cairo: Publications de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1998). An attempt to look at empire “from the inside out,” is Maya Jasonoff, *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture and Conquest in the East, 1750–1850* (New York: Vintage books, 2005). Further entangled histories are proposed in François Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin, eds., *After Orientalism: Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and Eastern Re-appropriations* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

21 Natalie Zemon Davis, “Decentering history: local stories and cultural crossings in a global world,” *History and theory* 50, no. 2 (May 2011): 188–202.

22 The conceptual model is offered by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Mughals and Franks: Explorations in Connected History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); see also Romain Bertrand, *L’Histoire à parts égales, récits d’une rencontre Orient-Occident (XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup>)* (Paris: Seuil, 2011). An inspiration in prose has been Edmund de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes: a Hidden Inheritance* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2010), which follows a family collection of Japanese netsukes from Paris, Vienna, Tunbridge Wells, Tokyo, Odessa and London over a century.

23 The term was initially forged for literary studies, see Mary Louis Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2007, 1st edition in 1992).

the onset of the collecting and commercial culture studied and constitute a central focus. But the outcome of cross-collecting their architecture and crafts reached quite distant locations, such as Manhattan and upstate New York, and these trans-oceanic places are considered too. Yet, the key sites in these pages are not unexpectedly located in Paris and London, besides Cairo and Damascus, for the four capital cities possessed at the time the richest resources to afford supply and meet demand of such collectibles. Passing mentions are made to locations in Rome, Venice, Florence, Istanbul, Beirut, Jerusalem, Athens, Tunis, and Algiers.

## 2 Structure of the Book

The book takes as its point of departure a group of Middle Eastern artefacts offered for public viewing in Paris from 1865 to 1869. Chapter 1 traces the three distinct Parisian events (a loan exhibition, participation in a Universal Exposition, and a public sale) where these objects attributed to Islamic Egypt and Syria were exhibited, priced and dispersed in no time. Their collective biography, and varied afterlife over a condensed span of time, is already indicative of the diversity of channels and agencies that made their presence in Paris possible, and the range of mechanisms that engineered their dispersal. At the forefront in the commodification process emerge the figure of a high official and art lover from Egypt and the global strategy of a young British museum. Chapter 2 shifts the focus to Cairo and Damascus as sites of expanding trades in Islamic antiques after the 1850s in the latter, and the 1870s in the former. It demonstrates that the commerce of curios and the trade in Revival crafts were from the very beginning intertwined, and that European firms quickly jumped into the lucrative business. It highlights the centrality of architectural salvage, and of its repurposing, in the commercialisation movement. Chapter 3 charts a series of Egyptian attitudes and reactions to the cannibalisation of historic architecture that came with the commodification of

its fragments. Viewpoints are seized in particular through episodes revolving around three celebrated Cairene interiors, belonging to the historic palaces of al-Sadat, al-Musafirkhana and al-Mufti. Each case testifies again that positions were not unequivocal. The dismantling of domestic décor was viewed very differently in each situation and the opinions directly expressed or indirectly received do cross national divides. Chapter 4 is devoted to the end destination of the material culture collected in Cairo and Damascus: the fashioning of elaborate atmospheric rooms, in Cairo itself, and elsewhere across the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Sophisticated interiors constitute the sites where salvage was ultimately repurposed; the spoils of historic architecture were complemented with matching Revival furnishings and curios. The ensuing domestic décors were explicitly referenced as following the restoration model promoted by the Musée de Cluny in Paris.<sup>24</sup> The chapter attempts to position the historicist interiors not only with the grain of the French post-revolutionary doctrine of restoration, but indeed in connection with the Egyptian culture of reuse, a centuries-long tradition that has remained a living one to this day. The case studies suggest that a cross-fertilisation of both cultures developed.

The final chapter approaches cross-collecting and cross-decorating through the lens of cross-cultural dressing, commonly shortened as cross-dressing in the literature. Dressing native, so to speak, has a long history in European culture. Its manifestations, and the visual culture they set in motion, represent a further opportunity, and possibly the most telling one, to seize the subjectivities and emotions associated with the cross-cultural project. Ethnic guise and disguise are explored both within the deeply rooted culture of fancy dressing in Europe and the Ottoman codification of attire. It delves further into French and British

<sup>24</sup> The classical reference on its original and innovative museography is Stephen Bann, "Historical Text and Historical Object: the Poetics of the Musée de Cluny," *History and Theory* 17, no. 3 (1978): 251–66.

engagements with several types of garment worn in late Ottoman Egypt. The purpose is again to pay attention to connections and entanglements, in their day to day effectiveness and source of enjoyment, as well as, at times, cause of predicament, a notion that has been held central in intercultural relations.<sup>25</sup> The epilogue concludes by charting to the present the diverging traces left by the cross-cultural interactions examined throughout the book on either side of the Mediterranean. They can be best captured, in summation, by a combination of endurance and estrangement.

### 3 A Variety of Sources

These findings have been made possible by the fastidious excavation and cross-examination of a large array of primary and secondary sources, accessibility to which has been facilitated by the ever-growing digitised material available online. In this sense, this book is firmly anchored in its present. As most connected history, it would probably not have been feasible a few decades ago. Its method is based on the premise that nineteenth-century papers, prints and photographs still have something to contribute to contemporary knowledge, if expertly and sensibly mined, read and interpreted.

The material studied can be broken down into four main categories. First come the multiple traces left by the movement of artworks in auction and museum records. The mobility of pieces can be followed through sale catalogues, many of which are annotated with prices and buyers' names. An additional, and exceptional, source on auctions held in Paris is provided by the minutes of the sales, which were established for fiscal reasons and list all names involved and values hammered. The records provide good coverage across

the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> The archives of the V&A Museum in London, and the records of the Musée des Arts décoratifs and Musée du Louvre in Paris, are rich in acquisition and exhibition papers, both from the early 1860s onwards; they have been systematically used for the present study. Visual material constitutes the second resource based on which I have written. Sets of paintings, architectural drawings, photographs and engravings have contributed a wealth of evidence and insights on the cross-cultural phenomena I have set to analyse. Particularly useful has been a subgenre of pictorial Orientalism, not yet recognised *per se* but that deserves to be. It could be detached in fact from the Orientalist genre altogether and stand alone. It does not depict Western fantasises of non-Western people, but pictures cross-cultural interplay taking place, literally or figuratively, in the East. Photographs of Americans in Middle Eastern attire posing with their interpreter typically fall into that category, as do souvenirs sketched on the spot by travelling artists.<sup>27</sup> Other examples are given throughout the book.

Moreover, I have used material sources, such as artworks kept in museums, not to speak of architecture in Cairo. Lengthy visits to a particular late Ottoman house, the home of the prestigious Sufi family of al-Sadat, and to the remnants of a French Islamic Revival house (today relocated on the grounds of the French embassy in Egypt), have produced unparalleled information, particularly when observations made on site could be juxtaposed with historic iconography, plans and textual descriptions. Finally, writings of several sorts have been sought out to reconstruct the trade and consumption of historic architecture and

25 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

26 Isabelle Rouge-Ducos, *Le Crieur et le Marteau, Histoire des commissaires-priseurs de Paris (1801 à 1945)* (Paris: Belin, 2013).

27 Mercedes Volait, "Scène de genre, choses vues ou attrait du travestissement? Les Européens dans la peinture orientaliste," in *L'Orientalisme après la Querelle: dans les pas de François Pouillon*, eds. Guy Barthélemy, Dominique Casajus, Sylvette Larzul and Mercedes Volait (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2016), 37–49.

related crafts from Cairo and Damascus after 1850. Private correspondence, memoirs, travel accounts, administrative reports, press clippings, gazetteers, collection descriptions, letterheads and invoices, have all contributed precious data, and specifically when they are crosschecked among themselves and with other media. I have also strived to include Arabic writings, when available, such as historical chronicles, archival material, and news reports. Arabic inscriptions read from the architecture or deciphered on photography have produced useful hints as well.

Piecing together a puzzle (with no predefined outcome) may be the most appropriate metaphor to describe one of the investigation procedures I use in my research. I am borrowing the analogy from Egyptologist Paule Posener-Kriéger (1925–1996) explaining how she proceeded to reconstruct text from minuscule fragments of papyri. I similarly endeavour to assemble and reconnect the largest possible sets of visual, material and textual evidence on a place (e.g. the grand reception hall of the house of al-Sadat discussed in Chapter 3) or a practice (such as antique dealing or photography making), in order to reconstruct its material and social history. Navigating with profit across visual records that are frequently very loosely – if not erroneously – captioned, requires prior direct knowledge of the sites and things pictured. Data mining in this circumstance does not suffice. Topographical expertise is crucial to be able to attribute to specific places photographs bearing generic labels such as *Cour de maison arabe* [Court of an Arab house]. One needs to know the place in order to recognise it in pictures; vague and misleading captions, as is generally the rule, are of little help to get to what is depicted. Discourse analysis can certainly reveal stereotypes across photographs' titles, a well-established marketing technique, but little else.

Once a substantial amount of evidence can be related to a given locale (or thing or use for that matter), the cross-examination of the information collected serves to trace continuity and change, such as physical alterations. Modifications

illuminate in turn attitudes towards historic architecture. Identifying aspects of a place's social life can be equally meaningful. The abundant visual material depicting the architecture of the house of al-Sadat and portraying sitters at its premises, from 1868 onwards, can thus serve several purposes. It can help detect physical change from one image to another. But it can also outline a social interplay with new technology, here represented by photography, as I discuss in Chapter 3. In this sense, a reconstructed series of photographs can offer access to past practices that other sources do not reach.

#### 4 Data Re-Identification

Apart from reconstructing visual series on the basis of architectural and topographical analogies, I have strived to match photographs with their published versions and with any auxiliary data available.<sup>28</sup> The method has led me to rescue a number of images and artworks from anonymity. A telling example is an 1869 photograph depicting a "Coppersmith" according to its label. (Fig. 41) The triangulation with its printed version and the text related to it, as well as topographical knowledge, permits the identification of the location of his shop at the entrance of Cairo's main bazaar and the person photographed as Muhammad al-Shirazi [Mohamed El-Cherazy in the French source],<sup>29</sup> a name of obvious Persian origin, which

28 An example of results reached through data re-identification and intermedia cross-examination, is the reconstruction of the catalogue of architectural views of Cairo taken from 1875 to 1895 by photographer Beniamino Facchinelli (1839–1895). The study brought unprecedented findings on the monumental history of the Egyptian capital city; Maryse Bideault *et al.*, *Le Caire sur le vif, Beniamino Facchinelli photographe (1875–1895)* (Paris: INHA, 2017). The catalogue is available online at [<http://facchinelli.huma-num.fr/>].

29 Arthur Rhoné, *L'Égypte à petites journées. Le Caire d'autrefois*. Nouvelle édition (Paris: Société générale d'éditions, 1910), 272.



can be connected in turn to the tradition of Persian merchants in the city's central market place.

I have systematically proceeded with data re-identification of the visual documents used for this book. In doing so, I diverge from the internal analysis of images performed by conventional art history and semiotics. It is not so much the intrinsic meaning of an image, or its artistry, that is my concern – admitting that one can reach it beyond any reasonable doubt. What I attempt to read in images, and more often than not in series of images, is the social realities and relations that they convey and attest to. I contend that small clues on social matters can be extracted from even the most staged and artificial visual depictions, in particular when connected to other images or other sources.<sup>30</sup> The insights mined might not be the most visible ones. They might be tangential to the primary subject of the images, and they might lead to external issues. But they are always evocative.

A concrete example may best exemplify the investigation procedure. A colour plate from an illustrated compendium of costume and interior design over time and place, authored by French artist Albert Racinet (1825–93), can serve as a departure point. The image is numbered HA and labelled Turkey: it supposedly illustrates the progress made there in palatial design during the second half of the nineteenth century. (Fig. 1) It is meant, according to its author, to picture a shift towards a more inclusive synthesis of Islamic architecture, bringing together the Alhambra, the monuments of Cairo and the “good Persian school” in the design, as an alternative to the Turkish Rococo embraced during the preceding decades. The original conception of the room is rightly attributed to French architect Jacques Drevet (1832–1900), but the context given for its construction is misleading. It allegedly represents a *salāmlık* in a Turkish regal palace, i.e. a hall devoted to the reception of

male visitors. Racinet explains that Drevet's initial design has been slightly adapted, for the purpose of the chromolithograph, on suggestions made by an architect who had visited Egypt, Paul Bénard (1834–86). The reason was to provide the room with a “more archaic physiognomy” and a character adapted to its female use – an interesting twist for a type of room conventionally made for men. A pointed shape was given to the rear arches, turned wood screens were added to their openings (in place of coloured glass), and carved stucco filled the top of the bay windows. Thick carpets covered the floor in place of the central fountain that figured in the original design. The colour scheme followed indications provided by architect Paul Bénard; it is indeed very typically Second Empire in the red and green tones chosen.<sup>31</sup>

Anyone familiar with the iconography of architecture in modern Egypt, and moreover of Egyptian involvement in World's fairs, immediately recognises the initial structure from which the room comes: it is the vice-regal pavilion commissioned by the Egyptian ruler for the Universal Exposition of 1867 in Paris.<sup>32</sup> (Fig. 2) Rather than being a pure specimen of modern Turkish architecture, the standalone building is a perfect hybrid. It exemplifies the almost insuperable challenge that the conception of a characteristic Egyptian building represented for a French architect ignorant of Islamic architecture ... The result is a *unicum*, as nothing had ever been built in its semblance, nor was to be. The distribution of the pavilion is classically symmetrical in its perfect cruciform plan reminiscent of Byzantine architecture, while its interior decoration is neo-Moorish. The decorative

<sup>30</sup> On the different ways of using images in historical writing, Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> *Le Costume historique: cinq cents planches, trois cents en couleurs, or et argent, deux cents en camaïeu, types principaux du vêtement et de la parure, rapprochés de ceux de l'intérieur de l'habitation dans tous les temps et chez tous les peuples, avec de nombreux détails sur le mobilier, les armes, les objets usuels, les moyens de transport, etc.* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1876–88), 111: n.p. [329–30].

<sup>32</sup> Abundant visual documentation exists on the Egyptian participation to the 1867 Universal Exposition in Paris; full references are given in Chapter 1.



FIGURE 1 Picard, lithographer, after a watercolour by Stéphane Baron, *Turquie: Architecture intérieure des palais, dix-neuvième siècle* [Nineteenth-century Turkish palatial interior]  
 ALBERT RACINET, *LE COSTUME HISTORIQUE...*, 1876–88, III: N.P. [PL. 327]

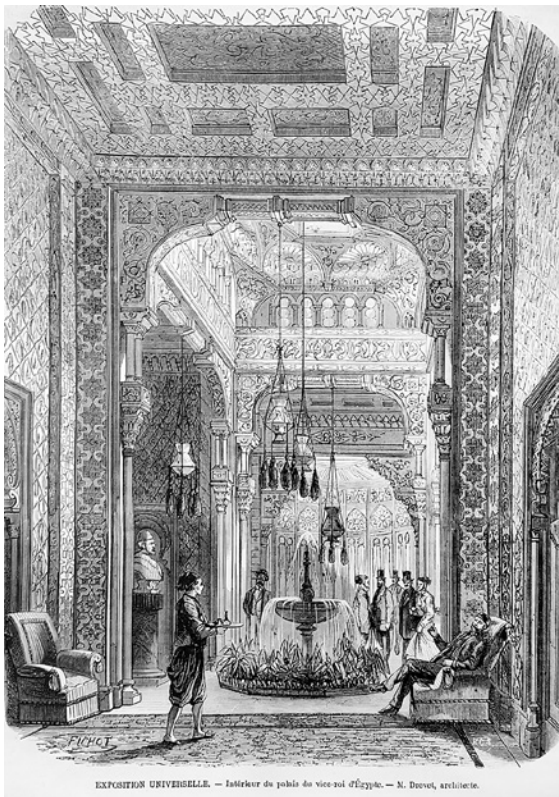


FIGURE 2 *Exposition universelle: Intérieur du palais du vice-roi d'Égypte* [Jacques Drevet, Interior of the Khedivial pavilion at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1867]

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choice displeased the Egyptian authorities, who made plain that it was inappropriate as “the ornamentation of old houses in Cairo is of a true Arab style, which is more beautiful and more appreciated than the Moorish style,”<sup>33</sup> and yet, it was built with a neo-Moorish interior design.

Data re-identification and cross-examination bring about a number of findings in this instance. It suggests that accuracy was not a prime concern when representing exotic architecture in Europe;

33 Quoted in Mercedes Volait, “Égypte représentée ou Égypte en représentation? La participation égyptienne aux expositions universelles de Paris (1867) et de Vienne (1873),” in *Voyager d'Égypte vers l'Europe et inversement: parcours croisés (1830–1950)*, ed. Randa Sabry (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), 425–41.

manipulations were tolerated, and some were even openly acknowledged, which is remarkable indeed. It shows that appearance (style) prevailed over physicality (production); in other words, a French-designed building in approximate Islamic style could pass as archetypal of late nineteenth-century Turkish architecture. Visually speaking, the pavilion primarily denotes the grip of the Alhambresque vogue, which was then at its height, and consequently a Western representation and alteration of Islamic architecture.<sup>34</sup> The Racinet plate is not about Turkey as it claims, nor about France despite its Gallic touch; it is chiefly about intercultural architecture. When paired with analogous iconography and additional fragments of evidence, under scrutiny the colour plate can uncover facts and perspectives that go well beyond the alleged Turkish interior it projects at first glance. Submitting visual data to systematic comparison and methodical criticism and paying attention to the metadiscourse and paratexts that accompany images in the form of captions, cross-references, and comments, are useful tools for historical enquiry. A number of other examples are developed across the book, whether the reality explored concerns the practice of fashioning interiors or cross-cultural dressing.

I similarly look at objects in a way that does not correspond to the traditional archaeological or art historical method. I do not consider material culture in order to reconstruct the remote societies that produced it, as archaeologists do, or to identify artistic authorship, schools and references, as is the usual business in art history. I use objects, together with their identification and provenance history, to comprehend the very process of their de-contextualization in the nineteenth century, and the shifts in their social perceptions and functions. I take their modern afterlife as an index of local availability and global desirability, as well as evidence of new social subjectivities and attitudes.

34 For a recent survey, Francine Giese and Ariane Varla Braga, eds., *The Power of Symbols: The Alhambra in a Global Perspective* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2018).

I practice object-based research as a means to access historical processes such as cross-cultural interactions, commodification dynamics, consumption practices and material politics,<sup>35</sup> here viewed through the prism of a very specific physical matter: historic architecture and related artefacts in and from the Eastern Mediterranean.

## 5 Revising the Narrative

This research falls at the intersection of several disciplinary perspectives: architectural history, nineteenth-century visual and material culture, Middle Eastern studies, and museum and heritage studies and its results invite revision of some common assumptions made within each framework. A first trope to revisit relates to visual Orientalism. Most of the iconography used throughout the book is generally attributed to that artistic genre. Yet it does not match the standard definition of pictorial Orientalism as an art based on ignorance, using the artifice of realism to impose an imaginary immutable Orient, carefully expurgated of any trace of modernity and the Western presence.<sup>36</sup> Not only do Europeans appear in the photographs and canvases discussed here; they frequently represent, in their interplay with local culture and people, their very topic. Interestingly enough, when expurgation has taken place, figuratively, through faulty labelling in particular, it came at a much later stage, as can be established in most cases, and such distortions reflect the spirit of decolonisation, rather than the pre-colonial or colonial gaze. Part of the imagery produced by Europeans in the Middle East and about

the Middle East consequently calls for rereading and reinterpretation.

Dominant dogmas regarding historic architecture in the Middle East may also be questioned in light of the book's findings. Cairene specimens are generally dated to the time of their initial construction. Consequently, they are known as representative of Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, Ottoman architecture, and so on. On close examination however, historic buildings appear to have been largely reconfigured throughout their existence and no less so during the nineteenth century, in view of their adaptation to modern life, and again during the twentieth century, when undergoing restoration. Today, their remnants represent mixed-period structures that primarily testify to their mutability over time. There is a pressing need to work out a new understanding of the identity and historicity of these buildings, one that does not erase whole stages of their expansion and transformation. That does not expurgate the impact of the industrial age. At present, the modern history of listed monuments in Cairo is entirely missing from the canonical narrative. That their conservation as tangible heritage was guaranteed by the organic system of religious endowments [*waqf*] is another belief calling for reassessment. It does not hold true in a number of historic situations, as historians have demonstrated. The fundamental topic here is rather the cannibalisation of Egyptian buildings throughout history, and the continuous recycling of their architectural salvage, together with the constant reworking of structures.

Finally, the translocation of cultural heritage needs also to be considered in a new light. It is today mostly equated with loot, as museum curators know too well.<sup>37</sup> "Of course, all this was stolen from us," is a phrase familiar to anyone interested in the public experience of museum collections. I heard it myself in 2015 at the V&A in London, during a Friday Late, the monthly event during

35 The vast opportunities opened by thinking materially in historical writing are discussed in Frank Trentmann, "Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 2 (April 2009): 283–307.

36 Linda Nochlin, "The imaginary Orient," in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-century Art and Society*, ed. L. Nochlin (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 33–59.

37 Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, eds., *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998).



which live performance, film, installation, debate, DJs and late-night exhibition openings attempt to bring in new audiences, with obvious success, for Friday Lates are lively evenings that do draw multicultural crowds at the museum's galleries. One ultimately realises that the perception of museum collections as stolen heritage is in fact quite widely shared. I had plenty of opportunities to observe that the prime impulse of younger colleagues, when entering a museum, is to consider that all they see is the product of misappropriation, and in particular of colonial pillaging. This view is possibly a matter of generation and education, but that does not mean it should be neglected.

The stories recounted in this book demonstrate that there were dynamics other than colonial plunder channelling Middle Eastern objects to European museums. They suggest that pillage was a modality among many others in the circulation of objects within the Middle East and across the modern Mediterranean during the period under study. There was an even more powerful force at work behind the mobility of historic objects changing hands across short or long distances: trade. Commerce is an insidious mechanism that takes good advantage of any major social and political disruption, as has been well demonstrated for post-Revolutionary continental Europe,<sup>38</sup> and other dramatic phases of its twentieth-century history.<sup>39</sup> And yet, commerce is a transaction between consenting parties, not necessarily a despoliation forced on people by coercion. As the book demonstrates, the commercialisation of things from the past in the Eastern Mediterranean did not start with colonisation (and decolonisation did not end

it either, one must add). The economic model of demand and supply entrenched in trade constitutes a far more complex reality than plunder, and one most difficult to control and counter.

Transparency of provenances and transactions is here of paramount prominence. The channels and economic mechanisms that drove objects, and indeed entire rooms and parts of monuments, to museums and collections in the West (and nowadays to the Arabian peninsula) should be public information. As long as it is kept confidential for fear of restitution claims, suspicion on how objects were and are acquired will loom large. I do believe that these issues belong to the public sphere and ought to be discussed openly, to the benefit of the common good and all parties concerned. If some repatriation is meant to happen in the process, so be it. All indications however are that reclamations will be very limited, with the exceptions of few strongly contentious pieces.

And then there is the consciousness and appeal of history. The “melancholy of history,”<sup>40</sup> and its absence therein, create different attitudes to the past and the urge of ensuring its transmission. It is safe to assume that senses of time diverged across the modern Mediterranean during the period considered. At least, the tempo of historic longing did, as nostalgia for bygone days is quite a recent phenomenon in the region, while the “cult of the extinct,” to borrow the expression of architectural historian Geoffrey Scott,<sup>41</sup> obsessed nineteenth-century Europe and distinctively shaped its architecture, besides characterising a largely shared ethos across society. That the past possessed less appeal on the other side of the Mediterranean at

38 A recent publication on the British case is Westgarth, *The Emergence of the Antique and Curiosity Dealer*. See also the classic Bénédicte Savoy, *Patrimoine annexé. Les biens culturels saisis par la France en Allemagne autour de 1800* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2003).

39 Lynn H. Nicholas, *Le Pillage de l'Europe: les œuvres d'art volées par les nazis* (Paris: Seuil, 1995); Martin Jungius, *Un Vol organisé: l'État français et la spoliation des biens juifs (1940–1944)* (Paris: Taillandier, 2012).

40 The phrase has been coined by historian Peter Fritzsche to describe the mood generated in the West by the American and French Revolutions and the subsequent longing for an irretrievable past, Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

41 Quoted in Martin Bressani, “Revivalism,” 10, from Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965 – 1st edition 1914).

the time was not without material repercussions. It not only impacted the built environment, but indeed oriented the fluxes of historic artefacts and salvage.

I have endeavoured to comprehend with eyes wide open some domestic facets of these phenomena in the late Ottoman Eastern Mediterranean, a period that collided with the early experiencing of modernity. Further light should continue to be shed on the modern fate of past art and

architecture in the region. It entails confrontation with issues that will appear difficult and distressing to anyone craving the preservation of cultural property in this part of the world. But I do believe that it will ultimately be to the advantage of the afterlife of its tangible remnants, and allow for shared enjoyment of their contemplation.

Paris, November 2020