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Mercedes Volait

***Spolia in se* at the fair, 1867-1889: a channel for Islamic reuse in nineteenth-century architecture and furniture?**

Abstract

From 1867 onward, Universal Expositions became gigantic feasts of *spolia in re*, to borrow Brilliant's classical phrase defining stylistic reuses of the past in contemporary design. National pavilions took the form of replicas and creative interpretations of the historical architecture of the countries they represented. The furnishings displayed within their premises or on sale in the corresponding commercial galleries followed similar formulas. Much less known is the fact that *spolia in se*, that is material reuse, was also a fixture of many a pavilion at Universal Expositions. A case in point is Egypt which featured as early as 1867, and in subsequent fairs, authentic furnishings, as well as décors and specimens repurposing historic fragments into modern frames. When the event was over, Egypt's pavilions were dismantled and fragments reused elsewhere, as happened with the reception hall presented in 1873. A fashion for building and decorating with Islamic antiques developed in parallel in Cairo. Through selected examples, the paper proposes to uncover the range of agencies and dynamics that shaped the spread of this characteristic architectural genre, among which Egyptian displays at World's fairs and French precedents in material medievalism. Ultimately, it pleads for a proper historiographical recognition of its outcomes.

Bio

Mercedes Volait is CNRS Research professor and member of InVisu, a research unit devoted to visual and material history, based at Institut national d'histoire de l'art, in Paris. She has published numerous volumes on the history of architecture and heritage in modern Egypt, including 5 monographs and 8 collections of essays. Her current research focuses on the global outreach and consumption of architecture and craft from Egypt during the long nineteenth century, with particular attention to aesthetic interiors, Islamic-style furniture, art dealing and collecting, topographical photography, and cross-cultural exchanges. Her most recent book, *Antique Dealing and Creative Reuse in Cairo and Damascus, 1850-1890: Intercultural Engagements with Architecture and Craft in the Age of Travel and Reform*, was published by Brill in 2021.

Text

In 1881, Bohemian architect František Schmoranz (1845–1892) and his partner Jan Machytka (1844–1887) worked out designs for an “Arab Room” to be installed at the Museum of Art

and Industry in Vienna (currently the MAK).¹ (Fig. 1) Whatever were the terms of the commission, Schmoranz received in April 1881 the permission to reuse, for the purpose, remnants from the Egyptian structures that he had designed for the Vienna World's Fair in 1873.² At the end of the fair, as was common practice, the Egyptian section had been dismantled and portions had been acquired and stored by the Austrian administration in charge of historic buildings, the *Burghauptmannschaft*. As products of Austro-Hungarian workmanship and design evidencing ability with Egyptian Islamic décor, the spoils were understandably worth preserving. They kept indeed the record of a memorable *ephemeralia*. The Egyptian ruler, Khedive Ismā'īl (r. 1863–1879), had devised grandiose plans for the country's presence at the Viennese fair. Its material expression had to be “splendid and magnificent” as reported by the general commissioner in charge, Egyptologist Heinrich Brugsch (1827–1894).³ Accuracy was to be at the core of the endeavour. At an extremity of the main building, the replica of a funerary mosque was meant to be as faithful as possible to the aspect of comparable religious buildings and was to be furnished with original elements, such as a minbar (pulpit) and a dikka (lectern). The portable objects were to be provided by the Minister of Religious Endowments (*awqāf*) in Cairo, depending on availabilities.⁴ Egypt's tangible heritage was also to be represented by an adequate collection of Islamic artworks from the age of the Fatimids and the Mamluks (tenth to the fifteenth century).⁵ The initial plan experienced bifurcations, as funding and time constraints altered myriad features in the course of implementation, but the scenery achieved still enthused viewers.⁶

¹ Recent publications on the room include Němeček, “František Schmoranz le Jeune (1845-1892),” in *Le Caire dessiné et photographié au XIX^e siècle*, ed. Mercedes Volait (Paris: Picard, 2013), 117-38; Pflugradt-Abdel Aziz, “Exhibiting Islamic Architecture in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century: The Architect Carl von Diebitsch and His Successor Franz Schmoranz Jr in the Service of Egyptian Viceroy Isma'il Pasha,” *Art in Translation* 11:2 (2019): 200-22; and Ofner, “Das »Arabische Zimmer« (1883–1931) von Franz Schmoranz und Johann Machytka aus dem ehem. k. k. Österreichischen Museum für Kunst und Industrie,” in *Gezimmertes Morgenland Orientalische und orientalisierende Holzinterieurs in Mitteleuropa im späten 19. Jahrhundert. Phänomenalität, Materialität, Historizität*, ed. Julia Rüdiger and Maximilian Hartmuth (Vienna: Bohlau, 2021), 153-68.

² Ofner, “Das »Arabische Zimmer« (1883–1931),” 164.

³ Brugsch, *Mein Leben und mein Wandern [My Life And My Travels]* (Waban, Mass. : Heinrich George Brugsch, 1992), Reprint of the second edition, Berlin, 1894, ed. George Laughead Jr. and Sarah Panarity, Chapter 6, <http://www.vlib.us/brugsch/chapter6.html>, accessed 13 July 2022.

⁴ Letter of Ismā'īl's private secretary to Heinrich Brugsch, 18 October 1872, Series 'Asr Ismā'īl, Box 36 g1 (previous pressmark, current code unknown), Exhibitions, 36/3 « Exposition Universelle de Vienne », 1873, *Dār al-Wathā'iq al-Qawmiyya* (National Archives of Egypt), Cairo.

⁵ My translation for “une collection suffisante d'objets d'art et d'industrie de l'époque des Califes et du Moyen Âge,” Letter of Ismā'īl's private secretary to Heinrich Brugsch, 23 October 1872, Series 'Asr Ismā'īl, Box 36 g1 (current code unknown), Exhibitions, 36/3 “Exposition Universelle de Vienne,” 1873, *Dār al-Wathā'iq al-Qawmiyya* (National Archives of Egypt), Cairo.

⁶ For one such account: *Kunst und Kunstgewerbe auf der Wiener Weltausstellung 1873*, ed. Carl Friedrich Adolf von Lützow (Seemann: Leipzig, 1875), 91-5.

Repurposing remnants from the 1873 Exposition

As the Arab room was in turn dismantled in 1931 and again only partially preserved, it is not easy to retrieve the scope and provenance of what Schmoranz and Machytká repurposed. In all likelihood, they produced a mixture of sorts recycling spoils from the mandara (reception hall) installed in the Egyptian section, possibly supplemented with additional material. The mandara is primarily known through written depictions, and a detailed material comparison with the room is thus out of scope but Schmoranz is reported to have invested in its shape and fixtures the intimate knowledge he had acquired of Cairo's domestic architecture, from surveying a number of examples in 1870–1872,⁷ aided by Jan Machytká who joined effort in 1870–1871.⁸ The Arab room seems to have combined replicas of originals from Cairo such as the stained glasses and the *salsabīl* belonging to the *sabīl-kuttāb* built by Al-Ashraf Qā'itbāy in 1479 by the mosque of al-Azhar, both of which possibly used in 1873, with items made up by Austro-Hungarian craftsmanship on Schmoranz's drawings (six doors, twelve walled cupboards and latticework). The epigraphic frieze that was to run on top of the cupboards as per Schmoranz and Machytká's designs was pull apart at some point, as it does not appear on the photographs of the room taken in 1897 but do feature in an engraving from the time of the room's inauguration. (Fig. 1) Its components have recently surfaced from storage and have been inspected.⁹ The historic tiles feature white calligraphy on plain cobalt blue ground and may have belonged to a larger inscription for the existing text is not fully legible, as if pieces were missing. The loose tiles, many of them cracked, are said to have been acquired by Schmoranz in 1870 from the Mekhitarist Congregation in Vienna,¹⁰ and were possibly reused in 1873, or meant to be reused for that occasion. Their provenance is unclear, but a sixteenth-century or later Ottoman or Persian building is a likely candidate.¹¹ As Armenians, the Mekhitarists had privileged contacts with the Middle East, where fellow denizens were soon to become actively involved in the global trade of antiquities.¹² In contrast, the ware displayed

⁷ Wilhelm Lauser, "Die Ka'ah," *Allgemeine Kunst-Chronik. Zeitschrift für Kunst, Kunstgewerbe und Literatur* 7, no. 25 (June 23, 1883): 317–18; Němeček, "František Schmoranz," » *op. cit.*; Brugsch, *op. cit.* Awaiting proper publication, the drawings and watercolours kept at the Schmoranz archive in Chrudim offer ample testimony of an extended acquaintance with Islamic architecture in Cairo.

⁸ His Cairo's drawings were exhibited in 1876, together with those made by Schmoranz and other Austrian artists; Schmoranz, "Katalog der historischen Ausstellung des islamitischen Orientes, umfassend Darstellungen von Cultus- und Profanbauten," *Mittheilungen des k.k. Oesterreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie* 9, no. 126 (1876): 1.

⁹ "Auf den Spuren von Franz Schmoranz junior durch die MAK Sammlung," <https://blog.mak.at/franz-schmoranz-im-mak/> (accessed July 13, 2022).

¹⁰ Ofner, "Das »Arabische Zimmer« (1883–1931)", 160.

¹¹ Patricia Blessing, "The Blue-and-White Tiles of the Muradiye in Edirne: Architectural Decoration between Tabriz, Damascus, and Cairo," *Muqarnas* 36 (2019): 101-29.

¹² Examples and bibliography provided in Volait, *Antique Dealing and Creative Reuse in Cairo and Damascus 1850-1890*.

on the shelves and cupboards of the Arab room were ceramics gifted to the MAK at a later stage, allegedly by the Ottoman government.¹³ In other words, the chamber was both a reduction of the initial mandara and more; in any event, it was purely eclectic and artificial. Yet, its watercolours masterfully retained a sense of Cairene architecture and craft thanks to Schmoranz and Machytka's expertise and exquisite design.

While a style room, rather than a proper period room,¹⁴ the MAK re-installation brings to attention a two-fold by-product of Universal expositions that has remained off the radar to this day, at least in the case of Middle Eastern pavilions: the reuse of antiques in their architecture, and their subsequent afterlife after the fair. Ephemeral architecture at international fairs has generally been viewed through the prism of stylistic reuse of historic forms in contemporary design. In other words, it has been studied as "*spolia in re*," rather than as "*spolia in se*," or material reuse, to refer to Richard Brilliant's classical distinction of the two main types of aesthetic engagements with the past in contemporary design.¹⁵ The literal reuse hereby discussed concerns Mamluk and Ottoman fragments that were set up in modern frames at the scale of architecture, décor or furniture, in Egypt and elsewhere, during the long nineteenth century. In such instances, *spolia in se* and *spolia in re* were commonly combined, generating in the process composite structures and artworks that defy the usual categorisations of Islamic art historiography, and indeed art historical ones at large. The resulting artistic forms can be characterised as hybrid, but the label does little justice to the full range and substance of their expressions, as I have argued elsewhere.¹⁶ In the following, I contend two things: firstly, that nineteenth-century Islamic reuse in Egypt and elsewhere bore connections to French material medievalism, and secondly, that the Egyptian participation in Universal Expositions, and in particular to that of 1867 in Paris, actively promoted the genre.

Creative reuse in architecture and furniture in khedivial Cairo

Creative reuse of Islamic antiques in nineteenth-century architecture in Cairo is best exemplified by commissions due to French expatriates in the 1870s, some being implemented on designs authored by French architect Ambroise Baudry (1838–1906), who was active in

¹³ Ofner, 156.

¹⁴ In theory, a period room refers to an existing historic room translocated to a museum to illustrate a given architectural style of interior decoration; in practice, the scheme experienced diverse declinations, *The Period Rooms*, ed. Sandra Costa, Dominique Poulot, Mercedes Volait (Bologna: Bononia University press, 2016).

¹⁵ Richard Brilliant, "I piedistalli del giardino di Boboli: spolia in se, spolia in re," *Prospettiva* 31 (Oct. 1982): 2-17.

¹⁶ Volait, *Antique Dealing and Creative Reuse*, *op. cit.* Chapter 4 *passim*.

Egypt from 1871 to 1886.¹⁷ An icon in the group is the *hôtel particulier* of aristocrat Gaston de Saint-Maurice (1831–1905), who acted as grand equerry of the Egyptian ruler from 1868 to 1878. The grand mansion, built in the heart of suburban Cairo from 1872 to 1879, brought together historic fragments such as marble fountains (two basins and a mural one), rows of Iznik and Damascene tiles used to frame doors and decorate panels, as well as doors inlaid with Mamluk carved and chequered plaques.¹⁸ (fig. 2) The masterpiece of the house was a double-height cruciform grand parlour featuring dados and floors in *opus sectile* of coloured marble; it was covered by carved and painted ceilings, underlined by calligraphic friezes, of which one held biblical epigraphy in Arabic. The room was lighted by a large mashrabiyya closing one of its recesses, while a central *shukhshaykha* (wooden hexagonal skylight) provided zenithal luminosity filtered through coloured glass. The authentic fragments were combined with plaster replicas of historic ornament, and with new stucco work inspired by existing examples, for instance a stuccoed niche in the mosque of al-Mū'ayyad Shaykh (r. 1415–21). (Fig. 3 and 4). The house was ultimately furnished with local fittings, in the guise of tabouret-tables, a canopied vernacular bed, Indo-Portuguese chests, candlesticks, caskets, and all kinds of brass ware, of which Saint-Maurice gathered many precious specimens, a selection of which entered the South Kensington Museum (current Victoria and Albert Museum, London) in 1884 after having been exhibited in the show *L'Égypte des Khalifes* that he curated at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1878.¹⁹

In the very words of its patron, the intention had been to “build a house along an ancient plan, with materials coming from the most beautiful dwellings of the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth-century, [with] sculpted ceilings, painted and gilded, mosaics of marble and mother-of-pearl, doors in bronze and ivory, Persian and Cairene tiles, mashrabiyyas, inscriptions, plaster casts, etc. etc.”²⁰ The outcome was deemed a “master piece in Arab restoration” by a French visitor,²¹ the word defining then a very distinct praxis than the one it has come to

¹⁷ Crosnier Leconte and Volait, *L'Égypte d'un architecte : Ambroise Baudry (1838-1906)* (Paris : Somogy, 1998).

¹⁸ Volait, *Maisons de France au Caire : le remploi de grands décors mamelouks et ottomans dans une architecture moderne* (Cairo : Publications de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2012), Chapter 1 *passim*. High definition photographs of the house can be viewed online at <http://facchinelli.huma-num.fr/>

¹⁹ Carey and Volait, “Framing 'Islamic Art' for Aesthetic Interiors: Revisiting the 1878 Paris Exhibition,” *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 9, no. 1 (1 March 2020): 31-59.

²⁰ My translation from the original : “Il s'agit d'une maison que j'ai fait construire au Caire sur un plan ancien, avec des matériaux provenant des plus belles habitations des XIV, XV et XVI^e siècles. Plafonds sculptés peints et dorés, mosaïques de marbre et de nacre, portes de bronze et d'ivoire, faiences de Perse et du Caire, moucharabiehs, inscriptions moulages et matériaux, etc. etc.”, extract from a letter of Gaston de Saint-Maurice to Sir Philip Cunliffe Owen, director of the South Kensington Museum, 24 October 1882, Saint-Maurice nominal file, MA1/S180, Victoria and Albert Archive, London.

²¹ Ch. Gabriel (pseudonym of Gabriel Charmes), “Cinq mois au Caire, IV,” *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, 26 August 1879, 2.

embody today, and one significantly more interventionist. In the French architectural jargon of the time, “restoration,” also termed “restitution,” primarily defined the art of completing missing parts in the rendering of an ancient building based on the extended classical culture acquired at the École des Beaux-arts in Paris, and for a happy few, while on residence at the Villa Medici in Rome.²² This was the antiquarian culture invested in the creation of the Saint-Maurice house.

A photograph keeps the record of the type of second-hand material that the French aristocrat collected for potential reuse, in this instance the base of a large mashrabiyya in need of heavy repair (Fig 5). The salvage, as such material was commonly termed in English at the time, exemplifies the poor condition of what was available. There is no direct evidence on how Gaston de Saint-Maurice procured the pieces repurposed in his house. A much later source contends that he legally salvaged architectural fragments on site, thanks to the official permission he had been granted to this end, at a time when Cairo was being modernised by way of cutting up new streets through its historic urban fabric.²³ Truly enough, the opening of the main new thoroughfare in the city, the Citadel street, cut through 398 building plots,²⁴ and the clearing and resale of the ensuing rubble in stone and timber employed sixteen officials alone in 1872.²⁵

However, announcements published in the Egyptian official gazette (*al-Waqā‘i al-Miṣriyya*, irregularly released from 1828) delineate a broader context for salvage picking in Cairo. The journal recurrently advertised public auctions of rubble (*anqād*, pl. of *nuqḍ*) from derelict structures (*khirba* or *khariba*), of which the city contained countless examples. Most were endowed properties (*waqf*) that had reached advanced ruin, either because of fire or recurrent seism (3 major ones hit Cairo on 7 August 1847, 12 October 1856, and in 1863), but moreover for poor building maintenance over long stretches of time. During the late 1860s, announcements for rubble auctioning appeared at least twice a year in the gazette.²⁶ None of the corresponding locations had any link with urban embellishment. Dilapidation was a more

²² Pinon and Amprimoz, *Les envois de Rome (1778-1968). Architecture et archéologie*. (Rome: École française de Rome, 1988), VIII.

²³ Pierre de Witasse, “La légation de France a changé de quartier,” *L’Illustration*, no. 4955 (19 February 1938) : 204-06.

²⁴ ‘Alī Mubārak, *al-Khiṭaṭ al-tawfiqiyya al-jadīda li-Miṣr al-Qāhira wa-mudunihā wa-bilādihā al-qadīma wa-l-shahīra* (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘ al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya [Bulaq], 1306 AH/1888-1889 AD), III: 253-54.

²⁵ List of appointees in the Administration of parks and gardens and other services, 1872-75, *Muhāfaza Misr, Mahāfiḍ 1872*, 2002-3607, *Dār al-Waṭhā‘iq al-Qawmiyya*, Cairo.

²⁶ In issue no. 125 of 25 July 1867 (six plots totalising more than 1200 sq.), no. 165 of 16 December 1867 (2 plots, 100 sq.), no. 168 of 30 April 1868 (4 houses, up to 945 sq.), no. 261 of 28 December 1868 (6 places, 640 sq.), no. 279 of 11 March 1869 (2 plots, 465 sq.)

general condition of architecture in the city, and one that possessed a long track record.²⁷ The abundant topographical photography of Cairo corroborates the derelict condition of much of its historic buildings in the 1870s. (Fig. 6) Private transactions with property owners wishing to dispose of obsolete fixtures cannot be disregarded either.²⁸

Another significant example of modern architecture featuring repurposed historic décors in Cairo was the house that Ambroise Baudry erected for himself in 1875–1876. He too had managed to get a position at the khedivial court, as chief architect of Gīza Palace, and promptly acquired enough means to start building his own residence in suburban Cairo. The composite interiors he conceived incorporated historic woodwork (ceilings and door leafs) as well as a rich sample collection of Iznik and Damascene tiles, together with plaster replicas, and woodwork after his own designs. (Fig 7) A keen collector of Islamic art, with a good eye for rare collectibles, Baudry did amass during his stay in Egypt several hundred of Islamic antiques, including about three hundred tiles and myriad thirteenth- to fifteenth-century carved and chequered plaques that he had an indoor carpenter, the Maltese Peppe Gliveu, repurposing for him into panels, door leaves and cabinets. (Fig. 8) The one hundred and twenty-six loose plaques that entered the collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York after his death evidence a specific collecting behaviour aimed at securing a second life to medieval fragments.²⁹ (Fig. 9)

Mixed-period furniture from Cairo praised at Universal Expositions

Cabinet-making was indeed an area where mixed-period and mixed-culture artworks did thrive, way beyond Baudry's circle. Not all specimens in the so-called Arabesque style so praised in Cairo were an amalgamation of old and new, but a significant number were, until the exhaustion of stock, one suspects. Some of these composite furnishings were crafted by a celebrated Italian cabinet-maker, Giuseppe Parvis (1832–1909), who had settled in 1859 in Cairo, where he promptly developed an extremely successful line of historicist furniture, both in Islamic and (Ancient) Egyptian style. He presented his productions at all Universal Expositions since 1867 and won awards at about each of them in the following decades.³⁰ His

²⁷ Loiseau, *Reconstruire la maison du sultan, 1350–1450 : ruine et recomposition de l'ordre urbain au Caire* (Cairo : Publications de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2010).

²⁸ Contrasting attitudes to the commodification of historic architecture within Egyptian society are discussed in Volait, *Antique Dealing, op. cit.*, Chapter 3 *passim*.

²⁹ The objects from the estate of Ambroise Baudry were purchased in 1907, thanks to the Rogers fund, from Cairene dealer Panayotis Kyticas by the merchant Albert M. Lythgoe, for the MET. All can be viewed on the MET online collection and can be retrieved by searching "A. Beaudry" because of a typo in the spelling of the collector's name.

³⁰ Volait, "Revival, Replica and Reuse : Fashioning 'Arabesque' furniture in Khedival Cairo," *The Arabist, Budapest Studies in Arabic* 41 (2020): 229-42.

exhibits in Vienna included the double-leaf door inlaid with carved plaques in ebony that he was commissioned for the khedivial mandara, as well as three large cupboards, one of which was part of a style room intended for the conspicuous palace-cum-botanical gardens being built for the affluent Italian merchant Pietro Ciccolani, in the outskirts of Cairo at Shubra.³¹ (Fig. 10) Other cabinet-makers were to follow Parvis's track. In 1891, a commercial gazette listed four other manufacturers specialising in Islamic-style furnishings in Cairo: the Furino Brothers, Giuseppe and Nicola Jacovelli, Elias Hatoun, and Gaspare Giuliana.³² Typically, the last two were also dealers in Islamic antiques, while a major part of the Jacovelli brothers's business was in restoring Mamluk woodwork, metalwork and marble-mosaic in Cairo.³³ Historicist cabinet-making, creative reuse, repair and the trade in antiques were clearly intertwined activities at the time.

The oddest piece in the mixed-period genre was presented in 1876 at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, aside furnishings and cupboards exhibited by Parvis. The item was an amalgam of woodwork from various periods: it was described at the time as “a door of the sanctuary of a mosque in Cairo carved and inlaid with ebony and ivory.” (Fig 11) The work was valued \$14,000 – a considerable amount for those years. Interestingly enough, its composite nature passed completely unnoticed then. The guide to the fair just added that “it was made in the fourteenth century” and had been secured by the newly-born Boston Art Museum,³⁴ as an example of good design and skilled workmanship that could inspire American art students.³⁵ No close inspection is required to realise that the assemblage is completely made up, for no other function than display. The carved polygons are not inserted into a wooden structure as usual, but are laced on a wooden board; some carving does not fit the design in which it is placed. The whole is obviously a reunion of disparate parts, with significant recent interventions. Its attribution to the fourteenth century solely rests on the inscription placed at the bottom of the door. The ebony panel celebrates Sultan al-Zāhir Barqūq (r. 1382–1389), and would have been salvaged from one of his buildings, possibly his funerary complex erected in 1384–1386 in the heart of Cairo. Nail holes and cavities on the

³¹ “Il Signor Parvis,” *L'Exposizione Universale di Vienna Illustrata*, ed. Edoardo Sonzogno (Milan: Sonzogno, 1874), II:355.

³² *Annuaire égyptien administratif et commercial* (Cairo : G. Teissonnière, 1891).

³³ Balboni, *Gl'Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX; storia-biografie-monografie* (Alexandria: Penasson, 1906), III: 355-57. The Jacovellis were also keen collectors of Islamic art ; Paribeni, “Dall'Egitto all'Italia: la collezione Jacovelli di arte islamica del Museo Nazionale di Palermo (1901-1902),” in *Reflections of/on Art Collecting between Critical Assessments and New Contributions*, ed. G. Perini Folesani, A.M. Ambrosini Massari (Florence, 2014), 305-24.

³⁴ *The Centennial Exhibition of 1876, What We Saw and How We Saw It* (Philadelphia : Souder & Co, 1876), II :36.

³⁵ Weinstein, *Ink, Silk and Gold, Islamic Art from the Museum of Fine Arts* (Boston : MFA Publications, 2015), 49.

Boston door suggest that the frame may have been part of a minbar. The Barqūq complex did lack its original pulpit since the fifteenth century and it is plausible that pieces from it would have been found somewhere in the 1870s.³⁶ The curious door is an archetypical by-product of the creative reuse so prevalent in late nineteenth-century Cairo.

No information is given on its maker. Its current attribution to Ambroise Baudry is not substantiated by solid evidence.³⁷ The Egyptian activity of the French architect is well documented in his extended correspondence kept by descendants; clues would have existed if he had had any hand in the endeavour, and had won the above-mentioned sum. More importantly, the type of woodwork that Baudry designed could not differ more from the recreated door, as an eye can easily perceive when contrasting it with the overmantel made for his house. (Fig. 8) Truly enough, Baudry's furniture bears two inscriptions replicating, in light-coloured wood, the one adorning the Boston door and its four carved ebony colonettes do possess some semblance with their equivalents in the door. But that's about it. The Baudry's piece holds a much larger proportion of modern woodwork; it is ostensibly modern design beautified with historic fragments, rather than one faking a historic object. What can be safely assumed is that parts of both pieces may have shared a common provenance in some derelict structure.

The connection made to French material medievalism

Artworks playing with old and new do not easily fit conventional nomenclatures. More so when they relate to the "age of empire," and stem from the interaction of global and vernacular cultures brought about by ever-growing European expansion overseas.³⁸ Mainstream art historical narratives, as well as established taxonomies of cultural heritage, tend to allocate material culture to single localities, ethnicities and temporalities. Conventional historiography is not at ease with multi-layered matters and pluri-cultural contexts.

The reception of composite artworks at the time can help critically locate them. The appraisal of Baudry's house by a prominent French artist of the Second Empire provides an illuminating, if unexpected, insight. The celebrated figure happened to be Ambroise's elder

³⁶ Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and its Culture* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 229.

³⁷ Weinstein, *Ink, Silk and Gold*, 49.

³⁸ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage, 1989). The internationalisation of vernacular cultures provoked by imperialism is notably discussed in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

brother, and had been visiting in Cairo in 1875 and 1876. Paul Baudry was duly impressed by the achievement, and communicated back his verdict in explicit terms:

Ambroise's house is a gem. We would be rich if the building stood in the surroundings of boulevard Saint-Germain, or simply at the Batignolles; the doors and ceilings, the marbles and tiles, come from sixteenth-century palaces, it is an *Arab Cluny*.³⁹

The Cluny mention refers to the refurbishment and refurnishing, from 1839 onwards, of the Abbey of Cluny, one of the very few medieval mansions that had been left in Paris. It was the initiative of passionate collector and antiquarian Alexandre Du Sommerard (1779–1842). Until his death in 1842, Sommerard worked at restoring, at times heavily, the medieval objects he had collected during his lifetime, and more importantly, at rearranging them in rooms along a systematic ordering, combined with an attention to everyday life, that pretended to enliven the reading of historical texts. He could test many arrangements before fixing one. The aim was to awake a sense of the past through the “unmediated perception of objects,” to quote Stephen Bann in his must-read piece on Cluny.⁴⁰ In other words, Cluny was history in kind, rather than in writing. Sommerard's methodical collection became in 1843 the Musée de Cluny, and was continued by his son Edmond, but very little survives today of their evocative historical display, apart from some remnants in storage and a couple of images.

The idea, however, prospered. Varied declinations of Sommerard's vision materialised in the following decades. It came to give its name to an artisanal technique – “à la clunisienne” – which consisted in producing new period furniture from a single recycled fragment. For instance, a sofa could be made out of an old armchair by cutting the latter in two halves and adding a central part between them. It was the market response to a demand for antiques that exceeded the offer by far. A Parisian master in the genre, woodworker Ernest Eymonau (1847–1933), made a fortune in a trade advertised as the “reconstruction with old fragments of antique furniture for amateurs.”⁴¹ He mobilised for the purpose the traditional skills of the *charron*, the art of repairing cart wooden wheels, that has been his family's craft for

³⁹ My translation and my emphasis. The quote in French reads : “La maison d'Ambroise est un bijou. Nous serions riches si l'immeuble était situé dans les environs de boulevard St Germain, ou simplement aux Batignolles, les portes et les plafonds, les marbres et les faïences viennent des palais du 16^{ème} siècle, c'est un Cluny arabe.” Letter of Paul Baudry to Louise Garnier, 22 December 1876, Correspondence between Charles and Louise Garnier, and Paul Baudry, 2d part, 1873-1885, Mss 742, item 97, Bibliothèque de l'École des Beaux-arts, Paris.

⁴⁰ Bann, “Historical Text and Historical Object: the Poetics of the Musée de Cluny.” *History and Theory* 17, no. 3 (1978): 251-66.

⁴¹ My translation from “la reconstruction avec de vieux fragments de meubles anciens pour amateurs”; Charpy, “Le théâtre des objets. Espaces privés, culture matérielle et identité bourgeoise, Paris, 1830-1914,” PhD Tours University, 2010, p. 536-38.

generations, but has been made obsolete by the progress of motorisation, thus exemplifying both a professional metamorphosis instigated by the new infatuation with the past in French society, and the deep entanglement of old and new that sustained creative reuse.⁴²

Paul Baudry was far from being the only one perceiving “Arab style” architecture in Egypt as a local declination of the Cluny idea. The Saint-Maurice’s mansion did also prompt an equal connection,⁴³ as did most Orientalist interiors then, whether built in Egypt or in Europe.⁴⁴ While undoubtedly Eurocentric, the evocative label consecrates the centrality of Cluny as point of reference to any appraisal and revival of past architecture, be it European or Middle Eastern. It inscribes Islamic style architecture and décor in a broader intertemporal and intercultural framework. More importantly here, I argue that “Arab Clunys” identified in the designs of French architects and patrons in Cairo were not unprecedented in Egyptian architectural culture itself, whether in its promotion abroad or its genuineness at home.

The Egyptian promotion of reuse on the global stage

Earlier instances of creative reuse had taken place at the Universal Exposition of 1867 in Paris. It was the first time that nations were represented by stand-alone architecture. The Egyptian ruler had arranged for a lavish presence. Egypt had four buildings erected in the park, and substantial commercial space rented in the main premises of the fair. While change also occurred during construction, it was not on the scale of what will happen in Vienna, and the ostentatious Egyptian participation earned sensational success.⁴⁵

Abundant visual material exists on the Egyptian pavilions, but the focus is placed here on a plate that has escaped attention so far. Its caption reads “*Marqueterie ancienne employée dans un meuble moderne*” (Historic inlay reused in a modern furnishing). (Fig 12) The piece is ascribed to the khedivial kiosk and thanks to a rare photograph of its interiors (Fig. 13), one can identify precisely the composite furniture in which the panel was reused. It formed the back of a console presenting a Mamluk Koran and arms belonging to the Khedive, just a few steps behind his bust sculpted by French artist Charles Cordier (1827–1905). The arrangement composed an evocative double amalgamation of inherited and appropriated visual and

⁴² Prel-Berard, “Un compagnon du Tour de France,” *La lettre du cercle généalogique de la Drôme*, no. 96 (Fall 2018): 16-8.

⁴³ “La maison arabe de M. de Saint-Maurice est aussi remarquable dans son genre que l’est dans le sien le musée de Cluny,” “Une fête chez le ministre de France au Caire,” *Le Monde illustré*, 9 May 1885.

⁴⁴ Volait, “Les intérieurs orientalistes du comte de Saint-Maurice et d’Albert Goupil: des ‘Cluny arabe’ au Caire et à Paris à la fin du XIX^e siècle,” in *The Period Rooms. Allestitimenti storici tra arte, collezionismo e museologia*, eds. Costa, Poulot, Volait (Bologne : Bononia University Press, 2017), 103-14.

⁴⁵ A recent synthesis of historic accounts is given by Nour, “Egyptian-French Cultural Encounters at The Paris Exposition Universelle of 1867,” *MDCCC/1800 6* (July 2017): 35-49.

material cultures. The roundels decorating the doors' tops in the same pavilion were possibly spolia too. They can be paired with cut-wood work used to decorate the bases of late Ottoman mashrabiyyas (Fig. 5); at the time, cut-wood was also employed to adorn ceilings.

Further salvage ready for reuse was displayed for sale in the Egyptian commercial alley located in the vast circular galleries built in the Champ-de-Mars. Some of the elements on offer are known in some details because one collection was bulk-purchased by the South Kensington Museum before the fair even ended, from an Egyptian high-rank official, architect-collector Husayn Fahmī (c. 1827–1891).⁴⁶ One fragment of historic marquetry offered on sale closely relates to the inlaid panel reused in the khedivial kiosk. (Fig. 14) Other carved plaques, said to be coming from the fourteenth-century mosque of al-Māridānī, were set in what can be reconstructed, from a compilation of textual descriptions, as a much-remanufactured octagonal tabouret-table, with parts allegedly completed with French wood. The tentative identification cannot be checked as the object has been deaccessioned in 1939,⁴⁷ but the mention of “modern French” elements in its description suggests that the repurposing may have taken place in France, where the business of reviving, or rather “resurrecting,” old pieces at any cost was blooming, as already mentioned. A set of thirty-five plaques from the Lājīn minbar (1296) that could be reassembled to form a complete rosette, was also on offer at the same fair, and is now at the MAK in Vienna.⁴⁸

These few cases demonstrate that before French Arab Clunys flourished in Cairo, equivalent composite artworks had been part of Egyptian official and commercial exhibits in Paris. It implies that the circulation of creative reuse did not only work from Paris to Cairo, but functioned the other way around too, and more to the point, even predated the materialisation of the Cluny idea by French agency in Egypt.

The trail of creative reuse of Islamic antiques can be followed up in later fairs, involving this time mostly French Islamic art collectors. Spectacular composite doors (now in the V&A) were exhibited for instance by Gaston de Saint-Maurice at the show he curated for the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris. The famous “Rue du Caire” assembled for the 1889 World's Fair, again in Paris, did contain many authentic pieces incorporated in its constructions: the mashrabiyyas in particular were original specimens brought from Cairo, most attributed to the

⁴⁶ Volait, *Antique Dealing*, 34-53.

⁴⁷ Accession number 1049-1869 ; List of objects recommended for sale by Boards of Survey, 20 January 1939 (39/446) and 15 April 1939 (39/1712), MA/50/2/35, Victoria and Albert Archive, London.

⁴⁸ *The Future of Tradition-the Tradition of Future*, ed. Dercon, Krempel and Shalem (London and New York: Prestel, 2010), 93-4. The accession number of the set is Or. 3405.

seventeenth century, and it was also the case of the shop fronts displayed, an eleventh-century inscribed panel, and all the tiles presented.⁴⁹

At the intersection of two cultures of the Antique

Reuse also prevailed for the pavilions themselves. One of the Egyptian buildings at the 1867 Exposition, the okel, was purchased by Charles Cordier and was reconstructed as his studio in the outskirts of Paris. Another one was reinstated as a porter's lodge in an estate by the city of Le Havre.⁵⁰ Doors from the khedivial kiosk were retrieved at the end of the fair by Husayn Fahmī. The patron of the Cairo Street at the 1889 Exposition recycled some of the mashrabiyyas brought to Paris in a summer cottage he had built by the Atlantic in Normandy.⁵¹ Whether French or Egyptian, the buyers were all art lovers deeply attached to the recreation of Islamic architecture and craft from Egypt.

Yet, Egyptian pavilions were far from being the only ones being dismantled, relocated and reconstructed for new functions. In France, most ephemeral architecture, and indeed enduring ones,⁵² could experience new lives at a time when “restoration,” “renovation,” “recycling,” and “reconstruction” were still unfixed and labile concepts encapsulating very distinct activities from what they mean today. All were notions primary of a rhetorical nature, as has been shown for the reappraisal of medieval furniture in post-revolutionary France. And each did fabricate pure fantasies while serving competing agendas, depending on understandings of the Medieval Ages as times of cross-cultural sharing or ones seen through the chauvinist lens of French primacy.⁵³

In the case of Egypt, the remanufacturing of the spoils of the past encompassed extra-meaning, because it was connected to a centuries-old tradition of “upcycling,” to use contemporary parlance. Thanks to a dry climate sustaining the natural conservation of almost any material over ages, and because of limited resources encouraging the continuous reuse of existing structures, Egypt was in a way the land of reuse.

⁴⁹ Delort de Gléon. *L'Architecture arabe des khalifes d'Égypte à l'Exposition universelle de Paris en 1889: la rue du Caire* (Paris: Plon et Nourrit & co, 1889).

⁵⁰ Volait, *Fous du Caire : Excentriques, architectes and amateurs d'art en Égypte, 1867-1914* (Forcalquier : L'Archange Minotaure, 2008), 130-31.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 135.

⁵² Fiori, *Paris déplacé du XVIII^e siècle à nos jours : Architecture, fontaines, statues, décors* (Paris : Parigramme, 2011).

⁵³ Emery, “*Meubles: The Ever Mobile Middle Ages*,” in *Recreating the Medieval Globe: Acts of Recycling, Revision, and Relocation*, ed. Hannah Weaver and Joseph Shack (Arc Humanities Press, 2020), 121-54. My gratitude to Barry Flood for bringing the chapter to my attention.

It is no wonder then that Cluny-type recreations of Islamic architecture, commonly termed “restorations” at the time, found in Egypt a perfect terrain on which to blossom. They could benefit in this context from the articulation of two cultures of the Antique: on the one hand, the lasting tradition of Egyptian reuse, nurtured by the abundance of raw historic material, and on the other, the French understanding of “restoration,” as an illusionist reconstruction of bygone times. The two cultures eventually came into fusion, and World’s fairs did have their share in connecting them.

Offering modern creative reuse a place in historiography and the museum

There is a need, consequently, to expand Islamic Art historiography to offer modern Islamic creative reuse a proper place in art history. One museum storing mixed-period and mixed-culture furnishings and interiors from the region has been contributing its share. In the context of the refurbishment of its legendary Cast courts, achieved in 2018, the Victoria and Albert Museum has offered visibility to **the** plaster casts of Islamic ornament connected to reuse in modern Cairo, after extensive research on the global phenomenon of “Copy culture” on the one hand,⁵⁴ and sustained investigation in its early Islamic collections on the other.⁵⁵ Thanks to both, a replica of an arabesque ornament from the *wikala* (caravanserai) of Al-Ashraf Qā’itbāy, built in 1477 in the vicinity of the mosque of al-Azhar, is now on view in room 46, with detailed explanations on its provenance and use: Gaston de Saint-Maurice had exhibited it in *L’Égypte des Khalifes* show at the Exposition Universelle of 1878 in Paris, and it was part of the many pieces from this show that the V&A had purchased.⁵⁶

The overmantel designed by Ambroise Baudry in 1875-1876 also found its way to museum display, after another episode of removal and reuse. It had been acquired by a member of the khedivial dynasty, Prince Yūsuf Kamāl (1882–1967), after the French architect’s house was dismantled in 1936, and was transported to its palace in Matariyya, a suburb of Cairo, to be reinstalled in an “Arab Room.”⁵⁷ At the death of the prince, the piece entered the national collections as part of his bequest. It had most probably already lost its provenance. It is currently on view in the Mamluk galleries of the Islamic Art Museum in Cairo (room 8) because of the precious fourteenth-century carved plaques that adorn it, but no reference is

⁵⁴ In the context of the 150th anniversary of the Convention for Promoting Universally Reproductions of Works of Art for the Benefit of Museums of all Countries; *Copy Culture. Sharing in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, ed. Cormier (London: V&A Publishing, 2018).

⁵⁵ Moya Carey and the author have been studying early Islamic art collecting at the V&A from the 1860s to the 1890s.

⁵⁶ The accession number of the piece is 1022 :7-1884, Carey and Volait, “Framing Islamic Art”.

⁵⁷ Volait, “Revival, Replica, and Reuse,” 240 and fig. 8.

made to the peculiar story, and journey, of the furniture.⁵⁸ Despite growing interest in nineteenth- and twentieth-century tangible heritage in Egyptian and international academia alike, the rediscovery and re-appraisal of a rich moment in the late art and architecture of the city of Cairo is proceeding at its own pace in the museum sphere. When I shared the history of the piece with the then director of the museum, Ahmad al-Shoky, in the late 2010s, he concluded that a gallery devoted to the nineteenth century would be a most welcome addition to the current display (initially designed with expertise from the Louvre Museum), and all the more because there was much related material in storage. Since then, the museum has had several temporary displays focusing on nineteenth-century pieces selected from its holdings. Similarly, the new National Museum of Egyptian civilisation, which opened in Cairo in 2017, has been exhibiting examples of nineteenth-century creative reuse in woodwork, albeit without labelling. Meanwhile, Islamic revival furniture from the khedivial palaces' collections is being reinstalled in the Gayer-Anderson Museum in Cairo.

Casting a place for intertemporal and intercultural pieces in art history and the museum is certainly no easy game, for it requires subverting established taxonomies and delineating new ones. However, the pieces of the puzzle are on the table; it is a matter now of working at (re)assembling them. In a world of increased connectedness and with climate change demanding recycling by any means, the challenge should be seen as timely and motivating.

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⁵⁸ Its accession number is 23767.

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