Oleg Grabar
1970, at Qasr al-Hayr in central Syria, directing excavations
Contents

List of Illustrations vii
Preface xiii
Acknowledgments xix
Introduction xxi

Part One: Origins and Context

| I          | Islamic Art and Byzantium | 3 |
| II         | Islam and Iconoclasm      | 43 |
| III        | Upon Reading al-Azraqi    | 57 |
| IV         | The Iconography of Islamic Architecture | 69 |
| V          | Art and Architecture and the Qur’an | 87 |

Part Two: Secular Culture under the Umayyads

| VI         | Sondages à Khirbet el-Minyeh | 107 |
| VII        | Umayyad “Palace” and the ‘Abbasid “Revolution” | 131 |
| VIII       | Notes sur les Cérémonies Umayyades | 141 |
| IX         | The Date and Meaning of Mshatta | 151 |
| X          | La Place de Qusayr ‘Amrah dans l’art profane du Haut Moyen Age | 159 |
Part Three: Fatimid Egypt and the Muslim West

XIII Imperial and Urban Art in Islam: The Subject-Matter of Fatimid Art 215
XIV Fatimid Art, Precursor or Culmination 243
XV Notes sur le Mihrab de la Grande Mosquée de Cordoue 257
XVI Two Paradoxes in the Islamic Art of the Spanish Peninsula 267
XVII Qu’est-ce que l’Art Fatimide? 277

Part Four: The Muslim East

XVIII Sarvistan: A Note on Sasanian Palaces 291
XIX Notes on the Decorative Composition of a Bowl from Northeastern Iran 299
XX A Tenth-Century Source for Architecture 311

Index 321
List of Illustrations

Part One: Origins and Context

I Islamic Art and Byzantium

1 Damascus, Great Mosque. Court (after Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture) 8
2 Damascus, Great Mosque. Plan 9
3 Damascus, Great Mosque. Minaret 10
4 Khirbat al-Mafjar. Plan 12
5 Khirbat al-Minyah. Plan 14
6 Mshatta. Plan (after Creswell) 15
7 Quṣayr ‘Amra. Plan (after Creswell) 16
8 Qasr al-Hayr. Façade, as reconstructed in the Damascus Museum (after Creswell) 17
9 Qasr al-Hayr. Sculpture on façade 18
10 Khirbat al-Mafjar. Sculpture from Palace entrance 19
11 Arab–Byzantine coin 21
12 Arab–Byzantine coin 21
13 Arab–Byzantine coin 21
14 Arab–Byzantine coin 21
15 Post-reform Umayyad gold coin 21
16 Damascus, Mausoleum of Baybars. Mosaic fragment 22
17 Khirbat al-Mafjar. Mosaic fragment 25
18 Khirbat al-Minyah. Mosaic fragment 26
19 Quṣayr ‘Amra. Fresco of the Six Kings (after Musil, Kusejr Amra) 27
20 Qasr al-Hayr. Sculpture of prince 30
21 Khirbat al-Mafjar. Sculpture of prince 31
22 Qasr al-Hayr. Sculpture of prince 32
23 Quṣayr ‘Amra. Fresco of prince 33
24 Istanbul, Topkapi Saray. Ahmet III, no. 2147, frontispiece with portrait of Dioscorides 34
25 Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, A.F.10, authors’ portraits 35
26 Kitab al-Aghani, frontispiece 36
27 Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, A.F.10, frontispiece 37
Part Two: Secular Culture under the Umayyads

VI Sondages à Khirbet el-Minyeh

1 Le site de Khirbet el-Minyeh en contexte 108
2 Le site de Khirbet el-Minyeh 108
3 Vue générale du site 109
4 Plan du palais 110
5 Plan du secteur fouillé et niveau supérieur 111
6 Plan des salles ABC – niveaux inférieurs 112
7 Coupe des salles ABC 113
8 La voûte de la salle B effondrée sur place 114
9 Le mur 101 contre le mur ouest du palais 115
10 La cuve de sarcophage, loc. 228 116
11 Le mur 102, salle B, et le passage vers la salle A 118
12 Mur 102 – salle B 119
13 Mur 106 – salle B 120
14 Blocage 106a dans le mur 106 121
15 Céramique 123

IX The Date and Meaning of Mshatta

1 Mshatta, façade (after Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture) 152
2 Mshatta, plan (after Creswell) 153
3 Ukhaydir, plan (drawing M. al-Asad) 155
X La Place de Qusayr 'Amrah dans l’art profane du Haut Moyen Age

1 Qusayr 'Amrah, vue extérieure (cliché Claude Vibert) 160
2 Qusayr 'Amrah, première salle, vue d’ensemble (angle nord-ouest) 161
3 Qusayr 'Amrah, première salle, mur nord avec l’abside (ensemble) 162
4 Qusayr 'Amrah, première salle, mur est (ensemble) et arche centrale 163
5 Qusayr 'Amrah, première salle, mur est, détail: scène de battue 164
6 Qusayr 'Amrah, scène de battue, détail 164
7 Qusayr 'Amrah, scène de battue, détail 165
8 Qusayr 'Amrah, scène de battue, détail 166
9 Qusayr 'Amrah, scène de battue, détail 167
10 Qusayr 'Amrah, première salle, mur sud de la nef ouest, détail 168
11 Qusayr 'Amrah, première salle, mur nord de la nef ouest, détail 169
12 Qusayr 'Amrah, première salle, mur ouest, détail 170
13 Qusayr 'Amrah, deuxième salle, plafond 171

XI L’Art Omeyyade en Syrie, Source de l’Art Islamique

1 Qusayr ‘Amrah: Vue extérieure (cliché Claude Vibert) 175
2 Qusayr ‘Amrah: Vue intérieure: façade sud (cliché Claude Vibert) 176
3 Qusayr ‘Amrah: Salle principale, ensemble du mur nord 177
4 Qusayr ‘Amrah: Salle principale, détail: travaux des champs ou joutes 178
5 Qusayr ‘Amrah: Salle principale, détail: femme à la piscine 181
6 Qusayr ‘Amrah: Salle principale, mur est: moine chrétien (?) 182
7 Qusayr ‘Amrah: Salle principale, voûte sud: détail des travaux de construction 183
8 Qusayr ‘Amrah: Salle principale, écoinçon sud: musicien et danseuses 184

XII Umayyad Palaces Reconsidered

1 So-called Palmyrene sculpture from Qasr al-Hayr West 195
2 Qusayr ‘Amrah. View toward right wall 198
3 Qusayr ‘Amrah. Standing nude woman on right wall in main hall 199
4 Qusayr ‘Amrah. “Lady Niké” on back wall of right vault 200
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Qusayr ‘Amrah. Standing women on either side of ruling figure</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Qusayr ‘Amrah. Standing women on either side of ruling figure</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Qusayr ‘Amrah. Dancing woman on arch in main hall</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Qusayr ‘Amrah. Dancer accompanied by guitar player on spandrel of central vault</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Qusayr ‘Amrah. Standing nude woman in central hall</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Qusayr ‘Amrah. Alighting (?) woman, on left wall of main hall</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Qusayr ‘Amrah. Personifications on the side of windows</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Qusayr ‘Amrah. Female figure in upper part of central nave</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Qusayr ‘Amrah. Meditating woman in small side room</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Qusayr ‘Amrah. Naked women and children in side room</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Qusayr ‘Amrah. Naked women and children in side room</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Part Three: Fatimid Egypt and the Muslim West**

XV  Notes sur le Mihrab de la Grande Mosquée de Cordoue

1  Cordoue, *mihrab* de la Grande Mosquée, 965 (Foto Mas, Barcelona)  
   258
2  Cordoue, détail du *mihrab* de la Grande Mosquée (Foto Mas, Barcelona)  
   259

**Part Four: The Muslim East**

XVIII  Sarvistan: A Note on Sasanian Palaces

1  Sarvistan: plan  
   292
2  Sarvistan: elevation  
   293

XIX  Notes on the Decorative Composition of a Bowl from Northeastern Iran

1, 2  Bowl, painted and glazed earthenware. Persian, from Nishapur, ninth–tenth century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 63.159.1  
     302
3  Deep bowl, painted and glazed earthenware. Persian, from Nishapur, tenth century. Freer Gallery of Art, 57.4. Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art  
   304
Bowl, painted and glazed earthenware. Persian, from Nishapur, tenth century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 56.44
Beyond the usual objectives of prefaces to thank those who helped in the preparation of these books and to identify the technical idiosyncrasies of their appearance, this particular preface is also meant to explain and justify these four independent volumes given the general title of Constructing the Study of Islamic Art, 1954–2004.

These volumes include eighty-three articles published during a period of half a century. These articles constitute about two thirds of the contributions I made over the years to periodical literature, encyclopedias and collective books of one sort or another (with some exceptions noted below). Almost all book reviews have been eliminated, as have articles which contain major mistakes or which lead to incorrect conclusions without the redeeming value of useful reasoning or of otherwise unavailable data. Chapters or sections in historical or art-historical surveys or in introductions to Islamic culture have been excluded for the most part. Most of these, like those written for volumes 4 and 5 of the Cambridge History of Iran, for The World of Islam (London, 1976, with many subsequent editions), for the Larousse Histoire de l’Art (Paris, 1985), the Encyclopedia Britannica (Chicago, 1974), or the Grove Dictionary of Art (New York, 1996), are reasonably valid summaries of the state of knowledge at the time of their appearance, sometimes a generation ago. But they are dated by now and make better sense in the context of the volumes in which they appear rather than as contributions to scholarship. And, in any event, nearly all of them are available in most reference libraries.

Just as with any retrospective, there is an element of self-centered vanity for any author or artist to present anew his or her achievements. The usefulness of the task lies, primarily, in making accessible items which were often spread in many different and sometimes inaccessible places and, secondarily, in reflecting the evolution of a field and of a person during decades of many changes in the academic as well as political and cultural spheres. Even this large selection reflects only part of the energies and efforts of a life of learning and of teaching. Large numbers of files, photographs and hand-written notes have been preserved in the archives kept under the names of André and Oleg Grabar at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. Some documents were passed on to former students and colleagues or given to a few institutions in places with restricted facilities for learning or to young scholars who could profit from them immediately. In providing
such gifts, I followed, more modestly, the example of Eric Schroeder (1904–71), curator of Islamic art at the Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University, who, when he knew that his days were numbered by a fatal disease, passed on to me and to a few other young colleagues some of his books and notes. What he gave me is now, duly inscribed by him, at the Getty Research Institute or in the possession of younger scholars. And there is something soothing in continuing in this manner to preserve the use of resources for scholarship.

The first decision to be made, after selecting the articles to be included, was how to organize them. One way could have been according to the different methodological directions taken by these studies. Such an approach could have been justified by the two directions suggested in a couple of short articles written when I was in my early twenties, which are not included in this selection. One is a precise and detailed presentation of two unusual and until then unpublished bronze coins of the early thirteenth century minted by a minor ruler of the northern Jazirah, the upper Mesopotamian valley now in Turkey; their analysis led to comments on the meaning of the word sultan as a title. The other one is the hypothesis that a verse attributed to an Umayyad caliph can explain a very fragmentary painting in the bath of Qusayr Amrah, even though there is no reason to believe that the verse or its author had anything to do with the painting. In the first instance, all references are to written or numismatic evidence from the time of the coins involved, in the second one none are (even the verse is only known from a later source), and much of the bibliography deals with arguments around the representation of royal power. The information in the first article has by now been superseded and the second one was incorporated in a later book, The Formation of Islamic Art.

Alternately, the articles could have been put in the chronological sequence of their appearance, which would have illustrated the development of an individual's scholarly thinking and interests and of the ways in which that thinking and these interests were affected by new information and by changing intellectual fashions. But we finally settled on a compromise: two volumes reflecting the history of the Islamic world and of its art, and two others with a thematic focus.

There is, first, the early Islamic period, these first centuries which transformed an enormous area into a primarily Muslim one. Then there is the Islamic visual culture which overwhelmed these territories and which is still the dominant one from Senegal to the Philippines. But then, no one dealing with Islamic art can avoid explaining to himself or herself and to

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others what it is that characterizes that art in contrast or as a parallel to other traditions, especially, for the medievalist that I was as a student, to Christian art with many of the same sources. The search for verbal formulas to explain visual phenomena or for the ideological bases of the arts is an endless pursuit that often has to respond to new challenges of thought and of political and cultural events. Furthermore, the unique ways of Islamic art as it formed itself and as it developed lead to important issues of the history and criticism of art. In the late 1970s, I began a long and fruitful association with the Aga Khan Foundation and I was introduced to contemporary activities in art and architecture, as well as in the complex operation of cultural policies. Thus a third volume is devoted to general ideas on Islamic art up to our own time and to the theories derived from it or applied to it. And then, partly by accident, I began my acquaintance with the Islamic world and with the Near East in Jerusalem, and I have devoted much time and effort to understanding its monuments and their meaning over the centuries. A whole volume is devoted to that extraordinary city and it includes one totally new contribution, a lengthy response and reaction to the many works on Jerusalem which have appeared during the past fifteen years.

This division is an interpretation of fifty years of scholarly activities. But I hope that it will be of better use for other scholars than a purely chronological one would have been or the artificial one of various poles of scholarly procedures. Yet it is not entirely possible to separate the shadows of one's scholarly life from one's written accomplishments. For this reason, short introductions to each volume seek to recall the atmosphere surrounding many of the works and especially the people and institutions who over the decades created a context for learning and for growing which is almost impossible to imagine in the academic world of today. For Volume I, I shall introduce the archaeologists and archaeological institutions which helped and inspired me, especially in the 1950s and the 1960s. In Volume II, I shall mention the teaching and research institutions that became my home for nearly forty years and the fascinating evolution that took place in the ways students and colleagues in the United States and elsewhere became involved in the study of Islamic art. For Volume III, I shall sketch out the festival of ideas that accompanied so much of my academic life and some of the non-academic activities which, since the late 1970s, played an important role in the processes of my learning. Finally, when dealing with Jerusalem, I shall sketch the unique circumstances of working in the Holy City during the 1950s and 1960s.

The initial division of the articles was proposed as early as the late 1990s by Professor Cynthia Robinson, who first assisted me in sorting them out. But I had too many other commitments to fulfill at that time and could not manage to concentrate on the project in suitable fashion. Then, in 2001, the Institute for Advanced Study agreed to support the project of a retired professor and the Mellon Foundation provided the funds needed for a full-
time assistant. Mika Natif, a finishing graduate student at the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University, took on the job. She helped in making the final choice of publications to be included, devised and proposed the arrangement of articles found in these volumes, and undertook the tasks of scanning articles published in many different journals into a single format, of gathering illustrations, and, in general, of keeping the project going. Her sharp and critical mind was essential in transforming what could well have become a disorganized exercise into a reasonably coherent whole for future scholars and critics. Without her energy, dedication and commitment, these books could not have been completed and I owe her a deep debt of gratitude for having stuck with the life and works of an older generation than hers. Additional help was gracefully and intelligently provided by Elizabeth Teague, the copy editor, and I am most grateful to her.

Thanks are also due to two institutions. One is the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, which contributed to the publication of these books through ArchNet, a branch of the Aga Khan Program in Architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I was involved in the early creation of the program and am grateful to Mr Shiraz Allibhai, manager of the program, and to Dr Luis Monreal, the head of the Trust in Geneva for having continued to support my work so many years later. The second institution is the Institute for Advanced Study from whose School of Historical Studies I retired in 1998. Two successive directors, Dr Philip Griffith and Dr Peter Goddard, supported all aspects of the work involved in preparing these volumes and in making available to Mika Natif and to me the technical facilities of the Institute and the expertise of its staff. A special word of thanks is due to Rachel Gray, Associate Director of the Institute, through whom all needs and requests were channeled. A last expression of gratitude goes to John Smedley from Ashgate Publishing, who, I suspect, did not quite know what he was getting himself into when he agreed to consider the publication of the eighty-odd articles found in these volumes. His gracious help and patience was essential to the completion of the work. The following institutions gave permission to reproduce articles and pictures published under their copyright: Pennsylvania State University Press, Dumbarton Oaks, E. J. Brill, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, New York University Press; Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University, Metropolitan Museum of Art, State University of New York Press, Israel Exploration Journal.

A number of editorial decisions were made to ensure consistency across all four volumes, to simplify the task of publishing them, and to facilitate the use of the books. Diacritical marks and macrons were given up altogether. The hamza is shown as ' and the 'ayn as ‘. The date and place of the original publication of each article are indicated with an asterisk on the first page of each article. All notes are put at the bottom of pages. References to the original pagination are given in square brackets. Not all original illustrations
have been included. Some prints or negatives could no longer be located and scanning or photographing anew a mediocre print seemed senseless. At times substitutions were found and in a few instances original illustrations were simply omitted. Typos were corrected whenever we noticed them and minor emendations were made to the original texts to ensure clarity of expression. Bibliographical notes were not brought up to date, except when works announced in the notes were actually published.
Acknowledgments

The chapters in this volume were first published as follows:


We would like to thank all individuals, publishers and institutions for their permission to reproduce articles and illustrations published under their copyright. Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publisher will be pleased to make the necessary arrangement at the first opportunity.
Introduction

These first few pages are meant to set the academic and, to a degree, personal stage for twenty articles written between 1960 and 2001 and concentrating on the first four and a half centuries of Islamic history, roughly until 1100.

Two very different impulses from my days as an undergraduate student at Harvard University, the University of Paris, and the École des Langues Orientales, and then as a graduate student at Princeton University may help to explain my involvement with early Islamic art, with archaeology and with the patronage of the Umayyad and Fatimid dynasties. One impulse was my formation as a medievalist dealing first with Western Europe and Byzantium before 1000, and then with classical Arabic and Islamic history. The second impulse was my year of study, in 1953–54, as the Annual Fellow at the American School of Oriental Research (now the Albright Institute) in Jerusalem.

Original training as a medievalist provided me with a set of academic tools and intellectual role models which simply did not exist at that time for the history of Islamic art and culture. André Grabar, Marc Bloch, Henri Pirenne, Emile Mâle, Kurt Weitzmann, Hugo Buchthal, E. Baldwin Smith, Henri Stern, Ernst Kantarowicz, Meyer Schapiro, A. M. Friend Jr, J. Strzygowski, R. Krautheimer are only a few randomly selected names of scholars (all but three of whom I had known personally) whose contributions to the highest levels of scholarship are countless, but who also knew how to provide or inspire theoretical schemes for the understanding of the arts and who exuded, as individuals or in their writing, a mixture of charisma and authority made to attract budding enthusiasts for knowledge. Many of these medievalists of the Christian world showed much interest in Islamic art and culture and even made occasional contributions to its study. Some, like Kurt Weitzmann, felt very strongly that their approaches had a universal value, at least as a way to handle illustrated manuscripts first and then all images. Whether or not one agreed with their position, the impression on a student was clear: Islamic art was a medieval art with sources firmly entrenched in Classical Antiquity and its study needed the more developed and more elaborate methods used for Christian art. There was a Byzantine version of Christianity with carefully worked out rules, regulations and procedures, and with an established doctrine for the interpretation of images or the
construction of religious buildings. And there was a Western European or Latin version, much more varied in its multifarious appearances and much more complicated in its development. Both versions had formulated paradigms which affected the study of all arts at all times.

In those days, no one but collectors of Persian or Mughal painting or inveterate travelers to India or Iran considered the possibility of dealing with Islamic art after 1500 and it was natural enough that a young student would be attracted to the early Islamic period, the time when a new culture emerged out of its Late Antique roots. In a sense, classical Orientalism dominated the field. Its essentialist emphasis on a single Islamic culture with occasional aberrations from the norm sought explanations for whatever happened later in the formative decades of the seventh and eighth centuries. Scholars were fascinated by the ways in which a new faith was established, followed by a new state and then a new cultural system. The texts that had been edited, like Tabari, Baladhuri, or the early geographers, dealt mostly with the first centuries of Islam and Leone Caetani’s monumental *Annali dell'Islam* in eleven volumes and nearly 6000 pages only covered the first thirty-seven years of the *hijrah*. On a more popular level, the most easily available general book was Philip Hitti’s *History of the Arabs*. More than half of it deals with the first 200 years of Islamic history and the rest of the book is organized around “petty” dynasties in the west and in the east. In short, there was a methodological model, the history of Christian art, for the history of Islamic art and the historical or cultural ground had been prepared for the first two centuries of its existence.

It was a lucky accident that, in these days before major fellowship programs for study in the Near East, I was awarded the annual student fellowship of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR). That venerable institution with countless contributions to the study, mostly archaeological, of the Bible and of the Ancient Near East, sought, I believe, to show that its concerns were not limited to biblical times or to the New Testament. But there was another reason as well for my being chosen. The year was 1953, just five years after the division of Palestine into a new state of Israel and an Arab area taken over by what was then the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan. Some of the political and administrative complexities of the times dealt with the Palestine Archaeological Museum (PAM, now the Rockefeller Museum) in Jerusalem, then a privately endowed institution run by a consortium of representatives of various learned societies in Europe and the United States. One of these representatives was the president of the ASOR, at that time Karl Kraeling, an archaeologist and historian of early Christian times and of Judaism in Roman times. The museum was the repository of nearly all the finds from the fabulous site of Khirbat al-Mafjar, an Umayyad palatial ensemble with sculptures, paintings and mosaics that had become known through a number of articles published in the *Quarterly* of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine, but whose revolutionary character was only
dimly perceived at the time. R. W. Hamilton, the last Director of Antiquities of Palestine, had embarked on a major publication of the site, eventually published in 1959 by Oxford University Press as Khirbat al-Mafjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley. The subtitle of the book reflected the Orientalist mood of the time and guaranteed that no one outside the field would notice its existence and importance. Kraeling, a wonderful exemplar of the political scholar–administrator, was anxious that the publication come out as rapidly as possible because of the investment into the site made by the PAM and also to show the importance of the archaeological work carried out in the now defunct Palestine. He proposed the services of a graduate student for whatever purposes Hamilton needed. This is how, after a delightful visit with Hamilton and his wife at their house in or near Oxford, I came to catalog and eventually published the paintings of Khirbat al-Mafjar. I was offered the opportunity to handle the mosaics as well, but turned this task down for fear that I could not complete my Ph.D. thesis in a reasonable time (and thus find a job), if I had to learn about a technique which was not then very familiar to me. Conscientious scholar that he was, Hamilton completed the work on the mosaics in a competent but perfunctory manner and I have at times regretted a decision made for practical rather than intellectual reasons.

In any event, my entry into the world of archaeology took place in the store-rooms of the Palestine Archaeological Museum, where I acquired a life-long dislike for archaeological ceramics. It was combined, during the year of my fellowship, with the usual visits to Umayyad sites in what was then Transjordan, and with study trips to Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Anatolia. In Damascus, I could see the masses of paintings and sculptures from Qasr al-Hayr West, which are still only partly available and whose parallels with and differences from Khirbat al-Mafjar are so striking.

The archaeology and understanding of these early monuments of Islamic art was then dominated by two very remarkable individuals who were as different from each other as night and day. In Cairo, there was K. A. C. (“Archie”) Creswell (1879–1974), who was still called Captain because of his World War I activities, a small and energetic man always impeccably dressed, with an imperial feel for command on his face. He was passionate about early Islamic architecture and the first two of his monumental volumes on the subject had already been published, at least in their first version. He was a man of systematic precision in descriptions and details, an excellent draftsman and photographer, fanatically committed to a linear chronological progression of construction techniques and of shapes in design, with a minimum of concern for the cultural context of buildings, opinionated with prejudices on nearly everything. He could be very generous, as when entertaining a student who could be his grandson, but also dismissive in his criticisms. And he easily became angry and red in the face. His wonderful library (now at the American University in Cairo) was beautifully kept in his
apartment near the Abdin palace, in a neighborhood which was no longer fashionable when I met him in 1953, but which he terrorized by his knowledge of municipal regulations and by his control over the possession of radios.

The other figure was the much younger Jean Sauvaget (1901–50), who had died recently at the early age of forty-nine. Based in Paris during the last fifteen years of his life, he had spent a long time in Damascus at the École Française de Damas. The author of major books on many subjects, his most remarkable contribution consisted in masses of articles dealing with buildings, history, inscriptions, reviews of scholarly works and so on. They burst with energy, with the vitality of a mind constantly alert and fascinated by everything it encountered. I only met Sauvaget once when I was still a teenager and still recall the excited flamboyance with which he described the Arabic language as a “geometry.” He died as I was preparing to study with him in Paris rather than return to the United States where I had just spent two years. He was devoted to his students, who truly adored him and have remained amazingly faithful to his memory. Although he never, I believe, indulged in actual excavations, he was an archaeologist in the broadest and most fruitful sense of the word, seeking to explain everything that remained from the past and to relate these remains to history, even to contemporary practices. The connector, to him, between the written sources with which one writes history and the world of buildings or of things was epigraphy, the reading of inscriptions. With these tools – observation of the land, reading of appropriate written sources, epigraphy – Sauvaget did give new directions to a type of investigation which had been initiated by the great masters of the previous generation, Max van Berchem and Ernst Herzfeld (whom he frequently criticized). He did so with an astounding rhetorical panache, but also with an awareness of the land and the people surrounding monuments, thus forecasting better than his predecessors what will later be defined as “total history,” exemplified most successfully in an approach which welded together archaeology, geography and the knowledge of texts.

Sauvaget and Creswell did not appreciate each other, although I do not know whether they ever met. Sauvaget was ironic about Creswell and Creswell had warned me to “beware of Sauvaget.” Both of them were, however, the beneficiaries of the last decades of European imperialism. And, even though by the time I arrived in the Near East, nearly all areas were independent countries, the old imperial system remained active through the staffing of archaeological services and the maintenance of national research institutes. These were French, American and British in Jerusalem, primarily French in Damascus and Beirut, British in Iraq, British and French in Iran, French in Afghanistan. Everybody was present in Egypt and Turkey had French and

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British institutes in Istanbul and Ankara respectively. The aftermath of World War II was that there were no German institutes any place at that time, a situation soon to be remedied. These establishments, schools or institutes, were havens for students and, in fact, for all travelers. Cars could be made available for expeditions to remote areas or visits to major monuments. Introductions were provided for officials and ways explained to obtain permits of all kinds. If lucky, one could join for a week or a month an excavation somewhere, and a whole mythology had developed about the style of individual “digs.” In general, a certain camaraderie grew between young scholars with shared interests, some of whom became major figures in their respective fields, while others faded away altogether. With slow mail, few airplanes, no television, expensive and unreliable telephones, radios that still needed electric plugs in walls, these institutions provided bodily and spiritual sustenance, a rest from the exciting novelties of exploration, the feeling of an international, highly western, community in foreign lands.

Those of us who had traveled in the arid lands of South Jordan, whose bodies ached from being tossed about over the large ruts of bare tracks, who had to push cars from muddy holes, who lived on hard-boiled eggs and drank theoretically boiled tea at Beduin camp sites, who interpreted with enthusiasm any crummy wall somewhere in the steppe as possessed with the spirit of seventh-century Arabs or eleventh-century Turks, did not feel jealous of our colleagues sleeping in their beds and peacefully looking at manuscripts in the British Library or in the Vatican. We felt, on the contrary, that we brought to the story of visual remains an essential component, the component of the spaces in which events took place, the man-made spaces of buildings, cities or villages, but also the natural spaces of rivers, seas, mountains, rocks and sand. Our thought was that the awareness and the experience of these spaces defined the people who transformed the area by creating in it a new culture. The archaeological record, we used to argue, that of extensive surveys or of actual excavations, was the core documentation for history; written sources were but the veneer of a time’s memory, the self-conscious image it left of itself rather than the objective, even if randomly preserved, remains of a material culture in its natural setting.

Such were the thoughts and arguments that we developed and polished during long trips over bad roads. A particularly memorable one for me took place in 1956. Led by George Forsyth, then Chairman of the Art History department at the University of Michigan and driven by an extraordinary Lebanese driver who was a wrestler in his spare time, a marvelous new International Harvester four-wheel-drive station wagon took a group of us – George Forsyth, the biblical scholar George Mendenhall, Father Jean Fiey, a French Dominican monk from Mosul with a unique knowledge of Near Eastern Christianity over the ages, George Tchalenko, the Franco-Russian explorer of the so-called “dead cities” of northern Syria, the marvelous Swiss-American companion and photographer Fred Anderegg who was
eventually to become the photographer of my excavations at Qasr al-Hayr East and for the recording of paintings and mosaics in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Qusayr ‘Amrah, and finally myself as the junior member of the team (I was only twenty-seven) – from Beirut to Palmyra, Raqqah, Dura-Europos, Baghdad, Mosul, Nisibin, Diyarbakr, Midyat, Urfa, Harran, Aleppo, and back to Beirut during a period of five to six weeks. Even now, almost fifty years later, the memories of the landscapes we crossed like the deep wadis just south of the Syro-Iraqi frontier, the discovery of so many different ways of life such as the marsh Arabs of southern Iraq with their huts covered with vaulted reeds or the sugar-cone dwellings of north-central Syria, the incongruous encounter with the spirit of Marilyn Monroe among the devil-worshipers or Yazidis of the Jabal Sinjar in northwestern Iraq, the sad remains of Christianity in the Tur Abdin, negotiations needed occasionally to cross frontiers or to please policemen, all these memories are still fresh in my mind as the only member of the group to be still alive in 2005. It is, of course, easy and fun to recall anecdotes, especially when there is no one to contradict them. What really matters is that this trip, like many others, provided a visual and physical contact with the spaces in which history took place and with the people who now occupy these spaces. One of the most powerful lessons of field archaeology in a land that is not one’s own is the establishment of a contact with other people than yours and other social classes than the ones with which one usually mingled. It is an enriching and a humbling experience, but it is also a difficult one to transfer into scholarship, especially art-historical. It is rare indeed that some extraordinary object or some revolutionary remains are found. What does appear and can be reconstructed is the life of the common man. Even in excavated palaces, kings are present no doubt, but not as much as the artisans who built the palaces, the designers and artists who decorated them, the servants who worked in them, or the visitors who came from neighboring places or from afar. It is the archaeological base that is essential for the historian of art, as it sets up the mass of things against which he can measure the value of his masterpieces.

In the early 1950s and 1960s and until the completion, in 1972, of the excavation of Qasr al-Hayr Sharqi in Syria, my own experience was mostly in Egypt and the Near East, with the exception of a month-long investigation of west-central Iran. For the most part, Andalusia, the Maghrib and the Mashriq from Iraq eastward were areas in which others worked, like R. McC. Adams, whose *Land Beyond Baghdad* is a model of an archaeological overview of a region, and especially the Russian expeditions in Turkmenistan, Khorezm and Tajikistan, which truly revolutionized our knowledge of Central Asia before Islam and helped in suggesting explanations for the ways of its Islamization. My experiences in the Levant and a few exploratory trips to Iran, Afghanistan and then Soviet Central Asia led me, just a few years before the Iranian revolution of 1979, to draw up a grandiose and absurdly
optimistic plan for the full exploration of Khorasan, the large province of northeastern Iran. It would have involved collective work carried out in Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The idea was great on an intellectual level as well as on a human one, as it would have involved scholars from many countries trained in many different ways and included the investigation of literary sources as well as archaeological ones. In a manner befitting the style of my generation, the project would have followed a brilliant survey sketched by Herzfeld in *Der Islam* XI of 1921. I lost or maybe purposefully destroyed the many pages which described this project and it is a sad commentary on the decay of the world that this sort of dream is even more impossible now, thirty years later, than it was then.

Retrospectively, it is easy enough to be critical of the surveys we used to practice then without the fancy photographic equipment available now (my brief encounter with satellite photography and the Office of Naval Research is part of the more hilarious episodes of that time) as well as of the large-scale excavations of the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. A season lasted more than two months then; it included more than 150 workers and moved enormous quantities of dirt. But we did not use the new technologies being developed at that time with their cohort of specialized staff members. These novelties made the excavation of large sites prohibitive and the exploration of large urban sites so necessary for the history of Islamic culture, especially during the first centuries of its existence, has become unlikely unless new techniques of investigation are developed. The more serious defect of archaeological work concerned with the Islamic world is that most excavations and surveys are never fully published, if at all. The reason is partly social and economic in the sense that few archaeologists are provided with time for research or teaching jobs. Therefore, they have to run from one “dig” to the next one without time to breathe. But another and perhaps more important reason is that no one has figured out how to translate the mass of very concrete information provided by surveys and excavations into conclusions that can be used by others. In other areas, ancient Palestinian, classical or ancient Egyptian archaeology, for instance, there is a critical mass of intermediary scholarship on architecture, society or ceramics which allows one to fit and explain whatever is found. This is missing in Islamic archaeology and probably will never be developed, unless some stunning transformation occurs in the informatization of archaeological knowledge. The problem becomes intriguing when one turns to what may be called an archaeology of written materials, of words. This is the case with the Geniza fragments from Cairo, thousands of documents illustrating and depicting a Jewish life in and around the Mediterranean which can easily be extended to Muslims and

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2 Herzfeld’s subtitle “Denkmalsgeographische Studien zur Kulturgeschichte des Islams in Iran (Studies in the monumental geography for the cultural history of Islamic Iran)” is an ambitious blueprint for one man to accomplish multidisciplinary research.
Christians. But an archaeology of the written word also exists around some early texts, like Azraqi’s description of Mecca or geographers and travelers like Muqaddasi and Nasir-i Khosro. Several of the articles in this volume are not illustrated, precisely because they introduce conclusions or hypotheses from written sources alone. Here again, as with dirt archaeology, it is difficult to relate the information provided by these fragments to the high levels of art, but it is possible to reconstruct the human context of that art. This is particularly true of the Fatimid period (909–1173), for which literary and material documents provide a unique archaeological basis for research into cultural history.

And it is this cultural history which became the ultimate aim of investigations initiated by collections of written documents, architectural monuments or ruins, and scores of artefacts. Such investigations are never ended, as each generation or each individual scholar brings something new to what has been gathered before. But research in these areas is an unending trek toward the elusive aim of knowing what happened, who created what, and why. The definitive answer will never be found, but, during the search, the technical and intellectual powers of scholars are sharpened to even greater competence.

One last remark. As I complete this introduction, I realize the contrast between the excitement of recalling excavations and archaeological expeditions on the one hand and the rather ponderous scholarship so often inspired by them. Perhaps like many other things in life, the essential experience and at times joys of a broadly conceived archaeology cannot be fully reflected in academic writing.