

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 *Kunstammer* 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).