

DISTANCE LEARNING AND THE MUSEUM: THE ARTS OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM IN NEW YORK

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Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Ed. Maryam D. Ekhtiar, Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2011. xvi + 431 pp. ISBN 978-0-300-17585-1.

Now that the newly refurbished galleries devoted to the arts of the Islamic world at the Metropolitan Museum and the accompanying book have been available for two years, a conventional review hardly makes sense. As editor of this journal, I had hoped for a review in our previous volume that would have combined observations about both the book and the new galleries, but tragic circumstances (mentioned in my editorial preface to the current volume of this journal) prevented that from happening. In the meantime, Emine Fetvacı (2013) has provided precisely such a review, and, of course, there are other assessments of the new galleries, notably one by David Roxburgh (2012).¹ A very nice, 11-minute video showing the new galleries and narrated by curators Sheila Canby and Navina Haidar explains the concept behind the new installation <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nz-s4ah-wwf8>> and certainly encourages a visit.²

My goal here is a bit different from that of such distinguished specialists on Islamic art: how might one who is not a specialist learn about the subject if, like this reviewer, he or she has not yet had the opportunity to visit the Met? Part of the answer, of course, could lie in exploring resources other than the Met. However, the remounting of its famous collection, considered to be one of the most comprehensive in any museum, and the appearance of this book are a good reason to focus primarily on what that one institution provides.

At the outset, one must recognize that Islamic art as a "subject" is so ill defined that any attempt to study "it" is fraught with difficulties. Someone as knowledgeable and thoughtful as the late specialist on Islamic art, Oleg Grabar, grappled seriously with

the question of how to define it and ended up with an answer that in some ways is too vague to serve as a guide.³ Let's start by reviewing what Grabar had to say in a short essay (1976b) that appeared in conjunction with the opening of the Met's previous installation:

...[I]t is foolish, illogical and historically incorrect to talk of a single Islamic artistic expression. A culture of thirteen centuries which extended from Spain to Indonesia is not now and was not in the past a monolith, and to every generalization there are dozens of exceptions.

He then went on to single out three aspects of "Islamic art" which he found to be distinctive. It is "an art at the service of a society. Practically all ... artistic activities were ... directed to making daily, public or private, life more attractive or more exciting... Islamic art is characterized by an aesthetic deocratization." Secondly, it was an art "concerned with surface decoration" or "ornamentation," which often emphasized geometry in the designs. Thirdly, it is an art in which "a whole ... subsumes an almost infinite number of parts which are virtually independent of each other," in which there is "a tension between parts and whole." Grabar stressed that it was very difficult to explain in any convincing way the why of these features. At very least it was clear to him that "Islamic" art does not necessarily embody something specific to Islam as a religion, even if religious views and practices contributed in important ways to the formation of the arts of the Islamic world.

Grabar (1976a) reviewed that earlier Met installation, a review which seems to have had an impact on

the thinking underlying the new one by the Met and is worth quoting here:

There are two striking characteristics of any large collection of Islamic art. One is that nearly all items in it have a practical function which does not require the technical elaborations of forms which normally concern the art historian.... [T]he functions involved are always those of daily life: washing, pouring, eating, keeping perfumes, reading, playing chess, sitting, writing. We could conclude that the creative energy involved in Islamic art is an entirely gratuitous addition to the setting of life, a pure pleasure of the senses, whose peculiarity is that it was extended to a far greater number of techniques and social levels than most other traditions.

...[A] second characteristic of a large collection like the Metropolitan's [is]: many objects within it are remarkably alike in technique, size, shape, style and decorative theme. To put it another way, *it is as though there are no masterpieces*, no monument which emerges as being so superior to others within a comparable series that a qualitative or developmental sequence can easily be built up...

These remarks suggest that *the monuments of Islamic art may not really belong in an art museum whose setting detaches them from their purpose*.... This requirement of a context is important in that the objects lead constantly to the architectural setting in which they could be used. [*My emphasis – DW.*]

So, what is one to make of a book and collection containing "masterpieces" of an art, which arguably had no masterpieces, objects which perhaps "do not really belong in an art museum." Has the Met risen to the challenges posed by the limitations of museum display? For the viewer and learner, those challenges are all the greater, especially if approaching the subject and the collection at a distance, mediated by the printed page and, importantly, by the museum's online resources, about which I shall comment at length.

The curators at the Met and the authors who have contributed to this book deliberately (perhaps wisely) have avoided committing themselves to any kind of limiting definition of their subject, which in practical terms has been determined first of all by the existence of a curatorial department in the museum. What we have here is arts spread across a huge world in which Islam became either the dominant religion or one of the most important ones, but in which regional variation and the creative adaptation of other artistic traditions produced an art that may share much but also be infinitely varied. The Met's previous installation was pioneering in its attempt to display this diversity and

yet invite the viewer to tease out some of the connecting threads. The new installation seems to maintain that general goal but by its arrangement of the objects and the placement of the galleries vis-à-vis adjoining galleries within the museum, may now invite the viewer to think about other kinds of unifying threads and contextualization not envisaged by the curators several decades ago. As both Fetvaci and Roxburgh have noted with approval, the new galleries do provide a much better architectural "feel" for the context of the art than did the old ones. Clearly there is no single path to understanding and appreciation of this collection, even if one can walk through the galleries in the numbered sequence or read through this book in pretty much the same sequence.

The book is arguably a masterpiece for its genre, which may not in fact have been intended to be read straight through. Repetitive information in often consecutive entries suggests they might have been conceived as separate points of focus, a kind of reference work, especially since one object and the next may in some respects be so different. As Fetvaci has emphasized, the book presents not merely a review of the current state of knowledge regarding the history of the collection and many of its objects but also contains new insights which will be of value even to specialists in the field. One of the important contributions that she notes will be valuable for the specialist is the consistent effort throughout to provide transcriptions of any texts on objects and their translation. So we get the Quranic quotations, the Persian poetry, the felicitations, the craftsmen's credits.

The team of contributors to the volume is a distinguished one, each author given some freedom in how he or she might present the subject. The organization of the material is both chronological and geographical, corresponding both to the organization within the galleries themselves and that in what is currently considered a standard published treatment of Islamic art.⁴ After opening chapters on the history of the collections and the thinking behind the new installation, the book contains a chapter on the art of the early Caliphates, then switches to regionally focused chapters: Spain, North Africa, Western Mediterranean; Eastern Islamic Lands (9th-14th centuries); Egypt and Syria (10th to 16th centuries); Iran and Central Asia (15th to 19th centuries); the Ottoman court; and finally South Asia (14th to 19th centuries). Each of these chapters covers a lot of ground chronologically; so despite the regional focus, which in any event embraces a lot of "micro-regions," naturally there is substantial variation over time reflecting both internal developments and the assimilation of external influences. Some "Islamic art" indeed was produced not for Muslims but for non-Muslims within Islamic polities or for export;

and objects never intended for non-Muslims sometimes were appropriated to non-Islamic uses (e.g., for Christian church vestments).

Each chapter opens with a summary essay that tends to emphasize political history and places at least some of the objects in their historical context. The complexities of political history can defeat most general readers, since so much has to be compressed for such essays. Some of the essays (and the descriptive paragraphs which accompany each individual object) stand out for their ability to focus the reader on that which is really important and interesting. For example, Stefano Carboni opens the section on Egypt and Syria (p. 136) with a concise listing of the features of the art: "symmetry, repetition, overall patterning and abstraction" and then immediately illustrates these points with reference to a single object before proceeding to treat others with reference to the political history. Walter Denny's essays on individual Ottoman objects are gems of insight and contextualization (see, e.g., p. 306, cat. No. 215; p. 311, No. 220), without overloading the reader with the often abstruse detail so favored in art historical writing, including other entries in this book.

All told nearly 300 objects are described in the book, the selection striking for its rich inclusion of manuscript and textiles. The emphasis throughout is on what we might term "luxury items," something that reflects the collecting interests of the wealthy patrons of the Met (and more generally those who have collected Islamic art). So we do find here some of the most costly and technically most brilliant examples of these arts: "masterpieces" may not be a misnomer, Grabar's observation notwithstanding. From the book alone then, it would be difficult to test his idea about the "democratization" of art, even if arguably many of the objects were produced for urban elites and not just for the rulers and their courts.

The book has exquisite color photographs (the new photography for the book is credited to Anna-Marie Kellen and Katherine Dehab). Ironically, to my mind it is in this realm of illustration that some of the "problems" with the presentation in the book rest. The authors quite appropriately cite analogous examples either in the Met's own collection or in other museums, examples which, however, are not illustrated here. At least this reader would have wished to see some of the most important ones here alongside the Met's "masterpieces." A second drawback of the book's illustration is that in particular for the ceramic dishes, we generally are given only one view, looking straight on at the vessel from above. This flattens the three-dimensional object in ways that can quite distort our appreciation of it. In many cases, it would be important

to have side views, not only to show the shape but what is often significant decoration and inscriptions (about which there often is commentary in the descriptive texts).

While there are a few carefully chosen color photographs of Islamic architectural "masterpieces" (the Taj Mahal, the Alhambra....), there is nothing here to place the individual art objects meaningfully into the kind of architectural context which Grabar, rightly, I think, felt to be essential. Verbal description of those settings is here, but without the pictures to go with them, only the already well informed reader will be able to contextualize the objects. To have fragments of architectural decoration (as is true of so many collections of Islamic art) torn from their contexts is to present them in a void. Here are examples to illustrate what I mean.

Many museums have outstanding collections of ceramic tiles created by craftsmen in the Islamic lands. Among those that are most appealing are the lustreware tiles produced under the patronage of the Mongol/Ilkhanid rulers of Iran in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. A great many of those tiles were torn off the buildings by European collectors in the 19th century. One in the Met's collection (Fig. 1; for examples from other collections, see the image set at

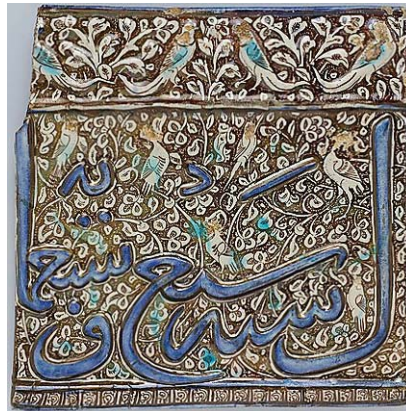
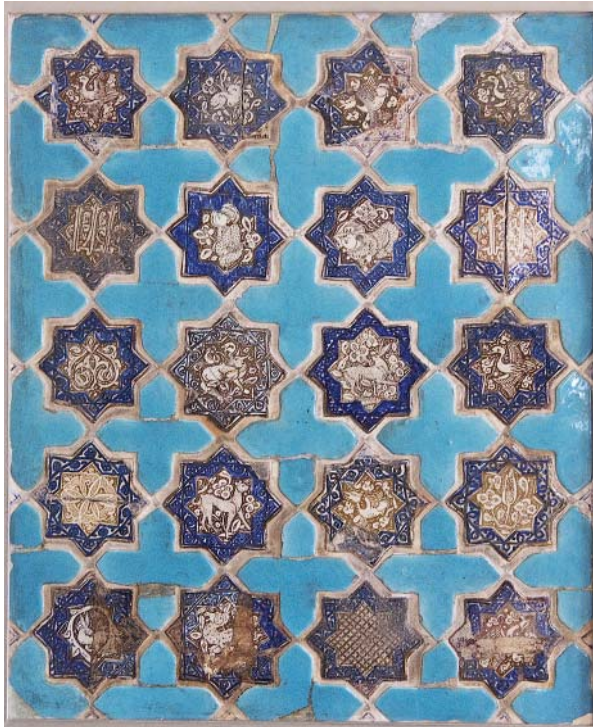


Fig. 1. Lustreware tile, dated 1308, probably from the shrine of 'Abd al-Samad in Natanz, Iran. The birds' heads were broken off presumably by an iconoclast. Metropolitan Museum Accession No. 1912.12.44. Source: <<http://images.metmuseum.org/CRDImages/is/web-large/DP221326.jpg>>.

the end of this article) came from the shrine of 'Abd al-Samad in Natanz, Iran, a building which is still remarkable for its largely extant tile decoration on the façade and the *muqarnas* (stalactite) dome over the tomb chamber (Figs 2, 3, next page). What one sees today on the lower part of the walls of that chamber though is only the plaster outlines of where the colored tiles were (Fig. 4). The book provides us with only a verbal description of this setting (p. 120, No. 77). Whether one might go as far as to wish for a "reconstruction" of that dado, the lower wall decoration of the tomb chamber, is another matter. Theoretically this would be easy enough to do by electronically cutting and pasting images of the appropriate tiles "back in place." We could be reasonably confident about the row of inscriptional tiles such as that in the Met,



placed at eye level, even if there are gaps so that the Quranic texts are now fragmented. The exact identification of the smaller tiles that would have formed the star and cross pattern below it is a bit more problematic. Figure 5 here at least conveys a sense of what that array might have resembled.

The Ilkhanid shrine of 'Abd al-Samid at Natanz, end of first decade of the 14th century (Photos © 2010 Daniel C. Waugh)

Fig. 2 (upper left). Main entrance portal. Fig. 3 (upper right). Muqarnas dome over tomb chamber. Fig. 4 (above). Present state of dado in tomb chamber with remnants of turquoise cross-shaped tiles and imprints of the now missing remaining tiles. The inscription band ran along the top. Fig. 5 (left). Tile panel of the type and approximate date and provenance of the Natanz shrine's tiles. In the collection of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, formerly in the Museum of the A. L. Shteiglitz School of Technical Drawing, which also owned the inscription tiles from the Natanz shrine reproduced at the end of this article.

The Ottoman craftsmen, especially those of Iznik in the 16th century, produced brilliant ceramics, combining motifs from Islamic tradition with motifs borrowed from, inter alia, Chinese ceramics. Iznik tiles covered large swatches of the walls of Ottoman palaces and mosques. In his description (p. 308, No. 217) of one such tile decorated with stylized leaves and flowers, Denny notes that a whole group with exactly this

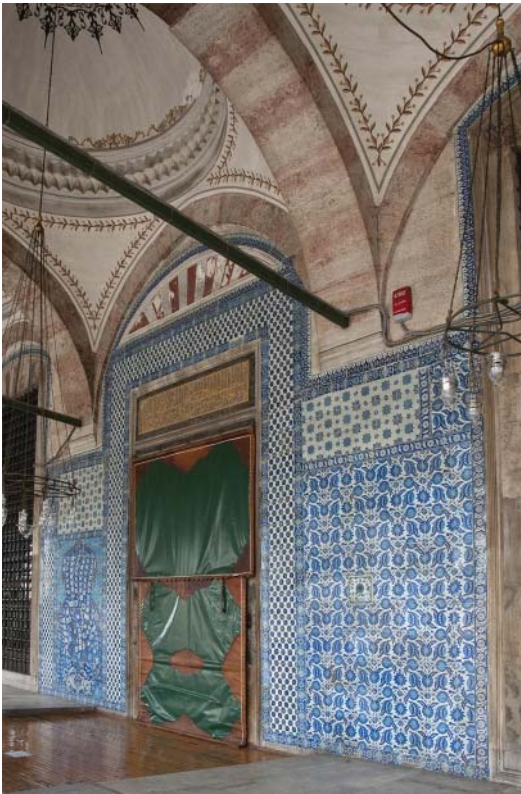


Fig. 6. The outside wall of the Rustem Pasha mosque, Istanbul, built in 1561, the Iznik tile panel on the right made up of tiles with the same design as that in the Metropolitan Museum collection. Photo © 2010 Daniel C. Waugh.

Fig. 7. Ceramic tile with Saz leaves. Metropolitan Museum Accession No. 1978.350. Source: <<http://images.metmuseum.org/CRDImages/is/web-large/DP212534.jpg>>.

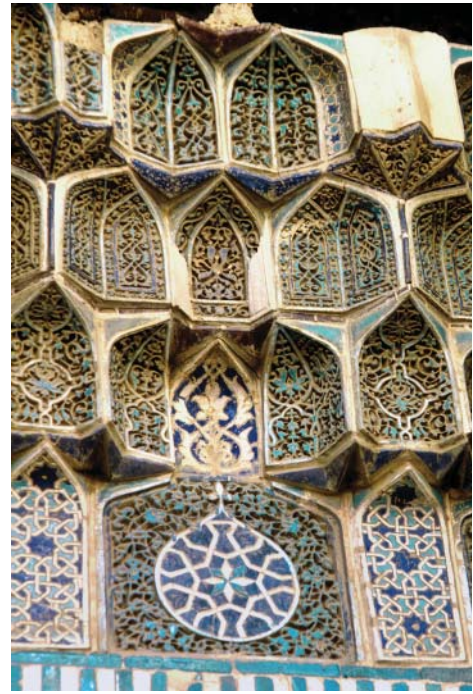


Fig. 9 (above right). Muqarnas over the entrance portal of the anonymous mausoleum at Shah-i Zinda dated 1360/61.

Fig. 10 (right). Interior of Mausoleum of Shadi Mulk, dated 1372, showing muqarnas in the squinch of the transition zone to the dome. Photos © 1979 Daniel C. Waugh.



pattern can be seen on the exterior wall of the Rustem Pasha mosque in Istanbul, built in 1561. Interesting indeed, and why not show it so we can actually see how those tiles were used? (Figs. 6, 7)

My third example concerns *muqarnas*, defined here (p. 192) as “the honeycomb-like decoration that often adorns the interior curves of domes, niches, squiches, *iwans*, cornices and portals of Islamic buildings.” Indeed, it is one of the most distinctive features of a broad array of the arts in the Islamic world, one which Grabar chose to illustrate his point about the whole subsuming its many parts (see, e.g., Figs. 2, 3 above). Nowhere does the book provide a clear illustration



Fig. Glazed ceramic tile of a muqarnas, 14th century, probably from Samarqand. Note that this image, from the Metropolitan Museum website, preserves the shadows created by the curved shape of the upper part. The image in the Masterpieces book has brightened the shadow, leaving an impression of a much flatter shape. Metropolitan Museum Accession No. 1920.20.120.189. Source: <<http://images.metmuseum.org/CRDImages/is/web-large/DP217218.jpg>>.

of a *muqarnas* (the closest, from a distance and at a wrong angle, is in the photo of the Shaykh Lutfallah Mosque in Isfahan on p. 170, neither identified or explained). What we have is one “tile” (cat. No. 130), photographed here “head-on” and thus providing little sense of its three-dimensionality (Fig. 8). As the accompanying essay correctly explains, is undoubtedly a component of a *muqarnas*, very possibly from Samarqand and similar to those still preserved in the 14th-century Timurid mausolea of the Shah-i Zinda complex. Indeed, these could have provided perfect illustrations of this quintessentially “Islamic” feature of architectural decoration (Figs. 9, 10).

Certainly the readers of the book will wish to visit the museum, but short of or in advance of that op-

portunity will want to visit its website. The Met has pioneered in the effective use of the Internet to present its collections and provide an educational resource of endless potential (and already significant achievement). Anyone interested in art and culture can easily find guidance (or get lost surfing) in the museum's wonderful Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, which links to all kinds of combinations of works of art by region, period, theme, dynasty, and more. Stefano Carboni (one of the contributors to the volume reviewed here and for some time a Met curator) told me several years ago that the museum's curators would discuss on a weekly basis the website and the timeline in order to plan its further development. Do other museums have this same level of commitment? Some certainly have moved in that direction, and at the very least full collections are now going on line.

Via the Timeline, one can put together a sequence of good overview essays that cover the same ground as the ones in this volume but arguably are more accessible in that they have been written primarily with the general audience in mind. When using the website, one can save links to favorites into one's "own" collection. Of course those who want ever more can grouse about what is missing in some of these generally very informative pages. For example, the page on "Takht-i Sulayman and Tile Work in the Ilkhanid Period," which deals with the great Ilkhanid palace in the hills of northwestern Iran, makes no mention of the pre-Mongol importance of the site, which surely has to have had some bearing on the Mongol decision to build there. The few photos are inadequate, and some explanation would be in order that some of what one sees in them has to be pre-Islamic. The web pages often contain a few bibliographic recommendations, one part of them offering links to pdf files of articles in the Met's *Bulletin*, links that, when I tried several of them, were all dead, a problem easily fixed.

Apart from all the riches of what is connected to the Timeline, the website now offers the opportunity to explore each and every gallery in the museum. For the Islamic collection, one can find links to a page which provides an overview of its history within the museum and archival photos of the displays (most also reproduced in one of the introductory essays to this book). The pages for each gallery have one or two panoramic photos of the installation as a header and then offer a set of links to a great many (but clearly not yet all) of the objects on view within that gallery. I think this is work in progress, where eventually the coverage will be complete. Depending on the particular room, to date this may mean information for anywhere from a few dozen to more than 100 objects. For each object there is a separate page, often containing multiple images (including, for example, the side

and bottom views of the ceramic dishes, or closeup details), formal descriptive data and in the majority of cases a short descriptive paragraph focusing narrowly on the object itself. Those paragraphs are no substitute for the richer and longer ones contained in the book. In some cases — a noteworthy example the scientific manuscript, *Kitab suwar al-kawakib al-thabita* (Book of the Images of the Fixed Stars) of al-Sufi `Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi (903–986 CE) — the additional images beg for their own descriptive text. (Suppose the user wanted to know what all the other constellations are that are depicted in the al-Sufi manuscript?)

Unlike the book, the gallery pages do offer the opportunity to view more than *Masterpieces*. At least in the case of the Iran and Central Asia gallery 453, the objects on display include a lot of those items of daily life which Grabar would have appreciated for contextualization: spindle whorls, seal impressions, buttons, coins, a lid.... For many of these, there is as yet no descriptive text, leaving the user of the website to wonder what to make of them. Moreover, what these pages do not yet do is convey a sense of the way in which the objects are combined and juxtaposed in the actual displays. Roxburgh noted, for example, that certain cases grouped objects by color in ways that would be thought-provoking.

The main images for the objects include an excellent downloadable color photo of sufficient size and resolution so that it could readily be used for educational presentations (the Met specifically permits copying for such purposes, providing that a reference to the URL is provided). Those wishing to enlarge the images to see fine detail can bring them up in a viewer only available on the website that enables zooming way in for closeups that are remarkable for their clarity. This feature alone emphasizes how the website complements the book, since, despite the quality of the images in the latter, in too many cases (for example with miniature paintings), the reader simply cannot make out easily the details.

The gallery web pages for each object also offer links via thumbnailed images to analogous objects in the collection, or even, in a few instances, to analogous objects in other museums' collections. Yet there is much to be done here, for even within the museum's own collection, not all the appropriate links are in place (for example, the ceramics painted in the color-rich technique known as *mina'i*). Possibly this is a result of features by which the software selects only certain categories of key words. One would hope to see eventually much more of this kind of cross-referencing, especially to objects in other museums' collections, since that then would fill a lacuna in the book.

Finally, the gallery pages provide links to related material on the Met's website, primarily that linked via the Timeline: the general essays, specific topical essays, or simply the relevant section of the timeline itself. In some instances the general essays on a particular period or region of Islamic art include a few photographs of the architecture. Here though the potential is not yet fully realized, the photos often being of indifferent quality and not necessarily highlighting the aspects of the buildings which should be of greatest interest.

Even though there is still much to be done to convey architectural context, as reviewers have noted, the museum certainly has made a serious effort to provide what it can. One whole gallery (461) is the "Damascus room," a largely early 18th century room dismantled in its entirety from a wealthy family's urban dwelling and here reconstructed (with a lot of significant restoration in conjunction with the remounting of the exhibition), providing the viewer with a stunning idea of at least one architectural interior. What we get here is the architecture, the inscriptions on the walls, the displays in the cabinets of objects a family might have collected, divans, but otherwise no sense of the "draped universe of Islam," in Sheila Blair's felicitous phrase. The website allows one to view a lot of closeup detail, and there is a link to a brief schematic video leading a person from outside on the street into and through a house of the type where such a room would have been found. There is, however, no link to the video footage of the symposium held at the Met on the Damascus Room, which would be very informative for those wishing in-depth information.

Much has been made of the "Moroccan court" (gallery 456) which the web page describes as follows: "based on Moroccan late medieval design, [it] was constructed by craftsmen from Fez as an intimate interior court. ... [T]his area of repose and quiet reflection underscores the living heritage of the Islamic world. Here, original Nasrid columns define the patio space, and dadoes of custom-made glazed tiles in a traditional pattern frame a fountain that brings the sound of falling water to the galleries." In the other galleries there has also been an attempt with color selection, lighting, the placement of objects (for example, hanging of mosque lamps), choice of floor materials, and in one case installation of an authentic set of ceiling panels, to convey a feel for the context in which objects might have functioned.

David Roxburgh noted with a sense of relief, that the museum so far has made a conscious decision within the galleries to let the art speak for itself and not provide a lot of aids such as video displays. Not having used the audio guide one could get at the mu-

seum for the Islamic galleries, I cannot comment on its content, though if other museums' guides are any indication, it is likely that more can be learned about the selected objects from that narration than from the printed captions (or, one imagines, from the current short paragraphs on the website).⁵ One might hope that the informative texts of the published catalog would all be made available for listeners or those who might like to read them on-line.

I would not venture to outline here a specific path for the learner who might access the Met's collection only from the website or from it in combination with the printed catalog. There is a great deal to be said for serendipity. And the fact is that, as with any "comprehensive" collection of art, the learner is not going to get a quick fix. What the Met has provided is a rich array of resources to be sampled, savored and revisited. As the curators in that short introductory video to the new installation emphasized, there is much here – not the least being the exquisite beauty of the objects – to excite the imagination, invite exploration in depth, and, one might think, fundamentally change pre-conceptions the learner might have had concerning the cultures of the Islamic world.

References

Fetvaci 2013

Emine Fetvaci, rev. of Maryam D. Ekhtiyar et al., *Masterpieces... and The Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia* [the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum], in *caa.reviews*, posted on-line (restricted access) to the College Art Association website, 13 October 2013 <<http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/2183>>, accessed 13 December 2013.

Grabar 1976a

Oleg Grabar. "An Art of the Object." In his *Islamic Art and Beyond. Vol. III. Constructing the Study of Islamic Art*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2006, pp. 13–29 (first published in *Artforum* 14 (1976): 36–43). Available on-line at: <<https://archnet.org/library/pubdownloader/pdf/10174/doc/DPC1739.pdf>>, accessed 14 December 2013.

Grabar 1976b

_____. "What Makes Islamic Art Islamic?" In his *Islamic Art and Beyond. Vol. III. Constructing the Study of Islamic Art*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2006, pp. 247–51 (first published in *Art and Archaeology Research Papers* 9 (1976): 1–3). Available on-line at <<https://archnet.org/library/pubdownloader/pdf/10190/doc/DPC1755.pdf>>, accessed 14 December 2013.

Roxburgh 2012

David Roxburgh, rev. of *The New Galleries for "The art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and Later South Asia,"* The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in: *Art Bulletin* 94/4 (2012): 641–44.

Notes

1. I have not seen the review of the Met's new installation by Nasser Rabbat ("What's in a Name? The New 'Islamic Art' Galleries at the Met," *Artforum* 50, no. 8 [January 2012]: 75-78) cited by Fetvacı. Unlike her and Roxburgh, Rabbat was critical of the Met's attempt to redesign the galleries to provide a sense of the architectural contexts within which the works on display might originally have been used.

2. The Met also has placed on YouTube several videos of full lectures and symposia presented in the museum's auditorium in conjunction with the reopening of the Islamic galleries. These are full length, filmed from the back of the auditorium with its large screen for the projections. The ones I have found so far (there may be others) include: A lecture by Maryam Ekhtiar entitled "Thematic Displays and Interconnections in the Islamic Art Galleries" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_ES-W7FVic>; a lecture by Christian Gruber, "The Praiseworthy One: Devotional Images of the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Tradition" <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sb5dyS1hWJs>>; a symposium on the Damascus Room (gallery 461) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9-2QteooMY>>; a symposium on carpets <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELwoMPTsZ9I>>; a symposium on sculpture <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDk0t8bV5wQ>>; a symposium on Nishapur (where the Museum carried out excavations; gallery 452) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPIpicGAKXc>>.

3. In addition to the work cited below, see, for example, Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, rev. and enlarged

ed. (New Haven; London: Yale Univ. Pr., 1987; original ed. 1973), esp. Ch. 1; idem, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art," *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 1-14; and his challenging *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Pr., 1992).

4. Those who want a comprehensive treatment of Islamic art by some of the best specialists, in books which illustrate richly the architectural settings and objects drawn from a wide range of collections, might start with the two volumes in the well-known Pelican History of Art, now being published by Yale University Press: Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650-1250* (New Haven; London, 2001, a substantially rewritten and expanded edition of the earlier Penguin volume that appeared in 1987); Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250-1800* (New Haven; London, 1995 [first published 1994]).

5. In this connection, it is worth quoting Fetvacı's conclusion:

The catalogue and the reinstallation together present the art and architecture of the Islamic world in much greater complexity than in the former installation, illuminating the multiplicity of visual traditions and the changes they went through over time. For the educated viewer, or one who visits the exhibition after having read the catalogue, these lessons are quite clear. One cannot help but wish that they had been made even more explicit, with further emphasis on use and meanings, by more detailed didactic materials (such as extended wall labels) in the galleries themselves.

Appendix

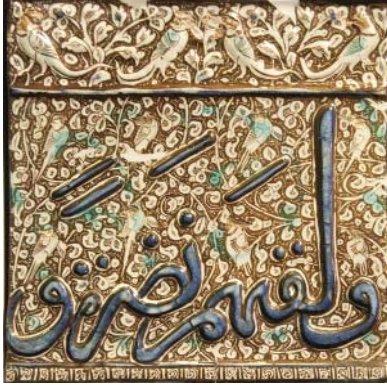
Inscription tiles from the shrine of 'Abd al-Samad at Natanz

Since I have made a point above about the desirability of depicting analogous examples from other collections, it seemed appropriate to collect here a good many of the lustre-ware inscription tiles that are generally assumed to have been removed in the 19th century from the shrine at Natanz. Regarding that removal of Ilkhanid tile work, see the article by Tomoko Masuya, "Persian Tiles on European Walls: Collecting Ilkhanid Tiles in Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Ars Orientalis* 30 (2000): 39-54, here esp. 41-44. While Matsuya indicates more than 40 tiles in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London were recorded as coming from Natanz, the only one I have found in their online collection database which clearly belongs in the sequence with those below is Accession No. 1485-1876, an inscription tile with the distinctive images of birds whose heads have been defaced. The the V & A database image set is not quite complete; but a great many tiles in that acquisition batch of 1876 are shown, and they are of a different design. Since the tiles from Natanz were dispersed and many lost, one should not expect adjoining tiles in the sequences below to connect and provide an integral inscription. They are depicted in the order in which they are displayed in the respective museums. I have not attempted here to provide full captioning data, but merely indicate the museum in which they are displayed where I photographed them under the limitations of gallery conditions in 2006, 2007 and 2012. The Victoria and Albert tile has been copied from the image in their collections database.

THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM, ST. PETERSBURG



THE BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON



THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM,
LONDON



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ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM,
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MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS

