

Volait described the act of looting or taking actual Mamluk pieces/artefacts of tangible heritage as one aspect of the neoMamluk or Arab style in furniture and woodwork... so much for preserving the heritage!

"In a few cases, the source and its imitation, that is, tangible heritage and architectural design, were literally embedded into one another through the practice of reuse... The French architect Ambroise **Baudry** (1838–1906) made a specialty of designing with antiques for the houses he conceived in Cairo between 1871 and 1886, and subsequently, for the interiors he arranged in France once back home. The principle consisted in incorporating authentic fragments into the edifices being erected, such as authentic carved ceilings or Mamluk marquetry inserted into the modern frames of doors and cabinets. The most spectacular achievement of architectural reuse in modern Cairo was the house built between 1875 and 1879 for the grand equerry of Khedive Ismā'īl (r. 1863–1879), the aristocrat Gaston de Saint-Maurice (1853–1905)."

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"The present piece is an attempt to reconstruct the rise, fall, and recent reappraisal of Mamluk-style furniture in Khedival Cairo, based on a scattered corpus of evidence, be that visual, material, or textual in nature, gathered somewhat haphazardly."

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The pre-neo-Mamluk style in fittings and equipment according to E. W. Lane: "Houses were mainly furnished with mattresses and cushions; vessels were stored in recessed shelves sometimes decorated with marble or tiles; meals were eaten on a tray placed upon a low stool. Lighting was provided by suspended chandeliers (Lane, *An account*, 18–27). That was about it in the 1830s."

"Four decades later, official statistics registered some **7000 Egyptian carpenters and woodturners** across the country, besides **21 'chair-makers' based in Cairo** (Delchevalerie, "L'Égypte" 432). In the meantime, **manufactured wooden domestic furnishing had seemingly become an industry.**"

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Piemontese Giuseppe Parvis (1831–1909). One of the pioneers. From northern Italy, near Turin. Piedmont region. Learned to be a carpenter in Turin and Paris.

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Started his profession in Egypt in 1866, he then was commissioned to make a "suite of Oriental furniture" for the Khedival participation in the **1867 Paris Universal Exposition**:

1. A restored ancient window (probably a mašrabiyya) -

2. several doors -
3. a large dikka (similar to those where the Holy Book was stored in mosques)  
-
4. a cupboard for vessels: Composed of a central body modelled after a Mamluk portal and featuring symmetrical panels inlaid with bone and wood and topped with crenellations, the cupboard bore an Arabic inscription versified by one "Moustapha Salam" (Illustrierter Katalog, 202), most probably the šayḥ **Muṣṭafā Salāma anNağğārī** (d. 1870), one of Khedive Ismā'īl's panegyrists (Mestyan 2019). Thanks to an engraving published in 1868, the cupboard can be identified as the one standing today in a corridor of the **Marriott Hotel** (the former Khedival palace of Gazīra) (fig. 2). It is dated **1866**, and **signed by Parvis** together with an illegible name, possibly of a local associate. Its public text praises the ruler for guiding Egypt towards the restoration of the past splendour of its crafts and arts.
5. a bookcase,
6. a mirror,
7. a tripod stand in ebony,
8. an alabaster table with rosewood legs and
9. chibouk-holders to be fixed on the wall (Édmond, L'Égypte 335-336).
10. Parvis is most probably also the author of the **case made for the arms of the Khedive and a large Qur'ān** that stood in the Egyptian pavilion in Paris. The furniture featured **an original Mamluk inlaid wooden panel as its back** (Édmond, L'Égypte 196-197). **This is the first known piece of modern furnishing incorporating spolia.**

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#### The Parvis Catalogue:

1. The grand dining-room of the **'Ābdīn Palace** (built between 1863 and 1874) rearranged after the 1891 fire clearly encompasses Parvis's furniture (Abdeen Palace 97-99).
2. Manyal Palace dining room (built between 1901 and 1929).
3. Also mirrored consoles or large cupboards, can easily be spotted in Khedival palaces.
4. Gayer Anderson neo-Mamluk furniture imposed by the current government employees in its Qaṣas and rooms are a testament to the current infatuation with the style in furniture and minor arts. "One suspects that the invented tradition imagined by Parvis and his followers did not exactly correspond to the folk art and period furniture... But the fact that such Revival furniture is being reintroduced today in a historic site testifies, however, to the recent reappraisal of Parvis's production and related works."

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5. A mirrored niche is present in a Qatari mansion as Parvis furniture is more and more in demand in international markets, especially the Gulf states. P. 233.
6. Cupboards in 1867 (Paris) and another variation of it in 1876 (USA).

Mirrored console probably by Parvis, today in the vestibule of a Qatari residence (photo by the author, 2012). P. 234.

Characteristics of Parvis's furniture:

- Use of woods of contrasting colours, such as ebony and golden mahogany.
- Inlay work in bone and mother-of-pearl.
- Metal plating in the form of roundels.
- Arabic inscriptions, carved on ebony and painted in gold.
- Deliberate juxtaposition of elements of different nature and scale is a typical feature of these furnishings.
- Inlaid lateral panels reproducing Mamluk elements to scale, while their central part is a reduction of the three-lobed portals to be found in many Mamluk mosques or madrasas.
- A horseshoe serrated arch used indiscriminately for openings. Its shape was described as Moorish, rather than Egyptian, at the time of the Egyptian exhibits at the 1867 Paris Exposition (Édmond, L'Égypte 196). But in fact this type of arch can be spotted in cupboards extant in late Ottoman houses in Cairo, e.g. at Bayt alSiḥaymī (ceramic Qa'a in the first floor). it became a standard and indeed a marker, of Parvis's furniture. Pp. 233-4.
- Large sized.
- Over worked to the point of Kitsch

Parvis's decorative syntax appears quite limited: thin columns, light and dark stripes (ablaq), stalactites (generally in black), marked pediments, turned wood, epigraphy, etc.

Parvis also made replicas from special pieces at the Islamic Art museum. According to the Comité's minutes of meetings, he made a formal request in 1892 to replicate a piece from the Islamic Art Museum.

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Procès-verbaux 9 = Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe. Procès-verbaux 9: Exercice 1892. Cairo: Imprimerie nationale, 1903. Pp. 17-18.

He then donated some of his collected art works back to the museum since 1903 onwards. They must have inspired many of his works. P. 234.

These donations are mentioned in successive issues of the Procès-verbaux of the Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe. The whole collection can be accessed and searched online at <http://www.persee.fr/collection/ccmaa> (accessed 17 July 2019).

His style, although oversized, kitsch and ostentatious, is still in demand among international and national buyers. Yet he also produced smaller pieces for less affluent customers such as tabore' tables.

Most Egyptian homes of note had their Arabesque rooms by the 1930s, such as the room designed by architect Ali Labib Gabr for the Mugib Fathi villa in Cairo.



Fig. 5. "Drawing-room in Arabic style", villa Mugib Fathy Bey, Cairo  
(*Photographs of various buildings*, pl. 32).

Volait assumes the meuble at the corner of the room is likely a Parvis or a Parvis era piece, but she implies the difference in quality between this piece and the rest of the furniture is due to craftsmanship, wood supply, tools and labour issues. "What could be produced in the 1930s was not identical to what had been handcrafted three decades earlier." P. 235.

"There is no vestibule in Cairo that does not have a mašrabiyya turned into a coat rack" as expressed by the French architect, teaching at the Higher School of Fine Arts, Jacques Hardey (1889-1974) in a letter to the French Ambassador at the time. A criticism bespeaking the popularity of the Arabesque style and its pieces in Egyptian houses in the 30s. P. 235.

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Another example of the popularity of this style can be traced in the exhibited pieces of furniture from the Huda Sha'rawi house at the Khedival Exhibition at Aish Fahmy Palace. P. 236.

### 3 Adapting salvages "à la clunisienne":

Giuseppe (1852-?)

Nicola (1858-?)

Jacovelli brothers (also spelt Iacovelli) are a case in point:

- They trained at the Parvis workshop.
- In 1885, they opened a workshop in Cairo where they practised for 17 years; producing furniture pieces for the high society of princes, princesses and pashas of Cairo.
- They were also quite active in the restoration activity of the Comite' since its formation in 1882. Balboni, Luigi Antonio. 1906. *Gl'italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIXo : Storia-biografie-monografie*. 3 vols. Alexandria: Tipo-litografico v. Penasson.
- They also gathered many original pieces and artefacts, probably for restoration purposes. But also for replication in their own furniture repertoire.
- "Their collection, rich in marble mosaic, woodwork, and tiles, was eventually donated to the archaeological museum in Palermo (today the Antonio Salinas Regional Archaeological Museum)."
- In 1891, a commercial guide listed no less than five firms producing "Arab Style" or "Arabesque" furniture in Cairo: the Furino brothers, Gasparo Giuliana, Elias Hatoun, Paglierini, and the Jacovelli (*Annuaire égyptien*).

Ambroise Baudry, the French architect, made a speciality of designing with antiques, a technique in which Parvis had experimented for a few early pieces presented at international expositions, possibly for the request of the Khedive.

"Baudry reused not only salvaged carved woodwork, but also ancient tiles and marble opus sectile, in order to lend authenticity to his reconstructions of Egyptian medieval architecture." A typical Expat behaviour. On the one hand, he knows the value of these recycled original pieces so he has to own and exploit them while he exhibits a total disregard of the collective consciousness of the indigenous people and the role these artefacts play in their belief systems, livelihoods, ethos and overall sense of pride as they are essential components of their material culture with its tangible and intangible heritage.

"He combined the repurposed material with plaster casts of Mamluk ornaments, and also painted facsimiles. These techniques were widely available in Paris at the time, and known as "à la clunisienne", in explicit reference to the **Musée de Cluny** in Paris, a medieval mansion that has been refurbished and refurnished anew by the collector and archaeologist **Alexandre du Sommerard** (1779-1842) in the 1830s."

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Sommerard invented the "practice of combining ancient fragments and new imitated parts in order to produce historicising pieces or modern fittings with an authentic antique flavour." p. 237.

Paul Baudry who was himself a famous artist mentioned Baudry's house in this context:

Ambroise's house is a gem. We would be rich if the building were located in the surroundings of the boulevard Saint-Germain, or simply at the Batignolles. The doors and the ceilings, the marbles, and the tiles come from 16th-century houses, it is an Arab Cluny. Pp. 237-8.

This would link Baudry's architectural approach to his furniture pieces to French styles at the time. But one can also make reference to the khedival and Parvis repertoire of neo Mamluk furniture pieces.

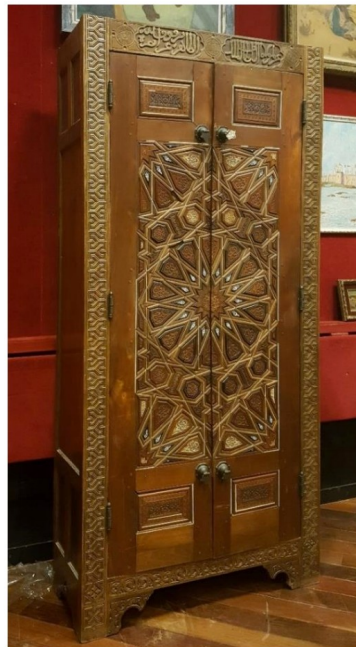


Fig. 6. Mamluk Revival cupboard from the collection of Ernest de Blighnières, auctioned on 23 Mai 2017 in Paris by Ader Nordmann, lot no. 296, hammered 38.000 € (photo by the author, 2017).

Baudry and his friend Ernest de Blighnières (1834–1900), who was posted in Cairo from 1878 to 1882, had many pieces of furnishing and decoration made out of spolia for their residences both in Egypt and France (fig. 6).

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"Carpenters were employed permanently at their homes for that purpose. At Baudry's, it was a Maltese craftsman with the name Peppe Gliveu, who worked at reshaping salvaged woodwork for future use." p. 238.

He subsequently established himself as a "contractor of carpentry in Arabesque style". Significantly, the last of these words are translated to Arabic as *šina'a baladī*, literally meaning 'indigenous' or 'vernacular' crafts.

That is, 'Arabesque style' was not perceived as alien to the culture, as postcolonial theory would have it today; it was deemed a local craft. It would be decisive to examine how the work of Parvis and Baudry intersected with one another, but no evidence of contacts exists in the extensive correspondence of the French architect.

The end-users of their arts differed:

- Parvis's furniture was meant for public display, and it can be hypothesised that it served the purpose of enhancing the legitimacy of the Muḥammad 'Alī dynasty in Egypt (Alley influence?).
- The works designed by Baudry were for private consumption. Mamluk Revival was not univocal; it could serve distinct purposes.
- Their artistry contrasted as well: Parvis's style was overtly **Baroque**, while that of Baudry belonged to a more **Classicist** vein.

#### 4 Re-use as an Enduring Tradition:

The zenith of reusing authentic historic Mamluk pieces occurred by the end of the 19th century as the Administration of Public Works demolished many old and historical buildings under the guise of safety and modernization. They demolished whole areas to make way for new wide and straight roads in order to accommodate the incumbent 'modern' Egyptians with their westernized livelihoods. Many of these areas were in Historic Cairo where they produced huge amounts of rubble and spoilia...

Volait asserts the notion of re use is entrenched in Egyptian mode of conduct regarding spoilia and older buildings since the earlier dynasties of Ancient Egypt [true but doesn't justify the act].

The demolition of the Ottoman mosque of Fatma al Nabawiyya by al Awqaf Ministry in 1999 to make way for a neo Mamluk style mosque, allowed the architect Umar al Farouk to buy the entrance portal of the mosque and reuse it in his house in Fayoum Tunis village.

Ironically, this practice is currently endorsed by ecologists and environmentalists. It is a form of recycling after all! p. 239.

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"Assembling elements of different dates (and places of production) is fascinating because it blurs the frontiers between local and alien, authenticity and artificiality, past and present, replica and reuse, creation and restoration. It produces hybrids and oxymora that deserve to be better acknowledged and comprehended." Pp. 239-40.



Fig. 7. Cupboard designed by Ambroise Baudry, displayed in the Mamluk Galleries of the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (photo by the author, 2017).

The case of the hybrid cabinet made by Baudry:

- It is currently at the Islamic Museum.
- Bernard dates it in the 19th century while, according to Volait, Baudry designed it in 1875.
- But the piece has a calligraphic inscription bearing the name of al Sultan Barquq (1382–



Fig. 8. Cupboard designed by Ambroise Baudry, as displayed in an 'Arab room' of Prince Yusuf Kamal's palace, Cairo (*Architetto Antonio Lasciac*, pl. 28).

1389, 1390–1399).

- It was originally donated by prince Youussuf Kamal and it was part of his Arabic Room in his mansion built by Lasciac in Matatriyya. Currently a museum.



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- And he probably bought the piece in 1930 when Baudry's house itself was demolished.

The above information highlights the tradition of salvaging and reuse in Cairo. The broader history of reviving Mamluk art for public assertion and private consumption is also alluded to but it is still in need of more research and scrutiny.

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