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HERAUSGEGEBEN VON BERT G. FRAGNER UND VELIZAR SADOVSKI

NR. 62

BARBARA KARL

TREASURY – KUNSTKAMMER – MUSEUM:
OBJECTS FROM THE ISLAMIC WORLD IN
THE MUSEUM COLLECTIONS OF VIENNA

Verlag der
Österreichischen Akademie
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INTRODUCTION

Vienna's public museums house a vast quantity of objects from the Islamic world. Exact numbers are still difficult to determine but the estimate approaches 40.000 works of very different quality. The objects represent the time period from early Islamic times, the eighth and ninth centuries, up to the twentieth century. They come from all over the Islamic world, from Indonesia and India to Central Asia, to the Maghreb and the Balkans. These regions roughly delineate the Islamic world as geographically conceived in this project. Obviously it is very difficult to draw parameters here, since innumerable historical events shifted the borders of the different regions. During most of the time period in question frontiers were not closed for it was impossible to really control them. Borders by the sea and on land were until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries only sporadically controlled and often insecure, but always permeable and vivid places of exchange. The regions comprising the Islamic world were and are neither ethnically nor religiously homogeneous. In regions such as the Indian subcontinent, Indonesia or the Balkans people from various religious and ethnic backgrounds have been living next to one another for long periods, the Islamic core regions have always included a heterogeneous population. It is thus often impossible and not really sensible to categorize exactly what is and what is not Islamic. Instead of drawing clear lines the project attempts to be inclusive rather than exclusive and often must leave questions of Islamic identity unanswered.

To date, no survey of the objects from the Islamic world that are today in Viennese museums has been written and many of the works have neither been studied nor published. One reason for this may be their dispersal over a large number of inherently different collections that deal foremost with European Art. Another reason may be the large quantity of extant items and their very heterogeneous nature that makes the corpus difficult to catalogue. The project does not only attempt to be geographically inclusive but also artistically comprehensive as it includes objects of very different types, such as for instance a coarse nineteenth-century plain cotton towel from Bengal, as well as a splendidly elaborate late thirteenth-century enamelled glass amphora from Syria. In order to stress the value of Vienna's ethnographic collections, such items are included as well. The term "art" as coined in

European art history should only be applied to objects of the Islamic world with caution. Translating it into the relevant languages, Arabic, Persian or Turkish is difficult; a telling fact since especially Islamic art largely refers to objects of daily use and decorative arts. The definition of the term Islamic art has received much attention by scholars in the field of art history.¹ Within this project its cultural definition includes artistic objects created in regions that were Muslim dominated or Muslim or strongly influenced by Muslim culture. It includes religious and secular objects. This project illustrates the cultural variety and richness of the artistic production from a diverse Islamic world and attempts to be inclusive rather than exclusive in this point. Obviously, the more valuable objects are given more attention and are fewer and better documented, but the less important items, much larger in quantity and largely unpublished, are given ample space and their importance in the context of the collections is emphasised.

The present book attempts to unite the objects from the Islamic world present in Vienna's museums within this short volume. If done in a detailed way, the project would fill thousands of pages. The author had only two years. This slim volume provides researchers with a tool to navigate through the holdings of objects from the Islamic world in Vienna's museums. It does not represent a detailed discussion and description of all of the circa 40.000 objects and it will surely not answer all questions concerning the relevant objects. The author permitted herself to focus on different – in her view – very significant topics and to elaborate on them. This study should provoke many more questions and point to future fields of research. The aim is to inspire researchers and *aficionados* of the arts of the Islamic world to continue the study of the objects only briefly laid out here.

The museum collections of Vienna largely grew out of the imperial collections of the Habsburg dynasty. The importance of the history of Habsburg collecting is well known and can hardly be overestimated. The art collections were an immanent part of the self image of the dynasty and, as will be seen, objects from the Islamic world were part of them from a very early date. Their presence is documented in all the complex layers of the history of collecting: from the medieval treasury, to the early modern *Kunst- und Wunderkammern* (chambers of art and wonder), to the imperial armouries, the Enlightenment collections and the creation of museums during the nineteenth century. Discussing the objects from the Islamic world without regard

¹ For example: GRABAR 1973; also FOLSACH 2001, 19-29 and BLAIR/BLOOM 2009, vol. II 310-313.

to the history of Habsburg collecting would deprive them of and isolate them from an important part of their history. However, in order to integrate all the objects into the histories of the Viennese collections and to study their reception at different times would require a thorough study of the coeval inventories and documents. This would go far beyond the scope of this project and remains to be researched in the future. Nevertheless the structure of this study will roughly follow the history of the development of Habsburg collecting from the Middle Ages through the early modern period up to the creation of Vienna's large museums during the nineteenth century.

The objects from the Islamic world are today distributed in different museums: the *Schatzkammer* and *Kunstskammer* collections of the *Kunst-historische Museum* (hereafter KHM). Parts of the old *Rüstkammern* (armouries) and the holdings of *Schloss Ambras* survive despite an eventful history in a fragmentary but still fascinating state and also form departments within the KHM. Several coins and medals from the Islamic world from the imperial collections were integrated into the department of numismatics of the same museum and the *Wagenburg* integrated the holdings of the imperial stables, including Ottoman harnesses and an Ottoman tent and textiles. Many of the old imperial carpets are now in the *Österreichische Museum für angewandte Kunst* (hereafter MAK). The holdings—mostly weapons—of the *kaiserliche* and the *bürgerliche Zeughäuser*, the old imperial and the civil arsenals, were given to the *Heeresgeschichtliche-* and *Wienmuseum* respectively. Most books from the Islamic world are now in the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek* (National Library). There is also a little studied collection of *turcica* in the *Wienbibliothek*. Furthermore there are objects in the Museum of the *Deutsche Orden* (the Teutonic Order; as such a private museum of the order but closely linked to Habsburg collecting and for that reason part of the project unlike the collection of the Mechitarist order which remains to be studied in a further scholarly context), the *Dom-museum*, the *Albertina* and *Schloss Schönbrunn*. Several items from the Islamic world of imperial provenance remain in the *Hofmobiliendepot*. A few objects are now in the *Naturhistorische Museum*. The most voluminous collection of *Islamica* is in the *Museum für Völkerkunde*.

In its structure the study attempts to follow the history of Habsburg collecting. A work that significantly eased navigation of the complexities of Habsburg collecting was Alphons Lhotsky's *Geschichte der Sammlungen* (History of the collections).² The single objects or groups of objects will

² LHOTSKY 1941-1945.

always be discussed within the context of the museum collection in order to make it easier for the reader to find out where the object is located. Many objects are accompanied by their inventory number and where extant, a selected bibliography. The order of the museums that house objects from the Islamic world discussed here follows the history of collecting. Departing from some of the earliest objects present in Vienna, the study begins with the *Dommuseum*, then continues with the single departments of the KHM, which includes an old nucleus of collecting. The different departments of this museum reflect the history and complexity of Habsburg collecting best. Within the discussion of the KHM, the roughly chronological structure goes as follows: it starts with the *Schatzkammer* and the *Kunstammer* and then deals with the collection of *Schloss Ambras* in Innsbruck which is today part of the KHM. Following this is a discussion of the Arms and Armoury section. It then continues with the *Wagenburg*, the collection of antiquities, the Egyptian department and the section of the musical instruments. The next collection to be discussed is also related to Habsburg collecting since it was formed by one of the members of the imperial family, the Museum of the *Deutsche Orden*. The holdings of the following two museums are closely linked to the military endeavours of the Emperors against the Ottomans: the *Wienmuseum* and the *Heeresgeschichtliche Museum*. The next section explores the eighteenth and nineteenth-century collections, *Schloss Schönbrunn*, the *Hofmobiliendepot* and the *Silberkammer*, the Albertina and the *Schloss Belvedere*. The collections of the National Library will only partly be taken into account here: the manuscripts and official state calligraphies from the Islamic world of the National Library have been largely published, and the corpus of the *Papyrusmuseum* is too vast and specific, to be included in this brief study.³ Only the Map and Globemuseum of the National Library will be discussed in some detail. The *turcica* collection of the *Wienbibliothek* remains to be researched in a more specialised study as well. The nineteenth century witnessed the development of large museums such as the *Naturhistorische Museum*, the *k.k. österreichische Museum für Kunst und Industrie* (later MAK), the *Museum für Völkerkunde* and the *Museum für Volkskunde* and the *Technische Museum*. The works in these collections will be examined in the final section.

Groups of objects that were published recently in coherent monographs or catalogues, such as the splendid carpet collection from the Islamic world of the MAK, the manuscripts of the National Library and the objects from

³ DUDA 1983-2008; AFSHAR 2003; PROCHÁZKA-EISL/RÖMER 2007.

Afghanistan, Kurdistan and Yemen of the *Museum für Völkerkunde* will be mentioned but they will not be dealt with in detail. The same applies to highly specialised parts of the collections such as the numismatic collection of the KHM and the papyrus collection of the National Library. In addition to that, groups of items, such as the collection of amulets in the KHM and the Iznik ceramics of the MAK and the *Museum für Völkerkunde*, are dealt with in a general way. As mentioned previously, very recently Ebba Koch coordinated a website including the most important objects from the Islamic world in Vienna's museums.⁴ Focus will be given to their contextualisation within the larger scope of collecting. In order to introduce the complexity of the collections a brief overview is provided in the following essay.

⁴ For an overview see also the website coordinated by Ebba Koch www.museum-islamischerkunst.net (consulted: June 3, 2010).

THE COLLECTION OF OBJECTS FROM THE ISLAMIC WORLD IN VIENNA

This essay provides the reader with a brief overview and weaves the objects from the Islamic world into the history of Habsburg collecting. The objects of Vienna's collections mentioned here will be discussed again as the reader proceeds to the description of single museum collections where documentation and bibliographical details of the items are included. In addition, some telling objects linked to Habsburg collecting but not in Vienna will be examined. Given its unique position in history, the bibliography on Habsburg collecting is very rich. Several studies have been dedicated, if not alone to objects from the Islamic world in the Habsburg collection, then to the rare and exotic objects in general.⁵ Many works were published in the catalogues of single museums and scholarly articles by museum curators and researchers. This publication attempts to unite all the holdings of objects from the Islamic world and to present them at least as a virtual unity.

Objects from the Islamic World in the Habsburg Treasuries of the 14th and 15th Centuries

Objects from the Islamic world were present at Christian European courts throughout the Middle Ages. During this period Europe was an economically peripheral region with slowly developing cultural activity, the economic, cultural and aesthetic center was located in the East, the Islamic world, the Byzantine Empire, China and India. Apart from some Italian city-states and Muslim dominated Spain, Europe was economically underdeveloped and could supply the Eastern core centres only with raw materials and slaves. The production of internationally appreciated goods was scattered between China, India, the Islamic world and the Byzantine Empire. Owning luxury objects originating in the East enhanced the owners' status and thus evoked their claim to power. Silk textiles were of special value in Europe, as they were exclusively available from the economic core regions, the Islamic world, the Byzantine Empire, India and China. The coronation vestments of

⁵ See for example: BORN 1936, 93-111; DUDA 1985, 43-56; KHM VIENNA 2000; TRNEK/HAAG 2001; LEOBEN 2006; SCHALLABURG 2007; MAK VIENNA 2009.

the Holy Roman Emperor in the *Schatzkammer* created in Norman Sicily (1133/34), one of the outlying regions included in the project, include the earliest and most complete surviving high quality textiles from the Islamic world in Vienna; the fourteenth-century Ilkhanid burial shroud of Duke Rudolf IV housed in the *Domuseum* is yet another. Both textiles were of high value and very rare and endowed their wearers with a sense of power and splendour. Only during the thirteenth century were Italian silk producing centres—first in Lucca and soon after in Venice, Genoa and Florence—able to compete. The production of silk in these cities slowly substituted the imports from the East.

The crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries increased the direct contacts between Europe and the Eastern core regions and therefore the exchange of objects was intensified. The market for relics from the Holy Land, many of which were transported in containers fabricated in the East, flourished. Examples for this are the two enamelled Syrian glass amphorae that once held relics from the Holy Land and were part of the *Heiltumsschatz* (the treasure of relics) of the cathedral of St. Stephan. They were already one hundred years old at the time they were first documented in the inventory of the *Heiltumsschatz* from the second half of the fourteenth century, which represents an early form of systemised collection, housing not only relics, but their containers and items with relic status. Due to their great spiritual importance certain relics and their containers are well documented during the Middle Ages. Originally the relics of St. Stephan were part of the treasury of Duke Rudolf IV *der Stifter* who donated this collection to the cathedral not only for spiritual but also for political reasons.⁶ This specific collection, the *Heiltumsschatz*, was far more homogeneous in content than the treasury since it included relics and their containers and was created to serve a specific purpose: to enhance the importance of the church and the Ducal capital, Vienna, as a centre of pilgrimage and power.⁷

An important question in the medieval and early modern context concerns the organisation of the objects within the collection for it provides information about their reception. In the medieval treasury, objects of very different nature and use were all kept together and represented a valuable but surprising mix of objects, at times even more curious than in the *Kunst- und Wunderkammern*: precious metals in the form of coins, jewelry and artistic objects, valuable dresses and vestments (maybe also the golden Ilkhanid silk

⁶ Objects discussed in: SALIGER 1987.

⁷ BAUM 1996.

used as a burial shroud of Rudolf IV), natural rarities such as prehistoric bones, exotic objects, books, charters and documents and of course relics that protected the dynasty were stored together mostly in large chests that followed the ruler from place to place. The quantity of items was usually not very large and especially the precious metals were in constant flux: they were used, gifted, robbed, captured and if necessary melted down. If the treasure did not travel with the sovereign, it was stored in a treasure chamber situated near him in a safe place within the castle.

Several objects from the Islamic world have a documented medieval provenance linked to the treasury of the ruling Austrian families (both Babenberger and Habsburgs) but are not kept in museum collections in Vienna. A tenth or eleventh-century ivory writing box from Spain was used as a reliquary and was reportedly in the possession of Margrave Leopold III of Austria (1095-1136), the patron saint of Vienna, and Austria and founder of the monastery of Klosterneuburg in which it is kept today together with fragments of valuable vestments attributed to him. However, apart from a simple silk veil, the textile fragments are dated to the fourteenth century and originated in the Eastern Mediterranean, Iran or Central Asia but they are still regarded as Leopold's relics.⁸ A Fatimid rock crystal crescent of the Caliph Ali az-Zahir (1021-1036), now in the *Germanische Museum* in Nuremberg, was formerly part of the Habsburg collections where it first listed in the inventory of the *Geistliche Schatzkammer* in 1758. The reason the crescent is mentioned at this point is that it fits into the pattern of medieval collecting: the inscribed horse ornament from twelfth-century Egypt was probably part of the booty from the Fatimid treasuries; in mid-fourteenth-century Venice it was mounted into a reliquary. How it entered the Habsburg collections is unknown but it may have served as a diplomatic gift.⁹ The piece became victim to one of the most notorious art fakers or reassemblers of nineteenth-century Europe. Salomon Weininger officially restored it for the *Schatzkammer* but took out parts of the original and replaced them with copies (including the rock crystal) in the art market from where it was bought by the *Germanische Museum*.¹⁰ Furthermore, the *Kunstammer* of the KHM houses an eleventh-century ivory olifant from Southern Italy that was used as a reliquary by Count Albrecht III of Habsburg, as a Latin inscription

⁸ See for example: SIEVERNICH 1989, 548, 549; KÜHNEL 1971, 80, No. 134. For the textiles: PETRASCHKE-HEIM 1986; BOHR/HÖSLINGER/HUBER 2011, 34-40.

⁹ See for example: SHALEM 1996, 62-63.

¹⁰ RAINER 2008, 62-67.

proves.¹¹ Some of the few surviving Habsburg inventories of the fifteenth century list carpets. These were mostly used in a domestic context as table covers, rather than laid out on the floor.¹²

The items mentioned illustrate that objects from the Islamic world were received already in very different contexts in the medieval period: as decorative furnishings of the palaces, as objects of representation in the treasury and, most importantly for the time, as containers of relics or as relics. The glass amphorae originally filled with relics of the *Dommuseum* may represent an example of one such object. They were likely souvenirs or gifts of a high-ranking pilgrim to the Holy Land. As we continue through time, we will see that the latter use will decrease significantly.

With the increasing political significance of the Habsburg dynasty during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the content of their treasury grew by way of inheritance, dowries, acquisitions and gifts, despite their reputation of being notoriously overloaded with debt. A necessary and logical result of this increasing accumulation was the reorganisation of the holdings of the treasury. Books, documents, precious metals in the form of coins or objects, and items of daily use such as clothes were successively singled out and stored separately.¹³

The Growth of the Collections in the Sixteenth Century

During the sixteenth century, the sovereigns became more sedentary. As a consequence, they had separate rooms allotted to their treasury and the rest of their collection, parts of which developed into the *Kunst- und Wunderkammern*. A more stable storage system allowed for the organisation of the collection in a more effective way. With this initial separation began the process of division and classification that promoted the development of research and science and was refined over the following centuries culminating in the creation of the great museums in the nineteenth century. The sorted out and reorganised *Schatzkammer* was reduced in number but continued to be the most important section of Habsburg collecting.

In the view of coeval observers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the regions dominated by rulers adhering to the Islamic faith were largely comprised of three rising powers: the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Indian Great Mughals. The expanding Habsburg dominions found a formidable

¹¹ LEOBEN 2006, 50.

¹² RIEGL 1892, 326-331; LHOTSKY 1941-1945, Zweiter Teil/Erste Hälfte, 1941-1945, 52.

¹³ LHOTSKY 1941-1945, Zweiter Teil/Erste Hälfte, 1941-1945, 1-108.