the manuscript is raised to the status of a "diplomatic gift" (p. 244): a term that should perhaps be reserved for transactions between heads of state. The style of its illustrations is claimed to refer to work for Shah Jahan: though with the exception of some branches of folk art, this is true of all styles in India from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. In the list of illustrations (p. 246) the versions of some names from the *Shahnamah* are unusual.

The final essay returns to an item from the Adomeit bequest. Kitty Johnson discusses a copy of *Dala'il al-Khayrat*, which takes the form of unbound folios enfolded in a leather cover, and carried in a leather pouch. The script used has the semi-circular descenders of Maghribi style, but the presence of the name ʿAbd al-Sahil, and more especially the character of linear motifs within the manuscript and on the pouch point to a sub-Saharan, probably northern Nigerian, origin. The work would be understood as an object of power in both the Islamic and the African traditions.

The plates are of excellent quality. In matters of detail, one may wonder whether the Mughal picture of a scholar (1.2) is not of the sixteenth century; and one may guess that the miniature Quran (3.15) has been trimmed to produce its present octagonal shape. In addition, a disturbing note is introduced when some manuscripts are held open by a clip or weight in the form of a golden hand, whose style is suggestive of European rococo.

Barbara Brend

JÜRGEN WASIM FREMBGEN (ed.):
The Aura of Alif: The Art of Writing in Islam.
256 pp. Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 2010. £40. ISBN 978 379135065 3.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X11000966

This book is the catalogue of an exhibition held at the Museum of Ethnology in Munich (*Die Aura des Alif*, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde München, October 2010–February 2011). The objects presented cover a wide range of media besides Quranic manuscripts: ceramics, coinage, architectural inscriptions, calligraphic tableaux, textiles, woollen hats, decorated trucks, modern religious posters, and even script tattooed on human and animal skin. This material is organized around twelve short essays. Some of them are broad introductory or interpretive papers that deal with Arabic calligraphy (Claus-Peter Haase), architectural inscriptions (Lorenz Korn), epigraphic coinage (Stefan Heidemann), and the idea of the "speaking object" (Avinoam Shalem). Others are factual discussions of artefacts in Munich and in other German collections: tombstones (Mohamed Rahim), a late Mamluk lidded metal tray (Doris Behrens-Abouseif), calligraphy from Ottoman dervish lodges (Jürgen Wasim Frembgen), a nineteenth-century Anatolian carpet (Maryam Ekhtiar), and amulets from Iran and Afghanistan dating to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Venetia Porter and Jürgen Wasim Frembgen). Two further essays deal with uses of script in modern-day Pakistan, one on trucks (Jamal Elias), and the other in the world of Sufi shrines (Jürgen Wasim Frembgen). Finally, an essay by the German artist Karl Schlamminger discusses the sensorial and spiritual experience of calligraphy. While it does not break extensive new ground, this beautifully produced volume

will be of interest to specialists, notably for presenting previously unpublished material from German collections.

Alain George

MARIAM ROSSER-OWEN:
Islamic Arts from Spain.
116 pp. London: V&A Publishing, 2010. £30. ISBN 978 1 86177 598 9.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X11000978

Richard Ford, an English gentleman traveller and writer in the early nineteenth century, wrote that Spain was "the most romantic and peculiar country in Europe" with some "altogether un-European" Islamic antiquities.

It is these Islamic antiquities of this "peculiar country" – the Islamic arts of Spain – that are the subject of this book. Spain has fascinated travellers, scholars and collectors for centuries, and this fascination is richly reflected in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, which form the backdrop to this book. The author is the curator in the Middle Eastern section of the Asian department at the V&A, and her deep knowledge of the collections of the art of al-Andalus is reflected in the beautiful illustrations that accompany the text, many of which come from the Museum collection.

This is not the usual tour of the highlights of the caliphal, taifa, berber and Nasrid dynasties of 711–1492, although plenty of those highlights are included. Instead, the author expands our understanding of what we mean when we talk about the Islamic arts of Spain, by including chapters not only on the often neglected *mudéjar* period, but also on the afterlife and influence of buildings such as the Alhambra until today. Islamic art in Spain did not come to a full-stop in 1492, when the period of Muslim rule ended. But it has taken a long time for Spain's Islamic art to become accepted as a fundamental part of Spanish national culture – as integral to the creation of Spanish identity as the flamenco dancer or the matador.

The first chapter focuses on the ages of empire, which include the caliphal, taifa and berber periods of the first 500 years of Islamic rule in Spain. Among the most extraordinary objects to survive from the period of caliphal rule is the group of containers carved from solid ivory, illustrated here by an extraordinary wealth of examples from the V&A collection. These were small and highly personal objects made for the close family members of this far distant, wealthy court, and as such they have been the subject of a number of scholarly studies. But the author has much to add to the subject, for example on the relationship between the carved decoration on the ivories and the decorative repertoire of contemporary luxury textiles. Later in this chapter, in the discussion on the berber art of the Almoravids and Almohads, the author highlights the importance of looking to North Africa for reference material for this rather disparaged period.

The Nasrids are the focus of chapter 2: traditionally this has been seen as a period of decline and degeneration in art and architecture, a view the author dismisses through her careful look at Nasrid architecture and material culture, reminding us for example that the Alhambra was in fact paved with expensive marble. She reassigns a group of openwork ivory caskets to Nasrid rather than Mamluk production, while drawing links between Nasrid style and contemporary developments in Mamluk Egypt.