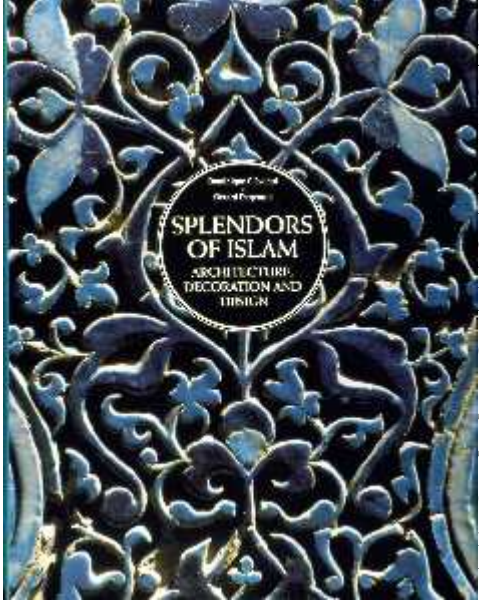


FROM INDIA TO SPAIN

Splendors of Islam: Architecture, Decoration, and Design



SPLENDORS OF ISLAM: ARCHITECTURE, DECORATION, AND DESIGN / Dominique Clévenot.--New York: Vendome Press, October 2000.--224 p.: ill.--ISBN 0-86565-214-7: \$70.00.

Lavishly illustrated with color photographs, this quarto-sized volume, serves as a visual survey of Islamic architectural ornamentation. It was translated from the French *Décors d'Islam* (Paris : Citadelles & Mazenod, 2000) by Jean Davis.

The author, a professor at the University of Toulouse, together with photographer Gerald de George, visited and photographed hundreds of monuments stretching from India and Central Asia to Morocco and Spain, and dating from the 7th through the 19th centuries. (Islamic monuments from China and Indonesia are not treated in this work.) Rather than provide a historical or geographical overview, the book is divided into four major parts. "Variation and Unity" discusses major monuments (the Dome of the Rock, the Alhambra, the Shah Mosque in Isfahan, and the Taj Mahal) to provide an overview of Islamic architecture. "Techniques: Knowledge and Know-How" details mosaic, stucco, brick, and ceramic techniques, and touches briefly on bronze, wood, and painted wood. "Ornamental Motifs" explores themes (the figure, plant forms, geometry, and calligraphy). Lastly "A Surface Art" reviews aesthetic principles and the relationship between buildings and their decoration. Each of the parts features a general introduction followed by detailed studies of several aspects of the topic and an addendum showcasing additional visual examples. Appendices include a map of major sites, a chronology of principal dynasties, a glossary, a bibliography, and an illustration index arranged by site (titled "Index of the Monuments").

The section on surface art is perhaps central to the understanding of this topic since it provides a historiography of Islamic architectural ornamentation. Descriptions of techniques and materials, such as the preparation of glass mosaic tesserae, ceramic tile mosaics, and brickwork, will also be very useful to anyone studying Islamic monuments. The section on ornamental motifs thankfully corrects many earlier misunderstandings with regard to the supposed Islamic ban on imagery. Although excellent full-page photographs are found on almost every other page, with smaller photographs throughout the text, I still found myself wanting more illustrations! Complex descriptions of techniques or designs would have benefited from diagrams, the discussions of pre-Islamic antecedents would have been easier to follow with accompanying photographs, and our understanding of monuments and their decoration would have been facilitated throughout with plans and elevations.

The volume is quite readable, but is poorly edited. For example, a few French phraseologies are awkwardly translated (such as the recurring use of "in principle"), the lack of attributions occasionally renders statements unpersuasive, specialized terminology is used but not defined in the glossary (technique words such as *champlevé*, or shapes such as a fleuron), illustration captions do not cite building locations, and neither the glossary or the "Index of the Monuments" refers back to the text and relevant illustrations. More significant is the lack of a comprehensive index, footnotes or endnotes, plans, sections, or elevations, and detailed maps. While these deficiencies severely limit the ability of this work to serve as a reference source, it is still an excellent contribution to the understanding of the materials, techniques, designs, and aesthetics of Islamic architectural decoration, and will serve both an academic and design audience.

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