

## Chapter XXII

### Patterns and Ways of Cultural Exchange\*

My remarks bear on three issues raised during the symposium: are we really talking about two worlds? What were the points of access for cultural and artistic influences or relations? What was the impact of whatever relations did occur? In order to reflect what actually happened during the symposium and to stimulate even further debate, these remarks are kept in the general form in which they were given, inasmuch as most of the examples are either of very well-known works of art and events or would have been quoted or discussed by other participants.

#### Two Worlds

However fashionable it may be to think in terms of two worlds (Christian West and Muslim East) or even of three (Catholic West, Byzantine East, Islam), in reality the period of the Crusades witnessed the participation of an extraordinary number of "worlds." These can be identified either in geographical terms or in theoretical ones.

Within Eastern Christianity, Byzantium proper, Armenia, Georgia, Syriac or Coptic Monophysites form separate religious entities, often at odds with each other. But there are also clear regional distinctions; Cyprus is not Greece, nor is Christian Egypt the same as Christian Syria. All are different from Comnenian Byzantium or from the New Balkanic kingdoms. Matters are even more complicated in Islam. On a dynastic level, the Fatimids, Zenguids, Ayyubids, Zirids, Hammadids, Almoravids, Almohads and Hafsids all represented different interests and sources of power; however, while some of these dynasties succeeded each other on the same territories, it is very rarely that the same regions formed foci of power under successive dynasties. Ethnic diversity is just as striking, as the rulers and the military were predominantly Turks, Kurds, or Berbers, while the cities were Arabicized and the countryside still preserved a mosaic of people from many origins. Sectarian differences were perhaps less acute than they had been in the tenth

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or eleventh centuries. The great Sunni synthesis formulated in Baghdad dominated most of the Muslim world west of Iraq, but several [442] branches of Shi'ism were still forcefully present, Sufism was making inroads whose importance is difficult to assess, and here and there (southern Syria or southern Algeria), older and more restricted sects were maintaining themselves. It is true that the ideology and rhetoric of a unified *dar al-Islam* frequently overshadowed local peculiarities and that a partly Iranized Baghdad was the intellectual metropolis, but it was remote and a bit unreal to a merchant in Ifriqiyah or to a warrior in central Anatolia.

I feel less competent to deal with the Christian West, but it seems clear to me that the Castilians of the Reconquista, the Normans of Sicily, the Crusaders, and the merchants of Venice or Genoa all illustrate very different entities, only occasionally tied to each other in a common venture.

These numerous "worlds" should not be seen only as geographical or regional entities, as places with certain internal constrictions and expectations, characteristics and traditions, memories and reputations. The whole Mediterranean world can be seen as several orders of "worlds" which cut across the traditional ethnic or territorial divisions. There is a social order, as princes and kings shared skills, habits and taste, regardless of their regional origins, or as merchants of many lands sold silks, spices, or slaves wherever needed and learned from each other navigational techniques or appropriate markets. There is a pious order, as Islam and Christianity both preserved an official religious structure and a variety of sectarian movements. There is a technological and scientific order, and probably many others. My point is simply that, as one sets the problem in terms of a "meeting of two worlds," it may be easier to think of it in terms of clashing, contrasting, or collaborating regions, but in reality the "meeting" was also one of different social classes, of different religions and intellectual tendencies, of different levels of learning. This kind of "meeting" occurred within every regional entity and ought to be studied comparatively.

### **Influences and Points of Access**

The central question dealing with "cultural contacts" is whether these should be defined as influences, impacts, or points of access.

Two initial observations are pertinent. One is that, because of the Crusades or for any number of other reasons, there occurred, in particular in the twelfth century, an extraordinary increase in the number of "points of access," that is, of places where contacts could be and were made, as well as in the variety of these contacts. What happened in Norman Sicily is not what happened in Pisa or Amalfi. The Holy Land, with its Western knights and ecclesiastics imported into a non-Western setting, is different from Anatolia, where Turkic soldiers and holy men settled in the midst of a Hellenized or

Armenian population. Sophisticated and intellectual Toledo was not like the vast emporium of Mahdiya on the Tunisian coast. Acre and Haifa became places where a Frankish knight or pilgrim would almost feel at home, [443] whereas Bagiyah (modern Bougie in Algeria), an exclusively Muslim city, had a Pisan ambassador with the wonderfully evocative name of Abu Tamim Maymun b. William. All these places, and hundreds of others, were places where contacts between different cultures were or would be established. Two variables must be introduced. One is chronological. For instance, the contacts between Western Christendom and Islam were extensive on the Tunisian and Algerian coasts during the twelfth century but not during the thirteenth, while Seville, Jerusalem, Damietta and Constantinople remained important points of contact during most of these centuries. The second variable is a qualitative one. Much deeper and much more far-reaching contacts occurred in Spain, Sicily, or Anatolia than in southern Italy or Egypt. It would, in other words, be highly desirable to draw up maps of identifiable points of access for every quarter of a century with whatever evidence we possess and then, if possible, charts of the kinds of exchanges which can be determined.

The second observation concerns the complex issue of influences, to which I shall return later, and what may be called the principle of communicating vases. In the case of the latter, similar concerns and similar needs lead to an almost automatic transfer of information. Such are the cases with much of the so-called scientific impact of the Muslim world on the West and with philosophy and theology, where the Christian West, as opposed to the Christian East, turned to Islamic ideas and interpretations because the same issues of faith and reason had been posed, not because of a precise influence of Islamic thought on the West. An appropriate parallel would lie in more contemporary times, as we should make a distinction between Pasteur's discoveries, which are only incidentally French, and the impact of Byron on continental literature, which is a willed influence.

To put it in more abstract terms, it is appropriate to talk of influences when the receiving organism adopts features from an alien source without being driven to them, without requiring them. Anything else is either an impact, often temporary and without long-range trace, or the result of unique circumstances.

In this restricted definition of influences, specific examples during our period are very few. Limiting myself to the visual arts, the most obvious one is that of *mudejar* art in Spain, where motifs and ideas developed in Muslim Spain become incorporated into the very fabric of Spanish art. Another example occurs in the modifications brought in the thirteenth century in the arts of ceramics, textiles and metalwork from Spain and Italy. It is also possible that direct influences lie behind the development of an architecture of urban citadels, although the subject still needs further investigation. Finally, there is the short-lived attempt by Roger II and William II to blend three separate artistic traditions into a unique Norman synthesis. It is curious

that the Byzantine world seems to have escaped either receiving or providing significant influences from and to the West or from and to the Islamic world [444] during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but this point may need correction.

On the other hand, examples abound of impacts on a limited scale and for limited periods of time. Nearly all of them are unique monuments or groups of monuments which are difficult to assess properly. The celebrated Innsbruck plate, made toward the end of the first half of the twelfth century, uses a Byzantine and possibly even Western technique of enamel and motifs of many sources for a minor prince of northern Mesopotamia. The portals of thirteenth-century Anatolian buildings exhibit a bewildering variety of types, whose parallels range from Western Christian to Iranian art. A last example consists in a group of inlaid bronzes probably from Syria; they are all of the first half of the thirteenth century, and their peculiarity is that they contain Christian subjects next to the traditional themes of the Muslim princely cycle. A recent study has proposed to explain these as objects made for the feudal taste of the Muslim or Christian aristocracy during the peculiarly symbiotic arrangements which followed the Muslim takeover of Jerusalem and preceded Mamluk rule.

The conclusion I would then propose for discussion is that, with the partial exceptions of Spain and Sicily, this period of intensified cultural contacts did not create many instances of meaningful syncretisms which would have taken root wherever they occurred. What happened instead is that specific and short-term conditions led to a relatively small number of idiosyncratic instances of single monuments or groups of monuments which can best be explained by the cultural contacts of the time.

### Impacts

One can only speculate about the reasons why two centuries of increased contacts did not lead to deeper and more lasting artistic impacts. One reason may well be that forms had not acquired as yet a national, ethnic, or even religious identity. On a methodological level, what this means is that the historian of art tends to use systemic criteria (i.e., criteria based on the formal or cultural orders to which any one feature belongs) before having properly defined the syntagmatic character of a monument, that is, its own justifications for whatever formal devices appear in it. Thus, the representation of Roger II in the Martorana forcefully emphasizes his imperial Byzantine clothes. These examples are rare, however, and, on the whole, formal choices were made for other reasons than the cultural associations which can be proposed for them. A silk was chosen for its beauty or its value, not because it was Muslim or Constantinopolitan. Matters will be quite different after the end of the thirteenth century, when conscious exoticisms will appear.

Another conclusion which can be proposed is that the deepest effects of increased cultural contacts lie not in material influences but in an increased [445] awareness of one's self. The Eastern Christian world begins to formulate its own justification for its particularities when faced with the presence of other Christian groups. The Muslim world develops and hones its own theory of Holy War and of the sanctity of Jerusalem under the impact of the challenge of the Crusades. Italian towns and Balkan states, Armenians in Cilicia or Armenia proper, Monophysite Christians in Syria and northern Mesopotamia, are only a few among many cultural or political entities which become more fully aware than they had been before of whatever it was that made them unique.

The paradox would then be that increased contacts in the Mediterranean led, in the final analysis, to the weakening of a Mediterranean unity which stayed on for a far longer time than had been previously thought. On the positive side, there was created a much richer and much more diverse Mediterranean world. One last example taken from the world of forms may strengthen my conclusion. With the increase of all sorts of activities throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, nearly all lands rediscovered their Roman or Late Antique past. The Muslim monuments of Aleppo, Damascus, Harran and Diyarbakr are full of classical reminiscences, as are the churches and sculptures of Italy and southern France. The new painting of Iraq or Egypt has a complex so-called "Hellenistic" past and, while less clear in the thirteenth century, the architecture of Anatolia does begin its dialogue with the dome of Late Antiquity and early Byzantium. One could argue that these revivals unify the various discrete regions of the Mediterranean. It is, however, more important to note that each area will use these forms in very different ways, from the classical explosion of Italy to the abandonment of its themes in Syria. Thus, once again, a common experience between 1100 and 1300 led to entirely different results, because these centuries of increased contacts ultimately strengthened or developed the separatedness of each area.

