

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.
