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Integrating the Medieval Iberian Peninsula and North Africa in Islamic Architectural History

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How do Islamic art survey texts present the architecture of the Islamic West, and how does this presentation shape the perception of the Maghrib in university classrooms? Examining the Great Mosque of Qayrawān and the Great Mosque of Cordoba as they appear in four representative and widely used art history survey texts, this article argues that a common art historical narrative characterises the art of early medieval North Africa as ultimately derivative of and artistically inferior to the art of early Islamic Iraq, Egypt, and the Iberian Peninsula. The article points to a shared chronological moment, which witnessed the expansion of the Cordoba prayer hall during the reign of ‘Abd al-Rahmān II and several building projects undertaken around the same time by the Aghlabid emirs of Ifrīqiya. Examining these two building programmes in relation to one another leads to different conclusions about these monuments of the Islamic West than are offered in the art history texts, which privilege formalist readings. The article proposes the utility of a pan-Straits approach emphasising specific contexts (historical, political, religious, social, and artistic) within the Islamic West in addressing the problematic issues raised by this narrative. Such an approach, especially if combined with critical studies of the colonial structures that informed early scholarship on the Islamic West, may offer a means for the discipline to re-evaluate the place of the Maghrib in the larger history of Islamic art. It may also provide a means to move beyond problematic inherited discourses of Islamic art history and its canon.

Keywords: Islamic architecture; Qayrawān; Cordoba; mosques; Umayyad; Aghlabid

How do Islamic art history texts – that are for many a gateway to the field of Islamic art and whose impact on students is considerable – present the architecture of the Islamic West (i.e. the Maghrib)? What are the implications for scholarly understanding of North African and Andalusi art in the broader history of medieval Islamic cultures, and for the way that it is taught in our universities?

This article focuses on two canonical works of western Islamic architecture, the Great Mosques of Qayrawān (ca. 50/670 but rebuilt in the third/ninth century) and Cordoba (founded ca. 168/784 with expansions in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries) with an eye towards examining the

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The article examines Ettinghausen, Grabar, and Jenkins-Madina’s *Islamic Art and Architecture 650–1250* (1987; rev. ed., 2001); Henri and Anne Stierlin’s *Islam: Early Architecture from Baghdad to Cordoba* (1996, translation of *Islam: vol. 1, les origines de Bagdad à Cordoue*); Bloom and Blair’s *Arts of Islam* (1997); and Hillenbrand’s *Islamic Art & Architecture* (1999). While this is obviously not an exhaustive group, together these popular survey books offer a standard art historical narrative about early Islamic art in the West as commonly presented in university classrooms both in the USA and abroad.

The congregational mosques of Qayrawān and Cordoba share several points of comparison, and yet they are treated separately and differently in Islamic art historical textbooks. The mosques were founded soon after conquests in Ifrīqiya and al-Andalus, respectively, in conjunction with the westward expansion of the early Islamic empire. The monuments share some formal and conceptual similarities in design and decoration, and each underwent an important phase of its overall building history at virtually the same chronological moment in the third/ninth century.

Despite these important points of similarity, art historical texts largely divorce al-Andalus and North Africa and interpret the two monuments in divergent ways – praising the originality of the mosque of Cordoba, but denigrating as imitative the mosque of Qayrawān. Such an approach illustrates the marginalisation of the Islamic West in the broader history of Islamic art. This essay intends to illustrate how the use of a pan-Straits approach, which considers the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa as a regional unit and that emphasises synchronous historical contexts within the region, can offer a corrective to these problematic notions.

**North Africa and al-Andalus in Islamic art history surveys**

Ettinghausen, Grabar, and Jenkins-Madina published their volume in 1987 and thus it is the oldest of the group of texts under consideration here. As the most detailed and substantive of the group, it largely sets the tone for the surveys published in succeeding years. Providing comprehensive coverage of the Islamic lands during the period 650–1250 CE, the text is divided broadly by chronology and regions, and further subdivided into artistic media. Thus, architecture is treated separately from objects, and even from architectural decoration. Its thorough discussions of the art and architecture make it an important reference work for researchers and students alike.

The placement of the congregational mosques of Cordoba and Qayrawān within the overall structure of the work illuminates how the authors chose to frame these monuments, and sets a precedent largely followed in the subsequent survey texts. Here the Great Mosque of Qayrawān, reconstructed during the reign of the Aghlabid emirs of Ifrīqiya (r. 184–296/800–909), is placed in the chapter on the ‘Central Islamic Lands’, where it is discussed with respect to mosques in the ‘Abbāsid royal city of Samarra (founded ca. 326/938) in Iraq, and in Fustāṭ, founded in 22/643 as the first Islamic capital of Egypt, while the Great Mosque of Cordoba appears in a separate chapter on the ‘Western Islamic Lands’.

Hillenbrand’s text, a volume in the popular Thames and Hudson World of Art series, is a small, portable format volume, less detailed and thorough than Ettinghausen et al., and organised into chapters following a general chronological scheme that is further organised according to dynastic and geographic parameters. Its highly readable integration of the art history into a historical framework, not to mention its portable size, makes it a popular choice for university students who have no previous experience with the topic. Hillenbrand’s text (1999, 46) follows the Ettinghau-
sen and Grabar model, likewise situating the Great Mosque of Qayrawân in the ‘Abbâsîd architectural sphere of Iraq and Egypt, as illustrative of ‘the absorptive and the creative transforming power of ‘Abbâsîd art’. The Great Mosque of Cordoba on the other hand appears in the chapter on ‘The Muslim West’, separated from the discussion of Qayrawân and ‘Abbâsîd art by four intervening chapters, which take the reader through a geographic and chronological journey through the art of the Fâtimid, Saljûq, Atabeg, and Mamlûk dynasties and thus up to the ninth/ fifteenth century. In Hillenbrand’s text, the Muslim West is irreparably isolated from the intellectual and cultural flowering of the rest of the Islamic empire, and the Great Mosque of Cordoba is interpreted as a splendid and innovative monument that managed to rise above both cultural isolation and ‘crippling mental dependence’ on the art of the East, emblematic of the Andalusi Umayyad challenge to ‘Abbâsîd religious and political hegemony.

The survey text by Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, Islamic Arts (1997) offers a variant approach to the monuments that nevertheless illustrates the centre/periphery interpretive model that arises from privileging formalist concerns. Published in Phaidon’s Art & Ideas series, Blair and Bloom’s text is compact and portable, reasonably priced and well illustrated, and like Hillenbrand, an appealing choice for undergraduates. Similar to Ettinghausen et al. it is organised by chronology and media (the periods being 600–900 CE, 900–1500 CE, and 1500–1800 CE), with each period further subdivided into sections on ‘the arts of building’, ‘arts of the book’, ‘the arts of the loom’, and ‘the decorative arts’. Blair and Bloom’s text follows the practice of the aforementioned texts, in that it discusses the Great Mosque of Qayrawân in the first ‘Rise of Islam 600–900 AD’ section, immediately after the sections on ‘Abbâsîd Samarra and the Mosque of Ibn Ţûlûn in Cairo. Here, the centre/periphery model is clearly illustrated, as Ibn Ţûlûn is described as a ‘copy’ of ‘Abbâsîd style, constructed by builders unaware of their replication of an imperial style. The mosque of Qayrawân is said to imitate both ‘Abbâsîd style and ancient Roman architecture, but remains a provincial (in both senses of the word) building interesting largely for its incorporation of materials from the imperial ‘Abbâsîd centre, namely lustre tiles and teak furnishings.

The Great Mosque of Cordoba is likewise here treated in a separate section, ‘Regional Centres and Local Powers 900–1500 AD’, and is presented as illustrative of the development of medieval hypostyle mosques in the wake of political fragmentation across the ‘Abbâsîd Empire. Ultimately, Blair and Bloom present the fourth/tenth-century additions as reflective of Andalusi Umayyad reliance on another imperial centre to the East (Constantinople), whose aid was required to achieve the goal of matching the splendour of the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus. In Blair and Bloom’s text, the Cordoba mosque is important as an exemplar of broader trends of the hypostyle mosque plan, and so Cordoba is followed immediately by discussions of the Bayshehir Mosque in Turkey (698/1299) and the Quwwat al-Islam Mosque in Delhi (begun c. 585/1190). This choice of monuments, spanning the Islamic lands from the far west to the far east, privileges formal typology to make an important point about one of the pan-Islamic factors that defines a history of Islamic art. However, the leap in space and time is destabilising, made at the expense of historical and regional context.

Stierlin’s text also separates North Africa and al-Andalus, and exalts Cordoba in striking contrast to the treatment given to Qayrawân. In keeping with the narrative established by the other texts, Cordoba appears all on its own, separate from North Africa and in a chapter whose title speaks volumes about the relative importance of the topic: ‘Umayyad splendour in Cordoba’. Qayrawân’s lesser status, in Stierlin’s text, is made even more apparent by its placement in a chapter titled ‘The Disintegration of the West’. Breaking with the aforementioned surveys that connect Qayrawân to an early ‘Abbâsîd political and artistic milieu, in this arrangement Qayrawân...
is temporally displaced, bundled along with the artistic developments of subsequent centuries as they developed under the auspices of the Almohads (r. 524–667/1130–1269) and the Sicilian Normans (founded 524/1130). Such an arrangement is all the more unexpected given the important tradition of French scholarship on the art of the Islamic West (Anderson and Rosser-Owen 2007, xix–xxv). However, here the fullest discussion of Aghlabid architecture, expanded beyond the mosque of Qayrawān to include other monuments, may implicitly acknowledge the impact of that same French tradition of scholarship. In keeping with the other surveys, however, Stierlin’s text nevertheless emphasises Qayrawān mainly as a reflection of significant developments in the imperial heartlands of Iraq and Egypt during the early period, despite the confusing placement of the discussion itself within a chapter on later centuries and dynasties. Thus, the structure of Stierlin’s text implicitly sends a message about the relative value of these two monuments: Qayrawān is at once peripheral to the imperial centre and also tied to a notion of disintegration, while Cordoba escapes both potentially negative implications, separated in splendid isolation from any taint of either artistic peripherality or association with political disintegration.

To sum up the impression of these two great monuments of the medieval Islamic West conveyed in art history survey texts, the Great Mosque of Cordoba, especially the fourth/tenth-century maqṣūra and mihrab added by the second Andalusi Umayyad caliph al-Ḥakam II (r. 349–365/961–976), is presented as a splendid achievement that appears full blown on the Iberian Peninsula. Cordoba is presented as exclusively engaged in a dialogue with Syrian Umayyad monuments such as the Dome of the Rock (c. 71/691) and the Great Mosque of Damascus (c. 96/715), as well as with ʿAbbāsid structures such as the Great Mosque of Samarra (232–46/847–61). It is ultimately judged in highly positive terms: extraordinary, brilliant, splendid, and powerful, even if isolated from the rest of the Islamic empire.

North Africa’s art, on the other hand, as embodied by the Great Mosque of Qayrawān, is overall denied contemporaneity with the developments in al-Andalus, and Qayrawān in these texts are notable almost exclusively as a pale reflection of developments in the imperial heartlands of Iraq and Egypt. The reader comes away with the impression that the Qayrawān mosque is ultimately less important than monuments and events elsewhere, despite the canonical status conferred upon this monument through its inclusion in the survey – and thus the Islamic art canon – in the first place. It would be very easy for a reader to infer from these texts that if there is any connection to be made between the early architecture of al-Andalus and North Africa, it is that North Africa’s artistic production ultimately derives from the more interesting monuments located in what today is Egypt and Iraq, remaining artistically inferior to both al-Andalus and the ʿAbbāsid lands to the east.

One might ask whether the fact that these texts are published in English might reflect an American bias against North Africa, or simply a lack of familiarity with the region. While three of the texts were originally written in English and all three are available in English editions, an explanation rooted in potential American bias is dispelled by the fact that most of the authors were Europeans trained in European institutions. Richard Ettinghausen (d. 1979) received his PhD from the University of Frankfurt, and his distinguished career as an Islamic art historian was carried out at such institutions as the University of Michigan, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, and the Freer Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC (Brisch 1980, 57, 185–186; Duda 1979, 61–64; Soucek 1980, 111–112). Oleg Grabar (d. 2011), the pre-eminent Islamic art historian, was educated at the University of Paris before completing his education at Harvard and Princeton (Hillenbrand 2012, 1–35).
Robert Hillenbrand was educated at Cambridge and Oxford and taught at the University of Edinburgh, from which he retired in 2007. The Swiss art historian Henri Stierlin, the sole author considered here who is not primarily an Islamicist, studied at the universities of Lausanne and Zurich (Stierlin and Stierlin 2009). In other words, the problematic subtexts in our art historical narrative cannot be easily dismissed as evidence of Anglo-American biases or ignorance based on geographic or intellectual distance from the territories in question. What is more pertinent here is that, despite the cosmopolitan educational formations of all the authors and their well-deserved eminence within the field of Islamic art, these texts present a troubling common narrative which, while not in itself originating from an American academic context, nevertheless informs it.

Furthermore, the implicit conclusions drawn about the importance of the two monuments, and thus by extension of the value of the art of the Islamic West, underscore larger notions that persist today in university classrooms: namely, the overall peripherality of the Islamic West to the larger story of Islamic art and architecture; the artistic exceptionalism of al-Andalus; and the implicit artistic inferiority of North Africa to both al-Andalus and the ‘centre’ of the medieval Islamic lands.

Towards a pan-Straits approach

Rosser-Owen has rightly called upon scholars to consider the Islamic West on its own terms. A pan-Straits approach, one that considers the numerous cultural connections between the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa during the period in question, may begin to move the field in that direction (Rosser-Owen 2009, 114–118, 2012, 20–29). There are, of course, obvious formal commonalities between the mosques of Qayrawan and Cordoba that justify speaking about a regional artistic phenomenon. What is missing in the art historical narrative presented in survey texts is greater consideration of the art historical implications of specific chronological points in the lives of the monuments and the historical contexts of such moments. When we turn attention to a common historical moment in the lives of both buildings, taking a synchronic view rather than privileging diachronic formal and typological concerns, what emerges is an alternative way of understanding these buildings, one that may begin to undermine the impression of Andalusi exceptionalism and North African provincialism implied in the common art historical narrative.

Beginning in 217/833, the Andalusi Umayyad ruler ‘Abd al-Rahmān II undertook the first expansion of the Cordoban mosque’s prayer hall, extending it by eight bays to the south. As the first expansion of the congregational mosque in the Andalusi Umayyad capital, this project was possibly the most visible and symbolically charged architectural event undertaken in al-Andalus since the mosque’s construction around 167/784 by the founder of the dynasty, ‘Abd al-Rahmān I. In keeping with the survey text genre’s focus on canonical works, the expansion of the Cordoba prayer hall in 217/833 does not merit the attention given either to the original building or the fourth/tenth-century addition that is presented as the culmination of the mosque’s history. In these texts, the third/ninth-century expansion is cast in a minor role. It is at most an intermediate stage in a teleological progression that begins with the mosque’s founding, and which culminates in the fourth/tenth-century mihrab and maqṣūra that embody the zenith of the Andalusi Umayyads during their caliphal period (315–422/928–1031).

However, from a pan-Straits perspective that takes into account historical context such as events in Aghlabid North Africa soon after the expansion of the prayer hall at Cordoba in 217/833, the significance of the expansion relative to a regional picture of architectural patronage begins to come into focus. In 221/836, just three years after the expansion of the Cordoba
prayer hall, the Aghlabid ruler Abū Muhammad Ziyādat Allāh b. Ibrāhīm I (r. 201–223/817–838) initiated the complete reconstruction of the Great Mosque of Qayrawān, a project that by 247/862 would transform the original modest and pragmatic structure into the monument presented in the art history survey texts (Golvin, 133–149).

The project was begun in the last years of Ziyādat Allāh I’s reign, during which he had managed to quell years of internal political instability. Along with initiating the Aghlabid conquest of Sicily, his absorption of former rebels into the Aghlabid fold from 213/829 onwards initiated a period of stability during which the major architectural projects of the dynasty were begun. Furthermore, following quickly on the heels of the Qayrawān mosque’s reconstruction in 221/836, a succession of Aghlabid rulers founded or rebuilt Friday mosques in other major Ifrīqiyan cities: Sfax (234/849), Susa (236/851), and Tunis (248/863) (Golvin, 150–161). In other words, the Aghlabids ushered in a veritable building boom in third/ninth-century North Africa.

The chronological resonance discernible in al-Andalus beginning in 217/833 in Cordoba and 221/836 in Qayrawān is significant, although one has to put aside formalist art historical concerns in order to glimpse the underlying causes. Discarding notions of a teleological development at Cordoba and ceasing to consider Qayrawān as merely the peripheral reflection of developments in the imperial centre, a pan-Straits perspective invites speculation on the role of religious architecture in a broader political arena. Scholars can point on the one hand to internal political circumstances. For instance, the construction of the mosques in the third/ninth century immediately followed the successful quelling of internal rebellions by the rulers in both al-Andalus and Ifrīqiya. The foundation of such monuments in the Islamic West thus suggests a connection with specific local circumstances through the political power emblematised by these congregational mosques. In addition to their obvious religious significance, congregational mosques in these important cities were highly charged symbols with great social meaning, where the community gathered to reaffirm fealty to the ruler and whose construction and expansion proclaimed the piety, religious commitment (and, therefore, legitimacy) of the rulers.

While Qayrawān was an important cultural centre of the third/ninth century, Cordoba’s reputation at the moment of the expansion of the congregational mosque was ascendant and, one might, therefore, ask whether there was also an element of rivalry involved in the building campaigns evident in both territories. Such a rivalry may have been rooted in part in the different relationships that each dynasty had to the ‘Abbāsids. The Andalusi Umayyads were after all politically outside the ‘Abbāsid fold, while the Aghlabids were the regional representatives of ‘Abbāsid power, with direct connections to the imperial court. This distinction between Cordoba and Qayrawān’s relationship to the ‘Abbāsid sphere undergirds the art historical narrative. What is left out of the story is a consideration of the building programmes of Cordoba and Qayrawān in relation to one another.

These two distinct relationships to the ‘Abbāsid central administration may be reflected in the building campaigns each dynasty embarked upon at this historical moment. When the Andalusian and North African projects of the third/ninth century are considered together, the relatively modest means of the Andalusis becomes clear. Their architecture workshops produced only a handful of new marble column shafts and capitals for the expansion of the Cordoba prayer hall, a striking contrast to the impressive scale and quality with which the Aghlabids were building at the same historical moment. What emerges is seemingly a rivalry between the Andalusian Umayyads and the Aghlabids, manifested in architecture and now apparent in other areas of the historical record. For instance, Adam Gaiser has recently argued that there were very close connections between the Andalusian Umayyads and North African Khārjījites, based on common economic and political interests (2013, 42). These connections offer another window onto an
Umayyad-Aghlabid rivalry; in 227/842, less than a decade after the initiation of the Cordoba and Qayrawân building programmes, the Andalusi Umayyads rewarded the Rustumid Imãm Aflãh b. ‘Abd al-Wahhãb with 100,000 dirhams following his attack of the Aghlabid royal city of ‘Abbãsiyya (Bakûsh 1990, 20; al-Balâdhurî 1983, 336; Gaiser 2013, 43, fn. 3).

The Aghlabid ability to construct four major monuments at this time might speak to their connection to the ‘Abbãsid imperial administration and its treasury, if it was the ‘Abbãsid treasury that funded the construction of these congregational mosques. However, recent research on the medieval North African economy as revealed by both texts and numismatic evidence suggests that this impressive Aghlabid building programme could in fact have been funded by the dynasty’s own considerable wealth due to the region’s economic strength during this period (Gaiser 2013, 62). This emerging picture indicates that by the third/ninth century North Africans enjoyed a flourishing economy deriving from an extremely lucrative trans-Saharan trade, and from their expansion into Sicily and Italy (Noonan 1986, 148–149; Savage and Gordus 1998, 379).

Furthermore, going beyond the focus on the Great Mosque of Qayrawân and considering the Aghlabid mosques of the third/ninth century as a group, the negative judgment against the artistic merits of the Great Mosque of Qayrawân becomes all the more debatable. More interesting are the questions that these contemporary building programmes in al-Andalus and North Africa raise about this moment in the history of the early Islamic West.

This is not meant to disparage the indispensable art historical tool of formal analysis. Rather, formalist concerns and approaches might be balanced with a higher sensitivity to the often problematic implications of formalism and typology. Greater attention should be paid to chronological specificity and cultural contexts, especially for regions long peripheralised in the discourses of Islamic art. The field would certainly benefit from critical studies of the major nineteenth and mid-century scholars of the medieval Islamic West, whose work remains foundational, and the colonial frameworks within which they operated. This is in fact what the fields’ leading practitioners have recently advocated as a way to move beyond the narratives and legacies of colonialism and the canon (Carey and Graves 2012; Flood 2007, 31–53; Necipoğlu 2012, 1–26; Rabbat 2004, 18–23, 2012, 1–15).

**A double marginalisation**

The tendency to view the art of Cordoba and al-Andalus as a unique phenomenon has created a problematic understanding of Andalusi Umayyad art as a manifestation of an exceptionalism that doubly marginalises al-Andalus in the field of art history. From the perspective of medieval European art history, al-Andalus has been, and continues to be, perceived as an exotic ‘other’ whose real or perceived threat to Europe north of the Pyrenees may be surprisingly alive and well today. Take for instance a map in the Blackwell *Companion to Medieval Art* (Fernie and Kennish 2006, 296), in which the entire geographic expanse of the early Islamic empire, from the Atlantic to the Oxus, is identified as ‘The Caliphate of Cordoba, c. 750’. Of course, the Cordoban caliphate did not come into being until 929, and one hopes this is simply a misprint. If this map represents the state of knowledge of medieval Islamic history within the larger field of medieval art history, it is sobering. The volume in which the map appears is after all the product of a distinguished group of specialists. Eric Fernie, author of the article in which the map appears, is a leading historian of medieval European art and former director of the Courtauld Institute of Art, an independent college of the University of London with a long-established reputation in the discipline. The map and the article on Romanesque architecture in which it appears imply a very different perspective on Cordoba’s position in world art history than that offered by Ettinghausen and
Grabar. Fernie’s article perpetuates a narrative in which the expansion of the early Islamic empire is the source or symptom of the rupture that sundered medieval Europe from antiquity and plunged it into an artistic darkness: ‘for anyone used to thinking of Carthage, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch as part of their world, the invasions must have had a devastating effect’, to be lifted only with the rise of the Carolingians (Fernie 2006, 296).

In contrast, the Ettinghausen text notes medieval Cordoba’s position as ‘the single most powerful cultural centre of Europe’ (Ettinghausen, Grabar, and Jenkins-Madina 2001, 83). In addition to the problematic story about the Islamic West that is promulgated in Islamic art history survey books, the publication of this map in a handbook on medieval art adds new inaccuracies to the art historical narrative of the Islamic West.

Viewed through a lens of isolation and exceptionalism in the field of Islamic art history, al-Andalus is thus relegated, along with North Africa, to the status of a peripheral outpost in the art history of the Islamic lands. As such, it remains largely incidental to more significant developments played out in the lands to the east. Rosser-Owen has published recent critiques of this perspective. Her plea for the field to engage the region on its own cultural terms is supported by recent research from other disciplines that likewise calls into question this inherited discourse and its centre/periphery model for interpreting the Islamic West (Gaiser 2013; Noonan 1986; Savage and Gordus 1998). As Gaiser concludes, the economic strength of North Africa and al-Andalus as a profoundly interconnected region renders problematic the notion of Baghdad as an economic ‘centre’ of the Islamic world in the late second/eighth century. In this period, the Islamic Maghrib, usually considered the fringe of Islammom, commanded its own centres, whether at Qayrawān, Cordoba, Tāhart or Sijilmāssa. (2013, 70)

Conclusion

This article has revealed, using the Great Mosques of Cordoba and Qayrawān as a case study, a discernible thread in the art history discourse as narrated in a small but representative cross-section of standard survey texts, one which perpetuates a problematic centre/periphery model by almost completely sundering the architecture of Al-Andalus and North Africa from one another as well as from the ‘central’ Islamic lands. The result of glossing over or ignoring the profound connections that united Al-Andalus and North Africa in the third/ninth century is an art historical paradigm that has fixed the Islamic West firmly at the historiographic outskirts of the discipline. Other angles have not been explored here, which would no doubt yield further insights, such as the role historians and Arabophone scholars have played in raising awareness of the artistic implications of historical connections between al-Andalus and North Africa.

To paraphrase Necipoğlu, in exalting the artistic sensibilities of the medieval Iberian Peninsula while disparaging those of North Africa, the story that is offered in our surveys of Islamic art, and which therefore carries over into our institutions of higher education, has done an injustice to the cultural complexity of the medieval Islamic lands (Necipoğlu 2012, 7). Barry Flood has also argued that

instead of occluding the entangled histories of colonialism, capitalism, and the canon, it is essential to explore the ways in which these imbrications are manifest in the practices of collecting and representation through which the field was constituted, and the contentions that currently shape it. (Flood 2007, 53)

Is it possible to balance the strictures of the art history survey genre with greater sensitivity to historical context? A pan-Straits approach that balances the formalist tools of art historical analy-
sis with a greater attention to historical specificity, and which incorporates new historical and material evidence that illuminates the significance of medieval North Africa within its regional and global contexts may offer one way to consciously and reflexively break from the troubling aspects of our inherited discourses of Islamic art history and its canon.

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Notes

1. This is by no means a comprehensive selection, but rather a representative one for a common narrative. See also Brend (1991), Delius and Hattstein (2000), and Irwin (1997).
3. The Aghlabids faced rebellions from the Arab jund (army). For example, Ziyādat Allah I had to contend with rebellions led by the Arab chiefs Mansūr al-Tunbūdūhī, who took control of Tunis and occupied Qayrawān in 209/824, as well as ‘Amir b. Nāfī’ (Abun-Nasr 1987, 55–56). In al-Andalus, ‘Abd al-Rahmān II subdued the seven-year rebellion of the Yemeni chief Abū al-Shammākh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Judhamī by giving him a position in the army (Kennedy 1996, 47).
4. My thanks to Adam Gaiser for sharing, in advance of its publication, his article ‘Slaves and Silver across the Strait of Gibraltar: Politics and Trade between Umayyad Iberia and Kharijite North Africa’.

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