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1 New display of Ottoman and Oriental swords
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Dresden, March 2010

OBJECTS IN CAPTIVITY PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE EXHIBITING AND MAKING OF IMAGES OF THE ART OF WAR

Avinoam Shalem

[...] no one would deny – and I think no one has thought to protest – the museum effect, through which Greek sculpture has assumed such a lasting place in our visual culture. By contrast, in the exhibiting of the material culture of other people, in particular what used to be called “primitive” art, it is the museum effect – the tendency to isolate something from its world, to offer it up for attentive looking and thus transform it into art like our own – that has been the subject of heated debate.¹

Short Prelude

The close link made between looted arms and armor and their origins and primary identities, as well as their constant presentation as the object of the defeated ‘other’ make this type of migrating

object unique. The history of their display cannot therefore be simply discussed as part of the West’s historical use and reuse of Islamic objects. Nor can one discuss the varied methods of their display in the West solely within the large fields of transcultural studies and exhibiting the ‘other’. In contrast to other objects, looted arms and armor usually remained ‘untouched’ because their authenticity was predicated upon preserving their initial form and decoration – in short, their initial appearance and even condition. The initial condition coupled with their subsequent display were together designed to tell specific narratives of heroic moments of capture and looting for centuries to come. They in turn served ideologies that needed to create images of the defeated and the triumphant.

¹ Svetlana Alpers, “The Museum as a Way of Seeing”, in: *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, conference proceedings

Washington 1988, ed. by Ivan Karp/Steven D. Lavine, Washington 1991, pp. 25–32: 26f.

This study aims ambitiously to discuss the fascinating story of the aestheticization of technologies of war. By considering and classifying different modes of display of looted arms and armor, mainly from the world of Islam, I suggest that the varied aesthetic notions which have motivated collectors and curators to organize objects of war have long traditions. The history of the display of arms and armor in our modern era often maintains this long-standing tradition. Historical motivations for display were shaped by the quantification of wars – displays of arms and armor were one way in which to indicate the killing of the enemy and the material looted in wars. Moreover, and in addition, in several cases the arms and armor of the ‘other’ was set within the global history of technology, regardless of the arms’ specific identities. In this article, I consider how exhibitions in the *Kunstkammern* of the late Renaissance and the baroque eras and in the private and public collections of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries reflect the unique nature of arms and armor as objects and how they attempt at once to honor and to alter their natures. The specific case of the Saxon desire to collect Ottoman weapons – as they are now displayed in the Türkische Cammer in the Residenzschloss in Dresden – serves as both prelude and epilog for this article.

Viewing and Observing

The citation chosen to open this essay harshly unwraps the up-to-date dispute and scrutinized examinations of museum’s display – namely of our modern

process of usually transforming objects into images and making narratives. It is taken from Svetlana Alpers’ article “The Museum as a Way of Seeing”, which was published in 1991 in a book called *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, itself the proceedings of a conference held at the International Center of Smithsonian Institution in September 1988.² As a matter of fact, the presentation of the ‘other’ has long been a controversial subject argued over by scholars and journalists as well as by polemical publicists and dilettanti.³ It is likely that the international Zeitgeist of our global times has sharpened our collective eyes to look at and think about this issue as if through a magnifying glass; the question forces us to be highly critical in our observations and aesthetic meta-consciousness, especially when we view the ‘other(s)’ in the context of a museum. Moreover, the recognition of specific spheres located beyond the borders of the so-called Western world as having their own distinct cultural domains has become a political issue and, as part of a post-colonial, Western corrective process, respect and a belated justice is being granted to these spheres, achieved in part through their representations in art museums.

Recent articles and books on the status of the foreign object in the global intercultural context of our own time have called our attention to this matter.⁴ But apart from the crucial question of whether or not works of art and visual materiality are the major agents for the transmission and display of culture – and in this case I think of the apparent exclusion of literary oeuvre and music, which are no less viable

² Alpers (note 1).

³ See mainly: Ernst H. Gombrich, “The Museum: Past, Present and Future”, in: *Critical Inquiry*, III (1977), pp. 449–470; *Exhibiting Cultures* (note 1); Joan Branham, “Sacrality and Aura in the Museum: Mute Objects and Articulate Space”, in: *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, LII/LIII (1994/95), pp. 33–47; Julia Harrison, “Museums as Agencies of Neo-colonialism in a Postmodern World”, in: *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies*, III (1997), pp. 41–65; Dietrich Heißenbüttel, *Ungleiche Voraussetzungen: Zur Globalisierung der Künste*, Stuttgart 2000; Karen Lang, “Encountering the Object”, in: *The Lure of the Object*, ed. by Stephen Melville, Williamstown 2005, pp. 135–156; *Islamic Art and the Museum: Approaches to*

Art and Archaeology of the Muslim World in the Twenty-First Century, ed. by Benoît Junod et al., London 2012, especially the paper by Avinoam Shalem, “Multivalent Paradigm of Interpretation and the Aura or Anima of the Object”, pp. 101–115.

⁴ Among many others these works include: *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, ed. by George W. Stocking, Jr., Madison, Wis., 1985; James Clifford, “Objects and Selves – An Afterword”, *ibidem*, pp. 236–246; *Globalisierung/Hierarchisierung: Kulturelle Dominanzen in Kunst und Kunstgeschichte*, ed. by Irene Below/Beatrice von Bismarck, Marburg 2005; *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums*, ed. by Hans Belting/Emanuel Araújo/Andrea Buddensieg, Ostfildern 2009; Stephen Greenblatt et

means –, providing the visual arts of the ‘other(s)’ a museum space for nuanced viewing might open for us, the beholders, different ways of seeing these artifacts and thinking about distinctive cultures. Hence, the conscious act of seeing cannot and should not only be explained by optic science and perception theories concerning the anatomy of the eye; instead, seeing is a social, acquired habitus that involves cultural factors. Thus, a change in seeing habits suggests a change of view.⁵ And, as Heinrich Wölfflin clearly alerted us almost a century ago: “It goes without saying that seeing is not a mere mechanical act, but rather always emotionally contingent. A new meaning of the world crystallizes in each new mode of seeing.”⁶

To illustrate this line of thinking with a rather provoking example, I would like to focus on the poster that the United Arab Emirates chose for the publicity of their pavilion in the 2009 Venice Biennale (Fig. 2). Its inscription “Laysa anta bal anā” (“It’s not you, it’s me”) addresses the viewer in both Arabic and English; the Arabic text is printed in black on top of the first part of its English translation in red letters. The poster adopts the aesthetics and appearance of a signpost, directing our thoughts and pointing to us a specific route of thinking and acting.

Indeed, this poster challenges the viewer who enters the Gulf Emirates pavilion because it clearly suggests that the interaction of the Western Biennale viewer with the art of what he might still call the ‘other’ no longer hews to the modes that characterize the long history of interactions between the two sup-

posedly polarizing and antagonizing entities, namely West and East. The poster purposefully breaks with the usual Eurocentric approach to any non-European art and also attempts to emphasize the fact that this interaction does not involve dominant-passive relationships, in which the West has usually appeared as the dominant and active player that looks at and uses the passive and vulnerable East. It cannot avoid, however, falling into the binary trap and perhaps unintentionally creates two entities of cultural ‘others’.

This tendency is in full accord with post-colonial critical thought and anti-Eurocentric scholarly voices, which call for re-considering the world’s narrative of art and history in a more balanced and progressive, if not enlightened, approach.⁷ The Eurocentric perspective reflects not only political incorrectness – as remarked by Edward Said almost forty years ago – but also a more generally conventional mode of thinking, which is closely bound to the paradigm of center and periphery.⁸ This centrist approach takes for granted that both mainstream styles and innovative moments occur in the center and that their influences are detected in the margins. In this mode of thinking, the peripheries echo only faintly the art production of the center, while the capitals play the primary role in creating and dictating style and modes of visual presentation. In the specific Eurocentric variant of this model, the whole process of artistic production and transmission and its subsequent evaluation refers to the Western centers as sources of inspiration, which beget pale imitations.⁹ Objects themselves, of course,

al., *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, Cambridge 2010. See also Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, New York 1983; *idem*, *Time and the Work of Anthropology: Critical Essays 1971–1991*, Chur 1991, especially pp. 31–43; *idem*, “Presence and Representation: The Other and Anthropological Writing”, in: *Critical Inquiry*, XVI (1990), pp. 753–772. For China as the paradigm of the ‘other’, see Zhang Longxi, “The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West”, in: *Critical Inquiry*, XV (1988), pp. 108–131.

⁵ My interest clearly focused on seeing this as anthropological behavior and not as a neuro-anatomical phenomenon. For the latter see mainly the recent book of John Onians, *Neuroarthistory: From Aristotle and Pliny to Baxandall and Zeki*, New Haven/London 2007.

⁶ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst*, Munich ⁵1921, p. xi (“Dass das Sehen nicht ein bloß mechanischer Akt ist, sondern seelisch bedingt bleibt, darüber ist doch kein Wort zu verlieren. ‘In jeder neuen Sehform kristallisiert sich ein neuer Inhalt der Welt.’”).

⁷ See mainly Enrique Dussel, “Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)”, in: *Boundary 2*, XX (1993), 3, pp. 65–76; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2000.

⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, London 1978, especially the introduction.

⁹ My approach to center and periphery strongly relates to the specific



2 "Laysa anta bal anā (It's not you, it's me)", poster of the Arab Emirates pavilion at the Biennale of Venice in 2009

might tell another story: numerous moments in art history suggest that sometimes it is rather the margin that takes the leading role and inspires artistic production in the so-called centers and capitals. In any case, it should be emphasized that the scholarly tendency to shift the focus of study from the center to the peripheries should not keep to the old-fashioned and traditional hierarchy of powers between center and margin. The scholarly acceptance of the so-called

attitude towards non-European art in the writing of history of art. See the discussion of this question in the field of Byzantine art by Antony Eastmond, "Art and the Periphery", in: *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. by Elizabeth Jeffreys/John Haldon/Robin Cormack, Oxford 2008, pp. 770–776. The query as to center and periphery in Italian art

margin should be conscious of the margin as a space in which equally important cultural and historical information can be collected. The so-called margin should be equitably treated in relation to its opposite 'other' (i.e. the center); it is a space of research as legitimate as the latter. More importantly, the methods of investigation should be adopted similarly for both spaces, in a balanced manner that in fact aims at blurring the division between the two.

If this challenge to re-think outdated notions of centers and peripheries is not taken up, any scholarly study – even those explicitly focused on margins and frontier or border spaces – will fall immediately and repeatedly into the trap of looking at and interpreting visual material from the particular perspective of the center; in our case, it will be tinged with Eurocentric bias. In short, what is crucially needed is a conscious shift to other relevant standpoints of cultural observation. The multi-perspective view of art and artifacts suggests a new interpretive model of visual reading that replaces our traditional monolithic one. This might result in challenging our conventional binary way of thinking related to the construction of ourselves and the 'other' – *anta wa anā* (you and me).

In cultural as well as in literary studies, this notion has been widely defined, discussed, and evaluated. Anthropologists, such as Johannes Fabian, have called our attention to the problems arising from the one-sided, Western operative angle of observing the 'other'.¹⁰ Said noticed the rise of interest in marginal regions and the corollary perception that these were the arenas in which innovations and new ideas were born. He called this phenomenon "extrapolation" and explained that it usually appears in the sphere he defines as "out of the centre".¹¹ Said understood

was largely discussed by Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg in their essay "Centro e periferia", in: *Storia dell'arte italiana, I: Materiali e problemi*, a cura di Giovanni Previtali, Turin 1979, I, pp. 283–352.

¹⁰ See the references to Fabian in note 4.

¹¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York 1994, p. 239.

the margins or peripheries as vivid spaces of political resistance and opposition; he linked the phenomenon to the intellectuals' moral and social responsibility to not uncritically accept but re-evaluate common paradigms and ideas about the primacy of the center. His call was directed mainly at the intellectual voices of local resistance and opposition in the post-colonial sphere.¹² This clear guiding principle is also expressed by Alan Pauls, one of the leading writers of Argentina today, who recently said in an interview:

Ich glaube nicht an das Zentrum, den Kern, den Plot. Nein, dem Hauptportal ziehe ich beim Schreiben immer den Nebeneingang vor. Was soll ich im Wohnzimmer? Mich interessieren der Keller und der Lastenaufzug.¹³

But beyond the change of direction between would-be center and periphery, more importantly – I think – is the fact that the text “It’s not you, it’s me” on the Emirates’ poster calls for a reversal of the conventional roles of the viewer and the one being viewed. It contends that the object of observation does not accept that role anymore and, in fact, warns us that we, the beholders, are actually being observed.

It is therefore a much more radical inversion rather than a mere change of stances and directions of the gaze. Here, the proclamation “It’s not you, it’s me” surprises the beholder because it raises the question of who looks at whom. The confusion it stirs in the mind of the beholder recalls the experience of looking at Diego Velázquez’s famous picture *Las Meninas* (1656),

in which the object of gaze takes the active role of the observer; the beholder and even the artist appear in the very focus of observation. Moreover, the mirror in Velázquez’ painting is transformed into the “mirror of consciousness” underscoring the intention of the reversal.¹⁴ It is no wonder that in both cases – the Emirates’ Biennale poster and Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* – the mirroring effect is the central key for understanding the displayed image. The practical and metaphorical mirror is crucial because it suggests a radical change in the direction of seeing, far beyond the mere reversal of symmetry in a given space, and also turns the beholder into the object of observation.

So what are the implications of the contemporary Zeitgeist that demand a radical change in viewing the ‘other’ today? How should museums’ collections display the art of the ‘other’ to their visitors, especially while taking in account the rapid changes in the ways our own twenty-first century societies choose to observe manners of other cultures and societies? In fact, this is a crucial question that seems to be in the central focus of many museums of Islamic art all over the world today. The Louvre, the Victoria and Albert, the Staatliche Museen in Berlin, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art have been, or are, reorganizing collections of Islamic arts formed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and rethinking the proper display of Islamic art in the twenty-first century. Moreover, the numerous exhibitions on Islamic art that have followed II September 2001 raise new ideas and ques-

¹² Contemporary artistic voices, working in the global context of art today, demand a similar recognition and status in the post-colonial era. See *The Future of Tradition – The Tradition of Future*, exh. cat., ed. by Chris Dercon/León Krempel/Avinoam Shalem, Munich 2010.

¹³ “I do not believe in the center, the nucleus, the core of the plot. No, in writing I always prefer the side entrance to the main one. What should I do in a living room? I am much more interested in the basement and the service elevator” (my translation). The German text is cited from an interview article by Paul Ingendaay, “In diesem Land zählen nur die Toten”, in: *Frankfurter*

Allgemeine Zeitung, 28. August 2010, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/themen/buchmesse-ehrengast-argentinien-in-diesem-land-zahlen-nur-die-toten-11028327.html> (accessed on 11 November 2018).

¹⁴ See John R. Searle, “*Las Meninas* and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation”, in: *Critical Inquiry*, VI (1980), pp. 477–488; Joel Snyder, “*Las Meninas* and the Mirror of Prince”, in: *Critical Inquiry*, XI (1983), pp. 539–572; Leo Steinberg, “Velázquez’ *Las Meninas*”, in: *October*, XIX (1981), 102, pp. 45–54; the quote is from *ibidem*, p. 54. See also Michel Foucault, “*Las Meninas*”, in: *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, New York 1994, pp. 3–17.

tions concerning the art of display regardless their specific political outlines.¹⁵

East and West?

As of 2010, when the Dresden museums celebrated their 450th anniversary and especially with the re-opening of their permanent collections in the Türkische Cammer in March of that year, the Saxon capital was clearly mapped in the global context of displaying Islamic art. It introduced new concepts for exhibiting its princely collection of ceremonial artifacts and royal paraphernalia, which placed its Türkische Cammer in center of the most current practice and discourse of exhibiting Islamic art (Fig. I).

Apart from the excellent catalogue published on this occasion, in which Dirk Syndram, director of the Rüstkammer and of the Grünes Gewölbes of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, emphasized that new information and meticulous research was presented to the readers,¹⁶ the study and reorganization of the objects by curator Holger Schuckelt and their display in the newly refurbished and designed rooms reflect a new attitude by the curator towards the collection of the Saxonian House. This new attitude forces the beholders to reframe their perceptions of and approach to the typical German princely collection of Ottoman art and even to the various collections of so-called *Türkenbeute* (Turkish booty), that is objects captured during or after battles with the Ottoman armies.

But perhaps before bringing up the question of the museum's praxis of display of the art of the 'other', I would like to challenge the all-too-common and taken-for-granted expression 'East and West'. This phrase

claims to explain the centuries of interactions between two main cultural spheres, which as a consequence contributed to the creation of the history of Western civilization and also to the shape of that very civilization itself. Moreover, one may even argue that this clear distinction even now informs the classification of art objects in museum collections and has guided the corollary creation of separate exhibition spaces for these two cultural spheres. However, I must confess that it is true that 'East and West' is a much better expression than others used in its place. For example, formulations such as "Europe and the Orient", as in the title given to the mega exhibition held in the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin in 1989, or "Europe and Islam", an expression which has conquered Western European and North American media and which is frequently found in the titles of books attempting to narrate the interactions between Christendom and Islam, both imply an asymmetrical disposition between the two cultural vectors that are thought to have shaped Western civilization. Both oppositions are peculiar in their own ways. In the first one, "Europe and the Orient", Europe, a clearly defined geographical continent, is juxtaposed to the unspecified space called the Orient – a term that refers to a direction rather than a location. The second expression, "Europe and Islam", confronts the European continent (though presumably not Bosnia or Thrace) with a religious movement. This juxtaposition deliberately suggests that Europe is free from any religious affinities whereas its opponents, regions in Asia and to some extent North Africa, are defined by the religious identity of their populations.

In short, these examples of terminology emphasize the specific tendency of the West, mainly Europe, to

¹⁵ See the articles by Salah M. Hassan, "Zeitgenössische 'islamische' Kunst: Kuratorische Darstellungsstrategien im Westen in der Zeit nach dem 11. September = Contemporary 'Islamic' Art: Western Curatorial Politics of Representation in Post 9/11", in: *The Future of Tradition* (note 12), pp. 34–41, and David Roxburg, "Die Inszenierung des Orients, ein historischer Überblick vom späten 19. Jahrhundert bis heute = Staging the Orient, a Historical Overview from the Late 1800s to Today", *ibidem*, pp. 17–24. See also

Finbarr Barry Flood, "From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art", in: *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions*, ed. by Elizabeth Mansfield, London 2007, pp. 31–53.

¹⁶ Dirk Syndram, "Vorwort", in: Holger Schuckelt, *Türkische Cammer: Orientalische Pracht in der Rüstkammer Dresden*, Berlin/Munich 2010, p. 5; see also similar notion in: *idem*, *Die Türkische Cammer: Sammlung orientalischer Kunst in der kurfürstlich-sächsischen Rüstkammer Dresden*, Dresden 2010, p. 30.

define itself by confronting it with its main ‘big other’ and by establishing a model based on contrasts and oppositions. The lands of Islam are then defined as having an amorphous, unexplainable, and perhaps mysterious character, namely that of the Orient; alternatively, the lands of Islam are transformed into a single monolithic entity characterized solely by the confession of a majority of their populations. The construction of the lands of Islam as an unvarying religious space is of course needed in order to define also the West as an equally monolithic space, one that ostensibly takes its identity from modern, secular, enlightened ideals. In both expressions, the contrast is paramount.

Though the expression ‘East and West’ is relatively less objectionable, what should we make of the impulse to consider only two vectors? Why do scholars, journalists, and even curators use so normative a binary system of reasoning, organizing, and explaining? And, in addition, why should these vectors usually move only along the single horizontal axis of east-west linkage? As history shows, the continuing, interactive, and mutual influences between the cultural entities ‘East’ and ‘West’ tend to move also on vertical north-south linkages, as well as along diagonal routes; Mediterranean naval connections in the ancient and medieval eras attest these linkages in the earliest periods. Artistic interactions, be that the movement of artists and artisans, the trade with art objects and luxury

goods, or even the transfer of artistic and aesthetic ideas, have rarely recognized any cultural or religious borders. The fluidity of people, ideas, and things was and is part of the global interactive space of our universe.¹⁷ In fact, at the very moment that movement started, be it by travel, the transfer of things, or the exchange of thoughts through oral or written (today digital) media, the whole space was immediately defined as interactive.

In this respect, and following this line of thinking, the classification of the arts of the ‘Orient’ – as in Western museums for ‘Islamic’, Indian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese arts, including Dresden’s *Türkische Cammer* – illustrates primarily the history of the West’s collecting, storing, and exhibiting the art of the ‘other’ rather than the art history of a particular geo-cultural space. Each of these collections tells us the story of Western interest, be it economic, artistic, or aesthetic, in the arts of the non-European spheres. As such, these collections are mostly revealing European tastes in luxurious exotica; as a corollary, the histories of display tell us very little about the objects and their own stories. Instead, the trajectory of each Western museum which collected the arts of the ‘Orient’ widens our perspectives about the alterations and transformation that Western aesthetics and artistic praxis underwent during the centuries when it was confronted with the arts of the ‘other’.¹⁸

¹⁷ Numerous books and articles have been published recently on the global character of art and artistic interactions. As far as the early and high medieval space of the Mediterranean basin and the question of the migration of Islamic objects to the West are concerned, see mainly Eva R. Hoffman, “Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century”, in: *Art History*, XXIV (2001), pp. 17–50; Avinoam Shalem, *Islam Christianized: Islamic Portable Objects in the Medieval Treasuries of the Latin West*, Frankfurt am Main ²1998; *idem*, “Objects as Carriers of Real or Contrived Memories in a Cross-Cultural Context: The Case of Medieval Diplomatic Presents”, in: *Migrating Images: Producing, Reading, Transporting, Translating*, ed. by Petra Stegmann/Peter C. Seel, Berlin 2004, pp. 36–52; *idem*, “Des objets en migration: les itinéraires des objets islamiques vers l’Occident Latin au Moyen Âge”, in: *Chrétiens et Musulmanes, autour de 1100* (= *Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa*, XXXV [2004]),

pp. 81–93; *idem*, “Islamische Objekte in Kirchenschätzen der lateinischen Christenheit: Ästhetische Stufen des Umgangs mit dem Anderen und dem Hybriden”, in: *Das Bistum Bamberg in der Welt des Mittelalters: Vorträge der Ringvorlesung des Zentrums für Mittelalterstudien der Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg im Sommersemester 2007*, ed. by Christine van Eickels/Klaus van Eickels, Bamberg 2007, pp. 163–175; see also Anna Contadini, “Artistic Contacts: Current Scholarship and Future Tasks”, in: *Islam and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. by Charles Burnett/Anna Contadini, London 1999, pp. 1–60; *eadem*, “Sharing a Taste? Material Culture and Intellectual Curiosity around the Mediterranean, from the Eleventh to the Sixteenth Century”, in: *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World*, ed. by *eadem*/Claire Norton, Burlington, Vt., 2013, pp. 23–61.

¹⁸ See mainly Glenn H. Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, Chapel Hill 2002.

Quantification of War and Traditions of Display

For reasons other than the ‘East and West’ conundrum, the movements of trophies of war are highly interesting. In comparison to different types of objects of the ‘other’ in Europe – mainly trade goods, souvenirs, and diplomatic presents, which often gained new, normative identities and were given new names – trophies of war, especially in zones in which the memory of the battle was kept green, seem to have retained their alterity and their dissimilar identities. This is understandable. In numerous cases in which Christian victories were celebrated or memorized around objects looted from Muslim palatial treasuries and sacred spaces, Islamic objects were collected and displayed to illustrate the weakness, fall, and ultimate final destruction of the infidel – the ‘other’; though it must be emphasized that in many other cases, looted Islamic objects were aesthetically treated and displayed for the appreciation of their beauty and superb artistic techniques. At the same time, because swords, daggers, scabbards, and even belts, helmets, and shields usually kept intact more of their initial Muslim identity even when on display in the West, weapons also appear crucial in shaping the nature of Islam for their viewers. As far as the *Türkische Cammer* is concerned, if one were to argue that the trophies of the Ottoman wars – mainly comprising arms and armor – display to the viewer an objective image of the Ottomans, the impression would be totally false. On the contrary: in the princely and aristocratic *Kunst- und Wunderkammer*, these objects were displayed expressly in order to create specific stereotypes and archetypes of the enemy and of his aesthetic world. Whereas trade goods were easily adapted or modified for Western needs, given new functions that sometimes went far beyond any logical relation to their original one, or granted new biographies that were mainly focused on their second

or third lives – emphasizing their donors or the persons to whom they were presented –, the trophies provide us with information about the defeat, surrender, submission, or capitulation of the ‘other’. The Western collections of Ottoman trophies of war, whether banners, swords, shields, varied tools of warfare, and of course looted royal insignia, functioned as the visual evidence for the taxonomy of wars and the destruction of the unbelievers. Through these collections and their arrangements, wars were systematized, victories evaluated, and defeats measured. The best examples are the numerous Byzantine and Islamic objects kept today in the treasury of San Marco in Venice or the Ottoman banners in the church of Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri in Pisa.¹⁹ They provide tangible evidence for the conquest of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204 and the victory over the Ottomans in the famous naval battle of Lepanto in 1571, respectively. But, at the same time, the fact that the memory of their identity as Byzantine or Islamic objects was kept fresh for the benefit of viewers endowed them with an important role in constructing the image of the ‘other’, even if it was contrived.

The fact that looted arms and armor were fastened to their origin and primary identity and their constant presentation as the object of the defeated ‘other’ make this type of object unique. At the same time, one should not forget that numerous arms and armor from the lands of Islam reached European collections as diplomatic gifts. Thus, as mentioned above for the case of trophies of wars, their primary identities were usually kept in memory, too. At any case, the history of the display of arms and armor of the world of Islam cannot be simply discussed as part of the history of the West’s use and reuse of ‘Islamic’ objects. Nor can one simply discuss the varied methods of their display in the West within the general contexts of exhibiting the

¹⁹ See the recent publication *Le bandiere della Chiesa di Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri di Pisa: loro storia, significato e restauro*, ed. by Marco Gemignani, Pisa 2015.

²⁰ Though it must be emphasized that even looted Islamic objects in the West cannot be discussed as one monolithic group. Different geo-cultural spheres from which and to which they were integrated dictated

3 The troops of Miran Shah erecting a minaret of skulls in Herat, Persian, Safavid, probably Shiraz, 1546. Munich, Museum Fünf Kontinente, inv. 77-11-294



'other'. In contrast to other objects, looted arms and armor usually remained untouched. Their authenticity was built upon preserving their initial arrangement, form, and decoration, in short their initial look and even condition, because they were to tell for centuries to come a specific and highly charged narrative about the heroic moment of capture and looting. The object's mode of display, the title given to it by its new owners, and the specific context in which it was put on show

and even sometimes used are therefore part of the ideology of the making of the narratives of trophies – the making of images of defeat and triumph.²⁰

The history of the display of arms and armor is as long as the history of war. Moreover, as will be suggested here, the history of the display of arms and armor in our modern era seems to uphold the ancient tradition of presenting these objects as part of the quantification of wars, namely as an indication of the

varied approaches to them. Other objects from the Islamic lands collected in the West, either as traded luxury goods or diplomatic presents, were normally transformed, namely by giving them new shapes and even

renaming them in order to accommodate new needs in both sacred and profane spheres. On this topic see mainly the discussion in Shalem 1998 (note 17).

concrete number of losses – either human or material. In fact, we tend to forget that the specific information on wars presented to us by journalists today, be they in Syria or Libya or in West Africa or Gaza, are mainly focused on and measured by the numbers of casualties and of destroyed machines of war. Daily reports on these arenas usually assess the state of the conflict by informing us of the numbers of tanks, military convoys, aircrafts, and architectural compounds that were destroyed each day and, of course, by numbers referring to the loss of human lives.

The focus on weapons, casualties, and even trophies is not new. The story related in the Bible (1 Samuel 18:27) about the two hundred foreskins that David brought to King Saul after he slew two hundred Philistine soldiers is the best example of how victory was measured by recording the number of the killed enemies and by collecting evidence from their bodies.²¹ Moreover, the famous lamentation of David over the death of Saul and Jonathan in the war (2 Samuel 1:27) ends with the concluding verse: “How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished.” And the song of praise for David that was sung and danced by the Israelites after their victory over the Philistines clearly distinguishes King Saul from the young hero David by the numbers of Philistine soldiers each killed: “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (1 Samuel 18:7).

The tradition continued in the early modern period and in the Islamic world as well. A Persian miniature from Shiraz, dated 1546, which is now part of the Preetorius collection at the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, or Museum Fünf Kontinente, in Munich, depicts the legendary minaret made out of hundreds of skulls that was erected by the armies

of Miran Shah (d. 1408), son of the Emperor Timur (d. 1405), in the city of Herat, in present-day Afghanistan (Fig. 3).²² This gruesome minaret is in fact a stratagem for displaying Miran Shah’s triumph in Herat and the devastation he wrought upon the rebels. The skulls are those of the Kartids, a Sunni dynasty that ruled Herat from around the mid-thirteenth century until the end of the fourteenth century. The nightmarish vision of the skull minaret commemorates the outcome of the Kartids revolt against the Timurids; they were massacred at the hands of Miran Shah around 1383/84. Nor is this practice isolated to the historical past. Even in the twenty-first century, photographs of hundreds of prisoners of war captured behind barbed-wire fences in the Sinai Desert, former Yugoslavia, or Iraq, or even images of people being transported like herds on trucks,²³ also transmit the quantification of defeat and triumph.

Of course, besides body parts and depictions of casualties, other personal objects – such as swords, shields, and helmets – were also collected and put on display. And as surely as body parts of the defeated or photographs of prisoners, these personal belongings amassed together were visual evidence of the history of successful war as constructed by the victor.

But, how and where were these vignettes usually displayed? The walls of a metropolis, especially the section next to the city’s main gates, were normally used for the exhibition of looted arms and armor. This particular site provided the best public space for recounting the story of triumphal battles and absolute victories. Placed on view at the threshold that marked the division between the interior and exterior of the fortified urban space, namely the walls that divide inhabitants of and strangers to the city, the display’s

²¹ A carved relief panel from Yemen, which is datable to the pre-Islamic period, shows the collections of hands of the killed enemies as trophy of wars. This depiction might be regarded as another method of quantification. The relief panel is kept in the Sana’a National Museum (inv. YM 13981).

²² See Hans-Caspar Graf von Bothmer, *Die islamischen Miniaturen der Sammlung Preetorius*, Munich 1982, no. 19.

²³ See for example the image of Egyptian prisoners of war in the Suez Canal during the October War in 1973 (*Insight: Micha Bar-Am’s Israel*, ed. by Alexandra Nocke, London 2011, pp. 94f.).



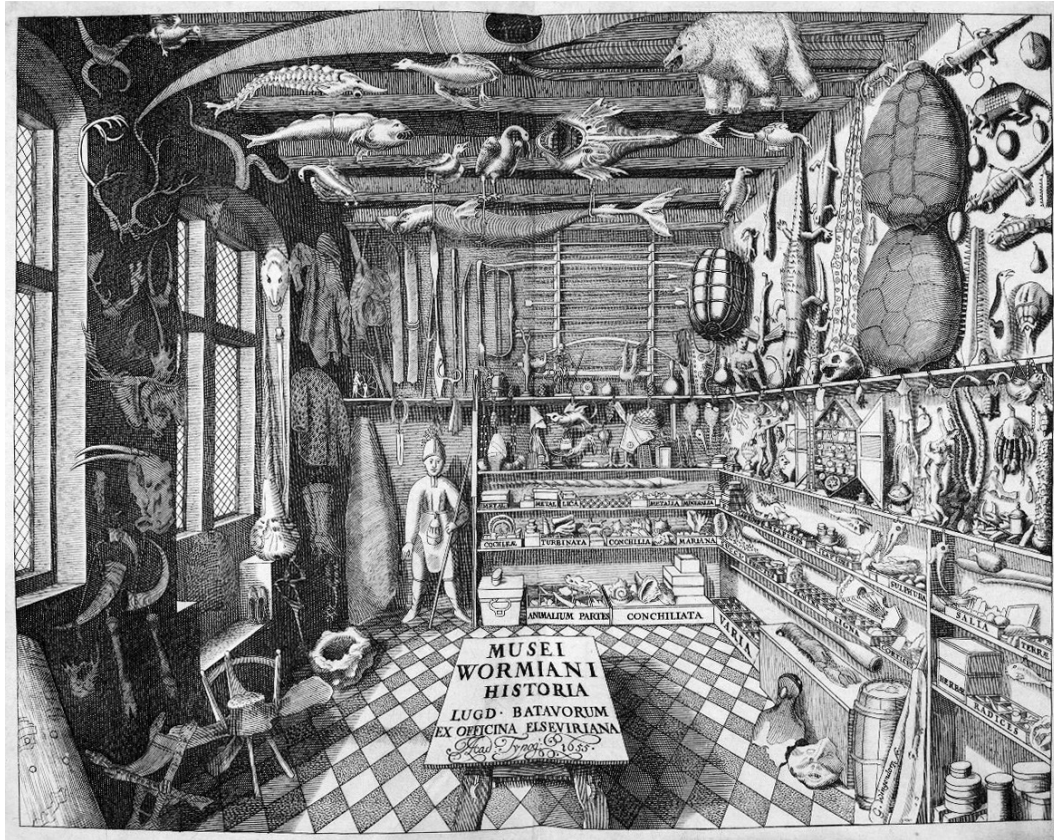
4 Crusader (?) metal maces hanging on the Bab Zuwayla in Cairo

intent was twofold. It gave confidence to the inhabitants within the walls of the city by exhibiting the former weapons of destruction in a passive, lifeless mode, while at the same time it warned foreigners and non-residents, who often gathered at the markets located just outside the gates, against taking any aggressive action against the city by visually reminding them of the inevitable outcome. In several cases, specific objects were even associated with defeated kings and sultans or with valiant warriors. The dead body of a famous enemy was presented through these artifacts that had been designed for his safety and protection but had ultimately failed in the face of greater might and virtue.

²⁴ It is worth mentioning that carved stone reliefs with depictions of shields and swords appear on another Fatimid gate of the city of Cairo, the gate of Bab al-Nasr (dated 1087). However, these motifs might be referring to the specific insignia and relics of the Shiite Fatimid Dynasty

An interesting example of such a strategy is to be found on the outer walls of the Fatimid city of Cairo, next to its southern gate, Bab Zuwayla (dated 1092). Several metal weapons, mainly metal spheres, which were most probably thrown with catapults or formed part of large maces with chains, hang on the outer walls of the gate, just next to its main entrance (Fig. 4). They keep fresh the memory of wars and attest to the strength of the city to resist and defeat its enemies. Though probably gaining extra apotropaic meaning through decades and centuries of display, these weapons on Bab Zuwayla appear then as examples of the particular aesthetic of publically hanging arms and armor that I would like to define as ‘ascertaining victories’ mode.²⁴

of Cairo rather than to the looted armor of defeated enemy. On this decoration, see Avinoam Shalem, “A Note on the Shield-Shaped Ornamental Bosses on the Façade of Bāb al-Nasr in Cairo”, in: *Ars Orientalis*, 26 (1996), pp. 55–64.

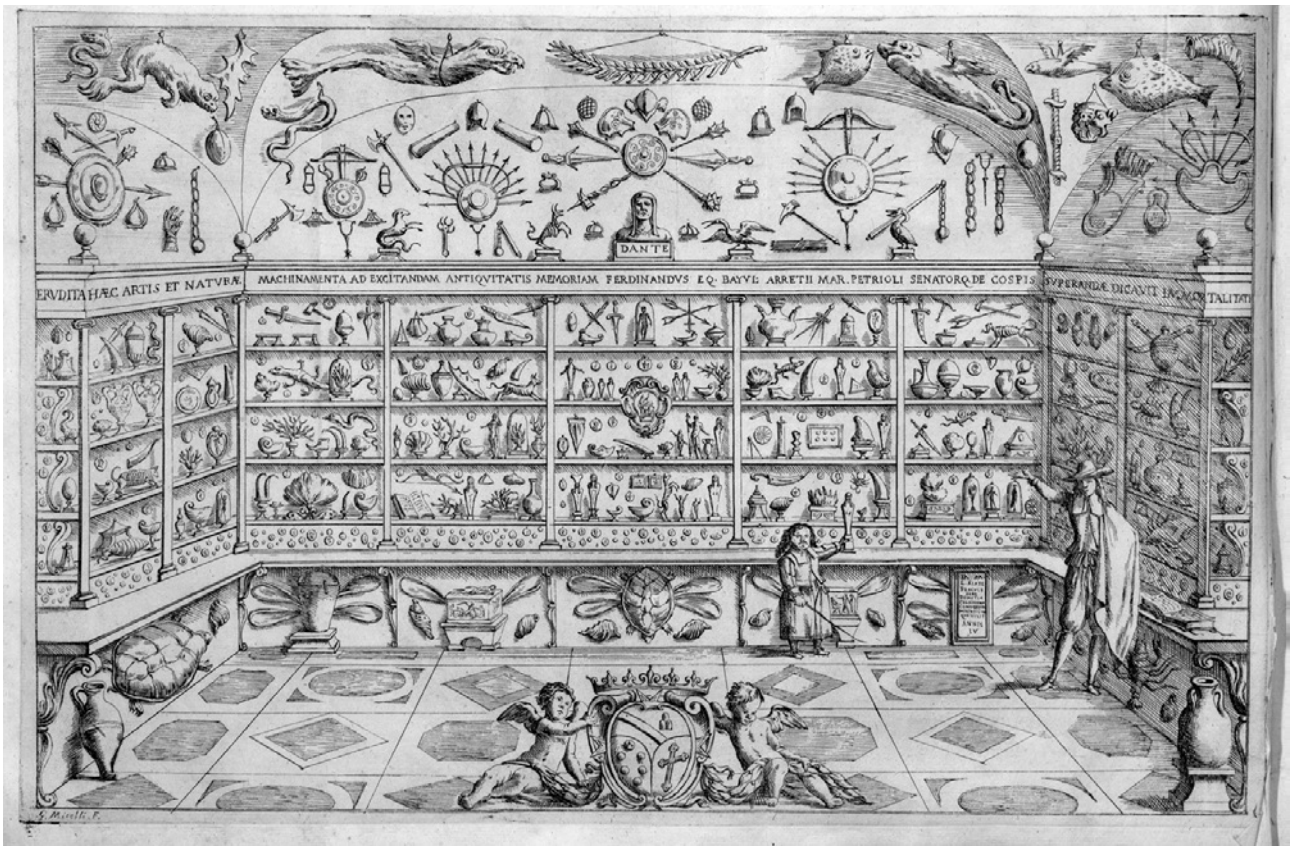


5 View of the main room of the collection of Olaus Wormius, in: Ole Worm, *Museum Wormianum* [...], Leiden 1655, frontispiece

It is quite interesting to see how this method of display was kept alive in the *Kunstammern*, in early public museums, in private collections, and even in churches in Europe. The method is defined by the act of hanging these artifacts on walls and by presenting them *en masse*. In this way, the harmful and destructive weapon is stripped of its power; its position on the wall suggests its passivity or obedience. Like any dangerous enemy or lawbreaker who was punished and put to death by hanging, the looted weapon of the enemy hanging on the wall, divorced from the body of its owner, is unable to achieve the fatal acts for which it was created. Its clearly submissive state is due to the defeat of its owners at the

hands of the group which then displays it in their own home country. Moreover, this type of display presents the object as part of a group, often negating its individual character, and prevents any potential study of its unique qualities. On the other hand, the impact of the object was also emphasized by its place in a large new composition, accompanied by other tools of war.

It is worth classifying the multiple types of *en masse* display for arms and armor, each of which had slightly different intentions and effects. The first is the 'serial' display. It is best illustrated in the famous engraving of the main room of the collection of Olaus Wormius (1588–1654), the Danish physician



6 Giuseppe Maria Mitelli, View of the cabinet of curiosities of Ferdinando Cospi, in: Lorenzo Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, Bologna 1677

and antiquarian (Fig. 5). The depiction shows different objects exhibited on the walls and the ceiling of Wormius' room. In addition to the numerous specimens of the fauna in the chamber, arrows, lances, and a bow are also displayed on the distant narrow wall. They are organized in either vertical or horizontal lines, creating a clear and carefully planned composition. This method of display emphasizes the variety of types by presenting similar objects, such as arrows or swords' blades, next to each other in rows and by creating a unified distance between the objects. The organization is both ordered and repetitive, as if to communicate the principle of classification. It is true that, if necessary, one artifact might be singled out,

but as a whole, its position as one of a larger group is underscored. This 'serial' display relates to the natural sciences. The clear symmetry transmits notions of categorical order that are bound to taxonomy and to the transfer of knowledge and wisdom, and, of course, victory.

A slightly different approach can be found in the display of arms and armor in the depiction of the cabinet of curiosities of Ferdinando Cospi (1606–1686), a Bolognese nobleman who published in 1676 a five-volume book of his large collection of *naturalia* and archaeological objects. In the print depicting his cabinet (Fig. 6), the arms and armor are displayed on the upper registers of the walls, just above the shelves.

Unlike the ‘serial’ system of Wormius, in which the weapons were classified into subgroups based on their shape and type, in Cospi’s cabinet each grouping includes different sorts of weapons. A single shield usually forms the central point of the display, while arrows, swords, maces, scabbards, helmets, and even a bow are organized around it. The weapons either emit from the shield as if from a sun or are organized around it in a radiating scheme, again calling to mind a sun or a star. In both cases, the sun or star associations are perhaps emphasized by the shining surfaces of the weapons. I would like to call this mode of display the ‘nimbus’ presentation. In Figure 6, the nimbus effect is unmistakably visible in the arrangement of the arms and armor above the bust of the Italian poet Dante, providing him with a proper halo above his head. While the gleaming metal surfaces of the weapons, especially those of shields and arrows, may have inspired this vignette, the placement of this arrangement above Dante’s head might allude to the visual association between nimbus and shiny metal shield.²⁵

The shield’s ability to reflect, mirror-like, and the polished surfaces of blades that sparkle, lighting-like, are also purposefully engineered to blind and dazzle the eyes of the enemy. And indeed the account of Rashidah, daughter of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu’izz li-Din-Allah (953–975), clearly illustrates that this was the main effect of the glittering shield hanging in the Fatimid audience hall in Cairo:

The whole of the throne too was furnished (*furisha*) with this fabric, and all its walls covered with the wall hangings (*ta’aliq*). Everything, floor and walls, was nothing but glittering gold. In the forefront (*sadr*)

of the throne room (*iwan*) was suspended a gold shield (*daragah*) called al-‘Asjada, which was adorned with all kinds of costly precious stones (*jawhar*) illuminating its surroundings. When sunlight fell on it, the eyes could not look at it [without] becoming tired and dazzled.²⁶

This account, which is found in the late eleventh-century *Book of Gifts and Rarities* by al-Qadi al-Rashid, also provides us with a clear description of Fatimid tactics of exhibiting arms and armor. The idea of hanging up shields, textiles, and rarities with precious stones in order to enhance the effect of shine and glitter is most revealing and suggests that weapons of war, such as shields, were regarded as ‘sun-like’ objects when hanging on walls. The ‘nimbus’ mode of display has a long history, both outside Western Europe and before the early modern period.

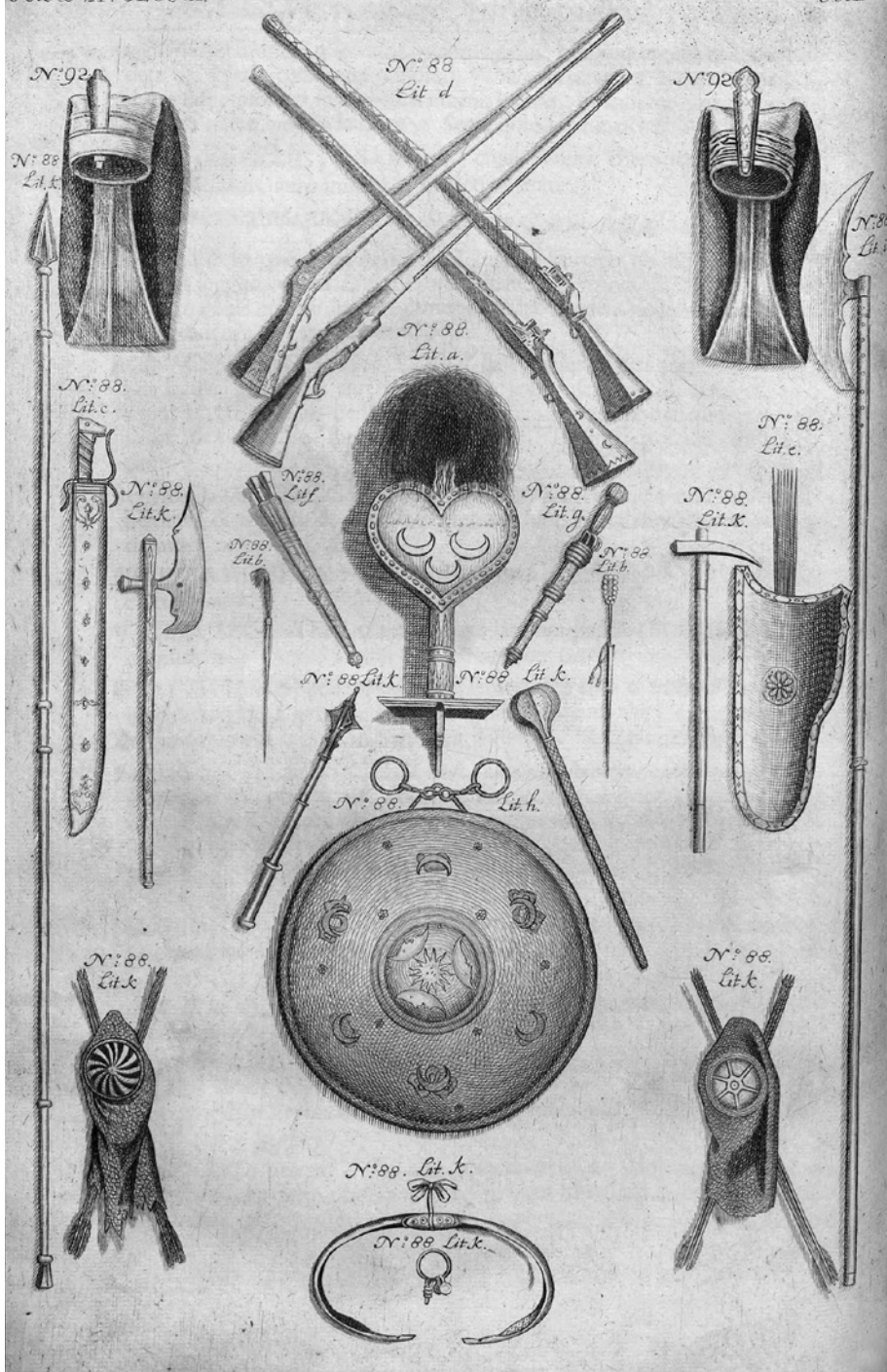
An illustration in the inventory of the Danish royal collection published in 1710 circa is another visual document that merits discussion here (Fig. 7). The engraving depicts the so-called Cort Adeler’s booty, a number of Ottoman objects looted by the Norwegian seaman and merchant Cort Adeler (1622–1675) during a naval battle against the Turks in 1654 in which he was commanding a Venetian ship.²⁷ As in the display of Wormius’ room, the rigidity of the symmetrical arrangement of the Ottoman weapons probably aims to place the arms and armor into clear order, according to an ‘enlightened’, namely critical, classification. The different weapons are organized into groups suggesting their defending roles and destructive effects on the battlefield. The Ottoman matchlock guns appear on top and are organized in an X-shape, as if presiding over the

²⁵ On this association, see Vera-Simone Schulz, “Intricate Letters and the Reification of Light: Prolegomena on Pseudo-Inscribed Haloes in Late Medieval Italian Painting”, in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, LVIII (2016), pp. 59–93.

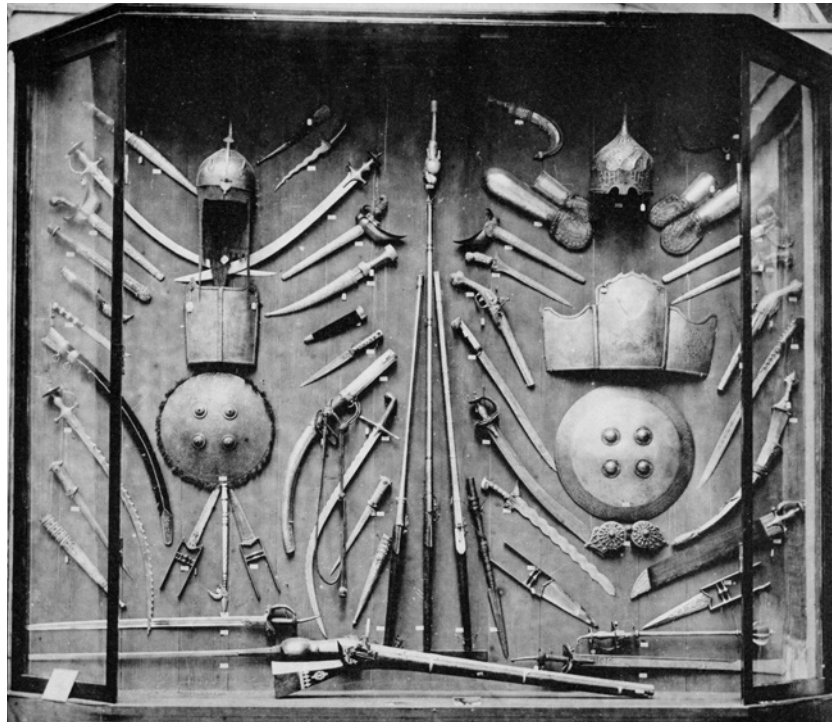
²⁶ *Book of Gifts and Rarities: Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa al-Tuhaf*, ed. by Ghada

al-Hijawi al-Qaddumi, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, pp. 163f., caption 173.

²⁷ Holger Jacobaeus, *Museum Regium, seu catalogus rerum tam naturalium, quam artificialium, quae in basilica bibliothecae Augustissimi Danicae Norvegiaeque Monarchae, Friderici Quarti, Hauniae asservantur [...]*, Copenhagen [ca. 1710], part II, sect. II, no. 88.



7 Ottoman trophies of war looted by Cort Adeler, in: Holger Jacobaeus, *Museum Regium [...]*, Copenhagen [circa 1710], part II, sect. II, pl. II



8 Central Asiatic arms and armor
from the Dambmann Collection,
in: Ulysse Pila, *Exposition coloniale [...]*,
Lyon 1895, pl. XXVI

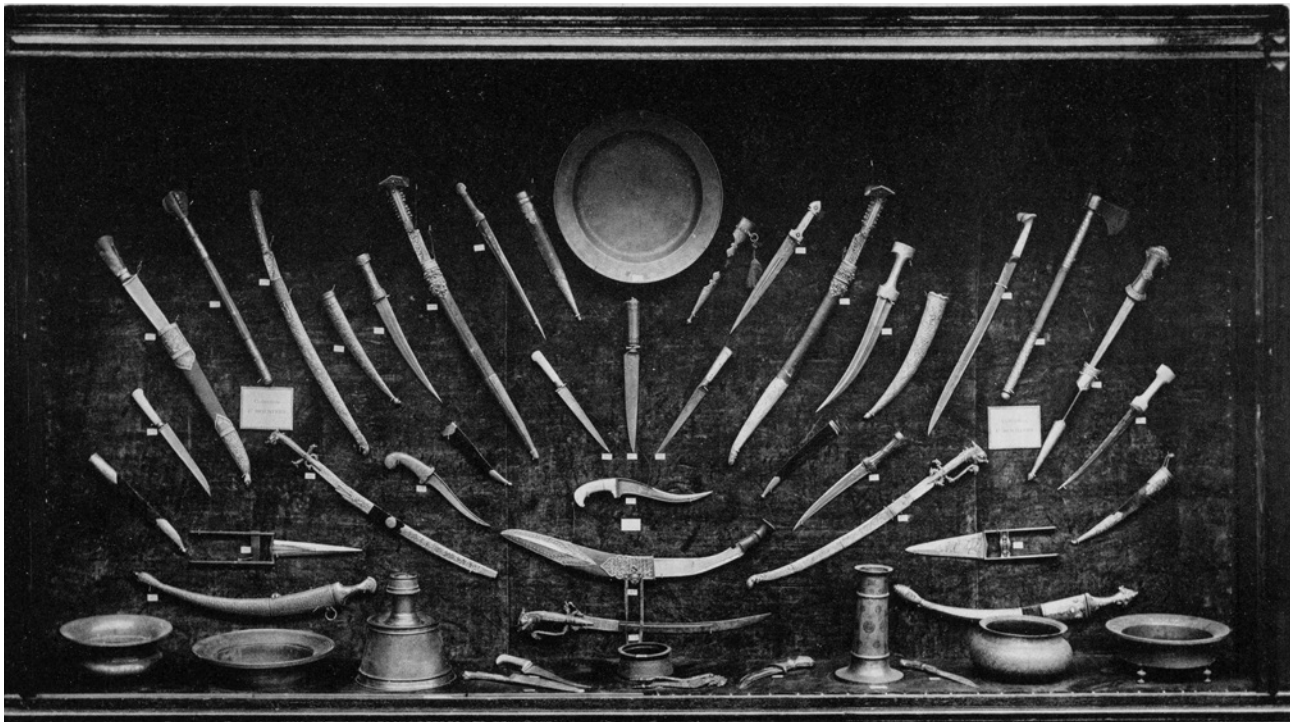
rest of the weapons and claiming their rank as the most powerful devices. It is tempting to suggest that this arrangement might signify that they override the power of all the other weapons displayed below, as if the X-shape – traditionally symbolizing conflict – referred to the act of cancellation. The Ottoman shield hanging in the lower part of the panel highlights again the idea of the shield as a radiant sun; in fact, it is engraved with a sun in its center. Six small metal crescents are designed on the outer parts of the shield, encircling or orbiting the sun, so to speak. The accompanying text gives the following description of this shield: “A Turkish shield belonging to the

above-mentioned Ibrahim, made from the branch of some kind of a tree [...] and decorated with sun and moon figures”.²⁸

As mentioned above, the Ottoman weapons looted by Adeler seem to be arranged into hierarchies suggesting power, as either defending or attacking devices. However, their particular display, in which all objects appear as if placed on a large rectangular carpet, should be noted. This carpet-like pattern, or perhaps tableau, presented the looted objects as motionless figures within a rectangular scene. Compared to the radiating arrows emerging from a central point – which sometimes resulted in

²⁸ *Ibidem*, part II, sect. II, no. 88, lit. h; quoted in Anne Marie Flindt, “Cort Adeler”, in: *The Arabian Journey: Danish Connections with the Islamic World*

Over a Thousand Years, exh. cat., Århus 1996, pp. 68–76: 70; for the shield see especially fig. 5 on p. 72.



9 Central Asiatic arms and armor from the Holstein Collection, in: Ulysse Pila, *Exposition coloniale [...]*, Lyon 1895, pl. XXVII

their partial concealment behind the sun-like central shield – this mode of carefully spacing the objects symmetrically and ‘flattening’ them over the background surface ensures that most of them can be fully seen. However, similar to the repetition of symmetrical motifs found in carpets or textiles, the arms and armor are organized in patterns that integrated each single object into the larger whole. As already noted, the radiating sun was one such format, but fantastic plant and tree compositions were no less common too. In these patterns, the weapons were usually organized in repeating vignettes that accentuated a central and vertical line from which

elongated ‘branches’, ‘leaves’, and circular ‘blossoms’ grew. These two modes are best illustrated in the organization of the vitrines of Asiatic arms and armor in the *Exposition coloniale* in Lyon in 1894 (Figs. 8, 9).²⁹ In both displays, namely the one exhibiting the “armes de l’Asie orientale” of Dambmann and the other the “armes de l’Asie orientale” of Holstein, the weapons are symmetrically organized along a single upright axis. Dambmann’s weapons recall two large plants, and Holstein’s appear as a single large tree with spreading branches. The symmetrical formats of either nimbus or fantastic plant or tree – which together seem to dominate the exhibition praxis in

²⁹ Ulysse Pila, *Exposition coloniale organisée par la Chambre de commerce à l’Exposition universelle de Lyon en 1894*, exh. cat., Lyon 1895, pls. XXVI and

XXVII. Florence Vidal, *Lyon 1894: la Fête s’invite à l’Expo!*, Master Thesis, University of Lyon II, 2010.



10 Showcase of Ottoman arms and armor in the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, Vienna

the *Kunstammer* and the antiquarian cabinets – were repeatedly and continuously used in public museums and universal exhibitions. They can even be found today in the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum in Vienna, in the vitrine of the Ottoman trophies of war (Fig. 10).³⁰

It might be suggested that the popularity of the sun-like nimbus and the fantastic plant or tree patterns far into the nineteenth-twentieth centuries is rooted in their ability to convey the idea of the natural order of the world. In the case of the radiating sun, an allusion to the concept of a powerful cosmic center and subordinate peripheral spheres might be recalled,

while the plant or the tree might evoke the natural notions of growth and evolution that favor the strongest and most adaptable – to wit, the victors.

Allusions aside, the aestheticization of the destructive machineries of killing and the technologies of wars is embodied in all these modes of display. But another approach to display, the ‘bouquet’, seems to bring the aestheticization process of weapons to its climax. This approach takes artificial and stylized nature – the flower bouquet – as its model. The numerous displays on the walls of the nineteenth-century Peleş Castle in the Carpathian Mountains in Romania look simply like posies of mixed blossoms (Fig. II).

³⁰ I would like to thank Barbara Karl from the MAK in Vienna who provided me with this image.

³¹ See for example the letter sent by Kaiser Franz Joseph I on 2 October 1896, after his visit to Peleş Castle, cited in: *Peleş Castle: 125th anniversary*



11 'Bouquets' of weapons
displayed on the walls
of Peleş Castle, Romania

The castle, which was inaugurated in 1883, has a huge collection of weapons, comprising over four thousand objects, both Western and Eastern. Shortly after its opening, the castle and its collection of curiosities became famous; they were praised by notables, including Kaiser Franz Joseph I.³¹ It is likely that the whole notion of presenting weapons arranged as blossoms and stems in a vase was derived from the accessories that were used to carry or on which to rest the weapons. These were usually simple devices into which a soldier could place or even hang his sword or arrows, such as sheaths, girdles, scabbards, and quivers. In the 'bouquet' mode of display, they become vases.

This mode of display has an early history as well. A depiction of a furniture piece for placing lances is found in one of the scenes of the mid-seventh-century wall painting from the city of Afrasiab (Fig. 12). The lances are placed vertically into a cage-like structure, which gives the impression that the shafts are stems of flowers arranged in a vase. Another interesting structure appears in a Mughal miniature painting from a copy of the *Hamzanama* made for Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) in circa 1570 (Fig. 13). It displays an indoor scene, *Misbah the grocer brings the spy Parran to his house*. A large, dome-shaped apparatus is depicted at the back of the scene, between Parran and Mis-

of its foundation, ed. by Gabriela Popa et al., Sinaia 1995, p. 29. For a recent discussion of Peleş Castle, see Shona Kallestrup, *Art and Design in Romania*

1866–1927: *Local and International Aspects of the Search for National Expression*, Boulder, Co., 2006, pp. 15–41.



12 *The ambassadors' painting*, Sogdian, mid-seventh century. Samarkand, Afrasiab Museum of Samarkand

bah; it may be a shield. From it are suspended arrows and swords as if they were blossoms. In the case of Peleş Castle, though, it must be noted that the opulent display of the weapons in 'bouquets' underscores the useless nature of the weapons as articles of war in their new home; they have been tamed and even rendered domestic. In addition, similar to the flower-bouquet, which is mainly praised for its mixture of fragrances (an invisible and somewhat spiritual asset), the weapon bouquet may evoke the sounds of war. Like instruments in a symphony, the varied metal weapons transmit the rattles of unsettled swords and lances, the singing of bowstrings, and the percussive blasts of powder muskets.³²

³² It should be added that this type of display was largely adopted in the universal exhibitions and also in artists' studios in the nineteenth century. See for example a photograph of the Albums Maciet (Paris, Bibliothèque des Arts décoratifs), which shows the hall of Islamic art at the exhibition in the Palais de l'Industrie in 1893, reproduced in: Rémi Labrusse, *Islamophilie: l'Europe moderne et les arts de l'Islam*, exh. cat. Lyon 2011, Paris 2011,

Lost Bodies and Their Resurrection

I will bring into this discussion one final mode of display, that of the remembrance of the 'lost body' of the warrior, whether victorious or defeated. This specific notion of display is native to arms and armor, which it aims to present as the physical remains of a now-vanished warrior. This is entirely predictable, as objects such as lances, swords, axes, maces, and shields are in fact extensions of the warrior's body. They are designed to transform his hands into either sharp, dangerous weapons or into impenetrable defences. Moreover, helmets, cuirasses, gantlets, and extra sheathing or armor for arms and legs could be regarded as the warrior's supplemental skin. Complete sets of armor

p. 51, fig. 21. For the display of arms and armor in artists' studios, see Brigitte Langer, *Das Münchner Künstleratelier des Historismus*, Dachau 1992, pp. 81 (studio of Friedrich Rentzing) and 123 (studio of Carl de Bouché). The 'bouquet' mode can even be found on serially produced artifacts such as the decorated paper from Augsburg published by Ingeborg Bähr in the present issue; see below, p. 471 and Figs. 3, 4.



13 Dasavanta and Mithra (attributed),
*Misbah the grocer brings the spy
Parran to his house*, circa 1570.
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Rogers Fund 1924, inv. 24.48.1



14 Rome,
Trajan's Column,
completed 113 CE,
detail



15 Muhammad ibn Badr al-Din Jajarmi, folio from the *Mu'nis al-ahrar fi daqa'iq al-ash'ar*, fourteenth century. Princeton University Libraries, Department of Rare Books and Special Collection, Manuscripts Division, Robert Garrett Collection, inv. 94 G

bear the memory of the warrior's body in the same way that garments remind the viewer of saints' bodies.

This mode of display, too, has a long history and can be traced back to the ancient world, to the setting of the *tropaion* (in Latin *tropaeum*). Common in Greek and Roman antiquity, this was a monument erected on the battlefield for the display of the looted arms of the defeated foe.³³ It consisted of arms and other spoils taken from the enemy and hung, either upon snags or columns, for public display. Sometimes they

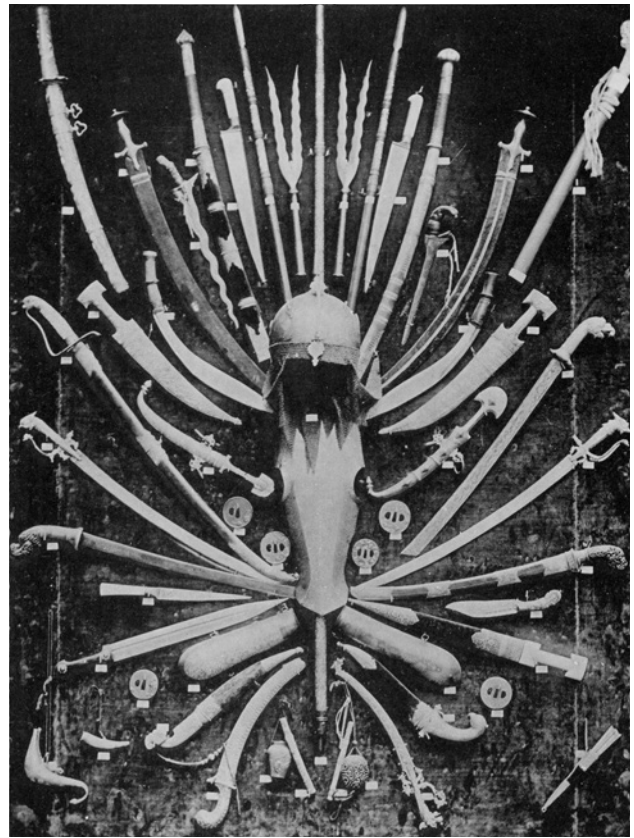
were erected in specific spots of the battle, which marked the escape turn of the opponents – the victory location. And, it is likely that in numerous cases they could have been regarded also as mementoes, namely consecrated to the gods of war in gratitude. One of the reliefs on Trajan's triumphal column in Rome (completed 113 CE) presents an example of such a *tropaion* (Fig. 14). On the one hand, the display of the numerous trophies of war at the bottom of this relief suggests that the general notion of hierar-

³³ See mainly Wilhelm Jänecke, *Die ursprüngliche Gestalt des Tropaion von Adamklissi*, Heidelberg 1919; Lauren Kinnee, *The Greek and Roman Trophy*:

From Battlefield Marker to Icon of Power, New York 2018, especially pp. 65–67 and 74–104.

chy and quantification of war are at play; this display renders visible the victory of the Romans over their enemies, the Dacians. But, on the other hand, this specific display – the anthropomorphic *tropaion* – calls to mind the Dacian warriors themselves, alluding to the fallen soldiers. On top of the amassed arms and armor and military banners of the Dacians, the image of the warrior is suggested by a complete coat of mail, helmet, and swords, and by the several shields located on each side of the figure. The arrangement evokes the presence of the warrior’s body. It is no wonder that this type of decoration was chosen to ornament tombs and stelæ of famous soldiers, though in these cases it would have been a complete set, meant to emphasize their respective successes in battle and prove that they each remained whole through their combats. Though sometimes depicted in a pattern that is less evocative than the example of Trajan’s Column, the soldier’s arms and armor call to mind the death of the noble warrior and serve, too, as his remains.³⁴

The same idea of the allusion to the foe’s ‘lost body’ by displaying his arms and armor is to be found in one of the illustrations of the fourteenth-century poetic anthology of Muhammad ibn Badr al-Din Jajarmi, the *Mu’nis al-abrar fi daqa’iq al-ash’ar* (*The Free Men’s Companion to the Subtleties of Poems*). In one of the folios, four types of weapons – a corselet, a helmet, an acton (a padded jacket worn under the armor), and a shield – appear against a landscape background (Fig. 15).³⁵ Unfortunately, the verse that once was located just above this particular depiction is missing. However, it has been reconstructed by A. H. Morton, who drew upon other manuscripts with copies of this poem. His translation of this Persian verse clearly suggests that the ‘lost body’ of the foe was recalled by anyone looking at these ‘emp-



16 Central Asiatic arms and armor from the Bellon Collection, in: Ulysse Pila, *Exposition coloniale [..]*, Lyon 1895, pl. XXVIII

ty’ weapons. It reads: “In tatters on the bodies of his foes are: corselet and helmet, acton and shield.”³⁶

The most obvious and most telling example of this way of perceiving the ‘lost body’ in modern times is the frequent use of mannequins for displaying arms and armor. The numerous mannequins of Mamluk and Ottoman riders (and horses!) in the Museo Stibbert in Florence bring to life, so to speak, these arti-

³⁴ See for example the unfortunately destroyed Nabataean mausoleum of Suwayda (Syria), as depicted in the illustrations of the French archaeologist Charles-Jean-Melchior Comte de Vogüé (1829–1916). This illustration is published in Frank Rainer Scheck, *Jordanien*, Cologne 1985, p. 363.

³⁵ Marie Lukens Swietochowski/Stefano Carboni, *Illustrated Poetry and Epic Images: Persian Painting of the 1330s and 1340s*, New York 1994, pp. 35–37, nos. 4a–f.

³⁶ Alexander H. Morton, “The *Mu’nis al-abrar* and Its Twenty-ninth Chapter”, in: Swietochowski/Carboni (note 35), pp. 58f. The folio is kept

17a, b. Vitrine with a helm and a shield from nineteenth-century Iran at the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto



facts.³⁷ But allusion to the body can also be made with a more subtle display. The exhibition of the “collection C. Bellon” of arms and armor of Central Asia in the *Exposition coloniale* in Lyon in 1894 (Fig. 16) uses the ‘nimbus’ mode of display discussed above. But the arrangement also goes beyond the typical transmission of the (subdued) power and energy of the objects because it also evokes the image of a powerful (Mongol?) rider, which was the archetype of the fearsome steppe warrior, much romanticized in the modern period. A much more recent mode of displaying the warrior’s ‘lost body’ in Islamic collections tends to organize a limited number of weapons in the vitrine on different levels that correspond to the bodies of their original owner or user. In the newly opened Aga Khan

Museum in Toronto, the arrangement of a helmet and a shield from nineteenth-century Iran suggests the standing figure of an armed warrior (Fig. 17). The Ottoman arms and armor vitrine in the recently reopened Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Fig. 18) alludes to the ‘lost bodies’ of a mounted warrior and two more armed warriors presented as if in a parade. The viewer’s eye is forced to complete the empty spaces between the elements, which in turn compel him or her to imagine the warrior’s body.³⁸ Similar to the use of the mannequin, this kind of display aims to bridge the gap between the object’s original function and the aestheticizing gaze in museum context.

today in the Princeton University Libraries, Department of Rare Books and Special Collection, Manuscripts Division, Robert Garrett Collection, inv. 94 G.

³⁷ See *Turckerie*, ed. by Kirsten Aschengreen Piacenti/Simona Di Marco (= *Museo Stibbert Firenze*, 4 [2001]). See also the horses displayed in the His-

torisches Museum Johanneum in Dresden in 1935 according to archival photos published in Schuckelt, *Türkische Cammer* (note I6), pp. 8f.

³⁸ I would like to thank Filiz Çakır Phillip from the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto and Navina Haidar from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York for sending me these images.



18 Vitrine with Ottoman arms and armor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

The *translation* of the museum's artifacts from objects of active use to inactive objects vulnerable to the beholders' aestheticizing gaze is a major preoccupation of curators in every museum. Swords and knives, if placed corpse-like on the base of a vitrine or drooping lifeless on walls, have lost their ability to transmit the power invested in their complicated histories, namely their ability to complement and

enhance the power of the fighter's body or to present their sharpness as a force capable of piercing and harming. The 'lost body' mode of display provides a subtle solution to this problem; it restores the latent power inherent to all these tools of war and murder, whether they were meant for attack or protection. The excellent display of an Ottoman sword in one of the vitrines in the Introductory Gallery (room 450)

of the arts of Islam suite at the Metropolitan Museum in New York (Fig. 19) captures the energy and dynamism of the hand of the Ottoman combatant. The sword is exhibited diagonally, as if struck from above to hit the base of the vitrine by the very tip of its blade. This active display re-animates the power and danger of the sharp metal blade and, no less important, brings the 'lost body' of the combatant into virtual presence.

Poetics of Displays

The aestheticization of the display of trophies of war is an interesting phenomenon, which opens a series of questions about the history of the display of arms and armor and, to some extent, about the reception of the 'other' in Europe. When, for example, was the first display of an Islamic shield that was meant to provoke admiration for its fine ornament rather than terror at its intended use? Or, when and why was the decision made to stretch flat a banner on a large board, as if ironed, in order to exhibit its specific décor? Or can one tell at what moment a sword or a tent were aesthetically appreciated rather than used as illustrations for history or aide-mémoires?

As far as the trophy of war is concerned, the aestheticization process results in a crucial change in the role of the trophy as it comes to rest in its new and presumably final sphere of display. It marks the change from an object with a distinct identity and function into a work of art with a historical-cultural value. I assume that the impetus for the primarily aesthetic treatment of an object of war was first discovered when the re-used object served in a sacrament, a ritual, or a ceremony of any kind, where it was first divorced from its intended function. At any case, the relation between practical function and aesthetics appears as one of changing proportions, especially as soon as the contexts of these objects were changed. Once they arrived in Western Europe, and ultimately in museums, were these trophies of war more completely alienated from their historical context by the

aestheticization process? Do these tools of war gain an extra, neutral meaning as they float in the gallery's space, devoid of specific time and place?

It is true that the modern idea of the white cube as the ideal space for exhibiting art aims to present objects in the first instance as divorced from their historical and geographical settings; for this reason, most of the museums' postcards present their masterpieces on plain backgrounds. But can history be so conveniently forgotten? And if so, what is left? Can the works we consider art be neatly and thoroughly disengaged from their initial lives as religious, cultural, social, political, historical, and magical objects? As far as arms and armor are concerned, a further issue might be raised: even the most aestheticizing modes of display cannot dispel the idea that Islam was the religion of the sword – at least in the popular Western mind. In this respect, displays of Islamic arms and armor might in fact cause common stereotypes and clichés to endure. Exhibitions of these objects, aesthetic as they may be, might thus adhere to, and even promote, the long European tradition of creating moral hierarchies between Islam and Christendom; no less crucial, their arrangements also maintain the power of Western narratives to display, classify, and produce knowledge about the nature of the major 'other'. The neutral space of the museum is not enough to overcome these long-standing imperatives; in fact, it is just these neutral spaces that make the narratives so convincing, because they disguise their subjectivity.

Yet, it is likely that the common belief that the religion of Islam was mostly spread by the sword encouraged the beholders of these attractive weapons to use adjectives such as 'violent', 'fierce', 'cruel', 'merciless', and 'vindictive' to describe these objects. But these words reveal more about the psyches of Western collectors of these objects rather than on the world of Islam. Their use illustrates the fear that Europe experienced in the age of the Ottoman conquests in Europe. This kind of fear often gives rise to the creation of stereotypes, acts as a trigger for bigotry,

and encourages the drawing of clear-cut but imaginary boundaries between identities perceived as mutually opposing. Arms and armor might function in this way as visual emblems that first inspire and then consolidate stereotypes. The aestheticization of these objects is all the more interesting because it suggests that, in the Western desire to collect and display these objects, sensuous pleasure was no less a factor. The viewer's aesthetic experience, standing in front of these objects, navigates between two poles of excitement: fear and desire, the mixture of which generally produces an obsession with the fetish.³⁹

And yet, the majority of the artifacts in the *Türkische Cammer* in Dresden are recognized and recorded as specifically commissioned *orientalisierende* artifacts, namely objects of oriental flair and exoticism which were not necessarily looted from the invading Ottomans nor even made in the Islamic world but instead produced at the order of the electors of Saxony. This interesting fact forces us, the beholders, to change completely our perceptions of the arms and armor and the war paraphernalia in the collection in Dresden. As in the mirroring effect in the poster of the Arab Emirates at the Venice Biennale, these objects mirror the art of the 'other' – they were made as copies, reproducing and sometimes adapting what was perceived as otherness.

Moreover, the use of these Orientalizing artifacts, which included war objects and costumes, at the Saxon court adds another layer of interpretation. In this specific case, fascination was not restricted to observation alone – in which the object of desire remains untouchable, remote, and exotic because it is consciously out of place – but instead involves direct interaction with the object. Ottoman dresses were worn, turbans used as headgear, and swords and shields held in hands and placed on forearms. The



19 Vitrine with Ottoman sword
at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York

³⁹ William J. T. Mitchell, "Totemism, Fetishism, Idolatry", in: *Migrating Images: Producing, Reading, Transporting, Translating*, ed. by Petra Stegmann/Peter C. Seel, Berlin 2004, pp. 14–24; *Recettes des dieux: esthétique du fétiche*, exh. cat. Paris 2009, Paris/Arles 2009.

ter C. Seel, Berlin 2004, pp. 14–24; *Recettes des dieux: esthétique du fétiche*, exh. cat. Paris 2009, Paris/Arles 2009.

Saxons consciously played, as if in a theater, the roles of the great Ottoman rulers of Istanbul and the Empire. And the phenomenon went beyond fascination per se. The mimicry might even verge on parody, as Homi Bhabha argues.⁴⁰ At any case, the untouchable object of desire was tested. The imaginary ‘other’ became a subject of role-playing and experimentation in this European princely context. To a certain extent the exotic factor was retained, but it also became actually tangible and to some extent real.

Can museums create new exhibition spaces and novel modes for displaying these interesting objects, in which they can be seen and understood beyond the traditional frames of Orientalism and beyond the varied types – serial, nimbus, tree, bouquet, and lost body – in which they were previously shown? Does the aestheticization of display suggest only European desire for exotic fantasy? Or perhaps, in some cases,

was the aestheticization of arms and armor an apparatus used for annulling the vicious and destructive power of these objects? The poetics of display might have softened the homicidal potential intrinsic in all these objects. If this is true, exhibitions of arms and armor raise an interesting question about the human urge for aestheticization, a sort of *Kunstwollen* that impacts on the museum’s curatorial praxis in arms and armor galleries. Collections of Islamic objects of war in Europe and North America tell us fascinating stories about cultural interactions and about how the human gaze on technologies of destruction copes with their deadly potentials. It is at the same time true that these European collections tell us very little about the Islamic past and its people and cultures. But any past – including the history of exhibition of arms and armor – is a foreign country and the stories are well worth telling.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London/New York 1994, especially the chapter “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”, pp. 121–131; first published as an article in: *October*, 28 [1984], pp. 125–133. On the question of mimicry, see also Barbara

Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam and European Identities*, Cambridge 2001.

⁴¹ I deliberately refer to David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge 1985.

The usual close link made between looted arms and armor and their origins and primary identities, as well as their common and constant presentation as the object of the defeated 'other', make this type of migrating object unique. The history of their display cannot therefore be simply discussed as part of the West's historical use and reuse of Islamic objects. Nor can one discuss the varied methods of their display in the West solely within the large fields of transcultural studies and exhibiting the 'other'. In contrast to other objects, looted arms and armor usually remained 'untouched', because their authenticity was predicated upon preserving their initial form and decoration. The initial condition coupled with their subsequent display were together designed to tell specific narratives of heroic moments of capture and looting for centuries to come. They in turn served ideologies that needed to create images of the defeated and the triumphant.

This study aims ambitiously to discuss the fascinating story of the aesthetization of technologies of war. By considering and classifying different modes of display of looted arms and armor from the world of Islam, I suggest that the varied aesthetic notions which have motivated collectors and curators to organize objects of war have long traditions and can be traced back to the ancient world. Historical motivations for display were shaped by the quantification of wars: displays of arms and armor were one way in which to indicate the concrete numbers of lives and quantities of material lost in wars. In this article, I consider how exhibitions in the *Kunstammern* of the early modern period and in the private and public collections since the nineteenth century reflect the unique nature of arms and armor as objects and how they attempt at once to honor and to alter their natures. The specific case of the Saxon ruler's desire to collect Ottoman weapons – as they are now displayed in the *Türkische Cammer* of the Dresden Museums – serves as both prelude and epilogue for this article.

Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Fotos: Elke Estel und Hans-Peter Klut: Fig. 1. – Author: Figs. 2, 4, 19. – Marianne Franke: Fig. 3. – From Ole Worm, Museum Wormianum [...], Leiden 1655: Fig. 5. – From Lorenzo Legati, Museo Cospiano, Bologna 1677: Fig. 6. – From Jacobaeus (note 27): Fig. 7. – From Pila (note 29): Figs. 8, 9, 16. – Barbara Karl, Vienna: Fig. 10. – Antoine Fleury-Gobert: Fig. 11. – National Museum of Korea in Seoul, Republic of Korea (Photo Jeon Han): Fig. 12. – The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: Figs. 13, 18. – Media Center Art History and Archaeology Department, Columbia University: Fig. 14. – Princeton University Libraries, Department of Rare Books and Special Collection: Fig. 15. – Aga Khan Museum, Toronto: Figs. 17a, b.

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Simon Vouet, *Portrait von Artemisia Gentileschi* | *Ritratto di Artemisia Gentileschi*, ca. 1625.
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