

## ISLAMIC ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

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The Islamic collections in the Oriental Institute Museum represent an important aspect of the archaeology of the ancient Near East. Over the years, various articles on Islamic archaeology, especially the Oriental Institute excavations at Quseir al-Qadim, Luxor, Aqaba, and most recently, Khirbet al-Mafjar have appeared in the Oriental Institute *Annual Report*. In the *Annual Report* for 2011–2012, we wrote of the need for a comprehensive examination for the Islamic collections in the Oriental Institute Museum (2012, pp. 81–82). From the earliest excavations of the Oriental Institute, Islamic materials have been included, such as Alishar Hüyük in Turkey and Khirbet al-Karak in Israel. Some major excavations have focused on Islamic sites, such as Istakhr and Rayy in Iran. In addition to Islamic archaeological collections, many objects have been purchased or donated to the museum. Among the most important are the Arabic manuscripts and papyri, studied by Nabia Abbott and more recent scholars. Finally, there are ethnographic items, including a fine collection of Palestinian costumes. All this material makes the collection one of the most important in the United States, but it has been relatively little studied and examined in detail. The 2015 exhibition, centered on the material from the site of Fustat (*A Cosmopolitan City: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Old Cairo*), showcased the rich archaeological material from the excavations at Fustat in the Oriental Institute Museum, in addition to material in the museum from other excavations in Egypt and as well as the manuscripts and papyri.

We suggested a new project some five years ago, an introduction to Islamic Archaeology organized around these collections. As a first step toward this goal, we recognize the need for a comprehensive catalog of the Islamic holdings in the Oriental Institute Museum. This catalog should assist scholars working on the Islamic materials for research projects using Oriental Institute collections and provide interested members of the public a glimpse into all these collections for the first time, leading toward a new understanding of the archaeology of the Islamic period. Tasha has received a grant during the last six months to conduct an in-depth compilation of little studied or indeed unstudied aspects of the Islamic period collections in the Oriental Institute. The result of this research has been a detailed assessment of the collection as well as a better understanding of how a forthcoming catalog might be structured.

This year, Tasha looked at a variety of different materials from book bindings to ceramics and nineteenth-century photographs. This report will detail some of these findings. One of her particular interests has been examining the Chinese ceramics in the Oriental Institute Museum collection. A detailed study of the material indicated that the Oriental Institute Museum has a small but significant collection of Tang Dynasty ceramics when Chinese ceramics were first imported into the Near East in larger numbers, particularly to the Persian Gulf region. Early porcelains, celadons, and Changsha ware are found at the sites of Istakhr, Jundi Shapur, and Samarra. Particularly outstanding are two pieces in the Istakhr collection that are fragments of xing ware, a northern Chinese porcelain which was the finest porcelain available at that time (Krahl 2010, pp. 202–03). Although only two fragments were preserved, the fragments

were from a wine cup and a wine cup stand, which makes it tempting to suggest that it might possibly be from an original set (fig. 1). Thanks to the meticulous records kept by Istakhr's excavator, Erich Schmidt, it should be possible to demonstrate whether this is in fact the case or not. These cup stands have been dated to 825–850 CE and have been found at the Belitung shipwreck, a ship filled with ceramics destined for the Islamic market that wrecked off the coast of Indonesia (Krahl 2010, p. 203, fig. 150; Exhibition checklist cat. nos. 263–265).



Figure 1. Two fragments of xing ware from Istakhr, A169101 and A169126 (photo: Tasha Vorderstrasse)

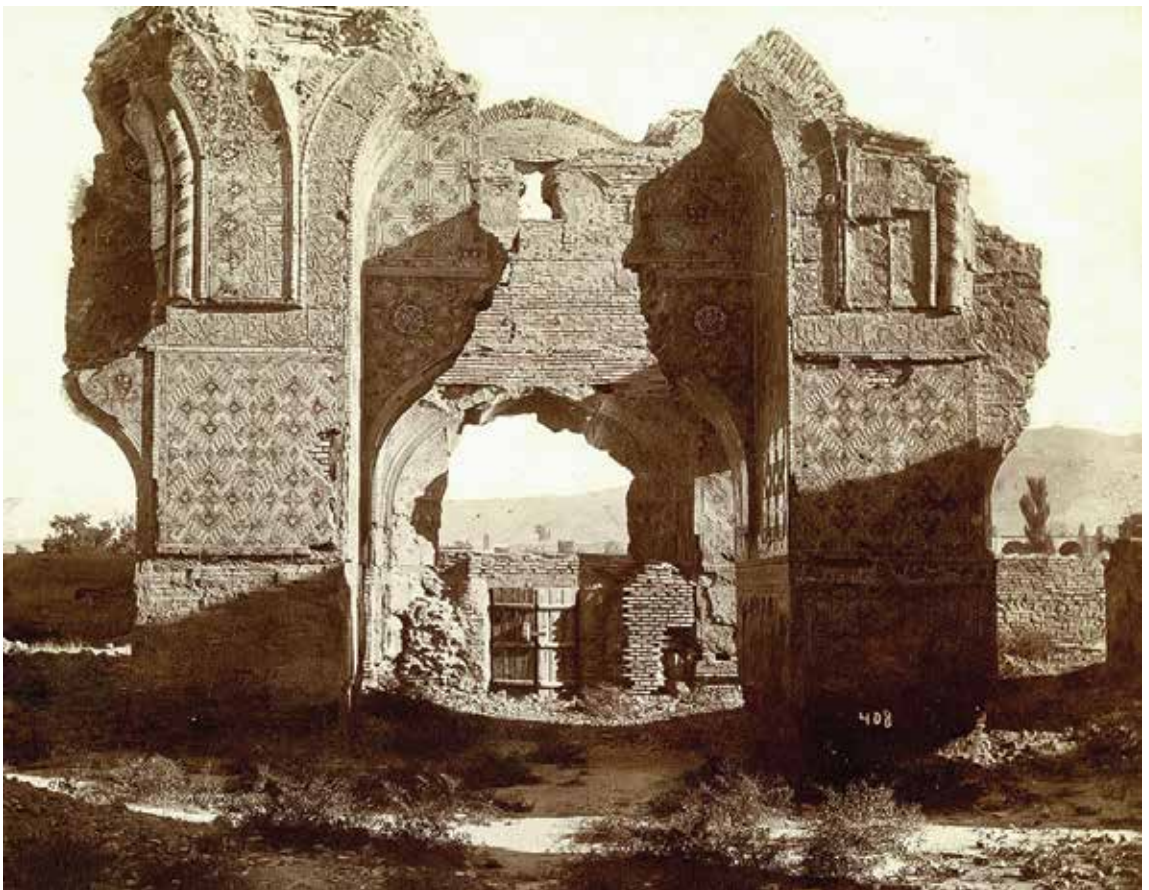


Figure 2. Blue Mosque in Tabriz by Antoin Sevruguin (P. 1230/N. 23639)

One might continue studying specific artifact categories as a more productive beginning before turning to detailed analyses of the geographical areas represented in the Oriental Institute collections — materials that range from as far east as Iran and west as Morocco. As an example, the Iranian collection represents the largest part of the collection and includes important material still to be discovered. An unexpected collection illustrates this point: the Oriental Institute Museum archives has about 150 photographs of the Armenian-Iranian photographer Antoin Sevruguin (1830s–1933) (fig. 2). The work of Antoin Sevruguin has been studied in detail by scholars of early Iranian photography and an exhibition on his work was organized by the Freer/Sackler in 1999–2000 (Bohrer 1999). Although the presence of his photographs had already been noted, along with the publication of one of the photographs, in the catalog of the Oriental Institute exhibition *Picturing the Past* (Larson 2012, p. 51, fig. 6.2), these pictures had not been examined in detail until a recently published article (Vorderstrasse 2018).

It is naturally tempting to think of the Islamic collection at the Oriental Institute Museum as the product of a formidable history of archaeological excavations and surveys throughout the whole of the Middle East. Indeed, the study of this Islamic Archaeology has yet to be published. The recent research of Tasha has now demonstrated that these materials are extremely varied and in some cases highly significant for our understanding of Islamic material culture and history. This expands the range of the catalog topics and suggests a beginning for important research in the Oriental Institute for future Middle Eastern studies.

## References

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