Topics in the Arabic Art and Culture: The Western Mediterranean

Professor David J. Roxburgh
Harvard University, Department of History of Art and Architecture
roxburgh@fas.harvard.edu

Course Description
A problem oriented inquiry into Arabic art and culture (ca. 750 to 1300), focusing on regions circling the Mediterranean, from the Iberian Peninsula to Iraq. Materials (the book, painting, portable arts, epigraphy, architecture) and geographic focus vary. Themes also change, but include relations between art and literature, aesthetics, vision and perception, courtly culture, the rise of a mercantile patron class, and cultural continuities and resurgences. The Western Mediterranean is the focus in 2003.

Introduction
Readings

- Encyclopedia of Islam, s.v. “Al-Andalus” (several authors), vol. 1, pp. 486–503 (FAL, RFA 50.23.50).

Caliphal Iberia: Cordoba and the Great Mosque
Readings

- Jonathan Bloom, “The Revival of Early Islamic Architecture by the Umayyads of Spain.”
- Oleg Grabar, “Notes sur le mihrab de la Grande Mosquée de Cordoue.”

Caliphal Iberia: Madinat Al-Zahra
Readings

- Dede Fairchild Ruggles, Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain.
Portable Arts of the Caliphal Court

Readings

- Ernst Kühnel, Die islamische Elfenbeinskulpturen. 8–13 Jh, pp. 1–24; cat. entries 19–51; 88–130; 131–141 and accompanying plates.
- Francisco Prado-Vilar, “Circular Visions of Fertility and Punishment: Caliphal Ivory Caskets from al-Andalus.”

Art and Architecture of “The Party Kings” (Muluk Al-Tawa’if)

Readings

- Cynthia Robinson, In Praise of Song: The making of courtly culture in al-Andalus and Provence, 1005–1134 A.D.
- Cynthia Robinson, “Ubi Sunt: Memory and Nostalgia in Taifa Court Culture.”
- David Wasserstein, The Rise and Fall of the Party Kings: Politics and Society in Islamic Spain, 1002–1086.

Fatimid Egypt

Readings

- Oleg Grabar, “Trade with the East and the Influence of Islamic Art on the 'Luxury Arts' in the West.”
- Oleg Grabar, “Imperial and Urban Art in Islam: The Subject Matter of Fatimid art.”
- Marianne Barrucand, ed., Trésors Fatimides, exhibition catalogue
- Anna Contadini, Fatimid Art, museum catalogue

Norman Sicily: The Cappella Palatina and King Roger II’s Manuscript of Al-Idrisi’s Geography

Readings

- William Tronzo, The Cultures of his Kingdom: Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo.
- Ugo Monneret de Villard, Le pitture musulmane al-soffitto della Cappella Palatina in Palermo. [browse illustrations]
- La geographie d'Idrisi: un atlas du monde au XIIe siecle, CD-ROM.
- René Herval, “Ecléctisme intellectuel à la cour de Roger II de Sicile.”
- Donald Matthew, The Norman Kingdom of Sicily.
Cross-Culturalism

Readings

- Jerriyn Dodds, Architecture and Ideology in Early Medieval Spain.