Marco Spallanzani. *Metalli islamici: A Firenze nel Rinascimento*.
The Bruschettini Foundation for Islamic and Asian Art. Florence: S.P.E.S. Studio Per Edizione Scelte, 2010. 204 pp. index. append. illus. tbls. bibl. €80. ISBN: 978–88–72423363.

This elegant book is the latest offering by an economic historian whose interest in the applied arts from the East (from the eastern Mediterranean to Goa) as imported and displayed in Florentine collections has resulted in numerous publications. A good example of an interdisciplinary approach that combines evidence from account books with visual sources such as depictions of Renaissance interiors and the actual pieces still in museums worldwide, it reevaluates the contribution of masters not traditionally considered part of the Renaissance.

During the Renaissance, objects from the Near and Middle East were avidly collected by the same families who also invested in antiquities and commissioned devotional works of art from contemporary artists for their palaces and private chapels. In Italy, and elsewhere in Europe, therefore, collections usually contained more than one category of objects. While the figurative and applied arts certainly featured in considerable quantities, arms and armor as well as scientific and mathematical instruments also found favor, especially those of beautiful workmanship and, if possible, exotic provenance. Owners like the Medici occasionally expressed their appreciation of such pieces by adding their family crest or an inscription.

Its format and price notwithstanding, this is a rather short book, which also includes appendices, documents, and a great many welcome and beautiful illustrations both within the text and in a series of large color plates; nonetheless, the author manages to give a very systematic and well-organized account of Islamic metal objects in Florentine collections. Starting with the analysis of different kinds of sources at our disposal, he continues to explore production centers, trade routes, and the available market for such pieces. As one would expect, in Florence the Medici owned Islamic metalwork from the early fifteenth century onwards, as is attested by entries in their account books.

Given the origins in Cairo, Damascus, or even further east, and the multitude of potential dangers to the cargo during the long journey towards a Florentine collection, the kind of objects discussed in this book did not come cheap. Spallanzani dedicates an entire chapter to the going rates in the different currencies used in Florence at the time and also suggests that the values entered into the inventories of proud owners may on occasion have been inflated — although that begs the question of the use and purpose of inventories and the date of compilation. Certainly the large format, weight, gilding, beautiful decoration, cost of shipping, and customs taxes paid for some of these vessels will have contributed to a calculation of overall expenditure that must have been considerable. Another factor to be considered is the difference in value between objects labeled either "da Domasco," "domaschino," or "alla domaschina," given the diverse provenance and possibly quality of Islamic metalware that was soon imitated by European craftsmen.

Of the three appendices, the first (complemented by eighty-four documents) traces the numbers of different forms of vessels in the above three categories from the year 1390 to ca.1562, attesting to a steady increase in numbers overall and to the speedy rise of objects *alla domaschina* from the early 1470s onwards until they overtook the other two categories in 1492. From 1493 *alla domaschina* ware seems to have been almost exclusively collected by Florentine families. The second appendix signals Islamic metalware in Italian museums and collections, while the third gives an overview of the different forms of heraldic shields used in Italy as background for coats of arms from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century.

As a nonspecialist of Eastern applied arts, I found this an interesting and beautiful publication that made me think about a different category of objects in Renaissance collections that was obviously dear to their previous owners. I particularly wondered about the parallels between affixing a coat of arms to a metal vessel and the inscriptions on antiquities at the time of Lorenzo il Magnifico and how this might have been more than just an expression of ownership. I shall keep my thinking cap on for a little while longer.

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