

Arts and Crafts of Morocco*. James F. Jereb. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2015 [1995]. 160 pp.

Reviewed by Felicia Katz-Harris

James F. Jereb's *Arts and Crafts of Morocco* holds between its covers a sumptuous collection of images that illustrates the rich artistic heritage of Morocco.

While most of the following comments are minor in relation to the merits of this beautiful book, Jereb uses the outdated (though not necessarily incorrect) spelling "Moslem" throughout the book, which is distracting. In all fairness, this book is a reprint from 1995, although even in the mid-1990s, "Muslim" was the preferred spelling. Whatever the reasoning for the author's choice of spelling twenty years ago, it would seem logical that the author, the editor, or the publisher would have seized the opportunity to use the current appropriate standard when the book was reprinted.

The book's short but useful introduction provides cultural, religious, and historical contexts that are essential to understanding the traditional arts for a general audience. Following chapters present various traditional art forms with examples from different regions of Morocco. While no single book can cover it all, nor should any be expected to, each chapter has its merits and covers such topics as beliefs, symbols, and tattoos; textiles; jewelry and adornment; leatherwork, woodwork, and metalwork; ceramics; ceremonies and the celebration of life and death; and finally, a chapter on collecting Moroccan arts and crafts.

The arts of Morocco, according to Jereb, have two distinct modes. They are rural or tribal arts (described as textiles, jewelry, pottery, woodwork, and leatherwork) and urban arts, which he asserts to be more religious-based, devotional art (such as Qur'anic verse and arabesque motifs). However, these art forms are found in both rural areas and in urban centers. Jereb eventually concedes that the urban and rural arts do not exist in isolation but influence each other. With that in mind, perhaps the urban-rural distinction was less useful than his subsequent discussion of regional style. Still, it would have been valuable to have included a chapter on religious or devotional arts or to have included examples of the various forms of calligraphic (Arabic) arts that the author touched on in his discussion. Also, while there was some discussion of Moroccan Jews in the context of Moroccan history and culture, it would have been interesting to see examples of Moroccan Judaica.

Following the introduction, the author sets the reader up to appreciate a fundamental idea in traditional Moroccan art. Jereb provides a good foundation for understanding the concept of *baraka*, a belief in Islamic mysticism that a God-given power or spiritual presence can be found in objects, places, and people. Any object made for use (be it a textile, piece of jewelry, incense), but not for sale to tourists, can be infused with *baraka* and protect the maker or wearer from the

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djinn, the evil eye, or other form of negative force. In essence, baraka is a significant aspect of much of Morocco's traditional arts; these arts are more than utilitarian and more than decorative. They have magical, protective, and sacred qualities.

These ideas lead into the author's excellent account of the meaning of motifs common not only in Morocco, but throughout the North African and Middle Eastern region. Examples include *khamsa*, representational eyes that ward off the evil eye, magic squares, fish, birds, geckos, six- and eight-pointed stars, triangles, and more. The explanations of these motifs are reiterated in several chapters, making the point somewhat repetitive, although they are applied to different media and interestingly provide some alternate interpretations. In addition to motifs, the author provides information about the type of magical power contained in certain elemental properties like coral, ebony, and iron to name a few. Photographs of particularly dazzling examples of beaded, talismanic jewelry are described with very detailed captions, providing an excellent resource for identifying similar items. While Jereb includes a significant bibliography, it would have been appreciated to know the specific source for the interpretations of these amuletic symbols for future reference. Jereb mentions his communications with "numerous Berbers," but the reader is never introduced to any specific informant or practitioner who may have offered their interpretation of these symbols. In addition, there is no introduction to any specific artist with whom the author may have worked, making the artwork and the ideas less personal. Still there is anecdotal information (such as how families would go into debt "renting" bridal jewelry) that adds interest and distinct cultural information that allows us to get to know a little bit about the cultural milieu.

All collectors will appreciate the concluding chapter on collecting, which provides suggestions on where to go to search for treasures of our own. Jereb even provides the elusive formula for proper bargaining in the souks of Morocco. What he does not provide is caution against buying fakes.

Overall, this well-written book is accessible for a general public. The images and information are as appealing to collectors as they are helpful in identifying special objects. Of particular significance are the exceptionally detailed captions that complement the photographic plates. In fact, these captions offer quite extensive information even for the specialist regarding materials, provenance, and the context of over a hundred objects of traditional Moroccan art. This is an inspiring book with quality photographs and informative research. Curators in particular may find this book to be good groundwork for an alluring museum exhibition.

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