

BOOK REVIEW

Making Modernity in the Islamic Mediterranean

**Edited by Margaret S. Graves and Alex Dika Seggerman
(Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2022). Pp. 285. \$75.00
cloth, \$30.00 paper. ISBN: 9780253060341**

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Making Modernity in the Islamic Mediterranean features a postcard photo on its cover, depicting a girl working at a carpet loom. Her hands expertly maneuver through the task, echoing a rich generational tradition. The girl, with her head down, seems fixed under the camera's gaze. Her fixed position contrasts with the dynamic nature of postal cards that move through time and space thanks to two major innovations of the 19th century: photography and transportation. These technologies altered 19th-century artistic practices, a period situated "between the premodern past and postmodern present" (p. 5). However, what we've received from this era appears stagnant, dull, and lifeless. It needs a fresh infusion of colors to rekindle its vibrancy like the sharp and vivid colors added by a cover designer to enhance the vibrancy of 19th-century heritage. The cover image of this collection, by highlighting multiple faces of this epoch, encapsulates the essence of what the editors aimed to achieve through this volume.

Making Modernity is the fruit of collaboration following the HIAA (Historians of Islamic Art Association) conferences in 2016, bringing together an ensemble of eleven chapters, along with an introduction by editors Margaret S. Graves and Alex Dika Seggerman. As the editors note, the book is a response to a gap in the literature that overlooks the 19th century. The period is all too often seen as unworthy of study by historians of Islamic art and not modern enough to attract the interest of modern and contemporary art historians of the region. Compared with the relatively well-studied case of 19th-century Iranian art, the editors mention some of the reasons for this neglect, which include the divisive and messy context of the region that was impacted by the emergence of new nations from the Ottoman Empire and the simultaneous interventions of various colonial powers. We might add that today's sociopolitical situation can be regarded as another factor in the advancement of 19th-century art historiography. In the case of Iran, the political sensibility and difficulty of accessing scattered collections of the 20th century (Pahlavi era) compared to Qajar heritage is considerable. Similarly, in the Mediterranean Islamic lands, contemporary sociopolitical factors may be considered as variables influencing the focus or diversion of scholars' attention toward this epoch.

The editors clarify that the scope of the book does not refer to any unified artistic school or style; rather, it pertains to the condition of production, circulation, and reception of art in this transitional period, resulting in an aesthetic shift across the globe. The new world system that preceded modernity in the 19th century was highly impacted by new technological and transporting possibilities that altered networks of materials and ideas. These new connective possibilities, they claim, shape the geographical scope of the book. They argue that cities spread on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean are more connected than cities across the districts like Middle East or Islamic lands that most often

form the scope of art historians' studies. However, throughout the book the interconnectivity of discussed cities and regions (Istanbul, Beirut, Fez, Damascus, Tunis, Cairo, Hijaz) does not receive much attention. Instead, the networks depicted around each of case studies reveal asymmetrical connections with old and new imperial centers. That is why the two case studies on Tunis and Morocco, which experienced direct French colonial intervention, stand apart from the others, which focus on emerging nations from the Ottoman Empire. Considering that other geo-environmental, culturological, and historical commonalities among these cities have been overlooked, it appears that framing the Islamic Mediterranean as a distinct district is more of a pragmatic response to the gaps in the literature rather than an analytical one.

The book contains three parts: "Picturing Knowledge," "Conceptualizing Craft," and "Aesthetics of Infrastructure." Together, these sections shed light on the aesthetic shifts that occurred during this era, following transformations in both the material and the intellectual domain. By exploring diverse mediums such as painting (Chapter 1), illustration (Chapter 2), the printing press (Chapter 3), photography (Chapters 4, 8, and 9), ceramics (Chapter 5), textiles (Chapter 7), architecture (Chapter 10), and industrial infrastructure (Chapters 9 and 11), the book effectively illustrates how transformations in images, objects, and landscapes altered the sensorial environment of the 19th-century subject and led to the emergence of new perceptions of time, space, community, and matter.

Part I, comprising four chapters, emphasizes visual culture and its role in shaping the modern subject. In "Well-Worn Fashions: Repetition and Authenticity in Late Ottoman Costume Books" by Ünver Rüstem, the aim is achieved by relying on the concept of the "imaginative community." The chapter reveals how the circulation of pictures depicting diverse Ottoman ethnic costumes contributes to forging new imagined communities of nations, sects, and intellectual kinship. Likewise, "Picturing Knowledge: Visual Literacy in Nineteenth-Century Arabic Periodicals" by Hala Auji sheds light on the pedagogical significance of print illustrations in stimulating a perception of scientific advancement and molding the public's view of the self as a subject of modernization. The last chapter of this section, "The Muybridge Albums in Istanbul: Photography as Diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire" by Emily Neumeier, highlights the role of photography as evidence of technological advancement and the new visual culture as a mediator in the diplomatic realm.

The diverse range of mediums discussed throughout the book enables the authors to transcend Eurocentric definitions of artistic movements and depict a moment before strict distinctions were made between authentic and inauthentic arts, crafts, and industry, as well as Islamic and modern art. Part II, "Conceptualizing Craft," comprising three chapters, reveals the gradual shifts in categorization and valuation of crafts. "The Manual Crafts and the Challenge of Modernity in Late Nineteenth-Century Damascus" by Marcus Milwright offers a review of an encyclopedic book that documented manual craft of the time with no distinction between what was later categorized as art, craft, or industry. The author not only presents the *qāmūs* as a window into the dynamics of socioeconomic life of Damascus but also as a lens through which to explore the practice of art historiography of the 19th century. Two other chapters in this section discuss the institutionalization and preservation of crafts at the intersection of colonial intervention and local elites' ambitions. Margaret Graves, in "The Double Bind of Craft Fidelity: Moroccan Ceramics on the Eve of the French Protectorate," and Jessica Gerschultz, in "The Turn to Tapestry: Islamic Textiles and Women Artists in Tunis," elaborate how protectorate ideology legitimized French administrative intervention in the craft sector, and anxiety about authenticity sharpened the line between traditional crafts and modern arts. These two chapters complement each other by illustrating the process of the codification of craft as an embodiment of a pure national past that should be preserved amid the rapid changes of modernity.

While craft shapes perceptions of the past and locality, Part III, "Aesthetics of Infrastructure," explores how technology is incorporated in shaping the 19th-century subject's vision of the future and the world. The four case studies in this section deliberate

on modernity as the outcome of the engagement of local and international actors, as well as the negotiation of the past and future. “Alabaster and Albumen: Photographs of the Muhammad Ali Mosque and the Making of a Modern Icon” by Alex Dika Seggerman demonstrates how the circulation of images of a traditional icon, such as a mosque, can transform it into a monumental symbol of a modern city. “Tents and Trains: Mobilizing Modernity in the Late Ottoman Empire” by Ashley Dimmig discusses how the integration of traditional symbols, like tents in the opening ceremony of the Hijaz railway, forges characteristics of local modernism in the eyes of both locals and outsiders.

Reviewing all the chapters, it becomes evident that each one incorporates, to a certain degree, the proclaimed goal of the book: to pore over the condition of modernity and to challenge the conception of modernity as a rupture in the art history of the region. While primarily situated within the field of art history, the book also makes contributions to broader studies encompassing social, political, and economic aspects of the 19th century. With the detailed case studies, the value of this book extends to serving as a pedagogical text for understanding the process of materializing modernity on a larger scale than just the Islamic Mediterranean lands.