

# Rediscovering the Past | The birth of archaeology | Islamic archaeology

Spain's Islamic heritage was a key part of its modern identity.

European focus was on the peoples who could be claimed as ancestors of the Europeans: Greece as ancestor and role model, the Middle East for its biblical relevance. Islamic sites drew less attention. In Spain, the Islamic past was valued as a part of the national heritage, and was something that set Spain's identity apart from that of other European nations. Study of Islamic art and archaeology had already begun there in the 18th century. The fine quality of materials and workmanship made Middle Eastern artefacts desirable. Growing appreciation of Islamic art made this subject one of the new professional fields studied. But archaeology lagged behind. The foundations were laid in work at Fustat (Egypt) and German excavations at Samarra 1910–13 under Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Herzfeld.



**Working Number:** SP 070

**Name:** Dish

**Holding Museum:** National Museum of Decorative Arts

**Date:** 1875-1933

**Materials:** Tin-glazed earthenware

**Curator Justification:** Spanish archaeologists were interested in traditional techniques, in the hope of making connections between contemporary and historic materials. They thus collected not only antiquities but also contemporary pieces from North Africa. This ceramic dish was brought back from Safi (Morocco).



**Working Number:** SP 076

**Name:** Bronze Lamp of Abu `Abd Allah Muhammad III of Granada

**Holding Museum:** National Archaeological Museum

**Date:** 1873

**Materials:** Paper; lithograph

**Curator Justification:** The lamp in this drawing was part of the founding collection of the National Museum of Archaeology in 1868. The publication of this and other objects as well as monuments stimulated interest in the Arab past of the Iberian Peninsula.



**Working Number:** SP 075

**Name:** Casket from San Isidoro of León

**Holding Museum:** National Archaeological Museum

**Date:** 1872

**Materials:** Paper; lithograph

**Curator Justification:** The Dean of León Cathedral (Spain) donated this casket to the National Museum of Archaeology in 1869. It was part of the Cathedral Treasury and is an example of the important place of Arab workshops in the Iberian Peninsula in Middle Ages.



**Working Number:** SP 077

**Name:** Arab Vase

**Holding Museum:** National Archaeological Museum

**Date:** 1875

**Materials:** Paper; lithograph

**Curator**  
**Justification:** The "Alhambra vase" is a rare example of its type. It is a kind of water-purification device, and comes from the Nasrid workshops. It was acquired in 1875 from the Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción in Hornos (Jaén, Spain).



**Working Number:** SP 078

**Name:** Remains of the Garments of Prince Philip of Castile, son of Ferdinand III

**Holding Museum:** National Archaeological Museum

**Date:** 1878

**Materials:** Paper; lithograph

**Curator**  
**Justification:** The rich silk textile in this 1878 drawing came from the Arab workshops of al-Andalus. It once belonged to Prince D. Felipe, son of King Fernando III of Castile. This was the first publication of an important type of textile, found intact, from a burial.



**Working Number:** SP 053

**Name:** Description of the Arab monuments of Granada, Seville and Córdoba: the Alhambra, the Alcazar and the Great Mosque

**Holding Museum:** National Museum of Decorative Arts

**Date:** 1885

**Materials:** Paper, ink; printed

**Curator**  
**Justification:** José Contreras' Description of the Arab monuments is an important publication of the Islamic heritage of Spain. It aided not only research but also conservation. His careful work has proved an invaluable record that is still in use today.



**Working Number:** UK 077

**Name:** Islamic pottery from Ephesus

**Holding Museum:** The British Museum

**Date:** Excavated 1870; 14-15th century

**Materials:** -

**Curator**  
**Justification:** Englishman John Turtle Wood gave up his position designing railways in the Ottoman Railway Company to conduct a search for Ephesus (Turkey). Ephesus was an important site in classical antiquity, and duly yielded significant remains. However, among his finds was also Islamic material, including this 14th-century ewer. The value of such

relatively recent objects came to be appreciated, and from the turn of the 20th century, studies of Islamic archaeology and architecture took root.



**Working Number:** JO 004

**Name:** Qusayr Amra

**Holding Museum:** -

**Date:** AD 8th century; visited by Alois Musil in 1896

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:** The 8th-century AD desert castle at Qusayr 'Amra is a World Heritage site. Its famous wall paintings show that figurative art was not prohibited outside religious contexts, at least during the first two centuries of Islam. The abandoned structure was re-discovered by the Austrian Alois Musil in 1898.



**Working Number:** DE 003

**Name:** Façade of the Palace of Mushatta

**Holding Museum:** Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum, State Museums

**Date:** AD 743–744; given by the Ottoman sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II to Emperor Wilhelm II in 1903

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:**

The Umayyad façade of Qasr al-Mushatta was a gift from Ottoman Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II. A key work of Islamic art, it is a prime example of shared heritage. The monument shows the origins of a cultural era, rooting in the various local traditions of Late Antiquity, and its early development. It thus became seminal for the Islamic Art Department, whose very establishment by Wilhelm von Bode in 1904 is due to this gift.



**Working Number:** TR2 136

**Name:** The Hijaz Railway delegations

**Holding Museum:** Istanbul University, Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi (Rare Books Library)

**Date:** Late 19th century – beginning of the 20th century

**Materials:**

**Curator** Photograph

**Justification:** The Hijaz Railway, which passed close to Qasr al-Mushatta, enabled the removal of the facade. The new railway network opened up archaeological sites across the Ottoman Empire. In return for German assistance with the railways, 'Abd al-Hamid II granted exceptions to the antiquities laws, permitting the removal of objects.



**Working Number:** DE 004

**Name:** Excavation of Samarra

**Holding Museum:** Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum,  
State Museums  
**Date:**  
**Materials:** City: AD 8th – 9th century; photo: 19th century  
**Curator** -  
**Justification:** Samarra was temporal capital of the Abbasid  
Caliphate. It was excavated by Ernst Herzfeld  
and Friedrich Sarre (first director of the Islamic  
collection in Berlin) between 1911 and 1913. Study  
of Samarra contributed to an understanding of the  
developments and changes in Islamic art at the  
time.

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