

Regarding the exhibition: the Munich exhibition *Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art* (1910) and its scholarly position

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'Muhammadan art' in the *Weltstadt*

It was the cultural event of the year 1910:¹ on 14 May, the municipal exhibition ground in Munich's Theresienhöhe opened its gates to an unprecedented and exotic event, the exhibition *Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art*. This mammoth undertaking featured more than 3,600 artworks from approximately 250 international collections, museums and institutions and was installed in eighty halls (figure 1).

* This paper summarizes and partially expands some aspects of my dissertation, which is the first comprehensive and contextualized monograph on the Munich exhibition *Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art* (*Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst*): Eva-Maria Troelenberg, *Eine Ausstellung wird besichtigt. Die Münchner 'Ausstellung von Meisterwerken muhammedanischer Kunst' 1910 in kultur- und wissenschaftsgeschichtlicher Perspektive*, Frankfurt and Berlin: Peter Lang, 2011. For the sake of brevity, I will not refer to every corresponding section of my own book in this paper. For specific facets of the Munich show see also the contributions in Andrea Lerner and Avinoam Shalem, eds, *After One Hundred Years. The 1910 Exhibition 'Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst' Reconsidered*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010; as well as the catalogue for the exhibition *The Future of Tradition – The Tradition of Future*, which was held at Haus der Kunst in Munich in 2010-11: see Chris Dercon, León Krempel and Avinoam Shalem, eds, *The Future of Tradition – The Tradition of Future. 100 years after the exhibition Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art in Munich*, Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 2010. Apart from these publications, which were prompted by the centenary of the event, and appeared almost simultaneously, the 1910 Munich exhibition had been addressed by several scholars who have touched upon it within larger contexts of art history, historiography or museology, most notably: David J. Roxburgh, 'Au Bonheur des Amateurs: Collecting and Exhibiting Islamic Art, ca. 1880-1910', *Ars Orientalis*, 30, 2000, 9-38; Stephen Vernoit, 'Islamic Art and Architecture: An Overview of Scholarship and Collecting, c. 1850-1950', Stephen Vernoit, ed., *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections, 1850-1950, London and New York*: Tauris, 2000, 1-61; Annette Hagedorn, 'The development of Islamic Art History in Germany in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in Vernoit, *Discovering Islamic Art*, 117-27; Desirée Heiden, 'Ausstellungskonzeptionen zur Präsentation islamischer Kunst. Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum – Pergamonmuseum – Museum Dahlem', in Jens Kröger, ed., *Islamische Kunst in Berliner Sammlungen. 100 Jahre Museum für Islamische Kunst Berlin*, Berlin: Parthas, 2004, 123-36; Jens Kröger, 'Ernst Kühnel and Scholarship on Islamic Ivories up to 1971', *Journal of the David Collection*, 2(1), 2005, 269-93; Susan Kamel, *Wege zur Vermittlung von Religionen in Berliner Museen. Black Kaaba meets White Cube*, Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004, esp. 126-30. A concise chapter is also dedicated to the Munich exhibition in: Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire. Religion, Race and Scholarship*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, esp. 410-3. My thanks for feedback on this paper or parts of it particularly go to Toufoul Abou-Hodeib and Amanda Phillips. All translations of historical quotes are mine. My English has been revised and proofread by Jesi Khadivi and the editors of this issue.

¹ See Ernst Kühnel, 'Die Ausstellung Mohammedanischer Kunst München 1910', *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, 5, 1910, 209-51, here 209.

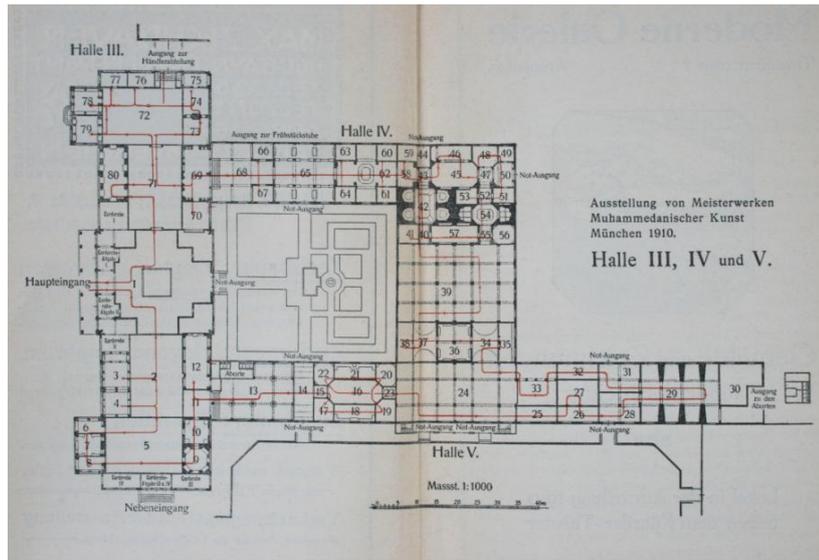


Figure 1. Ground plan of the exhibition halls, Munich 1910, after *Amtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed.

The Bavarian crown prince Rupprecht,² last designated heir to the Bavarian throne, had set the ball rolling for the exhibition in the first place. A semi-professional connoisseur of the arts, and a widely travelled man, he recognized the outstanding value of a set of Safavid carpets (the so-called ‘Polish carpet’ group) that had been forgotten in the Wittelsbach collections for centuries.³ Together with Ludwig von Bürkel, editor of the *Münchner Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst*, Rupprecht developed the idea for an ‘Oriental Exhibition’ that would centre on his carpets. The idea was very quickly picked up as the theme for the annual large-scale municipal exhibition in Theresienhöhe – an institution which had been established in 1908 to promote Munich’s culture, economy and tourism.⁴ The events for 1910 were

² For the most recent comprehensive biography of Rupprecht see Dieter Weiß, *Kronprinz Rupprecht von Bayern (1869-1955). Eine politische Biografie*, Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2007; for his Middle Eastern art interests see Eva-Maria Troelenberg: ‘Vom Wohlgefallen zur Wissenschaft – Rupprecht von Bayern und die Kunst des islamischen Orients’, *Münchner Beiträge zur Völkerkunde. Jahrbuch des Museums für Völkerkunde München*, 12, 2008, 97-108; for the larger historical and political context of relations between Bavaria and the Ottoman Empire, see Klaus Kreiser, ‘Zu den bayrisch-türkischen Beziehungen zwischen 1825 und 1914’, in Lermer and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 143-58.

³ The designation ‘Polish’ explains itself through the fact that a significant number of carpets from this group were made for Polish patrons and thus show Polish coats of arms. On this group see Friedrich Spuhler, *Seidene Repräsentationsteppiche der mittleren bis späteren Safawidenzeit. Die sog. Polenteppiche*, Berlin: Dissertationsdruckstelle der Ernst-Reuter-Gesellschaft, 1968; for the Munich carpets, with further bibliography, see Troelenberg, cat. nos. 24 and 25 (and see further comments), in Dercon, Krempel and Shalem, *The Future of Tradition*, 118-9.

⁴ Some of the historical exhibition halls have survived and were restored in recent years; they now contain a branch of the ‘Deutsches Museum’ in Munich. However, no traces of the temporary interior design for the 1910 show are left. For the history of the exhibition ground and its buildings, see Burkhard Lauterbach, ‘Ein Ausstellungspark entsteht’, in *Vom Ausstellungspark zum internationalen Messeplatz. München 1904 bis 1984*, Munich: Münchner Messe- u. Ausstellungsgesellschaft, Münchner Stadtmuseum, 1984, 33-6; Michael Gaenssler, ‘Die Architektur des Münchner Ausstellungsparks’, *Münchener Messe- und Ausstellungsgesellschaft*, in *Vom Ausstellungspark*, 42-9; Sylvia Hladky, ‘Die Geschichte der denkmalgeschützten Messehallen auf der Theresienhöhe’, in Bettina Gundler, Michael Hascher and Helmuth Trischler, eds, *Unterwegs und Mobil. Verkehrsruellen im Museum*, Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2005, 17-28. For the exhibition ground, its position within the modern urban fabric

expected to be particularly spectacular and to attract a large international audience. In the financial closing report of the exhibition it was clearly stated that 'Munich needed to offer a particular quality, something interesting in a modern sense'⁵ – the term 'modern' here presumably referring to a potentially timely connection with current (consumer) culture. The general approval for and selection of an 'oriental' theme must clearly be seen against this background: the intention was to create a glamorous, exotic atmosphere that would help to compound Munich's image as a cultivated and flourishing *Weltstadt*.⁶ During the first stages of planning, most of the artistic and economic input for this undertaking duly came from established local bourgeois circles whose greatest interest lay in making the event as popular and as profitable as possible.⁷

Therefore, an extensive publicity campaign – 'propaganda' measures in contemporary terms – was launched. Such publicity was part of the usual Munich cultural machinery, which became more and more sophisticated each year, but it was the first time that such an effort had been made for a topic as exotic as 'Muhammadan art'. Typically, advertisements for the exhibition were omnipresent in public places throughout Bavaria and beyond,⁸ and a considerable programme of public events also accompanied the annual exhibition each year. The exhibition ground (figure 2) contained not only the exhibition halls themselves, but also provided diverse restaurants, fairground facilities, a concert hall and a commercial department where carpets and other artworks were sold. There was even a 'Karawanseraï': a house furnished with a number of workshops for craftspeople brought from the Turkish and Syrian parts of the Ottoman Empire to demonstrate traditional techniques such as inlaid metalwork or carpet knotting. The Karawanseraï component of the exhibition (figure 3) was clearly modelled after the anthropological displays and 'living history' stage settings that had traditionally been part of the World's Fairs and other exhibitions since the nineteenth century.⁹

of Munich and the preconditions for the 1910 exhibition, see also Andrea Lerner, 'Orientalising Munich: Local Conditions and Graphic Design for the Munich 1910 Exhibition', in Lerner and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 175-200, esp. 176-9.

⁵ Karl Kühles, *Bericht über die Ausstellung München 1910*, Munich: Schön, 1911, 15: 'München musste eine besondere Qualität noch bieten, neuzeitlich Interessantes.'

⁶ For the medium of the exhibition and its position in urban cosmopolitanism, see also Alexander T. Geppert, 'Ausstellungsmüde: Deutsche Großausstellungsprojekte und ihr Scheitern 1880-1930', in *Wolkenkuckucksheim* 5:1, 2000, 2. [<http://www.tucottbus.de/theoriederarchitektur/wolke/deu/Themen/001/Geppert/geppert.htm> accessed 25.08.2011]. A direct reference to Munich's self-designation as a 'Weltstadt' in the aftermath of the exhibition can be found in *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (henceforth MNN), 478, 1910, 7.

⁷ Kühles, *Bericht*, 15-7; see also *Ausstellung München 1910. Amtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed., Munich: Rudolf Mosse, 1910, 22-9.

⁸ Kühles, *Bericht*, esp. 39-42. For a closer examination of some of the 'propaganda' measures, such as orientaling postcards and posters, see: Ernst Rebel, 'Orient als Reklame. Klischee und Rätsel in der Münchener Werbegraphik um 1900', in Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer and Eckhart Hellmuth, eds, *Exotica. Konsum und Inszenierung des Fremden im 19. Jahrhundert*, Münster: Lit, 2003, 237-57; see also Lerner, 'Orientalising Munich', esp. 184-200.

⁹ *Amtlicher Führer der Ausstellung München 1910*, Munich: Rudolf Mosse, 1910, 77-80. On the tradition of 'Völkerschau' in Munich see Anne Dreesbach, 'Kalmücken im Hofbräuhaus. Die Vermarktung von Schaustellungen fremder Menschen am Beispiel München', in Bayerdörfer and Hellmuth, *Exotica*, 217-36, and Anne Dreesbach: *Gezähmte Wilde. Die Zurschaustellung "exotischer" Menschen in Deutschland 1870-1940*, Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2005, with an explicit reference to the Munich 'Karawanserei' on 105-7.

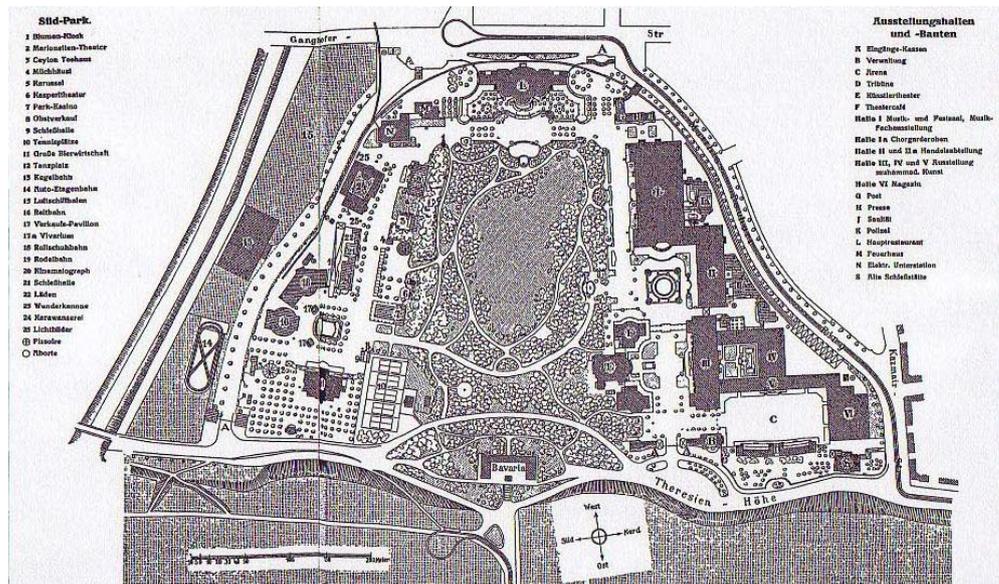


Figure 2 (above). Plan of the exhibition ground on Theresienhöhe, Munich 1910, after *Ämtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed.

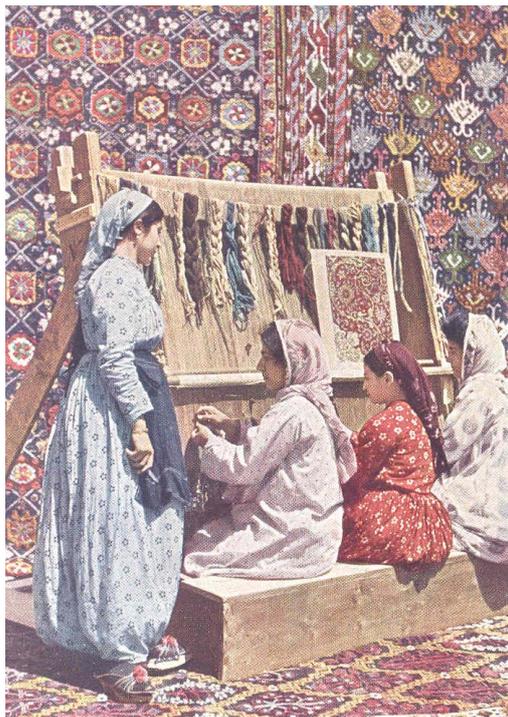


Figure 3 (left). 'Muhammadan' workers in the exhibition, picture postcard, Munich 1910, photo: W. Hümmer, collection of the author.

These measures were aimed at attracting a broad regional and international audience, which it was hoped would encompass connoisseur collectors and other members of the cultural elite interested in luxury arts, as well as a general population assumed to be likely to respond to the more spectacular aspects of the event. Even if it harkened back to Orientalist stereotypes, this multi-layered programme is in itself a rather modern phenomenon. The organizers of the Munich event understood that the exhibition format had established itself as the 'key

medium'¹⁰ of the era, and took advantage of this medium to promote the city's own cosmopolitan image: in the wake of the World's Fairs, the exhibition had gained the power to define cultural agendas and political discourses. It thus comes as no surprise that the Munich show mirrored certain crucial aspects of the cultural, political, and to a certain extent social landscapes of the European early twentieth century. One could for example interpret the exhibition as a medium of democratization, a reflection of the declining power of established elites: a large number of the artefacts on show came from hitherto largely exclusive private or noble collections, and were now to be found openly on display to all for the entrance price of one Reichsmark.

The list of lenders to the exhibition also reflects the interrelations, involvements and aspirations of European nations in the Middle East. Even though the lender profile of the show was remarkably international, it is for example striking that practically nothing came from public collections in France. Parisian private collectors, including the Louvre's own curator Gaston Migeon, sent their personal treasures to demonstrate French expertise and wealth in Islamic arts – but these lenders only made their appearance as private citizens. This is undoubtedly connected to the tense political atmosphere that existed between the neighbouring countries, a tension that greatly affected central European politics in the period up to the 1914-18 war.¹¹ It also explains why some important objects such as the famous 'Baptistère de St Louis' are not part of the Munich canon of 'Masterpieces': in this respect, the Munich selection should be considered a 'German' canon of the arts of Islam. The plethora of artefacts that came for example from institutions in Istanbul only enhances this effect, since the Istanbul loans underline the close diplomatic connections that existed between Germany and the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century.

Scientific protagonists and scholarly definitions

There are, then, a number of factors that are external to the academic and scholarly realms that should nevertheless be borne in mind when considering the Munich exhibition. Of course, it is important to note that these political and economic factors were a crucial prerequisite for the provision of such a large and systematically promoted platform for the arts of Islam in the West. However, this paper will focus particularly on the scholarly position of the show and its subsequent impact on Islamic art history. This premise immediately leads us further away from the local Bavarian context, since the main academic protagonist of this event was the Berlin art historian Friedrich Sarre.¹² Sarre was one of the first major scholars in Germany

¹⁰ Alexander T. Geppert, 'Welttheater: Die Geschichte des europäischen Ausstellungswesens im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Ein Forschungsbericht', *Neue Politische Literatur*, 47, 2002, 10-61, here 11.

¹¹ On Franco-German rivalry, particularly considering scholarship on Persian manuscripts, see Robert Hillenbrand, 'Western scholarship on Persian painting before 1914: collectors, exhibitions, and Franco-German rivalry', in Lerner and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 201-29.

¹² Selected literature on Sarre's biography and scholarly activities are as follows: J. Heinrich Schmidt, *Friedrich Sarre. Schriften zum 22. Juni 1935. Forschungen zur Islamischen Kunst* 6, Berlin: Reimer, 1935; Ernst Kühnel, 'Friedrich Sarre †', *Der Islam*, 29, 1949, 291-5; Jens Kröger, 'Friedrich Sarre und die islamische Archäologie', in Charlotte Trümpler, ed., *Das Große Spiel. Archäologie und Politik zur Zeit des Kolonialismus (1860-1940)*, Essen and Cologne: DuMont, 2008, 274-85.

to focus professionally on the arts and architecture of the Islamic world, with particular specialization in Anatolia and Iran. Descended from a wealthy family of the haute bourgeoisie of the Kaiserreich, he had the means not only to travel extensively, but also to assemble a respectable collection of artefacts related to his main fields of interest.¹³ This expertise had led to his appointment as honorary curator for the newly established Persian-Islamic department in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in 1904. Sarre thus embodies a direct connection to the Berlin museum landscape of the early twentieth century.¹⁴

In Munich, Sarre first came into play as a consultant for Rupprecht's precious rugs, subsequently being asked to help with preparations for what was at the time still being called the *Oriental Exhibition*.¹⁵ During the autumn of 1909, he established himself as the driving force behind the undertaking. Sarre aimed to create an exhibition with a serious scholarly format that would promote the idea of Islamic art and, of course, his own reputation.¹⁶

It should be noted from the outset that the Swedish private scholar and collector Fredrik R. Martin had been Ludwig von Bürkel's first choice as a consulting expert for the exhibition. This was probably due to the fact that Martin had recently published his work on 'Oriental carpets'¹⁷ and Bürkel's own first draft for the show had been very much focused on carpets. In the end, however, Martin's contribution to the show appears to have been rather minor. He apparently assisted in locating and acquiring loans and later helped with the cataloguing,¹⁸ while Sarre himself widened the whole thematic focus of the exhibition far beyond the carpet. In October 1909, Sarre wrote to the Swiss Orientalist Max van Berchem:

Now after long negotiations it has been decided in Munich that it shall really be something big and it shall attempt to get the best from home and abroad ... The main thing will be to get the best examples of metalware, glass, ivory, ceramics, fabrics together for once.¹⁹

¹³ Friedrich Sarre, *Erzeugnisse islamischer Kunst*, 2 vols, Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1906-9. Another important publication by Sarre in the wake of the Munich exhibition was *Denkmäler persischer Baukunst*, 2 vols, Berlin: Wasmuth, 1901-10.

¹⁴ On the foundation and early history of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin see various contributions in Kröger, *Islamische Kunst in Berliner Sammlungen*; on the connection between Munich 1910 and the Berlin Museum, see Jens Kröger, 'The 1910 Exhibition "Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst", its protagonists and its consequences for the display of Islamic art in Berlin', in Lermer and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 65-116.

¹⁵ BayHsta, MH No. 9286 Acten des Königlichen Staats-Ministeriums des Königl. Hauses und des Außern, Betreff: Ausstellung München 1910 (Muhammedanische Ausstellung 1909-1911). This file in the Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv contains several documents which employ the term 'Orientalische Ausstellung', particularly in the early stages of planning before Sarre became involved.

¹⁶ Letter from Friedrich Sarre to Max van Berchem, Neubabelsberg 5 October 1909 (copies of the letters are held in the archive of the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin).

¹⁷ Fredrik R. Martin, *A History of Oriental Carpets before 1800*, 2 vols, 1906-08 [without place and publisher].

¹⁸ Biographical literature on Martin is sparse, for some information see Josef Strzygowksi, 'Oriental Carpets', *The Burlington Magazine*, 14(67), 1908, 25-8, here 26; Vernoit, *Discovering Islamic Art*, 212. On Martin's role in the exhibition and his relationship to Sarre see also Kröger, 'The 1910 Exhibition and Berlin', esp. 70-1 and 74.

¹⁹ Letter from Sarre to van Berchem, 5 October 1909: 'Es soll nun, wie nach langen Verhandlungen in München beschlossen ist, wirklich etwas Grosses werden und versucht werden, das Beste aus dem In-

Such a large and ambitious enterprise could not be realized without the collaboration of a professional team. Sarre contrived to hire a small but cleverly selected group of young scholars that would not contest his leadership, but could still ensure the professional drive necessary for an exhibition that would bring such a large number of artefacts to Munich. These 'academic collaborators'²⁰ included the art historian Rudolf Meyer-Riefstahl (1880-1936), who was quite well connected to various art dealers and collectors in Paris;²¹ the Orientalist Arnold Nöldeke (1875-1964),²² who had published works on the shrine of Husayn in Karbala' and was seeking to pursue an archaeological career; and Ernst Diez (1878-1961),²³ who had been a student of Josef Strzygowski. Sarre's most important assistant was certainly Ernst Kühnel (1882-1964).²⁴ In 1905, Kühnel had earned his doctorate in art history on an Italian Renaissance topic, but soon after that he turned to the study of the arts of Islam.²⁵ In 1909, he applied for a position as a museum assistant in Berlin, emphasizing in his application a desire to focus on Islamic arts and therefore his preference to be employed either in the Museum of Applied Arts or the Persian-Islamic department.²⁶ He gained experience preparing an exhibition of Islamic manuscripts in the Prussian State Library,²⁷ following which he was hired for Munich by Sarre, who later repeatedly expressed how much he had relied on his younger collaborator's assistance.²⁸ Indeed, Kühnel seems to have done a large part of the groundwork for the exhibition and was rewarded with the opportunity to establish himself in the field with a number of publications on the show, among them a lengthy article in Bürkel's well-regarded *Münchener Jahrbuch*.²⁹ Kühnel's writings clearly reveal him as an exponent of the history of style that was developed by Alois Riegl during these years: his approach to the object consists of formal

und Auslande zu bekommen. ... Die Hauptsache soll sein, die besten Sachen an Metall, Glas, Elfenbein, Keramik, Stoffen einmal zusammenzubringen.'

²⁰ *Amtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed., 25: 'Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter'.

²¹ For Meyer-Riefstahl's biography and career, with a bibliography, see Peter Kropmans, 'Rudolf A. Meyer-Riefstahl (1880-1936). Ein vergessener Kunstvermittler', *Sediment*, 3, 1998, 62-88.

²² See Elisabeth Weber-Nöldeke, ed., *Arnold Nöldeke – Altiki der Finder. Memoiren eines Ausgräbers*, Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: Olms, 2003.

²³ See Ernst Kühnel, Doris Brehm and Dorothea Duda, 'In Memoriam Ernst Diez 1878-1961, Bibliographie der Arbeiten von Ernst Diez', *Kunst des Orients*, 4, 1962, 110-2; Karin Rührdanz, 'Ernst Diez', in Peter Betthausen, Peter H. Feist and Christiane Fork, eds, *Metzler Kunsthistoriker Lexikon*, Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1999, 59-61.

²⁴ See, for example, Franz Babinger, 'Ernst Kühnel (1882-1964). Ein Nachruf', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 115, 1965, 1-13 (with a bibliography for the years 1959-64 by Irene Kühnel); Karin Rührdanz, 'Ernst Kühnel', in Betthausen, Feist and Fork, *Kunsthistoriker Lexikon*, 233-4; Jens Kröger, 'Ernst Kühnel and Islamic Ivories'; Jens Kröger, 'The 1910 Exhibition and Berlin'.

²⁵ Ernst Kühnel, *Francesco Botticini*, Strasbourg: Heitz, 1906; Ernst Kühnel, *Granada*, Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1908; Ernst Kühnel, *Algerien*, Leipzig: Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1909.

²⁶ Central Archive of the State Museums Berlin (SMB), Nachlass Bode Nr. 3096, Letter from Ernst Kühnel to Wilhelm von Bode, 5 November 1909.

²⁷ *Katalog der Sonderausstellung Orientalische Buchkunst. Handschriften und Miniaturen aus den Ländern des Islam und aus Ost-Turkistan*, Berlin: Holten, 1910.

²⁸ For example, in a letter to Wilhelm von Bode on 9 May 1910, he expresses his gratitude for Kühnel's valuable assistance (transcript of the correspondence in the Archives of the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin.) For some other similar references to Kühnel see also Kröger, 'The 1910 exhibition and Berlin', 80-1.

²⁹ Ernst Kühnel, *Die Ausstellung mohammedanischer Kunst*.

analysis of its aesthetic features and the deduction of chronologies or relationships from stylistic parallels and developments – a quintessentially art historical approach with a methodological slant which was distinct from other, more philological premises previously applied to material from the Islamic world.

Sarre and Kühnel's mutual commitment to the professional method and scholarly direction of formal analysis was a crucial factor for the exhibition. Indeed, they hoped that this approach would even enable them to popularize Islamic art, and in a sophisticated way that might lead somewhere beyond romantic Orientalist notions such as the bazaar or the shopworn cliché of the Arabian Nights.³⁰ They very soon realized the futility of such ideas. While the show managed to attract a crowd of approximately 1.3 million visitors during its May to October run, this number is perhaps less impressive than it may appear at first sight. A much larger number of ticket sales had originally been expected, based on the sales for similar events held on the same exhibition grounds in previous years.³¹ Moreover, the number refers to the entire event, with all its beer gardens, merry-go-rounds and extensive cultural supporting programme including attractions as diverse as *Muhammadan Munich nights*³² and the premiere of a Gustav Mahler Symphony. There is no way of telling exactly how many of the visitors even made it inside the exhibition halls, let alone how many of them found the interest and energy to absorb the spirit and message of 'Muhammadan art' as Sarre and Kühnel sought to convey it. In any case, the popular response to the Muhammadan theme was apparently rather underwhelming, in spite of all the supporting efforts of the liberal local press.³³ Ernst Kühnel's reaction to this lukewarm reception makes no attempt to hide his bitterness:

Hardly ever has an undertaking of this scholarly and artistic scope, which was intended to take effect beyond specialized circles, been confronted with such a prejudiced and insensible audience as the Munich exhibition of Muhammadan art ... The expectations of those who already had some knowledge about this art were exceeded in every respect and the disappointment was only on the part of the ignorant.³⁴

³⁰ Moriz Dreger, Ernst Kühnel and Friedrich Sarre, 'Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken Muhammedanischer Kunst in München 1910', *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk*, 13, 1910, 441-536, here 441.

³¹ Kühles, *Bericht*, 43, 50.

³² Stadtarchiv Munich, Ausstellungen und Messen 42a, 'Muhammadanischer Münchner Abend in der Bierhalle'.

³³ The popular daily newspaper *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten* (hereafter *MNN*) covered the exhibition and its programme almost on a daily basis, and with a tone generally much in favour of the event. However, as outlined above, the popular response was rather restrained, as can already be deduced from the visitor numbers, and this becomes apparent in a number of statements by the curators, such as the one by Kühnel quoted below. On the public response, see also Kröger, 'Ernst Kühnel and Scholarship', 85-7.

³⁴ Kühnel, *Die Ausstellung Mohammedanischer Kunst*, 209: 'Selten hat ein Unternehmen von wissenschaftlicher und künstlerischer Tragweite, das über Fachkreise hinaus zu wirken bestimmt war, ein so vorurteilvolles und unempfindliches Publikum gefunden, wie die Ausstellung mohammedanischer Kunst ... Denn die Erwartungen derer, die von dieser Kunst einige Kenntnis hatten, sind in jeder Hinsicht übertroffen worden, und die Enttäuschung blieb lediglich auf Seiten der Unwissenden.' On the position of this quote see also Volkmar Enderlein, 'Islamische Kunst in Berlin', *Museumsjournal*, 2, 1993, 4-8, here 8.

Accordingly, the significant and lasting effects of the show were located on the level of professional discourse rather than in the popular imagination – another reason to maintain focus on the exhibition's significance for professional circles.

To understand the qualities of this watershed event, it will be necessary to take a closer look at the underlying concepts and premises. One of the key terms is addressed rather explicitly in the title, which was finalized soon after Sarre had established himself as the exhibition's main curator: *Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art*. It was most likely Sarre's deliberate decision to emphasize the notion of the 'masterpiece' in this way. Therefore, a closer look at the terminological implications of this title is in order. The keyword 'masterpiece' signals the art historical claim of the whole undertaking – but what exactly is a masterpiece? Hans Belting has shown that this term did not always mean the same thing and that its shifting status was largely interwoven with the changing genealogies of Western art and art history throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: for a long time the term stood mainly for an ideal, for the very idea of a perfect artwork. Subsequently, the rise of the museum, with its concrete canonization of artworks, was an important step towards the professionalization of art appreciation and the institutionalization of its ownership. Within the museum, according to Belting, art history ceased to be dominated by personal taste and was transformed into objective knowledge which could be controlled, since it was embodied by concrete artworks placed on public display in the museum. Consequently, artworks sanctioned in this way represent the perfection of the masterpiece – no longer limited to a potential achievement as defined within the more theoretical realm of ideal aesthetics.³⁵ It should be stressed that these were developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that were already historical by 1910.³⁶ And yet these observations can shed significant light on the central concept of the Munich exhibition: in the age of the museum tangible objects had become capable of being declared 'masterpieces' – making the works selected for the Munich exhibition very real and concrete representatives of the concept of art.³⁷

In short, the idea of the masterpiece has developed in very close relationship to the construction of canons. Within these parameters the label 'masterpiece' established itself as an official index of value – particularly in the context of museums dealing with historical, established collections. Moreover, the term implied a high standard of artistic quality, emphasizing aesthetic values as opposed to cultural, historical or ethnographic approaches. What was established by means of the 'masterpiece' concept was a conservative and elitist canon³⁸ focused on perceived aesthetic achievements that were subject to particular criteria of art historical discourse, not to say value judgements. The appropriation of the 'masterpiece' code for the Munich exhibition must be viewed in the light of these

³⁵ Hans Belting, *Das unsichtbare Meisterwerk*, Munich: Beck, 1998, on the discussion of the term 'Masterpiece' see mainly 40-60.

³⁶ This is the very topic of Belting's book 'The invisible Masterpiece' and actually deals with the emergence of avantgardist, new notions of art after the breakdown of the classical 'Masterpiece' canon in the early twentieth century.

³⁷ Belting, *Das unsichtbare Meisterwerk*, esp. 54-5.

³⁸ For a secessionist counter-position to this, concerning the scholarship on and collection of non-European exotica, see Glenn Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, esp. 36.

developments: the designation of specific artworks as masterpieces was in many ways a natural response to the needs of a nascent history of Islamic art that was still looking for its epistemic guidelines.³⁹ There was a plethora of material, of objects, but hardly any defined criteria yet with which to categorize them, a situation that was exemplified by the absence of a comprehensive overview.⁴⁰ Accordingly, it must have been self-evident for Sarre to construct his work within the canonizing framework of the masterpiece concept. The logical step, from this position, was to establish a canon of works that could then form a basis for defining the particular criteria that would designate the 'masterpiece' within Islamic art. Since traditional codes employed for judging works in the Renaissance tradition, such as *disegno*, *colore*, perspective or mimesis, were often hardly applicable to such works, such categories had to be modified, or new criteria such as the visual qualities of ornament or calligraphy had to be detected and promoted.⁴¹ This was certainly one of the main intentions of Sarre's strategy. By adopting the masterpiece as an established epistemic device and at the same time infusing it with new criteria particularly suitable for the arts of Islam, it became possible to focus on works of 'applied arts' and raise their hierarchical status so that they could be considered and evaluated on the same level as Western sculpture or painting. This assimilative approach was also qualified to communicate

... which role the Orient and its products have played for the cultural history of Europe, that medieval Europe obtained luxury goods and treasures from the Muhammadan Orient, that the East was known for a long time as the home of every refined pleasure and of higher scientific and artistic practice, that silk fabrics and carpets from the Orient have partly defined the universe of decorative forms in the Occident and have exerted significant influence on the colouristic development of Italian Painting during the Renaissance period.⁴²

³⁹ On numerous aspects of the early historiography of the arts of Islam see for example the contributions in Vernoit, *Discovering Islamic Art*, as well as *Ars Orientalis*, 30, 2000 and, from a French perspective, Rémi Labrusse, ed., *Purs Décors? Arts de l'Islam, regards du XIXe siècle: Collections des Arts Décoratifs*, Paris: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 2007.

⁴⁰ In 1907, the French scholars Henri Saladin and Gaston Migeon had published their two-volume *Manuel d'Art Musulman*, one volume focusing on architecture and the other on arts and crafts of the Islamic world (Henri Saladin and Gaston Migeon, *Manuel d'Art Musulman*, 2 vols, Paris: Picard, 1907). The *Manuel* is largely considered the first comprehensive survey for the history of Islamic art, but compared to contemporary German scholarship it was methodologically much more rooted in historical and philological traditions. Additionally, its canon of small-format images, apparently an eclectic collection from different sources, is of relatively poor quality. In terms of mature art historical methodology, Friedrich Sarre's two-volume *Erzeugnisse islamischer Kunst*, published between 1906-09, was certainly more ambitious and more technically advanced than the *Manuel* (Friedrich Sarre, *Erzeugnisse Islamischer Kunst*, 2 vols, Berlin: Hiersemann, 1906-09). The Munich exhibition's wealth of objects allowed for an integration of these methodological standards with a really inclusive canon of artworks, which now became subject to the same descriptive and photographic standards.

⁴¹ *Amtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed., 1910, 52-54; Dreger, Kühnel and Sarre, *Meisterwerke*, 443-5.

⁴² *Amtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed., 1910, 50 '... welche Rolle der Orient und seine Erzeugnisse in der Kulturgeschichte Europas gespielt haben, daß aus dem muhammedanischen Orient das mittelalterliche Europa Luxusgegenstände und Kostbarkeiten bezog, daß das Morgenland lange Zeit als die Heimat jedes feineren Lebensgenusses und höherer wissenschaftlicher und künstlerischer Tätigkeit galt, daß die aus dem Orient stammenden Seidenstoffe und Teppiche die dekorative Formenwelt des

Hence, the European high culture of past epochs ultimately remained an essential reference-point. In this respect, the masterpiece approach also stands for an explicitly conservative and indeed Eurocentric attitude, as exotic as the exhibition's topic may have seemed at first sight.⁴³

The terminological definition of the exhibition's topic also deserves some critical consideration. The exhibition guidebook states that '[t]he term "Muhammadan" or "Islamic" art is appropriate insofar as it stresses the religious character of its unity'.⁴⁴ Of course, from today's perspective the title 'Muhammadan' appears outdated and incorrect, but it was in common use for a long time. It is interesting that this terminology raised some objections in 1910, even if not in a scholarly context. The publicist Alexander Roda Roda attacked the show's title in an article which was published in the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* in July 1910: the term 'Muhammadan', he claimed, had historically been in use whenever there was talk about the stereotype of Islamic idolatry. Nowhere in the world, he furthermore explained, had Muslims ever applied this term to themselves.⁴⁵ However, apart from this demur, no one else seemed to have any problem with the term. For the purposes of the exhibition's title it was obviously most important that 'Muhammadan' signalled a religious connotation, hence the parallelization with 'Islamic'. This established the subject as an equivalent to the Christian art of the West, another important demonstration of Sarre's thoughts working within historical and traditional European categories. In this worldview, art and culture were determined by religion. At the same time, this terminology expressed the basic idea of a unity of Islamic art that was able to subsume various artistic heritages and epochs. The alternative term 'Arab art' was rejected, as the catalogue author clearly states:

We must hint to the fact that the Arabs themselves, the creators and lords of Islamic state development, did not have any artistic skills. When it was up to the erection of splendid mosques and to their artistic ornamentation, the caliphs had to request their architects and artists from the Byzantine emperor.⁴⁶

According to this paradigm, influences from Hellenistic and ancient Iranian sources were an integral basis of Islamic art and culture, while the culture's historical precondition was to be found in the conquests of Muhammad and his successors.

Abendlandes teilweise bestimmt, und auf die koloristische Entwicklung der italienischen Malerei zur Renaissancezeit von bedeutendem Einfluss gewesen sind.'

⁴³ Related considerations concerning the notion of the 'Masterpiece' can be found in Eva-Maria Troelenberg, 'Islamic Art and the Invention of the *Masterpiece*', in Benoît Junod, Georges Khalil, Stefan Weber and Gerhard Wolf, eds, *Islamic Art and the Museum*, London: Saqi Books, 2012.

⁴⁴ *Amtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed., 1910, 51: 'Die Bezeichnung „muhammedanische“ oder „islamische“ Kunst ist insofern zutreffend, als damit der religiöse Charakter ihrer Zusammengehörigkeit betont wird.'

⁴⁵ Alexander Roda Roda, *MNN*, no. 327, 1910, 1.

⁴⁶ *Amtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed., 1910, 52: 'Es mag darauf hingewiesen werden, daß den Arabern selbst, den Schöpfern und Herren der islamischen Staatenbildung, keine irgendwie künstlerische Befähigung eigen war. Als es galt, dem neuen Glauben prächtige Moscheen zu errichten und sie künstlerisch auszuschnücken, mussten sich die Kalifen die ausführenden Architekten und Künstler vom byzantinischen Kaiser erbitten.'

The idea of a unity of Islamic art, conveyed through the title 'Muhammadan', also provided a large scale of conceptual clarity.⁴⁷ In France, parallel developments were taking place during this period; Stephen Vernoit has explained these in relation to changing paradigms. Towards the end of the nineteenth century French scholarship reverted less and less to single designations such as 'art Arabe' or 'art Persan', indicating that Islamic art was no longer being considered within the premise of racial or nationalist ideologies, but as part of a larger culture and religion.⁴⁸ Moreover, the umbrella term 'Muhammadan' had a distinguishing function: after all, the initial working title had been 'Oriental Exhibition', a global and imprecise label which could just as easily subsume the art of the Far East, of Japan and China.⁴⁹ All in all, the title 'Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art' signalled the increasing self-confidence of a scholarly discipline that was on the way to discovering and defining its own potential directions, goals and key questions, as well as defining a consistent subject.

From a present-day perspective, this certainly must lead to some critical questions. Twentieth-century postcolonial discourse has generated an increased understanding of the museum object's alienation from its original context and of the fragmentation of cultural material as a result of the coincidences and missing links of tradition and reposition. There are a great number of objects (many of which were presented as 'Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art' in Munich) which have long been studied in Western collections but will probably never reveal their exact cultural provenance, whether 'Christian' or 'Muslim': one example of this would be the oliphants which were produced in a kind of 'International Fatimid' style in the Mediterranean during the Middle Ages.⁵⁰ The universal and seemingly coherent term 'Islamic art' can hardly account for such complexities. Quite the contrary, it risks obscuring not only the gaps and emphases of Western reception, but also the variety of the source cultures.⁵¹ Moreover, the very term 'Islamic' has frequently been queried in recent discussions of the definition of the art historical subject: can this doctrinal term be used for all kinds of artworks, secular and sacred, made by both Muslim and non-Muslim artists and artisans?⁵²

Interestingly, this scholarly debate was not unknown in 1910. The year of the Munich exhibition also saw the publication of the first issue of Carl Heinrich

⁴⁷ This is also explicitly pointed out in the *Amtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed., 1910, 51-2.

⁴⁸ Stephen Vernoit, 'The Rise of Islamic Archaeology', *Muqarnas*, 14, 1997, 3.

⁴⁹ See also Sophie Makariou, 'L'enfance de l'art: un siècle d'étude de l'art islamique', in Labrusse, *Purs Décors?*, 56-63, here 56.

⁵⁰ As Shalem has shown, stylistic and technical qualities can hint at particular production sites for certain groups of objects, but so far no written sources are known to confirm these groupings. Avinoam Shalem, *The Oliphant: Islamic Objects in Historical Context*, Islamic History and Civilization 54, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2004, 67-79.

⁵¹ For a concise summary on such problems in the postcolonial discourse see also Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, 'Kunst und kulturelle Differenz, oder: Warum hat die Kunstgeschichte in Deutschland den postcolonial turn ausgelassen?', *Kunst und Politik. Jahrbuch der Guernica-Gesellschaft*, 4, 2002, 7-16, especially 8.

⁵² See for example Lorenz Korn, *Geschichte der islamischen Kunst*, Munich: Beck, 2008, 10-11; Lorenz Korn, 'Islamische Kunstgeschichte und Archäologie: Letztes Fach der Orientalistik?', in Abbas Poya and Maurus Reinkowski, eds, *Das Unbehagen in der Islamwissenschaft. Ein klassisches Fach im Scheinwerferlicht der Politik und der Medien*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008, 135-8, here 140-2; also Kamel, *Wege zur Vermittlung*, 139-140.

Becker's periodical *Der Islam*. It was mostly dedicated to cultural-historical approaches to the Muslim world, reflecting a nascent trend towards a more applied and less philological *Islamwissenschaft*.⁵³ A central contribution to the first volume was Ernst Herzfeld's famous study on Mshatta,⁵⁴ while the second volume featured copious material about the Munich exhibition.⁵⁵ In this light, it appears particularly significant that Becker provided a kind of categorical preface in the first issue of his magazine, under the title 'Islam as a Problem'.⁵⁶ It is precisely the idea of a supposed unity of Islam, diametrically opposed to Christianity, that he subjected to critical reconsideration in this text:

The less people know about this, the more they generalize. In contrast, who would dare to label the state of the Abyssinian church simply as Christian without making a fool of himself? Or mention it in the same breath with Protestant Christendom?⁵⁷

According to Becker, this terminology of simplified keywords could only lead to generalizations that would be incapable of reflecting the complexity of history. He eventually explains the 'term and idea of a unified Islamic civilization'⁵⁸ as an outcome of clerical medieval approaches which mainly saw an enemy and threat in Islam. On the other hand, Becker also detects modern pan-Islamic tendencies that emphasize common traits of religion, politics and civilization. Under this premise, he considered it appropriate to apply this universal term when dealing with contemporary contexts.⁵⁹ Such a stance certainly also served as a justification for his publication's title *Der Islam*. However, he still emphasizes that

... this fact, which is undeniable for the present day, has significantly handicapped our understanding of the historical development of Islam.⁶⁰

Accordingly, his general objections remain particularly valid for historical issues, and the Munich *Masterpieces*, mainly historical artworks, were certainly a prime

⁵³ Alexander Haridi, *Das Paradigma der 'islamischen Zivilisation' – oder die Begründung der deutschen Islamwissenschaft durch Carl Heinrich Becker (1876-1933). Eine wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Würzburg: Ergon, 2005. For a concise localisation of the Munich exhibition within the larger panorama of Oriental Studies around 1900, see Suzanne Marchand, 'Orientalistik and Popular Orientalism in Fin de Siècle Germany', in Lerner and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 17-34.

⁵⁴ Ernst Herzfeld, 'Die Genesis der islamischen Kunst und das Mshatta-Problem', *Der Islam*, 1, 1910, 27-63, 105-44.

⁵⁵ Ernst Kühnel, 'Ausstellung von Meisterwerken mohammedanischer Kunst in München (Mai bis Oktober 1910)', *Der Islam*, 1, 1910, 181-94, 369-84.

⁵⁶ Carl Heinrich Becker, 'Der Islam als Problem', *Der Islam*, 1, 1910, 1-21.

⁵⁷ Becker, 'Islam als Problem', 1: 'Je weniger die Leute davon wissen, desto mehr verallgemeinern sie. Wer würde dagegen wagen, ohne sich lächerlich zu machen, abessinische Kirchenzustände kurz als Christentum zu bezeichnen? Oder sie gar ohne weiteres mit dem protestantischen Christentum in einem Atem zu nennen?'

⁵⁸ Becker, 'Islam als Problem', 3: 'Begriff einer islamischen Einheitszivilisation'.

⁵⁹ Becker, 'Islam als Problem', 3.

⁶⁰ Becker, 'Islam als Problem', 3. '... für die Gegenwart unbestreitbare Tatsache hat das Verständnis des geschichtlichen Werdegangs des Islam ganz wesentlich erschwert.'

example of this terminological problem. Becker concludes his article with a critical perspective and a rather simple practical agreement:

The deeper we investigate, the more we will differentiate, and one cannot advise often enough always to describe thoroughly what is meant by the term 'Islam' in every single case, particularly when it comes to comparative judgements. But even with the greatest caution and astuteness concerning terminological distinctions, the specialist will always find himself reverting to the collective name Islam.⁶¹

Thus, terminological markers such as 'Islamic' – and by extension 'Muhammedan' – could serve as a term that specialists agreed upon while remaining fully aware of the immanent heterogeneities behind it. Under this precondition, such a term was legitimate as a succinct label. This was exactly what the Munich exhibition needed. The adjective 'Muhammadan' was certainly most suitable for this: the term seemed precise enough to distinguish the show's topic from a more general concept of 'the Orient', and it offered a parallel and equivalent to the canonical idea of a Christian Western culture. For a more general audience, however, it may have manifested an undifferentiated idea of Islam that was not necessarily easy to reconcile with the variety of objects and topics of the exhibition.

Topics and exhibition layout

How did the show itself reflect these premises and purposes, both at the level of the subjects, and in the exhibition layout?⁶² Naturally, the exhibition focused on objects of the so-called 'minor arts'. As has already been described, the scope of the exhibition had expanded quite significantly to include genres and techniques far beyond the carpet. However, the 'Polish' carpets from the Wittelsbach collection remained the starting point. They were shown in the entrance hall, which was conceived as a modernized version of an Iranian *iwan* (figure 4), thus foregrounding the first regional topic, which was dedicated to the arts of 'Persia'. Three large halls contained Iranian carpets, flanked by a large group of other textiles (see figure 1 for the ground plan and all following room numbers). Another highlight of this section was the famous hunting carpet from the imperial collection in Vienna, which was shown lying on a plinth under a large glass plate in the centre of room 5. Metalwork, book arts and a particularly large quantity of ceramics were shown in the smaller cabinets and in rooms 13 and 14.

⁶¹ Becker, 'Islam als Problem', 2: 'Je tiefer wir eindringen, desto mehr werden wir differenzieren, und man kann nicht genug dazu raten, namentlich bei vergleichenden Werturteilen immer recht genau zu umschreiben, was man im einzelnen Falle unter Islam versteht. Aber bei aller Vorsicht und Schärfe in der begrifflichen Scheidung wird doch auch der Spezialist immer wieder den Sammelnamen Islam schlechthin anwenden.'

⁶² The exhibition catalogue (*Amtlicher Katalog*) was printed in several successive versions and a comparison of these versions reveals that there have been some alterations within the arrangement of objects, partly due to the late arrival of some of the loans. However, it is possible to reconstruct a general outline of the circuit through these catalogues and the ground plan.

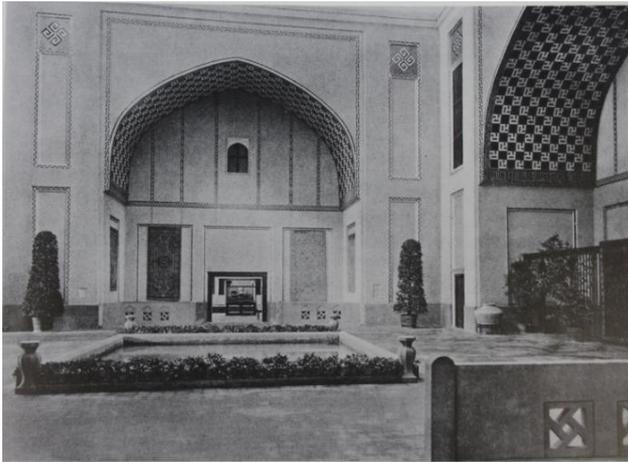


Figure 4. Entrance hall of the exhibition (room 1), design by Ernst Fiechter, Munich 1910, after Sarre and Martin, *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken*, published by Bruckmann 1912, vol. 1.

Room 16 was dedicated to the pre-Islamic Sasanian period. Textiles covered the walls and showcases were filled with objects, mainly metalware from Russian collections such as the famous Bobrinsky collection.⁶³ A short essay on ‘Pre-Muhammadan Art’ in the exhibition guidebook explained the role of works that served to illuminate an age of transition between late antiquity and the Islamic period.⁶⁴ Ernst Kühnel emphasized that this important prelude to Islamic art ‘... has probably for the first time [been shown] in a rather comprehensive manner’.⁶⁵ The further rooms, up to number 24, contained more exhibits from the later periods of Iranian and Central Asian artistic production, such as metalwork and ceramics from Bukhara and Samarkand, and ‘bronzes from Mesopotamia and Persia and silver partially inlaid with gold (so-called “Mosul bronzes”)’.⁶⁶ The Artuqid bowl from Innsbruck was on display here, as well as the silver-inlaid brass tray of Badr al-Din Lulu of Mosul.⁶⁷ For comparative purposes, these works were combined with a group of high- and late-medieval objects whose provenances were still largely unclear at the time, but which were suspected to lie in Armenia or the Caucasus region.

Of course, the ‘Persian’ department of the exhibition also featured a number of important examples of book arts. Showcases and walls in room 18 were filled with folios from several private collections, their dates ranging across five centuries. These were mainly drawings of princely subjects. More folios were situated in room 21. It is remarkable that the formation of comprehensive groups attributed to particular masters was not, apparently, a high priority. For example, folios attributed to the painter Bihzad were spread over different rooms. The ‘masterpiece’ idea was certainly crucial to the overall concept of the exhibition, but apparently it was restricted to an impersonal dimension. Rather, it seems as though individual

⁶³ For the most important objects from the Bobrinsky collection, with further reading, see Troelenberg, cat. nos. 3, 4, and 10, in Dercon, Krempel and Shalem, *The Future of Tradition*.

⁶⁴ *Amtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed., 1910, 61: ‘Vormuhammadanische Kunst’.

⁶⁵ Kühnel, *Die Ausstellung Mohammedanischer Kunst*, 212: ‘... vielleicht zum ersten Male in einem ziemlich vollständigen Bilde ...’

⁶⁶ *Amtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed., 1910, 94. ‘Bronzen aus Mesopotamien und Persien, in Silber, z.T. auch in Gold tauschiert (sogen. „Mosulbronzes“).’

⁶⁷ On these objects, with bibliography, see Troelenberg and Shalem, cat. nos. 9, 11, in Dercon, Krempel and Shalem, *Future of Tradition*.

artistic achievements were considered less important than the 'masterly' standard of a particular artistic centre, court or epoch, perhaps even less important than the connoisseurial profile of a particular collector.⁶⁸ For example, a closer look at the provenances of the pages in room 21 reveals that they mainly came from the collection of Fredrik R. Martin. Martin's formidable collection contained other material in addition to Persian manuscripts, but a decision had clearly been taken to show important pieces from this collection together – leaving the obvious Iranian focus partially obscured by the addition of other pieces including an Ottoman Qur'an. This is only one example of a number of significant ruptures or confluences within the overall regional organization of the show. Apparently, the general assumption of a unity of 'Muhammadan' art justified such inconsistencies, sometimes easing the transitions from one topic to another as in room 24, which included carpets from both Iran and India with dominant red grounds. However, it remained sufficiently clear that the primary focus of the exhibition was Iran, and its prominent position implied a clear hierarchy, as the guidebook bluntly stated: 'The most important branch of Muhammadan art is the Persian one'.⁶⁹

Walking further along the designated route, the visitor would then enter into a narrow sequence of rooms which formed a secondary suite (rooms 25-33), showing mainly objects and documents which could be considered addenda or complements to the actual corpus of 'masterpieces'. This included Alphons Leopold Mielich's watercolours of the recently discovered Umayyad desert castle of Qusayr 'Amra⁷⁰ and Friedrich Sarre's photographs of Iranian monuments.⁷¹ These documentary media allowed for an integration of architecture which was otherwise represented only by fragments in the exhibition itself. Moreover, it offered some insights into the most recent achievements of German-language scholarship in Middle Eastern studies, including especially major research projects at Islamic sites. A part of this final section was also dedicated to historical perspectives on European experiences of the 'Orient': here the visitor would find a cabinet of prints and drawings with primarily early modern Ottoman subjects. The integration of such exhibits was most likely intended to build bridges to familiar horizons for the European beholder, but of course these pieces were placed quite literally outside of the canon of the 'Masterpieces of Muhammadan art'.

From here, the visitor had to return to room 24 and then proceed to the very small Indian section (rooms 35-39), which mainly consisted of carpets, textiles and the attractive Mughal albums from the Völkerkundemuseum in Berlin. The large adjacent hall (room 39; figure 5) with a peristyle structure resembling a mosque⁷² was filled with more than twenty carpets; most of them were Turkish, some Armenian and Iranian. A late Ottoman Qur'an casket and *rahle* (a support for a

⁶⁸ On similar strains evident within the collecting strategies of Edwin Binney, 3rd, see the article by Keelan Overton in the present volume.

⁶⁹ On the position of Iranian art in Munich and also more general in early twentieth-century narratives of art history see also Lorenz Korn, "'Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst' – Highlights of Persian Art in the Munich Exhibition and its Aftermath', in Lermer and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 317-31.

⁷⁰ These watercolours had been published in Alois Musil and Alphons Leopold Mielich, *Kusejr Amra*, 2 vols, Vienna: Gerold, 1907.

⁷¹ Sarre, *Denkmäler Persischer Baukunst*.

⁷² This appearance was achieved by simply covering up the existing tie-beams of the hall so that they resembled a peristyle cluster of columns.

book) completed the prayer hall atmosphere, aesthetically complementing the architectural impression made by the *iwan* structure on the opposite side of the exhibition building's courtyard. In spite of Sarre's apparent degradation of the carpet within the show's larger concept, it is clear that this genre of Islamic art was still a significant element of the Munich exhibition: the two largest and most distinctively designed rooms created an architectural axis, arranged with a large variety of carpets. Moreover, a closer look at the qualities of several groups of carpets and their relationship to each other further reveals the underlying concept of the 'masterpiece' at work. The large entrance hall (figure 4), sometimes also referred to as the 'Repräsentationsraum', was reserved for a small group of first-rate carpets of exceptional provenance. The room was installed in a manner that gave it a similar appearance to the display of Old Master paintings in a gallery: the carpets were hung as single pieces on rather large neutral wall surfaces. On the other hand, the 'mosque' in room 39, halfway through the exhibition, featured a greater number of carpets of slightly lesser quality, which were spread across the surface of the floor and interrupted by columns. These pieces were presented less as individual outstanding works than as the requisites of an atmospheric setting. There was obviously a subtle, gradual hierarchy among the 'Masterpieces'.

The large carpet hall was followed by a labyrinthine cluster of smaller rooms (rooms 40-59) whose segmentation corresponded to the small scale of the exhibits they contained, mostly pieces from Syria and Egypt. These included an impressive number of glass objects which had never before been assembled as a group, as well as rock crystals, Qur'an fragments and secular book illuminations, leather panels, and Egyptian wood carvings. One room was dedicated to metalwork, mainly figurative aquamaniles and Mamluk inlaid metalwork. Another room contained a set of four large and important works in metal, among them the famous inlaid Qur'an chest from Berlin,⁷³ as well as a number of smaller ivories and woodcarvings. Rooms 49 and 50 presented ceramic finds from Fustat. Curiously, amidst this Syro-Egyptian cluster, the thematic focus was interrupted by a so-called 'Polish cabinet' (room 51) with textiles that were considered to be Polish products made after Iranian models. Apart from these pieces, room 51 seems to have been some kind of stopgap repository for a number of rather miscellaneous curiosities which did not readily fit into any other category, such as a Chinese coffee set which Kara Mustapha had allegedly used in his tent when besieging Vienna. The integration of such pieces certainly resulted in an unexpectedly multi-faceted vision of Islamic art, but at the same time it may not have contributed to the inner coherence of the exhibition, particularly for spectators without much previous experience of the visual culture of the Islamic world.

The exhibits in room 53 epitomized another strain of 'Oriental' influence on the West: it showed a group of metalwork objects which at the time were considered to be products of Venetian workshops, but made in an 'Oriental' style and technique, and thought possibly even to be the products of migrant workmen.⁷⁴

⁷³ Museum of Islamic Art, inv. no. I. 886.

⁷⁴ These works and their provenance remain the subject of a lively scholarly discussion: see for example Sylvia Auld, *Renaissance and Venice, Islam and Mahmud the Kurd. A metalworking enigma*, London: Altajir World of Islam Trust, 2004; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, 'Veneto-Saracenic Metalware, a Mamluk Art', *Mamluk Studies Review*, 9(2), 2005, 147-72.

Alongside these ‘Veneto-Saracenic’ objects, the beholder would again find a number of ‘Polish carpets’ in the same room. Examples from this group of carpets appeared as a recurrent theme throughout the exhibition. They formed a kind of leitmotif, a prototypical example of Islamic art.

The sequence of Egyptian artworks was resumed in room 54 with Fatimid rock crystals. These fragile and small-scale pieces often came from far-flung church treasuries. The exhibition offered the chance to bring these impressive objects together in one room. Another important focus in this section was a group of ivories assembled in rooms 59-61, along with some Sicilian textiles. Sarre regrouped the ivories at least once while the show was running: while he initially separated the painted from the carved pieces, he later put them all together in one room. It must have been particularly important to him to find a model of presentation that would provide ideal conditions for the scholarly gaze, since so little was known about the provenance of these ivories. Indeed, his adjustments may well demonstrate that Sarre was reacting to new discussions with visiting colleagues, and that his own ideas were also evolving. Certainly the Munich exhibition triggered a lively academic debate about these pieces – particularly between Ernst Diez and Ernst Kühnel – which can be considered the birth of scholarship on Islamic ivories.⁷⁵



Figure 5. ‘Mosque’ (room 39), after Sarre and Martin, *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken*, published by Bruckmann 1912, vol. 1.

Rooms 61-68 saw another change of regional topics. This enfilade of large halls had initially been envisaged entirely for the display of ‘Spanish-Moorish’ art, including that of the Maghrib. A series of *azulejos* from the Folkwang collection⁷⁶ featured prominently in this section, especially because the overwhelming majority

⁷⁵ On the Munich exhibition within the larger context of Kühnel’s ivory studies see Kröger, ‘Ernst Kühnel and Scholarship’, 276-7.

⁷⁶ On the *azulejos* of Karl Ernst Osthaus and the Folkwang Museum, see Annette Hagedorn, ‘Walter Gropius, Karl Ernst Osthaus und Hans Wendland. Die Ankäufe maurischer Keramik für das Deutsche Folkwang Museum Hagen im Jahr 1908’, in Martina Müller-Wiener, ed., *Al-Andalus und Europa. Zwischen Orient und Okzident*, Petersberg: Imhof, 2004, 389-98.



Figure 6. Room 68 (photograph taken before the objects were completely installed), after anon., 'Muhammedanische Ausstellung München 1910', *Der Baumeister. Monatshefte für Architektur und Baupraxis*, 9, 1910-11, 32. (Photographic reproduction: Gabor Ferencz).

of the expected loans from Spain never arrived.⁷⁷ Room 68 (figure 6) in particular must have left a rather makeshift impression during the first weeks of the exhibition, since it housed only a small number of objects. Later Sarre decided to install in this space a number of Iznik ceramics, then largely known as 'Damascus ware', but which were already being discussed as products of Ottoman kilns.⁷⁸ They gave a first taste of the last important regional emphasis of the exhibition, which properly started in rooms 69 and 70 with further ceramics and textiles of mainly Turkish origin. Interestingly, these were presented alongside an eighteenth-century Neapolitan variation on the nativity crib scene, from a Munich collection. Referring probably to one of the Magi, it showed 'a Moorish prince and his court', executed in miniature woodcarving. The costumes and décor of the figurines were considered reminiscent of late Ottoman material culture: in this context they exerted an unexpected synergetic effect between a particular strand of local, vernacular collecting culture in Munich and the exotic 'Muhammadan' topic. The picturesque character of the tableau, which seems to contradict the scholarly resolution of the exhibition, was elegantly explained away with the fact that such pieces '... provide a small-scale image of the use of the exhibited fabrics and objects'.⁷⁹

The large hall 71 was filled with carpets that were mainly identified as coming from 'Asia Minor'; however, the centrepiece on a plinth was a so-called

⁷⁷ Stephen Vernoit has provided a deeper investigation of this issue, explaining that around 1910, Spain was obviously extremely reluctant to send national cultural property abroad: 'Hispano-Moresque Art in European Collections, c. 1910', in Lerner and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 231-67.

⁷⁸ See Dercon, Krempel and Shalem, *The Future of Tradition*, catalogue entries no. 20 [Helmecke] and 21 [Troelenberg], for further reading on the group.

⁷⁹ *Ämtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed., 114; *MNN*, 1910, no. 328, 1: '... im kleinen ein Bild der Verwendung der ausgestellten Stoffe und Geräte'.

'Syrian' (thus actually Mamluk) carpet. Moreover, several showcases contained arms and helmets, mostly from the Iranian world or the Ottoman Empire, as well as some from Egypt. Room 72 (figure 7) made it entirely clear that this was not only a regional, but also a conceptual focus: it was explicitly dedicated to 'Memories of the Turkish Wars' and included an Ottoman tent and a horse-and-rider mannequin with harness and armour.⁸⁰ Turkish cannons and banners were arranged atmospherically and the display was surrounded by large-format carpets on the expansive wall surfaces of the hall. The Ottoman focus, strongly permeated with the topic of 'war', spread to several of the adjacent smaller rooms which contained further arms and armour and janissary headdresses, as well as European drawings or paintings which directly picked up the subject of the Turkish wars – most prominently a Venetian depiction of the battle of Lepanto from Sarre's own collection.⁸¹ This cultural-historical focus was complemented by further artworks from the Ottoman Empire, such as ceramics, book arts and silk fabrics from Bursa, chronologically ranging up to Turkish Rococo, which was represented by European-influenced embroideries. A wide spectrum of Ottoman Turkish art was shown, with a pronounced focus on the issue of war – presumably felt to constitute the most obvious bridge for the Western spectator.

The circuit ended in room 80. From here, the visitor had to cross the big hall (room 72) once again to return back to room 1 (figure 4) where the main entrance and exit were located. The 'Polish rugs' from Munich were thus not only the first but also the last impression received by the audience of the exhibition *Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art*.

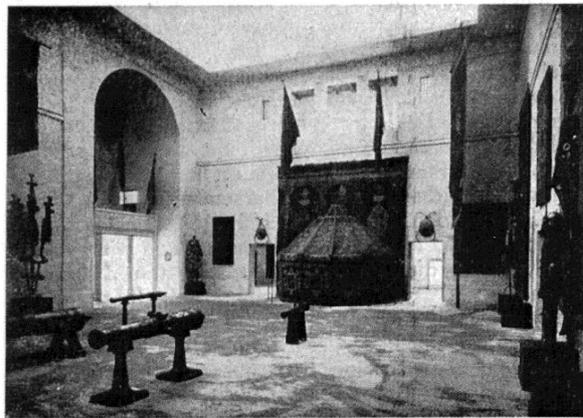


Figure 7. Room 72, after Wilhelm Michel, 'Darbietungen und Feste der Ausstellung München 1910', *Weltcourier*, 5(19), 1910, 582-4, photo: Jäger and Goergen, Munich.

In short, the objects were arranged according to a roughly historical trajectory whose sequence was oriented around the major Islamic dynasties. This implied shifting regional foci. Within these categories, the exhibits were largely grouped according to technique, but none of these criteria were absolute: throughout the show one would find mixed presentations as well. Certain hierarchies were obviously implied; these were particularly striking in the large

⁸⁰ *Amtlicher Katalog*, 2nd ed., 115.

⁸¹ On this painting, see Friedrich Sarre, 'Die Seeschlacht von Lepanto. Ein unbekanntes Bild aus der Werkstatt Tintoretto. Mit einem Anhang über seine historische Bedeutung von Otfried Neubecker', *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, 59, 1938, 233-46; exhibition catalogue *Venezia e la Difesa del Levante*, Venice: Arsenale, 1986, cat. no. 11.

carpet halls where important pieces were singled out on central plinths. The section on Iran, commencing in pre-Islamic Sasanian times, provided the most complete regional survey, while Spain and the Maghrib and India were the most poorly represented regional sections. Textile works and ceramics comprised the lion's share of the display materials, followed by book arts, metal, arms and armour and jewellery. Interestingly, carpets formed one of the smaller groups, with only 229 catalogue numbers. However, the carpets must nevertheless have been prominent within the overall impression made by the show because of their conspicuously large format. Objects made from glass, rock crystal, ivory and carved wood, European depictions of the 'Orient' and other marginalia trailed far behind in total numbers.⁸² With around 3,600 artworks, it should be stressed that this exhibition must have been utterly overwhelming, both for the spectator and the scholar. One week after the opening of the show, Friedrich Sarre took one of the Bavarian princes on a tour. Within the scheduled two hours, only one third of the exhibition could be taken in.⁸³ Maybe it was in consequence of this experience that Sarre later divided his guided public tours into sections. The visitor who wanted to see the whole show with Sarre had to complete a cycle of six successive visits.⁸⁴ Even later in the exhibition's run, Rudolf Meyer-Riefstahl offered a guided tour of the exhibition's twenty-five highlights.⁸⁵ Certainly, the programme of public guided tours was only indirectly linked to the scholarly implications of the show, but such problems of didactic mediation also indicate a more general problem on the scholarly level. Namely, how could this plethora of objects be presented and processed in such a way as to provide a fertile basis for art historical research?

A central tenet of the exhibition was the presentation of all of the artworks in an atmosphere that was unromantic and neutral, yet appropriate to the subject. It was necessary that the setting should systematically prevent any allusion to the 'Arabian Nights' fantasies which had been so popular during the nineteenth century: this resulted in a difficult task for the interior designers. As the exhibition guidebook explains, they had to

... avoid having the rooms which would contain the Islamic artworks somehow arouse the impression that they were buildings, halls, chambers of the Orient; but they also had to provide a spatial framing which does not appear alien to the exhibits, or even contradictory in stylistic and colouristic terms, for in that case, they would ... have stood alone, lost, unrelated and unable to enter into a vivid relationship with the senses and souls of their beholders.⁸⁶

⁸² A summary of the most important categories as conceived by the protagonists themselves can be found in Dreger, Kühnel and Sarre, *Meisterwerke*, 449.

⁸³ *MNN*, 1910, no. 232, 3.

⁸⁴ *MNN*, 1910, no. 238, 3; *General-Anzeiger* no. 254, 1; *General-Anzeiger* no. 273, 4; *General-Anzeiger* no. 312, 1; *General-Anzeiger* no. 328, 1; *General-Anzeiger* no. 345, 1.

⁸⁵ *MNN*, 1910, no. 427, 7.

⁸⁶ *Amtlicher Führer* 1910: '... vermeiden, daß die zur Aufnahme der islamitischen Kunstwerke herzurichtenden Räume irgendwie den Eindruck machten, als ob sie Bauten, Hallen, Gemächer aus dem Orient vorstellen sollten; ebenso mußte[n] sie aber darauf achten, daß die Ausstellungsgegenstände nicht in einer räumlichen Fassung erschienen, welche ihnen ganz wesensfremd, ja stilistisch, farbig widersprechend war, denn dann würden sie ... einsam, verloren,

Accordingly, the architectural frame was required on the one hand to offer a neutral backdrop, but on the other hand to mediate between the beholder and the object. However, this 'neutrality' was not necessarily understood in a purely formal sense. It was meant to extricate the artworks from historical contexts that could have distracting associative meanings, or could otherwise be an obstacle for the modern recipient's perception. As has been shown, the visitor's route certainly did follow a vaguely historical thread. A cursory look at some of the rooms shows us that there was clearly an underlying 'Islamic' flair, particularly in distinctive displays such as the entrance hall or in the so-called 'mosque'. The section dedicated to the 'Turkish Wars' in particular alluded to a concrete historical context. However, within the overall layout of the exhibition, these historical clues were introduced to form only a basic system of coordinates. The majority of the eighty spacious exhibition halls provided a much more restrained background, placing an emphasis upon the aesthetic qualities of the single piece. In this case, the objects themselves were not primarily intended as testimonies of a historical narrative, but rather as autonomous aesthetic entities that might reflect a historical panorama of artistic achievements in a secondary or complementary fashion.⁸⁷ The leitmotif of the exhibition was thus neither the document nor the historical tableau, but the masterpiece. This was the point at which the conservative canonizing premise and the modern design of the exhibition interior came together effectively, combining to create the innovative qualities of the Munich exhibition.

Scholarly infrastructure and strategy

However, the scholarly strategy of the Munich exhibition did not solely rely on the objects themselves and their presentation. It also provided an elaborate infrastructure that turned the exhibition into a temporary research centre. One of the rooms (room 30) was equipped with a library for the exclusive use of visiting specialists. The books were compiled by the Leipzig publishing house Hiersemann, in cooperation with the Bavarian Court and State Library.⁸⁸ According to the reading room's printed index, which was available free of charge, the exhibition reading room was intended

... to provide the most important volumes of plates and recent compendia of the subject for those visitors to the Munich exhibition of Muhammadan art

zusammenhanglos dagestanden haben, unfähig, mit den Sinnen und Seelen der sie Beschauenden in eine lebendige Wechselbeziehung zu treten.'

⁸⁷ For a deeper investigation into the relation between the historical and the aesthetic criteria of the Munich exhibition see Eva-Maria Troelenberg, 'Framing the Artwork: Munich 1910 and the Image of Islamic Art', in Lermer and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 37-64. The importance of the 'sober' exhibition atmosphere has frequently been mentioned as one of the most important qualities of the Munich show. For an assessment of this position and its impact on later exhibitions in the later twentieth century, see David J. Roxburgh, 'After Munich: Reflections on Recent Exhibitions', in Lermer and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 359-86.

⁸⁸ Information taken from Friedrich Sarre's preface in Friedrich Sarre and Fredrik R. Martin, eds, *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken Muhammedanischer Kunst in München 1910*, 3 vols, Munich: Bruckmann, 1912, vol. 1, I-V.

who wish to study particular exhibits in a scholarly way.⁸⁹

The index itself lists 130 titles representing a cross-section of scholarship on Islamic art and culture, particularly focusing on information and visual materials relating to significant objects in the exhibition. Of course, it contained the main works of Sarre himself and those of Fredrik R. Martin, as well as the publications of significant pioneering exhibitions⁹⁰ or standard publications such as the *Manuel d'Art Musulman* of Gaston Migeon and Henri Saladin.⁹¹ A large number of monographic studies of particular techniques and of arts-and-crafts pattern books were also at hand, providing comparative images. Specialized art historical approaches, represented by texts such as Alois Riegl's and Wilhelm von Bode's carpet studies were, of course, also included.⁹² Moreover, the library thematically complemented the exhibition itself with important works on architecture and the catalogues of those public collections which had not sent their treasures to Munich. Finally, some facsimile reprints of famous manuscripts and a selection of books with more philological or historical approaches, such as Alfred von Kremer's *Culturgeschichte des Orients unter den Chalifen* or Gustave Le Bon's *Civilisation des Arabes*, completed the holdings. Many of the publications were expensive and/or denoted as 'rare' or 'out of print' in the index.⁹³ Their availability in Munich, in extremely close proximity to the original 'masterpieces' of the exhibition, certainly increased the value of this unique event for the scholarly community. Such a research library, systematically aiming at the documentation and analysis of Islamic visual culture, may have been unprecedented at the time. Although the selection of books, which was most likely compiled by Sarre in collaboration with the editing house Hiersemann, was limited to the most important independent publications, the index of this library can be considered one of the first comprehensive bibliographies on the arts of Islam in German.⁹⁴ In the preface to the index, explicit reference is made to two of the most important precedents which were of course also part of the library itself: the archaeological bibliography of V.G. Tiessenhausen, published in Russian in St. Petersburg in 1906, and the extensive *Essai de Bibliographie* by the

⁸⁹ *Ausstellung von Meisterwerken Muhammedanischer Kunst. Verzeichnis der von der Firma Karl W. Hiersemann Buchhändler u. Antiquar 29 Königstrasse Leipzig im Bibliotheksraum aufgelegten Druckwerke u. Handschriften*, Munich: 1910, preface: '... beabsichtigt jenen Besuchern der Münchner Ausstellung mohammedanischer Kunst, welche einzelne ausgestellte Gegenstände wissenschaftlich bearbeiten wollen, die wichtigsten Tafelwerke und neueren Zusammenfassungen des Gegenstandes darzubieten'.

⁹⁰ While a closer examination of these forerunners must remain outside the focus of this paper, it is of course important to note that, starting from the 1880s, Europe had seen a number of exhibitions dedicated to Islamic arts. The most important benchmark (and challenge) for Sarre's curatorial concept was certainly the *Exposition des Arts Musulmans* that had been held in Paris in 1903. Its short exhibition guidebook and a folio publication of the most important exhibits were of course part of the Munich research library. For a concise account of exhibitions on Islamic art up to 1910, see Roxburgh, 'Au Bonheur des Amateurs'.

⁹¹ Henri Saladin and Gaston Migeon, *Manuel d'Art Musulman*, 2 vols, Paris: Picard, 1907.

⁹² For example Alois Riegl, *Altorientalische Teppiche*, Leipzig: Weigl, 1891; Wilhelm Bode, *Vorderasiatische Knüpfteppiche aus älterer Zeit*, Leipzig: Seemann, 1901.

⁹³ 'selten'; 'vergriffen'.

⁹⁴ Scholars who wanted to consult further specialized literature or particular papers published in periodicals were referred to the Bavarian Court- and State Library with its renowned portfolio of 'Orientalia'.

French scholars Arsène-Auguste Ronflard, Lucien Bouvat and Yves Rioche, which had appeared in the *Archives Marocaines* in 1905.⁹⁵

Access to the exhibition library was strictly limited to visitors who were able to prove their professional interest. However, it was certainly not exclusively reserved for Sarre and his collaborators. The official exhibition guidebook explicitly notes that – upon personal registration in the exhibition office and with plausible professional authorization – it was even possible to request objects to be taken temporarily out of the display for closer examination in the library.⁹⁶ In addition to this, a ‘study storage’ area was set up. The objects kept in this space were listed in the exhibition catalogue with the note ‘WD’,⁹⁷ which meant that they were not part of the public display. This ‘reserve collection’ included extremely fragile or fragmented carpets and textiles, as well as large-scale pieces that often had comparable but better-preserved or more elaborate counterparts in the exhibition. The storage area also contained large bundles or sample collections of textiles, such as a ‘collection of 30 Oriental fabrics of different periods and provenances’ from the Folkwang collection.⁹⁸ Some of these reserved objects were of very uncertain provenance and thus could not be placed within the exhibition circuit proper. Others were simply aesthetically not very appealing: for example a series of tombstones and stone slabs with inscriptions was presumably relegated to the storage area for this reason. Thus, the storage area was not only reserved for pieces which had to be treated with particular care by the conservator, but also provided a space for objects that did not even remotely fit the claim of the ‘masterpiece’, nonetheless constituting valuable comparison pieces for the art historian. In this context it is interesting to note that more recent works (from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries) were also often outsourced to the ‘study depot’.

Sarre actively sought to attract a large number of specialists to this temporary research-laboratory of Islamic art history. Indeed, the Munich show must have been required viewing for the scholars of the day who specialized in Islamic art and cultural studies or Middle Eastern archaeology: it is documented that the Orientalists Carl Heinrich Becker, Max van Berchem, Ignaz Goldziher, Ernst Herzfeld, Alfred Jeremias, Enno Littmann, Leopold Messerschmidt, Eugen Mittwoch, Moritz Sobernheim and Heinrich Winkler met in Munich to view the exhibition.⁹⁹ Obviously, some of these specialist visitors used their time there for

⁹⁵ V.G. Tiessenhausen, *Materialy dlja bibliografii musulmanskoj archeologij*, St. Petersburg, 1906; Arsène-Auguste Ronflard, Lucien Bouvat and Yves Rioche, ‘L’Art Musulman. Essai de Bibliographie’, *Archives Marocaines*, 3: 1, 1905, 1-95.

⁹⁶ *Amtlicher Führer*, 1910, 19.

⁹⁷ An abbreviation of ‘Wissenschaftliches Depot’.

⁹⁸ *Amtlicher Katalog*, 3rd edition, cat. nos. 2929-2958: ‘Sammlung von 30 orientalischen Stoffen verschiedener Zeit und Provenienz’.

⁹⁹ An unexpected document for this encounter is a letter to Max van Oppenheim, the diplomat-archaeologist who had discovered the Hittite residence on Tell Halaf shortly before 1910. The letter, which was explicitly written on the occasion of the Munich exhibition, is signed by all the above-mentioned names, together with the name of Sarre. On Oppenheim, this letter and its importance for the excavations of Tell Halaf, see Gabriele Teichmann, ‘Grenzgänger zwischen Orient und Okzident. Max von Oppenheim 1860-1946’, in Gabriele Teichmann and Gisela Völger, eds, *Faszination Orient. Max von Oppenheim. Sammler – Forscher – Diplomat*, Cologne: DuMont, 2001, 10-105, esp. 53, and Josefine von Bothmer, *Die Gründungsgeschichte des Tell Halaf-Museums*, Berlin: 2007, 37 [http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS_thesis_000000002643 accessed 28.08.2011]. A copy of the original

strategic purposes. In late August, Gertrude Bell came to Munich.¹⁰⁰ The British historian and archaeologist was by this time an established figure in Middle Eastern studies,¹⁰¹ and she seized the opportunity to announce her latest project – the investigation of the ruins of Ukhaidir – while simultaneously making herself known to a number of other scholars. She apparently met Sarre for the first time in person in Munich: in a letter to her mother, she describes how she

... spent the afternoon with Sarre and various other professors, known and unknown. I stayed till [the exhibition] closed at 6 o'clock ...

About the show itself she goes on:

The exhibition is wonderful. I am very glad that I am alone here so that I can really work at it. But it is bewilderingly large. I shall have a good grind at it tomorrow.¹⁰²

A few days later, on a Sunday, she reports about her experiences:

I had a delightful day at the exhibition today. All the professors were taking a holiday so that I had the library to myself. I read a great big book all through – it was about carpets, but it had lots of other things in too, and I felt at the end that I had got a good way forrader. The exhibition is in the Ausstellungs-park ... I lunch in a little open air restaurant near it, which saves time and is pleasanter than the hotel. It's broiling hot – I love it. Today before I came away I found in the park a place where a lot of orientals are sitting and carrying on their trades. So I sought out the Syrians – they are from Damascus – and had a long gossip with them. One was a Druze and he told me all the news of the Hauran. I was delighted and so were they for they never have anyone to speak to.¹⁰³

document is held in GhStaPKB (Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz), I. HA Rep. 76 Kultusministerium Vc Sekt. 1, Tit. VIII, Nr. 19, Bd. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Archive of the Museum of Islamic Art Berlin: transcript of a letter from Sarre to Wilhelm Bode, Munich, 22 August 1910.

¹⁰¹ Bell was not only a Middle Eastern archaeologist. Her political involvements, particularly in the foundation of the modern state of Iraq, were also significant. As a result of these two functions, she founded the Baghdad Archaeological Museum that opened in the 1920s. For her biography see: Janet E. Courtney, 'Gertrude Bell', *The North American Review*, 223(833), 1926-27, 665-3; D[avid] G. H[ogarth]: 'Obituary Gertrude Lowthian Bell', *The Geographical Journal*, 68(4), 1926, 363-8 or, more recently, Julia M. Asher-Greve, 'Gertrude L. Bell, 1868-1963', in Getzel M. Cohen and Martha Sharp Joukowsky, eds, *Breaking Ground. Pioneering Women Archaeologists*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006, 142-97; Jim Crow, 'Gertrude Bell – Fotografin und Archäologin', in Trümpler, *Das große Spiel*, 597-607, and the epic biography by Georgina Howell, *Daughter of The Desert: The Remarkable Life of Gertrude Bell*, London: Macmillan, 2006.

¹⁰² Letter from Gertrude Bell to her mother, August 1910 (precise date unknown), full text available online in the Gertrude Bell Archive / University Library of Newcastle: [http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter_details.php?letter_id=1763 accessed 25.07.2011].

¹⁰³ Letter from Gertrude Bell to her mother, 21 August 1910 [http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter_details.php?letter_id=1763 accessed 25.07.2011].

This very last remark about her ‘gossiping’ with the workmen from the ‘Karawanseraï’ is incidentally one of the very few recorded instances in which this ethnographic part of the supporting programme and the actual scholarly core of the exhibition are explicitly linked (and is probably the only real testimony of the workmen’s individuality as persons and interlocutors, not just living ‘props’). The whole quote, referring at the same time to the exhibition, its specialist visitors, its scholarly infrastructure, its more populist aspects and the atmosphere of a hot Munich summer, provides a lively illustration of the event ‘Munich 1910’ and the impression it made upon one visiting scholar. In spite of Bell’s relaxed narrative tone, she was not in Munich as a passive beholder, but rather with a clear working agenda. In the same letter she refers to an article on Persian and Arab literature that she was writing in the evenings. She certainly also benefitted her archaeological work by studying the exhibition.

Another important professional visitor to the exhibition was the Swiss Orientalist Max van Berchem.¹⁰⁴ Sarre invited van Berchem to collaborate as early as the autumn of 1909, when he first became involved with the Munich project. Van Berchem was one of the most distinguished epigraphers to work on Arabic inscriptions – a field in which Sarre, primarily trained as a European art historian, considered himself an amateur:

I often feel like my own works are ... dilettantish and academically unsatisfying. These fields should only be touched by someone who is, like you and Herzfeld, a man of letters and philologist and connects this firm basis with knowledge of artistic things. But this primary field is barred for me and, considering my age, will remain so. Thus, my works will be pulled to pieces and found worthless upon closer examination by the philologists. – But I am reporting reflections to you here which I should rather keep to myself.¹⁰⁵

This quote is certainly permeated in part with the semi-ironic coquetry which can often be found in Sarre’s writings when he refers to his own academic work. But it still provides some important hints of his own methodological approach: he was very aware of the fact that he was not an Orientalist or Islamicist and therefore had to work under different premises and use different epistemic devices. A genuinely aesthetic approach, based on stylistic analysis and independent of written sources, was his means of negotiating Islamic artefacts. In

¹⁰⁴ Sarre’s letters to van Berchem are kept in the University Library in Geneva; copies are also held in the archive of the Museum of Islamic art in Berlin and the Fondation Max van Berchem in Geneva. The author wishes to thank both Jens Kröger (Berlin) and Antoinette Harri (Geneva) for providing access to this correspondence, which turned out to be one of the most important primary sources for the Munich exhibition. On Sarre’s co-operations with epigraphers and with van Berchem in particular see Kröger, ‘The 1910 exhibition and Berlin’, 72.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Sarre to van Berchem, Neubabelsberg 6 July 1910: ‘Oft kommen mir meine Arbeiten ... dilettantisch und wissenschaftlich ungenügend vor. Diese Gebiete sollte einer nur begehen, der wie Sie und Herzfeld ein Schriftkundiger und Philologe ist, und mit dieser festen Grundlage die Kenntnis des Künstlerischen verbindet. Aber dies erstere Gebiet ist mir und wird mir bei meinem Alter verschlossen bleiben, und so werden meine Arbeiten bei der Nachprüfung von Seiten der Schriftgelehrten zerpfückt und wertlos befunden werden. – Aber ich erzähle Ihnen hier Reflektionen, die ich lieber für mich behalten sollte.’

this respect, he was probably one of the first scholars who recognized the potential of art history, in the sense of Riegl's *Stilgeschichte*, to form a key to Islamic culture. However, he had to concede some limitations to this disciplinary choice, most obviously where inscriptions were involved. The names, dates or geographical clues in inscriptions were of course also of high value for the historian of style: one dated object could for example offer a gateway to the understanding of a whole group of related works. Therefore, Sarre attached great importance to the epigraphic reading of the objects he published. While it remained clear that art history ('Kunstwissenschaft') was the key discipline for him, this led quite naturally to an interdisciplinary approach.¹⁰⁶

Max van Berchem was the ideal candidate for such cooperation: he had studied Semitic languages in Leipzig, Strasbourg and Berlin, spent time in Egypt and completed his studies in Paris. He often published in French and had also collaborated with Saladin and Migeon for their *Manuel d'Art Musulman*, but he was just as integrated in German-speaking academia. His activities as a private scholar were not restricted to philology. He worked continuously on his long-term project of a *Corpus Inscriptorum Arabicarum*. The corpus was originally meant to apply epigraphic, historic and archaeological approaches to Arabic inscriptions in a variety of media. Even though this very comprehensive idea ultimately could not be realized at full scale, van Berchem always retained his strong interest in archaeological and art historical questions. As part of the corpus project, he also collected '*inscriptions mobilières*' from inscribed objects that were spread over different museums and collections.¹⁰⁷ It was thus not only in Sarre's interest to arrange for van Berchem's collaboration – the show must have also been a unique possibility for the epigrapher.

Van Berchem arrived in Munich in late July and instantly started a thorough survey of the objects. His compilation of notes taken in Munich has largely been conserved with his estate and it eloquently documents his *modus operandi* via pencil notes found in his copy of the exhibition guidebook, obviously taken in front of the objects.¹⁰⁸ A considerable number of them were marked '*à voir*' – envisaged for closer examination. This resulted in a selection of pieces that he considered most interesting both in an art historical and an epigraphic sense. The majority of these pieces were examples of metalwork. He created a brief aide-mémoire for each object, usually including sketches of the basic outline, a short description with the most important attributes of the piece, the Arabic inscription and a first translation. Sometimes he made rubbings of particular details directly onto the sheet. The object itself and the reading of its textual message are very literally regarded as being on an equal footing with each other in van Berchem's work. He obviously did not see any methodological need to choose between the artistic value and documentary

¹⁰⁶ On the general importance of the collaboration between art historians and Islamicists see Korn, 'Islamische Kunstgeschichte', 145-6.

¹⁰⁷ For further reading on van Berchem's life and work see Ernst Herzfeld, 'Max van Berchem, geb. den 16. März 1863, gest. den 7. März 1921', *Der Islam*, 12(3), 1922, 206-13; Richard Ettinghausen, 'Islamic Art and Archaeology', in T. Cuyler Young, ed., *Near Eastern Culture and Society*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951, 17-47, esp. 27-8; Johann Fück, *Die Arabischen Studien in Europa. Bis in den Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1955, 290-2; Vernoit, *Discovering Islamic Art*, 206.

¹⁰⁸ The documents are also kept in the Fondation Max van Berchem, Geneva.

value of an object. In the publication of his work's results he explicitly explains the significance of inscriptions within the general corpus of Islamic art:

For a general historical approach, they offer exact data, even if in a compendious form. Yet, for art history they are indispensable, primarily as documents for a local and chronological identification of the products on which they are applied, and these in turn serve for a more precise identification of similar artworks on which no historical dates can be found.¹⁰⁹

A perfect example of this approach can be seen in van Berchem's work on the Bobrinsky Bucket. The piece was still largely unknown to European scholars at the time, and its appearance in the Munich show and the epigraphic reading that he undertook on this occasion can be considered the apogee of this object's fame in Islamic art history and the trigger for more substantiated research on inlaid metalwork. The inscription, which contains precise dates and important information about the place of production, the craftsmen and the social background of the patron and owner, had already been published by the Russian scholar N.I. Veselovsky in 1910, but only in a Russian translation and in a less than prominent publication, at least for German-speaking academics. As van Berchem states, this publication was only brought to his attention by Kühnel.¹¹⁰ It turned out that his own reading largely matched Veselovsky's, but it was only in the context of the Munich exhibition that the object and its inscription became known to a wider audience of European scholars.

Max van Berchem's estate also contains a number of photographs of objects from Munich, some of them in remarkably large formats that improve the legibility of the inscriptions. This testifies to another important element of the scholarly strategy that underpinned the exhibition: a systematic campaign of photography was undertaken under Sarre's careful supervision by the renowned Munich publishing house Bruckmann, which specialized in elaborate art books and periodicals.¹¹¹

When Sarre began work on the exhibition, he must have immediately realized what an outstanding opportunity it presented to gather an extremely large number of first-rate objects from diverse collections in one place. He wanted to turn this unique, ephemeral assemblage of objects into a lasting instrument for further research. The best and most up-to-date means to achieve this was a thorough photographic documentation of the main exhibits. To stress the professional

¹⁰⁹ Max van Berchem, from the introduction to his chapter on Arabic inscriptions: 'Arabische Inschriften', Sarre and Martin, *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken*, vol. 1, I: 'Der allgemeinen Geschichte dienen sie mit genauen, wenn auch kurzgefaßten Daten. Für die Kunstgeschichte sind sie aber unentbehrlich, zunächst als Urkunden für die örtliche und zeitliche Bestimmung der Erzeugnisse selbst, auf denen sie angebracht sind; und wiederum dienen letztere zur genaueren Bestimmung ähnlicher Kunstwerke, an denen keine historischen Daten zu finden sind.'

¹¹⁰ Max van Berchem, 'Arabische Inschriften', no. III. Van Berchem quotes Veselovsky's publication as 'Weselofski, *Heratski bronzowi kotelok iz sobraniya grafe Bobrinskago*, Petersburg 1910' and describes it as a richly illustrated art historical monograph on the piece.

¹¹¹ Katharina Krause, 'Argument oder Beleg. Das Bild im Text der Kunstgeschichte', in Katharina Krause, Klaus Niehr and Eva-Maria Hanebutt-Benz, eds, *Bilderlust und Lese Früchte. Das illustrierte Kunstbuch von 1750 bis 1920*, Leipzig: Seemann, 2005, 27-42, esp. 33.

character of this campaign, it was envisaged that it would be produced in cooperation with the Bavarian Academy of Sciences.¹¹² Even though this cooperation was never realized, it did not affect the spirit of the resolution and its momentous outcome: several hundred photographs were taken and prepared for duplication in collotype print, a state-of-the-art photomechanical method for reproducing fine art prints that allowed for a particularly fine rendition of details and shades, in circulations of up to 1000 copies. Polychrome prints were also possible in this technique, although this method was significantly more complex and costly.¹¹³ In spite of this, some selected objects were rendered in colour print. In early July 1910, the picture campaign had advanced far enough to offer selected prints of 400 exhibits in the show, for both general and professional audiences: this was the point at which the Munich 'masterpiece' canon became virtual, and from this moment it quickly started to circulate.¹¹⁴

A lasting canon, an art historical attitude

The background to the picture campaign was of course Sarre's vision for a large art historical publication of the most important 'masterpieces' from the exhibition. Quite early on during the run-up to the show, Sarre must have realized that it would not be possible to produce an extensive descriptive catalogue in time. It was thus decided to publish a comprehensive small-format guidebook-cum-catalogue that was brought out in four successive editions while the exhibition was running. The large catalogue project was not abandoned, however. The decision was made to take advantage of the exhibition's 'laboratory' conditions and finally publish the most important objects and results once the show's run was finished. It was not until 1912 that *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken muhammedanischer Kunst in München 1910*, edited by Sarre and Martin, was announced.¹¹⁵ However, this delay was not considered a weakness – it was rather perceived by the editors as a chance to confirm, adjust and conserve the main premises and observations of the event.¹¹⁶

A summary of Max van Berchem's work, featuring transcriptions and readings of the most important inscribed objects, was one important aspect of this publication, and by this means the Bobrinsky Bucket and several other iconic objects such as the D'Arenberg Basin finally took their place on the stage of scholarly publishing in a notable way. But the lion's share of the publication consisted of three lavishly illustrated volumes, a solid testament to the abundance of the photographic material. In its entirety, the book presents a condensed and crystallized version of the Munich canon. Unlike the exhibition itself, it is not arranged according to regions or dynastic periods, but to artistic techniques and materials, picking up the

¹¹² Letter from Friedrich Sarre to Max van Berchem, 5 October 1909.

¹¹³ For this technique see anon., 'Lichtdruck', *Lexikon der Kunst*, vol. 4, Munich: dtv, 1996, 322.

¹¹⁴ A remark in one of Sarre's letters on 17 June 1910 suggests that the pictures were already sold while the show was running. Moreover, Bruckmann issued a (price) list of available images as late as 1912, so the prints were obviously marketed for several years. See *Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst auf der Ausstellung München 1910. Verzeichnis der Photographien in unveränderlichem Platindruck*, Munich: Bruckmann, 1912.

¹¹⁵ Sarre and Martin, *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken*.

¹¹⁶ Sarre in the preface of Sarre and Martin, *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken*, vol. 1, V: 'bleibendes Denkmal der Ausstellung'.

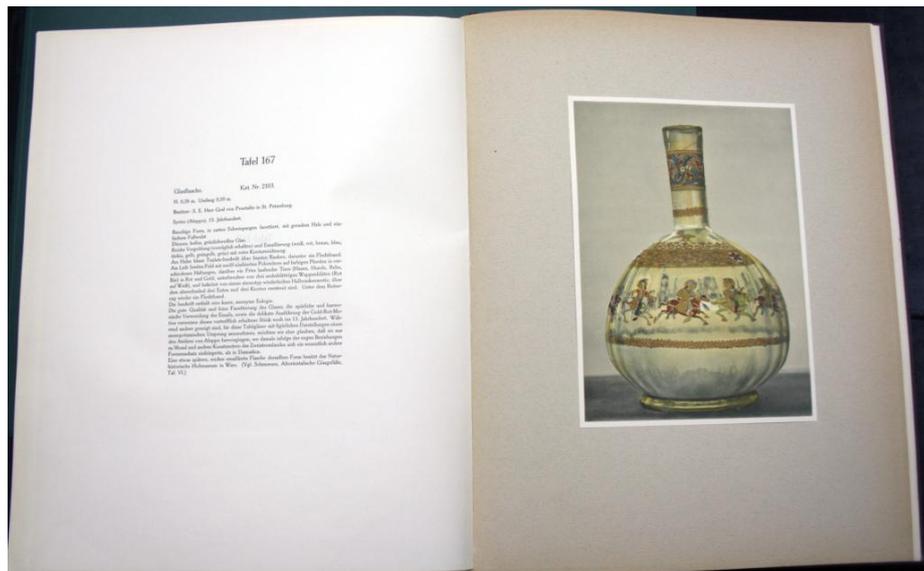


Figure 8. Double page from Sarre and Martin, *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken*, published by Bruckmann 1912, vol. 2, pl. 167: Glass bottle with polo players, now in the Museum of Islamic Art Berlin, inv. no. SMB I 2573.

idea of a unified, continuous ‘Muhammadan’ culture. Every chapter is preceded by an introductory text, followed by a sequence of plates from the Bruckmann production and corresponding descriptive texts (figure 8). The first volume contains manuscript paintings, book arts and carpets, while the second volume covers metalwork, glass and rock crystal. The third contains fabrics, arms and armour, and works in wood and ivory. Some sort of hierarchy must be implied here, since the enumeration starts with the arts of the book, which may be categorically closest to painting in the canonical European sense of a supreme artistic discipline. Also, in his introductory text on the paintings, Martin claims that the arts of the book have to be considered the ‘basis of all Oriental art’.¹¹⁷ Marginal categories such as jewellery or European depictions of the ‘Orient’, which had been part of the exhibition, were omitted entirely. Approximately 3,600 exhibits were condensed into a selection of 257 plates, each reproducing one single piece or a small comparative group of objects set against a neutral background, focusing on their aesthetic qualities as unique artworks. The selective and canon-defining concept of the ‘masterpiece’ was affirmed here and the pictorial language of the 1910 photo campaign was an important prerequisite for this. Art history as a visual discipline was thus confirming its attitude through a visual medium by applying a pictorial mode that was in accordance with the ‘masterpiece’ concept.

This emphasis on a very high standard of visual media may also partially explain the lavish format and trappings of the three volumes: they each measured forty by fifty centimetres, with images either bound or mounted on single sheets of firm cardboard. The resulting monumentality automatically led to exclusivity: the standard edition was available in buckram binding and cost 375 Marks for all three volumes, a considerable sum. For 500 Marks, they could even be bound in morocco leather. In any case, the three-volume set came in a large ‘protective box’, weighing

¹¹⁷ Martin in Sarre and Martin, *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken*, vol. 1, III: ‘Die Buchkunst ist die Grundlage aller orientalischen Kunst’.

thirty kilograms altogether. The three official volumes were a luxurious product in terms of economic value, and old-fashioned weighty tomes in terms of publication technique. In this respect, the publication appears formally less progressive than the exhibition itself. On the other hand, the large format and heavy paper quality was thoroughly appropriate to the promotion of this outstanding new canon of Masterpieces. 350 copies were already subscribed before they were delivered in March 1912.¹¹⁸ Even though it was anything but a handbook, this solemn publication was a veritable milestone in the history of academic literature on the arts of Islam, both in quality and scale.

However, despite Sarre's active promotion, the publication was largely met with indifference within the academic community and it received relatively few reviews or announcements.¹¹⁹ A remarkable exception to this is Josef Karabacek's long paper *Muhammedanische Kunststudien*, which he published in the proceedings of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna in 1913.¹²⁰ The Orientalist Karabacek was one of the most ardent critics of the show itself in 1910.¹²¹ He himself had already undertaken several decades of work on the material culture of Islam: his 1881 publication *Die persische Nadelmalerei Susandschird* was a seminal work for early carpet studies.¹²² Yet he adopted the perspective of a historian and philologist in his work, rather than a *Kunstwissenschaftler's* point of view. His approach always remained primarily focused on text and historical narrative, with the object as a confirmation or complement to written sources. This is why he was so critical of Sarre's pronouncedly art historical methods, and even Max van Berchem's epigraphic contributions could not prevent Karabacek from turning his *Muhammedanische Kunststudien* into a devastating critique of the new art historical trend, exemplified in his view by the first volume of the 1912 publication. While he describes it a 'repository of exquisite material',¹²³ he believed this material had been treated in a premature and erroneous way. Running over a hundred pages, his arguments veer from sharp and convincing to petty and polemical. In any case, it leaves the reader in no doubt that it is part of a fundamental discussion about epistemological method and academic sovereignties of interpretation: ultimately, Karabacek could not accept the art historical approach, with its focus on the object as an aesthetic entity, and claimed priority for philological source studies.

¹¹⁸ Bruckmann Archive, Verlagschronik 1912.

¹¹⁹ Sarre tried to incite museum professionals such as Wilhelm von Bode and the Japanologist Otto Kummel to review the publication: transcript of a letter from Sarre to Bode, 9 September 1911, in the archive of the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin. He also toured the 'Vorderasiatische Gesellschaft' in Vienna and the 'Kunsthistorische Gesellschaft' in Berlin in early 1911, giving lectures about the exhibition and showing samples of the picture plates which were still in preparation at that time: anon., 'Ausstellungen Mohammedanischer Kunstwerke', *Österreichische Monatsschrift für den Orient*, 37, 1911, 20-1; a transcript of Sarre's lecture in Berlin: *Kunstgeschichtliche Gesellschaft Berlin, Sitzungsbericht II, 1911, Ordentliche Sitzung am Freitag, den 14. Februar 1911*, Berlin: 1911.

¹²⁰ Josef von Karabacek, 'Zur orientalischen Altertumskunde IV. Muhammedanische Kunststudien', *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, phil-hist. Klasse*, 172, 1, 1913, 3-109.

¹²¹ Josef von Karabacek, 'Zur orientalischen Altertumskunde III. Riza-i Abbasi, ein persischer Miniaturmaler', *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, phil-hist. Klasse*, 167, 1, 1911, 1-48.

¹²² Josef von Karabacek, *Die persische Nadelmalerei Susandschird. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungs-Geschichte der Tapiserie de Haute Lisse*, Leipzig: Seemann, 1881.

¹²³ Karabacek, *Muhammedanische Kunststudien*, 3: 'Fundgrube erlesenen Materials'.

This conflict added one significant episode to a larger controversy between Sarre and Karabacek which had been triggered by the Munich exhibition.¹²⁴ For the art historian, this damning review spurred him to defend and justify his position even more insistently. And indeed, there were some favourable reactions from the art historical side, even if mainly from the international community: it seems as though such pedantic disciplinary quarrels were perhaps more characteristic of German-speaking academia. The two most important reviews of the publication appeared in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and in the *Burlington Magazine*.¹²⁵ Both expressed some criticism, mainly on formal or terminological issues, but ultimately acknowledged the eminent importance of the publication, primarily for its outstanding picture corpus.

In fact, these images were reprinted in different art historical media throughout the following decades. The objects they showed became canonical, the pictures themselves their iconic agents. No wonder, then, that during the 1920s ideas for a second edition of the *Meisterwerke* publication were pursued. However, these plans were never to see the light of day, mainly for organizational reasons, as Jens Kröger has explained elsewhere.¹²⁶

Instead, a good share of the Munich pictures made a joint appearance again in a very prominent publication: the first edition of the *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte* was also the first series of modern art historical handbooks which provided an exclusive volume on the arts and architecture of Islam.¹²⁷ It was edited by Josef Strzygowski's former students Heinrich Glück and Ernst Diez, the latter having been one of the 'academic collaborators' in the Munich exhibition. Fifteen years later, in the *Propyläen* section on Islamic arts and crafts, Diez reverted explicitly to the catalogue descriptions and images from Munich, largely keeping to the same comparisons of objects. Alluding to the exclusive format and small circulation of the three monumental volumes from 1912, he made it clear that the handy *Propyläen* issue would be a welcome medium to spread the wealth of material and the knowledge achieved in Munich to an even wider audience.¹²⁸ The placement of these images in the canonical *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte* not only resulted in a condensed and more popularized version of Sarre's masterpiece canon that harkened back to the exhibition's initial concept, it was also an important confirmation of the growing disciplinary and methodological claims to make Islamic art subject to the European discipline of art history.

¹²⁴ See Sarre's vigorous response to Karabacek's first critique of 1910: Friedrich Sarre, 'Zu Josef von Karabaceks "Riza-i Abbasi". Eine Entgegnung', *Der Islam*, 2, 1911, 196-219.

¹²⁵ Raphael Petrucci, 'Les chefs-d'oeuvre de l'Art Musulman à l'Exposition de Munich', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 4, 8, 1912, 79-84; Martin Conway, 'The Catalogue of the Munich Exhibition of Musulman Art', *Burlington Magazine*, 23, 1913, 232-7.

¹²⁶ Kröger, 'The 1910 Exhibition and Berlin', 84-5.

¹²⁷ Heinrich Glück and Ernst Diez, *Die Kunst des Islam, Propyläen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 5, Berlin: Propyläen, 1925. On the *Propyläen* series see also Dorothea Peters, 'Kunstverlage', in Georg Jäger, Ernst Fischer *et al.*, eds, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, vol 2, part 1, Weimarer Republik, Munich: Walter de Gruyter, 2007, 463-508; Hubert Locher, "'Musée Imaginaire" und historische Narration. Zur Differenzierung visueller und verbaler Darstellung von Geschichte', in Katharina Krause and Klaus Niehr, eds, *Kunstwerk – Abbild – Buch. Das illustrierte Kunstbuch von 1730 bis 1930*, Munich and Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007, 53-75, esp. 66.

¹²⁸ Diez in Glück and Diez, *Kunst des Islam*, 557. According to Peters, Kunstverlage 475, the first edition of the *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte* had a circulation of 5,000 copies.

In sum, the existence of this now canonical corpus of images proved to be vital to a discipline that often dealt with ‘migratory’ objects: many of the Munich exhibits, particularly those from private collections, have changed hands since 1910: some have even disappeared altogether, while others have re-emerged after decades and can be easily identified by their Munich pedigree. One of the most striking examples is the famous Iznik plate with pomegranate decoration, now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin (inv. no. I.1992.2). In 1910, it was on loan in Munich from the collection of Edgar Haniel von Haimhausen, an Imperial legation councillor in London. The plate was never displayed again after Munich – but in the early 1990s it turned up on the art market. The Munich photograph of the piece, which had been published and republished in the interim, had secured the object fame during its absence from the visible world of public exhibitions, and it was finally bought for the Museum of Islamic Art where it is prominently placed in the permanent exhibition.¹²⁹ In this case, the claim to ‘masterpiece’ status, which implies that these pieces are of indisputable museum quality, was maintained through the circulation of reproductions and ultimately found fulfilment after more than eighty years.

Reprise: Islamic art and the pluralistic syntax of modernity

It goes without saying that the epistemic step so strongly promoted by the Munich exhibition and publication was an ambivalent one: it invoked a categorical elevation of material culture from Muslim regions, but at the same time subordinated these objects via the Western gaze in terms of their presentation and analysis. In this context, it is also interesting to compare this seemingly objective, scholarly approach with the artistic reactions it triggered. It would be far beyond the scope of this paper to describe in detail the responses of the various avantgarde artists who visited the show but it should be mentioned that the sober ‘scientific’ mode of presentation was very well-received by pioneers of modernity such as Wassily Kandinsky, who reviewed the exhibition for a Russian art periodical,¹³⁰ or Henri Matisse, who travelled from Paris to see it.¹³¹ Even though their artistic positions were different, both artists took advantage of the decontextualized, formal and strictly aesthetic access to the object that was granted by the exhibition, focusing on the formal qualities of Islamic arts such as ornamental and colouristic style, or the independence of the works from strict mimesis – aspects that were quite in line with

¹²⁹ For information about the acquisition of this piece the author thanks Volkmar Enderlein; see also Gisela Helmecke, cat. no. 20, in Dercon, Krempel and Shalem, *The Future of Tradition*, 110.

¹³⁰ Wassily Kandinsky, ‘Letters from Munich’, English translation in Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, eds, *Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art*, 2 vols, Boston: Da Capo Press, 1994, vol. 1, 73-6; Russian original in *Apollon*, 11, 1910, 13-7.

¹³¹ The affinities between modernism and Islamic art, explicitly in respect to the Munich exhibition, has been addressed most notably by Fereshteh Daftari, *The Influence of Persian Art on Gauguin, Matisse, and Kandinsky*, New York and London: Garland, 1991; Rémi Labrusse, *La condition de l’image*, Paris: Gallimard, 1999, esp. 68-94; Rémi Labrusse, ‘The Avantgarde and Islamophilia: Anatomy of an Exhibition’, in Dercon, Krempel and Shalem, *The Future of Tradition*, 25-31; Joachim Kaak, ‘Hugo von Tschudi, die Ausstellung von “Meisterwerken muhammedanischer Kunst” und die Moderne’, in Lermer and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 159-73; and, with a remarkable focus on applied arts, Annette Hagedorn, ‘Der Einfluss der Ausstellung “Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst” auf die zeitgenössische Kunst’, in Lermer and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 285-315.

the 'masterpiece' criteria of the scholarly approach.¹³² This illustrates the close relationship between a given time's art historical methods and its artistic developments: the art historian's subject may be historical, his social and political background may be conservative or even reactionary – but his methodological approach is often just as contemporary as the avantgardist's artistic premises.¹³³

However, it would seem that artists were not necessarily interested in the categorization or identification of the exhibits themselves. They rather considered these criteria as a confirmation or catalyst in their own quest for new pictorial solutions.¹³⁴ A radically subjective position can thus be observed, exploiting 'foreign' aesthetic categories, but at the same time inscribing them into the aesthetic syntax of modernity. It also adds a cosmopolitan, modernist dimension to the exhibition that probably went far beyond its initial scope. At the same time, it is a reminder of the fact that any perception of art – and probably even more so across cultural borders – is subjective and depends upon the recipient's standpoint, be it scholarly or artistic. In this perspective, the Munich exhibition of *Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art* can also be considered a general case study for the pluralism of modern definitions and perceptions of art, both within and beyond academia.

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¹³² See also Pierre Schneider, *Matisse*, Munich: Prestel, 1984, 160.

¹³³ Beat Wyss, *Der Wille zur Kunst. Zur ästhetischen Mentalität der Moderne*, Cologne: DuMont, 1997, esp. 99, 115.

¹³⁴ See for example Matisse's much-quoted own testimony: 'Thus for me, the revelation has come from the Orient ... It is much easier to dedicate oneself if one sees one's efforts confirmed by a tradition, however old it may be. It helps you to overcome the divide.' ('La révélation m'est donc venue de l'Orient ... On se livre d'autant mieux qu'on voit ses efforts confirmés par une tradition, si ancienne fût-elle. Elle vous aide à sauter le fossé.') Quoted in Henri Matisse, *Ecrits et propos sur l'art*, texte, notes, et index établies par Dominique Fourcade, Paris: Hermann, 1972, 204.