

Chapter XXIII

Europe and the Orient: An Ideologically Charged Exhibition*

Between 28 May and 27 August 1989, the Martin Gropius house in Berlin, a monument of, and to, modern architecture, hosted an unusual exhibition which received only minimal coverage in the popular press and professional publications.¹ Divided into fifteen very unequal sections, it included 636 items in nearly all the media of artistic creativity short of whole buildings, and in many media, such as paper, that are generally informative but not always art. The catalog has almost 1,000 pages and weighs over ten pounds. It belongs to the by now common category of abominable catalogs which are useless when visiting the exhibition and cumbersome to work with afterwards. Too thick to peruse in comfort, their overburdened bindings are too fragile to adorn coffee tables or desks. Catalogs like this one may well be useful records of an event, but I fail to see why they could not at least be printed in fascicles that could be sold together but used separately.

This particular request is likely to remain unheeded, and by the time the exhibition is over, all that will remain of it will be the catalog. Its magnitude; its excellent illustrations – 948 altogether, and over 300 more than the number of items in the show – many in color; its lengthy essays on a variety of subjects and often elaborate (or at least long) notices on exhibited objects; and its all-encompassing title *Europa und der Orient 800–1900* guarantee that the catalog for a temporary event has, or soon will, become a book of lasting value. This is the reason why it deserves a review, even by someone who did not see the exhibition itself and even if it appears long after the event. Just as the size and spread of the great London exhibition of 1976 made its catalog, *The Arts of Islam*, a standard reference book, so will the quality and quantity of data in this catalog not be repeated for many a decade; it will be used for a generation, even by those who do not read German. Furthermore, the topic of the exhibition touches on many issues which have often and at times emotionally been discussed in recent years and which touch the most sensitive

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¹ The only review – a negative and rather mean one – that I have seen appeared in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* for 21 July 1989; I owe a copy of it to Catherine Ševčenko.

nerve in the difficult relations between a culturally dominant Western world and the Islamic cultures of Asia and Africa, and perhaps other non-Western cultures.²

The organizers of the exhibition, although apparently aware of “Orientalism,” more or less as defined by Edward Said in 1978, hardly considered the twin questions of authenticity and identity which are at the core of the Orient’s own contemporary discourse. In several different ways I shall return to this omission, but the most immediate criticism to be leveled at this catalog – and a criticism valid for nearly all of its companions in gigantism known to me – is its absence of conclusions or of statements that emerged from the exhibition and from the studies which led to it.³ It seems absurd that those who by creating a show raise questions should not then bother to propose some answers, but leave that task to writers less familiar with the evidence and less involved with it. One wonders, as is so often the case nowadays, whether simply mounting the show was in itself the sole objective of the sponsors of the exhibition and of the events surrounding it. If so, then comments about or deductions drawn from the show may in fact be irrelevant to it.

Yet there are many important questions raised, consciously or not, by the choice of objects shown in the exhibition and by the text of the catalog. Answers to some of these questions are occasionally implied, and the whole event is a reasonable starting point for discussing a variety of considerations on the burning issues surrounding East–West cultural relations. This essay will deal with some of the hypotheses and conclusions that could have been derived from the exhibition in three general areas: (1) what the exhibition was and criticisms of it; (2) varieties of functional and ideological relationships between Europe and the Orient over time; (3) the chronological sequence of these relationships and its implications.

² The issue is primarily cultural and visual, not political and economic. This is why the general term of “non-Western” seemed preferable to “Third World,” “developing worlds,” or “north–south.”

³ It would be interesting some day to identify and evaluate those exhibitions that have made a lasting impact on scholarship or on the general public. For Islamic art, the 1910 shows in Munich and at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, the 1931 exhibit of Persian art in London, and the 1976 World of Islam exhibit also in London all led to significant alterations in the prevailing conception of Islamic art and affected the quantity, probably also the quality, of the scholarly work which followed them. The point has been demonstrated for Persian painting: Nasrin Rohani, *A Bibliography of Persian Miniature Painting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1982), p. 144. For a broader perspective on exhibition and ideology, see Oleg Grabar, “Geometry and Ideology,” in F. Kazemi and R. D. McChesney, *A Way Prepared: In Honor of R.B. Winder* (New York, 1988). Why did some shows succeed and others not?

The Exhibition and its Catalog

The event – the exhibition and the catalog together – is consciously and willfully Europe-centered and [2] seeks to show what a Middle Eastern or Western Asian “Orient” has meant to Europe. It does not try to understand that particular Orient on its own terms, and there is no point in criticizing it for something it does not try to do. But it does assume, as early as the introduction (p. 15), that there is a European culture and that it has had a history of contacts and relations with an Orient. The latter is true enough; the former is a myth which may finally become a creative reality by the end of the twentieth century. Earlier, mostly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,⁴ it was an exclusive, elitist and basically racist club that ended in 1914, when it entered into a self-destructive period of some thirty years during which Europeans killed around eighty million other Europeans and, directly or indirectly, were responsible for probably as many murders all over the world, and for many yet to come. I shall return later to the significance of this point to the system of relationships between Europe and the Orient suggested by the Berlin show.

Almost half the catalog is taken up by twenty-two “essays” (the English term is used in the book to distinguish these pages from the catalog proper) on a wide range of topics. Some, like Dirk Syndram’s on the fascination of Europe with ancient Egypt or Michael Scholz-Hänsel’s discussion of the ways in which “Moorish” Spain dazzled the European nineteenth century, are learned surveys. Others, like the chapter on “Tulipomania” in Europe by Pieter Bisboer, Karl Syndram’s original approach to the Orient in European literature, and Karl-Heinz Kohl’s “Cherchez la femme d’Orient,” are on broader topics. Two essays were taken from earlier publications, one by Gerhard Stamm on Raimond Lull, the other one by the late Richard Ettinghausen from *The Legacy of Islam*. A number are dedicated to the presentation of specific documents: Renaissance artists and the Orient (only pictures), views of Turkey by Pieter Coeke van Aelst and Melchior Lorck, the personality of the French draftsman and traveler Louis-François Cassas, and so on. Two essays deal with music, and performances of music and dance of many sorts were among the activities surrounding the exhibition.

⁴ The universalization of a humanistic view of man developed by the eighteenth century and proclaimed by the French Revolution demanded a practical leadership, and this led to the idea of the Concert of Europe, to which others were not invited, or, if they were, only as curiosities. One of the most bizarre representations of “others” together with Europeans (Americans are curiously absent from either group, as is the Ottoman sultan) is the painting *Hommage à la République* exhibited by Henri Rousseau *le Douanier* in 1907. It is beyond the timespan of the Berlin event, but reflects the tail end of the show’s concern. In it are shown, to the side of a group of Europeans, a collection of small figures, “Easterners,” including the shah of Persia and the emperor of Ethiopia (New York Museum of Modern Art, *Henri Rousseau* [New York, 1985], p. 178).

Some were classical and somewhat esoteric; others were more popular and catered to the sizable Turkish and Pakistani communities of Berlin.

The quality of the essays is on the whole reasonably high. They are heavily illustrated with items from the show, as well as many which were not in it, thus increasing considerably the information in the book. Each essay deserves comment, but that task is beyond both the purposes of this review and the competence of any one reviewer. Two remarks are, however, pertinent to the broader objective of assessing the value of the book. One is that seven of the twenty-two essays deal exclusively with connections between the Ottoman world and Europe, and three or four more prominently feature the Ottomans as well. Part of the explanation is simple enough: the Ottomans were closest to modern Europe and therefore many more documents by and about them have been preserved; furthermore, there is a significant Turkish audience in Berlin, although the emotional or aesthetic relationship between Turkish workers and the Ottoman world remains unclear to me. But there is also a more profound explanation for the predominance of Ottoman material, to which I shall return later.

The second comment is that there is no attempt by anyone to explain the relationship in any depth or with any sense of perspective of either European or Islamic art, history and culture. The relationship is presumed, even perhaps demonstrated, at least as a one-way movement from East to West, but it is never clear whether we are dealing with something important or with peculiar freaks of history.

The essays are followed by a catalog arranged in fifteen chapters varying considerably in length. The first, on the discovery of the Orient, has 259 items; the fourth, on treasures, has 142 items; the seventh, on images of enemies in war and art, has 106. These three sections contain three-quarters of all the items shown, and thus the tantalizing titles of some of the other twelve chapters (the Vikings and the Orient, Charlemagne and Harun al-Rashid, Bellini and Dürer, women in Orientalist painting, and so on) do not lead to equally profuse illustration. There is nothing wrong with such imbalance; it may at times have been required by the layout of the show, but it can also be legitimate in itself. It is obvious, for example, that it takes more objects to illustrate treasures through ten centuries than it does Melchior Lorch (chapter 10) or Western embassies (chapter 11). The result is, however, that the visual impact, presumably of a visit to the show and certainly of a perusal of the catalog, does not match the intellectual, scholarly, or even sensory objectives and potential of the event. Once the broad theme of Europe and the Orient has been launched with a brilliant fanfare of fancy pictures and heavy essays, there is practically nothing to guide the viewer toward the objects.

Within the category of treasures, for example, is a group of nine fantastic birds and griffins (4/74–4/83). [3] Some are of Middle Eastern provenance; others were made in the West, and one example is a seventeenth-century

German woodcut of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt with a dragon and a griffin in the foreground wonderfully poised for battle. The selection is a good and interesting one, and it is indeed remarkable that a group of objects with a related power of expression, a comparable technique of manufacture, and reasonably similar ornamentation could have been manufactured in places as widely separated as Egypt, Lorraine, North Germany, Flanders, Saxony, Mesopotamia, Sicily and Andalusia. Whether these geographic attributions are wild guesses or reasonable conclusions is really not very important, because the ground has not been prepared for a discussion of metal objects from different regions, and no reference is made to the ground-breaking, even if controversial, studies by Boris Marshak on some similarly related groups.⁵ The point of Marshak's work is to establish a "genetic" relationship between objects grouped together by shape and technique. Such a relationship, even if tentative and tenuous, at least allows us to see the objects in historical perspective, as the remnants of an evolution or development.

Alternately, objects can be seen as individual works of art to be appreciated and understood on their own merit. To do so, however, would have required a real study at least of the most important of these objects. And here another problem arises. For, if one takes an object as well known as the Pisa griffin (4/83), the largest extant metal object in Islamic art, one finds in the book a thoughtless description that does not even reflect two recent studies on the griffin, which may or may not be correct, but which give it a completely different provenance and date.⁶ This is a serious scholarly failure which makes one doubt many other references and explanations. But scholarship, after all, is for scholars and not the general public, so why does it matter? In the case of the Pisa griffin it matters because the entry does not even begin to explain the several levels on which this striking object can be understood: in its own time and place of manufacture somewhere in the Muslim world for functions as yet unknown; in Pisa, where it may well have been put in the cathedral to commemorate a victory; later in Pisa, when the memory of the victory had faded, and the griffin became an ornament with or without any identification of its origins; and finally as a treasure expressing something about East–West relations in a museum. In their passion for repetitive descriptions of what one can anyway see in the illustrations, the entries are for the most part of as little help to learning as those recorded voices on cassettes that now accompany art shows.

⁵ Boris Marshak, "Bronzovoi Kuvshin," *Iran i Sredneia Azia* (Leningrad, 1973); "Ranneislamskie Blundy," *Trudy Hermitage*, 19 (1978).

⁶ Marilyn Jenkins, "New Evidence for the History and Provenance of the Pisa Griffin," *Islamic Archeological Studies*, 1 (1978); S. Melikian-Chirvani, "Le Griffon Iranien de Pise," *Kunst des Orients*, 5 (1969); and B. Spuler and Jeanine Sourdél-Thomine, *Islamische Kunst* (Propyläen Kunstgeschichte) (Berlin, 1973), p. 263 (a work listed in the bibliography of the catalog, but obviously not read).

In short, most of the entries deconstruct the objects to the point of making them utterly boring, and nearly all the images are more interesting than the texts accompanying them. But, it can be argued, what matters is the more than twenty-five pages of bibliography which should lead back to the true “deep” scholarship about objects, even if the authors of most of the entries do not do so. For many objects, it is true, this scholarship does not exist, a fact that could usefully have been acknowledged in the book itself. The usefulness of the bibliography was weakened for me in particular by the appearance of several references to a certain “Grabar, Oleg-André,” which shows a discouraging ignorance of art historians and their relationships. In addition, many other works by these two authors combined into one could have been cited as appropriately, or uselessly, as the ones that were, and it is clear that few of the many books and articles listed in the catalog have been read. These lists are a parody, and a bad one at that, of bibliographical exercises common in my youth; they look thorough but they are in fact incomplete and unused. The enormous bibliography is an uncritical, unthoughtful compendium probably by a computer or by someone who knew nothing about the topics involved. The same false learning is often found in the footnotes; it was as though the mere addition of a note took precedence over its content or its relevance. On an informational level, then, the photographic record is stupendous in its sheer size and in the quality of the prints in black-and-white or color. The choice of objects is impressive and in some cases, like the small but little-known group from the land of the Vikings or the various views of Istanbul and Turkey, the documentation is rare and important. If only more thought had been given to the individual objects and to the ideas that can be derived from them!

Varieties of Functional and Ideological Relationships

The objects in the exhibition and the catalog can be organized according to seven kinds of relationships between Europe and Western Asia. There is some overlap between these categories, and more than one item pertains to several, but, as an initial organization of my own reaction to the material, these seven categories represent a way of seeing both individual objects [4] and the complex psychological and intellectual attitudes which affected both their manufacture and contemporary or later reactions to them. Each one of these categories, except perhaps the first one, deserves deeper study than I have given to it here, and I have tried to indicate some of the directions further discussions may take. The order in which I have put them is not entirely arbitrary, as it moves from near neutrality of value to the complete subjection of an object to a more or less acknowledged purpose. I am, of course, aware of the fact that neutrality is, in the eyes of many contemporary thinkers or writers, impossible, and I may well agree that neutrality is rare in

the attitudes of people, even the most conscientious scholars, and possibly that neutrality is itself immoral in that it denies truth by always seeing “another side.” But my point of departure is the existence of objects which are (or were) part of an event. The event is not neutral and may well have used objects for some justified or evil purpose, but the bias of the event does not necessarily affect the objects, and they are my primary concern.

The first category can be called “contact and souvenir.” The seventh chapter of the exhibition, with the title “Images of Enmity: War and Art” (“Feindbilder: Krieg und Kunst”), contains, in spite of its title, a series of written documents which record wars, truces, protests, questions, answers, alliances, and other common ways countries use to deal with each other. These documents contain valuable data, but they do not in themselves mean much. A slightly more complex issue comes from items brought to Europe after violent or peaceful encounters with the Muslim world. These items are of varying importance (a sword, a helmet, a knife; *the* sword attributed, probably incorrectly, to the last Muslim ruler of Granada), but none of them had an impact on the arts or on culture (as opposed, for instance, to the exotic object with which I shall deal shortly). They remained less as memories than as souvenirs.

A particularly complex issue revolves around the two sieges of Vienna by the Ottomans, in 1529 and 1683. If one adds the battle of Lepanto in 1571, we have three violent contacts which have been recorded with considerable care and at many levels, both the events themselves and all of the participants – images abound of European and Ottoman leaders done almost exclusively by Western artists. These are all records of specific moments in history which affected Western Europe’s sense of its successful defense of its alleged territorial space. It is striking, if it indeed becomes fully demonstrated by further research, that these images are rarely interpreted in ideologically charged fashion, as were nineteenth-century paintings of the Greek War of Independence and especially the French conquest of Algeria. Horace Vernet’s *La Première Messe en Kabylie*, in which noble Arabs witness the religious ceremony in front of a huge wooden cross, is all the more ironic (and certainly unwittingly so), as the troops protecting the celebration of the liturgy are all European zouaves dressed in pseudo-Oriental clothes. This ideological manipulation of the contemporary realm seems to me to have been rarer in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when contact, even military and destructive contact, could be seen simply as something that happened, perhaps with an identification of bad and good guys, but without any unusual distortion of the shape of the event.

The second category is learning. Both the essays and the catalog contain a great deal of information about the discovery of a historic Orient, the fascination with ancient Egypt, the explorations for ancient Mesopotamian remains, some truly astounding pictures of Persepolis (p. 475), and eventually the discovery in the Orient of Hellenistic and Roman art, at times under the

patronage of Semitic rulers, as in Petra or Palmyra. The reasons for these searches for knowledge were, as they still are, Europe's own search for its origin. Because of Herodotus and other Greek and Latin writers, Egypt and Persia were central to this search, and the Bible had made the whole eastern Mediterranean the land in which holy history was made visible. Both believers and new rationalists wanted to understand how Judaism and Christianity came into being and what spaces and environments shaped this growth. And then the culture and an ethic raised on Plutarch could not escape imagining where the Ptolemies, the Seleucids, Croesus, Antony, or Mithridates had lived and acted out their heroic deeds or ghastly misdeeds.

Fascination with learning the past, one's own or that of others, is a fine thing, but the extraordinary point about European learning is how little it involved the Muslim world, the contemporary reality of the Orient. There was a superficial description of it (of which more anon), but very little on its languages or culture. Hieroglyphs and cuneiform tablets held more fascination than the Qur'an or mosques. The exceptions to this generality are Andalusia, whose Islamic past was necessary for understanding Granada and Cordoba, and Cairo, where a small number of French and English painters and writers did record the contemporary world with sympathetic romanticism.⁷ This attitude will later [5] be understood as a contemptuous paternalism which indeed appears in literature much more than in the visual record.

In short, then, learning about the past, its history, art and philosophy, was a reason for Europe to turn toward the Orient, but it was not in order to learn how the living world of the Orient functioned except on very limited levels. The only exception, that of the sciences, lost its pungency in the fifteenth century, even if, as several sections of the catalog make clear, the knowledge of a debt to the Muslim world and the use of certain astronomical tables remained until much later.

The third category is exoticism. By this term I mean the use of foreign objects and motifs or the representation of alien scenes in order to satisfy needs of one's own. In dealing with the Middle East, what are these needs? Two predominate from the evidence of the exhibition. One is luxury, as from the beginning of the ninth century until today the Muslim world furnished Europe with its expensive objects in metal, ceramics, glass, crystal, and especially silk, cotton and wool. The rhythm and extent of this relationship varied over the centuries. At the time of Harun al-Rashid and Charlemagne, almost everything that was *de luxe* in Western Europe came from the Orient, though admittedly the Byzantine Christian Orient rather than the Islamic one. By the end of the twentieth century, carpets and a few weaving techniques alone have remained as luxury creations from the same

⁷ Nearly all the painters and draftsmen involved are mentioned in chapter 14 of the catalog; the names of John Frederick Lewis and Pascal Coste are particularly noteworthy for their images, while Stanley Lane-Poole was the outstanding writer of that time.

Orient, and even these are about to be replaced by machines. Why the Orient was able to feed Europe's luxury needs is easy enough to explain in terms of taste. The Orient's products were of a quality unknown in Europe for a variety of reasons.⁸ At some point things were turned around, and luxury in the Orient today comes almost entirely from the West and Japan. A curious variable in the receptivity to Oriental things lies in distinctions from area to area. Why are there so many rugs in Flanders and so many imitations of Arabic inscriptions in Italy? Why are high Spanish, French, or German paintings immune to Oriental themes until the nineteenth century, when French painting in particular picks them up with a vengeance?

All these questions can only be answered through a study of European history and culture, as is also true of the dominant nineteenth-century theme of sensual sexuality associated with the Muslim world. The theme is given much prominence in the catalog and essays and is accompanied by a particularly voluptuous choice of images. Many difficulties of interpretation surround this particular side of exoticism, none of which has as yet been seriously discussed.⁹ For instance, its growth parallels that of Romanticism and of the first statements of some depth about Islamic art and literature made by European writers. They all come from Kant, Goethe and Hegel. Goethe, in fact, wrote on the arabesque much before it had been recognized by Owen Jones.¹⁰ Why should the odalisque, whose filiation out of the Late Renaissance reclining Venus is generally accepted on a formal level, have appeared at this time? Whatever answers are eventually found to questions such as this one,¹¹ they will be found in the peculiar paths of Western culture, and they are not likely to enlarge our knowledge of the Orient.

⁸ There is no good history of luxury trades in the Middle Ages. Part of the reason for the superiority of Middle Eastern luxury products lay in the concentration around Baghdad (from where it spread everywhere in the Muslim world) of an enormous amount of capital and of a market of consumers, but the details of how it worked are yet to be sorted out; see R. Hodges and D. Whitehouse, *Muhammad, Charlemagne, and the Origin of Europe* (Ithaca, 1983); M. Lombard, *L'Islam dans sa première grandeur* (Paris, 1971); S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, esp. vol. 4 (Berkeley, 1984).

⁹ John Sweetman, *The Oriental Obsession* (Cambridge, 1988), deals primarily with architecture, but its conclusion, which does handle paintings, belies the noun in its title. It is one of the most balanced statements about what Islamic themes meant to Western Europe. Sweetman emphasizes the positive values of an eclectic approach which sought to learn and accept all possible models if they helped or satisfied genuine aesthetic and social needs. This position is largely antithetical to those who, like Edward Said (*Orientalism* [New York, 1978]), insist that any modification of original and specific traits is a willful or accidental betrayal of the model. Said, of course, did not deal with the visual world, which is quite different from the verbal discourse of his concern, but his approach can easily be applied to some of the paintings of the orientalist tradition. Whether it is correct to do so remains an open subject.

¹⁰ For sources and a preliminary discussion, see Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Das Ornament in der Kunst des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Hildesheim, 1987), a work unmentioned by the organizers of the exhibition.

¹¹ I suspect that a fruitful approach lies in the reading of travel literature, of the drawings which were inspired by it, and especially by the immensely complicated and

Exoticism can also be seen as escapism, as a way to disappear in imagination or, as through architectural decoration, into the artificial surroundings of domestic interiors.¹² Escapism can be physical, an invitation to deserts, to sun-filled spaces, to mysterious bazaars, even to such sexual adventures as permeate the Oriental experiences of Gustave Flaubert, André Gide, T. E. Lawrence, or Richard Burton. Escapism can also be an attitude given to one's subject. Fromentin's Egyptian girls (p. 867) and most of John Frederick Lewis's women from Cairo (pp. 871 and 873) seem to be pre-Raphaelite heroines in Oriental costume dreaming some impossible dream. This longed-for escapism in the representation of exotic women permeates their disquieting message and transmits a judgment of the world of others, of the Muslim Middle East in this case. In its intense form, beauty and luxury mean misery, moral degradation and a desire to escape. There is something depressing about these images, however beautiful they are, and they do indeed deserve a more developed analysis.

I can be brief on the fourth category of relationships, which is imitation. Since the treasures of Scandinavia (a tenth-century one is discussed on pp. 522–3) and the coins of King Offa in the British Isles which imitated early Islamic coins, Europe has copied the techniques of the Orient so closely that the place of manufacture of many chess pieces, silks and bronze lions or dragons cannot be securely identified. These fairly well-known examples are abundantly illustrated in the exhibition, but two – imitation in clothing and Egyptomania – are more original. The former is developed in two short chapters (pp. 759 f.) with fascinating and often very beautiful examples taken from paintings, ceramic figurines and theater costumes. It is also prominently featured in a chapter dealing with portraits. Egyptomania dominates the first chapter with literally hundreds of examples of ancient Egyptian themes in nearly every [6] conceivable form. Three essays, including one on the rather astonishing museum of Aegyptiana created in 1651 by the learned eccentric Athanasius Kircher, deal with the topic, and it is amazing that, by comparison, ancient Mesopotamia and Iran did not affect artistic creativity until the late nineteenth century, and even then to a much smaller degree. In general, however, imitation was constant; it existed in all European lands, but varied in intensity according to rhythms which are still to be investigated. Among its most extraordinary examples is a late-fourteenth-century miniature of Gluttony painted in Genoa entirely in the manner of a Persian miniature (p. 627).

My last three categories – recording, representation or re-presentation, and manipulation – form a sequence in intensity of ideological charge.

psychologically as well as intellectually shaky eighteenth-century positions on "others." On the one hand, they (i.e., the others) cannot but exist and must therefore represent some stage in the growth of mankind. On the *other* hand, the universality of high culture was an item of faith, and other cultures had to be morally wrong. For a debated statement, see Barbara Stafford, *Voyage into Substance* (Cambridge, 1984).

¹² Sweetman, *Oriental Obsession*, p. 249.

Recording is, at first glance, easy enough to understand. Hundreds of images exist which are supposed to show what some observer has seen, and scholars have already for several generations used Melchior Lorch to explain Istanbul and other reporters like him to explain Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Persepolis, Cairo, or Granada. Some of these visual statements seem indeed to be factual records of existing buildings or cities and of correctly rendered clothes, uniforms, objects, or events. The various portraits of Mehmet the Conqueror or Giovanni Mansueti's representations of Mamluks are first-rate standard drawings, paintings, or medals of their time and seem to be acceptable records.

But to distinguish truth from imagination is sometimes difficult. Out of dozens of examples, which show a range of "truths" and of amusing oddities, I will cite three. In 1633 a formal Polish embassy to the Pope entered Rome with a procession that included ten fantastically decked-out camels (pp. 768–9). The tent of the grand vizier entered by the victorious Austrian dignitaries in 1683 (p. 267) is a pastiche of dramatic orientalist myths arranged as for a grand opera. Even the schematic vision of a visit to a Turkish commander has been simplified almost to the point of meaninglessness (p. 267). In all three of these cases, there are many reasons to question the accuracy of the drawing, and yet they are at the same time perfectly reasonable accounts of an event.

The last two examples are in fact re-presentations. They transform an event that happened or a person who existed into the image the viewer wanted to see. Such re-presentation can be amusing, as is the frontispiece to an edition of Lady Wortley Montagu's letters (p. 327), where the fully dressed British lady, seen from the back, is greeted by a nude seated woman into a world of naked ladies who all look alike and very British, as though taken from the standard repertoire of graces in various poses. On a more serious level, the dozens of representations of all sorts of Ottomans, from ruling sultans to simple people seen in streets or invented in harems, offer a huge range of transpositions of observed, copied, or invented details into images which can be very successful works of art (as with Dürer's and Rembrandt's drawings or with Carpaccio's and others' paintings of events taking place in Jerusalem¹³) or caricatures, at times benevolent, at other times cruel. A similar set of transpositions occurs with events which are transformed to fit the visual habits of viewers. For instance, a Dutch traveler transforms Persepolis into a mixture of Rome and San Marco or perhaps into an Indian mosque (p. 475).

The last step would be manipulation, that is, the transformation of a topic in a way that would invite hate, contempt, or, much more subtly, alienation from the world for which it is destined, as though it does not

¹³ Julian Raby, *Venice, Dürer, and the Oriental Mode* (London, 1982).

belong with the “civilized” world or else exists only for certain clearly defined functions. One miniature (p. 635), by Jacop Ligozzi, who died in Florence in 1627, shows the “*Mufti, il Papa delli Turchi*” accompanied by an extraordinary emblem identified as a monster. It is a powerful image of the kind of hate-mongering that had existed since the Middle Ages. I have alluded earlier to the manipulation of events around the conquest of Algeria and around the representation of women. Images of Algeria show the victory of Christianity through military means (an echo of the Crusaders, who appear more than once in the images of the show), while women are shown in a sensuous world from which men have been banned. There is still something so vulgar and obvious in these manipulations that it is difficult to take them seriously, except for the fact that, in the case of some of Ingres’s paintings among many examples, we are dealing with masterpieces of composition and color, truly great works of art, almost escaping this immorality. It is only toward the end of the period considered by the Berlin show that people began to manipulate their vision of the “Orient” through international exhibitions.¹⁴ It was a “true” manipulation because it thought that this vision was the correct one, and it thus transformed the attitude, not so much of the Europeans who visited the exhibits, as of the Egyptians, Ottoman Turks, Iranians, and other “natives” who took part in them and began to believe, according to a recent hypothesis, that this is what they were.¹⁵ [7]

I am not prepared at this time to agree or disagree with this particular hypothesis. What I am trying to argue, however, is that no light is generated by simplifying the evidence, and if one positive conclusion can be derived from the Berlin event, it is that there have been in the past and probably are now many kinds of relationships between the Islamic Middle East and Europe. These many relationships need to be thought through and investigated in their manifold details before firm conclusions can be reached on anything.¹⁶ And, most important, critical judgment or even condemnation

¹⁴ Several studies are in preparation on the topic of the Orient and exhibitions. In the meantime, see Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, *The Expanding World of Art, 1874–1902*, vol. I (New Haven, 1988), and Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Cambridge, 1988). A fascinating much later and little known episode of manipulation through form is the making during World War II of Persian miniatures with Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt winning over Mussolini, Hitler and Tojo; see A. R. E. Rhodes, *Propaganda* (New York, 1976), p. 136.

¹⁵ T. Mitchell, “The World as Exhibition,” *Comparative Study of Society and History* (1987). I do not necessarily subscribe to all of Mitchell’s conclusions and hypotheses, but they are far more exciting than most of the prevailing ones.

¹⁶ The exhibition deals exclusively with Western Europe, but there has been a long-standing relationship between the Eastern European world and the Islamic Middle East. It is a very different relationship until the eighteenth century, when Poland and then the Russia of Peter the Great adopt and put in their own version of a generalized Western view. Then in the nineteenth century the conquest of the Caucasus in particular created a Russian Oriental romanticism which affected, among others, Lermontov and Tolstoy.

of certain attitudes should be muted until these attitudes have been understood. It does not, of course, require much sensitivity or intelligence to be offended by the erotic representation of women in orientalist paintings. But is the offensive part the treatment of the women? Or is it the vision of the Orient? What is the relationship between the two?

Edward Said and others have written eloquent pages on the reification of an image of the Orient in order better to subjugate it, and it may well have been so in the convoluted minds of some and the sick imagination of others. But there is no need to exaggerate. For every Gérôme there is a Manet, and Ingres was not only a depicter of flesh. In the overall sweep of Western art, the handling of the Orient was a minor occurrence. Too much should not be made of it except to note that it was there, that it was profoundly permeated with prejudices, that some of those that now seem offensive, like association with the desert or sensual beauty, were originally meant as compliments, and that their impact on the Orient itself was minimal, at least until the last decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

Chronology

A typology of visually perceptible relationships between the Orient and Europe is a taxonomic list of convenience which may or may not require additional discussions and elaboration. It acquires life when seen in concrete examples and set in time. Each object has its own specific and at times even unique moment, like the Rosetta Stone, which opened up the field of Egyptology, or the years of Melchior Lorch's sojourn in Istanbul (1555–59), which provided us with a very precise image of the Ottoman capital. Most objects are also part of sequences of objects like the often bizarre transformations of ancient Egyptian motifs which formed a timeless Egyptomania (one of the very successful and original chapters of the exhibition) or the succession of views of Cairo and Istanbul, which were most useful as representative of an evolution in the technique of recording cities and in the appearance of the cities recorded.

At some point it will be possible to establish a correlation between types and various periods of history and probably various places, countries, or

For any sort of thorough scholarship on the subject, the Polish and then Russian phenomena should be examined and, much later, the vision of the Balkan states and of the Christians of the Near East, which is yet another story. It is interesting to note, however, that the Greek War of Independence became a major literary and artistic motif in Western culture (Byron, Dumas, Delacroix), but Turgenev wrote about Bulgarian and Serbian "patriots."

¹⁷ There is little study of the ways in which the visual impressions are made and retained. I assume that historians and social scientists have probed into the tensions or conflict between the truth of what one is and the image others expect of one. To all of this India was probably an exception; the most immediately effective introduction is S. C. Welch, *India, Art and Culture 1300–1900* (New York, 1985).

societies. All I can do at this stage is sketch out, from the exhibition itself, some key moments in the making of contacts between Europe and the Orient, some specific places involved in these contacts, and a few hypotheses for an evolution.

Three “key” moments are clearly visible, and it would be interesting to know whether they do in fact stand out over all others. Keeping in mind that I am dealing with visual evidence alone, these are the Crusades, the two Ottoman attacks on Vienna, and the European conquests in the nineteenth century, especially of North Africa. There is also British India, almost entirely absent from the exhibition, which played a significant part in the architectural imagination of Great Britain, but with nothing comparable to the “Oriental” inspiration of Ingres, Delacroix, and eventually Matisse, not to speak of dozens of lesser lights in France.

The Crusades are directly reflected in the appearance of Eastern objects in the West and perhaps in a few new themes in decoration or techniques of manufacture. But if one considers the time of the Crusades, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, rather than just the fact of the Crusades, the wealth and complexity of the contacts increase enormously, as the archaeology and artistic history of Sicily, southern Italy and Spain demonstrate. This catalog is, however, far too superficial and unhistorical to focus properly on the immense variety of these contacts and on their actual operation. Some key examples of the works brought West because of or through the Crusades are missing.

The Ottoman attacks on Vienna provided the occasion for fascinating imagery in every detail, as personages and artefacts and, in fact, the whole topographical setting were lovingly recorded, as an earlier exhibition in Vienna had fully shown.¹⁸ We still miss, however, interpretations of these images within the social and ideological contexts of the late sixteenth century and of the late seventeenth. It is also an instance, especially for the sixteenth century, where there is an Ottoman visual record which could be contrasted with the European one, if only to evaluate the latter properly. To deal with the nineteenth century is difficult because the partly justified passions which have arisen around Orientalism as an expression of colonialism and imperialism [8] have contributed very little to the understanding of the visual impact made by North African and Middle Eastern forms on European eyes. Flaubert, Loti, Gérard de Nerval, even Mark Twain, wrote a lot of nonsense about the Orient they had encountered and, in the case of Loti, liked. Delacroix and Gérôme, and later Matisse, made beautiful paintings out of their experience, just as Ingres did with the rather vulgar topic of vast numbers of women in harems. Why is it that the “word” or the pen of Europe seems to have been so much less successful than the brush in

¹⁸ Vienna, Historisches Museum, *Die Türken vor Wien* (Vienna, 1983).

creating attractive works of art? The answer lies probably in some fundamental distinction between visual and verbal expression which lies beyond my competence.

The places through which and in which contacts were established are more obvious. Istanbul and Cairo dominate all knowledge of the Orient until the appearance of North Africa within a specifically French context. Until the seventeenth century, the pictures of Italy and Northern Europe dominate. England and especially France appear with a vengeance in the eighteenth century and dominate the nineteenth.

It is worthwhile to single out the peculiar state of Istanbul and of the Ottoman empire in the image provided by the exhibition. It was both alien and quite familiar to Europe, as it issued out of the same matrix of behavior and of memories of spaces known since Herodotus. It hovered between being just an enemy (a concept European countries developed among themselves) and an alien enemy, and this ambiguity affected many images. In addition, the two areas closest to the Muslim Orient, which either fought it or lived in more or less successful coexistence with it, are almost totally absent from the exhibition – I refer to the Iberian peninsula and the Eastern European world. The latter means primarily Russia, although there is also a fascinating Polish Orientalism. From a strictly scholarly point of view, the robes and arms of the tsars before Peter the Great and the liturgical clothes of many bishops could have been included, and many medieval or pre-modern objects found on Russian or Ukrainian territories belong to the same groups as the Western ones. At the end of the nineteenth century Vereshchagin and Repin are only the best known of many painters who went east or south with conquering armies and depicted the Orient or, in the case of Repin, episodes from a history of hostile relations between the Ottomans and various Slavic entities. All this could have been included, but I suspect that the Europe of the organizers of the exhibition stops short at the Oder–Neisse line. Much more puzzling is the absence of Spain, and my own lack of familiarity with the Iberian peninsula after the Alhambra only permits me to raise the question whether the visual memory of the Muslim world disappeared during the subsequent centuries of Spanish history or simply remained unseen because no one looked for it.

The most interesting conclusion suggested by the exhibition however, concerns the chronology, of the history of the relationship. There, it seems to me, granting some exceptions among rugs and other textiles, a clear break occurs somewhere in the sixteenth century, in the midst of the Renaissance. Until then most of the contacts through objects or images could be called practical and culturally consistent. Textiles made for Muslim princes may have been used to bury Christian saints, but it was a function of textiles to be used for burial. Aquamaniles still carried liquids and, even if handles were added to rock-crystal ewers, the basic function of ewers remained. Certain types of bronze griffins were copied, while others were used for new functions,

and Arabic letters or Muslim designs were carefully, if senselessly, copied. In all of these examples, perhaps a hundred of which are in the catalog, there is a continuity of functional use which keeps most of these objects alive until they enter museums. To use an architectural parallel, the mosque of Cordoba is still a religious space, even if the religion is different. Hagia Sophia, having been a museum for nearly seventy years, is religiously dead for Islam *and* for Christianity.

After the Renaissance, and always with some exceptions, practical objects gave way to images. Some of these carefully depict a reality out there, a pyramid or a uniform; many are interpretations and often falsifications of reality, whether archaeological reality or social truth. One detects fear, as the fear of the "Saracen" was one of the visceral fears of seventeenth-century Europe,¹⁹ curiosity at quaintness and difference of customs or clothes, at times even awe. Exterior details like clothes become theatrical props for beautiful exoticism. Oriental landscapes could be made dramatic or sensible, but they are always set in terms of a Western imagination about nature.

One could easily follow various recent studies and simply argue that, after the Renaissance, the Orient was no longer seen as a reality but as an image to be represented, rather than felt or understood.²⁰ This, however, is too simple-minded an answer to the images of the show, because it implies, as in a great deal of leftist cultural history about other worlds, that life and art were wonderful, sensible, and attuned to ecological [9] surroundings and social context, until disrupted and eventually ravaged, not merely by the physical presence of Europe, but also by the visions and prejudices carried by these Europeans.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of the eventual impact, if any, of post-Renaissance images on the Orient itself, what impression is provided by the mass of some three or four hundred post-1500 objects and images from Western art? First of all, a further chronological distinction must be made between the middle of the nineteenth century and what preceded it. Before 1850 or so, we have some beautiful pieces (by both celebrated and little-known artists), a large number of informative ones, a few cute things, and quite a bit of bad, if occasionally curious, art. The Orient seems to be a minor theme of Western art, and the most interesting and useful works are those which belong in the learned and recording categories. Very often, because of the Western propensity to make images, these are our only documents about the past and present of many lands.

But after the conquest of Algeria, the appearance of photography almost eliminated the need for recording places and events in drawings and paintings. The Orient soon became a playground for visual and other sensuous experiences for new classes of people weaned on Romanticism and its own

¹⁹ Jean Delumeau, *La Peur en Occident, XIVe au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1978).

²⁰ This is one of the themes in Mitchell's work.

vision of an Orient that had come primarily from mysticism and Persian poetry. Protected by the military, painters and writers would seek in the Orient aesthetic excitement and sensory titillation. Rimbaud went to Ethiopia and Aden to find something for his writing of poetry that he could not satisfy in France; parallel examples are Sir Richard Burton and Isabella Eberhardt. The point of importance, however, is that all of this is supremely irrelevant to the Orient, Algeria, Iran, or the bazaars of Istanbul. It is as though, in the vast sweep of its artistic history, medieval Europe essentially competed with an Islamic Orient which held for centuries most of the trump cards of learning and artistic technology; a post-Renaissance Europe looked at and observed, sometimes acutely, sometimes humorously, sometimes wickedly, all sorts of strange people who hardly threatened anyone any more; and, finally, a minor stratum in Europe went south and east to find something for its enrichment or its pleasure.

Assuming these various thoughts and ideas are reasonable, we can draw three broad conclusions from them. One is that, however interesting and valuable have been the many examples of contacts and relationships between Europe and what is here called the Orient, they are a relatively minimal part of the art and culture of either world. The common game of drawing up rosters of successes and failures, of influences in either direction, of counting up who invented what first is a silly and counter-productive game except when certain circumstances – temporal, as in the thirteenth century; spatial, as in Spain; historical, as in Sicily, Istanbul, or Cairo – make the relationship obviously important for the understanding of any one of these topics. All this changed somewhat during the short century of colonialism, and much has been written about these decades and on their architecture, but not on their art. It changed even more after independence, when the technological and cultural domination of the Orient by Sony, Mercedes-Benz, Hollywood and Yves St Laurent is far greater than the domination of Western markets by Oriental silks and metalwork was in, say, the twelfth century. It is also technology that cannot be reinvented in the Orient, as luster faience or inlaying were in the West. The revolution of today's technology is so complete that the events of the past, however much fun they are, are only pertinent to history. They have no meaning today.

My second conclusion, then, is that this exhibition, with all of its obvious qualities, contributes to making history irrelevant or useless because the knowledge provided is not meant to illustrate a period of time or a development through time, but to demonstrate attitudes that are more contemporary than the objects displayed, and because so little concern is given to work already done. This may be sad, but it may also be good for us to realize that the construction of today and of tomorrow does not need the past, because a true understanding of the past requires patience, humility, openness of heart and mind, understanding of ancient failures and forgiveness of past misdeeds. None of these are common attitudes, and none are likely to become common.

Historians may regret being of limited use, but they must rise up against the misuse of their domain by ideological and political forces which find justifications for today in what they claim to be the past or history. By talking of Europe and the Orient when one means a segment of Europe and a fictitious Orient, the exhibition requires of its viewer and reader a simplification of a very varied past. Seventeenth-century Vienna had a relationship to the Ottoman world which had no parallel in seventeenth-century France or England, whereas no other country in Europe had the relationship France had with North Africa. And even in these cases, it is [10] probably wrong to talk of whole countries, as, in any given time, for every categorical statement in one direction there were four or five that understood the same things or events quite differently. The historian is compelled to argue for dozens of types of contacts and for endless variants from time to time or area to area, in short for the infinite complexity of reality. The show implies broad generalities valid for all times and all places. It does, therefore, reflect a concrete ideological message which is accurate in all of its details, but false in its overall design. The message is one of consistent misunderstanding of the Orient by Europe, leading eventually to the invention of an Orient that satisfied European needs. It is true enough that misunderstandings occurred and that the Orient served to feed the fantasy of others, but it is wrong to limit contacts to these themes alone, or to make them the dominant ones.

Finally, more than ever this exhibition requires that serious attention be given to what the Orient saw in Europe. The only recent attempt to do so²¹ restricted itself too much, I believe, to Muslim travelers or visitors rather than to reactions within the lands of Islam. Except for India, the visual record is not likely to be very impressive because the making of pictures has never been a major form of expression in Muslim civilization. Even the written record is not always as strong as one would like, because the practices of confession and later of Dr Freud were not there to prelate those who talk about themselves. This is precisely, I believe, where the ingenuity of contemporary social scientists should be able to put together successively better models than exist of the images in the mind rather than on paper or canvas. No fruitful understanding of the relationship between Europe (the West) and the Orient (the Muslim world) can occur unless both (or all) sides are equally well understood. The fact that so many different types of evidence need to be sifted in order to get results should not be a reason not to do the work.

²¹ Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York, 1982).