



# The invention of Islamic art in German orientalism<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*The definition of Islamic art has varied depending on the perspectives of those who define it. Today, it is broadly understood to encompass works produced by both Muslims and non-Muslims within Islamic cultural contexts. However, the academic study of Islamic art did not evolve organically within Islamic societies; rather, it was shaped by European scholarly frameworks in the late 19th century. The disciplinary formation of Islamic art in Europe took distinct forms across different cultural and national contexts. This article traces German interest in Islamic art back to the early modern period, emphasizing the significant role played by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in fostering this engagement—primarily due to its geographical proximity to and historical interactions with the Ottoman Empire. In the German-speaking world, key figures such as Josef Strzygowski, Friedrich Sarre, and Ernst Herzfeld were instrumental in advancing the field. This study explores how the discipline—whose origins can be loosely traced to the 18th century, and which took form through both individual and institutional efforts in French-, English-, and German-speaking contexts during the second half of the 19th century—was constructed within the framework of German Orientalism through specific actors and scholarly practices.*

**Key words:** Islamic art, German Orientalism, Josef Strzygowski, Friedrich Sarre, Ernst Herzfeld

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## Alman oryantalizminde İslam sanatının icadı

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### Öz

İslam sanatının tanımı, onu tanımlayanların perspektifine göre çeşitlilik göstermiştir. Günümüzde, genel olarak hem Müslümanlar hem de Gayrimüslimler tarafından İslami kültürel bağlamlarda üretilen eserleri kapsadığı kabul edilmektedir. Ancak İslam sanatı çalışmaları, İslam toplumlarında organik bir şekilde gelişmemiş, bunun yerine 19. yüzyılın sonlarında Avrupalı akademik çevreler tarafından şekillendirilmiştir. İslam sanatının akademik bir disiplin olarak oluşumu, Avrupa'da farklı kültürel ve ulusal bağlamlarda kendine özgü biçimler almıştır. Bu makale, Almanların İslam sanatına olan ilgisini erken modern döneme kadar takip ederken, bu ilginin gelişmesinde Avusturya-Macaristan İmparatorluğunun oynadığı önemli rolü vurgulamaktadır. Bu durum, büyük ölçüde Osmanlı Devleti'ne coğrafi yakınlığı ve tarihsel etkileşimleri nedeniyle gerçekleşmiştir. Almanca konuşan dünyada Josef Strzygowski, Friedrich Sarre ve Ernst Herzfeld gibi önemli figürler bu alanın ilerlemesinde kilit rol oynamışlardır. Bu çalışma, kabaca izleri 18. yüzyıla kadar takip edilebilen, 19. yüzyılın ikinci yarısı ile görece Fransızca, İngilizce ve Almanca konuşulan dünyalardaki bireysel ve kurumsal çabalarla şekillenen bir disiplinin Alman oryantalizminde hangi aktörlerle ve pratiklerle icat edildiğini irdelemektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** İslam sanatı, Alman oryantalizmi, Josef Strzygowski, Friedrich Sarre, Ernst Herzfeld

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## Introduction

Islamic art is often broadly defined, with its meaning varying depending on who is defining it. The concept remains fluid, shaped by diverse perspectives. Some interpretations emphasize its religious essence, while others adopt a broader view that also includes works produced by non-Muslims within culturally Islamic contexts. This inclusive approach has led to the emergence of a new conceptual framework. Rather than using the term *Islamic Art and Architecture*, scholars have increasingly adopted the phrase *Art and Architecture of the Islamic World*. This shift reflects a disciplinary evolution that considers the cultural and social contexts of artistic production. This terminology was first introduced by American historian Marshall Hodgson, who argued that Islamic art is not directly linked to the religion of Islam itself, but rather to a broader cultural and historical context shaped by both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Within this framework, Hodgson maintained that the academic study of Islamic art was essentially a construct developed by European scholars in the late 19th century (Hodgson, 1974, p. 59; see also Gierlichs, 2018, p. 51).

This field did not emerge organically within Islamic cultures; rather, it was shaped by the perspectives and frameworks of Western scholars. As a result, the boundaries and definitions of Islamic art were established and articulated by art historians and archaeologists—primarily influenced by Western academic traditions—during its formative stages. Due to the absence of a distinct disciplinary field specifically dedicated to Islamic art, early studies were often subsumed under Classical Archaeology and European archaeological methodologies. These external influences significantly shaped how Islamic art was categorized, analyzed, and understood (Gierlichs, 2018, p. 51). Nasser Rabbat argues that the origins of this field can be traced back to the observations of travelers from various professions who documented the local architecture they encountered during their journeys to the Orient. Through their detailed and visually compelling catalogues, these travelers introduced Islamic architectural heritage—largely unknown in Europe at the time—to a broader audience. In the absence of an established framework, terminology, or stylistic models within European art traditions, scholars initially resorted to Eurocentric labels such as “Saracenic,” “Mohammedan,” “Moorish,” and “Oriental” to describe what they encountered (Rabbat, 2012, p. 1–2).

As Rabbat emphasizes, while the disciplinary and historical origins of Islamic art can be traced back to the 18th century, its formal establishment as an academic field largely occurred in the second half of the 19th century (Rabat, 2012). This development was primarily driven by individuals and institutions operating within French-, English-, and German-speaking contexts. Long before Islamic art was recognized as a formal academic discipline—as Rabbat suggests, and even earlier—European travelers, early Orientalists, art historians, and architects such as Edward William Lane (1801–1876), Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach (1656–1723), Richard Pococke (1704–1765), Jean-Baptiste Chardin (1643–1713), Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689), Pascal Coste (1787–1879), Owen Jones (1809–1874), and Jules Goury (1803–1834) documented Islamic architecture and art through their observations, writings, and illustrations, thereby introducing its richness to European audiences.

From the late 19th century onward, modern Orientalists and art historians began to shape Islamic art and architecture into a more structured academic field. Although the discipline had not yet assumed the precise form recognized today, its foundations were laid by scholars who placed the Islamic world at the core of their intellectual inquiry. Notable among them were Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941)—along with his students, who disseminated his ideas internationally—Ernst Herzfeld (1879–1948), Friedrich Sarre (1865–1945), Ernst Kühnel (1882–1964), Banister Fletcher (1866–1953), K.A.C. Creswell (1879–1974), and later figures such as Henry Walters (1848–1931), Mehmet Ağaoğlu (1896–1949), Hagop Kevorkian (1872–1962), Georges Marçais (1876–1962), Maurice Dimand (1892–1986), Richard Ettinghausen (1906–1979), and Oleg Grabar (1929–2011). Their collective contributions were instrumental in institutionalizing and academically legitimizing Islamic art as a distinct field of scholarly study (Blair and Bloom, 2003, p. 153–156; Crinson, 1996, p. 15–71).

It was not until the late 19th century that this architectural tradition came to be widely recognized as Islamic architecture. At that point, efforts emerged to interpret Islamic architecture as a formal expression of Islam. However, the field lacked consistent disciplinary definition from the outset. The question of how to approach Islamic architecture as a specialized field has been debated since its inception and continues to inspire critical discussion. Defining the subject matter of Islamic architecture remains challenging—both within the discipline itself and in the broader context of art history. Today, both fields are working to adapt their methods to the

critical demands of the postcolonial era and globalization. In European art traditions, a clear distinction exists between fine arts and crafts, particularly in the case of painting and decorative arts. In Islamic art, however, such distinctions are often blurred; art and craft are typically intertwined. Consequently, early European scholars often regarded Islamic artworks as inferior handicrafts. The absence of figural painting—except in certain earlier periods and in the Safavid and Qajar eras—also shaped European perceptions, leading many to dismiss Islamic art as underdeveloped. This perspective significantly delayed the formal institutionalization of Islamic art as a scholarly discipline in Europe, especially in Germany. Although certain individual works were highly valued, they did not alter this prevailing view (Gierlichs, 2018, p. 51).

Since post-war developments—marked by complex shifts in relations with the Orient—fall beyond the scope of this article, the focus remains on the period prior to the First World War. Although there is a substantial body of literature on the historical development of Islamic art in the German-speaking world, the emergence of Islamic art as an academic discipline within German Orientalism has received comparatively little in-depth scholarly attention. This study focuses on figures for whom ample primary material is available, allowing for independent research on each. Joachim Gierlichs has made significant contributions to the study of Islamic art's historical reception in German-speaking regions through various scholarly works. His detailed research (2009, 2004a, 2004b, 2013) provides a comprehensive and forward-looking foundation for such inquiries. Annette Hagedorn (2004a, 2004b, 2004c) has also offered a valuable point of departure for further exploration of the field. The jointly edited volume *Islamische Kunst in Deutschland* (2004) by Hagedorn and Gierlichs is both accessible and intellectually stimulating. With contributions from multiple authors, it examines the visual and historical development of Islamic art, particularly in relation to museum collections. Building upon these discussions, the present article aims to fill a gap by analyzing the disciplinary evolution of Islamic art within German Orientalism. The volume *Gezimmertes Morgenland* (Hartmuth & Rüdiger, 2021) further contributes to this inquiry by addressing a relatively neglected aspect of Europe's engagement with the Orient through interdisciplinary perspectives. It offers valuable insights and potential answers to several of the questions explored in this study.

Within this broader framework, the present study examines the historical invention of Islamic art as an academic discipline in the German-speaking world. It explores how the field emerged, the conditions that shaped its evolution, and the processes through which it became institutionalized. This article argues that German Orientalism played a pivotal role in both the invention and historical development of Islamic art as a discipline, particularly by influencing how it was categorized, collected, and integrated into institutional settings. It also analyzes the impact of world exhibitions and museum displays in German-speaking countries in shaping the discipline's institutional foundation. The article is organized into five interrelated and sequential sections. It traces the emergence of Islamic art in the German-speaking world by examining the chronological contributions of museums, exhibitions, and key individuals to the formation of the discipline. The study concludes with an analysis of how Islamic art has been positioned within broader academic and cultural contexts.

## **1. Historical Roots of Interest in Islamic Art in the German-Speaking World**

The history of collecting—and eventually exhibiting—Islamic material culture, much of which would later be classified as Islamic art, can be traced back to the 11th century. During this period, objects from the Islamic world drew the attention of aristocrats and clergy, who collected a wide array of items, including textiles and metalwork, valued for their artistic and aesthetic qualities. These objects were often incorporated into church treasures and reinterpreted through a Christian lens. In the Renaissance era, expanding trade and diplomatic relations with the Mamluk and Ottoman Empires facilitated the broader circulation of Islamic artworks. Manuscripts from the Islamic world—such as those collected by the Dutch Orientalist Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609)—also entered European libraries. Although these pieces gradually found their way into Western collections, they remained outside established academic frameworks (Rey, 2022, p. 184–187). Between the 16th and 18th centuries, France's longstanding diplomatic and commercial ties with the Ottoman Empire played a seminal role in the acquisition of Islamic objects. French travelers and merchants collected ceramics, textiles, and manuscripts, while travel accounts by figures such as Chardin and Tavernier further

fueled European interest in Islamic art (Sandalya, 2021, p. 69-87). Nonetheless, during this period, collecting remained largely informal and had yet to evolve into a structured museological practice. Prior to the onset of colonial expansion, Islamic artworks were primarily acquired through travel and diplomatic exchange.

The academic study of Islamic art in Austria has deep roots in Vienna and a long-standing tradition. European interest in Islamic art can be traced back to the early modern period—a time marked by heightened tensions between the Ottoman Empire and Europe. During this era, the material culture of the Islamic Orient attracted not only intellectual interest but also widespread curiosity. Austria's early role in this field is no coincidence, given the historical rivalry and proximity between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the Balkans. Their prolonged territorial conflicts fostered intense political competition while simultaneously enabling cultural exchange. As a result, the Habsburgs encountered and were influenced by Ottoman art—one of the most prominent traditions in the Islamic world—sooner than most European powers, largely through their territorial gains. This growing engagement found institutional form in 1754, when Queen Maria Theresia founded the *Orientalische Akademie* (Oriental Academy), the first official institution dedicated to training diplomats. At this academy—where Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856) was also educated—students studied Oriental languages such as Arabic, Persian, and Turkish (Kacı, 2021, p. 41–43). The institution played a leading role in nurturing Austrian scholarly interest in Ottoman and Iranian culture and literature.

Although interest in Oriental and Islamic art may have emerged in the German-speaking world as early as the 17th century, pinpointing the exact moment when Islamic artworks first arrived remains difficult. Such objects—particularly artistic ones—reached Europe through various channels, including diplomatic gifts, trade, war spoils, and broader cultural exchange. A major influx followed the Ottoman defeat at the Battle of Vienna in 1683, when retreating forces left behind numerous artifacts later seized by German soldiers. These items were initially stored at *Schloss Rastatt* (Rastatt Palace) before being moved to *Schloss Karlsruhe* (Karlsruhe Palace) in 1877. Among the most notable collections is the *Türkenbeute* (Turkish Booty) of Louis William, Margrave of Baden-Baden, one of Europe's most significant assemblages of Ottoman war trophies. This exposure sparked growing German fascination with the culture of their former adversaries

and led to the rise of *Türkenmode* (Turkish Fashion) in the 18th century—a movement in which European artists creatively engaged with Islamic and Oriental themes, reflecting broader aesthetic and intellectual curiosity (Hagedorn, 2004a, p. 11–14; see also Rott, 1933, p. 280–295). Through conflict, commerce, and diplomacy, a lasting cultural memory of Islamic art took root in German-speaking regions, shaping artistic and intellectual discourse for centuries to come.

Fischer von Erlach (1656–1723), a Baroque architect, authored *Entwurf einer historischen Architektur* (A Plan of Civil and Historical Architecture), published posthumously in 1725. The book offers a comparative study of architectural styles from various cultures and eras, tracing the universal history of architecture. Among the examples featured are structures from the Islamic world, including “Arab and Turkish buildings” and “new Persian buildings,” which he grouped alongside Siamese, Chinese, and Japanese architecture under the heading *Gebäuden der Araber und Türcken, wie auch neuen Persianischen, Siamitischen, Sinesischen und Japonischen*. In addition to Ottoman mosques, the book includes a drawing of the Kaaba and brief descriptions of select Islamic structures. This publication stands as one of the earliest recorded engagements with Islamic architecture in Europe and represents a pioneering contribution to German-language scholarship on the issue. While architecture is one of the most visible expressions of Islamic art, this tradition spans a wide array of media—including calligraphy, ceramics, textiles, glasswork, metalwork, and miniature painting—each enriching its historical and cultural complexity.

Numismatics represents an essential yet often overlooked dimension of Islamic art studies. Beyond their role as currency, Islamic coins function as artistic and cultural artifacts, featuring calligraphy, geometric motifs, and religious symbolism. As such, they offer valuable insight into the visual and intellectual traditions of the Islamic world. A pivotal moment in the scholarly study of Islamic numismatics occurred in 1724, when Leipzig orientalist Georg Jacob Kehr (1692–1740) published the first comprehensive scientific analysis of Islamic coinage, based on a hoard discovered in Gdańsk. Kehr's work can be regarded as the starting point of Islamic archaeology, because his analysis was not limited to the coins themselves but also encompassed their broader historical and cultural contexts. By the late 18th century, during the Enlightenment, Protestant theologians with historical interests and knowledge of Arabic began discovering Arab coins around the Baltic Sea. These 10th-century coins attest to expansive trade

networks linking the Vikings, the Islamic world, and Central Asia. This period also saw the emergence of specialized numismatic collections. Notably, Oluf Gerhard Tychsen (1734–1815) published the first scientific handbook on Islamic numismatics in 1794, and his collection remains part of Rostock University's holdings. His colleague, Thomas Christian Tychsen (1758–1834), expanded Göttingen's Oriental collection with Russian support (Heidemann, 2004, p. 25). This era marks a crucial intersection of Orientalism and Islamic art studies, as analyzing Islamic coins required both proficiency in Arabic and an understanding of the broader historical and cultural milieu.

## **2. The Role of Museums and Exhibitions in Shaping the Concept of Islamic Art within German Orientalism**

The 19th century marked a significant shift in both the scale and context of collecting Islamic art, coinciding with the height of European colonialism. Museums and private collectors acquired Islamic objects through trade, diplomacy, and colonial appropriation. Some of these works were displayed in Orientalist-inspired interiors—such as *boudoirs turcs* (Turkish boudoirs) and *salons à l'orientale* (Oriental-style salons)—while others entered national museums under broad labels like “Arab,” “Persian,” or “Islamic,” often reflecting Eurocentric classifications rather than accurate cultural distinctions (Rey, 2022, p. 185). In this context, both the British Museum and the British Library assembled outstanding collections, forming a distinctive and significant archive of Islamic art. Although the British Museum housed only a limited number of Islamic artifacts upon its opening in 1759, its collection expanded substantially from the final quarter of the 19th century onward. Today, it is recognized as one of the world's foremost repositories of Islamic art, particularly renowned for its manuscripts, miniatures, metalwork, and ceramics (Blair and Bloom, 2003, p. 154).

During this period, academic interest in the art, architecture, and culture of the Islamic world began to grow in Europe, albeit with a notable delay compared to other disciplines. This development paralleled a broader ethnological fascination with foreign cultures, fueled by intensified cross-cultural contact at the peak of colonial expansion. From the mid-19th century onward, German art historians began to view Islamic art within a global and cultural-historical framework, integrating it into the

emerging discourse on world art history. A concrete example is found in the first volume of *Geschichte der Baukunst* (History of Architecture), published in 1856 by art historian Franz Kugler (1808–1858), which included a dedicated section titled “Islam.” This followed earlier efforts by Erlach in the 18th century. Kugler’s book examined Islamic architecture across the Mediterranean and Western Asia, using an approach that aligns with modern geographic definitions of Islamic art (Ritter, 2021, p. 17). According to Hagedorn, members of Europe’s Arts and Crafts movement actively sought new artistic influences, contributing to a marked increase in the collection of Islamic art in Germany. He further argues that, unlike previous phases driven by antiquarian or personal interest, this period was increasingly shaped by the institutional expansion of museums and the growing influence of scientific research (Hagedorn, 2004a, p. 13–14).

Hagedorn’s approach is exemplified by the *Orientalisches Museum* (Oriental Museum), which will be examined in detail below. However, the relationship between museum development and the study of Islamic art predates this institution. The *Berliner Kunstgewerbemuseum* (Berlin Museum of Decorative Arts), founded in 1867 as the third such institution in Europe after those in London and Vienna, played a pivotal role in this process. At a time when new perspectives on art and craftsmanship were emerging, the museum also established a library and a trade school to promote modern handicrafts through collaboration between artists and theorists. As global artistic traditions were systematically studied, Islamic art attracted particular attention for its distinctive surface ornamentation and refined craftsmanship. The museum actively assembled collections from around the world, serving both as repositories for research and as sources of artistic inspiration. Julius Lessing (1843–1908), the founding director of the *Kunstgewerbemuseum* (Museum of Decorative Arts), began acquiring Islamic artifacts from international exhibitions as early as 1868. These acquisitions—including textiles, carpets, ceramics, glassware, and metalwork—were either obtained directly from the Middle East or received as donations and played a key role in incorporating Islamic art into European artistic discourse (Hagedorn, 2004c, p. 44). By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Islamic art had become institutionalized in major European museums. Dedicated galleries were established at the Louvre (with the Assyrian Museum in 1847), the British Museum, and Berlin’s Kaiser Friedrich Museum (1904). Meanwhile, ethnographic institutions such as the

*Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro* framed Islamic artifacts primarily as objects of cultural study, privileging anthropological interpretation over aesthetic appreciation (Rey, 2022, p. 187).

Before examining the *Orientalisches Museum* (Oriental Museum), it is essential to contextualize its origins within the framework of the *Wiener Weltausstellung von 1873* (Vienna World's Fair)—a landmark event in the history of Islamic art studies. As the first world exposition held in a German-speaking territory and the fifth of its kind overall, the fair was state-financed and stood out for its deliberate focus on Islamic artifacts. This emphasis was not solely aesthetic or academic but also strategic, reflecting the Austro-Hungarian Empire's geopolitical, historical, and cultural proximity to the Islamic world. The fair featured grand pavilions representing the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Qajar Persia, as well as smaller displays from Tunisia and Morocco. The organizers framed the exhibition as both an intellectual project and a tool of diplomacy. More than a platform for commercial products and handicrafts, the fair also showcased historical objects, effectively functioning as an international exhibition of Islamic art. Although not a specialized event like the 1910 Munich exhibition devoted exclusively to Islamic masterpieces, it nonetheless played a significant role in promoting and disseminating Islamic artistic heritage.

Following the fair, some artifacts remained in Vienna and were incorporated into the *Orientmuseum* (Oriental Museum), later integrated into the *Museum für Kunst und Industrie* (Museum of Art and Industry) (Ritter, 2021, p. 29). During the exhibition, a dedicated committee was formed to oversee the preservation of the displayed works and to foster trade between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Orient. By late 1874, a collection had been assembled through donations, purchases, and official commissions—later recognized as foundational examples of Islamic art. This effort culminated in the establishment of the *Orientmuseum* (Oriental Museum) (Gruber, 2013, p. 94). The museum was founded as a semi-official institution under an independent society led by its first director, Arthur von Scala (1845–1909), a textile engineer and key figure in organizing the World's Fair. Scala played a central role in shaping the museum's early vision and activities. The founding mission of the museum articulated three core objectives focused on the study and appreciation of Oriental—particularly Islamic—art:

- i) conducting comprehensive regional studies on the cultures and artistic traditions of the Orient.

- ii) organizing scholarly meetings and conferences.
- iii) publishing a dedicated journal to disseminate research and critical discourse.

In line with these goals, the *Österreichische Monatsschrift für den Orient* (Austrian Monthly Journal for the Orient) was launched in 1875 as a monthly journal, serving as a key platform for the academic examination of Oriental art and culture (Wieninger, 2012, p. 145–147). The successful organization of the World's Fair, the founding of the *Orientmuseum*, and the launch of its monthly publication represent critical milestones in the systematic study and institutionalization of Islamic art.

The development of Islamic art was shaped both by archaeological approaches and by the interior architecture of Islamic civilization, particularly as presented in world exhibitions. In museums, Islamic art was often displayed through reconstructed rooms and interiors designed to evoke the style, period, or atmosphere of the cultures represented. These immersive environments allowed visitors to experience the visual and spatial essence of a particular region or era (Ofner, 2021, p. 159). In 1886, the *Orientalisches Museum* was integrated into the *Handelsmuseum* (Commercial Museum) and later merged with the *Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie* (Austrian Museum of Art and Industry). Founded in 1863 and now known as the *Museum für Angewandte Kunst* (Museum of Applied Arts), this institution played a notable role in showcasing Islamic architecture. In 1876, it hosted a dedicated exhibition that drew heavily on the work of Friedrich Schmoranz (1845–1892), an architect and professor of applied arts. Having spent significant time in Cairo, Schmoranz meticulously documented architectural elements through drawings, photographs, and molds. These materials formed the basis of the exhibition, providing a tangible and detailed representation of Islamic architectural heritage (Ritter, 2016).

Although not yet explicitly classified as Islamic art, objects from the Islamic world continued to attract interest and were often presented under the broader category of *Oriental Art*. A key example is Arthur von Scala's *Orientteppichausstellung* (Exhibition of Oriental Carpets), held in 1891—the first exhibition of its kind worldwide. It featured 429 pieces, including a significant number of antique carpets from Islamic regions (Wieninger, 2012, p. 153). Scala remained active in similar initiatives in subsequent years, expanding his focus beyond textiles to include ceramics (Scala, 1884) and metalwork (Scala, 1895). These exhibitions reflect his sustained

engagement with a wide range of artistic traditions from the Islamic world, though they were still framed under the general rubric of Oriental art.

Another key contributor was Jakob Eduard Polak (1818–1891), a physician and ethnologist with extensive experience in Persia. In 1855, he accompanied the fourth Qajar Shah, Naser al-Din, on his travels and later played a major role in curating Persian carpets for the 1873 World Exhibition. His article *Der persische Teppich* (The Persian Carpet), published in 1885 in the *Monatsschrift für den Orient*, exemplifies his scholarly engagement with the material culture. Polak's work—preceding Sarre and following Joseph Karabacek—represents one of the earliest systematic studies of Persian carpets. Though not formally trained as an art historian, he offered detailed analysis with particular attention to the technical characteristics of various carpet types (Polak, 1885, p. 13–16). His contributions reflect the growing 19th-century European fascination with Islamic and Persian artistic traditions, and his scholarship significantly enriched the discourse on textile craftsmanship and its cultural meaning.

Alongside ongoing exhibitions, scholarly interest in Islamic art continued to evolve during this period. Joseph von Karabacek (1845–1918), a contemporary of Arthur von Scala, was primarily recognized for his work in numismatics. However, like Scala, he also made significant early contributions to the study of Islamic textiles and calligraphy. One of his most notable works is *Die persische Nadelmalerei Susandschird* (The Persian Needle Painting Susanjird, 1881), a study on Persian carpets. Karabacek served as a professor of Oriental history and auxiliary sciences at the University of Vienna and directed the palace library. Through these academic and institutional roles, he played a central role in shaping the university's specialization in Islamic art. His interdisciplinary approach bridged numismatics, art history, and Islamic studies, positioning him as a key figure in the early scholarly understanding of Islamic cultural heritage.

The study of Islamic art in the German-speaking world was shaped by diverse scholarly contributions across multiple disciplines. Notable among these was Heinrich Carl Ludwig Julius Franz (1831–1915), later known as Julius Franz-Pascha, who served as court architect to Khedive Ismail Pasha in Egypt beginning in 1859. His major publication *Die Baukunst des Islam* (Islamic Architecture, 1896) significantly advanced architectural studies in the field. At the University of Vienna, art historian

Alois Riegl (1858–1905) furthered the study of Islamic art through his influential book *Altorientalische Teppiche* (Ancient Oriental Carpets, 1892). Similarly, Gustav Schmoranz (1858–1930) authored a pioneering work on Islamic glassware, *Altorientalische Glasgefäße* (Ancient Oriental Glass Vessels, 1898). Collectively, these scholars enriched the emerging discourse on Islamic art, highlighting its multidisciplinary character and cultural significance (Ritter, 2016).

### **3. The Role of Josef Strzygowski in Shaping Islamic Art History**

Strzygowski (1862–1941), a distinguished art historian at the University of Vienna and a pioneer in comparative art studies, played a pivotal role in establishing a universal framework for understanding Oriental art. In the preface to the second edition of Franz Pascha's work (1896), he noted: "*We do not have a satisfactory explanation regarding the nature and history of Arab art, nor are there any signs of a movement that could produce such an explanation in the near or distant future*" (Reisenauer, 2008, p. 18). At the time, Islamic art had not yet developed into a formal discipline or institutionalized field, despite scattered scholarly interest. Strzygowski's engagement with Oriental art was unmatched among his contemporaries (Brich, 1996, p. 41). His academic focus gradually turned toward Islamic art, culminating in a series of influential lectures and courses: *Christian and Muslim Art in Asia Minor* (1899), *Egypt: Christian and Arab Monuments* (summer 1901), *History of Arab Art* (winter 1903/04), and *Islamic Art* (winter 1907/08) (Reisenauer, 2008, p. 18–19).

Influenced by Russian art historian Dmitry Aynalov's *Hellenistic Origins* (1900), he argued that the Orient had shaped both Hellenistic and early Christian art—a perspective he later expanded in his own work (Strzygowski, 1902, p. VII-X; Diez, 1947, p. 3). At the request of Wilhelm Bode (1845–1929), director of the Berlin museums, Strzygowski advised German Emperor Wilhelm II—then touring the Orient—on potential acquisitions from Sultan Abdulhamid II. He recommended the Mshatta Palace ruins, attributed to the Umayyad caliph al-Walid II. Located 30 km south of Amman, the palace was likely damaged by an earthquake in 749 shortly after al-Walid II's assassination. In 1873, Sultan Abdülhamid II gifted the unfinished desert complex to Wilhelm II. The stone facade was shipped to Hamburg in 1893 and later transported by river to Berlin's Kaiser Friedrich Museum (Diez, 1947, p. 3). The Mshatta facade significantly

raised the visibility of Islamic art in Germany and became a cornerstone of scholarly engagement. In 1904, Strzygowski published an article on the palace, further amplifying its academic importance (Strzygowski, 1904, p. 205-373). Mshatta quickly became a focal point for orientalist scholars such as Max van Berchem, Herzfeld, and Carl Heinrich Becker. Its origins sparked considerable debate and led to a proliferation of studies on the structure.

Strzygowski analyzed Islamic art within its historical context—a distinctive approach compared to his predecessors. His research spanned a wide chronological range, from the Umayyad period to the medieval Islamic era (Ritter, 2016). His influence stems from his pioneering work in Oriental, Islamic, and Turkish art history. He challenged prevailing Eurocentric frameworks in the German-speaking world and introduced a new methodological lens. His 1917 publication *Altai-Iran und Völkerwanderung* (Altai-Iran and the Migration of Peoples) examined the artistic traditions of Turkish tribes migrating from the Altai region, with particular emphasis on metalwork and tent art. Through such studies, he expanded the scope of Islamic art scholarship and helped lay the foundation for its systematic academic treatment. His comprehensive vision also manifested in the mentorship of numerous doctoral students who later became influential figures in the field. These included:

- Leo A. Mayer (1895–1959), an authority on Islamic urbanism.
- Mehmet Ağaoğlu (1896–1949), a Turkish architect of Armenian descent who focused on Turkish architecture.
- Emmy Wellesz (1889–1987), known for her research on star imagery in Arab painting.
- Kurt Holter (1911–2000), who specialized in Arabic miniatures and book bindings.

Sarre, too, was notably influenced by Strzygowski's work. This intellectual legacy in Austria and Germany paved the way for a new generation of Islamic art scholars, including Herzfeld, Kühnel (1882–1964), Ettinghausen, Ernst Diez, Katharina Otto-Dorn and Kurt Erdmann (Fakultät Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften Islamische Kunstgeschichte und Archäologie, n.d.).

#### 4. Contributions of German-Speaking Actors to the Emergence of the Discipline

The German-speaking states made numerous contributions to the institutionalization of Islamic art studies in Europe. One of the earliest scholarly efforts was by Anton Springer, who in 1857 published *Kunsthistorische Briefe* (Art Historical Letters), a series of essays comparing architectural forms from the Islamic world with those of Europe. This publication marked the beginning of comparative architectural studies in the field (Hagedorn, 2004b, p. 15; see also Springer, 1857). By the 1860s, encyclopedic works began including photographs and concise explanations of Ottoman and Persian Islamic art and architecture. Germany, in particular, became a leading center for Islamic art scholarship—until the disruptions of the Nazi period—fueled by scholarly travel, access to art markets, and personal and institutional engagements in the Islamic world. The establishment of the *Berliner Kunstgewerbemuseum* in 1868, followed by other decorative arts museums and world exhibitions, created a dynamic environment for the collection and study of Islamic art (Hagedorn, 2012, p. 80).

Many early scholars emerged from the German orientalist tradition, often with archaeological training and an interest in oriental languages, which they later applied to Islamic material culture. One of the most influential figures in this context was Riegl (1858–1905), a Viennese art historian. Although he lacked formal training in oriental languages, Riegl made lasting contributions to the study of Islamic ornamentation. His 1893 book *Stilfragen: Grundlegung zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament) analyzed Islamic motifs and positioned the arabesque as a peak in the stylistic evolution of decorative art (Hagedorn, 2004b, p. 18).

Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929) played a crucial role in integrating Islamic art into the European museum context. As the founding director of the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum (later renamed the Bode Museum) in Berlin, established in 1904, he pioneered the systematic display of Islamic artworks and promoted their scholarly study. His establishment of the *Islamische Abteilung* (Department of Islamic Art) within the museum marked a turning point in the institutional recognition of Islamic art as a distinct field in Germany. Bode's leadership provided both a physical and intellectual framework for the collection, exhibition, and analysis of Islamic art. His efforts created a space where Islamic artworks could be contextualized

within broader art historical narratives. The department's first director, Sarre, led the institution until 1931 and was instrumental in advancing comparative approaches and interpretive scholarship (Gierlichs, 2009, p. 1–2). Sarre's academic trajectory was shaped by fieldwork in Samarra between 1911 and 1913, conducted in collaboration with Herzfeld. This expedition deepened his expertise in Islamic architecture and helped lay the groundwork for interdisciplinary research within the department (Blessing, 2014, p. 1).

The department's foundational collection was significantly enriched by two major donations: the façade of the Mshatta Palace—gifted by Sultan Abdul Hamid II to Kaiser Wilhelm II—and Bode's own carpet collection. Additional contributions came from art mediators and diplomats such as Martha Koch and J. H. Loytved in Aleppo, and orientalist Bernhard Moritz. By the early 20th century, the department held more than 750 Islamic objects, including ceramics, architectural fragments, carpets, manuscripts, and metalwork. Beyond serving as a public platform, the collection stimulated academic interest and supported archaeological research by attracting gifts, loans, and new discoveries (Sarre, 1923, p. 35). In parallel, Philipp Walter Schulz (1864–1920) gathered Islamic and pre-Islamic artifacts during a two-year expedition to Iran. His collection was displayed in 1900 at the *Kunstgewerbemuseum*, part of the Grassi Museum in Leipzig, and many of the works remain there today (Gierlichs, 2013, p. 213–236).

Sarre was a foundational figure in establishing Islamic art history and archaeology in Germany. His research began with a year-long expedition to Anatolia in 1895, where he conducted one of the first systematic surveys of Seljuk architecture. Initially focused on ornamental decoration, his work later expanded to include tilework and monuments across various Islamic dynasties. Between 1901 and 1910, his fieldwork in the Islamic world resulted in several important publications, including *Denkmäler Persischer Baukunst* (Monuments of Persian Architecture, 1901) and *Iranische Felsreliefs* (Iranian Rock Reliefs, 1910), the latter co-authored with Herzfeld. These works helped define the emerging field in Germany and encouraged other scholars to pursue first-hand study in Islamic regions (Kröger, 2021, p. 123).

Sarre's most visible achievement was co-organizing *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken muhammedanischer Kunst* (The Exhibition of Masterpieces of

Muhammedan Art) in Munich in 1910, in collaboration with Swedish diplomat and collector Fredrik Robert Martin (1868–1933). This landmark exhibition featured over 3,000 Islamic objects and marked a turning point in European perceptions of Islamic art (Gierlichs, 2013, p. 215). The exhibition was comprehensively documented in a three-volume catalogue published in 1912 by Sarre and Martin. Each volume addressed different media: the first focused on miniatures, book arts, and carpets; the second on ceramics, metalwork, glass, and crystal; and the third on textiles, weapons, wood, and ivory. Introductory essays were written by specialists, including Kühnel on wood and ivory, and M. Dreger on textiles (Sarre and Martin, 1912). This exhibition elevated Islamic art's status within European museums and academia, helping shape institutional attitudes and scholarly discourse. However, as noted by Jens Kröger (2004, p. 22), the onset of World War I and ensuing economic hardship eventually curtailed the momentum generated by this pioneering event.

Herzfeld was a pivotal figure in the development of Islamic art and archaeology. Trained as an architect, archaeologist, and art historian, he engaged in extensive fieldwork across Syria, Iraq, and Iran. After completing his doctorate in 1907, he joined Sarre on expeditions through the Euphrates and Tigris region, leading to their monumental four-volume publication *Archäologische Reise im Euphrat- und Tigrisgebiet* (Archaeological Journey in the Euphrates and Tigris Region). In 1911, he was appointed director of the Samarra excavations, a defining project that integrated archaeology, art history, epigraphy, and philology. His interdisciplinary approach helped establish Islamic archaeology as a serious academic field. Though appointed as Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology at Friedrich Wilhelm University in 1920, he remained largely absent from the post due to continued fieldwork (Hauser, 2012, p. 290–293).

Ettinghausen described Herzfeld as one of the first scholars to treat Islamic art not only as an aesthetic tradition but also as a cultural product shaped by political, social, and religious forces. Herzfeld's methodology broadened the scope of Islamic art studies and contributed to its academic legitimacy in German-speaking institutions. Another key figure in this intellectual lineage was Kühnel, a student of Strzygowski. Trained in classical archaeology and art history, he also studied Arabic, Persian, and Turkish in Vienna. These linguistic skills, combined with his formal training, positioned him to become one of the earliest professors of Islamic art. Kühnel succeeded Sarre as director of the Department of Islamic Art at the

Berlin State Museums in 1931, continuing both curatorial and academic work. His lectures and publications further advanced the discipline, while his curatorship helped shape the museum's internationally respected Islamic art collections (Gierlichs, 2004a, p. 39).

## **5. Positioning Islamic Art within the Disciplinary and Institutional Framework**

From a disciplinary standpoint, situating Islamic art between the late 19th and early 20th centuries presents a complex challenge. One of the main difficulties lies in defining the framework within which Islamic art was initially studied. In the German-speaking world, three distinct approaches to its discovery can be identified. This first concerns the intersection of art history and archaeology with Islamic art.

*I. The Intersection of Art History and Archaeology with Islamic Art:* A key figure at this disciplinary crossroads was Strzygowski, whose background in classical archaeology and art history led to his appointment as professor of art history at the University of Graz. He became one of the earliest scholars to focus seriously on Islamic art. Another prominent figure is Cornelius Gurlitt (1850–1938), known for his research on Baroque, Rococo, and Classical architecture. As an architectural historian, he also engaged extensively with Byzantine and Ottoman architecture in Istanbul. Gierlichs (2004b, p. 29) describes Gurlitt as a pioneer in Islamic architectural research, emphasizing his role in promoting serious academic studies on Ottoman architecture.

Gurlitt's comprehensive three-volume work *Die Baukunst Konstantinopels* (The Architecture of Constantinople, 1907–1912) remains a seminal publication on Istanbul's Islamic architectural history. It includes detailed architectural analyses and large-format photographs of mosques, palaces, and other significant monuments. His work helped establish the scientific study of these structures and laid the groundwork for further academic inquiry. His influence extended to Hans Wilde, whose research on the architecture of Bursa (1909) built upon this foundation. Wilde, trained in classical art history, also made important contributions to the study of Ottoman architecture. This convergence of art history and archaeology produced a distinctive methodological approach to Islamic art in the German-speaking world. The combination of visual documentation,

comparative analysis, and historical contextualization laid the basis for further disciplinary developments in the early 20th century.

*II. Islamic Art within German Orientalism:* Islamic art emerged as a vital component of German Orientalism, shaped by its intellectual, linguistic, and cultural frameworks. Early academic investigations into Islamic visual culture were often filtered through Eurocentric perspectives. Yet these inquiries laid the foundation for Islamic art to be recognized as a distinct field of study. In the German-speaking world, scholars grounded their research in philology, historiography, and cultural studies, drawing upon both literary and material sources.

Studies on Umayyad art, for example, required proficiency in Arabic language and historiography, while Arabists found visual culture—especially from the Umayyad and Abbasid periods—a fertile source of inquiry. Areas such as calligraphy, miniature painting, ceramics, and architecture became central to early academic debates. These efforts not only contributed to the scholarly canon but also shaped museum collections across Europe, deepening global appreciation for Islamic art.

Prominent figures in this scholarly tradition include Schulz and Karabacek. Schulz studied Persian and Arabic under the guidance of Arabists Martin Hartmann and Moritz at the Seminar for Oriental Languages in Berlin (Gierlichs, 2013, p. 216–217). Karabacek initially earned a law degree from the University of Vienna before transitioning to Oriental Studies in 1866. He completed his doctorate in 1868 and began lecturing in 1869, specializing in Islamic paleography and numismatics.

Herzfeld also belongs to this intellectual tradition. His interdisciplinary training in architecture, art history, and Assyriology was complemented by mastery of Latin, Greek, Arabic, Persian, and cuneiform. His research bridged classical and Islamic antiquity, contributing significantly to the institutionalization of Islamic archaeology. Another influential scholar was van Berchem (1863–1921), a Swiss specialist in Islamic epigraphy. After studying Assyriology in Leipzig, he trained under Theodor Nöldeke in Strasbourg, aligning him with the German Orientalist school. Though he published primarily in French, van Berchem's academic path reflected the close ties between Oriental studies and the emerging field of Islamic art (Eyice, 1981, p. 116).

Collectively, these scholars exemplify how Islamic art emerged not in isolation, but as an integral part of a broader orientalist intellectual network. Their linguistic expertise, historical insight, and cross-cultural

methodologies helped elevate Islamic visual traditions to the realm of scholarly and institutional legitimacy.

III. *The Institutionalization of Islamic Art in Museums and Similar Institutions*: The institutionalization of Islamic art in the German-speaking world was deeply tied to museum practices, scholarly networks, and field research. Sarre exemplifies this trajectory. His archaeological and curatorial work—often in collaboration with other orientalists such as Strzygowski, Herzfeld, and Moritz—contributed significantly to transferring and exhibiting Islamic artworks in European museums. These scholars were instrumental in laying the foundations for Islamic art studies as.

Despite limited proficiency in Oriental languages beyond Turkish, Sarre was appointed to lead the *Islamische Abteilung* (Islamic Department) at the Berlin State Museums. To bridge this gap, he relied on a close network of linguistically trained scholars including Herzfeld, Hartmann, van Berchem, Diez, and Moritz. In the introduction to his *Reise in Kleinasien* (*Travels in Asia Minor*), Sarre acknowledged this intellectual collaboration, emphasizing the role of Oriental scholarship in shaping his perspective.

Schulz, a key collaborator of Sarre, also played a significant role in this institutionalization process. Between 1897 and 1900, he studied Persian and Arabic, traveled extensively in Iran, and collected a wide array of Islamic and pre-Islamic artifacts. His collection, exhibited in 1900 at Leipzig's Museum of Applied Arts (*Kunstgewerbemuseum, part of the Grassi Museum*), was largely retained by the institution and became a major scholarly resource (Gierlichs, 2013, p. 213–236). Schulz's linguistic training and close cooperation with Sarre allowed him to contribute both as a researcher and collector. His fieldwork and acquisitions played a serious role in shaping early 20th-century perspectives on Islamic and Iranian material culture in German museum contexts.

Another key figure was Justus Brinckmann (1843–1915), who served as director of the Hamburg Museum of Arts and Crafts (MK&G) from 1877 to 1915. He delivered numerous lectures, including a series on Islamic art presented between January 1904 and March 1905, accompanied by lantern slide projections. His initiatives coincided with the formative period of Islamic art's emergence as a distinct field within art-historical scholarship in Germany (Kraneiß, 2022, p. 66)

Collectively, the work of Sarre, Schulz, and Brinckmann underscores how exhibitions, museum collections, and public scholarship played a pivotal role in institutionalizing Islamic art. These efforts not only made

Islamic visual culture accessible to wider audiences but also secured its place within academic and cultural discourse in the early 20th century.

## **6. Conclusion**

The delayed European engagement with Islamic and Oriental art can be attributed in part to limited accessibility prior to the advent of photography and the expansion of global travel networks. European scholars, trained primarily in Renaissance and Classical art traditions, often found Islamic art's distinct aesthetic unfamiliar and difficult to classify. As Suzanne Marchand (1994, p. 114) notes, this unfamiliarity led to dismissive attitudes, viewing Islamic art as symbolic or ornamental rather than of equal. The German-speaking world's involvement in Islamic art cannot be reduced to a single cause; rather, it reflects a convergence of academic, institutional, and geopolitical factors. Among these, German Orientalism played a meaningful role in the recognition of Islamic art as a legitimate field of study. Scholars from this tradition contributed foundational research, built significant collections, and developed classificatory systems that shaped the emerging discipline.

Long before Islamic art was formally integrated into university curricula, museums and exhibitions served as primary sites for its scholarly engagement. These institutions functioned as *de facto* laboratories, where objects from across the Islamic world were assembled and interpreted. Orientalists were instrumental in this process, while art historians and collectors helped broaden public awareness through curated displays and catalogues. Although Islamic art was initially approached through the frameworks of Classical archaeology and the decorative arts, sustained efforts by German scholars and institutions gradually transformed it into a systematic academic field. This transformation, however, was not without epistemological and methodological challenges. Early scholarship was often marked by Eurocentric biases, where Islamic art was measured against Western aesthetic standards. This led to reductive categorizations that overlooked history.

Moreover, the role of collectors and scholars—such as Sarre, Herzfeld, and Strzygowski—raises important ethical questions regarding the acquisition and display of Islamic heritage in Western institutions. Their efforts, while pivotal to the discipline's formation, must also be viewed critically

within the broader context of cultural appropriation and representation. Ultimately, this study underscores the complex processes through which Islamic art was positioned within academic and museum contexts in the framework of German Orientalism. It highlights both the pioneering contributions and the conceptual limitations of early German scholarship, providing a foundation for ongoing reflection on the global legacy of Islamic artistic traditions.

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### Remzi Avcı

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