



1 Palermo, Museo Nazionale,  
Sala Araba, unknown date  
(ca. 1905-1915)

---

# REASSEMBLING THE SALA ARABA IN PALERMO'S MUSEO NAZIONALE

---

Dana Katz

During the final quarter of the nineteenth century, a hall known as the “Sala Araba” (Fig. 1) contained Islamic artifacts on permanent display in the Museo Nazionale of Palermo. Located directly over the principal entrance, the room spanned the width of the former house of the Congregation of San Filippo Neri at the Olivella (Fig. 2). This exhibition space was unique among museum institutions that had been nationalized as one of the first acts of Italian unification. The Sala Araba brought together objects from various collections, including metalwork, carved wooden panels, incised ceramics, and sepulchral inscriptions. Further works exhibited were plaster casts that repro-

duced *muqarnas* vaults and monumental epigraphy of medieval structures *in situ* in the city. The presentation of these artifacts in Palermo took place at a remarkably early date – the majority of Islamic collections in state-sponsored heritage institutions elsewhere in Europe were established at least a decade or more later.<sup>1</sup>

The museum’s director, Antonino Salinas (1841–1914; Fig. 3), bore primary responsibility for this display of Islamic objects, when, immediately following his acceptance of the post in 1873, he conceived of the Sala Araba.<sup>2</sup> Highly influenced by his mentor, the orientalist Michele Amari (1806–1889; Fig. 4), who was the leading arabist in Italy at the time and a pioneer of

<sup>1</sup> The South Kensington Museum was perhaps the only example that predated the Sicilian institution. Other well-known presentations of Islamic objects, such as that at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, the Musée du Louvre, and the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin, date up to two decades later. For these early collections see Tim Stanley, “A Historical Precedent: Islamic Art in South Kensington”, in: 4. *Jameel Ödülü [Jameel Prize 4]*, exh. cat., ed. by *idem*/Salma Tuqan, Istanbul 2016, pp. 20–31; Rémi Labrusse, “De la collection à l’exposi-

tion: les arts de l’Islam à Paris (1864–1917)”, in: *Purs décorés? Arts de l’Islam, regards du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Collections des Arts décoratifs*, ed. by *idem*, Paris 2007, pp. 64–74; also, Stephen Vernoit, “Islamic Art and Architecture: An Overview of Scholarship and Collecting, c. 1850–c. 1950”, in: *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections, 1850–1950*, ed. by *idem*, New York 2000, pp. 1–61: 19.

<sup>2</sup> Pierfrancesco Palazzotto, “La realtà museale a Palermo tra l’Ottocento e i primi decenni del Novecento”, in: *Enrico Mauzeri (1869–1966): storico*

Siculo-Arabic studies,<sup>3</sup> Salinas saw the inclusion of a room reflecting the Islamic past of Sicily as an essential part in any telling of the full history of the island. In this showcasing in the newly made national institution, he did not draw any distinction between these objects and those of the medieval West or classical antiquity in terms of their value to the cultural heritage of Sicily. The institution's longest serving director, from 1873 to 1913, Salinas was also its most significant, who formed its character and shaped its collection.<sup>4</sup>

In this room in Palermo's Museo Nazionale, which was dismantled shortly after the First World War and thus effectively 'lost', the familiar binary of Orient and Occident as presented by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) does not apply as straightforwardly as elsewhere in nineteenth-century Europe. Sicily had a separate, Islamic past, different from that of the Italian mainland, which both Salinas and Amari recognized. Muslim rule of the island lasted for nearly two and a half centuries until the Norman conquest between 1061 and 1091.<sup>5</sup> During the rule of Roger II (count 1105–1130 and king 1130–1154), the artistic production and court culture of Norman Sicily melded elements from the Latin West, Byzantium, and contemporary Islamic rulers. His successors William I (r. 1154–1166) and William II (r. 1166–1189) implemented policies of forced assimilation of the local Muslims. At the same time,

they preserved an Islamic mode for secular works under their patronage, namely their suburban residences in the parks that surrounded their capital, Palermo.

In the early modern period, Sicily was part of the Bourbon Kingdom of Two Sicilies and Palermo was a provincial center. After unification, however, the island was considered as backward or even liminal in relation to the mainland.<sup>6</sup> Yet Sicilians made important political and cultural contributions. Revolutionaries of the former Bourbon territory played a key role in the Risorgimento, and its scholars and thinkers keenly participated in the conception and formation of the modern state. This examination of the display of Islamic objects in Palermo's Museo Nazionale will address the following questions: what were the goals of the newly founded institution in light of Italy's unification? How did the choices made for the museum's assemblage intend to shape the cultural identity of the Sicilian region? In what ways was the Sala Araba mobilized to represent the island's artistic patrimony, and who was its intended audience?

### I. Palermo's Museo Nazionale and Identity Formation in Post-Unification Sicily

Under the directorship of Antonino Salinas and the tutelage of Michele Amari, Palermo's Museo Nazionale contributed to the creation of a Sicilian iden-

*dell'arte tra connoisseurship e conservazione*, conference proceedings Palermo 2007, ed. by Simonetta La Barbera, Palermo 2009, pp. 227–237: 227–231. See, most recently, Maria Amalia De Luca, "Il contributo di Bartolomeo Lagumina alla formazione e allo studio delle collezioni islamiche del R. Museo nazionale di Palermo", in: *Notiziario Archeologico della Soprintendenza di Palermo*, II (2016), pp. 1–23, URL: [http://www.regione.sicilia.it/beniculturali/dirbenicult/notiziarioarcheologicopalermo/II\\_De%20Luca.pdf](http://www.regione.sicilia.it/beniculturali/dirbenicult/notiziarioarcheologicopalermo/II_De%20Luca.pdf) (accessed on 1 April 2017). This article reached me too late to be considered in the present study.

<sup>3</sup> For a study of Michele Amari, who was senator of the Regno d'Italia from 1860 until his death and briefly Minister of Public Instruction from 1862 to 1864, and his contribution to the field of oriental studies in Italy with a particular focus on Sicily, see Karla Mallette, "I nostri Saracini: Writing the History of the Arabs of Sicily", in: *California Italian Studies*, I (2010), I, pp. 1–27. In these years, Amari was preparing his monumental study of Sicilian epigraphy in Arabic, of which a great number was preserved in the

museum (Michele Amari, *Le epigrafi arabe di Sicilia*, ed. by Francesco Gabrieli, Palermo 1971, [1875–1883]).

<sup>4</sup> Biagio Pace, "Antonino Salinas e il Museo di Palermo", in: *Emporium*, LXIII (1926), 375, pp. 152–162; Stefano Biondo, "Dall'adattamento a Museo alla nuova sistemazione museografica", in: *Quaderni del Museo Archeologico Regionale "Antonino Salinas"*, III (1997), pp. 9–16: 9.

<sup>5</sup> The Aghlabids took the island from Byzantine control in 827. The rule of Sicily at this time was closely tied to North Africa; when the Fatimids overthrew the Aghlabids in 910, a corresponding transition of power took place. Later, the Kalbids were installed as client rulers who remained in power until the mid-eleventh century. See Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims of Medieval Italy*, Edinburgh 2008, pp. 7–46, 88–111.

<sup>6</sup> Modern assessments of the alleged backwardness of Sicily may be summed up by the so-called "questione meridionale", a term coined by the Lombard official Antonio Billia in 1873, which was the same year in which Salinas became director of the Museo Nazionale. See James Dickie, *Darkest*



2 Palermo, Museo Nazionale, first courtyard, mid-1920s

tity in the first decade following unification.<sup>7</sup> This newly nationalized institution was thus designated to promote the region's artistic heritage.<sup>8</sup> At a time in which a cohesive, modern Italian identity was very much in the process of formation, the museum's holdings told of a specifically local history of the island. This constructed insular identity of the Sala Araba recognized a distinctly non-Christian facet, which

was unique among the regions of the recently formed Italian state. Salinas imagined the presentation of Islamic objects as an integral part of the museum's new seat at the former oratory of the Theatine Order of Sant'Ignazio all'Olivella in Palermo (Fig. 2). The intention to put these artifacts on permanent display, which took place as early as the mid-1870s, takes on a special significance when seen against the nationalis-

*Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of Mezzogiorno, 1860–1900*, Houndmills 1996, pp. 53–82.

<sup>7</sup> Ida Tamburello, "Come si è formato il Museo Nazionale di Palermo", in: *Sicilia archeologica*, III (1970), 12, pp. 31–36; and Stefania De Vido, "Mo-

strare la storia: Palermo e il suo museo", in: *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines*, CXIII (2001), pp. 739–758.

<sup>8</sup> For further examples, see Stefano De Caro, *The National Archaeological Museum*, Naples 2007, p. 11; and Simona Troilo, "National Museums

tic goals of Italy. At this critically important juncture, the new region attempted to define itself by means of articulating its own cultural heritage and artistic patrimony. Within this larger identity-building process in the modern state of Italy, Sicily's Islamic past was purposely emphasized by Salinas and Amari.<sup>9</sup>

The museum in Palermo was already a national institution when the troops of a unified Italy took Rome on 20 September 1870. After the establishment of the Eternal City as the capital of the kingdom in the following year, Etruscan (considered 'proto-Italic') and Roman antiquity would play a paramount role in the construction of Italian identity.<sup>10</sup> During his tenure as Minister of Public Instruction, the Neapolitan journalist and university professor Ruggero Bonghi (1826–1895) was the guiding force behind the creation of institutions mirroring these ideals, who promoted Rome's classical heritage by forming the Direzione Generale dei Musei e degli Scavi in 1875.<sup>11</sup> In the museological sphere, Bonghi's most significant contribution was the founding of the first state museums at the ex-Jesuit Collegio Romano in the capital in that same year.<sup>12</sup> The archaeologist Giuseppe Fiorelli (1823–1896), also from Naples, assisted Bonghi in this enterprise, assuming the role of the head of the

Direzione.<sup>13</sup> The principal intellectual interests of both figures lay in classical antiquity, best seen in the former Bourbon institution that became the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples, of which Fiorelli became the first director, and in the two museums created by Bonghi at the Collegio Romano that came out of the Jesuit Museo Kircheriano, the Museo Italicico and the Museo Lapidario; however, this last project was never fully realized.<sup>14</sup>

In post-unification Sicily, Roman antiquity as a stand-in for the region's artistic and cultural patrimony was less tangible than on the mainland. These sentiments were best expressed by the head of the Commissione di Antichità e Belle Arti di Sicilia, Francesco Saverio Cavallari (1809–1896), in an 1872 letter to Amari: "E per Dio sono cose importantissime ed altro che le cose dei barbari romani distruttori dell'antica civiltà Greca e Punica ed Italica."<sup>15</sup> Cavallari noted that he wished to lower the status of Roman antiquities in relation to products of cultures that he perceived to be superior. The excavations of Greek sites on the island, most notably at Selinunte, Solunto, and Tindari, had begun already in the early eighteenth century and produced many noteworthy finds.<sup>16</sup> The sprawling inland Roman villa of Casale

in Italy: A Matter of Multifaceted Identity", in: *National Museums and Nation-Building in Europe, 1750–2010: Mobilization and Legitimacy, Continuity and Change*, ed. by Peter Aronsson/Gabriella Elgenius, New York et al. 2015, pp. 461–495.

<sup>9</sup> Federico Chabod, *Italian Foreign Policy: The Statecraft of the Founders. 1870–1896*, Princeton 1996, pp. 147–172.

<sup>10</sup> Stefan Berger, "National Museums in between Nationalism, Imperialism and Regionalism, 1750–1914", in: *National Museums and Nation-Building in Europe* (note 8), pp. 13–32; see also Simon J. Knell, *National Galleries: The Art of Making Nations*, New York 2016, p. 85; Ilaria Porciani, "Identità locale – identità nazionale: la costruzione di una doppia appartenenza", in: *Centralismo e federalismo tra Otto e Novecento: Italia e Germania a confronto*, ed. by Oliver Janz/Pierangelo Schiera/Hannes Siegrist, Bologna 1997, pp. 141–182; and Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Medieval Identities in Italy: National, Regional, Local", in: *Manufacturing Middle Ages: Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Patrick J. Geary/Gábor Klaniczay, Boston 2013, pp. 317–345.

<sup>11</sup> Marcello Barbanera, *L'archeologia degli italiani: storia, metodi e orientamenti dell'archeologia classica in Italia*, Rome 1998, pp. 24–28.

<sup>12</sup> See Valter Curzi, "Per una storia dei musei di Roma: il dibattito sui musei archeologici e l'istituzione del Museo Nazionale Romano", in: *Ricerche di storia dell'arte*, LXVI (1998), pp. 49–65: 49f.; and Dante Bernini, *Origini del sistema museale dello Stato a Roma* (= supplement of *Bollettino d'arte*, XCIX), Rome 1997, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Fiorelli was the inspector of the excavations from 1863. In the same year, he founded the archaeological school at Pompeii and became the director of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Naples (Barbanera [note 11], pp. 19–34).

<sup>14</sup> Curzi (note 12), pp. 49f.

<sup>15</sup> Francesco Saverio Cavallari, *L'architetto e l'arabista: un carteggio inedito. Francesco Saverio Cavallari a Michele Amari (1843–1889)*, ed. by Gabriella Cianciolo Cosentino, Palermo 2012, p. 146, Carteggio Amari, IV. 1530, Syracuse, 19 June 1872 ("And by God, these are highly important things, other than those of the barbarian Romans, destroyers of the ancient Greek, Punic, and Italic civilizations.").

<sup>16</sup> Paola Pelagatti, "Dalla Commissione Antichità e Belle Arti di Sicilia (CABAS) alla amministrazione delle Belle Arti nella Sicilia post-unitaria: rottura e continuità amministrativa", in: *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines*, CXIII (2001), pp. 599–622.

at Piazza Armerina and its mosaics was first explored in 1881, but was only systematically excavated well into the next century.<sup>17</sup>

## II. The Museological Landscape of Nineteenth-Century Palermo

Before Salinas' conception of the Sala Araba in the Museo Nazionale in the 1870s, in the greater area of Palermo there were Islamic artifacts in ecclesiastical collections and in the hands of the local nobility.<sup>18</sup> These assemblages consisted of different categories of objects that represented diverse modes of collecting. The first included epigraphic works that held interest for antiquarians and early orientalists due to their philological character. The second significant grouping contained artworks that were identified as Islamic due to their ornamentation. In 1730, Father Ignazio Salnitro formed what came to be known as the Museo Salnitriano at the Jesuit Collegio Massimo, which was located by the mid-nineteenth century in a long gallery sited above the church of Santa Maria della Grotta.<sup>19</sup> The section that contained Islamic artifacts was named the Museo Cufico; it preserved also a collection of medals and coins. Similar holdings of the Benedictine abbey of San Martino delle Scale, ten kilometers southwest of Palermo, included inscriptions, ceramic vases, metalwork, and columns inscribed with Arabic text.

Further art and archaeological collections in the city included the museum at the University of Palermo founded in 1805. It contained a number of inscriptions in Arabic, as did the Biblioteca Comunale

nearby. The university became the principal repository of artworks in the city, which included medieval paintings and archaeological finds among its holdings, added to over time with objects excavated after 1827. The contents of the Museo Salnitriano were moved to the university in 1861, followed by the collection of the monastery of San Martino at the end of the decade.

The year 1866 marked a particularly auspicious time when several collections came together at the museum still housed in the university. Following the abolition of religious institutions in Italy in the previous year, a large number of works entered the Museo Nazionale of Palermo, which required additional provisions for their maintenance and safeguarding and caused crowding in the existing spaces. Consequently, the Commissione di Antichità e Belle Arti searched for a more suitable location for the museum.<sup>20</sup> The dissolution of monasteries also made numerous properties available. By the early 1870s, the museum's holdings were transferred to the Oratorian complex of the Olivella, the former house of the Congregation of San Filippo Neri.<sup>21</sup> The Commissione chose this site for the Museo Nazionale because of its large size and several courtyards, which allowed for the display of inscriptions and architectural fragments in the latter spaces (Fig. 2). Yet the pre-existing structure posed several problems: the monks' cells and narrow corridors were not well-suited for the presentation of artworks and needed to be adapted for this purpose, requiring extensive remodeling of the interior spaces.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Giovanni Salmeri, "L'antiquaria italiana dell'Ottocento e la sua variante siciliana", in: *idem*, *Sicilia romana: storia e storiografia*, Catania 1992, pp. 61–96: 79–81.

<sup>18</sup> These assemblages were informed by the aesthetics of the *Wunderkammer*. For a description of their Sicilian counterparts, see Vincenzo Abbate, "Wunderkammern e meraviglie di Sicilia", in: *Wunderkammer siciliana: alle origini del museo perduto*, ed. by *idem*, Naples 2001, pp. 17–46: 40–42.

<sup>19</sup> Roberto Graditi/Francesco Vergara Caffarelli, *Il museo ritrovato: il Salnitriano e le origini della museologia a Palermo*, Palermo 2003, pp. 19–23.

<sup>20</sup> The museum had limited exhibition space, and many objects were kept in storage in inadequate conditions. Antonino Salinas, *Del Real Museo di Palermo: relazione*, Palermo 1873, pp. 20f.

<sup>21</sup> On the history of the ecclesiastical complex at the Olivella, see Ciro D'Arpa, *Architettura e arte religiosa a Palermo: il complesso degli Oratoriani all'Olivella*, Palermo 2012, pp. 126–136.

<sup>22</sup> Significant architectural finds were exhibited in the former refectory; most notably, the metopes from temples at the archaeological site of Selinunte. See Salinas (note 20), p. 29.



3 Antonino Salinas,  
ca. 1907

### III. Salinas as Director of the Museo Nazionale and his “smania” for the Sala Araba

The institution’s longest serving director, from 1873 until 1913, Antonino Salinas was born in Messina in 1841 and fought as a partisan alongside Garibaldi’s troops against the Bourbons (Fig. 3).<sup>23</sup> Already in his youth, Salinas approached archaeology through his interest in numismatics. Part of the first generation of Sicilian scholars and administrators educated abroad and not within the Church, he attended seminars on archaeology and classical studies at the University of Berlin, traveling to Athens and other centers of archaeological interest in Europe.<sup>24</sup> In 1865, when only twenty-four years old, Salinas was appointed associate professor (*professore straordinario*) of archaeology at the University of Palermo. Nominated a member of the Commissione di Antichità e Belle Arti in that year, he was chosen to head the Museo Nazionale in 1873.<sup>25</sup> Salinas’ mentor Michele Amari (Fig. 4), the renowned orientalist and anti-Bourbon revolutionist, who participated in the 1848/49 uprisings, was instrumental in securing the appointment for him.<sup>26</sup>

Two documents are of utmost importance for reconstructing Salinas’ principal objectives at the time of his assumption of the directorship and, consequently, for examining the creation of the Sala Araba. The first will be referred to as the *Discorso* or *Del Museo nazionale di Palermo e del suo avvenire: discorso*, which was Salinas’ inaugural lecture as director at the opening of the academic year of 1873.<sup>27</sup> The second, longer work is the *Relazione* (full title, *Del Real Museo di Palermo: relazione*), also published in 1873 and prepared by him for the

<sup>23</sup> For a biography of Salinas see Agata Villa, s.v. Antonino Salinas, in: *Dizionario biografico dei soprintendenti archeologi, 1904–1974*, Bologna 2012, pp. 673–682.

<sup>24</sup> Barbanera (note 11), pp. 52–57. On Salinas’ stay in Berlin and his extensive correspondence with the leading German classical scholars of his day, such as Karl Benedikt Hase, Eduard Gerhard, August Boeckh, and Theodor Mommsen, see Vincenzo Tusa, “Introduzione”, in: Antonino Salinas, *Scritti scelti*, Palermo 1976, I, pp. 7–21.

<sup>25</sup> Elena Pezzini, “Salinas e il Medioevo”, in: *Del museo di Palermo e del suo*

*avvenire*: il Salinas ricorda Salinas, 1914–2014, exh. cat., ed. by Francesca Spatafora/Lucina Gandolfo, Palermo 2014, pp. 66–70.

<sup>26</sup> Salinas and Amari remained in close contact until the latter’s death. After his appointment as Minister of Public Instruction and his professorship in Florence, the older scholar stayed mostly on the mainland. See Mallette (note 3).

<sup>27</sup> Antonino Salinas, *Del Museo nazionale di Palermo e del suo avvenire: discorso inaugurale per la solenne apertura della R. Università degli studi di Palermo letto addì 16 di novembre del 1873 da Antonino Salinas*, Palermo 1873.

Vienna International Exposition as part of the Italian delegation's report.<sup>28</sup> In the *Discorso*, Salinas made a concentrated effort throughout to situate the Museo Nazionale on the cultural horizon of the city. Another key concern of the *Discorso* was relating the museum's collection and its provenance to the university where it was housed (albeit for not much longer). The *Relazione* provided a more nuanced and detailed exposition of both the origins of the institution and its goals, which was clearly intended for a much wider audience of learned specialists outside of Sicily.

In the *Discorso*, Salinas identified the principal missions of the Museo Nazionale as twofold. The first was pedagogical or to provide illustrative material for university teaching. The second was symbolic: the institution was meant to represent the region in the unified modern state, and, within this framework, "il Museo Palermitano deve rappresentare in certa guisa i monumenti e la storia delle arti di tutta Sicilia".<sup>29</sup> Salinas also emphasized the close connection between the museum and teaching at the university in the longer *Relazione* of the same year. The nucleus of the museum came from this institution and, moreover, he held the chair of archaeology in the university. The *Relazione* contained a detailed report of its holdings, which included a vast Islamic numismatic collection, inherited from the Biblioteca Comunale and the Museo Salnitriano.<sup>30</sup>

The earlier Bourbon museum at the university was open to visitors, but on the whole had a strong philological character, which determined its principal users. Early on in his tenure, Salinas recognized the variety of possible audiences for the institution of



4 Michele Amari,  
ca. 1850

<sup>28</sup> *Idem* (note 20), pp. 59f. For an explanation of the purpose of the publication see *Lettere di Antonino Salinas a Michele Amari*, ed. by Giuditta Cimino, Palermo 1985, p. 78, letter no. 53 (XXII.7348.56.), Palermo, 8 January 1873.

<sup>29</sup> Full quote as follows from Salinas (note 27), p. 14: "L'ufficio del nostro Museo deve dunque, a parer mio, rispondere a un duplice bisogno; ché da un canto agli insegnamenti universitarij sulle arti e sulla storia loro occorrono svariati modelli, gessi, calchi, fotografie, e copie di ogni genere, senza delle quali le lezioni non possono arrecare alcun frutto; e dall'altro

canto il Museo Palermitano deve rappresentare in certa guisa i monumenti e la storia delle arti di tutta Sicilia." Also cited by Francesca Spatafora, "La carriera accademica", in: *Del museo di Palermo e del suo avvenire* (note 25), pp. 22–24: 23.

<sup>30</sup> Salinas (note 20), pp. 55–67. The numismatic collection consisted of 22 gems, 90 precious stones, and an indeterminate number of medieval and modern coins, of which 65 dated to the Aghlabid period of rule of Sicily (Maria Amalia De Luca, "Il medagliere islamico dell'ex museo nazionale di Palermo e la sua collezione inedita di gettoni di vetro", in: *4th Simone Assemani*



which he was at the helm. He strongly believed that the study of objects or monuments was not reserved only for learned persons or specialists, noting in his correspondence the museum's role as a civic institution whose collections must be made available to the wider public.<sup>31</sup> Salinas authored three editions of the museum guidebook with the varying titles of *Guida popolare* and *Breve guida*, which reflected this projected audience.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, he planned to make the Museo Nazionale and its collections more accessible to the public at large already when taking on the position of director, an idea that represented an important shift in the character of the institution.<sup>33</sup>

In reference to the showcasing of the museum's collection of Islamic objects, in an 1874 letter to Amari, Salinas further explained his plan:

Come Ella vede l'arabismo per questa volta non avrà da lagnarsi di me; il nostro Di Giovanni protesterà che non son cose che abbiano i venti secoli di antichità da lui voluti, ma noi abbiamo diritto ad avere nel Museo di Palermo una sala araba e l'avremo.<sup>34</sup>

*Symposium*, conference proceedings Trieste 2014, ed. by Bruno Callegher/Arianna D'Ottone Rambach, Trieste 2015, pp. 157–197).

<sup>31</sup> He also noted his own donation of more than 6,000 artifacts: “[...] ché a me toccherà il piacere di creare il Museo di Palermo, stato sin oggi *sepolcro* misterioso di monumenti. Bisogna fra le altre cose, che il pubblico si accorga dell'*esistenza* di questo istituto e ne prenda a cuore i progressi. Da parte mia, ho fatto modestamente il debito mio donando quanto possedevo di monete, bronzi, terrecotte etc.: una raccolta di più di sei mila pezzi” (*Lettere* [note 28], p. 84, letter no. 57 [XXII.7354.62.], Palermo, 20 October 1873). The contents of this letter are discussed by Graditi/Vergara Caffarelli (note 19), pp. XXVIII. In a report on an object from a neighboring town, Salinas addressed another important audience of the museum, that of travelers from abroad: “perché è necessità suprema che nel nostro museo si formi una ricca serie di monumenti arabi, affinché il viaggiatore che viene in Palermo, in paese che fra gli altri d'Italia è singolare appunto per la lunga dimora dei musulmani non debba restar deluso non trovando non pure una fabbrica di quel tempo, ma neanche una raccolta di altri monumenti arabi” (Antonino Salinas, note on the “Conca araba di ottono nella parrocchia dei Greci”, Palermo, 22 October 1874; Palermo, Museo Archeologico Regionale “Antonino Salinas”, Archivio Salinas).

<sup>32</sup> Antonino Salinas, *Breve guida del Museo Nazionale di Palermo: parte prima. Antichità classiche ed oggetti moderni*, Palermo 1875; *idem*, *Guida popolare del Museo Nazionale di Palermo*, Palermo 1882; *idem*, *Breve guida del Museo Nazionale di Palermo*,

The archaeologist Francesco Di Giovanni (1805–1889), a close friend of Amari's, was openly unopposed to exhibiting Islamic art in the museum.<sup>35</sup> His aspiration, most likely shared by many of his colleagues in the Commissione di Antichità, was that the institution would focus on the classical antiquities of Sicily as representative of the region's identity after its elevation to a national level. Salinas (and Amari, who doubtlessly sided with him) wanted to counter directives from Rome and pressures from members of the Commissione to place only ancient works on permanent display. In another letter to the senior scholar, Salinas pointed out that ceramics from the Islamic period could be found at various sites and noted the remains of Arab villages nearby. He saw it as an obligation for the Museo Nazionale in Palermo to incorporate Islamic objects, a goal he went as far as calling, quite self-ironically, a “smania” (great desire) of his.<sup>36</sup>

The exhibition of medieval and, most significantly, Islamic works was a major departure from what was expected of a museum at the time, in particular because Bonghi and Fiorelli held the principal cultural heritage

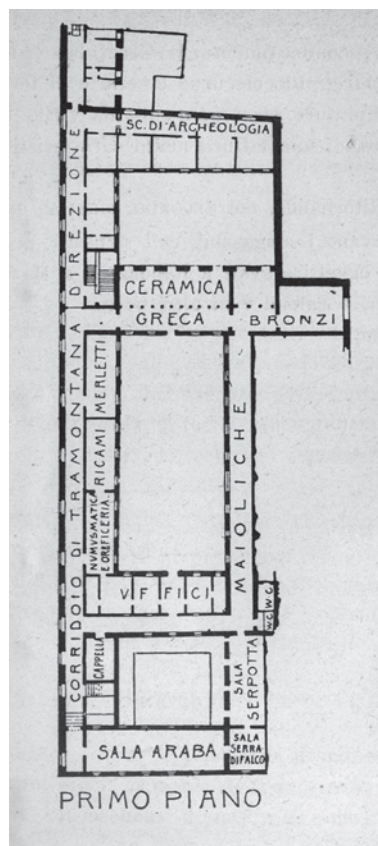
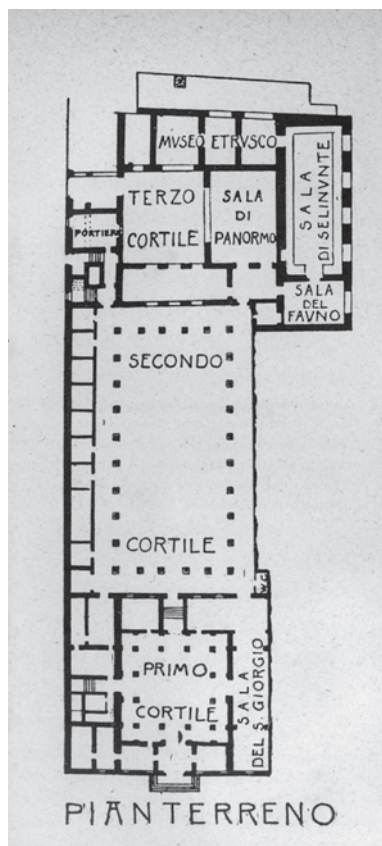
Palermo 1901. Salinas stated in a letter to Amari that it was his intention to reach a wider audience with these guides (*Lettere* [note 28], p. 90, letter no. 60 [XXII.7357.65.], Palermo, 12 December 1873).

<sup>33</sup> This outreach to the general public was not entirely new to institutions in the Italian South, and the major shift was in terms of its intended scope under Salinas. The royal Bourbon museums were open to visitors already in the late eighteenth century. See Paola D'Alconzo, *L'anello del re: tutela del patrimonio storico-artistico nel Regno di Napoli, 1734–1824*, Florence 1999, pp. 62–64.

<sup>34</sup> *Lettere* (note 28), p. 107, letter no. 66 (XXII.7364.72.), Palermo, 14 April 1874 (“As you will see, this time the Arabism will not have to complain about me; our Di Giovanni will protest that these are not the things that have the twenty centuries of age that he wished, but we have the right for an Arab Room in the Museum of Palermo and we will have it.”).

<sup>35</sup> Di Giovanni had participated in the revolutionary events of 1848/49 and later in the provisional government of 1860. From 1863 to 1865 he was president of the Commissione di Antichità e Belle Arti and from 1864 a senator of the Regno (Cavallari [note 15], pp. 43f., no. 2).

<sup>36</sup> “Ne' dintorni di Palermo abbiamo parecchi villaggi arabi abbandonati; quando la dotta vanga vorrà umiliarsi ad onorare quegli avanzi, avremo risolto questo e qualche altro problema e forse sarà soddisfatta la mia smania di avere nel Museo una sala di antichità arabe” (*Lettere* [note 28], p. 117, letter no. 69 [XXII.7369.77.], Palermo, 4 September 1874; also cited by Pezzini [note 25], p. 67).



5, 6 Ground floor and first floor plans of the Museo Nazionale, Palermo, from Salinas 1901 (note 32), pp. 16, 40

posts in Italy.<sup>37</sup> Salinas saw the importance of representing other periods in history, declaring in the *Discorso*:

È mia ferma convinzione che, come si studia la storia e la letteratura del Medio-Evo, così se ne debbano studiare le opere di arte; le quali sono precipuo argomento della gloria nazionale d'Italia.<sup>38</sup>

The early chronology of the display of Islamic objects in the Museo Nazionale can be reconstructed as follows. In the first guidebook, which Salinas authored

already in 1875, the room that was to house these works was named the “Stanza degli Oggetti Arabi” (later known as the “Sala Serradifalco”). It was situated in the west wing of the Olivella complex and, more precisely, in its southwest corner (see Fig. 6, lower right). Beside it was a larger hall (which eventually became the Sala Araba) reserved for the display of artworks of the medieval West that Salinas called the “Galleria del Medio Evo” in the first guidebook.<sup>39</sup> In the second guide of 1882, Islamic artifacts were seemingly not on exhibition, since the spaces that were allocated were “in co-

<sup>37</sup> Vittorio La Rosa, “‘Archeiologia’ e storiografia: quale Sicilia?”, in: *Storia d'Italia: le regioni dall'Unità a oggi. Storia di Sicilia*, ed. by Maurice Aymard/Giuseppe Giarrizzo, Turin 1987, V, pp. 699–731: 715.

<sup>38</sup> “It is my firm belief that as we study the history and literature of the Middle Ages, so we should study the works of art; which are the principal subject of the national glory of Italy” (Salinas [note 27], p. 12). Also

cited by La Rosa (note 37), p. 715. Salinas also published later in his career on Islamic material (“Trafori e vetrate nelle finestre delle chiese medioevali di Sicilia”, in: *Scritti per il centenario della nascita di Michele Amari*, Palermo 1910, II, pp. 495–507; republished in: Salinas [note 24], II, pp. 386–404).

<sup>39</sup> *Idem* 1875 (note 32), pp. 21–28.

struzione". What is most astounding is that, according to this edition, three rooms were reserved for them.<sup>40</sup> In the final edition of 1901 completed by Salinas during his tenure, the room was finally called the "Sala Araba" with the explanatory subtitle of "Monumenti arabi e siciliani medioevali"; accordingly, this hall united works identified primarily with the European West with those of Islamic artistic production.<sup>41</sup>

The objects housed in the Sala Araba largely came from collections on the island, as stated in the *Discorso* and in the longer *Relazione*.<sup>42</sup> The museum's metalwork holdings, which were primarily Mamluk, were further enriched by Salinas' acquisitions of the 1880s and by later additions.<sup>43</sup> In 1901–1903, the brothers Giuseppe and Nicola Jacovelli, two Italians living in Cairo, donated their collection of mostly early modern Islamic works of North African provenance, including stucco windows, wooden *masbrabiyat* (window screens) and furnishings, *intarsia* pavements, and Mamluk brassware, thus further enriching the Sala Araba.<sup>44</sup>

The 1901 guidebook offers a snapshot of the arrangement of the medieval and Islamic holdings in the courtyard and the Sala Araba (Figs. 5, 6). Tombstones and columns incised with Arabic texts were installed in the first courtyard off the main entrance. The exhibition hall of Islamic and medieval artifacts was located in the most prominent part of the complex, on the first floor over the main entrance. From photographs taken after 1903/04 (since the Jacovelli acquisitions are present; Figs. I, 7–9) we can trace the placement of objects in the room, for which a variety of display

devices were introduced. Several examples of Mamluk-era metalwork were situated on wooden hexagon stands in the center of the hall (Figs. 8, 9). A series of brass bowls and plates were placed atop sculpted capitals on a wooden cabinet against the east wall and toward the center of the room (Figs. 7, 8).<sup>45</sup> Directly above, on shelves supported by fourteenth-century painted wooden brackets, were ceramic vases, of which several were incised with Arabic inscriptions. These came from the vault of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, a church built by George of Antioch (d. 1151/52), the Syrian Greek commander-in-chief (*amīr al-umarā*) of Roger II's fleet.<sup>46</sup> In a glass case, a monumental ceramic vase inscribed in Arabic belonging to the Alhambra type and dating to the fourteenth century was on display (Fig. 9).<sup>47</sup> On the wall behind it were substantial fragments of a wooden doorframe from the monastic complex known as the Casa Martorana next to Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (Figs. I, 9). A reproduction of the mosaic portrait of Roger II in that church was placed within the frame. Two large Mamluk brass discs were situated on shelves on either side of the doorway and adjacent to the amphoras found above the vaults of the same church. Below the mounted flat disc on the left and next to the wooden display cupboard was a marble column inscribed with Kufic script from the destroyed medieval church of San Giacomo la Mazara in the city. Beside it and placed in a glass case against the wall was a window frame in stucco with an inscription in Arabic also from Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *Idem* 1882 (note 32), p. 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Idem* 1901 (note 32), pp. 42–45.

<sup>42</sup> *Idem* (note 27), pp. 5–8; *idem* (note 20), pp. 10–11.

<sup>43</sup> *Idem* (note 28), pp. 253f., letter no. 180 (XXII.7500.199.), Palermo, 11 December 1883.

<sup>44</sup> Andrea Paribeni, "Dall'Egitto all'Italia: la Collezione Jacovelli di arte islamica del Museo Nazionale di Palermo (1901–1902)", in: *Riflessi del collezionismo tra bilanci critici e nuovi contributi / Reflections of/on Art Collecting between Critical Assessments and New Contributions*, conference proceedings Urbino 2013, ed. by Giovanna Perini Folesani/Anna Maria Ambrosini Massari, Florence 2014, pp. 305–324.

<sup>45</sup> Many Mamluk objects that were in the Sala Araba are illustrated and

discussed in Ursula Staaacke, *I metalli mamelucchi del periodo bahārī*, Palermo 1997.

<sup>46</sup> Salinas 1875 (note 32), pp. 21–24. For an examination of the architecture of the church, see the chapter by Slobodan Ćurčić in: Ernst Kitzinger, *The Mosaics of St. Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo*, Washington, D.C., 1990, pp. 27–68.

<sup>47</sup> On the acquisition of this vase from the archbishop of Mazara, see *Lettere* (note 28), pp. 260f., letter no. 189 (without ref. no.), Palermo, 18 October 1884; and *ibidem*, pp. 261f., letter no. 190 (XII.7508.207.), Acropoli di Selinunte, 25 December 1884.

<sup>48</sup> Salinas published on this object in *idem* (note 24), II, pp. 386–404: 391–394. On the uses of the malleable material of stucco in medieval Sicily, see Jill Caskey, "Stuccoes from the Early Norman Period in Sicily: Figuration, Fabrication and Integration", in: *Confronting the Borders of Medieval Art*,



7-9 Palermo, Museo Nazionale,  
Sala Araba, unknown date  
(ca. 1905-1915)

A cast of a *muqarnas* vault with incised arabesques dominated the south side of the room (Figs. I, 7, 8). This vault came from the royal suburban palace of La Cuba in Palermo built by the Norman king William II in circa 1180. Below the *muqarnas* was a sixteenth-century *masbrabiya* from the Jacovelli brothers' collection. Arranged on either side was the marble inscription in two fragments inset with porphyry and serpentine from the Cappella Palatina (Figs. 10,

11), mimicking its supposed original placement in Roger II's chapel as door jambs.<sup>49</sup> Another noteworthy object was a carved wooden panel also from the Palazzo dei Normanni, preserved in a frame on the south wall of the room. At the center of the north wall was a painted cast that reproduced a section of the wooden *muqarnas* nave vaulting in the Norman chapel (Figs. 9, 12). Underneath the string course and framing the entire room was a copy, created by Salinas, of

ed. by *eadem*/Adam S. Cohen/Linda Safran (= *Medieval Encounters*, XVII [2011]), pp. 80–119.

<sup>49</sup> The inscription is currently in three fragments and is preserved in the loggia of Palazzo Abatellis.







10, 11 Intarsia inscription from the Cappella Palatina.  
Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia, Palazzo Abatellis

the monumental inscription in Arabic that was atop the Norman palace of La Cuba.<sup>50</sup>

In this arrangement of the Sala Araba, Salinas clearly intended to display Islamic objects in an analogous manner to works of antiquity and the medieval West, which presented a departure from prevalent exhibitory practices. At that time, these artifacts were frequently relegated to the status of *curiosa* in *Kunst- und Wunderkammern* of private collections. When part of larger displays, such as those of different nations at the grand universal expositions, these smaller works were often incorporated into ethnological tableaux

or considered in an applied arts context (for example in the South Kensington Museum).<sup>51</sup> Yet in his *Discorso*, Salinas stressed the importance of employing what he termed a “scientific method” for the study and display of objects.<sup>52</sup> His attention to small-scale works is particularly noteworthy, since he insisted on exhibiting the institution’s significant collection of coins and medals. Salinas knew that only *capolavori* or ‘masterpieces’ were valued by contemporaries and considered worthy of inclusion in collections and exhibitions.<sup>53</sup> He clearly believed in the need to look past the grand monuments to the so-called minor arts.<sup>54</sup> The way in

<sup>50</sup> Salinas 1875 (note 32), pp. 21–24.

<sup>51</sup> David J. Roxburgh, “Au Bonheur des Amateurs: Collecting and Exhibiting Islamic Art, ca. 1880–1910”, in: *Ars Orientalis*, XXX (2000), pp. 9–38: 12–16. As for the situation in Paris, in which there was a corresponding transition from arts and crafts to fine art, see Rémi Labrusse, *Islamophilie: l’Europe moderne et les arts de l’Islam*, exh. cat., Paris 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Salinas (note 27), p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> This was the approach that guided the 1910 exhibition of Islamic art

in Munich, proudly entitled the “Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art” (*Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst*). See Eva-Maria Troelenberg, “Framing the Artwork: Munich 1910 and the Image of Islamic Art”, in: *After One Hundred Years: The 1910 Exhibition “Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst” Reconsidered*, ed. by Andrea Lerner/Avinoam Shalem, Boston 2010, pp. 35–64.

<sup>54</sup> Salinas’ first intellectual interest was numismatics, and he also worked on Byzantine seals early on in his career (Antonino Salinas, *Annunzio di un saggio di sigillografia bizantina*, Paris 1864).

which he included the latter in a permanent display meant that their significance went far beyond that of objects intended to be marveled at by visitors. Salinas regarded these artifacts, among which were numerous Islamic examples, as imbued with cultural and historical import and, moreover, representative of the Sicilian region's artistic patrimony.

#### IV. Permanent Displays and Expositions of Islamic Art in the Final Quarter of the Nineteenth Century in Europe

In Western European institutions, one of the principal motives for sections or even entire rooms devoted to Islamic art was to reflect (and replicate in some way) their countries' colonial enterprises or aspirations of indirect imperialism.<sup>55</sup> As exemplified by the Arts and Crafts movement in England, there were strong ties between museums, material culture, and the applied arts in the second half of the nineteenth century. For Sicily, Salinas argued that an institution such as the Museo Nazionale of Palermo must take on an expanded role and "insieme ai monumenti dell'arte antica e moderna, dovesse accogliere le opere dell'industria e quei ricordi storici, che servono a testimoniare notevoli vicende politiche o a rendere una immagine perspicua della vita siciliana negli scorsi tempi".<sup>56</sup> Thus, he saw the institution's assemblage of material culture as forming a body of knowledge for its public. According to his vision, its collections would create a mental diorama of the island

and would serve as a record of past events; yet unlike other groupings elsewhere that could embody an expansive colonial present (as, for example, in the case of the British Empire), these works in Palermo's museum pointed to a local, inner history. Salinas articulated this notion most clearly in the *Relazione*, since for visitors, whether learned scholars or laypersons, "il Museo è divenuto in certa guisa campo di nuove scoperte".<sup>57</sup>

First conceived in the early 1870s, the Sala Araba of the Museo Nazionale of Palermo was one of the first collections of Islamic art intended for permanent display in Europe. The only earlier instance was the South Kensington Museum founded in 1852, whose holdings were centered on the 'applied arts' and included Islamic artworks derived from the first world's fair, the 1851 *Great Exhibition* in London.<sup>58</sup> Just after Salinas assumed directorship of the Museo Nazionale, the Orientmuseum in Vienna, which contained an important Islamic collection, was founded in 1875.<sup>59</sup> In Europe, at this time, Paris was widely considered as the capital of Islamic art, and the first major show coincided with the International Congress of Orientalists at the Palais de l'Industrie on the Champs-Élysées in 1873. At that site, later that decade, the initial formal presentation of these objects was made at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, which was open to the public from the late 1870s. In the Louvre, a section devoted to "arts musulmans" was formed in 1893; but only in 1905 was the first room created to showcase these works.<sup>60</sup> Islamic arti-

<sup>55</sup> See the essays in: *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, conference proceedings Washington, D.C., 1988, ed. by Ivan Karp/Steven D. Lavine, Washington, D.C., 1991.

<sup>56</sup> Antonino Salinas, *Ricordi storici delle rivoluzioni siciliane del secolo XIX conservati nel Museo nazionale di Palermo*, Palermo 1885, p. 5; republished in: *idem* [note 24], I, p. 360 ("[The museum] along with ancient and modern monuments should house the works of industry and those historical memories, which serve to witness considerable political events or to make readable an image of Sicilian life in recent times").

<sup>57</sup> Salinas [note 20], p. 75 ("[...] the museum has become in a certain guise a field of new discoveries").

<sup>58</sup> Stanley (note 1). The British Museum also had a significant collection of East Asian art derived from the Empire's colonial holdings that came

together under the remarkably influential curator Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks (1826–1897). See Rachel Ward, "Islamism: Not an Easy Matter", in *A. W. Franks: Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, ed. by Marjorie Caygill/John Cherry, London 1997, pp. 272–285.

<sup>59</sup> See Barbara Karl, "Persian Art in 19th-Century Vienna", in: *The Shaping of Persian Art: Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia*, ed. by Yuka Kadoi/Iván Szántó, Newcastle upon Tyne 2013, pp. 110–129.

<sup>60</sup> In France, many objects at this time were in private hands and came from ecclesiastical holdings dispersed during the Revolution. Also, there were many Arabic manuscripts in libraries and in other state institutions. See Rémi Labrusse, "Paris, capitale des arts de l'Islam? Quelques aperçus sur la formation des collections françaises d'art islamique au tournant du siècle", in: *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire de l'art français* (1997), pp. 275–311; *idem* (note 51).



facts could be found in museums in Berlin, of which the most notable instance was Friedrich Sarre's collection exhibited at the Kunstgewerbemuseum from 1899.<sup>61</sup>

Alongside these permanent displays in museums and temporary shows, the universal exhibitions of 1878, 1889, and 1900 played a vital role in promoting the public's appreciation of Islamic art.<sup>62</sup> Another key moment in the presentation of these objects to the wider public was their display in the Galerie Orientale of the Trocadéro, part of the *Exposition universelle* of 1878 and where the artifacts of private collectors were exhibited.<sup>63</sup> In Vienna, two large shows of carpets were held in 1880 and in 1891.<sup>64</sup> In 1885, the Burlington Fine Arts Club in London brought together ceramics from private collections.<sup>65</sup> In Paris, the seminal *Exposition d'art musulman* was held in 1893 at the Palais de l'Industrie, organized by Georges Marye, who was head of the Musée d'Alger.<sup>66</sup>

In mainland Italy, there were several collections of Islamic art. Apart from Sicily, other centers, most notably Venice, had a long and sustained relation-

ship with the Eastern Mediterranean and the Muslim world.<sup>67</sup> Yet, unlike the collection in Palermo's Museo Nazionale, many of these early assemblages focused on the so-called applied arts, such as carpets and ceramics.<sup>68</sup> By the second half of the century, there were numerous private collectors and dealers in these artworks, such as Mariano Fortuny y Marsal (1838–1874)<sup>69</sup> or Leone Caetani (1869–1935),<sup>70</sup> and smaller assortments could be found in local museums and in church treasuries dispersed across the mainland. Florence was the foremost center of oriental studies in Italy, and Amari held the chair of Arabic at the Istituto di Studi Superiori in the city from 1860 to 1873. The most well-known assemblage of Islamic objects was that of the Medici family; further major collections comprising these artifacts include that of weaponry of Frederick Stibbert, which he kept in his villa outside the city later transformed into a museum, and that of Giovanni Fossati of carpets.<sup>71</sup> The art dealers Stefano Bardini and his son Ugo had a significant number of Islamic artworks in their possession too.<sup>72</sup> Other col-

<sup>61</sup> On Sarre, see Jens Kröger, "Friedrich Sarre: Kunsthistoriker, Sammler und Connaissanceur", in: *Wie die islamische Kunst nach Berlin kam: Der Sammler und Museumsdirektor Friedrich Sarre (1865–1945)*, exh. cat., ed. by Julia Gonnella/Jens Kröger, Berlin 2015, pp. 13–46. See also Eva-Maria Troelenberg, "The 'Golden Age' and the Secession: Approaches to Alterity in Early Twentieth-Century World Art", in: *In the Shadow of the Golden Age: Art and Identity in Asia from Gandhara to the Modern Age*, ed. by Julia A. B. Hegewald, Berlin 2014, pp. 397–429.

<sup>62</sup> Linda Komaroff, "Exhibiting the Middle East: Collections and Perceptions of Islamic Art", in: *Ars Orientalis*, XXX (2000), pp. 1–8; Annette Hagedorn, "The Development of Islamic Art History in Germany in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries", in: *Discovering Islamic Art* (note 1), pp. 117–127; and Roxburgh (note 51), pp. 9–38. Islamic objects were an intrinsic part of these international fairs where even the peoples of these lands were placed on display. A notable instance was the so-called 'Rue du Caire' of the 1889 Parisian *Exposition universelle* (Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs*, Berkeley 1992, pp. 17–32).

<sup>63</sup> Labrusse (note 1).

<sup>64</sup> Jens Kröger, "The Discovery and the Exhibition of Islamic Art from German Collections in the 20th Century", in: *Islamic Art in Germany*, ed. by Joachim Gierlichs/Annette Hagedorn, Mainz am Rhein 2004, pp. 21–24: 21.

<sup>65</sup> Vernoit (note 1), p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> See Labrusse (note 1); Sophie Makariou, "L'enfance de l'art: un siècle d'étude de l'art islamique", in: *Purs décorés?* (note 1), pp. 56–63.

<sup>67</sup> *Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797*, exh. cat. Venice 2007, ed. by Stefano Carboni, New Haven 2007.

<sup>68</sup> For a broader European context, see Labrusse (note 1); and Julian Raby, "Exotica from Islam", in: *The Origin of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Zeynep İnankur/Reina Lewis/Mary Roberts, New York 1985, pp. 251–258. Many of these works in Italian collections are presented by Francesco Gabrieli/Umberto Scerrato, *Gli Arabi in Italia: cultura, contatti e tradizioni*, Milan 1985. See also the overview of collections in the capital in Valentina Colonna, "La formazione delle raccolte d'arte islamica a Roma (XVII–XIX secolo)", in: *Giornale di Storia*, 7 (2011), pp. 1–19, URL: <http://www.giornaledistoria.net> (accessed on 8 August 2016).

<sup>69</sup> Maria Giovanna Stasolla, "Il collezionismo di arte islamica tra Italia e Spagna nel XIX secolo: il caso di Mariano Fortuny y Marsal", in: *Arqueología, coleccionismo y antigüedad: España e Italia en el siglo XIX*, ed. by José Beltrán Fortes/Beatrice Cacciotti/Beatrice Palma Venetucci, Seville 2006, pp. 661–685.

<sup>70</sup> Giovanni Curatola, "Il collezionismo ottocentesco di arte islamica e Firenze", in: *Studi e ricerche di collezionismo e museografia, Firenze 1820–1920*, Pisa 1985, pp. 379–389: 386f.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*; Daniela Ceccuti, *Una miniera inesauribile: collezionisti e antiquari di arte islamica. L'Italia e il contesto internazionale tra Ottocento e Novecento*, Florence 2013, pp. 66f.

<sup>72</sup> Curatola (note 70), pp. 386f.

lectors with close connections to Florence were the father and son Jean-Baptiste and Louis Carrand, who donated their Islamic artifacts to the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, one of the principal assemblages of medieval art in Italy, in 1888.<sup>73</sup>

#### V. The Significance of Islamic Artifacts on Permanent Display in Palermo's Museo Nazionale

From this brief overview of Islamic art collecting and display, it becomes clear that the Sala Araba in Palermo presented a remarkably diverse association and relationship to these objects. What Salinas omitted from his 1873 university address, the *Discorso*, was any direct reference to the Muslim past of the island. Nonetheless, adhering to the museum's official mission to epitomize the "arts of all of Sicily", Islamic artifacts became part of its permanent collection in that same decade. In his lecture, Salinas further observed that the emphasis of contemporary cultural heritage institutions was on Greek and Roman antiquities.<sup>74</sup> The inclusion of Islamic objects as illustrative of a period of Sicilian history that encompassed two and a half centuries is particularly noteworthy in a European setting. Many assemblages of the time were informed by an imposed construct of 'East' and 'West'. Of course, many Islamic artifacts could be found in church treasuries and had been traded widely from the late Middle Ages and onwards, having reached ecclesiastical and private hands well before the nineteenth century. Yet elsewhere in Europe and on the Italian mainland, collectors and museums attached the value of exoticism to these works. In the case of Sicily, even before Amari's studies, there

was an awareness of this past. Most presciently, the Palermitan prelate Rosario Gregorio (1753–1809), who examined the epigraphy of various objects in his *Rerum Arabicarum quæ ad historiam siculam spectant ampla collectio* of 1790, termed these "Monumenta Cufico-Sicula", thereby fully acknowledging their Sicilian provenance.<sup>75</sup>

According to Edward Said's formulation, by the nineteenth century the European West had situated the Orient as its diametric opposite. Orientalism would imply a remoteness that was not just spatial but also conceptual, separating the 'Orient' from the 'Occident' of Western Europe.<sup>76</sup> In Sicily, due to the several centuries of Islamic rule and the extensive material remains from this period, there is no sense of distance or duality for persons such as Amari or Salinas (although for many of their contemporaries on the island the Muslim past represented a historical 'other'). Following Said's presentation of the Islamic East and Europe as binary opposites, Sicily may be regarded as situated between two poles. Therefore, in this dualistic universe, the island and its history is an anomaly in relation to the dichotomy inherent to the interest in and study of works of the Islamic East by most European scholars and travelers. This "third space" is, on the one hand, conceptual, but also, on the other, physically present – as a documented historical past, embodied by the objects in the Museo Nazionale and the medieval monuments in Palermo.<sup>77</sup> Homi Bhabha has argued that it is precisely within what he termed the "interstices", or the "in-between spaces", where identity may be found.<sup>78</sup> The Sala Araba, which symbolically placed on display the Muslim period of

<sup>73</sup> The Carrand donation included a large number of ivories. The Bargello's collection was further amplified by the gift of Venetian-Islamic metals and weapons made by the Italian ambassador to Paris Costantino Ressa (Ceccuti [note 71], pp. 66f.). On Carrand, see also *Arti del Medio Evo e del Rinascimento: omaggio ai Carrand, 1889–1989*, exh. cat., ed. by Paola Barocchi, Florence 1989.

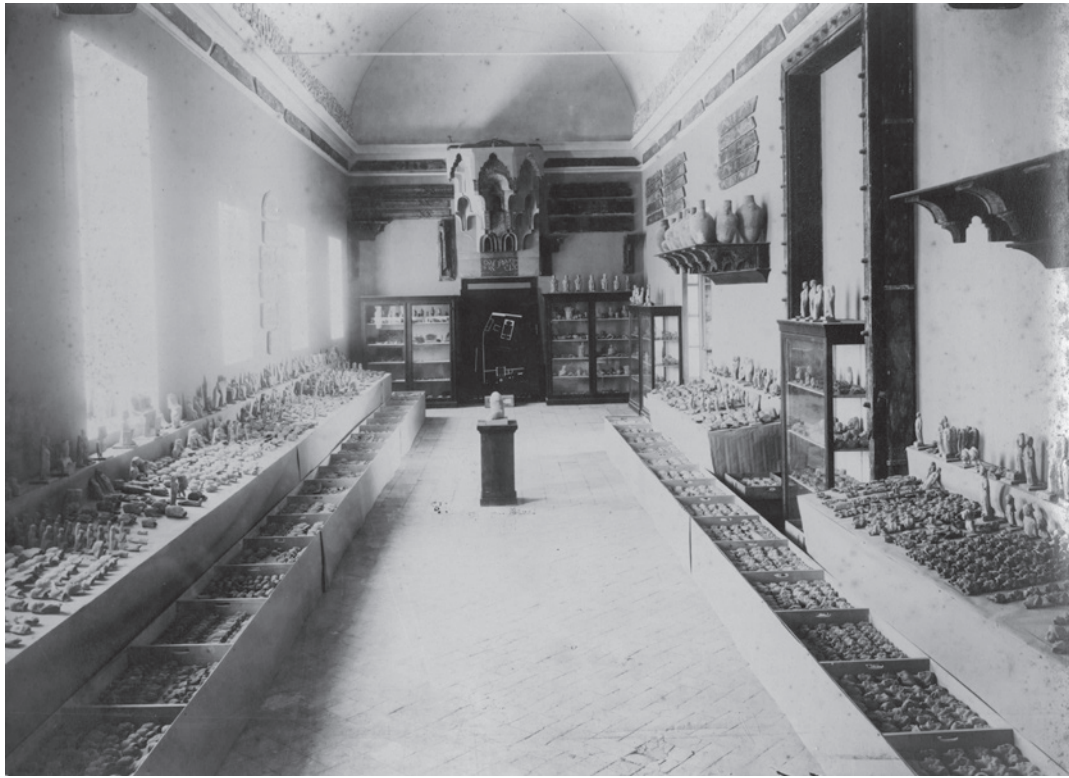
<sup>74</sup> "L'aver stabilito che il Museo di Palermo debba accogliere, intera, la storia delle arti siciliane, mostra come io non intenda farmi seguace di quella scuola che ancor oggi guarda con disprezzo tutto quanto che non sia greco o romano" (Salinas [note 27], p. 23).

<sup>75</sup> Rosario Gregorio, *Rerum Arabicarum quæ ad historiam siculam spectant ampla collectio*, Palermo 1790, pp. 150–171.

<sup>76</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York 1978, pp. 3–7; further elaborated in *idem*, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York 1994, pp. xi–xiv, xx–xxvii, 3–19.

<sup>77</sup> The notion of "third space" borrows from Homi Bhabha's conceptualization of what he calls the "Third Space of enunciation", in which two cultures meet and where a new culture is produced (Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, New York 1994, p. 37).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. If.



12 Palermo, Museo Nazionale, Sala Araba,  
unknown date (ca. 1920-1935)

rule, represented a culture that is neither that of the West nor that of the East as understood by Salinas' and Amari's contemporaries; it is a third, alternative space that breaks up the dichotomy presented by Said. In this region after Italian unification, these two figures created a "third space" to signify a historic period unique to the island and incorporated it into an official narrative of nationalist history-making – thereby also betraying Sicily's own ambivalent relationship to mainland Italy.

Furthermore, when choosing to embody the entirety of Sicilian history in an institution that originated in the newly unified Italian Kingdom, the Islamic

past for Amari and Salinas is not an 'other'.<sup>79</sup> They did not perceive the 'exotic' nature of Islamic artifacts, which was arguably the initial interest or attraction that drew many early collectors and antiquarians in Europe and also in mainland Italy to such objects. For Salinas and Amari, the inclusion of Islamic works in the Museo Nazionale seemed entirely natural and, what is more, necessary to exemplify a specific period in Sicily's history.<sup>80</sup> Unlike museums elsewhere in Europe, the initial impetus in Palermo was not that of collecting an unfamiliar or foreign culture with which Western Europeans came into contact, perhaps through a colonial presence; instead, it was that of a

<sup>79</sup> Mallette (note 3), p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Another difficulty for nineteenth-century European curators to integrate Islamic artifacts and display them with those of the West in their institutions was that the historical dimension of the former could not be adequately ac-

knowledged within existing epistemological frameworks; this is also pointed out by Dominique Jarrassé, "Les arts méconnus: historicité et ethnicité dans l'histoire de l'art au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle", in: *L'orientalisme architectural entre imaginaires et savoirs*, ed. by Nabila Oulebsir/Mercedes Volait, Paris 2009, pp. 109–127.



13 Palermo, Museo Nazionale, Sala Araba, unknown date (early 1920-30s?)

communal history or origin. In this sense, the Islamic past of Sicily had a vital function for the present: it may not have been considered an ‘exotic other’, but was perceived as distinct in time, a period that had to be actively re-interpreted and constructed anew by Amari and Salinas, in order to arrive at a historical narrative that represented the modern region of Sicily.

## VI. Aftermath of the Sala Araba

After Salinas’ retirement in 1913 and death in the next year, the Islamic collection in the Museo Nazionale became marginalized. Under the directorship of the archaeologist and numismatist Ettore Gabrici

(1868–1962), in the following decade the contents of the Sala Araba were moved off-site, and excavation finds from archaeological sites were stored in this room (Figs. 12, 13).<sup>81</sup> Following World War II, most of the museum’s medieval and Renaissance holdings, notably its paintings, migrated to the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia at Palazzo Abatellis, which opened in 1954 after its much acclaimed restoration by the Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa.<sup>82</sup> In storage during World War II, the archaeological collection remained at the Olivella, which was transformed into the Museo Archeologico Regionale when it reopened in 1946. The Sala Araba, however, was never reassembled, re-

<sup>81</sup> Maria Accascina, “Il riordinamento della Galleria del Museo Nazionale di Palermo”, in: *Bollettino d’arte*, IX (1930), pp. 385–400. On Gabrici as director and on his career as an archaeologist, see Agata Villa, s.v. Ettore Gabrici, in: *Dizionario biografico dei soprintendenti archeologi* (note 23), pp. 349–355.

<sup>82</sup> Marco Frascari, “Carlo Scarpa in Magna Graecia: The Abatellis Palace in Palermo”, in: *AA Files*, IX (1985), pp. 3–9; Vincenzo Abbate, “Il palazzo, le collezioni, l’itinerario”, in: Giulio Carlo Argan/Vincenzo Abbate/ Eugenio Battisti, *Palazzo Abatellis di Palermo*, Palermo 1991, pp. 14–119: 14–20;

flecting changing perceptions of the Muslim past in post-war Sicily.<sup>83</sup> In 1991, some of its objects were placed on permanent display at the restored Norman palace of La Zisa, which is administered by the Sicilian Region, in a section devoted to Islamic art.<sup>84</sup>

The formation of the Sala Araba in Palermo's Museo Nazionale raises many important issues. The first is the innovative and prescient thinking present in the Italian South in institutions brought into the fold after the Risorgimento. Second, a re-evaluation of such luminary figures in the Mezzogiorno, namely Antonino Salinas, is required. That of Michele Amari has already begun, and he is now recognized on a European scale as an influential, exceptionally well-connected nineteenth-century orientalist. Last, the marginalization of Sicily as part of what is widely termed as the "Southern question" is applicable; in particular since the assemblage of Palermo's Museo Nazionale it remains largely unrecognized in the scholarly literature. This is especially striking as the presentation of objects of Islamic art in the South Kensington Museum, the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, the Musée du Louvre, and the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin have been the subject of several studies, symposia, and exhibition catalogues.<sup>85</sup>

The importance of the Sala Araba is due not only to the early date of its formation, but also to the efforts of Salinas and Amari. Salinas, in choosing to incorporate Islamic works in the Museo Nazionale, caused a paradigm shift by recognizing their significance to the

Sicilian region. The archaeologist understood that the museum was the place where a shared heritage could be shaped, and for that reason he intended to make its collection accessible to the largest possible audience. In the conception of a hall for the permanent display of Islamic objects already in the early 1870s, Salinas moved beyond prevalent museological notions that prized these works for their ornamental and decorative qualities and not for their historic or cultural heritage value. Contemporary institutions elsewhere frequently fashioned similar collections using the idea of an encounter with a culture perceived as 'other'. In Sicily, Salinas placed this 'other' on display, thereby creating a "third space", alternate to the modern Italian state that was indisputably situated in the West according to Said's strict dichotomy. In Palermo's Museo Nazionale under Antonino Salinas' directorship, Islamic artifacts were integrated with art and archaeological holdings to form a canon of material culture that represented the Sicilian region in the new nation of Italy.

*I wish to thank Evelina De Castro at the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia at Palazzo Abatellis for inspiring me to research the Sala Araba during a project to catalogue the medieval inscriptions and architectural fragments in the museum's loggia. At the Museo Archeologico Regionale "Antonino Salinas", Francesca Spatafora granted authorization to consult the museum's Archivio Storico, and I am grateful for the assistance and disponibilità of Elena Pezzini and Alessandra Ruvituso. I would also like to thank Jill Caskey for her helpful comments on an earlier draft.*

1954–2014: sessanta anni della Galleria e delle sue collezioni a Palazzo Abatellis, ed. by Gioacchino Barbera, Messina 2015.

<sup>83</sup> After Carlo Alfonso Nallino (1872–1938) left the post in 1913, the chair of Arabic Language and Literature in Palermo remained empty for twenty years, which also affected the status of the study of the language and appreciation of these artifacts on the island in the following decades. See Ali

Kadem Kalati, "Storia dell'insegnamento dell'arabo in Italia (II parte: Palermo e Venezia)", in: *Annali della Facoltà di Lingue e Letterature Straniere dell'Università di Sassari*, IV (2004), pp. 279–296: 284.

<sup>84</sup> See Staacke (note 45), p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> See, for instance, Stanley (note 1); Labrusse (note 1); *idem* (note 51); Kröger (note 61); and Troelenberg (note 61).

The paper examines the exhibition of Islamic artifacts at Palermo's Museo Nazionale in a room that came to be known as the "Sala Araba", planned by the Sicilian archaeologist Antonino Salinas (1841–1914) in the early 1870s when taking on the directorship. Founded in the aftermath of the Italian unification, the museum was conceived as a vehicle for the formation of an identity – not that of the mainland, but of a particular regional variety. According to Salinas' conception, the display of works in this institution was to represent the entirety of Sicilian history. To this end, and under the influence of the Sicilian orientalist Michele Amari (1806–1889), Salinas exhibited objects that exemplified the period of Islamic rule of the island. The placement of these works on permanent display in the Museo Nazionale signaled a paradigm shift at a time when Islamic artifacts were overwhelmingly prized elsewhere in Europe for their decorative qualities and not for their historic and cultural value. This article traces the formation, contents, and significance of the Sala Araba, created at a remarkably early date for a European institution, and concludes with its eventual dismantlement after Salinas' death.

*Photo Credits*

---

*Museo Archeologico Regionale "Antonino Salinas", Photographic Archive, Palermo: Figs. 1, 7–9, 12, 13. – From Pace (note 4): Fig. 2. – From Lettere (note 28): Fig. 3. – From Romualdo Giuffrida, "Michele Amari tra lotta politica, ricerca storica e attività parlamentare", in: Siciliani illustri, Palermo 1990, I: Fig. 4. – From Salinas 1901 (note 32): Figs. 5, 6. – Author: Figs. 10, 11.*